Episode 581.

Rowen knew that the pagans believed in warriors, but he did nothing about it.

In reality, Rowen had no right to punish or judge them, so there was no reason to do it in the first place.

But Ludwig was horrified by what he had just seen.

If I thought I had to use my hands, I felt like I would kill it.

I had been traveling with Rowen for about five days, but this was the first time I had seen him.

As it turns out, Ludwig never encountered any pagans while traveling with Lowen.

Mercenarism.

Rowen believed in the Five Great Houses, and as a priest of them, he had a lot to think about when it came to martial law.

An idol representing a warrior.

As he watched, Rowen's expression and eyes clearly changed.

Ludwig couldn't tell what it was, but he could see the emotion in her eyes, and it wasn't a positive one at that.

"Dragon Bridge......."

"......."

"Ludwig, do you think those people you saw earlier were really the Mercenaries?"

"Because they said so......."

"The martial arts are an excuse."

Rowen looks at Ludwig.

"There's quite a few pagans who pretend to be martial artists to hide their true beliefs, and if you say martial arts, they'll say yes, so it's a mask."

At that, Ludwig could only nod slowly.

Don't touch the Warrior Bridge.

That's why, in a pinch, you'll declare yourself a martyr, just in case they back down.

"Didn't they say earlier that....... You don't think they're mercenaries?"

"Well, I don't know, you know, the martial religions have their own beliefs, and they don't really have a definition of what it means to be a martial religion in the first place, do they?"

The Mercenary Order is not a specific group.

It's all over the place, like a folk religion, and it doesn't have a formalized system of beliefs.

Just believing that Ellen Artorius will save everyone.

It's just dozens or hundreds of derivative beliefs with variations within them.

Heroism is not forbidden.

But it's heresy. Ellen is not the Great Goddess.

Of course, when you get down to it, it's never irrelevant, but no one seems to know about it.

However, there are now many more believers in warrior religions than there are believers in the Five Great Gods. Therefore, the majority of pagans are no longer pagans.

This is because they have no substance, no core, and are impossible to root out.

Numerous pagans are killed by the guards, some of whom are also believers in the warrior religion.

But if you kill them all for believing in a warrior religion, the refugee camps will be devoid of people.

"Technically, many of the cults in the refugee camps may have their roots in martial religion."

There's no such thing as a true martial religion, even if you wear the mask.

"But that's ridiculous, it's the Mercenary Cult in the first place, what difference does it make if they wear masks?"

It's just a heresy that has gotten so big that it can't be a heresy anymore.

From the perspective of the Five Great Houses, warrior religion was a harsher faith than demonic religion.

Rowen looks to the sky and exhales.

"A warrior saves everyone......."

She looks at Ludwig and smiles.

"Ludwig must have lived in the temple with you?"

"It's ......."

Demons, and warriors.

Ludwig felt that it was somehow a strange and grotesque fate that he had been so close to this strange entanglement.

A demon hated by all.

The warrior who became everyone's hope.

I was one of the people who watched from the sidelines as they went about their, perhaps, normal lives.

I've been watching the false peace between the devil and the hero for quite some time.

Even now, Ellen was back at the Temple.

At this rate, I'd probably end up having dinner with Ellen with a bunch of people hanging on for dear life to see her toes.

Ludwig couldn't believe that such a thing was possible for a small, insignificant being like himself.

Those who wish to see Ellen's face chop down an unrecognizable tree and pray to it, and Ludwig is able to eat with her and talk about the day's events.

I even asked her what an archbishop was, and she graciously explained it to me.

People's idea of a warrior.

Ellen in the reality she can see.

The gap between them was too large.

"You said you weren't sure about the demon, but what about the warrior?"

"......."

Rowen asks curiously.

Even as a pretender, I couldn't help but notice that Rowen was less than enthusiastic about the Mercenary Order.

But isn't that the same as being a warrior?

Ludwig knows that people are arbitrarily projecting these expectations onto Ellen. The Order of the Dragon is completely unrelated to the real Ellen.

The real-life Ellen Artorius, not the warrior of the Dragonlords.

What she's like.

Ludwig didn't talk to Ellen much when the Temple was functioning.

Even after the Gate debacle, Ellen's encounters were few and far between, as she only headed to the most dangerous battlefields.

So, as the Allied armies marched on, the only thing I could do was talk to Ellen from time to time and watch from the Royal Class garrison.

Ellen is strong.

Ellen is great.

Ellen is self-sacrificing.

A million words raced through his head, but Ludwig didn't think they could sum up the kind of person Ellen was.

We all know the story.

Ludwig has seen Ellen.

Ellen lived closest to Reinhardt.

"Ellen is....... probably, the biggest victim of all this....... I think."

Victim.

Ludwig could not help but think.

Ellen stayed with Reinhardt, not knowing what to expect.

Technically, I think Ellen would have loved Reinhardt.

Maybe even now.

But the demon approached Ellen. No, the demon approached others as well.

When all hell broke loose, some followed the devil, but not Ellen.

Ellen is betrayed by Reinhard.

That's why you're not a victim.

When Ludwig thought of Ellen, always looking so determined, but with a deep sadness in her eyes, he couldn't help but say.

"Are you a victim......?"

"Yes."

Ludwig nodded at Rowen's words.

I didn't want to go into the details because it would hurt, and it's Ellen's personal story, and it would undermine people's trust in her.

I don't think I'm going to tell Rowen that a warrior might have loved a demon.

However, the victim.

I can only characterize myself as a victim of all this.

That's what I thought.

"ouch......."

Ludwig saw the corners of Rowen's mouth turn up.

"So, you know......."

For some reason, Rowen's strange laughter gave Ludwig an eerie feeling.

"......Is there a problem?"

At Ludwig's question, Rowen shook his head.

"No, just....... I'm just saying."

Rowen walked the streets again, praying, and Ludwig stood by him wordlessly.

\* \* \*

By the time we were done cleaning up, the snow was ankle deep.

"Let's go, I'll have to come back tomorrow to check it out......."

Rowen didn't finish his sentence, but stopped walking.

An alleyway in a refugee camp.

A group of men, not exactly sturdy by any stretch of the imagination, but with obvious animosity, stood in Rowen and Ludwig's way.

When Ludwig turned around, there was another group of refugees blocking the exit.

Ludwig didn't know who they were or why they were blocking his way.

But obvious enemies.

And there were definitely some faces I recognized from earlier.

"Ludwig."

"Yes."

Ludwig immediately understood what Rowen was talking about.

Ludwig immediately grabbed Rowen by the waist and pulled her into a hug, hanging on to her side.

"Bam!"

I grabbed it so hard that Rowen let out a small squeal.

-Thump!

Ludwig's body, enveloped in blue energy, leaped a dozen meters in an instant, overtaking those who stood in his way.

Whatever their intentions were in approaching Rowen and Ludwig, it was impossible to keep up with their swift disappearance.

\* \* \*

"Is that enough?"

"Yeah, maybe......."

Ludwig set Rowen down carefully, carrying her almost like a burden.

"Egoo......."

Rowen stretched his back and made a pained sound.

"That....... I'm sorry. I was too......."

"No, because I had no choice."

They managed to break free of the flimsy encirclement in a short time. But there were at least ten men surrounding Ludwig and Rowen.

It was very difficult to see it as a simple robbery. Rowen scratched his cheek in embarrassment.

"You saw those people earlier, right?"

"Yes....... obviously."

I've seen some, but not all, who have called themselves martial religionists.

I wouldn't say they were exactly reckless.

For one thing, Rowen is a frail-looking man, and even Ludwig is one-armed and unarmed.

It's no wonder they're more afraid of the spear-wielding guards than they are of Rowen and Ludwig.

The what ifs that Rowen was always talking about. Well, that just happened.

They were going to raid a priest, and Rowen is an archbishop-level priest.

The pagans even tried to kill her themselves.

"It's not unheard of for pagans to build up to dangerous levels of power, but I don't think that's what you just did."

"What happens when such a faction is formed?"

"Well? Anyway, isn't the important thing that it wasn't that this time?"

Rowen deliberately deflected.

"Let's go back, I'm glad no one got hurt."

But, as if to say that all was well, Rowen walked ahead, and Ludwig followed in a daze.

When they saw the pagans, they had some serious momentum, but now that they were about to be attacked, they had the attitude that they were done.

Ludwig couldn't get enough of Lowen.

But in the end, no one was hurt, and Ludwig was happy to move on.

"By the way, Ludwig, you're running really well, my eyes were spinning."

"Oh....... That....... is one of my few specialties."

Lowen smiled softly at Ludwig's modesty.

"Really? What other skills do you have?"

"I don't know....... I don't know, except that I'm a little more fit than most......."

"I don't think so. Isn't being able to enhance your magic already a huge feat?"

"What? Ah......."

"You know how many people despair because they can't even do that?"

What Rowen says is true.

Even if Ludwig is missing an arm and can't fight properly, the average person wouldn't be able to chase him down with a single leap.

The fact remains that Ludwig was a superhuman, a man who could never be categorized as ordinary.

"I thought Ludwig was a humble guy, but after being around him for a few days, I don't think that's the case."

"......."

"Humility without respect is just self-deprecation."

Humility is not about thinking of yourself as insignificant.

Ludwig thinks of himself as insignificant, so that's not humility.

Ludwig was left speechless when Rowen said he was only beating himself up.

Because Ludwig knows best.

"Do I need to?"

"I have lost loved ones....... lost."

"I see."

"If I had been a little stronger, if I had been a little wiser, if I had been a little better......."

Ludwig says, still, blank-eyed.

"I lost people I didn't have to lose if I was stronger....... and that's all I can think about."

In the end, I couldn't do anything but blame myself for my incompetence.

He wanted to die on the battlefield, but was driven out because he was a nuisance to others.

"At least I know I can still do something....... I guess that's a good thing."

I think Ludwig discovered something similar to hope in despair.

This work will eventually end, but it's necessary for everyone.

Helping Rowen. The only sensible thing he could do.

"That's why I'm grateful to the priest."

"Um......."

She shook her head.

"You do realize that priests in Tuan can't date or marry, right?"

"That's not what I meant at all......!"

"Oh, my God."

Rowen chuckled to himself as he watched Ludwig blush.

He's a weirdo.

Ludwig looked at Rowen and couldn't quite put his finger on it.

Thus, in Ludwig's eyes, Rowen was a strange man.

At first I thought he was a saint, with a twisted belief in God. But in the end, I didn't see him as a bad person because he was trying to do the best he could with his almost fanatical faith.

When I encountered the pagans, I was afraid they would do something to me, but they never did anything to me.

And they say strange things that don't make sense.

Ludwig had no idea who the priest in front of him was.

It's like he's a good guy, or he's a crazy guy, or he's a crazy guy and he's sane.

A priest from a cold country to the north.

Ludwig doesn't consider himself smart, but he doesn't easily forget what he's heard.

Ellen said.

A bishop is a lord, and an archbishop is a lord.

Not necessarily, but usually.

Heinrich said.

Many archbishops may have fled to the ecliptic. Maybe it's not so strange to see an archbishop-level priest roaming the streets.

Rowen said.

He said he was a bishop before Gate, but after Gate, he was given an undeserved position to fill someone else's void.

With so few lands untouched, there will be no Archbishop in the role of High Lord.

That said, Rowen is not an archbishop in the same capacity as a high lord.

It means that a person has been elevated to the rank of archbishop with responsibilities other than ruling a province or administering an archiepiscopal see.

Is this work of cleansing disease why he was given the office of archbishop?

"Rowen."

"Yes, Ludwig."

"Is what you do as Archbishop....... Is that all you do?"

"ouch......."

Rowen nods slowly, as if he knows what Ludwig is asking.

"Well, it's more of a modifier."

"Pronouns?"

"Yes."

Rowen walks calmly and exhales white breath.

"People keep dying in the ecliptic."

"It's ......."

"There's a lot of heresy."

"Right."

"Strange things keep happening in places that are not auspicious, where ominous things keep happening."

Rowen's expression darkened even more as he said this.

"You haven't seen Ludwig yet, but sometimes the dead rise from the dead."

"...... Is that enough?"

At the mention of the undead, Ludwig felt goosebumps all over his body.

"When unholy energy is misused, even stranger things happen: false rituals of heresy. Prayers to unholy powers."

"ouch......."

"The reason I looked a little weird earlier is because I've seen so many strange things while traveling around the refugee camps."

Sure, Rowen was smiling, but he couldn't hide his chill.

Was it because they were worried about the negative aftermath of a false consciousness?

"Isn't it pointless or too risky to ask for something from a power that you don't know if it exists or not, when you don't even have the right power to ask for it?"

"I see......."

"It's part of my job to see if that happens, and if it's something I can deal with, I deal with it."

It's a bit like cleaning up an epidemic.

Wander around looking for things that need to be done, and if you can do it, do it.

"Although something very strange has been happening lately, and we're looking into that."

"Anything weird?"

"......Ah, here we go."

Before we knew it, we were at the Temple of Tuan, where Rowen was staying.

"Ludwig, be careful going in there. You know tomorrow."

"Yes, you mean by nine o'clock?"

"Um, ....... But tomorrow, could you come in a little earlier than usual?"

"Is there something special about......?"

"No?"

Rowen looks at Ludwig and smiles.

"Tomorrow, let's have tea before we leave, just the two of us."

Rowen winked at Ludwig, then shuffled into the shrine.

What a weird guy.

Ludwig couldn't get it out of his head.

I had a strong feeling that she was about to say something and then stopped.

Weird stuff.

When I tried to ask about it, I felt like the conversation was cut off on her end.

And.

'You said you live from temple to temple.......'

Although it was only day five.

Rowen had yet to take up residence in a shrine other than this ramshackle one.

Ludwig returns to the temple.

Again, no one was hurt today.

Ludwig was satisfied and grateful for that alone.

\* \* \*

-pot!

In a warp spot on the ecliptic, a group of people and supplies emerged with an intense flash of light.

Mass teleportation of supplies and personnel.

"This is......."

Louise von Schwarz was able to reach the snowy ecliptic gradient in the late night hours.

He arrived alone, without an entourage. He came alone because he was the only one authorized to enter the temple.

She looks around in the dark, snowy ecliptic.

"......?"

Naturally.

Without a single attendant, Ruiz didn't even know where she was on the ecliptic.

Louise must go to the temple.

However, since you have virtually no attendants, you have no way of knowing the way.

"What kind of snow is this......."

Even visibility is limited due to the falling snow.

So, instead of going to the temple, she ended up at the opposite place, the imperial palace.

Episode 582.

Louise von Schwarz received an unexpected vacation during the winter.

She was ordered to rest by the one person above her, her king and father.

During the winter, the King of Cernstadt was to take command of the army.

But she had to at least complete the handover, so it was some time before she could communicate the status of the Cernstadt forces and what was important.

That's why, after all the handoffs have been made, power has been delegated to the king.

By late night, she was able to reach the ecliptic via the Alliance's warp spot.

It wasn't until the late hours of the night, after several days of handoffs, that we reached the ecliptic.

So now.

Louise seemed to know what it was like to have her eyes spinning.

It's my first time traveling the length of the ecliptic, it's late at night, and it's snowing.

It's not that I've never stopped by the palace, but I've never been allowed to go to the temple.

She didn't recognize the distances of the ecliptic, so she couldn't tell where she was in the snowy night.

And right now, Louise is as embarrassed as she is excited about the situation.

I didn't know how to deal with my father's anger, and he was losing it.

Because of Heinrich's presence, Louise has accepted the idea of being a proxy for her brothers like it's a foregone conclusion.

Moreover, suddenly, the unthinkable happened.

Go to the temple.

So Louise finds this situation strangely uplifting, embarrassing, exciting, and sad.

He was told to go to the temple to rest, and he came alone.

For the first time in a long time, Louise felt like a child.

Also, technically, she's not the brightest bulb in the box.

I don't have the best eyesight, but it's a great place to get lost.

I even tried to find a temple and ended up in an imperial palace with nothing to do.

At this rate, I'd either be greeting the sun in the streets tomorrow morning or being buried alive in a snowstorm, so I asked a palace guard for the location of the temple.

"This is north of Daeha, and the temple is south of Daeha.

"Oh......?

It wasn't so much that I took a wrong turn, but that I could have gone the other way on purpose.

Eventually she staggers off and makes her way to Irene Daeha.

First, you'll need to cross the river to find the temple.

The famous Horsepower Train, the pride of the Huangdao, was out of commission and unavailable.

'No....... If it was up and running, I'd be more lost.......'

Louise has heard of magic trains, but she's never ridden one. She's only seen it a few times from a distance, making bizarre noises as it moves toward the ecliptic.

In any case, Louise is getting her first taste of navigating on her own.

Feeling like a lost child, Louise walks vaguely south of the ecliptic.

With the right orientation, you can find your way through a blizzard.

The problem was this.

A dozen bridges that connect the north and south of the ecliptic.

You must take one of those bridges to the south of the ecliptic.

"......."

But the snow made it impossible to see, so she ended up on the boardwalk along the Irine Daeha River.

And there, frozen in the winter cold, was the great Irine River. A light layer of snow lay on the frozen river.

Of course, frozen rivers can be crossed on foot.

Do we really need to find a bridge?

I could just walk across the river. Why?

'I just need to get across.......'

Louise doesn't walk along the riverbank looking for a bridge. She goes down to the frozen river and steps onto the ice.

Suddenly, Louise was on her way to Doha in the middle of the night.

-pawpawpaw

The sound of the Princess of Schwarz's footsteps in the snow rang out.

Louise stumbled a few times as she crossed the frozen Irine River.

-Bam!

"......."

Even if you have the balance of a superhero in a master class, you can still fall down a snowy slope if you're not careful.

Louise woke up in the snow, patted her ass, and looked around uselessly. She wondered if anyone had seen her.

It's the middle of a snowy, icy day, and there are no passersby. So there's no way anyone could have seen it.

But Louise walked away, her face slightly flushed, her steps quickening as if she were trying to get away.

Sure enough, I fell a few more times.

\* \* \*

After crossing the frozen river, Louise reached the streets south of Daeha.

Temples and imperial palaces are buildings that can be found anywhere on the ecliptic, as long as the ground is slightly elevated. They are not called landmarks of the ecliptic gradient for nothing.

But now, with the snow falling, neither the temple nor the palace is visible.

Louise walked for a long time.

I asked where the temple was, on a deserted street after a heavy snowfall, and found my way.

"You can go over there, over there."

"From here....... Is it far......?"

It's hard to say it out loud, and it's hard to say it in an imperative tone, so Louise can only say it in a vague interrogative form that's neither half-assed nor dismissive.

"Umm....... You'll be there for a while."

The person who asked for directions said he was busy too and disappeared.

Louise felt ridiculous, like a lost child. The idea of being a princess and heir to the First Empire seemed like a fantasy.

Of course, aside from that, you also have the ability to be a Swordmaster, which is a master class, but that doesn't help you find your way around at all.

Still, I couldn't help but be excited.

A temple that was forbidden to even look at from a distance.

Louise's heart skipped a beat at the prospect of seeing the place her son had grown up in.

Of course, the Zodiacal Gradient was not a glorious city, and the mood was palpable.

It was a snowy night, but the whole city had an air of despair and death about it.

If you had come to the ecliptic in good times, you might have felt jealous, but now the ecliptic gradient was a city of death.

The rare passersby hunkered down and walked up and down the streets, and the accumulating snow slowly covered the city, threatening to kill.

The situation in the capital city of Cernstadt would be no different.

In a world where the environment could be worse than Huangdao anywhere, it may be that Huangdao is an incredible city just for the fact that it has maintained its appearance.

And.

Suddenly, Louise could hear a group of footsteps coming from beyond.

Too scared to move to the side of the road, a group of people rushed past.

"......What is it?

Louise couldn't help but instinctively recognize them in their steps and actions.

Those who have been trained in combat have different footsteps to begin with.

They disappeared into the distance without a glance at Louise.

I don't know what was so urgent, but Louise couldn't wait to ask for directions.

What could possibly happen in the middle of the night that would cause someone so professionally trained in combat to move with such a serious expression?

Louise snapped out of her thoughts.

For now, we need to find the temple.

I was going to turn into a real snowman if I stayed still.

\* \* \*

As Louise walked in the direction of the temple, the night grew deeper and the snow piled higher.

This inevitably led to problems.

'What the hell is this....... Where am I?

It was inevitable that Louise would become a missing person.

I knew the temple was close, but there was no one to ask for directions anymore.

"I know it's close, but.......

Louise walked down the street anyway. In the direction she'd been told the temple was.

I wonder how long that walk was.

Louise finally spotted something beyond the pouring snow.

"Lights?

Something like a blue flame flared up.

"What is it?

Whatever it is, you're going to get lost and end up in the same place.

Soon, Louise couldn't help but notice the blue light getting closer.

A person.

A disenchanted one, too.

Someone was approaching, a flame of flesh-enhancing blue mana.

And I wasn't alone, there was someone beside me, dragging something.

The approaching man was pulling something resembling a cart.

-Is this correct?

-Aigo, thank you. There you go. Put it in here.

Someone pulled a wheelbarrow into what appeared to be a warehouse in the dark.

-I could have been in trouble without you.

-No, I was on my way, and watch your back.

Louise watched the scene from some distance.

A young man pulling a cart, and an old man.

I could see that it was a young man helping an old man.

But Louise couldn't help but notice something else about the young man, aside from the fact that he was capable of magical enhancement.

-A young man with a small body has been through a lot. Here's the least I can do for him.......

The sleeve of the young man's right arm was loose.

-No, it's okay. It's really okay.

Louise stayed nearby until the exchange between the old man, who was trying to reciprocate, and the young man, who was coldly refusing, was over.

After the old man entered the house, the young man turned around and couldn't help but make eye contact with Louise, who was staring at him.

"Do you need to see me......? Before that.......? Are you okay......?"

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

Louise von Schwarz.

The princess of the House of Schwarz says, with an uncharacteristically pitiful expression on her face.

"Can you give me directions to the temple....... to the temple......?"

I don't know him, but he doesn't hesitate to help out when he's not feeling well himself.

And right now, Louise needed that help.

The young man smiled when he heard that.

"Oh, I have to go there too, let's go together."

"That's right......!"

Louise jumped up and down in her seat.

\* \* \*

With Ludwig's guidance, Louise was able to reach the temple in no time.

When I got there, I wondered why I had gotten lost.

Of course, the falling snow turned both Ludwig and Louise into snowmen.

Louise could only thank God that the young man who had shown up at the right time, and the one who had the ability to enhance her powers, was a Temple student.

But that wasn't the end of it.

A temple is a region, not a building.

As soon as she crossed the gate, Louise was stunned by the snowy view of the temple and its vast grounds.

I did get some guidance from a Temple student.

But he'll go where he needs to go, and then he'll be lost again. Luiz is half-convinced that he'll be guided, but he'll get lost along the way.

Mia outside the temple just becomes Mia inside the temple.

Capture one of the Temple guards.

Louise's head is spinning.

Ludwig laughed, as if he knew what Louise was thinking when he saw her go white.

"The inside of the temple is quite large as well, where are you going, let me guide you to your destination."

"Hey, are you sure....... Are you sure you want to......?"

His demeanor is polite, but there is an indelible joy and eagerness in his expression.

"Yes."

It's amazing to see someone who doesn't even care about her own body so much as helping others.

"I need to go to a place called Royal Class Dormitory....... Do you know where it is?"

"......?"

The young man shook his head at that.

"Don't you know? If so, I can't help it......."

"No, it's just that that's where I'm headed....... I was just a little surprised."

"......?"

"Come on, let me walk you through it."

The person you asked for directions is the same as your destination.

The young man in front of you is not a teacher or a guard, so he must be a student.

Suddenly, Louise couldn't help but notice the empty sleeve of the young man's right arm, which she had consciously avoided asking or looking at.

Louise knew about what happened to her son's friends.

Dead classmates.

And stories about classmates who were injured.

"Do you happen to know if your name is....... Ludwig....... is that right?"

"......How do I change my name?"

My son's friend!

"I'm Heinrich's mom......!"

Louise bit her tongue, so excited that she almost slipped up.

"!!!"

"Hey, are you okay......?"

She bit down so hard, Louise couldn't help but taste the bitter taste of beef in her mouth.

\* \* \*

Ludwig took the lead, and Louise followed.

"I never thought you were a princess....... Excuse me. Oh, no, Commander......."

Ludwig was ecstatic to learn that Louise was Heinrich's sister and the military commander of Cernstadt. Ludwig had never been involved with the Cernstadt army, so he had only heard stories about Louise, but this was the first time he had seen her face.

Louise shook her head at Ludwig's words.

"No, no, it's okay. No offense, not at all. Not at all. I'm grateful. I'm a friend of Heinrich's......."

When Louise realized that the person who showed up at the right time wasn't just a Temple student, but a friend of her son's, her excitement was short-lived.

Louise stares at the back of Ludwig's head.

The sleeve of his right arm flapped pathetically.

Ruiz couldn't watch Heinrich grow up.

But through reports, we've heard about Heinrich's schooling at Temple and how he's doing.

Heinrich's classmates in the Royal Class.

So Louise had to get to know Ludwig, and after the war, she got to know him even better.

Ludwig.

B-11, second year Royal Class. Technically a horse, his talent is physical strength.

It's a short-lived talent, but she has an extraordinary five senses that she realizes even before she learns to enchant.

Of course, there were three more such cases from the second year of the Royal Class, but two of them were a demon and a warrior. I wouldn't dare compare them.

So if I had been educated in the royal class without the war, I could have been in the master class before graduation.

But the war took Ludwig's arm.

Even in his condition, with training and practice, he might be able to fight, but Louise saw the resignation in Ludwig's eyes.

I don't know why, but I recognized Ludwig's despair in the way he sat there on a snowy night, looking like he had lost everything.

War is always taking something from someone.

"By the way, did you see that cart earlier......?"

Louise saw Ludwig for the first time today.

Losing his arm, he retreated from the battlefield and returned to the temple.

But on this snowy day, I saw an old man I didn't know pulling a wagon on the street.

"Oh, I thought you might have slipped on the snow and hurt your back, so I drove to your house......."

"I see......."

Louise smiled at Ludwig, who scratched his head with a clumsy smile.

It's hard not to feel good when you see someone with a good heart. Especially when you're the beneficiary of that goodness.

Because.

Louise felt even more sorry for Ludwig's empty right arm sleeve.

Ludwig can't help but notice an old man who has fallen in the snow and is moaning.

The person who uses their time and energy to pull the old man's cart home for him.

Ruiz doesn't know the details of how Ludwig lost his arm, but he does have some idea.

I've heard reports of people losing their arms trying to save friends in danger.

Eventually, my inability to turn away from someone met a cruel day and I took his arm.

It was during this time that Ludwig's empty sleeve reminded me of the brutal truth that wanting to help others is a weakness.

"Sad times."

Ludwig stares at her at Louise's outburst.

"......, yes."

"Those were the days, but......."

Louise exhales a white breath in the falling snow.

"Let's get on with life."

"......."

"Come on, let's survive."

It's a take-it-or-leave-it world, but you can't take it for granted.

Ludwig stares at Louise, stunned by her outburst.

"Yes, you should."

Ludwig laughed, and Louise smiled back.

\* \* \*

What the hell, lady.

Why is she here?

"Who....... sister?"

Heinrich jumped out of his seat with a dumbfounded look on his face at the improbable visitor, and Ellen came down from her perch by the window to pet me.

Louise von Schwarz.

Someone who shouldn't have been there appeared out of nowhere.

"I, too, will be resting in the temple for the winter."

"And your sister......?"

"Yeah."

Louise merely told Heinrich that with her usual stiff expression.

No, can you explain a little more?

Whether Nana Heinrich was embarrassed or not, Louise looked at Ellen.

"I don't know about you, but I don't think I've ever seen this before......."

"Hello."

Ellen bowed her head in the manner of a friend's sister, not the princess and military commander of Cernstadt.

Louise next looks at me, sitting still on the window sill.

"Is this the cat?"

Does he know about the cat that showed up at the Royal Class Garrison? Louise wasn't too surprised to see the black cat.

"Yes."

Ellen scooped me up and held me out to Louise for her to touch.

What it is.

You're treating me like a way to talk to strangers now?

Uh.

That's convenient.

Louise stared at the cat (me) for a long time, then patted me on the head. As a matter of courtesy.

"......."

"......."

After Louise petted the cat a few times, Ellen looked at Louise.

They don't just stare, they stare.

What do you think?

How's my kid?

Say it fast.

Tell me it's cute.

That desire is evident in his eyes.

Louise could feel the slight panic in Ellen's eyes.

"That....... ears, they're cute......."

"That's right."

After being forced to take me in, Ellen tickled my hair.

Louise's look at Ellen is pretty hilarious.

They don't know each other, but they've never had a conversation, so Louise has no idea who Ellen is.

And you're a warrior who brags about your cat.

Was I disappointed or did I think it was humanizing.

But Ellen aside, Heinrich was still in a semi-panic.

"My sister....... How did this happen......."

"They told me to stay in room A-1. Where is that?"

Why is this person here anyway?

The Temple is not a place for just anyone to enter now, and Louise von Schwarz is certainly not just anyone.

I'm pretty sure it was Bertus who granted me access.

What does it mean to let Louise into the temple anyway?

Louise was allowed to live in room A-1 in the sophomore dormitory.

As it turns out, the room had been used by the emperor when he was a student at the Temple.

While King Cernstadt is to take command of the army for the winter, Louise takes a long vacation at the Temple.

Heinrich was frozen in place by the absurdity of the situation, while Louise looked up and down in wonder.

"This is the Temple......."

I don't know if she's comparing it to the academy in Cernstadt, or if it's something else entirely, but I can tell by the look on her face that she's pretty excited.

Heinrich disappeared somewhere with Louise, offering to give her a little tour of the royal class dormitories, leaving Ellen to watch the snow fall from the window.

Episode 583.

The day after Louise von Schwarz arrived at the Temple.

There aren't many people back in the Royal Class dorms in the first place, and Louise is the commander of the Cernstadt army.

As such, I could feel the people who recognized her get a little nervous, but it didn't get loud.

Whether or not people recognized her, Louise thought it was strange that she was in the temple at all.

Breakfast time.

"I was patrolling around ......."

"Yes, sister."

"I told you to rest."

Louise's expression hardened slightly.

"Sorry......."

"I didn't mean to hear that."

Just looking between the two makes me feel like I'm going to get stuck in something.

It's so awkward to watch them be so awkward with each other, it's almost painful to watch from the perspective of someone who knows them!

"But....... Nothing really happened. It's definitely safe around the ecliptic, and I didn't even see the monster. Ellen, right?"

At Heinrich's request for support, Ellen, who had been munching on her bread, nodded.

"Yeah, I think we definitely don't have a monster problem, and I don't think I'm going to patrol anymore because there's not much point."

They'd been out and about since their return to the Temple, but they hadn't drawn a sword or sliced a radish. So it was time to rest.

But when Heinrich and Ellen see the snow outside the ballroom window, their faces darken.

In addition to hunger and cold, the accumulating snow was a major problem.

The gate and the monsters were the cause of all this, but now they were secondary. Louise looked over at Ludwig as they ate.

"Um, by the way, Ludwig. Thanks for yesterday."

"What? Ah....... No, Commander. It wasn't a big deal."

What does this mean?

Louise, what can this man do to thank Ludwig?

Louise must have felt Heinrich's gaze as much as I did, because she went blank.

The look on your face like you just lost money by saying something you shouldn't have.

"You gave me directions to....... yesterday."

"Directions to......?"

"When I arrived yesterday, it was snowing so hard that I had to go to......."

Louise's face fell slightly.

No way.

"Are you....... lost?"

"......."

What it is.

Why is this lady so cute.

She doesn't even look like an auntie because she's a superhuman who got into the master class in the first place.

If you think about it, yesterday Louise von Schwarz arrived at the Temple very late.

Neither Ellen nor Heinrich could sleep through the snowfall, so they were out in the lobby, and it was late enough that they would normally have stayed up.

You didn't arrive late in the first place, you just got lost on the ecliptic.

Maybe it's because we've had so much snow that it's unavoidable.

A princess lost on a snowy day.

"So if I hadn't met Ludwig in time....... I would have been even more lost......."

After getting lost, he met Ludwig, who led him to the temple.

No, now that I think about it, it's a problem even if you find the temple.

The interior of the temple is incredibly spacious.

Even if you did find the temple, you'd probably get lost again trying to find the royal class dorms.

If I hadn't been so lucky to run into Ludwig, I might have woken up on the street.

"Ludwig, you must have been busy at work yesterday, because you're late."

To see if Heinrich sensed my doubt, he turned to Ludwig, who was eating.

"Work isn't busy, but....... I finished work on time, but on the way back....... There's someone who needs help, so I'm running late."

"That's so....... That sounds like you."

"Haha......."

I thought you said I was spoiled.

I was able to find the lost princess, so I guess that's a good thing in the end.

By the way, I could see Ludwig's expression getting better and better.

The cleanup seemed to help Ludwig realize that he could do something meaningful.

The wound would never be completely healed, but it could be overcome, and Ludwig seemed to be on his way.

Partly because Ellen forced him to come to the Temple, partly to gather information, and partly because it's nice to see Ludwig getting better.

"Huh?"

-Angel

"Yes."

As I sat on her lap, Ellen patted my back.

This.......

It's easy.......

If it weren't for the Gate debacle, I could live as a cat for the rest of my life.......

Of course, you'll have to be as good as I am at taking care of the house.

Honestly, I think Pacton likes the cat look too.......

Heinrich looks at Ludwig and asks.

"Are you going out on a cleansing mission with that priest again today?"

"Yeah, they asked me to come in early today so I could get a head start, it's been snowing a lot."

"Cleanup operation......?"

Louise tilted her head as if she didn't understand.

"There's a plague spreading across the ecliptic, so I'm guarding a priest who's purifying it."

Louise's eyes widened at that.

"You're doing good work."

"Oh, no, actually, I don't do much, more often than not I just end up walking by......."

"Still, it's a good thing, isn't it?"

"That....... Thank you."

Louise nodded, seemingly pleased that he was trying to do something in his condition. It made her feel even more sorry for him.

That lady's crush on Ludwig is already at an all-time high.

What....... If anyone hates a nice guy, it's the haters.

And I sneered at Ludwig for no good reason.

Yes, I am a problem.

If you think about it, the whole world is my fault, so it's a problem.......

I'm suddenly depressed.......

Louise stares after Ludwig as he leaves the ballroom.

"You're a good kid."

Louise seemed to think that Heinrich was lucky to have such a good-hearted boy among his friends.

And I can't help but feel sorry for the man who lost his arm like that.

"Yes, it is......."

Louise's words brought a bitter smile to Heinrich's face.

\* \* \*

Both Ellen and Heinrich had confirmed that the outer ecliptic was safe, so there was no need for outward patrols.

And Heinrich would not be able to get out even if he wanted to because of Louise's entry into the Temple.

After breakfast, Louise and Heinrich stepped outside the Royal Class dormitory.

I'm not going to patrol the perimeter anymore. I've had a few days to see that it's already well protected.

Heinrich left the dormitory now to give me a tour of the temple.

Even Heinrich, who wasn't very perceptive, could tell that his mother, who didn't show much emotion under false pretenses, was getting pretty worked up right now.

But there was a problem.

"It's snowing so....... You've come a long way."

"That's right......."

The snow that had started falling yesterday had turned the whole world white, so it was just white all around.

The good news is that the snow has been plowed and is still falling, but not enough to make walking around uncomfortable.

"It must be crazy out there."

"I'm sure."

Like everyone else, Heinrich and Louise are not happy to see this snow. So the snow that falls from the sky feels like a terrible curse.

Heinrich looks at Louise as if he's remembered something.

"Let's melt the snow."

"With your powers?"

"Yeah, I've never used it this way, but....... I don't think there's anything I can't try."

"Hmmm....... Do you want to try it?"

"Yes."

Heinrich begins to focus his energy.

"If it works out, I could go around melting snow on the ecliptic instead of patrolling, don't you think?"

Heinrich smirked, wondering if he could use his powers to clear the snow from the ecliptic.

"Yeah, whatever....... Try it for now."

For now, Louise watched Heinrich do his thing.

-Currrrrr!

Louise could soon see a sphere of red-hot flames high in the sky.

"Youngest, are you trying to summon the sun......?"

"Well, that would be great, but for now......."

The flames scattered a tremendous amount of light everywhere, and the intense heat was almost palpable.

A sphere of flame that roars and burns.

It was melting the snow on the ground.

Naturally.

-HoodooDooDooDoo

"......."

"......."

The snow that was falling from the sky turned into rain and started pouring down.

Naturally, they were bound to get rain, not snow, in the middle of winter.

Instead of snow, it was rain, and Louise and Heinrich's clothes were soaked through in no time.

"Uh oh......."

Heinrich let out a stupid yell and extinguished the fireball in the sky.

Louise let out a deep sigh.

"It looked like this."

"Well, did you......."

"If it's just enough heat to melt the snow and evaporate it quickly, this might work, but if it's baking people, it's a problem. No, we'd be worried about fires, but if we melted the snow this haphazardly, the streets would be icy."

Louise didn't think Heinrich's big picture would make much sense, but she figured it was better to let him try it out for himself than to explain it to him in words.

"......Sorry. I got your clothes wet unnecessarily."

Heinrich blushed, embarrassed that he'd had to do something so obvious to realize.

"I want you to get in the habit of thinking more deeply."

"Yes......."

"But......."

Louise looks at Heinrich and smiles.

"Your heart is in the right place."

"Yes.......?"

I did it because I wanted to help people, even if it didn't work and even if it didn't mean anything.

"Sometimes I wonder if that's enough."

Ruiz added with a laugh.

The suddenness of the words stunned Heinrich.

"Go, thank you sister......."

Seeing Ludwig changed Louise's mind, and she couldn't help but be happy that Heinrich was so similar to Ludwig.

Of course.

I said something I don't normally say, and Louise was as frozen as Heinrich.

And that's not the only problem.

So naturally, in the cold winter air, the two were bound to feel the extreme cold in real time.

This is not a problem for someone like Luiz, but it is for someone like Heinrich.

Louise sighed as she watched Heinrich's lips turn purple.

"......Let's get dressed first."

"It's ......."

They went out for a walk and had no choice but to turn back.

\* \* \*

Heinrich and Louise changed into different clothes and went for a walk around the temple.

"Youngest, there aren't as many people in the Temple as there used to be, are there?"

"Schools aren't in session, so there's probably a tenth of the usual number of people, maybe even less."

"If I can clear snow like this inside a temple like that, maybe I don't have to worry so much about the outside."

"That would be great."

Louise and Heinrich walked through the temple.

"What do you know about education at Temple?"

"I know."

Cernstadt also has an academy, and in fact the Cernstadt Academy is modeled quite a bit after Temple.

From having separate general education and specialized education, to having education from a very young age, to having education from all walks of life, with no restrictions on status.

"That's the classroom building where we used to have common training."

"Oh....... I see."

Louise looks at the white classroom building.

"That was the pool and....... That's where we used to do physical training......."

"Yeah."

Heinrich walked me around the temple and explained things.

The classroom wing where the Royal Class was taught, the building where psychic powers were taught, the places where magic sensitivity was trained, and so on.

And I took her not only to the royal class, but also to the primary and secondary schools that I attended as a very young child.

"This is Main Street. The shops are closed now, but almost all of the Temple students used to congregate here, go to the restaurants, stop at the cafes, and if they weren't going out to the ecliptic on the weekends, almost all of them were here."

"That's a lot of distance."

"Yeah, because there were over 100,000 students, and that's where they congregated, and they came from all over the continent, so I got to taste a lot of different indigenous foods. What....... I didn't really like."

"I see."

There were very few people coming and going, except for the guards shoveling snow, but the space was once bustling with students.

People come from all over the world, and cultures from all over the world converge.

While Main Street was not an educational site, it symbolized the Temple's success and prosperity.

But now, in the snowy streets, not a single store was open.

These are all places Louise knows in her head.

Or the number of students, or Main Street, or the different schools Heinrich went to.

I knew the places and sights in my head, but they were new to me.

"You've spent your whole life in this place."

"Yes."

Louise said, and Heinrich nodded.

"Let me just say this....... I hope you don't mind my saying, but the temple is a nice place."

"You need not look away. Do I not know that the Academy in Cernstadt is no match for the Temple?"

Louise stares at the view of the snowy temple.

"The Academy in Cernstadt is not a temple, nor can it be. Seeing it like this reminds me that it was only possible because of the Empire."

The Academy in Cernstadt was modeled after the Temple, but it was never able to achieve the scale of the Temple.

First of all, there is no reason to choose Cernstadt Academy when Temple is the best school on the continent. Most of the students admitted to Temple come from well-off families. There is absolutely no reason why they should be admitted to a second-tier academy.

Cernstadt's academy covers the cost of tuition, but like Temple, it's a full-funded institution, and the state itself falters.

As a result, the number of academies themselves is small and the scale is small.

It's not like Louise doesn't know that in the first place, so I don't think Heinrich is disrespecting the Cernstadt Academy just because he says so.

"No, sister, that's not what I meant."

Heinrich says as we make eye contact on the main street.

"I'm just saying I've spent my whole life in a good place."

"ah......."

Louise's breath caught in her throat at the suddenness of Heinrich's words.

"I wasn't exactly happy, but I wasn't exactly unhappy either. I was in a good place, with good people."

"......."

"So, you don't have to make that face."

Suddenly, Louise realizes what she's been looking like all this time.

Passing by the many places, schools, dorms, and streets that Heinrich has lived.

Louise was overwhelmed with guilt for not being there to see it, for not being able to be with him, and for her son, who had lived his entire life without knowing the truth.

So I couldn't really give a proper impression of the place as I walked through it.

Louise's face remained stony the entire time, as her guilt was not resolved, but rather deepened.

I'm happy to be in the temple.

In the end, Louise's mood sank lower and lower as she felt sad, sadder, and ultimately sorry that she hadn't been there to see them.

Temple is a good place, and I've never stayed in a better place.

So when you say you shouldn't feel sorry for yourself.

Ruiz didn't know if she deserved to hear that.

I was never watched over, never cared for, never had a proper conversation with.

Even with all the facts, we still didn't have a proper conversation.

I still refer to my son as my youngest, and he refers to his mother as his sister, just in case anyone overhears.

"Thank you....... for sleeping well."

"Oh, I can't believe you thought of that....... Thank you."

Louise could only curse herself for saying that.

Even at full strength, Ruiz saw with his own eyes that Cernstadt could not keep up with Temple.

Good for you.

If Temple was a good place for my son to grow up, I'm glad Cernstadt can't match it.

I was in a good place, with good people.

What a relief that is.

But as Louise thought about it, she couldn't help but be both impressed and bitter.

You've been in good company.

What a terrible lie that is.

Louise smiled bitterly.

"You've been in the temple with the devil, and you've been in good company....... You're telling a lie to comfort me, but....... I'm glad you said that."

"What? Ah......."

Her son, if you were to name the least fortunate person in the world, you'd have to put him in the top ten.

But he was lying to comfort himself, and Louise could only understand that.

But her words left Heinrich speechless, as if he'd been hit hard.

Louise cursed her tongue as she looked at her son, who stared at her wordlessly.

I put the devil in your mouth.

I'm sure I've said it before.

You may feel guilty that you were right there with the devil and didn't do anything to stop it.

"Youngest, I'm just......."

"Sister."

Louise nodded, bewildered, with a sense of dread that seemed to tighten in her chest.

"Yes, I'm listening."

At the sight of Heinrich's frighteningly determined expression, Louise felt the first kind of fear she had ever experienced in her life.

Heinrich's face is set in a grim line.

I was stumped.

We don't know what he's thinking, but he stares at himself for a moment, as if trying to choose his words.

You can't say anything, but you have to ask yourself if you'd be able to stand it if you were to hear the words of resentment.

Feeling suffocated, Louise waited for the words to come out of Heinrich's mouth.

After a long silence, long enough for the snow on my shoulders to fall instead of pile up.

"I've been trying to decide whether or not to tell you, but....... I think you should know."

"What do I....... need to know about......?"

"Yes."

The words that came out of his son's mouth were not words of resentment, nor were they an outpouring of grief.

Heinrich opens his mouth slowly, with a stony expression.

"In fact....... before my brothers tried to kill me....... came to visit."

"!"

Episode 584.

Heinrich looked determined, and Louise was stunned.

And rightly so. The Devil, the cause of all this, the one who deserves the hatred of all the world, has secretly visited his son.

And he hasn't told anyone about it, let alone himself, until now.

Heinrich explained.

Before she found out she was illegitimate, when she was struggling with her siblings' hatred and not knowing the truth, she received a letter from someone she didn't recognize.

"It was a....... that my brothers were going to kill me."

"!"

"Maybe....... I think they knew I was illegitimate, I don't know how they knew it, but......."

Naturally, Heinrich thought the letter was a prank, and he didn't believe it. But from the mouths of his brothers, who were actually uncles, Heinrich received confirmation that he was illegitimate.

"He came to me that day, so I guess he's been watching from somewhere."

"The Devil came to....... himself......?"

"Yes, he definitely showed up in person."

The demon suggested to Heinrich.

If you want to live like this, follow yourself.

Because if you stay here, you're either going to get killed, or you're going to want to kill your brothers.

"And....... I said if you follow me, I'll tell you everything. What's happened so far. What's going to happen next. What I can do from there......."

The more Louise listened, the more the hairs on her body stood on end.

Unbeknownst to him, the Demon King was digging up information on the Allies, and his own son was being watched.

I wonder if this is what it feels like to have your blood run dry.

But it was a good thing.

Her son hasn't followed the devil, he's here now, in front of her.

"The devil tried to trick you."

"......."

"Thank goodness, thank goodness, you didn't follow the devil. You made a good choice. You were wise."

The three tongues of the devil were tricked into following him.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

Liana De Granz.

Olivia Ranze.

It may only be three, but all three were either the children of prominent nobles or considered the future of the empire.

I don't know where they are or what they're doing, but it was already a shocking event in itself.

Taking advantage of Heinrich's panic and confusion, the devil tried to take his son.

Heinrich made him an offer he couldn't refuse.

Louise was overjoyed and thrilled that her son had rejected the devil's offer.

Since you can't say no or refuse, you've turned down the devil's offer.

How sophisticated and terrifying such a demon is.

"Sister, I didn't follow the devil because I don't believe in him."

Heinrich looks at Louise with a stony expression.

"What......?"

I didn't follow the devil.

But Louise's hands began to tremble as she watched her son say the words she was afraid to utter: that he believed in the devil.

"I know what you're thinking. Maybe the devil lied to me to get me to do this, or maybe I'm telling you these things because I'm caught up in the lie."

Heinrich says, swallowing hard.

"I have no intention of following the Devil, and I have no intention of cooperating with him, even if he comes back. You can rest assured of that, but no matter how much I try to doubt....... No matter how much I try to doubt....... I am the Devil....... Reinhardt is an evil being."

"Youngest, the Devil has deceived everyone. Didn't he deceive everyone by wearing a mask of gentleness and kindness, and didn't you see those closest to him who followed him and helped him?"

Heinrich couldn't help but freeze up at that statement.

Kindness and gentleness.

That's not something anyone who's ever been near a demon in his temple days can say.

"......nun. The Devil was far from kind and gentle. He was technically a madman."

"That....... is."

"Yeah, he was a crazy guy who got into all kinds of trouble. He was doing everything he wasn't supposed to do on the topic he was infiltrating."

If the goal is to infiltrate and capture, the Demon has done too many things he shouldn't have done.

But Reinhardt had gotten to know and befriended many people. But it was more of a coincidence, a series of coincidences, than a scheme of the devil.

If the goal was indeed subsumption, the demon would have no reason to behave that way.

It's too consequentialist to say that because the outcome is what it is, the purpose of the process must have been.

The devil lived in the temple like a madman. In fact, Heinrich is technically a victim.

But Louise is only frightened to hear her son talking about the devil.

I was afraid that I had already fallen for the devil's trick-or-treating.

"Sister, don't you think that at some point the Allies seem to be marching too easily?"

But Heinrich knew what to say to his sister.

"......No way."

"The weather is too good for winter, the warp gates of smaller cities have already been taken over without any operations, and even this battle in Serandia looks like someone has already swept through it."

Clearly a strange situation.

Things that no one seems to care about.

"You can't tell me that....... That's......."

"It is certain that the forces of the Devil are aiding our advance, fighting ahead of us."

A secret or strategy the empire is hiding.

I had vaguely wondered if that was the case.

But to say that it was all the help of the devil was something I didn't want to believe, regardless of the possibility.

"The devil is....... Why on earth would he do that, after causing the Gate debacle. Why the hell is he helping us?"

"I don't understand why the Demon is helping us. Why the Empire is keeping this a secret. I don't know what the Demon really wants, but....... I do know one thing."

The Devil caused the Gate Crisis to destroy humanity.

"There's something we don't know about the gate situation in the first place."

Heinrich is the one who no longer believes in that proposition.

\* \* \*

Ludwig was on his way to the Temple of Tuan.

It's a small comfort to Ludwig to know that he can do something, but he's not the only one who feels stuck in the snow.

Ludwig was told by Lowen that the collapse of the shack was worse than the cold from the snow.

Ludwig could see people on roofs clearing snow, as well as people clearing snow from the streets.

While the guards and the imperial family were hard at work clearing the snow, the citizens were just as eager to get rid of it.

That's why the streets of the ecliptic, which have been chilly since the Gate incident, were full of people for the first time in a long time.

But there were many people in the refugee camps who didn't have the energy to do this.

It's important to clean up, but what's the point in this situation? It's a shack with no protection from the cold wind, but without it, people are shivering to death in the freezing cold.

The land is now filled with such anguish everywhere.

Both Rowen and Ludwig know that cleaning up the disease is just the tip of the iceberg.

What Rowen is doing now has nothing to do with hope. It's a temporary fix for despair, it's not about saving the world, it's not about bringing peace.

But it's something we have to do because we can't afford not to.

In a time when even the slightest hint of hope has become a luxury, it's all we can do to patch the holes in the dam of despair.

Furthermore, Rowen is an archbishop, not just a priest, and Ludwig is a superhuman, albeit with a missing arm.

The reality is that even they can only do small things. So there is no place for the smaller ones.

Big things happen to big people.

The big ones, like Ellen, Heinrich, and Louise von Schwarz, who joined us for breakfast today.

Those who are very powerful individually, or can mobilize large armies, will end the gate.

It is their role to find hope.

When it's all said and done, when we can say peace in small ways, even the smallest things will find meaning.

A moment when those who somehow survived are faced with the task of peace and reconstruction. What Ludwig and Rowen are doing now means that they have saved countless lives and given them a future.

That's why Ludwig walks.

With the hope that one day it will all work out.

Rather than despair and give up, realize that there is still something you can do and do it.

Ludwig still refuses to give up.

While walking along.

Nearing the temple where Rowen resides.

-Where do I sell this?

-Wouldn't some of the nobles want to buy it?

Ludwig could see people running through the streets with sacks.

There were a lot of them.

A group of people, some of whom seemed to be in a group, some of whom didn't, were running in circles.

-Damn, I wish I'd eaten it instead.

-We've already been robbed, where's the good stuff?

-But I don't see any gold or silver in that temple.

-I would have sold it a long time ago. How did you get this much out of that poor man's shrine?

-Oh well, at least you only burned a little hair.

-We're better off. Anyone who goes in now is fucked.

Ludwig could see smoke rising from the sky beyond the alley.

-Fire!

"......!"

Before he could even comprehend the words, Ludwig was running.

\* \* \*

Through the pouring snow, Ludwig could see the grayish-white smoke that had engulfed the entire temple, billowing flames that seemed to defy the sky.

-currr

Thousands of people crowded around it, staring blankly at the enormous shape of the fire.

The Temple of Tuan, where Rowen is staying, is engulfed in flames.

-No!

I could hear the sound of something breaking and crumbling.

-I think it's falling apart.......

-What about the guards?

-See if you can turn that off.......

-Heaven's punishment for those who conspire with the devil.

-Yes, man, what those refugee camp bums have done deserves a thousand punishments!

Ludwig couldn't help but notice the people he had just passed.

Looting.

"Sometimes, some people try to start fires.

And fireproofing.

Someone has set fire to the temple and is taking advantage of the opportunity to loot its contents.

"Rowen!"

Ludwig leaped into the shrine as if possessed.

As the temple burned, they watched in amusement as Ludwig leapt into the flames.

But Ludwig didn't care what the onlookers thought, or what they had to say about the Tuan Order.

"Ugh!"

-currrr

Inside the smoke-filled temple, it was chaos. Anything that could burn was burning, and it was hard to tell what was going on.

-with

It was on the verge of collapse, and the sounds of breaking wood and cracking walls began to get louder and louder.

Who. Why.

No matter how much I hate the Tuan Order, do I have to do this?

Ludwig was soon visible through the acrid smoke.

'No way......?

Inside the temple, people Ludwig didn't recognize, but who wore the robes of priests, were lying all over the chapel.

He didn't have time to look closely, but Ludwig couldn't help but intuit that they were all dead.

-Bang!

He lifts a collapsed pillar that is burning, he lifts a collapsed stone pillar, he looks for something.

I hold my breath, knowing that inhaling smoke is dangerous even for a superhuman.

Find.

Who should be here.

How many times have I wandered through the smoke of a burning chapel.

Soon, Ludwig could see someone crouching in front of the statue of Tuan.

"!!!"

Archbishop Rowen.

Rowen was there, not in his usual gray, faded robes, but in white holy robes.

But what should have been a white robe was stained red.

"Rowen......!"

Rowen's entire body could only be described as exhausted.

After being stabbed and mauled so many times, the white shirt might as well be called a red shirt.

Ludwig knelt before Rowen's dead body, trembling and wide-eyed.

"Priest, priest, wake up!"

But even as he spoke, Ludwig knew that his calling could not bring Rowen back.

Even in death, Rowen remained wide-eyed, forever robbed of something he could never get back.

Clutching Rowen's shoulder, Ludwig blinked back tears that could not be contained, even in the heat of the flames that threatened to burn his entire body.

"This is....... What the hell. why. This is....... Why....... Why?"

-Support

The temple continued to burn.

-Top!

And with the sound of something breaking that shouldn't break.

-Currrrr!

The temple has fallen.

Episode 585.

Louise told Heinrich a shocking story.

Ruiz recognized that there was a secret to the Allies' too-easy advance, but he didn't see the need to uncover it now.

But it was still hard to believe that the devil was leading the charge.

But if that's the truth, it makes sense that the empire was forced to be silent.

When this truth begins to spread, people will doubt the devil's motives.

As confused as Ruiz is now, if word of this gets out to the Allies, it's going to spell trouble.

So the empire is forced to pretend that they are in control, even as they enlist the help of the devil.

"It's clear that the Empire is more than a tacit partnership with the Devil."

It is hard to believe that his son had fallen for the devil's trick-or-treating. If that were the case, Heinrich had no reason to remain with the Allies. His life was in danger, and he had no choice but to leave.

"The empire is....... the devil and......."

He could have had his son taken away by the devil.

But, to put it another way, the demon was trying to save her son.

"If there is a truth we don't know, what do you think it is?"

"I don't know, if the devil didn't want Gate to happen....... Then why the hell did it happen....... Why is the Empire hiding the truth....... I don't know."

The demon did not tell Heinrich the truth, which would be dangerous for him to know.

Heinrich stares at Louise in confusion.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to confuse you, but....... I felt like I had to tell you......."

"......."

Louise didn't have to think too hard to realize why this was happening.

Most people believe that the devil is the source of all evil, and the few who know the truth encourage their beliefs.

But if there's any truth to the Gate debacle other than what everyone knows.

If it's true that the devil really didn't want the gate to happen.

Then what's the world coming to.

If this situation, so strongly held together by hatred of the Devil, breaks down, humanity will end.

Heinrich sees the confusion in Louise's eyes, and finally bows his head.

"Maybe I'm possessed by the devil, but....... I can't help but think so, so I'm going to......."

"No. Well said. Well said......."

Louise still couldn't escape her confusion, but she couldn't help but praise her son's courage in telling her about his secret meeting with the devil.

Louise's head was spinning from Heinrich's words.

What is the Devil really like, what is the truth about the Gate debacle, and what is the Empire thinking?

I don't know anything.

But even if you have a truth that not everyone in the world knows, does it matter?

Regardless of the intentions, the gate incident happened and it needs to end, and that doesn't change in the face of any truth.

It's still snowing.

It's snowing hard.

The snow piles up.

Snow covers everything.

No land, no buildings, no trees, no frozen rivers.

Overwrites them all.

A gate event is like this snow.

A snowstorm so massive that it buries everything.

When it's snowing hard, everything else loses importance.

Snow must be cleared. You have to keep clearing it so it doesn't cover everything and bring it down.

Just as you have to clear the snow before it engulfs the world, eventually nothing else matters but the snow.

The truth was also buried in the snowstorm that was the Gate debacle, now invisible and unimportant.

We need to end the gating debacle.

That absolute drowned out all truth and justice.

Hence another absolute: buried truths don't matter.

Louise von Schwarz couldn't help but realize it.

But if the devil really is such a thing.

If you're on the front lines of the fight to end gatekeeping, but no one in the world recognizes it.

"If what you say is true and....... if that's really the case."

How scary, how strong, and how.

Also, what a sad existence.

"It's sad, all this."

Louise looks up at the sky and exhales wistfully.

\* \* \*

Heinrich and Louise walked down Temple Street in a daze.

What the Devil said to Heinrich may have been a lie.

But it's also hard to believe that the devil was lying. If he was trying to deceive, he should have said something.

It's going to be dangerous, come with me.

Follow me and I'll tell you what's happened so far.

That's all he said, and he even backed down when Heinrich refused.

Heinrich's opinion was the result of his own thinking and judgment about the demon and what was happening in the Alliance.

The idea that the Devil had been watching the Allied garrison all this time was very eerie to Louise, but in the end, the Devil hadn't even tried to trick Heinrich.

In fact, Heinrich's life was indeed in danger. An assassination attempt was made, but Louise was able to stop it.

If Ruiz hadn't intervened, Heinrich would have died.

The Devil did not want Heinrich to kill his brothers, nor did he want to be killed.

That's why we wanted Heinrich on board.

When the demon visited Heinrich, he did not say anything except that an assassination attempt would take place.

So there was only Heinrich's judgment.

It was a strange thing for Louise to think about.

He's hated by his brothers, his life is in danger, and he doesn't know the truth about Louise.

"The youngest."

"Yes, sister."

"Was leaving....... was not right."

"That would have been right, in the moment."

"Yes, you were dangerous and you didn't know what was coming. I didn't know I was going to do that...... either."

Heinrich's decision to stay behind when he wasn't sure of his safety could only be considered foolish.

"I had my reasons, but....... I could see what would happen if I left: it would affect our soldiers, our officers, our royalty, and even Cernstadt."

"ah......."

Louise was dumbfounded, as she hadn't expected Heinrich to be of that mindset.

"Even with my lack of brains, I could see that people were going to look at me like that."

"......."

"So I decided not to leave."

Whatever the reason, it's a betrayal.

The Cult of Tuan, the Cult of Als, and the Duchy of St. Tuan would be viewed the same way by those from Cernstadt.

I thought about it, so I didn't leave, even though I knew it was dangerous.

Louise felt her breath catch in her throat.

"And....... If I had left, there would have been nothing like this, no time like this, no....... forever. I wouldn't have known anything."

He would never know that not all of his brothers hated him, that there were some who were just too difficult to deal with and were holding back.

"I'm glad you didn't leave."

Heinrich looks at Louise.

War has changed so much, and it has caused so much misery.

But not everything changes for the worse. Heinrich had become a man who could think about a lot of things.

Moved and sorry, Louise couldn't find the right words to say.

Louise had so much to be grateful for in her son, who knew the truth and was grateful and accepting of the situation instead of hating himself.

I don't know how long we walked in that pleasant silence.

"......Hmm?"

As they walked, a distant voice stopped them in their tracks.

On the other side of the road, a group of guards blocked their path.

"Is this a restricted area?"

"I think so......."

The guards didn't say anything to Heinrich and Ruiz, but the shape of the road they were blocking made it clear that this was a controlled area.

I was just walking down the street and ended up in a place I wouldn't normally be.

"Looks like....... university grounds."

"I see, so you wouldn't know."

But it's a restricted area. Louise and Heinrich stared at the grounds and buildings beyond, where guards blocked their path. The guards in the distance pay them little attention, as if their staring is not a problem in itself.

But is there a good reason to control access?

With so few passersby, no one would dare to step foot there.

"If there are no people coming or going, and it's a controlled area, I'd say......."

There must be something going on inside that is confidential.

And the size of the guard in the distance was unusually large. We don't know what they're doing, but with a guard of that size, there must be something even bigger going on inside.

"It must be a wizarding university."

Heinrich looked at the sign and nodded slowly as if he recognized the university inside the gated area.

"It's a wizarding university....... Yeah, they must be doing research on something."

Louise nodded in acknowledgment, thinking that the Empire would then be able to treat it as confidential.

"Are you trying to build another one of those Titans? I mean, it would be great for everybody if we had another weapon like that......."

"Probably not the Titan, I'm told they don't have the money to build one more airframe."

"Oh yeah, so they're making another big magic weapon or something?"

"Anything that helps the war effort is good."

"It should be......."

Titans.

The sight of it sent a shiver of fear through Louise. Over and over again, she thought to herself, thank God those steps belonged to us.

Anyone who opposed the Empire, even if it was a demonic army, would be trampled underfoot and turned to dust.

The Empire is doing something at the Temple College of Magic. They're not Titans, but they're working on something.

"I think my classmates in B were included in the study. They're at Temple, and I've rarely seen them return to their dorms from Hogwarts."

Heinrich didn't know the details, but he could guess that Louis Ankton, Christina, and Anna de Gerna were involved in the research going on over there.

"Didn't the Titan Project also involve a child named Adelia, your friend......."

"Yes, I did."

Adelia's power cartridge was a great invention, but the Titan is a feat that far surpasses it.

But this time, other classmates are involved.

What kind of weapon would that be?

"All of your friends are....... are all freakishly brilliant kids."

Kids from Temple's sophomore class.

Louise couldn't help but think that there was a strange collection of monstrously talented people in that grade.

It's a weird mix of geniuses and disasters.

What a terrible coincidence.

Louise and Heinrich walked slowly through the snowy streets of Temple, leaving the College of Magic behind.

\* \* \*

Ludwig left the guard headquarters with a despondent look on his face.

The rubble of the crumbling temple could not have killed Ludwig. After securing Rowen's body from the pile of crumbling stones, Ludwig confronted the guards who had come to clean up the fire.

He was handed over to Guard headquarters, offering to cooperate fully with the investigation.

But the answer Ludwig heard stunned him.

'......It's hard.'

"It's hard......?

'Yes, if they were arrested at the scene. If a mob, not one or two, but dozens, attacked the temple and scattered....... If it was an accidental crime, not an organized one....... It's going to be very difficult to find the suspects.'

'I saw it with my own eyes. I saw people looting temples and fleeing....... Not all of them, but I saw them. I remember it.'

'Mr. Ludwig. The population of the ecliptic is now over a hundred million. And if this was done by people in the refugee camps who are not even properly identified....... it's virtually impossible to catch the culprits.'

If the raiders are hiding in an alleyway in a maze of refugee camps, it's impossible to find them.

'And the weather is like this.......'

When you have enough on your plate dealing with a snowstorm, you don't have the manpower, and even if you did, it would be nearly impossible to find the culprit.

Ludwig didn't know what to say.

The reality of the ecliptic gradient is that it's nearly impossible to catch the culprit unless it's happening right in front of you.

Accidental crime, accidental arson, accidental looting.

The coincidences made it virtually impossible to catch the culprits, the security forces said, even before the investigation began.

The deep weariness in the director's expression made me realize that he wasn't saying this because he was being disingenuous.

'But....... Just like this, just like this, just like....... no investigation, no nothing, just like that?

Guards have the power of summary execution because, at the very least, they are supposed to maintain order in society.

But if there's an event that causes a complete breakdown of social order, and you give up on this, what has the Guard been doing all this time?

If the guards aren't doing their job, I don't think they should have the right to kill people willy-nilly.

At Ludwig's puzzled expression, the head of the guard sighed heavily.

'Ludwig, and in the first place, this case is....... Even if we wanted to investigate it, we wouldn't be able to.'

'What does that....... sound?

"Arson, looting, and murder at the temple of the Great Lord.

Ludwig had some intuition as to why the head of the guard didn't recognize him.

"This is something the Crusaders should be authorized to do.

Maybe they're not willing to investigate, but even if they were, it wouldn't be something they could investigate.

The scene was cleared, but the Crusaders would investigate the incident themselves.

'I don't know if the Crusaders will be able to properly track down the people who did this, but....... Perhaps we should turn the case over to the Crusaders.

Hearing that, Ludwig came out of the district guard headquarters.

Rowen is dead.

Most of the people who stayed in the temple died.

And it's virtually impossible to find the culprits.

Ludwig walks down the street in a daze.

Archbishop Rowen.

He was weird, but he was never evil.

We don't know if the mob's goal was food for the temple or anger at the Tuan Order.

But Rowen, who hadn't even gotten a break from traveling the streets to help people, was literally and figuratively murdered.

Why.

Why so.

And it doesn't even get caught?

Trading the life of someone who could save tens of thousands of people for a slice of bread?

That doesn't make sense.

This shouldn't happen.

Even the security forces say they won't be able to find them, and they can't afford to.

Ludwig is not overconfident.

I don't think I can do anything that a guard can't do.

This is a job that requires brains, not brawn.

And it's a job that requires power to get involved in the case.

Ludwig had gotten that far.

You want to get involved, but you don't have the power, and you don't have the brains to solve the case.

I need help.

Help from someone.

It's really, really needed.

That the people who did this should be punished.

Ludwig thought to himself as he walked down the street, wide-eyed.

Episode 586.

"Ugh."

-Cat!

I don't know what's up with this kid lately.

He keeps opening his mouth wide and pretending to eat my face.

You don't realize that's a fucking scary thing from a cat's perspective, do you?

Weird or not, this is just plain scary!

I'm glad they didn't do something pointless like patrol the ecliptic.

It's kind of scary because he's like a kid with nothing in his brain except for playing with his cat all day.

Ellen murmurs as she flops down on the bed, leaving me at her bedside.

Luckily, Ellen doesn't seem to be as dazed these days, which is nice.

I'm glad to hear that animal therapy seems to be working so well for you.

"Cute."

Well.

That's not easy for you either.

Of course, Ellen's expression darkened as she looked out the window where the snow was still falling.

It's coming, like hell.

There's nothing Ellen can do as she watches the snow cover everything in sight. Because snow is not a monster.

There's nothing a warrior can do in a snowstorm.

So all I can do is rest.

Ellen lingered like that for a while, then pulled me into a hug and got up.

Well.

Is it lunchtime already?

So much for time melting away.

\* \* \*

Lunch break.

Heinrich and Louise had returned from their walk just in time to be seated in the banquet room.

However, the atmosphere was a little different than usual.

Not the atmosphere of the two, but the atmosphere of the ballroom.

-Please make a list of students who would like to volunteer to help with the snow removal and report to your supervisor.

Users were making announcements to people entering the ballroom.

The entire ecliptic is probably inundated with snow removal needs right now.

It's not a mandate, but it's an empowering responsibility, a mission.

So we were swamped with students getting their names on the list.

It's a scene of superhumans shrouded in a blue flame of empowerment clearing the streets of the zodiac with shovels, not spears and swords.......

Of course, there are superhumans, magic majors, and psychics. I think they could be of some use in clearing the zodiacal snow.

No, wait.

Instead of eating, Ellen's eyes were darting toward the crowd of snowplow volunteers.

I know you can do .......

You're a snow shoveler.

"Uh, Ellen."

Ellen brought food nearby and sat down, and Heinrich recognized her. Beside him, Louise von Schwarz was slicing sausages.

"Are you going to shovel the snow?"

"Because there's nothing to do."

It's not dangerous, but.......

You know how you learn to hate snow when you clean it?

No, I don't think I hate it enough already.

"If you want to, you can. And don't forget to check out ....... It's not like it wouldn't be helpful, and if you think about it, there might be a way."

"Oh....... Yes, sister."

Louise didn't seem to be trying to force Heinrich's hand, but she seemed to be halfway there.

Snow is probably the most pressing issue in the ecliptic right now.

If things get too serious, consider reaching out to Riana.

But there's something we can do rather than just rest, and it's helping people, and it's not dangerous. So there was a little bit of excitement in the normally quiet atmosphere.

Many are aristocrats, picked and chosen by the empire.

They fought for humanity in the face of the Gate crisis.

No matter where you come from or how you were raised, the idea that you have to use your power for the good of others is ingrained in you from your experiences.

So I'm from a noble background, and I'm Nabal, and the snow is killing people, so of course I'm thinking I need to move.

In that idea that people are great, but ultimately sad.

Suddenly.

Somewhere.

Something burnt....... something like that.

I smell burnt.

What is it?

Looking around, I couldn't help but find the epicenter of the smell.

Ludwig.

"Ludwig......?"

Heinrich narrowed his eyes at Ludwig.

Not only did it smell burnt, but it was a mess.

"Hey guys......."

Ludwig slowly approaches Ellen and Heinrich.

"I need to......."

"Dude, what's wrong with you. What happened?"

Heinrich stood up from his seat, and the others stared at Ludwig in disbelief.

"I need to....... Just once......."

Ludwig mumbles to himself.

"Can you help me with......?"

He was completely transfixed, and it was clear that something had happened to him.

\* \* \*

When it was clear that Ludwig had been through a rough patch, Heinrich, Ellen, and Louise finished their meal.

Exit the ballroom and enter the lobby of the Class B dormitory.

"I think you need to get cleaned up. Are you hurt?"

"Yes, I'm not hurt...... I'm not hurt....... Yes....... I'm not hurt......."

Louise grabbed Ludwig's shoulder as he repeated the same words as if they were broken.

"Go wash up, clear your head, get dressed, get your thoughts together, and then we'll talk. Okay?"

"Aye, sir....... Yes, Commander......."

Ludwig nodded slowly, frozen by Louise's words.

We all watched in stunned silence as Ludwig staggered back to his room.

"What the....... What the hell happened to her?"

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

"I think I was at the fire, but......."

Ellen was hugging me and looking worriedly in the direction of Ludwig's room.

\* \* \*

Ludwig was soon washed and dressed and out into the lobby.

It still didn't seem to calm down.

Ludwig explained the situation, rambling on about how fascinated he was. He wasn't a very talkative person to begin with, but now that something had happened, he was even more so.

"Looting?"

"Uh....... The people....... set fire to the temple where that priest was and....... looted it and....... and killed all the people in the temple......."

Ellen, Louise, and Heinrich couldn't help but roll their eyes.

"By the time I got there, it was too late. All the people were dead. The temple was burning. I went in to find the priest, but he was already....... murdered in a horrible...... way and....... The building had just collapsed on itself......."

Ludwig is crushed by the collapsing building, but superhumans don't die that way.

Ludwig was lying with Rowen's body in the crumbling temple when he escaped on his own.

He watched as the guards and mages arrived to put out the fire.

The arriving guards examined Ludwig and, after realizing he was not an official, let him go.

Maybe it's because I jumped into the fire that it smelled so bad.

In the end, Ludwig was forced to return to the temple, unable to do anything.

"If you do this....... It's not supposed to be like this, you know, what did the priest do wrong, it's not the priest who did wrong, it's the people in the temple who did wrong. They're looking at the fire and they're saying it's a good thing, and they're saying it's a good thing he's dead, and it's not supposed to be like that."

There was anger in Ludwig's eyes.

"I'm....... I don't know, maybe this shouldn't be happening, all I can think about is that, and......."

Ludwig looks at Ellen and Heinrich and says.

"I get that the people who did this need to be punished, but I have no idea how to find them....... I have no idea."

Ludwig mumbles to himself.

"I saw people running away after looting the temple. I want to find them. I want to find them and ask them why they did that. Why did they have to do that....... I want to ask him, he was a good man, he was trying to save people, he was a good man, why did you kill him......."

Ludwig has even seen the criminals himself. But he doesn't have the power to investigate, and even if he did, he doesn't think he'd be able to catch them.

"I'm sorry, I don't think I'm qualified to ask you to do this, but....... It's not something I can do, so I'm going to......."

Ludwig's face and eyes were filled with sorrow, frustration, and anger.

Ludwig has no power, no strength. And he doesn't think he can solve it.

That's why I came back to Temple for help.

Someone with power, strength, and even wisdom who might be able to help him.

There is only one person who can come to Ludwig's mind.

"Just once....... Can you help me just once......?"

Of course, it could only be Ellen Artorius.

Ellen looked at Ludwig, who looked desperate, and nodded as if it was a given.

"Yes. Let me help you."

Feeling guilty for Ludwig, Ellen, of course, couldn't refuse the favor.

\* \* \*

The arson, murder, and looting of Tuan's temple.

Ludwig asked Ellen for help, and she said she would help without a second thought.

Louise and Heinrich didn't respond immediately, but they listened intently to Ludwig's words.

Ludwig described what he saw as he saw it.

"The priest said that there were people defacing the temple, and there were people trying to set it on fire. Maybe....... Maybe the people who were doing those things were working together to do those things....... I think so."

Hatred of the Tuan and Als faiths sometimes leads to attacks on their temples.

People graffiti, deface temples, and even try to set them on fire.

And that arson attempt led to the real thing.

"Are you sure everyone in the temple is dead?"

Ludwig nodded at Ellen's words.

"When I entered the temple....... I didn't see anyone alive."

Once she agreed to help, Ellen's face remained calm and unmoved.

"And that it was done by 'normal' people."

"I saw people walking back from looting the temple, apparently....... I think they said something about food being better than this stuff. No, I don't think I heard it, I heard it, I'm sure."

After listening to Ludwig's words, Ellen considers for a moment, then looks at Ludwig and says calmly, "I'm sorry.

"There are many priests who aren't very physically capable per se, but is it possible for an archbishop-level priest....... be killed by civilians?"

Yes.

That's the problem.

Is it possible that an attack by vengeful men could kill an archbishop and everyone in the temple?

I was thinking the same thing as Ellen.

But Ellen's words made Ludwig shake his head.

"I thought about that, too, but if Father Rowen was a man who could fight, he wouldn't have used me as his bodyguard in the first place, and if something happened during the cleanup....... I'd take the priest and run."

Ludwig has a point.

If Archbishop Lowen was capable of fighting for himself, there was no reason for Ludwig to be his bodyguard. There's no reason why someone who can defend themselves shouldn't.

"And the temple wasn't that big, either. Maybe....... I don't think there were any paladins, and none of the bodies were wearing armor......."

There is a severe shortage of priests, and most of the combat-ready troops are in Allied camps. And it's not the headquarters of the Crusader Knights, but the individual shrines of the Five Great Lords on the Ecliptic, and they're small.

It makes sense that there wasn't a single paladin.

The ramshackle temple could have been attacked by a mob, and it's not impossible that everyone was killed.

A mob entered the temple, killing priests and worshippers and setting the temple on fire.

It's not impossible for it to happen. It's just less likely. The persecution of the Tuan and Alth faiths is a reality of the ecliptic.

Ludwig found it unbearable to see people's anger directed at innocent people in such a way.

"Like you said, if it was a mob, the Guard and the Crusaders won't be able to catch them all, and that includes me."

Just because she's Ellen doesn't mean she can do anything.

"I guess so......."

Ludwig sought out Ellen, thinking that there might be another way, that someone other than him, someone with more brains than him, might be better than him.

But just because it's Ellen doesn't mean you'll find anything there if it's a mob raid and looting of the temple.

Ellen remained silent and thoughtful, as if to say that if what you said was true, it was most likely something I would never know.

At this point, Louise von Schwarz stares at Ludwig.

It was clear that Louise had a huge crush on Ludwig because of his good heart. And yesterday, she'd even gotten some help herself.

So, it was clear that Ludwig wanted to do something to help him in his time of need.

"I don't know the details, but there are some issues that need to be clarified."

"Which......?"

"That we need to think about this case in three distinct phases."

Louise holds up a finger.

"Murder."

"Arson."

"And looting."

"This case has three distinct phases."

"So it's all about the order."

"Killing first, arson first, looting first. You have to be clear about what the objective of the raiders was in the first place."

Louise compartmentalizes the case.

"It's possible that the goal was plunder. If they raided the temple to do so, they would have been discovered and killed by the priests during the raid. If so, they would have stolen before the raid. When they were caught, they killed the priests, and then set the temple on fire. Why they would set fire to them, I don't know."

Louise says slowly.

"It could have been murder. If so, they would have stormed the temple, killed the priests, and looted the empty temple. The temple's contents may have been too valuable to leave behind. Setting it on fire may have been an act of anger."

Heinrich was listening to Louise's words.

"It is very unlikely that arson was the purpose. But Ludwig, you say that the priests were all dead when you entered the temple, so the arson must have come after the murder."

A story about the sequence and purpose of events.

Fireproofing is first priority.

Looting or murder would have been the goal, not arson. The words froze Ludwig in his tracks.

"Is the order....... Why does it matter......?"

"It's important."

Louise says.

"Because the murderers, looters, and arsonists might be other people."

Louise looks at Ellen.

He looks at me like I don't understand what he means.

"You're saying that three different things could have happened at different times, and by different people."

"Yeah."

What seems like a single event may actually be a series of events at the hands of different people, Ruiz said.

"Even if it was a mob in the first place, the people who killed the priests, the people who stole the stuff, and the people who set the fires would be different, and the timing of those things would be different."

"And."

"Ludwig, as you say, the temple is poorly guarded. I think you're right."

"No matter how many mobs there are....... No matter how incapable of combat the priest is."

"The likelihood of a priest the size of an archbishop being killed at the hands of a mob seems....... seems very low."

Neither Louise nor Ellen seemed to recognize that this was anything out of the ordinary.

At the end of the day, sitting down and talking doesn't change anything.

"Let's go to the field."

Ellen says

The crucial difference between Ludwig and Ellen.

In the land of men, there is no door that does not open at the name of Ellen Artorius.

It's not the Guard, it's not the Crusaders.

"Me....... sister."

Heinrich looks at Louise cautiously.

Louise looks at Heinrich with her usual stony expression. This is the man who, in all honesty, seems to be as cold as they come, but who, after all, killed two of his brothers with his own hands for Heinrich's sake.

I can't tell you how much I hate Heinrich and how much guilt I feel for him.

"You're helping a friend, who am I to tell you what to do, and I've had a hand in it."

Heinrich and Louise have come to rest.

I'm not here to be political.

"Of course, if you think it's dangerous, you should stop."

Louise says and looks at Ludwig.

"So I'll follow you."

Whether she helps or not, she seems to want everyone to back off if she thinks it's dangerous. There's no reason for her to stand by and watch Heinrich do something dangerous.

"Go, thank you......."

Ludwig was ecstatic when Ellen stepped up to help the unexpected.

This is something.

Things just keep getting bigger.

Somehow this job. I don't think it's going to end well.

So you have a bunch of people in this room who are suddenly up to no good.

I have a feeling this isn't going to end well.

I wanted to say something, but I'm a cat, after all, and I couldn't say anything except meow.

Episode 587.

Heinrich, Ludwig, Ellen, and Louise.

The four of them abruptly left the temple, leaving the cat behind, of course. Not a good place to be.

We all had our hoods up because it included people who didn't like to be in the spotlight and people who shouldn't be in the spotlight.

There's no reason to be stealthy, but you don't need to be overly conspicuous either.

Heinrich, however, looked guiltily at the snow on the streets and the countless guards clearing it.

Ellen, who has been leading the way, looks at Ludwig.

"Tell me everything you know about that priest."

"About Rowen......?"

"Yes."

"Does it....... important?"

"In some cases."

Ellen didn't bother to explain to Ludwig why the story about Rowen was important.

Ludwig began to tell the story as best he could.

The name is Rowen.

His rank as a priest is Archbishop.

And that he was tasked with cleaning up the mess while being escorted by a guard.

"An archbishop-level priest wandering the streets alone, things must be pretty bad."

"Yes......."

"Hmmm....... It must be that way. Most of the priests and paladins will be with the Alliance, and the Tuan priests are absolutely dwindling in numbers......."

There are so many places that need priests that an archbishop-level priest would have to roam alone, and so few of them.

Louise nodded as if she understood what I meant.

It might help your case if you tell us everything you know about Rowen.

Although Rowen is already dead, Ludwig considers how much he knows about her.

I don't think he deserved to die, but Ludwig didn't know much about Rowen.

We've only been working together for a little under a week, so we don't know much.

But then Ludwig remembers.

A story about an archbishop.

"......I heard about that."

"What story?"

"Father Rowen was originally a bishop, but after the Gate debacle, he became an archbishop......."

At that, Ellen and Heinrich nod slowly.

"There are so many vacancies, someone has to fill them, and you've been given an undeserved position....... I'm pretty sure that's what I heard."

Ludwig's ability to put clues together and deduce something is poor, but his memory is by no means bad.

You are not a lord who has lost a province.

She was actually ordained an archbishop in the wake of Gate.

"If you're talking about an archbishop with an extremely reduced archdiocese to manage, you're talking about someone who wasn't really an archbishop in the role of archbishop."

Ellen says as she walks away.

"He probably had a different job title, and he probably had different duties than he actually had."

Right now, they don't know what they're chasing, but they know what they need to focus on.

It's also important to have a good idea of who Rowen is.

Ludwig couldn't help but feel strange.

A dead person.

He's been murdered, but Ellen is asking about a different victim, not the fire scene or the suspect's description.

But Ellen might be sensing something she doesn't see, and Ludwig can only squeeze out what he knows.

"Before we broke up yesterday, I asked you what you really do for a living."

"What did you say?"

Ludwig's words were echoed by Heinrich.

"I'm looking into the strange things that happen in refugee camps."....... He says he's been doing cleanup work and learning about the strange things that happen in refugee camps....... Strange things happen in places where so many people die, he says, and he tries to deal with them if he can......."

"You recognize strange things?"

"Apparently....... and that's what you're doing."

At Ludwig's words, Louise nods slowly in her robes.

"If you don't read too much into it, you're trying to respond to an unspecified situation in a refugee camp....... If you think about the slightly risky possibility......."

Louise says still.

"I've been keeping my finger on the pulse of everything going on in the refugee camps....... I guess that means the same thing."

"That's....... What do you mean, sister?"

At Heinrich's question, Louise glares at her son.

"His actual role may have been intelligence gathering or surveillance of the refugee camps."

The answer was not Louise, but Ellen.

"Do the Crusader Knights or the Order of Tuan have any organizations involved in intelligence gathering?"

"Um......."

Just discussing the possibilities was getting me to the point where I was wondering if this was a problem I shouldn't touch.

"With the combined power of the Five Great Lords, the Crusader Knights are a force more powerful than most nations."

"Right."

"If a force of that size doesn't have an internal organization dedicated to intelligence gathering, that's even weirder."

"Wait....... So you're saying that Ms. Rowen was a spy or something....... or something?"

Ludwig said, puzzled.

"And, why do you only keep talking about....... you keep talking about......."

Rowen is a victim and a victimizer.

But Ellen and Louise were talking as if Rowen was the key to the case.

As if it were a suspect.

"Ludwig."

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

Ellen looks at Ludwig.

"If this is simply the work of angry people, there's nothing I can do about it."

"......."

"If Rowen was an ordinary priest, someone who really only did purification work, he would be a victim of injustice."

Ellen says, looking at Ludwig, whose expression is getting harder and harder.

"But if Archbishop Rowen wasn't an ordinary priest, this wouldn't be ordinary."

Archbishop Lowen.

The case depends on who she was.

In a normal case, there's nothing Ellen can do.

"If it's not something out of the ordinary, I might be able to figure something out."

Only if it's suspicious will you be able to figure it out.

The simpler the original case, the harder it is to solve, and the more complex the case, the easier it is to find clues.

Ellen focuses on the victim first, rather than the suspects, to see if there are any complications in the case.

"That's why I'm asking."

Nothing is certain yet.

I'm just asking, just in case.

Ellen added and walked away.

\* \* \*

At the edge of the road, with the burned-out temple in the distance, the group is forced to stop.

"Of course, it's under control."

Louise said, and we all nodded.

"It's not the Guard, it's the Crusaders."

As Ludwig had been told by the head of the Guard, the scene of the crime was already being guarded by troops of the Crusader Knights, not the Guard.

There were a few people milling around the burned-out temple, but most of them just walked by, shrugging off any sparks.

"I cannot touch the affairs of the imperial court, and I cannot touch the affairs of the Crusaders. You know what that means, don't you?"

"Yes."

She was a curious individual with too much on her shoulders to move.

She wants to help Ludwig, but only to the extent that it doesn't cross her personal boundaries. When people start to suspect her intentions, something even stranger happens.

"I have no intention of getting close. Youngest, you're in a different situation than I am, but there's no harm in getting too close."

"Yes, sister."

Heinrich nodded, his expression steadfast, as if he understood Louise's concern.

Louise doesn't need to get involved in the Crusaders' affairs because of her political stance.

She could only offer advice, and had no intention of getting involved in the case.

Add to that the fact that Ludwig is no different from a civilian in the eyes of the Crusaders, and they won't give him a pass.

But whether it's an imperial case or a Crusader case, there's someone with intangible, massive power that can go anywhere.

Ramen and Rafelt.

There is no such thing as a door that won't open in the presence of two holy relics.

"Ludwig, you follow me."

And don't be afraid to bring a friend along for the ride.

\* \* \*

What Ellen did was simple.

"What's going on?"

He approached the paladins cordoning off the burning temple, removed his hood, and spoke a few words.

"Yo, warrior......?"

The paladin in charge of blocking the entrance froze at the sight of Ellen, his gaze darting inside the temple.

Ellen does not hold a position with the Crusader Knights or the Great High Priestess.

However, being the owner of two holy relics already symbolizes more power than the Pope or the leader of the Crusaders.

Going against Ellen is like going against God.

"Last night, a mob set fire to this temple and slaughtered the priests, so the Templars are being sent to identify and preserve the site."

The paladin nodded at Ellen's question.

"Do you mind if I take a look inside?"

"There is a risk of collapse due to the fire, brave, if you enter......."

"If a building ten times bigger than this collapses, it's okay."

"Well, you may be the only one, but even outsiders......."

The paladin balked at the idea of bringing Ludwig in, not even alone.

"He's a friend of mine."

"But......."

"Is there a problem?"

The paladin was speechless at Ellen's words.

Ellen is an agent of God.

No matter where his orders come from, they can't outweigh Ellen's words.

Ellen didn't bother to wait for the paladin's answer, as he couldn't do either.

There wasn't a large paladin anywhere who dared to grab Ellen by the shoulders.

We're in the middle of nowhere, but Ellen doesn't mind being in the middle of nowhere.

It's just that she doesn't actively try to take advantage of them, and when she does, she's the kind of person who can get away with anything.

The burned-out temple had a partially collapsed roof and was in a precarious position where it could collapse at any moment.

So it was only natural that the paladins guarding the entrance would say it was dangerous for Ellen to enter.

"They're following.

But Ellen noticed something else.

Ellen entered the scene, followed by a paladin. They were mice before a feral cat.

Ellen looks around the interior of the temple. The chairs and other items in the temple have been burned, and the stone walls are covered in soot.

Ludwig, understandably, had a bad complexion.

The fire was contained, but I saw countless bodies here.

Now that I was back at the scene, I couldn't help but replay the scene from the morning in my head.

"What happened?"

"We're not sure yet because we're still investigating, but it's believed that unspecified people stormed the temple, looted the goods, killed the priests, and then set it on fire."

Even within the Crusaders themselves, it's unclear how the events unfolded.

"Do we have a casualty count?"

"Three laymen, three priests, and seven temple workers....... All were found dead."

Ellen nodded as she listened.

'We don't know the size of the mob, but....... It would have been impossible to put up much of a fight.'

The temple wasn't very large to begin with, but it was also very thinly staffed. This was inevitable, as the Tuan Sect's power had declined.

'All dead....... It's not that weird of a situation to be mobbed.'

This temple was too small.

This makes it very likely that Louise and Ellen's assumption that an archbishop-level priest would not be easily killed by the people is incorrect.

Episode 588.

"Have you recovered all the bodies?"

"Yes, there is a campaign in progress for the Crusaders' High Priestess."

Ellen stands still and looks around the burned-out temple.

No bodies were found at the site. The temple had already partially collapsed, so it was clear that it was important to recover the bodies quickly.

Ludwig looked around the temple with a stern expression on his face.

Ellen also explores the chapel of the burned temple.

"It's likely a mob attack.

The size of the temple is so small that it's easy for the temple to be attacked by civilians and the priests to be killed.

Catching the culprit will be difficult, but it's more likely than not that there's something else behind this.

"What was the fire situation?"

"It's believed that the arson took place with all the priests killed, and then people who saw the temple on fire came in and looted it."

"Are you saying you saw a fire and looted it?"

"Yes. We have multiple witnesses. They say they saw the fire and tried to get in."

"such as......."

At that, both Ludwig and Ellen narrowed their eyes.

As Louise says, there is a sequence of events.

But arson is not the last. Looting might be the last.

"You didn't loot and set fire to it, you saw it on fire and looted it?"

"Yes......."

It's not something that would happen under normal circumstances, but every penny counts, every meal counts.

The temple is on fire.

Those who saw the fire attempted to loot it, hoping to take something of value or food from its contents.

The reasoning that arson would be the last thing they would do is wrong. That's because I didn't understand people's desperation.

Looting comes last.

And the looters are not the killers, they are the bystanders.

He ran into a fire and stole.

Of course, it's also possible that the killers looted and then set fire to it, after which bystanders stole what was left.

"If the arson came first, the priests would have gotten out of the temple before it was swallowed by fire. The arson came after the murder, and the looting was done by bystanders.

"The priests died first, then the arson, and finally the looting.

'Then it's likely that the killers killed the priests and set them on fire, though we still don't know what their purpose was.'

"First of all, the marauders Ludwig saw aren't murderers. They're thieves.

"Well, at least I know one.

Ellen collects her thoughts and looks at the fidgeting paladin.

"This case, is there any chance of catching the perpetrators?"

"......I can't answer that for sure yet."

When Ellen asked, the paladin hesitantly replied, "Yes.

If this is indeed the behavior of a mob, then whatever priest Rowen actually is, even if Ludwig and Ellen are more involved, they won't be able to figure anything out.

If you find them, you'll probably catch a few thieves, but not the ones who killed the priest.

'It's not impossible that there could be a massacre of civilians by the Crusaders over this, but it's unlikely that the Crusaders would do something like that when they're already in the public eye.......'

Ellen ponders.

This is never a good thing, but Ludwig will back down if you tell him the case at face value.

The mob stormed the temple and set it on fire.

The killer is a civilian, and Rowen's lack of combat skills means that his healing powers are not enough to save him from the blades that mow him down.

Whether Rowen's real title is spy or whatever, there's no reason for Ludwig to find out in the first place.

"Warrior, leave this to us and......."

However, Ellen is conscious of the paladin's presence, who keeps trying to push her out of her comfort zone.

It was obvious that the thief was very uneasy about Ellen being here.

The paladin's insecurities were keeping Ellen from leaving.

'We've recovered all the bodies.......'

It's not that I don't understand the haste with which they removed the bodies, as they could have been preserved in the field and then buried in a collapsing building.

But it's not like the whole building burned down, and it's not like the whole building collapsed.

Ellen looks at the walls of the building that weren't swallowed by the flames.

'bloodstain.......'

We see blood stains where we think the body may have been.

In her mind's eye, Ellen imagines what the murder scene looked like.

The victim was killed with his back to the wall.

'Blood splattered on the walls, and a large amount of blood on the floor....... He must have died on the spot.'

'The weapon used was a blade. Most likely a sword.......'

'The direction of the blood spatter is right upwards. That means the cut was made from the left side upwards.......'

"It's not a downward slash, it's an upward slash, and it's not in the direction where the force is going to go.

"If you look at the amount of blood, it's not a cut, it's a dismemberment. The bones were cut together, and there's no way it could have been that bad.

'There's no way a civilian who doesn't even know how to properly handle a weapon can cut a man to the bone in one fell swoop.......'

"Never.

Ellen takes a closer look at the blood-spattered wall.

"The raiders must have included someone with a level of enchantment.

Ellen looked at the marks and read the circumstances of the killing, which were impossible for a normal human being to accomplish with ordinary strength.

We don't know if the paladins don't have a clue, or if they do but won't tell us.

We don't know if Ellen is withholding information simply because she's an outsider, because it's something that shouldn't be revealed, or because she has evidence in front of her and doesn't realize it.

"Something....... Okay?"

As Ellen pondered something, Ludwig interrupted.

"No, not really."

Ellen didn't tell him what she'd discovered, not even because of the watching eyes.

Ellen looked beyond the chapel to other areas.

The temple was not intact, and in some places it had collapsed.

Beyond the chapel, at the back of the temple, the roof had completely collapsed, bringing down the priests' quarters, the kitchen, and other buildings, with cold winds blowing in from the breached ceiling and a fresh layer of snow already on the ground.

"Warrior, there may be additional collapses."

"That's fine."

It's a pile of rubble from the roof, and you can't tell what's underneath it.

"Could there be other people's bodies in there? What's the status of the search?"

"Oh....... We've already collected all the bodies, it was early in the morning when this side collapsed."

"I see."

Ellen could see from the tiny skeleton of the collapsed roof that the paladin was right about the possibility of further collapse. The snow was still accumulating, and with just a few more feet of snow, the temple might collapse.

Ellen was convinced that the paladin's story of a mob attack was either a lie, or he didn't know the facts.

The assumption that they might not have been able to resist armed civilians is incorrect. The attackers would not have been civilians.

The order of events was murder, arson, and looting.

Ellen's guess is that it wasn't a mob that showed up during the killing phase.

If so, why?

What did the raiders intend to do with this location?

Not surprisingly, it was because this place had meaning.

But what possible meaning or value could there be in this not-so-big temple? Even though it was burned, Ellen didn't see much value in it.

If this isn't just an angry mob attack, there has to be a reason.

Reasonable cause and justification.

However, the Paladins have a history of intentionally withholding information.

The bodies have all been recovered, and if so, any meaningful clues Ellen could have gleaned from this place, aside from the bloodstains on the walls, would have been obliterated.

Ellen remembers Louise's words.

Three stages of events.

Murder, arson, and looting.

By killing them first, it was clear that they were not civilians. And it's unlikely that the goal was to loot in the first place, but to kill the priests.

At the end of the looting, they were just bystanders who turned into looters. The looters, then, are irrelevant to the real heart of the matter.

Ruiz said the three incidents may have been perpetrated by different people.

This wasn't just a case of angry people.

Looting was a natural part of the process, as looters jumped on the fire because they thought there might be something there that wasn't worth burning.

So looting is a byproduct, murder is the core.

Why was this temple raided?

I'm sure there's a good reason for that.

There's probably more to it than meets the eye.

What happened in the second phase was arson.

Why was fireproofing necessary?

That's probably because it's necessary.

Why fireproofing is necessary.

The result of arson.

Ellen looks at the crumbling temple.

Did I need to burn something?

Or, did it need to be broken?

It's hard to tell.

Ellen is sure of one thing.

It was clear that this was no ordinary temple.

"This temple, what was it doing?"

At Ellen's question, the paladin tilted his head as if he didn't know what she was talking about.

"Yes? It was a temple to Tuan, the goddess of purity."

"......."

It was getting to the point where I couldn't tell if he really didn't know or if he was pretending not to.

Ellen looks around.

"Ellen."

Then Ludwig, who had been silent, called for Ellen.

"Yes."

"Something....... smell?"

Ludwig's words silenced Ellen for a moment.

It definitely smells fishy.

We don't know if the paladins know and are hiding the truth, or if they want to send Ellen away because she is truly dangerous.

Ellen knows that Ludwig is not good with his head, but Ludwig is suspicious, too.

The scene is definitely suspicious.

No.

Smell?

Ellen looks at Ludwig.

Ludwig wrinkles his nose.

It wasn't a suspicious smell, it was a real smell.

"......."

It turns out this idiot was just being a dick and was literally talking about the actual smell.

And I mean that in the most literal sense of the word. It's a fire scene, and the burnt odor is so overpowering that Ellen is conserving her breathing as best she can.

"What smell?"

"That....... stinks......."

Odor.

You can smell the burnt odor, but the stench is a little off.

A horrible burnt odor that's everywhere.

But something else mixed in there.

It's subtle, but it's there.

A stench that gets under your nose.

To be precise.

"Yeah, it smells like feces."

"Right......?"

Poo-pee, i.e. the smell of feces.

"It's got the smell of blood in it."

I can smell the blood in the air.

It could be the scent of the dead, but that's not what Ludwig and Ellen's sense of smell detects.

It's a very strong odor.

The kind of odor that's not buried or lost in the flames, but is clearly coming from somewhere.

Ludwig couldn't help but focus on the smell.

The smell of filth and blood.

It was a smell I'd smelled many, many times on the battlefield.

A smell eerily familiar to Ellen and Ludwig.

And the epicenter of that smell.

Ellen folds her arms.

"Ludwig."

"Yes."

"Help me clean up the debris."

"Uh, uh! Okay!"

"Hey, warrior......!"

The paladin stood in Ellen's way as if to say no.

"One more time, one more unnecessary word."

Ellen lifts her robes, her fingertips brushing against the sword at her waist.

This refers to Laments, the Moonlight Sword and Voidblade.

"I know you're in for a treat."

Ellen's irritation was mounting.

\* \* \*

As Ellen and Ludwig began to clear the rubble of the collapsed building, the paladin at their side grew impatient.

The good news was that the building's exterior walls were still intact, so Ellen and Ludwig couldn't watch from the outside as they cleared the debris.

Shoveling snow and removing piles of rocks the size of houses was no small task for Ludwig and Ellen.

And both Ludwig and Ellen were convinced without lifting a stone.

The stench of blood and filth was growing stronger in the air.

There's something under this rubble.

Others approached and watched Ellen and Ludwig, but none of the larger paladins dared to stop her.

Unable to stop her, or even help her, he could only watch as Ellen cleared the debris from the building.

And just like that, how much debris was cleared.

"There was an underground."

"......Yes."

A space that was obscured by the rubble of a collapsed building.

In it, Ellen and Ludwig could see a staircase leading down to the basement.

And there was a definite smell of filth and blood coming from that basement stairwell.

Ellen stares at the pale-faced paladins.

"Don't follow me, don't go anywhere, wait here."

It was a stern warning to Ellen that she was deliberately trying to deceive me and that I should be prepared for whatever I saw.

"Let's go."

"Yes."

Ellen led the way, followed by Ludwig.

Episode 589.

The stairs down to the basement were not long. As they descended through the rubble to the entrance, the stench grew more and more unbearable, and the fetid scent of blood rose to disgusting levels.

"What the heck is......."

Ellen nervously pushed open the door to the temple's basement.

In the saccharine darkness, a cloak of the sun was draped over Ellen's shoulders, and soon, beside her, searing flames from the sun's cloak pushed back the darkness.

Soon, as the darkness receded, a long hallway appeared, with rooms all around.

The basement was not affected by the fire.

But the corridors were littered with bodies, some unclaimed, some not.

"Here too......."

Ludwig was wide-eyed, staring blankly down the hall.

There was a secret room in the temple.

The stench that rose to the surface was the smell of blood and filth from the corpses.

"I think killing the people here was the original purpose of the raiders."

Unlike Ludwig, who was fed up, Ellen walked calmly down the hall.

What does this temple, and the dead underground people, mean.

'I think that's what this place is really about in the first place.......'

Not too many people, but not too few either.

Ellen walked down the underground corridors, glancing at the various rooms.

Some rooms looked like dining rooms, some looked like storage rooms, and some were bedrooms.

'The surface was a cover, the underground was real, and there were more people living there than I'd ever heard of.......'

Ellen's eyes caught sight of a few weapons, including a fallen sword and spear.

'Traces of battle, not massacre.......'

'This is where the raiders and the people in the basement got into a fight.'

But more importantly, it was impossible to tell which of the bodies were attackers and which were victims. None of them were wearing priestly robes.

In the basement, there were more stairs leading down.

And a foul odor was rising from the basement.

Ludwig wasn't terrified, but he was more confused than ever, knowing that more people were dead, and that the temple was serving a purpose that was far different than it appeared.

Ellen has reached the second floor of the basement.

"Is this....... What is this......?"

Ludwig froze, mumbling to himself.

Ellen stares out into the open space, muttering to herself.

"Prison."

There were cages in what looked like a large detention center.

And the prisoners were dead, hanging from the walls.

'Cause of death is penetrating....... He was stabbed with a spear-like weapon.'

Ellen circles the second floor of the basement and sees the bodies beyond the bars.

'The other bodies all have the same cause of death, which means they were stabbed from the outside of the cage to the inside, with a spear....... Most likely by execution.'

"Judging by the scars on each body, they must have been tortured, not just locked up, and there are quite a few rooms that look like torture chambers.

"Imprisonment, and Torture.

"Were the people who stormed this place trying to rescue people who were trapped?

"If that's the intent, then these people weren't killed by raiders, they were killed by people in the basement of this temple.

"I'm not sure if the goal was to rescue or not, but I'm guessing it failed.

"Who are these people, and why are they locked up here?

"Ellen......."

Ellen's musings were interrupted by Ludwig's rapturous voice.

Ludwig, who calls himself Ellen, is standing in front of a cage, staring blankly into it.

"I....... I saw this person yesterday."

"What?"

With that, Ellen moved to Ludwig's side.

A mysterious prisoner, impaled on a spear. But of course, Ellen didn't recognize the person in front of her.

Ludwig's eyes were shaking violently.

"Yesterday....... Among those who tried to attack me and the priest....... There was this guy, apparently......."

"You were going to raid?"

Ludwig nods.

Ludwig briefly explained yesterday's situation.

There was an uproar over the pagans during the purge, and Rowen seemed to lose his cool a bit when he saw them. However, when he realized that they were Warrior Cultists, he gave up trying to help.

On their way back from the cleansing, the cultists attempted to attack Ludwig and Rowen, and Ludwig escaped with Rowen in tow.

One of the men who did is now dead in prison.

"You made it sound like you were going to leave them alone......."

"Actually, they were taken from a refugee camp....... or something like that."

Angered by Rowen's death, Ludwig sought Ellen's help.

However, we now have almost certain evidence that Rowen is very far from being a good person.

We don't know if this is the case with all of the people in the cages, but it is very likely that they are pagans.

And Rowen's demeanor at the sight of the heathen, who seemed to lose his cool, if only briefly.

Advisor's Office.

Now Ludwig has no choice but to know what this place is and who Rowen is.

"You can't possibly....... This is....... and the priest is......."

Ludwig mumbles something incoherent, and Ellen remains still, looking at the view of the prison.

"He must have been an inquisitor."

"......."

It's a place where heretics are interrogated, tortured, and indoctrinated.

If so, Archbishop Rowen would have been the priest equivalent of the leader of the Inquisitors.

Ludwig could only stare in disbelief, feeling betrayed and defeated.

It is almost certain that they were capturing and torturing the pagans in the refugee camps.

Ellen wasn't shocked, but that didn't stop her from exploring the dungeon.

The prison didn't just have cells and torture chambers. Ellen looked over the dead bodies to make sure there was nothing else unusual about them.

I realized they were refugees because they were skinny from not eating properly.

'I mean, they had enough force to inquisition and enough combat power to defend this place.......'

Raiding the strongholds of the Inquisitors.

So it was clear that it wasn't just a mob, and if it was a mob, it wasn't a normal mob.

'We stormed in to rescue them, but they'd already been killed for silence. And the entrance to the basement was sealed off by a collapse....... We're still not sure who did it.'

The raiders stormed the Inquisitor's headquarters, killing everyone inside before vaporizing the Inquisitors.

"In any case, the entrance to the basement was blocked by rubble, likely before the guards or marauders arrived.

A fire broke out, and the guards were called in.

The guards' inability to identify the space meant that the entrance to the basement had been blocked long before that.

Before anyone could see what they shouldn't, the Crusaders moved in and took jurisdiction of the case over to the Guard.

'You didn't let me in so I wouldn't see the shit you're doing here.......'

The sight of civilians being captured, tortured, and killed, even in the name of inquisition, was enough to make Ellen's blood boil.

But I can't stop Ellen from walking, so I can only make way for her in vain.

Ellen makes her way past the holding cells and torture chambers to the deepest room.

"Ellen......."

"Yes. I'm listening."

"If you're an Inquisitor, you're like....... paladins, you'd have to fight."

"I don't know, but I guess I should."

Though not necessarily, heretical inquisitors would have needed to have some real combat power, in case the pagans were dealing with dangerous forces.

"Then....... Mr. Rowen must be a high ranking Inquisitor."

"I'm sure you did."

"Then maybe Mr. Rowen....... who could actually fight?"

Head of the Inquisition.

Rather, they will need actual force.

Of course, this may not be the case. Those who sit on the papal throne of the Five Great Houses may have a great deal of divine power at their disposal, but they are not necessarily drawn from the ranks of paladins.

"Maybe not, but he was the one doing the outside work, so I'm sure he did."

But Lowen was on the ground, so he must have been a very good fighter. Maybe even better than Ludwig.

"...... Why the hell did they need security?"

Ludwig's confusion was palpable, and Ellen couldn't help but think that his questions were valid.

"If he's an inquisitor, he'll definitely be able to fight, and if he's just wandering around the refugee camps gathering information about the heretics or spying on them, there's no reason for him to be escorted by a guard, he'll be more comfortable moving around on his own. It doesn't make sense."

"Why on earth would they do that?"

"I don't know. Not yet."

That's definitely weird.

While we can't rule out the possibility that Rowen is indeed incapable of combat, it's odd that he's the head of the Inquisition and someone who's out in the field.

Ellen walked through the prison and came to a room at the end of another hallway.

When she opened the door, Ellen could see a desk, chair, and bookshelf inside.

It was the space of the person in charge.

The bookshelves were lined with books on the temple and theology, and Ellen approached the table.

There were a few papers scattered about, and most of them were encrypted, so Ellen couldn't tell what they meant by looking at them.

Since we were dealing with confidential information, it was only natural that all documents were encrypted.

But.

From there.

Ellen had a piece of paper she recognized.

"!"

It's not a paper trail.

Cautiously, Ellen lifts the single sheet of paper.

"Did you find anything?"

Ellen picked up the papers and handed them to Ludwig, who couldn't help but roll his eyes.

The one thing you can't recognize, but can recognize a password document.

The photos in those papers.

"My face is....... Why are you here......?"

There was a picture of Ludwig.

"I don't know what it says, but it's obviously a document with your name on it."

Just because you can't read it doesn't mean you can't infer what it says.

"I didn't need a bodyguard."

Ellen looks at Ludwig.

"I don't know why, but I think I reached out to you in the first place."

It was clear that Rowen had intentionally approached Ludwig.

For now, Ellen tucked the papers into her arms.

\* \* \*

The Temple of Tuan, already disguised as a decaying temple, had a place underground where people were locked up and tortured.

Home of the Inquisitors.

I was able to see the hidden side of the temple.

Most of the Inquisitors were slaughtered by unidentified raiders.

A fire broke out, and after the fire, looters ransacked the temple.

And the entrance to the basement was blocked by the collapse after the fire, which was intentional.

Ludwig is stunned that Lowen is the one who has masterminded such a terrible thing.

Your work is done.

Ellen returned to the surface with a stunned Ludwig.

At Ellen's command, the paladins were not allowed to enter or leave the area.

The paladins were supposed to prevent Ellen from seeing this, but they couldn't stand in her way.

Ellen doesn't know if they have anything to do with the Inquisition or not. But they must know what this place is about, and they want to stop her.

If I were to be decapitated by the sword of an enraged warrior right here and now, I would have nothing to say.

The paladins say nothing, waiting for the words to come out of the warrior's mouth.

"You said you didn't have enough priests."

Ellen didn't judge them or ask for the truth.

They likely wouldn't know the details anyway.

"I guess there are still some priests left to kill people."

Ellen walked past them and said, "That's it.

Episode 590.

Ellen and Ludwig made it out of the burning temple.

"The Crusaders will know I'm in there, and they won't be able to touch me, but they might try to silence you."

"......."

"Stay out of the temple for now."

"......Yes."

Ludwig was stunned.

Helping Rowen with his work gave Ludwig a small glimmer of hope that he could do something about it.

But Rowen was actually an inquisitor, gathering information from refugee camps to kidnap and torture heretics, and for some unknown reason, he was deliberately approaching her.

Rowen didn't need Ludwig's protection in the first place. He wanted to take advantage of it, and he did.

Ludwig suddenly understood Lowen's strange attitude toward the pagan. He was an inquisitor.

I may have been lying to you about the cleanup in the first place.

"Took you long enough."

"Yes."

Ellen and Ludwig joined Heinrich and Louise, who were waiting in the alleyway.

"...... You have that look on your face like you just found out you weren't supposed to know."

Louise didn't need to hear the details, just the look on their faces told her that something was definitely up.

\* \* \*

In Heinrich's case, he's the commander of the Cernstadt army and heir to the first throne of Cernstadt.

For a moment, Ellen wondered if she should tell such a person what the Crusaders could do, but then she realized that she didn't know what she was thinking.

It's inevitable that she'll get caught up in everything political, but Ellen isn't interested in that. She understands that with position comes responsibility, but isn't overthinking neutrality already political in itself?

Louise knows the importance of her position better than Ellen does, and she is here to help Ludwig, not as commander of Cernstadt.

That's why Ellen confided in Louise and Heinrich about what she learned in the temple.

It was an inquisition disguised as a ramshackle temple, with a huge dungeon and torture chamber beneath the temple, and everyone in it was dead.

"Inquisition?"

Heinrich heard the story and froze.

"I think they were capturing people and torturing them."

And then Ellen said something equally important.

That there were papers with Ludwig's picture on them in what appeared to be Rowen's office.

"Did you intentionally send Ludwig to......? Why on earth?"

"I don't know about that yet."

Rowen is an inquisitor.

He intentionally approached Ludwig and tried to use him in some way.

Heinrich looked at Ludwig in disbelief, his mouth watering. He had been getting better over the past few days, and this would only shock him more than before.

He was being taken advantage of, but he didn't even realize it, and he was happy that there was still something he could do.

Rowen was even traveling around the refugee camps with Ludwig, capturing, torturing, and killing any pagans he came across.

"That's weird."

Louise, who has been listening to the story, narrows her brow.

"What does using Ludwig have to do with the inquisition?"

The context was completely unknown to everyone in the room. Ludwig is not a believer in the Five Great Houses, nor does he believe in martial religion. He has nothing to do with heresy in the first place.

"By the way......."

Ludwig mumbles to himself.

"About Ellen....... about Ellen."

"Me......?"

Ellen shook her head at that, and Ludwig nodded.

"He seemed to really dislike the Mercenaries, and he asked me what you were like, and he said....... And when he heard I went to the Temple, he asked me....... and asked me what the Devil was like."

Ellen's expression only grew more serious as she realized that Rowen had mentioned her.

"No way....... was trying to get to you through Ludwig?"

"Maybe."

In response to Louise's question, Ellen nodded in silence. Louise frowns and bites her lip, unable to understand further.

"I don't know what you think of the martial arts, but....... It's not directly related to you, is it?"

"Yes."

It is an arbitrary folk religion, and as such, it exists outside of the will of Ellen Artorius herself, the object of the faith.

"As an Inquisitor, I'm guessing you wanted to get rid of the Mercenary Order....... If so, he was trying to reach you through Ludwig to do you harm."

Ludwig's eyes widened when he was told that Rowen had reached Ellen through him and might have tried to kill her.

"No way....... No way......."

"The Mercenary Order has nothing to do with me, but when I die, the Mercenary Order will be gone. Maybe that's what you were thinking."

Ludwig's complexion turned even whiter at Ellen's explanation.

The death of Ellen, the center of the Mercenary Cult, would destroy it. It's a naturally occurring folk religion, but if Ellen dies, it will cease to exist.

The Mercenary Church would seek another faith. They would return to the bosom of the Great Lord, or they would seek a new faith.

They don't love Ellen, they love hope. You just have to give them hope, no matter who they are.

Ludwig mumbles to himself.

"......Now that I think about it, I did say that."

"What?"

Ludwig said he didn't know much about the demon, and Ellen seemed to be a victim.

And.

"You say that Ellen seems to be the victim of all this....... I asked her if she knew that......."

Apparently, as he said that, he gave me an odd smile that I couldn't quite make out the meaning of.

Not as if you don't know, but as if you know differently.

"I don't know what it was, but it was as if what I knew was true and different....... It felt like something was laughing at me......."

Ludwig's words left Ellen speechless.

Louise watched as Ellen's eyes widened as if she had heard something shocking.

\* \* \*

A conversation between Ludwig and Rowen that no one else noticed.

That little snippet helped Ellen realize a truth.

"I knew why and how the gate incident happened.

That's why Ludwig laughed when he said that Ellen was the victim.

Ellen has never seen Rowen's face. But Rowen knows the truth, and Ludwig, who is close to Ellen and can see her at any time, does not.

Because it's funny, and because it's sad.

That's why I said that.

"I think it's possible that he approached Ellen to get rid of the Mercenary Order....... I think you're right."

Heinrich's words made Ellen want to bite her tongue.

'No....... No.'

Though she couldn't bring herself to spit it out, Ellen knew what Rowen had been thinking.

'He was trying to get back at....... on me.'

He was one of the causes of the Gate crisis, but he blames the devil for all of it, claiming to be a warrior and admired by many.

Those who believe in the Warrior religion treat those who believe in the Great Gods religion as sinners and praise only Ellen.

How disgusting and repulsive that must have been.

The death of Ellen would have been secondary to the demise of the Order.

Rowen also asked what the demon was like, not Ellen.

This means that if Rowen knew the truth, he might actually side with the Devil.

She is a priestess of Tuan.

So, if we know that Tiamata's owner, the Devil, didn't actually want the gate to happen, and even warned him about it, we have no choice but to support him.

The opposite was true for Ellen, who I could only hate and loathe.

Only Ellen knew that, and she was as still as a stone, unable to open her mouth.

Ludwig is even more devastated when he realizes the possibility that Rowen may have used him to get to Ellen.

Ludwig had to realize that being close to someone special was not only enough to make you special, but it also meant that you could be used without regard to your own worth.

"With both Rowen and your Inquisitor dead, it's impossible to accomplish whatever it was you were trying to do....... But that doesn't mean all is lost."

Louise looks at Ellen.

"Who the hell was it that raided that temple. Do you mind if I don't reveal that?"

Regardless of Rowen's intentions, there were too many red flags to assume that her death solved everything.

It is only speculation that Rowen might have tried to kill Ellen.

"Even if the Inquisitor was trying to kill you in the first place, there's something odd about that."

"Weird....... part?"

"What does kidnapping and torturing a martial artist have to do with you?"

"ah......."

For a moment, Ellen is shocked that Rowen might know the truth, unable to think about the implications of what has already happened.

"Not all fanatics and madmen are fools. I can't help but notice that you had nothing to do with the rise of the Mercenary Order. Were there obvious signs of torture?"

"There were torture chambers, and the bodies showed signs of being tortured."

Louise nodded slowly at Ellen's words.

"You can torture someone just to make them suffer, but torture is basically about getting information."

Louise says.

"What information can you possibly learn about yourself by torturing people who have never seen you in their lives, or at best, have only seen you in passing?"

That's definitely weird.

If Ludwig was approached to kill Ellen, it is likely that the torture of the Mercenaries was done for that purpose.

But no amount of torture can tell us anything about Ellen. There's no way they didn't know that.

"Maybe they were trying to convert......."

"The youngest. There's no way you can convert all of the Warrior Cultists through torture."

"Well, I see......."

"You may have thought that killing a warrior was the only way to end the warrior religion. But I can't help but think that it's crazy to try to kill a warrior under these circumstances....... I don't know."

We end up in a quagmire, wondering if it was just the craziness of a fanatic, or if there was something else going on.

We can deduce Rowen's purpose from the clues, but we don't know for sure what it is.

This was originally Ludwig's job.

However, as we dug deeper into the case, we realized that it was very likely Ellen's work.

Rowen's true purpose is still unknown. We don't even know who attacked the temple.

But if Ellen wants to dig deeper into this, it's inevitably going to be dangerous.

"The Crusaders, or the High Priest. Either way, they know about this, because the priest couldn't have done it alone. And I can't even be sure that he really tried to kill me, because that's just a possibility."

"I suppose so."

Ellen says calmly.

"I'm on my own from here, it's my problem."

It's political, it's dangerous.

No help from Louise, no help from Heinrich, no help from Ludwig.

Louise stares at Ellen, who looks stony-faced.

Someone who has to carry so much at such a young age and doesn't mind doing so.

Ludwig's words about being a victim of everything.

And that attitude of going it alone, no matter what's in front of you.

Luiz knows he can't keep his hands out of this.

But in the end, I can't help but feel sorry for the attitude that you have to take it all, whether you're willing or not.

You're on your own.

Louise thinks about Ellen's sad words.

"It's just me."

Louise smiles bitterly.

When you have so much on your plate, you're bound to have a lot on your plate, no matter how small.

What's royalty without an heir anyway?

A warrior is about to try his hand at something dangerous, when his death could mean the end of humanity.

"Your problem is the problem of all of humanity."

"......."

Suppose Ellen's death ruins everything in the world.

The things Louise carries on her shoulders become irrelevant in the face of Ellen's life.

Ellen couldn't help but choke up when Louise said she would help her all the way.

\* \* \*

Even the Inquisitors are, after all, part of the Crusader Knights and the Five Great Houses. So it was as if Ellen's destination for learning more about Rowen had already been determined.

It's the Crusaders' Great War.

Louise, as well as Heinrich and Ludwig, moved with Ellen.

Ludwig had originally asked Ellen to uncover Lowen's wrongful death, but it turns out that Lowen had been responsible for countless other wrongful deaths.

So, in effect, the raiders who killed Rowen may have done the right thing.

Rowen is not an innocent man.

Ludwig hadn't thought to question Lowen's mask until now.

No, I kept seeing something suspicious.

However, it's also possible that the idea of being able to do something just by being with Rowen kept you from questioning it.

Not knowing what to do, but wanting to do something about his frustration, Ludwig wanted to see this end.

How far does this work really reach. Where are the roots of this work.

What the heck is going on.

Ludwig wanted to know, just as Ellen wanted to know, even though he knew that knowing would only frustrate rather than enlighten him.

Did Rowen really want to kill Ellen?

The reason for the torture of the Mercenaries.

I wonder if the Crusaders know about this.

Just as Ellen was able to push her way into a raid site guarded by paladins, the Great Hall, the headquarters of the Crusader Knights, was no different.

"I want to meet the leader of the Crusader Knights."

That was all it took.

Episode 591.

Crusader Knight Commander Elayon Bolton.

The successor to former Crusader Knightmaster Revere Lance, who stepped down from the position due to what he did to his adopted daughter, Olivia Lance.

He was pro-Imperial, but only in comparison to Leviathan, not in the sense that he was fully embedded in the Empire.

Leviathan Lance dreamed of establishing a Holy Empire completely independent of the Crusader Knights and the forces of the Five Great Houses, and he intended to make the first High Priestess of that Holy Empire his adopted daughter.

He dreamed of an empire of gods called the Holy City, divided into five schools of thought, and a pope who ruled over them.

Of course, very few knew of his ambition, and he was forced to put an end to his long dream by being killed by a demon.

Compared to such a Leviathan, Elion Bolton is a more centrist figure.

Good enough. Someone who thinks the status quo is the best we can do with the forces we have and the resources we have.

As such, he was a natural fit for the powers that be.

The fact that the organization is still around after the events of the Gate proves that Elayon Bolton is more than capable of leading the Crusaders.

Ellen was alone in the meeting with the Crusader Commander.

But while I was alone in the room, the visit itself was accompanied by a group.

Ludwig, Heinrich.

And Louise von Schwarz.

The other three were not in the interview room, but were in a separate room waiting for the interview to end.

That was Louise's opinion.

Ellen asked if it would be better to wait outside so Louise wouldn't get caught up in a nasty argument, but Louise shook her head.

"Come with me, but do the talking.

"Don't you think it's better to be face-to-face together? If we're going to be separate, it's better if they don't know we're here together.

If you're going to go with them, go with them to the meeting with the Crusader Commander, or at least make sure they don't know you're there.

Ellen thought that was good.

I wondered if I shouldn't have come to the meeting in the first place.

"Just the fact that you're not here alone puts pressure on them.

'The Grand Master of the Templars must take my presence into account because you and I have come together, but I have my reasons for following my youngest friend to the High Temple of the Templars.'

"They won't believe you for that reason, but you don't realize how many problems you can get away with for that obvious reason, because all that matters is how you look.

'It will be much easier for you to talk to me if I'm not there.'

"Do you understand what I mean?

Listening to Louise's explanation, Ellen nodded.

"Okay, I see what you mean.

Like Ellen, Louise's mere presence is significant. The Crusader Knights may not actually talk to Louise von Schwarz, but they can't help but feel her presence.

So even in the unlikely event that the crusader leader had strange intentions for Ellen, he would have to give it some serious thought before he acted.

Ellen is a warrior in her own right, but she is also a guest with the heir to the Schwarz family.

Therefore, the conclusion is that to deceive Ellen is to deceive a warrior, but also to deceive the Schwarz family.

Presence can backfire if you overdo it, and Ruiz knew how to use it in moderation.

So Ellen waited alone in the interview room while the rest of the group waited in another room.

A warrior's name is never taken lightly.

Ordinary people couldn't ask for an audience, and even if they could, they'd have to wait until the crusader leader had finished his business.

But just because Ellen is here, the Crusader leader must stop what he's doing and come to the interview room.

If Ellen says she wants to see the crusader, it's no different than if she says she wants to see a horse and tells it to get in front of me right now.

It took less than ten minutes for Ellen to arrive in front of the Great Hall of the Templars, to reach the interview room, and to see the face of the Grand Master of the Templars.

-delay

When the door to the reception room opened, revealing the leader of the Crusader Knights, Elayon Bolton, Ellen rose from her seat and bowed to him.

"Hello."

As Ellen greeted him, Elayon Bolton stroked his shortly shaven beard thoughtfully.

"Hmm. I didn't expect to see you on the ecliptic."

"I see."

Ellen is very polite, but she is fairly polite. Even when she met Louise von Schwarz, she only said hello.

The emperor and the cider are at odds because of their temple days.

So Ellen is not particularly polite to anyone.

Of course, there's no one in the world to point that out. Not then, not now.

"Sit down."

"Yes."

When invited to sit down, Ellen took a seat on the couch, and Elion Bolton sat across from her.

They're pretty familiar with each other.

I've actually been on the battlefield with the crusader leader, and I've seen Ellen in meetings, even if she's not always there.

But it's not often that I get to come back to the ecliptic and see you at the Great Hall of the Crusaders.

Just before the gates burst.

Ellen was there the day Olivia Lanchette went on a rant about Reinhardt's whereabouts.

I don't think that was the first time.

Ellen thought to herself.

I wasn't sitting there for a good reason then, and I'm sure I'm not sitting there now.

Ellen is polite, but she doesn't talk back.

"Do you know why I'm here?"

"......."

Elion Bolton is silent for a moment.

"We've been informed that you entered the scene of a temple fire."

"Tell me from start to finish, what's what. What you know and what you don't know."

Ellen said nonchalantly, without changing her expression.

"You knew you'd come out like this."

This had never happened before, and Elion Bolton smiled bitterly.

"I do it when I have to."

Ellen knows how to be rude when she needs to be rude.

"If you're not going to tell me, what are you going to do?"

At that, Ellen pauses for a moment.

"I'm going to ask until you tell me."

I could lie here all day and no one would touch Ellen's body.

Even if it's the crusader himself.

\* \* \*

Ellen demanded the truth from Elion Bolton, half threateningly.

But the answer was simple.

"I don't know."

"......."

Ellen stares at Elion Bolton, stunned by the bluntness of the answer.

"You don't think I'm going to believe that."

"What you don't know, you don't know."

Ellen tries to figure out how to slip in a lie that is so casual.

If your opponent is consistent with the mortar, what the heck are you supposed to do?

"Are you saying that Archbishop Rowen in the temple wasn't part of the Crusader Order? I didn't know he was part of the Tuan Order....... What are you talking about?"

"No, Archbishop Rowen was a member of the Crusaders. He is the Inquisitor of the Crusader Order and the one in charge of the Inquisitors of the Zodiac."

As Ellen had seen and thought, Archbishop Rowen was indeed the head of the Inquisition.

"So, you're saying you didn't know he was torturing refugees in the basement of the temple?"

"To be precise, we didn't know about it until now."

"......Are you trying to make a pun?"

Ellen didn't know where to begin to point out that the leader of the Crusade Knights didn't know what he was supposed to know.

Ellen glares at him, and he stares down at the table.

"I'll have to make excuses for my incompetence."

"Incompetent......?"

"Yeah, incompetence."

The Crusaders look at Ellen, still, and say.

"I've been commanding paladins and priests as a crusader in the Alliance, and I've only been back in the ecliptic for a little over a week now."

"......."

"Is it so hard to believe that I couldn't help not knowing what was going on in the ecliptic?"

The Crusader Commander was busy.

It's been busy as hell.

Hence my statement that I couldn't care less and didn't know what was going on with the Crusaders of the Yellow Dawn and the Five Great Houses.

I wasn't competent enough to bother with that, so I ended up being incompetent enough to not know.

If nothing else, Ellen couldn't deny that Elion Bolton was being honest with her.

The Alliance is not just an army of the Empire. It is an army of many surviving nations, as well as the Mages' Guild, the Duchy of Saint-Tuan, the Army of Cernstadt, and many other groups and nations.

As such, each army is subdivided and the direction of the army is determined by the General Headquarters.

The Crusader Knights are a very important part of the Alliance, as is the Cernstadt Army, one of the largest of which includes the Kaiser's Army.

Just as the Emperor was busy, Louise von Schwarz, commander of the Cernstadt army, was unable to leave the Allies until the King handed over command of the army.

The leader of the Crusader Knights, Elayon Bolton, was also unable to leave the Allied lines.

"I don't know if you'll understand, Warrior, but the Crusader Knights are not a simple group."

Elion Bolton slams his fingers down on the table.

"The Crusader Knights are a coalition of the Five Lords."

"Of course I know that."

"It means an empire formed by the union of five imperial states."

"......."

It's a blasphemous statement, but it's semantically correct. The Crusaders are already a small empire in their own right.

"But the leader of the Crusaders is not the Emperor."

"......!"

Ellen couldn't help but roll her eyes.

Ellen, apparently, said that a few days ago in response to Ludwig's question.

The position of Crusader is above Cardinal and below Pope, and only as high as the Pope.

When human nations come together to form an empire, an emperor emerges, but when the five orders come together to elect a crusader knight, he is no more than a pope; he merely leads the group by proxy.

"Do you understand me when I say that I commanded the Crusader Knights of the Alliance as a Crusader Knight Commander, and as such, there are bound to be matters of the Order or Knights that I do not know about?"

While the Grand Master of the Crusade is in retirement, the five Popes are not in retirement. And the Knights Templar have no authority to command the popes.

If the Popes are hiding something from the Templars, the Templars may not know about it.

Ignorance is not bliss.

Ellen doesn't realize that just waging war is a daunting task.

Seriously, the Crusader Templar had no idea.

\* \* \*

Elion Bolton could not help but be ignorant of the affairs of the ecliptic.

This was partly because he might be overwhelmed with the task of conducting the war, and partly because the Popes were responsible for the affairs of the Order of the Zodiac and were not obligated to relay them to Elayon Bolton.

The Templars are nominally less powerful than the popes, so the pope's failure to inform the Templars about the affairs of the Imperium is not a dereliction of duty, but rather something they had no reason to do in the first place.

Elion Boulton didn't say the popes were weird.

The fact that the current Crusader Knight Commander is unaware of the situation in the Zodiac is not a surprise. It just leaves a lot of room for Ellen's imagination.

"I knew that Archbishop Rowen was fulfilling his duties as the leader of the Inquisition in the Eclipse. But I didn't realize he was torturing heretics."

"And I was contacted this morning and dispatched paladins, because it's not good for civilians to go into a place like that."

"It was my orders to secure the site and hide the underground facility."

"Like I said, you can see why."

"But we don't know what Archbishop Lowen was doing."

"I'm just hiding things that people shouldn't see."

Ellen listened to Elion Bolton's words in silence.

With all the attention the fire received, it was impossible to bury the incident quietly.

If his story is true, Elayon Bolton had his paladins deliberately collapse the building, burying the staircase to the basement in rubble.

The event had already happened, there was a massacre and a fire. He was lucky the looters hadn't gone underground and buried him alive.

Soon.

He doesn't know the raiders, and he doesn't know why Archbishop Rowen was killed.

Faced with the task of cleaning up the crime scene and uncovering the truth, Elion Bolton did just that.

The paladins on the scene also knew that the place was a temple of the Inquisitors, but they didn't know what happened.

If word got out that he was capturing and torturing people in the temple's basement, it would only make the Ecliptic's bad reputation worse, so there was nothing Elayon Bolton could do but clean up the mess.

And it was Ellen who went into the field to get a sense of what was going on.

Elayon Bolton doesn't know what Rowen was doing, and he'd have a hard enough time getting back to the ecliptic to figure it out in the first place.

"Really, you don't know anything?"

"I don't know, but I can make a guess."

Elion Bolton stares at Ellen for a moment.

He's supposed to be in the Allied camp, but he didn't just come back in the first place.

"Recently, the cemetery in the basement of the Crusader Knights was robbed."

It was information that very few people knew, but Ellen had heard it across the street. A big event, but one she'd forgotten about because it had nothing to do with her.

"Are you sure you don't want that job at......?"

"Yeah."

Elion Bolton nods.

"I would have been looking into that."

The leader of the Crusader Knights had returned to the Imperium to find out what had happened, and the heresy inquisitors who had remained in the Imperium in the first place must also be investigating.

It's a big deal that we can't let go of, even though other factions or people might be like, "Oh, that happened to us.

"It was refugees who looted that cemetery....... Is that right?"

At Ellen's words, Elayon Bolton shook his head in disbelief.

"We can't know that far. And there are no treasures buried in the tombs of saints."

Elion Bolton looks at Ellen and says, "You're right.

"It wasn't the treasure that was stolen, it was the remains."

"Is that ......?"

Of course, there was no way Ellen could know the truth.

Episode 592.

Elendor had also gotten word from someone at the High Command that the Templars' graveyard had been robbed. Unsurprisingly, the leader of the Crusaders and a number of high-ranking paladins had returned to investigate.

With so much power concentrated in the Alliance, it's inevitable that the security of the Crusaders' anti-Crusader warfare will be compromised, and we don't consider the theft itself to be impossible.

What they didn't realize was that it was human remains that had been stolen.

"Why on earth would you want to......?"

It didn't make sense to Ellen.

"We don't know. But many of the cemeteries were destroyed, and all the remains in them are gone."

It's not like Elion Bolton can't understand it either.

"It was only natural that Archbishop Rowen would want to investigate this. But I didn't think it would involve capturing and torturing heretics."

Elion Bolton stared down at the table.

"I've been looking into it since I got back to the ecliptic, and I'm still cautious about acting on it, in case it's an internal disgruntled faction, in case there's something I don't know about."

How someone snuck into the cemetery of the saints and stole their remains.

We don't know why, we don't know how, and we don't know who.

And it's clear that the Crusader Commander can't trust those left in the Eclipse to even begin to work on the case.

"What the hell does that have to do with people in refugee camps?"

"You can't help but think that the job of an inquisitor is to capture, torture, and kill innocent people, but they are actually the most likely people in the world to see the curse rituals of pagans manifest in power."

"......."

They have seen enough of the demonic works of the pagans, and have seen the unholy miracles they perform.

So it's a bit of an occupational disease to think that pagans are to blame for these problems.

"It is by no means impossible that the curses and prayers of pagans might have desecrated the tombs of the saints."

Even the crusader leader can't say that the pagan rituals in the refugee camps were never the cause.

In fact, there is a huge refugee population in the ecliptic, many of whom are either martialists or believe in some variation of martialism.

It is impossible to say that it is not possible that some of their unclean rituals or prayers could have burned uncleanness into the mausoleums of the saints.

"Is that possible, really?"

To Ellen's question, Elion Bolton neither nodded nor shook his head.

"It could be a possibility."

The Crusader leader doesn't know what Rowen has been up to.

But we do know that Rowen was looking into the grave robbing, given what happened with the Crusaders.

Then you end up with a weirder problem.

"Why in the world would Ludwig go to......?

Ellen wondered if Rowen had approached Ludwig to get to her.

But if Rowen was investigating a grave robbery, what the hell does Ludwig have to do with it?

If the approach to Ludwig was for a different purpose than the grave robbery, it could be.

But is that really the case?

And another problem.

"Did Rowen have any idea why the Gate debacle happened....... Did he know?"

In hindsight, when I think back on what he said to Ludwig, Rowen seemed to know why the gate incident happened.

At Ellen's question, Elayon Bolton stares at her.

"That day, do you remember?"

Naturally, Ellen doesn't know what day it is.

The day the sky opened up and meteors rained down.

I'm talking about the day this whole nightmare started.

"Do you remember the people who were there?"

"......a."

There were a lot of people there.

The place where you ask the devil, one last time, what you've done and what you want.

There, the devil said.

I loved humans, and I wanted to save them.

But you guys didn't believe me, and it was too late, so I told you about what was going to happen.

The people who gathered to interrogate the demon that day.

Emperors and princes.

Ellen and Saviolin Tana, the Crusader Knights, and the Popes of the Five Great Houses.

And those who gathered to prepare for the what-ifs.

Imperial Mages.

Chanapelle.

Senior paladins of the Crusader Order.

"Archbishop Rowen was there, too."

Rowen was the one who had been there when the demon made his last excuse.

Give up everything, give up everything.

I said I loved you, I wanted peace, but you didn't believe me.

He had seen the devil in front of him, looking miserable, giving up on everything, confessing in despair to the car about what was to come.

Archbishop Rowen, the leader of the inquisitors, saw such a champion of Tuan and a despairing apostle of Tuan before his eyes.

He was a priest of Tuan.

\* \* \*

On the day the heavens opened, there were many people in the great hall. There were mages from the imperial court, knights from Shanapelle, and high ranking paladins from the Crusade.

While many of them had already fallen into disfavor after the events of the Gate, others had survived. Rowen was one of them.

We don't know much about the demons, but we do know that they saw the Gate coming, and they saw it coming, and they saw how to stop it.

They're all holding back truths that shouldn't be revealed, but they're all human.

You can't help but suffer and wonder why this had to happen and what the hell went wrong.

Ellen could only stare in disbelief as she was told that the murdered Rowen had been one of those present that day.

At that moment, Ellen was in close proximity to the demon.

Rowen would have watched the scene from afar, one of the paladins guarding the perimeter in case of a possible attack.

She could hear the demon's confession.

Many people believe that the Gate was an act of the Devil to exterminate humans.

People hate Tuan for choosing such a demon.

Hate the priests who believe in such tuan.

I hate the followers of such priests.

And the warrior religion is on the rise.

How unfortunate, sad, and hateful it was to hear words of hate and anger spewed by people who didn't know the truth.

Ellen realizes that Rowen's hatred and dislike of her was perfectly natural.

But whatever Rowen wanted, whatever he investigated, he died.

We don't even know who died.

I don't even know why I approached Ludwig.

Louise said to Ellen.

Your work is humanity's work.

So, is all of humanity's work the work of a warrior?

Ellen eventually realized that beyond being suspicious of Rowen, she was also responsible for what happened to Rowen.

"You don't know who that person was killed by....... by whom he was killed?"

"......Yes."

The Crusader leader has only a vague idea of what Rowen was investigating. What she was really trying to do. He doesn't know who killed him.

You can't believe everything Elion Bolton said. It's entirely possible that Elion Bolton didn't tell the whole truth.

"Is it safe to assume that Rowen was killed while investigating a grave robbery?"

"Probably."

The Tomb of the Saints, in the basement of the Great Hall of the Crusader Knights, has been robbed.

Rowen was investigating the case and was killed for it.

That was the only conclusion I could come to.

\* \* \*

Elion Bolton's claim that Rowen didn't know what he was doing is not entirely without credibility. However, that doesn't mean that everything Elion Bolton says is true.

No champion would want an outsider, Ellen, meddling too much in what was an internal affair in the first place, so it's no wonder they're hiding things.

The paladins were more concerned with covering up what the temple was doing than destroying the evidence because they were too scared to get to the scene. That's why the bodies in the temple's basement were left untouched.

The paladins were in a hurry.

Once the site itself was covered up, they would take their time dealing with the interrogation facilities for the inquisitors.

It was the Crusaders' business, of course, and the Empire had no reason to interfere.

If it weren't for Ellen's sudden intervention on the scene, the story would have ended with a publicized mob attack on the temple and a looting arson.

The scene was covered up by paladins under the direction of Elayon Bolton.

However, Elyon Bolton claimed that Rowen was not instructed to interrogate the pagans, and the claim itself is not without credibility, regardless of its veracity.

We won't know what's going on in the ecliptic until Elion Bolton returns, as he's obviously spending his time trying to figure things out.

Ellen ponders.

Does Elion Bolton know that Rowen intentionally approached Ludwig?

From the looks of things, Elion Bolton was focused on covering up the scene.

It was clear that he hadn't checked the contents of the papers inside the temple, or even realized that Ludwig had been intentionally approached by Rowen.

I would have covered it up and tried to figure it out as part of my apprenticeship.

And the document with Ludwig's face on it is now in Ellen's possession.

After debating whether or not to tell her, Ellen made a decision.

I still don't trust Elion Bolton.

He won't trust Ellen either, so it's a mutual distrust.

"You don't mind if I figure it out on my own, do you?"

If he tells her to stay out of it, she'll be suspicious.

Ellen does not explicitly have any public power, such as investigative powers.

However, because it is unspecified, Ellen can interfere with anything in the world.

Ellen's ability to meddle in the affairs of the Crusaders where even the Emperor cannot is proof of that.

In some ways, it is Ellen who has the most transcendent power. She doesn't know what Elion Bolton is thinking.

It's just that he knows he can't resist.

"I will cooperate fully, but only within the authority of the Crusader Knights."

Within the authority of the Crusader Commander.

Ellen understood enough to know what he meant.

\* \* \*

After her meeting with the crusader leader, Ellen returned to where her group was waiting.

Ellen was assured of the Crusader's full cooperation. However, the Crusader made no mention of the princess of the House of Schwarz.

It's unclear whether this means that she should do her own thing, or that it's okay for Louise to have a foot in the door.

However, the crusader leader must solve a case of grave robbing.

It wouldn't hurt for Ellen to handle this in her own way, just as Rowen handled the case in his own way.

Elion Boulton was ambiguous about whether he really didn't know, or whether he knew but wasn't saying.

But the idea that he could not possibly be ignorant of the zodiacal situation was not without merit.

Ellen didn't bother to mention that Rowen was one of the people who knew the truth about the Gate situation.

I feel guilty, but the truth that must be hidden must be hidden.

Just as Elayon Bolton had paved the way down to the basement of the Inquisitor's temple with rubble. Ellen was bound to do something similar.

"The cemetery was robbed, and it's the remains that are missing?"

"Yes."

"Why on earth would you want to......?"

"I don't know."

The three were understandably surprised to hear about what Rowen was supposedly investigating.

If the treasure is missing, it's probably for a bath, but if the remains are missing, it's more likely that they were involved in something nefarious.

As an inquisitor, it would have made sense for Rowen to investigate the evil ones, the pagans.

In the refugee camps, those who appeared to be heretics were captured, tortured, and killed to determine if they had any connection to the Crusaders' grave robbing.

Whether it was justified or not, she did her job.

Disappeared remains.

Why did they steal the remains of the saints and where did they go?

Louise narrowed her brow in thought.

"Interrogating and killing infidels seems to have been the only conclusion the priest could come to......."

"Then we found the alleged culprits, and the best we can hope for is that he was killed by them......."

"But are there enough pagan forces in the refugee camp to do something like that?"

It's impossible to say that it can never happen.

But there's one piece of the puzzle that doesn't fit together: if Rowen eventually crossed paths with some powerful cult in the refugee camp and was slaughtered by them and their inquisitors.

All eyes naturally turn to Ludwig.

"Then why on earth would I want to......."

Ludwig was also confused because he couldn't figure out why Rowen had approached him.

"One thing's for sure, he didn't need a bodyguard, and I'm pretty sure he made a deliberate approach to you."

Rowen must have been more skilled than Ludwig. It's clear that he came to Ludwig's guard on purpose, even if it was only under the guise of needing protection.

But Ellen was beginning to wonder if these were two separate incidents.

Rowen was investigating the whereabouts of the missing remains.

He wanted to reach Ludwig so that he could reach Ellen in order to eradicate the Mercenary Order.

He's a guy who's supposed to hate infidels, so he could have been working on two completely different things.

Once Ellen realized the premise that Rowen was someone who had some knowledge of the truth about the gate, she came to a different conclusion than everyone else in the room.

Ludwig's involvement is separate from the paganism and theft of human remains.

The theft of the ashes is a matter of immediate concern to Rowen, and he has no choice but to investigate.

Approaching Ellen through Ludwig would be a completely different endeavor for Rowen, who has been in the game for quite some time.

Given the circumstances, Ellen was convinced that Rowen had no choice but to hate her.

But in the end, no matter what Rowen tried to do, the problem comes back to square one.

Who killed Rowen?

"Is there a refugee camp in....... with a cultist force of that size, could they possibly have the strength to storm the Inquisitor's temple?"

At Ellen's question, Louise was silent. As if she couldn't think of anything.

Heinrich von Schwarz, who had been thinking about it, but had been silent because he couldn't think of anything to say, spoke up.

"I wonder if Demon religion is....... maybe?"

"......magic?"

Real heresy, not paganism.

"Yeah, there's a lot of paganism in the refugee camps, there's no way there's not some kind of necromancer."

In reality, Demonists use true demonic power, unlike their half-hearted warrior counterparts.

In practice, the dangerous heresies have always been the magicians.

"Yeah....... I hadn't thought about that one."

Louise nodded slowly.

While the theft of the ashes was not the work of Satanists in the refugee camps, in the grand scheme of things, Heinrich's reasoning was true.

Episode 593.

Ellen was granted access to the case with the Crusader Chief's order to fully cooperate.

And while not officially part of the investigation, Louise von Schwarz was also working on the case as Ellen's assistant.

Heinrich then formed the opinion that Satanists might be involved in the case.

Unlike the Warrior Cultists, the Demon Cultists use the divine power of demons, and some of them are dangerous. So if there really was a demonic force, they could have robbed the underground of the Crusaders' Great Hall, and they could have killed Rowen, who was after them.

Ludwig says with a stern look.

"I heard from Rowen....... because the warrior cults are not considered heretics....... There are real cults that masquerade as warrior cults."

"...... should be good enough."

Louise nodded at Ludwig's words.

Mercenary religions have no roots and are not a cohesive force, so their beliefs often have different contexts.

It's also possible that they're spreading their beliefs disguised as warrior religions to the refugee camps.

And unlike the warrior religions, the Demon Gods are a collective force.

"If it were possible, a demonic religion masquerading as a warrior religion could have nearly ruled the refugee camps."

It's entirely possible that they're not just a creeping force, but that they're already the dominant religious force in the entire refugee camp, albeit in the guise of a warrior religion.

"Then again....... that a man named Rowen may have been fighting a monster of unimaginable size......."

If it's true that the refugee camps have been infested with demonic beliefs masquerading as warrior religions, then Rowen has been wandering the streets of the camps in an attempt to uncover the true nature of the great demonic cults.

If he was indeed capturing and interrogating Satanists and not innocent refugees, Rowen may have been seeking his own brand of justice after all.

The people Rowen captured, tortured, and killed were either Satanists or innocents.

It was getting to the point where I couldn't tell if what Rowen was doing was good or bad.

In the end, we don't know what Rowen's true intentions were, or who killed him, so we're left with a lot of possibilities, but nothing is certain.

Ellen drums her fingers on the table, which is littered with speculation.

"First, I think we should go to the cemetery of the saints."

Incident scene.

I'd better go there, Ellen concluded.

\* \* \*

The theft of the remains from the Cemetery of the Saints was not the trigger for all of this.

Rowen was a heresy inquisitor for the Eclipse, and he'd been at it a long time.

She must have had her own goals.

We don't know if it's a matter of identifying and eradicating demonic religions, or uprooting them entirely.

There have been extreme incidents since Gate.

Just because a bomb goes off doesn't mean it's the cause of everything.

In a world where gunpowder is everywhere, it's only a matter of time before there's a big explosion.

The problem is gunpowder.

With so many problems in the world, it's only a matter of time before the Demon Gods take over, the Warrior Gods overtake the Great Gods, and hunger and plague become a problem.

Gates are the cause of everything, and accidents are everywhere.

The theft of the saints' graves, the theft of their relics, were just a bunch of problems that met a trigger and exploded.

That's what Ellen was thinking.

The Knights Templar is also investigating the incident.

"I don't think Rowen shared the investigation with the Crusaders. Either that, or the leader lied."

Rowen would have launched an investigation immediately after the incident.

He returned to the Crusaders with a group of high-ranking paladins, but they dismissed him as knowing nothing about Rowen's investigation.

With no way of knowing if the crusader leader was cooperating, Ellen had no way of getting to the truth of the matter except to see, hear, and judge with her own eyes.

The Crusader leader can lie to Ellen or withhold information from her, but he can't block her path.

Ellen communicated her need to see the scene, and soon enough, Elayon Bolton assigned her a high-ranking paladin to serve as her escort.

"Greetings, warrior. It is an honor to meet you. Let me show you around."

"Yes, thank you."

Ellen didn't have much faith in him, as the leader would be no different than the master.

Ellen leads the group to the basement of the Crusader High Hall.

There are many facilities underground at the Great Hall, but the Cemetery of the Saints is the deepest.

The paladins blocking the way had been instructed to do so, and when they saw Ellen, they moved out of the way.

Louise agrees to help Ellen and Ludwig, but holds back.

It's up to Ellen to take matters into her own hands.

"Can you give us a brief overview of the case?"

"The incident happened on December 3, so about 17 days ago."

An incident that occurred 17 days ago.

The Crusader Templar could not return immediately, so he would have to wait until long after the event to return to the Imperium.

So it's understandable that we didn't know what the status of the investigation was or how it was progressing.

The content was clear and simple.

In the early morning hours of December 3, an administrative priest in charge of the tomb of the saints entered the tomb of the saints and, upon seeing the destruction, immediately reported to the priest on duty.

When the on-call priests and paladins arrived and checked the scene, they found that many of the sarcophagi had been destroyed and the remains missing.

"What was the security situation?"

"The Tomb of the Saints was originally....... However, due to its location, descending to the Tomb of the Saints will inevitably draw the attention of paladins and priests, though......."

"Did anyone see the culprit?"

"Yes."

"What about locks?"

"The entrance to the tombs of the saints is locked in peacetime. The only people with keys are the priests in charge of administration. However, when we interrogated the priests in charge of administration, it turned out that they were keeping the keys in their private rooms."

"You mean ...... could have been stolen?"

"Someone may have been using it on the sly."

There are thieves who steal from graves that have nothing to steal.

Inevitably, the priests in charge of the tomb would be severely punished.

And the suspicion that you might be a suspect.

"According to the priest who discovered the scene, the tomb was locked as usual."

"You mean the burglar got away with kicking in the door?"

"......We don't know that."

That's ridiculous.

During the descent into the catacombs, the perpetrators were never seen, and the doors were locked.

While we can't completely rule out the possibility of key mismanagement or insiders, there are two most likely explanations.

You may have entered the catacombs by teleporting.

"It's possible that a high-level wizard was involved."

It's likely that a mage with access to teleport, or better yet, mass teleport, was involved.

"The Knights are looking at that possibility as well, and you'll see when you get there."

When they reached the Cemetery of the Saints, the paladin in charge of the group inserted a large key into the massive entrance and unlocked it.

-Greg

A paladin single-handedly opens a door that no ordinary man can properly open. It was a giant door that a normal person would have trouble pushing or pulling.

Soon the door opened, and Ellen could see the scene preserved exactly as it had been on the day of the incident.

A giant underground cavity.

And there were sarcophagi embedded in the walls, as well as sarcophagi buried in the floor.

Some sarcophagi were intact, but many were shattered.

And the debris on the floor.

"That's not theft, that's vandalism."

"Yes....... Yes."

"How can there be this level of disturbance and not be heard from above?"

"It must have been heard, but none of the priests upstairs heard it."

Noise suppression.

And spatial movement.

Louise says as she stares at the scene.

"That's noise canceling."

I was convinced that the wizard was inevitably involved.

\* \* \*

"Can I come in and take a look?"

"Yes, anytime."

Ellen walked slowly into the catacombs.

The Crusaders don't keep Ellen well informed, but they don't stop her either.

Beyond that, only the people in the room will be able to figure it out and make judgments.

Cemetery of Saints.

Ellen didn't know about these places, and she didn't need to.

Ludwig, Heinrich, and Louise followed Ellen into the catacombs.

We don't know for sure if the temple raiders and the ashes thieves are the same.

However, it's clear that there were superhumans among those who raided the temple, and mages among those who stole the remains.

Everyone had a hunch that whatever type of group the perpetrators were, they weren't normal people.

There were sarcophagi buried in the ground, and sarcophagi embedded in the walls as if they were housed.

Like a cabinet, for example.

We don't know if the thief was alone or in a group, but the sarcophagus was mostly broken.

No matter how much noise canceling you've done to suppress it, it's just too harsh. It's literally destructive.

"There's a lot of ways to do it gently, like steal the ashes and put the coffin back.

Had they done so, the Crusaders would have been unaware for a very long time that the remains had been stolen.

One thing is clear: the thieves acted as if they didn't care if they were caught or not.

"They were confident that they wouldn't get caught doing this.

Maybe it's a dig at the Crusaders, maybe it's confidence that they won't get caught. Or both, we don't know.

We've all been there, done that, but there are still things we don't know.

Why I took it.

Why would they steal the remains? Leaving them defaced would have shown their anger at the Crusaders or their anger at the High Priestess.

'Fury......?

Rage against the Five Great Houses.

And that anger is most pronounced against two of the five major denominations.

Tuan and Als.

And while many of the sarcophagi were destroyed, others were intact.

Some bodies were taken, some were not.

"Did they only take the remains of the saints who believed in Tuan and Als in life?

Ellen reads the bio from a fragment of a destroyed sarcophagus.

"No.

I scanned the names just in case, but there were paladins from Riter, Mensis, and Shalam, as well as the remains of paladins who believed in Tuan and Als in life.

"There's no distinction.

This could be an act of rage, or it could be a faction that hates all of the Five Great Houses.

As she scrolled through the names, she couldn't help but notice one she recognized.

"This is......."

Ellen couldn't help but roll her eyes.

Reinhard, who was murdered by Leverier Ranze.

Ellen had to bite her lip when she saw the name.

At the time of the Miss Temple contest, Reinhardt did not show up.

It was then that Reinhardt fought Leviathan to save Olivia Ranze.

At the sudden recollection, Ellen felt an excruciating headache engulf her.

"Ugh......!"

"Ellen!"

Suddenly, Ellen faltered, holding her head in her hands, and Heinrich and Ludwig, who had been looking around, and Ellen, as well as the paladin who had been watching, rushed to her aid.

"Ugh......!"

It felt like a thousand needles piercing my head.

"What's going on, are you okay?"

"Warrior! Are you all right!"

"Go, what's wrong with you all of a sudden......!"

"Are you okay? Wake up!"

With the voices echoing around her and the pressure threatening to overwhelm her, Ellen squeezes her eyes shut and tries to catch her breath.

The sudden onslaught of names and memories made Ellen feel like an awl was being dug into her brain.

The hatred and anger of others, unknown in origin, threatens to consume you.

The presence of "it" in her soul, threatening to consume her at any moment, weighs on Ellen's psyche.

A tidal wave of souls that had been dormant because your mind was elsewhere.

Today I was confronted with so many things I've been trying to forget, including the demons and the gate situation.

And so the torrent of souls that had barely been quenched threatens to overwhelm Ellen.

"Hey, it's okay....... I'm fine....... I just got a little dizzy......."

It was by no means what you'd describe as vertigo, but Ellen had to hold her head steady and catch her breath.

Not yet.

Not yet.

We can hold on for now.

Not yet.

You can be calm.

I can't hand over my body, mind, and spirit yet.

You need to think about something else.

Just thinking about the devil and thinking about Reinhardt felt like my soul was being torn apart.

Ellen clutches the bone idol around her neck.

Holding on to the signpost of the heart that the Detomorian had carved out.

Returns.

Forget about it.

You'd rather forget about it so it doesn't get taken away from you.

Focus on the incident.

Levereer Ranze had his remains stolen.

I must see an end to this bizarre murder and carnage.

You need to know where all this is going.

In the midst of those thoughts.

Ellen thinks of something else.

No murders, no demons, no gates, no stolen remains.

The one word that will make you forget everything that's cluttering your mind.

Go back.

Go back to the template.

You need to feed the cat.

Like a lie.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

The pain that felt like it was ravaging my head and soul stopped.

"......."

Ellen stood still for a moment, wondering why the pain had stopped for this reason.

\* \* \*

"Maybe there's some kind of unclean energy in this place, and it's affecting you......."

"No, no. That's not it, I just do that sometimes."

To everyone's concern, Ellen assured them that it wasn't.

An investigation is an investigation, but the most important thing is Ellen's life. Even a paladin would be white with panic.

Ellen needs to put herself first, and that's what everyone else thinks.

"There's nothing urgent, so I think you should go back and rest."

That's why Louise suggested that we call it a day and go back to the template to organize our thoughts.

Ellen wanders through the catacombs.

The sarcophagi were destroyed, and the snow gave us some clues about the thieves.

Although we still don't know why it was stolen.

And Ellen's heart skipped a beat.

Fear that the spirits that have been lying dormant lately might swallow you whole.

"Okay, I don't think there's anything more I can find out here, so I'll send it to......."

That's why Ellen agreed with Ruiz. We don't know where these clues will lead, but they've been checked.

"Hey, by the way......."

But Ludwig was hesitant to leave, as if he had a question.

"Did you notice anything unusual?"

At Louise's question, Ludwig shook his head with an ambiguous expression.

"What? Ah....... I had a question for you......."

"What is it?"

Everyone follows Ludwig when he says he has a question.

Ludwig heads toward the wall of the catacombs.

Where the broken sarcophagi are.

"You mean this coffin....... How did they break it?"

"......?"

"How?"

"......?"

Ludwig's question left the other three puzzled.

Just as Ellen did, and just as the paladins did.

Everyone was focused on the destruction itself. I wondered why I'd bothered to trash this catacomb when I could have stolen it quietly and gone undetected.

I focused on the "why" I broke it, not the "how" and there was no reason to.

What's the point?

"Why is that all of a sudden?"

At Heinrich's question, Ludwig looks at the shattered sarcophagus.

The inside of the shattered sarcophagus looked like a gaping hole.

Ludwig looks at the blank wall and says, "I'm sorry.

"I thought you said you didn't clean up the scene."

"Yeah, I said yes."

Ludwig peers into the hole and raises his left fist.

"You know, like a fist or something....... If you smashed it with something like that and took it out like this....... Shouldn't there be a piece of stone inside?"

Ludwig's questions prompt Ellen to look inside the sarcophagus.

It's not like breaking rocks for beginners.

I took a deliberately abrasive approach, and I didn't have to worry about noise because of noise canceling.

You punch the sarcophagus with your fist, shattering it. The force is applied from the outside in.

If so, stone dust or debris would have gotten inside the coffin.

The sarcophagus wasn't completely devoid of stone dust, debris, and stones, but it was certainly unusual.

There are too few traces of it.

The same was true for the other sarcophagus.

But there are too many fragments of sarcophagi on the ground, and they are far apart.

Ludwig looks at the other sarcophagus.

"This is something....... from the inside out, don't you think?"

"!"

"Such......!"

Louise and Ellen couldn't help but notice something.

Certainly the debris strewn about the scene speaks for itself.

The force was applied from the inside out.

"How can you break it like that......?"

"Bodies."

"Huh?"

Ellen answers Ludwig's question.

"I brought it back to life."

Ellen says, eyes wide.

"The bodies of the saints....... to the undead......."

The body reanimated itself and broke the sarcophagus to escape.

There was no reason to think about why I'd smashed it like that.

Given how I broke it, it was easy to see what was going on here.

They are not others, but the bodies of saints honored by the Crusader Knights.

Someone reanimated them as the undead, and they disappeared.

The ashes were not stolen, they were resurrected.

At that shocking conclusion, Ellen, Ludwig, who had hinted at it, Louise and Heinrich could only stand by and watch.

Episode 594.

It is very possible that the remains in the cemetery of the saints were not stolen, but rather disappeared after someone raised them as the undead.

Thanks to Ludwig's intuition, Ellen realized something very important, so she asked the paladin who was acting as her guide.

"Did the Crusaders know?"

"......."

"You knew that."

Silence is the answer.

But keeping it a secret didn't stop me from lying about it.

It would be an insult and a fatal stain on the saints of the Order of the Five Great Houses for those who had been elevated to sainthood to become undead.

You wouldn't want anyone to know about it. Even if it was a warrior.

"We don't know for sure, it's just a guess."

"I suppose so."

Elion Bolton would not have wanted Ellen to know this. Ellen was about to stop there, but Ludwig's unexpected resourcefulness brought her to the truth.

The Crusaders knew.

But we didn't want it to be publicized, so we kept it a secret.

Elion Bolton can't stop Ellen, but that's probably why he hid the truth from her.

"Is there anything else you're hiding?"

"None."

But Ellen couldn't believe her ears.

"Let's go."

There's nothing else you need to know in the field.

\* \* \*

After leaving the Great Hall of the Crusaders, the four of them walk through the still snowy streets.

"For now, let's go back to the temple and take our time. The Crusaders have no intention of helping us properly."

"I might be interrupting. I'm sorry."

I don't know about Ellen alone, but there's Louise von Schwarz.

Not only the warriors, but also Cernstadt's successor, had learned the truth about a very serious, and possibly fatal, problem in the Crusader Order.

No wonder Elion Bolton was so uncooperative with Ellen.

"No, you've been helpful enough, and whoever it is won't be able to touch Ludwig that easily."

It's clear that Ludwig's safety is politically secured. Louise can't help him directly, but her presence helps.

Ellen summarizes the situation.

"The Crusaders knew from the start that they were a group of mages, not just thieves, and I'm sure Rowen knew that as well."

"The Crusader leader said that Rowen, who investigated the incident, didn't share his findings with him after he returned, so he doesn't know what Rowen was doing, but I'm not sure that's true."

"It's not impossible that what he says is true. The five Popes are responsible for the management of the Five Great Houses of the Eclipse and the Templars, and if it's a direct order from the Pope, Rowen doesn't seem to have to report to the Templar."

"Anyway, Rowen would have known about the connection between the undead and wizards, so it makes sense that he would have investigated the case, focusing on paganism."

"The best we can tell is that Rowen was pursuing a case and offended some of the people involved in it, and that's why he was killed."

"I'm not sure if they're really Satanists."

"And why on earth did you approach Ludwig....... I don't know. I don't think it has anything to do with this case. I think he was targeting me, and I think his intentions have nothing to do with this case. I think so."

There's a lot of truth to be found.

But in the end, I couldn't get to the heart of the matter.

We have some idea of why Rowen was killed.

We're not even sure who killed it, but the candidates are narrowing down.

But where the hell are they.

The simpler the event, the harder it is to get to the truth, and the more complex the event, the easier it is to get to the truth.

But you end up with a bunch of clues, and you don't know where they each point.

Unable to distinguish between meaningful and meaningless clues, I was left with no conclusions because I had to consider everything.

"If it's some kind of satanic thing......."

Ludwig says cautiously.

"I was able to resurrect the ashes, kill the priest......."

Ludwig looks at Ellen hesitantly.

"What did the devil do....... maybe......?"

"......."

Ellen's eyes widened at the question, as did Louise's and Heinrich's.

Louise had heard Heinrich say today that the Devil might not be so evil after all, and that there might be a truth to the Gate that the world hadn't known.

Fetishism and demons are inseparable.

Either the cultists were acting at the behest of the devil, or the devil himself infiltrated the saints' graveyards, reanimated their remains as the undead, and then disappeared.

Ellen feels the headache coming on again, like her head is going to crack.

There's no way Reinhard would do this, Ellen thinks, gritting her teeth and trying to endure the pain.

"Unlikely."

"Is that......?"

It was Louise, not Ellen, who shook her head at Ludwig's doubts.

"We all don't know where the devil is, do we?"

"Yes......."

"Let's say the Devil did this, can we use that knowledge to find him and punish him?"

At Louise's words, Ludwig nods dumbfounded.

"That's right......."

"What reason does the devil have to kill that priest, when no one knows where he is, whether it turns out he did it or not?"

"ah......."

"So there's no reason to take the risk and have a demon raid the temple and kill all the people there."

If it's the devil who raised the remains of the catacombs.

And if Rowen was killed in the pursuit of that case.

The logical conclusion is that it was the Devil who killed Rowen.

However, there must be a reason for the demon to kill Rowen.

There is no reason why the Devil should have to find and kill the Inquisitor named Rowen who is after him.

The same is true for infamy.

The fact that the Demon has reanimated the remains of the saints of the Crusader Catacombs as undead does not hurt him, even if the world knows about it.

If you're going to be treated like you caused the gate incident, you might as well spread the word that you just brought back a corpse.

The demon killing Rowen is unlikely because it would have no reason or meaning.

The result is incorrect reasoning.

The demon has no reason to kill Rowen. So he wouldn't have killed her.

Rowen's killers are a faction of Crusader Catacombs grave robbers.

This completes the false inference that the Devil would not have been involved in the grave robbing of the saints.

"That's right, the Demon King is....... There's nothing to be gained by killing Rowen, only the risk of infiltrating the ecliptic and doing something like that."

Ellen, barely speaking through her headache, was thinking the same thing as Ruiz.

I don't think so, because I believe in Reinhardt.

Really, when you think about it, there is no reason why Reinhardt should kill Rowen.

The crime scene was ostentatious.

If you're going to grab it, grab it.

If that had been the only thing that happened, I would have assumed it was the work of the devil.

However, the murder of Rowen, who had been following the case, made it much less likely that the demon was responsible.

It was clear that Louise and Ellen's conclusion was the most logical one.

However, the world is far from rational.

So the probability of a rational judgment being wrong was always, always, always high.

\* \* \*

Ellen said. If it's a simple case, there's nothing she can figure out.

That there might be something complicated, weird, and hidden that you can only figure out by doing it.

But the incident was hiding too many roots, and they weren't all there.

The priest doing the cleansing was the head of the inquisitors.

The Inquisitor was investigating the whereabouts and culprit of the stolen bones, and was capturing and torturing heretics.

And it's quite possible that the remains were not actually stolen, but rather resurrected through undeadization.

At the end of the day, you can't fix everything overnight.

Although the Devil's name was mentioned, Louise and Ellen decided that it was highly unlikely that the Devil was involved in this case, and Ludwig, who had raised questions, had no choice but to agree.

Return to the temple and make your way back to the Royal Class dormitory.

Ludwig's expression remained stony.

Regardless of who's involved and what the truth of the matter is, it doesn't change the fact that Ludwig has been deceived by Rowen all this time.

He didn't know what he was doing, and he didn't even suspect that he was being approached with any intentions.

I was terrified that the guards were killing civilians with impunity.

So when Rowen showed up, I jumped for joy.

We did it because we thought it was something that everyone needed, and we didn't think twice about it.

And when Rowen asked if he could be my bodyguard tomorrow and every day thereafter.

Ludwig felt like he had been saved.

But Rowen was an inquisitor, a man whose misdeeds were nothing compared to those of the guards.

There is no telling how many people have been tortured and killed at the hands of Rowen.

Ludwig didn't know that.

Even though Rowen's odd behavior suggested that she was not a normal person.

But he's doing what people need, so he must be a good guy.

That's what I vaguely thought.

Technically, I wanted to believe that Rowen was a good person, so I did.

Ludwig was a fool.

Rowen knew Ludwig before she met him, and ultimately Rowen was killed before she could accomplish what she wanted through Ludwig.

But if Rowen hadn't been murdered, she would have gotten what she wanted through Ludwig.

Whether that's killing Ellen to get rid of the Mercenary Order, or something else.

What if Rowen approached Ludwig with the intent to kill Ellen?

It's probably a good thing Rowen was killed.

Return to the temple.

Ludwig hated his weakness.

Disillusionment with yourself.

Hate.

Anger.

I thought I was getting there, until I met Rowen.

But I didn't recognize any of Rowen's names, and now I'm being pranked.

The comfort and security he finds in Rowen plunges Ludwig into a deeper hole.

Even though nothing had actually happened to her, Ellen and Louise had already sensed something was wrong with Rowen, even without knowing it. Even when he was killed, they sensed that he was no ordinary priest.

Ludwig only saw Lowen as a victim of injustice.

It was stupid, just stupid.

"......."

Now Ludwig could only hate his own foolishness.

Ellen, walking ahead, says.

"We have to assume that there are wizards among the cultists in the refugee camp, but it's also possible that warlocks are involved, not cultists. Or maybe that's more likely."

A lot depends on who the alleged culprit is.

For now, the devil is off the dragon's board.

Demonic forces that might be in the refugee camp.

Or wizards, including warlocks.

If the culprit is a cult, you should investigate the spread of the cult in the refugee camp.

We won't torture and kill civilians, but there are limits to our investigations.

Torture, aside from its brutality, is an excellent way to get information. Torture makes you vomit up information you don't even have.

If warlocks are involved, we'll need to know what the evidence is.

"I wonder if we can get this done before winter is over......."

Ellen looks up at the sky and sighs deeply.

What if a vast refugee camp was infiltrated by a demonic religion, and it wore the mantle of a warrior religion?

"Even if they weren't actually involved in this, it still doesn't change the fact that if they're wearing the hides of the warrior religions, and they're taking root in the refugee camps, they need to be taken out."

"......Yes."

The problem is.

Whether or not they are actually involved, the Demon Gods are a force that should not exist in the ecliptic.

Even if they have nothing to do with Rowen's work, finding them is something that must be done.

Rowen had told Ludwig that it was an appositive.

While working on a disease cleanup, he notices something suspicious going on in the refugee camp and takes action.

Rowen didn't fake the cleanup.

In fact, as they cleaned up the plague, they interrogated, tortured, and killed pagans when they found them.

Modalities.

He'd be helping people, and he'd be thinking about eradicating all of them if he could find them.

While saving people.

The Hypocrites were preparing for a massacre.

Rowen had already revealed himself to be an inquisitor, but Ludwig didn't realize it.

"That's a whole other issue, but I have something to think about."

Ellen says, this time looking at Louise.

It was Louise, not Heinrich or Ludwig.

"What is it?"

"The crusader leader has been hinting at it, and I don't think he's mistaken."

"Hint?"

"I was overly careful with my words, of course, because it's in front of me, because it's a case, because it's a case, because the Commander is here, but......."

Ellen says.

"He said that if there was something the popes were trying to hide from him, he couldn't know anything about it."

"......."

Louise was silent at Ellen's words.

It's not that I didn't have anything to say, I was just trying to figure out what to say.

Elion Bolton deliberately withheld information from Ellen, but eventually allowed her to see the scene with her own eyes. This was partly because he couldn't stop her.

"When nations come together, empires are formed and emperors are created, but in the Crusader Order, which was created by the five main orders, he said he was not an emperor."

Not every emperor in history was more powerful than every imperial vassal or king.

However, the Emperor of the Gradias Empire was indeed the supreme power of the continent, ruling over all of humanity's lands and wielding more power than any king in the empire.

However, the leader of the Crusader Knights, the Grand Master of the Crusader Knights, is, after all, only the Grand Master of the Knights, not the King or anything else.

"A man like Elion Bolton is not a great man to say such things because he wants power over the popes."

Louise is obviously not close to the current leader of the Crusader Knights, Elayon Bolton, but she knows what she needs to know: he is supported by the Empire not because he is a slave, but because he wants to maintain the status quo.

He doesn't want to make big changes in the first place.

It is unlikely that he spoke to Ellen because he had suddenly developed a lust for power that he had never had before, resented the five cardinal popes, and wanted to outwit them.

"The popes are deliberately hiding something from the head of the Knights Templar, and he is not authorized to find out what it is. That's what he implied to me."

Elion Bolton didn't say anything definitive.

If the popes are hiding something, I'm just saying I don't know about it.

"But this is an internal matter of the Crusaders, and I don't see how it has anything to do with Rowen's work, so I think approaching the popes would require a lot of thought."

While Ellen could interfere with any human power, she didn't want to get too involved in the internal affairs of the Crusader Knights; that's politics, and she knows not to mess with that.

In the end, it's the same perspective as Ludwig's.

People die, are sacrificed, or monsters appear.

It's easy to get your hands dirty with such things.

But when Ellen suddenly shows up at a papal meeting of the Five Patriarchs and tells you that from now on you're going to treat the head of the Crusader Knights as if he's above you, it's hard to know how that's going to end, whether or not that's possible.

It could be for the best, but it could also be for the worst.

"If this were simply a power struggle between the Crusader Grand Master and the Great Patriarch, it would be none of our business."

"I suppose."

"But if the popes were involved in this....... I don't know what to do."

Too dangerous to touch.

Something that may not be relevant to the case, but if it is, you shouldn't know about it.

"What a headache......."

You may know something about the Popes of the Five Great Houses that the Crusader Knights do not.

I'm already meddling in the internal affairs of the Crusaders, and I didn't think I'd be getting into something more complicated.

Episode 595.

You never know where the four of you are going to land.

It's clear that a nasty group of people are involved.

But when you add politics to the mix, it's even worse.

If you're trying to investigate a case involving undeadization and you end up meddling with the Crusaders, things can get complicated in a whole new way.

"By the way. I was wondering about......."

As Ellen and Louise deliberated, Heinrich spoke up with a question.

"What is it?"

"Are the ashes really undead?"

Louise nodded slowly at Heinrich's question.

"Nothing we could see. The paladins didn't seem too sure about that either."

The possibility that the remains are undead, which is also a guess based on the destruction of the coffin, but not technically a confirmation of undead.

It's just that it most likely did.

At Heinrich's question, Ellen, Ludwig, and Louise turn to look at him.

Heinrich began to sweat at the attention.

"I wondered if it was that easy to create an undead......."

"Um......?"

The words made Louise shake her head.

"Isn't it said that those buried in cemeteries are saints?"

"Yes, and the remains of those who accomplished so much in their lifetimes were buried there."

"The grave of a former Crusader Knight Commander was also there."

Louise and Ellen answered. Heinrich listened, his face serious, his lips pursed as if he were choosing his words.

"I don't understand how the ashes become undead in the first place....... I don't quite understand......."

You have become undead.

The reasoning itself is reasonable, but Heinrich was thinking about something more fundamental.

They were the remains of priests and paladins who must have accomplished great things in their lives, and whose divine powers must have been powerful in their lifetimes.

Is it possible for them to become undead and come back to life in the first place?

"Well....... I don't know much about evil arcana or black magic, such as the undead, and I'm sure it's a field unknown even to mages who walk the path of righteousness, so I'm not sure if the divine power the lion had in life would protect their remains after death."

"I don't know."

Not just any undead, but undead made from the remains of saints, if that's possible.

Is it even possible to create that many undead in a short amount of time?

Ellen's mind keeps going back to Tiamata.

Tiamata once manifested in the form of a cursed magic sword, and spawned undead on a massive scale.

'No....... No, not Reinhardt.......'

Ellen was pretty sure Reinhardt wasn't the culprit, given the circumstances.

In the end, Heinrich's question is this.

Whether it makes sense to create undead from the remains of saints in the first place.

"Let's ask."

Surprisingly, the answer came from Ludwig's mouth.

"If not me, at least you know better than we do."

A mage with a talent for the dark arts.

Anna De Guerna.

At that, Ellen and Heinrich nodded.

\* \* \*

There is no guarantee that black magic was used in the theft of the saints' tombs. It's entirely possible that priests of a non-magical religion were involved.

They are two different forces.

However, there may be a point of agreement in that they end up producing similar results.

Ludwig's suggestion to find Anna and ask her questions was worth a try, since it's unlikely that they'd be able to find the demonic priest now.

"He won't be in the dorm, because he comes back every few days and leaves the next day and doesn't come back for another few days."

"Where is he? Let's go ask him."

She figured she'd just have to go to the temple and ask.

"Huh? I don't know about that......."

Naturally, Ludwig didn't know where the three of them were studying magic.

Naturally, Louise and Heinrich's eyes met.

"University of Magic."

Earlier this morning, they were strolling through the temple when they realized that something was going on at the School of Magic.

"I'm not sure, but I think it's probably in there."

Heinrich said, and Louise narrowed her eyes.

"I don't know if they'll let me in......."

Seeing the heavy security, Ruiz seemed nervous.

But now they're with Ellen Artorius, who can see through anything in the world.

So there wasn't really anything I couldn't fit in there.

\* \* \*

Of course, that was an illusion.

"You are not allowed to enter."

Those were the words of the guard who blocked Ellen's path as she entered the grounds of the Temple School of Magic's research wing.

The people behind her weren't trying to get in, and she heard it herself when she tried.

"...... Why?"

"There was an order from His Majesty the Emperor not to allow anyone other than those involved in the research to enter."

When we say don't let anyone in because they're blocking her way, we're including Ellen.

Ellen stays still and looks into the eyes of the guard in the helmet.

What kind of super secret research is he doing that he can't even let himself in?

If it was a Crusader door, Ellen would have gotten through it.

But it was important that it was an order from the 'emperor'.

Emperor Bertus is someone who is in Ellen's circle of friends.

A friend who shares a secret that no one else should know, and who shares the blame for the Gate debacle.

A relationship in which you share the residue of guilt and grief, but can't express it in words other than friendship.

If he's banning you, there's got to be a reason.

Ellen accepts that.

"You don't have to go in there, I just need to know that there's a classmate of mine in that lab named Anna de Guerna who's working on a study, and if you could call her in if you can."

"I can't tell you anything about the research."

Even who is participating in the research is classified. I couldn't imagine what they were doing and why they were so security conscious.

"But I can report to the higher-ups that you're here for this."

Ellen wasn't really curious about what they were doing inside anyway.

I can only assume that they're working on something that could be used to help the war effort, and that's why they're so careful to keep it confidential.

She wasn't going to begrudge it, and she wasn't going to pry.

The research that happens here has nothing to do with what's happening now.

"That's great, can you tell them that?"

"Yes, I see."

Anna might be here, but if she isn't, you'll just have to wait until she returns to the Royal Class Dormitory.

She comes back every few days.

\* \* \*

Told by the guards to stay back because they couldn't report right away, the group eventually returned to the Temple dormitory.

For some reason, the Emperor has ordered that no one else, not even Ellen, is allowed in the College of Magic.

Royal Class sophomore, Class B dorm lobby.

We all sat around and sipped the tea Heinrich had brought and caught our breath.

I've been out in the snow so far, so I'm not physically exhausted, but I'm mentally exhausted.

"Whatever it is, it must be a highly confidential experiment."

"Sure."

At Louise's words, Ellen nodded in agreement.

Everyone in the room was curious about the research going on at the College of Witchcraft and Wizardry, but not much more than that.

It's a preconceived notion.

"In retrospect, it was odd that the Titan project was not classified, and I've heard that the Mages' Guild and the Mages of the Tower have been annoying Archduke Saint-Thuan quite a bit."

"What do you mean, bother?"

At Ellen's question, Louise shrugged.

"Wizards are the kind of people who can't stand the sight of any new magic or technology, and for those of us who have spent our lives in magic, the Titans....... is bound to shock them, isn't it?"

"Definitely......."

"Yes....... I did, apparently."

Heinrich and Ludwig also felt a shiver run down their spines as they imagined the Titan's overwhelming majesty, even when it wasn't in front of them.

At the Battle of Serandia, the Titans were so massive and overwhelming that they could be seen from anywhere on the battlefield.

"I mean, they're being made, and the higher-ups and wizards usually know about it, but to see it with your own eyes is something else. When I saw it, it seemed absurd that magic could do such a thing."

The Titan was a magical weapon of war, but in its presence, everyone could not help but feel as if they had seen an incarnation or manifestation of the gods.

"So it's no wonder that the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan, who was the mastermind behind the project, is being hounded by wizards, and....... Archduke."

Adelia in Class A.

The Archduke is the Archduke, and Adelia is a student from the Royal Class.

Heinrich mumbles to himself.

"Adelia must be going through a lot."

"That's just the way it is."

The Titan Project isn't exactly secret, but not all of its technology is, so it's inevitable that the wizards will bother the Archduke and Adelia, whether out of curiosity or because they covet the knowledge.

Wizards swarming around like dogs, asking questions, and Adelia, by nature, not being able to fend them off.

As Heinrich contemplated the scene, he couldn't help but be deeply concerned about Adelia's mental state.

Adelia is a celestial researcher. Hand-to-hand combat is not in her nature and she is not very good at it.

Of course, Adelia didn't fight, but she will always be remembered as the wizard who killed the most monsters in the world because of her creation of the Titan.

Magical research is usually confidential.

In this case, everyone didn't think much of it because of the preconceived notion that it was just another case. Of course, everyone was puzzled by the fact that even Ellen was not allowed to enter the research building.

"When will Anna be back?"

Ludwig's question left everyone unsure.

In the end, the guard wouldn't tell me if Anna was at Hogwarts or not. All he would say was that Ellen had come to see him.

Asking Anna about the black magic of undeadization doesn't give us a straight answer to this situation. You're asking her if it's easy to create undead from the remains of saints.

At the end of the day, it's not like I'm nervous or anything, but it's also not like I'm in a rush to get it done.

We could ask the Five Patriarchs for an interview, but that's too sensitive and we'll have to think about it a bit more.

If you're going to search a refugee camp for satanists, that's a long shot.

Rowen was not acting alone; he probably had numerous inquisitors scattered throughout the refugee camps, synthesizing information.

We don't know if Rowen ever reached the perpetrators.

It's on the heels of the case Rowen was chasing, and there are even fewer people available.

I don't even know if I'll be able to get to the end of this before winter is over.

So there's no point in rushing to do it today.

"Let's call it a day."

So, Ellen suggested that we take a break today to wrap up what we've learned.

"Ludwig, you can ask Anna what we were going to ask her when she gets back and let us know....... No, just call me."

Ellen corrected herself, realizing that it was better to ask the question herself than to leave it to Ludwig.

"Yeah, okay."

Ludwig nodded, his expression grim.

"I don't think we need to move too fast. Even if we don't know who killed Rowen, if they know we're after them, they'll be able to......."

Louise looks at everyone with a stern look on her face.

"We have to keep in mind that there's a chance they're going to try to get their hands on us."

These are the men who killed Rowen.

We don't know if they'll go after the warriors, but we can't say they won't do the same thing to Rowen if they know they're already being tracked.

Neither Heinrich, nor Ludwig, nor Ellen.

I didn't realize it was a significant risk to pursue.

"I think I've gotten myself into trouble......."

I didn't think this was a simple task.

But when he turns to Ellen for help, Ludwig can't help but think that this is a big deal.

The thought of Ellen being in danger because of him sent chills down Ludwig's spine.

Also, I feel like I'm causing irreparable harm.

"No."

Ellen shook her head at Ludwig's self-pity.

"At this point, I don't think I can let this go."

Rather, Ellen adds, it's better for people if whatever is happening can be addressed before it gets out of hand.

I don't say this to console you.

I only said that because I really thought so.

Episode 596.

There's no need to move quickly.

The opponent is a mysterious force that can raid a temple with the leader of the Inquisition and wreak carnage.

It's unclear at this point whether they are a group of mages, a cult, or a third force that is neither.

The important thing is that they don't leave their pursuers alone, and it's very likely that they'll try to touch not only the warrior, but also the princess of the Schwarz family.

At least in that respect, the Temple is safe, if not the Temple of the Inquisitors disguised as the decrepit Temple of Tuan.

You don't want to provoke them by moving too quickly.

So for now, Ellen was going to wait in the Royal Class dormitory, hoping that Anna de Guerna would give her some kind of clue.

You'll also need to think carefully about how you approach internal Crusader matters.

For now, we'll wait and see what happens.

Ludwig lives in a class B dormitory.

Ellen, Louise, and Heinrich were in the A-class dormitory.

It was snowing, and I needed to organize my thoughts.

Heinrich is no superhuman, so he retires to his room to rest after a long day of traveling.

Louise is sitting on the couch in the lobby, collecting her thoughts, when she sees Ellen, freshly washed, walking down the hall with a towel around her neck.

"Is something wrong?"

"ah......."

Ellen looks at Louise and shakes her head.

"Have you seen the cat?"

"Um......? Is it gone?"

Pets have never been Louise's thing, but if it's Ellen's pampered cat, things are serious.

When Louise hesitated, not knowing what to say, Ellen shook her head.

"No, I usually wander off on my own a lot, even in the garrison, and I'll be back in no time."

If you don't see her, she's probably wandering around the other dorms," Ellen says nonchalantly, and sits down across from Louise and begins to dry her hair with a towel, running it through her fingers.

Warrior, Ellen Artorius.

His brother Lagan Artorius' reputation had already faded.

The next great warrior, Ellen Artorius, has grown in stature.

It's a bit of a clunker and a bit of a mouthful.

So it was a girl of that age.

"Do you like cats?"

"......."

At Louise's question, Ellen's brow narrows in thought for a moment.

"I don't think so."

"Yeah......?"

"Yes."

After making sure there are no cats around, Ellen stares out the snowy window.

"Even now, I don't think I'm raising them....... they just come to me from time to time, I guess."

She adds that she doesn't recognize him as her cat, but rather as a friend who visits occasionally.

In fact, Ellen seemed to assume that the cat was just wandering around somewhere, rather than getting anxious when she couldn't see it.

"I hope it's not outside."

It's cold, and it's snowing.

So I wish I was walking around in a royal class dormitory instead of outside.

Ellen said and continued to dry her hair.

The Cat Warrior.

Louise couldn't help but giggle as she thought back to yesterday, when Ellen had insisted on petting the cat.

How did you get to where you are today while seemingly not thinking about it?

When Ludwig asked for help, I nodded and said I would help him, no questions asked.

I knew it was risky, but I stayed ahead of the curve and knew where I needed to go with my quick thinking and judgment.

She's wise, quick to judge, doesn't hesitate to help others, and is already strong in her own right.

She doesn't look like a warrior, but it's all the things that are hidden in her seemingly ordinary appearance that make her a warrior.

To Louise von Schwarz, Ellen Artorius was a stranger.

A son's classmate, a warrior, the owner of two holy objects, and the hope of mankind.

This isn't the first time we've met in person.

I've seen Ellen fight before.

But it's also about walking around with a cat, having a conversation with friends, or dealing with a problem.

It was definitely the first time I'd ever seen such a human face.

Louise is unfamiliar with the human side of such a warrior.

In the end, I couldn't help but like it.

Ellen entered the Temple with her overly heavy brother's name hidden.

Although she was already the owner of the relic, only a few people knew who Ellen was.

After all, warriors are the need of the hour.

Just as Lagan Artorius became a warrior because there was a Demon War.

After the events of the Last Demon and the Gate, Ellen Artorius is called a warrior.

Even Reinhard the Demon was considered a hero until his true identity was discovered.

Everyone was shocked to learn that there were two warriors, but one was a demon wearing a warrior's leathers.

With her son's suggestion that the devil might not be evil after all, Louise didn't know what to make of it.

After all, Louise isn't ignoring Ellen.

If all this hadn't happened.

If the Gate debacle hadn't happened, I'd have a different life.

Louise was a princess and heir to the House of Schwarz, so she would have been living as a royal princess even if the Gate hadn't happened.

But Ellen is different.

Ellen was a commoner.

If it weren't for the gate incident, I would have been destined for a normal life.

The Gate debacle made Ellen the most important person in the world.

If all this hadn't happened.

Ellen would have lived a normal life, not having to carry any heavy burdens.

"If all this hadn't happened."

"Is that ......?"

"What do you think they're doing right now?"

"......."

Ellen is stunned into silence by Louise's question.

"You wouldn't want to live like this, would you?"

"...... did."

Everyone sees Ellen only as a warrior. But Louise saw the human side of Ellen beneath that title, yesterday and today.

It made her wonder what kind of life he wanted, what kind of desires he had.

Even though I know it's pointless to talk about it now.

Ellen stares out the window in disbelief at Louise's question.

If all this hadn't happened.

"He was probably going to the temple."

I'm still at the Temple, but without the gate incident, the Temple would have been packed with students.

Even if you weren't that close, over time you'd probably have a small talk with everyone.

That's still the case today, but we wouldn't have had to build that sad friendship we can only call comradeship.

And.

No one would have died in a tangle of broken and tangled relationships.

There's no such thing as someone who can't be here.

If you were in that situation.

If all this hadn't happened.

Ellen looks out the window.

I wouldn't have had to look at those cursed eyes, cursed eyes.

Assuming everything hasn't changed, if it were to snow like this.

No.

A piece of the memory of that day naturally comes to mind.

Reinhardt smirks as he shoves a snowball into Herriot's mouth.

I remember sitting on the terrace in winter, eating beef stew on a quiet snowy night.

It wasn't a very special day.

That's what I thought at the time, too.

You'll look back on this later.

You'll realize that these days won't last forever, and you'll realize that every day you took for granted, every day you spent like that, was special.

So Ellen had a vague idea.

It's good enough.

I don't even want more.

Friends.

And loved ones.

I used to think that just being able to be there was enough.

At the end of the day, it's just a story.

It's not like I didn't know.

The days you thought you'd never come back from, just became the days you couldn't come back from.

It wasn't the way I envisioned it, but it's the kind of story that ends up happening.

And he was the one who broke it all.

If I could go back in time.

I wish I could pretend everything never happened and stayed the same.

What was I doing now.

"...... would have been building a snowman."

"Snowman......?"

"Yes."

Ellen says, "That's it.

In the piling snow, as it used to be.

Eat or drink something while watching the snow fall.

Or build a snowman.

That's all they would have been doing.

It's not great, it's not great, it's not great.

Ordinary days like that.

For those special occasions.

would have been living.

\* \* \*

By the next day, Anna de Guerna hadn't returned.

Anna wasn't the only one, Christina and Louis Ankton, who had been working on their research, hadn't returned either.

It is also possible that the story was not told because the research being done at the College of Witchcraft and Wizardry was not relevant to the three.

If so, everyone would have to wait in the dorms because we wouldn't know where they were doing their research.

Above all, it's time to be cautious.

Yesterday, I was all over the place, irritating people who didn't need to be irritated.

One day was enough for me to make hasty moves when I didn't know who the enemy was.

Two days of waiting in the temple.

Anna de Guerna still hasn't returned.

"Is he usually gone this long?"

At Louise's question, Ludwig nodded.

"Yeah, it doesn't usually come back well......."

The four of them gathered in the Class B dormitory, waiting for Anna to return.

"I don't think meeting him is going to give you a spiky number, so....... Why don't you look up the warlocks in the temple?"

"Maybe back in the days when the temple was running, but I don't think I can find it now."

Warlocks are no different, as the vast majority of wizards have been dispatched. Most of them would be in Allied garrisons.

"Hmmm......."

I wasn't in a hurry to move, but I couldn't help but get antsy as I was spending my time pointlessly waiting for Anna, who might return at any moment.

So we'd all get together in the B class dorm and sit around all day.

Ellen stroked the back of the sleeping cat sitting on her lap.

The next thing I knew, she was sleeping soundly on Ellen's bed this morning. She'd left the door slightly ajar, inviting him to come and go as he pleased, so the cat felt right at home in Ellen's room.

"The snow still hasn't stopped falling."

Heinrich looked out the window, worried.

My eyes were weakening, but I wasn't about to stop.

"It looks like the Imperial Mages have been called in to clear the snow, and I hear the mages in the Allied garrisons are making a huge comeback."

"That's good......."

Heinrich nodded at Ludwig's words.

Inside the temple, I could see through the window as the guards cleared the snow.

Many of the students have left to help with the snow removal, and they wait for Anna, who doesn't know when she'll be back. She's just trying to ask a question, and even though she knows it's not a great hint, it's all she can do right now.

You could try to contact the five patriarchs, but that's risky.

With a few more clues, Ruiz and Ellen decided to make a move.

I don't know how long I sat in the lobby like that.

-delay

Louise sees a dorm door open and a student walk down the hallway to go somewhere.

A slow, lanky student, walking slowly, with an almost sobbing appearance.

"Uh, Detto."

The student didn't respond to Ludwig's greeting, but simply nodded slightly and walked past him.

"Hi."

Ellen's greeting was met with only a slight nod, and the student went on his way without paying much attention.

In the two days she's been waiting in the dormitory, Louise has seen him a few times. She stares at the back of his head.

"Did you say Detomorian....... ?"

"Yes."

"Well....... Hmm....... You seem like a weird kid."

Louise took a moment to choose the least rude thing to say.

I haven't watched it for long, but I can't help but have a strong impression of the Detomorian. Everyone inevitably gets a spooky, ominous feeling.

"He's misunderstood, but he's a good friend."

Ellen nodded in agreement with Ludwig.

At that, Louise was visibly flustered.

"No, I don't mean like a bad kid......."

"Sister, I know what you're saying. I know....... I haven't talked to her much."

Heinrich was still hesitant because of the spooky aura of the Detomorian.

Detomorian doesn't give Louise, a stranger in his dorm, a second glance, and just goes about his business. He doesn't care who says hello or who's there.

Louise knew something about Heinrich's classmate.

Of course, seeing it with your own eyes is different.

"You said talent was a witchcraft, didn't you?"

"Yes."

A Detomorian with a talent for witchcraft.

"What the hell is witchcraft?"

Louise's question made Heinrich and Ludwig look dubious.

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

Even Ludwig, who had lived with him for many years, had no idea what witchcraft was.

Something like magic. But not magic.

"We don't know how it manifests, but it's definitely a way of dealing with power, and I've seen it a few times myself."

"You saw it yourself?"

"Yes."

Instead, it was Ellen who answered.

Long ago, Ellen had watched the Detomorian ritual of awakening the cursed sword Tiamata with Reinhardt.

Then I saw Detomorian praying for peace with Bertus and Savior Tana.

The amulet that now hangs around Ellen's neck was also carved by Dettomorian.

Ellen doesn't know if the amulet around her neck is really protecting her.

Dettomorian said to pray that the amulet would be a signpost to protect the soul.

So we just do that.

We don't know if it's really working. But let's hope so.

That's the nature of witchcraft.

Louise didn't really believe Ellen when she said she'd seen the spell manifest a few times. Ellen would say something like that because she had seen it.

"That's interesting."

Louise crosses her arms.

"If witchcraft is a manifestation of power, is it a way of dealing with mana or a form of divine power?"

A more fundamental question.

Is witchcraft magic or faith?

All three of us had a puzzled look on our faces.

"I don't know, but I've heard that witchcraft is the most primitive form of magic."

That's about all Heinrich knows, and even then, it's a story most ordinary people wouldn't even know. He only knew because one of his classmates was a Detomorian with an unusual talent for witchcraft.

Before there was any organized magic in the world, shamans were the first wizards.

That's why witchcraft is a primitive form of magic.

Ellen knows that.

But I hadn't thought about witchcraft.

I couldn't help but think that was pretty bizarre.

When Detomorian performed a ritual on Tiamata. And when I saw him praying for peace.

The word "origin" in the first place.

"However, when I'm actually using it, I tend to use something more like a prayer....... or something like that."

Louise looks at Ellen with interest.

"Is this magic manifested through prayer? Is that even possible in the first place?"

Magic is the "art" of refining and using mana, either in or out of the body, according to set formulas and theories. It is the way of mages.

But prayer is literally asking for the power itself to manifest. That's the way of the priests.

"I see."

Ellen listens to Louise and realizes that something is not right.

"Witchcraft, I think, is a very strange power."

You can't tell if a spell is really magic or not.

It has no set formula or theory. Therefore, it is not a technology.

It is not a prayer to the Great Lords, nor does it derive its power from the power of the Great Lords.

Where does the power of the spell come from?

If it's not borrowing, then it must be a skill, like wizards, and I don't see any skill in spells.

Witchcraft is a very strange power.

"Isn't that weird......?"

While Ellen and Louise are in the midst of their thoughts, Ludwig walks in through the cracks.

"A force that isn't magic and isn't divine actually works, isn't that weird?"

At Louise's question, Ludwig shakes his head.

"If it's actually the weird rituals of people who don't believe in anything that's causing the weird things to happen, I don't know if you're a pagan....... If it's actually the weird rituals of people who don't believe in anything that's doing the work....... I was just wondering if there could be enough of that going on."

Ludwig merely recalled Lowen's words.

The pagans would pray in strange places, and it might not work, but sometimes it did.

I don't think they did anything magical. But here's what really happens.

"Is witchcraft really that different from pagan rituals....... Is this it?"

"Well, that's not what I meant."

When Ludwig realized what he had said, he panicked.

What Ludwig was trying to say was that it wasn't so strange for witchcraft to work.

Ludwig was tempted to bite his tongue, however, for he had just said that the Dettomorians were no better than pagans.

"No."

Ellen looked at Ludwig, who was puzzled, and shook her head.

"Now that I think about it, maybe it was Dettomorian we should be looking for, not Anna."

The pagans in the refugee camps. Or the fiends.

If they're involved in this case, it's not Anna you should be looking for, but rather Dettomorian.

Praying to an unidentified power and having it answer you.

If the cause of the incident is a pagan ritual, it may be a shaman, not a warlock, you're looking for.

Detomorian has just left the dorm.

"Let's go there."

"Detto was away a lot, do you know where he went?"

At Ludwig's question, Ellen nodded.

That spooky, bizarre space.

The basement of the frat house.

Ellen knows that the Detomorian prays there every day.

Episode 597.

It was a clubhouse that had been completely converted into a Dettomorian hideout since the Temple ceased operations.

As they entered the underground space, everyone but Ellen was stunned.

"What is this......?"

Ludwig.

"Crazy, isn't that blood?"

Heinrich.

"What is this, what is this all about?"

Louise.

All three felt a sense of dread as they entered a space filled with unidentified shamans and symbols.

Regardless of one's personal strength and experience, it's easy to feel an unexplained sense of dread when faced with this sight for the first time. In fact, Ellen was freaked out the first time she came to this place.

"Are you sure we can come to....... right?"

In fact, even Ludwig, who was a much-misunderstood but actually good friend of Dettomorian, said so with a white face.

In many ways, Detomorians deserve special treatment.

Ludwig has seen civilians killed by guards for praying to strange idols.

But the sight of all the idols and shamanic circles in this basement, even priests who have never harmed another human being in their lives, under the guise of embracing and edifying pagans, might wonder if they should be the first to hang a Detomorian at the stake.

For being a student of the Temple, and a royal student at that, Dettomorian was able to get away with setting up a scene that deserved to be called the heretic of heretics.

Obviously, civilians who knew nothing about the heresy would see this and assume it was the work of a pagan.

Passing by ominous and bizarre sights, everyone is feeling uneasy.

"It's okay."

Ellen, being a seasoned traveler, was not afraid to go underground.

\* \* \*

The heart and soul of the shaman.

Arriving in the cellar-like space, Ellen could see that Detomorian was still sitting in the center of the circle.

Aside from the quaint, ominous vibe, it's a messy space to begin with.

Therefore, Ellen has no way of knowing if Detomorian is still wishing for the same thing.

I can't tell if the idols have been rearranged or the shamanic circle has been redrawn. It was crowded before.

However.

"You're here."

"Yes."

Detomorian said as he looked at the four who had suddenly arrived.

The word itself is already ambiguous.

Does it mean you knew it was coming or that it's just now coming.

The Dettomorian speaks in a way that is not easily understood by the listener, and whose intentions are unknown.

Ellen isn't very close to Detomorian either, and Ludwig tries to be, but can't.

Heinrich and Louise are frozen in place.

Ruiz isn't going anywhere, and Heinrich isn't going anywhere.

But there's something about the scene itself that overwhelms people.

"Did you think we were coming?"

In response to Ellen's question, Detomorian stares at the candle lit in front of him, which continues to emit a faint light.

"Well......."

Again, a vague answer.

Ellen approached the Dettomorian fearlessly, and sat down in front of the candle.

A warrior and a shaman sit across from each other with a single candle between them.

"Are you still praying for peace these days?"

"No......."

Detomorian was praying for peace until Ellen, Bertus, and Tana arrived.

"Then what are you doing?"

In response to Ellen's question, Dettomorian says.

"All is well."

"And peace."

Safe and sound.

Ellen shakes her head at that.

"I was praying for your soul's safety and peace."

"...... me?"

"Yeah."

The Dettomorian says still.

"Because that's the same word as peace."

Ellen still can't understand what the Dettomorian is saying.

But in the midst of this bizarre spectacle, it's hard not to feel a shiver run down your spine when you hear a shaman performing an unidentified ritual and saying a prayer for you.

"I see."

But Ellen looks at the Dettomorian and dips her head slightly.

"Thanks."

Say thank you.

"......."

Just like Ludwig did.

Ellen knows that the Detomorian is not evil.

It's still the same.

We don't know the outcome of the spell, and we don't know if it works. We don't know if the symbol the Dettomorian gave her really protects Ellen, and even if the Dettomorian is praying for Ellen's soul next to peace, we don't know if it will work.

But Ellen is grateful to Dettomorian because she knows his prayers are genuine.

After thanking the Dettomorian, Ellen cautiously raised her head.

Detomorian looks at Ellen with an expression that makes it impossible to tell what he knows and what he doesn't.

Detomorian, which is already extraordinary in a not-so-good way, seems even more extraordinary in this space.

If it normally looks dreary, in this dark and dreary space, the Detomorian feels like something that no word can really describe.

I wonder if we're in the wrong place.

You've been following a case and accidentally stepped into a place you shouldn't have.

The same thought was inevitably on everyone's mind.

But Ellen looks at the Dettomorian and says nothing.

"There's a cemetery in the basement of the Great Hall of the Crusader Knights."

"......."

Despite the blunt start, Dettomorian stays still and listens to Ellen.

"It's a cemetery where priests and paladins are buried who had powerful divine powers in their lifetime."

To cut to the chase.

It's too long a story to tell from the beginning, so I'll just ask what needs to be asked.

"I think someone has reanimated the remains in that cemetery and taken them somewhere."

"......."

"Is that even possible?"

As she spoke, it occurred to Ellen that the question itself might be rude.

It would be rude to assume that a Dettomorian would know the evil arts of creating the undead, and to come here to ask.

But in response to Ellen's simple but not lighthearted question, Dettomorian is silent.

However, Dettomorian's answer is not a yes or no.

"Don't."

"......?"

"Better not......."

Another word for it.

But since it was completely unintelligible, Ellen thought she had a clue.

What Detomorian is talking about.

"Do you think it's....... good?"

"Yes......."

It would have told me to sweep it under the rug and not dig into it.

"Can you elaborate on that?"

"No......."

I don't know if it's that I can't explain it, or that I can't understand it, or that I can't tell you. Unintelligible.

Everyone listened to Ellen and Detomorian's bizarre preamble.

That look that feels like a conversation, but doesn't feel like one at all.

Between them, Ludwig steps forward.

"Detto."

"......."

Ludwig sits down next to Ellen.

"Do you know something? Tell me if you do."

"......."

"I don't know, the priest I was trying to help was actually a really bad person, and I don't know what he was trying to do with me, and now I want to know what he did and how bad he did it....... I want to know what the hell happened and what's going to happen next......."

"You're going to die......."

"......?"

The Dettomorian's words puzzled Ludwig, as well as Ellen, Louise, and Heinrich, who listened in silence.

The Dettomorian speaks slowly, still looking at Ludwig with a sullen expression.

"Ludwig, you're going to die if you go any further."

At the sudden prophecy. Ludwig's complexion turned white.

"Do nothing......."

Although we don't know anything else.

Ellen and Ludwig could tell that Detomorian was genuinely worried about Ludwig.

\* \* \*

Sudden prophecy.

It's deceptively simple.

Death.

And the prophecy was directed at Ludwig.

Ludwig was stunned into silence, his mouth hardening into a stone.

Ellen was puzzled, too.

"What do you mean, all of a sudden Ludwig is like that?"

"......."

Ludwig wasn't going to argue, nor was he angry.

Ludwig is not the kind of person to do that to a friend in the first place.

"If you tell me anything, I'm going to....... if you say something?"

Ellen asked on behalf of Ludwig, who couldn't think of anything to ask.

Why are you saying that, and if you saw something, what did you see?

"I can't convince you and....... I can't explain......."

The Dettomorian only says that. He doesn't say that he doesn't understand what he sees, or that he doesn't know why he knows this.

Ellen was Ellen, Ludwig was Ludwig, and the sullen-looking Detomorian could ask no more.

"You have to say something, don't you? Suddenly. What if he dies suddenly and you don't say anything!"

"It's the youngest......!"

Thus, Heinrich, who had been watching the scene from behind, stepped forward, looked down at the Dettomorian, and snarled.

Louise panicked as she watched her son walk out of the room with something tingling and ominous about him, and she gingerly grabbed Heinrich's shoulder.

Detomorian stares up at Heinrich, unmoving.

A piercing gaze.

And a quick glance at a nervous Louise in the back.

"......!"

In that brief stare, Heinrich felt an eerie sensation that made the hairs on his back stand on end.

A gaze that seems to know what truths are hidden, even if it's only for a moment.

Heinrich's gaze sent a cold sweat down his spine, and Louise felt her breath catch in her throat.

Heinrich had a gut feeling that he shouldn't mess with Detomorian.

"Detomorian."

"Yes......."

However, Ellen, who believes in Detomorian, calls him out.

"If we don't get a proper explanation of why this is a dangerous job, why Ludwig is going to die, why it's better not to know....... I, we have no choice but to try to find out more about this job."

"......."

"It's not that I don't believe you, but there's so much at stake in this, I don't think I can let it go."

"That's right......."

Dettomorian nods in agreement, as if Ellen is right.

"I mean small....... Small and low, with little evidence, little credibility, insufficient explanation, and little appeal......."

It's been a while since we've had a Detomorian.

No, almost the first time.

Don't drag or stutter.

"I speak what I see."

"Don't say what you haven't seen."

"But, of course."

"What I say doesn't always come true."

"Maybe what I said was just a bunch of bullshit."

"But in an age where death is rampant. It's not a hard prophecy to make."

"Everyone dies at some point."

"Anyone can die at any time."

"Now that death is as common as hunger and poverty everywhere."

"Anyone's death is bound to look easy."

"Rather than divining mediocre fates. It's easier."

"So."

"I'm not always right."

"What I see doesn't necessarily happen."

"This time."

"You must be right."

"Ludwig."

"Do nothing."

"You're going to die."

It's a world where death is too prevalent.

So it's easier to see death than to see anyone's fate.

So it must be true.

Ludwig has no idea why this has anything to do with his death, and neither does anyone else.

On their way to inquire about witchcraft and pagan rituals, they hear a death prophecy that is completely out of character.

Ludwig stares at the Dettomorian, stunned.

If I'm talking about Ludwig's death, it's because I don't want him to die.

"Let me ask you a question."

After a long moment of silence, Ludwig speaks up with a stern expression.

"Am I going to die for nothing?"

"......."

"I can't do anything, I can't do anything in my own strength. I can't get help, I can't get help, I can't get help, I can't get help, I can't get help, I can't get help, I can't get help, I can't get help, I can't get help. I can't be of any help, and that's how......."

Ludwig says, looking miserable.

"Is that how you die?"

Ludwig asks, but Dettomorian is silent.

"......."

No answer.

But this time, the silence feels different. Everyone feels the difference.

We don't know what this silence means, but it's a deliberate silence.

because you know what's going to happen when you say it.

You'll die.

It's not a pointless death.

Detomorians don't speak.

A shaman speaks what he sees. He does not speak of what he has not seen.

For a shaman who cannot lie, the only lie is not telling the truth.

"That's not it."

"......."

"Detto, right?"

Detomorian says nothing.

"That's it."

You don't die meaninglessly and in vain.

We don't know what's going on, but the fact that death is in sight is already a hint that we can do something about it.

Rather, I read hope that something can be done.

Even if death awaits, even if that statement is absolute.

There is hope that it might not be absolute after all.

Being able to do something was something Ludwig hadn't been able to do since the death of Delphine Izdra, since he lost his arm.

After a long silence, the Detomorian finally bows his head.

"Destiny is fulfilled by those who will change it."

Once upon a time. Someone.

"Like I tried to change my destiny and ended up like this."

As if you wished for it, and then you got it.

"Me too....... as well."

Detomorian sees the future now, but he intuits that he has completed it because he tried to change it.

The words that were meant to stop Ludwig's death actually propelled him forward.

The future was known, but not the people.

He realizes that he has, in fact, left Ludwig behind.

"Me too, I can't get out of that shackle......."

No one knows what a Detomorian is talking about.

But I could read the self-doubt and frustration in his words.

The silent Detomorian soon looked up.

"Find Ashur."

"......?"

We were all taken aback by this out-of-the-blue statement.

"Then, you'll know."

Existence that has no reason to be mentioned in this context.

A friend who is already dead.

What the hell does finding someone who can't come back have to do with this?

"What do you mean, find Ashur?"

"You! You keep saying things I can't understand. What are you trying to say?"

When Ludwig panics, and Heinrich finally lets his old temper creep in.

"Get out."

Detomorian's face is grim as he issues his congratulations.

"More like this. I wouldn't change a thing."

The shaman was already beginning to fear for his own mouth.

Now Nagara could ask no more questions in the face of that determined demeanor and the desperate look on the shaman's face.

\* \* \*

The Detomorian may speak unintelligibly, but he's not a harsh person at all.

So telling the visitors to leave was almost the first time I'd ever spoken to someone in a command tone as a Dettomorian.

It doesn't matter who's listening.

Everyone heard shocking, incomprehensible, unintelligible words, and words whose intentions were hard to guess.

In the cellar of the lone fraternity house, lit by a few candles, Detomorian sat still.

With an attitude that makes it impossible to tell if you're praying for something, contemplating something, or doing nothing.

Into that silence, that candle-burning silence.

A small, soundless figure slowly approaches.

-Angel

"......."

Black cat.

Detomorian didn't even look in the direction of the cat.

The cat walks over and sits still across from the Dettomorian.

The first time she cried, the cat just stared at the Dettomorian.

The cat says nothing, and the shaman says nothing.

There is a long silence.

One hour.

Or two hours.

After a long silence, unknown how long, between the cat and the shaman.

"All I could do was this......."

The shaman opens his mouth slowly.

"To get you closer to something less dangerous, rather than something more dangerous......."

The cat listened to the shaman's apologetic words, but didn't react.

"But maybe I'm just letting everyone know after all....... Maybe that's what it is......."

The shaman hangs his head, and speaks laments.

"If you knew the future in full....... would have looked like."

-.......

"Even if I had full knowledge. As my actions change, so does the future. To know the future is to know nothing."

-.......

"Or is it that the future itself, clumsily learned, is....... Or was it orchestrated to fulfill its destiny......."

-.......

"I didn't realize I was no different....... I didn't realize......."

The shaman stares at the flickering candle.

"I wanted to do something, so I screwed up something......."

-.......

"I feel like this......."

The shaman finally, slowly, moves his eyes to look at the cat.

"You tried to change a fate that not even the gods could change......."

-.......

"It was stupid."

The cat sat still and looked at the shaman.

"You, you don't need my words."

-.......

"You know what to do."

-.......

"Well, you can do that."

At the shaman's words, the cat stared at the shaman for a long moment, then stood up.

The cat left without a word, and the shaman sat alone in front of the candle for a long time.

Episode 598.

The four of them left the club building where the Dettomorians were and returned to the Royal Class dormitory.

The original purpose was to ask if the rituals of the pagans in the refugee camps could turn the remains of the saints into the undead.

Then Ludwig heard a prophecy about his death.

And when Ludwig didn't back down from that, he gave a hint of frustration.

But the implication is also bizarre.

Find your friend, Ashur, who is already dead.

What the hell does that have to do with this case, the connection is so tenuous that I can't even figure out what it means.

"That asshole, he's crazy, but he's solidly crazy."

Heinrich frowned, as if he didn't like the Dettomorian.

"No, Heinrich. Detto was just trying to stop me, you know."

"If you know, you ought to tell me what you know. You ought to tell me what's going on. Just ignore him. He's a lost cause. You think I haven't seen one or two people go crazy from war, you know that?"

Everyone was on the front lines.

We all know that it's not uncommon for people to lose their minds in the horrors of war.

How many have been driven mad by the death of their comrades, the horrors of battle, the pain of injury, and the terror that the monsters exude.

There are many people who have been maimed and can no longer hold a weapon, let alone live a normal life.

All four of us in this room have seen the madness of such wars and the people who go mad in them.

"Never mind the asshole, what's this about Ashur? I thought he was a sullen but sane man......."

"The youngest."

Heinrich's harsh words finally got Louise to speak up.

"It's ......."

"Witchcraft is a force we don't know, and the shaman is someone we don't know."

"......."

"But even if it's an unknown force, you've seen people."

Louise looks at Heinrich.

"I didn't see him as a kid who misused his strength, and I didn't see him as a kid who misused his mind."

"But....... Isn't it just confusing, too....... Wouldn't it be better if you could tell us what you're talking about?"

Heinrich wasn't exactly wrong when he said that Ludwig's death would be more than a curse after all.

"I don't know of any other shamans who can give me an example, so I'm guessing he's doing it for a reason."

"What Detomorian meant when he said that doesn't mean anything if we talk about it now."

"......."

At Louise's urging and Ellen's words, Heinrich was forced to remain silent.

Ellen looks at Ludwig.

If he pursues this, Ludwig will die.

We don't know how or in what way it will die.

But Ludwig knew that death was not worthless, and he was determined.

It's okay to break that resolution.

You're out.

Is it right to say that.

"I, I don't believe in dying."

As if he knows what Ellen's gaze means, Ludwig gives her a stern look.

"I don't doubt Detho, but I do believe I can do something, and if I'm dead at the end of it, it's my fault, not his."

"......."

We pick and choose what we want to believe. Even lies are believed, so why not the truth?

I don't believe in death, but I do believe that the journey to it won't be meaningless.

"Yeah."

Ellen looks at Ludwig's determination and nods.

You can't break Ludwig's stubbornness.

Ludwig has been beaten too many times already, and if he is beaten this time, he will wither alive.

The look on their faces, as if they were living something worse than death, would be living in misery worse than death.

"I said you're going to die, not when."

The shaman said he would die, not when.

You don't have to be a shaman to predict that you're going to die, because you're going to die someday.

Ludwig decides to falsify the shaman's prophecy instead.

Ellen also tries not to think about Ludwig's death. Maybe it's not true.

Death is so prevalent that it's easy to make death predictions, but not everyone dies.

It's entirely possible that they were wrong.

If we rule Ludwig out for now, he's off to find another death.

Rather, it's better to keep it in sight.

"What does he mean by 'find Ashur'?"

Next issue.

To find Ashur.

What does it mean when it says you'll know then.

It's just a bunch of bullshit. If, in fact, the Detomorian is just a nutcase, then we can just dismiss it as malicious bullshit and that's that.

But that's a bit of a stretch.

If you're telling me to visit the five great patriarchs, or to go back to the field, I have a feeling.

It's so out of the blue and unexpected that it's bizarre.

Where the hell am I supposed to find an already dead Ashur?

There's only one conclusion to be drawn from the story of finding a friend who's already dead.

"Should I visit Ashur's tomb at....... to visit his grave?"

Ludwig's words left us all wondering what to do next.

The shaman's words further muddied the waters.

Ellen nods slowly.

"Going to ...... may be pointless, but it can't be a bad thing."

The person who left.

Finding his grave may put everyone in a miserable mood, but it's impossible to make it worse.

\* \* \*

All four exited the temple.

The four of them walked cautiously, fearing that the Crusaders or whatever faction had sensed their trail might be following or watching.

Ashur was gifted with divine powers.

Ashur took on the role of a priest, healing soldiers in the rear.

They were torn apart by a rear-guard assault of flying monsters.

It was hard to even look at the devastation of the bodies we had barely recovered.

The bodies of those who have done enough in the war are buried in national cemeteries in the northern part of the ecliptic.

Most of the students in the Royal Class have distinguished themselves in war, and while Ashar hasn't fought in combat himself, he has saved countless lives.

Since Ashur was not a member of the Crusaders, his grave is in the National Cemetery.

"I should have looked up ......."

Ludwig sighed in self-reproach, wondering if he had been so lost in his own despair that he hadn't even thought of his friend's grave.

The same was true for Heinrich and Ellen.

We had a long way to go, as the horse-drawn train was not running, so we had to cross the Grand River and travel north to the Imperial Palace.

In the streets, there were guards shoveling snow, and people who were familiar to Ellen, Heinrich, and Ludwig from the royal class.

-curl!

A wind that blows snow off the streets, and a superhuman who can control it.

I was able to watch him from afar.

-Wow!

-It's a superpower!

There was also a sad and wistful picture of the senior driving his children around while being embarrassed by the snow removal he was doing with his superpower.

A psychic who used to shred monsters with his wind blades.

The wind elementalist, who had been almost as powerful as Heinrich, was no more or less than a stranger to the children now.

-Ouch! Kids, it's dangerous, stay away!

Ludwig and Heinrich smiled bitterly as they watched a man who should have been called a war hero struggle with a crowd of children.

After all of this.

We all look forward to the day when superpowers like fire and wind are just a bit of a novelty.

A world where their power doesn't matter is a world of peace.

Hoping for peace, the four walk.

To find out the truth about deaths that have already happened.

With death to come.

Toward the grave of a dead friend.

Walking down a snowy street.

\* \* \*

All four were first-timers at the Zodiac National Cemetery.

Ludwigina Heinrich only learned later that after a brief funeral in the Allied camp, Ashur's body was transported to the Yellow Road for burial. I hadn't realized that the bodies of those who served were laid to rest in national cemeteries.

In Ellen's case, she was one of the busiest people in the Alliance in the first place, so she wasn't even able to attend Ashur's abbreviated funeral.

Not to mention in Louise's case.

So it wasn't long before I knew where Ashur's tomb was.

"Is that....... National Cemetery?"

Guards lined up in front of the massive main gate, eye-to-eye, guarding the entrance to the national cemetery.

And in front of the cemetery's main entrance, people braved the snow to enter.

It wasn't a very long queue due to the weather.

Naturally, Ellen would ignore such a queue, but she naturally stood behind him with her group.

I didn't want to give away my identity, so I said nothing.

But everyone has their own ideas.

If people were visiting the cemetery in this weather, they were there for a reason.

Why would you want to visit a national cemetery in this weather and wait in the snow to get in?

He was bereaved.

It was probably visited by people related to the dead as a memorial.

We all watched with a sinking feeling as visitors from all walks of life waited to enter.

How long have I been waiting.

Once the person in front of Ellen had checked in, she was allowed in, and one by one, the rest of her group began to check in.

"Hey....... Warrior?"

Ellen's face is well known, so the sudden appearance of a warrior as a worshipper is bound to cause an uproar among the guards at the gate.

"I want to be able to walk around quietly."

"Yes, yes! I get it."

The guards were surprised that he didn't want to draw attention to himself, but cautioned the others not to make a scene.

Since Ellen's face was her identity, the identification of the other three was only abbreviated.

Ellen and her companions slipped past the guards and set out after being told by the desk where Ashar's tomb was located.

We're all thinking the same thing.

It's natural to get a little melancholy when you realize you're going to a friend's grave.

At the same time, I'm thinking.

What clues are there in this white, snowy graveyard?

There is no such thing.

Maybe Dettomorian was actually saying that to remind us of something we'd forgotten.

But what was it about finding Ashur that he said he would know.

The inside of the cemetery wasn't plowed like the rest of the streets, so it was a slippery walk.

"That's a lot of room......."

Ludwig muttered to himself as he looked at the national cemetery.

The National Cemetery was located at the northern tip of the ecliptic realm.

Now there are refugee camps just beyond that tipping point, but back then it would have taken us completely off the ecliptic.

"It wouldn't have been this big originally."

"ah......."

Heinrich let out a small gasp at Ellen's words.

You don't need to know the details to make a prediction.

The national cemetery north of the ecliptic inevitably went through two rounds of expansion.

The first during the Demon War.

Second after the gate debacle.

War takes a lot of lives, and graves for the fallen inevitably fill up.

So just by looking at an outline of the National Cemetery, Ellen could tell which areas were the graves of Demon War veterans and which were expanded after the Gate incident.

Now the four of them are headed to Ashur's tomb.

An expanded graveyard after the Gate debacle.

"You mean this grave is all....... graves after the Gate debacle......?"

Ludwig mumbles something, and Heinrich nods.

Now, instead of looking to Ashur's tomb for clues, they're just overwhelmed by the ubiquity of death.

So many are dead and buried.

Even these graves are few in number compared to the dead.

Still, it was overwhelming.

An unfathomable number of deaths.

But it pales in comparison to all the deaths that have occurred since Gate.

Even that tiny grave was overwhelming to the beholder.

Ludwig mumbles to himself.

"I wonder how many people died......."

"More than 95 percent of all cities have been destroyed."

Louise says.

"I guess you could say he's just as dead."

Most of the city was destroyed, so it's not a stretch to assume that the population was depopulated on the scale of the destruction. In fact, it could be worse.

Even if 5% of all humans died, that's a lot of death.

But the opposite.

About 95 percent of them are dead.

I can't even begin to fathom it, so I'm going to have to say it as a percentage.

\* \* \*

A cemetery is a place where you can't help but think about death.

We look at the dead and infer what their lives were like.

Thinking about what my death will be like.

In conclusion, life.

You can't help but think about how you're going to live.

It's a space where death is on display, and it makes you think about life.

What life is.

What is a reason to live.

It's a space that forces you to face the simple truth that all humans die, so you can't help but think about living.

Not Ellen, not Heinrich, not Louise.

And Ludwig, who was told that death awaited him.

Walk still in your own thoughts.

Walking through the vast snowy graveyard, Ellen and the others soon found themselves in front of Ashur's tomb.

Gifted with divine powers, Ashur healed many wounded soldiers.

He died in the line of duty, not to kill something, but to save it.

"Ashar......."

Ludwig stares at the tombstone.

Not everyone cried.

It wasn't that I was trying to forget, but I was so caught up in the war that I couldn't think about my friend's death.

When winter passes and the army marches again in the spring, the three will return to the battlefield, except for Ludwig. Worry belongs to those without work.

Only Ludwig would remain here to contemplate death and life.

The reality is that people on the battlefield, living so close to death, are too busy to think about it.

Ludwig stares at the tombstone in silence.

I'd rather see the Dettomorian prophecy come true.

I'd rather do something, anything, than stand in front of my friend's tombstone and feel self-conscious for surviving.

Even if there is death at the end of it.

I wish I had a role.

It doesn't have to be as big a role as Ellen.

You don't need to have Heinrich's superpowers.

You don't have to be a commander like Ruiz.

A pawn on the battlefield would be nice.

For those who have been sacrificed, for those who will be sacrificed.

I want to fight.

"......."

Ludwig sat for a while in front of the tombstone and then got up.

We were all shaken, but no one was shaking.

"So......."

Louise opens her mouth to speak.

I'm not going to turn anyone's grave, but there are some things that need to be said, even if it means being uncomfortable.

"What is the significance of this place....... I don't know."

Not surprisingly, Ruiz doesn't know many Temple students.

So Louise looks at everyone's face, assuming that if there is a clue, it's something she doesn't know.

Heinrich wanted to dismiss Dettomorian's words as nonsense.

But even if it is bullshit, this level of bullshit is overly obnoxious and offensive.

Visiting a dead classmate's grave will tell you everything.

"This is weird, even a sane person wouldn't do something like this......."

Heinrich, therefore, felt that if Dettomorian's words were false, they were so unpleasant a lie that he had doubts as he stood before Ashur's tomb.

It's not going to be fun for you, and it's not going to be fun for the people who traveled all the way north of the ecliptic to do it.

"Do you see anything......?"

Ludwig looks at Ellen as if asking for help.

All else aside, Ludwig continued to watch Ellen make decisions and moves smarter than him.

Ludwig doesn't know anything right now, and he stares at Ellen, wondering if she might know something.

However, in this case, it's not that Ludwig is stupid and doesn't realize anything.

"I have no idea."

Ellen had no clue.

"What does Ashur have to do with the theft of Crusader remains and the deaths of Inquisitors?"

In Heinrich's words, he's done stranger things than searching for nymphs in a well. He only did it because he believed the Dettomorians had uncanny powers of foresight.

"I'm going to go back and confront him, grab him by the scruff of the neck and ask him why he said that, and he'll say something."

Heinrich became increasingly frustrated. Heinrich could barely speak at all, or if he did, it was only in vague terms and nothing direct.

Ellen says, looking at Heinrich, who is starting to get excited.

"Calm down. Detomorian is....... I'm sure he didn't mean to tell us that, and if he didn't, he had his reasons, and it's not like we're in trouble if we can't find any clues here anyway."

If the Detomorian's clues don't mean anything anyway, you're not in trouble, and you're not in a trap.

Heinrich sighed at Ellen's words.

"Ellen....... I get what you're saying, and maybe I'm being unreasonably angry, but it's completely unfounded. What we're doing here has nothing to do with what we're after. The only thing they have in common is that the Crusader underground is a graveyard, and this place we're from is a graveyard......."

"......?"

"We have one thing in common....... in common?"

I'm not sure what the connection is, but it's not like they have nothing in common.

Whatever they were, they all had one thing in common: they were cemeteries.

Episode 599.

It started with Rowen's death, but the Crusaders' catacombs were the culprit.

Detomorian says we'll know when we find Ashur, but we don't know what that means yet.

But this time, the destination is a national cemetery.

They have this in common.

The tombs of the saints have been robbed.

And it is possible that the remains have been reanimated as the undead.

Detomorian told me to find Ashur. Then you will know everything.

If the instructions to find Ashur meant to go to the Zodiacal National Cemetery, it ends up telling you to go to a different cemetery.

It's a scary thought.

Louise mumbles to herself.

"No way, the creators of the undead did the same thing here......?"

Louise's words made Ludwig wince.

"Well, not many people can get to the basement of the Temple of the Crusaders, but....... Do you think that's possible when it's so open here?"

An expanded national cemetery is an open space. When that happens, someone is inevitably going to see it.

"If it was a deserted night, it might be possible, and there was a wizard involved, and if we could use noise canceling and teleportation, we could do it here."

Crusader Catacombs.

And the National Cemetery.

What if the clue Dettomorian gave you hinted that the incident didn't just happen in the basement of the Crusaders?

"But if that's what happened, shouldn't it have been the same here, like the Crusaders were in a frenzy? It's not normal."

Heinrich asked.

It's a no-brainer.

It's a scene of mass grave robbing, or undeadization. Such a thing would not go unnoticed. If it happened in the National Cemetery, as it did with the Crusaders, there would be an imperial response.

But now, in the snow, the national cemetery was serene and peaceful.

It never appeared to be a place where strange and ominous events like undeadization had occurred.

"Yeah, I guess nothing happened."

As Ludwig says, it's not supposed to be this quiet at the scene of the crime.

What they have in common is a cemetery.

I couldn't figure out if there was a point to it, or if everyone was jumping on the Dettomorian bandwagon and extrapolating clues that weren't there.

"Wait......."

But in the meantime, Ellen bit her lip slightly.

"Do you get it?"

"Well, we've been waiting in line."

"Joule?"

"Yes."

Ellen looks at Louise.

"You know, the one where you waited in line to get in here. Remember?"

"...... did, apparently."

"Why are we in line?"

"......Why are you waiting in line?"

Ellen narrowed her eyes at Louise's question.

"Technically, it wasn't the line, it was the identity."

Louise nodded in agreement.

It was a flash in the pan, but that was a while ago.

"We didn't restrict access to visitors based on their status."

Among the visitors were nobles, soldiers, and people who appeared to be poor.

Soon, we were not restricting access to visitors based on their status.

"We didn't have a lot of visitors, but everyone was able to get inside, which means that anyone can get into this national cemetery."

"I suppose."

"Why are we doing identity verification in a place where anyone can walk in?"

If you're not restricting access, why are you checking?

"......Maybe to track down criminals. There's bound to be a lot of John Doe's. But....... I don't know if this is the place for a crime to happen......."

Crime only happens in places where it is likely to happen.

What kind of crime could possibly occur in a place where there are only cemeteries everywhere, and why would you need to check the identity of every single person entering?

None of the four know how access to the original national cemetery works.

But something.

That's weird.

"I need to see my manager."

We still don't know what happened.

But Ellen thinks differently than Heinrich.

I don't think Detomorian was talking nonsense. So it means something.

There's got to be something we can figure out here.

Ellen thinks so.

\* \* \*

Meeting the director of the Huangdao National Cemetery wasn't too difficult.

You can ask the crusader leader to jump out in front of the Crusader High Hall, but the Ecliptic National Cemetery is easier.

When Ellen called from the National Cemetery, the superintendent ushered everyone into the director's office as if they were on fire.

"Whoa......."

When Heinrich enters the room and sees her frozen hands and the tip of her frozen nose, Louise mumbles to herself.

"Gosh....... That was cold."

"Oh, no, my sister....... It's okay."

Louise couldn't help but feel sorry for herself, realizing that she'd let a problem that should have been of concern to her go unnoticed because it didn't affect her.

Of course, Heinrich had just run a bit of a fever, but his days of being a stern man were behind him, so he put on an overly good front.

"Ma, it's an honor to meet you!"

"Hello."

When the superintendent of the National Cemetery saw Ellen, he was overwhelmed.

This is a common and typical reaction. Just as the guards at the gate did.

Although this attitude sometimes sends chills down her spine, Ellen has no choice but to get used to it.

The four of us sat in silence while the manager bustled around and sipped tea.

I don't know what I'm here for.

I couldn't tell if she was just surprised to see Ellen or if she had some sort of ulterior motive.

But if the location was relevant to the case, the warden must know something.

Watching the warden bustle about preparing a total of five cups of tea, including her own, Ellen took a sip of her tea out of courtesy.

Ellen doesn't know much about cars.

But I could see the joy and sincerity in his face. It was as if he was facing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

I said.

I don't deserve to be treated like this.

Fighting to keep the thought out of her head, Ellen speaks up.

"It's not anything else, I was in line when I came in here."

"Oh, no. I'm sorry to hear you were in a hurry. If you had told the guards, you could have come straight in......."

"No, that's not what I meant."

Ellen realized that if she said the wrong thing, the middle-aged man in front of her might have a heart attack.

If you take it that way, it's ridiculous.

A warrior who came to me grumpy because he couldn't get a new one. Ellen had not the slightest idea.

"I thought you were verifying your identity."

"Yes, it is."

"Is there anyone who can't get into the national cemetery?"

"What? Ah......."

The superintendent scratched his head at Ellen's question.

Apologetically.

"We are restricting access to people whose residence is unknown or whose identity is not registered."

They're not the only ones.

However, the reality of the ecliptic is that there are more than enough of them now.

"You mean the refugees, right?"

"Well, technically, that would be the case....... No, of course, not all refugees are off limits. If you have a clear identity and a clear place of residence......."

But for refugees living in shacks, there was no way they could provide proper identification.

It would have meant that neither of them could enter the national cemetery.

It's not identity or wealth that matters.

"You mean only those who can be tracked, right?"

"For example, ......."

If the person is traceable, they are allowed in; if not, they are denied access.

The reason is probably simple.

Crime.

Refugees may enter national cemeteries and commit crimes.

Hiding out in a building somewhere in a cemetery to escape the cold, sleeping, or stealing. It's not so strange if you have controlled access.

Ellen's brow furrowed as she tried to figure out what to ask next.

"Yo, warrior. Of course refugees have a right to be memorialized, they're poor people, and I don't blame them."

At the mention of refugee restrictions, the warrior suddenly frowns and starts to think.

Seeing the look on her face, the warden could only assume that Ellen had come to visit because she felt it was unjust to keep the refugees out.

"Yes, I suppose so."

Of course, Ellen wasn't here to ask or argue, so she just replied dryly.

"Of course, not so long ago, the national cemetery was completely open. Anyone could come in, including refugees, yes, obviously......."

"Is that ......?"

Ellen and the other three couldn't help but react to the janitor's excuses.

"Does this mean that access control has changed?"

At her question, the superintendent nodded, not knowing who she was, for now.

"Yeah, sure. I mean, it's an inconvenience to the mourners, so why should we do it, and we haven't had any problems so far......."

"Anyone could come in, and the fact that they don't these days means......."

"Did something happen?"

"Something worse than theft has happened....... I can't help it......."

"What happened?"

The superintendent breaks out in a cold sweat, sounding regretful, but like he had no choice.

"......Someone has vandalized a cemetery."

In a word.

All four faces hardened simultaneously.

\* \* \*

Someone among the mourners vandalized the cemetery.

If you heard that story without knowing anything about it, you'd think there was someone out there who did just that.

But all the same, I couldn't help but feel that it was too much of a coincidence.

Graveyard Steal.

Cemetery desecration.

It's a little too similar.

"How did you deface it?"

Ellen's expression grew more serious, and the superintendent couldn't help but break out in a cold sweat.

"It looks like someone was trying to rob a cemetery....... or something like that. It looks like they were unsuccessful in their digging, but it's a big deal that there was an attempt at all......."

"Did you catch the culprit?"

"We didn't have any restrictions on access at the time, so......."

We found evidence of an attempted theft. However, because the cemetery was open at the time, we were unable to catch the culprit.

The National Cemetery Service was horrified that it happened, and hasn't let anyone in since.

"Are you sure the steal failed?"

"What? The lawn was ruined, but that was it....... I'm guessing it was probably because it was cold and the ground was frozen and the shovel wouldn't go in."

It was a bit of a coincidence, but it wasn't out of the realm of possibility that someone else had done it.

"Suppose grave robbers come in and dig up the grave in the first place....... Is there anything they can take?"

Louise focuses on something more intuitive.

"I don't know what they know to do that, but....... We don't know that either."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

It is very important to know if there are valuable treasures buried in the tomb.

If there is, it's probably just a bunch of grave robbers, and if there isn't, it's a little more suspicious.

After a moment of excitement at the sudden appearance of the warrior, his blood ran dry at the thought of being interrogated every minute.

"Lately, we've been burying coffins sent to us from Allied garrisons according to established procedures. Since the funerals come from the Allied side, we don't know....... We don't know if any of the burial goods(副葬品) are valuable."

"Oh....... I see."

At the warden's words, Louise nodded slowly in agreement.

"Booty......?"

Louise answers Ludwig's unintelligible question.

"I'm talking about the stuff they bury with the body. Of course, when a high ranking nobleman dies, there's a lot of stuff that's worth a lot of money, and that's what grave robbers are looking for."

"Oh....... I see."

If the superintendent is correct, grave robbers have recently entered the national cemetery.

We don't know if they were trying to scavenge or something else, but the attempt failed.

After confirming this, the ranger station has since allowed only those who have proven their identity to enter.

It's entirely possible that there's treasure in the coffin, so having a grave robber isn't that strange.

What could have been. What didn't happen.

Too much of a good thing, though.

Ellen stares at the superintendent.

You feel like you're going to catch something, but you still don't.

"Date."

That's why Ellen asks one last question.

"What was the date of the burglary?"

"Oh, I'll get to that in a minute."

The director goes to his desk and starts furiously shuffling through something.

Unlike the ambiguous attitude of the Crusader Knights, he feared and respected Ellen, and wanted to help her in any way he could.

It's pretty clear that they're not involved in the case at all, and they're not trying to hide anything.

Of course, even I might be faking it.

The superintendent soon had an answer.

"To....... We don't know if this is the day of the incident; with such a large site and limited manpower, it could have happened days ago......."

"Okay, when?"

"I found it on the evening of December 3rd."

At that, Ellen looks at Louise.

"It's that day."

"Yes."

December 3.

It was the day of the Tomb of the Saints robbery.

Beyond coincidence, the suspicions have now reached a level where they cannot be coincidental.

Episode 600.

Dawn, December 3.

A graveyard of Crusader saints has been found stolen.

That same day, the evening of December 3.

The National Cemetery also found evidence of grave robbing attempts, and the cemetery has since tightened access controls to keep grave robbers at bay.

While it's not impossible that the two events are unrelated, the overlap in dates is too suspicious.

If it's the same person, is the work at the national cemetery a failure?

"That's where we just went."

"Yes."

The four of them left the ranger station and headed back to the cemetery.

This time, however, we're not heading to Ashur's tomb.

After confirming the location of the tomb where the attempted grave robbery took place with the caretaker, we were on our way to the site.

The superintendent offered to show her around, but Ellen refused.

You have to see it to believe it.

Of course, it's snowing like this and it's been a while since the incident, so I don't know what going there would tell me.

Just as we learned something in the basement of the Crusaders, we thought we might learn something by checking it out.

"What the hell happened to....... What the hell happened?"

Ludwig felt like he was going to burst, not only because the case was so different from the one he'd started, but also because his head was spinning with the direction of the trail.

"Whatever happened, one thing is for sure."

Heinrich chews on his lip.

"What I thought was crazy ramblings from a crazy person, turned out not to be crazy."

Heinrich's self-pitying mutterings were a way of kicking himself for ignoring what the Dettomorian had just said.

"We had two things in common, not one."

Louise says, looking around the snowy national cemetery.

"What do you mean, two?"

In response to Ellen's question, Louise keeps her answer short.

"Something called a cemetery."

They had already left the administration center and walked a long way into the graveyard of the fallen.

"That it's a place where people of extraordinary power are buried."

What they have in common is a cemetery.

Beyond that, even the buried had one more thing in common: a place where the chosen ones were buried.

When we had a single crime scene, we had to consider all the issues stemming from that scene.

However, if you have one more site, you need to consider intersections between sites.

You should consider the things they have in common as stronger clues.

Louise spits out a white breath, and Najik says.

"If they were trying to create undead here too, and if the same thing happened in both places, then....... it's unlikely that this was done out of revenge or hatred for the Five Great Houses."

When the Crusader Catacombs were the scene of a crime, we had to consider that it might have been done out of anger at the Crusaders or the Five Great Houses. The very insult of turning the remains of saints into undead could be revenge.

However, the site is now home to the Zodiac National Cemetery, which has little to do with the Crusader Knights.

Then the purpose is not revenge.

And intersection.

The tombs of the saints, where those who had great power in life are buried.

The Ecliptic National Cemetery, where those who served in the Demon War in their lifetime and those who served after the Gate Crisis are buried.

What they have in common is that they are places where the mighty are buried.

"All other explanations aside, if the same thing was attempted here, the perpetrators' objective would be rather simple than complex."

"......I see."

Ellen nods, as if she knows what Louise is going to say even if she doesn't, and Louise mumbles to herself.

Too many clues and the case falls into chaos.

But once you find the commonalities between the clues, the guessing gets easier.

Through the commonalities between the increasingly fuzzy events and clues, they get closer to the truth.

"I just needed a powerful undead."

All the emotional words like anger, revenge, and hate have lost their power as clues.

It's not uncommon for reasoning to get sidetracked in the face of complex interests and forces.

If the perpetrators were here, and their intentions were consistent with what they were doing in the Crusader underground, then the truth is clear.

The undead were an end, not a means.

We needed undead.

Strong undead.

Therefore, the perpetrators may have had a very simple intention: to find the graves of the powerful.

Louise von Schwarz judged.

\* \* \*

Ellen stopped in front of a cemetery that didn't look much different from any other.

"Here it is."

A total of five graves in the neighborhood were believed to have been grave robbed. The grass covering the graves was overturned, so the conclusion was that the graves were not actually grave robbed.

Whether it was stolen or not, the administration had no choice but to tighten up access controls based on the presumption that an attempt had been made.

It's literally a national cemetery where war heroes are buried.

Each one of them is a graveyard of heroes. So it's no wonder that if even one cemetery was stolen, not to mention the head of the organization, the heads of everyone involved would be blown off.

Of course, with the naked eye, you can't even tell if there was a grave robbery attempt. Both the headstone and the ground were buried under snow in the first place.

Ellen looks around.

Given the weather, mourners have been few and far between.

"This is an inconspicuous place."

"I see."

Because it was tucked away in a corner, it was hard to see this spot from the center of the cemetery, obscured by the trees.

It's a place where you can steal, perform strange rituals, and even get away with a lot of weird stuff if it's nighttime.

Ellen dusted the snow off the tombstones and checked off the names on each of them where the alleged theft had occurred, then looked back at Heinrich.

"Heinrich, melt the snow."

"Okay."

So far, I've refrained from using my powers to avoid drawing attention to myself, but this is an inconspicuous location and there are no mourners around.

And now, it doesn't matter who's watching.

-Woof!

Heinrich's summoned flame radiates heat and begins to melt the thick layer of snow in an instant.

Ellen, Louise, and Ludwig felt the heat of the flames burning their faces in real time.

How long has it been.

Even as the snow melted, the ground in the cemetery was bare.

The grass, wilted and browned by winter, hung limply from the melted snow.

Five cemeteries.

The flat ground behind that headstone.

If there was an attempt to steal, it means there was an attempt to dig.

Ellen pawed at the flat grass of the cemetery where the attempted grave robbery had taken place, and soon, with a few tugs on the ground, she pulled a clump of grass out of the ground.

"Eh, Ellen......!"

Ludwig was horrified to see Ellen desecrating the cemetery with her own hands, but Ellen shook her head.

"I didn't force it, it was just the way it was."

Grass is naturally intertwined with its roots. Even in winter, if a lawn's roots break off, they won't reconnect.

So Ellen pulled up some of the grass that was broken in the first place, along with a pile of dirt.

"Looks like the admins did a pretty thorough job, they could have just let it slide."

At first glance, it doesn't even look like there's anything wrong with it, although the ground has probably been smoothed and repaired since the site was discovered to make it look less unnatural.

If it weren't for the fact that one of the cemetery managers is a very good snowboarder, I would have let it slide.

Louise nodded slowly at Ellen's words.

"It could have been found by mourners, not administrators. If it was my family or friends' grave, I'd look more closely."

"I see."

Although the warden said it was brought to the attention of administrators, it's entirely possible that someone in the mourning crowd spotted it and told the administration.

By not telling her that the mourners had found it, the warden could have been lying to her, literally. And for Ellen, that's the kind of lie she'll forgive.

Mourners or caretakers saw an unnatural filling of dirt and grass on the grave and assumed it was an attempted grave robbery.

The site was then repaired by administrators to make it look like everything was fine.

Ellen looked closely at the ground and could see the unnatural shape of the mounds of earth in the graveyard.

See it with your own eyes.

I came to see.

And no, Ellen didn't come to see the grass.

"Ellen......."

Ludwig mumbles to himself.

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

Heinrich mumbles to himself.

I don't need to tell you what Ellen is going to do from here on out, because you should be able to figure it out by now.

"I don't think so."

Ellen has a little blue magic in each hand.

There's only one thing you need to do to know what happened here.

Visualization.

-Poof!

Ellen sells land with her bare hands.

To check the grave.

Ellen starts digging.

\* \* \*

The superintendent offers to accompany her, but Ellen refuses, and for good reason.

And even though we didn't all come in and tell each other what to do, we all knew we had to do these things.

Even if they knew there was an attempted grave robbery, they can't do the crazy thing of digging up the grave themselves.

But Ellen has a different possibility in mind, and she has to do it herself.

I didn't need anyone to help me do what Ellen was doing.

Ludwig, unable to stand by and watch, tried to raise a hand, but Ellen told him to move out of the way.

It was all done with my bare hands and no shovel, but it didn't take long.

She's a master class superhuman whose whole body is a weapon, so when Ellen starts digging with her whole body, she's soon digging and breaking up the frozen soil, and soon, she's digging a deep hole.

"There's a body."

From the bottom of the pit, Ellen says, covered in dirt.

Sure enough, there was a body. Ellen's eyes widened as she recognized the remains of the lion she had finally found at the bottom of the pit.

And on top of the pit, Ludwig, Heinrich, and Louise stared down at the spectacle with stony faces.

We've all seen death, and we've all seen bodies.

They feel guilty, but they're not horrified and grossed out by the body itself.

If something like the Crusader Catacombs happened, there should be no bodies.

But the body is still there.

"Wait, that would mean....... that this place has nothing to do with undeadification....... or something?"

If the cemetery has nothing to do with undeadization, then Heinrich is right.

Someone tried to grave rob the cemetery and failed.

If so, Ellen has just dug herself a grave.

All it did was insult the death of someone who deserved to be put to rest.

"No, no."

But Ellen shakes her head.

In the dirt, Ellen picks up a piece.

"Is it a piece of coffin?"

Louise murmurs as she watches Ellen pick it up.

"That's ....... I think so."

A coffin buried in the ground is broken.

That's not something you can do externally in the first place.

"If it's undeadization, the undead would have crawled up to the ground to break the coffin in the first place, and if it's grave robbing, the grave robbers would have dug down to this point."

If the undead came to the ground by breaking the coffin, it makes sense that they would break the coffin.

However, the grave robbers were probably after the tomb's contents in the first place.

If they've dug down to where they can see the coffin, they're not going to noisily break it open when they could have just quietly removed the burial goods.

Since the grave robbers wouldn't have made a ruckus about breaking the coffin, we can only assume that the undead crawled out of it.

"...... What is this body?"

However, if the undead broke the coffin themselves, it doesn't make sense that the body that was supposed to be the undead would still be there in the first place.

In the Crusader underground, the perpetrators left the scene untouched, and in this case, not only did they cover it up again, but they also buried the undead back into the ground without retrieving them.

It's not the thieves' fault, because they clearly did something they shouldn't have done.

However, I suspect this was done by someone with an undead agenda, and they didn't end up taking the undead with them.

"Is it someone else's body or....... or something like that?"

Ellen frowns at Ludwig's question.

"I don't know, but if that's the case, why not....... I don't get it. If you're making undead and putting other bodies in them, you had to do that in the Crusader underground in the first place, but you didn't do it there, and you're doing it here?"

It's odd to take an already buried corpse and turn it into an undead, and then speculate on the possibility of putting another corpse back in that grave. It's an oddly laborious and pointless behavior.

It's unlikely that it's universal for people like Ellen to dig their own graves to identify bodies.

And when the time comes to dig up the body and see it for yourself, you can't help but wonder if the remains have been tampered with.

So reanimating the undead and putting another body in that tomb is not worthwhile or meaningful as camouflage in the first place.

It's weird if it's the same person.

In the Crusader underground, I had no interest in concealment, but here I did.

They didn't even take the undead, or they switched bodies.

"But....... That's a little weird."

Heinrich questions.

"What?"

"He was buried this year....... This much decay?"

"......?"

Ellen takes a closer look.

At Heinrich's question, Louise turns to look at the tombstone.

"Gordon Schick, senior knight of the Alskean. In October of this year....... This......."

It's December.

"It's only been two months?"

"Yeah."

Ellen in the pit narrowed her eyes at Louise's lament.

The corpse in front of him had gaping eye sockets.

It's October and the weather is starting to get cold.

We don't know much about the rate of decomposition, but from what Ellen can see, the body in front of her is already quite decomposed.

It's not completely devoid of flesh and muscle, but it's a bit too much for a body that's been buried since it started getting cold.

"I think it's the wrong body."

"I see......."

At Louise's words, Ellen nods in agreement.

I thought there was no reason to do the pointless thing of swapping bodies, but there is.

So it's pretty clear that it's not the work of grave robbers.

Ludwig mumbles to himself.

"What the hell....... Why did you do this......?"

Took the undead.

But this time, after taking the undead, we put in another body.

Why on earth would I do this?

The other possibilities are still out of reach, so for now, Ellen and the others can only assume that the perpetrators were just doing something nasty that didn't mean anything.

"I'll have to dig all the other graves."

Eventually, Ellen had no choice but to do a few more rounds of digging.

Episode 601.

A total of five graves where there was an attempted grave robbery.

After digging not just one grave, but four others, they all came to the same conclusion.

All the coffins in the ground were broken.

It was supposedly caused by the undead rising from the ground, breaking the coffin and crawling out into the world.

But the body was still in there.

Some bodies had varying dates of death and degrees of decomposition, while others did not.

Naturally, with so many people buried, the faces of the corpses would be unrecognizable, even in their decay.

"...... is not the body of a warrior."

Louise nodded as Ellen identified all the bodies in the dug-up graves.

All of the bodies retained some semblance of appearance, regardless of the degree of decomposition.

The shape of his body already suggested that his nutritional status was not very good.

The area itself is a newly expanded site after the Gate, and most of the dead from the Gate are buried there. So, yes, most of them are soldiers.

The bodies of the soldiers shouldn't have been this close together.

"No injuries."

"It's ......."

And most of the bodies here are warriors.

Naturally, they died in the fight against the monster. Their bodies would naturally show signs of mortal wounds, such as missing limbs, or even a missing skull.

The bodies look malnourished, but all of them have intact limbs.

"These are definitely the bodies of people from the refugee camp."

So this is the body of someone who died of disease or starvation.

"Then....... After you brought the corpse back to life, you put other people's bodies in this tomb....... Why would you do that?"

Heinrich asked the question, but the other three couldn't answer it.

Raising the dead as the undead is insane.

But raising an undead, taking it with you, and putting another body in its grave isn't crazy, it's weird.

I can't figure out the intent.

Ellen crawls out of the pit and carefully turns her hand.

"Well, one thing's for sure, there were people who tampered with the tomb. Though we don't know why it was tampered with."

The suspects are two.

Grave robbers, or those involved in undeadization.

But even if it was the work of the grave robbers, or the people we're chasing now, it's too weird to switch bodies.

There's no point in doing that.

The extreme case of digging up a grave and checking it out doesn't happen very often anyway.

It's understandable to disguise a grave by smoothing out the dug ground, but why disguise a corpse?

"Uh, by the way....... Shouldn't we get this back up somehow soon?"

Heinrich was on edge, knowing that even if this was an inconspicuous location, there would be a huge uproar if anyone saw them.

Of course, it's not just a shovelful of dirt, it's a full-blown grave, so even if you fill it in, it's still going to show.

"No, wait a minute."

But whether Heinrich was nervous or not, Louise was looking at them one by one with a meaningful expression.

In total, they dug five graves.

Five tombs with attempted grave robbing.

The coffin used for the burial is broken, and the body is not the one who was supposed to be buried.

"If the grave robbers forced the coffin open and switched bodies, we don't know why they would do that, and if the people we're after are involved in this, if they brought the real owner of the tomb back to life as an undead, that would make sense, but there's no reason to put another body in there......."

Swap bodies.

That part is so weird and doesn't make sense.

"Ellen."

"Yes."

Louise looks at Ellen with a stern expression.

"One more grave, can you dig it?"

"......."

"A different tomb, with no grave robbing attempts."

"Sure."

Ellen nodded.

\* \* \*

The attempted graves were still within close proximity to each other.

Ellen began digging in the grave, this time at a distance.

Hoping that this is a desecration of someone's memory, not only Ellen, but Louise as well, digs up the grave.

Soon, they dug a sixth grave.

"This time......."

"You're good to go."

It's different from the other five tombs.

This time, the buried coffin may have been covered in dirt, but it was still in good shape.

Like the other coffins that were attempted to be stolen, it didn't break.

"Nothing happened here, right?"

"Maybe......."

At the top of the pit, Heinrich and Ludwig were relieved.

Ellen looks at Louise with a hard look on her face. As if to ask if they should proceed with the next step or not.

"Let's open it."

"Yes."

Ellen grabs the lid of the coffin and applies pressure.

-Thump!

The lid popped open with a loud bang, and Louise and Ellen could see inside.

Still, you can't recognize the lion's face.

"This is another body......."

But the sight of that skinny body, with all its limbs intact.

From the look of the body, which could hardly have been a fallen soldier, I could already tell that it had nothing to do with the name on the tombstone.

Ellen, Louise, and Ludwig and Heinrich.

I stared at the body, frozen.

"Replace......."

Ellen mutters.

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

Now.

Really now.

What's wrong and where.

I had no idea.

\* \* \*

The sixth tomb was different from the others.

This time, the coffin is intact, but the body inside has been switched.

It's a scary thought.

After confirming that, Louise and Ellen climbed out of the pit.

"How did you know?"

In addition to the five graves where the attempted grave robbery took place, Louise suspects that bodies may have been switched in other graves as well.

This led me to imagine that there might be something more fundamental going on than just the grave robbers and the forces they were chasing.

"If this is the work of the people we're after, there were things they should have taken, but didn't."

"It's the undead you need to take care of."

"And what not to bring. Or, more precisely, things you won't be interested in."

"Booty."

Items buried with the body.

"The bodies were replaced, but all the graves had no burial goods."

The people responsible for the events in the Catacombs of the Crusaders are not people of little consequence.

So while they may have reanimated a corpse and taken it to the undead, it's safe to say that they're not the kind of people who get hung up on the treasure buried with the corpse.

All the graves they dug now had one more thing in common.

All graves have no burial items.

"Weapons and armor are usually buried as part of the burial, at least if not the lion's living possessions. But none of the graves contained any such items, and the bodies were all ....... They might be wearing shrouds, but nothing else was buried with them, and they were all wearing the same clothes. And if the bodies were tampered with, they were tampered with, but the absence of all remaining grave goods in the graves is not the work of grave robbers or the people we're after."

"......."

"Probably since they were buried."

This altered body was never meant to be the work of the current pursuers or grave robbers in the first place.

The body has been altered since it was first buried.

"That's not going to happen with the superintendent's clout."

Everyone starts to imagine the dreaded scenario.

Louise stares at Ellen for a moment.

"Ellen."

"It's ......."

"This seems to have too many things tied up in it."

What had begun with the death of the archbishop had spiraled out of control.

The archbishop was an inquisitor.

The Crusaders have an unknown internal problem.

The slain Inquisitor was chasing the remains of undead saints.

In the national cemetery, where the perpetrators seem to have been involved, the bodies had been switched.

Everything we've learned so far doesn't lead to a single conclusion.

Each clue reveals a different problem.

There are so many problems in the world, and every one of them is just the tip of the iceberg of other problems that can't be ignored.

Displaced bodies in the Imperial National Cemetery.

This is too big to be an aberration of a janitor. He wouldn't be able to do this.

Therefore, the switching of bodies in the national cemetery must have been done by a higher power. A higher power authorized, ordered, or condoned it.

Without it, it can't be attempted.

The suspicion will only be confirmed when we check the other tombs one by one.

Ellen mumbles to herself.

"This is....... Empire's involvement in this......."

"I suppose."

Louise could only nod her head in agreement.

What the hell did you do with the bodies?

What you were trying to do.

"Wait a minute....... If there are other bodies buried everywhere else, too......."

Ludwig's eyes widen in confusion.

"Is Ashur's tomb also......?"

Heinrich and Ellen gritted their teeth.

Find Ashur.

Then, he said, I'll know everything.

It wasn't the owner of the grave who was buried in the tomb, but a whole bunch of other wacky people.

That said, they haven't found Ashur yet.

You don't have to open all the other graves to see that all the bodies have been switched.

Tomb of Asher.

One more thing confirms this suspicion.

-Here! What are you doing!

And eventually, even in the most inconspicuous of places, someone was bound to find those who had been digging their graves for quite some time.

\* \* \*

Where did it go wrong?

What to look for.

Death of the Inquisitor.

The remains of saints who have become undead.

A transposed body in a national cemetery.

No one could now be sure that all the clues pointed in one direction.

It could be everything.

If everything in the world is a problem, how the hell am I supposed to solve this one?

In the snow that Heinrich had melted, Ellen began to shovel into the grave.

The warden and his troops watched with grim faces.

The rangers were horrified to see a warrior digging a grave out of nowhere, and Ellen offered them no excuses or apologies.

Told to fetch the warden and bring a shovel, Ellen revisited Ashur's grave.

A warrior digs a friend's grave.

The warden could only stomp his feet, unable to argue with the warrior's determined expression.

I dug graves with my bare hands. It was easier and faster with tools in hand.

With each stroke of the young shovel's blue-enchanted blade, the earth bared its flesh.

In no time at all, Ellen had dug down to the depths of Ashur's coffin, and with a shovel blade wedged into the lid, she twisted it open, breaking it open.

-Bam!

"......."

This time, it's a body they should be able to recognize.

Now, as all four of us were expecting.

There was an unfamiliar face in there, though it was beginning to decay.

"Hey, warrior....... What the hell is wrong with you......."

Without a word, Ellen crawled out of the pit and handed the shovel to the superintendent.

"Fill the grave, and pretend you never heard or saw anything about this."

Seeing the warden and others frozen in place.

"Remember, everybody. Unless you want to die young."

After digging a total of seven graves.

Ellen was now certain that every body in the national cemetery had been tampered with.

With that, Ellen gestures to her teammates.

"Let's go."

No more trips to the national cemetery.

Episode 602.

Ellen didn't explain anything to the people at the National Cemetery who were missing Earl.

They are too small to be involved in these things. It was better for their safety to know nothing.

After exiting the national cemetery, Ellen dried off her dirt-covered clothes.

Everyone was in disarray.

"We still don't know what happened, but we do know a few things."

And it was Ellen, not anyone else, who was the most confused.

"But the Empire is doing something with the bodies. Or at least they're aware of it. That much is certain."

It's impossible to say for sure whether all of the problems that occurred were caused by the Empire or not. However, it is highly unlikely that the Empire was unaware of what was happening at the National Cemetery.

Ellen looks up at the snowy sky.

Many clues begin to move in the right direction in the face of a decisive truth.

The ones that aren't may not be, but the ones that are will still give you clues to move in a certain direction.

"I get it now."

Ellen looks at Ludwig.

"Why Archbishop Rowen approached you."

"Okay......?"

"Yes."

Why Rowen approached the archbishop.

On the first day, there was a lot of speculation.

Rowen knew the cause of the gate, so he could use Ludwig to get to Ellen and do her harm, or so the theory goes.

Ellen suspected that Rowen's approach to Ludwig must have been for some other purpose entirely unrelated to this incident, perhaps related to the eradication of the Mercenary Order.

But that reasoning is overturned in the face of a truth that was unthinkable yesterday.

Realizing that the Empire might be behind these things.

Ellen realizes why Rowen approached Ludwig.

"He wasn't trying to hurt me through you, he wanted to investigate this case through you."

All of Rowen's actions were pointing in the same direction.

An incident in the catacombs of the saints.

It was part of a way to track down the case.

Ellen's words left Ludwig completely clueless.

"How can I......?"

Ellen points south of the ecliptic.

Something you can't see through the flurry of snow, but something beyond.

"It was important that you were a Temple student."

Temples.

"Because very few people are allowed to enter the temple."

Those who can come and go as they please do not realize how difficult it is to enter a temple and how nearly impossible it is to infiltrate it.

It's not a place where just anyone can get in.

In the first place, even when the Temple was up and running, it had strict access control.

"He wanted to know what was going on in the Temple through you."

Rowen had approached Ludwig for that purpose.

She cannot enter the temple herself.

"Wait, wait, wait....... What the hell does Temple have to do with this......?"

At Ludwig's question, Ellen sighed softly.

"Let's go to Hogwarts."

Ellen walks straight ahead.

"Then, you'll know."

In the face of the definitive truth, you finally know what happened and what it all means.

Many of the puzzles were nearing completion.

So it's clear where to go.

Temple College of Magic.

What the heck were those guards doing standing there like they were guarding a major secret.

Now I had a pretty good idea.

Louise followed Ellen's lead, her expression hardening into something else.

'I'm....... Why?'

If something is going on in the temple and access is strictly controlled.

The Empire would have to hide this from anyone.

He wondered why he had been allowed into the Temple at all: he might learn of the Empire's weaknesses or its secrets, and he was on the verge of doing just that.

Why the hell did they let me in.

Louise couldn't figure it out.

But in the end, the path is clear.

"Wait."

With that thought, Louise stopped in her tracks.

Ellen, Heinrich, and Ludwig look at Louise, who has a stony expression on her face.

"If the Temple College of Magic has....... If what we're after is really there....... If it is the Empire that is behind these things....... Are you saying it was the Empire that killed Archbishop Rowen?"

"......Maybe."

"The Empire has sent a priest to......?"

"Rowen figured out that the Empire was behind what happened at the Crusader cemetery, and he must have known they were doing something inside the Temple, so he approached Ludwig."

Rowen knew something, and he tried to get Ludwig to investigate the temple.

"And I'm sure the Empire noticed, and they killed Rowen and everyone else in that Inquisitor's temple."

An inquisitor getting closer to truths he shouldn't know.

The Empire would have had no choice but to take action against her.

However, I don't understand the Empire's overzealousness in desecrating the graves of the saints.

But with the clues strongly pointing to the Empire being at the center of this, there was no room for second thoughts.

"The Empire must already know what we're up to. I went to the College of Magic yesterday."

"......Yes."

It was all figured out, albeit for a different reason, the moment he reached the neighborhood of the College of Witchcraft and Wizardry in search of Anna de Guerna.

"From the moment we decided to look into this, the Empire could have known everything we did."

"Maybe......."

If the Empire was at the center of this, and no one else, they would have been watching everywhere they went and everything they did.

The ecliptic is the domain of empires, and temples are a key part of them.

When I was researching this, they told me that they had to be careful because the beasts that killed Rowen might come after them.

However, from the moment he decided to look into the case, the Empire would have already known his every move.

Stop by the temple on fire.

Stop by the Crusader High Priestess.

To the College of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Visit a national cemetery.

Every one of those steps would have been read.

And now we're closer to the truth.

"Was it because you were included that we couldn't do anything about it......."

If the Beast is the Empire and not some other group, it can never touch Ellen.

Because, after all, Ellen is Ellen.

The Empire may be helpless in its pursuit of these four.

I don't know about anyone else, but since Ellen is one of those trackers, the Empire can't do anything about it.

Louise had already decided to dip her toe in the water, and she was willing to take some risks.

But it's also going head-to-head with an empire.

Walking away at the right time was never an option. The empire was watching from the start.

Investigating a murder, and keeping a warrior safe.

She thought it was her first priority, but now that she realizes the empire is deeply entangled in this matter, she has unwittingly become entangled in something that could determine the fate of the Schwarz family.

Looking at Louise, who suddenly has to make a very big decision, Ellen says simply: "I'm not going to do this.

"I'll protect you somehow."

"......?"

"Yes."

Ellen nodded slowly.

Ruiz said that Ellen's work is humanity's work.

Ellen is fully aware of what Louise has risked to help her.

So, in the same way, Ellen will protect Louise for helping her.

The Schwarzes had no choice but to defend themselves.

All four of them have very important secrets, or suspicions, about the Empire.

Massive denial.

We return to the template to figure it out.

The Temple was their home, but now that they know something strange and dangerous is going on there, they can't help but return to it with a different mindset.

\* \* \*

Back at the temple, the group headed straight for the College of Magic.

As long as it's clear where you're going, you should be able to see what's happening there.

The location that was off-limits for a completely different reason was actually very relevant to the case.

And everyone could see that there was someone in the space where no one should be.

A person sitting still, in the falling snow, with an umbrella slung over their shoulder.

"Lord Tana."

"......."

Saviolin Tana.

She sat alone on the bench, watching Ellen and her group as they approached under the umbrella.

She gets up from the bench without a word.

Somehow, it was as if they knew they were coming and had been waiting.

"Did you know I was coming?"

"I was hoping it wouldn't come to ......."

Savior Tana stands still and looks at Ellen.

"Because if you come back here, you've already learned something."

If I didn't know any better, I wouldn't be back on this road to Hogwarts.

If I know something, and I know there is something, I will find this path again.

That's why Saviolin Tana was at the crossroads.

Hoping that Ellen won't come.

"If I told you to tell me nothing more, you'd know that the Empire was involved in this, and I'd rather you didn't. But three days. Only....... Three days."

Saviolin Tana blows out a white breath.

"That's too fast, Ellen."

Watching Ellen come face to face with a truth she shouldn't have known so soon, Savior Tana was saddened that she could only admire her ability to execute and act.

Saviolin Tana looks next to her, not at Ellen this time.

Louise von Schwarz.

"Your Highness the Princess."

"......."

"I didn't expect you to repay the Emperor's favors in this way."

Louise von Schwarz stared at such a viola tana with wide eyes.

Emperor's Favor.

That's not the only thing that makes it possible to enter the temple.

In the first place, it was the Emperor who advised Heinrich that he would have to kill his brothers to save them.

Saviolin Tana asks if it's fair to ignore the Emperor's favor and come all this way to learn the secrets of the Empire.

At that, Louise's brow narrows.

"I realize that I'm not in a position to discuss righteousness and humanity."

By the time I killed my siblings with my own hands, I had already abandoned Tian Lun.

"You do realize that I am not here to probe the Empire's weaknesses. Lord Tana."

Saviolin Tana sees Heinrich and Ludwig behind her.

"Whatever you see is coincidence, whatever you know is illusion, whatever you imagine is delusion."

"You may not accept it, but that's the way it is."

"I'd rather live without knowing, because knowing won't change anything."

"In the world."

"There are things that hurt to know."

"Some things are sadder when you know."

"Ellen."

"You are well aware of that."

"After this, there's nothing you need to know."

"I'm just asking you to accept that and back off."

"If you find out, you'll only be sharing a sin that's hard to bear."

"You don't have to do that."

Ellen's eyes widened at that.

What it would hurt to know.

Rather sad, I know.

That's all there is to it now.

Knowing the truth is better than not knowing.

It's not like nothing is happening.

You're doing something.

Something terrible is about to happen and probably already has.

It's better to know the truth than to share the guilt.

But to go home knowing nothing.

Already knowing too much of the sad truth, Ellen could not help but hesitate at Savior Tana's heartfelt request.

Although her demeanor is forceful, Savior Tana is clearly appealing to Ellen and the other three.

Back off.

Seriously.

"There's no way I can just go back to......."

Ludwig mumbles to himself.

"What the hell....... What are you doing with those people who were pitiful just to be dead....... What are you doing with them? They didn't even get to die in peace, and you're still doing that after they're dead......."

"I can't justify it. I don't want to justify it, and I'm not in a position to do so."

Saviolin Tana's tone was cold and detached.

"So, let's keep it simple."

Saviolin Tana stands in the middle of the sidewalk with an umbrella.

The only one on the continent to reach the realm of Grandmaster.

Her strength exceeds that of the warrior Ellen Artorius, and it is cautiously estimated that she may be of equal or greater power than Ellen at full strength.

She doesn't have a single Holy Grail, and she's been on more difficult or dangerous missions than Ellen, who has two Holy Grails, and she's still alive.

"I shouldn't know about this. I'd rather not know, so that when this all comes to light later, I can use the fact that I didn't know anything as an exculpation."

"Are you saying that if we knew what you were doing, we would be forced to be silent?"

"Yeah, because I'm doing what I have to do."

Tana nodded at Ellen's question.

Don't feel compelled to share your guilt; it's better to keep what you don't know than what you do know.

"This isn't about me and the empire, it's about you."

These are the people who feel guilty and responsible for even knowing what happened.

When all is said and done. The only way to escape blame is to not know.

To know the truth and be a silent sympathizer, or to pass up the opportunity to know and then later say you didn't know anything when all the facts are revealed.

A warrior should know none of this.

Because heroes are the hope of the people.

Because when some evil is revealed, it should be someone who has nothing to do with it.

The warrior must be an absolute good.

So it's better not to know.

"You know."

Ellen says still.

"Just because I don't know this much doesn't mean I can buy myself a pass."

"You're not even going to buy it. You know that."

"If it hurts to know, you already know a lot."

"I don't know how much harder it's going to be for me to be called a warrior by others before it gets harder and more exhausting than it already is."

"I mean, it doesn't hurt to know a little more."

"Step aside. Lord Tana."

"I need to know what's going on."

Louise listened in silence to Ellen's meaningful words.

The truth you shouldn't know.

Indulgences.

Some things people don't know about the Gate debacle.

Louise and Heinrich couldn't help but notice that Ellen was talking about him.

Episode 603.

Saviolin Tana looks at Ellen with sad eyes.

The conversation is not working.

In the end, then, there is only one recourse left to each other.

"I don't want to hurt you."

Saviolin Tana says.

"That's the same for me."

Ellen's response.

What they say to each other already shows how they feel about each other.

They revealed that they both thought they had the upper hand.

It may seem like we're crossing into the realm of childish ego battles, but after all, these are two of the most dominant players on the continent.

Is Ellen Artorius stronger, or is Saviorin Tana stronger?

"......."

"......."

They stare at each other in silence.

Eventually, they can't help but double-check their spacing.

Am I stronger.

Is the opponent stronger.

"Ellen......."

Heinrich looks at Ellen in a cold sweat.

It's one thing to know what the Empire is up to, but it's another thing entirely to have Savior Tana and Ellen cross swords with each other.

"It's okay, I'm not going to kill you."

At Ellen's arrogant remark, Heinrich, of course. Saviolin Tana smiles subtly.

"You're capable of provocation."

"......I wasn't provocative, I was just stating a fact."

Ellen says still.

"If you don't get out of the way right now."

-Woof

Ellen's entire body begins to surge with blue energy.

"Expect it to hurt."

"......."

Do not use swords.

Tana sighs at how cute that sounds.

"You mean you're not going to use holy water?"

Voidblade Lament.

Cloak of the Sun Rapelt.

The sight of them, both unarmored, about to go toe-to-toe, is rather disconcerting to Savior Tana.

"You don't need it."

"I don't think so."

Saviolin Tana scowls, as if you'd even touch my toes without the unreasonable power of a holy object.

I was trying to stop Ellen.

The arrogance of trying to stand before him without even a holy object.

Seriously, that attitude pissed off Saviolin Tana.

"I'll take that back."

Saviolin Tana tosses the umbrella she was using aside.

"If you don't back off now......."

-curl!

Saviolin Tana's entire body emanates a storm of magic that blows away the snow.

Saviolin Tana's tousled hair, having stirred up a storm with nothing more than a magical shockwave, settles into stillness once more.

Her piercing eyes glare at Ellen.

"I'll make sure you don't get out of bed until winter is over."

"Try it."

"Heck......."

-Thump!

In the rush of the moment, Savior Tana was already in front of Ellen's nose.

"You don't say a word!"

-Bam!

"......!"

一拳 (一拳).

Taking a direct hit, Ellen bounced off the street, smashing into a tree, while Heinrich and Ludwig, minus Louise, were swept off their feet in the aftermath.

"Don't be needlessly arrogant."

Saviolin Tana said as she walked over to Ellen in the woods.

"Take out the holy relic."

At Ellen's arrogance in trying to put her on equal footing without a holy object, Saviolin Tana was genuinely outraged.

In the midst of those broken trees, something suddenly flies.

'eye......?'

A snowball hurtled toward them, and Savior Tana dodged it with a quick shake of her head.

"Are you kidding me......!"

For a moment, Boogahmintana flirts with Tana.

She could already see Ellen bending at the waist through the rising dust.

Kick back.

-Quack!

"......cough!"

Struck by a wild, spinning kick, Saviolin Tana blocked it with her upper arm, but was forced to take several large steps to the side.

"I don't need it."

A calm-faced Ellen began to lunge at Tana, who had bounced away.

That moment when you're not really trying to kill each other, but it's about to become an emotional fight.

-That's it!

The fight came to an abrupt halt at the sound of a distant cry, familiar to both of them.

"......bertus."

"Your Majesty......."

The emperor was approaching in the distance, trudging through the snow.

\* \* \*

Bertus's sudden appearance put a stop to the dogfight between two of humanity's greatest powers.

And then, without explanation or explanation to anyone, they just slipped past heavy security and sat him down in the lobby of Hogwarts.

Including Louise von Schwarz.

"......."

"......."

Ellen and Saviolin Tana stare at the floor, mouths agape.

"I told her to tie up Ellen if she tried to come in, but I don't think I told her to punch me."

"......that. I'm sorry, Your Majesty."

Saviolin Tana was about to say that she was a great player who would step down because she played well, but then she shut up.

Bertus looks at Ellen, who is speechless.

"You don't have to be so....... Yeah....... because you're not here for anything good."

Bertus looks out at the assembled group.

Ellen isn't the only one, there's Ludwig and Heinrich, and even a princess from the Empire.

Bertus looks at them, then back at Ellen.

"Do I really, really need to know?"

In the end, the emperor says the same thing that Savior Tana said.

"I'll tell you what, even if you tell me not to do it, I'm still going to do it, and nothing is going to change."

"......."

"So it's just a matter of knowing."

"You should know."

Ellen says.

"I have a duty to know."

A duty to know, not a right to know.

Bertus couldn't help but smile bitterly, for it was clear that the words spoke of the responsibility Ellen felt.

"If this isn't just a bad thing, then I want to know more. What is it doing and why is it necessary. I need to know."

When Bertus saw Ellen's unyielding attitude, he had no choice but to give up.

"......Yes."

Then, you see someone else, not Ellen.

"I'd rather not."

Louise had no idea why Bertus was looking at her and saying that.

"And let me tell you something."

Bertus looks everyone in the face and says.

"I didn't kill Rowen."

"......what?"

Just when you think it's all over, something comes out of Bertus' mouth that turns the whole premise on its head.

"Believe it or not, there's nothing I can do about it."

It's only through a series of terrible coincidences that Ellen got here.

In the first place, the theft of the remains from the Crusader underground had nothing to do with the Empire.

"So who....... killed the priest?"

Ludwig's eyes widened at the sudden sound.

We've come this far in our pursuit of Rowen's death, but unless Bertus had something to do with it, this isn't over yet.

So who the hell was Rowen murdered by?

"I don't know."

Either they really don't know, or they're pretending not to.

No one would ever know the truth.

\* \* \*

"Calling an emergency meeting?

'Yes, the Five Popes say they have urgent business to discuss. They are gathered before the High Priest of Als.'

Elayon Bolton had now left the High Hall of the Crusaders and arrived at the High Hall of Alth.

Of the five main religions, only Als has a high temple in the ecliptic.

Since the Crusade is the center of power for the five major orders, the four popes, with the exception of the Pope of the Order of Alth, normally reside in the temples of their respective, more powerful orders.

Due to location and circumstance, it is customary for the Papal Conclave of the Five Great Houses to be held in the Great Hall of the Knights Templar. There is no better place for the symbolism and meaning.

However, the fact that the Five Great Patriarchs were holding an emergency meeting, and the location was the Great Hall of Alth, put Elayon Bolton in a pretty strange mood.

Why do you call yourself here?

But in the end, technically, the head of the Crusader Knights is subordinate to the popes.

It was Elion Bolton's duty to go where he was called.

Even so, you've got a lot on your plate.

I was also uncomfortable with the idea of not knowing what the popes were up to.

This was an emergency meeting, so there was no agenda and no attendants.

Although it had fallen from grace along with the Tuan Cult, the Daijiajie was still a formidable force to be reckoned with, and no passerby was quick to point fingers at the Daijiajie.

Elayon Bolton arrives at the Great Hall of Als alone and enters.

A conference room on the top floor of the former Great Hall of Als.

'I bequeathed people....... '.

As soon as he reached the upper levels, where there were no wandering priests or paladins, Elayon Bolton felt a chill down the back of his neck.

What we're talking about.

What's going on.

What if something happens?

After much deliberation, Elion Bolton opened the door to the top floor conference room, not so urgently, not so gracefully.

As in any conference room, there was a round table.

Unsurprisingly, the five popes are seated in the conference room. They stare at Elion Bolton as he appears.

There are five popes.

But Elion Bolton had forgotten to say yes to the popes, and his eyes were somewhere else.

In a room where there should have been only five popes, there was one more person.

Sitting in a chair, looking at himself, smiling, is Elion Bolton.

Elion Bolton, who is never fazed by anything, could not help but go white in the face.

"Elion Bolton."

"You are......!"

"Three years, maybe."

There, there was Reinhard, the devil himself.

Back in the days of human camouflage.

Reinhardt sat there impassively.

Reinhardt gestures to the chair in front of Elion Bolton.

"What are you doing? Sit down."

He sounded arrogant, like he owned the place.

\* \* \*

The Death Knight we created.

Chimeric Homunculus undead created by the Empire.

It was a similar direction from the beginning.

We needed to resupply our Death Knights, so we needed bodies.

But at that point, we didn't realize that the Empire was doing something similar.

It wasn't until I replenished my Death Knights in the Cemetery of Saints that I began to see what the Empire was doing.

I was concerned about that, just in case.

The Crusaders follow the case and inadvertently discover what the Empire is doing.

After Bertus told me what happened, I spoke with him briefly.

"We're already tracking it, we're being careful, but you never know what's going to happen.

Naturally, the Crusaders would want to investigate what had happened in their territory.

There was no reason to cover up or hide the site in the first place.

If they find out that I'm responsible for what happened there, so what.

But in a bizarre twist, events took a turn that might lead to the Empire's best-kept secret.

We're the ones who did it, but it's the Empire that gets caught.

Soon, my actions would have a weird butterfly effect, and the empire would fall apart.

But there was nothing I could do about it, so I decided to stay in the temple and see what happened.

And Archbishop Rowen is dead.

I didn't believe Ludwig's claim that the people in the refugee camp killed Rowen in the first place, any more than Ellen did.

Ludwig and the archbishop-level priest who was working to cleanse the city of the disease are dead.

There had to be something.

Unlike Ellen, who was obviously just beginning her investigation at that point, I knew most of the truth behind the story.

The death of Archbishop Rowen is likely no ordinary occurrence.

Naturally, the first place I went was to Bertus.

Through Sarkegar, we were able to meet up with them in a way that was scary to arrange.

Bertus already knew about this.

"No?

"Yeah, it's not us.

Bertus said the events at the temple were not the work of the Empire.

"You're right about the question of whether to handle it or not.

'......Troubled?

'It's the Inquisitor. The one.'

Of course, Bertus already knew something I didn't.

'I found out yesterday, too, that Ludwig was probably approached on purpose. He can't get into the Temple, so I think he's trying to do something about it....... I'm as puzzled as you are.'

Rowen was an Inquisitor, and naturally, he was investigating what had happened to the Crusaders.

He realizes that Temple has a connection to the missing body, though it's not quite the same thing, and he gets a hold of Ludwig's ID and deliberately approaches him.

Bertus was on top of it.

The Inquisitor, eager to get to the truth, tried to use Ludwig against him.

But suddenly it died.

Bertus was equally baffled by the situation.

I, too, was thinking that it was very likely the Empire that killed Rowen.

Given that Rowen was an Inquisitor, was pursuing a case, and had the Temple in mind, the Empire had every reason to kill him to silence him.

But the empire is not the culprit.

"I'm not sure why, but it could be a purge.

"......What? Purge?

It was a moot point.

"Reinhard, listen to me.

Bertus' story was long, but the gist of it was simple.

That the Five Great Houses may have different minds.

The popes of each denomination, to be precise.

'What....... bullshit......?'

When Bertus told me that, I couldn't help but freeze.

'Are they....... getting ready to take my side?

"Maybe.

Betrayal on Bertus' part.

To me, it's either move on or surrender.

"I don't know which side the dead priest was on, but it's happened and we can't stop the flow.

'.......'

"The Order and the Crusaders might split, there might be a civil war, and that would complicate things even more.

'Then what....... What should I do?

"We have to stop them. Until this whole Gate thing is over, I'm not letting anyone bleed over this.

That was something Bertus could not do. It was something only I could do.

"Do you know what you're talking about?

At my question, Bertus smiled bitterly.

"You never know.

'.......'

I couldn't say anything.

Episode 604.

We don't know when Ellen will get to the truth. But it was clear that Ellen was going to find out a lot more than she bargained for.

There's no stopping Ellen.

Something I did provoked the Crusaders, and someone digging into the case to investigate it got a lead.

And was killed.

Tracking down an incident without knowing anything is bound to take a long time.

The culprits are never caught, but Ellen is about to learn a very unpleasant truth.

We don't know what judgment Ellen would make in the face of that truth.

I can't get in Ellen's way.

So, I do what I have to do.

So now.

"Why....... are you here?"

I watched as the crusader leader shook with fear.

"Well, I didn't think I'd be sitting here either until a few days ago."

My first contact was with the Pope of the Order of Als.

At the convened meeting, I confirmed the support of the other four popes for my candidacy.

And finally.

Elayon Bolton, Crusader Knight Commander.

"I think we can all agree, even if it was my people who caused the Gate, I didn't want it to happen. You know that, don't you?"

"The five great and sublime popes have now recognized my intentions, and they have agreed to support me in the future, though they cannot do so openly....... So we'll negotiate behind the scenes, until the time is right."

"I wish you would have trusted me sooner, but it's sad that trust can only be earned after the fact, but what the heck, that was then, this is now."

"Okay, we're going to make this a solid, sticky, tight relationship."

"There will be no more division, no more infighting, no more eye-rolling, because you're tired, that sort of thing."

"Now trust me, your prophet, and empty your brains."

"You're the only one left, Crusader."

The look on Elayon Bolton's face as he listened to the story of how, unbeknownst to him, the leaders of the Order had already turned to the Devil's side.

He looked like he'd lost everything overnight.

"You know, if you refuse, it's going to tear the Grand Master and the Templars apart, and even within the Templars, it's going to tear them apart into factions that support the Pope and factions that support the Grand Master."

"Are you willing to gamble with the fate of humanity and the Order?"

"Or do you want to just come in here under me and pretend nothing happened?"

"You like that."

"Status quo."

I never thought I would have to make a threat like this.

Elion Bolton is not without veto power.

It's just that if you refuse, you won't die alone.

There will be a civil war, and a civil war is the end of humanity.

If you start screaming about how there's a demon in the ecliptic, you're going to cause chaos across the entire ecliptic, not just the Order.

If you come under me, you betray humanity.

But if you don't get under my skin, humanity may cease to exist.

He has to think about something he never thought about until he walked into the room.

In a short period of time, he will put a lot of things on the scale and put them down.

Elion Bolton is not a big fan of change.

But that's not technically the point.

If you don't like change, there's an underlying fear and reluctance to disrupt. Hence the status quo.

I want it.

But when you realize that everything is bound to change.

When you realize that it's impossible not to change.

"......No options."

They change more easily than anyone else in the world.

Elayon Bolton stares at me, his eyes burning with hatred for the five popes who handed everything over to him.

"What do you want, demon?"

"I told you, the status quo you like."

But once again, my ramblings raised eyebrows, not only at Elion Bolton, but also at the five popes.

"......what?"

"That's all you need to do."

I am here to stop the feud between the Crusader Knights and the Five Great Houses.

It's just that it eats them up.

The popes were preparing to join me, and the Crusader leader was uncomfortable with the move.

You will then need to raise one of your hands.

The Empire can't lift the hand of a Crusader Templar. It would cause a backlash from the popes.

But I can support the popes. The popes can override any pushback from the Crusaders.

"What, did you think I was going to come out and say I want to wipe out the human race, so kill them all, because that's not going to happen."

"......."

"Keep it this way. There's no need to set up a conflict in the empire. I'll be the liver or the gallbladder for those of you who want to be the liver and the gallbladder, so to speak."

All that talk of swallowing them up is just talk.

There is only one reason why the popes were willing to change, and only one reason why they really did.

They know I have no intention of turning against humanity. They know I'm not going to ask them to do anything crazy.

It's just taking advantage of me.

"So let's get this out of the way and get to the most important thing."

You can gain the cooperation of the Crusader Knights and the Five Great Houses. And if you want to rule, you can rule. But that is not possible right now.

And these serpentine old papists will treat me like the traitor of the century again when they decide I've outlived my usefulness and the Empire is stronger.

It's not exactly gross and disgusting.

It flips like the palm of your hand depending on the power dynamic.

If you're weak, you'll be ignored; if you're strong, you'll be ignored.

Right now, they don't really know what the empire is doing.

That's why I'm trying to take my side. The Devil himself and his forces believe they can erase humanity at any time.

And it's true.

Elion Bolton realized that the situation was irreversible, and he was faced with a situation where he had to think long and hard, but only short.

So I figured he should cooperate with me, no matter how he felt about it.

More importantly.

"Rowen, did you kill him?"

The real killer of Rowen.

I want to know it.

Was she purged, as Bertus said?

"No."

Elion Bolton shakes his head.

"I didn't kill him."

The Empire did not kill Rowen.

Bertus raised the possibility of a purge.

But the popes said they didn't do it.

"That's weird, even the popes here said they didn't do it, so unless you're the culprit. Who the hell killed Rowen?"

The leader of the Crusaders says he didn't do it.

"I tried to kill him, that's a fact."

The popes' expressions couldn't help but change.

"But I didn't kill Rowen, though I don't know about the other interrogators."

"Hmmm....... That means......."

There are a number of possibilities, but unless they're lying, this is the most likely one.

"No way, he's not dead?"

That's right, self-inflicted.

"That's right. The body was a fake with a face mask on."

Rowen is not dead.

\* \* \*

A fire has broken out on site.

That was weird.

The whole time, it bothered me.

That's overly conspicuous.

If it's a purge, it should be stealthy and all evidence should be destroyed.

But if Elion Bolton or the Popes had tried to purge Rowen, the fire should not have happened.

Fire draws too much attention to itself.

So if this is a purge, there shouldn't have been a fire.

But a fire broke out, and an unspecified number of people saw the temple on fire. So the looters came in droves.

And Ludwig saw it, and it reached Ellen, and now she's after the truth.

"Yeah....... I mean, it's almost like the fire was started in hopes that someone would find out that they were torturing civilians to death in the basement of the temple."

A fire breaks out, and civilians enter to loot the temple. The horrific sight of the basement goes unnoticed by the civilians, partly because no looters are crazy enough to go into the basement of a burning building, and partly because Elion Bolton is quick on the uptake.

But in the end, there was no stopping Ellen, even if she did see the basement.

It was an attention-grabbing incident in the first place.

It's not impossible that the Crusaders and Popes are lying right in front of me.

But it's very odd that they ended up forcing it into the spotlight.

And Rowen's body was fake in the first place.

Inquisitor Rowen is alive and well.

"Why were you keeping that a secret?"

The Pope of the Cult of Tuan asked, glaring at the leader of the Crusader Knights.

"You've never even hinted to me that the popes would make a deal like this if they had the chance."

The Pope of the Tuan Order, as well as the others, grew sullen at the mention of a subject who had betrayed mankind and had been labeled a demon.

"A new....... This is also a decision for the good of humanity......."

"Shut up."

I'm the one who said that, not Elion Bolton.

Disgusting assholes.

They've gotten under my skin, and it doesn't look good.

I don't want to clean up traffic.

I just want to get this over with and get back to eating Ellen's jerky.

"So it's true that you tried to kill Rowen, but I don't know the details, but you failed to do so?"

"Yeah."

In response, the Pope of the Order of Tuan glares at Elayon Bolton.

"Captain, why did you want to kill Archbishop Rowen in the first place?"

Even if Rowen didn't die in the end, we know that Elion Bolton tried and failed to kill her.

"I ordered them to stop all investigations, but they didn't listen."

"......."

At that, the popes all fell silent.

Of course, Elion Bolton knows what he's talking about.

If you mess with the empire, you'll be in trouble.

After returning to the ecliptic, Elayon Bolton would have updated Rowen, who would have been in charge of the case, on the progress of the investigation.

The empire is suspicious.

Elion Bolton's orders would have been simple. Dig no more.

"I think it's safe to say that digging for an empire at this time of year is not a very good idea....... I'm sure you'll agree."

The five popes looked uncomfortable, but that didn't stop them from directly refuting Elion Bolton's statement.

The popes think about joining me, but that doesn't mean they want to fight the Empire.

An incident in the basement of the Crusaders' Great War.

Tracking it down, Lowen realized that the Empire might be the culprit. So he approached Ludwig.

But when Elayon Bolton found out, he tried to stop Rowen, believing that messing with the Empire would destroy the entire Order.

But Rowen disobeyed the Crusader leader's orders.

Elayon Bolton had a plan to purge his men who would touch the powder keg, and he carried it out.

"Loyal as a dog, and then there's a case of obvious foul play and they won't let me investigate it, they even tried to purge me......."

He would have seen his men killed by the Crusaders, not any other faction, with his own eyes.

"If your eyes don't roll, that's a weird situation."

I could see Elion Bolton gritting his teeth as I spoke.

The other Inquisitors are almost certainly dead, and the paladins sent by Elayon Bolton for the purge are almost certainly dead to Rowen.

It's no wonder you feel betrayed by the Five Great Houses.

Rowen disguised one of the corpses as himself, set the temple on fire, and fled. By faking his death and fleeing, he bought himself some time.

I have no idea what you're going to do with all that extra time.

At the end of the day, Elion Bolton's behavior is at the center of this case.

But what if I were Elion Bolton?

The Empire had nothing to do with the theft of the Crusaders' underground remains, but they were powering the bodies of their fallen.

Just digging into the case creates friction with the empire.

It's dangerous enough to pry into the empire, and Rowen would have argued that he had no choice but to pry into this case.

In the end, Elayon Bolton was only half successful in his purge. He killed all of Rowen's men, but failed to kill Rowen himself.

Half of them failed, and Rowen disappeared, leaving only a fake corpse behind.

"Whatever happens next, it doesn't change the fact that it's my fault. I wasn't perfect."

The Crusader leader made what he thought was the best choice, but in the end he was unable to kill Rowen.

No one knows what kind of ripples it will cause.

"I don't know what Rowen is going to do, but we need....... Coincidentally, we need you the most."

What are you talking about.

Do you need me?

It wasn't Elion Bolton who answered.

"I don't know what the Devil thinks, but....... Rowen was a radical."

These were the words of the Pope of the Order of Tuan.

"Radicals?"

"Within the Cult, especially within the Tuan and Als, there are....... there are many such priests."

"What kind of priest is that?"

"Those who believe in the devil as a prophet."

"......?"

What is he saying?

"There are quite a few people who believe that the devil is the true prophet."

What the heck does that mean?

"It's not just the two denominations."

These were the words of the Pope of the Order of the Ritter.

"On that day, the paladins and priests who saw you in the temple....... You know they were no small number."

Even Elion Bolton said it.

"They were high-ranking paladins and priests of the Order, and Rowen was among them."

I didn't want a gate situation.

The priests I saw explaining how to deal with the gate situation because it was too late.

Only high-ranking priests and paladins with proven divine powers and skills could be there in the first place.

The future of the church saw me as I was then.

That means they know as well as I do that I didn't really want a gate situation.

"Do you realize now that I didn't make this choice just to save face?"

While lower-level priests and paladins may not know, those at the highest levels of the Church are bound to know the truth of the Gate situation to some degree.

Therefore, you must be perceiving yourself differently than the world perceives you.

"Archbishop Rowen, among others, has been quite supportive of you."

The upper echelons of the Five Great Houses were being filled with my followers.

Psychologically, there were more and more people supporting me than the empire.

If the popes are going to be on my side, it's not just their judgment.

It was inevitable: public opinion.

Episode 605.

I've gotten used to people who don't know me hating me, hating me. I thought it was inevitable.

But this time it's the opposite.

People who didn't know me were worshipping and loving me. Even within the Order of the Five Great Houses.

Just as Ellen is hailed as a warrior, they see me as the rightful champion of Als and Tuan, even if I don't have the world's recognition.

Quite a few people have seen me make my closing arguments.

Those who belonged to the Five Great Houses were high-ranking clerics and paladins of the Order, and they knew that the Gate was caused by my men, but apart from that, they knew that I did not wish it.

It was inevitable, then, that I would develop some supporters within the church.

Rowen was a radical among them.

In the first place, if there are radicals, there are moderates.

If you're a moderate who believes the devil had his reasons.

The radical is the one who says the devil is absolutely right.

That's assuming they both support me in the first place.

Does that mean that at some point, the majority of the higher-ups support me?

The popes didn't betray humanity, they just went with the flow?

Suffice it to say that even Elion Bolton, who was busy on the battlefield, is no stranger to this.

The Five Great Houses had been waiting for me to show up, and they had been my de facto supporters for some time.

"The radicals' claim that....... what?"

"It's not you, it's the empire and humanity that caused all this."

Those who didn't believe in me.

Is the argument that I'm responsible for all the people who didn't trust me, assuming I'm not at fault?

"Some of them, they want the empire to collapse."

In the end, it's the same thing.

Hold someone accountable.

It's just that it's not me.

Rowen was a believer in me.

And he was an empire-hater.

He tried to investigate the Empire's corruption, but the Crusaders stopped him and even tried to kill him.

"Rowen would have hated me, beyond the Empire, for not allowing him to reveal his corruption......."

Fire.

I was going to show the spectacle to someone.

I wanted an unspecified number of people to see it.

"You must now hate and distrust me and the Church."

Radicals are those who believe that empire is not only responsible, but humanity is also responsible.

That would mean that the Five Great Houses of God could never be clean. There would have been paladins, priests, and popes in their place.

What if we told you that the temples of the ill-regarded Tuan Cult were capturing, killing, and torturing civilians?

Otherwise, the abomination would have gone mad.

And the empire wouldn't be sleeping.

Without people, there would be no empire, and the empire would have to fall to the sword of the Five Great Houses.

"If we almost had a civil war in the ecliptic....... Is that too much of a stretch?"

At my words, Elion Bolton nods.

"Not necessarily, but it would have been a possibility."

From the beginning, Rowen was an Imperial Responsibilityist who went beyond investigating the case and basically held the Empire responsible for everything.

Elion Bolton would have seen Rowen as dangerous and would have wanted to eliminate him. Rowen would have wanted to bring down the empire if he had the chance.

As such, it was probably in the Crusader leader's best interest to purge Rowen. Left unchecked, the friction between the Order and the Empire could have turned into real bloodshed. Rowen was the kind of person who would rather detonate a bomb than avoid it, so it's not hard to see why Elayon Bolton's decision made sense.

If you leave Rowen alone, you do something dangerous.

So the fact that he tried and failed to do so would have made Rowen even more dangerous.

It's strange to hope that Rowen will stay sane after the Order he's been loyal to his entire life has tried to take his head.

That's what Elion Bolton means when he says you need me.

Rowen considers me a prophet, which means that when I meet with him, everything is solved.

We need to find Rowen.

Before you do something I don't want you to do, in the name of doing it for me.

\* \* \*

Bertus led Ellen and the others to the underground laboratories of the Temple College of Magic.

It was a horrible sight.

Everyone watched what was happening underground.

Reanimated corpse, reanimating corpse.

Where they are now, what they're doing, and how they're going to be electrified.

Ellen, Ludwig, Louise, and Heinrich could all see what the demon had seen the other day.

Everyone was speechless.

Not just warriors, but heroes from the past who are long dead.

Saw it.

"Like I said, I have no intention of scrapping this plan, no matter what you guys say."

Bertus eventually told me everything, and then nailed me to the wall that he was going to do what he said he was going to do.

"So if someone dies in the future, you're going to keep bringing them back this way?"

Ellen asks, and Bertus nods.

That means a lot of things.

Even if Ellen dies.

This means that if Saviolin Tana dies, we will bring her back to life and send her into battle.

This shouldn't be happening.

But at the end of the day, what is a corpse worth other than its weight in gold?

If you can use something like that, you should, right?

"Ashardo....... This is how you brought him back?"

Looks nothing like a living person.

If you can come back to life and speak and remember the same way you did when you were alive, then you're really alive.

At Ludwig's question, Bertus shook his head.

"Failed."

"You can't really bring back....... never happened......?"

"Yeah."

This is a half-hearted resurrection.

It can't be about electrification, it's about making weapons.

Delphine can't even find the body, so she can't even try.

What if you could really bring the dead back to life, not just in one piece, but with their memories intact.

A half-hearted resurrection, the mere fact that it was even halfway successful, leads to false hope.

Louis Ankton, Anna De Guerna, and Christina.

These three were the core of the study.

Ludwig says still.

"I want to see it."

"You better not look at ......."

As the Dettomorian said, find the ashram and you will know everything.

But we haven't reached Asher yet.

"If it failed, how did it fail......."

I have yet to see it in its full glory.

"I think you should see......."

Bertus looked at Ellen and Heinrich, who seemed to be of the same mind as Ludwig, and sighed deeply.

\* \* \*

Not everyone needs to be away as much as they did when the devil came, so all four of them stayed and watched the wizards go about their business.

You can't tell if they're an alchemist or a warlock by their outfit.

But they were doing what they had to do with a straight face.

If one evil wizard builds a dungeon and does horrible experiments in it, then if you do this on a national scale, you have hundreds of wizards doing horrible things.

An isolated area in an underground lab.

There, they were able to put a face to a name.

Christina.

Anna De Guerna.

Louis Ankton.

"You guys....... how......?"

Louis Ancton froze in his tracks at the sudden arrival of the Emperor, and Christina and Anna were equally surprised.

But I shouldn't have been surprised to see it in an unexpected place.

There was only one port in the quarantine zone.

"Is this Ashar......?"

Ludwig was looking at something in that port with a frozen expression.

The other bodies had been returned to life as if they were taxidermy, but with what could only be called a grotesque mass of flesh.

Ellen paled, Heinrich did the same, and Louise looked away with her mouth covered.

"What is this....... What is this....... This can't be Ashur. This is....... What did this do? What......."

Anna and Christina are both a bit taken aback by the sudden appearance of these people.

I realized that Bertus had granted me access, and I realized what was going on.

She always had an upbeat attitude.

But as if it were all a mask, inside the lab, he shook his head stoically.

"It just hasn't worked yet."

"What......?"

"There are still a lot of things we can try. I was able to talk a while ago. I was just doing what I was told, but apparently....... I could."

Anna and Louis were biting their lips at Christina's attitude.

I tried to revive my friend.

But it failed.

However, there are those who refuse to admit failure.

Something that's inside a port, but doesn't look like anything more than a trace of something.

Everyone sees it and calls it a failure, but there are those who still see the possibilities.

"Nothing is impossible."

It was possible to raise the dead halfway.

She asked why it was impossible to bring it back to life completely, and she believed she could do it.

Flimsy possibilities lead people to despair and false hope.

She lost her cool, mesmerized by the possibilities.

"If you're going to talk about failure, get out."

Inside the lab, Christina was a completely different person than she was outside. Faced with the possibility that she might be able to reverse her friend's death, she continued to touch Ashir's body.

After that failed, I tried a different approach, once again.

If that fails, another way.

Next.

You try dozens and dozens of times, thinking that one day you'll bring your dead friend back to life.

The result of all those attempts was this bizarre, chimerical mass.

Still, she had no intention of giving up.

Anna and Louis had already accepted failure, but Christina had not.

Ellen stares at the port with a stony expression.

It's an impossible task, but let's say you succeed.

Suppose you could bring the dead back to life.

If so, is there a place in the world for such a thing?

Ellen couldn't judge until then.

However.

I could tell that Christina, who had seemed fine in the garrison, had been broken long ago.

If you find yourself dead before the gate crisis is over, you may find yourself like this.

That you can fight even when you're dead.

That you can be a force for good, even after you've paid for your sins in death.

Should we be grateful for that, or despair?

But I never wanted to be a pile of flesh that didn't help anyone.

Ellen couldn't bear to see Christina in the midst of this horrible scene, desperately searching for hope where none existed.

"This is....... This is......."

There's something wrong with that.

Maybe I shouldn't be doing this.

In the end, there is only pain and despair for the living and the dead.

Already, Ellen could tell just by looking at her that Anna and Louis were reluctantly there, not to help with the research, but to shut Christina up.

Bertus tried to stop her, but he knew he couldn't.

It should stop.

It's only going to get crazier.

Find Ashur.

We find Ashur, but it's only a trail.

"Stop....... This is......."

Ellen says what everyone in the room wants to say.

Ellen pauses for a moment, and when she finally gets the words out, Christina turns and stares at her.

"Why?"

When Christina asks her to explain, Ellen stares at her.

"You know it won't work....... It's only going to make it harder on you......."

Ellen could already see the despair in Christina's abysmal, dark eyes.

This is not the look in the eyes of someone who is truly looking for hope.

This is not the look of someone who actually believes it's possible.

I couldn't resist, just in case.

You can't have the mechanical look of someone who is just hanging on because it's all they can do.

Even if it succeeds.

If you speak like Asher, and have Asher's memories, can you really say that you're alive?

But if you fumble with the memory, if you can say.

That's when it becomes something you really shouldn't do.

She was about to do just that.

Everyone is silent, but they agree with Ellen.

The fact that Anna and Louis, who must have been watching the whole time, were shaking their heads in sadness was proof enough.

You want her to stop, but you can't tell her to stop, so you're reluctantly helping her.

That stubbornness was destroying Christina and the other two in real time.

At Ellen's words that it's time to stop, Christina's abysmally deep eyes darken even more.

"You."

"This one here."

"Even if it was Reinhardt."

"Are you going to say that?"

On that note.

"......what?"

The mere mention of the name froze the air.

Episode 606.

No one would bring up the name Reinhardt in Ellen's presence, even if they were talking about demons.

Because everyone knows that's Ellen's backstory.

Just now, she crossed a taboo.

If it were Reinhardt and not Ashur who died, would you not try to bring him back, as I did?

From the look on his face as he said it.

I could tell from the look in her eyes that she already hated Ellen.

Nothing is hidden anymore in this horrible laboratory.

Malice.

Hate.

Hate.

Everything you've been hiding is revealed.

"What's that, and why?"

The corner of Christina's mouth twitches at Ellen's comment.

"You and Reinhardt had a special relationship."

"......."

"That's what I'm thinking right now. Isn't that right?"

Ellen's eyes widened, and everyone held their breath.

Everyone in Royal Class knows that it pains Ellen to even hear the name, much less to be told that she'll have to fight the Devil someday.

No one brought it up in front of Ellen and directly provoked her.

It was the first time she'd ever said that directly.

Things that had been hanging on by a thread were falling apart.

In a disgusting, horrifying, and terrifying sight.

The boundaries of truth that we've been pretending not to know collapse.

"Christina, calm down."

A lesser Bertus approached Christina, but she shook her head.

"Me, I just heard about that the other day."

Christina grits her teeth and glares at Ellen.

"All of this because of just a few people."

"......."

"Surely, it wasn't the devil."

"......."

"Do you have anything to say about that?"

Christina glares at Ellen as if demanding an answer.

Someone you already know.

But there are still people who don't know.

What she doesn't realize is that she has to lie to them.

"No ......."

"Really?"

There is someone in this room who doesn't know the truth.

We don't know how she got there or what she was told.

Ellen was pretty sure she didn't want more people to know the story.

"You're so shameless......."

"Enough."

Christina tries to lunge, but Bertus, who has seen better, gets between them.

"Ellen, I'm sure you've seen what you want to see, so why don't you go home first."

"......."

Ellen simply kept her mouth shut.

"Lord Tana, please fetch Ellen."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Everyone was confused by the sudden nervousness and unintelligible conversations.

"Christina, I need to talk to you for a minute."

At Bertus's seemingly murderous words, Christina smiled and nodded.

"Good."

Rather, they seemed to be waiting for the words to come out.

\* \* \*

Ellen was led out of the College of Magic by the hand of Savior Tana.

So far, the only people Ellen has been able to talk to about Reinhardt have been people who at least know the truth.

It was just Charlotte, or Bertus, or Tana the Violin.

But we didn't bring it up because it was painful for us to even talk about it.

But today, out of the blue, Christina's name came up in conversation.

And he gave off the nuance of knowing about everything.

Bertus wouldn't tell her the truth if he didn't want her to know it. So how did Christina find out about it?

If Christina knows, do Louis Ankton and Anna know the truth?

And whether being silent was the right choice.

It didn't take long to realize that Louise von Schwarz had a straight heart.

But learning the truth about the Gate situation is another matter entirely.

It's not just hypocrisy to cover one's own sins, it's an issue that, if misrepresented, could divide the entire human race.

Therefore, I felt it was the right decision to remain silent.

An unknown, dark emotion welled up inside me, but I knew it would be a mistake to respond to Christina's words.

They were trying to raise the dead, and they were using the dead.

That would be a sin.

But without the Gate debacle, there would have been no sin.

If so, you've committed the greatest sin of all: you are the cause of all sin.

Who are we to say something is bad, and who are we to say someone is wrong for doing something wrong?

It's no wonder she's suddenly having such a reaction.

To Christina, who is probably thinking that if it weren't for you, Ashar wouldn't be dead.

Ashur is dead, he can't be brought back, stop it.

Hearing that would have made me furious.

But that's not what I meant.

He didn't mean sin no more.

The implication was that it was bothering you, it was destroying you, and you shouldn't do it.

I didn't say it to reprimand her, I said it because I didn't want her to get hurt anymore.

But I know she couldn't help but get angry when she heard it.

Ellen gritted her teeth and was forced to follow Tana back to her dorm.

I didn't know what I needed to know, and I didn't know what I shouldn't have known.

\* \* \*

Ellen was led out of the lab by Savior Tana.

Bertus said something that sounded like he knew, and then he went off somewhere to talk to Christina.

So even in the lab, in the quarantined area, there were only Ludwig, Heinrich, and Louise. And Louis and Anna remained.

Break room in a quarantine lab.

The five sat in uncomfortable silence, unable to speak.

No one had anything to say about it.

Or those who have seen something they didn't want anyone to see.

They saw something they shouldn't have, and for their own reasons, they were too afraid to say anything.

But Louise is the one who's in the deepest trouble.

She was helping because she realized that pursuing Rowen's death could be dangerous for Ellen.

Rowen's death had nothing to do with the Empire, according to the Emperor, but he had learned a secret of the Empire that he was not supposed to know.

Louise's confusion goes beyond the shock and horror she feels at this sight.

The fact that he was able to 'see' it.

Louise couldn't understand it now.

Though nominally an empire, the Schwarzes have always wanted to surpass the Empire.

Louise knows that the royal family has had such aspirations for generations, and she knows that the Empire knows about them, and she knows that the Empire has kept the Schwarzes in check for many years.

Now is the time to confront the crisis of humanity, and I have no intention of publicizing the injustice and corruption of the Empire as I have done in the past.

But when all is said and done, it's the weakness of the empire.

Of course, the emperor may have been so confident in the military power he was gaining from this that he allowed Ruiz to watch.

But do we really need to show this weakness?

It would have been better not to show it.

The Emperor did not seem to feel any discomfort about Louise seeing this.

It's weird that you were able to get into the temple in the first place.

If he were the emperor, he would not have allowed Louise to enter the temple in the first place. He would have had plenty of reasons to deny her access.

"Is it okay for me to see this?

We don't know the emperor's intentions.

And what Christina just said.

I couldn't figure out what she meant by her accusatory remarks.

I couldn't help but think of Heinrich's words to the devil.

There's something people don't realize about the Gate debacle.

The devil didn't want Gate to happen either.

It is inevitable that the Emperor, Ellen, and Christina know about the truth.

As confused as Louise was, everyone else was feeling their own confusion.

"If Christina's right, can we save Ashur from....... alive?"

Ludwig's cautious question was directed at the silent Anna and Louis.

"......."

"......."

Their silence and facial expressions spoke volumes. Christina is trying to do the impossible.

"It involves black magic. Magic that uses unholy mana as its source....... It cannot be a power for the living......."

Anna added cautiously.

"Stronger than when they were alive, we can restore them that way, but....... I'll never be able to make you truly alive......."

Anna, whose understanding of the dark arts is no match for Christina's, already knew that Christina would not be able to reach the ending she wanted.

Knowing that, no one can say they shouldn't have stopped her. I don't need to tell you that, because it's clear enough that they were trying to stop her.

"Stronger...... than when you were alive?"

At Ludwig's questioning look, Louis nodded. Through clenched teeth, Louis Ankton opens his mouth with the expression of a bowed headed sinner.

"...... may look alive, but it's not."

"Just like the golem, just like the titan....... There's no difference."

"It's a reconstruction of a point in time when you were physically complete. You're not actually alive, so....... that you can extend a little further."

Heinrich asks as Louis speaks.

"Extend......?"

"You do realize that if you enchant before the enchantment circuitry is fully in place, the body can't handle the load and breaks down."

"I don't know if it should be me, but......."

Heinrich says, and looks at Ludwig.

"Yes. It's incredibly....... painful."

Ludwig remembered the pain vividly, as he spent several days in bed after awakening to his enchantment.

"Because pain doesn't matter to the dead."

"ah......."

The subjects feel no pain.

So beyond restoring your physical body, you can strengthen the elements necessary to manifest your power, including your magic circuits.

You will be able to transcend the limits of your body, the limits of your life.

In other words, it's a transmutation. You'll be able to wield a level of power in death that you weren't able to wield in life.

It can grant you powers that the living would not be able to withstand. It's a harsh statement, but in the end, it's not much different than dealing with objects. It's about making a weapon that only needs to be powerful more powerful.

They're not dead, they're just stronger.

Such an army was being formed.

"Do we really need a corpse?"

Hearing alone is great magic, beyond perfection, except that it involves a corpse.

Perfect, except for the moral issue of using a corpse.

"I mean, we could do that, like building a homunculus, but....... Right now, that's not the way......."

"You mean you can't power up in a short period of time."

"Yes......."

The homunculus experiment itself was a classic taboo, so I'm not saying it's without moral issues.

There are countless people who would sell their souls to the devil to save the world if they could, in order to get through their miserable days.

So maybe it's inevitable.

There are those who have sold their souls to the devil.

And when he sees that they have sold their souls to the devil, he is silent.

The Emperor said he had no intention of stopping it, and Louise knew she couldn't let him.

The emperor knows he can't stop this with his eyes, so he doesn't think it's a problem for him to watch.

I still didn't know the answer.

While those uncomfortable and sinful questions were being asked.

"Dying makes you stronger......."

Ludwig stares down at the table, muttering to himself.

Anna, Heinrich, and Louise could not help but shudder at the suddenness of his words.

"Don't think about it."

Heinrich said to Ludwig, frowning.

Everyone knows that Ludwig still wants to fight.

So Ludwig's words were bound to spark everyone's ominous imagination.

Raising the dead.

Even better, you'll be stronger than before.

Ludwig mumbles to himself.

"Right now, I'm useless."

It was no secret that Ludwig was beating himself up beyond belief.

"There was nothing I could have done. The people who killed the priest, even though they were never caught....... I had no part in it coming to this. Stupid, there was something I could do, and I was content with that."

Rowen is dead. And we still haven't caught the killer.

But Ludwig hasn't done anything to get this far; he's just followed Ellen around.

In the first place, Rowen was not the good guy Ludwig thought he was, but a man who captured, killed, and tortured civilians.

I was being used by Rowen and didn't even realize I was being used.

There were definitely some weird moments, but I didn't doubt it.

I just knew I was doing something to help make the world a better place.

Eventually, I saw something, even if it wasn't related to Rowen's death.

Magic to bring the dead back to life. Magic that makes you stronger than you were in life.

This shouldn't exist in the world.

But Ludwig can't help but realize that this is necessary, that it will end the war faster.

Useless.

But Ludwig laughs bitterly as he says it.

"It's okay. I don't want that. I don't want to fight to the death. I don't want to make that choice. I know that no one....... I know it won't make anyone happy, just....... because I feel helpless......."

That's what he says, but we all know he'd rather have it that way.

There are those who will grieve and despair when you die. You've already seen Christina.

I don't want to go out as a corpse because I want to be useful to someone, or because I want to go back into battle.

As long as there are people who care about him, Ludwig doesn't want that.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief as Ludwig, who had made everyone's day, briefly, a little worse for wear.

"......says something weird."

"Sorry......."

Heinrich even considered that Ludwig might suddenly be found somewhere, having taken his own life.

And if Ludwig does, it's up to Anna, Louis, and Christina to bring him back to life.

Trying to bring them back for real, like you did with Ashur, may end up breaking your friends even more.

Ludwig had no intention of doing or asking for such a crazy thing. It was just a possibility that popped into his head.

But even if Ludwig said he had no intention of doing so, he couldn't help but feel as uneasy as Heinrich did.

An almost obsessive need to be helpful to others.

I was beginning to realize that I had a twisted mind, one that didn't always look good.

Heinrich was a straight-A student.

Anna and Louis, seeing Ludwig up close, were even more terrified.

Ludwig is a nice guy, and he cares about others, but he can also be a jerk, literally.

He doesn't say he'd fight to the death right now, but there's no telling how Ludwig's thoughts might change in the future.

And we're all on the same page when it comes to not wanting to lose any more friends.

Louis Ankton stares at Ludwig for a moment.

"......Ludwig."

"No, I really don't think about that, and don't worry about it......."

"I want to show you something."

Looking at Louis, who had a determined look on his face, Anna nodded, knowing what she was talking about.

"What do you mean you want to show me?"

Ludwig couldn't believe what he was about to witness.

"This is where we....... to bring Ashur back to life."

It's the deep end of the underground lab.

Louis led off by saying that the three of them are doing something different than other researchers, and that something different doesn't necessarily involve bringing people back to life.

Episode 607.

Most of the lab was working on creating an army.

However, the project is well underway and on track, with completed subjects in full operation.

She was looking for a way to truly bring people back to life.

But that's not all that Louis, Anna, and Christina are focusing on.

I was doing all the things that constitute the next phase, application, and deepening of a project.

Other labs in the quarantine area.

Ludwig, Heinrich, and Louise, nervous that they might be in for another shocking sight, saw something completely unexpected.

It's not a brutal sight, it's not a horrible sight.

"It's a rabbit......?"

"Yes, a rabbit."

Anna nodded at Heinrich's words.

It's literally a rabbit.

A rabbit in a pretty big cage.

There were five cute rabbits in a cage.

They are far too cuddly to be in this place of horrific experiments.

I watched in fascination as the rabbits hopped around in their fairly spacious cage.

So what's the point?

Obviously, he doesn't mean let's watch it together because it's cute.

"Wait....... That's weird."

But as Louise watched the rabbits, she noticed something strange.

There's something a little odd about these seemingly healthy bunnies.

Something is subtle.

"Slightly, like I'm getting a leg up......."

I couldn't help but feel like something was limping along.

"By the way......."

Ludwig doesn't have a bad eye, so when Louise said that, he couldn't help but notice that the rabbits were a bit odd.

"Different lengths."

Louise noticed the length of the rabbits' legs, and that not all of them had balanced front or back feet.

"That's right."

Louis Ankton nods.

"It's a transplanted leg from another object."

Ludwig's eyes widen at that.

"Also, none of those rabbits have ever died."

This time it was Anna's words.

"It's an experiment with a living object."

We're already up to three this week on this project.

Black magic for the undead that animate the dead.

And the homunculus.

Louise mumbles to herself.

"Chimera."

"Yes. Right."

Plus, a chimera.

A branch of magic that synthesizes the best qualities of living things to create the ultimate creature. It is forbidden because it is often used in horrible ways, but it doesn't have to be.

All magic is not about what it is, it's about how you use it.

Transplants a limb from another object.

Everyone in this room knows what that means.

The missing leg.

Or, a missing arm.

You can reverse those things.

"Ludwig....... This is the most basic of chimera experiments."

Transplanting a limb is basic compared to replacing a head or an organ.

The fact that they were dabbling in sake was top secret, so even though they had a way to give Ludwig his missing arm back, they couldn't tell him.

But now that Ludwig has entered the lab and seen everything, they don't have to hide anything from him.

Rather, having learned the secret, he was able to do for Ludwig what he hadn't been able to do for himself.

"I see......."

Chimeric magic can also be developed into limb transplants for those who have lost limbs in war.

Bringing someone back to life is next to impossible.

But giving someone a missing limb is something that can be done.

\* \* \*

They weren't just raising animals in a lab for the heck of it; they were experimenting to see if there was a way to give Ludwig his missing limbs back.

That was easier than creating an army of the undead.

Ludwig couldn't help but be excited at the prospect of regaining his lost arm.

This doesn't just benefit Ludwig. Just as there are countless people who have died in wars, there are countless others who have been injured.

It is not beyond the realm of possibility that they will be able to regain their lost bodies once all of this is finalized and post-war rehabilitation begins. However, this will only be possible after a better understanding of chimeric magic has been achieved.

Depending on how the chimera is used, it could be beneficial to someone. In the end, power is only as good as the hands that wield it.

But sobriety wasn't the only thing he didn't say when he could have given Ludwig his missing arm back.

"It's going to be painful."

"That's fine."

I'd take the pain for the chance to get my arm back.

For that alone, Ludwig was ready for anything.

"Ludwig, it's not just sick, it could be dead."

"...... Is that it?"

"A chimera is not a regeneration, it's a graft, you're implanting a body part that wasn't yours in the first place, you might reject it, you might go into shock."

Louis Ankton looks at the rabbits in the cage.

Ludwig couldn't help but notice that only the successful ones were alive, not the unsuccessful ones.

"The way is easy, but the endurance is on you, and I can't do anything about that."

Ludwig was afraid you would go to extreme measures. If you can afford it, I can give you back the arm you lost in the Chimera procedure.

"I'll do it."

Ludwig nods with a stony expression.

I wasn't going to hesitate because I already knew.

"It's not that we're stuck as we are, but if we can do something more....... why shouldn't we?"

Reached this week.

So Ludwig could see new possibilities.

"Besides, my talent is physical strength."

He says he's confident he won't die because his only advantage is that he's strong.

Ludwig nods with a determined look on his face.

Louise looks at Ludwig and the others as they do so.

The idea of applying chimeric research to make limb transplantation possible is shocking but worthwhile.

And one who is not here, whom the emperor has taken away to talk to.

This lab is the most important area of the house.

So it's clear that the three Temple sophomores are key players in this research.

There are still unresolved issues and mysteries.

But it was clear that what was going on in this lab was more than just horrific and brutal, it was magic far too powerful.

The base is Black Magic.

It's a combination of research on homunculi and chimeras.

And then limb transplants with chimeras.

'These kids....... How in the world can they do so much?

It's not a single field of magic, it's a complex field of magic.

And these three are not just research assistants, they're key players by all appearances.

There is an absolute time limit.

Why are these kids, who are barely out of their twenties, able to do and accomplish so much?

Louise couldn't finish the question, which had a different direction.

Also, it's a port, not a replay.

'The arm to be transplanted is.......'

Probably not from a living person.

Louise's thoughts kept returning to Dettomorian's words.

Said the sullen boy.

If you keep pursuing this, you'll end up killing Ludwig.

That phrase stuck in my head.

\* \* \*

As you can tell, I'm a numbers guy.

Numbers can tell you a lot of things, assuming you can read them, so you spend a long time learning how to figure out what they mean, and that's really all there is to it.

By the way.

These days, it's easy to see numbers even if you don't know them.

You know.

These days, that number is, well, shrinking.

A few regular soldiers this time, a few enchanted superhumans this time, a few master classes. A few wizards. A few paladins. A few from somewhere in the refugee camp.

Dead.

How many cities are in a country, or a country, or a country, or how much food is left, or a supply route.

Destroyed.

You'll see numbers like this.

Don't bother reading the dwindling numbers.

Things are getting worse.

If it was this bad yesterday, it's even worse today.

It doesn't really change much, other than knowing more specifically what went wrong.

If there's a number that gets happier as it diminishes, it's the number of warp gates left, although thankfully that's now down to a countable number.

Things were going from bad to worse.

I suppose it could get worse, but that's not going to happen unless humanity disappears altogether.

The Gate spits out an infinite number of monsters, and there is a limit to the humanity that survives.

What happens when no one can fight anymore.

Then it really, really can't get any worse, can it?

Not every night, because I have plenty of wizards around me who can force sleep that doesn't come.

Anyway.

Such, a number.

Combat power.

People who can fight.

People who can still take up arms.

Their absolute numbers are dwindling, and they have absolutely no resources, let alone time, to grow.

Just like that, the number is gone.

Dead people.

Dead soldiers.

Dead knights, wizards.

When you guys suggested that we could quantify those missing numbers and put them back on the list in my documentation as power, I had a lot to think about.

Of course.

It wasn't that I was struggling with the idea that I shouldn't do that.

No, I didn't do it at all, I think I did it very briefly, just a little bit.

Why I thought about it so much.

That would be nice.

I don't think I could ask for much more.

Does that work?

If it does.

What's next?

Okay, then.

I was troubled by what happened next.

Let's say we're done.

Let's say the gate debacle is over.

What happens then.

I thought about it, but I didn't know.

So I gave up trying to figure it out.

First, let's see if it works or not. So, when I saw your output, I had that question.

A more fundamental question.

Things like this.

In such a short time.

Just like that.

Can we do it?

You see, Adelia didn't build Titan alone. Just like you're a genius. You see, Adelia didn't build Titan by herself, just like you are a genius.

That, in turn, required the Duchy of Saint-Thuan, which had the most concentrated technology for golems.

In the first place, the Titan wouldn't have been built without the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan, the owner of the duchy. Would it have been possible for Adelia to design the Titan on her own?

It might have been possible, but it would have taken quite a bit of time, and Adelia's self-deprecating modesty told her it would take more than a decade, though anyone listening might say that's too short.

Now.

By the way.

I've done some pretty bad things, had some pretty mean thoughts, and done some pretty cringe-worthy things.

The Empire doesn't invest in black magic, and as you probably already know, we don't dabble in evil powers.

I knew it was human nature, and my nature, to reach for the silver bullet when backed into a corner in a very specific situation like this one.

In other words, your knowledge of the Empire hasn't helped you much.

Would it take not one, but three Adelia-level geniuses to do that?

Yeah, maybe.

A while back, I had a brief conversation with someone who knows about this issue.

They were worried that they had gotten into bed with some dangerous people.

I said.

'To the best of my knowledge' 'I' have not joined hands with them.

I don't know if they understood me or not.

I didn't catch it, and it's certainly possible that someone else did, but I can't say for sure.

By the way.

Now that I've heard what you just said,.......

It knew something I didn't.

Where you heard it.

I don't know how you know that.

I'm pretty good at keeping people in, though, so there's no way it could have leaked out of my end.

Then I'm guessing you learned about it somewhere else, because that cuts down on the candidates.

So, as it turns out, I was lying back then.

Christina.

Let me ask you a question.

Emperor.

"It looks like you, or at least the three of you, are in cahoots with the Black Order, not me."

Bertus de Gradias asks, looking at Christina.

"Right?"

Christina looked at Bertus and nodded.

"Yeah. Right."

"Is it just you, or does that include the other two who aren't here?"

At Bertus' words, Christina shrugs.

"Well, what do you think?"

Bertus is silent, seeing the look on his face.

Christina may have been the only one working with Order, and it's unclear if the other two knew.

But Bertus is sure the other two know.

Bertus nodded, as if accepting the truth he had suspected.

She's been in contact with the Black Order, and through some means has recently learned the truth.

Her rapidly changing attitude toward Ellen is evidence of this.

"Yeah....... Anyway, the research is complete, and we have enough materials and blueprints that the Empire can maintain the project without you."

Bertus says, and crosses his arms.

"You know those stories, like throwing away your commitment, throwing away the hounds because the hunt is over, that sort of thing."

"......."

The Titan was created by combining the knowledge of the Duchy of St. Thuan with the genius of Adelia.

The Homunculus Undead were also created by combining the knowledge of the Black Order with the genius of these three.

Neither the former nor the latter can be duplicated if the blueprint is already complete. That's a different discipline than general magic.

So the blueprint is complete.

No more Christina, no more Black Order.

"By the way."

But Bertus, who spoke the words himself, narrows his brow.

"You guys aren't stupid, it's not like you didn't see that coming."

If Christina and the others have proposed and carried out this work entirely for the good of the Empire, for the good of humanity, then there is no need for a purge. They are mages who have accomplished great things, even if they cannot be seen by the world.

However, it gets complicated when there are black orders involved.

Their intentions are unknown, hence the need for a purge.

There's no way the Black Order didn't know that, and there's no way Christina and the others didn't know that.

"There must be some kind of safeguard."

I wouldn't have done this without having something in place just in case.

"I know."

Christina looks at Bertus and smiles.

It was a smile of unearthly anger, hatred, and malice.

Even if you know the truth about Gate, very few people will understand it in the end.

There are those who hate everyone.

Even if it wasn't their intention, there's no reason to forgive them.

If someone accidentally pushes a button that will end the world, why should he be absolved of his sins.

It wasn't even a mistake.

The truth is, it doesn't matter.

It's just that you've gone from one person to several.

Just because they are sad beings, where is the reason and justification that they should not be punished?

If someone asks you why people who have done things that are hard to say are wrong should die.

What will they say when they are asked why did the innocent, who did nothing wrong, have to die?

In a world soaked with the blood and tears of the innocent, why shouldn't theirs be? Shouldn't their tears and blood be the first to go?

No one can say for sure.

We all know that death can't save anything.

It's fair to say that there's no reason to add death to death.

Who are we to say that the hearts of the broken and torn need to be heard?

"When you tried to kill us, saying you were obsolete, I was going to tell you that it was the Empire that was obsolete."

Christina's hatred and anger, contempt and murder.

I say with a vengeance for all of this.

"Maybe the emperor isn't doing it for nothing?"

"I thought you said you were thinking about it."

If this is possible, then

It wasn't a consideration of the morality of bringing the dead back to life.

"I'm putting an army in someone else's hands that I can't control, that I can't defeat, that I don't have to think about."

"......Do you even know what a safeguard is?"

Bertus smirked at Christina's slightly surprised reaction.

"What's a safeguard but control?"

"That's right."

The moment the army was formed and completed, Bertus knew it could not belong to the emperor.

It's made with unknown technology. Bertus already knew he couldn't even control it.

I knew it, and I got caught.

You've been caught.

Already faced with the success of his first experiment, Bertus envisioned what would happen when he completed the project.

The gate debacle will be over.

The sacrifice will be small.

Eventually, there will come a time when you'll have to pay another price.

From the moment you make the decision to create that army, you realize that you are not the master of your empire.

I knew.

The project itself was a success.

But Christina is trying to bring the dead Ashur back to life.

But that wasn't the end of it, as she continued to try in vain, she was improving the project itself.

What if you could make the dead move, and even talk, as if they were alive and well?

Bertus was fully aware that someone could do the same to him.

If you bring a dead knight back to life, you can use its powers.

I knew, inevitably, that if I could bring a dead emperor back to life, I could have an empire.

Episode 608.

Rowen is not dead.

I faked my death, trying to buy time.

However, all of Rowen's men were killed by paladins sent by Elayon Bolton. It is possible that some of his men survived, but they are few and far between.

If Rowen is up to something, what is she up to, and what can she do about it?

Rowen was gone.

But it can't have left the ecliptic, so it must be somewhere in the ecliptic.

But where is it?

I've made a pact with the Five Great Houses, and the leader of the Crusader Knights is unwilling, but he can't go against the popes, so he has to cooperate with me.

"Password documentation......."

"Yes, I'm working on the decryption now."

The good news is that not all of the records in Rowen's temple were lost.

It could be relevant to our current situation, and it could tell us what Rowen has been up to. For now, Elayon Bolton has recovered the records from the temple's basement and is in the process of deciphering them. Fortunately, it is not impossible to decipher the records of the Inquisitors from within the Templars. It will just take time.

Yeah, that damn time.

"There's no guarantee that nothing will happen until it's done."

Even if it's decipherable, it's still the same amount of text.

Rowen shouldn't act until we've gleaned some meaningful truth from the piles of paperwork, something that tells us what Rowen is capable of.

Do I have that much time? Maybe, maybe not.

It's not out of the realm of possibility that Rowen is not up to something and has simply disappeared.

"It's not like I can't predict what you're going to do."

These were the words of the Pope of the Order of Tuan.

"What are you talking about?"

"Maybe in the past, but these are not the times for killing heretics, especially at the hands of the Church."

"...... Seems like a good kill for something like that."

"......."

"No, I didn't mean to offend you, it's just the way I talk. Tell me what it is."

It makes me cringe to see old people pout when I say something they don't need to.

Clearly, the pope was not wrong. When heresy becomes mainstream, you can catch, torture, and kill a few heretics, but you can't eradicate the whole heresy. There is bound to be carnage.

"It would be nice to be able to eradicate them, but they're impossible to get rid of, because they keep coming back."

"I'm sure you did."

"The inevitable pagans could not be eradicated, nor could they be converted."

"But if they're running heresy inquisitors in the ecliptic, doesn't that mean they're doing something?"

"If we can't stop the heresy, we want to know how big it is, if there's a core, who it is, where it is, how far it goes, things like that."

It was clear to Elion Bolton that this was the first time he had ever heard of such a thing.

It was clear that he had not been thoroughly informed of the inner workings of the ecliptic until now.

I thought I knew what the Pope of the Tuan Order meant.

Once upon a time, Bertus said.

Organized crime is inevitable.

A negative demand must be met, a supply arises to meet it, and the supply is inevitably organized.

If tackling organized crime only leads to the creation of other gangs, he said, it's better to take control.

At the time, Bertus asked me if I would ever consider becoming a Thieves' Guild Master.

This is the same as this.

The fundamental reason for heresy is distrust of the Church of God. Unless that distrust is resolved, hunting down and killing the heretics that arise is not the solution. Other heresies will inevitably arise.

The choice of the popes, therefore, was not the eradication or elimination of heresy.

Understanding their size and scope.

The emphasis is on learning more about the heretical forces themselves. Even if we can't eliminate them, it would be helpful to have a clearer idea of their whereabouts.

Too many pagans.

So instead of eradicating them, they took a different approach.

By owning a criminal organization, Bertus sought to gain control over the crime itself.

I wonder if the popes thought differently.

"Rowen was in control of the pagan faction, and key figures among them."

You don't have to win the hearts and minds of all the pagans. If you could control the leaders of each pagan faction, you had it all.

Elayon Bolton looks at the Pope of the Order of Tuan.

"Are you saying that ...... is actually behind the heresies and martial arts?"

"I guess you could look at it that way."

Times are messy, and inquisitors don't work like they used to.

The Church of the Lord was not judging heresy, it was taking it into its own hands. The popes were making those decisions, and Rowen was in charge.

The Cult of the Lord was behind the cult, and Rowen was the field director, so to speak.

But she was pursuing a dangerous endeavor, and was purged for refusing the orders of the Crusaders.

Indeed, Rowen would despise the warrior religion as well as the demonic faith.

However, due to the inevitability of pagan outbreaks, the task of identifying zodiacal pagan forces and bringing their leaders to heel has been a long time coming.

In this day and age, the true pagan masters are not the ones who deceive people by establishing an all-inclusive faith.

"This all sounds a bit like saying that Rowen is the owner of all heresies, doesn't it, and while he's not technically a lord, he's kind of like a lord or something?"

If you can control all the pagans, isn't that effectively being a priest?

Elayon Bolton believes he must kill Rowen for uncovering a truth that could put him on a collision course with the Empire.

However, I was completely unaware of the dangers of Rowen itself.

The popes were wary of giving him too much information in order to keep Elion Bolton in check.

Petty power struggles. And fear of each other.

The consequences were catastrophic.

The world was so strange that the Inquisitor, who was supposed to put down and edify heretics, was actually the master of heresy.

And what will Rowen do now that he has been abandoned by the Church of the Lord to whom he swore allegiance.

Rowen will be in a refugee camp.

They're going to use the pagans to do something.

\* \* \*

That night.

Three sophomores from Class B, Louis, Christina, and Anna, were back in the dorms after a long absence.

It wasn't just to take a long break.

Because what he couldn't do for Ludwig, he could do for Ludwig now that he knew the truth.

Lost arm.

You can revert it.

"It's easier said than done."

But unlike the other two, for whom giving the arm back was a basic procedure, Christina brought Ludwig in and immediately delivered a negative outlook.

Christina was speaking privately with the Emperor at the time, so Anna and Louis were later told what Ludwig had said. This is also why she returned to the Burinake dormitory.

"I've heard it's painful, I've heard about rejection, but it's okay, I can live with that."

You will regain your lost arm and be able to fight.

Ludwig wished he could do something about it.

Issues like rejection and pain had already been fully explained by Anna and Louis.

However, if she were to undergo the Chimera procedure, she would have to do it herself.

"Ludwig. It's not about that."

"Not......?"

"Sure, it can be easy in some cases, if it's something you just have to put up with....... The side effects, the rejection. If you just have to put up with the pain, it can be done."

Shouldn't that work?

As if she knows what he's thinking, Christina looks at Ludwig and says, "You're right.

"They're not going to put a rabbit's or a deer's or a cow's leg on you. What you saw was a rabbit. It's not a person, it's a rabbit. It's a procedure where they cut off the leg of a live rabbit, cut off the leg of another rabbit, and then glue it on."

"......Yes."

"When I say I'm going to give you a chimeric right arm, I mean I'm going to cut off someone else's arm and reattach it. Ludwig, are you okay with that?"

"......!"

Ludwig's eyes widened at that.

It's not a simple matter.

Body parts are not created.

A chimeric procedure makes something that doesn't belong together. Inevitably, then, Ludwig's new arm must be someone else's.

That's what she says to Ludwig.

If you're cutting off someone's arm and gluing it back on, it's easy.

"Of course you don't want that, but the lab has a lot of unsuccessful reconstructions, as you've seen. It's not perfect, so you'll inevitably get an arm from one of the restored bodies that didn't come back to life. A cadaver arm."

"So....... works......."

Your new arm is obviously someone else's, not your own.

You can't use a living person's arm, and what remains in the lab is the arm of a cadaver that failed to be restored.

"It's covered in black magic and sobriety and enhancements. It's not a normal arm. It looks like a human arm, but it's not a human arm."

Something else that looks like a human arm, but has already ceased to be a human arm.

"Didn't you think the bodies being restored were overly intact?"

"Uh......?"

"Most of them are war dead, people who died in combat. If you're killed in combat,....... they're going to have their limbs cut off, or they're going to be crushed."

Only then did Ludwig realize that he hadn't thought at all about the integrity of the bodies in the port being restored.

There were no severed limbs, and everything was being cleaned up.

"If they could use that technology on people in the first place, they would have told you that they could regenerate your arm, not transplant another one."

If you can regenerate a corpse, why can't you regenerate a living person?

I should have asked that question first.

"A living person wouldn't even make it through the process, which is why this magic is so....... that's why it can't be used on living people."

Christina's expression was one of pain.

If playback is possible, play it and do not transplant.

Regeneration is not something you can use on the living in the first place.

And reanimated things are not something you can attach to the living.

"Ludwig, if you ask me, I might be able to give you another arm that doesn't belong to a corpse. Do you want it?"

"No....... No, I don't want that."

Ludwig could never do something as crazy as chopping off a man's arm and reattaching it.

"Ludwig, I'm not really going to say no, but the point is, I don't know what the consequences of such a procedure would be, and I don't want to do it."

After she finishes, Christina looks at Anna and Louis.

Clearly, they weren't lying. If you undergo the Chimera procedure, you can get your missing arm back.

As long as it's a living human arm.

I mentioned the chimera procedure because I thought Ludwig might be acting strangely.

They weren't oblivious to the risks.

However, he was referring to the chimera procedure because he thought Ludwig might try to take his own life.

But who knows if the recipient will be able to tolerate it.

Transplanting magical byproducts of the dead into the living.

Ludwig could only stare at him with a stony expression, a look of hope given and then taken away.

Seeing that look, Christina bites her lip.

"Ludwig, if you really want to do that....... but if you die....... I will never, ever bring you back."

If you die during a procedure, you might be tempted to fight as a resurrected corpse afterward.

Therefore, Christina firmly nailed that, unlike Ashar, you should not try to undergo the procedure with the intention of dying.

"Okay....... Okay."

Louis and Anna could only shake their heads in disbelief as Ludwig looked on in dismay.

Episode 609.

Deep underground, tangled like a tunnel.

A dim light glimmered in what could only be called a crypt.

Deep underground tunnels filled with the smell of rotting corpses and strange idols.

Somewhere in the deepest part of the tunnel.

In the center of that cavity sat a woman.

Around her, the prostrate people were listening to her story.

Remember the day the heavens opened up?

I've seen it firsthand.

You know what the first thing I said was?

Wow.

Believe it or not, it's true.

I probably shouldn't be saying that after seeing something like that, but honestly, it was amazing.

When you see a rain of light falling from the sky, even if it's on your head, you can't help but admire it.

It's overwhelming.

It was a hopeless sight.

A referee, if you will.

Yes, it was a referee.

Light was falling on the sinners.

It was a heavenly judgment on the sinners who didn't recognize the prophet and tried to torture, intimidate, and kill him.

A lightning bolt strikes the earth, and the warp gates that have served people so well must be removed from the world.

That day, I saw the Devil for the first time.

Very sad.

Very sad.

He looked like he had given up on everything.

No one believed in him, and he had this look in his eyes that said he had failed at everything.

Nevertheless, the devil spoke.

How to deal with what's coming, and how to make it a little less bloody.

You sounded desperate.

The devil's seed, desperate to survive.

You're threatening to do this or that if I don't let you go.

That's what everyone thinks, and that's what I thought at the time.

But the devil was right.

We have paid too dearly for not recognizing the prophet.

I'm one of those guilty parties.

I can't help it that so many people have died, but how many could have survived because of what you said?

Just as you can't count the dead, you can't count the living.

People don't know the goodness of that demon, and they don't want to know.

Those who know the goodness of the Devil don't tell people about it, and they don't intend to.

Isn't that weird?

Good kids should be rewarded and bad kids should be punished.

Why did the nicest kid in the world have to be the one who did the worst thing in the world. Why should he be known as the worst kid in the world?

That's weird.

That's not right. That's not right.

That the world is the way it is, that the good guys don't get the prize and the bad guys get everything. I know.

That's not true, but let's pretend it is.

We should be good, and maybe the gods will take pity on us and reward us with something.

You may not be glorified in life, but you may be glorified in death.

You know what they say about being a good person.

That's a bunch of bullshit.

You know the drill.

If the good you've done in your life isn't rewarded, it just isn't.

If all the good things you've done in your life have come back to bite you in the ass, there's just something wrong with the world.

Maybe the Devil is wrong, because his minions caused the gates.

But isn't that really all the devil's fault and not to blame?

If you believed in the devil.

If only those in power had listened to the Devil.

This wouldn't have happened.

But no one knows that.

This shouldn't be happening.

In this way, sin and punishment are pinned on one person.

They shouldn't be resting on their laurels.

Someone is a warrior.

Someone is an emperor.

Someone's a crusader.

The Pope.

You said it was for the people.

You said it was for the people.

You don't want to be seen walking around.

Fellow sinners.

Hate her because she did everything wrong.

If they start hating us too, the world might collapse, and for that same reason, we don't want to make the devil take it all on himself.

Such as.

It's so unfair.

I'm so frustrated.

Sad.

It's disgusting.

The only reason I've kept you alive so far is because there's at least one thing that's similar to my idea.

The devil didn't do anything wrong.

The devil is right.

The world is wrong.

We were wrong, too.

Those of you who believe in witchcraft, you are the wrong people.

I was wrong for not recognizing that he was a prophet and for believing in him until it was too late.

But are we born into the wrong world, or do we become the wrong people because we live in the wrong world?

I'm not sure about that.

Well, I do know one.

If it's wrong, fix it.

That's why I've trained you so well so far.

I apologize for the initial touching, but I haven't hit you or put a needle under your nails since you've been a better listener.

We've seen you believe in a demonic religion that wears the skin of a warrior.

Of course, that's because I'd rather believe in a demon god than a warrior god.

Anyway.

For too long, I've kept the veil of reality over the truth.

Too many years have gone by when sinners have walked too proudly through the world pretending to be sinners.

The saying that truth is worthless in the face of reality.

That some things are meant to be buried.

There are sins that must be seen to be believed.

That there are truths that need to be buried, people that need to be sacrificed, people that need to be held accountable, and groups that need to be protected because the reality is too harsh.

I've heard it so many times that my ears hurt now.

So.

I don't want to hear any more of that.

The Empire and the Order have long since lost their legitimacy and no longer exist for the good of humanity.

Everything else is just an excuse, and they're just monsters who exist for themselves.

That we just need to be still, that we need to hang in there, that we need to let this all pass and then think about it.

I don't believe it anymore.

The world is just the way it is.

It doesn't change.

I could go on and on about how to suck it up.

If so, I'm changing it.

I think it's better to change it.

Rowen speaks to the prostrate men, his cold eyes shining.

"Wake up."

The prostrate rise to their feet.

"Let's show them the real world."

"To the multitude who condoned so many sins, who lied and deceived the people."

"I'm going to show the people who have been silent and are now silent how sick the world is."

"When disruption occurs on an uncontrollable scale."

"The moment when they take back the sins they have committed."

"I want to see the look on their faces."

"I think it's time to germinate the seeds of division that we've buried in the name of this great cause, in the name of now being the time for humanity to unite."

If killing the pagans would only cause them to grow like weeds, Rowen knew it was better to grow trees.

Rowen did not hunt pagans.

The pagans in the refugee camp were not responsible for the theft of the remains. She should have known from the start.

They wouldn't do anything she didn't tell them to do.

This made it easy to reach the other side of the empire.

Rowen was raising the pagans to be giants, and the masters of those giants were in my hands.

The trees are owned by terrified slaves who, through years of torture and pain, have become incapable of thinking of anything but submission.

"So you don't have to live in heresy anymore."

"This, too, will be the will of the gods."

"I believe so."

Therefore, she was the master of all paganism, while not believing in paganism.

\* \* \*

We know where Rowen is. But the scope was too broad.

We'll soon find out who Rowen has recruited. But for most people in the refugee camps, there is no such thing as a proper identity.

The popes gave orders, and Lowen carried them out.

But the popes did not know the full extent of the pagan powers in the refugee camps, nor their individual leaders.

I left it alone, assuming Rowen would figure it out.

But now that the information was important, I had to find it.

It doesn't take long either.

Two days at most, three days at most.

That would be enough to find out where Rowen was.

But time has always been an issue, and not as much time as I needed.

Death is sudden.

Like all of a sudden the heavens opened up, all of a sudden a gate opened and things became this way, and then the world became this way.

The reason for the destruction is trivial.

Just as a few small misunderstandings and miscommunications spelled doom.

Often, a trigger isn't a big deal.

-Kill! Kill!

"......."

I was watching a building burn in a refugee camp.

Thousands of people were trampling over the bodies of the fallen and throwing them into the fire.

It's a common sight.

Murder is a common occurrence in refugee camps.

But this time, the direction is different.

The refugees killed the guards.

Taking the spears from the guards, he stabbed their bodies.

It wasn't the shacks in the refugee camp that were burning.

The Guard headquarters was burning.

In the falling snow, I watched as refugees, driven by vengeance and madness, burned down the guard headquarters.

It was revenge for the persecution and oppression they had suffered.

It only takes a small act of violence to stir the pot of hatred. The guards are only human.

The moment they realized that their violence was not absolute, it was inevitable that the flow would break down.

Massive riots erupted in the Huangdao refugee camps.

They were killing guards, burning guard headquarters.

Getting started is easy.

And the moment it began, even the initiator would be unable to control the great tide of revenge.

\* \* \*

"Your Majesty. It must be suppressed."

The emperor listened to the story with a stony expression.

There's a massive riot in the refugee zone, killing guards and setting them on fire.

At first, it was just a small incident. But I knew that whoever started this, once they unleashed their hatred of the Guard, they could leave it alone and it would take care of itself.

The guards are a handful compared to everyone in the camp. They've managed to keep the refugees under control somehow, but when that fails, people won't take it anymore.

It doesn't matter who started it.

They've already turned their backs on the guards; all they need is an opening.

To say they turned their backs on the Guard is to say they turned their backs on the Empire.

At this rate, the refugee camps will become complete lawlessness.

And the rising hatred will not end with raiding and killing the refugee camp's guards and burning their headquarters.

If there comes a moment when that anger is directed at the imperial family.

What to do then?

The ecliptic has long been a sand castle on the verge of collapse.

The gunpowder was ready, waiting for the moment to ignite and blow up whatever the trigger was.

Unless you can feed the refugees.

Unless you can take care of their cold and hunger.

Unless you can provide them with a minimum level of safety and comfort.

It's just something that was bound to happen someday. Whatever the cause, the problem is always the gunpowder, not the tinder.

But empires can't fall.

It shouldn't fall apart.

Not yet.

It can never fall apart.

"Yeah......."

The people were crushed by the terror of the guards.

The riots happened because hate crossed the threshold of fear.

You can't give them bread.

Because there is no bread.

You can't give a hungry, angry crowd everything they need.

There is only one thing the Empire can give them.

Fear.

"Send in the army and the knights. Summarily execute all those involved in this matter."

The only thing that can hold back the hate and anger.

Fear.

The violence that can bring that fear.

Unfortunately, the empire was strong, if not wealthy.

Now more than ever.

\* \* \*

Can a nation that does not protect its citizens, but rather kills them, be called a nation at all?

Sure, they can exist.

As long as a state has the violence to sustain itself, it can continue to exist regardless of its legitimacy.

Massive riots broke out in the Huangdao refugee camp.

The guards were killed, and their headquarters burned to the ground. The Guards retreated to the ecliptic in a massive withdrawal.

Temporarily, the refugee camps became lawless.

But the violence didn't solve everything.

The outraged crowd had to direct their anger somewhere, and they had to find a scapegoat.

But only for a moment.

There was a bloodbath.

The Empire deployed large armies and knights to destroy any sign of violence.

The Knights Templar, a group of superhumans, could single-handedly slaughter a crowd of hundreds.

On top of that, the riot was quickly quelled when the lynch mob was called in to put down the riot.

Swords and spears slaying monsters sounded better to people.

Violence fueled by rage, in the face of a ruthless violence that bordered on the inscrutable.

The riots were brief.

Thousands of guards are dead.

However, in just a few days, hundreds of thousands of refugees were slaughtered.

The Empire crushed the outbursts, as if to nail down the idea that violence was the sole province of the state.

Fear shut everything down and held it in.

In the end, though, this took away all justification.

Everyone knows it's a lie that empires exist for the good of humanity.

The brief riot turned into a massive carnage, and the rampaging crowd was overwhelmed with fear and forced to hold their breath.

The Empire can't provide for the refugees, but it can kill them all within a few days.

It was impossible to overturn an empire by rioting.

Truth is probably good.

People still hate the devil.

Only one thing has changed.

People hate empires, too.

What's the difference between a demon and an empire?

People held their breath, but they began to whisper it to each other under their breath.

Episode 610.

Just a few days.

So much has happened in just a few days.

Sudden riots.

Sudden slaughter.

"The empire's days are numbered."

Louise said as she sat on the terrace with Heinrich.

"What do you mean you're out of luck......?"

"Do you think a country can survive if its people are turned away from it?"

"The empire is strong, so why not?"

"We'll survive. Until the cause loses its meaning."

Louise stared at the thickening snow.

"What are you talking about?"

At Heinrich's question, Louise nodded.

"Right now, you, too, are thinking that this behavior of the Empire is inevitable."

Heinrich's eyes widened at Louise's words.

If the empire collapses now, it's all over.

That's why I thought that if this action of the empire, this uprising of the refugees, led to the overthrow of the empire, the entire human race might be destroyed.

So it's brutal and horrible, but.

I thought it was inevitable.

"That is the rationale. To make an action compelling, whether it's war, raising the dead, or genocide."

Gate event.

"Right now, the Empire has an absolute and perfect excuse for the Gate Crisis. So the Empire will do whatever it takes to survive."

"Even the atrocity of raising the corpses of the dead and turning them into an army was justified by the need to end the Gate crisis. No matter how cruel, no matter how brutal, one absolute reason rationalizes everything."

"This is also true."

"This uprising was sparked by people's legitimate anxiety and fear, and the Empire was able to put a knife to people's throats because they now have the excuse of stopping the Gate."

"What would it have been like under normal circumstances?"

"Creating an army from the corpses of fallen soldiers? It would have been a continent-wide publicity stunt. The Empire would have been torn apart in an instant. Even I, in peacetime, would not have been able to accept that an imperial family that did such a thing belonged to the continent. Not that I wouldn't have accepted it, but I would have used it as an opportunity to bring the empire down."

"Rioting and slaughtering? We could have done that, but we would have had to pay the price."

"The empire is staking too much on the absolutes of the gate crisis."

"You're saving all the payoffs for later."

"You're going to have to pay for this one day."

"The day the gate crisis ends, all bets are off."

"The people will still be powerless, but they'll hate the empire."

At Louise's words, Heinrich shook his head in disbelief.

"Just because people hate empires....... Is it possible for an empire to fall?"

"No, it is not the people who bring down empires. Causes are not for the little people."

"If not, then......."

"Cause is for those in power, by those in power."

Causes are meant to be used. That's why they're not for the faint of heart.

"When the gate debacle is over, there will be another rationale."

"What other reason?"

"That empires should die."

Heinrich's eyes widen at that.

"It's a country that uses dead people to build an army, commits countless civilian massacres, and can't even provide for its own people."

"And now people are hating and hating the empire."

"It means that in the future, we will want someone else to take the seat of the imperial family of Gradias."

"No matter who sits in that seat, people won't miss the empire. They've already built up too much hatred and resentment."

People's hatred and anger toward the empire becomes a rationale.

But crowds can't bring down empires.

Someone with power, someone with authority.

When he takes over an empire on that basis, the people will support the new empire that replaced it.

A rationale is a reason, a rationale.

Evidence that suggests that when a new power emerges, people don't rebel against it.

As long as the empire is hated, people will not rebel against whoever takes its place.

"I've often imagined empires falling......."

Louise stares out at the landscape. It has long been the dream of the Schwarz family to overcome their inferiority complex to the Empire and become masters of it.

But now that the empire was truly crumbling, Louise von Schwarz was not happy about it.

Empires build karma.

At some point, you have to pay the price.

"That's interesting."

Louise exhales.

"If you're hated no matter who you are, is it really okay to let anyone sit in that seat......."

"What do you mean?"

"Let's say people don't like Gradias Huang. They'll already hate it."

"Yes......."

"Wouldn't it matter if a demon sat in that seat?"

"......Yes?"

Louise giggles at Heinrich's dumbfounded reaction.

"On the contrary, they might think that since they haven't seen the Devil, they might be a little better than the Empire, which is already the worst."

The Empire is showing the worst of the worst.

I hate empires and I hate demons.

However, I haven't encountered the devil yet.

So you might imagine that it might be a little different from the Empire, that it's already bad, but it can't be worse.

"He who has everyone's support is the master, or the worst of the worst in an already bad situation. I don't see why not."

If it's the best of both worlds, people will ostracize and reject the worst and want the best.

But if it's the worst of both worlds.

People will want a differential.

Empires are the worst. It is heading for the worst.

So feel free to sit down.

Feel free to take it away.

If you have the power to do so.

"I think I know why I was able to get into the temple......."

Louise said, and took a sip of her now chilled black tea.

'The emperor is digging his own grave.......'

Dig a grave.

I'm not selling you something you don't know.

Knowingly digging.

\* \* \*

"Yet?"

"Yes. I'll need a little more time, so I'm going to send you an email to......."

Elayon Bolton grew impatient at the sight of so many priests wrestling with paperwork at the Crusader headquarters.

Every available priest in the Crusader Order had been assigned to decipher the cipher, but the work had been going on for far too long with little progress.

Elion Bolton watched the bustle, and, unable to bear it, went out onto the terrace.

Outside the high temple of the Crusaders, it was still snowing.

Excessive snowfall had already become a major problem for refugee camps.

It's snowing, so much snow.

But that was one thing, but what was happening between people was more problematic.

Conditions in the refugee camps were already extreme, and so was the Empire's response.

Of course, he knew intuitively that this situation had nothing to do with Rowen.

I realize this is just the beginning.

The empire would rather cut its own flesh than let itself collapse.

There's no guarantee that the next thing to be cut is necessarily flesh. It might be bone, or it might be something else that needs to be sacrificed.

We need to find Rowen.

Rowen's control over the pagans scattered throughout the refugee camps means that the camps are effectively Rowen's.

When desperation and hopelessness get the better of them, evil and hatred can be the only thing left.

The riots have subsided in violence, but the next one will be even bigger.

"What difference does it make if I find it?

What happened can't be what didn't happen.

Just as the Gate debacle cannot be undone, neither can the riots in the refugee camps and the massacres of the empire.

Even if you find Rowen and eliminate the cultists, the chaos has already begun.

Finding the arsonist is one thing, but stopping a fire that's already out of control is another.

The arsonist and the fire are now two completely separate things.

You may be able to find Rowen and stop him from starting fires elsewhere, but the fire that has already grown will take care of itself.

The good news is that the person you need most right now, the Devil, has approached.

The Popes' arbitrary sacrifice of the Crusader Knights and the Five Great Houses is a gnashing of teeth and a rotting of guts, but what we need now is a demon.

Rowen is a follower of the Devil.

If so, you'll absolutely follow the devil's lead.

A word from the devil.

If we can get the word out to Rowen to stop his self-destructive behavior, we can stem the tide of madness somewhat.

But to do that, we need to find Rowen eventually.

You can't make a big deal out of announcing that a demon has appeared on the ecliptic to find Rowen.

That's like starting a landslide to put out a fire.

Secretly.

By implication.

If you can reach Rowen and let him know that the Crusaders and the High Priestesses have already sided with the Demon, you can control this chaos.

They tried to purge Rowen.

Elion Bolton's eyes glazed over as he realized the ramifications of his choice.

We don't know what the Empire is up to, but it's clear that it's doing something quite dangerous and sinister.

If the empire-hating Rowen were to learn of it, he felt that bad things were bound to happen, one way or another.

But in the end, Elion Bolton was caught in a self-fulfilling prophecy: to stop something dangerous, he invited something even more dangerous.

The Demon is waiting for information from the Crusaders, and he's probably scrambling to find Rowen himself.

But in the end, the important information is inside the Crusaders themselves.

Deciphering the coded documents will reveal the power of the cultists, and perhaps lead to Rowen's whereabouts.

But that task.

Grewen had accumulated so much material over the years that he was not able to analyze it properly.

It's been a few days already.

But hey, we've already been through this once, so there's time before the next one.

Even if the coded documents were decrypted and the information extracted, Rowen would still know what he had left behind.

So I could think of any number of ways to make this information worthless.

Just one word.

The devil you worship and follow so much has already come to us.

All I need to do is say that word and everything will be fine, but I can't do that.

The Devil's Approach.

The only ones who know are the Crusader Knights and the Popes of the Five Great Houses.

Just as the Gate debacle ultimately came down to misunderstandings and lies, so too is Rowen trying to set the ecliptic on fire without realizing that what he so desperately wants has already been accomplished.

Elayon Bolton watches as numerous priests shuffle through papers.

I should have spared a few of the Inquisitors.

If we had, it wouldn't have taken this long.

But there's no point in hindsight.

If only the Crusader Knights weren't so wary of having too much power that they deliberately don't tell you what you need to know.

If we had, this wouldn't have happened.

Popes and Elion Bolton's hypervigilance ruined everything.

Elion Bolton flips through the coded documents.

Having never served as an inquisitor, Elion Bolton could not and did not need to read these coded documents.

As such, all of the priests in the analytical chamber had either served as inquisitors or were doing something related to that.

Technically, Rowen was in charge of all the Inquisitors, so they were his subordinates.

However, most of Rowen's direct reports, who would know the key details of the case, are dead, so progress is slow.

But really.

Is it really?

Elion Bolton sees the priests in the analysis room in a flash of inspiration.

Turn the page, write something down, do something.

To do something.

Elion Bolton watches them go.

You're doing something.

But eye movement.

A hand gesture that flips through a piece of paper.

There's an unknown there.

An odd sense of dissonance.

It looks like it's doing something.

It looks like it wants to do nothing.

That's the kind of awkwardness I feel.

Elion Bolton covers his face with both hands and lets out a deep sigh.

'Holy crap.......'

It was stupid.

It was too stupid.

They could not be more relevant to Rowen.

By the way.

But why on earth.

Did he trust them to follow his orders?

That the Crusaders are a group that does the bidding of their leader.

Why did I take it for granted?

\* \* \*

Can you find a needle in a haystack?

That would be hard unless you had a ton of time on your hands. And now, when I wasn't even sure how much time I had, I was feeling in real time what it felt like to have my blood run dry.

The debacle, presumably involving Rowen, was going nowhere.

I debated dozens of times a day whether or not to include a super rainfall to show that the Devil had appeared on the ecliptic.

An accident happens and some flow happens.

You can't stop it.

But I'm not going to find Rowen by screaming at the top of my lungs from the sidewalk, so I'll have to wait for information from the Crusaders.

The same was true on the Bertus side.

Rowen told him what they had been doing and what they could do, but Bertus could do nothing but frame the catastrophe as a massacre.

If things get even more extreme, Bertus might actually choose to wipe out the entire refugee camp.

Hundreds of thousands have already died in one fell swoop.

An empire that has reached the point where it can roll a guard of masterminds can make such a thing happen.

If things get any weirder, tens of thousands, not hundreds of thousands, are slaughtered.

Not death by disaster, not death by starvation, but death by genocide.

I can't let that happen, but there's little I can do about it.

All you can do is get a little more information, a little faster, to get to Rowen.

You need to find the needle in the haystack.

You need to find it quickly.

For a guy who loves the devil so much, the least you can do is tell him to shut up and watch me now that I'm here so this craziness stops.

The Great Hall of Alth is an overly prominent location.

And meeting the popes in person is risky.

That's why we told them to send a contact to the designated contact point.

The location is the sewer under the Bronzegate Bridge.

The location of the Rotary Club.

As I made my way to the rendezvous point, I saw someone who appeared to be my contact standing in the corner of the sewer waiting for me.

A woman in tattered robes smiles at me.

The smile was a little uncanny.

What to say.

overly welcoming.

A smile that doesn't quite fit this moment.

"The Devil."

And overly friendly nicknames.

We don't know what's going on.

"Maybe......."

But then you realize.

Although it's impossible to find a needle in a haystack.

"I think you're Rowen."

The needle came to me, was it possible?

Episode 611.

For some reason, Rowen himself was waiting for me.

What's going on.

Did the popes deceive me?

Is there a reason for that?

Unsure of the right answer, Rowen kneels down to me.

"It is an infinite honor to see you again, my lord."

It was a sign of complete submission.

"Why are you here? I was obviously looking for you, but I certainly don't remember asking you to come here. We've never met, have we?"

"I know everything that goes on in the Order of ......."

a.

Was it?

The ecliptic has its own environment.

The Five Great Houses within the ecliptic.

Crusader Knights inside the Ecliptic.

At some point, it wasn't the butler's, and it wasn't the pope's.

Elion Bolton didn't know it, the popes didn't know it, Bertus didn't know it.

I didn't know that either.

"I should have met you, not the popes, if I wanted to eat the Lord's Supper in the first place."

"Sort of."

I've just met the right person to hand over the Order to me.

"All those who agree with me, I am ready to support you."

The popes, as well as the head of the Crusader Knights, knew that there were many forces within the Order that supported me, but they had no idea that I had been outmaneuvering them for so long since they had organized.

The Crusader Knights who attempted to purge Rowen would not have been his.

But that was about it.

There were only a handful of them that he could manipulate at will.

The rest of the paladins who follow the leader are all in the Allied garrison.

The ecclesiastical powers of the ecliptic had become Rowen's, not the Pope's.

So now, the Crusaders hadn't returned to their home base, but were actually in enemy territory.

Rowen was able to deal with pagan cults, including warrior cults and demonic cults, as well as the main cults within the ecliptic.

"It's a tempting offer, but why should I hold your hand when I'm pretty sure you're not even pretending to be sane?"

It doesn't take much of a conversation to realize that Rowen is a tainted human being.

"Do you think the popes are sane?"

"I may not be crazy, but I'm better than you."

No matter how sweet the promise of fruit, it's hard to resist.

I'm just here to stop the craziness.

Rowen looks up cautiously.

It was a hard look to bear.

He was flattered that I dared to even look up at him, but I could see in his eyes that he was literally "daring" to look up at me because he wanted to make eye contact and talk to me.

Gut-wrenching awe.

The mere fact that it was pointed at me was enough to make me feel uncomfortable.

"If you compare someone who uses pagans to start a riot to someone who thinks about killing all pagans, who's crazier? They're both crazy, but I'm not sure which is crazier."

But the words that came out of Rowen's mouth were more shocking than the look in her eyes.

"......what?"

The former is Rowen.

And the latter?

"Didn't the popes say that?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Didn't you say something about pagan cleansing?"

Pagan Purification.

I felt my whole body freeze at the eerie word.

"You didn't really think the five popes were just going to sit back and watch the size of the infidels, did you?"

Yes.

That's what I said.

"Now" is a time when you can't just kill infidels.

It reads like a statement of intent to kill as soon as they can.

And through Rowen, he knew the size of the cult and its leaders.

It was impossible to eradicate in the first place, so we tried to control it.

And after all of that, you'd want to get rid of it.

"They say new wine should be in new bottles, so why would you want to put anything less than vinegar in an old leather bag?"

Rowen was almost purged.

Then Rowen, and now he was telling me about the Purge.

"Do you mean to tell me you did this to save the infidels?"

"I want the Empire to fall, and I want the Devil to be the master of a new age."

"......."

"Tens of millions of pagans being saved by the Devil is kind of a byproduct of that."

Rowen laughs with an odd expression.

It was a very awkward, bizarre laugh.

"And no matter how much I enjoy killing and torturing people, it's still sad when tens of millions of people die."

"......."

"That's not supposed to happen."

A heretic's life is a life after all, says the Inquisitor.

It had a very unpleasant ring to it, like a serial killer talking about the dignity of life.

And the unpleasantness comes from the fact that Rowen isn't wrong.

There's nothing more disgusting than a wrong being saying the right thing.

"The popes really wanted to kill all the pagans, and they think they can get away with it?"

"You don't think you can do it?"

"......what?"

"Isn't it a good thing for the empire if there are fewer refugees who can't even feed themselves?"

I couldn't help but roll my eyes at the eerie possibility.

"Do you think it would be impossible to blame the infidel for what happened in the basement of the Crusade and kill him?"

"......."

"It's a matter of whether you can afford it or not. You know you can do it if you want to do it."

My work with the Crusaders is what I did.

But the popes weren't looking for a culprit, they were trying to pass it off as a pagan crime?

"No way, was that the policy in the first place?"

"He told me to look into that direction: ......."

The popes wanted to control the pagans, so they used Rowen.

This is how this bizarre structure of the Five Great Houses of God was established, with the pagans actually being the ones behind it.

But in the end, the popes couldn't kill the pagans, they were just keeping them under control, and if they could push them all away, they would.

The popes wanted to make it a pagan crime, regardless of the facts.

But Rowen had almost all the information he needed about the pagans in the refuge. Even if he captured and tortured the unidentified cultists, he would know they were not the culprits. They might be able to make a fake culprit, but they wouldn't be the real thing.

And they tried to approach the empire as the culprit.

There, Elayon Bolton ordered her to stop the investigation, but Rowen wouldn't listen.

It is clear that the popes are preparing to kill all infidels at some point.

Of course, that's not going to happen right away.

The popes hid their intentions from me. They must have known that I would be sensitive to the idea of a pagan purification.

These are the greats who will swallow it if it's sweet and spit it out if it's bitter.

They are attached to me because the tide of public opinion in the church is turning in my favor.

Is Rowen crazy.

Or are the popes crazy.

Both would be crazy.

However, it's clear whose hands we need to hold.

\* \* \*

The mood in the Emperor's City was fierce and turbulent. The recent riots and massacre of the guards were a reminder.

Smoke from the burning of corpses rose everywhere, and the guards roaming the camp were not the usual ones.

Silent guards, wearing helmets that obscured their faces, walked the streets wordlessly.

With so much hatred and anger toward the guards, no one dared to touch them as they roamed the streets alone.

For everyone could see that the silent watchers were something more than mere guards.

Some strange beings, human but not quite human, roam the refugee camp.

They resorted to extreme measures at the slightest sign of violence.

It was like a machine roaming the streets, unresponsive to anyone's words, to anyone's cries.

The guards who now control the camp said nothing, gave no warning.

He walked slowly through the streets, and at the first sign of disturbance, he headed straight for the kill and disappeared.

People were extremely frightened by its inhuman appearance.

After a few days of this.

Each of the four who sought Rowen's death remained in the temple in that ominous atmosphere.

Ludwig was given hope that the chimeric procedure might give him his arm back, but he also knew it would be life-threatening, and he was living with that choice every day.

And then there was the sudden disturbance in the ecliptic, which forced me to spend several days of silence in the temple.

But we can't do that forever.

Ellen called Heinrich, Louise, and Ludwig together.

"I think it's time to decide what to do."

In the end, the underlying problem was not solved.

Who killed Rowen.

The Emperor said that it was not the Empire that killed Rowen.

"It's unlikely that Bertus was lying about what he said then, since he showed us the lab, and if it was the Empire that killed Rowen, they had no reason to hide it."

"I suppose."

Louise nodded in agreement with Ellen.

It revealed a secret that was bigger and more important than killing Rowen. Technically, the death of one priest is very minor compared to what's going on in that lab.

If I had killed Rowen, I would have said that I had no choice but to do so.

He wouldn't lie if he didn't have to, so logic dictates that the Empire's failure to kill Rowen was likely true in and of itself.

What Dettomorian said.

I said I'd find out when I found Ashur, but what I found out was that the Empire wasn't involved in Rowen's death.

But that doesn't change the fact that you've learned something.

We were able to rule out one of the prime suspects.

"You wouldn't be wrong that Rowen's approach to Ludwig was to investigate Temple in the first place."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Then the Empire has a reason to kill Rowen. But the Empire has nothing to do with it, and under the circumstances, there's no reason for her to be lying......."

It wasn't supposed to be a mob attack.

The only faction that had reason to want Rowen dead was the Empire, and they didn't kill him.

So the situation was a quagmire.

"Were they really killed by infidels?"

Heinrich's question was.

Rowen was an inquisitor in the first place, so it's clear that if the pagans knew of her existence, they would always want to kill her.

"It's entirely possible that he didn't die pursuing the case, and that he was retaliated against because of the karma he's accumulated."

Ellen echoed Heinrich's sentiment, as if she couldn't deny the possibility.

"But suffice it to say that refugee camps are dangerous right now......."

It was the site of a large-scale riot, which was subdued by a massacre. Therefore, the current refugee zone was not a place to go and do anything good.

Carnage.

It literally took me by surprise.

Everyone in the room knew that the army we were building to end the gate crisis was being sent to kill people.

It's no secret that too much is being justified in the name of gating.

But even if it's not dangerous, it's no different.

If it was the cultists who killed Rowen, we don't even know where they are.

"But what happened in the first place....... at the Crusader cemetery."

After being silent, Ludwig speaks up.

"Is what happened there....... Is that what the Empire did?"

"Uh."

"Hmm."

"......!"

We all realized that we hadn't been thinking about the first thing we should have been thinking about in the face of this shocking truth.

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"I think those bodies got out as the undead, that's our conclusion, but what the Empire does is they take them and they regenerate them in those....... and reanimate them in these giant vats."

"Right."

"Then....... that what happened there had nothing to do with the Empire in the first place....... I think, but....... I'm sorry. I didn't mean to confuse you, I just thought maybe that's what happened......."

"No, you're right."

Ellen shook her head firmly when Ludwig tried to cloud her words.

"I don't need to ask Bertus to know that. It's clearly a different case, and there's no reason for the Empire to steal the graves of the Crusaders."

Crusader Grave Robbing.

And swapping bodies in a national cemetery.

That's a different case.

They work too differently, and the Empire has no reason to touch the Crusader Graveyard in the first place.

"So Rowen was investigating the wrong guy in the first place."

But it's just another labyrinth.

It's all the Empire's doing, but they didn't kill Rowen, and they had nothing to do with the theft from the Crusader catacombs.

Rowen then approaches Ludwig to go after the wrong guy.

Of course, there were enough similarities in the scene to make me think it was the work of the Empire.

However, they are technically two different events.

So who are the people behind the underground?

Did they kill Rowen?

"Now I really don't know what....... I have no idea."

Heinrich began to rack his brains.

"We don't have to think about this anymore. We're not obligated to reveal the truth."

Ellen said.

"I also wanted to find out why this archbishop named Rowen had approached Ludwig, and if he had any intention of killing me, but some things became clear: Rowen had approached Ludwig, and the reason was to investigate the Temple."

Not all questions are unanswered, so it's okay to let the case go with only unanswered questions.

It's not even an unjust death, as we learn that Rowen was involved in a lot of bad things; she literally did enough to deserve to die.

Karma, or should I say retribution.

If someone had retaliated against Rowen, it would have been what she deserved.

Ludwig mumbles to himself.

"Yeah, I guess I don't need to know everything......."

The truth you already know. The truth you know is overwhelming. Just enduring what's already happening is overwhelming.

It's painful enough to have to remain silent about something that's clearly wrong because it's real.

I don't think it's possible to dig any deeper into Rowen's work here, which is now completely lost.

"But when you give up, do it anyway. There's one last possible place."

Ellen says it's okay to let go, but she looks at everyone as if this is the last time she'll ever do it.

"The Crusader said that if the popes are trying to hide something from you, you can't know it."

"......Yes."

"And it's also true that the Crusader Master was hiding something from me."

Ellen says still.

"We need to find out what they're hiding, and even if they're not, the Crusaders are investigating this on their own. If they find anything, they might be willing to share it with us. If we don't get anything there, let's end this here."

The last ones to go.

Once again, to the Crusader Knightmaster.

And the Popes of the Five Great Houses.

We don't know if the truth they have has anything to do with Rowen's murder.

However, if I couldn't get anything out of it, it was time to dust myself off.

\* \* \*

The case is a quagmire.

Unless the Empire, the most likely suspect, did this, the only other possibility is the pagans. But figuring out which one of them is the culprit is near impossible.

That's why Ellen decided to visit the Crusaders one last time.

But it was a sensitive issue.

'Commander, you can now visit....... It's okay if you stop helping him, you might get in trouble.'

That's why Ellen told Louise that she didn't need to get involved anymore.

'What's the point of that now? I'm coming.'

Having already learned too much about what not to know, Louise realized that she, too, must come to an end.

Whatever the secrets of the Crusaders are, they are greater than those of the Empire.

Once again, four people left the temple.

The four of you walked the length of the halted magic train to the Great Hall of the Crusaders.

"The director is out of the office."

With those simple words, the paladins guarding the main gate blocked Ellen's path.

"Then I'll wait inside until you get back."

"You're going to be gone for quite a while, so you won't be back anytime soon."

"......."

Ellen glares at the paladins guarding the entrance.

The attitude is odd for some reason.

I was also blocked when I tried to enter the burned temple. I could tell he was really troubled.

But for now, something.

It's a little weird.

"Are you saying you went back to the Allied garrison?"

"......Yes."

That's a lie.

There is no way that Elayon Bolton would have returned to the Alliance garrison without properly finalizing the events of the current ecliptic.

The gatekeeper is lying now, because he wouldn't have returned without knowing what was going on in the zodiac.

But why tell such a blatant lie?

And.

Ellen looks at her surroundings, not at the paladin in front of her.

The paladins guarding the gate all have their eyes on Ellen.

Ellen and the gang.

Ellen takes a step toward the paladin.

"......!"

As Ellen approaches, he takes a step back.

A slightly different look than last time.

"Why is it falling like this?"

Despite his armor, the corners of his eyes, his face, and his fingertips were trembling.

It looked terrified.

Why?

"You don't have to come back right away. I'm going to go inside, and if you're not there, I'll find someone who is."

The moment Ellen tried to pass.

"You're not allowed in."

"......."

The terrified paladin blocked Ellen with his body.

I don't know what happened, but this cleared it up for me.

The absence of a Templar isn't the point.

It's important that we don't let Ellen in.

"Get out of the way."

"...... is not allowed."

It wasn't just the paladin in front of her, but the other paladins as well, and Ellen could feel the tension in the air.

As the mood begins to turn sour, so do the expressions on the other three faces in the back as they wait for Ellen to finish her story.

"Maybe I'm in the right place."

Ellen shakes her head, looking at the terrified paladin.

"You want to see if I can force my way through. If you want to know, try blocking it one more time."

Ellen takes another step toward the entrance of the Great Hall.

This time, the gatekeepers were unable to stop Ellen in her tracks.

\* \* \*

Ellen entered the battlefield instead.

The paladins who hadn't stopped Ellen stared at her back, their faces grim.

"...... That's weird."

Instead, it was a very strange sight.

Obviously, I came in with the idea that there was something there.

"Is anyone....... Why isn't he there?"

When I stopped by a few days ago, there were a lot of paladins and priests roaming around.

But now there was silence, with no one coming or going.

It can be incredibly disconcerting to be in an overly large space and not hear any sound.

Everyone was feeling that awkwardness.

"Something's going on."

"Let's go up."

The Crusaders' Great Hall, which seems to be nearly empty.

Ellen led the group up the stairs, if only to confirm the absence of the crusader leader.

My heart was beating in a strange rhythm.

What happens.

No, it happened.

Instead, the battlefield was empty.

It's as if you're trying to bite someone on purpose.

Soon, Ellen's quest to reach the upper levels, where the Crusader Knights' offices were located, was cut short.

-Pooh! Pow!

That's because I started hearing an eerie beeping sound.

"What......?"

The sound of something sharp tearing and cutting flesh.

-Thump! Thump!

The sound of something hitting a wall.

It was loud enough for Ellen, whose senses were far more acute than the average person's, to hear, as well as for the others.

It was so quiet in the room that the sound echoed even more clearly.

Ellen ran straight to where she heard it.

Close to the crusader leader's office.

Conference Room.

The sound was coming from there.

-Bang!

Without hesitation, Ellen kicked in the closed conference room door.

I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw what was happening in front of me.

Someone was killing people.

Ellen looks at the blood and dead people in the room.

Their flesh was strewn about, unrecognizable from how they had been torn and slashed.

The huge conference room was a pool of blood.

The person behind you slowly turns his head.

"No one told me to come this way......."

He turns around, sees Ellen, and twists his mouth into a grotesque grin.

"This would have been unstoppable."

"What....... What is this......?"

As Ellen froze and muttered, others arrived.

"Uh......?"

Ludwig could not help but be mesmerized by the scene of carnage and the man who seemed to be the master of it.

"Priest......?"

"Ah, Ludwig......."

She wipes the bridge of her nose with the back of her hand, holding the small sword in a reverse grip.

He tries to wipe the blood away, but it's a bizarre sight, with more blood smeared on his face.

"I see, Ludwig doesn't know anything......."

The look of regret on his face was palpable.

But the look of pure apology on his face, as opposed to the blood all over his body, only made him look more eerie.

"How did the priest......?"

Ludwig's reaction made it clear who the woman in front of him was.

Archbishop Rowen is alive.

A supposedly dead priest is on a killing spree in the great hall on the top floor of the Crusader Order.

And the paladins blocking the way at the entrance.

Empty substitution.

You can probably guess that this is not an isolated incident.

There was some collusion.

A conspiracy so big it's hard to fathom.

And dead people.

The clothes of the murdered, unrecognizable.

"You, who did you kill?"

At Ellen's question, Rowen shrugs.

"The popes."

The dead totaled five.

That was enough for Ellen to guess what was going on.

"By the way, have you guys seen Elion Bolton?"

"......what?"

"Where and how I smelled it. Because he ran away."

The crusader leader was not lying when he said he was out of town.

It's everyone's first time seeing Rowen in person except Ludwig.

"If you don't know, can you please stop interfering and get lost?"

"......what?"

"It's rude to stick your nose in other people's business."

I don't even know where things started anymore.

The priest who was said to be dead is alive.

For some reason, the priest is slaughtering five popes.

It's almost as if everyone in the room has moved out of the way.

Where.

What.

How did we get to this point?

Should I draw my sword?

Ellen's eyes were wide and her fingertips were shaking.

"I don't like that crazy bitch either, but I think we should leave her alone for now."

Suddenly, I heard a voice behind me, and I couldn't help but turn my attention to the hallway this time.

"It's all well and good for you to be all over the place, but why don't you back off?"

All four were even more aghast at the sudden appearance of the man.

"Olivia...... lanche?"

One of the three Temple students who disappeared with the Devil.

Olivia Ranze was looking at them.

Not Heinrich, not Ludwig, not Ruiz.

I was horrified, knowing that she should never have been in this position.

"I'll make it short."

Olivia looks at them, arms crossed, whether they realize she's there or not.

"From now on, the Crusader Knights and the Order of the Five Great Masters are ours. Well...... technically, we're just getting back on track."

"What did you say......?"

"So, go home thinking that's it."

Olivia was looking exactly at Ellen.

"You're smart, you know that if you start pulling knives around here, things are going to get weird, right?"

In the face of such an arrogant and imposing threat, Ellen felt like giving up on understanding the situation.

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Elayon Bolton waited at the warp spot for his spacewalk.

The popes knew that the Devil's following was growing, and Elayon Bolton was surely sensing the tide, if not the details.

But that wasn't the point.

The Cult of the Eclipse had already been mobilized by the Demon King's followers, and it was clear that Rowen was a key figure.

But it's only the Cult of the Eclipse that has fallen for it.

Allies.

The paladins and priests under the constant command of Elayon Bolton could support the Demon King, but they could not be controlled by Rowen.

A bond that has crossed battlefields and lines of fire together countless times is not something that can be betrayed easily.

As such, the Cult of the Zodiac forces are literally a handful compared to the paladins and priests of the Alliance.

While the Crusader Templar may have a lower actual rank than the Pope, he has a great deal of authority and power.

And that's just what Rowen has gotten his hands on.

The Crusaders were, and still are, capable of staging coups whenever they feel like it.

If he returns to the Allied lines with a large army of paladins, Elayon Bolton has enough troops to push back the unholy forces of the Eclipse.

Elayon Bolton was a madman who sought to execute the head of his enemies in the middle of the enemy's territory.

The most elite paladins who carried out the order were men of Elayon Bolton, but even they were slain by Rowen.

You have been grossly underestimating Rowen's combat power. It's clear that he's been hiding his true strength.

Elayon Bolton would pick and choose from those who remained, and those who were not captured by Rowen, under his breath, and Elayon Bolton would return to the Allied garrison.

The power of the Cult of the Zodiac is already beyond the control of the Popes and the Crusaders.

We don't know what we're going to do, but we need to get back to the Allied lines and think about it.

I've been back to a few places I thought I was home, so for now, I need to get my thoughts together while I'm safe.

"Forward to....... What the hell is going on?"

"I don't know."

I'm also outraged that the popes handed over the entire Church to the devil, and they weren't even the ones making the decisions about the Church in the first place.

And he was tasking Rowen's people to track her down.

The ecliptic is dangerous.

You need to leave.

That's why Elayon Bolton was at the warp spot, waiting for the mass teleportation spell to activate to take him back to the Alliance.

"When we get back, we'll go straight to the center. There's no guarantee Rowen hasn't tried his tricks there, too. We'll do the verification, and then we'll figure out how to handle this......."

You've ruined everything.

Elion Boulton felt like biting his tongue at the thought of breaking everything.

Go back.

Just go back, and then.

What's next?

Get it wrong and you could start a civil war.

It's not a small place.

The paladins and priests of the Alliance follow their crusader leader more than the Pope. There are some who support the Demon King, but it is only out of sympathy; they truly follow the man they have fought alongside, Elayon Bolton. As such, they have no choice but to side with him.

Now, Elion Bolton is a commander who has abandoned his army and gone into enemy territory.

If he can get back on track, if he can bring his army with him, control of the situation is in Elion Bolton's hands.

I had no intention of overstepping the authority of the popes.

But if the authority of the popes has become worthless, it's a problem that shouldn't go unaddressed.

It means that the Church of the Lord has completely ceased to function as an organization.

The fact that the Church of God has been privatized by a single entity is itself a problem.

If it was the choice of the chiefs to negotiate and coexist with the demons, I would respect that. There was no reason to disagree.

However, if someone other than the head of the Order is already in control of the Order, the Order should not exist that way.

The popes were incompetent.

Also, Elion Bolton was incompetent.

You think you're reading the signs, but you're looking up at the signs.

Empires, demons, and emperors.

I was thinking about those things and not really looking at the changes that were happening underneath.

I thought the movement from below might touch on a big problem, but I didn't realize that the movement from below was already a big problem.

I don't know where to start, but I'm going back.

The popes were incompetent beyond incompetent.

But Elion Bolton knows he's not incompetent, even though he's painfully aware of it.

A vast army of paladins and priests are still under his control.

After returning home, you must do something about the ruined Church of the Lord.

You should be able to decide what to do next.

"When we get back, we're going straight to headquarters."

"Yes, sir."

Elayon Bolton is nervous and anxious that his return could be the beginning of a massive civil war.

Will he go along with it, what will happen to his bond with the demon, and what will happen to Rowen.

There was so much at stake in his hands.

How long have I been waiting.

-Flash!

With a flash, Mass Teleport was cast.

With the fading of his vision, Elayon Bolton opened his closed eyes.

"......."

And as soon as Elion Bolton saw what was in front of him, it all clicked.

Since you traveled from a warp spot, you should have traveled directly to the warp spot of the Allied garrison.

But.

Elion Bolton has arrived in an unnamed forest.

And none of the people he was with were with him.

But he wasn't alone.

There were two people in front of me.

On a tree stump, a demon sat.

"I thought you were going to call it Intercept....... Well, it's a feature, I just experienced it, okay?"

And by his side was a girl with forked hair.

"This is ......."

Daughter of the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen, the greatest genius in the history of magic, was at the Devil's side.

"I went to....... in the first place in the first place."

When Elion Bolton dies, civil war breaks out.

There was no way that what the Crusader leader knew, the others didn't know.

"This is so....... We were supposed to hold hands, but now we have to face each other like this."

Yesterday's enemy is today's friend.

Yesterday, we were supposed to be friends, but today we're enemies again.

Around and around we went, and that was that.

\* \* \*

What happens when Elayon Bolton returns to the Allied garrison.

It was inevitable that something like this would happen, as I knew I had to be on the lookout for it. The moment Elion Bolton disappeared in the first place, it was only natural that he would try to return to the garrison.

"I wasn't going to kill any of you originally."

The Devil says, still.

"You know, there's no point in changing popes or crusaders, it's just a pain in the ass."

"I like the status quo. I like it more than you do."

"Of course, I don't want the gate situation to stay the way it is."

"So without much change, the Crusaders are the way they are, the Popes are the way they are. Let's just keep it rolling and stay out of each other's way. No more bloodshed. That's what I was thinking. So I wasn't going to kill them, I wasn't going to change them."

"But if we don't change it, something even worse might happen."

"And you were up to no good and didn't tell me about it?"

"I know it's hard for us to be full allies or superiors, but I heard that the popes wanted to kill all the infidels."

"I was willing to be taken advantage of, but you didn't say you were going to let me crush your liver because it's stuck to your gallbladder, or remove your gallbladder because it's stuck to your liver."

Elayon Bolton's eyes widened at the demon's words.

"Yeah, you wouldn't have known, it was the idea of the popes, and you were too busy killing monsters to think about it."

"Thank you for saving me from making lame excuses."

"I'm not going to say it's your fault for not knowing, because it's not really your fault."

For Elion Bolton, the war was hard enough.

Elion Bolton was too far away from the ecliptic to know what was going on, what the popes were thinking, and what was going on inside the Church from there.

This was true even before the Allied forces arrived. He roamed the battlefield rather than being at the Crusader headquarters.

I was so committed to the war that I was too far removed from the practice.

That's what Elion Bolton did.

I tried too hard.

To work too hard, to fulfill your responsibilities and beliefs as a powerful paladin who fights for herself.

I didn't care about politics.

"So, the popes have decided to change all that, and of course, if they hold a knife to my throat and tell me not to do that, I'm going to have to nod my head no, but I've already been screwed over enough by the time the motherfuckers tell me about their pagan holocaust plans, so I'd rather have someone there who listens to me and knows what I'm thinking."

"No way......."

Elayon Bolton stares at the demon, mouth agape.

"I met Rowen too late, I don't know if it was before he did something crazy, but if we let this continue, either all the heathens will die or the Empire will be crushed."

The devil had to decide.

"The Five Great Houses of God will be united, and a new religious system will be established that incorporates demonism and warrior religions to protect all pagans. No, you're not a pagan anymore, you're a part of the Order."

Unified Cult.

"And my sister, who I know well, will be the head of it."

The arrows and bombs fired by the others explode here and there, eventually converging into one big blast.

In the end, it was both a great unifier and a great divider.

Instead of preventing disruption now, it will be a key part of the divide later.

"In the middle of the Empire....... and plant the flag of Darkland in the middle of the Empire......."

The forces of the Devil have entered the ecliptic, and all who are observant know it.

"Yeah."

If we don't do this, we might break everything, so the devil is in the details.

We tried to utilize the Five Great Houses, but the situation has gotten out of hand. As such, we are in a situation where we cannot survive unless we make greater improvements to our constitution.

What would have been deferred to the future had he not tried to kill Rowen, was rapidly accelerated by a single decision by Elayon Bolton.

"The purge and all that, I honestly didn't agree with it, which is why I left you guys alone, but I think Rowen, that crazy bitch, was right."

"......."

"It seems to me that new booze should be in new bottles."

If you take control of a group and then leave it alone, you're leaving vested interests in place, and you're not really in control. You can hide as much as you want to hide from the top, and you can collude as much as you want to collude.

"It was impossible to just lend them a name."

If you're going to do it, do it right.

And brutally.

You want to make sure there is no warping.

I realized that purges are not uncommon even in times of chaos, and that in a time when the world is shaking, it would be foolhardy to try to take control of a group and not take out the incumbents.

I thought I controlled the Church and the Templars because I had the Popes and the Crusaders.

But the reality was that I hadn't gotten the slightest bit of control.

The existing popes have always harbored the idea of purging the pagans at some point, so they are not the right people for a reformed religious system, nor can we hope to inject new ideas into their inevitably aging heads. If they did cooperate, it would be under the guise of cooperation.

Eliminated popes who thought they had power when they didn't.

And this time, Elion Bolton.

It has power, it has symbolism, and it has a lot of followers.

The de facto core of the Order's power.

Had Elayon Bolton returned safely to the Allied garrison, civil war could have erupted in the ecliptic, depending on his choices.

"The popes are a pain in the ass, but you've done your best, and all you've gotten is a handshake?"

In reality, Elion Bolton didn't even sell the Church to the devil; that was the choice of the popes.

The purging of Rowen was ultimately done because it was best not to have that kind of chaos at this point.

"But since I've decided to push Rowen, I can't come with you."

But that doesn't change the fact that Elayon Bolton is an established faction now that the Purge has begun.

Not backing down because you're doing it wrong, but backing down because you have to.

Purge is what it is.

And now that he has chosen to take Rowen's hand, Elayon Bolton, the man who tried to kill Rowen, is no longer a threat to the Crusaders.

"That's why, unlike the popes, I want to give you a choice."

Elayon Bolton stared at the Demon King with a stony expression.

"Options......?"

"Yeah, just two."

The devil holds up two fingers.

"First, you die on this spot by my hand."

The devil folds his fingers together.

"Second, retire gracefully."

Retirement.

It was more unthinkable than death.

\* \* \*

There was an uncomfortable silence on the top floor of the Great Hall of the Crusaders.

The survival of a priest who was thought to be dead.

And the scene where that priest murdered five popes in cold blood.

Olivia Ranze, who disappeared with the devil.

We don't know how it all started, but Olivia Ranze was straightforward.

The Crusader Knights and the Order of the Five Masters now belong to the Devil.

Ellen's fists were clenched, unable to do anything, and so were Louise and Heinrich.

"Nonsense....... nonsense......."

Only Ludwig is there, glaring at Olivia Ranze.

"How can you be here? How can the Devil have the Crusaders? That can't happen....... It can't happen! How could you! Like this....... Like this. Like this. Talking shit like that in the middle of the ecliptic!"

Ludwig's dormant anger and self-pity explodes.

"Don't you have the slightest sense of guilt? Do you know how many people died because of you? And this was all the Devil's plan? How dare you have the nerve to do this......!"

"Hey."

"Am I talking to you?"

"......what?"

Olivia clicks her tongue briefly.

"And who are you in the first place?"

"!!"

As far as Olivia could remember, Ludwig was just a passing acquaintance.

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Who you are.

Ludwig stiffened at the shocking words.

Ludwig was left speechless by the realization that his opponent didn't even know him.

"I don't have time to convince a nag like you."

Treating nags.

Ludwig felt the urge to bite his tongue at that point.

"Back off, Ellen. I don't want to fight with you."

"......."

At this point, Olivia didn't speak to anyone except Ellen Artorius.

Even Louise is treated as if she's an afterthought, as if she knows that if Ellen steps down, everyone else will.

Ludwig's eyes light up as he watches Ellen, unable to draw her sword or retreat.

That hesitation.

The horror.

That fear and hesitation.

Ludwig clearly sees it.

In the first place, being a warrior is just a front.

It was impossible for Ellen to stand up to the Devil.

I still haven't gotten over my past feelings.

I wanted to do it just in case.

When Ellen faces the Devil, she may not be able to fight him.

Like Ellen's sensitive response to Christina's rant.

Whatever the truth, Ellen might not be able to hold a sword to the devil, Ludwig thought.

At this point, Ludwig has no choice but to check.

Ellen's inability to show hostility to the man who disappeared with the demon, let alone the demon.

Ellen is not the one to fight the devil.

This is where you realize.

-curl!

Ludwig's entire body is instantly enveloped in blue magic.

Understand that Ellen has no choice.

I don't blame Ellen.

But if no one steps up, if Ellen, for whatever reason, doesn't want to fight.

Someone else has to fight.

Don't let fear and panic hold you back.

Someone has to punish those demons.

"Ludwig! No!"

Ludwig started to leave, but Ellen quickly grabbed his shoulder.

"Are you....... No. Don't. You don't know anything. Don't do it. Don't fight."

Why I can't fight.

Why you can't draw your sword.

You don't know, Ludwig said, and Ludwig bit his lip.

"What don't I know?"

"......."

"What can't you tell me?"

Ludwig's words are echoed by Ellen.

You're disgusted with yourself for having to say it, but you know you can't help it.

"What you don't know, you're better off not knowing......."

When the Emperor and Tana tell her that she doesn't need to know about such things, Ellen insists that I do, and she tells Ludwig what she heard.

"It's all my fault. It's all my fault. That's all you need to know....... That's all you need to know......."

You don't know anything.

It's better not to know.

A little bit of truth is, after all, worse than nothing at all.

It will only make you feel like you don't deserve to know the truth.

"Okay, don't be silly."

In a tone that is both affectionate and murderous, Ludwig looks at Olivia this time.

"I don't know about Ellen or that princess over there and her superpowers, but you don't seem to care if you get screwed over, and I'll kill you for it."

Those words were the raw truth.

"There are things in the world you don't need to know, and there are things you can't figure out that will only make your head hurt, so just don't know, and don't waste your life being weird and stubborn."

It's a harsh statement, but it's also meant to keep Ludwig from jumping to his death.

There's no reason to approach the truth when it's useless and will only make you sad.

You're no match for me, and you're going to get your ass handed to you.

I don't even know who you are.

Therefore, you're an insignificant bastard who can die and no one will care.

Olivia's words, "I don't care if I have to kill you, I'll kill you if I have to," were the bitter truth.

In the face of that truth, Ludwig couldn't take a step back.

If you find yourself dead on the spot.

If you die.

What's going on?

If Ellen dies, it's a big deal. A warrior is dead.

Louise von Schwarz is the commander of the Schwarz Army. If she dies, the Allies will be thrown into chaos.

Heinrich is a very strong power for the Allies, and is performing at a similar level to Ellen.

None of them should be hurt or killed.

Only Ludwig is there.

They are the most unremarkable of the unremarkable.

Ellen gripped Ludwig's shoulder to keep him from making a move.

"So...... it is......."

If the guy who doesn't care if he dies goes out, he might actually die.

Because Olivia Lanchester might actually do it.

Ludwig couldn't help but notice that Ellen was desperately trying to put him off.

But that's already a weird situation.

The very fact that Olivia Lanchester cares about such things is strange.

Why doesn't Ellen attack Olivia.

Why Olivia doesn't want to fight with Ellen.

If Olivia Lanchester is on the Devil's side, we don't need to worry about that.

Not Ellen, not Louise, not Heinrich.

If they are his subordinates, you should try to kill them. All three would be a threat to him.

Olivia, however, would rather not touch the three of them, and would rather kill Ludwig, who is only a minor player.

And as if Ellen knew that, she stops Ludwig.

Olivia doesn't want to fight with Ellen, and Ellen doesn't want to fight with Olivia.

You don't draw your sword when you hear the shocking news that a demon has consumed the Five Great Houses.

That attitude is telling.

We don't know everything, but we do know one truth from this situation.

The only thing that this situation tells us is that they outwardly acknowledge that they're supposed to hate each other, but when it comes down to it, they can't touch each other.

They don't even hate each other.

I don't even consider it an enemy.

Ellen did not foresee or know about this situation.

However, they are panicked, but they don't end up fighting.

No, you can't fight it.

"From the beginning....... All....... Everything....... Everything people know......."

Ludwig mumbles to himself in disbelief.

"You were lying, weren't you......?"

Ludwig's eyes sank, dark and deep.

\* \* \*

There was no way a fight was going to break out on the spot.

Heinrich and Louise were also silent, knowing the disastrous consequences of their actions.

There were only two types of people: those who never drew their swords, and those for whom drawing their swords was pointless.

In the end, we watched with open eyes as the Crusaders fell into the hands of the demon, and we could do nothing but retreat from the scene.

The Empire was reanimating the bodies of its fallen, creating an army of the undead.

The supposedly dead Rowen is somehow alive and well, and has taken control of the Order as a minion of the Devil.

You'll only know the result.

We could only wait to see the results.

No wonder Louise and Heinrich were as shocked as Ludwig was.

And Ellen's shock could not have been greater.

I couldn't help but feel the fear and horror of Reinhardt's truth, whether I knew it or not, and why he was doing this.

"Ludwig, I'm......."

"I don't know, I don't deserve to know, and what I do know won't make a difference."

After walking for a while, Ellen cautiously opened her mouth to speak, but Ludwig cut her off mid-sentence.

The ability to know something.

The need to not know something.

Is there such a thing.

"Well, no matter how stupid I am, I know that."

"......."

"If the Church of the Gods already belongs to the Devil, then you shouldn't have fought there."

Ludwig nodded slowly, as if he understood why Ellen hadn't fought.

"It's not about whether you can fight the devil or not, it's that you just realized you shouldn't have....... I get it now."

Ludwig now understood that if he messed up, the ecliptic would be shattered.

"I don't think anyone should know that the Cult of the Lord has fallen to the Devil, because if they do, it could lead to worse things."

Ludwig looks at Ellen and asks, should we keep this a secret?

Ellen has no answer.

He looks past Ellen, who doesn't answer, and this time Ludwig looks at Louise.

"Because innocent people might die, because they might get caught up in a fight they don't care about, because we have to do it to reduce casualties."

"......."

Ludwig doesn't blame Ellen.

Ludwig saw with his own eyes that Ellen could not fight the demon.

It's unavoidable.

Ludwig thinks to himself.

What if his dearest friends, like Lannion Sessor and Delphine, who were actually people he cared about, were actually demons?

Even if you were yourself, you wouldn't have drawn your sword.

I'm frustrated, angry, and sad.

I don't think I'll ever be able to fight back.

So, Ludwig was thinking that Ellen might be shaken, and he was right.

I don't blame Ellen.

And there's no reason to complain.

What you can't fight is what you can't fight.

It's the world's demand that Ellen must kill the demon, not her will.

Because it would be incredibly sad to see Ellen, who has already saved so many lives, resented for not being able to stab a demon.

But if you keep getting told you can't do this and you can't do that.

What's left but to say that nothing should be done.

What happens is what happens, and what happens is what happens.

It will be true in every moment that you have to leave it all alone.

And another problem.

As you heard from Christina.

That the Gate debacle wasn't necessarily the Devil's fault.

That there is some hidden truth.

Ludwig doesn't know what Ellen means specifically when she says that all he needs to know is that it's his fault.

The point is, you don't deserve to know the truth.

The reason is simple.

Because it's nothing.

Because you're not important.

They're worthless, so it's okay to kill them, and they don't deserve to know the truth.

Where the hell does that come from.

Who the hell gives you the right to know the truth.

The truth is now rather unimportant.

Whatever it was, Ludwig realized it was worthless.

So, now I don't even have to wonder.

The look on Ludwig's face as he crossed the threshold of helplessness and despair was rather dramatic.

"That's hard."

I'm just saying.

"It's too hard."

After passing through the Temple Gate, Ludwig hurried away, even though the path was the same.

"I'll go first."

No one is fighting.

Someone must have done something wrong.

What to do if no one wants to fight.

As he spoke, Ludwig's dark face and gait seemed more determined than ever.

As if you've just decided what to do.

As if you didn't already know.

Ellen watched Ludwig's back as he walked away, biting her lip.

Small and tiny.

All I could see was the dark, slimy backside of someone who was so small and insignificant that he eventually realized he had nothing to offer.

Olivia Ranze's rant about how four deaths won't affect the mainstream.

It was the raw, unvarnished truth.

Even if the reason for this was to keep Ludwig from doing anything rash, it doesn't change the fact that the words were true and stuck in Ludwig's mind like a badge of honor.

Louise sighs.

"The devil doesn't want the world to end, and the empire is bound to falter, so this is what happens."

Though she couldn't see the details, Louise could sense the vastness of the flow, and knew the past, present, and future to some degree.

I don't need Ellen to tell me, I can already feel it.

Rampaging heathen.

Carnage.

Take control of the Demon's Crusade Knights.

A warrior who can't fight.

A demonic minion who does not want to fight the warrior.

And.

The Silence of the Empire.

"You don't know what you wanted to know, but you know what you need to know."

I couldn't tell where Rowen's work ended and mine began.

I didn't need to know.

But in an odd twist, she learned something she needed to know.

What the royal family must do to survive going forward.

I realized which way the tide was turning.

Ruiz had failed as an individual and hadn't solved anything.

But as Princess of Cernstadt, she couldn't have been more successful.

Louise looks at Ellen, who stares blankly into the snowy void.

It was on the verge of collapse.

But something that can't be broken, so that its stony face doesn't crumple.

That pale, hardened look, like a piece of glass that could shatter at any moment.

Louise continued to stare.

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Ellen turned and walked away quietly.

She realized something and disappeared, taking Ludwig with her, who was stunned.

"That's really bad luck."

Olivia smirked at Rowen's comment.

"I'm pretty sure there's a curse on us. We're always caught doing things we really don't want to be seen, asshole."

"Haha, maybe it's just that every moment is something you really don't want to see?"

"I guess you're right about that."

In the blood-soaked conference room, Olivia watched Rowen clean up the mess.

With a prayer of cleansing, a mop, and a broom, I was sweeping, cleaning, and organizing the scattered bits of flesh.

"If you're going to work so hard to clean it up, why don't you just twist your own neck?"

"These people don't deserve to die in peace, so I gave them a hard time."

"......How do you think someone like you is going to die?"

"I'll think about that then."

"Let's sell it."

"It's got to be good."

Neither Rowen, who cleaned up the blood with a gleeful smile, nor Olivia, who watched the scene in disbelief and offered no help, could be called sane.

"What happened to Elion Bolton?"

"If you go back, you go back, and if you don't go back, you don't go back."

"Good."

We were prepared to intercept Elion Bolton as he returned to the Alliance, or not.

We cannot allow Elayon Bolton to return safely to his camp and lead his army back to the ecliptic.

"I'm not going to kill Elion Bolton, no complaints?"

"I don't know about complaining, but wouldn't that leave a bad taste in my mouth?"

"I'm sending them to a place where they can't come back."

"It's not like we can send them home, is it?"

"Well, we'll give him a nice house with water and a nice view and let him live out his days in comfort, but he can't use anyone, and he can't be used. I don't know about you, but don't you think you have every right to grow old and die in peace?"

"That's not something I'd say after almost getting killed by that guy, but yeah."

Elion Bolton will spend the rest of his life in Edina.

Rowen smiled, knowing what Olivia meant by that.

"By the way, I see you've found a new home somewhere."

"Do you want to go?"

"Sure."

"Look."

"I'll do my best."

He's a tasteless little man, a creepy little madman, but his loyalty to the Devil is real.

It's only been a few days since Olivia has seen Rowen.

But he was very gentle with Rowen.

"I get that you like Reinhardt, but why the hell do I?"

"You're one of the people who believed in the devil when no one else did."

"......a."

Rowen professes to be a follower of the Devil, but when she first sees him, she recognizes his words as lies.

I changed my mind after the gate incident and everything went according to the devil's prediction.

So, from Rowen's point of view, the three people who believed in the Devil from the beginning to the end were almost on equal footing with the Devil.

"I wonder if it was necessary to kill the popes."

Olivia sighed heavily.

"They won't be able to accept the Holy Church, and the idea that Demonism and Deism actually have the same roots, which I still have a hard time accepting, and these old popes are going to be it?"

"I suppose so."

Before learning of the demonic contact, Rowen had envisioned adding two more orders to the Five Great Houses.

Wreak havoc in the refugee camps, causing carnage and maximizing antagonism to the Empire.

They take control of the Cult of the Gods and reform it to include the Crusader Knights and the Great Cult of the Gods, as well as Demonism and Warriorism.

I didn't think it would work, and I didn't have a specific plan.

He just knew that the moment the Five Great Houses expanded, there would be a great deal of chaos.

What Rowen wanted was destruction.

But just in time, the devil showed up.

Chaos was not what the devil wanted.

Rowen wished for destruction, but the demon did not, so the task became different.

Rowen's plan is interrupted, but he can't change what has already happened.

There was carnage, and antipathy toward the Empire was at an all-time high.

It does not attempt to take the next step, which is to make the denomination itself a bomb and blow it up with brute force.

The demon tries to reform the faith.

Like Rowen, I'm not trying to confuse the warrior religion with the demon religion.

In the name of the Cult.

Correct misconceptions about gods and demigods.

Of course, that's not easy either. It does end up being a bomb.

But this time, the architect of the bomb just doesn't have the heart to detonate it.

As such, it is not something that can happen so abruptly as to make the Cult of the Lord a divinity in Edina.

Over time, we'll take slow, incremental steps.

"Even if the popes don't accept our plan, it's not like it wasn't possible to set them up as puppets. Isn't it just going to make things more difficult? Who's going to do what they've been doing? Five popes in a row is suspicious. I don't have anything against Reinhardt, but I'm not sure it's the right choice."

"Ah....... I see what you mean."

Suddenly there are five vacancies for popes.

Hence the confusion Reinhardt doesn't want.

At Olivia's question about whether that in itself would add to the chaos and cause the Order to creak, Rowen shook his head.

"It's okay, the popes didn't do the job in the first place."

"...... was just taking up space?"

"Of course, they'd give orders and we'd do the work, but we didn't actually do the work, we didn't have the power, so it's fine without the popes, it's probably better off without them."

"If you're saying I have to do what you want me to do and do what you tell me to do from below, then the popes worked and had real power. What are you talking about?"

"Did that command come from your own head?"

"Hmm?"

At Rowen's words, Olivia tilted her head in confusion.

"Is the judgment of a person who only listens to what the auxiliary bishops tell him, who judges according to their advice, who is handed an analysis, who is told what the best option is, and who parrots it like a parrot, is it really the judgment that's in his head?"

"Ah."

"If you can control the information that goes into someone's head, you can control their behavior and judgment, but they'll think they're acting on their own. It's surprisingly easier to manipulate the thoughts of stubborn old men."

"You even piloted it?"

"I don't know if it's....... popes' judgment?"

"Heh......."

"I keep hearing that the Devil's forces are too strong. He has too many supporters within the Church. At this rate, the entire sect may fall to the Devil. There might even be a coup within the sect. This is the current state of affairs. It's hard to change that, if you keep whispering things like that."

Rowen laughs.

"What could possibly be going through the minds of a bunch of old pigs desperate to save their jobs?"

"Of course, you think you've used your own judgment to decide where you stand."

"But what if the devil actually had a lot of support, but not as much as the popes had been told?"

"What if the whisperers on the sidelines have been inflating, exaggerating, and making things up where they don't exist?"

"Was that really his best judgment?"

Humans make judgments based on information.

But information is not synonymous with truth.

If the information available only shows one way, people go that way, thinking it's their decision.

We don't think about who paved the road.

We don't think about who is showing us the way.

So people walk down the street not knowing where they're going, thinking it's their own decision, their own judgment.

The popes had been brainwashed.

And now that the devil has been touched, the useless popes have been killed.

And they're not the only ones.

"Is it just the popes, what about other people?"

And others within the Order of the Lord.

The word starts to get out about the positive public opinion of the demon and its growing following, and people get behind it.

It may not even have existed in the first place.

Maybe it's not a trend, but it's becoming known as a trend, and people are jumping on the bandwagon, and it's actually becoming a trend.

If Rowen's story is true, then the fall of the Order to the Demon King began with a rumor spread by a few people.

As they say, something becomes fashionable because it's known to be fashionable.

This means that the Cult of the Lord has been destroyed by nothing more than a rumor.

"I hadn't hoped for this outcome, but as it turned out, I guess I didn't do it in vain, because it was the judgment of the popes that led me to meet the devil."

"What were you originally going to do?"

"I wanted to get the Cult of the Lord to support the Devil and fight the Empire."

"......Did you know that Reinhardt is my least favorite person?"

"Wouldn't it be weirder if they liked someone like me? If anything, I think I'd be scared of someone like that."

"......You too, I feel bad."

"Holy Father."

"Not yet, but why."

"Ludwig, you must be hurt."

Olivia narrowed her eyes at the outburst.

I remember seeing it a few times off and on, but it's only now that I've gotten around to it.

I wonder if this is the same guy who ran into Reinhardt at the Temple tournament.

"......It's so refreshing to hear that from someone like you, what can I say, what is she?"

"It's nothing."

Rather, Rowen puts it more bluntly.

Ludwig is nothing.

Rowen doesn't say anything more. But Olivia remembers the look on Ludwig's face.

That look of miserable realization.

He had the look of someone confirming a truth he had secretly known.

This guy is nothing.

But we do all of this for people who are nothing.

That is, don't hurt the innocent.

Or was he saying that you never know what can happen when you hurt people who are nothing.

It's probably the latter.

"Are you saying I should have been more careful because it was nothing?"

"I was saying that it's better to kill than to hurt."

What happens when the nobodies become the nobodies.

It was in front of Olivia's eyes now.

\* \* \*

The news of the murder of the pontiffs of the Church of the Gods had not traveled far. It wasn't like they were out and about much in the first place, so it was just a matter of controlling the information.

Everything was done in silence and under the radar.

Crusader Leader Replacement Chart.

Olivia Ranze's dominance.

The sudden appearance of priests with powerful divine powers.

Their new teachings too.

It was all done quietly and stealthily.

The snow stopped.

The sun came out.

The weather was mild.

Really suddenly.

After what seemed like an eternity, the snow stopped, abruptly, and the warmth of the sun shone down on the land like a lie.

Warmer weather, almost like late spring, has arrived.

The frozen atmosphere of the ecliptic did not melt, but the snow that fell did.

Like it's a lie.

Everyone in the ecliptic watched as it melted as if it had just snowed.

"You know when you do this, you can't stop, right?"

"I know."

The Demon King was walking with Liana de Granz in a secluded park on the ecliptic, watching the wet snow melt into streams of water.

"You might be able to stop the slaughter right now, but you might have to kill more people with your hands later."

"......."

"You don't know what it's like to make things bigger and put them off until later."

"Right."

To quell the riots in the refugee camps, the Empire used violence.

To prevent the ominous atmosphere from turning into a larger riot, Rowen was brought in.

In exchange for Rowen's capture, he gained control of the entire Crusader and Lordship orders, as well as the refugee camps, behind the scenes.

But that's a catch-22.

Like the massacre that stopped an empire from collapsing right now.

This happens because there can be no group collapse before a gate event.

Taking down and absorbing an empire that has already lost its legitimacy and raison d'etre will be a post-Gate affair.

One day this will come to the surface, and the devil will have to repeat history.

And on a larger scale.

"You, can you do that?"

"......."

We're just plugging the holes to get us through the day, but we all know the dam is going to break at some point.

Who blocks this time, who blocks next.

I know I'm just delaying the moment the dam breaks.

"Was there anything I did because I could?"

And sword-wielding.

And being a demon.

Everything I've done so far hasn't been because I could.

I've been doing it because I had to.

After doing things because I thought I had to, all I knew was the truth: I shouldn't have done anything.

I still do what I have to do.

But when Riana hears that, she looks at the demon and bites her lip.

"After all, I can't say I can."

"......."

At that, the demon only laughed miserably.

"Poor little guy. Come here, let me give you a hug."

"Get lost."

There's a brief spring in the ecliptic.

Melting snow and ice, but ultimately not melting anything.

Well, there was a brief spring.

Episode 616.

A few days after the snow stopped falling on the ecliptic, an unusually warm climate prevailed.

The new year was already upon us, and the new January had already brought with it unseasonably warm weather, even as the political climate remained frozen.

Ludwig was walking through the streets of the Temple in the unexpectedly warm weather. The gates of the Temple were just around the corner.

"Ludwig, I think you have a visitor.

"...... Guest?

The story was told to the few remaining dorm users.

'Yes, he doesn't have authorization. He said he'd wait for you outside.'

'ah.......'

As he exited the Temple Gate, Ludwig saw a woman in uniform sitting on a chair in the square in front of the dormitory.

It was the uniform of the Crusader Knights.

She stood up and smiled brightly at Ludwig.

"Ludwig."

"......."

"I'm sorry, I've been busy with a lot of things and I'm just now getting around to seeing you."

Rowen came to Ludwig alone, dressed in the uniform of the Crusaders.

"What can I do for you, new Crusader Master?"

We have just received word that Archbishop Rowen has been named the next leader of the Crusader Knights, following the sudden retirement of Elayon Bolton.

Ludwig's look at Rowen held no hostility or malice.

All that remained was the cold demeanor of a man who had closed himself off to the world.

\* \* \*

The murder of Rowen was originally investigated by the Crusader Knights.

It was up to the Crusader Knights and the Cult of the Lord to announce who had died in that burned-out temple.

Rowen wasn't just faking his death, he was never dead in the first place.

She has now been named the next Crusader Knight Commander following the sudden retirement of Elion Bolton.

That decision was made at a papal meeting.

How can there be a papal conclave if there are no popes?

To Ludwig, who had seen five popes die at her hands, the story was a farce.

Ludwig doesn't know if Elion Bolton really retired or was murdered.

But now I didn't even care about that.

Sitting on a bench in front of the Temple Gate, Rowen said something to Ludwig, who didn't even bother to listen.

About what happened and why it happened.

Why he was almost killed, why he faked his death, why he needed time, why he approached Ludwig.

When Ludwig hears the reason for all this, he stares at Rowen.

There was no shock, no horror, no sense of betrayal at learning the truth.

"So, what did you do?"

Ludwig would only say that.

"......It's just, it's, it's, it's, it's, it's, it's, it's, it's frustrating."

"Are you telling me this because I'm worthless, that you're the one who impulsed the pagans to do what they did, and that's why the Empire killed people like that, and that's why it's the way it is. Are you telling me this because no matter who I tell, no one will believe me?"

"Um......."

Rowen hesitates for a moment, then finally nods.

"I wouldn't necessarily say no, because in this day and age of rumors, people don't believe them as much as they believe them, so if Ludwig went around saying that the new crusader knight was actually the one who pulled the strings in the refugee camp, no one would believe him."

"I'm going to leave what I don't believe, and the inquisitors are going to get me."

"You're right."

I don't care if you know, so don't tell me.

Ludwig stares at Rowen with a hard expression.

"Anyway, did you think that if I heard that, I'd be convinced, that there were circumstances, that what you've been doing has been done with good intentions?"

"I didn't think so, I thought they'd say something mean or try to kill me."

"If I try to kill you, will you die?"

"Nope. Not at all."

Ludwig doesn't show any reaction to Rowen's embarrassment.

Just keep talking in a calm, cool tone.

"So you're saying that you can tell me the truth because I can't kill you for hearing it, and I can't tell people the truth because they won't believe it?"

"I wouldn't say no."

"I'd rather kill you, but not even that......."

"......."

"Not even worth killing?"

"To put it bluntly, yes."

Ludwig was not enraged by Rowen's cruel words.

"Yeah, that's fine."

"......."

"Isn't that weird?"

"What is it?"

"A few days ago, I was treated like I was useless and shouldn't know, and now I'm being treated like I'm useless and should know. Who the hell decides that?"

Some truth.

You don't need to know because you're not important.

It's okay to know, you're not important.

Ludwig ultimately found the behavior and attitudes of those who handled the truth stranger than the truth itself.

In the end, there is no value in truth.

"I've been thinking about it for a few days."

"Yes."

"Your business, the Devil's business, Ellen's business, the Empire's business. I've thought about all of those things, and I've come up with......."

Ludwig opens his mouth with a deadpan expression.

"It's not like Ellen is going to tell you that it's all your fault......."

"It all happened for a reason. I don't know, but there's a reason, there's a story."

"You wouldn't say that, or act that way, unless you had that."

"They can't be looking at each other like that."

"Everyone looks sad, and no one seems to be happy, so I'm guessing everyone had a reason."

"Well, I guess that doesn't matter anymore."

Ludwig looks at Rowen and says.

"You guys seem to think you're in a position to decide something like that."

"That's what matters."

"That's the problem."

"It's not what the truth is, it's not what the story is, it's that attitude of controlling the truth. It's the attitude that you're pretending to care about people, but you're not, and you think you can decide whether they know something or don't know something, and that's the problem."

"I saw that in you guys."

"A very unpleasant, offensive, disgusting sense of superiority."

"You don't know."

"But I'm doing something very great and noble that you don't know about."

"So you don't need to know. Get out."

"You don't know."

"But I did something really great and noble that you didn't know about, and even though it looks bad, it's not, so you understand."

"So listen. How about, listen, am I right, this is what you're doing to me?"

"Isn't this offensive?"

"Sometimes it doesn't tell you, sometimes it does."

"Same reasons, different behavior."

"If the reasoning makes sense, but the behavior is the opposite, then you're just being selfish."

"So, the attitude is the same."

"They don't even treat people who are nothing, people like me, who are worthless, like people."

"Tell me or don't tell me."

"If you go any further than that, you're thinking you're entitled to save or kill someone."

"Just as the popes, whatever wrong they may have actually done, have been put to death by your judgment."

"You guys are just a bunch of weirdos with some very presumptuous delusions."

"Truth?"

"That's it, I don't even want to know anymore."

"It doesn't matter what you're trying to do, what you want, what you've done."

"The important thing is that you're all high on something."

"Whether it's a sense of mission, malice, hatred, revenge on the world, whatever."

"Or the illusion that you're making some great sacrifice to save the world."

"You're drunk on disgusting delusions."

"It's no news to you that you're devils who deserve hell, but I can't give you that punishment because, yes, as you say, I'm nothing."

"But that doesn't make the truth go away."

"It doesn't make the truth go away."

"You're sinners, aren't you?"

"The sinner must be punished, right?"

"Well, you didn't get punished, did you?"

"The truth is this."

"I don't know what's going on with your relationship, or your feelings, or your relationship, or whatever, that I don't know, that I don't want to know, but this is the truth, simple and clear."

"There are so many people buried in what you've done, and you keep burying people, and you keep burying people, and you breathe the truth in each other's faces, and you eat it up, and you understand it, and you lick it, and it's disgusting."

"Truth should be describable in one word."

"You should have been punished, but you weren't."

"That's the only truth."

In a maze of thoughts, judgments, and stories, Ludwig eventually found a simple truth.

Sin requires a price.

If sinners are silent in the midst of each other's sins.

Someone has to be held accountable.

"That Ellen I saw the other day looked pitiful."

"He looked pitiful, so I don't blame him, and I have no reason to blame him."

"I'm sure you have a story, too, just like Ellen's, and maybe you're a poor, pitiful person."

"But."

"Was there even one person who died who didn't?"

"I feel sorry for them, and I feel sorry for them, because they had to die, not knowing anything, caught in the middle."

"So I'd rather not know the truth about you guys."

"Now, even if you guys come out and tell me everything, I'm going to close my ears."

"Because pitying you, understanding you, doesn't make the truth that you need to be punished go away somewhere."

"Because that truth is so obvious."

"Knowing nothing, I will become your enemy."

"No matter what the truth is, no matter what the truth is, no matter how much you deserve it, you're going to pay the price."

"There are so many people who have paid the price for doing nothing wrong, and so many who have been forced to pay for nothing."

"You guys involved in this shouldn't have to pay any consequences, right?"

"Whatever the reason, you guys need to be punished."

"Regardless of your intentions, you're going to pay the price."

"That's the conclusion I came to."

Sin.

There are sinners.

However, there is no referee.

It's hard to find the right line in the sand when you're dealing with the intertwined forces of the Chinese zodiac, the Empire, the Cult of the Gods, and the Demon King.

It's only easy to find the sin.

Finding the guilty party is the easy part.

And it doesn't change the truth that they weren't punished.

Whoever it is.

It doesn't change the fact that everyone is cheating, trampling, and exploiting the little guy in the name of saving everyone.

Lowen smiles at Ludwig.

"It's like seeing the old me."

Someone who was embarrassed by their own smallness.

And Rowen, now a monster, looks at Ludwig as if he were looking into the distant past.

Like it's funny.

As if that's interesting.

"What are you going to do, Ludwig, how are you going to punish these monsters?"

Uselessness can neither be punished nor rewarded.

"......."

"To be a monster's friend, you have to be a monster."

To be a monster's friend, you have to be its equal.

Rowen did just that.

"You don't realize that it's the same if you're trying to kill a monster, do you?"

To kill the monster, you have to be equal.

You have to be a monster.

Rather, if you want to kill, you need to be more monstrous.

"I know."

Ludwig stares at Rowen with dark, abyssal eyes.

Seeing Ludwig like that, Rowen felt a shiver run down his spine in a different way than when he had faced the demon himself not long ago.

"I know."

It was the thrill of creating a monster with your own hands.

Someone who was nothing is about to become something.

Whatever the reason, whatever the intent, whatever the purpose.

It's fun to be something, whether you succeed or fail.

Rowen looks at Ludwig and laughs.

"Good luck, Ludwig."

Ludwig rose from his seat, as if walking away from something unclean, as if it wasn't worth listening to Rowen's ramblings any longer.

第 617页

"You're really going back? Today?"

"Yes."

"I don't think it's that urgent, but....... I can't help it."

Ellen didn't really have anything to call baggage. The only thing she brought with her when she came here was a cat carrier.

So when I went back to the Allied garrison, I was back in my normal clothes, but I didn't have anything else to carry with me.

"The snow has just stopped, but......."

Louise couldn't help but feel bittersweet at Ellen's insistence that they go back now that the snow had stopped falling and the weather had improved.

I came back for a break, got caught up in something strange, and ended up feeling even heavier.

The Demon King has taken control of the Crusader Knights and the Five Great Houses.

And I can't even touch it.

In the face of rapidly changing times, there is no such thing as a good group, but rather a group that survives.

Something radical was about to happen, and it was going to cost an unfathomable amount of blood.

The future of the empire is cloudy, and the time has come for everyone to make a choice.

It would be more peaceful to be on the Allied side of the ecliptic, not the other way around, and that's the way to avoid getting caught up in anything more sinister, especially for Ellen.

If you can't choose anything, you might as well go where you can't see it.

It's just a bunch of unsolvable problems.

There's no telling where this will end up.

If an empire falls, and a demon fills its place.

What fate awaits Ellen, who is supposed to be the devil's arch-enemy.

And what position should Heinrich take there.

No one has the answer.

Everyone is doing something because they fear the future. We all agree that the gate crisis needs to end, but the things we're doing in the hopes that it will, are making the time afterward even more frightening.

Is it really right to make the world a hellhole for the sake of a single absolute?

So what happens to the world after that absolute is achieved?

It is more dangerous for Ellen to remain on the ecliptic.

That's why we're leaving the ecliptic.

But I'd been thinking about it for a while.

"Cat, take good care of me when I come back."

"......Okay."

But for some time now, I've been waiting for a cat that hasn't shown up, a cat that hasn't shown up when I've tried to touch it one last time and leave.

But she never shows up, so Ellen leaves, leaving Heinrich in charge.

It might have disappeared altogether, Ellen had a hunch.

I kept getting that feeling that even if we were together, he would leave at some point.

Someday, from someone, like you've always felt that way.

I don't know why, but I don't think I can help it if it suddenly disappears.

We pass by each other, stay with each other for a while, and wish we could pass by each other again.

It's a shame we won't be able to say goodbye.

Eventually.

Ellen couldn't get too attached to anything too small.

"I'll be there."

Ellen was seen off by Louise and Heinrich, and left the Temple dormitory in silence.

Louise says, watching Ellen's back as she leaves.

"I think we should go back, too."

"......I think you should."

While there are dangers everywhere, it was clear that the imperial ecliptic was now, in a sense, the most dangerous place in the world.

\* \* \*

Not only did it stop snowing like it was a lie, but it melted quickly.

The snow accumulated for a long time, but it only took a few days for it to melt.

We've been having a string of warm days where I've wondered if it's a little too hot.

Ellen walks through the snow-melted streets of Temple.

There's not much to do in the Allied garrison, but in the ecliptic you'll learn too much that you don't need to know.

I'd rather live in ignorance if the goal is to fight anyway.

I decided that it was better to spend this winter not knowing anything than to get lost in a sea of things that were hard to think about and hard to decide.

How long can you hold on to a will that feels like it might break?

What's going on in the world.

If I couldn't go anywhere, if I was going to be forced down a path, like I was being pulled by something, I didn't want to see any paths anymore.

If it's a ship that's going to sink someday, should you abandon it?

Your empire, your own consciousness.

You're just holding on to things that will eventually fall apart.

Ending the Gate debacle should be the top priority right now, but everyone was thinking beyond that.

The Crusaders, the Empire, and countless other groups were already running through the scenarios in their heads.

One by one.

Louise von Schwarz realized that a major pillar of the Alliance, the Crusader Knights, had fallen into the hands of the Devil.

What happens when even the First Reich, Cernstadt, sides with the Devil.

An empire that has lost two of its pillars will cease to be an empire. Other empires will be forced to make a choice the moment this becomes visible.

Which side to take.

The Empire has already lost its legitimacy, and the Devil is the one who caused the Gate.

Both are groups that need to go away. But I don't think there's a megaforce that's going to rise above them.

What if the empire is isolated?

The Empire has an immortal army that can be used even if everything is lost.

We have a more powerful army than ever before.

Whether it's an empire on the verge of collapse, or the slaughter of those who sided with the devil to keep it alive.

Either way, it doesn't change the fact that we are once again at war.

"......."

And Ellen knows where she stands.

Whether victory is guaranteed or downfall is inevitable, you'll be on the side of the Empire.

It will inevitably happen, because another will will one day take its place in the place of the will that has disappeared.

So I'd rather not know.

There's no point in trying to learn something when the path is already set.

Eventually, you'll be nothing more than an undying army, doomed to be swallowed up by something.

For now, you can run away when someone pushes you to fight, but one day you won't be able to.

Like it or not, with or without someone forcing you to.

Fated to become an adversary one day, Ellen returns to the Alliance garrison to escape the aura of division and war that permeates the ecliptic.

Therein lies the only good.

The single, absolute good of ending the gate crisis.

And so, walking through the thawed streets, Ellen found herself near the entrance to the temple.

There's still no such thing as people coming and going.

But there it is, no people, but a small animal.

"......a."

I could see a black cat sitting on a nearby bench, curled up in the sunshine.

The cat turns its head to look at Ellen as she approaches.

-Angel

Ellen walks over to the cat, who is sitting on a bench and seems to be enjoying some much-needed sunshine.

It's a strange animal.

One minute it's gone, the next it's here.

Just when you think you're not coming back and give up and leave, it's waiting at the entrance as if it knew.

If you wait, it won't come.

If you give up, it will show up somewhere.

So I'm being condescending.

Somehow, I can't resist.

Ellen is squatting in front of a bench, eye level with the cat who is looking at her.

Conversations don't work.

But somehow, Ellen has always felt like she understood the conversation.

It seems to recognize my sadness.

They seem to recognize my pain.

It was like he felt my pain.

I'm sure I'm mistaken, but I don't think I am.

Like this now.

It's like he's waiting for Ellen at the entrance to the temple, as if he knows she's leaving.

Do they really know or do they not know.

I wonder if I'm giving meaning to things that are just coincidences.

Still, it's said that coincidences are inevitable.

This cat seemed to know his every thought in such a serendipitous way.

"I'm going to go."

-Angel

Ellen says a simple goodbye.

I wonder if I can come back.

When you return, what will the ecliptic look like?

It's hard to think that anything good can come of it.

Can this little animal survive the rising tide of war?

The Alliance garrison is dangerous, but the Zodiac is dangerous and the Temple is dangerous as it is.

The little guys always get swept away.

The fate of the little guys has always been that way, just as the Gate debacle only swept people away.

But.

The little guy in front of you.

Smaller beings are even smaller.

Maybe it's small, and when the wind blows, it blows, and when the waves crash, they crash.

Maybe it's just that it's too small to matter.

Ellen looked at the little black cat looking at her.

Recalling moments of great comfort in a small being.

"Goodbye."

I said, "I mean it," and kissed the bridge of the cat's nose.

"And, get out of here early."

-Angel

After one last playful slap at Honeybomb, Ellen headed for the Temple Gate.

As she exits the gate, Ellen stares up at the sky.

It's a warm day that has arrived as if to say that the bitterly cold winter is finally coming to an end.

But there was just too much snow.

With this much snow, I wonder if a day or so of warm weather will melt it all.

I've come a long way.

I'm sure there's still plenty of snow on the ground somewhere that doesn't get sunlight.

Who melts snow in the middle of nowhere?

Ellen holds the amulet still.

An amulet representing the moon and sun.

Hold it in your hand and carefully roll it around.

Exhaustion.

Sick and tired.

Maybe it's time to let go.

If it's something you're destined to fight anyway.

I wonder if this is the end of the world.

If the malice and hatred in this world will eventually create a situation that needs to be fought.

No matter what you do, no matter what you try, you're going to be forced to fight at some point.

The moment you feel like giving up.

A moment of vulnerability.

Ellen's eyes sunk deep.

Or maybe I had already reached my limit a long time ago.

It's as if you've pushed the envelope, and now you've reached a critical mass of time.

The sandbar of the ego is submerged beneath the rising waters.

-Took

All too easily, the amulet's leather straps snapped at the slightest tug.

Like when was the last time you had something so precious hanging around your neck to keep it from falling off?

Like finally breaking the shackles.

Like the beginning of something that is only now being liberated.

Ellen tosses the amulet she's been wearing aside like trash and starts walking somewhere.

It's like you've become something completely different.

As if she were now irrelevant to all the past, Ellen walked away and never looked back.

-.......

The black cat cautiously took the round amulet from the ground, and disappeared into an alley.

Episode 618.

Ellen returned to the Allied garrison.

The Chief's office, on the top floor of the Great Hall of the Crusader Knights.

I was sitting there.

There are five people sitting around, including me.

Olivia Ranze, now the de facto ruler of all denominations.

Liana de Granz stopping by for a quick climate control.

Rowen, the new Crusader Knight Commander.

And Herriot.

"Did Ellen go back to the Allies?"

"......Uh, yeah."

When Herriot asked, I said, "Yes. After all, the Allied positions would be quieter now, and it would be better to rest there.

However, I realized that something was different now.

I didn't rest because I was back in the ecliptic, but rather because I was back, I went through things that were harder to bear.

And I had something to do with it.

Not at first, but that's what happened.

It was bound to happen at some point, but it never felt good to see the back of Ellen's head when she was a completely different person.

"I have seen Ludwig, just as you said."

At my command, Rowen met with Ludwig.

I asked him to tell me a story.

Rowen may be the new asshole, but he sure gets things done.

Rowen has all the pagan forces in the refuge under his control.

Rowen was essential to the unification of the pagan world; after all, like Antirrhinus, you have to use what you can get, even if it's sinister and dangerous.

"I let him go because the Devil said never to do that, but I think it would have been better to kill him."

"How was it?"

"It was like he was going to stab everyone and slit his own throat for nothing."

Herriot's eyes widened at Rowen's eerie description.

Everyone in the room, including me of course, didn't really like Rowen. Or, more accurately, we couldn't like her.

They're only in because they're so valuable.

"That's just you. How is that different from what you did?"

"I don't want to have enemies like that."

It's hilarious how he just accepts it and realizes how weird he is.

"Leave it alone."

"You don't think it's going to be much of a threat, do you?"

I was silent as Rowen asked.

Instead, it was Olivia who answered.

"Yeah, I don't know what he's going to be."

Everyone seemed to agree with Olivia on some level. Even Rowen.

Ludwig is not a threat.

How much can an individual do without being crooked?

I even lost an arm.

The reason Rowen was able to do so much with his crookedness was because of the scope of the behind-the-scenes work he had been doing.

If Rowen was just a crooked Inquisitor or Paladin, there wouldn't be much we could do.

Ludwig, however, is a complete individual with no faction or power.

Ludwig is helpless, so we let him go.

I'm sure that's what you're thinking, but that's not really my intention.

"By the way, if you didn't think he was a threat, why did you insist on meeting with Ludwig? You could have just left him alone."

If Ludwig were not a variable, there would be no reason to send Rowen to meet him, and to all of them, he is too small a human being to be a variable.

"Come to think of it, you've always seemed to secretly care about her, and now you're doing it again."

Herriot shook his head, trying to remember what had happened.

I didn't pay any more attention than necessary, but I was definitely more sensitive to Ludwig's trends than the others.

And, sadly.

I was more shocked by the fact that Ludwig lost his arm than by Delphine's death.

Ludwig and I weren't on bad terms, but we weren't close either. We were in different classes.

And now, it's Ludwig, who can't be a variable and has lost his arm.

There was no point in bringing him back to see Rowen to explain. He'd be frustrated, angry, frustrated, but what the hell, why bother with Ludwig.

If you feel it's a threat, you should kill it.

If they're not a threat, you don't need to meet and talk to them.

Rowen seemed to wonder why I was bothering with Ludwig after all.

Because we were classmates.

The other side seems to take it that way, and Rowen can't help but think of it that way.

And indeed, I have no intention of touching my classmates.

Even if it's a threat to me, even if it's trying to kill me.

Unless that moment is actually in front of me, I'm not going to preemptively kill them just because they might be a threat to me.

In that situation where they actually shoved the tip of a knife into the back of my neck, it would be a different story, but I'm not going to get ahead of myself.

I wouldn't call it my only conscience, but it's my last resort.

I'm not going to cross that line.

If I predicted that someone who used to be a classmate would be a threat to me and killed them before they actually became a threat, I'm sure weirder things would happen if I started doing that.

For personal reasons, for the inexplicable absurdity of the world, I have no desire to kill Ludwig or any of the others with my own hands.

Never, until the moment comes when I am forced to kill them.

"No particular reason."

You don't have to give a specific reason.

You won't be convinced.

Only I know that Ludwig was the original protagonist of this story.

It may not make sense, but if it does, that's the problem.

Then we'd be talking about killing Ludwig.

I'm the only one who realizes that it's a weird situation for the protagonist to be stuck in the ecliptic with a missing arm at a time when he's supposed to be indispensable.

It was a very complicated and horrible set of events that led to this bizarre ending.

Many of the clues and events were already happening, but it was the events that we connected that created Death Knight.

We created Deathknight in the Tomb of the Saints in the Crusader underground.

Rowen began to investigate. He knew that no pagan or demonic faction could be large enough to do such a thing in the first place, so he kept his investigation to a minimum, keeping other factions as possible suspects.

Rowen assumed that either the Devil or the Empire was responsible for this.

She didn't know where the demon was, but the empire was on the ground she was treading.

Meanwhile, Ellen, Ludwig, and Elion Bolton had returned to the ecliptic.

Rowen was informed that Ludwig, a former Temple Royal classmate of the Allies, had taken up a new job with the Guard, and he deliberately approached Ludwig.

And just as he was beginning to gain Ludwig's trust and gather information about the Temple's inner workings, an order was issued to stop the investigation.

Rowen did not heed the order, and Elayon Bolton attempted a purge.

From then on, Ellen followed the case with Ludwig's help.

Eventually, what we did caused other groups and people to move.

And around and around.

I ended up with Rowen offering me control of the Crusader Knights, the Five Great Houses, and the Zodiacal Refugees.

I wasn't expecting that at all.

When I created Deathknight, I never imagined that this would happen.

Now Rowen knows that we're the ones responsible for the undead.

Naturally, Rowen wasn't surprised.

Every event will have a meaning.

What happens is the beginning of the end.

I know this is an ending, but I also know it's a beginning.

I know now that's how the world is made.

Of course, everyone will look at me like I'm a weirdo for reading too much meaning into this, but I can't help it.

These complex events that happened in the ecliptic, that stemmed from what we did.

Is this really how this is going to end, with me swallowing up the Crusader Knights, the Five Great Houses, and the refugee camps?

Is this the real ending?

I sent Rowen to find out what Ludwig was thinking right now.

Ludwig is not a tiny little guy.

Rather, only I know that it has the potential to be the weirdest variable ever.

Ludwig.

Ludwig, who lost his arm.

As they pursued the case, the four eventually realized what the empire was doing.

And Ludwig realized that there was collusion, conspiracy, and lies among the leaders and powerful people of each group.

Isn't that the real ending?

Is it possible that the original protagonist will never get to do anything at all?

Is it even possible for Ludwig to lose his role?

The protagonist should have what they want.

The world is supposed to give the protagonist what they want.

Either way.

What should have been Ludwig's, I took Alsbringer's.

If Ludwig is the protagonist of this world, and if that's really the way the world works, then Ludwig will not deviate from the story's trajectory.

I thought Ludwig was going to be eliminated, but now that he's back in my sights, I don't think he's completely done.

Ludwig can't escape the story. If that premise is correct.

Ludwig should get what he wants.

You want revenge, of course.

And the means to achieve revenge is, of course, power.

Ludwig was rendered useless and lost his arm.

No.

In the first place.

Shouldn't we be looking at it differently?

I didn't lose my arm, did I?

I get it.

I realize now.

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

To give something.

I should have taken something in the first place.

You didn't lose your arm.

Taking the arm was already the beginning of giving something in itself.

It wasn't that he was eliminated in the first place, it was the loss of his arm that set him back on track.

"You, by the way, what is that?"

While I was muttering something unintelligible, Harriet was looking at my hands.

"......Ah, this."

The thing I was rolling around in my hand the whole time we were talking.

"I don't know."

"......?"

I don't know. Why I took this.

I don't know what this means.

To Ellen, it seemed like an object that had come to the end of its usefulness.

Still, I didn't think it should be thrown away.

I took the round, white amulet into my arms.

\* \* \*

Night time.

A dark night when even the researchers are all asleep.

But deep, deep underground, where days and nights become meaningless.

Even there, in the deepest underground quarantine labs.

There were four people there.

Christina gets ready to work, organizing her prepared drugs and reagents in order.

Anna De Guerna drawing a magic circle.

Louis Ankton checks out his tools and equipment.

And.

Center of the spell circle.

There was Ludwig, lying shirtless.

Christina, wearing a mask, inspects the tools, which look more like those of a primitive surgeon than a wizard.

"Think again."

"Please."

"That you're going to die. I've said it dozens of times."

"I've been thinking about it a lot."

Christina narrowed her eyes at Ludwig's words.

"You're going to have a high success rate with a living arm, or an arm from someone who hasn't been dead for a while. It's not hard to get one, it's not ugly or dirty, it's safe and morally sound, it's just a matter of waiting."

"Now you know that's not what I want, Christina."

"......."

Christina realized time and again that she couldn't change Ludwig's mind.

"Ludwig....... Does it have to be this way......?"

Ludwig nods at Anna's words.

"I want to be strong."

"......."

"I'm incompetent, so I don't know any other way."

The good news is, you're not alone in dismissing Ludwig as nothing.

I have friends who are nothing.

Procedures that are more likely to result in death.

I'd rather have the most dangerous procedure there.

There are others who can help Ludwig. Anna and Christina know now that it's impossible to convince Ludwig.

However, just because you want to doesn't mean you can, and you shouldn't cast such dangerous magic on your friend's body without proper preparation.

So all three of them wanted to make sure Ludwig was in the best possible condition, checking him closely and starting him on medication a few days ago.

The result.

Louis speaks from outside the circle.

"Ludwig, I've done a full physical, and you're different from everyone else. A lot."

"...... is different?"

"That means it's abnormal."

Louis looks at the data he's checking and sees something with a serious look on his face.

Anna and Christina already knew this.

At Louis' words, Ludwig lay back and looked puzzled.

"In other words, your talent is really weird."

Before starting anything, Louis Ankton carefully examined Ludwig's body and noticed something very strange.

Other classmates had powerful superpowers, or two, or three, or an all-encompassing talent. In Ellen's case, she had many, many such all-encompassing talents.

But in comparison, Ludwig has only one talent: stamina.

A royal class, or even a B class, talent.

Ludwig never thought of himself as gifted.

However, there was only one Ludwig who had a talent called stamina.

"Strange talent?"

"I thought your talents were related to things like muscular endurance and exercise sustainment until now....... I guess not."

"Ludwig."

Christina receives Louis' message.

Wear gloves securely, and look through a mask.

"I think your talent is more on the Vitality side, not Stamina."

Not getting tired is the only advantage, or so I've been led to believe.

Talents related to vitality, not endurance.

Ludwig doesn't know what that means specifically.

What I thought was my only talent, turned out to be a pretty big one.

You don't need to know anything specific anyway.

"Anyway, for now....... That's good, right?"

It means that your talents can help you when you're on the cusp of success.

I was able to get the gist of it.

"Yeah, I'm saying you have a much better chance of not dying than other people."

"Good."

"Of course, that doesn't mean you'll be successful, keep that in mind."

"Okay."

Ludwig was blessed with unusual stamina.

It's not just about strength or endurance.

It's the lifeblood.

Louis Ankton realized that Ludwig had an uncanny power over him, as if he was being favored by something inscrutable.

Stamina.

It was indeed a strange and alien talent, Louis confirmed.

After a while, Anna, who has completed her circle, steps out of the circle, and Louis takes something from the prepared port.

It was an arm.

It was something in the shape of a right arm.

Ludwig asks, as he watches Louis bring in the arm.

"May I ask whose arm it is?"

Louis carefully lays it down where Ludwig's right arm should be.

"Larken Simonsteinstein."

"......I see."

Ludwig's eyes narrow as he listens. The name is not unfamiliar to Ludwig.

Larken Simonsteidt.

A traitor to humanity who rose to the rank of Grandmaster.

Saviolin Tana's squadron, humanity's strongest.

His right arm is placed where Ludwig's arm should be.

Louis steps back, and Christina approaches Ludwig, wearing gloves and a mask.

There's no telling how much of a difference an arm transplant will make.

However, it is clear that something unexpected will happen.

It's a simple graft, but in the end, the thing being grafted is the arm of a man who was once considered one of the strongest in the world, regenerated and enhanced with black magic and alchemy.

If the transplantation and adaptation is successful, something unexpected will happen.

With the arm of one who was a traitor to mankind, will you slay the enemies of mankind.

"That's it. I'll make it work, Ludwig."

"Please."

"Together, let's take revenge on the world."

Christina's eyes light up.

"Make them pay for all of this, make sure they pay."

I tried to get her to give up and quit, but as hard as I tried, she couldn't help but agree with Ludwig.

Seeing Christina's eyes glowing with madness and vengeance, Ludwig looks to the ceiling.

"Yes....... The price."

"I'll have to get something like that."

"I'm stupid."

"But no more, I'm going to ask other people for their opinions, and I'm going to ask for confirmation that my judgment is correct."

"Maybe I'm wrong, maybe I'm wrong, but I'm not going to look to others for answers anymore."

"Wrong is wrong."

"If it's right, it's right."

"I will take the path of my choice."

"I'm sure they all had their reasons."

"Maybe there's a reason, and it's something I can't help but accept."

"But, if."

"I can do that, too."

"I can do this too."

"I have to accept my inevitability."

"Like they justify a lot of things by saying they had no choice."

"Me too, I'll justify being this person in this world they've created."

"That's okay."

"If it's okay for them, it's okay for me."

"Revenge......."

"Well, I don't think it's plural."

"This one, yeah, as they like to say."

"Not for revenge or retribution......."

Ludwig says.

"Well, it's just the way it is."

Inevitability disguised as chance.

The words "I had no choice" repeated and piled up.

Another inevitability.

We've come to an end and a beginning.

Episode 619.

-srrrr

A meadow with green grass rippling in the breeze.

-Kagang!

The shockwave from the clash of sword to sword scatters blades of grass, punctures the earth, and scatters shards of the magic shield.

-Thump! Quack!

The darkness of the Void traced sharp, thick trajectories across the gleaming blade, and I busily teased it, dodging and parrying.

A few times like that.

No, a couple times like this.

I can't even remember the number anymore.

I can't even count how many days I've been dead.

It's almost second nature now.

Battlefield in the Otherworld.

-Quack!

With the Alsbringer out of my grasp, a dark sword is pointed at my nape.

-skuck!

Voidblade Ramen sweeps across my throat, and an eerie pain flashes through my mind.

The Ritual Arsenal.

"After ......."

And awakening.

Once again, in the meadow, I look across at Ellen, who stands across from me, looking the same as she did the first time, but this time she has her tiara out.

In all this training to ward off the death that will one day come.

Somehow, I'm getting more comfortable with defeat and death than victory.

"Beat me once."

"......."

In her dreams, Ellen was always silent.

It's just a rush.

-shhhh!

Ellen, flying on the breeze, stabs her Voidblade at me.

A battle in a dream that should have been a thousand units long ago.

I still haven't done more than hold out on Ellen.

\* \* \*

"Why don't you just take it easy, maybe one day in three?"

When I woke up, Airi, who had her hand on my forehead, asked me with concern.

My forehead and entire body were covered in a cold sweat.

No wonder.

It would be weird if I died dozens of times in my dreams and my body didn't react. If anything, I'd be afraid that I'd gotten too used to dying.

Now, in the moments when I'm actually fighting, I sometimes want to slap the shit out of them because I'm afraid I'll just think it's a dream and give up.

"Sleep is dead and I can sleep forever."

"...... Don't be an asshole."

Airi's expression darkens as she says something she's heard before.

Morning.

More than two months have passed since the events of the Cult of the Lord.

March.

After a long winter, spring is here.

Spring of Departure.

Spring is in the air.

\* \* \*

"The Alliance is almost ready to depart, we'll be on our way any minute now, and our destination is, you guessed it, Gethsanosia."

Everyone in the room nodded as Herriot spoke.

The Allies have regrouped and will now march to their next destination.

For an army that has been on the march for a long time, this break could be long or short.

It would be an understatement to say that it went by in a flash.

But just as I didn't spend that time playing, no, rather busy, the Allies had a lot going on in that short time.

This time, Sarkegar speaks up.

"Your Majesty, I have news that the improvements to the Titan are complete."

"How much?"

"I think we're up and running about five times longer than we were before."

"So it's roughly 30 to 40 minutes?"

"Yeah, it looked like he had some extra armor too."

The Titan was only able to move for about seven minutes.

But Adelia, the Archduke, and the Archduke's mages set to work to improve the Titan.

In just over three months, we've seen encouraging results, increasing Titan's uptime fivefold.

Sarkegar's report of scouting the Allied side was over.

Then Next.

Olivia Ranze.

"It's going pretty well."

"......."

"Okay, so we've got the high priests all in, and now we've got the lower priests being indoctrinated, covertly of course."

"What's going on with the pagan inclusion policy?"

"It's a sensitive issue, and we've been treading carefully since the announcement of the pagan policy, but you know what they say: if you mess with it too much, it'll happen again. We're going to have to start with the priests within the Order to get their minds right. It's a work in progress. You didn't expect it to happen anytime soon, did you?"

"And Rowen?"

"You know he's got all kinds of mental issues, but his work ethic is impeccable, and honestly, he's probably the most loyal person here, you just have to watch out for him doing weird shit with his loyalty."

"It should be."

It was inevitable that it would devour the Order.

But convincing all the priests of the Church of the Lord to embrace demonism was not going to happen overnight.

Add to that the inclusion of all pagans, and it becomes even more of an afterthought.

Therefore, we could not make any rash moves until we had established a firm grip on the Order and its edification to our liking.

The high priests are all subsumed by us, but most of the lower priests don't know that.

Since we don't have to worry about interference from the outside, we only have to worry about things falling apart from the inside.

Reform the Crusader Knights and the Cult of the Lord from within.

I don't know if reform is the right word.

And we're not just talking about the Church of the Lord.

"From our Demon Lord?"

"The integration is well underway, and I'd say we're about a sixth of the way there already. Now that we've picked up the pace, it looks like we'll soon have a majority of Satanists with a consistent belief system."

Antirrhinus says with a grim smile.

It's kind of fitting.

Since Rowen was nominally the head of the Crusader Knights, it was now Antrianus' job to unite the Demonists and Championists in the refugee camps.

Much to my chagrin, there was no one else as dedicated to the grumpy job as I was, so I couldn't think of anyone better suited than Antony.

I hadn't intended to send Antirrhinus in the first place. Someone has to do it, and when I asked who, the old man raised his hand with a childlike expression.

Integrate the Demon Cultists, and then merge them with the Cult of the Gods when you feel the Cult of the Gods is sufficiently reformed.

In the blink of an eye, you've gone from a continent that's almost tasteless to a group that can be called a nation.

"I always told you not to do anything stupid."

"Whether it be, Great One."

What Rowen and Antony have in common.

It's reliable, but there's always that crucial element of unease.

Antrianus has a tendency to make things worse when he wants to make them worse, and Rowen, while loyal to me, has the potential to do strange things of his own accord.

There's a saying about borrowing a fern hand when you're short-handed.

That's wrong.

Bracken is not insecure.

In many ways, I felt like I was borrowing from the devil, not the fern, because there were no people and I had to use everything I could.

The Alliance is ready to go.

Check for Titan improvements.

Cruising through the Lord's Order tasks.

Masochist integration cruising.

And again.

Look at Elyse.

"Immortal's allied deployment has been finalized."

"......Yes."

Immortal.

The Empire secretly decided to call it that.

"We can't commit openly, but it looks like we're going to do what we've done in the past: scout the battlefield ahead of time and preemptively wipe out small gates."

"The Empire has decided that only the most elite of the Immortals will be used."

"The scale of the input is three thousand Master Classes, ten Grandmasters, and a thousand Archmages. Technically, they could probably take on a large city on their own."

"We've also noticed that certain amounts of breakage are instantly regenerated."

"In the case of irreversible destruction, it looks like it could be salvaged and recovered."

There are 3,000 masterclasses to help you become one of the most powerful people on the planet.

A thousand mages, each with a level that allows them to cast mass teleport.

And ten grandmasters, of which there have not been many in history.

Some Grandmasters have even reached the level of Archmage at the same time.

There have been many geniuses in history.

All those geniuses came back from the dead.

Mankind's mightiest army.

No, it would be the greatest army in history.

They can't get hurt because they're already dead, and they can regenerate if their injuries are minor.

Even if it is destroyed, it will automatically return to its underground laboratory at the Temple College of Magic and be automatically repaired.

It's a disaster of an army.

The gate debacle is over.

Finally, after a trial deployment, if they realize they can take down a massive warp gate on their own, the Alliance might just pull out on the spot.

That army is a problem, but we're focusing on a different problem.

"Replication?"

"It doesn't appear to be possible at this time, but it's inevitably something we're working on. Keep it in mind, but I think it would be unseemly for the Empire to go that far."

A golem whose alchemy is infused with black magic to animate it.

I'm afraid of what will happen if the military, which I fear even now, is able to clone itself.

I felt it in my bones why people are afraid of risky technology.

Only now I'm moving with the same purpose, but when the force is directed at me.

You can't help but think of that time.

"If a technology is developed to prevent a gategate, and the gategate becomes nothing....... If that's a good thing....... I still don't know."

I couldn't help but agree with Charlotte's concern.

At this point, the gate situation seems to be resolved.

But what happens when you've done too many risky things to get through a crisis?

I couldn't help but feel anxious.

"Maybe we shouldn't think about it so hard, after all, the Immortals are just machines, powerful but without free will, and if we need to subdue them, we need to subdue the controllers, not the machines."

Rusinil has a point.

You don't necessarily need to create magic to break a tank in order to defeat it.

A spell that snipes people inside the vehicle is enough.

After all, Immortals are golems in human form, and they are controlled by someone.

Its controls, or controllers.

If you can get your hands on it, the Immortal is a tin can in human form.

But is it possible.

I realize, of course, that the Empire isn't the only one to be vanquished.

"The important thing is, they know it."

"Sure, because you're not an idiot."

Whether it's the Empire or the guys running the Immortals themselves, they're bound to be aware of the weaknesses in their operations. There's no reason why they wouldn't consider any weaknesses we can think of.

If you don't prepare properly, you may end up with an immortal that runs amok.

Then it's all over.

"Anyway, the Immortals aren't going to be used to attack us anytime soon, but it's worth keeping an eye out for ways to neutralize or deal with them."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

The march begins again.

A changed Alliance will move toward the end of the Gate Crisis under changed circumstances.

Finally, we look at Charlotte.

Now that we've reported enough about what's going on externally, it's time to share what's going on internally.

"The migrant resettlement is almost complete, Rajakh will be much less overcrowded, the local administration has been set up, and we don't have to worry about security issues."

Disperse the overpopulation of Razak to the rest of the archipelago.

This is something that hasn't been done well because the stability of local administrations is questionable. Anything that weakened local control would be leaked, and that's not a good thing.

However, Charlotte did succeed in establishing a functioning local government.

Create a system of policing, administration, and reporting.

That's why it's only now becoming a proper country.

"Continue to work on establishing and stabilizing the local administration. If things get out of hand, we may need to bring some of the pagans and fiends from the Huangdao here."

One by one, the tasks are completed.

Prepare with all things considered.

But.

I wonder if I'll end up being unprepared.

Such ominous imaginings persisted.

\* \* \*

The Senate meeting is over.

What we've been doing, getting out in front, scouting the battlefield, and killing through preemptive strikes, stops for now.

Immortals will do the work for us.

And it's clear that Immortal can do that much more accurately and reliably than we can, because it's a scale that makes your hair stand on end.

Unless you're playing a metropolis-scale game, there may not be a need for us to get involved anymore.

We may have to hold our breath, thinking about the post-Gate world.

"Reinhard, do you have a minute?"

It was Harriet who followed me out of the meeting.

"Overflow."

"......No, I don't mean to go off topic, but aren't you supposed to have all the time in the world?"

Uh.

That's right.

I'm not supposed to have a lot of time on my hands, am I?

"I have all the time in the world to spend on you."

If you don't have one, you'll have to make one.

Cancer.

Who's calling.

Needless to say, his face turned bright red at my words.

"You, you crazy bastard......!"

"Ew, why the hell would I even have time!"

"I'm not going to say that shameless thing anymore. You, you, you, you, you, you! What if someone hears you!"

"What are we, other people, huh?"

It's a leftover.

But honestly.

Isn't that a lot of leftover?

That, if you turn your back, it's a man, not a woman.......

That works.......

"Da, shut up!"

He was beaten for a long time by a gaping maw.

Of course, as always, it didn't hurt a bit.

Episode 620.

After all the time we've been together, I still haven't gotten rid of Pektong's habitual hot flashes.

So that's a good thing, but.

Herriot dragged me to his lab in Razak, his face gaping.

Every time I see this place, I honestly feel bad.

The enormous research facility in the basement of the Temple College of Magic naturally came to mind.

We were able to use that facility and scale for a single project.

Herriot's laboratory wasn't particularly well-equipped, to say the least, and she'd built it herself whenever she needed it, or, if she didn't know better, with the advice of the Lord Vampires of the Senate.

I know it's silly to assume, but I can't help but feel sorry for her every time I see her.

You don't even have to go to Temple School of Magic.

The magical research facilities in Razak, frankly, don't hold a candle to the facilities of the Magical Research Society fraternity in the Temple. At least those were the labs of professorial wizards.

Our paktong.

It's like watching your daughter pull up her socks while you're trying to get your nose in the wrong place.

She's actually a princess.

When I see him trying to do something just by being there, I think that maybe our paktong is actually a person with a strong life force.

She has the greatest talent in the history of the world, and she can't even fulfill it because she's with a man who can't get behind her.

What to do.

I'm the biggest pain in the ass.

Other kids are making Titans, they're making armies called Immortals.

My child, who is nothing compared to them, and in some ways even more talented than them, is cowering in this attic lab because she met the wrong guy!

"I'm sorry."

"......Suddenly? What?"

"I'm just sorry for everything."

"What, off the cuff."

Harriet pouted her lips as if to say, "Don't go off on a tangent.

No complaints, which makes it all the more salty and I'm sorry.

"Anyway, so what."

Despite what I think, I've come to accept that it's in my nature to talk like this.

"Look at this."

Herriot pointed to a flat metal griddle.

It's got a lot of patterns on it, and it looks like a base for something, to be precise, and it's a little bit convex, so it looks like a machine.

And it's not one.

It was a pair of griddles.

"Pfft. I'm not a genius like you, I don't know what it is when I see it. You'll have to explain."

"If you're a dick, you're a dick, if you're a genius, you're a genius, can you just do one?"

Paxton, I'm not a genius like you.

Okay, that was a weird one.

"Uh-huh."

"...... for real!"

-Bam!

"You said do one!"

"Shut up!"

I did what I was told!

Anyway.

It's a never-ending cycle.

It's so much fun, I can't stop.

He knows this, and if he thinks I'm being a dick, he'll say what he has to say.

Herriot placed the pair of metal griddles at each end of the desk.

"Okay, make this look like this....... Hmm."

As Herriot fiddles with it, the thin sheet of steel begins to move and take shape.

A few metal plates protrude from what used to be a base, and it looks like a cradle for something.

It's like a three-legged table turned upside down.

Herriot did the same thing, this time on a different griddle.

Something that looks like a pair of cradles.

Herriot grabbed what looked like a metal rod from something lying around the lab.

This was also true for temples.

We're not very organized.

You say you don't need to know what's where.

"Look."

-chirp! chirp!

Soon, blue sparks began to fly from a pair of griddles.

"......isn't that dangerous?"

"It's not dangerous, though it's the first time I've actually done it."

"How do I know if it's dangerous or not without actually doing it!"

"My theory can't be wrong."

a.

I don't know what it is, but it's math or something?

The expression is correct, so there's no reason why implementing it in the real world would give a different result.

You've done all the in-brain simulations.

I can't, but you can.

"Then it won't be dangerous."

"......I don't know if you believe me or not."

-Pajik! Pajik! Chijijijiji!

Soon, sparks began to leap from the edges of a pair of griddle spikes, which soon began to glow blue.

Gradually, the blue color begins to take on the shape of a sphere.

A pair of blue spheres.

The inside of the blue sphere was colored black.

This.

No way.

"Here."

In the left one of the spheres, Herriot put something that looked like a crowbar.

And.

-Took

The rod shot out of the sphere on the right and landed on the desk. It rolled around and fell to the floor in a heap.

You don't know what this is.

"Hey....... This......."

"Yes."

Herriot laughs.

"A warp gate. A new warp gate, on a path unrelated to the gate incident."

My kid.

In this harsh and crude environment.

We hit another big one.

"Does this....... makes sense......?"

"I did it because it worked, idiot."

"You are....... You are......!"

-Wrong!

"Ouch, that hurt!"

"You are the best paktong ever!"

"What are you talking about!"

\* \* \*

What is logistics and distribution.

To be honest, I still don't know the details.

I just know that it's very important.

And we know that the Golden Age of the Empire didn't come from the Demon Slaughter, but from the Warp Gate.

The golden age of humanity, and the golden age of empire.

It wasn't because people could come and go through the warp gate, it was because logistics could come and go beyond people.

The development of transportation and logistics leads to the rapid sophistication of society.

This is because rapidly developing logistics inherently allows for specialization.

Prior to the development of logistics, many cities would have to be self-sufficient, centered around a base city.

including food, commerce, and manufacturing.

To some extent, you have to be self-sufficient.

However, if logistics is extremely well distributed, a city that specializes in commerce or manufacturing may not need to produce food at all. Of course, they can import it, and that's what cities and countries with specialized agricultural environments do.

For example, suppose a city in a cold climate has a mine with a large amount of magic stones.

If the distribution is unreliable, the city has to be self-sufficient in food to a certain extent, even in cold climates, and in the end, it will be difficult for people to live, and it will inevitably be difficult to develop.

But what if you only have a warp gate?

Food will have to be imported from somewhere, and that's it, so it will be a mining city where you can mine magic stones in large quantities.

The logistically intensive Zodiacal Gradient became the Empire's largest city because it had the most warp gates.

People flock, goods flock, supplies flock.

So it was only natural that Gradient would be the largest city.

The food problem in the Zodiac Gradient is also a result of the fact that Zodiac was never an agricultural city in the first place.

Distribution is blocked, and a city that wasn't even self-sufficient is forced to feed itself.

So the empire is forced to farm and clear land in order to feed itself somehow, and to produce and supply food from secure lands elsewhere.

But without the overwhelming, always-on distribution simplification of a warp gate, everything has to be done by mass teleportation by the Archmages.

So first of all, there's a shortage of production, and if you're doing it outside of the ecliptic, you're going to have to have a super-skilled workforce of archmages just to move stuff around.

Since the Gate debacle, warp gates have become a completely obsolete technology.

The reason is simple.

It's because an imaginary dimension, a sort of virtual dimension, has become a real dimension, and the monsters of the Gate have taken over.

Of course, that doesn't mean you can't create a warp gate.

You can create one.

It's just a bunch of monsters spilling out of there.

"So, you created a second imaginary dimension?"

"Yes."

"I don't know, but the reason people haven't done it before isn't because they can't think of it, right?"

"Maybe not?"

This is the first time I've ever thought of this.

It makes me want to hug him fiercely and kiss him a hundred times.

"So it's because you're so awesome, right?"

You did what a bunch of farting kids couldn't do with the best facilities, and you did it with a header on the ground?

At my words, Harriet blanches and wiggles her fingers.

"......Well, I wouldn't say that."

"Exactly, no, exactly."

"Uh huh....... Right......."

You do realize what a great job you've done.

I'm watching him squirm with embarrassment after a major accident.

It looks a million times cuter and more awesome than usual.

"Let's cuddle, my paktong."

"Shh, no!"

"No why!"

"I don't like this, it's like praising a dog!"

"No, who cares?"

In the end, it was the same thing: I got what I deserved and I got what I didn't deserve.

What it was like to create a new imaginary dimension.

You may not realize it, but warp gates weren't invented by a single wizard in the first place.

From what I've heard from Archduke St. Thuan, it was a project that the Emperor pushed for long ago, almost at the cost of the empire.

The best wizards of the day would be attached to it, and it would be the result of the best wizards of the day working together for a very long time.

The Warp Gate is the culmination of many years of research and experimentation.

It's no one man's show, and she did it all by herself, here, with no facilities or equipment.

In the beginning, when I was still clueless as to the cause of the gate, Herriot had skimmed through the research on warp gates under the guise of studying dimensional magic.

This knowledge is already in Herriot's head, so it won't be exactly the same as it was before he developed the warp gate.

But at the end of the day, it doesn't change the fact that Herriot did something that no one else did.

Anyway, unlike the original, Heriot does fight, but that's not his purpose. She's not always on the battlefield.

So in the end, he had time to think and came up with his own, albeit crude, way to resurrect the warp gate technology.

Of course, I'm sure it's also due in large part to the fact that I made him do research on warp gates that he shouldn't have known about in the first place.

The truth in the end.

Herriot succeeded in devising a new warp gate system.

"What's the distance?"

"I'm just trying it out to see if it works or not, and if I make it bigger, of course the distance will increase, but it's not really serving any purpose right now."

"What if we can afford to go big?"

"It's not much different than an existing warp gate, and you know that warp gates work with all warp gates within their reach, right?"

"I know."

"Also, remember when I set up a network of interconnecting warp gates, a gated passageway that would allow us to reach our destination in one fell swoop without having to go back and forth?"

"A little bit."

The old warp gate system, or subway lines in layman's terms, were haphazardly built with too many transfers. It felt like spaghetti code.

It's kind of like the subway stations where the first subways were built were very dilapidated, even though you can't see the dilapidation.

But this is something that Herriot designed from scratch.

You don't have to get off and on at gate stops, then get back on, then get off, then get back on again to make a super long trip like you used to.

"I guess we're going to have to have a waypoint to travel super long distances after all, connecting gates to....... So we'll have to build a Nexus."

"Nexus......?"

"We need a connection point to amplify the warp gate signal, which is what the warp gate does, it's just a waypoint, it doesn't actually let people in and out."

"Did you develop that too, the bird?"

"...... No way, just make half a warp gate and that's a nexus."

"......?"

"You don't understand?"

"Of course."

Sir, I don't quite understand what you're saying.

Herriot draws a picture.

1 - 2 - 3

"Let's say it's a straight path."

"Yes, sir."

"......What do you mean?"

"No, explain."

"I mean, normally you'd have to build a whole warp gate to connect points 1, 2, and 3."

"Right."

"But now that the city is mostly destroyed, we don't need to build warp gates at every point, right? At points 1, 2, and 3, point 2 doesn't even have a city, but we want to connect points 1 and 3. But points 1 and 3 are too far apart, let's say."

"Uh."

"So point 2 doesn't have to be a fully completed warp gate, just a half-built one that acts as a waypoint, do you understand?"

"It's like a joke?"

"Yeah."

I can see what you mean now.

"With the current warp gate technology, you'd have to build a warp gate at point 2, but that's a waste of resources to build a warp gate at point 2 that's really only going to be used as a waypoint, so why not shorten that process and just have a structure there that can only perform certain functions of a warp gate, since there's no reason for people to actually go in and out of point 2. The nexus is just a name for convenience, and you can literally just build a little bit of a warp gate to act as a nexus. If you think you need to build a warp gate at point two later on, you can build it, but you can complete the nexus with a warp gate. It's basically the same structure."

Well.

I still can't quite understand it, but I know what it's saying.

What I'm saying is that you can set up a simplified station, just get it connected, and then complete it properly when you need to.

And.

Warp gates could reduce the cost of connecting entire continents astronomically. You're saying that the inefficiencies that have been there since the beginning of time have been eliminated, and now you have a completely streamlined operation.

Herriot smiles at me, half-understanding after all this time.

"Do you know why I told you this long story?"

"How do I compliment you?"

"......How the hell do you see me?"

Her eyes widen as she realizes I'm not saying this to get a compliment.

"It's not impossible to warp gate between the continent and Edina, and beyond that to the empire and Edina, and we can do it for a lot less money than we used to."

I couldn't help but roll my eyes at that.

Connect the Empire and Edina to each other with a warp gate.

That's downright dangerous.

The Empire still doesn't know where we are, so we're safe.

But it's not like Herriot is saying this because he wants to destroy Edina.

"Anti-Imperial forces in the ecliptic, we can bring them straight to Edina, and no one will have to see blood."

"......."

"You're thinking, 'If something happens, I'm going to have to lead all those people out of the ecliptic,' and you know that's impossible."

The seeds of division have already been planted, germinated, and are growing.

The moment that becomes visible at some point, a huge number of people are going to die.

You have a choice to bring down the empire.

And another option.

With my followers, I left the ecliptic and traveled far and wide southward toward Edina.

A war, or a campaign.

In both cases, it was clear that a huge number of people would be killed.

It is foolish to drive people into a death spiral to avoid war.

But just because it's stupid, is it wise to start a civil war on the gradient the moment this divide becomes visible?

I didn't choose what to do.

I was just thinking I might have to do it.

It's clear that connecting the Empire and Edina with a warp gate is a risky proposition.

But if it can tear tens of millions of people apart without a fight.

At least it's better than a campaign.

"I'm not saying you have to do that."

"......."

"But we just need to know that we've got one new possibility, and one much-needed tool to rebuild the world, even if not necessarily in this way."

Warp gates can be a technology for war, or a technology for prosperity and rebuilding, depending on how they are used.

"And we're focusing on connecting the archipelago first. Shorter travel times between the islands will allow for greater cohesion, as well as greater control of the central administration. You realize there's a reason why the imperial power has been so absolute since the development of the Warp Gate, right?"

The first step is to reconnect the Edina Archipelago to the warp gate.

Here's what happens next

I can't believe that such a world-changing technology came from a tiny, cute little head.

"I'll grant you a wish. What is it?"

I'd give anything to be in this mood right now!

You can bite your tongue and die!

What do you want!

I've got you covered!

"You're so serious, you shouldn't be....... Yeah......."

"No, not one. I'll do anything for you, ever. Just say the word! Anything! Just! Just! Uh! I'll do anything! Just!"

"It's too much!"

Herriot, who hadn't expected such a strong reaction from me, thought for a moment and then sighed.

"That's it, give me a cat."

No.

Ya.

Suddenly?

"Not again, you did that last time......!"

She's just as much a case of severe cat syndrome as Ellen.

He wants me to do it every chance I get!

And that's it?

"No?"

They look at me like I'm going to do anything for them, and then they look at me like I can't even do that.

Uh.

If that's the price you pay for creating a new warp gate.......

I wonder if it's too cheap, but.......

"You're going to do it, right?"

"......Naturally."

Eventually, that night.

I had to fall asleep while being violently hugged by Paxton in cat form.

Honestly, it's not a loss, it's just good for me......?

I want to.

Episode 621.

The next day.

"......Now I know."

-.......

"You're enjoying this."

Charlotte, passing me in the hallway in Harriet's arms, looked at me in my cat form and shuddered.

-Cat!

"And it pisses me off the most when they pretend like they don't enjoy it."

No!

Not so much fun!

He asked for it in the first place!

"Why? It's cute."

Of course, my paktong was stroking my head.

Yes.

How can you not do it when you love it so much, huh?

"I don't disagree, but a spoiled brat gets spoiled even more."

That's harsh.

It's not spoiling, it's making an already bad kid worse.

But I'm definitely not the most organized person in the world.

"Anyway, borrow me for a minute. I need to talk to you."

"Huh?"

At Charlotte's words, Harriet carefully picked me up and handed me to Charlotte.

Of course, our (former) Empress was relentless.

-Bam!

She grabbed me by the nape of the neck.

-Bang!

"Hey, hey, hey, you can't do that!"

"It's not even a real cat, so what. And then again, if it is a real cat, so what, it's a human world."

Herriot urged her not to be rough with it, but Charlotte didn't mind at all.

"Come find me later."

"ugh......."

-Ang! Awww!

"Shut up."

-.......

If I freaked out any more, I'd probably do a few spins, so I hung on for dear life.

Not all cats are created equal.

Of course, it wasn't that he didn't like cats, it was more like he hated me for being an abomination in cat form.

\* \* \*

Charlotte brought me into her office and sat me down in a chair.

Naturally, I'm back in human form. Charlotte sits across from me, her chin resting in her palm, and stares at me.

"I have a lot to thank you for, and I really like you, but you're such a weirdo, I didn't think you'd be like this."

Well, yes and no.

I never thought I'd have this kind of taste either.

But this feels good, right?

Do you know how many people get away with being cute?

Even the guys who know who I am laugh.

I mean, Galarsh didn't react badly to it, too? If you get eaten by an orc vampire, you're done talking.

Or was it because it was ridiculous?

"If you're going to like me, please like me like this."

"......."

"......I'm sorry."

Charlotte was so genuine that I suddenly had goosebumps all over my body.

Everything in moderation.

Charlotte's red eyes stare at me.

"But what, is there something you didn't tell me in yesterday's meeting?"

"It's not that I didn't say it, it's just that it wasn't the right thing to say right then and there."

"What is it?"

"I heard Olivia Ranze wants to try Elion Bolton."

"ah......."

"You're too good of a worker to just let go, you've got the skills, you're a veteran."

With a very simple handoff, Elion Bolton passed the reins of the Crusaders to Rowen. As such, when the Alliance begins its march, Rowen will take command of the Crusaders.

It's not without noise.

Naturally, the members of the Alliance's Crusader Knights know that the sudden retirement of Elayon Bolton was not arbitrary.

You can't help but notice that there's a political undercurrent.

But Elion Bolton's closest confidants are already tight-lipped.

They know that the de facto head of the Order has fallen to the Devil, but they know the repercussions of exposing it.

Not everything will be smooth sailing.

Elayon Bolton was a man who could not be left alone, and he had to deal with the noise that would inevitably engulf the Order.

So, if Rowen fails to take control of the Allied Crusaders, I can send in Elayon Bolton again. It's his failure, and it's my failure.

In any case, the former leader of the Crusader Knights, Elayon Bolton, has retired from active duty, albeit quite unexpectedly, and is spending his retirement in the Demon Realm.

It's not completely meaningless either.

His closest associates know what happened, and they know that he came under my influence after his retirement. They don't know about the Edina Archipelago.

As such, those loyal to Elion Bolton are now caught between a rock and a hard place.

There's a reason why they can't act rashly.

Olivia Lance wants to take over for the retired Elion Bolton.

"How? It's ridiculous to send them to war, isn't it?"

"Whatever. The point is, I think they're trying to get me to agree to the Cult's banner."

"Oh....... You want to be edifying?"

"Right."

There is no such thing as a demigod.

In the end, there are just different names for the gods. And the powers they manifest are inconsistent.

Olivia Ranze wanted to make the former head of the Crusader Knights a member of the Holy Order.

"Honestly, I don't know, but......."

I'm halfway to agreeing with the saying that a seat makes the man.

To be precise, position creates arrogance.

I can't imagine not being miserable if I were captured by the Empire and used for something. Especially if it's not of my own volition.

Of course, Elion Bolton doesn't get to decide, but I don't want to force a man of his stature to do something like that.

It's not like Elion Bolton is going to be able to do anything great just because he doesn't like something.

"Reinhardt, what do you think would happen if Elion Bolton were edified?"

"We're going to be priests or paladins, aren't we......?"

The Divine Order is not a demonic religion.

However, it is a new form of faith that is different from the Five Great Shintoisms and different from Demonism, agreeing that both Demonism and Shintoism have the same roots, and that is closer to the essence.

Elayon Bolton is indoctrinated into the Divine Order, not the Five Great Houses.

What does that mean?

"What if they change their minds about their magical beliefs, and then what?"

"You'll be able to use your divine powers....... Well, I guess it's up to you."

Priests of the Holy Cults sometimes use opposing divine powers. Not everyone can, of course, but it's not that rare.

Paladins of Tuan, for example, wield both healing and corrupting powers. As does Olivia Lance.

"That's what matters."

"You want to power up Elion Bolton? That would be helpful, but with his immortal, there's a good chance we're not going to go to war, and I don't know if he's going to be on our side, so I think we're better off leaving him as he is."

"......."

Charlotte opens her eyes.

"......Mian, tell me where and how I've been a jerk."

"I thought it was just you saying that you're not cut out for this job and you're not good at it, but....... I guess it's true."

Playing king.

Everyone knows I hate it.

"If Elayon Bolton is able to wield the divine power of a demon, and if he's truly moved by the Divine Order, it could cause tremendous ripples within the Order, not to mention a backlash within the Crusaders themselves. Assuming he shows it publicly."

"Oh....... were you talking about politics?"

I was so focused on the war that I didn't think about that.

This wasn't a story about the individual strength of Elion Bolton.

It's not the holy power of the demon that strengthens Elayon Bolton, but the influence of being converted.

That's what I was referring to.

"Rowen may have control of the Ecliptic faction, but he's going to have trouble controlling the Alliance's Crusader Knights. If necessary, we may have to bring him back, but it would be better if we could change his mindset a bit."

Bringing back Eleon Bolton is a hypothetical case of Lowen failing.

However, in that case, if Elayon Bolton has already been sensitized by the Cult, he will do what Rowen should have done but failed to do.

Indeed, there are many in the Allied garrisons who are puzzled by the sudden change in leadership of the Holy Templars and resent it.

Rowen is experiencing a replay of what Elion Bolton experienced in the ecliptic.

Rowen is another parachutist who came in under suspicious circumstances when the current leader was suspiciously replaced. He's got a lot on his plate, and it's only going to get bigger.

Olivia Ranze, of course, saw it coming, and was thinking of converting the playboy Elion Bolton and reinstating him as head of the troupe.

Rowen controls the Ecliptic, and Elayon Bolton controls the Alliance's Crusader Knights.

"I'd like nothing better than to have Elijah Bolton on board, and maybe even convert him......."

I can see why Olivia would think that, and I can see why Charlotte would see her suggestion as a positive.

"Hmmm....... I guess I should have done that."

I had a lot of work to do to overhaul the Five Great Divine Cults and overthrow the system while remaining undetected, but I was thinking now that if I was going to do this, I might as well do it sooner rather than later.

"No, if you rushed it, you'd only get a half-assed product."

Charlotte shakes her head.

"I'd rather do it now."

About two months.

That's a lot of time to be alone with your thoughts and feel the change in your mindset.

\* \* \*

Can we say that Elion Bolton was a prisoner of war?

The Empire and we are at war, but it's not a war of swords.

It's almost like we're all fighting a united front against the same enemy.

When I asked him if he was going to die or retire, he said he wasn't going to fight to the death.

In other words, he's like a general who left his base and went into enemy territory without realizing it was enemy territory and was captured.

He hasn't converted, but he's in my clutches.

It's not quite a prisoner of war, but it's pretty much the same as being a prisoner of war.

He's not actually royalty or a king, but he's more of a prisoner than a king in terms of the title he actually held.

So I guess you could say that protocols need to be tailored to the people, even if Elion Bolton doesn't have any power right now.

I'm even on my way to convincing them.

That's why Charlotte, Edina's regent, and I, Edina's actual owner, have decided to go to see Elion Bolton.

"By the way, I wonder if this is it."

"Is ...... correct?"

"Even though we're spherical....... Even though Riana said it was okay......."

"You're staying there?"

"Uh."

Elayon Bolton is neither noble nor royalty, but he once held a very specialized position as a Crusader Knight Commander.

We had a hard time finding a place for someone as big as a crusader knight to retire and be treated properly.

Even Razak, a royal castle, is hardly a palace. It's a royal castle in a small province, so there's nothing to be done about it, but to the eyes of the empress, Charlotte, it looks like a tacky provincial lordship.

We forced Elion Bolton to retire at one point, and we wanted to give him a treat because we didn't want to upset him, but we didn't have a place to do it.

Charlotte and I were walking along a deserted road in the outskirts of Razak.

"The lady says she's fine, and Lord Bolton says he's fine, so what the hell, and Riana doesn't seem to be in any real danger from the way she's been talking."

"......, right?"

So Elayon Bolton found himself as a guest at the mansion outside of Razak, the home of Lyanna's mother, Duchess Yelena.

So there you have it.

The Duke of Granz's cottage, which I visited during my summer vacation in the Darklands my freshman year.

When the Senate was debating what to do about Elayon Bolton's residence, Riana blurted out that they could just let him stay there.

It's one of the many ducal villas on the continent, built at the height of the Duke of Granz's power, and we couldn't give it away.

In fact, neither Elion Bolton nor Duchess Yelena seemed to have any trouble getting along with each other.

But.......

something.......

Oh, no!

I can't tell you what's what!

I know it's not weird at all!

Maybe I'm being a little conservative!

That's a bit much!

"Seriously, what the hell are you thinking?"

"......."

Charlotte gave me a disapproving glance and stomped ahead.

Right?

Am I weird?

\* \* \*

Technically, the residence of Riana's mother, the Duchess of Granz, is more opulent than Razak's castle.

This was not surprising, as the Dukes of Granz were far more powerful than the Edina royal family, a small state in the southern archipelago.

There's a difference between the great nobility of an empire and the royalty that was closer to the end of the line.

Being royalty doesn't necessarily put you above nobility. You can be a noble and a royal at the same time.

As the daughter of the Grand Duke of Saint-Antoine, Harriet was a noblewoman, but she wasn't exactly royalty.

The Duke of Granz's villa, which should no longer be called a villa but the main house.

As I walked down the path and came to a mansion with a view of the beach in front of me, I saw the back of someone's head.

A familiar back view.

"......What brings you here?"

Riana asked, glancing in my direction to see if I'd heard footsteps.

Then I cast my gaze toward Charlotte, who came with me.

"It's not private, seeing as you've brought the regent with you."

"Well, yeah."

I don't really have a reason to come here for anything personal.

I'll call you if I need something done, but it's rare that I'll be here.

"I'm here to see Lord Bolton."

"Oh, that guy."

The once prestigious and authoritative leader of the Crusader Knights is now just an old man in a restaurant.

No, I think Riana would have just called him Uncle, even if Bolton was an active Crusader.

Riana gestures toward the beach.

"Probably going for a walk."

"A walk?"

"I went with my mom, she'll be back in a bit."

Well.

"......!"

Before I could say anything, Charlotte pinched my side.

"......what are you doing?"

Riana cocked her head at Charlotte, who suddenly pinched her side.

"Huh? Oh, no, just?"

Charlotte smiled sheepishly and shrugged.

Episode 622.

The Allies are supposedly on their way, but we won't need them anymore. That's why most of us are on standby, but Riana has been given special privileges.

Absolute stability.

Literally.

Riana, who has the property of making it rain when she cries, has to take a special drug to control her weather. Something like a depressant.

As a result, Riana's powerful abilities require her to expend mental energy, not physical energy.

So what I usually ask her to do is to cut back. Because if she's on depressants all the time and they wear off, she's not going to have the strength to do it when she needs it.

As a result, Riana usually spends her days in the mansion as a form of recuperation.

The last time I used the ability was to melt a heavy snowfall on the ecliptic.

We drank tea until Elion Bolton and the Duchess returned.

Although not as much as it used to be, the villa still has occupants. It's one of the few places in Edina where you can live like royalty.

"You're going to convert me?"

"If you can."

"Hmmm....... Do I really need to go that far? It doesn't look like I'm going to get in trouble."

Correct.

Unlike Herriot, who teased me about being a punk, this one was a real punk.

And just as I didn't understand Charlotte and Olivia's intentions in converting Elijah Bolton, I didn't understand Riana's either.

I even took it to mean that Elion Bolton was about to have a mental breakdown in case he got into an accident.

"We don't have anything to do, so we're going to do mental training for a retired uncle?"

"I don't know about the other kids, but you don't really have anything to do."

"Well, yeah, but......."

She's a tough cookie, but she's still not compatible with him!

"Depending on the circumstances, we may have to reinstate Lord Bolton, and we're preparing for that."

Charlotte spoke on my behalf.

"Lottery......?"

"That means we're sending him back to the front."

"......Did you think I didn't know the word lottery when I asked you?"

"How do you know?"

Riana's mouth opens slightly at my words.

This.

"That's really bad, what do you think I am?"

It's like trying to pretend to know something and never finding the real thing.

No. Why do you know?

But what are you.

"You're a lucky bitch to have met a man of your caliber."

"......."

"......."

Was that harsh?

Sparks begin to fly across Riana's silent forehead.

-fazik! fazik!

"Really?"

"Do it?"

"Shut up! What are you doing like children?"

Charlotte sighed, looking back and forth between me and Riana, wondering if it was pathetic to bicker in the middle of a serious conversation.

Riana looks at Charlotte and shakes her head.

"Well, technically, we're still kids."

Right.

But I'm not a kid.

He's not a kid by any stretch of the imagination.

"......."

"Why is your face rotten?"

"No....... I did it all wrong."

At my apology, both Charlotte and Riana looked puzzled.

I'm getting old, and I'm scratching my head like I'm going to beat this kid. You're worse than I thought!

"Why haven't you broken the habit of saying things you shouldn't?"

"That's right."

Really? Why can't I grow up?

Is it too late?

"What do you mean you're going to reinstate him anyway?"

"It's not set in stone, but while the Zodiacal Cultists are out of the picture, there may be some pushback from the Paladins of the Allied Command. We're aiming to deify the entire Order of the Lord, which means it'll be easier to do so if our new leader, Elayon Bolton, can use the divine powers of a demon."

"Oh....... I see."

Riana nodded slowly, as if she finally understood what he meant.

Elayon Bolton would have been forced to cooperate with me even if the popes were still alive. But by choosing Rowen, he has given me the option of deifying the Church of the Lord itself. I could reinstate him now, but I'm sure he'd recognize that rebelling against me would create an even greater crisis.

However, Rowen hasn't failed yet, and if he does, and it becomes necessary to reinstate Bolton, it's just as well that he's fully bought into the Cult's banner by then.

Charlotte takes a sip of her tea.

He's a lot different than he used to be, but there's still a certain elegance in the way he sips his tea.

I'm watching Charlotte, and grace is a very strange thing.

It's like elegance, but it's not. It's not ostentatious, it's subtle, and if you try to imitate elegance and overdo it, it looks ridiculous.

I don't think about it, I just do what I normally do, and that's what feels elegant.

Elegance embodied. That would be classy.

Something's up.

It makes my heart skip a beat or something.

Anyway, is there such a thing?

"Hmm? You have guests."

I don't know how much they talked about it. The Duchess and Elayon Bolton returned to the manor.

Duchess Yelena de Granz.

And former Crusader Knight Elayon Bolton.

"Hello, Duchess. It's been a while since I've seen you."

"It's been a long time since I've seen you, Empress, and the Demon King is in high spirits."

"Oh, yeah......."

Charlotte stood up and bowed properly, and I stumbled to my feet and scratched the back of my head.

Elegance.

I don't really know what it is, but I'm pretty sure I won't have it until I die.

"Did you come to see me?"

As if on cue, Elion Bolton turned to me and Charlotte with a stern look on his face.

Okay, time to get down to business. Charlotte looks at me.

"Reinhardt?"

"Uh."

When I gave her a determined look, she smiled and pointed out the window.

"You're out."

"......?"

"I'm better off without you."

"Me, I'm a seat-wetter too......! Cover up when you cover up!"

Riana is your friend!

I wouldn't do that to Elion Bolton!

Charlotte's expression turned cold at my plea.

"Get out."

"Yes......."

I was eventually kicked out.

\* \* \*

Charlotte and Elayon Bolton stayed behind because they had something important to say, while Liana and the Duchess left the manor.

And I was kicked out.

Riana giggled at me.

"You look good, so why would you say something you didn't have to and ruin what little credit you have?"

"Shouldn't it be assumed that I trusted Charlotte so much that I handed her an important position?"

No?

"You know it didn't look like that at all."

Yeah, I know it's not.

Negotiations, politics. I don't know much about it, and it's not my cup of tea.

I'm grateful that Charlotte does that for me and thinks harder than I do.

Hmm?

But if you're going to do that, why am I here?

I thought we were supposed to leave that to Charlotte.

Oh, I'd be sitting there if I didn't have to come and have a useless argument with Riana.

A king who's deposed by his regent is not a good look.

It's true that I was hoping for something like that, but I was hoping for a relationship where we could be comfortable with each other rather than an overly hierarchical relationship.

Naga.

That was a bit much.......

I'll definitely say sorry later.......

I'm not just saying it, I'm actually going to say it.......

In the end, I had nothing to do until Charlotte finished her story, so I walked along the beach.

Me, the Duchess, and Riana.

I don't know about Riana, but I don't see the Duchess very often.

"I hear the Allies are on the march again?"

"What? Ah....... Yes, it looks like we'll be leaving in a few days."

I asked if the Duchess had any idea of what was going on in the world, as I'm sure she had heard from Riana.

Ever since I went from being her daughter's friend to being her king, and ever since I came here, the Duchess has been hard on me.

To be honest, my first impression was never a good one.

Not only did she frown upon her daughter hanging out with the lower class, but she would call Harriet to breakfast alone.

He was a very status-conscious person, a very secular person.

His relationship with the Duke of Granz was already very bad.

In the end, however, the Duchess of Granz seemed to have undergone a profound change of heart after the Duke's death.

She urges him to reconcile with his daughter, avenge his father, and reveal that the real killer of Duke Granz was not the Devil.

People change.

A snob can't stay a snob forever.

It is also possible for a person to become a worldly person.

A formerly evil person can become good.

A good person can become evil.

People change.

Whether it's big or small, we all change over the course of our lives.

Duchess Granz has changed, I have changed, Riana has changed.

And Charlotte, and Elion Bolton.

It will change and change and change.

"Are you leaving this time like last time?"

"I think we'll just have to wait and see, but I'm not sure what's going to happen, because if it's not bad, we won't have to fight it, but I'm not sure."

"I see......."

The Duchess sighs at my words.

It was a sigh of relief.

It was only then that I realized that I had been so lost in my own thoughts that I hadn't thought about it at all.

The Duchess is sending her daughter off to war. A battlefield of death and terror, infested with terrible monsters. No parent would be happy to send their daughter off to war, even if she was a powerful psychic.

Moreover, the more she uses her powers, the more her mind is torn apart. You can't help but notice that she's torn between surviving the war and leaving Anigo behind.

As the Duchess, I would be the one who keeps taking her daughter to war.

So, you're not going to like him.

It's not something I've seen often, but the fact that the Duchess didn't reveal that to me, I couldn't help but realize that she's actually a person who hides her heart well.

He's the kind of guy who keeps sending his kids off to war.......

What if it were me.

If I had a child and a friend of my child's kept telling me that he needed my son or daughter's abilities and kept taking them to war.

If you've made it so far, but you don't know how long you'll be safe.

I'm lucky I haven't gotten caught so far.

Riana is so needed.

Parents' worries, grief, and fears should be ignored.

"May I ask why you have spared Lord Bolton's life?"

I couldn't help but be taken aback by his abruptness.

I thought we were going for a walk together, so I thought we were getting along fine, but I guess we weren't." Riana's face hardened at the Duchess's offhand remark.

"Did Elion Bolton pull a fast one?"

I didn't think he'd do anything weird, but if he did it without my knowledge, I can't let him get away with it.

"Not at all."

The Duchess's expression was devoid of anything resembling anger toward Elayon Bolton.

"He's not a great conversationalist, but he's an honorable man of great intelligence, understanding, and caring."

I don't know if I like it, but I think it shows a lot of respect for Elion Bolton.

Then why are you asking me if I didn't kill it?

"It's not about Lord Bolton, it's about why you kept him alive."

Was the question completely unrelated to Elion Bolton's attitude or behavior?

That question was aimed at me in the first place, not Elion Bolton.

"...... I didn't think it was necessary."

If we didn't kill it like we did, we might find a new use for Elion Bolton.

At my words, the Duchess looks at me with a stony expression.

"Need....... Need......."

Then he walks away, muttering to himself.

Vibe.

It seemed to harden.

"When all this is over, what will you do with the empire?"

"Empire....... You mean?"

"Yes."

The Duchess's words made me feel like I had a stone in my throat.

Bertus killed Duke Granz.

Riana wants revenge, and so does the Duchess.

Bertus was a member of the imperial family.

As such, it was imperative that the empire's greatest threat, the Devil, be kept in check, as well as any revolutionary forces that could shake the empire to its foundations.

It was Bertus's definition, and it was what he had to live by.

Bertus was forced to kill Duke Granz.

But the Duchess has lost her husband, and Riana has lost her father.

It's no wonder they hate the Empire and Bertus.

The usual stuff.

Who I am is what I must do.

If it comes down to someone's righteous vendetta.

Where did the problem start, and who is really at fault?

If everyone does what they're supposed to do, and you can't blame them, and all that builds up is hate and anger and vengeance.

Is there something fundamentally wrong with the world?

"If I told you I wouldn't bring down the empire, would you hate me?"

"How can you hate it more than you already do?"

You're being honest, man.

"Mom, please."

"I have a lot to thank the Devil for, but you know I can't help but feel this way."

"......Why not?"

"You don't have to understand that."

"Is that ......?"

"Why should you understand that I don't like you?"

I couldn't help but be a little dumbfounded.

"Why try to make sense of so much when you're so confused you can't even see your own survival."

"......."

"Even you, who have taken on the karma of one nation and countless lives, why do you seek to preempt understanding?"

"......."

"You should hate people who hate you."

The Duchess looks at me and says

It was more of a childlike tone than advice or criticism.

"You must kill those who would kill you."

"......."

"Is that all?"

I didn't know what to say.

"Sometimes you have to kill those who don't want to kill you, sometimes you have to hate those who don't hate you, sometimes you have to take the breath of those who don't hate you."

"......."

"It is the life of a king to kill if necessary, even those who have loved you all their lives, even those who have never thought of betraying you. It is the life of a king to watch callously as the dying man dies in tears and fever, with a face stained with betrayal."

"......."

"Do you think there was anyone in history who became king with mercy, with gentleness, and with understanding?"

"...... wouldn't have been there."

"No nation has ever been built in a way that doesn't take, and those who aren't used to taking can't keep and can't have."

"......."

"But why, as a person, do you want to be king?"

With love, with understanding, with mercy.

There's no such thing as a history that brings the world together.

Taking away to take away, making mountains out of molehills.

They build golden towers of stolen things, and the greatest thieves in the world set thrones atop them.

That's a country.

Put a cap of stolen gold on it, and call it a crown, and he who wears it is king.

If you steal little, you're a thief; if you steal a lot, you're a mastermind and go down in history.

If a man steals everything in the world, no one calls him a thief.

I've already dethroned Edina, which is how it all started.

I started by snatching it too.

"Those who have struck down only those who deserved to be hated, only those who deserved to be hated, may be avengers and champions, but they cannot and should not sit on the throne of power."

Yes.

It's not about taking down people who deserve to be hated.

It's about making the fallen hate those who deserve it.

Emperor.

History is such a thing.

Sometimes you have to kill people who love you, and you have to be able to look them in the eye in their death with a sense of betrayal.

As a human being, it is arrogance to try to be a king.

The Duchess is pointing out my arrogance.

Are you so good as a human being that you want to be king?

How can you protect everyone when you're acting like such an ass?

Such a you.

You use my daughter, but can you protect her?

It's an accusation.

"You might get neighbors this way, but aren't neighbors the most terrifying thing in the world?"

A neighbor can always be on your side.

But it was always the neighbor who took something away.

Neighbors are equals.

So, kings don't need neighbors.

To a king, all things must be subordinate.

As Bertus once said.

That kind of arrogance, like everyone below me is equal.

There has to be a different kind of arrogance than the one we have now.

You have to be in that position.

Duchess Granz looks at me.

"I hate you for not being cruel."

It wasn't just that she hated me for taking her daughter to war.

This is how you can live in peace, with your enemies still alive.

It's pointing out the fact that, while keeping him alive may have served a purpose, it didn't serve a purpose in the end.

She doesn't hate Elion Bolton.

He seemed to think my approach of keeping Elion Bolton alive was risky.

You don't want a king who takes his daughter to war.

But if you have a king who doesn't have the heart to kill his enemies properly, if you have a king who is driven by recognition and perfection without regard to defending your country properly, if you have a daughter living in that land.

You'll hate the king even more.

The war will eventually end, but an indecisive, soft-hearted king will perpetually jeopardize the kingdom.

"A king must kill harmless things, even his own dog now and then."

This method doesn't try to kill Elion Bolton, regardless of his usefulness.

Not to kill those who have not revealed their teeth to me.

Something that only tries to kill the unwilling.

It didn't seem to like the way I was trying to kill only those who were clearly my enemies.

Duchess Granz speaks like a child.

"Are you going to convince the sheep inside the fence that their appetites can't be helped, when there are wolves and packs of ewes roaming outside the fence, and you don't even know if they're wolves in dog skins or not, and you're safe because you haven't shown them to me?"

The Duchess had no words to reply.

Elion Bolton was not a wolf.

The Duchess knew it.

But he doesn't know if it's a dog or a wolf, and he blames me for letting it into the fence because he doesn't need to kill it.

At some point, you're going to let a wolf in a dog's skin inside the fence.

That's what they say.

"That is the most dangerous tyranny of all."

A king who dispenses death harshly would be a tyrant.

A king who values death too much is a dark king.

"The Devil."

The Duchess kneels before me.

And, desperate.

Appeal.

"Be a cruel monarch."

A king and a saint are two different things.

If you try to be a king in the manner of a saint, you'll have nothing, you'll keep nothing.

Duchess Granz pleaded.

Episode 623.

On my way to convince Elion Bolton, I heard the Duchess's gentle but firm rebuke without actually speaking to Elion Bolton.

Fools are not the only ones who become tyrants.

No, there are only so many kinds of foolishness a man who sits on the throne can do.

A tyrant can be someone who kills people without any real principles, or someone who wages wars of conquest for no good reason.

But trying to read too much into the affairs of outsiders, and refusing to kill enemies who haven't bared their teeth to you, can be a tyranny in itself.

The Duchess was pointing out that the need to kill, the need I'm talking about, is very narrow.

It might be a threat.

It was pointed out to me that in these dangerous times, when the mere possibility is enough to make the choice to annihilate an opponent, I should first think about not killing someone I don't know if they are an enemy or an ally.

I thought I only had to kill enemies.

That was too human.

By the time you realize it's an enemy, they've already bared their teeth and a fight is scheduled.

Another way is to kill them before they become an enemy.

I am not Wang Jie.

But how long do you have to use that as an excuse to say that you don't have what it takes to be a king because you're already a king, and that's just not a rationalization or an excuse.

I had nothing to say to the Duchess, who was feeling insecure, that my methods were dangerous.

I agree with him.

As if protecting the flock inside the fence wasn't enough, I've been living with the idea that the beasts roaming outside the fence might be my flock.

The king is supposed to be the guardian of the inside of the fence, and everything outside the fence is the enemy.

I wasn't doing that.

I wouldn't want a monarch of that nature ruling over the land where I and my children live.

I'm not asking you to kill Elion Bolton.

I asked him if he would continue to do that, and if he realized how dangerous it was.

No nation has ever been built on love, understanding, and mercy.

A throne can only rest on what is taken.

And that throne must be maintained by blood.

If you're asking me if I didn't know that truth, I didn't.

It's just hard to accept that.

The Duchess wasn't telling me something that only she knew.

It told me something that everyone around me knew but didn't dare tell me.

Maybe they're sorry, maybe they know I'm struggling, maybe they don't want to put any more pressure on me.

The Duchess said what everyone knows but no one tells me.

That, too, is courage.

The walk was neither long nor short.

We walked in silence, the atmosphere heavy.

Back at the manor, Elayon Bolton and Charlotte are outside.

The conversation is over.

"Reinhard, a moment, Lord Bolton wants to talk to you."

"...... is it?"

I don't know how the story turned out.

But judging by the look on Charlotte's face, it didn't seem like a bad outcome.

\* \* \*

An exclusive interview with Elion Bolton.

Not inside the mansion, but outside. The footprints of the beach I had just walked on were still there.

I don't know what we talked about, but it made my heart feel even heavier.

"I don't think I ever had a choice."

"......Yes."

The original leader of the Crusaders was Reverie Lance, and that hasn't changed.

Olivia Ranze left the story at the margin.

Elion Bolton was one of the figures on the margins.

I don't know the personal history of Leverier Ranze, and I certainly don't know the personal history of Elion Bolton.

We only know what's going on in his public life.

With the fall of radical Leviathan Lance, centrist Elayon Bolton became the next leader of the Crusader Knights.

It would not have been of his own volition. The Empire wanted Elayon Bolton to be the leader of the Crusaders, and whether or not the popes were swayed by that, they would have wanted to keep a check on one of the key players in the Demon War, the war hero Leviathan Lance. The last thing they wanted was for the Crusaders to become too influential.

For one reason or another, Elayon Bolton became a Crusader Knight. It didn't matter if he wanted to be a crusader or not.

Even in the immediate aftermath of the Gate debacle, he was swayed by the opinions of the Pope, Ellen, and Olivia.

And over time, popes chose to make the Church the devil's own.

After only a few days, I was forced to back out.

And now, I've been offered the opportunity to become a Paladin of the Holy Order, with the possibility of returning to the Crusade.

In this way, he was a terribly manipulative person.

As if to show that despite his own authority and strength and lack of power, a man can be bent to the will of a greater power and a greater will.

"But now I realize that all the gods I have ever believed in have been false."

Right.

From the beginning, the teaching of the five gods and demons was all in vain.

Nothing is true, and even beliefs are just reinterpreted.

"Moreover, Tiamata has two forms."

"......Yes."

"Can you show me?"

Hearing is not enough.

Or do I need to see it with my own eyes, to know that the gods really are as powerful as the theocracy says they are.

I don't know which one, but I summoned Tiamata in my right hand.

Tiamata, a sword of purity with a milky white hilt.

But that's probably not what you want.

-curl!

You don't even need to say the word.

In response to my will, Tiamata's blade turns black and begins to shed its darkness.

"......The aura of corruption."

Elayon Bolton sees the magic sword Tiamata and stares at it in silence.

"Got it?"

"Good enough."

Elayon Bolton smiles bitterly as he summons his magic sword, Tiamata.

"Are the gods evil, or have we just been misunderstanding them all this time?"

The same is true here, where the gods are considered to be beyond the scope of human understanding.

However, it also lends power to misconceptions.

I thought I trusted them enough to lend a hand, when in fact I misunderstood them.

What the gods are.

Elion Bolton seemed to be stuck on that fundamental question.

"Just because you're a member of the Holy Order doesn't mean you have a full understanding of the Gods."

Demons and gods are the same thing.

That said, it's questionable whether five weeks is really five weeks.

"I can't tell you where it came from, but here's a fun fact."

"Is there anything else I should be surprised about here?"

"They say vampires came from the sun and moon gods in the first place."

The truth from Luna Artorius.

Vampires actually came from the gods.

Those who sought eternal life prayed to the moon, and they were blessed by the moon and cursed by the sun.

That's the beginning of a vampire, or so I've heard.

Those who asked the gods for forgiveness long enough were granted it.

Instead, they were forever cut off from the world.

"I don't think you're kidding."

Elion Boulton laughed bitterly, as if he knew that what he was saying was not even worthy of a trivial joke.

"To say I didn't have a choice is, in fact, a lie."

"......?"

"I just didn't have an opinion."

I guess that's how it works, so to speak.

"If he didn't want to lead the Crusade, he could have turned it down. But he didn't."

"If I had decided that the demon should be killed, or that he should be spared, I could have done so. But I chose nothing."

"If he wanted to challenge the decision of the popes to side with you, he could have said so, and he didn't."

"When you asked me to retire, if I didn't like it, I could have pulled a knife. But I didn't do that."

"It went with the flow. It's always been that way."

"Looking back, what a coward's life."

It's not that we didn't have a choice.

We didn't pick the less likely option, we just always went with the flow.

He had power and strength, but he lived a life in the middle, always going with the flow. He was not a judge of what was right or wrong.

Who is the majority.

Where's the buzz.

He went with the flow.

Neither an absolute proponent nor an absolute opponent.

It's a life of getting swept up or getting on board.

Elion Bolton seemed to realize that his earlier statement about not having a choice was a lame excuse.

"So, now you're going to make a choice of your own volition, is that it?"

"No way, it's still a big deal."

There is no such thing as resistance.

"If you've been a coward once, you might as well be a coward all the way, because at least you'll have one principle to live by: consistency."

A life without conviction or pride.

There may have been a time when he thought there was such a thing, but Elion Bolton admits that he's now too old to talk about it.

So, if you're a coward for the rest of your life, at least you've been consistent with being a coward for the rest of your life.

Not the consistency of a lifetime of goodness, but the consistency of a lifetime of cowardice.

The attitude of Elion Boulton, that he would rather be cowardly for the rest of his life than to make a choice and find his own way, was somehow hopeless.

"Considering that my rare choice to kill my subordinate turned out to be the worst choice ever, I guess I'm not supposed to make choices. Or is that just an excuse?"

Elion Bolton laughs.

Laugh long and hard.

As always.

An old man's self-help is often mixed with woe.

Elion Bolton's realization that when he looked back on his life's work, all he had left was cowardice.

The woe mixed with that self-help.

It was overwhelmingly sad.

\* \* \*

I also spoke briefly with Elion Bolton afterward.

"For months, I've been touring the country."

"It must have been a strange sight for you."

The coexistence of humans and demons is something I sometimes find disturbing.

"I did."

It's off the beaten path here, but he seems to have stayed in Rajak and wandered around.

Probably with the Duchess.

We don't know if the Duchess or Elion Bolton asked for it first.

"I can't help but think it's a strange land."

"That would be weird."

He must have thought a lot about the landscapes created in the Edina Archipelago.

"Ogres plow fields, trolls build buildings, orcs stand guard, succubi comfort children who have lost their parents and sleep with them, and mermaids appear on beaches to joke with people......."

"Wonderland."

"Was this even possible?"

"If this is possible, why haven't we done it before?"

"Why do we."

"Fear each other, hate each other."

"Had to die and be killed."

"Why was I able to say, in no uncertain terms, that there was no other option."

"Where did that come from, and how did everyone come to believe it?"

"It made me wonder."

Elion Bolton stares up into the blue sky of spring.

"Demon....... No. Reinhardt."

"Uh."

"This country, in a sense, would be a disaster."

Disaster.

Still, I think it's much more livable than the ecliptic.

But I didn't know what that meant.

"Do you realize how many people will despair just by realizing that the long, long history of hatred we've built up against each other was actually for nothing, that this could have been?"

"I guess you could look at it that way."

All the wars so far have been pointless.

A history of hate, of believing it was right, and then seeing the consequences of that futile belief.

They were able to coexist and be symbiotic.

The Demon War was not a glorious war.

For many, it may feel more like despair than hope, as it turns humanity's values and history on its head.

"Did you despair?"

"Yeah."

Most of all, it was Elion Bolton himself who felt despair in the midst of this peaceful and bizarre scene.

The dead, the dying.

They didn't have to, because they felt it.

"If I knew this was possible. No, in a world like this, there would have been no Gate."

The result of our distrust of each other is our current reality.

In a society of coexistence and symbiosis, there would have been no hatred, distrust, or fear of demons in the first place, and there would have been no Demon War to cause all of this.

Then, the humans invaded the demons.

It was a lack of faith and trust that caused all the problems.

In fact, it was the source of everything.

It was funny.

The Duchess said to hate everyone on the other side of the fence.

Elion Bolton realized that all the blood and tears had been for nothing.

Those who do not know war speak of killing, and those who know war speak of peace.

The pointlessness of killing.

"Humans weren't the only ones afraid of demons."

The same was true for the demons.

For a very long time, demons also feared humanity.

Elyse, an ancient Archdemon, once dreamed of humanity's destruction.

Even the great demon Valie was afraid of humans, which is why he wanted to go to a world without them.

They were both afraid of each other.

"I hate this country."

Elion Bolton said with a stern look on his face.

Because the moment I realized that peace was possible, I realized that everything I had done in the past could not be justified.

It was no longer a victory over the absolute enemy of humanity, but a slaughter that was nothing more or less than a terrorized madness.

Elion Bolton can't help but hate the scene, because he's been forced to face a grim truth.

"But I don't like it, so it's a landscape that must be preserved."

In the end, all of this shows us something we never thought possible.

You can't help but feel despair, but it's not a sight that should go away.

Truth doesn't go away because it's denied.

Just because you've learned a truth you don't want to know doesn't mean you can get it out of your head.

You can't erase the truth once it's been drilled into your head.

He seemed to think he had no choice but to defend this truth.

\* \* \*

After speaking with Elion Bolton, Charlotte and I were on our way back to Razak.

"I agreed to cooperate, but what did you talk about?"

When I spoke to Charlotte, it seemed like Elion Bolton had already agreed to work with her.

This is the life of a coward, and I will remain a coward for the rest of my life.

It would have been hard to admit that.

"Nothing much."

I don't know if Elion Bolton told me about his cowardice or if he told Charlotte as well, but I'm reluctant to go into more personal details.

"They say it's a strange land."

Elion Bolton was shocked.

Wonderland.

Sure, it was a sight to behold for the demonic exterminators.

"Sure, it's a strange land."

Charlotte giggled in agreement. I come from a world where I am essentially human, and there are no such things as demons.

I'm the one who finds this sight the strangest.

As with most wars, the Demon War was no different.

There was no such thing as deserving to die.

"It worked out just like I thought it would, but you look like shit."

"Uh, no. Good. Good."

"Then smile a little."

I smiled sheepishly at Charlotte's comment.

I can't stop thinking about it.

The Duchess says you must be willing to kill to keep the peace.

The words of Elion Bolton, who, after a war he thought was a justifiable killing, despaired at its futility.

The Duchess probably wasn't wrong.

But if I live by the Duchess' words, I will be Elion Bolton.

You should be afraid of your neighbors.

Forced to repeat the same history, knowing that the end of that fear is now.

Episode 624.

A city in ruins, somewhere on a continent.

A street in an abandoned city that has become unrecognizable.

There were a few figures in robes gathered there.

"The Immortals have already finished laying out their lines, and now the Allies are going to move again, and we're all going to the front."

Christina, clad in robes, spoke to the others, who, like her, were clad in black robes.

"How's the reverse recall device doing?"

"I've already seen it work on a couple of initial startups, so it shouldn't be too much of a problem with a high loss rate."

"All good."

The men in black robes looked at Christina and nodded.

"We were never in a position to say we had a lot of time, but they've done a good job so far."

At the black-robed men's flattering words, Christina nodded.

"What's next?"

"Then......."

The men in black robes were silent for a moment at Christina's question.

"I know it's ridiculous to be discussing this before the Gate debacle is over, but isn't it about time we talked about it?"

The black robes fall silent at Christina's question.

After the Gate debacle. What to do next.

One of the black robes says.

"The empire has outlived its usefulness."

An empire that has done so much evil to survive has lost its rationale and legitimacy.

For now, the rhetoric may keep it afloat, but when the Gate debacle is over, people will want to hold the Empire accountable.

"To survive, the Empire will have to find its next cause."

"Is it the devil?"

"Yeah."

If your empire is being sustained by the absolute rationale of the gate crisis, once that rationale is gone, it's time to find the next one.

All in the name of killing the demon that caused it all.

"It was a rationale for the Empire to unite all of humanity. Why not use it again?"

It was the existence of the Darklands and the Demon King that allowed the Empire to unite all of humanity so long ago.

To all attempts at division and to the forces of discord, it was said, "How should we fight among ourselves when the devil is strong?" There was no cause that outweighed that cause.

No empires were created, no empires were maintained.

If the devil doesn't exist, it's not possible in the first place.

So after the Gate debacle, it's just a matter of reverting to the old rationale.

"But the masters of the empire need not be the House of Gradias. All that is needed is for the mistakes of the last empire to die with the House of Gradias, and for a new one to be born."

Empires must exist to unite humanity. However, its masters may change.

At Black Robe's words, Christina stares at him.

"If you're going to maintain an empire in the name of the Devil, he's not on the list, is he?"

It's about uniting humanity against an enemy, and that enemy is the devil.

So the Black Robes were not planning on the Devil becoming the next ruler of the Empire.

"Of course, demonic rule would be unacceptable to most people. The chaos would be far greater than the current state of the Empire."

"Hmmm....... Yeah. Because you said it's more about how people perceive you than what you actually did wrong......."

Christina smiles meaningfully and nods slowly.

"So, who's supposed to be the next master of the empire, you guys?"

"......No way. We have a policy of not being up front."

The attitude of the men in black robes was resolute, as if they had no intention of abandoning their principles despite being reduced to a tiny minority.

"Yeah, that's what I'm curious about, because even though it's only now decaying like this, the Order's lore is still intact, its magic is still intact, and that's why it can create immortals, so what's the need to only move from behind like this?"

"There are some things that can only be done behind the scenes, and we're a group built to do those things."

A banner for humanity.

The Black Order is willing to betray humanity for the sake of its banner.

The moment they come to the forefront, their meaning fades. So instead of coming to the forefront, they do what only they can do: stay behind the scenes of history.

"There are many possible candidates to become the next Lord of the Empire, but they must first have some distance from the Empire, have earned enough majors to close the Gate, and be a worthy leader of humanity in their own right."

"Louise von Schwarz of Cernstadt is a possibility. She is the largest power after the Empire, and her character and personality are neither extreme nor overly compromised. She has the character to be a leader, and I can't fault her major. However, she almost certainly killed her own siblings with her own hands, which could prove to be a weakness in the future."

"The Grand Duke of Saint-Antoine, Raphael de Saint-Antoine, is not without possibility. His expertise in creating Titans is unparalleled, and he has remained true to the time-honored House of Saint-Ouen principle of walking the straight and narrow. While it is the opposite of our position that the power of an apostle should be wielded wherever possible, the attitude of the House of Saint-Thuan and its current patriarch, Grand Duke Saint-Thuan, deserves the respect and admiration of the people. In this case, however, the daughter is too great a risk, and no matter how well she does, she is not properly recognized by the people."

"There are a few other candidates, but ultimately there are issues with them being less powerful, less specialized, or not being able to take on the other big players."

"Because."

"Eventually."

"Ellen Artorius."

"She is suitable."

"The power, the symbolism, the people's support all point to her."

"If she can lay the foundation for the next empire, that would be the best outcome."

A great weight in the name of the warrior.

The Empire has lost its legitimacy, and there is an enemy worthy of extermination.

The warrior becomes a name and a symbol that weighs more than any nobleman, more than any king.

In the aftermath of the Gate, the fall of the old empire and the rise of the new will be necessary for the unity, prosperity, and unity of humanity.

Ellen Artorius becomes master of a new empire.

The Black Order decided that this was the best ending for the situation.

Christina remained silent, listening to the story.

It was the man with his back against the wall at the edge of the meetinghouse who had been silent until now.

"After all....... again."

At the sudden words, the gazes of the black-robed men turn toward them.

"Are you going to tell Ellen, who can barely stand to be called a warrior, that she must now become an emperor?"

His haphazardly grown black hair fell to the base of his neck, and his arms were bandaged outside his cloak.

"I have a question."

Black, abyssal eyes, visible through the haphazard growth of his hair, stare at those in robes.

"Who the hell are you guys to decide something like that?"

A hush falls over the room.

"Who the hell are you guys to tell me what the world is and what it should be, and how can you be so sure it's the way it should be?"

The man with the bandaged right arm, Ludwig, stares at everyone with eyes as deep as the void.

"Because that's the way to go for everyone."

The corner of Ludwig's mouth twitches up at that.

"Yeah....... That's the best justification ever."

"The only and absolute excuse for all evil deeds, all sin, and all blame."

"That disgusting sound of a path for all was what brought you here, and it was what you said to rationalize yourselves."

"For everyone?"

"No....... No."

"That horse is there for you."

"I mean, people who pick up on that."

"It's just an excuse for you guys."

"You're just as much an accomplice to the Gate debacle, aren't you?"

"You just want to run the world your way."

"When things go wrong, are you going to say, like anyone else in the world, that you didn't really mean for this to happen?"

"In the face of such a disastrous outcome, are you going to tell me that you didn't actually want this?"

"And then you're going to try to manipulate the world by trying to solve a problem that you got wrong, claiming you're going to get it right this time?"

For the world.

For the sake of humanity.

For the good of all.

They are merely excuses prepared for those who would do such a thing.

"So, what are you saying?"

The men in black robes say.

"Do you have the best answers, do you know who should be the next master of this world, do you know how to make peace, how to completely erase the seeds of another conflict of division and killing?"

Ludwig shakes his head at the question.

"Is your statement that all the world's problems would disappear if Ellen became emperor correct?"

"......."

"Since the Order of the Lord has already fallen to the Devil, if Ellen becomes Emperor, are you saying that they will simply support the warrior who became Emperor and be done with it?"

"......there's going to be some noise."

Ludwig smirked at that.

"It's just that what you guys are proposing is one of the ways, and even if the empire exists as it is, even if the world falls to the devil, even if Ellen becomes emperor, something is going to go wrong somewhere, and someone is going to die somewhere."

"I used to think there was a right answer, and I was just too stupid to get to it. That's what I thought."

"But now I know."

"That there was no right answer, just the only right answer."

"I thought you said each of you was a little bit responsible for all of this?"

"Whoever owns the next continent is going to be a little bit right and a little bit wrong."

"I mean, there's no such thing as a perfect answer."

"So without you, the world will have another answer that's just a little bit wrong, but just a little bit right."

"I'm not going to bother with that."

"I don't need to think of the right answer."

"Punishment, not answers."

"You who want to be judged on your intentions, not your results, on the subject that caused all of this. People like you who keep trying to push your own answers in the name of what's best for everyone."

"To erase the likes of you from the world."

"That's what I'm going to do."

I don't know the answer.

It doesn't even exist.

But then there are those who try to manipulate the world by insisting that they've found the right answer this time.

People who have never had to pay for a wrong answer, who keep telling me they have good intentions, who run the world and try to victimize me.

Ludwig thinks they should be wiped off the face of the earth.

Order's words that Ellen should be Emperor.

It can also lead to a good ending.

However, it's already disgusting that there are people behind the scenes trying to manipulate the world with words like that.

At Ludwig's threatening demeanor, the mages begin to rise from their seats one by one.

"Christina, I don't know if this is what you wanted to do in the first place."

When asked if bringing Ludwig to the Order's meetinghouse was the plan all along, Christina shrugged.

"The devil is in the details, so to speak."

Christina was sending frosty glances toward the robes.

Something starts to creak.

In fact, it's a given.

What the Emperor once tried to say, Christina gives back to the wrong people.

"If the world turns out the way you say it will, it will be so disgusting."

There was madness in her eyes, filled with hatred and anger.

Similar to Ludwig, but a little different.

It was, well, vengeful.

Surviving because those responsible are doing it for the world.

As if he couldn't stand it.

"So, I don't need you guys anymore."

"You know you're not the only one who can say that."

Mutually beneficial.

It's been a fact of life for Juji since the beginning.

The wizards of the Black Order are preparing something.

"Why, to summon an immortal?"

"......!"

The moment she reads the intent, she sits back and shrugs.

"Didn't you guys realize that you gave it to me with no safeguards in the first place?"

The fact remains that they were only temporarily cooperating in the name of Gate.

"Well, it's obvious: If I try to betray you, you'll try to take control of the Immortals, and you've already made arrangements for that."

"......."

"It's weird when they don't do that."

The wizards are silenced by Christina's words.

Immortals are controlled by magic. It makes sense, then, that they would have the means to do so, putting the technology in Christina's hands and using the resources of the Empire to perfect it.

Immortals become the property of the Black Order at the moment of absolute necessity.

Just as the Emperor knew what would happen the moment he created the Immortal, yet allowed it to happen, so too did Christina not assume that he had no such intentions.

Christina laughs.

Laugh at the wizards of the Order.

"By the way, isn't it a bit optimistic to think that you guys would have created an immortal exactly as you instructed?"

"......Did you think that was magic you could touch?"

The knowledge that the Black Order has imparted is immeasurable.

Simply implementing how to create an immortal is already the domain of geniuses.

However, finding and modifying the Black Order's hidden formulas is impossible.

The Black Order, of course, predicted what their opponents would predict.

I said, "If you want to do it, go for it.

"There are a lot of unreasonable geniuses in the world, and I guess you guys didn't expect that on the subject of secret societies."

It was home to some of the continent's greatest minds.

Only those who have talent know how unreasonable it is.

"......Why, it's not working?"

"......."

Already seeing in their expressions that her arrangement had worked, Christina smiled wickedly.

It's not that the Black Order was stupid.

It's just that someone's genius overwhelmingly exceeds someone else's expectations.

The Black Order was in decline.

The leaders are all dead.

Even the last of the remaining masters had been oxidized in the fight with the demon earlier.

What's left are the Black Order, who weren't so great after all.

Sadly.

It's just dregs.

The magic, visions, and arts of the great leaders are intact, but they can't even begin to embody them.

Residuals.

It was inevitable that they were unaware of the accidents of geniuses and the dangers of geniuses.

The only thing they could do with their rampage was to gain access to the Empire and the Temple geniuses who could harness its power.

It was the last thing they could do.

Those with the ability and talent have already died fighting the monsters of the Gate and battling demons.

That's about as far as they could go.

"In the end, does it look like this......."

One of the Order's wizards finally shakes his head.

Who knew this would happen?

They just needed to do something, and they wanted to do something, even though they knew that everything they ended up with wasn't going to be the way they wanted it to be.

The people who used to run the world from behind the scenes are now too good to do so.

And yet, in trying to do so, they ended up playing into the hands of those who hate them.

It's a simple story.

I tried to take advantage of it, but it took advantage of me.

They tried to take advantage of each other, and in the end, the weaker party got taken advantage of.

"Ludwig."

At Christina's urgent call, Ludwig's right hand surges with energy.

The sword is energized and takes the form of a sword.

Ludwig walks slowly toward the wizards awaiting death.

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A street in an abandoned city.

"I'm surprised you didn't try to run away."

Christina muttered to herself as she looked at the Order's mages, the ones who had been slain, and the way they lay dead.

Ludwig's right arm was still bandaged, as if he'd just summoned an ominous, eerie Auror Blade of Darkness.

The Order's mages were all slaughtered by Ludwig.

He didn't even try to run away.

"You knew there was no point in trying to run away."

"I don't know."

Anna de Guerna, waiting in the distance, approaches over the ruined rock ledge.

"No life detected nearby. This is....... that's all."

Anna looks away from the dead bodies with a stony expression.

Even if she had tried to flee, she would have been caught in Anna's spell, and the Immortal Archmages waiting in the distance were raising their shields.

"There might be a residual, but it doesn't matter, they're not going to take the immortal out of our hands anyway."

With that, the Black Order disappeared from the world for good.

You may have missed one or two, and you may have survived, but there's no point in trying.

"It's kind of scary to think that if it wasn't for Louis, I might have lost my entire immortal."

Christina grinned wickedly.

The intentions of the Black Order were obvious to begin with.

That's why he focused on uncovering the Black Order's tricks.

If it weren't for Louis, the Black Order would have tried to bend the world to their will, if not by force. By using immortals.

I wouldn't even call it a battle.

In a battle of genius and intrigue, genius won.

The Immortals that the Black Order wanted to make their army are now Christina's army.

"Ludwig, what do you think?"

"What?"

"Ellen becomes emperor, the devil becomes emperor, and things stay the same."

Christina asks.

"What do you think is better?"

To Christina's question, Ludwig says simply, as if it's a no-brainer.

"I don't know."

It was a straightforward answer, without even a second thought.

"Well, it'll work out."

It's good to be ignorant of what you don't know.

There's something you want to do.

Then it just does it.

Let the world's business be the world's business.

Ludwig replies and stares at his right hand.

The Grandmaster's arm gave Ludwig great strength.

Ludwig had the power to skip several steps.

But he couldn't get used to the foreign sensation of his own body.

It was an impossible procedure for the average person to endure.

'Years at most.......'

The Dettomorian's words that you're going to die.

Now Ludwig truly understood what he was talking about.

It's only been a few days since I've been able to get up and move around properly, after enduring pain that would have killed me.

At some point, your body will reach its limits.

We were paying the price now, in real time, for putting things together that shouldn't have been put together in the first place.

"Are you okay......?"

Anna studied Ludwig's complexion with concern. Ludwig nodded with a stony expression.

The body is still holding up.

I can fight again.

Until the body is shattered.

Until you finish what you need to do.

You just have to hang in there until then.

"Yeah. It's okay."

Not yet.

\* \* \*

"Report on the readiness of all troops for departure."

With the telepathic Ibiaman in front of him, Emperor Bertus sat still in the barracks of the General Headquarters.

She sends telepathic messages to the commanders of each of the armies, and they report back to her, summarizing the situation.

"The whole army is ready, Your Majesty."

Telepathic abilities streamline the communication process.

So Ivia was acting as a messenger, not moving from her seat.

"We will begin our march toward Gethosia tomorrow. We estimate that it will take us ten days to reach Gethosia, and the advance party will have already cleared the warp gates on a small city-sized scale, so there will be combat upon arrival. Make sure your respective commanders are fully aware of that fact."

If you're running Immortals, you can probably leave the small and medium-sized warp gates to them.

The only time you'll need to go all-out is when you're trying to capture a large city warp gate. These will get progressively harder, so if Gethonia isn't a breeze, expect it to get harder later on.

If Gethonia was difficult to capture now that we had the unrivaled army of Immortals, the remaining battles would be even more daunting.

The weather eased up, and the troops had a long winter's rest.

"Starting tomorrow, until we see a complete end to the gate situation, the military will not stop."

The Emperor blandly gave the order, and Ivia was quietly spreading the word to all the military commanders.

\* \* \*

Leading up to the departure, the garrison was quieter than busy.

With the bare minimum of tents and supplies, the long march was about to begin.

Like a beast ready to wake up after a long, long winter's sleep.

From now on, there will be no such long breaks.

The end of war, the end of humanity.

The army will advance until one of the two paths is clear.

In this tranquil garrison, those who had been in the temple so far were ready to depart.

Christina.

Anna.

Louis Ankton.

And Ludwig.

Naturally, everyone was horrified.

Ludwig, who lost his arm and had to return home, has clearly gotten his right arm back, albeit in a sling.

"Ludwig? No, that arm is......?"

Ludwig smiled sheepishly at Lanyon Sessor's question.

"There was an experimental procedure, and I was the first patient."

"Are you okay......?"

"Uh, it moves surprisingly well."

Ludwig demonstrated that he was fine by clenching and unclenching his fist and moving his arm up and down.

There are certain procedures that can restore a missing arm.

None of us had a clue what it was, so we were at a loss for words as we watched Ludwig's nonchalant demeanor.

Getting your arm back is great, but is it really in a condition to fight?

Judging by his bandaged arm, Ludwig didn't look like he was in any condition to fight.

Ludwig shook his head, as if he knew the concern.

"He's not going to be in direct combat, he's going to be in a rear support unit, so don't worry about it."

"Ah, ah, ah....... I see."

It was a lie.

Ludwig was supposed to be working with Immortal.

In a way, he was fighting in the most dangerous place since the rearguard action began. Ludwig had no need or reason to tell his friends.

Rumors of Ludwig's sudden return and regained right arm were bound to spread through the Royal Class garrison.

Scarlett heard about Ludwig's news, and she couldn't help but come to him.

"Ludwig......?"

"Scarlett, it's been a while."

Scarlett stared at Ludwig's new right arm, her mouth hanging open in disbelief.

Ludwig explained to the others what had happened to his arm and told them not to worry, as he would never have to go into battle himself.

"That would be great, but......."

But everyone was looking at Ludwig, who had returned, and feeling uncomfortable.

Aside from getting his arm back, you can't help but notice the change in Ludwig's mood.

Ludwig's eyes are dark and sullen. You sense something in his disheveled appearance.

Plus, it was obvious to anyone with a little bit of eyesight.

The lengths of Ludwig's left and right arms are a bit odd.

The right arm was a little longer. Slightly unnaturally so.

We don't know what the experimental procedure was, but we do know that it was no ordinary procedure.

Ludwig's return had a dangerous air about it, and we couldn't help but feel a subtle sense of foreboding.

"......."

"Cliffman, it's been a while."

He also encountered Klippmann, who urged Ludwig to retreat from the battlefield.

Ludwig, who was told by Klippmann to go home and not bother anyone, eventually returned and regained his right arm through some means.

Ludwig greets him with an unchanged demeanor, while Klippmann stares at him with a stony expression.

"That bastard......."

Klippmann looked at Ludwig, as if premonitioning something, and shook his head in annoyance.

After greeting one by one the familiar faces who had returned after such a long absence, Ludwig prepared to march and walked through the garrison as night fell.

Ludwig doesn't fight with Royal Class garrisons or Allied main armies anyway.

Rather, they would spend more time fighting alongside the Immortals than in the garrison.

I'm just saying hello to make sure it's not weird to be in the garrison.

However, not everyone was buying Ludwig's lie.

"Hey......."

Heinrich von Schwarz.

When Heinrich realized what was happening on the ecliptic, he could only stare at Ludwig as he returned with his arm back.

"I think that's....... right?"

Heinrich knew immediately how Ludwig had gotten his arm back.

He must have been transplanted with a black magic reconstructed arm.

I risked my life to get my arm back.

And I don't know how to overcome that rejection and other issues.

Only Heinrich knew that Ludwig was in a very dangerous state.

So, Heinrich knows that Ludwig is lying when he says he won't fight.

"Did you really....... did you really have to do that?"

"Well."

Ludwig smiled bitterly at Heinrich's question.

"Even if you're nothing, you can do something......."

"......."

"I wanted to make sure of that."

It's already happened.

Irreversible.

Heinrich could say nothing to Ludwig, who had already done the deed.

Heinrich says it through clenched teeth.

"You're going to fight and die."

Heinrich seemed to understand now what the Dettomorian prophecy had foretold.

Just like that.

Ludwig spotted someone standing on a hill in the middle of nowhere, overlooking the Royal Class garrison.

Ellen Artorius.

In the light of the full moon, Ellen stood still on the hill, looking down on the garrison as if observing.

Ludwig looked up at Ellen on the hill without speaking.

After helping Ludwig pursue the case without asking, Ellen returned to the garrison as if she were running away.

It was the first time I'd seen it since.

Ellen looks at Ludwig, her eyes moving slowly toward him.

There was no emotion in his eyes.

Ellen didn't say anything.

Not how did you get back, or what happened to your arm.

I wasn't panicked or intimidated.

There were no thoughts, no emotions, just an awareness that there was a person there.

"You're different."

Looking at Ellen, who somehow seemed to have become a different person altogether, Ludwig said.

More than she had changed, Ellen had become strangely different.

Something has changed.

Everyone changes.

It's going to change.

"......."

Dead-eyed Ellen gave no answer or reaction.

I just stood there in the moonlight, staring at Ludwig.

No longer did Ludwig ask the moonlit still life anything.

\* \* \*

The Allies move.

The danger is in the longevity of the group itself.

If it can be done quickly, that is the only good in war. Now that they have enough power, the Empire will immediately set out to destroy the warp gates across Ryzeln.

The empire had to pass through many small and medium-sized cities to reach its next destination, so the march would have taken a long time if it had been the same as before.

"You swept......."

But now, I was looking at a city in ruins, smoldering with smoke and flames.

"......I expected it to be a lot."

What was the name of the city?

I don't remember, but it was a city with one medium warp gate and two small warp gates.

But all I and Eleris could see was a trail of destruction and carnage.

Small and medium-sized towns and cities could be wiped out in less than half a day with just Immortal.

As much as we would have loved to see the Immortals in action, we were a bit late to the party, as we didn't want to draw any attention to ourselves.

Eleris is usually pale in complexion, but she was almost blue in the face.

Eleris could not help but fear the power of a cornered human.

Maybe the gate debacle is over.

"Depending on how the battle for Gethsinothia goes, the Alliance may be forced to withdraw entirely."

"Maybe."

If it appears that Immortal alone can handle the gate situation, the coalition may actually disband.

"But each gate becomes more and more dangerous, and it would be foolish to disband the Alliance so quickly. Like it or not, the Alliance can't leave here until every warp gate on Ryzeln is destroyed."

The gate crisis isn't over until the last warp gate is smashed.

If you hastily withdraw and realize that Immortals alone won't end the gate crisis, you'll have to regroup. It's not even funny.

In the end, the coalition must exist until we see a complete end to the Gate debacle.

Immortals are a large army, but they also have a tremendous advantage in mobility, with entire armies being able to move via mass teleportation.

As such, Immortals are able to wipe out these small towns with massive mass teleports across Regellen, just as they would intercept enemy strongholds.

"For now, we'll have to wait and see how the battle for Gethsinothia goes."

At the same time, the war intensifies and deepens.

It's coming to an end.

Episode 626.

Originally, the Allies would have had to fight a few small to medium-sized city battles before reaching their destination, Gethsanosia.

As Immortal took over the work of the Demon King's army and began to neutralize strongholds with greater speed and precision, the Alliance was doomed.

But the Allies were only moving forward, not fighting.

There were no monsters in the way of the Allies.

All that remained were the remains of monsters that had already turned to flesh.

That was, after all, a good thing for anyone for any reason.

Naturally, rumors of the Empire's massive vanguard were bound to spread.

But in the end, no fight is a good thing.

The idea that the Empire has some sort of large, unspecified military force is something that has been replaced by immortals, but it's also something that military leaders have always had some idea of.

We don't know what kind of power the Vanguard has, but the fact that they're ravaging small and medium-sized cities can only be a good thing for the University.

However.

-gooooooo

Gethsinothia, where a major battle was scheduled, had already been burned to the ground by the vanguard.

"What is this ......?"

It was inevitable that Kono Lindt would see the spectacle before anyone else.

A large, unknown military force had already destroyed the small and medium-sized cities, and even the large city of Gethsonia, wiping out all the gates and monsters.

\* \* \*

No matter how prepared an army is for war, no one likes to fight.

Small and medium-sized cities were already destroyed, so not having to fight in them was a no-brainer.

But is it really something to celebrate when your main base of operations has already been destroyed?

Whatever the reason, having a battleground that's already fallen in what's expected to be a very bloody battle can't be a bad thing in terms of power reserves.

But it's weird.

It's definitely weird that it can go this far.

It's good to be alive, and it's good to not be in a major battle.

Good things being good things, I couldn't help but notice a strange sense of discomfort and unease throughout the Alliance.

An Allied garrison that feels strangely disconnected, rather than excited, by the loss of an upcoming large-scale battle.

Commander-in-Chief Chamber.

"Your Majesty, will you speak now?"

Gathered in the barracks of the General Headquarters, one of the commanders in charge of each of the armies spoke up cautiously.

"Everyone knows that the Alliance has been operating a vanguard force. And everyone knows that neither Lord Savior Tana nor you are part of it."

Those in the know know that the role Immortals play now was once played by the Devil's Army, but most don't.

As such, we can only assume that the Empire has a very strong military presence.

"If we had such a powerful ally, if we had such an army, we would welcome it with open arms."

If you have a very powerful ally, why hide them, when it's better to reveal the existence of such a powerful army to boost allied morale.

There's nothing wrong with that.

"But we're marching without knowing English, and everyone is getting restless. Your Majesty, I think it's time you at least let the commanders know what's going on."

Bertus listened in silence.

Without the need to fight for Gethsinothia, it was inevitable that the military commanders would be confused.

Just as the emperor sits at the head of the table at the Allied General Headquarters, where representatives from each of the armies are gathered, so too are the seats based on rank.

And sitting closest to the table was, of course, Louise von Schwarz, the commander of Cernstadt.

'How will you answer me, Emperor.......'

Of course, having witnessed the experiments at Temple, she knew what the Alliance's current situation meant.

Louise couldn't help but know in her gut that the army was on the move, and the fact that it was powerful enough to take on a large city on its own made her nervous.

It's a powerful army.

However, it is an unidentified army.

Despite the good news that the Empire possesses a powerful army of unknown origin, the very idea of not knowing the truth is unsettling to subordinate commanders.

To tell the truth or not to tell the truth.

We didn't know which one would cause the bigger crisis.

Louise didn't know which choice was better.

Secrets spread more and more the more people know about them. Thus, merely mentioning that this command was creating an army from the dead was a foregone conclusion that one day the entire Alliance would know about it.

An ominous, uneasy silence ensues.

And just like that, the emperor made his decision and opened his mouth.

"I, uh, don't want to know."

The voice that pierced the silence did not belong to the Emperor.

Like Louise von Schwarz, she sits very close to the head of the table in this meeting room of the General Headquarters Barracks.

It was an unnervingly cheerful voice with a hint of laughter in the air.

"Am I the only one who thinks so?"

Rowen, the new leader of the Crusader Knights.

\* \* \*

With everyone demanding the truth from the Emperor, it's hard not to be taken aback when the new crusader leader suddenly says he'd rather know nothing.

With the sudden departure of the previous Crusader Grand Master and the arrival of a new one, everyone knows there's been a major political shift within the Five Great Houses. It's just that few people know what it is.

Those in the know kept their mouths shut, so no one really knew what the change in Crusader leaders meant.

There is no one in this room, even if they are new, who can ignore the leader of the Crusaders.

The hierarchy within the Immediate Alliance is also higher than that of most empires, so the Crusader Knights have more say than the kings of most nations.

As such, Rowen's comments were not something that could be easily dismissed.

"Chief, what does that mean?"

When asked to address the allegations, Rowen shakes his head.

"It means the Emperor has a purpose and has kept it a secret until now."

The emperor said nothing, and a suspicious silence fell over the hall.

"Haven't you all realized, to some extent, that the Alliance has a hidden power?"

"But the fact that we can't disclose what it is, what the hidden power is, until now, means there's a reason we can't disclose it."

"Doesn't the fact that you're so anxious about this, even though it's not a good thing, mean that it's something you're not supposed to know?"

"So I'd rather not know."

"I trust you're keeping it a secret for a reason."

Louise's stomach churned as she heard the Crusader leader say that he believed in the Emperor.

She doesn't know what the demon is really like, but she does know that Rowen hates the Empire.

She's even the one who caused the Empire to commit genocide.

Louise's own anger was rising as she watched the woman's nonchalant expression as she spoke of the abomination of believing in the Emperor.

'Of course you know.......'

Louise felt sick to her stomach, knowing that Rowen must have known.

"But if the Allies have an undisclosed history, it's better to know it....... It would certainly be more helpful in planning future operations."

"What if the truth is more problematic?"

"What......?"

"You know, knowing doesn't necessarily make you feel less anxious, but maybe there's a truth that makes you feel more anxious? Isn't that what I'm saying, that there's a reason you can't reveal it?"

Rowen says, smiling wryly.

"Let's say it's a power that shouldn't be publicized, would you be confident in saying that it shouldn't be used anymore? I mean, it's a power that could save us from having to do the Gethnosian offensive, which would have been a massive power loss."

If you're a sinister justice or damned power.

Let's just say that the hidden power of the Alliance is the strength gained by holding the hand of someone who shouldn't be held, even if it means public criticism.

Are there people in this room who can stand up and say that their power should not be used, and that only the Allies can end this war?

"I don't know what it is, but if I did, I think we'd all be forced to admit that the hidden power of the Allies - or, more accurately, the hidden power of the Empire - is necessary for the war."

"If it's a power that can only be kept secret, it's probably not the right power, right?"

"But if we knew we had that power, and we were forced to be silent about it, what would we be?"

"You're being an accomplice."

We don't know what powers the emperor had at his disposal.

But if the Emperor had a hand in that ominous, dark, evil power, it's a matter of knowing.

The Emperor is driving the war with an evil force. But if you know the truth and remain silent because you need this power, you become an accomplice of the Empire and the Emperor.

"Shouldn't you realize that your majesty's silence is for our benefit?"

Everyone swallows hard at the crusader leader's words.

Ignorance is bliss.

In other circumstances, it might not have made sense, but for now, we all realized that it did.

There are some things in the world you shouldn't know.

"Wouldn't it be pointless and too disrespectful of His Majesty's consideration to share the burden when he intends to bear it all alone?"

The leader of the Crusader Knights wants to keep the Emperor's secrets.

But everyone in the room sensed that it wasn't out of respect for the emperor.

It's a single sin.

The rest you don't need to know.

Whatever it is, whatever nefarious tricks are involved.

The Emperor's silence in the face of the spiteful crusader leader's words was proof enough.

If the crusader leader's accusations are ridiculous, there's no reason for the Emperor to stand idly by.

The mere fact that you are saying, almost with half-conviction, that the Emperor has committed a terrible, unforgivable sin is a very great insult to the Imperial House, the Empire, and the Emperor himself.

No matter how powerful the Crusader Knights are, only the Emperor can say they are.

The Emperor says nothing, even though the crusader leader has committed a very big offense.

No one knows that tolerance for disrespect is proof that the emperor approves.

Will you be an accomplice?

Are you going to remain ignorant and have an excuse ready later that I didn't know anything.

The Emperor nods slowly, looking at the silence in the room, which is now filled with people afraid to know the truth.

"Thank you, Crusader Commander."

The Emperor turns a cold gaze on the crusader leader.

"What, Your Majesty."

Rowen opened his eyes, too, and smiled at the Emperor.

"......."

The Grand Duke of St. Thuan, seated near the end of the table, watched the frosty confrontation.

\* \* \*

When the Allies succeeded in capturing Serandia, they were both saddened and elated.

A lot of people were dying, but it gave people hope that we might actually be able to end the gate crisis, and it was a battle that was won.

But gathering, burning, and re-burning the monsters of Gethsinothia's ruins was all the Alliance had to do.

-What happened to the transaction?

-Isn't that what you did?

-Is it?

-I feel like I have a huge army.

Soldier by soldier, commander by commander, each had their say in this strange and unknown situation.

Once Gethonia is cleaned up, the Alliance will announce a new plan.

Even then, there's no telling if it'll be without a fight.

-But if it continues like this, won't they need us?

-Without it, what are you going to do, go back and starve?

-Yes, I'd rather stay in the military.

-That's a good thing.

-Yes.

In the end, it's clear that we're all grateful for today's safety.

The Allied garrison had a bizarre atmosphere, one that left everyone more bewildered than elated.

"After all, I didn't get to try out Titan's new gear."

In the tent where the Archduke's troops were stationed, Adelia muttered the words to Najik.

"Too bad?"

"Oh, no, no, no, no, that's not what I meant!"

Adelia waved her hand, and Archduke Saint-Thuan shook his head.

"...... is not a tree. I'm partly to blame for not seeing the Titan's second maneuver."

"Oh....... Yeah, me too......."

The Battle of Gethsionosia was supposed to be the Titan's second maneuver. We would be able to see how our improved Titan was doing, get data, and see what we needed to work on.

Depending on how you listen, it might sound like you're bummed that there's no combat.

Adelia and Archduke Saint-Antoine, as well as the Archduke's wizards, were devoting as much time as possible to improving the Titan.

The Battle of Gethsinothia isn't the only thing that's gone.

There were no battles in all the places along the way.

No matter how busy she was with her research and how little interest she had in anything outside of it, Adeliarahan couldn't help but feel that something was going on.

"But really....... What's going on?"

She feels the same questions everyone else does.

An important battle has been lost.

And no one knows what happened. Even those who were present at the High Command meeting knew only that they would be hurt if they tried to find out. And even then, it was not the Emperor who spoke, but the leader of the Crusaders.

The emperor rarely spoke.

The Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan doesn't know what's going on, either.

"Adelia."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Archduke St. Thuan sits back in his seat, looking down at the Titan blueprints as he speaks.

"If you could end this war by selling your soul to the devil, would you?"

"......?"

The Archduke's out-of-the-blue question left Adelia dumbfounded.

Sell your soul to the devil.

There have been numerous legends of great demons lending their powers to warlocks in such contracts, but no one knows for sure if they were true or not. It could be that the stories were just made up to scare the demons, or it could be that they actually happened.

It's just an idiomatic expression.

Sell your soul to the devil.

In return, we end this war.

At the Archduke's question, Adelia stops to think.

What a tragedy.

A tragedy of too great a magnitude has occurred.

All it takes to end this war is your own soul.

But it's the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan who's in front of you.

Adelia's father is her friend's father, but they come from a family of pure wizards known for never touching evil power.

It was never a wise thing to say in front of him that he was selling his soul to the devil.

"Maybe ......."

Nevertheless, Adelia had no choice but to answer.

It's a small price to pay.

If I had to pay with my soul, my life, to stop these tears and blood, there would be no shortage of people who would do so.

Even as she spoke, Adelia could not help but glance cautiously at Archduke St. Thuan, wondering if she had made a mistake.

The Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan smiles bitterly.

"......I guess that's what I'd do."

"......."

Even the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan, a longtime believer, said so.

This war is so terrible that people would choose to put aside their family honor and even their own beliefs if given the chance.

"The emperor made that choice.

As he knew he would, Archduke Saint-Thuan could not help but know that the Emperor had reached out to some evil, even if he did not know specifically what it was.

Episode 627.

"Ewww....... Eek!"

"Ask this."

"Oof! Oof! Oof!"

-Oops!

Louis Ankton watched, wide-eyed, as Ludwig smashed his gag to bite down on the pain.

"It's going to hurt."

-ChiyiBenefit!

As Christina poured the mysterious solution on Ludwig's shoulder, there was a sound as if something was burning and black smoke began to rise.

"Ouch! ugh. Ugh....... Ugh!"

Ludwig's exposed right arm was glowing with darkness.

Ludwig's eyes were red and bloodshot as he tried to stifle the groan that kept escaping him, and the junction of his right arm and shoulder was oozing a steady stream of black, dead blood.

Christina was doing something to Ludwig's arm with a determined look on her face, and Anna was using her magic to keep him from struggling.

-Kaduk! carddup!

But the magic that bound Ludwig was also subject to being broken and re-cast by the simple physical forces of his body.

Unable to use magic himself, Louis Ankton was able to get the necessary reagents, medicines, and scrolls to Christina and Anna just in time.

"Hmph....... ugh....... Ugh!"

"Just a little more, it's almost over."

It's unbearable for humans.

Despite being given a lethal dose of painkillers, which would have made it difficult for a normal human being to respond to pain, Ludwig's mind was pushed to the limit.

A normal, healthy arm would have been rejected.

But it wasn't just any human arm, it was an arm that had been enhanced with black magic, technically a giant piece of magic itself.

Ludwig, who should have died of shock the moment he was transplanted, hangs on because his life force is uncannily strong.

As if protected by some inscrutable force, Ludwig somehow managed to withstand a painful rejection that would have killed a normal person a hundred times over without that level of vitality.

It wasn't until Ludwig's body broke out in a cold sweat, as well as Anna and Christina, who control his rejection, that Ludwig's condition returned.

"Are you feeling better now?"

Christina asked, looking at Ludwig, who was shirtless and covered in sweat.

"Yeah....... Now that's bearable."

The three listeners know that Ludwig's words are false.

The pain is only alleviated, but it never goes away.

It's just that it's not a screaming pain, and Ludwig can't help but feel the burning pain in the joints of his right arm all the time.

Ludwig's skinny right arm was hard to recognize as belonging to a living person.

And the veins bulging between his right arm and shoulder were all colored red.

Like a right arm eroding the flesh.

Indeed, the venom in his right arm, enhanced by black magic, was eating away at Ludwig's flesh.

Grandmaster's Arms.

In exchange for it, Ludwig gained great power.

Christina wiped Ludwig's wet body with a medicated towel and began dressing his right arm.

The bandage itself is no ordinary object either.

It's a long, long magical scroll in its own right, not to mention specially medicated.

Created by Louis and realized by Anna, this long magical scroll controls Ludwig's rejection and prevents the black magic from escaping.

Aside from the cosmetic issues, the bandages also serve to protect Ludwig's body.

Anna looks at Ludwig with a pitying expression.

"Ludwig....... The rejection cycle is getting shorter and shorter."

"......There's a price to pay for cheating."

It's not hard-won power.

Ludwig laughed bitterly, "So you have to put up with the pain.

Ludwig was the only living human to fight in the Gethsanosian campaign.

Not a single person was killed in this battle.

That alone might have made him useful.

For that alone, I feel like I'm not a nobody.

We did something.

So even if you die in vain, you don't die for nothing.

Still, a little more.

While you're still in motion.

You can do something about it.

It feels like you're going to break, but you're not broken until you really are.

As it is, if we can end a war without anyone having to fight, I think we can call that a meaningful life to some extent.

There will come a time when rejection will push the envelope, but it hasn't come yet.

It's not hard to endure the pain.

Because pain is fleeting.

I'm just afraid of this body breaking.

Ludwig breathed raggedly, his eyes bloodshot with pain.

\* \* \*

The Crusader Captain is a very bizarre position.

Even now, in its weakened state, it is one of the five most powerful forces in the Alliance, and one of the most important on the battlefield: the power to heal.

No other Allied faction can ignore the Crusaders.

There was no one to point out the crusader's disrespect.

And the rudeness was kind of nice.

If you try to find out, you'll get hurt.

You're hurt, very badly.

How in the world do you think they could have gotten a force equivalent to the Allied main body?

It's clear that it's a force to be reckoned with.

It's a powerful thing, and it's clear that you can't give it up easily.

What kind of nefarious means could be involved?

No amount of imagination can change the fact that you shouldn't know about it.

As the Crusader leader said, he should be grateful that the Emperor had kept it a secret until now.

You never know when you might be held jointly and severally liable.

That's when I realized the truth about covering my ears.

And another thing everyone has learned.

That the new crusader leader is a very unpleasant person.

And apart from that, she seems to know the truth.

"I'm offended that he's sitting there."

"What can I say, neither for me nor for Reinhardt."

After the meeting, in his barracks, Bertus smiled bitterly at a very unhappy-looking Saviolin Tana.

Bertus himself had nothing to say about it, but Saviolin Tana had every intention of slitting the new Crusader leader's throat at the first sign of an order.

If it weren't for Reinhardt's timely arrival, Rowen would have literally burned the ecliptic to ashes.

It was hard to bear to see such a man ascend to the position of Crusader Commander and look so nonchalant as if nothing had happened.

"It's enough that they moved the way I thought they should. It's hard to expect them to like your attitude."

In the end, it's enough to say that the Crusader leader's demeanor was in line with Bertus' intentions, and that he took control of the situation so that people would no longer question him.

And it's always better to have your opponent move your pieces the way you want them to than to have them move your pieces the way you want them to.

Rowen eventually spoke and moved as Bertus thought. Whether or not she spoke as he intended, it was within reason, within expectation.

The defeat of Gethsinothia by Immortals alone was bound to have a profound effect on the Alliance.

Faced with the choice of making noise instead of waging war without bleeding power, or saving the Immortals for a crucial moment, Bertus chose one.

"What was the breakage rate, by the way?"

"It was about 8 percent."

There can't be zero sacrifice, so Immortal had to lose power.

"That's a fun army, even if it's broken, I can just repair it and send it back to battle......."

You've converted a human into a golem, so it's not death, it's destruction.

Immortals are troops that can't die, but they can be repaired if they get damaged.

Until the time comes for a battle that requires a full army, continue to wage war with only emotes, if they are capable of doing so.

"Now it looks like we're really, really close."

Tana knows what's at stake.

But was that really the end of the gate crisis?

Saviolin Tana looked at the Emperor with a sad expression on her face.

"By the way, I noticed that the combat data is going to....... I wonder if that makes sense."

Only one human participated in the battle for Gethonia.

Except for that one person, the rest were all immortals.

Ludwig.

What happened to Ludwig, Bertus knew, of course.

Ludwig gained a level of power that ridiculously exceeded his original abilities.

"How is this possible with a single arm transplant?"

Bertus narrowed his eyes, scanning Ludwig's physical and combat data.

By the time Bertus tried to stop it, it was too late.

This was after Christina had performed the procedure on Ludwig.

"They told me that technically I didn't get an arm transplant, I got a black magic transplant."

His arm, already strong in life, has been enhanced with dark magic. A stronger, more robust magic circuitry has been implanted, and alchemy has imbued it with even more power.

It's not about getting an arm transplanted.

It's like being implanted with a giant piece of magic itself.

"......Is that possible?"

"They say it's not possible."

"......Yes, you made the impossible possible?"

"No, Your Majesty."

Saviolin Tana shook her head.

"I'm just trying to hold on to something that's not possible."

You've forced yourself to have something you shouldn't have.

Therefore, it is doomed.

But Ludwig's problem is ultimately a personal one.

It's not a choice anyone forced on you.

This is the path Ludwig chose for himself.

The real problem lies elsewhere.

The real problem with immortals.

Right now, Immortals are the Emperor's, but they can stop being the Emperor's at any time.

The true owners of the Immortals are the three wizards who created them.

The management of Immortals has also been removed from the hands of Imperial mages. They didn't need to, as all the groundwork was already laid.

Immortals are a force for war.

So, you don't need it after the war is over.

But the wielders of the Immortal are now thinking about its post-war uses.

How to do something about it.

It's important to note that while the three mages who led the research were trained by the Black Order, the experiments were eventually conducted by Imperial mages as well.

While it was impossible to wrest control of the Immortals, we now knew what would happen if we messed with the three wizards.

In front of Bertus's eyes is the analysis of the Imperial mages.

"It's intuitive and obvious, but that's what makes it harder."

It's a complicated read, but the important stuff isn't long.

Saviolin Tana's eyes widen at the Emperor's reaction.

"Is there any way to neutralize the immortals?"

It's unfortunate that we're at war, and instead of marveling at the usefulness of an incredibly efficient weapon of war, we have to figure out how to disable it first, but that's the most important thing right now.

"No, if you try to disable it, you're just going to make weirder things happen."

"For something even weirder......."

"It seems that once you kill Christina, the Immortal is set up to be a weapon of mass destruction from then on."

"Such......!"

Christina's safeguards.

If tampered with, the Immortal becomes a pseudo-unidentifiable killing machine.

Saviolin Tana gritted her teeth.

Whose idea is that, anyway?

"What the hell....... Why would you do that......."

"If you do that, you know you can't touch it, and maybe, just maybe, we've gotten this far on purpose."

"......."

It's not going to be for the purpose of slaughtering people.

"Cut the crap, and think about dying a gentle death after it's all over....... I can smell your intentions."

I'm doing this to save someone's life.

I'm doing this for the sake of peace.

In the past, neither the devil nor the emperor knew that doing this would cause a gate.

Hence the gate debacle.

She knows that's what happened to them.

Therefore, this time we show the correct answer.

Immortals are probably the biggest threat to you since the Gate.

It shouldn't be hard to kill one lowly alchemist trying to kill you with an immortal.

It's too easy, and you can do it right now.

But since we don't know what will happen if we kill Christina, we can't make that choice until after the Gate Crisis is over.

Now you know the answer.

If you kill Christina, a rampaging Immortal will take the monster's place and beat up the world.

Then you can't say you're doing it for the sake of something, even with the slightest hypocrisy.

When immortals run amok, the strongest will survive.

You can teleport, or run away to a faraway place where Immortals' attacks can't reach you.

In the end, only people who don't have that kind of power will die.

A group of people who say they've been doing this for something, but the option of killing an Immortal to survive is not an option in the first place.

The moment you make that choice, you may survive, but your entire raison d'etre and purpose is gone.

It's a malicious taunt and provocation.

If you care so much about the world and the weak, prove it.

Killing us is easy.

We're not running away anywhere.

Kill us, and you can live.

But do you get to choose?

Given that choice, she'd die laughing, mocking the hypocrisy of it all.

What if it's uneven?

It will be hunted by the Immortals as it was after the Gate debacle.

You're not being forced into a corner.

There's a way to go, and it's a very comfortable way to go, but it's a way to deny everything you've ever known.

But the moment you go down that path, you're negating everything you've done so far.

There are two paths she suggested

"In the end, it's all about Ease Sunda."

Die.

Only you will die.

Live.

Only you will live.

Episode 628.

Gthynosia must have been a ruin before, but now it was razed to the ground.

Thousands of master classes, a thousand archmages, and ten grandmasters.

On a hillside, with the scene of their devastation in the distance.

"My right arm's a black flame dragon......."

"......What? Black salt?"

"......I don't need to know."

"You say things that don't make any sense sometimes, what are you talking about?"

Harriet cocked her head at my mutterings.

Right arm....... That.

When is that ever out of style?

No, was it ever a trend?

Not actually a dragon, but Ludwig ended up with something similar.

I didn't see Ludwig fight. But when I first predicted that he would have some sort of graft on his right arm, I knew something like this would happen.

"Is he trying to get a leg or a left arm transplant?"

Rowen gives me an eerie look and says, "Yes.

"...... I know that doesn't make sense, but it's kind of scary because it sounds like something Ludwig would do."

Not another arm, but the arm of Larken Simonstein.

It's a pretty malicious development. If I were in Bali, I'd be jumping up and down with rage.

How dare you take my Master's arm?" he said.

Though technically, it's not like Valier Jr. was ever taught swordsmanship in the first place.

Airi must be very sad.

Now that I've had fun with my right arm, I'm going to get the other one implanted, and that's just saying.

Ludwig's state is also a state, but it's the power that Ludwig actually has.

Because it's real.

"I have a hunch that I've gained the equivalent of a Grandmaster, though I haven't fought one myself."

"I got an arm transplant....... Does that count?"

"I don't know, I don't really know, but I don't think it's just a concept with a new arm."

"umm......."

While Herriot has a broad understanding of magic, he hasn't seen the magic that created Immortals.

"An Immortal is an Immortal, but he's a Grandmaster......."

In the end, Ludwig has real power, albeit in an unstable state that could explode at any moment.

"I can't touch this one, and I'm wondering if I shouldn't have done it in the first place."

It's not that he's gotten foolishly stronger, it's that he's gotten several orders of magnitude stronger at the cost of his life.

He's the protagonist, so he's able to do it, but he's also the one who suffers the most.

"Leave it alone and just observe. If they were going to remove it because it was dangerous, they would have removed the immortal in the first place."

There are too many things I've let slide to be sensitive to one Ludwig at this point.

If you touch Ludwig, something else strange and bizarre will happen.

Rowen relayed the Alliance's situation to me.

The elimination of the need for a campaign in Gethsinothia has caused turmoil within the Alliance, with some commanders demanding clarification from the Emperor himself.

And then Rowen pulled an aggro of his own, blocking the question.

I'm sure it wasn't a nice thing to say, but it served its purpose in keeping the secret.

"How's the Crusader control going?"

"I wouldn't say it's been smooth sailing, because obviously everyone knows that Elion Bolton was forced to retire, and the backlash against him tends to be focused on me, so I wish this Battle of Gethsinothia had been real, so I could have gotten an estimate of who's not listening to me properly......."

When the battle is on, you'll know who trusts the commander and who doesn't.

That's why Rowen looked at me like I was going to get dizzy when I looked at him again.

"If you keep acting like you want to taste blood, you're going to end up looking pretty bad."

"......OK."

It's almost as good as having a crazy dog downstairs that only listens to you.

Elion Bolton is quiet.

If Elayon Bolton had been the leader of the Crusader Knights, he would have said nothing this time. That would have kept the secret amongst the High Command.

Rowen talks shit out loud. I'm sure she's doing it because she needs to right now.

So, in the end, Bertus was able to keep his secret as he wanted, but he was left with the image of the Crusader leader as a hated man.

"It's not you who suffers when you behave strangely, it's me. You're already an embarrassment to humanity by virtue of your existence, do you want to be an embarrassment to me?"

"Well, is that......."

Rowen shakes his head at my rant.

This bitch is guilty of a very heinous crime.

Of course.......

In that sense, I'm the one who has to die.

It makes me want to bite my tongue every time I feel like I'm not qualified to judge someone.

"I will be careful in the future, for I am the face of the devil."

"......Why is that more offensive?"

That's it.

Hate is hate no matter what.

Look at this.

I don't care what you say, it's not worth it.

Look at our pockets.

They're cute when they're still.

"......Why are you looking at me funny?"

No, not now!

Isn't there something wrong with this that makes me feel even worse when I look at it favorably?

"I know I can't help but be an asshole, but I'm just trying to be nice."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"And if you get caught by the wrong guy, you're screwed."

It's nice to be good at your job, and to be able to deliver the results you want.

And Rowen's personality isn't the problem, his personality is the problem.

Due to the nature of the work Rowen is about to do, he's going to be hated by a lot of people, and he's going to make a lot of enemies.

"Do you realize how dangerous you're about to do?"

"Sure."

He didn't seem to have a clue.

"Who do you want to include first?"

"You know."

No matter how thick, no matter how insecure.

It doesn't change the fact that Rowen is a loyalist.

"Louise von Schwarz."

"There you go."

Yes.

Just right, Antony overdose.

\* \* \*

"This is weird, to say the least."

At Erich de Lapaeri's words, everyone in the barracks fell silent.

Kierkegaard, Erich, Kono Lindt, Klippmann, and Heinrich.

The four of them hadn't even been through the big battles that were scheduled, and they were already sensing that things were going weird.

"If we don't have to fight, that's great. I don't really care."

Cliffman was sprawled out on a cot in the barracks, staring blankly up at the ceiling.

"Ellen was moving with us the whole time, and it's not like her troops were moving, or even if they were, is this even possible?"

Erich's question was valid.

The most powerful forces in the Alliance are, of course, Ellen and Saviolin Tanago, their Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages.

But Ellen hasn't moved, and Gasonosia is dead.

While it's true that too much of a good thing is a good thing, too much of a mysterious good thing is unnecessarily uncomfortable.

"Didn't the Empire develop some kind of secret weapon?"

Kaiir murmurs through narrowed lips.

"Titan has another crab?"

"I don't think it's a Titan, I asked Adelia and she said it's never maneuvered."

"Then it must be another weapon, so what's the point of hiding it, and if that's all it takes to take a big city, shouldn't the army be able to withdraw?"

"We don't know until we know for sure."

Kai and Erich were the ones doing most of the talking.

Kliffman's attitude was that he wasn't interested.

And Kono Lint and Heinrich were silent.

"Lint, do you have any guesses?"

"Uh, huh? What....... I don't know. It's me."

"......What's with the reaction, don't you think?"

"Huh? Oh, no, of course, of course I'm curious, I was just thinking, I wonder what......."

ConoLint doesn't know the whole story.

But after being captured and dragged around by Reinhardt, he realized that the Empire was doing something with the bodies of the fallen.

Something that is obviously related to the undead.

He also knew that Reinhardt was fighting on the battlefield.

But they also had a sense that Reinhardt's forces weren't large enough to take on a large city on their own.

Kono Lint knew that what was happening in Gethosia had something to do with the Empire's ongoing undead armament.

That's why I can't just hang out in those conversations. Something might come out that I shouldn't have.

Kono Lint's answer is cold, so Erich turns to Heinrich this time.

"Heinrich, did you hear anything from your sister?"

"Not really, I've been here the whole time and haven't visited her, but I don't think she knows......."

Heinrich saw it with his own eyes.

What armies are created and what power they can wield.

And once again, their classmates are deeply involved in the Empire's secret weapon.

In this position, Heinrich knew the most secrets that should never have been made public.

Heinrich is the only one in the room who not only knows about the Immortals, but that the Crusaders are now effectively the Devil's army.

I don't know if the Empire has since decided to call the army the Immortals, but I can't help but feel in my gut that the Immortals are now on the front lines and they are becoming the formidable force they are supposed to be.

It's a truth I can't tell you, even if I wanted to.

"Isn't it a simple matter of thinking about it?"

Curiosity leads to anger.

So to kill that curiosity, Heinrich looks at everyone and opens his mouth.

"Even if the Gate is over, the Empire has a lot of work to do, so even if you have an overly powerful weapon or technology like that, you don't necessarily want to make it available to the Alliance, because it could be abused."

A war between men, a quarrel of interests, or a matter of demons.

After all, there are problems like that, so it's unlikely there's a lot of secrecy or corruption in there, just the empire being careful.

You're just knocking on a stone bridge and crossing it.

"......I guess so, when you think about it."

It's just the universal desire of a group to have a powerful weapon to call their own, and it may not be so strange that it's treated as a highly classified secret and cannot be revealed even to allies.

After the war.

Is it hopeful just to be able to think about it, or should I be worried about what comes next?

Heinrich was thinking of the latter.

It's a powerful army.

But too much power is too dangerous in and of itself.

And the Demon was encroaching on the Alliance and the Empire in places they didn't know.

"Yeah, well, the Devil....... Reinhardt might be trying to steal the Empire's secret weapon, so it's best to keep it a secret......."

Erich speculated, and the atmosphere understandably froze at the mention of the demon's name.

Demons and gatekeepers are the magic words that justify everything.

Demon.

If the Empire keeps secrets, it's because of the Devil.

But Kono Lint and Heinrich could not help but feel like there was a stone in their throats at the mention of the Devil's name in such a way.

"But isn't that weird?"

Erich's suspicions were returned by Kaier.

"If the devil....... to destroy humanity, he can still do it now, can't he?"

"What are you doing, you've got the Alliance, you've got the Titans, and now you've got some kind of secret weapon or something, how are you going to mess with us?"

Erich's words made Kaier stare at his friend.

I'm stronger than I've ever been, and I've become a warrior and a paladin with a white knuckle.

I couldn't fix my friend's excessive dropping.

Kaier is the only one who is disappointed.

Kono Lint and Heinrich have no expectations and are not disappointed.

You are what you are.

With the same feel.

"......Crazy, why would a demon raid this place?"

"You said it would destroy the human race."

"Are we the only people here?"

"......?"

"If the ecliptic is attacked, it's all over."

Erich's response that he hadn't thought of that at all surprised Heinrich and Kono Lint, who were now more than just unexpected.

I stare blankly at the ceiling, and even Klippmann shifts his gaze toward Erich.

Now that's an enlightened look.

Everyone was shocked at Erich's fall from grace.

"The Devil....... Reinhardt, if the bastard really wants to destroy humanity, why attack this place? Give us no place to go back to, and that's the end of it. Cut off our supplies, and we'll all dry up and die. It's simple. What's so hard about that?"

It's not a thought or an idea that you have to be brilliant to come up with.

If the devil wanted to destroy humanity, he had a chance after chance. The same is true now, where there is virtually always a chance.

But the devil won't destroy humanity.

It's a no-brainer, but it's also one that no one thinks about.

You can only assume that they're being silent for a more sinister reason, and that's a reasonable assumption.

Since it's impossible to reason with the devil, we can only be sure of the intent, but not the method.

Erich's bewilderment at Kai'er's pinpricks showed on his face.

"Yeah, why don't they?"

"......."

"......."

"......."

Still, the three are silent as they watch Erich say for the first time what they've all thought at some point.

Maybe this is a good thing.

"Enough."

Only Cliff, who was lying still, heard Nazik speak.

"End it there. There's no point in talking more."

With a stern look, Kliffman says.

"We know what we have to do anyway."

An army to end the gate crisis.

"That's all we need to think about."

There's no need to defend, blame, or speculate about the devil's intentions.

Because it's dangerous to talk about, Kliffman drops the subject.

Heinrich stares at Klippmann.

It's a dangerous topic, and one that shouldn't be raised.

But Heinrich knew the moment was coming when he had to post.

Episode 629.

Night time.

-tab

The wooden cup clinks against the table with a dull thud.

-tab

Once again.

-Tap, tap

And then again twice.

-tab

The owner of the cup was clinking his wooden cup against the table.

Across from him was Rowen, the leader of the Crusader Knights, wearing robes and a hood that gave away the fact that he was a sneaky guest.

And the master of the barracks.

Louise von Schwarz tapped her wooden cup against the table.

It was an unintelligible behavior.

She'd let the crusader captain in in the middle of the night, but Louise was acting in ways that made no sense.

"Do you want me to come back later?"

If you don't want to talk, I'll come back whenever you feel like it," Rowen said, looking at Louise with a wide smile.

Louise remained still, and instead of answering, slid the wooden cup in front of her.

"......?"

Suddenly, Louise pushed the glass toward her, and Rowen couldn't help but look dumbfounded.

"Are you giving me that?"

"As you wish."

It wasn't until Louise looked at the cup pushed in front of her that she realized it contained a liquid.

It contained a milky, opaque liquid.

A glass handed to you out of nowhere, and a liquid you don't know what it is.

Rowen lifted the glass and downed it in one gulp.

Louise watched Rowen drain her glass with a grimace.

"Ugh......."

Emptying his glass, Rowen set the wooden cup down, covered his mouth, and took a few breaths.

"I drank it because I don't care if it's ...... poison. I'd rather it be poison. What is this?"

Eek, eek.

While.

She made a gagging sound.

"It's so thick, sour, and slimy. It's so offensive....... What the......."

Rowen, whose expression never crumples, shudders.

"Is this alcohol?"

Bottom line.

It was a strange liquid that I didn't recognize, but couldn't call alcohol.

Louise nodded wordlessly.

"The priests of Tuan also have a precept against drinking."

Malicious.

The taste of the alcohol itself is one thing, but the fact that you offered it is another.

"I heard there's also a precept of non-killing."

"That's right."

Rowen nodded nonchalantly.

It's odd that an Inquisitor who tortured and killed so many people would bring up the precepts in the first place.

"There will also be a precept for chastity."

"You're doing surprisingly well with that, aren't you?"

Louise stares into the face of the frail Crusader leader.

"By the way, I see you're a fan of this kind of drink, Commander, and I'll be the first to apologize if my reaction earlier was rude."

The world is a big place, and I'm sure there's a town somewhere that drinks this foul stuff. Rowen first apologized for his frown, saying that he could understand if the Princess of Cernstadt was sipping this foul liquor alone in her barracks.

But Louise shook her head.

"No way, I don't know of any such nasty traditional liquor."

"Um......? No?"

"Yes and no."

"Then may I ask why you drink this nasty stuff?"

Rowen didn't understand why he was drinking this weird liquor all by himself, and it wasn't even traditional.

"This is the secret wine."

"Oh....... Really?"

"Yeah, they confiscated the soldiers' dip."

That's why he was staring at the liquid in the glass, not emptying it.

"It's crazy. You're feeding an army out of people's blood and tears, and someone's making a drink out of it. I guess you could say that's hard work......."

Louise bites her lip.

"Isn't it pitiful......."

Even liquor that tastes so bad that it's unbearable is still called liquor, and you brew it and drink it.

"What do you think we should do with the soldiers who have been drinking?"

Louise stares at Rowen, still.

"We'll have to kill it."

"Why kill?"

"Because food is precious."

"Why is food precious?"

"If you don't have it, you'll starve, right?"

"Are you saying that I should kill it because it has damaged a life and death item?"

"Right?"

Louise stares at Rowen.

Louise was speechless, just staring.

You pointed to the moon, so you should look at the moon.

Don't point fingers.

But that's impossible and pointless.

Anyone can say the right things.

So, why does it matter that anyone can point to the moon.

It doesn't matter who's pointing, the moon doesn't mean anything in the first place.

"Do you want to keep them alive?"

At Rowen's naturally virtuous question, Louise shook her head.

"What are you talking about, I already killed it."

"......But why do you ask?"

The conclusion had already been drawn and enforced, so the question was meaningless in the first place.

There were soldiers who owed liquor.

The soldiers who made it somehow.

The soldiers who secretly shared it.

Ruiz ordered them to be killed.

I confiscated all the bootlegged liquor they were making and took a drink.

It was just a horribly tasteless and unpleasant white liquid.

I died trying to make something like this.

"Those who have stolen food so far have had their heads beaten off......."

Louise looks at Rowen.

"The bitch who stole so many lives and stole the entire Order of the Gods is the head of the Crusader Knights, and she's walking around with her head held high......."

"And."

"I am such a mean, evil, thieving bitch."

"I can't even hold a bucket of cold water, let alone a knife."

The little thieves were punished.

For small thieves, the most severe punishment was to take their lives.

But with a thief this big, you can't even ask him about the theft.

So why did the little thieves have to die.

Why they had to die.

What killed them.

Only the little ones get stepped on.

No, only the little ones were stepped on.

In the end, Louise had to bite her tongue.

My brothers were dead by my hand, and I had no one to blame but myself.

In the end, it's just a different kind of swearing in the mirror.

Louise could say something, but not saying anything would only make her feel worse.

Louise von Schwarz, self-loathing, bitter, and angry, stares at the crusader through blurred eyes.

"That's it. Tell me what you want."

Rowen sees Louise posture for conversation and whispers quietly in the barracks, where the sour aroma of wheat wine wafts through the air.

"The devil has chosen you."

"......."

Louise is silent.

She'd known this was coming.

Choice, how the devil can say that now.

No, it's not the devil, it's the messenger.

The look on the devil worshipper's face as he spoke, as if to say thank you, as if to say please, was telling.

Louise didn't answer for a very long time.

How much time has passed.

Louise opens the barrel beside her and scoops out a bowl of moonshine.

And drink it.

Just like you can't go without drinking.

It's like drinking poisoned wine.

Moonshine.

You drink the liquid, whose name has now been stolen by something else.

A clique, not a monopoly.

After drinking a bowl of such bootlegged liquor, the corners of her mouth twitch, and her clear eyes murmur.

"Terrible....... flavor."

How sweet is a drink made of blood and tears.

\* \* \*

"If we get past Cernstadt, it's like we get half the Allied army."

I couldn't help but shake my head at Charlotte's words.

"......It's not half bad, is it?"

"Can't I see that the actual size is not that large? Yes, the actual Allied forces in Cernstadt are less than half, and technically less than a quarter."

"So."

Charlotte and I were sitting alone in Razak's senate chamber, talking.

"But let's say a small country, a province, an empire with a thousand troops, sided with us. What do you think will happen the moment he says, "I'm going to side with the devil from now on?"

"...... I wouldn't do that unless I wanted to die, but if I did, I'd be glad to die a nice death."

"It's going to get slimy, right?"

"Yeah, right."

It's obvious that if a group of people with no size or power were to suddenly declare their support for the devil, they'd have their heads cut off in an instant.

Are we talking about the Great Hemp Fire?

"When a monarch of a small country does something like that, you're like, 'Oh, he's crazy,' but when a big country like Cernstadt makes a decision like that, people are going to think, 'Why would a country the size of Cernstadt support the devil at this time, because he's crazy,' and they're going to think, 'Oh, he's crazy,' or they're not going to think."

"You mean ......?"

Otherwise, I wonder if there's smoke in the chimney.

If a large country like Cernstadt were to suddenly make such a decision, there would be fierce criticism, but also a great deal of shock.

Why the hell would Cernstadt.

What's missing?

"But why just Cernstadt, we have the Order of the Lord?"

"Right."

Let's say the Church of the Gods declares its support for the Demon King at the same time.

1First Empire, Cernstadt.

Cult of the Lord.

It's not one crazy person, it's two.

Cernstadt is the largest state outside of the Empire.

The Church of the Lord is a force that transcends nations.

When those two groups start openly supporting the devil, you know something serious is going on.

"Everyone has to choose, support the empire or support the devil."

The idea of humanity supporting a demon is insane in the first place.

But when the two great powers make it public, humans have to seriously consider whether or not to support the demon.

Of course, it's not the majority of humanity that's worried, but the leaders and heads of the factions.

You'll do whatever it takes to survive.

There will be those who will say that you can fight tooth and nail, but you can never be on the enemy's side.

There will be forces that will claim to be on your side, claiming that survival is the absolute good.

The devil wins, or the empire wins.

Those who want to survive need to start predicting.

So Charlotte wasn't wrong when she said that half the time.

The moment they realize that two giant powers are on their side, there will be massive chaos and leaders will start betting.

Cernstadt isn't actually half of it, but a shaken and rearranged faction map would have more than half of it on my side.

"It's funny, it wasn't that long ago that everyone was dying to kill me, and now I can do this."

"How often do you serve a king you hate so much you want to kill him because he's your king?"

"I don't think there's anything wrong with ......."

As much as I assume there will be those who will fight me to the death, there will also be those who will crawl under the devil's feet to survive.

We don't know if the former will be the majority or the latter, but we do know that the latter will not be a small number.

"Anyway, all of this is predicated on Louise von Schwarz endorsing me, which she hasn't done......."

"Right."

Louise von Schwarz.

It was Charlotte who suggested that we should bring her on board first for future work.

It's ridiculous.

If I had remained silent, Louise von Schwarz would have died at the hands of Bertus. framed for the assassination of Heinrich.

In conclusion, Ruiz and Heinrich survived.

That's why I can see the potential for Ruiz to be on my side.

In conclusion, the Crusader Knights and the Five Great Houses alone can sway the Alliance, but without Louise von Schwarz, they will not be able to make a significant impact.

Let's start with the premise, and then we can paint a picture.

We've left it up to Rowen, but until we hear from him, we don't know what's going to happen.

"Maybe last year, but things are very different now, and she's learned quite a bit."

What empires do.

And that I have taken control of the Order.

We don't know if they even know what happened with Gate.

Louise knows that it's not at all strange for me to side with her at this point.

There's no reason for you to go to war with me.

And I know the tide is turning in my favor.

However, it doesn't really matter if Louise is aware of those nasty facts and truths or not.

Regardless of everything else, Louise knows she has to be on my side if she wants to survive.

"Louise von Schwarz will be on our side, surely."

Louise knows what the Emperor is thinking.

For that alone, Louise will be on my side.

Because she already knows who's going to win the fight.

It's not even a fight, you know.

\* \* \*

Good or evil depends on who writes it.

That's why those in control of history have always been able to label something as good and something as evil.

So good and evil per se became meaningless, and in the end, it was all about who could control the pen.

So who was the real good in the end.

So who was the real evil in the end.

Talking about it will only keep you up at night.

Those who live and hold the pen will be the holders of justice and goodness.

Therefore, survival is justice and goodness.

The loser will be written off as evil.

It will be evil, not because it is evil, but because it has been defeated.

"......."

Louise von Schwarz wasn't just pondering in her long silence.

The conclusions are drawn and the choices are made.

You need to think about whether or not you can afford it.

Things twisted and turned, and Louise von Schwarz saw things with her own two eyes that she should never have seen or even known about, with unexpected effects in unexpected places.

Everything will belong to the devil.

Louise knows it.

Cernstadt, and the Order of the Lord.

By the time the Gate debacle is fully concluded, more than half of the Alliance will have pledged to side with the Devil.

At their head is Rowen, the leader of the Crusader Knights.

For the Inquisitor, who has enforced order with evil, trampled on doctrine, and maintained the order of the Church, establishing order with blood and lies is what he has always done.

Intimidation, blackmail, conspiracy, intrigue, intrigue, torture, brainwashing.

It's her job to be mean and dirty.

Rowen looks at the Princess of Cernstadt, who remains silent.

King Constantine was senile, so her decision was as good as Cernstadt's.

After a moment of silence, Louise spoke up.

"I need to set a condition."

"Conditions?"

"If that's acceptable, I'll stand by your side."

Louise didn't just decide to fall in line with their side.

"I can get that to you, what are the conditions?"

"You don't have to ask the devil's permission. Consent is something you do."

"......Do I have a say in the matter?"

"Of course."

Luiz's requirements were simple.

"The condition is, it's your life."

"Is that ......?"

Rowen's brow furrowed at the offhand remark.

Suddenly you're asking for your life.

"......I have nothing to offer, but did you really hate me that much?"

"I hate it, and I wish it were dead, but that's a whole other issue."

"How is it different?"

Louise giggles into a bowl of bootleg liquor, apparently enjoying the look of bewilderment on Rowen's face.

"Is the devil going to rule, not tyrannize?"

"We'll have to wait and see how it turns out, but I'm guessing you're going to do the latter."

"Then I'll need your life even more."

"......?"

At Rowen's seemingly incomprehensible demeanor, Louise began to giggle.

"No wonder."

It was a frivolous laugh.

"How can a madwoman who has led riots, instigated massacres, and killed countless people in her life as an inquisitor be of any use to the Demon King's rule?

"......."

"Do you think that the secrets of a master can be kept forever, when there are so many who know them?"

"......I don't think so."

"As helpful as you may be now, once the Demon World is complete, the last loyalty you can give is to face the Judgment Seat of the Purge, or rather, that is the only way your loyalty will be complete."

At that, Rowen's expression hardened eerily.

Rowen's role is limited to now.

Rowen, regardless of what her personality actually is, has done too much.

For the sins she has committed so far, she must be judged when the reign begins.

When peace begins, existence itself becomes a burden.

Therefore, Rowen would rather die than see the world she desires come to pass.

You must die to complete your allegiance.

Rowen's death is not necessary for Louise, but rather for the Devil.

That's why Louise, though selfless, has nothing to do with it, and makes her offer conditional on Rowen's death.

To Rowen, to the Devil, on the grounds that Rowen's death would make the Devil's power unclear in the future.

Convince her that she must die.

"A yin being who should be living in the shadows, meeting Nan Se and wearing epaulettes, must have really thought he could live in the yang, which is impossible."

Louise looks at her with a grim smile, as if she can't stand it.

Louise von Schwarz is the princess of Cernstadt.

First Princess of the First Empire and heir to the second largest country in the world.

A losing trade doesn't necessarily mean she gets nothing in return.

When it comes to maneuvering, intrigue, and scheming, Louise is naturally more comfortable.

"New head coach. The circumstances may be different, the position may be different, but will the fundamentals change?"

Even if you're the devil's lion now.

No matter how much authority you have in the moment.

The fundamentals don't change.

Louise is the princess and heir to a great nation.

She had to live in the shadows.

Just as a drink made by lowly people with lowly ingredients and forced by circumstance is bound to be a disgusting moonshine.

Cheesy is cheesy.

"How can moss grow on the sunny side?"

If a being from the yin zone comes to the yang zone without knowing the subject, it will wither and die.

Episode 630.

"Hah......."

Rowen sighed deeply as he exited the Cernstadt military garrison.

Royalty is royalty.

And not just any royalty.

I knew they couldn't be organ horses that could be rolled in the palm of your hand, but Louise von Schwarz was out of the question.

I knew I had to hold an unwilling hand, but in the end I got what I wanted.

No, technically, I didn't even say I wanted to.

Louise did not tell Rowen that she wished you dead.

Said you 'needed' to die. Not to her, but to the demon.

The reason Louise's negotiations and demands are so eerie is that Rowen has convinced himself of them.

A dog's best friend is its bite.

No need for a cute dog.

The big, fierce dog just needs to bite the enemy.

But at the end of the war, the hounds are less useful, and the mad dog must go.

For a demon who will surely dream of ruling, Rowen may be necessary for now, but once things settle down, there's a chance that what she's done may come back to haunt her.

For the sake of the demon world, Rowen must die with all his sins the moment it is completed.

You must confess your sins, which have nothing to do with the devil, and leave.

She is already a villain, and every day will be a roll of the dice as to whether or not she will be revealed to be one.

The longer she lives, the more she will bear the blame for the Demon's acquiescence to Rowen's sins.

"......."

Louise von Schwarz had a huge hit on her hands.

Now, even if she withdrew that requirement, she'd still put Rowen in the mindset that she'd have to die the moment the world she wanted arrived.

The fundamentals don't change.

Royalty raised in nobility will remain royalty until death.

She may have succumbed miserably to the Devil for now, but when the Devil's World begins, Cernstadt will be among the first in the seniority list.

Louise von Schwarz might be called a traitor to humanity or a despicable human being who succumbed to the devil, but it doesn't change the fact that she would go on to live a life of royalty.

But for Rowen, the work she's been doing is catching up with her.

It must disappear to become who it serves.

The fundamentals don't change.

Nothing you say, nothing you do, will ever change.

Rowen was not supposed to be in Yangzi.

If I hadn't come out, if I had continued to live in the fog and shadows, I could have done so.

However, in return for coming to the yang, you must wither away, not return to the yin.

The shade that covered you.

A tree named Pope.

For living in the shadows they created, for cutting down the shade masters, for sitting in their presumptuous seats, the moss must die.

Rowen isn't particularly sad about it.

He's just offended that it took a royal prick to make him realize what he should have known all along.

But it's natural to think.

If only I hadn't made a living as an inquisitor.

What could have been.

She was an abandoned child, as were many of the children entrusted to the monastery.

Some children would grow up to be such entrusted children, and then demonstrate a talent for divine powers and be admitted to the temple.

Adriana said.

Or maybe you'll catch the eye of a Crusader and be groomed to be the next Crusader.

So says Olivia Ranze.

Someone else happened to have a similar talent, but his adopted monastery was an institution for training inquisitors.

That's why he was raised to be an inquisitor.

"......."

The fundamental question is who decides.

Am I right?

If it had been raised differently, could it have been different?

In a country where it snows all year round. In a dark, deserted monastery built to hide from the eyes of the world.

You're not learning horrible techniques to torture and brainwash people and make them confess to crimes they didn't commit.

I'm not being taught doctrine before I'm taught how to convince myself to betray it.

Isn't that something that could have been different if I'd grown up in a place like Temple without knowing how to hate people?

Olivia Ranze.

The man who shared his temple life with the devil.

The seat of the man who will be the next Holy Order leader and the next Holy Emperor of the Holy Empire.

Couldn't that person's seat have been mine?

Rowen, already a twisted and dark-minded man, was becoming even more twisted by Louise's words.

"......bullshit."

The good news is, Rowen only knows about Louise's intentions.

It's just that the intent is clear: stay out of my face and watch my grave.

So don't overthink it, or you'll just be playing into Louise's hands.

Olivia Lanchester's seat is Olivia Lanchester's seat.

There's no reason to covet it, no reason to begrudge it.

If it helps the demon to die and disappear, then so be it.

Because twisted loyalty is loyalty.

And the devil doesn't even like himself.

Just think about what you need to do.

Louise von Schwarz was included.

Now for the next.

The current goal is to start with those who are most likely to be included and work our way up.

The most important one, Louise von Schwarz, asked for a price, but she got it.

In fact, it's not even a price. It's necessary in the first place.

Rowen doesn't have to include everyone.

'Is the Archduke next.......'

Now it's the Grand Duke of Saint-Antoine's turn.

'You said I didn't have to go.......'

Who should capture the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan.

The best person for the job is already there, right by the devil's side.

\* \* \*

It was noon the next day when the report from Lowen's side to Sarkegar's reached me.

I couldn't help but look at the report and feel a bit of a sour taste in my mouth.

"Hmmm......."

Louise von Schwarz wants to purge Lowen.

Not right now, but after everything is settled.

Harriet, myself, and Charlotte gathered in the office to read the report together.

"It's necessary, but I'm pretty sure you didn't ask for it because it was necessary, you asked for it because you wanted to see it."

Charlotte looked at the report and nodded in approval of Louise von Schwarz's intentions and the need for it.

I do agree that Rowen is a bitch to kill.

I also agree that a purge is necessary.

But then again, how many of my people don't deserve to die?

"That's scary......."

Her fingertips twitched slightly as she realized that this was obviously not something she was used to.

"A purge is a necessary evil. Rowen shouldn't be the only one killed. Too many public figures ruin a country."

"I know what you mean."

You're right that we should give credit where credit is due.

However, excessive favoritism leads to a dispersion of power, and when passed from generation to generation, it sows the seeds of division. Therefore, the purge of public figures is a decision a monarch must make when conquest is complete.

Rowen isn't the only one being killed.

You're also killing Rowen.

"You know what you're talking about, right?"

Charlotte shrugs at my comment.

"Kill me if you must. Or rather, you should kill me."

"Huh?"

It wasn't me who was stunned by Charlotte's nonchalance, it was Harriet.

"If you keep me alive, I am by my very existence the seed of the resurrection of the Imperial House of Gradias. Rational thought dictates that I die."

Yeah, I don't know that much about that.

"Would I?"

"That's why I'm worried, because I would never do that."

"How many times have I rolled on the ground to save your life, and if I have to kill you later, I'll bite my tongue and die?"

It doesn't even make sense.

I can't tell you how many times I've tried to save Charlotte's life.

But now, after everything has stabilized, you're going to hang Charlotte because you want to build a nation?

I'd rather die than wake up with my eyes wide open and see that.

I understand that a monarch needs that kind of determination, but if that's the life of a monarch, I'd rather not be one.

That's not to say that we don't recognize the need for purges.

It needs to be purged.

But if you do, where do you start?

I have no intention of doing so, but I must weed out those who are under my command, those who have been under my command since before I came to Edina.

This means that Olivia or Riana should also be killed if necessary.

That level of purge would never happen, and the report was written by Rowen himself.

It doesn't just say that Louise von Schwarz demanded it.

Rowen has written in detail about why he must die.

You're ready to die when you're ready to die.

"I don't like this guy, he's a burden."

It's overwhelming to the point of dizziness.

"I don't know, it's a purge, it's Nabal, it's not something we should be thinking about right now, just tell them you'll do it, we can change it later."

Louise can mortgage the purge, but she'll get paid later.

You might decide later that you can't do that.

If that happens, you'll have to think differently depending on your needs at the time.

But at the end of the day, you're saying, "I'll give you whatever you want for now, because you can flip me off later.

"What should I say....... That's a bit of a stretch......."

Herriot couldn't help but shudder.

"Because when you're in a position like that, you have to lie a lot, right?"

"It is."

"And let's say things work out in our favor later. Do you think Louise is going to turn around and say why can't I keep my word? No way."

"Of course. Of course."

When Charlotte and I were talking about how good the porridge was, Harriet said we were both trash.

Let's do the purge for now.

I'll think about whether or not to actually kill Rowen later.

It's garbage logic, but hey, Louise knows my guarantee is lousy.

Purge.

I'm already thinking about things I shouldn't be thinking about at this point.

Think ahead.

Charlotte says, stretching out as if she's properly organized.

"Now for the next one."

Louise von Schwarz agreed to take our side, with the understanding that she would pay us later.

The Crusader Knights, the Five Great Houses, and Cernstadt.

Next.

Duchy of Saint-Tuan.

And the king of the duchy, the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan.

"I'll do my best."

Herriot nods, looking determined.

Look at this guy.

Look how cute it is.

"What are you going to be good at?"

"Huh? Is that....... convince......?"

Herriot seemed to think it was a given that he would go, given the task of convincing the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan.

"Why would you go, I'm going."

"Huh?"

"What do you mean, why are you going yourself?"

Charlotte didn't seem to understand either.

"Honestly, I don't think it's a bad idea for you to go. Don't you think you should consider your parents' feelings?"

"Hmm?"

"ah......."

"If you went and asked me to take your side, it would be easy for me to say, but the Archduke would....... Don't you think I'd look mean?"

I'm not a hostage, but it might seem like I need to listen to her if I want to see her happy.

If I were a parent, I'd be horrified.

Somewhere.

You'll have to find it yourself.

"The Archduke may understand your behavior, but I'm the son of a bitch who stole his daughter, after all. He may understand you, but understanding me is another matter entirely."

"......?"

"So this time, I'm the one who's going to go and hit him in the head."

"Well, is it?"

"Surely you're lucky Reinhardt doesn't slap you as soon as he sees you. No, Reinhardt needs to be slapped at least once as a courtesy, I think."

Herriot looked puzzled, and Charlotte nodded in agreement with my decision.

Yeah, just like Charlotte said.

I should have gone for a spanking at least once. I was mortified. To this day, he hasn't come to visit.

By the way.

That.......

What to say.

Let's say you've been slapped, but what do you do next?

Father-in-law, please.

You took your daughter, you asshole!

Not your daughter, she's already taken.

What more do you want, asshole?

Father-in-law.

Give me your father-in-law.

Is that the kind of....... Is that a situation?

The Archduke can use teleport.

So you don't have to meet at an Allied garrison.

If the Archduke wishes, we can meet in the Duchy of Saint-Ouen, and if he wishes to meet at the Allied garrison, we can do so.

Unlike in Louise's case, the Archduke is not going to turn down an invitation to meet and talk because his daughter is with me.

"What if my dad....... What if he tries to kill you......?"

Herriot's eyes were filled with tears.

In fact, Herriot had been to the Duchy of St. Thuan once to meet the Grand Duke, who said he understood him.

But that's just me, and isn't it natural to feel like the Archduke wants to crush me?

"Maybe I should come with you."

"......No, it gets weirder."

That's like going to get a marriage license!

Your daughter goes missing for three years following a man, then returns with him, then they fall on their knees together.

Example.......

That.......

What.

It's gone. Yes.

This is what I'm going to do!

"It's okay, I'm going alone."

"I don't think so......."

Herriot began to sob with anxiety.

"No, the Archduke might actually try to kill me if I go with you."

"If you come with me, Dad, why?"

"There's just something about it, I guess!"

No kids! No kids!

"Oh....... I see......."

Only Charlotte nodded grimly, as if she understood what I meant.

Episode 631.

Capturing the Archduke of Saint-Ouen has a qualitatively different meaning than the fall of Cernstadt.

Cernstadt is literally about gaining "scale" in terms of overall power.

But the Archduke is the head of Titan Management, one of the Alliance's power centers.

Of course, the devil is in the details, and you can't maneuver a Titan by yourself, but Titans are a huge part of the Allied force.

In seven minutes, I was able to turn the tide in a big city capture game.

While Immortal is the big dog right now, Titan is not only a close second, but it's being improved in real time.

Having an Archduke on your side doesn't mean you can have a Titan.

This means that the Titan can be neutralized.

Just as we don't want Immortals to be used in that situation. There should never be a situation where a Titan is used in any way other than fighting monsters.

Given the direction I have chosen to pursue, I must thoroughly neutralize the Alliance and the Empire.

By capturing Cernstadt, you're halfway to neutralizing the Allies, and by neutralizing the Titan, you're taking one of their power centers out of service.

No matter how we meet, I'm the only one going to see the Archduke.

Sarkegar makes contact with the Archduke, and I'm the one doing the talking.

Let the Archduke decide where to meet.

You can also meet him in Arnaka, the capital of the Duchy of Saint Thuan, but the Archduke may be very uncomfortable with that.

I don't want to be seen as threatening the Archduke in any way. That's why I'm not sending Herriot, I'm going myself.

The Allies have already left Gethsonia and begun their retreat. It's not like there was a battle in Gethsonia anyway.

Sarkozy returned to Razak with Rusinil earlier than I thought he would.

"What, why are you here with Gazoo and not Harriet?"

Travelers tend to be fast-casting heroes who drop off and pick up at designated locations.

But why are you here with Lucinil and not Harriet?

"I don't know, the scribe was going to bring him, but he insisted on coming with me."

"......?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Does sarkegar refer to a person?

I remember hating all of them, but not specifically Herriot, so why would I do that now?

"Anyway, did you pick a place?"

"......We haven't come face to face with the Archduke yet."

What, you didn't finish your work, why are you here?

I've gotten used to the evil, sullen look so often.

I've never seen Sarkegar look like this before.

It's kind of weird that they sent Herriot back and told him to bring Lucienille.

"That....... It may not actually be that important, but....... But I thought your majesty should know....... That's why I didn't bother to bring a scribe with me......."

Watching Sarkozy stumble around in a panic is something to live for.

"...... isn't doing this, why is it suddenly doing this? What is it?"

Sarkegar gave a rare sign of hesitation, and Lucinil tilted his head as if something was amiss.

Did something happen?

What didn't work?

"I think....... who developed the Titan....... was a classmate of yours......."

"Adelia? Why her?"

What the heck is he trying to say?

What did Adelia do?

"The child....... Apparently, the Grand Duke of St. Thuan....... Hmm......."

"......?"

Now this.

Am I right?

"A....... No way."

Lucinil's mouth dropped open and her lips began to quiver.

Sarkegar's face was bright red.

"Perhaps you have a soft spot for the Grand Duke....... with the Duke......."

It's very out there, it's very weird, it doesn't really mean anything, it doesn't really have any impact on the mainstream.

"Oh my...... hit......."

A major, mind-boggling accident has occurred.

No, it burst.

But wait.

This.

No?

"Archduke....... Archduke?"

You're not an archduke, are you?

Then it's real.

It's happening!

I'm in trouble!

Oh my God!

What am I going to do!

"The Archduke is....... Of course he's not......."

I can't tell you how many times I've nearly died.

But this is the first time I've ever really felt like I've been dead and come back to life.

\* \* \*

Sarkegar had been lurking in the neighborhood in various forms to take advantage of the Archduke's time alone.

"I'm never alone."

"The Archduke is busy....... Come to think of it, yes."

He's not a public figure, he's a public figure.

Louise von Schwarz is a busy woman. But the Archduke is not only a commander, he's also the head of research.

While the actual size of the army is nothing like that of Cernstadt, the Archduke won't have time to rest.

This made it very awkward to make contact when she was alone.

There was a reason why Sarkegar failed to fulfill my instructions to contact the Archduke and returned empty-handed.

But right now, that's not the point.

Sarkegar was uncharacteristically flustered by the situation, and Rusinil was beside him, listening mesmerized.

"Is it....... It seems that the Archduke often sleeps not in his own barracks, but in the research barracks. And there are other researchers in those barracks, but....... Ms. Adelia is pretty much a resident as well."

The Titan is a weapon of war that combines the Duchy of Saint-Tuan's knowledge of old golems with Adelia's genius for Magiccrafting.

In other words, the Archduke is the head of the lab, and Adelia is the lead researcher.

Soon you'll be seeing each other all the time, every day, every hour.

Still.

I'm still thinking about the possibilities.

Or that Sarkozy was misunderstood or mistaken.

It should be.

You have to do this!

It's dizzying!

"Apparently, if the Archduke skips a meal, Miss Adelia takes care of it, and if he falls asleep, she tucks him in........ That's quite......."

"Somehow it seems to be reversed......."

Lucinil shuddered at Sarkegar's explanation and mumbled something.

Right.

I feel sorry for my daughter's friend who follows her to war and develops weapons of war, and she looks overlapping, so when she falls asleep in the lab, the Archduke puts a duvet over her.......

It's supposed to be such a sweet picture, but it's the opposite!

"Well, that's....... that we can do?"

But honestly, it's not that weird, is it?

Put a blanket over him, and if he seems to be starving, bring him some bread.

It's not like she's doing it because she feels like it, it's because she admires the Archduke or feels sorry for him.

That.......

But that.

I felt sorry for him, and I kept thinking about him, so I wanted to take care of him, so I took care of him, and before I knew it, I was staring at him.......

That's.......

That's an unexpected possibility.

When I asked if that was possible, Sarkegaard looked very troubled.

"Maybe, but......."

"Yeah, Adelia, that's her personality. She can't say mean things, and she can't leave people alone who are worried about her because she's nice, even though she's not. I don't know if that's true, but she's nice. Yeah......."

"Are you saying that I think like you, but my personality is different from yours?"

"......, my lord, I'm not in the mood for an argument right now."

"Ugh, this. It's like you're just picking the ugliest words to say to make yourself look like a poor......."

"Enough! Leave the silver-haired kid out of it!"

"What, a kid?"

"No silver-haired hags!"

"This!"

Sarkegar watched me and Rusinil argue with a grown-up expression on his face.

With a really pathetic look on his face.

Anyway, let's get back to the point.

"So....... are you sure about that?"

You have no proof!

If your favorite thing to do is tuck them in and feed them, the world will be full of confessions!

"It's not proof, but....... but I'm pretty sure."

"How can you be sure when you have no proof?"

"Your eyes are......."

I felt my breath catch in my throat.

Adelia looks at the Archduke.

Facial expressions.

That's.......

That may not seem like much of a proof at all, but in fact, there is no proof at all.

In fact, it doesn't seem like evidence at all, which makes me wonder what other evidence there is.

"Fuck."

So that's what.......

A slave graduate student who was kidnapped by her professor and lived in his lab, and when she looked at him, he started to look like a man.......

\* \* \*

The unthinkable can't sneak up on you.

The Archduke is a modest man. So it would be inconceivable to him that Adelia might like him. So even if she does, he won't even notice. It's not even a possibility in his mind.

Sarkegar eventually returned to the Allies after a brief debriefing.

If I see an opportunity and make contact with the Archduke, I will deliver my message. The fact that Sarkegar saw the opportunity is actually not a big deal.

What did Adelia say to the Archduke....... There's nothing wrong with having those feelings.

The Archduke's children are alive and well. The missing daughter is alive and well.

It doesn't affect the mainstream, and technically it's not a big deal.

Who cares if the Archduke and Adelia are having a bizarre and embarrassing affair? It's about war, not romance.

I wish I hadn't known!

I know, but it's a problem I can't solve, and it has nothing to do with the mainstream, and I'm going to lose my mind!

"Have you decided when you're going?"

"Not yet......."

"Really? Then why was Mr. Sarkegar here earlier? He had a strange look on his face, is there something wrong?"

"Not really......."

"And since you insisted on taking me there earlier, I told you to fetch him. What did I do wrong to you?"

"No, no, no, you didn't do anything wrong, you didn't do anything wrong."

My paktong did nothing wrong!

"So who's at fault, what happened?"

"No, no, no, no, no one did anything wrong."

So is it Adelia's fault or this?

Nope.

What do people like....... It can't be wrong.......

It's not like anything happened!

"...... What the heck is that, what's going on?"

"No, nothing. No problem......."

Not surprisingly, Herriot seemed to think something was wrong.

I was paralyzed on the tip of my tongue as Harriet asked me questions with an innocent look on her face.

Herriot and Adelia met at the Temple and befriended each other.

While Adelia was aghast at the news that the Archduke had developed Titan with her, she was overjoyed at her friend's historic achievement.

Your best friend has a crush on your dad.......

How the hell am I supposed to say this?

\* \* \*

It's been a crazy few days.

The Allied forces set out from Gthynosia, and in the midst of their march, the Archduke was bound to have some time on his hands.

Report from Sarkegar.

We have made safe contact with the Archduke, and his proposed rendezvous point is Arnaka, the capital of the Duchy of Saint Thuan.

Arnaria of the White Palace there.

Meeting in an Allied garrison is risky. And the Archduke is the only one who can get around.

So it seemed like he'd rather meet on his own turf.

"......."

In fact, you should be very nervous.

I don't actually know what the Archduke thinks of me, and if he's angry at me for literally wielding Heriot out of control, I have nothing to say about it.

Then, I noticed something weird.

It was a different kind of tension.

Anyway, we know what we need to do.

Meet the Archduke.

And enclose.

That's all I need to do.

I don't know anything else.

Because Heriot doesn't know and the Archduke doesn't know.

I don't want to make you even more dizzy!

\* \* \*

Arnaka, capital of the Duchy of Saint Thuan.

I've been to Arnaka twice.

When she was a student at the Temple, Adriana came because of her abrupt withdrawal. The monastery where Adriana grew up was in the Duchy of St. Thuan.

At that time, I knocked on the door of the Duchy Palace to get priority access to the warp gate.

Looking back, I was pretty crazy.

It was then that I met the entire Grand Duke's family. Though I had seen the Grand Duke of St. Thuan once before.

Me and Harriet had almost gotten to the point where we were getting married.

The second time was with Heriot, after the gate incident. I didn't go into Arnaria, only Heriot did.

And now the third.

The fortified magical turrets of Arnaria remained intact.

The faces of the people were still grim. You'd think the Empire would retaliate once the war was over.

Would they rather be glad that the Duchy of St. Thuan had sided with the Devil, or would they see that the Archduke had truly turned and say that they knew it was coming.

We don't yet know what the Archduke will decide.

If you have the Grand Duke on your side, the world's misconceptions will eventually become true.

You won't even be able to make an excuse.

You will be accused of being a daughter of the Devil, and therefore of having been in league with him for a very long time. This is not true, but it is impossible to explain away.

I wonder how the Archduke would feel about the stigma becoming fact.

It wasn't Herriot who brought me to Arnaka, it was Elise.

I didn't want to bring Harriet with me. I'd just found out something ridiculous.

I walked through the deserted streets of Arnaka and made my way to the White Palace Arnaria, the great palace in the center of Arnaka.

A towering palace carved out of a massive mountain.

The palace was still beautiful.

The towering spires of the palace made me think.

As a child, he said, he used to climb that tall spire and look down on the street and watch the children play.

I can only imagine what it must have been like for Harriet as a child, watching from afar as children played on that lonely spire.......

It's kind of sad and kind of cute at the same time.

With these thoughts in mind, I arrived at the plaza where I could see the entrance to Arnaria.

"Your Majesty, be careful."

"It'll be fine, but it should be."

Naturally, I'm the only one going in. There's no need to make the Archduke nervous by bringing anyone else.

Elise gave me a firm warning, as if to prepare me for any eventuality.

The entrance to Arnaria was guarded by golems in human form.

A golem in human form.

It's similar, but I can't help but feel creeped out by the superimposition of a golem made of real humans.

"Purpose."

"Tell me."

Same question as when you first visited Arnaria.

"This is Reinhardt."

All you need to enter is a name.

"A message from His Highness the Archduke."

For the golems, the answer is the same as it was then.

"Come in."

But.

"The Devil."

I introduced you to Reinhardt, or should I say Demon King.

-groggy

The gates of the great palace began to open, revealing a tall, white stone staircase ascending toward Arnaria.

We didn't have to go all the way to the palace.

About halfway up the stairs to the palace.

The Grand Duke of St. Thuan was there, looking down at me.

The Archduke clutched his cane.

Obviously, it's not going to be a cane you use because you have a bad leg.

Perhaps that's the Archduke's weapon.

The suited archduke stared down at me wordlessly.

They're not like wizards, who usually wear broad-chested robes.

The Archduke was the epitome of an aristocratic wizard, exuding an air of dignity and nobility.

Honestly, it sucks.

Am I in a place I shouldn't be?

Shouldn't we have just sent Herriot?

Don't you think I'm just trying to do all the work for nothing?

"That....... That......."

Let's go low.

Fight the Archduke and you'll have a real life George!

I can't handle it!

"Can I go up to......?"

The archduke I met during my time at Temple was, to put it bluntly, a half-wit.

But now, as the war rages on, the Archduke is back to his old self.

The world's most powerful wizard.

Raphael de Saint-Étienne.

The Archduke looks down at me and says

"Come on up."

Honestly.

In more ways than one.

I was scared of the Archduke.

Episode 632.

Arnaria, the White Palace, had always been a tranquil palace, but now it was even more so.

Far from bleak, it's deserted.

Silence can inspire a certain amount of fear, but the silence of Arnaria was more like stillness.

The Archduke was right about it being a lonely place, but it was still lonely.

The Archduke climbed up the stairs to where I could see Arnaria in the distance.

The Archduke said nothing.

He walked a bit ahead of me, and I followed, waiting to see what he would say.

I felt like I was being punished.

Honestly, I'm on the hook.

I'm here to tell the Archduke to take my side in a situation where I have ten mouths to feed.

If I've gotten to this point in my impatience, I should be able to understand if the Archduke tries to cut my throat.

The Archduke is a man who has suffered tremendously because of my presence.

His reputation is in tatters because his daughter disappeared with a demon, he's hated by the people of his duchy, and he's favored by the Alliance.

The St. Thuan family's long-standing reputation as a path of righteousness has been tarnished in an instant.

What is honor.

To most people, this would be meaningless, but to someone like the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan, it's very important.

It was all evaporated by my mere presence.

The Archduke was silent for a long time, and I couldn't help but think of the palace.

I wonder how everyone is doing.

Her mother or her brothers.

My brothers are all mages, so I know they're in the Alliance, and I know they're safe.

But there's a world of difference between being okay and getting along.

I couldn't bring myself to say anything because I didn't feel qualified to even ask how everyone was doing.

For almost an hour.

The Archduke said nothing, and I was a honeyed mute.

It didn't feel like I was being punished, but I was.

After that long, long silence.

"That's weird."

The Archduke said that out of the blue.

Weird?

The Archduke glares at me.

"No matter how you look at it, you appear to be fidgeting......."

Actually, it does.

So if you're confident in this situation, doesn't that make it even weirder?

Is that the kind of thing that says, "Roll up your sleeves and come out swinging"?

"Well, it's....... Me......."

"......."

I want to say something, but I can't find the words.

I have nothing to say to the Archduke that I wouldn't say to anyone else.

I'm sure the Archduke knows that I didn't kidnap Harriet, I just followed her. But what's the point of that, when it's already bad enough that I've kept a secret and befriended his daughter?

The Archduke looks at me.

"Do you think I've done something wrong?"

No.

So if this isn't wrong, what is?

"It's ......."

I have no idea what the Archduke is thinking.

"Hmmm......."

The Archduke considers, then nods slowly.

"Okay, so tell me about it."

Did he mean to say "quit your job"?

"What do you think you've done wrong so far?"

The Archduke walks with a cane.

Standing in front of me like a judge, he said.

"Whatever you did to me."

"Whatever you did to my daughter."

"If you....... for example."

"Oh my God."

"Whatever they did to humanity."

"If you think something is wrong, what is it."

One who has never been untouched when it comes to evil power and trickery.

A man who pursued righteousness with righteous strength, who was noble and lived for righteousness and justice.

Someone who hasn't done anything wrong, but has lost so much because of me.

Someone who has done, and continues to do, what they are supposed to do, without a single bit of bitterness or resentment.

Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan.

"Tell me about it."

He is, perhaps, the one who is qualified to judge me.

\* \* \*

It's been a long story.

But in the end, it boiled down to trying to save everyone and bringing everything to this point.

What Akasha is, who Cantus Magna was, and why he created Richie's Tomb. How Akasha was originally intended to be used.

By the time I realized everything, it was too late.

I had been lying for so long that no one could trust me, and the people who felt the most betrayed could only hate me.

The story of trying to change the future and ending up making it happen.

If I hadn't done anything, nothing would have happened.

"Not chosen by the gods, but cursed by them."

The Grand Duke, having heard the whole story, said simply.

Are you saying that having two holy relics of the gods is a curse, not a blessing?

"Not you, but mankind is cursed."

But as if reading my mind, the Archduke corrected himself.

A curse on humanity?

"If the demon had no intention of harming humanity, and was using Akasha to escape to another world, there was no reason to fight."

Bali wanted escape, not war.

Fearing the threat of the demons, humanity invaded the Darklands and wiped out most of the demons, as well as their king.

Instead of trying to understand, I was afraid.

This happened because of a misunderstanding.

"Did I not cause the destruction of mankind by misunderstanding that my neighbor would kill me, and by misunderstanding I destroyed my neighbor?"

And the Gate debacle was all about misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

"Whether you want revenge or not, the truth remains that the Devil has taken the most decisive and certain revenge on mankind."

Regardless of my intentions, in the end it wasn't revenge, but at the same time I couldn't say it wasn't revenge.

I played the biggest role in the extinction of humanity.

That truth never changes.

"How can I do this, and not be cursed by the gods?"

You killed your neighbor in a misunderstanding, so you get it back in a misunderstanding.

This was the gods' judgment and curse upon mankind, or so the Archduke seemed to think.

\* \* \*

Is this a curse from the gods?

The Archduke looks up at the grayish sky.

"Of course, we'll never know if this is truly a curse from the gods or a mere coincidence."

If it was just a terrible coincidence, how could we calculate the probability?

"But even if this is a curse from the gods, it doesn't take away your sin, and it doesn't make you innocent. It doesn't change the fact that it all came from you."

Yes.

I don't want to say that I didn't do anything wrong.

No sin, no accountability, no going away.

The Gate debacle happened to save me.

Antirrhinus impulsed, Sarkhegar insisted, and Eleris activated Akasha.

That, too, is a stark truth.

"But is it not too harsh to say that you would rather have been dead?"

"......."

"I woke up with all my memories gone, my country gone, my father, king of a world and absolute, gone with the warriors, and the last heir to a fallen nation, with nothing more than a stigma. He knows only one thing: the world is about to end......."

"......."

"How did you make it this far, or rather, how did you get here....... Isn't it miraculous......."

The fact that I was the last Archdemon of a doomed realm was an extremely unfavorable condition for my survival.

It would have been better to be a man on the street, a nobody.

But in the end, I came close to destroying the world, and in the end, I rebuilt the Darklands, which is now inhabited by humans.

A lot of coincidences saved me, and a lot of coincidences got me into this mess in the end.

But in the end, he became the rebuilt King of the Demon Realm.

How did they do it.

The Archduke thought it was bizarre, and I thought back to the beginning and wondered how it was possible to do what I had done.

If someone had told me that I would be where I am now, years after I started, I wouldn't have believed them either.

"You may not be the most powerful demon in history, but you are the greatest demon in history."

That's how it works.

Rebuilding a destroyed nation.

We've rebuilt Darklands.

Therefore, I was able to face the Archduke as one who could call himself a demon, not a Reinhardt.

And perish.

It also succeeded in taking revenge on humanity.

I didn't do it all by choice.

However, the demon has done everything it was supposed to do.

"Now you've brought humanity to the brink of destruction, and you have the potential to become master of the entire world. You are the greatest, most perfect demon who ever lived."

And to be the master of the world.

"Isn't it pathetic that you, who never wanted the life of a demon, have become the closest thing to fulfilling the Archdemons' desires that anyone has ever achieved?"

I didn't want to be the devil.

I didn't want to be a king.

"Archdemons must be cursed to never live the life they want."

Yes.

If Archdemon is a race with such a curse.

Rebuilding Darklands when we didn't want to rebuild Darklands.

I can understand this situation where you don't want to see the end of humanity, but it's happened.

In the lineage of generations of Archdemons, I may be the only one who didn't want to be a demon and didn't hate humans.

Therefore, I have destroyed all mankind, rebuilt destroyed nations, and have the opportunity to make the whole world mine.

Is there really such a thing as a curse?

That's why the demons keep failing.

"That's a big deal."

"What's the big deal?"

If you have a curse like that, you're in trouble.

"Because the gate crisis will never end."

If an Archdemon has such a curse, there will never be an end to the gate situation.

Then it's bullshit again.

It's enough to send chills down your spine.

"Haha....... I see."

The Archduke laughed weakly at my words.

I don't know if there is such a curse or not.

Most importantly, it seemed to convey to the Archduke that I was desperate for the Gate debacle to end.

"So in the end, it's your fault?"

The Archduke said, "Tell me if I'm wrong.

So I said what has happened so far.

"That's the....... I put Harriet in....... and it's my fault for doing so......."

It's his own fault for following him, but it's the Archduke's fault in the end.

"You haven't heard from me since....... You must have been worried. Anyway....... It's all my fault. The world is the way it is, and it's all......."

"What has the world come to?"

"Yes."

"Why is that wrong?"

The Archduke looks at me.

"You said the world is the way it is because of me, so it's my fault......."

"All of that may be your sin, but why is it your fault?"

Are you saying that sin and wrong are different?

I couldn't figure out what he was really trying to say.

"Let's say you really did cause the gate incident with the intention of destroying the human race. Let's say you did."

The Archduke taps his cane against the marble staircase, and Nazik says, "You're right.

"You, you can't do that, can you?"

"......Yes?"

What does that mean?

"The Darklands never thought of war with humans, until they invaded the Demon Realm and destroyed your country, killed your fathers, killed those who were like family, and even enslaved you."

a.

"If, after what has happened to you, you have tried to destroy the human race, who is to say that it is unjust for you to have such a heart and to do such a thing, that it is wrong?"

Many died.

If I did it because I really wanted to, it would be a sin.

But it wasn't unfair.

The Archduke is talking about revenge.

Killing and murdering out of revenge is a sin because it cannot be justified in the end.

However, the vengeance may be justified.

Sin is right.

However, it is possible to do so.

You could have.

That's what the Archduke is saying.

I am what I am.

So you may be guilty, but you're not at fault.

That was what the Archduke was saying.

The first thing he asked me was, "If you think I've done something wrong, tell me.

The Archduke didn't say I did anything wrong.

"I did you wrong."

"......Yes?"

"If the War of the Demons was wrong from the start, then it was not you who was at fault, but I who did it to you first."

The Archduke was a participant in the Demon War.

So if the Demon War is a war gone wrong, then the result is the destruction of Darklands.

It was the Archduke, not me, who had committed an irremediable sin.

"Even if it was a just war, it's only natural that the heir to the ruins would seek revenge on all those who fought in the Great Demon War."

"......."

Ever since I knew I was a demon.

The Archduke believed that everything I did to humanity, however sinful, was justified.

I was justified in everything I was doing because I had a right to revenge on every human being.

The Archduke is technically one of your enemies.

As an archmage, the Archduke would naturally have had a great deal of experience in the Demon War, and that experience would have been earned by killing demons.

If I were a real Bali, the Grand Duke would be the one whose name would have to be very high up on the list when I wrote down that I was a murderer.

"Why do you come with the look of a sinner to the dwelling place of your enemies to apologize?"

In the past, I've worn a human mask, but since it's known that I'm a demon, that mask hasn't changed, even in situations where it's appropriate to remove it.

"I, I don't understand it."

The Archduke didn't seem to understand, coming here with the demeanor of a guilty man, looking on.

"Yeah......."

The Archduke looks up at the sky.

Beyond not even having the vengeance he should have, he doesn't really have a grain of wheat's worth of hatred, but rather only thinks about what I did wrong to the Archduke.

"My daughter was right."

The Archduke said so with a hint of something, a deep guilt in his voice.

"You may have sinned, but you have not done wrong."

The Archduke mumbles to himself.

"I have sinned and done wrong."

After learning the truth about the Demon War, the truth about the Ancestral Demon Valie, the Demon War was nothing but killing.

Humanity was not saved by the destruction of demons.

This brought back the gate situation.

It turns out I wasn't the only one who just needed to be still.

In the first place, it was a matter of humanity standing still.

I'm not a Valerie.

That's why there's no such thing as a vendetta against the Archduke.

The Archduke is just misunderstanding.

When I say it all came down to me, I don't mean because I caused the gate.

This absurdity was created from scratch by my own hands.

So there was no revenge or resentment or anything like that, just a deepening of the guilt.

Like the Archduke feels guilty about me.

Me, I couldn't help but feel guilty.

Episode 633.

As the Archduke says, I'm a strange creature if I'm not vengeful.

There are many who hate me, saying that the devil caused it all.

But hate is hate, and some say that's what you get for being a demon prince whose world was destroyed by humanity in the first place.

The right to destroy humanity.

If not me, then who the hell has it.

Rather, it's weird if you don't want it.

That's why people assume that my perfectly good motives make it natural for me to wish for the destruction of the human race.

But I was surprised.

The Archduke was ready to die.

"I was going to say, you can kill me, but spare my daughter."

The archduke's stern expression wasn't because he was angry at his daughter's thief.

I was ready to die.

The Archduke is my enemy.

He deserves to be killed, and he has his precious daughter with him.

So, if I'm asked to give my life, I'm going to give it.

And now that he knows that the Demon War was an unjust war, he even feels guilty about it.

"If I do something like that, you're going to jump forward ....... No, how do you see his face?"

"I see."

The Archduke nodded with a faint smile.

It's a weird situation.

He was probably thinking about a problem I hadn't thought about at all.

Herriot followed me.

The Archduke must have kept thinking. Am I using Heriot, or do I really value him?

If you value her, do you value her even though she is the daughter of your enemy.

What to think about that enemy.

You've probably been thinking about it for a while.

So the request for a rendezvous made the Archduke think that it was finally coming.

He thought he might have to make a terrible choice, one that would guarantee his daughter's safety in exchange for his neck.

But when I got there, I was fidgeting and looking at her with the look of a daughter thief.

Right.

From an archduke's point of view, I was ready to die.

Because the guy who deserved to kill me is looking like he deserved to die.

That must have been a weird feeling.

Soon.

The silence for over an hour was due to neither the Archduke nor I having anything to say to each other.

Because all they have is guilt.

So the Archduke is stunned when he realizes that I'm not vindictive and narcissistic and all that in the first place.

"Strange, you don't even seem to realize you're a demon."

Yes.

There should be at least some sort of vengeance, and it's odd that there isn't, even from the point of view of the devil being good.

"Actually, it's not much different than that - I have no memories of my time as the Prince of the Demon Realm, and I was born anew the day the Demon War ended."

"Or that you know the future."

"It's kind of irrelevant now."

I don't need to tell you that I'm the creator.

They won't believe it.

"Yeah......."

The Archduke slumped down on the bench, refusing to understand what he couldn't understand.

I wonder if I'm feeling a decade older.

Honestly, I didn't come to this meeting with a light heart either, but the Grand Duke chose to meet me with a heart far heavier than mine.

More than I can imagine, the leaders of humanity should fear me.

I realized that while I was afraid, I was also acknowledging the legitimacy of my vengeance.

I realized that the very act of trying to include them, rather than exterminate them, could be seen as forgiveness in a sense by the leaders.

If this is good news, it's good news.

Revenge was not in the realm of my imagination, so it was not even on my mind. Rather, it was those who feared the devil, not me, who were justifying, signifying, and rationalizing the logic of my actions.

I can do that.

He who has the right to destroy mankind, seeks to forgive and dominate it.

Some will shudder at its oppression, while others will be grateful for its mercy and favor.

Like the attitude the Archduke has now.

"......I think I know what you want."

The Archduke now knows what I'm trying to say without me having to say it.

"Do you need my power."

Archduke's Lore.

Archduke Power.

And the Archduke's territory.

There, the people.

"Yes."

In other words, everything in the Duchy of Saint-Thuan.

"Yeah......."

The Archduke nods.

"If that can be even the smallest reparation for all I have done to you, for all I have done to the demons, then I will."

"People are going to start pointing fingers."

"None of that has anything to do with it."

The Archduke smiles faintly.

"There are laws of existence, and we just follow them."

The Archduke, thought to be a sinless man, has become a sinful man.

"I thought I had upheld that moral, but it turns out that all of that was just hubris."

Even if you always thought you were on the right path, even if you thought you were on the right path, at some point you look back and realize you were on the wrong path.

The Archduke finally admits his arrogance.

"If that's the case, I'll do what I can now."

Recognize that you have been overconfident in your ability to judge the good path.

"My power, from now on, is yours."

No one can be right all the time.

Like everyone does.

The Archduke was such a person.

\* \* \*

The Duchy of St. Thuan has decided to side with me.

It wasn't at all what I thought it would be.

I was worried about what would happen if the Archduke tried to kill me.

The Archduke thought he had to cooperate with me because of the sins he had committed.

The process wasn't what I had envisioned, but I got the results I wanted.

"It would be nice to have a meal, but you're not ready."

"Ah....... Yes."

You're probably referring to other preparations, not meal prep.

Did the Archduke tell the Archduchess that he was prepared to die?

Told or untold, if you met the Archduchess now, she might have a heart attack.

I know she's safe, I've seen her with my own eyes, but I'm sure she's as afraid of me as the Archduke is.

"I'll explain it well. If you come back later, I'll be able to beat you like I used to."

The Archduke will only be able to see her after he explains things to her first.

Just like old times.

I can't help but feel nostalgic for the way the Archduchess and Harriet's brothers treated me when I first came to Arnaria.

It was incredibly overwhelming at the time.

I wonder if things will ever go back to the way they were.

For some reason, the Archduke's words struck a chord.

You can go back to the way things were.

Yes, you should be able to do that.

Even if you can't do anything about the things that have become irreversible.

Things that can be reversed, obviously, can be reversed.

"You would have had something of your own, by the way. Was there ever a place on earth for that?"

"There is. It's not huge, but it's there......."

The Archduke nodded slowly, wondering if there was still a safe place to plant a flag in this murderous land.

Anti-aircraft should be fine.

No more.

Or maybe it wasn't anyone else in the first place.

"I suppose you could stop by if you'd like."

The Archduke's eyes widened at that.

"......really?"

Probably.

It's clear that she's excited to see with her own eyes where her daughter has been all this time.

I'm the king.

If I want to do it, I'll do it. What?

But then I remembered something the Duchess had said not long ago.

You don't know if it's a wolf or a sheep, you don't know if it's a wolf or a sheep, so what do you do when it gets in the fence?

The Archduke is not just anyone.

However, what many people learn about Edina is the danger.

For now, even Rowen has never been to Edina.

"That....... Well, I'm sorry to break it to you, but I think....... I shouldn't have to make that decision alone."

It's kind of crappy to build up expectations and then let them down, but I guess it's not up to me to decide.

"Well, at least now that we're here, Harriet might come here occasionally and....... I mean, it's not impossible......."

"Yeah, I see what you're saying, and when you look at it that way, it's probably better that I don't know, I get it."

The Archduke nodded, as if to say, "Don't feel bad," as if he knew what I was looking out for.

And I think I'm already happy that I'm not the only one who decides what happens in my world.

Oh no.

This is what makes her go.

Right.

In the midst of the heavy, serious atmosphere, I was reminded of something I had barely remembered.

Adelia.

Adelia's problem sticks in my head and won't go away.

"I told you ...... was fine, no need to apologize."

"No....... Uh, no, that's not it, thanks for understanding."

The Archduke had a different misconception.

What the hell.

I always knew that the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan was an idiot, but I also knew that he was actually a proper nobleman and a good man.

I wasn't going to say anything.

I can't stand it.

Does the Archduke really not know?

Let's get a little lucky, shall we?

"Titans, by the way."

The Archduke crossed his arms at my words.

"I can fully cooperate with whatever you do in the future, but I cannot give you the power of a Titan."

No, I didn't mean that.

But we have to talk about running Titan anyway.

"The Titan is a magical weapon that must be operated by me and Adelia, your classmate, as you know. It is impossible for me to operate the Titan alone, as it requires two devices called Master Orbs."

I'm aware of that.

But naturally, Adelia's story became a hot topic.

"And if you're thinking of using the Titan for war......."

It's clear that he's thinking about causing a lot of damage. Of course, the Archduke has no say in the matter if I want that, but in the end, I doubt the Archduke wants mass bloodshed.

"No, no, no, why would I write that?"

"Oh...... I guess."

"It's bad enough that it's not used in critical situations."

"Yeah. If you really need to use the Titan, you'll be dragging him into something dangerous too....... And frankly, I don't want that."

Yes.

If you have an Archduke and Adelia, you can run the Titan.

It's more of a failsafe, but it's also one of the weaknesses of the Titan, because with just the two of them, they can run the Titan without anyone else's permission.

Adelia may be a genius, but she's still a kid in the grand duke's eyes.

The last thing you want to do is get dragged into the Darklands' and the Empire's supremacy battles.

Anyway.

It's not so much that it's awkward as it is that Adelia's name has come up.

"Titans aside, that....... Speaking of which, that....... you know, Adelia."

"Oh, right."

"What's he doing....... doing?"

Carefully.

Don't look suspicious.

Let's hear what the Archduke is thinking.

If you don't know, I'm not going to tell you.

We're just making sure the Archduke doesn't really know.

In response to my question, the Grand Duke hummed....... and sighed.

"Yes, you said Adelia was very close to our youngest......."

I'm guessing you think I'm asking this at Herriot's behest.

This is good news.

"You can't say you're doing well by following a war zone."

It was a little weird to ask how you're doing.

"Well, aside from getting along, I guess you could say I'm safe."

I don't want to know if it's safe or not, I want to know what the Archduke thinks of Adelia.

What to do?

"The Archduke says that Adelia is....... What kind of child do you think she is?"

I don't know!

Let's just ask.

"Once, I remembered something you said."

"......me?"

"Didn't you say you were going to build something that would amaze the world in your own little magical society?"

a.

That's what we were talking about.

"I realized that my vision was much narrower than yours."

Eventually, Moonshine and the Power Cartridge were created.

I predicted it, not the wizard.

"Was that an object that belonged to a future you knew?"

"It's ......."

"It's funny, someone who knows this is going to happen in the future tells you the future, and no one believes them at the time....... No, that's what the future is supposed to be."

Who would believe me if I told you that crazy things happen?

"There are some people who make miracles happen. Adelia, I think, is one of those people."

People whose very existence is a miracle and a blessing to humanity.

That's probably the highest praise an archduke can give.

But....... Not that.......

No, I should really say.

It's really, really hard to pretend this isn't the case.

Does she look like a woman?

You can't say that!

"I was thinking, if it's okay with him, what if we asked him to become a member of our family when all is said and done....... I've been thinking about that."

"Is that ......?"

Me.......

Excuse me?

No?

"He was good friends with our youngest, and that's a good thing."

No, I don't think so.

No?

"Apparently, the third seems to like her quite a bit."

I want to die.

\* \* \*

After somehow exchanging the remaining words with the Archduke, I sobbed my way out into the square.

Honestly, I don't remember much of what happened after that.

"Your Highness......?"

In the distance, a hooded figure came running up, startled.

"I didn't think anything was going on, but......."

No......

Nothing happened to me.......

"Mom......."

"......, huh?"

"Mom I'm dying......."

"I, Your Highness......?"

Mom!

Mother!

She's not my mom, but she's my great-great-great-grandmother or something!

Yay!

I'd rather be a toddler and forget about this whole thing.

Eleris looked dumbfounded as she hugged me, realizing that I had suddenly become a damsel in distress.

"Zee, calm down. I don't know what's going on, but......."

Elise pats me on the back.

Dizzy.

I'm already dizzy.

I've heard more dizzying things.

"Curiosity is....... Curiosity kills people, not cats......."

"......Yes?"

I told myself not to talk about it when I went in!

Why go in there and ask me stupid questions!

Uh!

I'm an asshole.

Uh.

Episode 634.

I returned to Razak with Elise. Not to the royal castle, but to a secluded place nearby.

"Well, that was....... I'm at a loss for words......."

When I explained why I was in this state even though I had done everything I was supposed to do, she waggled her eyebrows.

Adelia likes the Grand Duke.

But the Archduke thinks of Adelia as a pawn.

And Herriot's third brother has a crush on Adelia.

"I think I'm being punished......."

"Are you saying that the Archduke is being punished?"

"Not....... Not......."

I feel like I'm being punished, not the Archduke!

I've written so many bad dramas in my life, I've had to see worse than this one, even in a war zone!

I feel like I'm being punished, not the Archduke!

I couldn't bring myself to say anything to the Grand Duke about it.

"I don't know, I don't know what I'm going to do with that."

"We can only watch......."

Okay, well, that's not even in my area of control, but I was curious and saw blood.

It'll work! Ugh!

Who cares about the drama as long as we're all alive and well? Even if you're rolling in shit, you're still alive, so there's drama.

I'll protect the world at all costs, even if it means saving it for the next installment of the epic drama.

I feel like an asshole for even thinking about it.

I don't want to watch that drama anymore.

"By the way, the Duchy has agreed to cooperate, hasn't it?"

"Uh....... That worked, though not quite like I thought it would."

"It didn't work out like you thought?"

"I thought the Archduke would treat me like I stole his daughter, but he didn't. He actually felt guilty about it."

"ah......."

Rather, it's a situation where I know the least about myself.

Or to be more precise, what I can't do because I'm not in Bali, other people can.

"It seemed even more so when I realized that the Demon War was a pointless war."

That the ancestral demon Balie created the New World through Akasha and attempted to migrate there.

The Archduke was most shocked by the truth.

Without the Demon War, demons would have quietly disappeared from the world.

But humans invaded the Darklands and slaughtered the demons.

As a result, the demon was killed, but the prince, Valier, survived, which led to the Gate.

The phrase "everything would have been fine if I hadn't done anything" doesn't just apply to me, it applies to people.

The Archduke seemed to think that the humans had gotten what they deserved.

Eleris's expression was understandably grim.

"If you could go back to the time before the Demon War, would you do it all over again?"

Can we make all wars, terrors, and invasions go away?

If you went back in time, knowing that the Demon War was leading to this, could you stop it all?

"I don't think so."

I was negative.

"No one would believe me if I told them I was going to move to the other world and not touch them. I wouldn't believe them if the devil said it, or if anyone else said it."

Akasha was a very powerful artifact in its own right.

For example, convincing you that they are developing nuclear weapons for peaceful use. If you believe that, you're an idiot.

Rather, the moment humanity learns of Akasha's existence, wars will break out to take it away or destroy it before it is complete.

So Akasha's presence in Bali was kept secret.

The Demon War was ultimately the result of fear and hatred of one another reaching a critical mass.

Unless the history of fear, distrust, and hatred is erased, going back in time will not change anything.

The look on Eleris's face, a part of that fear, distrust, and hatred, was never good.

Eleris is an ancient demon who was betrayed by his son and banished with his horns cut off.

Eleris spun up Akasha herself.

As such, I feel the most responsible and guilty for all of this.

Eleris traded my life for the whole world.

Because he loved me that much.

I can't tell you how much she cares about me.

"It's getting close to the end of the day."

"......."

The end of the Gate debacle won't make the responsibility and guilt go away.

But it's clear that we're approaching the end of time.

"Everything else is an afterthought."

"Yes....... Your Highness."

By the way, that's what the Archduke said after the dizzying tale.

"Do you remember what happened at Richie's grave?

'Yeah. I remember.'

It was then that Antirrhinus and Akrich fought.

I was surprised to see an archduke in the room.

"There was one person I saw that was very strange.

'ah.......'

I knew who the Archduke was talking about.

I was the first person to see it that day.

Someone you never thought you'd see.

"Do you know?

'Maybe....... Ellen's mother.'

"I thought it looked like .......

Given the time frame, it's probably after meeting Luna that the Archduke takes notice of Ellen.

So the Archduke would have been surprised to learn that the warrior was a girl who bore a striking resemblance to the strange man he had met on his trip to Ritchie's grave.

The Archduke didn't see me fight Luna then.

You may remember that it suddenly disappeared.

Clearly, the Grand Duke was quite impressed with Luna.

'A warrior is a warrior, but I suspect this person, Luna, has a more bizarre history. If I could, I would seek her out and ask for her help..........'

Apparently, as I suspected, the Archduke was thinking about asking Luna, who was by no means an ordinary person, for help.

"Actually, I already got help.

"......what?

"I'm afraid I can't help you directly because I have a few things going on.

The Archduke could not help but be surprised that I had already gone to Luna and gotten her help.

I can't go into details without Luna's permission, so I skimmed the surface, but the Archduke seemed to be convinced that a man who was as strange as he pretended to be was even stranger.

Well, yes and no.

I'm the one who can create this world, and I'm the one who can manipulate its time and space.

Incarnations.

It is not one, but the incarnation of the gods.

It's been a long time since I've been to Rizaila, but somehow it feels like a very long time ago.

How is Luna and the people of Rizaira doing?

That thought crossed my mind briefly.

In the end, I got what I deserved from Lizaira. I can't ask for much more.

I filled Elise in on the conversation I'd had with the Archduke.

We talked about it a lot, but the answer is simple.

This brings the total number of factions to three.

Cult of the Lord.

Cernstadt.

Duchy of Saint-Tuan.

"You can take over the world with a few words....... No, you're already halfway there......."

It's easy.

"I'm so scared, now."

In fact, it was so easy, I felt like my blood was running dry.

It's easy to swallow.

The question is, can you digest it? If you can't, you die, and the world dies.

Elise gently pulls me into her arms.

"Everything will be fine."

"......, right?"

"Of course, the Archduke said so."

Elise says, cradling my head in her hands.

"Your Majesty is the greatest, most perfect demon who ever lived."

"......."

"I think so, too."

Greatness and perfection.

I was the one furthest from it, and I was the one closest to it.

The vampire's cold body heat, as always, seemed to bring a measure of calm to a mind that was tinged with fear.

Elise is the best.

"Thank you, ancestor."

"......Rather say mom."

"Kitchen!"

Elise tugged on my ear.

\* \* \*

The Duchy of Saint-Thuan is not a very large country in terms of size, but it is significant in that it is the power center of the Empire.

With no way of knowing what will happen later, just being able to blockade one of the Empire's main weapons is extremely valuable.

If we can get Adelia on board, we can make Titan ours.

A situation where it's actually quite simple for an empire to lose control of a Titan.

I wonder if this is what Bertus intended.

We don't know that far.

You've called a meeting of the Senate.

All except Sarkegar, who is in the Alliance, and Riana, who is recuperating.

Five Gazoo.

Olivia Ranze.

Herriot.

Charlotte.

Airy.

And me.

"With this, Cernstadt and the Duchy are in our hands, and we can, in effect, disrupt the Alliance whenever we want."

These were the words of Lerouen, the lord of Thursday.

Yes, you can't take it over, but you can disrupt it right now.

Cernstadt, the Archduke, and the Crusader Knights should be removed from the Alliance immediately.

The Allies will panic. And panicked armies don't roll well.

"But even if we can break the Alliance, the Immortals are the mainstay of the war right now. As long as they remain strong, I see little chance of bleeding the Empire's forces."

As Galarsh says, the current state of affairs is that the Empire's greatest power, the Immortal, is completely unaffected.

"Of course, you're saying you're going to do something like that, not that you're going to disrupt the coalition."

As Lucien said, Lerouen said we can, not that we should. It's just a confirmation of our influence.

You can't take over, but you can disrupt.

And the Alliance is the army of all of humanity, and the remaining leaders of all of humanity are the ones who make the decisions.

In other words, half of humanity is in your hands.

If the war ends this way, we could already bisect the continent.

Antirrhinus smiled wryly.

"It's not just the Alliance, either. We now have the Cult of the Lord, the Demigods, and the Cult of the Champion, which are all major forces in the Imperial Zodiacal Gradient. That means everyone who believes in 'something' of any kind is under our control."

Every human being involved in the faith is under our influence. Most don't even realize that we are on top of their heads.

"Even beyond the Alliance, you already control half of humanity, great one."

Either humans accept our domination or they don't.

Tolerate or not tolerate.

I was already their master.

"What about the Cultists?"

"The Zodiac is teaching a select group of people how to use the divine powers of the demons, and while the results may not be immediate, it's not the powers that matter to them, it's the faith, and the results are still coming."

The deification of the Cult of the Lord is also well underway.

A few words.

A few conversations.

That's how you rule the world.

But laying the paving stones is the easy part.

It's those moments when conflict and disagreement become visible that matter.

"If only we could figure out how to deal with immortals, we wouldn't have to fight an empire."

Rusinil said.

I have a workaround, but it's not working yet.

But if you don't know that, and you're at the end of the gate, you're going to be in a lot of trouble.

"Yeah, about that coping mechanism."

Not long ago, new information arrived via Rowen.

More precisely, the information that Bertus sent through Rowen.

"Is there a paraphrase?"

His face became serious as he realized that the most important thing right now was to respond to Immortal, not all the other projects.

"Not paraphrasing, no way."

I don't think you can call that a breakthrough.

"She's the one who pilots the immortal."

Of course, everyone knows this information because I told them.

Christina.

Anna.

Louis.

Those three people are key.

Herriot, who had already heard the story with me, was not pleased.

"They say that if you mess with them, the immortals become unidentifiable weapons of mass destruction - literally, they go on a rampage."

A hush fell over the room.

This is not a paraphrase.

Only Antirrhinus smiles faintly and shakes his head.

"If I understand you correctly, it sounds like you're saying that the controller will eventually disappear."

"......Yes."

Yes.

This is by no means a foolproof method, but it is one of the worst.

A man with a mad dog is trying to kill me.

If I kill the dog's owner, the mad dog won't come looking for me.

Instead, it will bite and kill everyone in sight.

If I don't want to die, I can kill the dog's owner.

You can do that for as long as you want.

If you're willing to turn a blind eye to someone being bitten to death, you can do so.

"It's a very easy choice, but the moment we make it, everything we've done to end the gate crisis will be for naught, and we'll have ended the human race with our own hands."

Antony.

The crazy old man starts laughing like he's dying of joy.

You've been dropping shit to save humanity.

But I'm afraid that the Immortals will hunt me down, and the moment I kill Christina, Anna, and Louis, the rampaging Immortals will wipe out humanity instead of monsters.

The runaway Immortals will not be able to reach the Edina Archipelago, meaning that Razak will be safe even if the continent is shattered and humanity is destroyed.

I've worked all this time to protect humanity, and in the end, I destroyed humanity so that I could live.

Antirrhinus was chuckling as he imagined me choosing the option of trampling over what I had tried to do with my own hands.

I swear, sometimes I just want to kill that crazy old man.

This does not stop the immortal.

It's possible to make an Immortal not kill as much as you, but not as much as your people.

In fact, it's too easy.

It's not that there are no answers.

There is an answer. You just don't get to pick them.

Rather, it's as if it knows I'll never choose it because it's an option.

No, you might actually want to choose.

If I pick it.

Also.

We can talk all we want, but at the end of the day, your life is the most important thing, right?

Are you going to die laughing at me for saying that?

It's not revenge if I'm killed by an Immortal led by them.

My revenge will be complete when I kill Christina, Anna, and Louis, even if it means sparing my life and the lives of those I love.

That would be worse than death.

"I say here."

I look at everyone and say.

"The moment you touch Christina or any of her kids to save me. I'll rip the throat out of the asshole who did that and I'll die too."

The gate incident happened to save my life.

I can't let that happen this time.

I don't mean to criticize her, but in the end, I couldn't help but bite my lip as I watched her shake her head.

It had to be said.

"Great One, why don't you just bring them in and touch their brains, and that way you don't have to kill them? Or, you know, torture them."

"I'd be careful what you wish for when you don't know the extent of your 'touchy-feely' behavior, and I don't think you could have imagined that."

Antirrhinus laughed, as if he liked my cautiousness.

Real.

What is that old man?

The more I suffer, the more he rejoices.

That doesn't mean I'm going to do anything tricky, but I'm going to do what I'm told.

"Do nothing. Deal with it after the gate debacle is over."

I'm sure Antirrhinus would be up to no good, but he's surprisingly not, so I don't doubt him.

If anything, it's more likely that the other side will try to protect you and do something stupid.

Notably, Sarkegar is not here.

And the new kid on the block, Rowen.

You'll need to talk to them as well.

"Yeah, because there's not necessarily another way to do it."

Herriot looked at me, as if to say, "You don't have to go one of two ways.

"Yes, there is no such thing as absolute magic. Just as there is no such thing as absolute binding or sealing magic, there is a way to break it. We just haven't found it yet."

Galarsch nodded in agreement.

But Galarsh wasn't as hopeful as Herriot.

I can't believe I can now read an orc's facial expressions.

It wasn't a nuance, Galarsh said, just a way to find another way.

"If we had the time, we could find another way, but I don't think we have the time."

"......."

Yes.

Time is always the enemy.

Obviously, there are ways to disable an immortal in some way other than force.

But until we find a way to do that, will it not conflict with immortals?

I don't think so.

There must be a way.

But it takes time to find them.

Is that enough time?

Herriot's head snapped up, as if he'd remembered something.

"Yes. Immortals are golems, after all."

"......, right?"

"I wonder if Dad might know something about.......?"

Immortals are golems.

And Archduke Saint-Thuan is an expert on golems.

"I don't know right now, but my dad might know something."

Things are different now.

We now have the cooperation of the Grand Duke as well as the Duchy of St. Thuan.

So, we can finally take a chance on the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan, who has mastered the same type of magic.

Yes.

Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan.

"Yeah, speaking of which, I need to ask you something."

Problems you couldn't decide on your own.

"I'd like to show the Archduke around, is that okay?"

At that, Herriot jumped to his feet in surprise.

Episode 635.

The Archduke wants to stop by Edina.

The Senate's response was, "You're on your own.

Lucinil suggested that we limit Edina to only one Archduke, just in case, and I agreed, as did Herriot.

We don't know if the Archduke will actually be a clue, but it would be a shame if he wasn't.

If we work together, we might come up with something.

So a few days later.

"Dad!"

-Wrong!

I watched from afar as Herriot ran to the Archduke and embraced him fiercely.

Time makes a lot of difference.

When did the daughter who used to annoy her father become that?

Like the time you had to sneak off to Arnaria and return with a heavy conversation.

Now that the Archduke was on her side, Herriot would be able to see the family she'd always wanted to see.

It wasn't a tearful reunion.

Herriot wasn't crying, he was giddy with excitement, and the Archduke was beaming.

The father and daughter, who had been clinging to each other like they would never be separated, break the embrace, and the Archduke looks at me.

"Thank you. Reinhard."

"I'll thank you."

Seeing the Archduke's gratitude tickled the back of my head.

I don't think that's the way to say thank you.

Should I be thanked for taking the obvious for granted?

It feels weird to realize that just as there is hate for being a demon, there is also favor and gratitude for being a demon.

The Archduke stands at the gates of the castle, in the front yard, looking out over the landscape of Edina down the hill.

Now that the Archduke knows where it is, he can stop by whenever he wants.

"Yeah....... If it were an island....... If it were an island, it would be like this......."

The Archduke stared down at the peaceful seaside town of Razak, and somehow, he seemed to feel a strange sense of intensity.

"My God, I can't believe this is still around......."

Due to the great barrier of the ocean, even flying monsters from the continents can't reach it.

The Edina Archipelago itself is a tourist destination, so we had great weather, clear skies, and crystal clear waters.

It's a beautiful scene.

And that's not all.

"I can't believe this is what it looks like......."

From a distance, you can still see the demons and humans living together.

Some humans still fear demons. But there are also humans who talk to demons freely.

The Archduke's eyes widened at the sight of them living together.

It's like you want to properly regret the moments in your life when you didn't know this was possible.

Like trying to think about how pointless the Demon War was, instead of avoiding it.

"We came here early on in the gate crisis and focused on pacifying the area, so there wasn't a lot of damage."

The moment the Gate debacle broke.

I went straight to Edina and rescued Airi.

And destroyed all the warp gates in the archipelago.

"Yes, and after that, we set up a base on the continent, and we evacuated people and demons to it, and we've been doing that ever since."

Herriot looked at the Archduke and began to explain what we've been doing here since the Gate incident.

I'm going to tell you everything I couldn't tell you the last time we met, because there's no reason to keep secrets now.

Herriot was more excited than ever.

You've done something.

I tried to do what I could.

That's how I was able to create this world.

The Archduke looks down at his daughter, who is talking excitedly.

With a faint smile.

Not just what you've done, but what others have done.

How Olivia Ranze, who is notoriously difficult to get along with, helped people.

How much succubi are really loved by people.

How Charlotte is now stabilizing a confused Edina.

He talks incessantly, as if he wants to tell you all about what he's done, as well as what everyone else has done.

It was weird.

It's supposed to be the Archduke who's impressed, but somehow I felt like I was swooning at the sight of Herriot.

Herriot loves this country a lot.

You're proud of yourself.

It made me feel weird to see how much she cared about people and how proud she was of them.

I wonder if the Archduke felt the same way.

The Archduke puts his hand on his daughter's head, who can't stop talking.

"It's like old times."

"......Everyday? Suddenly?"

Harriet shakes her head, as if the past has anything to do with this.

"You were greedy for praise."

"Go, why are you suddenly talking about......."

Herriot glances in my direction with a wide grin on his face.

"When he knew how to do something, he'd demonstrate it, and he'd look up at her like he does now."

"......He was, wasn't he?"

There are few people in Arnaria, and Herriot was a genius, so he must have known how to use magic from a young age.

I choked up as I imagined Herriot as a child, eagerly poring over spellbooks to earn the praise of his dad, mom, or siblings.

It's cute to think about.

"It wasn't just magic, he'd brag about anything he'd learned, and once or twice he'd say he'd memorized a poem or a novel."

It's natural for children to want to be praised by their parents.

In that sense, it's hard not to love a daughter who brags about how hard she studied, if nothing else. She was a genius, even, and she would have been told she was great.

But at the end of the day, a kid is a kid.

"When our youngest was....... when you were so young......."

The Archduke looks down the hill and says.

"Now you're bragging about how many people you've saved......."

The kid who brought in a perfect score is now a grown man, bragging about how many lives he's saved.

By now, the Archduke's eyes were red.

"Oh, Dad......?"

With that look in his eyes, the Archduke slipped his arm under Herriot's armpit and lifted him up.

The Archduke speaks as if he were addressing a child, but with his daughter, who is no longer a child.

She was smart, inconsiderate, and just plain arrogant.

Not your smarts, intelligence, and abilities.

Watching them take pride in the fact that they saved someone's life. Watching them be proud of it.

What parent wouldn't be thrilled?

"Great. My daughter."

It's like when Herriot was a kid.

However, the weight is not the same as it was when he was younger.

It's probably the highest compliment a parent can give, and the best way to say thank you.

Herriot's eyes burned bright red as he watched the Archduke's eyes burn bright red.

"Oh, Daddy....... Me....... did well, didn't we?"

"Yeah, good job."

"I....... I worked hard. A lot....... with Reinhardt....... I tried hard. I mean, I can't be good at everything, but I tried my best. I tried to help people....... I couldn't save them all. It was hard. It was painful. But I did....... Hmph! Well, still....... Still......."

After crying, Herriot eventually breaks down.

"Still....... That's good enough for....... I did good, didn't I?"

When we talk about the people we saved, we can't help but think about the people we didn't save.

"Sure, sure."

"Black...... Hmph! Black! Hmph! Hmph! Hmph! Hmph!"

The Archduke gingerly picked up his youngest daughter, who was feverish.

It ended up being a tearful reunion.

\* \* \*

"...... sold."

Her eyes puffy and swollen, Harriet wore her bangs down and her face flushed.

"Nguyen, go for a walk with your dad."

"Ugh, huh......? Gee, what are you talking about?"

"Then you're Ngozi, aren't you? Forget it, go cry yourself to sleep and come back, the Grand Duke doesn't have much time."

"Lee, Lee, really!"

The Archduke is here on short notice as the Allies are advancing.

In reality, the Archduke has a lot of work to do, and he's practically gone AWOL.

I have to go back soon, so I'll have to talk about it when I have time.

Herriot tugged on the Archduke's hand and started down the hill, warning him to be prepared when he returned.

A daughter holding her dad's hand for a walk.

You're doing something you can't do without.

The Archduke smiled and followed Herriot's lead.

"I can't wait to see all these pictures in my lifetime. Ugh."

I don't know when she arrived, or if she was watching from afar, but when the Archduke and Herriot disappeared, Olivia Ranze was suddenly beside me.

Olivia made a gagging sound, as if she were feeling nauseous.

"Whatever, it looks good."

"Coming from an orphanage, I didn't have a father, and the father I did have was a whipping boy, so I couldn't relate to him at all."

"......was beaten with a whip?"

Was that really that bad?

"I'm just saying, it wasn't that bad, but I'd rather have been whipped."

No, why does this guy lie, even when he's lying?

But I don't know what Olivia means by that.

Herriot's pursuit of magic was ultimately self-directed, not because his parents forced him to, but because he liked to be praised.

Olivia has lived a forced life.

I wouldn't have gotten any compliments.

No matter what you've accomplished, you've always been told you're not good enough.

After a life of near-brainwashing, Olivia is a hollow person.

Olivia continues to stare at the backs of Harriet and the Archduke.

It was the kind of look you get when you're trying to imagine something you don't have.

"I didn't think so, but I must be a twisted person."

I don't know what the hell I was thinking, and Olivia looked at me and smirked.

"It was a real twist that you said ...... as if you knew that now."

"What?"

"So it's good."

"Hmm. That's it."

Olivia crosses her arms and looks out over the landscape of Razak.

"Actually me, I'm so scared these days."

I know what you're afraid of without you having to tell me.

"It's not too late to say, 'Hey, maybe we shouldn't be doing this, maybe we shouldn't be doing this....... too late, right?"

"......Yes."

Before I had it in my hands, I might have been able to.

But there are some things that are already in your grasp.

It doesn't fall back into place when we let go.

It will fall to the floor and shatter.

\* \* \*

The phrase "breakthrough" refers to a march that pushes through a large forest.

But can the Allied advance really be described as a crushing one?

The Allies are certainly marching hard, but they're not fighting anything.

Each military commander knew that an unknown and powerful force was fighting them, and that the Empire was using something sinister. It was bound to spread.

A power you can't reveal to anyone.

Evil power.

And powerful.

People naturally think of it.

The empire has played into the hands of the devil.

People naturally associate with things that are in an imaginary category.

People don't think about demons when they're helping the march, and then they think about them when they're not actually in the vanguard.

This is because the devil in people's imaginations is a very scary thing.

In reality, the devil and his army are more powerful than people imagine, and that's what people think.

The rumors that are being spread in fear are unfounded.

How the devil took the hand of the empire.

Why the devil is helping the empire.

Why the empire played into the hands of the devil.

Where we can't imagine it, we fill in the blanks with delusions that there is some basis for it that we don't know about, and then we just imagine it.

The devil may be in the details.

What will the demon take in return for helping the humans.

People were trying to keep their mouths shut because the mere mention of unfounded rumors could cause chaos, but secretly, the sparks of confusion and anxiety were being ignited in everyone's minds.

After all, the Allies weren't going to be fighting for long, so their heads were busy, not their bodies.

None of this is certain.

And so it was, May.

The Allies were moving in one direction, having canceled all other routes to the big cities.

Regeln Capital, Diane.

We're not done with the other big cities.

However, the Allies move straight to the location of the final battle.

"I can't believe Rosenthal was able to do this with just emoji....... That's amazing."

Bertus read Immortal's battle report in a daze.

The port city of Rosentine.

With the neighboring metropolises in close proximity, there were effectively three metropolises attached to each other, so if you entered Rosentine's territory, you would have to attack all three cities simultaneously.

Since each gate is progressively more dangerous than the last, making this the last point of attack could have led to the gate situation not being finished.

In other words, it's harder to capture than the capital.

In effect, you can't just take out one city, you have to take out all three at once.

Therefore, Immortal decided to target the Rosentine neighborhood before it became uncontrollably dangerous, and Immortal alone succeeded in pacifying the area.

"But about 8% of the immortals are broken, and now it looks like it's going to be impossible to use them to take over a large city."

"So you're saying that from now on we can't just trust immortals."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Titans, and other Allied forces.

It destroyed all three large cities near Rosenthal, where it was expected to be the hardest hit.

The Allies now advance on the Regeln capital of Diane.

There are three large cities on the route.

The remaining small and medium-sized cities will be handled by Immortals during the march.

The Allies only need to capture those three cities and the gate crisis is over.

Three battles remain.

The end is in sight.

We can stem this inexorable tide of destruction.

Immortals can't stay hidden forever.

A major battle will soon begin, and Immortals will have to fight alongside the Allies.

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Warp gates are now at a level not seen since the beginning of the gate crisis, and not seen since the beginning of the Allied advance.

Each warp gate has become a tinderbox of monsters, constantly spewing them out into the world, and the quality is nowhere near what it once was.

But a lot has changed from the direction this world was supposed to go.

In the original, the gate situation is eventually resolved.

Compared to the original, humanity's power was too overwhelming.

First, the Titan, a giant weapon that didn't exist in the original.

That alone is overwhelming, and then there are the Immortals, an army of the undead.

The gate situation itself hasn't changed.

Technically, the Gate Crisis was supposed to end even without the Titans and Immortals. It will take a little longer, but there's no reason why we shouldn't be able to overcome a catastrophe that even a weaker humanity can overcome now.

June.

The Allies advanced on the Regeln capital of Diane and began attacking the larger cities along the way, including Wallen.

In fact, it was our first major battle since the Battle of Serandia last winter.

Titans are much more powerful than they were in Serandia.

Then there are immortals, which didn't exist in Serandia.

And the original power, the Allies.

-Wow!

I watched from afar as hellfire rained down from the sky and the Master Class's army slaughtered the monsters.

"That doesn't make sense......."

It was an overwhelming force that made Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages pale in comparison.

The Allies will be unaware of the mysterious army that has suddenly appeared, clad in full body armor and slaughtering monsters with Auror blades.

But now they were at the forefront, slicing and dicing the monsters.

-Kugugugugung

Mages who don't actually participate in combat.

Adelia, Christina, Louis Ankton, and Anna De Guerna.

They were practically ruling this battlefield.

Humanity is stronger than in the original.

The gate situation is no longer an issue.

I was already convinced the moment I saw the Allied battle.

You don't have to watch it all the way through.

Wallan will fall.

That leaves us with two cities.

It's only a matter of time before the fate of everyone, including me, is decided.

\* \* \*

-currrrr

By the time the Titan flashed back to the rear, the battle was over.

The rain of flame and ice that dyed the sky red stopped, and the thunderous roar of war machines and artillery that seemed to shatter the world stopped.

It's true that the battle was quickly concluded with the help of a strange army, but that doesn't mean they didn't have a role to play.

A place where the corpses of giant monsters form mountains.

With the massive warp gate destroyed en masse, Ellen struck the final blow at what could only be called the mountain of monsters that remained, and slowly rose to her feet.

"Warrior......."

The people who follow Ellen into the heart of the battlefield are, of course, no ordinary people.

But even they couldn't help but look up at Ellen as if she were a god.

It was Ellen's first appearance since Serandia.

But those who had always fought in close proximity to Ellen couldn't help but notice that the warrior was very different.

Even in combat.

Even in combat.

And even now, when the battle is over.

He had a look in his eyes and an expression that said something, something empty.

"Warrior....... Are you okay?"

As Ellen ran down the mountain of corpses in a few leaps, her companion asked cautiously.

-nod

Ellen could only nod slowly.

It's more refined and sharper, with a combat style that seems to exclude emotion.

As if it came at the expense of all things non-combat related.

Ellen is stronger than she was in Serandia.

However, for those watching Ellen, it was incredibly disconcerting.

Somehow.

As if every movement and action has no soul.

It was inevitable that everyone would feel that way.

\* \* \*

Despite the cities being more dangerous, the Alliance suffered less damage when Wallen fell than it did in Serandia.

We all know that was the power of the revamped Titan.

And another thing.

A force that was too powerful to let go unseen.

The vanguard, where everyone wears an armored helmet with a faceplate covering their face.

And in the rear, a huge group of archmages, all dressed in black robes.

I know that because of them, Wallan fell faster and easier than Serandia did.

Who they are.

They would appear out of nowhere to assist in combat, then vanish with a massive spatial shift.

After the capture of Walloon, the Allies were forced to stay in place for a while to clean up the aftermath of the battle after establishing a garrison on the outskirts.

Allied Command Barracks.

"......Completes damage report."

We talked about all of the damage that was done and how they're dealing with it.

"As soon as we finish healing the wounded, we'll advance to the next objective. We've taken less damage than expected, so we'll be ready to move out quickly."

Emperors don't talk about what needs to be talked about.

Everyone knew that the vanguard the Empire had been hiding was the army that showed up today.

There were tons of master classes and archmages.

No nation in history has ever had that level of power. Archmages and wizards aren't called the most powerful people in the world for nothing.

In all of humanity, there are fewer than a hundred to two hundred masterminds and master classes in any given era. There may be some whose names are unknown, but there are not many such recluses.

That's ten times the standard for that era.

The emperor was unwilling to offer any explanation.

But for those sitting in the command center, the emperor's silence is understandably unsettling.

The crusader leader said that the emperor was trying to take the blame for everything on his own, so he shouldn't ask for an explanation and just go along with it.

The buck stops with the emperor.

But when the army finally showed up, they were terrified.

Is this a problem I can be responsible for?

With an army that powerful, is there really anything wrong with it?

What if you're really in the hands of the devil?

If it's an army of demons you've just encountered.

How the heck is the emperor going to be responsible for that?

"Your Majesty....... Have you really taken the hand of the devil?"

Finally, someone unable to overcome their insecurities mustered up the courage to speak up.

The Emperor stood still, looking at the man who spoke the words.

"No way."

The emperor bluntly denies the reasoning.

"I guess we can't hide it anymore."

Emperor Bertus shakes his head slowly, and finally gives a faint smile.

"I've gotten my hands on some black magic that can raise the dead stronger than they were in life."

Everyone's eyes widened at the bombshell.

The other two have different expressions.

Crusader Knightmaster Rowen gave a faint smile.

Louise von Schwarz bit her lip, as if anticipating what was to come.

"An army of immortals who are stronger than they were in life and, having died once, can reenter the fray with a bit of regeneration."

"It took a lot of ingredients for that."

"Heroes, warriors, knights, and wizards of the once-great human race. All who have fallen asleep amidst our praise and adoration have risen to fight for humanity."

"And we're bringing back many of the victims who have been dead since the Gate and rearming them once again."

"You may have thought that those who died as heroes were given a proper burial. No, not at all."

"I was stealing their bodies, resurrecting them as the undead, and reintroducing them into this war."

"I'm calling that army the Immortals."

"This is the truth you've been dying to know."

"Joining hands with the devil."

"How can I hold the hand of the devil, the enemy of mankind?"

The emperor laughs.

"There is no such thing as unscrupulousness."

It was, indeed, a terrible laugh.

"So, don't get yourself killed."

The Emperor speaks in a frosty tone.

"Unless you want to be an immortal."

Everyone could only freeze in front of such an emperor's smile.

"And......."

Once again, the Emperor smiles a meaningful smile.

"Is it not among you, and not I, who have taken the hand of the devil?"

The emperor has thrown a bomb.

Not one, but two.

\* \* \*

Is it bad to play into the hands of the devil, or is it bad to bring a dead comrade back to life and send them into battle?

First of all, no one can deny that both are bad.

The emperor's sudden revelation of the secret sent the commanders of the armies into a panic.

And the emperor didn't just tell one secret.

There are those in the Alliance who are in league with the Devil.

With a flip of his palm, the emperor spoke two truths that would shock everyone, as if to say, when was the last time he kept such a secret?

An army of undead called Immortals.

The existence of those who betrayed humanity.

That's all we have to think about now.

Who betrayed humanity? Who sided with the devil?

Accidents happen that would not happen if the truth were revealed one by one.

Empires and emperors have turned to black magic to end wars.

There is a level of black magic that is acceptable to the world, but black magic involving the undead is naturally forbidden.

And the details aren't just about raising the undead.

It is an insult to the bodies and souls of those who died honorably.

The rationale of closing the gate will protect the emperor for now.

But just because you can justify something now doesn't mean you can justify it later.

The Empire had touched a power it shouldn't have.

First for insulting the deaths of some of the greatest heroes in human history.

Someone's comrade-in-arms, someone's family member, brought back to life and used as undead.

Even if they can't be held accountable now, one day the Empire will have to pay the price for tapping into forbidden powers.

It's as if the powers that be of humanity, upon learning of this, had an excuse to bring down the empire at any time after humanity was rebuilt.

After everything is better, after humanity has been rebuilt.

If there's an excuse to unseat the continent's top dog at any time, there's bound to be someone who wants to use it.

Thus, the empire had already been given a death sentence the moment it touched that power.

Normally, in this situation, if there were a group of people who chose to betray humanity and side with the devil, the maces of wrath would light up their eyes and seek them out.

But things are different now.

The emperor has gone mad.

The Empire may be able to maintain its existence by force for now, but it will soon be shunned by all.

There is also talk within the Alliance that the genocide of civilians at the hands of the Imperium in the Ecliptic has already turned many against the Empire.

If there are those on the Devil's side, there are those in league with him.

Soon.

The connection between the demon and the humans suggests the possibility that the demon is willing to use the humans and may even keep them alive.

Demons are an alternative.

The fall of the empire is certain.

In the meantime, someone has bet on the Devil's victory, and the Devil wants to take advantage of them.

Choosing to play the devil's advocate can be one way to survive.

Immortal's identity.

And the traitors to humanity.

By throwing the two truths together, Bertus wreaked havoc in people's minds.

Where did the devil start and where did he end?

An empire that wields great power, but has done things that can never be forgiven.

Or is he the cause of all of this, a demon who might devour humanity.

They're all horribly unpleasant.

However, if you don't pick a winner, you may have to face another destruction after narrowly surviving one.

It's time to make a choice.

And.

"Ohora......."

Crusader Knight Commander Lowen smiled faintly as he received the internal report on the current state of the Zodiacal Gradient.

"Looks like something pretty interesting is happening......."

In front of Rowen's eyes was a half-torn piece of paper.

A piece of roughly scrawled wallpaper.

"This is what you mean by sticking to the distance of the ecliptic?"

"Yes, sir."

There's a rumor floating around the ecliptic.

[The Emperor caused the Gate debacle].

The ridiculous rumor that the Gate debacle was caused by the Emperor.

Those rumors are slowing down.

But definitely.

It was spreading.

Episode 637.

Two days after the fall of Walloon.

"At this rate, we'll have the entire population restored in five days."

The underground laboratories of the Temple College of Magic.

Christina nodded slowly as she watched the Immortal slowly repair its damaged body in the port.

What's scary about Immortals is not the force, but this self-repair.

It's like a golem, a machine that can be repaired and restarted.

That's why the real power of Immortals comes from resurrection.

It's an army that won't die.

The only living member of that army.

Ludwig.

Naturally, at the Battle of Walloon, Ludwig participated as a member of the Immortals, wearing a helmet and faceplate.

While all of them possessed extraordinary power, Ludwig was unique among them.

To resist black magic, he had to undergo more powerful black magic and chimeric procedures, which made him more powerful than other Immortals.

Stronger than other Immortals, at the cost of enduring the unbearable.

The Allies had fought only one battle since the Battle of Serandia, but Ludwig, moving with Immortal, had little time to rest.

As long as he was fighting alongside tireless dead soldiers, Ludwig would be forced to fight more battles.

He still has the occasional rejection seizure, but he's been in pretty good shape since the Battle of Wall Run.

"Wook......."

Ludwig gulped down the dark liquid and covered his mouth.

"Oof! Oof!"

After a moment of gagging, Ludwig gulped down the liquid and let out a deep sigh.

Even Ludwig, whose only organ was his stamina, was bleary-eyed from so many hard fought battles.

Beside him, Louis Ankton and Anna were checking on Ludwig.

What Ludwig was drinking now was an alchemical potion to ease the rejection.

"It's definitely working, but I hate to say it....... Why does this taste so bad......?"

Ludwig covered his mouth to keep from gagging and caught his breath.

Ludwig wasn't having a rejection attack now, he was nauseated by the horrible taste.

"I don't know if it's just the writing, but something smells foul....... It tastes like it's rotting my tongue......."

Ludwig, who had endured pain that would have killed a normal person, shuddered as if the taste of the tranquilizer was too much to bear.

Christina shrugged at Ludwig, who looked even more disheveled by the horrible taste of the stabilizer.

"It doesn't actually have to taste that disgusting."

"......?"

"I did that on purpose."

"Huh?"

Ludwig's words brought a look of horror to his face, as well as to Louis and Anna, who were checking on him.

I made it taste disgusting on purpose.

"If it's good enough to eat, you'll keep coming back for it. I purposely made it so you only drink it when you really need it."

"Is this ...... bad for you?"

"It can't be good."

While the stabilizer is keeping Ludwig's body from disintegrating and rejecting it, it's a very dangerous thing in and of itself.

"It's fine for now, but it won't do you any good to drink it often."

Ludwig nodded, dumbfounded, at the suggestion that he had made it taste disgusting on purpose.

"By the way....... People have been seeing immortals in this battle. Is that okay?"

Louis Ankton said it cautiously.

Up until this point, the Immortals had operated in secret, but in this battle, they were visible to all Allied forces.

We all knew that the atmosphere was shifting in real time.

"It must be complicated, and it's none of our business."

As she says, politics is for those who play politics.

"If people knew who Immortal was, things would get really....... complicated."

"It's good to be complicated."

Christina says, looking off into the distance at the ports that are being replayed.

"When things get complicated, they come out of hiding."

"......ah."

"If you go into hiding after this is all over, you'll never find them, and they'll come back to haunt you, one by one."

She's not interested in politics, and she doesn't care how things roll.

But where there's chaos, there's opportunity.

When opportunity arises, there will be those who want to seize it.

Those who have been hiding and have not been able to be found until now will be among them.

That's all you need to know.

You don't need to know much more than that.

Disruptors.

Those who capitalize on chaos.

"We just have to wait for that."

And in the midst of the chaos, waiting for everyone to come together.

In our minds, the Gate saga is coming to an end.

"Let's get back to work."

There is no need for them to reside in this already automated facility.

At the end of the day, we all have one goal.

We're all in this together.

\* \* \*

There are those in league with the devil.

The Allies continued to move toward their next destination, but at the same time they were resting and fighting a fierce battle of nerves.

"How can such a thing be," he said, "and the wicked band of traitors to humanity must be found and brought to justice as quickly as possible."

There are those who argue otherwise.

"This latest weapon of the Hana Empire is too dangerous. Of course, those in league with the Demon King are a matter of grave concern, but it is also clear that supporting the Empire's course is a very dangerous thing to do."

There are those who hate both.

"......."

Some people say nothing at all, holding back what they want to say.

A seat without an emperor.

Louise von Schwarz watched as the powerful men gathered in the barracks of the Cernstadt military headquarters talked about it.

The powers that be wanted to find some sort of center of gravity in this chaotic situation.

They could not gather under the Emperor, whose power was too dangerous, so instead they gathered before Louise.

I have noise canceling turned on, so the story won't leak out of the barracks.

But the emperor said something he shouldn't have said in front of so many people.

Too many ears have heard the story, too many mouths have spoken.

Hence the story that the Allies have a demonic informant.

The story that the army that appeared at the Battle of Walloon was actually an army made up of the bodies of war heroes would soon spread throughout the Union.

Secrecy is only temporary.

The world learns of the madness of the Empire and the many traitors to humanity.

And Louise is one of those traitors.

Louise is torn between wanting to be on guard, wanting to slaughter the demon's inner circle in a fit of rage, and wanting to watch the situation without saying a word.

Not all of them are needed anyway.

"What do you think, Commander?"

There are many other military commanders here, but Ruiz is the only one who can be called a commander. She has the largest army.

Everyone looks at Louise von Schwarz.

The factor of the current coalition.

Her words must carry considerable weight. Perhaps that's why they came to her, not the emperor.

Surprised by the sudden downpour, they huddle for shade.

They know that the shade that has protected them so far, the Empire, is rotting and about to collapse, so they huddle together in the shade of the only thing still standing, the Cernstadt.

The devil, the emperor, the empire.

What the heck.

I'm not sure yet, because I have to kill the traitors to humanity.

Louise closes her eyes at the attention on her.

"Hmmm......."

The Emperor rolled the dice.

"I am......."

It was a signal.

A sign that it's time for her to roll the dice.

"I support the devil."

Or should I say, cold water.

Or should I say, frozen.

Despite the fact that Louise was sitting there looking like she was about to be turned to stone.

Well, it was fun.

\* \* \*

What people were waiting to hear from Louise was an analysis or prediction of the current state of affairs and where humanity is headed next.

I was waiting for someone to show me the way.

Does the empire have a future.

What to do about the devil's insiders.

Whether to act now or not.

I was hoping for a story like that.

I was hoping for some kind of insight or prediction.

Naturally, there was no situation in their minds in which the commander of Cernstadt would say that he supported the devil.

No one else predicted that she would be an insider, and certainly no one else.

"What the hell......?"

Many people froze, unable to say anything for a while, and when they finally did, it was all they had to say.

"That shouldn't be too hard, I'm the devil's insider."

The next bombshell was an even bigger one, and people's complexions were turning a dusty color.

I support it, but more than that, I'm the one who gets it.

No one else.

The commander of the second largest army outside of the Empire has openly declared his support for the Demon King.

There was no one in the room who could jump out of his seat, drag out the traitor to humanity, and tell him to hang himself.

There's only one thought on everyone's mind.

Since when?

Was Cernstadt, not another country, in league with the devil?

Why didn't anyone realize that until now?

Those who had been shouting at the top of their lungs that the devil's inner circle should be exterminated would rather bite their tongues and die here and now.

Their faces turn from anger to horror.

He was shouting at the top of his lungs that the devil's informants must be killed.

"Do you think I'm the only one calling?"

While you were unaware, the great nation of Cernstadt had already fallen into the hands of the Devil.

You think it's just Cernstadt.

Do you have any idea how many forces have already fallen into the devil's clutches without your knowledge?

Louise puts another thought into their confused heads.

What if you have a lot of devil's advocates?

Do you need to be on their side to survive?

Louise doesn't tell the whole story.

The Crusader Knights and the Order of the Lord have sided with the Devil, and the Grand Duke of Saint-Tuan has sided with the Devil.

It doesn't tell you everything.

There's no need for that at all.

"I want you to think about why I said this, where that confidence comes from, and why I chose to support the devil."

If you feed your internalized fears with your own imagination, you're bound to create delusions of grandeur.

Fear is an arbitrary size.

"Those who will, stay."

"Those who are not, go home."

"But I don't know if the door to my barracks will be open next time."

Just as the name of a demon once created more notoriety than the actual demon's power.

This time, the fear within them will bring them to their knees on their own.

"You have 10 minutes."

Only 10 minutes.

It was too short a time to decide the fate of the world.

But tight deadlines create anxiety, and the idea of no next time is hardwired into our brains.

Telling me there's no next time is more like coercion.

At the end of those nerve-wracking ten minutes, there were no empty seats in the barracks.

Obviously, someone left.

However, there were many more spots that went unoccupied.

"......."

In the end, even with all the anger and hatred, does it crumble in the face of the absolute desire to survive?

Louise was never satisfied with the sight before her.

Episode 638.

"Your Highness, the Titan's maintenance is complete."

"Great, thanks."

The Archduke was reading a book in his research barracks as Adelia briefed him.

"Your Majesty, further maintenance or upgrades to the Titan are unlikely to be possible at this time, and we expect to reach our next battle destination sooner rather than later."

"Sure, just keep the existing equipment and don't think about retrofitting."

"Is it safe to say that Titan is complete as it is?"

"I suppose."

As it stands, the Titans are only scheduled to fight in two battles going forward.

"For the next two times, that's all the Titan will be used. After that, it's better not to use Titan."

"I see."

Adelia nodded at the Archduke's words.

I'd rather not have a huge weapon of war like that.

Once the gate event is over, it can be used to deal with the remaining monsters, but should not be used for anything else.

So there was no need to improve Titan beyond this level.

This means that neither Adelia nor the Grand Duke will have to spend time hanging on to the Titan, but will always have to keep the Titan in its current state.

It means you've finally broken out of your shell.

Adelia looks at the Archduke in his chair.

Perhaps because he no longer had to work on Titan, the Archduke was reading a book, not a research paper.

I rarely talk to the Archduke about anything outside of work.

So when I saw that the Archduke was reading a book unrelated to Titan, I couldn't help but be curious.

"Do you happen to be....... May I ask what you're reading?"

I knew it was a grimoire because of the complexity and diagrammatic zines.

"It's a family vision."

"What? Oh, I'm sorry. ...... That wasn't my intention."

How dare you stare at the Saint-Tuan family's arcane tome while reading it.

I knew how important the vision statement was, so I couldn't help but blush at the presumptuousness of the question.

The Archduke smiled faintly at the despondent Adelia.

"...... I misspoke, I'm sorry. I meant that there's nothing here that you'll find interesting. It's something you already know."

The Archduke flipped the book open to reveal the title.

[horsepowerautomation-27]

"......?"

Horsepower Automatic.

Of course she knows what it is.

"Is this a book about golems?"

"Technically, it's a book about any device that uses horsepower to move. Golems are one of those things, so I guess you can't say no."

It has a magic train, it has a warp gate, it has golems.

Adelia's talent, Magiccrafting, specializes in that.

It's a very comprehensive discipline, but that probably means that there are at least 27 volumes of those ridiculously thick books.

And by the time Adelia made the Titan, she had understood and learned almost everything there is to know about golems. Much of it was passed down from House Saint-Thuan, so it was as if she had read it all, if not more.

That's why the Archduke said it wouldn't interest you because you already know it.

But Adelia is impressed with something else.

House Saint-Thuan keeps its distance from justice and the dark arts, but that doesn't mean it doesn't have an interest in all areas of magic outside of those unholy forces.

The scale of the Saint-Thuan family's vision over the years.

The book on horsepower devices alone is that thick, with more than 27 volumes, and I wonder how many other visions there are.

The weight of that time felt overwhelming to Adelia.

Without that accumulated knowledge, the Titans could not have been created, Adelia couldn't help but think.

But it was weird.

The Archduke said that there was no need to modify the Titan now.

But you're having a family vision involving a golem. I'm pretty sure I remember everything.

The Archduke shook his head, as if he knew what Adelia was questioning.

"It has nothing to do with Titans. That's not what this book is about."

"Oh....... I see."

"To be precise, there is documented research on neural networks for remote control in horsepower devices."

"The master or....... system in the master orb?"

"It's one of them."

The Archduke and Adelia use an orb called the Master Orb to power up and control the Titan.

Remote-controlled neural networks.

Adelia didn't know why the Archduke was looking at it now.

Naturally, the Archduke can't explain why he's watching this.

I can't tell you that I'm thinking about how to disable immortals because the devil wants me to.

Even the Archduke does not know the magic of Immortals.

So we don't know how to disable it.

We can only imagine.

For now, I was working through the strands.

"Have you ever been to Arnaka?"

Arnaka, capital of the Duchy of Saint Thuan.

Home of the Archduke and home of Heriot.

At that question, Adelia shook her head.

"Sorry. I haven't seen any......."

The Archduke laughed at Adelia's comment.

"There's nothing to be sorry about, it's just the way it is. Let's go when the war is over."

Adelia thought the Archduke was a little strange these days.

He is always solemn and solemn, but at the same time, he is also kind and gentle.

But lately, something.

I find myself smiling a lot.

Is it because the end of the war is near?

If only I could have seen the dignity and poise, the unflinching pride.

Plus, he now looks like a man who is determined to do something.

In the end, it looks like the Archduke is brighter than before.

Adelia doesn't know the full story.

"Anyway, we don't use any guards in Arnaria. We have very few vassals."

"Oh....... I hear you've replaced it with an automated golem."

"Yeah."

It's not exactly a secret, so of course Adelia knew about it.

The capital of Arnaka, the White Palace of Arnaria, is guarded by automated golems.

It's natural for those in positions of power to value protecting what's theirs.

Once the human variables have been controlled, Arnaria is a perfect fit.

It's a very safe place, but it's also a very lonely place, Adelia remembered hearing that once.

"It has visions of how to automate those golems and build some sort of neural network to control them remotely."

"Oh, I see."

The biggest golem in the Alliance right now is the Titan.

But of course, Titans aren't the only ones with golem power.

Steel golems of iron dart across the battlefield in short bursts of teleportation and blink magic.

Before the Titans were deployed, and even after they were deployed, Golem power was still a great addition.

Right now, the Archduke is looking at a book that tells him how to build an army of golems.

How to automate your golem.

How to steer.

How to connect that army with a magical neural network so it can be manipulated from a distance.

It reads.

So it's already here, it's already working.

It would not be the first time the Archduke had seen the book, as he had already applied his family's vision.

In other words, the Archduke is reviewing now.

Adelia wants to help the Archduke if she can.

"Did you find anything that needs to be addressed?"

Magiccrafting is also one of Adelia's talents. So if the Archduke was stuck, she wanted to do more than just work on the Titan now that she was done with it.

Whatever it is.

If I can help, I want to help.

"No, not really."

The Archduke, however, looks at Adelia as if to say otherwise.

Is the Archduke double-checking what he already knows because he has nothing better to do?

In Adelia's eyes, the Archduke seemed to be thinking about something.

"It just made me want to think about that possibility."

"What is the likelihood that......?"

"The idea that the lack of guards in Arnaria might be a vulnerability."

"What do you mean vulnerability......?"

"Adelia, suppose you could interfere with the neural network that controls the golems of Arnaria."

"Yes......?"

"Then, Adelia, you can control the golems of Arnaria even though you are outside of Arnaria, so in effect, you can open and close all the doors of Arnaria."

Seize control of the golems.

"If such a thing were possible, would not the safety of the palace of Arnaria depend on a single wizard?"

"I haven't thought about that, but if I did....... would be dangerous."

Arnaria's golems are networked together.

If you take away that network, you take away the whole golem.

"I was wondering if it was possible to do something like that. I was wondering if it's just something that no one has tried yet....... I was thinking about that."

Arnaria is just an example.

The Archduke was talking about something else entirely.

But Adelia, who has no way of knowing, is worried.

You already have a network of golems configured.

To intercept it and wrest control from the golems.

Is that even possible?

"I'm not sure, but the fact that no one else has tried that....... I'm pretty sure."

"In the past, Dispel and similar means were used to neutralize golems. But as I said, that was in the past. There's no reason to build a golem that can't resist dispel."

We make golems because we have a way to deal with dispel. Methods of resisting magical interference are also part of the golem technology.

But not by disabling it, but by interfering with the golem's control neural network altogether.

The direction is different.

The Archduke is thinking of magic that has never been done before.

If there is such a thing as magic, it's a dangerous thing.

It's not just about Arnaria, it's about the golems that the Archduke is running now, and even the Titans could be intercepted by someone.

What hasn't been thought of hasn't been studied.

This raises the possibility that it might be surprisingly easy to do.

Adelia wondered if the Archduke was thinking this to bolster Arnaria's defenses.

In any case, the Archduke's worries may be futile, but they are worries nonetheless.

If I can help, I want to help.

"Then I'll take a look at......."

-Electric charge.

Adelia was about to say something when a voice called out to the Archduke from outside the lab barracks.

"What's going on?"

One of the wizards who entered the barracks pointed outside with a stern expression.

"There's something you need to check out."

It was more of a puzzled look than an urgent one.

\* \* \*

The sons of the Grand Duke were also there.

"Father, you have come."

"What's going on?"

The attitude was that they didn't understand.

"It's a golem."

"Yes."

A golem fell in front of the assembled mages.

Medium Iron Golem. It has only one inherent magic, Blink, a short-range teleportation spell.

However, the explosive physicality unleashed by the behemoth sweeps across the battlefield.

These days, it's a super-heated, breath-breathing monster, but it's always been one of the Archduke's countless golems, a stalwart on the battlefield.

Like Titans, Golems can be salvaged and repaired and put back into service if their internal core systems are intact.

As such, the Archduke's golem army is not reduced in numbers by much.

"As you can see, it's still intact on the outside, but I can't get it to restart at all. I've been trying to retrieve it since the last battle, when it was abandoned without its summoning spell triggered."

"I see."

There was almost no external damage. No, it had barely seen combat.

So, we find a healthy golem abandoned on the battlefield, immobilized, and we retrieve it.

But no matter how many times he tried to bring them back to the camp, he couldn't, so he called in the archduke.

At his first son's words, the Grand Duke examines the golem.

But even the Archduke narrows his eyes.

"All the internal horsepower circuits are destroyed. No, not destroyed. Every part is intact."

The Archduke could see why the other mages had called him.

"Only the enchantments that were planted have 'evaporated', is this possible?"

If it's a total loss, that's understandable. However, there is no external damage, and the internal components, magic stones, and devices are still intact.

Only the enchantments were cleanly removed.

So now the Archduke was looking at a golem that had been destroyed in the strangest way in the world.

"Looks like a powerful dispel spell hit......."

The Archduke just said that there's no way his golem would be subject to a Dispel-type neutralization spell.

Obviously, monsters don't use dispel. And even if they did, there's no way the Archduke's golem would be immune to such a disabling spell.

Do monsters use magic now?

A dispel powerful enough to neutralize an Archduke's golem?

So what about Titans?

What if it wasn't a golem, but a Titan, that fell victim to this mysterious method?

If that had happened, every wizard in the world might have despaired.

"I....... Do you mind if I take a look?"

While the Archduke was still frozen, Adelia spoke softly.

The Archduke, as well as the other wizards, are on their way, and Adelia begins to inspect the golem.

Like the Archduke's horse, it was an oddly neat mess.

All the vital parts are intact, all the magic stones are intact.

However, the golem's magic circuitry to function as a golem has been destroyed.

No, it's not destruction. If it was, there would be no trace of it among the destroyed circuits.

It's gone, as cleanly as if someone had just ripped out the entire horsepower circuit.

Is it possible to neutralize such a sophisticated and precise dispel, especially against a golem that already has a countermeasure for dispels?

It's a ridiculous idea, both for the Archduke and his wizards.

Of the recovered golems, the most intact ones were the most damaged.

Everyone is freaking out because they think the monsters might be using powerful dispel magic.

"Ah....... I think I know what's going on......."

However, Adelia was the only one who knew what was going on.

\* \* \*

After reassuring the Archduke that if he was right, it was nothing to worry about. Adelia headed off somewhere.

It was a Temple garrison, a Royal Class garrison.

Adelia has no choice but to know who the culprit is.

"Send the golem to......? Me?"

"Yes. Do you remember?"

It was Scarlett, the red-haired girl.

Episode 639.

Adelia turned to Scarlet and asked. Did you ever neutralize a golem at the Battle of Wallen?

Because you're in the middle of a battle, you don't know everything that's going on around you.

However, Scarlet occasionally uses her powers to terrorize soldiers or to neutralize magical-like powers used by monsters.

As such, Scarlett's superpowers are more of a secondary ability than something that actually helps her in combat.

In Adelia's mind, it was entirely possible for the Archduke's golem to appear somewhere on the battlefield, only to be destroyed by Scarlet's neutralizing waves.

\* \* \*

Adelia went out to fetch someone and returned a few moments later with a red-haired girl by her side.

She was a very unique and beautiful girl with fiery red hair and eyes.

But now the red-haired girl hung her head.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

The Archduke and the other wizards were dumbfounded.

"Sorry....... We made a mistake, we'll be more careful next time!"

We could only stare in disbelief as Scarlett repeatedly apologized, her body shaking like an aspen tree.

Scarlet is one of the lesser known of the Temple's psychics.

It's easy for psychics who excel at large-scale destruction to make a name for themselves on this battlefield, but Scarlett's powers aren't particularly effective at destruction.

Obviously, it's a very unusual ability. That's why we've been testing Scarlett's ability to disable the Gate within the Royal Class itself.

It didn't work, but Scarlett was clearly capable of more than just magic or superpowers.

"Adelia, what are you talking about?"

"That's....... That's my friend Scarlett....... She's a psychic, and her powers are pretty unique."

"What kind of superpower?"

"It's an ability where all the magic and superpowers don't work."

"......?"

It's a very unusual ability, but your opponent is a monster.

Since magic is never her main focus, Scarlett's abilities don't get much attention.

And those who know Scarlett at all know that magic and superpowers don't work on her.

"Disable......."

The Archduke stared at Scarlett, who apologized profusely.

Superpowers are supposed to be alien and bizarre, but a superpower about neutralization is a very strange one.

"I think you can rest assured that the monsters didn't use dispel."

Adelia has brought Scarlett to calm the agitated Archduke. Not to worry, the monsters haven't neutralized the golem.

But Adelia couldn't help but read something strange in the Archduke's expression.

He looked like he'd just found a completely unexpected answer in a completely unexpected place.

"We're sorry, it won't happen again!"

"It's okay. One golem isn't that much damage to the power at this point, and golems aren't people. Even if it is damaged, it doesn't mean you've done much damage to anyone."

"Well, still....... But......."

"You said it was fine."

The Archduke gently patted Scarlett on the shoulder, assuring her that she was fine.

Of course, the Archduke's reassuring pat on the back was killing Scarlett's expression in real time.

"But we need to make sure we know what happened first."

-Bam!

The Archduke snaps his fingers.

Then a golem was summoned from thin air.

The Archduke looks at Scarlett and says, "I'm sorry.

"Can you neutralize it?"

"Yes....... Yes?"

Scarlett, the other mages, and Adelia were taken aback by the sudden proposal.

"We need to know how strong you are, so we know what to look out for when we operate our golems in the future."

"Oh....... Well, is it......."

As if the Archduke's words made sense, Scarlett nodded and moved closer to the golem he had summoned.

Scarlett cautiously approaches the golem and places her hand on its hull.

It didn't take long either.

-Thump!

The golem's power source, a stone of steel, lost its glow, and it stopped moving.

It's not destroyed or shattered.

The golem literally stood still and stopped maneuvering.

-Bam!

The Archduke snaps his fingers.

We sent a few signals to the golem, but ultimately got no response.

"Let me check."

Adelia approaches the immobilized golem and begins checking it out.

"Exactly the same."

"Well, it's me after all......."

A golem with dispel countermeasures was stopped by a simple touch.

For the wizards, it was a sight to behold, and one that made no sense.

"Do I have to touch it to stop it?"

But the Archduke asks for something else entirely.

"What? Oh, no....... I don't think that's necessary."

The Archduke listens to Scarlett's story with a serious expression on his face.

At this point, the Archduke's first son, who had been silent, cautiously interjected.

"I....... But if he misuses his powers....... Titan could be neutralized?"

That sent a chill down my spine.

This is Archduke Serious.

Not only are Titan parts stored here, but also the Archduke's golems.

This means that if Scarlett misuses her power even once, the Archduke's power will be neutralized once and for all.

Like this now-neutralized golem, the Titan could become one.

An overwhelming dispel ability that indiscriminately erases all magical power that touches its wavelength.

Scarlett's superpowers are now of the grotesque variety.

Scarlett's face fell and she began to tremble, as if she had heard something unimaginable.

Of course, this is only possible if Scarlett decides to do so.

The Archduke's wizards, as well as Adelia, begin to realize what they've brought into the garrison.

"Pfft, I'll be gone in a flash!"

Adelia watched in disbelief as Scarlett turned and sprinted away from the Archduke's garrison.

"Come to think of it, that was a really big deal....... I'm sorry......."

Of course, there's no way Scarlett would do that, and there's no Titan nearby, but it was definitely a risky move to bring her here.

Scarlet's powers were not monstrous in that sense, but rather more dangerous to her allies.

"I can't believe Scarlett's powers have already reached that level......."

I even saw one of the golems neutralized right in front of my eyes.

No matter how powerful the magic, no matter how powerful the magic.

Scarlett can remove the spell if she wants to.

It wasn't until she saw it with her own eyes that she realized how powerful and dangerous it was.

\* \* \*

"Hmph, hmph....... ......."

Scarlet sprinted through the garrison, making it back to the Royal Class garrison in one fell swoop.

Scarlett doesn't rely on her superpowers much. They rarely help her in battle in the first place.

However, he did occasionally use his powers in battle to save allies whose minds had been overpowered by monsters.

However, the Archduke's golem, caught up in the force, was overwhelmed.

Scarlett was both amazed and baffled that such a thing was possible. Surely, golems roam the battlefield, and it had never happened before that Scarlett's powers would catch them. There was no need or reason for Scarlett's powers to be activated at all times during battle.

What happened because Golem had bad luck and Scarlet had bad luck, so to speak.

This was caused by terrible timing.

Scarlett was so startled that she broke out in a cold sweat.

You've unwittingly neutralized a golem.

Okay, let's call it an accident.

'I....... But if he misuses his powers....... Titan could be neutralized?'

But Scarlett's mind seemed to go blank as she recalled the last words she'd heard.

Titans are an indispensable force in the Alliance right now.

To think that if she had misused her power, the Titan could have literally turned into a mountain of tin cans, Scarlett could only count herself lucky that it hadn't happened before now.

The Titans had only been deployed twice in combat so far, and the Titans were always moving in the middle of the enemy rather than on the friendly side, so the chances of that happening were slim to none, but the fact that it could happen at all was a huge shock to Scarlett.

If your mistake incapacitates a Titan, your life will not be enough to pay for it.

It was only then that Scarlett realized she had an ability that was far more dangerous to her allies than to her enemies.

A psychic who is actually more dangerous to his allies.

Disabling one golem was enough to cause a lot of trouble.

Unlikely, but just in case.

The mere possibility of having any negative impact on Titan was enough to make Scarlett decide.

"I shouldn't be here.

Realizing the dangers of her abilities, Scarlett's best option is to leave the battlefield as soon as possible.

Before it causes more irreparable damage than it's likely to help.

With the end of the Gate Crisis just around the corner, it's better to keep powers that are dangerous to your allies off the battlefield.

It's not a cowardly decision to survive. You can't do more harm than good.

First, we need to find Mr. Mustang.

Explain the details of the situation and they'll send you back.

With that thought in mind, Scarlett visits the Command Barracks at the Royal Class Garrison.

"What's wrong, why are you breaking out in a cold sweat?"

When Anna saw Scarlett, pale in complexion and sweating all over, she approached her with a serious look on her face.

"Do you want some fatigue pills? Christina gave me some......."

As a master alchemist, Christina had always kept simple fever reducers, painkillers, and fatigue remedies in her barracks as a kind of first aid kit. Anna studied Scarlett's complexion, offering to give her whatever she needed.

When asked if she had any such elixir, Scarlett shook her head.

"Oh, no. Anna, it's nothing like that. I feel fine."

"You're feeling fine......, what else is going on?"

Anna continues to study Scarlett's complexion, sullenly, but with concern.

"Oh....... You know what....... Apparently, I'm not supposed to be here anymore, so I'm going to go to......."

"What does that mean......? Why would you?"

Not knowing who you're talking to or what you're talking about.

"Actually, during the last battle of Wall Run......."

Scarlett begins to say things she shouldn't, to people who shouldn't hear.

Unknowingly disabling a golem.

You've just been summoned to the Archduke's garrison to see that you've neutralized a golem, and you've broken one as a test.

I don't think I should be here anymore, because I might break Titan if I get it wrong.

At the end of Scarlett's explanation.

"ouch......."

Anna looked at Scarlett with a meaningful expression and nodded.

"That could be......."

Scarlett recognized the look in Anna's eyes.

"I can see that......."

Along with the Detomorian, there's always the sullen Annada. So you can't help but feel an inexplicable sense of reluctance when you talk to him.

Anna De Guerna.

A girl with a talent for black magic grabs Scarlett's shoulder.

"Scarlett......."

"What?"

"Don't tell anyone about this."

"What......? Don't do it?"

"Don't, especially......."

Anna looks around, as if biting her lip.

It was a dangerous picture, one that made it look like Anna was trying to hypnotize Scarlett.

"Don't ever do that to Christina."

"What? Anna, I don't know what you're talking about, but I'm a......."

Scarlett couldn't help but be baffled by Anna's out-of-nowhere story.

When Scarlett asks what's wrong, Anna gets in her face.

Scarlett couldn't help but swallow involuntarily as those deep black eyes, dark as the abyss, drew closer.

Somehow, it's intimidating.

"If you don't do it, don't do it."

Scarlett felt like she was going to break under the pressure.

Don't just say it out loud without explaining why.

But in the look in Anna's eyes, Scarlett could see the horror in the abyss.

"What are you two doing?"

Then, from behind him, he heard a voice.

Anna paled at the sound of that familiar voice.

Turning around, I see Christina approaching, wearing a colorful apron that looks like she's been tinkering with alchemical reagents.

"What, what are you talking about that's so secret?"

Christina flashed a deliberately wicked grin and elbowed Anna in the side.

"Oh, no, it's not that....... It's just that Scarlett doesn't look well......."

"Huh? Scarlett's not feeling well, huh? Why are you sweating like this?"

Scarlett has no idea what's going on. Christina walks over to Scarlett and touches her forehead, which is wet with a cold sweat.

What the hell does she have to do with what you just learned?

When she asked if he was sick, if she should give him medicine or call a priest, her touch showed nothing but concern for her friend.

But Anna is shaking.

I can't figure out why.

"Anna, what's wrong with you, you look more sick?"

Unsurprisingly, Christina was noticing Anna's mood even more strangely.

Christina glares at Anna.

There seemed to be nothing wrong with her nonchalant behavior and demeanor.

It's better to look weird than not.

Scarlett couldn't figure out why this was happening.

"No....... It's just, he's got a cold......."

"A summer cold that even dogs don't catch, because they sleep under a proper blanket?"

"Ugh....... It should be......."

"Wait, I've got a tonic, I'll give you both one."

Christina often walks toward her barracks on foot.

What's wrong with her bringing a tonic to her friend because she looks sick?

"Anna......? What's wrong with you......?"

"Go back."

Without explanation, Anna squeezes Scarlett's hand.

"Go, go, go. Don't tell anyone what just happened. Don't tell anyone, don't tell anyone. Go, go."

Scarlett didn't need Anna to tell her, she was going to.

"You, you shouldn't be here."

I don't know why she's doing this.

Scarlett couldn't figure out why, and Anna wouldn't tell her anything more.

Episode 640.

Anna tells him to turn back without saying anything, but no one turns back for no reason on the battlefield.

Unless you're like Ludwig, who was irreparably injured, you can't get permission. If you are forced to leave, you are of course guilty of desertion.

Anna just told Scarlett that she shouldn't be here without really explaining why.

The good news is that Scarlett knows that Anna is not a bad person at heart, no matter how sullen and dark she may be.

Anna wouldn't have said that for no reason.

That's why, Scarlett told her teacher, Mr. Mustang, who is now the military officer in charge.

It's so hard, so painful, and I just want to quit everything.

Send it to the template.

I'm a bomb that only goes off on the friendly side, and if I stay on the battlefield I'm going to cause an accident.

Scarlett didn't mention any of that in the end.

Why Anna does it.

There's a reason she told me never to tell Christina.

There must be a reason for that desperate look in Anna's eyes.

Ms. Mustang was understandably puzzled.

She was surprised when Scarlett, who had been doing her job without complaint, suddenly said she was tired and asked to be let go.

It was literally a no-brainer.

In an army at war, a soldier begging to be sent home doesn't work, and there are plenty of soldiers who do.

And if they are allowed to go home as they wish, the coalition will be untenable.

Some people want to stay because of the food they eat in the military, but others want to quit because they've seen the horrors of death.

So Scarlett couldn't just go back to asking him to let her go for no reason.

But more importantly, Scarlett is no ordinary student.

As a member of the Temple Royal class, he has accumulated a number of majors far beyond those of the average soldier.

And Mr. Mustang misunderstood Scarlett.

So far, I've been able to keep it together, but it's a lot of work and it's hard.

I didn't express it, but I knew it was hurting, and this is how it would eventually come out.

'Yeah, you've been through a lot, Scarlett. I'll talk to the higher-ups. After what you've done, you can go home and rest, and leave the rest of us to do the rest. Don't feel guilty, you've done enough. You've done enough.

'Teacher.......'

That's why Mr. Mustang comforted Scarlett with those words.

In the arms of Ms. Mustang, who had a good reason but wouldn't say it, and who held her warmly despite her childish pleas to go home, Scarlett couldn't help but break down and cry.

So in the end.

Scarlett was able to return to the ecliptic gradient through a warp spot immediately afterward, with no real explanation as to why.

So I didn't even get to say goodbye to my friends.

Only Anna's words.

Don't say anything and go away.

Because I believed the words meant something.

\* \* \*

Normally, the return of a soldier from the military shouldn't be a big deal.

However, in a royal class with fewer people overall, someone's vacancy tends to come out of nowhere.

So it was inevitable that there would be an uproar over Scarlett's seemingly trouble-free departure without a word or goodbye.

An army on the march pauses for a moment to eat.

"Scarlett's back, suddenly?"

Lanyon Sessor shook his head as he ate his dry bread and listened to Kono Lint tell the story.

"I didn't see him, so I wondered what happened, and he said he went back."

Being casually curious about everything going on around Kono Lintja, I was the first to notice Scarlett's absence.

"What's going on?"

"Well, I don't know, maybe he doesn't talk and it's just piling up in there."

Erich, who has never been on good terms with Scarlett due to past grudges, was not happy.

They've both crossed too many firing lines to discuss the bully they once were. They're both too different people than they used to be.

But old guilt and resentment don't go away.

Erich munches on his biscuit, stony-faced at the news of Scarlett's rear-guard action.

As it was a break in the march, we were eating preserved food in the field without a mess hall, so we were all sitting in a circle.

"I thought you looked sick, but if even the priests can't touch you, something's seriously wrong, and you have to go back to the ecliptic......."

Christina sighed as she remembered the last time she'd seen Scarlett, just yesterday, she'd looked gaunt.

If the condition is beyond the priests' holy powers, it makes sense that Scarlett would return.

Anna remained silent and ate her bread in silence, making no comment or addition.

People, not so much anymore.

At some point, Ludwig and Ellen stopped coming to the table to eat separately.

Heinrich is more often than not traveling with the Cernstadt forces these days.

In Ivia's case, she's the messenger for the command center, so she has the hardest time seeing faces.

As such, the second-year royal class was largely absent.

Louis, Anna, Christina, Adelia, Konor Lindt, Erich, Kaier, Klippmann, and Lanyon Sessor.

There were twenty-two people in Classes A and B combined, and now there were only a handful left.

"Where did he get sick? Did he?"

At Lint's question, Christina nodded.

"It didn't seem serious, so I gave him a tonic, but it didn't work?"

Anna tried to silence Scarlett.

And indeed, Scarlett did as she was told by an incomprehensible Anna.

But alas.

Scarlett only spoke of the Archduke's golem, not who had taken her to the Archduke's camp.

"Hmm? I don't think he went home sick, so I don't think I have to worry about that."

What Anna didn't realize was that the secret would only be kept if she silenced Adelia as well.

Anna's eyes widen at Adelia's sudden words. Anna looks at Adelia with desperation in her eyes.

But you can't say anything with your eyes.

"Not sick, then what is it?"

"Oh, that's actually......."

Anna could only watch, biting her lip, as Adelia opened her mouth.

After Adelia explained everything that had happened, Christina's eyes widened.

The same was true for others.

Scarlett's powers, which were once immune, can neutralize other things.

So, upon further reflection, everyone panicked when they realized that Scarlett could potentially disable the Titan, even by accident.

Abilities that are actually more dangerous to allies.

So when Scarlett said she had to leave in a hurry, we all nodded in disbelief and understanding.

"That's why I joined the march today, to see if Scarlett is really back."

Everyone's happy.

If it wasn't because I was sick, I wouldn't be able to do it.

Louis listened, frozen in place.

But her reaction was a little different.

"Oh....... You did......?"

You feel like you've found something.

Like you've confirmed something.

Adelia has no idea, but she can't help but feel creeped out by the look in Christina's eyes.

Christina smiles meaningfully and turns her attention to Adelia.

On the other end of that gaze was Anna.

"Secretly said something about......."

Anna looked down and trembled. Louis Ancton was watching her, too.

"A secret story? What's that?"

At Adelia's question, Christina smiled.

"No, there is such a thing."

"......."

Adelia felt a strange sense of discomfort at the sight, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it.

\* \* \*

After a while.

Just before the army left, Christina sat on a rock.

Louis was speechless at this point, and Anna stood in front of Christina.

"Christina, I'm....... not......."

"Like that?"

Christina shakes her head.

"Did you intentionally hide something from us that we should know?"

Anna had no answer to Christina's question.

"Did you think I was going to do something bad to Scarlett if I found out about it, and that's why you were so scared?"

Anna flinches at Christina's directness and shudders even harder. Christina rises from the rock and approaches Anna, who has her head down.

In front of Anna's bowed head, Christina bows her head even further, forcing herself to make eye contact with Anna, who is looking down.

"I can't help it that you look at me like I'm crazy, but you do realize that I didn't do all this alone, right?"

Watching Anna's eyes roll back in her head, Christina whispers.

"I don't know if it's weird to do something crazy and go crazy, or to do something crazy and act like you haven't done anything yet, Anna."

Immortals were created together.

We also decided to join forces with the Black Order.

"You're not trying to tell me that you want to stop now, you're not trying to tell me that you want to quit now that you've gotten this far......?"

"......."

"Why do you look like you're trying to pretend you have nothing to do with...... these days?"

"I am....... Christina......."

"Isn't that the worst thing......?"

Anna, who looks like she's about to burst into tears, is pulled away from Christina by Louis, who pulls her toward him.

"Stop it. Even Anna....... idea."

"Why, you think I'm going to do something bad to Scarlett if she finds out about this, too, because she can neutralize the Immortal?"

The mere sight of the anger, malice, and madness in those eyes made Louis' heart race.

"Christina, that's not what I meant."

"......."

"Calm down. We need to, uh, calm down."

Christina gritted her teeth at Louis' earnest, understated words.

As if you're trying to suppress something.

As if you're trying to force something that won't budge, as if you're pressing and pressing and pressing.

After a few moments, Christina blows out a breath like she's gagging.

"......Yes, I guess I was harsh. I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, Christina, I didn't....... I didn't want to get too many people to know......."

But Anna nailed Scarlett, telling her that Christina should never know.

Knowing what she was lying about, Anna's fingertips trembled.

"There's no way I'm going to hurt Scarlett, because that's not possible, and then it doesn't make sense that I'm doing this, because if I do what I set out to do to save Asher, and I hurt Scarlett, and I hurt my friend, I can't do that, and then it's weird, of course."

You might be able to save your friend's life.

Those are the hands I've held and the things I've done.

If you get swallowed up in it and end up hurting your friends, you're negating the whole thing.

When Christina comes to her senses, Anna begins to shake and burst into tears.

"I'm sorry, I was anxious....... I was so, so scared....... I was so anxious......."

Christina cautiously approached Anna and began to comfort her.

"I know, I know, I'm a little off. No, not a little, but a lot. Admit it. Admit it. I'm not going to say I'm sane, either. Of course not. I can't help it that you're so worried, yeah. Yeah."

"黑....... 흐흑....... ugh......."

"I admit it, I was weak. Not strong, like you guys, who can go through all this and still think straight. I was weak....... I was weak, and that's why this happened."

I was weak and I went crazy.

She knows that Louis and Anna are stronger than her, and that's why she can still be so rational.

Weak and broken.

It was weak and drove me crazy.

What was tolerable for someone else was unbearable for him.

The truth that was bearable for others was unacceptable for him.

However, a crazy person is not necessarily irrational.

"But....... You know there are traitors in the Alliance."

"......."

"......."

"The Crusaders already fell months ago, so why not the other side? That's probably too optimistic."

Through Ludwig, they know that the Five Great Orders have been taken over by the Devil.

Now, months later, the devil has probably increased the number of traitors.

Maybe a third.

Maybe half.

Or. everyone but them.

You may have already made enemies.

"We can't be the only ones who know Scarlett has these powers, there's bound to be someone who wants to use her somehow, and the Devil knows about her powers in the first place."

That Scarlet's abilities can be used in that way.

Reinhardt knew about Scarlett's abilities from the start.

But what if you realized that power could be used to disable Immortals the same way it disables golems?

"I'm not trying to hurt Scarlett."

"......."

"We have to protect Scarlett."

The devil will try to take advantage of Scarlett.

So you have to honor it.

"That's why I was angry, not because I hate you."

Anna wipes her tears away and lifts her head to meet Christina's eyes.

I have to protect Scarlett. To tell her I'm sorry that she's upset because I didn't tell her something important.

"My heart....... You know?"

But the look in his eyes said he was worried about his friend.

It was too dark, and I could only see ominous shadows.

Episode 641.

It wasn't long before Scarlett was back on the ecliptic.

With a large warp spot in operation at all times for resupply, Scarlet was able to return to the ecliptic in no time at all, scared to get permission.

It's a huge distance, but a single mass teleport cast by several archmages could bring supplies and people back and forth at any time.

While some had returned to the ecliptic for the winter, this was Scarlet's first time back at the Temple since joining the Alliance.

In fact, those who were able to fight in the temple were rarely back in the temple, as they were almost always on the battlefield.

"Whoa......."

-Hair

After returning and showering, Scarlett collapsed onto her bed in a heap.

Scarlett realized that the end of the gate crisis was not far off.

The sense of urgency grew.

There's always the question of whether she'll make it to the end of it all. Scarlett is stronger than most, but she's also been close to death many times.

As such, there was no certainty that it would survive to the end.

But it all came to an abrupt end.

No one is injured, and the gate debacle is not over.

Because your ability is dangerous to your allies.

So I didn't know if being on the battlefield would be a problem.

"......."

Sprawled out on the bed, Scarlett lay there, dead as a doornail.

It had been done before, but Scarlet knew that the Alliance wouldn't be in much trouble without her.

There are Titans, and there are weird armies that I can't quite put my finger on.

Is this the end of the fight?

There's still a lot of unfinished business, but does fighting unidentified monsters now wrap up a paragraph?

Scarlett knew it would all end somehow, either in death or survival.

But no.

Scarlett was, to put it mildly, frozen, as she hadn't expected her fight to end this way.

It doesn't feel real.

Suddenly, without any real foreshadowing.

You can take a break now.

And the words.

From Anna.

What was that story about never telling Christina?

What it meant.

At first, Anna looked so desperate in her eyes that Scarlett did as she was told, but she couldn't help but feel uncomfortable.

By trusting Anna, you're saying that you didn't trust Christina after all.

If I ever get around to it, I'll ask.

Because it could have been nothing.

Scarlett is lying on her bed when she suddenly realizes something.

The smell of a fluffy comforter is all too familiar.

After being outside for so long, the dorm bed, the blankets, and the view of the room were all so unfamiliar.

The days of begging on the streets seemed like a distant memory.

The war has consumed everything, and everything before it has faded into obscurity.

Everything feels like the distant past, and everything that was once familiar is unfamiliar.

I couldn't live outside of the temple, so I tried to cling to it.

But now Scarlett is free to live outside the Temple.

Even when the war is over, there will still be monsters left on the continent.

Wherever a sword is needed, Scarlett has a use. And everywhere the world needs a sword. Scarlett can now live without the Temple.

Scarlett pushes herself out of bed and stares at this familiar yet unfamiliar landscape.

The second floor of the Temple Royal Class dormitory.

It's summer and the landscape is green.

Can the temple be restarted?

Too many people have died, and too many of them are students.

Scarlett was supposed to be in fifth grade.

But everything stops at second grade.

No dorms, no education, no landscapes.

Everything is frozen and not flowing.

"......."

Will humanity ever regain its original serenity?

Suddenly, Scarlett realized that it was all a bit much.

It would be next to impossible to get the temple up and running again.

However, even if the temple is up and running again.

Friends who are already gone are not coming back, no matter what.

Ashur.

Delphi.

There's no coming back from that.

Even if, miraculously, Temple were to start teaching again, their empty seats would be empty forever.

Even if peace were to return to the world, the countless voids left by such people would never be filled.

Scarlett finally bites her lip and begins to cry a little.

Scarlett buried her face between her knees and cried for a long time, remembering the face of Delphine, who had died in her place.

I wonder if I should live.

Scarlett could somewhat understand Ludwig's feeling of being forced back from the battlefield.

I don't think this is the end of the story.

I think there's something more we can do.

How Ludwig eventually returned to the battlefield with a bandage around his arm, claiming that rear support was all he needed.

I could kind of see where he was coming from.

It's disturbing that we're back here, no matter how good the reason, when others are still risking their lives.

Scarlett, however, is a very different case than Ludwig.

Ludwig is without power, but Scarlett is, and that's a problem.

Ludwig had even more reason to retreat from the battlefield.

Scarlett knows best that she can't help herself.

But just like Ludwig, Scarlett was not one to sag and say, "I don't have to fight anymore.

It's disturbing and uncomfortable for some reason.

Scarlett stares at her hands.

Think about your superpower.

What a bunch of useless abilities.

Actually, it's not technically a useless ability.

Ever since the monsters started using their strange powers, Scarlett's abilities have had a place.

However, the number of monsters with magical-like powers is small among all the different types of monsters. They are often accompanied by overwhelming physical power, so they don't mean much.

So psychic powers were a tool, but I couldn't rely on them alone.

It's even gotten to the point where it breaks magical equipment that touches the wake of his abilities.

It's a problem because it's so advanced.

The good news is that you can consciously control it.

It's a good thing there's no magic at all, or the teleportation spell wouldn't work.

At that level, I would have had to walk all the way across the ecliptic and back by myself.

It's a superpower that doesn't do much for the enemy, but rather disables friendly golems and magical equipment.

If it were a human vs. human fight, Scarlett knows her powers would help tremendously.

Enemy mages won't even be able to get a raw hit on Scarlett.

But it's a fight against monsters, so it doesn't really matter.

Of course, that's not the kind of fight Scarlett wants to have.

It's useless, but useless is a good thing.

The power to neutralize magic and superpowers.

Scarlett smiles a bitter smile of her own.

Funny how I was ostracized as a child for being a witch.

In fact, you're probably the furthest thing from a witch.

I don't know how to do magic, and magic doesn't work.

I was teased because I had red hair and red eyes, and it made all those years of bullying seem funny and bittersweet.

Eventually, Scarlett left the battlefield.

It's a bitter pill to swallow that your abilities are actually harming your allies, but on reflection, I can't help it.

'Yes.......'

Scarlett thinks for a moment.

'For someone like me, being useless is a good thing.......'

Depending on how you look at it, this is a powerful ability, but one that is better left unused.

Such power.

So I want to come back and wait for the war to end, and I want to see a world where people can live in peace, even if things can't go back to the way they were.

You just have to hope for it.

With that in mind, I thought I'd take a deep sleep for the first time in a very long time.

-Angel

"......?"

Scarlett cocked her head at the sound beyond the window.

Obviously.

It was a cat crying.

"What is it?

The sound of a cat meowing.

Out the window.

It was a cat sitting on the window sill outside Scarlett's dorm room window, crying.

Scarlett knew the cat.

The cat is crying as she looks out the window at herself.

"Ah."

Suddenly, Scarlett remembers who she had forgotten.

Apparently, Ellen had gone back to the ecliptic briefly because she forgot her cat in her dorm.

After that, Ellen rarely came out of her barracks, so we didn't have much to talk about, but it was clear that she had left her cat behind.

So, that black cat has probably been living in the dorm ever since.

-Angel

-TalkTalk

The cat taps a fern-like paw on the window.

As in, open.

Ellen has a cat.

And I got to see Ellen take him back. I saw him pacing around in his cage.

It's not weird to have a cat.

-Angel

-TalkTalk

But something strange.

"I'm on the second floor here......?"

This is the second floor of the dormitory.

And since they tend to be taller than normal buildings, a two-story dorm is much taller than the second floor of a normal building.

How in the world could a cat be up there?

Scarlett couldn't help but look at the cat and panic.

Anyway.

I don't know how he got up there, but it would be a shame if he jumped down and hurt himself.

Couldn't that be the case a lot of the time?

It's one of those things where you go up because you can, but you don't know how to get down.

But that cat.

I've seen him since he was a kitten, but why hasn't he grown up at all?

Is it a slow-growing variety?

Scarlett opened the window cautiously, not wanting to take any chances.

-Dalcock

With sound.

Fold.

and the cat jumps into Scarlett's room.

However.

-Thump!

While.

"......!"

The cat walked into Scarlett's room and took on the form of a human.

"Oh......?"

It's called being human.

If you're too surprised, you'll end up sounding like an idiot.

Nothing comes out of my mouth.

"....... a......? a......."

I was so surprised.

Scary.

Also, to my horror.

While Scarlett is speechless.

"Let me ask you a quick question. I'm in a hurry."

Humanized.

"You, before you got here. I mean, from yesterday to now."

A cat, in the guise of Reinhardt to be exact, asks.

"Christina."

"Louis Ankton."

"Anna de Guerna."

"Ludwig."

Where did the cute cat go, Reinhardt, looking seriously stern.

That foul-mouthed Reinhardt.

"Have you ever met any of these four people?"

I didn't even bother to explain it.

Beyond the obvious answer, Scarlett was not in a position to think.

-Hair

"a....... ah....... ah......."

Scarlett couldn't say anything, and she just stood there, frozen in place.

"Help, help....... Help me......."

Reinhardt's brow narrowed as he looked at Scarlett, who seemed to understand why.

"Hey, I don't know about you, but I'm in a goddamn hurry. Now!"

Urgent is urgent.

Still, they didn't explain.

But as he stared down at Scarlet, the demon's complexion turned grim.

Obviously, there was no sign of anger, which would have made him look angry.

"If you can't answer that quickly, at least put some clothes on!"

"!!!!!"

On top of that, Scarlett had just gotten out of the shower and into bed, so she was still in her underwear.

\* \* \*

Scarlett nearly fainted.

The world's accomplishment in breaking into Scarlett's room was to turn red in the face and tell her to get dressed if she couldn't answer his questions, so she shivered and got dressed.

You're in someone's room without permission, and you're giving them orders.

The devil is an asshole.

Scarlett cowered in the corner of the room, shaking, not from embarrassment, but from bewilderment at what was happening in front of her.

What's a cat.

The Devil.

What the question is.

So far, what and how.

If the cat is actually a demon.

What's going on up until now?

Scarlett was backed into a corner, her whole body shaking, but she didn't dare open her mouth.

Unfortunately, Scarlett wasn't the only one with a problem.

"Uh, I didn't mean to look, but, uh, whatever. I'm in a hurry. I'm sorry. I'm in a hurry, too. I know it's not the case, I know it's not the case. I know, but......."

The devil was in a hurry, too, but he was babbling like he knew what he was doing.

I don't care if you saw me in my underwear.

In the context of what's going on in the world, this is no big deal. Why are you apologizing for this?

Scarlett is just scared of the demon's sudden appearance in her room.

Scarlett has seen a lot since the war.

But in the strangest of moments, my mind went blank as I realized that I was facing a demon that I should never have encountered.

I'm afraid of the devil.

But no matter how you look at it, the gibbering demon may be embarrassed and ashamed, but he doesn't seem to care.

"You're not going to kill me....... You're not going to kill me?"

"Why would I kill you!"

Rather, it's a madman's rage.

"So right now you're embarrassed, you're scared, you're wondering why I've been doing this all this time, and you don't believe me. I know. I get it. I get it. I know you're embarrassed, but just calm down."

More than before.

However.

Scarlett couldn't help but think as she looked at Reinhardt.

I feel like I've become an even bigger weirdo than before.

It looks a little too much like Reinhardt in the Temple.

I'm an asshole.

Scarlett's tremors gradually become less frequent.

I'm not trying to kill myself.

If that's not what you're thinking, then why are you here?

"What the hell are you doing......?"

"Dude, when I hear that, there are so many things that come to mind about what you're wondering, I can't even begin to figure out what you're wondering."

You mean the gate situation.

I'm asking what you've done so far.

Or are you asking about this situation now.

There are so many things I've done that I can't figure out what you're asking.

Scarlett stares out the window.

"That....... cat?"

"Yes......."

There were probably a lot more important things to talk about, and Scarlett was dizzy about what was going on right now.

All that aside, I can't help but wonder what the devil is doing in the guise of a cat.

"This....... That....... That, uh, is actually the most complicated......?"

And Reinhardt, other things are quite complicated and hard to explain, but the cat mimicry is the hardest to explain.

It would take me about half an hour to explain what we've done so far, starting with our intentions.

Scarlett asks, watching Reinhardt's speechlessness.

The most important question.

"Ellen is....... Do you know......?"

"No, I don't know."

"......."

Despite the scary situation.

Despite the fear of the opponent.

"This crazy....... perverted asshole......."

Scarlett couldn't help but smile.

"This....... You're right, you're right, but if I'm going to get cussed out, I should get cussed out by Ellen, not you! You could have just called me a pervert with that thing earlier!"

"Trashy....... to the point of being shameless......."

I don't know about you, but in the end, pranking people with cats is the kind of perv that wouldn't say anything if he had ten mouths to feed.

"......Yes, that's the guy I'm going to kill."

The devil had no choice but to shut up.

Episode 642.

Scarlett had a double whammy with the devil and then surprised herself.

This was the first time Scarlett had ever sworn in her life.

So it was a bit of a surprise.

He said something he would never have said if it was the devil in front of him.

So you realize that you're thinking of the person in front of you as Reinhardt, not the Devil.

At first glance, Reinhardt hasn't changed much from his Temple days.

Other than being a bit more of an asshole, it seemed to be the same.

Of course, I was afraid of Reinhardt even in my Temple days.

Or, more accurately, it was a mixture of longing and fear.

But in the end, Scarlett couldn't figure it out.

In the end, in this moment.

Why me?

What did I say?

Just as Scarlett was confused by the disorganization of the situation, so was Reinhardt.

It was obvious to Scarlett that Reinhardt knew the situation was bizarre and that Scarlett was panicking.

All other emotions aside, Scarlett could clearly feel it.

That the devil is getting very impatient.

I keep looking out the window, trying to calm Scarlett down somehow.

"Okay....... No, it's not good, but ask me quickly. I know you won't believe me if I tell you anything, but I'll tell you as much as I can. I'll tell you anything and everything......."

"No."

Scarlett is panicking, and she's scared.

Scarlett takes a few deep breaths, slowly calming her panicked chest.

But I asked about the cat, because that's what I wanted to know, above all else.

But I didn't have to ask about the other issues.

"I said perverted and shameless, not that I don't trust you."

"......?"

I was confused, surprised, and scared.

But when it comes to believability, Scarlett is not a believer.

The day the gates opened.

Scarlett wasn't there.

But.

Elsewhere.

The dungeon where the demon was imprisoned.

"Sure, I remember."

Scarlett remembered clearly the way he'd spilled the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Bertus took Scarlett with him to interrogate Reinhardt in case the demon used a spirit.

Neither the Emperor, nor Savior Tana, nor Scarlet believed every word of the demon at the time.

I hoped for peace.

I wanted to save everyone.

I knew the future.

All the words that sounded like the ramblings of a madman mumbling under his breath.

Even the devil, who used to say I made the world.

"I, for one, believe in you."

Scarlett clearly remembered.

\* \* \*

Those who knew the truth were silent because they knew the truth.

Scarlett was one of those people who knew the truth, but dismissed it as nonsense at the time.

Except now, I know that that hollow, sad look in his eyes, like he'd lost everything, wasn't a front, it was the truth.

The devil even told me that if you don't trust me, kill yourself before everything goes wrong.

If we had done as the devil said and cut off the devil's head and hung it in the street, the gate incident would not have happened. We will never know.

But I know that if I had listened to the devil and let him go, the gate would not have happened.

I know that the despair and sadness I felt in the demon was not disguised, but was what it seemed.

Scarlett realizes that everything the Devil said was true, even if it seemed false at the time.

I know about Akasha.

But even if Scarlet believed the demon's words, there was nothing she could do about it.

I was there because the people who mattered needed me to be there.

And I'm one of those people who has remained silent because I know there's no point in telling people the truth after everything that's happened.

Scarlett did what she could.

I silently believed that killing monsters and saving people was the only way to go.

So Scarlett didn't say anything about the demon, she just did what she had to do.

It wasn't his place to tell people the truth.

Mourning and pitying the existence of demons.

He was just where he was supposed to be.

So Scarlett had no reason to ask about the gate situation in the first place.

Because you already know.

The Devil doesn't need to tell Scarlett that she won't be able to trust me.

Because you already believe it.

It's one thing to believe in the devil, it's another to fear him.

"Do you really think I'm here to get back at you......?"

"That....... Yes......."

Maybe he's here to get back at someone who didn't believe in me back then.

The Devil believes that the world is the way it is because people didn't trust him, so he may have a vendetta against those who didn't trust him, and Scarlett is one of them.

He suddenly realizes why Scarlett trusted him and yet trembled at the thought of being killed.

"Why would I do that, you had every right to not trust me at the time, and I don't blame you and I don't resent you."

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

Scarlett couldn't help but notice that he wasn't the least bit resentful as he scowled at her, asking why the hell would I kill you?

Reinhardt is still the same.

It's a demon, but it's not a demon.

It's just that they're still, well, people.

It's still baffling.

Despite what you believe, you're not an important person.

Why you're here.

Why are you asking me if I've seen my friends.

Reinhardt was stumped as to how to convince Scarlett, until he realized that he didn't need to convince her.

Scarlett was just too surprised. She just needed time to calm down.

I didn't have to tell the story. I've heard it all before.

Scarlett just needed time to calm down.

"Now that you've calmed down a bit, if you'd like to tell me slowly what's so urgent......."

"Wait."

Just as we're about to get down to business, Reinhardt's expression turns grim as he glances toward the window.

"Well, I don't think we have time to talk about it."

What the hell did he see, Reinhardt thought, and threw back the curtains roughly.

"Yes......?"

"I'm grateful and glad you trust me, but here's what we're going to do. I'll tell you all about it later."

Reinhardt stares into Scales' red eyes.

As if to say, never forget.

"From now on, you're never to be separated from me."

"Is that ......?"

Scarlett froze at the strange confession.

"Do you understand? Whatever happens, just stay with me. Just remember that, and if anyone tries to pull me away from you, don't let them. Do you understand?"

"What? Yes....... Oh, yeah. That......."

Trying to tear it apart?

Scarlett soon realized what Reinhardt's abrupt words meant.

-shut up!

Suddenly, Reinhardt is small.

-Angel

"......."

He was telling me to take myself with me wherever I went.

Believing is believing.

For some reason, he realizes that Reinhardt has come to him out of the blue, not to harm him, but to help him.

By the way.

Scarlett felt sick to her stomach at the sight of the black cat's piercing eyes juxtaposed with Reinhardt's grimy, dirty ones.

"I feel bad......."

-Hello!

I watched the cat paw at her front paws as if she was happy to do this, and Scarlett felt even worse.

And.

Soon.

-Smart

At the sound of someone knocking on her door, Scarlett felt every muscle in her body tense.

-Scarlett, it's me.

It was Ludwig's voice.

\* \* \*

If cats have facial expressions, they must be looking very serious right now.

I rambled and rambled and didn't really get to the point of what we needed to talk about.

The devil has turned into a honey-eating cat and can't open his mouth anymore.

What's clear is that the demon has no intention of harming Scarlett, and Scarlett feels sorry for Reinhardt.

Why is the Devil here?

And.

Why is Ludwig here?

-Smart

-Scarlett? Can you open the door for me, please?

Scarlett felt a strange dread creep through her body.

It's clear that there were things going on that he didn't know about, in places he didn't know about.

Scarlett looks at the cat.

-nod

The cat nods, as if it's okay to open it.

-Dalcock

When I opened the door, there was Ludwig.

Ludwig still wears a bandage on his right arm, and his unruly hair has grown out of control.

There's Ludwig, somehow sharpened and much darkened.

"Ludwig......?"

"Oh, there it is."

Ludwig smiled thinly.

She hasn't been told what's going on. So Scarlett knows this is the moment to feign nonchalance.

"I thought you were gone again."

Scarlett feels uncomfortable with Ludwig's words.

They are superhumans whose senses are far more advanced than the average person's.

It's hard to imagine Ludwig not sensing the popularity on the other side of the wall.

"I was wondering if I should go out and look for it."

If he hadn't opened the door, Ludwig would have realized that he hadn't opened it on purpose while he was inside.

Somehow.

It only took Scarlett a few words to realize that Ludwig was telling a blatant lie.

For now, we need to feign nonchalance.

If you don't know what's going on and haven't heard anything, you should pretend you don't know anything.

You should pretend that nothing is happening.

"Is Ludwig....... back?"

"No, not really, but I'll be back soon."

Ludwig gestures outward with his head.

"It's a beautiful day, why don't we go for a walk?"

Ludwig's gentle smile would normally have made Scarlett say yes.

Ludwig may not be that close, but at the end of the day, everyone in the Temple Royal class is a comrade-in-arms.

The camaraderie of crossing the line of fire together is a far cry from ordinary friendship.

They're all incredibly valuable to each other.

You don't have to be intimate enough to know everything about each other, but you can die for each other.

Comradeship is such a strange form of friendship.

And Ludwig risked his life to save Scarlett's.

It cost Delphine her life, and Ludwig his right arm.

Of course, Scarlett saves Ludwig before that, but in the end, they owe each other their lives.

Because that's what comrades-in-arms are for.

I can't help but feel intimidated by this unknown.

"Sure. Great."

Scarlett, however, is dear to Ludwig's heart.

Just like you do with all your other friends.

Still, you can die for Ludwig.

So there's no reason you can't go for a walk.

"Uh, but wait a minute."

"Yes."

Scarlet still hadn't forgotten what the demon had said.

Ludwig watched Scarlett go into the room for a moment, and then emerge with her black cat in her arms, pacing from room to room.

"Ah....... You're here?"

Ludwig smirked at the black cat as if he hadn't seen her in a long time. Scarlet twitched the corner of her mouth, not wanting to give the wrong impression.

I know what I'm dealing with, and I'm feeling very gritty.

"Go, cat......? Go, live with, mountain.......? walk?"

Scarlett tries to say something to make it less awkward, but her tongue is tied.

-Cat!

Fortunately, Scarlett was interrupted by the piercing cry of a cat.

Ludwig didn't know, but Scarlett understood the meaning of the cry.

Shut up.

"Look at him, he only hangs out with girls."

Ludwig looks at the black cat with a meaningful smile.

-Accept

The black cat desperately avoided Ludwig's gaze.

Episode 643.

June.

"It's getting hot, it seems like winter was just yesterday."

"I see."

Ludwig and Scarlett walked the promenade near the Royal Class dormitory.

It seemed like just yesterday we were in the midst of one of the worst snowstorms of the year, and now summer was here and it was time to start worrying about the heat.

Can the war end before fall?

The Allies had now reached a point where they could talk about a true end.

It's not yet the season for excessive heat, though, so the weather was perfect.

And beyond the Temple Realm, the weariness and hunger of the Ecliptic is not felt here.

I could still see the well-organized streets, neat shrubbery, and beautiful, elegant architecture down the hill.

The temple is still beautiful and sprawling.

The only thing missing is the student.

Once home to some of the continent's brightest minds, the vast grounds of the school are now deserted.

Dead, or on the battlefield.

It's not that there aren't any students, but there is a very small residual population, and even the teachers who are supposed to educate them have gone off to war.

It's still beautiful, but a space that doesn't have something to be there is just a dead space.

The temple is still under strict access control, so only a very limited number of people are allowed to see it.

Scarlett walks by Ludwig's side, still holding the black cat.

Then, Scarlett sees Ludwig's bandaged right arm.

Ludwig said that there was some kind of trial procedure, which allowed him to get his arm back. He said he moves well and has no discomfort, but he can't fight, so he does things in the rear area.

Comrades-in-arms, but in the end, everyone was busy with what was in front of them.

Scarlett could only be vaguely glad that Ludwig had said that.

By the way.

If Ludwig is in a rear-guard unit, which unit is it and what is he doing there.

Scarlett had no idea what Ludwig was doing, and she hadn't asked.

Initially, Ludwig barely showed up at the Royal Class garrison after returning to the Allies at the beginning of spring, stopping only to say hello.

I had vaguely assumed that the rear-guard duty I had been assigned to would keep me busy.

Ludwig, who was working in a rear-guard unit, was so busy that he didn't have time to see his friends.

Now that I think about it, that's weird.

Since the spring departure, the Union army has now fought only once, at Wall Run.

Our first stop, Gasonosia, was overrun by the vanguard.

If anything, the main force has nothing to do but move, and Ludwig, the rear guard, is busier.

It could be that the rear troops don't know what they're doing and actually have more to do than the main force, but Scarlett couldn't figure out why.

Ludwig regained his arm, but was declared unfit for combat.

How can a group of people like that, with a very important warp spot at their disposal, come back to the ecliptic like this?

Using a warp spot requires procedures and permissions. Just like Scarlett does.

Ludwig is unfortunately not that important anymore.

But now he's back in Temple, with the Union army advancing, and he's looking for Scarlett.

The end of the war was near, and with the fight ahead, there was little time to care about anything else.

But now I'm starting to see it.

Everything about it is weird.

Ludwig's arm.

Anna's warning.

A demon who suddenly found himself.

The ability to neutralize yourself.

Natural.

Scarlett realizes that she has become the center of something unknown.

"Ludwig, the bandage on that arm is....... When are you going to take it off?"

"I probably won't be able to solve it for a while."

"Are you sick or....... or something?"

"Not really, and it's kind of ugly."

That right arm.

I can't help but find that very strange too.

I just thought it would be a good thing if I could somehow use my arm again. But now that I've taken a closer look, I'm noticing something strange.

It's unnaturally long compared to Ludwig's left arm, and a little more than the size of his hand and the thickness of his forearm.

That's weird.

It's like it's someone else's arm.

Scarlett's skin crawls as she imagines her fears.

What are those arms?

"When the war is over, will we be able to live in the Temple again, like we used to?"

Ludwig was talking about something else entirely.

"That would be great, but......."

"Right, because even after the Gate is over, there are still monsters on the continent, and it's not over until they're all taken care of."

Ludwig smirks.

"And when Temple is up and running again, are we in second grade or fifth grade?"

"I'm not sure about that either......."

If your temple starts running like it used to again.

Scarlett wasn't the only one making assumptions. Ludwig was thinking about it, too.

"You know what?"

"Yes."

You're just getting to the point where I can't figure it out.

Scarlett waits nervously for Ludwig to speak.

"This cat."

But Ludwig didn't get to the point, he pointed to the black cat in Scarlett's arms.

"Isn't that a little weird?"

"What?"

Scarlett flinched at the words.

The cat was pretending to be as oblivious as possible, desperately feigning nonchalance.

"Over......? Do? Not?"

Scarlett bit her tongue at the suddenness of his words, but Ludwig didn't seem to mind.

"No, I don't think it's grown at all."

"ah......."

"It's been a while, shouldn't it be a little bigger?"

Scarlett's doubts were shared by Ludwig.

Black kitten.

It should be a graveyard by now, but it's still tiny.

The default value for the Small is Cute transformation party did not change.

"Well, I don't know if there's such a thing as a variety of......?"

"Hmm, I don't know about cats, but that could be it."

Fortunately, both Ludwig and Scarlett were able to move on to Morgue.

Scarlett inwardly breathed a sigh of relief.

Behind Ludwig, who is slightly ahead of her, Scarlett glares at the black cat in her arms.

"You're raising suspicions by changing like that!

The look in his eyes was enough to give away the meaning, and the cat yawned incoherently.

"Scarlet."

And Ludwig's voice suddenly fell silent.

"Yes, Ludwig."

You're finally telling them why you're here.

Instinctively, Scarlett couldn't help but feel it.

Ludwig looks back at Scarlett and says.

"Don't you want to live outside the temple?"

"Is that ......?"

Scarlett was stunned, as she hadn't expected this at all.

You're not going to leave your intact temple out there.

He seemed to take it for granted that he could provide such a place.

"The Temple isn't as safe as you think it is."

"It's not safe......?"

"Yes."

Ludwig stared at Scarlett in silence.

"I think you'd be better off somewhere safer than the Temple, so I'm offering."

"......."

With that, Scarlett stares at Ludwig for a moment.

"Ludwig."

"Yes."

"You realize that this situation is weird....... right?"

The temple is dangerous, so we'll find you another safe place to stay.

It's certainly odd that Ludwig, and no one else, would say those words so nonchalantly back in the temple.

But Scarlett didn't ask any questions, and Ludwig didn't explain anything.

Ludwig nods slowly at Scarlett's point.

"Yeah, it's going to be weird, telling you that I can come back to the ecliptic on my own accord, that I can get you a safe place to stay, and that my bandaged right arm is going to be suspicious."

"......."

No matter how you look at it, Ludwig doesn't look like anything other than someone who is plotting something right now.

"Still, can't you just trust me?"

Scarlett bit her lip at Ludwig's words.

"I believe you, Ludwig. I trust Ludwig. Of course I do. Ludwig is very important to me. Obviously....... I care about Ludwig a lot, and I would die for him."

Not because Ludwig had saved her life, but because every friend and every comrade-in-arms was important to Scarlett.

The war has changed so much, Scarlett realizes, that everyone she knows is as precious and important as life itself.

Even Erich de Lapaeri, who has been tormenting himself.

The moments of crossing the line together have built up and built up, and I would risk my life for him. And vice versa, I'm sure Erich would risk his life for Scarlett.

Because that's what comrades-in-arms are for.

It's a vote of confidence from one of those precious people, Ludwig.

I believe it.

"But, Ludwig. I don't know anything, what the hell is going on. You don't know anything. If you don't tell me anything....... I'm so frustrated and scared of what's going on."

Anna's warning.

The Devil's Question.

And Ludwig's suggestion.

Something is going on, but Scarlett doesn't know a single thing for sure.

"What the hell....... What's going on here?"

It was a question to Ludwig, but it was also a question to the demon in his arms.

What am I that you suddenly seek me?

Because what the hell am I capable of.

Scarlett asks, and Ludwig's expression turns bizarre.

"ah......."

Like you've realized something.

Ludwig gets a strange look on his face and starts to laugh.

"Ha, ha....... Ha....... Ha, ha....... Ha, ha......."

I don't know if I've run out of steam or not. Ludwig, with an unreadable expression, laughs half-heartedly.

"Ludwig......?"

Suddenly, Ludwig starts laughing, and Scarlett calls out to him, feeling goosebumps all over her body.

"Oh....... This, this....... Gee....... Ha, ha, ha....... This one....... This is it....... Oh, yeah....... Haha....... I'm no different....... Haha......."

Just like that.

After laughing hysterically for who knows how long, Ludwig suddenly realized.

"......."

Tuk.

and stopped laughing.

"I'm sorry, Scarlett."

"......."

"I'd rather not know."

You realize you've become the one saying it.

Knowing how ridiculous that was, Ludwig laughed long after he said it.

\* \* \*

To make someone aware of something.

What you don't know.

Hating those who decided it, Ludwig was saying it to his friend after all.

It's better not to know.

But while Ludwig may laugh at himself, he has no intention of stopping what needs to be done.

Rather good.

To be a monster's friend, you have to be a monster.

He who would kill the monster must become the monster.

This is proof that you've become a monster.

If so, are we really going to be able to kill monsters?

I don't think I've ever had that kind of power, that kind of power.

You're not going to be told that you're a nobody, that you're not worth dealing with.

If nothing else.

I could fall down and die, but I wouldn't be miserable.

Scarlett stares at Ludwig in disbelief as he says that it's better not to know.

"I know you can't explain anything, but are you saying that I'm safer outside the Temple?"

"Yeah. If he knows something, he'll get more dangerous on his own."

So trust me, Ludwig said.

Scarlett has no doubts about Ludwig's intentions.

However.

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

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"At some point....... stopped being the Ludwig I knew."

When Ludwig returned with his new arm, he didn't just look different. I couldn't help but notice that Ludwig had become a different person.

When I got back, and even now, when I'm saying things I don't understand.

Not just the words, but the attitude, the look, and the behavior.

Even the atmosphere.

Scarlett felt like the Ludwig in front of her was a different person altogether.

"I hate to say this, but....... I'm scared of Ludwig."

"You're scared......?"

"It's ......."

Scarlett couldn't help but be horrified by the change in her friend's appearance.

"Scarlett, it's bound to be different."

"......."

"When Ashur died, when Delphine died. No, it can't be the same from the moment the Gate happened until now."

Ludwig is right.

So much had happened that it was inevitable that things would change.

I couldn't stand to be different.

Ludwig wasn't the only one who had changed, Scarlett was one of the others, just to a different degree.

The only people who haven't changed are the dead.

In fact, it's more unusual for a demon to still have some semblance of its former self, or even more unusual for a demon to still have some semblance of its former self after all that it has been through.

"Sure, I'm sure you do, but....... Telling you to just do what I say without knowing anything about it is....... is so different from the Ludwig you've been."

I didn't feel like I had changed, I felt like I was a different person.

"What if I don't want to do what Ludwig says, what happens, what do you do?"

"......."

In the past, Ludwig would have accepted Scarlett's rejection as a sign that there was nothing he could do about it.

Otherwise, I would have tried to explain and convince them of everything.

Nevertheless, Scarlett's rejection would not have been met with bitterness or resentment.

But now.

What would Scarlett do if Ludwig turned down such an offer?

It was like they were trying to force me to listen.

Ludwig looks at Scarlett with his deep, dark eyes.

"Scarlett, I can tell you one thing."

"......."

"There are people who are trying to take advantage of you. You may not realize it now, but at some point, they will."

"Are you trying to use me as....... on me?"

"Yeah."

You want to use it.

Is that what the devil is trying to do?

To take advantage of yourself?

But the Demon, in his cat form and in Scarlett's arms, can't say anything right now.

"Scarlet, there are those within the Alliance who have ties to the Devil."

"!"

Scarlett's eyes widened at that.

It's a very shocking and strange situation to have that demon in your arms right now.

Are you saying the devil's hand is already stretched within the Alliance?

"And that number is never small."

Contrary to what the Allied soldiers and people think, Ludwig knows that a significant portion of the Allies have already fallen to the Devil, and he knows that many more will continue to fall.

"The Devil already knows about your powers, and he's about to find out that you're stronger than ever... or maybe he already does."

As Ludwig says, the devil knows.

Scarlett couldn't help but realize that Ludwig had found her on his own.

Just know.

The devil was faster than Ludwig.

"The Devil is going to use my powers to....... my powers?"

"I suppose."

You don't know how your power is being used.

However, the devil can't say anything right now.

It's the Devil who comes first, but it's Ludwig who can explain.

Scarlett couldn't help but be frightened by Ludwig's solemn expression.

"Something....... Something....... Ludwig saying something like that......."

Ludwig is Ludwig.

"By all means....... the devil to....... who has to deal with....... as if you can deal with....... I hear you......."

Demon is a big, heavy name.

He may be a small cat now, but he's no ordinary creature.

Ludwig, on the other hand, is an ordinary man.

It's not Ellen, it's not the Emperor, it's not Savior Tana.

But now Ludwig was talking as if he had to take on the devil himself, as if it were possible.

Speak as if you are the one who can do it, or belong to a group that can do it.

The Ludwig Scarlett knew was not like that at all.

"I don't know if it can be done or not. The point is, someone has to do it."

You don't know if you can do it or not, but you do it because you have to.

That's not Ludwig, that's Ellen.

Scarlett swallows the words that have been bubbling up.

The Devil is not who you think he is.

It doesn't.

I just wanted peace, but I couldn't do anything about it.

You wanted to save the world, but you made it this way.

It's just a poor, pitiful thing.

I've heard that pathetic, wretched confession firsthand.

So both heroes and demons are just pitiful people in the end.

That's what I wanted to say.

So when Ludwig occasionally spoke of his hatred of the devil, and when he spoke of it to Ellen, Scarlett discouraged his behavior.

Don't bother Ellen.

I don't want to make it harder on a warrior who is already hard enough as it is.

It was all Scarlet could do to silence those who spoke of the Devil behind her back, those who spoke of him in Ellen's presence.

I wanted to hold the devil in my arms and plead his case, but I couldn't.

Scarlett can't help but notice the look on Ludwig's face.

He realizes that no amount of persuasion will work on a changed Ludwig.

The changed Ludwig is just saying.

There is no Ludwig, who was always asking for someone's opinion and listening to their story.

"Scarlett, anyone will try to use you, put you in danger, so let's go somewhere else. Where no one can find you. Safe until this is all over. We can stay that way."

Before someone tries to take advantage of them, before they become dangerous.

Hide from the world.

"Then I'd rather Ludwig go to....... using me?"

If someone is trying to take advantage of you, why not the other way around?

Ludwig might be tempted to use Scarlet instead.

It's a statement that would probably offend Ludwig greatly, but he just shakes his head.

"That's not going to happen."

"......."

"There's no way I'm putting you in danger."

He's not sure, but Ludwig has no intention of using her. Demons and others covet Scarlet's powers.

Is Ludwig just trying to stop someone before they take advantage of him?

Scarlett had no idea how her powers were being used, what Ludwig was talking about, or why the demon had found her.

Ludwig, who says nothing, but that this is best for you.

I'll explain everything to you later, so don't you ever get away from me.

Which is right.

Scarlett believes in him as someone who has seen his despair before her eyes, and as someone who knows the whole truth about him.

She trusts Ludwig, who risked his life, even his arm, to save her.

I believe in both.

But you are forced to make a choice.

Will you follow Ludwig?

Would you turn down Ludwig's offer to hear the devil's explanation?

But do you really need to make a choice right now?

"Ludwig....... Can you give me some time to think about....... about it?"

Scarlett's words stunned Ludwig into silence.

There was an indelible sense of impatience in the silence. There was a sense of urgency in Ludwig's demeanor.

But that silence doesn't change the fact that time is passing.

"I can't give you that much time."

Already in those words, Scarlett's refusal was not being considered.

Scarlett couldn't help but realize from Ludwig's words that if she refused, he would take her by force.

Episode 644.

Ludwig's nervousness doesn't really mean anything.

Ludwig's nervousness was that the Devil or some other force would approach Scarlett, and the Devil was with her when Ludwig arrived.

When Scarlett asks for time, Ludwig says he can only wait a few hours.

When Scarlett said she wanted to be alone, Ludwig said he wanted her to go for a walk and collect her thoughts until he returned, then headed off somewhere.

Scarlett did not know that Ludwig had gone to the Temple School of Magic.

Ludwig has been acting strangely for some time now.

A demon who knows the truth, but ultimately doesn't know where he's been or what he's been doing.

In the end, Scarlett is afraid of both.

I trusted them both, but they were both now afraid.

A dorm room you could have come back to.

"What....... happened?"

The cat turned back to the demon, and Scarlett demanded an explanation from the demon.

I can't help but be scared, but Scarlett needed to know what was going on.

The demon cautiously looks out the window.

Ludwig might be nearby, keeping an eye on Scarlett's movements.

Seeing that there are no listening ears around, the demon opens his mouth.

"At the last battle of Wallen, you saw a strange army, didn't you?"

"Yes, apparently......."

All saw the majesty of that strange army.

Everyone had more or less figured out that the Empire was the real power that they had been hiding all this time in some way.

"It's a bit gory to explain, but the army is actually kind of like a golem."

"Golem......?"

"Yeah."

Reinhardt nods steadily.

"A golem made of corpses."

Scarlett couldn't help but gulp at the words.

\* \* \*

Just as Ludwig didn't have much time for Scarlett, the demon didn't have much time to explain to her.

What powers the Empire touched, and who those resurrected were.

And who was responsible for the experiment.

Hearing all of this in such a short amount of time left Scarlett frozen.

I've heard too many horror stories to name just one.

And it was Christina, Louis, and Anna, who had been in charge of the experiment so far, who had been talking about it so casually.

"Ludwig recently had one of those arms transplanted."

"Ludwig has....... chimera procedure?"

"Yeah, if not that, then what."

When the demon asked if there was any magic outside of the Chimera procedure that could do that, Scarlet was speechless.

War makes too many things possible.

Scarlet couldn't help but feel a sinking feeling in her stomach at the thought that Ludwig had wanted to return to the battlefield so badly that he needed such magic.

But at the same time, I couldn't help but wonder.

It's an army made of cruel and unusual things, but it's a necessary one.

It's an army built to end wars, so it should be a force that's needed right now.

"But....... Why is it important to me that I can neutralize that army......."

Before she could finish, Scarlett couldn't help but realize something.

After the gate event.

The devil is in the details of what happens next.

Someone might try to take advantage of him, Ludwig said.

"After the Gate debacle....... Do you want me to get rid of that army......?"

It's the most powerful force in history, let alone humanity.

Scarlett can neutralize that army with her powers in an instant.

Like a golem suddenly reduced to scrap metal, the greatest army in history could be neutralized with the same ease if you did the same thing to it.

"Yeah."

The demon nods.

"Ludwig is right."

I'm not going to deny it, says the devil.

"Ludwig is really back to protect you, and I intend to use you."

There's no point in making excuses and self-rationalizing.

When Ludwig says he's protecting Scarlett, no matter how suspicious she looks, he's telling the truth.

No matter how well you package it, you're still going to have to use Scarlet.

Ludwig rushes back to the temple to keep Scarlett out of the Devil's clutches, but the Devil arrives just in time to use her.

Scarlett couldn't help but shudder at the Demon King's casual acknowledgment of everything.

"Do you really....... fight?"

"......."

"You don't have to, you're not....... You didn't want this, you're not the kind of person who wants this."

"......."

"So many people were killed and injured in the Gate incident alone, and as soon as that's over. I mean, do we have to start thinking about the next fight now, before it's even over?"

To Scarlett's despair, the Toroe demon remained still, his back against the wall.

"Yeah, maybe we don't have to fight, who knows."

"Then when it's all said and done, we'll just have to live in each other's places. That army will eventually be....... What's the point if there's no fighting?"

"Sure, sure."

Even the most powerful army is meaningless off the battlefield.

In such a large land, in a land where so many people have died that most of the land is empty, is it not enough for each person to live in their own place?

As if that weren't enough, as soon as one fight was over, he was already preparing for the next. Scarlett didn't know.

"Things are so much different than they used to be."

"What do you mean, different......?"

"You don't know much about the situation in the ecliptic, much less the situation in the Alliance."

Scarlett has been away from the ecliptic for a long time, so she doesn't know how it works.

She doesn't even know the mood of the Alliance. Scarlet isn't in a position to decide that.

"We've come too far to stop, and we've done too much to just say, 'Let's go back to nothing and live in each other's space.'"

It's not like a toy where you can put everything back when you've played with it long enough.

The world is too big to play with.

So what moves, stays moved.

You can't invalidate everything.

"I don't know, maybe I'll end up with a bigger problem this time because of what I did. Maybe."

Just as everything we did to stop the gate ended up completing it. This may have a similar ending.

But at least Scarlett knows that what's happening to the world isn't a demonic conspiracy.

It's not the devil's conspiracy, it's the devil's failure.

Even after that one disastrous failure, the devil built something once again.

"Maybe it's selfish. Maybe my behavior of trying to do something again on a topic that has failed once will seem disgusting and unforgivable to some people, and there are those people out there."

"......."

"But I've come too far to stop, and I don't know how this thing I'm doing is really going to end, but to stop now, to pretend it never happened, would be the biggest mistake and wrong I could make."

If you didn't want to do it, you had to do nothing.

If you haven't even started, I don't know, but if you start something, you have to see it through to the end.

The moment you give up, everything you've built comes crashing down.

Even the devil doesn't know the complete answer.

However, the devil knows the perfect wrong answer.

Half the ecliptic, half the Alliance.

Running away from everything by pretending it never happened.

That's a perfect wrong answer.

"I'm not going to deny that it's a very risky choice for you to help me, and I'm not going to say that it's the right choice for you to help me, because I might actually be wrong."

"......."

"I don't know the answer, and I know that the people who want to kill me have their own legitimate reasons, and I know that I have no excuse for their anger toward me, because, after all, it all happened because of me."

Even those who want to kill the devil have their reasons, and no one can deny them.

But the devil has his own agenda.

You've come too far to turn back.

Now it's about getting where you need to go, getting there more safely, and getting there with certainty.

It's just the reality that all other options have become unavailable.

"Scarlet."

"......."

"Help."

The demon looks at the red-haired girl.

"I need you."

Scarlett had never heard anything so short, yet so sincere, in her life.

Scarlett stares at the demon, stunned.

No.

Look at Reinhardt.

A memory from long ago flashes through my mind.

A memory that seemed to have been lost amidst war and countless deaths.

But sure enough, somewhere in the back of my mind, a memory was being reawakened.

Demon.

Reinhardt was a strange man.

Despite being the last word in Class A, and being criticized for being inferior to Class B, he still got into accidents.

Rumor has it that he's a bit of a weirdo, both within Class A and in Class B as well.

The guy you don't want to get involved with.

Reinhardt was certainly the kind of guy who would hear that.

But for Scarlett, Reinhardt was a weirdo in a different sense.

One day.

"What's wrong with red.

I found myself being bullied by Erich de Lapaeri, and I said something like that out of the blue.

He's a strong man.

It was after winning a duel with a senior.

After winning what was clearly a reckless fight through some kind of miracle, Reinhardt said.

Facts.

Scarlett was more afraid of Reinhardt than Erich at that point.

There wasn't much tied up.

But Scarlett always watched Reinhardt from afar.

If only I could be like that.

I wish I had that kind of courage.

For Scarlett, who had been hunkered down in fear of being kicked out of the Temple, Reinhardt was a shock in more ways than one.

Suddenly.

I woke up and realized that Reinhardt had been watching me the whole time.

I want to be like that.

That's how Reinhardt became an idol in my mind.

Just like that.

Looking back at the past naturally brought up other memories.

Scarlett couldn't help but smile at the memory of that time.

I couldn't help but chuckle at the absurdity of my own thoughts in this situation.

"At the tournament, remember?"

"Uh....... Suddenly?"

The demon nodded at Scarlett's question, a puzzled expression on his face.

"......I remember."

Reinhardt couldn't help but remember the moment when Scarlett, out of nowhere, told him you were my idol.

These are times and events from the past that have been buried under so much death and sorrow.

However, it turned out to be nothing, which made it all the more precious.

The days when everything was peaceful, when nothing was wrong, will never come back.

"I said, 'There are people who hate you, and there are people who love you.'"

"You said....... That's what you said, you."

Reinhardt's eccentric personality and temper got him many detractors.

But even then, there were people who didn't hate Reinhardt for some strange reason.

If not necessarily Ellen and Harriet, there were quite a few people who were close to Reinhardt.

There were a lot of people who hated it, but there were definitely people who loved it.

Do you like this guy, do you hang out with that guy.

I've had a lot of people tell me that.

As she watched, Scarlett realized.

"I looked at you and realized that just like I can't make everyone like me, I can't make everyone hate me."

"Yeah....... You said that."

Scarlett realized something in that thought.

If it's impossible to be loved by everyone, it must be impossible to be hated by everyone.

"Strangely, so much has changed....... So, so much has changed......."

Scarlett looks at Reinhardt.

The one now called the Devil.

"You're still in that situation."

Like that time when everyone hated Reinhardt and everyone loved Reinhardt.

The same goes for demons.

Some people hate the devil to the point of wanting to kill him, while others can't bring themselves to hate him.

Or, someone will still love the devil.

The scale has only grown from temple to global.

"......Is that how it works?"

He smiles bitterly, as if he knows what he's talking about.

In that past Temple, Scarlett had a crush on Reinhardt.

What made him different from others was that he didn't like it out of reason, but out of respect.

Reinhardt, once an idol, is now a cursed fiend for even daring to mention his name.

No, it was a demon from the start.

Such a being has found himself across time.

And I ask you sincerely.

Help.

I need you.

What to do.

The Devil had his reasons. He said he didn't mean for this to happen, and who are we to say that he deserves to stand on the blade of judgment?

But what about the opposite?

How can the cries of those who say the devil must die be unjust, then?

There are causes that are justified, and there are causes that deserve to die.

The Devil is a contradiction in terms.

The devil is in the details for a reason.

Those who wish for the death and destruction of demons have their reasons.

What to choose if everyone is justified and everyone has their own reasons.

"I am......."

Scarlett, at a crossroads, went still.

Episode 645.

After a while.

Ludwig returned from a short walk.

Technically, I was just stopping by Hogwarts, but it didn't take long.

I couldn't stay away for long because of my anxiety.

Scarlett was now in a very dangerous situation.

It's no wonder Scarlett is upset, because I've just told her to do as I say without explaining the situation to her.

So it was natural to give them time to think about it, but I couldn't give them too much time.

Back at the Temple dormitory, Ludwig knocked cautiously on Scarlett's door.

"Scarlett, it's me."

Ludwig stood before the door and waited in silence.

There was no answer.

I wonder if he's thinking about something other than his room.

-Smart

"Scarlet."

He knocked again, but Ludwig didn't hear an answer.

Ludwig stands still at the door, waiting for an answer.

-Smart

Then, three times.

Ludwig's expression hardened.

Ludwig knows.

In the first place, there is no popularity contest in the room.

I knocked on the door just in case.

Ludwig knew that Scarlett wasn't in the room.

"......."

If.

No way.

It can't be.

Never.

It can't be.

Scarlett can't do that.

Ludwig reverts to himself, as if hypnotized.

As he thought about it, Ludwig's eyes sank deeper and deeper into the abyss.

If yes.

What to do.

I don't know how.

How does Scarlett.

No.

Scarlett' to 'How.

Should I?

"......."

Just in time for the ominous shadow of his mind to move on to the idea that Ludwig must make an ominous decision.

"Ludwig."

Ludwig turned his head at the pretense of popularity in the lobby, which was oddly not a visit.

In the lobby, Scarlett walked in, dragging a huge trunk.

"I need to grab something."

The words were barely audible to Ludwig.

Ludwig continues to walk toward Scarlett.

Scarlett couldn't help but panic as Ludwig strode toward her.

Seeing that frighteningly hardened expression, Scarlett involuntarily took a small step backward.

"Ludwig......? Why do you look like that......."

-Wrong!

"!"

Ludwig did as he was told, hugging Scarlett roughly.

Scarlett was understandably taken aback by Ludwig's sudden embrace.

"Why, why suddenly......."

"Good."

"Is that ......?"

"Good."

Scarlett could feel Ludwig's heart beating so fiercely in her embrace that she thought it might burst, even though it wasn't hers.

What the heck is good about that.

What on earth are you so relieved about.

"Thank goodness....... I'm so glad......."

Scarlet is unknown, but.

Somehow.

I think I know a little bit.

Scarlett couldn't help but shiver a little.

"Zee, calm down. I....... I'm not going anywhere."

Scarlett pulled a relieved Ludwig into a hug and gently patted his back.

Hugging him, Scarlett couldn't see how violently Ludwig's eyes were shaking.

"Thank goodness....... Scarlett......."

Because you don't have to think about it.

Because you don't have to imagine something.

Ludwig muttered the same words over and over again, like a madman.

Scarlett hadn't suddenly disappeared, as Ludwig had ominously imagined.

He had to go somewhere to get something, and he was dragging a huge trunk with him.

"You said you didn't have time, so let's go."

"Ah....... Yeah. Let's go, Scarlett."

As if to say calm down.

He says he's not going anywhere, and Scarlett hugs Ludwig and pats him on the back reassuringly.

Scarlett didn't ask any more questions or argue, just packed up her things.

But Ludwig was thinking that Scarlett might have disappeared.

I was thinking about what to do then.

If Scarlett is gone, you're thinking about something else.

What to do then.

I was imagining what I should do with Scarlett.

For a moment, he doubted Scarlett's willingness to follow his lead.

I wasn't just suspicious, I was terrified.

"Sorry, Scarlett. I'm sorry......."

"No......."

Hearing Ludwig's suddenly apologetic voice, Scarlett hugs him harder.

Just as Scarlett can't see Ludwig's wavering eyes because they're hugging each other.

'I'm sorry I....... I'm more sorry.......'

Ludwig couldn't see Scarlett's expression, either.

\* \* \*

Ludwig and Scarlett were walking out of the Royal Class dormitory.

Aside from Ludwig's relief that his ominous imagination hadn't been realized, he couldn't help but wonder.

"But what did you go outside to get?"

The only thing I need to pack is my clothes, which should be in Scarlett's room, but I found them in the lobby.

"Oh, I got some books from the library, I think....... Ludwig won't tell me, but I think I'll be here a while."

"I see......."

Even if you don't tell him anything, he knows he'll be leaving the Temple for quite some time.

Ludwig had to admit that he had brought a book to pass the time.

"Ludwig will take care of the return, right?"

Scarlett looks at Ludwig with a grim expression.

Returning a book.

Ludwig grinned bitterly, knowing that Scarlett was being deliberately oblivious.

"I'll drop it off at ......, and if you need anything, I'll get it for you."

"You mean it doesn't have to be a book?"

"Of course."

In a world where there's not much to be had, he'd take whatever was within his reach.

Naturally, I was grateful. When he offers to help me find a place to hide in case someone tries to take advantage of your powers, I graciously oblige.

"But what about the cat? I guess I can take it with me."

Ludwig was puzzled that Scarlett had brought the cat with her on the last walk, but not now.

Maybe not for humans, but for cats.

You're definitely going to be bored.

"He was just hanging out with me for a while, and he's not even my cat. Wouldn't it be better if he stayed in the Temple dorms?"

"Oh....... I see, Scarlett had just gotten back."

"Right."

Scarlett stays still and watches the entrance to the temple draw near.

Someone who tells you nothing.

A person who lies with a straight face.

Who's the worse person.

Obviously, it's the latter.

Scarlett thought so.

\* \* \*

As soon as Scarlett stepped outside the temple, she was confronted by a mage in robes.

He was a nondescript wizard in plain gray robes.

Scarlett didn't ask Ludwig anything, and Ludwig was secretly grateful to Scarlett for not asking.

But Scarlett knew who was in front of her.

No, who wouldn't be the right word.

I knew the 'what'.

An army of the dead.

When I didn't know what it was, I wanted it, but now that I do, I can't help but feel creeped out by it.

To end the war, they dabbled in dangerous magic, and what you see before you is only a small part of the result.

-Flash!

With her teleportation spell, Scarlett was able to arrive in a room she had never seen before.

Scarlett's destination wasn't a street, but a room in a building.

Scarlett looks around in a spacious but unfamiliar room.

I couldn't help but recognize the features of the room I was in.

No windows.

You don't even know if it's underground or above ground.

"Ludwig, this is....... Where are you?"

Scarlet couldn't tell if this was somewhere inside the ecliptic, or even if it was some other city.

When Scarlett asks where she is, Ludwig stays still and grabs her shoulder.

"Scarlet."

"It's ......."

"Just be patient. I'm never, ever going to let you stay here long."

Make a promise, not an answer to a question.

Ludwig's words say it all.

The implication here is that you have to live like a prisoner.

Ludwig explains things to Scarlett.

To tell the person guarding the door if you lack or need anything, and if something happens.

That there is plenty of food and other things to eat.

"You know that....... that we're not supposed to leave?"

Ludwig lowered his eyes at Scarlett's question, which was finally asked bluntly.

"Sorry, all to protect you......."

Ludwig was about to say something like that, but then he shut his mouth.

As if he can't stand the thought of putting words in his mouth on the subject of locking up his friends.

"I'm sorry."

"......I can't help it."

Those words of inevitability, coming out of Scarlett's mouth, sounded so much like something Ludwig had once said.

\* \* \*

Ludwig went home.

An army called Immortals.

Scarlett now realizes that it was the army that said they were rear-guard troops.

Ludwig would have been fighting on the front lines, not in the rear. He would have been fighting in the most dangerous places.

Even the Devil and Ludwig do what they can.

And Scarlett, too, chose what she thought was the right thing to do.

Windowless rooms.

The room itself is spacious, with a bathroom, and there doesn't seem to be any inconvenience to living there.

But even though the room was large and spacious, Scarlett found it odd.

It's not exactly a cage.

The furnishings were all made of quality materials.

But the windowlessness, the whole structure of the room, not knowing if it's above or below ground, the soundproofing. There's something about those things that you feel.

It doesn't look like a prison, but it is a room made to be a prison.

A prison built to hold inmates who are difficult to handle.

I wonder who these rooms were for before the Gate debacle.

Scarlet doesn't know.

But you have to accept what has happened and live with it.

Scarlett pulls her clothes out of the trunk and begins to organize them.

You're going to be here for a while.

The trunk contained more books than clothes.

Among the miscellaneous books, there are professional books, novels, history books. And there are even dictionaries.

I brought it to kill time.

Scarlett explained.

I honestly felt like it would take me years to read it all.

In a room with no one but herself, Scarlett pulls out one of her usual novels and opens it.

But it didn't say anything about a novel.

Scarlett flips through the pages one by one.

It's any expression or shape that's written there.

[Teleport]

[Mass teleport

[Noise canceling]]

The novel contained not a novel, but a magic scroll.

"I'm sorry, Ludwig.

Scarlett tucked the scrollbook, carefully disguised as a novel, into a stack of books in the trunk.

Ludwig imprisons Scarlett in an unnamed prison.

Or, to be more precise, I thought I had.

One item from the demon, a scrollbook.

And the second thing.

Scarlett fiddled with the purple brooch on her arm.

When the time is right, the devil will give the signal.

You can then perform the promised action.

"......."

Before long, Scarlett's hands were drenched in a cold sweat.

\* \* \*

'......I can help.'

After much deliberation, Scarlett decided to help me.

To be honest, I didn't expect Scarlett to be on my side.

But as Scarlett said, just as there were people who didn't understand me, there were also people who did.

And Scarlett was the latter.

I spoke with Charlotte and Harriet after returning to Razak.

"Wouldn't it have been better to bring him in?"

Herriot narrowed his eyes, worried about leaving Scarlett alone.

I gave him a scrollbook and a beeper, and he was nervous to return.

Whether it's available or not, it's dangerous to leave Scarlett alone with them, especially since she's committed to helping us.

"That's what I thought, too."

"......What, you're saying you're staying?"

"Uh."

Charlotte bit her lip.

In class B, Charlotte was best friends with Scarlett.

"It's risky, but it's the smart thing for Scarlett to do at this point."

But despite her misgivings, Charlotte had to admit that Scarlett's decision was for the best.

"Could things get more dangerous if I'm gone?

Scarlett clearly said so.

"Immortals are self-repairing when damaged. Scarlett is the one who can most completely neutralize an Immortal at this point without causing any damage, and if she suddenly disappears....... something more dangerous could happen."

With Christina, Ludwig, and the others in control of Immortal, it's very dangerous to provoke them.

It's in their best interest to keep Scarlett in custody for now, rather than letting the boys, who are excited by her disappearance, do something even more unknown.

Scarlett chose to become a prisoner herself.

I appreciate your offer to help, but you put yourself in the most dangerous situation.

That's why I gave him the scrollbook I carried with me, as well as a signaling device I'd made for Scarlett in case things didn't work out.

If Scarlett is in danger, or if we need her on our end, we'll send a signal.

In the end, Scarlett has to trick her friends.

A friend who needs to be locked up.

And a friend who has to trick a friend who is trying to trap him.

"......Sad."

Charlotte muttered gloomily to herself, unable to bear the current state of affairs of the B-class boys who had once been her classmates.

The possibility of Scarlet's power being channeled through the Archduke.

As soon as he heard the news, he was on the move, reaching Scarlett faster than Ludwig.

What if I was late?

If you arrived at the Royal Class dormitory after Ludwig had disappeared with Scarlett.

If we didn't know where Scarlett went.

I wonder what it was like.

This time it was fast.

That's how we got to Scarlett.

However, as I said myself.

The fact remains that by using Scarlet, you're putting Scarlet at risk.

Round and round and eventually.

Because of me.

Two heroines from the original.

Delphine is dead.

Scarlett must trick Ludwig.

"......."

"Everything will be fine."

I don't know what my expression was, but Harriet gently put her arm around my shoulders.

"Right."

Charlotte sees it, too, and nods her head in agreement.

"Everything will be fine."

Please.

It has to be good.

We say that, but we don't know if it's a certainty or an assertion.

Or a prayer.

It's just the wind.

Now we couldn't tell.

Episode 646.

Night time.

"Good."

After hearing Ludwig's story, Christina closed her book and nodded.

At the end of the march, most of the people in the camp were asleep.

In the mobile barracks, Christina was talking with two others, including Ludwig.

Except for Christina, they didn't look happy.

Ludwig, in particular, was hanging his head, unable to forgive himself for doing this.

You decide to keep your friend effectively locked up. Until everything is finalized.

Even if it's for Scarlett's safety, she's being held for an indeterminate amount of time in an unknown location with nothing explained to her.

Louis, Anna, and Ludwig's expressions were bad, but Christina's were a little different.

"Hmmm......."

Clearly, there were doubts floating around.

"Scarlett finally agreed to do what we said, so what's the problem?"

Louis Ankton looks at Christina and asks, his voice a little sharper.

In the end, it was Christina who said Scarlett needed to be locked up, and she got her way.

"Don't be sensitive. This was necessary."

Louis Ankton gritted his teeth.

Eventually, someone has to make a decision.

She just happens to be that role.

"Has Scarlett been acting a little weird?"

"If it's weird, what?"

Ludwig was uncomfortable with Christina's question, as she seemed to suspect something.

"No, just, whatever."

"I didn't."

Ludwig cut her off, as if her question wasn't worth the trouble.

At Ludwig's words, Christina sighed.

"I know I'm a bitch, but why do you guys seem more emotional than me?"

Christina's eyes turn cold.

"Do you think this is a topic for a petty argument or an emotional battle? The Immortals are the most powerful army in the world, but Scarlett is the only one who can instantly and completely neutralize them. They can kill empires, demons, and everyone in between, but they can't even give Scarlett a scratch."

If Scarlett wanted to, she could erase the immortal like she would an eraser.

"So what are you saying, we should be suspicious of Scarlett?"

At Louis' words, Christina gritted her teeth.

"It's great that Scarlett is following our lead, but does it sound so weird to you that I'm saying we need to be careful?"

"......."

"We're not the only ones who know Scarlett has that power, Adelia figured it out first."

"You can't be....... And now Adelia?"

"Adelia's with someone!"

"!"

"Have you already forgotten who the daughter of the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan is?"

She shouted, and suddenly everyone realized she was telling the truth.

I'm not doubting Adelia.

It wasn't Christina who was emotional, it was the other three.

I felt terrible that I had trapped my friend, so I didn't think about what I should have done.

"The Order of the Divine has already fallen to the Devil, and the Allies are slowly turning to his side, one by one, but what about Archduke Saint-Antoine? He would naturally, too naturally, fall to the Devil's side, maybe even before the Order of the Divine!"

Now that the demon has begun to move, it will inevitably come into contact with Archduke Saint-Tuan.

That should be obvious without even looking at it.

It's ridiculous to discuss the possibility that Archduke Saint-Thuan might not have sided with the Devil.

"The Devil is working hard to find a way to neutralize the Immortals, and even if he didn't know how right now, he'd still try to get his hands on it."

The side that must use Scarlet's power.

The side that must stop Scarlett's power.

All of them would have acted on that information as soon as they saw it.

It's rather odd that Archduke Saint-Thuan isn't on the Devil's side, and the Devil should have made his move.

But it turns out that Ludwig was faster.

"If we're faster, that's just a weird situation."

The opponent was able to move faster, and as it turns out, the one who received the information late was faster.

"Even if Scarlett went straight back to the Temple, there's no way she's going inside if they're in cahoots with Bertus."

In the end, everyone realized that they were more emotional than she was, and that they weren't reaching the conclusions they should have.

"But in the end....... Scarlett's safety is in our hands....... protecting....... you're doing......."

Anna said it with a twisted look on her face, as if she felt terrible for using the word protection.

Is the protection right?

Shouldn't it be called confinement and surveillance?

But Anna has a point, after all, Scarlett is in our hands, so why doubt her?

"Yeah, obviously that's good. That's great, but....... That's why I'm asking. We need to block even the smallest possibility."

Christina looks toward Ludwig.

"What's weird, you really didn't notice?"

Ludwig is the only one who comes face to face with Scarlett.

If something was wrong, Ludwig was the only one who could see it.

Ludwig ponders.

Strange, or not so strange.

Scarlett was freaking out in the middle of something she clearly didn't understand.

He said he needed time to think about it.

After a moment's thought, I decided to follow Ludwig's lead.

So, we ended up locking Scarlett up.

Ludwig had a dangerous fantasy: Scarlett might have disappeared for a moment in the meantime.

But in the end, Scarlett didn't disappear, she just went to the library to get a book.

He returned with a large trunk in tow.

Is that weird?

"......."

Should we even be suspicious of such behavior?

I wouldn't call it weird, but it is what it is.

I didn't check what was in that trunk.

But, at best, it could have been a piece of clothing or a book, and you had to open it up and search it?

This is Scarlett, who, without explaining anything to you, has convinced you that you need to be locked up for your own good.

I wonder if I should be suspicious of such a Scarlett.

"No, I didn't."

Ludwig's answer was still the same.

Christina asks.

"Are you sure?"

If I had to doubt Scarlett any more than that, I'd rather be betrayed.

"I'm sure."

Ludwig concluded.

But.

"That would have to be true."

Under Christina's threatening glare, Ludwig said nothing more.

\* \* \*

Zodiacal gradient.

Hwang Sung Emperatos.

Central Palace Tetra.

"Now, more and more, it seems like everything is getting out of my hands."

"......Majesty."

"I can control Immortal right now, and I can control the Alliance, but......."

The distance from the heart of the Empire to the Allies is long.

But that physical distance could always be reduced.

The Allies were in the palm of your hand at all times and could move at will.

But in the rapidly changing circumstances that followed the demon's revelation, the whole situation of the allied forces was moving into territory that the Emperor could not see.

This makes sense.

It was Bertus, not the devil, who induced it in the first place.

We've given them the sign that it's okay to start, and they're just starting to move.

However, the situation had been out of Bertus' hands since he had initiated it.

The Allies are now both physically and politically distant from the Emperor.

The leader of the Alliance is in disarray, and will gradually be devoured by the demon.

Immortals do the Emperor's bidding for now, but after everything reaches its conclusion, they will no longer belong to him.

The empire is losing power.

Saviolin Tana stares at the Emperor with a stony expression on her face, as he engineers and orchestrates a situation in which she intends to lose everything.

The emperor keeps losing something.

No.

To be precise, I'm putting it down.

One by one.

One by one.

Not to have something.

You are designing and arranging every situation to put something down.

All is not lost for the emperor yet.

"You still have control of Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages. All is not lost."

The emperor is too much of a good thing to lay it all down once and for all.

While the Immortals are a very powerful army, the Empire has the Shanapels and the Imperial Mages. These two powers are not to be underestimated.

Saviolin Tana's words make Bertus stare at her.

"That's the problem."

I'm not saying that's a good thing.

Tana bit her lip at the Emperor's comment that that was the problem.

"I don't want to, but why are there so many people I have to go down with?"

The Emperor smiles bitterly.

The emperor has too much, and he has no way of letting go of some of it.

The emperor has many things.

Some things can't be thrown away.

Because.

The emperor can't die alone, even if he wanted to.

"Lord Tana."

"......."

"If I asked you to take the Imperial Mages and Shanapelle and disappear, would you do so?"

At that, Saviolin Tana's eyes narrow.

"I'm....... Why....... Why does it have to be like this. Why....... you have to do this....... I don't know."

Saviolin Tana is a knight who has been loyal to the Empire his entire life.

He didn't know how to live without it.

A person who knows no other life.

The emperor's final order to such a knight is to abandon the empire.

Eventually, clear tears begin to trickle from between tightly closed eyes.

"Your Majesty is young. Why should this happen....... Why your Majesty should have to deal with this....... I don't know."

What does being young and mature have to do with the emperor.

An emperor must be an emperor.

Saviolin Tana, who had served the Empire closest and longest, knew herself how ridiculous her words were.

It's just too bad.

You dreamed of being an emperor, but you didn't become one the way you wanted to.

Bertus was suddenly crowned emperor in the midst of a war and without a coronation.

The prince who wanted to be emperor got his wish.

It's just that he's the emperor of an empire on the verge of collapse.

Such an emperor has only one last wish.

To be the last emperor of mankind.

"Why be the last one on a sinking ship?"

If everyone is abandoning ship, why should you be the last one on board.

The last emperor of a fading nation.

There is no reason why the grave should not be lined with vassals.

The last emperor of the Imperial House of Gradias.

He will be remembered in history as a shadowy soldier who will never be seen again.

Episode 647.

The day I saw an immortal being created with my own eyes.

Bertus said.

Someone has to be responsible for all of this.

Afterward, for a while, Bertus and I talked.

"I'm not just talking about who's responsible for Gate.

"So, what responsibilities?

'And the responsibility of the Demon War.

It all started with the Demon War, so if we're going to talk about accountability, we should start there.

Bertus said.

In that story, I couldn't help but recognize the responsibility and who Bertus was talking about.

If the real cause of the Gate debacle was the Demon War, then who is responsible for the Demon War?

That would be humanity.

But humanity as a whole is paying the price, not being held accountable.

Someone has to take full responsibility.

Hence, humanity, the beginning of everything and the source of everything.

The imperial family of Gradias, who decided the war.

The imperial family must be held accountable, Bertus said.

"Did you cause the Great Demon War?

Of course, after the war, it wasn't up to Bertus to decide.

And that war, after all, was caused by the dictates of the Imperial House of Gradias.

While the Empire may have started the war, it was always going to happen eventually, and if it wasn't a war that anyone wanted, no one, not even the Empire, would have been able to mobilize such a large force in the first place.

"Remember when I used to say that?

"......what?

"The one that said everyone below me is the same.

Yes.

I said something like that.

"But I'm not here because I actually did something, and it's not like I don't take credit for that.

'.......'

'Just as you are a demon because you are an Archdemon, so I am because I am the Emperor's son.'

Yes, Bertus certainly said he was above everyone, but he didn't say he was above everyone because he was great.

It's inherited.

Wise or incompetent, those in the imperial family are granted power.

It's not a matter of right or wrong, it's just the way it is.

"If you're born with the glory that you don't deserve, you're born with the responsibility that you don't deserve.

'.......'

"If I take the glory and the power, but not the responsibility, isn't that kind of ridiculous and lame?

If you're going to deny responsibility, you shouldn't have inherited power and glory in the first place. Neither comes from you.

"Maybe it's time to take responsibility, because really, it's not like I didn't play a role in all of this.

If you've been treated with honor since birth, it's not because you're great, it's because it's inherited.

Therefore, you are also responsible for everything that happens in the Demon War that has nothing to do with you.

If you're going to inherit power, you should also inherit responsibility.

In front of Bertus' solemn expression, I was speechless.

If you've been honored for something you didn't do, you have to take responsibility for it.

That's for me, not Bertus.

All the things I have because I created this world.

So shouldn't I be responsible for what happens in this world?

Not Bertus.

At the end of the day, Bertus is a victim of me.

Because it doesn't change the fact that I'm the perpetrator of all of this.

"You don't have to make that asshole face.

I wonder what kind of face I was making.

However, Bertus said.

"Is it harder to put the world down, or harder to swallow the world. Do we really need to compare?

What Bertus needs to do is difficult.

So, is what I need to do easy?

"It's funny to say this, but just like I take responsibility for myself, you take responsibility for yourself.

Yes.

He's right.

Letting go of the world.

Digesting the world.

Both will be challenging, but the latter will be harder.

There's a way that Bertus is responsible, and there's a way that I'm responsible.

Bertus is not giving me the world.

You're leaving the world to me.

If I can clean up the mess the Emperor has made, the world will be mine, and I will survive.

But if I fail, the world may not be destroyed, but everything I have and myself will be.

"I think you should be angry.

Bertus chuckled, as if he didn't understand the strange look I was giving him.

"That's weird.

Then, Bertus laughed.

Like you can't stand it without laughing.

I, for one, could not laugh in Bertus' presence.

\* \* \*

-Grrrrrr!

The battlefield once again.

I was wielding a sword in the midst of an inferno of fire, ice, and thunderbolts.

Do not use Tiamata and Alsbringer.

-Kyaaaaah!

The mere sight of the dimorphic liquid monster charging at me vaporized it with flames.

Fireworks.

On the battlefield, a lot of people get mixed up.

So they don't think everything that happens is coming from me.

You pick up a broken spear of unknown origin and hurl it into the enemy lines.

-Quizik!

A spear pierces the head of a behemoth that has been rampaging across the battlefield, trampling soldiers.

-Kwow!

But it doesn't fall down.

I can't count the number of times I've had to use a water station that looked like a bunch of differently shaped, eaten monster heads.

Not as much as Ellen, though.

I've killed more monsters than I can count.

I fly across the battlefield, lunging at any monster that hasn't fallen, punching it in the face.

-Bam!

It's not the sound of a fist.

Technically, it's the sound of an energetic shockwave fired at the moment of fist contact.

In the flesh of the behemoth, half of it blown away in an instant, I pass a group of soldiers looking up at me in disbelief.

There's a good thing about immortals.

If you're wearing an armored helmet, you're probably one of the Immortals.

When an unknown soldier advances, slaughtering monsters, the soldiers think it's the hidden power of the empire, not the devil himself.

So, it's better to wear a helmet than to move around with a different face.

Just as the soldiers look at me in awe but don't suspect me, the immortals don't suspect me.

Amidst the bombast and roar of battle.

In the distance, the trajectory of the Voidblade slices through the monsters as it advances.

I, too, ran toward the warp gate as part of the battle.

I'm not the only one.

Immortals also include wizards.

Among the golden glow that bathes the battlefield, healing and blessing the wounded, are the shots of Olivia Ranze.

And.

-Flash!

Some of the light flying toward the city from the rear of the battlefield was coming from Herriot.

-Currrrr!

Among the thunderbolts raining down from the sky were some summoned by Riana.

How to be held accountable.

Just as you can't take all the responsibility for your life, there are many ways to take responsibility.

Is this the right way to be accountable?

But I don't want to be responsible for death.

I am responsible or accountable in some other way.

He swung his weapon as if possessed.

\* \* \*

Before reaching Wallen's next large city, Luboten, the Allies kept their distance.

Until all other small and medium-sized cities' warp gates have been handled by Immortals.

With Immortal's mission accomplished, the Allies advanced on Luboten.

It was definitely more intense than the Battle of Wall Run, and the battle itself took longer.

But in the end, it was still less of a sacrifice than Serandia.

The look on the faces of the Allies as they saw Luboten reduced to ashes was a little different from the look on their faces after the successful capture of Serandia.

It's a less damaging victory, but that's not because I'm sad.

Now we have one more thing to do.

Now, the end is really coming.

Everyone knew it, and there was a sense of resignation rather than triumph on everyone's faces.

Knowing that the moment they had hoped and prayed for was just around the corner, the Allies cleared the battlefield in a mood of sober reflection rather than triumphant celebration.

It's up to the Allies to clean up the battlefield.

We're back in Lazak.

Riana looks at me and shrugs.

"But why did we have to fight it ourselves?"

"It's better than nothing."

"Well....... That's not exactly wrong."

At my words, Riana nodded with a pensive expression.

I'd rather be fighting than watching the battle from afar. I could use Dreadfind's Ring to transform and fight as one of the Allied soldiers, but it would be weird to have a very powerful soldier whose identity is unknown, so I didn't.

However, since the advent of Immortals, it's not unusual for the Alliance to have very powerful allies whose identities are unknown.

So, I thought I'd just throw on a helmet and head into battle. I didn't want to be too obvious with my Tiamata and Alsbringer.

I was going to go by myself, but then she heard me and said she'd go too.

And then Olivia and Riana came along.

It's easier for someone like Olivia, who can fight on the battlefield in a helmet or robe, and the Crusaders are ours.

Plus, even Elise and Lucinil helped with the battle.

That's not a significant majority, but it's better than nothing.

It can't hurt to have the monsters die a little faster.

I don't know if it makes sense to anonymously insert yourself into a battle you're going to win anyway.

It's a battle won, but not without death.

Someone would have been hurt, someone would have been killed.

I don't think I killed the most monsters in today's battle, but Riana and Herriot did.

Herriot stood still in the clearing in front of Razak's castle in the night, staring down at the hillside.

You're bound to have a lot on your mind.

-profit! profit......! profit!

And Olivia was sitting on the rocky ledge in front of the castle, wincing as she stripped off her plate armor soaked in the blood of the monsters.

-Ah, that sucks!

-Bam!

Olivia scowls, dropping her armor.

I didn't take it off, I peeled it off.

"Now you're saying she's cute sometimes, am I crazy?"

Riana smirked as she watched Olivia sulk.

No, I don't think I'd call that cute.

In the distance, Olivia stares at me with an axe-eye.

-Reinhardt! Don't look at me, help me, you idiot! I can't even put this on myself!

"Okay."

Walking over to the squirming Olivia, I untied the knots in her armor.

"So you're not wearing full body armor like me?"

"Rowen told me to wear it, but I didn't give a shit, so I forced myself to wear it."

Apparently, he visited Crusader Captain Rowen just before the battle began.

"It's consecrated armor, so it works. Do you think paladins are stupid enough to wear this?"

Paladins don't wear armor for nothing, Olivia explained with a heavy sigh, because they can bless and, in some cases, enhance the physical body.

Just as I was disguised as a soldier, Olivia was disguised as a paladin, so I had no choice but to wear plate.

With Olivia's platinum hair tangled up, I had to say it was a ghostly sight.

This is unavoidable if you're going to be in melee combat.

Liana and Harriet were looking a little tired, but still fluffy.

Eventually, I stripped Olivia of her armor and she was down to her underwear.

You're wearing armor, so you're going to be light on the inside.

"......."

"......."

Well.

Uh.

That.......

"Either look at it properly, or don't look at it at all, you. It's more sinister."

Olivia shoots me a cold glare.

"Oh, I didn't see that....... No, I did, but that's not what I saw......!"

"And I smell blood now. Don't come near me."

"When you ask me to take off my armor!"

Come on, come on, come on!

"That was then, this is now."

But really, as Olivia said, it did smell like blood.

Olivia watched Harriet's back as she looked down the hill in the distance with envy, then rose from her seat.

"When I'm reborn, I'll learn magic too....... It sucks....... Mr. Lee......."

Olivia stumbled into the castle, leaving her armor where it lay.

I could see Charlotte coming out, too scared for Olivia to enter.

"I hear the battle went well."

Our regent is technically a fighter, but Charlotte's job is not to be on the battlefield, so she wore the most modest dress possible.

"What....... Fortunately."

We participated, but in the end, the biggest roles were played by Titans and Immortals.

Charlotte crossed her arms and took a deep breath.

"Now....... Diane."

"Right."

I couldn't help but break out in a cold sweat when he said that.

Now we can really see the end in sight.

All the other places were also cleaned up by Immortal.

Regeln Capital Diane.

Now for the really last one.

Only the final push remains.

All of us were left to ponder.

Episode 648.

The battle is over.

As always with big city raids, it was a matter of clearing out the corpses of the monsters and killing the survivors.

But that role was now being fulfilled by Immortal.

It's an army that never tires and can die and rise again.

As such, the outskirts of the garrison were now occupied by Immortal knights and mages patrolling the battlefield and dealing with any monsters that might have survived.

Soon.

The area outside of Luboten is both an Allied garrison and Immortal territory.

It was a place completely out of the reach of the living.

A person who is now unable to tell if they are alive or dead.

-pook!κΈ°κΈ....... 껙!

Ellen chopped off the mole-like creature's head as it leapt out of hiding and lunged at her.

But from the severed head of the mole monster, jet-black blood poured toward Ellen.

From the color of the blood, it was clear that it was a dangerous substance that should not be touched.

Claws and teeth aren't the only dangers of monsters.

But the blood never made it to Ellen.

-qiibin!

Before it could reach Ellen's body, or even her Auror armor, a shroud of flame from the sun's cloak vaporized the mole's blood before it could reach her.

"......."

Even without the two orbs, Ellen is strong.

However, Voidblade Rament and Infernal Rapelt complete Ellen.

Rafelt's Voidblade, shaped like a cutout of the night sky, slashes through everything it touches.

And the sun cloak, which could have unleashed hellfire, is now a weapon to protect the user.

Rapport detects a "threat.

Even the strongest of humanity, those who have made it to the master class, have fallen victim to the unpredictable threat of monsters.

However, when Rafelt awakens to his true power, he defends Ellen from every attack that threatens her, whether she knows it or not.

As if an all-knowing deity is watching over you.

If the monsters' breath is dangerous, stop their breath, and if their blood is dangerous, stop their blood.

Whatever it is, if it's a "threat," it's blocked.

A sword that cuts through anything.

A shield against anything.

The perfection of the workshop makes Ellen Artorius a warrior.

So even in the most dangerous parts of the battlefield, even if it's a monster that's beyond common sense, Rafelt will always protect Ellen.

Because she can cut through anything and withstand any attack, Ellen goes into the most dangerous places.

But it's not always about slaying giant monsters.

Even a small monster like this is dangerous to someone.

That's why Ellen is possessed even after the battle is over, wandering the outskirts of the battlefield in search of monsters even though no one has ordered her to.

The first to enter the battlefield, the last to leave.

Even now that she was a puppet, Ellen was doing the same things she had always done.

So, we all know that Ellen is weird, but we don't know "how weird".

I didn't say much, and I didn't do much differently.

"Immortal will take care of this, why do you need to do this?"

Ellen turns slowly at the sound of a voice behind her.

"Why don't you get some rest?"

It was Christina with two soldiers and two mages.

"......."

Ellen stares at Christina for a moment.

Christina shook her head.

"I thought it was a little too flavored, but you're really weird."

"......."

"What's going on?"

Ellen didn't answer Christina's question.

"Are you mute or something?"

Despite Christina's prodding for a response, Ellen remained silent.

Christina narrows her brow as she stares at Ellen, who is still, unresponsive, a doll.

"What are you, turned in a different way than I am?"

"......."

It's the ones who end up broken after horrible things.

Those who are still intact are too strong.

Having spent time in some of the most horrific, nasty places, it's no wonder Ellen is broken.

So, it's going to look like this because it's broken in some way.

She only thinks so.

Ellen didn't respond to my continued sarcastic remarks.

He doesn't seem offended at all.

It doesn't even appear to ignore it.

Looking at Ellen, who doesn't respond, Christina frowns.

But Ellen doesn't leave.

All I could do was stare at her.

"I'm an asshole in a very different sense than I used to be."

"......."

"Well, okay, I actually came to you with a proposal."

Ellen is still silent.

"You know Immortal, don't you?"

For the first time, we have a reaction that feels like a reaction.

-nod

"Oh, you're listening, aren't you?"

It's a simple way of communicating that she's nodding, but eventually Christina realizes that Ellen is listening.

"I'm not going to go into a long explanation, you're busy."

Christina laughs.

"Be my hostage."

At Christina's evil grin, Ellen stares.

"Because if I have you, I'm definitely going to get in your face."

It will try to get it back somehow.

If you have Ellen, there is someone who will come to you.

It's hiding somewhere, poisoning you, and you don't even know where it is.

It is impossible for any being to search the entire world.

If you hide forever, you will never be found.

As such, you'll need to make sure that you have a sacrifice to summon the demon.

"Ellen, I need you to be bait for the devil."

"......."

Christina smiles.

Hostage.

I don't intend to stop there.

"Of course, when the devil came looking for you......."

She starts laughing, as if she's having fun imagining it.

"It would be irreversible."

The moment the devil showed up to save the hostages.

What the demon will see is not a living Ellen Artorius, but an immortalized Ellen.

What would the Devil say to Ellen, who had already died an irreversible death and was now a shell of her former self?

Feeling deprived.

The feeling of facing something irreversible.

I thought I'd make him feel the same way.

"Grab it."

Christina commands.

It was already a shell, and I couldn't imagine trying to make it a shell again.

\* \* \*

It didn't take long.

About 30 seconds.

One immortal uses a sword, another uses magic.

That's all it took for the Immortal Four to be neutralized by having their heads blown off, snapped in half, or their backs severed.

The Voidblade cuts through everything it touches.

And all attacks are neutralized by Rafelt.

In the face of the Voidblade, even the Master Class's Auror Armor is a mere drop in the ocean in front of the blade.

Nothing short of a holy object can withstand the cutting power of a Voidblade.

So Ellen just swung, and it was blocked.

Christina watched, wide-eyed, as the fallen Immortal disappeared in a flash of light.

Is this enough?

The Immortal that Christina brings with her is also one of the best in Immortals.

Ancient heroes who reached the rank of grandmaster couldn't last 30 seconds in front of Ellen.

If these four can be neutralized so easily, it is unlikely that any other immortals could be brought in and the result would be any different.

"What is......?"

Ellen had sliced through two Grandmasters and two Archmages and could only stare at Christina.

Christina realized.

The absurdity of holy objects.

Ellen is Ellen, but it's a holy object.

I couldn't help but feel the absurdity of that Voidblade Ramen.

Ellen clearly reacted to the attacks being made on her.

Ellen, having subdued the Immortals, begins to walk slowly toward Christina.

As Ellen approaches, Christina steps back and casts her spell.

Call an immortal.

-Flash!

In response to Christina's will, dozens of Immortals begin to travel short distances through space to intercept Ellen.

But it didn't make sense.

-Circling!

With a single swing of the Voidblade, the Immortal is cut down along with his Auror armor.

-Kwalung!

Thunderbolt and Charge are blocked by a shroud of flames.

This creates a ridiculous situation where the fire stops the charge.

"Does this....... Does this make sense......?"

-Quack!

Not swords, not magic, not Ellen's Auror armor, not even the barrier of flame she wears.

The Voidblade, however, slashes everything in its path.

That was a mistake.

The devil is not the problem.

Ellen was the problem.

No force of arms, no magic, will be of any consequence before Ellen Artorius, wielding the Voidblade and wearing the Cloak of Infernal Fire.

The only reason we've been able to tolerate Ellen so far is because she retains her humanity.

It is impossible to bring the unflinching Ellen Artorius to her knees by force.

Christina realizes.

After all, an alchemist is an alchemist.

He was all about his lab and his desk.

I've never been in a fight, and I've never watched a fight.

With over a thousand archmages and master classes at my fingertips, I thought there was nothing that wouldn't fall before me.

Why a warrior is a warrior.

What the heck a holy object is.

You know it in your head, but you haven't seen it with your eyes.

The twenty Immortals she had summoned had already been neutralized and disappeared at a rate not unlike the first.

Christina sees Ellen walking toward her in a daze.

It's not that urgent.

As if to say, if you want to run away, run away.

Tighten slowly.

The moment she finally decides to leave.

-shhh!

Before she knew it, Ellen had reached out and grabbed Christina's throat with one hand.

Ellen's movements aren't something you'd see and recognize from a desk bite you've never fought.

"Turn off...... Yuck!"

A skilled Battlemage might be able to cast Spatial Shift on a pain in the neck, but that's not the case for Christina.

Battlemage is the path of choice for the less talented mages.

For the elite class of mages, there is no reason to have any real combat experience.

So it's no wonder that Christina can't see or react to Ellen's movements, and that she can't use magic in her pain.

All the formulas you've been thinking about are being thrown out of whack as your breathing gets harder and harder.

I'm choking.

Sick.

I think I'm going to die.

How can I work my magic calmly when all I can think about is that?

How do Battlemages do that?

Christina realizes how difficult it was to do something so trivial.

How powerless you are.

By the time you realize how arrogant it was to step in front of Ellen, it's too late.

The arrogance of an alchemist who wasn't even a battlemage, let alone a battlemage, to believe in the power of the Immortals was unspeakable, and Ellen was demonstrating it with her actions.

Being grabbed by the scruff of the neck was enough to shut down all magic, and I could no longer call upon the Immortals.

How to call an immortal is also magic.

"Off......."

As her breathing tightens, Christina struggles against Ellen's fingers, which are twisted around her throat.

But even with all her strength, Ellen couldn't move a single finger.

In the face of an overwhelming power differential, everything else is irrelevant.

Even the Immortals have been swept away by the Voidblade, so there's no way Christina can control Ellen's fingers.

"I, Lord, if you kill me....... regret....... will......?"

In the end, Ellen could only stare at the ugly figure making such miserable threats.

And just like that, just before she passed out.

-Hair

Ellen abruptly let go of Christina.

"K...... huh! huh! huh! huh! huh! huh!"

Ellen stares down at Christina, who's sobbing uncontrollably on the floor.

It was an emotionless stare.

It's not even a look of disdain, like looking down at trash.

"Hmph! Black! Hmph!"

Exhaling and inhaling several times, she still couldn't escape.

You need to run away.

You need to run away.

It's all in my head, but the magic keeps failing.

I'm not even strangling anymore.

I couldn't work my magic because of the pressure and fear.

How the hell did you do this.

How can magic be used in combat?

How do we do that?

How can a human be so strong?

Christina was horrified as her body experienced what she knew in her head.

No matter how justified the anger, no matter how justified the hatred.

The weak are the weak and the strong are the strong.

Those who don't know the fight, don't know the fight.

You can buy it, you can scheme it, but you have to keep it on topic.

If you don't know what you're talking about, you're in for a rough ride.

Ellen stares at Christina, crumpled up like a piece of trash, gasping for air, completely incapacitated by a single, brief blockage in her airway.

And then Ellen's mouth, which hadn't been able to open until now, opens.

"It's still useful."

"Off......!"

-chiiiiing!

Christina couldn't hear a word of what was coming out of Ellen's mouth.

It's a small voice.

However, it had an uncanny resonance, like a mix of tens of thousands of voices.

Christina writhes in pain, as the voice itself seems to tear at her brain.

This is just a small fraction of what Ellen has endured.

But Christina could not bear the overwhelming sound of the spirits, not even the sound of their voices, and she could only cower and tremble.

"I'll let you live."

"Ugh!"

Ellen had become something Christina couldn't imagine.

Even simple violence.

Even a simple voice.

She couldn't handle it.

The only good thing is that she didn't pay for her arrogance with her life.

Ellen returned to the Allied garrison, leaving a stunned Christina on the ground where the monster's corpse lay.

Episode 649.

Coalition forces will be stationed for about three days to regroup.

The days after the battle and the cleanup.

Cliffman's Barracks, Royal Class Garrison.

"How come you're busier now that the battle is over?"

Erich had come from somewhere late at night with a piece of bread, and he lay down on the rug and muttered.

"Many wounded?"

Lindt asks, and Erich looks over at him.

"When has there not been?"

Erhi, who could use divine magic, was busy healing people.

There were four of us in the barracks, Erich and Klippmann, and Kai and Lindt.

As usual, Cliffman was lying on his cot, staring blankly at the tent.

Add Heinrich to the mix, and it was almost always like this.

Of course, Cliffman never once suggested that his barracks be turned into anything resembling a hideout.

Kono Lint had been frequenting Klippmann's barracks for some time now, and Kai and Erich, who had come to look for him, had been pestering him, and Heinrich had been looking for them.

Kliffman has always been quiet about it.

"And Heinrich?"

Kaiir shook his head at Lint's question.

"She's moving with her sister, she's royalty, she's got a lot of work to do."

At Kaier's words, Erhi turns to stare at him.

"......Heinrich went to school with Temple, so yes. Heinrich's sister is the commander of Cernstadt and the next king. Is it okay to call her that?"

"......, right?"

Both Kaier and Erich tilted their heads at the sudden question.

"Is this blasphemy?"

The commoner and the royalty are friends, so it's okay to call the royalty brothers.

We all started to think about it.

I thought about it and decided to ask Heinrich when he got back.

"One more to go."

There is talk of pacifying the rest of the world.

That's why everyone knows that Diane, the capital of Rieseln, is the last stop.

Lint's words brought a pensive look to everyone's face.

"When the war is over, I'm going to visit everyone who has ever written to me."

Lindt's words made Erich shudder.

"......Do you remember all those people?"

"I've got them all, I'm sure I can find someone with an address."

"What's the point of even going there?"

"No....... I was just wondering how you were doing....... and if you're okay......."

Lint blurted out, and when Erich asked what the hell they were doing, Kaeir clicked his tongue.

"That's not what he's doing, he's probably trying to find a pretty girl."

"ah......."

"Oh, no! I! had! those! pure! intentions!"

It's kind of hard not to notice ConoLint's cheesy underbelly.

Of course, I don't know what's really going on inside, but Conor Lint is starting to laugh.

"If there's such a thing as an apostrophe....... And there's a kid I miss......."

-Bam!

"Eek!"

And before he could finish his sentence, Kono Lint hit the floor with a blow to the back of the head so hard that both his eyes popped out.

Suddenly, it was Kliffman who stabbed Lint in the back.

"Why are you suddenly hitting me!"

Conor Lindt cried out as he was slapped in the back of the head.

"Shut up, because you're going to die."

"Huh? What kind of superstition is that?"

"Anyway, we'll talk about it when we're done."

The moment when everyone was stunned, staring at the suddenly sullen Cliff.

-pulp

"Uh, there they are."

Heinrich entered Klippmann's tent.

Kono Lindt slaps the back of his head and glances at Heinrich.

"Have you done your business?"

"Uh, roughly."

Heinrich slumped into one of the chairs in the back of the barracks.

With Heinrich in the room, it was inevitable that our earlier conversation would come up.

In the end, it's just a bunch of talk.

You and I are friends, but that doesn't mean we're friends with your family, so should I think of Louise as a friend's sister, or should I treat her like one, and should I feel comfortable calling her Heinrich in front of her, or does that offend her?

When Heinrich heard the question, he narrowed his eyes.

"...... Why the hell would you want to know that?"

"Just."

"Uh, just."

It's literally just a question for no particular reason or purpose.

There's no such thing as a good story to tell your friends, it's just whatever comes to mind and for no particular reason.

"Come to think of it, everyone but Erich....... from the commoners."

With the exception of Heinrich and Erich de Lapaeri, everyone in this room is a commoner.

"Do you see that now?"

"I don't know, it's just new to me now."

Heinrich had all but forgotten where he came from, so it was refreshing to think about it.

"I don't think my sister would mind how you guys treat me....... And so would your sister......."

Heinrich didn't think Ruiz would care much about that, either.

Though he still didn't know her well, Heinrich didn't see Louise as someone who was strict about her status.

"Well, come to Cernstadt sometime after the war. I won't be able to afford it, but I won't fail to treat you."

Heinrich's words.

"......."

"......."

"......."

At that, everyone is silent, looking only at Cliff.

It just so happens that Kono Lint just got stabbed in the back of the head for crying about the end of the war.

"......what the hell."

Klippmann responded.

"Why do you let him get away with this while you stab me in the back!"

Naturally, Lint was going to be a bit of a dick for saying the wrong thing.

"What the fuck, royalty doesn't say anything, but you can't hit them for being royalty, huh?"

"Shut up. I didn't hit you because you were too far away."

In reality, Kono Lint was sitting next to Klippmann's cot, and Heinrich was a bit far away to slap him on the back.

"......What the hell are you guys talking about?"

Naturally, Heinrich didn't understand what was going on because he didn't know what they were talking about.

"No, he's the one who talks about what he's going to do after the war before it's over!"

"....... Is that what you were talking about?"

You never know if a superstition is true or not.

"It's not good form to talk about what's next before you're done. It doesn't do us any favors to relax."

Heinrich nodded as if he understood what Klippmann was talking about.

The moment you relax because the end is near, you may actually lose your life at the end of it all.

And Diane is the final destination, but also the most dangerous.

There will be more people dying than ever before.

So it's ridiculous to talk about what comes next before everything is done. Heinrich seems to pause for a moment, then adds a cautious postscript.

"Also, the end of the Gate debacle won't be the end of everything......."

At Heinrich's words, Erich looks in his direction.

"What do you mean, just because the gate thing is over doesn't mean it's all over?"

"......."

Heinrich is silent in response.

For quite some time.

When Heinrich suddenly fell silent for a long time, everyone could only stare at him.

He didn't look like he had nothing to say, but it was clear that he was choosing his words.

"Now, there's something you need to know."

It was a sign that we were going to talk about something very important, not just chit-chat with friends.

Heinrich is the only remaining member of the royal family with any power in this position.

As such, Heinrich may be a friend, but he is the only one with access to information coming from the highest levels of the Alliance.

Heinrich looks around.

"Lint, send us to a place very far away from the Allied garrison."

"......Suddenly?"

"I'll tell you later, but for now, don't ask me anything."

Everyone, I've never seen Heinrich look so serious.

\* \* \*

The sudden change in Heinrich's mood made everyone realize that this was not a time to play around.

One by one, they were brought to a place very far from the Allied garrison, as Heinrich of Kono Lindt had said.

A place where the lights of the garrison can be seen in the distance.

Of course, I could only assume that this was not something anyone else should hear.

There's nothing to illuminate the surroundings but the dim moonlight.

"Dude, you're scaring me."

Kaier asks, stunned by the change in the atmosphere.

All eyes are on Heinrich.

"Like I said, the end of the gate crisis is not the end of the story."

Everyone is looking at it.

When the gate crisis is over, people will finally be freed from their fear of monsters.

That's not it.

"Of course, the end of the Gate won't be the end of it. We still have to deal with the remaining monsters on the continent, and we don't know how long that will take."

That's what Lint said, and it's certainly true.

"Yeah, you're right, but I'm talking about something else."

While Heinrich is trying to figure out how to break his luck.

"You mean the devil?"

Only Cliff, who had been silent, spoke up cautiously.

Everyone else is silent, and Heinrich stares wide-eyed at Cliff.

"Because that's all you're going to hear."

Kliffman had a pretty good idea of what to expect.

"......."

And Kono Lint's expression, which he had been deliberately ignoring, hardened.

The topic of demons had to be addressed at some point, and the work of demons was bound to surface at some point.

The Gate debacle is over, and unless you're one of the remaining monsters, it's clear that you're going to have to start thinking about the devil's work.

"Right."

Heinrich speaks up after a long silence.

"Right now, more than half of the Alliance has sworn allegiance to the Demon King."

"......what?"

"What?"

However, Heinrich's shocking words left everyone speechless.

"Your sister chose to follow the devil."

The next, more shocking statement made us all want to deny reality.

\* \* \*

No one should be surprised to hear that a significant portion of the Alliance's leadership has already sided with the Devil.

Even within the Alliance, the Temple, and by extension the Royal Class, are treated as special, and it's difficult to get information out of the command center unless it's a special case like Heinrich or Ellen.

But to understand the Alliance's decision to side with the Devil, there are some things you need to understand first.

Mass riots and massacres in the ecliptic.

Army of the Dead. Immortal.

The empire's position in jeopardy.

And the movements of the Crusader Knights and the Order of the Five Masters.

Heinrich went back to the ecliptic and described what he'd seen and heard, what events he'd been involved in, and what he'd learned at the end of it.

"That the army is....... undead made of warriors......?"

Kaier mumbles to himself.

"The fallen, plus the dead heroes of the past."

The characters from history were reanimated as the undead and fighting alongside each other.

Their jaws dropped as they realized that the unidentified allied forces were more fearsome and formidable than they had imagined.

And Kono Lint's reaction was a little different.

He didn't know the specifics, but he knew that what the Empire was up to involved raising the dead heroes of the past as the undead.

So I had a pretty good idea of what Immortal was. I just couldn't tell anyone.

One new thing I learned.

The three of them, Christina and Louis Ankton, are deeply involved in the creation of Immortal.

Not at a deep level, but actually key people.

"What are you doing......."

He was a classmate, albeit a B student.

I thought I wasn't really doing much on the battlefield, but I was doing the most important thing, hidden from everyone.

"So, Cernstadt decided to side with the Devil because the Empire might fall after the Gate debacle?"

Klippmann's words silenced Heinrich for a moment.

"Yes, you're right, no matter how you slice it, there's a debate going on in the Alliance right now about whether we can survive with the Empire or with the Devil, and you've already made your choice."

It's not about right and wrong, it's about survival.

After the gate debacle, you'll have to decide whether you're a demon or an empire.

That choice may have to be made by the head of a group, and beyond that, it will inevitably come down to individual choices.

Erich mumbles to himself.

"It doesn't make sense....... It doesn't make sense....... The devil wants to rule the world? That's how it works?"

Erich's words were tinged with disbelief and horror, as if people would let that happen.

"Like it or not, we're already halfway there, people just don't know it."

"The brass may be able to decide that, but I think it's a different matter whether the rest of us can accept that."

At Klippmann's words, Heinrich nodded.

"That's a question for another time. Anyway, what I'm saying is, it's time to make a choice."

Emperor or empire.

You must select

Now that we've reached the end of the gate crisis, we need to realize that the next problem exists, and we need to think about it.

"That's ridiculous."

Then, after a long silence, Kaier Bjorden spoke up.

"All of this happened because of somebody, and we don't know where they are or what they're doing, and they're trying to devour humanity, and they're actually doing it? That can't be right."

Heinrich is silent in the face of Kaier's restrained anger.

"Maybe it's a problem, maybe it's wrong, maybe it's a sin, but none of this would have happened if it hadn't been for Gate, and you can't live with an asshole like that, and you're going to follow him, and you're going to stand by and let him take everything? That's not....... That's bullshit. It can't be......."

"I didn't do anything."

It wasn't Heinrich who broke in on Kai's words.

This is the only time I've met the devil himself since the Gate debacle.

Heinrich von Schwarz.

Then there was Conor Lint.

"I actually....... I met Reinhardt the other day."

After surprising everyone, Heinrich surprised himself this time.

\* \* \*

Just as Heinrich was hiding something, Kono Lint was hiding something from everyone.

Immortal's deployment to the front lines is recent, and even before that, suspicious activity on the marching grounds was ongoing.

A city destroyed in a preemptive strike.

Kono Lint was suspicious of what was going on, so he went out to scout, where he saw the unknowns fighting far ahead of the Alliance.

And I realized it was the Devil's army.

She was then kidnapped by Reinhardt's men and woke up in Reinhardt's castle.

I spoke with Reinhardt briefly afterward.

He didn't elaborate, but it was clear that he wanted to stop the gate from happening.

Now that everything has gone wrong, we're doing our best to end the gate crisis.

It can't be true. Lint did, in fact, lead his army ahead of the allied forces and saw the demon army fighting with his own eyes.

"So everything that happened last year was....... was done by the Demon Army?"

"Yeah, right now it's probably....... although I don't think it's moving because it has an immortal."

Outraged, Kaier listened to Lint's explanation and froze.

"The gate thing happened because of Reinhardt, but he never wanted it to happen, that's for sure."

I wasn't just sitting on the sidelines doing nothing.

I was constantly doing things where people couldn't see me.

"But then you said that if others knew the truth about you, it would be a problem of its own, so it was better to leave it alone....... to keep this a secret. That's what I told him."

Obviously, if it's a truth that's going to destroy and divide people, it's better that it not be known.

So Conor Lindt was silent.

"But things are different now. It wouldn't matter if the empire was still standing, but you shook hands with it just before it fell, and now that things are going badly....... I have no choice but to step up."

"I suppose."

Heinrich agreed with Klippmann's speculation, as it was the first time he'd heard the full story behind it.

"Anyway, they got me here safely, although I did run into them one more time after that......."

"One more time?"

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

Conor Lint's face fell.

Later, Lint met Reinhardt again.

It was to ask for help with a problem related to undeadization, but there was one reason for the gaping face.

"In the face of....... 당해서......."

He didn't see it because the demon wanted him to, he saw it because he was lured into seeing it by Sarkegar in the guise of a beautiful girl.

Episode 650.

Everyone was stunned by the beauty story, but what came next was even more shocking.

The Demon Army sought to rob the Imperial Mausoleum to replenish its supply of Death Knight.

He needed Kono Lint's help to infiltrate the imperial palace.

Lint helped the devil.

But the coffins were all empty.

I went to the Huangdao National Cemetery, but all the bodies had been replaced.

I couldn't help but notice that something was going on in the Empire.

So after replenishing the Death Knight in the Tomb of the Saints under the Crusader Knights, the demon warned Lint not to get any closer, saying it could be dangerous, and disappeared.

Heinrich couldn't help but roll his eyes at Kono Lindt's words.

"Is that....... Was that you guys......?"

The one that entangled Ellen and Heinrich, and Louise and Ludwig.

A case that ended up with no way of knowing who the real culprit was.

Heinrich could only gape at the realization that what had happened in the Cemetery of the Saints was actually the work of Kono Lint and the Devil.

I kind of figured it out if it was the devil.

But it was a shock to see Kono Lint woven into the mix.

"Well, I mean....... It was never a good thing, but....... I thought it was necessary, and I don't regret it."

Lint looks at Kaier.

"He's the cause of everything, but he didn't do nothing. He tried to do something, and now he's like this....... Unlike what I said last time. Reaching out to the Alliance like this....... I'm sure he has his reasons."

"That's what happens when......."

The reason he was trying to make everything about a topic that hadn't done anything was because he hadn't seen it.

Kono Lint even helped the Devil do his thing to some extent.

Kaier was speechless.

"You know what....... Huh......."

Erich stood still, staring blankly at Konorint.

Cernstadt's choices are about survival.

But Konorint spoke as if he trusted the devil.

It's a qualitatively different problem.

It would be cowardly to go up against him in hopes of survival, but trusting him might be seen as just plain crazy.

"After all, believing in the devil is....... A little strange, yes. I suppose you can't help but think so......."

Lindt's words made Erich shake his head.

"No, not that one......."

As if that's not a perspective at all. Erich looks at Lindt.

"You, how did you not tell me until now?"

"......?"

Heinrich nodded, as did Kaier, who had been frozen at Erich's outburst.

"That's what I'm most excited about right now."

Even Kliffman said so.

Certainly, Kono Lint is an ability in and of itself, so there's a lot of talk about it here and there.

So whenever something happened, he would immediately tell me where it happened and how it is now.

I can't help but wonder how he could have kept such a big secret for so long and never even hinted at it.

"Now....... Are you saying I'm cheap?"

Conor Lint was embarrassed to see his friends panicking where he shouldn't have been at all.

"No, you didn't know that until now?"

"I'll put up with you when you put up with me, you assholes! What do you think I am?"

Kono Lindt couldn't help but resent being treated like a dick.

A surprise to everyone.

Kono Lindt was a man who knew when to keep his mouth shut.

At the sight, Heinrich smiled bitterly.

Kono Lint had a secret of his own.

"I've met him."

"......what?"

I thought it had disappeared somewhere and I couldn't even see it, but that wasn't the case.

Unsurprisingly, Reinhardt was everywhere. It's just that those who have met him are keeping a secret.

"You too?"

Kono Lindt was understandably surprised.

"It's not like you. I didn't help you....... I got it."

"You got help?"

Conor Lint was forced to cooperate with the Devil half-heartedly.

Heinrich, however, is a different case.

However, in this case, it was a very painful topic to address.

"If it weren't for ...... Reinhardt, I might have died."

That's because he had to talk about his brothers' deaths.

\* \* \*

The topic Heinrich brought up was a heavy one.

Because we're talking about a long, long time ago.

When he was too young to remember, he awakened his powers and burned his brothers to death.

And being banished to the temples of the Empire.

That's why they were hated by their siblings.

Heinrich had no choice but to tell them all about his dark past, so that they could understand the circumstances that led his brothers to try to kill him.

And brothers who are jealous and hate him for becoming a war hero.

A letter from an anonymous friend, stating that you will be killed by your brothers.

The suspicion that I might be illegitimate, which I heard from the Emperor.

At the end of the conflict, Reinhard came to Heinrich.

I'll explain everything to you, and we can talk about what we can do together, because I'm going to get killed.

Heinrich did not follow Reinhardt.

And Heinrich, torn between telling his mother the truth about his illegitimate child and not telling her, had no choice but to do so, even though he felt guilty.

This is the moment to say it all.

The moment his sister killed his brothers with her own hands, Heinrich realized that his eldest sister was actually his mother.

All of my friends who heard the whole story were baffled by it.

"Reinhardt didn't save me, but he tried to, and the things I did because of that letter....... are what kept me alive in the end."

In fact, Heinrich was almost killed. Only Louise, who had spoken to the Emperor, learned of the attempt and prevented it.

Reinhardt didn't save Heinrich himself, but as it turned out, Heinrich would have died if it weren't for Reinhardt's letter.

"I don't want you to understand, sister....... No, your mother chose to side with the Devil....... because she knows that."

We know that the demon tried to save his son.

That saved it.

It's true that you made a choice to survive.

Underlying that judgment, however, was the knowledge that his son was alive today because of the Devil.

I can't help but thank the devil, because Louise is definitely going through something.

That's what Louise thinks.

The same goes for Heinrich.

That she was truly loved.

Why you didn't die.

It all started with a letter from the Demon King, in which he realized that his mother, whom he thought was his eldest sister, had begged him to let her live in the temple.

Everyone was at a loss for words.

What I thought were brothers were actually uncles.

The uncles were trying to kill their sister's son, who they mistook for the youngest.

And the mother kept her son.

"I don't know how Reinhardt knew I was going to die, but the bastard....... He obviously didn't want me dead. Maybe he did it to take advantage of me....... I don't think that's the case, and the way he acted towards you, Lint, not me, I think he just....... He wants us to be safe, he wants everyone to be happy, and even though he didn't get his wish, he still wants that, that's for sure."

Finally, Heinrich, the man who started the whole thing, looks at everyone.

"Whatever the real cause of the Gate debacle, whether it was actually Reinhardt....... Yeah, Reinhardt could be wrong. No matter what the devil does, there's not always a good ending, I know that."

The devil is either right or wrong.

That was and still is an unknown.

The results will tell the tale, so there's no point in prejudging the outcome at this point.

"So, I never thought I'd say this, but......."

When he saw himself as a flint or a bonfire, Heinrich sincerely wanted to kill Reinhardt.

That's why it's hard to believe that Heinrich himself is the one who says this now.

"I believe in Reinhardt."

That concerned letter from a friend who didn't name names.

Now, you need to send a faithful reply to your friend.

We still don't know if the devil is right or wrong.

But, trust me.

Too much has happened for me to trust Reinhardt.

That's why we follow it.

To survive, Cernstadt chose the devil, or so the story goes.

But now that it's all said and done.

Heinrich says he does it not to live, but because he believes in Reinhardt.

I wonder how long the silence lasted.

"Me too."

Of the silent ones, Kono Lint speaks up.

"Me too, asshole, I'll believe it."

Some people believe in the devil as a prince somewhere.

Someone believes in the devil as a commoner somewhere.

But man may have status, but faith has no status.

\* \* \*

The people gathered here are special soldiers, but they're still just soldiers.

It's unclear how much of an impact they will have on the mainstream by believing in the devil or not.

But there comes a time when we have to have that conversation.

In this moment when everyone is taking sides, you have to stand somewhere, whether you want to or not.

Will you believe in the empire or the devil?

Will the empire survive, or will the devil?

It's just a matter of whether you choose to believe or survive.

"Whether you believe it or not, does this mean we're going to have another war when the Gates debacle is over......."

Everyone fell silent at Klippmann's words.

What Reinhardt wants or believes is a separate issue.

In other words, as soon as one catastrophe ends, another storm begins, with no one to take it in.

We can't all be on the devil's side.

Not everyone can be on the Empire's side.

"You must choose one or the other, it's either this or......."

Heinrich shakes his head at Kaier's words.

"You can choose neither."

"......what?"

"Literally."

To select nothing.

"There are empires and there are devils, and there are people who wish they were both gone."

Choosing nothing is certainly an option.

"Then....... What am I supposed to do?"

Erich asks.

What are we supposed to do?

Are you cowardly, or not cowardly, or not even that choice, and hoping for the doom of all?

Heinrich laughs bitterly at Erich's question.

"What can I say?"

Just the price.

Just a ref.

Judgment and punishment must be meted out to the guilty, for the rest is history.

There are those who think so, and Heinrich knows they are his biggest enemy right now.

After a moment of silence, Kliffman speaks up.

"Heinrich, I want to ask you something."

"......What is it?"

"Ludwig's arm."

"......a."

Kliffman asks.

"That has to do with something called immortals, right?"

I had a procedure.

Immortals involving Christina, Louis Ankton, and Anna.

Something's different in Ludwig.

It's like a puzzle finally fits together.

"Obviously, yes."

At Klippmann's question, Heinrich nodded.

Since we know what an Immortal is, Ludwig's recovered arm must be related to it.

So it can't be a normal arm, and Ludwig is not in a normal state.

Everyone in this room will eventually have to choose.

It's just a matter of whether you're making choices to survive or because you believe in them.

Unlike the other two who have already made their choice, you're one of those who can't help but think about it.

"I was wondering if you could give me a word."

Kliffman said.

\* \* \*

Charlotte and I were sitting across from each other in the king's office, which had become the regent's office.

"Hmmm......."

"umm......."

Charlotte and I have the same ambiguous expression.

Charlotte was the first to speak up.

"It doesn't really matter, because an unspecified number of people know we're intervening in the Alliance, and there are forces there that aren't sympathetic to us. Our intervention itself was bound to spread far below the Alliance."

"I knew that."

As Charlotte says, some people have reason to keep secrets, while others have no reason to keep secrets and are aware of the involvement of the Demon King's allies.

Not too long ago, I thought that if the news got out to the Allies, it would be devastating.

In practice, just because commanders cooperate with you to stay alive doesn't mean everyone agrees with their decisions.

But with the final battle on the horizon, and the bulk of the real power in the Immortals, it may not actually matter if the Alliance falls apart.

It's a matter of whether suspicion turns into division, or whether it reaches the final battlefield.

Demon followers and Imperial troops are now coexisting where they shouldn't be.

But the good news is that it's only a short distance to the Rieseln capital, Diane.

The division must be after the capture of Diane.

And the rumors of the devil's intervention haven't gotten too widespread yet.

This is a rumor spread by one of the people in the know.

"I don't know about anything else, Heinrich, but aren't you getting your ass handed to you by your mom?"

"......Maybe."

Charlotte nodded in agreement at my vehemence.

Heinrich had an accident, so to speak.

"And what else did you report to your mom about getting into an accident?"

"......Yes."

Heinrich knows of course that Cernstadt is on our side. In fact, it is Louise von Schwarz, not me or Lowen, who is responsible for bringing in the other weaker and smaller powers.

Because of this, she is actually exposed to a great deal of threat. She is, in a sense, an even more frontline frontman than Rowen, so it's not surprising that she is subject to assassination threats.

Louise has risked it all to get ahead of the curve.

In the meantime, Heinrich informed his friends of Cernstadt's treachery.

"Charlotte, you're right....... It's not a big deal after all, since it was going to happen anyway......."

"It's not unreasonable, and Heinrich was thinking of you in his own way, and it seems to be working out."

"It should be."

It's not that I don't understand Heinrich's feelings, or that it's necessarily a stupid move.

It's about thinking about my friends at the same time as it is about me.

Heinrich wanted to avoid a situation where his friends would later realize that things were changing rapidly and might have to antagonize him.

And I would have wanted to speak for myself.

Heinrich did what he did because he wanted to prevent me from having to kill my classmates.

Let's not fight among ourselves.

But Louise is going to be embarrassed when her son tells her that he did it in public.

Did you really get spanked by your mom......?

"That's not what's important right now."

Heinrich's behavior was troubling, but as Charlotte says, it's something that will eventually come to light.

What Charlotte and I are thinking about right now is not that Heinrich was in an accident.

A message was sent to me.

Since Louise has never met me in person, she has to go through Rowen to get her message to me.

So the son has leaked a secret to his friends, and he's like, "I need you to go to my mom and deliver this message to the devil," and he's like, "I need you to deliver this message to the devil.

The message is to be delivered to Rowen, the leader of the Crusader Knights, whom Louise personally dislikes.

The fact that it got to me at all means that Louise swallowed her shame and humiliation and asked me to deliver the message to Rowen.

"If that was my son, I'd be pissed."

"......."

Charlotte nodded in agreement with me.

Heinrich.......

You lived because you were a son.......

You should know what you're asking your mom for, don't you think.......

And so from Heinrich to Louise.

Louise to Rowen.

And a message from Rowen to me.

Heinrich's behavior may have been an accident, but it was a message that meant a lot to me.

Following Heinrich's confession, Kono Lindt has apparently decided to stand by my side.

This is very large.

In Louise's defense, her idiot son was an accident waiting to happen, but in my defense, it was a good thing.

Having Kono Lint on my side opens up a whole new world of thinking.

There are so many things you can do.

Erich and Kaier seem to be on the fence.

And finally.

Kliffman.

This side delivered the word.

It's not a very politically important message, and it's not a message that's going to make a big impact.

"It's not up to us to decide, is it?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

But it wasn't up to me or Charlotte to judge the message.

And it's not a lighthearted message, whether it's influencing the mainstream or not.

I want to meet Riana.

The message was from Cliffman.

Episode 651.

A message from Kliffman, or more accurately, a request.

That you want to meet Riana.

It's not up to me or Charlotte to decide in the first place.

Of course, I could have told him to go see her, but I didn't want to do that.

Does Cliff have the right to say he wants to see Riana?

Cliff wasn't the only one who said he'd take our side if we let him meet Riana.

Even if he is on our side, does Cliff's power mean much to us at this point?

Klippmann has definitely gotten stronger and has raised his major.

But in a world of master classes and archmages, Cliff's power won't mean much.

It can't be a variable like conolint.

You can think of things like that.

However, we decided not to consider them.

I didn't even want to think about it.

Relationships matter.

Maybe the most important thing in the world.

I think so.

Because the world is the way it is because of that relationship, because of that emotion.

If I weren't the demon Valerie.

If Ellen wasn't Lagan Artorius's sister.

If Charlotte wasn't the Emperor's daughter.

It's all about getting to know them without properly addressing those issues.

These issues should not be treated lightly.

So in the end, it's not really my call.

It's up to you to decide.

\* \* \*

"Me......?"

When Riana heard Cliffman's message, she had an indescribably strange look on her face.

Riana's dilated pupils told the story of how surprised he was.

At Temple, Cliffman was a man without numbers.

No, that wasn't enough.

He had no idea how to treat women or men, and after countless encounters on the dance floor, he hadn't spoken the first word until months later.

Worse for the girls, if Ellen or Harriet tried to talk to them, they would flounder and sink into themselves.

He had a day's worth of socialization, so to speak, and his bowl was the size of a soy sauce paper.

When I was playing against someone, I would get lost in my own thoughts and get picked off.

Riana, on the other hand, was completely unassuming.

It looks very cranky on the outside, but it's actually very fluffy and I don't care what anyone says, I don't take it to heart.

She's always been very proactive about anything and everything, so once I've gotten to know the kids, it's always been Riana who says let's go somewhere.

The guy who overshadows everyone.

He's not afraid of anyone.

They're opposites, but I've found that people with completely different personalities work better together than people with similar personalities.

In fact, Riana had always seen only a passive Cliff and had been dragging him around for some time.

I was the one who decided to put Cliff in Mr. Temple, but Rianna was the one who really helped with that.

Eventually, they became friends.

When Duke Granz died, he vowed revenge on me.

But Riana came to my rescue on the day of the Gate Crisis, without telling Klippmann.

Without telling me the true cause of my father's death, or that he had decided to rescue me.

I guess you could call it a betrayal.

However, while the Temple days were years ago in time, they feel like decades ago in sensory terms.

Everything has changed.

Riana has changed, and so has Clifford.

Kliffman, who had always been a passive person and had difficulty interacting with people, demanded to meet Riana.

And.

She was always proactive, bold, and acted like she didn't even know words like stranger.

"......."

Riana was blue in the face and shaking.

\* \* \*

Is Riana's behavior a betrayal?

Riana would not have wanted to take Cliff alone on a dangerous road.

Truly, I was no force then. It was madness to follow me, even to try to save me while I was held captive by the Empire.

Herriot was the only one who agreed to join her in the action.

Riana didn't realize that the road vampires were trying to save her.

It's a crazy thing to do, and Riana would have died that day.

So I wouldn't have been able to tell Kliffman that.

In effect, I couldn't take Cliff with me on my way to die.

But even if there is no betrayal, there can be a sense of betrayal. I don't know what Kliffman thinks of Riana's behavior.

Of course, Riana wouldn't know.

Kliffman said he wanted to meet Riana, but he didn't say what he thought of her.

I don't even know what Kliffman thinks of me.

Like Christina or Ludwig, you might want to hold me accountable.

I've been through too much to imagine that it will ever be the same as it was at Temple.

Neither Riana nor I know what Cliff is trying to accomplish by asking us to meet, or what he has in mind.

That's why Riana is blue in the face and shaking.

You never know what you'll be told, and you never know when you'll be attacked.

So much has changed that Riana is not the same Riana, and Cliff is not the same Cliff.

That's the scary part.

It's not because it's dangerous to meet.

It's important to see and hear how things have changed, because the moment you see it can be terrifying.

It was not for me or Charlotte to judge this message.

At the very least, you should let her know.

"You don't have to force yourself to meet."

"......."

On balance, it's better not to meet.

Whether Cliff is on our side or not, it doesn't really matter to the mainstream.

But Riana is one of the most important people on our side.

In the unlikely event that he does, Cliff is the only one who could hurt Riana. So it's better not to meet.

The potential gains are very small, and the potential losses are enormous.

Tapping away at the calculator, this encounter can't even be considered.

I can bounce an abacus, but I'm not going to let the results of that abacus influence my decisions.

There's only one thing that matters.

Does Riana want to meet, or not.

I'm sure Riana can do the math without me telling her.

If you don't want to meet, you don't have to. Whatever the reason.

The decision is left to Riana.

Just as the outcomes and realities of this world are not the result of a P&L.

In the end, it's not about gains and losses.

Riana was terrified.

It's weird.

In her Temple days, Riana was clearly a psychic with immense potential. But her powers weren't as strong then.

But Riana has always been confident and assertive.

What is Riana like now.

It's no exaggeration to say that he's the world's greatest superhero.

Riana's power is now beyond the reach of any mage, let alone a psychic.

Now stronger than anyone else, Riana's personality is the opposite.

Easily depressed, overwhelmed, and distressed.

It became passive.

She's terrified of what she'll hear when Cliffman asks to meet with her.

Riana is as weak as she is strong.

Riana says.

"It's ......."

"Uh."

Riana's eyes were fluttering.

"Me, I'm so scared......."

We haven't even met yet.

I don't even know what Kliffman is thinking.

But Riana's eyes were bright red.

"I'm scared....... I think I'm going to die......."

There's only one reason for such a strong reaction.

It's because Riana cares about Cliff, and only Cliff.

Your loved ones will never treat you the same way again.

I'm so scared of that.

I'd even go so far as to say it's killing me.

Yes.

It's probably similar to how I hate and dread the moment I see a different Ellen.

Riana hung her head and shuddered for a long time.

Over the years, I've had my fair share of anxiety attacks.

But it was the first time I'd ever seen him this weak.

"Still....... right?"

I think it's because she realizes that, as a human being, Liana de Granz, she shouldn't turn it down.

"We don't have to meet."

Do we have to meet?

I'm not sure about that.

He may come back from the encounter wounded, either physically or emotionally, or he may not.

"Well, let's think about that later."

"Later?"

"Okay. I don't know what happened, but let's just say we'll think about it later."

We don't know what the future holds.

But right now, we're in a position where we can make a decision that only Cliff can make.

Later.

"If you decide not to meet now, do you think you'll regret it later, or do you think you won't?"

I don't know if I'll ever get a chance to meet Cliffman again.

But if I take this opportunity to say, I'm not going to meet you.

If you give that answer to Kliffman, or ignore it altogether.

What happens.

What will Kliffman think, and what will Riana regret later?

Put aside the authoritarianism of whether you should or shouldn't meet.

I only think about regrets.

Whether you'll regret it or not if you don't meet.

"Right now, I'm scared to death and....... But......."

Riana looks up.

"If we decide not to meet now, I'll send you an email to......."

Tears eventually fall from the reddened eyes.

"I think I'll feel like this for the rest of my life......."

We don't know if this is an opportunity or a crisis.

However.

If you don't meet him, you'll regret it for the rest of your life.

Riana seemed to think so.

\* \* \*

Is there such a thing as something you must face, even if it's scary?

Is it okay to run, evade, or ignore?

But there are such things in the world.

Something you'll surely regret later.

Things you avoid because you're afraid now, you'll surely regret later.

It's scary, but there are things you need to do to avoid regretting it later.

For Liana de Granz, it was this.

"I can come with you.

At Reinhardt's words, Riana shook her head.

'It's not....... I think meeting alone....... seems right.'

Not wanting to give any indication of what might happen, Riana chose to face it alone.

You need someone to help you get there and back, but in the moment, you need to be alone.

It would be the least she could do, if not atone for leaving without saying a word. Riana thought.

In the first place, there's no reason for Klippmann's demand to be granted.

Heinrich relayed the words to Louise.

Louise heard the outlandish requirement.

And Rowen, who passed the message along.

Charlotte and Reinhardt too.

The same goes for Riana.

And.

Also, Kliffman, who actually said it.

I wouldn't have thought that could be possible.

But in each person's judgment, the message traveled beyond the person, and in Riana's own judgment, upon hearing the request, the meeting was arranged.

The world has changed, times have changed, and people have changed.

We used to be able to walk down the dorm hall and knock on the door, but so much has changed that you have to go through a lot of people to get what you want to say.

Let's see.

You have to go through a lot of people for that one word.

It became too hard to get the words out.

That's how the meeting happened.

In a wooded area, you can't go far beyond a clearing that's empty except for the strewn corpses of slain monsters.

Indeed, it's been a long time coming.

But in the nature of the times, where you can't help but feel more time has passed than you can see, psychologically it feels like decades have passed.

Cliffman was able to have the meeting he wanted on a stump there.

"......."

There was a face there that only Cliff wanted.

Always confident, sometimes overbearing.

The one who used to grab Cliffman's arm and drag him somewhere, always confidently whisking the boy along with her, telling him to trust her and follow her.

His hands were now clasped together, his eyes downcast.

As if they don't deserve eye contact.

Like someone who has committed such a great sin that they can't even look the other person in the eye.

"......Hello."

Even the words, as I struggled to get them out, were barely audible.

Just like that.

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

Klippmann could see Liana de Granz, who had shrunk to the point where she couldn't get any smaller.

Episode 652.

We've all had a few moments in our lives where our heart beats so hard we think it's going to explode.

It could be because you're too surprised, too scared, too excited, or too thrilled by the moment.

Right now, Riana was having one of those heart-stopping moments.

Out of fear.

But it wasn't just fear.

Exciting moments can be a mix of emotions.

It was a moment as daunting as it was frightening, and Riana's heart was surely about to burst.

There are moments when you feel like you can hear your heart beating in your ears, not just your chest.

It's an overwhelming moment.

But you never know what's going to come out of that mouth, and in that fear.

Riana could barely make eye contact, her eyes downcast in front of a friend she hadn't seen in far too long.

There was a moment when we vowed to slay the devil together.

I was so grateful for the gesture.

However, the two of them were too small for that.

They were too small to have the mighty name of the Devil as an enemy.

There was a time when I found myself and my friend vowing revenge on such topics.

But before you know it, it's a name that carries a lot of weight.

Her determination for revenge took a turn for the worse, and Riana, who wanted to kill the demon, became his henchwoman.

One of the Devil's most important minions.

For the record.

He had become one of those who should be called the Four Heavenly Kings.

It would take me days and nights to explain all the many things that have happened.

But at the end of the day, a conversation is only a conversation if it's initiated.

At the greeting that Riana managed to stammer out, Cliffman merely stared at her and said nothing.

Even in the past, Kliffman hasn't been a man of many words.

Even when he wasn't dealing with Riana, Cliff was always a listener, and when asked to speak, he would either give a short answer or ramble on.

There were no words around it.

Then, as now, she was speechless, but I couldn't help but notice that Riana wasn't the same.

In the past, Kliffman was a man of few words because he couldn't find anything to say.

But it's not that I can't find something to say, it's that I'm choosing what to say.

It's not because I don't know what to say.

I'm just trying to figure out what to say.

Time has passed.

People change.

Just as Riana has changed, so too has Kliffman.

"At least you come to see things like me."

The boy without numbers had become a cynical man.

\* \* \*

They came to see something like me.

There was so much meaning in that one word, it made Riana dizzy.

Those few words encapsulated all the thoughts, self-doubt, and disillusionment that Cliff had been feeling.

"What....... you mean......? Something like you......."

Riana looks at Cliffman with shaky eyes.

"You're weak, I am."

"......."

"Isn't that why you left it behind?"

"!"

That's a rant.

Not a rant against Riana, but a rant against himself.

"There would be no point in taking me, a guy who could only just get his powers up, so it makes sense not to."

Riana had to interrupt Klippmann's self-deprecating remarks.

"No, no, no......."

"And if not?"

"......?"

"Was there another reason?"

Kliffman asks.

Riana could only bite her lip with a sad expression.

"If you go with me, ......, you'll get hurt, no, you'll die, and I don't want you to get hurt because of my insistence."

"That means that if I went with you, you'd only die or get hurt, and there's nothing I could do to help you."

"......."

It's a nice way of saying, you know I'm useless and meaningless when I'm next to you.

Would things have been different if Cliff had been around?

It wouldn't have been.

It would have been a burden.

I didn't go with you because I didn't want you to get hurt.

I didn't go with you because your presence would only create negative variables.

Actually, they're the same thing.

It's just a different way of expressing it.

Riana said it the former way, and Kliffman took it the latter way.

And it doesn't change the fact that the latter is true.

But isn't that a bit harsh?

It's the mind that counts.

Doesn't it hurt to be perceived as doing something out of concern for you, when you're really doing something out of disregard for you?

Riana's intentions don't matter.

I was discarded because I was useless.

It was weak, and I couldn't go with it.

Klippmann took it in stride.

That's what Kliffman had been thinking ever since Gate.

"Riana, I'm not saying I'm sorry or that you shouldn't have done it, you should have, and you were right, I wouldn't have been any help, obviously."

"......."

"It's not going to be much different now."

Cliffman, who couldn't even find the right words, was able to compose his thoughts and speak them in a cool manner.

But even the direction of all the outpouring is confusing.

This isn't a dig at Riana.

Disillusionment with yourself for being weak.

An assessment that borders on self-loathing.

Cliffman is just telling the truth.

She lists them, and doesn't even seem to blame Riana.

All resentment and disillusionment is directed at the self.

If she was strong enough to help, she would have sought help from Cliffman.

Blaming yourself for being weak.

Disillusionment with yourself for being weak.

What Ludwig felt when he lost his arm, Klippmann continues to feel.

That's why Klippmann couldn't leave Ludwig alone.

Clearly, Riana was scared.

He might curse, resent, or lash out at Kliffman for the betrayal he felt.

That's what I thought and feared.

But now, Riana is faced with something she never expected.

Cliffman doesn't blame anyone.

Rianado.

Demon King.

No one.

"Again, thank you."

"......."

"For coming to see something like me."

But he was only blaming himself.

Riana was even more terrified of Cliffman's behavior.

Riana gritted her teeth and shook her head, looking only at Cliff, who was now a broken man.

"I was wrong. I....... I'm sorry......."

As Riana finally bursts into tears, Kliffman watches her, his expression still stoic.

"No, Riana."

"I, no, I did it all wrong. I......."

"You didn't do anything wrong."

No one to blame but yourself.

It was the hardest thing to bear, Riana could tell.

\* \* \*

Cliffman wasn't angry, and he wasn't feeling betrayed.

I was taking it for granted.

I didn't take him with me because he wouldn't help me.

Then it's my fault for not being helpful.

It's just me being weak.

And it's still weak now.

That's what I was thinking.

Clifford stood still in front of her until Riana stopped crying.

With the same expression as the first time, Cliffman just stared at Riana.

"When you've calmed down, can we talk?"

"......."

I don't resent it, but it wasn't friendly either.

Hug someone who is crying or give them a pat on the back.

It wasn't always that way, but now it seemed like he had no intention of doing so.

The statement that you didn't do anything wrong makes you feel even more guilty.

Riana was unfamiliar with Cliffman.

Riana has become a different person altogether, and not in the way she thought she would.

Kliffman asked Riana, who had stopped crying, a few questions.

Not wanting to offend, Kliffman chatted nonchalantly with Riana.

At the end of the day, the only one who's wrong is the one who's unhappy.

Riana could only stare at him the whole time, and he asked her what she felt comfortable asking.

"Your father's death was....... wasn't because of the devil, was it?"

"......Yes."

"So, is it an empire after all?"

"......."

"Right."

When Riana disappeared with the demon without saying a word, Clifford had some idea of what had happened.

There would be no other explanation if Riana, who knew the demon was an enemy, suddenly rescued the demon and disappeared.

"Actually, I thought I was going to die that day, because it was reckless. I was moving with Harriet, but she was ready for it, too, but you....... I didn't want to drag you into it."

Circumstances overlapped and Reinhardt was able to escape the temple, but Riana was planning on hitting a rock with an egg.

It was a sure-fire way to die.

That's why I couldn't take Cliffman with me.

But in the end, it's true that we did bring in Herriot, but not Cliff.

Herriot could have helped.

I couldn't be Cliff.

That's true.

"I understand."

Riana gritted her teeth at the resignation in his tone.

"You didn't....... You never understood......."

"I completely understand that I was useless......."

"I didn't want you to die because of me more than I wanted to die!"

"......."

Eventually.

Riana's face twisted into a grim line.

Cliffman stares at Riana's high-pitched voice.

"Not because you're useless, not because you're weak......."

Tears fill Riana's eyes again.

"I did it because you were important......."

Cliffman's eyes widen at Riana's devastating confession.

"Because you're important to me, because I don't want you to die....... That's why I did it....... It's not like that. I didn't mean it like that. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I did that. I was wrong. I know I was wrong. I just....... I was wrong, and I left you behind, and that's right, but......."

"......."

"Please, because you don't mean anything. Because you're useless. Not because you're no good. Because you're weak. It wasn't like that....... It wasn't like that....... Believe me. I really do."

The fact that you left it behind.

But why I left it.

It was all about him, after all.

Looking miserable and crying, Riana's words were more of a plea than a confession as she told Cliffman, who was feeling differently at the time, how she felt.

"Just....... Just slap me or something. Cuss me out. Tell me why I left you. Tell him he's a traitor....... I'd rather that......."

I felt like I was being choked to death by the fear of being judged.

But when she saw him, she realized she'd rather he hated her.

It's better to be the one looking for the reason for the problem than the other way around.

When you try to find the reason for your problems in yourself, you get sick.

Those who believe that everything is someone else's fault can at least survive.

If you live your life believing that everything is your fault, it will rot you from the inside out.

More than dealing with Cliffman's anger, Riana found it painful to watch Cliffman's self-inflicted death.

If it's a good way for someone else to live, there's no reason to care.

But for Riana, Cliff is not just anyone.

As Riana cries, Kliffman stares blankly at the sky.

Forest.

You can see the rays of sunlight through the leaves.

"I cared about you too."

"......."

"But to someone I care about, I couldn't be of any help."

"......."

"I didn't even want to think you were bad, that there was a reason for everything, a reason for not telling me, a reason for not taking me, a reason for the gate opening, a reason for everything."

Kliffman says he's been thinking about this for a long time.

"I didn't want to do anything that would make you resent me."

One choice among many.

Cliffman didn't want to choose the option of resenting Riana.

"If I didn't want to resent you, this was the only way I could do it."

Because Riana was important to me, I tried to justify all of her behavior.

Why they didn't take him, why they didn't say anything.

To do so, he had to find the cause in himself.

If only it was a little stronger.

If only it was a little more useful.

If only Riana had been trustworthy enough to ask for help and tell me everything.

And that was it.

Riana has done nothing wrong.

The only way to avoid blaming Riana was to blame myself.

Riana fights back tears as she watches Cliff make such a devastating confession.

"Real......."

Riana, eyes bright red, looks up at Cliffman.

"Really you....... You're still so stupid......."

It was a matter of blaming Riana.

It was easier to assume she had gone mad and followed the devil, and to blame Riana for not saying anything.

But if you're not an idiot for wanting to understand the other person somehow and going down the path of blaming yourself, then something.

Riana grabs Kliffman's hand.

Riana squeezes hard enough to crush, but Kliffman realizes that her grip is weak.

He's a powerful psychic, but he's still not very good physically.

Changed.

Riana has changed, and so has Kliffman.

However, some things haven't changed.

Even after so many events, it's clear that we still care about each other.

"There are benefits to being stupid."

"What is that......?"

"I know I'm not worth much, and I know I'm still weak, but....... I did something stupid like say I miss you for some bullshit that won't work......."

Cliffman squeezes Riana's hand, which is holding his.

"Just like that, I could see you again."

There is no reason for Riana to come to see Cliffman.

Only Cliff knew that.

But I said that nonsense, even though I knew it didn't make sense.

I want to see Riana.

Rationally, he knows. He knows he'll never see Riana, that there's no reason for her to come see him.

But just in case.

It's silly, but just in case.

But in the end, they gave in to the strange request.

So here's how I can see it again.

In the end, we realized that even though we were broken, we didn't resent each other.

I could tell that one was beating himself up and the other was feeling sorry for himself.

Doing stupid things doesn't always lead to bad things.

"Real....... real......."

At Klippmann's words, Riana's lips quiver slightly.

"You...... are getting a little old for this........ real......."

Tears form again in the corners of Riana's eyes.

"I feel it......."

Saying you feel like you're going to throw up.

He shudders as if he can't stand it.

Eventually, Riana laughed.

Only smiling with joy.

I hadn't laughed in three years.

\* \* \*

"......."

"......."

My eyes lock with Paxton's.

"Well....... done?"

"My stomach is in knots because it seems to have gone so well."

"Uh huh....... Well, yeah......."

Kliffman.

I felt like he was something.

It didn't do that when I watched it as a cat.

No, it's because I'm in front of Riana.

I didn't mean to peek in the first place.

No, it's more of a peek, but Harriet and I are watching from a distance, just in case.

We need to stop Cliff from doing anything he might do.

But then there's Riana's sobbing. Or the way Cliff talks so much.

Not only was I watching, but I was also listening to the entire magical conversation, so my cringe was pretty intense.

"Well, that's good....... I'm glad."

Yeah, you're right, it's not as bad as it sounds.

What it's like to be the guy who felt it. You're lucky you didn't get in an accident.

At first, I thought it was a bit out of character, but then I realized that Cliff was only thinking about Riana because she was important to him.

So, I was grateful to Riana for coming to see me on the first of the month.

I couldn't help but be touched, even if it was sad to realize that Riana was blaming herself and not just Cliff.

In the end, only Cliff confirmed that he valued Riana more than she realized.

Even when I was watching him in his cat form, he was so inarticulate that I had no idea what he was thinking.

But in the end, you speak your mind in front of Riana.

"Actually, it was kind of exciting......."

Herriot blushed at the sight of Riana, who had now begun to talk easily, despite the tear stains, and at the two of them, who had begun to have a normal, if somewhat emotional, conversation.

Excited?

"......Do you like that?"

"......?"

Do you like what you feel?

"Why, do it?"

His brow twitched at my words.

I've never done anything like that, but I'm sure it's possible.

"Don't, really."

As I look like I'm about to do something stupid, Herriot opens his axe eyes and glares at me.

No, but.

It's kind of hard to hit a line you feel without any buildup, isn't it?

What should I say?

"Meeting you is the luckiest thing that ever happened to me."

That's all I can think of!

Herriot, however, shakes his head at my offhand remark, if not at my conversion.

"That's a fact."

"????"

"Wrong?"

No, this isn't it.

I don't know what to say to that because it's so straightforward.

"Oh, no....... Well, yes, but......."

"Hmph......."

Yeah, whatever.

Nothing like the best of luck.......

It's a bit....... to admit that with your own words. Isn't it......?

Pacton walks up beside me and crosses his arms.

He looks up at me and smiles wryly.

"Isn't my sweet little kitten happy to have an owner like me?"

No.

No!

Hey!

Why are you better at this!

"My, my, I did it wrong......."

"Don't be silly."

Feel and nabal.

My heart almost stopped.

Episode 653.

Riana and Klippmann's tense mood had broken a bit.

It was enough to know that we still cared about each other.

"Are you capable of....... that far?"

"Yes."

"I heard there was some kind of weather anomaly last winter....... Is that it?"

"That's right, it was me."

When Riana tells him that she can now do more than summon lightning, she can also cause extreme weather events, he can't help but panic.

I nodded dumbly, realizing that this was the most extreme weather event I'd ever seen, and that Riana had done it.

"That's amazing......."

"But this one, you can't just use it, it's a little different."

"What if it's unusual?"

"Um......."

Riana sighs heavily, sitting on the jaw of a rock.

"Should I say, the shittier the mood, the stronger the effect......."

"Um......?"

"My superpowers seem to react to my emotions. Things like extreme weather....... react to negative emotions."

The ability to react to dark, negative emotions.

I didn't wake up from a good experience in the first place.

Unless you can manipulate your emotions at will, triggers like this are bound to have limitations.

"It's a powerful ability, but....... I don't think I'll be able to use it easily."

Klippmann's words made Riana shake her head.

"Not really, I can use it whenever I want to use it."

"I thought you said you had to feel bad to use ......?"

"There's a way."

Riana pulled the potion from her bosom.

To Cliff, it was just a vial of some unknown substance. Riana smiles eerily.

"If I get this one wrong, I get so depressed that I want to hang myself right now."

"A drug that makes you depressed....... for depression?"

"Right."

"You eat that stuff?"

"But there are no side effects. It's safe, and if there are some side effects, so be it. If I can kill hundreds of thousands of monsters in exchange for a few mood swings, so be it."

It's not life-threatening, it just makes you feel a little, well, bad.

Cliffman could only nod, dumbfounded, as if such a thing shouldn't be done. Some people can't kill a single monster without risking their lives, and if that's the price they have to pay, then they should do it.

But as Kliffman said that, he saw Riana's hand trembling slightly as she held the crystal potion.

Clearly, Riana was afraid of the drug in her hands.

You know best what a terrible feeling it is to drink it.

Not without a price, but we're talking hundreds of thousands.

Kliffman seemed to be distracted by the unit.

If you add up all the monsters Cliff has ever killed, you'll never reach 10,000.

But Riana can do that with a single use of her ability. Cliffman is stronger than he used to be, but Riana is on a different level.

In a single battle, Riana can slay dozens of times the number of monsters that Cliff has killed so far.

Klippmann's expression hardened, and Riana took his hand.

"What's wrong....... Don't give me that look."

"No. You and I have different things we can do. I was just, like, thinking about it."

"Yes......."

Cliff knows that everyone can do different things.

The number of monsters Cliff has killed so far exceeds a thousand units, a feat that would be impossible without Riana's overpowered abilities.

You just have the wrong comparison.

Could there be more psychics than Riana?

The moment Riana was able to call lightning.

Kliffman couldn't help but think back to that time.

At her father's coffin, Riana screamed and awakened her powers.

Although he doesn't know much about psychics, Klippmann clearly remembers the moment when Riana awakened to these new powers after a traumatic experience.

And now, it has even more power.

Did you naturally have that power?

Or.......

"Riana."

"Huh?"

"Did you ever....... what happened....... happened?"

Father's death.

What is the equivalent of that, the awakening of another power through something else.

Clifford could tell by the way Riana's complexion immediately changed at his question that something had happened.

After a moment of silence.

"I have sinned."

"......."

"A sin so great, so irreparable."

It was hard for Kliffman to comprehend that he wasn't sad, that he had done something to deserve it.

Riana kept her explanation short.

It killed people, not monsters.

An unfathomable number of people.

I didn't explain anything beyond that.

"Why....... did you do that?"

Riana wouldn't have done that for no reason, so Kliffman couldn't help but ask.

"There was a reason, obviously."

"......."

Riana stares at the bare ground of the forest, at the weeds growing beneath her.

"But I realized, too late, that there are some things you shouldn't do even if you have a reason."

It was something I felt I had to do, but in the end, I shouldn't have.

You did something you shouldn't have done, and now someone else is paying the price.

"So, I don't think about revenge anymore."

I've become such a ridiculous person that even talking about revenge for something is ridiculous, so revenge is out of my head.

That's all Riana had to say.

\* \* \*

Riana is back.

No matter how long we talked, it was a short reunion.

Cliffman went back, and Riana was waiting for us at the location we had told her.

"So, how was the story?"

"Weren't you hiding and listening anyway?"

Riana's words left Harriet and I speechless.

"......How did you know?"

"I bet you don't."

b.

Was he surprisingly obvious?

No, I think it's a bit ridiculous to think it's not obvious.

Riana's expression grew lighter. Kliffman would be, too.

If so, Cliffman may support us later, but he's not the only reason Riana met Cliffman, because she finds meaning there.

Regardless of the political implications, there are things that need to be addressed before the final fight.

"Are you happy?"

"A little?"

Riana smirked and nodded at my question.

There's still a lot going on.

"Let's go back, it won't do us any good to stay around here longer."

After saying that, Herriot starts casting.

Clearly, Riana was scared.

I wonder if Cliff is different.

Clearly, Cliffman has changed, but not in the way Riana fears.

Obviously, I checked in to see how everyone was doing, albeit in a different guise.

But that didn't tell me how they would react when they actually saw me.

Just as Cliff doesn't resent Riana, there may be people who don't actually resent me. This was the case with Scarlett.

They may not show it on the outside, but like Christina, they may be harboring hatred on the inside.

Cliff wasn't the only person Riana had to meet.

But faced with Cliffman, Riana looks a lot more relaxed.

I wanted to meet someone, even if it was just me.

It's not long now.

That's the kind of person you want to meet.

Besides Ellen, there was only one other person.

\* \* \*

A day before the march.

Adriana entered the barracks for the first time in her life.

I wasn't scared, but I couldn't help but feel nervous about the unknown.

The master of the barracks was sitting at his desk, not in a chair, his arms crossed, watching Adriana intently.

It was a frown.

We don't know his actual age, but he looks about five years older than he is.

He smiles all the time and seems to make a good impression wherever he goes. But this was Adriana's first time alone with him, and she couldn't help but feel uncomfortable with his smiling face.

You're smiling, but it's a smile that looks like it's stuck in your face.

The other person is smiling, but Adriana unnecessarily gets the feeling that they're not smiling at all.

Adriana, Paladin.

And the Supreme Commander of the Paladins.

Rowen, the leader of the Crusader Knights, stood before Adriana.

Really suddenly.

Adriana was summoned by the leader of the Crusader Knights.

Although a paladin, Adriana moves with the Temple army, and while she is technically a member of the Crusaders, she is not under their control.

As such, Adriana was both surprised and nervous when the new leader of the Crusader Knights, whom she rarely saw, summoned her.

The story of the sudden replacement of the previous Crusader leader, Elayon Bolton, was a strange one for Adriana, who was no longer moving with the Crusaders.

We still don't really know how it happened.

Even Adriana couldn't make sense of the situation, and it was clear that things were even more chaotic within the Crusader Order. And the chaos was still ongoing.

A figure of controversy and suspicion, Rowen's history is said to be quite strange.

He is rumored to have ties to the dark side of the Cult of the Lord.

Inquisitors, or death squads.

Someone who shouldn't be out there is out there.

Is this okay?

Adriana could feel the unowned horses running amok in her suspicions.

Then, Rowen, the suspicious new leader of the Crusaders, summoned Adriana.

You've never seen yourself, and you don't care.

Adriana is not a high-ranking paladin.

While their skills are nothing to sneeze at, and they are often already at or above the level of a High Paladin, they have no real title and no real duties.

That's why the call from the leader of the Crusader Knights seemed so bizarre to Adriana.

Even.

He had it open and in front of him, and he was sitting at his desk, not in a chair, but at his desk, staring at himself.

He's smiling, but somehow reluctant.

Rudely, I can't help but think that the stare is offensive.

"Sir, if I've done anything wrong......."

Eventually, Adriana couldn't resist and cautiously spoke up.

At Adriana's words, Rowen shook his head.

"......No?"

"Then is there something, anything I should do....... to do?"

"Hmmm......."

Adriana asks, but Rowen remains silent.

This is an unknown person.

We can usually get some idea of how a person is feeling from their facial expressions and reactions.

But Rowen, the leader of the Crusader Knights in front of him, felt none of that.

He's smiling, but it doesn't make him look happy, and you can't tell what he's thinking.

As if they had some kind of special "training".

When you're talking to someone whose intentions and feelings you can't guess, it's easy to feel uncomfortable.

But it's someone with more power and authority than you.

If you're a human being with the power of life and death, you're supposed to be horrified, not offended.

Adriana couldn't help but sense that Rowen was used to such things.

Someone who is used to instilling fear in others with their demeanor alone.

Naturally, Adriana had a hunch that one of the rumors was likely true.

The crusader leader uses honorifics to Adriana, a sarcastic subordinate, but it's hard to tell if he's being respectful or not.

How much time has passed.

Just when Adriana thinks she's frozen in place.

"You've had quite the career, Adriana."

"......?"

Adriana's panic grew as she realized that the sound was coming from nowhere.

A storied career.

Was there anything you could say about yourself?

"Isn't being from the Temple Royal class a distinguished career in itself?"

"ah......."

Adriana nods thoughtfully, wondering if that's what he was talking about.

On every continent, talent is a temple to be scraped.

Only the most talented among them are admitted to the Royal Class. Status and power don't matter. Only talent determines admission to the Royal Class.

So, that alone is enough to make his career a royal one.

"I don't know about you, but I don't know about....... I'm not sure."

Adriana doesn't say that because she's modest.

Indeed, powerful psychics and wizards certainly have firepower befitting their origins and talents.

Adria told herself that she paled in comparison to such formidable talent.

"Why, does it have to be mages and psychics? I thought you had a lot of experience slaying monsters, even compared to the high ranking paladins and priests in the Crusade."

"...... did."

You can't remember how many times you've been out slaying monsters. He's been out monstering for as long as the Gate has been going on, and not just with the Alliance.

Before I knew it, the crusader had a career worthy of attention.

Rowen begins to read the papers on the desk next to him.

"From the Abbey of Artouan, in the Duchy of Saint-Théon....... Birth is unclear and....... Educated at the monastery, showed talent and entered the Temple Royal class......."

Was it a document that contained his history?

Adriana watches as Rowen reads it in silence.

"Dropped out of Temple around sophomore year....... Returned to the military after the Gates scandal broke. Since then, I've transferred to Temple and have been a member of the Army ever since......."

Unsurprisingly, his history included not only dropping out, but also returning to the Temple and joining their forces following the outbreak of the Gate.

The rest of the book was all about the battle, and Rowen didn't read any further.

So at the end of the day, why did you prepare your history and what do you have to say?

Rowen gets off the desk and walks over to Adriana.

"We're from the same place."

"......?"

"I'm from a monastery, too, sweetheart."

Adriana was taken aback by this out-of-the-blue statement.

A child abandoned in a monastery.

So does Rowen, so does Adriana.

They seem to be about the same age. Rowen would be the older one.

"Talent, I think, or something like that."

Rowen's words were becoming increasingly unintelligible to Adriana.

We're from the same monastery, we're the same age. They even have similar talents.

But I'm a Crusader Knight Commander, and you're a mere paladin in the Temple Army.

Are you trying to criticize the difference?

Adriana couldn't figure out why the chief had to make such a pointless remark to her.

Rowen holds still and brings her hand to Adriana's cheek.

Adriana was suddenly aware of Rowen's hand on her cheek, the feel of it eerie.

It's not because I feel bad.

It's actually kind of eerie.

In contrast to his good-natured, clean-looking face, Rowen's calloused palms were overly rough and hard.

The same could be said for Adriana's hands, but the texture of her parched hands clearly represented something of the texture of Rowen's life.

The crusader leader looks at one of the paladins and speaks.

"You and I, what difference does it make......."

It's not derogatory or sarcastic.

"I'm like this, and you're like this......."

There was an undeniable tinge of jealousy and envy in his tone.

Adriana couldn't understand what she was feeling for Rowen. Why in the world would the crusader leader call her, and why would he say things she couldn't understand?

"There's someone who wants to meet you."

That's all the crusader leader had to say.

\* \* \*

The crusader leader ended up shouting something unintelligible.

It just said that someone wanted to meet her and gave her a location and a designated time.

The time is night.

It was an unknown command, but we couldn't deny it.

So Adriana headed to the southern part of the garrison, unaccompanied by anyone else.

Why in the world would a crusader leader issue such an order?

Someone wants to see me.

If I wanted to meet with someone about Adriana's age, who isn't even a very high ranking paladin, would I be able to ask the crusader leader for such a favor?

So who is the other side?

Why on earth would they want to see you?

In doubt, Adriana left the garrison and continued walking south.

A meadow, far away from the battlefield, with no sign of the battle.

In the moonlight, Adriana could soon see someone sitting in the grass.

"ah......."

I still don't know what's going on.

I don't even know how this happened.

But Adriana can only guess at some level.

What was happening.

Why the crusader leader gave such an order.

So what happened to the Crusaders?

We don't know everything, but we have a good idea of what's going on and what's happened.

And why on earth would anyone want to see me, a nobody.

The man who had been sitting still jumped to his feet at the sight of Adriana.

I wouldn't call it a painted face by any stretch of the imagination.

I can't even say I've missed him.

It wasn't like that.

We weren't even that close.

But obviously.

Still.

Deep down.

You have someone in front of you who you know is very important to you.

"Line......hart......?"

"It's been a while."

In the moonlight, the unimpressive junior smiles sadly, as he always does.

"Senior."

And I called her by the same name I called her then.

Like a spell, Adriana could not know everything, but she could know a single truth.

"You're safe......!"

Adriana ran like she was possessed, hugging her bad-tempered junior fiercely.

"Well, who am I?"

Just like before.

The ugly junior was being arrogant.

Episode 654.

It was actually a very traumatic and complicated moment.

However, Adriana's head turned white the moment she saw Reinhardt, regardless of all her other worries and circumstances.

All other thoughts flew out the window.

So, all I could do was run over and hug Reinhardt.

I heard somewhere that he was safe, and I know he showed up on the ecliptic.

I knew I was safe.

But the moment she saw him face to face, her uncontrollable relief overcame everything else and she couldn't help but hug him.

And.

Once the mind is a blank slate, it is gradually filled with thoughts.

I hugged him too hard.

And Reinhardt jumped up and hugged Adriana.

Well, that's good to hear.

"......."

"......."

After a while, it gets awkward.

It was as if they were siblings separated by war, and the hug was so intense that it became awkward.

If we use.......

Did it really have to come to this......?

It's tempting.

I was happy to see her and hugged her, but I didn't know when to pull away, so I hesitated, and then I gently unhooked my arm from Adriana's side first.

"Oh....... that......."

"Yeah....... Well."

They move away from each other, face to face, and subtly shy away.

Adriana couldn't help but laugh at the absurdity of the situation.

For some reason, I couldn't help but feel a stirring in the pit of my stomach.

I was a junior who was an asshole and said a lot of annoying things.

Again, this was the expression Adriana saw most often.

When I couldn't run, when I didn't know what a fight was.

This was the look I always got when that happened.

"Still the same, junior."

At that, Reinhardt snapped.

Like you're trying to force down an overwhelming emotion.

I know he's a demon, but in Adriana's eyes, Reinhardt was still the nerdy, overconfident junior who didn't know what he was doing.

On the topic of.

Later, he risked his life to save Adriana. I didn't realize it was Reinhardt until much later.

Later on, I became the protagonist of some terrifying things.

He's still synonymous with terrifying things, and the fact that he summoned himself through the Crusader Knights makes it clear that something is going on that Adriana can't see.

I still don't know what happened or how it happened.

But Adriana can't help but notice.

Junior.

Just that one word.

What the hell did I feel when I heard those words.

The corners of my eyes would turn bright red, and I'd watch as I forced myself to hold back something that was about to burst out.

Not the devil.

Temple's Reinhardt was who he was, and who he wanted to be.

You can't help but know that.

Otherwise, you wouldn't have that look of longing in your eyes at just that one word.

Adriana was so surprised, so happy, that she threw herself at Reinhardt and hugged him wildly.

This time, he gently cradled his junior's head.

"Hey, junior, that was tough."

"......."

The second hug held a different emotion than the first.

Worried and coddled, not welcoming.

More than she realizes, Adriana is special to the demon.

When you had something to hide, but no power.

Those days when you were really weak and couldn't do anything but have a bad temper.

Adriana before Ellen Artorius in the world.

He was the first to see her weakness, and the first to guide her.

Someone who didn't hesitate to take a person with a bad temper and a bad first impression by the hand and lead them.

That's why Adriana is so special to him, even more so than she realizes.

To the Devil, Adriana is the only one.

"Yes."

The Demon speaks while in Adriana's arms.

Adriana, the only one in the world.

"It was hard."

He was someone who could show his vulnerable side.

At that honest answer, Adriana choked back tears and realized that, while she was stronger than anyone else, she was actually weaker than anyone else.

That's why I hugged my broken and bruised junior harder and harder.

\* \* \*

It wasn't a tearful reunion, but it was a near-tearful reunion.

Reinhard and Adriana sat side by side in the moonlit grass.

They're both a little more comfortable with the awkwardness now, but Reinhardt is stuck in a rut.

"Ummm....... I don't know, there's just so much to say that I can't say anything."

"Actually, so am I."

Adriana had exactly the same thoughts as Reinhardt and didn't know where to start.

Just as the devil has been through a lot, so has Adriana.

Of those, I'm just sad that I don't have a story to tell that I can laugh about.

"After all, there's a lot I don't know. I didn't even try to find out."

The leader of the Crusaders has become a man who moves at the behest of the Devil.

The possibilities are endless. Adriana couldn't help but wonder what Elion Bolton's sudden disappearance meant.

"Then Lord Bolton would be......."

"It's alive."

"Oh, I see....... Thank goodness."

Adriana breathed a sigh of relief.

Just as Adriana doesn't know Rowen, she doesn't know Elion Bolton.

Still, Adriana couldn't help but think that it was a good thing that someone was alive and not dead.

Watching Adriana breathe a sigh of relief, Reinhardt smiled bitterly.

"Although all five popes are dead."

"......?"

"I didn't kill him, but I told him to kill me."

"I see...... you mean......."

Adriana shook her head with a complicated expression.

The death of a pope is a very big deal. If it was publicized, there's no way Adriana wouldn't know about it.

The replacement of the Crusader Knights is still confusing, as is the unannounced death of the Popes.

Of course, the implication is that the entire top echelons of the Church are puppets doing Reinhardt's bidding, and that his control is so great that he can even cover up the deaths of popes.

I thought I was going through the motions, but Reinhardt ended up deciding someone's death.

Adriana knows that all of this was a tragedy that neither of them wanted to happen. But it's inevitable that they'll end up making decisions that will save or kill someone.

That made Adriana sad.

To Adriana, who thinks Elion Bolton is lucky to be alive, I'd kill for him.

It's telling you not to have any illusions.

Adriana didn't ask why.

It's painful to say, and it's painful to hear.

And naturally, there's one person who can't help but come to mind.

Irine's Hound.

Whoever was called that.

We hadn't known each other for long.

However, he became entangled with the Crusaders and the Cult of the Lord, was taken hostage, and then rescued.

With nowhere else to go, Reinhardt turned Adriana over to the Rotary Club.

And Adriana couldn't help but become very close to Loyar.

But the loyard was actually Lykanslov.

Lykanslof as he told Adriana to run away.

In the end, I couldn't help but think of Loya and the people in the Rotary Club who died saving Reinhardt.

They're all dead.

Loyar thought he was doing a good job of keeping his secret, but most of the club already knew he was a lycanthrope. Of course, they also secretly knew that Reinhardt was no ordinary man.

If any of them had opened their mouths, neither Loyard nor Reinhardt would have been safe.

Neither Reinhard nor Loya had any idea that they were keeping a secret, until they were all dead.

Loyar's name, too.

People in the Rotary Club.

Neither Adriana nor Reinhardt were talking to each other.

But the prolonged silence itself is enough to let them know what each other is thinking.

Neither of us ever came out and shared a sad story.

Now is the time to think about later.

"Will it all work out?"

It won't.

Adriana couldn't help but realize that there would be something else when the gate was over.

Demons and Empires.

What happens in between is already happening.

"I don't think so, as it's always been the case."

Reinhardt is not optimistic about the outlook.

"Still, I'm going to do what I can."

"......Yes."

Adriana looks at Reinhardt.

The junior, who was so far below him in everything, now found himself in a position of unfathomable strength and unfathomable power.

"Junior, am I stronger than I used to be?"

At Jimjit Adriana's scowl, Reinhardt smirked.

"I suppose so."

"Weapons are no longer swords, but hammers?"

To kill the monster, I picked up a giant hammer, not a sword.

Large hammers that the average person can't even lift properly.

I've smashed a lot of monsters with it, not slashed them.

At that, Reinhardt nods.

"I know."

"......Huh? How do you know?"

"Gee, I've been watching......."

Reinhardt didn't know whether to say something or not, and finally sighed heavily, as if giving up.

"Cat. Remember?"

"......cat?"

Adriana shook her head at the offhand remark.

If you say cat in this place.

There's only one.

Adriana's eyes widen as she realizes something.

"Oh, no."

"That was me."

"......."

Adriana's jaw dropped at the shocking story.

A black kitten that appeared out of nowhere.

When it seems to disappear, it reappears, and when it seems to stay for a while, it disappears again.

And in the end, the black cat that Ellen took to the temple.

"Honestly, it's like a dog....... Not like a dog, but whatever. Yeah, admit it, it's pervy. I know, I know, but......."

"Somehow."

Reinhardt starts to excuse himself, but Adriana interrupts him.

Reinhard stares at Adriana for a moment.

Adriana laughs, even though it's a pretty bizarre story.

Laughing, he pinches Reinhardt's cheek.

"For some reason, that cat only really likes me and Ellen."

Oddly enough, the kitten was unusually compliant with Ellen and Adriana.

She'll sit on Adriana's lap and eat jerky, and she doesn't resist when Ellen takes her to her room.

It certainly did.

If it was Reinhardt, it makes sense that the cat would behave the way it did.

That fact speaks volumes.

The cat's behavior shows that Reinhardt hasn't changed.

He still liked Ellen and cared about her, so he'd come to see her like that.

And.

She was not only well behaved in front of Ellen, but also in front of Adriana.

"Well, junior, Ellen is Ellen, but....... I've missed you a lot too, haven't I?"

"......."

Reinhardt blanches at Adriana's words. No, the Demon, a being so high up that it's hard to look at him anymore, blushes.

He's embarrassed to have been found out and doesn't know what to do.

After all, at this point, I'm still here because I want to talk to Adriana.

"You're so cute."

"Uh, what can I say......."

Unable to bear the sight of her blushing junior, Adriana giggled for the first time in a long time.

I laughed and then surprised myself.

I couldn't remember how long it had been since I'd laughed so hard.

As soon as I realize that there was a time when I could have laughed like this, I'm forced to calm down again.

"So, no particular reason?"

"Why?"

"Okay, if you have a point, I think you should probably get out of here, because I don't see one."

We hugged a little too hard, thought about what we shouldn't say, and talked a little.

So if he had something to say, he'd better get out of there, but Reinhardt didn't have much to say about it.

"Technically, it was for no reason at all."

"Hmm?"

Reinhard looks at Adriana.

"After Gate, everything I do has a reason."

"......."

"In other words, they didn't do it because they wanted to."

Because we need something.

Because we need to be strong.

Because we need allies.

I need information.

I want some kind of power over someone.

To prevent any disaster.

To prevent someone from dying.

Or, to kill someone.

It was all for a good reason.

It was more of a necessity than a reason.

What to do as a demon.

It was a time when you moved toward a goal that you knew you had to accomplish in order to get where you wanted to go.

Even what happened with Ellen was necessary in the end, because you can only predict what's going to happen next if you know what's going on with the warrior.

But.

I didn't have to meet Adriana or anything.

"Before it's all said and done, just. Something you do because you want to. There's no need, there's no reason, but there's at least one thing that you just want to do....... I wanted to do."

"......."

Adriana gave a faint smile at that.

It's been a while since I've seen you.

Wanting to do something that was just that for once, the demon sought out Adriana.

"Is that what you were coming to see me about?"

"......Is something wrong?"

"Weird, thanks I."

Suddenly, Adriana stretches, reaching for the sky.

"But I feel a little bit, well, miserable, because I'm being told this because I'm not really worth using."

"......No, that's not it."

"Why, you do realize that I don't have much influence, that it doesn't really matter if I'm on your side or not, that meeting with me is a waste of time on your part, that I'm just a nice way of saying that I'm weaker than you now. Do you think I'm stupid?"

"......."

At the end of the day, Adriana isn't very relevant to the mainstream.

They're much stronger than the average person, but they're infinitely weaker than the people who ultimately decide the big story.

No power, no strength.

So the demon didn't have to take the time to find Adriana.

Other people to watch are worth watching in their own right, but not Adriana.

Adriana is someone you don't need to use.

"Thanks for packing it so well, though, junior. That you wanted to come for personal reasons. I'm glad."

"......."

In the end, it's the same thing, but it depends on how you look at it.

You could call it a waste of time.

However, it's also possible to say that you've left something big behind and found someone you really want to see.

Adriana couldn't help but be pleased that she was the only one who found it for personal reasons.

Reinhard stares at Adriana.

"Actually, I was scared."

"......Scary? What?"

Just as Adriana looked at Reinhardt and thought it was the same old, same old.

Adriana's demeanor makes the demon think he's back to his old ways.

"I was scared that you had changed."

"......a."

"You've changed, everyone."

That's why I hadn't seen Adriana until now, because her attitude and outlook might have changed.

Some people have gone to extremes, because it's weird not to change.

She's the only one who can remember and reminisce about the past, and when she sees him again, she can curse him for making the world the way it is.

The devil says that he was afraid of it.

Not death, or anything else.

He says he was afraid that Adriana would see him and make a face and curse him.

"That's all you were afraid of."

"......."

"You're scared to death of something as simple as......."

Adriana bowed her head and wiped the tears from her eyes.

The devil doesn't cry.

You can only tell them about your fears with a straight face and that you were afraid of them.

Like you're going to throw away all your weaknesses today.

Tell them your fears that you haven't told anyone.

"I didn't have a use for it."

"Yes."

"Well, now that I've seen you in person."

"For......?"

Reinhardt looks at Adriana, who says she's here for a reason, and wonders what's been on her mind as they've been talking.

"You're out of this."

"......?"

"Stop fighting."

Adriana's eyes widened at the absurdity of it all.

"Go back to the ecliptic, or follow me, because I'll do the other stuff, and they'll do the other stuff."

Now, there's only one fight left in the Gate debacle.

So don't fight the final battle, and the devil will come to life when he sees Adriana.

"Junior."

Adriana's expression hardened.

"Are you asking me to be a coward?"

"Yes."

They don't say it out of cowardice, or for other reasons.

You might survive the final fight, but you might die.

Run away cowardly and live.

The demon has no intention of using Adriana, but he does so because he wants her to survive.

"My power may be weak, junior, weaker than yours, weaker than all the other strong people out there, and it won't mean much."

"......."

"Still, it's not like I don't want to do something."

The desire to save someone.

Wanting to be of some help.

The size of your power is not proportional to the size of your heart.

The demon bites his lip at Adriana's words.

Everyone has their own resolutions.

It is arrogance to try to defeat it for your own greed.

Adriana wants to fight, but I have to pull her off the battlefield because it's dangerous.

"But I can do more than one person's share."

"......."

Reinhard could not force Adriana anymore.

It was already selfish enough to say that you were afraid of someone's death and wanted them to be left out.

You don't want him to leave, but you can't force him to leave.

But like something is unbearable.

Adriana could read enough in his expression to know that he wanted to do it, even if it was by force.

"I promise."

"......what?"

"Promise me you'll survive."

In front of a junior who said it with a sad face.

"So, who am I?"

Adriana laughed, and echoed the words that the mean junior sometimes said.

Episode 655.

Riana's meeting with Cliffman wasn't really necessary.

It doesn't really matter if Cliff is on our side or not.

But Riana only met Cliff.

That's what I thought when I saw it.

I've been there.

Still, I've always done things with a purpose.

I'm the same way, and I think it's okay to meet someone once in a while who just wants to watch.

Just as Riana was scared, I was scared.

I was afraid that Adriana would take out her anger on me.

But Adriana didn't blame me, as Cliff did.

I wanted to be presumptuous and take her off the battlefield, but she refused. I knew she would refuse.

In fact, by that logic, if someone shouldn't fight, there shouldn't be a single soldier in the Allied forces. There would be no such thing as someone who was forced to fight.

So it was no surprise that Adriana rejected my selfishness.

I hope you survive.

Not Adriana, not me, not anyone else.

The promise of survival is not a guarantee of survival.

Regardless of those promises, someone is going to die.

Because that's what war is, that's what fighting is.

"Are you okay?"

"Uh, okay."

Back in Razak, I nodded at Harriet's question.

"Your expression has gotten worse."

I did.

Harriet puts her hand on my cheek, looking worried.

Riana seemed to have gotten over it.

Meeting Adriana made me feel even heavier. We didn't argue or anything, but Adriana was worried about me.

I should be feeling better, but I've sunk further.

Still, I don't regret meeting Adriana.

"It's just, I want to do better."

"......?"

"That's why."

After a brief lapse, I realized I needed to do better.

You can't keep them all.

It's not wrong to want to protect everyone.

\* \* \*

"Christina, what's wrong?"

"......."

When asked by Louis Ankton, Christina simply sat at her desk with a blank expression on her face.

It was Christina's dogma that was holding Ellen hostage.

Neither Louis Ankton, Anna, nor Ludwig had any idea that Christina was trying to do such a thing.

So, to the rest of the world, she just looks like she's suddenly pale and speechless.

She couldn't tell him she'd done it.

"What's wrong?"

"No, nothing."

"I don't think it's anything, what's wrong with you these last few days, eat something."

Ellen Artorius.

You can use Ellen to bring the demon down.

I was confident in my thinking.

So I thought it was just a matter of running it.

I didn't think I could take him down lightly.

So I took only the best of the Immortals, and waited for a time when there were no outside eyes.

But instead of subduing Ellen in a blind spot, the immortal was sliced to pieces.

Then, after subduing Christina, Ellen seemed to hesitate for a moment. She put Christina down and walked away.

It didn't put up even the slightest resistance.

It's true that Immortal was defeated because Ellen was strong.

But it's not because Ellen is strong that Christina can't resist.

Christina felt it in her skin that she had been too complacent about the fight.

You don't even need the same Battlemage.

It doesn't even need to be enchanted.

Even if she was asked to fight a single strong soldier, she realized that she was weak enough to be helplessly killed.

Creating an immortal doesn't make her stronger.

I was deluded into thinking that because I held the power, I was stronger.

But there's more to it than regretting such misery and arrogance.

In the days that followed, the moment I was choked by Ellen became a nightmare and haunted my dreams, but that's not the point.

'It's not human....... It's not human.'

While trying to take Ellen hostage, I realized something very strange.

Ellen's voice.

An eerie voice that could never be human.

I felt the kind of pain I've never felt before, like tens of thousands of people talking at the same time, like my soul was being torn apart just listening to it.

Ellen hasn't lost her flavor.

It's not something that can be expressed at that level.

Ellen has become something other than human.

It's dangerous, scary, and terrifying all at the same time.

Something that has any will of its own.

'This is dangerous....... This is, this is dangerous.'

Originally, they wanted to kill the demon, to capture Ellen to draw out the demon.

However, in her arrogance, Christina made the mistake of getting in Ellen's face and provoking her.

However, that mistake proved to be a good thing in hindsight.

The most dangerous things right now are not demons, empires, or immortals.

It's not even a gate situation.

A sword that cuts through anything.

A cloak that shields you from any attack.

Ellen Artorius, holding the two holy relics, was swallowed by something strange.

Christina paid the price for her arrogance and mistakes.

And it taught me something I needed to know.

Right now, the most dangerous person is no one else but Ellen Artorius.

Now that she's been favored once, she's not going to put herself out there.

Just because you're not used to fighting doesn't mean you're going to go the Battlemage route now.

As usual, you just need to act in a thematically appropriate way, with the Immortal in the foreground and only giving commands from behind.

She believes she's already dealt with the Scarlett threat.

But other threats.

What to do with Ellen, who shreds her immortal like a piece of paper?

Is there anyone in the world who can take on Ellen?

What the hell has Ellen Artorius become.

What the heck do you want.

But the obvious.

Ellen, who had become something unknown, clearly said so.

It's still useful, so I'm not going to kill it.

Even with Immortal's armies in place, Ellen can still advance through their saturation and attacks.

If anyone can actually do it, it's Ellen.

That means that when it's all said and done, we're going to kill Christina because we don't care what happens to the immortal.

Ellen doesn't speak for the empire or the devil.

That's why Ellen is the only one who can be driven to exterminate Immortals without regard to the interests of the world, and why she has no qualms about killing Christina.

Only then does Christina realize the strength of Ellen Artorius that she has only heard about.

People take it for granted that warriors are allies.

That's why we can only admire the strength of the warrior.

But I can't imagine what would happen if that Ellen Artorius became an enemy.

But she saw it with her eyes.

When the warrior becomes the enemy, no one can stop him.

I watched as no army, no sword, no magic worked.

Ellen was better when she had some semblance of humanity left.

Ellen Artorius was crumbling under the weight of her guilt, but because she was human, she was able to communicate with it, to touch it and make it back down.

However, there's no conversation.

For example.

What if your warrior has become a monster?

Humanity has developed weapons to end the gate crisis.

It's not Titan, it's not Immortal.

Humanity's greatest weapon has been in human hands ever since the Gate.

Ellen Artorius was humanity's greatest weapon.

But the weapon is now, well, a weapon.

The dehumanized warrior may still be on the side of humanity, but he's not on Christina's side.

From the start, they were never meant to be used as bait.

We don't know if Ellen is a threat to humanity, but to Christina, she is.

"I have to kill Ellen.

The unknown is, in and of itself, the biggest threat.

If I don't get rid of Ellen, it might ruin everything.

She begins to dwell on it.

"Christina, come on, something's going on, don't keep it to yourself, talk to me."

However, no one would agree that Ellen should be killed.

She couldn't get the thought out of her mouth.

\* \* \*

The Allies have now begun their advance to the final objective, Diane.

Will the gate crisis end, or will humanity end?

Under normal circumstances, an army's combat power should diminish as it marches. In a bizarre twist, however, the Union army's combat power grew exponentially with each battle.

This has been the case primarily since the introduction of Titan, and secondarily since the arrival of Immortal.

As the Gate situation grew more and more dangerous, the Allies were growing stronger.

Everyone knows who the Titans are.

A giant golem created by the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan and the Temple's genius wizards.

But with the second power, everyone saw it, but no one knew what it was.

It might be a good thing that the imaginary force was part of the Allied forces, but in the end, unless you knew what it was, you were bound to be secretly terrified.

But those who know the truth can't keep their mouths shut forever.

It was inevitable that there would be stories spreading throughout the Allied ranks, stories whose origins were unknown.

A powerful army whose identity is unknown, the Undead Legion was created by the Empire from the bodies of its fallen.

That's why all the troops are wearing armored helmets that cover their faces, or robes that cover their faces.

He's bundled up because he's afraid someone might recognize his face in that helmet or robe.

The story of an emperor who tapped into a forbidden power to end a war.

Truths that are true but too good to be true spread like wildfire.

The rumors didn't stop there.

Stories spread of traitors within the Alliance, of those who had sworn allegiance to the Devil.

The emperor has his hand in the liquor.

Those who swear allegiance to the Demon King are emerging from the Alliance.

As the Allies headed into the final battle, they were plagued by two bizarre rumors that threatened to shake the entire Alliance.

And finally.

Another piece of news spreading through those who are forced to travel in and out of the ecliptic for supply reasons.

Rumors were even spreading in the zodiac that the Gate was actually caused by the Emperor, not the Devil.

-Nonsense.

-What's wrong with you, Emperor?

Unsurprisingly, few believed the rumors.

-With so many people starving in the zodiac, you have no one to blame but yourself.

-Yes. Last time I heard there was some kind of a big ruckus and a lot of people died, that must have been it.

-If something breaks in the first place, it's your fault.

Most people didn't believe the rumors.

But rumors are fleshed out and mixed up.

First rumor.

An army made of the dead.

Second rumor.

Those who have sworn allegiance to the demon.

Third rumor.

Rumors that the Emperor was responsible for Gate.

Some people don't believe in rumors, but others are susceptible to them.

And for those with a weakness for rumors, they combine them.

-But....... If it's true that His Majesty the Emperor caused the Gate crisis, then....... What the hell is a demon?

-Don't say anything crazy, you're going to get in trouble.

-No....... That's weird....... Doesn't it make sense that the Devil would leave us alone all this time in the first place....... Don't you think it doesn't make sense?

The behavior of a demon that hadn't attacked humanity until now.

It was already becoming something of a rationale in itself.

Assumptions that people haven't made before are crystallized in bizarre and overly credulous rumors.

-Think about it, if the Devil really wanted to wipe out the humans, he could have done it. He could have targeted us somewhere else, not here. The question is, why doesn't he?

In ordinary terms, it didn't make sense that the human race was still alive.

But so far, no one has thought of it, or if they have, they haven't said it out loud.

But the moment you start mentioning his name, it gets out of hand.

There was talk of demons all over the Allied camp.

-Isn't it true that you're not really interested in destroying humans or anything like that?

-Nonsense! Didn't the Devil attack the Yellow City the last time? He....... I heard he ravaged the Imperial City at the time of the Empress's execution.

-No. As far as I know, he only took the Empress with him, and I don't think anyone else died.

-I heard thousands burned to death?

-Was anyone in the ecliptic at the time?

Eventually, rumors breed speculation, and speculation masquerading as fact becomes another rumor, circling the drain.

In the end, it all comes down to suspicion.

Why the devil leaves humanity alone.

That the Devil caused the Gate Crisis in order to destroy humanity has been an unquestioned assumption until now.

But what's the next step?

While the Demon is thought to have disappeared, there was a time in the not-too-distant past when the Demon appeared at the execution of the Empress.

It's not like there weren't people who saw the fight firsthand.

It's unclear if it was the Imperials or someone else, but the demon appeared and slaughtered the Swordmasters and Archmages, before being stabbed through the heart by the hero who finally showed up and disappeared.

-Wasn't the king, in fact, dead by then......?

-No way he's that dead.......

There was even talk that the demon might have actually died at that moment.

Is the devil long dead?

-No, what about the traitors who are now siding with the devil now that he's dead?

-Right?

People are confused because they can't tell where the rumors are true and where they are false.

That's why rumor mongers are created.

People who pick up scattered stories and create their own truths are everywhere.

The Devil has no intention of destroying humanity in the first place. This is evidenced by the fact that he hasn't attacked humanity so far.

The Gate debacle was an accident or conspiracy caused by the Emperor through some means, and the Devil was blamed for it.

When some of the Allied leaders learned the truth, they sided with the Devil when they realized the real culprit was the Emperor.

So, in a moment of crisis, the Emperor began to steal the bodies of the fallen and create an army of the undead. To defend the empire and himself.

It's a story that has nothing to do with the facts.

There is no explanation of what the Emperor has to gain by causing the gate, or if he has caused the gate, why he would want to organize an alliance to end it.

Even the backstory of how the Immortals came first and the Devil's supporters came about is reversed.

At the end of the day, a story that sounds good is more convincing.

After all, just as the story that started with the premise that the devil was evil won people's trust.

It's only now that a story that started with the premise that the emperor was evil is starting to gain credibility.

Some stories are easier for people to believe if they have someone who is absolutely wrong.

Not surprisingly, there are many who dismiss such stories as nonsense.

Most importantly, people are starting to have a disbelief problem.

When a rumor is overblown, it is inevitable that some small part of it will be treated as true, even if only a few people believe the overblown rumor.

Few people believe in the truth of the fabrication.

However, as far as the source of the rumor goes, I'm inclined to believe it's true.

The emperor has created an army of the dead.

The Devil is intervening in the Alliance.

There are some Alliance leaders who have sided with the Devil.

Demons have not attacked humanity since the Gate, not even once.

Those four truths, they get stuck in people's heads.

When a rumor is blown out of proportion, it makes people realize that it's only as good as its source, whether they believe it or not.

Really, did the devil cause Gate?

If the Devil didn't cause the Gate, it makes sense that he hasn't touched humanity until now.

In fact, if the Devil caused the Gate, it's hard to see how he could have kept humanity alive this long.

In fact, outside of the Gate incident, there was no mention of the demon directly exterminating people or destroying human cities.

Just like that.

The Allies advance on Diane amidst the chaos.

With the underlying confusion of not knowing who to hate.

And just like that, we're on our way to the final battlefield.

"That's the maximum charge anyway, no need for more."

Redina said, looking at Kaier Biorden sitting in the Arc Crystal Chamber.

"I know that."

It is Redina's job to draw energy from the Arc Crystal, where Kaier's energy is stored.

However, ever since she realized that Kai'er was very weak after all the fighting, Redina hasn't bothered to ask him about the Arc Crystal.

Suddenly, she understood.

Kaier realizes that, in the first place, he was doing what he had to do, whether Redina told him to or not.

So, without Redina's urging or prodding, Kai did his job, and without being told to please stop.

"You're just sitting there draining your energy. I told you not to come in here when you're not charging."

When a person reaches a state of extreme disenchantment, they die.

The source of life is being depleted.

By now, Redina was more aware of how debilitated Kaier was than Kaier himself.

But as the battle continued, the relationship, which wasn't all that great to begin with, became completely strained.

It's the only thing I can do, and if I don't do it, what will I do?

Torn apart by Redina's verbal assault, Kaier's self-esteem was shattered and he clung to the only thing he could do.

Even when Redina apologizes with remorse, even when she pleads, Kaier doesn't listen.

"I'm not trying to do that."

"What do you do?"

What are you doing in front of an arc crystal that is already fully charged?

Redina, who had told him not to come out of his room, was now the most anxious because she knew what her behavior was doing to Kai'er's body.

"I'm not good with magic, but I can put magic into an arc crystal, so I was trying to see if I could control the rate at which I put it in."

"......."

The only thing you can do.

Kaier seemed to be trying to see if something else was possible for him.

I broke it.

Redina couldn't help but watch Kai'er's face, her eyes wide.

"But that doesn't work. Arc Crystal doesn't give me mana, it takes it away."

I'm not giving it to you, the arc crystal is taking it.

Kaeir smiles bitterly as he finally admits that he doesn't know and leaves the chamber.

"Adelia must be amazing to create something like this."

A tremendous talent, born with a tremendous amount of power.

But the inability to maneuver magic.

Redina bit her lip as she watched Kaier self-deprecate that he was nothing, but that he was useful because of his brilliant classmate.

All of Kaier's self-help advice was once said by Redina.

You say he's an idiot with nothing but a lot of horsepower.

He would scowl at me if I made eye contact, telling me to stop playing and charge my arc crystals.

The sight of those you couldn't save because you didn't have enough magic in each battle.

Because of the sight of people dying, not by one or two, but by the hundreds.

I can't help but think that it was due to a single disloyal person.

So far, we've wounded Kaier.

Kaier doesn't deny the hurt he felt.

What Redina has been saying, she now says herself.

I'm useless.

That's all you can do.

That's what I say to myself now.

Redina looks at Kaier and lowers her eyes.

"Can we talk for a second?"

Gone are the days of always speaking in commands and screaming.

Redina now tries to be as polite as possible to Kaier.

The truth is, Kaeir wasn't really paying attention to his tone.

Episode 656.

"You're telling me not to charge my arc crystal?"

Kaier frowned at Redina's comment.

"Yeah, I'm just going to use it as is until the Diane battle."

Once the fight at Diane is over, the gate situation is over. Redina's suggestion was to leave things as they are now and use the Arc Crystal only once.

"I shouldn't have to keep using it in the middle of a battle."

As Kaier said, the arc crystals were being used in battle, with Kaier charging them and Redina drawing from them.

"You fell down while doing that."

"......."

Kaier is in very bad shape.

Even if there is one final battle left, there is no way to know if Kai'er will be safe if you continue to use the Arc Crystal in the same way.

An arc crystal that is now fully charged.

Redina's suggestion was to fight the final battle without recharging, and leave Kaier out of it.

Redina nods, looking at Kaier, who looks stoic.

"I know what you're trying to say, and I'll be able to do more magic with you, and I'm sure that will help."

"......."

"But you know what....... has a weird army."

At that, Kaier's eyes widened.

Now Kaier knows what that army is.

"They say it's some kind of....... I don't know what's true and what's not, but either way, I don't think the need for you and me is as great as it used to be, so I think we'll be fine with the arc crystals we already have."

So you don't need to burn lives to draw magic.

That's what Redina was saying.

Kaier knows about immortals.

Clearly, she wasn't wrong.

With Immortals, the importance and need for Redina to cast magic from Arc Crystal is less than it used to be.

It's unlikely that Kaier will have to shoulder much of the burden anytime soon.

But, is it worth it?

Before Kaier could say anything.

-Hair

Redina knelt before Kaier.

"Please."

Redina kneels down and looks up at Kaier.

"Don't push yourself any further."

"......."

"All this time I've been....... I was mean to you. I was wrong to you. I didn't know anything. I've been selfish."

As the senior, younger than him, kneels and begs, Kaier watches in silence.

"I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I want to apologize, but I don't know how. I don't know what makes a good apology. I'm sorry......."

Looking down at Redina, who eventually begins to sob, Kaiur Bioden smiles bitterly.

Kaier wasn't the only one broken.

Even Redina, who had to decide the fate of so many people, couldn't help but be broken.

But that would have been a mess.

Look at something you've broken and apologize.

He's shaking, head down, not sure what to do.

No need to apologize.

Just keep doing what you've been doing.

Kaepernick has been saying that for years.

But now, their role can be filled by someone else.

If so, I don't think we need to be so hard on ourselves.

You're not dead yet, so it's kind of mean to insist that you can do a little more.

If I'm going to risk my life when I don't have to, it's not to end the gate crisis, and it's not because I want to save people.

Telling people to just do what they've always done, even here, is just plain vindictive.

To a sulky kid who's always been beating himself up and sulking, you made me this way, and now you're forcing me to use my life-burning magic to save people.

Right or wrong, it's just plain cheesy.

It's just something to annoy her.

Because.

Kaier kneels in front of Redina, who apologizes.

"I've always wanted to die and watch you live with regret for the rest of your life."

"Please....... Please......."

"Too bad."

With all due respect, it was Redina's word against mine.

There's no reason to get stuck on something that doesn't make sense.

Forcing yourself to die when you don't have to is just plain stupid.

"......blah, blah, blah!"

Redina bursts into tears, and Kaier gently pats her shoulder.

"Me, I'm sorry....... I. I've been all wrong. I've been....... been so bad so far."

"Don't cry. Asshole."

Kaier gently patted the younger man on the back for being a jerk.

\* \* \*

Reconciliation is hard, but once you've done it, it doesn't seem like a big deal.

In the end, no matter what, it was the immortal that brought Ledina and Kaeir together.

Ever since the arrival of the Immortals, Redina has felt that her presence with the Arc Crystal is not as important as it once was.

Kaier was forced to realize that there was no point in obsessing over charging the arc crystal with a false sense of mission.

In the end, of course, it was Redina's attempts to convince Cai'er to do the same.

Reconciliation is something that only those who have done it know.

Until you reconcile, it feels like the hardest thing in the world, but it's really the next most important thing.

"......."

"......."

That is, the awkward silence that sends chills down your spine.

If they were very close to begin with, it might be possible to reconcile and go back to the way things were, but this is a cider where there's no "way things were" to begin with.

The Arc Crystal is a very large power cartridge.

In the first place, the project involving the Arc Crystal was not Kai or Redina's idea, but Adelia's.

Someone who has powerful magic but can't use it.

A person who can perform magical operations at near-superhuman speeds, but has too little magic power.

Knowing of their existence, Adelia created the Arc Crystal.

So while Lydina and Kaier are senior to each other, they met through work in the first place.

We had a bad relationship in the first place, and then we left and met over something that didn't even exist.

So, it's back to business as usual.

At first, we tried to cheer each other up, but it was short-lived, and the frustration was building.

Since they had never been close, and had only made up after complaining to each other, it was bound to be more awkward than if they had just vented their frustrations.

"......."

"......."

Redina's fingers were twitching, and Kai was no different.

"Some....... Yes....... Right......?"

That was all she could manage to say.

"......Yes."

That was all Caierdo had.

Eventually, you'll need a different topic.

Allied forces halted in their tracks, near the Arc Crystal Tower.

Redina looks up at the starry summer night sky.

"But lately, there's been a lot of weird rumors."

"Ah....... that."

"I guess the war is over, so they're talking about nothing."

Redina dismissed the ominous rumors of the Alliance as mere gossip.

It's just people getting excited and saying this and that.

There were quite a few stories that were definitely unbelievable.

Listening to Redina, Kaier says to Nazik.

"Well, that's probably true for the most part."

"......?"

"Mostly true."

Seeing Redina's confusion, Kaier says.

"What....... are you talking about? What rumor is true?"

At Redina's question, Kaier stares at Redina's dumbfounded face.

"That the Empire used black magic to create an undead army of warriors."

"And that there are those who choose to side with the devil."

"That the Emperor was involved in the Gate debacle."

"All of them, probably true."

Redina's eyes widened at Kaier's words.

"When the war ends, it won't be the end of everything. Something else will start."

Kaier stares at Redina.

"I don't know, but you're an important person, so you should know."

The truth doesn't matter.

You have to decide where to choose and where to follow the truth and facts.

\* \* \*

In her barracks, Redina sat dazed.

It's long past your bedtime, but sleep hasn't come.

Many of the rumors that have surfaced are true.

An army of the undead.

Traitor to humanity.

That the Emperor was involved in the Gate debacle.

As far as whether or not she hated the devil, she didn't think so.

Redina could not equate the Reinhardt in her head with the demon known to the world.

But that didn't mean we could completely separate them.

You don't know which one is the real devil.

But there was a monster in front of me.

So I was just dealing with the monsters in front of me and not thinking about what was causing all this and who to hate, and even if I did, I couldn't decide what was wrong.

But now that the topic has been raised, it's time to think about what you've been holding back.

Where did this all start and who's to blame?

The betrayers of humanity, they didn't really betray, did they?

Were there really different people to be judged?

Like many of us, she was feeling lost in the confusion.

The point is, what we've taken for granted is crumbling at a very rapid pace.

Is the devil really evil?

Was humanity really a victim?

The boundaries of truth were breaking down, and everyone was being judged.

Redina finally couldn't stand it any longer and had to cautiously leave the barracks.

The closer we get to the end, the more sleepless nights I have.

In addition to herself, Redina could see someone else sitting in a dark corner of the barracks, unable to sleep.

"Adriana......?"

It wasn't anyone else, but Adriana, who was gazing blankly up at the stars.

"Oh, it's Redina."

"What are you doing up?"

Redina asked, carefully sitting down next to Adriana.

"Just?"

Adriana smiled cautiously and said.

Adriana had always been like a sister to Ledina, and now she was more than that.

When she suddenly decided to leave Temple, it felt like she was saying goodbye to her life.

I watched Adriana walk away, calmly, but with a sad look on her face.

And then.

Redina clearly remembered Reinhardt's expression turning very serious at the mention of Adriana leaving the Temple.

Adriana has not returned to the Temple since.

After the Gate debacle, he suddenly joined the Temple forces.

Adriana still hasn't told Ledina the full story.

"Can't sleep?"

"Yes......."

At Adriana's question, Redina nodded.

Redina would be lying if she said she didn't have a connection to the demon. Technically, it's a bad blood thing, but in hindsight, it's ridiculous to call it that.

And clearly, the connection to Reinhardt was more on Adriana's side than Redina's.

"Adriana, have you heard the rumors?"

"Rumors? Oh....... You mean that."

Rumors are a dime a dozen, but there's a lot of excitement in the Alliance. They're easy to pick up on, even if you're not a fan of rumors.

Reinhardt was a taboo subject, even between Adriana and Redina.

As such, it was almost the first time the topic had come up in years, if not ever.

"Adriana, what do you think?"

Rumors.

We don't know how he knew, but he said most of the rumors were true.

I'm still skeptical, but what if it's really true?

Redina couldn't figure it out.

Adriana is silent for a moment, then looks at Redina.

"It's sad, I think so."

It sounds like nothing.

For her, it felt like the culmination of a lot of thought.

"Redina."

"Yes."

"We must survive."

Adriana squeezes Redina's hand and says, "Be still.

The words spoke with more determination and desire than ever before.

Actually, I don't need to say much.

No matter how many unknowns there are, no matter how many unknowns there are, the goal is always the same.

Surviving.

To survive and live in the world.

In the end, all the words are just a long way of saying it.

Looking Adriana in the eye with a look of determination, Redina finally said.

All your worries are gone.

It's too late to think about what the truth is.

I fought to survive.

I fought to save it.

Now we can put the finishing touches on that.

"Yes."

You just need to survive.

"Let's do it."

At that simple answer, Adriana hugged Redina hard.

\* \* \*

In the midst of the chaos, the Allied forces advance on Diane, the capital of Regeln, a nation that has already fallen, with signs of division.

As we neared the last cluster of gates, there were still monsters coming at us even though we hadn't reached the zone of operations.

As such, the Allies were forced to remain in a state of constant combat after a certain point.

It was inevitable that the closer I got to Diane, the more monsters I encountered.

Immortals were in full force, not only punching through the Allied lines, but also diverting them and taking out the monsters that were coming from behind.

The Allied combat fatigue is not as high because the Immortals, an indefatigable army, are doing most of the perimeter fighting.

And so, little by little, the alliance gained ground.

Today marks the end of this long, long process.

Allied General Headquarters.

-Grrrrrrr!

-Currrrr!

The cries, screams, and roars of the giant beast could still be heard in the distance.

"Tomorrow."

Emperor Bertus looks at the assembled military commanders and declares.

The looks on the commanders' faces were mixed.

Some have already decided to side with the devil.

There are those who still stand by the Empire.

Somewhere in the middle, there are those who look at the emperor with suspicion.

Personal judgment and opinions don't matter.

If you're here anyway, you're going to have to fight.

No matter whose side you're on or who you support.

They are the ones who must end the gate crisis if they are to survive.

"Immortal is currently holding a defensive line near the garrison, and tomorrow the entire army will advance on Diane."

"The operational instructions are for each army to move according to the details given below. It shouldn't be much different from what you've been doing, but I want you to familiarize yourself with it."

"There is no going back."

"Already, the rear areas beyond the reach of the Allies are swarming with monsters."

"Remember, our troops are surrounded by monsters."

The Allies, led by Immortal, managed to break through the horde to Diane, but the monsters were constantly replenishing, and the path they'd already cleared was now overrun with them.

The fight will be fought on all fronts, not by forming fronts.

Very few people can escape via teleportation.

The last of humanity's armies is now on absolute death row.

It's an attack that shouldn't even be attempted in the first place without hitting that horrible drain.

Having gotten this far, the coalition must accomplish a single goal.

Destroy all of Diane's warp gates.

If that goal is not achieved and the Alliance is wiped out, humanity is doomed.

The words of the Emperor Bertus, who already had few on his side, could not help but be heard, regardless of what was in their hearts.

"Extra large gate three, large gate five, medium seven, small fifteen."

"It's the number of the last warp gates in the world, and if we destroy them, the gate crisis is over."

"It took the entirety of humanity to get the Alliance this far."

"There is no next."

"If the military is wiped out without a single warp gate remaining, it will be the end of the world, not just humanity."

Everyone's faces turned solemn at that solemn declaration.

It was the same for Rowen, the Crusader Knight Commander.

The list of things to say was not long.

Eventually, you have to go and fight.

Someone who's been silent opens their mouth, as if they know it's the last time.

"Your Majesty."

I can only say this for now.

Because it's the last of the last.

"Did your majesty cause the gate incident?"

The solemn mood in the room stiffened.

There have been times when I've been at a loss for words, even if I'm hanging by my fingernails just thinking about it.

But this is a unique situation in many ways, and I could say this to the emperor's face.

Emperor Bertus stares at the man who spoke those words.

It's a phrase that's on everyone's lips.

It's just that he's the one who said it.

Bertus stares at him with a hard expression.

"Does it matter now?"

Neither positive nor negative.

But technically, it was more of an affirmation.

The Emperor speaks with his eyes closed.

"God bless us all."

That's probably.

It was probably the emperor's only sincerity.

\* \* \*

-cooler

Not too far away, I can hear the howls and bangs of many monsters.

The advance starts tomorrow, but the battle is ongoing.

War machines will assemble and start bombarding as soon as they arrive in the area of operations, and will need to clear a path as they begin to advance.

The battles themselves won't be long, as city raids have always been.

Prolonged battles mean annihilation. Allies don't replenish, but enemies just keep coming at you at an insane rate.

After the last meeting, the Emperor was in a warp spot awaiting his return.

The emperor doesn't have to stay on the battlefield.

Now that we don't even know if the Allies will listen to the Emperor's orders, it's rather pointless for him to stay.

The Emperor simply needs to be informed of the outcome of the battle in the ecliptic.

If the Allies are wiped out, you can wait for the coming destruction of humanity.

If the Allies are victorious, you can wait for what happens next.

As the Emperor waited at the warp spot for a teleport cast by the Imperial Mages, Saviolin Tana stood by his side.

With all the rumors swirling around the Allies, the Emperor actually felt that the Allied garrisons were the most dangerous place for him.

That's why Saviolin Tana kept a close eye on her surroundings, even as she stood by the returning emperor's side.

Just in case someone is swayed by a strange rumor and wishes to harm the Emperor.

All that's left is the Emperor and some of his entourage.

Naturally, Xaviorin Tana will be in the final fight, not only because of her command of Shanapelle, but also because she is a very formidable fighter in her own right.

You never know what will happen later.

However, Savior Tana vows that tomorrow's battle will be a victorious one.

Whatever happened, everyone's prayers were answered.

I vowed to get the word out.

"Your Majesty."

"Yes, Lord Tana."

Saviolin Tana wanted to answer the question, maybe for the last time.

"I'd like to ask you something."

"Yes, please."

"The rumor is......."

Saviolin Tana bites her lip and lowers her eyes.

"After all, is that what His Majesty did....... did this?"

Speaking of rumors.

Gate, and that the Imperial Emperor was responsible.

It's just a rumor.

Saviolin Tana felt when she realized that such a bizarre rumor was spreading.

Reinhardt says, "The devil wouldn't do that.

Even if the Crusader Crusader, Rowen, had practiced such dogma, he would not have allowed it.

Then eventually.

There's only one source of rumors.

At Savior Tana's question, the corner of the Emperor's mouth subtly lifts.

"I don't know."

"......."

The emperor didn't have a good answer this time.

But just as the answer given by the General Staff was tantamount to an admission, how is this any different?

Saviolin Tana gritted her teeth, feeling miserable and helpless.

"Lord Tana."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Sir is not going to the war tomorrow."

At the Emperor's offhand remark, Saviolin Tana's eyes widened.

"Yes......?"

"My lord, I have other things to do."

This is the final battle.

And the most important fight of all.

But the shock of being told to leave suddenly made Saviolin Tana forget her words.

"We'll talk about that when we get back."

"Your Majesty....... Your Majesty......?"

Before Saviolin Tana could say anything.

-Flash!

A flash of mass teleportation engulfed the Emperor and Saviolin Tana.

Episode 657.

Day of the march.

As dawn broke, the Allies spent the day defending their positions, and now it was time for the morning of the advance.

And just like that, it was morning in Razak.

As in the last battle, I was disguised as one of the Allied soldiers.

As it is, you will enter the battlefield and join the final fight as a single soldier.

But just like last time, Harriet, Olivia, Riana, and the Lord Vampires were all ready to go.

The paladins and priests of the Holy Order, our greatest strength, have already been unwittingly assigned to the Crusader Knights.

That's why, as much as the coalition is committing, we're committing.

The five Lord Vampires were ready, as were the mages of each house.

"I can go."

"If that's the case, why would you go?"

"......Yes."

In fact, there's a good chance they don't need our help.

So it's just me.

But then again, I couldn't really explain why I should go, so everyone else was going to follow.

That's not all.

Olivia Ranze wasn't the only one waiting to depart with a full suit of paladin's armor.

"It's been a while since I've fought a battle instead of commanded one."

Elion Boulton was one of the first to sign up for Diane's challenge.

No one asked me to do it, I asked myself.

I'm a retired crusader, but if I'm wearing cotton gloves, who's going to recognize me?

Just as Olivia disguises herself as a paladin to fight, so will Elion Bolton.

Charlotte volunteered that she could fight for a day, then backed down when I corrected her.

Charlotte has the ability to fight, but she doesn't know how.

That's why Charlotte was there now, looking nervous.

Similarly, Airi is a succubus queen, so she's got a lot of fighting power, but her horns make her impossible to camouflage, so I told her to stay away.

It's not a massive organization like the Allies.

But our troops are already in the Alliance, so in effect, most of those who could fight in Rajak are heading to the battlefield.

That's not a huge number.

I'm not sure that's even close to the full power of a demon.

But how did I come so close to swallowing up an entire continent with only a handful of people?

Anyway.

Before you leave.

Now that you're a king, you have to say something.

Not everyone is playing, but everyone is there.

Herriot.

Olivia Ranze.

Liana De Granz.

Elion Bolton.

Elise.

Lucinyl.

Galarsh.

Lerouen.

Antirrhinus.

Vampires on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

Charlotte De Gradias.

Airy.

Sarkegar.

"I'm not a big talker."

There is only one thing I can say in front of these people who are my power.

"This whole time, I've been doing this to save my life."

Yes.

I've done all of this to survive.

"So, let's survive."

So there's nothing to dream about, nothing to hope for, except to survive.

Not just them, but everyone who has stood by my side.

To all those who are not on my side.

May there be such a thing as life and survival after this.

Pray.

\* \* \*

The final battle actually started before we even reached Diane.

The rampaging monsters roamed far beyond the city limits, and they kept showing up.

The day of the battle was just a moment in time when Diane was within striking distance.

Already, the final battle has started two days ago.

The Allies push through the waves of monsters.

As always, Ellen Artorius was at the forefront.

He slashes at monsters with the edge of the Void, wraps himself in the cloak of the Sun God that burns all attacks, and charges ahead.

-Waaaaaah!

-knowwhat!

The shouts of evil-driven soldiers and the cries of monsters rang out, threatening to tear the world apart.

This is the final battleground.

So not only are the behemoths at an unprecedented level in numbers, but the Allied forces must not only push forward, but also hold off the onslaught from all sides.

It's a battle of prioritizing the annihilation of the Alliance or the destruction of all of Diane's warp gates as they are forced to drain.

To put it very brutally.

Here, even if the Allies are wiped out, you can still accomplish your goal of destroying all warp gates.

The remaining monsters in the world can be slowly exterminated.

No more monsters should appear.

Magic and flame, sword and claw, will crackle.

Venom, flame, and lightning scorch the ground as they streak across the sky, spewing from the gills of flying monsters.

And so it is with the flying monsters that crisscross the sky, blasting them from the ground with cannons, thunderbolts, and airborne explosions that tear them apart and set them ablaze.

Something is constantly dying.

People and monsters alike.

Toward the end of all this malice.

-Titans! Titans yet!

-Titan will be summoned at the start of Diane's attack!

The final battlefield of blood and gore was unlike anything that had come before.

"Hmph!"

-Crackle!

Sparks fly in Heinrich's eyes, and the surging horde of monsters disappears in a roaring blaze.

In an instant, thousands of units are consumed in flames, and the ones that aren't killed by the flames break through and mow down the soldiers.

There are monsters for whom flames don't work.

That's something Heinrich is familiar with.

But he couldn't get used to seeing monsters that he couldn't handle breaking through and killing people.

-Flash!

-Bam!

Heinrich's eyes widen as he watches the monster break through the flames, only to be struck by a harsh lightning bolt from the sky and explode.

Lightning strikes.

Well, it's definitely possible to do magic.

But.

-currrrr

As the sky darkened, thunderstorms began to pierce the darkened sky.

Soon.

-Flash!

Heinrich could only squeeze his eyes shut against the blinding flash.

Dozens, no, hundreds, in a very short time.

No.

-Crunch!

Heinrich could only stare in disbelief as thousands of thunderbolts swept across the battlefield, blasting the monsters to pieces.

That wasn't the end of the story.

-Flash!

Thousands of thunderbolts per second sweep across the battlefield.

Even the highest-level magic, Thunderstorm, can't do this.

A shower of thunderbolts bathes the battlefield in white light, erasing monsters like an eraser.

All over the battlefield, too.

"Liana......?"

Naturally.

Heinrich couldn't help but notice who was in the room.

\* \* \*

A thunderstorm rages in the darkened sky.

As if it were an aimed shot, you're hit by a wave of monsters.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm depressed and want to die."

At Herriot's question, a dark-eyed Riana gagged on her own words.

A corner of the Allied battlefield.

Only a few people realize that the torrential downpour of lightning across the battlefield is coming from Riana, who is gagging in her seat.

Even in the midst of her crippling depression, Riana remains focused on her abilities.

More lightning strikes.

More lightning.

Use it to clear the monsters and clear the way.

"But now that I think it's over, I'm going to feel better, and that's the problem."

Herriot smiles sheepishly at Riana's sarcasm.

They're surrounded, but the Allied forces are stronger than ever.

And while the numbers are never large, the forces of evil that are joining forces cannot be ignored.

If Riana, by her very existence, can do what a few military divisions can do, the same can be said for each Lord Vampire and their clan.

I know it's early to be optimistic, but things are looking good.

Is this really the end.

It was around this time that Herriot began to wonder if the Gate debacle could be over.

-Flash!

"Uh......?"

Flashes of light begin to flash across the battlefield.

It was not a light of destruction.

Where that flash comes from, destruction is not happening.

It's disappearing.

Both Riana and Herriot were in positions overlooking the battlefield, so they could see the synchronized white light of the battlefield as sparks and explosions flew everywhere.

It is not a light associated with destruction.

"Teleport......?"

Clearly, it's a flash of mobile magic.

It's not like someone is arriving through that light.

Disappears.

In a flash of light, someone disappears.

It's not just ordinary soldiers who disappear.

They're soldiers in masks.

Riana mumbles to herself, unable to believe what she's seeing.

"Immortal is....... Immortal is disappearing, right?"

Herriot's eyes widened at the sight.

"No way....... No way. No way. No way....... No way......."

Herriot could only freeze in his terrifying imagination.

But the reality in front of you speaks for itself.

Immortal was withdrawing of its own accord.

\* \* \*

"......Heh!"

Instead of slicing up the monster, Ludwig was suddenly transported somewhere in a white blur of light.

"What....... What is......?"

Apparently, just as he was about to leap into battle and take down one of the giant monsters with a single blow, Ludwig was caught in a recall spell without even knowing English.

When Ludwig opened his eyes, he was in a familiar place.

The place where the immortal arrives by recall if it breaks.

Underground Research Center, Temple College of Magic.

While the temple was unable to teleport, the basement of the College of Magic was now able to do so on a limited basis.

Because if the immortal breaks, we need to come back here to repair it.

Ludwig stared in disbelief at the massive cavity and rows of restorative ports.

Of course, you can always revert an Immortal even if it hasn't been destroyed.

-Pot! Flash!

Ludwig is not alone.

With a flash, Immortal's mages and soldiers were being recalled at breakneck speed.

As he watched the Immortal mages who appeared to be casting Recall, Ludwig couldn't help but realize what was happening.

Immortal is fleeing the battlefield and has been forcibly summoned by Recall magic.

I mean, who else could do this?

"Christina......?"

Ludwig gulped when he saw Christina standing still in the center of the gathering of Immortal mages.

In a nearby restorative port, Anna and Louis Ankton lay asleep with their backs to the wall.

It was clear that he had been forced to fall asleep.

There's no way they'd agree on something like this.

"Don't panic, Ludwig. It's all planned."

Looking at the frozen Ludwig, Christina says with a stern look.

"Christina? What are you....... What are you trying to do......?"

Ludwig could not accept this situation.

This is the final battle.

It's a step.

But with one last step, the most important power, the Immortal, leaves the battlefield.

This was crazy, and crazy doesn't begin to describe it.

No matter what the intent, no matter how worthy the purpose.

This is a no-no.

Christina smiles faintly, as if she can tell from Ludwig's expression what he's about to say.

"I don't know about you, but most of the Alliance has sided with the Devil, and if the Gate incident ends without incident, the entire Alliance will fall to him."

"So....... What are you going to do?"

"If the Alliance becomes the Devil's, then humanity becomes the Devil's."

He doesn't ask, but Ludwig already knows.

I can't help but wonder why she's doing this and what will happen next.

"You can't just leave something like that alone, can you?"

"No, Christina....... No, no, no. This can't happen....... This can't happen! This is crazy!"

Even if they betrayed humanity and sided with the devil, even if they said they couldn't leave it alone, is it okay to do this?

In the end, the powerless will be the first to die, and they had nothing to do with it.

She was nonchalantly saying she would sacrifice them.

"I'm not trying to annihilate the Alliance, I'm just trying to reduce their numbers, enough so that the Immortals can clean up the mess."

If you have an army that's going to be the Devil's later, it's already the Devil's.

So we weaken it.

Until you can breathe on emotes alone.

"Meanwhile, it wouldn't be so great if the guys we're supposed to be killing died fighting the monsters. Don't you think?"

Ludwig jumps to his feet, wide-eyed.

You can't let this happen.

I couldn't.

-Bam!

Ludwig plays Christina's slap.

"Don't do anything crazy. Send Immortal back to Diane right now."

Ludwig also crossed the line to some extent, but not as much as Christina.

I never thought I'd do something like this.

This is just insanity.

It's not understandable, it's not justified, it's just insanity.

At the sound of Ludwig's chilling voice, Christina smiles even as she is held captive.

"Okay, let's say we just throw in an immortal and the gate situation is over."

"Yeah, it's too late to think about it once this is all over, because this, this, this isn't for anyone!"

"And what about revenge?"

"......what?"

"The Alliance is more than half owned by the Devil, and the Emperor is about to abandon the Empire, and the only way to get revenge is to kill the Devil, and kill the Emperor, and kill Ellen, and kill them all. Do you really think it's possible to just kill the Devil and leave everyone else who chose to side with the Devil alone? Do you really think it's possible to just pick out the wrong people from the great mass of the Alliance and kill them?"

"You....... what are you....... are you......?"

"The monsters at the gate are killing the people they're supposed to be killing anyway, it's just a matter of whether the immortals do it or the monsters do it."

You're dealing with groups, not people.

If the war ends unscathed, it will only serve to make the Demon King's forces more powerful.

Instead, we weaken it beforehand.

Whether later or now, Immortals will have to kill a lot of people.

"Ludwig. It would be better if we did this now, so that there is no war between the Immortals and the Allies later, and if the Immortals and the Allies fight, more people will die."

"That's sophistry, Christina, and it doesn't even make sense!"

If the gate incident ends with the Alliance still intact, and Immortal stabs the Demon Army into the Alliance, the secondary battle will cause even more damage.

"If we reduce our numbers ahead of time, the Allies will surrender in front of Immortal, because they'll know they're no match. Think about it, Ludwig, this is the way to save lives."

It tolerates death now to avoid killing more later.

If the secondary battle between the Allies and the Immortals ends with the Allies being wiped out, then the war will end with more people dying.

However, if the Allies have lost a significant amount of power in the Gate War, they may choose to surrender unconditionally in front of the Immortals, regardless of whether they sided with the Demon King or not. This would actually result in fewer people dying.

If things go the way she says, she'll be right.

"I'm not going to wait for everyone to die, and the Immortals aren't going to stay off the battlefield for long."

"......what?"

"They're hiding somewhere, watching the situation, disguised as something. The ones we need to kill are supposed to come out one by one when they think the Alliance is going to be wiped out."

"Now....... and wait for that?"

"Of course."

Someone has to fill the void of power that Immortal's absence has weakened.

So wherever you are, if you're watching, the Demon King's army is there.

Individual or collective, in any way.

"When they show up, we'll send in the Immortals again, and they'll kill them along with the monsters."

"......."

"Don't worry. The sooner the demon appears, the sooner the Immortals will be reintroduced to the battlefield."

When the Demon shows up to support the Allies, Immortal goes to the battlefield to kill the Demon.

He wants to capitalize on that desire for humanity to survive.

Ludwig thinks the devil is to blame for this.

But is it worth it?

"This shit is not....... This is not revenge....... No, no, no! People are dying because of us, not the devil, and then we're the ones who really need to be killed, not the devil or the emperor! Why do people have to die? Why do people have to be sacrificed for your wishes? That's not what we've been doing, that's not what we made Immortals for!"

Ludwig could not help but shout with evil at the idea of summoning a demon with the blood of the innocent, who were so thirsty for revenge that they would spill their own blood.

"What are you talking about, Ludwig......?"

At Ludwig's question, Christina shakes her head in disbelief.

"When have I ever said that I do this for people....... Not once, but......?"

"......what?"

"You said, too, that you don't do this for the people, that you want to make the people who should pay the price pay the price......?"

Apparently, Ludwig said so, too.

"I just, I want revenge."

She never once said she wanted to speak for the victims, to speak for their injustices.

It's just getting back at the world.

It's just an outlet for anger.

For someone.

I never said I was doing this for some grand, happy ending.

When I created Immortals, I wanted to end the Gate crisis and use its power to get revenge.

I just wanted to make sure that everyone who did this paid for it.

She never said she created Immortal for the underdog, or to speak for the underdog.

"Are you sure you weren't mistaken?"

"......."

"Ludwig, what you're trying to do. Trying to kill the Devil, making people pay for these things, did you ever say that it had nothing to do with justice or anything like that....... Is that what you were thinking in your heart......?"

It's a decision that has nothing to do with judgment of good or evil.

If that's how you started, why are you now invoking some sort of justice that the weak shouldn't be victimized?

"If you were under any illusions that this was some kind of good or just cause, Ludwig....... you are still....... still......."

Christina smiles a horrible smile.

"You're still a fucking retarded asshole."

He said.

It was revenge in the first place.

You said you wanted revenge, you said you wanted to get even.

I don't want to do anything too terrible at this point.

It's ridiculous to say that we have to toe the line.

Ludwig's eyes widen at Christina's words, and he stares into her dark eyes, which have become the abyss itself.

"Okay, maybe you're right....... But....... Yeah, if this is revenge, if you have to do this shit to get it....... If you're going to make them pay, and we're going to be the ones who have to pay............."

Ludwig thuds a left hand into Christina's body.

"I'm not going to, like, get revenge or anything."

She had become a monster, something she couldn't understand and couldn't accept.

It's become something that shouldn't be in the world.

But we can't kill her either.

"Let me go. Just me."

Christina's eyes widened at Ludwig's cold declaration.

"...... Are you serious?"

On some level, she knew that was coming.

"Uh."

"......."

"Whatever you do, I can't stop you, and you won't listen to me, so there's only one thing I can do."

Ludwig knew he couldn't convince Christina.

Both, in their own way, went crazy.

That's why it's impossible to convince them.

I also know that killing her will cause even more chaos.

So I'd rather part ways.

You need to get out as soon as possible.

So that we can fight a little faster on behalf of the people who will die because of her decisions.

Christina decided to let people die.

Ludwig isn't quite that crazy yet.

"Send it to me."

On a battlefield without immortals, you are very likely to die.

Christina stares at Ludwig, who tells her to leave him alone, as if that's a good thing.

Just as Ludwig can't convince Christina, the opposite is also true.

I will say no more about your affairs, and I cannot break Ludwig's will to send you to the limbs.

"......Okay."

At Christina's command, the mages of Immortal begin casting.

"Don't die until your immortal returns."

Ludwig thought Christina's words sounded funny.

Is someone still valuable?

Even when it looks like this.

Even while doing this.

Is it possible to say that you don't want someone to die?

That's insanity, and also.

Maybe it's just the nature of being a horribly selfish human being.

"Christina."

Just before the teleport is about to finish casting, Ludwig looks at Christina and says, "I'm sorry.

"In the end, the one we picked was also a wrong answer, the most horrible wrong answer."

I couldn't find a correct answer.

I realized that the right answer was each person's own wrong answer, created by their own minds.

So, in the midst of all the choices I've been faced with.

Ludwig is not sure about himself and Christina.

They were forced to admit that they were wrong, just as the rest of the world was wrong.

Everyone picked the wrong answer.

The people who picked the wrong answer are arguing about how close their answer was to the correct one.

That's what's happening now.

In Ludwig's words of self-help and contempt.

"Still, this wrong answer makes me feel good inside."

Rather than insisting that her incorrect answer is the correct one, Christina replies that she just wants to make it all go away.

-Flash!

Soon, Ludwig disappeared in a flash of light.

Without immortals, alone.

Ludwig will not die easily.

I gave you this arm so you wouldn't die so easily.

Just wait.

On the battlefield, until the ones you need to kill show up.

The Immortal will then return to the battlefield and begin hunting.

In addition to hunting monsters, they also hunt demons and heroes.

If you feel bad about people dying, you just need to show up.

While Christina is silent, waiting for the situation she wants.

Ludwig is gone, and Anna and Louis are asleep in a silent but immortalized underground lab.

-Jerbuck

-Jerbuck

Soon, somewhere, you begin to hear quiet footsteps.

-Thump!

-Woof!

Then you start to hear the sound of a bulkhead breaking down in a lab that is supposed to be closed.

Christina's expression hardened.

The lab is closed.

After the development of the Immortal was complete, no one was allowed to enter. All imperial wizards had been driven out, and Immortal troops guarded the labs to ensure that no one else could enter.

The sounds you're hearing right now are, in and of themselves, indicative of an immortal army being neutralized.

"......."

Christina stares at the entrance to the underground lab.

Someone is coming.

While neutralizing the Immortal, break down the barrier enough to gain access.

Very powerful.

What is.

-Kwaggagang!

With a loud bang, the entrance to a closed underground research wing shatters, revealing a figure.

Christina looks up from the rising dust to see who it is.

It was a familiar face.

And he's not on the Allied battlefield right now.

"......Saviolin Tana."

Christina looked at Tana, who had appeared alone, and muttered the name.

Even with the title of World's Strongest Swordsman, she was unable to participate in the Great Demon War.

And even now, she couldn't go into the final fight with the title of World's Strongest Prosecutor.

She suddenly realized.

Perhaps this is my fate or curse.

You can't fight where everyone remembers.

You can't take the crown.

It may be the fate of Savior Tana, the First Sword of the Continent.

From the greatest seat of honor in the Demon War.

Even in the final fight to end the gate crisis.

There was no place for her.

The emperor sent his sharpest sword here.

A cursed genius, doomed to fight where glory resides.

Saviolin Tana holds still and closes her eyes.

"This is......."

In a place no one in the world will ever remember.

In a darkened basement, without glory or honor.

"My last battlefield."

She had to fight the hardest battle of all.

Episode 658.

In a flash of blue light, one Immortal hit was reduced to ash and disappeared.

"......What is it?"

Christina looked at Saviolin Tana with a dumbfounded expression.

Christina doesn't know what a fight is.

But that doesn't mean it's not common sense.

Saviolin Tana is apparently called the First Sword of the Continent, or the strongest knight on the continent.

But what she was seeing was hardly a "prosecutor's" fight.

-Woof!

The azure auror swords floating around Savior Tana were proof of that.

No, it's not in the form of a sword.

A shape that looks like it's been forged and sharpened from horsepower.

There was a shape of an auror that was more of a "spear" so to speak.

Since the start of the battle, Saviolin Tana hasn't drawn her Galeblade Tempesta once, instead throwing her Auror blades around.

That's more like a wizard.

She knows this on a common sense level.

Those who can augment their physical bodies with magical power are those who have attained the level of Enchantment.

If you can go beyond that and enchant your own armor, call it a master class.

Those who go above and beyond, who can create a weapon out of nothing but aurors, a level that few in human history have ever achieved, are called Grandmasters.

"That's weird."

Saviolin Tana looks at the inaccessible Immortal and Christina beyond.

"It's been decades since I reached the level of a grandmaster......."

Saviolin Tana snaps her fingers, and a blue flash blasts the Immortals that attempt to attack her.

-Kookaburra!

There was a huge explosion, and along with a few ports, the immortals failed to react and disappeared in the blast.

"Why does everyone believe I've never taken a single step forward in my 'grandmaster' career......."

Last winter, Ellen Artorius challenged me to a fight.

The fight didn't escalate, so we don't know the outcome.

However, there's a difference between Ellen Artorius's imagined viola tana and the real thing.

It's not the beginning of a grandmaster's journey.

It's been decades since I reached that point, and my body is the same as it was in my youthful prime.

Isn't it a bit complacent to assume that she'll stay in place for decades, content with her position?

A man who lived his life knowing nothing but the sword.

He is a man who realizes that he has nothing in life except the sword on his back.

That time.

The years.

The world's strongest man, who has been on and off the battlefield since the Gate debacle, seriously realized the need for strength and has put his whole heart into honing himself once again.

It'll never be the same.

Why do you think someone who has reached the pinnacle will stay there?

Those who reached the top continued to climb in different directions.

You're wrong to think you'll be able to reach her if you go a little further.

It doesn't matter how hard the people below you have worked to break through and make it to the top.

The pinnacle is no longer where it stood decades ago, and it may have moved even further away.

Because.

Saviolin Tana is now a prosecutor, a title that seems strange to her.

No sword required.

It's not like you don't need a sword because there is a physical form of sword, the Auror Sword.

There's really no reason to fight with a sword.

Saviolin Tana is a being who has reached the point where she realizes that, at the end of the day, everything works.

All of the people who have been pierced by that magic spear while trying to get at Savior Tana are Master Class winners.

Even such beings are wiped out by a single auror shot.

The mind control spells used by archmages also don't work at all.

Training to counter magic is an essential part of a knight's training.

So it's no surprise that magical control measures don't work for the pinnacle of knights, Saviolin Tana.

Swords are swords, and magic is magic.

Christina says through clenched teeth.

"Yeah....... I know you're strong, but whether you can handle it is another matter, right?"

"......."

This basement is where the full power of the Immortals resides.

This is the total power of the immortals that Diane is supposed to be fighting.

Even if Xavier Tana is a powerhouse beyond reason, there are some things that are impossible.

It doesn't change the fact that she's in a crowd now.

It's like a tiger herding a bunch of cats.

But if those cats can pounce on the tiger until it collapses from exhaustion, the tiger will eventually die.

So no matter how strong Xavier Tana is, she's just walking into the middle of an enemy, naked.

There is no set end, it just gets delayed.

The reason Savior Tana is able to hold on right now is because the battlefield itself is limited.

The destruction of the lab itself affects the survival of the Immortal.

He's hesitant to let the fight escalate because he's afraid it might destroy the entire lab.

It's a small space, and you have to protect the lab, so the Immortals can't attack properly.

It doesn't matter how much stronger Savior Tana is than the public perception, it doesn't change the fact that she came in on a limb.

Despite Christina's words, Savior Tana summons several more Auror spears.

"You'll know it when you see it."

The confidence bordered on arrogance, and she couldn't help but grit her teeth.

\* \* \*

-Flash!

With a flash of light, Ludwig reappeared on the battlefield where he'd been so long ago.

There are no immortals.

-The monsters are coming!

Suddenly, Ludwig sees the Allied forces in complete disarray as all their reliable allies have evaporated.

The collapse of the Alliance was imminent.

The presence of Immortals is important, but not essential. Allied forces can fight without Immortals.

But a crumbling morale will bring everything down like dominoes.

She's wrong.

No, I didn't even try to find the right answer in the first place.

I knew it was wrong, but I boldly declared that I would do something crazy just for revenge.

Slowly, Ludwig pulls a crystal vial from his bosom.

Then, open it and drink the contents.

"ugh......."

An artificial, nasty flavor that I can't even figure out how to implement.

After swallowing the tranquilizer, Ludwig roughly wipes the corner of his drooling mouth.

-curl!

Ludwig doesn't have an army.

All you have is a body.

You can't fill the void left by Immortal alone.

There are many things you can do with a stronger body than before. But at the end of the day, you only have one body.

On a battlefield of screams and shrieks, Ludwig can kill the monster in front of him, but it's still irrelevant to winning or losing the war.

Just fight.

-Thump!

With a few leaps, Ludwig is in the midst of the monsters, an auror sword materializing in his right hand.

-Whoosh!

With one swift spinning slash, a torrent of creepy-crawly aurors is unleashed and the monsters around them are swept away.

Ludwig could hear the exclamations of the soldiers who watched the ominous but overwhelming force from afar.

Although still irrelevant to winning or losing the war.

When it comes to localized warfare, there's definitely a role for Ludwig.

Someone wielding a pitch-black Auror sword, shaped like a greatsword, strides boldly across the battlefield.

It's so overwhelming that people don't back away, they follow.

They weren't always like this.

Christina, and others who have changed.

The days when we could laugh and talk amongst ourselves have become a mirage.

Someone became the bad guy to kill, and someone became the bad guy while trying to kill the bad guy.

And Ludwig, who watches, becomes a dreamer of his own evil in the name of judgment.

The ones I loved have gone to a place I can't love anymore.

The survivors have been reduced to being unworthy of love.

The one thing that doesn't change.

Fight for the people.

Fighting to save someone.

Because I didn't abandon that one absolute path.

Because you can't turn away from that.

"K......!"

-Koo-koo-koo-koo!

Fight.

With my right arm feeling like it was on fire.

While resisting the eerie sensation of black magic invading his body and thoughts.

Ludwig didn't even think to steal the tears of blood from his eyes.

Swing the sword.

"Aaaahhhhhh!"

It's like you've become a one-headed beast with black magic.

The stray black beast moves forward, slaughtering the monsters.

\* \* \*

Immortal has left the battlefield.

In no time at all, they were gone.

The majority of the Alliance knows what Immortals are. Even those who don't believe the rumors know that they are powerful allies.

They disappeared altogether.

-where....... Where are you going?

Since Immortal's arrival, every battle has been planned with Immortal in mind.

Immortals have shown more power than we could have ever hoped for.

Thus, even those who knew what an immortal really was may have questioned the process, but no one questioned the absolute necessity.

Think about it later.

You'll need it for now.

I'm silent for now, because I need to be.

I know I shouldn't have done it, but I needed it so badly.

The Allies recognized the utility of immortals and relied on them.

It was the same for me.

-Grrrrr!

-Bam!

As I crushed the creature's head with a wave of magic in my fist, I could only stare in disbelief at the waves of monsters rushing into the vacated space.

So far.

Did it have to come to this?

I trusted that there would be at least a little bit of reason left.

You want to kill me, you want to kill the person responsible for the gate.

Do they want me dead enough to abandon everyone like this?

Where is the authority to do this?

Knowing that so many people had so much riding on Immortal, it suddenly disappeared.

The sudden disappearance of the Immortal stuns the advancing army, and they begin to falter and retreat.

Without the thousands of master classes that had swept across their path, and the destructive magic of their archmages in the rear, the army's strength was inevitably diminished.

No wonder the vanguard suddenly disappears when you're supposed to be following.

You grit your teeth and forge ahead, but in the end, your body is one.

In the areas I couldn't cover, the wire was gradually being pushed back.

You're confused, and a nauseating rage is building inside you, but you can't stop it.

There are no immortals.

Disappeared.

-Vanguard is gone!

-Run away!

Dangerous.

Immortals are obviously a big part of the power.

But in the original, you could have the final fight without the immortals, without the Titans.

You can.

Just to be clear.

The evaporation of Immortal took the morale with it.

It forces commanders and soldiers to make fearful guesses.

-Deserted us!

Broken morale is an epidemic.

Others follow the cries of the frightened soldier.

You can.

Without immortals, it's an uphill battle, but not impossible.

Many more will die, but they will not be wiped out.

You can do this without Immortal. Despite the loss of Immortal in the final fight, the Alliance has more than enough troops. You've gotten this far with enough troops intact.

However, Immortals have come to mean too much to the Allies, and their sudden evaporation is as much a betrayal of trust as it is a huge demoralization.

If the front row starts to collapse, so does the back row.

If the entire coalition is demoralized and collapses, that's it.

Now the entire allied army is marching, surrounded by monsters.

If it collapses, it's just rolled up and destroyed, there's no back.

-The Emperor has abandoned us!

Before I knew it, the screams of the soldiers about the evaporation of the Immortals had been replaced by it.

The Empire's secret weapon.

The immortal is gone.

In other words, the emperor has abandoned humanity.

In fear and dread.

A growing coalition of followers of the Demon King.

So those who thought the Emperor had abandoned the Allies were shouting in retreat.

The emperor hasn't abandoned it.

It was not Bertus who abandoned you.

But it doesn't mean anything.

There's no way you're going to be able to capture and persuade soldiers who are screaming random words in terror and desperation.

I don't even have time to rage about the insanity of retreating Immortals.

However.

If you walk away, it's all over.

We've been relying too much on immortals.

As a result, the empty space in Immortal is dozens of times larger than the actual space.

-We're all going to die! We're all going to die!

-Run away!

There's nowhere to run.

There's no point in shouting that we're surrounded.

You'll fall back, step on an ally's foot, get tangled up, start getting crushed by an ally, and then a wave of monsters will come crashing in and you're done.

Just like that.

The moment the Emperor's betrayal sweeps across the battlefield, sending the Allies into panic.

-Currrrrr!

The sky is falling.

A vast crack appears in the sky.

And not just one, but dozens.

Not over the heads of your allies, but all over the battlefield.

The blue sky becomes a spidery crack that projects darkness like a broken mirror.

"ah......."

The sky.

Of course, the sky is visible to everyone.

You'll see soldiers dropping their weapons and fleeing, countless superhumans looking back and not knowing what to do, and mages gritting their teeth and spewing magic from the rear.

Flashing rain from a broken sky.

You see a meteor shower falling over the battlefield.

It's magic that's traumatized everyone.

The day the heavens opened.

Because that's when it all started.

That's why it's a curse on all mankind.

-Wang.......

Everyone looks up at the sky in disbelief.

-Magic of a king!

Raining meteors.

It had become a symbol of the devil to humanity, to all who remembered that day.

For all who saw that day on the ecliptic, it was a spell of apocalypse.

-Here comes the king's magic!

The reason for the despair, however, is that the voices of those who see the magic in the symbol of the devil are not hopeless.

-quagga-quagga-quagga!

That's because it's being poured into monsters, not humanity.

"Yeah......."

If you need to.

In this situation.

If you have to do it in front of people who are running away screaming betrayal.

Is there only one thing I can do?

The helmet is off.

It's back to its not-so-sleepy self.

A pair of horns.

Archdemon.

In the guise of a ballet.

and summon it.

-Woof!

In my right hand, I have Tiamata.

Alsbringer in the left hand.

No need to say anything.

Everyone just needs to see it.

It can no longer be the devil disguised as a single soldier.

-Oh, oh.......

-aah.......

Those in close proximity begin to freak out.

No need for words.

-Woof!

From the flames of the fires that reacted to the horsepower pushed to its limits, the heat wave that responded began to tear and burn the incoming monsters.

Run.

Into the waves of monsters.

He rushes in, now using all his strength.

You don't need a golden tiara.

-Woof!

Ruinous corruption pours from Tiamata, a sword that sheds vast darkness, tearing monsters apart, and blue magic pours from Alsbringer, ovipositing them.

And the flames from Hwayo's flame burn the monsters, clearing the way.

Gone are the days of the emperor's betrayal.

-Wang Yi.......

-The king is here!

People started chanting about the rise of the devil.

And that the word "devil" could have such a hopeful ring to it.

Somehow, even in this situation.

It felt ridiculous.

Episode 659.

In the middle of the battlefield.

Olivia Ranze was also fighting in paladin's armor.

The earth was shaking from the vibration alone of thousands of meteorites raining down from the torn sky.

Then, Olivia could clearly see the huge flames and flashes of light that engulfed the waves of monsters.

"Reinhardt......."

The Immortals are gone, and the demonic forces have moved in.

The armies of the devil, everyone knows that the tip of the spear is pointed at monsters, not humanity.

Is this the end of the misunderstanding?

But isn't that just covering up a misunderstanding with a misunderstanding?

Cover up the misconception that the devil wanted to wipe out humanity with the misconception that the emperor abandoned humanity.

I'm sure Reinhardt didn't mean to, but that's how things were going.

But covering up misunderstandings with misunderstandings is only after the allies have survived.

Destroy all warp gates and everyone survives unharmed.

No truths, no misconceptions, can be brought back to humanity by the defeated Allies.

For now, we need to survive.

So Reinhardt took off his mask and revealed himself as the devil.

Demonstrate the magic that kills monsters.

To support a coalition that is about to trip over its own feet and collapse.

You need to unmask.

Whatever it is, let it be strong.

Everyone should know that while there are no immortals, there are powerful allies who are unbowed by them.

Because.

-Pak!

Olivia also takes off her helmet.

As she untied her hair, Olivia's brilliant platinum locks fluttered in the battlefield breeze.

Even in the midst of such a devastating battlefield, some figures are bound to stand out, and Olivia Ranze was one of them.

Even before the Gate incident, Olivia Ranze had a great reputation as a Saint of Eredian.

She also fought in the Demon War, taking a rear-guard role, but her killing of so many demons earned her the uncharacteristic nickname of Reaper.

But even that fame pales in comparison to the notoriety she gained after Gate.

Traitor to humanity.

She became more famous as a wicked woman than a saint, and in every city where humanity still existed, there was a wanted list of traitors who had betrayed it.

Naturally, those with even a mildly hateful interest in the Devil must know the faces of the three traitors to humanity as well as the Devil himself.

Olivia Ranze.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

Liana De Granz.

One of those three, Olivia Ranze, has made an appearance.

-Olivia Ranze.......

-Saint of the Demon King!

Those of the soldiers on the battlefield who recognized her face could not help but be aghast, and those who did not could only look at her with the aghast of others.

Even the Crusaders are aghast that she was fighting alongside them on the battlefield in paladin's armor.

But it's in the middle of the battlefield.

I don't have time to share my feelings of shock and horror right now.

You have to fight.

The same goes for Olivia.

Kills a monster.

The empire created an army of warriors to kill the monster.

What you need now is power.

Power to kill monsters.

Whatever the source of that power is, it's probably good.

Power to kill enemies.

The power to put an end to it all.

People want it.

-Currrrrr!

The power that stretched from Olivia's hand was clearly not auspicious.

Not the white and golden power of a pure saint, but a dark, ethereal energy was radiating from Olivia's body.

Take a moment to marvel at the dark forces that make people seem so evil in their pretense.

-Kurrrrrr

The earth rumbles with the dark power, and something begins to emerge from the ground.

One by one, ominous beings rise from the ground, oozing with an aura of common corruption, unrecognizable as mere lesser undead.

An unfathomable number of Deathknights rise from the earth.

That wasn't all.

-Kaaaaaah!

Rising from the ground, the skeletons waved their hands in the air, and one by one they mounted the translucent horses of bony spirits.

The Death Knight begins to take the reins of the Ghost Horse.

And Olivia Ranze hops lightly onto the ghost horse.

A saint, turned evil, looks down on the terrified humans.

"Let's go."

-Chak!

With a frightening jerk of the reins, the ghost horse begins to glide, not run, toward the waves of monsters at breakneck speed.

Led by Olivia Ranze, countless Death Knights follow on ghostly steeds.

-Kaaaaaaaah!

The ghost horse's crooning overpowers the monsters' screams.

-Quadruple!

The army of ghost horses tramples the monsters roughly.

Like a ship sailing through a tidal wave.

Everyone watched in disbelief as the army of ghost horses roughly trampled the horde of monsters.

And as if that were a sign.

Several of the paladins moving around the battlefield suddenly start to join you on their ghostly steeds.

"This....... What the hell......."

Olivia Lanze, who disappeared as a saint, now wields the power of darkness and corruption, just as her alter ego did.

On top of that, several of the Crusaders' paladins use corruptive powers that they are supposed to reject.

The Demon's forces were inside the Crusaders.

It's clear they're using their damned power.

But.

-Grrrrrr!

-keeeeeeeeeeee!

It was also clear that they were attacking monsters, not humanity.

\* \* \*

Everyone is in their place, doing their job.

We're doing the best we can to fill the void left by Immortal.

Everyone's strength is different, and we can't all fight from the same place.

Reinhardt's place.

Riana's place.

Olivia's place.

And road vampires and their minions have their place.

Of course, there's a place for Herriot.

The Lord Vampires are summoning meteors to drive the monsters away.

Reinhardt, Olivia, and the rest of the Allies were in the vanguard, forcing themselves to show up to keep morale up.

With the Immortal gone, Herriot stood by Riana's side as she focused her mind to summon a greater power.

Herriot seemed to understand why Immortal was pulled.

You probably knew this was going to happen.

It's not a hard thing to think about, but I never thought I'd do it.

I can't believe you hate me this much.

Why do I hate it so much.

After all, you know that he's going to do this to save everyone, but taking advantage of it would imply that you know what he's thinking.

Why this is necessary, he doesn't know.

I can't even understand it.

But now is not the time for anger, panic, or tears of frustration.

Everyone knows that rather than discussing the injustice and irrationality of this situation, they should be supporting the coalition that is about to collapse.

So even though I know I'm falling into a trap, I try to do the best I can.

"......."

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

The magical genius, who is said to be the most talented person in history, has already performed numerous miracles.

But the miracles had little to do with war.

Now, we need the genius of Herriot de Saint-Etienne.

Just this once.

You have to be a genius at disruption.

Herriot stays still and pulls out the earring she'd been holding.

A small, pair of earrings.

'I heard the Tranquility spell is an artifact with a permanent imprint. I don't need it, and Ellen doesn't need it, so you do. Don't you think it'll make it easier to cast if you can stay calm?

Earrings enchanted to stabilize the mental line.

Reinhard and Ellen's treasure from the Darklands.

There he sees Reinhard and Ellen, who have created a secret that he can't be a part of, and it was given to him by Reinhard as an apology to a depressed Harriet.

No, I meant to give this to Harriet in the first place as an apology.

While they're certainly valuable, the earrings may not mean much to Harriet anymore.

In practice, this doesn't mean much.

Even without the earrings, Herriot is now able to stay calm in the middle of battle.

So I carried the earrings with me, but didn't wear them.

I felt that relying on artifacts to create magic to keep me calm was a far cry from how I wanted to be strong.

But now is the time to borrow the power of anything.

You never know how much a pair of these little earrings will help, but they mean a lot.

This is a Herriot treasure.

It's something your loved one saved with a dear friend.

Herriot stood still and placed the pair of earrings in her ears.

The calming effect of the earrings glowing a faint green is minimal.

But it's not the magic of the earrings that puts her mind at ease, it's the meaning behind them.

Do it.

Whatever it is.

Reinhardt fighting in the front.

And then there's Ellen, fighting from beyond.

And everyone on this battlefield.

With a loved one.

A dear friend.

And for everyone.

Not because they were the last of their kind.

To make sure they reach the right ending.

Whatever it is, it has to be successful.

You don't put your heart into things, but you believe they do.

'The second one is fine, no, the third one is fine, the last one is fine.......'

It's not magic that helps her, but her mind, which knows the meaning behind the earrings.

'But, hey, it's nice.......'

Herriot's calm eyes are no longer filled with confusion and sadness.

I don't have any emotions to devote to anger, bitterness, or pettiness.

In a time when surviving is not enough.

In that final fight.

Just wanting everyone to be happy is a luxury.

Let's just survive.

It's time to get to the end of it all.

So my seat, if you will, is a little farther away.

If you can survive.

If you can get to the ending.

That's probably a good thing.

-OffOffOffOff!

Somewhere on a battlefield filled with the screams of flying monsters.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen takes a deep breath.

"Hoooooo......."

Blue energy lines appear all over Herriot's body.

On Herriot's earrings.

And the power cartridge around his neck glows.

Using your flesh as a magic scroll, you can instantiate magic by simply infusing it with energy.

Herriot envisioned this as a freshman in Temple Royal's class, and he made it happen.

He developed a power cartridge that allows you to harness horsepower outside of your body like you would inside of it.

Time has passed.

Herriot didn't live for battles and fights, saving his magic primarily for assisting Reinhardt.

And while Herriot has been a force to be reckoned with in this battle, he's never been the center of attention.

But just because I wasn't in the thick of the fight doesn't mean I wasn't thinking about it.

I didn't fall asleep every night scribbling away next to a sleeping Reinhardt for nothing.

Magic that benefits people.

The magic of caring for the wounded.

The magic of creating a new warp gate.

How could there not be magic in the destruction?

In the end, it was all about fighting and strength.

How could I not have envisioned such magic?

Now we need to show it.

I've never done it before.

I didn't even think it was possible.

which had never been successful.

The magic that only exists in your imagination.

Now, we need to bring it to life.

What you could accomplish if your talents were used to destroy, not create.

It's time to show, not tell.

Soon, the blue energy lines on Herriot's body begin to fall away from his skin.

The energy lines that were imprinted on your flesh leave your body.

Blue energy lines of the air type float through the air like a thread.

"Herriot......?"

Riana stares blankly at Harriet as she does something.

"......."

Eyes narrowed, Herriot bites his lip as if concentrating on something.

I didn't realize how focused I was, or that my bitten lip was torn and bleeding.

A spell that magically scrolls flesh.

Only Herriot de Saint-Etienne could do that.

But those power lines are now out of the body.

A power cartridge that allows you to use magic outside your body as if it were inside.

The whole principle of the power cartridge is in Herriot's head.

But even with the horsepower of the bundle of modified power cartridges hanging around Herriot's neck, it's not enough to create the magic he wants to create.

No amount of magical powers can create the magic that Herriot envisions.

What is magic.

Herriot thought long and hard.

Magic is still the domain of geniuses.

But in the distant past.

There was a time when magic was untouchable, even for the greatest of geniuses.

There is no way to use the magic in your body.

You have no training methods to build up magic in your body.

Magic, when you have to control an external source of mana to use it.

There were only a handful of wizards in the world, and they could be counted on one hand.

Even then, those few wizards could only perform small miracles with their genius.

In the distant and ancient past, magic was like that.

"What do you think?

'Is this....... You can.......'

"That's all I can do.

Gazoo of Tuesday.

Eleris had some idea of how to use her natural mana.

When asked if nature's mana could be used like my own, Eleris performed a small miracle.

It's easy for modern wizards, but it was an ancient method of magic.

He could summon flames, lights, and, although it took a while, fireballs.

"Can I do that?

It was barely possible, even for beings who had lived hundreds of times longer than he had.

To the Ancient One, the young wizard's words must have seemed like a slap in the face.

I could have been accused of dreaming of such a thing after only living for twenty years.

But Eleris knew the desire behind Herriot's question.

'Sure, Harriet. I'm sure you'll do much better than me.'

That's why the head of the household didn't laugh at Herriot. She taught him everything she knew.

Reinhardt always felt bad that he hadn't been able to provide a good environment for Herriot.

But that was an illusion of ignorance.

Herriot had an environment like no other on the continent.

The five Lord Vampires, who had existed for immeasurably long periods of time, were together.

They are not simply called archmages.

Beyond their magical capacities and skills, they were like beings with countless magical and arcane arts in their minds, accumulated over time.

I was in the company of great wizards who could actually use those tricks, not just know them.

Anytime I had a question, I could just say the word to them and they would impart a wealth of knowledge to me that I didn't even know existed.

Having lived for so long, their magical accomplishments have virtually come to a standstill.

They've reached their limits.

But none of them hesitated to pass on what they knew to the eager-to-please Herriot.

Every road vampire wanted to know how far a man whose talents were unparalleled in history could go.

Thus, since coming to Edina, Herriot has been a disciple of the Five Lord Vampires.

Most mages don't even have a single archmage as a mentor.

But Herriot has had five Lord Vampires as his teachers, and they've been around longer than even the Archmage.

Sometimes to Elise.

Sometimes to Lucinil.

Sometimes to Lerouen.

Sometimes to Galarsh.

Sometimes to Antirrhinus.

We've been given so much knowledge and so much inspiration.

So Herriot wasn't in a bad environment, he was in the best environment.

The greatest geniuses in history have been studying magic in an environment that has never existed before.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen has had moments that have pushed her talents to the limit.

And now the fruits of that labor.

Tons of knowledge and wisdom.

How that vast body of wisdom, accumulated since ancient times, could be realized in the hands of a mage barely twenty years old.

It's time to show the world.

Herriot has created a system that allows him to use magic in a near-improvisational way, with magical scrolls that construct his physical body in real time.

Herriot created a power cartridge that allows you to use mana outside of your body as if it were inside.

And Herriot has been studying ancient magic. He's been trying to figure out how to use nature's mana.

In fact, Herriot once created an impromptu magic circle and used natural mana to summon a lightning bolt when he was mana depleted.

Herriot had already realized a similar principle, drawing magic circles on his body to perform magic at high speeds.

However, once the magic in the vessel named Flesh is depleted, the magic in the other vessel named Power Cartridge is depleted, and you can no longer perform magic.

So, we need an infinite number of new bowls.

Use a bowl named Nature.

If you use a near-infinite bowl to perform your magic, you can use near-infinite, limitless magic.

But using a vessel that transcends the physical is no easy task.

"How is that different from Akasha?

'Yes......?

When Antony heard Herriot's idea, he smiled a meaningful smile and said, "You're right.

"If there's a magic that can hold all the magic, and a magic that can make all the magic happen, aren't they essentially the same thing?

Herriot realized the enormity of his dream when Antony said that.

But the old monster didn't say that in the sense of don't even think about it.

"Akasha was nothing more than a magic tool, so why couldn't magic fulfill the scribe's vision?

There's plenty of potential, he said.

"Akasha was a magical tool for recording and reproducing reason.

'So....... I heard.'

"So who's to say we can't create the magic that is the source of all reason?

In the end, Herriot's dream was more ambitious than he could have imagined.

The principle is different, but the end goal is to create magic similar to Akasha.

But it doesn't have to be exactly like Akasha.

You don't need to reproduce everything.

Implementing it is magic, and that's all it takes.

So there's only one magic trick to dream up.

"Everything.

Or, more accurately, "the magical source that can be anything.

Like Akasha does.

Just as Akasha, used for destruction, creates anything and vomits it out into the world.

If you can create magic that can implement any magic, you can create all the magic in the world.

All the magic seeds, so to speak.

The underlying magic of everything that depends on how you germinate that seed.

Akasha was the tool that kept track of it all.

Herriot has no intention of creating Akasha, nor does he think it's possible for him.

You don't have to write it all down and know it all.

You don't even have to create anything.

Create an Akasha that can only implement magic.

The absolute principle that makes all the sense.

If you have that one thing, you can make all the magic happen.

Bringing everything in the world together and making it one.

That's Akasha.

If yes.

The one that can be everything.

That's not Akasha either.

If the method is different but the result is the same.

albeit on a smaller scale.

I guess you could call that Akasha, too.

Akasha became a world.

But Herriot can't dream of anything like that.

In order to create a myriad of them, you need a lot of horsepower.

So.

Natural Mana.

You need to draw on the magic of the world.

That's not possible.

There aren't even people who want to try.

But apparently, there was someone out there who said that such a ridiculous thing was possible.

I thought, why not?

You can do it, can't you?

"You say no without even trying?

'You think people don't use it because they're stupid? The modern theory of magic is that people smarter and better than you used chi to create it.......'

"What if they're all stupid?

"......?

At the time, I thought he was just saying it to torment himself.

But it wasn't.

He meant it.

"What if they're all dumber than you, and that's why they created the magic theory you have now?

'What, what....... What the hell are you talking about?

"It's possible that every wizard in history is dumber than you.

He spoke so confidently, so unapologetically, at a time when Herriot was not even in the top echelon of archmages.

'Are you....... Are you serious?

"Yeah, I mean it.

I confidently said things that no one would believe.

'You....... How much of a genius do you think I am? On what, exactly, do you base your.......'

'You're going to be the greatest wizard the continent, nay, the race, has ever seen. You know what I can do.'

'Uh, yeah.......'

The ability to believe in yourself and make it happen.

It's a strange power, but it's the one that got him here in the first place.

"I believe that.

To that power, he said, he certainly believes so.

Reinhardt, obviously, had no doubts.

Herriot doesn't believe that every wizard in the world, or even every wizard in history, is dumber than he is.

But there are those who believe otherwise.

Someone who believed that, told you that you could do it.

So on that belief.

In that absurd belief.

You have to answer.

Although I don't think so.

If you think so.

Let's believe for a moment that I am.

Let's hope I am.

Yes.

It's the best in history.

Unprecedented.

I'll show you what the world's most powerful wizard is.

with infinite mana.

Let's become an infinite wizard.

-Currrrr!

Herriot's hair whips around, and the bundle of power cartridges around his neck jiggles.

Use your own magic and the magic in your power cartridge as ingredients.

A spark, so to speak.

It is up to Herriot to create the embers to start the great fire.

Blue energy lines leap into the air from Herriot's body and take shape.

Soon enough, Herriot and the other mages in the distance couldn't help but notice the blue energy lines that poured from her body.

-Currrrrr!

No one knows what's going on, except for Herriot himself.

Blue threads emanating from Herriot's body begin to take shape in the air.

No one had ever seen it before, and no one had ever tried it, but the wizards had to know what it was.

A line drawn in thin air.

Shapes.

Symbol.

Characters.

The interconnection of them.

-Magazine......?

-That's....... A magic circle?

Most magic circles take the form of a flat surface. But now, Herriot draws a magic circle in thin air, a shape that has never existed before.

Geometry in three dimensions.

And beyond that.

In order to detect and absorb real-time changes in the flow of mana, the form of the magic circle that absorbs natural mana must also change in real-time.

A four-dimensional magic circle is drawn out of thin air, not in a fixed form, but in real time, with its shape changing according to the situation.

No, it's embroidered.

-Currrrr!

Rays of energy from Herriot's entire body shoot up into the air and form a giant sphere.

It was as if a giant star had been created by magic.

Riana was right beside her, eyes wide, watching the strange changes that came with the storm of magic.

When that storm was over.

All the mages nearby could see something materialized in the sky.

A blue, glowing sphere of magic. No, a magical star.

The source of all things magical.

That's why it makes sense in the world.

Samra's universe.

第 660 集

"That....... What is that......?"

Lucinil was in the midst of a gathering of the Lord Vampires' wizards when he saw a magical star suddenly appear in the sky.

It was a form of magic I'd never seen before, and I had no idea what it was.

"Looks like our cute little scribe has had one hell of an accident."

Antirrhinus could only chuckle at the enormity of the sphere.

Lucinil glares at Antrianus as she casts Massive Destruction.

"Heriot? What is that in the first place?"

"I don't know."

"What, like you know anything about that topic......."

-Flash!

But before Lucinil could finish her sentence, I saw a flash of light from the giant magical orb, slamming into the center of the wave of monsters.

It was simple.

It was a streak of white light.

-Crack!

But the results weren't simple.

An even more widespread explosion than the meteorite's fall obliterated the monsters.

Lucinil was stunned by its overwhelming destructive power.

"It's unknown magic, so it's not going to happen, is it?"

"What the....... the hell?"

Even though they were the inspiration, they couldn't have predicted it would turn out this way.

That flash wasn't the only one.

-Flash!

The blue magic star was shooting its destructive flashes into the sky as well as the ground.

"What the hell is that, some kind of unknown destructive magic, and at that speed?"

"Is there anything magic can't do?"

Antirrhinus' words are the fantasies of dumb wizards and those who know nothing about magic.

Wizards know all too well what magic can't do. So it stands to reason that the Lord Vampires, the world's oldest living wizards, know the most about what magic can't do.

So it was only a malicious joke for Antirrhinus to say that.

But the joke is on them.

-Digitize!

Lightning bolts from magical stars intercept swarms of flying monsters and shoot flashes of light.

The scale of large-scale destructive spells that are instantly unleashed on the battlefield, rather than starting with a magic sphere, has just more than doubled.

An unfathomable amount of magic was being cast, at an unfathomable rate.

"I've lived long enough to know that......."

Antirrhinus smiles.

"Wow, you get to see a lot of things."

Even the heat-loving lunatic could only stare in pure admiration at the miracle of the one and only Wu Sheng for now.

Immortals may be gone, but unknown things are happening on the battlefield.

Meteors are raining down and wiping out the monsters, a demon has appeared and is making his way through the waves of monsters, and an unidentified giant star has appeared in the rear and is providing support fire.

A blue barrier was already forming around all the charging soldiers as well as the destructive magic.

Destroy as well as protect.

Even if you don't understand the situation, everyone knows it's there to help the Allies.

Just when you think the morale of the nearly collapsed Union army is hanging on by a thread, and the retreating soldiers are beginning to find their footing.

-Currrrr!

On the other side of the battlefield, something is beginning to emerge that will fully restore crumbling morale.

The whole space opens up to reveal a colossus.

-Titan......!

-The Titans are here!

Where was the despair at the sight of a giant weapon that could be seen everywhere on the battlefield, and everyone in the Allied army began to cheer.

"Ho ho....... Titans are already coming in."

At Antrianus' words, Lucinil bit her lip.

"This is not a good thing."

"I suppose so."

The Titans were originally intended to be summoned after the Allies had advanced some distance.

But for now, I'm putting the Titan out early because I'm afraid the coalition will collapse before I can get to Diane.

Putting the Titan in for morale means that it can't play a role when it comes to getting into Diane's heart.

\* \* \*

"Is this okay......?"

At Adelia's question, the Archduke shook his head with a stony expression.

"That's not good."

Titans should be used later.

But I had no choice but to use it now, or the Alliance would self-destruct.

However, it will be summoned back to destroy the warp gates in the depths of Diane, where the Titans are really needed.

If so, the moment the Titans disappear, the morale of the Allies may once again hit rock bottom.

Whatever it is, today is the last day.

Whether it's the destruction of continents or the end of monsters.

Everything was on the line in just one day.

The Archduke looks up at a blue star in the sky on the far side of the battlefield.

It was a huge miracle that I don't even know what it means.

A miracle of destruction that shouldn't exist in times of peace.

Titan, then Immortal, and now this.

It's a time when all talent is directed toward destruction.

It was everyone's hope that that era would come to an end today.

\* \* \*

-kiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!

With the sound of the Ghost Horse, the armies of Deathknight sweep across the battlefield.

Mounted on erratic ghost horses, the Death Knights galloped and trampled the monsters as if they were defying the laws of the world.

The Death Knights and Death Paladins ran wild, leaping over the giant monsters like they were lightweight obstacles, and were too fast for them to reach.

It's a horrifying sight for any human being, but the horror belongs to them now.

And Olivia Ranze, running at the head of the pack, was stabbing, slashing, and crushing the monsters with her giant spear.

For Reinhardt, who would have the toughest fight, Olivia was not using her Tiamata.

But Tiamata's power is not important to Olivia, who has already mastered the power of divinity.

As she sweeps across the battlefield, she raises her hand to the sky, and a massive beam of light descends from the heavens, enveloping the vast battlefield.

-Ohhhhh!

The wounds of the wounded, the fallen and the dying.

That warm holy light is itself a healing light and a source of life.

The power of purity.

Even more powerful than when she was known as the Saint of Eredian, Olivia scatters healing light across the battlefield in a matter of moments, healing everyone in her path.

Dramatic healing was spreading over an incredibly large area.

For those who have experienced that miracle of life, in the end, it's good to be the devil and the emperor.

So sacred.

That's beautiful.

What a warm light to bring into the world.

The one it chooses to follow can never be evil.

In fact, isn't he the manifestation of Tuan, the god of purity?

But Olivia Ranze doesn't care what they think.

Soon, as if to deny those people's changing thoughts, her right hand, as she galloped across the battlefield on her ghostly steed, was suddenly filled not with pure power, but with a shadowy darkness.

Rising acrobatically from her ghostly mount, Olivia soon leaps toward the giant, bell-tower-like monstrosity.

-POOF!

Compared to that behemoth, the spear in Olivia's right hand is a toothpick.

-knowwhat!

However, the black energy from the spear explodes like a thunderbolt, disorienting the giant monster.

-then......!

You think the monster is going to fall, but instead it falls and stands tall.

But the eyes of the giant monster that had just been spitting fire at the world had changed.

As if it were contaminated with something.

The monster's giant eyes glowed with darkness.

Those watching Olivia Ranze's battle are about to find out.

The monsters impaled by Olivia Ranze's spear as she sowed the light of life are rising, not dead.

No, it happens even if you're already dead.

Instead, they charge toward the monsters.

The giant monster turns to face the monsters, not the human army, and begins to spit out searing flames, as if it were in control of something.

Sowing life-healing light.

Use Corruption to control death.

Saint of Life and Death.

Olivia Ranze was killing monsters by raising them from the dead.

Mounting the ghost horse again, Olivia rides up the back of the giant monster to its crown.

It doesn't stop there.

-Currrrrr!

A giant dragon-like creature swoops down, claws raised, toward the head of the monster, which spews flames that burn the monsters.

Olivia prepares her javelin for the dragon, from the ground to the sky.

-Kwalung!

With a thunderous crack, the spear pierces the dragon's behemoth.

-Quadruple!

The falling dragon crashes to the ground, leaving a trail of monsters in its wake.

Olivia rides her ghost horse toward the dragon impaled by the javelin.

Already the dragon was dying, being forced to rise in the power of corruption.

A smile tugs at Olivia Ranze's lips as she rides her ghost horse.

"Yeah......."

Until now, we've had to hide, so we can't show our power.

But now, you have to do everything you can.

"I've always wanted to ride that!"

Leaping from her ghostly mount, Olivia found herself on the back of a rising dragon, shrouded in the power of corruption.

The ghost horse is gone, and Olivia has a new mount.

-Whoosh!

With a gust of wind, a flap of wings, and a single leap, the dragon rises from the dead.

-QuietAllowAllowAllow!

-Currrrrr!

A dragon that spits lightning and flames from its maw.

-Quack! Quack!

Then, in Olivia Ranze's hands, the spirit of youthful death takes the form of a spear and begins to deliver death to the flying monsters.

Flying monsters that die and crash will revive before hitting the ground and start flying once again.

Healing light in the right hand.

A being holding a spear of death in its left hand.

The monsters she kills come back from the dead to slaughter her, and the humans she touches with her healing light come back from the brink of death.

Saint of Life and Death.

Everyone on the battlefield could look up and see the light of death and life shed by Olivia Ranze on her dragon.

Episode 661.

Just as a desperate battle was raging in Diane, a desperate battle was raging in the basement of Temple College of Magic.

It's just that there's no one to remember the fight.

It's definitely an uphill battle.

But it wasn't Saviolin Tana who was heartbroken.

"......."

Saviolin Tana watched helplessly as the Immortal Swordsman was impaled by an Auror's spear and exploded.

She hadn't moved a step since the battle began.

Every approaching immortal was being intercepted.

"This....... monster......."

Christina muttered through clenched teeth.

It's clearly human.

They're not immortals that have been resurrected and made more powerful, they just have a human body.

But Saviolin Tana was in the same position as the first time, unwavering, fending off all of Immortal's attacks.

Heck, I haven't even drawn my black yet.

Even the most elite of Immortals, those who had risen to the rank of Grandmaster, could not get Savior Tana to draw her sword.

Even so, it's a battle of thousands against one.

Even if you can't attack thousands at once because of the confined space, is this possible?

At least Ellen Artorius has the power of a holy relic.

However, Saviolin Tana had none of that, and was completely shutting down Immortal's offense.

If anything, this is a more ridiculous monster.

Though she has been labeled the strongest woman on the continent, Saviolin Tana's stature pales in comparison.

Before the Demon War, there was Squadron Shanafel and her mentor, Larken Simonstein.

Before and during the Demon War, there was a warrior, Lagan Artorius.

Now, after the Demon War, we have Ellen Artorius.

She was always talked about ahead of her.

For a short time after their disappearance, they were known as the continent's strongest.

That's why some say that Saviolin Tana was the strongest player in the world before the next strongest player came along.

But that's a different story.

She's always been the second choice, but that doesn't mean she's really the second choice.

Strength is not about what the world thinks of you.

Power is power.

Only those who have seen and experienced it know how powerful it is.

Ellen Artorius is powerful, but it's Xavier Tana who has risen to that level without a holy object.

The strength she has built over the years has earned her that position.

But the Great One is standing in his way.

It was a shield that would shatter a spear if you tried to pierce it.

If you extend the fight, the lab will be destroyed, and the Immortal will not be able to regenerate. You'll be doing your opponent a favor.

Trying to launch a massive offensive to kill Saviolin Tana and having the entire lab destroyed.

Saviolin Tana would want that.

'Wait.......'

But when she got that far, she was overtaken by a sense of wonder.

Just as Christina withdrew Immortal, predicting the self-destruction of the Allied and Demon armies, so does Saviolin Tana.

You want your entire lab to collapse in an all-out assault to break an unbreakable shield.

'No....... That's not it either.'

It should be obvious that she wouldn't make that choice.

Blowing up the entire lab to kill one Saviolin Tana is a choice she has no reason to make.

Saviolin Tana hasn't moved an inch since the battle began.

She thought it was a way to show off a bit of slack.

It felt like a show of strength that I could block all of Immortal's attacks without moving.

No.

It's not about showing off, it's about having no intention of actively attacking immortals.

In fact, while Saviolin Tana continues to neutralize Immortals, she hasn't done anything about the ones she can't reach, let alone Christina.

In fact, all of the Institute's Immortals are within range of that spear.

She won't attack at all unless you get within about thirty meters of her, and then she won't move.

It appears to be on the defensive, gauging the distance, but does not intentionally attack Immortals.

It's simple.

If you start attacking everything in sight, the Immortals will go on the offensive.

Saviolin Tana knows that taking on the entirety of the Immortals is beyond her.

So we're only dealing with confrontation and the upcoming immortal.

One reason.

"Did you turn off the time....... off?"

We know what she's going to do when she reinserts the emoji.

This is to prevent Immortals from being reintroduced to hunt down demons and their forces.

As such, Savior Tana does not actively attack.

To maintain the confrontation, to keep the situation where Christina has the Immortal tied to this spot and neither she nor I can choose.

Saviolin Tana didn't come to wipe out the Immortals in the first place.

I'm not here to kill Christina.

It's just here to keep the immortals tied down.

To prevent the immortal from returning to Diane.

"Ha, ha, ha....... Hahaha....... The thought of doing that....... Was that it......?"

"......."

"You guys are no different than me, huh?"

If Immortal doesn't return, Allied casualties will be higher.

If Immortal dies, the Emperor will die, but he's just as determined as Savior Tana and the Emperor to allow others to die because he doesn't want the Emperor to die.

When Christina sneers that you're not like me, Savior Tana remains silent.

"That's the way it's supposed to be."

"......what?"

Saviolin Tana looks at the alchemist, who has been driven mad by the madness and despair of war, with a stony expression, and Nazik says.

"Killing the people of the empire in the name of protecting it."

"Protecting people, killing the same people, just in a different guise."

"All you do in the name of serving and protecting something is kill and destroy."

"In the name of serving everyone, you end up serving no one."

"Forgetting all about the original purpose and intent, and going all the way to the end, even though you know it's not the way to go anymore."

"That's the way it is."

Saviolin Tana walked that path.

I've lived with the sword of the Empire for a long time, killing anything and everything.

Killed more humans than demons.

I'm not sure if I really saved anything with that action. Maybe it had to be killed, maybe it didn't have to be killed.

It's just, it's done a lot of killing.

"So as far as this gate thing goes, it's been a difficult but clean fight."

"Monsters are evil."

"There is no room for dialog."

"So killing was the only good."

When you're fighting a non-negotiable, non-compromising enemy, there's no reason to think about it. The Gate situation was therefore a war in which there was no reason to think about killing, apart from the difficulties of the war itself.

But that's not where Saviolin Tana ended up, not in a place of absolute goodness.

You're in a place where you relate to people, not monsters.

Whether it's an act of defending something.

Without knowing if you're breaking something.

You are here to fulfill the command.

"Yes, that's the way it is. When you protect something, you end up losing the very thing you're protecting."

command and at the end of the command.

After all, Saviolin Tana is no longer here to defend the empire.

It stands here as the last sword in a falling empire.

"Just like now, when you promised to bring your dead friend back to life, you ended up sending others to their deaths."

"......."

At Saviolin Tana's point, Christina bites her lip and glares at her.

I wanted to bring my dead friend back to life.

But what I learned along the way was that my anger should be directed at everyone.

I dreamed of revenge.

But when she withdrew Immortal, she put all her remaining friends in the Alliance in a precarious position.

Christina's actions could lead to the deaths of countless people, as well as the deaths of her friends.

Of course, she doesn't know that.

Saviolin Tana is merely stating what Christina already knows.

"Christina."

"......."

"Still, do you want to bring your dead friend back to life?"

I thought there was a way to save it.

Immortals are half-resurrections.

If you can find a way to make it a little more whole, a little more complete.

I thought I was within reach of a true resurrection.

Does that change now?

"I can do it."

We just haven't figured it out yet, but it's possible.

She thinks so.

There must be a way.

I don't think it's impossible.

But Christina understands what Saviolin Tana is saying.

I didn't ask if it could be saved.

It asked me if I wanted to save it.

"But I don't think you're entitled to that anymore."

I'm sure there's a way, but I don't think I deserve to save Ashur.

There's no reason or entitlement to find a way to bring your dead friends back to life when you've killed so many of them in your quest for revenge.

Trying to regain what was lost on a topic that even those who remained threw into the fire is laughable.

It is.

Things like original intentions or thoughts.

The trigger was.

Eventually, it becomes pointless.

The port containing Asher's body is located in the lab, but Christina hasn't been going there for some time.

I have a lot of work to do.

Thinking it was something to do after everything was done.

In the end, what I had originally set out to do, what I had originally dreamed of doing, was no more.

"By the way, do you think I didn't know I was going to end up being an asshole?"

What Saviolin Tana says, Christina knows.

Didn't know.

That it would all work out like this, that eventually I'd be able to put things like saving Ashur out of my head.

I knew that as long as I chose to seek revenge, as long as I chose the world as my target, this is how it would all play out.

She has the most powerful army at her disposal, but she'll have to deal with some of her biggest enemies.

Empire.

Demon.

Warriors.

They are, in a sense, more dangerous and formidable enemies than the Gate incident itself.

It can't be easy, because you're trying to get revenge against the whole world. Therefore, such extreme measures were necessary, and the opponent is also responding to such extreme measures.

The gate debacle is safely over.

The empire is gone.

A demon reigns over the world.

That's the conspiracy of the world.

The same people who are using lies and deception to cover up the truth about Gate are trying to cover up the world with lies and deception again.

You don't need to overthink it.

She will kill all those who tie that knot of lies and deceit.

Not for anyone else.

All that talk about doing it for someone, doing it for a friend, etc. has become meaningless.

The smallest unit, after all.

For myself.

I will have my revenge.

May there be doom for all.

"You want to stall."

With limited space and difficulty attacking, Xaviorin Tana can survive. Eventually, she will run out of health, but her job is to keep the Immortal from returning.

However, there is a major flaw in Saviolin Tana's behavior.

"By the way, what if we do this......?"

At Christina's signal, the Immortals surrounding Savior Tana begin to retreat, one by one.

Rather, it paves the way.

"......."

Saviolin Tana watched the scene with a stony expression.

As if to keep an eye on the situation, the blades of the Auror's spears are scattered around.

But the immortals were no longer overrunning and attacking.

-Flash!

Rather, they disappear one by one.

As Saviolin Tana watches the scene with a stony expression, Christina begins to laugh.

With a flash, the immortal disappears into thin air.

Clearly, Immortal is heading back to the battlefield.

We will return to the battlefield to hunt down the monsters, while also hunting down the demonic forces if they have made themselves known.

Saviolin Tana could only watch.

There's nothing she can do to stop it.

"Why should I deal with you?"

In no time at all, all the Immortal troops were gone, and the lab was once again deserted.

If Saviolin Tana lunges at her, Christina can't do anything about it.

"Look."

But we don't need an army to protect her.

"You can't kill me without an immortal anyway, can you?"

If you kill Christina, the Immortal goes on a rampage.

They will not only hunt demons and monsters, but will attack allied forces indiscriminately.

But Christina couldn't help but feel uncomfortable with the look on Saviolin Tana's face.

I wasn't panicked or surprised.

She walks slowly toward Christina.

With no one to protect her.

-jerky

Slowly.

Christina's eyes widen as she sees Tana, the viola, approaching with certainty.

She's just walking along, not saying anything.

"No, no, no......."

Fumbling, Christina slowly backed away. She couldn't read any intent in Savior Tana's expression.

"If you kill me....... what happens. You know that, right?"

Understandably, this is intimidating.

You know their intentions and what they want, so you know what to choose.

She believes he would never kill her because he would be trying to protect his people.

But as Tana approached with a determined look on her face, a million possibilities flashed through Christina's mind.

Some people have gone crazy.

Is there any law that says you can't do that, Saviolin Tana?

Isn't it possible that she's so tired of the hatred and malice that she's just going to twist her throat?

Eventually, she backed away, leaving Christina stunned on the spot.

She doesn't know about fighting.

I sent all of my immortals away.

You've never gone anywhere and gotten a slap in the face.

He spoke as he pleased in front of a being with the stature of a grandmaster.

"Oh, don't come back......."

Christina, who hasn't been exposed to the slightest bit of violence, looks over at Saviolin Tana, who hasn't been exposed to the slightest bit of violence and is terrified.

It's not a sneer, it's not a scorn.

Gritting her teeth, Saviolin Tana's eyes were filled with sadness.

"Like you....... How can someone like you....... A child like you......."

"......."

"Did it have to be like this......."

He shouts confidently from afar, but cowers in fear at the mere proximity of a being that could kill him.

You start to shake because you think you might die.

Poor, shabby creature, to be so small in the face of death. Dreamed of revenge too great.

Savior Tana can't help but feel incredibly sad at the insignificance of Christina looking up at her, frozen and terrified.

Nor is it the villain of the century.

Nor is it an immortal absolute.

Just a little bit of brains.

One alchemist.

Saviolin Tana, suppressing her grief, brings her hand to Christina's throat.

But before I could grab it, Christina slipped her hand into my arm.

"I told you not to come!"

In Christina's hand, she held a teleportation scroll.

-Flash!

With a flash of light, Christina, Anna, and Louis Ankton were gone.

Christina may be small and insignificant, but her life is not insignificant.

She knows better than anyone what will happen when she dies.

They acted like they were willing to die if you tried to kill them, but when death was right in front of them, they ran away.

Tana stares around the lab, where she's suddenly the only one left.

Christina ran away.

But Saviolin Tana was curious.

Was Christina running away because she was afraid of death, or was she running away because of what would happen if she died?

What's done is done.

That's not what Tana is for.

Saviolin Tana's goal was never to kill Christina in the first place.

Rather, it was meant to protect.

She just misunderstood and ran away.

A blue veil unfurls from Savior Tana's body.

Then, Savior Tana pulls something out of her arms.

Signalized artifacts.

Saviolin Tana presses it.

I didn't turn off the time.

In fact, I even knew it was coming.

I knew that if I pretended to stall, Christina would send Immortal back into battle.

Not to defend the devil.

I left the fight between the Immortal and the Demon to them, and came to bring the Immortal back to the battlefield.

And, when it's confirmed that the Immortal has returned to the battlefield.

To blow up this lab that regenerates immortals.

That's what Saviolin Tana came for.

-Dalcock

Saviolin Tana pressed the button.

There was an explosion.

Episode 662.

Outside the ecliptic.

-Flash!

"@Andrea\_McGee....... 허억......."

At one change, Christina arrived via mass teleportation scroll, and broke out in a cold sweat.

I almost got killed.

Saviolin Tana tried to kill her, back and forth.

Christina sighed and swept her hand across her chest as she looked at Louis and Anna, still unconscious on the ground.

"Crazy......."

He knew he was off his rocker, but he didn't think Saviolin Tana would do such a thing.

I'm not sure I could have handled it.

But Christina's expression hardened.

She has to give many instructions remotely and is connected to many facilities and immaterials for control.

Among them is the lack of response from the lab.

Saviolin Tana wasn't crazy.

The entire underground laboratory of the College of Witchcraft and Wizardry was blown up before he could disappear.

"How in the world did you get to...... in the first place?"

Christina muttered, frozen, dumbfounded.

Immortals are now unrecoverable once broken.

It was a facility that could not have been built without the tremendous support of the Empire in the first place.

The immortal is intact, but once the immortal is gone, it cannot be recovered.

Christina stared blankly at her two friends, stunned and unconscious.

Now we need to end with the remaining emoji.

No matter what.

How much time has passed.

"으......응......."

"ugh......."

Christina stared at her friends as they gradually regained consciousness.

"What is......? Where is......?"

She'd drugged them before the Diane fight started, knowing they'd resist what she was going to do in the first place.

But after falling asleep in the lab and suddenly waking up outdoors, it was natural to panic.

Where to start.

Christina bit her lip and watched them slowly rise to their feet.

\* \* \*

-currrrrr

A blinding flash of light swept through, and all that remained was a giant pit.

The explosion was so massive that an entire research wing of the Temple College of Magic was blown away, and even the surrounding buildings collapsed in the aftermath.

In the middle of the pit, where everything above it seemed to have evaporated, there was a man.

Where Xavier and Tana had spread out the Auror field, the blast was unharmed, as if it hadn't even touched them.

'They buried explosives in the basement of the College of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

'Explosives....... You mean?

'When the Immortals return to the battlefield, detonate them. However, you must not kill those three.'

That was the emperor's orders.

"After this fight, there's no reason for Immortals to exist anyway.

Immortals are only needed for today.

So things like facilities to recover immortals are meaningless after today.

No, it's dangerous to go beyond the meaningless.

The problem with killing Christina is not the problem with blowing up the lab.

The explosives that Saviolin Tana buried as if they were intact would not have killed the Immortal, but would have been able to counteract the blast.

That's why I could only blow up the lab when all the immortals were gone.

'But....... If it's as His Majesty says, then Immortal is.......'

"They're going to kill Reinhardt.

I'm sure it will.

Immortals will go back to hunting monsters upon returning to the battlefield, but if Reinhardt and his forces appear on the battlefield, they'll try to fight them as well.

The emperor's answer to that concern was simple.

"That's for Reinhardt to figure out.

'......a.'

"Isn't our job done just by preventing destroyed immortals from being repaired?

Even if Saviolin Tana hadn't shown up in the first place, Christina would have sent Immortal back to the battlefield.

But if Savior Tana hadn't come, the Demon King and his allies would have to deal with a restored Immortal.

Immortals no longer respawn.

What happens behind the scenes is now up to the people on the battlefield.

Saviolin Tana is free to return to the battlefield and resume fighting.

The emperor gave no further orders.

Live your life.

He said.

That's why she doesn't head to the battlefield.

You didn't die in the last fight.

She heads off somewhere to do the last thing she needs to do.

Not something you do because someone told you to.

To do what you decide to do with your own will.

\* \* \*

On the battlefield, there are a lot of unpredictable people.

But in this final battle, the Battle of Diane, such unexpected surprises were happening far too often.

The evaporation of the Immortal, which was supposed to slay the monsters in the vanguard, was the first.

The sudden appearance of a demon is the second.

The appearance of unknown magic is the third.

And the Titans, ahead of schedule, are fourth.

Fifth, the appearance of the courageous soldier, who performs great miracles of healing and death at the same time.

And sixth.

The missing Immortals suddenly began to return to the battlefield.

For some inexplicable reason, the immortal disappeared and returned.

Then they rejoin the battlefield and march on, slaying monsters.

Morale, which had been on the verge of collapse, slowly began to climb, and then skyrocketed the moment Immortal returned.

The inexorable march to Diane had begun.

After all, unless you're a soldier who can only see the monsters in front of you, or someone with a bird's eye view of the entire battlefield, you can't possibly know everything that's going on.

The march of the Immortals across the battlefield seems to be through waves of monsters.

Facts.

You couldn't tell by looking at them that they were chasing a demon that was cutting a path through them from beyond.

-Currrrr!

Immortals don't run through monsters to get to Diane.

He's on his way to kill the demon that's headed for Diane.

-Grrrrr!

But apparently even that path is covered in monsters, so they're definitely making their way through. It's just that their destination isn't the same as their actual destination.

The Demon plunges into the midst of the monsters, heading forward, forward, forward, and Immortal follows, slaying them, and the allied army advances toward the path Immortal has cleared.

Together, the demon and the warrior clear a path to Diane.

This is followed by an immortal.

And the Allies follow. That's how it looks to the uninformed.

For us, however, it's a different story.

The Devil wasn't breaking through monsters. He was running from the Immortals.

\* \* \*

The return of Immortal was also witnessed in the presence of Herriot and Riana.

"Is Immortal....... back?"

Then I could see them all converging on the place where the demon was.

Immortals will certainly kill monsters, but they will also try to attack Riana and Heriot, as well as the demonic forces.

And the distance between Reinhardt and Herriot was too great to support.

Too far away.

Herriot was pushing back waves of monsters from all sides of the Alliance through a magic star.

Unable to help.

And more and more, the Immortals rush in to kill the Demon first.

Too many.

At that rate, even a Reinhardt would collapse.

It's too far away, and Reinhardt might be swept away if he unleashed his destructive magic.

But the immortal mages summoned across the battlefield have already begun bombarding Reinhardt with magic.

We don't care about immortals being swept together.

Chasers are a problem, but so are wizards.

Best.

What is the best thing to do in this situation.

Herriot looks up.

There's binge drinking, screaming, and screaming all around.

Overly blue skies.

Herriot's eyes widen.

"Riana! Rain!"

"Rain?"

"We need to make it rain!"

"Got it!"

Without further ado, Riana realizes that something unusual is going on and uses her ability without question.

We can't do much to help Reinhardt, who's too far away, but we can at least keep the wizards' magic from reaching him.

And Olivia Ranze, who is scattering healing light across the battlefield, is overly prominent.

Neither Reinhard nor Olivia will be able to escape the massive spell at this rate.

Blocking the wizards' view as much as possible will provide some safety for both of them.

-currrrr

One minute, the sky is clear, the next, dark clouds roll in with uncanny speed.

-Tuk, Tuduk

Soon.

One drop, two drops of rain.

-Shoot!

It starts to spill over into crazy epic proportions.

It's not magical, but it's the most effective way to block your view.

Let's hope this is enough to keep Reinhardt going for a while longer.

The problem is that Immortal's view is blocked, but everyone's view is also severely limited by the pouring rain.

There's no problem identifying the pia.

But now, we don't know what's going on in the heart of the battlefield.

While this might not look good for the Allies, the last thing they needed was for Reinhardt to die.

-Shoot!

-Kurrrrr

Torrential rain pours down, while simultaneously unleashing a barrage of Cipherun thunderbolts through the dark clouds, and meteorites still fall.

It was hell on earth.

It's like the end of the world has come.

But you can't stop it.

I can't even care about Reinhardt.

You've succeeded in casting a great spell, but it's one you're not familiar with.

That moment when you realize you need to do the best you can and refocus.

Over the horizon, near the edge of his vision, he saw something running toward him.

A helmeted soldier running toward the Allies, not in the direction of the monsters.

A chill runs down Harriet's spine.

Immortals don't just attack demons.

Instead, some of the Immortals, blinded and unable to locate the demon, begin to hunt down the visible demonic forces.

Naturally, that would include Harriet and Riana.

There's no such thing as a screaming bird.

With the Immortals distracted, the pressure on Reinhardt, who is being chased by the most Immortals, will be lessened.

"Liana......."

"I'm watching."

Apparently, Riana was watching the lunge of one of the Immortals.

-Flash!

Dozens of lightning bolts rain down from the sky, hitting the charging Immortals.

-Currrrrr!

With a shockwave that rips through the atmosphere from thermal expansion, the charging Immortal rolls a few times across the rainy ground.

However, it comes back from a blow to the head that would have killed a normal monster or human.

This is the monster rush that led to the master class.

Its speed is not that of an ordinary human runner, but more than a steed running at full power.

-Kurung! Kureng!

Once again, the charging Immortal is struck by Riana's thunderbolt, but incredibly, it parries the blow with its sword.

Doesn't fall down.

"Hmph......!"

-Currrrrr!

If you can't stop it with an attack, apply pressure to the ground to drive it into the ground.

But as if the earth-crushing force can't affect it at all, the Immortal rushes on, only slowing down slightly.

Most knights are trained in antihorsemanship.

Immortals are warriors and ancient heroes who have become more powerful than when they were alive.

Unsurprisingly, the people who made it to the master class have a tremendous amount of horsepower.

Auror armor blocks both physical and telekinetic attacks.

"Oh, no......."

Herriot gapes at the Immortal as it rushes toward him, dodging the dangerous ones among the barrage from the magic star, deflecting blasts and resisting interfering magic.

Only one object.

You can't even stop the rush of a single master class-level immortal.

The sudden explosion in numbers when Immortal was created is something that everyone had forgotten about.

By their very nature, master classes are treated as strategic weapons, even if there's only one of them.

The master class, which also included extreme anti-magic to become a tactical weapon, was no exception for Herriot, who perfected the ultimate spell.

If only I was more familiar with this magic.

You can't stop a single one.

And now Reinhardt is being chased by thousands of such strategic weapons.

Worrying about Reinhardt in this situation is foolish.

Live.

If you survive, you have

Riana and Herriot do their best to block the Immortal's charge, but it's not coming through the monsters, it's coming through the Alliance.

You can stop them with earth-shattering magic, but you'll be killing a lot of allies together.

This is also why you can't prevent the immortalization of a single object.

There are countless ways to do this if you're alone, but the Immortals knowingly or unknowingly use the humans as bait, leaving Herriot unable to use his powerful magic.

Determination.

Just when you think you need to make a decision.

Rushing forward at breakneck speed, the Immortal soldier raised his sword and plunged his Auror blade into Liana, who stood in front of Herriot.

"Riana......!"

The moment she reaches the point where she realizes she can't let him die, and reaches out to cast her spell.

-Bam!

Something flew out of nowhere, slamming fiercely into Immortal's side.

"Cliffman......?"

Out of nowhere, only Cliff appeared.

Neither Riana nor Herriot had time to panic.

I don't have time for a long story.

Riana flings herself at the fallen Immortal.

Then, before it can reorient itself, you grab it by the scruff of the neck.

-Currrrrr!

A fierce hailstorm begins to rain down on Riana's body from the sky.

And it pours into the Immortal's flesh as it flows through Riana's body.

As if you're trying to force lightning into it.

-digging support!

So much so that Herriot had to cast a spell of total resistance on everyone nearby.

-Currrrrr!

If it doesn't go down after a few dozen shots, you can shoot it hundreds of times.

Pushing the limits, Immortal was already twitching his limbs without even getting up.

"Get lost!"

-Kwaggagang!

With a fierce flash that could no longer be called a thunderbolt, the immortal was reduced to ash.

"@AndreaMcGee....... 허억......."

Focused thalamus at ultra-close range.

Cliffman created a gap, and Riana finished it off.

Episode 663.

Immortal Master Class I almost failed to subdue a single object.

If it weren't for the timely arrival of Cliff, we would have been in trouble.

"I knew you guys were here."

"Goma, thank you....... It was dangerous, really."

Breathing heavily, drenched in rain, Cliffman stares at Riana and Harriet.

Cliffman was fighting somewhere on the battlefield when he saw a barrage of artillery fire coming from the center of the Allied lines and knew Riana was here.

Then we realized that we were about to be attacked by something inside the Alliance, not a monster.

Riana staggers to her feet.

There was only one.

Even as a master class, it was only one of thousands of Immortals on this battlefield.

Neither Harriet nor Riana could stop that single entity, and it took an enormous amount of energy to do so.

And even though it was raining heavily, many were aware of the thunderbolts that rained down and exploded with tremendous force.

Somewhere on the battlefield, Cliffman sees it and rushes to protect Riana and Herriot.

Of course, what only Cliff could see, Immortals can also see.

Liana and Harriet look around in despair.

"More coming......."

I felt threatened for my life just to stop one object.

But now, across the battlefield, the Immortals have located Herriot and Riana and are approaching.

This time, it's not one.

Herriot grits his teeth as he sees immortals coming at him from all directions.

"We might have to move locations."

"Where?"

Herriot bit his lip at Riana's words.

This is a battlefield, and the Allies are already surrounded by monsters on all sides.

If you're going to run away, run away at all.

And running away means that someone else will have to deal with those immortals.

Is it important to survive.

Or is it important to reduce one more immortal?

To Herriot, who is at a crossroads, Kliffman says.

"Cast all the enhancement magic you can on me."

"Are you trying to deal with......?"

"Uh, I'll see what I can do, and if it doesn't work, run."

Cliff clears his throat.

You should do what you can.

You can only take it so far.

That's Kliffman's conclusion, and neither Liana nor Herriot deny it.

The magic star is still unleashing a fierce barrage of light on the monsters.

If Riana and Herriot run away from this spot, it will cost them more.

You have to hold on.

It's Kliffman who has to protect them.

The Demon's forces are strong, but they are outnumbered in absolute terms.

And there is no such thing as an obligation on the part of allies fighting to protect them.

It's up to you to keep it or kill it.

Cliffman's entire being is uplifted by the protection and strengthening spells Herriot has bestowed upon him.

You're out of a place where you have to fight.

But how many of you are holding your ground on this battlefield?

It's a fight to keep something.

As such, Klippmann has come to the defense of what must be defended.

But can you afford it?

I don't know why the immortals suddenly disappeared, and now they're back and trying to kill me.

In fact, you don't even need to know.

In a fight to defend something, it's only natural that Cliff would stand up to defend what he holds most dear.

"Hoooooo......."

Movements across the battlefield, approaching places they shouldn't be, are clearly indicative of the Immortal.

The Demon is pursued by thousands of Immortals from the depths of the battlefield.

Everyone is in a hurry to get things done.

No augmentation.

The good news is that outside of the master classes, the mages' attacks were being neutralized by Riana and Herriot with long-range sniping.

The real threats are the master classes that come charging in, counting on overwhelming antihorses and shields.

Riana and Heriot have an impact on the entire battlefield. Their deaths will cause irreparable damage to the entire battle.

Cliffman's best bet is to deal with the enemy in front of him.

Two that have become too big to fail.

I have to protect the monsters of the upcoming masterclass from topics that don't even make it to the masterclass.

That's a bit presumptuous.

Isn't that impossible?

Finally something like me.

Can you do that?

But I'm not standing here because I can, I'm standing here because I have to.

So, here we go.

Before enemies can get to it, you'll have to run.

I'm not quite at the level of a master class.

But right now, Cliffman's entire body was filled with a terrifying aura, not only from the blue magic barrier, but also from the sword in his hand.

-Currrrr!

There were fierce flames and thunderclaps, and a glow of magic as blue and thick as an auror's blade.

Herriot was working as much magic as he could.

The strongest wizards do the best they can.

That should do it.

Kliffman stabs his sword into the charging Immortal.

-Bam!

-Thump!

Obviously, the sword should have bounced off or shattered the body just by touching it.

But the body is intact, the weapon is intact.

You can.

There are limits to our bodies and capabilities, but there's magic behind them that knows no bounds.

-Flash!

It also supports Riana's powerful thunderbolts.

It's close enough to electrocute, but Herriot's protective magic prevents the blast from having much effect.

-cardeddup!

"Heh......up!"

-Bang!

After pushing aside the charging Immortal, Cliffman swings his sword as if in a daze.

Your body and mind immediately adapt to a state of being that you've never experienced before.

-Quack!

I pound, pound, pound on the Auror armor on Immortal's body.

In addition to Riana's blitz, Herriot somehow manages to tie up Immortal's feet so that only Cliff can hold on, giving her time to deliver the decisive blow.

-Bam!

Eventually, the sword lodges itself in Immortal's chest, and the powerful Auror enchantment within the sword itself explodes, reducing Immortal's flesh to dust.

"@AndreaMcGee....... 허억......."

One.

Processed.

With the help of a powerful wizard and the support of the most powerful psychic, Kliffman succeeded in taking on a being who had reached master class.

But just dividing those few sums was enough to make me physically ill.

And it gets better.

Dealing with one was enough, but the more intense and conspicuous the battle, the more the Immortals on the battlefield spotted the three and approached.

Can you do it.

Cliffman clears his throat, wiping the rain off his face.

Can you do it.

In the midst of his obsessive thoughts, Kliffman gritted his teeth.

I don't do it because I can, and never have anyway.

After Gate, every battle was like that.

There were any number of variables.

More enemies than expected, and enemies you didn't expect.

It was a daily occurrence for him to see his men die, and he would often return from the battlefield alone to find them all dead.

People thought Kliffman was an oddity.

He's been in fights with people who were better than him, but he always came out on top, even when they were all dead.

It wasn't a losing battle either.

Even though he was alone, he completed his mission and returned.

Uncanny powers.

The talent of combat is actually more of a superpower.

Even my friends say it now.

But Klippmann doesn't disagree.

He just thinks his talent is more luck than superpower.

I got lucky.

I couldn't help but think that was the case.

In a battle that would have killed even a master class, Cliffman somehow survived.

The only person who thought it was bizarre was Cliff himself.

Later, I even wondered if I had survived at the expense of others.

You didn't survive because you were strong.

You survived by taking away someone's luck.

After the most dangerous monsters and players stronger than him were wiped out, he killed the remaining monsters and survived.

That's why Kliffman considers his talent to be a matter of luck.

Only Cliff knows better than anyone else that he didn't survive because he fought well or was strong.

And on the battlefield, one man's luck is another man's bad luck.

Survived through someone else's bad luck.

Having seen it with his own eyes and experienced it countless times, Kliffman was extremely reluctant to fight alongside anyone.

If it's a talent for surviving and winning through the misfortune of others.

It's more of a curse.

So I kept pushing myself into a harsh battlefield.

He was willing to fight alone in the most dangerous places.

It was, in a sense, a plea to the unknown.

If winning any battle is my talent.

Let's see if we can save this one.

Let's see if I survive this one.

Let's see if I can survive the worst of it with no coworkers to sacrifice.

Just like that.

He volunteered for a suicidal mission and still survived.

It's not even that strong, and it always wins.

Always survive.

But I've never been happy to win.

Places you thought were dangerous weren't actually dangerous.

It was just a battle that could have been won.

Every day was another day of good fortune outside of those fights.

It was a victory and a curse.

Cliffman now realizes that his talent is not one of strength, but one of serendipity.

The serendipity of survival and rebirth.

If so, you may win the battle because you're here, but Riana and Herriot will die.

But I couldn't resist coming.

I didn't have the option of watching from afar, because I might end up killing them.

You see the oncoming Immortal forces all over the battlefield.

For now, you're not alone.

So, you have to fight to keep it.

So, Cliffman hopes.

His physical body has been strengthened by a great deal of auxiliary magic, and he can take on a master class.

But in the end, I have to be strong.

I have to be strong.

If you don't push the envelope, you'll only fall down.

So.

For today.

Just for today.

A talent that only guaranteed survival.

This time, may it be strong.

I accidentally dodge an enemy's sword, and someone else gets stabbed instead of me.

No more of that damned luck.

A sword that can pierce through enemies.

And may he manifest as a shield to protect his friends.

So.

A talent named Combat.

Hopefully that will change now.

Herriot's many spells of protection and empowerment.

And I don't know if it was a stabilizing type of magic that works on the mind or not.

Or maybe the damn talent answered your prayers.

However, in the face of the looming crisis, Kliffman's mind is as calm as ever.

"Hoooooooo......."

Clearing his throat, Cliffman's energy soon calms.

And the magic in the hand that holds the sword flows, more and more, through the sword.

"You......."

Riana stared at Cliffman's figure, wide-eyed.

Not heard.

We can only hope.

They just want to.

As if coincidence and luck weren't enough already.

Isn't it time for that to become fruit?

How long do we have to be miserable survivors of ridiculous luck?

Survival by accident is survival.

A life well-lived is a life well-lived.

I've definitely gained some experience in that time.

Coincidences eventually stack up and stack up until they become something that can no longer be a coincidence.

If you keep getting lucky, you'll eventually have to build up your experience and create something in the name of that luck.

Even the cursed misfortune of the past remains in the name of the experience of battle, and it was Cliff himself who carried it out.

Never.

No one else was fighting for you.

The experience of the moment is definitely something that builds and builds.

There is no doubt that the experience gained in the name of combat is a fortunate one, paid for by the blood of comrades-in-arms and comrades-in-arms.

To the point of overflowing.

In a flash, Klippmann's body disappears.

And.

-skuck!

The Immortals, who had rushed to the edge, were cut in two at the waist in unison.

Sudden awakening.

"......What is it?"

"What, what?"

Herriot and Riana were rather taken aback by the sight.

In the next moment, Cliffman lunges at Immortal, who is charging toward Riana and Harriet, swinging his sword at them.

In a body pushed to its limits, with the immense power of the world's most powerful wizards at its back.

The only thing missing was himself.

With that gap filled, it's no wonder Immortal doesn't notice Klippmann's approach.

No.

At this point, Klippmann may not really need Herriot's help anymore.

-Bang! bang! Ka-kang!

In three swift strokes, Kliffman's sword slashes through the opening in Immortal's chest, decapitating him.

Kliffman is neither shocked nor impressed.

With a calm, cool eye, he scans his next target, then moves on.

We pushed the envelope, but we didn't just pave the way to a master class.

Klippmann's change is a little different.

Eventually.

The damned luck that has always been with me was meant for this moment.

By luck, by chance, by survival.

It's for now, when you don't need it anymore.

No more chance, no more luck, no more luck.

Through the experience they've accumulated.

What you've been building by chance and luck has already reached critical mass.

As ever, at the end of a series of coincidences that force survival.

After accumulating experience.

It's a given that winning is inevitable.

It's about reaching a point where you no longer need luck to survive, to be alive, and to win.

To reach a point where you are destined to win.

It is, therefore, a developing talent that inherently teeters on the line between superpower and destiny.

So it is. A blood fate forged over countless sacrifices and deaths.

A talent named Battle (戰鬪).

Just like that, you're done.

\* \* \*

-Shoot!

Suddenly, it starts to rain, and it must be Riana's power.

I understand where you're coming from.

In fact, the saturation of the wizards was becoming very inaccurate.

But the Immortals within range are in hot pursuit.

-Kugugung!

"Ugh......!"

With the Flames of Hweyo, with Tiamata, and with Alsbringer, we push through the waves of monsters.

Even though it's raining heavily, Huayo's flames explosively vaporize the rainwater into water vapor, blinding his pursuers. This is a good thing.

In effect, it focuses on moving forward rather than killing monsters.

There's no other way to describe this situation other than to say it sucks.

Immortals are missing.

It was hard to accept, but I knew what the situation was leading to.

So from the moment I showed up, I knew it was coming.

Immortal is back, and he's after me.

If Immortal succeeds in killing me, he will now send Olivia, Harriet, and Riana to find and kill the Lord Vampires.

It starts when I die.

When you die, the Immortal will try to find those who followed you.

So I shouldn't die.

In fact, it's not a bad thing.

Immortals follow you.

-knowwhat!

"Suck!"

-Thump!

I just need to move forward.

The Immortals follow me through the waves of monsters.

Ahead is a monster.

The back is an immortal.

This is what it looks like.

I was actually doing something that doesn't sound like running for your life into enemy territory.

It's more of a dash, a run for the hills.

Instead, you don't have to worry about attacking, you just move forward, jumping, stomping, and kicking monsters.

The whole thing will be swept away by the immortal.

"I'm here, I'm here, I'm here, you sons of bitches!"

Rather, he wields the flame of fire, the holy light of Tiamata, while cursing that he is here.

At the same time, it vaporizes the puddle with flames, blocking the view.

Or should I say, enticement.

If the monsters die and the immortals are destroyed, it's a win-win situation for me.

As long as you don't get caught up.

The moment I catch up, I'll be surrounded by thousands of Immortals, and I don't have the wits to survive that.

As I ran, I couldn't help but look back, even as I leapt over the monsters trying to tear me apart, because I needed to see how far my pursuers had gotten.

I've seen my fair share of scary things in my life, and I've seen my fair share of horrific things since Gate.

There were plenty of monsters that were just plain awful to look at.

"Crazy......."

However, the "fear" itself was never as strong as it is now.

No torrential downpour, no monstrous waves can stop them.

With blue Auror armor all over my body and Auror blades in my arsenal of spears, axes, swords, and other weapons, a thousand master classes are chasing after me.

There are those who cut their way through the monsters and kill them, and there are those like me who charge through them.

Masterclasses are the pinnacle of superhumanity.

Thousands of them are chasing me at breakneck speed, intent on killing me.

It's true that horrible-looking monsters are disgusting and scary.

But then comes the one that can literally crush and grind those terrible, terrifying creatures, moving dozens of meters in a single leap.

It's not hundreds, it's thousands.

-knowwhat!

The monster isn't even hit by a weapon, it's just bumped into and torn to pieces by the auror shockwave it generates.

They come in swarms.

There's no such thing as a choice to deal with it.

Run.

Because I have to live.

It's a way of life.

But very unfortunately.

-Wednesday!

-Quack!

"Ugh......!"

Immortal had a huge number of Archmages who could provide ranged support, not just checks.

A mass destruction spell covers the area above where I run.

Then the monster dies, and hopefully I die in a heap.

I can't really see where I am because of the rain, so I indiscriminately hit mass destruction spells.

Icy spears, thunderbolts, and random explosions.

And.

-Poof!

"Fuck......!"

The land is suddenly a swamp.

Thousands of swordmasters follow me, and blind archmages hurl destructive magic at me.

As if it doesn't matter if the immortal is swept away.

-Currrrr!

"Ugh!"

Grabbing the sinking monster by the horns, he rises, this time trampling over the creatures floundering in the swamp.

It might even be a good thing.

"Shit!"

But they come running, trampling other immortals as they sink into the swamp.

Even the sinkers come out floundering.

If anyone touches me, it's over.

Immortals are scarier than monsters.

-Quack!

"Turn off...... Yuck!"

And direct destructive magic goes to my head.

With the help of Auror armor and antimagic, it shouldn't be a fatal blow.

My magic alone would have killed a normal person hundreds of times over.

The moment you realize you're going to get caught by the Immortals for magical interference.

-knowwhat!

With a roar that tears through the sky, a breath of flame and thunder rains down on the Immortals following me, instantly separating me from them.

-Currrrrr!

The massive fuselage lands in front of me at a speed similar to that of a plummet to the ground.

I could clearly see the golden light atop the behemoth.

-Reinhardt! Get in!

Olivia on her dragon waves to me.

Are you here to save me?

What's that dragon?

I'm too busy to see what's happening on the battlefield.

One result: Olivia rode her dragon to my rescue.

But the answer is a given.

"No! Go!"

-What?!

"Come on, I have to stay here!"

It's my job to lure the Immortals and smash Diane.

If I run away, the immortal will instead attack other people.

And you may already be under attack.

Don't forget your value to attract immortals.

The more I risk, the faster the war ends.

So you can't leave it.

If I hesitate any longer, the Immortals will attack me and Olivia.

Then we both die.

I do this at my own risk.

"I said go!"

At my shout, Olivia no longer hesitates.

-profits......! You idiot!

Olivia screams it out loud.

-Don't die, fool!

-Kugugung!

The dragon in front of me leaps wildly, soaring through the downpour once more.

It's clear that everyone is doing more than they should.

So, like them, I have to do more than I can.

Where the thunderclap and flames had swept away.

Just run.

While luring immortals.

I'm Diane, on the front lines of this battle.

Episode 664.

An enemy's enemy is an ally.

I'm practicing that now, but my biggest problem is that my enemies are squeezing me back and forth.

I'm walking a tightrope, and in a moment of weakness, I'm eaten by both enemies simultaneously.

It looks weird, like I'm weightlifting to the front lines, but funnily enough, I'm not in the deepest part of the line.

It's hard to see through the heavy rain, but I can see the Void's trajectory flashing in the distance, and I've seen the bodies of monsters slashed to pieces.

Having entered the battlefield from the beginning, Ellen is far ahead of me.

I was already in the middle of Diane as I fought my way through the waves of monsters, mowing them down with my Voidblade and Rapelt.

Ellen's recklessness in venturing into the depths without an escort is also reckless, but she has the lapel and ramen to back it up.

My side, the one with the immortal on its butt, is more dangerous.

But the deeper I went into Diane, the more monsters I encountered, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to choose between the immortals behind me and the monsters in front of me.

The only reason I've gotten this far is, rather comically, because of the saturation directed at me.

Massive spells are still hovering over my head, with a thousand archmages trying to kill just me.

-Koo-koo-koo-koo!

But it was a blind spell, and the destructive magic was sweeping away the monsters in my path.

-Kurrrrrr

-Shoot!

The magic that was trying to kill me was killing the monsters that were trying to kill me.

Flashes, explosions, cold, flames, and blasts of unrecognizable magic.

I'm lucky there's no magic to bind my feet, even for a moment. I don't know if it's because I can't see it, or if it's because of my anti-magic powers, but it's not directly applied.

I'm a walking, unspecified bombing range, so I'd rather walk through fire and rain.

Ellen pushes ahead with her Voidblade and Rapelt, but I'm the spear through which the attacks that are meant to kill me pierce.

That doesn't mean you can relax.

If I don't run, the Masters of Immortals will catch up with me.

With Immortal in hot pursuit and me breaking through the front, the Allies were quickly advancing on Diane.

It's already been destroyed, but Diane's warp gate location is already in her head.

Simply run while guiding the immortal toward the warp gate.

It sounds easy enough, but you have to run through the most dangerous parts of the battlefield without getting caught by the enemy.

Something is protecting me, but I don't know how much longer.

-Goooooooo!

And then I saw a huge explosion of flames in one of Diane's places.

"What......?"

There was an explosion in the distance.

In an instant, a huge amount of raindrops had receded, so I was able to see the spectacle.

The raindrops pushed by the explosion soon turn into water vapor and explode into the sky.

Shockwaves of flame from Rafelt pulverized the monsters, and a blade of darkness from the Voidblade sliced through the warp gate with precision.

Not only had one of Diane's warp gates been neutralized, but the epicenter of the monsters was now completely empty.

She's doing what I'm trying to do with Immortal, and she's doing it on her own.

Ellen was strong, and I knew she was even stronger now that she had awakened two holy objects.

But in the final fight, can he do it alone, without his usual knights of Shanapelle in tow?

I've heard that Ellen seems to have gotten stronger since her condition became completely irreversible, but that's about it.

Like a ghost stalking a battlefield, Ellen destroys one warp gate and then runs off into the distance again.

If I encountered Ellen in her current state, would she attack me first, or would she take care of the monsters first?

Unknown.

But it's dangerous to get too close to Ellen.

And it's possible that the immortal could attack Ellen.

With that thought in mind, I was about to run in a different direction than Ellen.

-Currrrr!

In another place, an alien black energy erupted.

Somewhere close to the heart of the battlefield, as I, Ellen, and the Immortals are.

I don't know if it's quite right to say that the darkness is on fire, but it's clear that a fiery dark shape is engulfing the monsters in Diane's heart.

I'm not the only one in the vanguard, and there's more than one front in the coalition.

Something is breaking through some place on the front line, and the Allies are following.

You don't have to look long to see it.

Ludwig is clear.

We don't know the limits of the power he's gained with his black magic.

However, you are standing at the front of the battlefield, just like Ellen and I do.

Whatever he was thinking, unlike Christina, I could hear the determination in Ludwig's step.

A strong sense of prioritizing getting it all done somehow.

There is also a warp gate in Ludwig's direction.

And just as I can see Ludwig in a downpour, he is too close to me.

Avoid.

Just as it's dangerous to run into Ellen on the battlefield now, it's also dangerous to run into Ludwig.

All later.

Break down Diane's gate first.

-Currrrr!

Every time Ludwig swings his greatsword, the black magic of the sword shatters the monsters and clears the way.

The ominous menace of the figure reminded Ludwig of a berserker. The Allied troops marching along the road Ludwig has opened must have been terrified by the sight of a berserker wielding such ominous power.

Heavy rain means you can't see every inch of the battlefield.

And just because it's not raining doesn't mean you can't afford it.

-Ka-ka-ka-kak!

Stomp, leap, and slay the monsters that cause the earth to tremble.

-Bang! Kwalung!

Eventually, I make it to the warp gate, dodging monsters and immortals.

Size is medium.

Monsters were pouring out of the dimensional hole.

As if for the last time, the monsters came out like a gusher of water.

I don't have to deal with those monsters myself.

-Currrrr!

The powers of destruction that pour forth from me crush, tear, and burn the monsters that besiege me.

I feel like a god of destruction.

I felt as if I was intentionally harnessing these powers, as I was being surrounded by spells of destruction of all kinds.

I accomplish my goals with the power of those who would kill me.

It's a pretty ridiculous but plausible situation.

It's a chaotic and bloody battlefield, but I only need to fulfill my purpose.

Survive.

To do so, we need to break the warp gate.

"Heh......up!"

-Currrrrr!

Like a vortex condensing, the power of destruction and corruption rushes into Tiamata as she becomes a magic sword.

Maximize aurors.

And with his Tiamata, enchanted with the divine power of maximum destruction, he ran and ran and ran through the monsters, crushing them under a torrent of destructive magic.

Stab it into the gaping maw of the dimension that spews the monster.

-Quadruple!

I could clearly see the destruction of the warp gate as the force was unleashed.

I can't cut through it like Ellen, but I can break the warp gate with my own strength.

-currr

In case the Immortals ignored the gate and came after me, I broke it down with my own strength.

However, if one warp gate disappears, the Immortals chasing you will be able to catch up faster.

There's no such thing as a break.

"Fuck......!"

No matter how helpful the Immortal's attacks are, it doesn't change the fact that they're trying to kill me.

Run, run, run.

I wonder if everything around me is a trickster.

You don't even know how much you've been running around.

There was too much magic and monsters that changed the environment to rely on barriers alone.

You run, you run, you run, you run, and you break the warp gate you arrived at. And then you run again.

You don't even know how much time has passed.

The Alliance had already entered Diane, as the destruction of the warp gates had reduced the incidence of monsters.

Immortal still trails behind me, seemingly untouchable, while I slaughter Diane's monsters.

Ellen goes solo, I lure the Immortals in, and we break down warp gate after warp gate.

The Allies who had reached Diane were also destroying the gates one by one.

My heart is beating like crazy.

I'm not running out of fear that an immortal is about to catch up with me.

Really.

That's it, really.

We're almost there.

I could hear ghostly horses galloping in the distance, giant monsters crashing down, and armies being crushed to death.

One by one, Diane's warp gates crumble away.

The moment you can say the following.

What to do next.

I wonder if we'll ever have a moment to talk about that.

Just like that.

Reaching Diane, the Allies were on the verge of breaking the final gate, which was everyone's wish.

As the number of warp gates decreases, the number of monsters spilling out of a single gate increases.

However, with fewer gates, the total amount of monsters will be lower.

Before they knew it, the Alliance had gone beyond being surrounded by monsters and had taken out the monsters on the outskirts and surrounded Diane.

The number of monsters is absolutely reduced.

So.

There are fewer and fewer monsters to stop Immortals.

My life is on edge as I reach the end of this thing.

That moment when you've had enough and start thinking about how to handle your immortals.

In the distance, somewhere in the torrential downpour, I saw a reddish glow in the sky, growing in size.

"ah......."

I know what that is.

We've been destroying warp gates all over the battlefield.

Now we're down to one.

No, you're done.

Only one warp gate remains.

What happens then.

The gate debacle is over.

The gate situation is over, but you have to deal with what comes out of it.

-Currrrr!

The last remaining gate stops spitting out monsters and grows larger and larger.

Rising into the sky, the red hole of the warp gate blazes as it grows as massive as the sun.

From there, something appears.

No.

Pour.

-Thump!

From the red hole of a warp gate stretched to its limits, a behemoth fell to the ground.

When there is only one warp gate left, the gate will disappear after the last monster is spit out.

There had been many monsters in the form of dragons by this time, but this one was bigger and more alien than any of them.

The final disaster.

A bizarrely shaped dragon with six pairs of massive wings on a fuselage that looks like a projection of the night sky.

In the original, it's just the last monster, and it doesn't even have a name, but I named it the Otherworldly Dragon.

Something with such an overwhelming presence that even in a downpour, it's so huge that you can see its massive form from anywhere.

-Greeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

-ddddddd!

With a roar that seemed to bring the world crashing down.

The otherworldly dragon roared.

Now, the gate debacle is over.

Now, if only the otherworldly dragons would do something about it, we could all say the following.

The otherworldly dragon opened its gaping maw to the world.

And.

-Woof!

From the behemoth's maw, a void shot forth.

There was no binge drinking.

However.

As much as the emptiness struck.

The world has been erased.

\* \* \*

The final monster that came out of nowhere.

The battlefield was chilled by the irrational violence the creature spewed.

-shootaaaaa

Even in the downpour, everyone could see the alien, jet-black behemoth in the distance.

A bizarre behemoth that appeared out of nowhere.

And a black breath that erased everything it touched.

-Thump! Thump!

Every time the behemoth opens its gaping maw and spits out its brains, there's no impact sound, no binge, no explosion.

It was literally disappearing.

"Is that....... What is that......?"

Herriot froze, watching the unreasonable destruction wrought by something that had suddenly appeared from the rear of the battlefield.

Neither did Cliffman, who sliced up the last Immortal, nor did Riana.

Already, a number of mages were pouring magic into the seemingly dangerous creature.

However, it passes.

No lightning, no flames, no explosions.

As if you can't even reach that which has taken the form of the night.

Not even a flash of light from the magic star could reach it, only to pierce through it and explode behind it.

It has a shape but no form.

It may be a spirit form enemy.

So Herriot fired a powerful beam of light with the power of exorcism, but even it only grazed him.

I can't quite make out what it is, but it's a monster that uses a very different form of power than we're used to.

"What......?"

Every monster is different.

It's not like there weren't monsters that didn't work with fire and magic.

But that one spits out a breath that wipes out everything it touches, and it doesn't even take all the hits.

It's as if it exists outside of the world.

Herriot expands his field of vision to see the behemoth.

The closer I looked, the more incomprehensible the shape became.

And I watched as it washed away all the magic that was being poured into it.

The image projected by the Otherworldly Dragon's body is similar to the image projected by Ellen's Voidblade.

If Voidblade Lament is a blade of night that cuts through everything it touches.

That one can do what Voidblade Laments can do on a wide area.

As such, Herriot was forced to realize the power of Ellen's sword, and vice versa.

The Voidblade doesn't cut through everything it touches.

It erases everything it touches.

It's a thin blade that slices through the void, and we've mistakenly thought it cuts through.

It can accomplish in a breath what the Voidblade does.

A dragon with a night form.

So it's unreachable by the reasoning that exists in the world.

But it can destroy the world.

Why does that even exist?

How am I supposed to kill something like that.

Cliffman's path to the Master Class was awakened, and the Immortal Attack was too scary to pass up.

At the end of the day, everything we've done hasn't mattered in the end.

It felt like it was there to laugh at everyone in the world.

-Digitize!

Then, a crack opens up in the space in front of it, revealing another gigantic figure.

Dragons of overwhelming size and Titans of massive weaponry to rival them in size.

A Titan that has been removed from the battlefield, minimally recharged, and ready to do anything to combat its despair.

-Whoosh!

The giant swished its tail, not its breath, this time.

Then, the titan's waist disappeared.

It's not destroyed, but the part of the trajectory where the dragon's tail touches is gone.

The Titan crumbles, as does whatever it was that had kept the Allied morale up until now.

Not everyone could see the spectacle, but they could hear the Titan crumble and hear the rumble.

Its loud echo was the despair felt by all in the Allied ranks.

"How....... What....... How....... do......?"

The immortal is gone.

It reappeared.

Titans were brought in.

That's what it's all about.

If you see something like that at the end.

What the heck am I supposed to do?

All of this happens in the .

Facts.

Was it unfinishable?

No Riana, no Harriet.

I couldn't help but feel a certain sense of abandonment that went beyond despair.

-shootaaaaa

It was raining.

Episode 665.

The Titan has fallen.

And with a single breath, part of Diane was erased.

I know.

It does not allow attacks with non-holy weapons.

In the original, only Ellen and Ludwig could fight. Everyone else had to leave the dragon to them to slay the monsters.

Others can't even attack it in the first place.

Ellen did not have a sun cloak then, and Rament was not a Voidblade.

In the end, there was no one to beat.

Ludwig uses Alsbringer to summon an incarnation, which is then destroyed along with the dragon.

I had a thought.

Things are very different from the original. Therefore, new things can happen because things are different.

Ellen's ramen has changed, and she now has a sun cloak, which is not present in the original.

So I thought it might be possible to tackle the Void Dragon in a different way than the original.

I thought I might be able to get past this last situation without using Alsbringer.

But it was a ridiculous idea.

The moment I saw part of the army wiped out with a single breath, all other possibilities were put out of my head.

You can fight it.

Surely, I or Ellen could fight that.

But even if you can kill it without using Alsbringer, there will be nothing left after that.

-Goooooooo!

It's overwhelmingly violent.

Otherworldly dragons.

This will be the last absurdity I have to face.

Being subjected to an absurdity of my own making.

What I pay for.

The work was already done.

To use Alsbringer on the spot to kill that last monster.

From the moment Alsbringer was placed in my hands, it was my destiny.

There are a few questions running through my head, but it's not time to dwell on them.

If it needs to be done, it needs to be done.

Because that's how it's always been.

It's just that what you need to do now is the last thing you need to do.

Everything I had done to survive, to not want to die, was eventually lost.

As the violence I had written about became a reality, I lost all other thoughts.

But there's still an army of Immortals chasing me from behind.

All warp gates are gone.

There are still a ton of monsters that have already been vomited out, but there are no more monsters.

We only need to deal with that dragon.

I look back.

An army of Immortals following me, heavy losses but still powerful and intent on killing me.

It's a pain in the rear.

I don't mind if that one follows, but I need to finish that one.

Immortals are not going to help you fight that.

The remaining monsters can only be dealt with by the Alliance.

Then the immortal is now just a threat.

So.

No more running around.

No one should have to risk their lives dealing with immortals.

"Now......."

From your arms, take something.

-Dalcock

Scary to press buttons on artifacts.

-pot!

Two people appear in front of me.

"I don't think we need immortals."

And in a pinch.

The Immortals that have been following me around slaughtering monsters.

-Crispy!

It turns to dust and disappears.

Neutralization wavelength.

Immortals crumble, as if they've hit an intangible wall.

Two people showed up on my cue.

"Does that mean we're done with all the immortals?"

"Please."

One is Scarlett.

"Let's go, Lint."

The other is Conor Lindt.

These two were waiting for my signal.

Scarlett was holding her breath for the most important moment.

Then Kono Lint brought Scarlett here from her imprisonment, and she's been watching the situation, waiting for me to give her the signal.

It was obvious that Immortal was going to attack me, so I was waiting for this moment.

I just ran away until the moment when the immortal could disappear.

Somewhere on the battlefield, my people are also fighting Immortals.

That's it.

From the moment I give the signal, Kono Lint will move across the battlefield with Scarlett in tow, neutralizing all Immortals.

Scarlett can turn Immortals to dust with just a little bit of force, and Kono Lint can move them quickly across the battlefield.

As long as Scarlet was there, Immortal couldn't kill me.

Of course, there were plenty of close calls.

We need to get rid of everything before the immortal does anything weird here.

"Hey....... Is there a way to do that....... to do that, right?"

Kono Rint mumbles to himself as he watches with uneasy eyes the massive dark shape in the distance.

"I can do that."

Okay, that's not a lie.

"We don't have time for a long story."

Scarlett says, with a stern, but determined look on her face.

"Stay alive."

I'm not asking you to save humanity.

I'm not asking you to save everyone.

The words to stay alive.

I find that harder than saving everyone.

Well, I couldn't really say that.

Erase all other thoughts.

What a ridiculous idea it was to not use Alsbringer.

You can fight that, but what's the point if you get caught up in the fight and everyone dies.

If I dodge its attacks, that's how many people die.

The dragon's roar is getting louder, and its fuselage is getting closer.

Braving the rain to reach the point where an otherworldly dragon is rampaging.

I could see someone running in the opposite direction of me.

It was Ellen.

-curl!

Ellen got there before me.

Ellen, cloaked in the cloak of the sun, leaps high, the veil of night stretched long.

Swing the Voidblade at the dragon's head.

And.

-Scourer!

The dragon's head has been cut off.

Hilariously, effortlessly.

Next moment.

It disappeared with a bang.

"What......?"

Now.

What did I see?

\* \* \*

Some people may have no idea what happened because of the heavy rain.

Those too far away may not even realize that an otherworldly dragon has appeared.

But those watching from afar must have exclaimed in delighted disbelief as the dragon that had crippled the Titan with a single blow was sliced and diced.

The final boss has arrived.

Then he was sliced up by Ellen and disappeared.

But you could bring anyone in the world and no one would be more surprised than me.

That's not a monster that dies like that.

In vain like this.

It's not a monster that disappears into thin air.

It wasn't even a fight.

Ellen merely swung her Voidblade as she would any other monster.

A Voidblade that slashes through anything.

If the power of an Otherworldly Dragon and a Ramen is essentially the same, then an Otherworldly Dragon can be slain.

I'm the only one who realizes how ridiculous this is.

I tried to use Alsbringer.

However, Ellen made it look so effortless that I was able to defeat the enemy I had spent so much time trying to defeat.

Whatever it was, it didn't use Alsbringer.

Ever since Ellen's ramen took on the form of the Void, that last monster was destined to fade into nothingness like this.

However, I wasn't sure if the Voidblade would work with it.

I knew that the Voidblade would cut "anything", but not holy items.

However, otherworldly dragons were not among the exceptions to the Voidblade.

I should be happy.

Yes.

You should be happy.

I know it's not.

The dragon is gone.

The Gate debacle is over, we just need to clean up the remaining monsters around here.

Immortals can be handled by Scarlet.

But.

All that's left for me is to get started.

That's why I can't rejoice.

-Tat!

After almost flying through the air, Ellen lands lightly on the ground.

-shootaaaaa

At the spot where the otherworldly dragon had appeared, which had become a giant clearing, Ellen was looking exactly in my direction, drenched in rainwater.

"......."

Maybe a hundred meters.

The distance is not very far.

The otherworldly dragon disappeared far too easily.

I have to deal with something in this position anyway.

It just went from being an otherworldly dragon to something else.

You have to deal with a warrior.

Somehow.

The moment I saw the otherworldly dragon, I knew I had to use Alsbringer.

Then, I actually tried to write it.

But then what happens to the future I see.

That future where I die, and Ellen dies.

That was.

I thought, for a moment.

This is what happened.

The idea of using Alsbringer to hunt otherworldly dragons was never meant to be.

Ellen looks at me in the rain.

No, that's not Ellen.

A collection of spirits that have taken over Ellen's body.

An assemblage of certain demons, perhaps even more enlarged and massive than before.

It definitely has a will.

The first time I encountered it, I definitely had a conversation with it.

I wonder if I can win.

I fought so many times in my dreams.

I've died countless times.

But will I be able to win this battle that has become a reality?

It was supposed to happen.

If I am the son of a demon, and Ellen is the sister of a warrior.

It was bound to happen at some point.

I knew this moment would come, and I knew it from the moment I got close to Ellen.

I didn't hesitate to get close to Ellen, even though I knew I would one day.

It's a trade-off.

If you turned away Ellen from the beginning.

If you're unaided, unsupported, and distanced from nothing, maybe.

This would not have happened.

I got close, even though I knew I would regret it.

I wanted to avoid this moment at all costs, but I knew it was coming.

That there would come a moment when he would have to fight for his life with Ellen, one way or another.

This is the expected sequence.

I got over the last hurdle easily.

With that, no more people will be sacrificed to otherworldly dragons.

Instead, the trial falls on me alone.

A harsh trial for only me.

You need to beat Ellen.

No, it's not enough to win.

Recover Ellen without killing her.

Somehow, I need to stop Ellen from killing me, subdue her, and even get her back.

Fighting a fight you know you're not going to win, when you know you're not even going to kill.

That should do it.

I do know one thing, though.

If the future I see is correct.

If I lose, I'm not the only one who dies.

Ellen, who killed me, takes her own life.

Against an otherworldly dragon, I would give my life to kill it, but this time I can't even kill it.

You can't fight with the intent to kill.

If you do, you die, and so does Ellen.

The gate debacle is over, and the last monster is dead.

However, I can't think of a worse day than today.

A torrential downpour runs down its face and into its eyes.

He has no expression, and looks like he's crying his eyes out.

No, someone who is actually crying.

'It' stands still and points a sword at me.

"Devil......."

A voice that sounds like multiple voices overlapping.

It was a bizarre sound that seemed to tear at my eardrums, not my soul.

Just hearing the voice was like reliving the pain and terror I felt as it consumed my body.

I wonder how long Ellen put up with that.

The sum total of hatred for me.

The culmination of all the anger and sadness of those who had to lose so much, so innocently.

Apparently, it once said it would take me and everything I love.

'It' says.

"Now, let's see the end."

It walks slowly toward me, with a short, blunt opening statement.

Deepest Diane, where everything has evaporated, and it's just Ellen and me.

The battlefield binges and monster screams are far away.

-shootaaaaa

-challenge.

That's why I could hear myself stepping in puddles in the rain.

It's a giant pit, and no one is watching.

-Charles

-Rumble

I'm neither desperate nor impatient.

A calm step that definitely closes the distance.

The vibe is different.

When Ellen arrived at the master class, she was not only clad in blue Auror armor, but also in an unidentifiable off-white smoke.

That's a lot of spirits at work.

Their true purpose is to kill me, not to end the gate crisis.

Therefore, it will be the most powerful.

They're going to do everything they can to kill me.

-goooooooo

A strange, unintelligible rumble and tingling emanate from Ellen's body.

Warriors.

Perhaps, right now, Ellen is the strongest person on the planet.

Such a being wears the sharpest sword in the world and the hardest armor in the world.

The vessel, named Warrior, holds the wrath of all those who died because of the demon.

It's strange that the last enemy a demon must face to rule the world is not the one right in front of him.

Despite all the odds, I'm not one of those otherworldly dragons that Ellen slayed with a single blow.

I've previously confirmed that Voidblades can't ring relics.

-Bam!

With a light sound of spurting water, Ellen comes to my periphery, lightly swinging her Voidblade.

The light, calm, yet sharp leap, and the arcing trajectory of the Void Sword as it approached, seemed at first glance to be beautiful.

Obviously, a Voidblade can't break an artifact.

-Bam!

"Turn off...... Yuck!"

However, not being beige was by no means unbearable.

Unity of the Voidblade.

I blocked it.

I broke my wrist.

Episode 666.

A forest outside the ecliptic.

Christina didn't tell Anna and Louis Ankton everything when they woke up.

Saviolin Tana has raided the underground lab.

All I could do was take you and run, and now the underground lab is blown up.

That's it for now.

Either the Immortals were intentionally withdrawn, or they were reintroduced to kill the Demon.

I didn't bother to tell you about all that stuff.

Both Anna and Louis were stunned that they couldn't stop a single Saviolin Tana.

The Empire had a hand in making sure Immortal was no longer recoverable, but in the end, Diane's situation was the most important.

Christina watched the entirety of Immortal's fight.

I tried to kill the demon first, but he used the monsters to scurry away like a mouse.

Neither Herriot nor Riana could be killed, only Cliff, who had suddenly become an unexpected monster.

I felt my blood run dry.

Immortals will continue to be destroyed and losses will be irrecoverable.

It's almost as if they knew this was coming, and they're just using their immortals to get away with it.

And.

Christina looked.

The appearance of a giant unknown monster.

Its overwhelming and inscrutable majesty.

But before I could fully realize the destruction and disaster it was wreaking, I saw it being sliced up by Ellen Artorius.

She had a hunch.

The gate debacle is over.

But something even more shocking happened before that.

When he saw Christina, wide-eyed and clenching her teeth until her lip bled, Louis Ankton asked cautiously.

"Christina, what's wrong?"

"......scarlet."

At that, both Louis and Anna's faces hardened.

"Scarlett, and Konorint....... They're smashing Immortals."

Scarlet, who was supposed to be languishing in a safe city somewhere, was running back and forth across the battlefield with Kono Lint, smashing Immortals.

No combat.

As Scarlett traveled to the location of the Immortal, she would use her ability and the Immortal would instantly turn to dust and disappear.

Scarlett's abilities are essential to Immortals.

Scarlett was able to do things that even Ellen or Savior Tana couldn't do.

One thing is for sure, Scarlett is siding with the devil.

Since when?

"Did Scarlett go to......?"

"Yes."

Louis Ankton asked with a puzzled look, and Christina nodded slowly.

"Scarlett betrayed us."

Christina says, her face twisted into a grim line.

We don't know how or why Scarlett ended up there.

Ludwig's assurances that Scarlett could be trusted were the ramblings of a backward fool.

Should have killed it.

However, Immortal can never kill Scarlett.

No, it's not an immortal in the first place, and no one can kill Scarlett now.

ConoLint is here to help.

It will be impossible to even reach, let alone hold on to.

When Saviolin Tana stormed the underground research wing, I assumed her intention was to stall the Immortals from returning.

So I sent all of the Immortals back to the battlefield, since they couldn't touch me anyway.

But then, instead of killing her, she blew up the lab.

The emperor has read it all.

Back on the battlefield, the Immortals attempted to hunt down the Demon.

But instead, the Demon used the Immortals to chase him, stirring up the entirety of Diane as if he were the vanguard of the Immortals.

And when he finally caught up, with fewer monsters to stave off the pursuit, he summoned Scarlett as if she had been waiting for him and began to smash the Immortal backwards.

Immortal was taken to the extreme by the Devil.

It was read to the emperor.

You've been taken advantage of by the devil.

Immortal will now be able to tear through the entire battlefield with Scarlet and Kono Lint, neutralizing them all.

The lab that can regenerate incapacitated immortals has been blown up.

At this point, all of your immortals will be gone.

"We need to get Immortal off the battlefield."

The absolute number of Immortals has been declining at an alarming rate, even with the arrival of Scarlet and Kono Lint.

We're stuck.

If all of your emotes are gone, you won't be able to do anything with them.

First, we need to keep the power of the Immortal alive.

You'll need to find another way.

There are still more than half a dozen immortals left.

At this rate, Immortals will be wiped out.

We'll have to find another way to fix the remaining immortals.

First, we need to figure out how to deal with scarlet.

Decorating something with immortals is the next step.

"The gate thing, is it over?"

At Anna's question, Christina stares at her.

Yes.

We should start with the gate situation.

"I think so. We'll have to kill the rest of the monsters, but Diane will fall. But if we don't take the time to reorganize the Immortals first, we're in danger......."

-Poof!

"......?"

Christina couldn't help but make a silly noise.

"Anna!"

And then, out of the blue, Louis Ankton shouted.

Anna's blackened hand was buried in Christina's heart.

She didn't even feel the pain.

Something that just happened in front of you.

Dreams.

or should I say.

All I could think was that it was unrealistic.

Anna De Guerna says, still.

"I'm done playing third-rate villain."

"What......?"

-Poof!

Anna pulled her hand away from Christina's chest.

Crimson gore dripped from a hole in his chest.

Anna stares at Christina with dark eyes.

"Let the immortal disappear."

"You. What the hell. Why, why, why......?"

Christina was frozen, unable to speak, and Louis Ankton was pale with incomprehension.

"Uh....... Uh. Uh....... Why......."

Anna says, holding still, watching Christina gape in disbelief.

She knew the magic.

But he didn't know.

"You are now useless."

Anna looked at her dying friend with cold eyes.

"Bertus told me to tell you so."

It left a cold goodbye.

\* \* \*

Christina is dead.

Without even closing your eyes.

Realizing what had happened to him only just before he completely stopped breathing.

He died in tears of blood, his eyes bulging and his lips biting.

Louis Ankton didn't understand what was happening in front of him.

"Anna....... Anna what are you doing! Christina, if Christina dies......!"

"Immortals will start killing random people."

At this point, the immortal will completely lose control and start rampaging.

"But once she's done with Immortal and starts planning her next move, there's no stopping her."

If my army starts waging guerrilla warfare against an entire continent, no one will be able to respond.

Scarlett or Conorint?

Do your sabotage or assassination before they show up, and then disappear.

Even if it can no longer be repaired, if it provokes a localized war, Immortals can always destroy it, not to mention infinitely hinder the building of the Demon King's world.

Just as the demons could have destroyed the human world by now, but didn't.

If she can't kill the demon now, she's going to do it in the next phase, and she can.

There is an immortal in place, and there is a scarlet that can reliably neutralize that immortal.

If you don't do it now, you'll never get the chance to make immortals disappear completely.

"So I killed it."

I asked if the gate debacle was over just to make sure.

Once the gate debacle is over, it's time for the immortals to go away.

Timing is everything.

If you kill her too quickly, Immortal will crush your alliance.

If you kill it too late, you won't be able to deal with the rampaging Immortals.

So she was holding her breath.

Until the moment comes when it's most certain and safe to kill her.

Anna is taking instructions from Bertus.

We don't even know when Bertus approached Anna.

At the last minute, I was waiting for the right moment to kill Christina.

A friend died.

In trying to save his friend, he ended up putting his friends in danger.

I have a friend who killed him with my own hands.

There are some things that only end when friends die and kill each other.

Christina was murdered at the hands of a friend in a bizarre last minute act.

That's why she was a third-rate. No, she wasn't even a third-rate villain.

I never suspected my friend until the end.

Such, a third-rate villain.

Anna holds up Christina's body and looks at Louis.

Anna's back was stained red with blood.

Anna has fulfilled Bertus's orders.

Anna took Bertus' orders, not because she was promised a reward.

Bertus had no intention of giving Anna anything, and Anna had no intention of receiving anything.

I think you should.

So that's what I did.

Just like Christina did this because it was the right thing to do.

Christina, I'm just doing this because it seems like the right thing to do.

I didn't really want anything.

Bertus couldn't have asked for more from Anna.

The empire will be gone, so it doesn't matter if Bertus promised something.

"Let's go."

There's nowhere else to go.

Louis Ankton, a bystander and silent collaborator through it all, mumbles something incoherent at Anna's words.

"......where?"

Where we need to go.

Where you can go.

Is there one?

In the end, all three are sinners who will go down in history and have nowhere to go.

"Well......."

With the friend I killed on my back.

"The place we need to go is....... somewhere."

Anna smiled, her eyes deadpan.

Episode 667.

-Bam!

I can't even count the number of times I've broken my wrist.

Just withstanding the pressure of the Voidblade is enough to break your wrists, shoulders, and arms.

If it weren't for Tiamata's resilience, I would have died the moment I split the sum.

I'm used to pain.

I've died thousands of times in my dreams, so I'm used to death, so why shouldn't I be used to pain?

-.......

Ellen walks slowly toward me, who has bounced off into the distance.

It's not rushed, either.

It was a move that assumed I wouldn't be able to avoid this battle.

So, it's not laid back, but it's not rushed either.

That slow, calm approach, in and of itself, takes my breath away.

Ellen's entire body pulsed with a grayish aura that bordered on blue auror.

The Ellen I imagined in my dreams didn't win either.

I thought the real Ellen would be different, that she would be stronger, even with the power of those demons.

It's not funny.

I thought it would be stronger than I could ever imagine.

But it wasn't without reason.

I couldn't bring myself to kill Ellen.

I don't even dare to think about it.

So I can't go full throttle.

But that was hubris.

Even with all my might.

Even if you do everything you can.

I realized that I would never be able to beat Ellen.

After walking slowly, Ellen closes the distance in a few strides.

-Quack!

When the Voidblade and Alsbringer collide, a shockwave rips the earth apart.

-Bang!

Two concatenations.

And.

-Bam!

"Turn off...... Yuck!"

He struck me with his knee and blew me away.

Ribbed.

-Woof!

Tiamata's powers restore you again.

Took disenchantment to the extreme.

Nevertheless, the moment it endures a unity, it is simply destroyed by overwhelming force.

The gap is too big.

I thought I was as strong as anyone.

Ellen is too strong.

The gap is not as wide as it used to be.

Not as much as when Ellen blocks a swinging sword and loses her grip on it.

However, each stroke of the sword shatters and tears the bones and muscles protected by the auror.

There's still that gap.

Ellen in her right mind.

This is not the Ellen I met at Charlotte's execution, the one who was so guilty of pointing a sword at me that she was beaten to death.

Otherwise, I can't even feed Ellen a single effective hit.

He is gifted with all kinds of talents, clad in the strongest weapons and the strongest armor, and possesses an immeasurable number of souls.

Did it hit me, and I couldn't beat it?

It's not just melee either.

-Kwalung!

A flash of flame grazed my cheek.

Even flames from the sun's cloak, not the Voidblade, pierce my defenses.

-profit

The wound heals with a sound that shouldn't come from human skin.

What I can count on is resilience.

And the power of Alsbringer to boost your performance the stronger your opponent.

Ellen is stronger because of the power of the Relic, but I don't even have the Relic to make this fight work.

He would have broken his wrist on the first hit and lost his sword, and his throat would have been blown off on the third.

If it weren't for Tiamata, I'd be dead.

Voidblade and Tiamata collide.

-Carded!

Sparks flew as the Voidblade and Holy Blade clashed, and my attempt to push to the right turned into Ellen flipping my wrist over and catching me.

No, to be precise.

From the moment it poked me, it knew how I was going to respond.

Soon, it was read.

-Poof!

"......!"

In an instant, my chest opened, and before I had time to react, I was stabbed in the lungs.

Before the blade could sever my body, I kicked Ellen's body and stepped back.

"Ugh......!"

-Woof!

Tiamata's Holy Power heals critical wounds.

Unless you have a holy object, you cannot block Voidblade's attacks.

I'm used to the pain, so it didn't distract me, but a sword in the chest is always eerie.

It comes at you with a vengeance.

-Bang! kang! ka-kang!

In the midst of a breathtaking onslaught, one misstep and you're dead.

That's not the only problem.

Ellen is not without its flaws.

Too many loopholes.

Ellen is completely defenseless against the onslaught of attacks.

-Bam!

"K......gh!"

However, if you poke your head into the gap, the intense reactionary force will only make you feel like you're going to break.

It's not the Auror armor that Ellen is wearing, it's the reactionary force of the sun cloak unfolding itself.

It's not that we don't defend.

You don't have to defend it.

Even a full-force attack won't work.

There's a reason you've been slaying monsters alone in the deepest recesses of the battlefield.

A sword that cuts through anything.

A shield to defend against any attack.

I knew Ellen was strong.

But that was it.

Not even a full-powered attack can touch a single hair on Ellen's head.

It's a different kind of holy grail.

They can't even reach Ellen, who holds two holy symbols that specialize in offense and defense.

-Bang! kang! ka-kang!

You're in a hurry just to dodge Ellen's barrage of attacks.

There's also a basic disparity, where all my attacks don't even touch, and Ellen's attacks can be decapitated if they miss.

-Bam!

"K......!"

With a single, weighted front kick, I'm thrown backward with a crushing pain that feels like every bone in my body is shattering.

The good news is that unless you're critically injured, you can recover.

The power of healing.

Tiamata's divine power to regenerate no matter how wounded.

But for now, I'm just extending my roster a bit.

It stares at me with a numb expression as it bounces off into the distance.

-shootaaaaa

I cringe at that insensitive stare.

I.

I can't beat you.

This was going to happen from the day we met.

Was I destined to lose here?

What have we done so far?

In the end, I couldn't get past you.

Is there a story waiting to be told about the devil being defeated by the hero?

You didn't grit your teeth all this way just to die on the spot.

And it's not just me that dies, if you kill me, you die too.

I don't know.

Somehow I've escaped death, but my life is about to be taken.

Because good luck doesn't last forever.

It watches me measure the distance and opens its mouth to speak.

"Is it unfair?"

"......."

Clearly, it has a will.

I don't know how it works specifically.

I know it's not impossible to have a conversation.

"I saw you trying to protect the humans."

So you've seen it all.

"Now we know, and you know, that you were trying to protect humans."

It will know that I'm doing this for something, and it will know that.

The result is this.

I know my intentions were not evil per se.

It asks.

"Is it unfair that it has to be this way?"

How could it not be?

While it's true that a lot of people died, the Allied casualties pale in comparison to the original, thanks to a change in plot.

One more step.

One more step.

We just need to get Ellen back.

That's all there is to it.

There's nothing to be greedy about.

But at the end, he dies without getting Ellen back.

It's not even a fight.

I don't see how that could be unfair.

I just need one more step, but I can't take it.

I lost the last fight, and I may have to lose everything.

"Of course."

I don't want to sound like a broken record, but.

I can't say I don't feel bad, I can't say I don't feel bad.

All of this while .

Every day you've ever spent.

I thought I might be able to get you back.

And sometimes.

After everything is back to normal. Sometimes, I wish I could be back to my old self.

Sometimes, really sometimes.

I imagined it.

All those days.

Nervous.

That's not all.

"When I woke up, I was a frail, demonic prince in a dying country."

"I don't remember anything."

"Knowing only that the world is about to end."

"I didn't want to die, so I fell into the ecliptic, relying on a silly camouflage spell that dispelled in a single dispel."

"So far......."

"I tried to save everyone somehow, and the world ended up like this because of me."

"But somehow, through gritted teeth, I've made it this far."

"Now, you just need to get your act together."

"Well, you're about to get your ass handed to you."

"Wouldn't that be unfair?"

In fact, it all happened because of me.

I feel like I'm going to die at the end of it all, with just one last step left.

It would be weird if that didn't make you feel frustrated and sad.

I'm angry, frustrated, and sad.

How I got here.

I came all this way just to die.

To my pleas of injustice that don't fit this situation, it doesn't laugh at me.

"Poor......."

It doesn't condemn or criticize my Toro.

However.

Stand still in the rain and close your eyes.

In its eyes, the rainwater flows, unhindered.

An unfathomable rain falls on its head, runs down its face and eyes, and becomes a puddle.

Tears.

It must be the torrential rain that Riana summoned.

-shootaaaaa

-Rumble

I felt like this epic was the tears it was shedding.

If the world cries, and it turns into rain.

In a torrential downpour that makes you wonder if this is how it's going to be.

It speaks, in the heat of the world.

"Well, what about us?"

I don't even know how many "we" I'm supposed to count anymore.

"Aren't we pathetic?"

"I should have just gotten swept up in your story and disappeared."

"We."

"I didn't have a role, I didn't do anything."

"By a monster."

"Sometimes by humanity."

"Sometimes."

"By you."

"For reasons of your own."

"The 'I' that had to go away."

"Our trampled lives."

"He deserves it more than you do."

"All they had to say was 'I had to.'"

"Do I need to be convinced of that?"

With his eyes closed, he spoke softly, not in anger and despair, but in a muffled voice that conveyed a desperate sadness.

I didn't dream of anything.

Other people's dreams.

To be precise, they were trampled underfoot by the dreams I had.

Even if I say it wasn't my intention, those are the deaths I caused.

Their frustration and anger is understandable and justified.

If I dare to speak of injustice to them, it would be injustice and intolerable to them.

"I can't help but be sad."

"It's unfair, but I can't help it."

"As if we were dying in those words."

"The Devil."

"Unless you can give us our lives back."

"Unless you can give us back everything you took from us."

"In frustration, bitterness, and anger."

"Die an inevitable death."

"Only if you die like that."

"Only if you get it back."

"Wouldn't that be the least you could do to apologize for all the deaths you caused?"

It's impossible to give your life back.

I know this, and I know that.

So I must die too.

Just one step away from achieving everything.

Bitterness and despair, resentment and anger.

Only by dying in sorrow can it be a minimal apology.

It shouldn't be alive.

Trying to live is greed in itself.

It stares at me, still and open-eyed.

"But your heart. I know."

I wonder if it has been refined over time.

It didn't appear to be as intensely emotional as it had been when it first appeared.

Or had she gotten into Ellen's body and started to resemble her because she was always so calm?

The look in his eyes.

Eyes once filled with emptiness and abysses.

It looked like a deep, frozen lake.

It's not warm.

It's not without its enemies.

However, it was silent.

"I have no intention of forgiving you, and I have no intention of sparing you."

"But at the very least, out of respect for you."

"Let's make a deal."

You recognize me, but you can't keep me alive.

There is a price I must pay. Knowing my intentions does not change the ending, nor does it bring death to life.

There is a price to pay.

However, I do have a suggestion.

Transactions.

"Only you die."

The words were plain and brutal.

"Those you love."

"Your loved ones."

"All the things you want to keep."

"I will spare everyone but you."

"From this child you have loved, I will escape."

"And I'll be gone."

"You will not be able to see with your own eyes how all those you have loved live."

"Well, into the world of numbness. Come with me."

"Filled with bitterness, resentment, and anger."

"Be like me."

"It's gone from the world."

Was it?

I get it.

What that "future" meant.

That scene where I get killed, and Ellen kills herself.

That future was not a future of defeat.

The battle is not lost.

You weren't killed in a fight.

You've seen the next part of this transaction.

I would have taken the deal because it would have saved my life.

You can fight and lose.

I know I'm going to die anyway.

If I hadn't seen what was coming next.

Obviously, I would have taken the deal.

\* \* \*

What I saw in the preview was me dead, and Ellen taking her own life.

That's not who I am after a defeat.

This was after I accepted the deal to die and end it all.

If I don't take the deal, it doesn't kill me.

Everyone, including me, Harriet, and Olivia.

He will begin to kill all those who have sided with him.

And in the end, he'll kill Ellen, the one he's blaming.

But if it dies now, it's gone.

If I hadn't seen that future, I would have taken the deal.

Because that's the best I can do.

To die after a pointless struggle, to die and have everyone I love die.

I'm the only one who dies.

It's pretty obvious what to choose.

You don't have to die with everyone else.

That's not lying.

When I say kill me and go away, I mean it.

In the future I saw, if Ellen took her own life, it would be because she realized she had killed me with her own hands.

The promise will be kept.

But one truth we know because we know the future.

Not only do I die, but so does Ellen, who killed me.

That this isn't a one-and-done deal.

Demons and heroes.

If only two of them die, will there be peace for the rest of us?

To disappear with you is the only ending I'm allowed.

I might be able to beat Ellen if I used Alsbringer, but there's no point in doing so, since I'm going to die with her anyway.

Whether Ellen kills herself for killing me, or I borrow the power of an incarnation to kill Ellen and die in return, it's the same thing.

The future I saw wasn't about the outcome of battles, it was about choices.

If I refuse, I must fight it, and if I lose, it will kill everyone I love.

If you accept, only you and Ellen will die, and everything else will belong to those who remain.

Without me, they'll get by somehow.

Some will mourn, and most will cheer as the hero defeats the demon.

Funny.

The Demon War ended with the annihilation of the Warriors and the Demons.

And even now, across time, the hero and the devil are meant to die together.

Is it always the case that heroes and demons are destined to die together?

It proves that I've been doing all this to protect something, not to destroy it.

At the end of the last.

Prove it by giving up everything and dying at its hands.

You should be able to reach the end of everything and have none of it.

If it's just me, that's fine.

If it's just me.

That's good.

I imagine a confused Ellen who eventually kills me with her own hands and wakes up in a daze.

And then we saw Ellen, who ultimately chose to die.

Again and again.

Dozens of times.

I've seen it hundreds of times.

Whenever my will is about to weaken. Whenever your resolve tries to weaken.

I gritted my teeth at the sight.

I did something about it, telling myself that I hadn't built up all this time to see that future.

Killed by Ellen in a dream.

I was trying to hold up a crumbling world.

And then I get to the end of it, and I have to choose a future I never wanted to see?

We've talked too much about things that can't be changed.

I can't help it.

So for now, let's do this

You have to accept it.

The inevitable.

I want to do something about it this time.

I don't want to have to choose, and for once, I don't want to choose.

You'll lose, but you won't necessarily lose.

You're not necessarily going to die.

It's not necessarily just the possibility of me losing.

Just like you can't buy your happiness with someone else's misery.

My misery does not buy your happiness.

It's a terrible, cruel thing to say.

Me too.

I guess it's okay to be happy now.

Eventually.

I don't want to die.

I'm afraid of dying.

I'm afraid of what happens after I die.

Ellen, who will take her own life, and those left behind.

All I've seen is Ellen, but I shudder to think of the thoughts and feelings of those who didn't see her.

Because.

For once, I'm going to make a choice that shouldn't be made.

I know I shouldn't pick it, but I do.

"No."

I, shake my head.

Yes.

Let's keep it simple.

"I promised."

It was a clear promise.

There were plenty of days when I almost died.

There were times when I encountered enemies I couldn't defeat by fighting.

Once, in the face of such an enemy, I survived on a promise.

"I won't make you sad."

Luna Artorius.

She saved my life for one reason.

I won't make Ellen sad.

The rest of it was because I said I'd do it anyway.

"I promised your mom."

She didn't believe me.

Just as I knew this was coming, Luna knew it was coming.

But if I end up dying at Ellen's hands, and she takes her own life, that promise is ultimately unfulfilled.

Nor are they ordinary.

It's a promise to God.

So you have to honor it.

No, I want to keep it.

"So, even if I wanted to kill you, I can't."

The moment you said that.

Suddenly.

Really suddenly.

The world stopped.

And it turned red.

"What......?"

Everything stopped, and I was the only one who could move.

Even the rain stopped.

In a world where time has stopped, something is different.

The dark clouds have cleared.

And there was a giant hole.

In the center of the sun, now dozens of times larger than usual, was a gaping hole.

No.

Not a hole.

Something is blocking the sun.

The sun is dozens of times more massive than usual.

And, the moon obscuring it.

"Th...... expression?"

With a sudden solar eclipse, the world came to a standstill.

And.

Through the stopped raindrops, I saw something that hadn't been there before.

"You didn't forget your promise."

I turned my head at the sound of a familiar, nostalgic voice that seemed to come out of nowhere.

I couldn't help but doubt my eyes.

Now there was someone I thought I'd never see again.

Month.

And the sun.

I know someone who is involved in both.

And there is only one person I know of who can perform such a miracle.

"Hello......?"

Luna Artorius.

The same person who appeared in the moonlight appeared in front of me, this time with a huge eclipse.

"Did you not say."

What she said as she sent me on my way.

"The favor of the moon and the sun be upon you."

It was a promise, not an origin.

Episode 668.

Luna Artorius.

She appeared with the eclipse.

I wonder if he was watching this from somewhere.

When I mentioned the moon and the sun, I thought it was just a way of asking for blessings.

I don't know if it was the rejection of the transaction or something else that was important.

A promise not to make Ellen sad.

It was my willingness to honor that promise that led to Luna's intervention.

We don't know why.

As far as I can tell, the closest thing to an absolute in the world has appeared.

It's impossible for me to beat Ellen in her current state.

But if you're Lunar, you can do it.

Alsbringer summons an incarnation.

But she is the incarnation of two gods.

She could definitely do it.

"How did you get here?"

As if to say sorry.

As if they were proud.

Luna was looking at me like that.

Luna looked at me and smiled wistfully.

"I'll take care of 'that'."

Then, state your purpose bluntly.

It takes care of it.

"Then Ellen would have to go to......."

"It will come back to you. The way you wanted it, the way you envisioned it. Whole."

The words made my heart race like crazy.

You'll get an intact Ellen back.

It will return to its original state.

All the spirits are gone, the gate debacle is over, and I get everything I wanted.

That's it.

that's it.

The time I spent traveling to Rizaira to see Luna wasn't really about making me stronger, it was about making a difference that would allow her to engage with the world.

"The rest, I'll leave to you."

Luna walks steadily toward Ellen.

As if we don't need to talk about it anymore.

Is this it?

Everything is resolved.

Is there a moment where there are other problems, but they're just problems in the world, and you just have to solve them?

Just like that.

Just like that.

In this goddamned world.

It's not that bad.

It can't be.

"What about your mother?"

"......."

Luna's steps stopped at my call.

If it were that easy, there would be no reason not to do it by now.

There has to be a reason for Luna's appearance at this point.

If it was something I could do with the flip of a palm, I should have done it sooner.

Watch, watch, watch.

It must have appeared out of necessity.

"It's gone, right?"

"......."

"That's what it is."

It certainly won't come without a price.

If it was something she could do for nothing, she would have stepped in long ago.

At Richie's grave, Luna tried to kill me.

If she had killed me then, she said, she would have disappeared from the world in return.

Same for this one.

In exchange for doing this, she will disappear.

That's why it's only now showing up.

She doesn't want to disappear either.

You showed up because I still want to keep my promise.

You'd want to do something about it.

"I am not of this world by nature."

Luna, who has stopped walking at my call, looks back at me.

"I've existed long enough without a circle, I've done things without a circle, I've had happy times without a circle, so I have no regrets."

"......."

"If I am not sorry, why should you be sorry?"

That should do it.

If Luna sacrifices herself to get Ellen back, is that it?

I don't know.

I don't even know how to beat Ellen.

Even if we win, we don't know how to pull those spirits out of Ellen and destroy them.

Luna says she'll do it all for you.

Is that it?

That is.

It's an all-too-comfortable conclusion.

It's hard to accept.

I can see why in the future.

I would have rejected this intervention from Luna as well.

If Luna gets involved, she'll disappear.

I would have rejected her intervention and made a deal.

And Luna was unable to stop Ellen's self-determination.

I wouldn't have wanted Luna to sacrifice herself when I could have done it all myself.

But what's different.

I know the consequences of accepting the deal.

The future is obviously different than the future that would have happened without knowing anything about it.

Is letting Luna sacrifice herself the only answer I can find from the future I've seen?

I really.

Can't do anything, no role?

"And your father?"

"......."

It was the wrong thing to say in this desperate situation, and Luna seemed to freeze up a bit at my comment.

As if I'm pathetic for saying that even in this situation.

"I'm done talking to Ronan."

As if to say, I've told you enough, it's none of your business.

By the way.

Unlike how it looks in Lizaira, I have a pretty good idea of what the couple looks like in real life.

Madame, the embodiment of the gods.

Human husband.

Obviously, Ronan doesn't have a say.

"You didn't ask me to know that because that's what I chose to do?"

"......."

"Right."

By the way he kept his mouth shut and glared, I could tell Ronan had been informed.

Luna, on her way to Ellen, finally comes back to me with an annoyed look on her face.

-Cock

Luna pushes my forehead with the tip of her index finger.

"In this situation."

-Cock

"A good child is."

-Cock

"With tears of gratitude."

-Cock

"Staying quiet."

-Cock!

"It's polite."

-Bam!

"Eek!"

The rebuke, punctuated by a chestnut, sent me spiraling backwards.

Despite this situation.

I laugh.

"No."

"......."

"You said you wouldn't let Ellen be sad, but you don't want her to die."

"You don't die. You merely return to the will and power that belong to you."

"If I can't see anymore, what's the difference between that and dying?"

"......."

In other words, you're replacing sadness with sadness.

If you trade Ellen for Luna, you're bound to end up with Ellen being sad.

To get Ellen back, I must die, or Luna must disappear.

In the end, something important is missing from Ellen's life.

The irritation faded from Luna's expression.

Her expression turns cold.

The first time you saw me.

It was the look on his face when he was seriously trying to kill me.

Just seeing that look sent chills down my spine.

"Is there any other way, then?"

"......."

"If I disappear, you'll die in a reckless fight, and that thing will go crazy."

"......."

"It's not like you have any choice but to let me take care of that for you, and you're just going to throw a fit because you don't want me to go away?"

"Yes."

Luna's brow narrows at my unthinking words.

"Maybe like this....... Like this......."

Luna lets out a deep sigh.

"What a clueless, ugly little bastard......."

He didn't just say it, he seemed genuinely disappointed.

Even in this situation, when everything could easily be solved by someone else, I found myself swarming with no answers, and it was so pathetic that I couldn't stand it.

No way, no way.

They're just being pushy.

I want Ellen back.

But I also don't want Luna to disappear.

I wonder if there's a better ending.

Why does it always have to be at the expense of something.

"That's the way it's supposed to be."

"......."

"You know."

Come to think of it, it's always been that way.

There was never a way to do it.

I didn't know how to get stronger.

I didn't know what caused the gate.

I didn't even know how to find Lizaira.

For any given problem, there has never been a perfect way to solve it.

But I got hit.

I can't count the number of times I've crashed and burned, but I can count the number of times I've miraculously figured out how to do something or somehow solved a problem.

It's not an absolute, but I've gotten stronger.

We had a gate incident, but now we know why it happened.

I didn't even know how to get to Rizaira, but I found it somehow.

Maybe that's why Luna is in front of me now.

"I don't know," he said, "but it's a miracle that it's worked at all."

"That's right."

"Shut up and listen."

"......."

"Where is the guarantee that it will be the same this time?"

"No."

Blind.

It's pathetic to me that you can't do anything about it and refuse the only solution.

But what to do.

I don't want to lose it.

If you accept Luna's sacrifice because you can't help it now.

What's next?

Now that Luna has accepted that she has no choice, she will make other sacrifices as well.

I know I have to make compromises to survive.

But if you get used to compromise, you'll end up sacrificing everything you hold dear.

I'm afraid to take that first step.

It's impossible to live a life without compromise.

I don't want to live a life where I'm used to compromise.

It was full.

And I don't want to let go of anything.

Ellen, Luna, too.

I don't want to get used to the idea that in order to have one, you have to give one away.

"Fool."

Luna finally clenches her teeth and turns away from me.

It was clear that he was genuinely upset.

I would be genuinely upset if I had to go to all this trouble to say no, and then you just said no without doing anything about it.

"Don't expect me to help you twice."

They mean it.

After much deliberation, I've come to the conclusion that I'm going to abandon the easy way out and take the road that leads only to death.

They're not going to show up to help me twice.

It would have been a stroke of genius.

Getting Ellen back with Luna's help would have solved everything.

But since you declined, you won't be helped twice.

I have no intention of accepting a deal with a spirit, so there is a high probability that I will die.

Perhaps on my deathbed, I'll wish I had gotten Luna's help.

But I'm the one who makes the decisions now.

I don't want the Ellen from the world where Luna disappeared.

A mother died for her daughter, and I don't want to rejoice that she's back.

Luna turns away from me and walks over to Ellen.

Luna looks down at me on the ground, disgusted.

She waves her hand in the air.

Then, in her hand, a sword.

A cloak was draped over his shoulders.

"......?"

"That's all I can do."

In her hands were, apparently, Lament, the sword of the moon, and Rafelt, the cloak of the sun.

In the suspended world, the Voidblade and Suncloak in Ellen's hand were gone.

Luna has stolen Ellen's holy relic, which was her biggest problem.

This is something that didn't happen in the preview.

A different future, a different outcome from my different words.

I don't know what changed.

Clearly, something is different.

"Look, there's something there."

"Come on!"

-Bam!

"Eek!"

I got my ass kicked.

That's probably not something you want to pay for by ceasing to exist.

Yes.

After all, we have something.

There's something you can do for them that doesn't have to cost them their existence.

You wouldn't have known any of this if you'd stayed put.

You should have just masturbated to the idea that you had no choice, and told Ellen that your mother saved you and disappeared.

I can't help but let it show on my face.

"Even in this situation, I still hate you."

Luna looks at me and grits her teeth.

He looks like he's going to go crazy because he hates me.

But he's doing it because he can't stand to see me die like this.

We can't just leave them alone.

"If you've come this far and you can't do anything about it, you might as well die, you ugly bastard."

She looks at me with an evil eye.

He looked frustrated, annoyed, and bewildered.

I don't think I've ever been a very expressive person.

Come to think of it, so did Ellen.

I must have some sort of talent for pissing off people with Ellen-like personalities to the point of insufferability.

"You said something like, 'Don't you ever want to have another child?"

"What? Oh....... I did."

Do you really think that.......

Have you tried it?

"I'm never going to have kids."

Luna gritted her teeth.

"For a kid like you who's too hands-on, that's a problem."

Ragan and Ellen got lucky.

What if I'm unlucky enough to be a kid like you?

So, I'm anxious and scared and I can't give birth.

"But......."

With that said.

"Live."

You say you'd rather be dead, and then you end up saying something like that.

"Some good sons, some bad."

"The stronger son, the weaker son."

"I don't need all that."

"I."

"I liked my son best when he was alive."

"You, not the helpful me, the living me."

"Like you want me to be available at any time."

"Me too."

Such.

With sad words from experience.

As always.

She disappeared with a single step.

Episode 669.

Once Luna was gone, the world began to move again.

The sky is cloudy again, and the raindrops that have stopped falling pour down to the ground.

-Shoot!

There's a dizzying cacophony of gunfire and binge drinking, and battles between monsters and allied forces are raging everywhere.

Its depth.

The final battlefield, shrouded in torrential rain.

Beyond.

It was the only one besides me who noticed the sudden change.

Suddenly, Lament and Rafelt were gone.

"You're playing tricks."

You'd think I'd pulled a fast one, since you wouldn't have noticed the world stopping.

Cloak of the Sun God and Sword of the Moon.

As an incarnation of the sun and moon, it makes sense that Luna would be able to take it away from its owner.

It's probably the most help she can give without paying such a high price that she disappears.

Or maybe she paid a price for this, but we'll never know because she didn't tell us.

Luna doesn't want me to die.

Look.

Mother.

On a topic where I called you an asshole for not getting it.

Since they swarm, they help in ways other than disappearing.

If I hadn't known the future, I would have told my mother to go away because I was going to die, and Luna would have given in to my insistence.

Then I would be dead, and so would Ellen.

If they had stayed put, Luna would have solved everything and disappeared, and Ellen would have lost her mother.

I choose the third option.

Without even accepting the transaction.

Luna doesn't even take the hand that is outstretched to her.

It will do it somehow.

So I told him to back off.

The result.

Luna isn't gone, and the two holy objects that made Ellen the most powerful person in the world are gone.

Voidblade's absolute offense.

Lapelt's absolute defense.

We lost two.

And I still have two holy relics.

It would have noticed that the two holy objects that had suddenly disappeared did not respond to its will.

The warrior has lost his holy relic.

So, maybe now you can be an opponent.

And Luna said.

that they won't help anymore.

The cost of refusing an incarnation's favor is high.

She really won't help you any further than that.

If you've come this far and lost, you might as well be dead.

Absolute offense.

Absolute defense.

They're gone.

They are not equivalent.

Because I still have two holy relics.

Now, on the contrary, the conditions on my end are good.

If you still lose.

If this fails.

Yes.

In Luna's words.

I'd rather die.

-Rumble

Somewhere on a battlefield far, far away, a thunderclap rises.

-shootaaaaa

From the great pit where the rain puddles, it looks at me, bereft of its holy object.

"If the holy relics are gone, it must mean the gods have abandoned us."

"It means the gods want you to win."

"They want our deaths to be forgotten as they are."

"Yeah......."

"If so, we will reject the gods."

It doesn't scream at you to return the missing holy relic.

If you feel abandoned by God, say that you will no longer seek God's name.

It moves slowly.

-sigh

There was something among the ruins that I couldn't tell if it was the remains of a broken building or something else.

It picks up something sticking out of that corner.

It was a rusted sword, unrecognizable as to who it belonged to, and even more unrecognizable as a half-broken hilt.

It was an ugly sword that couldn't have been very good quality even when it wasn't rusted.

Probably the sword of someone who fought here a long time ago, when the Diane's Gate debacle broke out.

The corners of its mouth curl up into a smile for the first time.

That's obvious.

It was a smile.

"Rather....... good."

Ellen is holding the broken sword and laughing.

"It's not a holy grail."

"The sword of a nameless man, swept away in your stories."

"A trampled, broken weapon."

"Rather, I am worthy to pierce your heart."

The sword of the trampled, of those who are nothing.

The swords, spears, and bows of such men, lying abandoned in the world.

It may not be the most powerful weapon to kill me.

A weapon that deserves to kill me.

A grayish aura begins to grow around the broken sword.

-gooooooo

The weapon's ominous gray aura begins to smolder and smoulder in the form of death.

A weapon of nothing.

Rather, it's that old sword that looks like it might break if you hit it.

Something in that sword.

Something neither magical nor divine.

The sum total of hate, anger, and despair.

That would be, obviously, resentment.

"Behold the devil."

"Can our resentment reach your heart."

"We're curious too."

Can you really call that a weak weapon?

Rather, it's the weakest thing in the world.

The most dangerous thing in the world.

The saddest thing in the world.

Isn't that a weapon?

\* \* \*

As many people have died since the Gate, there must have been countless moments when they were forced to fight monsters with nothing but swords and spears.

There will be as many broken weapons as there are dead.

How many times have the powerless been forced to fight with powerless weapons.

How many others fell without weapons.

As if all those weapons had been put together and refined, the Sword of Resentment exuded a dangerous aura.

The moment the sword struck Alsbringer.

-Quack!

"K......gh!"

I felt an indescribable pain.

Not in the flesh, but in the soul.

It was the exact same kind of pain I felt when the spirits entered my soul to consume me.

The mere clash of sword against sword is enough to tear one's brain to shreds.

It smiles at me as I back away in a cold sweat.

Like a Voidblade, it's not a weapon that if you misplace it, you'll die on the spot.

But the unearthly power of that sword inflicts ghastly pain without ever touching me.

It was the same kind of pain I felt when my soul was about to be consumed.

Fear and pain that you never want to relive again.

It feels like it's just one swipe away.

"Heh...... billion.......1"

Physical wounds can be regenerated by Tiamata's divine power.

But the pain inflicted on the soul is cumulative.

It can't be healed.

If the Voidblade is a weapon that can kill me at any time, that's a weapon that can mow me down.

It's not sharp, but it attacks different parts of the body.

When it took over my body, I experienced several comas.

It's not as powerful a weapon as a Voidblade, but the moment you get dizzy, a huge gap opens up.

-Quang!

-Kaahhhhh!

The broken sword doesn't pierce my Auror armor, but it sends a powerful shock of its own, an ache in my brain that threatens to tear my soul apart.

-Bam!

"Cr......gh!"

And not just a weapon, Ellen's body is a weapon in itself.

You can tear monsters apart with your bare hands, even when you have no weapons at all.

It's not that the conditions have gotten worse, it's just that we can now attack them spiritually in addition to physically.

If anything, they've taken the holy relic away from him, forcing him to seek out more dangerous weapons.

Excuses are lame.

Already now, the future is different.

Luna was as helpful as she could be.

Importantly, it found the other weapons, but not the other shields.

That's important.

"Flame."

-Currrrr!

With a word of determination, a massive shockwave of flame erupts from the flames of the pyre and explodes at Ellen's feet as she lunges for me.

-Quack!

But, as if she knew before the sparks flew, Ellen ducks out of the way and lunges at me as I bounce back.

The water vapor from the explosive evaporation of the standing water was trying to block his view, but his reflexes hadn't changed.

I can't see it, but it's there, like it already knows, cutting through the vapor to get to me.

-Ka-ching!

"Ugh......!"

Just the thought of crossing swords is enough to tear your mind apart.

First.

My immobility was disturbed.

The aurors on the Tiamata and the auror armor protecting my body are disrupted.

Very briefly.

"......!"

-skuck!

But in that split second, the broken sword slashed halfway across the nape of his neck.

The good news is that my distraction was brief.

-Bang!

I managed to close the distance, kicking Ellen as she tried to land the decisive blow.

Tiamata heals your bleeding nape.

A little deeper and you're dead.

No, it's already deep enough that I think I've cut an artery.

The sword disturbs my will. For a moment, I am incapacitated.

If it weren't for my specialized training in Rizaira, I might have lost my mind the first time I clashed with that sword.

No, they would have been devoured by those spirits before they could get here in the first place.

My fingertips tremble.

Voidblade is dangerous in a different sense.

That broken sword literally attacks me.

The longer the battle goes on, the more your mind will break down.

The moment you pass out, it's all over.

-Kaduk! kang! Kaang!

As the onslaught continues, a soul-crushing pain overtakes my body.

Beyond the physical limitations of a broken sword, it deflects and returns every attack I make.

"@Huck....... 허....... 허억......."

Only after dozens of back-and-forths do they realize it.

Voidblade is not the problem.

The sun's cloak is not the problem.

A broken sword is not the problem.

I've crossed swords time and time again.

Days, weeks, months.

There were times when I was up all night.

The demons may be in control of Ellen's body, but it's still Ellen I'm dealing with.

She fights against her will, but in her own way.

That's the problem.

It's like fighting in a dream.

I learned the sword from Ellen.

So not only does Ellen know everything I know about swords, she's always been ahead of me.

How to slash.

How to stab.

How to measure the distance, and how to close it.

How to use squares.

How to use articulators.

How to write a counter.

How to reverse a counter.

I learned all of this from Ellen.

Of course, Ellen, who taught it to me, did everything incomparably better than I did.

Now, I have to fight the person who taught me everything I know.

Without being able to surpass the Master, you must fight the Master.

He's even holding a broken sword.

You can't win with a holy relic.

-kakak!

Ellen rushes over and strikes again, this time with an honest slash from top to bottom.

When the sword is held at an angle and about to shed.

-Bam!

"Big......!"

I was sent flying, not by the sword, but by the speed of my rush, by an upwardly thrusting knee.

I rolled on the ground a few times in a fit of gut-wrenching agony.

You fall into a puddle, roll a few times, and finally manage to get up.

He drew the eye upward, pretending to strike, but actually putting no pressure on the sword at all.

Reads everything about me.

I know all too well what I'm weak at.

Ellen can't lose to me even if she wanted to because I taught her everything.

Ellen Artorius is my nemesis.

In return for Ellen teaching me the sword, I quickly became stronger. I learned how to fight, and as such, my skills are now second to none.

But in doing so, I had become someone who, if nothing else, could never beat Ellen.

It's like the old days.

I keep getting hit, knocked down, and rolled over.

But I don't feel nostalgic.

The only reason I don't die is because of Tiamata's divine power.

I should have died a few times already.

I was able to recover because it wasn't an absolute death sentence.

And now it's causing me irreparable mental anguish.

My vision is blurry, and I feel like I'm going to pass out.

Even sending a stream of magic through your body becomes more and more daunting.

I've gotten this far.

I don't have laments and lapelts.

And you still lose?

Can't I win this?

Or am I just weak?

Then how.

What was I supposed to do?

I thought I had done everything I could on my own.

The pain that accumulates in my mind weakens me.

Negative, self-defeating thoughts fill my mind. Even though I know these thoughts are forced upon me by the whispers of those demons.

The urge to give up and let go of everything is overwhelming.

Without that broken sword.

Then what.

Is it better?

If you're holding a really normal sword, not that bizarre one.

I mean, what difference does it make if you don't even have a weapon?

It's a fight against someone who knows everything about me.

Now it looks like Ellen could throw away her weapons and fight with her bare hands and still lose.

No, I think I'd lose more overwhelmingly if I fought without the penalty of a broken weapon.

There's no reason for your opponent to see the loser mentality creeping in.

Lightly, like a leap, Ellen rushes toward me.

You raise your sword to block the lunge, but you know it's coming.

I'm not going to be stopped this time.

My heart was broken.

Confidence in victory is not the same as winning.

But.

Conviction of defeat.

That, necessarily, results in defeat.

The moment Ellen slashed at my helplessly raised sword, I felt the pain of my soul overtake me once more.

I was completely disarmed, and the Tiamata slipped out of my hands.

-Got it!

The moment Ellen hits me, the water in the puddle splashes everywhere, creating a wild splash.

I'm going to die.

I miss the sword, and Ellen pounces on me, crushing me.

You can't run away from it because it's got you all tangled up.

I know.

Simple.

I've fallen victim to this time and time again.

As he rushes at me, he sheds his sword, sending his entire body flying and crushing me.

Looking me up and down.

With a sword pointed at my throat.

Always.

"It's dead."

Yes.

Always.

Like this.

I said.

Episode 670.

What I heard was, unmistakably, Ellen's voice.

I couldn't help but be surprised.

And it was the same for the other side.

It stood there, dead-eyed, its hand trembling as it held a sword to my throat.

It's something we've done time and time again.

Like fighting Ellen's way, but without her will.

After a battle of inertia that I've fought time and time again, Ellen stopped, not shoving her sword into my throat.

I've always been on the losing end.

Ellen has always won.

Just as it had become habitual for me to lose to Ellen, it had become habitual for her to win against me.

So, the habit of stopping at the last minute was still there.

I said the words I always say, and they slipped out without me realizing it.

"Ugh....... Ugh......! Ugh......! Black! Hmph!"

Unbearable tears flowed from Ellen's dead eyes.

Tears mixed with rainwater flowed down my cheeks.

Something that shouldn't be crying is crying.

Not tears of frustration and anger.

I'm just crying because I'm sad.

"Ellen......?"

"Black......! Ew, ew, ew, ew. Ah....... Ugh......."

We don't know what's going on.

However, in the silence, I could hear a fierce struggle.

It's not completely gone.

Clearly, there's still an Ellen in there somewhere.

Yes.

Luna said she could give Ellen back.

Even though we haven't actually borrowed Luna's power, that already tells us that we can get Ellen back.

And I said that that one could give Ellen back in the first place.

Ellen didn't disappear.

It's just that I'm weak.

It's just that I'm weak and can't take it back.

Luna can give it back, and it can give itself back.

It's just that I can't find it.

I can get Ellen back intact, and she's still in there somewhere.

Clenching her teeth, trying to do something about it, but unable to do anything, she cries.

Suffer.

-Currrrr!

An off-white stream of air begins to rise from Ellen's body.

"Off......eh......eh......!"

Hold your head in a bun.

"흐....... black....... Heh......eh...... ugh. Ugh!"

-Crunch!

With a torrent of souls that seemed to have lost their minds, a shockwave hit me that threatened to tear apart the earth around me and crush my body.

I wonder how many tens of meters we've been pushed back.

I'm pushed out of the way, barely able to get to my feet, and Ellen grabs my head in a torrent that feels like something is pouring out of me.

-Currrrrr!

Amidst the earthquake-like rumbling of the ground, something was welling up inside of it.

"Kill....... kill....... I have to kill....... You too....... And the warrior....... All that you love. All that is dear to you....... You must take it....... Is that....... It's only fair....... Even so....... you have to......."

It glares at me, clutching its broken sword, spirits radiating from its body.

You don't know if it's bad or good.

If it gets worse, is it good for me?

A torrent of spirit surges through Ellen's body, and she doesn't know if it's escaping or running wild.

But the harsh gray torrent rising from the broken sword made it clear that it was as dangerous to me as it was to him.

If you get too close, you might get killed.

But a strong sense that it's now or never.

It was definitely there.

How to combat it.

I don't know.

How to kill that thing.

I don't know.

But I do know this.

Having been consumed by it, having had my soul attacked by the power of the strange sword it wielded, I knew one thing.

It can kill the living, but it can't kill the soul.

You can inhabit something and take control of its body, but you can't kill the original owner of the soul.

If that were possible, it would have killed my soul the moment it entered me from the beginning.

The failure to do so means that, while it is a collection of souls, it can never be killed or destroyed as a soul.

I am the proof that I was swallowed by it and not killed.

The fact that Ellen's spirit is still out there somewhere proves it.

So.

Go.

-Currrrr!

Toward it that rushes at me, wrapped in the torrent of a wild soul.

It doesn't back away, it moves closer.

-Quadruple!

It wasn't just the mind that was being attacked, but the sword felt like a huge physical pressure.

-Currrrr!

The raindrops were being pushed back by sheer force of physics without even reaching us.

From the broken sword against Tiamata, wild flames erupted as the pressure of the surging spirits clashed with Tiamata's divine power.

We don't know if the spirits are extinguished flames or physical flames.

The flames of the demon enveloped me, and I felt like my reason was being blown away by the pain that threatened to tear my brain apart.

In the torrent of the soul, it tries to kill me somehow, like squeezing out the last spark.

A pain that feels like it will tear my soul apart, and a different kind of pain that threatens to tear my heart out.

But.

Pain may weaken the soul, but I know it won't kill me.

The Voidblade cuts through my flesh.

Though that sword of resentment attacks my soul.

You can never kill a soul.

You don't have to break down in pain and fear.

-Carded!

I know.

You can't win.

I've never won, not even once.

For the unknowing Ellen, the days of learning to wield a sword while hiding the fact that she was a demon were always like that.

He didn't learn the sword so that he could later fight Ellen and win.

This is how we ended up fighting.

It was always my job to lose badly when Ellen came out with her heart on her sleeve.

Only defeat was mine.

But it wasn't always the same defeat.

One sum, then two sums, then three sums, then four sums.

Before I knew it, I was able to fight for about ten minutes.

"It's hard.

We'll have an Alsbringer. Ellen once said that because she was tired of dealing with me.

I always lost.

It always fell.

I was a progressive loser.

I knew I couldn't win, but I gritted my teeth and tried.

I didn't get stronger to fight Ellen, but I did it for what was going to happen one day.

I've been losing to you my whole life.

-Currrrr!

As we locked swords in the raging torrent, I looked into Ellen's eyes, filled with hatred and rage, as she somehow managed to push my sword away and go for my throat.

Say.

"Only once......."

Since the Gate debacle, I've shed tears that I've never shed before.

"Perfect."

Eventually, it can't hold it in and bursts out.

"Really, just once......."

I didn't cry because I knew tears wouldn't change anything.

"Because it's good for once."

So desperate.

So desperate.

Eventually, the tears come.

In a storm that tears at the soul, where the tears that fall are lost in the torrent of the soul.

"If I....... win....... why not......?"

Only once.

For now, when it matters most, we want to win.

I can win now, or I can spend the rest of my life losing to you.

If you lose now.

From now on, you can't lose even if you want to.

I can spend the rest of my life beating the crap out of you like I did at Temple.

"So......."

That eternity.

It's enough to get all that time back.

To my self-implication.

I call out to my spirits.

Just this once.

Only once.

"I am......."

For now.

"null......."

No matter what.

"Win."

will win.

-Crunch!

"Off......u.......h......aahhhhhh!"

It's facing some kind of limit, and its behavior is getting wilder and wilder.

-Bang!

Instead of blocking the upward slash, step back to avoid it.

No matter what power is imbued in a weapon, its absolute limits remain unchanged.

Broken Sword.

There are limits to that.

He lunges and deflects the incoming sword this time.

It fights with Ellen's senses, but in the end, the thing that owns the body is clearly confused.

Dulled.

Ellen Artorius, I know my sword better than anyone in the world.

But eventually.

Because.

I know Ellen's sword better than anyone in the world.

It's me again.

He deflects the sword in front of him and somehow manages to go for my throat this time.

You parry my sword and then duck to avoid a swipe at your neck, lowering your stance.

Avoid the knee that will shoot up toward you as you lower your stance, and turn your head to avoid it.

That distorted face, crazed with confusion, anger, and despair, is right in front of me.

"Ugh......h......black!"

A sword stabbing through pain and despair.

But I know this interval won't come back, so I'm right.

-Poof!

"......!"

The sword that stabs me in the heart, I don't block it.

An eerie pain stabs at my brain, but it's nothing compared to the pressure on my soul right now.

Rather, it pulls.

Pull that poked arm out.

-Bam!

Grab it by the throat.

"Ouch!"

-Currrrr!

There's no getting away from it.

I'm willing to be stabbed in the heart a few times for the sake of one victory.

Dozens of times, hundreds of times.

Thousands of times.

I would have done anything and everything to get you back.

This is probably about right.

The torrent of souls pummels my body with physical force, but my body breaks and regenerates at the same time.

If I don't kill on the first hit, I play forever.

I can do that because I still have my holy relics.

For the sake of a single victory.

For a one-time opportunity.

I've been waiting for this moment of weakness.

Without sacrificing Luna.

Without sacrificing myself.

I grit my teeth and let go of countless opportunities because I knew this moment would come.

I'm going to do something now or never.

Toward it, struggling with its grip around my neck, as if to tell me to let go.

Toward Ellen.

Everything I've ever done to kill monsters.

All of my achievement points that I hadn't spent in a very long time for this moment.

Write now.

To get you back.

And maybe.

which will be the last.

[Use all 287,620 achievement points].

"Retire.

"Hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Since then, there's been no such thing as unearthly powers.

It doesn't need to be self-suggesting.

These powers can be the last to go.

Because we don't need it anymore.

Now more than ever.

More than any other moment.

Desperate.

With the most powerful salts.

Barely (自己暗示)

I command you (言靈)

With that said.

"Disappear!"

Episode 671.

-currrrrr

There was a lot going on on the battlefield, and in the depths of Diane, where the otherworldly dragon had appeared, things were still happening.

But only a few were able to witness the transformation firsthand.

-shootaaaaa

A torrential downpour obscured the scene, as did a huge cloud of water vapor from the explosion.

It was impossible for the Allies to concentrate there, if not for that reason alone.

The fight against the remaining monsters was raging, and the frenzied Immortals were slaughtering allies and monsters alike indiscriminately, causing great chaos.

So there was no one watching what was going on in the depths of Diane.

Suddenly, a grayish-white torrent pierced the sky, then ebbed and flowed.

But then something else happened.

A huge cloud appeared.

It was a puffy cloud, similar in color to a dark cloud scattering heavy rain.

But it was too close to the ground to be a cloud.

And in the clouds, despairing human faces were constantly appearing and disappearing, writhing as if they were alive.

Only a few people realize that it is a collection of all the souls that have ever died.

However.

-Greer

But the ominous, eerie, and guttural screams that the giant cloud spat out were whispered in the ears of everyone on the battlefield.

Some were moved to tears by the desperation in the sound.

Right under that giant cloud.

-shootaaaaaaa

There, in the pouring downpour, was a man holding a woman in his arms.

"ah......."

The man was looking up at the sky with a despairing look on his face, the rain hitting him in the face.

You've done everything you can.

I was able to get it back eventually.

But it wasn't a complete success.

The chanting, hoping to make the spirits disappear, was only half successful.

Ellen Artorius has disappeared from her body.

But it didn't disappear from the world.

It was still tangible, still weeping strangely.

It can find its next body, or it can spread its curse across the world and bring ruin to all things.

The demon embraces the girl he has finally reclaimed, and looks up at the sky with a determined expression.

If you can't make it go away, the disaster it causes will continue.

It can also be picked up by others.

Or again, inhabit the body of Ellen Artorius.

Or he could be inhabited by a demonic body.

-pot!

Suddenly, however, someone appeared at the demon's side.

"Something outrageous has happened."

That's an old wizard.

He was a vampire named Antirrhinus.

As always, he looks like he's up to something nefarious.

You have the first victory you wanted, but the girl has fainted and the demon is now powerless.

The demon crouches down, clutching his precious girl, and points a trembling finger to the sky.

Even the finger pointing was powerless.

"Are you sure you don't mind?"

"......."

"What happens next, I don't know."

"......."

The demon lifts his head with difficulty, looking at the old vampire with an expression of unbearable amusement.

Too weak to speak, the demon's eyes were growing unfocused.

"Now that you've finally succeeded in getting it all back. I don't have to swallow that thing to get the pleasure of twisting my throat in this moment of having everything."

"......."

Intense despair.

Old vampires like that.

"If you are now, and I swallowed that thing, wouldn't it try to kill you now?"

The devil suggested to the old vampire.

When I transferred the spirit to Ellen Artorius, and learned that it had been suggested by Antirrhinus.

And when he sees a future where he's going to die.

The devil didn't kill the old vampire, he made an offer.

"I'm about to make you an offer that will be hard for you to refuse.

'Hehe....... That's interesting.'

It was an offer that even the old vampire couldn't refuse.

"Well, what is it?

At the end of the last.

Wouldn't you like to be the last man standing and have the chance to destroy everything?

If it somehow escaped from Ellen's body, and you can't finally destroy it.

Before it does any other harm to the world, why don't you try it?

And so it became my last enemy.

How about being the final nail in the coffin of the story, not just hovering on the periphery.

If it wanders off without finding a host, that's a bigger problem.

If it can't be extinguished, someone has to carry it.

So that moment of kicking that thing out of Ellen's body.

Someone has to carry the load next time.

"What would you do if I swallowed that?

"I'm going to subdue you somehow and extinguish you, and if I can't, I'm going to lock you up.

'You can't make Ellen Artorius do that, so you're going to make me do it?'

"Right.

'Heh, heh, heh. You're being honest.'

"If you don't want to do it, say no.

Watching the final desperation.

Or, to create my own final despair.

Which one do you want.

The Devil made such an offer to a vampire who reveled in despair.

"By nature, this old man enjoys watching everything from behind the scenes, not doing something in front of it.

An old vampire doesn't enjoy overly decisive afterthoughts.

I like to twist stories, but I don't like to take the breath out of them.

We may interfere and make suggestions, but it's not our job to decide the end of the story.

If there is a happy ending, enjoy it.

If the story ends in despair, I enjoy that too.

I like a story that unfolds on its own, with an ending that makes sense.

I'll add a little bit to that, but I'm not going to go out on a limb and say that it should end in despair, or that it should end in happily ever after.

To end this story on a note of despair, the old vampire always had a chance, but didn't take it.

But this time, it's different.

"But you, faithful Antirrhinus, how can you refuse your lord's command?

I was asked not to sit still, but to be the final desperation.

If you find yourself on the losing end of the final fight, that's a great story too.

If you win, it will also be overwhelming despair.

An old vampire is not one to turn down an opportunity like that.

So in the end.

After an impossible struggle, the demon reclaimed the warrior.

And I haven't changed my mind.

He gestures helplessly at the giant cloud of spirits, as if to tell them to do what they're supposed to do.

You are no longer yourself when you are consumed by it.

Antirrhinus doesn't know what happens next.

You never know what's going to happen.

-Greer

Antirrhinus looks up at the giant cloud of spirits that emitted a grotesque howl.

In fact, the old vampire might have gotten here even without a favor from the Devil.

They revel in despair.

What despair that implies.

You can take it into this body and savor it to the limit.

You can truly sense the immeasurable tears of so many as if they were your own.

"How......."

"Here too......."

"Are you greedy......."

Thus, Antirrhinus seemed to go mad with joy.

You'll eat it and die.

The crazed vampire decided to eat it, even though he knew it would kill him.

There's no reason not to eat it.

I have lived too long to live for the sake of living, and indulging in perverse pleasures has become my purpose in life.

Dying for a taste of that is a small price to pay.

It's worth paying a little more.

The old vampire puts his hand on his arm.

And from there, a crimson red gem is revealed.

You could die eating that.

I want to savor it a little longer.

That's why we've been secretly preparing since we received the offer.

Get ready to gobble that thing up.

The red jewel did not belong to Antirrhinus in the first place.

A certain vampire, older than Antirrhinus, who no longer exists.

Others thought he was seeking the Sage's Stone, but the truth is different.

It's a jewelry he made to give his soul to a girl, and it contains a wish.

This is a vessel for the soul.

The bean failed.

It's a simple truth.

Souls cannot be generated.

Nothing is nothing.

Therefore, after many years of study, he completed his vision, but in the end, after reflecting on the truth he knew, he returned to the void, leaving only this jewel behind.

A vessel for the soul.

Something great, but at the same time useless.

A miracle stone that could do nothing for those who needed it.

That, too, was despair.

The old vampire never told the demon of the stone's existence.

I couldn't give it a simple ending where I could just seal it up and make it disappear from the world.

As in not actively interfering.

I don't want to be the decisive help, I don't want to be the old vampire.

But for now, we need it.

To get that right.

To be the last absolute desperation.

The devil asked for it, so I'm going to do my best to be the ultimate despair.

"Come....... Come, you lost ones......."

In the old vampire's right hand, the crimson gem floated into thin air.

"I want to feed on your despair."

-Woof!

The crimson gem glows, and dozens of primal djinn begin to appear around it.

There is a great deal of soul-searching going on.

It's something the old vampire has never done.

It doesn't matter if it doesn't hold up and breaks.

If so, you just have to take it at face value.

-Greer!

The giant cloud of spirits slowly begins to move, as if in response.

No.

I'd rather not be driven by it.

-Quietly!

Dragged is probably the best way to describe it.

The cloud of spirits is drawn into the Crimson Gem, as if it were being forced by something.

-Kaaaaaaaaaaaah!

The screaming cries were clearly showing that the spirit cloud was resisting the pull.

However, the gem that holds the soul begins to consume the cloud of souls as if it were eating them.

-Currrrrr!

The torrent of souls resists, but the soul vessel sucks them in like the core of a storm.

As it sucked, the crimson gem began to grow increasingly turbid, but it continued to suck in the clouds that blanketed the area as if it had no limits.

"Ooh....... Maximilia....... what a great thing you have made!"

The soul stone begins to consume all the souls, as if it knows no end, until the old vampire can't help but call out the name of the vampire who created it.

How long has it been.

A place where the winds that once broke the earth and tore at the air have ceased.

In between, an old man holding a red jewel stood silently.

-Woof!

However, the jewelry was turbulent.

As if it had so much soul in it that it would break at any moment.

It's a great thing, but it's no wonder it doesn't hold up.

The old vampire remains.

-Bam!

I swallowed the stone.

"Hmm."

"Hmph."

"hi....... Heehee. Hick......."

"Ughhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

The vampire, who was already half-crazy, goes berserk.

Tears of sorrow welled up in Antony's eyes.

With a wry smile of amusement on his face.

"Maybe....... Maybe these sad things......."

"What a world......."

The old vampire laughed for a long time.

The vampire laughs for a long, long time, as if dazed by a despair so sweet, and then his expression turns cold.

"Ah."

"Too much to eat."

"First things first......."

The overlapping echo of bizarre voices is enough to make you realize that you've already swallowed the soul stone, and Antirrhinus is fading away.

But this time, it's different.

Up until now, you've taken the place of your physical owner.

In this case, they become one.

The will of Antrianus and the will of the spirits are merged.

The old vampire will be assimilated, along with his heat.

It is Antony, and it is the sum total of desperate souls.

Antirrhinus looks at the demon, still cowering, and the girl in his arms.

There's no such thing as a final fight.

The demon was stunned.

You've already won the impossible, and you've exhausted all your energy.

So it's actually a no-brainer.

The monster, already something else, neither vampire nor spirit, stares at the stunned figure of the demon, still desperately clutching the girl he had saved.

-shootaaaaaaa

To the demon, stunned by the rain that falls like despair, the monster speaks.

"Maybe you were hoping for something like that."

"It's no fun killing you when you can't resist, so I'll come back for you later."

"Maybe I didn't paint a picture of you all ready to show up to kill me."

"But....... It's not."

"I like stories that are both epically hopeless and divinely hopeful."

"I love horribly vapid stories, too."

The monster slowly approaches the fallen demon.

There's only one question.

Kill the demon first.

Which warrior the devil loves first.

They both die here, at the hands of the monster, having reached the end of everything.

Such.

It will have a miserable and disastrous ending.

Beyond great despair, beyond great hope.

To bring closure to a story that ended in nothing.

It's the devil's choice, and you'll have to live with it.

Just as I thought that, a grayish-white resentment grew in the monster's hand.

"......hmm."

As it approached, it sensed something and backed away.

-Bang!

And something stood between the demon, the warrior, and the monster.

A massive dark greatsword struck between them, and they vanished like a mirage.

The monster turns its attention to the direction the greatsword came from.

And there was a ghost, covered in blood, with no telling how much of the monster's blood he was covered in.

Covered in blood, so much blood that not even the best preparations can wash it off.

The ghost's right arm burned with a strange darkness.

In the ghost's right hand was the dark greatsword made of darkness that had just stood between the monster and the demon.

The ghost, standing before the monster, murmurs in a shaky voice.

"What's the answer....... I still don't know."

"But......."

"The most obvious wrong answer is, I think I know......."

"Here......."

"Here, these two die......."

"As far as that goes, I think it's the most obviously wrong answer......."

"Because I don't know the answer."

"As far as definitive wrong answers go."

"As far as wrong endings go."

"I have to stop him."

"Who you are."

"What you are."

"I don't know what you want."

"Stand down."

-Currrrr!

The greatsword in the ghost's right arm suddenly points at the monster.

The ghostly human says.

"These two, they can't die here."

Seeing it, the monstrous vampire shakes his head.

"And as for you, who are you out of the blue?"

Unfortunately, the monster doesn't know who the ghost is.

He was still too small for anyone to remember.

But it's self-explanatory.

Knowing that history has a name too small to remember.

That's why he didn't put his name to it anymore.

"That stuff, I don't need to know."

I didn't even feel bad about it.

Episode 672.

Only a few were able to see specifically what was happening in the heart of the battlefield.

One of those close to the heart of it was Ludwig.

Slashing, slashing, slashing at monsters in the rain.

As he made his way across the battlefield, building a mountain out of the monster's carcasses, Ludwig saw the battle unfold.

A dragon that seems to have the universe in its body.

After witnessing the dragon's destruction of the Titans at close range, Ludwig despaired, as did everyone else.

But before the creature could wipe the Alliance off the face of the earth with its overwhelming destruction, I saw Ellen defeat it once and for all.

And soon, I saw the battle of the demons and heroes begin.

It was a series of incomprehensible situations.

It's commonplace for people to see demons and warriors fighting, but for Ludwig, it shouldn't have happened.

The two fight.

Ludwig had seen it from afar, but he had a hard enough time taking down the monsters that were flooding in from all directions.

A battle of demons and heroes.

But even more unacceptable was what happened next.

Immortals suddenly began killing monsters and Allied soldiers indiscriminately.

The screams and resentful cries from across the battlefield spoke for themselves.

Ludwig knows what that means.

Christina, who is supposed to be in control of the Immortals, has gone insane, or is dead.

Ludwig doesn't know what's going on.

The important thing is that the nasty monster appeared and disappeared.

With all the warp gates destroyed, all that's left to do is kill the remaining monsters, and the last enemy of humanity is the Immortals.

Immortal has left the battlefield.

And when he went back in, everyone saw him trying to kill a demon fighting for humanity.

Ludwig saw it too.

The demon lured the Immortals and made a mess of Diane.

I've seen him fight for humanity more desperately than anyone else, in more dangerous places than anyone else.

He went out on a limb for humanity, even when that humanity's weapons were trying to kill him.

Can you forgive the devil?

Should the devil pay no price?

I couldn't think about that.

The moment an Immortal starts slaughtering Allied soldiers, people will assume that the Immortal's actions were ordered by the Emperor.

It's all her fault, but people don't even know she exists.

Therefore, all blame and guilt will be pointed at the Emperor.

The empire is not at stake.

When this war ends, the empire doesn't just disappear.

The empire is already gone.

With the Immortals irresponsibly gone, and even now with the tip of their swords pointed at the Alliance, the Empire has ceased to exist.

The rest of the world may not know it, but everyone in the Alliance has already seen the demon fight for humanity.

Everyone saw how he used the threat of being hunted by the Immortals to kill the monsters.

I couldn't help but feel betrayed as I watched Scarlett appear from all corners of the battlefield to neutralize the Immortals.

There's no telling what terrible things could have happened if we hadn't had that alignment.

Scarlett's betrayal proved to be a blessing in disguise for Ludwig.

The empire is gone.

The war is over.

The world needs someone to take the next baton, and it's the devil.

But if the demon dies on the spot.

A demon who went from being the enemy of mankind to its savior in a single day.

Humanity is once again in turmoil.

It doesn't matter if they are good or evil.

Without one to hold the baton, humanity is torn apart.

If the demon dies on the spot.

To whom will the allies pledge allegiance, and how will it all work out?

It's not about whether the empire was right or the devil was right.

The problem is that the empire is divided between those who believe the empire is right and those who believe the devil is right.

If the demon dies, the rift will intensify.

Someone must ensure the safety of all, even in the name of tyranny.

The devil isn't the only one who pays the price.

Responsibility for not stopping Christina.

Failure to persuade.

So at this moment, Ludwig himself is to blame for Immortal's slaughter of the Allies.

No.

Actually, that's probably a good thing.

Ludwig watched as the monsters were sliced and diced.

The devil's desperate fight.

Somehow saving Ellen from an unknown force.

What you tried to keep, what you tried to get back.

I watched as it was finally returned.

Ludwig could not be saved.

I couldn't convince him.

But after a desperate fight that could be seen from afar, the demon succeeded in reclaiming Ellen from something unknown.

That win.

A demon who succeeded in keeping something after that desperate fight.

Reinhardt.

The triumph of a demon who has finally reached that which he could not.

I couldn't let it end in a futile death.

Already seen.

There's a price to pay.

When he said he had to take responsibility, he didn't know the first thing about Reinhardt.

As I watched him being chased by the Immortals from afar, I didn't have the slightest idea of what Reinhardt was dealing with.

We still don't know everything.

We don't know what's been going on, and we don't know what's going to happen.

Just this win.

Reinhardt's victory shouldn't be a miserable return to nothingness.

It's impossible to find the right answer, and that hasn't changed.

I don't think it's right for the world of demons to come.

But.

For the demon to die on the spot.

And the death of Ellen, whom the Devil has somehow managed to save.

That's the wrong answer.

Because it shouldn't be.

Since the path he was on was also one of the worst answers, Ludwig doesn't deserve to pay for his mistakes.

If so, then the minimum line.

So, back to the original mindset.

You have to fight for someone's life.

Not the death of something.

Not the wages of sin.

After all, you're fighting for your life.

-Kwagga River!

That's why Ludwig fights.

No one will remember, and

Even those saved will not remember.

Last fight.

"It's a bizarre power."

A strange gray light flickers in the eyes of an old wizard you don't recognize.

All I knew was that the old wizard had taken everything that had protruded from Ellen's body.

I thought he was one of Reinhardt's men, but he's trying to kill Reinhardt.

Ludwig wields a greatsword of blackness, and the old wizard blocks it with an outstretched hand.

The black magic sword that has been shredding and tearing the flesh of monsters is too easily blocked.

"That right arm, I don't think it's yours."

The old wizard points to Ludwig's right arm, which is burning with darkness.

"I'm sure I've heard of you somewhere, but......."

The old wizard shakes his head.

"Well, I don't remember, but that's not unusual for an old guy like me......."

I can't really explain it, but the old monster was unpleasant to look at.

"But it was a shame that no one got in my way at the end, so maybe that's a good thing."

The old monster loves nothingness, but he's happy enough to know that someone got in his way at the end.

So, I had no intention of killing the demon before I could defeat Ludwig.

Because that's the story.

I'm still not a fan of spoiling a story with tacky tricks.

There was one last time.

So, it's beautiful to get past each other.

"@AndreaMcGee....... 허억......."

He's blocking their way, but Ludwig has already crossed the line of fire several times.

Just as Reinhard had been pushed to the limit and passed out, Ludwig was already at his limit.

Plus, Ludwig didn't get strong in the normal way in the first place.

-Currrrr!

"Turn off...... Yuck!"

The torrent of black magic that erupted from his right arm was out of control, and the pain that coursed through his body was invading his consciousness.

We've come this far after a hard-fought battle.

So Ludwig's stamina was pretty much gone by the time he got here.

The demon had a means of recovery called Tiamata, but Ludwig has none. And Ludwig's condition is not something that can be cured by divine power.

He can't even control the power of his right arm, which has begun to run amok.

You're up against an enemy you don't even know who they are, but they're probably the most powerful you've ever faced, and the situation is the worst.

The old wizard, watching Ludwig's anguish, stretches out his right hand.

"Boy......."

-TzuzuTzuzuTzuzu

"Easy power comes at a great cost."

His hand, lowered to the waterlogged earth, swings lightly toward Ludwig.

Despite being separated by more than two dozen meters, Ludwig saw a rift in space.

The atmosphere compresses, creating a blade of wind that swings toward Ludwig.

"......!"

-Kwaggagang!

"Boom!"

The wizard, who had sent Ludwig flying with a single flick of his hand, was already in front of Ludwig's nose the next moment with a short space leap.

-Ohhhhh!

In the mage's right hand, a strange storm of gray light, not mana, raged.

-Crunch!

A torrent of souls washed over Ludwig.

"Off......hhhhhhhhhh!"

The pain is not physical, but spiritual.

It was an unfamiliar pain that made even Ludwig, who had gotten used to pain during the Chimera procedure, scream.

Swallowed by the torrent, Ludwig rolled across the floor, shivering, unable to get to his feet.

We don't know what it is, but the devil definitely fought something like this.

So Ludwig couldn't help but realize that the pain the demon felt was now being felt by him.

Beyond the pain, the terror of the core rises.

Not on the level of aches and pains, but a soul-sickening sensation.

Despair fills my head.

I can't.

How can something like me.

This is not my place.

Such.

Thoughts fill my mind.

The fallen demon over there.

Was Reinhardt fighting something like this?

How the hell does a demon fight something like that.

What's even weirder is the monster in front of you.

With something like that in your body, why are you having so much fun?

An unfamiliar pain for the first time in your life.

And the horror.

A sinking feeling of despair.

The monster approaches Ludwig, who is shivering all over, and smiles a sickening smile.

"Isn't it more beautiful because you can't kill someone?"

"Hmph......."

"This old man likes the look on the face of a man with a broken heart."

Gritting his teeth, he tries not to back down, but the pain he's just felt has him stumbling backwards.

-Chulbuck

Trembling with fear, Ludwig stumbled backward, and soon fell flat on his ass in a puddle of water.

"ugh....... ugh......."

"You didn't get to see the despair of someone you really wanted to see, so why don't you show it to them instead?"

Unable to make facial expressions while stunned.

How I despair.

There's no telling how much pain they're in.

When you really take it all away from the one who gave you the chance to take it all away at the end. I want to see the look on his face, but I can't see it now.

So, the monster will get that look from the nameless person who showed up to defend him.

Fear grips Ludwig's entire body.

First-time pain.

Unheard of.

Something that truly deserves to be called a monster is coming to bring pain and terror, not death.

Nevertheless, we can't back down.

Squeeze a force that won't let go.

While somehow supporting a wobbly leg.

Happens.

"Ugh!"

Biting your lip until it bleeds, offsetting the pain of your soul with the pain of your body.

Taking a step forward, Ludwig swings his dark greatsword.

-Bang!

Your greatsword is blocked by the force field the monster has created.

If once doesn't work, twice.

-Bang!

If that doesn't work, three times.

-Bam!

The force field shattered, but in that moment, the monster was already preparing for the next one.

What the heck is in front of you.

Why it has this power.

Or maybe I'm just too weak.

The old wizard waves his hand.

"How about this."

-deaddeaddead!

"......!"

The earth trembles and boulders begin to cling to Ludwig's body.

"This is ......!"

Then, squeeze yourself like you're going to break.

-Currrrrr!

Torn pieces of the earth wrap around Ludwig's body, compressing him to no end.

Soon, the rocks become increasingly transparent and turn into crystals.

In a prison of crystals, Ludwig was trapped, wide-eyed.

A normal human being would crumble under the pressure.

However, Ludwig is by no means an ordinary man.

I may not have the name and fame to back it up.

It doesn't fall into the mold of mediocrity.

-Tweet......!

The crystal prison that holds Ludwig is cracking, and it's about to explode.

-Ka-ka-kang!

The crystal shatters, and Ludwig, trapped in it, falls to the ground, gasping for air.

-shootaaaaa

Sagging like a wet rag in the rain, it was already a loser in its own right.

"hao......."

But as if admiring its own escape, the creature stares at Ludwig, who remains collapsed, breathing heavily, trying to get to his feet.

Once again, the dark greatsword is in Ludwig's hand.

The fight continues.

Ludwig is clearly strong.

The Greatsword of Darkness is already a powerful magical weapon in its own right, and it's intimidating enough for an old wizard, and it's capable of destroying defensive forcefields.

It was a monstrous force.

However, the other person is too much of a stranger.

The old monster, with its strange powers, was too alien a foe for Ludwig to deal with.

Magic for traveling through space.

And the torrent of souls was something that Ludwig could do nothing to stop, nothing to avoid.

Monsters don't have to deal with themselves.

Ludwig knew he was just playing.

The flying earth spears, explosions, and thunderbolts can be dodged and crushed, but the torrent of spirits wielded by the old wizard is unstoppable, and the mere touch of it floods your mind with such terror and agony that your mind threatens to collapse.

"Turn off......eh!"

Antony watched with amusement as Ludwig writhed in agony.

It's the kind of power the old monster wishes he had.

A power that doesn't kill, but can cripple.

The power to twist anyone's expression into despair, fear, and pain.

He never coveted it until the devil offered it to him, but once he had it in his hands, it was a power he hadn't realized he wanted.

Antirrhinus was the only one in the world who enjoyed using this power.

Don't let the enemy get in your way.

His limbs are shaking, and his eyes are filled with terror from the pain.

Antony doesn't know who is in front of him.

But just by being here, you're not an ordinary human being, and you don't have an ordinary will.

So, the monster is curious.

How far this power can take a human being.

"Show me. Boy."

-Currrrr!

A torrent of souls from Antrianus' grasp engulfs Ludwig.

"Off!"

Ludwig sits up and begins to shake and scream.

"I wonder what the look on the face of someone who's broken and bent and doesn't even have the will to get up anymore....... I wonder."

It won't kill you, but it will break you to the limit.

Antirrhinus intended to test the limits of its power.

It's a great toy to see what you can do.

It's good entertainment until the real toys wake up.

-Currrrrrr!

"Aaahhhhhhhh!"

As if to remove the legs of an ant before stomping it to death, Antirrhinus looks down at Ludwig, who is having a seizure.

And watch.

Happen.

Do you have the energy to get up, the mental strength to get up.

After the storm passes, Antrianus sees Ludwig on his knees, his legs shaking as he rises to his feet.

His right hand still held the dark greatsword.

"It's happening."

"Ugh......ugh......."

Ludwig already knows that his opponent is playing with him.

I know I can't win.

I'd rather stall for time.

If the stunned demon wakes up, things might change.

I can't.

Reinhardt might be able to.

I always failed, but.

Because Reinhardt always succeeded.

Hold on.

Until Reinhardt gets up.

Not to be a devil's advocate, but.

There must be someone who can find new answers.

And that's not me.

Because he's the devil.

Like Christina.

Killing and destroying things out of spite alone is wrong.

Eventually everyone dies.

Despite your intentions, someone is sacrificed.

If it happens eventually, no matter who's in front of you.

If any of them end up costing you.

If no one has the right answer.

At least one without malice.

I saw no malice in him.

Reinhardt.

It must be honored.

Running, fleeing, fighting.

I've seen the desperation in his eyes as he fights to keep even that in the face of all the evil directed at him.

You have to hold on.

Until Reinhardt gets up.

The monster in front of you also knows that you're interested in it.

You don't know what kind of monster it is, or what the hell you're suffering from.

Just don't fall down.

If all you have to do is get up.

If it can change things even a little bit, it should happen.

Antony smiles when he sees that Ludwig's eyes are still alive.

It's a monster's favorite thing in the world, maybe.

If that will is turned off, it's okay if it's not.

He enjoys the process.

-Currrrr!

In the monster's right hand, once again, the torrent of souls is young.

Episode 673.

-shootaaaaa

It was still raining.

Antirrhinus's expression had already hardened.

"There you go again."

I watched as Ludwig withstood the torrent of souls this time, staggered, and somehow got up.

The dark flame that had been burning in his right arm was already extinguished, and though he was drooling at the corners of his mouth, Ludwig was rising to his feet again, as if he could not be knocked down by something that could not actually kill him.

The average person endures an onslaught of these demons that should cause reason to collapse at the mere touch.

Even the devil is stunned by it, but Ludwig grits his teeth and gets up, knowing he's being played.

Only to stall for time.

You know you're not worth the time you're spending, but you don't go down without a fight.

Is there such a thing as a soul of steel?

Is there such a thing as an unbreakable human being?

Once again.

A torrent of spirits washes over Ludwig.

-Currrrr!

Ludwig, who had been screaming at the top of his lungs, was no longer screaming in agony.

That's not tolerating.

I don't even have the energy to scream anymore.

But it still happens.

This time it will fall.

For the monster, this was no longer a pastime.

If you kill this boy, who somehow manages to hold on, just because he doesn't fall, with your own hands, you lose.

Break it, stomp on it.

I wonder if I should kill the boy who can't get up anymore.

If there is such a thing as unbreakable, I want to see it with my own eyes.

If such a thing exists, I want to know it exists.

It was a curiosity that Antirrhinus had long held.

You should check to see if it breaks.

If it doesn't break, it's amazing.

If it breaks, it reaffirms the truth that existence is always swallowed up by despair.

So, now, it's actually killing it yourself that defeats the monster.

So the moment I decided to see if the boy would wake up this time.

-shhhh!

"!"

-Kwaggagang!

The dark greatsword, flying through the gusts of spirits, shattered the force field the monster had spread and grazed his right ear.

Antirrhinus' right ear disappeared in a gust of black magic.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha....... ha ha......."

In the place where the torrent of souls had ceased, there was a boy crouched, his teeth clenched, breathing hard.

"Yet, did I have enough energy left?"

I watched as the boy's face contorted in despair as his decisive, determined, but ultimately unsuccessful ambush failed.

Waiting for the monster to let its guard down, saving its last bit of energy.

It must have been the surprise of conversion.

However, I missed it.

The miraculous attack clearly succeeded in penetrating the gap, but in the end it was unable to make more than a scratch.

Antony smiles at the look on Ludwig's face as he realizes his one chance has been squandered.

The boy wasn't trying to hold on.

I had a goal in mind.

"You've got a good look on your face."

Nothing is unbreakable.

That look says it all.

"Is that right arm your hope?"

Ludwig's work was unimportant anyway, so it never reached Antony's ears.

That right arm that looks like it's been transplanted from another being.

Something sinister with dark magic.

It's probably related to immortals.

If that's what he's been holding on to for the one chance to turn the tables, that arm is everything to him.

Antirrhinus waves his hand in the air.

The sharpened blade of the wind flies.

-skuck!

"......!"

So futilely, the ground of strength that the boy had held on to through gritted teeth is cut away.

"Eek......!"

Ludwig, who has lost his arm twice, groans as he clutches his bleeding arm.

You don't have the power to turn the tables.

The bee sting on the toy has been removed.

"Now all I have to do is suffer."

-Currrrr!

A storm of spirits forms in the monster's hands, and it lunges at Ludwig.

Hope has been dashed, and now it will be broken.

Since you can't pull off the upset, all you can do is enjoy the look of despair on their faces.

But.

-curl!

"Off...... to......."

-Currrrr!

"ugh......."

"......."

"......."

No matter how much time passes.

Ludwig staggers, but manages to get to his feet.

Clutching the wound on his right arm, he paced the floor, obviously.

Stand up.

Antirrhinus's expression hardened.

That look.

It's like you're dying, but you're determined to keep getting up as long as you have the willpower.

We see Ludwig's eyes, which are constantly waking up.

That glow doesn't fade.

While writhing in pain.

Knowing that all you can do now is stall for time, and that you're just playing for fun.

A worthless enemy.

No, it keeps happening to topics that aren't even enemies.

"Why is this happening?"

"Being nothing."

"Knowing you can't do anything about it."

"Without any basis."

"Why, does it keep happening?"

Without any power.

It just keeps getting up to stall for time.

What variables do you believe will be present when the devil wakes up.

Ludwig, who has lost most of his strength to stand on his own two legs, speaks.

A boy with eyes that are fading, mumbles to himself.

"Because that's all I can do."

"Because I don't know how to do anything but this."

"This, at least, should be done......."

"I don't miss my missing right arm."

"Because it wasn't mine anyway."

"Yeah......."

"Getting up when you get knocked down."

"This was something I could do."

"It's the only thing I'm good at."

"This is all I could do."

"Stupid topics and good stamina were my only strengths."

"I kept running, I kept grabbing my sword, I thought if I did something, something would happen. I did......."

"In the end, it couldn't be anything."

"I could only become something by attaching someone else's arm to it."

"Yeah....... I'm nothing."

"I have no power."

"This must be what I really look like......."

"You can kill me anytime, but if you're keeping me alive because it's fun to do this......."

"Do more, do something."

"As long as I can, it's going to keep happening......."

"Just a little longer, play with me......."

"It's going to keep happening."

"It's the only thing I'm good at."

As if fear, despair, and pain would never break his resolve, he would continue to get up, only to buy time.

For the first time in his life, Antirrhinus felt a strange emotion.

That is.

It was offensive.

What is unbreakable.

I wanted to see it.

However, when faced with an actual unbreakable human being, Antirrhinus felt an unbearable discomfort.

Maybe this stupid.

While being well aware of your own insignificance.

Presumptuously, don't fall down.

Antirrhinus felt.

That one won't fall down.

You'd rather faint from blood loss.

It will continue to rise as long as it has the will, and if it collapses from blood loss, Antony will taste it.

Overwhelming sense of defeat.

If you reach the limits of your body and lose consciousness without being broken, you will only realize that you failed to break an unbreakable human being.

Ludwig's fading eyes tell the tale.

That he would soon lose consciousness, not from a broken heart, but from blood loss.

"It's nothing."

You don't know who it is that's in front of you, but how can you blame yourself?

"This old man has lived an immeasurably long time, and has seen as many great men as lowly ones."

"Some were inscrutably strong."

"I've seen more than my fair share of noble blood behave like lesser mortals."

"immeasurable despair and."

"An immeasurable amount of hope."

"I saw it all boil down to the futility of death."

"There were many great ones, and many insignificant ones."

"But I've never met anyone as insignificant as you, and as tough as you."

"Yeah......."

"How can you not call it great?"

"You are the most uniquely great human being I have ever known."

"How can I say that you are nothing?"

The boy is not strong enough to overcome the old monster.

However, I can't seem to break it.

It cannot be broken by pain that cannot kill it.

It just keeps happening.

You know you can't do anything, but you wish you could.

Not because it's the right answer, but because the death of the demon is the absolute wrong answer.

What must be done, must be done somehow.

It was the first time I had ever encountered such determination.

"I lost."

Antirrhinus says, and this time he raises his right hand.

It held the blade of the wind, not just the power to torment and torment.

You tried to break it, but it won't break.

Take that breath, admitting defeat.

It's unbreakable, so I'm going to break it.

That was the highest praise and homage Antony could give to the nameless man before him.

-Woof!

Ludwig looks at the blade of wind in the monster's right hand.

It was a losing battle.

All I could do was get up, but even that was no longer meaningful.

The opponent has lost interest in an enemy that doesn't go down, and is about to take his life.

After you, it will be the turn of the fallen demon and Ellen.

You don't even know what's in front of you.

I don't know what's going on.

However, at the last minute, he reversed course and tried to protect the demon, but failed.

Like despair.

Like nothingness.

-shootaaaaaaaaa

Rain.

Lower.

"......."

It was a life of failure.

Not protecting anyone, not being strong, not anything.

Failure after failure, losing after losing, making bad decisions after making bad decisions, and finally losing your life.

Well, does it end in a loser's life.

I'm incompetent and stupid, and this is the only ending I'm prepared for.

On a trivial topic.

As a tough guy.

That's it.

You have the confidence not to fall, but you don't have the confidence not to break, and you don't have the means to attack the enemy in front of you.

Something like me.

You can't dream of winning.

We did our best.

That was the best we could do.

I'm sad and frustrated that this is the best I can do, but I did everything I could.

You can't ask for much more than that.

As if that wasn't enough.

Me.

That's enough for my topic.

Didn't do enough.

The moment you think that.

Ludwig couldn't help but be reminded of a conversation from long ago.

Ludwig takes a moment to look at the Demon King, stunned in the rain and unconscious with Ellen in his arms.

I admired it, I hated it, I decided to kill it.

The end is a being determined to protect.

The Devil had certainly heard that before.

It's not an exaggeration to say that the words have stuck to his back.

It was the middle of the night before the semifinals of the Temple Tournament.

Sensing defeat, Ludwig asked Reinhard.

"Reinhard, I have a question for you.

"What is it.

"You've been fighting even though you know you're going to lose, right?

"...... did.

"But, you won them all.

The Demon King, who always fought recklessly, was actually weak, not hiding his strength.

It hid its identity, but not its power.

I don't mean weak, I mean really weak.

It was nothing.

On that topic, I've always fought an impossible battle.

I went into the fight knowing it was Jiri.

But we've always won.

"How do you think that could have happened?

Ludwig wondered about that.

Why fight when you know you're going to lose.

And how the heck I got through it.

"You have to believe.

"You believe?

"Yes.

Obviously.

I've heard it said.

"You're going to lose, but you're going to lose, and you have to believe.

"You can win?

"Yes.

In every fight where you expect to lose, you lose.

"I'm going to win at all costs, and I have to believe I'm going to win.

"What if I still lose?

"What does it matter?

The devil denied Ludwig's mindset.

"I'm going to lose, but I'm going to do my best" is like a ready-made excuse for defeat: "But I tried, so I'll do better next time." Isn't it setting yourself up for defeat, giving yourself an escape hatch?

Saying you've done your best is just making excuses for yourself.

It's the same now.

The moment I think my best is good enough, that's where it ends.

You're already done with yourself.

The Devil said.

It's not about making excuses to lose, it's about making resolutions to win.

Then, just in case.

Just in case.

Just in case there are other results.

Once again, the devil has gained something from an impossible fight and an impossible resolve.

Demon King, who has always come out on top in such fights, proved himself once again.

Who the hell is that.

Can you say for sure that you can't achieve that victory?

Why am I giving up.

You've done your best.

That's my limit.

Why accept death gracefully.

Rather than continue to lose and end up as a nobody who can't do anything.

But only once.

You want one win.

I want to win just once.

It's not dead yet.

Life isn't over until you stop breathing completely.

I lost my right arm, which gave me indescribable strength.

But you still have a body.

Your legs are wobbly, you don't have the strength to stand, and your consciousness is fading.

Still, I figured there had to be a drop of power in there somewhere.

If death is coming.

I'm not going to blindly wait for death.

I can't reach it, but I'm going to try.

Because that's what got Ludwig through all those days when he fell asleep exhausted, when he kept failing and losing.

Not giving up.

Moving forward to the point of ignorance.

Ludwig finally realizes that it was his only weapon, his most absolute weapon.

So before the blade of death approaches, you take a step forward.

-Woof!

Strengthen your physical body by drawing on any magic that may have been lying dormant in a corner somewhere.

It was an enemy that even an implanted Grandmaster's arm couldn't take down.

If death is coming, you should at least try to fight it.

No means no, but I always walked forward, just in case.

With the intention of fulfilling a lifelong obsession to the last.

"You're trying to fight......."

The old monster's expression goes beyond displeasure.

It was a wonder.

Shrouded in a pale blue enchantment, a boy who shouldn't have the strength to move a finger takes a step forward.

It's not much, but it has staying power.

Even if it's a light that looks like it's about to go out.

It's definitely light.

A little bit of light drives out a little bit of darkness.

It gives strength to the weak flesh.

"Yeah. Let's fight."

If it's a fight you're going to die in anyway.

If an enemy you can't resist is trying to kill you.

It's scary.

It's hopeless.

If this dies, so does that.

-Woof!

"And, if you fight."

Why not turn a mental milestone into a victory?

"Victory, I hope."

Even if playing to win doesn't bring you victory.

"So......."

Why stay broken and resigned and wait for death.

and wishes.

"I."

A winning formula for victory.

"Null."

In this spot.

"Win."

Ora.

-Currrrrr!

The part of the sky that used to be the dark clouds opened up.

A beam of golden light strikes the earth.

-Kugugugung!

Something slammed into Ludwig's face with a fierce shockwave.

That's obvious.

It was shaped like a spear.

"Oh....... It's......."

The old monster stares in disbelief at the spear, which appears from the sky in a flash of light.

It has always been the weapon of the lowly.

The easiest form and.

This is the most lethal form.

It's always been the underdog's weapon.

Concise form and concise end of day.

That straight line is the most deadly of all.

It's what a weapon for the weak should look like, when the weak try to fight back against what they can't fight back against.

The old monster knows the name of such a weapon.

Weapons of the underdog.

Reliquary of Courage.

Holy Spear.

"Alixion ......."

Apparently, it had a name like that.

Episode 674.

The Immortals began to slaughter indiscriminately, but the damage was minor.

Scarlett and Kono Lint, who moved up and down the battlefield and focused on neutralizing Immortals.

But the Allies saw the Immortals attacking the Allies.

No one could really see the fight going on deep inside Diane.

Even those who fought near it knew nothing about it, except that it was the site of a series of extraordinary events.

So neither the outcome of the final fight, nor the process.

No one knew.

No one had seen what happened after the otherworldly dragon disappeared.

Not even the monsters could reach the core, so it was Olivia Ranze, who unleashed the power of death and took control of the skies as she slaughtered the remaining monsters and dug deep into Diane's heart.

What Olivia saw was Reinhardt, stunned, holding Ellen in his arms, in the middle of some kind of battle.

They returned with Olivia on the dragon.

Immortals are wiped out.

All of Diane's warp gates are destroyed.

The remaining monsters were either scattered or slaughtered by the allied forces.

The rain has stopped.

The war is over.

\* \* \*

-Tadac

All around Diane, smoke rises from the burning corpses of the monsters.

The Gate Crisis is now fully concluded, and while there will still be countless remaining monsters scattered across the continent, there will no longer be an influx of monsters from the Otherworld.

Humanity has survived.

But as ever, the mood of the should-be hopeful Allies was grim.

For one thing, the sacrifices were greater than any other battle to date.

The Immortals, who had made the war easy up to this point, suddenly attacked the Allies in the final fight.

It's as if they're trying to make you pay for taking it easy.

The resulting confusion, distrust of the empire, and anger were widespread.

Then there was the chaos caused by the sudden appearance of the demonic forces, and the fact that they fought harder than anyone else.

Not everyone on the battlefield saw the Demon appear and fight, but those who did, even from a distance, witnessed the Demon's desperate flight as he killed the monsters, luring the Immortals to kill him.

And, apparently, the fight against the final, unidentified monster, and the vague knowledge that the Devil was involved in what was happening in the depths.

Distrust of the Empire.

And whether or not to trust the long-hated devil.

In the midst of this complexity, the Allies were caught between a rock and a hard place.

At least things were better for the command center.

They were aware of the demonic involvement in the Alliance in the first place, and some even chose to support it.

And now, even those who oppose him know they have no choice but to support him.

Knowing that the Empire had fatally betrayed him when it mattered most convinced him that the Empire was no longer on the side of humanity.

The Allies would rather kill them all than have them fall to the Demon Army.

What happened in the Battle of Diane was not lost on anyone.

As such, the Allied Command was already overwhelmingly in favor of the Demon King.

That's why the leaders of the Demon Army could casually stroll into the General Headquarters barracks and take a seat near the front of the room, even if they were met with fearful stares.

But it was a very unexpected person who now sat at the head of the Allied General Staff.

"Has each military casualty been counted?"

No longer a man of the Empire, though his appearance resembles that of a demon.

Not the man of the empire, but the man who can't.

Charlotte de Gradias sat in the highest seat of the Alliance as the representative of the Demon Army in place of Emperor Bertus.

Something has changed.

It was a bizarre power shift that made me wonder if nothing had actually changed.

\* \* \*

Near the General Headquarters Barracks, where access is strictly controlled.

Access to the General Headquarters was strictly controlled, even as the remaining monsters were being exterminated.

But everyone will know anyway.

The leadership of the Alliance will be replaced by the forces of the Devil.

"Shouldn't you be in a meeting?"

Harriet shook her head as she watched Olivia perch on a crate near the barracks.

"I don't like talking about headaches."

"......Isn't everything you're going to do going to be a headache? You already hate it, so what are you going to do?"

"I don't like....... Cut me some slack today."

"Hmmm....... If you put it that way, there's nothing I can do about it......."

In effect, Olivia was the general manager of all denominational issues going forward.

Olivia had more work to do than Rowen, the Crusader Knight Commander, who was probably chattering away in the barracks right now.

I couldn't help but feel bad for Harriet as she walked out of the meeting, sighing heavily, saying she didn't want to think about it.

Of course, Olivia's performance was nothing to write home about.

He raised legions of monsters to fight monsters, flew across the battlefield on a dragon, and raised countless others from the dead.

The dying are brought back to life by the passing of a dragon cloaked in brilliance.

It was such an overwhelming and miraculous sight that it left a lasting impression on Herriot and everyone else.

A saint riding a dragon.

Rumors were already swirling in the Allied ranks.

You're safe.

It's miraculous.

Everyone fought in the most dangerous places, but none of the demon's closest aides were killed or injured.

Everyone played a role, and every single one of them made a difference.

In the Battle of Diane, he did something so important that the absence of just one of the demonic forces would have shifted the damage scale by 10,000 units.

Herriot, Riana, and Scarlett were the biggest influences.

Without Scarlet, the Allies might have been wiped out against the runaway Immortals.

Olivia looks at Harriet, her eyes bleary with fatigue.

"Is Reinhardt up yet?"

"I think so."

"What the hell happened to ......?"

"I don't know."

But even those who played such an important role didn't know what was going on in the depths of Diane's heart.

An overwhelming monster.

Sudden evaporation.

By the time Olivia arrived, it was all over.

You realize that Ellen and Reinhardt are safe, and you bring them back, but you still don't know what happened.

"And her?"

At Olivia's question, Harriet shook her head.

"I guess I don't remember anything."

I'm referring, of course, to Ellen.

"What happened? Where the hell did that thing on him go? I'm glad you got rid of it, but was there a way to do it?"

Ellen doesn't remember anything, and Reinhard is passed out.

It's a strange finish, one that feels like it's over, but doesn't leave a pleasant aftertaste.

"But....... I'm glad you're safe. Everyone."

At Olivia's grumbling sincerity, Harriet's eyes widened in surprise.

"Yes, thank you."

"......."

Olivia blushed and pursed her lips in embarrassment, while Harriet smiled.

\* \* \*

A barracks near the General Headquarters.

Ellen sat still in the chair in front of the cot, staring down at Reinhardt as he lay unconscious.

You don't know when they will regain consciousness.

"Ellen?"

"......Yes."

Herriot stepped into the barracks and studied Ellen's complexion.

Ellen knows what Harriet is worried about right now.

When Ellen woke up, she was so out of breath that it took a while for her to calm down.

"It's okay. It's gone. I can feel it."

"Thank goodness......."

Harriet smiled in relief and threw her arms around Ellen's neck.

I never thought I'd have a moment like this again.

But then, miraculously, this moment came.

The moment when you can hold each other and not worry about anything.

The moment came again.

Overwhelmed by the moment, Herriot started crying again, and Ellen patted him on the back for a long time.

Ellen doesn't know what happened.

It's important to know what happened in the last fight, Reinhard is knocked out and Ellen doesn't remember anything.

However, Olivia returned to pick them up from the middle of the battlefield.

I also heard all about how the Battle of Diane went.

Immortal's exit, re-entry, and runaway.

Until annihilation.

It's not hard to imagine what's to come.

The empire is gone, and it will be denied to all.

The Devil will rule over mankind.

"Let's stay together now. Because it's all over....... Because the sadness is over....... Just like before. Huh?"

"......Yes."

Ellen nodded slowly, clutching at Harriet's arm, which was holding her tightly.

You can't pretend something hasn't happened.

That's not to say there won't be bumps in the road.

But there was something to be gained, something to come back to.

Ellen stares down at Reinhardt, who is sleeping peacefully.

We don't know what he did, but Reinhardt must have redeemed himself somehow.

I don't remember, but I distinctly remember hearing a desperate voice on the other side of my faint consciousness.

I know it's been an uphill battle.

That's why he's probably in a deep sleep.

-Snarl

Ellen summons Cloak of the Sun.

Ellen doesn't realize that the holy objects have been out of her hands for a while.

Gone are the flames of hatred that flickered from the sun's cloak.

Something that was filled with hatred has taken up residence in you, a flame that burned with the fuel of that hatred, and it's no wonder it's gone.

The hate is gone, and the flames of hatred no longer manifest in the sun's cloak.

This time, Ellen summons Lament, the Moon Sword.

But the moon sword was still projecting the dark night sky.

The hate is gone.

But the sadness didn't go away.

That's why a moon sword that responds to grief still projects emptiness.

-Snarl

After returning the sword and cloak, Ellen touches Reinhardt's sleeping forehead.

The hate was gone, but the sadness was not.

It's because he knows that whether he comes back or not, he won't be there.

Reinhardt, with eyes filled with sadness, who has managed to save himself, but will never see himself again.

Your loved one's forehead and hair.

Ellen continued to sweep, over and over, as if it were the last time.

"I love you."

Forever.

I wish I could whisper those words in your ear forever.

Heroes and demons cannot coexist.

The existence of one always excludes the other.

In a world where heroes win, there should be no demons.

There should be no heroes in a world where the devil wins.

"I really....... I love you so much."

Thank you.

I love you.

Ellen whispered the words over and over again.

"Sorry......."

Ending, crying.

"I'm so....... I'm so sorry......."

My heart sank as I realized I couldn't be with him.

\* \* \*

Night time.

When Ellen cautiously exited the tent, Olivia Ranze, leaning back against a crate, stared at her.

It's not what you'd call a good relationship.

They were uncomfortable with each other, and there were times when they actually got into fistfights.

But Olivia Ranze returned with Reinhardt, whom she had found on the battlefield, as well as Ellen.

"Thank you, you got me there......."

"Where are you going?"

But before Olivia could thank Ellen, she had a question.

Olivia looked at the dried tears in the corners of Ellen's eyes.

Olivia knew what Ellen was trying to do.

"......."

Olivia stares at Ellen, whose jaw drops, and Olivia stares back.

"I don't know what you're thinking, but just stay in there, it's over."

Ellen looks up with difficulty.

"Because it's over....... I'm not supposed to be here......."

Just because it's over doesn't mean it's really over.

Now something else will start.

You have to travel a long way down a road you don't know how far.

In the new history that will be written in the name of the Devil, there should be no heroes.

It will create a lot of cacophony just by existing.

Those who reject his tyranny will add many more hopes to the names of heroes. It can only be the beginning of division.

There's already a huge faction called the Mercenary Order.

Just because the devil is taking over the world doesn't mean it's going to be a smooth ride.

There will be a lot of blood.

And the presence of a warrior will only absolutely increase the amount of blood that must be spilled.

But you can't throw away the life you saved, so you have to hide somewhere in the world.

The idea of a demon and a hero joining forces to create a new world is a ridiculous idea that no one will believe.

The warriors will be divided into two camps: those who support the heroes and those who support the devil.

It will divide the world by creating false hopes, and it will cause another great many deaths.

So in a world where heroes win, the devil wins.

In a world where the devil wins, there should be no heroes.

So, just as empires doom themselves, so must heroes.

Olivia knows what Ellen is talking about.

More is not always better.

It shouldn't be.

There's nothing wrong with that, obviously.

"I, I don't deserve to be here."

Ellen betrayed Reinhardt.

In the end, that truth doesn't change.

"If I'm....... I'm not supposed to be there, I'm going to get in trouble for being there, and I don't deserve to be there."

It's already good enough to be saved.

To accept anything more from Reinhardt would be a disservice to those who trusted him in the first place.

You can't be presumptuous.

"I don't know that shit."

"......."

"Do you think it would be good for me to have you stay with us?"

"......."

"Do you think I'm saying this because I like you?"

From Olivia's perspective, Ellen has always been an eyesore.

I'd welcome it with open arms if it went away.

But Olivia didn't want to let Ellen leave.

For Reinhardt's sake, who had been waiting for this moment, I couldn't let him go.

"Without you, Reinhard would be dead."

"You saved Reinhardt, and you saved Reinhardt, and you saved Reinhardt, and that's it, don't think about anything else complicated, is that hard?"

"Just shut up like an idiot and say something!"

-Bam!

"......."

Olivia harshly squeezed Ellen's cheek.

Do what Ellen did one day, and give it back to her.

Olivia's eyes filled with tears.

"Just be still, how hard is that, just be there, it's not going to be easy, but we'll figure it out, just like we've figured it out so far!"

"I want to....... I want to......."

At Olivia's insistence, Ellen's eyes fill with tears.

"I want to be with you....... together....... like we used to....... I want to stay like that......."

As well as others.

Olivia Ranchuwado.

We'll bicker and get on each other's nerves, but I want to get back to those moments.

Ellen is shaking and freaking out, and Olivia looks on in disbelief.

"But you're not supposed to do that....... I, because of me, have killed so many people....... I, because of my greed....... Because I wanted to be with you. Because I wanted to be with Reinhardt....... I can't let people die because of me......."

There are people whose very existence is a rationale.

Ever since Gate, Ellen has been under the microscope.

You've been expecting something different than what you've actually committed to, and that will continue to be the case after the war.

The mere fact that Ellen is alive is enough to ignite a war, a huge wildfire.

So you can't just stay here because you want to be here.

It's a sad state of affairs, but with the Devil planning to take over the world, it was a foregone conclusion that the next seat would be Ellen's.

If he's living a simple life in the countryside, that's fine, but if he's got big plans, Ellen can't be around.

Ellen is the biggest obstacle to the Demon's future world. In fact, she'd be better off dead.

Olivia couldn't force it anymore.

It's not that I don't know. I know it's best for Ellen to go because of the problems her mere presence will cause.

Olivia also wants Ellen to be gone.

But don't get too excited.

In the end, I succeeded in doing what I thought was impossible.

All the way back to Ellen at the end.

After waking up, Reinhardt has to face the fact that Ellen is gone.

It shouldn't be.

So as much as Olivia wanted Ellen to leave, she couldn't let her go.

"Well, at least until he wakes up."

That's why Olivia had to say it in the end.

But even that doesn't work, and Ellen shakes her head in frustration.

"No....... I won't be able to, or rather, I won't be able to......."

The moment you speak to an awakened Reinhardt, he's going to freak out.

If you give it a little hug, it will collapse in your arms, wanting to stay there forever.

Even now, I can barely keep my feet on the ground, and I'm afraid that if I share even a few words with an awakened Reinhardt, I'll be unable to get up from the spot.

That's why I'm leaving.

It's now or never.

So Ellen tries to go when Reinhard hasn't gotten up yet.

"What a dumbass bitch......!"

Olivia was about to slap me when she finally did.

"Let me go."

A voice from behind her stopped Olivia's hand.

"What......?"

There was Charlotte, a former imperial and second Archdemon with hair so black it seemed to melt into the darkness.

"Ellen is right."

Charlotte approached slowly, gently releasing Ellen's grip on Olivia.

"It's not over, it's just beginning, and if we get the first step wrong, the whole thing will fall apart before we even get started."

"......."

"So, you have to let it go."

The only thing the Devil has devoured is the Alliance.

The work of returning to the land of men and uniting all forces in the name of the Demon King is just beginning.

Even if the warrior is present in a way that suggests he's surrendered to the devil, people will project hope arbitrarily just because he's there.

The warrior is too big a symbol to be alive with the demon.

Die, or live the life of a fugitive.

There are only two choices.

So Ellen must disappear, if not die.

Charlotte looks at Ellen.

I don't think either of them trusted Reinhardt.

But Charlotte, who had been transformed into a demonic form, was able to be with him.

Charlotte has become too much of something else to be a raison d'être.

"As if there were no eternal battle."

Ellen sobs, and Charlotte holds her still.

"There will never be a goodbye......."

"......."

"Let's make sure we believe that."

I know it's just for later, not forever.

Charlotte pulled Ellen into a strong hug.

Episode 675.

Ellen left.

Olivia stared at the back of his head in disbelief.

As much as I don't like Ellen, I'm still stuck on the idea that this isn't the way to send her off.

It was painful to imagine the look on Reinhardt's face when he woke up.

It didn't make sense to Olivia to let Ellen go.

I don't know about anyone else, but I'm sure Charlotte would want Ellen to stay.

But beyond telling me to let it go, Charlotte's demeanor bordered on harsh.

Charlotte was responsible for all aspects of Edina's nomination.

So, when the Age of Demons begins, it will be Charlotte who actually rules the world.

Eventually it comes full circle and Charlotte becomes emperor.

You have to think about the unfathomably big picture, so you can't get hung up on personal feelings.

So is it possible to tell Ellen to just let it go because she's better off without it?

With that thought in mind, Olivia glanced over at Charlotte and couldn't help but gasp.

"......."

Charlotte's eyes were squeezed shut, her mouth closed, and she was crying harder than anyone else.

What a relief.

It was Charlotte who felt the most guilty, saying that they had betrayed each other and that Ellen shouldn't be here.

So, as she watched Ellen leave, Charlotte sobbed under her breath, unable to get a proper cry out.

You know you're in the same boat.

You've made him leave of his own accord, and he won't be able to live with that.

It all worked out so well that it didn't feel like it could have.

In the end, it can't all work out.

So Olivia does something she wouldn't normally do.

"It's all crying and shit on a good day."

"Ew....... Ugh......!"

Olivia picked up Charlotte, who was sobbing under her breath, and gently patted her back.

\* \* \*

Ellen walks through the cluttered Union camp with her hood pulled down.

Some were collecting the dead, some were trying to assess the damage, some were crying, and some just stood there, dazed, in the middle of nowhere.

The damage was probably the largest of all the battles so far.

The fight was over, but no one was celebrating.

Now that some fears were over, there were many more who were excited about the new world to come.

Because no one knows what's going to happen next.

A demon declared to be absolute evil, and a warrior touted as the one to defeat it.

The demon has saved humanity, and the warrior is on the run, slipping through the Allied lines.

People will never know who was really at fault.

Those who are exposed to a fabricated truth will be exposed to another fabricated truth.

As one disruption ends, another begins.

The fight against the monster isn't completely over, either.

But now that all the warp gates were destroyed, civilization could be rebuilt.

As time goes by.

One day, we could return to the days when civilization spread across continents.

And, although we can't be sure, if the demon does his job well, there will be no fighting between demons and humans in that world.

A world where demons and humans coexist.

Can such a world be made whole.

Can mutual hatred be overcome.

Unknown.

But Ellen can't join that world because she's the last foreign object from the Old World.

You need to live in a quiet place somewhere.

As if they don't exist.

There are still two holy relics.

The monsters remain.

So Ellen still had a lot of work to do.

You don't want people to know that the warrior is alive.

From a lowly position, somewhere in the world.

You will live to kill the remaining monsters.

If he could take responsibility for his actions in that way, he should.

Charlotte said they would see each other again someday, but Ellen didn't think they would.

You shouldn't expect that.

I think it's a little disrespectful to come back after a long time and ask if there's still a place for you.

As time passes, Reinhardt's name will remain a memory.

So, just watch from a distance.

Hopefully the new world will be a good one.

It's enough to do what you can, in a lowly position, for people in a lowly position.

And so it was, by the time the acrid smoke reached the outskirts of the cluttered Allied garrison.

Where to go.

In the middle of nowhere, in a vast expanse, trying to follow the stars.

-Ellen......! Ellen!

Ellen gritted her teeth at the sound of a voice behind her, a sobbing voice, and couldn't help but turn around.

-Where....... Where are you going! Where are you going......! Where are you going......!

Herriot de Saint-Antoine, looking like a mess and crying, came running up to me in desperation.

He can't even run properly, and he's stumbling around like he's going to trip over a rock, and he's running in a frenzy.

Despite being a great wizard, she was still in poor physical condition, so in her desperation she ran, gasping for breath as she reached Ellen and grabbed her by the sleeve.

"Don't go....... Where are you going....... I told you to stay with me. Stay with me....... I told you to stay with me, ah......."

That's it, we're done.

You said we can be together now.

You're breathing hard and your face is red with tears.

"Please don't go....... Please, don't go....... It's over. It's over. It's over. It's over. It's over. You don't have to go. Huh? What's wrong? What's wrong with you....... What about Reinhard? What's Reinhard going to do....... Huh?"

This is why I didn't want to see it.

It was also painful to have others catch on.

It was especially painful to watch Herriot.

That it's all going to be okay now, that there's only good things to come.

It pained Ellen to hear him say that, with a big smile on his face after hugging her when she woke up.

So, while she was out for a bit, I tried to make a run for it.

Why would anyone do this?

People who should love Ellen's absence, hold on to her departure.

They're the ones who should wish I wasn't there.

Now that Reinhardt is unconscious, the very people he should be wishing away are holding him captive.

Ellen looks down at Harriet, who is crying, clinging to her as if she will never let her go.

Herriot was Reinhardt's next best friend at Temple.

But we couldn't fully like each other.

We knew from the start that our hearts were in the same place.

So as much as we liked each other, as much as we cared about each other, we were bound to hate each other to some degree.

And the direction of that emotion has always been, to some extent, Harriet's jealousy of Ellen.

But now, Harriet is begging Ellen not to go.

Reinhardt said, "What are you going to do?

That's what we're talking about.

"Don't go. I don't know why you're doing this, but....... If you don't have to go, you don't have to go. We can stay together, okay?"

In the end, it's probably because Herriot de Saint-Ouen values himself as much as he values Reinhardt.

If you think about it.

It's always been that way.

At some point, this is who he's always been.

She was always giving in, always wanting to be with him, always giving in a lot to Ellen.

When jealousy and bitterness exploded.

Cheesy.

That was the harshest thing I could say to my friend.

"Actually, you don't have to go to....... to go there."

In fact, there may not really be a reason for you to disappear.

Maybe you just need to stick with it somehow, for whatever reason, and stay with it.

Whether people say the devil gave in to the hero or betrayed him.

You can also let people imagine whatever they want, pretend you don't know what's going on, and just live happily ever after.

But I've been selfish enough so far.

I betrayed Reinhardt, and I got too much.

In the end, I crossed the river of no return and was somehow saved.

I can't be any more selfish than that.

I'm blind to the other problems it will cause.

To love, to be loved.

It's crazy to ask for more than that.

You can't allow that to happen to yourself.

Give yourself that happiness.

Such anon.

I can't believe that's what life is like for me.

Compulsion to live in despair.

Feeling guilty and compelled to live to atone.

All other reasons aside.

Recognize the dark compulsion to leave, to leave only because of it.

"Then don't go....... If you don't have to go, you shouldn't go......."

Looking down at a crying, pleading Harriet, Ellen eventually stops crying.

Rather, it smiles.

"Reinhardt is right."

"Hmm......?"

Harriet looks up at Ellen, tears in her eyes at the sudden words.

What Reinhardt always called Herriot.

You want everything to work out, and you don't want anything that's only good for you.

They can't be selfish.

The biggest pain in the ass is going to go away, but he begs her to stay for Reinhardt's sake.

"You're an ass."

"Uhhh......?"

What do you call someone like that if not an idiot.

Harriet may be the smartest person Ellen knows.

In the end, it was the dumbest.

Harriet stares at Ellen in disbelief, not wanting to cry.

"I've already been given so much, so much, so much."

There is also a sense of insecurity, as if there will be some sort of punishment for being greedy.

"......."

"If you're too nice, like you are now, you'll never have anything."

You can't be nice and have nothing.

You give and give and give and give, and eventually you're out of a job.

If you want it, you can have it.

If you dream of a situation that's too perfect, you may wake up and realize that everything else has been taken away from you.

"Don't let Reinhardt take you for granted."

"......."

You'll cherish it, but if you allow yourself to take what's next to you for granted, you'll stop being desperate.

You'll always be pushed to second, third, and so on.

Without Ellen, Reinhardt was desperate for her.

With Ellen's life at stake, Reinhardt's only thoughts would be about Ellen.

I don't know Ellen Reinhardt's heart.

The mind is neither absolute nor eternal.

A lot of time has passed, and no one's mind is quite the same, and that includes Reinhardt's.

They may not even realize it.

Come to think of it, I've never made a single concession.

I hadn't even thought about that.

I don't know if that's a concession, or if I'm even qualified to say that.

But now that I've had my fill, it's time to make way for those who deserve it a little more.

Any more greed than that will lead to worse things.

So, if you're this nice, you're a little bit.

You have to stay awake.

Looking at her friend, who doesn't know what she's hearing, Ellen smiles sadly.

Because, in the words of a dear friend, you're cheesy.

Because it's always been that way.

"I'll be there."

It will fade away, unceremoniously and unwillingly, until the very end.

\* \* \*

This is an unfamiliar ceiling.

"......."

The moment I thought that, my body jumped out of bed.

A pungent odor from somewhere.

I couldn't help but intuit that it was the smell of battle.

Cot.

And the barracks.

It means I'm in a tent.

What's going on?

"Hmph......!"

I heard a noise next to me, turned around, and there was someone there, startled awake by my getting up.

Herriot.

"Wake up......!"

-Wrong!

You're safe.

Before I could think about it, I realized that Herriot was alive.

"What....... happened?"

I fainted at the last minute.

After giving Antirrhinus his final instructions, there was no telling what would happen next.

Being alive means that Antirrhinus did not or could not kill me.

Harriet pats my anxious back gently.

"Rest assured....... I'm done."

Herriot's voice speaks volumes.

Relief mixed with sadness.

That tells me that a lot of people are okay.

But the sadness in his voice.

I had a hunch as to what that meant.

\* \* \*

I was knocked out for three days.

Soon, three days had passed since the Battle of Diane.

We caught up with Herriot to find out what happened next.

Charlotte is taking my place, cleaning up the mess and reorganizing the Alliance.

Just cleaning up the chaos and divisions in each army would be enough to bleed them dry.

After a bit of back and forth, I heard Harriet crying as she spoke.

Ellen left.

"Sorry....... I didn't catch it....... I wanted to catch it somehow....... Somehow......."

I gingerly picked up Harriet, who was sobbing so hard that I could barely breathe, even though it had already been three days.

Ellen left.

Although I'm getting a little nervous.

I think we're good to go.

Anyway, it's back to normal, and I think it left on its own.

There are many reasons why it's shocking but not hopeless.

Perhaps, on some level, she knew that's what Ellen would do.

I only thought about getting Ellen back.

It's overwhelming just thinking about what to do.

After I got Ellen back, I didn't think about how I was going to carry her.

I didn't think about how to deal with that, and I didn't know.

According to Ellen, her presence in the world we're about to create is the seed of a great discord.

So.

It's almost scary to think that this isn't a good thing.

I realized that in the path I was about to take, I would never be the same.

The things you hold dear become worthless in the name of reality.

I'm going to have to accept that sometimes I have to throw things away and tear them down with my own hands.

Ellen returned.

Alive.

That's it.

Even that was a luxury we gave each other.

There was only one future: either one of them would die, or both of them would die.

It was impossible for us to face the future with each other alive, so I guess we should be grateful that it's possible now.

If you want more than that, you're asking for too much.

I couldn't help but laugh bitterly at the thought.

You, too, probably walked away thinking.

Thinking that anything more is a luxury.

Like I did.

So did you.

"Don't cry. It's okay."

"Black......! Hmph! Ugh......!"

Therefore, I held a sobbing Harriet in my arms and patted her back quietly.

Episode 676.

You've won.

You have gotten, and will get, a lot.

However, despite the victory, there is something to lose.

That's probably unavoidable.

There was still a lot we didn't know.

What happened to Antrianus, who absorbed the souls.

I don't know how I managed to stay safe.

Ellen left.

He would have left me for his own reasons.

I can't obsess over that anymore.

Every end touches a new beginning.

You're going to have more work to do.

It's time to really get to work on the karma of being the ruler of the world.

On such a subject, one cannot be broken by the loss of a single person. Such a man would be unworthy to be the ruler of the world.

Get out of bed and straighten your clothes.

I'm not a superhuman.

However, you have to go the superhuman route.

Then I should at least imitate her as much as I could. Herriot looked at me as if I were a completely different person.

I'm not surprised or saddened that Ellen left.

There's no such thing as time to fuss.

What you get back is what you get back.

What's lost is lost.

Don't delay.

"Pfft."

"......Yes."

"Let's go to Charlotte."

I must be a different person from now on, a different person than I have ever been.

Someone so thoroughly different that you forget you even exist.

You will be the loser of the continent.

\* \* \*

In my absence, Charlotte was at the Allied Command Center, assessing the damage, treating the wounded, and overseeing everything else going on around Diane.

So, around the barracks of the General Headquarters, the highest authorities in the armed forces came and went.

Where you could only get in by spying, you now have a front row seat.

It's bizarre.

Pulling Charlotte aside, I filled her in on the current state of the Allied forces.

"The damage is considerable, and there's still a lot of confusion. Most of the troops don't even know we're in charge of the Alliance, and if they do, it's going to be even more confusing, so we're trying to get each of the military leaders to come in."

Even at the top, they weren't sure if this was right or not, what the hell happened to the empire, or where the hate was going.

It's also ridiculous to say that the Allied forces here have been consumed by the devil.

Noise and chaos are inevitable, but you don't have to intentionally amplify them.

"We'll have to decide if we want to go loud or quiet."

"In a big way, yes."

Do you announce your reign of terror, or do you hide it like it's something you're not?

If you hide it, you're afraid of the fallout; if you reveal it, you're afraid of the immediate chaos.

"More importantly, the return of the Union army. The Union army has been marching from all over the country, and it's going to take time and food to get them back safely, and that's not the end of it, it's going to take a lot of money and time to get them back to where they belong."

Yes.

It took an enormous amount of resources just to get humanity to this point.

The war is over, but it's not really over until these troops return home safely.

You'll have to send them all home.

How to move and how to dissolve.

Just getting the Alliance back to the ecliptic, the primary return point, will take nearly a year. In the meantime, we must feed our troops.

The list of things that could make my head explode is already making me gasp.

"Over there......."

Charlotte and I are talking about a problem we're both stuck on, when Harriet cautiously interrupts.

"That's....... I think I can do something about it."

"......?"

As it turns out, Herriot had invented the warp gate system.

"But is that a nexus or something....... Didn't you say you needed something like that?"

However, you will need to create a warp gate. You can't build a warp gate that will take you straight back to the ecliptic from here.

But if you think about the time it would take to rebuild the gate facilities that have all been destroyed so far, that's still going to take a lot of time, isn't it?

"No. I can send the entire coalition, all of them, anywhere in the world, not just the ecliptic, at a moment's notice."

This guy again.

What did I do?

\* \* \*

During the Battle of Diane, I didn't really know what was going on in different parts of the country.

It was taking all my energy just to get away from Immortal.

So I heard about the strange magical orbs that appeared in the rear of the battlefield.

Spells that draw from nature's mana and manifest it into magic.

For example, a spell that draws mana from the atmosphere to cast a spell.

I had no idea how it worked.

But at least I knew that Herriot had actually done what I was talking about.

Importantly, the magic allows for a spatial leap of such magnitude that the entire Alliance can be transported from this location straight back to the ecliptic.

Herriot fidgets with his fingers, looking nervous.

"I don't know what to call it, but....... It's magic like that."

"You are, you are the real......."

"ah......."

As if realizing what was about to happen, a pale-faced Herriot backed away.

"It's my best paktong!"

-Wrong!

"I knew it!"

I hugged him vigorously, and he freaked out, as he always does.

This magical genius has reduced armaments on an astronomical scale with a single spell.

Charlotte watched with a fascinated expression as I hugged Harriet and tried to figure out what to do.

"Oh, thank...... god. Just sending this army back was going to take my breath away, so what are we going to do?"

Great, sublime, noble, even beautiful and cute, the best paktong in the universe blew away all the problems at once.

Overt or covert?

You don't need them all.

"All Allied forces withdraw. Tear them all apart."

All armies go home at once.

In the end, it doesn't matter who is king of the world or who sits on top of your head.

After all, all soldiers want is to come home alive.

You can't hate us for paving the way for you to come back alive.

\* \* \*

The Allies withdraw.

And I'm heading somewhere, walking through the Allied lines, who are busy cleaning up the mess.

There are some things you need to see.

I arrived at the Temple Royal class garrison.

As I walked in, I couldn't help but notice the mood change as well as the expressions on the faces of those who recognized me.

The Royalist side will already know that the Demon has taken control of the Alliance.

But actually seeing me is a much different thing.

In the frozen atmosphere, I met the fearful stares directed at me.

But there were bound to be some guys who would beat me without fear.

"Hey."

Conor Lindt.

He walks up to me and holds out his hand.

Just as he approached me without hesitation, I grasped his hand firmly.

"Yeah."

Without him and Scarlet, the Alliance might have been wiped out.

In a way, Scarlett and Kono Lint have done more important work than I have.

There are casualties in the Royal Class, but none that I know of are dead.

Adriana, Scarlett, Erich, and Cliffman.

Everyone else is fine.

Literally, it was a miracle.

But it's also a no-brainer.

Things have changed a lot since then, but they were much larger and stronger than they were in the original.

So the absolute number of casualties is very, very small compared to the original.

"What about the others?"

"What's everyone doing....... stare at."

But Kono Lindt's face was not happy.

"And Kaier?"

"......I'm still not getting up."

"......Yes."

Everyone is safe, but one.

We were told that Kaier Bjørden was in a coma.

\* \* \*

I opened the tent and walked in, and there was a familiar face.

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

"It's been a while."

Redina, who could no longer be called a child, looked at me and jumped out of her seat.

He wanted to say something, but his mouth fell open.

Even if you don't hate me, you will all fear me.

There are very few guys like Kono Lint who can get to me first.

"I'm just here to see."

"......."

At my words, Redina bowed her head deeply.

On the cot in front of the chair where Redina was sitting, Kaeir lay.

While it's great that everyone is safe, someone is bound to get hurt.

Kaier was not a hand-to-hand combatant.

Redina explained it slowly, with a grimace.

Redina had promised Kaier that she would use the Arc Crystal sparingly in the final battle, as the Immortals would take over her role.

"My immortal is gone, so....... I had no choice but to use the arc crystal."

But the immortal suddenly disappeared.

As he waited, Kaier had no choice but to charge his Arc Crystal.

They fought, recharging their Arc Crystals in real time as they used them to their limits, and Kaier charged his beyond his limits.

So before the battle was over, Kaier was already in a coma.

Herriot wouldn't have been able to cast the magic needed for every location on the battlefield.

A great deal of horsepower, and Redina using it.

That alone could have saved a lot of people's lives.

In return, Kaier remained in a coma with no indication of when he would return to consciousness.

Redina starts to cry.

"You must....... I promise."

"......."

"We're going to make a world where everyone is happy....... I promise."

A world where everyone is happy.

How childish.

The reason it's childish is that even a child would realize that it's impossible.

The kids know, and Redina, no longer a little girl, cries and begs.

There is no such thing as a happy world.

I can't promise you that.

In front of a crying Redina with a messed up face.

"By all means, just like that....... I'll do that."

I couldn't say that.

\* \* \*

"That's it."

"Right."

The look on Adriana's face when she said that was more of a sense of frustration than excitement.

It was a moment when I had only one goal: to end the Gate debacle.

That was the absolute goal, the absolute good.

That absolute good was done.

Adriana and I had been trying to survive each other, and here we were, reunited, alive and well.

There are no absolutes to follow now. From now on, it will be a time of choices and decisions. In the midst of it, we may make the wrong choice, the wrong decision, and cause something irreversible to happen again.

Some of us would never see them again.

Someone is actually dead.

Adriana and I survived.

"Now, you're going to be a continental emperor?"

Adriana looked at me and gave me a strange smile.

A continental emperor.

Yes, it should be something like that.

"Maybe."

"Hmmm......."

"...... Why?"

At my answer, Adriana gave me a stern look and then slapped me on the shoulder.

-Bang!

"Why, why are you hitting me?"

"If you're going to use vague words like "maybe" for a topic that's going to be such a big deal, do you think it's going to make me or anyone else believe you, so why don't you say it with more conviction?"

Adriana's expression as she forced her eyes to open was both fierce and cute.

Right.

I'm done being vague.

No, rather, it seems to me that people in that position only say vague things.

Of course, you don't need to copy that.

"Yes, I'm sure it will."

"Yeah, that's the way it should be."

Adriana smirked, as if she was finally starting to like it.

\* \* \*

As I walked around the Royal Class garrison, I saw a few familiar faces. Those who knew of me looked at me with fearful eyes from afar.

Until I called for Scarlett and Conor Lint, Cliff was the only thing keeping me going.

I miraculously made it to the master class and was told that I was instrumental in saving Riana and Herriot.

A talent named Combat.

Klippmann didn't seem too impressed with that.

Instead, he seemed grateful that he was able to protect Riana and Herriot.

"Good job."

"You too."

Despite the fact that we were reunited after quite some time, that was the extent of the conversation between Kliffman and me.

But with this guy, it's always been that way.

There wasn't much conversation.

It's always felt like this is good enough.

It's pretty amazing that it's still there.

I walked around the garrison and met people.

And then I realized something.

"Reinhard....... Ludwig, have you....... haven't you seen them?"

Ludwig was nowhere to be found.

"No....... I didn't see it."

"I see......."

Scarlett shook her head in despair.

Immortal's rampage means that Christina is very likely dead.

And Ludwig was moving with Christina.

But I saw Ludwig in the deepest part of the battlefield.

I noticed that it was moving in a different direction than the immortal.

Christina would be dead.

Anna and Louis don't know what happened.

Ludwig may have joined them after the battle.

But it's also likely dead.

I figured that since I was fighting in the most dangerous place, I should have a good chance of dying.

How could Ludwig have died in such vain?

I couldn't have any confidence in that.

No matter how much time has passed since then, I've never heard of anyone finding Ludwig, or even seeing him.

Episode 677.

The Alliance is a giant beast.

Its very existence requires a huge supply of supplies every day.

So when you've served your purpose, it's best to disband as quickly as possible, and fortunately, Herriot's presence allows us to do so in the shortest amount of time.

It has several effects.

Scatter humanity's remaining reserves across the continents, making it impossible for them to band together.

Herriot's power is to send legions, so while they can't attack us, we can attack them with an army.

It divides humanity, and then exerts its influence on each of them.

We are too powerful an enemy to resist, and even if we had the intention to push back, we can't make it happen.

This strengthens the effectiveness of the domination.

After gaining their loyalty, disband the coalition.

Soldiers will be happy to know that they can return home without a long march.

And just knowing that it was the devil who made it possible for me to go back will have some positive effect.

Of course, you can't please everyone.

Fragmentation will happen, and the precursors are all over the place.

But first, there's something you need to do to disband the coalition.

Commander-in-Chief Barracks.

Sitting to my left was Charlotte and to my right was Olivia Ranze.

Heir to the empire and now my left arm.

The symbol of the Order of the Lord and my right arm.

And before me sat representatives of every remaining group of humanity.

"Good morning, everyone."

I say, looking at the still, frozen figure.

In this moment, as I sit here, no one can resist me, even though they may cast uncomfortable and fearful glances at me.

You can't even get out of your seat.

"It is I, Bali the Demon."

This sight means that I am already the ruler of the continent.

\* \* \*

Up until this point, Charlotte had taken over my role, so they knew that the demonic domination had begun, but when they saw me as a demon, they seemed to recognize that everything had truly fallen into his hands.

There were tons of people sitting there who had already decided to be on my side.

Louise von Schwarz of Cernstadt, who spearheaded the effort, was seated near the head of the table, and of course Lowen, the head of the Crusader Knights.

Not surprisingly, the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan was there.

Funnily enough, his seat, which was originally near the end of the line, is now near the top.

Since his daughter had sided with the devil, he had been relegated to the lowest of the low, and certainly not by choice.

But now that her daughter has sided with the devil, she sits near the top of the throne. She, too, will be irrelevant to the will of the Grand Duke of St. Thuan.

From a traitor to humanity to an apologist for a new empire.

The Grand Duke of St. Thuan's stern expression showed that he had no interest in his new position.

What to say.

He's like a big brother to me.

It's like you're living in a place that's disconnected from the rest of the world.

She's an idiot.

He's also a weirdo.

In fact, when I was knocked out, the Grand Duke of Saint-Thuan was the first to find and embrace Herriot.

Anyway, many of the delegates in this room decided to side with me even before the war was over.

Louise von Schwarz stepped into the role.

The Imperial troops in the Alliance are already in our hands. Of course, the Emperor is not the only one here, as there are quite a few Imperial commanders.

They had already turned their backs on the Empire because of the tremendous betrayal at the Battle of Diane.

And Charlotte finished the process of recruiting all the officers and commanders of the Imperial Army.

They're not already an imperial army.

"The Gradias Empire will cease to exist, and the continent belongs to me from now on."

"I don't want it to be taken in a tyrannical, rigid way, that it's a relationship of absolute dominance and loyalty."

"Yeah."

"Think of it as a 'promise.'"

"When you need me, I will help you."

"So, you guys help me when I need you."

"It's not going to change much."

"The point is, there are still monsters on the continent."

"It would take an incalculable amount of time and money to rebuild a ruined civilization."

"Of course, the chasm of distrust and resentment that you have built up against me is too deep, and we are not even of the same race."

"So whatever you're thinking inside, it's not something I can control."

"The first thing you need to do is not be overly loyal to me, not to give me anything."

"Each in their place, each doing their best for themselves."

"The rebuilding of civilization, the restoration of shattered livelihoods."

"That's the task you'll have to fulfill before your loyalty to me."

"You don't have to try to give me something."

"I'm not going to force them to take it."

"Just, accept me."

"And most of all."

"Live well."

"That's the best loyalty you can give."

They're not the ones who can give me something.

Go your separate ways and live happily ever after.

Rebuilding a crumbling civilization, standing up.

My goal is to rebuild and revive a shattered civilization. Therefore, the loyalty they can give is not to a few pennies in tribute, but to rebuilding a foundation upon which they can stand on their own two feet.

What horrible words did I expect to hear from the mouth of the Devil himself?

You're all fucked now.

I'll give you back what I got.

Or that foolish humanity will now pay the price of defeat.

Or that if you defy me, there will be bloody vengeance.

I've been waiting for that to happen.

But when I told them to live in their own place, they looked puzzled.

"Don't think this is an easy command."

"In these desperate times, I am giving you the hardest command of all."

To live well.

Is it easy?

For people who have to live in a broken world, it's actually the hardest thing to do.

In a world where monsters still roam and much of civilization has been destroyed, living well is the most unruly command.

I added, and everyone's faces darkened as they thought about how to live well.

In fact, I think I finally understood that this was the harshest and most difficult challenge.

We're all tired of talking about death and blood.

I need not warn you of those who do not serve me, of those who have betrayed me.

It's never too late to discuss such things after the fact.

"I said I'd help you guys."

It's a good day.

"I'll give you the first one I can give you."

The war is over.

"For now, everyone, go home."

Let's go home, wipe our feet, and rest.

No one is exempt.

\* \* \*

Not everyone was surprised to hear that the Allies were preparing to withdraw as soon as their forces were cleaned up.

This is because it was seen as a procedure for withdrawal, returning to the ecliptic, and similar things before occupation.

But when I explained that the withdrawal I was referring to was literally the withdrawal itself, their faces turned puzzled.

Their jaws dropped when I told them that they could be instantly transported to their hometowns.

They can return to their respective hometowns in just one day.

Many people have lost their homes, but everyone has a place to go back to.

And it's not just the soldiers who want to go home.

They all looked like they'd been slapped in the face in their sleep.

You don't even have to fight an empire.

You can just go back to the way things are.

From there, you just live.

They're shocked that that's the price of accepting my dominance.

No, this is not a prize.

The sweet fruits of accepting the Devil's rule.

It's a price so sweet that you have to wonder if it's a poisoned chalice.

"I told you. Go back and mind your own business. But there are no more supplies to feed you. It won't be easy to survive on your own."

It's no small feat.

Suddenly, everyone seems to realize that going home is not always a good thing.

"There is nothing more to say. Prepare to withdraw as soon as you're ready, and report to me when you're ready, and I'll send you back at once."

Some of the people sitting there looked determined.

I saw the looks on their faces as if they were preparing to say something extraordinary and were willing to die on the spot.

There were definitely some people who wanted to call it a dirty trick.

But I can't bring myself to open my mouth because of the implications of my words.

He was so overwhelmed by the idea of being able to go back immediately that he seemed to forget what he was trying to say.

The bewildered looks were quite refreshing.

"Go back, live well."

That is the first edict of the new continental emperor.

But then one of them raised his hand.

"I....... Devil......."

I don't know who it is.

"What is it?"

He looked dumbfounded.

"If the Allies withdraw....... How will you take over the Empire....... Do you think......."

Given that he's wondering if it's possible with only the remaining Imperial and Demon armies, I'm guessing he's probably in favor of me.

Empire Takeover.

"Do you mind if I talk about that?"

Before I can say anything, Rowen speaks up.

"The emperor, they say, has already fled."

I've heard this before.

But the emperor has fled.

With those words, the last of the Empire's loyalists, if there were any left, were gone.

The throne is empty, the palace is empty.

We just need to enter that empty palace.

\* \* \*

Bertus slowly regained consciousness as the carriage rocked at a steady pace.

"......!"

In the darkness of the carriage, Bertus jumped to his feet.

Where am I.

My whole body felt as heavy as a soaked cotton ball.

I don't even know how long I've been asleep.

They're just in a dark carriage, going somewhere.

Bertus stumbles over his last memory.

The battle of Diane is over.

So Bertus prepared.

Prepare to be the last emperor of the fading Gradias Empire.

Betrayed humanity, the cause of it all, ready to pay the price.

We need an offering for the new age.

Thus, empires are a manifestation of hatred, and they die with the emperor, who is an absolute evil.

With the Emperor, the true source of all evil, hanging from a pole, all hatred should be burned away and a new era should dawn.

So it's been a buildup.

With that, Bertus was ready to go.

Prepare to hand over everything to the new power.

And, the posture of one who deserves to die.

However, Saviolin Tana is back.

Bertus's order didn't end with blowing up the basement of a magical college.

After that, he doesn't have to listen to my commands anymore.

Now you're not my article.

Don't come back, stay alive.

The empire will cease to exist, and stop being a knight in shining armor.

Live by your will.

And so it was ordered that she break the oaths of loyalty that bound her.

However, Savior Tana returned a few days after the battle of Diane.

"Lord Tana......?

The knight who was told not to return, returned and put the emperor to sleep.

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty.

That faint voice was the last thing I remembered.

In the dimly lit carriage, Bertus groped for himself.

He had a change of clothes.

His clothes, in the dim light, certainly didn't look very classy.

-Thump!

After a few taps on the coachman's side of the carriage, it stopped with a slight rattle.

Soon, there was movement from the stallion's side.

-click!

When the door opened, there it was.

"Your Majesty."

"Lord Tana......."

There was the face of Saviolin Tana.

"Is this....... What is this?"

I said live free, you said survive.

The emperor's knight had the audacity to kidnap the emperor.

Saviolin Tana knew what she had done, and she looked devastated.

"This is....... This can't be, this shouldn't be."

Tana must have known what Bertus was up to. Even if the emperor didn't tell her, she knew what he was doing and what he was preparing.

The emperor has dug his grave.

Now we just need to get in there.

The moment was right around the corner, and I'd already made up my mind.

We are ready for a new era that must be ushered in by embracing the sins of all and putting the expression of evil to death.

At the last minute, Saviolin Tana's behavior threw off all our calculations.

Bertus had no idea how far the carriage had come or where it was headed.

The plain clothes, the unadorned carriage, the lack of fancy, made me realize what Saviolin Tana was up to.

"I need to go back."

It was time for that, and all the plotting and scheming to make it happen.

"Why do you have to, do you have to?"

Finally, tears form in her eyes.

"I have to die. Someone has to be responsible."

The death of an emperor does not extinguish all hatred, nor does it erase all sin.

But it will go away, at least a little.

If everyone blames the emperor, and the emperor, the symbol of that blame, must die, then fewer people will blame the new era.

"That is not courage, Your Majesty."

"......."

Very young.

The knight he's known since he was a baby, the knight he sometimes played with as a child, finally bursts into tears the likes of which Bertus has never seen in his life.

"That's running away, too."

It's about leaving the world to someone else and running away with death.

I've paid my dues, you say.

To die content, after all, is not to take responsibility, but to avoid responsibility.

"You have the courage to die, but not the courage to run away ugly and live? Why....... Why do you have to?"

Death isn't the end of the world.

Death doesn't solve everything.

Why try to die.

Isn't it courageous to endure the ugly, dirty life of a fugitive?

After all, isn't Bertus' desire for death a way for him to find his own honor?

If you try to find your own comfort in dying under false pretenses.

Why not really live the life of a cowardly, dirty fugitive.

It's better to survive real dishonor than to find fake honor.

"Lord Tana....... I am....... I don't want to do that, I'm......."

-Hair

Saviolin Tana ends up on her knees, headbutted.

Bertus has always been a loyal knight, but this is the first time he's ever seen him throw himself on his knees.

Even if she is a goddess, she has her moments.

Even the Emperor didn't dare to ask her to do this, even to the point of bowing her head to the ground.

Then she puts her head down and sobs.

"Please....... Please......."

"My whole life, I've been doing what I'm told."

"They say loyalty doesn't pay."

"This Saviolin Tana. The Emperor's Sword."

"For this loyalty, for dedicating my life to the Empire, I would like to be rewarded... not paid."

"Your Majesty."

"Please live."

"It may be an ugly life, but it's the life of a coward."

"May you live."

"That's the....... this god wants to receive is the only recompense......."

"Didn't you tell me to bend to your will now?"

"This is my will......."

Bertus stares, wide-eyed, at his knight, who is not on his knees, but on his stomach, weeping.

He has devoted his life to the sword, his life to the empire.

A woman who has lived her entire life for the sake of the empire itself.

Even before Bertus was born, she was a knight of the Empire.

No, she was a knight of the empire even before the first emperor was born.

She didn't want something from the Empire.

She is the oldest loyalist of the empire, the one who has served the empire the longest, and the one who has been closest to the imperial family.

We've done the dirty work, and we've done the necessary work.

I've lived that way without a name.

It is a knightly virtue that loyalty has no price.

If she is.

For someone who's been around as long as she has.

You're probably entitled to ask for something in return.

I'm even afraid to use the word quid pro quo, so I say reciprocation.

I want only one thing in return for my loyalty.

Be alive.

"Please....... Your Majesty....... Please......."

A cowardly life.

The last emperor who betrayed humanity should hang from a pole. Or is it better to run away and be alive somewhere.

It was impossible to focus hatred on a dead demon.

When Bertus realized that there was a surviving heir to the demon world, he was overjoyed.

I said that, not realizing that I was speaking to the heir of a demon.

The presence of a demon is actually necessary for the consolidation and maintenance of an empire.

The last demon is alive somewhere.

That alone made people tremble with fear and put all their hopes in the empire.

The empire concentrated all of humanity's power in such a way.

You've used the devil as a symbol of hate.

Is it time for the emperor to step into that role?

The life of a fugitive, a cowardly, ugly loser.

Rather than the reality that the emperor is dead, the reality is that the emperor has fled.

Better for a new era.

Bertus didn't know.

However.

Your article is being misread.

A man who lived his whole life for an empire.

Now he's lost his empire, and he's begging for his life, desperate to save the last remnant of it, the Emperor.

Bertus clenched his teeth, and the viola tuned to a desperate tune.

The last knight of the Imperial House of Gradias stood there, unable to capture or even strike.

Episode 678.

The list of things to say to the Allied General Headquarters wasn't long.

Withdraw all allied forces and send them home to focus on rebuilding.

Effective dominance is not immediately possible or meaningful.

This is after they have become self-sufficient and self-sustaining on their own land.

For now, it's better to break up the coalition and let them scatter, so they can neither come together nor fall apart without our strength.

The fact that I have decided to dominate you does not bring actual domination.

The list of things to do gets longer, not shorter, as you solve them.

After ordering the Allies to prepare to withdraw, I left it all to Rowen, Louise, and Harriet for now.

The rest of us had more pressing problems to solve.

An empty imperial palace.

We need to fill in the gaps in the ecliptic as quickly as possible.

With no battles scheduled, there were only three of us at the palace: me, Charlotte, and Olivia.

As if the palace guards knew we were ducks, they naturally cleared the way when I showed up.

I couldn't see the expressions on the faces of the guards in their helmets.

However, they were fully prepared to enter the palace bloodlessly.

By Bertus, of course.

The palace was nearly empty, save for the guards guarding the entrance.

As the palace's defense, the magical barrier didn't really need people in the first place.

But the most important people were still there.

"You're back, Empress."

"I can't call it that anymore, but yeah. I'm back."

Chamberlain.

The person in charge of all the administration inside the imperial palace.

While he wasn't one to go out and about, he stayed behind to run the palace.

\* \* \*

All I had to do was step into an empty palace and it was mine.

To be clear, this is not my job from here on out, it's Charlotte's job.

Charlotte would naturally know the inner workings of the palace and would be up to speed on its operations.

So I didn't have to do much.

So Olivia and I walked through the Tetra, the central imperial palace of Imperatos.

The central palace was solemn, serene, and huge.

Olivia looks up at the soaring ceiling of the Central Palace.

"Something....... doesn't feel right."

"Sure."

I ran to the end of the war.

But what happened after the war was so continuous that I wondered if I was dreaming.

All I could think about was getting here safely, and I didn't know what to do next.

The Emperor's palace, once untouchable, is now mine.

But I wasn't happy at all.

"I'm so....... Is it because I'm too small?"

Olivia looked at the enormous palace and felt more overwhelmed than fulfilled.

"Me too."

The palace is huge, but the world is nothing compared to it.

Our words make the world go round, and a single mistake is irreversible.

It will be torn apart, it will be merged, and sometimes it will be disputed.

Just as I'm a centerpiece, Olivia is a giant centerpiece.

It is charged with the enormous task of unifying and reforming all believers in the Five Great Gods.

So there was a lot of pressure on me and Olivia.

"Still....... We got here somehow."

Olivia holds still and hugs me.

"I can't lie and say it's all going to be happy."

"It's ......."

"Still, let's trust that we can do it. We've done it before, and we'll do it again."

After rejecting religion, she is forced to return to the path she left and do what she least wanted to do.

It's all because I wanted it for her.

I was always on the receiving end.

I'm still giving it away.

"Thank you, always."

There was no reason not to thank her, so I hugged Olivia fiercely.

Like I'm shaking a little bit.

Olivia, hugging me, was also clearly shaking.

You still have to trust that it will work out.

Just as feeling defeated doesn't necessarily mean losing.

A hopeless vision will only bring despair.

You have to trust that it will work out.

\* \* \*

How much time has passed.

At the summons of the servants, Olivia and I made our way to the Emperor's office. Charlotte cleared the papers from her desk and placed them neatly to her right.

"All you have to do is come and sit down."

"...... Is that it?"

"Yes."

While Charlotte knew most of the details, Bertus left with a clear handoff.

"I think most of the key bureaucrats knew what was going to happen. We're just going to call them back and let them do their jobs. Of course, there are some who run scared, but in those cases, we have a plan in place as far as who to name as their successor."

National politics is not a vacuum.

Bertus had already made arrangements to ensure that the status quo would be maintained when I arrived.

"That doesn't mean it's all good, though, because there's still absolute starvation, there's still a lot of backlash against the Empire, and there's still a lot of opposition and rioting that's going to happen when you're crowned, and that's not something that Bertus can do anything about. We're going to have to take care of ourselves."

The war was dragging on and people were getting tired.

You can take over an empire.

However, an empire on the verge of collapse has immeasurable problems.

We're not drinking from a poisoned chalice, we're drinking from the poison itself.

Taking over an empire isn't always easy.

I inherited a sandcastle that was on the verge of collapse.

The bureaucrats remain, so you can run your empire through them, but the challenge of normalizing the situation in the ecliptic remains.

Once we stabilize the ecliptic, is that it?

Beyond the ecliptic, there is the matter of imperial territories and empires.

It will be necessary to gain their complete submission, and to begin to aid them in their self-reproduction.

"The good news is that when the Allies pull out, we'll be able to spend our military resources on the ecliptic, which would have meant another year or so of this, so it's a good thing out of a bad thing."

The rapid withdrawal of allied forces results in the conservation of resources.

For us, and for the rest of the world, Herriot's presence is a huge help.

Indeed, Herriot became the greatest wizard of all time, molding not only humanity but all races.

Charlotte stares blankly out the window after she says that.

I can only imagine what you're thinking.

You're probably thinking about the missing Bertus.

With everything ready to go, Bertus disappeared.

No, it ran away.

But neither Charlotte nor I thought Bertus would run away.

Somehow, I don't think that's what he had in mind.

"I rather like it. The people will hate the fugitive emperor, and it will make it easier for the Gradias imperial family."

If the emperor had been executed, there might be some who believed in the emperor's injustice.

But the emperor's escape would mean the end of the last thing he had left.

So Charlotte will think that Bertus got away, and that she's lucky to be alive. Just like I'm thinking that right now.

But neither Charlotte nor I were sure if Bertus had really thought that and run away.

"Christina, Louis, and Anna are unaccounted for. I don't think we'll ever find them. We'll have to see what happened to them, but the infrastructure for making Immortals was destroyed, and we'll never be able to rebuild that on an individual level, but you never know with people."

We need to find out if Christina is really dead, and if so, if the other two are too.

You can't say you're not a hot root, either.

And what happened to Ludwig.

Plus the problem of Antirrhinus.

It's not all over yet, and I don't know everything.

There's more and more to do, and more and more to keep up with.

\* \* \*

It's been two weeks since the Battle of Diane.

In the meantime, Charlotte took over the administration of the Zodiac.

The Allies slowly began to make a comeback under Herriot's leadership.

As soon as they return, the story will spread across the continent that the gate incident ended in a Union victory.

And stories of imperial treachery and demons will spread.

The rest of the chaos that will ensue will be left to people everywhere to sort out.

Conflicting claims will ensue between those who reject me and those who have seen me in action in the Alliance, and it will cause countless conflicts across the continent.

You can't be everywhere at once.

May the leaders of mankind do what they say they will do.

I don't know what else to say, just that you guys have fun and live well.

It's the next one that really controls them.

For the time being, it was hard enough to keep up with the ecliptic.

After the Allied withdrawal, the complete end of the Gate Crisis was announced to the ecliptic.

All troops returned to the ecliptic.

And.

At the same time, the story of the devil devouring the empire will be spreading.

A joy so great that it drowns out all the confusion.

And, a bizarre story that will suddenly make that joy seem bizarre.

Imperial betrayal and demonic domination.

It's a story that's bound to be told at some point.

The blackout begins.

The Gate was actually caused by the Emperor, and the Devil has been trying to protect humanity.

That pretty much sums it up.

The Great Hall of the Central Palace Tetra.

b.

Herriot.

Charlotte.

Olivia.

Airi summoned from the Edina Archipelago.

Riana.

Sarkegar.

Four Lord Vampires, excluding Antirrhinus.

There's Rowen, the Crusader Knightmaster.

And Louise von Schwarz.

Here were all the people who were about to take over the reins of my regime, so to speak.

I wish the Grand Duke of St. Thuan could be here, but he has returned to his duchy with his army. leaving his daughter in charge of everything.

"......I honestly don't believe it even if I did."

Everyone in the room nodded slowly at my words.

Black propaganda.

Honestly, it was a little too obvious.

It is nothing more or less than the new regime badmouthing the old regime to justify its rule.

"I mean, why not?"

I nodded at Olivia's words. Whether people believe in it or not, it's good for me to have a few more people believe in it.

"Let the words of those who have seen you fight in the Union Army be your witness."

Black propaganda that doesn't make sense.

Actual veterans can attest to that.

I agree with Charlotte that that will get you some traction, and that's enough.

Charlotte begins to explain.

"What's happening on the continents is out of our hands, and our first goal will be to keep the entire ecliptic afloat and stabilized."

"Perhaps many of the forces that went home will have a different mindset over time."

"Many of them may be unwilling to accept our domination now that we're about to start functioning as an empire, and that may be the position of the rulers, or it may be the result of representing the position of the ruled."

"But there isn't a single power on the entire continent that can invade the ecliptic by force, so while they may be able to resist our rule, they'll never pose a real threat to us."

"It's going to be hard to get the political legitimacy, but if you subordinate them, obedience is bound to follow."

"It doesn't have to be power to make us dependent, it can come from the power we have or the resources we have or the technology we have."

"In the long run, we need to subjugate entire continents to the Empire, not politically or militarily, but economically. Once we're full, we create a situation where the moment they refuse to recognize our dominance, it's all over."

"Everyone may hate us, but we can dominate them if we make them realize that without us, everything they have is gone."

"Luckily, we have the blueprints for the new warp gate."

Charlotte looked at Harriet as she said it, and Harriet nodded.

New warp gate.

That's the second button on our way to dominating the entire continent.

"The primary goal is to stabilize the ecliptic."

"Then, restore and redesign the warp gates around the continent to unite the continent economically. Once we have control of the warp gates, no one can oppose us."

You can live a comfortable life in exchange for miserable submission to the devil.

So subjugate them economically rather than militarily.

Eventually, economic prosperity will speed up the rebuilding of civilization.

The moment we have a warp gate, we have the leash of an entire continent in our hands, just by being in control of it.

We talked briefly about where we need to go from here.

"We may actually have to use force. We're running low on food, and we've got Edina's problem to worry about, so I suggest you stay at the palace for now. You never know when or where you'll need it."

The ecliptic is a boiling cauldron right now.

An emergency can strike at any time, so we need to stay in the ecliptic for now.

Episode 679.

Terrace on the third floor of the Tetra of the Central Palace.

Despite the chaos that will ensue, the uproar does not reach the Central Palace.

Harriet and I were having tea for the first time in a very long time.

"Hah....... I still don't get it, I don't even know what it is......."

Just as Olivia felt like she was about to collapse, so did Harriet, and she sighed deeply.

With that said, Herriot did some magic and saved us an astronomical amount of money and time.

Indeed, his magic has destroyed countless monsters and protected countless people.

If you were to line up the greatest wizards of all time, Heriot would be at the top of the list.

Over time, that will happen.

Virtually all of the judgment will be hers from here on out. I'm in the position of deciding whether to approve them or not.

During the war, we were the busiest, but now Charlotte will be the busiest.

Herriot may be a brilliant mind, but he's not very good at politics.

Neither I nor Herriot's powers should be used anymore. Of course, once the situation stabilizes, we'll need to build a new warp gate, so Heriot will have to step up to the plate again.

In many ways, Herriot has become indispensable.

Harriet crosses her arms and looks out the window.

Where was the arrogance and contempt in his eyes?

Now it's full of worry and depth. Worry and fear about what's to come and what's already happened.

I don't know how long it's been since I've had tea.

Herriot's eyes seemed to soften.

I don't even know what you're thinking.

"Reinhardt."

Suddenly, Harriet called out to me.

"......?"

"We need to talk."

In that one word.

It sent a chill down my spine.

"Uh, ugh....... Uhhh......."

I got up from my hip dancing position as I watched Harriet get out of her seat.

Something.

Something.

That thing about needing to talk.......

I'm so fucking scared!

We were talking about it, but now that I'm asking to talk about it, I'm losing my mind!

We're talking about something other than this, right?

I followed behind Harriet as she walked off into the distance, trembling with an unidentifiable fear.

\* \* \*

Shouldn't we have just talked about it where we were sitting?

Herriot took me to a doorway somewhere, flung it open, looked around, and motioned for me to come in.

We don't know who it belonged to, but it was a bedroom.

It wasn't the emperor's bedchamber, where I'd been staying ever since I entered Tetra.

It was one of those rooms that was empty, just like so many other rooms were empty.

-Dalcock

Then, when I walked in, she closed the door and locked it behind me.

There.......

You know what?

Why lock it?

She stares at me, blocking the doorway and leaning back against it, as if to make sure I can't get away.

"......."

And Herriot stares at me, still and terrified.

Let's talk.

I realized that those few words were more terrifying than any declaration of war in the world.

Is there a problem?

Did I do something wrong?

What to do?

I've been racking my brain lately, trying to figure out if I've done something wrong, if I've done anything to make it worse, but I can't figure it out.

The list of things I've done to make you feel bad is endless.

I should have taken care of you, but I didn't.

It's not that I didn't do anything wrong, it's just that I did so many things wrong that I can't figure it out.

My heart is pounding.

"......Scared?"

"Uh......?"

She asks if I read that in my expression.

Scary.

Of course not.

I can't count the number of times I've been scared in my life.

I don't think I've ever felt such an unidentifiable sense of dread as I did today.

I don't even know why I should be scared, I'm just scared.

No, not scary, but something.

Squeezed.

Squashed.

If I did something wrong, can't you tell me what I did wrong?

I'm confident on my knees!

Once you're on your knees for doing something wrong, they're going to ask you what you did wrong!

My history of wrongdoing is almost like building a castle, so when the words start spewing out of my mouth, I don't know where to start!

"You're not going to answer?"

Herriot asks quietly.

What's wrong.......

You don't, and then all of a sudden you're like, "What's wrong?

Isn't this what I used to do when I was in Temple, when I was picking on other kids?

"Mmm, scary....... I'm scared......."

As Herriot prodded me for an answer, I could only nod in disbelief.

When I admit to being scared, she shakes her head.

"Why are you scared?"

It's crazy.

I'm losing my mind!

"Well, you....... I don't usually do this......."

At some point, it became impossible to go any harder than that on him!

I have a lot to be sorry for, and a lot to be thankful for.

So.

So.......

"I can't do this?"

"No....... Why not......."

Herriot walks over to me with a coy smile.

As it approached, I had no choice but to step back and flop down on the bed.

Herriot looks at me, crouched, from top to bottom.

With a coy smile.

"Are you afraid of being yelled at by me?"

I'm in trouble.

It's cute to say, but it's scary to think about.

The only time she's ever been annoyed, appalled, or angry with me was at the beginning of our freshman year, when we hadn't gotten to know each other yet.

It's not like I'm not angry.

From one day to the next, he always understood me, always accepted me, always did something for me.

The thought of her getting angry and pointing out all the things I've been doing wrong makes my eyes glaze over.

I don't even know what to say to apologize.

"Uh....... I'm scared."

So I could only shake my head in disbelief.

If he comes out like that, I might actually bite my tongue and die.

Herriot asks again.

"It's not like anything is going to happen to me if I get yelled at, so why are you scared?"

I think I'm the only one who's serious about this.

What the hell are you trying to say?

Getting yelled at doesn't mean anything is wrong.

but.......

Scary stuff.

Or someone who wasn't angry gets angry.

Something like that.

If someone who is absolutely nothing gets mad at me, that's none of my business, but.......

"Because you are."

Because you're not a nobody.

Because you can't.

It's understandably scary when someone like that gets angry.

I liked the words that came out of my mouth.

Harriet straddles me on the bed.

She leans in close to me, almost nose to nose, and looks me in the eye.

No come on......!

But his actions and words couldn't have been more different.

"I've been away from my family for too long."

"It was......, not......."

"So, now that I'm almost done, I'm going to go to......."

Herriot glances out the window for a moment.

"I want to go back to the duchy for a few years, and you don't need me right now."

The words felt like a stone dropped in my heart.

I get it.

Obviously, you know what I mean.

You can't help but feel that way.

I know that Harriet really loves her family and misses them.

So suddenly?

Not for a moment, but for years?

Herriot asks.

"Can I do that?"

"......."

It's already done a lot for us.

They've done so much for me that I can't thank them enough.

And what Herriot did for me, no one else could have done for me, except Herriot.

You can't ask for more than that.

I wonder if I've gone too far.

It's not like we're going to go away forever.

I'll be back whenever you need me.

It's not going to be the way it is now, beside me, closest to me, taking it for granted.

It was always within reach.

He was always there to talk, and he took it for granted.

The first to hear me talk, the first to see me struggle.

I'm not going to live like I have in the past.

Can I do that?

You're not trying to punish me.

It's asking for permission.

Herriot was saying goodbye, so close we could feel each other's breath.

Herriot asks.

"No?"

Of course not.

That is.

I hate it.

I don't think it's fair to ask for more than that, and to take it for granted that you'll stay by my side.

But eventually.

"No......, of course."

It's pathetic that that's the only answer I came up with.

It was an acknowledgment of something.

Herriot laughs at my answer.

It was the first time I'd ever seen him laugh like that, and I wondered if it was possible.

Herriot leans in a little closer to me.

And before I can say anything else, Harriet presses her lips to mine.

I don't know how long we stood there, talking to each other, feeling like we were about to lose our minds.

Herriot moves away from me.

He looks at me and smiles.

"I actually knew that."

"What......?"

He smiles and whispers, quietly, in my ear.

"If I do this....... you won't be able to push me away."

"I've noticed from the way you fidget when I say something a little too hard."

"Sometimes I wonder if they're doing this because they're sorry."

"I don't mean to sound like I'm sorry. I knew that at some point."

"I've always known how to do it."

"But....... because that's cowardly."

"Because it's cheesy."

"So I didn't."

"But....... I'm not going to do that forever."

"Now I'm going to be cowardly and cheesy."

"I'm going to do it my way."

I don't understand what the hell Herriot is talking about.

"Marry me."

Harriet whispers in my ear.

"Otherwise, I'll never see you again."

Did knowing what to say mean saying it?

Marriage.

When I say that, it makes me feel weird.

Tell me you're getting married or I'll leave.

Is that....... Is that a threat from this guy?

"Well, by the way......."

"No way, no way?"

Herriot's expression changes.

No, not that.

Not like or not.

"......Weren't you going to do that?"

"......?"

Herriot is visibly flustered by my words.

"No, then....... you weren't going to?"

For a moment, I was scared to leave.

If anything, it's embarrassing on my part.

"Of course I do."

At my words, Harriet's face begins to widen as if she doesn't understand the situation.

Marriage.

Isn't that what you're supposed to do?

"That, that....... That, that....... such....... Was that......?"

I don't know what you were thinking, but were you thinking that maybe you wouldn't do it?

Her lips quivered as she listened to this answer to the words she had spoken with so much intent.

As if we hadn't already forgotten about our brazen behavior.

"Of course I do. I should."

"Uh, ah....... Uh, yeah......."

Her face flushes at my assertion.

Our paktong.

Gearco.

You.

This bastard crawls.

It makes me say things like.

You're making me say more shitty things.

"And....... I hate to say this, but......."

"......?"

"Would you like me to share that....... only with you......?"

Pacton's face tightens as he realizes that it's not quite what he imagined.

"You, you and....... He....... with Charlotte....... And with Olivia's sister....... with Olivia's sister?"

Of course!

Emperor!

Marriage is supposed to create power where none exists.

You may need to do more than that!

It's not my choice to do it or not to do it. It's what I'm supposed to do!

Now it's even weirder if you don't!

"Oh....... Well, yeah....... That....... It's a story....... Yeah....... That's right......."

Herriot nods, dumbfounded.

Then, gradually, his expression turned cold.

The bottom line is that it's bullshit.

In front of a guy who wants to marry you.

Yeah, I'll do it with you and I'll do it with other people.

That's what I said.

Eventually, Herriot, who is on top of me, gets a look of frustration on his face.

And then eventually.

-Bam!

"to...... to......."

It starts to choke me.

"Oh, it's......! You, you, I hate you!"

Tears eventually form in the corners of his eyes.

"I hate you the most in the world!"

I had ten mouths to feed, but I couldn't think of anything to say, so I had to strangle myself.

"Well, then, fuck me first, fuck me first, you piece of shit!"

Herriot screamed at the top of his lungs that if he didn't do it, he'd die on the spot.

Episode 680.

Central Palace Tetra, the Emperor's office.

"You've been playing with ......."

Herriot and Reinhardt arrive first thing in the morning.

That was all Charlotte had to say to Herriot and Reinhardt.

Charlotte's sarcastic response made both Herriot and Reinhardt blush.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah."

Marriage.

As Reinhardt argued yesterday, it should.

There's no such thing as a "no" option.

It's just unclear how many more people we'll be working with.

Charlotte was fully aware of that and was thinking that maybe she should do more than just agree.

"You'll have to do it with me, you'll have to do it with Olivia Ranze, you'll have to do it with Airi. It's going to be awkward, but I might even be forced to do it with Riana. It's not like I don't have to make up people and force them into marriage alliances......."

"What are you talking about, Lee, not Riana!"

"Why not, I'll do it if I have to."

Reinhardt freaked out, and Harriet began to blush.

"Well, still....... But......!"

"You're trying to cover for work, now, for your own good?"

Reinhardt froze as Charlotte's expression turned cold.

With that said, Reinhardt may now have to marry someone who, for better or worse, he'll probably want to die of hate.

So Reinhardt doesn't have a choice in the first place.

If you do it, you do it; if you shouldn't, you shouldn't.

"That, that's....... That is....... but......."

"Well, Riana was just saying, you don't have to go that far. Anyway, you have to get married. A lot."

Charlotte didn't say that Reinhardt was fooling around because he said he was going to marry you.

The part about Charlotte playing and falling asleep is different.

Charlotte's icy gaze is directed at Herriot, not Reinhardt.

"But what, you want to go first?"

"Well, then....... Then why not?"

At Charlotte's words, Harriet added cautiously.

Marriage.

I'll put up with this guy doing that.

But I want you to be the first to do it.

It's Herriot's last ditch effort.

"Marriage is a matter of state, did I just say that?"

"Well, it was......."

"It's a state 'event,' right?"

"Uhhh......."

"Surely an event has a 'cost', right?"

With that, both Herriot and Reinhardt had no choice but to realize what Charlotte was talking about.

"How many times can we do that on our terms? You want to take care of your own wedding and then fuck up a country that hasn't even started?"

"Well, for short......."

Charlotte's face twists at Reinhardt's cautious words.

"......If the wedding of the new Emperor of the New Empire is held in an abbreviated ceremony, will it be rumored that it is a frugal empire or an extravagant one?"

"......He, he, he? Go?"

"Luckily, the times are such that it would be flattering to have such an event on a grand scale. There's nothing wrong with a small one, but the reason the Emperor's marriage is a state event is that it has a pre-marital purpose: to announce the union of power with power, not the union of an individual with an individual. The purpose is to publicize it. If an emperor or a king were to marry in a small, secretive ceremony, with only a few people in the know, do you think that's some kind of espionage?"

Charlotte sighed, as if just thinking about it was giving her a headache.

"How many years do you think it will take to have a proper wedding with each and every one of them?"

"I don't know, but......."

"Once the country has recovered to a point where the emperor's wedding doesn't affect the national economy?"

"You know that thing about getting married and dying of old age....... something like that?"

"I know."

Charlotte looks at Herriot and Reinhardt with a cold stare.

When I say we'll do it first, I mean we'll do it separately.

We're not in a position to do that.

"Well, good. You spoke first, so I'm going to clean this up now."

Charlotte pulls out a blank piece of paper and begins to scribble something down.

Charlotte finished writing in a flash and handed the paper to Reinhardt.

And, of course, it had a person's name on it.

"Notify and come."

"Notification......? What notification?"

"......Why don't we stop playing dumb?"

Charlotte looks like she's about to get really angry, and Reinhardt frowns.

"No, I mean, right now....... to announce your marriage to these people? Right now?"

Reinhardt squinted at the names on the papers.

Charlotte shakes her head at Reinhardt and Harriet, who look puzzled.

"I thought you two were getting married?"

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

"You said you'd do it with me."

"Uhhh. What....... Uh-huh."

"I thought you said you were going to do it with other people?"

"Uh......."

It's a marriage you're going to have anyway. And it's a marriage you're going to have a lot of. And they understand and accept that.

And doing it separately is very difficult in the current environment.

So what's the problem?

"Well, I'm going to do it anyway, so let's do it all at once."

All at once and.

Herriot and Reinhardt's jaws dropped slightly at that.

"Oh, no....... That's......."

Charlotte smiles wryly at their expressions.

Charlotte points a finger at Reinhardt to visit.

"If you do, go forward to the people listed there."

"We're getting married in the same place, at the same time, on the same day."

"Let's make the day of the ceremony Independence Day."

"Specifically, tell that to Olivia Ranze."

"If you want to grow old and die eating your own wedding, say no."

Charlotte's bold decision to hold the wedding and the inauguration at the same time made both Harriet and Reinhardt realize that something was not quite right.

But even so, it would be a pointless drain on the treasury and not feasible to organize multiple marriages of the emperor in these troubled times.

The economy will collapse because of the wedding.

Charlotte's decision is economical and rational.

It's only a problem because it's dehumanizing.

When Reinhard and Herriot come to discuss the future Emperor's marriage plans, they are told that they want to be separated.

Is it just you guys? We're all getting married at the same time.

That's Charlotte's answer.

"No....... But......."

"Well."

"No matter what......."

Obviously.

Reinhardt's gaze was fixed on one of the names on the papers, and he couldn't leave it.

Charlotte's expression turns cold as she watches Reinhardt freak out.

"What did I just say to you, marriage?"

"I said national security."

"Do you want to take a leave of absence?"

The new emperor, who had come to talk about marriage and was given a list of people to marry, left the office as lonely as if his soul had left him.

Charlotte smiled at Harriet, who was equally flustered by the storm.

It was a sneer.

"Hmmm, if we were in better financial shape, we could have had a monopoly for a year or so. Too bad, huh?"

"......what."

Harriet's face turned even redder at Charlotte's nakedness.

"You're an asshole. But hey, you deserve it."

"......."

Heriot knew this was inevitable if he was going to be emperor, not just king, and Reinhardt had even told him so himself.

But neither Reinhardt nor Herriot expected it all to come at once.

However.

The reason for Reinhardt's pale complexion.

"Uh, by the way....... Is that okay?"

Herriot had seen the name on the slip of paper, too, which is why he was so pale.

This is a bit of a stretch.

Because it had a name like that.

"It's a job, I have to do it, what are you going to do, is this the end of it, I might have to do it three or four more times depending on the situation."

Not three times, not four times, but three or four times.

We don't know how many more marriages we'll have.

Sure, it's necessary.

It's not like you didn't have a sidebar that said, "Kick the shit out of him.

"What do you say we sneak around and watch?"

"Well, don't do that!"

Charlotte chuckled for a moment, trying to imagine the scene.

\* \* \*

On the orders of Charlotte de Gradias, the de facto acting emperor, the new emperor Reinhard wandered aimlessly through the central palace, the Tetra.

You need to get married.

A lot.

Frequent.

Quite a bit.

I don't know about you, but when you're an emperor, that's what marriage is supposed to be.

I knew it, and I knew it was something I had to do.

But all at once, without being prepared.

All of them.

The emperor didn't see it coming.

The first person the emperor turned to was Olivia Ranze.

"......."

"......."

By the time I finished my half-dead, gibberish-like explanation, Olivia Ranze's face had turned grim.

"I've often thought about how I might not be able to marry you, but I never thought I'd do it this way. In a group? What is that?"

This is the look of someone who is really upset and wants to break something.

Olivia Ranze hadn't been sober in a very, very long time.

"I'm going to tinker with the doctrines of the Church anyway, and I'll be able to make my own decisions once I'm married."

Once we realize that earrings are earrings and nose rings are nose rings, and that it's the gods and the doctrine, we can get rid of the practice of not allowing pure priests to marry.

Reinhardt was on the edge of his seat, wondering if he was going to get a big slap.

Olivia studied Reinhardt's expression.

"You're sorry, aren't you?"

"......."

"Why are you sorry? Actually, you should be, right? It's just that I'm in a bad mood, and there's nothing you can do about it......."

It's like fate after all.

"Ha ha....... Yeah. I suppose it's a good thing it's going to be like this and no one dies, because we shouldn't be too greedy....... And if I refuse now, I might just die of old age......? Is that some kind of unspoken threat?"

Olivia frowned in displeasure at Charlotte's message.

If I say I'm going to do it separately, I might do it later when I have more time.

"By then, the kid will have already been admitted to Temple......."

Olivia seemed to imagine what would happen if she didn't accept the offer.

It's not something you can do because Olivia says you shouldn't, and it's not something you can do because she says you should.

But you can't help but feel bad.

They say it's inevitable.

Olivia Ranze is in a very bad mood right now.

"We'll see how they do."

Olivia Ranze looks at Reinhardt with a cold gaze.

You say you can't do anything about it now.

"The next time you make me feel bad, I'm going to make you regret being alive, do you understand?"

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

Olivia Ranze's cold glare told me that she wasn't lying at all.

It's going to be the hardest, most exhausting thing in the world.

Before we were even married, Olivia declared that she would scratch every chance she got.

\* \* \*

The devil, half-dead in the morning, was a ghost in the afternoon, pounding on Airi's door.

"They say demons follow Archdemons, but of course they're not without feelings."

Airi nodded at Reinhardt's explanation, as if it were a given.

"So if your wives are all human, that's going to be a problem for the demons, too, so my presence is definitely going to make a difference."

Airi nodded slightly, as if she understood what he meant.

"That....... I wonder if it's too easy to decide......."

Reinhardt's reaction to Airi, who seemed to be approving of the marriage rather than agreeing to it, made him uneasy.

"You're right, Charlotte, you should marry more, but it's not balanced to have too many humans, so maybe you should consider finding some demons to be your brides?"

"Uh......?"

"How about Sarkegar? He's been a crucial player since the fall of the Darklands, so I can't blame him, and he can take any form you want."

"Er......? Sarkegar......?"

Reinhardt's complexion turned white at the mention of a name that had nothing to do with the one Charlotte had written down, but was so out of place.

I'm afraid you're going to respond too strongly.

"Or we could try to find the surviving Dreadfind clan, or organize the remaining demons in the Darklands, or the Mermaid Queen........ Are you physically challenged? I've heard that some mermaids are capable of living on land......."

"Hey, is that....... Excuse me......?"

"There's also an Archdemon who was married to an Orc."

"Just....... Just swear!"

"Come to think of it, there's also Elise."

"......what?"

"Valerie, aren't you technically the closest to Eleris out of all of us?"

In fact, only a few people know that Eleris is an ancient Archdemon, and Airi doesn't know it.

Reinhardt's complexion was as white as a vampire's.

"Mi, don't be crazy! That, that's....... That's a no-no!"

"Are you saying ...... can't because it's undead?"

"Oh, no!"

"......?"

In the end, Airi said something that made the demon want to vomit blood.

\* \* \*

"I'll take my time finding a demon bride for you.

Reinhard slipped out of Airi's room like a fugitive, heading for the next location.

It's just a matter of time before it happens, and that's what I'm thinking.

But I never expected this.

Reinhardt can certainly say that.

Why do we need to do this?

Why you need to do this.

But eventually you have to do it.

-Smart

Reinhard knocks on someone's door.

A moment later, the door cautiously opened.

-Dalcock

"Is there a ...... meeting?"

Louise von Schwarz looked at the demon and shook her head.

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

If there was a suicide button, I'd press it right now.

"Ooh, we....... We need to talk....... Ha, that....... want to......?"

Reinhardt thought so.

"Yes, by all means."

Louise nodded.

Episode 681.

Louise von Schwarz remained in the imperial court as a key figure in the demon army.

She needs to get back home as soon as possible, but as a key member of the Demon King's army, she needs to learn everything she can about the palace.

Louise stares at Reinhardt, frozen, as he sits in his chair.

It's a long time in terms of cooperation, but Louise has only communicated with the demon through Rowen, and they don't actually know each other.

The first time I saw him face to face was at a meeting of the General Staff, just before the Allied withdrawal.

We've seen each other a few times since I entered the palace, but this is the first time we've met in person, and the first time we've had a conversation.

Despite being a very important and close collaborator, Louise was a complete stranger to Ma Wang.

Heinrich would know better.

"This is the first time we've met."

"That's right......."

Looking at the frozen demon, Louise shakes her head.

"Why don't you make it easy on yourself, you're about to become emperor of an entire continent, and I'm obviously in your service."

Louise only said that because she thought Reinhardt was being wary of her because he considered her his friend's big sister.

A being who stands above everyone shouldn't have to freeze like this just because the other person is a little older.

The tales of demons that Heinrich had heard from the mouths of men were in fact a bit distorted.

His restlessness is quite comical for a bully, and if he's like this, the future of his new empire is in doubt.

I don't know about Rowen, but Louise has no ill will toward the Devil.

He was the one who tried to save Heinrich from certain death, so he deserves our gratitude.

And now that we're here after the gate debacle, I have to say, it's great.

But what is it that is making me so anxious?

I couldn't figure out why.

Despite what you may have heard, the devil is actually quite fragile.

Louise wondered if she should revise her judgment.

After much hemming and hawing, the demon finally speaks.

"That...... is."

"......that?"

"Yes....... That....... I have something to tell you......."

If I'm being honest, I'm tempted to scream at him to just talk.

That moment when you realize that the would-be emperor is so small, and that this empire is so unnerving.

"Get married......."

For Louise, that one word summed up the whole situation.

Louise wondered why the demon was so frozen.

Why I'm mumbling.

The moment I heard the story, which somehow managed to get out, I knew.

Louise stares at the demon in silence.

It didn't take much thought.

New empires are never solid.

That's why you need to ally with a lot of groups and build a foundation, sometimes underfoot.

So it's better to have more than an alliance with the Schwarzes, the first imperial family.

And as the heir to the House of Schwarz, it is imperative that you become involved with the new empire.

For a new empire.

For the continuation of the royal family.

This choice would separate Louise, the would-be Imperial, from the Schwarzes, and thus confirm Heinrich's succession to the Schwarzes.

You join the Empire for a good and solid reason.

And so, for the right and only reason, Heinrich is crowned King of Cernstadt.

It's so easy to do things you've always imagined, but never knew how to do.

For her, it's not just good, it's the right thing to do.

"It's necessary, so there's no reason not to do it."

Louise said, and nodded.

"Thank you."

Louise's hand was outstretched in a very businesslike manner, and the Demon King clasped it with a dumbfounded expression.

"I, he, I, I, I want you to do better!"

For a moment, Louise stares at the demon with wide eyes, wondering what the hell is going on.

She takes a deep breath.

Even if it's the right thing to do, there are things they need to know.

"But there's something the Devil needs to know."

"ah......."

"That's Heinrich's job."

The Demon King swallows hard, and nods with a stony expression.

"Well, you know....... there."

"Oh....... I see."

Louise said nothing more.

\* \* \*

I wonder if this is what it feels like to have your soul sucked out.

No, I think broken is the right word.

"......You really did that."

When I told her I'd accomplished my mission, Charlotte's eyes widened and she covered her mouth in disbelief.

"You told me to......!"

"I didn't think you'd actually do it. How brazen are you?"

This.

This!

If you ask me to do something and I don't do it, what am I?

If nothing else.

If nothing else!

I can't believe I get to do this crazy stuff.......

What the hell is an emperor?

I don't want to do it! I'm already driving myself crazy not wanting to do it!

"So, did you accept?"

"...... He didn't even bother."

Get married.

Quite a bit of it, too.

Even people you never thought you'd meet.

I wonder if I'll have to do more marriages like this in the future.

While I agree with Charlotte that for people like me, marriage is work.

It's like, you know, I ended up marrying everybody.

I knew it was going to happen at some point, but now that it's suddenly right around the corner, it's crazy.

I'm so scared.

What happens to me in the future?

I'm already dizzy, how much more dizzy can I get?

"Don't worry, I'll take care of the arrangements."

Charlotte said she'd take care of scheduling and other issues.

Somehow.

He's enjoying tormenting me.

Charlotte looks at me and giggles.

I'm feeling a little spiteful this morning.

"So, we're down to the last hurdle, right?"

"Last......? Any more......?"

"No, that's all you need to marry for now, but it's polite......."

Charlotte walks over to me with a wicked grin on her face and whispers quietly in my ear.

"But as a matter of courtesy, Heinrich, you should tell him yourself, shouldn't you?"

"Uhhh......?"

"You're not supposed to tell me you're marrying your mom."

"!!!!!"

He bit his tongue, but unfortunately, he didn't die.

\* \* \*

Since the massive return of the Allies, all of the Temple veterans have returned to Temple, and Heinrich is no exception.

The entire continent was a boiling cauldron as the events of the end of the Gate War and its aftermath spread across the ecliptic, and the Temple was no exception.

Anxiety, despair, fear, and a glimmer of hope.

It's a mix of things, and I think we're all trying to find our way through an uncertain future and an uneasy reality.

So I called Heinrich to the imperial court.

Not in the bedroom or parlor of the Central Palace Tetra, but in the garden in front of the Tetra.

Without a single escort.

"Does ...... mean I have to call you Emperor now?"

Arriving at my summons, Heinrich gave me a dubious look.

"No....... Just....... Do what you're doing."

"What's wrong with you? What's wrong with your face?" I don't care. On the contrary, you're just getting started, so it's understandable. I don't think there's anything I can do for you now that I'm all superpowers. Is there something you need me to do?"

"No, that's not necessary. I have something to tell you......."

I feel like throwing up.

I want to die.

I tried to figure out how to break my luck, but the answer was nowhere to be found.

There shouldn't be an answer to this.

I scramble off the bench and walk over to Heinrich.

Then grab him by the shoulders.

I mean, what else is there to do but just say it!

"I'm getting married."

"......?"

The bold declaration made Heinrich shake his head.

"Uh, what....... Congratulations. With who? Harriet? Charlotte? Sister Saint? Maybe....... All three......?"

"......."

If only moods could kill people.

Maybe right now.

\* \* \*

-Currrrr!

"Look at that, look at that! Herriot!"

"Ugh....... Oh, no......!"

Charlotte dragged Harriet, who didn't want to look at Hansako, to the window to watch the random explosion of fireworks in the garden in front of the Tetra.

We don't get to hear the conversation, but we do see a red-faced Heinrich, clearly intent on killing Reinhardt.

-Lord, die, die, you son of a bitch!

Heinrich's cries of outrage could be heard from the windows of the Tetra.

"Dangerous....... No?"

"It's okay, I'm not going to die from that."

"You are the real......."

A war hero went on a rampage to kill an emperor, and few people saw the spectacle firsthand.

"Ugh, that's going to burn the grass. What am I going to do?"

"This is not the time to talk about that!"

Charlotte giggled at the sight.

We're all broken, and Charlotte is one of those broken people.

Eventually, the uninformed storyteller himself noticed the commotion and personally restrained Heinrich.

\* \* \*

Heinrich was eventually dragged away by Ruiz.

My stomach is still in knots.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand on end as I realize what can happen when a tease who can't handle a campfire tries to kill me.

Tetra's second floor.

After the dust settled, I was having a cup of tea when a clueless Riana grabbed me and asked me what was going on.

"......a."

After hearing the whole story, Riana nodded shakily.

It was obviously a bizarre situation that even Rianamazer, who would normally be laughing his ass off, was forced to make such a face.

"But what....... I don't know if it's necessary or not, but it's a necessary thing......."

I don't think we can say that Charlotte was obviously malicious, but even if she wasn't, it's clear that this would have happened.

Of the nations with spare capacity, the first is obviously the Empire, and the second is Cernstadt.

When the two factions combine, there is virtually no force that can stand against the New Empire.

So in terms of strengthening that bond, I think she realizes that it's a necessity.

It's just a little harder to accept.

"By the way, does that mean....... five people at once?"

"......Yes."

Harriet, Charlotte, Olivia, Airi, and Louise.

You must marry five people at once.

As she stared at her fingers, Riana suddenly pointed in her direction.

"What about me?"

"What?"

"Why am I not in there?"

No.

What are you doing?

You can use that.......

You guessed it!

Riana narrows her brow in displeasure.

"I'm married to this new guy's mom, and I'm done with honeydew, so I don't need it, is that it, is that sad?"

"What the hell, and don't put it like that......!"

"Then what do you call that?"

"But......!"

It's too wordy!

I'm already dizzy, and you're trying to make me even dizzyer?

"By the way, I didn't mean to imply that I wouldn't do it if you said you had to marry me."

"Stop, stop....... Stop."

"Well, I don't like the idea of being a concubine, waiting for a bunch of emperors and having visits that don't happen, or being looked at."

That would be too boring, Riana says, and sips her tea.

"Actually, I don't have any superpowers, so I don't have much of a political advantage."

The power of the House of Granz, a great noble family that spanned the entire continent, was lost with the death of Duke Granz, the flight of Riana, and the events of the Gate.

But maybe you're a superhero who can hold the world in your hands and shake it.

Charlotte didn't force her marriage to Riana because there was no political advantage to be gained from it.

Of course, I'd do it if I could, so that's the problem.

No.

But why is it my marriage and Charlotte's to decide?

Why am I doing what I'm told to do?

Isn't that what it is, a puppet emperor?

Is this right?

Riana sips her tea and looks out the window.

"But I don't have to be your wife to help you."

You said you'd continue to play the Four Horsemen.

Riana giggled.

Yes.

That's about the right distance for him and me.

That's why some things are good.

Episode 682.

Time has passed.

As Charlotte planned, the wedding will be a low-key affair.

But that wedding has a lot of meaning.

It's a proclamation of a new empire, and it formalizes that humanity has been trampled underfoot by the devil.

Empress Gradias is now completely at the feet of the Demon King.

The emperor fled.

It means that Charlotte de Gradias, the last heir to the House of Gradias, has become a half-demon and is now the bride of a demon.

I announce that Louise von Schwarz of Cernstadt, First Empress, has become the Devil's bride, and the Kingdom of Schwarz has come under the Devil's control.

Olivia Ranze is also a pure saint who betrays her doctrine and becomes a bride of the devil, signifying the subjugation of the Five Great Houses to the devil.

There is a demonic bride there, which means that there will be an era of humans and demons in the future.

In the case of Herriot de Saint-Ouen, it may not mean as much as others, but those who have seen and heard of his exploits on the battlefield know.

The world's greatest wizard has become the devil's bride.

With the wedding, a new empire is proclaimed.

And the chaos that followed.

Whether it's prosperity or something else that comes after chaos.

It would be the beginning of what would be another long, long day.

The night before your wedding.

I was sitting alone in my bedroom.

I wanted to be alone.

"......."

On the table in front of him was a bottle of whiskey that he'd pulled out of a display case.

I'm a crazy person who drinks on the eve of a wedding, but it doesn't really matter.

If you want to break it, you can break it.

Think about what you've lost.

That may seem like a lot, but it's not all lost.

EpinHauser.

Loyar.

People in the Rotary Club.

They became immortalized regardless of whether I won or lost.

There's no coming back.

Would they be happy to see me now?

I'm not sure.

This time, I think about the things I don't know.

Bertus and Saviolin Tana are gone.

Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages were also scattered.

Christina and Ludwig are nowhere to be found, nor are Anna and Louis Ankton.

The Immortal may be gone, but the magic that created it remains.

They don't know what happened either.

And Antony.

I don't even know if Antony is lurking somewhere, waiting to breathe down my neck.

The deal was done, and Antirrhinus would have killed me.

But it didn't die.

I don't know what happened to that either.

And.

Also.

Survive to the point after the ending.

I don't even know what that means.

Isn't this after the ending?

The gate debacle is over.

So what is an ending?

If you leave me alone for the rest of my life, that's good enough for me.

The important thing is that things like event notifications are no longer responsive.

Things like information, challenges, and retirements.

I don't see those things anymore.

As of my last departure, that ability seems to have disappeared.

I wonder if this is the only reward I'll ever get.

If that's the reward, I guess it's not a bad thing.

If they wanted to take me somewhere now that it was all over, that would have been even worse.

The system is gone.

As if disappearing after the ending is a virtue.

The rest of the world is yours.

No cheats, no help, no messages. Things like previews.

It will no longer be in my life.

The last preview was not malicious.

I was taking it like, "Oh, get ready to die," or something like that.

In fact, it was meant to let me know that if I accepted the last transaction, it would be.

Yes.

Fucking asshole.

Glad you were able to help at the last minute.

What's lost is lost.

Don't know what you don't know.

What's done is done.

I will have to live for the next moment.

You take a sip of whiskey and look out the window.

A pale full moon was rising in the window, casting a soft glow into my unlit bedroom.

Probably.

I don't know how long I'll be able to live with it.

For the rest of my life, I will look at the moon and think of two people.

Luna.

Ellen.

Even if I never see them again in my life, I can't help but think of them when I look at the moon.

Ellen left, and it was inevitable.

It's more dangerous to be with me.

I know you left because you were thinking of me.

At some point, you'll forget.

Just pulling Ellen out of the hole she fell into to save me was already a miracle.

You have to push the boundaries of unfathomable possibilities and be satisfied that you succeeded in doing so.

Take another sip.

When I handed over the whiskey, a hot breath rose in my throat.

I can't remember the last time I had a drink.

Time will cover everything.

We're lucky enough as it is.

So there's no reason to think about people who aren't there.

You'll be doing something in your own space, and you'll still be feeling guilty, so you'll probably be out hunting monsters.

I'll try to do as much as I can without being seen.

He fumbled in his pocket and pulled out something.

A round, milky amulet.

An amulet with an engraved image of the moon and sun.

It was presumably made by grinding the bones of something.

Ellen took this off, and I picked this up.

Now this doesn't mean anything.

Whatever it actually did for Ellen, she's now free of that bondage.

To me, of course, it means nothing.

The next time you see Ellen, it won't be for a long time.

I guess I'll just have to let go of those regrets for the future.

Throw it out the window.

I'm going to put some force in my hand, and break it.

I thought about it for a while.

For a while.

For a while.

And so on for a while.

I'm laughing at myself for agonizing over it.

When you realize you've spent hours thinking about whether or not to throw something away.

I couldn't help but realize.

This is a meaningless object.

I can't even throw this away.

Oh dear, I can't even throw away a crappy amulet that has no value anymore.

"......Xfoot."

That it will never be possible to let go.

In the cold moonlight, I had a realization.

And so it goes, sip after sip, glass after glass.

Somewhere around the second, third, and fourth glasses.

-Smart

There was a knock at the door.

In the future, I'm going to hear the voice of an honor guard saying someone's here.

When I opened the door, there was a familiar face there.

"Should we now call you Your Majesty....... ?"

"Never mind."

It was Elise.

\* \* \*

"Drinking on the eve of a wedding, that doesn't look good."

"Whatever."

"I guess so."

By the moonlit window, Elise and I sat across from each other.

"As you say, I've been looking for any trace of Antirrhinus......."

"Well, there you go."

"Yes."

Eleris followed my instructions and searched for signs of Antirrhinus.

The final fight in Diane.

Antirrhinus' whereabouts after that are unknown.

It's clear from the time and context that there was a battle after I was knocked out.

Maybe it was Luna.

But Luna said she wasn't going to help anymore, and she probably meant it.

But that doesn't mean it wasn't Luna. She might not have been willing to let me die for nothing.

After taking the souls, Antirrhinus fought with someone.

Then it disappeared. We don't even know if it's dead or not.

It's not that I don't have a good guess, but I'm not sure.

"Okay. I guess the fact that I'm alive is important."

And so would Ellen.

It was long.

It was a long, long time coming.

Meeting Charlotte in the castle of the Demon King.

Flee to the ecliptic.

From there, I wandered around in a daze.

Where the scribe's advice had led him, there was Elyse.

It started out as a demon castle, but it all started when I met Eleris.

Standing face to face with Elise on the night before the end of everything felt like some kind of destiny.

Eleris stays still at the table, staring out the window of the palace.

"I never thought I'd see something like this here."

"No, and I never wanted to."

"That's weird, it must be a very desirable seat for someone, and the last person you want to sit in it is......."

We looked at each other and laughed bitterly.

Eleris did not want war.

I didn't want a war either.

He wanted no throne, no rebuilding of the Darklands.

I told her to stop being a vassal of a fallen nation, and she was thrilled that I didn't want war.

But the two of us were the biggest culprits in all of this.

I was investigating a gate situation that wouldn't happen if I stood still.

Eleris spun up Akasha.

There was a war.

I found myself in a position I didn't ask for and didn't want.

If you didn't wish for a tragedy and it happened because of him, is it all his fault?

Don't be responsible.

Whose sin was it after all?

Me, the cause of it all?

Elise on Akasha herself?

Ellen and Charlotte, who didn't trust me and went behind my back rather than talk to me?

Bertus, who personally ordered my arrest?

Or Antirrhinus, who insisted that running Akasha was the answer?

I don't know.

Now, I don't even want to know.

It's just something you can't know until you think about it.

If you know.

If it becomes clear who is most at fault, so what?

It's not going to change anything.

However, the guilt is shared by all.

I'm not sure who's at fault, but they all say they are.

So they met their end.

I became an emperor.

Ellen is gone.

Charlotte will become regent of the new empire.

Bertus ran away.

"......."

Eleris was silent, and I took a shot of whiskey.

Everyone came to some sort of conclusion.

Everyone who was partially responsible for this has met their end.

But Eleris hasn't gotten any closure yet.

"Don't go."

"......."

But I can't help but wonder why he's here in the middle of the night, on the eve of my wedding.

It's clear that they want to leave.

Otherwise, he wouldn't look so sad.

"No, Your Majesty....... No, Your Majesty....... Um....... No."

Elise shakes her head.

"Bali."

If I leave, she is no longer my vassal.

So you don't have to serve me anymore.

"You, you don't need me anymore."

Then Elise says, with a sad look on her face.

At one point, Eleris' existence was absolute.

Without Eleris' help, my radius of action would be severely limited.

No, life would have been impossible.

When I needed magic, Elise was always there to help me.

But that role can now be filled by Herriot, or anyone who isn't Herriot.

"You know, I spent a long time in a place that has nothing to do with the Darklands."

"......."

"So, it's just a matter of going back."

In reality, Elise doesn't have to be by my side the whole time.

"And while few people know I'm the one who spun up Akasha, it can't hurt to have me by your side."

That's true, too.

After leaving Darklands, Eleris spent many years in places unrelated to it.

"So now, can we go back to....... Can I go back?"

She doesn't belong in the demonic realm in the first place.

She never intended to get this deeply involved in Darkland's work.

It was only a short stay.

But I've done more than I intended, I've played countless crucial roles, and I've committed sins of immeasurable depth.

So Eleris' choice to leave, even for my sake, is somewhat understandable.

You're not going back.

You want to do something about your guilt.

So you're going to try to find another harshness to push yourself to.

You're going to want to do something that's not out of character.

Just like Ellen chose to do.

"Eleris, she's a wreck."

"......Yes, I did."

Elise nods wistfully.

"If you hadn't believed me when I said you didn't want war, and had killed me then, none of this would have happened."

"......."

Yes.

If you killed me then.

None of this would have happened.

"If you were suspicious of what I was doing, didn't trust me, and killed me, none of this would have happened."

"......."

Elise continued to doubt whether she could trust me.

But, in the end, I couldn't put my hands on it. The first thing I told Elise was that I knew the future.

"And none of this would have happened if you hadn't fired up Akasha to save me."

"......."

Antony's proposal.

Sarkeesian pressure.

Eleris fired up Akasha, and the gate was open.

He didn't want to lose me.

Eleris said.

He wouldn't trade me for the world.

You said you hate war.

You said you hate fighting and death.

Over the course of our time together, she ended up valuing me more than anything else in the world.

Just like that.

Just like that.

It popped.

"While we're on the subject, do you want to be assertive at the end?"

"......."

At the verbal assault, Eleris hung her head in silence.

"No."

I shake my head.

"Don't go."

Elise struggles to lift her head and looks at me.

Elyse's eyes widen as she catches my gaze.

Because that would be me right now.

When she sees me like that, she can't help but feel the same way.

"Maybe I don't need you anymore, who knows."

There are many people who could replace Eleris.

There's Lucinil, there's the other road vampires, there's Herriot.

"You've gotten yourself into this mess because you've been busted."

"......."

Elise finally bursts into tears.

You can't replace someone with someone else.

A blank is a blank.

"How can anyone replace the part of my heart that Elise takes up, and that's something no one can do."

You can sit someone there, but while the gap may be filled, the loss is not.

"Don't go."

"......."

"I don't want Elise to be the last one to go, to be told not to go."

A loss is a loss.

You can fill a role, but you can't fill a heart.

"I can't afford to go twice when I don't have to."

It's not an accusation.

This is what happened because it collapsed.

All the way back to the end.

I hope this doesn't stop you from leaving.

At that dire statement, Eleris jumps to her feet.

"Okay. Okay......."

Then he gently pulled me into his arms.

"I'm not going. I'm sorry I....... hurt you more than......."

I thought I had hurt her, but she gave me a long, soothing hug.

The vampire's cold body temperature.

Cold, but always warm.

That's the way it is now, and that's the way it's always been.

This is what made me who I am today.

Without it, we couldn't even get started.

It's not a good ending, but it wasn't a good process either.

We made it to the end together.

You don't want to be torn apart for no reason.

Now that you've made it to the end.

I want to go beyond this with you.

I wondered if I had some kind of evil force that was holding him tightly, urging him not to leave.

Elise trembles, and speaks softly.

"My presence won't make much difference, but......."

"If it hurts to be without me......."

"If it hurts that much......."

"Yeah......."

"For the last time in this immortal life, I will watch you forever......."

It's been said that road vampires have an appetite.

"With that, I'll wrap it up."

Eleris, a long, long time of existence.

"I'll be with you forever."

It was as if I had decided when to put an end to what had been an unfathomably long day.

I pulled her into a face-to-face hug, thanking her for the promise of an eternity.

"Thank you, Elise."

I was grateful to hear that we would be together at the end of it all, just as we were at the beginning.

\* \* \*

It was a wedding of epic proportions for the soon-to-be owners of a new continent.

It's not even a public wedding.

It's a mood, but it's also because luxury is impossible for a humanity on the brink of collapse.

As such, it was a wedding to which only the leaders and most powerful of humanity were invited.

The ecliptic will announce the fact of the marriage and the proclamation of the new empire.

So it's small, but it's small, and everyone is happy with it.

That said, the number of invitees was not small.

The leaders of each of the allied armies were present, as well as the kings and nobles who were still alive.

It doesn't hold a candle to the golden age of the empire, and compared to that, it's more like a small banquet at the imperial palace.

And, unsurprisingly, the look on their faces at the wedding was one of fear and anxiety rather than excitement.

Can this empire be trusted.

Can humanity ever be rebuilt?

Is it even right that reconstruction is in the hands of the devil?

Sensitive people already know.

Those who thought of rebelling against the New Empire did not come.

Of course, there will be those in attendance who will be rebellious and will be there as a means of exploration.

In the midst of all that mess, but with the music playing.

Holding the baton was Lanyon Sessor, the man who always cheered everyone up with music in the Alliance.

During the war, after the war.

You'll need music.

A band plays upbeat music, people come and go as they are directed.

Of course, nobility and royalty aren't the only ones in the room.

"Scarlet."

"Ah, Ivia."

Unsurprisingly, the redheaded Scarlett stood out quite a bit among the attendees.

"You look great in that dress. Where did you get it?"

"That....... Charlotte gave it to me. She said you'd need it."

Scarlett blushed at Ivia's envious glance.

Yvia, a telepath.

She was one of the unsung heroes of this war.

Ivia's telepathic abilities have greatly accelerated the speed of communication in the command center.

They're not the only heroes.

Among those who didn't fight, there are countless heroes.

There were many men from the Temple who were worthy of the title of war hero.

Ranion Cesordo playing music.

Ibiado, a telepath.

Adelia dines quietly with the Grand Duke of St. Thuan and his sons.

And the countless others who wouldn't be here today.

Every single one of them who died in the war deserved the title of hero.

Ivia says to Scarlett, "Hold still," pointing to Lannion Sesor, who conducts the band.

"Lanyon is going to be a bard."

"Bard......?"

"Yes."

Lanyon Sesor also deserves a lot of credit.

So he could sit in the court musicians of the imperial palace, and there would still be plenty of people with money to hire Lanyon.

But to be a bard wandering the continents.

Around this time, too.

"He said he's been singing about what he's seen and heard from the Allies, and I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, but I think he wants to tell the truth."

How hard that fight was.

How tragic.

How heroic, though.

Scarlett nodded at the thought of traveling the world singing a song like that.

"I'm still not sure, I think my ability to....... I don't think it matters much anymore."

Faster communication.

It was a much-needed skill for the army, but now that the Alliance was disbanded, Ivia didn't know what she was going to do.

Now that the war is over, you are responsible for your own livelihood.

No empire is so rich that it can afford to give its war heroes a place to sleep and eat forever.

After all, the new emperor's orders are harsh: eat well and live well.

You've done a good job so far, now you're on your own.

Maybe later we can give something to war veterans, but for now it's hard.

Because everyone is starving.

Ivia, for her part, seemed to be at a loss as to how to make a living in the immediate future, even after attending the Emperor's wedding.

"Scarlett, have you thought about what you're going to do?"

"umm......."

Scarlett bit her lip slightly at Ivia's question.

"I'll probably end up doing an article."

"A knight? Scarlett's a good one, I suppose. If it's a knight, is it here?"

Ivia points to the floor of the ballroom, the imperial palace.

"Yes, perhaps....... the Emperor's escort to....... I think."

"......really?"

Ivia couldn't help but gape.

Some people have come face-to-face with the Devil, while others in their class are vaguely afraid of him. Like Ivia.

This is especially true for those who weren't even close to Reinhardt when he lived under his name.

Scarlett becomes the Emperor's bodyguard.

"Charlotte said....... You said that my strength is in my ability to protect....... and she asked me if I'd like to be in that position, so I agreed......."

That was Charlotte's suggestion.

In the case of Immortals, Scarlet's abilities were specifically used for destruction and incapacitation.

But Scarlet's powers are actually specialized for protecting things.

With a knight by his side who can neutralize all magic and superpowers, the emperor's safety is assured in any situation.

"Of course....... although I suspect you'll be seeing more of my protected ugliness......."

But Scarlett was pretty sure that even if she had superpowers, she would hardly be able to protect herself from a demon that was incomparably stronger than she was.

In fact, I even had an ominous thought that if there was a crisis, the devil would risk his life to protect them.

Scarlett was almost convinced by the thought.

And just like that, there were a lot of people in the ballroom, just as Ivia and Scarlett were staring at the ballroom where the wedding was taking place.

Among them were the Grand Duke of Saint-Antoine and his family, dining at one of the tables.

"Wow....... It's hard to put into words."

"I see."

Watching your favorite youngest get married.

But it's a joint wedding.

The devil marries with five brides, and the youngest is one of them.

As they ate, Adelia still couldn't quite wrap her head around the fact that in many ways, that's what Herriot had become.

I met him the other day and we talked for a while, but it was still the same.

The Archduchess was sobbing incoherently, and the Archduke couldn't bring himself to reprimand her.

I can't help it, it's a bit of a mess.

And in the corner of the table sat Heinrich von Schwarz, his mouth hanging open in disbelief.

Around him sat Erich, Kai, Kono Lindt, and Klippmann, all with the exact same expression on their faces as Heinrich.

Everyone is frozen.

-Celebrate. What is this? Yeah, uh....... No, your sister is gonna be so happy to see you do this.

-pakpak!

-.......

And Liana de Granz was giggling and slapping Heinrich on the back.

-Da, shut up Riana.......

-Eup! Eup!

Only the gentle Cliff could force Riana's mouth shut.

Heinrich and his friends were stunned, unable to comprehend the horror of the situation.

Soon.

The wedding has begun.

All attendees stood up from their seats.

The devil and his brides all stood up at once.

Centered on the Devil.

The closest, on the right, was Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

There were no complicated procedures, no lengthy ceremonies, no long speeches, no moments of the new emperor ranting about his vision of a new empire.

Louise von Schwarz, Herriot de Saint-Étienne, Mawang, Charlotte de Gradias, Olivia Ranze, Airi.

Five side-by-side demons, each wearing a colorful dress, stand still.

"For those who know me, I hate long-windedness."

"I don't expect anyone to come this far and not know who's getting married, so I'll skip the explanation."

"I'm getting married."

"Also, today is not only a wedding day, but also a day to proclaim a new empire."

"As of this hour, I proclaim a new empire."

"I've announced my marriage, I've announced my empire, I've done everything I'm supposed to do."

"It's a poor time for everyone, so it's unseemly to eat and talk long."

"Thank you for your time."

"Because I have a lot of work to do, and so do you."

"I don't want to hold on to it for long."

"So eat in moderation, drink in moderation, and go home in moderation."

"I don't like anything long anymore."

"The war and the dissension have been too long."

"So from now on, let's keep things short."

"Okay, let's get this over with and get it done."

Everyone froze in their tracks at that bold statement.

No formality.

Rude.

No procedures.

Blind.

Is this the new empire.

Marry.

It's a new empire.

Two words and it was all over.

So that's what it means to be the new emperor, the new ruler of the continent.

Is this domination really right?

But no matter what anyone thought, a new reign had begun.

Whatever.

The Emperor says he will.

Episode 683.

Last episode - Red Thread

Some things are written in blood.

Some pictures must be drawn in blood.

So it was with the Demon King's Empire.

In the aftermath of the Gate, the Demon King declared a new empire.

There were those who believed in the Devil, and there were those who did not.

Hence the divide.

The divisions scattered and germinated their own seeds.

There have been a few wars.

The seeds of division were not lost, but scattered somewhere else.

Importantly, the Demon King's empire was never defeated.

If you're asking if there was no prosperity and rebuilding, it wasn't.

While division and conflict persisted, the world was restoring civilization.

And so, sometimes hesitantly, but eventually, the tide of history moves forward.

5 years of New Empire power.

-Sarak

A forest in a sea of blood.

Ellen looked around at the scattered bodies.

I stare at the sculpture, which is obviously neither human nor beast.

As if you were pondering something.

As if those were the original forms.

Ellen takes out her notebook and writes something down.

I've written, and I've drawn, albeit briefly.

It's something she's never done in her life, but she's gotten used to it.

But why draw a picture?

The monsters were sometimes symmetrical, but ultimately they were all different. Many had an appearance that could only be described as grotesque, horrific, and unfamiliar.

Drawing and documenting those individual monsters is something that didn't really make sense during the Gate crisis.

Nevertheless, Ellen does it.

After a long, bloody walk through the woods, Ellen closes the notebook, puts it in her backpack, and walks away.

The sun is going down.

Ellen knows that night in the woods and mountains can come too quickly.

\* \* \*

-Tadak, tadak

Night has fallen, and Ellen is sitting in front of a campfire.

Just as fire chases beasts, it sometimes chases monsters.

But that doesn't really mean much either.

Just as there are monsters that fear fire, there are also monsters that are mesmerized by it.

It may be dangerous because it's a light at night, but there are monsters whose vision doesn't depend on light.

So a nighttime bonfire in an uninhabited area may or may not be dangerous.

This may or may not be meaningful.

So the bottom line is simple.

A bonfire has the obvious benefit of chasing away the cold, so you might as well get one going.

That was one of the many realizations Ellen had during her long wanderings.

In the end, it was all I could do to keep my nerves in check and fall asleep.

A life of killing monsters in no-man's land.

Ellen can kill the monsters, but she can't eradicate them.

Gone are the days of monsters pouring out of warp gates.

But it's not like I haven't had a dangerous day in five years.

The monsters often had dangerous ways of attacking, which were sometimes fatal to Ellen.

If anything, I've gotten more lost in the post-Gate era.

I wouldn't say it's just the monsters.

More often than not, I've been starving, eating the wrong thing, or breaking out.

So, Ellen now realizes that she can eat something pretty toxic and not die.

Of course, that didn't stop me from doing things like roasting and eating unknown monster meat.

Ellen pulls her notebook out of her backpack.

Not surprisingly, it wasn't just one book, but several.

Ellen flips through the pages, holding her notebook up to the light of the campfire.

Some pages I'll spend a lot of time on, others I'll flip through pointlessly.

Sometimes, I'll annotate with something I remember.

Or should I say journal.

Ellen had been writing this for some time.

I had this intense feeling that this was something I had to do.

So I'd occasionally stop by where people lived. To get a notebook and a pen.

Naturally, the edges of the notebook were tattered from rough living.

After looking at the notebooks for a while, Ellen organized them and stuffed them into her backpack.

"Whoa......."

Ellen pulls a root of something out of her arms and chews it hard.

Ellen isn't sure what this is.

I just eat it because I know it won't make me sick.

And just like that, Ellen learned quite a few things she didn't even know she was supposed to eat.

I can't remember the last time I slept properly.

I don't even know the last time I had a proper meal.

Minimal food, minimal sleep, minimal water.

I was living on that alone.

If we got into a place where there was no food at all, we would be stranded for days at a time until we ran out of everything we had.

It was a fight against hunger, not monsters.

If it weren't for his freakishly strong body, the average person would have dried up and died long ago.

Why don't we go back to where the people live and take a few days off?

Despite living far away from civilization, Ellen would occasionally stop by a city or town where people lived.

Naturally, I had to hide my identity.

We're running out of food, yes.

But for now, we have a job to do.

And even if you go back, there's no way around it.

First things first.

No money.

Life in the no-man's land is all about killing monsters.

So there's nowhere for money to go.

If you've been in a human city long enough, you know there's money to be made, but it's also dangerous.

Along with the Emperor Bertus de Gradias, the Champion Ellen Artorius is the Empire's most wanted man, and it stands to reason that the Emperor, willingly or unwillingly, would consider the Champion and the Emperor to be the Empire's greatest enemies.

Against their will, the Emperor's supporters hate the fugitive Empress and Ellen Artorius.

So you can't stay in a human city for more than a brief visit and do something with it.

Anti-Imperial factions are no different.

That's where I'm sure I'll catch Ellen in a different sense.

Somewhere to make an arrest, somewhere to plead for the salvation of humanity.

Ellen's situation is that she can't go anywhere at ease.

Of course, you're not going to be found out for just stopping by. You can hide your identity and appearance as much as you want, it's just that you can't stay long.

Though she couldn't always watch, Ellen could now see glimpses of civilization coming to life.

The Adventurer's Guild that Ellen briefly experienced still exists.

But instead of exploring the doomed Darklands like before, it's more like a mercenary business where you get paid to kill monsters.

Security is unstable here and there, and we don't have enough troops to clean up the entire continent.

So you'll be tasked with killing monsters and paid by the Empire.

That was the Adventurer's Guild in its current incarnation.

If she had been paid for killing monsters, she might have drowned in money. No, we should question whether the Empire could afford to pay her that much money in the first place.

But if you're living in a no-man's land, trying to stay off the radar of the Empire, it doesn't make sense to just sign up for a new adventurer because you need money.

The face is so recognizable that it's impossible to create a fake identity.

So it's not like there's no money to be made, but it's too much of a risk.

When I was really desperate, I'd pose as an anonymous adventurer and take a bunch of evidence of monster slaying and pocket the money.

The nature of the Adventurer's Guild is that they pay you for killing monsters, so once you have an overwhelming amount of evidence of killing monsters, they have no choice but to pay you.

Of course, if you do that, the Adventurer's Guild will be like, "Who the hell is that guy?

There have been many times when I've had to grab my money and run before the commotion got out of hand, and it's actually dangerous.

After all, wandering in the wilderness is a dangerous and frustrating thing to do.

Going back to where people live is just as dangerous, if not more so, than wandering in the wilderness.

It's not like demons and empires don't care about such things, and it's not like there aren't hospitable towns for wanderers.

In some of these places, I would help out with small tasks and get a place to sleep or a little something to eat.

Regardless of what Ellen looked like, some people didn't know who Ellen Artorius was. A place cut off from the rest of the world still exists.

When Ellen finishes chewing the root, she leans back against the tree trunk and looks up at the sky.

In my temple days, I used to eat without a circle.

I can live on this amount of food, and I wonder if it was actually a waste of food to eat so much.

"......."

Ellen smiled faintly, amused at herself for thinking such a thing.

There was a guy who used to give me a pat on the back every day for eating so much.

And yet, when you want to eat something, the person who always cooks for you.

Ellen shakes her head and takes a breath.

I can't help but think about a topic I've abandoned, a topic I've become obsessed with.

What if it had just stayed.

But the current reality speaks for itself.

There are bounty hunters out to get Ellen and Bertus, and there are those who still hold her up as a hero and hope that she will one day save humanity.

Its mere existence is a flashpoint for war.

How many wars have already been fought without it, and how many more would have been fought with it?

Perhaps the empire crumbled before it was complete.

There should be only one sun.

Two suns set the world on fire just by existing.

And the truth is, the past doesn't mean anything.

It's also meaningless to say that you're wanted.

Even if you don't have all that, you still have reality.

The devil is married.

And a long time has passed.

"......."

It was never my intention to get involved.

You can't pick up the pieces of the past and go back to that time, that accumulation of time, that would have otherwise been lost.

They've probably already got a whole bunch of stories of their own.

It's just something to think about.

What if everything was good.

Just reminiscing.

Then, I should have eaten a little more.

The food Reinhardt used to make.

A moment when they could have touched each other.

That time.

A little more.

A little more.

"......."

Forcing herself to cut the thought off, Ellen closed her eyes and went still.

The wind was cold.

\* \* \*

The next day.

Ellen stirred the fire and stood up to put on her backpack.

The chaos of the night is gone by morning.

I don't get distracted when I have work to do.

The sadness and self-pity that creeps in like a paroxysm always comes just before I fall asleep.

Do what you need to do, as you always have.

You've decided to kill monsters in a no-man's land.

It is unable to live in all places where civilization exists, so it wanders to places where there is no civilization.

It's painful, but it's the path you've chosen.

So Ellen walks through the woods.

It wasn't hard to get to the trail we found last night.

Ellen learned to do quite a few things that she didn't know how to do at all.

Drawing is one thing, but the ability to keep track of something is another.

The shape and location of the broken branch.

Footprint.

Feces.

Predation traces.

From those things, I was able to infer things like the size, radius of action, and location of monsters that weren't there.

If Ellen were an adventurer, she would probably go down in history as one of the most accomplished adventurers of all time.

She was doing this before the Adventurer's Guild changed the way it rewarded monster kills.

Sometimes Ellen was funny.

Her brother, Lagan Artorius, was a legendary adventurer.

A legendary adventurer turned warrior.

But Ellen is in a different order.

First known as a warrior, then an adventurer.

Ellen checks the tracks and tries to figure out which direction the missing herd headed.

After checking the faintly pressed bushes and footprints, Ellen checks her notebook.

Match the contents of the notebook.

And walks on the trail.

Sometimes the trail gets lost, but you can still find it if you have a general sense of direction.

There was a time when I was just killing monsters.

There are monsters everywhere on the continent, and all you have to do is kill, kill, kill.

Then one day you'll be able to hunt down the final monster.

Save people from monsters.

You'll be able to accomplish that goal.

But it's not easy, and eradicating every single lurking monster is a daunting task.

So the monsters will be fewer and harder to find.

So Ellen gradually realized how to track the monster.

Overall, it's not much different than hunting.

But it's a hunt with different prey each time.

In the case of giant monsters, it's easier to see them from a distance.

However, monsters are deadly regardless of size. So if you see a giant monster, run and kill it, and make sure to take care of the small and medium ones.

Finds and kills hidden monsters.

In the midst of those days, in recent months.

Ellen felt her breath catch in her throat.

Even though they were running out of food, they were prioritizing the search for monsters over getting food.

I found myself reaching for my notebook more often than usual.

Ellen moves carefully, but quickly.

Passing footprints and broken branches.

Footprint.

Footprints that match the drawing in the notebook.

Follow it.

Monsters usually look different.

There were even a lot of dimorphic monsters that you couldn't see as creatures.

Of course, there are some that look alike.

A winged form, or a giant monster.

There are many others like it.

However, a perfect match is very rare.

It's not that they don't exist, but they're just different colors and horns.

But a few months ago.

Ellen was confronted by monsters that looked exactly alike.

Of course, they weren't strong monsters. All of them fell to the ground, splattered with blood.

But Ellen gagged in horror on the spot.

Since then, Ellen hasn't stopped looking.

By comparing traces, wandering through neighborhoods, and rummaging.

Find something.

Hopefully there is no such thing.

Hopefully that's a delusion.

Draw, collect, and find traces.

Look and look and look.

Hopefully it's one of those things that happens from time to time.

Hopefully, there are monsters in that form as well.

How much time has passed.

When you've been lost in the woods for over five hours.

At the crevice of some hill.

-Crunch!

Ellen heard a low, raspy monster cry.

"......."

-Slurp!

After taking out the ramen, Ellen looks at the cave.

The monster stood still in the crevice of the hill, glaring at Ellen with red eyes.

Threat.

Threatening to kill you if you get too close.

But Ellen isn't backing down.

Slowly approach the creature.

-croak!

As Ellen approaches, the monster sticks its clawed front paws out of the gap.

The warnings and threats get bigger and bigger.

But Ellen's eyes widen and she moves closer.

No.

Please don't.

Hopefully.

The moment you take that one more step.

-knowwhat!

Leaping at Ellen, the behemoth opened its enormous gaping maw to reveal hundreds of teeth.

-skuck!

The charging creature was sliced from gills to tail by the Voidblade's strike, sending it crashing into the forest with the same speed it had charged.

Immediate.

It was the exact same shape as the monster we'd been chasing.

It's not even the first kill.

I've killed that type of monster time and time again.

But over and over again, I see the same monsters.

I'm not interested in dead monsters.

That's not what Ellen was after.

She was looking for that monster, but it wasn't really the monster she was chasing.

Why they made the threat.

Monsters are usually indiscriminately aggressive toward everything but monsters.

But I just hid in my cave and growled.

Like a warning to stay away.

Ellen cautiously makes her way to the cave where the creature jumped out.

It shouldn't.

It must be delusional.

That shouldn't happen.

I wandered around the neighborhood for months thinking that.

Obsessively.

There are monsters that divide and multiply.

Thinking it would be something like that.

But even before she entered the cave, Ellen was already despairing.

-King

-click!

Inside, a small cry is heard.

"ah......."

Once inside the cave, Ellen could only gape in disbelief.

Something as small as an adult's forearm, maybe six of them.

Something that looked like a shrunken version of the monster that had just died was lying there, unable to open its eyes.

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

-Hair

Ellen faltered in front of the little nag.

Something we haven't found in any other object so far.

Ellen found the monster, but it wasn't her goal.

I've been looking for the monster's offspring.

The offspring are, in and of themselves, evidence of reproduction.

The most common form of proliferation that is neither replication nor division.

The existence of multiple monsters with the exact same shape suggested the possibility.

Some of the monsters are breeding.

We don't know if they were always there or if they're just adapting.

Therefore, there will be other individuals that reproduce.

Of course, there are monsters that interbreed with other species.

I hadn't seen it until now, so it remained a possibility.

If one is possible, why not two?

In addition to the individual in front of you and this species, there are probably other species that can reproduce.

I don't know when it started.

But the monster isn't shrinking, it's still growing.

Somewhere in the world.

It's not going to appear at the gate, it's going to multiply and grow.

What that means is one thing.

Monsters don't disappear from the world.

The moment you kill the final monster, it won't come.

"No......."

Ellen couldn't see anything but despair.

Episode 684.

"Are you ready?"

"Of course."

In response, Charlotte looks at Reinhardt with a lukewarm expression.

"I'm going to ask you again because my idea of ready is not the same as your idea of ready. Are you ready?"

"That's it?"

It's still ugly.

I've checked my outfit and my hair is in order.

So you can just walk away.

But it was always about something other than the outfit.

Finally, Charlotte inspects the Emperor's attire and puts her arms around his waist.

"You know, you're still getting in trouble with us for that wedding crap, right?"

"......Uh, I know."

The Emperor was trying to move things along quickly, but I was still scratching my head from the unhappy wedding.

Herriot still gets a kick out of it, especially when it comes to weddings.

"If you don't want to make that one more thing, good for you."

"Okay......."

"I agree with your usual point that a speech doesn't have to be long, but it doesn't have to be a dog. Yours is, obviously, a dog."

"I'll be good......."

"You say you're good with words, all the time."

"I'll be really good this time......."

"Because I hear about that all the time."

Even after being scolded, I still end up talking crap in front of people.

The emperor's habit of owing a thousand yuan for a single misspoken word has not yet been cured.

"......then can't you do it?"

"What?"

"Oh, of course I should do it, uh!"

The Emperor, sensing death in his gaze alone, shook his head.

The emperor then scratched his head until he was ready, or to be more precise, until he was about to start.

And so, after a labor of love.

-Dalcock

The door to the anteroom opened, and a red-haired knight entered the room.

"Your Majesty, it's time."

"Oh, right."

The Emperor's knight Scarlet led the way, followed by the Emperor himself.

Charlotte's glare followed, as if she wanted to see how I did it.

\* \* \*

Thousands of people stood nervously in the temple's huge plaza.

The first thing the Empire did was reopen the temple.

Although not as large as it once was due to the absolute decline in human numbers, Temple received a tremendous number of new students.

It doesn't have the same benefits, but it's also not the astronomical tuition that it used to be.

The temple is up and running.

That should be enough.

As the Empire no longer belongs to the Imperial House of Gradias, the Temple is no longer called the Gradias Temple.

A temple is a temple is a temple, and the emperor didn't bother prefixing it with any other modifiers.

Just like that.

Elementary to Elementary, Secondary to Secondary, and High School to High School.

And it's not just humans anymore.

There were definitely demons, albeit in small numbers.

Some demons are as close to human form as you can get, while others are a bit stranger.

All beings who are educated and have the intellect to understand can be admitted to the Temple.

Demons have been mixing in the ecliptic for a long time, so the sight isn't unique to temples.

But, of course, it's not without its detractors.

Just like that.

In the plaza, where an eclectic mix of incoming students gathered, all eyes were on one place.

The place where the emperor will appear.

A huge horn blows, and a tune begins to play, announcing the emperor's arrival.

The voice of an imperial mage in a social role rings out.

Some worship him.

Some fear him.

Some people hate him.

"Now."

"The agent of the gods."

"Lord of the Holy Empire."

"Conqueror of the Empire of Gradias."

"Founder of the Magical Council."

"Protector of the Autonomous Territory of Mankind."

"The end of the gate debacle."

"Archdemon."

"Because."

"Lord of all the demons of the world."

"The rightful ruler of all mankind."

"Also the Savior of the world."

"Mushin."

"Undefeated (不敗)."

"Immortality."

"Demon of Flame."

"Reinhard the Great is entering."

Reinhardt the Great.

That's the emperor's name.

The continental emperor appears before the people.

No fancy coffins, no halls.

The solemnly dressed Emperor stands on a dais, looking down at the assembled crowd. Behind him, Scarlet, the Emperor's bodyguard, stands erect.

The commencement address for Temple's incoming freshmen is an annual tradition.

Every time he has stood in this position, the Emperor has been met with a look that means one thing or another.

Hatred.

Envy.

Awe.

There's also fear.

It means that the emperor has not yet united the continents, let alone united humanity.

-um.......

The emperor's voice echoes across the square.

-He....... I do this every year.

-maybe that, the gradient....... No, it shouldn't have a gradient anymore. Okay, just temple.

-When I reopened the temple and received my first recruit, I did something called a speech.

-I can't do this for long.

-So then, I said one word.

-faculty.

-that's it.

-And then, he....... Because something happened that I'm going to regret very much.......

The Emperor looks off into the distance and frowns. Mmm, big. Coughing a few times, the Emperor turns to face the people.

Some people were baffled by the emperor's tone.

-So, since then, I've been trying to squeeze something out of it, but I don't know if it's in my nature or not.

-I'm me, that. I'm not comfortable with all those...... long modifiers in front of my name.

-That's too long.

-I'm embarrassed because I feel like I'm bragging about myself.

-But I guess that's what you get for being an emperor.

-Because you need to know what I've been up to and who I am, and it's not exactly a lie.

-Ruler of all demons, yes.

-The ruler of all mankind, yes.

-Lord of the Holy Empire, so that's a good one.

-I still have two holy relics, so I must be an agent of the gods.

-So I'm kind of embarrassed to say that, but it's true, right?

-Why should I be ashamed to tell the truth. Once I thought about it, I wasn't ashamed anymore.

-Yes....... There's a reason why they're prefixed with a bunch of modifiers like that.

-That's a long-winded way of saying I'm great.

-Recognize how great you are. Something like this.

-Listing the evidence for my greatness.

-Yes, there are kids here, so they might not know what that means.

-They might not know what a masquerade is yet, right?

-So, let me summarize it for the kids.

-I am, fucking great.

-You are facing the greatest and most dignified being in the world.

-So, feel very honored.

There was a slight pause in the room.

Even if you're an emperor.

I get it.

He said that out of his own mouth?

Whether the emperor is good or not, the mere fact that he's saying that.

Very unfriendly.

In this atmosphere, the emperor looks out at the silent crowd and speaks.

-What the hell, you guys.

-clap.

At that commanding statement, everyone starts clapping mechanically.

-twinkle-twinkle!

Everyone is clapping because they want to see what it's all about, but then their faces get all weird.

-See?

But the playfulness of the emperor's expression was lost in the applause.

-Greatness is this.

-Some of you hate me.

-Some of you will hate me.

-Some of you will want to stick a knife in my back.

-but when I tell you to clap, you clap.

-No matter what you have in mind for me.

-You can't go against me.

-Just as the remnants of humanity who defied me will eventually kneel at my feet and die a miserable death in my fence of self-governance, eating the dog food I feed them.

-As if they still hate me, but a representative of the autonomous territory puts his head at my feet in the hope of aid.

-You cannot defy me.

-All those who defied me were either killed or turned into flesh-eating beasts.

-That's why I'm great.

What happened to hate, hatred, and anger?

Clap when you're told to clap.

When you are told to kneel, you will kneel.

That's all you need to dominate.

Loyalty would be nice, but obedience is sufficient.

The emperor knows it now.

But that sounds completely out of place here.

You're right.

So what the heck.

This isn't a speech after conquering humanity, it's a temple initiation.

When an emperor blurts out that I'm great at a temple entrance ceremony, he's bragging in the wrong place.

-By the way, great me.

-There is one way to become greater than this great, honorable, and absolute emperor.

Rebuilding the shattered Demon Realm, conquering humanity, ending the Gate Crisis, and rebuilding civilization - a feat no one else has ever accomplished.

-There is only one thing that even this demon king, who has accomplished this great work, has not been able to do.

One minute you're bragging about how you've accomplished everything, and the next minute you're telling them what you didn't do.

-graduate.

-I, for one, still haven't graduated from Temple.

We all froze in our tracks at the absurdity of it all.

The demon was not allowed to attend the temple in the first place.

So did everyone at Temple at the time, because it was completely shut down.

But in the end, facts are facts.

The Demon King did not graduate from Temple.

And with the reopening of the Temple, there are quite a few former Union soldiers who attended and graduated from the reopened Temple.

Some of his classmates and former Temple students have since returned to school and graduated.

In any case, the fact that the devil didn't graduate is as true as any modifier prefixed to the devil.

-In other words, you can do what I couldn't.

-I don't know about you, but the only thing I can think of that's better than this great devil is that I can live a life with one.

-Somewhere, I can say I'm better than the devil at one thing.

-which I am so grateful for.

-I'm on the verge of a life where I can proudly say I graduated from a temple that even the devil himself couldn't.

-Where you can go and live a life where you can say you're an asshole who didn't graduate from Temple!

-So, drop out.

-Graduate safely.

-Over.

Everyone stared at the back of the Demon King and Imperial Emperor as he disappeared in a blur.

There's no applause, no cheers for the departing demon.

Everyone panicked.

No matter what you think of the devil, there's a single thought in everyone's head.

The idea that Reinhard the Great was a very strange man was imprinted on everyone's minds.

\* \* \*

-I told you not to do that!

-Ah, no, you made it longer this time!

-Didn't I tell you not to make it short? Didn't I tell you not to do it like a dog! This is the best, no, not the best, but the second most like a dog! Second!

-That's it? You didn't do a good job.......

-Ahhhhhh!

Scarlett stood in the doorway, listening to Charlotte's hysterical voice from the waiting room.

This is nothing new to Scarlett, who has been by the side of emperors longer than empresses.

And, of course, this was an event, not peacetime, so the emperor's bodyguards were numerous.

Scarlett was the Emperor's bodyguard and head of the Imperial Knights, so these were her subordinate knights.

One of them asks.

"Mr. Director, would you rather have a script?"

I'd rather have Charlotte write the script than fry her like that.

"He won't read ...... if there's a script."

Scarlett's habit of treating everyone with respect was still there.

No matter how many times the emperor tried to break the habit, it never changed.

"Technically, you can't read it."

"You can't read?"

Of course, the emperor is not blind.

"If you have a script, um....... My beloved people, you read it like ......."

"Ah."

"You're surprisingly nervous."

It doesn't seem to be straining at all.

But I'm so nervous that I can't even read the script, and the bullshit comes out of my mouth because I'm nervous.

So Charlotte has been trying for five years to somehow fix this weird ailment, but she's been unsuccessful, and when it's all said and done, she cries.

-What's wrong with you, should I just die or should we die together?

-Why are you so mad at me for not being able to do that......!

-It's not getting any better! It's not growing!

-When you grow up at this age, that's a disease......!

-She doesn't say a word. What else?

The other guards were listening to the emperor's scratching through the door.

It's so common that no one is surprised by it.

Scarlett says with a faint smile.

"Still, isn't an emperor who can't give a speech better than an emperor who loses?"

At that, everyone gave me a confused look and nodded.

Mushin

Lost.

Immortality.

Those titles were earned the day he single-handedly stopped an army advancing on the rebellion.

The emperor was never defeated.

It didn't even require an army.

Since the declaration of the New Empire, there have been several wars.

After all the talks and compromises broke down, war was inevitable.

The Emperor took only Scarlet to all those battles.

No one else was present.

Even Scarlett was kept on the far side of the battlefield without a fight.

"Are you sure you want to go alone?

The emperor stood alone against the advancing enemy army.

"We need to instill fear in those who don't submit.

'That I won't die.

'If they know they can't kill even me alone, they'll no longer rebel against me or the Empire.'

"Then this won't happen in the future.

"I'm not so sure there won't be.

"At least, it'll be less.

To terrorize those who refuse to accept domination.

The emperor set out alone.

And the Emperor's enemies knew why he was the apostle of the War God.

Episode 685.

You can nag all day long, but the emperor doesn't have time for that.

After giving the commencement address, the emperor returned to the palace.

At the emperor's side on the throne was Charlotte.

The deputies in the row begin to report individually.

"Your Majesty, we have word that the warp gate to the Human Territory has been destroyed."

"...... again?"

As if to say, here we go again, the Emperor rubbed his eyes and pressed both hands to his temples.

"I don't want you to starve, but what do you want me to do if you break the warp gate, the conduit for aid? Do you want me to carry you in a wagon? Do you want to die?"

"It wasn't the Autonomous Government that destroyed the gate, as usual......."

"Citizens."

"Yes, Your Majesty......."

The gate debacle is over.

But warp gate phobia is rampant on every continent. People think the warp gate is a giant time bomb.

Reintroducing something that brought humanity to the brink of extinction is understandably scary and unsettling.

As such, warp gates across the entire continent, not just the Territories, were often destroyed by the sabotage of frightened citizens. This isn't just a problem for the Territories.

Nevertheless, the benefits of warp gates are not to be given up just because people are afraid of them, and so, as in previous eras, the area around warp gates is protected by a strong military presence.

"We continue to propagandize that all gates from previous eras are unrelated, but there are many who refuse to believe it....... Citizens of the Territories, in particular, are uneasy, seeing the Warp Gate as an entrance to invasion."

Warp gate phobia is particularly acute in the Human Territory, which is a rallying point for anti-demon forces that reject demon rule.

"Did we cover the cost of repairing the warp gate during the last destruction?"

"Yes, it was."

"Really? I guess they thought they could get away with it because they were rebuilding it for free. I'm going to have to correct them."

The Emperor begins to speak in a cold tone.

"From now on, the Territorial Government will pay for all warp gate repairs, and they will defend them with their lives. Tell them so."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

There are many humans in the territories.

Those who refused to be ruled by the Demon King, and the followers of the Cult of the Dragon.

Rather than kill them, the demon allowed them to live together in one place.

That's why there are sometimes uprisings, but they are eventually crushed.

Furthermore, they cannot survive without the aid of the New Empire.

It's a group of people who hate the Demon, but the reality of the Autonomous Territories is that they can't survive without him.

That was Charlotte's plan.

The emperor receives reports and gives orders.

While listening to Charlotte's advice from time to time.

It's not that different from what we've been doing in Edina, but the scope of what we're dealing with is vastly different, and the number of lives at stake is vastly different.

The Emperor looks bored, but not distracted, as he makes decisions and judgments, one by one.

Some of it was important, but some of it was so trivial that I wondered if I needed to hear it.

However, there were some topics that were both trivial and too important not to report to the emperor.

"Your Majesty, we have caught the man who defaced the statue of your Majesty installed in the Aligarh district last Monday. He is a 67-year-old man who lives nearby and is currently in the custody of the guards."

"......Why did he do that?"

"It doesn't matter why, Your Majesty. Defacing a statue in your likeness is in itself a challenge to the imperial authority. I understand you will be punished in the extreme."

"And Monday? I don't remember, how did we do the defacement?"

Instead of reporting to the emperor, I frowned.

The emperor heard so many words in a day that they often faded from his memory.

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

"Pee? Ah....... Yeah. I think I heard that."

"Yes......."

Well.

and the emperor crosses his arms.

The emperor had forgotten, but the ministers remembered, for it was such a traumatic event.

The attitude that they can't see why they should be upset about it at all.

Even then, I had this reaction.

"I never told you to install that statue in the first place."

The demon pauses for a moment, as if searching his memory.

"I don't know who it is, but some sculptor said he was going to dedicate it to me......."

"This is Ernak."

Charlotte whispered the name in his place, and he nodded as if he remembered.

"Yeah, that's right, a guy named Ernak carved it as a tribute to me, and isn't that the case with all my statues and gargoyles of all kinds?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"I didn't tell you to put it there, and why is it a challenge to the imperial authority to have a citizen deface something that was carved by a citizen at will?"

In fact, they're all over the empire.

In any form.

An artist or group of people who worship a demon creates a bunch of artwork that is selfishly idolized.

"Because being in the image of the emperor is in itself a symbol of the emperor's authority."

"Then shouldn't we stop with the arbitrary creation of the image of that great and dignified emperor, which is in some ways a challenge to the imperial power......."

If it's a problem caused by doing something you weren't asked to do, then Charlotte cut off the emperor before he could finish his sentence because he wouldn't let her do it in the first place.

"If you start censoring like that, you'll eventually go to the point of forbidding bards to sing about the exploits of His Majesty the Emperor, and you'll create an atmosphere of unnecessary fear, surely, surely. You'll get tired of that situation later on."

"Is that....... is it?"

"Banning an idol out of concern for idolatry is, in another sense, a very powerful form of idolatry, Your Majesty. And if you issue a ban and then later rescind it because it becomes more troublesome, your people will only feel uselessly confused. And inevitably, they will think the Imperial House is inconsistent."

"Well, yeah, I guess. Uh, let's pretend it didn't exist......."

Left to their own devices, they'll idolize the emperor and fight over whether it's right or wrong.

If you say no, there's an endless list of things to ban, and you're just creating a pointless atmosphere of fear, which only fosters more antipathy.

If they get tired of it and rescind the ban, that's the end of the emperor's pointless bullshit.

So, letting go is the medicine.

"Anyway, put the old man away, he's probably been drinking, and when people are hungry, they'll put bad things in places they shouldn't."

"......Yes, Your Majesty."

Knowing that the Emperor rarely punishes in such cases, he eventually sighed and nodded.

"Give him a warning. Pull that shit again and I'll make sure you get spanked in front of the Emperor himself. I wonder if you're up for that."

The old man will be released with a grotesque warning from the emperor.

There have been many reports since then.

Whenever the emperor's judgment was close to a mistake, Charlotte would quietly talk to him and decide.

Everyone knows that Charlotte is the new head of state.

However, she is respected despite being a remnant of the Gradias imperial family because everyone knows that she is the Emperor's Empress and will never act against his will or do anything he does not ask her to do.

Then, the ever-present topic came up.

"Your Majesty, there have been sightings of a warrior in the province of Orland, west of Cernstadt."

With that, the silence in the room subsided.

Of course, there are two topics that are the most sensitive in the entire empire.

One is a warrior. Ellen Artorius.

"There was also a sighting of Emperor Bertus in the province of Orland about two months ago."

The other is, of course, about Bertus de Gradias, the last emperor.

"Taken together, these two incidents suggest that the abolitionist and the warrior are not acting in concert......."

"Can you take responsibility?"

"......."

"I mean, can you take responsibility for that?"

After reporting the incident, Zhao Yi bowed his head even further before the Emperor's icy gaze.

"We've dispatched them whenever we've heard of sightings of warriors and abolitionists, but I don't recall any of the information ever being true."

Because they are the most wanted, most sightings are false.

We don't know if any of it was real or not.

However, all traces failed.

And once again, in this eyewitness account, the emperor stares at the reporter.

"Your Majesty, God is merely reporting the information on....... I'm just reporting what's been posted."

"Isn't it your 'opinion', not information, to 'assume' from two eyewitness accounts that Lunger and Warrior are together?"

"That, that's......."

"How long must we expend the power of the Empire on false sightings, most of which are fake, and some of the informants don't even know what a warrior or emperor looks like? There have been sightings from the southern and northern ends of the continent at the same time, haven't there?"

But it wasn't the reporter who answered, it was the other way around.

"Your Majesty, the Emperor and the Champion are the greatest threats to the Empire at this time. The moment they reach the Territories, humanity will regroup, and the impure within the Empire will be seduced. We must keep a close eye on them, even if it's only for the smallest bit of information."

Other ministers chimed in to agree.

It's true that the Autonomous Regions are effectively slaves, but they haven't been exterminated, and their resentment is still there.

If wars up to this point have been merely the resistance of the angry, the moment a lost emperor or warrior reappears, a real war can break out.

Even those who hate the Demon King, those who remain in the Empire instead of leaving for their own territories, may follow suit.

So the Lords and Ladies are a real threat to the Empire.

Some still believe they are lurking somewhere, waiting to save humanity from the tyranny of the Demon King, and the Heroic Cultists of the Autonomous Territories still believe it.

For those loyal to the Emperor, then, finding and killing the Warriors and Emperors is the only way to eliminate the fires of the Empire.

All their words are spoken in the hope of the eternity and well-being of the empire.

Their words may be misleading, but their loyalty is unquestionable.

So there was a huge bounty on Ellen's head, and the Emperor couldn't deny their worthiness.

In order to justify their rule, they eventually had to demonize warriors and lords, and the propaganda continued.

He now believes in demons as the saviors of the world, and hates warriors and abolitionists.

In reality, civilization has been rebuilt to some extent, absolute hunger has been largely eliminated, and humans are rebuilding their cities and buildings.

We're not quite there, but we're getting there.

Most people believe in substance and reality.

Life has improved for many since the Demon King's reign.

That's why people believe in the devil.

But the truth is, after Gate, things were only going to get better no matter who was in power. It's just that the devil is in charge.

It's really only going to get better, and who knows if it's better now that the Devil is in power.

But it's getting better, and he's actually not unleashing unnecessary violence on those who meekly accept his rule.

I can't say that every policy has worked out well, but there has certainly been no mindless tyranny or genocide, literally.

The idea of suddenly rounding up people and burning them to death had never happened on any continent. The Demon King was baffled that so many people actually imagined and feared such a thing.

They've even created self-governing territories for humans who refuse to be ruled, and they call themselves the guardians of those territories. Of course, we all know that's just a name, and that they're really watchdogs.

After all, unlike at the beginning of his reign, a significant portion of humanity now supports him because of the better life they now have.

So it's only natural to hate the opposite: warriors and fugitives from justice. It's natural.

So even if the emperor wasn't tracking them, an entire continent was.

The emperor is convinced, but he's still not happy.

"Yeah, that's probably true, but it's not the only thing that's false. How long are we going to have to listen to these murderers who claim to have killed emperors and warriors and then go around begging for money?"

The emperor's breath caught in his throat every time such a story was reported.

"Your Majesty, the unavoidable occurrence of an accident should not stop us from attempting to find the Emperor and his warriors, in case they have hidden themselves in your territory."

"I would expect you to be even more vigilant than you are now, with increased surveillance of the autonomous regions, nighttime curfews, and bans on gatherings so that people cannot gather."

"Your Majesty, the cunning men of the Autonomous Regions are merely taking advantage of your mercy."

"It is a matter of grave concern to me that the leadership of the Autonomous Regions includes members of the last rebellion, not to mention the ungrateful ruffians who have already been pardoned by His Majesty time and time again."

"It's not just the Autonomous Regions that need to be addressed. We need to significantly increase the activities of our intelligence services to weed out the rogue elements within the Empire."

"You are correct, Your Majesty. There are countless rogues who have deliberately disaffiliated themselves from the provinces in order to operate within the Empire."

One of them asks a question, and the words spill out, and the emperor looks down at his deputies.

The Emperor looks at Charlotte, who stands still.

"Help me.

I could see the meaning in his eyes.

Charlotte looks down at him, a faint smile on her face, and shakes her head.

"From now on, I'm the one who gets the political debriefings."

Eventually, Charlotte takes over.

"Let's cut the crap and get the ministry reports out of the way."

It's always, always, always this way.

They are all loyal to the Devil.

Their loyalty is unquestionable.

It's just that the wording is radical.

So loyal, in fact, that he's willing to say in front of Charlotte, the queen's half-brother, that she should kill him.

Some of them are even former empire figures.

That's because they're either irreplaceable enough that they won't be replaced after five years, or they've proven loyal enough that they won't be replaced.

So while Charlotte may doubt their intelligence, she doesn't doubt their loyalty.

Episode 686.

The Emperor exits the Alchemy Chamber and walks through the halls of the Central Palace. Now that all the important business has been taken care of, Charlotte will take care of the rest.

We get the gist of it, we talk about it, and we're done with the big stuff for the day.

At the Emperor's side, as always, was Scarlett.

In fact, I now spend more time with Scarlett than anyone else.

"Is that all we have left for the evening?"

"Yes, Your Majesty, as I told you last time, the Adeptus Banquet will be held tonight at the Palace of Spring."

"Yeah......."

"It must be the first time in a long time that all five empresses are together."

"......Yes."

The emperor has five wives, and they are of equal rank.

All five are empresses.

There was some concern that it would cause internal chaos, but the emperor decided to go for it.

Of course, even among the five empresses, there are differences in influence between individuals.

The most influential is, of course, Charlotte, who is in charge of the entire country.

But that doesn't make the other empresses any less influential.

Airi commands and controls a demonic force that has become a vital pillar of the Empire.

Ruiz, unsurprisingly, controls Cernstadt, the largest faction after the Empire.

The current king is Heinrich von Schwarz, but she's practically the king, as she's helping him get used to running the country.

Cernstadt had a larger territory than the imperial provinces. Even the Edina Archipelago, where it was based after the events of the Demon's Gate, was already a Cernstadt.

Because of the overly dense population on the ecliptic, the Empire could hardly attempt to recover and expand.

The empire focused on shrinking the size of the ecliptic, which had become so bloated that it resembled a malformed city-state, and relocating people.

That's not all.

"His Holiness has already entered the palace."

"Oh....... Really?"

Olivia Ranze, who had completely reformed the Order of the Five Great Houses into a new entity and was already the master of another vast empire, also wielded immense power.

Of course, there are those who have overstepped their bounds and made themselves too famous.

The most powerful wizard that has ever existed.

An unparalleled being with access to infinite magic power.

Herriot de Saint-Ouen.

So a new title had to be created for her.

Because different beings need different places.

The supreme decision-making and interfering body when it comes to magic, above all mage groups.

The current head of the Mage Council.

"The Archmage says he's headed there, too."

For Herriot, the title became his name.

\* \* \*

The Emperor headed to the Palace of Spring ahead of time, as everyone was expected to gather for a banquet in the evening.

The banquet hadn't started yet, but we were busy preparing.

The Palace of Spring, where Charlotte had once lived as a princess, was still in full bloom.

Charlotte's frequent visits to state affairs led her to move from the Spring Palace to the Autumn Palace, where the institutions that dealt with state affairs were concentrated.

There were two people in the courtyard of the Palace of Spring now.

St. Olivia wears her platinum hair in a bun.

And the dark-haired Adriana standing next to him.

"It's been a while, Your Majesty."

"I see Your Majesty."

At Olivia's side is Adriana, who has become the Saint's bodyguard.

There was no sign of the venom in Olivia Ranze's voice as she smiled gently, her mouth covered, at the emperor who had come to visit.

If anyone has changed the most since we got married, it's Olivia.

She declared that she would scratch him, but after marriage, she mellowed out, as if that was a good thing.

The reason is simple.

Empress Olivia was very busy founding the Holy Roman Empire.

So I rarely saw the emperor.

So when I see the Emperor for the first time in a long time, it's too much of a waste of time to fret and scratch.

We only have so much time together, so we make it count, so we say sweet things and act nice.

"When did you get here?"

"Just now, just now."

Even the emperor's questions are answered with respect.

I wondered how a person could change so much.

To be more precise, I acted and spoke like I was back in the days when I was called a saint.

That's why people who know her feel uncomfortable with the way she looks.

'Something....... I feel like I'm basically reaffirming that I'm too nice, but I don't want to admit it. What's not to like?

That's what Charlotte said of the mellowed Olivia.

Of course, there were many days when I cried to myself that it was harder to see Reinhardt after we got married.

"While you're here, go away for a few days."

"I'd love to, but I'm busy, and so is Your Majesty."

"......Oops."

Olivia beamed, as if she couldn't ask for more.

-Uh-oh, Reinhard is here.

Everyone's heads turned at the sound of a distant voice.

He was approached by the Archmage, Herriot, who had just entered the palace and was dressed for the occasion.

Olivia's expression hardened.

"He's a bit of an exorcist, he always comes when it's good. No, you know that, don't you?"

Sure, she's changed a lot, but she hasn't changed the part of her that hates Harriet.

"Well."

As she approaches, Herriot gives Olivia a cold stare.

"You are what you are."

"If you haven't seen someone in a while, why don't you at least pretend to be happy to see them?"

"If I'm talking to His Majesty for the first time in a long time, shouldn't you have the decency to be unobtrusive?"

"I haven't seen you in a while, either?"

"I haven't seen you in a long time."

If you get between them, you know you're always the first one to get beaten.

"......."

The emperor broke out in a cold sweat, but said nothing.

\* \* \*

Herriot had a bit of an argument with Olivia, but claimed to be tired and went into the Palace of Spring first.

He says this, but in the end, he's being considerate because he knows Olivia doesn't have a lot of time.

Olivia had to organize the country from scratch, so in a sense, she had more work than the emperor.

He took enormous risks, even taking on the task of reforming a religion that was sure to be met with fierce backlash, and he was and still is a dangerous and busy man.

"How are you doing?"

At the Emperor's question, Olivia sighs.

"As always, we have a long way to go."

Due to the nature of the religion, the domain of the Holy Empire is not limited to the territory of the Empire.

The temples, monasteries, and shrines of all the world's divine orders are all realms.

Your territory and people are scattered across continents.

Demons don't actually exist.

It takes a very long time to convince them of that, and even then, most don't accept it.

It's hard to turn common sense on its head.

"I have to say, though, that it's a little easier these days with demon priests."

Demigods are the gods of demons.

If the gods truly reject demons, then none of the demons should be able to wield the divine power of the gods.

Nowadays, however, there are also demon priests, and people tend to think differently when they see demons who can use the divine power of the gods.

"I guess I'm just going to have to trust it since I have the tiamata in the first place, but maybe the absolute numbers are important."

"Yeah, numbers are really important."

Having spoken with Olivia at some length, the Emperor shifts his attention to her this time.

Adriana, Patroness of the Holy Grail.

The latter designation made Adriana, like Scarlett, a knight to protect the king.

Adriana flatly refused, saying she didn't have what it takes, but Olivia almost forced her into the position.

They say that a place makes a person, and Adriana, once a powerful paladin, has lived up to her name as a guardian knight of the castle after all these years.

"Why are you wearing a dress today?"

"I was ordered to dress appropriately for the occasion, so I went to......."

A nervous-looking Adriana was wearing a more colorful dress than the saintly Olivia.

Olivia must have put her in that dress on purpose.

Olivia covered her mouth and laughed at the sight of Adriana.

"Now that we've gotten rid of the law that Tuan priests and paladins can't marry, why bother hiding your attraction?"

"......."

It was as if the Holy Father had declared at the point of marriage that he was throwing away all the laws of the past.

Adriana, of course, was nervously fiddling with the hem of her uncomfortable dress.

The Holy Empire doesn't have a lot of territory.

However, the actual jurisdiction is all the lands where people live.

It's a religion that's been around for a very long time, and that religion is eventually going to be everywhere there are people who believe in it.

As such, the Holy Empire is not only a nation, but also an intelligence agency of the current empire, gathering information from all continents.

It's not something that's designed to happen, it's just the way it is.

As such, it is inevitable that the temples and shrines scattered across the continent will be aware of everything that is happening on the continent.

"What about the Autonomous Regions? They seem to be doing okay, judging by the lack of talk."

As such, there are temples of the Cult of the Gods in human territories that are not officially under the control of the Demon King's Empire.

It is naturally very small, but it is not nonexistent. For even in a place dominated by martial beliefs, there are still those who believe in the Gods.

"Hmmm....... Rowen says they've lost all energy to resist since the last war. I don't know, they didn't rebel because they could overthrow us at any moment, but I don't think anything can happen for five years."

Crusader Knightmaster Rowen was not purged.

After the war, she returned to where she was supposed to be.

The place where the negative belongs.

It's just that your job has changed from inquisition to intelligence gathering.

She serves as the head of the Imperial Intelligence Service.

Synthesizing information from across the continent to detect threats to the Empire.

In particular, her main role is to monitor the territories.

It was actually a proposal from Louise, who wanted to purge Rowen. Rowen was happy to accept.

You can't sit on your laurels for long.

Rather, he's better suited to doing what he's good at, and he doesn't hesitate to go back to the dark side once he's done what he needs to do.

The reinstatement of former Crusader Knight Commander Elayon Bolton and his declaration of support for the Holy Empire is an even better outcome.

Of course, the Crusader Knights are now fully subservient to the Holy Empire. This makes sense, since the Crusader Templars were originally a collection of the power of the Five Great Houses, and the Holy Empire is a collection of the Five Great Houses.

"Slowly, they're arriving."

Olivia smiles as she watches the two approach the Palace of Spring.

The emperor jumps out of his seat as if he's been scalded by a fire.

Both Adriana and Olivia smiled at the sight of such an emperor.

"Adriana, isn't this picture funny every time you look at it, even if no one else does?"

"Shh, it's loud......."

"......Hmm. I'm not going to say anything."

From one day to the next, whenever you see the Emperor, you look like you've chewed on a rotten turd.

And she's always got a cold look on her face.

Together, they are walking to the Palace of Spring.

A frozen emperor is an emperor, but Olivia rose from her seat.

The master of the empire is Reinhard the Great.

And the head of the empire is Charlotte de Gradias.

However, there is one person in the imperial family who is most respected.

Regent of Cernstadt, Empress Louise.

Empress Louise is not very close to the Emperor.

For some reason, those in the know know and those who don't know don't know.

What they don't know is that Empress Louise is the emperor's most difficult person.

So, ironically, there is a bizarre situation in which the emperor is the most respected in the imperial court because he is the most difficult and feared.

"Oh, you've come, you've come, sir."

The emperor bends ninety degrees to greet you.

"...... I'm still not sure why the hell I'm your teacher, but that's classy, Your Majesty."

Louise clicked her tongue briefly at the stuttering emperor.

In Louise's presence, the emperor becomes the mouse before the cat.

So everyone assumes that the dreaded Reinhard the Great is afraid of Empress Louise, and everyone is afraid of Louise.

Louise von Schwarz was actually a master swordswoman, and she was a war hero in her own right. If someone is afraid of her, it's for good reason.

Of course, those in the know know it's just a joke.

Olivia is still jealous, even though she's changed, and Reinhard's behavior in front of Louise is just hilarious.

"Let's go to ...... first, sister."

The current king of Cernstadt, Heinrich von Schwarz, rushed into the Palace of Spring as if to flee.

Since the declaration of the Reich, Olivia realizes that Reinhard and Heinrich have become a private couple who never meet.

When we make eye contact in public, we look away from each other as if we've seen something we can't see.

Just like now.

"Car, is there any chance......."

"I drank it on the way here."

"And the, the meal is......?"

"The banquet will be starting soon, so why eat beforehand?"

"Oh, I see, I was short thinking......."

It's like a puppy that can't do this, can't do that, and is restless.

Empress Louise usually stays there for her work in Cernstadt, but occasionally returns to the imperial palace for a few months.

At such times, the Emperor is unable to sit or stand, and he suffers from daily anxiety. Even without Empress Louise by his side.

He's doing it because he wants to be nice to himself, but it's hard to tell from the sidelines that he's trying to be nice to his wife.

"......Majesty."

"Yes, that....... Yes? Yes sir."

"How many times have I told you to stop acting like an old filial pest, trying to make up for lost time?"

The eerily detailed description described exactly what the Emperor was doing to Empress Louise.

It looks like you're not trying to be nice to your wife, you're trying to be nice to your parents.

Forget the gifts the emperor gives to his other empresses, Louise is always a gift, and the fact that she's always there to say hello is proof of that.

"That, that's....... I'm sorry."

Eventually, the emperor bows his head.

I want to be nice to him, but I don't know how.

"I feel like I'm not the Empress, I'm the Empress Dowager."

The emperor isn't the only one.

Olivia respects her to a certain extent, and so does Charlotte.

And one more person who freezes as much as the emperor.

Another empress who enters the palace first, and then rushes in when she realizes Louise is there.

"Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, there you are, there you are? Lou, Louise?"

Archmage.

Herriot's bumbling was on par with the emperor's.

"Yes, and how are you, Archmage?"

"Well, sure! Ho, do you happen to have a car......?"

"I drank it."

"And the meal is......?"

"Isn't there a banquet coming up?"

"Oh, yeah, right, right? I guess I wasn't thinking straight......."

It sounds exactly like the emperor.

They send gifts for birthdays, seasons, and say hello.

"Hah......."

I married Louise because I needed her, so I didn't have high expectations.

No, I thought, there might be something nasty in store.

Because you have a small base, or a short history with the emperor.

I thought I might be ignored or treated with less respect.

But this was a marriage that went awry in the most bizarre of ways.

Episode 687.

Honoree banquet.

As a banquet to bring together the people responsible for the Gate debacle, the size of the arrivals was significant.

There were tons of people, and naturally, the Palace of Spring was bustling.

It's a gathering of people who have made a huge impact, so it's not just the big names from all over the world, but also individuals who are not big names but have made a great impact.

It's a banquet to which most of the people who are the backbone of the empire are invited, so it's a big deal, and the Emperor and all five Empresses attend.

The last of the five empresses to arrive was Airi.

Her presence is enough to make people fall silent.

Succubus Queen.

The bloodline of one of the greatest demons of all time.

She's a member of a race of succubi called seductresses, which are considered the great demons, so it's no wonder she's in the spotlight.

"Hello?"

"Yes."

When they reach the second floor, where the Emperor is, Airi nods in agreement.

People are mesmerized for a while, then they go back to telling stories and dancing.

There are also those who secretly glance in the direction of Airi.

Airi was originally a representative of the demons who married the Emperor.

I thought so too.

In reality, Airi is in charge of the demons, and her main job is to find the remaining hordes of demons in the Darklands and integrate them into the Empire.

Charlotte is also an Archdemon, but she doesn't have the energy to run the entire empire, so Airi does.

"No matter how you look at it, of all the empresses, you have the most support for this....... Isn't that a little odd?"

Airi smiles subtly at the Emperor's words.

"You don't know what's going on in the world."

Nicknamed Mafu, Airi is actually the most recognizable among humans.

Archmage.

The last Empress of the Imperial House of Gradias.

Regent of Cernstadt.

Ruler of the Holy Empire.

They're all great at what they do, but Airi is the only demon.

Humans support Airi for one reason only.

The most beautiful empress.

It lives up to its nickname, the Archdemon of Seduction, by keeping things simple.

I can't tell you how much that alone has changed the way humans perceive demons, and how much money it would take to win that with propaganda.

When the Demon Empress was revealed to the world, Charlotte did not stand idly by as soon as she realized the perception was spreading among the people.

Just like we did in Edina.

We had succubi doing psychological counseling, and we had the empress doing poverty work.

The only Empress of Demons among the Emperor's Empresses, she serves the people in the lowliest of positions.

Airi and the other succubi had been doing it long enough on the Edina Archipelago to have their teeth chattering, and it was something they loved to do.

So, ironically, unlike the other empresses, whose heavy duties made it difficult for them to travel outside, Airi was the empress closest to the people of the zodiac.

Public outreach to raise awareness of demons.

Airi might not be the only one.

As such, Airi was the only Empress of the demons, and the most famous and supported.

There are even humans who hate the Emperor but support Empress Airi.

Airi won people over in the simplest, most obvious way.

"Maybe we'll get some new Shadowwalkers this time."

"Really?"

"Yeah, we're a pretty grim species, but we've survived because we're good at hiding. They like dark places and have good ears. Don't worry, they're not cannibals. I could work in intelligence. I wouldn't mind living in the ecliptic."

"Good."

Of course, that doesn't change the fact that she's also an advocate and protector of the demons.

It's a place where humans are the majority, but eventually, demons have to live alongside them.

The demons, who cannot live in the land of the humans, must be given a home, and a place where only they can live.

The Emperor stares down at the banquet hall.

Some faces you recognize, some you don't.

Some faces I haven't seen in a while.

As they greeted each other, some of whom hadn't seen each other in a long time, they stared down at the emperor.

The emperor stays still and looks in the opposite direction.

It's not Irie, it's Scarlett, who's always there.

"Go down."

"Yes, Your Majesty, but I'm......."

In a ballroom where everyone is wearing a dress or suit, Scarlett is still wearing her armor.

"Come on, let's go say hi to Ivia."

If you're going to stick around this long, why not say hello?

The Emperor watched as Scarlett hesitated and walked down the stairs.

\* \* \*

The entire Spring Palace was like a banquet hall, with tons of people eating and drinking everywhere.

Naturally, cliques congregate, and there were people all over the ballroom.

There's a lot of gossip, and it can range from private to public.

Among the stories buried in the music, some people were happy to see each other after a long time.

But there were also a lot of familiar faces in the room.

Such is the case with Harriet and Adelia, who have been apart for a while, but now meet up every chance they get and mumble, just like they did in Temple.

The two of them were muttering now, papers lined up on the banquet table.

"I'm not sure how efficient this would be, but wouldn't it be a little less versatile? I'd like to be able to use it in ways other than harvesting."

"No, that's not how it works. Because there's a joint here in the front, and if you replace it, it'll look like this."

"Yeah, and?"

"Then you can act as a plow, and you can sell as much land as you want."

"Ah....... I see. It's efficient because you can swap out parts to make it versatile. The core is the same, so it's easy to repurpose."

"Right."

As Adelia and Harriet talk about it in the ballroom, Riana, who's emptying her champagne glass, slams it down as if it's not good enough.

-Tak!

"What the hell, you come all the way over here to make me smell like manure?"

"Huh?"

"Oh......?"

"Do I have to come all the way out here and listen to you talk about building a farming golem? I don't know about you guys, but I'm sick of it."

At Riana's words, both Adelia and Harriet reorganized the pile of plans on the table.

Herriot's reaction to the initially awkward topic prompted Adelia to pull out her design drawings and start fidgeting.

It's no wonder Riana's not thrilled with the idea of getting all dolled up and wearing earrings, necklaces, and a fancy dress.

Cliffman chuckled beside him.

"......Funny?"

"Sorry......."

Naturally, he laughed without thinking, and with one glance, Kliffman hung his head.

Riana can't help but have a seizure at the mention of farming.

Liana was the general manager of the vast Saint-Tuan Agricultural District, the breadbasket of the empire.

Agriculture to livestock, forestry to fisheries, and processing afterward.

When it comes to food, Liana de Granz is in charge of everything.

Once an absolute powerhouse when it came to war, Riana's psychic powers are now responsible for feeding the entire nation.

In a way, I was given a more important job than I had before the war.

Riana's territory is much larger than most countries. It produces food that stretches across continents.

As such, it was the second largest military presence after the Ecliptic, and Riana was one of the few beings authorized to call upon the Archmage in an emergency.

One is, of course, the Emperor, and Riana is the only person other than the Emperor who can call on Heriot in an emergency.

So all this talk about food is very important to her, but it's also the last thing she wants to hear.

There's a reason the Empire's massive food warehouses are located in the Grand Duchy of Saint-Tuan.

And there's a reason why Adelia is showing off her design drawings and Herriot is interested.

"But when the automated golems are finished, food production will explode, and we'll be able to supply the entire continent, which will reduce your burden, which is good for you, right?"

Herriot said, and Adelia nodded.

The technology to make golems for warfare is now shifting to production.

Create an automated machine for agriculture.

In fact, there are a lot of golems in the farming business, and they are now dreaming of full automation.

Thanks to the Duchy of St. Thuan's golem technology and Adelia's collaboration, the knowledge that once created the Titans will now be used for agriculture as well as mining, in part to gather useful things.

Of course, we all know that there's a certain, uncomfortable possibility that a small change to the production line could turn agricultural golems into fearsome war golems.

Depending on what you attach to the part, it can be used for production or destruction.

Riana narrows her eyes at the notion that it's all for your own good.

"Who says you can't do it at all?"

Riana's painted nails tremble, her painstakingly drawn eyebrows come together, and her red lips part.

"Let's not do it now."

"You guys know me....... You know how I usually am?"

"Do you think I'm sitting in some elegant salon or something, saying, "Rain, rain, rain, snow, snow, snow"?"

"I'm wearing suspenders, rummaging through manure bins, and staring at the rain all day when I need rain."

"I don't know why my crops are behind, so I spend all day asking farmers about it."

"The boars are eating the roots, the monsters have ruined the farming, the pests are rampant, soothe the depressed and take action, eh?"

"That I am."

"Not in a long time."

"I put on a dress, I put on makeup, I painted my nails, I was a little bit cocky. All the way to the palace, huh?"

"Do I have to hear about it again today?"

"Well, we can forget about that for today, and listen to it tomorrow......."

"You guys who've been holed up in your labs don't know me......."

"You guys who like to study don't know me......."

"Do you know how I feel about you guys talking about how it's good to be able to study......."

Adelia and Herriot actually say that.

They ask me why I don't like it when I can just do research. I don't consider it work in the first place.

"You don't know how much I want to play, you guys don't know......."

Eventually, my eyes go blank in confusion and I mumble to myself.

"Uh, yeah....... We can talk about this later at the mage meeting......."

Adelia and Herriot had noticed, too, and they turned to face Herriot and nodded.

In the end, only Cliff could drag Riana, now a super-sword, to the dance floor.

"Did you think she....... can dance?"

At Harriet's question, Adelia stares blankly as Kliffman dances with Riana.

"You know what? That one, that one, the polarity, it makes me dizzy sometimes."

It wasn't Adelia who answered, but Kaiir, who approached from a distance.

"Ah, Kaier."

It wasn't just Kaier Biorden.

A wheelchair with Kaier sitting in it. Behind him, a woman pushing it.

"It's been a while, Sister Adelia, and Archmage."

"Hello. Senior."

"It's been a while."

Behind Kaier was Redina.

About two years ago, Kaier Bioden woke up from a coma.

\* \* \*

It was Redina who cared for Kaier, who had been in a coma since the war.

Naturally, being war heroes themselves, they were provided with support and periodic visits from a priest to check on Kaier's condition.

But Redina was always there.

In truth, Redina shouldn't have had to care for Kai so much.

But Redina stayed by his side for the entire three years he was in a coma.

We didn't know if Kaier would regain consciousness or not.

I stayed with Kaier, whose only heart was beating.

And then one day.

Kaier opened his eyes.

They've been together ever since.

I helped him rehabilitate and lived with him.

Perhaps, if his rehabilitation goes well, he'll regain his strength and get out of the wheelchair.

That's what Redina had been telling Kai all along.

-Brother, eat this.

-Sober is...... okay? I hope you don't drink, though.

-What do you want to eat?

-Want to take a walk?

Herriot and Adelia watched it go by.

It's miraculous that Kai'er regained consciousness, and they've both visited him from time to time to see how he's been taken care of by Redina.

And I think it's fair to say that the heavens were touched by Redina's care that Kai'er actually regained consciousness.

There is no such polarity.

"......."

"......."

If the polarity on the male side is Cliffman, the polarity on the female side is Redina.

It's nice that it's working out, but in the end, they both realize that it's a bitch.

After spending a while asking Kai if he was okay and if he needed anything, Redina took a breath when Kai said he was going to go talk to some friends for a while.

Redina looks at Harriet and smiles.

"By the way, I saw your book, Archmage."

"Oh....... Is that......?"

"Yes, the Book of Samurai. We're only up to the introduction, right?"

"Yes."

The magic that made Herriot an Archmage.

After the war, Herriot tried to organize his realizations in writing.

Redina is fast at doing magic, but she lacks absolute horsepower.

So if you can unlock the magic that Herriot has awakened, you can solve your own problems.

So I thought I'd try to understand Herriot's book, at least the introduction.

"Does anyone even understand that? I don't understand any of it, not even a little bit."

This is not a book for everyone, even wizards.

Like Adelia, Redina is a member of the Magical Society, so she has access to Herriot's book.

"Oh, yeah, right......."

"You won't be disappointed, in fact, I think that's why you should use it."

"Yeah. Honestly, I didn't understand....... at all."

But there's a reason why I can't help but say, "I have no idea what your book is about, so you can go ahead.

The council is reserved for the best of the best among mages. When its leader, Herriot, decided to put his greatest realizations into writing, everyone in the council objected.

It's too powerful a spell, and it shouldn't spread so easily.

So Herriot started by writing an introduction.

And to the people of the masquerade, let those who wish to see, see.

But neither Redina nor Adelia understood.

Other members of the council have had similar answers so far.

Herriot explains the magic she's come to realize.

But the wizards can't figure out why this is possible.

Some people don't understand how the magic works.

Even if you understand how the magic works, you may wonder if it's humanly possible.

The theory exists, and it works.

But it's a very simple conclusion that there's only one person in the world who can make it work: Herriot.

"So you can keep that spellbook, it's a spell that no one will ever use anyway."

No one will understand you anyway.

But great magic must be recorded for posterity.

So it would be significant to preserve the magic in a spellbook that no one else of the time could understand.

"By the way, you're not an Archmage for nothing, you're a spellcaster before you're thirty."

It's not even just magic, it's the greatest magic in the world.

Herriot couldn't help but blush at Redina's crass remark.

"By the way, I heard your sister Adelia is getting married soon, too?"

"Oh, that....... Yeah."

Soon, Adelia was to be married to the third son of the Grand Duke of St. Thuan.

Somewhere in the distance, the Grand Duke of Saint-Antoine, also a member of the cabal, was talking to someone, and the Grand Duke's three sons were also present.

"So we're family now?"

"Oh....... Well, is that......."

Harriet smirked as she watched Adelia blush and shake her head.

Episode 688.

There were a lot of people in the ballroom, most of them from Temple.

Most notably, all of them were sophomores when Gate broke.

Not only are there two demons, an emperor, and an empress, but everyone else's majors are revolutionary, and they all have one big job right now.

"Ivia, how are your studies going?"

Scarlett asked as she approached, and Ivia nodded.

"Yeah, I'm getting some hands-on experience these days, so it's not like I don't know anything about it."

Unsure of what to do after the war, Ivia eventually found her way to where her skills were most needed.

At the reopened Temple, he is now majoring in military studies.

Although he is not yet in active duty, he is expected to join the Imperial Army after graduating from the military academy.

And, although it was still a long way off, the Emperor intended to make Ivia commander-in-chief of the Imperial Army.

The ability to talk to everyone within range of her ability from where she sits will be more effective when she's in command.

Naturally, with the full support of the imperial family, Ivia was granted an environment where she could only study.

Scarlett looks around the ballroom with Ivia.

Students from the sophomore class at the time of Gate.

These are important people, but of course, not everyone is there, and not everyone is okay.

In particular, most of the Class B positions were vacant.

"People in my class rarely....... in my class."

"......Yes. Right."

There are only three people from Class B in this position.

Charlotte, Scarlett, and now Ivia.

No. 4 Ashur killed.

No. 9 Delphine Izadra dies.

All but number 10 Lannion Sesor, who had become a bard, were missing.

The 8th Detomorian, who remained in the Temple, had been carrying out the Emperor's secret identity since the war ended.

With the exception of Lannion Sesor, who has been heard from time to time, and five others, including Detomorians, who are certain to be alive, everyone else is unaccounted for.

Ludwig.

Christina.

Louis Ankton.

Anna De Guerna.

Their deaths were almost a foregone conclusion.

Missing on the battlefield meant death, as there were many men whose deaths could not be physically confirmed. Since Ludwig was missing from the battlefield, he must have died at the end of the last fight.

It's ridiculous to even try to find it.

There are two vacancies in Class A.

Lunges Bertus.

And Ellen Artorius.

They are both missing and wanted.

"Everybody....... Where did they go?"

In the lively atmosphere of the banquet, Scarlett imagines the faces of those she can no longer find.

Is it too much to hope that they're all still alive somewhere?

I wonder if it's a luxury.

Ivia, Scarlett, and Charlotte, who watches from afar.

I was thinking about the people I can't find anymore.

\* \* \*

Since the banquet was being held in an entire palace, the group was divided into several groups.

There were three or four of them, all from the Temple, of course.

Even though we're all a little bit distant from each other, we have a bond that we've been through a war together.

Even those involved in politics, who were in places unrelated to the war, were not readily accepted into the mixed group of Temple members, even though they were not outright excluded.

Of course, they were also relatively young, so they weren't able to intervene, and the Temple attendees weren't interested in political gain in the first place.

That's not to say that there aren't people who are completely apolitical.

Aside from the emperors and empresses, the most powerful person in the world is probably the current King of Cernstadt, Heinrich von Schwarz, both in terms of actual and perceived political power.

"......."

"You're going to lose your shit, asshole."

"What difference does it make if you see it?"

Of course, at this point, the great King of Cernstadt was not paying attention to the banquet, but rather staring off into the distance, listening to his friends' rebukes.

It's been a long time since we've been together, and we're not eating or drinking, just staring at each other with our mouths shut, not talking, so I can't help but hear Kono Lint and Erich say things like that.

But Heinrich's mouth twists into a grimace and he glares at his friends.

Heinrich's eyes were on the Emperor.

The Emperor was talking to Empress Louise, who was now at his side.

The contrast between his helplessness and the empress's pathetic look was striking.

"Don't you see?"

"I can't help it, but......."

"I've never been in that situation, so I don't know."

Heinrich's brow narrowed at Lint and Erich's irresponsible response.

Kaier chuckles at the sight.

"I know it's not what you want to be, but sometimes I'm glad I wasn't born into royalty, thanks to you."

Heinrich's story reminded us all that power sometimes leads to things that are beyond the reach of the normal mind.

It's something we have to do, and it's something we need to do.

But everyone gets dizzy.

Kono Lindt shakes his head.

"But what are you so worried about, you've never held hands with me before anyway?"

Actually, yes.

The relationship between Empress Louise and the Emperor is very clerical.

It's a work marriage, so they treat each other like it, especially Louise.

So you treat it like a job, and you sigh at the emperor sulking.

"Whatever you're worried about, whatever you're scared of, it's not going to happen now, is it?"

According to Erich, no matter what Heinrich says, in the end, if there's nothing more than a formal relationship between the two of them, it's just something you shouldn't bother with.

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

5 years.

Five years.

In fact, Heinrich now thinks a little differently.

Is it true that my mother is going to age like that for the rest of her life?

I don't know that.

Naturally, since she's just reached the master class, Louise doesn't look much different from the other empresses.

Sometimes, Louise would say it with a sad look on her face when she realized that she was really annoyed.

'Don't worry, that's not going to happen in my lifetime ....... I wouldn't do something you don't like.

Heinrich felt like he'd been hit over the head, and of course, with all of his actions and demeanor, Louise was bound to feel the pressure.

Not to be outdone, Ruiz said in his own words.

I felt like I was being harsh.

After that, Heinrich didn't know what to do.

"By the way, officially, that....... Reinhard is Heinrich's father......?"

"I'm not sure about that, but......."

"......Now, that's enough. Please."

Heinrich's forehead broke out in a cold sweat as he asked for a favor like he was the king of Cernstadt.

Luckily, it was a good time to change the mood.

Kliffman, who had been dancing with Riana, sat her down at Harriet's table, heard something, and started walking over.

"It's been a while."

Everyone was happy to see Cliff pull up a chair and sit down.

They may be part of the same empire, but they all have their own agendas.

So it was rare to see everyone in the same room.

"How's everything going?"

Everyone nods appropriately at Kliffman's words.

As the King of Cernstadt, Heinrich naturally resides in the capital of Cernstadt.

Erich de Lapaeri became a paladin, a member of the Crusader Knights of the Holy Empire.

Cliffman is the full-time bodyguard to Riana, the head of the Empire's agricultural district.

The Agricultural District is important, but before that, Liana de Granz is irreplaceable, which is why she has only the overwhelmingly powerful Cliff as her escort, even among the Empire's master classes.

"If rehabilitation is work, I'm doing it."

Caierdo smiles and nods.

Unsurprisingly, Kaier is not yet out of his wheelchair and relies on Redina's help to get around.

"I'm worried about the next one."

But even when his rehabilitation is complete, there is no place for Kaiir. Neither his gift of giant powers nor his inability to wield them.

If there is a war, we may end up using arc crystals again, and then we'll have something else to do, but we'd rather not.

Konorint shakes his head in disbelief at Kaier's words.

"Hey, you'll be fine for the rest of your life on your pension."

"Yeah, but that's not true of you either."

"Uh, yeah."

There are only a handful of people who receive the highest level of meritorious service pension, but they have all achieved that level of specialization.

Of course, there are those who have turned down meritorious service pensions.

"By the way, this thing called a veteran's pension, are they really giving it out?"

Currently, the pension is only available to war heroes, but the long-term plan is to extend it to all veterans.

Although this is highly unlikely.

Heinrich narrows his eyes thoughtfully at Erich's words.

"I can't give it to you right away, but I plan to give it to you someday, though I'm not sure when that will happen. I'm also considering giving it to you as an estate, which Reinhardt seems to be against."

"Why don't you give it to me as an estate, isn't that better?"

"There is a lot of empty land in the world, and if you give someone a territory, they have to develop it by themselves, but is that a reward? If you say you're going to develop an empty land, it's a territory without any merit. If you say, "I gave you a territory and that's it," you'll only get backlash. It's as bad as not giving it."

"Oh, right."

While we don't yet have a pension for every veteran, there are certainly those who do.

And gradually expanding the scope of that pension is one of the Empire's long-term challenges.

At the end of the day, we've all done something big in our own way, and we've all earned our place.

"What's up with you?"

Klippmann looks at Kono Lint.

"Not really?"

Konorint shrugs.

"Well, it's a situation where it's best if you don't have anything to say."

At that, everyone but Lint nods.

Of course, Kono Lint has its place.

"I'm kind of surprised that we're doing anything, especially Heinrich being king, but honestly, I'm more surprised that you're doing it."

"Right."

"Uh."

"That's true. How is that possible?"

The others nodded vigorously in agreement with Kliffman.

"......what the fuck."

Lindt's eyes widen with trepidation.

"No, you're an Imperial Intelligence officer, this doesn't make sense."

Kono Lint was now one of the highest ranking officers in the Empire's spy squad, or intelligence service.

"The creepiest thing is that I spent three years pretending to be an idiot on that topic."

I've even been careful to hide the fact that I'm doing it from my friends.

When I was asked, with a hint of concern, if I should get a job, I cheerfully responded that I was going to live on a pension for the rest of my life.

"This asshole is being devious by pretending he's not?"

"I'm a person whose work ethic is to keep secrets, you sneaky......!"

A man who is surprisingly good at keeping secrets.

A thorough guy, even a little creepy.

My friends were the most shocked to learn that Kono Lint wasn't actually a puzzle.

Heinrich chuckles over a glass of champagne.

"But the way you really got found out....... kind of, like, you."

"What's like me......! What's like me......!"

Heinrich pressed the seizure button, and Kono Lint turned bright red and let out a stifled yell.

Everyone else chuckled, knowing what was going on, and Kono Lint bit his lip in frustration.

Kono Lint, who hid his membership in the Imperial Intelligence Service from even those closest to him, was found out in a fairly bizarre way.

"My deductive skills came into play."

Kono Lint was so thorough that Erich, the least intelligent man in the room, found out he was in the Secret Service.

Yo was.

Erich visited Kono Lint from time to time, who was living a life of leisure.

And then I looked.

Kono Lint goes on a date with a ghostly young woman.

He couldn't interfere right away, so he left, leaving Erich to find out later, and when Erich asked who the woman was, Kono Lindt answered briefly.

Girlfriend.

Naturally, Erich didn't believe him.

Erich sought out Klippmann to discuss the urgent and ridiculous fact.

Is this possible.

I turned to Riana, who was with me.

It's probably Sarkhegar, Dreadfind, the Archdemon of Shapeshifting.

And since Sarkeghar is a member of the Secret Service, Kono Lint must also be a member of the Secret Service.

So they were probably talking about work, not dating.

We don't actually know because Riana has no ties to the Agency, but Sarkegardo and Kono Lindt are also high ranking members of the Agency.

A long-kept secret has been blown too wide open.

"No way, no how."

It wasn't exactly deduction, but in the end, Erich's absolute faith that nothing like that would happen to his friend led him to unlock the secrets of Lint.

"Why......? I can't....... Why shouldn't I......?"

"Why in the world would an average-looking girl go out with you?"

"You can do it......!"

"No. There's no way, no way, no way that could happen unless you're a coworker demon."

There's no such thing as luck, Kaeir shook his head.

Conor Lint squirms in frustration.

"You motherfuckers......! I'm saying this in hindsight, but I wasn't really talking about work then......!"

Eventually, an exasperated Lint said something that got everyone's attention.

"!!!!"

And Konorint froze, realizing what he had said.

"......?"

"Uh......."

"Uh, yeah......?"

Sudden silence.

"What I don't understand at all is....... not."

"Oh, no, I was talking about work....... I was talking about work."

I tried to pick it up, but it was too late.

Everyone had heard something so serious that they were at a loss for words.

"Hmm....... Oh, well, it's all good for you anyway, isn't it? The, uh, bad guy....... No, I thought I heard you say you weren't even a bad demon....... No, that's a bit of a stretch......."

Heinrich broke out in a cold sweat, and the others nodded in agreement.

Erich mumbles to himself.

"You bastard, it's impossible to marry a beautiful woman after all, so why not marry a demon who could be any beautiful woman......."

"No, no, no......!"

Just like that.

Lint tries to deny it vehemently.

"Mr. Lint."

"......!"

Kono Lint felt a hand on his shoulder and opened his eyes.

There, one of the maids of honor was looking at Kono Lint with a gentle smile on her face.

Nearby, one of the maids, who has been quietly surveying the banquet, filling glasses, and clearing plates, suddenly puts her hand on a banquet attendee.

To do such a thing out of nowhere means that the handmaiden in front of you deserves it.

"If not, then what?"

Under that gaze, Kono Lindt froze, looking like he was about to bite his tongue.

And everyone else in the room froze.

I don't know what's going on.

One of those situations where you have no idea what's going on, and then you find out.

"And....... Me, me....... spying on me....... were you......?"

Kono Lint was a stickler for secrecy, not because he was a devious and manipulative person, after all.

We didn't know when or where Sarkegar would be watching.

"I told you, Mr. Lint......?"

The handmaiden's beautiful mouth curves up in an arc.

"All the time, watching."

No one could tell if it was affection, obsession, or just a watchful eye to keep him from making fun of her.

"You didn't keep your mouth shut, so you're going to get your ass kicked again like last time......?"

"Sin, sin, I'm sorry......."

But if nothing else, it was clear that Sarkegaard was enjoying Kono Lint's reaction.

Episode 689.

"I told you to stop picking on her."

"The response is so good, I can't stop, Your Majesty."

Holding the glass of champagne his maid had brought him, the Emperor took a long swig and sighed heavily.

The Emperor was still frozen, smirking at the squirming Kono Lint and his classmates around him.

"It's nice to be cuddly, but I'm afraid he's going to start claiming that something is planted in his ear."

"Planting something in your ear......? What are you talking about......."

"No, there is such a thing."

Every once in a while, the emperor says something that only he knows, and no one else understands what it is.

The captain of the Intelligence Corps, created after the war, is Rowen.

Rowen is the leader because there are more specialized people in the field. Sarkegar and Kono Lindt are more suited to field work.

As such, they are placed based on ability, not merit.

Sarkegaard seemed quite interested in Kono Lint.

I think he often did things that were nothing more than harassment, but it was clear that he cared a lot.

The emperor stares at the banquet hall. Countless people talk about countless things.

The Emperor watches the stories and the gatherings without mingling with them.

-You're too young to be enjoying a drink.

The emperor watches as a middle-aged gentleman approaches a silver-haired girl.

A middle-aged gentleman walks up to a silver-haired girl in a colorful dress and shakes his head.

-HoHo....... What is that blood-red wine? I've never seen such a brilliant color in my life.

-......That's right.

-......Yes?

-p That's right.

She gives her wine glass a quick swirl, and the eerie red color of the glass confirms her words.

After lightly wetting her lips with the liquid, the girl opens her blood-stained lips. Gruesome fangs are revealed.

-Huh, huh......!

-Never seen a vampire before?

-What, is that......, human blood......?

-Why not? Want a drink?

-No, not at all, not at all, it's fine!

-Yes? Well, can I get you a drink? -Bam! I could do that. It'd be kind of nice.

-No, not at all! No, not at all! Shh, excuse me......!

The emperor watched with a smirk as a middle-aged man shrank away from a girl with a seductive smile.

As the man runs away in horror, the dark-haired woman approaches the girl.

-Rucinil! I always tell you not to scare the aman!

-No, you asked me what it was first, so I told you.

The Emperor watches as Eleris and Lucinil argue.

Many demons joined the Empire, but most of the vampires who had been with them since Edina left.

Galarsh and Leruen led their clans out of the Empire.

Tired of the noise, he led his clan back to their own silence.

What's left is Elise, Tuesday's housekeeper, and Lucinil, Wednesday's housekeeper.

And the Toyo clan, left behind by the disappearance of their patriarch, Antrianus.

Elise had taken them in and was taking temporary charge.

So Eleris was not only a Hwaju, she was now also a Toyo, caring for Toyo's clan.

Originally, the Lord Vampire clans were few in number as they did not seek to expand their membership.

But they all played a fairly important role in the early empire.

To ensure their legitimacy, the vampires created a bloodletting organization.

What's funny is that some humans, upon learning of the existence of the Lord Vampire, have reacted to the idea of a vampire that can withstand the sun.

I was often bombarded with people asking me if I wanted to be a vampire.

So, not for the humans, but for the vampires, he created an estate where they could live in peace and strictly forbid outsiders from entering.

Some people knocked on the door, saying they wanted immortality and eternal life.

Because that's always sweet.

While the feast was still going strong.

The Emperor saw Empress Louise approaching.

"Your Majesty."

"Ah....... Yes."

"I have something important to tell you."

"Four?"

Without asking for the Emperor's opinion, Empress Louise grabs him by the arm with a very serious look on her face and starts dragging him somewhere.

And then there was Heinrich von Schwarz, who watched the spectacle with his mouth hanging open.

\* \* \*

The place where the Emperor was taken to Empress Louise was one of the unoccupied rooms somewhere in the Palace of Spring.

The emperor's heart was beating like a madman.

Is it time?

Is this how it ends up?

But why today?

There are other days, but today?

Why?

The Emperor had many things to fear, but now the world fears Louise.

Fear mixed with guilt.

That's why he freezes when he sees her.

"I'm going to go, sir. I'm going to go, sir. I'm going to go, sir. I'm going to go for five minutes....... Five minutes....... Five minutes......."

"......."

“그, 싫어서는! 싫어서는 절대 아닙니다! 그, 괜, 괜찮! 좋습니다! 좋죠! 그, 그래도 자, 잠깐…….”

"...... for real!"

-Bam!

"Ack......!"

In the end, Louise, having had enough of the bullshit, does the unthinkable: she drives a honeycomb into the emperor's skull.

Louise looks down at the Emperor with cold eyes, her eyeballs bulging.

"Have a seat."

"Yes."

At Louise's simple command, the emperor sat up in bed.

Louise's eyes grow even colder at the sight.

"Not there, here."

Louise pointed to a chair, not a bed.

The Emperor, realizing that he had not been prepared for this, staggered to his feet and sat back in his chair.

It's no wonder the emperor's face is so grim.

When the Emperor finally regained his senses, he saw that the Empress was not empty-handed now, but was holding something.

-Dalcock

Empress Louise removes the contents one by one and sets them down.

"Is this....... What is it, a book?"

Inside the case was a book.

No, it's more like a notebook than a book.

A tattered and dirty notebook.

It was laid before the emperor.

"I think you should see this."

The Emperor was puzzled, but did as the Empress said and carefully opened the notebook.

\* \* \*

The soiled notebooks were frayed and tattered at the edges, and many were even torn.

It wasn't a deliberate tear, it was more of an accidental tear.

"This is from the Adventurers' Guild headquarters in Cernstadt."

"......Yes."

The emperor was puzzled at first, flipping through his notebook.

Most of them were illustrated.

"Is ...... a picture of a monster?"

"Yes, I think so."

"......Why do you draw pictures of monsters?"

Monsters have a form of beauty, and who wants to record it?

There are a lot of weirdos out there, so it's not like there won't be any.

Louise didn't answer. As if to say, "Go ahead and watch.

The drawings aren't very detailed, but they do capture the characteristic details.

It's not a very well-drawn picture, but it's not an overly crude one either.

It's a quick, precise drawing that looks like it could have been done in ink.

Each page didn't just have a picture of a monster on it.

And at the bottom of the picture, there's a small print.

[Northeast of Cernstadt, in the hills near the border with Eyreden].

The Emperor looks at the note and shakes his head.

"Found at....... Same thing."

What it tells us.

I saw and drew these monsters, not in my imagination or something else.

It's time for the Adventurer's Guild to pay you to kill monsters.

"You don't have a policy of paying for drawings, not monster corpses, do you?"

"That's not always the case, but it's usually the case."

There are exceptions, but I don't get paid for drawings. So this wasn't a proof drawing for a paycheck.

And most of all, it's too long.

Rather than express his doubts, the emperor decides to take a closer look at the notebook.

I don't know who it belongs to, but I'm careful not to damage the old, tattered, dirty notebook.

I have no doubt that these notebooks are very valuable, regardless of their condition.

The emperor's expression becomes increasingly serious as he turns the page and checks another notebook.

Louise watches the emperor as he flips through a notebook she's already seen.

"......what."

It's a drawing, and not all monsters are created equal.

However, there are some very similar looking monsters that have been spotted in the notebooks.

The location is different for each.

And they are found thousands of kilometers away.

The more you look at it, the more you realize why the original owner of the notebook drew a picture of a monster.

As the notebook neared its final volume, the emperor's expression grew eerily hardened.

Later, a series of monsters are drawn that look exactly the same.

The discovery location is similar.

And when the Emperor saw the last page of those notebooks, his eyes widened.

Little monsters are drawn.

And there was a short note written on it.

And the neat writing was quite disorganized.

As if to speak for the wavering mind of the author of this notebook.

[Definite immature object].

[He was protected by his mother].

[Monsters are breeding].

[This raises the possibility that the subspecies of monsters that have been discovered so far were actually conspecifics, rather than similar-looking individuals].

[It is likely that many of the monsters already have the ability to reproduce].

[Of the monsters discovered so far, 24 are believed to be capable of reproduction].

[Actually, it's probably more].

The emperor said nothing for a while.

Louise was looking at the emperor's silence, too.

"I need to call them all."

"......Yes."

Louise nodded at the Emperor's words.

Episode 690.

The banquet hasn't stopped. Stopping the banquet doesn't make things better or fix them.

And nothing is certain yet.

It's just that it's quiet, and it's bringing together people who need to talk.

Palace of Spring meeting room.

With Scarlett out front to keep anyone from stopping by.

Five empresses and an emperor gathered together.

The emperor waited patiently, until everyone had checked the contents of the notebook.

Everyone's expressions and reactions were not much different than the emperor's.

Some species of monsters reproduce.

In fact, we don't even know how much of each species grows or where.

The continent-wide restoration rate is less than a third of what it was in the previous era.

So exterminating an entire continent was out of the question at this point. It would have to wait until later, when we could afford it.

But if this is true, the days of monsters disappearing will never come.

Even if it's not as desperate as it was with Gate, there will be a constant battle with monsters.

Maybe one day we'll be able to dry the seeds of monsters, but that's a long way off.

A dark cloud fell over their faces as they realized this.

"Well, it's not too late, because it was never going to be possible to scour the entire continent to kill the monsters in the first place."

Charlotte is right.

It was just another disaster after a disaster, and there was no way to prepare for it.

A new empire that could barely stand up would not be able to fly.

I prayed that this wouldn't happen, but it did.

We all know this without Charlotte saying it.

We did our best, but there was just something beyond our best.

"It means that monsters, as a species and as an animal, are beginning to take hold in the continent's ecosystem, and we don't know how the changes that will cause will affect us all. We should be more afraid of the unpredictable things that will happen as the ecosystem changes, not just of monsters attacking people."

Changes that occur as other species begin to appear in a stable ecosystem.

The monsters have already caused a great deal of devastation.

Many places were barren and unrecoverable.

"Maybe we should change the way the Adventurer's Guild works, rewarding those who find hordes of monsters breeding this way."

Everyone nodded at Charlotte's words.

Whether or not we could do anything about it right away, it was very important information. Just knowing that these monsters were breeding could have prevented a crisis or disaster in the future.

If you destroy a nest of breeding monsters, you're eliminating thousands of monsters that will be born later.

We need to increase funding for Adventurer Guilds and pay for Adventurers.

Even if it's smooth sailing, there is an absolute lack of troops to keep the peace.

The emperor smiled bitterly.

Governments that entrust adventurers with policing.

It reminded me of a day when I scoffed at the idea that if there was such a thing as a government, why does it exist at all?

The silent Shenghu flips through his notebook.

"Sure, this is important, and it's a big deal, but......."

Olivia holds up her notebook and looks at the source, Empress Louise.

"Empress Louise, you said this was from the Adventurer's Guild, right?"

"Yes. That's right."

"Where is that adventurer now, I'd have to take out an empire pillar to reward him for something like this. Are you just going to sit there and wait for me......?"

"After handing them over to the Belorussian branch in northeastern Cernstadt, they disappeared."

Olivia, who also brought up the question.

Other Empresses.

And the emperor.

I already knew that answer was coming.

It's just that no one brought it up first.

"Here are the place names in the notebook, all of which are areas we have not been able to restore......."

"They're all from no man's land."

"And judging by the sheer volume, it's not like we're talking about a few months."

"The handwriting is the same, so it was all written by the same person."

"This must have taken years of time to write up......."

"I've heard of adventurers going into dangerous areas to hunt monsters, but this was written by someone who lived in those dangerous areas, right?"

"If an adventurer of this caliber is registered with the Adventurer's Guild, there's no way we don't know his name......."

"But they just gave me this stuff and disappeared without even waiting for a reward......."

"You're saying you're someone who can't be rewarded."

"You're such a savage that you've been doing this in a no-man's land for an estimated several years......."

"The average person can't do this, and there's no reason to do it."

"The person who was doing something that no one had a reason to do, but someone had to, and no one told them to......."

An adventurer traveling from place to place in uninhabited and dangerous areas.

A certain adventurer who disappeared after handing over something that should have been a great reward.

Strong enough to survive this long in a land of monsters and collect and record such material.

But the person who collected it, gave it away, and then disappeared.

Rather, it is because the land of men is also a dangerous place for the adventurer.

So it's not gone, it's just run away.

Everyone knows this the moment they see the notebook.

Olivia took out the rush.

Shenghu's eyes narrow.

"Surely, it must be Ellen?"

Everyone knew that the author of the notebook was Ellen Artorius.

\* \* \*

"We could do a compare and contrast."

The Archmage looks at the Emperor and speaks cautiously.

The temple still has some of Ellen's items from her time at the temple, as well as her exam papers and other materials.

So if you do a handwriting contrast, you'll know it's really Ellen.

"Okay, just to be sure, I'll have to do a handwriting comparison."

But neither the Archmage who told the story nor the Emperor who approved it knows the outcome without being told.

I don't even remember the handwriting, but I know it's hard to believe that such neat handwriting and concise, precise drawings don't belong to Ellen.

His calm personality comes through in his handwriting and drawings.

There's no way Ellen Artorius didn't know she was going to be found out.

They may have decided that there were more pressing matters that needed to be communicated first.

The handwriting comparison results will come quickly.

And for now, we need to think about what we would do if it were Ellen who wrote this.

The Emperor says still.

"They must be running away."

I would never be so optimistic as to think that you won't be found out.

And since she's the most wanted man in the world even if her identity isn't discovered, Ellen needs to get out of no man's land as quickly as possible.

"When, where, and how did it come up?"

The Emperor looks at Empress Louise and asks.

"The materials arrived in Velodosia, a stronghold city in northeastern Cairnstadt, last Saturday. The Guild reviewed the contents of the notebooks, determined their importance, and on Sunday morning they arrived at the Adventurers' Guild headquarters in the Cairnstadt capital of Köylan. Normally, the materials would have been sent to the Adventurers' Guild of the Eclipse, but it seems that the Adventurers' Guild Master of Köylan, seeing the urgency of the matter, sent a report directly to the Royal Court of Cairnstadt."

The materials that arrived on Saturday traveled through Sunday and reached the imperial palace on Monday night.

It's not often that Adventurer's Guild materials reach the Imperial Palace, so the Adventurer's Guild made a quick judgment call about their importance.

In order to get to the emperor as quickly as possible, the chain of command was somewhat ignored. Moreover, a report that should have gone to Heinrich, King of Cernstadt, in the normal chain of command, went to the regent first.

It was not to Louise, Regent of Cernstadt, but to Louise, Empress.

That's why Louise von Schwarz was the first to get the information.

It's a matter of urgency, so he takes the quickest route to the emperor.

The Cernstadt Adventurer's Guild headquarters is not to blame for the delay, they were flexible and adapted to the situation.

But in the end, I ended up with a two-day time difference.

"In two days, we wouldn't have gotten out of Cernstadt yet."

Charlotte nodded at Louise's words.

"Velosia is the most important base city for the rebuilding of northeastern Cernstadt, with a number of small and medium-sized cities around it, as well as a number of forward bases."

"If she gave the materials to a local small adventurer's guild, they might be destroyed or lost, so Ellen had no choice but to come to the base city."

Herriot agreed, noting that it was clear that Ellen had been forced to take a risk and go very deep into human territory.

It might have been discarded by the clerk at the adventurer's guild in a provincial city as unreliable, or it might have been lost in transit.

Obviously, we wanted to eliminate that risk.

"Two days is too little time, no matter which way you flee. Ellen Atrorius is still within the borders of Cernstadt, Your Majesty."

"......Yes."

The Emperor nods in agreement.

He hasn't been seen since the Gate incident, and there have been countless sightings here and there that have been attributed to mistaken identity.

For almost the first time in this situation, Ellen's location is almost certainly known.

If you lose it now, you won't know where it went.

At the very least, it's a tiny trace of something that needs to be communicated.

The world is too big.

This is really the first and last chance to do so.

"Will anyone but us know that these materials were written by Ellen?"

But the emperor asks the wrong question.

"These notebooks have passed through a lot of hands to get to this point. The likelihood that others will come up with the same idea that we did is quite high."

It's already been reviewed by tons of people. It's been vetted by a lot of people, so it's ready to go to the emperor.

From local junior Adventurer's Guild officials, to high ranking officials at headquarters, to the Guildmaster, to the dignitaries of Cernstadt.

I was able to come because the information was approved as legitimate.

It's no secret that the average person could never amass this amount of material.

It's not hard to figure out, then, that it was Ellen, the lost warrior, who posted this.

It's just impossible to be as certain as people in this room. We can only guess.

The emperor seemed to hear voices already.

It was as if I could hear countless deputies shouting that the warrior must be slain.

There are things that I've been doing because I have to, even if I don't want to.

If anything, I did more things I didn't want to do.

There were things I had to do that I didn't want to do.

There was something I wanted to do but couldn't.

This one will be forced eventually.

Find a warrior.

Kill the warrior.

Already, the hallucinations filling my head were telling me what the future held.

"Wait a minute....... Just a second....... I need to think about this."

The emperor rose from his seat.

\* \* \*

On the upper floors of the Palace of Spring, in the dimly lit corridors where the banquet attendees never came, only the distant sounds of music could be heard.

The emperor was still, looking down at the people coming and going from the courtyard.

Naturally, the other side was bustling with revelers.

On the moonlit night, the emperor stares at them and is silent.

The emperor was fondling something in his arms.

Things you still haven't thrown away.

Hold it still and roll it in your hand.

Soon, behind the stoic emperor, someone approaches with a pretense of popularity.

"Reinhardt......."

"......."

The Archmage and Empress Herriot stand still beside him.

"Let's do it."

"......."

At that simple statement, the emperor is silent and makes no reply.

"I hope so."

The Emperor does not respond to the Empress's words.

No, the answer is no.

"If it's not now, we don't know when it's going to happen again, and we have a lot of things in place for when it does."

While the proliferation of monsters is a harsh truth, this is also an opportunity that may never come again.

If you miss it, there may not be another one.

The emperor opens his mouth to speak.

"Sorry."

"......What, all of a sudden?"

Herriot shakes his head at the Emperor's sudden apology.

The Empress is still here.

They don't know why they need to be apologized for.

Eventually, the Emperor gingerly embraces the Empress, who looks dumbfounded.

"I'm sorry I let you say that."

"ah......."

"I didn't say I needed time to think about it."

In the emperor's arms, which hold her strongly, Herriot smiles.

"I didn't mean to hear you say you're sorry."

"...... Don't make me feel more sorry for you."

"......What do you want me to do?"

The grumbling empress also strongly embraces the emperor.

There's no time to hesitate.

You don't have a lot of time to think about it.

"Yeah, let's do it."

But we all knew this moment would come at some point.

So, we were always ready.

\* \* \*

The emperor soon returned to the conference room.

Your worries are over.

I made a resolution.

It's ready to go.

Warriors are one of the last bastions of empire.

"I let it go too long."

If you messed with it, it could set off a chain reaction.

But now I have quite a bit of gunpowder in my powder keg.

Now, when it pops, it just sparkles.

Nothing happens when you kill a warrior.

In the early days of the Empire, when warriors had many supporters, killing a warrior could lead to an uprising of angry factions.

It would have made it impossible to build an empire.

That's why the Empire couldn't mess around with the name of a warrior.

The Empire rather put its faith in the hopes of the anti-demon forces, who believed in the lost warrior.

One day, a warrior will appear and save us.

That belief actually means, in other words, that they don't do anything until a warrior shows up.

In that situation, if a warrior died or was rumored to have died, they might explode in anger rather than despair.

And so, while those who believed in a warrior as their savior waited in vain for a warrior who never came, the devil steadily built his empire.

Along the way, there have been a few bouts of humanity's resistance to evil, all of which have been thoroughly crushed.

And now.

The anti-demon forces are still trapped within the confines of the Autonomous Territories, still believing in a false hope and waiting for a hero who never comes.

The death of a warrior would bring complete despair to the territory.

Even if they are outraged, it's just a candle that's about to be blown out.

In the end, the despairing territory will be completely subjugated.

It's been a long time coming.

It's been a long time coming, with many political situations and circumstances, and a few wars.

Those who believe in the warrior are now a candle before the wind.

Even if it grows, it can no longer burn larger than a candle.

So now.

"As of this time, we are closing the border to the northeast of Cernstadt."

A warrior deserves to die.

Episode 691.

That night, I got the handwriting comparison results.

To everyone's surprise, it was Ellen's.

But since the action had already begun, the handwriting was merely reaffirming.

The border blockade had already begun, and the emperor was almost ready to march.

The announcement came as a surprise to the people of the Zodiac, as well as all the dignitaries and Imperial nobility.

The New Empire confirms the arrival of Ellen Artorius in the northeastern region of Cernstadt.

All borders in the northeastern district of Cernstadt are currently closed.

And the devil himself is out to hunt for heroes.

The dreaded name and enemy of the empire.

Abolitionists and warriors.

The Emperor himself has declared that one of them will now be hunted.

It was a big move, indeed.

The best and brightest of the imperial army were summoned, including the Cernstadt army and the Zodiacal standing army.

Many watched as the massive army disappeared from the ecliptic in one fell swoop through the massive mass teleportation manifested by the Archmage.

People were overwhelmed by the magic of the Archmage, who had become a living legend.

Naturally, the mass movement was quickly spread across the entire ecliptic, with people traveling to and from all continents through warp gates set up in the ecliptic.

Within days, word spread across the continent that the emperor had begun a hunt for heroes.

Unlike before, the devil himself is in the details.

This has never happened before.

So everyone would know it was real this time.

It's been a long, long love-hate relationship.

However, something has changed from the past.

No one thought of the emperor's defeat.

A warrior with nothing.

The emperor who has it all.

It's pretty obvious how the fight will end.

Naturally, the word spread to the territories.

The warrior cultists were both pleased and dismayed that the missing warrior was alive.

The warrior would not win, for those who hated the demon knew best.

They have watched, heard, or actually experienced the carnage of the demigod called Mushin from afar.

An army has been defeated by a single demon and has fled, and the place where they have gathered is a territory.

In their learned fear and despair, they are forced to admit that if it were not for the mercy of the Devil, the Autonomy would not exist.

So they believe in the warrior, but in the end they can only weep when they realize that the luck granted by the heavens to the warrior has come to an end.

\* \* \*

"Assimilation Column Overview."

"Yes, here."

Ellen accepted an apple from the market and popped it into her mouth.

-Square

The sweetness spreads with a cheerful sound.

It was a sweetness she hadn't tasted in a long time, and it sent shivers down her spine. It was a sensation she hadn't felt in a long time, and she shivered as she walked down the street.

Civilization is only appreciated by those who have been away from it for a long time.

That you can eat an apple you didn't grow or harvest yourself.

That it can be done for a few fairy tales.

You might think you want to eat apples in a field, but you'd be a fool to actually go looking for them.

It's ridiculous to think of apples when we'd be grateful to find an edible tree or grass root.

But in the city, a few fairy tales can make it happen.

Despite her newfound gratitude, Ellen doesn't stop to look around.

Wearing a hood or covering your face doesn't exactly raise suspicion. Ellen isn't the only one who does that.

Compared to previous eras, the New Empire is still unstable, and crime rates are nowhere near as high as they were in previous eras. As a result, many people are wanted, and many have hidden identities.

Ellen is bold enough to enter the city because the New Empire is unstable.

Of course, if you get stopped, you're in trouble.

Ellen walks along the edge of the path and slices an apple.

There was no such thing as money.

Luckily for Ellen, however, she encountered a mugger on her way into town.

For others, it would be a misfortune, but for Ellen, it was the luck of the draw.

The robbers were fortunate enough to give Ellen what they had.

One gold coin, ten silver coins, and thirty fairy tales, but they were all in Ellen's bank account.

The robbers didn't know who Ellen was, and she was beaten and knocked out, so it's unlikely her identity was discovered.

So, for the first time in a very long time, Ellen is able to beam with gratitude and apologize to the muggers who tried to rob her.

The only reason I came into the city, rather than the outskirts, was because I needed information.

-They say a warrior has appeared in the northeast.

-Ah, she's lying again. How many people have you seen in this neighborhood?

-No, this time it's different, the devil himself is out in force.

-What?

-Yes. If it's a demon that hasn't moved before, it must be something.

-Here....... And what happens to the transaction?

-I don't know. The Imperial Knights, the Archmages, they're all scrambling to find heroes. They've got their entire border sealed off. They can't move an ant, and they're doing a lot of checkpoints.

-Getty Images....... Something's happened to me...I've got a hard-on.......

-But a warrior is a warrior, why get caught for nothing?

-The king is a godless man. Didn't you hear about the battle on the Meilan Plains?

-You think that's true? It's all a lie.

-Of course it's true, those battle veterans can't sleep at the sound of your name.

-I want it to make sense. No matter how great a demon is, how can he fight a war alone?

-That's why he's a demon!

From the many stories she hears on the street, Ellen picks out the information she needs.

Ellen had an inkling of what her actions would cause.

But he decided it was information he needed to share urgently, even if it meant letting them know he'd come out of nowhere.

If we don't take action at the national level, if we don't do something about it, it's going to spiral out of control.

As a result, however, the northeastern border of Cernstadt was completely sealed.

We don't know how wide the Empire's blockade will be, but it will probably be impossible to penetrate.

Importantly, Cernstadt had more territory than the Empire.

If the Imperial and Cernstadt armies can be brought to bear, we should be able to establish a blockade that completely seals off the northeastern borderlands.

But she knew she couldn't afford more, and that's true.

Despite the circumstances, Ellen is in town for a reason.

You can't get information in no-man's land.

You don't know if you've really been compromised, or what the military is doing.

So I had to get into the city to get a sense of the situation.

And second.

Right now, Ellen is not in northeastern Cernstadt.

Ellen wasn't getting out of Cernstadt, she was getting deeper into it.

We were headed to the southwest, which is the complete opposite of the area with the roadblocks and constant stop-and-frisk.

So now the army was blockading the wrong place.

\* \* \*

After submitting her materials to the Adventurers' Guild of Velothia, Ellen made a hasty exit from the city.

And I ran like crazy.

Heading southwest, not northeast, to enter Cernstadt, the closest country to the no-man's land.

Regardless of the reasonableness of the information, everyone knows it's suspicious.

Ellen knew that if she tried to get out of Cernstadt the way she came in, she'd end up in the middle of a sealed border zone.

Whatever it is you're trying to catch, you can't be caught now after running away for so long.

That's why Ellen chose to go deeper.

In the opposite direction from where the barrier is installed.

I took the risk of entering the city and found that the cordon had been set up in the Northeast, as expected.

Of course, if nothing is found on the cordon for a long period of time, it may be predicted that you have actually entered Cernstadt.

So you can't slow down. We just need to get to the border of the Southwest Region as quickly as possible.

Your side of the border may be blocked as well, but you don't have to cross it.

We have the information we need.

So there's no need to stay in the city longer.

So Ellen makes her way out of town, discreetly but quickly.

And when you finally made it out of the city safely and took the last bite of the apple.

-Wasak

"......."

I should have bought another one.

and.

Ellen regretted it very briefly.

\* \* \*

Ellen ran off the beaten path.

Running on the road is naturally suspicious when someone sees you, so I ran through uninhabited forests and mountains.

There's no time to lose, and the Empire isn't stupid, so it's a no-brainer that Ellen won't be where the cordon is set up.

So you should definitely run Cernstadt at a fast pace where you can run.

You're doing something that's pretty much across the entire country.

No monster hunting, no tracking, just movement.

We passed by some cities, but had no choice but to enter others.

We had to keep up with the shifting tides of the Empire in real time.

In the days that passed as Ellen fled in the opposite direction, stories of the warrior's appearance had already spread throughout Cernstadt.

Not just Cernstadt, but the entire continent would now have its eyes on northeastern Cernstadt.

Whether the hero will be caught or not. Whether the Demon will finally end his tiresome relationship with the Hero.

There was a lot of debate going on.

Even within Cernstadt territory, there were those who said that this time the demon would be slain by a warrior.

Ellen wasn't interested in individual opinions.

The truth mixed in with the opinion.

That the empire is still setting up roadblocks, waiting for the heroes to escape.

That you don't really know where you stand yet.

That was all I needed to know.

Ellen made a quick exit from the city, purchasing only the bare minimum of food and checking in on Imperial troop movements.

The desire to sleep in my bed was like a chimney, but I couldn't even attempt to do anything big.

Ellen was able to travel without horses for distances that could only be covered by riding a horse.

With no sleep, even the superhuman Ellen was bound to be exhausted, but she couldn't let her guard down.

If the Imperials were aware of their movements, they could change their escape route at any moment.

A city that I arrived in after fleeing in the opposite direction and breaking through the center of Cernstadt.

Ellen hadn't gotten any of the dreaded information there, such as that the Empire had noticed her movements.

However, we got something completely unexpected.

-I hear they've captured a warrior.

"......?"

It was a story that Ellen hadn't even guessed.

\* \* \*

The warrior has been captured.

Ellen, a warrior in her own right, was baffled by the story.

I'm here, but who the hell got caught?

It could be a mistake, a misunderstanding, or a rumor. It's not uncommon for people to jump on the bandwagon of an individual rumor.

But everyone I talked to was talking about it.

-That was a hell of a fight, but a warrior's a warrior.

There was even a battle going on.

-But how can you stand against the devil?

-Am. Not even a warrior can reach out an arm to a demon alone, let alone an Archmage.

-Even nowadays, it's said that Archmages are not stronger than demons.......

-should be.......

-ahem. After all, that's what happens.

Some praise the greatness of the demon, while others secretly lament the defeat of the warrior.

Ellen hurried out of the city.

Something.

Things were getting weird.

He was definitely headed southwest of Cernstadt.

But the warrior was captured.

There were even battles of epic proportions between demons and heroes.

Who the hell fought who?

Ellen had no choice but to stop by the city to check on the situation, even as she quickened her pace because of the bizarre rumors.

Countless armies watched the battle between the Demon and the Hero, and the Demon and the Hero bravely fought one-on-one.

I didn't even enlist the help of an Archmage.

At the end of the battle, the story goes, the devil defeated the warrior and sent him back to the Yellow Road.

It couldn't be a rumor. Too many people were saying it.

It was really Ellen Artorius, and that's what was being said.

Ellen couldn't figure out what was going on.

Time passes, and in the next city, Ellen is here, and there's talk about her treatment.

-Public execution.

-Wow, that's a lot of people on the ecliptic.

-You're building a really big firing squad.

A warrior has been defeated by a demon.

You have been transported to the ecliptic.

We're going to do a public execution.

Who did they catch, and what are they trying to do?

Ellen gave up trying to think.

For now, you need to get out of Cernstadt. The good news is that there are no stop-and-frisk checkpoints because of stories of a captured warrior.

You'll get away with it.

And just like that, in the last city you stopped in to almost reach your destination.

-The warrior has been executed.

Ellen couldn't help but realize that the strange show the Empire had put together was coming to an end.

-In the end....... The devil has won.

Under strange circumstances, Ellen walks down the street in a daze.

What are they up to, what's the purpose of this?

Falsely claim to have captured a warrior, and publicly execute the fake warrior.

But Ellen is alive.

No one will seek salvation from Ellen now, as no one will seek a dead warrior.

Is that a consideration?

Didn't you even have any intention of catching me in the first place?

If Ellen accidentally shows up, the public execution will be exposed as a lie, and that's not good for the Demon King's empire.

Executing the Fake Champion may be powerful right now, but Ellen being alive is a flashpoint in itself.

'As it is....... to live away from people forever....... I wonder if that's what he means.......'

It can be both a mercy and a warning.

I'm going to kill it, never to be seen again.

The Emperor's Army was initially meant to be a show, with fake soldiers being captured, imprisoned, and executed.

But why now.

After years of silence, when Ellen didn't show up, why now?

This is the most dangerous time for empire sabotage.

In fact, right now Ellen is in Cernstadt territory.

If she had known that had happened, Ellen would have fled to a place far, far away from the land of men, lest the Empire's fake execution show be discovered to be self-inflicted.

I would have been hesitant to turn over my notes.

We don't know why.

Importantly, the warrior was said to be dead.

I had no intention of going public, but I'm going to have to live a quieter life from now on.

We can't help Reinhardt's empire, but we can't hurt it either.

Does the empire intend to release itself as it is.

So, Ellen walks through the city.

This city is the last stop.

The border in Cernstadt is still a long way off, but the destination is just around the corner.

Ellen wasn't headed to the Cernstadt border post in the first place.

Southwestern tip of Cernstadt.

In such a situation, there's only one step left.

As Ellen walks down the sidewalk, she sees something in an alleyway.

Small animals curled up in the warm sun.

-Angel

-Angel

Four cats were basking in the sun on a corner of the street.

"......."

In the midst of all the weirdness, Ellen couldn't help but smile faintly.

Cat.

It had been a special animal to Ellen for some time.

They've gotten me through some tough and painful times.

Cats are city animals, so you won't see them in the fields.

So, on the rare occasions when she was in the city, she would see one of these cats or another, and Ellen would smile as she remembered those difficult but strangely nostalgic times.

How are we doing?

Such worrisome thoughts naturally come to mind.

I left it in Temple and haven't seen it since.

They come and go.

The child who comes back to you when you think she's gone forever.

I never got around to naming.

The black cat is.

Obviously.

Like that.

It had black, shiny fur.

Of the cats, my eyes naturally gravitate toward the black cat.

The black cat has something around its neck.

I wonder if it's a stray cat.

Or, you've been abandoned.

But the thing around the cat's neck is neither a bell nor a leash.

Ellen's eyes widened.

"......!"

Something round and milky white.

A sculpted moon inside a sun.

That's obvious.

It looked exactly like the amulet Ellen had received from Detomorian.

It's not a lookalike.

It's not the same thing.

Cats too.

Talismans.

is the same as

It looks just like I remember it, and not a bit different.

"You, you....... You....... thou....... you....... here....... Why......?"

Ellen's lips quiver.

In a place where it shouldn't be.

An animal that can't be.

In front of Ellen, wearing a necklace that shouldn't be there.

-Angel

Be still, I cried.

Episode 692.

If human thought is a thread, then the thoughts in Ellen's head were a tangled mess right now.

You don't know where it started to get tangled, and you can't untangle it.

I couldn't figure out what was what.

There is no way to understand why the cat of that time, wearing the collar she had removed, appeared not in the temple but in a city southwest of Cernstadt, thousands of kilometers from there.

Ellen ran away.

Without even knowing why they should run away.

I turned into an alley and ran like crazy.

What was it.

What the heck happened.

What happened so far.

Thinking but not knowing the answer, Ellen runs away.

Just run down the side streets.

The maze of alleyways looked exactly like the one in Ellen's head.

I break out in a cold sweat, and I'm out of breath, even though I'm so used to running.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha......."

Scary.

Fear.

It was eerie.

I feel like I've been hit by something.

I feel like I'm being played.

I could still feel the fear, like I was running from someone's grasp.

The cat that was always there.

My cat was my sanctuary.

The cat, the only good memory from a difficult time, became an object of fear when she encountered it in a completely unexpected situation.

Running through the alleyways, Ellen now has no idea where she entered or where she is running.

We're going around the same circle.

Or is it going somewhere.

You need to climb over the fences and buildings and get out of the city quickly.

"@StephanieMcDonald" ....... htp....... 허억......."

I look back with an unknown fear, but nothing is following me.

You run without knowing what you're running from.

Nothing is following you, but the thought of something following you fills your head.

I don't know what it is, but.

To someone who seems to know what it is.

I feel like I was being watched.

I thought you were running away.

In fact, it was within reach.

Otherwise, none of this would make sense.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha....... ha ha......."

-Ka-ching! Puck!

After stepping over trash and crates in the alleyways, running aimlessly.

Ellen was running down an alleyway, not sure where she'd taken a wrong turn, when she noticed that her surroundings were getting whiter and whiter.

"What......?"

Suddenly, it's foggy.

This can't happen in sunny weather.

Still, she can't stop, so she just runs around the alley.

But when the fog reached its peak, Ellen couldn't help but feel the change had come again.

Clearly, I was running down an alley that was blocked on both sides.

But when the fog hit, it was all gone.

The walls of the buildings that flanked it.

Even the ground I stood on was shrouded in ankle-deep fog.

Fog was everywhere, and all the terrain around me was gone.

I could walk anywhere in the open and not see or feel anything but fog.

A chill runs down my spine.

If it's magic, you don't even know what kind of magic you're dealing with.

Even if you're not immune, no amount of magic can hurt or interfere with Ellen at all.

But before you know it, you've fallen into some kind of magical maze.

Ellen runs blindly.

You run, and you run, and you run, and you run, and you run, and you run, and you run, and you run, and you run, and you run, and you run, and you run, and you run.

Are we spinning in circles?

I know I'm going somewhere.

Ellen couldn't figure out how to get out of this maze.

Just running, running, running.

"Ha ha....... Ha ha....... ha ha......."

That moment when you're out of breath and want to collapse.

-Woe is me!

"Hmph, hmph......!"

Suddenly, the fog was a dog.

Then, Ellen looked.

A high, hot sun and an azure sky.

A pristine white beach that appeared out of nowhere.

-shoot

And waves.

-Stephen

Ellen arrived at a shore with clear emerald waves.

What's going on.

This is where.

Is this a place that exists in the real world?

With that thought in mind, Ellen looks at the beach with trepidation.

There it was.

Like fate.

Reinhardt was there on the beach.

An amulet you once wore.

The amulet that was just hanging around the black cat's neck.

"Now, did they all get away?"

It was now hanging around Reinhardt's neck.

\* \* \*

After wandering through an unknown maze, Ellen found herself on a beach.

I had to know everything.

What's been going on so far.

The black cat was Reinhardt.

You're not tethered to something, you're not bound.

-shoot

Only the crashing waves and distant seabirds invaded the silence between them.

As Reinhardt approached, Ellen could only shiver.

All Ellen could do was tremble, watch Reinhardt approach, and take the smallest step backward.

We don't know where she is, but it's clear that they already know where she is.

"Uh, how about....... How about......."

Ellen is horrified, unable to comprehend the situation, and Reinhard shrugs.

"You're not an idiot, and you're not going to escape the same way you came in."

It was being read.

"That was the last city."

I also knew where I would end up.

As soon as I entered Cernstadt, I knew to head southwest.

Southwestern Cernstadt.

"The last city before entering the Sren Mountains."

There is a huge mountain range there.

"Didn't you know you were going to Rizaira?"

Ellen's hometown.

He knew that Ellen would flee southwest of Cernstadt to her hometown of Lizaira.

I knew Ellen wasn't going to disappear across the southwestern border, but rather head for the Sren Mountains.

"Of course I thought it would go there."

In from the Northeast, out to the Southwest.

Now that we've read the root, it's pretty obvious where we'll end up and what cities we'll pass through.

Chances are, you're already halfway there.

Backing away, Ellen eventually backs herself into a corner.

The demon grabs Ellen's chin and looks into her eyes.

"If you made it to Rizaira without getting caught, what do you think would be different?"

"......."

"I don't know about you, but I've been there before."

"What......?"

It was the first time Ellen had heard of it.

Ellen had told Reinhardt about Lizaira a long time ago, in passing.

I didn't think I would remember that.

That's why I thought I'd never know.

But more than just remembering, I've actually been to Rizaira.

When?

Even if Ellen had ended up in Lizaira, Reinhard could have come to Lizaira and found her.

The moment they entered Cernstadt, the devil knew where Ellen was headed.

Even if you managed to escape, you could have gotten into that final destination.

Running away was impossible in the first place.

Ellen holds her jaw and swallows hard.

Ellen couldn't even move under Reinhard's downward, penetrating gaze.

Vaguely scared.

I felt vaguely sick.

Reinhardt released his grip on her jaw and took a step back.

One minute you're in the city of Cernstadt, the next you're on a tropical beach in the middle of nowhere.

"Here....... Where is......?"

Reinhardt shrugs and points behind Ellen.

The inside of the island, not the beach.

When Ellen turned around, there was a mansion.

It was an alien sight.

Beachfront in the middle of nowhere, mansion in the middle of nowhere.

The mansion was clearly not in any of his memories.

"You really don't get it?"

Reinhardt asks.

The closest thing I can think of is the Duke of Granz's villa in the Edina Archipelago, which I visited one day, but it's definitely not the same.

Ellen looks out over a more distant landscape.

It was a tropical forest.

Somewhere like this.

There was only one landscape in my memory.

"You can't possibly....... Here....... We....... used to be......."

"Yeah."

Reinhardt nods.

"That deserted island we came to on a group mission back in the day."

Some unnamed desert island.

Places you've done group missions in the past.

It wasn't a place that didn't exist, it was a place that clearly did.

But a mansion had been built where none had existed before.

I don't know how I got here or what that mansion is.

I don't even know why I was brought here.

A place that held fond memories of a time when things were hard, but ultimately good.

Ellen and Reinhardt had returned.

Why did you bring me here.

What you want to do and how you want to do it, she doesn't know.

Reinhardt doesn't offer any explanation.

If anything resentful came out of my mouth, would I be able to live with it?

Traitor.

Fugitive.

In reality, Reinhardt had no excuse.

He left for his own reasons, with no explanation.

No matter how much bitterness, anger, and resentment I hear, I have nothing to say.

I don't have the confidence to convince them.

Reinhardt says nothing to Ellen, who is afraid of what she might hear.

Suddenly, he grabs one of the thicker branches on the ground.

-Whoosh!

"......?"

Ellen caught the branch out of nowhere.

"I don't know what else."

Reinhard then picks up a twig.

"We should have a long overdue sword fight."

Reinhardt had a mischievous grin on his face that somehow reminded me of his Temple days.

Reinhard approaches slowly, holding the branch like a water lily, pointing it at Ellen.

However, just thinking about those days makes Ellen shudder.

So.

"Ugh....... ugh......."

I feel so blessed to be facing this, I can't help but cry.

But while Reinhardt's demeanor was playful, his hands were anything but playful.

"Uh-huh."

Seeing Ellen sobbing, Reinhardt rushes in, lightly kicking up the white sand.

"You're an asshole."

-Bam!

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Overcome with grief and longing, Ellen was struck in the head by a branch before she had time to react.

"ugh......."

Reinhard smiles down at Ellen, who is sprawled out and crying.

"Won't you wake up?"

"......."

"Now, who do you think you're dealing with?"

Apostle of the War God.

Demon of Flame.

Ruler of the continent.

You're playing against Reinhardt the Great.

Of course, now I was holding a branch.

"Get up, we're going again."

Ellen staggers to her feet, sobbing.

The end of the branch that Ellen is somehow holding wobbles.

What to do.

I finally pick up a twig, and I'm like.

I wonder if they believe they can go back to the way things were.

So much has changed, and we've spent so much time without each other.

You know this is not the way to go.

How to do it.

That heart, that attitude.

Ellen was so sad and saddened that she couldn't concentrate.

It's actually Ellen who wants to go back.

But I can't go back.

I can't allow myself to do that.

Because I, the sinner, feel compelled not to.

"La, Reinhardt....... I, I can't....... I can't......."

So my fingertips are twitching.

"Really?"

"Uh, yeah...... me. I can't....... I can't do it....... I'm sorry....... I'm sorry. I was wrong. I'm sorry......."

Reinhard's eyes change when he sees Ellen, overcome with emotion, barely able to stand.

"Then."

The playfulness is gone.

An auror forms on a branch.

"Fuck you."

It's not a light leap.

By the time she realizes it, Reinhardt is already in front of her, and an ordinary twig has become an Auror blade, stabbing Ellen in the side.

Dies.

The moment you think about it.

-Bam!

Ellen's branches, too, deflected the Auror's deadly sting.

"Ha, ha....... Ha......."

The sheer force of the impact causes Ellen to take a few steps back, and she stares at Reinhardt, wide-eyed and breathless.

Reinhardt chuckles again, and slings the branch the Auror is carrying over his shoulder.

"Come on, you're good at it."

Don't make excuses while you can.

With that, Reinhardt points the branch at Ellen again.

I'm not sure what you want.

Nothing will be done until you're willing to deal with it.

So Ellen held back her tears and pointed the branch at Reinhard.

Apparently pleased with the attitude, Reinhardt smiles.

Episode 693.

For two men whose bare bodies are weapons, branches make excellent weapons.

Sometimes it doesn't really matter what the auror-encrusted weapon is, unless it's a holy relic.

At Reinhardt's insistence, Ellen sometimes wore an auror and sometimes fought with nothing but bare branches.

Ellen lost, mostly.

It was so overwhelming to compose myself that I couldn't concentrate on anything but the unbearable guilt of meeting Reinhardt's eyes.

So.

-Bam!

"Hmph!"

-Bam!

"Ugh!"

-Puck!

"......."

-Bam!

"Suck!"

It's been beaten down for a long time.

Reinhardt didn't really mean to kill Ellen, but he didn't let it slide either.

Ellen's stamina and fatigue from being on the run for so long had pushed her to the limit, and she couldn't remember the last time she'd had a proper rest.

I can't even remember the last time I had a proper meal.

So it was a one-sided beating.

You can't control your emotions, and your body is already at its limit.

I'd rather have peace of mind.

The pain, the ache.

I'd rather be beaten like that than verbally criticized.

I think words would hurt more, so I'd rather be beaten like this than not.

I feel like I'm being punished for what I've done.

When I think about it, it hurt, but it was a relief.

But the pain is cumulative.

I was already at my physical and mental limits.

A moment when you don't know how much you've been beaten, when your vision is blurred not by grief but by pain and the limits of your consciousness.

One knee kick as Reinhardt approaches.

-Thump!

"Hmph......gh!"

It hit her, and she ended up passing out.

\* \* \*

-shootaaaaa

By the time Ellen woke up, the sun had set and night had already fallen on the deserted island.

"Ugh......!"

Then, as he regained consciousness, he scrambled to his feet, realizing with horror where he had passed out.

Fainting was rare. Passing out in a no-man's land is the equivalent of death.

My body had never been pushed to such extremes before.

My whole body ached and ached.

"Are you awake?"

At the sound of a voice, I turned my head, and Reinhardt was still there.

In front of Reinhardt was a bonfire.

-Tadac

And on that bonfire, something on a skewer was roasting.

It was a big lobster.

A few had already been eaten, and their shells lay beside them.

It's been a long time since I've eaten a tree root, chewed on a tree, or had a proper meal in a city.

There was little in the way of meat available where the monsters were seething.

So, it's not just now that I'm lethally hungry, it's always been that way.

"Eat."

"......."

The nonchalant manner in which he spoke left Ellen speechless.

I don't think I'm supposed to do this.

I don't think this is supposed to happen.

I don't think I should be doing this so casually, like I'm just going to breeze through everything.

Reinhardt frowns as he watches Ellen, unable to move closer or further away.

"Don't make me tired, eat."

"Yeah....... Mmm, I'll eat......."

Eventually, afraid to see Reinhardt angry, Ellen crawls over to the campfire.

Ellen can't help but notice.

I wonder if I caught it myself.

Even if you pretend, it looks like your clothes are wet and dry.

I must have caught it myself.

I don't know how long I was stunned.

But during that stunned period, my body was revitalized to some extent.

Reinhardt said nothing.

Ellen gently removes the claws from the baked lobster and detaches the tail.

It was pretty hot to the touch, but that didn't matter.

Somehow, it's a little pathetic.

It's not that I'm sad or hopeless or anything.

You try to run away, but you can't.

It's not a tearful reunion, and it's not listening to criticism.

I don't know if Ellen heard something that made her want to kill herself.

I felt like I was driving myself crazy by not saying anything.

He struggles with a branch, gets a good beating, and passes out.

Then he gets up and tries to eat the lobster with his bare hands.

Even now, Ellen is a scruffy, disheveled mess.

You should look like a beggar and eat like a beggar.

And you have to eat it in front of the last person you want to look like this.

But Reinhardt prepared it for me, so I have no choice but to eat it.

It's not that big of a deal compared to the things you've been doing wrong, but not eating is still wrong.

Even in this form, on a topic like this.

My stomach is hungry and my tongue is tingling.

This situation.

Too.

Too.

terribly.

Not sad or sick.

I'm embarrassed to death.

"......."

"Eat it? What do you have to be sorry about? What's the big deal about this now?"

When Ellen can't do this or that, Reinhard frowns, wondering if there's another reason.

It's not.

Not because I'm sorry and sad.

Ashamed.

I'm too embarrassed to eat.

I'm speechless.

"Oh, no....... Not that......."

But the words that are on the tip of my tongue don't come out because I realize how ridiculous it would be to say that I'm ashamed or embarrassed by the situation.

"Or eat it."

In the end, Ellen can't resist Reinhardt's advances and bites into the lobster's flesh.

In one bite, Ellen's mind went blank.

It's so good, it'll make your tongue melt.

Too sweet.

Why it tastes so sweet.

That's weird.

I don't think it has any sugar in it.

I felt like I was going to lose my mind from the sweetness that was about to cross my tongue and melt my brain.

I want to shove it all in my mouth right now.

But it's too embarrassing to do so.

But the moment you bite into it, the juices are splattered all over your mouth, so no matter how much you want to eat it, it's not going to be pretty.

And the fact that you want to eat pretty is the most pathetic of all.

Reinhard stares at Ellen, her eyes wide with a mouthful of food, unable to move.

With a sour look on his face, Reinhardt opens his mouth.

"After all, you've just ridden through Cernstadt territory without washing up properly, and you're no better than a feral dog, so why don't you just take it easy?"

"!!!!"

It's not that I don't know.

I knew what I was thinking.

Eventually, tears well up in my eyes.

Not because it's too sad.

I'm sorry.

"흐......끅......."

"...... goes to hell."

It's not that I didn't wash, it's that I didn't.

Hold back the urge to say something like that. You know they'll say it on purpose.

It's not like it's going to help the situation.

Ellen stifled a sob of disappointment and ate her bite.

And when they weren't enough, they went into the ocean and caught a few more.

Reinhardt looked at it, gritted his teeth, turned his head, and laughed.

It's nice to smile, but.

I appreciate you not being angry, but.

It wasn't a happy laugh, it was a sneer.

Ellen cried a little more because the sneer made her feel sad.

\* \* \*

I tried to make it look like a dog, but that's not going to happen when you're eating it with your bare hands.

Reinhardt looked at Ellen's mess and stepped away slightly, as if he were about to see something dirty.

It's sad, it's sad, it's depressing.

But I never thought it would be this way.

I thought I'd get blame, resentment, or something like that for running away.

It's not that, it's that I'm treated like I'm too messy to get along with, which makes me sad in a way I never imagined.

Not in the "I resent you" kind of way.

You're dirty.

Hearing this makes my head spin.

Even worse, Ellen knew better than anyone that she was actually dirty.

"Are you done?"

"ugh, ugh......."

Ellen nods cautiously at Reinhardt's question. With a few stomps of his foot, Reinhardt clears the campfire and begins to walk away.

"Follow me."

"......."

Reinhardt strode ahead, unopposed, and Ellen stumbled to her feet and cautiously followed.

When Ellen gets close enough, Reinhardt suddenly starts to walk loudly.

He looks back and smirks.

As if you had a bad joke up your sleeve.

"......www."

"......."

But when he saw the look on Ellen's face, he shut up.

I knew that if I said one more word about hygiene, Ellen would look like she was going to choke herself to death.

Ellen was now being pushed to the edge in a direction she never expected.

Reinhardt entered the mansion, something that had never been on this deserted island before.

Open the gate, step inside, and light the lamp.

"You'll have everything you need. Get cleaned up and rested."

"......?"

"I have a lot of work to do. I'll be back tomorrow. Or maybe the day after."

With those words, Reinhardt left the manor.

I opened the door to the mansion and Reinhardt was already gone.

I felt possessed.

What is this mansion?

I didn't even know if I was actually in the right place for the desert island group mission.

I don't even know what Reinhardt is trying to do.

But the point is, you've already been caught.

You can't run away.

"ah......."

Was it?

Ellen realizes.

This is a deserted island.

You can't swim to shore from an uninhabited island in the middle of nowhere.

Even if you don't know how to navigate, and you somehow manage to build a raft or something, it's suicidal to rely on it and move forward.

Where you can't run away.

This is a prison.

Reinhardt walks away, knowing that Ellen can't get away.

"I see...... you mean......."

Ellen realizes that she is trapped in the world's biggest prison.

A physical cage can be smashed by Ellen.

But the ocean is a huge natural barrier that Ellen can't control.

Desert Island Prison.

I can't think of a better prison to keep Ellen locked up and stifled.

Ellen cautiously looks around the mansion.

I couldn't tell, but it seemed like it was meant to live on its own.

To illustrate that this isn't a hastily constructed mansion, there are even some magic tools that Ellen has never seen before.

I wonder if this is okay.

I don't think so.

But in the end, the thought of not being able to escape overrides all of Ellen's other preoccupations.

You've probably thought of this too.

I think I even expected to give up.

Maybe she thought about the day she would find Ellen, and knew she would try to run away like she did last time.

I wonder if that's why we have a place like this.

Ellen heads to the bathroom, frustrated with whoever's plan this place was.

I already had a change of clothes.

After removing her soiled clothes, cloak, and boots, Ellen washes herself in hot water.

Be meticulous.

Like you're going to wash every single hair on your head.

Even after a long, frantic wash, I wasn't done.

Fill a bathtub with water and submerge yourself in it.

"......."

I wanted to take a break.

I hadn't had a proper break in years.

So I'm left with this weird feeling like I don't deserve to feel this way.

Sinking into the bathtub.

I can't figure out what's going on.

I wonder if it's okay to let it all slip away like this.

No conclusions were drawn.

However.

So warm, so warm.

It's a prison.

I'm sorry that I've been given such a warm place, and I'm in pain.

"......black."

Ellen cried again.

Episode 694.

It's been a while since I've slept in my bed.

It's been a while since I've been able to go to sleep without worrying about being attacked, and with all my nerves relaxed.

When Ellen woke up, she was startled by the feel of the pillow against her face.

The otherness that has been created by the life we've lived is actually a fear of comfort.

-Second!

Birdsong from the jungle beyond my window and the sound of waves in the distance tell me that yesterday's events were not a dream.

"ah......."

Somehow, since yesterday, everything seems unreal.

Everything from my reunion with the black cat to this morning feels like a little freaky lie.

In fact, it's probably more like a dream you have when you're falling asleep in front of a campfire, unable to overcome your fatigue.

Or a zoomorphic light on the brink of death.

But no matter how hard I try to stay awake, I can't help but realize that it's real.

Normally, as soon as I wake up, I'm in a hurry to get organized and hit the road.

Walking, sometimes running.

Kill the monster.

Chewing on a tree root.

You can't even lie down, just nap in the rough outdoors.

It's so unfamiliar to wake up in a nice, fluffy bed after a long, dull day like that.

Strange.

"ugh......."

Ellen stayed in her pajamas and hugged the covers for quite a while.

I felt like an idiot, but I couldn't get up.

\* \* \*

Ellen took a shower, newly grateful for the ubiquity of water.

After changing into my prepared white cotton dress, I sat in silence for a moment.

-curl

Hungry.

I was always hungry.

In all honesty, I wasn't thrilled with what I ate yesterday.

For years, I felt a hunger carved into my bones that no amount of eating would ever satisfy.

Ellen heads to the kitchen.

The pantry was stocked with ingredients, the cookware was in place, and the kitchen had all the systems in place.

They didn't have the luxury of cooking in the field.

But I learned a lot standing on Reinhardt's shoulders at Temple.

Once you know the basics, the application is not difficult.

As long as I had the ingredients, I could cook whenever I wanted.

For the first time in a very long time, Ellen ate with a knife instead of a fork.

But we didn't build anything spectacular.

I was going to make the meat stew I loved so much.

It's not a big deal, but I plan to make a lot of them.

I'm going to break the ice with the forced news.

So Wangchang.

Eat, eat, eat, and make so many that you can't finish them.

I thought, I'll eat it up.

Ellen pulls out a giant pot from the kitchen and begins to prepare.

It doesn't have to be good.

Anyway, with my dulled palate, everything I eat tastes amazing. I could still smell and taste the lobster I ate yesterday on the tip of my tongue.

Just like that.

Ellen began to eat nearly a pot's worth of meat stew.

There's no one to judge you for looking like you ate yesterday.

What it feels like to lose control.

I ate for almost two hours.

I was so caught up in eating that I realized.

-delay

"!!!!"

The door to the mansion burst open, and Reinhard entered.

And unfortunately, Reinhardt had a direct view of the kitchen from the doorway.

Ellen scarfing down stew by the crockpot, not even setting the table properly.

Ellen realized that the white dress she was wearing was a little stained with splashes of stew.

Reinhardt sees it too.

"......."

"......."

There's a moment of silence.

And Ellen realizes that Reinhardt is not empty-handed.

I thought it might be something like a chorus.

Judging by its size, it's clear that Ellen has prepared quite a bit for the amount of food she's going to eat.

Apparently, Ellen has brought a meal to eat.

I couldn't resist, so I made a big pot of stew and ate it all.

I've made a bunch of them, and I'm getting hungry.

"Hah......."

Reinhardt sighs.

It was probably a sigh of frustration, not pathetic.

How much you've been starving.

I'm sure it was a sigh of frustration.

The sigh stabs me in the chest so deeply that it's deadly.

"......."

I knew I would cry when I met him.

I'm afraid of Reinhardt.

Sorry.

I felt like I was going to cry.

However, I was wondering why I kept getting embarrassed and crying.

Ellen cried again.

\* \* \*

The next level of food is in place.

On the first night of the diet, Reinhardt dumped a bunch of food in front of Ellen, who sat looking like she'd been caught rummaging through the kitchen.

"......I guess I was a little harsh yesterday."

"Huh?"

I don't know what you're talking about.

"I said wash, not scrub?"

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

In fact, Ellen's white skin was still flushed from washing so heavily yesterday.

This is bad enough where you can see it, it's probably worse where you can't.

Even when I felt like I was going to collapse and die from exhaustion, I still managed to get all my fingernails and toenails cleaned up.

I wasn't really preparing anything.

But something tells me you're determined.

I thought I was being ridiculous, but I did it anyway.

Ellen made no reply, but bowed her head, her face widening with another meaning.

Reinhardt smiles wryly as he imagines Ellen washing her gourd, crying with sorrow, after being told she looked like a dog rolling in the gutter.

"What do you think, do they have noodles?"

"ugh....... ....... 으......."

"Sorry, no. Hey, I won't. Uh, I won't. I'm not doing it!"

"......."

Reinhardt shook his head as he looked at Ellen, who was on the verge of another seizure of grief.

I'm pretty sure that's not what you're talking about.

It keeps trying to tease me with totally weird sounds.

It's lightweight, and it talks about nothing.

It's obviously done on purpose.

Now, I'm not mad at those words.

I feel so happy, sorry, and guilty.

I feel like everything can go back to the way it was.

I think I'm the only one who needs to be convinced.

I think I'm the only one who needs to accept it.

I just can't do it.

I feel sad and sorry for myself.

Ellen doesn't say anything, but Reinhardt smiles bitterly and rises from his seat, as if his expression alone can tell what he's thinking.

"Eat, I'm coming."

"......."

Reinhardt walked out of the mansion, taking care to make Ellen miserable again.

You can't not eat it.

Ellen ate the prepared meal.

Every last one of them.

Needless to say, it was delicious, regardless of how I felt.

\* \* \*

And so life went on.

Reinhardt didn't come every day; he'd skip a day, and he didn't stay all the time.

Often it was just a quick face-to-face.

I didn't always say much.

I didn't get any closer than necessary.

It was just a little bit of distance.

It was Ellen who was impatient.

I wish I could have said something.

Are you going to keep him locked up like this, or am I going to have to accept his life?

But my jaw dropped.

I felt too guilty to ask.

It was hard enough to keep my mouth shut and meet his gaze, but it was impossible to ask him anything.

It was only a few days of sleeping and eating without cravings.

I stayed up all night.

I shouldn't have to live like this.

I shouldn't be doing this.

Even a little.

To pay for what I've done, to pay for what I've done to the world.

We shouldn't be stuck here.

The compulsion was overwhelming.

Kicking myself.

It was just another day of suffering to suffer.

You'd think that would lead to complacency, but it didn't.

The self-pity only became more persistent.

The more comfortable you are.

The calmer the better.

It gets worse.

I felt like my body was getting easier, but my mind was getting more and more worn down.

About a month after that.

Whether Ellen was impatient or anxious, time passed.

It was enough to wash away years of fatigue, not to mention mental issues.

I was always resilient and fit.

Whatever it was, it ate and slept well.

One of those days, still sunny.

"Come out."

Reinhardt called Ellen outside.

\* \* \*

Dressed in a white dress and sandals, Ellen followed Reinhardt to the waterfront.

"Now, slowly, you're back to your old self, aren't you?"

"Huh? Ah....... Ah. Uhhh......."

"Okay, let's do this for real."

-grunt

In Reinhardt's right hand, this time not a branch, but a sword.

Ellen's eyes widen.

Sword of the War God.

Alsbringer.

It fell into Reinhardt's hands.

"Do you think I would have fed and housed you all this time just to raise a cheap pig that wouldn't get fat no matter how much I ate?"

At the outburst, Ellen nods with a wistful expression.

"......No."

So far, I hadn't said anything, so maybe it was just an extension of the first day.

They saw that Ellen had reached a mental and physical breaking point, and they left her alone until she was back on track.

Boom.

There were days when she was overwhelmed with thoughts, but in the end, it was enough to get her back on track.

"Ramen, do you have it?"

Do you have it.

Why do you ask?

Did it disappear?

Ellen nods in response to Reinhardt's strange question.

"Then take it out."

Like the first day, Reinhardt says sternly, "I won't allow any branches.

What happens if you say no?

Ellen says softly, clutching the hem of her dress in protest.

"I...... skirt....... and I'm wearing......."

"What the hell."

"......."

Ellen could only cringe in the face of Reinhardt, who said, "That's your business and none of my business.

"I've got five wives now, why would I care about your underwear?"

"......."

"Shut up and eat your lentils."

At the sadly abrasive words, Ellen clears her throat.

Yes.

There is no such thing as a right to plead.

There are things you can't do, but what you can do, you'll want to do.

On the first day, I was emotionally, mentally, and physically overwhelmed.

So I was literally beaten until I passed out.

The tip of my sword wavered, and so did my mind.

But it's now been three days.

It's still overwhelming, but I've somehow gotten used to seeing Reinhardt's face again after five years.

My health is back.

I was so well-rested, I felt refreshed, as if the grime had been shed from my body and mind.

I can't even remember the last time I was this prepared.

I was well rested.

I took a long break.

Well done.

I didn't say more than necessary, not because I cared about Ellen, but because I didn't have anything to say.

I wasn't going to say anything until Ellen was back on track.

Ellen still doesn't know what to do. She doesn't know if she deserves to be forgiven, if she deserves this life.

I don't think this is the case, but there are things you can do.

Reinhardt wants to check something, and Ellen is now fully functional, just as Reinhardt wanted.

Then, you can show it to them.

What Reinhardt wants to see.

That's pretty obvious, isn't it?

The confusion and hesitation finally eased a bit.

Ellen's face is finally calm, as she's been shaking with fear, crying with grief, and struggling with guilt the entire time she's been stuck on the desert island.

Ellen carefully removes her sandals.

With your sandals neatly tucked aside, you step into the white, bare sand.

Reinhard stared at Ellen as she did so.

After taking a deep breath, Ellen looks at Reinhardt.

A calm expression.

Serene eyes.

Reinhardt returns with the same expression and look in his eyes that he's always had.

"So, you want to beat me?"

Ellen asks, and Reinhardt nods.

"Isn't that obvious?"

On the first day, Ellen was so weakened that she wasn't worth dealing with.

Reinhardt wants to check.

How much stronger.

Compared to Ellen, now what.

He tries to prove it by fighting Ellen, who is at full strength.

Have you surpassed your teacher?

If so, deal with it.

Ellen gives a faint smile.

There will be anger, frustration, and resentment.

But I knew it was going to come at me with full force, so I watched it until it was full force. It waited without showing any emotion.

So, save the next one for another day.

You just have to give it your all.

-Snarl

In Ellen's right hand, she holds the moon sword, Ramen.

Ellen couldn't help but notice that something had changed in her holy object.

The Voidblade Ramen, always black as if it had been projecting the night sky for some time, returned as a silver, cold blade.

"ah......."

Voidblade is no longer Voidblade.

Ellen knows that Ramen reacts to sadness.

Just by being in the same place as Reinhardt, Rament loses the form of the Voidblade.

Grief is so easy to lose.

Just by being together, they disappear.

Now, I'm not sad.

"What's wrong with my holy relics. Isn't it cool?"

Reinhardt smirks as if he knows it.

"And Rafelt?"

Reinhardt asks about not summoning Cloak of the Sun.

Ellen smiles brightly.

Full.

"...... Is that all you need?"

And provocation.

"And if you summoned him later, how embarrassing do you think that would be?"

"That was then."

Reinhardt keeps his Alsbringer pointed at Ellen and slowly measures the distance between them.

There were always days like this.

It was always one of those days.

I don't know if this is allowed, but

We've decided to go all in for now, so we're not waiting for it to come to us.

So, we go first.

-pot!

The hem of her dress flutters wildly, and Ellen stabs the ramen into Reinhardt's chest, eyes wide.

Reinhardt smiles, seeing those veiled eyes and the trajectory of the sword.

It was a smile and a look in his eyes that said he wanted this.

-cardeddup!

Lament and Alsbringer clash, creating a storm of magic and blowing the sand of the white sandy beach into a frenzy.

Bottom to top.

"I don't know about anything else, but......."

Ellen sheathes her sword and glares at Reinhardt.

"You're getting pretty cocky, Reinhardt."

Ellen Artorius.

A warrior, long thought to be dead and gone, parries the demon's sword, muttering coldly.

I did you wrong.

I betrayed you.

You said I ran away from you.

If you beat me, it's in a completely unrelated area.

You wanted the whole me, so I'll show you the whole me.

No, you can still make a concession or two.

Ellen Artorius speaks with her eyes.

With a sword thrust upward from the bottom, the Demon says, stamping down with force.

"Well, that's good enough, isn't it?"

Reinhard pushes Ellen's sword away from him and smirks.

-Currrrrr!

A storm of magic erupted, and the two bounced off each other as roughly as they had fought.

In both cases, I landed properly and didn't end up on the white sand.

Ellen grabs her ramen and runs wildly.

Reinhardt rushes forward as well.

The hem of the warrior's white dress and the demon's shirt flapped wildly in the wind.

Episode 695.

The battle was not long.

Thirty-five total.

Reinhardt's sword was deflected by Ellen, who held the laments suspension, with a half-sword, slicing through the gap in the dynamo and sending his entire body crashing to the white sand.

-Bang!

The fight ended with Ellen climbing onto Reinhardt's chest as he lay half on the white sand, and placing the blade of her ramen at the nape of his neck.

Their blades and faces were close enough to touch.

"It's dead."

"......Yes."

Ellen says, and Reinhard nods.

I even found myself laughing at the subjugated subject, as if I had just wanted to hear those words from Ellen.

The fight didn't last long, but the white sandy beach was torn to shreds by two men who had already become monsters.

"Do you want to do more?"

Ellen asks, holding the ramen to her throat.

"No."

There's something you can tell from the moment you cross swords.

Ellen couldn't help but realize that Reinhardt hadn't thought he'd win in the first place.

Ellen knows.

Even if you do it a hundred times.

Ellen knew she was going to win.

So Reinhardt would have known.

Rising from Reinhard's crushed body, Ellen helps him to his feet.

"I guess I can't beat you."

No sword, including Ellen's, can defeat her.

That's still the case.

"Why do you have to beat me?"

"Actually, I don't really want to win."

Reinhardt laughs.

"I just like it."

"......."

"I don't care if I lose or win."

Reinhard watches the waves roll in.

Pushing, breaking, reversing, pushing, breaking, reversing again.

Watching that eternal push.

"It's just that we can do it."

I didn't want to win or lose, I just wanted to have this moment where we could cross swords.

If you win, so do I.

If you have

And then there will be one.

An eternity in a place that has nothing to do with winning or losing.

I wanted a continuation of these moments.

Reinhardt says.

Ellen doesn't know how Reinhardt managed to subdue her.

How the heck did they do it.

I still haven't beaten myself.

How in the world could I have subdued and saved myself when I was possessed by a demon that was stronger than I am now.

Ellen still doesn't know.

Reinhardt didn't seem to mind telling me.

Eventually, Reinhardt saw what he wanted to see.

Ellen and herself, and who's stronger.

Ellen is stronger.

We found that the gap was still unbridgeable.

I could lose forever, I just wanted to win once.

I knew that after that one victory, I would only lose, just like before.

"As you can probably tell, you're officially dead."

Finally, Reinhardt says what he's been dying to say.

Hearing that, Ellen's breath seemed to catch in her throat.

The thought of telling a real story scared me.

You feel choked up and scared because you don't know what you're going to hear.

The demon captured the fake warrior and executed him.

We don't know what kind of theater this is.

However, the warrior is dead.

It did.

"We forced them to bring their representatives to watch a public execution. They had a good look."

Reinhardt chuckles.

It stinks.

I couldn't help but think about it.

To the representatives of the Human Autonomous Territories, forced to watch as their hopes were executed.

It's brutal, but it will work.

The dead thing is probably a doll or something.

It shouldn't be hard to create something like that.

"This will put those bastards to sleep, and slowly disintegrate the Autonomy."

"......."

"There won't be anybody projecting false hope on you, and you won't have to feel pressured by that."

There will be no more prayers, prayers that Ellen will never hear, for the salvation of mankind as it groans under the oppression of a selfish demon.

Now that the symbol of hope, the warrior, is dead, it is impossible to do such a thing, even with a flame.

"Now you will not be in the world, no one will need you, no one will ask you to do the impossible. The warrior was defeated by the demon, and he died. That's the end of the story."

"......."

"People will forget you."

Reinhard looks at Ellen.

"Now, what excuse would you use to run away?"

"......."

"You know you can't run away, and you want to run away."

At that, Ellen bites her lip and lowers her head.

"You don't seem to be able to stand being with me."

It's all in the facial expressions.

They know without you telling them.

The moment itself is agonizing.

At the end of it all, Ellen could only shudder and open her mouth.

"I'm sorry....... I'm sorry......."

No matter what the reason, how reasonable it was, or how necessary it was.

He leaves without speaking to Reinhardt, who ultimately saves him.

It's been five years since then.

That time has changed a lot.

"......."

"If you're sorry, can you stay with me now?"

Ellen's jaw dropped.

Is there still room for me?

What's left for me to do?

I wish I could say I would, but I couldn't.

Too carefree.

To the topic that left me, to the topic that I tried to run away from and ended up getting caught.

He naturally says he'll stay with you now that everything's settled.

It's a flip of the palm that changes your attitude.

To sit in this cozy prison and make sense of it all.

Not too much.

Not being too selfish.

"Can't you do it?"

"Black....... ugh....... ugh......."

Eventually, Ellen begins to cry over it.

No, no, no.

I can't say either way.

I'm sorry to say no.

I'm even guilty of saying I want to.

At some point, I started making excuses and running away.

At the end of the day, I feel so pathetic for being caught and crying.

It's too hard.

So lonely.

So lonely.

I was sick all the time.

I want to say that, but I can't bring myself to say it.

Finally, after a three-month hiatus, they have a proper conversation.

A conversation that ended in tears.

"I don't know, I don't know....... I don't think I deserve this....... I don't think I do....... I, I don't think I should....... I don't think I'm qualified....... I don't think I have......."

"Who gives you the right to do that?"

"I don't know. Ha, but....... I don't think I should do this....... Someone like me....... I don't think I should....... I don't think I should....... What I did to you....... What I did to the world....... You know....... But what right do I have to....... What right do I have to......."

Reinhardt grabs Ellen's chin with his cold eyes and forces her to look up.

"Yeah, I knew it would be like this."

"I didn't think you could handle being with me after all."

"Whether it's self-blame or guilt. Or that I've been away too long, or whatever."

"The reason you left me in the first place, and it was something I could have done something about."

"The reason you left five years ago was actually just a shoehorned in reason, you just couldn't live with yourself."

"I didn't leave because I had to."

"You just left because you wanted to leave."

"If you just wanted to be by my side in the first place, you could have done that, and there are tons of ways to do that, and you know it."

If I wanted Ellen to be with me in some way, there was a way.

It's just that Ellen couldn't allow herself to do it.

So I left.

Even now, when all the other reasons to leave are gone, the fact that he won't allow himself to be with me is proof of that.

"You just, you can't allow yourself to do that."

"I thought you were the cause of all this."

"You betrayed me, and I don't think you deserve it."

"You know I don't want that, you know I don't blame you, I just can't forgive you."

"That's why you're crying now. Even now, when it doesn't matter that you're with me anymore, you're still forcing yourself to do this penance, just because you feel vaguely guilty."

"Torturing yourself doesn't make you better, it doesn't make you different."

"Where is the reason or necessity for that?"

"There is no such thing as....... doesn't exist."

At Reinhardt's words, Ellen rolls her eyes.

"I know....... I know......."

"I realize I'm doing this....... I know that what I'm doing isn't helping anything or anyone....... If anything, it's hurting you and it's hurting me....... I know."

"I hate myself, I hate myself, I hate myself, I hate myself, I hate myself for being stupid......."

"But I don't know....... If only I had done better then, if only I had believed. I can't get those thoughts out of my head....... I can't forgive myself for what I did, for what I did because I didn't want to forgive myself, for what I did because I didn't want to forgive myself......."

"I don't think I should be with you. I don't know what to do with this vicious cycle......."

"I know it wasn't all me, but I can't say it wasn't. If I'm even a little bit comfortable, if I'm even a little bit happy, I can't stand myself......."

"I can't even imagine such a thing......."

"Oh my God, I know I'm an idiot, but I know....... I know this won't bring the dead back....... I know that guilt can't buy me anything, and I know that it can't undo anything....... I know, but I can't throw it away....... I can't do it......."

"I know I'm only hurting you by doing this, but....... I don't know, I guess I just lost my mind at some point....... I don't know if this is the right idea....... I can't do this....... I feel like I'm broken......."

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry for running away, I'm sorry for betraying you, I'm sorry for not trusting you, and I'm sorry for wanting to run away even after all this, and I'm sorry for not telling you I'd stay with you....... But....... But......."

"Stop. Stop. Your mind, I get it."

"......."

Reinhardt catches Ellen in the act of confessing her bullshit guilt.

To Ellen, who is too guilty to look him in the eye, and who is feverishly clenching her eyes shut, the Devil speaks.

"You know the mansion you were in until today, and what this deserted island means."

"......Yes."

A prison built to create a situation from which there is no escape.

Putting them in a place where they can't get away.

"I know you're going to do this, so I've prepared this place."

If I can't change your mind, I'll lock you in a place you can never escape.

This is where that idea became a reality.

"When I saw you again, I didn't have much of an idea what to do."

"Because you're not going to be able to stand yourself."

"This is the result of what Harriet and I were thinking."

Ellen shuddered at the name she hadn't heard in a long time.

"I'm not even a wizard, so how could I have sent you here in the first place?"

Weird traps you've fallen into and spatial movements you didn't even notice.

Ellen couldn't help but realize that was actually what Harriet had done.

"Because I'm sure you're going to say something like, "You're going to run away screaming like a dog.""

"Because you're that kind of guy."

"Brutal."

"Because if left alone, you'll be even more cruel to yourself than this."

"It seemed like the only way to go."

It's good for a reason.

Herriot knew the moment she left that Ellen Artorius would be on the run for the rest of her life, and the Devil knew it too.

Even now, I'm crying that I shouldn't have.

Just be hard on yourself.

How can you choose to be happy if you don't think you deserve it?

The Emperor knew that Ellen's fundamental mindset would not change and that she would eventually try to escape.

So I tried to force it.

Locked.

Incarcerate.

I wanted to tie him down where he couldn't escape, and this is the result of that thinking.

Small islands and mansions in the Great Sea of Doom.

I thought locking her in a place where she wouldn't know which way to run might be the way to stop her self-pity.

I'll just have to deliver the supplies I need, and I'll slowly come to terms with this life, if not embrace it.

Otherwise, you'll just accept it with resignation.

Reinhardt's words reveal what he's thinking.

I couldn't argue with the fact that he was going to keep trying to run away.

Even Ellen knows by now that she's going to get away with it, for whatever reason.

"By the way."

"It turns out......."

"This is, like, weird."

"No matter how you slice it, you can't tie them down, you can't lock them up, you can't imprison them."

"This can't be right."

"So....... I created this place, and I've been watching you....... and I've been watching you......."

"This is what happens."

"Because you're stuck in this place, right in front of me."

"I see you've been sleep deprived and you're sulking."

"I don't think so, either."

"I don't think this is the way to do it."

"In the end, it's going to make you sicker."

The demon releases Ellen's jaw.

In fact, I've been struggling with it since I've been in this situation.

I don't deserve this.

I knew I couldn't run away, so I stayed put.

I was in agony.

Another self-pity party.

I'm not supposed to be happy.

You may be stuck, but you'll accept it.

It was clear he was going to get sick.

The Devil stares at Ellen as she cries.

If you lock her up, you'll be able to keep her in this place forever.

But Ellen will curl up in a ball, unforgiving and unconvinced.

It can be suboptimal, but not suboptimal.

It's like putting a bluebird in a cage and taking it out to pet it whenever you want.

Therefore, when the demon saw the reality that had become his idea, he could not help but think that it was not right after all.

"The Darklands were destroyed, the Ancestral Demon killed. Since arriving in the ecliptic, I have been unable to live in my demon form."

"Disguising it as magic could only go so far."

"It was impossible to live as a demon."

"To live among men, I needed a human form, and that is the Reinhardt you know."

"So."

-shoot

Wavy shores.

In a prison named Island, built for only one person.

The demon cautiously. He pulls something from the ring finger of his left hand.

Ellen is horrified, but she can't help but stare at the demonic figure.

"This ring, which allows me to blend into the world, is the most important object that has made all of this possible."

Rings.

It was the first time Ellen realized Reinhardt had ever worn a ring like this.

Since the ring was for camouflage, even its shape could be hidden.

Reinhardt, back in his demonic form, holds still and grabs Ellen's left hand.

"I've created a world where it's okay for me to be a demon, and I don't need it anymore."

"So, you know, you can't live anywhere with that look."

"There shouldn't be anyone walking around who looks exactly like a dead warrior."

"I can live with the way I look now."

"Now you can't live with yourself."

"So, I'll give it to you."

"Because now you'll need it more than I will."

"And I'll send you back."

The demon carefully places the ring on Ellen's left ring finger.

The ring, which was supposed to be the wrong size, turned out to be the perfect size for Ellen's finger.

Ellen stares at him, dumbfounded by the suddenness of the ring, and asks, shakily, "What is it?

"Is this....... what is it?"

"What I could have been Reinhardt, what I could have been a cat."

"......."

Dreadfind's Ring.

As the last Archdemon, the ring was actually the thing that made everything possible.

But now we don't need it.

So, give it to someone who can't live in the world without it.

You try to keep them locked up for the rest of their lives, and then you finally admit that you were wrong.

"It's good for me, too."

"People like you rotting away in a place like this, it's kind of a loss."

"Just like this time, when you gave me a very important piece of information. You'll do something again, something of your own."

"Because it's good for you, and it's good for me."

"I won't hold you back."

"So."

"You're free."

It gives you complete freedom, which is the opposite of confinement.

The chance to hold on to it forever, and finally let it go.

"With this, people won't know you're Ellen Artorius, and you won't have to go looking for no-man's land like you do now. You can just be normal, blend into the world and be a nobody."

If she lives as someone else, she's really gone from the world.

You can move in and out of the city normally, get an identity, and live as a completely new person.

"Do you know what I mean?"

Dazed, Ellen stares at the unknown ring on her hand.

"If you want to get out of here and get away from me, if you want to hide, I'll never find you again. If you decide to run away, I'll never see you again."

Having found the hero, the demon gives him the means to escape for good.

If Ellen decides to hide, the devil will never find her again.

"But it's also something that can come to you whenever you want."

It's something you can run away from forever.

But if you use it a little differently, you can always take it to see Reinhardt.

You can't even get around the ecliptic in the form of Ellen Artorius, but with the power of the Ring, you can.

Whether to use it as a way to escape for good.

It's up to Ellen to decide if she wants to use it as a key to an everlasting encounter.

The demon gently grabs the tip of the frozen warrior's left finger.

"So......."

"Instead of putting you in a place like this."

"I'm not going to force you to do anything else."

"Where you want to go, what you want to do. I'm going to give you complete freedom to do it all."

"I just need one favor."

"Once every few months."

"Once every few years."

"Because it's good."

"Sometimes."

"Sometimes, really."

"Come see me."

"That's it."

"That's good enough for....... because that's good enough."

"I don't even want more."

"It's not like you and I have to do something really, really great together."

"Like now, practicing swordplay."

"Make something to eat."

"We'll just get together and talk about nothing like we used to."

"Yeah, because it's nice to do something simple and trivial."

"It's okay to be together sometimes."

"There's no compelling reason why you shouldn't do that."

"You said you knew."

"You said you knew you were weird."

"Because that's all I'm going to ask of you."

"You give yourself permission to do that."

"So......."

"Self-flagellation, which only causes you and me pain....... Now, let's stop."

With those words, the tears that I had barely stopped escaped my eyes.

"ugh....... Ugh....... Black! Hmph!"

That's about it.

It's also not asking for too much.

"Come on, that's not too much to ask."

The devil was gritting his teeth, too.

It's like the devil to hold in anger and rage.

The same goes for the demon, who somehow manages to keep his eyes locked with the crying Ellen.

"So....... for me?"

After imprisoning the warrior you've managed to find, you set him free.

Give the gift of freedom.

I'll give you something you can leave forever.

I'm leaving for good, but I ask you not to.

Deciding to let go, not hold on.

I'm just making a promise.

It won't be very thick, and it won't be very solid.

Let's put one unbreakable thread between them.

If it's too hard to give yourself permission to look at yourself and you feel guilty, you don't have to do it all the time.

I'll see you around.

That's about as far as you can go.

You can give yourself that much, can't you?

Wouldn't it be too harsh on both of us to not allow even that?

It doesn't have to be that harsh, does it?

Now we're done.

You can give yourself that much credit.

That's what the devil says.

I knew that if I tried to pick him up, he would die in my arms, so I gave him a place in the world where he could live fully.

Return it to the world.

As always, live your life doing what only you can do.

It's okay to be where you're supposed to be, whether it's to pay off a debt or for whatever reason.

But sometimes.

When you're tired, overwhelmed, or just plain lonely.

Sometimes it's okay to come back and take a break.

I'll take that.

Eternal punishment is yours if you want to live it.

There's no such thing as a moment of redemption.

Allow yourself a small, occasional respite.

In the face of a demon who, in the end, chose to let go of attachment, who chose to let go even though he could have what he wanted.

You can't push it any further.

With nothing but gratitude and appreciation.

You must answer.

So, somehow, some way, Ellen manages to make that ugly face she's had all along.

While trying to make it look smiley.

"ugh, ugh....... Yeah......."

And I end up looking even more like a mess, with a mixture of tears and laughter.

-shoot

On a wavy beach.

On a beach where the waves will crash and break forever.

It promises another eternity.

Just like that.

Warriors.

"Please....... Please......."

Demon family.

Thin.

never to be broken.

"Sure, I'll do it."

They made a covenant, small and everlasting.

Episode 696.

Epilogue - Beyond Civilization

The northernmost point of a continent.

Places skewed to the west there too.

A snowy region in a place beyond a vast mountain range that doesn't even have a name because no one lived there before the Gate happened.

A polar region where the only season is winter.

-Hey......! I'm here!

Somewhere on a blizzardy plateau, a cry is heard, and a group of people head to the location.

Soon enough, the dozen or so elders were able to find the beast that had fallen in the blizzard and the man standing by its side.

"Whoa, that's huge, I haven't seen anything like that in three years."

A giant reindeer had fallen with an arrow right through its head.

"Let's strap in, because if we get more snow, we might be stuck in a shelter for a few days."

Everyone works together to tie a rope around the dead caribou. If the blizzard gets worse, they may be stuck in the hut for days without being able to return.

"We don't know, but Berton, he's got to go home, even if the snow is over his height."

"Of course, it's not snow today, it's an avalanche, and I'm going home."

Someone says something and the others start giggling and laughing.

"Let's get moving if we don't want to see Berton freeze to death not knowing what's on his kid!"

The man called Beton laughs at the joke and begins to tie the rope around the reindeer's body so that everyone can drag it along.

They were all dressed in thick robes and each wore a bow.

The man who appeared to be the leader of the pack looked at the blonde man he was roped up with and patted him on the back.

He was the man who shot the bow at the reindeer.

"By the way, Radias, this guy is like a shrine."

"Haha....... You're too kind."

"It's more than a shrine, we've all seen you take down a reindeer we can't even see because of the snow with a single arrow. To be honest, I used to think you were just shooting at random and making weird noises."

No one in the herd has seen a reindeer.

But a man named Radias pointed his bow at a spot in the blizzard, fired a shot, and walked away.

And in the field, a reindeer had fallen.

He's uncannily good at finding his prey, and his arrows always hit the mark.

"You, you."

Everyone nodded in agreement with the head hunter, especially Berton, who looked at Radias and thanked him several times as his wife began to disperse.

The carcass of the reindeer is tied up, and everyone begins to lead the reindeer back.

"By the way, Radias. Aren't you long past your prime, too?"

"When is......?"

"The kid."

"ah......."

"That septuagenarian Berton is going to be a dad today, and you're still not there?"

One person starts to chime in, and then there are comments here and there.

There's a time for everything, and it's probably getting late.

It's fine for your wife, but you're getting old, too.

It's always good to have something in place before you run out of steam.

The young man called Radias merely smirked.

"By the way, Ms. Violet, you said you were helping with the breakup today, right?"

"I don't know, but I'll do what I can to help......."

"Hehe......."

Radias's wife is coming to help Berton's wife give birth today.

But the elders were troubled by this.

"......Is there a problem?"

"For someone as fragile as your wife to do....... for people as frail as you."

-tuk-tuk

Another man punches Radias in the shoulder.

"I'm sure he'd have a fit."

"......?"

"Well, it's a good thing you're a hard-headed man. How did you ever think to come to a place like this with such a slender wife?"

At that, Radias smirked in disgust.

"Ahaha....... I got a bunch of....... of them."

Radias felt a stone in his throat every time he heard those words.

A place that was uninhabited even when civilization was still intact.

A polar region so far removed from civilization that there are no warp gates, and not even the monsters of the blast furnace gates would dare to enter.

Emperor Bertus and Saviolin Tana were living beyond civilization, under new names.

So whenever Bertus hears that Saviolin Tana, the woman he pretends to be his wife, is a frail woman, he can't help but feel a strange, indescribable sensation.

\* \* \*

The village in the snow was not that small.

At just over 300 homes, the community is quite large considering the extreme conditions it faces.

Thousands of kilometers in every direction are uninhabited, and beyond the great mountain ranges to the north lies a frozen, unknown ocean.

Bertus and Tana came to this location on purpose.

I didn't set out to find this environment.

Everywhere civilization exists, it's impossible to hide. So wherever you are, you're being hunted.

The deep backcountry is sometimes discovered by adventurers who stumble upon it.

I ran for my life, but I didn't want to kill anyone.

So we went to a place where there was no foundation for civilization at all.

Deep in the backcountry, where even the monsters don't look.

An inhospitable place for humans, beasts, and monsters alike.

There, he said, he could stay hidden forever.

Bertus and Tana crossed over to the far side of civilization.

And we've reached a place where someone lives in an environment that shouldn't be inhabited by humans.

For an outsider in an environment where outsiders are not welcome, everyone in the village was friendly and welcoming.

I took care of them, even as they wondered how they got here.

I gave them a place to sleep, clothes to wear, and food to eat.

No one asked me why I was there.

To them, the world was a snowy field.

No country, no history, no nation.

All they knew was that at some point, strange-looking beasts started appearing.

The small but sturdy civilization of the Snowfields stood firm in the face of the occasional monster.

To them, monsters were either "inedible" or "something that looked like it would make you sick".

So Tana and Bertus encountered a tiny community in a place where civilization shouldn't exist, and they hunkered down for a while.

A place that is harsh but welcoming, cold but not lonely.

A place so remote from the rest of the world that no one knows about it.

Bertus learned a lot.

How to live in the snow, how to survive.

What to do when you're stranded in the snow.

Beasts live in these extreme environments, and how to find them.

Where temporary huts for hunters are hidden.

I've taken hunting from a hobby in the distant past to a real skill for a living.

"Wow....... I moved fast, it's already here."

Leading the reindeer that Bertus had hunted, they arrived at a village on a snowy plateau.

Obviously, I don't go hunting on snowy days.

With his wife about to give birth, the village hunters are out in force, not for raw meat, but for a feast.

"Elaaaaaaaah!"

Berton begins to run home, screaming his wife's name at the top of his lungs, afraid to return.

Leaving his wife in childbirth to go hunting, he must have had a lot on his mind.

"Radias, why don't you try it this time?"

Bertus knows what the big guy is talking about.

Slaughter.

It was still something he hadn't gotten used to, so the boss hunter tried to get him to do it at every opportunity.

At some point, the boss hunter's earthly purpose became to mold Bertus, an outsider, into the perfect snowman.

"Oh, no, I'll leave it the way it's always been done."

"Tsk. You're good at a lot of things, but I guess you just can't get the hang of it."

"That....... Sorry."

Good hands, good eyes, and fast action.

Everything is perfect, but I can't do things like slaughter or skin them.

The guy who is so close to perfection but always misses the mark.

To the men of the snowfields, Radias is like that, incredibly good, but always disappointing in the wrong places.

"Haha, I thought I was going to see Radias flip out today."

Behind the boss hunter, a longshoreman on a rope chuckled.

-Hahaha!

"......."

In fact, it's not that I don't want to do it, it's that I try to do it.

The first time the boss hunter had him slaughtered as if he could handle it, Bertus had made a fool of himself, picking up a butcher knife and lunging at him.

Upon seeing the parasites spilling out with their entrails, Bertus ran out of the slaughterhouse and vomited.

Bertus could look at the gross, but he couldn't look at the disgustingly filthy.

Instead, the townspeople looked at Bertus as if he were some kind of weirdo and giggled.

After the vomit, word got around to the whole town.

A newcomer, a young man from out of town, vomits at the sight of blood.

Of course, there's no longer that much misunderstanding, but Bertus still can't get his hands on some things.

Bertus now knows.

In this life, you don't have to be super strong in any one area.

It's not just about being good at hunting, it's not just about being good at tracking.

You need to be a jack of all trades.

Hunting is hunting, slaughter is slaughter, cooking is cooking, and you need to know how to build a fire and gather firewood in this polar environment. The list goes on and on.

So, in the early days of settling in, I was sometimes treated like I didn't know what I was doing.

So now Bertus realizes that he has a lot to learn from everyone in this village, men and women, but especially the elders.

Now, I'm kind of doing my part by playing to my strengths and letting others fill in the gaps.

"Anyway, Beton is Beton, but you better get going."

"Yes."

Bertus, too, heads in the direction of Berton's house, which is where Berton ran to.

-delay

Then, the door to Berton's house opens and someone comes out.

Saviolin Tana.

Here, a woman known as Violet staggers out of the room.

Her bob, which had always been short enough to reach the base of her neck, was now long enough to reach below her waist and had to be tied back with a hair tie.

As they say.

Now I just pretend to look like a slender woman.

"......?"

-pull

And then Bertus saw Tana the Savior, her complexion as white as if her soul had been sucked out of her, stumble and fall to the snow.

She's slender and frail, not at all like the savior violin Tana is known for.

-A.......

-aah.......

Is something wrong?

"Hello, honey......?"

Bertus also rushes to Tana's side, who has faltered.

Tana looks up at Bertus, who has approached her in a daze.

His complexion was beyond white.

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

"Moo, is something wrong?"

"Ah, ah....... No."

-aahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Behind Tana, who was shaking violently, the Bettens' house was filled with the guttural moans of a woman in the throes of childbirth.

-delay

The door to Berton's house opens cautiously, and the midwife steps out.

"It's nothing, she's in shock, let's get her home, get her some warm water and lay her down."

"Yes......?"

With those words, the old woman closed the door.

Bertus could see Savior Tana's pupils fluttering very violently.

What did you see?

"That....... Honey, honey....... The child is....... He....... just....... Heh, heh, heh....... Ha ha....... Uh, how about....... How....... How? Huh? Huh?"

I'm trying to explain something, but I can't seem to get my head around it.

Everything is fine.

But I must have seen something very disturbing.

Suddenly, Bertus understood why the other hunters were more worried about Violet than Berton's wife, who had given birth.

I knew I would be mesmerized by the birthing process.

Just as Bertus has no immunity to parasites, Tana has no immunity to anything.

The hunters are convinced that Violet, the image of a young foolish woman here, must be.

"I'm....... and I'm useless......."

Bertus smiles bitterly at the sight of Tana, her head hanging low and shivering.

"Let's go back."

"Yes......."

Supporting the trembling Savior Tana, Bertus made his way to their home.

\* \* \*

Bertus sat Tana down on the bed and gave her a cup of warm water.

Bertus smiled as he watched Tana gulp down the not-so-hot water.

Not long after Tana and Bertus arrived, the villagers built a house of their own.

Even though supplies were scarce, people scrambled to find materials and quickly built a house.

Then he shoved them both in, saying, "Live here.

They never said they were going to settle down, never said why they were here.

They built the house without asking, as if they knew what they were doing.

So Tana and Bertus had no choice but to sit down.

Bertus tried to help out in the village after that, and realized how much he didn't know. And what he didn't know, he learned.

But in Tana's case, it was even worse.

Beyond not being able to cook, I don't even know how to cut meat.

I don't know how to sew, let alone trim leather.

I don't know how to start a fire

Not surprisingly, I have no idea how to make the most important storage food in this environment.

I can't even play with my kids.

You can't help but smile embarrassedly in front of your kids.

Someone who doesn't know what to do with themselves when you give them a chore from the village.

She has a pretty face, a nice heart, and a nice demeanor, but she is useless to anyone.

Still, she's cute, and it's kind of fun to watch her bewilderment.

The village anaks are secretly envious of his hands, which are so white, clean, and calloused that it's obvious he hasn't done much hard work in his life.

She is confident in her abilities, but people, young and old, discourage her when she tries to do something that she is passionate about.

You don't want someone who's obviously overgrown to get injured trying to get somewhere.

So even when I want to do something I'm really good at, I don't give it a chance.

When I say I want to be a hunter, people laugh at me because I've been building up to it.

Everybody's like, "Don't make a joke about it.

In fact, it's a no-brainer.

I've held a sword all my life.

Everything else, living and otherwise, was supported by the imperial government.

Everything else, except the sword, was probably a good thing, and had always been somehow. It just wasn't any of her business.

So Tana doesn't know anything about swords, and she doesn't have any hair.

She is a person who has spent her life doing what she is good at and is complete with it.

If you suddenly ask someone like that to do something they have no connection to, you're lucky if they don't panic and cry.

So when I show you a job to do this, you're still saying, "What is this?

Even if it's something you taught them once.

I can't seem to get the hang of it.

Tana is even more incompetent than Bertus, the emperor.

This is the reality of Saviolin Tana, formerly the strongest knight in the Empire and the First Sword of the Continent.

"Have you calmed down a bit?"

"Yes......."

Once again, she had gone out to attend to the village's big event of childbirth, only to be told to go back to the midwife and rest.

She's seen people die, she's done it, and she's seen some ugly shit.

But it's unlikely that she's ever experienced the spectacle of the birth of life, and the shock of it all.

How?

How?

I'm glad I didn't pass out with a head full of question marks and exclamation points.

Bertus said nothing as he watched Tana fiddle with her water cup and catch her breath.

Bertus is the closest to her, and he knows she's suffering from the realization of how incompetent she's been.

Bertus looks at Tana and smiles faintly.

"That's not easy."

"......Yes."

The villagers who saw the couple respect each other always laughed, thinking they were cute.

No one asked why the couple was acting so strangely.

No one asked if it was a married couple.

At least Bertus is now a man, and his hunting skills are proving to be a boon to the village.

But Xavier Tana still can't do anything, and in the eyes of the world, she's just a fragile, foolish woman.

However, no one was overly critical of Tana's incompetence.

They may tease her playfully, but none of the villagers take her seriously.

That's because everyone saw them the day they arrived in town.

Through a violent blizzard, on the verge of collapse, unable to tell if it was a person or a snowball.

Everyone remembers the venomous look on Saviolin Tana's face as she arrived, clenched teeth and wide-eyed, carrying a stunned Bertus.

When asked how she got here, Tana said.

It was like there was a village here.

I heard the sound of an inhabited place.

But it had been more than three days since she'd heard it and walked over.

She heard a sound she couldn't hear, found her way through a blizzard, and reached this village.

So everyone says.

Foolish.

I don't even know how to do it.

No matter what you do, you're bound to get into trouble.

Great guy.

That's why no one can ignore Saviolin Tana.

Episode 697.

"I mean, honestly, it's fun."

"What do you mean, fun?"

Tana shakes her head at Bertus's words.

"This is what you look like."

"ah......."

"You've never been treated like this before in your life."

"Well, yes....... but......."

The emotions that Saviolin Tana feels in this village are new to her.

Everywhere she went, she was the Emperor's second in command.

It wasn't even a position that was earned by blood or anything else, but by merit.

As such, she was the furthest thing from incompetent.

There may have been a mistake in the command she received, but there was never a mistake in her execution.

In fact, she carried out the impossible orders of the last emperor to perfection.

It was a life without fail.

But ever since she arrived in this snowy town, she's been a failure at everything.

I've become so used to that failure that if Tana walks around with something heavy, even a four-year-old neighborhood kid will offer to help her.

Tana sighs.

"Hah....... I think the people of this town are more capable, wise, and well-rounded than any I've ever seen in my life."

"I think similarly."

Supporting yourself in life.

Those who have run the world marvel at how a community of only three hundred homes can live cooperatively and self-sufficiently in this extreme environment.

Every single person in the village knows what needs to be done, and they do it.

Someone should always be available to fill someone else's role.

That's why everyone needs to be a jack of all trades.

All Tana had to do was use her sword.

So in this small community, Tana becomes fatally incompetent.

"If monsters were common, I'd have something to do about it, but they're not, and it's a strange thing to wish for......."

"That's a good thing."

"Yes......."

In fact, excessive Ojira monsters are also very rare.

The occasional monster is found dead in the wild, or if found, hunted by the town's hunters.

There are plenty of other people who can do the hard work, and there's no reason to jump through hoops.

A pretty lady for kids.

A foolish and naive neighbor to the Anaks.

For the elderly, the cute and silly new house is Tana's reality.

"But it's still hard for me to deal with people who are so much younger than me treating me like a child....... It's still hard to take, although the hardest part is not having anything to say."

In fact, Tana outlived the oldest man in the village.

Everyone is like a child, and they don't know what they're talking about.

And we don't actually know anything.

The disparity is a source of frustration for Tana.

Tana gazes out the window at the snow falling, her cup of water cooling.

"Still....... I'm grateful that a place like this exists."

I was trying to live out of sight in the extreme outback.

However, you still live in a place with people.

And you can live with it.

Tana laughed as she said it, and Bertus laughed too.

Snowy snowfield.

An unnamed town.

-I hear it's a boy.

-Uh-oh, yeah!

There, just now, the news of new life was resounding.

\* \* \*

A healthy baby boy is born, and the mother is healthy.

When Berton urged his hunters to go out hunting, even in the snow, in anticipation of his wife's birth, he did so so that they could feast after the child was safely delivered.

Of course, the mother and child, as well as Berton, couldn't make it to the feast because they were at his side.

In the hall in the center of the village, all sorts of meat dishes were prepared to celebrate the auspicious occasion, as well as the reindeer that Bertus had hunted.

It was only natural that Tana and Bertus would join the feast.

-It should have been a daughter.

-Why would she be a daughter?

-If it's a boy, he'll be just like Berton, that rambunctious bastard. Wouldn't it be better to have a daughter who's more like Ella?

-You say your daughter looks like her dad, but isn't it possible that she's a clueless daughter who looks like Bettany?

-Gee, that would be a little awkward.

-Uhhhhhh!

Everyone was talking about the birth of a new life.

People were chatting and drinking fermented reindeer's milk.

It's not a lot, but it's not a lot either.

It's not like they can't afford a feast, and there are plenty of good hunters in town.

So on a good day, you can eat and drink as much as you want.

Bertus and Tana were also used to rough food, so they felt comfortable eating it.

Of course, Tana's face was not pleased.

Because on a day like this, there's something you'll inevitably hear.

"So, what's your baby's schedule?"

"For example, ......?"

The old man who worked as a midwife today approaches Violet and asks her with a kindly smile.

If you're going to ask me what's coming up on a day like this, what is it?

Child.

When are you going to give birth?

Not surprisingly, Tana's complexion turns white.

"I know you're scared by what you saw today, but we've all been there. It's not scary, it's great, it's sacred."

"ah......."

Tana is older than an old woman.

An older man, younger than her, asks her when she's going to have a baby, which, of course, makes Tana feel like she's going to go crazy.

Tana opens her mouth to say something.

"That, that....... It's putting up a good fight, but......."

Obviously, I haven't even tried it until now.

"허허....... The good guys and gals who don't seem to have a problem with Chuck don't stand a chance......."

The old woman squints her eyes again, this time at Bertus.

"Are you an asshole?"

"What?!"

A good old-fashioned dog whistle.

“아니! 아닙니다! 아니에요! 우, 우리 남편은! 머, 멀쩡해요! 건강하거든요! 자, 잔뜩! 잔뜩이거든요! 매, 매일! 막!”

Eventually, Savior Tana turned bright red and cried out.

The only thing that annoys her more than her own story is Bertus's, which she can't seem to let go of.

But once he did, he realized what he'd said and paled.

A bunch of them.

What the heck is a bunch of stuff?

"Every, every day....... Uh, a lot......."

What's daily is daily, and what's huge is huge.

"......Sit down, honey."

Tana jumped to her feet, only to collapse back into her seat as Bertus gently tugged her to her feet.

"Hehe....... You're more energetic this way......."

The old woman laughs, and so does everyone else at the table. After all, they're having fun making fun of this silly, pretty new girl.

If you don't know what you're doing, and you're always looking like an idiot, so be it.

In this town where everything is frozen, no matter what I say, they always react like a fish out of water.

The cranky old people have made it a point to make fun of her. My husband is funny too, but he's a gentleman, so no matter what they do to him, he's very polite.

A schoolboy, to say the least.

No matter what you tell him, he understands it, remembers it, does it, and takes it seriously.

It's useful, but it's not fun.

On the other hand, there's the wife, who is clumsy at everything she does, tries to do well but can't, and is always upset and restless.

It's useless, but it's fun.

In their own ways, they've both become necessary parts of the village.

-If it's a lot, how much is too much?

-He's a businessman, even if he doesn't look like one. He went out there by himself once and brought in a bear. He caught it, but what does it take to bring it in?

-bone?

-That's a given.

-then waist?

-Cancer. That guy's got a bad back.

-Hehe....... He didn't look like that.......

-There's more to it than meets the eye.

There's some joking chatter here and there, and Tana's face is getting redder and redder. Bertus's hand trembles as he grips his glass.

"Me, sorry, honey......."

"It's okay......."

They care about each other terribly, as evidenced by the fact that they've come this far together.

But the respect they have for each other puts the viewer in a strange mood.

It's like young people dating and being married.

Everybody's talking about it, but it looks good, so it's good. That's what everybody thinks.

And so the feast continues.

Soon, Bertus saw the chief seated at the head of the table talking to someone who had entered the hall.

Chief of an unnamed village and leader of a band of hunters.

He was in charge of the men when they went to hunt reindeer.

He engaged in a brief conversation and soon left the room.

Bertus watched the spectacle, though the chief's expression was a bit ominous, as it should be.

"......."

"......."

And it wasn't just Bertus, Tana shared that look with Bertus.

I don't even know what it is.

Bertus shrugs slightly, and Tana smiles softly.

The feast continues.

After some time had passed, Mr. Berton appeared in the hall, saying that his wife had fallen asleep.

After a round of congratulations for being the guest of honor, Berton sat down next to Bertus.

"Brother Radias."

"Yes, Beton."

"Why don't you make it easier on yourself......."

"I'm comfortable with this, so congratulations today. You're a boy."

Bertus congratulated him, and Berton scratched his head.

Berton was, of course, much younger than his wife, Ella Bertus.

But even so, Bertus learned more about the affairs of the village from Berton than he did from the adults in the village.

So Bertus always had a lot to thank Berton for.

"Yes, I'm healthy. I was a little worried, but Ella seems fine and....... By the way, is everything okay with your brother?"

At that, Tana blushes.

"What? Ah....... Yes, sin, sorry."

"He said that if Ella was so worried, she should go see you."

"Please be sure to tell her I'm sorry......."

The person helping her was more frightened and shaking than the person giving birth, so the midwife sent her away to go and rest.

"By the way, brother."

"Yes, Beton."

"My child, no name yet."

Berton asks Bertus with a serious look on his face.

"Can you give it a name?"

Bertus couldn't help but feel flustered.

"......What's your name?"

"Yes, I would really like my brother to build it. Originally, the village chief would do it, but when I asked him, he said it was okay......."

It sounded like fatuousness to Bertus, and to Tana, who was listening.

I never thought I'd be asked to name someone in my lifetime. And I'm still the new kid on the block.

Is it okay to have your own punchline, like naming a child who will become a villager?

I already had the chief's permission, so why not, but it was a bit embarrassing.

"Because I feel something for you."

"What is......?"

"I don't know what to say....... I can't really put it into words, but you look different from the likes of me, and if you're going to name my child after me, I think he'll have a bright future......."

When Bertus heard that, he realized why Berton was saying this.

Feeling like a different person from the ground up.

You get that vibe from their tone of voice and behavior, even if you can't quite put your finger on it.

Bertus seemed to know what he was talking about, but he still hesitated.

To give someone a name.

It's a seemingly insignificant task that could determine someone's entire life.

Me, do I deserve it?

I left everything behind and ran away.

Is it okay to do that?

I had a problem that no one else knew about.

-About

A thick hand rested on Bertus's shoulder.

"I'll do it, but."

"Ah....... Chief."

Chief and leader of the hunters.

When he returned, he had a hand on Bertus's shoulder and was smiling.

"In a town where there's nothing new, there's nothing as special as a new name."

It would be disrespectful to your new home and your new child if the village chief invited you to stay and you refused for some unexplained reason.

"Yes, let me think about it."

"Thank you, brother!"

We can't just name it, so you'll have to think about it.

But the chief's hand didn't budge, even though he said he'd think about a name for someone.

"And, step out for a second."

"What? Ah....... Yes."

"And, Ms. Violet, could you come out here for a moment?"

"......Ah, yeah."

Is there something to be said for that?

As you follow the chief out of the town hall, the chief walking ahead of you with his back to you says, "Don't move.

"We have a customer looking for you."

Bertus, Tana, and I all felt a chill run down our spines at those simple words.

How?

Who came.

Did the trackers make it this far through the backcountry?

If so, what to do.

The chief said it wasn't a big deal, but it's not uncommon.

Just as it's a big deal for Tana and Bertus to arrive in this unnamed snowy town, it's no small feat for the guests looking for them to make it this far.

"Let me know if you need help. I'll be watching."

As if he knew it was a bad thing, the chief said.

No wonder.

If you're looking for someone to come all the way here, you know that the person you're looking for, or the person you're trying to find, can't be a normal person.

How it can help.

It doesn't matter who comes to help, if they can't handle it themselves.

Bertus is Bertus, but the viola tana is treated like half a dime here.

But they've been in this nameless town for a long time.

So, we don't know if it will actually help or not.

I already trusted in the giant back of the chief hunter and village chief.

You don't even know why you believe it.

Just as they taught me how to hunt, butcher, navigate and survive in the snow.

It seems to be able to find its way through these unknowns.

Both Tana and Bertus find themselves already trusting the chief without reason or evidence.

With that, the chief, Tana, and Bertus left the hall.

It was a snowy night and everyone in the village was in the hall, so there was silence in the village except for the loud sounds from the hall.

You follow the chief as he walks to the outskirts of town.

Where you've trudged through the snow to get there.

There were two men in black robes.

Two black robes with a little snow on them.

"Let's talk."

With those words, the chief turns away and speaks only with his eyes.

If you ask for help, they will help you in some way.

The fact that they were waiting, not raiding, meant that they either didn't want to harm the village or had some business there.

Two people in a blizzard, dressed in black robes.

The person on the right carefully removes the hood.

"......!"

"You, are you......?"

And both Bertus and Tana were stunned.

Long hair, black as night.

The Pale Face.

"It's been a while."

"Anna......?"

Anna de Guerna, the missing warlock, was there.

The person on the left also removes their hood.

"Louis......."

Similarly, the man on the left was Louis Ankton, who disappeared with him.

The remnants of the long-defunct Gradias Empire have reunited for the first time in five years on a plateau far from civilization.

Episode 698.

It was Anna and Louis who came to the unreachable place.

Their relationship ended with the demise of the Gradias Empire.

Bertus is wanted, but Anna and Louis are not.

All information about anyone associated with Immortal has been buried beneath the surface. That's why Louis and Anna are not wanted.

But it was like they'd dropped off the face of the earth.

Anna and Bertus' promise went as far as killing Christina.

What happened after that is a story of nothing.

Bertus tried to die, but could not.

Anna and Louis disappeared, and we traveled through time to find Bertus and Tana, now hiding in the backwoods.

But the reunion isn't a happy one.

We don't know how long time changed Anna and Louis, just as we don't know how long time changed Bertus and Tana.

And I don't know how I ended up in the middle of nowhere.

That's why both Tana and Bertus were nervous and kept their distance.

Neither Anna nor Louis approaches them, seemingly aware of their wariness.

However, Anna's expression was serene.

No anger, no hate, no sadness.

I had no idea what he meant.

"I won't make this a long story. I've been gathering the scattered mages of Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages of Gradias."

Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages.

The emperor ordered them to disband, just before the empire faded away.

After the final battle in Diane, their fate was up to them.

None of them have joined the Demon King's new empire.

They can't join in the first place. The responsibilities of the imperial family are also their responsibilities, and the demon king is in no position to take them with him.

The greatest power of the Gradias Empire was, naturally, the group that should have been liquidated along with the rest of the Old Empire.

This is why Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages were scattered after the Battle of Diane.

There would be people living their own lives, finding their own paths, living somewhere with a hidden past.

Like Bertus and Tana living the life of a fugitive.

Some of them, many years later, had aligned themselves with the new empire.

And a few of them have aligned themselves with the anti-demonic Human Autonomy.

The scattered remnants of the past go their separate ways.

However, most of the mages of Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages have gone into hiding.

Anna says she's reuniting those scattered imperial mages with Shanapelle.

"Why would they do that?"

At Bertus's wary words, Anna stares at him.

"I'm going to create an association."

"What......?"

"I'm trying to create something like the Black Order or the Cantus Magna. No....... It's already been done."

Bertus couldn't help but roll his eyes.

In the aftermath of the Empire's demise, Anna has drawn together a rather scattered group of Chanapels and imperial mages.

The group that the Emperor disbanded, Anna reunited.

And it has already become an organization worthy of being called an association.

"That's....... Why are you making it? What are you going to do with it?"

"Well."

Anna looks out over the snowfield on a snowy night.

"They scattered because they couldn't be incorporated into the new empire."

"People with too much to do to stay hidden, scattered and holding their breath. That in itself is a disservice to humanity....... No, it's a disservice to people."

"It's also pointless that some of those people are just waiting to die in an autonomous territory with no hope and no future."

"There's more we can do together than we can do separately."

"I've got it together for now."

"There are a lot of things you can do."

"We could wipe out monsters that are just out of people's reach."

"What the Black Order did, what the New Empire can't do, we can do in the shadows."

"But in most situations, if it's not something everyone needs, I'll be a bystander."

"It's more likely that our generation will just create this association and pass our work on to the next generation."

"It's best if we don't end up doing anything."

"Just in case, somewhere, at some point."

"I'm gathering people, in case you need us."

"That's it."

"I'm not going to listen to you tell me this is right or wrong."

"This was the best I could do."

"Just as you did your best, so did we."

Powerful individuals are more powerful when they are united than when they are scattered.

So while there's no specific use for their power yet, it's too much of a waste for them to be scattered and living in Jaya.

Anna gathered them together.

The Black Order is gone.

However, a new Black Order has been created.

Knights and wizards from a lost empire become secret societies for a new one.

There's no point in talking about being right.

Just as Bertus ran away.

Anna did something, too.

Bertus felt embarrassed, but not angry.

The moment the Empire ceased to exist, so did the Emperor's authority over Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages.

It's their choice to come to Anna.

For now, I'm just curious.

"So, why am I here?"

Why would anyone come looking for Lung-je, who has chosen a life on the run?

What do you want from someone who has given up everything.

Anna's expression was unreadable, but Bertus seemed to know what was coming.

"The rationale is lacking."

"......?"

"Yeah, rationale."

Anna says still.

"Most of the scattered people still follow you. Most of them are loyalists from countries that no longer exist, who think that living quietly under a new empire is bending to your will."

"A few of those people have decided to join us, but there are many more who refuse because they think it's against your will to join a group like this."

"We know where they are, but there are a lot of people who have no intention of joining us."

It was about what I expected.

"You mean, if I join you, I can unite them all?"

"Yes, and here's Sir Tana."

A new association has been created.

But Anna de Guerna doesn't have a reason and she doesn't deserve it.

There are those who join the cause, but there are many more who refuse to join, believing that Bertus' last command was silence.

Emperor of a lost empire.

And the emperor's knight.

When they join, they can quickly absorb all the hesitant ones.

Reuniting Shanapelle and the Imperial Mages will make them a formidable force.

It's probably already powerful enough to be called an Order by now, but with Bertus on board, it'll be easy to rally the scattered masses just by having someone with both the name and the credentials.

It's one thing to be a minor wizard of the realm, it's another to be the Emperor of the realm.

"Besides, I don't think I'm cut out for this, and neither is Louis."

Anna created a new power.

But you don't own it.

"I don't just want your cooperation, and I don't just need you for the sake of it."

"......."

"All of this, you take care of."

At that, Bertus stares at Anna, his expression stony.

"Is the leader of that organization....... to be its leader?"

"Yes. We trust your judgment."

"......."

"A lot of things went wrong, but I think you did the best you could, and the world is proving that it wasn't the worst choice."

"......."

"Lead us."

Anna isn't trying to create an association and wield it.

I have come to form an association and offer it to the Emperor of the Ruins.

You never know, you might need it someday.

We gathered people who were too good to be buried, and we found people who could do something more with their lives.

That's as far as Anna could see her role going.

Gathering scattered people.

I came to Bertus to ask him what happened next.

And to keep himself as one of the settlers.

Bertus remains still, staring into Tana's face.

Maybe it's the cold, maybe they're scared.

He had a pale complexion.

"......."

Tana looked uneasy, then cautiously.

Bertus's fingertips squeezed very weakly.

There was no conversation.

However, the tremor in his fingertips speaks volumes.

The look of desperation on your face also speaks volumes.

Bertus smiles faintly at the look on Tana's face.

"Anna....... I don't blame you, and I don't deserve it."

"......."

"You granted my last request, and for that alone, I am grateful to you."

Last minute.

Kill your friends.

Bertus asked for a cruel favor, and Anna granted it.

That wasn't a deal.

Bertus had nothing to offer.

"But it was cowardly and lame enough to run away."

Tana's only request as she threw herself down.

It was a plea to live.

It is also cowardly to try to find your own honor in death.

But why can't you make a really cowardly, really crappy choice.

It's the life of a fugitive who can't push the words away.

But that choice wasn't forced.

In the end, Bertus made his own choice.

You've made a coward of yourself.

"You can't wear another crown you made for yourself, on a subject you abandoned and ran away from."

"That's cowardly and old-fashioned and all that, so I'm going to leave it at......."

"It's just cheesy."

"From the moment I abandoned all my responsibilities and ran away, I never had any rights."

"So if anyone in the world comes and offers me any rights and powers, I will not and cannot accept them."

"The moment you throw it away, it's already done."

You've abdicated your responsibility.

He chose the life of a fugitive.

So I can't have any rights in my life anymore.

That's fair.

That was Bertus's decision to run away.

"So I have no future responsibilities, no rights, and no intention of seeking any honor."

"To survive."

"Other than that, I'm not going to do anything."

Bertus squeezes Tana's hand, which she holds lightly.

Tana jumps back in surprise when Bertus squeezes her hand hard.

"I'm sorry, Anna."

"I'm not going to say it's right or wrong, and I don't want to take any rights or responsibilities for it."

"You created that, against my will."

"Then you should be its rightful owner, not me."

Is it a criticism that something made with your own hands should be left in the hands of others.

Or does it mean that even the work you did was your own, and that the glory and responsibility should be yours.

It's just that Bertus has no intention of wearing another crown dedicated to him.

You have made a crown where there was none, and you shall wear it.

At that, both Anna and Louis are silent.

"I thought you'd say that."

I don't blame, I don't attack.

Anna nods, as if she somehow knew the ending before this conversation.

"But are you happy with this?"

Anna asks, pointing to a still, snowy village.

Quiet and unremarkable.

A small town in the middle of nowhere, where it's just cold.

That's it.

Is this your rest.

"You don't deserve it."

"......."

Bertus keeps his answer short.

"Let's go back, Louis."

"......Yes."

Louis Ankton stays still and bows his head toward Bertus and Tana.

Anna turns away without a word.

That was the end of the reunion.

\* \* \*

Anna de Gerna is the new owner of the association.

It may have been Anna's plan to create that organization and have Bertus take command.

But Bertus didn't take it.

Anna would have realized the futility of forcing it on an unwilling Bertus.

That's why I went home quietly.

So Anna will have to start thinking.

What to do with your new association.

How to lead them.

By somehow managing and drowning out the internal noise and disagreements.

You have to lead them in some way.

The guests, looking for an outsider in a town that had no reason for them to be there, went home quietly.

There was no commotion, but Bertus and Tana's faces were set.

Anna and Louis went home.

However, someone has already figured out where they are.

There's no way they can't figure it out, and there's no telling what the other workers will say to Anna and Louis when they return with the results.

They're gone for now, but they might come back for more.

And there's no guarantee that you'll be as persuasive then as there is now.

"I'll have to leave."

"......, maybe."

Tana nods sadly at Bertus' words.

You must leave, if only to avoid harming this village.

There is no such thing as a permanent place in a fugitive's life.

We're only here for a short time, but we can't be complacent.

After all, the backcountry is a place that can be reached by someone.

So now we're back on the road, a long road with no idea where we're going.

The only good thing is that today's guests aren't here with any animosity.

For the favors this town has shown them so far, the only way to repay them would be to disappear as quickly and quietly as possible, lest they come to harm.

And just like that, I was on my way back from the outskirts of town.

In the snowy streets, a giant shade awaited Tana and Bertus.

"...... village chief."

They were met by a village chief who offered to help them if they asked.

"So, who were the guests?"

The chief asks, smirking as always.

"This is your old friend......."

"Friends. Good."

The chief chuckles.

The chief's boisterous laughter echoed through the snowy village, and the sounds of a raucous crowd could be heard in a distant hall where a feast was in full swing.

The chief speaks from a vantage point overlooking the village, with his back to you.

"Do you have a story?"

The chief's sudden question left Bertus speechless.

It was a question that no one in the village, let alone the chief, had asked in the short time we had known each other.

"Without ......, I can't."

"Yeah, I guess so."

How could there not be a story for one who had to come so far beyond this civilization?

And when he has guests who come to him from beyond civilization, how can there not be a story?

The chief puts his hand on Bertus's shoulder.

The thick chief's arm rested on her shoulder, and Tana watched with a slightly uneasy expression.

"Then."

"......?"

"Then in this town, is there no story?"

It is said that those who flee beyond civilization must have a story.

A village in the middle of nowhere, beyond civilization, doesn't have a story.

"Just as you didn't ask, we didn't ask."

Bertus and Tana realize it's a strange town, but they don't ask.

The villagers didn't ask them either.

"We don't know who you are."

"......."

"But."

The chief grabs Bertus by the shoulders and points to the village.

"You don't have to know who they are to be their neighbor."

Bertus and Tana don't know what this town is.

However, in order to return the favor and goodwill of these villagers, you want to leave the village to avoid causing any harm.

That's because it thinks of them as neighbors.

We don't know each other, but we're neighbors.

Here's the story.

We don't have to know each other's stories to accept and understand them.

The moment Tana carried a stunned Bertus over the snowy mountains to reach this place.

People accepted Tana and Bertus as neighbors without wondering why.

I understood Tana's desperation, her need.

"This village exists because we recognize the obvious: the colder it is, the closer together we must live."

It's cold, and people need to stay close together to survive.

This is that community.

"No matter how small this town is, how little there is to eat, how harsh the weather......."

The chief laughs.

"One handsome young man, one old woman whose eyes are suspiciously pretty."

"......!"

-Hahahahahaha!

The chief laughed as the world went by, and Bertus and Tana went white as a sheet.

Where the hell am I?

Who is here.

Who the hell is the chief.

I know nothing.

Eventually.

Just as the chief hadn't asked anything so far, Bertus hadn't asked anything either.

The Chief says.

"So, you don't have to leave."

To Bertus and Tana, the words felt like a promise from the gods.

"This is ....... Chief."

So I just said, "Yeah.

\* \* \*

Tana and Bertus returned home.

Anna and Louis came to visit.

Then I realized that I was in an unknown town.

"This is....... ."

Up until now, we've both been curious, but now the space is starting to feel like some kind of mystery.

"I don't know."

The chief didn't tell them to leave.

I was told I didn't have to leave.

No matter what, they'd do it, no matter what, reassured Bertus and even Tana.

The chief promised that he would continue to embrace them as he had embraced them before.

An opportunity presented itself, and Bertus turned it down.

You'll never know if it was right or wrong.

You've chosen to live the life of a fugitive, and you've been promised protection.

So in this unnamed snowy town.

This is probably what Bertus and Tana have left behind.

"Did you know who I am....... who I am?"

"That's....... I'm not sure."

The chief had known all along that Tana was much older than she looked.

Are the other villagers?

If the townspeople have been making fun of you all this time, you must be really bad.

Tana gritted her teeth in embarrassment and frustration.

They decided to stay in town.

I'd be lying if I said it didn't blow my mind.

There's another opportunity.

Some unexpected spots.

Just imagining sitting in a seat that someone else had created allowed me to design in decades of what I could do.

If you can and should still do something, you can come up with anything.

But.

All that imagination was dashed in one fell swoop.

Tana's fingertips trembled with anxiety.

The moment it touched his hand ever so slightly, it was gone.

A certain desperation to not do so was conveyed in that single tremor.

What's not your place.

Something that can no longer be yours.

All delusions about him were wiped clean.

I left everything behind.

However, something still remains.

I ran away and found a place of sanctuary.

And I didn't get there alone.

There's no reason to fantasize or dream about something new.

I chose the life of a fugitive, and someone was always with me on the run.

So, instead of putting a new crown on your head, you should cherish what you have left.

It's enough to spend time with the people you have left and the time you have left.

As I told Anna.

When asked if I was happy with this, I said that I didn't deserve it.

Undeserved.

The emperor who lost everything.

One who stays by the side of an emperor who has been reduced to nothing.

With someone who deserves it.

In an undeserved place.

Protected by some undeserving being.

How could I not feel more than satisfied and undeserving?

It is sinful that such undeservedness is allowed.

You don't have to hurt the world to dream of something.

"Tana."

"Is that ......?"

As Bertus approaches, Tana's eyes fill with panic.

It's a look you've never seen before.

"We......."

"......."

That hesitant approach is all it takes.

What you're trying to do.

What you want.

I get it.

"Oh, no....... Uh, how dare I......."

"...... Why not?"

"That....... Bertus is not like me....... much younger and....... and......."

Tana blanched, her complexion turning blue. Bertus narrowed his brow.

"......Does that make sense?"

"......Yes?"

"If we're going to live here for the rest of our lives, we're going to have to pretend to be married for the rest of our lives."

"Ah."

I can't even say something weird like that because it's not true.

"In this small town, are you suggesting I have an affair?"

"That's not....... Not......."

Bertus sat still in front of Tana.

"Stay alive, you asked."

"......Yes."

I did him a favor.

That's how we got here.

"Now then, can I do you a favor?"

"For example, ......?"

"I'm sick and tired of hearing about it."

When to create.

When.

That should be enough to convey what you're asking for.

"Why not ......?"

We've been together for years.

Tana is healthy in many ways, and Bertus knows it.

"That......! That! That! Being, being....... No, that, impossible that....... Oh, no....... but....... But! I've seen Bertus since he was a baby! How could I, how could I......!"

"I don't know about that."

"Ugh, ugh....... You can't do this....... No....... Please......."

Tana was almost crying.

I can't push it, I can't not push it.

It just turns blue and starts crying.

When pushed.

I'm not leaving this town, so I'm not going to pretend to be a married couple for the rest of my life and force them to be celibate.

Saying I love you.

We love each other so much that the words themselves are unnecessary.

There's no reason why you shouldn't.

The only reason they've been pretending is because Tana wants to keep some sort of conscience, and Bertus respects that.

However, Bertus no longer has any respect for Tana.

Then, in fact, it's all over.

"I don't know, just stay put."

"That, that....... That's......!"

After that, it's like she just screamed her face off in the hall.

Daily.

A lot.

Enormously.

It was a mess.

Episode 699.

Epilogue - The End of the World

After the New Empire promulgated a law recognizing land ownership by peasants who cleared the ruined lands, groups of pioneers left the city.

There's still a lot of vacant land, and on the uncleared land, the grass sways in the breeze, and the growing crops poke their heads up cautiously.

Small towns where rural people might stop by, but no reason for urban people to visit.

The southwestern tip of the continent.

A small to medium-sized city that is part of the Safe Zone, but is neither a strategic nor a stronghold city, and thus far removed from the gaze of the Empire.

Imperial Mandate, Leanda.

Many small villages have sprung up since the war, where villagers make a living by consuming the crops they grow and selling the surplus to Leanda.

Then, in a small, unnamed farming village on the outskirts of Leanda, there was a strange visitor.

A man who was more of a tramp than a guest.

One such man had been staying in an abandoned barn that had been empty for quite some time, ever since the cow he shared with the village died.

A man leaning back against the wall of a barn, next to rotting straw, dead and motionless.

-Mr.

Toward him, a girl ran, her rich, long brown curls bouncing.

"......."

Slowly, like a dying giant tree moving, the man raises his head and looks at the girl running toward him.

The girl who came running at the sound of the moon holds out her hand to the man.

"Uncle, you haven't eaten, have you?"

"......."

"Eat this, your mom said to bring it to you."

In the girl's hand were three steamed potatoes that had cooled.

My mom told me to bring it to you.

It was a lie.

Because no town likes a strange bum.

The man looks at the water girl, then takes one of the potatoes and puts it in his mouth.

"Here, I brought you some water."

A bite of potato.

Take a sip of water.

Slowly, lazily, as if performing a ritual, the man performs the movements separately.

She watches in wonder as he eats his potatoes and drinks his water.

A man in a cloak that looks like a giant.

He was eating potatoes with only his left hand and drinking water with only his left hand.

The man's hollow right shoulder, shrouded in a ragged cloak, speaks volumes.

The man had no right arm.

\* \* \*

The girl patiently waited for the man to nibble on the three potatoes.

"Thank you."

The girl smiles broadly as she accepts the empty bucket of water with a brief thank you.

In the distance, men carrying farming implements click their tongues as they watch the man in the barn and the girl talking in front of him.

-Want. They won't listen to you if you say that, so use want.

-Sandy Don't you think you should give your mom a hard time?

-Where is he going to get off talking?

-although.......

The mutterings of the villagers reach the man's ears as well as the girl's.

"Don't worry about it. Grown-ups are just scared of strangers."

"...... Of course."

To the girl's more-than-adult comment, the man replied.

It's natural for adults to have vague fears.

An unidentified bum lying on the street.

It was Sandy who found the tramp, screamed at him, called the adults, and brought him to town.

One-armed tramp.

The villagers ask him questions, but he tells them nothing about himself.

His movements were slow and his eyes were barely focused, as if he was dying, or worse, already dead.

Everywhere you look, it looks ominous, or like it has some sort of terrible disease.

That's why it's odd that Sandy's side is so close to this ominous bum.

It's not a deserted town, so we didn't kick him out, but no one wanted to get too close to the bum.

After sobering up at Sandy's house, the tramp took up residence in the town's abandoned barn, where he sat for the rest of the day until Sandy's mother politely asked him to leave.

The rest of the time, I was sneaking in potatoes, sweet potatoes, or bread slices that Sandy would bring.

I'm not going to sit on my ass forever.

The villagers gave him that look whenever they saw him sitting idly in the corner of the barn.

The man barely moved for the rest of the day.

No one came to visit unless it was Sandy, and passersby wondered if the man had been left for dead.

It's also true that Sandy is an outlier.

The other children in the village didn't approach the ominous tramp either.

Or a man-eating ghost.

Or the ghost itself.

There was a lot of speculation among the kids about the bum.

No matter what the kids said, no matter what the adults said, Sandy took care of the bum.

And so, it was about two weeks before a tramp took over the town's barn.

Now I just need you to leave me alone.

The villagers' patience is beginning to wear thin.

Of course, Sandy doesn't care about any of that.

The bum, whom people suspected of being a mute, would, at some point, say something to Sandy, even if it was just a snippet.

Sandy finishes her meal and smirks at the silent bum.

"Mister, you know what?"

"......."

"This barn smells like it used to when they had cows."

"......."

"I don't even own a cow, and it smells horrible."

Scattered hair and random facial hair.

Naturally, it was bound to stink, and the barn where the man was staying had begun to smell like the cows it once housed.

"I suppose."

The man merely responded to Sandy's words.

It smells terrible.

I see.

Sandy's eyes widened at that simple statement.

"......I thought you were telling me to take a bath?"

"......."

"There's a waterfront in front of here."

The man doesn't respond to everything Sandy says.

Sandy now has some idea.

The man's ears are almost eaten away.

So when Sandy says something, she responds by nodding or shaking her head without really knowing what it means.

And it's not just your ears.

You can see by now that most of a man's senses are quite dull.

The villagers don't know.

It's not just the right arm.

The man's missing arm stands out too much, but his whole body is diseased.

Sandy grabs the man's arm.

Not being understood doesn't mean the conversation isn't happening.

"Come on. I'll get you cleaned up."

"......."

Sandy tugged hard, and the man slowly, but surely, rose from his seat.

Sandy didn't make it happen, it just happened.

The man is suspicious, speechless, and ominous.

In fact, if you watch him up close and long enough, you'll realize that no one listens better than he does.

Sandy knows.

\* \* \*

Sandy was originally an outcast in her village.

He would go where he was told not to go and do what he was told not to do.

But if you tell me I must do something, I won't do it.

She was a bullfrog of a girl.

The children of the town are excited to hear about Sandy, as they've been in trouble with her pranks and antics since they were very young.

So it's no wonder that Sandy's parents are effectively giving up on her.

Still, it's a little risky this time.

Sandy started taking care of a bum who was obviously dangerous, although she couldn't give a specific reason why he was dangerous this time.

So everyone tries to stop her this time, but as always, Sandy tells them not to, and they work even harder to take care of the bum.

Now they were even dragging the bum down to the stream to wash him.

The bum was yielding to Sandy's touch, not resisting it, as if it were an object.

Not only does he wash his wild hair with tons of soap, but he also cleanses his face and beard.

It was like a tiny mother taking care of a big baby.

-Take off your clothes.

-.......

It wasn't until a neighbor who saw her trying to strip the man of his clothes told her she was in trouble that Sandy stopped her rampage.

"No, you're relying on the kid because you can't do a single thing yourself?"

Sandy is Sandy, but she knows that men have problems, too, and she scolded Sandy.

"......I see."

But the bum only said that.

"You're an offensive little man."

"Don't, Auntie!"

In the end, Sandy's polarity forced the village anak to return home, unable to bear the bitterness any longer.

The next day.

Sandy could see that the man had somehow managed to wash his clothes clean.

\* \* \*

It's early the next morning.

He could see the man, still dirty but with all the clothes he was wearing washed and dried, leaning his back against the wall of the barn.

"What, did you do this by yourself?"

"......Yes."

Sandy smiles coyly at that short answer.

She then strokes the man's head vigorously.

As if to say something complimentary.

"Good for you, mister, you can wash yourself."

"......."

"...... is a tease?"

"......."

"I can't tell if I'm being heard or not."

Sandy can't figure out what the man is thinking either.

Sure enough, I had washed my clothes and body somewhere overnight, but I didn't smell as bad as I used to.

But his clothes are worn and tattered, his hair is a mess, and his beard is growing out of nowhere.

What Sandy brought today was thinly sliced bread.

"My mom, don't hate me so much. He's just scared."

"......."

"You know I'm bringing you food, so I'm paying your share?"

"......I see."

I don't like it, and I don't want to do it.

We all have those moments when we can't help ourselves.

I hate and fear the unknown bum, not to mention Sandy's weirdness.

It would be a shame to let them starve to death.

I can't get my daughter to stop being a weirdo, and I'm pretty sure she's not going to eat her share and give it to a bum.

Eventually, Sandy's mother reluctantly cooks enough food for Sandy to have some left over to give to the bum.

The townspeople want the tramp to go away, but they don't want him to die in town.

So you're afraid of the bum, and you hate Sandy's behavior.

In the end, you can't help but be happy.

I thought Sandy was just an out-of-control talker, but then I realized there was a kinder, gentler side to her.

And Sandy didn't just bring bread.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere, Sandy pulls out a knife.

"Mister, stick your chin out."

Sandy's eyes flicker and she wields the knife menacingly.

"......."

"Unsightly beard, I'll shave it off."

Sure enough, the man was looking at Sandy with cloudy eyes, neither frightened nor panicked.

"I've seen my dad do it so often, so maybe I'm good at it."

Sandy grabbed the man by the end of his chin and lifted him up, plunging the knife under his chin, but he didn't react.

-Square

"...... Is this correct?"

A girl who never shaves her beard shakes her head with clumsy hand gestures.

The man just stood there, not sure if he didn't care or if he couldn't feel.

"Oh....... I think I'm on to something......."

Obviously, your first shave won't be a comfortable one, and it's not a razor.

So it was bound to be sloppy.

Soon, as Sandy, who was so close to the man's face that she could practically touch him, was shaving his chin and nape, she realized something was wrong.

"......Hmm?"

I realized there was something around the man's neck, something hidden by his clothes.

A ring with a small silvery chain attached to it.

In the center of it all, a necklace with a crimson gemstone.

I could tell even by looking at it that it wasn't just a gem. It wasn't just a crimson color, but the crimson color was swirling around in the gem, as if it were a vortex.

"Uncle....... What is this......?"

Sandy was about to reach for the necklace out of curiosity.

-Tak!

"Bam!"

The man, who until now had been as slow as a turtle, grabbed Sandy's wrist roughly.

The man's blurry eyes found focus.

Then, precisely, look Sandy in the eye.

"Don't touch it."

At that strong, almost imperative warning, Sandy nodded dumbly.

"Ugh, ugh....... Yeah."

Even Sandy, a do-or-die kind of girl, couldn't help but nod her head in agreement at the gravity of the man's words.

The man hides the exposed crimson jeweled necklace back into his clothes.

Sandy feels awkward and starts to shave the man's beard, who is now speechless again.

Of course, I was still clumsy.

"Hey, what are you doing!"

"Ack! Surprise!"

He even held a knife to a man's throat, and when a villager misunderstood it to mean something else and cried out in fright, Sandy teased the knife the wrong way and still managed to cut the man's cheek.

"Uh, uh, uh, ah, mister. Sorry......."

"......."

"Auntie, you scared me!"

"Sandy, what are you doing dangerously, can you stop?"

Even though his cheek was cut and starting to bleed, the man didn't seem to feel anything, just stared off into space with cloudy eyes.

In the end, Sandy had to go to the trouble of calling in the old woman from the village to sanitize the bum's cheeks and apply a cotton bandage.

I also took a knife to my overly scattered and unruly long hair and gave it a bit of a makeover.

"Um......."

Sandy stares at the roughly shaved, groomed man.

"...... is your brother, not your uncle?"

Intrigued, Sandy stares at the man's face.

But here's the kicker.

The man who was sensitive to the necklace, even though he hadn't touched it, is grave despite the wounds on his body.

What the heck is that necklace?

Sandy couldn't help but wonder even more.

A man who has nothing wears a necklace that looks mysterious and precious, even when he doesn't.

"Is that necklace of yours some kind of great treasure or something?"

In response to Sandy's question, the man's eyes slowly move to look at Sandy.

"......No."

I don't pretend I didn't hear it.

"Never, ever."

The man leans back against the wooden wall of the barn, his eyes closed.

"But, more than anything else in the world, ....... than anything else in the world."

It was the longest answer Sandy had ever heard from a man.

The most important thing in the world.

But not the treasure.

Sandy couldn't understand the man's words.

If it's important, is it not a treasure?

If it's not a treasure, why is it the most important thing in the world?

Sandy laughs bashfully.

With an evil grin.

"Why does someone like you have the most important thing in the world?"

How could a bum lying on the street, dying, have such a thing?

Sandy, who's been taking care of the bum all this time, deserves that evil joke.

At Sandy's words, the man looks up at the sky in confusion.

"...... Even I don't know that."

Sure enough, the man had a faint bitter smile on his face.

I'm taking care of him, but he's really weird.

Thinking about it, Sandy gently stroked the man's hair, which looked a little sad.

\* \* \*

-shootaaaaa

The day it rained so hard it felt like the world was drowning.

There was a nasty, nasty fight that no one saw.

'For an old monster like this, I suppose this is a fitting end.......'

The last monster to be pierced through the heart by the golden spear was rather pleased.

'In the only era where all five holy symbols appeared, the last one pierced his heart and killed him....... What an undeserved ending.......'

Ludwig watched, wide-eyed, as the last monster was slain, seemingly happy to be dead.

Dying.

The old monster broke open his chest and pulled something out of it.

The old monster was laughing.

'O boy.......'

"If you really want to be a hero, you have to.......

'You'll need to take this.......'

'This, if left alone, would destroy the world.......'

'If you carry it, it will destroy you and you alone.

'As long as you are not destroyed, as long as you endure, the world will be at peace.'

"The Holy Grail of Courage.

"A holy object that gives you the power to defeat anything.

"You will give me the strength to endure this.

'Never, never will I give you the power to surpass it.......'

'Perhaps a lifetime of carrying this.......'

'That is the honor you should bear.'

'It would be doomed.

"Maybe, you know.

'See if you can find a way to extinguish this once and for all.......'

"But that day will probably never come.

'Master of the last holy relic.

"Apostle of Courage.

'You won, but.......'

'Having triumphed, to bear eternal ruin.......'

"To carry the burden of someone else's sins, sins you didn't commit, for the rest of your life.

'That must be your destiny.......'

'And, no one will remember you.......'

'How is this.'

"I'm thrilled.

"Glorious.

'Is this a disastrous ending.......'

The last monster laughed, as if greatly satisfied, and disappeared, dissolving into the raindrops.

The crimson jewel it left where it died, he couldn't help but take, not knowing what it was.

The moment he held it, the man had a hunch.

That it is your destiny to carry this with you for the rest of your life.

You won, but.

I knew there was a price to pay for victory.

And so on.

Every day was hell for a man.

Episode 700.

When the man woke up from his dream, it was already daylight.

Just carry it.

I have yet to live the rest of my life, only five years.

Something that doesn't fall apart.

A man whose life's work has been to keep himself from falling down, lives an uneventful life, on a final mission to keep himself from falling down.

Without knowing where to go.

Without even getting anywhere.

You're constantly walking down a path where you don't know if you're running away or moving forward.

An eternal wanderer, wandering in search of that which cannot be found.

The role of the fourth apostle, and the owner of the last holy relic, is that.

Everything is fading, but the fire hasn't gone out yet.

It can burn until it's extinguished.

Holding the most important thing in the world, but also the most dangerous thing in the world.

without letting anyone know I had it.

I walk, and sometimes I stop.

The man stares up at the sky.

In the midst of so much clamor, and with ears that are now barely audible.

Be still as if you were trying to hear the world.

How long has it been since then.

-Mr.

I always see a little girl running up to me, bright, bubbly, and sweet.

I wonder how many days I've been in this nameless town.

I couldn't quite remember.

However.

A town with a cute, adorable, sweet, and spunky girl.

It's time to leave.

"Special for today, I also brought sausages."

The man shakes his head as he watches the girl with the sausage sandwiched between her buns.

"Sandy."

"......?"

Since coming to this village, this is the first time the man has called the girl's name.

The dying man's eyes come back to focus, and he rises to his feet, his whole body rejuvenated.

The guy who was always sitting on the sidelines was always at eye level with the girl.

However, the eye level of the man and the girl who got up is very different.

As she straightens her hunched back, she looks up at him with her mouth hanging open, wondering if he's really that tall.

To Sandy, it was as if the man had become a different person altogether.

The man looks down at the girl and says

"Tell the villagers."

"Deliver......? What?"

What does that mean.

"No matter what, don't leave the house until the sun goes down."

Men are strange things.

Sandy knows he's a weirdo.

But, really.

He's a really weird guy.

Sandy had no idea.

The man starts to walk somewhere still.

To the man's almost distant ears, the sound of horses' hooves was coming from somewhere.

\* \* \*

Sandy didn't know what the man meant when he said that.

But, somehow, it seemed serious.

Sandy was screaming everywhere, just as she had been the day before, that she needed to save the fallen man.

Sandy didn't say, "Don't let the bum come out of the house," out of the blue.

That's just weird, and no one will believe it.

So Sandy got crafty.

A monster has appeared near your village.

Don't leave the house.

I screamed at the top of my lungs.

The good news is that little Sandy, who is known as the tomboy of the neighborhood, has never toyed with monsters.

The story of the monster had people shaking in fear and walking with their doors closed.

Some people asked Sandy what kind of monster had appeared. Sandy said she wasn't sure, but that it was a very ugly, scary-looking monster, and that they needed to be quiet until it passed.

However, Sandy's mother and father thought she was up to something else.

So the moment I vowed to myself that this time I'd really beat the crap out of it.

-doo doo doo doo doo!

In the distance, an unrecognizable roar began to sound.

I don't know if it's a monster or what.

Realizing that something was really wrong, Sandy's parents grabbed her and hid inside the house.

The villagers didn't know what was happening specifically.

However, the noise was getting louder and closer to the village.

Closer, closer, closer.

From the moment you think something has arrived in town.

-hhhhhhhhhhh!

The sound of a horse dying.

-quack!

-What the fuck is that asshole......!

The sound of a person dying.

Everyone's ears were wet with blood.

\* \* \*

When the screaming subsided, Marley was the first to run outside, past the parents, and of course, Sandy.

It was already night.

Frantically running to the place where she had heard the screams and death, Sandy found herself at the mouth of the village, where night had already fallen.

Dead horse.

Dead people.

And the scattered armorers.

Meanwhile, a one-armed man stands, bathed in pale moonlight.

The golden spear in his left arm.

A man who didn't seem to have the strength to break a twig had killed dozens of horsemen.

"Uncle......?"

Even for the most hardy of hearts, Sandy couldn't help but swoon at the sight.

At Sandy's call, the golden spear in the man's left hand vanished like a mirage, as if it had never been there in the first place.

A man slowly approaches Sandy, who is crouched and shaking.

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

Then, carefully, he squats down to be eye level with Sandy.

Maintaining eye contact with a terrified Sandy, the man says, "I'm sorry.

"Bandits."

"......."

"I saw a village further west of here plundered by them, and then they killed everyone in it, young and old alike."

"......."

"I wasn't going to bother. The bandits' business....... is none of my business."

You can't care about everything in the world.

But the man stayed in the village.

Even if people notice.

Sometimes you get a pass.

Without saying anything.

I sat in the corner of the barn, waiting for something.

It's not because the man can't see the bandits with his eyes open.

"Sandy."

"There is no such thing as goodness....... originally, no price is given."

"Just because you're good, just because you're good."

"It doesn't make me happy, and it doesn't reward me."

"That's why they're more likely to suffer."

The man puts his hand on Sandy's head.

Just as Sandy sometimes did when she felt sorry for the man.

A hand that looked like it belonged to a dead man.

Was it warm.

Sandy stares at the man blankly.

"But sometimes it was good."

"Good boy."

"There should be a reward for that alone."

"Although it doesn't always pay off."

"When you live like that, you've got to have some good things happen once in a while."

"That way, people will affirm the good, even just a little bit."

"For saving a dirty beggar who was lying on the street, dying."

"The beggar defeated all the bandits who tried to raid the village, like......."

"It can't hurt to have such an unbelievable story."

People you can ignore.

Someone you don't mind letting die.

The girl who screamed all over the neighborhood because she couldn't bear to leave him behind.

And the quirky girl who took care of the beggar to the fullest.

Take care of their meals.

Wash.

Shave his beard.

The girl who could talk.

It was a reward for her goodness.

The man was not interested in bandits.

But the girl had done him a favor, and he had no choice but to repay her with what he could.

He knew the bandits were coming, so he stood guard at the barn, undaunted by the stares from the villagers.

After all, the villagers were good.

I might have given him a look, but I didn't chase him away with a stick.

The heart of this town, the heart that can't help itself.

And Sandy's brutal but kind line.

To repay him, the beggar stayed in the barn for a long time, unnoticed.

"Sandy......."

"I'm sorry."

"Oh no, I've made you see a horrible sight......."

"That's why I told you not to come out......."

But it was inevitable that the girl would witness this.

The man carefully places his hand on Sandy's cheek.

"Thank you."

"You don't have to be this way, you don't have to be this good."

"But your line....... made me feel joy, for the first time in a very long time......."

"I want you to know."

After stroking his cheek a few times, the man slowly gets up.

Sandy still doesn't know what happened.

I don't even know who the man is.

However.

Because Sandy saved someone.

Through someone's death.

The village has been saved.

Turning to the wanderer's back, who is about to leave without a word, the girl says.

"Uncle."

At the girl's call, the man stops.

"Where are you....... are you going?"

At the girl's vague question, the man doesn't turn around.

Clearly, the man was looking for something.

You don't know where that is, so you're just wandering aimlessly.

"Where there is eternal rest."

Just walking away.

To the most important, saddest beings in the world.

To find a land that will give me eternal rest.

The eternal wanderer has left.

\* \* \*

The eternal wanderer walks aimlessly in search of a land of rest.

You don't know where it is, or if it even exists.

In front of the man who left the mouth of the village and started walking randomly.

There were two inyoung under the moonlight.

One was standing, the other was perched on the ledge of a rock.

The man stood still, halting in front of the figure.

"It's been a while, Ludwig."

A face in a blurry field of vision.

Distant voices.

Ludwig remembered the look and the voice.

That hair, red even in the moonlight.

"Scal......let?"

A dear friend was waiting for him in the moonlight.

And behind it.

A being with a pair of horns was staring at him, a being he couldn't help but recognize.

"It's been a while."

Ruler of the continent.

Demon.

"Reinhardt......."

A being with a name that could be heard everywhere sat on a rocky ledge, watching Ludwig.

"......What is it for?"

Naturally, we see a golden spear in Ludwig's left hand.

"......is that Alixion?"

"......."

"Loosen up, you think I'm here to fight?"

The emperor raised his arms as if he had no intention of hostility.

How you found me.

Ludwig wondered about that, but it might not mean anything.

Your opponent is the ruler of the continent.

What you look for, you will find at some point.

If you spread your chain of serendipity wide enough to catch it, you'll eventually find what you're looking for.

Eventually, Ludwig was caught in the chain.

"After all, it was you, wasn't it?"

The Devil says, still.

He was staring at the necklace, which was hidden by Ludwig's clothes, to be precise.

"......."

Ludwig said nothing.

But he didn't need to hear the answer, he already knew everything.

"You saved my life, you may not be alive, but why did you disappear?"

"I didn't save ...... because I thought they were right."

At Ludwig's words, Reinhardt sighed.

"Yeah, well, you saved my life, so if you screw up, come back for it."

You said that since I'm alive because of you, you have the right to take my life.

Reinhardt adds.

"By the way, is that tolerable?"

At Reinhard's words, Ludwig looks at the Emperor with a stony expression.

Tolerable.

I hadn't thought of that.

Every moment is hell, but you just don't get knocked down.

"I think I should take that one."

"......."

"There's no reason you should have it."

"......."

"No matter how much I think about it, it's mine to keep."

Someone has to keep carrying the soul stone that would be a disaster if left alone.

Ludwig continues to fight this in real time.

It's the world's heaviest burden.

Ludwig bears the sins of others.

So the emperor's point about me carrying the burden rather than you makes sense.

"I can't let you have one of these, after you've cost me my life for nothing."

We didn't save the emperor because he was right.

But you can't make the emperor carry the burden.

As if he knew Ludwig would say something like that.

"So you're just going to spend the rest of your life looking like a bounce back and then die?"

"It's none of your business."

"Why don't you at least put this life behind you? It's not hard to make yourself comfortable, and if you're not going to give that up, I want you to realize how important you are."

You don't have to be a wanderer.

In fact, it wasn't that long ago that I almost fell down on the street and died.

At the Emperor's suggestion to make life easier, Ludwig shakes his head.

"I need to find it."

"......."

"These are not monsters....... They're just sad beings who had no choice but to become monsters."

"......."

"So, I have an obligation to find a way to give them rest, and it's up to me to do it."

It's not a burden to be eradicated or someone else's to bear.

It's just a bunch of miserable statues that can't find rest.

We need to find a way to give them a rest.

That's why Ludwig is looking for a place he doesn't even know is there.

Scarlett looks at Ludwig with a sad, obsessive look on her face.

The Emperor is still, staring at Ludwig.

"You're still stubborn as ever."

The Emperor had guessed that Ludwig would refuse all of his offers.

"Then let me make a suggestion."

"I don't intend to receive anything."

"Are you going to look up 'the end of the world'?"

"......what?"

The end of the world.

Ludwig's eyes widened at the out-of-the-blue comment.

I wasn't going to take anything for nothing, but this was an unexpected offer.

"I'm trying to figure out where the hell this world starts and where it ends."

"This continent we're on may or may not be the only one."

"So that's why I've been preparing the fleet for a long, long time, just to find out."

"We'll be sailing soon."

"Maybe not."

"I might have just the thing you're looking for."

"Divinity and magic. And superpowers."

"Maybe there's another force beyond that, and maybe it can do the impossible."

The Land of Rest.

Is there such a thing.

Could there be another world beyond the continent?

Now ruler of the continent, the Demon King wants to find out if there are other worlds beyond his own.

Margins of the story.

For there may be something in the margins of the ocean beyond this continent, just as there always has been.

Try to find it.

Ludwig stares at the demon in silence.

Not waiting for an answer, the demon pulls something out of his arms.

It was a magic scroll.

"To go, use this."

The idea of a teleportation scroll that takes you to a designated location was one that even Ludwig couldn't quite grasp.

The demon stares at Ludwig.

"We're not happy to see each other, so I'm leaving."

Again, they're not the kind of people you'd want to have a long conversation with.

"And if you can't handle it, you can leave it with me. I'm not asking for it forever, but I can keep it for a few months, and then if you fall apart, I'll lose it. You know?"

"......I'll give you something to think about."

I had a purpose.

Ludwig received three offers and turned down two.

"Finally......."

The Devil looks at Ludwig with sad eyes.

"I'm sorry. Everything."

Ludwig doesn't know why the devil is apologizing.

Shouldn't we be saying thank you?

Why do you say sorry.

But the demon said nothing more.

Scarlett looks at Ludwig with a sad expression and bows her head.

-Flash!

With a flash of teleportation, they were gone, as if they had never been here.

Ludwig stares at the scroll in his hand, dumbfounded.

End of the world.

The devil is not complacent and wants to do something.

Beyond that, there may be nothing, or there may be something.

However, beyond the known world.

There's probably another possibility there.

What you can't find on this continent, you might find in the world beyond.

It's better than just wandering around.

Ludwig didn't think long about it.

-Flash!

The scroll unfolded, and light enveloped Ludwig's body.

Then, when the light fades and you open your eyes.

Ludwig was on a hill, overlooking a huge harbor.

The ships were encamped.

It's a fleet of ships headed for the edge of the world, where we don't know how far.

So it had to be on a scale that had never been done before.

In the midst of all the big ships, Ludwig saw mermaids coming and going in the sea.

And, behold.

Friendly faces.

A face you never thought you'd see again.

"...... You're here, Ludwig."

Disappeared Shaman.

"Detto......Morian?"

Detomorian was there.

A shaman who didn't always know what he knew and where he knew it.

Heading in an unknown direction, not knowing where he was going, not knowing what he was looking for, not knowing what powers awaited him. Naturally, a being who wielded powers beyond the world's understanding would have to pave the way.

"To the other side of the world."

The Dettomorian will go with Ludwig, beyond the borders of the unknown.

"Let's go together."

Ludwig is overwhelmed by the expanse of the Great Sea and the abyss beyond.

I was looking out at a huge fleet of ships that would sail in the direction of dawn and dusk.

Episode 701.

Epilogue - Spring Palace

At some point, a cat started living in the palace.

A cat with fur as white as snow.

The reason it was known as the cat of the palace, rather than the emperor's cat, was that there was no one in the palace who claimed to own it.

You don't have a maid to take care of your cat, you're not exactly an emperor or empress, and you don't have someone feeding you.

There's no set place for it to appear.

One day it was yawning on the Emperor's lap, another in the arms of an Archmage on a palace walk, another dozing at a desk in the Regent's study, and still another, somehow, atop a chandelier in the main hall of the Tetra of the Central Palace.

They were even found not in the central palace, but somewhere in the seasonal palaces, including the Palace of Spring.

So it's a cat with an entire palace as its home.

It's a pretty privileged cat to be able to climb into the emperor's lap at any time, but when we get to the question of whether the emperor actually owns the cat, things get murky. The emperor hasn't given any specific orders about the cat's care.

And crucially, they were fairly rare to grow.

It's clear that he lives in the palace, but he's been seen for days, and sometimes for months, without anyone finding him.

The imperial palace is very large, so no one looks for it, assuming it's somewhere in the palace.

Eventually, they'll show up every few months, or even once a year.

And emperors and empresses don't look for cats when they're missing.

That's why it's known as a palace cat, not a cat owned by the emperor.

The only wild beast in the palace that can disappear and reappear at will.

It's a specialty of the palace, sure, but it's not a particularly important beast, and time has passed.

During that time, the empire has had a few tilts.

One of the empresses had a child, and she gave birth.

Time passed, as did events.

Over time, the famous cat was forgotten.

The cat hadn't been seen in almost four years.

There was talk of the cat dying somewhere in the palace, or getting stuck between buildings or on a rooftop somewhere, but no one looked for it because the emperor or empress hadn't told them to look for it.

But then, just as suddenly as it had disappeared, the cat reappeared.

The cat, who was gradually being forgotten, began to stroll through the palace unharmed, looking exactly as people remembered him.

Then, around the same time, the Emperor did the bizarre thing of bringing in an illegitimate child from somewhere. The imperial court was briefly up in arms, but the Archmage graciously accepted the child without much fuss.

It's been a while since that happened, and a while since then.

"......Princilla, didn't I tell you that once or twice?"

"Yes......."

2The princess was being scolded.

And directly to her mother, the Empress, the Archmage.

But even as she scolded Priscilla, Akmeiji couldn't help but look at the child sitting next to her.

The Archmage's expression grew more troubled as he watched.

She had snow-white skin, clear eyes, and shiny black hair in a tight braid.

His face was like porcelain, painstakingly molded by a master.

Add to that a cute dress with ruffles, and it's almost unbearable to not want to hug her.

But Empress Herriot composes herself.

"What's wrong with you, I've told you many times that Rune doesn't like this."

"But......."

2The princess, Priscilla, pouts.

Of all the Emperor's children, the Second Empress is said to have inherited the Emperor's unruly and maliciously stubborn personality the most.

We all prayed that they wouldn't be alike in that regard, but they were.

It's become a bit like a dog's tailgate where you have to do what you want to do.

"I'm not doing anything wrong."

"What......?"

"What did I do wrong?"

2Princess Priscilla.

Eventually, he points to his brother, who sits there as if he's missing a soul in the face of his mother's scolding.

"What's wrong with such a cute rune on a boy theme?"

"......!"

The Empress bit her tongue at the outlandishness of it all.

Emperor Lun simply sat there, as if he was used to his sister's tirades.

Eventually, Priscilla was caught by her mother and forced to listen to three hours of nagging.

\* \* \*

Past.

Ellen, who hadn't been heard from in four years and didn't know where she was or what she was doing, gave the child to the Emperor.

I hadn't heard from him for a while because he was back in his hometown of Rizaira.

The emperor knew at once why he had returned and why he hadn't been heard from.

After a long time of reunions and stories, the Emperor returned to the palace.

"...... is Ellen's baby, and of course it's mine.

Akmeiji was surprised by the child's unexpected arrival and couldn't take his eyes off her.

A child, slightly frightened, cowering, clutching the emperor's pants, face down.

It was so adorable, I wanted to hug it right then and there.

'I can't believe....... gave birth to such a beautiful daughter and hid it all this time?

'......No.'

"......? Did you know that?

'I didn't realize....... Not that.......'

"Not that, but what?

'Is your daughter....... No.'

'????'

Suddenly, the empress understood why the emperor had that look on his face.

It was around this time that the white cat began to reappear in the palace.

\* \* \*

It had been three years since the four-year-old prince came to the palace.

As Empress and Archmage, Herriet accepted Rune, the bastard child of the Emperor, as her own son.

This was partly because she had the most experience with childcare in the imperial family, and partly because she wanted it so badly.

But the problem was the second princess.

We all thought there might be a problem because she didn't like her brother or was jealous of his sudden appearance, but it was quite the opposite.

I liked it so much, it was a problem.

It's just that they're very weird in the way they like it.

She tried to dress up in girl's clothes at every opportunity, and tried not to fall off all day.

Just as Priscilla took on the emperor's eccentricities, Prince Rune took his mother's reticence a little too far.

It's clear that she dislikes Priscilla's behavior, but she doesn't express it strongly enough, so she ends up letting Priscilla get away with it.

So if the people in the palace looked away for a moment, they'd see the princess dragging the prince around, turning him into a little girl who just wanted to be held.

"......."

Scolded and told to stay away from Rune for the rest of the day, Princilla walked through the halls of the Palace of Spring with her horns raised.

Priscilla is in a bad mood.

I have to go to the temple tomorrow, which is a Monday, so the only time I can play with Rune, who is still young and not going to the temple, is today, which is a Sunday.

I'm sure my mother will be at Rune's side all day today, so I'll be sure to keep my glow on tight.

In the midst of all this, a high-pitched, shrill voice bursts into Priscilla's ear.

"From the looks of it, you've been up to your pervy ass again, and you've been punished by a witch."

A little taller than Priscilla.

And a beautiful face with gorgeous platinum hair.

But far from being beautiful, it's an irritating sneer.

Priscilla's expression is filled with irritation.

"What are you again."

"I told you not to say 'you', you want to get stuck with the witch again?"

Amelia, daughter of the Holy Father and First Empress, was there.

Amelia was laughing at Priscilla, who was clearly upset.

"You're the one who told my mom not to call me a witch."

"If you call a witch a witch, what do you call her?"

If Priscilla's favorite thing in the world is Rune, her least favorite thing in the world is Amelia, the pretty-faced, mean-spirited villainess in front of her.

"Why is my mom a witch, you stoned bitch!"

"What......? degrees, stones, and years?"

"Yes, you stony-faced bitch!"

At such a young age, Priscilla's foul-mouthedness was a result of her many arguments with Amelia.

The maids who come and go from the palace don't bother to stop him.

It's common knowledge in this palace that when Princess and Rune get together, there's always a game of dress-up, and when Princess and Amelia meet, there's always a fight.

Here we go again.......

and it passes with a heavy sigh.

But just because it's a child's game doesn't mean it's not polite.

Amelia, pissed off at being called a bitch, throws up her arms.

She is the daughter of Shenghu.

I inherited all of that good looks and, of course, that ridiculous combat talent.

"You, you rummaged."

Amelia lunges, and Priscilla claws at her.

-Bam!

"Yuck! Will you let go?!"

"Do you want to let go?"

Amelia, holding Priscilla's head roughly, begins to squeeze her.

If we move on to fisticuffs, Priscilla is no match for her.

But that doesn't mean you lose.

I know that if I admit defeat, my squeaky-clean face will always be met with another round of sneers and arrogance, which will only piss me off more.

"Ow! Let go, let go, you crazy bitch!"

"Call her sister. Call her sister. Call her sister, you cheap bitch."

"Do it!"

"Then search."

-quack!

"Aaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

The maids sigh and pass by as they watch the daughters of the most honored man on the continent behave like a bunch of municipal sluts.

It's become so commonplace that it's almost unheard of.

-Stop! I can't stop!

Eventually, Amelia releases her grip on Princilla's hair only when an Archmage comes running out into the hallway, having heard the commotion.

"Mommy, he did it again! He hit me again!"

Priscilla shouts, ducking behind the Empress, and Amelia's face contorts even further.

However, Harriet was biting her lip and looking at Amelia with a sad expression on her face.

"Amelia....... You always tell me to be nice."

"......."

Amelia's face only contorts further at the Empress's sternness.

"And that thing called my mom a witch again!"

"Be quiet, Priscilla."

One of the biggest reasons Priscilla hates Amelia.

She's been acting out and calling her mother a witch, and her mother hasn't reprimanded her once.

I can't figure out why.

Instead of being angry, he looks sad whenever he sees Amelia.

I don't know why, but it almost feels like they're apologizing.

"Heh......!"

Amelia eventually bit her lip and turned away with those words.

When I think about the bullying Amelia has been subjected to since she was a child, I can't stop thinking about it.

So when Priscilla sees Amelia, she almost has a seizure because she's been bullied relentlessly for no apparent reason.

From a very young age, she was pinched and hit for no reason, and when she had an accident, she would blame it on Priscilla.

You can't always get away with it, so it's time to stand up and be counted.

"Princilla, can you and Amelia please....... get along?"

The mother makes eye contact with herself with a sad expression and says, "Yes.

"He does it first, even when I'm still, so how are you doing?"

"......."

True to Priscilla's word, it was Amelia who was the first to argue.

She can't help but feel frustrated and sad. And now, after all this time, she's starting to feel the same way Amelia did.

She was the older sister who always picked on her for no reason.

And I don't know if it's just her, but she calls her mother a witch and shows her dislike for her.

I don't know if it's because I take after my mother, Shenghu.

Someday.

Priscilla watched from afar.

In the back of the palace gardens in the spring, where no one can see her, Amelia sobs in her mother's arms.

Even then, obviously.

She was holding Amelia, who was sobbing softly, just as she was now, with a sad expression on her face.

What's wrong with Amelia, and why is her mother so hard on her when she's so easygoing.

Priscilla had no idea.

\* \* \*

There are two ways to keep Priscilla from bothering your runes.

Someone is always at Rune's side.

Or that there's always someone by Priscilla's side.

Akmeiji went for a walk to calm a very upset Princilla, and naturally, the First Prince Rune was free.

There are four of them in the Palace of Spring, which has become the home of the Archmage.

Empress Herriot, owner of the palace and Archmage.

And all the emperor's children.

Amelia, who is not in the Holy Empire because of the Temple, is in the Zodiac, and Rune, who has become Herriot's son, is in the Palace of Spring.

That's why the Palace of Spring is so noisy every day.

1Prince Rune had no second sister, so he sat at a table in the teatime hall of a peaceful palace.

I'm not exactly a tea drinker.

-Angel

Instead, he was face-to-face with a white cat sitting on a table, and he was stroking the cat's back.

A kitten as white as snow.

The cat stood in the sunlight, eyes closed, tail wagging lazily.

And Rune was idly petting the cat.

Since the reappearance of the missing white cat, it has often been in the presence of a rune that appeared around the same time.

1Emperor Lun had such a cat with him all the time.

As if they were family.

-hmm.......

In the midst of this relaxing time, Rune slowly turns his head at the sound of a voice behind him.

1Princess Amelia crossed her arms and stared at the runes.

"Well. Kid."

Turning to the subject she'd been staring at first, Amelia returned Rune's gaze bluntly.

"......."

Rune shakes his head wordlessly in response and turns his attention back to the cat.

Amelia and Priscilla get into all sorts of mischief, and Priscilla wears runes and does all sorts of weird things.

Amelia didn't really bother with the 1st Prince rune.

That said, I didn't wear runes like Priscilla.

Amelia acts like she doesn't really care that much about the 1st Emperor rune. It's more like she's playing chicken with it.

Act as if you don't like it or dislike it.

But Amelia approaches Rune, who is distracted by the cat, and sits down in front of him.

Then he looks around.

Like you want to check if a person is present or not.

Let's make sure no one is coming or going. Amelia remains still and holds Rune's hand.

"......?"

"Come here."

Amelia still has Rune sitting on her lap, hugging her tightly.

"......."

"Be a good boy....... Yeah."

And then it says nothing.

As if this is a good thing.

With a faint smile.

Rune strokes the cat, still in her arms, as if she's used to it.

I don't really talk to them, and I don't have conversations with them.

Amelia is not very expressive, but she is very fond of the first prince.

It's just clumsily worded.

The first emperor was a man of few words to begin with.

1Virgin who doesn't quite know how to like something.

Princilla doesn't even let Amelia get close to Rune.

Partly because she's afraid they'll bully her like they did to her, and partly because she's trying to protect Rune. And Amelia doesn't even try to take Rune from her. If she gets too close, she blocks it, as if she's trying to protect it.

He won't let Rune see what he's done to her, and he snarls at Amelia whenever she passes near him.

I don't want to see that, so I don't go near the runes when Priscilla is around.

There's no way in hell I'm going to bother my sweet, adorable little guy.

But when she's not with the demented Second Empress, Amelia has her own way of showing affection for her youngest sister.

Amelia smiled happily as she hugged Rune, while the white cat watched, tail wagging.

With that, Amelia, who had been holding Rune in her arms, felt a tug and carefully pulled him out of her arms.

I don't know why anyone would watch this, but I'm so embarrassed.

It's a bit of a chicken and egg situation.

Amelia's expression hardened when she saw who had just entered the tea room.

"Amelia."

"서....... 성후님......."

Amelia's mother.

Holy Empress Olivia, Master of the Holy Empire.

Dressed in her posthumous priestly robes, she now exuded an air of divine authority.

Princess and Archmage are also very similar, but Amelia and Olivia really do look alike.

"Can I talk to you?"

"It's ......."

Amelia hesitantly followed her mother's call, walking slowly behind her.

That step was somehow very heavy.

"......."

And Rune stood still, watching Amelia's steps as she walked away as if she were being dragged.

"Y'all....... Can't we all just get along?"

-Angel

As Rune muttered to himself, the white cat wagged its tail.

Episode 702.

Empress Herriot was walking through the Imperial Palace after leaving the Palace of Spring with Priscilla.

Sure, Priscilla's polarizing, but the root cause is Amelia's relentless bullying from a very young age.

"It's weird in the first place, if you hate your mom and me so much, why don't you just go live with your mom in the Temple dorms or in the Holy Empire?"

In the words of Priscilla.

It's Amelia's choice to stay at the Palace of Spring, despite always saying she doesn't like the way she looks.

If you don't want to be seen, there are plenty of ways to stay out of sight.

Therefore, the Princess can only assume that Amelia is staying at the Palace of Spring to torment her, nothing more, nothing less.

As his daughter grumbles, Akmeiji stares off into the distance.

"Priscilla."

"Why."

"When Rune first came, do you remember?"

"......Yes."

Empress Rune is the daughter of an Archmage, but is actually an illegitimate child taken in by the Emperor.

But Akmeiji accepted the rune without question or debate.

At the time, Priscilla was seven years old.

"I'm glad Priscilla thinks Rune is cute, but didn't you ever feel sorry for him?"

"......."

While Priscilla was surprised by her sudden sibling, she was also very affectionate from the start.

Because it was too adorable to hate.

But I don't know that I've ever been truly sorry.

Seeing her mother always following Lun, taking care of him, watching over him, taking care of him.

Can you really say you've never felt like something was off?

"......I think it was a little bit."

"How?"

Priscilla stares up at her mother.

Something you don't want to admit, but can't help but recognize.

Something like sorrow.

"Something....... mom, like she was taken away from me."

"I see."

Empress Herriot smiles faintly and gently strokes her daughter's hair.

"But thanks for putting up with me so far."

Priscilla blushes at the sudden compliment.

"......But what does that have to do with Amelia?"

She's jealous of Rune and wonders what the horse has to do with Amelia. Priscilla pouts, and Harriet kneels down carefully to be eye level with her.

"You know, His Holiness. When I had Amelia, I was so busy and had so much to do, I couldn't raise her."

"......."

"So my mom raised her for a while."

Only then did Priscilla's eyes widen as she realized what her mother was talking about.

With the rise of the Holy Empire, Olivia had a lot on her plate.

Not only did she feel threatened for her life, but she was unable to raise her child properly.

That's why Herriot raised Amelia in the safest palace in the Holy Empire, not in the Great Hall.

"So Amelia actually has two moms, the Holy Father and this one."

"......."

"When Amelia turned three, she had you."

Herriot strokes Priscilla's cheek sadly.

"And after she gave birth to you....... the Holy Father was free and took Amelia to the Holy Empire."

Priscilla felt a pit in her stomach as she saw her mother look very sad, as if she was thinking about that time.

"It's not Priscilla's fault, but Amelia is....... I'm sure she felt like Priscilla took her mom away from her."

Olivia wanted to be with the daughter she couldn't raise in her arms.

Herriot hasn't been able to take Priscilla out of her arms since she gave birth.

But for Amelia, she is suddenly separated from the mother who raised her.

So Priscilla has been robbed of her mother, or so she thinks.

Amelia had been bullying Priscilla for as long as she could remember.

It's not her fault, but you can't help but resent her.

She was young, and she's still young enough.

I can't let go of that resentment.

"Then why do you call your mom a witch?"

"It's not because you hate me, it's because you love....... because I love it so much."

Because if you do, they'll look at you.

Because you care.

For the first time in her life, Princilla understood why Amelia had been crying herself to sleep in the arms of her mother, whom she pretended to hate so much.

"So the things Amelia says about her mom, don't read too much into it. Amelia doesn't hate her mom."

Eventually, we learn why Amelia is staying at the Palace of Spring.

I can't help but wonder why he doesn't live in the Holy Empire, or why he stays in the Palace of Spring instead of the Temple Dormitories.

You don't want to fall off.

"I don't know, even if I wanted to be nice, you're the first one, so I don't know what to do."

"......."

Knowing why you hate something doesn't mean you can fix it.

As such, Herriot could only smile sadly.

"And then there's my mom, who fights every time she sees you."

Herriot's face contorted grotesquely at Princilla's pointed remark.

In practice.

Even if you respect each other when you're not together, you're still going to get into a fight.

They don't go as far as Amelia and Priscilla, but they inherit the same relationships.

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

"You can't even get along with your mom, and you're telling us to get along?"

"Uh, I'll try to get along with my mom, and I'll try to get along with ......, and I want to get along with you, but you always come off like that!"

"That's what I just said, but you said to be nice."

"yi......."

"How are you going to get along with Shenghu, does your mom know?"

Harriet's face turns bright red and she begins to shake.

"You're so much like my dad, you don't say a word!"

"What!"

Eventually, my mother, like my daughter, exploded with a bang.

\* \* \*

Same time.

Empress Olivia took her daughter and sat side by side in the palace garden in the springtime.

"How are you doing, are you okay?"

"It's ......."

Amelia sits at her mother's side, fidgeting. Olivia stares at her daughter, unable to keep still.

"Still fighting?"

It should be obvious who we're talking about.

"That's....... He first......."

"...... is it?"

"......."

Sung-hoo asks her if she knows what she's doing, and Amelia hangs her head in shame.

"Why do you hate Priscilla so much?"

"......."

Amelia can't answer.

But you already know that without me telling you.

Why I hate it so much.

But he can't blame her because he knows it's his fault he wasn't there when she needed him the most.

In fact, back in the Holy Empire, Amelia cried every day.

I want to see my mom.

Take me to my mom.

So, reluctantly, the Emperor took Amelia to visit the Palace of Spring from time to time.

And that's exactly what happens.

I don't want to go back to the Holy Empire.

Empress Herriot, cradling her infant daughter, is at a loss for words, and Olivia is devastated.

After so many unwanted separations, Amelia came to believe that Priscilla was the cause of everything.

I'm beginning to believe that if it weren't for Priscilla, none of this would have happened.

"She's part of your family, you can't treat her badly, but you can't bully her either."

"...... He's not my family."

"......."

"He's like my father, why is he my family?"

"Yeah. I see that's what you think......."

Olivia laughs bitterly at Amelia's comment.

I don't even consider them family.

No, you're envious of Priscilla.

Because Princilla is the Archmage's real daughter.

That's what I envy.

"Is it because I'm not your real daughter, so now that you have a real daughter, you don't like me?

'That's not it, Amelia....... It's not....... I'm sorry. I'm sorry....... But if you do this....... If I do this....... the Holy Father will be sad....... Amelia.......'

Olivia had seen her crying in Harriet's arms, and Olivia had seen her from a distance.

Olivia could only watch from a distance as Harriet freaked out.

And still.

Amelia doesn't call Olivia her mother.

As if that wasn't bad enough.

When you finally get the words out, you realize you're awkward, and your face contorts.

There was a gap that Olivia couldn't fill because she was spending so much important time away.

So even though she's a daughter, she's hard on herself, and Olivia is hard on her.

I didn't mean for this to happen, but it did.

So when my daughter said she wanted to go to the temple and live in the zodiac in the future, I reluctantly agreed.

You know you don't really want to go to the temple, you really want to stay at the Palace of Spring.

But now that she knows what happened, Amelia feels sorry and guilty for Olivia.

That's why I freeze like this when Olivia comes to visit.

They feel nothing but guilt and remorse for each other.

Olivia didn't really scold or criticize Amelia.

Olivia looks at her daughter's stony face, then smiles sadly.

"Actually, even if you had stayed with me in the Holy Empire the whole time, I don't think you'd be any better off than you are now."

"Is that ......?"

"Just, yeah."

Olivia stays still and looks up at the sky.

Due to circumstances, Olivia was forced to leave her daughter in the care of Harriet.

But I wonder if everything would have been fine if I hadn't.

Olivia still thought about it from time to time, but now it was more of a negative.

"You do realize that the Archmage is a former Grand Duchess of the Duchy of Saint-Tuan, right?"

"Ah....... Yes. I heard you come from a famous noble family......."

"And about your mother's origin?"

"......."

Amelia was unable to answer her mother's question.

It's not that I don't know.

I couldn't bring myself to say it.

"You know, my mom was an orphan."

"......."

"I was adopted by my stepfather at a young age, but he wasn't a very good person, someone who wanted to use me to do something great. I always had to live up to his expectations. I always had to be good, kind, and outstanding."

"......."

"It was like....... I felt like I was being forced to live for no reason."

Amelia doesn't know why her mother is telling her this.

"So I don't really know what a warm family is, or what a parent should do for their child."

Olivia laughs, almost childishly.

"So there's no guarantee that if you had a childhood with me, it would have been a good one. If anything, I might have been mean to you, or I might not have done what I should have done. You might have ended up hating me even more than you do now."

"I, I....... Holy Father....... I don't hate......."

"Yeah? Well, that's nice, I guess that's the best I can do for being separated?"

Uh-huh.

while doing it. Olivia smiles wryly.

Amelia is mesmerized by the look on his face.

The most difficult person in the world.

Amelia often thought that the most beautiful person in the world was her mother.

"But unlike me, who was an orphan, the Archmage was the youngest daughter of a great, great noble family."

"Good father, kind mother."

"And she had three brothers who thought she was beautiful."

"So you used to be a very bratty, cheeky, arrogant kid......."

"Well, he does know, after all."

"What makes a good parent."

"I know how a good parent acts, I know what a good mother is."

"I didn't know what it was, so I studied and researched and researched, and I ended up being clueless, and he knows."

"So she was a much better mom than I was, and Archmage was a much better mom than I was."

"That's why you've been crying for days and days about wanting to go back."

Amelia's eyes finally fill with tears at Olivia's sad words.

"Sorry......."

I know my mom didn't do anything wrong.

So, when you look back at what you've said and done, you can't help but feel guilty.

"No. That's because the Archmage cared for you and loved you, and if I was grateful, why would I blame you or him?"

"Would you have been the only one crying?"

"She cried a lot, too."

"The way she cried made me feel like I was stealing someone else's daughter."

"After all, the......."

"You mean, he loved you like his own daughter."

"He's very grateful."

"You've been so sweet to me, my daughter treats her real mom worse than anyone else, huh?"

Amelia's playfulness eventually leads to tears streaming down her face.

If I had raised it from scratch.

I've had that thought many times, but now it's ridiculous.

If I had raised him myself, not knowing what a good parent is, it would have been worse.

I've gotten to the point where I think so.

"I'm sorry, I was....... I was wrong......."

Amelia starts to cry because she realizes she's hurting her mother the most in the end, and Olivia just stares at her.

At the point where you're apologizing, you already know what's wrong.

That's enough, Olivia knows.

Speaking of someone's tears.

Than you cried.

Than the Archmage cried.

I cried more.

I don't say I cried alone where no one could see me.

Because that's not going to make anyone happy.

"I'm not judging you, Amelia."

"......."

"I don't want to say I'm sorry, and it's not like I've done anything wrong."

Olivia looks up at the sky.

"Are you thanking the Archmage?"

"......."

"You should be grateful."

"Thanks and....... have......."

You can call her names, even call her a witch, but she can't do anything about it except give you an embarrassed, sad smile.

On days when Amelia would have a meltdown, Priscilla would come over in the middle of the night without her knowing and stroke her head until she fell asleep.

Still not enough.

I'm still sad.

Amelia, who is always grumpy and even spoils her own daughter, has never truly reprimanded or criticized her.

I know I should be grateful for that alone.

It just doesn't translate into action and words.

"Akmeiji was so kind to you, even though you weren't his biological daughter, wasn't he?"

"It's ......."

"If you're right, that's why he loved you, not his family."

If Priscilla is not a family member because they share the same father, then of course Harriet is not a family member of Amelia.

It's not even really a mother.

And yet I loved her like a daughter.

"Of course, Amelia."

"......."

"You must give back to Priscilla the love you received."

Because it was loved.

Don't try to return that love to the Archmage, but rather love the Archmage's daughter like a real sister.

"Then he'll love you even more than he does now."

"......."

Then they'll love you more.

They'll be grateful and happy, not grudgingly smiling with a sad face like they always do. They'll smile because they're really happy, and they'll love you even more for it.

But in the end, you're saying something sad to yourself, and she's saying it in her own words.

Olivia hides her feelings, smiling mischievously and stroking her daughter's hair.

"I'm not asking you to love your mom, but if you want to be loved by your fake mom, I'm asking you to do that, and you're going to say no?"

Amelia steals a glance at Olivia, who asks her the same question over and over again.

I'm not forcing you to love me.

That if you want to be loved by someone who thinks you're a mom, you have to do it.

After all, she knows.

Even if they don't spend a lot of time together, she knows that her mother loves her very much.

"Sorry....... I'm sorry....... I'll do that......."

Therefore, Amelia has to force her mouth to move to speak.

"Uh, mom....... I'll do as you say."

At that, Olivia beams with satisfaction.

"Okay, this is my daughter."

"......."

Olivia gently pulls Amelia into a hug.

"By the way."

"You know what?"

"Because if you don't kill it now, it might crawl up your ass later."

"Just like who."

"So, don't be too loose."

"Because she's my sister."

"You have to treat her like a big sister, okay?"

Amelia couldn't help but blush at his smirk.

"Yes......?"

"Be nice, but if she's mean, beat her. Up and down, be sure."

I couldn't tell if he was asking me to hit him or not.

"Got it?"

"Oh, yeah......."

I know I'm a bit of a weirdo myself.

My mother seems like a really weird person.

Amelia couldn't help but think so.

Episode 703.

That evening.

Central Palace Tetra.

There was an emperor who had just returned from a long tour of the continent.

The Emperor, who had been out and about a lot lately, had left the affairs of state largely in the hands of Empress Charlotte.

On his return, the emperor gathered all his children for dinner.

No empresses, just three kids and a simple meal.

A hush falls over the dining hall.

The Prince Rune is naturally silent, and Amelia and the Princess could only stare at each other after what they had heard today.

The Emperor slices off a few pieces of steak, pops them in his mouth, and stares at the silence.

"My golden babies......."

"I see you're in a bad mood again today."

"Looks like you got your ass handed to you again."

Amelia, it's you again.

"......heng."

Amelia purses her lips at that.

The Emperor looks at the Princess's hair.

"Princilla, you've been squeezed again."

"Nah, I didn't get many......."

For some reason, when Priscilla zooms out, the Emperor's eyes widen in embarrassment.

"Wasn't it your turn to tell me you almost got your head ripped off......?"

"Well, not that much......."

The Emperor is embarrassed to see that Priscilla has somehow become the new baby girl, and Amelia is also embarrassed and glares at Priscilla.

Not that bitch.

Normally, I would have run straight to the emperor's crotch and wailed and whined.

I used to exaggerate that if I stepped on a toe, that boar bitch was going to break my foot.

But today, I'm feeling a little quiet.

The Emperor looks at Rune, who is eating a metallurgical meal, mocking his fork and knife.

The youngest of my children, the only one who doesn't get into trouble.

However, he is deeply concerned about his future.

The emperor was more worried about his quiet son than his two daughters, who were already showing signs of trouble.

A bullying disposition can be fixed in life, but it's scary to learn to steal late in life.

I feel like I'm going to crash and burn.

Literally, the too-pretty youngest son.

"......?"

Under his father's penetrating gaze, the prince looks at the emperor and shakes his head.

It's adorable, it's cute, and it drives me crazy in so many ways.

"Hah......."

The emperor, who doesn't know what to worry about, but is very worried about something, sighs to the heavens.

As he eats his own food, he cuts the meat into small pieces and feeds them to the cat in small portions.

But later is later, and the emperor looks at his two daughters.

"Anyway, my golden girls, I've called you because I have a request that I hope you'll listen to."

"...... please?"

"......What is it?"

"Even your father knows you're birds. They're your daughters, of course they're birds, I can't help it. I know you're all leaky when you're left alone, but when you're together, you're not just leaky, you're broken."

Amelia has a difficult childhood.

Because of Amelia.

Both have seriously twisted personalities.

"Maidens fighting over each other's hair, that's what happens."

"Kids grow up fighting."

"You seem to be fighting a little hard for something like that, but....... Anyway, it's okay."

"If you're in the palace, you can join. It's like, "Oh, yeah, I'm going to do that now."

"But......."

"Please. Some."

"Should we not fight in the temple......?"

"I'm not asking you to hold hands and play nice."

"Can't we just ignore each other like cows and chickens......?"

"Why do I keep hearing about you guys bumping into each other every few days and fighting in the temple when the school year is on a different topic?"

"It's been rumored beyond the Temple and across the zodiac that you two don't get along enough to fight over hair."

"1Rumor has it that Empress Amelia is a madwoman who beats her brother like a rat."

"2Rumor has it that the princess princess is a foul-mouthed brat who talks smack to her sister."

"It's now crossing the ecliptic and spreading to the continents......!"

"Rumor has it that my greeting to anyone I meet is that I'm a child farmer, is that okay with you, Your Majesty?"

"Everyone says this......!"

"This ugly father is so ashamed of himself that he can't live!"

"By this father and emperor."

"I have a plea for you, precious and noble Empress and my daughters!"

"Please....... Don't fight outside......!"

"If you're going to fight, fight from within!"

The emperor was puffing away. The two princesses were speechless at the emperor's words.

In fact, anyone who happened to bump into them at the temple could see them talking and then moving on to the real thing.

"And it's not just the two of you, Amelia, you've been known to beat up kids......?"

"......It must have been right because it deserved to be right."

"You beat me up anyway......! And Priscilla. You're the one who keeps forcing your classmates to take weird drugs."

"......because it's good for you, right?"

"How do you know that, you can't feed me that......! It's illegal, it's illegal!"

"My dad said he didn't have one of those back in the day and made his friends build one."

"That's....... That's......."

The Emperor looks at the Sago daughters with a soul-sucked expression.

I'm guilty of so many sins that even if I say the right thing, I can't convince them.

"......I don't want anything else, so please keep it inside the Imperial Palace. Don't leak out of the temple and advertise that the imperial family is soybean flour. Is that too much to ask?"

Even the emperor knows it hurts to say it.

This isn't the first time I've said this.

Priscilla gags.

"......You're not my mom, and you're not my dad, so who the hell do you think you are?"

"......!"

Amelia can't help but laugh in disbelief.

"My dad told me he beat up kids at Temple, too. He says I'm no match for him."

"......!"

The only perfect exception is the prince.

Emperors are no exception.

No, it was actually worse.

"He did, but......! He did it for a reason......!"

"You had a reason to hit me, why do you think I don't?"

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

"I'm sure I've fed him what's good for him."

"......."

My daughters recognize that this is an uninformed admonition.

"So, why did you beat up kids like that when you were at Temple, and you said that all the people who got beat up by you back then are off somewhere now, doing big time."

"Yeah, I'm curious. How much beating did you have to do to become a Temple legend? You didn't even graduate, and you've been known to beat up seniors."

When it comes to tearing down the emperor, the feuding sisters are the only ones who stick together.

"Yeah, that's what she said. She said he tried to beat her up at Temple, too. I heard it all."

It wasn't just the Emperor who went white at the words, but Amelia as well.

"What? Witch....... No, I mean the Archmage....... Archmage?"

"Ugh. Seriously, go ask him later. He tried to slap me."

Amelia's jaw dropped in amazement.

"How can you hit someone so nice....... where is there anywhere to slap......?"

"I didn't hit him! I didn't hit him!"

"So you're saying you tried to hit me......?"

"Well, you know what, Amelia....... It's just that things....... It was a tumultuous time....... At that age,......."

"It must be real. How could you....... That's too much....... No, why did you get married......?"

Amelia mumbled to herself as her eyes went unfocused.

Actually, it's not even a lie.

He actually threatened to carve a fingerprint on my cheek if I spit out the wrong word.

"Hey, guys......? That's not what we're talking about......."

"Why don't you mind your own business."

"......So."

The emperor tried to admonish his daughters, but they began to beat him verbally.

Indeed, the emperor is not easy, but what the heck.

Reinhard the Great doesn't get the fatherly treatment he deserves.

-NanNan

The white cat was eating the meat that Rune was slicing.

It had a softly wagging tail, as if it was having a lot of fun doing something.

\* \* \*

The emperor went out to admonish his daughters without knowing the subject matter.

It happens all the time.

But I can't let my daughters get away with their tantrums, so all I can do is tell them to get their karma back and do their own thing.

That's how I finished my meal and headed home.

The Emperor's three children were on a tram headed to the Palace of Spring.

As always, Princilla had Rune, the prince, sitting on her lap and cuddling up to her, and Rune was cuddling up to her, too.

Amelia was sitting across from me, her eyes darting out the window.

They're the kind of people who, whenever they run into each other, end up getting into a fistfight, but neither of them are in the mood for that today.

Because after hearing what Amelia went through as a child, Princilla realizes that even if she can't fully understand Amelia, there's a reason for all the shit she's been through.

So did Amelia. She knew that what she had been doing was only making it worse.

I've even had my mother ask me to do that, and I know that no one can be happy by making things worse.

Eventually, Amelia realizes she's done something wrong.

That's why she's going to do something she's never done before in her life.

"Hey."

"......why."

"I thought you were going to snitch right away, but you didn't."

"......It actually didn't hurt that much. Do you think I'm always being a mom?"

Amelia presses down on the yes that wants to come out naturally.

"What....... So thanks."

"......?"

Priscilla's eyes widen at Amelia's words.

It was the last thing I ever imagined coming out of my mouth.

"Zee, what are you saying?"

"Because I don't want to say it twice?"

Amelia averts her gaze.

Princilla could tell by Amelia's slight blush that she hadn't misheard.

But long-standing emotional goals are misleading in this situation.

Is he drugged?

You can't help but wonder, "Why is that happening?".

"......What are you thinking?"

"I have no idea."

In the ambiguous silence, the tram moved slowly.

Priscilla gave up trying to think.

He's just as moody as he is asshole, so all I can think about is whether I want to be like that today.

If you continue to do this, it won't be so hard to get along.

With that thought, Priscilla looks at the rune in her hand.

It's the first time she's ever said this in her life, even though Amelia is forced to look out the window to avoid eye contact.

I can't help but stare at Priscilla, curious to see her reaction.

And of course you see it.

Princilla smirks as she looks at Rune.

Clearly, you have a perverted imagination.

It's certainly cute and pretty, and it makes Amelia's heart flutter when she sees the runes dressed up like that.

But the princess who does it herself is a bitch.

It's clear that Rune doesn't like Princilla's behavior because she's so reticent and timid.

"Hey."

"......What, again."

"You're all good, but can you please stop putting weird clothes on little kids?"

At Amelia's words, Princilla's brow narrows.

"What, after all this time of pretending not to care, why are you suddenly pretending to care?"

"No, she doesn't like it."

Cute is cute, but watching Amelia do that to Priscilla in an attempt to win her over was enough to make me run out of patience.

"How do you know that?"

As if to say don't interfere, Princilla pulls Rune closer to her.

I don't know how you know that, you just know it when you see it.

"Hey, kid."

"......."

"If you don't like it, you should say so. I'm not fooling myself into thinking you like it because you're silent."

"What! Why are you suddenly talking to Rune and not me! Don't talk to me!"

Amelia asks, looking at the rune, ignoring Princilla, who is about to explode.

I'm definitely at fault here, too.

She's always been the one who gets the short end of the stick, which is why Priscilla is forcing her to do this ridiculous thing.

"Kid, if you don't like it, don't like it. If you like it, just say yes. What?"

Priscilla swallows hard.

Obviously, Rune doesn't like it, but she's never once told Priscilla outright that she doesn't like it.

Rune cautiously opens his mouth on Amelia's chard.

"...... is not good."

"Yeah, you heard me, I said no."

"......."

Priscilla could not help but bite her lip at Rune's little answer.

But that wasn't the end of Rune's answer.

"But....... My little sister likes....... then I like it too."

"......?"

Rune's answer caught Amelia off guard.

Even the princess was surprised.

Dislike.

It's obvious that I dislike it, but it's not because I'm soft-spoken and inarticulate.

It's just that the little sister likes it, so she stays quiet.

No, if she likes it, I like it.

Amelia and Princilla were both taken aback by the unexpected answer.

What a deep, loving child.

Amelia's face falls, and her lips quiver.

Like you can't stand it because you want a hug right now.

Priscilla, on the other hand, was encouraged.

"Joe, it's good, it's good anyway, okay?"

"You bitch....... and you're still going to do that shit?"

I hate it, but my sister loves it, so it's okay.

Doesn't that mean I should stop?

Amelia's face contorted as Princilla replied that she liked it anyway, so she would continue.

Humans themselves are repulsive.

As it turns out, I wasn't wrong.

2You can't help but think that the princess is a glutton for punishment.

"What! I'm not going to do that anymore, that's how it works, and it's funny that you pretend to know when you don't."

Of course, the princess was touched by Rune's words, so I had no intention of forcing her to do anything like that in the future.

In reality, Priscilla doesn't just walk around wearing runes and harassing people.

Being a bastard and wearing a rune that was bound to be recognized to some degree was significant.

He taught me about life in the palace and played with me all the time.

After Empress Herriot, it was the Princess who helped Rune fit into the palace.

That's why it's ridiculous that we're doing this now.

When Rune was in trouble because she was unfamiliar and scared of the palace, you did nothing.

No, it's sarcasm.

Amelia's attitude of trying to pretend she cares about Rune by saying a few words now when she's never cared before.

Humans themselves are disgusting.

As it turns out, I wasn't wrong.

1No matter what Amelia's situation is, she's not meant to live like that.

"Rune doesn't care about you in the first place. It's too late to pretend to care now."

"What......?"

"Am I wrong?"

Their resolve to get along is destroyed in a few words of conversation.

"Rune, isn't it funny, you're trying to be a big sister. Hmph."

As if looking for an answer, Rune hesitantly opens his mouth.

"I'm....... big sister....... I like......."

In a word.

Priscilla's eyes lost focus.

"What......?"

What has that done for you so far?

Of course, the only time Amelia shows affection for Rune is when they're alone, so there's no way Priscilla would know about it.

Amelia smirks at Priscilla's reaction.

I like it when you're stunned.

Very good.

"Where do you get the confidence that she's only going to like you, huh? On what basis? On the subject you've been bullying her about by putting her in a weird dress. She's only putting up with it because she's nice, when in reality she doesn't really like you?"

"Is that really Rune......?"

Priscilla looks at Rune with a bleached complexion.

"Well, actually....... You don't like me? You like....... that one better?"

I'm just being nice and putting up with it.

Are you tired of thinking about it?

"Both....... Okay......."

Rune's words made Priscilla feel like her broken heart had been reattached.

But it's still frustrating.

I love that one too.

Amelia smiles at that, intrigued.

He then stands up, walks over to Rune, and sits down in front of him.

Just as a very wicked question came to mind.

The corner of Amelia's mouth quirks up wickedly.

"You know, kid."

"......?"

"Do you like me or do you like that?"

"What, what question are you asking!"

What a ridiculous question to ask.

Obviously, it's me.

Look at what you've given me so far.

But that doesn't change the fact that in the end, we were forcing Rune to do something he didn't want to do.

That's why she thought it was worth a shot.

If the rune prefers me for doing nothing, I'll be able to watch Princilla's soul crumble to dust and disappear.

How refreshing.

"Da, of course it's me!"

"Well, you don't know what the kid is going to say, do you?"

Amelia has nothing to lose by being honest and saying she likes Priscilla better.

Because it feels so good to have Rune tell you that she likes you, even though she's only ever hugged you once in a while, and that alone makes you want to hug her, and you can't stand it.

Amelia's blue, deep eyes stare at the runes.

"Quick, who is it?"

"......."

And so it went on for a while, with Amelia looking at the runes with a smirk on her face, and Priscilla staring at them with a pleading look in her eyes that said, "Please tell me it's me.

Eventually.

This question always leads to the same result.

"......black."

"!"

"Lou, Rune......?"

The little prince can't stand this and cries.

"黑....... 黑......."

The two older sisters were exhausted in different ways as they watched the youngest shed beady tears.

Princilla's brow narrows.

"Dude, Rune is crying because you asked him a dog question!"

"Oh, no. I, I'm......."

Amelia can't do this or that because she never imagined she would cry.

While Princess and Amelia fidget, unsure of how to comfort their youngest, who is in tears.

The youngest sobs, muttering in a tearful voice.

"I like all my sisters, but....... Black....... Why can't my sisters get along......?"

"......?"

"......."

"Aren't you sisters supposed to fight......?"

Amelia and Priscilla both stare at each other at the sincerity of her words.

What are you doing with a child in front of you?

The youngest, who is much younger, tells her sisters not to fight.

I've even been known to ask my youngest who he likes better, and he cries.

Is it right?

Is this what a person would do?

Amelia thinks she's a princess, too.

I don't know about you, but.

First of all, I don't think I'm human.

They both end up thinking the same thing.

"Oh, I'm not fighting. I'm not fighting....... Yeah."

Priscilla huffs and puffs and glares at Amelia.

"Uh, uh....... Kid. I won't fight. We'll get along."

"Then you two can work together to get......."

At Rune's words, they join hands without thinking.

Clumsily clasping his hands together, he waves them in front of him as if to say, "Look, Rune.

"Ooh, we're going to be good, Joe. Uh, is that it?"

"Well, yeah! Da, of course! No, I'll try! Yeah! Rune, I'm sorry."

As they smile awkwardly, hand in hand, Rune wipes the corners of her eyes with her sleeve.

And then he smiles like he's just been crying.

"Always like this. Do we have to be friends?"

When the sisters saw that smile, they thought.

I don't know what else.

If only I could see this smile on my youngest's face every day, just by being close.

"Of course!"

"Of course!"

I could get along with Chulcheon Ji-su.

\* \* \*

The tram arrives at the Palace of Spring, and Rune walks a little slower, separated from her sisters who are walking ahead.

They are still holding hands as they walk toward the palace.

Shaking their heads as if they can't bear to be there, they glance back at each other.

It's like looking out for the youngest child.

Under the watchful eye of the youngest, who wants to make sure they hold hands until they enter the palace, they eventually give up and walk hand in hand.

Rune watches until they finally enter the palace, where they let go of each other's hands in dismay and go their separate ways.

Rune smiles as she hugs the white cat.

"Right. Mom."

-Angel

"This is so easy."

-Angel

As if in praise, the cat licks Rune's cheek a few times.

Why can't we get along.

At that question, the cat turned back to her mother, carefully hugged her son, and whispered, "I'm sorry.

"Runes.

"Yes, Mom.

'The next time they fight in front of you, just cry.'

'......?'

"That'll fix everything.

Rune didn't understand why crying would solve everything.

"Why should I cry?

To Rune's question, which she didn't understand, she answered.

"Rune's sisters are so different from each other, but they have one thing in common.

'Same thing......?

"That I love runes so much.

'.......'

"Neither of us will ever fight again, even if it breaks my heart to see Rune cry.

It was a simple enough answer, and Rune couldn't understand her mother's words.

"And runes are cute.

"Why is that......?

In response to Rune's question, the motherly cat stroked Rune's head and said.

"Sometimes in life, that's all you need.

Rune didn't know what her mother was talking about.

However, I did what my mom said and just cried, and the situation was resolved.

Then, in the future, if you think things are going to go badly, you can just cry.

Either they understand each other or they don't.

One tear from my youngest solved everything, and it will solve everything.

"Cute, that's nice."

However, the youngest prince has discovered that cuteness can be used as a weapon.

-Pet?

The White Cat frowns at the Prince's smile, a shadow of something sinister flickering across it.

"Right, Mom."

-Yes

I wonder if I've taught my son something I should never have taught him.

The white cat could only tremble in fear in his son's arms.

What happens next, who knows.

Still.

In the springtime palace, where the sound of sisters fighting over hair echoed daily, it was clear that peace was in the air for the time being.