

5

The Death Mage

Densuke
Illustrations by Ban!

ONE PEACE BOOKS

5

The Death Mage

Densuke

Illustrations by Ban!

ONE PEACE BOOKS



5

The Death Mage

Densuke

Illustrations by Ban!

ONE PEACE BOOKS

5

The Death Mage

Densuke

Illustrations by Ban!



Summary



In his second reincarnation, Vandal was born as a dhampir. After his mother Dalshia was killed by humans, Vandal swore vengeance on High Priest Goldan and the others who murdered her.

After making new allies, enhancing his undead, and taking his first steps toward revenge, Vandal and his party took to the road. They encountered the Ghoul Elder Zadilis, entered a demon barren, and made a big contribution by helping to defeat the Kobolt King, Gyahn, who had attacked the Ghoul's grotto.

After the battle, Vandal became closer to the ghouls as he helped solve various problems in the grotto. When he decided to help fight off the Noble Orc Bugogan and his army of orcs, Vigaro and the other ghouls begged him to become their Ghoul King. With Vandal as their king, the enhanced ghouls managed to defeat the orcs. Rather than face an oncoming conflict with their human pursuers, however, Vandal decided to lead his new companions away in search of fresh pastures.

This led them to the giantling city of Talosheim, also known as the City of the Sun. Here, Vandal was able to add many new allies to his forces, including the mighty Sword King, Borkz, and enhance his followers through further dungeon exploration.

As Talosheim continued to recover and grow, vampires arrived secretly in the city with orders to kill Vandal. But Vandal acquired the skill Soul Crusher and took his revenge on Sercent—the noble vampire who killed Vandal's own father, Varen—by eradicating his soul. He then also crushed the soul of a divine artifact found beneath the castle of Talosheim, the magical spear, Ice Age. Around that same time, however, Goldan and an expedition army were preparing to depart the Milg Shield Kingdom and invade Vandal's new home...



Character

Death attribute Magician



VANDAL

Hiroto Amamiya after his second rebirth. A dhampir born from a vampire father and a dark elf mother, he possesses massive magical power and a command of death attribute magic. He finally achieved the Job Change that he had almost given up on and became a true Death Mage.



DALSHIA

Vandal's mother. She suffered a terrible death, but Vandal used his death attribute magic to bind her to one of her own bones, keeping her in the world as a spirit.



ZADILIS

The elder of the Ghoul Grotto. She appears to be a young woman but is 290 years old. Perhaps held back by her physical appearance, her mental age is not as advanced as her years.



BASDIA

Zadilis's daughter. A female warrior with an athletic, honed frame that also features feminine curves. She has taken a liking to Vandal.



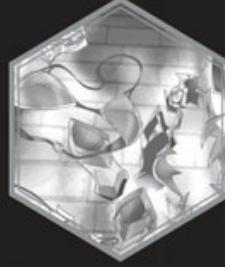
VIGARO

The young chief of the Ghoul Grotto. Trusted implicitly by the young male ghouls and adored by the females, he's a ghoul with everything going for him. He is also Basdia's father.



SAM

Originally a servant killed by bandits and left to wander as a spirit. After Vandal avenged his death, Sam chose him as his new master and swore loyalty to him. He has taken the form of a carriage.



SARIA & RITA

Sam's daughters. They received Living Armor found in a dungeon treasure room to use as their bodies. Since obtaining the Spirit Body skill, they now have more of a visible outline.



TALEA

A former human, now a ghoul, who hitched her wagon to Vandal's after his rise as king. Has significant skill at making armor and weapons.



BORKZ

Giantling undead who was one of the heroes of Talosheim, known as the Sword King. Places great faith and trust in Vandal.



CHAPTER TWO
THE CROWNING
OF THE ECLIPSE KING

CHAPTER THREE
REVENGE PLAYED OUT LARGE

CHAPTER FOUR
REPOSSESSION, REPOLLUTION

CHAPTER FIVE
AFTER THE CLOSING BELL,
A LIVELY LAUNCH

SPECIAL CHAPTER
THE ARMOR SISTERS'
ARMOR CONTEST

AFTERWORD
GLOSSARY



Chapter One: Foes Flying Into the Flame

Thomas Palpapekk had a bitter look on his face as he drank tea in his private rooms again that day. In the two years since leaving the post of marshal, his volume of daily duties had greatly decreased. He was a count in name only, meaning he held no lands. So when he held no other official position, he had plenty of leeway to enjoy some tea, just like today.

What he didn't have was any mental leeway.

"Those damned vampires," he spat into his teacup. He spared no mercy in disparaging the demon god-worshipping vampires with whom he was involved. They weren't his personal allies, nor friends of the Milg Shield Kingdom as a whole. He knew full well that they were in a mutually beneficial relationship of each using the other. That didn't stop him from getting mad when they started to overstep.

About one year earlier, something had stirred in the Amidd Empire: the idea of an expedition into the boundary mountains. Amidd was keen to order the Milg Shield Kingdom to undertake this mission. Indeed, the orders were inevitable at this point.

They were ostensibly being given a chance to atone for the failed Talosheim expedition from two hundred years prior. But in truth, the Empire had noted the unexpected boost the Milg Shield Kingdom had received when Viscount Valchez developed the reclaimed demon barrens and sought to whittle down some of that shiny new strength.

That said, even orders from the Empire itself shouldn't be sufficient to realize such an expedition. They couldn't simply order one of their member nations to send men to their deaths for seemingly no reason, and expect agreement.

However, an Amidd Empire general called Maubiht had uncovered an ancient document. It proved the existence of a tunnel large enough for an army to march through, created more than ten thousand years before, and even detailed its location. The tunnel hadn't been dug back out yet, but once it was reopened, crossing the boundary mountains would become much easier. An armed force would be able to reach the other side in just a few days. On top of that, the crossing would be safe, with no fear of being attacked by monsters until they exited the tunnel. That removed many of the outward reasons to oppose the expedition.

To make matters worse, the king of the Milg Shield Kingdom, as well as the current marshal, Count Reggston, were both onboard with the idea. They had likely been told that any land they developed in the mountains could be added to their own territory, along with funding to aid that development.

"Morons!" Thomas scoffed, casually insulting both the king and a noble of his own rank.

The two of them were completely incapable of imagining the true nature of the expedition.

Thomas was better informed. He knew of the dhampir who had vanished two years previously, after crossing the boundary mountains with a bunch of ghouls. And he knew of his contact with the vampires who had got into something of a panic when told that the dhampir had escaped.

A short while later, a new vampire contact had shown up, saying only that his predecessor had been given new duties. It had been over a year since then, and Thomas's only message from the vampires had been "it would be wise to keep to yourself"—something that seemed to be neither a command nor a warning.

So Thomas could assume that the expedition was intended to kill the

dhampir, and the vampires planned to use the forces of the Milg Shield Kingdom to do it. After all, there was no way an Amidd general could have turned up documentation about a tunnel that had been lost for so long, rather than someone from Milg, which actually bordered those mountains. In other words, the ancient text had been provided by the vampires.

The vampires were also surely going to work the dhampir into their story about the expedition's motivations. Perhaps the dhampir's hiding place would contain rare magical ore, or maybe he had horded a stash of artifacts there, thought to be long lost.

The worst-case scenario would be if the dhampir had taken up in the ruins of Talosheim. The Milg Shield Kingdom had ostensibly won that battle, but it was a lasting humiliation for the nation. The victory had cost them vast sums from their coffers and more than ten thousand fighting men, along with a national hero, his party, and his mighty artifact. And yet the kingdom received scant treasure and few other resources for winning it. That was why the Milg Shield Kingdom continued to fear the boundary mountains. They were the gateway to disaster; a gateway better left closed.

And now that there was a clear way to cross those terrible peaks, the nobles of the Milg Shield Kingdom were starting to think that maybe they could send men to Talosheim once more. That they could reclaim the artifact of Ice God Yupeon, the beloved spear of their fallen hero. They spoke passionately of seizing that shame and wiping it away.

And that was just the nobles. When the peasants found out about the tunnel, they would explode into a fervor.

"I'm a count of the Milg Shield Kingdom and I have connections to vampires," Thomas reasoned to himself. "I therefore suspected there must be nobles with

similar connections in the Amidd Empire . . . but I didn't think they went as high as a general." Thomas was surprised that a general would be in command of an expedition that was doomed to fail.

Because Thomas knew for certain that the expedition would fail. Oh, it would go well until the vampires took out the dhampir. But after that, all bets were off —unless you were betting on no man coming back alive.

The reason was simple. The vampires were never going to let humans advance so easily into the southern part of the continent. Because there lay the home of the demon vampires' greatest fear, the Vida progenitor vampires.

If those vampires were discovered, the Alda faith was liable to declare a holy war, waking them up well and good. The pope of the Alda religion always had a powerful hatred of Vida. Even typically conservative cardinals became hardline extremists once they took up the position of pope. That's how it always worked over there; Thomas saw no reason for it to change.

And with that inevitable outcome, rather than stir up trouble, the demon god-worshipping vampires would prefer to nip the expedition in the bud. Most likely by causing the tunnel to collapse. Thomas had heard that the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom side of the tunnel had indeed collapsed two hundred years ago and could no longer be used. That hadn't necessarily been the work of the vampires, but he had no doubts that they could pull off something similar.

"General Maubiht must be getting paid well for this—or maybe he's going to be turned into a vampire," Thomas mused. "Once he gains eternal life, he'll probably set his good-for-nothing son up as his puppet and pull his strings for a while. Sounds about right."

Even if the expedition did fail, by that point the good general would have established some alibi to remove himself from the line of fire and quit the

position, keeping him from being blamed for its abject failure. Wasn't that a sweet spot to be in? This expedition would be a loss, not only for the Milg Shield Kingdom but also for the Amidd Empire, and yet one man was going to come out of it very nicely indeed.

If possible, Thomas would have loved to crush the ambitions of both the vampires and General Maubiht, but he could see no way to manage it. As soon as he made the slightest move, the vampires would just wipe him out. He had been told to keep to himself. This is what they were talking about. Things might have been different if he had some secret, powerful force of his own that he could deploy without the vampires knowing, or skilled spies or intelligence officers...

The facts were, however, that so long as Thomas did nothing, he would not personally suffer, and neither would the house of Palpapekk. They had no lands, meaning they would give none of their people to the cause. Now that he was no longer marshal, he couldn't be called to account for military mistakes.

Even so, once the poor moron Marshal Reggston had been kicked out—or hung from his heels—Thomas and his surviving countrymen would be left with the undesirable task of trying to recover from all the damage. That thought did sting.

“I need to at least try and reduce the damage to our nation. But how?” Thomas pondered. “Ah. There is that guy.” He was referring to an adventurer who had been a member of an elite party, but whose personality issues had been a little too big for even his exceptional skills to overshadow.

Very well. Time to play a card.

Thomas rang the bell on his work desk, summoning his trusted valet who knew all of his dealings apart from those with the vampires. The man who

entered the room looked like he had been cut straight from the “Butler” page in a book of professions.

“Whatever can I help you with, my lord?” he asked with a bow. “If you seek entertainment, I can arrange something immediately.”

“If those are arrangements intended to lead to marriage, don’t bother. Is it your plan for me to die on my back, you old goat?”

His valet chuckled. “My lord, as head of the house of Palpapekk, people expect more from you. All good nobles have plenty of women—preferably pregnant ones.”

“I have three already, at my last count,” Thomas reminded him.

“This is but a third of what your noble father has, my lord. I beg you, at least take two more,” his valet pleaded.

“Then find me a pleasant lady: elegant, proper, and well over seventy,” Thomas jibed. “Bonus points for having no relatives and being ready to croak within a year.”

“Master Thomas, please keep your proclivities for women older than I am under control.”

“I just don’t want to leave a mess of wives and relations to the next generation. That’s enough of that talk, anyway,” Thomas said, putting the jibes to rest. “I need to talk about Raily. Do you think we could somehow point him in the direction of Marshal Reggston?”

The valet’s expression was difficult to read, behind his wrinkles and eyebrows and prodigious facial hair. He did make a surprised gesture but his eyebrows didn’t even twitch.

“You mean, Green Gale Spear Raily? That would be possible, but are you

certain, my lord? He is a grade B adventurer, and one we worked hard to bring into the fold in place of Blue Burning Blade Heinz. He's not on the same level as Heinz, true, but I do not see the merit in sending him off to the marshal. And if you let him go without even a letter of introduction, we won't be able to leverage this for some kind of favor down the line."

The valet's appraisal of Raily was that he was simply an inferior adventurer. He could fight, of course. Thomas had no qualms with the man's combat prowess. Raily had the strength his grade suggested and the talents to grow it further. With more work, he could likely reach grade A. His inferiority was in regard to—well, pretty much everything else. As an adventurer, as a retainer to a noble, and as a person.

Worst of all was his personality. At first, he had seemed just to be ambitious—greedy, perhaps—but he was actually also desperate for the approval of others. He had developed some sort of elitism complex, making repeated comments about being a chosen hero. His self-satisfaction had run to following in the footsteps of the heroes of old by purchasing slaves and turning them into adventurers. He was the type who looked like he was going places, but in the end that place would be an early grave or worse.

Now that Thomas had tracked this mud into his house, this might be a good chance to wipe it clean.

"No matter," Thomas replied. "If I send a letter with him, when he screws up, it will blow back on me. Tip Reggston off that Raily is the second coming of the tragic hero Mikhail, something like that. He happens to be a spear user himself, so all the better. The people will love him. Ah, and don't forget to bump him to grade A with the adventurers' guild."

"Very well. He will be thrilled to become a real hero, I'm sure," the valet said.

“I’ll start by getting the guild master to promote him to grade A. Then I’ll offer some whispers to him that maybe he won’t be able to become much of a hero, held back here as your charge.”

The valet gave a bow and headed out. He was going to be doing substantially more than “whisper,” Thomas was sure. The valet held his position exactly because he was up to that task.

There was more Thomas could have done, of course, if he wasn’t being watched by the vampires.

“Not worth dwelling on it,” Thomas mused. “If Raily joins with Reggston, it should ease the burden on the rest of our combat strength.” Having such a powerful hero would mean the force required less fighting bodies overall. If it meant that one or two hundred fewer countrymen went into the fray, then his mission would be accomplished. “Luckily for us, our nation rarely sends adventurers along on military action that doesn’t require combat with monsters. Even in the worst-case scenario, we’ll still have plenty of adventurers within our borders to keep the number of monsters down.”

All Thomas was left to do was hope Raily could sufficiently ingratiate himself with Reggston. If he pissed the marshal off too quickly, then all of this would have been for naught.



On the day after Vandal told Dalshia that he wasn’t yet capable of repairing the resurrection device, the dhampir headed over to the local ruins of the adventurers’ guild to perform his third Job Change.

The market around the guild was booming as always. It was so popular that there was a shortage of fish sauce.

The fishing industry in Talosheim relied entirely on Doran Moisture Cave. The fishermen waded into the water and used nets and javelins to catch the fish, then carried them back by hand. This meant a single fishing session turned up a lot less fish than oceanic methods, which literally brought them in by the boatload.

Supply for the smaller fish used to make the sauce was simply unable to keep up with demand. Even Vandal couldn't make the sauce without the raw fish.

"Can't you fish them from the waterways?" Vandal suggested. "All the Flying Sharks are gone. That should make fishing easier than going into Doran Moisture Cave."

"That's a good idea, but the fishermen won't go for it," the giantling receptionist replied. "Too boring, they say."

"...You guys do love to fight, huh." Vandal shook his head. It seemed the fisherman needed the excitement of the occasional battles that cropped up when they were fishing.

The receptionist was also undead, of course. She had been nothing but rotten flesh and bone, but Vandal used Restore Freshness to return her to her just-deceased state.

"If it wasn't for the bonito and the seaweed then we really would have run out of fish sauce completely," she continued. "I think the answer is to develop something else people want to eat." Her single remaining eye gave him an expectant look.

It was a good point. Developing a new product of some kind would split

demand and prevent shortages, even with the current fish supply.

“But I’m the one who has to make it as well. I only have so much time,” Vandal said.

“You’ll make it work!” the giantling replied cheerfully. “I’m also still *looking* forward—haha—to getting a replacement for my missing eye!”

“I’m on it,” Vandal assured her. He hoped he would be able to get along so well with the first receptionist he met in a real adventurers’ guild, but that was for the future. He headed for the Job Change Chamber.

Undead Tamer. Crusher of Souls. Poison Master. Insect Master. Evil Boss.

“...What’s “Evil Boss” all about?”

There was a new option. What could it mean? Some kind of evil...boss...? Like Satan? Not Santa? It was probably connected to having crushed the soul of the spear, Ice Age, when they defeated the Dragon Golem.

Evil Boss, huh? He liked the sound of it. It probably gave modifiers to the God Smiter skill. But he definitely didn’t want to pick it until he was registered with a real adventurers’ guild.

“I’ll save it for later.” This time he picked Undead Tamer. That sounded like a good power-up for Borkz and the skeletons.

—Name: Vandal

—Race: Dhampir (Dark Elf)

—Age: 5 years old

—Alias: [Ghoul King]

—Job: Undead Tamer

—Level: 0

—Job History: Death Mage, Golem Creator —Status

Vitality: 115

Magical Power: 224557626

Strength: 80

Agility: 81

Muscle: 87

Intellect: 407

—Passive Skills

[Brute Strength: Level 1] [Rapid Healing: Level 3] [Death Attribute Magic: Level 5]

[Resist Maladies: Level 5] [Resist Magic: Level 1] [Night Vision]

[Spirit Pollution: Level 10] [Death Attribute Allure: Level 5] [Skip Incantation: Level 3]

[Enhance Brethren: Level 7] [Magical Power Auto Recovery: Level 3] [Enhance Followers: Level 3 (NEW!)]

—Active Skills

[Suck Blood: Level 3] [Limit Break: Level 4] [Golem Creation: Level 6]

[Non-Attribute Magic: Level 4] [Magic Control: Level 4] [Spirit Body: Level 3]

[Carpentry: Level 4] [Construction: Level 3] [Cooking: Level 2]

[Alchemy: Level 3] [Brawling Proficiency: Level 2] [Soul Crusher: Level 2]

[Simultaneous Activation: Level 2] [Remote Control: Level 2]

—Unique Skill

[God Smiter: Level 1]

—Curses

[Unable to carry over experience from previous lives] [Unable to enter existing jobs] [Unable to personally acquire experience]

In the moment he performed the Job Change, Vandal acquired the Enhance Followers skill. It was like the Enhance Brethren skill but for humans, and would enhance familiars, beasts, spirits, cattle, and golems who followed the holder of the skill, offering around the same level of enhancement. It was generally learned by those with Jobs like Tamer, Alchemist, Elemental User, and Herdsman. Users could raise the level by having more followers, making it easier to master than Enhance Brethren.

Even better, it was “backward-compatible” with Enhance Brethren. “In my case, I can give double modifiers from Enhance Brethren and Enhance Followers,” Vandal said. He was pretty pumped up by this simple and effective way to boost the overall fighting strength of his forces.

After that, Vandal proceeded to dig up the Yupeon statue that had previously been buried. He tried to destroy and repair it repeatedly in order to test out the

God Smiter skill. But nothing happened.

The only way to work out the skill's effect seemed to be using artifacts created by a god, such as Ice Age, or an actual god themselves. The earth around the statue looked a little red, but Vandal didn't see anything else of note.

A few days after the Job Change, Vandal was back in the underground chamber below the castle. He was there to collect the remains of the Dragon Golem.

With Vandal's current Golem Creation level he could at least turn the orichalcum remains into fixed shapes to move it around. But he still couldn't actually work the material into something new.

"If I could make orichalcum weapons, I wouldn't be undead right now, I'd be a god." That was the blacksmith Datara's take on the situation. Orichalcum was highly prized by blacksmiths and crafters, but at the same time almost impossible to work. It couldn't be melted, no chisel existed that could damage it, and even if it was bent into a different shape, it just snapped back. Even the greatest of blacksmiths couldn't make weapons or armor from it.

"There are still ways I can use it as fixed shapes," Vandal reasoned. "Turn it flat, add a handle, and that's a shield. Turn it into lumps for use as a mace or hammer. Or turn it into larger lumps to fire from the catapults." The results would include shields made from a material with some of the highest physical and magical defenses in the world, and blunt weapons that could smash through any barrier. He may have been joking about basically giving it away as catapult ammo, but the material was still going to be useful.

He gave Ice Age, now a simple orichalcum spear after the destruction of its soul, over to Sam. They didn't have anyone who really used a spear as a

weapon, but it might work as a mounted weapon.

While he was breaking down the remains of the golem into small enough pieces to pass through the entrance to the audience chamber above, Lefdia found something interesting. A piece of the wings of the golem, shattered by Mikhail two hundred years prior. She appeared through a gap in the rubble, climbed up on top, and stood to stomp—well, finger-tap—on it.

“Is there something down there?” Vandal asked. He moved the rubble aside, as directed by Lefdia.

Beneath it, he discovered the bodies of maybe five people, wrapped in cursed ice. The ice had stopped them from decaying, just like Zandia’s own hand, but they had taken so much damage that Vandal couldn’t confirm how many bodies there were.

“Who are these people?” Vandal asked Lefdia, but she didn’t seem to know anything more. She had only pointed them out because she thought she’d found something interesting.

From what Vandal could tell from the size of the bodies, they weren’t giantlings. They probably weren’t vampires, either...

“Right. Mikhail had some allies with him, didn’t he?”

They hadn’t been mentioned by Borkz or Zandia, and only appeared as background color in the stories passed down in Talosheim and the Milg Shield Kingdom. Vandal had no idea of their names or even their number, meaning they hadn’t really been top of mind. But they had certainly been there.

That made this a grave created by Ice Age. Perhaps unable to leave the bodies of its master’s companions in a wounded state, it had surrounded them in permanent ice and then buried them in a hole created during the fighting,

under rubble from the golem's body. There might not have been a headstone, but it was a more opulent grave than most kings could wish for. Considering the value of orichalcum, it was on par with a pyramid from Earth.

Vandal moved all the orichalcum aside and checked each body in turn. The first was a massive man, close to giantling size. The twisted shield at his side suggested he was a defensive specialist. He was also in a pretty grotesque state; everything below the neck, mincemeat.

The second was maybe a dwarf. There wasn't a body to speak off, just a tattered braid—or more likely a beard—a shattered axe, and metal that looked like fragments of armor. There were markings of the holy seal of Alda, suggesting this one had either been a devout believer or held a religious position.

The third was a female magician. She was wearing a robe and holding a staff, so that much seemed clear. However, it was impossible to tell if she was human or elf, because she had nothing left above her bottom jaw. That meant no telltale ears to make a distinction, but Vandal thought she was probably human.

The fourth was a tanned woman wearing leather armor made from monster hides. Her head was intact, but the same could not be said for her body. She looked like some kind of twisted puzzle. The Dragon Golem's wings had likely rent her to pieces.

The fifth, upon closer inspection, wasn't human at all.

"This looks like an ogre," Vandal said.

Another race of demi-human monsters. He was wearing armor and didn't have a weapon, meaning at first glance he looked like a big warrior; at first Vandal assumed the horn was simply on his helmet, but it in fact grew directly

from his head.

Although they were often mixed up, ogres were different from demonlings, one of Vida's new races. Ogres had one horn while demonlings had two.

This ogre had likely been a familiar, then, tamed by one of the other four. Its body had been punched full of fist-sized holes, leaving the head and limbs intact.

It had therefore been Mikhail and these five who had taken on the Dragon Golem. Mikhail alone had made it back to the surface, though severely injured, where he had encountered the vampires and been killed himself. The names of these fallen companions were lost to history, and their spirits would already be in the cycle of reincarnation.

Vandal stood over the corpses of these heroes. "Lefdia, great work. I can make at least one great undead from these," he said.

He hadn't even considered offering up a prayer. Vandal had no intention of mourning the dead of his enemies. He might have shown more restraint if these were the bodies of giantlings, but the bodies of aggressors from the Milg Shield Kingdom were nothing more than raw materials to him.

They took flesh from orcs, and bones and skin from dragons. This wasn't any different. If he had queasiness about that sort of thing, he wouldn't have made his skeletons in the first place.

"I can give one of the eyes from the big fellow to the receptionist," Vandal decided. "The others are all too badly damaged to turn into undead without some work. I guess I could stitch them together?" It would be good practice for when he made a body for Dalshia. "First things first, we need to get the orichalcum out of here."

Once he finished his stitching, he'd had to find a spirit to put inside. He had Death Attribute Allure, so he wasn't expecting too much trouble, but he had also read *Frankenstein*. He didn't need his creation turning on him.

—Name: Vigaro

—Rank: 7

—Race: Ghoul Tyrant

—Level: 7

—Age: 171 years old

—Job: Axe Lord

—Job Level: 0

—Job History: Apprentice Warrior, Warrior, Axe Warrior —Passive Skills

[Dim Vision] [Brute Strength: Level 5 (UP!)] [Resist Pain: Level 4]

[Paralytic Venom (Claws): Level 3 (UP!)] [Status Boost With Axe Equipped: Mid (NEW!)]

—Active Skills

[Axe Proficiency: Level 7 (UP!)] [Brawling Proficiency: Level 2] [Command: Level 4 (UP!)]

[Cooperation: Level 2] [Logging: Level 2] [Demolish: Level 1 (UP!)]



“And so we are welcoming a new undead,” Vandal stated.

“Congratulations, young master!” Sam enthused. “This is the first time since making us that you’ve made undead besides bugs and dinosaurs.”

“Finally, we’re not the youngest undead anymore!” Saria exclaimed.

“Rooaaah?” groaned Bone Chimera.

“I wouldn’t say the young master made you, Knochen. More like . . . transformed. He didn’t turn Lefdia into undead either,” Rita said. The Bone Chimera had been named Knochen. It meant “bone” in German.

“What a happy day,” Sam said.

Vandal proceeded to unveil their new “companion.” He had used the parts from Mikhail’s party. He figured that if he used the bodies of these heroic companions and a vast sum of MP, he might be able to make something particularly strong right from the start, even without the heroes’ original spirits.

He used the least damaged body, that of the female magician, as the base. He took the tanned female warrior’s head, which fortunately was a compatible size. Making a careful incision, he trimmed the head of its lower jaw and then attached it in place.

The magician’s body was not in great shape from the neck down either, with shattered bones, rent skin, and damaged muscles. Turning her into a zombie meant the condition of internal organs didn’t matter much. Still, having a stomach was directly tied to earning experience, and he wanted his creation to be as complete as possible. Back on Earth, he had heard that paying attention to even the parts that others wouldn’t see was the secret to good craftsmanship.

Nonetheless, the warrior woman's body was in pieces. There were no organs to find there. The same went for the others. Vandal therefore decided to go to the remains of the adventurers' guild and get some monster organs.

He used Golem Creation on sturdy Trihorn horns to make bones, took a liver and kidneys from a Hydra, and reshaped some lungs from a long-necked dragon that sometimes appeared in Doran Moisture Cave. Vandal had also been wanting a companion with the power of flight, so he attached dragon wings to its back. That had been a mammoth task, requiring him to change the shape of the scapula bone and add ogre muscle fibers to allow the wings to move.

He also decided to make a tail grow out from the tailbone. He attached the stinger and poison glands from a Cemetery Bee that had passed away from natural causes, combined with poison glands from the Venom Wyvern, Hydra, and Shark-eating Anemone, letting his creation dial in whichever poison it desired. The limbs from the elbows and knees downward were those of the ogre, hopefully providing access to Brute Strength.

The female magician's body didn't have sufficient muscle to support all this, so Vandal ended up bringing in further necessities from the bodies of the female warrior and ogre. He also took skin from the female warrior to cover wounds and burns. As a final touch, he embedded the body with magic stones from the monsters he had taken materials from.

"And she is the result!" Vandal announced.

"Aaaaaah!" The fresh female zombie emerged from the shadows. He had named her Rapieçage, which he was pretty sure meant "patching" or "mending." It was a word he had heard used on Origin, so he wasn't 100 percent certain.

She had a certain beauty—somewhere between that of a woman's and a

girl's, but with the curves of a mature woman and intensity of a hardened warrior. All four extremities were ogre limbs, meaning she could crush a human skull with her bare hands or trample one to dust with her feet.

With the leathery wings on her back, the snake-like tail sporting a bee's stinger, the stitching that wove its way across her entire body, and the creative mix of pale white, dark brown, and ogre-green colors, she had an otherworldly beauty. She struck one as being a beautiful, alluring, but ultimately unknowable female zombie.

Her stats were pretty good too.

—Name: Rapieçage

—Rank: 4

—Race: Patchwork Zombie

—Level: 0

—Passive Skills

[Night Vision] [Rapid Regeneration: Level 5] [Secrete Virulent Poison: Level 5]

[Resist Physical: Level 3] [Resist Magic: Level 3] [Brute Strength: Level 1]

—Active Skills

[Electrification: Level 2] [High-Speed Flight: Level 1]

Pretty impressive, considering she had just been created. The Hydra organs

gifted her excellent regeneration capabilities, and her tail could switch between a paralytic agent, a nerve agent, and a hemotoxin. Perhaps because of her magician and warrior body parts, or because of something else Vandal didn't understand, she had high resistance to both physical and magical attacks. As he had hoped, the ogre parts gave her Brute Strength.

Vandal hadn't been expecting her to even pick up the Electrification skill from the Trihorn. It must have come from using its horn to make her bones. Touching her was definitely a tingly experience. Using the ogre extremities had created a body slightly more gangly than the original torso, perhaps, but overall Vandal was pleased with the results.

"She's quite muscular, isn't she? And yet also voluptuous," Sam observed.

"If I had made her too thin, she wouldn't have been able to lug herself around," Vandal replied. "This is the power of muscles!"

"I bet that Gubamon fellow would throw a fit if he saw this," Sam cackled. "Even if their names didn't exactly go down in history, you stole hero bodies right out from under his nose!"



“Absolutely,” Vandal said. “It’s fun to imagine the kind of face he would make—not that I’ve seen Gubamon’s face yet.”

Rapieçage was starting out from rank 4, meaning she could fight alongside them at once, and had a versatile skill set. She didn’t have any weapon skills, so they would need to work on those next, but the experiment could be considered a resounding success. She could even cause considerable psychological damage to one of their future foes.

“She is a work of art, Lord Vandal!” Eleonora’s eyes were moist with a wellspring of emotion. “You’ve not only combined multiple bodies, but you’ve also brought together different powers from each part! That’s on the same level as Gubamon and Tehneshia, and you can do it already!”

“I see,” Vandal mused. “So this is the kind of thing they do.”

The progenitors had been alive for tens of thousands of years, meaning they probably had all sorts of techniques and secrets for undead creation that Vandal couldn’t match. He didn’t know when it would happen, but he’d have to ask them about that—before crushing their souls, of course.

“Uhn...ngh...nggh.” Rapieçage started to gnaw at Vandal.

“Hey, lady! No eating Lord Vandal!” Eleonora shouted.

Rita laughed. “Rapieçage loves you, young master!”

“A little light nibbling,” Sam said.

“This hurts a bit too much to be called nibbling.”

“Raaaagh!” roared Knochen.

“Hey, don’t worry, Knochen,” Vandal said soothingly. “Lefdia, nothing for you

to worry about either.” Knochen was butting at Rapieçage with its monkey and wolf heads, while Lefdia was poking it with her fingers.

Based on these results, Vandal decided to hold off on mass-producing zombies for a while. It didn’t look like he was fated to become the next Dr. Frankenstein, but as it turned out, having creations that loved you could be painful, too.

Acquired the skill Surgery!

Vandal proceeded to give Rapieçage Brawling Proficiency training, while distributing orichalcum gear to the others.

After that, he set about repairing a particular device in order to both earn more Golem Creation skill experience and prepare for the battle with the vampires. It was only possible since the Milg Shield Kingdom forces didn’t do an especially thorough job of destroying it, and even 200 years passing didn’t have any marked effect. The vampires would never expect this device to be up and running again—it would definitely be something of a trump card during the upcoming battle.

During this period, Vandal fought numerous dragons; Borkz had an epic encounter with a Storm Dragon; Vigaro fought a Burst Ogre, an ogre variant that was covered in fire; and Zadilis had a magical battle with a Great Trent, a tree monster that had acquired the power of magic. These encounters were all great, for both materials and experience. The Storm Dragon meat went well with some wasabi, the Burst Ogre materials made heat-resistant gear, and the wood from the Great Trent made excellent staves.

Best of all, however, Vandal also found the original ancestor of the garlic plant. Raw and untamed by human cultivation, the smell was even more potent than typical garlic. Now he could use death attribute magic to enhance and improve it.

"I should probably make items that remove mouth odors, too," Vandal mused. "Rather than mint gum or whatever, a magical item imbued with Remove Odor magic would be more practical."

"You would make a magic item just to remove bad breath?" Eleonora asked, amazed.

"Pretty extravagant, don't you think!" Borkz chimed in.

"Young master, even nobles don't have magic items," Sam explained.

"Extravagant, is it?" Vandal managed a small smile. "Then I'm definitely doing it." Thus Vandal set about cultivating garlic and making magic items to remove its smell.



As summer came into its own, a couple of things happened.

First, the garlic cultivation was going incredibly well. With the semi-demon barren soil of Talosheim and fertilizer created using Vandal's Fermentation skill, the garlic was growing at a remarkable pace: enough for a decent harvest every week. His attempts to improve the final product led to garlic bulbs as big as those on Earth but with a less pungent aroma. The nutritional ingredients remained the same. At least, that was what he thought from what magical testing he could conduct. He didn't exactly have access to a mass spectrometer.

In any case, garlic was quickly added as a new condiment to the market around the adventurers' guild, helping to ease demand for fish sauce.

Second, he successfully created a magic item to remove mouth odors. It looked like nothing more than a large barrel, but water placed inside would become infused with Remove Odor and Death to Bacteria effects. The water could then be gargled as desired.

He placed the barrels in the square, at each public bath, and other buildings that he owned. Everyone started to wash their hands with barrel water before meals and then gargle with it afterward.

Not long after, Braga ranked up to a rank 5 Black Goblin Ninja.

Braga had heard from Vandal about ninjas and put himself through ninja training. He also asked Datara to make him weapons like shuriken, *kunai* throwing knives, and a curved dagger. After leveling up some more, it hadn't taken him long to rank up to a monster with "ninja" in the name. It was an impressive feat that surprised even Vandal. He hadn't expected knowledge provided by himself—and based mostly on fiction anyway—to lead to Bragda becoming Ramda's first ninja. It had to be the result of Braga's superlative physical abilities and fast-growing black goblin constitution.

"King!" Braga exclaimed happily. "Look how high I can jump! Nin-nin!" He proceeded to hop around, jumping more than fifteen feet high.

Vandal wondered if he would also eventually obtain this world's first Ninjutsu skills, start summoning giant toads, and swap places with logs when he got hit. It really felt like he would, if Vandal shared more of those stories with him.

"I need to work harder myself!" commented Zulan, the giantling undead who

had been training Braga as a scout. He had also started training as a ninja; maybe it wouldn't be long before Ramda had two ninjas running around.

One day, Zamed the Anubis and some ghouls took Vandal to a corner of the city to see a tree with large green fruits. He had often seen them growing in the jungle demon barrens.

"King! We have a kobol tree growing!" one of the female ghouls exclaimed.

She was right. This was a kobol tree, which normally only grew in the demon barrens when there were kobolts around.

"Those things are kobol fruit? I've never seen them before," said Zamed.

"They don't look ripe. Can we really eat them?" Memedigga asked.

There weren't any full-blooded kobolts around, so the group hadn't even seen them before. However, the tree was clearly growing because of the Anubi in the city.

"Maybe the small number of Anubi in the city are why it took so long. Maybe it's just coincidence. Or maybe someone ate some kobol fruit when they were out of the city, and the seeds happened to drop here. There's no way to work it out." Vandal shrugged. What they did know was that Talosheim now had kobol trees and kobol fruit, which normally only grew in demon barrens.

"The tree is still small, King."

"That's true," Vandal agreed. The tree was only about five feet tall and had less than ten fruits growing on it. "I guess I'll start by giving it a shot of MP."

The reason that monsters and even normal plants grew so quickly in the demon barrens was because the earth was polluted by magical power. Vandal

therefore wondered if providing the soil with some MP could promote the growth of the kobol tree. So he poured a vast volume of MP around the tree, and scattered some of his homemade fertilizer.

The next day, the kobol tree had grown to over ten feet and had dozens of fruit growing.

But that wasn't all: there were now more of the trees sprouting up in the vicinity.

The success lit a fire under Vandal. He decided to start trying to grow other plants in other places. Using the land between the first and second city walls, where there weren't any buildings at present, he set about experimenting with a variety of seeds, including acorns and walnuts.

"I won't be using any more MP for the rest of the day," Vandal mused. "I can spare two hundred million or so."

He used Astral Projection, turning his arms into extending feelers before activating Magical Power Transfer toward the ground. He let the MP flow all day, starting in the morning, over lunch, and into the evening. His MP was recovering even as he used it, meaning in the end he probably used over three hundred million. All this was thanks to the skills Remote Control and Simultaneous Activation, which let him use multiple types of magic at the same time.

The next day, however, nothing had changed. Assuming that just pouring in MP wasn't cutting it, Vandal decided to spread some fertilizer and then apply the MP for a second day.

"If this goes well, we'll get to eat all sorts of fruit every day," Vandal murmured. "When we go to the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom, we'll be able to

bring back more rare fruit and trees...and I'll turn Talosheim into a kingdom of fruit... Hahaha!" Ripened with fruity passion, Vandal shot three hundred million MP into the ground.

He knew for certain that trees would have grown by the next day. But the outcome surpassed even his own expectations.

"Wow. I'm even impressing myself here."

He checked to make sure he hadn't grown a bunch of poisonous fruit, then headed right back to the city to report his results.

"Oh! This is incredible! Child, this is another of the legends of our Goddess Vida, come to life before our eyes!" The resident religious nut, Nuaza, was loving it. "How she took the barren lands of her people and turned them into our first woodlands! Ah, this is a miracle! The work of the divine, for sure!"

"Miracle is one word, perhaps," Vandal corrected him, "but this isn't divine. I'm mortal."

"It's still an amazing feat," Dalshia said. "I bet you could turn deserts into forests in the blink of an eye!"

"Mom, please," Vandal replied. "It took me two whole days to make a small forest."

"That's still incredibly fast. It normally takes hundreds, if not thousands of years for a forest to grow!"

She wasn't quite on the same level of fervor as Nuaza, but Vandal was still happy with all her compliments.

"What's this flower good for?" Nuaza asked.

"Now that there is a warfall flower," Zadilis confirmed. "The boy said there's

oil to be extracted from these.”

camellia, and named for how the falling petals resembled the heads of generals tumbling after defeat in battle. After flowering, the fruit that grew could be steamed and squeezed to produce an oil that could be used for cooking, and as an effective fuel.

Most of the citizens had skills like Dim Vision, which allowed for reading by moonlight, and Night Vision, which made nighttime as bright as day. This means Talosheim didn’t really need lighting up. But Vandal had been keen to obtain a source of cooking oil.

“Now we’ll be able to make tempura, deep-fry things, and even make mayonnaise.” He already was considering the possibilities. Acorns could provide oil as well, but the demand for acorn powder was on the rise. Meanwhile, making lard from orcs or other monsters was a lot more work than extracting oil. Now he would be able to set about making all sorts of dishes and condiments that he couldn’t access before— “Young master,” Rita asked. “Is that tree moving?”

“Huh? It can’t be,” Vandal said, still lost in his haze of delicious daydreams. “Trees can’t move ar—” But even before he finished speaking, he tilted his head.

The very tree in question moved its roots like feet and slowly slid sideways.

“It moved,” Vandal said.

“It did move,” said Zadilis.

“Which is why I said it moved in the first place!”

“Looks like an Ent,” Zadilis mused. “Where could it have come in from?”

“Who cares? We make lumber real quick from one tree,” Vandal said, hefting

his beloved axe. He had become quite the woodcutter recently.

But immediately after his comment, an unsettling rustling noise radiated out through the entire forest.

“...I think every tree I can see just moved,” Rita said.

“Don’t tell me—all of these are Ents?”

Kachia’s words were dead on.

Ents were rank 3 plant monsters. They used their feet-like roots to move around and had a humanlike face in the trunk. They were strong for their size and had trunks as tough as steel. The fact that they were made of wood might suggest a weakness to fire, but they also had the Resist Fire Attribute skill.

They were also slow, cumbersome, and could only fight by swinging their branches and roots around. Impressions from old tales that featured talking trees made most assume they were smart, but in fact, Ents ranked close to goblins in terms of intellect.

Indeed, they were more plant than monster, never attacking others except in self-defense or unless their habitat got too dry. They were rare, even in the demon barrens, and pretty harmless unless you got too close or started fires nearby. Their fresh leaves could be used to make moisturizer, while the trunk wood sold for a high price as lumber. The monster bounty parts came from the face.

The cause of the creation of Ents had been something of a puzzle for researchers. The leading theory was that Ent seeds existed, and once these grew into a mature tree, those would become Ents. However, the existence of the seeds themselves had never been proven.

Another theory suggested that large trees in the demon barrens sometimes became corrupted by MP and turned into Ents. Powerful magicians had poured magic into the ground in attempts to prove this theory, but none had been successful in creating an actual Ent.

"Van, how much magic did you give them?" Kachia asked.

"I was recovering as I used it yesterday, so I'd say around three hundred million."

"...I still can't quite get used to you saying things like that, Van," Kachia admitted. She had to catch her breath a little at the "hundred million" part, although she was starting to become more open with Vandal. She had started down the path of learning magic herself recently, but her own MP topped out at about 100. Now she was faced with a five-year-old child who was talking about dumping millions of times her own power into the ground in a single day. It was still a little hard to believe. "I wish you could share it with me. Not that you don't share sometimes."

"I understand the feeling," Zadilis said. "Even the mightiest magicians can't lay claim to a number in the hundred millions."

It seemed, then, that Vandal pumping so much MP into the soil had turned all the previous normal plants into Ents. Every one of them. He had single-handedly proven where Ents came from—although it would probably be a few years, at least, before he could share this discovery with civilized human society.

"You think things will be okay like this?" Kachia asked.

"They were walking around before we got here. I think it's fine," Zadilis reasoned.

"They don't seem to want to attack us, so long as we don't threaten them with axes."

"Child, how is your Death Attribute Allure working?" Nuaza asked.

"Looks like... Yes, it's working on them," Vandal said. He wasn't sure why these plant monsters without "death" or "cemetery" or anything like that in their name would be affected by Death Attribute Allure. But he couldn't deny that it was working.

He ran an Appraisal, just to see what popped up.

"Rank 4. Name: Immortal Ent. Description: Ent variants that have received large volumes of death attribute magic from the seed stage. However, they don't harbor any evil intent. They have resistances to all environments, physical attacks, and magical attacks, and excellent regenerative abilities."

That was the result. Basically, Ents that were really hard to kill.

"Okay. We'll call that a boost to fighting strength and food supplies," Vandal summarized. For now, he was focused on producing some warfall flower oil. He needed to make some golems and get a production line running.



A group of seven proceeded down the dark, large passageway.

This party of men and women, carrying lanterns and armed with various weapons, might have looked like adventurers exploring ruins or a dungeon. Not a bad guess, but only half correct.

"I thought it would be tougher than this! All that talk of ruins from the time of

the gods, sealed away hundreds of thousands of years ago.” The speaker was a man in his late twenties. He stabbed a demon with his spear while he spoke. Demon-type monsters were formed from clots of polluted magical power, turning into horrible fiends brimming with evil intent. Even the lowest-ranking goat-headed Lesser Demons, like the one the man had just exterminated, were rank 6 and should have posed quite a threat. However... “These are trash mobs. I’m not even breaking a sweat.”

“You said it, Raily!” The one sucking up to him was a small man in light scout’s attire. Green Gale Spear Raily’s pale face split into a smile at the praise.

“No point complaining. You have an Alias! You’re a grade A adventurer! Finding a foe that can hope to challenge you is the far harder challenge!” Further sweet words of praise came from a woman wearing a top that left nothing to the imagination. Raily’s smile widened at these further comments.

“You think so too, Flark?” Raily asked.

“...”

“Ah, of course. I set his collar to silent mode,” Raily recalled. “No matter!”

Flark was their tank, wearing black metal plate armor—far heavier than steel—and carrying a shield that was bigger than their scout. He didn’t even turn his head toward Raily when the man addressed him, but the hero wasn’t bothered.

Raily just gave a chuckle. “Sure, sure. No point complaining! The greatest heroes of all time weren’t doing great deeds every single day. Sometimes you have to do the simple stuff that also comes your way. Especially when it’s coming from Count Maubiht.”

“Future heroes see the world differently from us plebs!” enthused the scout.

“Oh, you’re remarkable! I’m falling for you all over again!”

These two were sucking up to him even harder than before. Flark just gave a short sigh.

Listening to the exchange would have suggested that this was not a party of equals. The collars around the necks of Raily's three companions made that even more clear. Each of them had a black, hard collar around their necks. They were slaves, owned by Raily. The brand marking their collars also indicated that they were criminal slaves.

These were different from indentured slaves, who could return to some semblance of a regular life if they paid off whatever they owed. Criminal slaves could be used and abused as their owner saw fit, all the way to their deaths, without any recourse toward the owners and any hope of ever being freed.

They were far from equals: Raily held their lives in the palm of his hand. And with a party of no one but his own slaves, it made sense that his ego would get overly stroked.

However, in this case, he was joined by three others, apart from his slaves. Three who were grinning a little at the exchange between their other companions. Three with crimson eyes and pale white skin.

"What do you guys think?" Raily asked them casually.

One of them grinned a little wider and replied, "We are happy to do business with you, Master Raily." The comment was accompanied by a flash of fangs.

Green Gale Spear Raily was talented in battle, but that was all. In every other regard, he was a normal adventurer.

He came from humble beginnings and had become an adventurer due to his confidence in his fighting skills. His main goal was to make money. Also, he

would never tell anyone else this, but he dreamed of becoming the kind of hero he had heard about in legends as a kid.

When he was starting out, he had happened to be present—by complete coincidence—at the moment when Heinz registered as an adventurer. Raily quickly built a bond with the younger youth, and they ended up forming a party together.

The other members were a female dwarf shield-bearer, a young archer and scout who loved to fling around big words, and a beautiful elf who commanded elemental magic. They gave themselves the name “Five Hue Blades.”

The four others who comprised the Five Hue Blades—everyone apart from Raily himself—were indeed like the heroes of old. One short year after they had barely made it through their first job to kill some goblins, the five of them were standing alongside veterans of the trade as grade D adventurers.

One more year and they had stepped forward from being the rank and file to becoming grade C. During their third year, they had succeeded in clearing an undiscovered dungeon for the first time. This brought them valuable magic items, fame, and even renown. Heinz, by now clearly the party leader, was raised up to grade B. The magical blade he had found in those dungeon depths provided him with his Alias, the Blue Burning Blade.

It was also around that time that Raily realized he was starting to feel a bit uncomfortable around Heinz.

Raily had his own talents. He had a face and raw strength that matched Heinz, he was sure. Heinz was the party leader, perhaps, but that didn’t explain why Raily felt like little more than an afterthought.

Heinz was the only one promoted to grade B after their dungeon exploits.

Raily had found a mithril magic spear, set with a green gemstone and capable of controlling the wind, but he hadn't got an Alias for his trouble. Heinz, the oh-so-talented golden boy, had nobles and merchants knocking down his door with offers of posts on staff or exclusive contracts. Not to mention the women he was bedding! The girls on every desk in every guild they visited got moist—around the eyes, if not also elsewhere—at the sight of him.

Raily, meanwhile, was nothing more than "Heinz's companion." It was like he had a sign around his neck painted with those very letters.

Raily came to realize the truth. He wasn't the hero in this tale. He was living in The Tale of Heinz.

It was the most painful and humiliating realization of his life. But that alone probably wouldn't have been enough for Raily to leave the cushy Five Hue Blades. It was a bridge so many adventurers had crossed before him—the bridge marked "That's Life." He could have accepted it and settled into his role as a member of Heinz's party.

That was before they received a certain job. A job that would split them apart.

It entailed capturing a dark elf witch who had been allured by a vampire and had given birth to a dhampir. A rare kind of job, but one that had proven simple to complete.

The witch hadn't been their equal, in magic or bow skill, and the rumored vampire hadn't shown his face or his fangs. Heinz had hit the elf in the sternum with the scabbard of his sword—not even needing to draw the blade—and that was the end of it. They had collected their payment and left the town behind.

But since that job, Heinz was often seen lost in thought, and started to say things that Raily couldn't relate to or even understand. Raily recalled how,

when they were just starting out as adventurers, Heinz had killed a pregnant female goblin. It had clearly weighed on him for a while, but eventually he'd got over it. Raily convinced himself that Heinz would move past this problem, just as before.

He realized just how wrong he was when Heinz turned down an invitation to a big party held by an important noble.

"Tonight is also a celebration of holy Alda," the noble's messenger had enthused. "Our guests would love to hear your tales of slaying that evil witch."

But Heinz turned the messenger down on the spot and sent him away. The noble had been a major representative of the Milg Shield Kingdom, where they had been at the time, and had significant influence with the adventurers' guild.

"Why did you turn him down?!" Raily had raged. "I've told you countless times! It might be a pain, but a higher rank means you have to socialize, like it or not!"

"But I don't think that woman was a witch," Heinz replied. "I'm not sure if this country...if Alda is truly right."

In the moment Raily heard those words, he knew their partnership was doomed. That he couldn't follow this youth any longer.

They were adventurers. They took jobs, fought monsters, and made money. They sought to increase their rank, obtain fame and renown, go up in the world, and then retire to live in comfort.

Raily wasn't about to tell Heinz not to follow his dreams or have ideals. He still hadn't given up on becoming a hero of legend, and he wasn't going to tell others not to feel the same way. So he didn't mind if Heinz had ideals, or dreams, or a misplaced sense of justice. But it wasn't right for him to suffer

because of them.

That was the crux of it. Heinz, the wonder boy, would be fine. The poets and bards would be singing his praises before long. He could turn down every noble coming his way and it wouldn't matter. He could doubt the values of this nation and the beliefs of their religion; he could even head to the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom, where dhampirs were considered humans with rights like everyone else, and he'd turn out fine. His strength, his faith in himself, the power of friendship—something or other would get him through. He'd rise to grade A, grade S, achieve fame and money and rank and women, all of them crowding his door.

But not so for Raily. He couldn't cross to a nation at war with his homeland for hundreds of years and assume he'd be protected by saying "adventurers have no nation." Even if he tagged along and somehow made it through, he'd still be nothing but Raily, the companion of Heinz.

Raily couldn't stand it any longer.

After leaving the Five Hue Blades, Raily landed an exclusive contract with Count Palpapekk, the big noble whose party Heinz had declined. He rose to grade B and achieved the Alias of "Green Gale Spear." This was all coming from the power and influence of Count Palpapekk, of course, but that didn't bother Raily. The truth, in his mind, was simple: he had always been capable, but unable to prove himself while in Heinz's shadow.

However, Raily was not blessed with a trustworthy band of followers. Any half decent adventurer was too full of themselves, and never listened to him. He needed people who were going to listen. Left with little choice, he worked solo or in temporary parties, thinking that people would come asking to join him once he had made more of a name for himself.

Along the way, he had ventured out with that same high priest involved in the witch hunt request. They attempted to capture the dhampir child who had got away and what was apparently a bunch of ghouls he had shacked up with. Nothing had come of the expedition, but it had proven only a minor bump in the road.

The real one had been lurking just ahead.

Still failing to get any interest in joining him, Raily had decided to purchase some slaves and raise them up into adventurers. He heard stories of how the legendary hero Bellwood had reformed criminal slaves and turned them into reliable allies who protected him on the battlefield. Raily therefore took his savings and purchased some combat slaves, then began to train them as adventurers.

The slaves differed from other adventurers in that they did exactly what he said, which worked—to some degree. The problem with the slave idea was that Raily was still a grade B adventurer; beginner slaves weren't going to be able to keep up. He changed his Job to Slave Handler and acquired the skill Enhance Slaves, but that only slightly improved the situation. Furthermore, the Milg Shield Kingdom belonged to the Amidd Empire, and following the same ruling as the empire, even slaves were afforded certain human rights. If he pushed them too hard, he would face criminal charges, and while slaves from the Vida races wouldn't have been a problem, the western side of the continent wasn't exactly overflowing with them.

This led Raily to the idea of using criminal slaves. That decision purchased the ire of his master, Count Palpapekk, but Raily didn't really care. The way he saw it, this wasn't the count cutting him from his employ; Raily was the one making the decision to leave the count.

“Count Palpapekk is such a moron!” Raily cackled. “He could take back his spot as marshal if he proved himself on this new expedition, but oh no, he’s just turtling, up in his manor! I don’t care about his cowardice, but he doesn’t get to rob me of a chance to make a name for myself!”

“True, but that let Marshal Reggston introduce you to General Maubiht!” cooed Messara, the excessively sexy magician. “You’re better than working under some local count.” She had reached an elevated post in the magicians’ guild at a young age, but then sullied her hands with forbidden texts in order to maintain her youth and beauty. To that end, she had kidnapped and killed ten children—that authorities knew about—and bathed in their blood.

“Heh heh, you said it. Everyone in the nation expects you to succeed in the footsteps of a tragic hero, boss! You might even get your hands on an artifact-level magic spear, right? That’s beyond just a bump to grade A! You could make grade S, my man!” The small scout was a former grade C adventurer called Genny. He had worked alone and seemed a pretty solid pick within his field, but behind that façade he had pulled all sorts of dirty schemes. Those included luring adventurers into traps to take their possessions, along with their lives, and selling off rookie adventurers into black market slavery. His misdeeds finally caught up with him when he was arrested by the adventurers’ guild.

“...”

Flark, their shield bearer, seemed—at first glance—far less extreme than the other two. That didn’t change the fact that he was a criminal slave. He had been the second-in-command of a band of mercenaries who made a living as bandits during times of peace. When it came to men killed with his bare hands, his number was higher than the other two put together.

However, forming up a party of criminal slaves damaged Raily’s reputation,

regardless of his deeds in the field. Just as he became convinced the path to grade A was closed to him, this expedition offered the chance to turn his fortunes around in a single sweep—only for Count Palpapekk to decide not to take part in the action, and refuse to provide support for Raily to do so solo.

As he looked around for a way to change his fortunes, he had happened to hear that the current marshal, one Count Reggston, was searching for skilled adventurers to join him on the expedition. Once Raily decided that was to be his course of action, things suddenly started to go so smoothly he almost thought it was a joke.

He was summarily raised to grade A by the adventurers' guild, got away without having to pay the normally exorbitant fee for breaking his exclusive contract with Count Palpapekk, and soon found himself face to face with Marshal Reggston. That had subsequently led to his hiring by the commanding officer for the expedition, one General Maubiht. All this led him to those who lurked in the shadows behind the general.

“Are you sure about all this?” Raily asked. “I’m Green Gale Spear Raily, the second coming of Divine Ice Spear Mikhail. Won’t your boss get mad if you deal with me?”

“She won’t care.” The vampire he was asking gave a wry grin. “We’re allies, sharing the same purpose in this expedition. Correct?” The vampires were underlings of the progenitor species vampire Tehneshia. They had come to him, seeking a deal by appealing to his desire for fame and glory with one simple question—“Don’t you want to become a hero?” Raily had jumped right on it.

“Yeah. Totally correct,” Raily replied.

He wanted money, of course, but firstly he wanted fame. That started with the glory of being the first to clear out the boundary mountain tunnel. It would

be followed by taking out the evil dhampir and the two traitor noble species vampires. If all went well, Raily might end up with an exclusive contract with Count Maubiht. He could get a cushy title and live the high life in the Amidd Empire for the rest of his days after retirement. He didn't care what the outcome of this expedition might mean for his nation.

The vampires, meanwhile, would get an influential member of the expedition to help smooth over their presence, bait to lure out the target dhampir, and combat strength.

"Maybe you're looking to get eternal life?" another of the vampires said.

Messara made a face that suggested she wanted exactly that, but Raily shook his head.

"No thanks," he replied. "I'd rather have the glory." He certainly had no plans to become a vampire and spend hundreds of years basically enslaved to someone more powerful. He kept that thought to himself as he looked the vampires over.

"A shame." The vampire sounded like she had peered into his brain, read his intentions, and tossed him away. After all, they had only been looking for someone to use for this expedition and had no reason to grow attached.

"Boss! Exit coming up!" Genny was pointing ahead.

The tunnel was blocked by countless rocks, but the scout's nose hadn't missed the fresh air seeping in from the cracks between them. Messara used some detection magic to check beyond the blockage and picked up a few minor hits.

"There are some undead out there," she reported.

"Strong ones?" Raily asked.

"No. Rank 2 at best," she replied.

"Then we don't have a problem," Raily grinned. "Stand back. This is a job for me and the Wind Magic Spear, Zephyr."

Raily raised his beloved spear and focused his mind. A wind whipped up inside the tunnel— "Hundred Cut Spiral Thrust!" he shouted. Wind attribute magical power pooling in the tunnel was intensified by Zephyr and then channeled by a high-level battle tech that sent a blast of rotating wind crashing down the tunnel. Tons of hard and heavy rock were blown aside with a terrible rumbling, easily smashed and scattered by Raily's spear attack. Flark proceeded to leap through the resulting hole and secure the external position.

"..."

"Huh?" Raily joined him a moment later. "There's no undead here."

Raily saw a rugged plain and some woodlands spreading beyond the rocks, with no sign of anything that looked undead.

"That's very odd," Messara stammered. "The rocks must have blown them away."

Fragments of the rocks destroyed by Raily scattered around the general vicinity. "Fragments," perhaps, was not the correct word, as some were as large as a man's head. A hit from one of them could defeat a rank 2 monster.

"You might be right," Raily said. "Phew. So this is the air in unexplored territory. I feel a fine breeze whipping up. A big moment for my future tales of heroism!"

"So long as you leave us out of such tales," commented one of the vampires as they passed by Raily. They proceeded to take out a magic item that looked a bit like a compass, and then splashed some red liquid on it to take some kind of

reading.

“If you don’t mind me asking, what are you doing?” Genny ventured.

“This is a magic item used to locate vampires,” one of them responded. “It will allow us to locate the traitors.”

The vampires themselves didn’t know the exact location of the dhampir and their other targets. They were now going to locate the destination for the expedition. If Count Palpapekk had known this, he surely would have bemoaned the lack of preparation in this hastily formed operation and felt even worse about not being able to stop it.

“No response for Sercent’s blood,” the vampire holding the compass reported. “Maybe he was killed or is just outside the search radius.”

“That range extends into the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom from here,” another said. “We should consider him to be dead.”

“And Eleonora?” asked the third.

“Hold on. I’m doing hers now,” the first vampire replied. He splashed some of their store of Eleonora’s blood onto the magic item and looked at the result. “I have a response for her. It’s northeast from here—around where records state Talosheim once stood.”

“You’re saying the dhampir and ghouls are also in those ruins?” the second vampire exclaimed.

“Hah! That suits us down to the ground!” Raily joyfully pursed his lips. “A new hero will finally atone for the failures of the Milg Shield Kingdom and the hero Mikhail from more than two hundred years ago! Along with the lost artifact, that great national treasure! This is exactly what I wanted! The goddess of fate smiles down on us today!”



Vandal had finally obtained oil from the seeds of the Immortal Ent warfall flowers. Now he was going about trying to create some homemade mayonnaise. He had geega bird eggs, fruit vinegar, and oil—all the ingredients he needed.

What he didn't have was a device to prepare them. The efficacy of his hand mixing was going to make the difference in terms of how long this would take.

That had ultimately resulted in Lefdia holding a whisk.

"You still okay, Lefdia?" he asked the zombie's left hand as she whisked briskly at the contents of the bowl. The appendage belonged to Zandia, once the second princess of Talosheim, and it sure had some smooth bakery moves. Maybe the princess had been good at baking—or maybe it was the spirit that had entered her left hand.

"Wow! It's a hand mixer!" Dalshia enthused.

"Mom, it's definitely a hand doing some mixing, but that isn't quite the same thing," Vandal said.

He had started out by making an actual hand mixer. It wasn't powered by batteries but was rather a golem—a golem shaped like a hand mixer. Made from metal, it was pretty heavy, but that didn't matter if the baker had Brute Strength. However, the word "hand" in the golem's name seemed to spark a rivalry with Lefdia, and she had clung to Vandal's face to get him to use her instead. That had resulted in her taking the place of the golem mixer.

"She's lighter than the golem I made, that's true. Easy to handle."

Lefdia, for her part, just kept on mixing. Vandal was slowly adding oil, letting the mixer do her work. Then he started using Whisp Fire, a blue flame that sucked away heat rather than imparting it, while the mixing continued.

“Vandal, is Lefdia okay?” Dalshia asked.

“Huh? Yeah, no problem,” Vandal replied. “She’s a zombie, Mom. She doesn’t get worn out.”

He wasn’t even sure what Dalshia was worried about. Sure, the sight of an expressionless child and pale, severed hand gloomily illuminated by a pale blue flame gave a lot of material for worry. But around here it was just another Tuesday.

“That’s another kind of condiment, right?” Dalshia asked. “Isn’t there some way to set it up so golems can make it all, like with the oil or seaweed?”

Vandal had already created a production line for warfall flower oil, comprised of golems and magic items. Now Dalshia wanted to know if he could do the same for this new concoction.

“I plan to do so in the future,” he replied. “The problem with making mayo is that you can’t just add the oil all at once. You need to slowly add it, like this. Golems won’t be able to handle such a delicate task right away.” The golems Vandal created were superior to those normally created with Alchemy, but they couldn’t do anything. Vandal needed to instruct them in order for them to add the oil at the correct speed.

In that regard, things like the hand mixer, fans, and massagers were easy to make. They had limited moving parts and could be ordered to move faster or slower. But when it came to something as complex as cooking, Vandal had to be there to give moment-by-moment instructions.

“This would have been easier if I had experience making mayo on Earth or in my previous life,” Vandal said. He had done some cooking for himself while on Earth, but clearly that hadn’t run to making his own mayonnaise. “Once I work it out, I’ll be able to let golems take over. This is just for now.”

First he planned to have a taste-test to see what everyone thought. Based on their reactions to the miso, fish sauce, seaweed, and bonito, he could only imagine it would go down a storm. The ghouls and giantling undead in particular had a taste for strong flavors. The same went for the black goblins, anubi, and orcas. Vandal might have been worried about their blood pressure in the future if they were human. He was sure they would like the mayo. He might even end up making more junkies—indeed, he knew for a fact that would happen. But if that was the price he had to pay to get some of that sweet mayo for himself, it would be worth it.

That giantling at the exchange said we needed a new product, Vandal recalled. *Seems like good timing.*

“Okay,” Dalshia said. “But if you’re feeling tired, take a break. Make sure you don’t overwork Lefdia, either.”

“Sure thing,” Vandal replied, as Lefdia started her mixing again.

“Lord Vandal, what do you need?” Eleonora appeared. He had called her to check on the flavor, now the mayonnaise was complete. “Is that...one of the diseases you are researching?”

“No. A new condiment,” Vandal corrected her.

Mayo probably didn’t look like cooking, from the perspective of a resident of this world, but she was making a big leap with that assumption. He was researching diseases, sure...

Most of those living in this world had little fundamental knowledge about sickness or bacteria. Many had no idea about microorganisms that couldn't be seen with the naked eye. The only exceptions would be highly educated intellectuals, or those involved with crafts such as brewing and baking. Vandal could only assume that was why Eleonora had gotten the wrong idea.

"My apologies," Eleonora said. "I thought you wanted to test and see if that stuff works on vampires." It seemed like she had been expecting to become part of some unethical clinical trial.

"No, I just wanted you to try this mayonnaise for me."

"I see. Oh, but look at me, thinking this is the source of some sickness!" Eleonora moaned. "What punishment will I receive for this? Please, be gentle —"

"Then your punishment, please, is to taste it," Vandal told her. It had been more than a year since Eleonora had joined his ever-expanding party, but she was yet to change her ways. She seemed to expect punishment for pretty much anything. That had been wearing on Vandal to start with, but by now he had simply grown to accept it. He normally tried to play along by "punishing" her with things that weren't any kind of punishment.

"Lord Vandal, that's hardly a punishment. Make me offer up some of my blood or ask me to act like furniture for a whole day." Vandal did consider, for a moment, getting her to let him put his head in her lap.

"I'm sorry, Eleonora, but I still think Vandal is too young for that kind of activity," Dalshia said.

"Ah! Please, I promise, I wasn't suggesting anything untoward—" Eleonora protested, shaking her head vigorously from side to side.

In any case, the mayo was finally complete. The vinegar was probably similar enough, but there hadn't been geega birds on Origin, let alone Earth, and the oil was coming from Immortal Ent trees. Turning these ingredients into mayo perhaps required different ratios. All of his attempts so far definitely still had room for improvement. This batch, however, might actually have been the finished thing. He was planning on the dipped finger test first, and then moving on to a green salad— “The proof is in the—”

But his words were cut short before he got to the pudding.

“Vandal?” Dalshia prodded, concerned.

“Mom,” Vandal said. “The Milg Shield Kingdom, with the vampires pulling their strings, are on their way here.”

“Oh no...”

“The surveillance undead caught something?” Eleanora asked. “How did they know to come here, though?”

Vandal took the whisk from Lefdia and put down the test batch of mayo.

“We’d better gather everyone and talk this through. I’ll explain everything the undead have seen. We can taste-test the mayo while we talk,” Vandal suggested.

He had thought the enemy wouldn’t be here until the fall, or winter. Next spring, even, if they took their time.

But the moth was flying straight for the flame.

—Name: Raily

—Race: Human

—Level: 47

—Age: 25 years old

—Alias: Green Gale Spear, Second Coming of the Tragic Hero —Job: Slave Handler

—Job History: Apprentice Warrior, Warrior, Spear Fighter, Magic Spear Wielder —Passive Skills

[Status Boost with Spear Equipped] [Status Boost] [Agility: Level 5]

[Status Boost with Non-Metallic Armor Equipped] [Instinct: Level 3]

[Detect Presence: Level 2] [Enhance Slaves: Level 2]

—Active Skills

[Spear Proficiency: Level 8] [Armor Proficiency: Level 5] [Thrown Projectile Proficiency: Level 5]

[Dismantle: Level 2] [Sneaking Steps: Level 2] [Magic Spear Limit Break: Level 4]

[Train: Level 1] [Coercion: Level 1]



Chapter Two: The Crowning of the Eclipse King

Vandal had gathered everyone from his main party in the castle hall, excepting those out of the city on tasks such as dungeon expeditions. He wanted to report that the invasion of the Milg Shield Kingdom forces and the vampires was imminent and discuss what to do about it. He also wanted them to get their tastebuds wrapped around some of his prototype mayo.

“This is great! So delicious!”

“I would prefer a little more stimulation. Maybe add some wasabi?”

“You think? It seems pretty good to me like this...”

“Amazing! I’ve never tasted a condiment like it! Lord Vandal, whatever can you cook with this?”

“Raaaaaoooooh!”

“Thuuup, sluuurp... Aaah!”

“Huh? Wha—aaaaaaah?!”

“Oh no! Rapieçage is trying to slurp the mayonnaise from around Talea’s mouth!”

“Don’t just watch! Help out!”

“Ahah! You get to taste-test delicious treats, Talea, which we spirits can’t even eat! So nope, not helping!”

“Ah! You monsters!”

“Okay, okay. Take some of this and quit your yapping—”

“Thuuk, thuuuuuuuh!”

“...Boy, this zombie girl is sucking on my fingers with all her strength.”

“I see it,” Vandal said, barely managing to pick Zadilis’s voice out from the hubbub. “Without her own spirit—or one of them, anyway—she’s little more than a beast.”

So much for dealing with military matters. None of them were able to beat their hunger for taste-testing new treats.

Lefdia had been looking about as pleased with herself as a severed hand could be, happily taking credit for mixing the ingredients. But once she saw Rapieçage sucking on Zadilis’s fingers, she leapt up and clung to Vandal in fear. It was clear that Rapieçage didn’t have the mental capacity to take part in this kind of discussion. Unless she was obeying a direct order from Vandal, she acted like any other zombie, and had never uttered anything close to a real word. Vandal had tried adding more spirit bodies, like he had with Skeleton, but it had zero effect. Either Skeleton was a special case, or she needed more learning and life experience—if that word even applied. For now, Vandal decided to presume that was the case and gradually raise her up right. Zombies and skeletons were like children. They didn’t grow up overnight.

“Rapie, take Zadilis’s hand out of your mouth,” Vandal told her.

“...Oorhg.”

Rapieçage opened her purple lips and pulled away from Zadilis’s ash-grey fingers, strings of saliva hanging from her blue tongue. Her lips and tongue had changed color, for some reason, after she became a zombie. Vandal had been sure to apply Maintain Freshness magic in order to stop any decay.

Zadilis sighed. “Suddenly licking my claws like that! Don’t blame me if you get a numb mouth.”

“She’ll be fine,” Vandal said. “She’s undead.”

“I know that, boy! I can see the stitches!”

“Phew,” said Talea, similarly relieved. “I almost had a same-sex zombie lip-locking encounter right in front of Lord Van!”

“We have to keep our guard up in future,” Eleonora agreed.

Zombie media on Earth suggested that zombies had poor eyesight but an excellent sense of smell. But Ramda zombies did not seem to follow that pattern. Rapieçage had a human head, her senses were even more atypical. Apart from the Night Vision she had obtained by becoming undead, her senses seemed similar to those of a human. The others therefore escaped her notice simply by wiping the mayo from their mouths. Perhaps Earth zombies were more impressive than Vandal had once considered.

“Can we please get onto the topic of the Milg Shield Kingdom’s army bearing down on us—”

“We wipe them out, no? Forget them. I need more mayonnaise.”

“That was still a test batch,” Vandal protested. “There isn’t any more right now.”

“What?! Make some more! I’ll help! How do you make it?!”

“Hold on,” said Zadilis.

For a moment, Vandal expected to hear the voice of reason.

“We’ll hardly be able to make more without the raw ingredients. Boy, what do you need?”

“...I’ll make some more,” Vandal conceded. “Please, just listen.”

Ramda mayo was another hit from the Vandal kitchen. Except for Rapieçage and Knochen, the entire party then proceeded to share information and discuss

how to handle the Milg Shield Kingdom invasion while each of them—including Vandal—cooked up their own batch of mayonnaise—an event that would go down as the New Talosheim Mayonnaise Meeting.

While Vandal was making mayonnaise, the rocks blocking the tunnel that led to the Milg Shield Kingdom were completely blown away, and adventurers and vampires emerged from within. Vandal learned certain facts by overhearing their discussion: First, the vampires who worshipped the Demon God of Living Pleasure, Hihiryu-Shukaka, were using the empire and Shield Kingdom to attack Talosheim again, just like they had two hundred years previously.

Second, they had used a magic item to locate Eleonora, which pointed them toward Talosheim.

Third, they had no plans to scout out Talosheim right away. Vandal and his allies had fled from the jungle demon barrens without fighting, and so his enemies were cautious about the same thing happening again. They were also concerned that the spirits of any who were killed during such recon would spill important information.

“They did draw my blood, on multiple occasions, but I had no idea they possessed such a magic item,” Eleonora sighed.

“Don’t worry too much about it,” Vandal reassured her. “If they are coming right here, that actually suits us best. Right now, the party of four adventurers and one of the vampires have remained to protect the tunnel exit. The other vampires have left, presumably to report back. It seems the humans used a magic item to contact the Milg Shield Kingdom.” The vampire community was led by creatures who had been lurking in the shadows for tens of thousands of years. Vandal had no idea what kind of crazy magic items they might have in

their possession. That said, the item they had used was clearly perfect for locating traitors, which seemed to fit aptly into the teachings of the Demon God of Living Pleasure and the personality of Vilkain.

I wonder if he used the same item to find Varen . . . my father? Vandal thought. *Well, can't worry about that now.*

“When will they be here, then?” Zadilis asked.

“There doesn’t seem to be a fixed plan yet,” Vandal responded.

Further discussions by the adventurers made it sound like more adventurers and knights would be coming in order to secure the tunnel and hold the exit. The first party of adventurers would then return to base. At the same time, the Amidd Empire would hold military talks concerning the discovery of the tunnel and how to handle the subsequent invasion. They needed to discuss the budget, the number of soldiers and knights to commit to it, and where all these resources were going to originate from.

They planned to make up some excuse about “warning against ancient evil spirits” and get a party of Divine Alda monks to purify the tunnel with holy water. The real reason was to try and limit Vandal’s access to what they currently thought were Medium-type powers.

Then the Amidd Empire and Milg Shield Kingdom would announce the joint expedition to great fanfare. There would be ceremonies and festivals to raise the morale among the people. In the Amidd Empire, General Maubiht would throw a party preemptively celebrating their victory, before setting out with his best knights to meet the mercenaries, who would have vampires mixed in. Milg would also gather knights from across the nation at around the same time and hold its own ceremonies...

“Considering all of this red tape and partying, I would say winter at the very earliest,” Vandal concluded.

“Do humans die if they hurry?” Zadilis pondered. “They don’t even live one hundred years and yet they move more slowly than we do.”

“Tell about it,” Vigaro moaned. “Just come meet axe now.”

The ghouls certainly had no frame of reference for such extreme pomp and circumstance. Vandal saw some meaning in a celebration to commemorate making a decision, but all the military ceremonies felt like a waste of time to him, too. He wondered if troop morale really would take a big hit without them.

“Humans love to put on a show,” Talea said.

“Just think of them as that kind of creature,” Eleonora advised. Their words held weight, coming from former members of the human race.

“Dad told us that rich people need to do things that make them stand out from the poor ones,” Rita added.

That sounded about right as well. Vandal wasn’t a hereditary noble but aimed earn a title in the future. He wondered if he would end up having to do things like that.

“In that case, it won’t be till spring,” Borkz reasoned. “It might not snow around here, but it does get damn cold.”

Trapped between the mountains, winter in Talosheim was nail-bitingly cold. So cold that it seemed impossible that snow didn’t fall. It was likely that one of the mountains to the side, either east or west, was stopping the snow from reaching them, but those ranging peaks couldn’t prevent cold from sweeping down onto the city.

That would make military maneuvers in the winter very hard on an invading

force. It would take five days at walking speed from the tunnel to Talosheim. There might not be snow on the ground, but there wasn't a road, either. Even if they had the records from two hundred years ago concerning Talosheim's whereabouts, they would still need to cross the demon barrens that had developed since. If they decided to push through all of this and still come during winter, their forces would be seriously weakened.

"Though they sure as hell don't know the climate around here either," Borkz added.

"True, but that's likely to make them more cautious," Vandal replied. "The vampires might not be bothered by the cold, but they are planning on exploiting human forces. They aren't going to force them to march through the winter."

"Good point," Eleonora said. "If that was their approach, the vampires wouldn't have bothered teaming up with humans in the first place."

Everyone had serious expressions on their faces as they discussed their plans. At the same time, Vandal was holding Lefdia and everyone else was holding hand mixer golems, with oil-filled bowls in the other hand. They were mixing and adding ingredients and working with the contents of the bowls, making mayonnaise as they talked. A pretty surreal sight.

"Sounds like spring," Vandal concluded. "Borkz, you're adding the oil too fast." They weren't going to hang around until summer. The invasion would come springtime.

"This ain't easy," Borkz complained.

"Making delicious things never is. You've seen the effort the boy has to put in," Zadilis said.

"We're helping to make things that we can't even eat," Saria added. "Please

try not to complain too much.”

“What about the adventurers and vampire protecting the tunnel?” Talea asked. “Should we take them out?”

“An appealing idea,” Vandal replied, “but we’d best leave them.”

Doing so simply wasn’t worth it. Killing or capturing a few adventurers and one vampire wasn’t going to do much, or even provide them with useful information. The enemy still hadn’t decided how many troops they were going to commit to this action. Raily and even the vampires wouldn’t have a clue about such details. The same went for the strength of the vampire forces. One vampire they were willing to leave on guard duty didn’t hold any position of importance in their organization.

There was also the fact that reaching the tunnel entrance where Raily was on lookout was a bit of a pain. There was no road, and plenty of demon barrens in the way—the same obstacles the enemy faced in reaching Talosheim. Borkz had taken a party over there last year and defeated a lot of monsters along the way, but other monsters would have filled that void since. They would be unlikely to be able to sneak up on their foes while fighting off such monsters, raid them successfully, and then make it back. The chances of defeat were too high—and if they did succeed, that success would be measured by how much more cautious their enemies became.

“Appealing? What do you mean?” Dalshia asked.

“One of the adventurers, Green Gale Spear Raily,” Vandal replied. “I’ve heard his voice before, and he’s there.”

Indeed, he would never forget it. Raily was one of Heinz’s comrades whom he had overheard talking in Evbejia. One of the voices in the group who had

captured Dalshia, cashed her in with High Priest Goldan, and then spent the night commemorating her memory with booze in a tavern after she had been burnt at the stake. When Vandal explained all of this, everyone's faces hardened up.

Dalshia looked with concern at her son. "Vandal, are you sure—"

"Yes. We'll leave them be, for the time being. Don't worry, Mom. I'm not going to creep off and try to kill him alone."

Vandal wanted vengeance. If he didn't take them out, there was no telling when they might come for him again. If possible, he wanted to do it himself. But if that wasn't possible, he wasn't going to force it.

"He is going to take part in the expedition himself. If any of you encounter him in battle, please do the honors. That said, he is a grade A adventurer, so perhaps do so carefully."

"Grade A, eh?"

"Can't wait to test my strength against adventurers!"

"Squeak, sounds exciting," Skeleton piped up.

"Indeed," said Basdia. "No need to hold back against adventurers now." Everyone was excited about the prospect of some real combat. These were clearly foes, siding with the vampires and the sworn enemies of Vandal. There was no reason anyone in the room should feel mercy or pity toward them.

"He calls himself the second coming of Mikhail," Vandal revealed.

"Seriously?" Borkz was hooked by this news in particular; he looked ready to march out and start killing right now. "Grade A, spear wielder. That does sound like fun."

Raily was definitely going to stick out in terms of strength from the expedition forces. If he were to be defeated, it would negatively affect morale. Vandal welcomed any of his companions to bring him Raily's head.

"Borkz, everyone, thank you for thinking of Vandal and myself like this," Dalshia offered. "But please, don't push yourselves too hard."

"Indeed. We will be most careful," Zadilis assured her. "Well, boy, is this stuff ready yet?"

"I think I'm about finished too," Talea added.

The mayonnaise was indeed complete. They gave it a proper taste-test, including slathering it onto vegetables; mixing it with wasabi, garlic, or ginger; and eating it with meat. The geega egg and warfall oil mayo definitely had a richer taste than ingredients from back on Earth.

It would go well with okonomiyaki and takoyaki...but that means more acorn flour... The food-related issues had felt more important to Vandal than a battle he had been long-preparing for. Luckily enough, the acorns from the Immortal Ents gave off little lye, even if they weren't washed first, allowing them to be easily turned into flour. That said, based on the number of Immortal Ents he had grown, the volume of flour that could be made per day was insufficient for Talosheim's current population. *If things work out, we'll resolve that issue next summer.*

"We'll stick to the original plan, then," Vandal concluded. "Destroy the expedition and replenish our fighting power. Then we'll strike a massive blow to the Milg Shield Kingdom to cripple their national strength and destroy the tunnel."

His outline of the plan was met with general shouts of agreement from

everyone, including even Rapieçage—although her participation was a little delayed due to licking more mayonnaise.

The plan to strike back at the Milg Shield Kingdom after defeating the expedition was about more than just holding a grudge or taking revenge for the events that had occurred two hundred years ago.

Of course, that was a part of it, but there were more deeply considered and logical reasons. There was no hope of forming any kind of mutual cooperation between modern Talosheim and the Milg Shield Kingdom or their Amidd Empire overlords, let alone lasting peace. To human society and the Amidd Empire, Talosheim wasn't a nation. It was a ruin infested with dangerous monsters. No different from a horde of goblins, apart from scale and level of threat.

After all, they had previously attempted to wipe out every living thing in the city, with no envoys sent, no demands for surrender, and no prisoners taken. Talosheim had at the time been a nation of giantlings. Perhaps one of Vida's new races, but still living, civilized creatures. The ancestors of those same aggressors were not about to open negotiations with what they saw as nothing more than a horde of goblins.

If they found themselves losing the battle, they might accept terms of retreat and leave...but would surely return with an even larger army in the future. If the Talosheim side worked at it tirelessly, never giving up, trying every angle—they might manage talks after years or even decades of struggle. But the followers of Divine Alda weren't going to accept that, regardless. From what Ice Age had said, the Empire that worshipped the religion so intently, Amidd, would have no ear for Talosheim's plight.

That was before they even considered the fact that allies with the vampires

who worshipped the Demon God of Living Pleasure, Hihiryu-Shukaka, were buried deeply in the internal structure of both the Amidd Empire and the Milg Shield Kingdom. So deep that they could make this entire expedition thing happen in the first place. If Talosheim extended an olive branch, the vampires would snatch it from their hands and beat them to death with it.

Above all else, history made it clear why driving back the invaders would not be enough. Why they needed to deal a blow to the Shield Kingdom itself.

Amidd was focused on maintaining the respective power balance between a ruling home empire and their affiliated nations. The invasion two hundred years ago and this new one also carried some element of that; the leaders of the Empire wished to whittle down some of the excessive strength the Milg Shield Kingdom was fostering. This meant that, even if they defeated the expedition, once Milg had recovered sufficiently, the same thing was liable to happen again.

Conversely, while the nation was weak, they were unlikely to launch any kind of expedition across the dangerous boundary mountains. The vampires' allies and moaning holy men wouldn't matter.

Because the real enemy of Amidd was their neighboring Olbaum Electorate Kingdom. Amidd couldn't afford to ignore that threat and keep sending out expeditions. Doing so would eventually dilapidate not only the strength of the Milg Shield Kingdom but also the Amidd Empire itself, and lead to defeat in a war with Olbaum.

The vampires are a different problem, Vandal thought, but if we can at least take out the tunnel, that should give us a good few years... Maybe a decade or more before this becomes a problem again.

The reason Vandal had not simply destroyed the tunnel to the Milg Shield Kingdom the moment it was discovered was so that, when the vampires and

kingdom forces did make their move, he would know exactly where they were coming from and be able to detect them in plenty of time. If the vampires found some other unknown route, it would have been a lot harder to see them coming from so far away.

Now that he had identified the enemy's approach, the tunnel had served its purpose and could be filled in. Regardless of the military, Vandal didn't want adventurers wandering down it either. If talk of the "unexplored southern regions" spread among grade A adventurers, it could start a whole new bunch of problems.

"I guess you could call it that."

Their enemies saw the task as wiping out some monsters. But for Vandal and his allies, it was a defensive battle followed by a counter-offensive. War was definitely one word for it.

"Then we're going to need all sorts of things."

"That's true," Vandal agreed. "But Talea and Datara are making plenty of gear already. We can continue to build up stocks of meat and fish before springtime, and we have the Immortal Ents for acorns, walnuts, and oil. We even have honey. The waterways are flowing through the city, and there are numerous wells... What else do we need?"

All the dungeons close to Talosheim had hardened it for a siege. That had already been the case two hundred years ago. With Vandal showing up and half the giantlings turning to undead, they were now in an even better position. All their provisions could be kept almost infinitely, and more than half their fighting strength was comprised of undead and golems. The ghouls actually needed to

eat, but worst-case scenario, they could chow down on the enemy dead. Vandal could handle attempts to poison their water supply with Detox magic. Vandal couldn't think of anything they needed to hurry to prepare.

"What do you think?" Borkz raised his voice. "We need a boss! A leader to lead us into war!"

"Oh, not this again." Vandal shook his head.

Borkz was yet to give up on getting Vandal to take up the post of king of Talosheim. But the nation state was no more. Vandal wasn't sure appointing him king would make any kind of difference.

"Lord Van, I think you need accept that this is simply going to happen," Talea advised him.

"That's right, young master!" said Sam. "You've already got a fine stone statue in the square!"

"I have some notes on that thing as well, if I'm being honest," Vandal mumbled. Recalling the statue of himself that had been erected in the square in front of the castle, Vandal gritted his teeth a little. It was well made. Stone carvers with long years of experience had poured their pride into it. However...it also had a far more expressive face than Vandal was capable of ever pulling off. It was hardly like looking in a mirror.

"Lord Vandal," Eleonora piped up, "if no one from the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom can get here either, I don't think you need to worry." As she pointed out, the tunnel that led through the mountains on the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom had been rendered impassable. Vandal didn't know a great deal about civil engineering in this world, but he doubted that even a battalion of one hundred top-class earth attribute magicians could fix the problem. Even Vandal,

with his Golem Creation skill and hundreds of millions of MP, would take longer than he liked to get the tunnel open.

It would probably be faster to just start digging a fresh tunnel in a different spot, but there was an ancient story about an attempt to dig a tunnel that described how diggers had stumbled across a horde of underground monsters that proceeded to devastate the surrounding area, eventually leading to the fall of the unlucky digging nation.

The lesson? Leave the boundary mountains alone.

“That’s one way of looking at it...” Vandal mumbled.

“From their perspective, boy, you must pretty much look like our king,” Zadilis said. “Once the fighting starts, who do you think is going to take command?”

“I mean, we have you, Borkz, Vigaro—”

“You’re talking about commanders on the ground,” Zadilis cut him off. “What about overall command?”

“...Me?”

“That’s right,” Rita stated. “You’re the one who started all of this, young master.” Vandal had been the one suggesting everything, from preparing for the battle with the expedition force and vampires in the coming spring, to the city’s overall operation. He had listened to input from the others, of course, and had made adjustments accordingly. But Vandal was the one who proposed the overall plans.

“Whose name is going to come up as leader of Talosheim, apart from yours?” Basdia asked. “If someone asks me, that’s who I’d say.”

“Squeak. You are indispensable as leader of Talosheim,” Skeleton added. “All supplies and trading would collapse without you.”

Everyone who lived in Talosheim saw Vandal as its leader. Indeed, they had for some time. He was Ghoul King to the ghouls and new breeds like Braga, the Oracle Child to the giantling undead, and master to those like Rita, Eleonora, and the Cemetery Bees. Also, as Skeleton stated, Vandal had become a vital part of the everyday makeup of Talosheim. The golem factories would run until the MP ran out, including the newly completed facilities to smoke bonito. It wouldn't be easy, but he'd have a facility for the mayo running eventually. But miso and fish sauce required him to do the job, and making the seaweed would take years without him. The golems might have decades in them, but they wouldn't work forever either.

Vandal realized that, even though he had never taken the role, or even said he wanted it—indeed, he had always tried to turn it down—he had already become the representative of Talosheim.

I still don't like it...but I thought Oracle Child might turn into an Alias, and it never has...not that I don't have plenty of other red flags. Vandal sighed. He was still planning on making a name for himself as an adventurer in the future, so he had been worried about his stats being revealed upon registering at the guild. However, upon further consideration, it was a little late to be worrying about that.

He had death attribute magic, Death Attribute Allure, Spirit Pollution, and Enhance Brethren, not to mention the Alias Ghoul King, the skill Soul Crusher, and the unique skill God Smiter. It would only take a glance for someone to realize something was up.

Of course, it would only be the receptionist who saw all that. He couldn't imagine that anyone important, like the guild master, would take the time to register a child. Once he was registered, he could run away from that specific

town and become active elsewhere, avoiding the problem.

That was all enough to convince him to proceed.

“Okay,” Vandal said. “I’ll become your king.”

Skill level increased for Cooking, Remote Control, and Enhance Followers!



A week after Vandal agreed to become king of Talosheim, a massive coronation ceremony was held.

“Can’t I just say I accept the position and we call it a day?” Vandal asked. “I’ll still prepare a banquet.”

“Child,” Nuaza chided, “this might seem pointless, at first glance, but it will suitably adjust the awareness of everyone present—including yourself.”

There was no escape, from the sound of it, and so they set about preparing to do it right. First, Vandal made a crown and throne from orichalcum, pretty much just throwing something temporary together. As they were made from Dragon Golem fragments, the results were black as iron, and would sell for enough to purchase a castle or two, if put on the market. Talea had wanted to do the crafting work, but her priority was to build combat gear. Vandal planned to turn the items into shields and armor as soon as they did their job at the coronation; Talea could do a proper job of it once the battle was won.

Then they announced the ceremony and prepared a feast. That part felt like it had taken up the majority of the week.

“The king, preparing all the food himself,” Vandal sighed. “Maybe I should call myself the CooKing?”

“Young master,” Sam interjected. “What if that were to show up on your stats?”

The joke went down like a lead balloon.

Then everyone dressed up—still looking like barbarians, despite donning the finest furs—and lined up in the square outside the castle.

“Hold on!” Borkz shouted. “Why am I a military officer? And standing in the front?! I’m a free-spirited adventurer!”

“Boy, I’m still in training myself. I don’t think I’m ready to be court magician,” Zadilis said.

“Young master! I’m just transportation. A servant! I’m not suited to the position of a man of letters!” Sam protested.

“Ah, so I have to take my lumps but you’re all allowed to complain? That doesn’t seem fair,” Vandal said. “Sam, you in particular! What did you expect when I was making a venue a cart could fit inside? Please, take some notes from Pauvina and Lefdia.”

He had come to recognize the importance of this ceremony, so he decided to fill the empty posts of military and state officials, including the court magician, with little regard to the feelings of those assigned. It meant little more than having the best seats for the ceremony anyway. Pauvina and Lefdia were standing in the spot for the nobles, carrying the bag that contained Dalshia’s bone.

“Now, let the coronation commence,” announced Nuaza, who was running the ceremony. Normally the head priest of the Vida temple would handle such

duties, but currently they only had the former priest and apprentice warrior, Nuaza, in residence. He hadn't wanted the job either, but when Vandal told him to suggest someone who could do it instead, Nuaza was completely unable to do so and gave up.

"Let us give our blessings to the Goddess Vida and our father Talos for the coming of this day," Nuaza began. "We can be sure that our absent former king, His Majesty, First Princess Lebia, and Second Princess Zandia would all be thrilled to learn of this ceremony." He went into a short history of the city of Talosheim, and then had Vandal swear a vow to shoulder that history and bring further prosperity to his nation. The child would be crowned, receive the title of Sun King, and the ceremony would be complete. Then the feasting would commence— "However, from this day we set forth on a new track of history," Nuaza said, altering the traditional ceremony. "Child, do you swear to accept the crown of Talosheim alongside the title of the first Eclipse King?"

He wasn't getting the title of Sun King after all. Taking the current state of Talosheim into account, the title didn't really suit him. The Talosheim of today was far more active at night than during the daytime, for one. The citizens of the city were made up of undead—ghouls who could see by moonlight—and new races who could see as well at night as they could in the day. The only real exceptions were the Cemetery Bees and Immortal Ents. The title Eclipse King had been chosen because it had less negative connotations than something like "King of Darkness." Vandal also eventually wanted the giantlings who had made it out of Talosheim to return to the city, along with their descendants. And once Vandal became a noble, he wanted to secure his standing in society and engage in activities such as trade. It was better to keep light and darkness out of it.

"I shall be one with Talosheim," Vandal said, intoning the fixed passage, even as he considered how often he actually planned to be coming back and forth.

Then the orichalcum crown was settled on his head.

“Eclipse King Vandal has taken his throne.” As soon as Nuaza finished the final syllable, a mighty roar went from the assembled crowd.

Pteranodon Zombies, and swarms of Cemetery Bees filled the skies.

The citizens had all been made aware that this coronation was for the purposes of fighting off the Milg Shield Kingdom’s expedition force. The same Milg Shield Kingdom’s army that had decimated Talosheim once was coming back again. That thought, above all others, whipped them into a frenzy.



The giantlings maintained their stance of “the grudges of the father shall not be passed to the son,” even after becoming undead. But that didn’t mean they were going to underestimate the nature of the threat coming for them. If another generation of their enemies was coming to finish Talosheim off, they would fight back with everything they had.

“Oh, my dear, small, sweet Vandal . . . although you’re so little, you’ve gone so high up in the world!” Dalshia was happy enough to weep tears of joy. That made Vandal happy too, even if he thought the “so little” part wasn’t really necessary.

“Your legend as the king of kings starts here, Lord Van!” Talea declared.

Well that’s not going to happen, Vandal thought, keeping it to himself. Now we have a big party, everyone eats well and shouts and sings, and we’re done. I can explain the plans for the battlelines and everything we need to do to prepare tomorrow.

It might seem like they were moving slowly, but it was still only the tail end of summer. Their enemies wouldn’t be here until next spring at the earliest. Vandal had also placed surveillance undead and golems at fixed intervals along the route the army was likely to take after leaving the tunnel. He would have plenty of warning before the enemies arrived, even if they sent a scouting party ahead. The castle walls could become surveillance golems, and if they got past them the buildings of the city itself were stacked with golems. Having the Cemetery Bees flying around only tightened their security.

Yes. We’re locked up nice and tight, Vandal assured himself.

Acquired the Alias Eclipse King!

Not so sure about this Alias. He'd been banking on the fact that Oracle Child hadn't become his second Alias yet, but this was just as unfortunate. I do already have the Alias Ghoul King. I guess another royal-themed one can't really hurt.

He was pondering this as he looked over his allies, and then something came to him.

There's actually something we do have in common. A shared element, you might say. I'm not sure if I can make use of it, but it has to be worth a try.

He couldn't do it here, however. For today, he just enjoyed the feast with everyone else, including fresh sashimi, Needle Wolf hot pot, dinosaur steaks, and gelatin made from kobol fruit and honey.



Bohmak Goldan had removed his armor. Now, simply dressed like a monk, he was taking opinions from the holy warriors under his command. He looked like nothing more than an affable old man. Not only Vandal, but anyone who knew of his violent battlefield escapades, would doubt what they were seeing.

"Tell me, then," he asked the men under his command. "You all think we should avoid joining this Milg Shield Kingdom action?"

"Yes, Lord High Priest." This from a holy warrior who was barely more than a youth. He looked tense, but spoke firmly. "Our strength is needed in other more fitting places. We aren't soldiers or adventurers. We don't have to do what any nation tells us."

"We don't fear battle with monsters," offered another. "But is there any

meaning in joining this expedition?"

The holy warriors were said to have started out when priests took up weapons to defend secluded temples from wild beasts, long before the Demon King created monsters. In current times, they defended their temples and the faithful flock while also traveling to dangerous hinterlands to spread the holy word. For these holy warriors, then, there seemed to be little to excite the blood in the Milg Shield Kingdom expedition this coming spring.

These were educated individuals. Just as with the Talosheim expedition two hundred years ago, the political motivations for the action were brazenly obvious. There also weren't any humans beyond the boundary mountains who needed protection.

"We followers of Alda, God of Law and Life, must fight monsters," stated another. "For we holy warriors, it is our sworn duty. There would be meaning in our fighting alongside this expedition across the mountains, against the monsters and Vida races that lurk there, I do admit. But ought we not still prioritize the protection of those directly threatened by monsters?"

to doctrinal validity.

"You make fair points," Goldan replied. Goldan was himself one to choose such naïve ideals over worldly fame and glory. If not, he would have long ago accepted his promotion to cardinal, rather than remain a holy warrior, fighting on the frontlines despite his advancing age.

"We don't wish to prevent you from completing the hunt for that young dhampir, High Priest," one of the men quickly stammered.

"Not at all," Goldan assured him. "I allowed that to become too personal. You need not worry."

The man had lived a long time and had never before let a target escape his grasp. He always tracked down the vampire or lamia in question, no matter how skillfully they concealed themselves. And the same went for dhampir and their parents. Dust, all of them. With just one exception.

A dhampir exception, by the name of Vandal. Goldan had given the creature's blighted mother to the flames, reducing her to purified ash, but the infant had somehow evaded him for a subsequent period of six whole months. When the creature resurfaced, still only around the age of three, it had become a Medium and was leading hundreds of ghouls. Unexpected was hardly the word for it.

This Vandal had somehow led his ghouls away across the boundary mountains. Goldan regretted having prevented that as much as he regretted failing to kill the monster in its crib.

If he has a way to cross the mountains and escape, Goldan reasoned, he must also have a way to cross back over and attack us. The southern part of the Vangaia Continent was closed off by the boundary mountains. The entire region was a nest of Vida's new races, and it was also said that powerful progenitor species vampires lived there. A few hundred ghouls posed a threat to a single town, perhaps, but leaving that dhampir in play... Goldan couldn't help but feel that the fate of an entire nation—indeed, an entire continent—might be at stake. *If that dhampir increases his minions, he may form a monstrous military capable of freely crossing the boundary mountains that remain unpassable to us. They could wipe out every settlement in those foothills, both to the east and west.*

This was exactly why, when he had been contacted about joining this expedition beyond the mountains, Goldan's heart had soared. This had to be an opportunity provided by Divine Alda himself.

However, the intent of the expedition was to take back the national treasure lost in the previous expedition two hundred years prior, and to purge Talosheim once and for all. Goldan's issues with Vandal, including the supposed threat he presented, were entirely personal. Goldan had barely shared them with the marshal at the time, Count Palpapekk, let alone the upper echelons of the Milg Shield Kingdom or Amidd Empire. Thinking about it logically, the southern part of the continent was a large place. Even after making it across the mountains, it seemed unlikely he would be able to even find Vandal; the child had eluded him in some scrubby forest for months. The only chance of an encounter would be if the dhampir knew they were coming and was lying in wait.

"He is a cunning and cautious creature, that dhampir," Goldan mused. "If he thinks he can't win, he'll run again without a second thought. If I ever encounter him again, it will be when he thinks he can best me." When considered in that light, Goldan knew that Vandal wouldn't appear during this expedition. It had only been two years since the last sighting. That wasn't enough time to put together the kind of military force capable of defeating the thousands of elite soldiers who would constitute the expedition. He might have a better chance if he holed up in a solid fortress—like the Talosheim of old, perhaps—but those city walls had been blasted full of holes, and two hundred years as a demon barren would have done it no favors. The place would be a ruin.

Which all meant, it was indeed pointless to take part.

"Very well," Goldan said. "I understand exactly how you feel. I will turn down the offer to join the expedition."

That very night, however, just before bed, Goldan was praying to Alda and received an oracle—one of the few he had ever received in his life.

"The shadow of the Demon King falls once more. Search it out and eradicate

it.”

“This is...my Lord Alda!” Goldan exclaimed. “You are telling me to cross the mountains and defeat the dhampir!”

Receiving the message on the night he had decided not to join the expedition was clearly a sign. It couldn’t be a coincidence. It was providence.

It also linked the shadow of the Demon King with Vandal.

That this assumption was actually completely correct—even though the oracle was not only incredibly short and didn’t even include the letter “V”—was something that even Alda, the author of the message, could not have imagined.



Vandal successfully created a disease to use in the fighting.

infection is transmitted through air, mucous membranes, or blood. The disease takes hold five seconds later. The main symptoms are violent vomiting, headaches, dizziness, fever, and joint pain. It takes days for it to kill someone, and even then, only a small percentage of victims,” Vandal explained.

At his feet lay a Twinhead Tyranno, eyes rolled back in its skulls, tongues lolling out while saliva and stomach juices pooled on the floor, burbling and bubbling.

“...Young master. That sounds like a pretty serious disease,” Sam commented. “If it spreads across the Milg Shield Kingdom and Amidd Empire, it will cripple them completely.”

“It probably would,” Vandal agreed. “But they have life attribute magicians

and Alda priests. They'll be fine."

"Healing diseases with magic is quite difficult," Sam said. "The type of magic required depends on the disease, too. It's not that simple."

"There are some people with Resist Sickness, and even some with Resist Poison as well, but not many," Kachia added, making it clear that Amidd and Milg weren't especially well set up to handle a major pandemic. Human society was not aware of detox methods such as sterilizing with alcohol and heat, and there were no antibiotics in this world. There were potions and healing magic skills instead, which weren't great at handling disease.

First of all, potions for diseases were expensive. Even then, they didn't work on all types. The general approach was to take something to alleviate the toxins accumulated in the body and heal up while their effects were lessened.

Secondly, healing magic that specifically targeted diseases was not advanced. After all, a spell that enhanced vitality to beat a cold might cause the instant spread of cancerous cells in a cancer patient, killing them in short order. Only the advancement of biology and anatomy in this world would improve such techniques, along with further discoveries about the workings of the body, viruses, and bacteria.

Even when it came to resistance skills, there were few adventurers or knights with those specifically intended to resist diseases. In most cases, monsters fought with poison, which was also favored by assassins and thugs. Resist Poison was therefore fairly common, but Resist Sickness much more rare. And those who did become sick often enough to pick up such a skill were hardly cut out to become adventurers.

"Did I make something more dangerous than expected?" Vandal pondered. "But I also engineered it to cease functioning after twelve hours. It should be

fine." Even if it did somehow spread across the population, no one was going to die from it in half a day, and considering the population density in this world, it wouldn't be able to spread very far. If things got out of control, he could force the issue with wide-range Death to Bacteria; he had the MP to pull that off.

As Vandal reasoned with himself, Rita and Saria peered at the dyno.

"Young master, shall we finish the poor thing off?" Rita asked.

"Or do you want to wait the full twelve hours?" Saria offered.

"No, let's end this. Please, go ahead," Vandal said.

"Sure thing!" the girls said in unison. They moved in toward the Twinhead Tyranno, their white buttocks swinging left and right in unison, and then chopped off one head each, using halberd and glaive, respectively.

Yes, white buttocks. As Rita and Saria had leveled up their Spirit Body skills, they had not only finally obtained their long-desired ability to eat, but also corporeal forms that at a glance looked like living people. Their pale skin was much like Vandal's—certainly not healthy looking—but they might also have gone a bit heavy on the wax concealer.

The older sister, Saria, had a mature look, with hair grown down to her back. Rita had two pigtails, the picture of an energetic young woman. Their bodies also suited the armor that they wore.

Their spirit bodies had previously been little more than stick figures, but now they filled out the chest parts of their beachwear armor, tucking in at the waist, and with full, round butts. In terms of pure surface area, more than half had to be exposed.

"That's got to be seriously distracting," Vandal mused. His own body was still that of a child, meaning he only had a mental understanding of such sensations.

A few more years and a normal kid might be having their first crush. He decided in advance to move them toward wearing cloaks before he reached that milestone.

The two of them had been super excited, of course, when they first managed to actually appear.

“Look at me, young master!” Rita had shouted excitedly, showing off her new (spirit) body. “I’ve completely filled out the armor! Not the tiniest gap to be seen! I’m almost popping out! But then my tummy is so slim! Thank goodness I spent every day wishing repeatedly to be hot and sexy!”

Vandal had spent the day thinking about how much the two must have bottled up their feelings, how he had asked so much of them, and how—if he ever made more Living Armor in the future—he would help them learn the Spirit Body skill as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, the overly excited sisters had been tossing him from pillar to post, quite literally.

Because the Spirit Body skill was about more than just keeping up appearances. It made spirits corporeal, functioning like muscles and bones for other undead. In turn, it gave the sisters a massive boost in strength.

That said, skimpy armor such as theirs offered limited physical defense, and left so little to the imagination. But that was not a problem in this instance. They might look more human now, but a spirit body was still just that: a spirit body. They could get their heads caved in, a sword through the chest or belly, or their exposed thighs slashed open, and it wouldn’t matter. They didn’t have organs or blood, flesh or bones to spill or be exposed. They might feel some discomfort, but their bodies were nothing more than parts of themselves that they chose to manifest. If they ever got into any real danger, they could turn

that off and return to the disembodied armor that had served them well enough so far.

“Young master, please. Mock my foolishness,” Sam suddenly said, sounding strangely sullen and sniffly. “I finally understand what you were asking when you confirmed with me, multiple times, whether I really wanted you to put my daughters into that armor.” He looked in the direction of his two beloved girls. They had greaves and gauntlets on, meaning the overall exposure was less than, say, underwear, but there was still plenty for a man to wrap his eyes around.

However, none of the ghoul guys had hit on them yet. Probably because they were known to be Vandal’s personal guard.

“I didn’t expect it to turn out quite like this either,” Vandal told him. “There are steps we can take. Give them cloaks or wrap them up in something.” What they couldn’t do was change the armor. That was their bodies.

“Hey, do you think I should dress like that too?” Kachia asked.

“You are fine as you are, thank you,” Vandal quickly replied. Eleonora had asked him pretty much the same thing just the other day, and Vandal replied in the same way. If they dressed so skimpily, their defenses would immediately hit rock bottom. Kachia didn’t even have Eleonora’s regenerative powers, making it doubly important that she stayed protected.

More importantly than that, making all of the women in his group wear such sexy gear would ensure that his Ghoul King and Eclipse King Aliases be quickly joined by something like Horn King or Sex-Crazy King. Those were not only unlikely to have any desirable effects, but also weren’t going to do him any favors in polite society. That had to be avoided at all costs.

“Well, let’s carry on. We need to get some leveling done before spring,”

Vandal said.

“Okay!” Rita replied.

“Young master, I would like to level up a little too,” Sam said.

“Ah, I just went up!” Kachia exclaimed. “I’m level 100 at last! Now I can change Jobs!”

Skill levels increased for Brawling Proficiency and Suck Blood!

Acquired the skill Cooperation!

—Name: Saria

—Rank: 6

—Race: High Magic One-Piece Swimsuit Armor —Level: 35

—Passive Skills

[Special Senses] [Physical Stat Boost: Level 4 (UP!)] [Resist Water Attribute: Level 3 (UP!)]

[Resist Physical: Level 3 (UP!)]

—Active Skills

[Housework: Level 2] [Halberd Proficiency: Level 5 (UP!)] [Cooperation: Level 3 (UP!)]

[Bow Proficiency: Level 3 (NEW!)] [Spirit Body: Level 4 (UP!)] [Remote Control: Level 3 (NEW!)]

[Armor Proficiency: Level 3 (NEW!)]

—Name: Rita

—Rank: 6

—Race: High Magic Bikini Armor

—Level: 36

—Passive Skills

[Special Senses] [Physical Stat Boost: Level 4 (UP!)] [Resist Fire Attribute: Level 3 (UP!)]

[Resist Physical: Level 3 (UP!)]

—Active Skills

[Housework: Level 1] [Glaive Proficiency: Level 5 (UP!)] [Cooperation: Level 3 (UP!)]

[Bow Proficiency: Level 2 (UP!)] [Thrown Projectile Proficiency: Level 1 (NEW!)] [Spirit Body: Level 4 (UP!)]

[Remote Control: Level 3 (NEW!)] [Armor Proficiency: Level 3 (NEW!)]

—Name: Bohmak Goldan

—Age: 65 years old

—Alias: Vampire Hunter

—Job: Demon Crushing Divine Warrior —Job Level: 97

—Job History: Apprentice Holy Warrior, Holy Warrior, Priest, Divine Warrior

—Passive Skills

[Enhance Senses: Level 3] [Instinct: Level 5] [Alda Divine Enhancement: Level 10]

[Mental Fortitude: Level 3]

—Active Skills

[Staff Proficiency: Level 9] [Armor Proficiency: Level 6] [Shield Proficiency: Level 7]

[Light Attribute Magic: Level 6] [Life Attribute Magic: Level 5] [Non-Attribute Magic: Level 1]

[Magic Control: Level 4] [Limit Break: Level 6] [Angel Advent: Level 1]

[Clergy: Level 5] [Command: Level 3] [Cooperation: Level 4]

—Unique Skill

[Receive Oracles]

—Negative Status

[Zealot: Religion] [Old Age (Onset)]

“I bet Ent-something!”

"Heh! We'll see how that works out for you. I'm betting on Armor Master."

"Sorry, everyone, but what are you betting on?" Vandal asked, coming upon Vigaro, Borkz, and some others placing some kind of wager in the lobby of the ruins of the adventurers' guild.

He took a moment to reflect on how they really needed to change the name of this place. Supply Depot or The Exchange might work. Vandal wouldn't have been surprised if the circle of gamblers had been actually holding cards in their hands—although playing cards didn't really exist because paper was very expensive in this world, so something similar.

"Y'see, boy," Zadilis said, "every time you perform a Job Change, you get access to new Jobs, correct?"

Vandal had been placed under the curse "Unable to enter existing jobs" by Rodocolte, but each time he had visited the Job Change Chamber so far, there had been Jobs that were new to Ramda on display, which continued to increase in number. Vandal had shared this information with the educated Zadilis and the experienced adventurer Borkz. In dealing with Jobs that had never existed before, the two of them hadn't known any details, but they could still provide Vandal with clues based on existing Jobs with similar names.

Incidentally, after the coronation, Vandal had shared his full background with everyone in Talosheim: the ghouls, the giantling undead, and even the Cemetery Bees and Immortal Ents. Now everyone, without exception, knew that he was a human who had previously lived in two other worlds, that he was cursed by the Reincarnation God himself, and that one hundred other resurrected were eventually coming to this world. The confession had garnered various reactions, including: "I don't really understand, but wow!"

"I thought you were different...special, but wow!"

"You lived on another continent—island—world? Called Dirt, you say? Wow."

The bees just buzzed and the trees just rustled.

In any case, everyone accepted him. They didn't all understand the concept of other worlds clearly, but had some awareness of ideas about reincarnation. Indeed, some of the giantling undead had already been suspecting something along those lines. Vandal had already reproduced two of the legendary foodstuffs said to have been left by the hero Zakkato: miso and fish sauce. So it was perhaps only natural that some of the residents wondered if he had also come from another world.

The part about being cursed by a god, however, was little more than adding one name they had never heard before—Rodocolte—to the list of his existing enemies, which already included the mighty God of Law and Life, Alda, and the gods supporting him, and the progenitor species vampires who worshipped evil gods. It was hardly a big leap or especially worrying for anyone, which made Vandal, in turn, very happy.

In any case, this gambling seemed to have something to do with Vandal's Jobs.

"So we're betting on what kind of new Jobs you will have this time," Zadilis explained.

"Cuz regardless of the one you choose, multiple new Jobs tend to be displayed for you," Borkz added.

"What new ones you think?" Vigaro asked.

"...New Jobs are normally only discovered every few decades, or even centuries, right?" Vandal asked. Immediately after the end of the age of the

gods, new Jobs like Knight and Soldier were discovered one after the other. But as time passed, discovering new Jobs became a rarer occurrence. Currently the adventurers' guild and other guilds paid a handsome reward for the discovery of new Jobs.

"Right. But you've been finding them hand over fist for the past two years!"

"Bet you find a new one again!"

"...Don't get mad with me if I don't," Vandal said.

"So what Job do you think might appear?" Zadilis asked him.

Vandal thought for a while before he replied.

"Maybe something like...Forester?" Vandal was seemingly the first on Ramda to grow Ents from seeds, which made it the obvious choice. He had been cultivating every tree they found in dungeons and demon barrens and turning them into Immortal Ents, one after the other.

"Forestry?" Borkz asked. "They already do that in human countries, although I don't think it's a Job."

"What? They do?" Vandal hadn't expected that. Long ago on Earth, people had just cut down trees and left the land bare, creating arid plains and barren wildlands, but it sounded like Ramda already had the concept of reforestation.

"Yeah. It started after the heroes planted trees on the wastes ravaged by the battle with the Demon King," Borkz explained.

It sounded like even Bellwood hadn't been able to hold back tree-cultivating techniques and wait for nature to restore greenery to the world. He hadn't wanted to share otherworldly technology, but had been fine with teaching them about planting trees. Maybe he had been some kind of extreme environmentalist back home. Of course, the people might have engaged in the

practice even before the Demon King appeared, and there just weren't any surviving records.

"And what are you betting with?" Vandal asked. Talosheim didn't have a currency, meaning all transactions involved the exchange of one item for another. There also wasn't a leading product that could act like a currency either. Vandal guessed they were staking food.

"I'm putting up some fern tea," Zadilis said.

"Dried strips of Ammonite," Vigaro said.

"Meat from a noble orc I hunted recently. There are hordes of the piggies in Barigen Death Mountain," Borkz said.

"I'll stake some honey that there will be no new Jobs," Vandal said.

"Boy, why so negative?" Zadilis asked.

"Because a run of good luck only makes me worry more that my luck will soon run out," he admitted. Then he headed into the Job Change Chamber.

Available Jobs: Crusher of Souls. Poison Master. Insect Master. Evil Boss. Zombie Maker. Arborist.

Despite Vandal's concerns, he had two new Jobs on offer.

"Zombie Maker and Arborist. I'm only vaguely sure what an Arborist is—like a tree surgeon? I guess it came from turning all those seeds and branch cuttings into Immortal Ents," Vandal mused.

It felt like a magician's cheap trick to Vandal. Although he'd have to be a street performer or join a troupe to get by with such tricks in this world.

Vandal assumed Arborist would be like a Tamer for plants, and perhaps making it easier to turn plants into monsters. That said, plant-based monsters weren't like undead or insect monsters in that they were generally easy for anyone to tame. He put that matter aside for now.

The bigger mystery was Zombie Maker. Vandal knew for a fact that Gubamon and Tehneshia had been around for tens of thousands of years. Both were progenitor vampires who could create and control undead due to the blessings of the Demon God of Living Pleasure. Vandal would have expected them to have discovered Jobs like Zombie Maker and Death Spirit Magician long ago.

"Maybe they don't take Jobs. Maybe they can't?" Siding with the evil gods may have pushed them too close to becoming monsters, removing the possibility of them taking Jobs. He had no evidence for such suppositions, and Eleonora didn't know the race or rank of the progenitor species vampires, so there was no way to check. That would also have to wait for the future.

He simply had to accept his loss at the bet and pick a Job.

"Considering my need for an overall strength boost, I think Insect Master or Arborist would be best. At the same time, one of Heinz's allies, Raily, is coming with the army in the spring."

Vandal didn't want to kill him by his own hand at the expense of everything else. Even if he had the chance to kill him, he would give up on it without hesitation if the battle strategy demanded it. He was confident that his allies would defeat Raily for him. However, he couldn't say the same about having to give up because he wasn't strong enough to do the deed. He wouldn't be able to accept that. For that very reason...

"I'm taking Crusher of Souls," Vandal said.

Skill level increased for Spirit Body, Soul Crusher, and Remote Control!

Acquired the skills Mental Multitasking and Substantiation!

—Name: Vandal

—Race: Dhampir (Dark Elf)

—Age: 5 years old

—Alias: Ghoul King, Eclipse King —Job: Crusher of Souls

—Level: 0

—Job History: Death Mage, Golem Creator, Undead Tamer —Status

Vitality: 125

Magical Power: 247013388

Strength: 90

Agility: 89

Muscle: 95

Intellect: 457

—Passive Skills

[Brute Strength: Level 1] [Rapid Healing: Level 3] [Death Attribute Magic: Level 5]

[Resist Maladies: Level 5] [Resist Magic: Level 1] [Night Vision]

[Spirit Pollution: Level 10] [Death Attribute Allure: Level 5] [Skip Incantation:

Level 3]

[Enhance Brethren: Level 7] [Magical Power Auto Recovery: Level 3] [Enhance Followers: Level 4]

—Active Skills

[Suck Blood: Level 4 (UP!)] [Limit Break: Level 4] [Golem Creation: Level 6]

[Non-Attribute Magic: Level 4] [Magic Control: Level 4] [Spirit Body: Level 4 (UP!)]

[Carpentry: Level 4] [Construction: Level 3] [Cooking: Level 3 (UP!)]

[Alchemy: Level 3] [Brawling Proficiency: Level 3 (UP!)] [Soul Crusher: Level 3 (UP!)]

[Simultaneous Activation: Level 3] [Remote Control: Level 3 (UP!)] [Surgery: Level 1 (NEW!)]

[Mental Multitasking: Level 1 (NEW!)] [Substantiation: Level 1 (NEW!)]

[Cooperation: Level 1 (NEW!)]

—Unique Skill

[God Smiter: Level 1]

—Curses

[Unable to carry over experience from previous lives] [Unable to enter existing jobs] [Unable to personally acquire experience]

In the instant he performed the Job Change, the skill modifiers boosted the level of his Spirit Body, Remote Control, and Soul Crusher skills. He supposed

that Crusher of Souls gave modifiers to spirit-related skills. He also acquired the skills Mental Multitasking and Substantiation. He wondered what those might be. Something to do with spirits and souls, surely.

Strangely, the Job Change hadn't provided the boost to combat strength he had been hoping for.

"...Maybe I should have gone with Poison Master," Vandal pondered. "Then there's the wild card, Evil Boss."

In any case, Soul Crusher was a skill activated by performing some other kind of magic or martial arts attack. At least that was a boost to combat strength.

Consoling himself with that thought, Vandal left the chamber and returned to the first floor, where Zadilis and the others were waiting. He reported his findings and handed over the honey they were owed.

Then he headed out to Borkz Demi-Dragon Plains, which had been his primary monster stomping ground since the previous year.



The footsteps of winter were approaching. Although tall mountains sandwiched Talosheim to the east and west, the city still got plenty of daytime sunlight. In the courtyard garden around the back of the palace, there stood stone monuments to Sun Giant Talos and Goddess Vida, which supposedly received the most sunlight in all of Talosheim.

"Ooh, aah, mmm!"

“Hah, aah, that’s, aaah, so deep!”

“Ah—uhnn... I’m so hot! My body is burning up!”

That same garden full of monuments was currently also full of the moans of beautiful, nearly naked women.

“No more, ah, no more, don’t pump any more, I can’t take it!”

“...We can stop whenever you like,” Vandal said. This was tough to watch, the child thought, as he addressed the four women—Bildy, Basdia, Eleonora, and Kachia.



Of course, they weren't up anything immoral, or even sexy. There were completely reasonable explanations for all of this.

"No, don't stop!" begged Eleonora. "I can keep going!"

White smoke was rising from her white skin. This whole thing had kicked off when she had said she wanted to acquire the skill Resist Sunlight prior to the springtime battle.

Vampires were generally weak to sunlight, silver, and light attribute magical attacks. The Resist Maladies held by most vampires didn't extend to cover these weaknesses, and it was difficult to acquire skills like Resist Sunlight and Resist Silver after the initial damage was done and one became a vampire. Eleonora, however, was now in different circumstances. When Vandal acquired the Alias Eclipse King, it also provided her with a way to acquire Resist Sunlight.

Importantly, it was a given that the expedition army from the Milg Shield Kingdom would choose to fight in the daytime. No humans would pick to fight at night against monsters that could see in the dark. There would be vampire agents mixed in among the army, of course, but they could still function if they wore thick clothing or full plate armor to keep the sun off their skin. Such a getup would attract attention walking around a town, but in an army conducting a military campaign, they would blend in more easily. In fact, the vampires wouldn't be participating as regulars from the official army, but rather as private mercenaries in the employ of some noble, allowing them to dress however they liked without raising eyebrows.

Eleonora had thought she could use the same technique, dressing up in heavy clothing, a mask, or plate mail, but she was too accustomed to fighting in light

armor. Full armor wouldn't hinder her too much, but there was still time before spring. So she had decided that acquiring Resist Sunlight was the better idea.

Which was why she was out here, in the sunniest spot at the beginning of winter, sunbathing while battling to learn the resist skill. With just strips of cloth wrapped around her chest and waist, her appearance was nothing short of provocative. All the while she cooked in the sunlight while her Rapid Regeneration skill healed her burns, with Vandal providing more magical power when her MP dipped dangerously low.

It was a pretty Spartan approach, but Eleonora seemed extremely passionate about the undertaking. Vandal felt he hadn't been giving her much attention recently so he decided to go along with her request.

That was when Bildy, Basdia, and Kachia had passed by, leading to this particular situation. Of course, the ghouls had no need to acquire Resist Sunlight. All they were doing was practicing their magic while receiving MP from Vandal.

"It's just, ah, Vandal, your (Spirit Body) hands...the way they are rubbing (stiff muscles)..." Bildy moaned.

"Yes, yes," sighed Basdia. "These pressure points—they're like buttons making me moan!"

Vandal wasn't just transferring MP to them but was also giving them the same kind of spirit body massage that he had used on Talea. He applied Spirit Bodification to his hands and inserted them into the bodies of the women, directly stimulating stiff muscles and pressure points. It was like a low frequency massage that could think for itself.

"And there are pressure points...in all of these places?" Basdia asked.

"There are," Vandal declared, without a moment's pause.

The main ones were located on the top of the head or the bottom of the feet, but there were quite a few in spots that one might hesitate to touch on someone of the opposite sex. Vandal gave them some warning, but was going ahead and touching those parts too. His hands were transformed using Spirit Bodification, all split up and divided out between them, meaning he didn't feel any warmth or softness from their skin. It was all just "touching a living organism" to him, which made it pretty easy—from his perspective.

"Okay... Well, if you say so..."

Vandal wasn't looking to grope her, of course, so he wasn't touching or pressing excessively.

As Origin had been a world of both science and magic, the study of qi energy was recognized as a form of magic. What on Earth had been seen as Eastern medicine, such as pressure points, acupuncture, and moxibustion, had therefore been studied and used to the same extent as the equivalent of Western medicine. Vandal had therefore been forced to take part in all sorts of experiments to see if death attribute magic could be used in Eastern medicine. So when he used Spirit Bodification to investigate the body of a living creature, he had developed a complete understanding of the pressure points and their effects, including those unique to the physiology of the ghouls.

As it turned out, applying death attribute magic to Eastern medicine didn't have much effect.

"Ah, I'm not saying I don't want you touching me. In fact, it makes me quite happy, but it's also a little...confusing, having you be quite so aggressive," Basdia admitted.

“This isn’t something I can really be aggressive or gentle about, to be honest,” Vandal said. “Of course, I’m not saying I don’t want to touch you.”

This was a massage. Vandal’s hands were using Spirit Bodification and were all weirdly divided up, but it was still just a massage. There was nothing dirty about it—although, the significance of skinship went without saying.

“Haah, haah, haah... Van, too much, too much MP!”

Kachia, meanwhile, was only receiving MP from Vandal, and yet she was perhaps the most overheated of all of them.

“Really? I’ve only given you a little so far,” Vandal replied.

“A little for you is a lot for me!” Kachia exclaimed. “I told you! I don’t even have two hundred MP!”

This was worse than the average for female ghouls, with their penchant for magic, but slightly better than the males. The number had been influenced by her not only originally being human, but also having been a frontline adventurer. Frontliners like warriors and knights had less MP than backliners like magicians. Instead, they had higher vitality, strength, muscle, and agility. Unlike magicians, the only time a frontliner was going to consume MP was by using a battle tech. Those with more MP than vitality would not normally be rushing to fight with the vanguard.

As Kachia had been a frontliner, the status boosts she received from becoming a ghoul followed the same pattern life. The increase to her MP had been relatively higher than that with her other stats, as she was becoming a female ghoul, but the value it was increasing from had been low to start with. She had therefore become an apprentice magician without much MP to work with, reducing the volume of magic she could practice and keeping her from

increasing her skill levels. That was why Vandal was helping her out by refilling her MP as she trained—the only issue was Vandal’s skewed perspective on the topic of MP.

With more than two hundred million in the bank himself, for him “a little” was still tens of thousands. A few hundred was like a speck of dust on a grain of rice. As a result, every time Kachia ran out of MP, Vandal refilled her “a little,” but it was ten times what she could actually handle. It was no surprise she let out moans as it “overflowed.”

“I don’t see the problem. Having it flow out can’t hurt you, can it?” Vandal asked.

“No, it can’t, that’s true, but it feels...well...”

“Okay then,” Vandal continued. “Your MP is recovered. Please start training again.”

“I don’t think I can,” Kachia said. “I’ll run out again so quickly.”

“And then I’ll fill you back up.”

“Oh, ohhhh...” Kachia started once more. For some reason, she looked like she might burst into tears.

Bildy and Basdia had already starting training again. Bildy had earth attribute magic, and Basdia had water and wind, while Kachia was lucky enough to be blessed with four attributes—fire, wind, light, and space. However, Bildy was only average in terms of magical skill. Basdia had almost no magical potential, so she had previously thought that devoting herself to learning the martial arts would be a better use of her time to serve her grotto. Meanwhile, Kachia had given up on using magic for much of anything when she had been told it would be a miracle if she could ever make practical use of it.

Since then, however, Basdia had ranked up and Kachia had become a ghoul and changed Jobs. The increases to their MP, intellect, and other stats now allowed them to practice like this.

Eleonora was stripped down to catch as much sun as possible; the other three were showing so much skin—not only because of the standards set by ghoul fashion, but because the training was making them so hot that they took even more off. Vandal didn't quite understand that, even with the heat.

“Haah...oooh... Master Vandal, I’m close, so close, close to...getting the skill...” Eleonora moaned, her skin changing from snow-white to stimulating red, and back to white again.

“Mmmm, it’s hard to control the earth,” said Bildy, her grey ghoul skin glistening. “How do you do it, King?”

“Okay! Again, from the start!” Kachia was grey as well, looking pretty ripped for a magician.

“I need to power-up quickly...or I could get hooked on this,” Basdia said. Her skin was a darker grey, patterned with those red lines that accentuated her curves.

There was plenty of jiggling going on, in all those intense skin tones. In front of the monuments might seem like an inappropriate place, but both Vida and Talos had apparently been pretty open about stuff like this, so it was no big deal.

I wonder if Vida would ever send an oracle to me, Vandal thought. He prayed at the temple every day he was actually present in Talosheim, but perhaps that kind of lip service wasn’t enough to get into her good graces. The oracle Nuaza had received had pointed directly to Vandal, of course, so he did seem to be on

her divine radar. Vandal decided to ask the giantling priest to teach him how to pray properly.



Out in the cold air of winter, some soldiers were being kept busy with carpentry tasks.

"I don't mind the extra pay, but when exactly did we become slaves?" muttered one, working in a pair with his fellow infantryman to carry stone.

His friend grinned at this question. "Hah! Slaves don't get paid anything! Not that there's anything to spend our coin on out here."

The soldiers were working at the exit to the tunnel discovered through the boundary mountains from the Milg Shield Kingdom. They were erecting simple fortifications. The interior of the tunnel was now safe to traverse, having been cleared of monsters by Raily, also known as the Second Coming of the Tragic Hero.

However, there was nothing safe about the world beyond the boundary mountains. It was jam-packed with the kind of rank 3 monsters you normally had to visit a demon barren to encounter. And even mightier monsters popped up all the time. In order to prevent such monsters from passing through the other way, some kind of fort was needed at this end of the tunnel.

However, no regular craftsmen could work in a place where monsters might gobble them up at any moment. The Milg Shield Kingdom's army had therefore deployed its troops.

A third of those sent defended the construction site and the tunnel; a third

worked on the actual construction; and a third took time to rest and recover. They worked on that rotation while completing a temporary fort to at least hold the position.

They had also hired a few dozen adventurers, mainly grade C, for lookout duty, scouting the vicinity, and helping with defense as required. Green Gale Spear Raily and his party had taken out a few rank 8 monsters in the vicinity, including a Stone Dragon, but since then nothing higher than rank 5 had appeared. It had still been deemed better to be cautious.

So far, that caution had been rewarded. There were some injuries, but not a single death. It felt far more dangerous to be on the frontlines against the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom, comparatively speaking. The talk of a cursed, blighted region of vampires and dragons had proven unfounded.

“Just wish there was more to do,” commented the first soldier. Being so far from civilization meant that there weren’t many ways to pass the time. No merchants or entertainers or whores came through. And not only the troops, but even the adventurers had been prohibited from drinking due to the ever-present dangers. The only thing they had to look forward to was mealtime, but that generally consisted of wartime fare—hard baked bread, dried meat, and either cheese or dried vegetables.

When Raily had been here, he had supposedly bandied around dragon meat with carefree abandon. The grade C adventurers stuck here now, however, were working a low-paying emergency request that they couldn’t reject. They had a very different attitude from a grade A adventurer holding an exclusive contract with an Amidd Empire general, and who was already anointed as a hero at home. The grade C lot were only interested in collecting as many materials as they could from the rare monsters of the southern climes, and they

kept most of the meat for themselves. If there was so much that it simply wouldn't keep, they might sell some cheap to the army, but there was little chance of it making its way into infantry mouths.

"Man, I heard a rumor that the grade S adventurer Thunderclap Schneider turned down a chance to take part in this expedition," a soldier grumbled.

"Hah. A grade S is too busy dealing with all the women who want a piece of him. How many half-naked beauties do you think he has waiting for him, even now, while we work our fingers to the bone? Gah! I wish they'd all just die!"

"Keep your moaning to yourself. There will be plenty of that for us once we get home. And we're building something important here, a fort and checkpoint that will be key to the Talosheim expedition."

"Whatever. You think we'll actually see some action?" the first soldier pondered.

His friend paused, but only briefly. "...No way." The actual marching force was going to be the elite of the elite. Regular infantry couldn't hope to get picked to take part. And most of these guys, including themselves, were the regular of the regular.

"Well, no matter. All is as Divine Alda wills it. I'm sure, if we work hard, good things will come to us," said the first.

"Whatever you say. Alda, Lord Alda, bless us with popularity among the tavern wenches."

"If that's what you want, you need to pray to get promoted first."

The two of them continued to banter as they hammered more nails.

—Name: Eleonora

—Rank: 9

—Race: Vampire Viscount (Noble Species Vampire) —Level: 12

—Age: 8 years old (Age at time of becoming a vampire: 20. Total age: 28)

—Job: Servitude Warrior

—Job Level: 45

—Job History: Slave, Servant, Apprentice Magician, Apprentice Warrior, Magician, Doom Gazer —Passive Skills

[Night Vision] [Self Enhancement] [Subordination: Level 4 (UP!)]

[Brute Strength: Level 6 (UP!)] [Rapid Regeneration: Level 3 (UP!)]

[Resist Maladies: Level 6 (UP!)] [Instinct: Level 3] [Spirit Pollution: Level 3]

[Magical Power Auto Recovery: Level 4 (UP!)] [Detect Presence: Level 3]

[Resist Sunlight: Level 3 (NEW!)]

—Active Skills

[Excavation: Level 1] [Time Attribute Magic: Level 5] [Life Attribute Magic: Level 5]

[Non-Attribute Magic: Level 2] [Magic Control: Level 3] [Sword Proficiency: Level 3 (UP!)]

[Brawling Proficiency: Level 2 (UP!)] [Sneaking Steps: Level 4 (UP!)] [Steal: Level 1]

[Housework: Level 2] [Shield Proficiency: Level 2 (NEW!)] [Armor Proficiency: Level 1 (NEW!)]

[Limit Break: Level 2 (NEW!)] [Skip Incantation: Level 1 (NEW!)]

—Unique Skill

[Alluring Doom Gaze: Level 7]



Compared to the time of Vandal's third birthday and today, there was a significant difference in the overall fighting strength of Talosheim. Vandal had himself become stronger, but more significant were the advances made by everyone around him.

Among the ghouls, the only ones left at rank 3 were Talea, the other crafts-focused types, and the youngest generation. Almost all of the others had become rank 4, taking on becoming Warriors, Grapplers, Archers, and Apprentice Magicians. Many had pushed higher than that, even, reaching rank 5 races such as Ghoul Barbarian, Ghoul Heavy Warrior, and Adept Ghoul Grappler. This marked incredible growth compared to your standard grotto of ghouls.

The giantling undead, who hadn't changed much in two hundred years, now were spending their days and nights in dungeons. Most of them had at least increased by one rank. Braga and the other new races were developing at an incredible rate too.

Then they had the Stone Golems that formed the third wall; the Cemetery Bees, which had doubled in number; and around one hundred Immortal Ents, although they could only be used in defense due to their poor mobility.

All of this went double for Vandal's personal guard. The sheer power on display was pushing others to try and keep up.

"That's not allowed," said Pauvina, as she swung her beloved mace through the air with determination.

"What isn't?" Vandal asked.

"Making that face, like you don't believe me." She hefted her stone mace, which she had begged Vandal to make so she could train. "I'm not a child!"

"I mean, you're two years old," Vandal replied.

"And you're still five, and smaller than me!"

"...The issue here isn't really age, or size," Vandal said. At two, Pauvina had indeed surpassed Vandal in both height and width. She wasn't just big but also had decent stats. A regular human would have no hope matching her muscle due to her Brute Strength skill. A little arm-wrestling would lead to broken bones and a crushed hand. Vandal had been careful to teach her how to control that strength—at the expense of a few bruises of his own—so that wasn't the problem here.

"So what's the problem?" Pauvina pouted.

"Skills. You don't have enough skills yet, Pauvina."

Being able to win at arm-wrestling was one thing. Combat relied on skills more than stats. Having a few skills to fall back on made all the difference.

"I've got Mace Proficiency!" Pauvina retorted.

"That's still Level 1. It doesn't really count," Vandal replied.

"Rapieçage is the same!"

Rapieçage grunted and looked over at Pauvina with goggling eyes. She had

only recently finally acquired Level 1 Brawling Proficiency.

So far Vandal had given her some human spirits, along with a thousand or so spirit bodies. And although her skills like Resist Physical and Brute Strength were going up nicely, she was having difficulty acquiring fighting skills for some reason. Still, her skills were increasing, which meant her fighting strength was as well. She was still rank 4, but she had another advantage.

“Even if Rapieçage does get hurt, I can just swap out her parts,” Vandal said.
“That doesn’t work for you, Pauvina.”

Rapieçage was a Patchwork Zombie, created by Vandal by stitching together multiple corpses. She could lose limbs or even her head, and he could simply stitch on new parts from a convenient corpse to restore her to normal.

“Mrm...”

“Hnn...”

Vandal’s remark, however, seemed to depress not only Pauvina but also Rapieçage. Maybe she didn’t like him saying that he didn’t care if she got hurt. Reflecting ruefully on his comment, Vandal decided he would make it up to her with some mayo later. For now, he had to focus on Pauvina.

She wasn’t exactly his daughter, but at least felt like his sister. That feeling was making him hesitate about taking her into life-risking battle. She was still only two years old.

“Pauvina, once you get a Level 5 skill, or once you grow up, then I’ll take you into battle or dungeons or whatever you like,” Vandal told her. “Focus on your training until then.”

Then he handed her a late birthday present. This was a proper metallic mace, a big upgrade over the stone mace she had been using to train with.

“Wow! Can I really use this?” Her face immediately lit up.

“Buah!” Rapieçage looked happy as well, for some reason.

“Of course. It’s a present for you.”

“Thanks! That stone mace was so light, it was hard to really swing it!” Pauvina reported, immediately starting to happily swing her metal mace around.

Vandal gave a satisfied nod. He might consider her his sister, but that was all the more reason she was capable of taking out ten, even twenty regular soldiers with a single swipe. This world was a tough one for those of Vida’s new races, such as Vandal and most of his allies. If Alda worshippers learned of Pauvina, they would surely lump her in with Vida’s creations. That was why she needed to be strong.

“Hah! Hah!” She continued to swing her new weapon.

“Uh, uh!” Rapieçage was doing the same, swinging her empty fist up and down happily.

Vandal wasn’t sure for a moment why, and then he worked it out: Rapieçage was playing at copying Pauvina.

“I’ve heard that younger kids often play by copying their older siblings,” Vandal mused. It looked like he didn’t need to worry about making some mayo, at least.

“How to pray to the goddess? Whatever do you mean, Child? You are showing your devotion with your actions already!”

So said Nuaza, whom Vandal asked how best to show his faith to the Goddess Vida. Vandal was surprised by this answer, of course. He had been hoping he

could get baptized or learn of some proper way to pray, which in turn might have led to receiving a divine oracle.

He honestly didn't feel like he'd been showing devotion. He had rebuilt the temple to Vida, but never visited other than to offer a quick prayer.

"Uh, I'm going to need you to tell me more. What about the laws and teachings of Vida?" Vandal asked.

"The teachings of Vida, Goddess of Life and Love, are simple," Nuaza replied. "Sing the praises of life, and love others. There are some more detailed passages, but nothing I would call especially binding."

The core of her teachings was all simple stuff, like preserving the value of life and treasuring your family, friends, and loved ones. Further practices had branched out, such as "eat everything you are served at mealtimes," "feed the hungry," and "give short words of thanks before and after eating." These were the kinds of thing that Nuaza said Vandal was already practicing.

People spoke Japanese in this world. Vandal had previously been Japanese and so had maintained his custom of giving thanks before and after eating, without even really thinking about it, and ate whatever was placed in front of him. He had also created new condiments and dishes and shared them with other people.

"I guess you're right," Vandal said. Vida's teachings felt pretty Japanese to him. Maybe she had always been that way, or maybe she had been influenced by Zakkato all those tens of thousands of years ago.

The "love" part maybe wasn't quite so Japanese. She had been a pretty proactive goddess when it came to sexuality, by all accounts.

"What about rituals?"

"Nothing in particular. Marriages and divorce, prayers for planting and harvesting, and a coming-of-age ceremony."

It didn't sound like anything too complex. The heroes had apparently said "the form it takes doesn't matter. The thing is not to forget the importance of life and love."

She's pretty easygoing, for a goddess, Vandal thought. I'm all for not getting stifled by religion, but there doesn't seem to be much for the faithful to hang their hats on.

Vandal had assumed religion was all about ceremony and circumstance. Although that probably hadn't been an issue when Vida was knocking around down here on the ground and everyone could talk right to her.

Apparently, the same was true of pretty much all the gods, with a little variation depending on their personal proclivities. Shizarion liked dedications of songs and art; Zantark liked to see dances with blades and the head of the latest hunt; Rekrent required the faithful to intone the results of their research for the year in front of a statue.

"Alda and the gods who support him are the ones who like more complex rituals," Nuaza explained. They had a ritual for baptizing newborns, long chants that were used in prayer, and they required their faithful to take lengthy pilgrimages. That was closer to what Vandal had expected from a religion. Maybe these things were just due to Alda's personality, or for maintaining clergy on the ground in the Alda business after their god departed, just as Vida had all those tens of thousands of years ago.

"If that's the case, then," Vandal wondered, "why hasn't Vida got in touch with me?"

She had given the oracle to Nuaza more than one hundred years ago, meaning she had seen Vandal coming from a long way off. Vandal could have certainly used some divine advice—like a way to fix up the resurrection device in five minutes, or at least the location of one that was still working.

“Ah, child,” said Nuaza. “The goddess was badly hurt in her battle with Alda. She cannot send her oracles to the mortal world with any kind of frequency...at least, that’s what I was taught.”

Vida had been seriously injured in the fighting in the distant past and had gone into a deep slumber, along with Zakkato and progenitor vampires. Most of the gods serving her were also unable to do much. They didn’t have many followers, and the numbers of Vida’s new races were continually being whittled down by Alda’s forces. Although this information was all just second-hand information Nuaza had heard from a researcher from the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom.

In order to receive an oracle, one also needed a certain aptitude. Otherwise they might only get part of the oracle, or remember nothing at all. For example, even if a god sent out an oracle that “A man called Joe is in league with evil; he is a danger,” the one receiving it might only remember the words “Joe” and “danger,” and be left unsure of whether Joe was the danger or Joe was in danger himself.

“She might also just not have anything she needs to say to me,” Vandal considered. An oracle might not be the best way to impart how to fix the device or the location of an alternative.

“Still, I am sure you will one day be granted her protection, child,” Nuaza assured him.

“I really hope so,” Vandal muttered, looking up into the chilly sunlight of

midwinter.

Spring was right around the corner.



Soldiers, knights, adventurers. Without consideration of individual stats, race, and gender differences, adventurers would generally be considered the strongest in one-on-one combat.

Soldiers needed to protect the peace, fight on battlefields during war, and put their lives on the line to protect settlements from monsters. Ignoring those exceptions who were no more than town thugs in helmets (like the Evbejia guards), those who joined the army officially (as opposed to temporary conscription) started with the Job Apprentice Soldier, before changing to Soldier.

These Jobs were basically downgrades of Apprentice Warrior and Warrior. They were only superior in that they leveled up faster and gave modifiers to acquiring skills like Cooperation and Status Boost: Under Command. However, these were also skills that meant nothing unless fighting in a group.

Soldier was inferior to Warrior because soldiers didn't fight as much as adventurers. Even as peacekeepers, they weren't fighting criminals to the death every day, and major monster stampedes only kicked off a few times a year, if that. The demand for them to fight just wasn't that high.

The same went for wars. The Amidd Empire and Olbaum Electorate Kingdom had been at odds since the founding of both nations, but they only skirmished once every few years.

Soldiers trained every day, of course, but adventurers had far more practical combat experience. That was why the Job was inferior overall, but leveled up faster.

Knights required higher combat strength than Soldiers, making it a more powerful Job. Knight started from Apprentice Knight, followed by Knight Squire. Then, once the title of Knight was awarded, the Job became True Knight. However, not everyone could achieve this step. There were skill issues, of course, but no matter how powerful a Knight Squire was, they needed the trust of a noble who would employ them.

Knights were also peacekeepers, and in some cases could be given charges such as lord of a village. That meant they spent a lot more time sitting at a desk than being a soldier, and more got hurt in training than actual battle. Career soldiers were said to be around grade E in terms of adventurers' guild adventurers, with a Knight Squire at around the same level. A True Knight might be a high grade D.

Thomas Palpapekk was smiling as he finished considering all this information. His smile was striking, too—soft and approachable—sure to make any who saw it like him.

“I’ve always been good at keeping up appearances,” he mused. Inside, he felt like throwing up, or twisting his face as though he had just swallowed a cloud of bugs.

He was looking out over the forces, illuminated by the warm spring sunlight—although the dawn and the nights were still cold—forced to accept that his cunning plan had partly succeeded, but partly failed.

He was in Milg, the royal capital of the Shield Kingdom. The ceremony currently underway was for the departure of the expedition army. They had

listened to a speech from the king of Milg; the Commander of the expedition, the Amidd Empire's General Maubiht, had promised victory; the High Priest of Divine Alda had blessed the men, including Chezale, the second son of Marshal Reggston who was second-in-command of the forces; and then there had been a military parade.

Palpapekk wasn't pleased with the smug look on General Maubiht's face, the dashing smile on Chezale's, and, worst of all, the entire face of Green Gale Spear Raily, who was introduced by the king as the second coming of one of their nation's greatest heroes.

But there's nothing I can do, Palpapekk thought. The knights and soldiers from the Amidd Empire numbered a few dozen personal guard that General Maubiht had brought from the Amidd Empire. There were about thirty holy warriors, led by the famous vampire hunter, High Priest Goldan of Alda. Then there were six thousand elite troops from the Milg Shield Kingdom.

Even the infantry were elite, all promoted from Soldier to Jobs like Bow Soldier, Mounted Soldier, or Armored Soldier. They were the equivalent of grade D adventurers, capable of taking down a rank 3 monster alone, and fighting even more capably in a unit.

The knights, meanwhile, were True Knights at the very least. Most of them had then gone on to positions like Guardian Knight, Holy Knight, and High Knight. This put them as approximately grade C adventurers or higher, and capable of defeating a rank 5 monster alone.

These were the cream of the crop, the Milg Shield Kingdom's trump card. The last line of defense for their nation, there to respond to surprise raids by the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom that normally posted soldiers couldn't, or sudden rampages by hordes of monsters.

And there were six thousand of them here. Joining an expedition that was of zero benefit to the Milg Shield Kingdom, to risk their lives in a battle that would also be of zero benefit to the Milg Shield Kingdom.

The death of a single one of them would be a terrible loss. These weren't lives worth expending to wipe away a pointless black mark in the nation's distant past, and they weren't worth the head of a single dhampir, either.

Half of Thomas Palpapekk's plotting had paid off. The grade A adventurer Raily joining with his party, as well as the addition of the vampire hunter High Priest Goldan, had reduced the number of men required by a third. But then the king, stirred by the participation of their new hero, had stated that they needed to send their own elite fighters or their name as a longstanding nation of battle would be sullied, and he offered up six thousand of their best.

"Quite the lineup, eh, Count Palpapekk," said the man at his side.

"Indeed, Viscount Valchez," Palpapekk managed to reply. *Quite the lineup indeed.* The words had a very different meaning as he repeated them inside his head, but externally he clung to his calm demeanor.

Viscount Valchez was not at fault here. Only a fool would walk away from such an opportunity to enrich his own domain, and Valchez wasn't skilled at politicking or military matters. He was an average noble, in everything other than his financial reach. He wasn't directly involved in this expedition at all. At best, he would help move provisions around.

"This expedition business is all very well," Valchez continued, "but I hope for the safe return of as many of these men as possible." That was the best thing about this man for Palpapekk. Mentally speaking, he wasn't an idiot.

"Indeed. They are a precious resource for our nation," Palpapekk said.

They were elite. A normal soldier could be raised up from a grunt in a year of training. Who knew how many years it would take to replace these—even with training, many wouldn't make the cut. Doubly so for the knights.

We still have three thousand elites in reserve. There's no sign of a monster rampage, and Olbaum won't be ready to send troops out again just yet. They don't know what's happening beyond the boundary mountains either, Palpapekk thought. He therefore predicted that they should be safe during the expedition itself. *We just have to pray that they kill this dhampir quickly and get as many men back here as possible before the vampires cave in the tunnel.*

"Still, I do wish Thunderclap Schneider had been able to take part," Valchez opined.

"Ah, yes. The grade S adventurer," Palpapekk replied. Schneider had visited the Milg Shield Kingdom a few times. He was a real hero, not the product of manipulation like Raily. He could hunt down rank 10 dragons with ease and noble species vampires were small fries to him. He had defeated one of the demon gods, and had wiped out countless nests of lamia, scylla, and other monsters. He was superhuman. One of the five strongest individuals in all of the Amidd Empire, and a hero. It was said that Alda had sent more than a few oracles to warn him of danger, in order to keep him safe.

"If only he didn't have...certain habits," Valchez said. He was referring, of course, to Schneider's love of the ladies.

"A shame, indeed. But what lady can resist a hero?" Palpapekk said with a smile.

Inside, however, he was raging. *I don't care if he's the favorite of a god! Wasting his time with women while our nation is hung out to dry—he can go hang himself!*



Mental Multitasking was a skill that allowed the user to think about multiple things at the same time. It probably had a similar effect to dividing one's head into two.

For Vandal, using it felt like he suddenly had two brains, and could think about two things separately. For example, one could solve some math equations while the other controlled his body in a boxing match.

The number of trains of thought he could set were not dictated by the level of the skill. He could do three or four, but the more he added, and the more complex the things were that he tried to do, the more likely it was that things would start going wrong. Increasing the skill level would likely allow him to do more complex tasks.

He also successfully increased his number of heads using Astral Projection, and then used the effects of Mental Multitasking in each of the heads.

“You are highly efficient as always,” Zadilis commented. “If you combine that with the Skip Incantation skill, do you think you could trigger multiple spells at once?”

“Yes. If I use the Simultaneous Activation skill, I can cast up to six spells with a single head, at the moment,” Vandal replied. Normally, even with Mental Multitasking, the user only had one mouth, which meant one technique. However, Skip Incantation meant incantations weren’t needed. Using Simultaneous Activation made that even easier. Add Limit Break, and the number should increase even more.

“That doesn’t reduce your MP too much?” Zadilis asked.

“Not really,” Vandal responded. “But it does wear me out.”

It mostly felt like burning some glucose. Considering the vast volume of magic at his disposal, Vandal wasn’t especially happy about needing to eat in order to keep using his skills, but he could avoid that issue by using Astral Projection first, and then working with just his main head.

At the moment, Vandal was teaching Zadilis and Talea how to play shogi.

“It looks simple, but it must be a very deep game,” Zadilis commented.

“I think it could be a lot of fun with some more practice,” Talea said.

Reversi had proven to be a big hit, and so for the next game, Vandal had created a stone shogi board and pieces. He had considered making chess, but as they understood Japanese in this world, shogi seemed more appropriate. Furthermore, all the existing boardgames here were far more complex and difficult than shogi, so he was sure people would pick it up quickly. Finally—and most importantly—Vandal didn’t have much experience with chess. He knew how to move the pieces, and the basic rules, but that was it. However, that had been in intelligence tests on Origin, so he wasn’t sure how different the rules had been from those for Earth chess. There had been a piece called the “magician,” after all.

Clack-clack—Vandal was playing on two boards at once, perfectly keeping up with both games as he clicked down some pieces with both his left and right hands. He was killing time after his latest trip into a dungeon while practicing his Mental Multitasking.

“What’s happening with the sickness you were working on?” Zadilis asked, clicking down her own piece.

“It’s finished. Thanks to all your help, it only worked on the dinosaurs and goblins we captured,” Vandal reported. *Click-clack.*

“Then we just need to make some Death to Bacteria magic items and we’ll be all set,” Talea commented. *Click-clack.*

Vandal watched the movement of the pieces and saw what was coming. He gave a small sigh.

“I concede,” he said. “Oh, that’s also in the rules. You have to say that.”

“Boy. You could sound a little more upset,” Zadilis said, looking for some sauce on her victory.

“Zadilis, I’ve lost ten games in a row,” Vandal reminded her. “I don’t have any pride left to regret losing.”

Just as with reversi, Vandal had never actually played shogi with anyone on Earth. He had only ever done it in video games or alone. As a result, the outcome was also the same as reversi—he had quickly become unable to defeat the rapidly improving Zadilis. And while he had beaten Talea the first three times, he hadn’t won since.

“Hehehe, please, reward me,” Talea cooed.

“It was a fair fight,” Vandal conceded. They were playing by another rule as well: the loser had to massage the winner.

Vandal wasn’t aware of it, but the technique generally known as “massage” didn’t really exist on Ramda. They had no awareness of pressure points either. There were massage-like techniques for use among the richest or in the best of the brothels, but they didn’t extend to pressure points, acupressure, acupuncture, or moxibustion. That meant the massage golems that Vandal had placed in the public bathing facilities were something of a big invention.

“Okay. Here we go,” Vandal said, turning his arms into bisected Spirit Bodification fronds and then sinking them into Zadilis and Talea’s bodies. Then he started to work on their internal tension, while using his Substantiation skill to work the skin on the outside.

The Substantiation skill, which he had acquired after changing to the Crusher of Souls Job, allowed him to solidify whatever shapes he made with Spirit Bodification. At first glance, it might not seem that useful—turning something solid that you had specifically created not to be solid—but Vandal felt on an instinctual level that this skill was going to be super useful in the future...and he wasn’t thinking about the potential for some tentacle monster roleplay.

“Lord Van, you seem distracted,” Talea commented.

“Ah, I’m sorry,” Vandal replied. Doing three or more things using Mental Multitasking was what made his concentration start to slip.

“Boy, you seemed so keen when you were massaging, say, Basdia, but don’t seem that bothered about us,” Zadilis noted. “I’m not taking that very well.”

“Oh, I knew it!” Talea exclaimed. “You like the young ones!”

“That’s not it,” Vandal said. “You’re both young, anyway.”

Both of them could be rounded up in years to 300, but Vandal had used Rejuvenation on them to bring their bodies back down to pretty much the age they looked on the outside. He looked closer at the two of them and saw their lips were smiling. It seemed they were only poking fun at him.

“It’s been three years since your Rejuvenation, Zadilis, and about a year for you, Talea, hasn’t it?” Vandal commented, increasing the number of arms he was using.

“Hey, hold on! Why are you making so many arms?!” Zadilis exclaimed.

“I thought I might make you a little younger again,” Vandal said innocently.

“I d-d-don’t need any more!” Talea yelped. “I’m feeling a lot more energized now, thank you! No more need for any more massaging today!”

“Oh, don’t hold back on my account,” Vandal said. Their faces were pale, but he wasn’t letting them get away. He started the Rejuvenation.

“Stop that—aaaaaaah!” shouted Zadilis.

“Yaaah! There’s even more than before, aaaaah!” cried Talea.

All those shogi wins came at a price. Vandal continued the Rejuvenation until their skin was as smooth and soft as newborn babes.

Skill level increased for Mental Multitasking and Substantiation!

Acquired the skill Rapid Cognition!



Chapter Three: Revenge Played Out Large

About two weeks after finishing planting the spring wheat, the residents of one of the farming villages in the newly reclaimed land saw the marching expedition army off. All of the villagers' faces were cheerful, their hearts full of hope and support for the expedition.

Joining in Viscount Valchez's new settlements had been good for these people. They were the third sons of farmers from elsewhere, peasants, and the poor. Now they had simple but sturdy homes to live in with their families, a plot of land that would grow well from the first season thanks to the lingering magic of the demon barrens, and significant tax breaks. Even the expedition hadn't interrupted those tax breaks, and they hadn't been asked to contribute any supplies. The troops taking part in the action were elites, meaning there had been no conscription either.

If the expedition was a success, they could expect fresh territory for Milg beyond the boundary mountains, with new developments. Then their produce would have new markets for its sale. Their income might not be much to start with, but their children and grandchildren would be living in the region that connected the new territories with the Milg Shield Kingdom proper, perhaps allowing villages to grow into towns or more.

Of course, the economy of the Milg Shield Kingdom wouldn't look so healthy if the expedition failed. But failure was not on the villagers' minds.

The troops were the Milg Shield Kingdom's elite. They had the Second Coming of the Tragic Hero, grade A adventurer Green Gale Spear Raily, and High Priest Bohmak Goldan, a vampire hunter renowned across the Amidd Empire. Their

destination was Talosheim, a place where they had suffered losses, of course, but had already defeated two hundred years ago. They would recover Ice Age, the artifact Mikhail had left there, and put an end to whatever remained of the place once and for all. That was the expedition's official objective.

The people knew the boundary mountains were dangerous, but with a grade A adventurer who could fight off dragons and a high priest who had killed countless vampires, *surely* they would be fine. Talosheim had been defeated once already. The fortress there would be in ruins, and any enemies no more than undead stragglers and monsters. Hardly a threat to the holy warriors of Alda. The expedition army would wipe out the evil undead, and plant the flags of the Milg Shield Kingdom and the Amidd Empire in the soil of Talosheim.

That was what the majority of the people, not only in this village but across the Milg Shield Kingdom, thought was going to happen.

“Good luck!”

“We’re right behind you!”

Amid the shouts of the villagers, the expedition army headed for the tunnel beneath the boundary mountains.

The expedition army reached the entrance to the tunnel through the boundary mountains one month and a few days after leaving the capital. The plan was to take three days to march through the tunnel, and then about a week from there on to Talosheim.

Today, they arrived at the simple fort and checkpoint created at the tunnel mouth, restocking one last time and letting the troops rest. All of the monsters had been cleared out of the tunnel by Raily and his party, but the men would be

marching alongside an unseen foe—the utterly terrifying claustrophobia of millions of tons of mountain overhead.

Even in Ramda, it was known from simple experience that spending too long in the dark had negative mental effects. They could use magic items and lanterns to illuminate their way, but they also wanted to avoid any losses of morale. That was why they let the troops rest, gave out some booze, and distributed fresh meat on the day before they headed inside.

“What’s happening on the other side of the tunnel?” Goldan asked. The leaders of the expedition were gathered in the command pavilion to hold the final military meeting prior to crossing the boundary mountains. The fort and checkpoint that had been built at the tunnel’s exit was much smaller than the one on this side, making it more comfortable to discuss plans here.

“The terrain is the same as it was two hundred years ago,” replied the second-in-command of the expedition army, Chezale Reggston. “However, the previous expedition crossed over a relatively safe route through the mountains, meaning we will be taking a different path this time. We will need to cut a way through as we proceed. However...”

“Yes? What? Your reports need to be accurate, Lord Chezale.” This comment came from a man sitting at the back of the pavilion, wrapped in a glorious cloak and looking somewhere between middle and old age. It was Count Rangil Maubiht, the commander of the expedition. Maubiht seemed more demeaning of Chezale than simply their relative command positions would suggest, but that came from the difference between a count of the home nation and a count of an affiliated one.

“...However, there are signs of a large-scale battle between two groups of monsters,” Chezale continued. “We believe this to be the reason for so few

powerful monsters being sighted around the tunnel exit.”

“I took a few of those out too,” Raily chipped in.

Chezale gave him a displeased look. He didn’t want this adventurer scum even in the room, but the commander had impressed upon him how important Raily was to the effort, instructing that the adventurer be given all the same privileges as a leader of the expedition. There was no kicking him out of the pavilion now. That problem was compounded by the presence of High Priest Goldan, who, strictly speaking, ranked no higher than a civilian. Kicking Raily out was not an option.

“Indeed,” said Maubiht with a smile. “Your deeds allowed us to hold the position until the grade C adventurers could reach the tunnel mouth. I expect the same kind of results from you in Talosheim.”

“You can count on me, my lord general,” Raily grinned. “My spear will pierce anything that shows up, dragon or otherwise!”

Chezale and Goldan both tried as hard they could to keep the displeasure off their faces. Grade A adventurers had influence even beyond some nobles, and built bonds of trust with the nobility and powerful merchants that went beyond mere lip service. Even so, those two detected something unpleasant.

“The place might have a reputation as some vast demon barren that none have ever explored, but it seems to me that it’s the mountains that are the danger. Once you cross those, things aren’t so bad. This whole thing was made possible by you finding that tunnel, Count.” Raily never missed a chance to brownnose, either.

In this case, his words also sounded like fact. The fort on the other end of the tunnel had indeed been attacked by dragons multiple times, but Raily had

driven them all off. Other attacking monsters were around rank 3, with maybe some wyverns and rank 5 or 6 large reptilian monsters that no one had seen before, mixed in.

The attacks were frequent, meaning adventurers or soldiers of only average strength wouldn't last long. But it also wasn't anything close to the tales of terror they had been told about the boundary mountains. The reason for this, of course, was Borkz and the others from Vandal's side wiping out a Goblin King and his nation and taking down numerous dragons during their own search for the tunnel.

Furthermore, the entire region, which included the tunnel exit, was considered close to Talosheim lands. Much of it had originally been demon barrens, but when Talosheim was still thriving, giantling warriors had often culled monsters to protect the outlying villages. That explained the small number of dragons hanging around there today. Demon barrens might produce monsters at a rapid rate, but massive outbreaks of rank 10 or higher monsters happened far less frequently than multiple times in a span of two hundred years. Demi-human type monsters bred and grew faster than dragons and other larger monsters, meaning they could recover more easily. But there weren't many of those apart from goblins, and ones that only really multiplied inside dungeons.

"Tell us, Lord Chezale," Goldan asked. "There still hasn't been any contact with those ghouls?"

"No. The only demi-human monsters that have been sighted in any number are goblins. There was one report of an ogre," Chezale replied.

"Hmmm..." Goldan furrowed his brow. He had joined the expedition due to an oracle from Alda, and so was a little disappointed to have no leads on the

dhampir, even beyond the tunnel. But he accepted that the foul creature and his minions simply had to be nesting further away. Indeed, there was a high possibility that the dhampir had taken up residence in Talosheim, the intended destination of the expedition. Demi-human monsters would often live in abandoned ruins. The same probably went for dhampirs and ghouls.

“Once we clear the tunnel, then,” Chezale continued, “we will need to send out an advance party to keep us apprised of any dangers while we march toward our destination. I would like to ask you, Master Raily, to join this scouting unit.”

“No problem. If something big shows up, like a dragon, I’m pretty much the only one who could handle it. Right, Grandpa?” he said, winking at Goldan.

“Hmph! I’m not over the hill yet, whippersnapper.”

The group proceeded to discuss the route they would march along, the formation of the scouting party, means of communication with the baggage train bringing supplies from the rear, and then finally, plans for the actual assault on Talosheim.

However, the only real option was for Goldan and Raily to form the core of the party fighting monsters along the way. Once they reached Talosheim, they would take command of units of knights and work to reduce the number of monsters. Then they would search the key locations in which further monsters might lurk, such as the castle and the temple of Vida, and defeat any powerful monsters they might find.

The majority of those in the expedition army did not expect to be fighting in Talosheim. Rather, they would be working to purify the demon barrens and search for the lost national treasure. Goldan himself only expected to be fighting a small force of monsters, even if the oracle were true. None of those

present believed that they needed to plan in any more detail.

Once the discussions were done, Goldan quickly departed the pavilion. He had no need or desire to suck up to the nobles. For him, taking part in such military discussions was pure suffering, and not the good kind he could use to train his religious body and mind. He didn't need to spend any longer around those people than necessary. Chezale also said that he would go and check on the soldiers and knights, and stepped away.

"Well, my lord general. When are we killing those two?" Raily asked.

"Please, Raily," Maubiht chided him. "The old goat is one thing, but we need Chezale to take over command of this whole affair once I step away for health reasons. If he dies before that happens, we won't have anyone to pin this whole thing on."

Once Goldan, Chezale, and Chezale's men had all left the pavilion, Raily, Maubiht, and the other remaining individuals started the real meeting. This group knew the true purpose of the expedition, and all had connections to the vampires who worshipped the Demon God of Living Pleasure, Hihiryu-Shukaka—with three notable exceptions.

"Sheesh. This isn't the easiest thing for me, having come up from being an adventurer," Raily said.

"Not necessarily, Master Raily. Our world is a complex one too." The man who replied looked like a veteran mercenary, with blond hair, blue eyes, and numerous scars scraped down his face. But in the next moment, *he* became *she*—a woman in her thirties, as if she had just teleported into the mercenary's place. "In some cases, more complex than human society. That's why I understand your situation. Don't feel like you need to hold anything back."

Not just her appearance but even her voice had completely changed. She flashed him a smile, complete with white fangs. She was a noble vampire, sent by the progenitor Tehneshia to join the expedition army as part of General Maubiht's special mercenaries.

"In terms of the problem of the dhampir and vampire traitors, you will be on hand to help resolve the matter, Lady Aira," Maubiht confirmed.

"Of course," she replied. "The traitors won't be too challenging, I'm sure, so long as we're careful of Eleonora's Alluring Doom Gaze. There's a high probability that Sercent is already dead, too. But if they seem to be giving you trouble, I can step in—quietly. I wouldn't want to give the game away."

Aira had been sent to dispose of the vampire traitors. Most of the expedition army was unaware that there were vampires in Talosheim, as they'd be liable to run away if they knew. Aira and the other vampires had therefore been given magic items that could detect the presence of the owner of any blood that they sprinkled on it, along with orders to take out the traitors amid the chaos of battle. They were also going to help assassinate the vampire hunter who had been a pricking thorn in their side for so long and was the trump card in ensuring an end to the dhampir, which the demon god himself had sent an oracle about, demanding its demise. "That's what Lady Tehneshia sent me here for. Me, the Vampire Count, easily one of the five strongest of her underlings."

Indeed, she was a Vampire Count. Rank 10.

Only grade A adventurers could take her on, and that was if the vampire deigned to fight them head-on. Most nobles of her stature had many subordinate vampires beneath them, and often lived in secluded castles that were more dangerous than some dungeons. As a result, they could often fight off parties that included grade A adventurers. Goldan himself had never

defeated a Vampire Count.

Furthermore, Aira had thirty other vampires with her, including those sent by Vilkain and Gubamon. Even the lowest were rank 7, and there were two rank 9 Viscount vampires. Together, they had the fighting strength to decimate the entire expedition army if they wished it.

“Hehehe, you won’t need to step in,” Raily said, grinning. “This dhampir you’re so worried about will be killed by *me*.” Raily’s smile was intended to let Aira and the other vampires know that, as a grade A adventurer and hero himself, he wasn’t scared in the least of what waited for them. That the renown for taking down this target would belong to *him*.

Aira didn’t seem particularly bothered by this and returned a smile of her own. “I look forward to seeing you in action, Hero,” she said. From her perspective, she simply needed to complete her orders. There was no need to bicker over who would get the glory. If Raily really could kill the dhampir, he was welcome to it.

“But how will you fight?” This from Maubiht. “This is an expedition, meaning we will be fighting in the daytime.” Given the expedition army would be on the attack, they would already be at a disadvantage, not to mention the vampires’ weakness to the sun—although both they and the enemy would have certain preparations in place.

But Aira’s smile only widened. “It won’t be a problem,” she said. “Talosheim is a city pinned between the mountains, as well. Zakkato’s mercury mirror was destroyed two hundred years ago by your own ancestors. The sun will set early on those ruins.”



Spring had sprung in Talosheim and warm days arrived. Vandal's eyes were open, staring into the void without blinking. Finally, he spoke.

"There are here. They've come."

He was using the surveillance golems and undead that he had placed close to the tunnel to watch the activity around the fort erected by the Milg Shield Kingdom. When he switched his view to the Lemures familiar he had dispatched, he was able to see the largest group of people he'd ever seen on Ramda crowded within the walls of the fort. There were thousands of them. Not ten thousand, but probably more than five.

"Are there any vampires?" Eleonora asked.

"I can't tell just from what I can see here," Vandal replied. "And there are lots of knights in full armor."

Vampires didn't look that different from the race that they had started out as, with just their eyes, fangs, and pale skin setting them apart. Due to their weakness to sunlight, they would often be seen wearing thick clothing, fur capes and hats, or hoods during the daytime, which could give them away. However, they didn't stand out among an army of soldiers in armor and helmets.

"I doubt they are among the knights," Eleonora said. "They will be mixed in with her mercenaries or adventurers."

"The Milg Shield Kingdom has an annoying tendency to not hire adventurers as much as they can," Kachia added. "They'll be among the mercenaries."

"In that case, I think I see them," Vandal said. There was a group with armor and shields different from the rest. They all had helmets on and heavy armor,

but they were marching in perfect formation. There were about thirty of them. They were keeping their skin out of the sunlight, meaning he couldn't see their faces.

"If they are definitely among the enemy, I'd better set out today. East or west, where do you want me?" Zadilis asked.

"Take the eastern side," Vandal told her. "They won't be here until the afternoon."

"Okay. You can count on me," she said.

After sending Zadilis off, Vandal and the others also started preparations. First things first, they called back everyone who was currently out in a dungeon. They had been preparing for this for the last two years, meaning they didn't have to panic or even hurry. They had all sorts of secret weapons and aces in the hole lined up to deploy. It spoke volumes that the city now knew an expedition army of six thousand strong—and all elite fighters at that—was closing in, and yet nobody panicked. Their reaction wouldn't likely have been any different even if the army were double the size.

"Just a final reminder," Vandal said. "After you get a kill, don't start eating right away."

"We know, King," Borkz replied. "Just make sure you've got plenty of mayo for us after!"

"Dino miso sauté is nicer than man meat anyway!"

"I want a shogi set!"

""Whatever you need—mayo, miso, shogi—I'll do my very best for you all to celebrate our victory," Vandal told the assembled fighters. "So please, try not to die. Even I can't cross to the afterlife to reward you."

“Telling undead not to die!” Borkz chuckled. “You got it, Eclipse King!”

In fact, the atmosphere in Talosheim was more cheerful than normal. They had evacuation points set up for the non-combatants, like Pauvina, so there weren’t the civilians running around on the streets in panic like in some apocalyptic Earth movie.

There was nowhere to run from Talosheim anyway. In the southern continent, beyond the boundary mountains, Talosheim was the only safe haven.

“Our backs are already to the wall,” Vandal mused. “Preparing for a fight is only natural.”

Even if they managed to cross the boundary mountains in the other direction, the ghouls and giantling undead would still be seen as monsters to be hunted down in the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom. Their only choice was to drive off the expedition army.

That was why they wouldn’t be taking any prisoners. This might be an elite force, but most armies would consider retreat if they lost about a third of their number. The conditions here were completely against the expedition force being willing to fight a prolonged conflict.

for the expedition army. There were thousands of them on the march at the moment, meaning only the dumbest of monsters—like goblins and Needle Wolves—dared to attack them, picking at their weak spots in small numbers. But if the human numbers were significantly reduced, and the remaining troops fled in an uncontrolled rout, most of them would be picked off by monsters. Even if they managed to maintain formation as they retreated, it would take them days to escape back to the tunnel through the boundary mountains. Vandal might even be able to take captive a couple hundred or even a thousand

of those who realized there was no escape.

“But taking prisoners...” Vandal started.

“Would be meaningless for us,” Sam finished for him. “Prisoners of war are either sold back to the enemy nation for a price, or taken home by the captors and used as slaves. However, neither the Amidd Empire nor the Milg Shield Kingdom would seek to negotiate with us, and I can’t see us getting much use from them as slaves.” Neither the Amidd Empire nor the Milg Shield Kingdom saw Talosheim as a nation, or Vandal as a king. They were just monsters. No negotiations would be held, even if Vandal tried to start them. These were nations that simply would never accept a country of ghouls and undead ruled by a dhampir king.

“We might be able to handle a few dozen slaves, but hundreds would be too much,” Nuaza stated. He was also correct: turning the captives into slaves would be very difficult. There were collar-shaped magic items that forced slaves to do as they were told, but Talosheim didn’t have any. They would have to make a prison-like facility in Talosheim and watch the slaves at all times to ensure they did their work. Those slaves wouldn’t be thugs or petty criminals, either—they would be elite soldiers, hard-trained and experienced in combat. They might be broken and surrender once, but with the passage of time, their desire for revenge and loyalty to Alda could come back.

“There aren’t enough of us, anyway,” Vandal said. “We don’t even have two thousand ourselves. We can’t handle hundreds of prisoners.”

The current population of Talosheim, excepting the Cemetery Bees and Immortal Ents, was about a thousand giantling undead; seven hundred ghouls, including all the new children; and two hundred of the new races like Braga. Around one thousand nine hundred in total.

Golems wouldn't be able to provide the kind of watch those highly trained captives would require, and the same went for freshly made zombies. These were elites, each one of them capable of defeating a rank 3 monster alone. Even without weapons, they could probably take out a rank 2 and a rank 3 by working together. That was how Brawling Proficiency worked in this world: fleshy bodies could smash stones if they used battle techs. Like the karate masters of old Japan, fighting bears with their bare hands.

Even if the captured could be used as slaves, there was the question of what to make them do. Talosheim had undead and golems aplenty who never got worn out. A bunch of humans couldn't provide comparable labor.

Turning them into allies seemed less likely than a miracle. If they were all humans, it might be possible for those from different nations, with hard work and patience. But Vandal and his allies weren't considered human by the expedition army. They were monsters. Creatures Divine Alda sought to destroy. Creatures who had taken them prisoner and killed their friends. Vandal also didn't have anyone among his allies who would have a clue as to how to convince them to change sides.

"But child, you might be able to sway them if you use the Death Attribute Allure skill?" Nuaza suggested.

"If that's where this is going, you're basically saying we have to beat them to within an inch of their lives first," Vandal replied.

It had already been proven, with Kachia and the other adventurers, that Death Attribute Allure could affect living humans. However, that was only when they were in a mental state of utter despair, seeking the release of death. If they wanted to use Death Attribute Allure to turn the prisoners, they would need to torture them viciously until their minds were broken—until they

begged to be killed; to die with eyes that were already dead. “If that was the plan, it would be more humane to just kill them and turn them into undead.”

“I concur,” Sam said. “That would make it easier for you to extract information from them, too.”

“But child, why are you worrying about the handling of enemy soldiers now anyway?” Nuaza asked. “I thought the decision had already been made to just wipe them out.”

“That’s true, but as the moment draws near...” Vandal hesitated. “I’m starting to think a certain bunch of people might have a problem with it.”

“A bunch of people?” Nuaza asked.

“The resurrected,” Vandal replied.

Wiping out the expedition army and crippling the Milg Shield Kingdom—the others weren’t exactly going to see this as an act of benevolent justice. That thought made Vandal feel kind of depressed.

“I guess I might be able to explain it all. They might understand. But I need to get stronger...in case they don’t.”

That was his final conclusion. He had more reasons in this world to get stronger than he could possibly count.

—Name: Aira

—Rank: 10

—Race: Vampire Count

—Level: 79

—Age: Approx. 30,000 years old —Alias: Tehneshia's Hunting Dog

—Job: Murderous Executioner

—Job Level: 88

—Job History: Apprentice Warrior, Apprentice Magician, Magic Warrior, Execution Warrior, Illusion Weaver —Passive Skills

[Night Vision] [Resist Maladies: Level 9] [Brute Strength: Level 9]

[Rapid Healing: Level 9] [Spirit Pollution: Level 3] [Murderous Recovery: Level 7]

[Instinct: Level 5] [Enhanced Loyalty: Tehneshia: Level 5]

—Active Skills

[Suck Blood: Level 4] [Water Attribute Magic: Level 5] [Fire Attribute Magic: Level 5]

[Non-Attribute Magic: Level 1] [Magic Control: Level 5] [Sword Proficiency: Level 10]

[Armor Proficiency: Level 9] [Limit Break: Level 7] [High-Speed Flight: Level 5]

[Tracking: Level 8] [Torture: Level 5]

—Unique Skill

[Illusion: Level 7]



The seven day march was going better than expected.

They had prepared sturdy wagons, so the transport of materials was going smoothly. The monsters that appeared along the way had all been handled by the soldiers without the need for Raily to step in, providing fresh meat for evening meals rather than the usual dried rations.

The daylight hours were short because they were moving between massive mountains. They also lacked mages who could use illumination magic, so they had accepted the expense and brought magic items to do the job instead of lanterns. Given those factors, the fact that they had reached a position with a view over Talosheim within the planned seven days was testament to the march's success.

However, all that ended the moment they arrived.

"It seems the scouts weren't simply seeing illusions," General Maubiht concluded. He had ordered them to create their camp on the grassy plain that spread around Talosheim. The terrain was flat, with no cover apart from grass that reached to the waist, and clear lines of sight. It wasn't the kind of place an army would erect a base if they were going to war.

Maubiht had gathered the leaders of the expedition army here in order to look out over Talosheim. Down below, they could see the castle walls towering at least a hundred feet high. As far as Maubiht and his forces knew, only the imperial capital and other key fortifications ever reached this height. But even the smallest giantling was twice the height of a human. And given that the city stood in demon barrens, Maubiht assumed these kinds of defenses had been required. They looked even higher than the records from two hundred years ago had stated, perhaps, but he could simply assume that the estimate at the time was slightly off.

But the issue wasn't the height; it was more than that while the walls did look in poor repair, ready to collapse at the blow of a single siege hammer, there was no sign of the two massive holes reportedly blasted out of the castle by the hero Mikhail.

"What can this mean?" asked Chezale Reggston, second-in-command of the expedition. "Could the records simply be wrong?"

Military records were not always the most accurate of documents, that was true. Matters could also get exaggerated in order to aggrandize the heroes and generals of the past. Unexpectedly, it was High Priest Bohmak Goldan who responded.

"I think this is the work of the dhampir, Vandal. The one who escaped from Viscount Valchez's domain with a few hundred ghouls."

"The one you can't stop bringing up?"

"Yes. The dhampir clearly ordered the ghouls under his command to repair the walls," Goldan continued, with complete confidence.

Chezale, however, was skeptical. There had been no reports of a single ghoul sighting for the entire expedition. It seemed reckless to draw that conclusion from just this evidence.

"Would they even do such a thing?" Chezale replied. "I have heard of monsters taking residence in ruins, but I've never heard of them fixing the place up. I know ghouls are intelligent for monsters, and might build homes on their own, but are they strong enough to make these kinds of walls?"

"Hmph. You are a captive of your preconceptions, Lord Chezale," Goldan chided. "The dhampir leading these ghouls is a monster with human-level intelligence, at least. Take a closer look at those walls and consider what they

mean! If they had been in that condition for two hundred years, they wouldn't still be standing here now!"

"G-good point," Chezale conceded. Upon looking more closely, the walls did seem hastily constructed, with weaknesses everywhere. They weren't going to last for two decades, let alone two centuries. These were not the mighty walls that had repelled ten thousand Milg Shield Kingdom troops prior to the arrival of Mikhail.

"This all suggests that Vandal is holed up in Talosheim with a highly organized horde of ghouls," Goldan concluded.

"I see. Certainly an opinion worth considering," Maubiht said gravely. Inside, however, he was not pleased with this development. This old goat had no contacts among the vampires, and yet he had reached the truth of the matter immediately. He looked over at Aira, hidden as a mercenary nearby, but got no response from her.

He couldn't imagine this was some kind of vampire ploy. Maubiht, Aira, and the other vampires hadn't been planning to ever tell anyone else involved about Vandal and Eleonora. They planned to march on Talosheim without revealing anything, and see what the ghouls and traitors led by Vandal did in response. The tracking magic item revealed that Eleonora was still in Talosheim at the last use, and there were no signs around the tunnel or on the way there through the demon barrens of subordinate vampires or ghouls watching the army's movements. Maubiht and Aira had therefore shared the opinion that Vandal and his forces weren't aware of the oncoming expedition army.

So they had decided on a simple plan: send in the soldiers and knights, and if the enemy tried to flee, Raily and Aira would track and destroy them.

As long as they had the magic tracking item, there was no way for Eleonora to

escape, and Aira was sure that she didn't know about its existence. Vandal wouldn't abandon her, since she surely represented the greatest fighting strength Vandal possessed. If they fled, it would be together. In the case that he did split up with Eleonora and tried to escape separately, it would be easy to track and kill him, even if he kept a few ghouls around. And if he did decide to make a last stand without fleeing, although this seemed exceedingly unlikely, they had Raily and his goons to kill him on the spot. Amid the chaos of the battle, they could also take out the annoying High Priest Goldan.

Those were the objectives of Maubiht and his true allies. They didn't care how many of the elite Milg Shield Kingdom soldiers were lost in the action. Those who survived would take and hold Talosheim. Maubiht would return home to report the results of the battle, and then retire due to fictitious health reasons. If Raily was still alive, Maubiht would take him along. Aira was only here as a mercenary, meaning she could depart without suspicion once her contract was up. Then the vampires would bring down the tunnel, leaving poor Chezale and whatever dregs remained trapped in Talosheim. General Maubiht would become a vampire, obtaining eternal life, while Raily would sup sweet nectar through his connection with the reborn Count Maubiht.

So went the plan. They didn't want Vandal detecting their presence prior to the siege, as it could slow down their advance. They assumed their target had to be in a panic at the moment, with an army suddenly appearing on his doorstep, but they couldn't afford to give him time to recover his wits.

"What do we do, then? They might be crumbling, but big walls are still big walls," Raily said. "We can't take a look inside so easily."

He was wrong, of course. Aira and the other noble vampires had the power of flight, meaning they could easily take a peek over any height of wall. Vandal

might have archers on the walls, but only monster ones. They didn't have decent bows or decent arrows. The vampires could just fly higher than the archers could shoot.

However, the fact that they were vampires was also a secret to be kept by Raily and Maubiht. There was no way to employ their flight in such a manner. It goes without saying that Aira had to keep her mouth shut at the meeting.

Goldan, however, was a man known as the Vampire Hunter. He wasn't one who cared for subtlety. "We attack, of course, full force, just as for normal warfare," Goldan said. "Send in the heavy armored troops to secure a close parameter, watching out for potential archer fire or magic, and then smash through the gates with our battering ram. After that, we'll see what move the ghouls make. Normally they would just charge, but they are smarter with a dhampir leading them. They might split into small groups and try to lure us into the ruins of the city and attack us there."

"Shouldn't we surround the entire city first?" Chezale asked.

"That uses too many of our troops," Goldan replied. "This might look like a grassy plain, but we're still in the middle of a demon barren. If monsters attack us while we're all spread out, the damage will be catastrophic. Are you willing to accept that?"

Chezale nodded. "General, any thoughts?"

"We should listen to the High Priest. Prepare the battering ram and form up a unit to lead the charge!" Maubiht commanded.

The soldiers immediately commenced preparations. They hadn't planned for a full-blown siege, but had brought a battering ram along just in case. Soldiers brought the weapon forward, while the heavily armored defensive soldiers

offered themselves up to lead the strike. Goldan wasn't watching them prepare, however. He was more concerned with the sun, which was already close to setting.

"We didn't make it in time," he muttered. It wasn't close to evening yet, but the boundary mountains blocked out the sun. Most dhampirs weren't bothered by sunlight, but they had even better night vision than ghouls. On the attacking side, they only had humans. Goldan had wanted to settle this before it got too dark, but it didn't seem that was going to be possible.

Naturally, when the leaders of the expedition were in cahoots with vampires, nothing could go as planned.

Vandal was hiding directly above the gate on the third castle wall, using the eyes of his golems to check out the expedition army. He watched the heavy infantry closing in, defending their battering ram. He waited for the moment to reveal himself.

The approaching enemies didn't seem to know anything about the situation in Talosheim. Ever since Raily first appeared from the tunnel, Vandal had been on the lookout for enemy reconnaissance—in particular, familiars sent by the vampires. Vandal didn't know if the monsters in the demon barrens had even helped them out or something, but it seemed that their secrets were safe.

battle techs based on Shield Proficiency and Armor Mastery to enhance their defenses. These weren't standard infantry in leather armor with spears and shields. They had full metal armor and tower shields, and they wielded axes and maces. As elites, their skills were probably at least level 3, if not 4. Regular infantry had skills around level 2, making them perhaps the equivalent of grade E adventurers, according to Eleonora and Kachia. These elites were probably

capable of defeating a rank 3 monster on their own. With a number of them together, they might manage a rank 4. If their whole troop was of a similar level, it would make a powerful foe. In a video game back on Earth, only the highest level players would be able to emerge unscathed.

Vandal was most satisfied with how strong they were. They would be absolutely perfect for what he had planned.

“Let’s get this started.”

Vandal stood up on the wall. He was revealing himself not only to the encroaching attack unit, but also to the main enemy camp and the entire force.

“Is that...the dhampir?!” Chezale stammered, voice and face taut as he stared at the image enlarged by light attribute magic.

“He really is here!” said Maubiht. The two of them were surprised for different reasons, but neither had expected Vandal to just pop up like this.

“This is the provenance of our lord Alda!” Goldan shouted. “All of you, with me!”

“High Priest, please, hold a moment! He is up on the castle walls!” shouted one of the young holy warriors.

“Wait there, old man! That dhampir is mine!” yelled Raily, also trying to stop Goldan. The only one among the leaders who didn’t display any shock or surprise was Aira, keeping her silence while she watched and waited for Vandal to act.

Why is he showing himself? Aira thought. Has he simply given up all hope, seeing our forces arrive? He can’t be planning to buy time while the ghouls and Eleonora escape, surely? Aira had been ordered to bring back ghoul skins by Tehneshia, meaning she couldn’t allow too many to get away.

Then the enlarged Vandal in the image started to move.

He lifted a spear above his head.

“That’s... Ice Age! He’s got Ice Age!”

“This dhampir has obtained our national treasure?”

The spear did look a lot like the Milg Shield Kingdom’s lost artifact.

“That belongs to me!” Raily bellowed. “Get your filthy paws off it!”

“Hey! Someone use Appraisal! Is that really Ice Age?! The real thing should be made from orichalcum!” Maubiht ordered.

“It’s not possible at this range, sir!”

Vandal was watching the reaction of the expedition army leaders through his insect undead. It felt good to see them panic, exactly as planned. Getting Datara to make this fake iron Ice Age had been worth it.

Then, Vandal raised the fake Ice Age higher over his head and snapped it—by bending it via Golem Creation—and tossing it to the ground.

The enemy camp fell completely silent in that instant.

Then they exploded in fury.

“Curse you! Our national treasure!”

“The sheer insult! On my honor as a knight, I swear to impale you!”

“You little shit!” Raily was right there with the others. “That artifact was meant to come to me! And you destroyed...destroyed it... I’ll kill you!”

The expedition army wasn’t here to execute Vandal and the traitor Eleonora. They had come to wipe away the pain and humiliation from two hundred years prior: to occupy Talosheim, reclaim their lost national treasure, and bring glory

back to their nation. That was all they had been told they were here to do, after all. Vandal knew that seeing that same national treasure, the magical spear, snapped into pieces would get a rise out of them.

“Hold fast!” Maubiht shouted. “The spear is orichalcum! He couldn’t snap it like that! It’s a bluff, to confuse us!”

“That’s right! Calm yourselves, keep calm, remain in formation!” Chezale too attempted to soothe the frayed nerves of the command units, but the structure of the expedition army was in worse shape than Vandal had expected. The expedition army was mainly comprised of knights and soldiers from the Milg Shield Kingdom, to whom their commander, Rangil Maubiht, wasn’t an officer worthy of respect. He was nothing more than a pompous noble from the home of the Empire, which none of them really liked. On the other hand, the second-in-command, Chezale Reggston, was the second son of the current marshal of Milg, so the knights respected him.

But Raily thrust his spear into the air, full of rage, and raced toward the frontline with his slaves. “Enough! Stay out of my way! We can’t sit here and be mocked like this! I’m going into battle! If you’re scared of a dhampir and a few ghouls, just sit there and watch!”

With that, the knights and nobles who were meant to be holding him back all hurried to join in.

“You’re right, Master Raily!”

“The honor of our nation is at stake! With all due respect, stuff your orders, Lord General!”

For these men, Raily was the hero he had been so calculatedly built up as. They might not have believed every word of the tales, but at the same time,

Raily was not without his appeal. He was obsessed with appearances, greedy and self-centered, and yet at his core, he did care for others. He freely shared the meat he hunted with the knights and soldiers. He had defended the fort at the end of the tunnel from dragons multiple times, and also shared that meat with the men posted there. That had brought him an unexpected popularity among the knights and soldiers.

“Gah! I knew that the oracle spoke of this dhampir! Of Vandal! Brave followers of Alda, rise up! This is our holy crusade!” The famous vampire hunter, Bohmak Goldan, was also on his feet, declaring some kind of epic holy war.



All of those in command were believers in the faith of Alda to some degree. They were now faced with a situation like something from the old tales: a hero and a holy man had stepped up to defeat evil together. The anger already overheating their heads turned into burning insanity. The incensed knights and nobles all rushed to take off after Goldan and Raily.

“You rabble! Obey your orders! Obey! This is mutiny!” Maubiht shouted.

“Damn it all! Black Bull Knights, follow the lead unit into battle! Archers, proceed in the rear! Light Knights, focus on reporting!” Chezale, meanwhile, started to give orders.

“Chezale! What do you think you’re doing?” Maubiht roared.

“General, we can’t calm the men down again after this!” Chezale argued. “We need to at least maintain cooperation between each unit and—”

“Silence! You are exceeding your authority!”

The rift between commander and second-in-command was also widening. Chezale had simply superseded Maubiht’s command, while Maubiht was so shocked that he chose to berate Chezale rather than try to snap the soldiers out of it.

They’re already barely holding it together, Aira thought with a sigh, deep under her helmet. Human armies are so fragile. Zakkato once talked about how the strength of humans is to work together, but look at this... For all intents and purposes, she was currently only the captain of a unit of mercenaries. If all it took to cause this chaos was the breaking of a single spear, she had to wonder what the purpose was of hiding herself like this.

“Lady Aira, shall we act on our own?” Her second-in-command suggested

quietly.

Aira gave it some thought and then said, "No. We'll stay like this for now. Humans' greatest strength is in their numbers, and they still have those. This isn't a problem yet."

The reason behind Aira's response and the reason the leaders of the expedition army lost themselves so recklessly were the same: They thought there was no way they could lose.

They were clearly going to win. They all still believed that. They had six thousand elite troops, capable of killing rank 3 enemies, one on one. Then they had their grade A adventurer and their anti-vampire specialist. There were noble vampires, such as Eleonora, among the enemies, although very few in the army knew about that. Furthermore, Goldan had bent every ear that would listen about the dhampir and the numbers he had with him. All the leaders had heard multiple times on the way to Talosheim that there was a dhampir Medium and no more than five hundred ghouls under his command. Even if he had somehow increased his minions, he wouldn't be able to match the numbers of the expedition army. They might have some of the giantling undead that had appeared in Talosheim mixed in, but they wouldn't be working in any kind of organized fashion. At this time, none of the expedition army had a sense of this situation being any kind of real danger.

"That worked even better than expected," Vandal said. "I had more options ready in case it didn't work, but I guess we're good."

The expedition army was on the march, managing to keep some kind of formation. The lead unit had reached the castle gate but was having some trouble breaking it down.

Once the enemy was sufficiently drawn in, Vandal gave the command: "Next,

then. Third castle wall...begin the attack." Then he used Flight to head back to the second wall himself.

"The brat is running for it—what?!"

Even as Raily and his party rushed forward, the walls started to come down. They had looked to be in pretty bad shape, but no one had expected them to completely collapse all at once. Raily stopped in surprise.

"Gah! A trap! But he sprung it too early," Goldan cackled. "He must have wanted to crush us beneath the wall, but we're too far away!"

The unit that had been engaged with the gate had suffered some damage, but they had already been running their battle techs. They might have a few broken bones, but they all survived. All they had to do now, surely, was clamber over the remains of the walls and continue their advance—and then Goldan and the others in command got the surprise of their lives.

Beyond the collapsed castle wall, there was a sturdy-looking second wall. Slightly shorter, perhaps, but also entirely unexpected.

"What?! There was nothing in the military records about the city having double walls!" Chezale exclaimed.

"That's why I'm telling you to pull the men back!" Maubiht shouted.

"Yes, okay! Archers, support the lead unit as they retreat! All units, hold in place—huh?" Chezale was trying to give orders when he made another dumb sound of surprise. The rubble of the walls had stood up and started to move around.

"Ooooohn!"

"Ooooooooh!"

With moaning, roaring cries, the Stone Golems that had formed the castle walls rose to their feet. There was easily a thousand of them. Then the stone figures moved quickly, surprisingly quickly, toward the frozen expedition forces, and started to attack them.

“Fall back! Fall back!”

“Raagh! Shields up! Keep facing them; don’t show them your back!”

“Maintain formation! Show some backbone, heavy infantry!”

Some space remained between the units that had been heading toward the walls and the Stone Golems the walls had turned into. The lead unit of heavily armored infantry, who had already been by the gates, were hit hardest. They had avoided being crushed in the sudden collapse of the walls, but were now being pounded on all sides by the stone giants that had risen from the rubble around them. Even worse, the iron gate they had been pounding on had turned into a rank 6 Iron Golem. They were clinging to the tatters of their morale, planning to fight to the last, but their fate seemed sealed in stone.

“Save the advance unit!”

“Black Bull Knights, forward! Stand firm! There’s nothing to fear from lifeless golems!”

Brave voices rising from the ranks of the expedition army belonged to the Milg elite. They had faced all sorts of battles and all sorts of peril. That had bound them together, from knights down to foot soldiers, in a powerful bond of camaraderie. Even a thousand golems were not an impossible enemy for them.

Therefore, while Chezale and General Maubiht were still stunned with surprise in the main camp, each component of the expedition army continued to function. The same went for those led by Raily and Goldan. They closed in

against the golems, smashing the roaring, thumping stone giants with their individual weapons and the strength of their cooperation.

For a moment, it looked like the army would defeat every last golem, and the army would be able to regroup.

“Fire.”

That was the moment before Vandal gave this simple order to the Curse Weapon crossbows on the second castle wall and the catapults on the roofs of Talosheim buildings.

“Guhaah?!”

“Gyaah!”

“Hah! Flying rocks—gaaah!”

Some of the crossbow bolts did hit the Stone Golems, but most of them had already been wiped out. Two thirds of the bolts found their way into the expedition army. The massive rocks flying in from overhead, meanwhile, were more than even an elite shield bearer with heavy armor could hope to survive head-on. And when they saw the rocks coming and tried to move, the Stone Golems and rubble got in the way, with the “heavy” part of their heavy armor stopping them from moving quickly to begin with.

“This can’t be!” Chezale shouted. “A massive number of archers, and catapults too? Just what are we fighting against? General, what is the meaning of this? What is the Empire hiding from us?!”

“I don’t know! I don’t know anything!” Maubiht retorted.

“You still won’t share what you know? Even now?!” Chezale raged. It wasn’t rare for demi-human monsters to use bows, but Chezale had never heard of them using catapults. Such devices weren’t easy to make. Those with the skills

to do so in Amidd, Milg, and even Olbaum were made to join a guild and kept close watch on, ensuring that no unregistered weapons were created. It seemed impossible for there to be such weapons in Talosheim, dropping rocks on their heads. There was nothing in the records from two hundred years ago about the giantlings using catapults.

No—that dhampir made them? Chezale thought. That's insane! And yet Chezale stood and watched as his troops fled in terror before getting crushed by a barrage of flying boulders.

"Curses! Retreat—" Chezale started to shout.

"If I may, I think we should attack with our entire force." This was when Aira, the mercenary who had been silent until now, finally spoke up.

"Mercenary scum! How dare you!" retorted one of Chezale's aides.

"You've been cowering in back here this entire time, and now you want us to get our men killed?" raged another.

"The troops are in a panic," Aira observed. "They won't be able to retreat in an orderly fashion. The heavily armored ones make easy targets, too. But if we attack the second wall, that will naturally move us out of the range of the catapults. The only enemies we've seen so far are these pathetic stone dolls. They can regroup once the rocks stop falling on them."

There was something to her words. She was being coldly pragmatic about the losses they would suffer, but the loss of ten could sometimes save a thousand in battle. It would be one thing if their forces were only lightly armored, but with the expedition soldiers' high vitality and defensive strength, their armored knights could repel any arrows coming their way in a proper formation.

"G-good idea! Forward march, all forces!" Maubiht commanded.

“General!” Chezale shouted.

The problem with this plan, however, was that it only worked if the enemy didn’t have any more tricks. If the second castle wall also turned into golems, there would be nothing to stop the catapults from continuing to fire. They also hadn’t seen a single ghoul yet. Maybe they were all busy operating the crossbows and catapults, but maybe not. Chezale had a bad feeling that something else was going on.

“Silence! This is an order as commander of this army!” Maubiht roared back. He was having much the same feeling as Chezale. Indeed, until a moment ago he was barking nothing but orders to retreat. But now he had done a complete one-eighty.

Because this was coming from Aira. Her tone had been even, but she was barely concealing her irritation. If he denied her, he might be seen as unworthy of dealing with the vampires. She might even just kill him on the spot.

“You need to pull your weight too!” the general shouted at the “mercenaries.”

“Of course, my lord general. We will earn our fee, I assure you,” Aira replied. This exchange was really Maubiht begging for Aira’s aid, and Aira telling him that unless he pulled his own weight, the vamps would have little more use for him.

As it turned out, at this point in time, going with Aira’s plan was actually the right move.

“Nuhnn! Mountain-Smashing Hammer!” High Priest Goldan’s mace shattered stone.

“Great Gale Thrust!” Raily’s spear shot forward.

“. . .” Flark’s shield repelled missiles.

“Power Healing! Come on, back into the action, if you please!” Messara was healing the wounded and sending them back to the frontlines.

“That’s right! Soldier on, soldiers!” Genny was also hopping around, offering support.

Most of the golems had now been defeated, and the hard work of that group had even helped mitigate the impact of the catapults. The expedition army was rallying. If the heavy infantry could raise their shields, cast battle techs and form up into lines, those crossbow bolts would be rendered worthless. In fact, Goldan and Raily were shattering the “golem bombs” that Vandal had spent so long perfecting—rocks that would turn into golems after landing—meaning they were not only protecting their leadership, but also making Vandal click his tongue in annoyance. The two of them didn’t realize what was happening, but did find it strange that breaking a few rocks was giving them experience.

On the other hand, the fact that they were breaking the rocks in midair meant that it took too long for the expedition army to notice the barrels that were also breaking in midair—seemingly on their own.

“Huh. These humans might work out after all,” one of the vampires commented.

“Lady Tehneshia wouldn’t have worked so hard to put all this together, otherwise,” Aira replied. “We’re moving. Just don’t do anything too conspicuous until they breach the wall for us.”

“Yes, my lady!”

However, by the time Aira and the other vampires reached the battlefield, it had become difficult for them to remain incognito.

“Guhaah!” Someone made a coughing sound.

A cold liquid splashed down onto another man’s helmet.

The soldier didn’t seem too bothered by it. This was a battlefield. A place where blood and other fluids splashed around all the time. Getting distracted by a few splashes of something could get you killed.

“Guhem!” But then the splashed soldier also started coughing.

His head was throbbing, he felt dizzy and sick, his joints were aching, and his stomach was cramping...it even felt like he had suddenly developed a fever. He hacked. “Is this...poison?” His throat burned. He could barely speak.

And the same thing was happening to soldiers all across the battlefield. Indeed, the only people it wasn’t happening to was Aira and the other vampires.

That went as planned. Vandal gave a satisfied nod from the second wall, watching as the infectious water spread out from the soaring plague missiles, launched by the catapults.

The soldiers and knights had been picking themselves back up, but now they couldn’t even walk. They collapsed onto their knees as they coughed and spluttered. Goldan and Raily, even after smashing down all those rocks, were no exception.

A unit of what looked like mercenaries were still standing, looking confused by the proceedings. Those had to be the vampires. The fact that they were standing so close together certainly helped in identifying them.

The disease Vandal had created was one that would only infect those who weren’t susceptible to Death Attribute Allure. It didn’t do anything to the

ghouls, Cemetery Bees, Pauvina, or vampires, but it did infect the primarily human Milg Shield Kingdom expedition army via all possible infection routes, and they started showing symptoms in seconds.

“Gnnnh... Antidote potions don’t work!”

“Keep your shields up! The name of our very nation will weep if we fall to this toxin!”

“Why is this happening to me? I have Resist Poison!”

Many of the infantry mistakenly thought Vandal’s disease was poison. It was an easy mistake to make, considering they had suddenly started to collapse without warning. But even if they drank the antidote potions in their supply, they only felt better for a moment. The potions might remove the toxins from their body, but the virus that was creating them was still present and still working away.

“Treat Ailment! This isn’t poison, it’s a sickness!” The first to recover was High Priest Goldan, as Vandal might have suspected. “Heal those around you! If you have magic, start using it!” He used life magic to heal his own sickness, then started to shout at those nearby while incanting more magic.

“Messara, hu, hurry, hurry up!” Raily gasped.

“Koh, koh, koh! Wait...my throat...”

It wasn’t so easy, however. Without the Skip Incantation skill, there was no way to get the complex incantations out when the magic users could barely even speak. That wasn’t the only thing working against them, either.

“Hold fast, I’m almost... Goh, gohoh! What? Why am I...gooh!” Goldan had been cured for a moment, but then he started to cough and splutter again.

Vandal spoke to himself as he watched. “A sickness is different from poison in

that it is received from the people around you.” Goldan had healed himself using his magic, true. But he was also surrounded by thousands of men all coughing and sneezing, and without masks on. A single sneeze or cough sent a massive amount of virus flying. Easily enough to get Goldan reinfected. Generally people would develop antibodies to prevent catching the same disease again, but the sickness Vandal had created was more hardcore than that.

“This is a special disease that mutates faster than influenza. You just keep on enjoying it, right up until the end!”

The only ways out of the nest of infection were to use an anti-disease magic item that provided a continuing effect, cure all of the people directly around yourself, or drag yourself away from the battlefield and then cure yourself with magic. There was a final option—survive for the twelve hours that Vandal had set as the disease’s lifespan—but that certainly seemed like a challenge.

Having sided with the demon god, this sickness couldn’t affect Aira and the other vampires. They were now in a difficult position.

“What’s going on?!” Aira exclaimed. The human army that Tehneshia had worked so hard to arrange, and that the vampires had spent so long lurking within, had suddenly been turned into a hospital ward during a killer plague. Aira and the others didn’t know that everyone would be perfectly fine in twelve hours. The expedition army no longer represented fighting strength for them, or even a place to hide. The humans had become worthless in a single instant.

Their original plan was no longer going to work.

“Bah! With me, all of you! Fly up and kill that dhampir, then hunt down the traitors!” Aira shouted.

“Are you sure, my lady? We will be forced to reveal ourselves.”

“We’ve already been revealed! What do you think they’re thinking—we all happen to have Resist Maladies?”

The vampires had quickly realized that this was a disease. What they didn’t know was the exact effects of the disease that Vandal had created, so they believed that it was their vampiric Resist Maladies skill that kept them safe. The expedition army was busy being ill at the moment, but if they recovered some capacity to think, they were surely going to ask questions about the mercenaries’ strange reaction.

“We can clean things up afterward! First, we need to ensure we complete our orders! Or are you going to betray our masters?!” Aira shouted. Forsaking any semblance of calm, she raged as though her mistress Tehneshia herself had taken control of her body. The vampires were all quick to shake their heads at her question. They knew that failure to do so would immediately get them killed by Aira, who was also known by the Alias “Tehneshia’s Hunting Dog.”

“So get moving!” she barked.

Aira ended her magical disguise and flew up into the air with the other vampires. She cast off her full-face helmet, which would only get in the way when using Blood Suck, and used a special release device to instantly purge the armor that had been concealing her and the others as mercenaries. Such armor, from their perspective, didn’t really offer much protection. Then she drew her beloved blade that ended in a flat square rather than a point—known as an “executioner’s sword” on Earth—and flew directly toward the second wall. When she saw the expressionless, pale face looking up at her, Aira smiled as she prepared to dive down and strike.

“You were certainly full of surprises, but that ends now! My sword will cleave

you in two, filthy half-blood!" she crowed.

As she plummeted down, however, everything around her suddenly flashed white.

"Ah? Gyaaaaaaah!"

"Guaaaaaaaah!"

"Aaaagh! Lady Aira! The sun, the sunaaaaah!"

Talosheim had been darkening, becoming gloomy enough for even vampires to move around in without getting cooked. But suddenly the warm sunlight of spring illuminated the city once more. Vandal watched as the vampires started to sizzle in the sunlight, like raw ingredients dropped into boiling oil.

"That's the end of phase one," Vandal murmured. Begin phase two."

Zadilis had been waiting on the western side of the mountain range, leading a unit of light attribute magic users. Above her head, there was a skull floating in the air, about the size she could give a full-body squeeze to. It was one of Vandal's familiars, a Lemures. They were normally almost completely transparent, but Vandal had used Visualization magic to allow everyone to see it.

"It has to be soon... Ah, there we go," Zadilis said, as the Lemures started to rattle its teeth.

Zadilis and her group turned to face the mercury mirror that was located nearby. The mercury mirror was a combination of the knowledge Zakkato had left in this world and the magic that existed there. It was a magical device that caught the sunlight and directed it toward Talosheim, turning the gloomy patch of land captured between mountains into the City of the Sun. Two hundred

years ago, however, the Milg Shield Kingdom's army had destroyed it. They smashed the liquid metal mirror and tore down the pillars that once supported it.

Vandal, however, had used Golem Creation to repair the damage. Zakkato had apparently given some thought to future maintenance when constructing the device, because once it regained its original shape, Vandal had been able to restore it to functionality using Alchemy.

“Target the enemy!”

Even better, Vandal had turned the mercury mirror as a golem. It could now be ordered to move around.

“Everyone, all together! Super Sunlight!” Zadilis had ranked up to a rank 7 Ghoul Elder Mage, and now she displayed why, by shooting a massive beam of eye-burning light from her hands.

The others followed suit—a horde of female ghouls, giantling undead, and Anubi magicians—all incanting either Sunlight or Super Sunlight as well. Sunlight was a spell that unleashed the brightness of the sun. Super Sunlight, meanwhile, was like the hottest, most skin-blistering summer day imaginable. Both were techniques that had been developed long ago by Alda priests in order to fight vampires. It was therefore quite ironic that the dhampir Vandal was now getting ghouls and undead to shoot them off.

“Keep firing until you’ve burned all your MP!” Zadilis commanded. “Burn those demon god-loving vampires to a crisp!”

They weren’t close to the action, but the sudden rush of experience they received told Zadilis and the others that their magic was doing some serious cooking.

“Impossible! Zakkato’s relic was long destroyed! How is this even happening?!”

The pain from being burnt by silver or sunlight was very hard for a vampire to bear. Vampires were pretty much immortal unless their heads were chopped off or their hearts completely destroyed, but this was a pain that exceeded those limits and could eventually be fatal. Having a high level of Resist Maladies or powerful regeneration meant nothing. Indeed, more than half of Aira’s forces—the weaker Vampire Ritters—had already dropped down to the ground. They were crawling in the dirt, trying to escape the sunlight by hiding in the grass.

“Lady Aira, we should land and regroup as well,” suggested one of the vampires.

“You imbecile!” Aira shouted back. “Can’t you see what’s happening down there?” Aira pointed to where the vampires who had already landed were being defeated one after the other.

“Vampire scum!”

“Curses! Enemy reinforcements! Cut them off here!”

Even as the vampires tried to hide in the tall grass, the soldiers around them mustered up what strength they could to attack them with their spears and swords. To the humans of the expedition army, the creatures who had exposed themselves by flying around and being burnt by sunlight were the enemy, nothing more. The soldiers assumed they hadn’t been flying toward Vandal to kill him, but rather to join up with and reinforce him.

The vampires had written off the humans due to their sickness, but a sick man

with a sword could kill a vampire after it had received such agonizing burns. One of those unlucky enough to land next to Goldan was getting turned to meaty mush by his battle mace in that very moment. General Maubiht and Raily stared on in shock at this new development, but they couldn't very well order the men to stop killing vampires.

“Do you get it? If so, get over the wall, quickly!” As she barked these orders, Aira used water magic to create white ice across her body, reducing the effects of the sunlight. Her remaining underlings followed her example, using darkness or mist techniques to protect themselves as they tried to advance.

“Gyaaaah!”

A blinding flash sliced horizontally through the air, slashing one of the vampires, who descended from the sky with a scream. This was the power of the Sunlight Cannon—Zadilis’s Super Sunlight, directed at a single spot on the mercury mirror golem in order to create a blast of pure light. It was enough to cook raw meat or vegetables; a little darkness or mist wasn’t going to stop it.

“Scatter! Don’t clump together! Getting hit by that will kill you!” Aira shouted, giving the insane order to try and avoid light itself.

The vampires tried, but then they saw countless shapes coming through the air toward them from the shadow of the second castle wall and beyond the third.

“Hello there! What a lovely day for some sunbathing!”

The incoming enemies were led by none other than their secondary target: Eleonora herself, with a smile on her face.

Around that time, the ghouls and undead suddenly appeared on the right

flank of the expedition army. Vandal had never planned to be on the receiving end of a long siege, holing up in Talosheim's sturdy walls and letting the catapults do all the work. They might have tough defenses, but they also couldn't hope for reinforcements.

No good would come from trying to wait the enemy out. If the siege took too long, the expedition army would send for their own reinforcements, and the progenitors might decide to get involved themselves. The plan had therefore always been to defeat the enemy while their guard was still down, in a short and destructive battle.

Vandal had used Golem Creation to make a tunnel that ran under Talosheim, which ended in a large cave for his forces to wait in.

“Raaaagh!”

“Kill them!”

“Protect our children! Wipe out the invaders!”

“You won’t raze our nation again!”

Morale was still high among the ghouls and undead, to say they had been waiting underground for a couple of hours. They weren’t races that were uncomfortable in the dark and, more importantly, this was a battle to defend their home. A few hours waiting wasn’t going to dull their resolve.

“The enemy!”

“Fight back—baagh, gaaaah!”

The elites of the expedition army tried to respond in a manner befitting their eliteness. But the sickness was infesting their bodies and stealing their strength. They stood and tried to form back into military lines, but only managed to vomit everywhere.

“Rise, rise, rise, rise, rise, rise!” Vandal, still on the second wall, reactivated the golems that the expedition army thought they had destroyed.

“Goooooooh!” they roared.

“Impossible! The golems are moving again!”

“Geaaah!”

The reformed stone giants started to trample the expedition army, as if in retaliation for the smashings they had just received.

The leaders of the expedition army had been regarding the golems as eliminated. But the stone that formed the material of these golems hadn’t been physically destroyed. It might have been split and smashed, but it was all still around on the ground. Vandal could easily turn all that stone back into golems.

Then Vigaro and the others got in the mix. That meant the crossbows and catapults had to stop, but it made no difference in terms of the massacre befalling the expedition army.

“With me, warriors!” Vigaro was quick to lop off the head of one of the knights, who was unable to even stand due to the sickness and the golems.

“Undead cowards!” a knight shouted.

“Shut up and die!” retorted a giantling undead. His massive club took out the second knight just as easily.

Proud knights—and indeed, even ordinary soldiers—might have hesitated to kill an enemy suffering under a powerful sickness. Vigaro, the other ghouls, and the undead had no such hesitation. Call it a clash of cultural values? To them, these fools who had walked here without any understanding of their foe were simply lambs to the slaughter.

“Damn! Spiral Thrust!”

Of course, not everyone in the expedition army was taking it lying down. More than a few of them stood up despite the disease and unleashed battle techs. The attack launched by one of them hit Vigaro in the stomach, a rotating spear with fierce piercing strength. The man who launched it had diminished strength, and knew he would be finished if his opponent survived—so he gave it everything he had. The blow landed...with a screeching metallic sound.

“Huh?”

The soldier stared at his shattered spear—now just a useless stick—and then one of Vigaro’s four arms swung his axe. *Thunk!* The man was sent flying away and stopped moving.

Vigaro’s belly was protected by an orichalcum-made body wrap. “He had good arm,” Vigaro said. But that didn’t matter. The soldier had been carrying the steel spear he was supplied with—a spear that, far from the mass-produced type made by pouring metal into a cast, was a unique weapon forged by a blacksmith. Yet it couldn’t hope to compete with orichalcum, the mightiest of magic metals. The man’s desire to desperately strike some kind of blow had caused him to throw the spear so hard that it shattered completely. Of course, Vigaro had taken no damage; his body wrap didn’t even have a scratch.

“Huh.” Vigaro did seem a little sorry about it all. “But you picked fight,” was his final conclusion. The man had made his bed, and now he had to sleep with an axe in his brain.

“Hahaha! I’ll turn you into mincemeat for tonight!” Sam was giving off peals of terrifying laughter, mowing over soldiers who ran toward him, soldiers collapsed on the ground, and soldiers trying to run away. He was still a rank 4 Blood Carriage, but that was powerful enough to handle the diseased and

suffering expedition army.

“Turn my magical power to flame and defeat my foes! Flame Shot!” This shout came from a pale-looking, magically inclined soldier. Having spotted that Sam was undead, it wasn’t a bad choice to go with fire magic.

“No thanks!” Sam swung his spear at the red fireball, scattering it into harmless wisps.

“Is that... Ice Agaagh?!” The magician’s sentence devolved into a sound resembling *sqnxgjuzsh* as he was run down by the carriage.

Sam gave a wonderful smile at this success. “This spear the young master gave me feels so handy,” he enthused. “I will have to thank him again later.”

Vandal had destroyed Ice Age’s magical functionality, along with the piece of Yupeon inside it, but the remaining vessel was still made from orichalcum. With greater magic resistance than mithril, a Fire Shot from magician infantry—elite or otherwise—was never going to stand a chance.

“Squeak! Our master is a genius! We are cutting down these supposed elites like dead grass!” Skeleton exclaimed. He had recently ranked up to Skeleton Viscount.

“You said it!” the lich Nuaza happily agreed. “These are the same Milg Shield Kingdom soldiers who cut me in half so easily two hundred years ago, but this time it’s like they’re made of mud!”

The two of them were slashing and smashing their way through the enemy.

“Although fighting enemies so much shorter than myself isn’t doing wonders for my back!” chortled Nuaza.

“Hahaha, mine neither! If I spot a nice looking replacement spine, I’ll let you know!”

More soldiers took up position in front of Skeleton and Nuaza. “Cursed monsters! You dare mock us?!”

They hadn’t overcome the sickness from Vandal, but instead activated their Limit Break skill to push their strength and resistance past normal limits, making a temporary recovery. This would cause the illness to surge back even more powerfully once the skill ran out— perhaps strong enough to even kill them—but they had decided that risk was better than simply being cut down.

“Fight, men!” another shouted. “Give our allies time to retreat!”

The members of the expedition army had already realized that they weren’t going to win this battle. They had more men, but they were also all sick. What these knights could do, however, was hold back the enemy for as long as possible, to allow many of their allies to escape.

“Raagh! Shield Bash!” The soldiers raised their shields and rushed forward in a line.

Skeleton and Nuaza charged right at them.

“Rock Smash!” Nuaza swiped with his orichalcum mace to destroy the shields.

“Squeak! Slicing Moon!” Then Skelton’s magic sword cleaved flesh.

The two of them hadn’t really been mocking anyone, much less dropping their guard. They were taunting the soldiers to get them riled up. They wanted them to use the last of their strength to try and strike some noble final blow, rather than to potentially run away.

“What is this? Some kind of mirage? Or have I lost it completely? Why are there naked women on the battlefield—?!”

The question was cut short by a slash.

“This is reality,” Rita said. “And we’re not naked!”

“You’re joking! A crazy naked wench isn’t taking me—”

This defiant statement was cut short by a squelch.

“Just let us kill you! I’m also not crazy in the slightest!” Saria shouted.

The sisters were swinging their glaive and halberd around, finishing off soldiers to the left and right, but they didn’t seem especially happy about it.

“Sister, no one seems to appreciate what we look like very much. Why is that?” Rita asked.

“Hmmm, the young master said we look very cute. We’re even wearing the cloaks he told us to!” Saria replied.

The two of them continued to slash and stab their way through the enemies as they pondered this problem. They were wearing cloaks that were also magic items, concealing their scintillating rear-facing action, but they were still very exposed in front. In fact, putting on cloaks had only served to further accentuate how much was out there.

“There are others showing off a lot of skin as well!” Rita reasoned. “Like Kachia and Bildy.”

“Basdia isn’t shy either.”

“I’m not as shameless as you!” Kachia shouted from a short distance away, voicing some resistance to their characterization. She was actually correct in this instance, but the sisters didn’t pay any heed.

“Gah! You monsters! Die!”

They didn’t reply, because some of the surviving archers had fired off some arrows. Their aim was true, for what it was worth, and their missiles passed

right through one exposed tummy and another half-exposed chest.

“Ah, sister, we still have some goons fighting back.”

“Okay. I’ll support you with my bow. You rush them down.”

“You got it!” Rita tore off far more quickly than one might have expected from disembodied armor, while Saria switched from her halberd to her bow.

“Impossible...” gasped an archer.

“I mean, what did you expect, shooting a spirit body with regular steel arrowheads?” Rita asked.

An arrow shot by Saria proceeded to punch right through the man’s chest plate.

“Of course, you wouldn’t have done any damage to our armor either,” Rita said. Then she started to chop the archers down with her glaive.

Aira stared at Eleonora in sheer disbelief.

She had no idea how another noble vampire was standing there in the sunlight with nothing but a smile on her face.

Eleanor chuckled. “This is strength from someone most powerful.” Then she swung her sword—which looked like it had a black pole for the blade—downward.

“Groooahhh!”

Bzzzzzz!

“Raaaaah!”

Then Knochen, the Cemetery Bees, and Rapieçage all attacked the

immobilized nobles.

“What in the—they’re using insect monsters?!”

“Gyaaaaah!”

Surrounded by clouds of the Cemetery Bees, with jaws that could chew through stone and stingers that could punch through steel, the nobles started to drop from the sky, weakest first.

“Mere undead won’t defeat me! Steel Slice! Burst Slices! Hundred Raging Slices—geeah!?”

The Vampire Viscount sent by Gubamon to join the expedition was skilled in Sword Proficiency and desperately unleashed a string of battle techs. He smashed dozens of the bones all across Knochen’s body, but it wasn’t enough to keep away those fangs and horns.

“Rooooohn!” Knochen had been a rank 7 Bone Chimera, but after being merged with some of the massive volume of bones resulting from the giantling undead and ghouls’ hunts, he had ranked up to rank 8 Union Bones. This creature, created from the merging of literally thousands of bones, didn’t have any weak spots to speak of. In order to defeat Knochen with physical attacks, you’d need to quite literally break every bone in its body. They were the leftover monster bones that Talea and the crafters hadn’t been able to use. As they could easily have been turned into weapons or armor, some of them were harder than steel. If an enemy was serious about defeating Knochen they would need to use magic...

But there’s no way these vampires can use magic like that! Eleonora gloated to herself. The enemies were being burnt by the sunlight and dodging around to avoid the Super Sunlight Cannon, while needing to cast spells at the enemies

flying toward them. They wouldn't be able to pull it off. They'd need skills like Skip Incantation and Rapid Cognition at the very least.

As Eleonora happily considered their enemies' predicament, one of the flagging nobles got punctured by the stinger on Rapieçage's tail. The vampire screamed as Rapieçage smashed his face in with her mighty fists. The nobles were of a higher rank than Rapieçage, but the sunlight was proving to be a fatal environment for them.

“Gah! I'll at least take your head!” Aira shouted at Eleonora. That seemed the best she could possibly manage at this point. Too many unexpected elements had occurred for their original plan to possibly succeed. Even if it meant risking execution by returning without completing her orders, she needed to try and get this information back to her mistress.

The fact that she understood the importance of reporting what had transpired here, and yet she tried to kill Eleonora first—that was her undoing.

Aira was sure that with her skills, even though she couldn't use magic, and even though her opponent was unaffected by the sunlight, she could still win.

“Now die!” Aira activated her Limit Break skill. She pushed the pain of the sunlight into the back of her mind and closed in on Eleonora at incredible speed. Her opponent's sword really did just look like a metal pole; Aira's burnt face smiled at the sight of it.

Looks like she's favored defense over attack, but she'll need to do better than a piece of metal piping if she wants to defeat my executioner sword!

Eleonora, on the other hand, retained her composure and cast Accelerate on herself before intercepting the faster-moving Aira.

Aira was a female vampire who had long rooted out others of her kind who

had betrayed or failed their mistress Tehneshia. She had lived for tens of thousands of years and had executed more than a thousand victims in her time, giving her the unique Job, Murderous Executioner. Her Sword Proficiency was at Level 10 and her other skills were also powerful.

However, Eleonora had a master who was far more terrifying than Aira's mistress.

Your neck, from her left, came the message.

"I understand, Lord Vandal," she replied. Eleonora raised her sword to protect her neck and held it there with all her strength.

"Dark Night Decapitation!"

This was a powerful battle tech that Aira had created herself, and which had lopped off the heads of nobles similar to Eleonora many times before. It collided with the sword Eleonora was holding—and a deafening screech rang out.

Aira's sword stopped dead.

"What? Guaah!"

Even Aira's most powerful attack was unable to cut Eleonora's orichalcum sword. Aira's eyes opened wide, her hands numbed by the impact, causing her to drop her sword.

But there was nothing surprising about this situation. Sword King Borkz himself had been using the higher tier of Sword King Tech battle techs, and he hadn't been able to even scratch the battered Dragon Golem—simply because it had been made from orichalcum.



elasticity greater than Damascus steel.

Aira noticed that Eleonora's smile had grown. Then all she could see was white.

She let out an ear-rending scream.

Zadilis and her group were watching the situation using their light attribute magic, and when they saw that Aira had stopped moving, they blasted both her and Eleonora with the Super Sunlight Cannon. Aira instinctively knew she wouldn't be able to withstand much of this, and tried to make a run for it, but found herself moving as slow as a turtle.

This is time attribute magic! Eleonora! Aira thought. *But when did she even cast it?! And she's got to be caught in this beam as well—* Aira was unable to do anything. By the time the Sunlight Cannon was finished, she was damaged beyond recognition. All the expensive magic items she had been wearing were still there, but every inch of exposed skin had been roasted a charred black, with bone showing through in many places. It was so bad that it looked like she'd already been burnt to death.

“Oh, ooh, why, how...” But she was a powerful noble vampire, with vitality that kept her narrowly alive.

What she couldn't fathom was how Eleonora had taken no damage at all, even from such a powerful blast of sunlight. Her skin was a little red, but that soon returned to white.

“Are you asking about my sword? Or about the sunlight?” Eleonora asked, grabbing Aira by her burnt head as she spoke.

“Gaah!” Aira cried out.

“The answer for both is the same. This orichalcum sword, and my resistance to sunlight, they all come from Lord Vandal.” Now Eleonora was showing off not her sword, but her white hand with its nails extended.

“Haha, okay, so, we lost,” Aira managed to spit out. “Kill me, then. But you, you will die! Lady Tehneshia will avenge us!”

“That sounds most terrifying,” Eleonora replied. “In that case, you can help us to fight her.”

Before Aira could even question the stupidity of that statement, Eleonora sliced off her head. A fountain of blood erupted upward.

“Rise. To me.”

The fresh blood from Aira’s neck formed into a Blood Golem before it hit the ground, and then floated over toward Vandal’s mouth.

“How does it taste, Lord Vandal?” Eleonora asked.

Before Vandal could reply about drinking the blood of a powerful, high-ranking vampire, he glanced over at empty air.

“Why would I ever serve a dhampir like you! Even in death... I will...oh, I will serve you!” Aira’s spirit quickly changed its tune. “I will tell you whatever you want; please, just turn me into undead too. Allow me to work faithfully at your side, to repay you for having killed me!”

“Too easy. You just have to get to them before they start holding a grudge,” Vandal said. Then he looked back at Eleonora. “She’s agreed to help out. Her blood tasted pretty good too. Now I think we need to get down there.”

Vandal started to make his move, with Lefdia clinging to his back. This massacre wasn’t finished yet.

Skill level increased for Suck Blood!



The remnants of the expedition army and the command structure—a few hundred defenders, General Rangil Maubiht, and Chezale Reggston—were in a state of panic. Primarily because Aira and the other vampires had revealed themselves.

“General! Just what is the meaning of this?!” Chezale shouted.

“What do you think? They are using Flight magic items!” Maubiht shouted back.

“Then why is the sunlight burning your mercenaries alive?”

“You didn’t see right! That’s poison or something else unleashed by the dhampir!”

“Then why were the mercenaries in disguise?”

“I don’t know! I don’t know!”

That was the best Maubiht could do. For Chezale and the others, vampires were evil monsters, making it impossible for them to accept that such creatures had been among their own forces. Even more so when they had been the special mercenaries brought to the expedition by General Maubiht himself. Maubiht had treated them as a key part of the army, listening to the leader’s opinions on multiple occasions.

“Some vampires must have infiltrated my mercenaries! It has nothing to do

with me!"

But by this point, no one was going to believe a word coming out of Maubiht's mouth.

"You're working with the vampires!" one of the men accused.

"You want to wipe us out!" another chimed in. "That's why the mercenaries said we should charge!"

"Know your place!" retorted one of the knights. "You dare make such accusations against Count Maubiht, general of the very Empire to whom you owe allegiance?!"

"Shut your mouth! You must be consorting with vampires too, heretic!" one of the soldiers shouted back.

This was no longer an expedition army. The force had dissolved into two groups: the confused Maubiht and his knights from the Empire, and Chezale and the soldiers from the Milg Shield Kingdom.

Those scum-sucking bloodsuckers! They're planning on cutting me loose, clearly, but I won't allow that! I'm not going down like this! Maubiht was desperately putting his own survival first, trying to bring the situation back under his control.

"Enough! We don't have time to worry about the general! Retreat! Begin the retreat! Form a rear guard and hold back the enemy! Otherwise we are all dead!" Chezale shouted. Even as their leaders stood around bickering, the lives of the men were being reaped like wheat by their undead foes. High Priest Goldan and Raily were still holding out, but it was only a matter of time before the expedition army was wiped out. "All forces from the main camp! Join the rear guard!"

“What? Chezale, what are you saying?! We need those men to defend us!” Maubiht screamed.

“General, you still don’t see what’s happening here—!”

“Silence!” Maubiht cut him off. “My men will not move an inch for you!”

“Gah!” Chezale threw up his hands. If they kept bickering like this, the remaining soldiers from each side might end up fighting each other in the main camp. The Milg Shield Kingdom would probably win, considering their numbers, but they didn’t have the time to find out.

The compromise, perhaps, was to send just the Milg Shield Kingdom soldiers to join the rear guard, but those men weren’t mindless golems. If they were ordered to go out onto that killing field while those from the holy Empire remained in the camp, something was sure to explode. To make matters worse, General Maubiht’s authority was now worth dirt, with the implication of being a heretic who sided with the vampires hanging over his head. The soldiers would ask themselves why they had to die so a fang-lover could make his escape. Although things would have been different if Chezale was in Maubiht’s position.

“Ah! The vampires have been killed!” one of the men shouted.

“A miracle from Alda!” shouted another.

The images of the battle projected by their light attribute magician showed an enemy swordswoman chopping off Aira’s head. Aira had actually been burnt by Zadilis and the ghouls, and the swordswoman was Eleonora, also a noble vampire, but these men didn’t have that information. For them, the flash of light looked like a miracle from their god.

Chezale hoped that this would help everyone to calm down.

“Ah, Lady Aira...” General Maubiht, however, and those among his knights

who were in on the secret, paled visibly at this development. For them, Aira and the other vampires had been their lifeline through this whole expedition nonsense. Each vampire was worth a thousand knights, after all. They didn't need any grade A adventurers when they had the rank 10 Aira. They thought they were safe and secure. They thought victory was assured. They had convinced themselves of these things, until this moment.

"We're done for! Retreat! Retreat! Guard my retreat!" Maubiht shouted.

"General!" Chezale exclaimed. But Maubiht was already gone, running from the main camp in an attempt to escape—alone if he had to. He cast aside all the soldiers dying in battle, desperately trying to save himself.

Rangil Maubiht may have held the position of general, but he wasn't a veteran fighter or calculating tactician. He was a political general, skilled in more logistical affairs. He had received information from the demon god-worshipping vampires, achieved results that also suited their ends, and then talked the State Bursar into giving him money for all sorts of things. He didn't possess fighting skills; he wasn't even ready to kill in battle. The tussle to survive was the role of the soldiers on the battlefield. In his mind, the officers should keep a seat warm in the main camp, waiting for their men to bring back the glory. This expedition army hadn't even needed him in command, but based on the strength the vampires displayed, and his overestimation of his own worth to them, he had allowed things to fall out of control.

"All forces, retreat! Defend me!" Maubiht screamed, practically foaming at the mouth as he ran away.

"General... No! You aren't worthy of that title any longer!"

Chezale prepared to fire an arrow at the fleeing man's back. He needed to deal with this deserter himself. They were better off without him and any men

who would follow him, now that his true colors had been revealed. But Maubiht was still commander, at least in name. If word spread that their leader had fled the battle, the expedition army would cease to function. They would fall into a pure rout, to be picked off and killed by pursuers or monsters. That had to be avoided at all costs.

“Archers! Rangil is fleeing right before the enemy—” But before he could finish giving the orders, Chezale started coughing.

His throat ached so badly that he suddenly couldn’t speak. Peering through watering eyes, he saw that Maubiht was already down on the ground. And not just him: all the knights who had followed his orders to protect his retreat were also now unable to stand. The rest of the expedition leaders were either throwing up the contents of their stomachs or dripping with snot and tears. All of them were suffering.

This can’t be happening! Chezale cursed.

“This is their main camp!” shouted a voice outside.

“Kill all the leaders! The king said to make sure the general and the nobles can still be identified!”

“We’ll go after the ones who ran away!”

As Chezale struggled to stand, still spluttering and coughing, the camp pavilion fell down. A giantling undead dressed in black, a black goblin with his face covered in a cloth, and a monster that looked like a kobolt but riding a raptor burst in.

Chezale saw that one of them, the giantling undead, was carrying a soldier in one hand. The man had his limbs chopped off but was still barely alive. That told Chezale exactly what had happened.

“Got one!”

Zulan used a strangely shaped double-bladed knife—a kunai that he had ordered especially from Datara—to kill Chezale, and then snapped the neck of the dying man he had brought along as a handy portable sickness spreader. That was all the time it took for Braga and the other black goblins to finish killing the rest of the leaders.

Then Zulan shouted fresh orders. “Let’s move! This is the first battle for our ninja unit! We need to make a big splash! The child will reward all who make a name for themselves!”

“I want honey!”

“I want tempura!”

The ninja unit was led by Zulan, who had ranked up to a Zombie Ninja. His second-in-command was Braga, a Black Goblin Ninja. They set off across the battlefield again, keeping pace with Zamed’s mobile units, consisting of the Anubis riders on their tamed monster mounts.

It seemed that Vandal had forgotten to tell them one important thing about ninja: their famous use of stealth.

The remaining expedition army soldiers, unaware that their leadership was all dead, continued to resist under their own judgment.

This meant that there was zero cooperation as an organized army. Rather, it was a bunch of small units all fighting separately. Messengers were unable to move due to the sickness, and the main camp had fallen into chaos before getting promptly wiped out, meaning none of those in command in the field were getting any kind of orders.

The men weren't continuing the fight because they were proud warriors who staked their lives to the last. They were simply too sick to run away, and the enemy didn't look like they would accept any kind of surrender.

"Gaaaah!"

"Fgooooh!"

Bzzzzzzzzzz!

They were facing black orcs holding shields taller than the soldiers themselves who charged in swinging axes and mauls, plus massive bee monsters, undead, and ghouls. All of them were terrifying monsters to a human. If the soldiers were captured, it would only be to be eaten—or at best, kept as emergency rations. Faced with these odds, and the horror of this situation, there were some from among even the proud elite of the Shield Kingdom whose minds simply broke.

"I don't want to die! I'm about to become a father!"

"I see. Then you should have trained harder." Basdia, using an axe swirling with magic wind that she had cast herself, chopped off the head of the soldier who had apparently left a heavily pregnant wife behind at home, "I'm not dying here! I'm going home to propose to Milly! And then we're going to—"

"I'm doing the same thing after this battle!" The orcas Gobba swung his staff at a knight who was desperately fighting back. The knight sailed away beautifully through the air before crashing with a *krrnnch* and rolling across the ground.

"Wait, please! I have a family—!"

"Huh? Most people do!" Borkz was chopping down soldiers one after another as they begged for their lives. Vandal had told them all not to take any

prisoners, and they had no reason to spare invaders who were here to kill them and their families to begin with. The expedition army had launched this attack, and they had three times the numbers of Vandal's forces. It was important to whittle them down as much as possible. Furthermore, Death Attribute Allure had no effect on those begging, because they didn't want to die.

"You rabble!" Raily yelled. "Fight harder!"

His mind was still intact. He had used an anti-malady potion that he happened to have brought along, curing himself of the sickness, and then used his beloved spear to shatter Stone Golems while using Daunt to drive off the Cemetery Bees, finally managing to get his footing.

"But boss..."

"Haah, haah..."

"*Gaahaack*, please, a potion...for us too..."

However, that only applied to Raily. The three criminal slaves who formed the rest of his party were unable to move. Genny looked pale and ready to drop on the spot; Flark still had his shield up but was breathing heavily; and Messara was already on the ground. Raily clicked his tongue at these useless slaves, then checked their surroundings.

The expedition army had already lost half its forces, and most of those left were running away. The only ones left fighting in any organized sense were the holy warriors led by High Priest Goldan and the few knights and soldiers able to join up with them. They had formed into a circle and were using healing magic to keep themselves cured while slowly retreating. Raily hoped he could meet up with them... Indeed, if he couldn't, he probably wasn't going to survive.

"Gah! We need to get over to them!" Raily shouted.

“Good luck with that!”

A bold and cutting ranged attack, Slash Vortex, slashed toward him. Raily swirled his weapon, catching the attack and avoiding it, using the defensive battle tech Circle Dance.

“You scum!” Raily raged.

“That was Circle Dance, huh? I’d expect no less from a grade A adventurer.”

Raily had used Daunt to drive off everyone from around him, but now Borkz stood inside the circle of influence. Raily could instantly tell that this wasn’t a normal undead or ghoul. His experience as an adventurer and his Instinct skill were practically screaming at him. Screaming, *Oh, shit.*

“What’s with you? Why is someone like you obeying that dhampir brat?!” Raily asked.

His attacker had clearly been holding back when he’d unleashed that Slash Vortex. And the attacker hadn’t maintained the element of surprise, either—he had unleashed it after first speaking up. Raily knew that this was someone stronger than himself. So why would he place himself beneath that dhampir?

“What do you think? It’s a quest, an adventurer quest. Oh, and he gave me a military post.” The remains of Borkz’s lips moved up in a smile as he provided this answer that wasn’t really an answer. He was already raising his magic sword. “They say you’re the second coming of Mikhail, don’t they? He’s the one who killed me, two hundred years ago. I thought I’d better check and see if you really are as strong.”

“The grudge of a loser! Pathetic!” Raily was facing overwhelming, physical pressure in the form of an imminent threat to his life, with his entire body crying out to try to survive. But this also wasn’t an enemy he could turn his back

on and run away from.

“You! Up! Stand in front of me!”

The slave collar forced Flark to follow Raily’s orders, and the big man staggered into position.

“Genny! Messara! You too! Get up!”

The two other slaves cried out at these orders.

“No! I’m rear support!” Messara pleaded.

“Me too, boss! You can’t expect a scout to shield you!” Genny said. At least he was dressed in leather armor; Messara was only wearing a special dress with a focus on magical defense. Neither of them would offer any better defense than a sheet of paper before Borkz’s magic sword.

“Shut it! You slaves are just pieces of your master’s equipment! You die so I can keep living!” Raily retorted. Then Raily raised his magic spear and focused his mind. The three of them were right in front of its tip. He was clearly intending to sacrifice all three of them.

“Boss! We’ve worked so hard for you!” Genny begged.

“You said you’d free me once you became a noble and make me your wife!” Messara exclaimed. “Was that a lie?!”

Flark’s eyes looked resigned through the slits in his helmet.

Borkz, however, also saw them as nothing but Raily’s equipment. Originally, criminal slaves would have faced execution or life imprisonment, and the undead Borkz could see the spirits of the victims the three had killed. He had no sympathy for them.

“Don’t worry,” Borkz assured those spirits. “Once I kill you, I’ll be rewarded

with wine. I'll drink a cup to you...yah!" It almost sounded like Borkz had forgotten about Raily completely as he rushed in.

"Iron Wall!" Flark unleashed a desperate final battle tech.

"Three Tier Slice!" Borkz's magic sword sliced through Flark's shield and his body.

"Damn youaaaaa!"

"Nooooo!" Genny swung his knife with tears in his eyes and Messara swung her staff, but the second and third slices cut them down.

"Raaaaaaagh! Hundred Cut Spiral Thrust!" Raily unleashed his strongest battle tech.

However, Raily's Spear Proficiency was only at level 8. Borkz's Sword Proficiency had maxed out and turned into the higher tier skill Sword King, making him a true master of the blade. Even Raily's most powerful battle tech wasn't difficult for Borkz to stop. Borkz activated the battle tech Willow Weave, which should have caught and displaced an incoming attack... *Slash!*

"Huh?" A chunk of meat was cut from Borkz's shoulder.

Raily's spear had struck faster than Borkz's Willow Weave. Borkz managed to protect himself from attacks to the head, but chunks of his arms and legs were being chopped away, right along with the dragon-materials armor that was meant to be protecting them. Borkz saw Raily's lips rise in a smile, and it reminded him of something: he was capable of this exact same thing.

"Magic Sword Limit Break," Borkz recalled. "Something like this?"

A skill that pushed the capabilities of magic items beyond their normal limits. Most of those in Jobs who were focused on using magic weapons had this skill. Raily had activated his in order to penetrate Borkz's defenses.

But of course, Sword King and former grade A adventurer Borkz had access to the same skill. He had just forgotten how to use it. As he swung his sword, the familiar feeling from when he was still alive came rushing back.

Borkz reacquired the skill Magic Sword Limit Break Level 10!

The skill Magic Sword Limit Break turned into Magic Sword Limit Exceed!

“Huh?”

This time, Willow Weave was enough to catch up Raily’s magic spear and send it flying from his hands.

“So you’re not that hot after all,” Borkz said. His magic blade, glittering with magical power, slashed down toward Raily and his empty hands.

“You’re joking!” Raily screamed. “I’m not going to end my life like this! I’m going to become a hero!”

“Don’t think so. Pierce!”

The tip of the sword pierced Raily’s heart with a meaty *thunk*. Blood spewed from his mouth, leaving his tongue hanging out, and he stopped moving.

“But this isn’t the end for you.”

In fact, they were just getting started. That was the message Borkz shared with Raily’s spirit.



Vandal took a deep breath of the air hanging over the grassy plains, heavy

with the reek of blood and offal.

Then he expelled it, along with feelings of superiority, euphoria, happiness, achievement, and hunger. He had to be calm and in control. He was about to take his revenge. For this, he had to be composed.

This battle was going to end in an absolute, overwhelming victory for his forces. That was now just a fact for Vandal. The fact that the king of Talosheim himself was on the frontlines was nothing but Vandal's own ego at play. There were some strategic reasons to fight himself, but only minor things when considering the big picture. In the end, it was ego. After all, children were known for being selfish.

"Rise, rise, rise!" He dashed across the ground, muttering to himself. He was using Spirit Bodification on his internal organs, making his body lighter and increasing his agility, providing him with the speed of a wild beast. He was heading straight for the only group from the expedition army that was still offering any kind of organized resistance—the one led by High Priest Goldan.

"Alda is with us!"

"Stand firm! There is still hope!" The shouts of the holy warriors were stirring up their knight allies.

"Alda, watch over me now! Steel Crush!" At their head was Goldan, his wrinkled face stalwart enough to make the devil himself run for cover. He was also smashing his battle staff down onto Vigaro.

"Nghhh!" The ghoul took the hit on his orichalcum body wrap, falling backward with a grunt. While it was—strictly speaking—armor made from orichalcum, it was really little more than a wearable shape with a belt and fasteners attached by the crafters; the equivalent of a batch-cast item made

from magical metal. Being orichalcum meant the attack hadn't shattered it, which was good, but it also hadn't been able to absorb the entirety of that impact.

"Gah! What is the meaning of this? Why are all these ghouls and undead wearing such powerful equipment?!"

Goldan might have pushed Vigaro back, but the aging human was still in dire straits. The sickness was sapping his strength, forcing him to continually incant and spend MP to cure himself, while still fighting. He had succeeded in purifying the vampires who had fallen from the sky, burnt by what he assumed was a miracle of Alda, but other than destroying some of the fire-and-forget Stone Golems, he had done nothing else of note during the battle. The anti-undead magic he had attempted to use had been blocked by the orichalcum's magic defense, preventing him from defeating enemies that way. "I won't be able to obey the oracle like this..." As Goldan groaned, he suddenly saw a white shape cutting toward him, flitting along like some kind of illusion.

"There!" Goldan breathed.

"That's him," Vandal said.

Both saw their target, and both moved at the same time.

"Eat this! Hard Shot!" Goldan targeted Vandal with a battle tech that sent a bullet-like shot out from his war staff.

"...Death Shot." Vandal used a one-shot wand passed to him by Lefdia to cast a series of power-boosted Death Shots, but his target wasn't Goldan. He dodged the incoming Hard Shot with ease. With his Detect Danger: Death that warned him about incoming attacks, at this distance it would be impossible not to avoid them.

Vandal's Death Shots landed on the shields and armor of the holy warriors around Goldan. As they were formed in a circle, if they tried to avoid the attacks by moving around, then the backliners and those on the other side of the circle would likely get hit. So they chose to try to tank the attacks. The incoming magic attacks were only about fingertip size, and the men had decided their Rock Wall and Rock Body battle techs, desperately imbued with the last of their MP, would be able to resist. But that wasn't the case.

“Gaaah?!”

“Guwah...”

The holy warriors collapsed with eyes rolled back in their heads.

“Kaufman! Elrick!”

“Two with one attack?!”

Wow. So weak. Vandal had expected the soldiers Goldan had brought with him to be better than the average expedition army grunt. He was just as surprised as the rest of them that they had died so easily. However, he was using an attack that had previously killed a rank 6 Hydra, a creature with superlative regeneration strength and vitality. These shots now had even more magical power and had been cast using wands. Conversely, the holy warriors had only been using battle techs like Rock Wall and Rock Body. They didn't stand a chance.

Vandal pushed his surprise aside and raced forward, firing off more Death Shots toward the gap in the circle he had just created, fragments of the wands scattering all around him.

“Guwah!”

“Hnngh...”

“Alda! Protect mewaaaah...”

Vandal shot and shot and shot, aiming for their legs. The vitality-eating Death Shots were effective wherever they landed, be that body or toenail, and the backliner magicians and archers collapsed. Vandal was almost amused.

“Bah! I’ll handle this!” Goldan realized that they were going to get wiped out if this kept up, so he stepped out in front of Vandal.

“Fall back! Vandal handle this!” Vigaro shouted and the ghouls fell back.

That created an opening for Goldan to pray to Alda.

“My lord above!” Goldan intoned. “Send an angel to aid me in defeating this cowardly dhampir!”

This was more than a prayer. He was activating the skill Angel Advent, a power only available to the chosen clergy. A pillar of light descended from the heavens and enveloped Goldan, forming a halo above his head and wings of light on his back. This was Goldan’s trump card—a way to increase all of his stats by calling down an insubstantial divine angel to inhabit his body.

“Iron Body! Iron Wall! Light Blade!” Goldan unleashed a sequence of defensive battle techs, also making use of Skip Incantation, which bringing down the angel had activated. A blade of light mighty enough to chop down a giant closed in on Vandal.

It never reached him, however; the Magic Sucking Barrier swallowed it whole.

“You’re finished! Adamantine Smash!”

Goldan didn’t stop for a second, his glittering mithril war staff swinging right toward Vandal’s head—which then soundlessly exploded from the neck up.

“Yes!” The holy warriors shouted in glee while the ghouls held their collective

breath.

“Gaah!” Then Goldan stepped back in pain.

He had taken a Death Shot from the headless Vandal at point blank range.

“Is something wrong? Did you think blowing my head off would kill me?” Vandal asked. He had used Spirit Bodification on his head, making it look like it had blown apart when the attack landed.

“Unholy monster!” Goldan retorted. If he hadn’t been using Angel Advent and his battle techs, the Death Shot would have instantly killed him. Vandal had also added Soul Crusher onto the Death Shot, so it had sapped away a third of Goldan’s MP. “I don’t know what you are doing to whittle down my MP, but with Angel Advent active I can borrow all the vitality and magic I need from one of the heavenly hosts themselves! I have ten thousand MP at the moment! You can’t hope to remove it all!”

“...That’s all you’ve got?” Vandal replied. It hardly seemed like a number worth boasting about. Even as he had that thought, Vandal popped a second Spirit Body head from his body. “We’re finally getting to fight, one on one. Let’s keep going.”

“Monster! One on one? Can you even count?!” Goldan retorted.

“Huh? I guess I do have a helping hand. But you’re possessed by an angel, so let’s call it two on two. Still sounds equal to me,” Vandal replied. He was using Mental Multitasking and Remote Control to manipulate multiple bodies, but Vandal only had one soul, so he only counted as one. He thought Goldan was talking about Lefdia, still clinging to his back.

“Bah! You would consider undead the equal to an angel sent by God? I have nothing more to say to you!”

Vandal supposed there was no discussing anything with Goldan. He didn't want the man to actually start spitting, rather than just spitting words, so Vandal decided to continue the fight.

"Now it's my turn," he said.

Vandal extended his nails and divided his arms using Spirit Bodification, turning them into whip-like shapes. He was basing the result on things he vaguely remembered from art textbooks back on Earth: perhaps the three monstrous Hundred-Handers, or Hecatoncheires, from Greek mythology, or even the thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara. His recollections were vague, but he didn't care. He was only using them for inspiration. Goldan's face was transfixed in surprise.

Then Vandal started to actually hit him with his arms.

"Whip Whack!" He unleashed a Brawling Proficiency battle tech normally reserved for the long-armed male ghouls. The first attack bounced harmlessly off Goldan's shield.

"Hah! A ghoul battle tech? That won't make a dent in my Iron Wall—" Goldan started.

"Whip Whack, Whip Whack, Whip Whack, Whip Whack, Whip Whack, Whip Whack!" Vandal repeated.

Thwap, thwap, thwap, thwap, thwap! He continued to swing his unlimited arms. Every strike was a Whip Whack.

Impossible! Goldan thought. *How can he perform this many battle techs in such quick succession?!* Any normal human...even a superhuman couldn't make this work. And yet Vandal was attacking with dozens, even hundreds of Whip Whack attacks. *I can't believe this!* Between all of Vandal's countless arms,

Goldan peered at the head that he had just cut off.

“Whip Whack!”

“Whip Whack, Whip Whack!”

“Whip Whack, Whip Whack, Whip Whack, Whip Whack, Whip Whack!”

What he saw looked like a massive cluster of grapes. Not your normal fruit: grapes made from the heads of children with hollowed out, vacant eyes.

“Monster!” This was the first time Goldan’s voice had trembled with fear.

As Vandal looked at the priest with all his many eyes, he wanted to laugh. When it had happened—when Dalshia was burnt at the stake—Vandal hadn’t been able to do a thing, other than hide like a bug and try to survive. And now, here was Goldan, terrified of him. He called him “monster,” not with contempt but with true fear in his eyes. This was simply wonderful.

However, going as full ball as this was hard—even with Vandal’s prodigious volume of MP.

“Come to me.” He used Substantiation on one of his heads and called up a golem that he had created in advance from nearby.

“Roooooh!” A red golem rose from the ground, this being a blood golem created from the blood of the expedition army soldiers. It leapt into Vandal’s mouth. It wasn’t especially fresh, smelling of soil and grass, and even had chunks of soldier mixed in at some points, but it was good enough for the moment that he didn’t care about those things.

Seeing Vandal feeding put a definitive crack in Goldan’s mental state. He finally understood that it didn’t matter how long he held out for. Vandal might start having to catch his breath, but he was never going to have to catch his MP. Even without the refill, of course, he still had half his MP...more than one

hundred million remaining.

“Ngggh, raaaaaaaah!”

Thwap, thwap, thwap! Vandal’s arms and claws continued their whipping even as all this happened, digging into Goldan’s shield and stripping off parts of his armor, revealing a body glowing with holy light beneath.

Every whip included Soul Crusher, stripping away Goldan’s MP in seconds and forcing Angel Advent to come to an end.

All that remained was a bloody old man.

It was time to end this.

Vandal bared his fangs and then attacked Goldan with all of his heads.

“High Priest?! Everyone, protect the high priest!” The remaining holy warriors—of whom there were now only a few—moved to protect the immobile Goldan. Vandal hadn’t noticed it while he was focused on his own battle, but some of the other humans had tried to interfere while he was unleashing all those Whip Whacks. Vigaro and the others had been forced to step in and clear them out.

They had even managed to actually destroy some of his heads, but it didn’t really matter. All those extra heads were exactly that—extra. Even if they were all destroyed, he could just make a new one. Their resistance was completely futile.

Vandal’s fangs sank into Goldan’s neck.



Chapter Four: Repossession, Repollution

“What...what has happened to me?”

Goldan was confused. He couldn’t see, he couldn’t hear, and his body was cold. He didn’t have a clue what was going on.

“I had an important duty...a duty given to me by God himself...”

“That is true, Goldan,” came a sudden voice. “My brave servant.”

“What? My lord?!” From the sheer divine power he felt in just those few words, Goldan was instantly aware that this was the voice of his god.

“You were unable to complete that duty.”

Goldan wanted to crumple into himself. He had failed in the duty his divine master had placed upon him. His heart ached with bitterness and remorse.

“But I shall give you another chance to fight.”

“Is that so? You will?!” Goldan exclaimed.

“Yes, of course. And if you can meet my expectations in the next battle, the sin of your failure this time shall be forgiven.”

“Of course, my lord! I, Bohmak Goldan, shall fight in your holy stead for as long as the light of my life burns!” Goldan vowed.

With that, the color restored to his world. He didn’t feel any warmth, but his body actually felt better than it had in many years.

“High Priest! You are still with us!” one of his men shouted.

“He’s awake! Bring the potion!”

In the same moment he awoke, he immediately saw the enemies of his god clustering around him.

“Get back from me, you filth!” he shouted. He punched one of those nearby and leapt to his feet.

“High Priest! What are you doing?!”

“What do you think?! I’m making a start on killing all of you heathen monsters!” he roared.

Luckily, his beloved war staff was lying nearby. He kicked it up with one foot and snatched it from the air, and then started to hammer at his foolish foes.

“Guwaah?!” One of the holy warriors was blasted off his feet with a wet cry, his armor and lungs staved in together.

“High Priest! It’s me, Algen!”

“I see you! Now you die, Algen, enemy of my lord!” Goldan replied. Goldan flung himself in among the remnants of the holy warriors he himself had taught and trained, smashing them down one after the other.

“Hahaha! God! My lord! Watch me as I atone!”

What remained of the expedition army was wiped out by the freshly minted Zombie Priest Goldan. Even those who tried to run succumbed to the disease and collapsed, to be finished off. Not a single invader survived.

Skill level increase for Brute Strength, Suck Blood, Spirit Body, Remote Control, Mental Multitasking, Rapid Cognition, Brawling Proficiency, Limit Break, Simultaneous Activation, Skip Incantation, Soul Crusher, and Death Attribute Allure!

Acquired the skill Command!

Reached Level 100!



Vandal was very satisfied with the results of the battle. It was nothing less than a complete victory. It had been a defensive fight, after all, in which they had held all the trump cards. But it was nice to have their expectations confirmed now that it was over.

Vandal and his allies had started their preparations from the moment Eleonora joined them. They had arranged all sorts of tricks and traps, with backups and redundancies far beyond what anyone would think were required.

They had found the tunnel the enemy was likely to use and had set up surveillance. Created the golem castle walls, lined them with crossbows, and developed catapults. Designed a sickness that would only infect the expedition army. Dismantled the Dragon Golem, made orichalcum armor and weapons, and distributed them among Vandal's allies. Repaired the damaged mercury mirror and turned it into a golem to fight vampires. Group cooperation further increased the fighting strength of each individual. Vandal's lowest ranking allies were rank 4, but the effects of Enhance Brethren and Enhance Followers affected them. That made their actual fighting skill closer to rank 5.

Against all that, the expedition army had been formed purely to lose. The main camp had been primed to rupture along the fault line between the Empire and Shield Kingdom because of a weak-willed commander who had already sold out his homeland to the vampires. The second-in-command didn't have the skills required to pull off the kind of miracle required to win. More than anything, they hadn't bothered to properly run reconnaissance, so they had had no idea of what had been waiting for them in Talosheim. They might have been

an elite force, each member capable of defeating a rank 3 monster alone, but it turned out that not a single foe at the destination had anything less than combat strength of rank 5.

As a result, Vandal's side achieved a miraculous result, suffering injuries but not a single death.

Vandal, not his enemies, had the skills to pull off a miracle. He had also confirmed that Pauvina and other non-combatants were safe inside the castle buildings—which he had also turned into golems, just in case.

"Now for the cleanup," Vandal said. He had recovered his exhaustion by drinking Goldan's blood. So he started to turn the corpses of the expedition army into zombies. There were about five thousand of them, fewer than the full force because some of them were too squished or no longer had legs they could move around on. Vandal could have used Fix Corpse to repair those, or Surgery to stitch bodies back together, but it didn't seem worth taking things that far.

Five thousand was more than enough for his purposes, anyway. The remaining thousand could be experience points for the undead and food for the Cemetery Bees. Their bones could be absorbed by Knochen or turned into mulch for the Immortal Ents. Their spirits could become Living Armor.

While he performed these tasks, he collected information from some of the more important spirits. The most important of these was Aira, who for centuries had been aide to one of the progenitor vampires. Completely under the effects of Death Attribute Allure, she told Vandal whatever he wanted to hear in a desperate attempt to please him.

"I see," Vandal said. "I suspected that it was the progenitors who destroyed the tunnel on the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom side. At least it happened after the royals and their retinue made it to Duke Heartner's domain. Would

Tehneshia be able to fix the tunnel?"

"No, even Lady Tehneshia... That is, I heard even Tehneshia couldn't do it," Aira reported.

That meant they need only do the same thing to the tunnel on the Milg Shield Kingdom side and the progenitors wouldn't be able to use it either. That was good news.

He also learned from Aira that when Tehneshia and the others joined the Demon God of Living Pleasure and swore their allegiance to him, they received his divine protection in exchange for losing access to Jobs. They became genuine monsters. That explained why Zombie Maker had been a new Job.

He also collected the names and other useful information on those humans who were currently in league with the demon god-worshipping vampires, particularly those in the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom. When they finished, Vandal immediately turned Aira into a zombie. Tehneshia and the other progenitors had a rite in which they could call forth the soul of a noble species and turn it into undead. Vandal therefore needed to turn her into undead to prevent any information on himself from leaking.

"Lord Vandal, why don't you just crush her soul like you did with Sercent?" Eleonora glibly made this terrifying suggestion, but Vandal shook his head.

"I don't have that much against her," he replied. Vandal's trauma made him reflectively angry, murderous even, when he saw women being hurt or debased. But Aira was not a woman to him—simply an enemy who had tried to kill Eleonora. He was also of the mind, however, that it wasn't a good thing to go around crushing souls left and right, even if they belonged to his enemies. He could kill them without hating them.

“Ah, but I’m going to be putting all of these under your command,” Vandal added. “If you don’t like anything they do, just say. Then I’ll crush them.” He might have stopped hating them, but that didn’t mean he was attached. He might have returned to zero from minus, but he wasn’t heading into plus territory.

“Ah! Like I’d...ever...” Aira spat through gritted zombie teeth.

“Very well, Lord Vandal,” Eleonora said sweetly. “We understand each other, Aira?”

“...Yes... Lady... Eleonora...” Aira finally chewed out. Vandal ignored the frustrated vampire zombie and continued to collect information from the other dead.

He had to put up with Raily’s cloying fawning to obtain information on Heinz and the others who had crossed to the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom. Raily gave him the names, Jobs, skills, and physical descriptions of the other members of the Five Hue Blades, from when Raily had known them. For one, though, it was already too late: the elf elemental magician, Maltina, had perished in a dungeon. After Heinz crossed to Olbaum, he and his party had attempted a special dungeon with connections to the hero Zakkato, and that was where she had died.

That meant there were only three targets left for Vandal’s vengeance.

“I guess I can’t hope to find her spirit,” Vandal mused. “It would be interesting if she turned into undead in the dungeon.” He shook his head with a sigh and returned to his questioning.

He also found out about the grade S adventurer, Thunderclap Schneider, in the Amidd Empire. He was a saint so beloved that Alda had sent oracles to

protect him multiple times; he had saved numerous towns and villages from disaster, and defeated rank 10 and higher monsters in the dozens. A true hero. He also made sure to always surround himself with women, and lived a life that would make even nobles on his own island green with envy.

The vampires hadn't wanted anyone to realize Aira and the others were tagging along, so they took steps to ensure he didn't participate, but he had also turned down the offer of his own accord before it even reached that stage. Schneider didn't go anywhere where there wasn't booze and women.

"Jeez. Glad he didn't come, though."

It wouldn't have been so easy to win if more high-ranking adventurers had been part of the expedition army. Especially if they were talking about grade S, even higher than Mikhail had been.

Vandal had also reached level 100, and so he quickly went to change Jobs. The battle had been great for both experience and leveling up skills.

Available Jobs: Poison Master, Insect Master, Evil Boss, Zombie Maker, Arborist, Corpse Commander, Plague Demon, Spirit Gladiator

"Woohoo! There's more of them!"

He was happy but also perplexed by how quickly he was finding new Jobs. It felt like he would be able to live off the proceeds from reporting these to the adventurers' guild, at least for a while—if he could manage such a report.

Corpse Commander had likely popped up because he had obtained the Command skill. The Job was likely to boost skills like Cooperation and Command that would enhance his forces.

Plague Demon didn't sound much like a Job—more like a monster. Given its place in this list, he was *pretty* sure it was a Job. Something from this incident must have triggered it. *You make one little disease that turns inert after twelve hours and look what happens*, Vandal thought. *Such an overexaggeration!*

Spirit Gladiator sounded connected to his Brawling Proficiency skill and experience using Crusher of Souls. It would probably apply modifiers to combat skills, such as Brawling Proficiency. He was worried about the kind of outfit he might have to wear in such a Job, but at least it would give him a chance to shout, “Are you not entertained?!”

“I’ll go with Poison Master this time,” Vandal decided. He was planning on going to Olbaum next year to sniff things out and obtain information on the adventurers’ academy. He wanted to buff up his personal strength for that trip. He had previously assumed they would just turn him away, but in the time since then, he had thought up a few ideas. He could get Spirit Gladiator another time.

Skill level increased for Resist Maladies!

Acquired the skill Poison Dispersal (Claws, Fangs, Tongue)!

—Name: Vandal

—Race: Dhampir (Dark Elf)

—Age: 5 years old

—Alias: Ghoul King, Eclipse King

—Job: Poison Master

—Level: 0

—Job History: Death Mage, Golem Creator, Undead Tamer, Crusher of Souls —Status

Vitality: 160

Magical Power: 328116728

Strength: 108

Agility: 105

Muscle: 105

Intellect: 757

—Passive Skills

[Brute Strength: Level 2 (UP!)] [Rapid Healing: Level 3] [Death Attribute Magic: Level 5]

[Resist Maladies: Level 6 (UP!)] [Resist Magic: Level 1] [Night Vision]

[Spirit Pollution: Level 10] [Death Attribute Allure: Level 6 (UP!)] [Skip Incantation: Level 4 (UP!)]

[Enhance Brethren: Level 7] [Magical Power Auto Recovery: Level 3] [Enhance Followers: Level 4]

[Poison Dispersal (Claws, Fangs, Tongue): Level 1 (NEW!)]

—Active Skills

[Suck Blood: Level 6 (UP!)] [Limit Break: Level 5 (UP!)] [Golem Creation: Level 6]

[Non-Attribute Magic: Level 4] [Magic Control: Level 4] [Spirit Body: Level 5 (UP!)]

[Carpentry: Level 4] [Construction: Level 3] [Cooking: Level 3]

[Alchemy: Level 3] [Brawling Proficiency: Level 4 (UP!)] [Soul Crusher: Level 4 (UP!)]

[Simultaneous Activation: Level 4 (UP!)] [Remote Control: Level 4 (UP!)]

[Surgery: Level 1]

[Mental Multitasking: Level 3 (UP!)] [Substantiation: Level 2] [Cooperation: Level 1]

[Rapid Cognition: Level 2 (UP!)] [Command: Level 1 (NEW!)]

—Unique Skill

[God Smiter: Level 1]

—Curses

[Unable to carry over experience from previous lives] [Unable to enter existing jobs] [Unable to personally acquire experience]



“Huh? I’m such a master of poison, I even get it on my fangs and tongue?” Vandal exclaimed. He suddenly had all sorts of ways to expel poison. *Talk about toxic masculinity!*

“Young master, we have obtained all of the supplies of the expedition army!” Sam reported.

“Okay then. Shall we set out?” Vandal said.

“Lord Vandal, can I come along too?” Eleonora asked.

“We’re just going to be in the wagon,” Vandal replied. “If you don’t mind that.”

“I don’t! Let me come too!” Pauvina yipped.

“I guess...that would be okay?” Vandal conceded.

“Yay!”

“The Eclipse King’s army is marching out,” Vandal ordered.

One of the soldiers standing guard at the fort hastily erected at the exit of the boundary mountain tunnel was looking out into the night, with a comrade at his side,.

In the months he had been here, all the troops had grown accustomed to the terrifying roars, distant explosions, and pillars of fire or bolts of lightning that appeared in the vicinity. The men were scared at first, but once they realized it was monsters fighting amongst themselves—therefore reducing their own numbers—they had been better able to accept it.

Most of the monsters nearby had been hunted down and cleared out by the grade C adventurers hired by the army. It seemed there were plenty of monsters out here that turned into pretty good money. The belly fur from a particular hedgehog-type monster could be turned into a fine carpet and went for a high price, so the sentry had heard.

However, the atmosphere at the fort was still tense.

“Hey.” The man finally spoke up. “I heard—”

“Shut it,” his comrade snapped.

“I didn’t even say anything yet!” he said.

“And you weren’t about to say that something has happened to the expedition army?” his friend replied.

“You already heard, then.”

It had already been over ten days since the expedition army had departed the fort. They should have reached Talosheim days ago. And yet no messengers had returned, and no smoke signals had gone up. They probably had other means of signaling or communication that the rank-and-file weren’t aware of, but those didn’t seem to be working either. That was why things at the fort were so tense.

“The wagon train bringing more supplies should be reaching the other end of the tunnel by now! How haven’t we heard anything yet? Isn’t there something wrong?” the sentry persisted.

“There probably is. I agree,” his friend conceded. “But if you ask the captain, be ready to get slapped.” Spreading rumors that might damage morale would lead to reprimands. His companion was clearly interested in the topic but didn’t need their hardnosed superior giving them a lecture. If the soldier had been with a hot woman, then he might have been more interested in running the risk. “But you know...huh? Hold on, what’s that?”

“Where?”

“There, look. Something glowing out there.”

The sentry followed the finger of his comrade and did indeed see some light source out in the gloom. A pale white something, wavering.

“Monster eyes, maybe. It’s nothing. It’s far away, too. Ignore it,” he suggested.

Maybe it was because humans were a rarity here, but monsters were often sighted scoping out the fort from a distance away. It had been scary to see glittering monster eyes looking in this direction, but the kind of monsters that would think before they acted were also the kind that weren't going to rush their fortress, however quickly it had been cobbled together. The sentry assumed the light was just more eyes looking at them...

"Hey, those lights," his comrade said. "There are more of them. It almost looks like...they're coming toward us?"

The sentry looked back and saw that the lights were multiplying. From one to two, three, five, ten, to dozens. There were more and more of them! Not to mention— "I can hear something, too. Like... Voices?" the sentry said.

"Report to the captain! Those aren't normal monsters!" his friend screamed, and then started blowing the whistle to announce an emergency.

The captain rushed onto the walls, joined by the adventurer party leader who was on night duty.

"What's the noise—what's that?!" the captain exclaimed.

There was no need for the sentry to report. There were now countless pale lights. Easily more than one hundred. The sound was getting louder too.

"You can use light magic, correct?!"

"Okay. You want to see what's coming, right?" The adventurer intoned some magic and cast Illuminating Shot. A large ball of light appeared in his hands, and then he cast it as hard as he could into the sky.

The darkness was suddenly dispelled from across the entire plain, as if the sun had risen in the night. What they saw there was exactly what they had been waiting for: the expedition army.

“Aaaah...”

“Grrrrh!”

They had white eyes, with tongues hanging out, gaping wounds exposed, organs dangling, and yet they still continued their march. Those elites of the Milg Shield Kingdom.

The sentry gave a gargling scream and fell back. But there wasn’t a man among them who could blame him.

“That—that’s the expedition army flag,” the captain said. “This means the army...has been wiped out?”

“I would say so,” the adventurer said. “There are thousands of them. I can’t imagine anyone survived.” The adventurer wasn’t optimistic enough to believe that if this many of the six-thousand-strong expedition army had been turned into undead, others could have survived, especially after the undead army had revealed themselves like this. Even worse—“Fort! Take! Kill!”

“You...sent...deaths...now die...!” The undead were moaning and groaning, barely forming sentences.

As soon as he heard this, the adventurer shouted, “Captain! Full retreat!”

The scared sentry’s eyes opened wide at these words.

“Fight them and we’ll all die! Captain, we don’t have four hundred in this fort!”

There were three hundred soldiers and then nine parties of grade C adventurers. Each grade C could handle rank 5 or 6 monsters alone, and an entire party working together could take down a rank 7. The soldiers remaining

were far from elite, however. They could maybe handle a rank 2 monster, and a rank 3 if lots of them fought together.

“But they’re just zombies! You grade C adventurers can surely handle them!” the captain shouted.

“If they were rank 2 zombies, we could probably handle a few thousand of them. If we all fought together and you don’t mind the fort getting torn apart. But you can hear their voices, can’t you?”

“Voices? Yes, I heard them, but so what?” the captain replied.

“Low-ranking zombies don’t speak. They’re like beasts. They just howl and growl. Maybe with a handful of words mixed in. But these ones recognized the fort when they saw it and are speaking of grudges over what’s happened to them. There are smarter undead than just zombies over there!”

As the meaning of the adventurer’s words sank in, the captain paled. There were higher-ranked zombies, 3 or higher, among possibly five thousand undead.

“If there are hundreds of them out there that are over rank 3, we won’t be able to fight them. Zombies of rank 3 or higher will start to use the battle techs they had in life. And undead have unlimited stamina. There are just too many of them!”

The captain was beset by visions of a future in which they were helplessly overrun by undead. “Retreat! Full retreat!” He was shouting before he even realized it. “Trap the tunnel! Oil the fort and set it ablaze! Archers, magicians, buy us as much time as possible to prepare! They’ll need your help, adventurers!”

“Leave it to us!” the leader of the adventurers replied.

“All forces, prepare to retreat! All forces, prepare to retreat!” The fort quickly propelled into action.

The soldiers defending the small fort in front of the tunnel managed to successfully retreat. They suffered no losses and whittled down the undead, at least a little. Then they hurried down the tunnel, fully aware that if the undead caught up with them in there, it would be a horrible end for them all.

They desperately raced through the tunnel. They made it to the other side, where the captain of the fort there joined them, already aware of the situation due to a rider sent on ahead. They then commanded the magicians who had been hired for this very eventuality to bring down the tunnel.

That should do it, or so they thought.

But it wasn’t long before one of the magicians detected the undead digging their way through the cave, just a few hundred feet from the exit.

The fort was only intended to stop adventurers and criminals from attempting to cross the boundary mountains without permission. It hadn’t been designed with fighting off monsters coming out of the tunnel in mind.

“Can’t you collapse more of the tunnel?!” the captain asked.

“It’s already collapsed!” the leader of the magicians replied. “What more do you want?! Our magic won’t reach more than a few hundred feet anyway. We can’t repeat the spell immediately, either! It will take a day for everyone’s MP to recover!”

The undead didn’t need to take any breaks and were digging out of the tunnel at an alarming pace. The magician had detected that more than a third of the

collapsed section was already clear again. Retreat was the only option.

“What about the people living on the reclaimed land?!”

“Send horses and get them to evacuate!”

“Hurry! All forces, retreat!”

Mounted messengers rushed to the town and the settlements on the recently reclaimed land, while the soldiers all fell back. Those pioneers from the reclaimed barrens fled back to the town under the protection of guardsmen, trembling in fear at the prospect of a monster attack. In town, the adventurers' guild put out an emergency call, gathering adventurers from nearby villages and towns. Their ruler, Viscount Valchez, gathered as many soldiers as he could.

It seemed like the preparations weren't going to make it in time, but somehow, they did. The undead could march day and night without pause, but they also did so more slowly than living humans. There turned out to be enough time to evacuate everyone to safety and make at least some preparations for the upcoming battle.

That said, defending Viscount Valchez's town of Valcheburg against three thousand zombies was still a major and traumatic event for the region.

“Bwahahaha! Your hero has returned!” Green Gale Spear Raily, once hailed as the second coming of the tragic hero Mikhail, used his wide range of battle techs to shoot down the arrows launched by the town's defenders.

“I am General Maubiht! Greatest leader of the Amidd Empire! Open the gates! Open the gates!” General Maubiht, the gaudily dressed and pompous leader of the expedition army, took command of the undead forces.

“Gwahaheehoo! Evil fleshy fiends! Bohmak Goldan, servant of God, shall decimate you!” Holy man Bohmak Goldan, known as a fearsome vampire

hunter, smashed holes in the city's defensive walls with his powerful staff attacks.

"The undead are inside the city!"

"Bwahaha! Offer up your flesh and organs to your hero!" Raily cackled, spearing one of the soldiers in the belly as the soldier tried to fight back.

"Impure! Impure fiends! Death!" Goldan smashed the other soldiers away, shields and all.

"Hahaha! My triumphant return! My triumphant return, hahahaha!" At the back, Maubiht was laughing and raging as he commanded the zombies.

However, being turned into undead had weakened the attacking forces. They also didn't have access to the kind of coordination they had enjoyed in life. Viscount Valchez's forces suffered losses, but they managed to protect the non-combatants and keep damage to the town itself to a minimum, outside of the exterior walls. It also helped that Raily's spear and Goldan's war staff had been swapped out with regular army equipment, and that some others who had taken part in the expedition—like Chezale and the Black Bull Knights—didn't seem to have been turned into undead. The biggest factor in their favor was how slow the undead were.

When Viscount Valchez hired a Medium to try and find out what had happened to the expedition army, however, the crusty old crone could only shake her head.

"The spirits of those undead all returned back over the mountains," she reported. "Every one of them. I bet they didn't even hear my voice calling out to them."

"All part of the plan, of course."

At that time, Vandal and his companions had finished pillaging and destroying the reclaimed lands, and were now on the way back home. Vandal had created a disposable army from the zombified invaders and unleashed it on the Milg Shield Kingdom, fully aware that it would be wiped out.

In order to prevent their presence from being detected by the troops at the tunnel mouth, Vandal used Whisp Fires, had the zombies make a lot of noise, and made sure his group did plenty of moaning and groaning themselves. He placed zombies other than the expedition leaders who had lucked out as higher-ranked undead at the front of the force. He hadn't wanted to lose Maubiht or Raily in some early skirmish. But the soldiers in the fort had all retreated anyhow.

"You don't want to wipe them all out, young master?" Sam had asked.

"No. There's no value in killing them, and no requirement to do so. Which means it would be wrong to kill them," Vandal replied.

The fort soldiers had minimal training and their commander was hardly a key figure. It wasn't worth going out of their way to kill them. They were more useful as messengers.

Vandal had felt some irritation when they set fire to the fort. He used Steal Heat to put out those flames and had his team collect what they could from the smoldering remains. Then they had started down the tunnel.

"Wow, this is so big! How many of you could we fit down here side by side, Father?" Rita ask.

"Five... Maybe six."

"How do you think they dug this tunnel?" Saria wondered.

“Gnghh?!”

“Rapie, don’t fly too high or you’ll hit your head,” Vandal chided.

They continued down the tunnel, letting those at the head of the army handle the fort at the exit. Once they got outside, Vandal used wide-range Detect Life to locate any remaining vampire spies, whom they then quickly dealt with.

After that, they headed straight...not for the town, but for the site of the former jungle demon barren, currently reclaimed land. Vandal sent most of the army on to the town itself, while keeping around a thousand zombies in the villages on the reclaimed barrens. The main force reached Valcheburg, the domain of Viscount Valchez. Then Vandal had them recklessly charge the town.

There were around three thousand zombies, between ranks 2 and 4, and lacking boosts from Vandal’s Enhance Brethren or Enhance Followers. Vandal was pretty sure Valcheburg would survive the attack. After all, the zombies were going to walk up to the town from the front in the middle of the day; any magicians as a part of the undead army wouldn’t be able to cast magic; Goldan and Raily didn’t have any magic items; other useful undead like Chezale weren’t included in the force; and if they did breach the walls, Vandal had ordered them not to attack anyone who wasn’t carrying a weapon, as well as the elderly, women, and children.

Valcheburg might not have the greatest defenses, but it had a population of about ten thousand. Vandal knew they would get word in plenty of time, and there were other demon barrens with dungeons in the vicinity. They would be able to scrape together adventurers and soldiers. If a horde of undead was shambling toward them, they could pour down a rain of arrows and attack magic from the walls, greatly reducing the enemy numbers.

There would be some losses among the soldiers and adventurers, but Vandal

estimated not more than one hundred or so. Thanks to Jobs and skills, the fighters on this world were much tougher than humans on Earth or Origin. Worst-case scenario, the zombies might make a few holes in the walls and rampage around a little before getting wiped out. Vandal didn't want them killing too many people, so all that sounded pretty good.

"Those corpses were only a temporary burden for us anyway," Vandal said. "Our main objective is to have Milg struggle to deal with all the refugees from the reclaimed lands."

Refugees had been a complex issue on Earth too. The total residents from the reclaimed lands were probably only going to be two to three thousand people, but that would still be a burden. The former residents of the reclaimed lands, now displaced refugees, weren't going to have anywhere to go back to. Many of them were people who hadn't been able to make a living in their original homes, meaning they didn't have options outside of farming the new land. The loss of the reclaimed land would also eliminate security and religious posts, creating damage that spread to many walks of life.

Then there was the shocking loss of six thousand elite soldiers, with half of them turning into undead and coming back to attack the town. Beyond the economic and personnel damage dealt to the Milg Shield Kingdom, this would also harm trust, worsening their relationship with the Amidd Empire, responsible for ordering the expedition. Perhaps the Empire would try to push all the blame onto Milg, as they had done two hundred years ago, but Vandal had made sure that General Rangil Maubiht would be shouting the Empire's name loudly as he led the undead detachment. Meanwhile, second-in-command Chezale, hailing from the Shield Kingdom, was not among the undead. That would make a lasting impression on witnesses.

Furthermore, Vandal had Goldan and Raily causing chaos and standing out a lot more than the actual damage they created. That should harm trust in Alda and the fallen hero. There was no television or internet here on Ramda, and while there were publications similar to newspapers, they were only for the rich. That meant information did not spread accurately or quickly. However, the sheer impact of this event could not be understated. Vandal was sure that word of it would spread across the entire west of the Vangaia Continent within the year. Neither the Empire nor the Shield Kingdom would be able to even whisper the suggestion of another trip across the boundary mountains for decades to come.

On the other hand, Vandal had given up spreading the scandal about General Maubiht of the Empire being in cahoots with Aira and the other vampires. All the vampires had been killed and turned into zombies, but even if they had been in the undead army, the people in Valcheburg probably wouldn't have spotted the difference. Even if they had, the Empire could pass them off as unrelated undead who had joined the force. The worst-case scenario was Vandal getting framed for it all, with the vampires passing Talosheim off as a nest of Vida's followers. He might have had a better chance of revealing the truth if he'd had connections to someone trustworthy, or his own position and status. But as he had none of those things yet, at least in human society, it seemed hopeless.

Vandal had also accepted that this incident would reveal to the progenitors, Count Palpapekk, and the upper echelons of the Amidd Empire that he could make use of undead. Vandal's thinking had been that, rather than being completely shrouded in mystery, giving them some idea of how much of a threat he could pose would keep them from making a move on him too quickly.

The fact that the expedition army didn't return alive from Talosheim would

tell them that he had sufficient strength to drive off a large force, meaning he couldn't hide that fact at the very least. But even if they saw he could control undead, they wouldn't know whether or not he could control undead that he didn't personally create, unlike the progenitors. He would continue to keep everything other than the undead as secrets, including the golems and the bioweapons. It would surely take a while for the progenitors, the Empire, and the Shield Kingdom to make any more moves, and even if they came, Vandal had plenty of ways to stop them.

Vandal's plan for the reclaimed land, therefore, was to steal from the abandoned villages like thieves in the night.

"Okay, everyone. Let's rob them blind," Vandal said.

"Yaaah!" Vandal put the thousand remaining undead on standby, and then he and his allies started to pillage all the evacuated farming villages.

"Ah, I've found a spinning wheel," Vandal called.

"Squeak, there aren't any livestock left though," Skeleton noted.

"Did they take them with them?"

"Maybe, or just released them, hoping to round them up later. Horses and cows are vital to the working strength of a farm, after all. You reduce the number of people on a farm before you reduce the livestock."

"...Farming is more hardcore than I expected," Vandal said.

"You're the one putting them out of business," Skeleton reminded him.

"I mean, that's a good point."

The main purpose of their thievery was to obtain livestock. Rather than donkeys, horses, and pigs, they wanted cows, goats, sheep, and chickens. They

had golems to work as labor, and horses and donkeys needed more than just grass to graze on, making them a pain to look after. The area around Talosheim was too rough for riding and filled with monsters that would love some fresh horse. Pigs weren't needed because there was always monster meat aplenty.

As for cows and goats, Vandal wanted them for milk. He could use Fermentation magic, but he couldn't make cheese or yogurt without something to use those skills on. He wanted butter, too. That would really increase the range of dishes he could make. He also wanted to try the fermented butter that he had heard about in the lab on Origin. He wanted chickens because geega birds couldn't keep up with the demand for eggs. Because each of their eggs was ostrich-sized, they were actually a little inconvenient when it came to cooking.

However, it seemed that wish wasn't coming true. There weren't any livestock left in the village.

"Keeping livestock costs money," Kachia commented. "Although goats will eat anything."

There were demon barrens dotted around this world, and dangerous monsters like goblins roaming within them—and even outside of them—limiting the available arable land. They might be able to grow enough in the way of crops for humans, but they didn't have the space to grow feed for animals on the scale they had back on Earth. That meant livestock were precious. When the farmers evacuated this place, they would have taken what they could with them, and released the remainder in the hope of rounding them up again.

"A shame, but that isn't the only thing we came for," Vandal said.

The next thing he had wanted was machinery to spin thread and make cloth. Almost all the fashion in Talosheim at the moment was based on furs and

leather. Anything that could make cloth had been lost in the two hundred years since their defeat.

“I could make a sewing machine golem, but I need thread and cloth to work with.”

“The scientists on Origin didn’t know how to make thread or weave cloth?” Skeleton asked.

“No, they did not.”

The scientists had been terrible human beings, but they had also been scientists on the cutting edge of an advanced civilization. They had been some researching artificial fibers, but nothing as basic as weaving.

“With a working example I can use golems to copy it, then add improvements and get a proper clothing factory.” The day was near when Talosheim would have clothing, food, and housing, functioning as the most modern city on all of Ramda.

“What about the fields?” Kachia asked.

“We’re taking everything, of course,” Vandal replied.

They weren’t there only to take the possessions that the villagers had left behind. They also wanted the unharvested grain. In fact, that was even more important than the livestock “This is fine wheat,” Vandal observed. “Let’s take it all, right down to the roots. Rise.”

With that, the fields of wheat rose up with a rustle. Upon closer inspection, countless legs had now formed from the soil beneath the wheat. Incredibly, Vandal had turned the soil of the fields into golems. He was planning on having the soil itself walk the wheat all the way home!

Yes, for this would open the door to bread, savory pancakes, and octopus

balls! Soon he would be able to make all the ramen he wanted!

Vandal would be able to increase the volume of udon and pasta as well. He hadn't been able to keep up with demand using acorn powder, so this was going to be a big help. The straw would even allow him to make straw paper, although that could take some trial and error.

"Young master, what about these ones? They look like millet, maybe," Sam commented.

"Those are quick-growing so we'll take them. Nutritious, as well," Vandal replied. He recalled a fad for eating millet back on Earth. Millet would also be easier to process than acorns.

"Ah, this one is buckwheat."

"They probably eat it in galettes in Milg. We can take that too," Vandal said.

Buckwheat was wonderful. It could be eaten cold with dipping sauce, or hot in a soup, or made into a fragrant tea...or at least, that's what Vandal had heard.

"What about the beans?"

"We're taking everything," Vandal repeated.

The beans looked to be something close to soybeans. Now he would finally be able to make normal miso soup. Not to mention soy sauce. And tofu, soy milk, soy dregs, fried tofu—this was going to be wonderful. He bet it would even be delicious to boil the beans in their green cases, throwing on some salt and eating them like edamame.

"These beans look different."

"These are . . . adzuki beans!" Vandal exclaimed. "Rise, rise, rise." With adzuki beans he could make some mochi. They didn't have any sugar, but perhaps

honey could fill that void.

“And that smaller field seems to be for growing tomatoes.”

“Ah! The ultimate ingredient!”

Along with the mayonnaise lover, there had been a tomato lover on Origin. When a heart attack had suddenly killed him, he had become a spirit who ranted constantly about the food served in the lab cafeteria while lecturing at length on the wonders of tomato sauce. Vandal had liked mayo when he was on Earth, but actually preferred ketchup.

“I’ve never seen them here before, so I had all but given up. Finally, this day has come! Rise, rise, rise.” These weren’t the only ingredients he would need for ketchup, but he was sure he could work out the other stuff.

The farming villages also offered up potatoes, carrots, radishes, and onions. Potatoes meant Vandal would be able to make potato starch.

Once the field golems had marched away, Vandal used Golem Creation to smooth over the lumps in the soil.

“Okay. Back to Talosheim,” he said.

Leading their new army of field golems, Vandal and his allies departed the Milg Shield Kingdom. They had caused catastrophic damage to the farmland, as planned, and left one thousand more undead behind. He also cast Virulent Poison on the waterways, standing water, and soil of the empty fields. This wasn’t the kind of poison that would fade with the passage of time: it was a pollutant that would seep down into the bedrock and groundwater, and remain for decades to come. People wouldn’t be able to live in the reclaimed land anymore, and they wouldn’t be able to use it for anything.

From Vandal’s point of view, leaving the undead in the villages was an act of

kindness. It was a warning to the people of the region, ensuring that villagers wouldn't come back and start to grow fresh crops with poisonous water. Another kind thing he had done was avoid poisoning underground water sources, so that the poison had less chance of reaching the town through well water.

"Viscount Valchez. Let's call it even, for stealing away the jungle demon barren from us," Vandal said, looking toward Valcheburg. Then he entered the tunnel.

"One thing, young master," Sam said. "You can make wood golems from trees, can you not?"

"Huh? Yes, I can," Vandal replied.

"Then for thread and paper, can't you just turn the raw materials directly into golems to make them?" Sam suggested.

"...Wow, you're right." Vandal shook his head.

He had been taking the long way around. But there would still be good things to be had from obtaining wheat and soy.



Around the same time, in the divine realm of the God of Law and Life Alda, Alda himself and the other gods were holding an emergency meeting.

The first issue on the table was Bohmak Goldan. Although confirmed to become a Hero Spirit, and maybe even capable of becoming a god himself depending on his future deeds, Goldan had suddenly stepped off the path of Alda's teachings.

“Curatos. Show everyone the record,” Alda commanded.

Records God Curatos proceeded to open a large book. Countless bubble-like spheres rose up into the air. Each of their surfaces carried images of the scenes the expedition army had seen in Talosheim.

As the timeline of the attack progressed, the bubbles suddenly started to pop and vanish in large numbers. The very last bubble showed a closeup of Goldan’s undead face before it vanished as well.

“Those are the records of the children of men who participated in the expedition army,” Curatos intoned.

“...Nothing after that?” one of the gods asked.

“Unfortunately not,” Curatos replied. “Their spirits were either captured after they were killed, or they were turned into undead like Bohmak Goldan. However, take a look at this.” Curatos turned to the next page, revealing images of the walls of Valcheburg being breached and the undead expedition army pouring into the city to fight their soldiers. These were also images that Curatos had recorded from the eyes of the faithful. Curatos could record anything that people saw in the moments around offering a prayer to a god, and then play it back for others to see.

A few of them, such as Alda, already knew about what they were seeing, as they were the gods these unfortunates had been praying to. Many of the others, however, were yet to see these images. They had quite the impact.

“The dhampir child is capable of this?”

“Unbelievable! You believe this dhampir is responsible for creating a new disease?!”

“The way he uses undead. He is like Za—”

“Silence!” Judgement God Niltark stepped in before any of the other gods went too far. “We must never call this dhampir anything other than *dhampir*, or by his given name, Vandal! You may not like it, but that’s the only name he is to have!”

“Of course. My apologies, Divine Niltark,” replied the god who had been about to put his divine foot in it. They weren’t avoiding calling Vandal “the second coming of Demon King, Gudranis” because they wanted to be civil—they wanted to avoid Vandal picking up an Alias.

The Aliases displayed on a person’s status weren’t just titles or idle names. They had actual effects. If someone was called Goblin Killer, the Alias would cause additional damage to monsters with “goblin” in their names. If someone was called The Immortal or The Undying, they would be much harder to kill. The primary condition for acquiring an Alias was to have many individuals or a select few with great authority to call them that name. Everyone gathered here, regardless of exact differences in power, were gods—some of the most powerful beings in all of Ramda. If the gods here started to call Vandal “the second coming of Zakkato,” who knew what kind of strength it might give him.

“But Alda, why have you called us here?” This from Thunder God, Fitun. Among the gods supporting Alda, he was one of the newer generation, only joining the pantheon within the last ten thousand years. “This young dhampir controls large numbers of golems and undead, has created sickness, and has killed an army of six thousand and then sent them as undead to attack the Milg Shield Kingdom. But, to put it another way, isn’t that all he has done?” It might have sounded like Fitun was denigrating the value of human life, but he wasn’t wrong. What they had been shown in the records wasn’t really enough to warrant bringing all the gods together like this.

There had been wars in which tens of thousands of people had died. Rampaging monsters had wiped out entire nations. Compared to those kinds of casualties, this was a drop in the ocean. The losses between the expedition army and Valcheburg combined numbered less than ten thousand. The fact that only soldiers and adventurers had been killed only reinforced that thinking. Of course, their families, loved ones, and friends would be filled with grief, but it wasn't the same as butchering helpless civilians. It would also be problematic if the gods got too involved with a single nation.

"The deeds of this dhampir are surely most foul," one of the other gods said.

Fitun had to keep himself from breaking out into laughter. "What are you talking about? It all seems quite half-hearted to me."

"Half-hearted?!"

"Exactly. One example: the dhampir used his sickness on the expedition army, but not in Valcheburg. That's why the people were able to fight off the undead." If Vandal had done so, even the three thousand undead would have been able to wipe out a town of ten thousand people. Indeed, if he had simply removed the restriction placed on the sickness—that it became inert after twelve hours—he would only have needed to infect a single person in Valcheburg to wipe out the entire city. The strength of the infection and the amount of time it took to take hold were too low for it to spread to other villages or towns, but he could have infected ten thousand within a few hours. Even if some of them recovered, the mutated sickness would surely seize them again. None would have survived. The entire population of Valcheburg, suffering as they slid into death, would have left behind the perfect materials for making more undead. "Half-hearted, is what I'd call it. No. Naïve. He is not a cause for concern."

“...Fitun, it sounds like you’re somewhat underestimating this dhampir,” Curatos said.

“Please, Divine Curatos. I am simply saying that the things this dhampir has done do not warrant a gathering of this nature. If we need to discuss anything, it’s the demon god-worshipping vampires who have infested your holy nation, Alda,” Fitun replied. Fitun wasn’t the most fervent supporter of Alda. He was a former hero who had reached godhood by winning the people’s praise for his deeds during battles with Vida’s new races and the demon gods. He hadn’t been like Goldan, who fervently believed in Alda during his mortal life.

“I can’t believe how boring it is, being a god,” Fitun mused. “Enough with this dhampir and undead nonsense. Why can’t I face someone strong enough to get my blood boiling, like when I was a human?”

Then Alda opened his mouth. The other gods could only assume he would admonish this brash younger god for his callousness.

“Fitun is correct, in this instance,” Alda stated.

The gods all murmured in surprise, including Fitun.

“However, things are not that simple. There are suspicions that this dhampir, Vandal, has destroyed an artifact that was created by Yupeon. Indeed, that he crushed the piece of his divine spirit placed inside it.”

These words got the gods all riled up again.

“Impossible! He crushed a piece of his divine spirit...That’s practically his soul!”

“That’s why Yupeon isn’t here?”

“So maybe the reason he didn’t use the sickness in the town wasn’t naïvety, as Fitun suggested, but rather some kind of warning to us? That he can do

whatever he wants, should he wish it?"

"But he would never be so bold as to openly taunt us, surely? That would be like ancient—"

"Silence!"

It seemed that Alda had called this meeting to share his sense of concern and reaffirm their slacking awareness of the issues at hand. It was one thing to remember that they were at war with the remnants of the Demon King and Vida's forces, but even gods lost their edge after one hundred thousand years without any major developments. This problem was exacerbated by their supposed enemy not showing any kind of organized resistance.

"Shall we send an oracle? Tell our people to kill the dhampir?" one of the gods suggested.

"No. That could have completely the opposite effect," Alda said. Such an oracle could be mistakenly interpreted by those of the cloth, leading to dangerous messages like "Kill child." If they sent another party of holy warriors or soldiers off to Talosheim without first gathering more information, it would be the expedition army all over again, anyway.

After further discussions, they decided to send oracles to each temple, in the hope of warning the people and preparing them for whatever might come next. The dhampir had just pulled off a big move. He would slink back behind the boundary mountains and probably keep to himself for a while, rebuilding his strength.

They had someone else other than Vandal to worry about, as well. Multiple oracles had been sent warning of the danger he posed, but they had all been incorrectly interpreted. Therefore, that man who had made a contract with a

demon god was still roaming around free—Thunderclap Schneider.

Then we can use this time for the priests to gather potential heroes and train them up! Fitun gave a grin. *Hah, wise Alda, you too are naïve.* If Fitun was in command, and there was even the smallest chance the dhampir could become as strong as the Demon King, he would order his death immediately, even if it cost dozens, tens of thousands, or millions of lives. He would have the gods go through the agonizing pain of dividing their spirits and send all the angels and Hero Spirits they had. Under his watch, this dhampir wouldn't have the chance to grow any stronger.

Fitun did not share this plan with the others, however. Although they weren't likely to listen to begin with, he didn't actually want them to follow it.

Finally, an opponent I can actually have a proper fight with. The first since I became a god! I need him to grow stronger. The “proper” fight Fitun was looking for wasn't someone strong one-sidedly destroying a weaker foe. It was two who were clearly capable of defeating the other, fighting it out to the death.

Now then, my little dhampir, Fitun thought. Grow big and merciless and cruel, and strong; more than anything, grow strong! I will watch over you, until the day I kill you myself!



“You'll pay dearly for this, dhampir!” Tehneshia smashed a sturdy-looking table with her fist and then reduced it to kindling. “Curse you, curse you, curse you!”

“Do try to collect yourself, my dear. Although you seem more in control than when I have one of my episodes,” Vilkain observed.

“He’s right. All your howling here won’t reach Talosheim,” Gubamon added.

Tehneshia clicked her tongue at the two observers, but she also didn’t smash down her raised fist again. She simply returned it to her side.

“What are we here for today?” Vilkain asked. “You want to reflect on what went wrong with our plan?”

About one month had passed since the undead army had marched on Valcheburg. The progenitor species vampires who worshipped the Demon God of Living Pleasure, Hihiryu-Shukaka, were all gathered around the same table.

“That’s part of it, of course. But I also want to discuss how we’re going to kill this dhampir,” Tehneshia replied.

Gubamon chortled. “Suppose we need to share what we know.”

It was true. They had been defeated. They had pulled the strings of the Amidd Empire, making the Milg Shield Kingdom send out troops to kill Vandal in overwhelming numbers, but the plan had backfired in spectacular fashion. Tehneshia was rightly riled up, but Vilkain and Gubamon seemed less concerned. The reason was simple: Tehneshia was the one who had proposed the plan, and who had taken the biggest losses.

The elites of Milg, the guards in Valcheburg, and the future of the people living in the reclaimed lands—these weren’t the kinds of problems the vampires bothered themselves with.

What didn’t feel so good was having their collaborators for making inroads into the Empire weeded out. They had collaborators besides Count Maubiht, who had returned to them as undead, but those had now been sniffed out by

the Empire. Not all of them, but many had been killed. It seemed that Maubiht had been keeping tabs on others like him in order to protect his own position, and that information had somehow leaked out with his death.

Vilkain and Gubamon had also lost spies to agents of the Emperor or Thunderclap Schneider, but Tehneshia had lost the most. Then there were the nobles who had gone with the expedition army. Vilkain and Gubamon had sent ten each, while Tehneshia had sent ten, plus Aira, to command them. Losing all of them was painful.

Aira had been a noble with the rank of Count, holding the Alias “Tehneshia’s Hunting Dog.” She had been a loyal and important part of Tehneshia’s operation for tens of thousands of years. And she wasn’t a little guard dog—she had been a big dog, playing key roles within Tehneshia’s administration. In terms of combat strength, she had been top three among all of Tehneshia’s vampires.

Given that they had lived in the darkness for tens of thousands of years, it might make it sound like her minions weren’t well-trained. But that wasn’t exactly the case. In their organization, those below sought to rise by defeating those above them. Those above sought to trample those below and keep them down. It was a miracle for an organization with these kinds of values to produce anything like a promising new generation of members. As vampires had no natural lifespan, there was no need to replace older generations.

It wasn’t rare for vampires to reach Ritter or Baron, but the struggle became more intense at Viscount, where vampires could remain for hundreds of years. Of course, that partly had to do with Tehneshia and others giving out crazy orders that led to death rather than glory. Underlings like Aira, who managed to live to Count or higher, were precious indeed. There were higher races that

nobles could rank up to, like Marquis and Duke, but once nobles got that strong, they actually become a threat to the progenitors, making them more likely to be erased than praised.

In any case, Tehneshia's overall strength had taken a serious hit.

"Heh heh, I'm not so happy myself," Gubamon hacked. "I wanted the corpse of the second coming of the Tragic Hero, but it was burnt to ash in the town. I can't make undead from ashes!"

None of those present actually believed he was interested in such an artificial hero like Raily. Tehneshia was grinding her teeth noisily as she glared at Gubamon.

"The most painful thing is how he still keeps his secrets," Vilkain said. "Although we now know the dhampir... Vandal is capable of using undead."

They had suffered major losses from this operation, and yet learned very little from it as well. The fact that Vandal could use undead had been made abundantly clear when the expedition army returned. But they still didn't know how he had made them.

"The Vida progenitors are helping him," Tehneshia said. "They must've developed new techniques in the centuries since we last saw them."

"Hmmm, I still think there are too many undead for that," Gubamon countered. "I heard that thousands of them came out of the tunnel. Even I couldn't make that many undead easily."

"Maybe if they were rank 1, the lowest form of undead," Tehneshia was forced to agree. "But it seems there were some rank 3 and 4 undead mixed in. That would take over a year at just one hour per body."

"I heard the report from a sentry who returned alive," Vilkain said. "It's a

damn mess. We won't be able to get the humans to act again any time soon."

"Most dangerous of all, Aira and the other nobles were not among the undead," Gubamon said.

"Most likely, they spilled everything they knew," Vilkain concluded. Vandal must have turned them into undead, but kept them with him, extracting information. This was a headache not only for Tehneshia but for all three of them.

The other two had sent minions who didn't know as much as Aira. Still, their capture would have exposed numerous bases, gathering places, and information on other underlings. The only good news was that these were underlings dispatched to the Amidd Empire and its member nations—places where Vandal didn't have free roam.

In any case, the progenitors would have a difficult time collecting any more information. All the sentries they had left behind had been hunted down, and the dead nobles had been turned into undead, meaning the rite to resurrect them wouldn't work. Even if somehow those undead were destroyed, the ritual couldn't be used on vampires who had already been undead once. And Vilkain was sure that Vandal would have taken further steps to keep them from getting them back.

"The best that we can say—whether he has joined with the Vida vampires or thrown in his lot with another demon or devil god—is that he looks set to stay in the south for a while," Vilkain summarized.

"Indeed. Why bring down the tunnel themselves otherwise."

"In the time being, working out a new plan is a must," Gubamon said. "What a pain this dhampir is proving to be."

They needed more information and greater fighting strength. There was a lot of work ahead of them. Decades of preparations, perhaps. That was what Tehneshia, Gubamon, and all the listening nobles thought.

Vilkain was the only one with a different opinion.

He defeated an army of six thousand and turned thousands of them into undead, Vilkain pondered. Even if it means defying the oracle from Hihiryu-Shukaka, I should be working to bring him under my control. Luckily for me, it was Gubamon's goons who killed his parents and Tehneshia who sent the expedition army. Under the right conditions, I might be able to make it work. The next few decades are going to be interesting!



Two months had passed since the undead expedition army attacked Valcheburg and was wiped out.

“What a mess,” muttered Count Thomas Palpapekk in his office, looking down at a sheet of paper.

The expedition under General Maubiht had failed far more spectacularly and caused far greater losses than Palpapekk had imagined possible. He wanted to go back and see himself from last year, and give himself a firm shaking.

First things first—not a single member of the expedition army had come back alive. Six thousand elites of the Milg Shield Kingdom, from only nine thousand the nation maintained. That was painful. It would take years to replace them with similarly trained soldiers. The knights had practically been nobles, so they were even harder to replace. It wasn’t a case of simply appointing skilled

adventurers to the post in order to replace the losses, as the title of Knight had to be handed out from nobility.

Then there was all the equipment the expedition soldiers had been armed with and the costs of the expedition, including building the forts at the tunnel mouths. The human cost was massive, and the financial one no less severe.

After that came the loss of the reclaimed land in Viscount Valchez's domain. When the undead emerged from the tunnel, they hadn't marched directly on Valcheburg, but rather unhurriedly headed for the villages on the reclaimed land. Considering that undead didn't need to rest or sleep and could march day and night if they wanted to, their marching speed had seemed quite slow.

That had allowed all the residents of the reclaimed land to evacuate to safety. Then all the undead had been defeated at Valcheburg and their bodies burned so that nothing nasty would spread from them.

At that point, the people had prepared to return to their homes. Of course, the villagers and the Viscount had been expecting some of the fields to be trampled, houses to be damaged, and maybe some undead still hanging around. None of them were expecting almost a thousand undead still in the area.

They had needed to gather soldiers and adventurers again, forming a purging party. Luckily enough, wiping out the undead wasn't all that difficult. However, there had been some Poison Zombies among the undead—creatures that could spit poison from their mouths. So, just to be on the safe side, magicians examined the soil, the well water, and the waterways to check for more poison.

The results were another terrible blow. For some reason, Virulent Poison had infected the soil, all standing water, and the waterways. None of them could be used. Purifying the poison was so difficult that even the greatest mages from

the magicians' guild threw in the towel. If left to nature it would take decades, if not a century, to clear.

The project to take back the demon barrens was over.

This initiative belonged to the house of Viscount Valchez, but the state had provided a large amount of subsidies, and many nobles had been expecting certain rights to come their way. While not as large a piece as some of the others, the house of Count Palpapekk had been expecting dividends as well. The shock of losing all of that hit the entire nation.

The final blow had been Goldan and Raily leading the undead that attacked Valcheburg. Those who had been called heroes were reduced to monsters, shuffling around and trying to kill the very ones who had sung their praises. It was an utter nightmare. That thorn was still stabbed into the side of the Milg Shield Kingdom, and blood seeped from the wound.

“Two hundred years ago, we got away with calling it a victory. This time, what can we call it but an utter defeat?” Palpapekk muttered. “Those interminable singing corpses have smeared mud on the face of the military, the adventurers, and Divine Alda himself.” There had been no keeping this information quiet, either, as they had gathered soldiers and adventurers from other towns to defend Valcheburg. Leaders had tried to prevent the flames from spreading too far by mixing in some false information, but the people were going to continue to discuss this for a while, that was for sure.

As a result, the atmosphere in the Milg Shield Kingdom was nothing short of gloomy. To make matters even worse—if such a thing was possible—many in the royal capital and the army were talking of taking revenge for this incident. If the target of their ire had been the Amidd Empire, Thomas would have seen it as a step toward the realization of the independence that he so desired for

Milg. However, that wasn't the case: their spears of hatred were pointed beyond the boundary mountains, toward Talosheim.

"This is such a joke. All the work of that dhampir...of Vandal. We have all been dancing in the palm of his hand, all of us," Thomas cursed. He was sure that Vandal had set everything in motion that the Milg Shield Kingdom had suffered from. The strangely slow-moving undead, the strangely low non-combatant body count, the strangely large volume of poison. It was all too much to just write everything off as a coincidence. "He's planning to corner our nation, force us into reckless revenge, and then lie in wait again. The reason he killed so few was so his victims would feel their suffering for as long as possible. I've been told he's a child, but this is cruelty worthy of the most devious adult."

Thomas also slightly misunderstood Vandal's intentions. Without working it out, he looked back at the document on his desk.

"And this is also all part of the plan," he muttered.

There was all sorts of writing on the page, but the summary was simple. The king of Milg was requesting, in light of these difficulties, that Thomas become marshal once again.

Count Reggston's second son, Chezale, had been second-in-command of the expedition army. But the fact that he hadn't been among the undead, and the fact that the Amidd Empire had made such a big deal of General Maubiht being in command, resulted in Reggston passing his noble title to his eldest and stepping out of the public eye.

The issue was that the chair of marshal had come back around to Thomas.

"Vandal!" Thomas spat the name. "You might seek to end me, like you did Maubiht, but things won't go so easily. I will stop this foolish war of revenge—

and eventually, in your nest in the south, I will teach you the pain of what you have wrought here!"

After Thomas Palpapekk had been appointed marshal, late spring was becoming summer in full swing. In an office about three notches grander than Palpapekk's, a strikingly handsome youth was listening, arms folded, to the report of his aides.

The young lines of the man's face housed sparkling eyes and projected incredible charisma. His ears weren't completely elfin, but were also longer than human ears.

"Is that everything?" he asked. His voice was beautiful and androgenous.

"Yes, Emperor Mashukzal Fohn Bellwood Amidd," a military-looking man replied.

Indeed—this half-elf youth was Mashukzal, the current Emperor of the Amidd Empire.

Vandal would have been surprised to learn this. In fantasy fiction on Earth, half-elves were often the subject of discrimination, but on Ramda that wasn't the case. That was because on this world, humankind, elves, and dwarves had all fought together with the heroes against the forces of the Demon King. Divine Alda even decreed that "humans" referred to these three races. Numerous legends also told of the heroes forming bonds of true friendship with elves and dwarves. The only subjects seen as worthy of discrimination in the Amidd Empire were Vida's new races, and there were plenty of them to go around.

That said, some nobles had opposed a long-lived half-elf taking the throne of Emperor, and there were some who considered humankind superior. However,

Mashukzal had the strength to put down such opposition, and had taken the throne. He had just finished listening to the report about the expedition.

“It seems we accomplished our initial goal, to draw out the vampires nesting in the Empire and wipe them out,” Mashukzal stated. “But I admit, this report is a little unexpected.”

When the proposal for this expedition had been brought to Mashukzal, he already knew that General Rangil Maubiht was in contact with the vampires. He therefore ordered his aides to collect information while the vampires’ attention was focused on the expedition, then weed out and kill the traitors lurking in the Empire. Hard work and covert activities at long last exposed multiple nobles with connections to Count Maubiht, which in turn led to the capture of multiple vampires pulling their strings. They captured and tortured those, which in turn led to more vampires and more traitors. In the end, they had put a serious dent in the power of the vampires within the Empire.

This was something to be very happy about. They couldn’t go public with the information that multiple nobles had been in cahoots with vampires, but it was such a good result that the fact that they couldn’t share it actually did sting a little.

However...

“You mean...the expedition army being wiped out and turned into a horde of undead who attacked the town, the Shield Kingdom reclamation project falling apart, and then the boundary mountain tunnel suddenly collapsing?”

“Of course,” the Emperor replied. “The original plan was for the expedition to succeed, Maubiht to get his head lopped off, the Empire to send some support over to Milg for the reclamation project as an apology, and then put a bow on the whole thing.”

Mashukzal and his advisors had assumed that the expedition itself would succeed. That they would at least defeat the couple of hundred ghouls and the dhampir who had led them across the mountains, albeit with losses to Milg's elites. But this result would only whittle down the strength of Count Palpapekk and the others like him who plotted independence. The result would have strengthened the Shield Kingdom by bolstering the reclamation, keeping Milg happy while filing down the fangs that might bite back. A route into the south would have been nice, but one that could be closed off by collapsing a single tunnel was more a risk than a convenient means of access. The Empire's primary goal was to prevent Milg from achieving independence, making it easier to eventually absorb them completely in the future.

"Still, how did he overcome ten times his number of troops? He decimated them. What did he do—this dhampir called Vandal?"

"We still don't know. There wasn't a single living survivor, and all the Mediums who attempted Summon Spirit have failed," the aide reported.

"I see. The only thing we do know, then, is that he can tame undead . . . Indeed, turn corpses into undead and have them obey him," Mashukzal pondered, looking over the scant information that had been collected pertaining to this Vandal character. "Very interesting. It would be wonderful to obtain him beneath me—"

"Your Majesty, I doubt the followers of Divina Alda would allow it."

"We can blindfold them, if we must. The great vampire hunter just tumbled down to earth. I think those fussy priests can keep to themselves for a bit," Mashukzal replied.

realist and a rationalist. That was why he always took the path with the greatest benefits for the Empire. The teachings of Alda, with their emphasis on

law and order, were simply a useful tool for controlling the masses. The name Bellwood was also effective for maintaining authority. The discrimination against Vida's new races, starting with dhampirs, was extremely useful in diverting the dissatisfaction of the people, and so he had allowed the sacrifice of these races to continue. It would be difficult to wind it all back now, and there weren't many of Vida's new races in the Empire anyway.

"But won't it be hard to capture him?" his aide asked.

"Of course it would. But I didn't say capture. I said I want him beneath me," Mashukzal said.

"Beneath you, Your Imperial Majesty?!" one of his aides exclaimed. His men had served him for a long time and knew that his rationalism could make him say all sorts of wild stuff, but the idea of the emperor having a dhampir under his command was beyond shocking.

"That's far too dangerous! If it were to be exposed the Empire would collapse!" another urged him.

"That's an exaggeration. It would depend on exactly how useful this dhampir Vandal might be. But if we can get the Pope of Alda to say that God permits it, everything will be fine," Mashukzal said casually.

"That isn't how it works, Your Imperial Majesty!"

"It is, if we make someone pope who'll say what we want. Our beloved people can't tell if we've really received an oracle or not."

His aides broke out into a cold sweat at these terrifying ideas their emperor was casually tossing around.

"But the easiest method would be to have him serve from the shadows," Mashukzal added, to a collective sigh of relief.

“Your Imperial Majesty,” an aide replied, “at the moment the only things we know about the dhampir are that he can make undead and control them. How much use would he really be?”

In works of fiction from Earth, there were often those in power who sought to turn those who’d died in battle into zombies, creating undead soldiers and using them for military purposes. Mashukzal could actually make that happen but he didn’t, as the Amidd Empire was a country for living humans. There were issues in terms of faith and psychology—it was easy to imagine how the soldiers and people simply wouldn’t accept it. Soldiers who knew that their destiny was to become undead and keep on fighting after their deaths would start to think their commanders were building those deaths into the strategy. And ordinary people would never accept their husbands and sons continuing to fight after death. To begin with, there was no guarantee that the soldiers would remain loyal after becoming undead. A single word from Vandal could start a rotting mutiny.

“I’m not planning on turning our own soldiers into undead,” Mashukzal reassured the room. “I simply thought it might be interesting if all the bones scattered across our old battlefields turned into skeletons and marched on the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom.”

“I see! A horde of undead, with no direct connection to us, heading toward Olbaum of their own accord. I can’t see that being a problem.”

“But I still see issues with making it happen,” another aide added. “How to even make contact? Even if we could, Your Imperial Highness, I fear the dhampir may not think favorably of you.”

Regarding the state-sanctioned killing of his mother, there might be some leeway once the dhampir learnt that Mashukzal felt differently about the

teachings of Alda, at least in his private life. But Maubiht—though connected to the vampires—had still been a general of the Amidd Empire, and the expedition had been carried out in Mashukzal's name.

"If that is the case, we need not worry further about this Vandal," Mashukzal remarked. "Those who cannot cast aside personal grudges will never achieve great things. In any case, he surely plans to remain on the other side of the boundary mountains for at least the next decade. Just don't miss the moment when he emerges. We can make contact then."

"As you command. We shall keep careful watch," his aide assured him.

"In addition, the house of Count Maubiht should be dissolved. Have his imprisoned eldest son commit suicide, leaving some missive regretting the family involvement with vampires," Mashukzal ordered.

"It shall be done. Any movement on requesting Thunderclap Schneider to investigate the south?"

"Ah. My dear cousin and his little plan," Mashukzal said with a sigh, recalling the face of the cousin with whom he had always clashed over something. The man was a pain to deal with, but keeping him alive gathered resistance forces to him. That made it easy to keep an eye on them and gave his cousin a use of some kind. That said, it was too dangerous to let him send Schneider off to the south. "I doubt Schneider will even accept the job. But if he looks like he might, get my cousin to put a stop to it. Just don't make an enemy of him. We're not at that point yet."

"Understood," the aide replied. "And what of the Milg Shield Kingdom?"

"Indeed." Mashukzal pondered for a moment. "They will need a little something to sweeten all this."

There were reports of some in the Shield Kingdom plotting revenge due to the failure of the expedition. If things went that far, the nation wouldn't be nicely whittled down—it would be left useless and crippled. Something was needed to quell those flames.

"In that case, Your Imperial Majesty, how about building a fort—using imperial funds, of course—in the Viscount Valchez domain, to keep watch on the boundary mountains? That would also allow us to watch for your dhampir."

"An interesting idea," Mashukzal replied. The fear in the hearts of the peasants would lead them to overestimate the defensive strength of such a fort and help to calm them down. It would also let Milg know that they didn't underestimate this situation, maybe even turning their hearts back toward the Empire. Even better, the Empire would pay to build it, but maintenance and personnel expenses would come from the Shield Kingdom—in perpetuity. That would help to keep down their military strength. "Proceed."

The construction of the fort, led by the Amidd Empire, allowed Viscount Valchez's domain to somewhat regain its footing. Ultimately, it would suffer under the burden of this clearly unnecessary fort, but that was a problem to be faced by the next generation.

The progenitor species, Count Thomas Palpapekk, and the Amidd Empire. After accepting the existence of Vandal, these three groups all had two things in common regarding him.

The first was that, just like Alda and the other gods, they avoided using unnecessary names or insults in order to keep Vandal from acquiring an Alias.

The second was that they all believed Vandal would remain in the south,

behind the boundary mountains, for at least the next ten years.



A port town in the Sea Nation Galahad, located in the south of the Amidd Empire. A tavern-like building served as the base of Thunderclap Schneider, the only grade S adventurer in the western part of the Vangaia Continent.

It didn't look like much of a spot for a grade S adventurer to use as their base, but Schneider wasn't using it as a customer. He had purchased the building and ran it as the owner.

In the back of the tavern, three men faced down one.

Two of them were sitting down. One looked to be in his thirties, with numerous scars across his face. It was clear, even with his clothes on, how muscular he was. Behind him stood two others who also looked like they could handle themselves in a fight. The man facing them was tall with silver hair, looking to be in his early to mid-twenties. His face was almost feminine, but his incredibly muscular body and masculine air watered down any such impression. This might be what it would look like if a wild carnivore were personified; if beauty and violence merged in human form.

"So, messenger from Duke Malme, speak."

This man was none other than Thunderclap Schneider himself. He sat with his legs crossed, leaning back.

"To the point, then," said the scarred messenger. "We wish to ask you to conduct an investigation of the southern part of the Vangaia Continent." There was sweat on his brow as he did so. The messenger was himself of a noble

bloodline—if anyone else had spoken to him like that, he would have reprimanded him for his poor attitude. But he was never going to do that to Schneider.

Because Schneider had something on his side: raw, unassailable strength.

A number of nobles had already lost their lives by picking the wrong fight with Schneider. Among them had been a vested count whom Schneider had beaten to death, in public, without any pretense. Yet Schneider had faced no punishment. He had been forced to take a certain-death request, perhaps considered a reprimand, but he had completed it without any trouble and returned in short order. Emperor Mashukzal had accepted this result, proclaimed Schneider innocent, and dissolved the house of the murdered count. In other words, the Emperor publicly declared that Schneider was more important to him than some foolish noble.

“An investigation, is it? For how long, and what do you want investigated? If you want me to investigate, I can pop over and right back and say, ‘I investigated the south’ and we’d be finished, Mr. Messenger.” Schneider was in a playful mood, but “popping over” to the south and returning alive would still take significant skill to avoid becoming a quick lunch for a monster.

Departing from Galahad also opened up the option of sea travel. However, some strips of oceans along the way were demon barrens, with plenty of sea monsters lurking in the depths—including ones like kraken and sea dragons large enough to sink big ships. Even if Schneider completed his survey in name only, it would still ensure that his name went down in the history books for having come back to tell the tale.

“...There’s a certain dhampir we would like you to go and kill,” the messenger finally said.

The real request Duke Malme, the sender of this messenger, wanted to make was not for a mere investigation, but for the elimination of Vandal.

Duke Malme, cousin to Mashukzal, was a devout believer in Alda and held the title of Cardinal himself. For him, the fact that High Priest Bohmak Goldan had been turned into undead and had led monsters in an attack on a town, was a problem that needed to be immediately addressed.

“I see. You’d better tell me more. Lisana, we’re going to be here a while. Bring some drinks.”

“Of course!” said an elf cheerfully, dressed like a seductive dancing girl. She came over with a teapot and some cups. The two guards managed to keep their eyes from lingering over Lisana’s exposed legs and jiggling bosom, but the messenger couldn’t restrain a gasp.

“Master Schneider!” he exclaimed.

“Ah, sorry, no booze on the menu today. I’m trying to live a little healthier.”

“That’s not what I mean. This is a sensitive matter. I would prefer the bar staff don’t overhear—”

Then he found himself unable to continue his objection. The look in Schneider’s eyes had pierced him, stopping his tongue dead.

“You must have checked in with the guild, right? Lisana is one of my party. If you can’t trust her, get the hell out of here.” Schneider grinned. “Shall I help you leave?”

“No, no! No need for that! I spoke out of turn! Lady Lisana, my deepest apologies! Please, forgive me!” the man immediately begged, giving it everything he had. Otherwise Schneider was liable to grab him by the head and throw him out of the tavern. His Alias of “Human Launcher” was renowned

across the Empire.

“I’m fine. It doesn’t bother me,” Lisana said, not seeming the slightest bit upset as she laid out the cups and poured the tea.

“Back to your request, then,” Schneider said, his intent to fling the messenger out fading away.

The men wet their throats with tea that, for psychological reasons, they were currently unable to smell or taste, and then managed to continue with the discussion.

The reason Duke Malme wanted Schneider to go and kill the dhampir was twofold. First, his pride wasn’t about to let someone who had damaged the authority of Alda so deeply get away with it. And second, he considered leaving someone capable of taming thousands of undead at a time to their own devices, a danger. A little obvious, perhaps, but not wrong.

The reason he was asking Schneider was because the target dhampir was in the south of the continent, an unexplored demon barren that required incredible skills to even reach, and also because the dhampir was capable of taming undead. If they sent in a large number of troops a second time, it was likely the dead would quickly side with the dhampir. That meant they needed to send a small force, each member capable of handling a large number of enemies.

“And so you come to me,” Schneider concluded.

“Yes,” the messenger replied. “Also, though we haven’t been able to confirm it, this mission may be related to an oracle from Divine Alda.”

“An oracle? You mean that ‘be prepared for sickness’ one?” Schneider asked. It was an oracle that had been announced a few days previously. It had resulted

from Alda seeing the records of the expedition, as Vandal had rendered the troops unable to fight back with his disease. The interpretation of the oracle might have slightly missed the mark, but it hadn't been a complete waste: specialist magicians at the magicians' guild had been given a bigger budget for their research into disease, and the holy warriors started to work harder to acquire Resist Sickness skills.

"No, not that one," the messenger said. "The one before that."

"You mean about the Demon King? That's this dhampir?" Schneider asked.

"That's what Duke Malme thinks."

"Okay then." Seeing Schneider thinking, cup still in hand, the messenger sensed a possible opening and pushed his luck.

"Master Schneider, you are important enough that Divine Alda himself worries about you," the messenger said. "I'm sure you are interested in this proposal. The payment will be more than compensatory. The Duke has informed me that you will be paid one hundred million Amidd, receive a dukedom of your own, and be allowed to take ten women from the Shrine of Amidd. It also goes without saying that anything acquired during the course of the investigation, material or otherwise, will belong to you, Master Schneider."

The details of the reward made it clear what people thought of Schneider. He had a deep love for the God of Law and Life, Alda, but had a deeper one for money and women. That was the impression of him held by the nobles.

"Nope. Not doing it," Schneider promptly replied.

"Why—why not? The Pope himself is saying that you may take what you wish from the seminaries; if the women you desire are priestesses, they will be stripped of their rank, for you! Please, won't you change your mind?" the

messenger begged. If any of what he had just said became public, it would be a massive scandal. But it was only Lisana, ironically enough, who muttered under her breath in response.

Due to the teachings of Alda relating to preserving law and order, Alda was often considered a god who would probably have a lot to say about the restriction of certain desires, but actually his teachings were fairly liberated. So long as you stuck to law and order, pretty much anything else was allowed. That was why excuses such as “this is for the sake of order” or “this has been decreed by law” had become popular among the highest levels of the faith in order to forgive corruption. The reason that High Priest Goldan had turned down the chair of a cardinal and continued to fight on the frontlines was because he had hated those developments among the faithful.

“The reward is generous,” Schneider said.

“Then why?!”

“...I’ve been getting the chills recently,” Schneider admitted, spreading his hands. “It might be summer right now, but it’ll be fall soon, and then winter. Whether I go by mountains or sea, it’s going to be bloody cold.”

“...That’s the reason you would turn all this down?!” the messenger exclaimed, his jaw dropping.

Schneider made a face. “Hey, I know how I look, but I’m in my fifties over here. How about a little more consideration for an old timer suffering from the chills, huh?”

It was true: Schneider was actually well over fifty. He might look like he was still in his twenties, but he had registered with the adventurers’ guild more than forty years ago. That was what it showed on his guild card stats—there was no

denying it.

That was also why there were all sorts of rumors about how he was able to preserve the toned, hardened body of a twenty-something hero. Some suggested that it was because he had killed so many dragons, then bathed in their blood to excess and become immortal. Others believed he had a lover so skilled in the bedroom arts that she kept him youthful. There were also more defamatory rumors, such as rather than defeating a demon god he made a contract with it to retain his youth. When asked about the subject, however, he would say that he only looked young, and then made comments about his advancing age. He was a slippery fellow.

“Can’t you see this white hair? This was blond, not so long ago!” Schneider grabbed a chunk of his platinum blond—what he called white—hair. Perhaps he could prove that it had been blonder in the past, but it was also luxurious and full; no one other than him was calling it “white.”

“Schnei, you’ve been complaining about the same thing for ten years,” Lisana chided, while calling him by a pet name.

“That’s right! I’ve had grey hair for ten years!” Schneider asserted.

“...There’s no winning this one.” Lisana shrugged.

“That’s all the time you’re getting,” Schneider told the messenger. “Sorry, but off you pop. Tell Duke Malme that I’m far too busy worrying about old age to take the job.”

“V-very well,” the messenger stammered. “I’ll take my leave.” He rose, and the three of them left the tavern.

They certainly hadn’t been happy with the reason for Schneider’s rejection of the offer, but they also hadn’t been able to do much about it. There was

nothing in terms of physical strength they could do to persuade a superhuman who killed dragons and demon gods. If they threatened him, they were the ones who would end up threatened; indeed, it could even lead to something happening to Duke Malme. The Emperor wasn't going to make any overt moves to protect his cousin, leader of the resistance forces that he was.

All they could do was leave, returning home with a tacitly edited report stating that they had been turned down.

"Well, everyone. What do you make of that?" Schneider asked.

Background presences that had been lying low now came back to life. They looked at each other and shared a chuckle. The three individuals now gathered around Schneider and Lisana might have caught the eye for a moment—handsome, attractive, something impressive about them—but otherwise the three simply looked like a bartender, a waitress, and the drunk hitting on her.

In actual fact, these five all held a shared secret.

"Good question," said the dwarf waitress Meldin. She was just a normal dwarf—although her actual job wasn't waiting tables, but instead being a grade A adventurer. "I think it's more likely that the Pope is getting himself into a flap than this being something that is truly from Divine Alda."

"I don't see that as a problem." The thin bartender, Zod, gave a smile. He had no other noticeable characteristics other than a small moustache. He seemed unassuming, but most people would run a mile if they found out who he really was. His name was Zolkodorio, and he was a progenitor species vampire. "That worthless idiot can flap around all he likes, it won't make a difference. And if he flaps too much then the Emperor will simply remove him."

“But we don’t want that,” said Meldin. “What if the next pope can actually do his job?”

“Good point.”

They all chuckled.

“Someone’s got their eye on you, anyway!” said the third with a hiccup, the drunk with a mohawk hairstyle. He was actually a dark elf. Using a magic item to hide the length of his ears, he appeared to be a tub of dark-skinned muscle. His name was Dolton, a warrior from a powerful clan of dark elves. “No way I’d be taking a trip to the south.”

“You’re drinking too much, Dolton,” Schneider chided. “Tea. Drink some tea.”

“Gah! You want me to drink that colored water?” Dolton stuck out his tongue. “You should be complaining to Zod, anyway, serving up these delicious drinks.”

“My apologies,” Zod offered. “Please, have another drink.”

“Oh! Thank you! Ah, that’s the stuff!” Dolton enthused.

“Hey. Should you really be giving him so much?” Lisana asked.

“That one was simply mint water,” Zod replied in a quiet voice. Indeed, he hadn’t said it was alcohol when he handed it over. Water was, after all, “a drink.”

“Enough health talk. I’m interested in this dhampir,” Meldin said.

“The dumb Pope’s oracles are one thing, but if he’s connected somehow to the Demon King, then he’s clearly connected to me. If the Demon King really does come back, this time I might actually get wiped out.” As she spoke, Lisana began to transform. Her white skin turned a blue-black, a vertical split opened in her forehead that turned into a third eye, and her red tongue turned a

fluorescent pink and extended down as far as her full bosom.

"Hey, your disguise is slipping."

"Sorry, sorry. Just remembering the past." Lisana gave a laugh and then sucked her tongue back in, returning to her original appearance. She was an elf woman, just like it showed on her guild card. What she kept quiet was that her body was also the incarnation of the Demon God of Narcissism, Julizanapippe. Indeed, she was the demon god that Thunderclap Schneider had supposedly defeated. "What do you think, Schnei? You turned down the quest, but do you want to go and meet him?"

"I actually would, but it's not really an option right now," Schneider replied. "I've got a lot I need to get done. Duke Malme is one thing, but the Emperor is on to me, I'm sure."

Schneider was a human, no doubt about it. He wasn't a vampire, a demon god, or one of Vida's new races.

Rather, he was a follower of Vida.

"I'm sure the Emperor saw through my ruse as a humble servant of Alda long ago. He knows the oracles from the pope about me being in danger are actually saying that *I'm* the danger." There had been multiple such oracles concerning Schneider, suggesting that he was in danger, but nothing had really happened as a result. In fact, it had been Alda trying to warn the pope that Schneider was himself a threat. Schneider knew how hard it was to understand the full meaning of oracles, and so he didn't judge the man too harshly in this respect.

Schneider was a mortal man, meaning he didn't know about the reincarnation system or anything else the gods had to deal with. That hadn't stopped him from having his doubts about the teachings of Alda, ever since he was a kid. He

never understood why everyone hated Vida's new races so much. His suspicions had been confirmed after he became an adventurer and finally met one of the new races, a lamia, for himself.

That Alda was wrong.

...Or maybe it was just that his late-blooming first love had been with a beautiful lamia.

Regardless of the reasons, after spending time with her and her people in their village, Schneider's belief that Alda was wrong became a conviction. However, he had also considered that maybe the lamia were special, so he had set off to meet others from among the new races. Before long, Schneider had chosen Vida, not Alda.

He then chose to hide his true nature and enhance himself while building experience as an adventurer. The other option was to cross to the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom, a place that allowed for faith in Vida and the existence of the new races, but to him, that would have been a foolish choice.

If he ran off to the Olbaum Electorate Kingdom, he wouldn't be able to help the new races who were suffering in the Amidd Empire.

Being here in the Amidd Empire allowed him to help where he could. There wasn't much an adventurer born from peasants could do, perhaps, but to him, it would be enough to save even one more of them.

And then he had ended up as grade S. It just went to show that you never knew where life was going to take you.

"I doubt he knows about you, Lisana," Schneider said.

"I bet he doesn't. No one seems to know, or remember, that there were demon and devil gods like me who changed sides to join the heroes," Lisana

said.

The ancient myths spoke of gods, giants, and dragons who had changed sides to join the Demon King, mainly out of fear. However, there had also been a significant number of demon and devil gods who had betrayed the Demon King and chosen to side with the gods and heroes of Ramda. Their existence simply hadn't been recorded.

They might have "devil" and "demon" in their names and hold terrible powers that could be considered evil. But they weren't evil personified. The hero Zakkato had called the Demon King and his horde "invaders from another world," and that was the actual truth. For the people living on Ramda, the battle with the Demon King had been a holy war to protect their world. But when considering it more objectively, it had simply been the indigenous population fighting an invading force.

The Demon King and his kind were at fault, in that they could have asked for help or shelter, learned the local customs, values, and manners, and tried to fit in. It went without saying that some of them weren't exactly happy that the Demon King immediately started a war and dragged them all into it, but he had also been so terrifying that they hadn't really been given any choice but to fight in it.

One of those had been the Demon God of Narcissism, Julizanapippe.

Then Zakkato had managed to persuade her and others like her to change sides and join the heroes. In the subsequent battle between Alda and Vida, those former demon gods who had changed sides fought on the side of Vida, because that's where the revived Zakkato had been. But they got completely trashed by Alda and Bellwood, their strength depleted or completely sealed away. Those remaining had to cast aside their bodies at the time and settle for

incarnation further into the future.

Bellwood then stepped in to erase all mention of them from history. He had never wanted to admit that any of them had changed sides in the first place.

"If the Emperor hears that I'm going to the south, he'll probably think I'm trying to finally hook up with the Vida progenitors and make a move on him," Schneider said. "He's letting me be for now because I'm still an asset to the Empire. But if he starts to consider me a threat to his regime, that's when things turn nasty." He might be a grade S adventurer known as the Demon God Smiler (and a smiter of women), but the Empire was too big for him to take on alone. The Emperor would have a personal guard equivalent to grade A adventurers, with plenty of hidden tricks and traps that even Schneider wouldn't be able to easily overcome. "I have my oracle as well. I need to abide by that."

"You mean the oracle about saving the mother and child?" Dolton said.

Schneider had received it more than ten years previously. He had been pretty surprised, as it was his first time. A vast volume of knowledge and a great awareness had filled his head, along with what felt like a secret code that he needed to decipher. The main thrust of the information he'd received was as Dolton stated. More accurately, he believed that it said: "Become a shield to save the mother and protect the child from the blood, but do not cross the range or the ocean."

"I think you're done with that," Meldin said. "We've saved loads of mothers and children since then, and even found Zod."

"For which you have my thanks," Zod commented.

Schneider first thought the oracle was telling him to help mothers and children in the western part of the Vangaia Continent, and he had saved as

many as he could as a result. Sometimes it simply meant fighting off bandits; sometimes it developed into a whole adventure that ended with something like breaking the seal on a progenitor vampire.

Of course, there were other interpretations. Schneider had also visited his mother's grave in his hometown, and tracked down women he had been in contact with to see if they were pregnant or in danger. The main result of that had been finding out he had fathered a bunch of children with various lamia, scylla, arachne, centaur, and mermaid women. Dolton had frowned upon all that, but Schneider had been young and passionate—what else could he say?

So plenty of comedy had also ensued. In the end, however, they had pretty much settled on the idea that the oracle had been intended to lead Schneider to freeing Zod. However, after hearing what Duke Malme's messenger said, Schneider finally realized their mistake.

"We were wrong," Schneider said. "The oracle was telling me to save the mother in the Milg Shield Kingdom, and protect her mixed-blood baby."

"Maybe. What about the 'range and oceans' part, then?" Lisana said.

"It's telling us not to get close to him for a while, if we failed in the first part," Schneider concluded. "I would have been in trouble if I'd gone on the expedition."

"You think that dhampir could have killed you?"

"He beat back an army of six thousand. This is no normal kid. My guess is, as a grade S adventurer, Vida didn't want me facing off with that dhampir."

"If that's true, he can't have anything to do with the Demon King," Lisana asserted. "Vida would never help him out otherwise."

"Makes sense," Schneider said. "I feel bad about failing to help them, but it's

not like I'm all-powerful. If I do ever meet him, I'll apologize, but I can't do much until then."

There was no time to sit around worrying about it, either. They had another job, starting tomorrow: to help out a clan of merfolk by defeating a pod of kraken, and they needed to prepare.

"Hey, you know anything about seaweed being good for the hair?" Schneider asked.

"Zakkato said something like that, but it's an old wives' tale, nothing more," Lisana assured him.

"But seriously, I'm sure my hairline has started receding—"

"You are imagining things. It hasn't moved an inch."

"You think? I'm really sure my hair is thinning out—"

"You're imagining things!" shouted everyone in the room.



Chapter Five: After the Closing Bell, A Lively Launch

In her nearly comatose slumber, Vida couldn't be sure if she was seeing a dream behind her closed eyelids, or imagining things with her eyes wide open.

She might not have been all-powerful, but she was still a goddess. She now found herself in this pathetic state only because of the war with Alda ten thousand years ago.

Ten thousand years...and longer, before even that...

After her birth into this world, Vida had spread the power of the life attribute throughout it, becoming known by the people as the Goddess of Life and Love. Everything was peaceful back then. Everything so relaxed, so soft, so gentle.

But that had all been shattered by the attack of the Demon King. Vida had no choice but to join the other gods in fighting this force invading from another world.

That was when Zurwan had suggested summoning their own heroes from another world. Vida had agreed with the plan while Alda had opposed it, but in the end, they had gone ahead and summoned seven heroes. The gods in this world had agreed, but another continued to speak out against it: Rodocolte, the only god with the power of reincarnation. His resistance to the plan had been fierce, but all he could do was speak against it, and no one had been willing to listen.

Vida had chosen Keisuke Sakato, a youth who had been trying to hang himself in a rural workshop. The one who would eventually become Zakkato.

"Ah! A goddess herself has come for me! Father, mother, I'll be with you soon!" he had said.

"Stop that! No need to go anywhere! Please!" Vida had pleaded.

That was quite the fuss, Vida recalled. Sakato had been trying to kill himself because an organization called a “bank” had betrayed him, forcing his workshop out of business and pushing him to suicide. Vida had therefore hoped he would accept moving on from his original world to become a hero for her, but Sakato had made some strange demands.

“So, are you going to give me some kind of, er, special powers?”

“Of course,” Vida replied. The gods had already decided to give the humans selected as heroes additional strength. Indeed, summoning them here without giving them anything would, at worst, simply kill them. A different world meant everything was different, down to the laws of physics and even the composition of the air. Ramda and Sakato’s planet were not all that different, but bringing them over without making any adjustments would either shorten their lives, due to the presence of magical power, or possibly turn them into bizarre monsters. The gods therefore made adjustments to the souls of the incoming humans, which had resulted in what might be called “heroic strength.” The “blank spaces” used to make these adjustments were what determined the so-called “quality of a hero.”

Rodocolte was the real specialist in this kind of thing, of course. If he had helped them, they would have been able to make even better adjustments.

Zurwan connected them to a world called “Earth,” which didn’t have any magic, and none of the residents could control magical power. The number of people who could fight with swords and spears were also limited, and the gods were aware that none of their heroes possessed individual strength on a scale that could contest the Demon King and his forces. The gods also couldn’t bring Earth weapons with those resurrected—the same differences in physics would mean they would break, malfunction, or simply explode if any attempt was

made to use them. As a result, the gods had to enhance the strength of each hero. Whether they liked it or not, the heroes were to be given the kind of physical abilities that would shame any superhero, an aptitude for magic, and powerful equipment created exclusively for their use. Furthermore, Ramda already had the Job and skill systems in place, which had been created by Rekrent. The heroes would be able to obtain truly unimaginable power with a little experience.

“Okay then. Load me up with manufacturing cheats,” Sakato said.

“...What? Didn’t you hear me say we’re at war?” Vida replied.

For some reason, Sakato was obsessed with becoming better at “manufacturing.” Vida expected him to want the strength to chop down his enemies with a sword or to freely wield magic. Indeed, that was the kind of hero that Vida herself wanted. She tried to persuade him, but Sakato was having none of it.

“I’m not good in a fight,” he protested.

“And I’m saying I’ll make you stronger!” Vida said back.

“I think that’s something like throwing pearls before swine . . . I’ve got a terrible sense of direction, too.”

Vida sighed. “I’m the goddess of the life attribute, meaning any manufacturing-based cheats I can give you will be related to farming, livestock, forestry, and carpentry. Are you okay with that?” she asked, eventually giving in. She didn’t have days to try and change his mind, and didn’t have anyone else she could turn to either.

“That sounds great,” Sakato quickly agreed. “I know a lot about making things already.”

And so, going against the original plan, Sakato was brought over to Ramda as a hero with an emphasis on manufacturing and technology, rather than individual fighting strength. Vida had first been depressed about it, sure that she would have been the only one to have summoned such a strange hero. But it turned out that those chosen by Rekrent, Pelia, and Botin had also all wanted production-based cheats installed.

That meant of the seven heroes, four hadn't wanted fighting strength. The gods wondered if maybe the very image of a "hero" was fundamentally different on Earth from their own. It certainly was a puzzle.

Alda and Zantark were angry, saying they should have made better choices.

What followed was battle after battle.

Islands sank into the sea. Entire nations were laid waste, and Shizarion's soul was crushed. Vida, Sakato, and all the heroes fought with their lives on the line, defeating or sealing away demon and devil gods, and keeping the overall situation at a stalemate.

This was when Sakato—who, somewhat grudgingly, had taken the advice of the leader of the heroes, Shohei Suzuki, and changed his name to Zakkato to fit in better in Ramda—finally distinguished himself.

"If there are gods and humans from this world changing sides to join the Demon King, surely the opposite could also happen?" he suggested.

After positing this crazy idea, he set out to headhunt some demon and devil gods who might be willing to oppose the Demon King, to the ire of the others.

"Zakkato, what are you thinking? They are evil, pure and simple! They aren't going to have a change of heart. Have you forgotten how many innocents they

have already killed?" Bellwood raged.

"Indeed. Even if one of them did agree to change sides, it would merely be a trap or some attempt to extend their life. To even suggest forgiving those who had done evil and bringing them onto our side is pure foolishness," Alda admonished.

"Please! Come back to your senses!" Even Vida tried to stop him.

Yet Zakkato had not only continued his headhunting, but the other heroes who had chosen production-based abilities also started to help. Unbelievably, they were successful in turning more than ten demon and devil gods to their side, although none of them held particularly high positions in the Demon King's forces.

Vida couldn't believe it, but Zakkato only calmly explained that he thought this was pretty ordinary in warfare. While the gods who changed sides didn't contribute much to direct fighting strength, the fact that they now had traitors changing sides had an unexpectedly large impact on the Demon King's army.

Rather than holding his position with charisma, the Demon King used his overwhelming strength and secret technique that could crush souls to maintain his status. Some beneath him truly worshipped that strength, but many only followed him out of fear or for their own ends. The fact that some of his followers chose to betray him started talk among his forces that he was growing weak, or that maybe the traitors had decided the heroes could win and they wanted to be on the winning side.

They succeeded in disturbing the Demon King himself, as he began to worry about which of his underlings might betray him next. The iron shackles that held the Demon King's forces together started to crack. Cooperation between units broke down, and more traitors changed sides. This all helped to break the

stalemate and push things in favor of the heroes.

But they still couldn't afford to drop their guard. They needed to strike before the Demon King put those shackles firmly back in place.

That was when Zakkato proclaimed that he would start producing weapons from another world.

"With our knowledge, technology, and magic, we should be able to make a powerful modern Earth weapon here on Ramda!" Zakkato declared. He wanted to use such a weapon to defeat the Demon King.

The Demon King had a number of special abilities, making him extremely difficult to defeat via normal means. He was capable of deploying two barriers simultaneously: one that nullified magic and one that nullified physical attacks, creating a seemingly impenetrable wall of defense. Bellwood, the most proficient of the heroes in combat, couldn't damage the Demon King with his holy sword. Even attacks from the gods were just shut down completely.

But Zakkato came up with a way to pierce both barriers and actually damage the Demon King. "The Demon King may come from another world, but he still isn't aware of the kind of advanced technology possessed on Earth. Maybe we can use that to our advantage," Zakkato explained.

When researching the barriers used by the Demon King, he had worked out that they weren't hard walls that repelled the attacks, but closer to membranes that absorbed energy. He had also determined that the anti-physical and anti-magic barriers were completely independent. That meant if they could perform an incredibly powerful physical attack that had too much energy for the anti-physical barrier to absorb, the anti-magic barrier would do nothing to stop it. Damaging the Demon King meant they just had to have a way through one of the two barriers.

The plan was therefore to apply Zakkato's ability to nullify the damage from one specified type of weapon to a modern Earth weapon. Then Bellwood would use his ability to copy the power of another hero once per day to also gain immunity to the weapon they would use. Once the two of them were immune to the effects of the weapon, they would launch an attack with it together. It would pierce the anti-physical barrier and then defeat the Demon King. That was the plan.

Bellwood himself was completely against the plan, however. The weapon Zakkato was trying to make left terrible environmental trauma in its wake on Earth. It spread invisible poison over a wide area that lasted for tens of thousands of years. A truly terrifying weapon.

"Zakkato, are you serious?" Bellwood raged. "You would leave this beautiful Ramda with a crisis as bad as the Demon King!"

"Better to still be here than lose everything to the Demon King first! This world has magic, as well, something we don't have on Earth, and it won't pollute the entire planet. Only the continent where the Demon King now resides, and there isn't a single human left there anyway!" Zakkato replied, just as heatedly.

"But there are people who have escaped from there! Who now fight alongside us in the volunteer army. Are you going to be the one to tell them, after they've risked their lives to take back their homeland, that they can never go home—even if the Demon King is defeated?"

"...They have my sympathy, of course," Zakkato admitted. "But we won't be able to win without making some sacrifices. Suzuki, I'm starting to think you just don't want me to make any weapons from Earth."

The debate ended up divided between the four production-based heroes,

including Zakkato, who wanted to use the weapon, and the three combat-based ones, including Bellwood, who were against the plan. The two sides had clashed in the past, with Zakkato often the one to talk down the other producers when they complained about Bellwood and his stubborn allies, reminding them that they had to work together to win. But even he seemed unable to negotiate a peace this time.

Among the gods, Alda and Zantark sided with Bellwood, while Vida, Zurwan, and Rekrent all sided with Zakkato. Vida was sure that the gods could work together to purge the weapon's pollution. It might take them a few thousand years, or it might only take a few; in any case, she was confident they could do it. She also felt sorry for those who had fled the continent in question, but the place had already been riddled with lakes of poison, deserts, and forests of monster fungi. After a certain point, they had to give up on taking it back intact.

Alda and the others opposed maintained that there was no way to know whether a poison that didn't even exist in this world could be purified. They were worried that the poison and the magic in this world might somehow link together and turn into a new calamity. They believed that there was no need to risk anything so dangerous—that they were already on the way to winning, and just had to keep going.

The fact that the war had been swinging in their favor, ironically, gave them the leeway to bicker.

Zakkato decided the one way to change the minds of the combat heroes and the gods siding with them was to actually make the modern Earth weapon. To be more precise, he started to make the poison. His plan was to only make a small amount, far less and far weaker than was needed for the actual weapon, then test if the magic and power of the gods in this world could indeed purify it,

and if so, how long it would take. He worked with the other manufacturer heroes on this, while Vida continued to try and persuade Alda.

That was when the Demon King's army suddenly made its move.

The Demon King divided his forces into two and launched a full assault, regardless of the cost to his army. One force, commanded directly by the Demon King, came straight for the volunteer army base where Bellwood and his team was ensconced.

The other was a smaller force, led by the Demon King's right hand, and it targeted the weapons factory where Zakkato and his allies were at work. Bellwood and his allies marched out with the volunteer army to meet the Demon King. Vida tried to go and help Zakkato, but Alda and the others stopped her.

"They are heroes too. They will be able to fight off the smaller force. Indeed, they will likely be ones coming to our aid. The most important thing is that we defeat the Demon King," Alda reasoned.

At the time, I thought Alda was right, Vida thought. That's why I didn't act... but as I reflect on it now...

Bellwood and his forces managed to drive off the attacking army. However, the attacking force turned out to be weaker enemies that relied on strength in numbers, and monsters intended to stall them with high resistance and defensive strength. The Demon King leading them wasn't the real thing, either.

The Demon King instead disguised himself as a low-ranking monster and attacked Zakkato and the others, crushing their souls and destroying the factory.

"The only heroes who could threaten me are gone!" Demon King Gudranis

had apparently declared upon crushing Zakkato's soul. He had thought more of Zakkato and been more scared of him, than of Bellwood. He had worried that one of Zakkato's plans might eventually be able to take his life. That was why he'd sacrificed so much in order to take down Zakkato and the other manufacturer heroes. He even crushed their souls to ensure they would never come back.

Vida, Rekrent, and the others desperately tried to resurrect Zakkato and the fallen heroes. They tried to piece back together their shattered souls and restore them to life. But by that point, Rodocolte had already collected the pieces of their souls for himself.

"If souls that aren't a part of my reincarnation system are stitched together and resurrected on Ramda I have no idea what kind of errors in the system that might cause," he had explained haughtily. "I wanted to send them back to their original world, but I don't have the power to interfere in worlds outside of my jurisdiction. So I cobbled together a new soul from pieces of the four and sent it off into my own system. I certainly didn't like it, but it's better than unexpected errors cropping up."

The souls of Zakkato and the other heroes had already gone beyond the reach of Vida. Bellwood raised his holy sword and made his own declaration.

"I too feel our loss. But for their sake as well as ours, we must use what strength we still have to defeat Demon King Gudranis and save this world!"

I don't really want to remember anything that came after this...

The final result was that Bellwood won, and Ramda was indeed saved. The sacrifices, however, were too great.

Bellwood and the other two combat heroes survived. But all of the gods other

than Alda and Vida were left so weak as to practically be dead. None of the members of Bellwood's volunteer army survived. Along with the continent where the Demon King had resided, numerous other corrupted regions remained. Many of those had still not been purified now, ten thousand years later. Known as demon barrens, they continued to spread.

And the remaining humans—humankind, elves, and dwarves together—numbered less than three thousand.

"Yes, we paid a steep price," Bellwood said. "But we are still alive. We must move forward. Please, lend me your strength. For the sake of the future." He held out his hand to Vida.

But she rejected him.

We can't turn back time, Vida thought. Regretting what has been lost won't bring it back. Alda said we should work together, to bring meaning to the sacrifices others had made. I didn't have a problem with that sentiment. But I also couldn't bring myself to trust them any longer.

His opposition to Zakkato's plan, after all, had been that the cost would be too high. Of course, there had been no proof that the Demon King would have been defeated if they had used it. But Bellwood could surely have at least listened to him.

It hadn't been the first time Bellwood had shut Zakkato down out of hand. It had been the same with the gunpowder, the firearms, the landmines, the steam engines. Everything Zakkato thought up may indeed have created fresh calamities for this world, if used in the wrong way. There had been many times that Vida had heard what he was planning next and had tried to persuade him of how dangerous it would be. But they always discussed it. She never dismissed him without consideration.

There were also doubts that she could not dispel about the events surrounding the Demon King's attack. *Did Bellwood and Alda choose to give Zakkato and the others up? Did they choose to walk into the Demon King's trap?*

There was no proof of it. The possibility could easily be written off as simply her imagination. Bellwood had come to this world that he knew nothing about, put his life on the line, and ultimately defeated the Demon King; it would be going too far to make accusations on top of all that. Vida knew that much.

But she still couldn't trust them.

She had even less trust in Rodocolte. The only thing that god cared about was souls being reincarnated in the worlds he was responsible for, and nothing else. His only reaction to the war—the entire thing—was a passing moment of happiness that the Demon King had been defeated. But if the Demon King had offered to increase the number of humans in this world for him as much as he liked, instead of the gods who were originally here, Vida couldn't help but think that Rodocolte would have taken the Demon King's side.

The loss of Zakkato and the other manufacturer heroes was a terrible blow, not only to Vida but also all of Ramda. After those four had perished, Bellwood and the remaining heroes had been forced into a series of fierce battles as the conflict swung in the Demon King's favor. The losses continued to pile up, with gods, members of the volunteer army, and the refugees they were protecting now dropping like flies.

Even after victory, Bellwood and the others struggled to restore this ravaged world. Their powers all focused on combat. They could fight off the monsters the Demon King had left behind, but when it came to agriculture and manufacturing, they were just regular people. That was exactly why they needed Vida's cooperation.

But rather than work with them, I made a different decision, Vida reflected.

Vida planned to create a reincarnation system unique to this world, giving rise to new races of “humans” who could survive in a world full of monsters. She returned to Alda and the others to propose this different approach to save the world. Of course, Alda and Bellwood both opposed it, but she had expected that.

I thought that if I could get results, than they would accept it. That's the only way I thought I could persuade them.

That was the reason that she didn't listen to Alda and the others. Although there might have been some petulant revenge mixed in there, if she was honest.

Vida went out and gave birth to her new races. She took Zakkato's body and infused it with vitality, successfully turning him into undead. She settled for that after all her attempts at a complete revival failed. Without his soul nearby, or someone who could control death itself, it was impossible to reverse death into life. She had therefore only been able to achieve a puppet, running on faint residual memories—fragments of Zakkato's memories and knowledge. *I don't think it would have upset him. He always said to use whatever you could.*

Then Vida gathered the strength from the former demon and devil gods who had joined her retinue, and created her own unique system based on the reincarnation system left behind by the Demon King. However, this was a copy of the Demon King's copy of Rodocolte's system. It worked but was always throwing up errors, and she couldn't afford to take her eyes off it for a moment. She was made painfully aware that, even though she didn't like him, Rodocolte definitely had some special skills.

But I didn't want to give up. I gathered my supporters to me. I created my new

races with them, and put the souls of the newborn children into the system.

Vida assumed that she required experience to improve the system. In order to achieve that, she needed her races to go through the system and be reborn, even if it meant restricting their movements a little to start with. On that score, she had been lucky: the incomplete system had been able to function in its incomplete state, and the children Vida created gradually grew in number.

Maybe it was because I copied the Demon King's system, but some of them ended up with longer lives than I expected, or were stronger than expected, or changed a lot when they ranked up. But I had started out wanting to make strong children, so that didn't bother me.

This was a mistake. She should have brought Alda and those on the other side to the table of discussion sooner. By the time she realized this mistake, Alda and the heroes were attacking her. Bellwood and the others were already far beyond a normal lifespan. Alda had been keeping them young because he believed the world needed them.

Alda was accompanied by the dependent gods and brethren of Rekrent, Pelia, and the others; Vida had the gods who had sided with her, Talos and his people, and the children she had created.

The two sides fought—and she was defeated.

Having heroes proved to be the deciding factor. The city she had created for her children, using the knowledge of Zakkato, was laid waste. Vida was stripped of her divinity by Alda, then gravely wounded.

Yet she still clung to the last of her strength, taking as many of her surviving children with her as she could. She created a tall mountain range in the south of the Vangaia Continent, giving her children a place to hide, and then collapsed

into a deep sleep.

How long has it been since then? It could have been ten thousand, twenty thousand, or a million years. She was still so weak that she had no idea. Alda, having the same strength as Vida, shouldn't have had the ability to inflict her with an incurable wound, but it seemed that he and his followers were doing a good job of reducing the number of those who believed in her—in other words, those who prayed to her, which is what gave her strength as a divine being. Meanwhile, her children were not increasing. They were heading for extinction.

All the gods who had sided with Vida were either now slumbering, stripped of their divinity, like her, or eking out a secretive survival on the prayers of the few and far between. She had no idea what had happened to Talos and his people. Many of the vampires—some of the most powerful among her children—seemed to succumb to the allure of those who would devour this world.

How did things come to this? Why does Alda continue to do such violent, cruel things? There was no longer a Demon King. The former gods of Alda's army who had betrayed him to side with the Demon King were doing their best to atone, but he continued to hate them. *Even after you were the one who trampled all over the best chance they had been given to make that atonement! Even though your very teachings state that, once a sinner atones for their sins, they are no longer a sinner!*

He also hated knowledge and technology from Earth. Even though the gods here were the ones who had summoned the heroes from Earth and had survived because of their aid. Vida couldn't understand why he had spoken out against her plan, even though he himself had distrusted and doubted Rodocolte more than anyone. Not to mention his continued persecution of her children—even if it gave the truly evil gods free rein to do as they pleased right under his

nose. The only place the world was heading was the dissolution and destruction of everyone and everything.

I don't understand, I don't understand, I don't understand!

At that very moment, a premonition flashed through Vida's mind. Maybe it was something from Zakkato's body, which slumbered next to her; maybe she had recovered a little more of her strength; or maybe Rekrent or Zurwan were out there somewhere, also recovering a little, and sharing some of that strength with her. She didn't know the cause, but it was definitely a premonition.

They are coming back. I don't know how, but Zakkato...Keisuke and the others are coming back to this world!

The soul Rodocolte had created when he randomly stitched together pieces of their crushed souls and then sent into his system, was returning to Ramda.

But hold on... That wasn't all that she saw. When the recipient of the soul was reborn, it would be into dire circumstances; she saw him struggling with his powerlessness, until he was forced to take his own life. This was also the work of Rodocolte.

"I will not allow that to happen." She couldn't just sit by and let such events transpire.

He wouldn't have any of the memories of the past. His personality would also be completely different. But she still couldn't leave him to such a fate.

Vida hadn't been able to do anything for Keisuke and the others. Hadn't been able to repay them at all for everything they did. Now was her chance to make up for that, even a little. With that in mind, Vida sent out some oracles. She wasn't even sure there was anyone left to hear her voice, but it felt like they reached someone.

Then, when her premonition finally came true, Vida gathered all of her strength. She reached out with hands that were so weak, so pathetic, that it felt as though her heart was breaking, but she reached.

As the soul arrived in this world, she scooped it into her hands. She immediately realized that three horrible curses had been placed on the soul.

“Rodocolte!” she cursed. She was unable to break them.

Before she became too despondent, however, Vida noticed a few things that made the soul unique. First, it was wreathed in a special attribute of magical power that did not exist on Ramda, and yet that she felt was somehow familiar. And second, it had a massive volume of empty space—that is, the quality of a hero.

“I mean, it’s got four heroes’ worth, that’s true,” Vida pondered. “And Rodocolte’s patch job only increased the volume of emptiness. There’s almost too much of it...but maybe I can use some, to give him the strength to cover the curses placed on him?”

She started by trying to give the soul strength using the life attribute that she herself had been known for.

“That’s odd.” The unique magical power already surrounding the soul swallowed her own power, becoming one with it. “That shouldn’t have happened. I guess I’m even weaker than I thought. In that case, I’ll give him my protection...that didn’t work either?!” Her attempt to provide her protection was also immediately swallowed up.

She knew that the process could be difficult if the one receiving it didn’t believe in the god trying to protect them, but she had never heard of it simply being consumed.

“Hmm. What should I do?”

There wasn’t much left that Vida could try. She had been able to give out special abilities and unlock cheat skills in the past, but didn’t have the strength for that now. If she pushed herself to the breaking point, she might be able to give him one power, but if that was swallowed as well, it would all be over.

“Okay. I have an idea!” Vida scooped up a few hints of residual memories from the body of Zakkato. Then, she enveloped them in blood that seeped from her own wound, and applied the entire package to the soul.

This time the magical power didn’t get in the way, perhaps because these memories shared such a connection to the soul in question. They merged into the soul.

“Now this soul has my blessing,” Vida said. “That should help improve his tragic fate a little. There will still be walls to his growth, but no limits. New Jobs will appear for him more easily, and the people around him should be affected as well. His bad luck will still be stronger than his good, but there’s little I can do to change that. Ah, but this magical power... I’ve felt it somewhere before... Could it really be so?”

Vida sent the soul off into the system she had created. From the characteristics of his soul, he would likely be born as a vampire or dhampir. As vampires rarely had children together anymore, more likely a dhampir. There was a chance that he would be born into an environment even crueler and harsher than before Vida had decided to get involved.

“Now I can only hope the others heard my oracles and move to help him... I’m sorry, there’s nothing more I can do.”

Those four heroes had given their lives to save this strange, unknown world,

and ended up with their souls crushed. And this was all she could do for them. She could only apologize.

She hoped that he would love this world. That he would love the sky, the wind, the land, the greenery, the animals, the people. After everything she had asked of him before, and how much she had relied on him, she felt terrible to have to put so much on him again.

And then Vida's awareness sank away into slumber.



It was about four months after the daylight robbery of all those villages. The season had turned to full-blown summer. Vandal was using Whisp Fires, magic that sucked the heat from the air around them, to provide cooling every single day.

Vandal had also turned six years old and was spending his days busy in Talosheim. Setting up the new systems for agriculture and textiles was proving to be a lot of work.

The crops they had stolen, soil and all, were growing well. Too well, one could almost argue. When he started down this path, Vandal had been thinking he would need to use death attribute magic to stop the crops from expiring in the different climate beyond the mountains, and then gradually breed strains that could flourish here. However, the crops had adjusted without any issues to Talosheim's soil. As they had been crops growing on reclaimed demon barren land, maybe the semi-demon barren soil of Talosheim suited them more than expected.

The wheat was ready to harvest in just three months, quickly putting an end to Talosheim's grain shortage. The other vegetables were also ready to harvest earlier than expected. And after that, in fact, they had blossomed a second time, and the roots turned into feet and started walking around.

The issue seemed to be with the fertilizer, which had been made from discarded monster parts and given a jolt of Vandal's magical power via his Fermentation skill.

“Well, it's not really a problem.”

In fact, it removed a lot of the tasks and attention that a normal farmer would have to provide. The final product was also high-quality, so there was nothing to complain about.

Well, maybe one thing. Every time he went to check on them, they would charge at him as though begging to be eaten. However high-quality the produce might be, he didn't want to chow on raw onions. He also didn't need tomatoes flying straight at his mouth. There was no tomato-throwing festival here in his kingdom.

“The key is to catch them all,” he muttered, increasing his number of arms using Spirit Bodification to scoop up all the juicy missiles launched by the monster plants. It was like they were harvesting themselves.

In the end, he managed to stop them from doing that, and only the plants bore large fruit. The wheat, root vegetables, and potatoes were yet to turn into actual monsters.

The textile business, meanwhile, had been going well for a while.

“Rise.”

He managed to use Golden Creation to control the raw materials, just as he

used golems to make wood. He hadn't been able to take fibers directly from the plants, of course, but doing so did work with boiled, softened plants. He managed to make hemp from a plant collected in Borkz Demi-Dragon Plains. He also made a kind of warm wool from the belly fur of Needle Wolves, and something like silk from the Cemetery Bees.

The bees weren't like wasps from Earth, meaning they didn't build paper pulp around their nests. But when their young went into their pupas, they did close off the individual chambers each pupa was inside of. In the case of the Cemetery Bees, the lid for these was made from thread. The lids were for chambers to hold bees that would only be a foot and a half once fully grown; each harvest garnered a slightly larger volume of silk than that obtained from a silkworm. Of course, when the bees grew their wings, they broke out through the lid. But Vandal could restore shattered shards back into a plate by turning them into golems—that wasn't the issue.

The thread was faintly honey colored. Vandal went out on a limb and named it honey thread.

"There's a different problem at hand here," Vandal muttered.

A golem spinning wheel could make thread. A golem loom could weave it into cloth. All sorts of dyes could be made easily by boiling the leaves and twigs dropped by the Immortal Ents. The resulting cloth was high-quality, even to Eleonora's discerning eye, and would have merchants clamoring to purchase it if they took some to a merchants' guild...but cloth was, ultimately, just cloth. It wasn't clothing yet.

"Making clothes is hard," Vandal said.

"You're not wrong, boy," Zadilis agreed.

“I can make loincloth!” Vigaro exclaimed.

“That doesn’t require any sewing,” Rita said.

“If my wife were here, she could have made some simple garments,” Sam said wistfully.

“We’re her daughters!” Saria replied. “Maybe we can.”

The issue was, they didn’t have anyone with the experience and knowledge to make cloth into clothing. For the ghouls, cloth was a rarity hardly ever obtained, and they generally made do with furs and skins. The Talosheim giantling undead had had little contact with the outside world for a long time, and little desire to bother with clothing. Lefdia was like Pauvina and Rapieçage: all fingers and thumbs.

There were some who could perform simple sewing, like Rita and Saria. But they didn’t have a seamstress or tailor among them who could make an outfit from scratch.

Vandal was similar. He had learned some sewing in home economics class, but that was it. Trying to recall his experiences, he thought maybe he could manage an apron. The fibers researcher on Origin hadn’t been an expert at turning those fibers into clothing either.

“We just need to get some skills and we’ll be able to make stuff,” Vandal assured them. Once he had the skills, he might be able to work out how to make some of the clothing he had seen on Earth.

Apart from the really simple stuff—like Vigaro’s idea—it simply came down to trial and error for all of them.

Acquired the skills Agriculture and Clothing Making!



Vandal was sitting on his throne, in his audience chamber. A large number of spirits were lined up in front of him.

These were the spirits of the expedition army undead that he had sent to attack Valcheburg. It had taken them more than four months to make their way back. There were only about one hundred left—they had experienced death twice, and long periods of movement, meaning most of them had been unable to hold their personalities together. Vandal had not accepted them as his brethren, and after their bodies were destroyed, he hadn't used death attribute magic to maintain their spirit bodies. That kind of treatment and four long months was enough to turn almost any spirit into a moaning, listless specter.

"You all did very well," Vandal told them. "I am going to forgive your crime of attacking Talosheim."

The spirits all gave a happy cry at this proclamation. They were thrilled from the bottom of their dead hearts that they could now officially join Vandal's forces.

"General Chezale, please show them the way," Vandal commanded.

"Of course, Your Majesty." When Chezale appeared, wearing a military uniform with medals pinned proudly to his chest, the reaction of the spirits fell into two different camps. Many of them were overjoyed to be reunited with their former commander, and their shouts of joy only grew louder. A smaller number looked so surprised that their twisted faces turned even more twisted.

"Chezale! You're the general!?" At the head of the minority was General

Rangil Maubiht. His eyes opened wide enough for his eyeballs to drop out at this unexpected promotion for Chezale, who in life had been his subordinate, and who hailed from an inferior nation.

Chezale chuckled at his former commander's response. "Well, well, if it isn't my lord, Commander Maubiht," he said. "It's been too long."

"You're a general, Chezale? How can that be! You were Lord Vandal's enemy, just like me! Why would he make you a general?!"

"Hehehe, the Eclipse King is a benevolent ruler. He has seen my good works and rewarded me with medals and a place as general," Chezale replied.

"Ridiculous!"

Maubiht was having trouble accepting it, but Chezale had actually been a lot of help. He hadn't been an especially brilliant commander, or an invincible warrior in battle. But after becoming undead, his administrative talents had come to the fore. He knew about managing armies and gathering supplies, along with details on the construction of every base inside Milg and the kinds of strategies favored by Amidd's various nations. He also had some knowledge about the law and commerce, making him a useful person—well, useful undead—for Vandal's future. Borkz was strong and reliable and trustworthy, but he couldn't do simple desk work to save his life.

"Now, proud new warriors of our illustrious ruler!" proclaimed Chezale. "His Majesty shall provide you with new bodies! You will join with me and the Black Bull Knights to fight for the glory of the Eclipse King!"

Vandal had kept the Black Bulls from joining the raiding party. They had the skills to fight as a powerful, coordinated unit in battle, so Vandal had them teaching the giantlings and ghouls to fight in the same way. They were knights

themselves, meaning they could handle a certain level of desk work. This made them convenient for a number of reasons, and valuable going forward.

Raily's slaves—Flark, Genny, and Messara—also had potential value, so Vandal was holding onto them. They had a colorful history, of course—mostly red—meaning he would need to keep an eye on them, but for now they were meek and submissive.

The spirits of the former expedition army only started to celebrate all the more vigorously. Learning that Chezale was their general, and that the Black Bulls still existed—if that was the word—seemed to have given them hope for their future lives—if that was the word.

“I won’t accept this! I will not accept you as general!” Maubiht was still shouting in anger.

But it didn’t take much to shut him up. “You have a problem with me, do you?” Vandal asked.

The air in the entire chamber immediately changed, with all the spirits turning to glare at Maubiht.

“Eep! No, no, that’s not—!” Maubiht’s spirit stammered.

“I appointed Chezale as general and awarded him his medals. It is all performed by my authority and intent. If you are discontent with that, it means you are discontent with me,” Vandal said.

“No, never! That was never my intimation! I went too far; please, forgive me!” Maubiht bowed his head low.

Vandal didn’t forgive him immediately, taking a moment to lay down a cold stare. Then Chezale threw him a lifeline.

“My apologies, Your Majesty. Please forgive my man his rudeness.” There was

a smile evident in his voice; Maubiht's spirit shuddered but was ignored.

"You really want him beneath you? I think he'll be hard work," Vandal said.

"So be it. It is the duty of those in charge to make use of even the useless," Chezale stated.

"...Very well. I will leave matters of personnel to you, Chezale," Vandal replied.

"Thank you, Your Majesty. Up on your feet, man! You are going back to bootcamp!" Chezale shouted.

The spirit of former general Maubiht was carried away by Chezale and his men. As a spirit unable to conceal his feelings, he looked quite the picture. To Vandal, it seemed entirely ridiculous.

The large number of happy spirits who hailed from the Milg Shield Kingdom, and then the less happy-looking spirits from the Amidd Empire left the chamber. Most of them were slated to become either Living Armor or Cursed Carriages. The remaining spirits who had completely lost their minds would become golems or cursed weapons. In any case, he was unable to make undead those that consisted just of a spirit body—astral undead, as they were known, like ghosts or wraiths.

The original issue had simply been that Vandal's death attribute magic level had been too low. But he had crossed the required technical threshold now. The issue was finding spirits to use.

Turning a spirit into astral undead required the spirit to have an absolutely abnormal level of negative emotions. Anger, hatred, regret, sadness—a crazy cocktail of all these things was required. Meanwhile, those killed by Vandal were actually happy about it, due to the effects of Death Attribute Allure, and

rather than hold a grudge, they generally begged him to let them repay him, heads hanging low in respect. There was no way they could become such undead.

In any case.

“...The theatrics do exhaust me,” Vandal muttered. It was required, but he didn’t really enjoy it. The show they had just put on was necessary for Chezale to truly take command of the spirits. It would be fine while Vandal was around, but if they didn’t make the hierarchy clear, it could cause issues when he set out for Olbaum. There weren’t a large number of them, but he still needed the spirits of those from the Empire to understand the command structure.

The kind of infighting that groups like the Demon King’s forces were prone to would only get in the way here. Vandal could have just crushed Maubiht’s soul, but jumping to his last resort would have made it more difficult to handle a similar outburst by someone else in the future. He would only go that far if they planned something too terrible for him to overlook. For now, he had to hope they would be smart enough to keep their dissatisfaction to complaining about their superiors when they weren’t around.

Only two spirits remained.

“Now then. Raily, Goldan, step forward.”

“You called, divine one?” Goldan asked, his face looking completely insane.

“Heh heh, hehehe!” Raily was slack-jawed.

Seeing them both like this, Vandal did feel something rising inside himself.

“Ahem.” He gave a small cough, forcing himself to ignore the taste of blood mixed into his saliva. “I do have something to ask you both.”

The two of them quickly bowed.

“Please, just say whatever you need,” Goldan replied. “All that I am is yours to command.”

“Hit me with it; hehe, give me a spear, just give me my spear. I’ll kill anyone you want,” said Raily.

There’s no helping these two, Vandal thought. Then he spoke.

“Be gone!”

His arms, both transformed using Spirit Bodification, thrust forward into Raily and Goldan’s spirits. The two of them stiffened in surprise, then gave loud screams.

“Gyaaaaaaaah! What! Why? Why?!” Raily exclaimed.

“Guwaaah! Divine one! Why? You said—said my sins were forgiven!” Goldan pleaded.

“Aaaaah, I didn’t, I didn’t do anything wrong!” Raily wailed.

“I just...obeyed my lord’s teachings!” Goldan protested.

“I understand,” Vandal said. “Neither of you are at fault. I’ve known that for a while.”

It certainly wasn’t Raily’s fault. He had just been an adventurer. He couldn’t be blamed for joining the squad that had marched to the jungle demon barrens to kill the ghouls, or for joining this more recent expedition, or for using criminal slaves as shields, or for capturing a woman who had given birth to a dhampir and handing her over to religious fanatics. None of these things were crimes in the society he hailed from. None of them were punishable under the law.



His dealings with the vampires was a serious crime that carried the penalty of death. But Vandal had no duty or desire to carry that out in the Empire or Shield Kingdom's stead.

Goldan wasn't at fault either. All he had been doing was following the teachings of Alda, seeking to remove the vampires and those who followed them from society. He couldn't be blamed for trying to kill the dhampir, for whipping and branding its mother in an attempt to locate it, and for executing her by burning her at the stake. For the people of the Empire and its nations, these acts were considered good and just. He just came from a different society than Vandal.

Furthermore, the undead Goldan and Raily could be useful. They didn't have bodies right now, but they would be able to fight well for him if he gave them new ones. That was why he had taken four months to try and think his way through this.

But it proved impossible.

"So impossible that I think the stress alone might increase my Resist Maladies skill," Vandal sighed. "Just thinking of forgiving you makes it feel like an ulcer is opening in my stomach. I've been spitting up blood since I started looking at you."

"Pffo—Pffoooh no!" Raily wailed. Goldan just screamed wordlessly.

Giving it some more thought, it was completely obvious that different societies were going to have different takes on good and evil. Vandal recalled how, on Earth and on Origin, those from different societies had fought wars and killed other people all the time.

That had brought Vandal to question whether he actually had to try and withstand this torture. Perhaps if he had been seeking to enlighten the people of Ramda, then he should have. He should have forgiven them.

But Vandal was here to pursue his own happiness. He wasn't going to exert himself trying to enlighten others at any kind of cost to himself.

If forgiving them or accepting them was off the table, he still had other choices. He could turn them into golems and bury them somewhere, or just release their spirits. However, the more he considered these options, the less likely they became.

Raily and Goldan presented completely different levels of danger from, say, Olby, the trapper who had sold out Dalshia. If Vandal let those souls out of his sight, and they were recovered by Rodocolte, Alda, Yupeon, or Hihiryu-Shukaka, he would be seeing them again before much longer. If they did just come back to fight him again, all very well. But he couldn't be sure about what damage they might do elsewhere. He didn't know the capabilities of the gods, but he believed firmly in their capacity for evil. He knew how cruel and vicious they could be.

Goldan had a skill called Angel Advent—literally bringing down what, on Earth, would be considered an angel, to possess his body. Alda had his eye on this guy, that was for sure. Vandal wasn't about to take the risk of Goldan getting back to him.

"More than anything," Vandal finished, "I just hate you both."

"Gyaaaaaghaaaah—" It was impossible to tell where Goldan's scream ended and Raily's began. The sound could probably shatter glass. But it stopped immediately when a clear, shattering sound rang out. Their spirit bodies melted away, the fragments of their souls scattering like particles of light.

When Vandal saw this happen, he felt happiness from the bottom of his heart. He had felt the same thing when he had crushed Sercent's soul: a kind of clean elation, like the world had suddenly become a little bit more beautiful.

“—Okay. That leaves five,” Vandal said.

Heinz and two remaining allies, Count Thomas Palpapekk, and the progenitor vampire Gubamon. He wasn't sure if gods like Alda and Yupeon were in a place where he could reach or kill them, so he left them out. It was still quite a collection of people to punish.

He wasn't going to be finished any time soon.



“Now, a toast to our victory,” called Vandal.

“Cheers!”

Vandal and his allies had celebrated once upon returning from the robbery expedition, but now they were celebrating again to mark the true end to the war.

Four months ago, the pièce de résistance had been hamburg steaks consisting of dinosaur and orc mincemeat, geega eggs, and breadcrumbs made from the mountain of hard bread found in the expedition force's rations. It had been before the first onion harvest, so the results weren't quite enough to satisfy Vandal. But everyone else had loved it. Meals using mince had either never been developed here on Ramda or gotten lost somewhere along the way.

This time, the main dish was something else. Bowls that everyone was holding, containing ramen noodles.

“This looks like udon and pasta, but it’s completely different,” Zadilis commented.

“It’s good! Real good!” Borkz shouted.

Vandal had finally succeeded in creating the lye water required to bring out the ramen’s unique texture. After that, he simply had to make a device for producing the noodles and work on the sauce and soup a little. With that, something approximating ramen was created. It wouldn’t get people lining up outside the door, like in some of the best places on Earth, but Vandal thought it was at least better than the instant noodles he had experience with.

“The noodles are good, and the soup is delicious too. How do you make this, Van?” Basdia asked.

“I made the broth by simmering dinosaur bones,” Vandal replied. It had a taste similar to chicken broth, but with a richer flavor. Bones from carnivorous dinosaurs produced a certain characteristic twang, herbivores had a smooth aftertaste, and the long-necked ones came out a tad fishy.

“Young master,” Sam enthused. “All those years of research have finally paid off!”

“I guess it will almost be three years,” said Rita. “Making lye water is harder than making a new disease, huh.”

“Rita, I’m not sure that’s the best comparison.”

“Young master, this ramen lacks ketchup!” Saria reported.

“...I’ll try and fix that next time,” Vandal replied.

“King, what about tofu?” Braga asked.

“Braga, I think putting tofu in ramen might be a bit too much for you,” Vandal

said carefully. He was interrupted by Gobba slurping down his own ramen.

“Hmfgh gubabababagormpff!”

“Gobba, if there are words in there, I can’t hear them.”

Vandal had made plenty of noodles to go around, but the way some people were inhaling them, he was getting worried that there wouldn’t be enough.

Lefdia, who couldn’t eat herself, had been repeatedly feeding noodles to Vandal.

“Ooh, these are delicious! They are so different from the udon, even though they are made from flour as well!” Dalshia exclaimed.

Slurp, chew, chew, chew. Vandal was using magic to share his sense of taste with Lefdia, allowing her to enjoy the ramen as well. He chewed down another mouthful, doing his best to please them both.

“Say, Lord Van. You don’t have to go this far,” Talea said.

“This is all good training,” Vandal’s head replied—in the kitchen. Here, there were multiple Vandals floating in the air while they made more ramen. He had used Astral Projection to divide up his spirit body. Then he had used Substantiation on his hands, along with Mental Multitasking and Remote Control to create multiple chefs, each capable of cooking multiple dishes at once.

“All the other preparation is complete, so it’s just about boiling the noodles,” one Vandal admitted.

“Then putting them in the bowl,” said another.

“The desert sherbet just needs to be scooped out,” said a third.

“...When you talk,” said Eleonora, her eyes spinning, “maybe just one of you

could do it?"

"Huh? There is only one of me, Eleonora," said all of the Vandals together.

That was when he finally realized that, when he was working like this, it gave the impression of the room being full of different Vandals. From his point of view, it didn't feel that different from when he increased his number of heads. All Vandals were still Vandal, with the same unified memories and intentions. They didn't have their own unique drives or senses of self, and there was no need for them to talk among themselves.

"So many of you, Lord Van..." said Talea, practically drooling. "You wouldn't miss one of you, would you?"

"Please, Talea. There are distance restrictions, apart from anything else."

For now, he could only move about thirty feet from his main body that still housed his soul. He would probably be able to increase that distance by leveling his Remote Control skill. It would also be perfect for making an alibi for murder...although Vandal's negative thinking quickly led him to only be able to imagine a future with a stony-faced cop telling him "all the crazy stuff you can do puts you top of the suspect list."

"Shall we start serving the sherbet?" one of the Vandals said.

"Yay! Sherbet!" Pauvina shouted.

"Yay!"

"Baagh!"

The other youngsters, including Bildy's daughter Vabi and Basdia's daughter Jadal, immediately got excited. Vandal wasn't sure if he should include Rapieçage among them or not, but she seemed happy too.

In any case, the summer of Vandal's sixth year passed peacefully in Talosheim.

Skill level increased for Resist Maladies, Enhance Brethren, Soul Crusher, God Smiter, Cooking, Remote Control, Spirit Body, Mental Multitasking, and Substantiation!



Rodocolte, ensconced in his personal divine realm, had just finished maintenance on the reincarnation system. About the only thing such maintenance could amount to was checking to make sure there were no problems happening. His system was so polished and complete that it was capable of automatically correcting a certain degree of error. It was just when he started to wonder if maybe one of the resurrected should be dying on Origin around now, and whether anyone on Ramda had made contact with Vandal, when it happened.

The reincarnation system threw up an alert.

"What?! Impossible! There was nothing wrong a moment ago... A soul has vanished?!" Rodocolte was shocked by this major event—something that hadn't happened for more than ten thousand years.

He quickly started to adjust the system again. The loss of even a single soul had a large effect on the entire system. If a soul that was meant to be reborn after death instead vanished, without any adjustments, it would lead to a baby without a soul being born. This wasn't like a stillborn. It simply wouldn't have a

soul, but its brain would work normally, and its heart would beat, and it would grow and mature. As it did so, a soul that hadn't yet returned to the reincarnation cycle might enter the body and fuse with it, coming back to live via extraordinary means. And that was only one of lots of things that could possibly go wrong.

In order to prevent this, the system would assign a different soul to the empty resurrected. But that meant a different baby without a soul would then be produced. The repetition of this cycle could lead to serious system errors. Left unattended, it could give rise to children who remembered their entire previous lives, or who possessed strange special abilities.

"Hmmm. Two souls have vanished," Rodocolte noted. He continued to put emergency measures into place while investigating the souls that had vanished.

The soul of the human Bohmak Goldan wasn't such a problem. Alda had already put in a request after his death to turn him into a Hero Spirit or even a god, so his soul had been removed from active duty. Alda surely wouldn't be pleased, but the vanishing of his soul didn't have a direct effect on the system.

However, the loss of the soul of the human Raily had caused some system damage.

"What happened? Has the Demon King been revived?" Rodocolte wondered. Their souls were gone, meaning he could no longer view records from Raily and Goldan. Rodocolte had no other choice but to check the records of others who had been nearby. He looked at the records of the generals who had taken part in the expedition army, the holy warriors led by Goldan prior to their becoming undead themselves, and the soldiers and adventurers who had been in Valcheburg.

This led him to a surprising truth.

"They have been turned into undead. And the cause...is Hiroto Amamiya. Vandal, as he is now known."

Rodocolte had known that death attribute magic could make undead, but he was seeing it here on a much larger scale than expected. That alone still wouldn't have been enough to shock him, except...

"What's going on? How has he become this strong, while cursed by me? He's not as strong as he was when he turned undead on Origin, but he's close to it. And this volume of magical power! It's far beyond that allowed to mortals!"

Rodocolte had thought Vandal might circumvent the constraints on experience, but he hadn't expected him to have a Job. He realized that there were some pretty big holes in his curses. They resulted from Rodocolte not being all that interested in the Job and skill systems on Ramda. Furthermore, the curses opened up a large empty space in Vandal's soul, providing him with even more magical power than he had held, even on Origin.

There was a bigger problem than the Jobs and magical power, however. He was going around crushing souls.

"I can't believe Vandal has the same type of ability as the Demon King! This is bad!"

If Vandal kept on crushing souls, in the dozens or hundreds or more, he was going to cause insane damage to Rodocolte's system. It wouldn't collapse completely, perhaps, but it would cause an incalculable volume of bugs. If Vandal went completely wild and crushed tens of thousands of souls in a short period, reincarnation would cease to function on Ramda. No new children would be born, turning it into a world of the dead.

"I need to do something about this!" Rodocolte exclaimed. But there wasn't

much he could do. He couldn't risk going down there himself; that would be far too dangerous. He might ask Alda and the other gods but, considering the state of the world at the moment, he wasn't sure if they were in any position to help. He also didn't want them to find out about his ongoing plan to send in more resurrected. Rodocolte could also interfere with his system a little to create his own "angels" from high-quality souls, but finding such materials wouldn't be a quick process.

It seemed like he had to wait for the resurrected to start dying on Origin.

"What other choice is there? At least it looks like he has some restrictions on crushing souls, or maybe he has set rules for himself. That's the best explanation for why he has only crushed two by now," Rodocolte reflected. "I'll just have to wait for the other resurrected to make it to Origin."



"Mom, Messara told me that if I contract with four gods—the Devil God of Bones and Fangs, the Demon God of Lewd Skin, the Devil God of Fallen Flesh, and the Demon God of Internal Organs—I might be able to do something for you," Vandal reported.

"Hey, Vandal," Dalshia said gently. "I don't think those kinds of contracts would have your best interests at heart."



“Fair enough. We don’t have a lead on a god that deals with blood anyway,” Vandal said. “I guess we’ll go with the forbidden art of making a homunculus, then. I won’t be able to try that until I get to the library at the magicians’ guild.”

“Er, um, I’m not sure you should. They say Alda will unleash divine punishment on anyone who tries that.”

“Hmmm. Then it has to be the resurrection device. I just can’t fix it yet.” He was working on making straw paper while chatting with Dalshia about her resurrection.

Acquired the Alias “Unspoken Name”!

“Huh?”

He had picked something up, but he didn’t understand what it was. So he just put a pin in it for now.

—Name: Vandal

—Race: Dhampir (Dark Elf)

—Age: 6 years old

—Alias: Ghoul King, Eclipse King, Unspoken Name (NEW!) —Job: Poison Master

—Level: 9

—Job History: Death Mage, Golem Creator, Undead Tamer, Crusher of Souls —Status

Vitality: 168

Magical Power: 328119451

Strength: 117

Agility: 114

Muscle: 108

Intellect: 758

—Passive Skills

[Brute Strength: Level 2] [Rapid Healing: Level 3] [Death Attribute Magic: Level 5]

[Resist Maladies: Level 7 (UP!)] [Resist Magic: Level 1] [Night Vision]

[Spirit Pollution: Level 10] [Death Attribute Allure: Level 6] [Skip Incantation: Level 4]

[Enhance Brethren: Level 8 (UP!)] [Magical Power Auto Recovery: Level 3]
[Enhance Followers: Level 4]

[Poison Dispersal (Claws, Fangs, Tongue): Level 1]

—Active Skills

[Suck Blood: Level 6] [Limit Break: Level 5] [Golem Creation: Level 6]

[Non-Attribute Magic: Level 4] [Magic Control: Level 4] [Spirit Body: Level 6 (UP!)]

[Carpentry: Level 4] [Construction: Level 3] [Cooking: Level 4 (UP!)]

[Alchemy: Level 3] [Brawling Proficiency: Level 4] [Soul Crusher: Level 5 (UP!)]

[Simultaneous Activation: Level 4] [Remote Control: Level 5 (UP!)] [Surgery: Level 1]

[Mental Multitasking: Level 4 (UP!)] [Substantiation: Level 3 (UP!)]
[Cooperation: Level 1]

[Rapid Cognition: Level 2] [Command: Level 1] [Agriculture: Level 2 (NEW!)]

[Clothing Making: Level 1 (NEW!)]

—Unique Skill

[God Smiter: Level 2 (UP!)]

—Curses

[Unable to carry over experience from previous lives] [Unable to enter existing jobs] [Unable to personally acquire experience]



Special Chapter: Armor Sisters' Armor Contest

Dalshia, still stuck as a spirit, once suggested to Vandal that maybe she should become undead as well. Vandal had persuaded her it wasn't the best idea and so Dalshia had given up, putting her proposal in mothballs...but then those who should never have found out about it did exactly that.

"Young master! Let's head out to find something for Lady Dalshia to use when she becomes Living Armor!"

That moment—when Rita and Saria turned up with Sam to make this proposal—was when Vandal realized unwanted (spirit) ears had heard something they were never supposed to.

"Nothing wrong with being prepared, young master!" Saria enthused. "Even if Lady Dalshia doesn't become Living Armor, we can always give it to someone else!"

"...You do make a good point. Shall we head to a dungeon?" Vandal didn't want to throw cold water over all their excitement, and they didn't seem to be trying to force Dalshia to become one of them. They simply settled on finding potential armor for her as a recreational activity combined with some light training.

Vandal therefore decided to tag along.

"My apologies for my daughters, young master," Sam said. "I might also add..."

"I know," Vandal assured him. "I won't accept anything too revealing."

Having made that pact with Sam, they all set out for Borkz Demi-Dragon Plains. As searching for armor was at the top of the list this time, Vandal didn't hold anything back when taking out the mid-bosses. They therefore proceeded

with even greater efficiency than normal, cutting through dinosaurs and opening treasure chests with abandon.

They did find some suits of armor, but nothing especially nice.

“The design of this one is too boring. Rejected,” Vandal said. After all, they weren’t just looking for stats, but also a specific appearance. If someone was simply going to be wearing it in battle, stats were more important, but this was the armor that would form Dalshia’s actual body if she chose to become Living Armor. He couldn’t afford to ignore design when he was considering the body of his mother—even if Dalshia was never going to seriously consider it.

“This looks like some tough armor, but...rejected,” Sam said.

“You bet it’s rejected, Father. I wouldn’t let her near that,” Rita replied.

The full plate armor that Sam had found was undoubtedly intended for a woman, but the shoulders, knees, and chest sections were all mounted with huge-horned skulls.

“It does look like some kind of magic item, but it’s in terribly bad taste,” Vandal agreed.

Passing magical power through the armor gave it a burst of defensive strength and made it lighter, but also made the skull’s eye sockets glow blue. It didn’t seem to be cursed...but when he considered Dalshia wearing it, he could only envision a female berserker who had fallen into darkness. It might look quite good on Skeleton, though.

“This armor is too inefficient,” Rita said. “Rejected.”

The plate mail in question was also for a woman but, in contrast to the Skeletal Armor of Darkness (working title), this one was mainly white. The shapely design didn’t look especially wasteful to Vandal, but— “Blech, these

metal plates hanging down from the shoulders. There's no need for the parts around the neck, elbows, and knees either," Saria said.

She was identifying metal sections intended to protect areas with major arteries, such as the neck, and the joints of the armor itself. These were all important for protecting the life of a warrior and implemented in some form in all the best armor.

"I see where you're going. None of this stuff is needed with Living Armor," Vandal said. Living Armor was the actual body of the individual, meaning it didn't need anything special to protect itself. In fact, such bells and whistles might only serve to reduce the range of movement. The fact that the armor was their body also meant that damage to that very armor was the biggest threat they faced. Taking damage to their body due to bits of armor designed to protect someone wearing it would be both ironic and dumb. Vandal considered the possibility of Dalshia wearing this armor and getting defeated as a result. He could never accept that.

"From that perspective, highly revealing gear might be best suited to becoming Living Armor," Vandal realized. The smaller the actual body, the harder it would be to get hit by attacks, and the less chance there would be of serious injury. In the end, putting Saria and Rita in the equivalent of metal swimwear might work out for the best.

"Now that you've reached such a conclusion, young master, I have found the perfect armor to show you! Ta-dah!" With a flourish, Rita produced armor that could more aptly be described as some small metal parts connected together by belt straps.

"This is a strap to connect different sections of armor that protect vital areas," Sam noted. "It's made from mithril, so that's pretty good quality..."

"But this is far past the issue of overexposure. It's like something a flasher would want to wear," Vandal said.

The armor was simply far too skimpy. The stomach and back were completely exposed, just like the sisters', but the chest and crotch pieces basically made a micro-bikini, casting aside all pretense of functioning for protection. The gauntlets and greaves were terrible as well, but the body would be so exposed they were hardly worth mentioning.

"I think this would normally be worn either beneath other armor, or maybe over the top of it," Sam suggested. Armor normally wasn't worn directly against the skin to begin with: users would wear undergarments created especially for that purpose.

"That's probably the case here," Vandal said. "But that isn't always how it works when Living Armor is involved."

Since armor formed the actual body of the Living Armor, it felt strange for them to wear clothing, even if they did use Spirit Body and Substantiation to appear as they had done in life. It felt odd, apparently, to have something between their body and spirit body. It might just be how the sisters felt about it, or it could be something common to all Living Armor; at the moment there was no way to know which.

More than all of that—Vandal simply couldn't bring himself to imagine Dalshia wearing this armor.

"Rejected, I'm afraid," he said.

"That's a shame. It looks really easy to move around in," Rita said.

"Try and find something a little more focused on defense," Vandal suggested, trying to make sure no more underwear-type armor was brought before the

court.

“Young master, what about this one? It’s got a good design and offers good defense,” Rita said, showing off a suit of armor that seemed to have been blended quite tastefully with a dress. The upper body was protected by firm metal parts, while the lower part was made of skirt material.

“Look! Such a wonderful design! The chest and back and stomach are completely covered, and the skirt looks tough too!” Sam appraised.

“The interior of the skirt is even outfitted with pieces to protect the legs! The joints have a full range of movement. This looks perfect!” Rita added.

They had just been asked by Vandal to find something that was more than a fancy design, also offering defense, and now they had quickly found something that did both. Vandal couldn’t deny its potential. If Dalshia took this armor as her body, and then used Spirit Body to depict herself as she had been in life, she would look elegant and beautiful, no doubt.

“But the materials are just bronze and cotton. There doesn’t seem to be any magic applied,” Vandal said, raising the problem with this one—the materials. “The metal is a nice golden color, and the skirt is made of fine materials with lovely dye. It all looks nice...but it won’t take much of an attack to put a dent in this.”

“True,” Sam conceded. “Fire magic would burn the dress right off.”

Completed armor could have magic cast over it, turning it into a magic item and enhancing its toughness and resistance to magic. However— “Bronze and cloth both have limits on the amount of magic they can handle,” Vandal said.

Different materials had varying degrees of difficulty in applying magic to them, and varying degrees of resistance to having magic applied. It also

depended on the types of ornamentations applied, the dyes used, and the skill of the crafter and magician in performing their respective tasks.

“After turning her into Living Armor, I’m sure the armor would be enhanced somewhat by ranking up, but it’s better to start with the best possible armor,” Sam said.

“Which means, rejected,” Vandal said, dropping judgement on the skirt suit. “But I like the design. Let’s take it back with us for later reference.”

“It’s not easy to find the right armor,” Rita lamented.

“Oh well. Onto the next chest,” Saria said hopefully.

“With this many duds, we might be better leaving and coming back in,” Sam suggested—but then they had a run of better luck. As it turned out, a dungeon couldn’t spit out bizarrely shaped armor forever.

The chests started to turn up a selection of armor for women, made from excellent materials, with good stats and nice designs. Vandal, the sisters, and Sam took them all back to Talosheim and presented them to Dalshia.

“Even if you like one of them,” Vandal said, repeating himself but wanting to be clear, “we’ll only use it once we know that reviving you in any other way, such as reincarnation or a homunculus body, isn’t going to work.”

“Yes, yes, I do understand,” Dalshia replied with a nod.

The first suit of armor was presented by Rita.

“This tasteful piece is made from highest-quality steel, decorated with mithril. Don’t worry about the weight, ladies, because a little magic enhancement has those pounds piling off. The delightful cloth accents are all woven from monster fur, providing magical defense that’ll give your enemies’ MP a sapping, while the tasteful design will keep you from feeling overexposed!”

The armor in question didn't exactly fall within the metal bikini category, but a third of the bosom of any woman wearing it would still be exposed. The cloth wrap around the waist had a deep slit up the side, meaning plenty of thigh would be on display when the wearer moved around, and the cloth itself—aptly described as an “accent” in Rita’s spiel—was thin enough to practically see through. The entire suit looked like what would happen if a dancer’s outfit were turned into armor.

“I like it! It hides two thirds of the bosom, and you can’t see the naval at all. This is right about how much skin the ghouls show—I’d fit right in!” Dalshia enthused.

She and Rita were obviously seeing this quite differently from Vandal. Although his own perceptions, in their own way, were well out of whack, he thought this skimpy medieval pole-dancer affair was almost acceptable.

Next up, Saria wheeled in a full body suit in hardcore black.

“Lady Dalshia! I’m recommending this one for the coming combat season. Check out this chic design, with a black steel base and white gold overlay. You might feel the weight a little, but that only means you’re being better protected!” It was ostensibly designed for women, without any skulls or other tastelessly aggressive elements, and decorated with sophisticated white gold for an elegant finish.

“It does look heavy, but it also looks tough. And so pretty! But...” Dalshia paused for a moment. “I think it might be a little too big?”

The armor was indeed around ten feet tall. That went beyond a robust human or dark elf woman, and more into giantling territory.

“I think I’m about four feet too short to fill it out. If I curled into a ball, I could

probably fit into just the torso section.”

Vandal indicated for Saria to keep it moving.

“But this will be your body if you become Living Armor!” Saria, however, wasn’t giving up. “That means you don’t need to match up with your body size from when you were alive! I’m sure that’s how it works!”

“If we were talking a few centimeters, maybe. But I’d be worried about her filling out something that’s so much taller. We also don’t know if a spirit body can handle such an extension of her original size,” Vandal reasoned.

“Hmmm. I guess that could be right.”

“The toughness of this armor is just what I’m looking for, though,” Vandal consoled her. “Tough enough that Mom will never die again.”

“If I rank up and obtain Spirit Body, and it turns out the same size as I was when I was alive, that would be a problem,” Dalshia said.

In the end, they rejected the giantling armor due to its size. The only one left to present their pick was Sam.

“Here is my recommendation.” However, he didn’t produce armor, but rather a piece of paper that simply had “Let’s give it some more time” written on it.

“What’s the meaning of this, Father?” Rita asked.

“Exactly what it says,” Sam stated. “This is a body for Lady Dalshia we are talking about here! We don’t have to choose from just what we have on hand at the moment. We are sure to continue to collect armor from dungeons, many more times. Let’s give this search the time it requires.”

“Ah, right. Well said, Father,” Saria agreed.

“It also means we can use this as an excuse to go adventuring with the young

master again!” Rita said happily.

“Oh, Vandal, you’re still so popular!” Dalshia said happily.

That brought the first expedition to find armor for Dalshia’s body to an end. However, there would be a second, and then a third, not too far in Vandal’s future.

Special Chapter: Armor Sisters’ Armor Contest The End

Afterword

To those of you for whom this is the first time, nice to meet you, and to everyone else, welcome back. I'm Densuke, the author of this work. Thank you for picking up this book.

With this, the fifth volume, I have passed the deadly number four and arrived at my fifth publication. This is a feat that will surely go down in human history—oh, what am I talking about? Enough of that.

I have other good news. The first volume of *The Death Mage* comic from Takehiro Kojima has been released. There has also been something of a trend with internet novels being turned into anime in recent years. Maybe *The Death Mage* will become anime soon as well! I've been waiting to have a prophetic dream about it, but nothing has hit me yet. Hopefully it will turn out the same as my dreams about publication and the manga!

As some people might start by reading the Afterword, I'm not going to drop any big spoilers. The new heroine for the published edition, who first appeared in the previous volume, sees some action again in this one, and we also see some more characters coming in from the internet edition. Existing characters also get to show off what they can do, which I hope you will all enjoy. In particular, look out for the sisters on the cover. They have been part of the story since the first volume. Takehiro Kojima had already drawn their faces in the comic, but now Ban! has kindly drawn their reborn(?), sexy new forms! They also get up to all sorts of antics in “The Armor Sisters’ Armor Contest,” with Sam in tow.

Of course, our main character, Vandal, is also growing up. He's continuing his trajectory away from normality, after making careful preparations. I hope you enjoy the gross and grisly—ahem, bold and brave—way Vandal and his allies

take on their enemies.

You'll also see the return of someone key to the story, and the first appearances of people who have only been names until now! There's a lot going on in this one.

I've done my best to write a fun story, but it still feels like the afterword is the hardest thing for me. It sounds silly even to me, but I have more difficulty deciding what to write here than for a new story or fresh additions. It's still cold outside, so I'm too scared to walk around and think. It's not a good idea to wander at night, even close to home. I'm left with no choice but to sit and think, but then my family complain about how weird I'm acting. I can't play a cellphone game to take my mind off things because I still have a flip phone. I've considered upgrading, but my current phone does pretty much everything I need. It also stops me from getting hooked on some game or other and becoming enmeshed in microtransactions...although I do already spend a lot of money on books.

My apologies for the incoherent ramblings. I am running out of space and so I'll wrap things up. To my proofreader, editors, and all the staff at Hifumishobo, thank you all once again. I would also like to thank Ban! for the fantastic illustrations of my weird characters, and to apologize for asking him to design more weird and wonderful ones this time. To everyone involved in the publication of this book, and to all of my readers for your support—thank you all so much! I look forward to seeing you in the next volume!

—Densuke

Glossary

Monsters

Ghoul Tyrant

The highest race ever confirmed for a ghoul. Boasts a body rivaling that of a giantling and an increase to four arms, with a lion-like head that looks ready to fight the king of the beasts—and win.

Generally serves as a king of hundreds of ghouls, meaning they almost always have Enhance Brethren. It has been a thousand years since a confirmed case of a Ghoul Tyrant, however, with some scholars suggesting that Ghoul Tyrants cannot result from a ranked-up ghoul, but rather by an aberration at birth.

Jobs

Axe Lord

A Job Change allowed when an Axe Warrior has reached level 100 and has Axe Proficiency at level 6 or higher. Capable of learning a variety of skills specialized for the use of axes, including Status Boost With Axe Equipped, which provides a boost to all stats when the holder wields an axe.

Holding this Job is equivalent to a statement of axe skill. An Axe Lord can easily find work with nobility, become a teacher of axe techniques, or even create their own style and open a training hall of their own. Among adventurers, those holding this skill are generally at least grade B.

Servant Warrior

Also known as Sword Gladiator. Someone considered to be a slave and possessed of close combat skills may change to this Job when the one considered their master or owner gives them permission. It is not social systems or mental state that results in them being considered a slave, but rather the presence of something that proves their status, such as a slave's collar, tattoo, or brand. Skill modifiers are basically the same as for Warrior, but include modifiers for Limit Break, Toughness, Strength Boost, and Enhance Self: Slave, which boosts one's stats when in servitude to another. However, unlike Warrior, this Job gets no modifiers to Armor Proficiency, so it isn't suited to shield bearers.

Crusher of Souls

A Job that someone can change to after they have crushed at least one soul. Offers modifiers to the acquisition of skills like Soul Crusher, Spirit Body, Remote Control, and Mental Multitasking, with a large boost in magic and intelligence at the expense of little growth in anything else.

Although the name of the Job makes it sound offense-oriented, at the point of acquiring this Job the holder already has the ability to crush souls, so it mainly exists to complement the Soul Crusher skill.

Skills

Substantiation

A skill that allows parts of the body that have no substance to be made corporeal. Mainly learned by astral-type monsters, such as ghosts and specters, that are created when spirits are polluted by magic and become monsters.

The substantiated parts will then take regular physical damage, but as they aren't actually flesh and blood, the damage taken is less than that from silver or magic items. While this skill provides a state closer to having a corporeal body than Spirit Body, it cannot be said to be an improved version of that skill, since it takes damage and is affected by forces such as gravity, when in effect. Vandal is the only confirmed living person to have acquired Substantiation.

Aliases

Eclipse King

Acquired by becoming the king of Talosheim, but wishing to take the Alias of Eclipse King rather than Sun King, with more than ninety percent of the population of Talosheim agreeing to this change.

Primarily gives the effects of Enhance Brethren to everyone ruled by the Eclipse King, even humans, elves, or dwarves. It also allows the Dusk Vision skill to be obtained by races that don't have it, and Night Vision by those that do. Races weak to sunlight or moonlight may further obtain resistances to them.

Unspoken Name

An Alias acquired by someone whose existence is known to those with a certain level of authority within numerous forces or factions, and yet said parties behave carefully in order to ensure they don't apply an Alias with a slip of the tongue.

The God of Law and Life, Alda, and his associated gods; the Amidd Empire's Emperor, Mashukzal; and three progenitor species vampires had all been taking care not to give Vandal an Alias, which is why he got this one instead. It has no

real effect, merely indicating that the individual bearing it is feared and despised, at least at a national level, and at the divine level at most. If people find out someone has this Alias, it is normally taken to mean they are an extremely dangerous person.

If those who are being careful not to award an Alias start to call the individual in question by a suitable Alias, this one will disappear.

Densuke

Resides in Saitama Prefecture. Has loved light novels since his childhood and has been writing them himself for close to twenty years. He was aiming to become an author of orthodox fantasy but kept getting distracted along the way. After many twists and turns, he won an award during the Fourth Internet Novel Awards, and achieved his debut as an author. He likes pizza and chicken skin senbei and works out every day. He likes undead heroines the best.

The Death Mage Volume 5

(Yondome ha Iya na Sizokusei Majutusi vol. 5) © DENSUKE 2019

© BAN! 2019

© HIFUMISHOBO 2019

Originally published in Japan in 2019 by HIFUMISHOBO Co., LTD

English translation rights arranged through TOHAN CORPORATION, TOKYO

ISBN: 978-1-64273-467-6

No part of this may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the publisher. For information contact One Peace Books. Every effort has been made to accurately present the work presented herein. The publisher and authors regret unintentional inaccuracies or omissions, and do not assume responsibility for the accuracy of the translation in this book. Neither the publishers nor the artists and authors of the information presented in herein shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential or other damages.

Written by Densuke

Illustrated by Ban!

English Edition Published by One Peace Books 2024

One Peace Books

43-32 22nd Street STE 204 Long Island City New York 11101

www.onepeacebooks.com

Table of Contents

1. [Chapter One: Foes Flying Into the Flame](#)
2. [Chapter Two: The Crowning of the Eclipse King](#)
3. [Chapter Three: Revenge Played Out Large](#)
4. [Chapter Four: Repossession, Repollution](#)
5. [Chapter Five: After the Closing Bell, A Lively Launch](#)
6. [Special Chapter: Armor Sisters' Armor Contest](#)
7. [Afterword](#)
8. [Glossary](#)
9. [Colophon](#)