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AUTHOR:  
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ILLUSTRATIONS BY:  
DaiXt  
KUROGIN (DIGS)

# BLACK SUMMONER

THE RISING OF THE BATTLE JUNKIE



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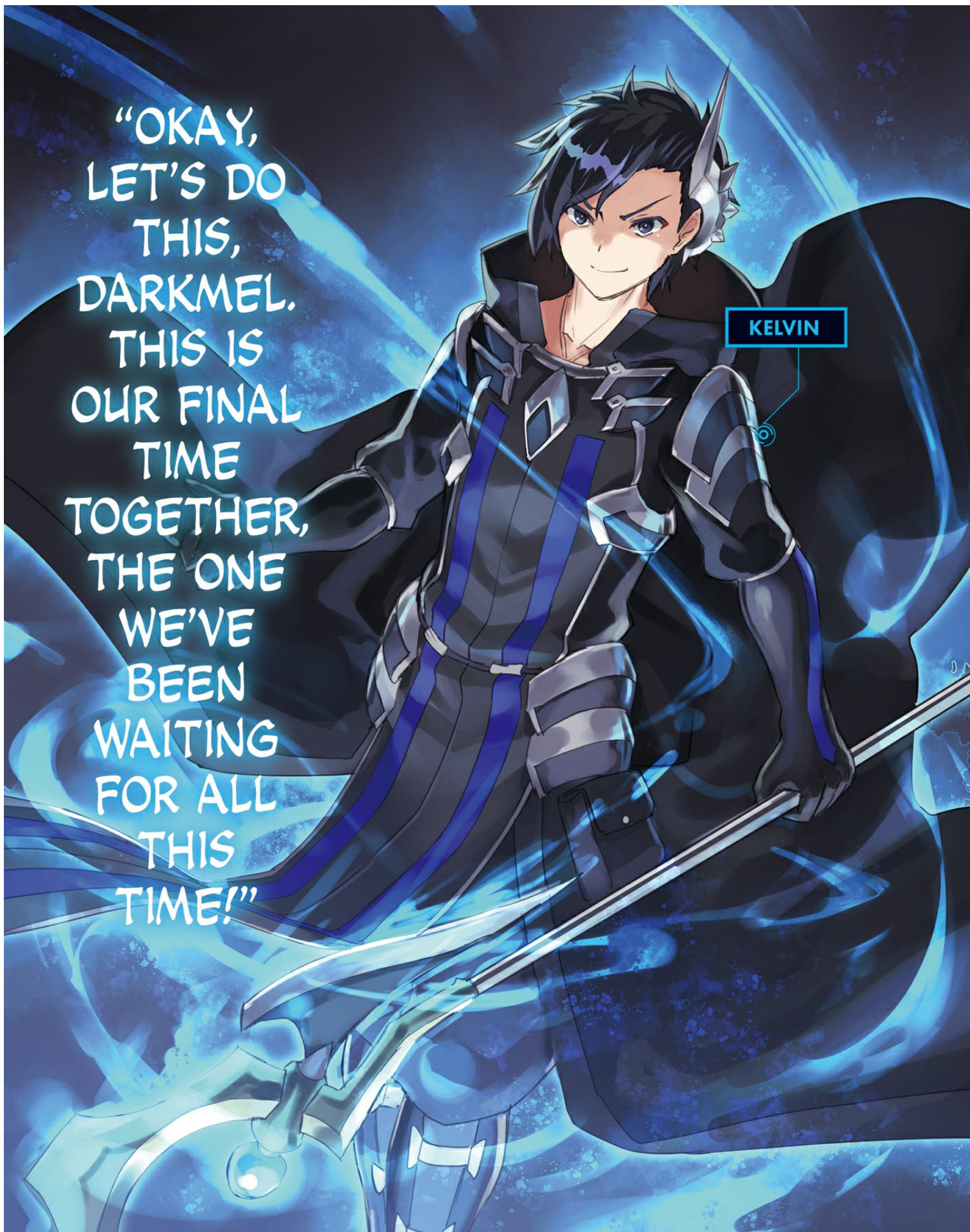






“OKAY,  
LET’S DO  
THIS,  
DARKMEL.  
THIS IS  
OUR FINAL  
TIME  
TOGETHER,  
THE ONE  
WE’VE  
BEEN  
WAITING  
FOR ALL  
THIS  
TIME!”

KELVIN





# BLACK SUMMONER

## Characters



### Kelvin Celsius

Summoner who gained powerful skills in exchange for memories of his past life while transmigrating from Japan. Constantly seeking battle with powerful foes.  
Alias: Grim Reaper

## Kelvin's Companions



### Efil

Kelvin's slave and a high elf girl. A perfect maid, her love for her master included.



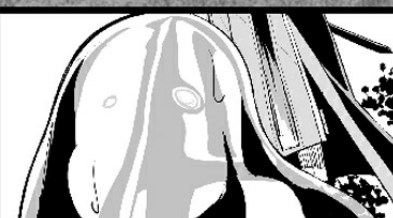
### Sera

A beautiful demon in Kelvin's service. Daughter of the previous Demon Lord. Ignorant and knowledgeable in equal measure.



### Rion Celsius

A hero summoned by Kelvin who became his half-sister. Has a rather skewed view of what it means to be a little sister.



### Clotho

The first monster Kelvin ever took on as a Follower. Its Storage and ability to create materials make it a key player!



### Melfina

Goddess of Reincarnation (currently on leave). Refers to herself as Kelvin's wife. Eats a lot.



### Gerard

The dark knight who serves Kelvin. Dotes on Ruka and Rion as if they were his own grandchildren.



### Shutola Trycen

Trycen's princess. Currently freeloading at Kelvin's place. Every day is a blast!



### Ange

Former Apostle. Now happily enslaved to Kelvin.



### Bell Baal

A former Apostle. Made up with her older sister, Sera, after a fierce fight. Seems like a typical prodigy but is actually pretty awkward on the inside.



### Sylvia

Delighted she got to reunite with Shutola. Now searching Abyssland for Sister Ellen.



### Ema

Sylvia's adventuring companion. Relieved she has been reunited with Shutola. The type to chop things with a greatsword using brute strength.



## The Black Goddess and her Apostles

A group that blindly believes in DarkMel and aims for the destruction of the world. They have declared war on the entire world from their flying giant battleship, the *Elpis*.



### DarkMel

Melfina's hatred made manifest.

Her goal is to destroy the current world and remake it, all for Kelvin's sake.



### The Third Seat: Creator

Real name is Jildora.

Though he was defeated by Gerard, he has now been revived as the machine-dragon Jildora Sun thanks to the death of Tristan.

## The Apostles of Elearis

An organization that worships Elearis as the Goddess of Reincarnation and schemed to resurrect her and bring her back into the world. Have now made peace with Kelvin and the rest.



### The Fourth Seat: Protector

Real name is Serge Flore.

The previous Hero. Possesses the unique skill Absolute Gospel. Was the one who invited Kelvin's group to Abyssland.



### The Seventh Seat: Reviver

Real name is Estoria Kranweltz.

Currently tasked with protecting Sister Atra while in her Sister Ria persona.

## The Holy Empire of Deramis

A country that worships the Goddess of Reincarnation. Headed by the Pope. Connected to the Rizean Empire on the Western Continent through the Crux Bridge, but is at odds with them.



### Colette

The Oracle of Deramis. Summoned the Heroes. Her fanaticism makes her a bit sick in the head.



### Shiga Setsuna

A Hero summoned from Japan. Serious and diligent. Cleans up the problems that Touya causes.



### Kuromiya Miyabi

A Hero summoned from Japan. One quarter Russian. Her thoughts are a complete mystery.



### Kanzaki Touya

A Hero summoned from Japan. Lucky pervert. Dual wields. Very oblivious to signs of affection.



### Mizuoka Nana

A Hero summoned from Japan. Partnered with Mun-chan, a flame dragon. Has a comforting aura.



### Phillip

The Pope of Deramis and Colette's father. Like Serge, he was a member of the party of Ancient Heroes.



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ILLUSTRATOR: DAIXT, KUROGIN (DIGS)



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# Chapter 1: Final Battle

*Central Ocean:*

Though this development had been terribly abrupt, I was currently being moved while in Melfina's arms. As for why I was being carried by Melfina, well, let's think back.

First was Melfina and DarkMel's fight. At the end of their fierce exchange of attack and defense, DarkMel's domain had been cleanly broken. They must have synced up perfectly as they threw their strongest blows, and the moment their fists met in the air, the outer space-like area that had surrounded us shattered with the sound of breaking glass. The tinkling started from one place at first. Then, like peeling skin, it spread everywhere in an ominous chorus of destruction. Since I was completely out of MP, I didn't have anything left with which to respond to this situation.

*No matter what, I need to warn my friends about this.*

I hurried to blast out a telepathic message through the Network, telling them to evacuate the ark. With that done, the next thing on my list was securing my own safety.

*I'm begging you, what little magic I have left, please be enough,* I wished as I tried to cast Fly. This domain's destruction was already a done deal, and I had no idea where we would be flung once it was. In the worst case, I could be thrown out of the ship entirely. So, my spell was in preparation for the worst in order to prevent Mel from worrying and getting in the way. It was all I could do at that moment.

"Hraaaaagghhhh!"

"Yooooouuuuuuuu!"

With their wings spread as wide as they would go, the two combatants continued to raise their power, heedless of the destruction of the area around them. The more power they put behind their fists, the brighter their halos



glowed. At this point, they were already too bright for me to look at.

Then, the next moment, the domain broke as I'd predicted it would. The backdrop that was made to look like space flew away, and our surroundings changed drastically. The pieces that used to be the scenery turned into particles of light before scattering, revealing the sanctuary we were in that had, up until now, been hidden by DarkMel's domain. It was probably best for me to ignore any common sense I had or consideration that we were inside a battleship. What was unveiled before my eyes was an exact copy of the Great Cathedral in Deramis. Even the atmosphere—or should I say aura? Feel of the air? It was exactly the same as well.

Still, that didn't stop Melfina and DarkMel from fighting. There was no way something like the austerity of the place or the feel of the atmosphere would stop two sworn enemies from fighting, and the two of them gave no signs of stopping.

*Or maybe they're so focused on their battle that they didn't even notice the collapse of DarkMel's domain? Yeah, that seems really likely. That happens to me every once in a while too. Getting caught up in something is only natural. If I was fighting someone just as strong as I am, then it would be even more natural.*

"You're pretty good!"

"You too! As expected of me!"

*Oho, isn't that the pipe organ from the Apostle headquarters in Abyssland there? In the end, I wasn't able to break it back then, and DarkMel was able to make off with it all in the ark...*

And now, it had been caught up in all this destruction and been destroyed really anticlimactically. DarkMel hadn't even tried to fix it, probably because she didn't even notice it'd been destroyed.

While enjoying the battle between two deities from my seat up close, I indulged in my own sentimentality, analyzed the fight, and worried about my surroundings all at once. I was approaching a state where I could feel the whole suite of human emotions simultaneously. I'd had Parallel Processing running full speed the whole time, so my brain probably resembled one that had been



running without sleep while on drugs. And yet, I wasn't actually fighting in this giddy heightened state, so my mind was only getting clearer and clearer.

That was why I instinctively understood that in a moment, the entire sanctuary would be pulverized into dust, the aftereffects of which would sink the entire battleship.

*Now I understand how Sera feels when she gets a prophetic feeling! Just kidding. Now's not the time to be messing around, though.*

It was true that my mind was much sharper than usual, but my ragged body couldn't keep up. In the end, it was all I could do to dodge crumbling chunks of rubble. If the *Elpis* were to sink, then getting out would be extremely tough for me.

*It'd be such a joke if I weren't able to save myself after sending that telepathic message to everyone. Maybe I have enough in me for one more cast of Rubber Counter?*

I suddenly gasped in alarm. Both Melfinas had already busted through the wall of the Great Cathedral and forcefully opened a hole in the battleship's armor plating from the inside. They were fighting all over, free in the air. As a battle junkie myself, I couldn't help but respect and be in awe at their fight, which was on such a high level that they were able to ignore the terrain completely. Unfortunately, the ship, like this cathedral, would probably be going down soon. All I wanted was to continue watching their fight, but there was no replacement for my life in the end. I put all of my Parallel Processing ability into intoning another spell, using what little MP I had left to its fullest. It seemed all the emotions I was feeling were translated into my magic, as I was somehow able to create a barrier on the level of Rank S.

"Great, this should somehow—"

"We're escaping, honey."

But right after I created that barrier, Melfina had shown up out of nowhere. She treated my barrier with as much respect as she had the ark's walls, busting right through them and picking me up by the armpits without waiting for any sort of consent.



*All my efforts in making that wall turned to nothing right before me... Wait, that doesn't matter!*

“Whoa, Mel?!”

“No need to worry. I am the Melfina with a clean and pure heart!” Melfina boasted, a musical lilt in her voice.

Though I bragged about my mental state being unusually clear and sharp, I had been caught and picked up all too easily. It was fine, since Melfina was the one doing it, but I wouldn't be able to face Sera like this.

*Sorry, I got too full of myself. But Mel, nobody with a clean and pure heart would actually say it like that.*

“Ah, not that! What happened to DarkMel?! Did you kill her?!”

“No, not yet. We exchanged punches many times and I have damaged and exhausted her, but as expected of myself, I should say...no matter what, we are evenly matched. Look, I'm all worn out too, though my heart is being fulfilled as we speak.”

“O... Ooohhh?!”

That sneak attack from Mel had me blushing so hard I thought I might fall into a panic, but I didn't have that sort of time. Mel kicked off the ground at an incredible speed, bringing me along with her as we flew through the hole in the wall.

::I'd love to take our time and talk, but we should get out first. I ended up getting caught up in things and snapped this ship like a twig... Ah, please reply with telepathy. You'll bite your tongue otherwise.::

*Like a twig?* I replied. *You... No, never mind. That doesn't matter. Judging from the surroundings, I can kind of tell.*

::I would expect nothing less, honey. Then let us get out of here for real. We're going after DarkMel!::

*What? You can go faster tha—*

And, well, that was how I got here, carried around by Mel as the situation demanded. While Melfina had prioritized my escape, DarkMel had left the ark



on her own. The destruction of the *Elpis* had oddly enough served as a gong between rounds for the deities.

As we were leaving the battleship, which was falling apart around us, I was able to witness the *Elpis* snap in two from the middle. *Ah, exactly like a twig. There's no better way to describe it.* Once again, I was impressed by how incredible Melfina as a goddess and DarkMel as someone trying to usurp her were.

::The principle governing everything DarkMel does is your enjoyment, honey. I don't think she would do something as base as taking hostages, even if the end is at hand now.::

*Yeah, I know. If she were to try anything, it'd be something likely to make me happy, wouldn't it?*

::That's pretty annoying as well, though... Anyway, it's goodbye to the ark. We're going straight outside!::

We finally made it out of the battleship, which was amazingly large, and found ourselves under the big blue sky. I wanted to thank someone from the bottom of my heart since I'd survived to see the sun again, but as expected, I didn't have much time to leisurely enjoy that feeling.



Now that we'd left the *Elpis*, which had indeed "snapped like a twig," we hurried to get a sense of the situation. The giant battleship made a huge noise as it started to fall out of the sky, and the Aqua Swallows were trying to leave with full haste so as not to get caught in it. They must have had good acceleration, as not a single one was caught under the sinking battleship, though there were armored angels and angel monsters everywhere. Now that the *Elpis*, which had been spewing them out endlessly, was no more, they would soon be unable to enjoy the superiority of their numbers. They probably wouldn't pose a threat at this point. I could leave them to the Aqua Swallows, so I stopped paying attention to them.

::Honey.::

*Yeah, let's go there.*



After doing a loop to look around, it was easy to see what piece of the battle was most in danger of being lost. With me still being carried by Melfina, we headed for the group of Efil, Sera, and Gerard—they were the strongest among the people who had stayed outside to combat the enemy forces.

::Master! You're okay!::

::Whuh— Princess?!::

::I was revived thanks to the power of love. V for victory!::

::You're giving the peace sign when you're basically in tatters... There's a lot I wanna say, but I'll make this short.::

::Before that, do something about the way you look.::

As we arrived, we were met with joy and astonishment in equal measure, but they didn't fail to point out that I was being carried by Mel either. Silently, Mel released me.

*Now then, I'd love to give my friends a hug since we've reunited and all, but there's something else I should be doing.*

I shared what had happened inside the *Elpis* with everyone through telepathy, immediately starting an exchange of information as, at the same time, Sera and the others shared what had happened with them. From them defeating the machine-dragon, to the revival of Jildora and DarkMel's attack—which had resulted in Jildora's unexpected instant death—to what had happened to its body, which brought us to the current situation.

::The moment Jildora cried out, that cool thing was already there, wrapped around him. There were several layers, and he turned into that.::

*A black sphere...* I mused.

What she pointed at was a black sphere that was floating in the air. I wasn't sure how to feel about describing it as cool instead of gross or disgusting, but as Sera had said, I could see signs of tentacles. It was certain that inside, covered in layers of tentacles, were DarkMel and the machine-dragon.

*Has someone tried attacking it?* I asked.

::Nope. I had a really bad feeling about it, so for now we're just watching. It

hasn't moved since it became like that, so we were just talking about what to do.::

*Sera's instinct was on the mark. Those tentacles are more dangerous than they appear.*

::Seems like it. According to your information, Master, anything that touches it is weakened....::

*Still, what to do? I thought to myself. Leaving it all up to Clotho, who's got a good matchup with the tentacles, is an option, but if DarkMel were to unleash her power rivaling a deity's here, Melfina would be the only one able to deal with her. Also, Clotho was in my pool because it had just expended all of its MP. I wanted to come forward myself, I did! But in the end, is relying on Melfina going to be the best choice anyway?!*

"Hey, foolish son of mine. If you've got the time to wallow in your troubles, then explain things so I understand it."

"Ah, sure. Touching that is dangerous. It's better if you give up on the idea of attacking it directly."

Sera's father was right beside her, and I reflexively answered his question. It was the first time anything had been said out loud.

"Oh? You're finally here, honey. I was so caught up in merging that I didn't realize it until you spoke. As your wife, as someone who loves you, I'll need to do better."

All of us gasped in surprise as a voice came from inside the sphere. Instead of sounding excited or tired, the voice spoke in a gentle, slow but still clear manner. After that, the tentacles that had been surrounding whatever was inside gradually unfurled. Everyone was wary of DarkMel, including me. Then, I laid eyes on what was inside: DarkMel's changed form.

The unwound tentacles compressed together tightly, becoming a part of the machine-dragon as they were stowed inside its jet-black body. Her body, not transformed from the sphere, was familiar to me. It looked very much like Tristan's familiar, which I'd seen before entering the *Elpis*. However, it was colored completely differently, with armor opposite the white-and-blue armor,



which removed the sense of divinity that it used to have. In fact, it was now entirely black. When I looked closer, I saw that there were many details shaped by tentacles, which I could see wriggling about ominously.

I compared it to the form of Jildora after he was revived, which I had learned about from the information exchange earlier. The change from the mandala that Jildora had deployed from his back was great and awful. It was shining...technically, but it was like the shine was going through a filter of blood; it was a red so dark that it was basically black. As it was, it looked like a dark or wicked god, the kind you'd see worshipped by evil cults.

"It seems my affinity for this flesh is better than I thought it would be. Is it because it's made from parts of divine pillars, which were made by Elearis? Yes, yes...wonderful. With this, I'm sure Jildora is feeling fulfilled."

The black machine-dragon's body had nothing above the neck. Thanks to DarkMel's attack, the dragon head had been torn off. In exchange, DarkMel sat where the head would have been. Well, she wasn't really *sitting*, I guess. Her bottom half was buried in the stump of the neck, and their connection was reinforced by tentacles. Just like a mermaid's bottom half is a fish, she was a Dragon King from the neck down. Her light armor, which had been damaged in her fight with Melfina, had become even more sinister.

"Very good!"

"Honey, your inner voice is leaking out. And your feelings are showing on your face."

Once DarkMel unfurled her black wings, I found myself unable to hold back my own body and heart, and I ended up letting my real feelings slip out of my mouth. I mean, I had never expected a surprise like this! Anybody would grin. I definitely grinned.

"You operate as usual to the very end, don't you, honey? You're so lovely. But that ends now. It's a bit sad to entrust all of my wishes to my last resort, but needs must. Goddess of Reincarnation Melfina, do you have the courage to face me one-on-one as I am now?"

Melfina didn't answer DarkMel's challenge. The fact that DarkMel immediately got full of herself as soon as she gained the upper hand was very

much like a side of Mel. But DarkMel, having shown herself and her unfathomable power, left even Melfina, who had regained her original strength, in a cold sweat. Efil and the others were feeling DarkMel's intimidating pressure in person for the first time, and they withered in the face of it. I was the same, as DarkMel had become even greater than when I had faced her. Our reactions were, in a sense, natural and to be expected. The gap in power was too great.

*Mel, be honest. What are our chances?* I asked.

::Honestly, this is a pretty bad turn of events. While I'm fatigued from our earlier fight, DarkMel in that form isn't showing any sign of exhaustion at all. It's not her putting up a front either. I'm sure she's fully recovered.::

*That feels like good news and bad news at the same time. What about her strength now?*

::She's clearly gotten stronger. Enough to overtake me as the Goddess of Reincarnation. I expected her to pull some kind of trick when she escaped the flying ship, but I didn't expect it to be this powerful... I made an error in judgment. No, helping you escape, honey, was the best choice in the end. I don't regret that, but....::

*It's also a fact that we can't win like this, huh?*

DarkMel's goal was to have me enjoy myself. She had made plans and factored in my strength, my bonds with my friends, and the power of Melfina as the Goddess of Reincarnation; and her purpose was to crush all of that anyway and give me the greatest time enjoying that fight. DarkMel was probably so fast that she could even sense the small moment needed for a telepathic exchange, but she most likely wouldn't do anything during it. She would simply watch and wait for the moment I gave my final order.

::There's no choice but to stop, is there?::

*What? Stop? You mean this fight?* I asked.

::Hee hee, no. I will pay the price and give you my final blessing as the Goddess of Reincarnation, honey. No questions; no matter what happens, this is our only hope.::

*H-Hey!*



Heedless of what I was saying, Melfina forcefully gave me what she referred to as her final blessing.



Power overflowed from my body. I looked down at my hands and saw that they were wrapped in a beautiful white and blue light that reminded me of Melfina as the goddess. Just looking at the light filled my heart with warmth. It calmed me to the depths of my soul. The light was also surrounding those around me, like Gerard and Sera. That went for Boga and Mdofarak too, and—*Hm? Not Efil? And not father-in-law either. So there are those with the light and those without?*

Suddenly, DarkMel spoke up with a dissatisfied look on her face. “Melfina, you’re going to step down from your position of your own free will?!”

She’d said “step down.” Of course, that was probably referring to Melfina’s title.

“What does she mean, Mel? This light, is this the blessing you were just talking about? Just what did you sacrifice?! Hey!”

Mel had put her hand on my shoulder, and I could somehow feel her presence becoming fainter. In fact, she was actually looking somewhat transparent. The moment I saw her like that, I started to imagine the worst.

“Don’t worry. It’s not what you’re thinking, honey. I won’t disappear. I just quit being the Goddess.”

“Q-Quit?! What for?!”

“In order to use our last resort to avoid the destruction of the world.”

“It was something prepared in case of the revival of the evil gods; a phenomenon in which Apostles can temporarily ascend to godhood,” DarkMel explained. “By abdicating her position as Goddess, she can redistribute the power she had in that role. I never imagined you would have thought of that. Are you sure? It’s a double-edged sword to this world, you know?”

“I know.”

DarkMel seemed as unhappy as ever, her air of superiority having now been

completely forgotten. I was sure that there was still something behind all this, something that I hadn't even considered.

::Listen to me, honey. I won't disappear, but for reasons I won't say, time is of the essence. From now on, open up this conversation to everyone you can and I'll explain about this light.::

I paused for just a moment before replying. *Let me hear it.*

::As DarkMel just said, I used my authority to temporarily raise my Apostles to the domain of gods. This time, the Apostles are you, honey, and your Followers.::

*My Followers... I thought to myself. Which is why Efil and my father-in-law aren't affected—I didn't form a contract with them.*

::Stepping into the realm of gods means that anyone affected with my light will have the same abilities as me. Please think of it like you all now have the unique skill Sympathetic Resonance and your stats are now borrowing from mine, only it applies to more than one person. This power is so great that no one would ever normally be able to use it fully, but the level of your senses should also have been raised so that you can.::

I switched back to the Network. *The effects are so nice and well-thought-out, I'm kind of scared to listen to the rest...*

::That's not all. Just like Sympathetic Resonance, as long as I, the source, am okay, you will not be affected by status effects or status debuffs. Nothing will happen, even if you touch DarkMel's tentacles.::

*That's so amazing, it's almost like cheating. But doesn't that mean if something happens to you we're all in trouble?*

::Yes, it does. That's why...:: Melfina's Summoning undid itself as she returned to my pool. ::I'm doing this.::

*I see. That certainly is the safest option.*

Back when Melfina was using her artificial body, her stats didn't change even when she went into my pool. In essence, even with her in my pool, the light would keep its power.



::I'm going to butt in here,:: said Sera. ::I get that this power is awesome, but DarkMel just said that this is a double-edged sword to the world. What did she mean by that? It seems like you're in a hurry too, Mel, so there's something else to this, isn't there?::

Sera had said everything that I wanted to say. *Yes, that's exactly it!*

::Honestly, if things stay as they are, the world will collapse,:: Melfina informed us.

::Uh...huh?:: I think all of us replied at once.

::I said that the world will collapse. After all, while this is happening, there is no deity for this world. This method was made so that if the ancient evil gods somehow revived, then the current deity would be able to empower their Apostles to go out and subjugate them. It's a sort of heretical back door that will also destroy the world along with the evil gods if it were to fail. Put simply, uhhh...it's like Ragnarok? At any rate, it means that my back is against the wall! I am! Betting everything! On the friends in whom I trust!::

*Uh, no, wait...huuhhhh?! I cried out telepathically.*

I was shocked. But the effects of the light quickly asserted themselves, and my feelings were put under control. *Man, this light is convenient! And it's so pretty for being a heretical back door! Oh, it seems trying to force my emotions into overdrive doesn't work either.*

"Hee hee! From that restlessness of yours, I see you understand what's going on, huh?"

"You knew, DarkMel?"

"Of course! Who do you think I am? But neither I, DarkMel, nor I, Melfina, should have wished for the collapse of the world...or so I thought, but it seems the white me is a gambler. To be honest, I never expected her to do this in the heat of the moment."

A black spear formed in DarkMel's hands. It looked exactly like Luminary or Eclipse, only bigger.

*Seriously, you can just make something of that level on the spot?*

“Fine. I will stop the collapse myself by taking the position of Goddess. Just like a goddess, I will save the world. There’s no time left to be dawdling, honey. You don’t want to lose the world either, right? Let’s enjoy fighting forever and ever, okay? If you want, take up your weapons. Breathe in sync with your comrades and fight united. I will satisfy you, even with the power of a deity!”

As she shouted, a sinister type of magic flared up around DarkMel, along with extreme killing intent. I didn’t have to say anything; my friends knew how I felt.

*I see, so we all feel the same.*

Even though DarkMel stood in front of us, a tough enemy, and she’d announced such a crazy thing, no one was hesitant or anything anymore. It was probably thanks to the light enveloping us, but our feelings had always been there, and we’d always shared them.

Through the Network, I said, *Efil, take my father-in-law and retreat somewhere safe. Mdo will mainly be sniping, so I don’t mind if you take her with you.*

After a moment’s pause, Efil replied, ::I...understand. I regret that I am unable to fight alongside you. At the very least, take this.::

*Yeah, thanks.*

Efil cast Bursting Heat on Mel, who manifested a part of herself from my pool to receive the buff. Now all of our first attacks would have double the power.

::Good luck!::

Efil rode on Mdofarak, and they flew off along with my father-in-law. I had expected him to object, but surprisingly, he allowed himself to be taken away.

“Don’t give me that face. I know my own strength. Foolish son of mine, I’m leaving Sera to you. You’re pretty much the only man capable of protecting my beloved daughter, after all.”

“F-Father?!”

*I never thought my father-in-law could say such things... It seems the world really is ending. Yeah, I can’t lose now.*

::Right now, there are several lives within DarkMel,:: said Melfina. ::The Light



Dragon King Suncrest, Deus Ex Machina, and Jildora, who is acting as a core that produces energy. Then there's DarkMel, who sits at the center of everything—defeating her means destroying the other four as well, most likely.::

::What do we do then, Princess?:: asked Gerard.

::You must destroy DarkMel's real body, which is at its head, break the red mandala that's deployed on its back, and destroy the core Jildora that is the fuel source. Even if you get most of them, just one will allow Jildora to fully revive. In that sense, this is a race against time.::

*In other words, this is a free-for-all, isn't it? This is great! What a ride!* I cried telepathically.

Our plans had been decided. However, even after all that, DarkMel was still willing to wait. She really was a great one.

"Okay, let's do this, DarkMel. This is our final time together, the one we've been waiting for all this time!"



The die had been cast. Our fight, on this huge stage which was a compilation of all that came before it, would take place over the ocean, where there would be fewer unintended consequences while we brought out everything we had. There were things happening around us, like the ocean being choppy, the sky being dyed the colors of Abyssland, or huge water tornadoes spontaneously opening up using seawater. Those might have been signs of the coming collapse. Each and every one was small potatoes compared to DarkMel, but it hadn't been long since they'd started to happen. If things dragged out, it would only get worse. I couldn't look on it lightly...although there was a part of me thinking that this kind of setting was the perfect backdrop for our fight...or something...

Facing off against DarkMel were me and Sera using Fly, Gerard riding Boga, plus Mdotharak, who had left the front lines but would be serving as sniping support.

::Whooooaa there, just made it! Or did I?! Kelvin, bro, I came to help! There's no way I'd miss it!::

In exchange for Mdofarak, who was carrying Efil and her charge, Dahak came flying in at incredible speeds.

*So now Dahak is added to the mix, I thought. You were almost late, you damn delinquent. But I'll leave that alone since I'm feeling great right now.*

Through the Network, I told them, *Dahak, Boga, sorry for jumping straight into it, but can I entrust the signal to start the fight to you guys? No need to hold back; DarkMel will be able to take anything. Make it a good one.*

::Ooh, seriously?! My breath right now will never be stopped, you know!::

::Hey, Dahak! Shut up and just do it!:: Boga retorted. ::Don't get too full of yourself because you're feeling strong right now! I know those kinds of people get their comeuppance right away!::

::Shut it, Boga! The biggest trick to enjoying life as a dragon is to ride the wave whenever you're feelin' good!::

::The hell did you just say?! Then try producing a better breath than me! Loud Eruption Breath!::

::You've said it now, you bastard! Your breath will never beat mine! Mine is super amazing, for real! Venom-Vice Breath!::

They say some people are close enough to fight, but in this case, that would mean that they were too close.

*Come on, there's no need to compare whose is bigger now, especially while your emotions are being controlled.*

In a sense, I was impressed. But Dahak's and Boga's boasts weren't empty. Their breath attacks were just that powerful thanks to Melfina's unleashed stats, and the green and red lasers they unleashed could have disintegrated the earth without a trace. The attacks were fitting for a starting gong, and it seemed like the attackers themselves were also surprised by the power they put out. Still, that meant that they were able to use the power bestowed upon them, meaning Mel's blessing was working well.

"Cruel Demise: Roar."

The two Dragon Kings were a bit too shaken for their size. Unlike Dahak and

Boga, DarkMel was composed, even though she was expressing how excited she was. The tentacles that had parasitized the machine-dragon instantly formed two dragon heads that spewed, of all things, jet-black breath attacks from their mouths. Of course, these attacks were aimed at Dahak's and Boga's breaths, which were heading towards DarkMel. The four breath attacks hit each other head-on, creating a pretty fancy light show and an incredible shock wave that spread throughout the area.

“Gwoaaarrgh!”

“Gnrgh...dammit!”

Even though it was two combatants to one, there was a clear gap between the duo of dragons and DarkMel. Dahak's and Boga's breaths, which couldn't even be compared to before, they were so powerful, were just barely able to break even with DarkMel's. Actually, it seemed like they would lose at any moment. Given my body's anatomy, I didn't know what it was like to use a breath weapon, but I could easily understand that the pair were putting their all into it. And even with that, our enemy was easily able to defend herself against the attacks without even shedding one drop of sweat. It made her power stand out all the more.

::Hang in there, Boga!::

::You too, Dahak!::

But their attacks weren't the only thing assaulting DarkMel. Sera flew forth at speeds that rivaled what I had seen during Mel's battle inside the ark, and Gerard was riding in on a casting of Volhelm, which Boga had secretly launched. Of course, I was also making my move.

Before, the force created by the breath attacks would have made it impossible to approach DarkMel, but now such forceful measures were possible. The blast waves, which have normally gotten stronger the closer we came, now felt like nothing but a pleasant breeze. Everything I felt, everything I saw was in a different dimension than the one I had been living in previously. Even though my emotions were being reined in, I couldn't help but feel a little giddy. Of course, that was only natural. Seriously, even without her explanation, I would have figured out at least that much.



“You gotta start with a greeting! Agito Matoi!” Gerard jumped from Volhelm to Volhelm, with every jump seeing him launch an Agito. The slashes combined with Boga’s flames to become enveloped in fire as they headed for DarkMel.

“Combined attacks really do stir my curiosity! But—” DarkMel swung her giant lance, releasing a slash just like Gerard’s. And just like with the breath attacks, they canceled each other out. “Gerard, I thank you for always supporting my beloved! This is the least I can do to show it!”

The machine-dragon’s body, or rather, whatever passed for its abdomen, suddenly swelled. I thought it was going to be tentacles again, but apparently I was wrong. There was some sort of sphere inside the crowd of tentacles. It looked like a huge crystal, and there was a humanoid shadow wriggling inside of it.

*Is that...the core?*

::An invitation directly from the black princess? How fun! My liege!::

*Yeah, I know. Jildora’s original form is inside that thing, right? I’ll leave the core to you, Gerard. But either way, this is a race against time. I’ll try to draw some of DarkMel’s attention, so take care of this while Dahak and Boga are continuing to attack. We’ll handle everything else!*

::Understood!::

*Don’t let your guard down just because she’s exposed her weak point! It’s clearly a trap!*

::Gah! Hah! Hah! Much obliged for your concern!::

Having heard my exchange with Gerard, Boga changed the direction of his fire missiles to the core. Gerard, with just his shield and sword in hand, charged straight at the machine-dragon’s core, which was coming out of its abdomen.

::What do I do, Kelvin?:: Sera asked.

*Try to find the heart of its divinity, I answered. To be honest, I have no idea where it could be, so we’ll have to rely on your instincts.*

::Heh heh, so I’m a reliable woman, am I? Leave it to me, I’ll squash it flat!::

After mentioning that getting a sense of the entire picture would be best,

Sera flew high into the sky. She was overflowing with confidence, as always, even though we were pressed for time.

*Man, she's so reliable,* I thought fondly.

::All that's left is that mandala and DarkMel's main body,:: said Melfina. ::Even in my current state, I can give advice. I will help you as best I can, honey, though it might not be much.::

*Ha ha, this kind of reminds me of how we started out,* I answered. *That's more inspiring than anything in this world.*

DarkMel was firmly fending off all our attacks, but her gaze was always fixed squarely on me. It was as if she was urging me to come at her, like she was beckoning me with her hand. In fact, that was probably exactly her intention. But—

“Don't worry about it! Of course I'm your opponent!”

Both of our mouths curved upward as our weapons clashed.



While Kelvin and DarkMel's main body crossed blades, Gerard faced off against Jildora at the machine-dragon's abdomen. In less than a second, the Volhelm projectiles Gerard was riding on would collide with their target. With the target so close, the core's surroundings finally started to move.

The core, shaped like a pearl but large enough to fully ensconce a person, had been exposed and seemingly defenseless up until now. However, it must have just been waiting for Gerard to approach, because the black tentacles around it moved, hiding the core once more while also intercepting the intruder. The tentacles squirmed and wriggled, expressing anger like no other. A set of fangs nestled over the core, made of tentacles that had stiffened into sharp points. That wasn't all—the machine-dragon's arms greatly swelled before separating from the body and moving independently. They floated into the air with large, red eyes on the palms.

After being taken over by DarkMel, the machine-dragon had just barely managed to maintain its dragon shape, but now it had given up even that. Its torso had warped into something unsightly, and its two arms had separated and

were now rife with an eye each and wriggling tentacles. Only Deus Ex Machina's armor, which had remained after all those grotesque transformations, testified to its previous form.

*It's almost like an ogre's face and hands—no, I suppose I should call it a manifestation of Jildora's rage.*

In only this small amount of time, Gerard could feel the malice of his sworn enemy and target of revenge: Jildora. The shape of the enemy in front of him seemed far from what Jildora would normally create. If anything, it was closer to Tristan's sense of aesthetics, which was something Jildora would have scoffed in derision at. Gerard, who had fought many of Jildora's creations up until this point, had started to understand his sense of pride even without wanting to. However, the current Jildora had thrown away his pride and was filled with the will to kill his enemy no matter what. Or rather, the black will to at least take his enemy down with him.

*You're still attached to this world, even after becoming like that?*

The ogre laughed. It looked like a beast that had gone too long without food finally seeing some prey. The look expressed the voice of Jildora's soul, which had been absorbed by it.

"Gah ha ha! Very well! As a king of Hades, I will cut away your grudge! Now come!"

As Gerard psyched himself up, he supplied his Demon Sword Dainsleif with divine magic.

"Skyfall Matoi!"

Gerard's Skyfall exhibited massive destructive power with just a simple slash, and the blade was only forcefully held together through the use of Melfina's power. Even buffed, the knight had to use both hands to grip his sword. He pointed the wild stubborn mule of an attack, specialized in dealing damage, towards the brutish fist that was already swinging down at him in an attempt to pulverize its target.

The clash was settled in an instant. Gerard sliced through the fist and continued forward. His swordplay, seemingly impossibly fast for a greatsword,



saw both fists bisected within the blink of an eye. The fists' red eyes, which inflicted all manner of status effects on anyone their gaze rested upon, did nothing to Gerard, powered up by what was effectively Sympathetic Resonance as he was. Neither was he subject to the debuff that would normally have come from touching them.

“Grk?!”

However, even though the fists had been bisected, they didn't simply allow Gerard to pass by. Sharp tentacles extended from the surfaces of the fists, including the bisected parts, and they stabbed at Gerard as he passed by in an attempt to punch through his armor. Though Gerard had no fleshy body and the attack wasn't a serious threat, the damage would still add up. Seeing Gerard suffer so, the ogre's face laughed harder.

“It's a bit early to laugh like that, Jildora!”

Cutting through the tentacles that threatened to swallow him up, Gerard swung his greatsword heroically as he stepped forward. Then, the Volhelm projectiles hit the ogre, but Gerard didn't stop. Nor did he stop when an intense wind whipped up under his feet. He ignored everything as he unleashed his greatest attack at the ogre's face, which had grown surrounding the core.

“Graaaaaaggghhh!”

The Volhelm projectiles forced themselves deep into the ogre, making Gerard's footing more stable than before, so he no longer needed to worry about falling. Even so, unlike the fists, which he had so easily cut through, the ogre's face was very tough. Was it because there were just that many more tentacles in the concentrated mass that made it up? Or was it because the tentacles had absorbed Jildora's curse? Either way, none of that mattered to Gerard. He simply sliced, cut, and slashed. No matter how many tentacles came at him, or how the ogre's face laughed, he concentrated all his nerves on cutting the enemy in front of him. And his beloved sword did its best to answer his wishes.

When the shine of his Skyfall Matoi reached its peak, Gerard swung down his weapon. His sword traced a path through the ogre's face, reaching the core inside. As if to prove it, the ogre's face separated strongly to either side and the

laughing stopped.

*Crack. Shatter. Tinkle.*

Both the core's surface and Dainsleif shattered. The attack was too strong, and though it did defeat the ogre, that was the reason it stopped one step short of completely destroying the core. The sword couldn't handle the strain and broke.

"You only needed a little more...I suppose that's too bad?"

Gerard thought he could hear a voice coming from inside the core. The humanoid figure he could hazily see inside seemed to laugh in place of the ogre.

"No, actually, I should thank you for giving me the chance to avenge my friend."

"What?"

As the tentacles around Gerard ate into his armor, he stored his broken blade and took out another one. It was both a sword and a gun, otherwise known as a gunsword. It was the weapon Jildora had used after taking over Jin D'Alba's body.

"That's—"

"I avenged myself and my own regrets before, after all. This time, I will allow my comrade in arms Dan D'Alba to do it. Farewell, Jildora."

"S-Stop! Sto—"

Gerard stabbed the blade into the cracks in the core and pulled the trigger. The gunsword, loaded with Melfina's magical power, exhibited her power to the fullest as it destroyed Jildora's body and the core.







“Hmmmm...” Sera let out a worried noise from her position high up in the air. She had just flown off full of confidence, and she was now there with her demon wings flapping and her arms crossed, looking down at the scene playing out below her feet.

“Hrrrrmmmm...”

She tilted her head to the right, then shifted it to the left. Right now, she was relying on her incredible instinct to find Deus Ex Machina’s heart, but it wasn’t going well.

“I mean, like...is there even a heart? Nothing’s coming to me at all!”

Sera wanted to stomp on the ground to vent her frustration, but there was no ground to stomp on. She was gradually getting more and more irritated. Luckily, her emotions were being kept in check by the buff, so she quickly calmed down. With that, she once again took stock of the situation.

*Let’s calm down. Thinking normally, the heart should be somewhere inside that cool-looking thing. But my intuition isn’t reacting at all. That means it’s not in a normal spot. That thing was basically a collaboration between Jildora and Tristan, from what I hear, so wouldn’t they put it in some weird and twisted place? Given that, if I want to find the heart... Oh!*

Suddenly, her head shot up to look in a direction completely different from where the machine-dragon was. Sera, being a person who was quick to act, immediately flew off in that direction.



Once the giant battleship that was made for extermination had sunk, the flying ship armada from Toraj quickly started their retreat. The only thing left for them to do was possibly clean up the rest of the armored angels, so it was pretty safe to say they’d done their job. However, while all this was happening, a battle between gods had started. No matter how good the Toraj ships were, if anyone were to carelessly get too close, there would be many casualties. At the moment, their goal was just to get somewhere safe.

“Ohh, oooh, they’re really going at it! Man, I wanna get in there myself!”

“Stop that, Az-chan. The level of that fight is in an entirely different dimension. Even we Dragon Kings can’t get near. It’s most likely something only for those of the highest level—well, just watching is free, so be satisfied with that. I’d wager we’ll never see a fight like this again!”

“Come on, you two should try being at least a little nervous! Jeez!”

Still, there were those in the gallery who were nonchalantly watching the battle. The Ice Dragon King Salafia and Azgrad, who was riding on her, were one such couple.

Meanwhile, Shutola, who was also riding on Salafia, warned them, “I’m getting shared news about the battle from dearest brother Kelvin, and while the evacuation is getting closer to finishing, we still can’t let our guard down!”

“Ha ha ha! You’re wrong about that, Shutola! If there’s a fight we can’t do anything about, how could we *not* watch it?! It will become nourishment for me, and thus Trycen!”

“Jeez! And then you spout another dumb line...”

“Now, now. It’s true that Az-chan is being too thoughtless, but you’re also worrying too much, Shutola-chan. Also, we’re doing our jobs right now, aren’t we? All of us Dragon Kings are working under your instruction to cordon off a safe area and protect the border so as to keep the outside world safe. The aftershocks of the fight won’t reach any of the continents. The levee I made with my ice is still holding up, after all!”

“Mrrr!”

“Hee hee hee, you look cuter than usual when you puff out your cheeks and pout like that, Shutola-chan! If I were in my human form, I’d give those little cheeks a squeeze, you know?”

That only got Shutola to puff out her cheeks even further. At first glance, it seemed like they were just monkeying around, but Shutola was worried from the bottom of her heart after receiving the messages from Kelvin and the others. Still, she didn’t try to go help them herself. She had realized that if she went, she would only be in the way, given the strength of both sides. She

couldn't be of any direct help, but she could get rid of any obstacles outside of the fight. So she had recruited the Ice Dragon King Salafia as well as the Lightning, Water, Wind, and Darkness Dragon Kings to help create a cordoned-off pentagon around the fight. With that, she could keep the influence of their god-level fight to a minimum.

"But the problem is that it isn't just their fight. This world itself is on the line. The only thing I can do now is pray, but my esteemed brother will surely—"

"Hunh? Hey, isn't something coming this way?"

"It's an incredibly strong presence. Actually, it's also way too fast; your mother is shocked."

"J-Jeeeee! What the heck is it?!"

Having been interrupted in the middle of a good line, the young Shutola became completely sullen and pouty. She would probably turn quite red once she returned to her adult form.

"Wait, isn't that big sister Sera? The fact that I can recognize her means that she should be dropping her speed quite a bit, though..."

"What? *That's* dropping speed?! She started far enough away to look like a speck, and now she's already almost here!"

As Shutola had pointed out, Sera was going far under her max speed as she closed in on them. Sera, with her body now pumped full of power equal to Melfina's, could have reached them instantly. However, the strength of the sonic boom that would have come with that would have been enormous. Shutola surmised that Sera had thought of that and so was limiting her speed.

::What happened, big sister Sera?: Shutola tried conversing with telepathy, but Sera didn't reply. *Uh, huh? Big sister Sera...she...doesn't she seem to be in battle mode?*

Shutola only noticed Sera's ghastly expression as she got closer. She was emitting bloodlust as if she were coming towards an enemy, and Shutola reflexively stiffened.

::B-Big sis! Stop! Stoooooop!::



Though Shutola managed to send out that message even through her panic, Sera changed neither her speed nor her mood. Shutola had barely any time to think before Sera activated Blood Scrimmage and Crimson Astraea and threw out her strongest punch.

“S-Stop! Pyaaaaaaaaaaaaaagghhh?!”

With no time left until the attack, Shutola let out a strange but cute scream as she closed her eyes in fear.

“H-Huh?”

Of course, that fist never hit Shutola. Though she understood that in her head, it seemed that her smarts came back to bite her as she couldn’t help but think of various scenarios where such an attack could happen. But what did Sera attack, then? In order to find out the answer to that, Shutola opened her eyes.

“Wheeww! Who would’ve imagined it was hiding in a place like this? It’s so twisted, I almost gave up! Especially since right now I’ve got so much power in me, it takes a lot of mental effort for me to be considerate of my surroundings!”

Shutola turned to face the voice, and she saw Sera standing proudly in the air with a face that screamed, “I did it!” Now, Sera’s expression was as genuine and childlike as usual, as if her previous mood had vanished into thin air.

“Big sister Sera, that’s...”

“Hm? Oh, this? It’s Deus Ex Machina’s heart.”

Sera stuck out her right hand, which was holding a cube of metal.

“That’s...from the Tyrant Regress we captured?”

“Yep! This is basically one of Jildora’s inventions, isn’t it? That guy implanted a divine pillar’s heart into it. Who would have expected an important part of the machine-dragon’s core was actually implanted outside its body in a golem? No wonder I never was able to find it with my intuition no matter how hard I tried!”

“I see...so that’s how it was.”

“Uh, what do you mean by that?”

Shutola was completely satisfied by Sera's explanation, while Azgrad seemed completely in the dark.

"Wait a second, how did you even do that? Did you use those super dangerous-looking arms of yours to just crush it in your grip?"

"Oh, you got that? Well done!"

"Whoa, I got it right even though I wasn't even meaning to!"

"Hey, you...it seems that golem had some strange powers. How did you get around that?"

"What do you mean? I just sent out an order as I crushed it. Like, 'Don't resist!' You know? Oh, I don't actually have time to be chatting right now. Bye, then! I'm going back!"

With Tyrant Regress now in cube form (complete with fresh blood sauce) creaking under the pressure of her immense grip, Sera departed with even more speed than she'd used to arrive while leaving Shutola and the others dazed and astonished.

"Yeah, there's no way I can pick a fight with people of that level," Azgrad said, squirming in anticipation.

"Your words and your body aren't reacting the same way, esteemed brother..."



Two black weapons intersected and then simultaneously crumbled. One was an avatar of death reminiscent of a grim reaper's scythe, which had been made using Melfina's magic—a Boreas Death Scythe overclocked to the limit. The other was decorated like a holy weapon, but it was emitting the power of an evil god—a pitch-black divine lance. There were no weapons in the world more powerful than these; both were the pinnacles of destructive armament. So what would happen to them if they were to clash? The answer was simple, one that had been told in stories for ages, a common hypothetical with a common end. Both parties lose, and both weapons are destroyed.

But right afterwards, something unusual happened. Kelvin and DarkMel,

heedless of the fact that their weapons had been destroyed, continued to strike with those weapons. The results were the same. As well as the next time, and the next time, and the next—no matter how many times their weapons were destroyed, they continued to recreate them and wield them once more.

The trick behind their actions was actually simple; the truth could be summed up in one sentence. Both sides were actually creating new versions of their weapons the moment the previous ones broke. However, there was no time to relax in those moments in between. The two opponents were constantly aiming higher, sinking deeper into their own world as each time they sought a faster blow, a more powerful weapon. Every swing that was made was aimed at a lethal spot, such as the neck, face, or heart. Their aiming such lethal blows at the person they most loved over and over read somewhat strangely, but it probably wasn't so different from just confessing love plainly.

::That black lance... It's of the same type as my Boreas Death Scythe! She can even imitate my weapon! Damn, just how much does she love me?! My excitement just won't end!::

::If this keeps getting faster, I won't be able to keep up and warn you of danger through the Network! I can't believe you reached this state even with the emotion-control effect! And be careful you don't get a nosebleed! It'll ruin your big stage!::

Kelvin had been receiving Melfina's full support and had long been fighting beyond his own limits. Even so, while he was able to get through DarkMel's fierce attacks, he was one hand short of being able to finish her off. The countdown to the end of the world was ticking down, and they were both out of time to fight. Yet, more importantly to them, the fight was fun, they were happy, and they were bursting with love for their opponent. Caught between two goddesses, Kelvin was drowning in the best time of his life. At this stage, both of the goddesses had also shoved the collapse of the world into a corner of their minds, possibly out of sheer happiness at seeing Kelvin's expression. The fate of the world was dubious.

"Don't just keep ignoring uuuussss!" Two voices sounded in unison.

"What?!"

Two dragons' worth of breath was fired their way before Kelvin or DarkMel could clash. Dahak, who had been suppressed by Cruel Demise: Roar, and Boga's attacks had suddenly gotten stronger.

"This is—"

DarkMel came back to her senses along with Kelvin, adopting an anguished expression. It was because she knew that Kelvin, in the state he was in, with all his senses focused on one thing, could not properly deal with the breath attacks of earth and fire. On the other side, Kelvin had received a telepathic message.

::Oh, so this is that telepathy thing! Feels weird!::

::That voice...Azgrad? Why're you—::

::Oh, it's nothing. It's just that your red-haired friend came over just now and did as she pleased. As soon as I thought she'd left, she ended up coming back again, and before I knew it, I was kidnapped! So right now, I've been forced onto Dahak's back!::

For a moment, Kelvin had no reply. Then, ::I'm not sure I get it, but for now, sorry.::

::Don't apologize! Damn. After I understood the situation, I was okay with it. If we left you guys alone, you would have continued to flirt forever, after all. I've buffed Dahak's and Boga's breath attacks with my power to wake you up! What I'm tryin' to say is: you two, the idiot couple, need to figure out a way to go out in a more modest and proper way! It's way too tough for me to butt in!::

::O-Oh, sure...::

Azgrad was making a good point; Kelvin had gone strangely far.

::He gets it, Azgrad, so just be quiet! Sorry for raining on your parade, but bro, we're going to help. We're running out of time!::

::I won't die until I get to eat big sis Efil's cooking!:: Boga chimed in.

Another pair of larger enhanced beams of light joined in. This was followed by a corresponding new message.

::My liege, I understand your feelings, but there's no point if the world doesn't exist anymore! We've destroyed the core! Even if it tries to regenerate,



as long as I am here, we will bring it down as many times as it takes!::

::Gerard, Sera!::

Gerard reported from the machine-dragon's abdomen, while Sera did the same from high above. Now, all that was left was DarkMel's main body and the mandala. And once more, an attack flew towards the blood-colored ring.

"Sniping from Mdofarak, I assume. Dahak and the others tried to distract me and make an opening, I believe. You were close."

::Dahak and the others did well, but I missed? That's impossible. I hereby lodge a formal complaint. Let me try once more. Just one more time.::

Mdofarak had shot Sagittarius from DarkMel's blind angle, and the attack was just about to connect when a newly sprouted tentacle stopped it.

*Claaaang...*

The mandala's bell rang ominously. It was a familiar sound, the sound of regeneration. Immediately, Gerard fired several times into the remains of the core while Sera used both her hands to stop the heart from trying to return.

"Once I'm used to it, this battle situation is nothing!"

"Is that so? That makes me happy!"

While all that was going on, Kelvin had been continuously exchanging slashes with DarkMel, much like a punch-out. Somehow, he was moving even faster than before Dahak and the others had stepped in to help. The situation was already disadvantageous to Kelvin and the gang, but then DarkMel evolved even further. Even when Mdofarak, who had been hiding up until now, added her breath attack into the mix, the situation didn't change.

::Clotho!::

"Thought so!"

Clotho was summoned directly above the mandala, having spent all this time focusing on recovering mind and body. But this move had also been predicted by DarkMel. From one of the water tornadoes raging over the ocean, a dragon head covered in tentacles flew towards Clotho. Even after being reduced to a single head, it still looked familiar. It was the machine-dragon's head, which

DarkMel had torn off and thrown into the water. It opened its mouth and charged at Clotho, who was trying to destroy the mandala. Though Clotho formed many spikes out of its body to try and stop the attack, the dragon head didn't stop. It bit into Clotho's body and carried it away from the mandala.

"Too bad! No one can interrupt us—"

*Dooooong!*

The strange noise from the mandala interrupted DarkMel. Right afterwards, several lines extended through the giant blood-colored ring and bell. And, as if hearing the sound made it remember something, it crumbled into tiny pieces.

"Uh, what?!"

::*Woof! Bowwow wow!* (I got it! I took it down! Yeaahh!)::

::Awwwwright! Good job, Alex!::

Clotho had been summoned as a trump card to destroy the target. Thanks to its efforts in the ark, DarkMel had started to see it as dangerous and needing caution, but that had come back to bite her. Clotho's Summoning had actually been a bluff, hiding Kelvin's magic circle and Alex's attack, which had used Alex's stealth abilities. In Alex's mouth was Rion's Black Sword Aklama. The countless slashes that the wolf had been able to make thanks to his partner's sword had sliced apart the evil mandala.

"Khh! But! Still, this is really, *really* your last move. You're stuck, honey! Even with Clotho and Alex with you, you can't beat me!"

"No, you're wrong about that! I still have you!"

In that instant, Melfina materialized from Kelvin's pool. The blue goddess and the Grim Reaper holding a staff both swung their last attacks.



The battlefield was silent. Strangely enough, while there were tornadoes and other natural phenomena raging around them, this one spot was wrapped in a calm air. No one called to them from the outside; the inhabitants of the area simply stood still, looking at the sanctuary.

"Ahhh, yeah...so this is...how it...turned out, huh? I...tried my best...in my own

way...though..."

"You tried to work too hard and take on too much by yourself. It's about time you relax; no one'll blame you if you do. Even if there was someone, I'd shut them up."

"Hee hee! You're the same, honey...but...I definitely did...go too far, didn't I? I ended up...putting too much strain...on my body...to unleash my power..."

DarkMel spun her words with a voice so small, it seemed like it would disappear, but she sounded truly relieved as she lay in Kelvin's arms. Beside her, another version of her watched over them. Meanwhile, Gerard, who had managed to avoid falling by grabbing onto Sera's ankles, and Sera, who was keeping her position in the air even while supporting Gerard, watched the conclusion of this conflict as well.

"So this is finally the end, huh? Are you sure you don't want to run over to them, Sera? Usually you would charge to my liege's side without thinking."

"Jeez, you know I can at least read a room. Actually, I believe I'm better at that than most people!"

"Hey now, your voice is a bit too loud. Still, hmm...then I suppose for now we should just watch over them quietly. Just like the princess is doing."

"I'm not great at keeping quiet, though. Oh well, I'll do it. I suppose I need to see this with my own eyes anyway."

Sera's gaze was directed at the place where the machine-dragon had been. The tentacles had all disappeared without a trace, leaving behind its original mechanical appearance. But both arms had been lost during the battle, and there was massive damage where the core used to be. The thing was full of holes, but it was still barely in recognizable shape, though that was starting to crumble away now as well.

Lastly, there was the neck part where DarkMel had been. At the moment, she was no longer there. Instead, there were just copious amounts of blood stuck to the stump.

"Are you sure you should be...minding me...? There's...not much time...left, you know?"

DarkMel's body, which Kelvin was holding, had no lower half. At the end of the fight that had taken place, Kelvin's and Melfina's finishing blows had broken DarkMel's spear and slashed into her diagonally from the shoulder to end the fight. The massive amount of blood on the machine-dragon was from this blow; Kelvin's enlarged reaper's scythe had swallowed up DarkMel's entire lower half and disintegrated it. Her life was now a candle in the wind; even with healing magic, she wouldn't last for much longer.

"I have enough time to spend some with you. I can't thank you enough, it was all thanks to you that I was able to have such a fun time, wasn't it?"

"Even though I...tried to destroy...the world...and kill you...as well?"

"It's because you were trying to do all that for real that I was able to become just as serious. That's why you shouldn't feel guilt over me. In fact, I want you to be proud. I know better than anyone how deep your love is."

"Ah...urgh..."

DarkMel raised a shaking hand towards Kelvin, but she stopped halfway out of guilt. Seeing that, Kelvin extended his and met her halfway. Her white skin had paled even further due to blood loss, but DarkMel's cheeks nevertheless went a little red at that.

"I wonder...why... Even though...my wish...was crushed in front of my eyes, I...for the first time in so long...I feel like a fog in my heart has lifted... Hey, Mel...fina..."

Melfina, unsure of whether or not she should reply, took a second to do so. "What is it?"

"Like this, there probably isn't any possibility of me...reincarnating the world...but it is still collapsing... That's the one thing...we need...to avoid... Make sure...you don't let...our beloved...die, okay?"

"Yes, I can promise you that. I don't plan to lose either the world or my husband. You were able to do all this; I'll show you I'm able to work a miracle just as big."

Melfina put her hand on top of Kelvin's hand, which was gripping DarkMel's. She wasn't lying. DarkMel could tell by looking into her eyes.

“Is that so...? I’m relieved... Ahhh, fun times...never last...huh? But, even so...right now...is more precious to me...than any eternity...”

More blood spilled from DarkMel’s lips as tears streamed down her face. Kelvin could feel the heat being sapped from her hand little by little. There was no doubt that at this point, it was hard for her to even speak.

Kelvin resolved himself, deciding to tell her how he felt. “DarkMel, there’s something I want to say to you.”

“Huh?” She seemed surprised.

“Honey?”

Only the three of them knew what Kelvin said that day. Even Gerard and Sera, who were physically the closest to them, couldn’t hear what was spoken. However, the two who had heard Kelvin’s words displayed surprise in unison.

Sera tilted her head quizzically. “What do you think they’re talking about?”

“Hmmm...maybe my king is weaving one of his usual terrible poems?”

“Ahhh...I’m pretty sure that’s wrong, but I can’t be a hundred percent on that. Not *a hundred* percent.”

The details were unknown, but it was most likely a question of perspective.

“Are you...serious? I can’t believe that’s a product of a right mind... Just to tell you...I have no idea...what will...happen, okay?”

“I’m always serious, and sane. I wouldn’t be joking at a time like this.”

“I’m sorry to interrupt when you’re acting all cool, but you just thought that up on the fly, didn’t you? You said it out loud because you wanted to try it, right?”

Kelvin paused, looking guilty. “Well, you could say that.” He averted his gaze, and Melfina let out a light sigh. Still, she didn’t seem angry.

“If you want to do it, honey, then I won’t say anything more. Now, it’s all up to her.”

“Thanks.”

“Heh...hee hee! I know...that I am pretty insane, but...it seems that we were



birds of a feather all along...”

“Thank you very much for the compliment. So, what do you think?”

“I already have the answer...ever since...you took my hand, honey.” DarkMel paused. “But I am, you could say, full of bugs...to be honest, I’m not sure if it’ll work out...myself...”

“If you’ve got the answer, then that’s enough. I’ll worry about the rest.”

“Is that...so? I’m already...so sleepy... I’ll take a nap now... Honey...”

“What?”

“I...love you...”

Suddenly power left the hand that Kelvin was holding. DarkMel’s expression as she closed her eyes was deeply, deeply peaceful. Next, her body, having lost its vigor, glowed and turned into particles of light before scattering. DarkMel was no longer in Kelvin’s arms.

After a moment, Melfina spoke. “Are you sure you’re okay with this?”

“Okay or not, I took action because I knew that was the best move. Our troubles are only going to increase from here on out, Mel, so I’m sorry, but bear this cross with me.”

“Hee hee hee! You’re asking me *now*? And didn’t I already tell you? I’ll make sure to bring about a miracle on that level.”

“Yeah, I’m counting on you for that. Now then, for the next problem—how do we stop the destruction of the world?”

Kelvin surveyed his surroundings, which were storming so hard, it was like the end of the world. It made him realize that the quiet he’d been experiencing before was just because they’d been lost in their own world.

::I am notifying everyone through telepathy: we have safely taken down DarkMel. Next, in order to stop the collapse of the world, in the name of the previous Goddess of Reincarnation, we must name an interim new deity of reincarnation.::





### *Aqua Swallow 3:*

With my final battle with DarkMel finished, we decided to regroup on one of the Torajian flying ships for the moment. Now that DarkMel, the mastermind, had been dealt with, the huge dilemma facing the world was its lack of a deity of reincarnation. In order to solve that, I had gathered the chief players outside of our core party as well. This included Colette, Setsuna and her group, Prettia, Sylvia, Azgrad, my father-in-law, the former Apostles, and others that had done well during the battle this time. Rion and Ange were included in this, but there were many who had yet to be fully healed from the wounds they'd sustained. So out of everything there was to say, I first wanted to thank everyone at the gathering.

"Goma, where the hell were you all this time?! I was worried you might have fallen from the ship!"

"As if I would do anything so dumb. There were other places that looked to be in danger, so I helped out there."

As soon as they came, Sabato and Goma had started a sibling fight. Given the situation, I felt I should get started before Sabato ended up getting punched off the ship. I had Mel handle the explanation.

"...and that is the current situation. Because we've already taken down the target, all that's left to do is determine my successor, the next deity of reincarnation. Once we do that, we can stop the collapse of the world."

"Mm, but isn't that simple?" Sylvia asked.

"It's not something we can just decide on a whim. Even though this will only be an emergency interim succession, if the one chosen doesn't have the right personality and strength to be a god or goddess, then when it comes to the succession, they will be failed and destroyed as an evil usurper. Originally, the leaders of the angels would spend long months debating a successor, giving candidates trials to help them with the process. But we need to figure this out in a very short amount of time. If we don't, it's the end of the world."

"O-Oh...so we were invited to a pretty amazing meeting, weren't we?"

It had been hundreds of years since the last change of the deity of reincarnation, when Melfina had taken over from Elearis. It was understandable for them to be nervous.

*Still, we need to find someone who's fit to be a deity of reincarnation in both mind and body?*

"I'll say this now, but none of us from Gaun would be a good fit, okay? My old man might fit the bill in physical strength, but as for whether or not he's got the personality to be a god? No, hell no. Absolutely not. Get it?"

Goma grinned silently from her position behind Sabato.

Sabato looked to Goma for agreement. However, he only saw her smiling silently with a balled-up fist ready to strike.

"Wh...Why're you angry— Bwaghh?!"

"Then what about Colette-chan? She's got experience as Deramis's Oracle under her belt, and I don't think there are many people with a purer heart." While completely ignoring Sabato, who was sent flying behind her, Shutola laid out her opinion.

"No. I suppose in this case, I should explain about Colette first. Shutola, I'm sorry but it's already too late for her."

"Huh? Too late for what?"

"Well, like...you know?"

I hesitated, unsure of how to explain Colette's unique brand of perversion to the young Shutola, as I reflexively glanced at the Oracle. That was when I realized something was strange. This entire time, since I had called for the meeting to decide Melfina's successor, Colette hadn't said a word. This was unlike her, as she had a reputation for her faith, and that made me doubt what I was seeing, as I worried about her health.

"Colette?" I asked before repeating in a singsong voice, "Coleeeeeette?"

But she didn't answer.

"H-Hey, seriously, are you okay?"

Colette was shockingly unresponsive, even after I called out to her. She just sat in her seat quietly with her eyes open. She wasn't moving at all, and there was no vigor to her. Neither could I see any light in her eyes.

“Uhhh...it looks like Colette is unconscious...”

Setsuna, who was sitting next to Colette, confirmed her state.

*So, her spirit couldn't take the shock of hearing that Melfina was no longer the Goddess of Reincarnation... This is probably a reaction caused by how deeply faithful she is. I'm sure she forced herself into a comatose state to lessen the damage to her psyche as much as possible.*

“In regard to Shutola's suggestion, Colette cannot become the Goddess of Reincarnation. No matter how pure her heart is, her body won't be able to withstand the succession of power. In human standards, having undergone Evolution would be one of the conditions. And, most importantly, Colette has devoted her life to being the Oracle of Deramis. As you can see, even if she were to become the goddess, as she is now, she surely won't be able to make normal decisions.” Melfina paused. “Honey, I'll leave Colette to you.”

“Huh? Ahh, yeah. You're right...”

What she was basically saying was that I needed to give Colette some aftercare, regardless of our current problem. In the worst case, she might oppose the new deity of reincarnation and become a second Iris, after all. The power of faith is a frightening thing. Of course, Melfina was still as healthy and energetic as ever. The situation was also very different from when Elearis's power had been sealed, and as long as we followed up properly, she shouldn't go off in the wrong direction.

“But if that's the case, then our list of candidates becomes very short. In human terms, that would leave only Saints, Daemons, Titans—one of those...and if you aren't one, it's impossible, right?”

“And their personality must befit a god or goddess. Let's see...”

“Hey, you louts! I know you're going to suggest Sera and Bell! No! You can't! It's true that they check all the boxes and would be very suitable on top of being treasures of this world, but their papa will not allow them to become



goddesses! As a demon, that's a no-go! Never!"

"Be quiet, father."

"Shut up, papa, you're slowing down the discussion."

"Okay!"

The moment he was reprimanded by both his daughters, my father-in-law quieted down. He probably had some complicated feelings about all this as a demon. Even if he was quiet now, it seemed he would burst once again if Sera's or Bell's names were to come up. So that outed the Northern Continent group.

::...liege. My liege::

*Hm, Gerard? What's wrong?* I asked.

::You should know already. At this rate, won't the princess recommend our Rion?::

I paused for a moment. *So you think that too?*

::Of course! She's had the healthy body of a Saint ever since she Evolved, and a kind heart that will interact with anyone equally. I thought of Efil for a moment, but she will always prioritize you in any situation, my king. To her, you are always number one! In the end, the only one who can be recommended for the position would be Rion. But if that were to happen, then we would no longer be able to be with her, right? Princess's Summoning was a special case. A deity of reincarnation should normally never interfere with the mortal world. That's in the princess's own words. You know what that means? I'll die of loneliness!::

*That... That's got to be too far, right? And look, just like Mel took an extended vacation, she could make an artificial body and come back to us, right?*

::That vacation was something Princess got after putting in hundreds of years of work! With the world like this, there's no way a newbie like Rion would be able to come back so easily, even if she was a goddess!::

I had no reply to that. Internally, I thought, *Someone suited to becoming a deity... Ah, yeah. Rion's basically the only one. Thinking pragmatically, everything Gerard said was on the mark. The very idea of a world without Rion*

*is making me want to vomit. But someone has to take the role or the world will collapse. Just what do I do...*

“Actually, I already have a candidate in mind. I was going to decide after hearing what you all have to say, but it seems like my thinking was correct. She would serve well as my successor with no problems.”

As the debate progressed, Mel suddenly piped up. In that instant, Gerard and I almost jumped in surprise.

::My liege!::

*I know! I know, but...* I replied.

I was extremely conflicted, having to weigh my precious little sister and the world itself on a scale. Thinking about it, Rion wasn't even considered an adult in this world yet. Making such a small, cute, lovely little girl like Rion become a goddess... I... I...

“Allow me to once again announce the name of the person who is best suited to become the next deity of reincarnation!”

By the time I'd realized, my mouth had moved faster than my thoughts. *Sorry, Mel. As an older brother, I need to protect my little sister!*

“Goldiana Prettiana, I would like to entrust the position to you.”

“Mel, you can't— Whaaaaaaaat?!”

“Oh? Me?” Goldiana replied liltingly.

Right after my scream, Colette collapsed to the floor.



“The next deity of reincarnation is...Goldiana?!”

The moment Melfina announced who would be succeeding her, it seemed like time had stopped in the ship. In reality, everyone but Sera and Rion had frozen with their mouths open. Colette had even collapsed and was vomiting blood.

*Y-Yeah, I get you. At this rate, you'll become Goldiana's Oracle instead of Deramis's Oracle, won't you?* I could feel myself resonating with how the passed-out Colette must feel as she vomited blood.

“C-Colette! Get a hold of yourself! Kelvin-san, Colette’s in trouble!”

“I know. I understand her painfully well, Rion. Could you give Colette a lap pillow for a while? I’ll heal her in the meantime.”

“Got it, Kel-nii! Do your best, Colette! Your wounds aren’t that bad!”

*It’s unfortunate, sister mine, but Colette’s wounds are much deeper than you think. Look how she won’t wake up even after getting a lap pillow from you.*

I had never seen Colette so grievously wounded. Her condition wasn’t improving at all, even after applying Rank S White Magic. What did that mean?

Though I thought that on the surface, deep inside I was supremely relieved. After all, Rion hadn’t been chosen. It was an extremely unexpected outcome, and most likely Gerard felt the same as I did. After all, he was secretly dancing a happy jig in the corner of the room so no one would notice.

I mean, well, if Prettia were to become the next deity of reincarnation, I would honestly be pretty sad too. Her *unconventional* looks meant that she made men shiver in fear, but in the end she helped us out a lot. And surprisingly, she had a lot of common sense on top of being a good friend to my comrades. But even so, not that I had the slightest shred of basis for this feeling, I did get the sense that Prettia would absolutely destroy the common sense of a deity. For example, if he—*ahem!*—*she* was to become the Goddess of Reincarnation, then I could absolutely see her just showing up the next day in the mortal realm anyway. Gerard would probably wish for that too. After all, he was such a kindhearted knight. There’s no doubt.

“By the way, Sera, Rion, neither of you seemed surprised. Did you two already predict this?”

“Heh heehhh...of course!” Sera chortled proudly. “After hearing all those conditions, anyone who didn’t think of Goldiana first would have to have something wrong with their head, right? As her best friend, I can guarantee that with confidence!”

“Right? Prettia-chan has a lot of life experience, and she’s always overflowing with love, after all. I secretly admired her, thinking that I’d like to become a wonderful woman like her in the future. That’s how much she’s trusted, and I

think she'll be a great goddess."

"Oh...sure..."

What Sera and Rion had to say was correct; it was all correct. But still, as a big brother, it left me in a rather strange mental state. Like, halfway between wanting Rion to become a wonderful woman like Goldiana, and halfway to getting on my knees and begging her to stop.

"Hey everyooone!" Goldiana called out in her usual lilting affectation. "It's understandable that you're all surprised, but this isn't the time for it, is it? The world is still in danger, you know? If I can stop that by becoming the next Goddess of Reincarnation, then I'll happily take that on! So please, calm down."

"P-Prettia-chan!"

"Wooaarrghh! Prettia-chan! Prettia-chaaaaaaaannnnnnn!" Dahak bawled.

Still, when I tried considering Prettia's words without any bias, she did sound very kind and pure, just like a goddess. From her attitude that put the balance of the world first while everyone else had fallen into confusion, to her strength of will that allowed her to take on such a heavy responsibility with no problems—I started wanting to acknowledge her as the goddess from the bottom of my heart.

*Prettia, you would be a good fit for the next Goddess of Reincarnation.*

"Also..." Goldiana started again, almost in a singsong, "the interim part means that it's not like I'll immediately become the next true goddess, right?"

"Yes. It's as you say, Goldiana. In the end, becoming the next proper deity of reincarnation would require consent from the elder angels. But in the meantime, we will hold over with an interim succession. It should take about a month. Still, you have my recommendation as the former goddess. Their confirmation is really just a formality, so it should be almost certain for you to become the next goddess officially."

"Mm-hmm, that's good enough. There's a lot I want to discuss with you for the future, so let's take care of everything until then. Okay?"

"Ghaahaghh?!"

Prettia suddenly sent a wink flying at Gerard. This unexpected event meant that he had no time to dodge, and just like that, Gerard was sent flying into a wall.

*You're getting way too shaken up.*

"We don't have much time left. I'd like to quickly have Goldiana become the interim goddess."

"Understood. What should I do?"

"Nothing too difficult. Start by just closing your eyes and calming your heart, please. Once that's done, please imagine the form of the ideal goddess you want to be, and how she acts. The stronger and truer those thoughts and feelings are, the more divinity you will be granted."

"I see. There's no problem with starting from the looks, then?"

"Looks? No, there shouldn't be a problem..."

"My! That's great news!" Goldiana gushed. "Then a goddess has to look like...that! I'll get prepared, so wait for me!"

Prettia stepped a little ways away from Mel and started quietly doing what seemed like meditation—or rather, she took a pose that seemed to be to show off her muscles. I'll leave the specific pose to your imagination, but whatever you're imagining will generally fit, I think.

Prettia gently breathed out, and out, and out—until her eyes all of a sudden snapped open wide.

"ROSE ISHTAR FINAL EDITION MILD!"

I had no idea what kind of mistake was made, but with a sudden explosion, a pink monster appeared in front of our eyes, coughing. She was a mass of muscle shaped like a peach-colored goddess. It was so shocking and impactful that I'll just skip all the details. Please, let me skip the details.

"It... It's a goddess! As I thought, Prettia-chan has always been a goddess; that's why she's becoming the goddess!"

Tears were now streaming like a full-on river down Dahak's face, creating an awful scene. However, since the impact of Prettia's new form far outshone



what the dragon was doing, no one cared or blamed him.

*So, this is what people mean when they say they were so shocked no words would come out...*

“Mm-hmm!” Prettia grunted coquettishly. “Actually bringing your ideal into reality really helps with the imagination. Ah, does anyone have a mirror?”

“Uh...uhhh...if you’re fine with my hand mirror...”

“My, what a cute mirror! May I borrow it, please? Just for a little bit?”

Nana was so nervous that she shook almost audibly as Prettia took the mirror from her.

*I’m guessing she’s going to do her makeup and final checks on her looks? Ah, stop! If you keep winking at the mirror, it’ll break! Like, physically! And you’ll deal the finishing blow to all of the men’s psyches as well!*

“You’re smaller than you were in battle, Prettia-chan. It’s cute!”

“Mm, very economical.”

“So you can freely control your Final Edition to be in whatever shape you want. As expected of the one person who could fight evenly with me. I always thought you’d become like a goddess or something, Prettia. And that’s coming from me, Serge!”

*What? That used to be even bigger?! Ah, no, there’s no need to actually send me an image through the Network! Rion, stop uploading that info! If you have to send it, make sure it only goes to Dahak, please!*

“Can... Can we get on with this, then?”

“Yep, I’m beautiful today too! Everything’s perfect! Now, imagine! Me in perfect form!”

After that, a bright pink light overflowed from within the flying ship, and the succession was safely completed. There was no need to dwell on it anymore. It happened. Nothing went wrong. That was everything.

“My king...my liege...Dahak fell over due to blood loss. There should be a limit to unsightliness.”

“Please, just leave me alone.”

## Chapter 2: Towards a New Age

It had been a couple of days since the battle with DarkMel, the mastermind who had involved the entire world in a fight. Since then, Prettia had succeeded the position of Goddess of Reincarnation, and while large scars were left on the world from its impending collapse, we had managed to save it splendidly. Now it was completely stable, and the angel-type monsters had all been cleaned up.

However, the incident had been huge and far-reaching. Everyone had their hands full with the aftermath, and their schedules were absolutely murderous. This was especially true for Colette of Deramis, as she had to deal with everything concerning the Goddess of Reincarnation on top of her other business, which was already keeping her plenty busy. Her being busy was a constant, but these days, it was so bad that others were genuinely worried she would work herself to death.

To be fair, I was also technically involved with the new Goddess of Reincarnation, so I was dragged into those events. I was having so much fun every day that I didn't even have time to fix Gerard's broken sword, and it was like you could feel the insanity from my eyes. Ah...I'm already so nostalgic for those fun times the other day. I wanna go back...

::Honey! Honey!!! It's fine to zone out sometimes, but please keep it in moderation, okay?::

*Exactly what value or meaning is there in a meeting where we only talk?* I asked.

::Don't say that. There definitely is meaning to it, so at least shape up on the outside. Look sharp! Good, you're wonderful today too.::

Mel, who was sitting next to me, did some work on my face as I returned to my senses. As for what I was doing at the moment, I was in the middle of a meeting in Deramis. It was about the new Goddess of Reincarnation. In terms of my standing, I was considered the Apostle of the previous Goddess, Mel. In talking about the succession, Mel and I were designated the most important

people on the subject.

It was a huge honor and responsibility, one which Colette had heaped on us with one hundred percent good intentions, while Pope Philip did so one hundred percent as a prank. However, I was basically just an extra to Mel, so all I was doing was sitting in a chair. It needn't be said that at this point, such a responsibility was nothing but a bore and a chore. Still, that didn't change the fact that my manners here would affect Mel's future. So I pushed down my own desires and resolved myself to stay with her until the end.

Once Prettia had become the future interim Goddess of Reincarnation, Mel had lost her power as the Goddess. Actually, she had retained her last bit of power to appoint a successor, but powers like her reincarnation ability were long gone. Also, Mel was not currently using an artificial body to appear. Her real one had descended to the mortal realm. But she had stopped being a goddess, so it was only natural, I guess.

The Sympathetic Resonance her artificial body had employed was also gone, so her stats had completely changed. I suppose you could say they had gone back to what they'd been before Mel had become a goddess? Of course, her appetite hadn't gone down a bit even after losing her position, and her Hearty Eating skill had remained as well. Even without being a goddess, Mel was still Mel—it seemed that would never change. Her terrible sleeping habits and eternal willingness to approve of me hadn't changed either.

“Now then, let us leave this matter as is. The next time we see signs of a Demon Lord coming, we, the Holy Order of Rinne, will cooperate with your church to prepare.”

“Yes, that sounds acceptable. As the first-generation Oracle, I will also put in all my effort. As fellow Oracles, let us get along!”

“Y... Yes, let's. I also wish for a good relationship.”

The person talking to Colette and identified as an Oracle had a very unique speech pattern, one reminiscent of Prettia. However, Prettia was on the continent in the sky where the angels lived, Isla Heaven, and was currently trying to charm the angel elders. As for who the speaker was—

“Oh? You seem kind of down, Kelvin-chan. Look, you've got to smile! Smile!

You had a much better smile back when we had our encounter in Gaun!”

That shocked Colette, who let out a confused squeak. “K... Kelvin-sama?!”

“It’s not what you think; you’re misunderstanding.”

*A misunderstanding here would be way too damaging, so allow me to correct it now. That’s completely false.*

Uhh, where was I? Oh, the identity of that person. She was Grostina Brujowana, Prettia’s sister disciple, who I’d had a fierce battle with at the Beast King Festival in Gaun. I remember back then I’d been suffering from some powerful poison. At any rate, as for why she was somewhere unexpected like Deramis’s temple, it was because she’d been appointed as the first-generation Oracle of Goldiana.

Yeah...there was a lot I wanted to respond to, but I decided to suppress the urge. All this was due to Prettia’s love. Yes, her love...though if I stopped there all of a sudden, it might sound nonsensical. So allow me to explain it in order.

It had all started when Prettia had rejected the Holy Order of Rinne’s offer to switch the god they worshipped to her. Normally, every time a new deity of reincarnation took over, the custom was for the Holy Order of Rinne to pivot and change their target of worship with the times. Just like when they had switched from Elearis to Melfina, they wanted to go from Melfina to Goldiana. But Prettia, who—after becoming the new Goddess of Reincarnation—had learned of the previous Oracle Iris’s misfortune, had misgivings that Colette might go the same way. Others, including Colette herself, had rejected such concerns, saying that the circumstances were different, but Prettia insisted that as long as the slightest chance of such a future remained, it wasn’t something that should be allowed to happen. As an alternative, she’d suggested that the Holy Order of Rinne continue their course with Melfina, while Prettia would enjoy a smaller faith with those who chose her. The result of that choice was a new organization called Goldia.

“Honestly, the new Goldia hasn’t changed its member composition or range of activities from when it was a dojo, right? What are you saying is different?”

“Mm-hmm,” Grostina grunted coquettishly. “It’s as you say, Kelvin-chan. Nothing’s changed. We imitate Goldia’s teachings to train our bodies, dress

ourselves, and learn homemaking skills—in essence, we’re polishing ourselves as usual. And the feelings we have towards our big sister...those haven’t changed either. You see, our sister hates things that would make a girl cry. That includes having a girl cry over her. That’s why, though I’m the only one right now, I’ve decided to take over her position in Goldia. I may only be an Oracle on the surface, at least for now, but I’m going to give it my all.”

“Grostina-san!” Colette cried.

Grostina thumped her burly chest in an attempt to cheer Colette up. Her appearance aside, she had a great personality, something she’d undoubtedly gotten from Prettia. The relationship between the Holy Order of Rinne and Goldia would surely be slowly built from here on out. But I had the feeling that the two Oracles would forge a strong relationship, one based on respect, faster than that.

“Jeez, Colette-chan...I told you to just call me Gros-chan. Well, I suppose that won’t fly in an official setting, so I don’t mind if you use my full name, then. You might not be able to tell, but I am from a noble background, so if I wanted to, I could totally play the part of a well-bred lady!”

“Ha ha! Goldia’s Oracle truly is gentlemanly and amusing. No matter what I hear, I’m entertained!” Pope Philip laughed, truly delighted. The pope had made sure to show up, going as far as to expose how young he looked, in order to build a good relationship with Goldia.

“Hey now, Philip-chan! Don’t say ‘gentlemanly’! It’s ‘ladylike’! Lay! Dee! Like!”

“Agh, wait! You got... You got me right in the funny bon— Pffftt ha ha ha!”

*Yeah. They’ll totally build up a good relationship. I think.*

“Ah, that reminds me. Colette, what happened to that one thing? You know, the grave.”

“Oh, yes. It’s going well. If you’d like, we can go see it after this?”

“I’d love to. It’s important to us, after all.”

Mel and I held hands under the table so that no one could see.





After the meeting, Mel, Colette, and I walked a little ways away from Deramis's temple to a certain spot. Many stone tablets were lined up on the ground here, indicating that we were in a graveyard. The word "graveyard" might automatically make someone picture a dimly lit, unconditionally scary place, but here in Deramis everything was colored white and clean, and the area was decorated with grass and flowers to add color. The air was also especially clear, and you could look off into the distance to see the ocean. For a graveyard, it was a very comfortable hangout spot.

"This is a nice place. If I didn't already know this was a graveyard, I would have considered this part of a hiking course."

"And then a barbeque afterwards? I get it, totally!"

*Oh Mel, don't react so seriously to a joke. And Colette, don't react like you've just had a revelation that we could actually do that. It's completely destroying the nice mood.*

"Ah, Mel, did you discover the amazing taste of barbeque from that incident in Faanis?"

"What... What could you possibly be talking about? A normal angel like me has no idea. Still, this really is a nice graveyard. Yes, a truly nice one."

The former goddess guiltily averted her gaze. Mel had originally come down to the mortal world on leave, but these days she'd been even truer to her desires, probably because she was finally free of the fetters of godhood. To be fair, she'd been fulfilling what responsibilities she had left as the former Goddess properly, taking the meeting today as an example, so there were no complaints, but...in the end, the biggest problem was her appetite. As the master of the household, I was seriously worried that one day Efil would no longer be able to cover it on her own.

"Thank you very much. This place was developed by a past Oracle so that departed souls would be able to rest peacefully. Having inherited her will, this place still accepts anyone regardless of status as long as the application is filed. Of course, given the cost of this place, it cannot be made free. We have been making efforts to make sure that most people can make use of it by keeping the cost down with group graves, but..."

“No, no, there’s no way you could be expected to make this place free! Look at how wonderful it is; some cost is to be expected.”

“Hee hee! Hearing you say that would have done the founder, Oracle Cecilia, good too.”

That being said, Colette was currently disguised so that the citizens who had come to worship wouldn’t see her. Since Mel and I were already famous as Rank S adventurers, she had borrowed a habit and hood from the church and was hiding her face as well as she could. It was understandable, but to be honest I wanted to be able to see her face at least when she was paying her respects.

“Please, don’t worry. From here on out, only those involved with the church, specifically those with the permission of someone of a cardinal rank or higher are allowed to enter. I can show my face to those people.”

“Huh? Did I just say something out loud without realizing it?”

“No, you just had that kind of face, honey.”

“Yes, you did,” Colette agreed.

“Grr...”

To think the day would come that not just Mel but also Colette was able to read my mind... *Do these things really show up that clearly on my face? Am I that type of guy? Hey, no, this is outside of a battle, okay? Even I know what happens, then.*

Like that, I sank into the mire of self-doubt. Meanwhile, we reached an area with a towering white wall with silver filigree. In front of the gate that led into the depths of the white wall were guards who seemed like they belonged to the Holy Order of Knights. Furthermore, in front of those guards was another person who was dressed the same as we were. The figure seemed to be having a conversation with them.

“Good work. I trust the task is going well?”

“Yes, Colette-sama. We’ve been waiting for you. It is indeed going well. After all, this was proposed by the Oracle herself. Though it’s being done in secret,

we've managed to gather more than enough skilled craftsmen and mages. Oh, and these people must be Mel-sama and Kelvin-sama, I presume?"

"Cardinal Sai?"

The person who had turned around after Colette had called out to them was Cardinal Sai, his black skin poking out in places from his white robes. Judging from the fact that he wasn't wearing the high-ranking vestments I'd seen him in before, he had changed for the same reason we had.

The moment the guards saw Colette, their eyes widened and they hurried to snap off a stiff salute. Sai used his authority to have them open the gate, saying that they shouldn't talk there out in the open. The conversation flowed naturally, so that we grouped together to head to our destination. Apparently, Cardinal Sai had his hand in what Mel and I had requested as well. When I asked, it seemed that Colette had always planned to visit and check up on what was happening here.

After going through the gate, I saw that the area beyond was also a graveyard, but with larger tombstones than before. The decorations on them were also more magnificent and detailed. Most likely, everything from here on out were graves that belonged to those of authority in Deramis. The dungeon we'd conquered before, the Catacombs of Heroic Spirits, had, as its name implied, been a graveyard. However, the place had become a den of monsters recently, so from what I heard, only the harder floors were available.

*Is this place an alternative? No, that dungeon should be something Pope Philip designed, so it's newer. Hm, I'm not sure what the relationship is.*

The one thing I could say was that this area was very well guarded. There were statues shaped like dragons and angels placed throughout that in no way seemed like mere monuments.

*This is the same kind of thing that I saw in the temple, isn't it? The thing that's placed on Pope Philip's floor? Yeah, that's totally it.*

If anyone tried to infiltrate the area, the statues would definitely start moving with the objective of repelling the invader. I'd yet to see it, but for some reason I was absolutely certain that was what would happen.

“I see. And that’s why you were waiting in front of the gates?”

“Yes. Since Colette is so busy, I have relieved her and taken charge of this project. That being said, Colette’s will and preferences have been considered heavily in the design and such, so...”

Both Mel and I made questioning noises in response to Sai trailing off. It was rare for the man, who didn’t even balk when facing Pope Philip, to hesitate to speak like that.

*What happened?*

“Please be at ease! I tasked Cardinal Sai with most of it, but I, Colette, have always been in control of the most important parts!”

“Ah...”

We reacted in unison without meaning to. Mel and I had realized what was going on and muttered a response at the same time based on what Colette had said.

All this was because after the fight, we had asked Colette for a favor. We wanted a grave so that we could hold a memorial for DarkMel, Mao, and Riold, so we asked if Deramis could make it. We knew that Colette would be busy, but there was a reason we needed to have it happen.

They were the masterminds behind a world-endangering incident. There was no way their names could be left on a grave; no one would allow it. But still, I wanted at least us to be able to mourn them. I had heard about Mao from Rion and Riold from Ange, and of course I knew DarkMel best. They knew they would be considered evil by the world at large, but still insisted on pursuing their own justice. The people who understood that were very few in number. And because they were so few, I wanted to be the one to respect those feelings.

I would have been okay with any size of grave, no matter how small. I had talked to Colette, who I felt I could trust the most at that time, about it partially because I knew she would never refuse me. Still, even ignoring that, I would probably have relied on her. After all, she was the one I trusted most in the end, and Mel agreed with me. I didn’t even hesitate.

“Um, Colette-san...what’s this?”

“I did my best! I made use of my own pocket money!”

The center of the graveyard was usually where the most influential people were placed. In such a precious spot was a gigantic stone monument, so big it seemed like it was trying to push all the others out. I didn’t know whether to call it a monument, a statue, or an idol. It was shaped like Melfina—no, DarkMel.

“Isn’t...” I hesitated. “Isn’t it a little...*too* big?”

“Hee hee hee, not at all! Ah, but what wonderful craftsmanship. Oh, my nose. It’s bleeding...”

At this point, I started thinking that maybe I should have hesitated a little bit.



It’s no use crying over spilled milk. No matter how much of a fuss Mel or I made, we couldn’t undo the statue that had already been sculpted. Still, with the model of the statue made so obvious, there was no way we could try to hide who it was.

*What do we do? Hrm, seriously...what do we do?!*

“Colette, this...there’s no way people won’t—” I started, but I was cut off.

“You needn’t be worried on that front! No matter how detailed we get with DarkMel-sama’s features, those who don’t know the details will simply see it as Melfina-sama! So I have explained it to those on the outside as a statue of Melfina, who will guide wandering, lost souls! I made good use of the fact that statues aren’t colored!”

“That’s not the problem, you see—” Melfina tried to say, but she too was cut off.

“Your worries are well-founded, Melfina-sama! As Deramis’s—nay, *your* Oracle, there’s no way I would be unable to differentiate between you just because of color! But you don’t need to be worried about that either! Even if two statues of the same color were placed in front of me, I would be able to sense the soul within and figure out which one was Melfina-sama and which one was DarkMel-sama! I’m telling you, their smells would be different. Yes,

their smells!”

Both of us had given up at this point, in more than one sense of the word. “Yeah...that’s a relief,” we said in unison. Our abilities alone wouldn’t have been enough to stop Colette; we knew that.

“Err...did you know about this, Cardinal Sai?” I asked.

“Yes. I knew, and I helped. I know what you want to say, but Colette-sama is right. By setting this up as a statue of Melfina, the symbol of the Holy Order of Rinne, it can seem natural, even in this area.”

“Yeah...well...I guess it *does* make some sense...”

“To tell you the truth, when Colette-sama first told me about it, I was a little worried about what would happen. But now I can say with confidence that this was the right choice. We consulted Serge as well, and she wholeheartedly gave it her stamp of approval!”

Neither Mel nor I had any words in response. *Oh yeah, wasn’t Cardinal Sai in love with Serge? He was pretty much the only person in Deramis’s upper echelons who could be said to be an upright, decent person... It’s too bad. You chose the wrong person to consult with. She totally just said yes because she was amused. That dang strongest Hero...*

“I think I would like to treat this statue as a national treasure of Deramis. It will be proof of the four great countries banding together once again! No, even more than that, it will be a miraculous creation! I will come every day to offer my prayers, so the power of miracles must come to reside within it! Rather, I should say that it *will*! I’ll make it so! In fact, I can start now! Please, witness the Oracle Colette’s once-in-a-lifetime prayer!”

“Wait, wait, wait! You’re inflating this way too much, and you’re getting off point! Sit! Stay, Colette!”

Both Mel and I had to work together to calm Colette down and change her intentions for the statue. What an exhilarating sense of relief!

“Excuse me. I seem to have lost myself there.”

“Yeah, I’m glad that was all you did. If you’d managed to go even a little



further, we would have been in trouble.”

“Now, now, no need to go that far,” Melfina interjected. “At any rate, now that everyone has calmed down, let’s get back to the subject at hand. It’s too late, so let’s just accept the results. It seems that as a grave, this is almost complete, am I right?”

“You’re correct, Melfina-sama. All that remains is to conduct the ceremony to lay the spirit to rest. This rite is one that requires someone of a bishop’s rank or higher, which is why we will have the Oracle, Colette, conduct the rite personally.”

The ceremony that Cardinal Sai was talking about was one that friends and family who were left behind had to hold in order to send departed souls back to the wheel of reincarnation. Once the ritual was done, the dead would be able to achieve true peace, with all lingering regrets expunged, and head for a new life (according to Mel). Basically, it was a Deramisian funeral.

“Colette, can you do this ceremony now?”

“The ceremony? I can, but don’t we need to gather everyone?”

“No, it seems like they’ll all be busy for a while. Sera is off on the Northern Continent to survey what scars were left by the world collapse, Shutola is stuck in Trycen, and everyone else has gone back to their hometowns to check on them. It would take a long time to get them all in one place.”

“We can’t afford to stay in Deramis forever either. Once these meetings end, we plan to head back to Parth for a while. So we want to at least send DarkMel’s soul off, even if it’s just us. I’m not the Goddess of Reincarnation anymore, so I’m no longer in a position where I can ask this of you, Colette. Even so, if you’ll agree, I would like you to be the one to send my other half and her Apostles to the next life. Would you?”

“DarkMel and the others have been working their hardest for a long time. In fact, they’ve been working *too* hard. That’s why we’d like to see them at peace as soon as possible. I want to ask you too, Colette. Please, will you do this?”

“You trust me that much, Melfina-sama? Kelvin-sama? I understand. I, Colette, will make it the funeral of a lifetime!”

Colette showed us a never-before-seen expression filled with determination. She must have been incredibly happy that we were relying on her. Still, why was I getting just the slightest sense of déjà vu?

“I would like you two to stand behind me and pray for the peace of the deceased. Cardinal Sai, could I trouble you to help me?”

“Yes! I will assist you, Colette-sama.”

“Huh? Help? Assist?” I asked.

A few minutes later, though there were some worrying factors, the funeral was completed without a hitch thanks to Colette’s efforts. There was a bright moment where I even thought I saw a light ascending to the heavens from DarkMel’s statue in the middle of the ceremony, though it might have just been my imagination. Honestly, it looked like the light of the sun to me, but I had no idea whether it had actually happened or not.

*Still, if that really was their souls... Either way, I guess the only thing I can do is pray for her peace. Also, this was just a selfish wish of mine, but I prayed to be able to meet them as formidable enemies in my next life as well. In fact, I’m totally gonna find you guys and pick a fight!*

“With this, the ceremony is finished. Well done, everyone.” Colette declared, sweat running off her in huge drops. The ceremony wasn’t time-consuming, but it seemed the burden on Colette was significant. The exhaustion she was feeling after such a short time was proof of how hard she had to concentrate. Furthermore, she made sure to show us a smile afterwards to put us at ease.

*I need to thank Colette from the bottom of my heart here. Seriously, thank you.*

“So, now DarkMel and the others can move on, right?”

“Yes. I’m sure their souls have achieved peace. I will guarantee it as Deramis’s Oracle!”

“Colette-sama was the one who finished the ceremony. This may be presumptuous of me, but I believe what she says.”

“Thank you, Cardinal Sai. If it weren’t for your support, I would have fallen

halfway through. I needed that stamina recovery.”

“I’m honored by your words.”

*Ah, so that’s the spell that Cardinal Sai cast during the ceremony.*

As soon as Mel and I once again thanked her, Colette stumbled, like the strings of nervousness that had been holding her up had suddenly been cut. Seeing her like that brought a smile to everyone’s faces, brightening the mood. I suppose you could call this a finale; the ceremony tied a neat bow on everything.

But...if such a nice ceremony were to be the finale, then that would make it hard for me to say what I wanted to say.

*Mel, dear, could you say it for me? Huh? No? It has to be from me? Oh, come on, please...*

“Um...papa, mama, may I come out now?”

“Huh?”

Out of nowhere, a terribly cute and young voice came from behind DarkMel’s statue. This was followed by someone poking their face around said statue, and the moment Colette saw the owner of the voice, her eyes popped out like saucers as she bled from the nose.

The small, young girl who had emerged looked to be around young Shutola’s age. Her appearance combined with her large round eyes gave off a very beautiful impression. She looked absolutely wonderful, the powers of cuteness and beauty coming together to be more than the sum of its parts. She was wearing obviously nice clothing, which made her seem like a princess from some castle or the daughter of a famous household. *I mean, doesn’t she just? There’s no way she doesn’t come from someplace like that!*

With her long, glossy black hair that reached down to her hips swaying as she walked, she came up to Colette, who was at death’s door. Colette was already basically down for the count and was doing her best to avoid looking at the girl as she fought with her own desires. For an instant, Cardinal Sai moved to intervene and stop her, but the moment he saw her in full, he stopped and turned towards us.



“Could you please provide an explanation for this, Melfina-sama? Kelvin-sama?”

*Weirdly, Cardinal Sai, it sounds like you’ve raised the intonation to the ending of your favorite phrase there. Yeah, I get it. I’ll explain. Properly, even.*

“Papa, mama, this person seems to be in a lot of pain. Umm...we need to save her. So in this case, I should use healing magic, I think?”

“She’s fine. Just come here quickly. That girl has an illness and whenever she sees something cute, she bleeds from her nose and mouth. So you need to get away from her, DarkMel.”

“I’m not cute!” the girl stammered. “Jeez, papaaaa!”

“That’s not true! You’re the cutest in the world, DarkMel!”

I wrapped DarkMel in a hug as she came to us, proceeding to turn the movement smoothly into several twirls. As we spun, I ended up meeting Cardinal Sai’s gaze.

*I get it. Okay, I’ll explain.*

“Uhhh...well, this is our beloved daughter.”

“I’m DarkMel. Pleased to meet you!” She bowed politely. How cute.

“My, how polite of you. My name is Sai Dill, and I hold the position of cardinal here in the Holy Empire of Deramis.” He turned back to me. “I was very surprised to see you had a daughter. I would never have expected that. Her name surprised me even further.”

“Oh man, aha ha ha ha...”

Yes, the girl’s name was DarkMel. Though at first glance she looked like nothing more than the cutest little angel in the world, she was actually the very same DarkMel who was the mastermind and big bad behind our last battle. Back when DarkMel lay dying, I had formed a contract with her using my Summoning skill. Her wounds hadn’t been something that could be healed using magic, so the only way to save her life was to send her temporarily to my pool. DarkMel had agreed to my plan by squeezing my hand.

After that, DarkMel had slept for several days. That was understandable, given how severe her wounds had been. On top of that, she had fused with that Deus Ex Machina-slash-Former Dragon King-slash-Jildora thing, so she'd been in a very precarious state already. Also, because Melfina had abdicated her position of Goddess of Reincarnation, all the power DarkMel had absorbed had become even more unstable. All that, and she'd still woken up after only a couple of days. It was basically a miracle. It had taken some time, but DarkMel had certainly revived herself within my pool.

"Papa, is it my fault you're being yelled at? Uh, um...sorry..."

"Oh, no, I'm not mad or anything, okay?! I was just a little surprised that these two had a child! I didn't mean anything by it!" Cardinal Sai exclaimed.

"R... Really? That's good to hear. So everyone gets along, huh?"

*So darn cute.* But still, something unexpected had happened when she had revived herself. The DarkMel I'd summoned afterwards was young, with a mental age to match. Also, it seemed she lacked her memories and had returned to Level 1. Mel and I, the only two who knew the secret of my contract with DarkMel, froze on the spot, our minds going blank. Whether it was lucky or unlucky, we had been alone when it happened, and as soon as DarkMel had seen us after being Summoned, she'd said this:

::Are you my...papa and mama?::

I'd been shot right through the heart, instantly overtaken by fatherly instinct. Suddenly, I no longer cared how things had come to be the way they were; I was done for. That was when I'd made a decision—for us to raise this girl to the best of our ability as our own daughter. *I mean, look at her. Look at how cute she is.* Anyone would do anything for her, and now it was my turn to work hard.

Trying to think about it calmly, DarkMel basically looked like a younger version of Melfina, so it wasn't strange to claim her as Melfina's child. After all, angels stopped aging once they hit a certain stage just like demons did (according to Mel). In addition, DarkMel's hair color was the same as mine: black. With all that, she was basically our daughter already! Trying to explain what had happened to Sera and the others had engendered a huge misunderstanding with terrible consequences, but it was okay in the end!

“Eeee!” Mel and DarkMel squealed in unison.

“So, a lot happened, but...we checked on her memory with Sera, and it’s really gone. It doesn’t seem like she’s lying. But as you can see, he’s become the world’s sappiest, most doting parent,” Melfina explained.

“I understand how you must feel, Melfina-sama.”

“No, you don’t. All this happened because the love he felt for DarkMel had nowhere to go once she was gone and was redirected as love for the child. That’s why, erm, well, since I was the cause of a lot of it, I couldn’t really blame him. If you could just overlook this...”

“Mama, come play!”

“Okaaaay!”

“You absolutely dote on her too, don’t you, Melfina-sama?”

Now I felt I could deeply sympathize with Gerard’s and my father-in-law’s feelings. I didn’t care what other people thought, that was how caught up I was in how much I loved my child. If anyone were to try to take her, I understood the feeling of wanting to kill anyone who went after their child. After all, I’m the same now. It’s a natural reaction, isn’t it?

“Eep! Er, ummm...who...who is this weapon of mass destruction?!”

Colette, having come back to her senses, asked this while trying her best to keep DarkMel from being directly in her line of sight. Colette surely meant it as a compliment, but it had come all the way around to being rude again.

“She’s not anything dangerous, okay? She’s Mel and my—”

“N... No! I cannot handle such wonderful violence! I have heard what you said, but I don’t have the blood necessary to lay eyes on a young DarkMel! I want to see, but I can’t afford it! How cruel! This is just torture!”

Colette covered her eyes with her hands, blocking her vision, although it wasn’t necessary since my child was quick on the uptake. She hid behind me so as not to enter her eyesight.

“So, what do you plan to do now? Even though it hasn’t become common knowledge, all the higher-ups of the four great countries know of your daughter



—DarkMel—and that she was the cause of the last battle. To be honest, I don't know whether they'll be able to accept her.”

“Have you forgotten, Cardinal Sai?”

“Huh?”

“With the ceremony just now, the DarkMel all those people knew has achieved a peaceful rest. You, Sai, and Colette even went as far as to guarantee it. That means the pure, innocent little girl here is our daughter. The only thing this DarkMel is guilty of is being cute!”

“Urk! Buh... But that's just a bold-faced lie—”

“I see. You have a point,” Colette interrupted him. “I have heard stories of a great man born in the other world from a single parent, so it isn't strange at all that Melfina-sama, a former goddess, was able to just pop out a child! If anyone tries to complain, I will guide the public so that they will stand with us, for I am the Oracle of Deramis!”

“Please, Colette-sama! I'm begging you, please calm down!”

“I am calm, though. I've lost so much blood, I have no choice.”

*Great. That means Colette's become our comrade.*

“Please think about it one more time, Cardinal Sai. If you were to ask Serge Flore for advice, what do you think she'd say? The answer should come to you right away.”

Sai sucked in a breath. “You mean that cuteness is justice! I see... That is an excellent point!”

And with that, Cardinal Sai also joined our ranks, recognizing DarkMel as an absolutely adorable entity.

*I wonder if everyone else who has spread out to other countries has finished doing their part in convincing people?*



*Kelvin's Estate, living room:*

“Is everyone here?”

“Everyone’s here, Kel-nii!”

A few days later, we returned home from Deramis. The rest of my companions had also gathered in the living room, back from wherever they were all over the world. Huh? You thought that they wouldn’t be back for a while? Oh, well, that was just an excuse to get DarkMel accepted as fast as possible. But our desire to lay Rio and Mao to rest was real, and to be honest, using a teleportation gate meant that getting home would be almost instantaneous—at any rate, we were all in one place.

“So, I would like to start this debriefing session now. Mel and I, the Deramis team, will start.”

The purpose of this meeting was to report the results of our plan to secretly negotiate with the lords of the various countries all over the world to accept DarkMel’s existence. Mel’s and my success should be obvious from what happened a few days ago.

“We have successfully convinced several people, starting with Colette Deramilius, the Holy Empire of Deramis’s number two, then Cardinal Sai Dill, Deramis’s four official Heroes, and Serge Flore. Only the pope, Philip Deramilius, remained cautious. But we’ve got him completely surrounded by people on our side, so it should only be a matter of time until he agrees.”

“Colette’s enthusiasm was especially amazing to see. We can probably be confident about Deramis.”

“There’s no need to fret, everyone! I, Colette, will make this happen even if it costs me my life!”

“My liege...is it just my imagination or is Colette sitting right next to me?”

*It’s not your imagination. She’s just so motivated that she left Deramis to participate in this meeting. Apparently, once this is over, she’s going to head back immediately using the teleportation gate.*

“Then I, having been asked to handle Toraj, will go next,” Gerard continued. “I managed to secure an audience with Toraj’s ruler, and she agreed so readily it was almost disappointing. She did so as soon as I laid out the circumstances, though I suspect the fact that Sylvia and Ema were with me was a big factor.

She stayed in a great mood from beginning to end. Oh, and she gave us some presents.”

“My, what splendid vegetables! We can use them for today’s dinner,” said Efil.

She must have known about Mel beforehand, because Tsubaki-sama had also gifted Gerard with a veritable mountain of vegetables. The maids, with Efil in the lead, did their best to carry out the goods.

*That reminds me, weren’t Sylvia and Ema going to stay in Toraj for a while? Of course that would put Tsubaki-sama, the human resources monster, in a great mood. I’m sure everything we’ve built up with her played a part too, but more than anything, we had perfect timing. I’ll have to show my gratitude to Sylvia and Ema for their help later.*

“Whew, it’s done,” said Efil.

“Thanks for the hard work, Efil-nee. Should we go straight into our report?” Rion asked.

“Indeed. Rion-sama and I were in charge of Gaun and the Elven village. Starting with the results: both the Beast King and elder Nellas have accepted DarkMel.”

“The Beast King was opposed at first, but after listening to what Efil-nee had to say, elder Nellas came with us as support. Also, Sabato-san, Goma-chan, and the other princes all worked to convince him. Even Kilto-san, who we’ve basically never even met, was passionate in his support, just like Sabato-san and the others.”

“In the end, he was deeply impressed, saying that his children were finally able to speak out without fearing their father,” Efil added.

“I see. Really, Leonhart said that?”

It was hard to sense what was in Leonhart’s heart, as his way of teaching his children went in the exact opposite way of me or my father-in-law. I could only give my best guess, but his children’s actions must have moved him somehow. Either way, it’s the Beast King we’re talking about, so the possibility that he was reluctant to accept because of some sort of hidden goal couldn’t be discounted.

Also, while I was of course grateful for the actions of Sabato and everyone else we had a lot of opportunities to be involved with, I was especially grateful to my sworn friend Kilto from the bottom of my heart. Somehow, I could easily make deductions about why he did what he did, such as wanting to show his little sister Goma his good side, or being so stricken by Rion's cuteness that he just had to stand up to his fearsome father. But regardless of those reasons, Kilto's spirit was a wonderful thing.

*I definitely should invite him to go out drinking with Azgrad and me next time.*

"How did Shutola and the Dragonz do in Trycen?"

"Do we even need to say?" Shutola huffed proudly.

"Basically the only answer we got was 'If that's what Shutola, who that bastard Azgrad trusts completely, says, then isn't it good enough?'" Dahak explained.

"We didn't even get the chance to say anything..." Boga added.

"I knew we wouldn't from the start. It was a very easy job." Mdofarak also didn't miss her chance to chime in.

"Ah, but esteemed brother Azgrad wants you to go visit Trycen later, dearest brother Kelvin. It seems he has something personal to discuss with you."

"Azgrad does?"

*I see. But what could it be? Is it something I should bring our comrade Kilto for? Hot damn, Azgrad, did you finally learn to read the room?*

Sera piped up, "Then I'm next! The Empire of Grebarelka—"

"Agreed immediately, right?" I quickly interrupted her.

"Whaaat?!" Sera stammered, "How did you know, Kelvin?! Did you get a skill to see the future or something?!"

"Wouldn't that be closer to your ability?"

Sera was terribly surprised that I had predicted the outcome, but the result really wasn't in question. I didn't even have to ask Bell to help; my father-in-law was like putty in Sera's hands. Just like I was now.

“Mrr...but I wanted to surprise you...” she grumbled.

“You’re amazing, Sera-san! I respect you as much as my papa and mama!” DarkMel stated.

“My, you have a bright future ahead of you! DarkMel’s gonna become big later on, Kelvin! Mel!” Sera replied.

Having been complimented by DarkMel, her mood did a complete one-eighty, prompting her to give a very auspicious prediction.

*Yeah, keep doling out those compliments. Sera’s reliable in that respect, so if she says it, it’ll probably come true.*

“Also, I have a message from my father.”

“From father-in-law this time?”

“He says, ‘I would love to see my grandchild’s face sometime, but what I want to see most is someone I’m directly related to.’”

“I... I’ll do my best...”

*You just dropped a bombshell, father-in-law! You broke this peaceful and heartwarming mood in an instant!*

“The last report comes from your big sister Ange! I went all the way to the far reaches of the Western Continent, all the way to the headquarters of the Adventurer’s Guild. Even *I’m* tired after all that.”

“And I seriously appreciate it. Good job, and thanks for all the hard work. If I remember correctly, the guild headquarters is on the far west of the continent, right?”

“It is! But don’t worry, it was worth the trip.” Ange gave a snappy thumbs up, though even if she hadn’t, her smile would have told me how successful she’d been anyway.

“Oh man, I gotta tell you... I was able to get a meeting with the guild’s president, but...I’ll start with the result: it was no good. Tee hee!”

“All that and it was no good?!”

“Nice reaction, Kelvin-kun! But I’d appreciate it if you’d listen to your big

sister's report until the end first. This is what the president said: 'As the head of the guild, I cannot overlook the fact that DarkMel-chan and the mastermind DarkMel are one and the same. Normally we would be discussing whether or not to crush any possible evil future she might plan. But that does not mean I wish to make enemies of Deramis or a guild-approved Rank S adventurer. Those who stand above others must always discern the flow of the times and common sense. That is also the job of a pioneer. So I declare that this conversation didn't happen and I never knew anything! Mel "the Smile" and Kelvin "the Grim Reaper" had a child? Wow, congratulations! I can't send any money as a gift, but allow me to celebrate from the bottom of my heart! Oh? Her name is DarkMel? That's pretty punk!'"

"I... I see. Thanks for going as far as to imitate his voice."

Ange's frankly amazing acting had left me a little befuddled, but from what I could tell, the president was basically okay with it. Well, it was more like he was pretending not to know, to be fair. I'd never met him, but he was an adult in both the good and bad sense.

"That means that we've gotten an agreement from pretty much everyone who knows about DarkMel, though only verbally. From here on out, any complicated negotiations should be handled by Shutola and Colette, I think. But..."

"Please leave it to us. Shutola-chan and I will be invincible! Right?"

"Yup!"

*Yeah. There probably isn't anyone who can win against them in a straight negotiation. In any case—*

"Glad to have you, DarkMel!"

"Me too, papa!"

Everyone raised their hands in celebration.



*Trycen Castle, Azgrad's room:*

Having gotten a message from Shutola, I had immediately made my way to

Trycen, where Azgrad was. Though this trip would have been a lot on foot, with the use of teleportation gates, I was able to get there as easily as taking a stroll.

I went with Shutola, DarkMel, Rion, and a packed lunch, so it was almost like we were heading off for a picnic. We were even walking under a clear blue sky with the cries of birds tickling our ears. Although Trycen had been haunted by a Demon Lord just a little while ago, it now gave off a totally peaceful impression.

*What a nice day it is today, yeah. Makes me want to put my hands together and pray it isn't ruined by some vicious monster appearing somewhere.*

"Sorry. I wanted to invite our comrade Kilto, but I didn't think it wise to suddenly show up at Gaun's palace," I said. "Let's talk, the three of us, next time. To be fair, though, your message was also out of the blue, Azgrad, so you shouldn't blame me."

"You're the one who's said something out of the blue," Azgrad replied. "By 'Kilto,' do you mean Gaun's third prince? Why would his name come up?"

"Why? Are you seriously getting shy *now*? You called me to talk about our little sisters, right? I could tell, even without you needing to say it out loud. Don't worry, I thought it'd be hard for you to talk freely with Shutola around, so I sent her to play with DarkMel and the others. I'm sure the three of them are playing with dolls or something by now."

It took a moment for Azgrad to reply. "I see. So you already saw through me. You were right about Shutola too. Thanks for the consideration."

"It's fine. So, where would you like to start?"

"Ah...about that—"

We transitioned smoothly into little-sister talk. Personally, I would have liked to have exchanged some light verbal jabs to start with. Something like how wonderful our own little sisters were, for example. Then we could totally move on to passionate discussion. If our comrade Kilto had been there, he surely would have taken the lead splendidly and with no embarrassment on that front.

"Kelvin, allow me to get straight to the point. Would you welcome Shutola into your family?"



“Uh...what?”

*Huh? What did Azgrad just say? Make Shutola...family? What the heck? She's already freeloading at my place, so how much more part of the family could she even get? Oh, is he talking about having her stay longer? Even though things have calmed down now that the angel-type monsters are no more, Trycen's still in the middle of rebuilding and is a little unstable because of that, after all. If that's the case, he could have just said it straight. Oh man, I was really surprised there for a moment, aha ha ha ha ha...*

“I heard that you have a child now. If that's the case, you'll probably be getting married soon, so why not include Shutola in your circle of wives? Come on, I'm begging you.” Azgrad bowed in a show of sincerity.

I couldn't respond, resulting in a span of silence. My brain had completely frozen. *I mean, come on. I need help, Parallel Processing! But also, what the hell do you think you're saying, Azgrad?! I thought we were just going to talk about our little sisters, but now you want me to marry yours?! There's a limit to how far out of left field a bolt from the blue can be!*

“Okay, Azgrad. Why don't we start with you raising your head? I'm gonna be honest, I'm really confused right now. I thought we were just going to have a nice, passionate chat about our little sisters. I'll freely admit that Shutola is like a little sister to me, and that she actually is a little sister. Yours, to be clear. Wait, where was I going with that?”

“Oh...sure. You do seem confused. I guess it really did come out of nowhere. Why don't we both calm down a little?”

*Take a deep breath... Okay, I feel a little better.*

“Let's start off with this: right now, you're the standin king, Azgrad. Wasn't your plan to eventually have Shutola succeed the throne? So why are you bringing up marriage to me?”

“That was the plan at first, but then a certain really vocal somebody came to stay, so...”

“Vocal?”

“A. Z. Chaaaannn? Who could you be talking about?”

“Grk!”

The window was flung open with a bang just as Azgrad adopted an expression that said volumes about how unwelcome the voice was. Cool air blew into the room and met my skin, followed by a presence that was too large, too strong, to be a mere life-form. What appeared before us had been Azgrad’s partner during the recent battle, the Ice Dragon King herself.

“Ah, hello, mother. Please excuse the intrusion.” I said.

“My, how polite of you! Hello, Kelvin-san. It’s been a while since I’ve seen you. As I say every time, thank you for taking care of my Az-chan for so long. Please, feel free to treat this place as your own and relax. Oh, that’s right! Would you like some sort of frozen treat? I can make it extra cold, you know?”

“Why’re we even on this subject?! This is Trycen’s palace—in my personal room, even!”

*Oh, sorry. Just kind of thought that was the kind of greeting I should give...*

“How many times have I told you not to come into my room without permission, Salafia?! At least come from the door! Do you even know what a door is?!”

“But it’s just so rare for you to invite a friend over, Az-chan, I couldn’t help it! Tee hee!”

“Don’t ‘tee hee’ me! Think of how old you are!”

“Okay, that was too far!” Salafia said with a smile and a playful note, though her expression said anything but.

“Agragh?!”

Salafia produced a very large popsicle from who-knows-where and shoved it into Azgrad’s mouth. It didn’t seem to hurt, but it was still a harsh punishment. I even got sympathy brain freeze.

“Agghaghaaghh! Don’t think something like this counts as a punishment!”

“My, what a nice appetite! You really are my son!”

Or so I’d thought, but Azgrad chewed through it in an instant.

Wow, Az-chan.

Azgrad sighed. “Fine, whatever. In a sense, this is perfect timing, so let’s just get back on track. As you can see, Salafia is clinging to me twenty-four seven and won’t shut up about me becoming the king. She won’t even consider the time, place, or whoever is around. At some point I was so tired and embarrassed, I just gave in. Though I don’t really want to, I’m going to officially succeed the throne.”

“I did my best. I’m proud of my son.”

“Uh, well then. That’s...congratulations?” I offered.

“I really regret bringing her back to the castle now. It was a mistake...” Azgrad muttered.

Though the Ice Dragon King gave a snappy thumbs up, I could only return a strained smile. *Does she always get this excited when Azgrad’s involved?*

“Well, dumping all the troublesome things and responsibility into your life onto your little sister is an unthinkable act as a man, after all. I’m glad your mother’s feelings got through to you,” Salafia replied.

“Yooouuuuu!”

“N-Now now, calm down...” I started. “At any rate, I understand that Az-cha—Azgrad has decided to become the king.”

“What was that just now? Is it me or did you misspeak?”

*Oh come on, you can’t blame me, can you? Salafia really emphasizes the honorific when she refers to you. I just got influenced by it, is all.*

“Still, that’s completely separate from you wanting me to marry Shutola. I mean, why?”

“It has a lot to do with it if she’s not going to take the throne. It’s easy to forget since she’s still in that small form, but Shutola’s already eighteen. It’d be fine if she were a man, but for royalty, when a woman gets to that age, they need to marry. In fact, back when my old man was still in his right mind, he had intended to find Shutola a husband from some powerful royal family by the time she reached this age. Basically, what you’d call a political marriage.”

“I see. I hear that’s common with nobles and royalty... And?”

“Once my old man turned into a Demon Lord, everything he was preparing went bust. It was because he shifted to the opinion that it was better to just use force to take land than go through all that troublesome diplomatic stuff. To be honest, I was happy when the marriage talks went up in flames. But now that I’m set to take the throne, that means Shutola will have to tie herself to someone from who-knows-where sometime down the line. I know that her memories are already back, so there’s nothing stopping it from happening anymore.”

I sympathized with Azgrad’s feelings for his sister at every turn, but in general, this was a very heavy subject. As things stood, Shutola was another little sister to me, so it hurt how much I understood how Azgrad felt.

“So I thought of a compromise. Kelvin, that’s you.”

And while all those emotions were running their course through me, I was offered as a compromise.

“A compromise?” I reflexively asked before immediately thinking better of it. “No, before any questions, I should hear you out entirely first. Please, continue.”

There was a mountain of things I wanted to say, but first I needed to process the situation. The fact that Salafia wasn’t saying anything meant that this decision came with her approval. Still, it didn’t have my approval just yet.

“As I just said, at this rate, Shutola will have to be wed to some other family. Trycen’s on the decline thanks to the Demon Lord incident, but that doesn’t change the fact that we’re one of the Eastern Continent’s four great countries. There’ll be many people who want to get their hands on that name. In fact, there are more than a few civil officers who want to use this chance to restore our country in a big way.”

“But you don’t want that to happen, do you, Az-chan?” Salafia chimed in. “You wouldn’t be able to forgive yourself if your cute, adorable little sister were to end up in the hands of some piece of trash like your younger brothers, especially one you’ve never even met, right? I get it, I totally do!”

“You don’t have to get in your comments every time!” Azgrad shouted. But then he calmed down. “Well, you’re not wrong, though.”

That got me smiling too. *Buh... But I’m not convinced yet, okay?!*

“So as a compromise, I took the initiative to find a worthy person we could build a good relationship with while continuing to restore the country’s prestige. Someone decent who I know is a hundred times better than scattering pearls before swine.”

“Az-chan, pigs are actually quite clean and tidy, and are actually rather smart on top of being delicious. I think it’s rude to compare them to fools whose entire existences are completely useless, don’t you?”

“Oh...no, I didn’t go that far...”

*Ah, I get it. Salafia’s the type that’s totally sweet on anybody she likes but is absolutely merciless on anyone she doesn’t. Like the princes she refers to as Azgrad’s little brothers—from the way she acts, they’re all in the latter category. Could they be the reason she has yet to visit Trycen’s palace? If I remember right, they all went missing during the Demon Lord disturbance, didn’t they? To be fair, though, people stopped searching for the princes awfully quick for reasons like there being no time or them just not being popular enough.*

*Whoops, my mind totally went off the rails there. I don’t actually care about those princes.* I urged Az-chan to hurry up and continue with my eyes.

“Ah...basically, you’re the only one who came to mind when it comes to someone that I can resonate with, someone with similar tastes, and someone that I respect. And if she’s wed to someone like you, Kelvin, a Rank S adventurer who’s got way more influence than some small country somewhere, that’ll solidify a deep bond between our parties, and no one will complain. I can concede and make a thousand compromises, because if it’s you, I can leave Shutola to you. Though it really is a *lot* of compromises I’m making.”

“Oh, sure...got it.”

It was pretty embarrassing to have that said to my face. It was true that I’d beaten Azgrad in battle and probably earned his respect then, and there were a lot of points where we resonated, from our tastes and interests as battle

junkies to the fact that we treated Shutola like a little sister.

“I understand what you’re trying to say, Azgrad. I do, but...I can’t just say yes.”

“Huh? Hey, you tryin’ ta say that Shutola’s not good enough for you? Or are ya tryin’ ta pick a fight with Trycen?”

“I’d love a fight, but that’s not what I’m trying to say. Aren’t Shutola’s feelings the most important here? I know you did this thinking of your sister, but I don’t think we can move forward with this without hearing what she thinks.”

Yes, no matter how sensible the proposal was, even if it was for Shutola’s sake, the person in question’s feelings were the most important. If I tried to force Shutola into it when she didn’t want to, then my life afterwards would be —

“Ah, if that’s what you want, she already gave the okay, you know?”

That had me dumbstruck for a moment. “Huh?”

What Azgrad said had been so unexpected that I ended up letting out a weird sound. *What does he mean, okay? Did he...already ask Shutola and she said okay?!*

“S...suhh...seriously?!”

“Man you’re really distrustful today, aren’t you? As her older brother, of course I’d ask how my little sister felt first. Both the small and normal Shutola have said yes.”

“And keep this a secret, but when I asked her what she really thought,” Salafia added, “she actually confirmed it to me too! Both of them are looking forward to being married to you, Kelvin-san.”

I was speechless.

“My! You’re so happy you can’t even speak, I see! It was worth setting this all up ahead of time, then. You’re happy too, aren’t you, Az-chan?”

“My feelings on this are so complicated, I have no idea if I’m happy or not. Well, I guess Kelvin’s reaction is reasonable; of course he’d be ecstatic. However! You’re forbidden from holding hands or kissing her until we’ve had the ceremony. If you do, I’ll cut you down, diplomacy and my reputation be

damned. Got it?”

While Azgrad and Salafia moved the conversation forward on their own, I had just managed to restart my brain after that shock. I wasn't sure whether I should call them really prepared or far too thorough, but whatever they were, they were so scary that it surprised me.

*Wait. Just wait. This is all so sudden my heart isn't prepared!*

Shutola...*that* Shutola, was looking forward to marriage?! And you're saying that goes for both the child and adult versions? Even now, after Azgrad and Salafia had said that explicitly to me, I couldn't quite bring myself to believe it. It was true that I liked Shutola, but that was just as a little sister, not as a woman. At least, that was what I'd thought. And I'd thought Shutola was the same way, which was why I was so shaken by this.

*Asking her over the Network would be the fastest way to resolve this, but...it's not like my mind is made out of steel or something!*

“Hey, look, Kelvin's started clutching at his head. What's up with that?”

“It looks like he's confused and asking himself whether it's really okay to look at his little sister that way, and whether Shutola really said what we told him she said. What youth! How wonderful, yep!”

“I'll leave the latter half of that alone for now, but the first half can't be true. Jeez... Hey, Kelvin! Why the hell are you sweating the small stuff *now*?! You're close enough to actually kiss your actual little sister, aren't you?! Shutola's a way better option since she's not even blood related to you! What the hell is there to worry about?! Huh?! Tell me!”

“What?!”

*He... He's right!* The moment I started thinking of things his way, suddenly all my guilt towards Shutola disappeared.

*To be fair, Rion's not my sister by blood either. But I'll let that go.*

I would never have expected Azgrad to teach me something so simple. It seemed that I was the one who wasn't qualified to discuss little sisters.

*You understand little sisters way more than I do, Azgrad!*



“Heh, seems like you’ve finally woken up.”

“Yeah. Thanks to you, brother-in-law. It feels like a fog has lifted!”

“Please, being called that way just feels creepy, so go back to the usual. Now then, as for the latter half...you can talk to Shutola through telepathy, right? Just get confirmation. Or what, are you scared to know for sure, Mr. Grim Reaper?”

“Heh, you don’t need to rile me up like that. I believe you, Azgrad.”

At this point, I no longer held even a shred of doubt. I immediately decided to set up a call with Shutola over the Network.

::Hello, this is Shutola. What did you need, Kelvin-san?::

*Oh, you went back to your original form, I see, I replied. Sorry for bringing this up so suddenly, Shutola, but there’s something I wanted to confirm.*

::What a coincidence. To tell you the truth, there’s something I wanted to warn you about as well::

*Huh? Warn?*

::Yes. Even though you’re in esteemed brother Azgrad’s room, you should at least make sure the door is locked properly::

I was so shocked I couldn’t say anything back. Slowly, I turned to look over at the door, confirming that it was half-open. I could see adult Shutola, Rion, and DarkMel peeking through the gap.

“Uhh...are you going to be my mama, Shutola-san?”



*Kelvin’s Estate, Dahak’s plantation:*

“I see. So what happened then?”

“Both Azgrad and Salafia were scolded thoroughly by the adult Shutola. Basically she told them to think more carefully before acting when it came to private talks that concerned the country’s future.”

“Oh, that’s what she was mad about?”

After returning from Trycen, I'd talked to Gerard and Dahak out on the dragon's plantation. An uproar about my engagement to Shutola had already spread throughout the estate, so I was there taking temporary refuge. Asking why I was doing so would be complete nonsense. There's no need to worry; I'll return soon anyway. Just let me have a moment of peace.

"I totally thought she'd want to talk about her apparent engagement to you, big bro."

"Gah ha ha! Shutola is a very wise girl," Gerard interjected. "I'm sure she weighed all sorts of things on a little scale and figured out the best route forward. Yep, otherwise there's no way she'd come to such a decision. By the way, my liege, it's been a while since we've last crossed swords. Why not have a bout? It'll serve as some liliight training. Yes, training."

Gerard proposed nonchalantly, as if he was just making small talk. But I could feel his sharp gaze from under his helmet, and it said that there was no way it would just be training. It was shouting at me, asking me what the heck I was doing to his granddaughter.

"Don't try to intimidate me while exuding all that pressure, please. Honestly, it'd be tough for me to have you as an enemy too right now, Gerard."

*I made sure to get her consent, okay? The adult Shutola mostly talked about how beneficial it would be to the country and didn't say much about what was in her heart. But, the child Shutola put her feelings very succinctly, with a simple, "I like you, big brother, so it's okay!" To be honest, I couldn't feel more blessed. I suppose you could say I got the outward excuse from adult Shutola, and the real feelings from child Shutola. At any rate, all of my reasons to object had been blasted out of the water, so I got engaged to her.*

"I've already been punched full force by Sera the moment I brought up the engagement," I complained. "So congrats to me."



“You make it sound like you just got out of prison, but...”

Sera’s all-out punch was fierce, to say the least. Thanks to that, my cheek had swollen painfully. But most likely the real danger had yet to come. Even though there really was no other choice given the circumstances, I had promised to marry Shutola. With that, Mel’s, Efil’s, Sera’s, Rion’s, and Ange’s attitudes had completely changed. Before, we had all agreed that I would marry everyone all at the same time. If I were to neglect that promise, I would die for sure.

“Oh, fine.” Gerard relented. “But once you get out of your pickle, I get to cut you down, got it?”

“You know you just went from a bout to one-sided murder, right?”

“Old-man jokes aside, what’re you going to do? Seriously?” Gerard changed the subject. “Are you really going to marry everyone at the same time?”

“I’ve read up on how humans form mated pairs before, but...” Dahak hesitated, “It sounds like a lot of work. Unlike us dragons, you don’t just decide that’s what you are, you need to get permission from the parents, go through a complicated ceremony, and a lot of other preparations besides, right? And when it comes to royalty like Shutola... Wow, bro, you’re amazing.”

Actually, my relationship with Colette also had a big question of responsibility attached to it. I was told long ago that I might be dragged into a troublesome conflict between royalty and nobility, but thanks to the vicissitudes of love, I ended up in that position anyway. To be fair, it was my fault, but...

“Still, Dahak, you’re quite well-versed in such things, aren’t you?” Gerard commented.

“Heh heh! Of course I would be; I plan to be Prettia-chan’s mate someday! It’s only natural to study up on the culture.”

It took a moment for Gerard to reply, “Indeed. Well, do your best. Really. I am rooting for you from the bottom of my heart.”

“Oh no, I won’t fall for that, Gerard, my man! I have no openings to be exploited so easily!”

*You’ve got it wrong, Dahak. Gerard really is rooting for you. Still, though,*

*marrying Prettia, the next Goddess of Reincarnation, huh? I'm kind of curious in a morbid way, but I also know it'd be better to do what my detection skills are telling me to do and stay away. In the first place, would a normal wedding ceremony be okay for something like that?*

“Oh, wait, isn't big sis Sera also royalty? Man, bro, you're in trouble.”

“In terms of getting permission from the parents, that would be way more difficult than Trycen's side. I get the feeling he seriously would set up like a 'True Tower of Trials' for me to go through or something.”

“Are you referring to the tower you climbed in Grebarelka, my liege? That does sound likely...I suppose I should get ready, then. I need to find another tower I can watch from.”

*What?! You're going to build one, Gerard?!*

“Uh, well, anyway, it'll be several more months until Rion comes of age. I'll make a plan and finish my preparations during that time. In the meantime, I want to find the rest of the divine pillars and see if we can find any more promising talent, so things'll get busy. That reminds me, I also want to try going to the unexplored places in the Western and Northern Continents. I'd like to have DarkMel build up a lot of different experiences!”

“Wow, you're stretching yourself thin, aren't you?” Dahak whistled appreciatively. “You sure you aren't trying to do too much?”

“Being busy is a good thing, but if something were to happen to DarkMel—” Gerard threatened.

“Hey now, don't draw that sword. Seriously, you don't have to resort to that for every little thing. It's fine, I tell you!”

Dahak seemed a little worried, but I couldn't afford to complain about being busy. Before she lost her memory, DarkMel had taken great pains to become the Goddess and have me enjoy myself. She'd even gone so far as to try and subject the entire world to the cycle of reincarnation. Now that I'd rejected all that, I didn't have the free time to sit around and be depressed. I would prove that the world didn't need to be reincarnated, that I could enjoy life, battles, and everything else endlessly with the world as it was. And I wanted to show all

that to my child, DarkMel.

“Papa!”

DarkMel called out to me from the mansion as I was trying to keep Gerard’s sword in its scabbard. My body responded before my brain could give any orders, and it seemed Gerard was the same. Neither of us could bear to fight in front of DarkMel, so we immediately made a show of getting along as she ran over with a smile and I picked her up.

“What’s up? Did your mama take your snacks again?”

“Pft, no! I shared my portion with mama that time! She did look like she really wanted it, but I was the one who gave it to her.”

“It only shows itself every once in a while, but it seems like the little lady here is more mature than sister Mel. Or at least that’s the impression I get.” commented Dahak.

“Oh, yeah, well...yeah...”

It was true, which was why I couldn’t really argue. Especially when it came to appetite, for some reason DarkMel only ate as much as would be appropriate for a child her age. In fact, it might have been a little less, even. Meanwhile, Mel was as big an eater as ever. It was a mystery.

“It seems like mama and the others want to talk about the future. They sent me as a messenger because they said that papa probably wouldn’t run away if I was the one who told him. So I did my job properly!”

“I... I see. Thanks, that’s a great help...”

“Oohhh, they really know your weak points, don’t they?” Dahak seemed impressed.

“This is bad, this method would work on me too...”

He was totally right. Neither I nor Gerard would be able to dodge this attack. It was a surefire method.

“My liege, just a little while ago you seemed to have resolved yourself; you even looked cool doing it. It would be good for you to remember that as you go.”

“That resolve is enough to give me stomach pains, though!”

“Let’s go, papa!”

“O... Okay, let’s.”

Holding hands with DarkMel all the while, we walked back inside as I tried to psyche myself up.

*Schweeen!*

But as I was bravely resolving myself to my fate, something came to shake up all my efforts—something from the heavens. Specifically, a strange, pink mass of light came down from above. All the men present froze as DarkMel, wondering what was going on, tilted her head cutely.

“Oh crap...”

“It really is...”

“Oh no! Oh noooo!”

“Huh?”

We knew the identity of that pink light. It had been burned into the back of my brain. *Move, my body! We can still make it!*

“Mm-hmmm!” came a coquettish grunt. “Sorry. To. Keep. You. All. Waiting!”

And thus, the new Goddess of Reincarnation manifested herself. I hurriedly covered DarkMel’s eyes so as to prevent her from experiencing as much as possible.



Though it was the same blue angel’s wings and halo that Mel had once shown me, the impression they gave had done a one-eighty. The sight was both hideous and atrocious, complete with full-body tights for some reason. It made me want to give a lengthy scolding about what would happen if it affected DarkMel negatively. However, the offender probably had no ill intention. In fact, she probably thought it was a good thing. That was why she was so dangerous and hard to deal with.

The great lord of fear that had come from the sky, or rather, the future



Goddess of Reincarnation Prettia, descended as if her presence was only a matter of course. I don't mean anything deeper by that, by the way. It was just so sudden, I made a mistake in the wording. Dahak was excessively excited about the new divinity that was now in his plantation, but Gerard and I would have really appreciated if such surprises didn't happen in the first place. In the worst case, our hearts might have just stopped beating.

"He— Uh...hey, Prettia. What a...provocative entrance that was. There's a child, DarkMel, here, so I'd like it if you'd...exercise a little prudence."

"Uh, yeah. He's right." Gerard chimed in. "Your...charm...is dangerous, after all. If we aren't given the chance to get used to it gradually, it's bad for the heart."

"I agree with my big bro and the boss! You're crazy sexy today too, Prettia-chan!"

"Papa, I can't see!"

With Dahak's natural follow-up, Gerard's and my statements seemed better. They probably would be taken as something positive; at least I thought they would.

"My! Sorry about that! I totally forgot that you got yourself a cute little child, Kelvin-chan. May I greet her?"

It took me a moment to formulate a response. "Right, yeah... I suppose this was a wall she'd have to get over someday, and now is the time."

"DarkMel," Gerard chimed in with advice, "make sure you open your eyes gradually. Don't go too fast! Promise me!"

"Um...I don't really get it, but I just have to open my eyes slowly and without hurrying, right?"

"Oh you! So you rate my beauty that highly, do you? Oh fine, I suppose I'll use my usual Pretty Dress Change to contain my overflowing love."

"A good decision!" Dahak gushed. "After all, your beauty has reached the realm of the gods, Prettia-chan!"

Our conversation seemed like it was both properly meshing, and also not. But

any misunderstandings would only serve to make people happier, so there was no need for me to correct anything. Still, I was grateful that Prettia had put on a nonrevealing pink dress and completely erased all angelic elements, including the wings. She had become much friendlier to DarkMel's eyes.

"Wow, so cool! Is she your friend, papa? Grandpa?"

"Oho, so you think Prettia-chan is cool. You've got some tasteful eyes on you, little lady!" Dahak exclaimed happily.

"My! What a cute little girl! I almost couldn't stop myself from nuzzling you!"

"Sorry, but don't do that. It would (physically) be too much for DarkMel's soft skin."

"I..." Gerard started, "I would gladly offer myself up as a substitute to save DarkMel from this—"

"Oh my, really now?! Am I being rewarded for something? Is this a reward for all my hard work?!"

"Don't be too hasty, Gerard! You've got to value yourself more!"

"Exactly! It's not fair that you're the only one, boss!"

At this point I was starting to feel that the intersection of emotion and conversation was becoming so complicated that things were getting out of hand, so I decided we should all put a pause on things and head back inside first. Once we were inside, we would have women such as Sera and Efil there, which should make things go along easier than with just us guys.

*Probably, anyway. Yeah, definitely probably.*

"Hee hee! Everyone gets along so well!"



*Kelvin's Estate, parlor:*

Because they were already waiting for my return, everyone was already gathered together. Of course, I felt the room was filled with an uneasy atmosphere, but with the bomb named Prettia thrown into the mix, all of that had been blown away. In a surprise guest sort of way, not the bad way that

happened with us.

As I expected, Prettia had immediately struck up a conversation with the women, greatly smoothing out the mood in the room. I had Rion and the young Shutola sitting on my knees (DarkMel was on Mel's knee), and so my mental state was recovering nicely as well. As a result, Prettia's unexpected appearance had actually transformed my fate for the better.

"Mm-hmm, Kelvin-chan's such a sinful man! Even I'm starting to be attracted to him!"

Sometimes a statement is so impactful, it could stop my heart. *Well, it's still better than the pressure that would be put on me by multiple peop— Ah, no. Wait a second. This is bad, it actually might be too much for me.*

"Still, what happened today? Weren't you supposed to be up with the angels trying to get approved as the new Goddess of Reincarnation?"

"Mm-hmm!" Goldiana grunted in her usual coquettish manner. "Oh Sera-chan, you always remember everything about me. I'm so happy! You see, I wanted to come and report on quite a lot of different things today, that included. To tell you the truth...as of today I've been accepted as the Goddess of Reincarnation!"

"Huh, already?! Wow!"

"Congratulations, Goldiana-sama."

"That's great! Today's shaping up to be a day worth commemorating!" Dahak exclaimed.

I had already kind of suspected, but from Prettia's report, I knew she was now confirmed to be the next Goddess of Reincarnation.

"Allow me to congratulate you too. But that's really fast, isn't it? Didn't Mel say that it'd take at least a month even with her recommendation? It hasn't been nearly that long."

"That's right. I made that prediction based on how careful the elders are, but..." Melfina trailed off.

"Wow, Prettia-san must be an amazing person to be able to beat mama's

prediction like that.”

“Thanks, DarkMel-chan. And there’s no need to worry, it’s simple: all the angels’ hearts were charmed by the sudden appearance of the avatar of love that is me, that’s all!”

Neither Mel nor I could come up with anything to say in reply. *I see. So the angel elders just gave up, then? Yeah, I get that. That would be a move that the previous DarkMel wouldn’t have been able to use.*

“W...Well at any rate, that doesn’t change the fact that you were officially accepted. Hm? But doesn’t that mean you need to leave the mortal realm posthaste?”

“Whuh— Whaaaaaat?!”

*You’re being way too noisy, Dahak, reacting to every little thing.*

“That is how things will end up, but it doesn’t have to be now. It looks like there’ll be some sort of official inauguration ceremony, and they’re planning on having that later. Also, even if I go to the other side, I can always just make an artificial body and come visit every once in a while just like Mel-chan, so don’t worry...okay?”

“Urghh...”

“Grhaaghh!”

Coincidentally, Dahak and Gerard just happened to be next to each other. Prettia had turned towards the two of them to launch a wink, turning their little corner into a disaster zone.

*Also before that, I don’t think you’ll be able to come as often as Mel. That was the entire reason I didn’t want Rion to become the Goddess, after all... Well, Prettia might be able to do it, given that she was able to get approval from the elders so easily. How should I put it, Prettia’s got something that just convinces people somehow. It’s like a really solid bond of trust or an overwhelming aura or something.*

“Ah, right! It seems I can return the Heroes to their original world even in my current state. So it’s time to go back, the four of you.”

“Huh?”

The subject was something we’d have to broach someday, but it was still all too sudden.



*Deramis’s Great Cathedral:*

A few days later, we had all gathered in Deramis. The reason was, of course, to see Setsuna and the other Heroes off to their original world. Everyone was in the Great Cathedral, where Colette had first summoned the four of them. With us were Prettia, Colette, Captain Cliff, and the ancient Heroes as well, and though he was hiding, Pope Philip was also present in the back.

Everyone who had gathered took turns exchanging goodbyes. Captain Cliff offered words of encouragement, Nana teared up at what Colette said to her, and so on. While watching all of that, it really hit home that they would be leaving. I was starting to fall into a sappy mood, even though that wasn’t like me.

“Are you really all going home? Even if you are, you should at least go and say your goodbyes to the people who aren’t here.”

By the time I’d noticed, it was my turn, and such words naturally came out of me.

“Heh heh,” Touya laughed. “I wouldn’t have expected you to try and stop us, Kelvin-san. No need to worry; once that decisive battle ended, we spent our time traveling around to give our thanks to everyone. Some cried, some did their best to convince us to stay...but we’d already made our decision. We have a home, a world we need to return to.”

“I see. Well, if that’s what you choose to do...yeah, then I won’t say anything more. It’s too bad I was never able to have a taste of you once you matured, though. Ahhh, that’s seriously going to be a regret.”

“Ha ha ha! You never change, do you, Kelvin-san? I’m truly sorry about that, teacher!”

“Also, your wording just now was very unpleasant. Were you sexually

harassing us? Should we sue you?" Until the very end, Miyabi's attitude towards me stayed the same.

Oh well, at this point even her barbed words would be a good memory. I was their teacher, at least sort of, so I decided to laugh and accept it.

"Whoa, he's laughing. He's definitely planning something sinister. It feels so gross. Please don't come any closer."

*Hah! Hah! Hah! Hah! No...it seems I'll never get along with this one.*

"You two take care, Setsuna, Nana. Wow, is Nana *still* crying?"





“Urghh...I mean, it’s just sad, and I feel lonely...”

“She’s the same as ever in situations like this, even though she’s now able to hide in a pile of corpses. But that’s also one of Nana’s good points. Kelvin-san, about this Nehanjakujou you gave me...”

Setsuna removed the katana from her belt, scabbard and all, and offered it to me.

“Oh, you can keep it,” I told her. “You won’t be able to use it freely given how powerful it is, but I know you’ll handle things properly. Keep it along with the pendant as mementos of your travels.”

“Are you sure?”

“It’s not like I could even use it. It would be better for that to stay with someone who can bring out its full power. Nehanjakujou is already your partner, Setsuna.”

“Thank you for everything you’ve done for me, all the way to the end. I’ll take good care of it for the rest of my life.”

With a kind look in her eyes, she stroked the scabbard with the sword in it gently.

*Yeah, this was definitely the right choice.*

“Oh, that’s right. Speaking of katanas, we came without telling teacher Nito, so could you tell him sorry for me later? If he knew, he would go to absurd lengths to stop me.” For a moment, Setsuna’s kind eyes went cold and inhuman.

*Just what did you do, old man Nito?*

“It’s about time. I should fill you all in on how the teleportation will work,” Melfina said.

“Goddess... No, I suppose you’re just Mel-sama now,” said Setsuna.

“You can call me Mel. I’m just a regular angel now, if a little bit stronger than average.”

“I object. What is your measurement of ‘a little bit’?” Miyabi interjected.

*Our opinions align for once, Miyabi. I want to know that too.*

Colette took the reins. “Ahem, allow me to explain, then. Your world lies on the same temporal axis as this one. In other words, when you return, about a year will have passed. Four children suddenly disappearing would have caused a huge uproar, so in order to prevent any sense of discomfort, we will edit the memories of those who know you. For example, they will think you all departed for a sudden study abroad opportunity, or something similar. We will prepare the necessary papers and documentation needed as proof, so you needn’t worry on that front either.”

“So you’re saying that my mom, dad, and friends won’t have to be saddened by my disappearance?” asked Touya.

“Exactly.”

“I see. That’s great...” He breathed a sigh of relief as he rubbed his chest.

“Just a word of warning: when you return to your original world, you will all lose the power that supported you in this one because the laws of that world are fundamentally different, being a place with no magic.”

“Huh?” Miyabi was so shocked she reacted audibly. “Whaaaat?!” It was very easy to tell what she was feeling.

“It would be possible for you to return with all your power intact as a reward for your efforts, but I don’t recommend it. Using such power in that world would stand out far too much.”

“You’re right. You should just graciously give up on it, Miyabi. You understand it’s not a realistic request if you think about it, right?” Setsuna told her.

“I want to mow down, like, bad guys and stuff.”

“You... You’re planning to become a real-life superhero?!”

Setsuna and the others somehow managed to talk Miyabi down, and they decided that their reward would be something else.

“Then what would you all wish for? I can grant almost anything as long as it’s within reason.”

“Hmm...what should we do?” asked Touya.

“What about money? I could use the power of money to buy something to mow them down with...” Miyabi mused.

“Come on, Miyabi-chan, don’t suddenly lose all your motivation!” Setsuna replied.

*Touya and the others came to help people rather than earn a reward. I think it’ll take a while for them to decide on something.*

“Um, I just figure I should ask, but...there won’t be any new threats to this world, right?” Touya asked.

“There’s no way, Kanzaki-kun! As if such huge incidents would happen all the time...” Though she was denying it out loud, Nana’s eyes darted over to peek at me repeatedly.

“Well, if you’re asking... I didn’t want to worry you guys unnecessarily, so I didn’t tell you, but...”

“There really is danger?!” all of them cried at once.

*That’s why I said I didn’t plan to tell you. Especially since I just heard about it from Prettia, and there’s been no research on the matter.*

“But, and this is just to clarify, it has basically no chance of happening. Even if the evil gods miraculously undid their ancient seal and were revived, there would be no effect on your world. So you can return without worries!”

None of them said anything. They just stared silently.

*Huh? That’s weird. Why are they all staring at me?*

“What I’m saying is that unlike last time, the info we have isn’t clear. And, like, it’d be nice if it could be settled with just me being there—”

Touya sighed. “I know you, teacher. You’ll end up making something happen that doesn’t have to. When it does, wouldn’t it be better to have more help? Yeah, it would definitely be better.”

“We’re already in this boat, after all,” said Setsuna.

“If that’s what Kanzaki-kun says, then I’m all for it!” cried Nana.

“I can play again,” Miyabi agreed.

And with that, it was decided that the otherworld Heroes would be staying.

*So is this, like, because they trust me? Or because in a different sense, they believe in me?*

“I’m sorry for wasting the grand goodbye you’ve all come to give us by deciding to stay...” said Setsuna.

“What’re you saying? As the Oracle, I welcome you on behalf of Deramis.”

“She’s right. There’s no need to be all stiff now,” Prettia cooed. “Ah, that’s right, if you’re wondering what your reward should be, why not ask to be able to travel between worlds freely? Between this one and your home, that is.”

“Whaaat?! We can ask for that?!”

“I don’t know if you’ll be able to do it whenever you like, but there shouldn’t be a problem with going back and forth regularly. Right, Mel-chan?”

“Well...if that’s what you all want, it is possible. As I said before, you’ll lose your abilities when you return, but they’ll come back whenever you’re here.”

“We’d love that!” all four exclaimed.

And with that, the matter of their reward was settled as well.

*Prettia, you’re already doing great work as a goddess, I see.*

“Wow, I was worried for a while there,” said Colette, “but I’m glad it all turned out great—”

*Doooong! Dooooooooong!*

Suddenly, the ringing of the Great Cathedral’s bell sounded in everyone’s ears. From the tone, it wasn’t informing us of the time. Instead, it seemed noisy, as if it were hurrying us. Before I could ask Colette what was going on, we heard screaming from outside.

“Intruder! Intrudeer! He’s heading for the Great Cathedral!”

“Damn you, don’t you dare enter such a sacred place!”

“Where are you, Setsuna-chan?! This old man came to get you!”

“Stop spouting nonsense! Hey, the weird old man went that way!”

Silently, everyone turned to look at Setsuna.

“Maybe I should just go home alone...” she muttered.

## Chapter 3: Battle Rally

*Kelvin's Estate, Kelvin's room:*

Everyone had been acting strange recently. It wasn't like the sense of silent pressure I was feeling before. It was somehow more restless, like they were hiding something from me. The problem was, this wasn't just the women, but the men like Gerard and Dahak too, along with Clotho and Alex. It even seemed like Clare, Uld, and the rest of my acquaintances were in on it too.

*Hmmm...I don't think I did anything bad...* Recently, I had been enthusiastically attending to the impending wedding. Whenever I talked to them about that, Efil, Sera, and the others would return to normal, but they still seemed strange in situations that were completely unrelated to that.

"Are you hiding something from me, Efil?"

There was a beat before Efil answered. "N...uhh...no. I would never hide anything from you, Master."

Even when we were all huddled around a table to decide on a venue and the like, that was the only answer I could get from Efil. She usually responded to questions right away, but now she was taking a few seconds to choose her words, and she looked so pained while doing it! I could almost see her reasoning to herself that it needed to be done. Such was the aura she was putting out. I was certain that someone had silenced her. It was always easy to see when such a composed and perfect maid was made to do something against their will. Their hearts were basically on display.

*Now then, just what could they be hiding? I suppose in times like this, the most common thing would be some sort of surprise or prank. Like a surprise birthday party or some other celebration? Thinking like that, I can see why Efil would agree to stay silent. But it's not like my birthday is anytime soon, and it's not like there's anything else to celebrate...*

"Hmm, is that so? Well, I just thought I'd ask, so don't worry about it. Yeah, I

don't mind at all."

"I'm so sorry..."

I tried being a little mean, which caused Efil to bow her head apologetically over and over. It seemed she knew she was being obvious, and now she was despondent on top of that. Knowing as much, I couldn't leave her like that, so I drew close to try and convince her as best I could that I didn't mind...

"Papa, I'm coming in."

But just before I could, DarkMel announced her visit. *That was close, it's still the middle of the day.*

"Oh, hey, DarkMel, what's up?"

"I have a delivery for you, papa. Here!"

"A delivery? Looks like a letter..."

I took the proffered envelope from her tiny hands. There was no sender noted, but it was closed with the wax seal of the Celsius house. At any rate, I knew it had come from someone close.

"Ah, you can't open it yet! Don't!"

"Huh? Why not?"

"Uh, ummm...it's an invitation, and you can only open it in the right spot. So you can't open it right now, papa."

*An invitation, huh? Is this some kind of game that DarkMel made up?* I thought, but then I noticed something. If this was a game, then Efil would probably be smiling warmly as she watched. However, Efil was currently more nervous than anything. *Does that mean Efil has something to do with it?*

"So I hereby invite you to a certain spot, papa! Come with me!"

"Oho, so it's an invitation for right now. Where are we going, I wonder?" I asked in a happy, singsong voice. "Uh, Efil, as you can see, I'm going out. We can continue this later."

"Understood. Take care."

I was then pulled by DarkMel to wherever she wanted to go. This was

probably all according to some sort of plan, but Efil still seemed somewhat saddened, probably because I had been about to do my best to console her, although that could just be my own overconfidence speaking.



*The Fairy's Song, bar:*

Being led by DarkMel, I walked and walked and walked, out of the room, out of our estate, and into town. Because I was matching her stride, it was quite a slow pace for me and felt more like a stroll, which reminded me that I hadn't had the chance to take it easy, given how busy I was with preparations. It probably wasn't why DarkMel had brought me out, but it was still worth the invitation for that reason alone.

"We're here, papa."

"Here... You mean the Fairy's Song?"

"That's right. Okay now, let's go in!"

Still not understanding what was going on, I stepped through the saloon doors with DarkMel.

"Oh, you're finally here. We've been waiting!" exclaimed Uld.

"Welcome, Kel-chan!" Clare added.

"You sure kept us waiting!" shouted the rest of Uld's party.

Greeting me as usual were Clare, Uld, and his party as well. There were also other adventurers I recognized in the bar.

*What's this? It's a bit too early to drown your sorrows, you know?*

But there were also some slim girls among all the burly and muscular men.

"I was waiting for you too, Kel-nii."

"And I waited with Rion-chan."

It was Rion and the young Shutola. *Yeah, okay. I get it.* At this point, given DarkMel's bond with them, it was still possible this was all some sort of huge game of pretend.



“Excuse me, Kelvin-sama.”

However, for some reason, Colette was next to them as well. Her very presence solidified that this was no game and that something far more serious was going to happen. The fact that Colette was here signaled some huge incident.

“Ah, uhh...seriously, what kind of gathering is this?”

“Here, papa! Open the letter here, please!”

*Now? Right at this time?* I pulled the letter out of my pocket and did as she said. There were two sheets of paper inside the envelope, and so I started looking through the first one.

“Kelvin-sama, we hereby invite you to the Battle Rally.” I paused. “Battle Rally?”

“Yeah, it’s an invitation! You know how you’ve been so busy recently, Kel-nii? Well, we all put our heads together and thought of a present to give you a break and also celebrate the good news from before. And what we came up with was the Battle Rally!”

“Look at the second sheet for details, dearest brother.”

“Ah, okay.”

I flipped over to the second page. There was a map that spanned the entire Eastern Continent, with eight round, blank spaces denoting checkpoints. It was a rally, so I figured I’d have to fill these in.

“From here, Kelvin-sama, you will have to complete a circuit of all the checkpoints. Each circle is connected with a line, so please follow them in order from the start.”

“In order... All of these?! From Parth to Toraj...and then Trycen, Gaun, Deramis—hey, this will easily have me make a circuit around the entire Eastern Continent...”

“We’ve cleared it with each country, so don’t worry, you won’t cause any problems by crossing borders in the course of following the route. Of course, you aren’t allowed to use teleportation gates.” Shutola’s smile as she told me to

run on my own two legs was lovely.

“I think I get it. This is supposed to be a reward for me, and it’s called the Battle Rally. Can I assume there’s some sort of battle at each one of these checkpoints?”

“Correct! As I thought, you’re really sharp, Kel-nii! We did a lot of preparation, all for this day!”

“We’ve finished all our prep too!” the three members of Uld’s party shouted.

As soon as I heard them shout, I realized that at some point, the round table I’d been sitting at had been moved to the side along the wall.

*This is the same situation in which Sera and Nagua once dueled, isn’t it? Which means, the starting point is here—I see...meaning there’s a battle here too!*

“Well, I think you’ve already figured out this whole thing, dearest brother.”

“No, no, I never thought it was something this big. I’m truly surprised,” I said. “By the way, does the number of people here have something to do with the Battle Rally?”

With a forced smile, I looked around me. Starting with Uld, everyone seemed to be grinning suspiciously. It was creepy.

“It does! After all, this bar is the starting line and the first checkpoint! Your opponents for this round are all the people here!”

“Let us punch you, Kelvin!” all three of Uld’s party members shouted in unison.

“A-All of them?!”

I had thought it was a weird time for them to be drinking, but I’d never thought they’d all be in on it.

“Ah, allow me to correct one thing,” Rion interjected. “Shutola and I are in charge of a different checkpoint, so as soon as the Battle Rally starts, we’ll be leaving.”

“I’m also in charge of support and putting up barriers, and not part of the

team to punch you, Kelvin-sama. So allow me to leave now,” Colette announced.

“Barriers... No way, Colette—on *all* these people?”

“Hee hee! My support, with Clotho-sama’s help, knows no bounds. As proof, I didn’t throw up once while using my techniques!”

Colette stood proudly, raising her arms into the air. I thought Clotho’s MP, which it had been saving up since the last big battle, had lessened. So this was where it had gone.

“There was a moment where she was close, though! She got ahead of herself and kept continuously applying barriers!” one of the crowd called out.

“Still, the Oracle didn’t lose it! We can all attest to that!” added another.

“Yeah, she was just about to, but she held it in somehow!” came a third voice.

“Hey, uh, everyone...you don’t have to go into that much detail!” Colette stammered.

*Ah, weren’t there a lot of people here in Parth who either saw or at least heard about Colette’s disaster back during my promotion ceremony? That was a sad one.*

“At... At any rate!” Colette continued. “Now you don’t have to worry about killing anybody! You can relax and retaliate, I mean! Okay, enjoy the brawl to your heart’s content!”

“Colette, watch your wording,” Shutola admonished her. “Um, also, dearest brother, you’ll have to carry DarkMel with you while you run. She’ll be keeping an eye out to make sure you follow the prescribed route. And make sure you let her off when you reach a checkpoint. Before you start fighting!”

“I’m also the one who will stamp your map when you clear a checkpoint. No cheating, okay, papa?”

“I won’t cheat. I won’t! Clearing this the right way and enjoying this is more important.”

*So I’m going through this alongside DarkMel, huh? Ha ha! The difficulty is probably set with DarkMel’s unique skill in mind. In other words, it’ll be crazy*

*hard.*

“Now then, it’s been a while but I should go all out, I think,” Clare announced.

“Huh? You’re participating too, Clare-san?”

“Of course I am! I won’t hold back, you hear, Kel-chan?”

“Hey, Kelvin. I know I shouldn’t be saying this, but watch out for Clare. She may not look it now, but in the past, she brought the house down as a battle cook, you know?”

“Don’t you go leaking unnecessary info, dear!”

“Yes, ma’am! Sorry, ma’am!”

I knew it was really rude, but I felt more pressure from Clare than Uld, the active adventurer.

“Oh my, you’re already ready?” asked a familiar voice.

“Hah! Sounds like we had good timing,” said another.

With the explanation over, the bar was taken over by the premonition that the event was about to start, but then some more visitors came into the bar. It was Nagua, his friend the elf Ariel, and Kokudori the dwarf. Furthermore, Mist, the guildmaster of Parth’s Adventurer’s Guild branch, came in followed by a gaggle of guild employees.

*What the heck is with these numbers?!*

Just to check, I shot a glance over at Colette. When I did, she made a powerful pose that shouted, “Yeah, I did it!”

*No, that’s not what I was asking.*

“I heard that this would be the perfect chance to legally punch this poser, so I made sure to come!”

“Nagua, watch your words! Sorry he’s always like this, Kelvin-san. But since we’re doing this anyway, I won’t be holding back!” said Ariel.

“No worries, and thanks! By the way, where are Sylvia and Ema? It’s weird for it to just be the three of you, isn’t it?”

“Huuunnhh?!” Nagua grumbled.

“Sit, Nagua! As you might be able to tell by how irritable he is, those two are doing something else. I’d appreciate it if you’d be a little understanding here.”

“Ah...yeah, I get it.”

*Understanding... This will be a long road, won’t it?*

“Mother and I are here too, Master!”

“Excuse us for dropping in from the roof.”

It seemed that all the participants were yet to gather, and now Ellie and Ruka had appeared, still in their maid uniforms.

*Hey now, this bar is supposed to be pretty spacious, but it’s starting to look like a clown car.*

“And that’s everyone. Once again, the first checkpoint will be us, the Mob Union,” Mist declared.

“No, no, come on. Mob?” I groaned. *I’m not sure about your naming sense, Guildmaster Mist.*

“It’s because all of us at the first checkpoint are aware that we cannot compare with your power, Kelvin-san. But this time, the rules are special and we will not be killed. No matter how strong the attack, if anyone takes a single hit, they will be forced to retire from the fight since Colette’s technique will activate. Those who have retired will be sent outside of this fenced-off area we marked with tables, so it’ll be easy to tell who’s out.”

“Uh...meaning that I’m out if I take a single hit too?”

“Exactly, papa!” DarkMel was sitting outside of the makeshift arena, beyond the tables, waiting to stamp my map. She was convinced of my victory.

*I can’t afford to make any mistakes here, can I? If I do, it’ll make DarkMel cry.*

“Let’s make the signal to start this Battle Rally the sound of the saloon doors, which you’ll hear when we leave,” Rion decided.

“That sounds like a good idea. Okay then, dearest brother—Rion-chan, Colette-chan, and I will be excusing ourselves here,” said Shutola.

“Please enjoy this giant festival involving the entire Eastern Continent, Kelvin-sama!” Colette added.

Rion and the others walked off, disappearing beyond the saloon doors. In that instant, the bar was enveloped in chaos.



“Whew...”

I exited the Fairy’s Song. Whether because they knew beforehand what was going on or were attracted by the tumultuous sounds of battle inside, the bar was surrounded by onlookers, though from the cheers and clapping, I figured it was the former. Mist and her guild employees had participated as well, so it seemed the event had gotten to a scale I hadn’t expected.

“Well done, papa. You managed to get your momentous first stamp!”

“It’s all thanks to your support, DarkMel. Make sure you watch your papa’s heroics at the next checkpoint too, okay?”

“Okay!”

It had been a white-hot, exciting battle where I couldn’t afford a single mistake. Once DarkMel settled in on my shoulders, I changed to travel mode.

“Goddamn, Kelvin. You cleared that way too easily for the number of people you were facing,” Uld groused.

“Dear, it’s uncool to say something like that even though you lost!” Clare scolded him.

“I see Colette’s technique sent you two outside the bar,” I noted.

“Yeah, I was surprised. After all, the moment I thought I got hit by you, the scenery completely changed on me!” Uld cried.

“I thought I’d be able to put up more of a fight with a frying pan since I was so used to wielding one...” Clare added. “Once both of us were sent outside, the only thing I could do was laugh. Ha ha ha!”

She let out an invigorating laugh, but she had actually been the one I had to watch out for most after Ellie, Ruka, and Nagua’s group. I was way past

surprised by how few openings she was showing with just a single frying pan in her hands. In a sense, it was only natural for Uld to have been so whipped.

*I should be careful too...*





“Congratulations on passing the first checkpoint, Master,” said Ellie.

“Congrats! It was the Mob Union’s complete defeat!” Ruka remarked.

The mother and daughter, who had participated in the bout, jumped off the roof to appear before us.

*So Colette’s technique can send you somewhere like the roof if it’s not set well...*

“Nice fight, you two. You both did well, surviving until the end.”

“But we still didn’t stand a chance! Even though I did all I could, from attacking from the shadows to teaming up with my mom...”

“Ha ha! As your employer, I can’t allow myself to be defeated so easily,” I replied.

“Employer, huh?” said Clare. “Once again, I realize that you’ve moved up in the world, Kel-chan. It’s moving. And now you even have such a cute little daughter! Whoops, I mean, you already had one...I guess? Did Ellie-san and Ruka-san know about it? When you first came here, I mean.”

“Wha—? Wait, don’t talk about the past; it’s embarrassing! I’m going now! There’re still a lot of checkpoints to get to!”

“Ahhh, you have to run all around the continent, right? Thinking logically, that’s a ridiculous idea, but...” Uld trailed off.

“That fight was only a prelude, Master. From here on out, as you progress, the fights will rise to an impossible level, so...please do your best,” said Ellie.

“Come back alive, Master!” called Ruka.

While Ellie was hesitant, her daughter sent me off with a smile and an ominous farewell.

*Is it seriously that bad? You’re making me look forward to it! Okay, let’s hurry!*

“Hah, that’s right! Later on, you’ll have to fight Sylvia—” Nagua started.

“I’m sorry to interrupt you after having appeared mysteriously from the shadows, but Master is already gone,” Ellie told him.

Nagua fell silent.

“Give it your best, Kel-chaaann!” Clare called.



*Parth suburbs:*

After leaving town, I headed south for Toraj. If I went too fast, it would strain DarkMel, so I cast Fly and a barrier spell to combat that. If I were to go around spreading shock waves as I moved, I’d be treated as a rampaging nuisance.

“The prescribed route has these flags spaced out at even intervals, so you can just follow them to get to the next checkpoint, papa.”

“That’s nice and easy to understand. But are these flags on every route? Wouldn’t that take a lot of work?”

“It worked out with Ange-san’s help. In fact, preparing so many flags was more trouble.”

“Ah, I get it.”

I could picture in my mind the sight of Ange running around stabbing flags into the ground at high speed.

“So that’s the next spot? It was closer than I expected.”

“You’re just very fast, papa.”

We were on an open plain south of Parth. There, waiting for us, was a group of four I’d seen just the other day.

“We’ve been waiting for you, teacher!”

“Much faster than expected too. Though in a sense, it’s also unexpected that you flew here instead of running.”

“Touya, Setsuna, Miyabi, and Nana—oh, and I shouldn’t forget Mun.”

“Gyarr!”

“Does this mean all of you are my second match?” I let DarkMel down from my shoulders, and once she retreated to a safe area, I put up a barrier around it.

“Yes. We were invited, thankfully. We, the Otherworld Hero Team, will be your opponents here.”

“They really went all out, making the second out of eight battles one with the Heroes of Deramis.”

“Mrr.” Miyabi pouted. “I don’t like how you look down on us. We are planning to win; know that your destiny is to retire here.”

“Again with that, Miyabi-chan?!”

“Ha ha ha... Anyway, given the gap between us and you, teacher, we’ve decided to rely on Setsuna, who’s fairly close to your abilities, in this fight,” Touya explained.

“Really now, so it’s all on Setsuna?”

“Yes.”

My question, which really asked what was going on here, had Touya respond with a magic incantation. He created a cage of light, trapping Setsuna and me in a space that was basically a straight line. Meanwhile, Touya, the rest of his party, and DarkMel were outside the bars, watching as Setsuna and I took our positions inside.

“And this is?”

“Anchor white. It’s a Rank A White Magic spell mainly used to restrain the enemy. That said, you’d be able to break free easily, teacher.”

“Um...our rules here are very simple. If you can get past Setsuna without taking even one of her attacks, you win, Kelvin-san. But if Setsuna’s katana touches you, the event ends here. The match will be decided in a moment, Kelvin-san. But, uhhh—”

“Allow me, Nana,” Miyabi interrupted. “Just as Touya constructed this spell so that Setsuna’s sword will reach across the entire width and make it impossible for you to go around her, Nana and I will obstruct you once each. I will use the Rank S Black Magic spell, Enormity Crush, to bottom out your agility, while Nana will deploy her Frozen Temple. It’s impossible to win—now is your chance to run.”

“By the way,” Setsuna added, “I will be using the final technique I inherited from teacher Nito, the same drawing technique that finished an Apostle. And I will do so without holding back.”

“Wow, this is a great setup you’ve thought of here. I’m happy!”

“Still, I think the solution is simple. You can just break my barrier and skirt Setsuna’s range. But as for whether or not you’d be okay with that, Kelvin-san, is an entirely different matter,” said Touya.

*Man, these guys really have grown.*

I never would have imagined they would try to provoke me using my own personality, given what straight shooters they all used to be. Living in the gray and getting as dirty as necessary wasn’t a shameful way to live. After all, it didn’t matter if you were dead. And most importantly, it showed how much they wanted to beat me, and I was happy about that.

“Of course I’ll take you on! Sorry, but I’m serious too. What will win, my speed when boosted to the max with the highest possible overclocking or Setsuna’s sword under these special circumstances? Let’s compare!”

As I cast Sonic Acceleration on myself, ten pillars of ice sprouted up around me and the ground underneath me was dyed pitch-black. In front of me, Setsuna took her stance.

*I love this. Her expression is great!*



I was using Sonic Accelerate Hexa, the support spell that would give me the fastest speed. Every level of overclock raised the effectiveness by another factor, from twice to three times as strong, and so forth. However, going as high as Hexa was unstable. Instead of a straight multiplication effect, the strength of it seemed to rise and fall with how excited I was. In fact, it was so variable that in normal cases I had to wonder if Penta made me faster. Still, in this situation, with the look Setsuna had as she took her stance, I couldn’t measure how strong the spell would be.

“No need for a signal. Go when you please, Kelvin-san. You can make me wait if you want, though I don’t think you’d try that against a little girl like me.”

“Thanks for that biting provocation. But you don’t have to worry. I really want to charge right into you as soon as possible. If you’re saying I can go already, then I’ll do so after a countdown. You ready? Three...two...one!”

My voice resounded, contested only by the sound of the ice pillars freezing the area around them. Of course, the moment my countdown reached “one,” we took action faster than the sound of our movements could catch up. Could Touya, watching from the outside as he was, even see me? While ignoring the alarms that my detection skills were blaring in my head, I tried to pass through as Setsuna was drawing her sword right in front of me.

“Gyaarghh!”

Suddenly, a wall of fire sprouted up before me, hiding Setsuna from my sight. It came from Mun, who was flying above the walls Touya had set up.

*So that’s why Miyabi bothered explaining what she and Nana would be doing. By purposefully leaving out Mun, she hid the fact that he would be blocking my view with fire.*

To be fair, I’d had an inkling that Mun would try something. That was why I’d started a countdown, so that Mun could follow along. If I didn’t, it wouldn’t count as a total victory over the Heroes, and it would put a damper on my excitement. The fire was dense and blocked my sight well. Meanwhile, I couldn’t see Setsuna on the other side. When I thought of her waiting there, I couldn’t help but shiver.

I had no choice but to rush through the fire as I faced off against Setsuna for the instant it would take for our clash to be over. Setsuna shouldn’t have been able to see me beyond the fire, but her eyes were definitely tracking me. My skills detected the innumerable ways I could meet my death.

*Oh, old man Nito, why did you teach her such a dangerous final technique? Thanks, though. I’ll show you my gratitude later, so wait for me.*

“Now!” both of us shouted.

The moment our excitement reached its peak, Setsuna revealed the blade of her Nehanjakujou. Whether I got hit or managed to dodge, the results would likely only become apparent after I got past her. Believing that I had dodged all

her slashes perfectly, I reached the goal I was aiming for.

“Whew,” Setsuna let out after a moment. “It’s my complete loss. I managed to nick the sleeve of your robe, but I never touched your body.”

“Pwaahh!” I finally let out the breath I’d been holding. “I was so nervous when you cut my sleeve. That was great, Setsuna; I really enjoyed your iai technique.”

I might have been a little singed, but I was totally fine. Touya and the others outside the barrier were able to guess the result of our match from our conversation.

“As the leader, you should announce the result of the match out loud, Touya,” Miyabi stated.

“Huh? Really? Don’t you usually hate that?”

“I do, but you should do it. I want to feel good when we win next time.”

“Miyabi-chan...” Nana started.

“Yeah, you’re right. I understand.” Touya paused to turn back before he announced in a loud voice, “Kelvin is the victor of this match! Thank you very much!”



Having parted ways with the Heroes, DarkMel and I resumed our journey to Toraj. The next checkpoint was not on or near the ocean, as I would have expected, but in the middle of the mountains.

*Is this so I can feel free to go as wild as I want or something?*

“That match was amazing, papa. Like, I thought it would go all *pow!* But instead in the middle there was a *gyoom!* Setsuna’s countless slashes were also wonderful to see!”

“I see! Basically, only you and Setsuna would be able to see all of that, so I’m glad you were watching.”

“Of course I was! My papa is fighting, so it’s my responsibility!”

“But you know, if you praise me like that, DarkMel, your papa will let his

guard down because he's so happy."

"Oh no, that can't be allowed! I'll stop praising you!"

*Even her panicked flailing looks cute*, I thought as I blazed across the landscape.

They say time flies when you're having fun, and before I realized it, I was already at my destination.

There was a huge lake at the third checkpoint, showing off nature's beauty in a way that was comparable to Toraj's ocean. I even wondered if it was acceptable to ruin such a nice place by turning it into a battlefield.

Once again, there were quite a few people awaiting me at the shore of the lake.

"We've been waiting for you, Kelvin! But I'm surprised that you're faster than expected!"

The moment I touched down, Tsubaki, Toraj's princess, quickly came up to greet me. I could see that the others were comparable to Tsubaki in standing... Was she just the elected representative or something?

"Aw, don't say that," I replied. "I was looking forward to this so much that I came here like I was in a trance. More importantly, it's amazing you've gathered so many big shots in one country. Are you planning some sort of huge meeting or assembly?"

"Keh heh! That would be nice too, but it would only be a side event. Our main goal is to fight you." Tsubaki laughed while hiding her mouth with her fan.

*You say that, but everyone here is someone I normally shouldn't even touch.*

Starting off, there was Tsubaki from Toraj along with the black-masked ninja beside her. Then, from Gaun, there was Jereol, Yujil, my comrade Kילו, Sabato, and Goma. Deramis had supplied Cardinal Sai, who was leading the party of the ancient Heroes (minus the pope and Serge). From Trycen, there was Azgrad, who I had already expected to show up at some point, and Rosalia, who had returned to her dragon form. That meant that there were VIPs from all four great countries here.

“We, the Four Great Countries Alliance, will be your third opponent!”

“An all-out battle against the four great countries, huh? You’ve really put some effort into this, Tsubaki-sama.” I paused, hesitant to ask my next question. “Are you also going to fight?”

“Of course. You know, I used to be able to match Sylvia and Ema on the battlefield.”

I kept quiet, but the way I looked at her must have given something away.

“Ah, you’re doubting me, aren’t you?! I’m telling the truth!”

“Hey, you, from Toraj, just drop it and let me speak!” Azgrad stepped forward, subbing in for Tsubaki, though it seemed she had more to say. “Shutola went around, doing a lot to make things just right. She even managed to gather all these other weirdos as well. Heh, I never would have dreamed of Trycen putting up a united front with Gaun during my old man’s time.”

“I could say the same, king of Trycen,” Jereol replied. “But wouldn’t this be a chance to bury the past? I would have liked Dan-dono to come as well.”

“Aiming for a rematch, Jereol? I hear you got your ass handed to you by grandpa Dan during the war.”

“You’re as belligerent as ever, even after becoming king, I see. It’s been a while, so I wouldn’t mind taking you up on that challenge, you know?”

“Hey now, this isn’t the time or place for that, all right?” Sabato cried. “I’m here, Kelvin! And so is Goma!”

“Please, Sabato, you’re embarrassing me, so stop it. If you keep it up for another three seconds I’m going to punch you,” his sister warned him.

“Seriously? In this situation?!”

*I wonder what it is about gatherings this big. Everyone’s trying to get their chance to speak, so there’s no control and nothing gets anywhere. Hm, but the guys from Deramis are weirdly quiet. Actually, the color on their faces is...off.*

The ancient Heroes were still silent when I walked up to their group. “Your friends are scarily silent, Cardinal Sai. Did something happen?”



“No, well...it’s just that Serge left Deramis on a journey without telling any of us. Ragat, who’s usually quiet already, is really depressed. And even the usually cheery Sorondil is like this, as you can see. I, too, am crying myself to sleep every night... Heh heh, I told the pope to participate in this festival with us to try and regain even a little of his spirits. He gave me a scolding; it’s over for me...”

“I... I see... Um, live strong, okay?”

“Heh heh...even that kindness stings...”

*Are you telling me to send these guys flying, Pope Philip?*



“Everyone, even if my master wins this bout, he will still have to cycle around the continent again. So, considering time, I believe we should start.”

My opponents didn’t seem like they would ever come together, but then Rosalia gave her warning. Starting with Tsubaki, everyone seemed to have been reminded of that fact and stopped their conversations that were going off the rails.

*As expected of the older sister maid dragon of my house. She gets things done when she has to.*

“*Ahem!* Once again, allow me to explain the format of our battle. As you can see, there are important people from every country gathered here. You are going to battle every one of us, Kelvin, but there will be two restrictions. We would stand no chance without them, after all.”

“I was fine with a pure fistfight, but everyone else was making a huge fuss about how it wouldn’t be a fair fight. Well, it’s true that I’ve lost to you before, Kelvin. Sorry, but follow the princess’s restrictions.”

“There was nothing else to be done, given our strengths. I’m getting tossed off a cliff every day, so someday, I’ll...”

It seemed that Azgrad and Sabato were somewhat unhappy with their group’s plan. Still, I already had experience with being restricted during the second checkpoint. At this stage, I wasn’t going to say anything about it. If we could

fight more evenly by placing a handicap on me then I would happily shackle myself— Ah, no, don't get me wrong. I'm not into that kinda thing, okay?

“Restriction number one: you cannot hurt us!”

*Wow, that sure is a crazy restriction right from the get-go.*

“Keh heh, you look surprised. Amazing, I love it! But there is a reason for it. We are royalty, or at least important people in our respective countries. Even though we won't die thanks to Colette's technique, we cannot allow ourselves to be wounded so easily. Sorry, but I hope you understand.”

“We don't really care if you do hurt us, though.”

“Yeah.”

“You guys...you do know that royalty doesn't usually lead from the front, right?”

For Gaun, royalty fighting was the crux of everything, and Azgrad just liked battle, after all. It should have been expected.

“We have Colette-dono's technique, so once we take a certain amount of damage we'll be evacuated somewhere else. Your goal, Kelvin, will be to render us unable to fight without activating it. So things like making us faint or restraining us, the method doesn't matter.”

“By ‘a certain amount,’ how much are we talking?” I asked.

“A scratch or something similar is no problem!”

*That standard is so sloppy!*

“Restriction number two: no environmental destruction! This lake is an important natural feature and protected by Toraj, with a wide range of rare species living within it. Dirtying the water and destroying trees is out of the question, as is placing a burden on the ground with magic!”

I took a moment to process everything before trying to get a verbal confirmation. “So what you're saying is that for this trial, I need to be kind to both man and nature in my attempt to break through, right?”

“Indeed! Buuuut, we will be under no such restrictions as we attack. You need

to protect this area while taking that into account, okay? My Suiten no Hitofuri has quite a bit of power to it, after all!”

With that, Tsubaki formed a naginata out of the lake’s water. It resembled Huba’s weapon, but it seemed a level higher in quality and price.

“Hey, isn’t that going too far? All your conditions are ridiculous,” Azgrad complained.

“Do you even realize what you’re saying, King of Trycen? This is just right. Ah, I forgot to mention it, but if something happens to this lake, I’ll have you pay me back with your body, Kelvin. Keh heh!”

That laugh was Tsubaki’s most evil expression of the day. *What is she planning on having me do if that happens?!*

“I don’t really mind these conditions, brother-in-l—Azgrad. I’ll be the one taking responsibility if something happens, and if I can’t clear this with at least that much of a handicap, there’s no way I’d be able to get through the next trials. That’s what you want to say, isn’t it, Tsubaki-sama?”

“Indeed!” Tsubaki said after a beat.

*What was that pause just now? It’s not like she’s already being stubborn about fencing me in, is it? Is it?!*

“Okay then, can we start already? I’m itching to go here.”

“It was obvious from the corners of your mouth. Very well, then let us start at Kagenui’s signal. He will flip a coin into the air. When it lands is the moment we start. Is everyone okay with that?”

All of my opponents nodded together, and I also agreed, of course.

“Well then, Kelvin, enjoy to your heart’s content.” The moment Tsubaki snapped her folding fan closed, the masked man next to her tossed a coin straight above him.



*Trycen, a certain desert:*

“You won hands down, papa! It was an absolute, unequivocal landslide!”

“Thank you. You really know a lot of difficult words, don’t you, DarkMel? Your papa is so proud!”

As I headed to my next destination, DarkMel praised me from her spot on my shoulders. I returned the compliment, and we were wrapped up in a nice family mood. I managed to slip an invitation into my comrade Kilito’s pocket signed by both Azgrad and me, and I was aware that the fight had gone perfectly.

“Heh heh, I studied with Shutola-san! Ah, but you’re more important, papa! The instant that coin hit the ground, you landed that attack on everyone’s necks... Wasn’t that Sera-san’s specialty? You told me you studied that move a long time ago because you admired her so much, papa!”

“Ah, well...yes, but it’s embarrassing if you talk about the details like that...”

“There’s no need to be embarrassed. It’s wonderful that you put effort into acquiring a move you thought was good. It’s amazing that you landed it so accurately on Rosalia-san, even though she was in dragon form. I’m impressed!”

“Y... Yeah. Well, if you put in as much effort as I did...”

Like DarkMel said, I’d thought the way Sera knocked people out with one shot to the neck was cool, so I had put in a lot of practice under Sera’s instruction. There was a simple reason I had gone through all that too: I thought it was cool. That was it. That was why when faced with the pure look of adoration from my daughter, I was feeling really bashful.

Even so, the reason I’d been able to finish the battle as soon as it started was definitely because of my training. Also, I guess because I had been able to move at the same speed against Setsuna at the previous checkpoint? Being able to move around at the speed required to evade Setsuna’s sword would of course lead to fights lasting only an instant. A neck strike at super high speed... I’d really done well despite myself.

But it seemed things would start to get tough from here on out. This had only been the third checkpoint, which meant I wasn’t even half done. That was a nice thing, but the question was when I would use DarkMel’s power.

*Hmmm...that’s certainly something to think about.*

“We’re almost at the next checkpoint, papa.”

“So the next one is in Trycen’s desert? We’re keeping cool thanks to your magic, DarkMel, so the noon heat is no big deal. Seriously, you’re a lifesa—”

Right as I was praising DarkMel to bits, as usual, I spotted my next opponents. Or rather, we spotted each other. A pair of red eyes burning with motivation stared at me, boring a hole right through my head.

“You’ve made me wait quite long, my foolish son! So, you think you’re a big shot now, huhhh?!”

In the middle of a desert quite literally deserted by humans (and monsters too), stood a Demon Lord with a large stature and his Demonic Four Heavenly Kings, all filled with the will to fight. It needn’t be said of course, that this was my father-in-law Gustav, Victor, Vegalzeld, Reinhart, and the perverted butler.

“It has been too long. So, you’re all participating as well, I see.”

“It really has been too long. I’d expected you to finish the first through third fights quickly to come meet me, so I’ve been up since dawn!”

*Since... Since dawn?! I hadn’t even learned of the Battle Rally at that point!*

“Papa, Gustav-san was actually really excited about this,” DarkMel whispered. “That’s probably why he was in place so early. Even though his words are harsh, he really does think highly of you, papa. Don’t worry.”

“Really?” I whispered back.

*When did you learn so much about your dad, DarkMel? No, actually, I guess getting past this trial should come first.*

“Sorry about that. So, would I be right in assuming my opponents for this fight are all of you?”

“Of course! Hell’s Doting Parents Bunch has arrived!”



My father-in-law was such a doting parent that he had named his group the Hell’s Doting Parents Bunch of his own will, but clear killing intent started to leak from him and his group.

*Wait a second, I need to let DarkMel get to a safe place first.*

“Hurry and put DarkMel down, my foolish son! What if she feels our killing intent?!”

“That’s not something the side who’s letting out such killing intent should be saying! But thanks for worrying!”

Even though my father-in-law was feared by many demons in hell, it seemed that DarkMel was considered one of the few people he would dote on. She wasn’t Sera’s and my child, but it seemed that grandchildren were grandchildren to him. At any rate, I did as he said and hurriedly put DarkMel down and erected a barrier around her before dashing back to where he and his friends were waiting.

“I keep wondering when I will see a grandchild from Sera like now or when but that would be proof that you laid hands on her which means I really should kill you yeah you need to die but I wanna see my grandchiiiild!”

“Please calm down, father-in-law! And take a breath while you’re at it!”

Waiting for me since that morning, and seeing DarkMel, whom he treated as a grandchild, merged with his love for Sera to bring my father-in-law’s excitement to strange heights. Anger and joy mixed together, causing the latter half of what he said to sound like a curse.

“Khuh heh heh, I will explain the details of this bout with you in Demon Lord-sama’s place,” Victor chuckled.

“I’m counting on you, Victor. Also, you’re all more composed than I expected. Weren’t you all just pumping yourselves up with my father-in-law?”

“When it comes to Sera-sama, Bell-sama, and his new granddaughter DarkMel, Demon Lord-sama is never able to maintain his calm, after all. We, the Demonic Four Heavenly Kings, must be able to adapt to our superior. Basically, we’re just used to him. You’ll be the same soon enough.”

“Are you sure we *should* be getting used to him? I can see my father-in-law with Sebasdel completely within his grip, crushing him bodily behind you. It gives a whole new meaning to being in someone’s clutches.”

“Sebasdel is a pervert, so it’s fine. I don’t really want to get into this sort of thing, but this is like a reward for him.”

“It truly would be if this was being done by Lady Bell! But this is—”

“I think I just heard a pained cry?”

“Now, now; don’t say that. Okay then, let’s move on to the explanation.”

*He totally just ignored me! And Reinhart and Vegalzeld are acting like this is okay since the way he usually carries himself is so bad! Ahh, I see... I guess if I consider that, I’m actually fine with it. Okay, I get it.*

After having convinced myself, by myself, I saw Victor looking up as he stuck his arm down his gigantic maw to remove something from his gullet.

*Everyone’s acting like this is normal, but I for one think it’s in bad taste to take stuff out of your mouth, you know?*

“Don’t worry, it’s not something that would be dirtied by my saliva. I just used my Storage skill on something I ate the other day.”

“Yeah, I figured. Is that a model?”

“It is, yes. This is the theme of our fight.”

*Theme? I thought, noticing that the model’s head was long, narrow, and pointed. Also, I felt like I recognized it from somewhere. This sinister, demonic design...it’s truly representative of hell. Ah, isn’t this that one tower? Uhh...I think the name was—*

“The Tower of Trials, was it? The same place as where I faced off against you for the second time, Victor, and also where I fought my father-in-law, right?”

“As expected of the person Sera-sama chose, you have a good memory. That’s right, this is a miniature of the Tower of Trials. Reinhart made it to resemble the real thing. And now, it’s done its job.”

With that, Victor once again swallowed the model tower. As he crunched audibly away at it, I realized he was actually eating the thing instead of storing it again.

*Wait, you made that just to introduce me to what the trial would be?! Reinhart made it, right? Is he really okay with that?! I looked fearfully over at Reinhart, the creator of the model and the man whose colleague was eating his work.*

“It’s fine, it’s fine! In terms of art, destruction and creation are inseparable, like two sides of the same coin. Paradoxically, that piece was finished the moment it was eaten. I am satisfied.”

“I... I see...”

It seemed Reinhart was much more of an artist than I’d thought. Meanwhile, Victor finished his snack and Sebasdel behind him was falling farther and farther into dangerous territory. However, Vegalzeld, the one who seemed to serve as a doctor here, was giving my father-in-law a sign that he was good to continue what he was doing.

“Khuh heh heh, let’s get back to the explanation. As you might have guessed, the theme for this challenge will be recreating the Tower of Trials. After all, the last time you challenged the tower in Grebarelka, Reinhart and Vegalzeld weren’t around, so it wasn’t complete. Really, we would have liked to have built a tower here as well, but we weren’t given much notice, so it couldn’t be done in time. That one point is the thing I regret the most!” Victor lamented.

*Ahh...Sera and Shutola probably figured they would try that, so they refrained from letting them know until the last second. How thoughtful. There’s no way my father-in-law and Victor would ever refuse a request from Sera, after all, and if they really did build a tower, it would just cause a lot of trouble.*

“So you’re saying that I’m going to fight each of you in order instead of all at once?”

“Basically, yes. We’ve taken the liberty of watching your previous trials from here, and each one of them have had you fight with a handicap. Since that’s the case, don’t you think it’s about time you had a plain, straightforward fight? So, how about it, mister battle junkie?”

Victor smiled with his big mouth, as if to say he understood me. However, I had no idea when Victor had gained such an understanding of me. *Was it thanks to Sera once again?* Either way, I was happy they would be fighting me without any restrictions.

“Are you still okay, papa?”

“I’m fine. Basically, if I don’t get through this checkpoint on my own, I don’t



think my father-in-law will approve of me. And there's no way they're the kind of enemies who would go down with a single neck chop." I stopped DarkMel with a wave of my hand and told her I was okay.

While I was doing that, the other side's snake demon, Reinhart, came forward. "I'm gonna start things off. I, the evil venom demon Reinhart, am in charge of the Trial of Deadly Poison. It's too bad this desert doesn't have much in the way of poison, but just pretend it does. H'okay, let's get to it!"

"Yeah, come at me!"

After that, I faced the Demonic Four Heavenly Kings in a straightforward fight. Using what I'd heard from Rion, I immediately stole Reinhart's sketchbook. Though I was exposed to the poison he was emitting from his body, I was used to such things by now, having been bathed in Grostina's deadly venom way too much in the past. Instead of recovery, I prioritized taking my opponent down, and I managed to claim Reinhart's consciousness.

*Now then, I can take my time healing—*

"Whoa there, ya sure did a number on my buddy Reinhart, and I'm gonna get payback! Next is the Trial of Brute Strength, and I, Vegalzeld, the Demon Gigant Lord, will be your opponent!"

"Wai— Do I seriously not even get any time to heal?!"

"Nope, I'll do yer healin' for ya! Though my healin' will just make you worse!"

Normally, Vegalzeld's glowing hand was used for healing and treatment. However, at the moment, we were enemies, so there was no way he would simply heal me. Too much medicine could become toxic, and I wouldn't be able to take it if I got worse, so I decided to use close-combat techniques combined with wind to not give him a chance to attack. I one-sidedly punched and kicked at him, putting out an overwhelming number of attacks to trample over him. In real time, it was over in an instant, as Vegalzeld was blasted out of the battlefield.

"Khuh heh heh, as expected! It seems we stand no chance against you one-on-one! So let's change things up: now starts the Trial of Gluttony, and your opponent is me, Victor the ater panzer demon!"

*“Huff, huff! Ha... Having been revived from the grip of death, I, Sebasdel the Demon Lord’s butler, will be your opponent for the Trial of Differences—Grwhoff!”*

I would have welcomed a two-on-one fight, but it looked like Victor’s partner was already at death’s door.



*“Jin Scrimmage!”*

*“Vortex Armor Dual.”*

By concentrating their Black Magic on their arms and legs, my opponents recreated weapons that I’d seen in the past. I was at the mercy of Sebasdel’s teleportation ability, all while also being victim to Victor’s Devour magic, though at this point I had conquered all these abilities long ago. I concentrated on what I had in Skill Eater and responded by creating an armor made of whipping winds.

*“Hup!”*

*“Grk!”*

*“This—”*

The moment I dodged his attack, I grabbed Victor’s black arm and Sebasdel’s black leg. Just my grip on them caused the armor to crack, and in the next moment, they shattered into pieces. By adding a bit of magic to a piece of their equipment and using that opening to attack, I wouldn’t have to worry about Sebasdel running away or Victor eating my magic with his skill.

Still, just overclocking to Dual already boosted the power of my spell to a crazy degree. The storm blade swirling around my arm didn’t just destroy their armor, it went right through and proceeded to cause major damage to what was inside. Though none of the wounds were fatal, it was enough to push them both into being unable to continue combat.

*Wow, I have to remember not to try to scratch my cheek or anything with this on.*

*“Well done! Khuh heh heh...heh!”*

“That was...intense! But in the end, I get more pleasure...from Lady Bell’s wind...”

My strong winds picked up the sand on the ground and whipped it into the air as Victor and Sebasdel were likewise flung into the air, forcing them to retire from the match. The parting lines they left behind signaled that I had beaten all the Demonic Four Heavenly Kings. I had more than enough stamina and will, and all that was left was my father-in-law, who was putting out some serious hints of anger, but—

“■■■, ■■■■■■■■■■! ■■■■■!”

“You don’t even have enough reason left in you to speak?!”

Rather than his usual yanyuedao, he was wielding a bloated blood weapon that was more in the shape of a greataxe than anything else. The bladed portion alone was about as tall as him, so everything else aside, it was massive. Size wasn’t the only thing that mattered in a weapon, but since in my father-in-law’s case, his anger directly translated into strength, the size did in fact mark how dangerous it was.

While wielding that stupidly huge weapon, my father-in-law charged at me without hesitation. He was overflowing with awfully dark emotions, red blood, and Black Magic power, which all came together to form a thick layer around his body. His warped expression was sinister in the extreme.

*No, wait, isn’t this just his panicked face taken to the extreme? He looks more demonic than anyone I’ve ever seen in my life. But even so, I won’t lose.*

“I’ll say this as many times as it takes, father-in-law! Please give me your daughter’s hand!”

“■■■■■■!!!”

I confronted his scream, laden with curses, with my sheer force of will, and I also ran towards him. If my opponent was making use of anger, then I would contest him. The corners of my mouth raised upward nastily as I formed a Boreas Death Scythe on my staff and stepped forward powerfully enough to displace a large amount of sand. At that point, my father-in-law was pretty much already in range, and as our blades clashed, his arm was blown backward

in greeting, as was mine.

From there, everything was a blur as I was absorbed in the fight. What I did know was that we shouted our feelings for Sera as we slashed and struck at each other. We were both awkward people, so that was the only way we could communicate our true feelings. I was sure that my father-in-law wasn't yet willing to forgive me, but we should at least have been able to share our feelings a little bit.

*Don't worry, father-in-law. I'll be patient and continue beating you black and blue until you give up!*



*Gaun:*

I moved on. Honestly, I still had aches in places, but I was pressed for time so I had no other choice. I was going slower than before the last fight, but I still managed to trace the flags and make it to Gaun. My next destination was the arena in the capital, which I hadn't been to since the Beast King Festival. Given the spot, I had an inkling of who my next opponent would be.

"We should take a break, papa..."

"No, there's an enemy I haven't seen yet who's waiting for me. I can't afford to stop just because I took an hour to fight my father-in-law. Sure, I got right up to the point of needing to use Mel's blessing, but I didn't in the end. And look, I reattached my arm with White Magic, so I'm totally fine!"

I put up a strong front for my daughter, but I was truthfully pretty exhausted. I felt that I'd gotten noticeably stronger than before, but in a happy coincidence, so had my father-in-law. It seemed he still had room to grow. I was once again impressed by how frightening his potential was and also how wonderful a father-in-law he was.

*Still, just when did he get so strong? He didn't push all his work onto his Demonic Four Heavenly Kings to go train or something, did he? Ha ha, there's no way!*

"Jeez, make sure not to push yourself too hard, okay? Thanks to the skill you borrowed from mama, you can drown in as many potions as you like, but your

energy and willpower isn't included in that..."

*Dang, DarkMel is worried about me. I'm a failure as a papa! But at the same time, I was happy she cared, which gave me a little energy back. Father-in-law, I'm growing to understand your feelings more and more.*

"I'm ashamed...but this is a festival everyone went through so much to put together for me. Please, allow your papa to be selfish, at least for today."

"Mgrr... Oh, fine, then. I'll watch over you so you don't exceed your limits, papa! But don't ever make mama cry, okay?"

"Y...uhh, yeah. I'll try my hardest..."

While I was getting scolded by my far too put-together child, we finally reached Gaun's capital. I decided to stop using Fly, opting to walk the rest of the way to the arena instead. As I walked through the capital, anticipating what would be waiting for me, beastfolk flooded out from all over to surround me on all sides. I tensed up, wondering what was going on, but they didn't seem hostile.

"Oohh, Grim Reaper's here! The same Grim Reaper that went wild during the Beast King Festival!"

"Which means it's about to happen, right?! I managed to buy a ticket for the arena! I need to hurry to my seat!"

"Don't move from the line! Make way! Make way!!!"

"Gimme your signature!"

"Hey you, playboy! You should stop by our place and fill up before heading to the arena!"

"Don't push! Don't! Push!!! Hey, protect Kelvin-dono!"

"Ah, you touched my chest just now, didn't you?! You pervert!"

"Ouchies?!"

Confused by the suddenness of the situation, DarkMel and I froze.

"What's going on?"

"They're totally in a festival mood, aren't they?"

My vision was filled with Gaunian citizens, soldiers, and men and women, young and old. The only thing they had in common was how excited they were. So excited, it called to mind the atmosphere of the Beast King Festival. They would probably continue like this from morning till night.

A path was opened up for me, probably for me to go to the arena, and it was clear that I was supposed to walk down it like I was leading a parade. There were soldiers holding back the throngs of citizenry, all while shouting at me to hurry with bloodshot eyes. It seemed their line would break if I continued to stand around, so I followed their instructions and ran for the arena.

“Did I hear something about a ticket back there?”

“I believe he was talking about a ticket to the arena.” DarkMel explained. “When Shutola-san negotiated with Leonhart-sama, the condition he put forward was to use the arena and put on a show. And since the lineup is even more exciting than the Beast King Festival, I heard tickets sold out immediately.”

*I see. I could easily imagine Leonhart manipulating a Torajian abacus. Which means the next checkpoint will be a Gaun-style match?*



*Gaun, mixed fighting arena stage:*

“Now, it’s finally time! This is a special event hosted by Leonhart-sama: the Special Beast King Festival! Every person featured today is a peerless, fearless combatant capable of single-handedly bringing down thousands of enemies and fighting entire armies alone! You won’t even be able to blink! Ah, and commentating will be me, Ronove, the announcer for this arena!”

Ronove gripped her mic as hard as she could as she commentated passionately, her words flying out to the spectators in their seats and exciting them even more. As always, she was using a lot of words to build me up as much as she could. Meanwhile, the exhibition match that was being held on the stage ended before I even had a chance to set foot on it, and it was quickly vacated. Then, arena staff motioned for me to get up onstage, and I was reminded that these people were pros. I could see a figure on the other side, ready to emerge at the same time I did.

*Man, they're really good at this.* It looked like there were a total of six opponents of all sorts of builds, genders, and ages. *I can guess that the only thing they have in common is that they're all scary strong.*

“Can you believe it?! After Grim Reaper’s entrance, here comes Ice Princess, Blaze Princess, Peach Ogre, Purple Butterfly, Reflector, and Leopardess! It’s a grand gathering of Rank S adventureeeers!”

*I know you knew about them already, Ronove.*

But the way she announced them, like it was a surprise, really excited the crowd. I couldn’t blame them; I was the same. I was not only facing Sylvia and Ema, but also Goldiana and Grostina. And to finish things off, even the host, Leonhart (currently using some random girl’s appearance) and the unknown quantity, Bakke, were here. The lineup was even fancier than at my promotion ceremony, and my excitement would not fade. It was like they’d gathered all the most fitting Rank S combatants around.

“Heh! Don’t you look happy, Kelvin! My wallet’s looking overjoyed too!”

A truly lively and determined beastfolk girl was the first to speak, sounding very happy as she did so. Instead of a weapon, she had an abacus in her hands. *Why an abacus?*

“You’re...Leonhart, right? I don’t recall that form ever... Who is it?”

“My wife! For a head-on fight with no tricks involved, this is the easiest to move around in. So, as you can see, I am going to fight you seriously today. Fairly and with no holds barred!”

“Yeah...but I get the feeling the queen doesn’t fight with an abacus.”

Now that he mentioned it, I could see a similarity to Goma.

*Yeah, so this is Gaun’s queen.*

The way he spoke so clearly in that form had me believing him out of hand, but I had already decided to ignore half of what the Beast King ever said. After all, we were talking about the infamous Leonhart, who considered getting an opponent to let their guard down and stabbing them in the back to be a good and fair method of fighting. He would probably try something again here, so I

didn't feel I could trust him in that regard. Not at all.

"Mm, Kelvin. Good luck today."

"Hey! When was the last time I fought you, Sylvia? The promotion ceremony? From what I hear, Ema is about as strong as you, right? Why did you hide that?! You've even got a great title!"

"That's what you're mad about?! I just didn't want to stand out! But Tsubaki-sama from Toraj did something while I wasn't looking..."

*Ahh, the two of them are guests of Toraj right now, aren't they? I bet Tsubaki-sama thought it would be a good thing.*

"We're here too, Kelvin-chan!" Grostina and Goldiana cooed in unison.

A fluorescent color suddenly appeared and spread across my vision. This was accompanied by Prettia's deep voice, and that of her disciple, Grostina, as they jumped out in front of me. They had probably paid attention to the colors in their titles, as today they were wearing pink and purple tights, respectively. Honestly, I wanted to praise myself for not screaming when they showed up.

"Of... Of course, I would never forget you two. In fact, you're basically burned into my brain permanently."

"Oh, no! That's positively sinful! You like us that much?!"

"Jeez, you're such a flatterer! I might actually fall for you!"

*Stop. Just please, stop with the jokes.*

"Uh...ermm...I'm grateful you're participating in this for me, but what about your jobs as the Goddess and her Oracle?"

"Oh, it's totally not a thing *at all*! Maidens in love can sometimes exhibit amazing and unexpected powers. You don't need to worry, Kelvin-chan; just enjoy this Battle Rally."

"My sister is right!" Grostina added. "For example, I have enough room in my heart to refrain from taking a promotion to Rank S. After all, the job of a capable woman is to deepen and widen her heart and mind. In fact, this could be considered a move to take in essential nutrients. Like the kind you get from hot guys?"



“Ha ha ha, I see...”

*Oh no, what do I do? They're so reliable, I'm tearing up.*

“Keh hah hah! Rank S adventurers are always so colorful! I never get tired of watching.”

The speaker, clutching a cask of booze, was someone I'd just met the other day, a Rank S adventurer from the Western Continent and queen of Faanis, Bakke Faanis.

*You're laughing like it doesn't apply to you, but the rumors about you are really something too, you know?*

“By the way, Kelvin, I see that you've already got yourself a kid. Man, I never would have expected that. You really are the perfect picture of a man!”

“I wouldn't have expected *that* to be said of me in the midst of this lineup.”

“The heck are you saying? It's a compliment, you know. Anyway, lemme just be blunt: how many others have you gotten pregnant? Or are you hiding more children somewhere?”

“None! And of course not! Hey, in the first place, don't just ask me about private stuff like that...”

“Then what about Ange? Hm? Hmmm?”

“Did you even hear me just now?!”

Bakke herself was basically the perfect picture of a drunkard.

“Now that the stage has heated up, allow me to introduce today's special guests: Elder Nellas from the Elven village, and contestant Kelvin's daughter, DarkMel.”

“Hello, I'm Nellas. I see you're really going at it before the event's even started, contestant Bakke. I should say that's expected of the champion drinker of the Western Continent, and the one who beat me in that contest. Drinking while talking is natural for you, almost like you're simply breathing.”

“Let's leave the booze talk there for today, Elder Nellas! Do you have any words for your father, DarkMel-chan?”

“Yes. These commentator seats are very nice because it’s so easy to see the stage. I’ll be able to see all of my papa’s exploits. Ah, but I’m also rooting for everyone else as well, so I want to watch them all do great!”

“Mmmm!” Ronove made a noise, unable to stand how cute DarkMel was being. “A wonderful speech, thank you! You’ve even almost managed to charm me, Ronove! That was close!”

*Why is DarkMel in the commentator’s seat? Is this some sort of plot by the Beast King?* “Well, I’m fine with it if she can see her papa’s heroics from up close!”

“Looks like you’re going to get another title added to your entry in the Adventurer’s Directory, Kelvin-chan,” Goldiana remarked.

“Mm, it’s unavoidable,” agreed Sylvia.

Their comments, which seemed really on the mark, were scary, since they really could come true.

“Now then, allow me to explain the rules of this Special Beast King Festival! This time, it will not be the traditional tournament. Instead, we will be using somewhat irregular rules compared to what we’re used to here in Gaun. Are you all curious? I know you are! How will these seven people compete for supremacy?! Listen and be amazed, you lot! It’s a battle royaaaaa!”

“YEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

The arena erupted with cheers at Ronove’s announcement. *A battle royal, huh? That’s going pretty all-in for them.*

“Oho, so they’re planning to wash away booze with booze?”

“I don’t think that’s right, Nellas-san. The saying should be washing away blood with blood!”

*Please don’t force my daughter to make such ominous corrections, Elder Nellas.*



“This time, the format is special! Normally, magic would be forbidden and the contestants would be limited in the equipment and items they can bring, but

for today only, all those restrictions are gone! Basically, magic is fair game, the contestants can feel free to show off their favorite weapons, and you can prepare a mass of healing items even if it's unfair! This battle will allow all of that so as to be as close to real combat as possible!"

I was surprised by the battle royal format, but then I was even more shocked by how many things were being allowed. Unlike the Beast King, Prettia, and Grostina, who normally fought in close combat, Sylvia, Ema, and I were mainly magic users. I was seriously grateful they were allowing us to go all out. The only thing was, I had yet to figure out how Bakke fought. I had, of course, looked her up in the Adventurer's Directory, but I thought it would have been a waste to research someone I had yet to fight, since it would spoil the surprise, so I couldn't read through all of it. In that sense, I was very interested in this upcoming battle.

*This is a battle royal, so I can go for anyone I want first, right? Then let's go after Bakke. Yeah, let's. I've decided!*

While I was psyching myself up, my Parallel Processing raised a very obvious question. How would this arena withstand a brawl between Rank S adventurers like us? This stage had been broken, pulverized, and blasted to smithereens countless times during the last Beast King Festival. I knew it was tougher than normal bedrock, but to be honest, I wasn't feeling too confident in—

"By the way, the stage being used this time is something the stage artisan Caesar put his heart and soul into! Reflecting on what happened at the last Beast King Festival, he was fired up about making a stage that would even be able to withstand fights between Rank S adventurers! The man himself is in the stands today, watching along with his apprentice! Given how confident he is after being made to cry so hard before, I'm sure we can expect great things, wouldn't you all agree?!"

*Yeah. I'm pretty sure I know exactly what's going to happen to this stage.*

"Continuing our explanation of the rules: this fight between the seven contestants will start with them evenly spaced around the edges of the round stage. The stage has been colored so you can find your marks. Please, find a starting spot you like!"

With that announcement from Ronove, we all moved to our starting positions. I went with the one that was closest to me, and once we were finished taking our places, I looked to see that to my right was Bakke, followed by Leonhart, Prettia, Grostina, Ema, and Sylvia. There wasn't any deep reason for it, but my immediate thought was that I was glad I wasn't sandwiched between Prettia and Grostina. The fact that Bakke, who I'd decided to start with, was right next to me was also a lucky coincidence.

"Yo, Kelvin! Let's get along, since we're next to each other and everything."

"You're raring to go, aren't you, Bakke? Wait, you're *still* drinking?"

"Of course! You heard what she said earlier, didn't you? You can bring what you want, so I can bring as much alcohol as I like and you can't say anything about it! Ah, or did you say that because you wanted a drink too?"

"No, there's no way I'd drink liquor before a fight. That's just a bad idea..."

"Ha ha ha! Being able to exhibit your full power even while drunk is the mark of the truly powerful! If you want, I'd be willing to bet on this match. It'd be motivation for the both of us, wouldn't it?"

Bakke was really confident, suggesting a bet as she drained the cask that she was treating like a beer stein. While I was astonished and exasperated that a bet was what she'd come up with, Leonhart on her right responded to the proposal.

"Hmm," he said thoughtfully, amused, "that's a pretty interesting proposal. Let me in on that too."

"Whoa, the king himself is in! Nice! If only my husband was as strong of spirit as you. He's still cute in his own way, though!" Bakke exclaimed gleefully.

"You can boast about your love life to Prettia. But let's see...since we have the chance, why not say that the one who wins this fight can give one order to any one of us? Wouldn't that be thrilling?" Leonhart suggested.

"Oho! That's good! The best! I love it! High-risk, high-reward bets are my favorite!"

"Mm, would I be able to ask for all-I-can-eat?" Sylvia asked.

“Wai— Sylvia?! You’re seriously planning on signing up for such a ridiculous bet?!”

“Oh? Well, if that isn’t just the most interesting proposal. What do you think, Grostina?” asked Prettiana.

“I think we absolutely *have* to join in! If someone else gives an order that goes too far, it could impact society’s morals, after all. It would be a lady’s job to stop that,” Grostina replied.

*Morals, huh? If only you two would follow that in your dress code.* Yet, regardless of how I felt, everybody went with the flow and joined in on the bet. While it just boiled down to me needing to win, every person here could be the one to come out on top. Winning wouldn’t be that easy.

“Mm, I will declare it now: if I win, we are having a meat party at Kelvin’s house.”

“Meat...party?”

“Uh, yes. It’s exactly what it sounds like. It seems she wants to eat as much of Efil-san’s handmade cooking as she feels like. Ah, I’m fine with setting the same condition if I win, by the way.”

*I’m completely sure you’d be competing with Mel in that case... And if that happens, it’ll dramatically increase my estate’s food expenses.*

“Then, if I, the Beast King, were to win... Let’s see...why don’t I have Kelvin marry Goma? You’ve got a whole crowd of wives already, so what’s one more? We could have you strengthen your ties with Gaun; it shouldn’t be a bad deal for you. I could help you do a lot of business too, as your mother-in-law. Heh heh heh...”

*Leonhart is the only one I can never allow to win,* I immediately decided.

“Jeez, you shouldn’t put something so heavy on a bet like this! Don’t worry, Kelvin-chan. If we win, we won’t ask for anything like that. For example, if I were to win... I’d just want to embrace you for a little!” Goldiana offered.

“Of course, I agree with my big sister, and I would have the same wish too! You can feel free to recuperate from your daily exhaustion in my ample bosom.

It's totally wholesome, and I would never try to get in front of Sera-chan."

*Nnnnope! That request can never happen either!*

"As Leopardess, my wish is always simple. Kelvin, embrace me!"

"I see, so you want the same thing as Prettia and Grostina."

"Come on, don't be such a virgin. I know how much of a womanizer you are."

*Oh no; none of them are going to ask for anything decent. I can afford to lose this fight even less than the one against my father-in-law.*

"Oooh, it seems the contestants are hyping the event up among themselves!"

"They're probably talking about the drinking party that's going to happen after the match. Of course, I will be participating as well."

"You've only been talking about booze this entire time, Elder Nellas!" cried Ronove. "How much do you want to start drinking, seriously?! Anyway, leaving him aside, allow me to explain how the match will be decided! There are two points that will mark your loss! If you either are rendered unable to fight or willingly announce your desire to surrender, you lose! And if you fall off the stage, you also lose! For the latter, if a part of your body or clothes touches the ground or the barrier protecting the spectators, you will be counted as having fallen, so be careful you don't fall too fast!"

*Whoa there, those rules weren't in the Beast King Festival either. They must've added some loss conditions since this will be a total brawl. Depending on how the fight unfolds, it could be settled in an instant.*

"It seems the spectators can't wait anymore either, so sorry for dragging this out! Finally, it's time for the fight of the century! To begin, I'll have our guest, DarkMel-chan, start things off. Are you all ready?!"

"Okay! While it may be audacious of me, I will have the honor of starting this event!" DarkMel took a deep breath. "Let the match...BEGIIIIIN!"

Her adorable signal was a shout of encouragement to me! Riding the wave of motivation I felt, I went for a preemptive—

"Rose Ishtar Final Edition!"



Surprisingly, Prettia was the one who made her move as soon as the signal to start went off. She turned into a giant, completely pink de— No, goddess. The long blonde princess curls that she was so fond of, the ones she was rumored to tend to every single day without fail, were now in a position to touch the top of the walls that surrounded the stage. The impact of her transformation was massive, of the highest order, even. But in terms of size she was barely this side of passable to stay on the stage.

“Hey now, don’t you think that’s a double-edged blade you’ve resorted to?! You’re out if you touch the barrier!”

“Mm-hmm,” Prettia grunted a teasing response. “Thanks for the warning! You’re such a gentleman, Kelvin-chan. But I am an especially bold girl!”

Prettia’s smile, which made it seem like she was enjoying being on the edge, was delivered to everyone in the stadium. The next thing that could be heard were the cheers of the audience, so loud they started to sound like screams. It was understandable; anyone would be surprised if something like this suddenly appeared.

“Mm, starting with the most threatening presence in a free-for-all is standard. Get ready, Goldiana.” Sylvia warned.

“Teaming up isn’t prohibited just because this is a battle royal! And our wishes would be the same too!” Ema chimed in.

“Oh?” Prettia reacted with her usual lilt.

Sylvia and Ema made for Prettia, who had drawn the attention of the entire stadium. It seemed they fully planned on coming together to win this match and absolutely ravage my food expenses. Though fighting Prettia would likely prove very hard for them individually, they excelled at coordination with each other, which made the outcome a lot less guaranteed. Given Prettia’s overwhelming size, they could aim to knock her off the stage.

“Iceland.”

That seemed to be Sylvia’s intention, anyway. Once she finished chanting her spell, the surface of the stage was covered in slippery ice. The ice had the least

amount of friction possible, making it more slippery than a skating rink.

*This would work as a strategy against Prettia, but it's going to affect the rest of us too. Well, actually, no. I have Fly.*

"You're lookin' pretty comfortable there, Kelvin, being so distracted! Or what, do you just like peeking at others?!" Bakke teased.

"I'm asking you seriously here, please don't make statements that people can misconstrue!" I cried.

Bakke was scolding me while I was distracted, but I made sure to argue against the part that could damage my reputation. Just like the other three had started their fight, we were now in the middle of one.

*This is a battle royal. What's wrong with checking up on the others? I mean, look, the Beast King's here too, right? If you don't pay attention to your surroundings, you have no idea what kind of dirty tricks they might pull.*

"If you don't like it, then show it with your actions!"

"Whoa there!"

I dodged a sword that left behind a red trail. The blade Bakke swung had red fragments growing out of it that looked like a dragon's scales, so it was clearly made from dragon materials.

*It kind of resembles Azgrad's spear.*

Every time she swung her weapon, embers scattered from the spaces between the scales, and when the sword struck the stage, it melted the ice where it hit.

Speaking of melting, the same thing was happening to the ice under Bakke's feet. Normally, stepping carelessly on this icy stage would lead to someone slipping and falling, but in Bakke's case, the moment her feet touched the stage, the ice melted, allowing her to move properly. In other words, it wasn't just her sword but Bakke herself who was like lava in that she put out a lot of heat. If I were to touch her carelessly, I would likely get more than just burns.

"What's this?! The stage is already covered in ice! And some spots are already starting to come apart! As expected, Master Caesar's honor has already



cracked!”

*Come on, Ronove. You’ve got to stop making those kinds of comments.*

While I brought my hands together in prayer for Caesar, who was likely in the audience, my fight with Bakke started in earnest. From experience, it seemed to me that her skill with the sword was below Rion’s. But, her physical abilities were not to be underestimated, and she was able to use heat in her attack and defense in a way that didn’t rely on Red Magic. In terms of individual strength, she might have been stronger than Sylvia or Ema.

“Oh? If it isn’t Leonhart-chan. Why’re you spectating here so carefreely? If you don’t have an opponent, I will happily be one for you.”

“Grk!” Leonhart reacted. “So I’ve already been found... I thought I was well hidden, though. Awww...could it be, you’re free too? Huh, Grostina-san?”

“Mm-hmm!” Grostina moaned. “I can’t have you underestimating a lady’s intuition. This is a battle royal. I bet you planned to hide yourself until only one enemy was left so that you could take advantage of their exhaustion.”

“Wow, you’ve got me figured out, haven’t you?”

“No matter how honest you make yourself look on the outside, you’re the same as always on the inside. I don’t even need to ask my experienced older sister for advice when it comes to you.”

“I see. Seems like it’s my loss, then, Goldiana’s sister disciple. I’m completely beaten.”

“Well, I *am* her sister disciple, after all. Now, let’s leave the talking there and have some fun! I am the Violet Fairy who will dance across this stage!”

Grostina had found the Beast King, who was hiding off to the side, and just like that, a fight started. Facing Grostina, who was enveloped in a purple aura, was the Beast King, wielding twin bastard swords he had produced from who-knows-where.

“I am even more elegant on ice!” Grostina exclaimed.

“Oh, man... Well, those movements certainly *are* elegant, but...”

Grostina slid on top of the ice, jumping and spinning as if she were a figure

skater.

*Are those skates made of the poison from her unique skill?*

As she moved around, she was scattering poison from her muscle-bound body, creating her own field surely and steadily. There was no excess in her movements, and there was no doubt that everything she did was calculated. But I sympathized with Leonhart, who wore an indefinable, awkward expression on his face. I would also feel intense fear if someone like her was skating gallantly around me.

“What’s this? Looking away again, are you?!” Bakke shouted at me.

*Whoops, I’m being scolded again. I wasn’t not paying attention, okay? I’m just using Parallel Processing to pay attention to other battles as well. My main concern is only you, Bakke.*

I answered, “Don’t say that. Don’t you need to have a wide field of view in a battle?”

“Wide field of view?” Bakke paused to process what I had said. “Ah, Kelvin...could it be that you swing *both* ways? I mean, I’m not *opposed* to my own sex, but if you’re looking at *that one*, well...yeah, I can only say that your titles in the Adventurer’s Directory aren’t for show! I lose to you in that respect!” Bakke was pointing at Grostina, who was jumping and spinning around, as she told me how impressed with me she was. A misunderstanding of this magnitude was nothing other than home-run class.

“Hey, you’re taking ‘battle’ to mean something entirely different here, aren’t you?!”

“Heh, want me to keep this a secret as someone who’s interested in the lecherous side of you, Kelvin?”

“You’re wrong, okay? Seriously, you’re wrong! Hey, are you listening to me?”

“To tell you the truth, I have some fire dragon blood running in me. My race is ‘dragonkin,’ officially. Do you know about them?”

It seemed she had no intention of listening to me. Still, I appreciated that she had changed the subject to something that seemed interesting. *Oh, fine, I’ll go*

*along with you. Just for today, okay? Just for today.*

“Nope. I might have heard something about it somewhere, but not enough for me to remember any details. Does Faanis have anything to do with fire dragons?” I asked.

“I don’t know any details about their Evolution and so on either. The only thing I do know is that I can freely control heat. I can also do this, by the way!”

I made a surprised noise as, along with her shout, Bakke released a strong light from her body.

*Hey now, you’re not going to take the form of a real dragon or anything, ar— Hey, wait. Wait! If you take the form of something as big as a dragon now, you’ll—*

“Watch me, Kelvin! I’ll make it so you won’t be able to tear your eyes away from me!”

I had no time to warn her before the light surrounding Bakke became even stronger.



What happened afterwards was tragic. I tried to stop her, but it was in vain as Bakke transformed into a fire dragon. It was the opposite phenomenon from Dahak’s or Boga’s human transformation, and a gigantic dragon reminiscent of the Fire Dragon King I’d seen in the volcano in Faanis appeared onstage.

The stage, covered in a barrier, was already being occupied by the massive goddess Prettia. This transformation was a huge problem, as the stage was already full to bursting with its current occupants. And then a Dragon King-sized dragon was thrown into the mix. What do you think happened? The answer is easy: overflow.

“How’s this, Kelvin?! How do you like my true power?!” Bakke shouted after finishing her transformation.

“Oh?” Prettia reacted in her usual drawn-out coquettish manner.

Inevitably, Bakke, in her now giant form, clashed with Prettia. As the stage was so slippery with ice, it was all too easy for even someone with superhuman

balance like Prettia to slip and fall. Meanwhile, Bakke's balance was probably shot because of the copious amounts of alcohol she drank all the time. Anyway, starting from that conclusion, the great devil and the giant dragon both lost their balance and fell over.

"Oh no, how could this be?! Both contestant Goldiana, who gigantified herself for some reason, and contestant Bakke, who became a dragon for some reason, have fallen! It's hard to see thanks to the dust cloud that's been kicked up, but they might be out of the ring!"

Yeah, they've definitely gone out of the ring. Prettia's foot did so when she fell, and Bakke's tail is totally off the stage as well. I noticed first because I was closer, but this result was deeply unsatisfying. Drinking in battle is no good for sure.

"Wai—?!"

Winding back to just before the two fell, another tragedy had happened at the same time. Leonhart had been in the form of his wife. Given his skill and cunning, he should have been able to just barely make his way out and avoid getting caught up in the disaster. However, Sylvia had made her move before he could.

"Wintry Expanse."

The floor around Leonhart changed all at once. It went from one meant to make him slip and fall to one designed to freeze his legs to the ground and stop him from moving.

"Sylvia-chan, isn't that a little unfair?" Ema asked.

"Mm, if anything goes, then so does this," Sylvia replied.

"Yeah, you're right. But..."

*KerTHUDDDDD!*

With no time for a dialogue between Sylvia and Leonhart, two massive, superheavy bodies fell mercilessly on top of him.

*Did Ronove and the others in the commentator's box not see that? That's too bad. You don't get to witness something like that often. This is a historic*

*moment; the Beast King's been snared!*

"Oh my, no!" Prettia reacted. "I seem to have gotten carried away. Well, it's no use crying over spilled milk, I guess. Okay, time to change tack! It's too bad, isn't it Bakke-chan? Wait, hmm?"

"Kkhngaahh..."

Having fallen off the stage, Prettia tried to stealthily talk to Bakke, who had failed out with her. However, for some reason, the woman in her dragon form was snoring. Yes, it seemed that Bakke was asleep.

*Did she think that there was no point in trying anymore, whether she was out or not?*

Still, the boldness to be able to sleep in the middle of a match with everyone watching wasn't an ability just anyone possessed.

*Exactly how ironclad is her spirit?!*

Prettia tried to explain it away. "She's been drinking since yesterday, after all. Still, she changes modes surprisingly fast."

*I see. She did seem pretty sleepy from the beginning.*

But she was sleeping while draped over Prettia in her dragon form. As things stood, Prettia would be unable to stand, and if she moved carelessly, she would impact us as well.

"Hrmm...okay. I have come to a momentous decision," Prettia announced. "I'm going to stay here for a while and watch my cute little sister and my cute friends' gallant forms as they fight. So just treat me like a beautiful backdrop."

"Understood, sister!" Grostina shouted.

"Mm, as expected of you, Goldiana," Sylvia commented.

It seemed Prettia had considered that as well. She told us to ignore her and that it was fine if our attacks hit her, so we should just continue. The peach-colored goddess lay on her side like a sleeping Buddha and graced us with her gaze filled with love.

*Could this...be considered an artistic collaboration between Caesar and*

*Prettia? It's destructive in a lot of ways.*

“Ohh?” Prettia seemed surprised by something. “Oh my, oh my?”

The next instant, her gigantic frame was lifted slightly. A scream came out from under her, sounding like that of a woman.

“Nooot...yeeeeet!”

“Grk! He's still alive?!”

Allow me to explain Ema's surprise. It seemed that Leonhart, who had presumably been crushed under a pile of giant bodies, was not yet out of the fight. He supported Prettia's *and* dragon Bakke's weight with his arms, cracks spreading on the stage from under his feet.

*Wow, he's powerful.*

But I could see his tail twitching behind him, so it seemed like he was barely holding on.

“Then...should I turn it back into Iceland? He'll probably slip and get crushed again,” Sylvia proposed.

“Stop thaaaat! You bruuute!” Leonhart shouted.

Unfortunately for him, the real brutish one was currently the “backdrop” that was putting such weight on Leonhart.

“No, that's not necessary,” Grostina replied.

“Grostina-san? I know we're in a battle, but why?”

“When Leonhart-chan and I were fighting, I spread colorless and odorless paralytic poison in that area. In his state, it doesn't seem like he'll be able to move, so eventually, he won't be able to gather up any strength.”

“That's unfair! You cheater!” Leonhart shouted once again.

*Ahh, that's where Grostina was dancing on ice before. It was poison for the eyes, but who would have thought it was actual poison? Oh well, this poison might turn out to be good medicine for Leonhart.*

I had, at least formally, gotten back at Leonhart for the way he had messed with Rion during the Beast King Festival, but it was possible I still held a grudge

deep in my heart as a brother who loved his little sister.

“Mm, perfectly nasty,” Sylvia commented.

“Tee hee hee!” Grostina laughed. “Aren’t you two the ones who froze him there to crush him in the first place? Not to mention, now that my sister has fallen from the ring against her will, I need to try all the harder, don’t you think?”

“I see. So both of them are eliminated, and it’s only a matter of time until the Beast King is crushed.” Ema was talking herself through the situation. “So that just leaves me, Sylvia, Grostina-san, and Kelvin-san, right? Now that there’s four of us, we can split up evenly.”

“That’s right!” Grostina affirmed. “It seems you two were going to party up from the very start, and that would put me at a small disadvantage. So Kelvin-chan, why don’t we call a cease-fire for just a little bit and make a temporary party? We’re comrades who’ve exchanged fists once already, so we should be able to improvise a little teamwork, don’t you think?”

“Heh, you’re proposing a tag-team battle?”

If anything went in this battle royal, then teaming up in the middle just like Sylvia and Ema had done from the start was also allowed. Grostina’s looks and behavior made me distinctly terrible at dealing with her, but I knew how capable she was from the Beast King Festival. Just like I had become stronger since then, there was no doubt that she had climbed to greater heights along with Prettia. Also, unlike the Beast King, I knew she was trustworthy and would likely respect this deal.

“Yeah, that might be fun,” I agreed.

“Whoa there, could anyone have expected this?! It seems we’re about to witness a tag-team match among Rank S adventurers! At first it was looking like the results would be a little disappointing, but this is a great turn! I’m getting fired up! But I’m still concerned about contestant Goldiana, who remains fallen on the field!”

“It’s because she really stands out, with her coloring and her eccentricity. It’s like she’s shouting, ‘Even after losing, Goldiana is still here!’”

“Um...should we not be worried about Beast King-sama?” DarkMel asked timidly.

“It’s fine! Strength is everything in Gaun!” both Ronove and Elder Nellas replied in unison.

*True, this is Gaun, after all.*

“Now then, let’s start. Don’t underestimate my poison!” Grostina warned their opponents.

“Who cares about poison?! The food we cook is more harmful than poison any day!” Ema shouted in retaliation.

“Ema...” Sylvia tried to get her partner’s attention. “Ema. That’s not something you should be competing for. We are simply on the side that eats. Nagua is strict about us never making food.”

“Hey, come on, save me!” Leonhart cried from under Prettia. “I’m seriously in danger now, I can’t really put strength into my arms anymore. Please, Bakke, get up!”

*Snore...*

With all our individual personalities clashing against each other, it didn’t seem like things would get any less chaotic, even this late into the match.

*You guys seriously never get tired of this, do you?*

“Okay, Grostina! Let’s go!” I cried.

“Of course! Let’s!” Grostina responded.

“Mm, come,” Sylvia taunted us.

“I’ll make you regret taking us on in a team battle!” Ema shouted.

The girls held their weapons crossed together as we charged at them. This was followed by sounds of clashing swords, magic, and the Beast King finally running out of strength and falling, which caused the stage to split in half with a loud noise and was followed by a mysterious scream from somewhere in the stands.

*Ah, I’m so happy to have worthy opponents!*







*Deramis, along the northwestern coast:*

Putting Gaun behind us, DarkMel and I were heading for the last of the four great countries that would be our stage: Deramis. Well, actually, that was a bit misleading. We *were* heading there, and now we've arrived. The sixth checkpoint in this Battle Rally was on a beach in northwestern Deramis. Still, this wasn't the same fine sand and calm seas one would find in a Torajian tourist spot, but a dreary beach filled with rough rock and violent waves. It would have been a fitting backdrop for a final scene in a drama, as it was basically a cliff. There was a pretty decent dungeon nearby, so this wasn't really a place people visited. Anyway, my opponent was already waiting for me, of course.

"I expected you to get this far, bro! Of course you'd beat the Hastily Gathered Rank S Adventurers Party!" Dahak shouted in greeting.

"You call it a party, but it was a battle royal, so isn't that name kind of off? If anything, it should be called 'Great Rank S Adventurer Melee.'"

Dahak in his dragon form was the one who greeted me. He seemed to be really curious about my fight with Prettia (I didn't actually fight her), as he had me stand on a tall boulder that looked to be the stage for our fight and wouldn't stop bringing it up. I knew that it would just turn into a dangerous topic, so I'd had DarkMel take refuge.

"If you care that much, why didn't you try to get into the Gaun checkpoint when they were assigning them?"

"Ah, yeah...I would've liked to, but there was a reason I couldn't."

"What reason? Does it have to do with the battle I'm going to have here?"

"It does! I'll call them now, okay? HEEYY! BIG BRO KELVIN'S HEEEEE!"

Dahak nimbly took off below the cliff, shouting as he went. I hadn't expected him to be my only opponent, but I wanted to ask why he had to be the only one up here to greet me.

*You know that you can still hear the sound of the crashing waves from up*

*here, right? I have no idea who's down there—did they want to participate in some extreme form of swimming or something?*

I stayed quiet as the first one to come up from under the edge of the cliff face was Toraj's Water Dragon King, Fujiwara Torajirou. The moment he crested the lip, our eyes met, and we ended up spending a while just staring at each other.

*Please...say something.*

"Yeah, yeah. I'm going, so just be patient, my idiot son! And Salafia, don't stay there forever just because it feels nice! It's time for the festival!"

"Oh, it's that time already? This natural Jacuzzi was so nice, I couldn't help but stay in!"

*Huh? Natural Jacuzzi? That's like...a whirlpool bath, right? These voices belong to Dahak's mom and Salafia. What a fearsome pair of mothers. Hmm...whoever made this has a great creative mind.*

"Hey, Dahak...even if you're in your dragon form, I think a Jacuzzi is a little—"

"Oh no, apparently it ends up hitting your pressure points with just the right amount of force. Ah, but I haven't gone in! It'd be terrible if the seawater seeped into my dirt!" he replied.

"Ah, I see..."

*I get the feeling Dahak's basis for decisions is a bit off from normal. Hey, wait, the only voices I've heard so far are from Dragon Kings! There's Dahak with earth, Torajirou with water, his mom with darkness, and Salafia with ice... No way, it couldn't be!*

"Well done, Master. Have you had enough sugar?" Mdofarak offered.

"Yo, you're finally here, I see. You're late, big bro!" Boga greeted me. "I was so bored, I was about to go dig a hot spring! A bath is nice, but hot springs are the best in the end!"

"You feeling okay, Kelvin? It's me! Your best friend, Fromme-san! I came here today to beat you up! Today's a good day to die, after all!"

"Wait, Kelvin, as in Ri-chan's big brother? Oohh, you're pretty hot. This little lightning never got the chance to talk to you directly during that last battle, so

maybe I should keep you in reserve depending on what happens today...”

*What is up with this parade of...personalities? Dragon Kings are showing up one after another.*

“What’s wrong, big bro?” Dahak asked.

“Ah, don’t worry about it. I was just thinking that you really shouldn’t turn your eyes away from reality. I’ll try my best,” I told Dahak, but it only seemed to puzzle him.

*So, this is the reason he couldn’t participate in Gaun.* Having all the Dragon Kings face me at once was like a dream. I would be squaring off against Mdofarak of light, Boga of fire, Fromme of wind, and—uhh, just Lightning-chan? Is that okay? Did I ever hear the Lightning Dragon King’s name? She looked like a dragon, but she spoke and behaved like a street fashionista, so I figured she was as far from normal as the rest. And, as always, Fromme was highly excitable.

“Oh man, that was an impactful entrance,” I praised them. “Seeing all the Dragon Kings appear together is quite the sight. So, what kind of fight will we be having? I’d love it if we were to all just fight, but that’s probably not it, right?”

All the battles up until now had had some type of format that allowed the other side to win somehow. Though fighting all the Dragon Kings at once seemed like a great present, there was no way it would be so simple and rough.

“Good on you for asking. You can just stand there, Master. It’s super simple,” Mdo answered first.

“I just have to stand here?”

She wasn’t making much sense. Her explanation was too lacking.

“Sorry, bro. I’ll explain.” Dahak stepped in. “The first thing we, the Dragon King Family Mix-Up, considered was a straight-on fight, but our opinions were pretty scattered.”

Dragon King...Family Mix-Up... Well, leaving his sense for names aside, we were dealing with a farming street punk, a street fashionista, a sweets hound, a berserker, an extreme “shy guy,” and dual moms. Asking this feverishly

excitable group to come together and make a decision was nothing but mad, in my opinion. I could totally see the conversation being tugged every which way.

Dahak continued, “Anyway, anything too complicated would be impossible for us, so we decided on something super simple and clear-cut! These bastards got tired of talking during the latter half of the discussion, so if you can believe it, we got a unanimous vote on this!”

*So...they just got bored?!*

“I see, I see. And what did you decide on?”

“We’re gonna shoot all our breaths at once!”

That gave me a moment’s pause as I tried to process what he’d said. “Sorry, I don’t think I heard you. Please repeat that?”

“We’re gonna shoot all our breaths at once! It’ll be your job to take it and protect yourself enough not to activate sister Mel’s blessing! If you do that, you’ve cleared this checkpoint!”

*Okay, um...by “all your breaths at once,” you mean like you did to the ark before? You know that’s clearly not something you should point at an individual person, right?*

“That’s why I said you just had to stand there. Super simple,” Mdofarak restated proudly.

“We’re talking about you here, bro. The man boss Gerard swore loyalty to. Something like this will be no problem, I know it! I’ll still be going full blast, though!” Dahak shouted confidently.

“If Az-chan were here, we’d have been able to make even stronger breath attacks though,” Salafia lamented.

I had nothing to say in response. I was simply amazed.

“Jeez, you’re still not talking, Water-chan? Look, you need to be bold like Wind-chan!” said the Lightning Dragon King.

“Yahooo, I’m gonna blow you away!” came a shout from Fromme.

The Dragon Kings were all super motivated, enough that I suspected what

they were really motivated to do was kill. They charged up their breath attacks, and I could see the ultimate form of each of their respective elements weaving together in their mouths.

“H-Hey—”

“Let’s get right to it, bro! We want you to accept all our feelings!”

That was the last thing Dahak said to me before “combat” commenced. It seemed this part of the Battle Rally was the type of event where I wouldn’t be able to get a word in edgewise.



### *Outskirts of Parth:*

The combined breaths of all the Dragon Kings made for a fearsome attack. If I had taken it all straight-on, I suspect I would have been disintegrated along with everything else in the area. However, since the attacks traveled in a straight line, I managed to cut a safe zone by using an overclocked Boreas Death Scythe while simultaneously redirecting the breath attacks up towards the sky. And with that, I had cleared the sixth checkpoint surprisingly easily. Fromme and the mothers slapped me on the back over and over in congratulations, while Lightning-chan hit on me, and Dahak and the other Dragonz gave a round of applause to send me off as I left Deramis.

“When I think back, I realize how much better at magic I’ve gotten.”

“Really? I heard that you were always strong, even a long time ago...”  
DarkMel replied.

“Oh no, I used to barely be able to control Rank S magic—especially my Boreas Death Scythe, if you could even call it ‘control.’ It was more like the spell was controlling me, since it was like a bucking horse. Your mama had to put me in a submission hold a lot.”

DarkMel responded with a puzzled noise, tilting her head to one side as if trying to imagine what kind of situation would require that. To be fair, if I were to hear that without knowing the circumstances around it, I probably wouldn’t understand even a fraction of it.

“So, we’re finally at the seventh checkpoint, and back in Parth. There’ll only be two more battles, which means we’re in the final stretch. If my opponents are supposed to be even stronger than the ones I’ve faced so far, there are only a few options I can think of.”

“Hee hee!” DarkMel laughed. “Of course you’d be able to figure out who you’re fighting beforehand if you’ve come this far. But I’m sure you’ll be satisfied, papa. Everyone wants you to—”

*Take cover, DarkMel!*

“Waghh?!”

Though I sent her the order using telepathy, it was so sudden that DarkMel let out a cry of surprise. I changed grips to move her from my shoulders into my arms and made an emergency detour from my original heading. DarkMel covered her head with her arms, still not understanding what had happened.

“Wha— What is it?!” she cried.

“An attack, I think? I didn’t really expect to be attacked in the middle of the Battle Rally.”

A single arrow of light had flown right at me while I was making my way through the sky. It was a shining arrow, so the first culprit I thought of was the elf who was all show, Sorondil, but I quickly dropped that idea. The arrow I had dodged left a giant crater in the ground, and Sorondil was nowhere near that level.

“Aha ha, it’s not an attack. Just an emergency quest, ‘an unexpected checkpoint has emerged’ type of thing. I figured that I wanted in, since you were doing something that seemed so fun!” came a voice.

“Serge Flore!”

As I touched back down on the ground, Serge made her dashing entrance from a nearby piece of high ground. The bow she held in her hands was probably a transformed Will. As always, she was a Hero who played the most ridiculous first hands.

“No, the number of presences doesn’t match. Hey, it’s not just Serge over

there, is it?”

“Oohh! That speed in understanding the situation...so charming! If you were a girl, I might have seriously fallen for you, Kelvin!” Serge exclaimed.

“You should say that to your old party members instead of me. They’ll probably be so happy they pass out.”

“Ew, don’t wanna.”

*So instead of passing out, you passed out an immediate refusal? Where did that huge smile from just now go?* I felt sorry for Cardinal Sai and the others, but most of them were probably just reaping what they had sown.

A chorus of voices rang out.

“Wait a second, Defender. You suddenly called us out for something, and it was to make us take part in this game with you? I don’t know about the others, but at the very least *I’m* too busy for that.”

“This old man doesn’t really mind. It was a request from a cute girl, and I got to see how much Setsuna-chan has grown. As her teacher, I need to show her my good side at least sometimes.”

“Um, personally, I would have preferred to meet up with *him* at the next checkpoint... Huh? I can’t? Ah, okay, I get it...”

After Serge, the others present made themselves known one after another. There was Bell, then old man Nito, and finally Estoria.

*I see. I get what’s going on here.*

“Whuh...” DarkMel started. “What’s going on here? The seventh checkpoint should be at home; this attack wasn’t in the plans!”

“Whoops, sounds like the tiny DarkMel doesn’t understand. You need to shape up, former boss!” Serge shouted.

“Um, you’ll scare the child if you...shout like that,” Estoria did her best to scold Serge, probably because she understood how to treat children, being someone who worked at an orphanage.

“Awww.”



Judging from DarkMel's reactions up until now, their appearance hadn't been planned. She tried to reason with them. "Uhh...for now, I understand you all want to participate. But fighting here will cause trouble for us. If civilians were to make a mistake and travel along this road, it would be dangerous for them!"

"Ah, no need to worry about that. We used the same Bewildering Incense we used in Gaun, the one that was specially made by Creator. And just in case, we spread it all along the road from here to Parth, so normal civilians will never even come close."

"Whaaaat..." DarkMel seemed both shocked and quietly crept out.

"You still had some of that left?" I asked incredulously.

Bewildering Incense had been used in Gaun to convince the citizens to move away while in a hypnotic state so that Ange and Bell could attack us. They were right; if they had used that, no one would get close to us. It seemed they had done the proper prep work, one way or another.

"Don't just move things along without me. I'm going home, okay?" Bell complained.

"Aww, you're no fun, Condemner. Are you sure you're okay with that? You know that even your dad was in this event?" Serge wheedled her.

"I don't care. In fact, that just makes me want to go home even mo—"

"Your big sister Sera is also participating."

Bell froze immediately, just as she was about to turn around and leave. "Just for thirty...no, twenty minutes."

"I knew you'd come through, Condemner! Such a good kid! Let's get married!"

"Shut up. Time's already started, so let's hurry it up."

*Man, Bell is so weak-willed when it comes to Sera. It seems she did inherit something from her dad.*

Serge clicked her tongue in disappointment at having had her fun cut short. "Anyway, Kelvin! As you heard, we, the Apostle Remnants Team, are the guardians of checkpoint 6.5! You won't say no to this, will you?!"

“There’s a limit to how stupid a question can be! Of course I love this!”

“Urghh,” DarkMel groaned, “and now another checkpoint has been forced in... Fine. I’ll contact management about this through telepathy.”

“Thanks, DarkMel.”

I felt sorry for her since she seemed so unhappy, but I really wanted to prioritize Serge and her friends’ proposal here. With so many Apostles lined up in front of me, I had no choice but to accept.

“So, what kind of fight are you planning on having?”

“Erm, well, I don’t want it to overlap with any of the fights you’ve had up until now. So not a super handicapped battle, or a battle royal, or one that will be settled in an instant.”

“Defender, the time. Faster,” Bell said curtly, tapping the tip of her boots on the ground. It seemed to be a signal to say that while she had conceded to stay for a while, she really would leave once that time was up.

“Ah, okay. Since there’s no time for a preamble, I’ll just get right to the conclusion! It’s a game of tag, Kelvin! In the past, you chased after me in Deramis, but now our positions will be reversed!”

“Uh, tag? So you mean, I’m going to be running from you guys?”

Serge replied, “That’s right. Just like the kid’s game, the rules are very simple. It’s very good for education too, since it helps you learn how to hunt.”

*No, no, I’m sure only a very small number of people actually learn hunting from tag.*

Nito piped up, “I see, so it’s an escape game. This old man’s been chased all over Abyssland, so it’ll be good to be on the other side for once. There are times when this old man wants to go back and experience what his childhood was like, after all.”

“It’s basically just a hunt, right? I’m always on the hunting side, so this certainly does fit me. I’ll kick him away, no need to trouble sister Sera,” Bell added.

Estoria, however, was far less confident. “I’m slow, clumsy, and a half-wit, so

I'm not well suited to being a chaser... B— Uh, but if Sir Gerard is ahead, then I think I can try my best! Y... Yeah!"

While Serge, the originator of the idea, was a given participant, it seemed everyone else was more or less motivated to do this as well.

*I should love this... I guess I'm unsure because of the rules for this game of tag?*

"Look at that face!" Serge exclaimed gleefully. "You're worried about how we're going to chase you, right? Or are you curious about *something else*?"

"I'm not! I'm more concerned about the concrete rules. It doesn't matter which side chases and which side is being chased; tell me what the conditions for victory are. Neither of us will be able to give it our all if this gets too close to Parth, right?"

"That's true. There's no way we could scatter Creator's incense in town too. Okay then, I'll go into detail about our game of tag."

Serge went on to say that the way I could win was to reach Parth's territory while still alive. Of course, she and the others would try their best with the methods available to them to stop me from doing that. Put simply, the serious attacks of four Apostles would be raining down upon me. It didn't matter how many of them hit me, or even if my blessing was to activate. The only thing I had to do was stay alive.

"That's a pretty violent thing to be saying with such a nice smile. So, this means even if I die once and have the blessing activate, the match will continue? You just want me to run back to Parth like my life depends on it? Because in this case, it actually would."

"Ha ha! What's wrong?" Serge taunted me. "You getting cold feet, Kelvin?"

"No way. I'm actually thrilled you're all so determined. Truly, I am. Basically, all I have to do is run away, but you wouldn't complain if I found myself having to return fire to lessen the burden, would you?!"

"Oh, that's fine, totally fine! We're planning on putting our lives on the line too. Of course, I don't think killing the most unkillable man from the Apostles, a far-too-stubborn woman, or me, who will simply revive somewhere, would be

much comfort considering what you're risking. And Condemner has an even sharper intuition than me, so there's no way she'll get done in by some half-cocked counterattack."

"Hmph," Bell snorted. "I don't need any ass-kissing."

*Oh yeah, she's right. Nito has the title of Survivor, but Estoria is a vampire and also outstandingly undying. After all, she survived after taking both Gerard's and Ange's all-out attacks as well as Rion's purification.*

As for Serge, while it was only once, like me, she could activate an ability similar to Mel's blessing. Of course, considering that would mean Serge leaving the battle, killing her would still be very worth it—setting aside whether or not I'd even be able to do it, that is. As for Bell, though fighting her head-on was another matter, fighting her while having to show her my back as I ran away would honestly be hard. Her intuition was as sharp as Sera's, and I could basically assume none of my attacks would hit her.

*Hmmhmm... I see, so this is an escape game where you have to consider all of that as well, huh? Every single thing is made for them to have the most fun possible. But I'm going to have fun as well... Wait, does that mean that this is a win-win relationship?!*

"Whoa...wait a second!" DarkMel interjected. "Don't just put your lives on the line so lightly like that, jeez! You're not enemies, and it's not like you're monsters or some group of villains! You too, papa!"

"Ah, okay. You're right. Sorry."

"Wow, it's a...weird and complicated feeling hearing that from my former boss," Serge remarked.

DarkMel replied emphatically, "I don't care how it feels; this is something we can't just let slide as the ones running the event! Please wait a second; I need to call some helpers just in case."

She contacted someone through telepathy. Seeing her not give an inch to Serge and carrying out her duties this way moved me, and I was embarrassed that all I was thinking about until now were my own desires. I was *really* embarrassed, actually.

*Just how wise is my daughter?*

“Could it be, Kelvin? You, a foolishly doting parent?” Serge questioned.

“How... How could you tell?”

“Oh man, I gotta tell you, for those types of people, it shows up on their face more than they think.”

*No way, Serge...do you have as sharp an eye for observation as Sera and Bell? Heh, I see. She's grown instead of being trapped by her stats. She could very well be my strongest opponent today. I need to get it together!*

“Oh, she's here. She's coming from that way,” DarkMel piped up.

“Huh? Already?”

I looked in the direction DarkMel had indicated. We were currently around three days' carriage ride from the border of Deramis and Parth. It wasn't that far if you flew, but it wasn't a distance you could cover instantly. Unless...

“Hey hooo! I came as a guest after hearing about the circumstances. It's me, the former Assassin Ange! Let's have a good day, everyone!”

*Oh, sure. Makes sense if it's Ange.*

DarkMel chided her, “You're not a guest, Ange-san. It'd be terrible if something were to happen to papa, so you need to help if he's in trouble.”

“Ah, okay. Sorry.”

Ange ended up having to apologize as soon as she arrived. DarkMel had no mercy, probably because my life was on the line.

“We, the administration, will be adding a rule of our own. Once mama's blessing activates, if something that would endanger papa's life is going to hit him, Ange will save him. If that happens, he will fail this checkpoint. So if that happens, please graciously accept it, okay? This is a message from the top of the food chain: Shutola-san and Colette-san. Do both sides accept?”

*So those two were in charge of everything?* It was a bit late, but this was the first I'd heard of it. They were probably the best for the job as managers and in the case of unexpected circumstances like this.

“I don’t mind. It won’t come to that, though.”

Serge replied as well, “We don’t mind either, but we won’t hold back even after his blessing activates, okay? Can you really save Kelvin in such a situation, Assassin?”

“I’m telling you it won’t come to that,” I insisted.

“I’d love to believe you, papa, but Serge-san’s concerns are well-founded,” DarkMel answered. “So, papa, please apply Sonic Acceleration to Ange-san. You don’t need to overclock it since we need it to stay active for a while.”

Serge commented as if she’d solved a mystery, “Ah, I see. You want to boost her speed. Then she’ll be even faster than Condemner.”

“Tch!” Bell clicked her tongue. “Well, sure. It’s Ange.”

“Heh heh, of course!” Ange puffed her chest out. “I, Ange, am already the fastest, and I’ll be even faster than that with the buff! Oh, and I’ll be taking care of DarkMel while we’re moving, so you can be doubly at ease, Kelvin-kun!”

“Sure, thanks.”

She was right. If Ange had Sonic Acceleration on her, then she was faster than I would be with an overclocked instance of Sonic Acceleration. And with her Uncontainable skill, she could save me just like Jildora had escaped his giant golem. Still, I know I said it multiple times, but I didn’t plan on letting that happen.

“It’s been a while, and Bell is looking like she wants to go home. DarkMel, please signal the start of the match!”



At the moment, I was the wind soaring through the sky. I flew faster than anything, speeding up and slowing down on a trajectory that no one could predict. After all, wind shouldn’t be restrained by anything. As wind, I loved freedom, and that was why I was returning to Parth. More fun was awaiting me there!

“Goddammiiiiit!”

Though that was the frame of mind I’d adopted, the reality was very different.

The only part that was the same was the fact that I was desperately moving forward, like the wind.

“You’re pretty stubborn, Kelvin. That’s how you earned the name Grim Reaper! But personally, I’d like to feel some sort of resistance right about now. If I were to put it like Assassin, I suppose I should say, ‘I’d like your head’? Anyway, why don’t I get serious. Willzillion!”

Serge, who had been launching arrows at me and mass-producing craters as I ran, now switched to creating countless holy swords. When I turned back for a second to check what was going on, I saw her running at the same speed I was, and the whole area around her was buried in holy swords.

*Jeez, she really doesn’t know any limits or restraint, does she?* She was way too awesome to waste on being an ally. If possible, I’d have liked for her to always be an enemy.

Still, it wasn’t like Serge was the only one I had to watch out for. I was being chased by all the Apostles, who were buffed with Bell’s Sonic Acceleration. My buff was stronger due to overclocking, but if I wasn’t careful, Serge would easily catch me, since her normal agility was so stupidly high.

Even if I was careful, though, I was having to sidestep attacks and take other actions in addition to running, while the Apostles could just chase me in a straight line. That said, old man Nito seemed unable to keep up, and he was slowly falling behind...

“Come on, Survivor, you’re lagging behind. I’ll kick you along, so go do something!” Bell shouted.

“You can shout at me all you like, Bell-chan! But this old man wants to move at his own paceeeuurRAAAGGHHH—”

Like that, the old man who was about to be left behind was periodically being kicked forward by Bell. Her powerful kicks were accompanied by powerful wind, and the old man was sent forward towards me. He was killed and scattered to the four winds every time but always managed to revive somewhere. This pressed me hard, since I had to make split-second decisions every time it happened.

“Quickdraw: Swallow!” Nito cried.

“You’re there?!” If I didn’t find him quickly, he just continued to throw out Wild Beast Style techniques one after another. This “combo” attack was much more annoying than it would seem at first glance, and terribly dangerous. After being on the receiving end of such attacks many times, I had finally realized that it was better to search for the old man’s real body—the sword—but his iai techniques were on par with Setsuna’s. It was very hard to dodge, and just as hard to take. He had even managed to claim one of my arms once.

“Euthanasia!” he called.

“Whoa there, that’s dangerous!” I replied.

After I somehow got through that storm of attacks, Estoria came with her own set of attacks and obstruction attempts. She did these things at times when I found it hard to keep my posture and footing, so I really had no time to think or rest at all.

I especially had to watch out for her barrier, which tried to trap me in a coffin of light. The barrier was as tough as Adamantite Fortress, so my only option to slice it open instantly was Boreas Death Scythe. But if I used that, it would slow me down for a beat, which would allow follow-up attacks from Serge and Bell outside the barrier. Those two were like a nightmare combination, and I really wanted to ask them if they’d been practicing their teamwork in secret or something.

*I have to say it: thanks!*

“Obsidian Edge Dual 10x!”

I made an emergency formation of black swords for both defense and as a counteroffensive. I had them float in the air, following me the way Serge liked to have her swords do. If possible, I’d have liked to have cast Ground Cleave simultaneously, but I didn’t have the time for that.

“What, is that all, Kelvin?! Rion was able to bring a lot more!” Serge shouted.

“Then you should be praising her more than insulting me!”

Holy swords rained down on me like a squall. Each one of the weapons



launched by Serge was far more powerful than my black swords, which were being steadily destroyed instead of being able to achieve any sort of equilibrium in their clashes. I had nowhere near enough time and effort to spare to make swords that could take on a monster like her, but they were enough to buy some time.

*I think it's about time for old man Nito to come flying, based on the pattern?*

"It's about time I finished you off," Bell announced.

"Grk!"

As I was thinking about Nito, Bell came in from my side. She had already created her magical armament, Scrimmage Debilitate, and had whipping winds spouting out of her greaves to boost her speed.

"Windhose!"

The wind she put out turned into a tornado that moved with Bell's kick to come at me from my side. The tornado dug up the ground as it moved, swelling quickly. It looked like a giant whip extending from her leg. Even though she was making a sweeping motion with it, the attack ended up tall enough to rival a giant's height. If I were to accidentally touch it, I would no doubt take a heavy blow that would more than just "hurt."

If I was Victor, I would have had the option of burrowing deeper than what was being dug up by the tornado. But I wasn't, so the only option left to me was to either hurry and escape to the sky or cut through the tornado with my scythe. The latter was faster, but I had a bad feeling about it. Still, if I were to carelessly fly or jump, I would be a sitting duck for Serge or Estoria.

*It's fun decision-making time, as well as time to get a move on, Parallel Processing!*

"Haarghh!"

After a moment's consideration, I chose to slice the tornado apart. In order to create enough space for me to pass through, I needed to gigantify my slash as well. My scythe attack would make a path.

"We won't..."

“Let you...”

“Go...”

“So easily!”

“Whaaat?!”

The moment I made my path, old man Nito came springing up out of the scattered tornado along with dozens of his clones.

*So, this was the origin of my bad feeling.*

The Nito clone squad had been hiding within the eye of the tornado. I had immediately realized that all the Nitos were clones, but why did they all have swords?! No matter how many he made, shouldn't there only have been one of him in his true form?!

“Treat my holy katana Masamune well, okay, Survivor?” Serge reminded him.

“Does this old man look like the type to handle a katana roughly? All right, let's cut each other fair and square!” Nito shouted.

I sucked in a surprised breath. “So, Serge transformed her holy sword into a katana!”

Serge, the free Hero, wasn't just raining down her holy swords willy-nilly. As she attacked, she was also handing weapons over to Nito. These sharp weapons were originally Will, and as katanas, they were just as high-class. If they were handed over to a master of iai techniques like Nito...

*Hey, hey, come on now, are you guys the best or what?!*

“I'm going to cut you open,” said Bell. “Gladius Aile.”

“S-Sorry!” Estoria stammered. “Salvation Ray!”

Both Bell and Estoria were letting out incredible killing intent. The attacks they unleashed could likewise be described in one word: insane.

“With our speed, we're already nearly at Parth. Congrats, Kelvin. The finale is close. Will Durandal.” Light concentrated on the blade of the holy sword in Serge's hands, changing it into a greatsword comparable in size to that of Gerard's weapon. Just by seeing her ready such a weapon, I felt it was scarier

than any she'd launched an attack with so far.

*What the heck?! Why is there so much magic?!*

"Thanks. Wait, you still have a hidden trump card?! Wow, seriously, thanks!"

"Of course I do; I'm the world's strongest Hero, after all! So why don't I come over and receive that smile of yours that says you're becoming addicted in full?!"

There was an army of quick-drawing old men in front, and the strongest Hero Serge behind. Meanwhile, Bell was closing in from one side with blades of wind at her feet, and Estoria was trying to blot out the sky above with a squall of huge lasers. By anyone's account, I would be done for.

It was the best situation I could be in.

"Okay, I'll take you all on!"





*Parth:*

“I... I managed to make it somehow!”

I had shaken off my pursuers and reached Parth without losing my life. My equipment was in tatters, to such an extent that I’d have to ask Efil to fix them for me. And though I had ended up failing to reach my personal goal by having my blessing activate in the midst of the match, I had managed to prevent a situation where I needed to be saved by Ange. I had used all my power and gotten through to the end.

“Aww, man...we were so close!” Serge whined.

“Don’t be like that. That bout was so full of excitement, it was like my brain was on drugs. You were able to drive me to total exhaustion and even made me use my blessing...”

“But I wasn’t the one who did that!” She puffed up her cheeks like a hamster.

*What are you, a child?*

“This old man thinks he’s broken his record for deaths in one day...” Nito complained.

“You kept popping up infinitely whether I cut you, crushed you, or blew you up, so to me, you were very scary, in a sense. If I didn’t erase you the moment you showed up, you’d slash at me or use one of your iai techniques, after all. I couldn’t even count how many times you cut me today, Nito.”

“I don’t want to be told that by the person who uses magic to instantly regenerate after being cut...”

In this world, using a few elite fighters was much more effective than sheer numbers, but Nito’s slasher army was insanely threatening. If not for my White Magic, I would definitely have lost.

“I’m so tired... Can I go see Mister Gerard now?” Estoria asked.

“You’re way more energetic than this old man for sure, Estoria-chan,” replied Nito. “In terms of age, aren’t you one of this old man’s comrades? You can feel

free to take comfort in that, you know?”

“Huh?”

“It hurts when you reply with a straight face. This old man’s heart is made of glass...” He sank like a ship.

*All this right after I praised him in my heart.*

“Jeez, you’re as slovenly as ever. Hurry up and go, Kelvin.” Bell chased me off with hand motions like I was some sort of pest.

In truth, she was the one who had beat Serge to the punch and pierced my heart. *Yep, that was a good kick.* She looked like she was feeling kind of proud, and she was showing off the composure of the strong.

“Oh... Oh, sure. You’re acting pretty cold for being today’s MVP. Don’t you, like, have something more to say? Anything?” I asked her.

“What the heck is an emm-vee...what was it again? Anyway, our business with you is done, so go straight home. Right now, as fast as you can. Don’t make sister Sera wait.”

“Ah, I get it now. You’re hurrying me along because Sera’s next. You love your sister just as much as I do, don’t you, Bell?”

“Wanna get stabbed again?” Bell fired back after a beat.

“Nope! I’m going!”

Seeing Bell start to seriously let out some killing intent, I hurriedly pulled off an about-face. If I stayed any longer, I’d only end up seeing a continuation of what had happened before.

I made my way home, which was to be the seventh checkpoint, while being seen off by Serge as she shouted encouragement in a lax tone that was the complete opposite of what it had been in battle, saying, “Well, do your best!”

“Hey, congrats, Kelvin-kun!” Ange congratulated me.

“Congratulations on the clear, papa,” DarkMel joined in.

“It was close. It hurts that I had to use Mel’s blessing, but I’m glad I was able to save DarkMel’s. If I had failed while saving it, though, I would have been a

joke.”

“As the one that would have had to save you, I was on the edge of my seat the whole time,” Ange said. “I guess DarkMel-chan will have to show her stuff at the next checkpoint? Personally, I think it would’ve been fine to use her thing on that last fight.”

“Papa repeatedly told me through telepathy not to,” DarkMel revealed. “You’re right, Ange-san, there are only two checkpoints left. I strongly recommend you use it on the next one. What do you think, papa?”

“Well...”

Since both of them were saying this, the next checkpoint was probably pretty hard. Still, I couldn’t decide without knowing exactly who was waiting for me there or what kind of fight we would have. My trump card, DarkMel’s power, only had a limited time span, after all.

I couldn’t very well run full tilt through town and cause trouble for everyone, so now I was making an exception and walking. Even though we were going slower, because I was walking through such familiar scenery while making small talk with my companions, we were home before I knew it. After praising golems One and Two for their gate-guarding efforts, I immediately came upon the site of the battle. The big lineup of people in front of me were clearly my opponents.

“Are you sure you shouldn’t go now, Ange?”

“Hmm? Oh, yeah. You’re right. Make sure you judge strictly, okay, DarkMel-chan?”

“Of course. I won’t allow any cheating. You do your best too, Ange-san.”

“Heh heehhh, when you put it like that, your big sister is gonna get all fired up!”

Ange put DarkMel down and walked over to the other side. With that, everyone had truly gathered. Colette had already applied Tabernacle to the grounds, so our attacks wouldn’t leak outside.

*Seems like they were waiting for me fully ready.*

“Kelviiiin! You’re finally here!” Sera was the one who called out to me first, with a cheerful and assertive tone, as if she couldn’t wait any longer. Everyone else also said their piece.

“I totally believed you would make it here, Kel-nii!” Rion shouted before adding, “I won’t let you get any further, though!”

“*Grrowwwrrr!* (Yeah, we won’t let you through!)” Alex added.

“I’m sure you’ve already guessed who you will be fighting here, given where the checkpoint is, my liege. We are indeed your opponents,” said Gerard.

“Your last obstacles are your most trusted comrades. The seventh checkpoint is the Celsius house: us!” Ange added.

“Ange-san, we aren’t the last checkpoint,” Efil corrected her. “More importantly, your equipment is damaged, Master. We need to repair it before proceeding.”

With Sera in the lead, Rion, Alex, Gerard, Ange, Efil, and Clotho had gathered in front of me. Even though I saw them every day, for some reason my heart soared.

“We’ll take care of DarkMel-chan, dearest brother.”

“I’ll be rooting for you from the balcony, papa!”

Young Shutola also made her appearance. She took DarkMel by the hand and they both disappeared inside.

*Hmm...well, she seems like the one in charge of all this, so I guess Shutola will be watching along with DarkMel?*

Meanwhile, Colette grabbed my hand. “I don’t believe you will need it, Kelvin-sama, but just in case, I will apply my technique. There, now I can rest easy.”

“You used Arcadia, the one that allows me to avoid a fatal injury one time, right? Did you do the same for everyone else too?”

“I did. With Clotho-sama’s help, I somehow managed it all yesterday.” Colette paused for a moment before continuing. “In a sense, this Battle Rally is the biggest trial you’ve ever faced, Kelvin-sama. I want you to win no matter what, so that you can reach the end. I know very well that someone like me doesn’t



have the right to ask this of you, but...please, *please* claim victory with these hands of yours. That's all I want."

Colette bowed her head deeply. I was a bit flabbergasted by the fact that she was acting like a proper holy woman instead of the berserk Oracle she usually was, but that was quickly taken over by feelings of love. I gently patted her head.

"You're right that my opponents this time are the toughest that I can imagine. Each one of them is already strong, but they've also built up trust and have a sense of teamwork; they'll be the toughest foe I've ever faced. Fighting them alone is nothing but reckless. But...isn't that just par for the course when it comes to me? I'll win, so as to not make you cry ever again. Definitely."

"Kelvin-sama!" Colette cried. "I'll pray for your good fortune!"

After that, Colette likewise ran inside, probably to join DarkMel and Shutola. The prayers of an Oracle of Deramis seemed like they would have a great effect, and I was thankful for that.

*That's a load off my mind.*

"Now then...my beloved comrades, how will we enjoy life today?"

"Enjoy life? What do you think of that line, Rion?" Gerard asked.

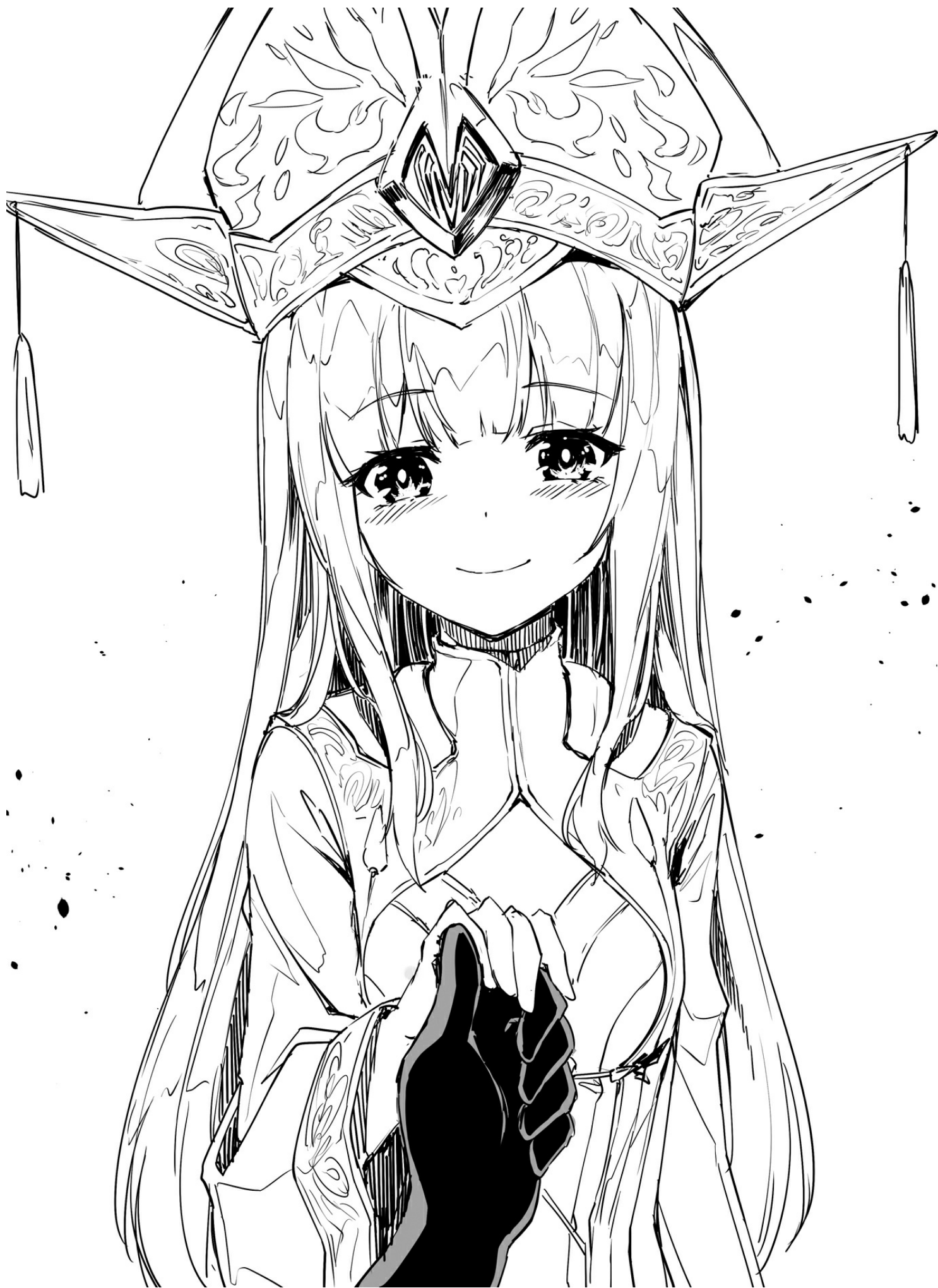
"It's super like Kel-nii, and very cool! You think so too, right, Alex?" Rion replied.

"Arf! (No comment!)" barked Alex.

*Stop! You don't need to pay that much attention to what I say! It just came out because I thought it would suit the mood!*

Even as I cried out internally, I made sure to not let it show on my face. I mean, just imagine what would happen if I let my face redden. It would be like I was admitting that what I'd said was embarrassing. The best choice was to hide my embarrassment and move on quickly while maintaining the current atmosphere.

*So come on, keep it moving. Someone please start explaining things already!*



“Hup!”

My soul’s scream must have done something, because Sera jumped over to Clotho’s favorite fountain, landing on top of it.

*Is that supposed to be like a substitute podium or something?*

I maintained my cool expression, but internally I was breathing a sigh of relief.

“We’ve all received Colette’s technique that allows us to avoid a fatal wound, like you got just now, Kelvin. If the effect activates, the person in question will fly to the balcony where DarkMel and the others are!” Sera pointed to where DarkMel and the rest were waving.

*I see. So that’s heaven.*

“I see you’ve learned how to joke, Sera. That wording is perfect. Seriously perfect.”

“Indeed,” Gerard agreed. “Shutola is there too, so allow me to ascend. Unfortunately, chivalry will not allow me to retire so easily.”

“Huh? What the heck are you two talking about?” Sera seemed confused.

*Whoops, that was a mistake. My mouth connected directly to my mind for a moment there.*

“Sorry, I’ve regained sanity now.”

“Jeez, get it together, okay? You should say something too, Efil!” Sera turned to her compatriot.

“It seems that Master is in especially high spirits because of DarkMel-sama’s presence. Does this not mean he will become doubly happy the more children he has?!” Efil seemed as if she’d had an epiphany.

“E-Efil, are you tripping on something too?” Sera jumped down from the fountain to earnestly try and call Efil, who was lost in thought, back to reality.

However, what Efil had said could legitimately be a concern for the future. DarkMel alone had put Gerard in his current state. If more children were to be born to Efil, Sera, or any of the others, what would happen to me?

Rion chimed in, “Sera-nee, leave Efil-nee to me. You need to continue.”

*“Woof woof! (We’ve gone off the rails again.)”* Alex barked.

“Or would you like me, Ange-san, to take over? As a former guild employee, I’m good at explaining things,” Ange offered.

“Oh, right! It’s fine, I’ll do it! Kelvin, let’s get back to it!” As Sera declared that she would restart the explanation, she climbed back up the fountain. It seemed she was fixated on using that as a platform or podium for her speech.

“I’m not sure how many times I’ve had to say this line today, but...what are the rules?”

“Well, basically, there aren’t any rules. You’re free to use any weapon or ability you have! This will be a serious fight to the death with nothing prohibited! The arena will be the entire area that’s been covered by Colette’s Tabernacle! Your goal, Kelvin, is to defeat all of us without suffering a fatal wound and being sent to the balcony! This will be the hardest of all your checkpoints so far, but we needed to go this far if we really wanted to treat you!”

“Once someone is sent to the balcony, they won’t be allowed to come back, so don’t worry about that. This has been your Ange-san, who jumped in as soon as there was an opening!”

“Ahh! I was gonna say that!” Sera pouted. Though she was somewhat unhappy with Ange, that was all she had to say, so she once again descended from the fountain. Meanwhile, I could feel myself tearing up with joy.

*I’ve been so quick to cry lately...*

“I see, you guys really have set everything to perfectly suit my tastes. This is bad; I seriously think I’m gonna cry... Anyway, you’re all really going to try and kill me, right?”

“Of course!” they all replied at once.

*“Woof! (Of course!)”* Alex added.

As everyone’s voices harmonized, Clotho also swelled in size to indicate its joy. At the same time, their emotions flooded into me through the Network, so it was a lot of work to sort through everything. As a battle junkie, I couldn’t

have felt more blessed.

“Blood Scrimmage and Crimson Astraea!”

“Blue Flame release. I’ll be going at full strength at the start.”

“Human-Wolf Union: Triple Wield—Kagerou Mode!”

“*Bowwow, woof!* (Superconductive Lightning!)”

“Heh heh... Your big sis Ange-san still has Sonic Acceleration active, and now Superconductive Lightning is added to that! This is truly the height of speed!”

“I’m done injecting myself with grandchild power! I’m doing better than ever!”

Leaving aside the suit of armor at the end, it seemed everyone was going all out right from the start. Clotho had become so large, it was bumping up against Colette’s barrier.

“Before the signal to start, Kelvin...just use DarkMel’s power already,” Sera suggested. “You’re one hundred percent going to lose as you are, you know that, right?”

“Do you really think so? Personally, I’d rather win with my own power given how far I’ve come. And you know, there’s another checkpoint after this too.”

“But that won’t matter if you don’t even make it there. The rules here make it so you can use anything you want, don’t you realize that? It also means DarkMel will just be watching from outside, so I don’t think there’s any need to hesitate.”

“I would like to see you finish this Battle Rally, Master. But that doesn’t mean I will give this fight less than my all; that would defile the entire event.” Efil paused for a moment before continuing. “Please, Master, would you show me your coolest side?”

I had no words. Efil was talking about DarkMel’s unique skill, Monster Parent. The skill raised the abilities of anyone DarkMel recognized as family, especially a parent, as long as they were within her sight. I had conducted a lot of tests, and it seemed there was no doubt that I was considered her father and Mel her mother. As for family, of course everyone living in the estate counted, but

surprisingly, it also applied to the golems I'd made. DarkMel's familial love stretched both deep and wide, and it made me cry.

Her unique skill was very strong, and the buff it gave her parents—meaning Mel and I—was absurd. While her family would end up in the best condition they'd ever been in, her parents would be in a state to wield the most power they'd ever had in their lives. At first glance, there might not seem to be much difference between the two, but take the time to think further. How powerful were we in the past? That's right, Mel used to be a Goddess, and I'd wielded her power during my fight against DarkMel. Such a situation would generally be impossible now, but DarkMel's unique skill would make it possible. By the way, it seemed this ability had support effects, and even without activating her skill, she wasn't letting me out of her sight.

However, that didn't mean the skill had no drawbacks. At present, it could only be activated for three minutes at most, and only once a day at that! Because it affected all family members within her line of sight, it would buff them as well.

*Ah, but that isn't really a demerit. Really, it would be the opposite. Whoops.*

"DarkMel, I'll answer your hopes! Get ready to use it on my signal! Your papa will try super hard!"

"Okay, then. The seventh checkpoint: papa versus the Celsius house. Start!"

DarkMel's signal from the balcony could be heard by all of us. At the same time, she activated her Monster Parent skill, and my power from that time came back to me. I was armed with my usual Boreas Death Scythe in my dominant hand and three blades made with Obsidian Edge floating on my other side. All the blades were made by overclocking the spell to Hexa, and I polished them even further by adding Ground Cleave Hexa as well. Their sharpness and durability were easily over that of normal Rank S weapons, and they were each able to stand up to a deity. It took only a moment for me to create these, showing how powerful DarkMel's ability was.

::Initiative wins! Bloody Reaper's Tail!: Sera made the first move. She mixed her blood with some water to form a giant tail and attempted to mow it across the entire field. Bell had just tried to swing a tornado at me earlier... Man, these

sisters loved flashy attacks.

Sera had used the same attack against Goldiana during the Beast King Festival, but her tail was much larger this time around. Even though as the one doing the swinging, she was human-sized, her tail was big enough that it seemed like it should belong to a huge monster.

*Actually, where did she even get enough water to do that in the first place? There was no sign of her using some sort of magic item to make water like she did during the Beast King Festival. Hrrm...so I get to have a fun time solving a mystery right from the start, huh? Well, rather than trying to figure out how she got the water, I should be concentrating on the huge wall in front of me as well as the other combatants. Let's start with the attack I'm facing. This is Sera we're talking about, so I'm sure she has Blood Dominion applied all over that thing.*

Even though I was under the effect of Monster Parent, I couldn't afford to just take the attack, because while my strength was as great as it was during that final battle, I wasn't under the effects of Mel's Sympathetic Resonance anymore. Status effects and debuffs still worked on me, so if that tail were to touch me, all of the effects attached to it would still kick in. Essentially, touching it was an absolute no-go.

::I failed to cut through it last time, so this time, I'll escape upward!:: she announced.

*I have no idea what you're talking about, but that was a bad choice!* I answered. *Clotho!*

The moment I dodged her tail sweep, Sera invoked Clotho's name. "Why Clotho?" would have been my first question, but before that thought could fully cross my mind, the answer flew at me from directly below. Innumerable weapons came out of Sera's tail. Each one of them was at least Rank A, and for some reason I remembered them all. Or rather, they were all weapons I'd made with my own hands. Still, these should have been stored inside Clotho. It was unnatural for them to be coming out of Sera's tail. But I kind of remember this method of attack...

*THAT TAIL IS JUST CLOTHO TRANSFORMED?!* I bellowed through the Network.

::Congrats, you're correct!::

I was mistaken. Actually, they'd tricked me. It wasn't that Sera had somehow created a bunch of water to use in her attack; Clotho had cooperated after being given some blood to change color. They had used my memory of what happened during the Beast King Festival against me. The reason Clotho had swelled so much before battle was to give me the strong impression that it was there while the real one hid with Sera. If I thought about it, the name for the attack was a little different, so everything made sense as a trap meant to mislead me.

*Man, you really can never tell what the smart ones with good sense will do!*

Still, my choice to fly straight upward wasn't as bad a move as Sera had claimed. Even if I were to cut through that attack with my scythe, the moment I made contact with Clotho, my MP would have been sucked out of me. Even if I did actually manage to cut the tail clean in two, Clotho would have been able to instantly reattach the two halves. If that happened, I wouldn't have been able to avoid that gigantic tail, which would lead to me being touched by Sera's Blood Dominion in combination with having my MP taken away by Clotho. That in itself would have led to a game over.

*That really was a wonderfully done surprise attack!* I told them. *Still, I can easily dodge simply launched weapons like this even after the fact!*

::Then allow me to support.::

I mentally gasped. While a huge number of prototype weapons came at me from below, a blue light was unleashed above me. A small beat later, I could feel incredible heat burning my skin.

*Ah, this isn't light; it's Efil's Blue Flame,* I thought.

::Melting Pyrohydra: Yama.::

Timingwise, Efil had launched a single arrow all the way up to the edge of Colette's barrier just as Sera swung her tail. The moment I jumped, the arrow quietly went alight with blue flame, which exploded the moment Efil sent her telepathic message. While exuding heat that would have melted any normal person, an eight-headed dragon appeared from the explosion. Of course, there was no cute greeting like I'd imagined from the way it just popped up; instead, it bared its vicious fangs and flew towards me.



*So, not only are there eight pyrohydras powered by your unique skill, but each head was buffed as you fired them!* I said. *When did you learn such a technique, Efil?!*

::Aha ha, you know you don't have the time to be happy about that, Kel-nii.::

::That's right, because we're here too!::

I was in a really hazardous position, and beside me appeared Rion and Ange, holding hands like best friends.

*It's beautiful how well they get along,* I thought, although they were probably holding hands so that Ange could use Uncontainable on both of them. There was a massive fire above me and a rising storm of weapons below, so they wouldn't be hit by either with that skill in effect. Ange had simply applied the plan that was going to be used to save me during the last checkpoint here. By carrying Rion to this point, she had also upped their collective speed.

::Prison of Slashes, close. Now you can't escape to the sides either!::

All around me, Rion placed residual slashes to form a prison. Not only that, but they were all made with different swords. Some were covered in poison, others had elemental effects applied to them—there was a whole wealth of variety. She had most likely caught the weapons Clotho had thrown in order to leave these. But because every cursed weapon was purified by Rion the moment she touched them thanks to her unique skill, whether for good or bad, it seemed there were no slashes of that type made in this medley. However, all the weapons Rion had finished slashing with were handed over to Ange...

::Hragh!::

*Whoa, that's dangerous!* I yelled telepathically.

...only to be thrown at me a second time! My situation was already hell, and now the curtain of weapon fire had also changed direction. I was happy about it, but there was seriously no way for me to dodge it! Even as I was thinking about that, Rion and Ange were working hard and expanding the prison on top of throwing yet more weapons my way!

::Rubber Counter Hexa!::

In this situation, I needed to endure. I made an emergency cast of Bell's original spell, surrounding myself with what was effectively a rubber ball to turn aside all the attacks around me and even completely cancel out the ones that came at me straight-on. With attacks layered this thick, there would be clashes no matter where projectiles were sent, but I wouldn't compromise on my protection. I used Parallel Processing to the fullest to more effectively cancel out attacks with my spell over and over and over again! To be honest, there didn't seem to be an end to the amount I had to deal with.

::Hup!::

While I was busy, Efil launched a Direct Blue Fulmination Rain from straight below me, which my skills detected. Unlike before, she didn't send the technique name over telepathy, instead choosing to attack sneakily. I seriously felt her deep love coming from that move. It seemed that was just how much she wanted to pierce my heart. However, the attack would explode as soon as it made contact with its target, which made it a bad matchup with Rubber Counter. If I continued trying to hole up, it was certain that I'd receive massive damage.

*Hmmm...I guess I'll just have to get a little forceful.*

Then, I called out through the Network, *Barrier, expand!*

I pushed on the walls of my Rubber Counter from the inside, causing the balloon to expand all at once. With that, the barrier would reflect attacks instead of turning them aside for an instant. This would make the reflected attacks clash with the ones that followed it, and if I was lucky, they would all explode. The Direct Blue Fulmination Rain that Efil had shot so sneakily would probably be included in that. I had been set upon from all sides, but this created a small moment of freedom for me.

This was my chance, a golden opportunity. I had no time to sit and think. If I was going to make a move, I would have to take action immediately, wasting no time on decision-making. I decided to use the time I'd created for myself to go at my opponents one by one, so I flew back to where I'd been. My first target would have to be someone I could definitely finish off.

Rion and Ange, who were closest to me, seemed like they wouldn't be

affected by any attacks, but they actually needed to turn off Uncontainable whenever they launched an attack of their own. If I went for that instant, the chances of catching them weren't zero. Still, there was no guarantee that I could get the timing right. It was safer to leave them for later. As for Sera and Clotho, each one of their attacks was deadly to me. It wouldn't be funny if I were to feel hurried and charge into them only to be destroyed in return. So...

*You'll be my opponent, Efil!* I called out telepathically.

She was the farthest away, but her fire attacks would be the most annoying if I were to leave her alone, so I decided to go for her first. Normally, she wasn't someone I could catch without support magic, but as I was now, it didn't matter how much of a lead she had. As long as I moved first, I wouldn't even lose to Ange. Realizing she was being targeted, Efil gasped through the Network and tried to erase her presence while shooting an intercepting arrow. It was a strange thing, seeing a launched arrow that looked like a shot from a cannon, but the cannon itself was disappearing. Still, my head was abnormally clear because I was so excited, so I easily kept sight of her.

I dealt with anything my scythe could cut apart with a slash, and anything that would explode on contact by sending one of the two black blades I'd created beforehand at it as I plunged at Efil, taking the shortest route possible. I could feel a pressure that sent chills down my spine coming from behind me all the while, but now wasn't the time to turn back. I kept whatever it was back by throwing up a wall of scattered Wind Shots behind me as I focused on taking Efil down. I would use my scythe to claim certain victory.

::So, you really have come this way, my liege!::

*I thought you were weirdly absent from the attack. You were dedicating yourself to the defense here, huh, Gerard?!*

Right before I could swing my scythe at Efil, Gerard stepped in between us with his shield at the ready.

::I stand no chance of catching you with my speed, after all! The best chance to show my stuff as a knight is working as a duo with Efil to challenge you, my liege! This is all for my grandchildren!::

*Oh, uh...sure.*

The Dreadnought Legalus wielded by Gerard was a super useful piece of equipment capable of reflecting any attack. By combining it with his unique skill, Self-Transcendence, he could bring that effect to new heights. However, reflecting magic required an equal amount of MP to be spent. Even if he were to try to borrow some from the Clotho clone that was no doubt hiding somewhere inside his armor, there was no way it would have enough MP to compete with my overclocked Boreas Death Scythe after helping Colette apply her technique so many times!

*I'll just reap you along with Efil!* I told him.

My scythe had its sights set on both Gerard, who was putting his body on the line to stop it, and Efil, who was farther back. As long as I got on my ideal trajectory, this would prove to be a killing blow that worked on both the divine ark and DarkMel. However, I soon felt that something was wrong. It was something I'd never felt before when using Boreas Death Scythe.

I projected my bemusement. *The blade of my scythe...is chipped?!*

The scythe that I'd swung no longer had a blade on it. It looked like the lost magic had turned into particles near Gerard's armor. The victor of this clash hadn't been my Boreas Death Scythe, but Gerard. *But why?!*

::It was a bit heart-racing to try in the heat of the moment, but it seems like it went well. Slashing Damage Invulnerability is the name of my new skill. Oh, I believe Clotho had a skill of the same type? It's my special trump card, which I had to use a shocking amount of skill points to get!::

*Gah, seriously?!*

::Gah! Ha! Ha! Looks like that made you very happy, didn't it? After all, a lot of your attacks are slashing, my liege! I must be quite the natural enemy for you, since those don't work on me!::

::As you expected, Master is overjoyed. Good for you, Gerard-san.::

While taking Gerard's counterswing to my gut, I exchanged some congenial messages. It really hurt, but more than that, it felt like good news. This was the first time Boreas Death Scythe had been blocked in that way. Not only that, but the fact that my scythe was actually damaged meant it lost to Gerard's

toughness after being nullified, I think?

*Mrrmmm...there are so many things to test. My inquisitive mind won't stop itching!*

However, in reality, Gerard was following up on his counter, and behind him, Efil was providing fire support. I didn't have the leeway to indulge in thoughts like this. First, I needed to activate some high-speed healing. I healed up my cut abdomen before it could start leaking any blood.

*Light Heal Quad*, I said through the Network, then thought to myself, *Okay. Fully fixed. It's wonderful that even if I have to overclock it, I can instantly heal most things in this situation.* Anyway, I had to fight through my tears to get around the currently super interesting Gerard so that I could get at my original aim: Efil. I was really starting to need to take someone down, or Ange and the others would catch up.

::Even if you are my sworn ruler, I cannot allow you to lay a hand on Efil so easily!::

*What?!*

Gerard once again stood in front of me. He hadn't just reacted to my speed while under DarkMel's skill, he was keeping up with me.

*What the heck do you mean, 'no chance of catching me'?! You totally do have a chance. You actually did it!*

::You aren't the only one affected greatly by Monster Parent, my liege! I am being watched over by my grandchild! I am a match for thousands!::

*Ha ha! I see, so Glory Within Mine Hands is having the highest effect imaginable, Gerard!* I laughed through the Network. *Of course you'd be able to catch me, then!*

As was the case in all our fights up until now, DarkMel would not play favorites. She was looking at me from a neutral standpoint, which was fair and just and everything else similar. Because she was watching me, that also powered up Gerard, who was close to me. But still, the effectiveness of his buff was crazy. It was probably due to his unique skill being combined with it for an ideal effect.

While I was caught in a storm of happiness, I grabbed my remaining black sword and started a dance of swordplay.

::Nice escorting, Gerard! Thanks to you, we caught up! Eat my combo attack with Clotho, Kelvin! We have a total of ten!::

::And Alex will take Sera-nee's and Clotho's traits and—::

::Paired with my mountain of hidden weapons, Rion and I will deliver them to you!::

My far-too-reliable comrades rushed at me, armed with new skills and combo attacks. *Whoo! I can't deal with all of this!*

::Melting Cage Rampart::

*Oh, crap...*

While Gerard and I were exchanging sword strokes, Sera and Clotho came at me with their killer combo, and Rion and Ange were doing the same with their invincible combo. Furthermore, Efil cast a spell that surrounded me with fiery walls; she was probably trying to prevent any escape attempt. Everyone was now trapped in a cube of fire. Actually, I guess I was the only one who was *trapped*. Gerard, who was protecting Efil, was wearing his Crimson Rogalia, so he was most likely more resistant to heat than I was.

::Blood Clotho Scrimmage!::

Clotho merged with Sera's grotesque-looking arm, and though the look of it didn't change, the pressure it was exuding doubled. While thinking that the new name was just what I expected from Sera's tastes, I was also impressed by how dangerous the new combination was. All of Sera's and Clotho's special traits were concentrated in that piece of armor. As before, I would be instantly out of the fight if it were to touch me, but was it just me or did their combination also multiply the power of the thing instead of adding it? Even considering I was in the strongest state I'd ever been in, if I were to take an all-out hit from that, there was no way I'd come out on the other side okay.

On top of that, Ange and Rion were using Sera's flashiness to help them hide and sneakily approach me. They sent nothing through the Network, but Rion was definitely still imitating Sera and Clotho. Rion was also being princess-

carried by Ange using Uncontainable to facilitate the quick delivery of her payload. It seemed Headhunting Cat Transport was attempting to be as fast as ever today. That delivery would spell my loss, though. Put modestly, it was the best present!

::Look, it's your end!::

::I will pierce your heart, Master!::

::No, the ones to finish this will be Clotho and me!::

Gerard's sword, Efil's arrow, and Sera's fist all came at me at once. No matter how I dodged or blocked those attacks, Rion and Ange would surely take the opportunity right after to launch a surprise assault. Of course, there was no running from any of this in the fortress of fire I was trapped in anyway. I was totally cornered, on the brink of despair...

*This is the chance of a lifetime!*

*You know I'm not the type to just lie down and die! Shining Laurel Hexa!* I said telepathically, while thinking to myself, *You guys aren't the only ones who laid a trap! I'm the same.*

I finished my quiet incantation, added the overclock effect to the spell, and allowed my original magic to burst into reality. Several overlapping rings of light manifested in layers, constricting the giant cage of flames around us. The spell affected everything inside the rings, meaning everyone present. I hadn't been able to activate it before, since everyone was scattered in the beginning and I didn't want someone interfering from outside the spell. I had been right to wait for the best opportunity.

::What's this?! A new spell from Kelvin?!::

::Wait, An-nee! You undid your ability!::

::Huh?! I didn't mean to. When did I—::

::Mgrhh! Khh, my power isn't working at all! I'm supposed to be in perfect condition.:: Gerard tried to brute force his way out of the spell. Unfortunately for him, I wouldn't have used it if it was the sort of magic that could be broken through in that way.

I had prepared a new spell in secret, all for the occasion when I would have a serious battle with my party. If they wanted to use pure power to wrest themselves free of it, well, let's see...they would need at least enough pure strength to rival all the Dragon Kings together, or there was no way.

::Those rings... They resemble your Glory Sanctuary, Master.::

*Should have known you'd see it, Efil. You're sharp. I certainly did model it after Glory Sanctuary, but it wouldn't have worked on Sera or Ange if it was just a strengthened version of that. So I added something else.*

::What else?!:: Sera demanded.

*Did you really think I'd tell you?* I answered.

::Aagggh, that's not faaaair! Wait, whoa! The blood I solidified is going back to normal?!::

::Seems like it. I get it now; indeed I do,:: Gerard chimed in.

My Shining Laurel only used Glory Sanctuary as a foundation, but its ability to seal and restrain everyone inside was still present. It changed from three rings on each part of the body to giant rings restricting an entire area. Because it was binding space itself, Sera's Blood Dominion would not be able to touch it.

::Grandpa Gerard, now isn't the time to be calmly analyzing it!::

::Ah, nope. I can't reactivate my skill. Eheh heh...looks like I relied on my ability too much and carelessly got too close. Whoopsie!:: Ange chuckled.

::It's not time to laugh either, An-nee!::

::Urghh...you're so strict when we're in battle, Rion-chan!::

*Rion turns into a monster when it comes to fights against people, after all. Oh, whoops, went off the rails there. Gotta correct that. Let's get back to it. Of course, all this strength couldn't have held Ange, who could slip through things. To solve that problem, one of the properties I'd given the spell was to forcefully restrict all the unique skills of anyone within its area of effect. The reason Ange and Rion were now exposed was because Uncontainable had lost its effect. The same went for everything Sera had equipped herself with; without her magic, her bloodbending skills would no longer be able to keep the blood solidified.*



This amazing feat was made possible by spending more than ten times the cost of a regular Rank S spell on it. Or should I say ‘this amazing spell’? If I hadn’t been under the effects of Monster Parent, my MP wouldn’t have been enough to cast it. At any rate, the results were great.

Still, the spell wouldn’t last more than ten seconds, and it was very weak to outside stimuli. As I said already, I couldn’t afford to cast it with all my enemies spread out. I had to think they had the upper hand and find the spot where they were most committed to the attack.

*Jeez, I guess it really was worth getting close to Efil and exchanging blows with Gerard.*

Thanks to that, I was able to enjoy them fully, although it was still too soon to indulge in such sentiments. I only had about five seconds left until unique skills were free to use again.

*It’d be best to eliminate everyone inside all at once rather than trying to get them one by one.*

In truth, I still had one more spell I’d been hiding. Remember what DarkMel had done during my final fight with her? She’d combined two elements into one spell, and I’d actually worked hard and made my own little version of that. As expected, it was really hard to control, and in my normal state it would have been too much of a bucking horse to even incant. But, I *could* use it while in front of my beloved daughter. *I wonder why? It’s so strange... Anyway, let’s use all the rest of my mana and finish this at once.* Preparations were already complete, with Shining Laurel in place. It was time to use all the MP I had and invoke my once-in-a-lifetime spell.

“Borealagann.”

The instant I activated the spell, magic gushed throughout the area. It took the form of abundant emerald-colored light that contained the properties of two elements within it. With a glinting, whining noise, the shining light turned into a beam that rained upon my enemies faster than the sound of it could even reach them. I hadn’t meant this as revenge for earlier, but they were assaulted from all sides by lines of converging light that completely buried the area within its effect.

Everyone reacted wordlessly. Without even time to make a sound, the ones who had been forced to retire were all sent to the balcony one after another. It was only natural, as the lasers from Borealagann combined both the slashing edge of Boreas Death Scythe and the hot annihilating retribution of Disaster Ray. Such a supremely dangerous attack had hit them in such a way that they'd had no way to escape, so they were defeated. They'd had even less of a chance than I'd had earlier.

*Still, that really was a high-wire act of a fight, I told them. Allow me to thank you all one more time. Thank—*

::Hmmm...it's still a bit too soon to say your thanks.::

I stopped in shock. Right after the light faded, a greatsword suddenly severed my left arm.



My left arm flew through the air past my opponent, and I had to wonder if that had been calculated. I could save MP if I picked it up and reattached it, but I was sure I wouldn't be left alone to do that. For now, I had to stop the bleeding.

::Hrm, I had meant to end this in one shot. As expected, my liege.::

*I took a moment before replying to appreciate what had happened. Yo, Gerard. I would never have expected you to live after taking Borealagann. Thanks to that, I've only got a little bit of MP left. What the heck kind of trick did you use to survive?*

Standing before me was the Sword Guru, Gerard. The demon sword in his hands was dripping with my blood, proving it was the culprit responsible for my being down an arm.

*Oh man, he totally got me.*

His armor looked like it would fall apart at any moment, and there were visible holes where the light had gone through him. Even so, he had the use of all his limbs and was more than willing to continue. In fact, he seemed to be doing quite a bit better than me with my missing arm.

::It wasn't much. Just some luck combined with my desire not to lose.::

::That's right; your big sis Ange did her best too!::

*Whoa! You're okay too, Ange?* I asked. *Actually, no, maybe not okay...*

Ange, probably having just undone her stealth state, popped up from behind Gerard, covered in blood. One of her legs was barely functional, but other than that... She really was hanging on by a thread, or at least that was how she seemed.

::Looks like Efil-chan, Rion-chan, Alex, and surprisingly, Sera-san weren't so lucky. They were all sent out before they could try to endure your attack. But thanks to the fact that Gerard and I weren't hit in vital spots, Clotho's final act of defiance came in time.::

I took a moment to picture what must have happened. *I see, so it sacrificed itself to be a shield for you two*, I said.

::Exactly. It absorbed as much magic as it could from the attack as it covered and protected us,:: Ange explained.

::Furthermore, slashing attacks don't work on me, so I'm relatively okay,:: Gerard added.

Ange continued, ::Unfortunately, slashing does work on me, so now I look like this.:: She gestured to her battered body. ::I'm gonna go ahead and take the L to blood loss, aha ha... Whoops, that was close. I'm gonna get yelled at by Rion-chan again.::

::Oh no, you did great work right up until the end, Ange,:: the knight reassured her. ::You used all your power even on the brink of death and managed to help me launch a surprise attack against my liege. Even though it wasn't a fatal wound, it was still serious.::

So that was why it seemed like Gerard's sword had appeared out of nowhere for that last attack. She had paired up with *him* this time, hiding until the attack was done.

::Leave the rest to me. I couldn't fulfill my duty as a knight, but I can at least win this match.::

::Okay, I'm at my limit, after all. It's...pretty hard now...so I'm co—:: Ange could go no further. Before she finished, she was sent to the balcony by Colette's protection. Having received her final will on the battlefield, Gerard stuck his sword into the ground and stood quietly.

::Now, this is a true showdown, my liege. Judging from the fact that you haven't healed your arm yet, you're low on MP. It would be embarrassing to have to censor you with a rainbow like with Colette, so I'll finish this quickly.::

*That'd be great, thanks, I replied. But Gerard, is it just me or are you doing better than you look? In fact, aren't you in better shape than when we started? That shouldn't be solely due to DarkMel watching us. What's got you so worked up?*

Gerard didn't answer. He certainly looked ragged and worse for wear, as at first glance he was covered in holes, but the will to fight—to kill—that was overflowing from him said that he was only going to rev up into his best state.

*Does he have some sort of new move up his sleeve?* I considered that for a moment but quickly rejected the idea. After all, he had the potential to get much stronger in the purest and simplest sense of the word.

::Right now, I am incredibly angry. I understand in my head that this Battle Rally is a celebration, but that doesn't help. Yes, I am furious. Even though they were under the Oracle's protection, what you, my liege, did to Rion, Efil, and the others...all my cute grandchildren...I cannot forgive that!::

*Oh...I kind of expected this, but...don't you think that anger is...unfair? Misplaced?*

::No arguments!::

*Whaaaat...*

Even though I'd been invited to this event, I apparently wasn't allowed to argue about anything.

*I mean, I get it. Gerard's anger was half because Rion and the others were defeated and half as a present for me as a battle junkie. After all, we haven't been together all this time for nothing. With a bond as solid as ours, we can sense these things about each other without even having to talk about it.*

::My liege, I have long been prepared for this. I will suffer the indignity of a knight who has murdered his own king. My rage is too fierce, too large to be represented by mere hannya or yaksha. Prepare yourself, prepare yourself, PREPARE YOURSELF!::

*It's half...maybe? Thirty percent—no, I'd be happy with ten percent, I think, I mused to myself.*

Then, through the Network, I answered, *Well, I guess that's a form of loyalty too. Ha ha! Am I really allowed to have such a good day?*

In my head, I thought, *I could really use a weapon to defend against Gerard's sword with...* However, because I had no MP to work with, I couldn't carelessly create new ones. Since Clotho wasn't there, I couldn't take something out of its storage either, so I decided to make use of the prototypes Clotho had spewed out early on in the fight. Luckily, there were many unbroken ones lying around.

While being careful of Gerard, who looked like he could jump at me at any moment, I tried to find a weapon that fit my hand. I only had one, so that limited what weapons I could use, but... *Yeah, let's imitate Rion and find a sword that I can move around with. Since slashing attacks don't work, this one that excels in defense and evasion would— Ah, I get the feeling he's gotten angrier. Was choosing the same type of weapon as Rion a bad move?!*

::Heh, my liege...you're really good at rubbing me the wrong way!::

*Huh, and you just answered my question. Thanks,* I replied.

Gerard paused for a moment. ::Know my fury!::

*What was with that pause?* I wondered. Still, he seemed to be getting more dauntless by the second. The possibility of a single hit activating Colette's technique was very real. I needed to parry each one of his attacks and counter with kicks infused with White Magic in energy-saver mode. On the off chance my weapon was to break, I would have to immediately get another one. That was how I had to shave away Gerard's HP. A single mistake could end everything. This would be a very long, grueling fight instead of a flashy one. However, rather than feeling dread at that prospect, I was thrilled and excited. My desire to fight was getting sharper and more distinct. My ability to concentrate was growing stronger and stronger, and at some point, I stopped

bantering, changing this fight into an eerie one where the only communication was the clash of swords.

“That might be papa’s best smile yet,” DarkMel commented.

“It was a good idea to set this Battle Rally up, wasn’t it?” Shutola answered.

“Yeah, I’m glad Kelvin looks like he’s having so much fun!”

“Gramps looks like he’s having a lot of fun too. Even though he looked so angry just a little before,” Rion noted.

“Well, Gerard-san is a man too, after all. Your big sis knows these things!” Ange boasted.

Because my hearing was so good, I was unconsciously picking up voices that I didn’t need to be paying attention to. It was rude, so I decided to pretend I couldn’t hear them. Right now, I was simply going to enjoy the moment. That was all.



*I wonder how Dahak will react once he sees how the arena we were fighting in was transformed into a wasteland? Will it be with anger? Sadness?* I thought it was strange that I, his master, was considering this after the fact, but I was starting to think that we’d gone too far. Who would have thought we would have continued slashing and kicking at each other for the next hour? After DarkMel’s unique skill lost its effect, the fight only got more even.

*Oh man, we totally went wild.*

I was satisfied, but I also felt guilty when I considered what would have to happen afterwards.

*Is he busy repaving the walkways right now? I’m so sorry, Dahak.*

“That was hard fought, Master. Well done. Here, a towel and a drink,” Efil offered.

“Oh, thanks.” I took a sip. “P—haaahh! Man, that’s cold! I really feel like I’m coming back to life! Oh, that was a nice fight from you too, Efil. Even though I was surrounded by a hellish inferno, I was getting chills inside.”

“Thank you very much. That makes all the training worth it.”

*Well, there's no use worrying about it. Let's just bask in the afterglow of the battle. Mmm, Efil's special drink seeps right to my core. Wiping my sweat off with this towel feels so nice too. Efil must have cooled it down beforehand. It refreshed me instantly. Heh heh heh, I could go for another round like this.*

“Cheer up, gramps! It was a good fight!” Rion attempted to cheer the suit of armor up.

“Heh, even if you say that, I'm no good...” Gerard replied. “I wasn't able to avenge you, Rion. The others too... My love, my passion, my power...none of it was enough! Aaarrgghhh!”

“Wagh! Grandpa's helmet turned into a fountain!” Shutola yelped. “Clotho, want to try riding the water? I'm sure it would feel nice!”

“Now's not the time to play around, Shutola-chan. Come on, help me cheer gramps up!” Rion pleaded.

“Oooohh! Ooooooh! Ooooh! Ooooooooooooo...” Gerard would not stop.

“*Whine...* (It's more impressive than my howl...)”

My battle of souls against Gerard had, as could be gleaned from their conversation, ended in my victory. After that white-hot battle where it was kick or be cut, Gerard had totally burned out and lost it. His lamentation was so strong that even the people he considered his grandchildren were having a hard time cheering him up. Someone like me wouldn't be of any help either.

*I should just stay quiet and let Rion and Shutola fix things.*

“Oh man, that was a splendid loss!” Ange exclaimed.

“Ah, Kelvin! Looks like you won, huh?” Sera added.

“Oh, if it isn't Ange and Sera.”

The two of them had changed at some point, as they were now in casual wear. But why were they speaking like they had just now learned the result?

*I can faintly smell soap. No way, did they take a bath? While Gerard and I were in the middle of a fierce fight? Seriously?*

“Before you head to the last checkpoint, Kelvin, wanna take a bath? I had Efil heat up some water, so it’s at the perfect temperature right now!”

“The water was great today too! I was so exhausted and the bath felt so nice, I almost fell asleep.”

I considered it for a moment, but... “No, there’s no time. I’ll bear with it for a little longer.” *Damn, they really did take one.*

“Really? Ah, by the way, Kelvin! Was that last fight exciting for you? Did it make your heart race?!”

“Wha... What’s with you all of a sudden? I mean, sure, yeah to all those things. Speaking conservatively, it was the best.”

“Awright! Ange!”

“Yup! Sera-san!”

They high-fived. It was a really good one; the sound it made was loud.

“M... My faith is at its limit! I need to let it out somehow...Efil-san!” Colette cried.

“Here, Colette-sama,” Efil responded promptly.

Then, Efil also high-fived them. Colette appeared out of nowhere, seeming to have dropped out of her saint mode, and exchanged high fives with the other girls as well.

*What the heck is going on?*

“Oh, sorry about that. We really racked our brains to think of what would make you happiest, Kelvin-kun,” Ange explained. “We also took a long time to prepare all this, so it just feels like we finally got rewarded for all that work. As the one responsible for the climax of this Battle Rally, I was so worried about whether or not I’d be able to do it well.”

“It was a really large-scale undertaking, since it involved Rank S adventurers from all four great countries, and even Gustav-sama and the others from the Grebareika Empire,” Efil added. “I’m so glad I was able to see your satisfied, happy smile, Master.”



“It was a truly wonderful time for me, being able to gaze upon your divine countenance. Let’s do this again next year. Rather, we should do this every year. Yes, let’s!” Colette ranted before she devolved into fervent panting.

“Hee hee, that’s a great idea! But Kelvin, you already look so lively! The corners of your mouth, I mean.”

“Is... Is it that bad? Well, that just shows how fun it was. I’m grateful, really.”

*So, we might have a festival this fun next year too, huh? I’m really happy about that prospect, but right now I’m more worried whether my body will be able to hold out. I’m gonna have to train up by then.*

“Jeez, you’re all so hasty!” Shutola chided them.

“She’s right. The Battle Rally isn’t over yet, after all,” added Rion.

“Oh, Shutola, Rion! Is Gerard all right now?”

“Uh, he passed out from what looked like all the crying...and then Three and Four came wandering in and took him to his room,” Rion answered.

“Ah...I *did* order them to carry anyone they found passed out drunk back to their room...”

I had thought that order would prove useless since Sera was too much for the golems to handle when she was dead drunk, and Gerard was too resistant to booze for it to matter, but it seemed to have had an unexpected effect in this case. Well, it was a good one in the sense that he had been taken to a place where he could calm down. Once he did, I wanted to try getting him to work hard on his next attempt at regicide. I was open to challenges throughout the year.

“You’re finally at the last checkpoint, dearest brother. Work hard so that you won’t regret what happens, whatever the outcome!”

“We can’t afford to go along with you, so we’ll just cheer you on from here. You and DarkMel should just go for it!”

“You got it! Leave it to me!” I cried.

*The last checkpoint was...there, wasn’t it?* My last opponent was already obvious to me. More so given the last checkpoint’s location. In a sense, it was a

place full of memories for the two of us.

“Heh heh! The identity of the last checkpoint’s guardian is still a secret, so I won’t tell you, Kelvin!”

“Ah, uhh...y-you’re right, Sera-san. We can’t tell you, Kelvin. Your big sister Ange is also stumped as to who it could be.”

“W... Would it be a problem for my faith if I were to claim I didn’t know?! But I should also read the room!”

“I wonder who it could be. I can’t even imagine,” I replied sarcastically.

“Right? Right?!”

*Oh Sera, why did your intuition choose this moment not to work?*

“Would you consider bringing this boxed meal with you, Master? That last fight took longer than expected. And, most likely...the mysterious guardian of the last checkpoint will also be hungry.”

“Oh, sure. I understand, though the identity of this mysterious person is as obscured as ever,” I replied.

Efil handed me a huge picnic basket. Everyone was so good at taking care of me, it was troubling.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, papa!” DarkMel called out to me. “Let’s head out before the sun sets. The next checkpoint is in the forest on the outskirts of Parth. The finale of this Battle Rally is...uhhh, still a secret, okay?”

“Yeah, you gotta keep the surprise until the end. Okay, let’s go. To the final battle!”

“Have fun!” My entire family saw me off with a cheer as loud as they could give, and DarkMel and I dashed away to my last objective.

However, the enticing smell coming from the basket made both our stomachs rumble. I mean, come on. Think of all the fights we’d had! And DarkMel should have been tired from traveling so far. Being somewhat uncool is more endearing.

*That settles it; we’re eating as soon as we get there.*



There likely wasn't any need to rush anymore. The goal was right in front of me. With DarkMel on my shoulders, I waved goodbye to the guards at Parth's gates.

*You know, now that I think about it, these guards were the first people I ever talked to in this world aside from Mel.* That thought made everything somehow feel even more moving.

"Have a good trip!" called one of the guards.

"It's really more a stroll than an entire trip."

"I know, but my job is basically to greet people or send them off with well-wishes! You should know that, Kelvin. You agree, right, DarkMel-chan? What a cruel papa you have!"

"Hee hee! You're right. How cruel of you, papa!" DarkMel echoed.

"Ha ha ha! Anyway, I'll be off."

"Right. Make sure you come back before it gets dark!"

They used to be so stiff and formal compared to their very friendly and casual way of speaking to me now.

*Okay, I should go.*

"Actually, I wonder why mama chose that forest as the last checkpoint? If she wanted to go all out then I think the underground training area under the estate would be better..." DarkMel wondered aloud.

"Oh, you don't know, DarkMel? The forest we're going to was the first place papa saw after coming to this world. Basically, our starting point. I'd lost my memories of my previous life at the time, as well as how I'd proposed to your mama. But we became lovers again anyway; life is strange like that."

"I see. Still, you two really get along. It's enough to make a person embarrassed just to watch."

"Hey now, if that's how you want to put it, you'll be included in this too, DarkMel. Your papa won't allow you to separate yourself like that. Or what,

would you like to get away from your papa? Are you already in your rebellious stage?”

“What? No! Not at all! I want to get along too!”

I continued to hide my empty stomach as we talked, and I walked towards the forest with DarkMel on my shoulders.

*Hmm, everything I see here is nostalgic. Wait, we’re already here? Man time really flies, huh?*

“Hey, been waiting long?” I asked the figure we were approaching.

“Yes, quite long. I believe I told you before that arriving five minutes early for a date is what’s expected. In fact, I believe ten minutes would be even better, no?”

“That’s the first time I’ve ever heard you say that. In the first place, we never decided on a time to meet. Well, anyway, uh...hi, I managed to get here without failing, Mel.”

The final checkpoint in this Battle Rally was my forest of beginnings, and the one who was waiting for me was my wife, Mel. It was so obvious, there really was no need for Sera to hide it, but there was probably no one more fitting for my final opponent.

“Of course you did. If you didn’t, everyone’s effort would have been wasted.”

*Grrwwlll*, came a sound that surely wasn’t me. *I’m sure I just imagined it.*

“You’re as strict as usual. But I’m happy you’re my final opponent.”

*Grroowwwrrrr*. The sound was coming from somewhere directly below my ears. *I said I’m sure I just imagined it. Come on, read the room!*

“Uh, ummm...papa? Mama?” DarkMel chimed in. “Sorry to interrupt you two, but why don’t we eat first? If we don’t do something about these sounds, I won’t be able to concentrate on this important conversation...”

Once I listened closer, I found that adorable sounds were also coming from DarkMel’s stomach. Her face was also a bright red.

“You’re right! Let’s hurry up and dig in! Can’t do this on an empty stomach,

after all!”

“What a great idea!” Mel agreed. “Actually, I haven’t been able to pull my attention away from the inside of that basket! Honestly, I was this close to drooling!”

And so, we entered a temporary cease-fire. It was time for lunch. What? It’s not actually lunchtime, you say? Don’t worry about it, we hadn’t eaten yet. At any rate, I opened up the basket that Efil had given me, and all three of us enjoyed it together. During our meal, I told Mel all about what had happened at the checkpoints before this. I was also surprised to learn that one of the side dishes had been made by DarkMel, who had woken up early just to do that.

*Yeah...peace is nice too once in a while.*

“Whew...Efil’s cooking really is the best. Of course, I love your cooking too, DarkMel.”

“I’m full as well. Ah, I’m starting to feel a little sleepy...” DarkMel answered.

“Then we could just take a nap... Wait, no, let’s get back to the subject at hand. I do plan on doing this seriously, more or less.” Mel tried to steer things back on track.

“What a coincidence; I’m the same. But I was really worried about whether I should break this nice and relaxing mood or not.”

“Mmnn...ah!” DarkMel gasped back awake. “I... I’ll try my hardest for a little longer! Now then, papa, mama, please continue!”

DarkMel sat herself down on a nearby fallen tree trunk while Mel and I went back to the positions we’d been in when I first arrived. Now that the problem with our stomachs had been resolved, we were fully motivated. Actually, I was honestly a little sleepy, but I just had to cover for that with spirit. Once things started, I would wake right up anyway.

“Let’s make the last battle a pure one-on-one fight. No handicaps, unlike the usual mock battles. However, because I am no longer the Goddess, I will be quite different from what you remember, you know?”

“Whew, you always try to make me happy, just like that. I’m looking forward

to it. But, as we talked about before, I'm already on my highest gear thanks to all my earlier fights. If it turns out your skills have dulled because it's been a while since our last bout, you'll end up on the floor in one hit, just so you know."

"No need to worry about that. I can't afford such a sad showing with our daughter watching. In fact, I'm more worried about you, honey. None of your fights should have been easy. I only pray that taking this all on back-to-back hasn't hampered your ability to bring out your best due to exhaustion."

"You're better at breaking than praying. I know you best, Mel, so I can say this with full confidence as the person who's experienced your strength directly to the point of dying. You break things very...cleanly."

"If you're going to go there, then you're much more of a threat creating those poems of yours than with your magic or armed combat. Even as your legal wife, I feel that way, so there's no doubt about it. It only happens every once in a while, but it really resonates in my heart."

Both of us suddenly looked over at DarkMel. After some time looking like she was pondering a deep mystery, her eyelids snapped open. I could almost hear the accompanying sound effects.

"It's a draw!" she declared. "Both papa and mama are correct!"

"Krggh, a draw, huh?! You're good, Mel!"

"You're no slouch either, honey. I take back what I said earlier, I'm not worried anymore!"

Our little verbal battle, which had served as an exchange of greetings, ended in a draw. But the true battle was yet to come.

*Hm? Ah... Aaahhhh! That's right, I see! They really thought of everything! Oh, whoops, now that I know that, I should do this before we fight.*

"DarkMel, watch our fight closely. Reeaaaaally close, just like you've been doing, okay?"

DarkMel seemed puzzled, but she answered anyway, "Yes, of course. I won't miss even a single moment, papa."

“Good, that puts me at ease. Sorry to keep you waiting, Mel. Let’s have a good match.”

“Yes, let’s make this fight something unique to the two of us.”

I understood one thing after standing in front of Mel: that this Battle Rally was an absolutely wonderful present just for me, that everyone worked hard to make happen...but at the same time, I had to wonder if these festivities weren’t for DarkMel’s sake as well. More specifically, the DarkMel from before she had lost her memories.

Though the rules differed at each checkpoint, I was getting serious at every one. DarkMel had gone around the continent with me and had my battles in every country burned into her memory. In other words, she was seeing me enjoy this world from the bottom of my heart.

DarkMel had once lost all hope and attempted to become the Goddess forever, with the reconstruction of the world and my reincarnation as the axis of her plan...all so that she could rule over everything as the Goddess as she spun a new story and I enjoyed my life in a way that would never be boring through the power of reincarnation.

However, this Battle Rally was like a counterargument to her. It was like yelling, “What in this world would leave me free enough to be bored?! There’s no stagnation even without you trying to do that!” to her face. I was having this much fun with just the powerful people I already knew, so I was sure if we took the time to search, there’d be many more powerful people to take on. I knew my friends and family wanted to pass these messages through DarkMel to alleviate her hopelessness and give her peace of mind.

The ones who had planned this Battle Rally were most likely my family members. *Jeez, they really went above and beyond for DarkMel and me.*

“That’s right, there’s something I forgot to say during that earlier exchange,” I announced.

Melfina reacted with puzzlement, but there was one more thing I wanted to say to her, no matter what.

*Come on, don’t look so suspicious. Don’t worry, this is the last thing. You know*

*I want to hurry up and start the fight, so bear with me just a little longer.*

“What is it that you have to say it now, of all times? You know that no matter what you say in the middle of the fight, I won’t be swayed, right?” Mel asked.

“Don’t get me wrong, it’s nothing big...just that if I win this fight, I want to propose to you once again. It’ll be my coolest proposal ever, Mel. Count on it!”

“Huh?! Uh...huhh? Y...uhh, whaaaa?!”

“Now then, DarkMel, give us the last starting signal! I’m all ready, so we can go at any time!”

“Okay! I’m going to give the signal!” DarkMel shouted.

“Wai— T... Time! Time out! That’s not fair!”

Whatever sounds came out of the forest of beginnings sounded fun and lively. Whether it was the sound of laughter, or the sound of clashing swords and magic, we were the only ones who knew the truth.





## Afterword:

Thank you all so much for buying *Black Summoner Volume 15: Rising of the Battle Junkie*. This is Mayoi Doufu, the author who has been leading a very busy life thanks to several factors. For those of you who have gotten your hands on these novels after reading the web-novel version, thank you for your continued support, as always.

*Black Summoner* has finally reached fifteen volumes and the completion of its first part. As a sort of punctuation, I made the subtitle for this volume the same as the web novel. I also asked to make the cover art a callback to volume one, so Kelvin is finally front and center on the cover again. Oh man, it's so moving seeing volumes one through fifteen all lined up on the floor. I just get to look at them with my arms crossed and stuff. It really is moving! And I can line up the versions that have been translated into other languages too, which is super nice! Anyway, it's like *that*. Just like the illustrator, DaiXt-sama, said on the cover, I'm glad Kelvin gets to grace the front of it!

Now that I've celebrated Kelvin, what should I write about next? I've already written countless afterwords, but I still feel like I don't know what I'm doing. There's just no way to learn such a thing. Rather, holy crap, the afterword this time is three pages long. How did this happen? I'm in despair.

How about I talk about a...certain horse game? No, I did that last time, if I remember correctly. Horses... Speaking of horses, it looks like my editor got really into horse races this year. Oh man...I get it, though. Horses are cute, after all. Once Corona is over, I'd like to have him show me around Nakayama or Tokyo. Ah, I'd like to try riding a horse too. Meanwhile, another editor has become entranced with cats. Twitter's full of cats too. But I get that—cats are also cute. This is the natural way of the world; there's nothing to be done. Once this whole pandemic ends, I'd love to be introduced to his beloved cat, Mashiro-chan. I want to try feeding it a Churu. Actually, I want to go to a cat café. I want to be buried in them and take a deep breath.

Anyway, this might all sound like confused ramblings, but the important thing is that your author is leading a happy and energetic life. It's times like this when I really want to write novels that people will find fun.

Lastly, in regard to the production of the *Black Summoner* novels: I would like to give my thanks to Kurogin-sama and DaiXt-sama, who drew Kelvin's fights so well all the way through. I would also like to thank the proofreaders, and all you readers shouldn't be forgotten either. Well then, I will be praying we meet again in the next volume. Please continue to enjoy *Black Summoner*.

Ahh...that's right. Seems like there'll be another announcement after this.

—Mayoi Doufu

## Preview Chapter: The Starving Summoner

There had been a string of pleasant days dressed in a pleasant spring atmosphere. These days, Parth was the picture of peace. There were no sudden appearances of vicious monsters or a certain breed of angel-type threats falling from the sky.

*Man, those times with Demon Lords and black goddesses were terrific. My days had been so boring lately that this thought had seeped deep into my mind. I mean, wow, peace sure is great. Seriously, it's the best!*

"No, I can't do it. It's too peaceful..."

I was gazing out the window of my room while resting my chin in the palm of my hand. Those words had come out of my mouth naturally and completely unconsciously. A bird that had been resting on a nearby tree took off; it must have hated my unmotivated tone. Don't get me wrong, though; I didn't mean it like I wanted to disrupt the peace or anything, okay?

Just a month earlier, I had made my way around the entire continent enjoying the Battle Rally. I hadn't had such a fun time since my fight with DarkMel, and even now, when I closed my eyes, I could see those fights vividly in my mind.

Unfortunately, that was a month ago. Since then, I'd had to go all over the place making the rounds in preparation for the wedding, stocking up on drinks for the reception, reserving a venue, and doing other acts relating to the new Goddess. With all that, I had no time for any battles at all, and as things stood, no matter how much of a rational battle junkie I was, I would end up buckling under the stress. At the very least, I wanted to fit in some mock battles with my friends to fulfill my needs in between my many commitments.

"Ah, but that brawl with my father-in-law was good."

"What are you talking about, Master?" Efil asked in response to my muttering.

Scratching my cheek in embarrassment at being heard, I decided it would be

fine to open up to her. “Oh, nothing much. I just haven’t been able to have a real match recently, or get some good exercise by beating monsters, or anything like that, right? So I’m feeling a little battle-starved, I guess I should say...”

“Well, everyone *has* been fully booked these days. They have no free time. If that’s how you feel, Master, would you like to head down to the underground training area right now? Though I may be unworthy, allow me, Efil, to be of service to you.” Efil put her hand to her chest, looking extremely motivated.

*I’m happy you feel that way. I really am, but...*

“You can’t just try to make me happy like that, Efil. Didn’t we decide a little while ago that fighting would absolutely not be allowed unless it’s for work? In fact, we really should be cutting down your maid duties as well.”

“No...you can’t...”

“Grk! Even if you cry, that won’t change anything!”

If I were the me from before, I would have happily taken Efil up on her offer. However, there was now a reason I couldn’t, a reason it would never be allowed! I tearfully suppressed my desire to shout an invitation to fight, struggling to overcome my own urges.

“You’ve been carrying a new life inside of you for about a month now, Efil. You should understand how everyone, including me, feels.”

“I... I’m sorry. I know in my head, but I just...”

Yes, in a joyous turn of events, Efil was pregnant with my child. After the Battle Rally, Efil, who was usually perfect in her self-control, started to feel ill, got fevers, and was assaulted by urges to vomit. These symptoms had continued for a while, with me attempting to heal her with magic. However, her condition wouldn’t change, and Gerard, the Dragon Kings she’d been feeding, and I finally started to worry, feeling that something was wrong. While my family made a fuss about how she needed to go see a doctor—or rather, Colette—Ellie, the subhead maid, stopped us and said this:

“Congratulations, Master, on your pregnancy.”

“Congrats!” Ruka followed up, but at that time, I wasn’t able to process what she’d said.

I’d exchanged looks with Gerard, who had just received the unexpected news of a great-grandchild, and then looked back at Ellie for confirmation. She nodded encouragingly. Finally, I turned to Efil, whose face had gone red, and managed to squeeze out the words “Well done.”

Men are never reliable when it counts.

“I really thought I’d be the first, since I’m the legal wife...” Mel had muttered, which was quickly followed by a flurry of voices.

“You’ve got DarkMel, so in a sense, you were the first. I don’t care about the order myself, though! Goldiana told me that it’s in times like these a woman should show how bighearted she can be!”

“I think you should have kept the second half of that to yourself, sister Sera.”

“Khhh! Is it just the number of times?! It’s gotta be the number of times! It’s frustrating, but congratulations, Efil-chan!”

“Can I try touching your belly, Efil-nee? Huh? There won’t be any movement yet?”

“Wow, I’m already getting a little sister? Nice, papa!” DarkMel seemed happy.

Of course, the excitement wasn’t just limited to Gerard and me. I don’t want to get into who said what, but the women were really something. In the end, everyone seemed to agree that it made sense it was Efil.

Since then, there had been a disturbance in the family, in a lot of ways. After some discussion, it was unanimously decided that Efil should be banned from fighting. She would occasionally tempt me like she had just done, but I used my will of steel to caution her instead of falling for it.

However, Efil stubbornly refused to give up any of her maid work. So she was permitted to do as she pleased during the initial stage of the pregnancy as long as she didn’t push herself. Of course, Ellie and the other maids were secretly working to keep tabs on her and lessen her work as much as possible.

“You’re the one who understands me best, Efil. You don’t need to apologize. I

know you offered because you were thinking of me. So, how do you feel? Has the taste of anything changed? You looked like you were struggling in the kitchen.”

“Ah, yes. I asked Ruka to be my taste-tester, so I somehow managed proper adjustments to the flavor. As long as I get the process and quantities right, I can make things pretty much perfectly.”

“I see. Seriously, though, don’t push yourself. If you think you’re feeling anything other than perfect or you start getting a bulge, you need to go on absolute rest, okay?”

“Yes, I understand that perfectly well. But please allow me to be selfish while I still can.” Efil smiled.

*Oh, come on, I can’t say anything more once you make that expression. Fine, serve me as much as you like. I wonder how long my will of steel will hold out?*

“Hm?”

There was a good mood going between us, but then I heard the sound of panicked footsteps coming from outside the room. I listened carefully and realized that the footsteps were coming towards us.

*What’s going on? I know everyone’s been trained not to run in the hallways unless there’s an emergency. It’s gotta be either Sera or Ruka...or maybe Dahak or Huba, though that’s a long shot. Jeez, I guess I should go give whoever it is a talking to.*

*KerSLAM!* The door flew open.

*Hey now, doors aren’t meant to be treated like that. You’re being rude.*

I was about to put those opinions into words when I realized that, shockingly, it was Rion on the other side of the door. Since this wasn’t something I’d expected of Rion, I found myself unable to form words. Meanwhile, she shoved a piece of paper in my face.

“Kel-niiiiiiii! I got an acceptance letter from Lumiest! Just noooooowwww!”

“Seriouslyyyyyy?! Riiooooooon, good jooooooob!”

Instantly, I forgave her for everything. She jumped into my arms, so of course

I caught her, and we spent the next while spinning around in celebration. There was a mountain of things I wanted to ask her and talk about, but for the moment, I decided to prioritize this skinship.



### *Academic City, Lumiest:*

Lumiest, located on the Western Continent, was one of the few schools in this world. It was famous, and nobles and royalty from all over gathered there to learn. It seemed the requirements for being admitted were very strict, and I had heard there had been members of royal families who had been rejected for failing to meet them. If the prospective student didn't have both standing and talent, or at least something that made up for a lack of those things, there would be no room for them at Lumiest. Once you got in, however, the instruction was super first-class. It didn't stop at just martial skills or magic either—many things were taught there in the best of environments.

That should do it for an explanation of Lumiest. And as for why Rion was waving around a letter of admittance, allow me to tell that story. Going back to a few days after I finished the Battle Rally, just like my life these days, I was too busy preparing for the wedding, among other things, to enjoy any fights.

I returned home and took a small break. In order to soften my exhaustion from doing things I wasn't used to as much as possible, I sank limply into one of the deck chairs on the balcony. Even though no amount of fighting could make me this tired, having to prepare everything in a way that was even and fair for everyone was such a difficult task that I had no energy left. At any rate, it was safe to say that I was wholeheartedly done.

“Um...do you have a minute, Kel-nii?”

“Rion? It's Rion!”

There were precious few things outside of battle that could recover my mental HP. However, one of those things, my little sister, happened to come over to resupply me with her essence with perfect timing. Of course, I immediately jumped out of my chair—a completely natural response from any older brother.



“Aha ha, those are some amazing reflexes, Kel-nii. Wasn’t that faster than during the Battle Rally?”

“As your older brother, it’s a given that I pull out all the stops for you, right? Anyway, what’s up? If you just want a private chat between siblings, I’m all for it. I’ll recover at double the speed.”

“Of course I’d be okay with that too. But first, I wanted to show you something... It’s this.”

“Hmm?”

Rion handed me a pamphlet. Of course, I took it without hesitation. I read the large header text to discover that it said “Lumiést.” Apparently, my lovely, adorable little sister had come all this way with documents pertaining to the Academic City of Lumiést.

“This is the introductory pamphlet for the Academy City that Shutola and Colette said they graduated from. What are you doing with it, Rion?”

“Uh, to tell you the truth...I want to try experiencing school life.”

*I was utterly shocked, and wordlessly, the pamphlet fell from my hands. Huh? What did she just say? School life? Rion...wants to go to Lumiést, which is on the Western Continent? It wouldn’t be realistic to commute from home, so...she’d be living in a dorm? Away from me? It’s called an Academic City, so of course they’d have dorms. But still, are those dorms really safe? Are they designed to withstand Rank S spells cast by unknown forces? Actually, I can’t allow Rion to live with random young people from who-knows-where; I don’t even know them! So, does that really mean she’s going to be living away from me?*

My Parallel Processing started working in loops, going from question to confirmation to answer over and over. Outwardly, it looked like I’d completely stopped functioning. However, Rion seemed to have expected that reaction, as she waited patiently for me to restart.

I gasped as I snapped back to reality. “Was I frozen just now?!”

“Yeah, totally unmoving, like time stopped. Here, I picked up the pamphlet you dropped.”

“Oh, thanks. Sorry about that...”

“Also, I think you’ll get this as soon as you read it, but the dorms are separated by gender so you don’t have to worry!”

“Uhh...did I say what I was thinking out loud or something?”

“Nope, I just figured it was the first thing you’d be concerned about, Kel-nii.”

“I... I see...”

While I was happy she understood her brother so well, I couldn’t agree to Rion attending Lumiest. After all, even if the dorms were separated, there would be guys in the school, right? And they’d be starving ones in the middle of puberty too, right?!

I wanted to argue that point passionately, but I couldn’t actually do so in the face of Rion’s angelic smile. Then, while I was hesitating, *he* suddenly appeared.

“I heard what’s going on! You can’t do that—you can’t, Rion! Even if the dorms are separated by gender, the school itself will be rampant with those starving beasts! Men are all wolves! I cannot allow my cute Rion to go to such a dangerous place!” Gerard must have climbed up from the floor below, as he put his hand on the railing and stuck his head over it as he screamed from his soul.

It seemed he just happened to be down below and heard us talking. *What an incredible sense of hearing. Is he a bat?!* Still, I praised him in my mind for saying exactly what I wanted to, giving him a “good job” hand signal out of Rion’s line of sight.

“He’s right. I’m worried about that too. Also, Lumiest isn’t an easy place to get into, you know? You need a letter of recommendation from a good source, and depending on the situation, you might need to donate a large amount of money too. You’d also be surrounded by relatives of VIPs... We’re just worried about you, Rion, more than anything.”

Having seen my chance, I voiced my own concerns. Rion was a kind girl, so I had no doubt she would reconsider after seeing her beloved older brother and grandpa so opposed.

“I... I see. Yeah, you’re right. It’s just that I was so sickly before reincarnating

that I couldn't really go to school...so I just wanted to experience that life, even if only a little. I thought that I wouldn't have the chance once I marry you, Kelnii, so... But that was selfish of me, wasn't it? I'm sorry."

I could practically hear the sound of both our hearts throbbing in sympathy for her, and we were both lost for words. Rion understood where we were coming from and had backed down. Yes, she'd backed down, but what was this pain in my chest? I was also feeling very guilty. Was this the outcome we actually wanted? Really?

"My... My liege, I can hear the sound of my conviction snapping clean in half..."

"What a coincidence—me too. But still! Even though we've broken, it'll be too late if something happens to Rion! Far too late!" Somehow, I managed to endure the urge to give in.

"I see... I have now heard everything! Leave this to me!"

I gasped in shock as we heard another voice coming from beyond the balcony railing. Who was it? Well, being in love with the person in question, I didn't even need to think. Sera, who seemed to have been listening in from below just like Gerard, made her appearance with an awfully confident expression.

*Hey, why is everyone suddenly popping up from there? Is it some kind of fad around the house or something?*

"Y-You too, Sera? I mean, I'm okay with it, but...what was your idea?"

"I have the perfect idea for you two worrywarts who are just piling anxiety upon anxiety!" Sera announced.

"A perfect idea?" Gerard and I parroted in unison.

"You're worried because you'd be sending Rion off alone. Since that's the case, you just have to include a reliable guard that'll be admitted with her!"

"I...see?" *Damn you, Sera. Again with the outrageous ideas.*

"An escort, huh?" Gerard answered. "If there were one, both my liege and I would have peace of mind!"

"Right? Heh heh!"

“Wait, wait. Just...wait. Gerard, it’s too soon to say that. The conditions for acceptance are very strict. Who would we send as a guard who could even get in? We don’t have enough money to get someone in with donations since our funds are tied up in Mel’s food expenses and the wedding. And there’d be no point sending a guard if whoever it is can’t be with her in the dorms. A male guard would be out of the question, so this guard would have to be the same gender as Rion and have as much or more power than her for me to allow it.”

“Hrm, you’re right about that. My liege makes a good point.”

Planning to talk Sera down, I launched a spiel with all the logic I could muster. It had to be someone who could get into the academy on their own and match Rion in power. I was sure that no such person would be conveniently available. However, Sera’s confident expression did not falter one bit.

“Then there’s no problem. My little sister, Bell, fits all your conditions! Since that’s the case, the next time I go home, I’ll ask her and father about it. I’m sure both of them will be totally on board!”

“Huh, Bell-chan?! I get to go to school with Bell-chan?!”

“Yep! You will! Bell’s a princess just like me, and now that Grebarelka is stable, the money won’t be an issue. In fact, if we need more, I can just go and earn some at the Beast King Festival! Heh heh, and the two little sisters would fit each other perfectly, wouldn’t they?”

From there, the conversation proceeded above and beyond what I could have expected.

## ■ KELVIN CELSIUS

■ 23 Y/O / MALE / DAEMON/ SUMMONER

■ LEVEL: 217

■ TITLE: GRIM REAPER

■ HP: 10512/10512 (+7008)

■ MP: 35169/35169 (+23446)

SUMMONING CLOTHO: MAX MP -1500

SUMMONING GERARD: MAX MP -1000

SUMMONING SERA: MAX MP -1000

SUMMONING MELFINA: MAX MP -20000

SUMMONING ALEX: MAX MP -1000

SUMMONING DAHAK: MAX MP -1200

SUMMONING BOGA: MAX MP -1200

SUMMONING MDOFARAK: MAX MP -1200

SUMMONING DARKMEL: MAX MP -200

■ STRENGTH: 2030 (+640)

■ ENDURANCE: 1702 (+640)

■ AGILITY: 3471 (+640)

■ MAGIC: 5169 (+640)

■ LUCK: 4147 (+640)

### ■ EQUIPMENT

BLACK STAFF OF DISASTER (RANK S) MAD HOLY SWORD CLIVE (RANK S)

BLACK SWORD AKLAMA (RANK S) SKILL EATER (RANK S)

ASTARTE'S EMBRACE (RANK S) BLOOD PENDANT (RANK S)

GODDESS'S RING (RANK S) BLACK LEATHER BOOTS OF THE  
DIVINE BEAST (RANK S)

### ■ SKILLS

MAGIC OVERCLOCK (UNIQUE SKILL)

PARALLEL PROCESSING (UNIQUE SKILL)

SWORD MASTERY (RANK S)

COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)

SCYTHE MASTERY (RANK S)

SUMMONING (RANK S) [AVAILABLE SLOTS: 2]

GREEN MAGIC (RANK S)

WHITE MAGIC (RANK S)

ANALYZE EYE (RANK S)

FLIGHT (RANK S)

PRESENCE SENSING (RANK S)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK S)

MAGIC DETECTION (RANK S)

MIND'S EYE (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

DISGUISE (RANK S)

NERVES OF STEEL (RANK S)

SMITHING (RANK S)

ARMY COMMAND (RANK S)

SPIRIT (RANK S)

HERCULEAN STRENGTH (RANK S)

ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

MAGIC ENHANCEMENT (RANK S)

SUPER LUCK (RANK S)

DOUBLE EXPERIENCE POINTS

DOUBLE GROWTH RATE

DOUBLE SKILL POINTS

EXPERIENCE SHARING

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

BLESSING OF THE GODDESS OF REINCARNATION BLESSING OF THE EARTH DRAGON KING

BLESSING OF THE LIGHT DRAGON KING BLESSING OF THE WIND DRAGON KING

SKILL EATER (RIGHT) / HEARTY EATING (RANK S) CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

SKILL EATER (LEFT) / DIVINE MANIPULATOR (UNIQUE SKILL) DISGUISE (RANK S)



■ EFIL

■ 16 Y/O / FEMALE / HIGH ELF / BATTLE MAID  
■ LEVEL: 217  
■ TITLE: BOMBING PRINCESS  
■ HP: 2076/2076  
■ MP: 21510/21510 (+14340)

■ STRENGTH: 989  
■ ENDURANCE: 962  
■ AGILITY: 6287 (+640)  
■ MAGIC: 4677 (+640)  
■ LUCK: 2354 (+1899)

■ EQUIPMENT  
PENUMBRA (RANK S)  
MERCILESS (RANK S)  
BATTLE MAID UNIFORM V (RANK S)  
BATTLE MAID HEADDRESS V (RANK S)  
GLITTERING MAGICAL JEWEL HAIR CLIP (RANK A)  
BLESSED SLAVE COLLAR (RANK A)  
GODDESS'S RING (RANK S)  
LEATHER BOOTS OF THE FLAME DRAGON (RANK S)

■ SKILLS  
BLUE FLAME (UNIQUE SKILL)  
ARCHERY (RANK S)  
RED MAGIC (RANK S)  
COVERT ACTION (RANK S)  
SERVICE (RANK S)  
FOCUS (RANK S)  
COOKING (RANK S)  
SEWING (RANK S)  
CLEANING (RANK S)  
ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)  
DOUBLE GROWTH RATE  
DOUBLE SKILL POINTS  
DIVINE RESTITUTION (UNIQUE SKILL)  
COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)  
FARSIGHT (RANK S)  
DEMAND DETECTION (RANK S)  
SKY WALK (RANK S)  
TEACHING (RANK S)  
MASSAGE (RANK S)  
DISCERNMENT (RANK S)  
MAGIC ENHANCEMENT (RANK S)  
MAGIC CONSERVATION (RANK S)  
MAGIC ATTACHMENT (RANK S)

■ PASSIVE EFFECTS  
BLESSING OF THE FLAME DRAGON KING  
CONCEALMENT (RANK S)





■ CLOTHO

■ 0 Y/O / GENDERLESS / DILLE MARE

■ LEVEL: 217

■ TITLE: EVERLASTING DARKNESS

■ HP: 8758/8758 (+100)

■ MP: 9527/9527 (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 7555 (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 6879 (+100)

■ AGILITY: 6570 (+100)

■ MAGIC: 6036 (+100)

■ LUCK: 5711 (+100)

■ EQUIPMENT

NONE

■ SKILLS

- |                              |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| GLUTTONY (UNIQUE SKILL)      | FLEXIBILITY (RANK S) |
| UNCHANGING (UNIQUE SKILL)    | DIVISION (RANK S)    |
| ARMORED SKIN (RANK S)        | DISMANTLE (RANK S)   |
| AUTO HEALING (RANK S)        | STORAGE (RANK S)     |
| METALLICIZE (RANK S)         | DIGEST (RANK S)      |
| ABSORPTION (RANK S)          |                      |
| HEARTY EATING (RANK S)       |                      |
| BLUNT DAMAGE INVULNERABILITY |                      |
| ALL ELEMENTAL RESISTANCE     |                      |

■ PASSIVE EFFECTS:

- SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)
- CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



## ■ GERARD

■ 138 Y/O / MALE / HADES KNIGHT KING / DARK KNIGHT

■ LEVEL: 217

■ TITLE: SWORD GURU

■ HP: 25696/25696 (+17064) (+100)

■ MP: 875/875 (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 5194 (+640) (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 5547 (+640) (+100)

■ AGILITY: 1517 (+640) (+100)

■ MAGIC: 645 (+100)

■ LUCK: 1216 (+100)

## ■ EQUIPMENT

DEMON SWORD DAINSLEIF (RANK S)

GUNSWORD HAVOC (RANK S)

DREADNOUGHT LEGALUS (RANK S)

CRIMSON ROGALIA (RANK S)

GODDESS'S RING (RANK S)

## ■ SKILLS

GLORY WITHIN MINE HANDS  
(UNIQUE SKILL)

SWORD MASTERY (RANK S)

MIND'S EYE (RANK S)

MILITARY TACTIC (RANK S)

AUTO HEALING (RANK S)

HERCULEAN STRENGTH (RANK S)

MATERIALIZATION

GREATER SLICING DAMAGE

RESISTANCE

GREATER DARK DAMAGE

RESISTANCE

ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)

## ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

SELF-TRANSCENDANCE/DEMON SWORD DAINSLEIF++

SELF-TRANSCENDANCE/DREADNOUGHT LEGALUS++

SELF-TRANSCENDANCE/CRIMSON ROGALIA++

SELF-TRANSCENDANCE/GODDESS'S RING++

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

SELF-TRANSCENDANCE  
(UNIQUE SKILL)

PRESENCE SENSING (RANK S)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK S)

ARMORED SKIN (RANK S)

RIDING (RANK S)

ARMY COMMAND (RANK S)

TEACHING (RANK S)

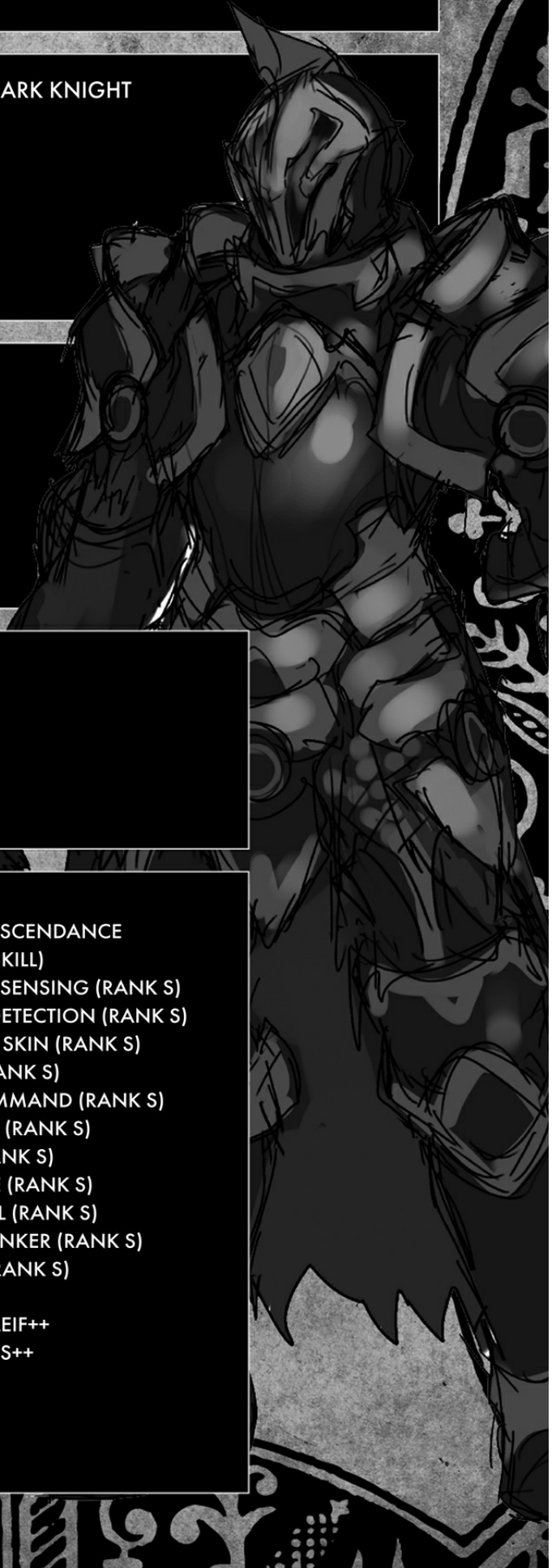
VIGOR (RANK S)

FORTITUDE (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

HEAVY DRINKER (RANK S)

FISHING (RANK S)





## ■ SERA

■ 21 Y/O / FEMALE / DEMON BLOOD LORD / CURSED PUGILIST

■ LEVEL: 217

■ TITLE: EMPRESS

■ HP: 17899 / 17899 (+11866) (+100)

■ MP: 18627 / 18627 (+12218) (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 3609 (+640) (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 3008 (+640) (+100)

■ AGILITY: 3533 (+640) (+100)

■ MAGIC: 4067 (+640) (+100)

■ LUCK: 3891 (+640) (+100)

## ■ EQUIPMENT

ARONDIGHT (RANK S)

QUEEN'S TERROR (RANK S)

CLIP OF CAMOUFLAGE (RANK A)

GODDESS'S RING (RANK S)

MOURNBLADE (RANK S)

## ■ SKILLS

BLOOD DOMINION (UNIQUE SKILL)

BLOODBENDING (UNIQUE SKILL)

COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)

BLACK MAGIC (RANK S)

FLIGHT (RANK S)

PRESENCE SENSING (RANK S)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK S)

MAGIC DETECTION (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT DETECTION (RANK S)

SERVICE (RANK S)

TEAMWORK (RANK S)

DANCING (RANK S)

MUSICAL PERFORMANCE (RANK S)

FISHING (RANK S)

AUTO HEALING (RANK S)

HERCULEAN STRENGTH (RANK S)

MAGIC ENHANCEMENT (RANK S)

## ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

BLESSING OF THE DEMON LORD

BLESSING OF THE DARKNESS DRAGON KING

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

FORTITUDE (RANK S)

SPIRIT (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)

SUPER LUCK (RANK S)



## ■ MELFINA

■ 1277 Y/O / FEMALE / GABRIEL / VALKYRIE

■ LEVEL: 238

■ TITLE: THE SMILE

■ HP: 20131/20131 (+13354) (+100)

■ MP: 22276/22276 (+14784) (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 3925 (+640) (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 4328 (+640) (+100)

■ AGILITY: 3444 (+640) (+100)

■ MAGIC: 4401 (+640) (+100)

■ LUCK: 3131 (+640) (+100)

### ■ EQUIPMENT:

SERAPH (RANK S)

SAINT'S EMBRACE (RANK S)

SILVER HALO (RANK S)

ARCHANGEL'S RING (RANK S)

ENGAGEMENT RING (RANK B)

REINFORCED STAR GREAVES (RANK S)

### ■ SKILLS

REINCARNATE (UNIQUE SKILL)

SPEAR MASTERY (RANK S)

BLUE MAGIC (RANK S)

WHITE MAGIC (RANK S)

FLIGHT (RANK S)

MIND'S EYE (RANK S)

NERVES OF STEEL (RANK S)

SERVICE (RANK S)

ALCHEMY (RANK S)

DISCERNMENT (RANK S)

MAGIC ENHANCEMENT (RANK S)

MAGIC CONSERVATION (RANK S)

ACCESSORY CRAFTSMANSHIP (RANK S)

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

GOURMAND (UNIQUE SKILL)

AUTOPHAGY (UNIQUE SKILL)

STEEL STOMACH (RANK S)

PURIFICATION (RANK S)

GUSTATION (RANK S)

OLFACTION (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)

HEARTY EATING (RANK S)

SUPER LUCK (RANK S)



## ■ RION CELSIUS

■ 14 Y/O / FEMALE / HUMAN / SWORD SAINT

■ LEVEL: 216

■ TITLE: BLACK COMET

■ HP: 8652/8652 (+5768)

■ MP: 5423/5423

■ STRENGTH: 2899

■ ENDURANCE: 1370 (+640)

■ AGILITY: 5510 (+640)

■ MAGIC: 4119 (+640)

■ LUCK: 3030

### ■ EQUIPMENT

DEMON SWORD CALADBOLG (RANK S)

FAUX HOLY SWORD WILL (RANK A)

LETHAL OPIATE SWORD (RANK S)

BLACK SWORD AKLAMA (RANK S) X2

BLACK RECESS (RANK S)

GODDESS'S RING (RANK S)

TAILORED BLACK LEATHER BOOTS OF THE DIVINE BEAST (RANK S)

### ■ SKILLS

RESIDUAL SLICE  
(UNIQUE SKILL)

SWORD MASTERY (RANK S)

COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)

ACROBATICS (RANK S)

SKY WALK (RANK S)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK S)

PAINTING (RANK S)

EMPATHY (RANK S)

PRESENCE SENSING (RANK S)

VIGOR (RANK S)

ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)

DOUBLE GROWTH RATE

DOUBLE SKILL POINTS

ABSOLUTE PURIFICATION  
(UNIQUE SKILL)

DUAL WIELD (RANK S)

COVERT ACTION (RANK S)

RED MAGIC (RANK S)

MIND'S EYE (RANK S)

NERVES OF STEEL (RANK S)

COMPANIONSHIP (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

MAGIC ENHANCEMENT  
(RANK S)

STRATAGEM (RANK S)

FORTITUDE (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

BLESSING OF THE LIGHTNING DRAGON KING

CONCEALMENT (RANK S) DISGUISE (RANK S)





## ■ ALEX

■ 3 Y/O / MALE / VANARGAND

■ LEVEL: 216

■ TITLE: HEAT HAZE

■ HP: 22288/22288 (+14792) +(100)

■ MP: 2514/2514 (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 4725 (+640) (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 4010 (+640) (+100)

■ AGILITY: 4473 (+640) (+100)

■ MAGIC: 2192 (+100)

■ LUCK: 1932 (+100)

## ■ EQUIPMENT

DEMON SWORD CALADBOLG (RANK S)

FAUX HOLY SWORD WILL (RANK A)

LETHAL OPIATE SWORD (RANK S)

BLACK SWORD AKLAMA (RANK S) x2

GODDESS'S RING (RANK S)

## ■ SKILLS

SHADOW TRAVEL  
(UNIQUE SKILL)

CREEPING DARKNESS  
(UNIQUE SKILL)

IMITATOR (UNIQUE SKILL)

SWORD MASTERY (RANK S)

ACROBATICS (RANK S)

COVERT ACTION (RANK S)

SKY WALK (RANK S)

BLACK MAGIC (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT DETECTION (RANK S)

IRON CLAWS AND FANGS (RANK S)

HERCULEAN STRENGTH (RANK S)

MIND'S EYE (RANK S)

COMPANIONSHIP (RANK S)

AUSCULTATION (RANK S)

OLFACTION (RANK S)

FORTITUDE (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)

## ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



■ DAHAK

■ 162 Y/O / MALE / BLACK DRAGON  
(EARTH DRAGON KING) / FARMER

■ LEVEL: 216

■ TITLE: EMPEROR GREENS

■ HP: 21529 (+14286) (+100)

■ MP: 4801 (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 4273 (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 3990 (+100)

■ AGILITY: 2359 (+100)

■ MAGIC: 2951 (+100)

■ LUCK: 1468 (+640) (+100)

■ EQUIPMENT (HUMAN FORM)

HOE OF MOTHER EARTH (RANK S)

WORK CLOTHES OF MOTHER EARTH  
(RANK S)

BOOTS OF MOTHER EARTH (RANK S)

TOWEL OF MOTHER EARTH (RANK S)

■ EQUIPMENT (DRAGON FORM)

DRAGON SADDLE (RANK B)

GODDESS'S COLLAR (RANK S)

■ SKILLS

GEMMATION (UNIQUE SKILL)

BLACK LOAM SCALES (UNIQUE SKILL)

GREEN MAGIC (RANK S)

BLACK MAGIC (RANK E)

NERVES OF STEEL (RANK S)

AGRICULTURE (RANK S)

HORTICULTURE (RANK S)

CONSTRUCTION (RANK S)

CONVERSATION (RANK S)

SUPER LUCK (RANK S)

■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

BLESSING OF THE DARKNESS DRAGON KING

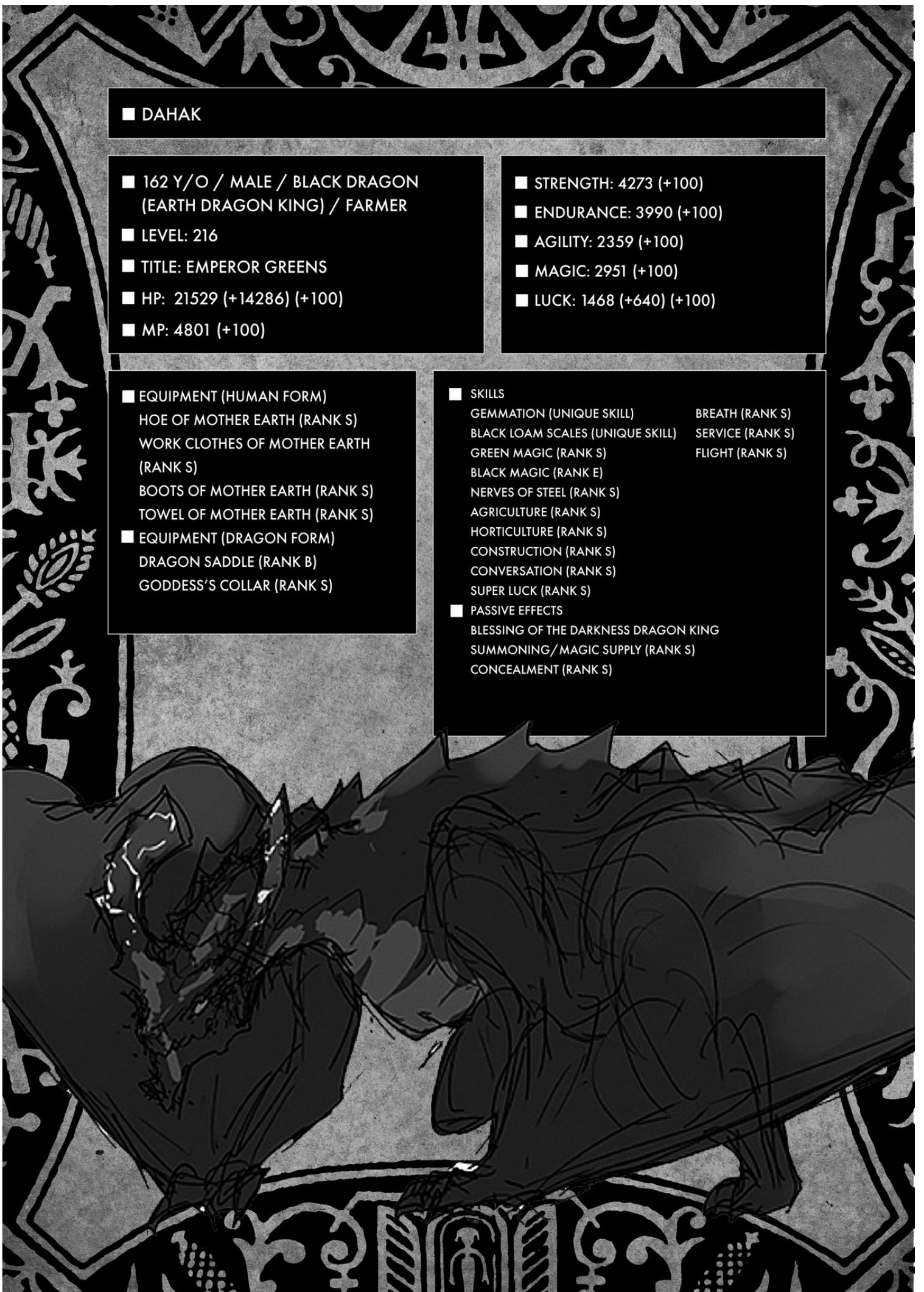
SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

BREATH (RANK S)

SERVICE (RANK S)

FLIGHT (RANK S)



## ■ BOGA

■ 103 Y/O / MALE / BLACK ROCK DRAGON (FLAME DRAGON KING) / GUARD

■ LEVEL: 216

■ TITLE: SWORD GURU'S FAVORITE DRAGON

■ HP: 36085/36085 (+23990) (+100)

■ MP: 411/411 (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 5673 (+640) (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 5628 (+640) (+100)

■ AGILITY: 845 (+100)

■ MAGIC: 491 (+100)

■ LUCK: 1128 (+100)

### ■ EQUIPMENT (HUMAN FORM)

STRENGTHENED ADAMANTITE TANK (RANK S)

STRENGTHENED ADAMANTITE GREAVES (RANK S)

### ■ EQUIPMENT (DRAGON FORM)

DRAGON SADDLE (RANK S)

GODDESS'S COLLAR (RANK S)

### ■ SKILLS

VOLCANIC BODY (UNIQUE SKILL)

SUPER EXPANSION (UNIQUE SKILL)

ARMORED SKIN (RANK S)

FLIGHT (RANK S)

BREATH (RANK S)

BURROWING (RANK S)

THUNDEROUS VOICE (RANK S)

AGRICULTURE (RANK S)

AUTO HEALING (RANK S)

FORTITUDE (RANK S)

HERCULEAN STRENGTH (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

GREATER SLASHING DAMAGE RESISTANCE

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)





## ■ MDOFARAK

■ 63 Y/O / FEMALE / THREE-HEADED DRAGON (LIGHT DRAGON KING) / GUNNER

■ LEVEL: 216

■ TITLE: SNIPING PRINCESS

■ HP: 8024/8024 (+100)

■ MP: 15742/15742 (+10428) (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 1876 (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 1613 (+100)

■ AGILITY: 4410 (+100)

■ MAGIC: 4840 (+640) (+100)

■ LUCK: 3448 (+100)

### ■ EQUIPMENT (HUMAN FORM)

ELEMENTAL CLOAK (RANK S)

MONOGRAMMED LEATHER BOOTS (RANK A)

PORTABLE INFINITE CANDY BAG (RANK A)

### ■ EQUIPMENT (DRAGON FORM)

DRAGON SADDLE (RANK S) (DRAGON FORM)

GODDESS'S COLLAR (RANK S) (DRAGON FORM)

### ■ SKILLS

MULTI-ELEMENTAL CONSTITUTION (UNIQUE SKILL)

COMPRESSED ERUPTION (UNIQUE SKILL)

AUREOLA BELL (UNIQUE SKILL)

BREATH (RANK S)

FARSIGHT (RANK S)

FLIGHT (RANK S)

PRESENCE SENSING (RANK S)

MAGIC DETECTION (RANK S)

FOCUS (RANK S)

SPEED READING (RANK S)

MAGIC ATTACHMENT (RANK S)

MAGIC CONSERVATION (RANK S)

AGRICULTURE (RANK S)

GUSTATION (RANK S)

OLFACTION (RANK S)

SPIRIT (RANK S)

MAGIC ENHANCEMENT (RANK S)

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



## ■ ANGE

■ 18 Y/O / FEMALE / TITAN /  
ASSASSIN  
■ LEVEL: 218  
■ TITLE: HEADHUNTING CAT  
■ HP: 5048/5048  
■ MP: 2856/2856

■ STRENGTH: 3455 (+640)  
■ ENDURANCE: 2051  
■ AGILITY: 9646 (+640)  
■ MAGIC: 1552  
■ LUCK: 340

### ■ EQUIPMENT

VICIOUS SWORD CARNAGE (RANK S)  
CUSTOM EXPLOSIVE TALISMAN THROWING KNIFE  
(RANK S) x?  
CUSTOM EXPLOSIVE TALISMAN BINDING CHAIN SWORD  
(RANK S) x?  
MEL-BRAND FLASH GRENADE (RANK S) x?  
HELLISH POISON KUNAI (RANK S) x?  
SHADOW SHADE (RANK S)  
GLOOM W/ CAT-EARED HOOD (RANK S)  
SLAVE COLLAR IV (RANK A)  
GODDESS'S RING (RANK S)  
BLACK LEATHER BOOTS W/ HIDDEN DEADLY POISON  
BLADE ATTACHMENT (RANK S)

### ■ SKILLS

UNCONTAINABLE (UNIQUE SKILL)	DISGUISE (RANK S)
ASSASSIN'S STRIKE (UNIQUE SKILL)	SKY WALK (RANK S)
SWORD MASTERY (RANK S)	STRATAGEM (RANK S)
COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)	COMPANIONSHIP (RANK S)
THROWING (RANK S)	ACTING (RANK S)
BLACK MAGIC (RANK S)	CONVERSATION (RANK B)
ANALYZE EYE (RANK S)	HERCULEAN STRENGTH (RANK S)
PRESENCE SENSING (RANK S)	ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)
DANGER DETECTION (RANK S)	DOUBLE GROWTH RATE
MAGIC DETECTION (RANK S)	DOUBLE SKILL POINTS
COVERT ACTION (RANK S)	
CONCEALMENT (RANK S)	
CONCEALMENT DETECTION (RANK S)	
HIDDEN WEAPON CREATION (RANK S)	

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

DISGUISE (RANK S)  
CONCEALMENT (RANK S)





## ■ SHUTOLA TRYCEN

■ 18 Y/O / FEMALE / SAGE / PUPPETMASTER

■ LEVEL: 215

■ TITLE: DOLL PRINCESS

■ HP: 1226/1226

■ MP: 12087/12087 (+8058)

■ STRENGTH: 463

■ ENDURANCE: 1125 (+640)

■ AGILITY: 1506

■ MAGIC: 4719 (+640)

■ LUCK: 3024

### ■ EQUIPMENT:

GODDESS'S MAGI-THREADS (RANK S)

MONICA (RANK S)

GEORGIUS (RANK S)

ROYAL GUARD (RANK S) x10

GUARD (RANK A) x25

FAIRY DRESS II (RANK S)

CLIP OF CAMOUFLAGE II (RANK S)

GODDESS'S RING (RANK S)

SHOES OF THE SPIRIT KING (RANK S)

### ■ SKILLS

PERFECT MEMORY (UNIQUE SKILL)

RETRIBUTIVE PERSUASION (UNIQUE SKILL)

PUPPETRY (RANK S)

BLUE MAGIC (RANK S)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK S)

COVERT ACTION (RANK S)

NERVES OF STEEL (RANK S)

ARMY COMMAND (RANK S)

MILITARY TACTIC (RANK S)

STRATAGEM (RANK S)

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

COMPANIONSHIP (RANK S)

NEGOTIATION (RANK S)

ACTING (RANK S)

CONVERSATION (RANK S)

VIGOR (RANK S)

SPIRIT (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

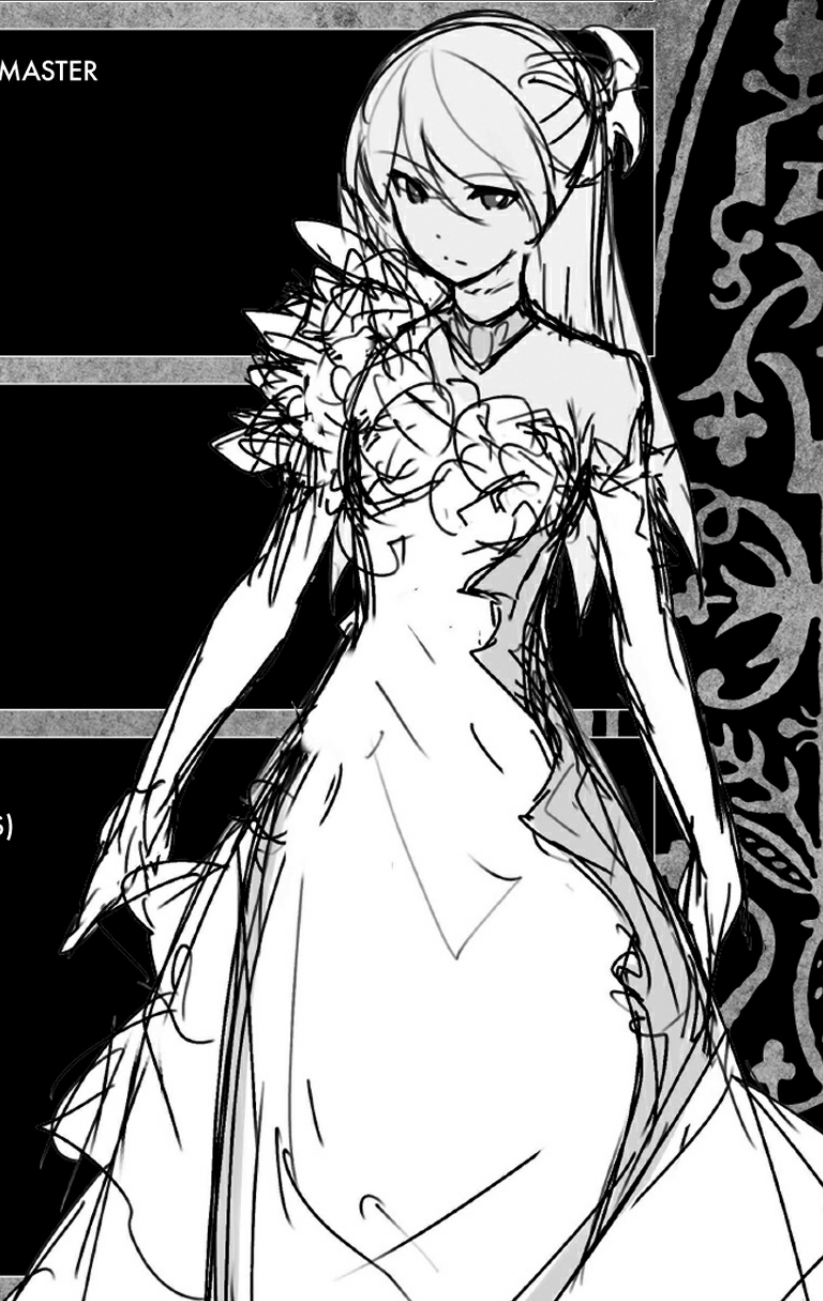
MAGIC ATTACHMENT (RANK S)

MAGIC ENHANCEMENT (RANK S)

MAGIC CONSERVATION (RANK S)

DOUBLE GROWTH RATE

DOUBLE SKILL POINTS



## ■ DARKMEL

- 8 Y/O / FEMALE / FALLEN ANGEL / CHILD OF THE DIVINE
- LEVEL: 72
- TITLE: GRIM REAPER'S BELOVED DAUGHTER
- HP: 780/780 (+100)
- MP: 1083/1083 (+100)

- STRENGTH: 591 (+100)
- ENDURANCE: 234 (+100)
- AGILITY: 347 (+100)
- MAGIC: 624 (+100)
- LUCK: 415 (+100)

### ■ EQUIPMENT:

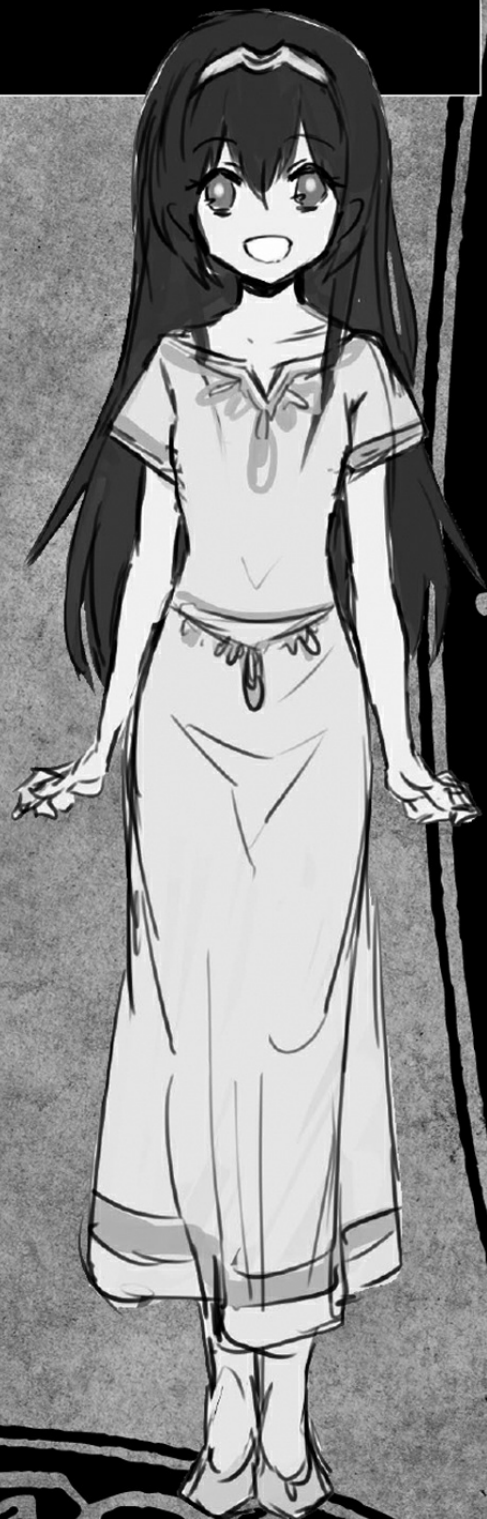
AGNOS-PASMA (RANK S)  
MINI SILVER HALO (RANK S)  
ARCHANGEL'S RING (RANK S)  
SHOES OF THE SPIRIT KING (RANK S)

### ■ SKILLS

MONSTER PARENT (UNIQUE SKILL)  
COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)  
BLUE MAGIC (RANK B)  
BLACK MAGIC (RANK B)  
FLIGHT (RANK C)  
DANGER DETECTION (RANK S)  
SINGING (RANK C)  
COMPANIONSHIP (RANK C)

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)  
CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



# Bonus Short Stories

## The Remaining Apostles Gather

The Apostles were an overwhelmingly powerful group that had been gathered together to revive the black goddess. Although each one of them was involved for a different reason, they all were blessed with great power and unusual abilities that meant their strength was completely off the rails—so much so that they had once managed to corner Kelvin and his friends in all sorts of ways.

However, due to a series of *happenings*, the organization was effectively disbanded. Iris, who was its core, had restored her Sister Ellen persona and returned to the orphanage. Meanwhile, DarkMel, the mastermind who had been manipulating her from the shadows, lost her memories and became Kelvin's beloved daughter. So it made sense for the organization to die out once it had lost the will to carry out its original purpose.

But then, certain events happened one day. The people who had lost their collective goal as Apostles gathered together in a particular bar. As for why... Well, it heralded the coming of turmoil.

"Nicely done getting here, everyone." The first one to speak was the woman who held the title of Defender: Serge. She was dressed like a townie to avoid standing out. Unlike her usual battle garb, her current dress gave her a much more reserved or subdued impression, though her Holy Sword Will was still visible at her side, which ruined all her efforts.

"It was seriously a chore coming all the way here from Abyssland," Bell complained. "And it was even more of a chore to shut my papa up first."

"I mean, of course I'd come, since it was Serge-chan asking. This old man had no other choice!" Nito exclaimed.

"Aaagh...why was I called, though? I've already washed my hands of all of this! I'm honest and pure now!" Estoria shouted in a panic.

Gathered together were Defender Bell, Survivor Nito, and Reviver Estoria. As one might expect, they, too, were disguised: one in a qipao, one in Wild Beast Style dogi, and one in a nun's habit. Leaving aside whether or not they blended in, their attire was at least *varied*. Thanks to that, they did, in fact, stand out at the bar.

"Yep, yep!" Serge was all smiles. "It was a slog, wasn't it? My thanks for agreeing, though! So, let's get right to it... Why don't we get in on that Battle Rally the people at Kelvin's place are planning? We can even keep it a secret from the organizers and take part as surprise guests!"

"Huh? Sounds like a pain," Bell answered flatly.

"Hmm...would they be happy with this old man as a guest? I mean, Serge-chan and the others will be there too, so on the whole, it *would* be a feast for the eyes..." Nito muttered.

"I-I-I-I don't want to stand out; it's just not in me. A surprise? I could never!" Estoria panicked even more. Their replies were all over the place.

"Hah! Hah! Hah! Thanks for responding exactly as I expected you to! But it sounds like there'll be a lot of people involved in this Battle Rally, you get my drift?"

"Again with that... No one here will fall for your smooth talk," Bell muttered.

"Like my beloved Setsuna-chan," said Serge.

"This old man is in!"

"W-Wait, really, Nito?" Bell stammered.

"And the dandy suit of armor, Gerard," Serge added.

"I'll muster as much courage as I can!" Estoria promised.

"Estoria, you idiot!" Bell cried.

"And of course, Sera will be there too," Serge concluded.

"Well, since the other two are already in, I guess there's no choice. I'll participate, since someone needs to supervise all of you," Bell grudgingly agreed.

The former Apostles were even easier to seduce than Serge had expected. At any rate, that was how the emergency quest “The Leftover Apostle Squad” was created.

## **The Remaining Apostles Brainstorm**

Serge and her group, having decided to participate in the Battle Rally that was being held by the Celsius family (without their permission), started to brainstorm their parts in endeavor. Serge, Bell, Nito, and Estoria had assembled in a bar, and the four of them were currently in the middle of a conversation, with serious and quiet looks on their faces.

“It’s great that we’ve all agreed to take part, but the question is how we should entertain Kelvin. Anyone with a good idea, raise their hands!” Serge instructed, her request ending with a lilting tease. She raised her own hand as an example as she looked around at the others. However, the suggestion was too sudden, and no one’s hand went up.

“What? Didn’t you call us here because you already had an idea?” Bell asked incredulously. “You’re seriously planning on making us do the work?”

“Of course! Now that I’ve been released from the duty that I have been attending to for so long, I basically only move as my whims dictate! Head empty and everything!”

“That’s not something you should be saying so proudly...”

“An idea... Huh? This old man doesn’t really understand what this Battle Rally is all about. Would it be correct to assume that it’s basically a festival where we all have some sort of battle against Kelvin-kun?”

“That’s basically it, according to rumors! I don’t really know the details myself, though!”

“Haahh...” Bell sighed, exasperated by how sloppy and careless Serge was. Even though Serge was the one who had called all the former Apostles together, she had only bothered to gather some rumors rather than detailed information.

“Ummm...why don’t we just mount an ambush and beat him up without

bothering to try anything clever? I know it sounds amateurish, but I think that would be the most efficient way to take him down,” Estoria suggested as she hesitantly raised her hand.

“You know...you say that you’ve had a change of heart, but it sounds like the way you think hasn’t changed at all...”

“Th-That’s not true! I was just thinking about how to raise our chances of victory as much as possible! I swear I haven’t been thinking of anything else, especially not how much I want to show mister Gerard my good side or anything like that!”

“Errr, well, I guess we know that Estoria-chan isn’t the type to keep secrets. I guess, in a sense, she’s very honest?”

“Hmm...that sounds like it would be a pretty fun development in its own way. If we were to do that with the people here, I don’t think it would be much of a game. If we’re going to do this, I think we’ll have to make the conditions so that Kelvin at least has a glimmer of a chance to come out on top.”

“Conditions? Like what?” Bell asked.

“No clue. What should we do?”

Serge clearly had no ideas, which caused a vein to pop on Bell’s forehead, indicating the rage she was feeling.

“This is just a hypothetical, but what if we make it so that there is some condition he can fulfill other than defeating us to clear the quest? Or something like that... Then we just have to think of what that condition would be,” Nito suggested.

“A condition, huh? Maybe something like getting away from us? Like how the children at the orphanage play tag,” Estoria followed up.

“That’s right. I think we’re on the right track. In this case, I guess the equivalent would be reaching the next checkpoint? But this old man doesn’t have great memories of fighting retreats...”

“Oh, that sounds like a great idea. I think it’d be fun. Okay, let’s do that!” Serge immediately accepted their suggestion in a singsong voice.

“Whaaaaat...” the other three reacted in unison.

With that, it was decided that their emergency quest would be a game of tag. After that, the Leftover Apostle Squad continued to chat, discussing the killer moves they would need to bust out during the chase.



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Black Summoner: Volume 15

by Doufu Mayoi

Translated by Kevin Chen Edited by Tess Nanavati

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