

An anime-style illustration of two young women in school uniforms running through a grand, dimly lit hall with high ceilings and arches. The girl on the left has short dark hair and a wide, excited smile, with her fist clenched. The girl on the right has brown hair with a blue bow and a more nervous expression. Both are wearing maroon blazers with gold trim and red bows. The floor is a checkered tile pattern, and there are faint, glowing circular patterns in the background.

# BLACK SUMMONER

AUTHOR:  
DOUFU MAYOI

ILLUSTRATIONS BY:  
DAIXT  
KUROGIN (DIGS)

DISTORTED LOVE



18

An anime-style illustration of two young women in school uniforms running through a grand, arched hall. The girl on the left has short dark hair and a wide, excited smile, while the girl on the right has brown hair with a blue bow and a surprised expression. They are both wearing maroon blazers with gold trim and plaid skirts. The background features large stone arches and a checkered floor, with a soft, ethereal light emanating from the distance.

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NOW,  
THE ONLY  
ONE IN THE  
WORLD WHO  
COULD MOVE  
WAS THE  
CASTER.

KELVIN

THE RANK 5 TIME  
MAGIC SPELL ETERNAL  
WAS A GRAND SPELL  
THAT COMPLETELY  
STOPPED TIME ALL  
OVER THE WORLD. IT  
STARTED WITH KELVIN,  
WHO WAS STANDING  
ACROSS FROM DOROTHY,  
BUT SOON THE TUMULT  
OF THE AUDIENCE  
AROUND THEM DIED  
AWAY ALONG WITH THE  
COMMENTARY FROM  
RANLULU AND MILKY.

"ETERNAL."

"DIE  
PEACEFULLY  
IN STOPPED  
TIME"

DOROTHY



A full-page illustration of a muscular woman with blonde hair in large pigtails tied with red bows. She has large, white, feathered angel wings and is wearing a white tank top with a heart-shaped pendant. She has her arms outstretched and a confident expression. The background is a mix of pink and purple clouds with floating pink hearts and white feathers. A bright light emanates from behind her head.

GOLDIANA

GOLDIANA DECLARED WITH A GRUNT AND A HEART MARK BEFORE FLAPPING HER WINGS POWERFULLY. THIS ACTION WAS NEITHER DELICATE NOR GENTLE; IT WAS THE OPPOSITE, VERY FORCEFUL. AND THAT WAS HARDLY SURPRISING. ALTHOUGH HER ANGEL WINGS LOOKED SOFT AT FIRST GLANCE, THEY WERE AN EXTENSION OF HER BODY. IN OTHER WORDS, THEY WERE ALSO MADE UP OF LOVE AND MUSCLES.

“BUTTERFLY’S  
CARESS!  
MMM-  
HMMM!”





# 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!



**DarkMel**

The form DarkMel took when she made a contract with Kelvin while on the verge of death. She's cute, and that's pretty much it.



**Melfina**

The former Goddess of Reincarnation and perennially hungry angel. Currently enjoying the heck out of her angelic life as Kelvin's wife.





**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.

## Academic City of Lumiest



**Art Desire**

Lumiest's principal and a narcissistic dark elf.

## Labyrinthine Country of Pub



**Shin Rainyheart**

The guildmaster of the Adventurer's Guild. The type of berserk lady who assaulted Kelvin at first sight.



**Rami Ryuuh**

Actually the Lightning Dragon King, but she's too busy enjoying her school life as a trendy gal. BFF's with Ri-chan (Rion).



**Dorothy**

Rion's roommate. The type of girl who seems perpetually flustered. Constantly tossed around by the waves caused by all the major characters around her.





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THE DEFENSE OF LEIGANT

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ILLUSTRATOR: DAIXT, KUROGIN (DIGS)



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# Chapter 1: Conclusion and Manifestation

A jet-black halo and wings were the sign that an angel had gone against a god's will and fallen. Horace's appearance was definitely that of a fallen angel, and it exuded a strange and indescribable feeling, like a complicated mix of holiness and evil. That was why his kind were rare, unconventional, and overwhelmingly strong.

In front of such a delectable feast, Paul's and Sinjeel's fighting spirit skyrocketed. Still, they were aiming to be rational battle junkies. So, following Kelvin's teachings, they accepted the fight as set in stone and knew that they needed to at least get Horace to tell them what they needed to know.

"Fallen angel? Weren't you a teacher at this school? Well, which one is it?!" Paul asked angrily.

"And just suddenly saying that you're here to bring Lady DarkMel back would only confuse her," Sinjeel added. "At least give the minimum amount of information necessary; I thought you were a gentleman. Is that only in looks?"

"Hm." Horace considered their words for a moment, then said, "I thought you would attack without giving me a chance to speak, but it seems you two are surprisingly levelheaded. Of course, that doesn't change the fact that this is a waste of time. Now, come with me, Comrade DarkMel."

"Hey!" shouted her two bodyguards.

The pair had tried to draw out some information while provoking the fight, but Horace ignored them, acting as though having anything to do with them would be a waste of time.

It seemed like only DarkMel existed to him now, so he spoke to her with one-sided kindness. "Fallen angel DarkMel, the actions you took were truly wonderful. It wouldn't be going too far to say that the revival of our absolute deity, Addams-sama, is all thanks to your achievements. The awoken archangels will surely welcome you warmly."



“Um...absolute deity? Uh, er...I really don't know what you're talking about, Instructor Horace. Are you sure you aren't, um...mistaking me for someone else?” DarkMel asked. She was confused after being told so many absurd things out of nowhere. She had no clue what Horace was talking about. Even so, she desperately tried to think of why he would say such things to her, though she came up with nothing.

Horace, however, seemed confused too. “Surely there is no need to put on an act anymore, Comrade DarkMel?” Her flustered manner was starting to sow doubts within him.

“I'm not...acting...” she replied.

“That's right, the little lady is the little lady!” Paul shouted. “She's not anything more or less, you psycho!”

“Could it be? Is there something wrong with your memories?” Horace asked. “Is that even possible? No, it can't be...but—”

“This bastard!” Paul interrupted him.

Horace had continued his policy of ignoring the pair as he started muttering to himself, clearly trying to piece something together. It was quite obvious what he was doing by now.

“But no matter what state your memory is in, my duty is to bring you with me,” he concluded. “I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't make it hard for me, if possible.”

“You idiot, did you really think we would listen to you, given how this has been going?” Paul sneered.

“Yes, well, I had to ask,” Horace said. Suddenly, he snapped his fingers.

Paul and Sinjeel, wondering what that was about, kept their eyes peeled, and they heard footsteps. These sounds didn't belong to just one or two people but a number in the double digits. An entire crowd. Eventually, the source became clear: people wearing Lumiest's uniform.

“Is... Are those students from Dorm Marle?” DarkMel asked.

“Yes, we are,” one of them affirmed. “If you don't go with Instructor Horace,



first-year DarkMel, we will be killed by him. Please, adventurers, don't make a fuss and just let this go. If you do, no one has to die. Right?"

"N-Nooo..." DarkMel muttered as the students moved to surround the three of them.

One of the students replied to her with a bright smile, declaring that they were hostages. It was strange to see that attitude in such a situation. Seeing them like that must have been a shock to DarkMel, as she paled and covered her mouth with her hands.

"I'd love to say that they're being manipulated, but that doesn't seem to be the case. They're acting naturally," Sinjeel said.

"Spouting a line like that with a smile means they're acting anything but naturally," Paul scoffed. "Are you bastards friends of his?"

"No, we aren't. We are Instructor Horace's students, and his hostages. Nothing more and nothing less." This time, a different student had spoken up, but with the same smile. As Sinjeel had noted, the way they acted didn't indicate that they were being manipulated using charm or something similar. However, that just made the scene even creepier to the trio. Voluntarily becoming hostages, their manner of speech... All of that came together to be extremely unsettling.

"You can feel free to ignore them and fight me," Horace warned the bodyguards. "Or you can prioritize their lives and give me Comrade DarkMel. If you choose the latter, I can guarantee the lives of these Marle students."

"Hah! And you expect us to just trust you?" Paul said snidely.

"Yes, I do," Horace replied. "So, what will you do? I don't mind either way, though I don't recommend waiting for outside reinforcements. This area is under my jurisdiction, which means I already have a barrier around it to mark it as such. Most importantly, I don't want to waste time, so I'd like you to make a decision quickly. If you keep me waiting too long, I'll start relieving students of their heads to alleviate my boredom."

"You! Damn! Bastard!" Paul gnashed his teeth.

"You're supposed to be an angel, aren't you? At least, sort of? Are you



seriously allowed to do something like this? This is more fitting of a demon,” Sinjeel complained.

“Yes, of course I am. So, what is your answer? I think it’s about time for the first victim,” Horace declared mercilessly as he approached a nearby female student and put his hand around her neck. If they didn’t come up with an answer within the next few seconds, her head would likely end up on the floor. Horace’s dispassionate attitude easily convinced the trio that he was cruel enough to make such a terrible future a reality.

“Instructor Horace...” Surprisingly, DarkMel was the one to speak up, breaking that unbearable tension.

“Yes, what is it?” the man asked in reply.

Unlike his attitude towards Paul and Sinjeel, which was wholly apathetic, Horace’s attitude towards DarkMel was somewhat soft, probably because she was also a fallen angel.

“You said earlier that there is a barrier erected around this area. Does that mean you did something to the stage as well? For example, switching the barrier to a different one to not allow papa onto it?” DarkMel asked.

“Oho, so you noticed.” Horace seemed impressed. “Yes, I did exactly that. I have confirmed that Grim Reaper Kelvin gains godlike power if you are near him. Even we wouldn’t want to encounter him in that state. We have sealed off the stage with the strongest barrier available to us.”

“I see. Thank you,” DarkMel replied.

“You’re welcome.”

That only drew grunts of confusion from Paul and Sinjeel. They were the first ones to get a slight feeling that something was off. Even though DarkMel was speaking and sounding as she normally did, their instincts told them that something was wrong.

“Please, get back, you two,” DarkMel said. “Everything will be solved as long as I step forward.”

“Hah! Never!” Paul declared.



“Sacrificing yourself would be a foolish act, Lady DarkMel. Please, don’t even consider it. I will use my brilliant mind to think of a way to solve this si—” Sinjeel was interrupted.

“Did you not hear me? I told you two to get back,” she said with more force.

That elicited noises of shock as the men’s doubts turned into certainty. In unison, they sprang into action before either could register a conscious plan. As DarkMel wished, they jumped far back and created an abundance of space between them and her.

*Wha... What is this? This overwhelming sense of presence that won’t allow me to say no?! Paul thought, bewildered. Did the little lady really just say that?!*

*This isn’t merely in the dimension of just strong, or stronger! Sinjeel thought in a panic. Are we, pupils of Master Kelvin, seriously terrified from the bottom of our hearts? Terrified...of her? No! No way!*

Their brains finally caught up, spewing a mountain of questions. But the situation was changing moment by moment, and then DarkMel had manifested a black halo and black wings. Paul and Sinjeel had no idea when she had revealed such appendages. In fact, not even Horace had been able to see the change as it happened.

Horace’s laughter slowly built up to a roar. “Please, Comrade DarkMel, you caused me some unnecessary worry there. But you have enough power that I can’t even see your depths; it’s enough to completely overwhelm me! Hmm, so you really were acting. My word, you *are* a mischievous one. But it seems you’ve made your choice. Allow me to express my utmost respect for you, having chosen to walk the same path—”

“You seem to be having some kind of misunderstanding,” DarkMel said. “I said that everything would be solved once I stepped forward, didn’t I?”

Horace’s sight was then filled with the darkness of countless tentacles that had suddenly manifested.



The mysterious tentacles that suddenly appeared in front of Horace approached him at blinding speed. Having sensed the absurd danger they

posed, he immediately took evasive action. It was close—just a bit closer and the tentacles would have grazed him. He was extremely lucky that the ceiling above them was tall enough that he had space to run to, and he had already manifested his black wings so that they could be used at any time.

“Oh my, you dodged?” DarkMel observed. “I suppose I should assume I’m not yet used to this power. Or maybe I should be impressed by how well I’m already using it? Well, whatever. I managed to secure the hostages, so I’m happy with the result.”

“Ugh, agh...”

“Urgh, aahhhh...”

The Marle dorm students who had been left behind were all swallowed up by the wave of tentacles, and pained voices that could barely be classified as screams could be heard. It didn’t look like they were taking damage, but they had been completely drained of consciousness.

From his vantage point in the air, Horace could see what was happening to his students and also grasp the full scope of the tentacles. The pitch-black appendages were growing out from under DarkMel’s skirt—called Agnos Pasma—and spreading out along the ground in all directions. On top of that, the area it was affecting was absurd. It covered the ground of the school entirely, as far as Horace could see.

“What... What is this sinister power?!” he muttered.

“Sinister? How rude,” DarkMel responded. “As you can see, Abyss Dagon is a combined Blue and Black Magic spell, and all it does is spawn an infinite number of tentacles. They *do* have the property of absorbing all the MP of anyone they touch, but that’s just a small detail. Anyway, now you won’t be able to force the students to commit suicide.”

The tentacles were gradually stretching upwards from the ground, seeking new prey. Of course, they were all stretching slowly towards Horace, who was the only one in the air.

“Urghh, they’re so slimy! But...it doesn’t seem to be causing harm to us,” Sinjeel said.



“Uh, hey, little lady! Just to confirm, you’re our friend, right?! Also, what is this power?!” Paul yelled.

Though they couldn’t be seen, buried as they were under the sea of tentacles, Paul and Sinjeel were still present. Unlike the students, they weren’t being drained and were still fully conscious.

“Of course I am,” DarkMel replied. “I don’t really want to give an explanation in front of our enemy, but...fine. It’s not like he’s worth much.”

“What?!” Horace exclaimed, indignant.

Normally, DarkMel would never mock her opponent. That alone was shocking, but her abnormal strength was even more so. She began her explanation.

“My Unique Skill, Monster Parent, makes papa the strongest he’s ever been as long as I’m watching him. As Instructor Horace said earlier, that’s why he’s wary of papa and took steps to separate him from us using a barrier. Isn’t that right? Yes, that plan was sound. A correct choice. Or it would have been if not for Monster Parent’s other use.”

“Other use?” Horace echoed, shocked and confused.

“Indeed!” DarkMel confirmed in a singsong voice. “It has another effect in the complete opposite circumstance. In short, it occurs when my papa cannot sense me at all. Then, my Unique Skill returns me to my strongest state. I suppose you could call it rapid pseudo-growth. It also returns my personality to the way it was, though, which is a bit of a problem. Of course, my strongest state—well, I guess you don’t need me to tell you when that was. It seems you’ve figured it out already.”

Horace let out a strangled noise of surprise. “So it wasn’t an act, and you have no intention of joining us to walk the same path. Then why did you help us?”

“Are you talking about the actions of my previous self? I’ll tell you now, that DarkMel is already dead. I’ve just temporarily regained my former strength thanks to a special ability. Of course, I love my papa just as much as the other me did, so I think I can make a good guess. I bet it’s so that, in case I was beaten, there would be another present left for papa. It makes sense for the

other me to have prepared a parting gift. It'd be terrible if papa was bored because he didn't have anyone to compete with, after all."

"A...parting gift?!" Horace repeated, dumbfounded.

"Yes indeed!" DarkMel once again confirmed in the same lilting voice. "Of course, that doesn't mean you specifically, Instructor Horace. It would be far too arrogant of you to assume that. I'm talking about the powers backing you. Probably an archangel or some sort of evil deity, right?"

DarkMel gazed, satisfied, at Horace, who was shaking with rage. Behind her, Paul and Sinjeel could only shake in fear at her words and actions.

"Whew, I think this conversation's gone on a little too long. Oh, I don't recommend trying to stall for outside support, okay? I'm sure you're aiming to try to escape, or at least get this information to your friends somehow, but I'm not nearly as kind as my mama. Look, I've long since cut off all connection with the outside," DarkMel said, spreading both her arms as sounds not unlike glass cracking and shattering could be heard around her.

Horace turned his gaze to their surroundings and saw that everything had been dyed black, even the ceiling.

"A pitch-black barrier?!" he cried in shock.

"Close, but not quite," DarkMel corrected him. "Rect Locus isn't a spell that creates a barrier. It would be more accurate to say that it hollows out a space and replaces it with a haphazard, tiny world. I'll warn you now, it would be better not to touch this black world. The very concept of it is extremely unstable, so even I don't know if it can maintain your kind's existence. But if you still want to try to get out, you're free to ignore my advice and go for it. Watching what happens would be interesting."

"Uh, um...does that mean it's dangerous for us to touch it too?" Sinjeel asked.

"It does, yes. Please stay there quietly," DarkMel replied.

Paul and Sinjeel shut up and did as they were told, resolving to wait for it all to be over.

"What?! The creation of an entire world?! That's absurd! There's no way you



would be able to accomplish such a godlike feat. You're not even the Goddess of Reincarnation anymore!" Horace yelled.

"I told you already, as I am now, I have the powers of a goddess. Well, sorry, I misspoke. Erm, more importantly... Ah, there." DarkMel seemed to be looking for something, and after a moment, one of her tentacles pulled up a bound student.

"Eeeeeek!" the student yelped before shouting in a heavy, nervous stutter, "What's going on?!"

"Aha, I see. So one was left unaffected. Looks to be very confused. It seems your strange brainwashing has worn off. If it wore off after the connection to the outside was severed, then that means... Right, the one who brainwashed them isn't you," DarkMel concluded.





She then pointed sharply at Horace. At the same time, the tentacles drained the screaming, confused student, who flopped lifelessly like an empty husk.

“I’m curious about who your friends are, but papa and the others can handle them,” DarkMel continued. “Now then, what should I do with you, Instructor Horace? Would you like to bravely face me and have all the information you possess sucked out of you? Or would you like to wisely attempt an escape but still get captured by me? Indeed, no matter which option you choose, I will respect it.”

“You shouldn’t underestimate me so,” Horace spat. “I am Horace Ascade, an apostle of the true god! Right here and now, I will slice apart the evil in front of me!” He spread his black wings to their full length and charged at DarkMel.

“Hee hee! So foolish!” DarkMel giggled. “Oh my, I misspoke again.”



Nothing escaped the area enveloped by Rect Locus, not even loud shouts that were actually more like screams. It was unclear whose voice it was, but there was no chance that it would be heard outside. And so, we’ll move along to the arena.

“Hello, DarkMel-san. You are representing Lumiest in this round, correct? DarkMel-saaan? It’s time, so please make your way to the stage!” Ranlulu said. “Huh, that’s weird. It’s time for the final round, but DarkMel-san isn’t showing herself. Ah! Maybe this is some sort of surprise?!”

“A surprise that the administrators of the event don’t even know about? You must be joking. At the moment, we are looking into her whereabouts, so please wait for the match to start,” Milky stated.

A small fuss was being kicked up in the event venue because DarkMel had not yet appeared onstage. As the announcers said, the administrators had finally started looking into what was going on, so there was no news yet.

“That’s weird. Unlike Mel, DarkMel is punctual, so she shouldn’t be late to such a big event...” Kelvin muttered to himself, trailing off as his mind started spinning with possibilities. Then, he gasped. “Wait! That can’t be! Has some sort of incident happened?! Was she kidnapped?! Does her papa need to go help

her?!”

Kelvin had come onstage first as the final round was about to start, but now his doting tendencies had, of course, started to show. Normally, this would be when his friends laughed uproariously, mocking him for being so delusional. But, as luck would have it, he was actually partially correct in this case, though whether she needed help was something only a goddess would know.

Kelvin didn't know, of course, so he was on the verge of running off the stage and racing through the academy to look for her. However, just as he was about to apply Sonic Acceleration to himself and run off, someone came onstage.

“Excuse me.” The figure happened to lock eyes with Kelvin as they entered with a nonchalant greeting. There was no emotion behind those words, no hostility or murderous intent. It was just a pleasantry—a natural, daily utterance by almost everyone.

The figure looked to be a female student from Lumiest, since she was wearing the same uniform as Rion. Generally, her features were nondescript, as if she could blend in anywhere. Even so, Kelvin felt the need to set aside his thoughts of DarkMel for the moment and concentrate on her. His perception as a longtime battle junkie told him that this seemingly normal girl would be absolutely *delectable* to fight. Just laying eyes on her gave him a hunger for combat, and his mouth was watering.

At his level of strength, the average Rank S monster wasn't much more than a snack to Kelvin, but all five of his battle junkie senses *thirsted* to fight this newcomer. She looked normal, but she wasn't. There was no way he wouldn't be interested in a student who gave such a mismatched impression. Naturally, a wonderful smile formed on his face, and by the time he noticed, he was already speaking.

“Who're you? What's your name? What do you want? Where do you live? Actually, wait, how about fighting me first?”

He was asking questions, but really they were closer to pickup lines as he invited the girl to fight. However, even after being hit by his battle junkie smile and invitation, her expression didn't change.

“I have come as DarkMel's standin,” she said. “My name is Dorothy. I'm in the



same dorm room as Rion-san, which makes me her roommate. What I want is to defeat you, Kelvin-san, so I will happily take you up on your invitation. Lumiest's victory is riding on the outcome of this, after all."

The mysterious student who appeared before Kelvin was, shockingly, Rion's friend Dorothy. Kelvin's smile didn't waver, but the reaction from everyone else was pronounced.

"What?! Thee-chan?!" Rami shouted in surprise.

"What?" Bell let out.

"Huh? We're substituting fighters?" Rion asked.

"No, I haven't heard anything to that effect..." Graham muttered.

Everyone who was watching from Lumiest's waiting room made surprised comments in response to the unexpected twist. It was understandable, since from their perspective, Dorothy's appearance had come out of nowhere.

*Rion's friend? Kelvin thought. That means she's a student at Lumiest, just as she looks. She said she was Rion's roommate, so she should be in the same school year... Wait, the same school year?! Wow, Lumiest! I had no idea you were still hiding some silver bullets! As expected of my little sister, she's got a great eye for schools. I'd love to become lifelong friends with someone this strong. Actually, please, become my friend!*

Meanwhile, Kelvin, having met Dorothy for the first time, and not knowing what was going on behind the scenes, assumed that she was a surprise fighter and therefore believed that she really was just a substitute for DarkMel. Sadly, that was the fault of a battle junkie's nature—or should he be pitied as a fool?

Still, even if she was able to trick the foolishly straightforward Grim Reaper, the administration considered this to be an unforeseen occurrence. Unsurprisingly, they tried to put a stop to it.

"What are you thinking, Dorothy-san? You're not a member of the exhibition team. Get off the stage this instant," Milky said in a quiet tone. As the person in charge of the competition, she couldn't allow this selfishness from a random student.

“I’m sorry, Instructor Milky, but I cannot obey your order. I am already in control of this area,” Dorothy replied.

“What did you say?” Milky reacted with confusion.

Dorothy snapped her fingers, and the barrier covering Kelvin and the others changed into something else entirely. It was now far stronger and blocked the summoning of Followers as well as telepathic communication. This ultimate purple barrier was made to completely counter a Summoner’s strengths.

*Hmmm? This color, and that behavior... Could it be?* Kelvin automatically understood what kind of barrier it was the moment he saw it. Why? Because it was familiar to him. There was someone beyond the stage who understood too, for the same reason.

“That’s...from way back...” Bell muttered.

“Bell-chan?” Rion prompted, concerned.

Bell, the former Apostle, had used that same barrier in the past, so she also immediately recognized it for what it was, just like Kelvin, who she had used it on once before.

::That purple color... It’s the barrier Creator made. Remember? The one Ange and I used when she was going to assassinate Kelvin,:: Bell informed Rion through the Network.

::You mean from the Beast King Festival?:: Rion replied.

::Yes. But why is it being used here? I gave the details of the Summoner Killer to Kelvin and the others to help them take down Controller, but no one else should know about it. Wait, we need to destroy it before anything else.::

::Um...I never saw it directly, but didn’t Sera-nee break the barrier last time?::

::Yes, she did. Sister Sera destroyed it with magnificence and grace. Normally it’d be impossible to wreck it so quickly, so she must have used Blood Dominion. Even though we were enemies at the time, I was impressed by her incredible initiative,:: Bell finished with a proud noise and a puff of her chest.

*Ah, that noise just now kind of reminds me of Sera-nee,* Rion couldn’t help but think, even though she knew the situation was too serious to allow for such

distractions.

::The barrier is stupid tough and specially made to allow only magic to pass through, so Kelvin's scythe won't be able to break it. It also blocks Summoning and telepathy, so in essence, it's an anti-Kelvin barrier,:: Bell continued.

::But...doesn't that mean this is an emergency?! We need to hurry and tell Kel-nii about this!:: Rion cried.

::There's no need. I'm sure that idiot already knows. He's a stupid battle junkie, after all.::

::Ah, right.:: Rion was instantly convinced. In a sense, that showed how much she trusted Kelvin. ::Then we need to hurry and contact Sera-nee,:: she suggested, immediately taking action. ::Can you hear me, Sera-nee? Hey, Sera-nee?:: Rion sent several telepathic messages to Sera, but wasn't getting any answer. She found that strange, so she persisted.

Finally, a reply came. ::Uurrghh...:: The answer was quiet and weak.

::Sera-nee, are you okay?!:: Rion asked, alarmed. She panicked, thinking that something might have happened to Sera and the others.

But the next thing Sera sent to Rion in the midst of her panic was ::We...got too excited and ate too much... I can't...move... Grfhh...::

It was a declaration that they'd eaten too much and had thrown in the towel. Apparently, they had gone to enjoy a tour of the stalls after subduing the doting father and grandparent. It seemed that Sera, who could match Melfina in terms of battle strength, only had an average-sized stomach.

::As expected, sister Sera, I see you're enjoying the festival to its fullest. That makes me proud as a student of Lumiest,:: Bell told her. She was very magnanimous when her sister was involved.



"Thee-chan, why?" Rion asked aloud.

The matter of the barrier aside, details of this entire affair were still shrouded in mystery. Why was Dorothy here? Why was she powerful enough to make Kelvin want to fight her? Rion, her friend and roommate, was especially



confused by this. She had a hard time believing what she was seeing. And no matter the details of how it had happened, she didn't know how she should react, seeing her big brother Kelvin so happy.

*I know I went with the flow of the conversation and agreed to try and do something about the barrier, but Bell was right. Kel-nii probably knows all this already, and he's looking like he's having so much fun. Maybe we actually shouldn't interfere? I'm not sure why, but I can't even tell how powerful Thee-chan is right now. Uurghh!*

What should she prioritize? The safety of her big brother? Allowing him to do the thing he lived for (battle)? Unveiling the true identity of her friend? Although Rion was worrying a lot, she'd already had her answer from the start.

"Can you leave this to me, Bell-chan? You don't need to break the barrier; just make sure that everyone in the venue is safe!"

"You don't think we should go save him?" Bell asked.

"Nope. It would be a different matter if Kel-nii asked us to, but right now he looks like he's having fun."

Bell sighed. "Right. Man, that weirdo is so lucky to be surrounded by people who understand him." She instantly understood Rion's thinking. She herself was pretty understanding of the Celsius family, despite her words about them. "So, what will you do, Rion? If you're going to leave the venue to me, does that mean you're heading somewhere else?"

"I'll look for DarkMel," Rion told her. "Her safety is the biggest obstacle to Kel-nii being able to relax and concentrate on the fight in front of him!"

"Heh, you really think of your brother a lot. What about Dorothy?"

"Yeah, Thee-chan's fine too! She looks super strong, enough that I don't have to worry about her!" Rion replied.

*Jeez, this battle-crazed family,* Bell thought as she saw Rion run off, leaving behind sparking electricity.

"Wait! Waiiit! I'll help too, Ri-chaaan!" the Lightning Dragon King, Rami, called out as she turned into lightning and chased after the teen.

If the two of them were to split up and search the academy at the speed of lightning, they would probably find DarkMel right away.

“Hm, it sounds like we are in an emergency,” Graham noted. “What should I do, Bell-dono? As a fellow student, I would like to help.”

“Hm? Then go supply the stage with magic so it doesn’t break,” Bell told him. “Even if the barrier changes, the stage won’t, I’m pretty sure.”

“Huh? We are going to repair the stage rather than break it?” Graham asked.

“Yes, exactly. Dorothy may be an unknown factor, but she entered the cage of her own free will. We can’t allow her to do as she pleases and possibly put the audience in danger, can we?” Bell reasoned.

“Ohhh, I see! As expected of our valedictorian, Bell-dono! I will go right away!” Graham nodded enthusiastically and rushed off to supply the stage with magic.

“Okay...I don’t know how crazy this fight is going to get, but this should hold things for now,” Bell muttered to herself once she was left alone in the waiting room, nodding in satisfaction.

Rion and Rami had gone to look for DarkMel, Graham was going to supply the stage with magic, and Art had disappeared after his match. At the moment, she was completely alone.

“I suppose I’ll just take it easy here and observe. After all, I’ll still be doing as Rion said and making sure no one is in danger,” she told herself before retrieving a swimsuit, a beach chair, a small table, a glass of southern fruit juice, and fries from her mini Clotho clone. That allowed her to relax as if she were on vacation. And to complete the look, she even put on a pair of sunglasses.





“Heh heh! According to sister Sera, when it’s time to play, play hard, and when it’s time to rest, rest easy. And this is the ultimate way to rest and relax, as I learned from her! I can’t do this anywhere near papa since he won’t shut up about it, and I have to act like an honors student at this academy, so I’ve never been able to find the right time to try it out until now. But while everyone else is in a panic and too busy with their own stuff, it’s the perfect chance. Plus, I’ve got some good entertainment going on right in front of me!”

Bell finished off her speech to herself with an uncharacteristic singsong giggle. She had quickly changed into the swimsuit and was now sipping her fruit juice through a straw, looking like she was in the middle of a tropical vacation. For that moment, Bell was a girl who loved and respected her big sister so much that she wanted to imitate everything she did. Still, that raised the question: why now? To be fair, it wasn’t as though Bell wasn’t thinking about what was going on around her.

“I can’t imagine the fighting idiot that managed to bring down the Black Goddess would lose to someone like this, so there shouldn’t be a need for me to do anything. I *am* curious about why she used this event to show herself, but my intuition is saying that it’ll all work out, so whatever. If things start looking hopeless, I’ll step in, but...I’m sure the principal and Seer disappeared to go put out the fires in the background, so everything should be fine. Now then, let’s see how well Dorothy can fight.” Lastly, Bell tied it all up with, “Having a day off without papa and Sebasdel around is just the best!”

The mini Clotho clone by her side watched over her with a look that said, “I don’t know any details, but you have it hard, don’t you?”



While the members of the Lumiest team (other than Bell) were moving around in a hurry, Kelvin had discovered a certain message. Marks that looked like they had been scorched into the wall with high heat had been left in a spot that was hidden to everybody else.

*We’ll go look for DarkMel, so concentrate on your fight!*

It had been left by Rion, who’d written it using lightning as she dashed off at high speed. Because she’d left at a speed only visible to Rank S adventurers like

Kelvin or people with commensurate strength, the civilians in the audience wondered if they really had seen a bright flash.

*A message from Rion, huh? Still, she's very skilled, to be able to leave a message with lightning like that. I already knew something was up, though; that's not a surprise to me. Something happened. What the announcer was saying was pretty suspicious, after all. I don't know who this girl is, but if she did something to DarkMel, I won't forgive her! But...this does mean I can concentrate on the fight thanks to Rion.*

Kelvin's desire to fight was rising, but he was also worried about where DarkMel had gone, so he was truly relieved to see Rion's message. Someone he trusted, a member of his family, was telling him things would be fine and to concentrate on the fight. Kelvin might have been a doting fool, but he also trusted his family from the bottom of his heart. That was why he immediately turned his entire attention to his opponent, Dorothy.

"For now, if I win, I'll have you spit out everything you know. You're good with that, right?" he asked her.

Dorothy flashed him a noncommittal smile as she produced a weapon from thin air. The staff was large enough to rival Kelvin's Black Staff, and she held it in her right hand while a book that was emitting sinister magic power floated to her left.

"I don't mind," she replied. "It's not like you'll win, anyway. Oh, and by the way, several people in this venue are hostages under my control. I recommend you don't try anything stupid."

"Hostages? Hah, I don't care about that. Not at all."

"What?" Dorothy let out after a stunned pause. Kelvin's indifferent response caused her expression to change for the first time.

"Anyway, let's do this. Like, right now. The fight won't wait for you to be ready, you know! Freshness is key!" Kelvin shouted.

Dorothy took a moment to collect her thoughts before saying, "Um...do you understand what I said? If you move, a lot of people will die."

"Sure, but if I don't move, I'll be the one to die, right? So obviously I'll move.

Anybody would. And if I'm going to move anyway, it'd be better to fight as hard as I can. I'm sure someone else will take care of the hostages. Seriously, though, you saved me! I was worrying so much about what I would do if I had to fight DarkMel. I mean, I'm her papa, you know?!"

Dorothy had no response to the reply that went above and beyond her expectations.

"Now then, I'm done with the appetizer. Can we start the main course now? You're not an actual member of the Lumiest team, so I don't need to wait for the signal, do I?" Kelvin asked.

Now that things had come to this, it seemed that both sides were consenting to fight. It was only natural that things kicked off an instant later.

"I knew it! You don't understand the situation you're in. Okay, I'll make someone an example so you *do* understand!" Dorothy shouted before reaching for the book that was floating by her side. Something radiating hostility appeared close in front of her. It was impossible to tell whether she had detected this movement from her quiet voice and unchanging expression. In a show of seemingly unnatural quick-wittedness, she made a great leap backwards. Once she landed on the other side of the stage, the Grim Reaper's scythe came down on her former position.

"Oh, you dodged easily," Kelvin noted.

The scythe had buried itself deep in the stage. Given the arena's special property of instantly repairing itself, if someone were to carelessly stab their weapon into it, it would normally get stuck inside (although it would also normally be too hard for anyone to stab a weapon into it in the first place). However, Kelvin easily withdrew his scythe in a clean arc. It didn't look like he had to put any effort into it at all, but the weapon passed through the stage like it were made of butter as it swung upwards in a crescent.

"Whoa there! Kelvin-san and Dorothy-san have started to fight without waiting for any sort of signal! What should I do here?! Personally I'd like to just continue commentating the fight, but the look Instructor Milky is giving me is so scaaaary! Um...what should I do?" Ramlulu asked fearfully.

Milky hadn't dropped her usual smile, but it was clear from the veins popping



out of her forehead that she was mad. DarkMel, a student from her dorm, one whom she was especially fond of, was missing. Not only that, but the girl's role in the final fight of the exhibition match had been taken. Of course Milky was angry. Depending on what happened next, it was possible that the academy's reputation could be ruined.

Still, Ran had tried to get into the commentary energetically, at least at the beginning, even with such a scary presence beside her. It took a lot of guts.

"I suppose it's fine? We can just say that this development was planned from the start, and that Dorothy-kun is the true final member of the team. That should let us save at least some face," a voice from behind them said without warning.

Ranlulu shouted out in surprise. It was Art, and his sudden shiny, golden appearance sent her heart pounding. That, combined with Milky being on the verge of exploding, meant that the day was proving to be very hard on the poor girl's intestinal tract.

However, her cry of surprise wasn't blasted to the rest of the venue as part of the commentary. Just as Art had called out to them, the switch for the broadcast had been flipped off.

"Are you serious, Principal Art?" Milky demanded. "Did that stupid outfit sap your brains out or something? We've got more than our fair share of fools already with Instructor Boyle!"

Art laughed heartily. "I see your tongue is more barbed than usual today. You look quite angry too. Take it a little easier on Instructor Boyle, will you? He may be pompous, but he works hard for this academy in his own way. Also, I'm serious. If the knowledge that this is some unforeseen trouble spreads, trust in Lumiest will drop through the floor. We will have Dorothy, who is causing this trouble, take responsibility for this later. But we still don't know why she took to the stage at this time. Won't you feel sorry for her if she's being controlled by someone else? It's best to solve this quietly for the moment."

"It seems like you were doing something in the background with the director of the Adventurer's Guild. Does this have to do with whatever that was?" Milky asked.

“Well, let’s just say it does,” answered Art. “I can’t reveal anything much at the moment, but Shin has captured several suspicious people. I’m sure they aren’t unrelated to the trouble that’s happening right now. Oh, and you can stop worrying about DarkMel. I just got word that Rion-kun and Rami-kun found her. It seems her life is not in danger, though, there was damage in other ways...”

“What do you mean by that?” Milky asked.

“Oh, nothing. Just talking to myself. Don’t worry about it right now.” Art was obviously avoiding eye contact as he answered.

Seeing that, Milky heaved a sigh and said, “I see. I suppose I just have to accept it. But now DarkMel-san won’t be able to participate in the match. She’ll get some sort of compensation for that, won’t she?”

“Of course,” Art assured her. “If you like, we can lock her in as the final slot for next year’s exhibition right now. Oh, sorry, our guests are waiting. Instructor Milky, Ranlulu-kun, please allow me to personally explain things to the public.”

The broadcasting switch was flipped back on, and the two women suddenly noticed that Art had brought his own mic as he raised a golden one to his mouth. “Hi, mic test, mic test... Hello! This is your principal, Art. I apologize for suddenly stopping the commentary. I’m sure most of you are bewildered by this unexpected development for the final bout. Am I right? But don’t worry. To tell you the truth, this was a surprise that I prepared...”

With an explanation from the principal himself, the audience regained their calm. The same went for the caravan outside of the city. The crowd that was watching the broadcast had gone wild, and now many voices of relief were raised.

“Oh, so that little girl wasn’t actually part of the team.”

“Of course not. It’s amazing that she managed to get into the academy at her age; there’s no way she’d have the strength to be chosen for the exhibition team too. I saw through the ruse right away, of course.”

“I did too! In the first place, it’d just be weird to have a father and daughter fight each other in the final round! They’d raise suspicions that the girl got in

with some kind of cheating or backroom deal! Like a Rank S adventurer throwing his weight around to force them to accept her or something.”

The shared relief seemed to have loosened some lips.

“Ah, agh...aahhh!”

“Huh? Hey, what’s wrong? You look like you’ve seen a demon.”

“Buh...b-b-b-behind you! Behind yooouuu!”

“What? Behind me? What’s behinngraaaaaggghh?!”

When the man turned around, he came face-to-face with a real demon and a demonic suit of armor. Their rude remarks had reached the doting duo who had been disabled at the edge of the caravan, instantly reviving them. What happened to the two conversing men after that remains unknown.

As for Kelvin, whose official opponent had now been set in stone...

“Ha ha ha! Those are some good reflexes! I’m attacking at a speed where Paul-kun, Sinjeel-kun, and the others would find it impossible to dodge, but you’re evading easily! Your looks and weapon make you seem like a mage, but the way you move is like a combat veteran! Huh, does that book follow you on its own?! Wow, that’s convenient!” Kelvin shouted enthusiastically.

“You sure talk a lot during a fight. Didn’t you say you didn’t need any more appetizers?” Dorothy replied.

“Hah, sorry! I was just waiting for so long. I think I was hungrier than expected!”

Kelvin had been fighting this whole time, disregarding Art’s explanation. He swung his scythe, mainly attacking at close quarters for the moment.

“Still, I can’t help but get a weird feeling while fighting you. Your speed... You accelerate and slow down way too fast. It’s weird. I wonder what’s up with that?”

Dorothy declined to respond. The weird feeling Kelvin mentioned was due to the speed at which she traveled while dodging his attacks. Her ability to sense danger and dodge were both plenty good. But to Kelvin, who had experienced many battles with many people, she sometimes moved in a very unnatural way,



almost as if she were fast-forwarding. Because he was using his favorite Green Magic spell, Sonic Acceleration, the difference in how they accelerated stood out all the more.

“Hey, come on, how about you show me what your ability is now instead of just dodging all the time?” Kelvin taunted. “Or what? Are you going to reach for your book like you tried to before? I’m good either way. Come on, come on, come on!”

As always, the Grim Reaper was in perfect form.

Because the first through fourth bouts of the match had been filled with opponents he’d have given an arm and a leg to fight, Kelvin, having finally been released from his forced waiting period, was like a runaway train. He couldn’t stop, and although he still did have some modicum of reason left within him, it was being used to figure out how to enjoy this fight as much as possible, so its presence wasn’t making much of a difference. With such a tasty-looking treat (Dorothy) dangling in front of him, the battle junkie’s brakes had been tossed aside, disregarded as useless.

“Obsidian Fillet!” Kelvin shouted, causing Dorothy to let out an alarmed noise.

The high-speed invocation resulted in a Rank S Green Magic spell that turned the entire battlefield into giant obsidian blades. The stage, which had up until now maintained a uniform smoothness through its auto-repair ability, suddenly changed colors and grew jagged, becoming a mass of large, sharp blades that pointed to the sky. The only exception was the spot where Kelvin was standing. These brutal blades were not only large, but numerous as well, and because they’d been spontaneously created, they would have skewered anyone standing above them upon manifesting. There was no room between the sharp edges for a person to escape, so anyone standing on the stage would no doubt have been cut to ribbons.

“So, you can react to attacks coming from blind angles too. You’ve got some good detection skills,” Kelvin noted.

“Thanks for the flattery. It doesn’t make me happy at all. I see you have a more ridiculous amount of MP than even the rumors say,” Dorothy replied. She had not taken any damage, despite the apparent impossibility of such a feat. As

Kelvin had said, she had jumped high into the air faster than the swords had manifested.

“But what were you planning to do after jumping? Radiance Crossfire!” Kelvin shouted.

“Crush you underfoot,” Dorothy replied before declaring her own attack: “Decadence.”

As soon as Kelvin noticed that she had jumped into the air, he fired a series of ten spears of light from his fingertips. They flew towards their target at light speed. Meanwhile, Dorothy tried to plunge herself back into the mass of blades she had just dodged. Who knew what was going on in her head?

She accelerated unnaturally from her position in midair straight downwards, then was swallowed up in the wave of blades, disappearing from sight. For a moment, the Radiance Crossfire bolts tried to follow her, but they impacted against the large blades jutting out of the ground, resulting in big explosions.

*Did she hit the swords on the ground? No, they disintegrated only around the area where she landed! She's got that weird superspeed too. Man, her fighting style is so interesting!*

Kelvin was giddy like a child as he confirmed Dorothy's location through his spell. Even after landing on the stage and having the spears of light explode near her, he reasoned that she was probably unhurt. And now, Dorothy took action of her own.

“Contagion.” As soon as she muttered the name of the spell she was casting, the mass of giant swords around her started to crumble away one by one. Some became rubble, while others decomposed to granules small enough to look like sand. Although the degree of destruction differed, none of the blades around her remained standing.

Dorothy had landed right in the middle of the stage, and the circle of destruction radiated out from her position, gradually coming to reach and break down the swords farther and farther away from her in a circle. The circle was expanding quite fast, already nearly reaching Kelvin's position.

*Is it an ability that corrodes the target like Dahak's breath? No, the magic*

*that's cloaking Dorothy and the magic in this wave of decomposition resemble each other greatly. The weird acceleration and deceleration must be in the same vein as this mysterious power of decomposition. The fastest way to confirm it would be... Hmmm...*

With the invisible wave that probably spelled certain death approaching him, Kelvin suddenly stuck out an arm.

"Uh...what?" Dorothy couldn't help but react with confusion.

"Don't 'what' me. This is the best way to understand what that is!" Kelvin yelled back. She saw the swords crumble in front of his eyes and finally he made contact with the invisible wave, focusing all his nerves and over half of his Parallel Processing ability on the arm he'd stuck out.

*Zzrmm...*

What occurred to his arm wasn't corrosion or rot, but rapid aging. First, his arm thinned before his eyes, then it turned completely into the weak and wrinkled arm of an elderly person. The meat on the tips of his fingers that had made contact first rotted away, turning to bleached bone.

While burning his observations into his brain, Kelvin started to intone a spell to solve the situation, laughing all the while.

"Divine Dress."

He was immediately enveloped in a white divine aura that would wipe away all status effects, and the rapid aging that was quickly eating away at his arm was contained to the forearm. However, because the invisible wave had yet to stop, the blades behind him continued to be destroyed one after another. Once all the swords on the stage were gone, the wave finally stopped its malign influence.

"Whew, it seems like I was right about it being a status effect, at least. Being able to stop it saved me," Kelvin remarked.

"You really aren't right in the head," Dorothy told him. "Offering up your arm like that to an attack you knew nothing about."

"What're you talking about? It was clearly the best way to find a solution. In



other words, my head is working just fine.”

Dorothy’s only reaction to that was to make a face that said, “What kind of nonsense is this guy spouting?”

“Hey, wait, what? You kept the effect to just the top of the stage? That’s awfully conscientious of you. You’re acting real kind, huh?” Kelvin observed.

“A massacre is not my goal, that is all,” Dorothy explained.

“Ah, I see. It’d be a waste of magic to make it spread any wider. So, while it’s a powerful attack, it seems it’s not really cost-efficient. You’re a lot like me!”

Once again, Dorothy had no words of response. Kelvin nodded over and over while dangling the arm that had been turned into bleached bone. Although Dorothy had taken hostages and threatened to kill them as a warning at the beginning of the fight, she was now claiming to be concerned about a massacre. Kelvin immediately realized that she had no intention of killing anyone. Meanwhile, Dorothy glared at him, somewhat unsettled by how easily the man saw through what she was feeling.

“Ooh, nice. Your emotions are finally reaching your eyes,” he noted.

Unfortunately for her, the battle junkie was happy that he was being glared at. As a result, Dorothy’s gaze only grew sharper.

“I got a lot of new experiences thanks to you, after seeing and directly feeling your attack. I’m pretty sure that the magic you’re wielding manipulates time. Your unnatural acceleration is because you’re speeding up your own time, and the reason my arm and all the swords are gone now is because you’ve sped up time to age it all rapidly. If I’m right, such magic would be a real threat...so how about it? Am I?” Kelvin asked. He used his scythe to sever his now useless arm as he spoke, then regrew the arm before Dorothy could respond.

“I suppose I should have expected this from the leading expert on battles, even though my stats should be covered by both Concealment and Disguise. I assume you want me to commend you?” she asked.

“Why, thank you for the flattery; that *does* make me happy. So? Am I right?”

Kelvin’s suspicions were right on the mark. Before Dorothy had appeared

onstage, she had applied a spell called Vivre to manipulate time and used it to evade his attacks whenever she was in a pinch. She also had the spell Decadence, which caused whatever the soles of her feet touched to age instantly by decades. Finally, there was Contagion, which had the same effect, only it exchanged a bit of power for a much larger area of effect. That was what had created the wave earlier.

“Yes, you are. I’ll admit it,” Dorothy replied. “I am a unique being, the only one who can use the most powerful type of magic: Time Magic. So let’s end playtime here. Die peacefully in stopped time—Eternal.”

The moment Dorothy rapped the base of her staff on the stage, the world stopped.

The Rank S Time Magic spell Eternal was a grand spell that completely stopped time all over the world. It started with Kelvin, who was standing across from Dorothy, but soon the tumult of the audience around them died away along with the commentary from Ranlulu and Milky. Now, the only one in the world who could move was the caster. Of course, not even she could move freely. There were several restrictions.

First, after activating Eternal, every single step taken required a massive amount of MP. Second, movement felt like being underwater; the caster’s body felt heavier, and any action inevitably became slow. Third, it was impossible to touch any living thing in the stopped world above a certain size. If the caster wanted to attack someone larger than the limit, the attack would stop as well just before hitting the target (specifically a couple of millimeters away).

Because of all these conditions, Dorothy wasn’t able to maintain the spell for long, and she was very limited in what she could do while it was active. However, the results were worth the downsides.

“The magic isn’t cost-efficient? There are too many restrictions on movement? Not being able to kill your enemies while time is stopped is a downside? Hah, all those preconceptions are wrong. All you have to do is make all the preparations you need to strike while the spell is active,” Dorothy said to herself.

The actions she took while Eternal was running were small. She held her staff

like a bow, drawing one hand back and setting her sights on Kelvin. That was all.

“Maul,” she said. An invisible string formed, touching each end of Dorothy’s staff and her fingers. This was accompanied by an equally invisible arrow.

This arrow-shaped Time Magic spell, Maul, was like a ranged version of Decadence. The effect was limited to the area taken up by an arrow, which would be launched and affect everything in its trajectory. Because its area of effect was even smaller than Decadence, it was that much more powerful.

*Whoosh.*

The unleashed projectile flew straight at Kelvin’s heart, stopping millimeters before it. Just a tiny bit more and Kelvin would abruptly die.

“Even if it doesn’t kill him now, it will once time starts moving again. That’s why this magic is unbeatable,” Dorothy said to no one in particular.

In order to move on to the end of the fight with a flourish, she raised the staff that she’d used as a bow with the most efficient movement possible.

“If you like fighting, you will certainly create grudges somewhere. I’m sure you don’t care, but this is for my comrade, Sixth Seat. Goodbye, Kelvin Celsius. I will eliminate you first in the name of the god-human Dorotheia. Proceed,” Dorothy stated.

Time started moving again once her staff tapped the stage. As she had proclaimed, the world once again started moving according to the usual laws as if nothing had happened. Of course, the casting of Maul now resumed its flight towards Kelvin’s heart as well. It was a total ambush from beyond anyone’s ability to perceive, one that was utterly unavoidable. The match would end with Kelvin’s death, Dorothy was sure of it.

However, the events that actually occurred in front of her eyes were far different from what she had expected.

“WHOOAAA, that was close!” Kelvin yelled.

While the voice she heard *was* pained, it was not one in its death throes. Maul, which should have been able to rip through Kelvin’s Divine Dress and pierce his heart thanks to its increased density of power, did not do its job.

Specifically, the attack stopped after gouging out the surface of the left side of Kelvin's chest and a large chunk of his left shoulder.

"I-Impossiblewwfgh?!"

Not only that, but Kelvin had instantly appeared in front of Dorothy, unleashing a ferocious no-holds-barred kick to the face, complete with run-up. Having been ambushed right back, Dorothy was sent flying, bouncing many times off the stage.

"To think you'd try to pierce my Divine Dress. That's all the surprise I can take for today... Not only that, but I couldn't detect any preliminary movement for that. Did you stop time completely? That's just amazing!" Kelvin called.

Right after time started moving, he had reacted reflexively to the danger and the loss of his Divine Dress by immediately casting Sonic Acceleration Hepta. Having become even faster than Ange, he'd twisted his body, getting his heart out of the way of the arrow.

*I couldn't see it, but it seems to be the same type of attack as before. My body's familiar with the experience,* Kelvin thought.

On top of that, though he couldn't actually see the attack because it was invisible, the fact that it was shaped like an arrow had helped his attempt to dodge it in a big way. No matter how powerful it was, it was still slower and smaller in effect than Efil's arrows, and he was dodging those day in and day out for training. At this point, he was capable of the ridiculous feat of dodging Efil's arrows from point-blank range, so there was no reason he, with his senses heightened from being in battle mode, wouldn't be able to detect and dodge the danger in front of him even though it had been launched outside of his awareness.

Even so, he hadn't been able to avoid it completely. At the moment, the marks of the arrow passing across his body were still there. Strangely, there was no blood leaking from the wound, though that didn't stop it from being a grave injury.

*Urgkh, I don't even have a shoulder left. But it looks like I can just barely move my left arm. Okay, the damage is light!* Kelvin decided it was much better than having his heart rot away.



Now that he'd sent Dorothy flying with a kick, he took a deep breath to compose himself. He had finally managed to land a blow, but he was injured as well. He had been healing his shoulder wound with recovery magic since it had happened, but for some reason the wound wasn't closing up. Or rather, the speed at which it was doing so was incredibly slow.

Right before Dorothy had taken Kelvin's kick to the face, she'd realized that she wouldn't be able to dodge and had abandoned any thought of evasion, starting to invoke a spell instead. The spell was called Tar, and it acted like a curse on her enemy's wound, causing its time to stagnate. In other words, in exchange for the wound not getting any worse, the spell essentially prevented any attempts to heal it. No matter how much healing magic Kelvin cast, the wound would never close.

Kelvin had sussed that out in broad strokes, though, and ceased attempting to heal it. Instead, he turned his gaze to where Dorothy had landed after her flight.

"Seriously though, how hard is your face? It feels like I kicked Gerard, and by that I mean it feels like I just kicked steel," he said.

"That's an awful thing to say to a girl," Dorothy shot back. "You're right, though."

The way Dorothy got up was creepy, as if she had rewound from her fallen state. Kelvin's kick should have been a clean hit, but the girl seemed absolutely fine as she cracked her neck. Although Kelvin referred to himself as weak since he was a Summoner, his all-out kick could fell a large tree, which meant it could easily remove a normal person's head from their body.

*To think he'd make me use my other Unique Skill, Dorothy thought. I don't have much MP left, so I'd rather avoid a prolonged battle, but...*

*That hardness, it's not from pure stats, Kelvin figured. I went with the flow and kicked her, but maybe I should have swung my scythe at her instead? Regret, reflect, and remorse. I gotta get it right next time.*

Both sides glared at each other as they readied their staff and scythe, respectively, trying to think of next steps. Dorothy's abilities were still shrouded in mystery, but her magic was running dry. Meanwhile, Kelvin was in high spirits, being able to fight someone with powers unknown to him, but he was

badly wounded with no way to heal himself. The fight was now at its climax.

The pair faced off only for a few seconds as they thought furiously about what to do. Oddly enough, they both arrived at the same answer: close-quarters hand-to-hand combat.

“Grk!”

They both threw aside their weapons and charged straight at one another. The first blow was struck, a beautiful cross counter, causing both combatants to grunt in pain at the same time. Even in such a state, neither of them stopped. They continued punching and getting punched, kicking and kicking back in a heated tussle. This development, unthinkable for a fight between a Summoner and a Mage—both backline jobs—left the audience clearly shocked.

“Wha... Hey, now... One moment, something grows on the stage, and the next, they’re already in a fistfight? What’s going on?!” Rarlulu shouted.

“And what happened to her staff? Why are they punching one another?” Milky asked.

Of course, few members of the audience even understood how things had gotten to this point enough to be shocked by it.

“Huh? Ah! It’s a fistfight! Kelvin-san and Dorothy-san have started a fistfiight! Actually, things are happening so fast, my commentary can’t keep up!” Rarlulu yelled.

“That’s been true since the first bout, though,” Milky commented.

“You’re right about that! Fight hard, me! And you in the audience as well! No matter who ends up getting the last laugh, this is it! Keep your eyes peeled, even if they dry and shrivel up!” Rarlulu shouted. Since events onstage were developing so fast, she’d had no time to talk earlier, but now that the opponents had shifted to a prolonged hand-to-hand fight, she was finally able to understand what was going on. As for Milky, even though she knew what had happened, she could only see afterimages.

“Ha haaa! This is nice! I like! A battle! Of strategies too! But this kind of fight is nice! Once in a while!” Kelvin said between breaths.

“If you keep up! This useless chatter! You’ll bite! Your tongue! So why don’t you just do so! Already!” Dorothy shot back, also between breaths.

Both sides punched the other, kicked, and went for weak spots. From the sight of them unleashing unreserved physical attacks, no one would think they were practitioners of magic. However, they each had their reasons for initiating this kind of fight.

In Kelvin’s case, he was most wary of Dorothy’s Time Magic. The long-ranged attacks he could make using magic and his scythe wouldn’t be able to hit her with her ability to fast-forward herself. On top of that, he had no idea when she would decide to stop time again, so he didn’t want to give her the opportunity to invoke a large spell. He needed something that could keep up with her speed, actually hit her, and not give her any chance to act. With all that in mind, the answer he’d arrived at was to bring things into hand-to-hand combat.

Meanwhile, in Dorothy’s case, she was most worried about her remaining MP. Though she’d failed to murder Kelvin with it, the spell she’d used to stop time, Eternal, was her most powerful and most MP-consuming spell from her Time Magic repertoire. It used so much that with the MP she now had left, she couldn’t cast it a second time. So what about using a potion to recover MP? The option existed, but the size of Dorothy’s stomach did not bely her looks: it was small. She wasn’t able to down a potion instantly like Mel was. Therefore, resorting to such measures would be willingly giving Kelvin an opening to exploit. She had to fight only with the little MP she had remaining, so she was left in the difficult situation where she couldn’t afford to waste it. The answer she arrived at was to use one of her Unique Skills and Vivre in short bursts at strategic moments to help her in a close-quarters fight.

“Gagh...agh!”

“Grkh!”

Using the close-quarters techniques he’d learned from Sera, Kelvin was able to inflict multiple impacts with one punch against Dorothy. The attack he made would be referred to in boxing as a liver blow, and it sent multiple shock waves through her steel-hard body, permeating to her innards. Even Dorothy, who had been maintaining an iron mask of indifference this whole time, couldn’t

help but twist her face in pain.

However, at the same time, she aimed her own sharp blow, complete with a good run-up, at Kelvin's jaw. Her steel-hard body worked on the offense as well as it did on the defense. Even though she looked weak, Kelvin felt like he'd been punched by Gerard, who was just a suit of armor, and the attack shook his brain.

"Whoa there, what a dizzying fight!" Rarlulu exclaimed. "I can't even see any afterimages from the two combatants, but the sounds of their punches and kicks are incredible! I can't believe these are the same combatants who were wielding staffs before! Instructor Milky, you're on exposition... Do you think they're fighting on even terms?!"

Milky took a moment to ponder the question before answering. "No. I can't be sure, but I don't believe they are."

"What?"

Though Milky said that, she, like Rarlulu, wasn't able to perceive all of what was happening in the fight. However, judging from the hazy afterimages she could make out, there was quite a difference in the number of blows being landed. And her conjecture proved correct.

*This is bad!*

The one who was lamenting in their hearts was none other than Dorothy. This fierce and furious bout of infighting might have looked even at first glance, but those were just the opinions of the audience, who couldn't actually see what was happening and were just going off vibes. In truth, Dorothy was taking two blows from Kelvin for every blow she managed to dish out.

There was a clear reason for this. While Dorothy could only use her remaining MP on Vivre at strategic moments, Kelvin's incredible MP level allowed him to use Sonic Acceleration without a care in the world to buff his speed across the board. The difference between those two states was too great. In fact, since Kelvin was able to overclock his Sonic Acceleration, he was actually faster than Dorothy's Vivre, so she couldn't keep up.

What was even more fatal was the fact that while Kelvin was able to use



magic in concert with his fists like Sera, Dorothy had none of those skills. It was obvious what would be better between a simple blow and a blow imbued with magic.

Finally, the steellike body that Dorothy possessed, which she thought would be an advantage, actually wasn't working out that way. In order to combat her steellike attack and defense, Kelvin had deployed a thin coating of Rubber Counter to the surface of his fists and legs which he was using to attack. This barrier, which had the elasticity and rebounding properties of rubber, weakened the strength of Dorothy's attacks and allowed Kelvin to throw her off-balance by altering the trajectory of her blows. In other words, the steel body that had been working to her advantage at first had actually become a threat to her victory.

*As things stand, I'll just be waiting to lose. If that's the case...*

Dorothy would have to be a little reckless to grasp victory. Having resolved herself, she finally committed to a last gasp of resistance.

Kelvin made an alarmed noise as Dorothy ascertained when he would attack and released her casting of Tar. The deep wound that had gouged out part of Kelvin's chest and most of his shoulder regained its place in time, which brought with it a flood of blood.

*Even if I have to take an attack...*

Kelvin landed his blow right after, but Dorothy gritted her teeth and braced herself as she unleashed a counter with a knife hand meant to pierce through him. Obviously, she aimed for Kelvin's heart, which was located behind his wound. Even if Kelvin were to use recovery magic, she would use her hands to deepen his wound and destroy his heart to finish the fight.

Dorothy wrung out the last of her MP to fast-forward her attack to its highest speed. The blow, backed by her steel body, was the fruit of her tenacity. However...

*"Obsidian Edge."*

A single giant blade suddenly manifested under her feet, getting in the way of her knife-hand strike. Though she immediately busted through the sword, it

didn't reach Kelvin on the other side, where he was waiting with his usual smile.

At this point, Dorothy no longer had the MP to use Time Magic, and the damage her body had accumulated made it obvious that she was only barely staying upright. She no longer had any moves to make...but the moment that part of Kelvin's Parallel Processing started to think that, he heard the sound of a page flipping from out of nowhere.

*"Kill yourself."*



We Divine Pillars were made to serve as the world's final shield, as well as the sword of the divine, one that repels evil. Our omnipotent mother, the Goddess of Reincarnation Elearis, erected ten Divine Pillars around the world. There was the Divine Whale Zeval, the Divine Dragon Zahahka, Deus Ex Machina, the Divine Wolf Galonzolf, the Divine Bird Wyldgroh, the Divine Spirit Deatotal, the Divine Snake Anra, the Divine Beetle Lenge-Range, the Divine Beast Diamante—and lastly, the one created here in Lumiest: me, Dorotheiara.

The purpose given to us, one that will probably continue forever into the eternal future, is to assist the Heroes in their battles against evil. Miraculously, Lumiest turned out to be a land devoid of conflict, which was likely why I was never awoken to fulfill my duty. But even in my sleep, I could instinctively feel my brethren fulfilling theirs. I think the reason I was able to feel pride over the fruits of their battles was that, at least in the stage I was in, I had the aptitude to become human. After all, humans were rich in emotion and prized bonds. But...in the end, those bonds were the reason my heart adopted all that darkness.

Having learned of the states of the other Divine Pillars, I was able to notice them changing for the worse during a certain time. They gradually fell from their normal states into crazed ones. If I had to describe it, I would say that my brethren had purposefully been given a bug. They hadn't fallen to evil, nor had they been destroyed. But seeing my only relationships violated so was truly unbearable. All I could do was watch from afar as they fell further into madness day by day.

After that, my emotions started to warp, and anger bubbled up inside me.

Who had done this? How dare they do that to my brethren! With such thoughts, my heart was filled before I knew it with negative emotions towards an enemy I had never even known.

That was when, suddenly, someone called out to me and said, *“Oh? Wait...is it just me, or do you have a heart? A terribly human one filled with hatred, at that. This is a surprise. All the other Divine Pillars I’ve seen up until now only fulfill their duties like a machine and aren’t equipped with unnecessary emotions.”*

Actually, she didn’t really speak—she communicated with my consciousness directly. I think I was shocked when it happened. But more than that, some other emotion spread through my heart. Finally, my time had come. This was the culprit who had driven my brethren insane. I didn’t have proof or a reason to believe that, but I was sure of it.

Thinking back, at that point, I had truly been a fool. I should have realized that from the beginning. But the rage that had built up in my heart wouldn’t allow for it. If my enemy was evil, the moment she touched the pillar, I would awaken. In that instant, I would be reborn, and it would mark the beginning of my revenge. With that in mind, I readied myself. But in the end, my awakening never came.

*“Did Elearis make a mistake in the design? Ah, no, that’s not it. If I remember correctly, this Divine Pillar has yet to be activated even once. Since she won’t come down to the material world, I can’t confirm what lies inside either. Right, that makes sense. Still...hee hee! Even though they were made so that the form they would grow into would remain unknown, seeing a human base is a surprise. I’m sure that goddess would never have imagined this outcome. My best guess is that this one was influenced by the students here and acquired a heart after its creation. Hilarious! Emotions are totally unnecessary for a Divine Pillar, but this is perfect for me.”*

It seemed that whoever this was, she knew a lot not only about the properties of us Divine Pillars, but also our creator, the Goddess Elearis. She managed to peer inside me, at all my rage, without ever touching me directly. Finally, I understood.

*"I had planned on making all the Divine Pillars bug out to ruin Elearis and her base of power, but I'll leave you alone. The more seeds of conflict there are, the better. Nurture your negative emotions well, will you? I'm sure they'll be a big source of power for you. That's just a piece of advice from a comrade."*

This unknown enemy was bearing an even bigger darkness, incomparable to my rage. She had lost all hope for the world, but still wanted it. The small divine factor placed within me had been blaring alarms at maximum volume this whole time. It said that our statuses were just too different. Instantly, my anger was snuffed out like a candle in the wind, and I felt fear.

*"You'll probably never interact with me again, and I don't even know if you'll ever have your time in the sun, but if that time does come, slam those emotions right at me. Or...right, you could take it out on my husband too, if you like. Since I have the chance, I'll tell you about him. I'll write the information straight into your memories so you'll never forget."*

With that, although I have no idea how, she carved an image of a man into my brain. Then, the image accelerated. It was an album collection, and scores of volumes with the man's information recorded on them were crammed into my mind, cycling over and over.

*"His name is Kelvin, and he is my beloved. No words can describe his manliness. He's also kind, strong, and incredibly funny. He's just wonderful and overflowing with attractiveness in all respects. Indeed, I daresay no better man exists. In the far-off future, Kelvin may come to destroy your kin. If that happens, what kind of emotions will bloom within you? Hatred? It'll be hatred, won't it? If I'm right, you'll have to stop him when you awaken."*

The black part of my heart now focused entirely on that man. My heart, which had been crushed under the weight of my negative feelings, was soothed by my enemy, of all things, which only fed the cycle of negativity within me.

*"It may be inappropriate, but part of me looks forward to seeing when that little seed of hatred within you will bloom. Will your story end as my opening act? Or will the incredible happen and you'll end up being insurance to let my honey have some fun... Ah, you're still here? You'll be waiting a long time, so go to sleep. At least, until you're needed..."*



According to my memories, those were the last words she spoke to me. Since then, every time one of my crazed brethren was destroyed, the hatred in my heart grew, becoming a black haze that hung in my heart. There was no longer any reason left within me; I was a demon of revenge, hell bent on seeking retribution for my brethren.

*I'm going to kill Kelvin*, I repeated over and over again in my mind. Yeah, I was nothing but a puppet.

The next turning point came after I was awakened. I would have loved it if the cause had been Kelvin, the person my head was full with thoughts of destroying, but unfortunately the one in front of my eyes was an unfamiliar man. His presence was unusual, as he was a fallen angel, but that was all. In truth, to my senses, he wasn't anywhere near as threatening as the woman who had talked to me. He was weak enough that I could easily crush him underfoot even in my newly born state. Normally, I would have had to follow my calling and destroy the man who woke me, but my biggest priority at the time was to kill Kelvin. That was why I accepted the man's proposal, since he said I would be able to finish Kelvin off with my own hands.

After that, the process I needed to go through to get to this point was disgustingly long. The man's name was Horace, and I was required to accept his financial support, be admitted to the academy where I woke up while obtaining scores that didn't stand out, and wait for my chance to make contact with Kelvin. It was a far better and more realistic option than searching the world on my own without any leads, but learning a human's common sense and whatnot was truly annoying. It was almost too much to bother, and I was worried that even all the hatred I had built up in my heart would be worn away to disinterest by the task.

Yet I endured. I learned what I needed to, all while keeping the darkness in my heart alive. I even managed to gain admission to the academy without anyone realizing who I was or what I had inside of me. With that done, I just had to wait for the exhibition match, which Kelvin would no doubt be taking part in. I could then use my position as a student to assassinate him as I pleased.

That was what I was thinking of during the entrance ceremony when...

“Hey! My seat’s right next to yours.”

The moment I heard that voice, the darkness in my heart was purified.



*That...was my life just flashing before my eyes? No, the fact that I’m able to think this means I’m not dead... But, uhhh...*

Dorothy had gone blind for a moment, but now sight was gradually returning to her eyes. Her mind was hazy as she confirmed the state she was in. It wasn’t just her mind that was sluggish; the sensation in her entire body was fuzzy, which was why she still felt like she was in a dream. Even now, she couldn’t quite remember what she had been doing before that moment or what had happened to get her to the present.

“It’s o... Lumie...exhi...winne...”

She could hear someone saying something off in the distance. She was only catching bits and pieces, but her brain couldn’t even process that much. Still, her sight was returning bit by bit. What looked like a blurry haze cleared up, and Dorothy was suddenly treated to the sight of a clear blue sky without a single cloud.

“The...sky?” she said aloud.

“Hm? What else could it be when you’re lying face up outside? Hey, you okay?” a voice asked from beside her field of view as she stared up at the sky, feeling like she’d be sucked into it.

The question was followed soon after by Grim Reaper’s face popping into sight. It was one she wasn’t very glad to see, but thanks to his appearance, Dorothy instantly woke up. She now vaguely understood how she’d gotten into her current situation and sighed.

“So I...lost?”

“Yeah, just as you were saying some really disturbing things. Hey, can you stand?”

Kelvin offered Dorothy his hand. It looked like he had already fully healed, and the hole in his shoulder was gone. She was a little suspicious of the offer, but

she took his hand surprisingly quickly.

“What’s this?! Kelvin-san, having claimed a wonderful, shining victory, is offering Dorothy a haaaand! What a beautiful sight! This is what they mean by friendship blooming on the battlefield!”

As she took Kelvin’s hand, Dorothy could hear Ranlulu cry out from her spot beyond the stage.

*Ah, the voice I heard before was hers,* she realized. At the same time, she was a little astonished by how big a deal the announcer was making of her taking Kelvin up on his offer.

“You heard the commentator,” Kelvin whispered. “Come on, put on a smile and wave at the crowd. That’ll make everything picture perfect.” He kept his voice low enough so that only Dorothy could hear.





After the briefest of pauses, she couldn't help but ask, "Are you planning to save me? Really? After I tried to take your life?"

"Well, yeah" came the reply. "Both your skills and strength show a lot of potential. But it felt like you were overwhelmingly lacking in actual experience. The next time you come to kill me, you should make sure to cover up that weakness. I'll be looking forward to it."

"What?" Dorothy paused, dumbfounded. "Um...do you understand the words that are coming out of your mouth?"

"Of course I do. But, I mean, you're Rion's friend, right? After actually fighting you, I think you'd make a good rival for her, you know? It's really nice to be evenly matched with someone. I'd appreciate it if you got along with her and stayed with her for a long time."

Dorothy was silent for a while, shocked speechless by the unexpected reply. She had been waving her hand as Kelvin had told her to, since the situation didn't really give her a choice, but she stopped now.

"You're saying you won't kill me...because I'm her friend?" she asked. "Even if you don't know if I was ever actually her friend? Also, you just told me to come try to kill you again... Do you *really* understand what comes out of your mouth? Seriously..."

Kelvin laughed boisterously. "If you understood why I said those things, you'd be joining me as a rational battle junkie. Don't worry; my family comes to kill me on a daily basis, so nothing will change by adding an extra person to that roster. I mean, isn't someone trying to take your head from behind, or someone putting you in a submission lock in their sleep because of bad sleeping habits, or someone strangling you while drunk stuff that happens a lot?"

"It's not!" Dorothy cried. "What kind of family do you even have?!"

The answer was the exact family he described.

"A-Also, that's not what I'm talking about!" Dorothy continued. "I tricked Rion-san—"

Kelvin cut her off there. "You don't need to worry about that, really. At the

very least, it looks like Rion still thinks of you as a friend. I may have just fought you, but Rion's the one who's spent the most time by your side in the academy. I choose to believe in the people she believes in."

He flashed her a smile different from the one he had adopted during battle, and Dorothy finally gave up trying to sort out her feelings. All she could do was let out a strangled cry as she fell into confusion, wondering what kind of emotion was welling up inside her.

"Ah, but of course, I'll be looking into who you are and why you came for my life," Kelvin added.

"At least that makes sense. If I may ask, did you really think nothing of the words I said in the final moments of the battle?" Dorothy asked.

"Hm? Ah...you mean that 'kill yourselves' line? Well, it was probably some kind of curse, but it didn't work on me. Our resident goddess created some equipment that lets us resist status effects, after all. I mean, it's not guaranteed, which is why your Time Magic worked so well. Or were you wondering why the audience is still okay?"

"Yes, well, that too. I raised my voice pretty loud, after all."

"Hm...well, I don't really know either," Kelvin replied. "This is just a guess, but maybe Principal Art defended against it with his music? Right after you passed out, leaving that curse behind, he suddenly appeared with actual fanfare noises. Everyone was surprised, but Art joined in on the commentary, saying that it was the fanfare of victory. I think all the noise overrode your last words."

"I see, so that principal... Heh! So he's seen through everything. Rank S adventurers aren't to be underestimated." Dorothy gave a slight smile, seemingly showing that she was actually feeling relieved now that everything had failed. "That curse was actually something made by my Unique Skill, Heroic Recollection. That skill is also why my body was hard like steel."

"Hey now, what's with the sudden honesty?"

"You were planning on pulling the information out of me at some point anyway, right?" Dorothy replied. "So this is all stuff you would have heard eventually anyway."

“Wow, that really is honest...” Kelvin muttered. “That Unique Skill, does it have to do with the book that was floating around you during the fight? I only caught a glimpse, but that’s a book from Trycen, right? It’s like an anthology about the previous Demon Lord turmoil?”

“Indeed it is,” Dorothy confirmed. “Heroic Recollection targets a single book and allows me to borrow the Unique Skills of the prominent figures recorded in it. The skills I borrowed this time were Royal Decree from the Demon Lord Zel Trycen and Steel Heart from Dan D’Alba. Since I can only borrow one Unique Skill at a time, I’m forced to switch out for every different activation. As for when I did that...well, I suppose I don’t have to tell you, do I?”

“No, you don’t. But...” Kelvin paused to sigh. “You have a skill like that *and* Time Magic? Huh...”

His eyes adopted an evil glint; it seemed he was getting more and more interested in Dorothy. Noticing that, she did her best to escape his gaze.

“Hey, do you mind if I ask one more question?”

“I do, but ask anyway,” Dorothy replied.

“If you wanted to kill me, why didn’t you just attempt an assassination instead of facing me in public? I’d welcome that too, and you’d at least stand a better chance than if you fought me head-on.”

“Well, uhhh...” Dorothy gummed up at the question. Then, she sank into thought, clearly chewing through something in her mind. After a few seconds, she seemed to come to some sort of conclusion and raised her head once again. “Maybe because all the hatred I had in my heart that would have driven me to do whatever I needed was cleansed by a friend.”

“Huh? What kind of weird reason is that?”

“It doesn’t matter if you don’t understand. That’s the reason...probably. Ah, but if I may add something, part of it may also be a prank from your daughter. I don’t really understand her motivations behind that, though.”

“Huh? You know those are fighting words, right?”

Suddenly, Kelvin’s murderous intent flared up, but Dorothy had expected that

reaction, so she casually let it slide off her back.

“Jeez, stop it with the terrible jokes. Ah, right, that reminds me: while you were out, I pulled a trick.”

“A trick?” she parroted.

“Yeah, a trick. Now that I’ve decided to keep you alive, it’d be terrible if you decided to try this against someone other than me, so I cast a fused Green and White Magic spell on your heart called ‘Heart Calm.’ Oh, it’s nothing you really need to worry about. Mostly it just strengthens healing and purification effects as they’re applied to you, so it’s actually beneficial. You woke up surprisingly fast after passing out, didn’t you? That’s the spell at work,” he explained.

Dorothy took a quick pause to think that over before saying, “You said ‘mostly,’ so that means the spell does more than that, right?”

“Of course. If you ever harm someone other than me with the intention to kill, it’ll immediately tear your heart into pieces, so be careful about that. Oh man, I gotta tell you, adjusting fused magic is really hard. This was the perfect chance for some exp— *Ahem!* I’m glad a person willing to help me test the spell showed up at the perfect time.”

Dorothy said nothing, but in her heart she thought, *On second thought, I really do hate him.*



The exhibition match that brought representatives from the Academic City of Lumiest and the Adventurer’s Guild together ended with the Adventurer’s Guild winning by a slight margin. The levels of the competitors were unbelievably high compared to the average year, so everyone who watched this year’s match, from the staff to the spectators, were really fired up. As an event put on by the academy, this year’s match was a great success. And, having fought a complete dark horse in the form of Dorothy, I was also fully satisfied with how things had gone. It didn’t seem like the cheers would stop even after the closing ceremony was finished; the excitement probably wouldn’t abate for the rest of the day, at least.

The attendees chattered among themselves.

“Hey, is it just me or did this year’s exhibition match rival Gaun’s Beast King Festival?!”

“I can tell, because I saw the final showdown in Gaun last year between the Beast King and Peach Ogre! The five bouts today were just as exciting!”

“Most of the adventurers were Rank S, so I can understand their strength, but what was really surprising were the students from Lumiest! Sure, they lost in the end, but they were basically evenly matched against Rank S adventurers! This is going to herald a new age! I need to spread the word when I get back home to my country!”

“It’d be best to have them marry into some influential families in my country once they graduate, but I heard that all the students from this year’s team are still in their first year. But considering the princesses from Deramis and Trycen who used to attend this academy, they could skip grades. Hm, I can’t afford to mix up when they’ll graduate, and I’ll need to take advantage of any chance I get to spark a relationship with them.”

“You shouldn’t say anything too rash out loud. They aren’t just strong, those students are all backed by major countries. Carelessly making a move on them is nothing but a terrible decision.”

“Yeah, they aren’t the sort of kids people from middling to small countries like us should get involved with. The fact that they’re as strong as Rank S adventurers means that each one of them is more than a match for an entire nation’s armed forces. I don’t have the confidence to hold on to even one of their reins.”

“Did you find Edgar? Once you do, have him come to my side. I believe he has at least the minimum amount of understanding, but there is a need to teach him not to interact with them in too pompous a manner. If he does, it could spell a second coming of what happened in Trycen.”

“Uh...understood!”

“Do you really need to be that worried? Edgar-sama will succeed the throne of Leigant. There’s no way he’d try to hit on anything that moves like in his home country. Hm, actually, maybe he would.”



And that was how VIPs from the various countries shared their surprise and future plans, since they were all gathered in one place anyway. It seemed to me there was actually a lot for them to talk about on that point, though some among them warned the others not to discuss such things in loud voices. At any rate, I figured I should commit the face of the guy who was talking about marriage and the name Edgar to memory for now. Why? I mean, isn't it obvious?

"You'll participate in the closing ceremony, won't you?" I asked Dorothy.

"Yes...fine," she replied.

After losing, Dorothy showed no sign of going on a further rampage. She even quietly participated in the closing ceremony. All the team members on both sides, other than our still missing guild director, appeared onstage, and after a thorough briefing and greeting from the principal, the exhibition match officially concluded.

By the way, Bell lowered the durability of the barrier erected over the stage with her powers and shattered it with a beautiful kick.



"Today's event was a great success thanks to everyone who gave it their all. Allow me to once again extend my appreciation. Truly, I'm grateful," Art, principal of Lumiest, said with a pretty smile and expression that made him seem like a woman from any angle.

Everyone he was talking to shared looks that said, *No, there's no way that's true.*

At the moment, all the people who had participated in the closing ceremony had moved to a reception room, led there by Art. It was only natural that Rion and the rest of the team were there, but so were the Rank S adventurers from the guild. It seemed that DarkMel was okay, and now she was sitting on a sofa that was too big for her.

*Mm-hmm, she's as pretty as always I'm so glad she's safe I'm gonna kill the person who attacked her! Huh...wait, that reminds me, I still don't see Director Shin.*

“Why were us adventurers invited, Principal Art? If you want to hold a postmortem on the match, aren’t we unnecessary?”

“Now, now, don’t jump to conclusions, Kelvin-kun,” Art replied. “To tell you the truth, I wanted to extend my thanks to you while also apologizing to your team. As for what I’m apologizing for—”

Bakke interrupted him. “You mean about that little girlie who fought Kelvin in the last bout?”

“Exactly! I knew I could count on you, Leopardess; you’re pretty sharp,” Art confirmed.

“Hah! The change was too sudden. It’d be weirder not to think there was something wrong,” Bakke spat out as she leaned back deep into the sofa.

To be fair, I’d been thinking the same thing, though in my case, the change was a good thing, so I actually wanted to thank him.

“Mrr...hrm...” Graham shifted around.

*But Bakke, you’re supposed to be talking to Art, so why are you looking straight at the male student sitting in front of you? He’s clearly uncomfortable with your stare, so come on, stop with the looks that clearly reveal your wicked thoughts.*

“For the rest of you, although I claimed it was a special surprise earlier, it actually wasn’t,” Art told the rest of the group. “There were no plans for Dorothy to fight in that bout. The academy had no part in her sudden appearance or the purple barrier that was deployed afterwards. This isn’t an excuse, but information given freely in hopes of a truthful exchange. Please don’t get the wrong idea.”

“Hmm? In other words,” Grostina said with a cutesy lilt, “you want to expose who she is and what her intentions are alongside the Adventurer’s Guild, who you have close ties to. That’s what you’re trying to say, isn’t it?”

“You can take it that way, yes.”

“It looks like there were suspicious people other than Dorothy who were taking action in the academy as well, you see. So having more hands to rely on

would definitely be better. In fact, were the people other than Dorothy even all that strong, Principal?” I asked.

“Um...why do you look so happy, Kelvin-kun?” Art asked. “With Bakke-kun, we’ve got enough people on our hands who act in a way that’ll negatively impact children’s educations, thank you very much.”

I couldn’t help but let out a shocked cry. *I’m being treated the same as Bakke?!*

“That smile did a one-eighty into a scowl all at once. Hilarious,” commented Bell.

“I know *I’ve* always thought this, but is it just me or are Rank S adventurers all weirdos?” Rami asked.

“You realize those aren’t the kinds of things you should say to guests, right, you two?” Art chided them. “And by that logic, I would also be a weirdo, so clearly that doesn’t work.”

The rest of the room reacted with unified silence and dubious stares.

*Stop bullshitting, you golden freak.*

“But jokes aside, our investigation so far has revealed that the problem is much deeper than we imagined.” Art steered the conversation back on topic. “Honestly, I don’t think the academy will be able to take care of it alone.”

“I see. For the moment, I understand all the relevant information. So, where did the others you caught go? Dorothy is here, but...”

Dorothy was sitting quietly next to Rion. She couldn’t try anything bad anymore thanks to Heart Calm, and even without that, it didn’t look like she wanted to anyway, so she wasn’t restrained with rope or anything. She was being as docile and meek as she looked.

“Director Shin isn’t here either, is she?” Grostina noted.

“Ah, about that, during the exhibition match, she was the linchpin in our efforts to clean up all the rats who got into the academy. It’s about time for her to return, but—”

A knock at the door interrupted him. “Excuse meee, it’s Instructor Arche!”

came a voice from the other side. “Sinjeel-sama and Paul-sama from the Adventurer’s Guild, as well as their companions, are here to see you!”

Speak of the devil. Once Art gave instructions to allow them inside, the door burst open, followed immediately by the entrance of a woman wearing glasses. Apparently, she had a more *active* personality than her appearance suggested.

*Hmm...her body is pretty well trained too. Oh crap, that was close. I almost started to drool.*

“Excuse me,” Sinjeel said as he came in.

“I’m comin’ in!” Paul added as he followed.

While I was busy being impressed by Arche’s physical prowess, Sinjeel and Paul entered. It looked like they were dragging something large behind them. It scraped along the ground as they brought it inside. The thing looked like a captured alien, and I almost did a spit take but managed to resist the urge. Not only did I resist, I also managed to get a better look at the person who was being dragged in.

The hostage was quite large, but also looked completely drained of all strength. It was clear that they were unconscious, but what was more concerning was how slimy they were. It was as if they had been crammed into a tank filled with octopuses or eels, their entire body covered in mucus. Given both the size and sliminess, it must have been really tough for Paul and Sinjeel to drag the person all this way.

*Wait...who is that?*

“What?! That’s Instructor Horace! Why is he in such a state?!”

Just as I was asking that question in my head, the bespectacled student with a very old and formal style of speaking told me with perfect timing.

*So he’s a teacher at Lumiest. Hmm, I see... And why do you speak like that?*

“His name is Horace Ascade, and he’s been an instructor here for a long time,” Art clarified. “Also, he’s the mastermind behind this incident. Isn’t that right, Dorothy-kun?”

“Yes...that’s right,” Dorothy answered.

“I see. In other words, he’s the culprit behind all this *and* the hoodlum who attacked DarkMel? Okay, then allow me to deal the finishing blow. None of you have any objections, right?”

“I do! Please calm down a little, DarkMel’s papa,” Arche objected.

“Indeed. I can’t say I approve of you immediately attempting to murder him just because he put your daughter in danger. You realize you’re in front of students?” Art added.

The pair immediately spoke up to stop me as I was about to stand up with my staff in hand.

“Oh, come on, I was *at least* half joking. Man, there’s no trust at all.”

“The fact that it was only ‘half’ a joke is more than enough reason to be wary. Now then, before Kelvin-kun flies off the handle, let’s pool our information on the events that transpired,” Art said.

*I just said I wouldn’t do that*, I thought, but Art ignored the look I was giving him as he started the sharing session. I was, of course, a little unhappy.

Anyway, jokes aside, from the way things were going, there was no mistake that the teacher named Horace was the one who had attacked DarkMel before she could participate in the final bout of the exhibition match. He was a fallen angel, a rather unique species, and apparently a descendant of angels who had fought for a wicked deity in the war between gods from the age of myths. It seemed that over an incredibly long time, their kind had spread, hidden, throughout the world, and now they were springing to action to revive their master.

“Angels can hide their biggest identifying features—their wings and halo—at will, after all. Horace and the other fallen angels probably blended into society by making use of that ability. I’m sure Kelvin-kun knows more than us, given that he has an angel for a wife and child,” Art said, turning to me.

“Well, sure. They’d obviously stand out a lot in their normal forms, so my wife and DarkMel almost always keep their wings and halo hidden.”

“Plus, keeping them out wastes magic power, yeah,” my cute daughter confirmed.



*She's so cute she's so cute she's so damn cute oh wow she's even cuter because I haven't seen her in so long!*

"Is that so? Still, I'm impressed that you guys managed to neutralize this man. He looks to be somewhere between Rank A and Rank S in strength. On top of that, you managed to pull information out of him. I see, so you two certainly did have the strength to participate in the exhibition match," Bakke praised them.

"That reminds me, by the time we found them, they'd already saved the students Instructor Horace used as hostages, didn't they? It was a shock to find out that he betrayed us, but it was more of a shock to see Sin-chan and Paul-chan pull off something this amazing," Rion said.

"Not to mention they're both totally unharmed! Look at you two go! You stars, you!" Rami teased them, jabbing them in the sides.

"Oh, uh, uhhh, um...you see...errr..." Sinjeel seemed to freeze up, stammering heavily and sounding like a robot.

"I mean, you could say we did it, or you could say we didn't..." Paul was acting just as weird.

Even though three girls were flattering them to pieces, they seemed more shaken than anything.

"What's wrong? It's not like you to hesitate and be all fidgety like that."

"To tell you the truth, Master Kelvin, we..." Sinjeel started, but he trailed off.

Paul picked up the slack. "We did report what happened and what we learned. But...uh, it wasn't us who beat Horace and questioned him."

"What? Then who did?"

"Well..." the two men started in unison. Their gazes went straight to DarkMel, who was drinking juice through a straw.

"Seriously?"

"Totally serious, Master," Sinjeel confirmed. "Elder sister DarkMel managed to take care of him entirely on her own. We basically just stood and watched..."

"Yeah," Paul agreed. "It doesn't seem as if big sis DarkMel remembers, but we

do.”

Both of them nodded, meek expressions on their faces. It didn't look like they were lying. *They don't gain anything by lying, so I guess I should just assume it's the truth. Still, wait a second... They're referring to her as an older sister... Were they doing that before? Hmmm...they're starting to resemble the Dragonz. Oh no, no, no, now's not the time to be caring about stuff like that.*

“Is what they're saying true, DarkMel?”

“Um, as Paul-san said, I don't remember anything... It felt like I was in a trance, or something like that...” DarkMel replied.

“I see. Since it's you saying that, DarkMel, it must be true! I'm convinced!”

“Oh my, you're so soft on your daughter, Kelvin-chan!” Grostina teased. “As for me, I can't hide my surprise at how perfectly she neutralized him. Well, let's just leave that aside for the moment! So, did we figure out anything else?”

“Oh, uh, yeah. We remembered everything big sis DarkMel managed to make him spit out, so we'll tell you in her place,” Paul said.

According to him, the fallen angel Horace's aim in making all this fuss was to recruit DarkMel, who was also a fallen angel, as well as deal a blow to the Rank S adventurers. In order to achieve those goals, he had activated the Divine Pillar that was in Lumiest's grounds, unleashing Dorotheia, who was sealed inside. That was how he'd gotten Dorothy on his team.

“I know you'll doubt what I say since I'm the one saying it, but I'll add something anyway,” Dorothy chimed in. “Originally, once I was awakened by Instructor Horace, I was supposed to prioritize eliminating the evil that activated the Divine Pillar, which in this case was Instructor Horace. I would be like a machine, but for some reason I don't fully understand, rather than erasing Instructor Horace, I could only think of doing so to Kelvin...san.”

“Why?!”

*We'd had no interaction at all at that point, right?! Not like I don't welcome the hostility or anything!*

“You've got good taste, locking on to Kelvin like that. I thought you were just

a plain little girl, but it seems we'll get along just fine," Bell whispered in Dorothy's ear.

"Uh, oh, okay?" Dorothy seemed puzzled.

*Bell-san, girl, why're you whispering like that?*

"Uhhh... So...anyway," Dorothy continued, "I accepted the deal he proposed, which was that he would create an opportunity for me to kill Kelvin-san."

"And that opportunity was the exhibition match, which means you've been planning this for a while," I mused.

"Yes, that's why I enrolled at the school. There were a lot of conditions I had to clear to be admitted, but Instructor Horace provided me with everything I needed."

"Oh my, Instructor Horace went that far? Sounds like Principal Art!" said Arche.

"Please don't flash that nice smile at me in times like this, Arche-kun," Art responded. "Still, hmmm... I checked out everybody who wanted to take the test. Did Horace-kun pull one over on me? To think there was an inside man at the academy! This corruption is a big deal."

It was rare to see Art so concerned. *Must be hard to stand above others.*

"Mwa ha ha, sucks to be you, Art! Allow me to express my honest feelings in this moment: serves you right!" The one who flashed an even better smile than Arche as she said those words was our guild leader, Director Shin, who had just entered through the window.

"Now's not the time to say those kinds of things, Director Shin. Not to mention, such words are inappropriate for someone of your standing—" Art started, but was cut off by the very person he was attempting to scold.

"Yeah, yeah. Thanks for the boilerplate answer, but now's not the time to argue, is it? Get it together, Principal Art," Shin told him.

Art said nothing in response. Even though Director Shin was the one who had picked the argument from her seat on the windowsill, she had countered with a common-sense argument. As the person who stood at the head of all

adventurers, she was too free with both her words and her actions.

Not that I would want to learn from her.

“Now then, let’s start talking about the serious stuff,” Shin continued. “While Kelvin was having his fight, I was looking for suspicious people. I caught about a dozen and tied them up good. They’re probably all fallen angels. Not that they still aren’t underlings too.”

“Tied them up...good?” Bell questioned.

“Ha ha! Still, what a feat, to have caught that many people in the span of one fight,” Graham commented. “Simply put, that was stupendous.”

“Uh, yeah, he’s right. Rai-chan and I were running around looking too, but we only managed to find DarkMel and the people with her,” said Rion.

“Yeah! Ri-chan and I were running down the hallways like lightning, pretty much! We were totes going fast! It’s basically impossible to be more efficient than we were!” Rami boasted.

“Ah, the reason for that is simple. The other ones were way weaker than this big lug, it looks like, and most importantly I wasn’t using speed to do what I did,” Director Shin explained.

“Uh, hmmm? What’s that mean?” Rami seemed confused.

Rion and the others also tilted their heads, puzzled by the statement, when the director suddenly took out a gun. It was the weapon she had used in her fight against Art.

“I mean, I just have to think really hard about hitting people who’re doing bad things while I shoot this gun off randomly. Then my special paralytic bullets will fly off somewhere, and boom! Right in the terrorist’s faces! The only other thing I had to do was follow where I could sense my bullets traveling and tie up anybody I found passed out on the ground. Oh man, it was such an easy job!”

“Shoot them off...*randomly*?” Bell asked.

“That’s crazy!” Rami laughed.

Everyone reacted with astonishment and exasperation at the things the director said while laughing.

*Still, an ability that lets you hit anybody you want by just shooting into the air, huh? I saw it in action during her fight with Art. Does the director have some sort of luck-based skill like Serge and Touya?*

Art tried to get things back on track. “More importantly, Director Shin, what were the results of your interrogations?”

“Ah, they just said the same things as that big lug on the ground there. They spouted some stuff about a revelation of reviving the wicked deity and the archangel, and that they were doing their best to enact a great purge of the world before that happened.”

“The wicked god and an archangel...and a purge. Urrghhh, there’s so much new stuff being said, I’m confused,” Suzu muttered.

“Ahhh... Sorry, as you can see, Suzu’s lost. Could you please explain so that we can all understand?” I’d personally visited the Evil Deity’s Heart in Abyssland, which was now known as the Northern Continent, and had had a chance to touch a little upon the deity’s knowledge, but it was all just rudimentary information. I wanted to learn everything I could about the subject of wicked deities and fallen angels.

“You want me to explain, but I don’t know all that much myself,” Shin replied. “After all, they’re talking about myths from when this planet was first born.”

“That far back?!”

“Well, there are theories that this planet was born around the spot where the wicked deity was sealed away after losing the war between the gods,” Shin said. “They also say that after the defeated wicked god’s heart and archangel’s body were imprisoned somewhere, all the people who followed them, as well as their angels’ cores and power, were sealed somewhere in this world along with them.”

“Hmph, so that means that this world is nothing but a prison for those gods,” Bell scoffed. “By the way, did you know that all the people who sided with the wicked god who weren’t angels are now designated as demons today, no matter what species they actually are? Or that they were all crammed into the Northern Continent? Even though the angels were stripped of their status and power, they were allowed to blend into normal society afterwards, so I guess

they thought fallen angels were better than demons? Well, that treatment is nothing but trouble to us.”

Bell seemed really unhappy, and she spoke as if she were spitting out the words. I understood why, since she’d been heavily influenced by the war on the Northern Continent between demons and the Demon Lord throughout her childhood.

*I get it, but please stop kicking my leg. My shin hurts. It hurts!*

“Trouble indeed,” the director agreed. “The ones I captured this time are just descendants of those fallen angels, not the original angels themselves. To be honest, it doesn’t look like they know anything about what happened back then.”

“So they caused such a ruckus without even knowing the details? I’m having trouble telling if this was premeditated or not,” Bakke commented.

“It’d be terrible if they were to start what they call a purge indiscriminately,” Grostina added. “By the way, do we know who they’re purging?”

“According to Horace, anyone who would oppose the wicked god and are strong enough to do so,” Paul answered. “So in this case, the targets would be individuals rather than countries. The first one they went after was—”

*“Me?” It’s an honor and very welcome, but why?*

“Well, even if it wasn’t Kelvin, there are a lot of Rank S adventurers gathered here for the exhibition match. Depending on the situation, they could also have gone after me, Director Shin, or any of the others,” Art noted.

“Still, for all that, it seems like they underestimated our strength, didn’t they?” Rion asked.

“Here! I have a question! What about the archangel? We haven’t talked much about the archangel. Seems like a leader based on their name?” Rami suggested.

“Details aside, you’re basically right. Apparently the archangels used to be referred to as the Ten Authorities. They were like an execution squad serving directly under the wicked deity during the age of myths.”





Isla Heaven is a piece of land that roams the skies. This place, where angels live, was normally impossible to exit or enter, even for angels. In other words, it was a totally isolated place. But today, an exception of exceptions occurred. Even the angels, who loved peace more than the elves did, were somewhat—or rather, very—restless.

“Finally, this day has come.”

“Indeed. This is the advent of a new Goddess of Reincarnation. I never expected I would be able to witness such a day.”

“Apparently this new one has strength, inner goodness, achievements, and a lack of impurity that satisfies even those elders. If things happen fast, the official proclamation from them will probably come soon.”

“Oh Goddess, please bring new light to this world...”

Those were the general reactions from the angel populace. Their reactions were understandable. After all, this was the day Goldiana would officially be appointed Goddess of Reincarnation. Interestingly, only the leaders knew how Goldiana looked. She had yet to appear in front of the public and was totally unknown to them...

That was why the Peach Goddess Goldiana used a special method to teleport directly to the Chamber of Wisdom, where the leaders of the angels were gathered, without exposing herself to the public. She had already visited this place many times and was used to the trip. However...today what awaited her in the Chamber of Wisdom was not the leaders she had expected.

“Oh? Did I teleport to the wrong place?” Goldiana asked.

“No, you are in the correct place. But, yeah...I’d love to hear that our new Goddess does not actually look like this, even if it’s a lie... Well, whatever. A new age dawns upon us. I will allow it,” came the reply.

After teleporting into the chamber, what awaited Goldiana was a gathering of ten unfamiliar angels. Their wings and halos were black, and they exuded an abnormal aura that could only be described as evil.

“Well met, false deity of this generation. I am the leader of the Ten Authorities, Eld Astel. Oh, feel free to not remember that name, since I’d prefer it if you would die here and now.” The moment after the red-haired man in the middle said that the Chamber of Wisdom was enveloped in black light.



A shadow slowly crept over the black light that completely covered the chamber. The unknown attack that Eld had unleashed didn't seem to harm any objects like buildings, so the room itself was untouched. However, the same could not be said for his target, Goldiana.

"Whew! Oh gosh, you surprised me!" she exclaimed.

She emerged from the black light, shouting and appearing to hug herself. It was a complete mystery why she was posing like that, but somehow the pose was sexy and sent shivers up the angels' spines, and it was also weirdly divine—or maybe none of the above. Anyway, the way she looked sent everyone into confusion.

"I seriously was so surprised!" she complained. From the way she spoke, she seemed unexpectedly okay but wasn't unscathed. In fact, from her point of view, Eld's attack had been more dangerous than expected.

*Hmmm, it was the right choice to reflexively use Loving Hold to protect myself. I suppose the attack was like something traveling at light speed, only arranged with some strange extra impact? That would've been dangerous if I'd been caught unprepared. Nooooow then, it looks like the teleportation method I used to get here's been sealed off, so I wonder what I should do now!*

Goldiana returned from her protective stance, which apparently was what Loving Hold was, to a normal one. As she did, she thought hard about what to do. The fact that she managed to do all this while still winking at her audience showed how splendid her dedication to fan service was. Unfortunately, that service was in vain, as it was deftly dodged by all of the Ten Authorities.

"Oh? Did you not like my present?" she asked coquettishly. "Maybe you wanted a blown kiss instead of a wink?" Though Goldiana asked that, concerned that her present hadn't gotten through, that wasn't why they had dodged.

The Ten Authorities ignored her question in favor of moving the conversation along.

"Khah hah hah!" one of them cackled harshly. "Did you hear that? I think you took it too easy with that attack, Eld!"

The one who spoke, sounding like an old person, was a man wearing pure-white robes with golden embroidery that hid him entirely, face included. Not only that, the robes were both large and not human-shaped. It was impossible to tell what whoever was inside looked like.

“Incomplete though she may be, she is still a standin Goddess of Reincarnation. It is clear that she at least has a corresponding amount of power.” Following the robed man, another of the Ten Authorities spoke up in a quiet voice. It was a small-statured girl this time. She had long, shining golden locks tied into pigtails and wore a weathered red gothic-style dress. She was also hugging a stuffed doll that was missing an eye and had cotton stuffing coming out of its gut.

“It looks like she’s not good at controlling her power. I bet it’s because she’s just awoken. Hazama, Rem, will you two do this in my stead?” Eld asked.

“Khah hah! No. While not as much as yours, my powers don’t lend themselves well to restraint either. I choose to be mature, sit back, and allow the young’uns to take this one,” cackled the man hidden in robes.

“I don’t want to either...” mumbled the gothically dressed girl. “I just...can’t deal with those looks. Also, my dolls, they aren’t ready yet...”

It appeared the Ten Authorities were in disagreement over who would be fighting Goldiana.

*Hrrmhmm? So the one that sounds like an old man is Hazama-chan, and the small and cute girl is Rem-chan? There’s also the one who just introduced himself, Eld-chan. I suppose I’ll take his word for it and assume he’s the leader. Hmm?*

Meanwhile, Goldiana was poring over her observations in her mind when she noticed something. She felt the same sort of presence from the Ten Authorities as she had from the machines enclosing the leaders of the angels she was originally supposed to meet.

*Could it be? The missing leaders... Are they...*

By shifting from her battle-ready stance to a beautiful pose, Goldiana further increased her thinking speed. It was as ridiculous as it was unclear why this

method worked, but that didn't stop it from greatly increasing the speed of her thoughts. Still, she only held it for a moment. A new member of the Ten Authorities stepped in front of Goldiana and her snappy pose.

"If neither Hazama-san nor Rem-san want to do it, I will. Of course, I ask that no one else butt in."

"Wait, Baldogg. I am the one most fit to bring down this false deity. Allow me."

One of the members who spoke up was a blue-haired, bespectacled man who gave off an intelligent impression. He carried several objects on his back that seemed to be weapons, though it was unclear what they were. The other one was a blonde, beret-wearing girl who spoke like a career soldier. She wasn't very tall; in fact, she was downright short, but the sharp look in her eyes and the strange pressure she gave off could be clearly felt on the skin.

"Were you not listening to what I just said, Gloria-san? Don't butt in. I swear I was clear about that, wasn't I? Or are you not fully awake and feeling groggy? If so, I'll take care of this, so feel free to go back to your little nap," Baldogg said.

"You should save the sleeptalking for when you're actually asleep. Everything has its logical place, and every person has their logical role. We're going to be using this place as our base of operations, you know? Are you *planning* on wrecking it with your haphazard fighting style before we even get a chance to move in?" Gloria questioned.

"Ha ha! You picking a fight with me?"

"I would never do something so inefficient. I only spoke the truth."

Both of them exchanged glares without speaking further.

*Oh no, that beautiful young man and beautiful little girl are fighting over me! When will my popular streak end?! I'm still such a sinful W-O-M-A-N even after becoming a goddess!*

Goldiana watched over the two who had sparks going off between them with an affectionate gaze. Any third party coming into this scene would have no idea what was going on. Still, she couldn't allow it to go on forever. Even though she'd become the Goddess of Reincarnation, it would be reckless to try and



take all the Ten Authorities on at once. That was why she'd been buying time and gathering information, but she was now thinking of ending it.

"You two sure get along, Baldogg-chan, Gloria-chan," she said. "I don't want to get in your way, so I'll just—"

"Khah hah hah! So, you no longer need to buy time to evacuate the angels on Isla Heaven? Your appearance aside, I see you're quite the kind false deity," Hazama said.

"Oh my! So you waited for me even while knowing that?" Goldiana asked.

In all honesty, the moment she had noticed the Ten Authorities, she'd sent a message to all the angels living on Isla Heaven using her own Peach Aura. The aura rose high into the sky, calling for an evacuation in huge letters. It was truly a wondrous show of power.

"We have no interest in the mediocre angels of this generation. Our aim is settled squarely on the powerful who have the ability to harm our one true deity," Eld Astel explained.

"An example would be...one such as you, who blasphemously stepped into the realm of the gods..." Following her leader, Eld, Rem elaborated while hugging her doll.

Unfortunately for her, Goldiana had already disappeared from their sight, and by the time anyone noticed, the Goddess was already dashing away at breakneck speed, having gained quite a distance. Goldiana, having confirmed the safety of the angels, had completely ignored the flow of the conversation in favor of running away. She was quite literally running full tilt.

"And became a false...deity... *Sniff!*" Rem, left behind in the Chamber of Wisdom, was tearing up. The shock from not being allowed to finish her sentence must have been too great for her.

"Sorry," Goldiana apologized. "I believe bravery and recklessness are different things, and I value myself too much to engage in the latter. I'm taking this chance to meekly but furiously make my escape!"

She continued her headlong dash, though she glanced backwards to make her apology. However, she unexpectedly found pursuers right on her tail.

“We won’t let you—”

“Run away from us so easily!”

Baldogg and Gloria, who had just been arguing with each other so much that they’d accidentally introduced themselves, were giving chase. Baldogg had one of the weapons from his back in his hands, while Gloria’s fists were cloaked in a sinister magic. They were already right on top of Goldiana, looking like they could attack at any time.

“Oh my, no! You two’ve got wonderful leg muscles!” Goldiana exclaimed. In concert with that compliment(?), she snapped off a massive welcoming wink. Once again, Baldogg and Gloria made sure to dodge it.

After dodging Goldiana’s wink, Baldogg and Gloria made their next move, the will to fight shining in their eyes. The weapon Baldogg retrieved from his back grew bigger, while the magic covering Gloria’s fists changed to light.

*I knew they’d dodge that wink. After all, you people just told me that I wasn’t your type, unlike Mister Gerard! The shortest route they can use to approach me while still dodging my wink is—*

*Fwap!*

The two would-be attackers let out noises of surprise as a pair of giant peach-colored angel wings suddenly sprouted from Goldiana’s back. The sheer presence of them was overwhelming, as if asserting that their existence was proof she was the Goddess of Reincarnation. If only the wings and not their owner were in sight, they would have indeed seemed very divine. As for why Baldogg and Gloria seemed so incredibly displeased by the sight... Well, they were seeing the whole picture.

“It’s a limited thing! Butterfly’s Caress! Mmm-hmmm!” Goldiana declared with a grunt and a heart mark before flapping her wings powerfully. This action was neither delicate nor gentle; it was the opposite, very forceful. And that was hardly surprising. Although her angel wings looked soft at first glance, they were an extension of her body. In other words, they were also made up of love and muscles. So what would happen if such a large and powerful appendage were to hit you?

“Grkhh!” cried Baldogg.

“Damn you!” shouted Gloria angrily.

The answer was simple: it was like being kicked with a wing-shaped leg. The pair of would-be attackers were swept away and forced to fall back a great distance. What’s more, the wind generated by the action forced them back even further.

“I seem to have blown you away as dynamically as the wavering of a woman’s heart! My apologies! Well then, I’ll excuse myself now!” she exclaimed, then spread her wings wide and attempted to accelerate even further.

At this point, it was impossible to catch up to her. At least, Goldiana was sure of that and had already started pondering what she would do next when...

“We hereby manifest our Authority,” said two voices in unison.

Once again, an overwhelming and undeniable sense of pressure assaulted Goldiana from behind. The moment she felt it, there was no way for her not to be on guard. What she could see from her position far off in the distance were parts of two sets of black wings and halos, the symbols of fallen angels. Baldogg and Gloria, who had just been forced back, had apparently revealed their true forms. Goldiana, knowing the true forms of the angel Melfina and the fallen angel DarkMel, instantly recognized what she was seeing. However, the change she was witnessing was a little different from what she knew. After all, the shapes of what had manifested were obviously not what was in her memory.

*Oh no! My sixth sense is raising some serious alarms! I know it’s rude to interfere in someone’s transformation, but now’s not the time to nitpick! I can’t overstay my welcome!*

Having sensed the danger she was in, she immediately gave up on her escape and moved on to her next plan. She plunged her hand into her bountiful chest, trying to retrieve something.

“It’s your turn to shine, Clotho-chaaaan!” Surprisingly, Goldiana now had Clotho in her hands. It was small and seemingly a clone, but its jiggly form and texture asserted that it was the real thing.

“Reinforcements?!” Gloria exclaimed, shocked.

“But such a weak little monster won’t change anything!” Baldogg shouted.

The Clotho clone that Goldiana was holding wasn’t one specialized for combat, so it wasn’t all that strong. It was natural for Baldogg to have called it weak. Of course, Goldiana hadn’t called upon Clotho to have it aid her in battle—her aim lay elsewhere.

“It sounds like there’s some sort of misunderstanding at work, but I don’t have time for that. I’ll be taking this opportunity to plow forward! Clotho-chan, pweeeease!” Goldiana cried, adding a heart mark to the end. Her voice was “wonderfully” low, and Clotho responded to her call by taking something out of Storage.

“That’s...” Baldogg trailed off.

“Mm-hmm, my emergency exit!” Goldiana confirmed.

It was a portable miniature teleportation gate, a super rare magic item that Kelvin had acquired in Abyssland. The teleportation gate had already been charged with magic while inside Storage, so it was ready to use at any time. As proof, the miniature gate started to open with an activation sound.

“You really are planning to run away, damn you!” Gloria shouted.

“I warn you: no matter where you go, you will never be able to escape us,” said Baldogg.

“Oh my, so scary!” Goldiana exclaimed. “So you’re planning on chasing me to the ends of the earth, I see! But I don’t hate that confidence! Okay, if you’re going to go that far, try to catch me! Try to make me turn to face you!”

The current Goddess of Reincarnation pointed and sent a heated look at Baldogg to go along with her words. The destructive power of it was incomparable to her winks from before; it was enough to instantly freeze the air around them.

“Never be able to escape us...” Gloria muttered as she pondered that line. Then, she gasped, “B-Baldogg, no way... Do you...?”

“What do you mean, ‘no way’?! ” Baldogg shouted, flustered. “Are you an idiot?! ” He had meant it as a taunt, but he ended up on the receiving end of an

unexpected counter. The man was forced to desperately explain himself in the middle of their manifestation. Of course, such an action created an opening and temporarily stopped their change into their true forms. Even though it was only for an instant, they had also stopped paying attention to Goldiana.

“Okay then, byyyeee!” she said, adding a heart mark.

“Hey, wait!” Baldogg shouted.

Goldiana took advantage of that moment to disappear through the gate. The only things left behind were the miniature teleportation device floating in the air and a passionate parting blown kiss. The gate was once again stored inside the Clotho clone before it also stored itself. That completed Goldiana’s escape, as now only the blown kiss remained in the air.

The pair of fallen angels stared silently at the unbelievable sight in front of them. They stopped trying to unleash their power and returned to their original states. Likewise, Baldogg’s weapon returned to its original size, and the almost divine light surrounding Gloria’s fists faded.

“We haven’t been humiliated like this since our battle with the gods, Gloria-san. I’ll be the one to take care of that false deity. You don’t have any objections, do you?” Baldogg asked.

“Ah, right. If that’s the case, I suppose there’s no other choice. Still, hmm... ‘Take care of,’ huh? Sorry, it seems I misunderstood. Um...how should I put it? I think there’ll be a lot of problems, given your respective positions, but I’m rooting for you. Do your best within reason,” Gloria responded.

“Wait a second. You really are misunderstanding something, aren’t you? Hey, come on, don’t avert your gaze like that! Why’re you acting so creeped out?!”

Even after Goldiana left, Baldogg had to spend a while defending himself. However, the blown kiss was still slowly flying through the air, not to be forgotten.

Unfortunately, Baldogg *had* forgotten about it. And though a great scream could be heard from the area afterwards, any details about it were lost to time.

In other words, such a story should be left for later.



The conversation reached a natural stopping point, so I left the room to take a break. I would've been fine with staying and continuing to chat, but spending too long surrounded by strong people wouldn't have been great for my sanity. I figured it would probably be better to take the time to cool down and attend to some errands while I was at it.

*So we're facing fallen angels who serve the evil deity, the Ten Authorities, huh? If I recall correctly, they were originally all gods in their own right, but they lost in that mythical battle and were stripped down and sealed in this world along with their evil deity? This is some crazy karma; it hasn't been that long since the thing with DarkMel and they're making their move with this timing? Heh heh...it's amazing that such a fun group decided to show themselves right now. I was thinking of spending my next few years training my juniors while gathering some particularly talented slaves and orphans with nowhere to go so we can play at being a school, but with this I don't think I'll have the time. Ah, I'm so busy! Too busy, in fact. Enough that a single lifetime isn't enough!*

"Hey, that guy, he's muttering to himself while laughing. What is going on?" asked an obviously noble girl with a hairstyle to match.

"You'd better not get close, Katerina-san..." one of her retinue replied.

"Hrmm? That man is Grim Reaper Kelvin Celsius-sama!" Katerina exclaimed.

"You recognize him?!"

"Of course. He participated in the exhibition match. He's also Rion-san's elder brother and DarkMel-san's father."

"Really? I was helping as part of the academy's security, so it's my first time seeing him."

"Still, you said he's Rion-san's and DarkMel-cha—*san's* blood relative? They don't look related. I mean, the two girls are such angels," Katerina said doubtfully.

"I suppose they resemble their mother? Bell-san's father was also in attendance, and she doesn't resemble him much either," her retainer reasoned.



*“Sister Bell’s father?! Where did you obtain such information?!”*

“Huh? Oh, right. When I was assisting security, I heard there was royalty outside with the caravan for some reason, and that it was Bell-san’s father—”

“I cannot afford to just sit around!” Katerina exclaimed. “I must go and offer my greetings to Bell-sama’s father!”

“Katerina-san?! Waaaaiiiiit!” her retinue shouted after her in unison.

The group following the young lady with the magnificently standard drill hair and style of speech went with their leader, dashing speedily off into the distance. As one might expect of a learning institution that catered to nobles and royalty, there were, of course, students who seemed like they had come straight out of a storybook.

*It sounded like they knew about Rion and DarkMel, so maybe they’re friends? But the way she referred to Bell, what kind of relationship would result in that? She seemed weirdly attached to the girl, so maybe... No, I should stop getting sidetracked. I can see this resulting in me getting kicked by Bell in the future.*

“Whoa there, sorry.”

“Oh! Sorry.”

I rounded a corner and bumped into a female student coming from the other side. Neither of us were running, so it was just a simple bit of contact, but...

*Huh? I bumped into someone without being able to sense them first? Strange...*

“Oh? Aren’t you that Rank S adventurer, Kelvin-san?” the girl asked frankly and without fear as soon as she got a look at my face. Normally, people would be shaken when they bumped into a Rank S adventurer, like that other female student earlier, but this girl was acting bold. And I certainly wasn’t acting suspicious, so that other girl was just surprised that I was a Rank S adventurer!

“I am indeed. And you are?”

“My apologies. I have yet to introduce myself. I am Melissa Crowlord, the student council president.”

*Oho, the student council president! So she should be one of the most powerful*

*students here. After all, she's in a position to unite all the kids who took part in today's exhibition match. Right...so I must not have been able to sense her thanks to some ability she has. Not to mention, I could feel her overwhelming presence the moment I laid eyes on her! It's as if she's surrounded by a divine light coming from behind her. Damn you, Principal Art! I really can't let my guard down around you! To think you were hiding such talent!*

“Your bout was well fought,” Melissa commented as she continued on. “It verged on the absurd, and just watching made my palms sweat. Truly a wonderful show, though someone of my level couldn't even follow the afterimages...”

*Hah, now she's acting humble, even after riling me up to this extent. Should I take it as a sort of provocation? Is she picking a fight with me? Or is she showing a layered response, like telling me to make her excited to fight? Well if you're going to go that far, as a battle junkie there's no way I wouldn't take you up on it! I was pretty satisfied being able to fight a surprise Divine Pillar, but that doesn't mean I'd say no to dessert. That's what it means to be a battle junkie! Saying no would just be rude!*

I heard a...unique voice say, “Oh? Why did you suddenly freeze? Did you finally realize that I'm not someone suspicious?”

“No,” Melissa replied. “As the student council president and a member of the exhibition match administration, I cannot allow a suspicious person who used a teleportation gate without permission to run free. In fact, I should ask: how did you use the gate without clearance? There's the matter of your odd appearance too. Truly suspicious.”

“Oh, you! So untrusting! I haven't done anything unusual at all! I told you, I have permission from Art-chan!” I heard the voice say in a lilting, coquettish tone.

I was hiding around a corner a little ways behind Melissa when a giant pink person with a distinct style of speech appeared from my blind spot. I recognized the figure, who was surrounded by a mysterious nimbus and exuding incredible pressure. The moment I saw her, I froze, but I would quickly come to understand the situation.

“My, if it isn’t Kelvin-chan!” I heard a voice say, telling me I had immediately been recognized. “I must give my thanks for this fateful encounter!”

“Ah, sure... It’s been a while, Prettia-chan...”

I had been wrong. I hadn’t sensed Melissa’s presence earlier because I’d subconsciously shut off my detection skills thanks to Goldiana, who was giving off an overwhelming presence in an aura around her.

*Oh crap, that was close. Seriously close. If Goldiana had shown up even a little later, I’d have attacked Melissa. I mean, I’m a rational battle junkie. I’m sure I would have stopped just short. After all, I’m rational.*

“Huh? Oh, um, do you know this person, Kelvin-san?” Melissa asked.

“I do. She’s a Rank S adventurer, just like me: Peach Ogre Goldiana Prettiana. I know her looks, along with the way she talks and acts, can set off alarms, but I guarantee she’s a good person... Yeah, I can guarantee it. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“Why did you lose confidence at the end?!” Melissa shouted.

“Jeez, you’re so *innocent!*” Goldiana exclaimed bashfully, adding a heart mark to her words.

I dodged the wink that went with it. *Oh no. My shield, Gerard, isn’t around. Actually, why is Goldiana even here? Shouldn’t she be taking over the work of the Goddess?*

“Ahhh! Why is the Rank S adventurer Goldiana Prettiana here?! And that’s Kelvin Celsius, who fought in that last bout!”

Even though we were in the midst of a rather striking reunion, the voice of a newcomer interrupted us. However, I recognized it.

“Uh, aren’t you...Ranlulu-san the commentator?”

“That’s me! I’m the one who hosted the exhibition match!” she shouted excitedly. “I’m honored you remember me! I’m a fan of really strong, skilled, people! So, if possible, if you have mercy in your heart, would you please give me your autograph?!” Ranlulu was much more excited than during the matches and thus was talking much faster as she shoved a book and some sort of cloth into my hands.

“O-Okay, I get it. Calm down. Are you okay with this, Prettia-chan?”

“Of course,” Goldiana replied. “I must take good care of my fans!”

“Wow, I feel like I’m dreaming!” Ranlulu exclaimed. “Thank you so much!”

“So you want me to sign this? Uh...what is this book and piece of cloth?”

“Right! It’s *Grim Reaper Kelvin’s Agonizing Poem Collection* and the souvenir version of the Goldia-style battle uniform!” Ranlulu answered.

*Wait a second. Where did she even get this thing?*



“Right, I did indeed give permission as the principal,” said Art.

“Um...really?” Melissa asked. She had gone to Art to confirm that Goldiana had come with permission as soon as we’d returned to the room. Of course, the answer was yes, and there was even proof of official protocols being followed.

*I totally get how you feel. I know you can scarcely believe it, even with the evidence in front of you.*

Melissa turned to Goldiana, saying, “My apologies, Goldiana-san. I jumped to conclusions and treated you like an intruder.”

“To be fair, you’re not exactly *wrong*, in a sense,” said Bakke from off to the side.

“True. If I didn’t recognize the person, I’d have done the same thing,” added Paul.

“Indeed. In my case, the Four Demonic Generals would probably have come to intercept the intruder,” Bell added.

Those assembled all agreed that Melissa had done the natural thing. Anyone would be wary if someone that *impactful* were to suddenly appear from the teleportation gate.

“They’re right, there’s no need to apologize so much,” Goldiana told her. “After all, I maintain these looks even while knowing how the people around me react. You just fulfilled your duty and gave a totally natural response. In fact, I’d like to applaud your strength of will that allowed you to act without flinching

or freezing in fear. You did good work!”

“Oh, uh, thank you very much! Well then, excuse me!” Melissa, having regained her good spirits, wore a stronger expression radiating a sense of duty as she left.

“How should I put this... You’re really a good girl at heart, aren’t you, Prettia-chan?”

“Oh?” Goldiana responded. “Did I melt your heart now, after I did the same to mister Gerard and Dahak-chan?”

“I... I think I’d like it if we just stayed friends. Gerard and I both...” Dahak? Oh, I’d give him to her at any time. He’d like it, after all.

“More importantly, sister dear, why are you here?” Grostina cooed. “Weren’t you supposed to be busy today?”

“Yes, I had something very important scheduled. But a lot happened,” Goldiana replied.

“What do you mean, ‘something’?” *Come on, don’t keep us in suspense. Just say it straight.*

“Mm-hmm, this group is so full of *life*! Okay, I would be happy to tell the people here—in fact, I think I must,” Goldiana said.

“The people here? What do you mean by that?”

“I was just about to explain! Clear out your ears and listen well!” she exclaimed.

The rest of us gulped audibly in anticipation for a variety of reasons.

*This is weird. Why am I getting more pronounced goose bumps than when we were talking about the Ten Authorities?*



“...and that’s how it went,” Goldiana said, ending her story. “I did my best to run away so that I could bring this information to you all! It was a true flight of love!”

No one had any response to that.

*I don't think that phrase applies. But still, I never expected the Ten Authorities to show up in Isla Heaven. And they're going around hunting everyone strong who could get in the way of reviving their evil deity! Gulp! Also, it's good to hear the Clotho clone and instant mini-teleportation gate to the mortal world, which I gave her for emergencies, already proved useful. It looks like the angels managed to escape thanks to Goldiana's quick-wittedness, but...wait a second...*

"Hey, where did all the angels go after they ran? You thought of an evacuation plan, didn't you, Prettia-chan?"

"Of course!" Goldiana confirmed. "Up until now, the angels of Isla Heaven have basically been confined to their own continent. It may be a floating one, but that doesn't mean they're totally immune to natural disasters or the like, right? That's why I set up designated evacuation points all over the world. They're supposed to go to one depending on where Isla Heaven happens to be!"

*She's so prepared, even though she's not officially the Goddess of Reincarnation yet. I don't think Mel would have done anything like that. I mean, she's an amazing Goddess and very thorough when it counts, and I'm sure she'd follow up on any matter that needed it, but when it doesn't count, she really doesn't do anything. Hrmm...*

"So the evacuation site I designated in this case would be..." Goldiana paused to think, "The country of snow and ice, Leigant!"

"Leigant..."

*I believe that's where we had Azgrad, Rosalia, and Sylvia head to so they could ask the Ice Dragon King Salafia for help. The climate should be harsh—will we be all right?*

"Hee hee! Don't worry," said Goldiana. "I thought this might happen, so the spot I designated is in the Ice Dragon King Salafia-chan's territory. Salafia-chan's charmed monsters can protect the angels when they're close to her nest, and it'll be much safer anyway since they'll be far from prying eyes!"

"But...when did you manage all that?! Shouldn't Salafia be in Trycen right now? I'm amazed you had the time to set up something on such a large scale."



“Well, as you might expect, it’s thanks to the Dragon King herself,” Goldiana answered. “She agreed right away because she could secure the refugees within seconds just by concentrating, according to her. This is just a guess, but I also think it was set up before she went to Trycen.”

“Wow.” Even I would need a fair amount of time to make a base on that scale. The wall Rosalia had to scale to succeed her mother was looking high and sheer.

“Then I guess the first thing would be to check on the safety of those evacuated angels. Man, you’ve got a busy life too, Prettia-chan.”

“Oh no, I won’t be heading there.” Goldiana shook her head. “Even though I’m not truly the Goddess of Reincarnation yet, I essentially am already. So I can’t meet the angels directly. I’m pretty sure you would understand, Kelvin-chan. It’s one of the softer aspects of Divine Binding.”

*Oh come on, don’t refer to a Goddess-exclusive hidden skill in such an S and M fashion. And don’t swing the conversation my way after that! People will misunderstand!*

“Well, that’s how things are, so would someone be so kind as to check on the angels in my place?” Goldiana asked. “As a race, they’re on average as strong as demons, and they have the protection of Salafia-chan’s nest, so I’m almost certain they’re totally fine, but this is the Ten Authorities we’re talking about.”

“Then why not ask Kelvin-kun’s party?” Art suggested. “They’ve got numbers. And in terms of party strength, they’re at the top of the Rank S adventurers. Also, I have my job as the principal, so I don’t have time to go.”

“Ah, that’s a good suggestion. I’m not good with the cold,” Bakke said offhandedly.

“I would like to accompany my dearest sister as her Oracle, so I’d like to ask Kelvin-chan to do this too,” Grostina added.

“I want to help, Kel-nii, but—” Rion started, but was interrupted.

“Okay, stop right there,” Arche said. “You may have the strength, but you kids are still students at Lumiest. You’re not allowed to take a leave of absence without the proper paperwork. And making exceptions wouldn’t be good for

the school.”

“Heh! Well, there you have it. Have fun on your trip, Kelvin,” Bell said with a smirk, ending the conversation.

Before I even knew what was going on, I’d been saddled with the job of going to Leigant. “Hey, don’t just decide on your own like that. In the first place—”

“Leigant is a harsh place. That’s why the monsters that spawn there are also vicious. They’re a whole lot stronger than the monsters you see on kill quests the Adventurer’s Guild puts out, you know?” Art explained. “Isn’t that right up your alley, Kelvin-kun?”

“Oh, fine. If there’s no one else better for the job, we’ll have to go, I guess. Seriously, what a bother!”

“So easy,” Bell muttered with a smirk.

Since my heart was as merciful as Buddha’s, I agreed to go to Leigant. I had no ulterior motives in agreeing. None at all.

“Just to confirm: who’s leading the angels right now?” I was pretty confident things would turn out okay either way, but angels had been refusing to interact with other races all this time. I wanted to make sure I was talking to the right person. “I mean, is the chief of the angels still alive? From what you said earlier, they were gone when you got there, right?”

“About that...” Goldiana started, but she paused, wondering whether to actually say it. Then: “Their bodies are most likely artificial.”

“Uh...what?”

Goldiana had said it with an unusually serious air, but then she started posing for some reason.

## Chapter 2: The Defense of Leigant

Several days had passed since the end of the fun exhibition match. I had just arrived in Leigant, which looked like a world blanketed in silver. Let's start off with what everyone else was doing over the past few days.

First, the hot news right now was that during the exhibition match, the fallen angels didn't just attack Lumiest. On the Eastern Continent, Sylvia and Ema were attacked in Toraj, Dan was attacked in Trycen, and Beast King Leonhart was attacked in Gaun. Also, Serge was attacked in the orphanage in Deramis, while Estoria was attacked while she was working diligently. Of course, since they had strength rivaling those participating in the event, they got through the attacks just fine, though there was some damage to their surroundings. On the reverse side, the fallen angels had been captured and were currently being interrogated.

Of course, it's not like people that strong would ever lose to those on the level of Rank A adventurers at best. The Divine Pillar, Dorothy, whom I had fought the other day, was honestly an exception to that rule. I was truly fortunate to have been able to fight her.

*I bet it's because I've built up a lot of goodwill in my daily life! Hah! Hah! Hah!*

Anyway, the attacks had also reached the Western and Northern Continents. It seemed that Pub, where Efil and the others were staying, was one such location. I was told that the Dragonz and Mel had dealt with the attack there. As for the Northern Continent, that had been taken care of by the Four Demonic Generals, and the rest had been dealt with by strong people I had yet to meet. This time, the fallen angels' targets were people with power equivalent to a Rank S adventurer. In essence, incredibly strong people. This tracked with what Goldiana had told us about the Ten Authorities: they wanted to eliminate anyone who could become an obstacle to the revival of the evil god.

I believed they had made these attacks through some sloppy plan to achieve that, but if they wanted to eliminate powerful people, they would need to send

people just as strong. Their actions so far seemed too crudely planned for a supposed organization, so the impression I was getting was one of rather doubtful ability. Like, did they even really *want* to succeed?

As for what everyone had busied themselves with after the event, the students and teachers of Lumiest decided to stay there and maintain vigilance to protect the place. Rion, DarkMel, Bell, and Art were the notable members of this group. Dorothy, who I was expecting a lot from in the future, had been dealt with for the moment, so she would also resume her life as a student. Apparently she had been afflicted with some sort of curse (was it really a curse?), but had been purified upon first meeting Rion. Basically, she was also a victim who'd been manipulated by the fallen angels.

*Still, to think that they'd go so far as to curse her to kill me while she was still in the Divine Pillar! There really are some awful people in the world. They should learn from how pure Rion's and DarkMel's hearts are! Seriously!*

But let's just push past that bit of resentment and move on. The rest of the Rank S adventurers had all gone off to do their own things. Goldiana and Brujowana had headed for the Holy Ground of Goldia, and Oddradd had decided to follow them. I was kind of curious about what the holy ground was, but I could just hear about the details later from Oddradd.

*Honestly, I'm almost afraid to ask about it, but...I'll just have to leave that to my future self. Yeah...*

Bakke had said something about returning to Faanis because she wanted to release all the excitement she'd built up during the exhibition match or something. I had no intention of asking for any details about that trip, but it did strike me that she must have been metaphorically starving, so I just hoped that the king of Faanis would do his best.

*And good luck.*

When it came to Director Shin, she had returned to Pub ahead of us to collate information from the guild branches across the country and come up with a countermeasure against the fallen angels. I felt like this was uncharacteristically serious of her, so I was honestly surprised. I mean, it was the obvious move, but given how I've seen our super freewheeling director act up until now, I couldn't

quite believe it. Still, I'd be glad if she put in some hard work too.

By the way, what was up with that book the Adventurer's Guild stall was selling during the event? The one titled *Grim Reaper Kelvin's Agonizing Poem Collection*? The credits named Shin Rainyheart as the editor, so I had to ask: what kind of joke was it supposed to be? Huh?

Anyway, my remaining disciples, Suzu, Paul, and Sinjeel, had all ended up heading their separate ways. With the way Suzu acted, I couldn't help but treat her like a younger girl, but it wouldn't do to forget that she was an experienced guildmaster who worked in Toraj. Now that the event was over, her reason for being there was gone and she had to return to Toraj. It was also her job to investigate what the fallen angels had done in Toraj, so she had multiple reasons to go back to the Eastern Continent. She had sobbed uncontrollably when we parted ways, so I was actually a little worried, wondering if she'd be okay once she got back. I mean, sure, she was incomparably stronger than before, but I meant it in a more spiritual way.

Sinjeel would remain in Pub and reunite with his party, so he had actually returned with us. After that, he'd left with Lady Respect and Lady Ice to see if their hometowns were okay. I did ask where he was heading specifically, but I figured he would be fine on his own in most situations. I didn't go easy on his training, after all.

*It'll be fine. He can totally win.*

Last was Paul. I'd totally thought he'd do the same as Sinjeel and return to Pub to reunite with his party, but— No, before I explain about Paul, I should first talk about a certain group of three students: Edgar Lauzer, Axe Ex, and Perona Madonna. They were in the same year as Rion and were from Leigant, the country I was currently in. Notably, Edgar was a prince of Leigant, and seemed to be the successor to the throne. As for what these three had done after the event... Well, they had gone missing. This had been discovered after the king of Leigant had requested to see his son, and given the situation, very few people knew about it. It was currently being investigated.

The biggest suspect was the Divine Pillar, Dorothy, who could use the Royal Decree skill thanks to her Heroic Recollection skill. Of course Dorothy had been

questioned, and she'd admitted that she had used her powers on Edgar surprisingly quickly. However, she'd claimed that she only did so on a level that wouldn't be suspected as practice for the exhibition match, doing things such as making him look at her favorably (apparently, there were also some students who had fallen victim to this even though she hadn't pointed her power at them). On the day of the exhibition match, though, she had only put some of the students under her control to serve as hostages for the fallen angels, and she'd said that the trio from Leigant were not among them.

Some people pointed out that she could be lying, of course, but in her current state, with her curse purified, she should have had no reason to side with the fallen angels. In short, the three must have run off of their own volition or been involved in some sort of trouble. Either way, it was highly likely that the fallen angels had their hands in it somehow. The Adventurer's Guild received reports that a trio that looked like them was spotted on the road to Leigant, so there was a chance we would see them on the way. Since Rion seemed to be familiar with them, I decided to keep this matter in a corner of my mind.

Or at least, that was what I normally would have done. But that wasn't all there was to the matter. Returning to the subject of Paul: the moment we got back to Pub and he met up with his party, he had turned around and said to me, "Master Kelvin, listen to me, please. To tell you the truth, I used to be Leigant's first prince. I'm disowned now, but I'm still Edgar's older brother."

My first reaction was to scrunch my face up, thinking, *This sounds like trouble.*

Paul had told me he wanted to go look for his missing brother, Edgar. Apparently Paul didn't get along with his father, the king of Leigant, but he'd had a normal, good relationship with his little brother before they were separated. He'd told me that, frankly, he had wanted to go greet him during the exhibition match, and when he couldn't find him, he had found it suspicious. Now, those suspicions were confirmed and he couldn't bear to sit still.

"Take me with you to Leigant, Master Kelvin! I'm sure I can be of some help!" he'd said, pressing his face really close to mine.

"Okay, I get it, so please get away from me!" I'd answered to calm him down for the moment. I had then looked at Paul and his party members before

saying, “I don’t mind taking you along, but what about your friends?”

“If Paul’s going, then we gotta go too!” one of them had shouted.

“Please take us too, Master Kelvin. I beg you!” another had exclaimed.

Apparently, Paul wasn’t the only one fired up about finding Edgar.

*What beautiful bonds they have! Still, hmmm... Even though Paul’s gotten passing marks in terms of strength, his party will really only get in the way. In the first place, I don’t think they’ll be able to keep up with us in terms of speed. Even if I tried to soften it, I would still be calling them a hindrance in battle. They’d probably be a match for an average fallen angel, but they’d stand no chance against a leader like Horace. They show a lot of promise, but honestly, I’d like them to refrain from doing this at their current strength.*

“Hey now, don’t trouble the Rank S adventurer. Even if we were to sit still and be silent in battle, we’d still just be dead weight. I guess Paul just barely makes the cut?” came another voice.

“Old Man?! When did you get here?!” Paul had exclaimed in shock.

An old gentleman had suddenly appeared as I was pondering my predicament, saving me. “It is an honor to meet you, Grim Reaper Kelvin. My name is Walter, though I am just an insignificant adventurer and gentleman. You could also think of me as this party’s guardian, I suppose?” he’d said.

“You’re not, though! I don’t remember you ever becoming that!” Paul had shouted.

The old gentleman had been wearing clothes so by the book that it almost seemed like a misdirect as he gave a very gentlemanly greeting. According to Walter, he was a senior in the business who had taught Paul and the others the ins and outs of adventuring when they were just starting out, so he was basically their mentor.

“Well sure, you might be right, Walter-san, but...” one of Paul’s party had admitted reluctantly.

“Yeah, we might have gotten full of ourselves just because we got a little stronger...” another had agreed.



“Walter-san’s words sink deep into my heart,” another had said.

“Hey, you guys!” Paul had exclaimed.

Unlike Paul, who was in his rebellious phase, his friends took Walter’s words to heart. I had wanted to object strenuously to their tagging along, so it was a great turn of events for me. Not only that, but even though Walter had said he was retired, I could feel that he would be a good match for Paul, even after his training.

*I would have liked to have met him when he was at his best. How unfortunate.*

Anyway, with Walter’s persuasion, it had been decided that Paul would be the only one accompanying me to Leigant. He was a local, so he would also be perfect as a guide.

*All’s well that ends well.*



“Are you worried about something, Master? You have a very serious look on your face,” a voice asked me out of nowhere as we made our way through the snow. It wasn’t Efil. There was no way I’d bring her to a place this cold. She was pregnant! So she had again remained in Pub. Then who was calling me ‘Master’? Well...

“It’s nothing, Rosalia.”

That’s right. I was being accompanied by Azgrad’s favorite dragon, the coolheaded maid of clan Celsius, Rosalia. Some might wonder why she was coming with us to Leigant, but my only answer would have been that there was a serious reason behind the decision.

“More importantly, Rosalia, the Ice Dragon King—your mother—gave you a trial, didn’t she? Must be hard for you.”

“Oh no, not at all. This is necessary for my mother to accept me as the next Ice Dragon King,” Rosalia replied.

The trial she had been given by the Ice Dragon King Salafia was for her to use her strength to safely secure the refugee angels from their evacuation point. Her goal fully overlapped with ours, but I couldn’t help but wonder why she

would get a trial now, of all times.

“Mother is currently enjoying her second dragon life as a general of Trycen’s Magic Knight Order. *Ahem*, I mean she is living a very busy life. I’m sure she doesn’t have the time to attend to her duties in Leigant with the timing of the fallen angel’s attacks. Added to that, she definitely thought this would be the perfect chance to see whether or not her daughter was worthy of becoming a Dragon King. I believe that was her thought process,” Rosalia explained.

“Your mother sure sounds like she’s enjoying her life, or should I say, dragon life...”

There wasn’t any deep meaning behind it, but I imagined Azgrad being metaphorically tossed around by a very energetic Salafia, complete with General Dan intervening.

“So, how confident are you feeling?” I asked.

“I have been training for this day, so of course I am confident I can succeed,” Rosalia replied. “My skills as a maid and my knowledge are satisfactory, and I can make more ice candies than before. I am ready to take on any situation, no matter how far away it is.”

“Huh? Oh, okay?” *Why are ice candies a part of it? Is that some sort of Rosalia-style joke?* “Well, given the details of your trial, our destinations are the same. We’ll be around to help.”

“Thank you very much, Master. I swear to devote myself to you with even more strength when I become the Ice Dragon King,” Rosalia said.

“Ha ha! How reassuring. Still, when that happens, you’ll be the Celsius house’s fourth Dragon King. We’ll have to celebrate.”

Mel made an excited noise. “Then we must have Rosalia make her special ice candy to show off her power as the Ice Dragon King! No matter how large it turns out, I’ll take responsibility and eat it! I absolutely will!”

Mel must have seen this as an opportunity to get food, as she jumped into the conversation with a sudden suggestion. Our current party consisted of me, Rosalia, Mel, and Mdofarak. The latter two traded off on watching over Efil in Pub with Shutola and Ange. Sera was going to send her father back to the

Northern Continent, so she was away. Gerard and Boga weren't fans of the cold, so they had decided to stay in Pub. Huh? Dahak? Oh, before any of us noticed, he'd left for the Holy Land of Goldia, leaving behind a letter. As usual, he was the poster boy for initiative. All I could do was pray for his safe return.

*I don't even need any souvenirs, so please...*

"Come on, Mel, you just want to eat desserts..."

"Oh no, I also want to celebrate Rosalia's achievement. I truly do. Krsh mrnch!" Mel replied.

"So...what are you eating now?"

"Natural shaved ice."

"Stop that. It's filthy." I took the plate piled high with snow from the ground and threw it away, preserving the barest modicum of her dignity as an angel. There was no way that was something an angel should do. If anything, they were the actions of a fallen angel... No, that'd be rude to fallen angels as well.

"Urghh...I sort of knew this would happen, but without Efil, there aren't nearly enough snacks for the road!" Mel complained.

"What?! You already ate all the snacks we prepared for you?! We spent nearly all the money we got from our last kill quest on it!"

"I didn't do it on purpose! It just happened! Yeah, like a passing fancy! By the time I noticed, the food was already in my mouth!" Mel claimed.

"Aagghh, don't say that while you take a bottle of strawberry syrup out of your pocket to suck on! Seriously, how hungry are you?!"

"Should I make some ice candy?" Rosalia offered.

"Please!" both of us said at once.

And thus the scene of an angel stuffing her face full of ice candy in the middle of a snowy mountain was complete. I rated her smile a full one hundred points.



"Paul is looking like he is having a tough time behind us, Master. It might be best to drop our traveling speed a little bit," Mdo called out to me as we were

making our merry way through the snow, taking down monsters as they came to give us a lavish greeting. She sounded more annoyed than worried.

Also, it seemed we would be having the blue Mdo for our entire stay in Leigant. Red Mdo didn't like the cold, and yellow Mdo apparently didn't want to deal with all the unnecessary static electricity she'd be generating.

"Wait, seriously? But we're already going pretty slow, enough that we can make small talk on the way. Heeeyyy, Paaauulll-kuuuun!"

I called out to Paul, who had a magnificent sprinting form but was lagging quite a ways behind us.

*I know we're running across snow, but it looks like he's still putting out about as much speed as Setsuna would have a little while ago? Personally, I think he's making a good showing, but...hmmm, considering our goal of ensuring the angels' safety, I'd honestly prefer to up our speed a notch.*

"You're lagging quite a ways behind us... Do you want to take this chance to go back to Pub? I'm sure you know we can't afford to drop our speed any further, right?"

"Haaah! Haaah! Haaah!" Paul gasped for air, struggling to get a reply out. "N-No need to worry about me, Master Kelvin! I, Paul-sama, haven't even begun to show my true strength! GRAAAHHHHHHH!" The shout he let out was beastly. And along with that impressive bit of noise, his speed actually increased.

*I suppose his pride as a native of this land, or possibly his desire to save his little brother, is allowing him to exceed his physical limits. Either way, it seems this forced march in the snow will be good training for him. All's well that ends well.*

"By the way, honey, where in Leigant is this refuge that Salafia supposedly set up?" Mel asked. "If there is a town or village nearby, I request we stop there first to do some shopping. Mainly for snacks—no, a full meal!"

"I'm impressed that you stay true to your stomach no matter what's going around you, but unfortunately I don't think we can do that. The place the angels were supposed to evacuate to is near Salafia's nest—in other words, one of Leigant's harsher areas. Do you really think there'd be a human settlement

there?”

“Heh! How could you ask that, honey? As an angel, I believe in the strength of humanity!” Mel answered with pride.

*What?! I have no idea how to react if you make such a nice expression out of nowhere... Actually, you aren't believing in them as an angel, you just want to believe because you're so hungry, right? No, let's not say anything out loud.*

“That is what our purehearted angel is saying, Rosalia. So, is there any such settlement in Salafia's territory?”

“There isn't. Our destination is the peak of Leigant Ice Mountain, after all,” she replied shortly.

“Grkhhaagh!” Mel sounded pained.

It was a clean, clinical denial. I understood, though, since we'd be treading some dangerous ground soon. If there *were* people living in such a place, they'd definitely be battle-hardened barbarians.

“Are there really none?” Mel persisted in asking. “Can't a miracle happen?”

“No, there are none,” Rosalia repeated.

“Grkkhhragh!” I was shocked. The mental wound I was dealt was deep. Deeper than the physical wound Dorothy had inflicted on me!

“Why is Master the one hacking up blood?” Rosalia asked, confused, but after a moment she moved on. “Anyway, we will essentially be scaling a sheer wall of ice soon. You would do well to prepare yourself, Paul-sama, bringing up the rear.”

“Whoo haa! Whoo haaa! Whoo haaah!” Paul was still struggling to catch his breath as he ran. “H... H... Hey, don't joke with me! What you're asking for isn't...preparation! You bastards get ready; I'm gonna overtake you! RRAAGGHHH!”

“Oh, you're unexpectedly energetic. How have you been teaching him, Master?” Rosalia asked.

“Hm? Ahhh, well, I could tell you, but why do you want to know? I don't think it'd be of much help to you.”

“Oh no, I was just thinking of trying it on Huba. I think it would be useful to keep her from slacking off.”

“I know I’m not one to talk since I’m the one who made the training plan, but you’re like a demon. Still, I don’t hate your attitude towards exploring possibilities.”

*Huba has Paul’s level of potential, so the idea might be fun to try out?*

With that final conclusion, I decided to walk Rosalia thoroughly through my training plan.

*All’s well that ends well...*

We continued on, with me feeling happy about the future, and reached the wall of ice Rosalia had told us about. According to her, after climbing this wall, we would be inside the Ice Dragon King’s nest.

*Wow, this is quite the precipice. The act of climbing on ice is already dangerous, but this isn’t just a big piece of it. It’s all filled with a special kind of magic that’s having some sort of effect on the surrounding area. Wait, if you trace the source of this magic, does that mean the entire mountain is standing on top of the ice? Whoa, the scale of it is crazy.*

I sighed. “This is some awfully extreme rock climbing we’re expected to do.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to just fly with magic, honey?” Mel asked.

“No, no, there’s no way I can do that. Paul’s right here, and I’m supposed to be his teacher. We’ll be using our limbs to climb the normal way. Do you think you can do it, Paul-kun? You can do it, right?”

“Haaah, haah, haaah!” Paul gasped for breath. “Bri... Bring it on!”

Mdofarak offered her two cents. “You are so serious at the weirdest of times, Master. I’m with sister Mel here. Let’s just fly. Mgmng...”

“Ah! Wait, Mdofarak! Honey, isn’t she eating something?! You don’t need to answer—I can already smell a sweet, inviting scent that makes me salivate! That’s not fair, Mdo! You can’t keep it all to yourself!”

Mdofarak rejected her. “I will never share this with you, even if you cry and beg, sister Mel. These are *my* snacks. Mgmng...”





The pair took off ahead of us, fighting along the way. *Seriously, you two cannot be starving that much.*

::I don't want to be told that by you, who's always starving for a fight!:: Mel told me through the Network.

*Right, okay.* I replied telepathically, then thought privately to myself, *Please don't read my mind, Mel-san.*

"I suppose I'll act like a proper dragon and fly as well," Rosalia said to me. "I am supposed to be your guide, after all."

It seemed that only Paul and I would be climbing the wall.

"But please be careful, Master," Rosalia warned me. "We've been facing monsters on the way here as well, but the ice that mother created here attracts monsters. It's a special property of this place that helps protect it. It will happen while you're climbing the wall too, and the monsters called by the ice's pheromones will attack you mercilessly."

"Mm-hmm mm-hmm, so you mean...this is a wonderful treat for me?"

Rosalia made a shocked noise as Paul turned to look at me with amazing speed. He laughed heartily, showing that he was raring to go.

*That's my disciple! Let's take it easy and have fun interacting with the monsters. What? The safety of the angels comes first, you say? Of course, I totally remember.*

"Heh, it seems I didn't need to worry," Rosalia said. "Since I'm exempt from this measure, I'll just be in your way the longer I stay, Master. So excuse me as I go on ahead."

"Sure, let's meet up at the top."

Rosalia ascended into the sky with impressive speed. *Whoa, has she gotten faster than before? I should pay more attention to her.*

"Okay! Then let's get to climbing, Paul-kun! This is the perfect chance for you to pull ahead of Suzu and the others! Aren't you lucky?"

"Of...course! Of course..."

I made sure not to look at Paul's face as we spoke. After all, he was definitely making an expression full of vigor and drive. Even if he wasn't, a man's face as he tries to muster up everything he has to surpass his limits isn't something to stare at.



"Grkhh! Haaghh! Huff, haa...ghrfhh... Whew!" Paul grunted with effort.

After we completed our ice climbing stint while battling monsters, Paul and I enjoyed the scenery from the summit in a way that only those who climbed it could. Although to be fair, with the raging blizzard, there was fuck all scenery to enjoy. Not to mention Paul was lying on his face and struggling to catch his breath. At any rate, I figured I should give him some words of praise.

"Congratulations, Paul-kun. You surpassed your limits!"

"Heh! Heh heh heh! It was...easy!" he gasped with great effort.

"Good, good. Seeing that you're still able to talk like that makes me want to throw you down the cliff so you can climb back up, but...we aren't here to train, so I won't. Let's prioritize the safety of the angels, as planned."

"You're a demon, Master..."

*Not a demon, a Grim Reaper. But setting the jokes aside, I wonder where Mel and the others are?* I looked around to assess our situation.

"Rejoice, Paul-kun. I don't even need to throw you back down. Looks like we still have a second helping to enjoy."

Paul panted and huffed for a bit before getting out a "What?" He forced himself up and followed my gaze. What we were looking at was the shrine of ice that was Salafia's home, and a tower of ice that had been slapped forcefully on top of it. The tower looked just as tall—no, taller than the wall we'd just climbed. Since it disappeared into the clouds, I couldn't see the top.

"It's a tower, so there should be stairs or some ladders inside, but...let's take a break out here first. You look like you might die if you keep surpassing your limits."

"Wha... What the hell kind of place...is this shelter?!" Paul huffed. He

definitely had some choice words, but given the angels would be evacuating from Isla Heaven, a continent that moved through the air, this tower would actually serve as a good landmark. At first glance, its construction looked absurd, but it seemed like Salafia had put thought into it in her own way.

“You’re late, honey!” Mel complained.

“You were taking so long, I finished ten of Rosalia’s ice candies. They were pretty tasty,” Mdofarak informed us.

“It wasn’t much. But still, it was a nice break,” Rosalia said.

Once Paul and I made our way into the ice shrine, we found Mel and the others sitting in a circle. They seemed bored, as all three of them were relaxing around a table of ice with sticks that used to have ice candies on them scattered all over it. No, not scattered—they were piled on top of the table.

*You guys definitely ate more than ten.*

“Now then, we’ve managed a decent break with snacks, so let’s get to climbing the tower. My stomach’s in the perfect state to move for a little less than five minutes!”

Paul’s expression changed, but he was silent.

“Don’t be so mean, Mel. Look at Paul-kun’s devastated face.”

“Tee hee!” Mel stuck out her tongue.

Not even I, the Grim Reaper, was murderous enough to want to set out immediately and deny Paul his rest.

*He should recover the bare minimum of stamina with five minutes of rest, right?*

“Here, have some ice candies, Master, Paul-sama. They have the effect of reducing fatigue and relaxing you. This is the style of cooking I learned directly from the head maid. Well, I made it almost entirely with my skills, so I don’t know if it can truly be called ‘cooking,’ to be fair,” Rosalia said, producing a surprising amount of ice candies. “Oh, sorry for the trouble. Here, you have some too, Paul-kun. Even if you don’t have an appetite, you should at least be able to swallow some ice, right?”

“Uh...yeah...” he replied.

*Don't offer him ice in such a cold land, you say? Don't worry; this shrine is warmer than the outside.*

“Oh? It's totally clear, but it actually has a taste. This is...mint chocolate chip?”

“Chocolate? Mine just tastes like fruit,” Paul said.

“Hee hee! The flavors were a bit of playfulness on my part,” Rosalia explained. “They all look the same so you won't be able to tell what flavor it is until you eat it. I still can't match mother in terms of the sheer amount she can make at once, but this bit of uniqueness should put mine ahead of hers. Heh heh heh heh heh...”

“R-Right...” Paul and I said in unison, trailing off uncomfortably.

*I have no idea what she's trying to accomplish with this, but I guess from Rosalia's perspective, this is part of her path to surpassing the Ice Dragon King?*

“The one I ate tasted like cold tomato. It was pretty unique,” Mdofarak remarked.

“In that case, the durian flavor I had was much more impactful, don't you think? In terms of the smell, I mean,” Mel said competitively.

“R-Right...” Paul and I said once again.

*So, you recreated not just the flavor, but the smell too? That's something Mel can't do even though she also uses Blue Magic, since she's exclusively on the consumption side of things. I mean, her cooking skills are as disastrous as Sylvia's and Ema's!*

Anyway, we really did feel better after eating the ice candies. I could see why Rosalia had said it was something she learned from Efil. I could see leaving the fire-based cooking to Efil and the ice-based cooking to Rosalia in the future, with them perhaps competing for the position of best cook in the family.

*I might look forward to that.*

“Awright, I'm back, baby!” Paul exclaimed, crunching on his candy. “Bring it on! I don't care if it's an ice mountain or an ice tower!”

While I was deep in thought, he seemed to have recovered super well. His physical and mental toughness were incomparable to before.

*Good, good. That makes this five-minute break worth it. Heh heh! I'm gonna make you even stronger, Paul!*



We climbed the tower of ice. Then, we kept climbing. After a while of that, we continued climbing. I considered using the outside of the tower to go for a second round of ice climbing, but since we had already incurred a loss of time with our break, I thought better of it and continued to use the inside stairs. It seemed that no monsters would appear in this place, so we really were just climbing. Honestly, I was bored.

"Maybe I should bunny hop up instead?" I suggested.

"What happened to all that stuff about losing time, honey?" Mel asked.

Every once in a while, I suggested some compromises like I just had, but each one of them was shot down. *Dammit, why?*

"Still, whooo, whoo... Tch! We're just climbing some stairs, but it's really tiring!" Paul complained.

"We are currently even higher up than the ice mountain's peak. That's why the air is thin. That slows your metabolism and makes you quicker to tire," Mdofarak explained. "It's only natural that you look like you're about to die, Paul."

"Oh? Hee hee! You sure know a lot, Mdofarak," Rosalia gushed. "I love that. I feel like I know the joy of a mother raising her child now."

"I demand you revise that statement. I don't remember ever being raised by you, Rosalia," Mdofarak replied.

"It's just a hypothetical; don't get so up in arms," Rosalia said dismissively.

"Still, we've gotten quite high, haven't we? It might be time to break for a snack again. Don't you agree, Rosalia?" Mel asked with a smile.

"I do not," Rosalia answered, also with a smile.

Our group's angel with a pure heart managed to deftly display her disappointment by dropping to all fours, even though we were walking up stairs. No matter how high we were, Mel seemed perfectly fine, if unsatisfied since her desires weren't being met.

*If only Paul-kun could be the same. If he was able to adapt to his environment, his body would naturally be able to handle this altitude. Anyway...*

"Hm? Oh, right, the evacuated angels are even higher up than this, aren't they? Won't they be like Paul-kun here?"

"Hey now, Master Kelvin, don't talk like I'm the only one in a terrible state...urp..." Paul protested weakly.

*Yeah. Looks like he's still out of commission.*

"The angels were living on Isla Heaven, so the entire race is used to altitudes like this. Mm-hmm!" Melfina puffed out her chest with pride for some reason.

"I see. In other words, all the angels are stronger than Paul-kun here, whom I trained?"

"No, that's not necessarily true. Well, in terms of average racial strength, they're about the same level as demons," Mel answered.

"Oho, which means there could be angels like father-in-law or the Four Demonic Generals?"

"Honey, drool! You're drooling!" Mel pointed out.

*Whoops. I ended up letting my desires show.* Rosalia handed me a handkerchief, and I wiped away my drool while calming myself down. *Okay. I'm calm now.*

"I can see the exit, Master," Rosalia announced.

"Awright, just you wait, powerful enemies I have yet to meet!"

"Honey, drool! You're drooling again! Also, they're not enemies," Mel reminded me.



I had wiped away the drool I'd subconsciously let out, and now we were

actually making our way to the tower's exit. We definitely were. As always, Mel and Rosalia fixed me with doubtful looks, but if they were to look anywhere, I'd prefer for them to look at the exit. After all, that was where we were heading.

*Yeah, uh...hey, would you please stop that now? I've totally calmed down. I'm not drooling or anything.*

"Now then, I wonder what's going on at the top of the tower... Oh?"

I stood at the front of the group and stepped through the exit first only to find myself on top of a cloud. I had no idea what kind of mechanism was at play, but a cloud was serving as the ground here. *Ah, wait, actually, could it be that there's actually a platform of ice inside this cloud? It's not slippery, but it is really cold. That's probably the case. Which means what looked like a cloud isn't actually a cloud, but wisps of cold air from the ice? I see, she's really skilled.*

"What a wondrous sight. It's a world of ice that looks like clouds, and above us is an endless stretch of blue sky. Then, there are...the angels who are wary of us," said Mel, impressed.

"I'm not really sure if that last thing qualifies as wondrous."

Setting that matter of opinion aside, everything else Mel said was true. The space that Salafia had set up for the refugees was surrounded by blue sky because it was above the clouds. Also, a group of guardian angels with their white wings and shining halos above their heads had spears in their hands, clearly wary of us. Their appearances made it likely that they were the evacuees from Isla Heaven. At least, Mel, the previous Goddess of Reincarnation, was saying so. But I had no doubt she was right.

"Our apologies for greeting you like this, guests, but would you please tell us who you are and why you've come to this place? Depending on your answer..." said an old angel who was standing at the front of the pack as he pointed his spear our way. He had a magnificent beard and a stern air about him.

*He matches Goldiana's description...which means this is the leader of these angels, I thought.*

Then, I connected with Mel through the Network. *I'm counting on you, Mel.*

::Roger,:: she answered.



After our telepathic check-in, I took a step back and changed places with Mel, who stepped in front with her own angel's halo and blue wings on display. As a native of Isla Heaven, she would be much more effective at communicating with them rather than someone they probably wouldn't know, like me.

"Please, put away your spears, Rafaelo," Mel began. "We're here to ensure your safety."

The lead angel gasped. "That...divine voice, and those wings the shade of the blue sky! Could you be..."

"Yes, I am the previous Goddess of Reincarnation, Melfina. I'm currently going by Mel, so please use that," she affirmed.

"OOOOOOOHHHHH!" all the angels cheered.

The angels' anguished faces changed all at once to expressions filled with hope. They were all cheering, as if the dark atmosphere that had reigned over them had never existed.

*Yeah, even that guy, the leader who's apparently named Rafaelo, is raising both his hands and shouting with joy. Also, uhh, err...*

"Um, excuse me. What is the meaning of those sashes, headbands, and fans you've all taken out that say things like 'Melfina Is Life!' and 'L O V E!'?" I couldn't help but ask, even as the angels were expressing their joy with crazed enthusiasm.

I mean, just before, they were dressed in a way that totally made them seem like angels, but now they looked like raving fans chasing after their idol. Hey, you there! Don't make a glow stick using White Magic! And stop dancing! Are you guys seriously angels of this age?

"What?! You don't know, dear guest?! We angels stan our Goddesses of Reincarnation, generation by generation, making a daily effort to spread their magnificence! Well, not that we could leave Isla Heaven, so really we just did so among ourselves. We also sometimes do missionary work through the Oracle of Deramis, sending her cheers through divine revelation to propagate to the masses. That's pretty much all we have to do during peacetime!" Rafaelo explained passionately, spittle flying from his mouth as he spoke. At this point,

there was nothing left of his previous stern demeanor.

*Ah, I understand now. These angels are crazy Mel fans. Uh...hm? Wait a second... I thought to myself before switching back to the Network.*

*Hey, Mel, could it be that the Oracle of Deramis becomes a crazed fanatic for their generation's Goddess of Reincarnation because of—*

::Please don't finish that, honey.:: Mel interrupted. ::It's pretty much exactly as you imagine.::

*Whaaaat?* I replied, while thinking to myself, *Seriously?!*

::Angels of Isla Heaven above a certain rank are able to send divine revelations to the Oracle of Deramis in the Goddess of Reincarnation's place. It only happens on rare occasions, though, like when I couldn't maintain my godliness due to exhaustion from work, or I just didn't feel like it that day, or possibly when I was too hungry to send the revelation myself,:: Mel explained.

*It definitely happened more than 'rarely,' didn't it?* I thought to myself. *You had others take your place a lot, didn't you? But I guess it makes sense. If angels who are this crazed about Melfina were handling the revelations, it's no wonder Colette was infected.*

Telepathically, however, I only replied with, *I see. Now that you mention it, Colette's really more like a victim, isn't she?*

::Oh no, Colette was always like that. Well, it's true that her devotion and their devotion connected through the divine revelations, and they both ended up strengthening each other's feelings that way. It's a sad bit of my history. Urgh....:: she clarified.

*That's just awful...* I answered sympathetically. I could imagine a scene with Colette praying earnestly in the Great Cathedral of Deramis. However, she was actually enjoying small talk in her head with the angels about the subject of their mutual faith. I could definitely see how that would be hell for Mel.

"Oh, my apologies for getting excited without permission! Now, please, this way! I'm sorry it's so filthy here!" Rafaelo exclaimed.

"Ah, sure..."

The angels split to our left and right to let us through, moving all at once as if they'd practiced beforehand.

*Filthy? I mean, this is just the shelter that Salafia made...*

“So, Melfina-sama—I mean, Mel-sama!—did you really come today out of concern for our well-being?” Rafaelo asked.



“Yes, that’s exactly it,” Mel replied. “After all, the next Goddess of Reincarnation, Goldiana Prettiana, cannot come to you directly because of the restraints placed upon her position as Goddess. Though I may not be able to fill her shoes, I came in her stead since I was the previous Goddess.”

“Ohhh! That is much appreciated! Um, if I could have your signature later—no, a handshake! Could I have a handshake?!” Rafaelo shouted.

“Huh? Oh, yes, sure, if that’s all you want...” Mel answered, taken aback.

“Ah! That’s not fair, Rafaelo-sama!” shouted another angel. “You can’t just take advantage like that!”

“You’re abusing your position! Resign right now!” shouted another.

“We all deserve an equal chance! You sure you didn’t fall?!” cried yet another.

“Heh ha ha! Idiots! Everyone knows it’s first come, first served in times like this! The howls of losers feel so good in my ears!” Rafaelo taunted them.

Thus started an unexpected fight between the angels, and the rest of us could do nothing but stand there, speechless.

*So, this is what the angels, who we’ve been asked to escort, are like... Is this the reason the Goddesses aren’t allowed to see them directly? It can’t be...but I can’t help thinking it.*

I kept those thoughts to myself, simply using the Network to ask, *Did you used to be like this, Mel? You’re from the same place, aren’t you?*

::Please don’t joke. I hate stuff like this, and it’s the reason I left for the outside world in the first place. In that sense, I was probably the only proper angel in the entire place, basically.:: Mel answered.

It didn’t happen often, but I sympathized with Mel in this case. I really did. I would’ve left the floating continent too. Honestly, I could no longer tell which side were the actual “fallen angels.”

The angels in question all began to chatter.

“Oh, Mel-sama’s friends, your faces don’t look too good. Is something the matter? Ah! Maybe you’re worried that since your faith in Mel-sama is so

strong, you may not be able to fully devote yourselves to the next Goddess of Reincarnation?”

“Hah! Hah! Hah! No need to worry about that!”

“The next Goddess of Reincarnation was handpicked by Mel-sama, so she’s basically the chosen one!”

“Oho ho ho! I stan all the Goddesses of Reincarnation, all the way back to the previous previous generation’s Elearis-sama. I will support the next one just as much with absolute devotion.”

“Hear! Heaarr!”

Once again, the rest of us were left speechless.

*Um, the next Goddess of Reincarnation is Goldiana... Are you honestly okay with that?* I wondered.



After that, Rafaelo led us to a temple of ice built in the deepest part of the refuge, where we were taken to a reception room. Yep...even this was made of ice. I won’t do anything insensitive like pointing out the fact that it was the exact same as the temple at the foot of the tower. I was sure that this was about the time that Salafia got bored of building things. The ice floor was made to look like a cloud here as well, so the details were definitely in place. Thus, I concluded that it was fine for her to cut some corners.

“This is just like mother; she’s such a perfectionist,” Rosalia commented. “The ice this temple is made of is all never-melting ice candy. She also made sure it was sturdy enough for the job. Gah, so this is the pinnacle of originality!”

*I was wrong. The details were different from what I expected. But I’m not sure if that’s a good thing either.* I heard two people make a shocked noise. *Okay, you there, the former idol Goddess of Reincarnation and Sweets Sniper Dragon King, don’t get up. Even if it’s ice candy, you’re not allowed to eat it.*

“Please sit here. Ah, both the chairs and table are made of ice, but strangely, they don’t feel cold, so don’t worry. I know I shouldn’t be talking, but this is quite the strange place,” said Rafaelo.

He wasn't perturbed at all by the hungry pair's strange reaction. In fact, he reacted with a smile.

*I see, I think I can assume his broad-mindedness when it comes to Mel rivals Colette's. He'll respond to most anything she does, or rather, literally anything weird she does, with a smile.*

"Ah, please, no need to hold back. You're not allowed to eat it. You know that, right, you two?"

"W-We won't!" Mel replied.

"That was rude of you, Master," said Mdofarak. "I have just had my fill of sweets. If I had any more, I would be scolded by sister Efil."

I wanted to retort, "Then what was with that reaction?" but I held it in. For the moment, we followed Rafaelo's instructions and sat down in the seats he'd indicated. It seemed that he would be the only representative for the angels, as the rest of them were waiting outside. He did his best, serving tea in cups made of ice with a smile.

*I'm sure this guy thinks of it like a perk.*

"By the way, what are your companions to you, Mel-sama?" Rafaelo asked. "Or do you only know them through the next Goddess of Reincarnation, Goldiana-sama? What a wonderfully powerful name for a Goddess, I must say. I know we will not be able to look upon her face, but everyone is excited to hear her voice for the first time."

Rafaelo asked this question as everyone was taking a break and sipping tea.

*Well, uh, yeah...we know both of them, but...how should I explain it? A long time ago, Colette was supportive of Mel and I when she found out, but I don't know if these types of fans will take it the same way. Should I really tell him without thinking much of it? Hrm...*

"Uh, well... Prettia-cha— *Ahem!* I used to work in the same field as Goldiana. And as for Mel—"

"This man is my husband!" the person in question interjected in a happy, singsong voice.



“BFFWHAAAHAH?!” Rafaelo did a spit take with the tea, though he made sure not to hit anyone with it.

*Ah, right. Mel’s always been the type to proactively spread knowledge about this.*

“Um, are you okay?”

“Oh, no, don’t mind me,” Rafaelo answered. “I was just a little surprised. Uh...just checking, but that wasn’t a joke or anything, was it?”

“No, it’s true,” Mel answered. “We’re already living together! Heh heh.”

Rafaelo was silent, while I could do nothing but shed cold sweat in reaction to Mel, who was honest to a fault in this case. She had no tact at all when it came to our relationship, and I had to wonder, *Are you okay, Rafaelo? You’re a proper fan, right? Can I believe in you?*

Rafaelo was still silent, and at this point I couldn’t stand to wait for a response any longer.

“Um, Rafaelo-san?”

“I’m fine... Don’t worry about me. I am calm, and I am acting normal. My heart has not been thrown into disarray. Even if my idol has gotten married, as a proper believer I must greet this news with happiness and cheer their relationship on feeling jealousy is out of the question and that is exactly why calmly drinking my water is the right path to take I’m sure my comrade the Oracle would also be happy in fact she would charge straight into the relationship and incur damage in her celebration—”

*He just smoothly transitioned into muttering to himself super fast!* I thought to myself in surprise.

Checking through the Network, I asked Mel, *Uh, hey, is Rafaelo-san okay?! His eyes are bloodshot!*

::He should go back to normal if you give him some time. Despite how he may seem now, Rafaelo is still one of the highest-ranking angels in Isla Heaven, high enough you could count on your hands. His mental fortitude reflects that.::

*Aha, right, does it really now? But I don’t think this will pan out like it did with*

*Colette...* I replied.

::Well, Colette's mental fortitude makes her seem like she comes from a different dimension entirely. I believe it's rather unfair to compare the angels to her.:: Mel argued.

She was right. I didn't feel like my own mental fortitude could compare with Colette's either. I was sure she could find joy in anything by convincing herself it was for Mel's sake.

Suddenly, Rafaelo gasped loudly. "What was I doing?!"

It seemed that while we were killing time with a chat through the Network, his mind had come back from whatever trip it had taken.

*He really is a high-ranking angel. That was faster than expected.*

"I...my apologies once again. But, Mel-sama, I believe knowledge of your marriage isn't something you should spread around too much. That knowledge would be too much for us angels, so if you must make it known, please do so in stages..."

"Awww..." Mel sounded disappointed.

*That's what I figured. And don't sound so sad about it.*

"Mel," I prompted her.

"Mgrr, fine," she reluctantly agreed. "I suppose the purpose of our visit this time isn't related to my marriage, so I'll choose not to actively talk about it."

"Please do. So, Rafaelo-san, there're a few things I'd like to confirm. Are all the angels who were evacuated here unharmed? Did anyone get lost or disappear during your escape, or was anyone hurt in the process?"

"Luckily, no one was hurt," Rafaelo replied. "However, well...we do have one missing angel. The name is Luquille, who is a high-ranking angel, just like me."

"Luquille-san? Do you know this angel, Mel?"

It took a moment for Mel to answer. "Yes, I do."

*Hm? Her face seems stiff. Her happy-go-lucky attitude from before disappeared.*

Just as I thought that to myself...

::I cannot say this in front of Rafaelo, so I'll tell you through telepathy. Luquille is the angel who competed with me to the last to become the next Goddess of Reincarnation. Or in other words, to replace Elearis,:: Mel explained privately.

*What, you had competition?! I replied telepathically. Doesn't that mean she's just as strong as you?! Which means she's an angel we have to be careful of!*  
The shocking truth was exciting my salivary gland!

::Erm, I'd appreciate it if you didn't immediately show interest in judging her strength. Candidates aren't only selected by their strength in battle. They have to have a personality befitting the position, and flexibility that will allow them to break through any difficult situation, among many other things. Anyway, they examine you for a lot of different qualities. Of course, I definitely had the strength to make you fall for me, didn't I, honey?:: Mel asked.

*I mean, weren't you basically DarkMel when you were being examined for the position?* I answered. *Well, let's just ignore that for now. So, do you have any other information on the angel Luquille? That's where my interest really is right now.*

::You're really laser-focused when it comes to things like this, honey. First, for some context, when I became the Goddess of Reincarnation, Isla Heaven's angels lost all memory of me. That's why no one knows how Luquille and I know each other. Luquille is no exception, and I'm sure she's lost all memories of her candidacy as well. Considering all that, please don't spread that information unless absolutely necessary, okay?:: Mel asked.

*Okay. You can trust me, you know how rational I am.*

::Wow, that's not reassuring at all.:: she replied.

*That's just rude,* I thought to myself. *Well, whatever. Let's hurry up and go.*

::Luquille is a high-ranking angel, just like me,:: Mel continued. ::She's prominent enough to be considered to be the next Goddess of Reincarnation, so she must have the skills and personality to match. I also remember her personality overflowing with affection for all. You know how I was back then, so I basically didn't interact with her at all.::

*So Luquille is a major contender for becoming a Goddess of Reincarnation... I answered. I see. I can imagine someone gifted with ability and beauty, both inside and out.*

::Honey, did you just think it was amazing that I was chosen for the position over Luquille?: Mel asked suspiciously.

*No, I didn't think anything like that. I know full well that your love is the heaviest in the world.*

::Honey!:: Mel cried.

We continued our telepathic chat, and I was sure that from the outside our expressions must have been changing at light speed. Which is to say, Rafaelo, who was sitting across from us, seemed very confused.

At any rate, the conversation eventually concluded with me learning about Luquille's appearance and battle strength. She was certainly beautiful enough to be a Goddess, and her strength was top class among the angels. In short, she was a perfect superhuman, or I should say, superangel. Still, would such a perfect angel really go missing all alone?

*I'd understand if she'd made herself a decoy so everyone else could escape or otherwise sacrificed herself in some way, but...from what Rafaelo-san said, that wasn't the case. No one even reported seeing her; she had already disappeared by the time the evacuation started. At least, that's the conclusion we've come to after gathering all the facts.*

"So, it was before Goldiana gave the order to evacuate...or maybe... Anyway, I understand. We will try to find Luquille," Mel mused.

"Oh, that is much appreciated!" Rafaelo exclaimed. "Thank you so much, Mel-sama!"

"Please, raise your head, Rafaelo," Mel replied. "I have to ask, do you remember what direction the floating continent went in after you all left Isla Heaven?"

"Right, I made note of that for sure. I remember it went northwest of the northern part of the Western Continent. Isla Heaven's path is completely random, so not even the Ten Authorities have a way of steering it."

I brought up a map of the world within my mind. If I remembered correctly, in that direction lay nothing but ocean. If they didn't change direction, they wouldn't come upon another continent, but...

*No, it's too early to assume that. Our enemy wants to revive the wicked god, and they have incredible power for fallen angels. They might also use unexpected, underhanded means, and I can't assume that they'll take it easy on women and children. In other words, even the slightest thing could blow up into something big. So, what to do?*

"I'm worried about Luquille, of course, but I'm also concerned about the safety of the leaders who stayed on Isla Heaven. They can't move from the Chamber of Wisdom, after all, so they might already be..." Rafaelo trailed off, not wanting to actually say it.

*Ah, I see. They don't know what happened in the Chamber of Wisdom, and they evacuated only with whatever they had on them at the time, I thought to myself before returning to the Network.*

*Should we tell them, Mel? That the Ten Authorities might be using the leaders' bodies as their own in this world, I mean.*

The leaders were able to enjoy what was essentially eternal life by entering special devices within the Chamber of Wisdom. However, it seemed the price for that was the loss of their emotions and sense of self. They would become machines that made decisions based only on ethics and logic. In doing so, they were able to always make correct decisions for the sake of the angels living on Isla Heaven, and that was also why they were able to play such a big role in the selection of the Goddess of Reincarnation.

It seemed rather sci-fi to me, and above anything else, it was hard to describe such a system, but...at the very least, it seemed to have the purpose of preventing a system like the monarchs and nobility that were so prevalent down on the surface. As long as no errors or trouble occurred, there would hardly ever be a need to select a new leader. There were a total of ten, which was more than enough stock (though I wasn't sure that such a word was appropriate in this case), so in theory, it was a perfect system. Then again, trouble was currently brewing.

Anyway, according to Goldiana, said leaders had disappeared from their machines when she'd arrived in the Chamber of Wisdom. Yes, instead of being murdered in the machines, they were gone without a trace. It was as if they had been perfectly swapped out for the Ten Authorities. Goldiana suspected that they had taken over the bodies of the leaders, just like DarkMel had been using the body of Elearis to act back when she was causing trouble.

::At the moment, it's just conjecture, so I don't believe we should say anything until we have confirmation.:: Mel replied.

*Makes sense, since it'll just spread unnecessary unease. Roger, I'll act as if we intend to save them just like Luquille,* I confirmed.

I promised Rafaelo that we would search for Luquille and the leaders to confirm their safety. As Mel had advised, that was likely the best choice.

"You keep saving us, Mel-sama. It would be great if we could do anything to help you..." Rafaelo trailed off, too shy to actually ask.

"It has been hundreds of years since you last left your homeland. For now, just prioritize getting used to your new environment, please," Mel suggested.

"It doesn't seem like the Ten Authorities are gunning for all of you, but it's better to be cautious than dead. I'll use my magic to improve your defenses. Rosalia, Mdo, help me."

"Understood. I will prepare the ultimate defense, one that will not lose to something my mother makes," Rosalia answered.

"I want to make a place that would be good to snipe from. I am so excited," Mdofarak muttered.

"Ohhh!" Rafaelo let out a long, appreciative sound. "All that for me—I mean, for us?! I could just die!"

"No, please don't do that..."

For now, we'd managed to confirm the angels' safety. *We also managed to reinforce their shelter, so I guess let's go to Leigant's capital next. There's Paul's matter, after all— Wait, Paul's been really quiet ever since we climbed the tower, hasn't he? What's going on? It's not like he's a cat we just adopted.*

“Whooo, haaaa...whooo, haaaa...”

When I went to check on him, I found him taking deep, quiet breaths.

*Ah, I see. He was quiet because he was focusing on recovering. I suppose I really did push him too hard...*



Isla Heaven, the Chamber of Wisdom. Now that the angels who had been living here were gone, its only occupants were the fallen angels, the Ten Authorities. They used the machines that had once held the angels’ leaders as chairs as they conversed.

“I thought we would get used to our power with the passage of time, but...hm, it seems the power really does fall when using an artificial body,” muttered the leader of the Ten Authorities, Eld, as he looked at his own hand.

“Khah hah hah! Even though we used the leaders of those angels, they’re still just fakes from the mortal realm. The vessel is too small to handle our power in full,” said Hazama.

“We can regain our full power for a time by manifesting our Authority. I confirmed that when we were chasing that Goddess of Reincarnation. However, it can only be done for a very short time. Any more and the body will break.”

“The timing of using such a move is something to consider too. It takes a few seconds to fully shift to our true forms. My word, what inconvenient bodies these are.”

These past few days, the Ten Authorities had spent their time and effort trying to get their artificial bodies used to their power. However, it seemed like they were unable to reach the level of power they desired, so all their words were colored with disappointment.

Rem sniffled.

“Oh, Rem, it’s about time you stopped sulking. You’ve been crying for three whole days.”

“Khah hah! It seems no matter how much time passes, we never change. We may have deteriorated in power, but that actually comforts me,” said Hazama.

He seemed to be having fun as he looked at Rem crying and laughed.

Seeing that, one of the others heaved a sigh and said, “Still, we can’t afford to stay like this forever. Eld, you’re our leader, after a fashion. Have you thought of our next move?” The one who spoke, who was sitting on the machine-seat next to Eld, was a man with long, black hair and bangs that covered his right eye. He continued, addressing Eld in a rather aggressive tone. “The fake fallen angels that are taking action on the surface are almost all in a disadvantaged position now, if they haven’t already been suppressed. It would be too much to expect more from them. Not that we were expecting much of anything in the first place.”

“Don’t be like that, Cheruvim,” Eld said. “At the very least, it’s thanks to them that we know the location of one of the enemies we’re targeting. They’ve done quite well for disposable pawns.”

“Hmph!” Cheruvim grunted. “So? Our next move?”

“It’s obvious, isn’t it? Luquille, come,” Eld said.

The angels living here had gone. However, there was always an exception to the norm. One such exception was here, a resident of Isla Heaven who had not evacuated.



Luquille had been born to a couple of high-ranking angels, which were few in number. As such, she was a genius and a lot was expected of her in the future. She herself was proud of her lineage and put diligence and effort into meeting the expectations of her parents and everyone else around her. In the process, she grew accordingly.

Since she was young, she had been compassionate, prudent, and devout. Luquille also excelled in magic and martial arts enough to rival the high-ranking adult angels, and everyone thought of her as a prodigy and a shoo-in for the next Goddess of Reincarnation. She was no different in this regard. She considered herself the most worthy of such a position, which was why she felt she had to put in the effort to continue to be so. In truth, she did have the power, intelligence, and spirit to be the next Goddess of Reincarnation.



“Huh? Just now, what did you say?” she couldn’t help but ask.

::Allow me to repeat myself. The next Goddess of Reincarnation will be the angel Melfina. That is our consensus. Melfina will proceed to the Chamber of Wisdom.::

“Understood,” said Melfina.

However, on the fateful day the next Goddess of Reincarnation was to be decided, the name the leaders had called was not Luquille’s. The one to succeed Elearis would be Melfina, an unknown angel who had just a few days ago returned to Isla Heaven from the outside world.

Actually, she wasn’t totally unknown. While Luquille didn’t know if Melfina knew her, she was of the same generation and remembered that Melfina had left for the outside world because she couldn’t stand the angels’ insular society. The other day, the barrier around Isla Heaven had been lifted for the first time in a few hundred years in order to let the angels into the outside world for a specific purpose, and Melfina had shown up out of nowhere, seeming to have taken advantage of the opportunity.

“Melfina’s the next Goddess of Reincarnation, not Luquille-sama?! Did someone make a mistake?!”

“But I can’t imagine the leaders making a mistake or doing something dishonest! This should be a proper decision.”

“Why not think about it like this: Melfina left for the outside world, without fear that she would never be able to return to Isla Heaven. That means she knows the world better than any other angel and has the widest knowledge base. Of course, she would also have interacted much more with other species as well.”

“I see. So you’re saying such initiative is necessary for one to be worthy of being the Goddess of Reincarnation?”

“That would be the case according to this explanation. It might be that just being kind won’t save the world, and merely being brilliant isn’t enough either...”

“Hey, that’s going too far. There’s no doubt that as an idol, Luquille-sama

would be— *Ahem!* She has the qualities to be a Goddess of Reincarnation. It's just that this time, she was unlucky. That's all."

"You know, I'd rather talk about how we're going to support Melfina—I mean, Melfina-sama! Maybe we should make a banner?"

"No, no, it's still too early for that. I'm going to keep supporting Elearis-sama until her time is actually over."

Having heard the leaders' words, the angels were in a titter, and many theories were being thrown about. However, in the midst of it all, Luquille stood still.

"Melfina...is the next Goddess of Reincarnation?" she muttered to herself.

She didn't remember Melfina as a bad angel but as someone who threw away her calling as an angel, or what could be called a failure. She wasn't an exceptional angel either, and neither did she stand out in a spiritual manner. At least, she shouldn't have. In fact, from how she acted on a daily basis, Luquille could even have called her lazy. And yet, Melfina had been chosen as the next Goddess of Reincarnation.

*But why? Why?! WHY?! Why Melfina?!*

Luquille had given her entire life up until now to become the Goddess of Reincarnation. This was the first time she had ever felt jealousy and hatred towards someone else. And because it was the first time, those emotions were *powerful*.

*Kyeeeeee.*

In that exact moment, all the angels, Luquille included, were affected by something. There was an annoying ringing in her ears, like she had tinnitus, and she found it horribly unpleasant. To go along with that, she also got a light migraine and the urge to vomit. Unable to stand it, she fell to one of her knees on the ground.

*Huh? What was that just now?*

After a while, the unpleasant symptoms gradually went away. In the end, she had no idea what had just happened. The unpleasant feelings deepened when

she realized that, and then she felt disgusted at her own emotions.

“Owww... Seems like I got a bit of a headache. Am I getting old?”

“What a coincidence. My head also hurts. Hrm, by the way, what were we talking about just now?”

“Hey now, come on, we were just discussing how we would express how wonderful the Goddess of Reincarnation, Melfina-sama, is to her Oracle, weren’t we? It’s too early for you two to go senile!”

“Of course the answer is to make a banner!” suggested one of the senior angels.

“Ah, right! You’re exactly right!” the other two agreed in unison.

Meanwhile, Luquille could only let out a confused noise as she looked around. It seemed she wasn’t the only one who had been affected by those symptoms. However, the conversation she heard caught on to something within her. It was like a revolting sense that something was *wrong*. It was a hard feeling for Luquille to put a label on.

“Ah, so that’s where you were, Luquille.”

“Jeez, we looked for you everywhere!”

“Mother? Father?” Luquille had been deep in thought when her parents called out to her—the two who, more than anyone, wanted her to become an example for all angels, to be an angel worthy of becoming the Goddess of Reincarnation.

“I... I’m so sorry,” Luquille said immediately. “Father, mother, you heard the leaders’ telepathic message, didn’t you? I, Luquille, couldn’t become the Goddess of Reincarnation...”

She bowed low to go along with her heartfelt apology. Her kind and gentle parents were the angels she respected most in the world after Elearis. While they probably wouldn’t make their feelings obvious or rebuke her, they would still be disappointed in her. Luquille couldn’t meet her parents’ expectations, and she felt deeply guilty.

But her parents only reacted with confusion. “What are you talking about,

Luquille?” her father asked. “Becoming the Goddess of Reincarnation? You know we only worship Melfina-sama. There’s no need to worry; this world is filled with nothing but peace.”

“Hee hee! Are you tired, Luquille?” her mother giggled. “Come, let’s return home. We must sustain the world’s peace along with Melfina-sama.”

It took a moment for Luquille to let out a “Huh?” She wasn’t able to immediately process what her parents had said. Actually, it was more like her head refused to process it. However, she wasn’t childish enough to think that way forever.

*This... Have all the angels other than me had their memories altered?*

She was a smart angel, so her intuition was likewise sharp. Based on her observations of the angels around her, her conclusion turned to certainty. After those mysterious symptoms that everyone was hit with, every other angel had had their perception changed. Specifically, Melfina being the Goddess of Reincarnation was now treated as common knowledge, like a self-evident truth. It was as though it had been that way all along, with the notion having settled naturally into everyone’s minds. They no longer knew anything about Melfina, the angel who had selfishly returned to Isla Heaven, and whenever Luquille talked about it, they would warn her not to disrespect the Goddess, as though they didn’t know she had been gunning for the position of Goddess of Reincarnation herself.

*That’s wrong. It’s not “as though.” No one remembers anymore, not even mother and father... Their memories have been changed... So why am I the only one unaffected?*

After some thorough pondering, she came upon a thought and started to suspect that Melfina being chosen by the leaders, and the alteration of all the angels’ memories, had been done by Melfina herself.

Luquille gritted her teeth, letting out a stifled noise that indicated she was seething. Then, she screamed, “So that’s why you returned with such perfect timing! Melfina! MELFIIIIINAAAAAAA!”

Not only had Melfina become the Goddess of Reincarnation by cheating, she had manipulated everyone’s memories in a way that left Luquille as the only

one who was unaffected. She was enraged by this false deity's wickedness and cursed Melfina from the bottom of her heart for stealing her one goal in life, her *raison d'être*.

Then, she resolved herself, deciding to surely deceive the false goddess and take her revenge. Since then, for the next few hundred years, she continued acting as an exemplar for all angels, waiting for her chance, all while polishing her god-killing blade. The saint who should have become the Goddess had turned into a being of pure vengeance.



Several hundred years after that fateful day, the one standing in front of the Ten Authorities was without a doubt Luquille. Her golden hair was waving in the wind, and she was emitting a merciful aura. Anyone would describe her as a saint at first glance, as she seemed to have a visible divine nimbus. That was how godly her existence was. That was...if not for one detail: her angel's halo and wings were jet-black.

"Thank you for summoning me, exalted members of the Ten Authorities. Luquille, at your service," she said as she took to a knee and bowed her head. Her mannerisms said that she was completely obedient to the Ten Authorities. At least, that was what it looked like.

"I need to thank you again, Luquille." Their leader, Eld Astel, extended his thanks. "You were the one who adjusted the angel leaders' bodies for our use as artificial vessels. And thanks to you putting our brethren on the surface to work, we've been able to descend to this world faster than planned. In essence, you created the chance for us to be revived."

"I am not worthy of such praise," Luquille replied in a monotonous tone. It seemed she wasn't very interested in his gratitude.

"Heh!" Baldogg scoffed. "This girl is saying she doesn't need your thanks, Eld. Why not skip the preamble and get to the point?"

"It seems you're right," Eld conceded. "We are prepared to grant your wish, Luquille, which I believe was to kill the previous false Goddess, Melfina?"

Luquille said nothing in response. She didn't even react to the name. She just

waited for Eld to continue, silently and patiently, like she was reading the group.

After a while, Eld continued. "I'll take your silence as confirmation. We will proceed to the first step on our way to purging this world. The targets for this purge are those who could become an obstacle to our deity. In short, your target, Melfina, is in this category as well. We want you to accompany us Ten Authorities to aid us in our purge, but...how do you feel about it? Will you do it?"

"Of course, that is exactly what I have been wishing for, after all," Luquille replied. "But what do you mean when you say 'accompany?' I am thankful for the help, but I can do this on my own. Personally, I'd prefer to be free to do it as I please."

"You would be well served not to underestimate our enemy so much, Luquille. No matter how base and inferior to us she is, she was able to deceive you once, wasn't she? It would be better not to let your guard down," said Eld.

Once again, Luquille responded with silence. Neither her nor Eld's expressions changed, but the air between them started to feel extremely heavy. It made the skin tingle and prickle, and was enough to make Rem, who was nearby, start to grumble.

"Khah hah! We aren't worried about you in the least, little girl," Hazama spoke up. "But according to the fallen angels on the surface, your target, the former false Goddess, is currently in some country called Leigant, no? We also have business there. So we're just accompanying you because it's on the way. Yes, we're only traveling with you partway, I say. I agree, it would be perfect if you could clean this up on your own. So we won't interfere. Well, I suppose I'll have to take that back if you're in danger?"

After a pause, Luquille closed her eyes and assented, saying, "I understand. That is fine."

Rem sniffled and said, "Then...who is going?"

"Well, I think it's safe to say it isn't you, Rem," said Hazama. "I believe it'd be impossible for you to exhibit teamwork, after all."

“Urghh...” Rem was still teary-eyed. While she was powerful enough to be one of the Ten Authorities, it seemed she was an extreme crybaby.

“Ridwan, you go with Luquille,” Eld said to another member of the Ten Authorities, who was sitting near the entrance to the Chamber of Wisdom.

A large man wearing an iron mask stood up silently. Although he didn’t say anything, this was probably his way of signaling his agreement.

“Looks like it’s decided. We already have people lying in wait in Leigant. Get the details from them,” Eld told them.

The iron-masked giant, Ridwan, nodded slightly but didn’t say anything.

“You’re so taciturn,” Eld commented. “Well then, let’s venture forth and complete our goals.”

“Luquille, if you’re able to complete your mission and return here, then we will offer you the source of our power, *Authority*. We’re looking forward to your success.”

Once again, Luquille spent a moment in thought before saying, “Thank you very much. Well then, excuse me.”

The next instant, she and Ridwan had disappeared from the Chamber of Wisdom. It seemed they’d left for Leigant.

“How much do you really trust that woman, Eld? She doesn’t look nearly as obedient as she acts to me. In fact, it seems like she’s using us for her own goals,” Cheruvim asked.

“If you look at it from the other side, Luquille probably doesn’t trust us completely either,” Gloria added. “She might be excellent for an angel from the mortal realm, but she’s so ferocious I can’t even tell when she’ll bite the hand that feeds her. She’s the exact opposite of how she looks.”

“Yeah. She’s keeping up appearances, but she’s looking at a different outcome than us,” Cheruvim agreed.

“I know,” Eld assured them. “It’s as you say—she will betray us if given the slightest chance. She’s basically a giant powder keg waiting to go off. I’m sure it’s going to be hard keeping her on a leash. I believe her act of reviving us was

only done to cause trouble for Melfina. Either way, that's all the reason she has to work with us."

"Khah hah! So she'd involve the entire world just to cause trouble for one angel! What a bold woman. I like her, I do!" Hazama exclaimed jovially.

"We're really working with...someone like that? This is so scary..." Rem muttered.

Eld took a moment to gather his thoughts before explaining. "While she is a powder keg, Luquille's hatred of Melfina is real. After all, she's waited for hundreds of years, wearing a mask to deceive her fellow angels and accumulating power all to wait and watch for her chance to strike. As a former promising candidate to become a false Goddess, her strength should be in the top class for this world too. Depending on how things shake out, Luquille could certainly become an obstacle to us. That is exactly why we will help her. We will help and use her until she is crushed as one of our pawns."

"Ah, I see. So your aim is to have her and Melfina destroy each other while Luquille's attention is still on her enemy. The one who's left will be finished off by Ridwan. Ahah...you're such a schemer, Eld-san," Baldogg said, impressed.

"Indeed. But judging from how she was acting, I believe that girl knows of our plan. Wouldn't that mean she'll end up as Ridwan's enemy?" Hazama asked.

"Melfina is her sole target," answered Eld. "I'm sure she wouldn't do something like that before completing her mission. It would only exhaust her. And even if that did happen, Ridwan would just have to make his move. Do you really believe he would lose, Baldogg?"

"Heh! That'd never happen. After all, he's—" Baldogg started, but he was cut off.

"Stop there, Baldogg. You'll just stretch this conversation on for way too long. Still, Eld, what if the impossible happens and Ridwan loses to Luquille? The Ten Authorities are supreme beings who act as God's own fingers. You'll be made to take responsibility for any careless losses, you know? I can't help but be worried about that as the subleader," Cheruvim told Eld bluntly.

"Hm..." Eld pondered his response. "If that should happen, what if we have



her take Ridwan's place in the Ten Authorities?"

Cheruvim was dumbfounded and took a moment to respond. "What the heck? Would you really bring a powder keg into the fold?"

"Khah hah hah hah! That's a great idea; it has my support!" Hazama exclaimed. "Only the chosen can rule the world. Hasn't that been our guiding principle? If Luquille defeats both Melfina and Ridwan, that would make her the one who is actually worthy of being in the Ten Authorities! It makes perfect sense! Khah hah! This is nice! I'm having fun!"

"Urgh... Hazama, your voice is too loud..." Rem complained.

"Hmph, talking about the impossible happening is a waste of time," Baldogg scoffed.

While Hazama was laughing mirthfully, Rem was covering her ears and Baldogg sulked.

"Then let's talk about something that isn't a waste of time," Eld said. "I've decided who goes to Leigant. So our next order of business is the greatest threats to the purge: the false Goddess Goldiana and Hero Serge. Do we have any volunteers?"



"Whew, I guess this should do it."

"We did a good job," said Mdofarak.

"This is a truly solid fortress. Or should I say, a frozen solid fortress?" joked Rosalia.

Blue Mdo, Rosalia, and I had just finished improving the angels' refuge and were feeling satisfied. We had put up a dual-layered defense with an invisible barrier of wind and a flavored ice-candy wall. Then Mdo and I had created an army of golems made of ice and steel, which would automatically eliminate any intruders, and placed them on sniping platforms. In addition to all that, we added a plethora of traps and other things. It seemed like Rafaelo-san and the others could fight reasonably well, so with these defenses, they should be able to defend themselves against the average fallen angel.

“Look, everyone, at this absolute fortress! We have just witnessed a miracle of the Goddess!” Rafaelo exclaimed.

“Oooooohhhh!” a bunch of angels shouted, impressed.

“Mel-sama! Mel-sama! Go, go, Mel-sama!” chanted another group.

“Please save me, honey,” Mel pleaded.

I had no idea what had happened while we were working, but Mel was now sitting on a divine-looking portable shrine that was being carried by a bunch of angels. Those around her were all wearing happi coats and waving specially made Mel fans. Rafaelo-san was waving a particularly large, specially made flag, acting like the leader of a cheer squad.

“How did it turn out this way?”

Yeah, I really had to wonder how we’d gotten here. I knew this was just how they were, but it was like Colette had cloned herself. There was a large number of fruit arrayed on the portable shrine Mel was sitting on. They seemed to be offerings, but somehow Mel wasn’t feeling up to eating them. She was the type who was always happy as long as she had food, but understandably, this seemed to be too much for her.

Or so I thought. Mel was eating at superspeed. So she *was* eating, but because the angels around her were constantly adding more offerings, the pile of fruit wasn’t shrinking!

“Seriously, what are you doing?”

Mel made a frustrated noise, even as she continued munching. “I assure you, I have not been tamed by this food or anything!” She finished with a gulp.



“This is big, Master!” Mdo exclaimed. “Those fruits are all...extremely high quality! I request permission to eat them!”

Mdo’s sweet-detecting eye was able to discern everything about the fruits just by seeing them.

*Wipe away that drool first.*

“Ah, right, Master...what are we going to do now?” asked Paul. “This is feeling like we won’t be able to leave right away.”

“About that...it seems it would be literally backbreaking to get Mel off of that shrine. I’d also like to head to Leigant’s capital as soon as we finish our business here, but...”

“What about having Mel-sama ask directly, Master? I believe the angels would listen to her,” Rosalia suggested.

*Right, that’s a good idea. But would Mel really want to escape the fruit heaven she’s in?* I thought. Still, I figured it was worth trying, so I sent her a telepathic message.

*It’s about time for us to leave, Mel, so would you please tell them to st—*

*Rrmblblbl...*

The sound reverberated with perfect timing. It was abnormal and came with a strange presence to boot. I detected the abnormally twisting magic and turned to face the direction it was coming from as quickly as I could.

“What the heck is that?” Apparently Paul felt the same way I did.

We were looking at something far off in the distance: a pure-white stake that seemed to have appeared somewhere near Leigant’s capital. Because we were so far away, it was impossible to tell exactly where it was. However, the fact that we could see it even from where we were meant that it was enormous. The stake had suddenly manifested, as if splitting apart space itself, and was gradually lowering itself to the ground.

Its purpose was a mystery. Was it an attack by the Ten Authorities? Would it have some sort of effect by sticking itself into the ground? If nothing else, though, I could feel instinctively that it wasn’t good for us. If I had to say, it felt

sort of similar to DarkMel's Ark, I think? Not only that, but the stake in Leigant wasn't the only one. I could feel several more appearing far off beyond the horizon. It was a troubling sensation. Including the one before us, there were probably...a total of three? Anyway, our enemy had at least enough power to teleport in such huge objects, as well as the strength to create it. That much was certain.

"N-No way! Is that..." Rafaelo shouted in shock, trailing off.

"Do you know what that is, Rafaelo-san?"

"Yes... Wait, Kelvin-sama! Why is your expression so extreme?!" Rafaelo sounded like he'd had a second shock after looking at me.

*Huh? No way, really?*

"My apologies. This is a chronic *illness* with my master. However, his appearance aside, he will not harm you all, so please don't mind him," Rosalia explained.

"R-Really?" Rafaelo asked. "Hmm...it seems there are illnesses that even we don't know about on the surface. How strange."

*I don't want to be told that by you people, who act the same as Colette. Also, I feel like that explanation was just horrible. Wouldn't you agree, Rosalia? The way I look isn't harmful either.*

"Wait, now's not the time for that! Leave my face alone for now! You were saying that you knew what that stake is, Rafaelo-san?!"

"Yes. In an old myth told among us angels, something much like that stake is described. Supposedly, when the world is nearing its end, the stake of judgment will come down from the heavens. It will carve its divine punishment into the earth and bring about destruction," Rafaelo recited.

"It's a myth from even before the war between the gods," Mel added. "It's said that the god of the extremist faction—which would now be called the wicked god—would do such things when he was about to destroy an unfit world. That stake is both an attack and a declaration. Of course, I've never seen such a thing before now."

“So it’s that big a deal... Then doesn’t that mean it’s okay for us to bring it down?”

I brought out my Black Staff of Disaster and enchanted it with Boreas Death Scythe before striking a stance. The distance was a bit of a problem, but if I were to concentrate my slash as much as possible, it would probably just barely reach. After all, the target was huge.

*I’m not one to miss something as big as that, Ten Authorities!*

“Even if you were able to bring it down, honey, wouldn’t that make things awful for the people directly below it? Given how large it is, destroying it would create quite a lot of falling rubble,” said Mel.

“If Leigant’s capital really is below it, then the results would be disastrous. If you’re fine with that, I can snipe it. Would you like to hit it hard?” Mdofarak asked.

“Wait!” Paul shouted. “That’s my hometown! H-Hey, this is Master Kelvin we’re talking about here! You’ve gotta have some sort of idea, right?!”

*I didn’t respond right away. Hmm, so they placed it in a populated area, expecting that I would launch a preemptive attack. Which means it wouldn’t be a good idea to unleash Boreas Death Scythe, since it slices through everything. Gah, you cowards! So...what do we do from here? I’ve already made my scythe. It’s a bit hard to stop now that I’m already showing off.*

“Sonic Acceleration Quad.”

After some intense thought, I converted the slash I was about to unleash to MP, using it to cast Sonic Acceleration as I struck an appropriate pose. With that, Mel, Mdo, Rosalia, and I had buffed our speed. Without delay, I started laying out the plan.

“If we can’t attack it from a distance, we just have to do something about it from up close. Everyone, we’re running as fast as we can to the stake. So, Rafaelo-san, we’ll have to hold Mel’s fan appreciation event some other time.”

“Huh? Ah, okay. Please be careful...” Rafaelo said, sounding confused.

“Come on, Mel, get off that shrine already. Sonic Acceleration will only be

active for a limited time.”

“Urghh...this is a big help, but this is such a waste of fruit...” she muttered.

I’d displayed a bit of quick-wittedness in the midst of the awkward atmosphere. Yes, it was quick-wittedness. I successfully got Mel off the shrine and created an excuse for us to go to Leigant.

*Well, what I said did probably trick them. Yeah, I’m sure they’ll accept it. Now all we have to do is go.*

“Okay, let’s go! The stake won’t wait for us!”

“Wait, Master!” Paul cried out. We were so close to leaving, but he stopped us with a pleading look.

*Damn, so it really was too much to ask for this to go well?!*

“I’m the only one without a buff!” Paul complained.

I took a moment to think of an excuse. “We’re in a hurry, so you hold down the fort, Paul-kun.”

Everything turned out fine.



Having escaped the angels’ refuge in a totally natural way, we flew straight for the stake. But when I thought about it, I realized Mel and I could’ve just ridden on Rosalia and Mdo to get there. We were already halfway to our destination by the time that occurred to me.

“Oh well, everyone makes mistakes.”

Having learned something, I transferred the remaining time in my casting of Sonic Acceleration to Rosalia and Mdo.

“Great, that should extend the effect a little. I’d rather have overclocked it to more than Dual, but overclocking makes the duration shorter, which isn’t good for long-distance travel.”

“It depends on how you use it,” said Mel. “But, honey, I notice you’ve gotten really deft at using magic. Seeing someone able to transfer the effect of an already cast buff is pretty rare, you know? Let’s see... I think among the Rank S

adventurers, only Art can do the same? The closest would be Sylvia, who's one step away from being able to do so."

"Well, to be fair, magic is my main niche. Plus, I'm being trained by you every day, Mel— Wait, Mel, how do you know that about Art? You should've been in Pub during the exhibition match, right?"

"Well, I *am* the former Goddess of Reincarnation," Mel said. "I know the abilities of pretty much every strong public figure. Plus, Art is one of the oldest adventurers."

*She's right, now that she mentions it. I think that might be the case?*

"Master and Mel-sama are acting like usual, it's kind of scary. We *are* in an emergency situation, aren't we?" Rosalia asked.

"Hm? Well, yeah. It *is* important to psych yourself up for a fight, but wouldn't you agree that remaining calm and natural is even more important? Yeah, I'm sure it is."

"You say that, but you're always craving more fierce fights, honey," Mel said. "You're able to flip your switch incredibly fast. It's super obvious when we look at your face, isn't it?" Mel turned to our two companion dragons.

"Yes, you're right," Rosalia and Mdo replied in perfect sync. While they couldn't do it right at this moment since we were in midflight, I could imagine them thumping one fist into their other open hand if their arms were free.

*Jeez. Fine, I'll stay silent.*

"More importantly, Master, are you sure about leaving Paul there? He seemed really unhappy," Mdo said.

"I mean, you're right that we could easily have accommodated him by riding you guys, but I didn't realize it at the time, and Paul is still too slow, so the only choice I saw was to leave him behind. Not that he would've been able to keep up in a fight between the Ten Authorities anyway."

"We *did* essentially bring Paul to just be a guide," Mel agreed. "There's not much point in that role now that we're traveling in a straight line through the sky, so I agree that either way, leaving him behind was the correct choice."



Well, given Paul's personality, I could easily see him making his way to the capital on his own, but he would just have to take responsibility for his own actions if he did that. I *was* training him, but he was still a full-fledged Rank A adventurer. I didn't have the right or authority to limit the actions of an adventurer, for whom freedom is a creed. Basically, if he felt he could make it, he could come on his own.

"Master, I see a large castle. That is probably our destination," Mdo told me.

"You're right. The stake is directly above it."

We flew and flew, until finally we were right in front of our goal. What lay before our eyes was an ancient stone castle with an accompanying castle town. Even though everything was made of stone, the place was overwhelmingly white, likely because it never stopped snowing. As for its size, it looked to be about the same as Trycen's capital. Being able to rival one of the Eastern Continent's four major countries was a great accomplishment.

"There's a large barrier around the castle, and another of the same size around the town. This double-layered defense also resembles Trycen. With defenses on that scale, it should be able to defend against most attacks. But—"

Mel finished my sentence before I could. "Honestly, it doesn't seem like it would be able to stop the stake."

There were no openings or weaknesses in Leigant's barrier. It was most likely made by hundreds of skilled mages and was suitable for defending the capital of a large country. However, the gigantic stake about to fall on the barrier was much larger than we had imagined. It was humongous, absolutely mind-bogglingly *big*. It literally looked like a simple white stake, but it was longer than Leigant's castle was tall. If such a thing were to fall on the capital...as Mel said, we couldn't be sure Leigant's barrier would hold.

"But I don't get why the stake is falling so slowly. If destruction is the goal, why not drop it all at once? Like, *THUD!*"

"If that thing were to fall all at once, *thud* would not begin to cover it," Mel said.

"We'll be arriving soon, Master," Rosalia said.

“Okay. Get in between the barrier and the stake. We’ll attack it there.”

“Understood,” Rosalia replied.

“Got it,” Mdo added.

Rosalia and Mdo raised their speed, approaching and then arriving at the point I designated. *Whoa, the impact of it is so different when looking from directly below. Leigant’s people have been exposed to this sight for much longer. I bet they’re terrified.*

“It looks like the castle town is embroiled in confusion, Master. There are lots of soldiers,” Mdo noted.

“Well, the kingdom’s central pillar is in a pinch, after all. Of course they’d be confused and send out soldiers.”

“We also appeared quite suddenly,” Mel added. “That would likely add to their confusion.”

“By the way,” Rosalia added, “dragons are a symbol of fear in Leigant. They attacked my mother, the Ice Dragon King, around the time the kingdom was founded, and were dealt a terrible defeat. That fact has been recorded deep in their history, which only increases that fear, I believe.”

*Ah, so the Dragon King-class Mdo, and the almost Dragon King-class Rosalia are triggering the Leigant people’s trauma. Would it be better to explain this away later? Just thinking about it is annoying.*

“Okay, let’s leave dealing with what’s going on below for later! What’s more important right now is doing something about that enormous stake!”

“Well, sure, but what *can* we do?” Mel asked.

“For now, just break it!”

I activated Boreas Death Scythe for the second time, readying my scythe and locking on to the stake. I’d decided not to attack earlier, fearing the consequences of any falling pieces, but from this position there was no need to worry. After all, we would be around to deal with any falling rubble. Also, the capital had a barrier that was capable of defending it. Even if we were to miss some pieces, the barrier should be able to defend against some rubble, at least.

“Now then, how’s this going to shake out? I’m looking forward to the results!”

I unleashed a full-strength, extra large horizontal slash at the huge stake. If it continued on its course, the blow would split the stake in two, so how would it react?

“Hm?”

Immediately after I launched my slash, I noticed that something had flown out of a small opening in the tip of the stake at great speed. It was generally white, so I couldn’t really tell what it was from this distance. Still, that got me to notice that the stake actually had quite a complicated structure. It was complicated enough and obviously mechanical enough to seem pretty sci-fi.

*What the heck? Is this a stake-shaped spaceship or something?* I couldn’t help but think. Then I switched to telepathy and warned the group, *Wait, now’s not the time for that. Watch out, something letting off a crazy and delicious aura just flew out of it!*

::What do you mean, ‘crazy and delicious,’ Master?:: Mdo asked.

::It’s short for ‘delicious enough that I feel like I’m gonna drool like crazy, heh heh heh!’:: Mel explained.

::As expected, Mel-sama. You know Master so well.:: Rosalia answered.

*What the heck? Why does this chat sound hostile?* I thought.

*Greeeeeeee!*

I reacted, letting out an alarmed noise. While we were goofing around, *it* happened. My Boreas Death Scythe’s slash was deflected right in front of our eyes.

*Am I going blind, or did I just see whatever flew out of the stake clashing with my slash attack and winning?* I asked through the Network.

::What a coincidence. I saw the same thing,:: Mel replied.

::I saw the same as sister Mel. So it can be defended against. That’s a new discovery,:: Mdo noted.

*Defended against?* I thought privately. *No, no, it’s nothing as tame as that.*

*This is the first time since Gerard that it's been DEFLECTED head-on instead of being dodged. Case in point, my Boreas Death Scythe was even able to cut DarkMel during our final battle. Oh man, it just goes to show that anything really can happen if I'm having a precious new experience at a time like this.*

"Yo, I believe we're meeting for the first time, aren't we? Should we introduce ourselves? Or would you like to start fighting right away? I'm good with either, so choose with your actions," I called out.

There was a moment of silence before our new enemy spoke. "One of the Ten Authorities, 'Unbreakable' Ridwan Mahad. The obliteration of the false Goddess Melfina and her apostles will now begin."

It was great that the guy who came out of the stake knew how these sorts of things worked. The man who appeared in front of us was a large fallen angel wearing a mask that seemed to be made of iron. And it wasn't just his mask. He was wearing metal armor over his entire body, making his defenses seem as impregnable as Gerard's. If I had to judge from his appearance, he wouldn't have looked like an angel to me. He didn't have his wings and halo manifested, so I couldn't tell if he was fallen or not, but...given that he'd identified himself as one of the Ten Authorities, I figured he was. What reinforced this assumption the most was the strong enemy aura he was radiating. There was no doubt he was in a whole different league compared to other fallen angels.

*Still, he said his title was "Un-flay-able"? "Un-play-able"? That mask is getting in the way, but what a weird title. Does he use sound to attack or something? Is he the same type of fighter as Art, contrary to how he looks? He's not gonna bust out an ocarina or something, is he? Well, I guess, I'll find out once I fight him. Okay, let's fight.*

"Hey, you sure know how to make a guy happy. I do have some objections to those claims of false Goddess and apostle and stuff, but I'm in a good enough mood that I don't care to voice them."

"Then there is no more need for words," Ridwan said. "Let us fi—"

**THUD!**

We reacted to the sudden noise with surprised sounds of our own. Just as we were about to start the fun part, we heard a pretty big blow land on Ridwan's

head. It sounded like a metal bat swung full-force. Of course, we had yet to start the battle. In fact, we were frozen in shock.

“What are you thinking, moving ahead on your own, Ridwan-sama?”

Ridwan didn’t respond right away, but soon enough he replied, “I should be the one interrogating you. What do you think you’re doing, Luquille?”

“Ah, so you really can speak. That’s reassuring,” Luquille said.

A beautiful blonde girl had appeared from behind Ridwan. If I wasn’t mistaken. She’d flown out from inside the stake and immediately landed a powerful axe kick on the back of Ridwan’s head. While she spoke politely, I felt hostility towards Ridwan coming from her on and off.

*What’s this, a fallout between comrades? Then maybe I should get in between them—*

“Wait, Luquille? Hey, you’re named Luquille? The one who’s missing from among the angels?” Mel asked.

Luquille answered after a moment’s pause, “Yes, exactly. It’s been a while, Melfina.”

“It’s been so long, that expression doesn’t really cover it, Luquille,” Mel said.

She admitted to being Luquille unexpectedly quickly. Mel nodded, so it seemed she wasn’t lying. Unlike Ridwan, she had manifested her wings and halo, which were jet-black. In short, she’d fallen. *Hrm, things aren’t looking good anymore. Rafaelo-san did ask me to search for her, but...I wonder if he’ll understand that she’s with the Ten Authorities.*

“We agreed that I would be taking on Melfina, didn’t we, Ridwan-sama? And yet you just said you were about to commence her obliteration. Please, don’t do anything stupid. I’ll kill you, you know?” Luquille threatened.

*Oh, so that’s it. I understand perfectly now. Ha ha! And now we have an excuse to fight; I didn’t even need to find one!*

“I just sortied to defend the Holy Stake,” Ridwan said in his defense. “But I see you’ve finally shown your true colors. You cunning little vixen... Still, I will make good on our promise. I have other things to do.”

As soon as that came out of his mouth, Ridwan tried to ascend rapidly. Of course, I called out to stop him. It was the fastest I'd reacted to anything today.

"Hey now, don't be like that. We haven't even fought yet!"

I applied an overclocked casting of Sonic Acceleration to myself and hurried to cut him off. I didn't know what else he had to do, but I wanted him to pay attention to me instead.

Ridwan gave me a look before saying, "It's your turn, Luquille."

"I don't care about that one," Luquille replied. "You can obliterate him if you want."

That was where the conversation seemed to have ended, as Ridwan didn't say anything back.

*What a selfish beauty we have here. Still, I think I get it. I'm slowly starting to see what's going on here. While Luquille is a fallen angel, she doesn't seem to be a total ally of the Ten Authorities. Also, she's obsessed with Mel and only Mel. It's sad, but it seems like she's not interested in me at all. Jeez, why are all the angels so enthralled by Mel? I'm a little jealous.*

*You've been called out, Mel. Can I leave Luquille to you?* I asked her through the Network.

::I wonder why, though? I don't remember doing anything that would cause a grudge. Not that I mind doing this. And you'll be taking on that Ten Authorities man, honey?:: Mel replied.

*Yeah. I'm super interested in him right now. I'll happily force him to fight me. Mdo, Rosalia, make sure the ground level isn't affected. The enemy's strength is unknown, so I don't know how fierce our fight is going to get,* I instructed them.

::Understood,:: Rosalia confirmed.

::Right,:: Mdo did the same.

*KerTHUNK!*

I once more faced off against Ridwan of the Ten Authorities. It looked like he was now willing to fight me as well, as he manifested his wings...

*No wait, something's off.*

Melfina and Luquille gathered magic together to form their wings, but the ones that had just popped out of Ridwan were weirdly mechanical.

*They're like...a high-tech flight unit that a bipedal robot would equip, I think? Yeah, that feels right. I mean, it went "kerthunk" as it came out! Kerthunk! Honestly, it looks futuristic and super cool. I want to add that to my golems too. I wonder if I can get some reference material?*

"Now I'm looking forward to seeing what's going on under that mask."

"What useless emotion," Ridwan replied. "You will be dying here."

"Is that so? I'm looking forward to that too!" I kicked off the air, charging at him. Meanwhile he...

*Huh? He's just standing there? Menacingly?*

"Come. I will take anything you are able to dish out," he declared.

"Hah! I see the spirit of service is alive and well within you!"

Apparently, he was very confident in his durability. *Oh wait, didn't he deflect my attack earlier? Then I'll take him up on his offer and see for myself what he can do!*

*Skring, skring!*

I passed by as I swiped at him twice with my scythe, once on the neck and once in the gut. The resulting sound was something I didn't think would ever come from my Boreas Death Scythe: a dull sound of nothing being cut.

"Ha ha ha! So I really can't cut through you!"

I turned my blade around and made one more attack with my scythe at his back and wings, but the result was the same. I was unable to leave a single mark on him. In fact, the moment Boreas Death Scythe touched him, the blade chipped. Ridwan had truly taken my attack head-on and defended against it. But I didn't have time to be shivering in delight.

*You need to be calm here. Be rational.* I told myself to maintain my reason as I tasked some portion of my Parallel Processing with analyzing what was

happening.

From the fact that Boreas Death Scythe was still active on my staff, this wasn't some ability that canceled out magic like Sylvia's Unique Skill did. My understanding of Boreas Death Scythe was that it embodied the concept of cutting through everything in creation. The only way to oppose it was to have something that represented the concept of never breaking, like Gerard's Slash Damage Nullification skill. I felt that chances were high that his equipment had been enchanted with this property. *Hm? Ah, I see. Not "Un-play-able."* Unbreakable. *That makes sense.*

"Now do you understand? Your attacks cannot hurt me," said Ridwan.

"Yeah, I get it. I need more ingenuity!"

I overclocked Boreas Death Scythe to the limit, amplifying its capacity for violence. The scythe itself enlarged into a brutal form, and now it was hard for me to control it even when I was just holding it. However, I found this unruliness quite reassuring.

"You claimed to need ingenuity, but all you did was increase the output of your spell. How shallow," said Ridwan.

"Well, you gotta start with the basics, don't you? Also, it's not like I really believe this will work. But...I do believe it'll excite you more!"

I swung my scythe while stepping into the attack. Ridwan also took action, bending forward and firing his vernier thrusters, unleashing a fierce jet of fire. We were going to clash head-on.

My enlarged scythe hit a seam in his armor. In other words, I'd hit a joint. Controlling the weapon was hard, which was exactly why I was so accurate with it, all in order to slice Ridwan apart with the best timing—at least, that was the plan.

"You never learn, do you?" Ridwan said disappointedly.

"Grk!"

My scythe was unable to bisect him, and once again my blade chipped. Furthermore, his form, covered in steel, was moving at incredible speed as it



crashed into me. The moment we were about to make contact, I twisted my body, narrowly evading the tackle. While my attack had failed, I'd at least avoided the worst possible outcome where only I took damage.

*I knew it. Just upping the output wouldn't work. Oh well, at least I expected this already. Anyway, I see that not only do his machinelike wings come with jets, but they give him quite a lot of speed. Normally, having so much armor would slow movement and agility, but this explosive speed can rival Sera. So he's both solid and fast, which means he's dangerous. Like a mobile weapon.*

"Heh heh, that's troubling. If I were to be hit with that, I wouldn't just be sent flying. Ah, so troubling. What should I do?!"

"Why are you laughing? Have you gone insane?" Ridwan asked. "Well, no matter. I will relieve your pain now."

His wings' verniers changed their orientation, and Ridwan made a ridiculously tight turn to swing back at me. Apparently, his turning radius was really good too. If this was indicative of the basic stats of the Ten Authorities, then the other members must be quite str—

*BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG, BAAAANG!*

"Whoa there?!"

A sudden series of loud noises interrupted my thoughts, surprising me. They were unmistakably gunshots, and repeated ones, at that. I dodged the flying bullets, paying attention to their source as they continued: a fancy machine-gun-like weapon that had at some point been equipped to his shoulder. It was constantly ejecting shell casings and spewing smoke, so it was definitely using live rounds. *Are you seriously an angel?! I mean, when did you even take out such a big-ass thing?!*

"Hm? That reaction speed... Do you know what a gun is? Now I see...you're a reincarnator!" Ridwan exclaimed.

Ridwan had guessed my background from the fact that I'd dodged his gun. But it wasn't like I cared if people knew, and the hail of bullets raining down on me was a far bigger concern at the moment. I'd equipped my golems with Gatling cannons, which were imitations of this gun, but Ridwan's weapon had a

much better rate of fire and the bullets were much bigger. It didn't seem to be stopping either, so I had to wonder if he was providing it with infinite ammo from Storage or something. This was proving to be a good reference for my golems.

However, just continuing to dodge like this wouldn't help me win the fight. After all, it didn't seem like the constant firing would break the gun or that it would run out of ammo anytime soon.

*If that's the case, I'll just make a wall to buy time and prepare—*

*Thunk thunk crack crumble!*

*Ah, no good, I see.* The moment I cast Adamantite Rampart in front of Ridwan's path, he blasted it apart with his gun. *Then maybe Tempest Barrier will —*

*Zzswsh zzswsh zzswsh!*

*And the spell that is a memento of Clive-kun is easily broken through. Okay, that's useless too.*

Tempest Barrier, which should have shaved away at anything that touched it, lost in strength to the bullets and was punched through and riddled with holes. Meanwhile, my enemy's bullets traveled on, essentially untouched. It seemed that the bullets being spat out by that machine gun were imbued with whatever ability made Ridwan "Unbreakable."

*So I guess I should assume that whatever ability he has affects not only the equipment he's wearing, but anything he launches, like the bullets from his machine gun. It's easy for someone like me, who has completed the Battle Rally, to dodge those bullets. But if even one hits me, it'll open up a huge hole in my body. It might even be fatal.*

"Break!" Ridwan shouted.

"Hwup!"

On top of all that, I had to deal with this dangerous bullet tackle. This attack was similar to evading Gerard's charges, and I estimated that if I were hit with it, it would break my bones.

*So this is what people mean when they refer to offense and defense uniting as one. It's really annoying that nothing he has breaks. With all his un-angel-like equipment, I bet he's still hiding other weapons. Now then, the most effective method so far seems like it'd be Shining Laurel. Most likely, the "unbreakableness" he boasts about is from some sort of Unique Skill. If I can neutralize that, we'll be able to deal an effective blow. The only problem is, Shining Laurel requires so much MP, I can't use it unless DarkMel is actively using Monster Parent on me. And right now, DarkMel is...in Lumiest! Basically, it's impossible to use.*

"I see that your ability to run away is first-class, at least. You're like a fly," Ridwan remarked.

"You know that flies are also trying their best to live, right?! Mud Gluttony Triple!"

This was my backup plan. While dodging the curtain of bullets, I chanted the Rank A Green Magic spell Mud Gluttony, which converted a large chunk of my MP into a huge mass of mud, making a mud golem that was like a Contaminated Mud Bind given will. Because it floated creepily through the air like a ghost instead of crawling, it would be able to act in this midair battle. Most importantly, since its body was made of mud...

"Hm?" Ridwan said, startled.

No matter how many bullets went into it, it could immediately reform its body. Furthermore, it was as gluttonous as Mel and would greedily try to eat anyone who was hostile to me.

*Now then, how will the defense you're so proud of fare against poison and binding?*

"Raaaaaagh!" Ridwan shouted.

Mud Gluttony was more agile than normal thanks to overclocking, which also increased its viscosity, mass, and regenerative ability by a large amount. It detected Ridwan's hostility and attacked the man like a tsunami.

"You little— Bgwhrggh?!" Ridwan sputtered.

Not even someone as sturdy as he would willingly jump inside a living swamp,

and he backed up quite a distance. But there was no way I'd just let that happen, and I activated the cast of Air Pressure Triple I'd sneakily set up behind him to send him sideways. Though he might have been physically invincible, he was still trapped in the net of gravity and hadn't nullified the effect of weight on his body. Forced by gravity, he flew forwards, right into Mud Gluttony's waiting maw.

"Mngmngmng..." Mud Gluttony mimed chewing, its big mouth moving in time.

No matter how much Ridwan shot his machine gun or fired his vernier thrusters from within, Mud Gluttony would not let him go.

*Now then, if he just suffocates like that, it would make this really fast but a little disappointing.*

"I'll still have to accelerate this a little. Glory Sanctuary Triple."

I cast another binding spell on Ridwan as he remained trapped inside the mud. I overclocked it to triple, so the rings binding my enemy increased from three to six, and it was much stronger.

*Normally, this would completely checkmate my opponent, so I wonder how it'll go with him?*

"Authority, manifest."

"Huh?!"

Suddenly, Mud Gluttony and Glory Sanctuary that were suppressing Ridwan burst apart along with a loud sound. A fierce explosion had occurred right in front of me, and the awful smell of burning mud told me that Ridwan had escaped his bindings. Also, the being before me had changed quite a bit from how he'd looked before. Uh, how should I put it...he was now basically a massive mountain of guns, so many guns that his original angel shape was lost beneath it all. But his head was exposed and he'd lost his mask, revealing a head that was obviously not biological, but metallic.

*So it's not just his outside! He's a robot on the inside too! Man, recent fallen angels are so modern.*

“To think I’d need to adopt this form. I admit you are more versatile than expected,” Ridwan said.

“Well, thanks. But that explosion... You didn’t use all those weapons to cause it, did you? Or did you whip out a bazooka or something?”

“It is an application of my reactive armor,” Ridwan answered.

“Hm? What the heck is that? Uh...I’m sure I’ve heard of it before...”

“There is no need for you to understand. Now that I have exposed this form, I must erase you immediately. Die,” Ridwan announced.



*Manifesting Authority, huh? Let’s assume it’s some sort of transformation ability. So these new weapons are several heavy firearms fused to the arms and legs, even bigger machine guns on each shoulder, and what seems like giant blades on the wings. I’m also curious about that reactive armor he talked about earlier. Judging from the fact that it blew away Mud Gluttony, it explodes when it feels an impact? From a visual estimation, the explosion would easily send me flying too. Right, so not only do I have to be careful approaching him, but touching him would be risking my life too, huh? On top of absolute defense, he’s also got ample weapons...*



“Ha ha! You greedy little gremlin!”

“There will not even be a speck left of you,” Ridwan declared.

The storm of gunshots was so loud it would make anyone want to cover their ears. It seemed I didn't have time to try to nonchalantly analyze his ability. As one might expect, with that many guns going off at once, there was no longer any space to dodge within the curtain of fire.

*Should I get out of the line of fire? Or maybe use Luquille as a shield? Ah, never mind that. Judging from their initial exchange, they don't get along well. I can easily imagine this guy tossing Luquille aside if it comes down to it. Mel's nearby too, and if things go badly, it might affect what's below us. Yeah, that idea's rejected. Which means... Ah!*

“I found something nice!”

I rose up through the air with all my speed, hurrying to position myself just below the perfect shield.

“Did you really think I'd let you get away?” Ridwan asked sarcastically.

The shield I referred to was actually the giant stake. If the stake was in the line of fire from the guns of the man chasing me, there was a chance he'd stop for fear of destroying it.

“How laughable,” Ridwan scoffed.

*Huh, that's weird.* Even though the giant stake was totally in range, Ridwan wasn't stopping the gunfire. He was acting as trigger-happy as always, and the hail of bullets was closing in. *I'll just hide behind the stake for now!*

*Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!*

Right after I took cover behind the stake, I heard the sound of bullets hitting it.

*Hmm, that's a surprise, both that Ridwan is totally willing to shoot at the stake, and that it's holding up to the gunfire. Is this stake as tough as Ridwan is? Or is it also affected by his ability?*

“You wretch, are you seriously using the Holy Stake as a shield?” Ridwan

sounded disgusted.

“Come on, it’s floating in the perfect spot and everything! Actually, can I get you to speak up?! Your guns are so loud, I can’t hear you over them!”

It was like being right next to an active construction site.

“Hmph. Then listen carefully to this,” said Ridwan.

“Huh?”

I heard something thrown to my right and left, avoiding the stake I was using as a shield. Not bullets, but something shaped more like explosives...

“Stun grenades?!”

The moment those words came out of my mouth, there was a bright flash of light accompanied by an explosion of sound that I could have sworn broke my ears, assaulting my senses mercilessly.

*Agghhh, owww... Heh...heh heh! Right, so he can make moves like that too. I’m super blinded and the ringing in my ears is awful. But I can deal with this using White Magic. The problem is that I’ve lost track of Ridwan in the split second I was incapacitated.*

There was no gunfire, and I could no longer feel his presence on the other side of the stake.

*Fshooooom!*

“I figured it was something like that!”

That was the sound of firing afterburners. I’d understood instantly that he was trying to take me by surprise. It would’ve been dangerous if my eyes and ears had still been overwhelmed by the grenades, but I’d already used recovery magic to heal myself. I blocked the blade wings that Ridwan swung down at me over and over with my Black Staff, which had been coated with a casting of Obsidian Edge. There were many wings attacking me, and they were all incredibly strong. Whenever the coating got shaved away by the attacks, I would recast the spell and continue defending. After defending a series of these blows, I sent Ridwan flying with the strongest Hyper Impact I could muster. However, in that instant, his armor exploded, sending part of it flying straight at



me.

“You are more annoying and tenacious than a fly. What is your name?”  
Ridwan asked after a pause.

I got through the explosion and fire with a casting of Rubber Counter while deflecting the piece of armor directly with my staff, somehow managing to get through the danger in front of me. Any damage I couldn't deflect was small enough that I could heal instantly.

*But still, this is awful. Yeah, quite bad indeed. I mean, I haven't been able to stop grinning since this fight started. I might get muscle pains in my face tomorrow.*

“It's Kelvin. Kelvin Celsius. And your name is Ridwan Mahad, right? I'll remember you as a wonderful and worthy opponent!”

“Then I will add your name to my data as well! As someone with enough backbone that it's unthinkable you're of an inferior species!” he said.

*By the way, Touya, it's my special privilege as your teacher to steal your moves, right?*

I enchanted my Black Staff with an overclocked casting of Divine Saber. This familiar sword made of shining light might not have fit a person with the title “Grim Reaper,” but it was my best option under the circumstances. Also, I stealthily cast one more spell without chanting.

Meanwhile, Ridwan switched out the guns that were all over his body for swords or other close-combat weapons, changing into a form that was specialized for melee.

*Huh, so you can instantaneously change your equipment.*

Rather than using Storage to switch out the weapons, this change felt more like the ability of Touya's and Serge's Holy Sword Will. That, combined with his absolute defense, made his body really interesting to me in terms of creating a fallen-angel-type golem.

*I want that body...*

“I will be taking your head!” Ridwan declared.

“Sorry, but someone else has dibs on that!”

This was a sublime battle between two people driven by a desire to fulfill their appetites. Actually, I got the feeling that our goals were a little different, but passion is necessary in all things. Desire swirled around, calling out to its kindred in others. I followed that instinct and attacked Ridwan.



“Haaah, whew. Jeez, getting down that tower and mountain were both a lot of effort, but getting all the way to the capital was no joke either! Still, those fireworks...they’re most likely from Master and the others having it out. Fighting that high in the air is just insanity! Seriously!” Paul muttered to himself as he watched the colorful explosions going off far in the distance. Kelvin had ordered him to stay behind, but he couldn’t sit still, so he had set out for the capital on his own—which was all well and good, but the capital was really far away.

He’d descended the tower of ice and the mountain of similar ice in a huge hurry, all while defeating the monsters that attacked him on the way, but then he’d gotten lost after reading his map wrong. A while after that, he’d realized he could just head in the direction of the fierce battle happening in the distance, which had led to his current situation. Truthfully, the capital was still far away. Paul had a feeling the fight would be over by the time he reached it.

“No, that’s wrong. In Master Kelvin’s case, I think there’s a distinct possibility that the longer a fight drags on, the more he enjoys it. Okay, then I have a chance!” he said, pumping himself up.

With that in mind, Paul continued down the animal trail he was on. Since he was still tired from going up and then down a mountain and a tower, he wasn’t thinking straight.

“Gah! Why must my esteemed self be forced to go down these roads that are not actually roads? I should be traveling down the right path! The royal one! I should be using the official route boldly and without fear!” came a voice.

“I believe that in this one case, we absolutely must avoid that, Edgar-sama. We have no idea where the fallen angels have eyes,” came another male voice.

“He’s exactly right! In fact, how many times have we had to say this? I wish you’d keep your whining in check!” This time, the voice was female.

“You fool, and I keep telling you that those words are lèse-majesté!”

Paul’s state of mind meant that he hadn’t sensed this trio even after they’d gotten so close. And in this case, “so close” meant close enough for them to nearly collide on the animal trail.

“Hm?”

“Mm?”

“Huh?”

“Paul-sama? Oh, if it isn’t Paul-sama! The Paul-sama who is Edgar-sama’s older brother by blood, the wild prince who quit being a royal to become an adventurer! What a coincidence, meeting in a place like this. ‘Sup!” said the woman.

The trio Paul had coincidentally run into were the students who’d gone missing from Lumiest: Edgar, Axe, and Perona. Because this encounter was so miraculous, everyone other than Perona spent the next while dazed and lost for words.

“So...what’re you guys doing in a place like this?” Paul asked.

“I should be asking you the same thing, brother. Aren’t you supposed to be running around all over the world freely as an adventurer?” Edgar replied.

The three other than Perona had regained their senses after a while. There was no way they could ignore each other now that they’d met, so Edgar had agreed to talk.

“You idiot,” said Paul. “After you went missing from the academy, the Adventurer’s Guild got a request to search for you. Of course, our country’s dignity is on the line here, so it’s being done in secret. I’m pretty sure that at the moment, Lumiest is treating you as having left on a trip?”

“I see, so that’s what happened...” Axe muttered.

“Don’t just act like it makes sense to you and only you like that,” Paul retorted. “So anyway, what were you all doing in the end? You two’re supposed

to be protecting Edgar, right?”

“Uh, well, you see...uhhh...” Axe floundered.

“It is fine, Axe. I will be the one to speak on this matter,” said Edgar, stopping Axe and taking a step forward. He then fixed Paul with a determined look. “I found out about *it*, brother.”

“About what?” Paul asked. “Actually, before that, can you do something about that pompous way of speaking? I’m sure you’re doing it to keep up appearances, but I seriously cannot keep a straight face. Just hearing the way you refer to yourself and how you call me ‘brother’ is like an itch I can’t reach.”

“P-Paul-sama,” Axe spoke up nervously, “you must know that is going too far —”

“No, it’s fine. You never change, do you, Paul? It’s a little reassuring.” Whose voice could this have belonged to? Edgar’s attitude, style of speech, and even expressions had changed totally from his earlier royal demeanor. The friendly smile on his face made him seem like a different person altogether.

“Hey, so you’re finally back to the Edgar I remember. You know, I’ve been hearing nothing but weird rumors concerning you ever since I left. Stuff about you trying to pick up girls and proposing marriage to everyone in sight. They’re all terrible rumors that don’t sound like you at all,” said Paul.

“Don’t be like that,” Edgar complained. “You’re supposed to be the first prince and you basically ran away from home, pinning everyone’s hopes and dreams on me as the second prince. I originally started that behavior just to conquer my shyness, but rumors only started more rumors, and by the time I noticed, I couldn’t change the character I’d made for myself. Since I can’t fix anything at this point, I’ve just been acting the same way in Lumiest, but...”

Paul sighed. “I figured that was the case. You’ve always been introverted, which was why the rumors felt like the exact opposite of you. Damn that old man, he should at least be able to figure out what he was forcing his son to do!”

“Well, ya see, it actually made the king happy,” Perona clarified. “He was cheering with both hands in the air, saying that Edgar had finally become aware he was royalty and gotten some manliness in him.”

“THAT. DAMN. OLD MAAAANNN!” Paul roared, stomping on the ground in anger.

“To be fair, I do believe this was all a consequence of your fight with the king and subsequent disinheritance, Paul-sama,” Axe pointed out.

“O-Oh, well, you’re probably right about that...” Paul muttered sheepishly.

“Wow, it’s pretty rare for you to say that so plainly, isn’t it, Axe?” Perona noted. “Usually you’re the one who points out that it’s extremely rude and stuff.”

“I am retainer to Edgar-sama, after all,” Axe answered. “Also, Paul-sama is no longer royalty. Thus, there is no such thing as being too rude. I simply stated a proper opinion.”

“Whoa, that’s pretty dry of you, Axe. You’re a dry axe!” Perona mocked him.

The younger man’s words put Paul ill at ease, but he continued to observe the three during their exchange. Though they were wearing thick coats, he noticed that they were all still wearing their Lumiest uniforms underneath. Also, for having walked all this way, they didn’t seem as exhausted as they should have been. Neither were their clothes and shoes sufficiently dirty.

“How did you all get here, by the way?” Paul asked. “You didn’t just tough it out and walk all this way, did you?”

“Right, I guess it’s about time for us to get back to the matter at hand,” Edgar replied. “To tell you the truth, we don’t know why we’re here either. When we woke up, we were already in a cave at the foot of a snowy mountain.”

“Huh? What the heck?” Paul asked.

“I wonder how much I should reveal...” Edgar mused aloud. After a pause, he came to a conclusion and said, “You know about my Unique Skill, See Through, don’t you?”

“I sure do,” Paul replied. “It allows you to know bits and pieces of the secrets of any hostile person near you, right? The only ones who know that are me, as your big brother, and your old friends like Axe, I believe.”

“Yeah, that’s right. I haven’t told father about it, so it’s a secret between us,”

said Edgar. “Of course, I’m using Concealment of the highest class, so no one at the academy knows either. Anyway, this skill is always active, regardless of my will...and I saw a lot during my time at the academy. Including stuff about a conspiracy.” Edgar sighed tiredly as he sat down on a nearby tree root.

“I mean, isn’t that natural? There’re a lot of people at the academy of high standing. Wait, does that mean you knew about the fallen angel stuff beforehand?!” Paul asked, shocked.

“Yeah, I knew about it for quite a long time. I was acting like a womanizer at school, so many people despised me, and I ended up learning about it,” Edgar replied.

“Tch! I *told* you it was dangerous,” Paul said.

“Please don’t reproach Edgar-sama so much, Paul-sama,” Axe said. “Edgar-sama acts like that as a way to survive in this world. Gathering hostility directly links to him being able to find his hidden enemies.”

“But still... No, I’m not going to comment on that now,” said Paul. “So, what happened after that?”

“I first learned about fallen angels from Instructor Horace, who works at the academy. He had the Acting and Conversation skills, so his attitude didn’t reveal anything, but he was really surprised on the inside,” Edgar said. “After all, he was basically a devotee of the Cult church, which plots to revive the wicked god. Not only that, but there were a fair few of them who’d infiltrated the academy.” He sighed. “I was so nervous the whole time...”

“Wow, sounds awful,” Paul replied.

“Yeah, it was. I was so scared,” said Edgar. “But since I knew about it, I couldn’t afford to do nothing. I went around meeting a lot of people in the name of proposing to them, all to confirm who was an enemy and who was a friend. I also participated in the screening trial for the exhibition match, where the academy would bring together all its most powerful students.”

“You did make *a lot* of impossible proposals,” said Perona. “When he proposed to Bell, I honestly thought he was going to die.”

“Ha ha ha, you’re right about that,” muttered Edgar. “Of course, her hostility

wasn't out of malice. I managed to confirm that she wasn't the type of enemy I feared she might be, so that was a good result. In fact, it was more dangerous when Dorothy-san, who I thought was completely harmless, came and brainwashed us. We acted like we actually were brainwashed and managed to get out of that situation, but..."

"Luckily, my resistance magic worked. I'm so talented!" Perona bragged, puffing herself up, putting on a demonstration of her White Magic. Apparently she had given Edgar a lot of different resistances with her spells.

"Despite the way she acts, Perona is still one of Leigant's top monks, after all," said Axe.

"Hee hee! She's a precious friend and is almost wasted on me," said Edgar. "So, to continue the discussion...we were planning to take all the information we'd gathered to someone we trusted around when the exhibition match ended. We'd confirmed who was a friend and who was an enemy, after all. Until then, we acted as usual and only had minimal communication about this information. Of course, Axe and Perona were thorough in their acting as well."

"But before that, you all went missing...which means you were kidnapped by the enemy, right?" Paul asked.

"That's probably it," Edgar admitted. "The fallen angels probably caught on to what we were doing at some point. But it's still a mystery why we weren't killed —"

"What do you mean, mystery? Obviously you were left alive to serve as bait," said a voice none of the four recognized, coming from someone who'd joined them without their noticing.

"Who the hell're you?!" Paul shouted at the mysterious figure who'd appeared out of nowhere.

It was a female fallen angel, with jet-black wings and a halo—Luquille. She was supposed to be dealing with Mel, but for some reason she was here.

"My apologies. I've forgotten to introduce myself. My name is Luquille, a devout angel who loves world peace more than anyone," she said.

"Hah!" Paul scoffed. "Anyone who's really like that would never say so right

off the bat! In the first place, you're a *fallen* angel! And did you say your name was Luquille?! You mean that missing angel actually fell?!"

While Luquille's greeting was elegant and indicative of her upbringing, Paul answered with an unreserved tirade. Even so, Luquille's expression didn't change. In fact, it seemed like she didn't even care about Paul or anything he did.

"I am speaking of matters of the heart," Luquille clarified. "Anyway, why don't we prioritize moving the conversation along? It's about time for Melfina to notice that she's fighting a fake version of me."

"What the hell are you talking about?!" Paul exclaimed.

"Oh, nothing. Just private matters," Luquille answered. "Oh, and please don't worry. I'm not going to take your lives. Due to certain circumstances, my standing may be a little complicated, but I am in no way part of the fallen angels who are causing riots all over the world."

"Do you even remember what you just said a moment ago?! You called them bait! You're totally an enemy!" Paul shouted back.

"Pau— Brother, stop," said Edgar. "Let's listen to what she has to say first. If erasing us was truly her goal, she would already have done so. I'm sure there's enough of a gap in strength that she'd be able to do it instantly. At the very least, she doesn't mean us any harm for now." Edgar stepped forward next to Paul and stopped him. Then, Axe and Perona got in front of them as well.

"First Pri— No, Second Prince Edgar is a wise man, I see," Luquille said. "It was worth using the Magic Incense of Bewilderment I worked so hard to get. Yes, indeed, all of my actions are based purely on goodwill. That is why I will not touch upon Edgar-sama's power that you were just talking about. Hatred breeds nothing, after all."

Paul made a strangled, angry noise. "This bitch, she just admitted it! Damn you, eavesdropping like that!"

"Calm down, brother," said Edgar. "So...Luquille, was it? What is your aim here?"

"Hee hee! No need to be so wary," Luquille replied. "My aim, you say? Let us



call it the reinstatement of a certain great figure.”

“I see,” said Edgar. “Well fine. You used me as bait to lure in my brother, so what now?”

“I just wanted to talk,” Luquille claimed. “Paul-sama, you are Leigant’s true first prince, is that correct?”

Paul seemed confused, but he still replied, “Yeah, that’s right. What of it?”

“I see,” said Luquille. “It’s nothing, everything is fine. Well then, Paul-sama, I will be taking a bit of your blood.”

“Whaaat?! Grk!”

None of the four humans were able to recognize what Luquille had just done. But by the time it was all over and they noticed a change, Paul was bleeding from his cheek. He’d been cut by something like a knife, but it was only a small scratch. Also, Luquille now held a little vial with a small amount of red liquid in it.

“Paul!” Edgar shouted.

“Y-Yoouu... What did you—” Paul struggled to get the words out in his rage.

“I did exactly what I said I would,” said Luquille. “I don’t believe my actions and words were in conflict, were they? As you can see, I just took a bit of your blood. Now then, my business here is done, so I’ll be taking my leave.”

“Wait right there!” Paul shouted again. He immediately ran forwards, stretching out his arm, but Luquille was already gone. The only thing she left behind was a single pitch-black feather that was for some reason falling slowly through the air.

“Dammit! She got away!” Paul said angrily.

“Your wound comes first, Paul! Perona!” Edgar called out.

“Aye aye, on it,” Perona responded. “Stay still, Paul-sama. I’ll use my monk skills to fix ya up in a jiffy!”

With those overly casual words, she laid her hand on Paul’s cheek and immediately began administering first aid. According to her examination, the

wound was shallow, as he'd only been dealt a small cut across his skin. With a simple recovery spell, it only took Perona a few seconds to fully heal him.

"You're good now!" she said.

"Whew, that's a relief, at least," said Edgar. "I'm so glad no one died."

"There's nothing to be glad about!" Paul shouted. "She took my blood before any of us could figure out what was going on!"

"Now, now." Axe tried to calm him down. "At least you're not dead. Still, I wonder what that woman plans to do with Paul-sama's blood?"

"From what she said, it sounded like she wanted Paul's—no, the true first prince's blood, but... Hmmm, to be honest, I can't think of anything that would require that," said Edgar.

"A use for blood, huh?" Perona pondered the question. "Well, classic uses would be as some sort of catalyst in a ritual, but I can't think of any reason it would have to be the first prince's blood..."

"I am also outside of my expertise on this subject," admitted Axe. "What about you, Paul-sama?"

"Idiot, you know I'm an adventurer, right?" Paul scoffed. "As if I'd know anything about— AH!"

"Ah?" the student trio echoed in unison. Paul seemed to have thought of something, which made Edgar and his retainers repeat what he'd said.

"Did you think of something, Paul?" Edgar asked.

"Oh, not really. It's just that, back when Edgar was a newborn, I think I remember that idiot old man taking some of my blood. I...think that he said that the blood he took would be used for something important. Uhhh...what was it... AAAH!"

"Aah?!" the trio echoed again.

"Uh, err...what's wrong, Paul?" Edgar asked.

"I remember now! I remember what that old man used my blood for!" Paul exclaimed.

“First, calm down, Paul-sama,” Axe said. “Perona, use your magic to calm him down.”

“Sure thing. Relief!” Perona cast her spell.

“I REMEMBER NOW!” Paul shouted again.

“Oh, it’s no good,” Perona remarked. “His hotheadedness is insane. Relief! Relief!” She had to cast Relief over ten times to help Paul regain a modicum of calm. Then, he slowly started to talk.

“That old man used the blood he took from me back then to make a key to some place. A place that’s a secret among secrets in Leigant, a place not even all of the royal family knows about.”

“So a secret place even to the country?” Axe wondered aloud.

“I don’t know of any such secret place either...” said Edgar. “To think such a place existed... So, Paul, that place is—”

“PAAAAUULLLLL!”

The entire group jumped, making surprised noises as Edgar was cut off by another unfamiliar voice. Actually, not totally unfamiliar. Paul knew the owner of this voice. The next instant, an angel with a blue halo and wings descended from the skies—it was Mel, who’d been fighting Luquille. Of course, everyone other than Paul was wary.

“Did a fallen angel just come by here?!” Mel asked frantically. “Where did she go? Do any of you have any idea?!”

Overwhelmed by Mel’s forcefulness, they gummed up. The only one who knew her, Paul, was a little shaken, since he’d never seen her so frantic.

“Don’t just stand there, Paul! Hurry!” Mel exclaimed.

“O-Oh, right! I-I’m not sure, but I think she went for the Divine Pillar that Leigant is managing...” he said.

“Where’s that?!” Mel asked immediately.

“I-I’ll take you there!” Paul reflexively offered.

That was how he was taken away by the angel, leaving only Edgar and his

retainers behind, dazed and confused.



Mel had grabbed on to Paul's shoulders and gallantly made off with him, and was now speeding through the air. Paul, having been forced into a ride that was even more of a scream inducer than a roller coaster, of course, screamed.

"So, where is this Divine Pillar?!" Mel asked urgently. "I took you and flew in the direction you pointed at, but I need to know where it is specifically if I'm going to go there!"

"Waaarrgghhhh!" Paul screamed.

"Your screaming isn't helping!" Mel retorted. "You need to stop being scared of such low speeds!"

Though Kelvin was the same, Mel's training was also quite unreasonable. Having caught a glimpse of hell for the umpteenth time today, Paul had to dig deep into his reserve of willpower to guide her.

"I see. To think a Divine Pillar was hidden between some mountains like that..." Mel muttered.

"Riiight!" Paul struggled to shout over the wind. "It snoowwss alll yeeaaarr theerre! So anyythiing buiillt on the groounnd geeettsss covered up whooole!"

Once again, his voice filled the air. However, he managed to communicate what he needed to Mel. All that was left for him to do was try his best to withstand the speed he was traveling at without vomiting rainbows. Once this trial was overcome, he would emerge a bigger man.

"Woooarrghhhhh! Guuuutsssss!" he screamed.

"Please shut up for a bit, Paul," said Melfina. "Your screaming will alert Luquille. Do you actually understand why I hid us using False Fog?"

"That'ssss nooot faaaiiirrr!" Paul was still screaming.

To him, this day was so terrible it was like all the misfortune in his entire life had been concentrated into it. But the fact that he didn't bite his tongue during the trip was a silver lining.

After a short while, they reached their destination. The blizzard in the area seemed never-ending, and everything was covered in white. This was Leigant's second ominous den of monsters, the Platinum Prison (the first was Leigant Ice Mountain).

"We're here," said Mel. "You said that there should be a small shrine nearby to serve as a landmark, right? Well...it's probably buried in the snow. Gah, why even make one if it's just going to be left to disappear? Where is the thing, Paul?"

"Heh...heh heh... I withstood it... I endured it all, Edgar!" Paul muttered madly to himself.

"Paul?" Mel said, a *smile* on her face.

"Right! It's there, right there!" Paul answered immediately. "That's the only place where the snow buildup is unnatural!"

In the face of Mel's *wonderful* smile, Paul was forced back to his senses. Right after his immediate answer, he started explaining next steps. "Once you find the shrine, turn west! Continue that way until you reach the first big tree, from which you head north for twenty-seven paces! By the way, these paces are counted using the stride of the first king of Leigant—"

"I'm not Shutola, Paul," said Mel, cutting him off. "I don't have any confidence that I'll be able to remember any of that explanation. So just say it straight in a way I can understand."

"What?!"

After that, Paul had to desperately use various ways to lead Mel down the right path, but he finally succeeded in showing her to their destination.

"Heh heh, I did it, Edgar..." he muttered to himself.

As a result, he was reduced to a state where his soul seemed to be emerging from his mouth, and he was currently lying face up on the ground, utterly exhausted. Even he had completely expended his stamina at last.

"I see, so this is where the Divine Pillar is hidden..." Mel said, looking around the area, ignoring him.

They were inside an underground space, ensconced by white walls of ice. At the center was Leigant's Divine Pillar, in front of which stood a certain figure.

"It's pretty surprising to see such an underground facility hidden beneath all that snow. And I suppose that blood is meant to undo the seal here...Luquille."

Mel was facing off against the fallen angel who'd just taken some of Paul's blood. Said fallen angel was smiling fearlessly, but the vial of blood couldn't be seen in her hands. It seemed she'd already used it.

"This country has a certain legend about its founding, that a servant of the divine defeated an evil dragon. The people of this country only think of it as a story instead of history, though. Still, a small number of the royal family knows what really happened, and they know that the servant came from this Divine Pillar. A great power capable of defeating a ferocious dragon... It is Leigant's greatest trump card and a secret that should never be leaked to outsiders," Luquille said.

"You're surprisingly knowledgeable about this place, aren't you?"

"I'm not just knowledgeable about this country," Luquille replied. "While you were ruling as the Goddess of Reincarnation, I spent a couple hundred years preparing and making moves in the darkness. There is no one better versed in history than me in this world."

"Well, I wonder about that," said Mel. She did not take her eyes off Luquille. While sparks of conflict weren't flying between them, they both fixed each other with heavy stares, as if they were trying to see through the other person's secrets.

"I'm sure the past kings of this nation were deathly afraid of this power being known to others," Luquille continued. "This place is set up to collapse if the blood of Leigant's first prince isn't used. It'd be too much work to dig the pillar out if I were to force it open, and I wouldn't have had the time to do so while avoiding the watchful eye of the Ten Authorities. Their goal is the destruction of these great and powerful Divine Pillars, you see."

"So that's why you needed Paul's blood," said Mel. "But I don't like the way you said that. You make it sound like you aren't colluding with them. Judging from the situation, you're most likely the one who used the bodies of the

leaders to revive the Ten Authorities...so it's real strange for you to say that your goals don't align with theirs. If that's what you claim, what *is* your goal, Luquille? What are you trying to accomplish by using the Divine Pillars?"

Luquille did not answer Mel this time. Instead, she turned on her heel and walked towards the Divine Pillar. Two paces, then three. She walked slowly but surely. While she might have seemed unguarded with her back turned, for some reason Mel didn't want to make the first move. Her instincts told her that she shouldn't touch Luquille.

Once Luquille reached the spot right in front of the Divine Pillar, she began to speak. "The mission I was assigned by the Ten Authorities is the elimination of the former Goddess of Reincarnation, Melfina. The destruction of this Divine Pillar was also my secondary mission. Of course, I have no intention of completing those. I also do not intend to allow the Ten Authorities to destroy the Divine Pillars. After all..."

Luquille's body started shaking along with her voice. Then, she turned slowly to face Mel. Of course, the mysterious change in her demeanor put Mel on her guard. She was actively trying to keep calm so that she could deal with anything that happened with a cool head. But as soon as Luquille turned around and Mel saw her expression, her heart was instantly thrown into chaos. What lay behind Luquille's eyes were pink heart marks. A chill ran down Mel's spine, freezing her in place. It was as if she were seeing Colette. All of that felt like pressure that stabbed like needles into her skin, and Mel felt fear.

*What is happening? Who is she? Is something like this really allowed to exist in the world? I can't believe it!* Mel thought as the fear took hold.

"After all, my wish is for Melfina-sama to continue being the Goddess of Reincarnation. Forever and ever, eternally! For always and always and always and always! A term never-ending! Neveeerrrr! You will reign as my ideal Goddess!" she cried, forming a heart with her hands.

"Eep?!"

Over a couple hundred years, the being of pure revenge had made a class change to fanatic zealot. A dark, polluted, zealot of the worst kind.



The icy underground space, which was totally blue and white—Mel’s colors—was being enveloped by a murky black miasma. The look of it made this obvious, but the air that was now overtaking this area was harmful and made it hard to breathe. This was especially true for Mel, who found it so strikingly awful that she screamed.

“Hee hee! What an adorable scream. What are you so afraid of?” Luquille asked. “Only you, me, and the Divine Pillar are he— Ah, right, Leigant’s first prince is here as well. Oh well, I don’t care about him anymore. That’s all he amounts to. We’re the only ones here, Melfina-sama. There’s no need to be afraid. Relax.”

Luquille was smiling as she talked, but Mel was sweating rivers. It ran down her back and cheeks; her entire body was giving her a bad premonition. Every signal Luquille was giving off seemed evil with a capital E to Mel.

After a moment’s pause, Mel said, “I can’t do that, Luquille. Everything I feel from you is dyed with evil. So much so that not even being a fallen angel explains it.”

Fallen angels were angels who received punishment for turning their hostility on the deity they served. However, that didn’t mean that fallen angels were evil. Though it only applied to a small minority, there were those who accepted the fact that they’d sinned and tried to do as much good as possible, as well as those like DarkMel, who were pure and innocent (outside of specific circumstances) because they’d lost their memories. In short, the change of race did not affect one’s personality much.

“I see, so that’s how you perceive me,” said Luquille. “Even though I’m being totally sincere. No, that’s not true. I do admit I used to despise you, Melfina-sama. I gave my everything to become the Goddess. There were people that expected the world of me. You stole all of that when you ascended.”

Melfina stayed quiet, so Luquille continued.

“Can you even imagine the pain I felt? In order to blend in with everyone else, I had to worship and extol you, my hated enemy who became the Goddess. It was agonizing, having to support you for so long. You know, my parents, who used to hope for the world for me, both worshipped you as well. And they did



so from the bottom of their hearts, knowing nothing of what I'd lost."

"Luquille, that's—" Melfina started.

"I know," Luquille interrupted. "There's no need to apologize, because I understand. I know that the culprit behind my falling and the reason only my memories remained was both you and not you. I spent a hundred years trying to understand everything about you, after all, Melfina-sama. Whether asleep or awake, I spent all my time thinking of you, hating you, and living with you at the center of my life. It was both painful and terribly pleasant. I prayed to you while betraying nothing of my thoughts, which were filled with wondering what would be the greatest misfortune to inflict upon you. Hee hee hee! Isn't that so delightful? You agree, don't you?!"

There was no room for Mel to interject, as the fallen angel across from her was speaking faster than even Colette.

"I'll speak truthfully, Melfina-sama. Thanks to leading such a contradictory life, both worshipping and hating you, my emotions surpassed simple love and hate. It's embarrassing to say, but both my love and hate for you has mixed together into one emotion! You're so adorable that my hatred intensifies a hundredfold. No, I hate you so much that I find you a hundred times cuter! I want to cherish you and cause you pain; both are true at the same time! Is this a tragedy or a comedy? It's so philosophical, don't you feel the hand of fate at work here?!"

"Uh, er..." Melfina wavered.

"I see, so it's too much for you to express in one sentence, right?" said Luquille. "Just what I'd expect from the perfect Goddess of Reincarnation. Everything you say is so deep. It's infuriatingly unpleasant, but also so profound I can't help but revere you! Ah, my heart is in chaos! It feels like I've fallen in love with the person who killed my parents! No, such a cheap analogy could never fully express these feelings! I want to kill you, but I also want to keep you by my side! I want to mess you up, but also hold you gently! It's so contradictory! So inconsistent! So conflicting! Our relationship is filled with nothing but paradoxes! But a positive and a negative become zero! No, these feelings are infinite!"



Mel said nothing in response. She didn't want to talk to Luquille anymore. Neither did she want to look at the hearts in her eyes any longer. She felt sick to her stomach, enough that the food she'd eaten was threatening to come back up.

"Oh, I seem to have strayed off topic. Ahem, let's get back to business," Luquille said, clearing her throat and regaining her calm.

However, Mel refused to let her guard down even a little. Why? The hearts in Luquille's eyes hadn't gone anywhere, so there was no way she was sane.

"So, after a couple hundred years of thought, I had a flash of inspiration. I asked myself, how could I continue to worship you while causing you the most pain possible? Indeed, the answer was simple; in hindsight, there was no need to think so hard," Luquille explained, spreading her arms wide and taking a step towards Mel.

Mel, in turn, took a step back.

"I technically already spoiled the surprise, but let me say it once more. You will be the Goddess of Reincarnation, the one who manages this beautiful world we all live in, permanently! That is the best way to fulfill both my love *and* hate!" Luquille exclaimed.

*Um, no thanks?!* Mel screamed internally. She didn't express that sentiment vocally because she didn't actually want to engage with the woman in front of her.

"Yes, indeed. I'm right, aren't I?" Luquille asked. "After all, you're actually quite lazy, Melfina, and I know that you love some human named Kelvin. You've finally managed to retire and return to this beautiful world, so you wouldn't want to return to such a demanding job, am I right? I understand your feelings painfully well, Melfina-sama. I do!"

*Don't just peek into my heart like that!* Mel retorted internally. Usually, this would be something Kelvin said to her, but now she was on the opposite end of things.

"But that is exactly why! If Melfina-sama were to be reinstated as the Goddess of Reincarnation, my faith would be fulfilled. I would be satisfied. And,

if Melfina-sama were to feel pain from the bottom of her heart, it would fulfill my desire for revenge as well. I'd be doubly satisfied!"

Seemingly satisfied, Luquille turned her creepily wiggling fingers towards Mel as she took another step forwards. Mel, overtaken by fear, took a step back in the opposite direction.

"Come on, Melfina-sama, continue being a Goddess of Reincarnation! I'm sure it'll be fun! If you don't want to do it alone, I will follow you to the ends of the earth! Let's work together, be each other's closest companions, and watch over each other from up close!" Luquille exclaimed.

"Uh, I understand your goals very well now," said Mel. "But that's impossible. The Goddess of Reincarnation is appointed by the angel leaders; it's not something you alone can decide. Also, it's already been decided that the next Goddess of Reincarnation will be Goldiana. Overturning such a decision is impossible."

While it was true that Mel was the previous Goddess of Reincarnation, her body was already dyed with the colors of mundane life, in both a good and a bad sense. Dyed completely, in fact. Even on the off chance she was to volunteer herself to be the Goddess again, the angel leaders likely wouldn't accept her.

But even after listening to Mel's words, which pierced the heart of the matter, Luquille only giggled. Her mouth curved upwards, as if to say, "So what?"

"Come on, Melfina-sama, you know those outdated leaders who can only make decisions like machines are no longer around," she said. Then, with a fearless smile, Luquille continued, "To be fair, I do understand your point, Melfina-sama. It certainly would be impossible to convince those outdated old fogeys who voluntarily threw themselves into those machines and lost their own wills. But right now, their bodies are being used as vessels. Also, the ones inside are the Ten Authorities, whom I revived personally. They may be fallen angels, but they're far holier than those leaders. In short, as long as I can make them understand your wonderfulness, Melfina-sama, you can once again be the Goddess."

"Y-You revived the Ten Authorities just for that, Luquille?!" Mel exclaimed in

shock.

“What do you mean, ‘just’? To me, this is the most supreme and worthy of efforts!” Luquille declared.

It was an utterly insane idea followed by nonsensical action that threatened to upset the balance of the world—none of it made sense to Mel. However, that didn’t mean Luquille wasn’t serious about it. After all, she was the worst of zealots.

“But I also understand that you don’t approve of my wish, Melfina-sama. Yes, I do. I know you best, after all, Melfina-sama,” said Luquille.

She’d been continuing to approach Melfina, but now she stopped, her wide-open arms brought together in prayer. With her superior looks, she now had the divine countenance of a saint. Though...the hearts were still in her eyes.

“To tell you the truth, my actual goal at the moment is this Divine Pillar. It was a stroke of fortune that I was able to meet you, Melfina-sama, but I’m going to leave things for today with just a greeting,” Luquille said.

“I... I see. Well that’s too bad— Wait, no!” Mel caught hold of herself and moved to prevent Luquille from touching the Divine Pillar. “What are you planning to do with the Divine Pillar, Luquille? If a fallen angel like you touches it, it’ll activate!”

“My final goal is to reinstate you as the Goddess, Melfina-sama, but there are several checkpoints I need to clear to get there. As I said earlier, there is a need to make the Ten Authorities understand. In order to do that, I need enough power to oppose them.”

Right after she said that, Luquille unhesitatingly touched the Divine Pillar, which then emitted a blindingly bright white light. The light spread throughout the underground space, completely filling everyone’s vision.

“Grrraaawww!”

In such a glaringly white world, the loud cry of something like a bird could be heard. Then, as if responding to the cry, the light started to weaken.

“Wyldgroh, the Divine Bird!”

What they saw once the light subsided was a giant white bird, about the same size as the Divine Pillar. It was the legendary guardian deity that was said to have once saved Leigant—the Divine Bird Wyldgroh.

“Dorothiara is in possession of a rare power,” Luquille said. “However, she also possesses humanlike, complex emotions. She would have been perfect as my comrade, but...unfortunately, the other Melfina-sama got ahead of me, and I was forced to swallow my tears and give up. *Ahem!* I seem to have gotten off topic again. I can’t help but get excited in your presence, Melfina-sama.”

“Stop, Luquille,” Mel tried commanding.

“I will do no such thing. Even if it’s an order from you, Melfina-sama, I am not such a fool that I would follow such a thing blindly,” Luquille refused. “I am a true believer who will correct you if you make a mistake—”

“Skreeeeeeee!”

Luquille was interrupted by Wyldgroh, who was right next to her. It looked at her, a fallen angel, as the evil it must defeat, and it swiped its sharp talons in an attempt to rip her apart. However...

“Hm, I see. So this is the level of a Divine Pillar at this stage,” Luquille noted.

“Kwoh?!”

Luquille had blocked the talons with one arm. Wyldgroh must not have expected that, as its next cry had been colored with surprise.

“But I’ll still give you a passing mark,” said Luquille. “Welcome to the ‘Reform the Wonderful Melfina-sama’ committee!”

Luquille slammed Wyldgroh into the ground with a move that looked like a shoulder throw. The bird split the ground apart—or possibly pulverized it—when it hit and was immediately rendered unconscious.

“As you can see, even bare-handed, I can easily overpower a Divine Pillar,” Luquille said. “I believe that as you are now, I am more than a good match for you, Melfina-sama. Of course, I will be leaving for now instead of fi—”

“But I’m not going to let you leave, you know?” Mel interrupted her, casting Iceberg Wall, completely blocking off the entrance and exit to the underground

space with a wall of ice.

Paul, who'd collapsed, was caught up in this and frozen.

"I see," Luquille said. "So you both blocked my escape and protected the first prince in one move. You've killed two birds with one stone, just as I'd expect of you, Melfina-sama. But...that won't be enough."

A sinister mass of magic instantly converged in one of Luquille's hands. Then...

"Death Ray."

The magic was unleashed, turning into a black flame that formed a fiery pillar large enough to envelop both Luquille and Wyldgroh. The pillar of black flame broke through the ceiling of the underground space, climbing past the surface and high into the sky.

"Grk!" Melfina grunted.

"As you are now, Melfina-sama, you aren't fit to be the Goddess of Reincarnation. So I will be your kind and thorough producer to make you fit by the time we next meet," Luquille said joyfully, as if her claim was punctuated with a musical note.

Mel could only make a frustrated noise as the fallen angel flapped her wings and took flight while dragging the Divine Bird roughly behind her. Mel was only able to confirm that through a small gap in the flames, and she knew it was no longer possible to stop Luquille from escaping through the hole in the ceiling. She couldn't even get close to the fallen angel. Though, in truth, she didn't *want* to get close either. Neither did she want to talk to Luquille. This irresistible sense of loathing broke Mel's will to pursue.

"Now then, it's about time for their fight to finish as well," Luquille noted. "No matter who comes out on top, the other will not be unscathed. Which one do you believe won, Melfina-sama? Oh, there's no need to answer. I'm sure you'll just say Kelvin. Well, if your wish comes true, I'll just have to recover Ridwan's artificial body. Though I'd do the same in the other case as well. And on the way, I'd also take the Holy Stake to serve as a means of transport instead of a carriage."

"So you're going to make an enemy of the Ten Authorities in addition to us,

Luquille? And you still expect to win?” Mel asked.

“That’s funny, Melfina-sama. ‘Expecting to win’ has nothing to do with it,” Luquille asserted. “Do you really think your beloved Kelvin thinks of that sort of thing when he fights? Of course not, right? The more powerful the enemy is compared to him, the more he wants to challenge that enemy, right? I’m the same. I am taking on this challenge with the same mindset as the one you love. You could say that this is a trial of my faith! I will make everyone understand, no matter what I have to do. That goes for you, Melfina-sama, who will likely become my greatest enemy, as well as the Ten Authorities who worship that sham of a wicked god.”

With that, Luquille disappeared at the same time the black flames did. Wyldgroh couldn’t be seen either, despite how large it was.

*She disappeared again, thought Melfina. She did the same thing when we first saw each other as well. Did she use some sort of spell to make an illusion of herself? If I knew this would happen, I’d have taken some detection skills.*

Mel predicted that Luquille was still in the area. Still, she exited from the same hole Luquille had and hurried off to rejoin Kelvin. While she hated the idea of once again facing off against Luquille to death, she didn’t hesitate like before. Now wasn’t the time for that, even if Luquille’s unique brand of crazy was super effective against Mel!

*Urrghh, my stomach hurts... My iron stomach actually hurts... I don’t want to see her anymore...*

Still, that didn’t stop her from feeling hesitant.

*Still... Hee hee! I see, so she thinks I’ll be her greatest enemy, huh? You really don’t know anything, Luquille. Your greatest enemy won’t be me or the Ten Authorities. You’d do well not to underestimate my husband, who’s even crazier than you when it comes to battles, Mel thought, putting her full trust in Kelvin as she accelerated.*

By the way, Paul was still frozen in the ice.



Ridwan Mahad of the Ten Authorities, having been given the Authority of



“Unbreakable” by the Wicked God Addams, was not technically a fallen angel. There was an ore called “divine iron,” which only existed in the unique domain in which gods resided. This ore was what he was made of, which meant Ridwan wasn’t a living thing.

But what was divine iron, anyway? A rare ore created when a god used his or her power to do something such as creating a world or reincarnating someone while giving that person special abilities. However, it always appeared after a delay, and because the degree of said delay was completely random in the vectors of both space and time, as well as the fact that it looked no different from a random rock and didn’t have any inherent magic to it, divine iron was extremely hard to find even for gods. It was truly a mythical item.

Divine iron became the principal raw material for the weapons and armor used by the gods since it was a miracle ore that held infinite possibilities within it. The full potential of the ore was unknown even to them, and every god knew of the ore. An example of a divine iron weapon would be Holy Sword Will, which had been given to Serge and Touya. Will, having the ability to respond to the will and skills of its user to change shape, could be said to be a weapon that reflected the inherent properties of divine iron. The gods who presided over blacksmithing coveted this miraculous ore from the bottom of their hearts, as they wished to improve their own skills.

However, given the ore’s infinite possibilities, divine iron was more difficult to form into a weapon or piece of armor than it was to find. Even when legendary blacksmiths took up the challenge of shaping it, only a small few managed to shape the metal into an armament, and there were so few people able to actually bring out the ore’s properties that some worlds might not even have one. Jildora, the Apostle with the title of Creator, might have been able to work the ore as he pleased, but he was no longer in this world. It was likely there was no one else who could work divine iron.

At any rate, returning to the subject of the Ten Authorities, before the great war between the gods, there was someone who was as interested in divine iron as the gods of blacksmithing. The name of this god was Baldogg Gettier, a fallen angel who was formerly a god of blacksmithing, and a member of the Ten Authorities just like Ridwan. Baldogg’s skills stood out even among the other

gods, and he had been ordered to make a massive amount of weapons in preparation for the coming war by Addams, whom he worshipped.

Baldogg had been given the Authority of “Tempering,” so he devoted himself to his research and training every day to be able to target divine iron with his Authority and make weapons and armor of markedly higher quality compared to any other. As a result, Baldogg was able to create a wealth of equipment, further strengthening the Ten Authorities, who were the greatest of the wicked god’s forces. At the same time, something had happened that Baldogg would never have expected. He’d ended up creating a golem of divine iron with its own free will, which would later be named Ridwan Mahad.

The golem had naturally high intelligence as well as the ability to freely transform its body at will. It might have been closer to a slime than a golem. Using its natural intelligence, the golem absorbed all the information it could from Baldogg’s creations and books. Thus, it was able to imitate any and all weapons using its ability to transform its body.

*“You are...my masterpiece!”* Baldogg once shouted excitedly. That was how incredible the golem’s strength in battle and ability to learn were.

It was greedy for more knowledge, and as the golem further distinguished itself through its desire to strengthen itself, Addams eventually took notice.

*“I will gift you with the name Ridwan Mahad, as well as the empty seat of the Ten Authorities. I expect results in the war befitting your status as one of the elite chosen,”* Addams said at the time.

The golem of divine iron, having defeated a member of the Ten Authorities in front of their god, received a blessing from Addams and was reborn as Ridwan Mahad. Since then, he spent most of his time in his favorite form: that of an angel. The power of Unbreakable, which he had been given along with his title, allowed him to make inorganic matter retain its shape no matter what. While it could only affect inorganic substances, that wasn’t a downside to Ridwan. A biological being would have been able to use this effect on his or her armor or something nearby at best, but Ridwan’s entire body was inorganic. Once he activated his Authority, nothing would be able to harm him, and nothing could defend against his attacks. He was truly an iron wall, the avatar of invincibility.

Ridwan's compatibility with his Authority was perfect.

Given the properties of Unbreakable, Ridwan was unable to transform his body. But, while he was manifesting his Authority, he was able to maintain the properties of Unbreakable even while transforming. In short, Ridwan was able to keep both Unbreakable and his natural flexibility, and thus had no weaknesses. Ridwan Mahad, an angel-type weapon with a will, had used this power in the war between gods to drive many gods to the brink of despair.

Still, the war had ended with the defeat of the wicked god Addams. Even Ridwan, proud of his perfect win rate, had lost in the end. In truth, his Authority did not give him true invincibility and was rendered useless through a certain strategy. The spells Divine Saber and Divine Dress, which invalidated any bestowed abilities and were still in use today, were said to have been invented at this time.

"Hey now, did you fall unconscious for a bit or something? That's not good; the fun is just starting," Kelvin complained.

"You bastard!" Ridwan cursed.

Even in the present, these spells would drive Ridwan to defeat. His limbs had been severed, and Kelvin had a hold of his head and was dangling it midair. At this point, Ridwan could easily be described as being wounded all over.

Ridwan had been stripped of his Unbreakable property by Kelvin's Divine Saber, reduced to his natural toughness, and every weapon he created had been cut down before he lost his limbs as well. Because his body shape was fluid, it was possible for him to just reconnect his limbs even after they were severed. However, every time Kelvin cut off a piece of Ridwan, he used Clotho to put that piece in Storage. With that, Ridwan gradually lost more and more of himself until finally, he reached his present state. Even though he'd lost his Unbreakable property, Ridwan's natural toughness was still equal to the legendary weapons and armor made of the same material he was, so it was honestly surprising to him that he was so easily taken apart even without the benefit of his Authority.

Every time a piece of him was cut off, his reactive armor exploded. The same happened even after Kelvin had claimed his head. And yet, despite being hit by

such point-blank attacks, Kelvin was still alive. Even when all the skin on Kelvin's face had been blown away, exposing the muscle beneath to be scorched and charred, and more wounds deep enough to expose bone had been dealt to the man besides, Ridwan had yet to kill him. No matter how much damage was dealt to Kelvin, even amounts that should have been fatal were regenerated at high speed immediately after. In the face of such incredible recovery, instantaneous damage was nothing.

*How much MP has this man spent since the beginning of the fight?!* Ridwan wondered in shock.

His confusion was understandable. Even though Kelvin had a massive amount of MP, he'd been healing himself constantly, all while attacking full force. Such heavy MP usage outstripped even Kelvin's maximum amount. It should have been around a hundred thousand, or possibly even more.

*So this is Grim Reaper?!* Ridwan thought.

The explosion that had just happened had blown off the left half of Kelvin's face. An eye inside the exposed bone of the socket stared at Ridwan. At the same time, the mouth still seemed to be curved upwards in a sinister fashion. That smile looked like the expression of a true grim reaper, which shook Ridwan to his core.

"You look like you don't understand what's going on," Kelvin said. "Well, you know...let's just say it's the power of love from a certain glutton."

"Don't you dare...fuck with me!" Ridwan shouted angrily.

"Ha ha ha! Still, what a weird thing. Your expression isn't changing at all, but your emotions are on full display," said Kelvin. "So are you afraid of me? Or do you want to know more about me? Well, I'm honored either way. By the fact that a member of the Ten Authorities is interested in me, that is!"

Ridwan let out a noise. In that instant, he'd understood. He was afraid of the human in front of him—one he'd classified as an inferior being.



What Luquille saw as she flew back to the Holy Stake was Ridwan about to die, his head in Kelvin's hands.

*So you can even defeat Ridwan, who has the Unbreakable Authority, Kelvin, she thought. I suppose I should say that's to be expected of the one who won Melfina-sama's love. Still, he doesn't seem to be in perfect shape. My apologies, but I'll have to retrieve Ridwan.*

Luquille immediately made a big swing, throwing Wyldgroh, whom she'd been carrying, towards the Holy Stake. The gigantic bird flew fast like a ball, and if it continued that way, it would crash unceremoniously into the stake's face. But right before it did, the Holy Stake transformed, forming a door to the inside. The door then rumbled open, and the noise distracted Kelvin for a split second.

*I've subjugated Ridwan's original target, the Divine Pillar, thought Luquille. But the Holy Stake does have functions like this in order for it to carry out its purpose. So I'll make full use of its carrying capacity. Thanks, Ten Authorities.*

Luquille made this move hoping to use the Holy Stake not only to store and transport Wyldgroh, but to also distract Kelvin. No matter how concentrated Kelvin was on the battle in front of him, he would reflexively show interest in the mysterious giant stake above his head suddenly transforming to swallow up a giant bird that would have seemed to come out of nowhere. The opening born from that, no matter how minuscule, was the perfect opportunity for someone in stealth mode like Luquille to take advantage of.

"Oh?" she let out.

Luquille approached at a speed faster than the eye could track, and she retrieved the ragged Ridwan in the instant she had. However, Kelvin had reflexively swung his staff, which grazed her and undid the spell that was granting her stealth.

*This is...Divine Saber. I see, so this is what defeated Ridwan, thought Luquille.*

But this was how she ended up exposing herself to Kelvin. She held the damaged Ridwan dangling from one hand as she scattered embers of black flame around her.

"Ahhh, I was wondering who it could be," Kelvin started. "I thought you were fighting Mel, but you *did* disappear at some point. I saw Mel hurry to chase after you, but, hmmm...it looks like you never ended up fighting?"

“What a strange thing to say, Kelvin Celsius,” said Luquille. “The fact that I’m here means Melfina has been defeated. Wouldn’t that be the normal assumption?”

“Nope, it wouldn’t be,” Kelvin declared firmly. “It’s true you’re fascinating enough to make my salivary gland, go wild. But, if I had to ask myself if you were better than Mel, I’d have to say no. Even if you managed a surprise attack, Mel isn’t a soft enough target that she’d let you escape so obviously unscathed. In other words, you must have run from Mel while carrying that big-ass bird. The fact that you ambushed me as well is pretty good proof of that assumption too. I can’t feel any confidence coming from you that you’d win. I’d say you’re about as strong as me on a good day, or maybe not?”

Luquille shut her mouth, refusing to respond to Kelvin’s question. It seemed his conjecture was right on the mark.

*He saw right through me with just this short exchange. This human’s an even bigger battle-crazed maniac than my info suggested,* Luquille thought.

The uncommonly sharp analytical ability of the battle junkie in front of her paired with his incredible craving for battle made Luquille’s impression of Kelvin go past being impressed into being fed up. At the same time, she was sure that she shouldn’t try to fight him at this moment.

“Though it’s embarrassing to admit, you’re right, Kelvin Celsius. But I have already fulfilled my objective. I’ll be taking my leave now,” she said.

Luquille flew off towards the Holy Stake. The thing started rumbling even louder, probably because the preparations for their return had already been completed.

“I see, objective, huh?” Kelvin said musingly. “Was your objective to retrieve that really divine-looking bird and Ridwan, who’s on the verge of death?”

“It was, yes. What of it?” Luquille replied after a pause.

“Oh, nothing,” said Kelvin. “I just thought that if that’s the case, you’re only half done!”

Luquille let out a shocked noise as, at the same time Kelvin shouted, she felt the weight of Ridwan disappear from her hand. She looked down, and saw that

Ridwan had indeed disappeared, even though she should have taken him back. It had happened so fast, it was as if Ridwan had turned into mist and disappeared.

*Did I take back a fake? No, Kelvin shouldn't have the means of making illusions like me or Melfina-sama,* Luquille pondered. *Even if he does, I'm specialized in this field of magic, and there's no way I'd mistake or fail to notice such a spell being used. I definitely had the real Ridwan— Wait, this...could it be?!*

Luquille had to stop herself from clicking her tongue. She bit down on the urge, instead looking up to glare at Kelvin.

"You... Did you form a Summoning contract with Ridwan?" she asked.

"Ha ha! You're quick on the uptake. I didn't expect you to get that right away. You're pretty scary," Kelvin said.

"You really don't have the right to be saying that," Luquille scoffed. "Putting a member of the Ten Authorities into a Summoning contract? There's a limit to how blasphemous you can be."

"Is there?" Kelvin asked. "I came to this world already contracted with a Goddess, so...even if you call it blasphemous, I can't really say I share that feeling. Also, I already fulfilled my end of the contract, so I don't think there's any room for an outsider like you to comment about it."

Generally, a Summoning contract was made between a Summoner and a monster of a lower level, and it had a higher chance of succeeding after lowering the target's HP. However, that restriction didn't apply to monsters with high enough intelligence to make use of language. All the Summoner had to do was convince the monster that he or she was a worthy master. Unlike a slave contract, it was impossible to use this method to force a master-servant relationship—only, there were exceptions to this. The exception being breaking the target's heart with fear to make them submit. This hidden option was only available to Summoners who reached Rank S. In truth, Kelvin didn't know about that and had just happened to manage it with Ridwan.

"You were pretty close, timing-wise. If you were only a few seconds earlier, the contract wouldn't have been formed," said Kelvin. "Well, let's just say the

goddess of good fortune smiled upon me this time.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Luquille. “I’d appreciate it if you don’t just selfishly monopolize goddesses. I’ll kill you.”

“Huh? Ah, uh...sorry?” Kelvin said, taken aback.

Luquille’s murderous intent skyrocketed in that instant, and Kelvin couldn’t help but be a little shaken by how suddenly her expression changed. He understood that he’d stepped on some sort of land mine.

“Oh, looks like Mel’s back,” he said.

Luquille let out a surprised noise as she noticed as she felt a strong presence suddenly appearing from the way she came. Of course, it was Mel.

“What’ll you do? Ridwan’s in my pool now, so will you go for another round to try and take him back? I’m not in perfect condition, but I’d still welcome another fight, you know?” Kelvin asked.

Luquille took a moment to think before replying, “No, I’ll refrain from that. I’ll just let you have Ridwan for now. Well then, goodbye.”

Luquille disappeared in a burst of black flames. She’d most likely gone to the stake, so Kelvin didn’t give chase. Was he exhausted from his earlier fight, as Luquille thought? He simply stood and watched the stake disappear as it ascended into the sky.

*Whoohoo! She’s totally just a lump of insanity and ambition! She’ll definitely get way stronger in the future! Mmm, oh man, I’m so looking forward to that.*

Nope. There was no way a battle junkie would value self-preservation enough to do that. Kelvin was just selfishly hoping that she’d grow and mature into a more interesting fight in the future.



Right after watching the humongous stake that seemed to be the fallen angels’ method of transport disappear, Mel showed up.

“Did you just let Luquille go, honey?” she asked. “That was on purpose, wasn’t it? I know it was.”



“Uh, sorry...”

Though I received a rather justified scolding, there was nothing I could’ve done about it. So I put on an acrobatic show that transitioned into a deep kowtow to ask for forgiveness. I explained that I’d made a contract with Ridwan afterwards and was met with an even more frustrated expression.

*Oh come on, that’s good news. You’re supposed to be happy!*

“That was quite a show, Master. A rare sight,” said Mdo.

“Did you cheat or something? I’ll have to report this to the head maid as well,” Rosalia asked.

“Hey!”

After that little bit of apologetic flair, I pulled myself together and we met up with Mdo and Rosalia, who’d been protecting the capital below. Its barrier was still present and essentially untouched, so I felt it safe to assume that the defense had worked for the moment. While Luquille got away— *I mean, right... While I let Luquille escape, I did still manage to contract one of the Ten Authorities, so I figured we ended up with a good result and I should still get praised. What? No? Oh, sorry, Mel. By the way, I’d appreciate it if you’d stop pouting already... Yeah, okay. I’ll treat you to as much of Leigant’s specialties as you want out of my own pocket.*

“Okay, let’s go report this to Leigant’s king! Come on, come on, let’s hurry up and get this all over with!”

“Seriously? You...” Mel trailed off, lost for words.

At any rate, I managed to get the rather materialistic Mel to stop being so mad.

“Ah, that reminds me...” Mel started.

“Hm? What is it?”

“I was so preoccupied with chasing Luquille that I forgot Paul. He was pickling in some ice. Whoopsie, hee hee hee!” she explained, sticking her tongue out cheekily.

The rest of us had no words. *Trying to imitate DarkMel won’t work.* I was the

type of man who could actually make such a retort. Still, the careless person who made such a mistake took the right to feast on Leigant's specialties on my dime anyway.

"It was a mistake. Yes, a simple, understandable mistake!" Mel tried to defend herself. "I'll go and save him right away! And I'll even retrieve that prince from Leigant I found on the way!"

Mel was acting unusually desperate, but that was how we ended up going through a rather complicated path to find and rescue Paul from the ice. While we were in the middle of these rescue operations, I also had to wonder how Mel managed to find Leigant's first prince and his bodyguards(?) without any detection skills. They were stranded on some snowy mountain, and she had managed to find them with such speed. It would have been great if she were to show such motivation all the time.

Mel was panting hard as she said proudly, "Angels are really capable when desperate, you know!"

"Seriously, I'm impressed that you were able to navigate that mazelike path... And you found the prince and his group super fast too..."

Mel was so worn out she was on all fours as she tried to regain her breath. Behind her, Paul and the others she had rescued were standing there blankly, as if they still didn't understand the situation.

*Yeah, I get it. This situation's pretty confusing.*

Mel wasn't in a state to explain anything, so I took up the mantle. Anyway, Mel's efforts to make up for her mistake earned her the privilege of eating on my dime once again, not that she'd technically ever lost it. Greed made people—actually, in this case it, angels—strong.

"Finally, I get what's going on, Master Kelvin," said Paul. "Still, to think you managed to chase that fallen angel off and take down her friend. I should've expected that from you; your strength is seriously in a whole other dimension. But I gotta say, my skills also helped, didn't they?"

"Hm? Your skills, Paul? What're you talking about?"

"Huh? I never told you?" Paul reacted with confusion. "My Unique Skill is

Identify Position. That's how big sis Mel found Edgar and the others so fast."

Apparently, Paul had gained a Unique Skill at some point, which allowed him to accurately identify the current position of a target he touched. In other words, it was a specialized skill for searching or hunting a target. I was also told that he could point out the target's current position accurately on a map, not just in his mind.

"To be fair, I can only stock up to three designations at once, though!" Paul boasted.

"And he used one of his precious stocks on me right before we were separated," Edgar added. "That was how that angel lady managed to find us so quickly."

"Huh, is that so? No wonder why it was so fast— Wait, uhhh...you're the Leigant prince people are looking for, right? But you look very different from the description..."

I took another look at Leigant's first prince, Edgar Lauzer. He looked like a gentle and agreeable person, with a soft bearing and style of speech. He was quite different from—in fact, the opposite of—how his description painted him. If I'd met him without knowing he was a prince, I wouldn't have been able to tell.

"Ha ha! This is the true Edgar, Master," Paul explained. "The way Edgar acts while at the academy is him pretending to be a prince. Actually, I never expected him to expose this side of himself to you guys."

"How could I continue my act in front of the people who saved our lives?" Edgar countered. "Also, Kelvin-san has been taking care of you, hasn't he? So I figured it would be okay. Once again, thank you for saving us, Kelvin-san. I will never forget this."

"Ah, ummm, we just did what was natural. Uhh, dang, this is really throwing me off."

I shook Edgar's hand. While this was a little different from what I was expecting, in this case, it was different in a good way. If this was how Prince Edgar truly was, then it didn't seem like he'd cause more trouble after going

back to the academy. Specifically, for Rion, DarkMel, and those around them. Naturally, crushing the prince of a country would cause a lot of problems...

*Ah, no, I already have experience from dealing with Trycen's idiot prince. Anyway, peace is best!*

"From the sound of it, the way my father and the academy have described me is quite different to how I'm currently acting," Edgar said.

"Yes, well...that's especially true for the descriptions given by your fellow students. The way Bell described you isn't covered by 'quite different.'"

"Really? Bell-san? By the way, what did she say?" Edgar asked.

"According to Bell, er...you are a shameless, skirt-chasing piece of trash pest and a filthy barbaric idiot who tries to put the moves on every woman he sees. It's a wonder to her how you can be so confident even though you've only got enough strength to barely differentiate yourself from a common student. She also said that you're some kind of reverse genius, and the number of times you've been rejected definitely puts you in the running for number one least liked in the world. She basically told me that since you stand out in a bad way all the time, you'd probably be found right away. And that to be honest, she finds you as unpleasant as Charles. Ah, also—"

"Ghrwhff!" Edgar spurted out.

"Stop!" Axe pleaded. "I'm sorry, but please stop there! Edgar-sama can't take any more! Also, it's far too disrespectful to royalty!"

"Edgar-sama's already vomiting blood from that mental attack. You're a genius. I can't stop laughing," Perona said.

"Now's not the time to be laughing, Perona!" Axe exclaimed. "Hurry, heal him!"

"Th-The same as Charles... The same..." Edgar muttered, on the verge of life and death.

"Stay strong, Edgar-sama!" Axe shouted. "Charles is clearly several levels worse than you! Definitely!"

"That's what hurt you most, Edgar-sama?" Perona asked incredulously.

The next thing I knew, the prince had started coughing up blood. I couldn't say for sure, but I saw the makings of a comedic trio in these three.

"Heh heh! Edgar's brightened up a lot," said Paul. "I'm so happy for him, as his brother."

"Are you looking for a retort or something, Paul? Seriously, you too?"

"Huh? What're you talking about, Master?" Paul asked.

"Honey...come on, let's hurry to Leigant's capital!" Mel whined. "I can already see the menu signs denoting their specialties!"



We then visited Leigant's capital to reward Mel for her efforts. We'd just carried out a really flashy battle above their heads, so they were still on high alert. I wondered how we would settle things peacefully so we could get in, but in the end that was all taken care of by Edgar, the current first prince, and Paul, the former first prince. Rather, it seemed that Leigant's king had already made it back from Lumiest, where he was attending the exhibition match, so we were taken to see him immediately.

*Hmmm, it's all happening so fast. Well, I guess not having any unnecessary trouble occur is a good thing. After all, my wallet's going to be destroyed after this. Ha ha ha ha...ha...*

"I believe I have not seen you since Lumiest, King of Leigant. Thank you for seeing us so suddenly."

My friends and I were currently in the audience chamber in Leigant's castle, one knee on the floor and bowing our heads. Of course, the one we were showing such obeisance to was Leigant's king, who was on the throne.

"Indeed. You may raise your heads. I give you my own thanks for finding my son, Edgar, as well as saving Leigant from the evil clutches of the fallen angels, Kelvin-dono," said the king.

It seemed he not only knew we'd fought above the city, he'd even confirmed that I'd fought Ridwan.

*Love it when things go this smoothly and speedily.*

“But I wonder why Paul is with you. My idiot so— *Ahem!* Why is that stupid-looking adventurer standing in front of royalty? Even Kelvin-dono, a Rank S adventurer, is bowing,” said the king.

“Hmph, don’t wanna,” Paul protested. “Adventurers are free to do what they like. I only bow my head to people who deserve it. That goes double for my idiot da— *Ahem!* Stubborn rulers like you. I’d rather die than bow!”

“Hah! You’re the stubborn one! Even adventurers know the bare minimum of etiquette. My word, how foolish can you get?! It’s because you never wise up that you’re stuck at Rank A! Who was it who flew out of here, all worked up about becoming Rank S? And yet, I *know* you’re only as strong as you look!”

“What did you saaayyy?! You know, I wonder how you know that I’m a Rank A adventurer?! You keep calling me a fool, but it sounds like you’re actually really interested in how I’m doing, doesn’t it?! You damn stalkeeerrr! Master Kelvin’s a broad-minded sort, so he’s willing to bow even to someone like you, but any other Rank S adventurer would NEVER do that! Not to a stalker like you!”

“Whaaat?! Did I just hear that right?! At the very least, Goldiana-dono and Brujowana-dono have shown proper respect to me! In fact, I have no idea what you’re talking about when you mentioned broad minds or whatever, but I thought being a proper Rank S adventurer like that was your goal, you idiot! I can see how small of a man you are from your actions! I knew you were a fool, and a fool of an adventurer, at that!”

“Huuunnhhhh?!” Paul shouted threateningly.

“Hmmmnnhh?!” the king shouted in turn.

“Hunnnhhhhh?!” they both repeated themselves.

Meanwhile, the rest of us watched this unfold silently.

*What kind of show is this?*

The spontaneous parent-child argument had Leigant’s king, who had seemed dignified at first, reverting his style of speech, while Paul got heated up almost immediately. But the content of their argument was disappointingly shallow, and as a third party who was stuck listening to them, I couldn’t have cared less.

*Aren't these two just clumsy in expressing themselves?*

"Idiot!" Paul shouted.

"Fool!" the king countered.

*Hm, and now they're not even arguing anymore. Is this not going to end unless someone stops them? Come on, prime-minister-looking person on the king's right, knight-captain-looking person on his left, do your jobs already. Hey, why're you two looking away? Please, do your jobs!*

::Honey, I can feel my stomach about to make a big rumble from hunger. Also, I can hear Leigant's specialties calling out to me. Can we just stop these two physically and leave already?:: Mel asked.

*I see you've gained another weird skill... I replied through the Network. I can't allow you to stop them using violence. With how loud they're being, no one will hear your stomach, so let it rumble as much as you please. I'll allow that.*

::Honey! I'm still a young maiden, you know! Harrumph!:: came Mel's shocked reply.

*I'm pretty sure no normal maiden would be so desperate to sate their hunger, I thought privately.*

::Grk! Stop, my stomach! I can't allow my hunger to run free when Efil's not around! Quiet down...stomach! Grrkkhh! I...can't hold it in anymore!:: Mel groaned.

*I'd appreciate it if you stopped talking about your empty stomach like that, I thought privately. Still, it really does sound like she's at her limit. I suppose I will have to step in—*

"Father, brother, I find it heartwarming to see the conversation between you two flowing after such a long time, but don't you think it's about time to settle down? Kelvin-dono seems quite shocked," said Edgar, stopping them while I was still preoccupied with internal affairs.

*Nice one, Ed!*

"Hrm, you have a point," muttered the king. "Thank you for stopping us, Edgar. And my apologies, Kelvin-dono. As you may already know, that

adventurer is of royal blood.”

“I already told him about that, yeah,” said Paul. “And I ended up flying off the handle too. Sorry for causing you trouble, Master.”

“If you’re going to apologize, do it to Mel. Her hunger’s at its limit now.”

Mel’s stomach growled loudly.

“Wow, it sounds like sister Sera when she’s in a bad mood. Master, that means sister Mel is truly at her limit. In short, we are in danger,” said Mdo.

Mel’s instinct for eating was so close to being unleashed that even Mdo had to issue a warning. If we let this instinct explode, she’d end up causing more trouble than the fallen angels. Specifically, she’d eat Leigant into a food crisis.

“Master, I must report that before any of us noticed, our food stores have disappeared. During the trip, Mel-sama must have...” Rosalia trailed off, afraid to finish the sentence.

“Mel-san?!”

Mel’s stomach made itself known with another growl. This time, it seemed to waver a little. Even in this state, Mel and her stomach were apparently feeling guilty about sneaking food.

“Oh, a hungry stomach? That’s all?” questioned the king. “Hm, I suppose that’s understandable, given how hard you’ve fought to protect our country on top of searching the continent for Edgar. Minister, prepare some food immediately. Make it a grand feast for the heroes who saved our kingdom.”

“Right away, Your Majesty,” replied the person on his right.

“Huh? Are you sure about that?” I asked.

“Of course I am. What kind of king would I be if I let our heroes starve? This conversation will likely run long, so we might as well have it while sitting at a dinner table.”

*Oh no, I was talking about the cost of the food... But well, I guess it’d be rude to refuse! Let’s take advantage of the king’s goodwill!*

“Right, I would like a larger portion of sweets. In fact, I would like to be fed



only sweets. Bring me dessert,” said Mdo.

“Um, may I be allowed to observe the workings of your kitchen?” asked Rosalia. “I am very interested as a servant myself. Yes indeed, I would love to steal their skills...”

“Grwl! Grrrwwhhlll! (I desire infinite extra helpings!)” went Mel’s stomach.

*Hey now, that’s going too far.*

::Heh! It seems my plan’s gone perfectly. Now we can enjoy as much food as we want without impacting your wallet, honey!:: Mel told me proudly.

*Don’t just regain your senses all of a sudden, come on...* I replied in kind, making sure it did not leak out through my mouth.

I was sure that this was in no way the result of some sort of plan. Mel had just lost to her empty stomach, let instinct take over, and things ended up working out in our favor anyway. But that was how our current Mel was, though the Mel from my previous life might have been the same.



“Wait, Paul, what do you mean by that?” Mel asked.

“What do you mean, what do I mean? It’s exactly as I said...” Paul replied.

We were having the meal Mel so desperately craved while sitting at a fancy long table as a rather ominous topic came up between Mel and Paul.

*What’s going on? Did some sort of trouble happen again?* I wondered.

“Listen to this, honey. Paul just said something insane,” Mel said, turning to me.

“Insane?”

“Not insane,” Paul defended himself. “Like I said, when that fallen angel took my blood, I used Identify Position to find her. She looked down on me as someone totally inferior, so I’m sure she never expected that to happen, right? Heh heh, well part of it was because she thought I was so scared, but it was just acting on my part. I mean, me being inferior is true, but I totally got back at her with that!”

“Uh...huh?”

I couldn't help but sound dumbfounded. *I mean, wait, doesn't that imply that he succeeded in activating his skill to acquire Luquille's location? LUQUILLE? And doesn't that mean that he knows where she is right now as well? Am I wrong or is that amazing news?! Like, seriously incredible!*

“Paul, you're ama—”

“Wait,” Melfina interrupted me. “Doesn't that mean we didn't have to take the annoying route we did when we were chasing her? You knew where Luquille was, right? So why did we have to go through that awful maze? Why?!”

“Urgk! I-I mean, I was kidnapped by you right as I was busy feeling relieved that that monster had left, so I was confused.” Paul tried to defend himself. “I was also desperate not to get crushed by the pressure you were giving off, so...”

“Didn't you just say that fear was an act? But what you said just now implies that you actually were afraid. Which is it?!” Mel questioned him further. For some reason, she was being especially hard on Paul today.

She had a point, though. I had experienced the route she had to take when we went back to save Paul and thought it was super annoying too. Well, this could be considered a teaching moment for him, as he was late in reporting to us. As I said before, Mel's fundamental style of teaching was quite spartan. However, Paul had definitely managed a great contribution this time, so I decided to save him.

“Now, now, why don't we leave the matter there, Mel? Eat this and calm down.”

I took a big chunk of meat from the dish that was Leigant's specialty—the hot pot—and brought it to Mel's mouth. She engulfed it all at once and started chewing, which instantly improved her mood.

*Looks like she likes it a lot. Yeah, she's so simple.*

By the way, neither Leigant's king nor Edgar were present at the moment. As for what they *were* doing, they'd gone to the kitchen to procure more food, as what was on the table was disappearing into Mel's stomach at a ferocious rate!

While I wasn't really one to talk, I couldn't help but want to make a quip questioning the behavior of this country's higher-ups. Leigant's king had dashed out of the room with Edgar in tow after saying something about falling at first sight and wanting Mel to try his dishes as well. According to Paul, he was known to frequent his castle's kitchen, spurred to action by his own tastes, and was now known as the secret head chef. As for Edgar, I was told that he'd always loved cooking and had improved his skills under his father's tutelage to a point where he could easily start his own restaurant.

"Sho goood!" Mel exclaimed.

"Sho sweeeet!" Mdo followed suit.

It was rare for Mel and Mdo, who'd had their palettes spoiled by Efil's cooking, to praise food so openly and emphatically, especially with their expressions. As one might have been able to tell from their faces and how they were moaning with pleasure, the king's cooking skill was quite high. He might have even been equal to Efil. However, there was something that caught my eye.

"Axe, the rate at which you're washing dishes is slowing down! Stop crowding the kitchen!" the king warned his son's retainer.

"R-Right! I'll try my best!" Axe responded.

"Don't just 'try your best,' up the pace! Don't make light of bodyguarding!" the king shouted.

"S-Sir, yes, sir!" Axe replied.

Then, the king switched over to Perona. "Why aren't you done extracting the poison yet, Perona?! We won't be able to make more food for Mel-dono fast enough!"

"Poison Cure! Poison Cure! *Glug glug*, Urp... I'm detoxifying as fast as I can while drinking recovery potions..." muttered Perona as she tried to hold all the liquid inside her. "In fact, why are we using poisonous ingredients?"

"Leigant is a frozen land! We will use any ingredient available to us! That's common sense! Also, it's been known since long ago that anything poisonous is more delicious! Now that you know, hurry up and detoxify the food! And you

call yourself one of Leigant's best monks?!" the king shouted.

"R-Right, got it... Poison Cure. Poison Cure..." Perona got back to work.

"Father, I've finished the preparations for this. Take care of it, please," said Edgar.

"Okay, leave it to me!" exclaimed the king. "Burn! BURRRNN! Heh hah hah hah hah hah!"

As you can probably tell, the kitchen was unexpectedly close by (in fact, it was right next to us), so I could easily hear the shouts coming from inside. Basically, the kitchen was really loud.

*I wish you guys wouldn't shout so much about using poisonous ingredients in your cooking. Ever since I Evolved, my hearing's gotten better and I've started to pick up information that I never wanted to know.*

"Head chef, the ice cake is done!" Rosalia exclaimed.

"Oh, that is nice work! Would you like to come work for us, Rosalia-dono?!" The head chef (the king, in this case) praised her loudly.

"What?! The king himself is scouting her! Just who *is* that maid?!"

"My apologies, but I must refuse," replied Rosalia.

"Sh-She turned him doooooowwnnn?!" went a crowd of people.

*Wait a second, Rosalia, didn't you just go to observe? And I can hear a bunch of onlookers shouting their reactions from the other side of the wall. They sound like cooks. Why are you all cooking together? Well, uh, let's just leave that alone for now...*

From what I heard, I could tell that the king of Leigant was the type of man whose personality changed as soon as he started cooking, igniting like a fierce fire. I supposed he lived up to the name he got due to the awe he inspired in his people: The Burning King of Cooking Despite Being in a Frozen Kingdom.

"And here I thought this king would be the first decent ruler I've met in a long time! I really did!"

In the back of my mind, I thought about the leaders of the four great

countries of the Eastern Continent. One was a cross-dressing enthusiast, one was a crazed zealot, one was a relentless talent collector, and one was a battle junkie—and then there was the doting parent of the Northern Continent. Yeah, now that I thought about it, there weren't any decent rulers anywhere...

*The only one who seemed normal was the king of Faanis, I think? Yeah, he was unusually proper, even though he's married to Bakke.*

"Decent? Heh heh, you're not great at joking, are you, Master Kelvin?" asked Paul. "That damn old man...you know he tried to force all those cooking skills into me with the same tyrannical attitude you're hearing now? He started when I was *this* little."

"Yeah, I think I'm starting to get why you wanted to run away, Paul. Having to deal with that would be... I mean, it'd be different if you were actually interested, but in my case I think it'd be impossible for me to deal with."

"You get it," Paul said approvingly. "By the way, the reason Leigant's been building up its military is apparently because they want to absorb food cultures from other countries. Don't you think that's insane?"

"Seriously? That's crazier than when Trycen was taken over by a Demon Lord. I mean, come on, you can do that by trading with your neighbors."

"Well, about that, you know how this country's environment is stupidly harsh and the monsters are all really strong? That's why no merchants ever try to enter or leave. We're basically isolated," Paul explained. "It's not a problem at your level, Master, but there's no merchant as strong as you."

"You have a point, but...I mean, seriously, for a reason like *that*?"

"Indeed, for a reason like that. My shitty dad is usually pretty calm, but all that disappears when cooking is involved," said Paul. "You know, his favorite saying is 'I used this flavor to make everyone submit!'"

"Wow..."

*Yeah. If I was in Paul's position, I would almost certainly have left Leigant too. How should I put it... It's worse than Edgar acting like a womanizer. It's way more extreme than Efil's love of cooking. They're like...cooking junkies? Hmmm, I seriously don't get how these weirdos think.*



“Whew, I’m way more satisfied than I expected to be. The king of Leigant’s pretty good. There were even bits of amusement fitted into the meal, something I don’t see anywhere else, so I’m looking forward to how he develops in the future,” Mel announced.

“Amusement?! I don’t remember anything like that.”

After that wildly ferocious meal, Mel and I had been shown to a guest room in Leigant’s castle. Mel, having eaten a prodigious amount of food, rubbed her belly, which didn’t actually seem all that inflated, and muttered to me, satisfied.

“That aside, honey...” she said.

“Hm?”

“That fallen angel you just contracted with your Summoning skill...how is he? He hasn’t shown up on the Follower Network, and it’s honestly rather creepy how quiet he’s being.”

“Oh, so you’re worried, after a fashion.”

“Of course. I am a proper wife with a daughter, after all. It’s only natural for me to be worried about my husband,” Mel said while still patting her stomach.

I put on a wry smile and summoned Ridwan, who I had contracted after that fight. A magic circle appeared in the center of the room, from which a metal sphere appeared.

“Oh? Uhh...what is this, honey?” Mel asked.

“This is Ridwan, our new ally. Well...he should be, but ever since I shut him in my pool, he’s been like this.”

The metal sphere was floating in the air, a couple centimeters above the floor. I had no idea if this sphere should even be called Ridwan anymore, but there was no doubt it had at least once been Ridwan.

*I can say that, right? I’m not wrong, am I? Hmm... I’m starting to second-guess myself.*

“I don’t get any answer when I try to talk to him, and there’s no response

when I try lightly tapping the sphere either. I kind of threatened him into the contract, so maybe he's sulking?"

"I can't bring myself to believe that a member of the Ten Authorities would do something so childish," said Mel. "He's not me."

"And there's another comment I'm not sure how to react to... Actually, this thing is so unresponsive, it feels like there's no real consciousness inside it. Did it go unconscious due to shock, maybe? Heeeyy, if you don't wake up, I'll start modifying you! You'll become some sort of weird modified golem, you know?"

I was half joking, but there still wasn't any response. *What do I do now? This is honestly troubling.*

"Maybe your fight broke it. I mean, it's basically a precision instrument," Mel reasoned.

"You really think so? I actually fought him, and it felt like he was closer to Clotho than anything..."

"Oh, of course, I'm sure I'm right," said Mel. "So there's only one thing to do! Hit it at a forty-five-degree angle! The angle is important, okay? Make sure you get the angle!"

"What do you think Ridwan is, Mel-san?"

Mel, supremely confident, had already started hitting the sphere with sharp chops. But it seemed even in this state, its "Unbreakable" Authority was still working. She immediately hurt her hand and went down, rolling on the floor.

"Jeez, it's not some old appliance," I said with exasperation as I put my hand on the sphere. In the worst case, I could just have Clotho eat the sphere so it could start replicating the special metal Ridwan was made of. But...now that I'd managed to make him an ally, I didn't really want to do that. In the first place, I was doubtful about whether Clotho would actually be able to absorb Ridwan, who was in a sort of absolute-defense state.

"Aw, man, and I even thought up some new moves since we've got a new member."

For example, since Ridwan could instantly assume the form of any weapon, I

could imitate his fighting style.

“Ridwan, become a sword!”

*Shrakiiing!*

“Just kidding. Uh...hm? What was that?”

I thought I’d heard a sound. Also, I was feeling a completely different sensation from before. Rather than touching a sphere, it now felt like I was holding on to something.

“Whaaaaat?”

I checked, and I was now holding a stylish, metallic sword. *That’s weird. I don’t remember ever forging such a sword. I also don’t remember taking anything out of Clotho’s Storage.*

“I see, so that’s how it works!”

“Whoa! Mel, you... You’re okay now? No, wait, what do you even mean by that?”

“It’s obvious, isn’t it? The member of the Ten Authorities named Ridwan, while being a golem, is a special one with a will, I believe,” she explained. “He had his heart broken by you, which is how he became your Follower. Because of that, well, how should I put it? He lost his ability to make decisions on his own, much like an old and decrepit household appliance. At least, that’s what I believe happened here. Yeah, it probably is! I’m totally confident!”

*She just straight up called him an appliance! Not only that, but she’s acting so confident even though her deduction itself is really haphazard!*

“Mgrr...you just doubted me, didn’t you, honey?!” Mel pouted.

“No, I mean...”

“Don’t make excuses! Look, there’s proof. Ridwan moved for the first time after you gave him orders. Though he may no longer have a mind, you’ve made a contract, so he’ll still follow your commands. Look, try giving another order.”

“Um, sure.”

While harboring some doubts, I tried sending Ridwan some orders through



telepathy. *Ridwan, become a shield.*

Ridwan immediately changed form, going from a sword to a shield large enough to hide my entire body. The next thing I saw was Mel with a very smug expression.

“I guess...maybe your deductions weren’t all that bad, Mel?”

“I *told* you! But now that he’s become like this, he isn’t even Ridwan of the Ten Authorities anymore...” she muttered. “Ah, right. Why don’t you give him a new name like you did with Clotho and Alex? I don’t like calling him the same name he had when he was an enemy, and giving him a new one would probably make him fit in better.”

“Huh? Can I do that?”

“Absolutely. After all, it is your right as a Summoner!”

I felt like I was a pretty good Summoner, but this was the first I was hearing of such a “right.” *Oh well, it’s not like I object.*

“Uhh...he used to be Ridwan Mahad, right? Mahad... Mahaaad... Ah! He’s really defensive, so what about Hard?”

“Isn’t that a bit too simple? I was expecting a more unique name, full of personality, where your creative and unique poetic aesthetics shine through,” Mel said.

“I’m begging you, don’t expect anything like that. Anyway, I’m kind of scared of dragging this out any longer, so Hard it is! I’m locking it in now! Welcome, Hard!”

I let myself be carried away, lifting Hard over my head and welcoming our new member. He would be a new ally of a different type. *A new weapon? Err...anyway...*

“You’re really big and heavy and hard to lift, so could you change into a staff of appropriate size?” I asked him.

“You totally just shattered the mood, honey,” said Mel.

And that was how we formally welcomed Hard into our group.

“By the way, how much can Hard transform?” Mel asked. “I’m also curious about how much of his Authority’s power he’s retained.”

“Now that you mention it, I’d like to test how much he can reflect my imagination. Now that we have the chance, let’s do some thorough tests. You won’t be able to sleep tonight, Hard.”

“You should be saying that to me, honey!” complained Mel. “To *me*!”

I was true to my word. We ended up staying up late researching and working out all of Hard’s functions.



When an enormous stake had suddenly appeared in the skies above Leigant’s capital, Kelvin had shown up and done a splendid job of fighting off Ridwan, resulting in the unannounced and unplanned act of turning him into a Follower. Though they had let Luquille, who had revealed herself as a third force not belonging to either side, escape, it was still an impressive victory for this defensive battle and added another heroic tale to Kelvin the Rank S adventurer’s list of accolades.

However, similar giant stakes carrying members of the Ten Authorities had appeared in places other than Leigant on the same day as well. One appeared over Deramis, one of the Eastern Continent’s four great countries, and one over Goldia’s holy grounds, which were hidden somewhere on the Western Continent. Yes, just like Ridwan had gone after Melfina, the former Goddess of Reincarnation, the other Ten Authorities also set the other strongest figures in the world at the same time. One of their targets was the former Hero who held the title of Defender, Serge Flore. And the other was the current Goddess of Reincarnation—though it was still not set in stone—and Rank S adventurer who spread love throughout the world, Goldiana Prettiana.

A lone girl hummed while walking through a remote region of Deramis. Her name was Serge Flore, the ancient Hero whom one of the Holy Stakes had pursued, and one of the world’s strongest people whom the Ten Authorities wanted to kill. She was wearing white clothes—her combat outfit—and carrying her favorite sword, Will, waiting for the Ten Authorities in an empty place. She seemed to be in a great mood, as if she were waiting for a precious lover to

take her on a date.

“So laaaaate,” she complained, but didn’t sound like she was losing her enthusiasm. “I wonder how long they’ll be? Maybe I ran a little too seriously?”



Serge sat down on a nearby stump as she watched the Holy Stake inch closer. She was so composed in the face of this fight that she was able to make jokes such as claiming she was the Defender of the stump she was on.

“Still, it appeared over Deramis so suddenly! And I couldn’t even try to bring it down, since it could’ve put the town below in danger. But, maybe it’s a little cute, since it followed me all this way? According to Pret-chan, there were devastatingly cute girls in the Ten Authorities, and I’m sure one of them will be visiting me! After all, I’m super lucky! I’m a Hero!”

Serge’s tone sounded like she was reading out of a book, though it was unclear what type of flag she was trying to set up. She could also have been saying that aloud, thinking that setting up too many flags would make fate work in the opposite direction. However, the universe usually treated people who thought in simple terms like that badly.

“You are the Hero created by the false goddess, Serge Flore, correct? Well met. I am Baldogg Gettier. As I’m sure you’ve realized, I am one of the Ten Authorities.”

The figure that ended up descending from the Holy Stake was one of the Ten Authorities who had chased Goldiana off Isla Heaven. He used his fingers to push up the glasses he was wearing, emitting an intelligent aura, though it was probably just a show. If someone with similar tastes were to see it, they might even have fallen for him, thinking he was an intelligent young man. He definitely had the looks for it, after all.

“I want a substitution,” Serge immediately said.

“What?” Baldogg was dumbfounded.

There was no hesitation within Serge. Neither was there restraint or consideration. She pointedly indicated to where he should return, the very picture of dissatisfaction. She sighed. “I really don’t understand my own luck. There’s no way...”

“What the heck are you talking about?” Baldogg asked.

“Agh, dammit. He isn’t going back,” Serge complained, trailing off. “So, why were *you* the one who had to come to me? You’re the glasses guy that let Pret-

chan go, right? So shouldn't you go after her for revenge? I should've gotten the cutie in the military uniform!"

Baldogg didn't reply immediately. For an instant, time froze. "My word," he eventually said. "I doubted my own ears when you started talking. It seems the information we got wasn't wrong. You're right. I have a score to settle with the false goddess. But there was another member of the Ten Authorities who was much more interested in her than me, you see. He was so persistent, so I let him go after her. Also, Gloria, the person you wanted to come, didn't show any interest in these purges at all. That's all there is to it. Are you happy now?"

"N-No...that can't be, Gloria-tan!" Serge wailed.

"I see," Baldogg said after a moment's pause. He had researched Serge beforehand, so he understood the reasoning behind her words and actions. Still, he shook his head before saying disappointedly, "As if that false goddess wasn't enough, to think someone like you would also be one of our targets. Cheruvim was right. I can only assume there's something wrong with Eld's thought process."

"Jeez, what use is there in bringing up the name of *another* dude I'm not interested in? Couldn't you have brought up a name that would've drawn out my enthusiasm, at least? Like the name of a cute girl or a beautiful woman. I mean, I was never actually interested in you, but it's even worse since you're hopelessly bad at talking to a girl, you know? You should, like, be more considerate towards me and stuff," Serge complained. Having gotten all that out, she paused for a moment before continuing. "This is boring, so can I go home already? I may not look it, but I'm actually pretty busy. Like, I have my hands full appreciating all the girls with bright futures back at the orphanage. Ah, but don't worry, I'm properly moderating myself. If I don't, I'll get yelled at, after all!"

"You're really hopeless," Baldogg said after a moment of shock. "Do you not understand the situation you're in? Or is this attitude because you're *that* overconfident in your own abilities?"

"Hmm? I understand the situation, and I think my attitude is the result of knowing exactly how powerful I am," said Serge. "You *do* seem weaker than

me.”

She stood up from the stump she was sitting on and smiled fearlessly as she hurled her taunts. After taking that abuse, Baldogg unleashed his murderous intent, signifying that he was taking her up on the fight she was picking.

“Aha ha!” Serge laughed. “Come on, don’t fall for such cheap taunts, fallen angel. It just shows how small of a person you are!”

Serge drew her Holy Sword Will out of its scabbard, acting like things were finally getting a little interesting. There was now an intense pressure being put on the surroundings, and all the objects in the area were screaming with the physical strain of it. The stump that Serge had just been sitting on let out an audible snap as a large crack split it, making it unable to keep its current shape.

“I wonder if I heard you wrong?” Baldogg asked. “What did you say to me, the one who used to be the God of Blacksmithing? Who was once hailed as the God of Creation? Humanity needs to be managed; it’s amazing how much of a nuisance just one of you can be.”

“Blacksmithing? Creation? What, are you some sort of cheap knockoff of Creator?” Serge asked. “Actually, you look more like Controller, so I guess it cancels out? Hm, yeah, you’re just some cheap knockoff, then. Also, I think you should take some time out of your day to clean out your ears. It’s not normal to be mishearing things at this distance.”

*Crack, snap, pop.*

In that instant, the stump completely split apart with a loud noise. There was no repairing it now.

“Heh! This is why I hate philistines like you. Ignorance is a sin, and you are so deep in it there is no atoning for it,” Baldogg said. “I will hand out your judgment myself. That is what I came here for, after all.”

“Aww, now you’re imitating Condemner? That’s a bit of a stretch, don’t you think?” complained Serge. “She’s not nearly as much of a fool as you, and she’s super cute, which is also different. Anyway, that’s enough talk. Let’s get this over with. I want to go back to my secret flower garden as soon as possible.”

“I hereby manifest my Authority!” Baldogg shouted.

“Aha ha! Let’s play a little, Will!” Serge exclaimed.

That was the signal for the battle between Serge and Baldogg to start, and they were going all out from the beginning.



## Afterword

Thank you so much for buying *Black Summoner Volume 18: Distorted Love*. This is Doufu Mayoi, and I am currently greatly enjoying the anime version. I just wuv the swordplay between Grandpa Gerard and Victor. To everyone who's picked up this book after reading the web novel, thank you again, as always.

Oh man, it's so humid these days. So, so humid. I mean, the rainy season comes every year, but when everything is so damp it affects my mood as well. So let's not push ourselves this season and spend it in a properly dehumidified and refreshing room watching the anime version of *Black Summoner*. That's the best way to get into a good mood in this humid time! You there, person who hasn't seen it yet! You should definitely try watching it!

Well, anyway, as you can see, this is the piece of tofu that has tried writing the exact same thing in the afterword for the comic version as well. Yes, volume 14 is going on sale on the same day. If there's anything I actually wanted to say, it would be that I don't have enough things to talk about in these afterwords! Even with an anime out in the world now, people don't change so easily. What a deep subject, yeah...

Finally, I'd like to thank those who helped to create this volume of *Black Summoner*. The illustrators Kurogin-sama and DaiXt-sama, everyone involved in the production of the anime, my proofreader, and you readers must never be forgotten either. Well then, I'm praying we meet in the next volume as well. Please continue to take care of the *Black Summoner* series.

—Doufu Mayoi

## Bonus Short Stories

### Gerard the Empty-Nesting Knight

A few months had already passed since Rion and DarkMel were admitted to Lumiest. In the beginning, Kelvin and Gerard had been the most strongly opposed to their attending the school, but now the two had switched to cheering the girls on. As an older brother, a parent, and a grandparent, their emotions from a variety of different standpoints were all mixed together, but in the end that was how things had shaken out. However, they still experienced periodic withdrawal symptoms from being separated for so long.

Gerard was silently sitting on a bench, staring off into the distance, thinking about who-knew-what. The sky was clear, and he was looking up at it dazedly. His expression was unknowable, since he was just a suit of full plate armor, but his state was obvious from the lack of vigor about him. Rather, he seemed so empty and soulless that even a child would worry about him at first glance.

“H-Hey, Gerard’s in a funk again. What do we do?” Dahak asked.

“There’s no point in asking; there’s nothing we *can* do,” answered Mdo. “When you’re faced with a high wall, you’re the only one able to get yourself over it. More importantly, let’s go eat some sweets. I’m sure that’s the best thing we can do at the moment.”

“I-It sounded like you were saying something wise, but I guess not, huh?” Boga said falteringly.

Dahak, Mdo, and Boga—the Dragonz—were sneaking peeks at Gerard from the shadows. They were worried about the knight, whose soul seemed to be flying away, which was why they followed him to this bench.

“We can’t do that. You know how much he does for us all the time, don’t you? So Mdo, you go be a replacement for his grandchildren and heal him up,” Dahak commanded.

“What? Why me?” Mdo asked incredulously. “You should do that if you really want to, Dahak. I give Boga permission too.”

“M-Me?” Boga asked.

“Idiot, think about it for a second. You’re the most childlike when in human form, so you’re the best fit,” Dahak reasoned. “Neither Boga nor I would feel like grandchildren.”

“Are you picking a fight, Dahak?” Mdo asked.

“No! I mean, come on, there’s no other way, right?!” Dahak defended himself. “When this happened before, Shutola, who gives off big grandchild energy, just happened to pass by, and he recovered. But we can’t count on that happening every time. The princess is busy, after all. Even now, she should be taking care of business she brought back from Trycen. So we’re the only ones who can fix this!”

“Grandchild energy...What is that even supposed to be?” Boga wondered.

The answer? It was something Gerard absolutely needed in his life.

“In the first place, looks aren’t everything when it comes to grandchild energy. If the inside doesn’t match the outside, then it won’t—” Mdo started.

“Grandpa Geraaarrrd!”

“Ah!” all three Dragonz let out in response to this new voice. Shutola, in her child form, had appeared without anyone noticing, crying out and running towards Gerard as if to interrupt Mdo’s argument. This unexpected appearance of a great source of grandchild energy left Dahak and the others lost for words.

“Ohhh, if it isn’t Shutola!” Gerard reacted instantly. “Hah! Hah! Hah! I’m glad to see you as energetic as ever today! Wait...what about your work?”

“I finished my morning portion, so I’m on a break right now,” Shutola answered.

“Ohh, I see! Just as I’d expect, Shutola!” Gerard responded happily. “So, what brings you here? Did you need me for something? I’m happy you came to see me even if you don’t, though!”

Gerard’s soul had been about to ascend to the afterlife, but it was forcefully

returned now and he was acting normally. It made Dahak and the others want to make a quip about how he was just on the verge of death.

“Well, you see, Rion-chan and DarkMel sent us some cookies they made in class. Uh, here! This is your portion, grandpa!” Shutola said in a singsong tone as she handed him some cookies shaped like swords and shields. They were wrapped cutely, and it was obvious how much care had gone into them.

“Oh... Oh... OOOHHHHHHH! I’m so moved, my tears are blinding me! This is...the best present I’ve ever receiiiiivveeed!” Gerard cried.

“Ah, jeez, you really did cry. I get the feeling dearest brother Kelvin will react the same way,” said Shutola.

“Of course he wiiilll!” Gerard continued to cry. “My liege and I are of one body and miiiiind! Waaaaaagghh!”

“Come on, grandpa, look at this wonderful gift you just received. It’ll be a waste if you keep crying like that. Let’s go back and enjoy it together, okay?” Shutola suggested.

“WAAAAGGGHHH! Okay! Let’s do that! Let’s go back together and eat this together!” Gerard agreed.

The Dragonz were lost for words as Gerard returned to the inn with Shutola. Her grandchild energy was so overwhelming that they could do nothing but watch her in action.

“Let’s go eat sweets,” Dahak suggested after a while.

“That would be good,” Mdo agreed. “I’m sure that’s the best way to soothe ourselves within our means.”

“I want manju,” said Boga.

## **Hard the Transforming Giant Robot**

After the fierce battle over Leigant, Kelvin had succeeded in making the now former member of the Ten Authorities, Ridwan, into a Follower, renaming him “Hard.” Though he (?) no longer showed any emotion and was like a soulless golem now, Hard still followed Kelvin’s orders, and it was found that his body

could be changed into all sorts of forms. At the moment, Kelvin was in a guest room in Leigant's royal castle, testing the extent of his new companion's ability.

"Giant scythe!" Kelvin shouted.

*Schwakiiing!*

"Rifle!"

*Kerk-chak!*

"Frying Pan!"

*Donk!*

"Okay, that should do it for the most part," Kelvin said. "As I thought, I can make him change into any weapon I command. Not only that, but even weapons that I don't really know the structure of, like guns, are possible as well. In other words, I don't need to have a precise image of what I want for Hard to automatically change. Not only that, but Hard's body is as unbreakable as ever. This'll really expand my options in combat!"

Kelvin was breathing excitedly as he held onto a rather well-decorated frying pan (Hard). His imagination was already running wild, imagining fighting with this new Follower.

"Yes, I also feel an immeasurable wealth of possibilities. But please wait a moment. Um, why did you ask for a frying pan? Honey, are you planning to cook?" Mel asked, drooling.

"Oh no, I'm not. I just wanted to see if Hard could change into something other than a weapon," Kelvin answered. "Wow, that reflex is way too strong; you're drooling so much..."

The instant Mel saw a cooking utensil, she started breathing heavily and leaking a prodigious amount of drool. She immediately began to imagine an as-yet unknown dish cooked up by her beloved husband.

"But it *is* interesting that I can order things that aren't weapons," said Kelvin. "That means I can request armor as well, or maybe even something else. For example, a special golem—or a transforming giant robot!"

"What?" Mel asked after a pause, trying to catch up mentally. Kelvin's

suggestion had come completely out of the blue, so she couldn't stop herself from letting out that question as she was wiping away her drool.

"Um...why a robot?" Mel asked further. "Are you going to get in it? Even if Hard were to manage to change into one, wouldn't you become unable to fight yourself?"

"Oh no, you're wrong, Mel," Kelvin replied. "I didn't say that example with battling in mind. When you think of transforming, the first thing that comes to mind in almost every case is a giant robot, right? And now, I have a Follower that can make such a thing a reality... I *have* to go through with it, don't you think?! It's only natural for me to want to try it! You saw that giant golem in Trycen! This would be very similar to that! While I did want to fight it, I also felt a different kind of excitement back then!"

"R-Right..." Mel replied hesitantly.

It seemed to her that Kelvin, who'd always been quite passionate about making golems, had some sort of weird switch flipped inside him. Mel was completely unable to sympathize, so she settled for a vague response.

"I think Rion will be happy about this too!" Kelvin exclaimed excitedly. "So let's try it right away! Hard, become a transforming giant robot—"

"Aahhh! No! NO!" Mel hurried to stop him. "We're inside right now!"

Thanks to Mel's efforts, Leigant's royal castle avoided destruction. However, Kelvin was more than likely to try it again someday, as long as his burning passion for golems was still alive in his heart!

## **Colette, the Oracle without a Goddess**

Several months had passed since Rion and DarkMel had started at Lumiest and Kelvin and the rest of his group had followed them to the Western Continent. At the time, Colette made a celebration of sending off Kelvin and Mel, whom she was such a fanatic for. She had been happy back then, but now she was starting to regret that decision.

She was standing in the sanctuary in the Temple of Deramis with her hands clasped together in prayer. She was silent, but her gaze was elsewhere.

Normally, the way she was acting would seem divine—but right now it was obvious Colette wasn't concentrating on her prayer, and her expression was blank to boot. Rather, she seemed so soulless that anyone who laid eyes on her would be worried.

"You seem to be distracted, Colette. Is something worrying you?" came a voice.

It took a moment for Colette to respond. "Pope."

The one who had called out to her was her father and superior. It was the pope of Deramis, Phillip Deramilius.

"We're the only ones here, so you can call me father," he said. "So? What's wrong?"

After another pause, Colette finally answered, "It's not enough."

"Not enough? What isn't enough?" Phillip asked.

"Isn't it obvious?!" Colette shouted. "The divine fragrance is critically lacking!"

Colette stood up as she shouted, turning towards Phillip as she stressed how important such a thing was. Her eyes were swirling round and round like whirlpools as she talked, and she was endlessly emitting a crazed aura. There was no way she was in a proper state of mind.

"Quite some time has already passed since Mel-sama and Kelvin-sama have left on their journey!" Colette continued shouting. "Meanwhile, I've been enduring this past my limits, but I can't do it anymore! Mel-sama's—the greatest treasure in the world's—fragrance! The aroma of Kelvin-sama, who is so valiant and wonderful! Those divine substances are no longer available for me to take in! As things stand...I, Colette, will...will go crazy!"

"Hrm, so it's something like withdrawal symptoms?" Phillip wondered. "I see my beloved daughter has a troubling amount of faith. Still, what to do... Ah, that's right. Why not use the belongings of Kelvin-kun and Mel-sama as substitutes and try to derive some of that holy aroma you speak of that way?"

"Do you really think I haven't tried that already, Pope?" Colette asked. "I've already tested all the things they've left that probably have the greatest sources

of scent. For example, a handkerchief I was given by Mel-sama, or some sandals I borrowed from Kelvin-sama. You're right that some previous version of me would have taken in enough holy fragrance and been satisfied. But... But I came to know it! That forbidden, sweet fruit! The addiction of smelling a cat, except it's a goddess and a Grim Reaper!"

The act of sniffing a goddess or a Grim Reaper entailed burying your face in the target's chest and taking a deep breath. In this case, the targets were, of course, Mel and Kelvin.

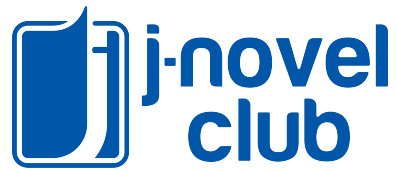
"Now that I've experienced the impact of that making its way through my brain, I can no longer be satisfied with half-measures! Even barging into Mel-sama and Kelvin-sama's love nest and repeating deep breaths in their room has gotten me nothing! That's how far I, Colette, have been corrupted! Ah, please forgive me for being so vulgar, Mel-samaaaaa!"

Colette cried for forgiveness, but did Mel even know that her room had been violated? Actually, she might be happier not knowing.

"Hmmm, I see. Your father is very worried about your future now," said Phillip. "But, well, Kelvin-kun has said he'll take responsibility, so as long as you behave properly in front of the believers, I guess I can allow it? Yeah, that sounds like a good plan. Oh man, I can't wait to see my grandchild's face! Hah! Hah! Hah!"

Colette seemed quite confused, but Phillip was used to dealing with that, as one might expect from the highest authority in Deramis. Afterwards, he sent an order to prepare the teleportation gate to go to the Western Continent.





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Black Summoner: Volume 18

by Doufu Mayoi

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