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Last BOSS
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Character Introduction

Dina

A beautiful girl who travels with Lufas as her advisor. Is able to use teleportation magic and has a good head on her shoulders, so she's quite capable. However, for some reason she barely leaves an impression.

In disguise

Aries the "Ram"

One of the Twelve Heavenly Stars that serves under Lufas. He's actually a monster that towers over 100m tall, but in human form is very much a femboy. Has a peaceful and kind personality.

In human form

Mars



One of the Seven Luminaries who serves under the Devil King. His attribute is Fire.

Gantz



A mercenary who works as a border guard for the great magic country of Svel.

Megrez the "Wise King"



An old friend of Lufas, as well as one of the Seven Heroes. An elf that founded the great magic country of Svel.

People that Lufas has met:

Me σ

The person who made and played as Lufas in the MMO *Exgate Online*. The goddess of creation, Alovenus, said to him, "I will grant you a new role." Before he knew it, he was inside the game, possessing his character.

Lufas Maphaahl

The heroine who is feared as the "Black Winged Conqueror," the one who nearly conquered the world. She was sealed away 200 years ago, but was revived due to a mistake. Is currently on a journey to meet her past friends, the Seven Heroes, as well as gather up her subordinates, the Twelve Heavenly Stars.

STORY RECAP:

Along with my friends, I had started the first large user-planned event in the popular MMO, *Exgate Online*. The story of the event was of a group of heroes trying to take back the world from the first person in history to ever manage to unite humanity and conquer the world, Lufas Maphaahl (me.) That's right. I am the villain.

So, I lost against the Army of Light led by the heroes. But the next day, the goddess of creation, Alovenus, appeared on my screen. Apparently she wanted to grant me a "new role." Like, what the hell? That totally sounds fun! So I didn't hesitate and got on board.

—Then, the next thing I knew, I was in the game, and I had possessed Lufas. Like, wow... What the hell?

Through that unexpected turn of events, I met my advisor, Dina. From her, I learned that the Seven Heroes who had defeated me had lost against the official last boss, the Devil King. Because of that, humanity had been slowly backed into a corner by the devilfolk over the last two hundred years. Not only that, but some of the Twelve Heavenly Stars who used to serve under me had sided with the devilfolk due to a grudge against humanity for defeating me. Like, what the hell are those guys thinking...

I, who had learned of humanity's plight, quickly decided to head for the great country of magic, Svel, which was founded by the "Wise King," Megrez. There, I stopped Aries the "Ram," who had been trying to invade the country. Then, having gotten more information on where the rest of the Twelve Heavenly Stars were, we headed for our next destination: The Grave of the Black-Winged King.





Contents

Main story

Short Story:
“A Wild Killer Maid Appeared”

Several men made their way along a dark, stone-paved road. They had torches in their hands and swords at their waists.

Those behind them had staves and bows. It was obvious from their unwavering movements that these were brave men who had lived through many hard battles.

However, even such strong men could not hide the exhaustion on their faces. There were countless nicks and scratches on their armor, and the magic-user-like man in the middle could be found to be lacking an arm upon closer inspection.

It certainly had been hell for them to get this far.

They'd been assailed by many traps as well as the many golems wandering about that Lufas Maphaahl had once mass-produced for her final battle. In today's world they were now an invincible brigade, each one at the level of a sword saint.

There were only a scant ten people left alive now, but when they'd entered, they had been a huge group of over fifty people.

This location was the place that housed the tyrant's treasures as well as the place said to house her soul—the "Grave of the Black-Winged King."

Sometimes it was hunters who entered, seeking treasures that lay resting here. Sometimes it was graverobbers. And sometimes it was soldiers, like these people, who wished for a reversal of humanity's fortunes.

In today's world, the people threatened by the devilfolk needed weapons and armor to overturn their superiority.

Like a magic sword that could sweep away hundreds of monsters with a single swing.

Or a spear that would always hit the enemy when thrown and automatically return to its user.

Or even elixirs, said to be the ultimate medicine, able to heal any wounds or sickness and even extend one's lifespan.

Any one of those items was a treasure that humanity would do anything for,

something that could make their inferiority disappear. Humanity wanted those items no matter what they had to give in return. They couldn't help it.

But this place was an emotionless hell. Invaders were mercilessly killed, their lives reaped and harvested. Every single golem was a threat. If a person were to fight them head-on, they'd have been killed in an instant.

So these people avoided fights, ran around traps, and finally, reached the top floor even while their party was whittled away.

"Just a little more..... We're almost there..."

"Yeah, we're gonna make everyone's sacrifices mean something..... We're going to bring back these weapons."

These people did not have the capability to challenge this grave judging by ability alone. No. In the first place, the only ones left in today's world who would have had the ability would have been the Seven Heroes.

Even so, they came because they wished for humanity's victory. They wished from the bottom of their hearts to end this dark world, no matter how many sacrifices they had to make. It was all for their children, the next generation, and for the families that they loved.

These ten warriors, who overcame even their fear of death, threw away all thoughts of self-defense completely as they proceeded ever onwards.

But reality was heartless.

Their biggest obstacle—one that could not be avoided—was waiting for them on the top floor.

"Intruder confirmed..... Warning..... It is recommended you leave within the next ten seconds. If you do not comply, or if you take hostile action, I am authorized—a-ah— authorized to remove you with deadly force."

One of the Twelve Heavenly Stars guarded the top floor and the king's treasures. She was history's strongest golem and a proud, ruthless guardian—Libra of the "Scales."

Her appearance was that of a lovely girl. On top of light-brown hair cut to her shoulders, Libra wore a maid's headband. She was clothed in a maid uniform

that was worn down by the passage of time, even torn in places.

Even so, the girl herself still looked as young as ever, as if she were frozen in time. However, her eyes looked like glass beads, utterly without emotion. Her upper arms, which were left exposed by her torn sleeves, revealed molded joints, as if to prove that she was artificial. These joints audibly creaked as she moved and had small cracks running through them.

As soon as the men recognized her, they readied their weapons.

“That is... Libra of the Scales!”

“Please wait, member of the Twelve Heavenly Stars! We did not come to fight! Please, listen to us!”

“Counting down... 10... 9... 8...”

“Please, listen to us! Right now, humanity is being pushed into a corner by the devilfolk! We had no choice but to come here to solve this!”

“7... 6... 5...”

“Please, for the victory of humanity! We need the Black-Winged’s inheritance!”

“4...—. —Countdown suspended. Objective of the intruders confirmed... Confirmed as enemies who are— aiming for master’s treasure. Confirmed fulfillment of conditions for extermination...”

“!!”

The warning countdown stopped, but the men realized that definitely did not mean she was not going to attack. The fact that the countdown stopped meant that there was no longer a need for a countdown! They had just fulfilled her so-called “conditions for extermination”!

“Wai—...”

“Exterminating—Program Selection. Activating Brachium!”

Everything was dyed white.

That was the last thing those men ever saw in this world. After that—there was not even a speck of those men left.

* *

It'd been about two days since we started traveling by the camping car, Tanaka. We'd reached our next destination: my grave.

To be paying a visit to my own grave... This was a very surreal situation. Well, honestly, it's not like I'm buried in there or anything, so it's nothing like an actual grave, I guess. If anybody were to be crying in front of the grave, I'd totally want to say in a singsong voice, "I'm not thee~re!"

"Here should be fine for now. Tanaka clearly stands out, so We'll be hiding him in the nearby woods."

"Okaayyy."

"Got it."

"Y E S, B O S S."

I had Tanaka, who for some reason replied in a really robotic voice, stop in a random spot in the woods before telling it to wait. If I didn't go that far, this car would follow me on its own.

After that, I took Dina and Aries with me and got out of the car, heading for the grave.

Well, I say that, but we were already pretty much there. It was a huge-ass pyramid. I'd heard about it already from Megrez, but it really was uselessly big.

No matter how amazing alchemy was, it was still surprising that they built something this big and it was still standing in perfect shape today. In terms of ridiculousness, Maphaahl Tower could still have been higher on the list, but Mizar's probably the only one who could've built something like that.

...Ah, now that I thought about it, both of these buildings were mine. I'd never seen the grave, though.

"Still... Why is there a village around our grave?"

"Ahh, well, it's kind of like a tourist attraction... The adventurers, hunters, and other people who wanted to conquer this grave all gathered here, so the merchants who saw a profit to be made gathered, too. It seems like more and more people came here until at some point there was a village."

“...So this grave is just a complete tourist trap, isn’t it?”

“It actually is a tourist trap, yes. That’s what happens when a famous big-shot has a grave. Later generations will turn it into a tourist attraction.”

I sighed after hearing Dina’s explanation, a pretty spiritless response compared to what I usually gave.

Now that she mentioned it, the pyramids were a tourist spot in my old world, too, so I guess it’s not that weird.

There’s a grave for me even though I’m still alive, and it’s a tourist attraction.

That is... I’m not sure how I feel about it.

While I was busy thinking, Aries pounded his chest for some reason, saying something and looking fully fired up.

“Leave it to me, Miss Lufas!”

Unfortunately, he looked more like a little girl trying her best, thanks to his appearance. It almost brought tears to my eyes.

“Hm?”

“I’ll go scatter those fools for you! It’s unthinkable for people to gather to rob your grave!” Aries said, enveloping himself in flames.

Hey stop, stupid! Are you seriously trying to turn into a giant sheep here?! You’re the one doing something unthinkable, you stupid sheep!

“Stop that, Aries. There’s no need to kick up a fuss here.”

“B-But...”

“No buts. In the first place, the fact that We are here now means that is not our grave at all. We feel sorry for everyone who went through the trouble to make it...but that is simply a building that We do not even remember being given. We feel no attachment to such things, so it being robbed is of no concern to us.”

For now, I managed to calm Aries down, preventing a violent future. That was dangerous... Unlike how this guy looked, he was really short-fused when it

came to me, huh?

Could it be... Were all the Twelve Heavenly Stars like this? I was glad they all liked me, but this was starting to make my head hurt.

“So... What do we do, Dina? Will we attempt to get in by disguising ourselves as free merchants again?”

“Of course. Luckily, this place is for tourists, so it’s common for merchants to come and go. Now, just leave everything to yours truly, Dina!”

Hm, she’s as reliable as always, this advisor of mine. It’s never been wrong to leave things up to Dina before now, so let’s follow her advice. Rather, if Dina weren’t around, I’d be pretty seriously screwed, wouldn’t I?

When we entered the village, the first thing I noticed were all the tents set up here and there for temporary housing. Most likely, those were either for merchants or adventurers.

I also saw residences made out of wood, but those were probably for people who’d decided to settle down here and give their all to either conquering the grave themselves or supporting those who did. There were also inns and eateries, making this place livelier than I would have ever expected from a village so near a ‘grave.’

If I really were dead, I certainly wouldn’t be able to rest with things like this.

“Well then, I’ll go find the person responsible for this place and get permission to do business. Miss Lufas, you should—let’s see, that inn over there seems nice. Can you go get us rooms there, please? I’ll meet up with you there once I’m finished.” After saying what she wanted to say, Dina didn’t even wait for my reply before she dashed off.

She was actually a really aggressive person. Well, if she was that full of confidence, then there shouldn’t be a problem.

“Hahh, Dina’s really amazing, isn’t she?”

“Indeed. She is surprisingly useful every time. I wonder why she was so unnoticeable two hundred years ago.”

Actually, what race even was Dina? It was a little late to be asking, though.

She didn't have elf ears, so she didn't seem like an elf. But she didn't have any wings, so she wasn't a heaven-winged, either. She had no fangs, so she wasn't a vampire, and she was still young after two hundred years, so she couldn't be a human, dwarf, halfling, or beastfolk. From the color of her skin, she wasn't a devilfolk, either.

To be fair, there were lots of ways to hide wings, such as the method I was using now, so I couldn't just judge from physical appearance.

My best guess was that she was an elf who was hiding her ears really well. If she were a heaven-winged, she would have been disgusted by my wings. If she were a vampire, she wouldn't have been able to move around during the day. But if that were the case, that would raise the question of why she was hiding her ears.

—...*Well, whatever, I guess.*

No matter what Dina was, it didn't change the fact that she had been really helpful. This was what they call uncalled-for suspicion.

"Let us do as Dina says for now. It would be nice if they had open rooms..."

In a perfect world, they would have had three rooms to rent.

I'm a man at heart, so there's no way I can room with Dina. But still, my body is a woman's, so I can't room with Aries, either. Thanks to the same gender issues, Aries and Dina can't room together. A room for each of us would be best.

With those thoughts running through my mind, I opened the door to the inn and went inside.

Inside, I saw four men who seemed like adventurers talking to a man who appeared to be the owner of this inn.

Seeing Aries and I, the innkeeper jumped forward, leaping over the counter before running over to us.

"Ohh! Welcome, Miss! Welcome! I'm so lucky to have a beauty like you as a guest! If you need rooms, I've got some for cheap!"

"Huh? Uh, boss... Weren't we just talking about renting..."

"Later!"

Apparently, this innkeeper was really true to his desires. In a way, it was really manly how he came right at us, leaving the customers that came first.

Hmm, would this be what they call 'the perks of being beautiful'? It's a pretty uncomfortable feeling, having come face-to-face with it.

"Indeed, it would be great if it's cheap. Owner, do you have three rooms free?"

"Three rooms... But there are only two of you?"

"There will be one more coming later."

"I see... Of course, I have three rooms free!"

Oh, so he does have them free. That's great.

After the brief moment in which I had that thought, the four adventurers raised an angry yell.

"Hey, old man! You just said you only have three rooms free, didn't you?! So what are you telling us to do if you give that girlie there all of the rooms?!"

"It's ladies first here. Give it up."

"What?!"

"Anyone would choose a pretty lady over some musty dudes who won't even pay on time. I'd make that choice in a heartbeat. If you're going to blame anyone, blame yourselves and the tab that you've run up."

"But we just paid off that tab!"

I managed to piece together what was going on from all their arguing.

Basically, those adventurers were habitually late in paying their dues. They had just been in the middle of paying what they owed and trying to get a room again. That was when Aries and I came in, and this old man prioritized us.

It's not like I didn't understand how he felt. I mean, I had been a guy just a little while ago, and even now, I was still a guy on the inside. But preserving order was important. If they came first, then they should have had priority.

Now then, a good compromise...

...Well, it does exist.

“A word, innkeeper?”

“Oh, missy. Wait just a little, I’m gonna drive these bums off first.”

“About that. We cannot approve of you driving off a customer who came first. So. Since there is no choice, We can settle for two rooms. Is that fine?”

Given the situation, there was no other choice. I just rented two rooms and gave one to Dina while Aries and I roomed in the other. I couldn’t imagine Aries would ever assault me. He probably didn’t even look at me that way...

It was not the best situation to be in, but this should be the better choice.

...I could imagine Dina complaining about it later since she’d been left alone, though.

* *

Inside a room which was by no means large.

There, beings that were not people sat around a seven-sided table.

Each corner represented one of the main elements that were said to make up the world: fire, water, wood, metal, earth, sun, and moon. And each seat was reserved for the devilfolk general that was crowned with the corresponding title.

However, there were only six present when there should have been seven, with the empty seat belonging to the element of fire.

“...What’s wrong with Mars?” the man sitting in the ‘Wood’ element seat growled unhappily.

Their statuses were the same, yet opposing. Even while being comrades with the same status, there was no trust between them, and they were all constantly planning on how they would knock the others down. However, they all deterred each other, so no one could have actually followed through.

It was under that perfect yet unstable balance that the Seven Luminaries were established.

And right now, one of the members who should have been equal to them was

making all the others wait, irritating them.

“Who knows? Maybe he’s dead. All the monsters that followed him are gone now. So is Aries, after all. I find it harder to believe he’s alive.”

The woman who sat at the ‘Earth’ element seat sounded happy. There was no hint of any grief or anger at the fact that one of her comrades had been killed. In fact, her tone oozed with joy, as if congratulating the fact that he died.

“So he was done in by Megrez, huh? ...Or did Aries rebel? Anyway, it’s his own fault for overestimating his own skill and trying to use one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars.”

“Heh, even among the Seven Luminaries, he was the weakest. Done in by a mere member of the Twelve Heavenly Stars? He’s a disgrace to us devilfolk.”

“Stop that, idiot. Saying that’s bad luck.”

The man who sat at the seat of the ‘Water’ element surmised Mars’ cause of death. The woman with an ominous aura who sat at the seat of ‘Metal’ wasted no time in making a joke about it, as if she’d been waiting to do so this entire time.

The one who hurried to stop them was the androgynous-looking man who occupied the ‘Moon’ seat.

Lastly, the man at the head seat of the ‘Sun,’ who was most likely the leader, spoke softly while looking at the other members.

“At any rate... Mars was most likely killed by something or someone. And on top of that, Aries of the Twelve Heavenly Stars has similarly disappeared... This is serious.”

There would be no anger over Mars’ death. However, there was possibly someone or something out there with the ability to defeat a member of the Seven Luminaries. That fact could not be ignored.

It would be fine if it was one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars or the Seven Heroes. However, what if it was someone from neither of those two groups? ...That would be a threat that, once again, could not be ignored.

“Venus. You should have been near Svel, right? Did you see who killed him?”

“Of course I saw.”

“Oh? Who was it?”

The woman named Venus laughed in response to the man with the Sun attribute’s question, sounding as if she were having fun. However, that was not the case for anyone else.

“I don’t know who, since I couldn’t get too close, or I would’ve been killed, too. But, I do remember that it was an absolutely stunning woman with beautiful, black wings.”

A beautiful woman with black wings who could kill one of the Seven Luminaries.

Hearing those words, no one would have failed to think of ‘her.’

But... But it was impossible. That person should have died two hundred years ago. That was how it should have been.

“It couldn’t be Lufas Maphaahl...?! Sh-She’s alive?!”

“No way! She should have been killed by the humans two hundred years ago!”

Lufas Maphaahl.

To the devilfolk, that was a name scarier than even the hero.

Once, she’d united the entire world under her dominion, a conqueror that managed to unite all of humanity. Her might was enough to stand at the top of the world, even during an age where hero-level individuals were normal.

More than anything, her way of being was fear personified. No matter if they opposed her or not, she had massacred any devilfolk she came across. She would put devilfolk heads on spears, exposing their defeat to the heavens as if she were trying to crush their very will to fight.

Begging for one’s life had no meaning. Warriors who had begged for their lives, saying they had a family, had their skulls crushed under her heel. If one ran, she’d grab their heads from behind before ripping off their head with the spinal cord still attached.

She was an absurdity that surpassed and crushed all other absurdities under it. She was unreasonable to the point where no others could have matched her. She would tear apart any who would invade her territory; she was an invader to invaders.

—The black angel was a fearful demon to the devilfolk.

Everyone feared ever meeting her. They wouldn't be able to run, and they couldn't be saved. If any devilfolk were to ever come across her, it would mean the end of their lives. There were no exceptions. No devilfolk that had ever happened across her sight had lived to tell the tale.

Luckily, Lufas' severe methods invited fear and rebellion from her fellow humanity, and she was unable to avoid being overthrown by the Heroes, but still, the number of devilfolk she'd managed to bury up until then was uncountable.

If she really was alive, then she could flip the power balance between the devilfolk and the humans right on its head. Just the possibility that the personification of fear could be alive caused the place to go into a confused uproar.

"The Black-Winged King, the only one the Devil King has ever avoided battle with, huh...? If she really is alive, then she is a far bigger threat to the devilfolk than the Seven Heroes. Venus, do you know where she went after that?"

"Yes. Right now she seems to be at the Grave of the Black-Winged King."

"All right. Then you continue to keep tabs on her. Report to me immediately if something comes up."

"Understood." The girl who presided over metal obediently acknowledged the order from the head of the Seven Luminaries.

The scene of her bowing reverentially, lit by rays coming from the window, looked almost like a play—

—Her smile seemed like it was ridiculing absolutely everything.



* *

I received the keys for two rooms and went and entered one of them.

Aries' and my room was number 202. Dina's future room was 204.

The room in the middle, 203, belonged to the adventurers that came before us. I sort of felt separated from Dina.

Inside the room it was... *Hm, not bad.*

It was just a simple room in a completely wooden building, but it was pretty large. There was even a bed, although it seemed like it would be pretty hard. It looked like there was also a bath. Personally, I had no complaints.

Well, to be honest, not having a bath was actually pretty normal for this world. In fact, it was more normal to not have a bath in the game. I was actually pretty impressed with how things had progressed in two hundred years.

The inn's fees were also pretty cheap at only 30 el a night, surprisingly. So for three people it was a very charitable 90 el. I guess Dina's sense couldn't be underestimated, given how fast she'd picked this one out.

"Now then, We suppose We should just wait for Dina to come back for now."

"Yes, Miss Lufas."

Although I said that we'd wait for Dina, she most likely wouldn't have much of a part to play this time.

Rather, anyone other than myself would simply die when faced with Libra.

It was true that Aries was a member of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, just like Libra, but their matchup was just horrible. While Aries was the type to use his abundance of skills to bring things into a war of attrition, Libra was a specialized exterminator who wanted to deal huge amounts of piercing damage right from the start. As long as one had less than 10k health when facing Libra, they'd just be unilaterally turned to ash.

As long as one managed to get past that, Libra, who had no way to heal herself, would suddenly turn into the easiest of the Twelve Heavenly Stars to defeat. But at any rate, her first attack was far too strong to allow that.

Even though I'd finally managed to get Aries under my control again, there was probably no choice but to have him wait in the back, unfortunately, now that we were fighting Libra.

"Aries. We must ask. Do you know of the whereabouts of the other Twelve Heavenly Stars?"

"Uhhh, let's see... Well, I was concentrating on bringing down Svel, so I don't know that much. But... I do remember Aigokeros the "Goat" inviting me to join the devilfolk once. He said, 'Come with me to the devilfolk,' so he's probably allied with them."

You'd think that since they're the "Sheep" and the "Goat," they'd get along, but that wasn't the case at all.

Aigokeros... He was a lord demon and looked like a demon among demons.

More specifically, only Aigokeros' head was that of a goat, and his body was that of a human while he also had the wings of a bat. He was the very picture of a legendary demon, from what I remembered.

Well, if I were to speak honestly... He was a guy who wouldn't be at all out of place with the devilfolk. In fact, I felt he was way more of a demon or devil than any of the devilfolk.

"Hm... What about the others?"

"The others are... Sorry, I don't know."

"Understood. So you don't all know what one another are doing, even though you're all of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, it seems."

I thought that, as long as I had one Heavenly Star, I could learn where all the others were, but it seemed that wasn't the case. *I guess there's no other choice than to work off of what info Dina has for a while yet, huh?*

For now, let's just take it easy until she comes back.

—As soon as I thought that, I heard a knock at the door with perfect timing.

"Ah, I'll get it."

"Mm."

Aries stood, taking the initiative to open the door.

It wasn't Dina at the door, but the four adventurers who'd just been arguing with the inn's owner at the counter. Today should have been the first time we ever met... What did they want? From first glance, it didn't seem like they harbored any ill will...

At any rate, I didn't know what Aries would end up saying if he were left alone, so I also walked up to the door.

"You four should be the ones who were arguing with the owner at the entrance, no? Do you have some business with us?"

"No, not business, per se. We just thought we should thank you for what happened. It's thanks to you that we don't have to camp out." A brown-haired man who seemed to be the leader replied to my question.

His short hair was spiked backwards, and his body was obviously well-trained. His sharp eyes reminded me of a carnivore, and I knew that he was overflowing with confidence.

"Oh, that is all? It was no trouble. You are all rather conscientious for adventurers."

"Even if you didn't think much of it, we did. We repay our debts. That's our way."

Unlike their hoodlum looks, it seemed they were actually rather honest and honorable men. Given how many people didn't even know how to say thanks properly these days, I'd really like these youngsters to stay as they were. *And I should take a page from their book, too.*

"We'll be in this village for a while. If something happens, you can count on us. That's all, see ya."

After saying what they had to say, the adventurers left. Apparently, they really were here just to say thanks.

And as if they were switching places, Dina showed her face right afterwards, entering our room.

"I'm back!"

“So you are. How was it?”

“Perfect. I got permission to both stay and explore the king’s grave. By the way, I passed by some people I didn’t recognize. Who were they?”

“Just some rather conscientious adventurers.”

With Dina back, we could now boldly walk into the grave under the pretense that we were exploring it.

Being able to explore one’s own grave is a pretty rare experience, isn’t it? Let’s take it easy the rest of today and go in tomorrow.

“—We cannot enter.”

“Doesn’t look like it.”

The next day, we were forced to a standstill outside of the grave.

To be more specific, there were a huge number of people gathered at the entrance already, so we couldn’t get any farther. All of them were making lots of noise while blocking the entrance.

Honestly, they were a real nuisance.

“Umm, excuse me... Did something happen?” Dina asked a random guy who was nearby.

Huh, he’s got brown, spiked-back hair and he’s real built... Wait, that’s the leader of the adventurers from yesterday!

When he noticed it was us, he went, “Ohh.”

“So you’re all here to explore the grave, too? Oh, so this blue-haired girlie here must be the other one you were talking about yesterday.”

“Yes, my name is Dina, a free merchant. So, what happened?”

The adventurers scrunched up their faces in thought when Dina asked her question again. Apparently, it wasn’t a happy subject.

“Yeah, there was a special investigation corps dispatched here from Laevateinn two months ago, but they failed to check in today. They should have reached near the top floor yesterday, so everyone was really excited that they were close to beating the thing, but.....”

“Isn’t it just that something happened that’s causing a delay to their regular check-in?”

“That’s what everyone thought at first, but it’s already been five hours. Isn’t it weird that it’s been this long, and they still haven’t sent any sort of message through magic?”

Hearing the adventurer’s reply, Dina looked over at Aries and I. We nodded silently and separated ourselves from the group, moving to hide behind a nearby shelter.

“What do you think, Miss Lufas?”

“They were most likely done-in by Libra. There’s no doubt she’s at the top floor.”

“I agree. She probably hit them with Brachium when they reached the top floor.”

The investigation corps that failed to check in was probably filled with pretty skilled people. I didn’t know exactly how hard this grave was, but judging by today’s standards it was clearly not something to be trifled with.

But it was their bad luck that they were just skilled enough to thoughtlessly make their way to the top floor.

To the people of today, encountering Libra meant unavoidable death. It was painful to think that all their hard work was for nothing. However, as long as Libra guarded the top floor—putting it bluntly, there was basically no chance of winning.

But she did have a weakness.

Brachium couldn’t be fired in succession. If they had just sent someone in alone to take the shot of Brachium, it would’ve been possible to then fight her with the remaining members, essentially sealing Brachium’s power.

But there was no way they could have known that. They had no method of figuring out the weakness—that Brachium couldn’t be fired continuously—because once she fired it, everyone died. Not to mention how hard and life-threatening it would’ve been to get up to the top floor in the first place, only to

be met with Libra's full force.

Dead men tell no tales— Since everyone had died, there was no one left to pass along information.

The only ones who knew of this weakness were Mizar and I. Neither of us had ever told anyone else about it. However, I'd only arrived in this world the other day, and Mizar was deceased. The other Twelve Heavenly Stars might have known as well, but there was no way any of them would hand that information over to any humans. So, there was no chance that anyone would know of Libra's weakness, causing a mountain of corpses to pile up until today.

Still, if asked if they would have had a chance at victory just by knowing of that weakness, I'd have had to definitively say no.

It was true that Libra didn't have a way to repair herself and still has her initial stats. She hadn't been boosted at all. However, even without Brachium she was just generally strong, with the highest level among all the Twelve Heavenly Stars at 910.

Unfortunately, outside of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, the Seven Heroes, and the Devil King, there was probably no one who would stand a chance against her.

...No, only about half of the Twelve Heavenly Stars had HP above 10k. The Seven Heroes had been weakened, so they were probably out, too. If that were the case, then there really were only a small number of people who could have broken through Libra.

"The victims will only continue to increase like this if we don't retrieve her soon."

She was still a little better than Aries because she wasn't actively attacking a country, but it was bad that we kept losing brave, skilled adventurers to her. Humanity's fighting power just kept getting shaved away, even though it was already so low.

We need to get Libra back before anyone else makes it to the top floor.

"All right, let's go, you two."

“Yes!”

“Libra will be impossible for me, but I can at least take care of the small-fry!”

With Dina and Aries in tow, I pushed through the throng of people and approached the king’s grave. I heard people trying to stop me, but I boldly ignored them.

But just as I was about to enter, someone grabbed my shoulder.

“W-wait just a second, missy! Were you seriously just going to go in?! Didn’t you just hear what I said?! That’s madness! The investigation corps was made up of fifty skilled veterans that were chosen by the country. And it was impossible even for them, you know!”

He was definitely a good guy. From his perspective, we definitely looked like stupid women who didn’t even understand the dangers involved. The fact that he didn’t just leave us alone but took the effort to stop us meant that he was really nice.

Although I was fully aware of all the risks when I tried to enter in the first place. *In fact, I don’t think there’s anyone in this world who knows how dangerous Libra is more than I do.*

“We will give our thanks for your concern. But it is unneeded. Now then, let us go.”

I gently removed his hand from my shoulder and stepped into the king’s grave.

Just like I’d expected, the inside was just passages made of brick-like stones. The surroundings were dim, and the farther away we got from the entrance, the darker it was.

We were not troubled for light, though. Aries lifted his hand and a small flame appeared in his palm, lighting the way for us.

We continued on deeper and deeper into the grave.

As one might have expected out of the first floor of this well-traveled place, pretty much all the traps had already been sprung. Basically, nothing got in our way as we moved on, and we easily made it to the next floor after finding the

stairs.

After we continued on for a while on the second floor, a single shadow appeared before us.

It was a badly made stone golem.

However, with my “Observing Eye” I could see that it was still level 150. To me, it was weak, but that probably wasn’t the case for other people.

“Oh? A golem, huh?”

“Yes. By the way, this is one of the golems you mass-produced for the final fight against the Seven Heroes, Miss Lufas.”

“Ahh, We see. So this is our golem? No wonder why it is such a high level even though it is built so shoddily.”

For the final fight with the Seven Heroes, I tried to cover the difference in war potential with mass-produced golems.

However, a player couldn’t bring more than one golem with them at once. Even if one had multiple golems on them, the game would prioritize the golem nearest to the top of the player’s inventory to manifest, and any other golems would stay in storage. So even if a golem I made were to be destroyed, I could only bring out the next one after the battle ended. Mass use of golems was banned.

Also, golem AI could only be set in levels from 1-5. The higher the AI’s level, the longer it took to move on to the next golem, causing mass-production of high-performance golems to be impossible.

But it was still possible to find any number of loopholes if one played the game enough.

On the flip side, since making high-level-AI golems was impossible in a short time, that meant making masses of dumb golems was completely possible. Even if I couldn’t employ one myself, I could still deploy all my golems if I distributed them to my soldiers.

I took advantage of that loophole to equip all my forces with low-level-AI golems to forcefully drag up my war potential. Even though I went that far, they

were still all basically just fodder for high-level players.

Apparently, this grave was littered with tons of leftover golems that I made, just wandering around.

“Hm, these should be golems that We have made, but We can feel their intent to attack us.”

“Didn’t you program these golems’ thought routines to indiscriminately attack, and I quote, ‘Any living thing that is not one of the ‘Zodiacs’ or a golem?’ Your country doesn’t exist anymore, Miss Lufas. Of course you’d get attacked.”

“...Ahh, oh yes, We remember now. These ones are idiots that can only keep attacking whatever enemy is closest.”

Low-level-AI golems were dumber than monkeys.

To put it bluntly, all these golems ended up as crude ones that could only charge at their closest enemy and repeat normal attacks. If a golem’s AI was low, they wouldn’t be able to use skills even if they had any, and they don’t think about their comrades, either.

Golems will use skills if their AI level is 2 or higher, but at 2 they basically just choose skills at random and don’t think about the situation at all.

That was why it was common sense between alchemists that at least AI level 3 was necessary for real fights. In a sense, my battle plan of mass-producing golems flew right in the face of established doctrine.

...the result was disastrous, though.

Common sense was important. It was there for a reason.

Ah, by the way, “Zodiac” was the name of the country I made.

“Well, if that’s the case, then there is no need to hold back. We can destroy these as We please.” I cracked my knuckles and looked squarely at a golem.

If the rejects I made two hundred years ago were still around and causing trouble for people, then it was my responsibility to dispose of them.

But just a moment before I was about to charge into the golems...

Something got in between us, recklessly stopping the golem’s fist with a

sword.

“Whoops! I can’t let you do that! For I am Jean the adventurer, a man who never forgets a debt! And these three are the rest of my adventuring party, the ‘Hawk’s Eye’! We owe you one, so we’ll help you out, missy!”

The ones who suddenly got between me and the golem were the brown-haired adventurer and the other three men in his party...

—Honestly, I’d rather they not have bothered.



* *

“TAAAAAKE THIS!” he said.

He was the adventurer Jean, right?

He swung his sword and cut into a golem. But the golem’s stone body didn’t even suffer a chip, let alone get cut in two.

The golems, which couldn’t feel any pain or fear, had nothing running through their heads but to keep punching whomever was in front of them. That was why their movements were so simple. They never flinched, cowered, or faltered. They simply and robotically attacked repeatedly, but depending on the situation, that could still be a threat.

Jean quickly backstepped to avoid said simple attack. But still, his expression betrayed a sense of tension that couldn’t be hidden.

“W-What a ridiculous punch! Taking one of those would be no joke!”

Correction: it looked simple to me, but apparently, that wasn’t the case for Jean.

Two of the other adventurers jumped close to the golem as if they were switching places. They wielded twin swords and an axe. *I guess they emphasized power and speed?*

One of the adventurers cut at the golem several times, trying to wear it down with nicks. The other tried to strike a strong blow to the golem’s arm with his axe.

Next, the man who stayed in the back took his bow and supported the three men in front as if to continue the combo.

It wasn’t a bad setup in my opinion.

But...

【Jean】

【Level】: 38

【Race】: Human

【Class Level】

▪Warrior: 38

【HP】: 2747

【SP】: 110

【STR (Strength)】: 135

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 90

【VIT (Vitality)】: 95

【INT (Intelligence)】: 70

【AGI (Agility)】: 85

【MND (Mind)】: 72

【LUK (Luck)】: 31

【Richard】

【Level】: 35

【Race】: Human

【Class Level】

▪Heavy Warrior: 35

【HP】: 3090

【SP】: 130

【STR (Strength)】: 142

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 80

【VIT (Vitality)】: 150

【INT (Intelligence)】: 50

【AGI (Agility)】: 77

【MND (Mind)】: 42

【LUK (Luck)】: 44

【Nick】

【Level】: 35

【Race】: Human

【Class Level】

▪ Light Warrior: 35

【HP】: 2100

【SP】: 145

【STR (Strength)】: 110

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 101

【VIT (Vitality)】: 90

【INT (Intelligence)】: 72

【AGI (Agility)】: 102

【MND (Mind)】: 50

【LUK (Luck)】: 62

【Shuu】

【Level】: 36

【Race】: Human

【Class Level】

▪ Archer: 36

【HP】: 2110

【SP】: 156

【STR (Strength)】: 120

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 115

【VIT (Vitality)】: 80

【INT (Intelligence)】: 82

【AGI (Agility)】: 70

【MND (Mind)】: 45

【LUK (Luck)】: 108

【Mass Produced Golem】

【Level】: 150

【Race】: Artificial Life Form

【Element】: Earth

【HP】: 9087/9100

【SP】: 0

【STR (Strength)】: 305

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 100

【VIT (Vitality)】: 355

【INT (Intelligence)】: 9

【AGI (Agility)】: 108

【MND (Mind)】: 15

【LUK (Luck)】: 70

...They're doomed.

If they had magic or something there'd still have been a possibility, but all of these guys were physical attackers. They wouldn't have been able to get past the golem's defense stat and shave away its HP like this.

It looked like they were attacking desperately, but they were most likely only doing 2 or 3 damage per attack to the golem at most. In fact, the golem had only taken 13 damage after all that fighting.

As it was, they'd get hit by one of the golem's punches and sent to the beyond before the golem even got close to falling.

Oh well... I felt kinda bad for rescuing them when they came to rescue me. It

was like I was blowing up their spot, and it might've ruined their confidence. But it was better than watching them die. *Right?*

I let out a small sigh before giving Aries a look. "Aries, go save those people."

"Understood! Leave it to me!" Aries responded happily to my order.

He kicked off the ground right afterwards, closing the distance to the golem. He dexterously wove through the adventurers who were in the way and landed a blow. Aries' fist, wrapped in flames, pulverized the golem's head and still had enough momentum to also send the body flying.

The golem's body slammed into a wall, causing it to crumble to pieces, never to move again.

Even though the enemy was weak, Aries really did well. Being able to eat through 9100 HP in a single strike... How reliable.

"..."

The four adventurers—who, until just then, had been stuck in a hard fight to the death against the golem—had their mouths hanging wide-open in shock after seeing the golem that was their opponent so easily disposed of.

Ahh. As I thought. Did that wound their pride? I had a brief moment before Jean shouted out, his voice filled with child-like excitement.

"SO... COOOOOOOOOLLLL!! Awesome! Amazing! Wow! Hey, did you guys see that?! Wasn't that awesome?! Huh?! Hey, missy, what the hell was that just now?!"

"Huh? Huh?"

Whoops, didn't expect this reaction.

Aries' eyes darted back and forth with surprise and confusion as he was surrounded by the adventurers, and he was unable to answer their questions.

I never expected them to react like this. I first separated Aries from the men.

"Calm down, adventurers. We understand your excitement, but you're all troubling Aries here. Also, Aries is male."

"O-Oh, sorry... Wait, a guy?! I totally thought he was a girl!"

This Jean guy... He's really overenthusiastic. No, he's straight up noisy.

Right after that, one of his comrades—the light warrior—slapped him from behind.

“Shut up, Jean. You’re troubling them.” Apparently, he was the quiet one who could see reason.

To be honest, I'm not really that fond of really energetic people. It's like, whenever they're around, my ears won't stop ringing and I just keep building up stress.

Well, that's probably just because all I did all day was play games, though.

“Y-Yeah. Sorry about that. Uhh, yeah... Looks like we got saved instead, even though we came to save you, huh? Thanks.”

“Don’t mind it. We thank you for your concern.” I didn’t put too much effort into those comforting words, though.

Jean looked slightly sad.

Even though they lacked the ability, they still tried to save us. *So I think it's fine to just value their sense of chivalry.*

Jean was probably a pretty simple guy, though. As soon as I comforted him, his expression was dyed in happiness.

“I-I see! Thanks for saying that. You’re a good person, aren’t you?”

Good, huh? I almost laughed reflexively, having that said about me.

It was true, though. *Given who I am on the inside right now, I'm not a villain. At least, I don't think so. I'm a normal person who won't do crimes or anything... At least I should be.*

But Lufas Maphaahl was a straight-up villain who conquered the world two hundred years ago. In fact, it wasn’t too much to say she was *the* villain among all villains. So the fact that I was now being thought of as a good person made me feel really itchy somehow.

The four of them introduced themselves.

“Oh, right. We haven’t introduced ourselves yet, have we? I’m Jean. I’m an

adventurer, and my class is Warrior.”

“I’m Nick, and I’m also a Light Warrior. Sorry our leader here caused you trouble.”

“I’m Richard. Class: Heavy Warrior. Nice to meet you.”

“Shuu the Archer.”

Once again: What a terribly balanced party.

Like, what is up with three out of four people being warrior-type frontliners? No one uses magic at all. There’s no healer, either. And without a ranger, aren’t they just screwed?

Personally, I’d only leave Jean as a warrior. I’d change Richard and Nick to a mage and an acolyte or something. And Shuu should be a ranger rather than an archer. Archers weren’t bad, but in tight spaces like this they couldn’t really show off their full power. Putting it bluntly, magic was much better for rear fire support.

In fact, magic—even low level magic—was necessary for opponents exactly like the tough golem they had just been fighting.

“I am Sfalú, a free merchant. My class is... Ranger.”

I actually had a lot of different classes, but from today’s standards that was probably too strange to admit. So I just told them the class that would be most useful in this situation.

Even without the Grappler class, I could still attack with my bare fists as a Ranger and only be considered a “weird Ranger.” But if I were to use Ranger skills after I had said I was a Grappler, then that’d be clearly unnatural. Since that was the case, I decided to say I was a Ranger.

“I’m Dina, also a free merchant. My class is Ranger.”

Am I hearing right? I think someone who’s never once used a ranger skill is spouting some shit.

Oh well. I never knew just how serious Dina ever was. *I’ll let that pass. But I’d have liked it if you at least picked a different class from mine.*

“I-I’m Aries, also a free merchant. My class is... R-Ranger?”

And last was Aries.

You totally didn’t understand what was going on and just kind of followed along, didn’t you?

What are we supposed to do now? Now we’re just some kind of weirdo team full of rangers.

As I expected, Jean had an exasperated look on his face. He spoke, completely ignoring the makeup of his own party.

“What a terribly balanced party... Are you all okay?”

The leader of a badly balanced party full of warriors just worried about the balance of our group.

What is this? This indescribable feeling of humiliation. You’re wrong. I can clear a low level dungeon like this by myself. I swear.

Well, I’d need about another five friends if I wanted to go for a level 1000 dungeon like the goddess’ divine territory, though. *Ah, but didn’t Megrez, one of my five friends, get blasted to smithereens at the gate?*

“No need for worry. Our levels are high.”

“Powering through with levels, huh? ...You look all dainty, but you’re all real muscle-brains, aren’t you?”

We were called muscle-brains by the leader of a muscle-brained party filled with warriors...

Oh no, now I really want to transmute a huge boomerang to stick into this guy’s head. Like, you don’t get to talk. Is this guy just here to get in my way and cause me stress?

“You probably don’t have enough power as you are, right? All right, we owe you for yesterday, so we’ll come with you as bodyguards!”

Wow, it’s crazy how much we don’t need that...

I mean, you guys were literally just dragging us down, you know? You couldn’t even shave 100 HP off a golem, remember? How are you all confident enough to

follow us like that?

“That isn’t ne—”

Just as I was about to say no, Dina covered my mouth and approved their presence on her own.

“Really? Yay! Then, please take care of us!”

I quickly removed Dina’s hand and gave her a condemning look. But Dina didn’t seem like she cared, and she continued talking with a smile.

“Isn’t it okay, Miss Lufas? Let’s just take it as easy as we can until we get to Libra. They’re offering, and we need to use whomever we can.”

“...You can be quite dark sometimes. You know that?”

I shivered after hearing Dina casually say, “Let’s use them as shields.”

Apparently the insides of my advisor were blacker than I thought. *I suppose I’m just lucky that that blackness hasn’t been aimed at me yet. Or maybe it already has, and I just haven’t noticed?*

“Fine. We suppose there is no choice but to support them as much as we can without it becoming obvious.”

If we were to leave them alone they’d probably get killed by golems. On the other hand, if I were to sweep through the golems too easily, then I’d probably break the adventurers’ spirits. So there was no other choice but for Aries and I to defeat all of them while pretending like it was a joint effort.

In other words... *Well, it’ll end up with us following Dina’s advice and using them as shields while we defeat the golems in a way that won’t stand out.*

“Well, shit...” I heaved a sigh.

I shot Dina a light glare to communicate that I blamed her selfish actions for this before moving forward. Seeing me do that, the four adventurers hurried to follow after me, and Aries and Dina did the same.

Now then, let’s hurry up to the top floor where Libra is.

We continued through the uselessly huge grave. The only redeeming factor of this grave was the fact that it got smaller the higher up we went. Thanks to the

pyramid shape, it got easier the higher up we climbed, which was great. I supposed the only problem was that the higher up we went, the higher the golems' levels became.

A golem stood in our way, generating sounds that echoed up and down the passageways. From what I could tell, its level was 300. Some pretty high-quality golems had started showing up.

More importantly, they'd kill the adventurers in one hit at this level, so this was pretty bad. We'd need to take care of them before they locked their sights on one of the adventurers.

"Jeaarr!"

The golem let out a strange cry and charged toward the adventurers. But for some reason, the golem stopped the moment I inserted myself in between them.

Then, the golem tried to go for a different adventurer. But this time Aries stepped in, and it stopped again.

What's going on here? The golem stopped moving, as if it didn't want to attack us. In fact, it was almost like it wanted us to step back.

With no other targets, it even weirdly went after Dina in the end.

Wait, could it be...it sees Aries and me as friends? It wasn't impossible.

For golems of this level, even I'd upgraded their AI levels. In other words, this one was way smarter than the golems down below. Then it wasn't strange that it still saw Aries and I as friends even though my country was no more.

Actually, if that wasn't the case, then we'd get attacked by Libra, too.

...

...huh? Then why was it attacking Dina?

"Wai—! W-W-W-WAIT A SECOOOND! Why meeee?! Save me, Sfaluuu!"

Seeing the golem chase Dina around, somehow I felt an incredibly sad feeling well up in me. I looked over at Aries, and judging from the faraway look in his eyes, he also empathized with Dina.

Dina, you...

...You were so forgettable even golems don't recognize you, huh...?

* *

I easily parried the golem's punch and quietly ordered the golem to standby. Then, I flashily threw the golem back, making it seem like it was destroyed, though that was just for show.

It wasn't a problem to destroy the low-AI-level golems down below. After all, they couldn't even tell it was me anymore and wouldn't follow my orders. They were just automated attack machines that hit at anything in front of them... It was the right move to destroy anything like that.

However, the golems from the middle floors and up were high level and understood simple orders. More than anything, they saw Aries and I as friends, so I didn't want to destroy anything that wouldn't attack us.

That was why we only pretended to destroy any golems from the middle floors and up, instead leaving them all unharmed.

"whistles That's amazing, Sfal. You blew away another one."

"Are you really a Ranger...?"

It seemed like Jean and Nick were finally becoming suspicious, but there shouldn't be a problem as long as they didn't see my wings.

A long while after we first entered this grave, we'd finally come to the 106th floor. I was told this place had 108 floors, so we were two away from the top.

The last investigation corps was able to reach here, it seemed, even though it took them an entire month. Hearing that, I felt both respect for how far they'd come as well as a sense of sadness, since they came so close.

Based on their levels, each and every golem should have been a real threat to them. Even so, the fact that they still made it this far despite their disadvantage showed how skilled they were. That was why it was such a waste. It was probably really painful for humanity to lose people like that now.

Seeing what was stationed in front of the stairs leading to the 107th floor, I spoke. "...Everyone, step back."

Oh wow, so that was still around.

There stood a steel guardian over 10 meters tall, a size larger than the other golems. It was the strongest golem I was able to make by myself without paying real money for it—a golem at level 600 thanks to using the rare material “mithril silver.”

Before the final battle, I used the best materials I had on hand and made several golems to guard my base. They weren’t as strong as Libra, whom I got Mizar to make. But even so, their level was 600, which was the highest I was able to achieve.

It would probably lose against Levia, who was made up of a lake’s worth of water. But it was still the strongest class of golem back then, enough that it wasn’t strange for them to be used to defend one’s borders.

The investigation corps did really well to have been able to pass this one.
...They probably had to use some people as bait to get through, didn’t they?

【Gatekeeper】

【Level】: 600

【Race】: Artificial Life Form

【Attribute】: Metal

【HP】: 105/45000

【SP】: 0

【STR (Strength)】: ????

【DEX (Dexterity)】: ????

【VIT (Vitality)】: ????

【INT (Intelligence)】: ??

【AGI (Agility)】: ???

【MIND (Mind)】: ???

【LUK (Luck)】: ???

...tch! I can't see its stats.

That meant it wasn't under my control.

When the target's level was over half of mine, anyone not a friendly only had their name, level, HP/SP, and attribute displayed.

I should have made the gatekeeper with AI level 3 or 4... *Is it unable to tell it's me? ...Let's test it out.* It made no sense that the other golems could tell, but this one couldn't.

"...Do you recognize us, gatekeeper?"

First, I approached the gatekeeper openly.

Jean shouted, "Watch out!" But I ignored him.

Now, how about it? Can you recognize me?

"...approaching...intruder—detecte—...de-de-detec—... Eli-Eli...e-e-e...
Eliminat..ing...ing-ing-ing-ing...ing..."

I avoided the gatekeeper's punch, and at the same time, I was convinced.

I'd had a bad feeling when I saw how low its HP was, and apparently, that feeling had been proven true.

This one was already broken. It couldn't even recognize me. But it just hadn't stopped moving yet. It was unfortunate, but there was probably no choice but to break this one now.

Judging from the fact that the other golems were still okay, this wasn't just because of wear and tear over the years.

As for something that could reduce this one's HP this far... Well, only devilfolk fit the bill. Of course, given how weak the Seven Luminaries were, just one or two attacks probably wouldn't affect it much. But ten or twenty definitely would.

In fact, I was actually impressed that it was still moving.

"Sfalu!"

“Do not worry. We are not weak enough to be killed by something like this,” I replied to Jean, who sounded worried, and moved forward.

I slipped past the gatekeeper’s tirelessly repeating attacks and into its bosom.

...One strike! My hand pierced through the gatekeeper, taking away its little remaining HP.

The golem emitted a flash of electricity, and pieces of metal flew through the air. The mono-eye that served as its source of sight flickered, and the rest of it fell to the floor.

“A-aah...gh... Intruders...extermi—...ex...”

The way it kept repeating its words like a broken record was at once both hilarious and pitiful.

I shook off the bits of metal that were stuck to my hand and stepped past the fallen gatekeeper.

Now there were no more obstacles. All that was left was stopping Libra.

I was just about to go up the stairs to the next floor, but I heard something talking, although the voice was mixed with static.

“...Wel—...o...back... ...Lufa—... ...Wel—...c...”

The voice was feeble, and I almost couldn’t catch it. But I did. I did catch it.

I stopped on the spot and glanced over at the fallen gatekeeper.

Even fallen, its arm was stretched out, as if celebrating my return. To me, who’d just broken it.

“...Your loyalty through this long journey of yours must have been arduous. Well done, working for us for this long. ...Just rest now...”

“...aahh...” In its very last moments, the gatekeeper let out a small, relieved-sounding noise that was barely even speech.

...This is a little too much. I know that there was no other way but to break it, but this is too much.

Weird. My heart won’t calm down. I can’t shake this feeling that I just made a huge mistake.

I had never seen this golem before. Or that was how it should've been. *This is my first time seeing it, right? And it's just a golem.* They just moved as they were ordered, like tools.

Why am I feeling like this?

"...Now all that's left is the 107th and then the top floor. You all wait here."

There was no doubt Libra was next. So now it was time for the party to temporarily disband. I needed to go alone.

But Jean shouted out to oppose me.

"W-Wait a second! Are you planning to go alone?! That's crazy!"

"No, that is the best choice. There is no one else here who can withstand Libra's first blow. Her Brachium can turn all of you into ashes thirty times over and still have more damage to deal."

"...!" Jean gulped and gave me a doubtful look.

He didn't doubt my words. His look told me that he doubted my identity.

"You... Just who are you?"

"..."

"I'm an idiot, but I'm not stupid enough to miss how ridiculously strong you all are after coming with you this far. Ever since the middle floors, you've been taking care of the golems so we don't fight them... You didn't even bat an eye at that tough-looking golem's punch... And you're talking like you know Libra... You... Just what...?"

"...We have no obligation to respond to that." I declined to reply and turned my back on him.

What I said extended to both Dina and Aries as well, but Dina would probably be way better than me at tricking them.

How should I put it? I'm no good at this.

I'm getting far too shaken over a single golem. I'm so lacking in composure, even I don't understand it. I really don't... Leaving how the real Lufas would feel aside, I shouldn't feel this way, right? I don't have any reason to feel sad,

right...? Agghh, what the hell. I'm going crazy.

I climbed the stairs to the 107th floor.

I immediately noticed that I was in a cold, sterile space that was just huge. The walls were crumbling and cracked in places.

In the middle stood a girl—no, a golem that looked like a girl—in maid clothes.

I could see traces of repair work on the clothes I gave her long ago. Even then, it wasn't enough; they were torn in places. Her exposed arms revealed joints that outed her as clearly nonhuman, and if I looked closely, there were small cracks running through her body.

She was the artificial life-form that I gathered the materials for two hundred years ago and had Mizar make.

She turned to face me, making an audible creaking sound as she did so.

“—Intruder confirmed... Warning... It is recommended that you leave within ten seconds. If you do not comply, or if you take hostile action, I am authorized to remove you with deadly force.”

It was a standard warning that she'd probably repeated many, many times.

Without replying or approaching her, I undid my hair.

“10... 9... 8...”

I took off my glasses and reached behind me. I removed the bandages that Megrez had gifted me, slowly putting my wings out in the open.

“7... 6... 5... ...” Her countdown stopped.

Not minding that, I continued to undo my bandages, fully releasing my wings.



Although Libra was still expressionless, it seemed to me that she was frozen in deep shock, her countdown left unfinished. Somehow, that struck me as funny, and I couldn't stop myself from smiling as I spoke.

"It's been a while, Libra. What's wrong? You look like a bird that got shot. Did you forget what We look like?"

"...Miss...Lufa...s...?"

I quietly watched Libra, who was still frozen. I was waiting for her to reach a conclusion first.

If she decided it was me and stopped attacking, that'd be great. If she still decided to shoot her Brachium, then I'd have to endure that first before restraining her.

It didn't seem like she was nearly as damaged as the gatekeeper just now was, so I should've been able to repair her.

"Comparing... Biological data, matched. ...Probability of being the real Lufas Maphaahl: 99.99989965%... From conjecture of situation...probability of surviving that fight: less than 1%... Total probability... Impossible to calculate...impossible... D-decision...dec-de-dec —...sion...impossible...impossible..."

"It's fine. There is no need to think so hard."

This was bad. She was getting confused because she thought she was seeing a dead person, which was unprecedented.

It probably wouldn't get this bad normally, but she must've been almost as broken as the gatekeeper was. Even if that wasn't the case, she'd been left here for one hundred ninety years, guarding this place without rest. Of course she wouldn't be able to make proper decisions on her own.

"Now, We will come and repair you. You need rest."

"—! Warning! If you take one step closer, you will fulfill the conditions required for extermination!"

"We don't care."

I ignored Libra's warning and boldly stepped closer.

One step, two steps! It seemed like Libra was having trouble deciding whether it was okay to attack or not. In the time she was deciding, I continued to close the distance between us.

"Now, then. We have moved. Are you not going to stop us?"

"... Program Selection!"

Libra's eyes shone, and her entire body started to emit light.

The first thing she did was create a film of light that covered the entire area. It was an isolated space made to ensure the enemy couldn't escape at the same time as making sure there were no unnecessary casualties.

In the middle of that space, a white radiance converged upon Libra, glittering like stars. That vivid radiance expanded and pulsated.

Now, then. This'll be the first significant amount of damage I'll take in this world. Honestly, I have no confidence I'll be able to avoid crying in pain, but... I wonder why? Right now, I really just want to get hit by her. I really don't understand it myself.

"Brachium, activate!"

And the star exploded.

The space was filled with a white aurora, and an impact stronger than anything I'd ever felt before assaulted my entire body.

The light raged like a storm, and colorful particles danced around the inside of the closed space.

Everything within the space was twisted, trampled, and destroyed. The attack didn't care about defenses, resistances, skills, or even arts as it pierced through everything to deliver damage up to the extreme limit of the system.

Crap. It hurts. And it burns.

Pain stabbed through me as if my body was being assaulted with heat that would char me all over... Well, it actually was, though. I knew that my HP was getting reduced at an alarming rate.

“Mnrr...!!” I clenched my teeth, but I still grunted in pain.

But even so, I kept moving forward through the light.

Frankly, I wanted to immediately fall back down the stairs to where it was safe. But I couldn’t afford to do that. More importantly, that’d be way too lame. Well, actually, it probably wasn’t possible anyway.

It was probably correct to assume that it was impossible to escape from Brachium once it started.

One step.

Two steps.

Three steps.

I advanced through the radiance, closing the distance on Libra. Meanwhile, the light mercilessly buffeted me, shaving away at my HP.

This is pretty harsh... But, it's not impossible for me to withstand.

“—!”

“Oh my. Looks like We are finally here.”

As soon as I reached Libra, she started moving.

Her left hand sunk into her wrist, and instead, a blade made of blue-white light appeared.

I dodged her thrust by a hair’s breadth, grabbing hold of her left arm and stopping her in her tracks. Then, I activated my Alchemist skill—“All Repair.”

It was a single-target healing skill limited to use on golems that would fully heal the targeted golem. This skill was incredibly inefficient and wouldn’t actually repair every golem. It would only work on golems the user owned.

And unlike the gatekeeper, Libra was the one golem that I’d kept on me even after I was beaten. I figured that my ownership might still hold. When I tested it, I was proven right.

All the cracks on Libra’s body disappeared, and I could tell that her HP was fully restored.

“Sorry for making you wait for so long. We have come for you, Libra.”

“...Assessing situation... Probability of this being the real Lufas: 100%... Confirmed as Lufas herself. ...Canceling mission: guard the king’s grave,” Libra said, closing her eyes as if she was finally at ease.

Seeing her finally able to rest after completing her mission, I gently picked her up.

* *

After successfully retrieving Libra, I was lost as to what to do next.

If I went back down as I was there was no doubt I would invite Jean’s distrust. They especially wouldn’t like the fact that I was carrying Libra. By my estimation, they might demand that I break her in the worst scenario.

Of course, I had no desire to do that myself, so if it came to that, they’d become my enemies. Jean and the others would pose no threat even as enemies. They’d still be annoying to deal with, though. So if possible, I wanted to avoid that outcome.

But I couldn’t come up with a decent excuse.

Hmm... At worst, I can just knock them out and run. Would that be okay...? Actually, I can’t think of any other way to do this.

While I was pondering and becoming a little depressed, I continued down the stairs.

“Ah, Miss Lufas!”

“Welcome back. Looks like you managed to get Libra back safely.”

When I got to the previous floor, Aries and Dina welcomed me with smiling faces. On the flip side, Jean and the others didn’t move at all. The faraway look in their eyes indicated that they weren’t really mentally here. They were totally out of it.

“Dina, what did you do to them?”

“Ahh. Trying to explain things to them was too troublesome so I may have...hypnotized them.”

“Hypnotized?”

“I manipulated their memories and implanted false ones, just a little bit... I made it so that they never met us in the first place. While I was at it, I also had them think that they were the ones who conquered this grave. That should hide our tracks for a while.”

My smile stiffened after hearing Dina casually say something so outrageous.

Ahh. Oh, right. She can manipulate memories. She was really useful, but also really scary. *I’m truly grateful that she’s a friendly.*

But now my biggest worry had just been cleanly swept away.

“As for Libra, she was already destroyed by the time they got here. The story will go that the investigation corps that came earlier gave their lives to destroy her. That should get some attention away from her.”

“Could it be you planned to do this to Jean from the very start, and that’s why you let them come with us?”

“Would there be any other reason to carry around dead weight?”

“...You’re a scary woman. You know that?”

“For you, Miss Lufas, I can become an ogre or a demon. Such is the woman named Dina.”

With a smug expression, Dina puffed out her chest. I gave a tiny shudder as I wiped away some cold sweat.

Well, whatever. Now, all that was left was to retrieve some of my things from storage. There was my promise to Megrez, too. *Let’s leave behind anything I won’t use anymore.*

To be fair, equipment that only gives, like, +100 attack or something had no use other than selling for money at this point. *I might as well leave stuff like that here.*

“All right. We’re going to the top floor.”

“Okaayy!”

“Y-Yes!”

Leaving Jean and the others on the 106th floor, we moved to the top.

When we finally got to the top floor, what awaited us was an incredibly gaudy room. The ceiling, walls, and floor all shined gold, and it pricked my eyes. Even as pure flattery, it would be hard to say this room was one someone could relax in. Heaps of gems and gold were piled up everywhere, and swords and other equipment were neatly lined up.

No. No matter how you looked at it, this wasn't a grave. In fact, if this *were* my grave, I'd hate it. There was no way I could properly rest here.

At least, that was how it should have been... *Why is it? Why can I barely contain myself when I'm looking at all this?* I didn't know why, but the urge to just take all this shiny stuff home with me welled up from within.

"Calm down, Miss Lufas."

"We are calm. ...We're calm, but for some reason We can't calm down. What is this?"

"Ahh. Come to think of it, Miss Lufas has always liked shiny things and would collect a lot of them, huh?"

I froze.

Huh? Really? I didn't remember that bit of backstory. *Collecting shiny things? Am I a freakin' crow?! No, well, I do have black wings...*

"Let's just take all the weapons we'll need for now before Miss Lufas goes crazy."

"Dina, saying We will go crazy is too far. We understand what is necessary at the very least."

"Okay, then. Why don't you let go of all those lumps of money you're holding that've got no use to us first?"

After having it pointed out by Dina, I realized for the first time that I was already holding a bunch of gems, gold, and shiny stuff.

...*Oh no.* That was completely by reflex.

No, uhh, yeah... I should have no interest in lumps of cash like this... I don't like

gaudy, nouveau-riche styles. In fact, I'm more of a dark, chic colors man myself.

But then, why is this urge so strong?

"Aries, Miss Lufas has just turned into a regular old crow, so let's pick out what's necessary by ourselves."

"Yes. Got it!"

Huh? Am I really not even just useless but an active hindrance now?

Even with those thoughts running through my head, I couldn't stop myself from reaching for weird, shiny objects. *This is bad. I can't stop myself. I just naturally move for anything that's shiny.*

"Miss Lufas! That's just decoration! It's for show! It's not useful at all! Just throw that away somewhere!"

"Miss Lufas, that's just a shiny piece of art!"

"Ah, yeah."

After getting yelled at by Dina and Aries, I dejectedly retreated to a corner of the room.

Naw... ...I swear, I'm not like this. I really want to look for weapons, I do. But my body won't listen!

After that, Dina and Aries continued to gather weapons I used to use while shooting me sidelong glances as I kept laying my hands on shiny but utterly useless items.

Spears, giant swords, knives, halberds, katars, tonfas, pile bunkers... Looking at them like this, I realized that I never did settle on a single weapon.

By the way, my favorite weapon was a whip sword.

"This should be good for now. Miss Lufas did use the rest a long time ago, but she'd never use them again anyway as it is now. Let's leave them here. Even those should be precious these days."

"What about the golems?"

"Ahh. I'll take those back to the tower, too. Miss Lufas, could I get you to gather all the golems you didn't destroy here?"

While I was waiting in a corner of the room, it seemed like my time had come. But said time seemed to entail some rather hard work.

Retrieve all the golems I only pretended to destroy, huh? Ahh, well. If I didn't, they'd just keep racking up casualties. There was no choice...

"Understood. It will take some time, though."

At any rate, I'd be useless if I stayed here anyway. *So, I might as well do what I can.*

...I lost a lot of dignity just now, haven't I?

In the end, retrieving all the golems ate up a lot of time and all, because this grave was way too huge. *Who was it that made this?*

For now, I gathered up all the higher AI level golems and left them with Dina along with all the weapons and armor. Apparently she could teleport with things if they weren't living, so she took everything back to Maphaahl Tower.

I digress, but I also destroyed all the dumbass golems that turned into automatic attack machines.

"Okay, let's get out of here."

"What about Jean and the others?"

"They'll wake up after a while and think they made it up here on their own. It won't be a problem."

I see. So when Jean and the others woke up, they'd become heroes thanks to having conquered the Grave of the Black-Winged King. They might take some of the treasures for themselves, but that's none of my business.

All this wealth I couldn't even carry was just a nuisance to me right now, so if they wanted it, they could have it. I was happy having gotten some useful weapons, the golems, and Libra.

I've got some complicated feelings about this place being robbed. I might not have been in it, but the grave *was* mine...

It was the same back on Earth, though. Showy graves with lots of treasure in them were basically there for the stealing.

Even if the grave robbers returned empty-handed, academic types would just show up and clear it out anyway, claiming they'd found historic artifacts and displaying the body in a museum or something.

This place really wasn't fit to be a grave. If I really were to die, I'd want to be buried in the ground in a place where no one would bother me.

After leaving the grave, we returned to the woods where Tanaka was waiting for us. Then, I used alchemy to transmute new maid clothes for Libra, and while I was at it, I wiped her body clean as well.

Well, I wasn't the one who actually wiped her clean. It was Dina, as usual.

After that, we spent a few hours waiting.

Libra just wouldn't wake up on her own, so I tried ordering her to do so. She woke immediately and opened her eyes.

"...Sight, all green. Checking all sections... All green. Starting."

Libra slowly sat up, eyes glowing. Seeing me, she stood, and with a complex series of inner workings, she performed a neat bow.



Hm, I have the opportunity. Why not take a look at Libra's stats?

【Twelve Heavenly Stars: Libra】

【Level】: 910

【Race】: Artificial Life Form

【Attribute】: Metal

【HP】: 120000

【SP】: 0

【STR (Strength)】: 6500

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 6900

【VIT (Vitality)】: 7020

【INT (Intelligence)】: 1300

【AGI (Agility)】: 5100

【MND (Mind)】: 1350

【LUK (Luck)】: 1600

/>

Hm, no change at all from what I remember of her stats.

Her SP was 0 now, but that was the same for all golems.

Golems didn't expend SP in order to use skills. Instead, they had a limit to the number of times they could use their skills. And that limit only recovered every twenty-four hours. That was why Libra could only shoot Brachium once, and there was no point at all in having her learn skills that used SP.

In exchange, their HP could get incredibly high compared to regular people, depending on the materials that had been used. This was especially true for Libra. She was a broken golem with boss-class HP, probably because her starting materials had been so good. Only Alchemist class skills could heal her though, so just having HP didn't necessarily mean she was tough.

For example: Aries had much lower max HP than Libra, but thanks to his HP

auto-regenerating skill, he was unexpectedly tough. If the two of them were to actually fight, though, it'd be over before said toughness could ever come into play. Aries would die in one shot to Brachium.

“Good morning, my master: Lufas.”

“Good. Do you feel all right?”

“There are no problems. Thank you for your concern.”

She was no longer speaking with a voice mixed with white noise, like a broken radio, but with a beautiful, flowing voice. I felt relieved as soon as I heard it.
Looks like she's really okay.

Libra noticed Aries next and bowed to him as well.

“It has been a long time, Aries. As usual, your outer appearance does not match with your actual gender.”

“*That's* the first thing you say to me in two hundred years?!”

After teasing Aries about his appearance and bringing him to tears, Libra looked off and faced Dina next. She performed another elegant bow.

“Pleased to meet you, unknown person. I apologize deeply for causing so much trouble.”

“This again?!”

Yep. Exactly as I expected.

I'd thought this would happen when the other golems in the grave couldn't recognize Dina. It looked like Libra didn't remember Dina, either.

She was the same as Aries and I, and as fellow people who didn't remember Dina, I felt a strange kinship with Libra.

“Libra, she is our advisor. Her name is Dina. Her presence was weak, but she was here two hundred years ago.”

“...!?! What...did you say...? Does that mean her stealth is so strong she doesn't even remain in my memories...?!”

“No way am I that forgettable! You're gonna make me cry!”

Dina was already half in tears. She grabbed Libra's shoulders and pulled her face close.

"See, it's me! Me! Look closely! Aren't I in your memories somewhere?!"

"... ..No, you are not in any corresponding memories. However, I have found some damaged data due to two hundred years of wear. I expect memories pertaining to Dina to be within this data."

Hmmm, I'd kinda thought that a golem like Libra might have been able to remember Dina, but looks like that isn't the case. Dina's got bad luck.

To think that her memory had been damaged, of all things, and that the data pertaining to Dina was part of that. *Isn't that basically harassment at this point?*

"Restoration will take a couple months, but it is possible. Until then, I will register Dina as a tentative advisor."

"Tentative?!"

Dina's expression grew more and more stricken the more Libra, who always stuck to her own tempo, talked. Even so, Libra never seemed like she paid that any mind.

Well, she's actually completely expressionless, so it's hard to tell what she's thinking anyway. But, given how she had guarded my grave even while being worn to tatters like that, I wouldn't doubt her loyalty, at least. Her face was frozen like a mask, but she must have had a burning soul somewhere inside... Probably. I bet.

"Libra, We must ask. Do you know what any of the other Twelve Stars are doing?"

"My apologies. I have been concentrating my efforts on guarding your grave this entire time, so I do not have much information on the outside world."

Libra's reply was just as disappointing as I had expected.

Since she was inside the grave this entire time, there was no way for her to get information from the outside. Luckily, there were still four stars left of the six Dina knew about, so there was no real need to rush on the information front.

“So, Dina. Where is the next of the Twelve Stars?”

“Next is... Let’s see... It’s a little far, but Parthenos the ‘Maiden’ has built a small settlement at the base of a mountain 2000 km west of here, where she is currently living in hiding.”

“A settlement?”

“Yes. She constructed a barrier to protect powerless monsters and trees from outside threats and has been living disconnected from the outer world.”

Ohh, how decent of her. I was proud that she wasn’t actively causing trouble for others.

I was a little worried, since she’d shut herself in, but I thought that could be solved later. At the very least, there wouldn’t be an increase in victims if we left her alone, unlike how it was with Aries and Libra.

“Also, umm... That mountain was where you were born, Miss Lufas. She chased away all the heaven-winged who were living there and turned it into a holy site after she began occupying it...”

I take it all back. She really did do something bad.

* *

“YES! IT’S A SUCCESS!”

The heart of Laevateinn—the country of swords—was its capital, with its center being the palace’s audience hall.

It was a place for the king to have an audience with others, so it was definitely not the sort of place one normally caused a fuss. But right now, the place was undoubtedly playing host to cheers of great joy.

In the middle of all this was a young, black-haired boy who was probably still in his teens. He was confused over whatever had just happened to him a moment ago.

Who knew what started it.

The boy, who lived in Japan, simply finished school for the day, gave it his all in his club activities, and went home as per usual. But that routine was

interrupted by an unusual voice.

“To the one who can hear this voice. Please, save us.”

It was a voice pleading for help.

It was a very nebulous thing. The boy didn't know who was asking, where they were, what situation they were in, or even what kind of help they needed.

The boy had no reason or duty to answer the cry, much less a voice that echoed in the back of his mind, the height of creepy. Normally people felt fear and doubt before any sort of sense of justice. Most likely, nobody would blame a person for ignoring the voice and running from the situation.

Humans feared the unknown. How could someone claim it would be a bad move to fear or run from a disembodied voice?

But the boy was abnormally softhearted. He had a screw loose, or he might have completely lost it.

If there was ever anyone in trouble, he wanted to help. If there was ever anyone lost, he wanted to reach out and lend a hand. His innate goodness was a virtue. The boy didn't have a shred of doubt nor an ounce of hesitation. He was called and he earnestly wished to help.

The defining nature of a hero was that spirit that thought, *I want to help*, instead of harboring any doubt.

But for a person, that wish clearly lacked a sense of danger or even self-preservation. It was a completely reckless and thoughtless action. Put bluntly, reason was abandoned in favor of emotion.

That was why the gate formed and the summoning through Exgate succeeded. He disappeared from the country called Japan, even though the summoning needed heartfelt acceptance from the summoned party.

—The Hero Summoning was a success.

The news would travel between countries near instantly.

* * *

It was dark, as if the space was enclosed in something dense enough to let no

light through. But strangely, I could see in the darkness. I could clearly make out my arms and legs, and I could walk sure-footedly.

That's why I thought, *Ahh, this is a dream.*

As I walked in the darkness, I eventually came upon a room that I recognized.

I wasn't in the world of Mizgarz, which I was becoming more familiar with recently. I was in a room of some house in modern Japan. I was surrounded by white walls, daily necessities scattered across the floor, and the bookshelves overflowed with manga and light novels.

This should be... Yeah, it's "my" room.

Everything was exactly as I remembered it—the placement of the furniture as well as the PC on the desk.

But... Why?

Why do I feel no attachment to this place? I don't feel nostalgic. The room doesn't feel familiar, nor do I feel at peace. It was as if I'd just visited the room of somebody I didn't know, even though I should've recognized this place.

I'm feeling a really strong sense of incongruity.

Strange.

Is there something wrong with me? Why was it I felt nothing when I was in the place where I'd been living for a long while, even though I felt some amount of nostalgia when I saw Aries?

I looked over at the PC, which was left on.

...It was displaying the title screen of a very familiar game: *Exgate Online*.

But it was weirdly blurred, kind of like it was mosaiced...as if one game screen was slapped on top of a different game. The looks were mismatched.

And that wasn't all. There was a window open, and it displayed something I should have been engrossed with without a doubt.

But when I took another look...

Suddenly, my shoulder was grabbed from behind.

I saw thin, white fingers. The grip's strength was disturbingly strong, and I couldn't resist.

By the time I had even thought to resist, it was already too late. I had been out of time as soon as I was discovered. *I'll just have to wait until my next chance.*

And my consciousness was forcefully pulled from my dream.

"—Miss! Miss Lufas!"

...I opened my eyes.

The first thing I saw was Dina's face as she shook me. Next, I saw Aries and Libra standing next to me.

"You need to wake up already, Miss Lufas. We're going to Vanaheim, right?"

"...Y-yeah... You're right."

The haziness lifted from my consciousness and everything came into sharp focus.

Ahh, that's right. I remember now; that was our destination.

I get the feeling that I was in a really deep sleep.

"Sorry. We had a strange dream."

"—What kind of dream?"

"...Ahh, that's... ..No, what kind was it.....? Sorry, We cannot seem to remember. It felt like a strangely important dream, but We just cannot seem to remember."

What was it, I wonder? I get the feeling I was having a pretty important dream, but I totally can't remember a thing.

Well, I get that dreams are just like that, though. I've heard that people only remember dreams for about five minutes after they wake up.

I really felt this dream was personally important somehow, but it very well could've been that I just thought that way and the dream itself was nothing special. I guess there wasn't much reason to keep stressing over it.

I got in Tanaka, and we made for my hometown, “Vanaheim.”

It was a small country on top of a mountain that was inhabited by the self-proclaimed ‘children of heaven,’ the heaven-winged... Well, it was more like a village. I remember that I—Lufas—also didn’t break tradition and set this location as my birthplace.

But, I had these black wings. I’d never thought of any really detailed backstory, but it wasn’t a stretch to imagine that I most likely had been persecuted.

While I was playing the game, there were so many heaven-winged with such gaudy wing colors that my black almost seemed normal. It felt more like, *I was prejudiced against black wings (lol)*. I mean, there were people who changed the color of each of their feathers and turned their wings into pictures. I was totally on the normal side of things.

“It’s about nightfall. Let’s stop here.”

Tanaka didn’t need a driver, so even if we left it alone it would just keep going. But sometimes it would try to go in some weird directions, and if it spotted a monster on the way it would chase it to try to attack. Someone needed to be awake to rein it in. That was probably why Dina woke me up.

Tanaka may have looked like a car, but it was a golem. In other words, it’d automatically attack enemies like an automated turret. We couldn’t allow ourselves to forget that.

If I’d equipped it with the max AI level of 5 like Libra, we could have given it detailed instructions, like to avoid unnecessary battles. But it wasn’t, and we couldn’t let our guards down even with AI level 4.

Put simply, it was like this certain priest who kept hurling instant-death magic at enemies that were immune to it from this certain popular RPG. With that level of idiocy in mind, I think it should be understandable why we couldn’t let our guards down.

“If that’s the case, Miss Lufas, there’s a perfect country just up ahead.”

“Country?”

“Yes. Actually, in terms of borders, we’re already in the country... Just a little bit ahead, you’ll find the capital of the country, ‘Gjallarhorn.’ It’s the country founded by one of the Seven Heroes, the ‘Sky King’ Merak, and is inhabited by the heaven-winged.”

One of the still-living Seven Heroes, huh? Meeting him is one of my goals alongside retrieving the Twelve Heavenly Stars.

But the knowledge that it was a country of heaven-winged founded by Merak stopped me from making a decision. No matter how I thought about it, stepping into a country of heaven-winged was a recipe for disaster. Of course, I didn’t have any plans of getting captured or killed. Even if they tried it, we could totally beat them back now that Aries and Libra were here.

I also just don’t like kicking up a fuss.

No matter how I shake it, I’m like a landmine to these people, not to mention the fact that one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars is currently occupying their old home.

Still, it’s not like anything will change if I put this off. We might as well go.

I’m gonna have to hide my entire body again, won’t I? The heaven-winged had long lifespans, so there were probably a lot of people who remembered my face.

“Understood. Let us stop there for the night. We do not much enjoy the idea, though.”

Given that there were only three of the Seven Heroes left, we couldn’t avoid this.

Feeling like a criminal headed for the gallows, I kept Tanaka running. Just as Dina said, we saw the capital ahead.

My first impression was—*What a strange country.* That was basically it.

It was incredibly white. They completely ignored aesthetic sense and color balance. It was just as white as could be. It was impossible to tell which buildings were housing and which were for some other purpose. It was all white, lacking in individuality.

Next was the location.

For some reason, all the buildings were facing a cliff. Actually, it was more like they were shoved onto the cliffside, as if clinging to it.

Just why would they bother building like this, even though there was perfectly good land elsewhere?

It reminded me of a Grecian town that I saw in a picture once, but this was even worse.

At the very least, they'd given a sparing thought to tourists and built stairs that led up to the city, but it honestly looked hard to traverse.

It was totally a town built upon the premise that everybody could fly.

And even stranger, across from the cliff was a second cliff, also with a town built upon it. But unlike the first side, the buildings here were all black. As with the first side, the second town was built under the assumption that people would be able to fly and seemed completely unsuited for those who couldn't.

There was a white palace built on top of the mountain in between both towns, giving off a strong presence.

"What is this idiotic capital?"

"It looks really hard to walk through..."

Seeing a city made up of two separate towns on either side of a mountain—and colored black and white on top of that—was stranger than fiction in my opinion. Likewise, Aries seemed to be of the same opinion, an exasperated look on his face.

Well, making the towns two different colors was fine, honestly. At that level, it could be explained away by saying it was the design or aesthetic of the place.

But white and black is way too extreme a difference. They seemed like completely different cities at first with one side completely white and the other completely black.

Just what was Merak thinking when he founded this place?

"Dina, what is this?"

“Uhh...Well, I’ve heard that this country is split into two factions and is currently going through something of a small civil war.”

“Factions?”

“Yes. There’s the ‘White Wing Supremacy’ faction, which maintains that white wings have been the heaven-winged’s pride since olden times and will continue to be. Then, there’s the ‘Mixed Wings Promotion’ faction, which opposes that viewpoint. As you know, the heaven-winged have always been fixated on the whiteness of their wings, and those with different colors will experience oppression and persecution. Ever since you disappeared, that tendency has only gotten stronger.”

I got a terrible feeling while listening to Dina’s explanation, causing cold sweat to drip down my cheek.

Huh? Could this be my fault? Like, because someone bad like me came out of the heaven-winged with different colors, things have gotten worse?

“I think you remember that during your reign, Miss Lufas, you outlawed persecution and oppression because of the color of one’s wings. But once you left, the white-winged ones started to strongly spread their opinion saying they really were better. In response, those with different-colored wings pressed for equal rights. Both sides have been arguing for almost two hundred years.”

Oh no. This is totally my fault.

Wait, what did she mean outlawed oppression and persecution? I don’t ever remember giving out that order! In the first place, it wasn’t unusual no matter what color wings a heaven-winged had, so of course I wouldn’t have cared about any of that.

Looks like this is totally something that this world’s ‘Lufas’ has done and I haven’t.

“What’s Merak doing?”

“Merak has taken a neutral stance and is somehow stopping both sides from actually coming to blows, but it doesn’t seem to be working.”

“...He’s got his own share of troubles, huh...?”

“What an incompetent man.”

“Libra. You shouldn’t be saying that.”

From what I remembered, Merak was the attentive kind of guy who paid attention to the atmosphere of the room and watched what he said so as to not anger anyone. At the very least, he wasn’t the incompetent man that Libra claimed him to be.

If even he couldn’t do anything about this fight, it must have been pretty deeply rooted. And since the reason for it lay with me, I couldn’t just let it pass without doing anything.

“So, where do we go? White? Or black?”

“...Let’s go with black first. They’re most likely the ‘Mixed Wings Promotion’ side.”

“Got it.”

I get the feeling I’ll just cause all sorts of trouble if I go to the white-wings side, so let’s head for the somewhat friendlier-seeming mixed-wings side first. Of course, I didn’t have any intention of revealing my true identity, but being prepared was never wrong.

“Master likes black... I have added that fact into memory. Next time, I will select black underwear.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

As usual, Libra was saying weird things with a completely expressionless face, so for the moment I just made sure to poke holes in what she was saying. I couldn’t really tell from her expression whether she was actually serious or just trying to make a joke. I would have been able to tell if, like, Dina was making the joke or something, though. And Aries was totally innocent, so his face had gone all red.

“Of course, I am talking about picking clothes for you, master. Or should I wear them and show off the perfect amount to maintain decency?”

“...No, it’s fine.”

“Understood. White it is. So you are mainstream.”

“No, We’re not for either of them.”

“...?! No way... Commando...?!”

Hey, this thing’s broken.

Without speaking a word, I smacked Libra upside the head.

Is this hunk of junk all right? Her thought patterns are weird. She should be AI level 5, but did Mizar teach her something weird, or what?

Aries was completely unable to keep up with the conversation and was just flailing around. If we didn’t stock up the party with some more people who had common sense he’d be stranded.

Wanted: someone who can call Libra out on her shit.

“At any rate, we will head for the black town first. Tanaka, you hide behind a nearby rock or something.”

“Y E S, B O S S.”

The rest of us got off, and under Libra’s instruction, Tanaka entered the shadow of a nearby boulder. Once he was tucked in safely, Libra took out a large square of cloth from somewhere and covered Tanaka before joining us.

Yeah, she actually was really useful if she tried. She only did stuff that anyone could do, but her actions were quick and without hesitation.

“So, how are we getting in? There seem to be some stairs at least, but...” Dina said, pointing at the stairs with a reluctant look.

There was, in fact, a set of stairs so people could climb into town. But they were just incredibly long with hundreds—no, thousands—of steps. If we were to try to climb up them it’d be dawn before we got into town.

“Please rest assured. I will carry everyone. Program selection: Skill: ‘Sky Jet’ activate,” Libra stated confidently.

At the same time, her back opened up, allowing something like a jetpack to appear and activate. It was a mystery how she could fit it inside her body, but apparently, she could fly.

It was actually just a skill for golems though—Sky Jet.

An item to teach a golem skills could be bought in-game for about 200,000 el, and I'd had Libra learn quite a lot of them. *But did the skill always look this...sciencey? What happened to the fantasy genre tag...?*

Libra took my right hand, Aries was locked against her left flank like she was carrying a barrel, and her left hand grasped Dina's nape. Dina made a strangled noise that should never have come out of a girl, but Libra didn't seem to care.

And with an incredible feeling of acceleration and booming sound, her verniers fired and we rose up into the air.

Wai—! You! ...Stop! Stop! This'll wake up everyone in town! Libra, stop! STOOOOOOOOOP?!

* *

“—So, what are you going to do about this, Libra?”

“We have safely landed in the city. I judge that there are no problems, master.”

“There are huge problems, fool!”

Carried by Libra, we safely made it inside the country of Gjallarhorn—*that's too long, Gjallar will do*—inside the country of Gjallar, but the method of travel was far too problematic.

She'd used her skill, Sky Jet, to carry us in. But it was the middle of the night, and we were moving by jet propulsion, making a thunderous roar. It wasn't a reach to see that people would be woken up by it, and as a result, we were currently being shot suspicious gazes from people who'd been rustled out of their homes.

Uhh, sorry. Sorry for making noise this late.

“You can't do that, Libra. If you make so much noise at this time of night, you'll wake people up.”

“That is no problem, Aries. From my analysis, none of those who have woken up have enough combat capability to become a threat. I will be enough to deal with them all. None of them will be an obstacle to master, even if they are awake.”

“No, that’s not why.....”

I wanted to facepalm after hearing Aries and Libra talk. *What do I do? This maid golem has no concept of causing trouble for other people.*

Was it because all I had done was make her fight in the game? All of her decisions were made only thinking about combat ability and threats.

NPCs wouldn’t wake up no matter how much noise someone might have been making, since it was a game.

Is that why Libra doesn’t know how to consider these kinds of things?

“Excuse me, just who are you people...?” A man who looked to be in his mid-30s spoke.

Since heaven-winged were both long-lived, and spent most of that lifespan in prime physical condition, this man was most likely around a thousand years old. His wings were a slightly dull grey and couldn’t be called pretty even as pure flattery.

And it wasn’t just him. All the people looking at us from afar had irregularly colored wings. None of them went as far as to have black wings like me, but there were people with almost blue or red colors, too.

Looks like this place really was the mixed-winged faction’s town.

“Oh my, sorry for all this so late at night. I’m a free merchant by the name of Dina. We have taken the liberty of stopping by at this time, but due to a mistake we’ve accidentally woken you all up. I deeply apologize for causing you all trouble.”

“We are Sfalū, also a free merchant. Sorry we bothered you all.”

“Uhh, I’m Aries. Also a free merchant?”

“My name is Copernicus the IVth, a golem tasked with guarding these three.”

As we introduced ourselves, I made sure to add in an apology. I kind of hated my speech pattern in situations like this, since I couldn’t stop sounding high-and-mighty.

Libra both gave herself a weird job and a name that was full of places to poke

holes in. *Can she just not read the situation at all? Ahh, well, I guess it's better than using her real name?*

Unlike Aries, Libra hadn't changed her outer appearance at all. If she were to use her real name there'd be a really high chance she'd be outed as the real thing. *But, Copernicus? What the hell?*

"O-ohh, so you're all merchants? What a novel way to come into town."

You don't have to try so hard to praise us, old guy. I know it was a ridiculous way to enter already, so you can get mad if you like.

But instead of getting mad, he welcomed us with a smile.

"Your long journey must have been tiring. My house also doubles as an inn. Now please, come over if you'd like."

Dina and I reflexively looked at each other in response to the old man's kind words.

Not only did he not get mad at us for our awful way of letting ourselves in, he even offered to lead us to an inn with a smile. *What a good guy.* I even felt weirdly moved. All the while, we followed the old guy to the town's inn.

The inn was... *Is this marble? No, wait. It looks like it's not just the inn.* All the buildings in this place were made of marble. I could tell due to the unique luster and beautiful speckles.

I see. This country's progressed really far in architectural techniques using marble. I bet there's a really skilled alchemist around.

"How much for a night?"

"One room will be 25 el for a night."

The man replied to Dina's question with a really fair price. 25 el would be about 5000 yen. So it would be 5000 yen a night for four people to stay. Considering that, it was actually surprisingly cheap.

We quickly paid the fee and were led to our room.

"This will be your room. Well then, enjoy yourselves."

The room we were led to was also walled with marble. It was a little much to

relax in. But it wasn't like there was no forethought made to guests. It wasn't like the entire room was just surrounding you with gleaming marble on all sides, thankfully. There was a soft carpet laid on the floor as well as a vase of flowers.

"Let's leave aside thinking about an audience with Merak for tomorrow and just sleep for tonight. Aries is already nodding off, after all."

"Oh my."

It was already late today. I shouldn't be talking, since we all just came in with a thunderous roar, but we should've been sleeping already.

Libra, Dina, and I—a golem, someone who never seemed to sleep, and a gamer used to pulling all-nighters—were just fine. Aries was looking really sleepy, but he was still desperately trying to stay awake, as if he couldn't possibly let himself sleep before me. His gallant dedication almost brought tears to my eyes.

You know I'm not going to say anything tyrannical like that you can't sleep before me, so it's okay to just go ahead and sleep?

"Well then. Good night."

"Yeah. Good night."

Dina and I burrowed into our beds and closed our eyes.

The bedding was a little hard, but given the fantasy setting, that was probably just par for the course.

Libra didn't seem like she wanted to sleep. She was simply standing in a corner of the room.

Well, she was a golem so she probably just didn't need to. I mean, she was awake for one hundred-ninety years straight when she was defending my grave.

Anyway, if she wanted to sleep she'd probably just do so on her own, so there was no problem.

After that thought, I let myself fall asleep.

* *

—Someone was yelling in an awful voice without a shred of kindness to it.

A little girl was being yelled at angrily by a man with white wings who must have been her father, at least by blood.

Parents yelled at their children. It wasn't an especially rare thing; most people experienced this sometime in their lives. But this wasn't anger due to concern for his child. There was only a selfish anger and a man simply venting his resentment at a little girl.

"Did you seriously injure someone else's kid again?! What did I say?! Don't hurt other people!"

"But, Father, they were the ones who hit me first, and a lot of them threw rocks at me. I was just trying to defend myself....."

"Shut up!"

A sharp sound echoed through the area.

The young girl knew it was because of violence brought down upon her by the living thing that was her "father."

This always happened. This man never listened to what she had to say. He was simply playing at being her father, pretending to discipline her. But in reality, he only thought of himself.

That was why he so quickly resorted to violence if whatever she had been doing didn't please him. He would never have said anything out of concern for his child.

Basically, he was only keeping up appearances. If the girl did anything, his reputation would worsen. That was why he pretended to scold her like this, shouting angrily like an idiot.

"I don't remember raising you to be like this! Where did I go wrong?! Huh?! Tell me!" The man yelled in his awful voice, and the girl agreed inwardly.

Of course you don't.

After all, she didn't remember the man raising her at all.

All this man's ever given me are jeers and violence.

Where did you go wrong? Everywhere. In fact, I don't remember you going

right anywhere.

“There are no parents who don’t love their children.”

Those were just simple, pretty words spouted by someone clueless who probably basked in their parents’ love their whole life. They probably had a sage expression, too.

There were tons of parents who didn’t love their children. Because they never wanted a child, or because the child was in the way, or because they were too noisy.

Or, because their wings were black...

For just those reasons, parental love could easily disappear.

The little girl never received anything even resembling love from the piece of filth that was at the very least called her father.

“...liar.”

Leaving behind that single word, the girl ran. She didn’t want to have to hear the man’s voice anymore and couldn’t find any meaning in continuing to talk to him.

That man is just a stranger. A stranger who just happens to share blood with me.

So I’m not sad. This isn’t painful. These droplets of water running down my cheeks are not tears. They’re not.

She ran.

She simply ran without even knowing where she was running to.

There was no place for her in this village.

Just for having taboo black wings... For having black wings, she was alienated, neglected, and discriminated against. Even though it wasn’t like she was contagious or would spread illness, she had rocks thrown at her, and if she ever fought back it was her fault.

Her only ally was her mother. But her mother was weak in constitution, and the girl didn’t want to worry her needlessly.

But the presence of her mother was a saving grace to the girl, and if that didn't exist, then she would probably have long fled the village.

—Why did this have to happen to me? Why? Just because the color of my wings is different?

There were heaven-winged other than her who didn't have white wings. They all lived clinging to each other as people under the same circumstances often do in a place the sun didn't reach, the exact definition of slums.

If she'd gone there, she probably would have turned out differently.

But she didn't know what the thing called her father would do to her mother if she left the house. The violence pointed at her might have instead been pointed at her mother.

—Why is the world this unfair? Why do we have to be this unhappy?

She couldn't stop herself from cursing god.

A great god of creation? As if. Goddess of love? I'm gonna puke.

If there really is a god that overflows with love and mercy, then why is the world so full of unfairness?

There's no point in praying. No one will reach out to help.

—No one will save me.

At such a young age, the little girl stopped relying on others.

Since nobody will help me, I'll just have to do it myself.

She was still living at home and was given the bare minimum of food, but she didn't know when that would stop. And more importantly, she had no intentions of continuing to live life like this.

That was why she wished to become strong.

She wanted to become strong enough to be able to wipe away all the irrationality and unfairness of the world.

I'm still young and weak, but one day for sure...I'll take Mom and get out of this miserable life.

The black-winged girl, Lufas Maphaahl, vowed strongly to do so from the bottom of her heart.

* *

“...What the hell was that dream?”

I touched my palm to my forehead and opened my eyes.

It was a strange dream... Yeah, a really strange dream.

That was probably Lufas’ past, wasn’t it? At the very least, things happened that I had no memory of experiencing or even writing as backstory.

Still, Lufas wasn’t just a game character. She existed in this world, so it was only natural for her to have parents. The fact that she was persecuted for her black wings was also something that was easy to figure out.

I sunk into thought.

Lufas should have existed before I became her. Since this body was not originally mine, that meant that something else was originally piloting this body. Should it be called the real Lufas’ soul?

But right now, I’m the one who’s here. I—simply a player who doesn’t know anything of Lufas’ past—am here.

So where did Lufas go? Did she get shot off somewhere when I arrived? Or was she still sleeping somewhere within this body?

...Or maybe she’s still sealed in subspace, and I’m just a fake.

But if I was a fake, then what was with Lufas’ memories being in this body? Why was I so angry just seeing a man I didn’t know who happened to be Lufas’ father in a dream...? Why was I so resentful of the unfairness and irrationality of the world? *How should I explain this wave of violently thrashing emotions?*

“...Master Lufas? It seems like your heart rate is spiking.”

“Libra?”

Libra—the only one who didn’t sleep—called out to me, seeming concerned.

She seemed expressionless at first, but somehow I could sense the small variations in her emotions. She wasn’t emotionless. She definitely had a heart.

And she adored and worried for me. Strangely, I felt as if we'd spent many years together.

"There is no need for worry. We only dreamed of a distant past."

"A dream of the past, was it?"

"Yes. We had something of a bad dream. We woke up feeling like a girl again... That was it. There is no reason for you to worry."

I can't tell these people, can I?

That I'm not actually Lufas but just an impostor?

...I really can't.

* *

"Now then, let us spend today sightseeing. All of you can move around in this capital as you please. But do not cause any trouble."

First thing in the morning, I announced to Dina and the others that we would be staying here for a while.

I was interested in just what kind of country Merak had made for himself, and I was concerned about the living conditions of those with colored wings, like myself. I also had the personal objective of confirming whether Merak was like me or not, so there was no way I could leave this place that quickly.

Given that Megrez was a resident of this world only, I'd half given up. But I did hold a little hope.

The problem was how I would get in contact... Unlike Megrez, Merak had yet to give up the seat of the king.

This country was only inhabited by the heaven-winged, after all. Their lifespans were different. Unlike Svel, which was also home to many humans, this place was just for the heaven-winged right from its founding. So unless he invited a big revolt or something, there was no way Merak would step off the throne in a mere two hundred years.

In other words, Merak was even harder to make contact with than Megrez, who had retired.

“Taking separate action... I have concluded this does not pose a problem in combat.”

“Sightseeing, huh... Where should I go?”

Libra and Aries didn't raise any objections in particular and seemed eager to go sightseeing. Actually, I couldn't really tell whether Libra was eager or not. On the other hand, Dina was very expressive and clearly seemed happy about the idea.

“That sounds great. Then I'll try going over to the white-winged faction's town. I might find something fun over there.”

It was much harder for me to go visit that side of the country, so if Dina went, that would actually help me a lot.

Acting separately divided our power and invited more danger than normal, but that shouldn't have been a problem with these people. Even if one of those Seven Luminaries or whatever came knocking, Aries and Libra had enough power to send them packing.

As for Dina... I still wasn't sure how much strength she had, but I got the feeling she had enough to at least stay cheekily safe. I wasn't that worried. Not to mention, she had the ability to teleport. If things got dicey, she could just teleport directly to me.

“Well then, let us split up for now. We will meet up at this inn later,” I said, leaving the inn.

Dina went off somewhere right after I did, and Aries also ran off in a different direction.

Libra... Ah, she's flying off somewhere with her jets again. I already told her to stop that, since it's so loud. What am I going to do with her?

Now then, I should go around this place myself.

Now that I was out of the inn, I started walking around town.

I kind of got the feeling that I was the center of attention, but I'd given up on avoiding it. It was only natural since I was covered head to toe in a red mantle.

It'd be nice if I had a more, like...nicer way of disguising myself... *Maybe I*

could just take advantage of the “Lufas = Female” thing and dress as a guy? Since I’m already a guy inside, I shouldn’t make any big mistakes.

Hm? Oh crap, isn’t this actually a good idea?

Let’s try transmuting up a cross-dressing set as soon as I get back to the inn.

“...Hm?”

After walking for a while, I found myself in front of a building that reminded me of a Greek temple and was surrounded by several pillars. But while it looked like a temple, it was colored completely black.

A pitch-black temple? Feels like it’s full of ill omens.

But it’d piqued my interest, so I continued on into the temple.

I was weirdly excited, wondering just what kind of evil deity would be enshrined inside. As far as deities of this world went, Alovenus was the creator and its only god.

The ‘devil’ part of devilfolk kind of gave off the image of being a fallen deity, but they were actually nothing of the sort. They just took on the name as a sort of rebellion against Alovenus.

Other than that, there were also the five dragons that governed the five elements outside of Metal and Water, which Alovenus presided over. But that was just fluff and never appeared in the game. The MMO aside, the dragons never even appeared in the TRPG or the console game. They were just phantom characters that only got mentioned in-setting.

Now then, who’s being worshiped in here? Is it some sort of independent religion? Or is this not actually a temple?

I went deeper and deeper into the temple, passing by other visitors who seemed to be here to pray, before I finally came upon the statue that was their object of worship.

Long hair stretching down to the hips.

Pitch-black wings.

A unique sense of fashion with a mantle worn on top of a dress.

That was unmistakably me, Lufas Maphaahl. Strangely enough, I was currently staring at a statue of myself.

“This statue is...”

I was dumbfounded.

A gentle-sounding voice reached out to me. “Oh, how rare. A traveler?”

I glanced over at the owner of the voice and saw a young man with red-black wings smiling back at me.

His face was... Not great but not too bad, either? Unlike elves, who were all beautiful, the heaven-winged were normal or average-looking. It did kind of feel like we were better-looking than humans on average, but ugly heaven-winged were pretty normal.

Although, the heaven-winged based their beauty on their wings, so no one really cared as long as someone wasn't extremely ugly. And to be normal even amongst the normal-looking heaven-winged? This red-black-winged guy was... Well, he must have had his share of troubles.

“You must be fairly surprised, seeing this statue.”

“Yes, quite surprised. To think that this temple worships the infamous Great Conqueror,” I replied.

The normal-faced young man seemed offended for an instant before his expression went back to normal.

Huh? Did I actually offend him by talking badly about Lufas? I was just saying the truth. The fact that he's offended by that is kind of funny.

I had the urge to laugh.

“It's true that to most of the world Lufas is an evil invader. However, to us, she is a savior.”

“Oh? ...We'd like to know more about that.”

Apparently this country...rather, this faction had an impression of me that was far removed from the greater world.

I decided to listen to him a little longer. I figured that if I did, I'd get to hear of

a side of Lufas that I didn't know of before.

"Did you know that the heaven-winged are a race that pride themselves on the whiteness of their wings?"

"Yes, We know that well. They claim to be descendants of angels, and that is why the whiteness of their wings marks them as superior, which is unique to the heaven-winged, correct?"

"Exactly. However, just because one is heaven-winged doesn't mean that they will be born with white wings. Some, like me, are born with different-colored wings."

Standards of beauty for the heaven-winged were mostly concerned with the color of one's wings, with the shape of their wings being next. One's face, body shape, and the like were next after that, so people like him with odd-colored wings got looked on with disgust.

Those with pure-white wings were not very common, though. Most heaven-winged had wings in a dim white that was pretty close to gray. I'd guess that having wings that were at least a light gray would barely be in the safe zone.

On the other hand, the closer to black one got, the more alienated they were. Of course, with my pitch-black wings, I was basically a pariah. And people like him, with wings that were an entirely different color, were immediately out of the running as well.

"With my position, it used to be really bad. Right now, we have our own town, so we're able to live pretty well. But in the past, it really was awful. We weren't even considered the same species. Just by walking down the street we'd be pointed and laughed at. We had no choice but to cling to other people in the same circumstances, living miserably in what were basically slums. Can you believe that? Just by having slightly different-colored wings we can't even get decent jobs. We were constantly starving back then."

The things he was talking about weren't just limited to the heaven-winged.

People discriminated against others over the littlest of things, and mob psychology tended to make them think they were in the right. Once someone thought they were superior, reason no longer held them back, and even good

people easily turned into demons or monsters.

In the “Stanford Prison Experiment” twenty-one subjects flipped a coin which separated them into jailers and prisoners. As a result, the jailers, which were treated as on top, quickly went berserk and far exceeded the calling of their station, oppressing the other students who had just happened to be prisoners.

In the end, the students who played the role of prisoners experienced severe emotional trauma, and the experiment had to be canceled in a mere six days. But the students who were jailers wanted to continue, claiming that wasn’t what was planned. Even then, they knew this was all an experiment, and their prisoners were innocent.

In other words, as soon as a human felt like only they should be on top, their sense of goodwill flew out the window and they became demons. Everyone had the capability to do this. So the heaven-winged, who claimed to be the descendants of angels, were no exception. They just thoughtlessly intensified their discrimination based on an easy-to-discern difference like the color of their wings.

Still, they’re taking it too far, from what I’m hearing. Descendants of angels? Don’t make me laugh.

“Almost every day we lived in fear, hiding from the outside world. It was miserable... Those days were truly wretched. But she was different.” He looked up, speaking passionately and longingly. “Her wings were black, but more beautiful than anyone’s. She used power to assert her presence and value, unlike us, who simply curled up in fear. And she dominated country after country, forbidding discrimination against heaven-winged who didn’t have white wings in each one under her umbrella, allowing us to be treated as people.”

Ahh, yeah...

Like, getting buttered up like this to my face makes my back really itch. I didn’t hate getting complimented, but this was just too much. It made me uncomfortable.

“It is all thanks to her that we were able to take back our pride. We aren’t miserable failures... We are proper heaven-winged who just happen to have

different-colored wings. We were able to be proud of that fact.”

“You sure put her on a high pedestal. But didn’t one of her subordinates, one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, steal your homeland?”

“I did not forget about that. But isn’t that just what we deserved? We betrayed her, cast her down. And as a result, we foolishly allowed the resurgence of the devilfolk. In fact, I consider it a mercy that we weren’t killed.”

...I see. This is kinda bad.

I felt clear enmity rolling off this man in waves as he talked passionately. He was so worked up he was voicing his complaints to a suspicious traveler from who knew where.

But I still needed to listen to him. To this man... No, to the heartfelt anger of the residents of this town.

“Those words are very close to being in contempt of the king, Merak... Just who do you think is your king?” I asked, and the man stiffened up.

The next expression he showed was cold and sharp like pure, frozen anger. It was frozen because the object of his anger wasn’t around. But if Merak were here, it probably would have easily turned into an all-consuming flame. Just like that, the man unhesitatingly spoke.

“He’s the worst fool of a king... A hero? As if. That title makes me laugh from the bottom of my heart.”

* *

Aries was walking by himself through the black townscape.

He didn’t have any particular destination or anything he wanted to see. He was just taking a walk because he had nothing better to do. There was no further meaning to his actions.

In the first place, happiness to Aries was being by his master’s side, so his first priority these days was to be useful to her, the master whom he was unable to serve for two hundred years. He wanted to do what he could for her and was willing to not spare any effort. Thus, he actually had no interest in exploring this place. In fact, he was considering just going to find his master now.

But I don't want to be a bother...

It was obvious to Aries that Lufas was interested in this town.

This country was founded by one of the 'heroes' who betrayed Lufas, so Aries had no interest in it. In fact, he would be more than happy to burn it all down right now. But his master wanted to explore it, so Aries complied as he didn't want to interrupt her fun.

So, since that was the case, Aries was currently out of things to do.

At the very least, he wouldn't interfere with his master's sightseeing. He would remove anything that could be an obstacle beforehand as well—specifically, any of the devilfolk's Seven Luminaries. They most likely had something in the works for this country. Rather, there was no way they didn't.

The only surviving members of the Seven Heroes—Megrez, Merak, and Benetnasch—were humanity's strongest champions. It was because they existed that the devilfolk had yet to conquer the world. That was why Mars, one of the Seven Luminaries, attacked Svel as well as used Aries. There was no way they would leave this country alone, either.

See? They really are here.

Aries could sense someone tailing him.

Wait. Actually, did they purposefully let me sense them? Either way, it looks like they want to talk to me one-on-one. Then, it should be best to go along with that idea.

Aries continued to walk, choosing a direction that led to somewhere empty. Eventually, Aries arrived at a plaza with no one around.

Is this...a park?

Normally, there would probably have been children playing in this place, but right now, it was empty. It wasn't nighttime either, so there was no reason for it to be this empty.

Is it some sort of barrier that prevents people from interfering...?

This was the work of magic from one of the elements in this world: Moon. There was a moon elemental spell that prevented encounters.

This spell, which simply kept beings you didn't want to approach away, was a convenient spell treasured by adventurers. Two hundred years ago, Lufas had often complained about how much she wanted to be able to use it. Even though she herself could not use it, Lufas had Twelve Stars which made up for any shortcomings she had. The Archer, the Maiden, and the Goat filled those roles, especially magic, which she was useless at.

The "Archer" was for attack magic.

The "Maiden" was for support and healing magic.

And the "Goat" was specialized in interference and disturbance type magic.

"Show yourself, Aigokeros. It's you, right?"

In response, a patch of empty space wavered. What appeared from the shimmer of air looked exactly like a demon.

The being had a goat's head, a human's body, and leathery bat wings—a grotesque monster. The demon's lower half fluctuated, as if it wasn't corporeal.

This was the "Goat" of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars: Aigokeros.

The man who looked exactly like a demon from legend stood across from Aries, his dark eyes glinting ominously.

* *

Libra surveyed the white town while she flew through the air.

She was currently flying above the town at an altitude of 1500 meters. It was a height at which even heaven-winged wouldn't approach without reason and one at which Libra would be almost completely safe from detection.

But even with so much distance between her and her target, Libra's eyes were still able to capture each individual heaven-winged resident of the white town, down to every strand of hair.

Libra was checking each heaven-winged resident of the white town, treating them as if they were enemies and confirming their strength.

They prided themselves on their white wings, and her master, with her taboo black wings, was ostracized from them as a monster. In other words, they were

her master's enemies. And her master's enemies were her enemies.

Since Lufas hadn't ordered an attack, Libra wouldn't do anything at the moment. But she was prepared to hit the entire town with Brachium the instant any of them took even the slightest hostile action. She would not have any mercy or compassion.

The first and foremost factor in all of her decision making was whether or not it would benefit her master, Lufas. If it was beneficial, she would guard or cover anyone. But if they brought harm, she would even murder a newborn baby. The only exception to this rule would be her maker, Mizar, but he was no longer in this world.

"Breathing, movements, line of sight, speech... Considering these factors, the current number of heaven-winged that suspect master's existence: zero people. No strange or unnatural points... Attack: unnecessary. Continuing observation... Standing by..."

Her mask-like face was frozen, expressionless. It was as if an automated doll were watching from the skies.

She collected data on each and every being in her sight for future use, saving their faces and habits into her memory banks.

Then she spotted one of her comrades, Dina, entering the white town. She was loitering in front of the clock tower in the center of town as if she was waiting for someone.

Libra most likely didn't remember her because of a fault in her memory data, so she didn't know much about Dina. But according to her master, she was very well-informed and knowledgeable about many places. It could be that she had an acquaintance in this town.

"—!"

As Libra was monitoring the entire town, she spotted a strange figure. It was a handsome man with green hair wearing sunglasses.

Normally, one would surmise from his lack of wings that he was just a human who came to sightsee or something.

But Libra's robotic eyes would not allow such lies. With one look, she saw through the man's disguise as a regular human with machine-like precision.

"...Confirmed unnatural skin color unique to mimicry. Fangs confirmed from bulge in upper lip. Devilfolk's vertical-slit pupils visually confirmed from gap in sunglasses. Conclusion: 98% chance of being a devilfolk in disguise. Complete: classifying as enemy. ...Conjecture: given direction and line of sight, 87% chance the enemy's destination is the clock tower, or the enemy will at least reach the clock tower on the way to his destination. Danger: enemy will make contact with Dina if he is allowed to continue. In fulfillment of conditions for elimination."

Libra's cold, robotic eyes glinted ominously as she flipped over her skirt, revealing two machine guns that seemingly popped out of nowhere. Libra unhesitatingly equipped them.

They were weapons called 'guns' which were originally only equippable by the Gunner class, a higher class than Archers. These weapons, which were commonplace two hundred years ago, were now rare in this day and age.

Regardless, Libra readied those rare weapons and made a steep dive, causing an explosive sound. Libra descended upon the town while leaving behind sonic booms, landing in front of the suspicious man.

Thanks to the steel doll landing in the middle of town, the ground cracked and pieces flew through the air. Libra stepped forward from the resulting cloud of dust, cutting off the man she'd concluded was a devilfolk.

"Wha—?! ...A golem in this place?!"

"Warning, devilfolk. If you insist on continuing forward, I will use force to eliminate you. In that case, I cannot guarantee your life. Is that understood? It is strongly recommended that you retreat from this place."

Raising her alertness level so that she could attack at any time, Libra issued her final warning while guardedly readying herself for battle. Meanwhile, Libra's eyes continued to gather data on her opponent, attempting to estimate his combat ability.

One of Libra's skills—"Search Eye"—carried the same effect as Lufas'

Observing Eye.

From the data Libra obtained, she understood that her opponent's level was 320 and his HP was 25000. As long as she didn't let her guard down, there was no way for her to lose against such an opponent. But considering modern power levels, he was very strong.

"What do you mean devilfolk? As you can see, I'm just a traveler who stopped by to see the sights."

"Behind those sunglasses you have vertical-slit pupils. Your upper lip is slightly bulging and judging from the pattern of your skeletal structure and differences in musculature... I have concluded that you are a devilfolk in disguise."

"...I see. So I've been found out. Oh well. That just makes things faster."

Whether or not he was finished talking, Libra noticed the slight movements his muscles made. She sensed him putting power into the tips of his toes and slightly bending at the knee.

Concluding that those were preparative motions for kicking off the ground, Libra immediately upped her alertness level, her thoughts shifting towards battle.

The man jumped forward hard enough to cause the ground to explode behind him, but Libra guarded against his fist.

The power in his punch was superhuman, but he was punching against a similar, inhumanly hard arm.

The clash caused a hard, metallic sound to ring out, and the fingers on the hand the man punched with broke.

"!?!"

"Confirmed hostile action. Commencing attack."

Libra swung her arm, forcefully throwing the man away, and using the small bit of space that opened up between them, her eyes shifted.

Both of Libra's eyes unleashed lasers, piercing through the ground.

The man—disappeared! Using some light footwork, he'd disappeared into

Libra's blind spot and charged at her from behind.



But a blind spot to a human was nothing to a golem like Libra.

Libra's arms bent in a way that would never work for a human, guarding against the man's fist. Then, her head snapped around 180 degrees! She shot her eye lasers at the man once again.

"WhooOOps?!"

The man managed to hurriedly jump backwards to avoid the attack, but Libra pressed her advantage.

She turned her whole body around, returning her arm and head to their normal positions before readying her machine guns and immediately blasting away on full auto!

Each gun was capable of shooting a thousand rounds a minute. So added up, Libra was putting a ridiculous 2000 bullets per minute downrange. Libra didn't bother putting anything like a silencer on them, of course, so the clamorous noise of gunfire rang through the town in broad daylight, disturbing its peace.

The man desperately avoided Libra's fire, kicking off the side of a building to make a great leap.

But Libra was aiming for when he was in midair and couldn't maneuver. Libra instantly switched weapons in order to shoot down her currently vulnerable enemy.

"Skill selection: releasing right arm limiter. Right Scale: 'Zuben El Genubi' Release!" Libra announced, and her right arm literally released itself.

Her fingers, palms, and upper arm all rearranged themselves, accompanied with the appropriate mechanical sounds. In a scant second it became a giant cannon with a meter-long barrel.

"—Fire!"

All the houses around Libra instantly had their windows shattered.

The cannon shot out a straight torrent of light that seemed like it would go on forever. Its white brilliance was accompanied with sparks and lightning as it raced through the sky, baring its fangs at the devilfolk man.

But the moment the blast seemed like it would hit, the man was suddenly pushed aside by a torrent of wind and escaped. He'd dodged Libra's bombardment. In fact, he continued to change directions mid-air as if he were riding the wind and once again charged towards Libra.

Libra shot her machine guns wildly in an attempt to intercept him, but all of her bullets were turned aside.

"I've got you!"

"—!"

Libra blocked the man's barehanded knife-edge strike with the barrel of her gun.

But the devilfolk's hand cut into the gun, ripping away about half of it.

His attack was far sharper than any normal barehanded strike. The man possessed some sort of invisible blade. That was what cut her weapon.

Libra instantly figured that out, and she noticed that there was a change in the wind, concluding that the man had manipulated wind in order to form a blade that could even cut metal.

"You can freely control wind... I see. So your attribute is Wood."

"Well done figuring that out. I commend you. You are correct. I preside over the power of nature. My element is Wood. I am one of the devilfolk's Seven Luminaries and control one of the seven elements, Wood, as I like. My name is Jupiter. Name yourself, doll. You are no mere puppet."

The man introduced himself even though he wasn't asked and undid his disguise. His previously almost human-colored skin turned an eerie blue, and he removed his sunglasses, revealing vertical-slit pupils and green eyes.

Libra had no obligation to name herself just because he did, but not doing so would go against her pride as a maid. He'd introduced himself, so she would do the same. That was the way of maids and part of her pride as one who served Lufas. So Libra returned her arms to their normal state, pinched the hem of her skirt and curtsied neatly.

"Well met, Jupiter. I am one of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, Libra

of the Scales. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“Ohh? The Scales, said to be the best at annihilation among the Twelve Heavenly Stars, huh? I heard you were destroyed in the Grave. So that really was just a hoax.” Jupiter laughed, amused, before taking a stance with both his hands straight out like blades.

At first glance it seemed to be a regular knife-hand, but his hands were adorned with invisible wind, forming blades.

The “Wood” element—as the name implied, it manipulated trees and plants but was also the element of wider nature, allowing it to control wind as well. As for its affinities with other elements, it was strong against Earth and weak against Metal.

And Libra’s attribute was “Metal.”

Its specialty was strengthening substances like one’s own body, weapons, or armor. Those with the metal attribute pulverized their enemies by strengthening themselves to be as hard as the greatest of metals.

There were aspects of the element that resembled alchemy, so the attribute had high compatibility with Alchemists. The attribute was strong against Wood but weak to Fire.

In other words, Libra had the complete advantage in this fight in both levels and attributes.

Considering just how few disadvantages she had, Libra had calculated her chances of winning this fight at 99%. But she still didn’t let her guard down. There would be no mercy.

Libra put away her machine guns before raising her left arm.

“Skill Selection: releasing left arm limiter. Left scale: ‘Zuben Es Chamali’ Release!”

This time, it was her left arm that transformed.

Her left hand shrank into her wrist as if it was being sucked in, and instead, a blade that shined bluish-white appeared.

If Libra’s right scale was a main cannon for long-range fights, then her left

scale was her main weapon for melee combat. A barrier of wind would mean nothing against this. It would only be cut like everything else.

“Prepare yourself,” the doll declared with an emotionless voice.

Then, the verniers on her back ignited and she accelerated towards her enemy.

* *

They were in a park that would normally be lively with playing children and their parents. But right now, there were only two present.

Mysteriously, the two of them were standing in the very area that other people were currently avoiding, glaring at each other even though they used to be comrades. They both served the same master, were both given the title of one of the Twelve Stars, and were powerful enough beings to be ranked among the top in the world.

Of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars there was: The “Ram” Aries.

And opposite him was similarly of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars: the “Goat” Aigokeros.

They were both comrades with the title of one of the Twelve Stars, but the two of them were facing off against each other with an atmosphere between them that was a far cry from what one would normally find between old friends.

Both of them had yet to launch an attack, but were mentally ready to respond to any strange movements the other made. They both had the resolution to launch a deadly attack at the other without hesitation even though they had been brethren in the past.

“Aigokeros... Why are you here?”

“As if you don’t know. All I desire are the lives of the Seven Heroes. You should know that.”

Aigokeros responded to Aries’ question with a low, impure-sounding voice.

Aigokeros’ voice had a creepy echo to it, as if several people were speaking at once. His mouth, which was normally what issued sound, didn’t seem to move

at all. His voice seemed to reverberate directly in Aries' ear, something that would be creepy and uncomfortable even if the one doing it was someone close.

Anyone with a normal amount of mental fortitude would probably have their sanity and spirit shaved away just by speaking with Aigokeros. Doing so naturally caused psychological discomfort, like nails on a chalkboard. This discomforting effect was always present in his voice. Aigokeros ate away at his opponent's sanity by confronting people, conversing with people, and even just by existing.

He was ranked highest among the few real demons that existed, a "Lord Demon" who struck fear into the hearts of others.

Aries narrowed his eyes, thinking Aigokeros' eeriness still hung around.

"Are you still allied with the devilfolk for that end?"

"Aye. I use them, and they use my power. Our objectives are aligned at the moment."

Hearing Aigokeros' reply, Aries put on a grim expression.

He did not find fault with wanting to bring down the Seven Heroes. Aries considered them enemies and hated them enough to want to kill them, as did all of the Twelve Stars. In fact, Aries wanted to support Aigokeros in this endeavor.

However, Aries did not like the fact that Aigokeros was allying himself with the devilfolk.

Aries also once cooperated with one of the devilfolk by the name of Mars. But even then, he'd refused to be completely under Mars' control. In the end, their interests had just aligned. He had never once fallen to the devilfolk general's control.

"Aries. I will once again ask you the same question as before. Come with me. Help me drive these hateful heroes to the depths of hell, my homeland."

"...Sorry, but I can't accept that invitation. I'll never be a subordinate to the devilfolk, even if I die. My only master is Miss Lufas."

“And I am the same. I will not tell you to pledge loyalty from the bottom of your heart. Just think of it as using them.”

“Even so, I refuse. I don’t even want to pretend to bow my head to the devilfolk.”

Aigokeros and Aries glared at each other, the atmosphere between them still one step away from going critical.

Aigokeros wanted to count Aries as an ally, even if he had to force Aries into it. But Aries was also one of the Twelve Stars. It would be in no way an easy win. Weighing up the merits and demerits of such an action, Aigokeros found more demerits.

That was the birth of this stalemate, and while the situation was one step away from bursting, it never did. It was a strange situation.

That was when Aries threw a stone.

“Especially now that our master has come back to us. That’s even more reason to not do something so unsightly.”

“...! So, that means the one who killed Mars really was...!”

“Yes, it was Miss Lufas. She isn’t dead.”

Their master was alive and well.

When he heard that, Aigokeros’ figure wavered. That was when Aries offered his own invitation.

“This time, I’ll ask you. Cut ties with the devilfolk right now and come with me. The time has come for the Twelve Stars to once again gather under Miss Lufas.”

“...I cannot do that yet.”

“! Aigokeros!”

“To join back with my master... That would be nice. But if I do not destroy our sworn enemy, then history will just repeat itself. In order to return to my master’s side, I must first send those hateful heroes to hell.”

Aigokeros refused Aries’ invitation.

No, he simply stated that he couldn't accept it right this moment.

I still haven't killed those damn heroes. I have yet to massacre those fools who ruined my master's hegemony.

If I return without accomplishing that, our failures will only repeat. If I want to go back to my master's side, I must first crush those awful enemies of ours!

"My will is resolved! Look well, Aries. I will be sure to remove Merak's head and drive this country down to the depths of hell and chaos. I will offer my master hell and death and the screams of these fools! Then, I will eat through the devilfolk from the inside and make them sacrifices to her."

If Lufas herself were to hear that speech, she would no doubt have said, "Hey idiot, stop that!" But unfortunately, Aigokeros, who had his passion lit after hearing news of his master's well-being, could not stretch his imagination that far.

No, he might actually have reached that conclusion, but he completely believed that killing the heroes would be good for his master. So he didn't stop. He wouldn't stop. He believed that the blood and destruction of her enemies would be the best offering, following the normally bloody lines of thought for a demon.

"Farewell, Aries. Observe as I dye this country in madness, blood, and death alongside our great master."

After speaking his piece, Aigokeros disappeared.

Aries did not want to stop him. Killing the Seven Heroes was the greatest wish of the Twelve Stars. Aries found no reason to stop Aigokeros.

After seeing Aigokeros off, Aries pondered.

Should I tell my master about this...?

"Miss Lufas doesn't like excessive killing and attacks on civilians, right...? So if I tell her, then of course she'll stop him... But the white half of this country are all people who would persecute Miss Lufas..."

Let's just observe the people of the white town for now and figure out how we should act depending on their personalities and how they think.

If they no longer cling to the color of their wings, unlike the past, and have lost the unsightly tendency to discriminate against others, then I can just tell my master.

If I do, then my master—who loves peaceful people and hates needless death—will definitely stop Aigokeros. But if they are still the same people who rejected my master, then...

* *

In the country of the heaven-winged, Gjallarhorn, a lone girl who wasn't a heaven-winged stood in the middle of the white town. This was one half of this country's capital, which had been split into east and west due to reasons regarding the color of one's wings, a source of discord that stretched far into the past...

The girl who had ocean-colored hair that reached down to her knees, and eyes of the same color, was Dina.

She had her arms crossed and was pouting as she waited in front of the clock tower situated in the center of the white town.

"...He's late."

The reason she was there was to exchange information with a certain person. Dina would expertly draw out the information she wanted but only spill what was absolutely necessary, all the while eloquently convincing the other person that he was profiting from all this.

She'd run that simulation in her head over and over again, but now that it was time to actually put things into action, her opponent just wouldn't come.

"Argh. Keeping a lady waiting is just rude! That's why that entire race is..."
Dina started walking while mumbling her complaints.

If her opponent wouldn't come, then there was no other choice. Dina didn't want to move about too recklessly, but in this case, she would probably have to go get them.

She walked through the town that was colored completely white with no variation, observing the people who lived here as she passed by.

For races that could fly, the basics of living were fundamentally different from other humans.

It was normal for entrances to be on the second or third floor of a building, but of course there were no stairs or ladders leading up to them.

The town was built so flush to the cliff face that there was a real danger of falling if someone made one wrong step. But it didn't seem like that caused any problems at all for the residents.

On the other hand, roads and walkways were far wider compared to normal human cities. That was because they were much more likely to bump into others than normal people since they had wings.

For good or bad, having wings was a major standard for this entire place.

That was just the way of life for heaven-winged. There was actually an aphorism spread throughout the world that said a heaven-winged without wings was just a human. That was why they placed such importance on the color and shape of their wings and hated anything that differed from their ideals.

“...Oh?”

As she was observing the comings and goings of the town, Dina spotted a suspicious-looking figure. The figure was similar to Lufas in that they covered their whole body in a mantle. The color of the mantle was white, but the objective of covering their face and wings was probably one and the same. Dina could tell this because she'd been with Lufas this entire time. Covering one's wings that way created unnatural bulges in clothing.

Of course, it wasn't possible to immediately see through that, and the only one who could do so straightaway would probably be Libra.

—Could this be an unexpected chance to have information fed to me on a silver platter?

Feeling the sight of the person in a white mantle was extremely unusual, Dina's face split into a bewitching smile. She was still technically waiting to meet someone, but... *He's the one who missed our appointed time first. I was at the right place at the agreed-upon time, so he has no right to complain to me.*

Coming to that conclusion, Dina made a hurried change in plans. She tailed the person in the white mantle.

Dina made sure not to be found out as she chased the white-mantled person through progressively less populated streets.

It's all right. There's no chance I'll be found.

Deceiving, tricking, and infiltrating the enemy without them noticing was Dina's specialty. She even had absolute confidence that she could do the same to Lufas or the Devil King if she put her mind to it. So tailing the figure in the white mantle without being noticed was no problem for her. It was like taking candy from a baby.

The person in the white mantle entered a small room, and Dina moved right up to the door. Then, she opened it just a crack so she could peek inside.

There's two, three, four...five people other than white mantle here. From what they're wearing and whatnot, it looks like they're all pretty rich and powerful.

The six people gathered here most likely had quite a lot of power and influence in the capital.

Now isn't this suspicious, seeing people like this gathering in secret and all.

Curious, Dina put her ear to the door and concentrated on listening in to their conversation.

"You're late, Laide."

"Sorry. I got held up at a meeting back there."

Apparently the person in the white mantle was named Laide.

When he took off his mantle, he revealed white wings as one might've expected. He looked to be in his mid-40s in human terms, and his body was clearly trained. His eyes held a sharp gaze. It was easy to tell that he wasn't one to be messed with.

No way was he a normal citizen.

"So, what did His Majesty say?"

"It's no good. We can't count on that opportunistic king. He wouldn't listen to

my advice, not even for the third time. He won't understand that if this keeps up, those with filthy wings will only keep multiplying."

Dina sensed that this was a gathering of people who were not happy with the black town. They were of the faction that had prided themselves on their white wings since ancient times and wouldn't accept anything that didn't fit within their standards. They looked down on others and believed they were true nobility, never doubting that fact.

From their perspective, it must have been mortifying to see those with mixed-colored wings—or in their words 'tainted wings'—create their own town and act as if they were equals.

"Then it really..."

"Yes. We will have to crush those filthy-wings that keep multiplying by ourselves."

Dina put her hand to her mouth.

This conversation's turned really violent. "Crush?" That's nowhere near peaceful.

It seemed to Dina that this situation had been in a stalemate for too long and was just about to explode.

"But that is..."

"Of course that will mean dirtying our hands. But someone has to do it. We can't defend justice only with pretty words. Someone has to fulfill their duty, even if it means becoming evil. Didn't we all gather like this because we were prepared to do so?"

Justice.

Dina couldn't help but chuckle, hearing that word.

I see. It seems like they're stereotypical people who are full of themselves.

By indulging in the word 'justice,' anything can be forgiven. In fact, by doing exactly what others wouldn't they may think they're noble for having to dirty their own hands to enforce justice...

Ahh, how laughable. There's no one more vicious and wicked than those with their eyes clouded by 'justice.'

"Also... I have heard that those filthy-wings are preparing for war with us as well. It'll be too late if they attack first."

Not only are their eyes clouded by justice, but they're paranoid too... This is serious, Dina thought. So they're delusional, think they're right, and also paranoid about being attacked themselves. They're just bombs waiting to blow.

I don't know if Merak's noticed this already, but the fuse to this country's destruction has already been lit.

"I've already called upon others who feel the same way we do, and we're forming a volunteer army. All our hearts are one. There is no doubt that we love our country." Laide spoke passionately, and all the others raised a cheer.

If one was in the minority, it was easy to put the brakes on a bad idea. But if one was in the majority, then a bad idea became impossible to stop. Mob psychology messed with one's decision-making abilities, causing one to perceive everything they did as right.

Now it was just a countdown until everything went haywire.

"Also, we have friends on the outside. They are without wings, but Jupitarr feels the same way we do. Actually, the information he's provided has been a great help."

"By the way, I don't see Jupitarr anywhere..."

"I suppose it's because moving around this town is very hard for Jupitarr, seeing as how he's human..."

Jupitarr... Is that the name of the one who lit the fuse?

This was most likely the case, but she felt that something was wrong since the person himself wasn't there.

Shouldn't Jupitarr himself be here for a meeting this important? That way he could rile them up even more. Did he just get lazy at the last second?

Well, the exact reason didn't matter to Dina.

I've gotten my hands on some nice info. I probably don't need to stay here any longer. This'll be a nice present for Lufas.

Dina disappeared the next instant as if she were mist without once letting her wan smile crumble.

* *

The blades of wind Jupiter unleashed burst against Libra's face, arms, legs, and chest. But she was unhurt.

Even if Jupiter—one of the devilfolk's Seven Luminaries who so threatened the world—put his all into an attack, Libra wouldn't even bat an eye as she continued to move forward. It was as if he were just fanning a breeze to her.

If Libra still suffered two hundred years of degradation, Jupiter might have been able to hurt her a little. But now that Lufas had restored Libra to her full glory, Jupiter had no chance of ever wounding her.

She walked straight through tornadoes that would've pulled out huge trees, roots and all. She treated bullets of wind coming from all directions like they weren't even there. And she never showed the slightest hint of wavering, not even at Jupiter's greatest attack, which he'd sacrificed HP for.

On the other hand, every single one of the attacks Libra unleashed had the power to kill. If any of them had hit, Jupiter would've been dead in an instant. She was shooting a cloud of death. There was no wiggle room with any of her attacks.

As time passed, Libra's aim was improving. She learned from her opponent's movements and compensated accordingly. But even this semblance of balance was razor-thin, since Libra was still holding back.

If she unleashed Brachium, everything would be over in an instant. The reason why she still hadn't was because Libra was still of the opinion that Brachium should be kept in reserve. In other words, the gap between them was so large she didn't think she needed it.

Everyone had the potential to become Lufas' enemy, including the king of Gjallarhorn. Libra always had that in mind, making sure she would always be ready to react if the need arose.

If Libra were to use Brachium, it would be unleashed against the entire country of Gjallarhorn instead of only Jupiter. The instant they were to ever become her master's enemies, Libra would use Brachium to eliminate them, country and all.

That was the only reason why she had yet to fire it. But she was ready to at any moment.

Of course, even if the people of this country were to become her enemies, Libra didn't think there was anything they could do. They were so far removed in ability it wouldn't even have been a fight in the first place. But sometimes reality exceeded the imagination, and united, people could display unprecedented power.

"Just in case."

Libra had learned that the uncertain and unreasonable existed two hundred years ago. So she would no longer make mistakes. She would no longer allow even a one-in-a-million chance for that to happen.

If a seed was allowed to grow, it could rip apart soil in a flash. So Libra elected not to use Brachium. But even so, Jupiter's life hung by a single thread.

"This won't do, will it? Looks like we're just not a good fit." Jupiter's smile, which never faded, was belligerent like a beast. But he still sounded calm.

His entire body was covered in wounds. They were all minor, but the damage was definitely piling up. Jupiter wasn't grazed. He was dodging all of Libra's attacks well, using all the evasion skills at his disposal. Even so, just the shockwaves from her attacks hurt him.

On the other hand, Libra had taken many attacks head on, but it didn't seem like she had been affected by them at all. She readied her blade with a relaxed expression as if saying she didn't even need to dodge.

Metal, or in other words, steel—the attribute to harden one's body like steel, cut apart tree after tree with a blade, and use one's weight to be unaffected by wind.

Iron could be melted by fire but would never be scored by wind.

From Jupiter's perspective, Libra was taking no damage from his attacks, but every one of hers was lethal. She was his natural predator.

But still, having been able to hold on all this time was a show of Jupiter's strength. Even among the Seven Luminaries, his mobility and evasion were far and away the best, which allowed him to deal with attacks even from stronger enemies.

If Libra were facing off against any of the other Seven Luminaries—Mars for instance—they would have long been turned into a corpse. However, being able to put up a fight was a far cry from being able to win.

All Jupiter could do was hold on. His chances of victory were very close to zero.

"Doesn't look like I'll be able to claim victory here. I don't like it, but I'll be retreating now."

"...!"

After hearing her enemy declare his intention to leave, Libra immediately returned her left arm to its normal state, once again equipping the machine gun she had left intact.

If the enemy were to assault her, Libra could defeat them with the butt of her gun or her blade. But if they ran away, it would be up to flying speed.

Libra's maximum flight speed exceeded mach 5, but that was only in a straight line after having enough time and room for acceleration. Basically, in addition to not having as much instant speed, Libra also couldn't outmaneuver Jupiter, who could freely manipulate the wind.

In other words, if he put all his efforts into running, successfully chasing him down would be a difficult task. Even if Libra managed to catch up, she wouldn't be able to capture him. So Libra judged that it would be best to add ranged attacks into the mix and try to shoot him down while he ran.

"Too bad. I'm more familiar with this place than you are!" Jupiter ran off into the townscape, dripping with cold sweat.

Libra immediately gave chase, but the capital's buildings were built too closely

together. It was like the planners never even considered that people would be walking through the streets. This place was only built for the heaven-winged.

That construction became a maze which allowed Jupiter to escape and hindered Libra's chase. Jupiter ran around corners, inside buildings, and into crowds. He could maneuver much better in these cramped spaces and had the advantage. On top of that, Libra's knowledge of the layout of this capital was still incomplete.

No matter how different their maximum speeds were, Libra could not catch up.

For example, if you were to place an Olympic gold medalist into this complicated townscape and make him chase one of the town's children in a no-holds-barred tag match, it would probably be nearly impossible for the medalist to win. That was what was called the hometown advantage.

Libra concluded that continuing to give chase was a wasted effort. Even if she continued, the chance of capturing Jupiter right now was close to nothing with their speeds and his maneuverability. Without complete knowledge of the town's complicated layout, continuing to give chase as she was now would only end with wasted effort on Libra's part. It would rather be more useful to take the information she'd obtained in the fight to her master as quickly as possible.

That was what Libra decided, and she ceased her chase.

"..."

With a small, high-pitched, machine-like noise, Libra turned her head.

Her sharp hearing could even pick up the sound of a pebble rolling from several hundred kilometers away. Of course, in order to do that she would have to shut out all other irrelevant noise, but that was how sharp her hearing was.

Using those sensors, she picked up Lufas' voice and the sound of her breathing before determining her location.

As for Jupiter... It was useless. He was shutting off any sound he made by making a wall of air. That meant that there was no point in using hearing to track him.

“Current location: Black town... The temple.”

I have found Master's location. At the very least, it doesn't seem like she is in battle with anyone at the moment.

Libra could also hear some other voice, but it didn't seem hostile.

Last night, her master had woken up with an elevated heart rate. Libra knew that humans experienced dreams, but she didn't really understand why. It was said that dreams were mostly to help one sort memories, and depending on the situation, the dreamer may experience some painful memories once again.

Master's response... That was most likely because she saw some sort of unpleasant dream, Libra thought. As I had expected, this country has a bad influence on Master.

And that was exactly why Libra wanted to eliminate any and all obstacles in her master's way during their stay in this country.

Libra would not be swayed by emotions. She would never be shaken by something intangible like dreams, and she would never lose her cool. That was because her true essence was that of a 'tool.' She found meaning in her existence by benefiting her master and removing all things that did the opposite.

She remembered the form of her enemy as well as the way he'd fought.

His level itself is low, but he's a slightly annoying enemy who can exert his evasion skills to dodge me. But there's no chance for me to lose. As long as I have some way to pin him down, victory is assured.

Unfortunately, he got away this time, but the next time he will not be so lucky. I will ready a weapon and a plan that will reliably put him down. The next time we meet, he will certainly breathe his last.

It would be over in an instant if I were to use Brachium, but there is no need for that. It would be more than enough just to threaten to use Brachium for intimidation. There is no need to actually shoot it, the doll, who had regained her duty and her master, thought.

What weapon would she need to kill her enemy? How would she do so? What

would she do next? Repeating those thought processes over and over again, she continued to search for ways to benefit her master.

For that was the very meaning of her existence as a doll created by Lufas.

* *

Seems like this country is far more troubled than I thought it would be.

While laying back on the sofa at the inn, I had a painful realization. For a start, there was the plain-faced man whom I met in the temple. *Ah, whoops. I never actually got his name. Anyway, let's just name him 'plainred (temp)' for now.*

The resentment he had towards Merak most likely wasn't limited to only himself. They built a temple like that and boldly enshrined a statue of me—who was hated as a villain the world over—after all. Just doing that clearly showed their will to rebel against the king.

I mean, I kinda get how bad the white-winged faction's discrimination is. But doing something like that is just adding fuel to the fire.

I know I don't have any right to think this, but isn't one of the reasons for the white-wing faction's discrimination because of the mixed-wing faction? But I'm sure that's not all the problem is.

At the moment, we were gathered back at the inn, exchanging information on whatever we had learned throughout the day.

Dina volunteered to go first, and she dropped a bomb on us.

“—is. So currently, the white town is preparing for a civil war.”

She informed us that, in their paranoia regarding their perceived enemies, the white town had already started preparing for a civil war and were currently forming a volunteer army.

Hey, Merak, what're you doing? The countdown to civil war's already started! If things keep on like this, your country will crumble without anyone even attacking it.

“From their conversation, there's no doubt that some person named Jupitarr was fanning the flames. Well, it's probably just a fake name, though.”

“...Hm, well done, Dina.”

I praised Dina while pinching the bridge of my nose.

I guess the one silver lining is that there's a mastermind. It might be possible to do something about all this if we get him. ...Although, I'm not even sure if it's stoppable when things have already progressed this far.

Next, it was Libra's turn to drop a bomb.

“I present my report. Today at 13:23 and 42 seconds I encountered and subsequently engaged in combat with Jupiter, one of the devilfolk's Seven Luminaries, in the white town.”

Apparently, she went to the white town today and fought a devilfolk leader.

One of the devilfolk appeared, even though this country is already on the brink of ruin? This is really bad.

If we just left without doing anything, this country really would fall apart, wouldn't it? If that happened the power balance that was being propped up by the three heroes that were left would break, inviting a huge assault from the devilfolk.

“Judging from his combat ability and our attributes, I have a probability of no less than 99% to emerge victorious. But if he were to attempt to escape again, capturing him would be difficult. In order to make sure to finish him next time, I request homing bullets and maintenance on my gun.”

Homing bullets... They were high accuracy bullets used by the Gunner class. I didn't have the Gunner class, but I could make the bullets and the guns for them.

Libra technically didn't have the Gunner class, either, but golems and monsters weren't the same as players in the first place. The problem was that Libra didn't have any bullets.

“...We do not remember this being terribly important. Do you not have any?”

“Everything I had was used in defense of your relics.”

“...”

Oh right, she stayed in one place for one hundred-ninety years. Then she might not just be out of homing bullets. She probably needed refills on others as well.

Oh well. Might as well refill those, too, while I'm at it.

Bullets were easily purchasable in the game, but that was probably pretty hard in this world. Making them myself would be best. It was amazing her machine guns hadn't broken in two hundred years, though... I suppose it should've been expected, given how Mizar made them.

"Write down all the bullets and weapons you are short of on a piece of paper. We will create them later."

"I am grateful."

Libra's Brachium opening was so strong she didn't use bullets all that much. But having them and not using them was much better than needing them and not having them. I decided on making sure Libra was at full combat readiness.

Aries' turn was next.

"Did anything happen on your end?"

"..."

"...Aries?"

"Ah, no! Nothing that I would bother you with happened to me, Miss Lufas..."

Hm, looks like nothing's up on Aries' end. That pause was a little weird, but well, everybody sinks into thought every once in a while.

I'll just be happy that there aren't even more things to worry about at the moment.

"Then We are last. This side of the capital has enshrined a statue of us, of all people, in a temple. That just gives those people on the white side unneeded incentive... I believe we are just counting down the days until war."

"My, what a nice town this is."

"Master, I suggest we fully support the black town if war were to break out."

"I think that's a good idea."

“... You all are...”

I told them of one of the problems of this side of the capital, and this idiot trio’s affection for the place shot up for some reason. *Like, stopping the war in the first place would be best, right? I don’t think we should be taking sides in this at all.*

I mean, we’d probably win...

I did some light research on the average levels in this place, and they’re around level 50 at best. No matter how many tens or hundreds of thousands of them were around, any one of us could take them on. *Well, I’m not sure about Dina, though.*

But if we did that, I’d just be sliding back into being the Great Conqueror whom everyone feared. I’d be wanted all over the world by the next day.

While I was busy thinking on how to prevent war, Dina coolly made a suggestion. “Jokes aside, wouldn’t it be okay to just leave them alone? Merak should be the one solving this country’s problems. I don’t believe you should concern yourself with this, Miss Lufas. Let them clean up their own mess.”

Well, given my position, there really was no need to go so far out of my way to stick my nose into this country’s business. After all, I’m a villain in this world’s eyes anyway.

Even I can understand that if I’m too careless things’ll get messy.

“Dina, doing that will break the balance that has been upheld by the three remaining heroes and invite an attack from the devilfolk. Allowing the Devil King’s forces to gain even more momentum will not be good for us... At the very least, the remaining heroes must be available to hold back the devilfolk for us until we gather the rest of us Twelve Heavenly Stars and regain our former power.”

Ohh, Libra’s making some good points for once. She’s kind of making it sound like we’re profiting while others fight, but it’s still better than Dina’s idea of just leaving them to their business.

My good impression was shattered almost immediately.

“So I suggest we side with the black town, sweep away the white faction, and unite the country. This current state where the country is split down the middle is not favorable, and they are just getting in each other’s way. It would be best to solve this quickly. Also, with the black faction in control, Gjallarhorn can become a pawn for Master Lufas later down the road.”

Hey, Libra, are your insides just pitch-black or something? So basically, you’re suggesting that the white town is in the way so we should just make them disappear and that later we can have Merak and the Devil King crush each other, right?

You’re right that rather than having both sides hold each other back, having one side take control and unify the country will make it much harder for the devilfolk to attack. But isn’t what you’re suggesting just too severe?

And as for Aries... Doesn’t look like he’s got any suggestions, huh? He’s never been one for asserting himself anyway. I guess he’s just letting us take care of it.

But what should I do? Dina and Libra’s suggestions were too cold and unfeeling, but they did have a point.

But I couldn’t bring myself to destroy an entire town as I was now. I couldn’t become that heartless, and at the very least, I didn’t have any personal grudge against Merak or this country.

I just wanted to pluck out that Jupitarr person and that devilfolk guy, Jupiter, from the equation and leave the rest to Merak.

“...Right now, it is as Libra said. Having this country and Merak fall to ruin would be bad for us. But still, We do not desire to choose one side and eliminate the other. At any rate, we must first find Jupiter and Jupitarr and capture them. If all goes well, we may be able to stop this civil war. ...Actually, aren’t those two just the same person?”

“Yes, it would make sense.”

Given the circumstances, Jupiter and Jupitarr are most likely the same person. At least, I think so.

It seemed like Dina agreed, and both Libra and Aries nodded.

First, concerning Jupiter: if he hadn't been stopped by Libra, then given the direction he was moving in, there was a high chance he would have encountered Dina from what I was hearing. And Dina tailed a suspicious figure that passed by the front of the clock tower (apparently his name was Laide or something), gaining information about a plot to start a civil war and a man named Jupitarr.

So I put two and two together. Jupiter wasn't heading for the clock tower but past it, towards the secret meeting place that Dina had stumbled upon. Also, the suspicious guy claimed that Jupitarr wasn't there at the appointed time. So it was easy to conclude that he was forced to be absent due to encountering Libra and being forced to retreat.

And to wrap it all up, there was Jupiter's disguise. When Libra first spotted him, he had apparently changed the color of his skin to pretend to be human. It was actually almost too obvious.

I guess we can just straight-up decide that Jupiter = Jupitarr.

There was no merit for any human in driving this place to civil war in the first place. What would someone have to be thinking to take down one of their own guardians when their world was on the brink of collapse?

But if it was Jupiter, one of the devilfolk who was just disguised as a human, everything would make sense.

"All right, let us first concentrate on capturing Jupiter. This situation should change for the better if we manage to take him."

"Am I not allowed to kill him?"

"Bring him back alive if at all possible. We want to drag him out in public as evidence."

It didn't sound good, but I figured that a scapegoat would be needed to stop this atmosphere of two sides rushing headlong into civil war. If I were to try to stop them now, it probably wouldn't work. It was hard to admit to making a mistake, especially on a national level. This was one of those situations where you just couldn't afford to back down. But if it was all the fault of a third party, then it was possible to foist all the responsibility onto them.

'We were all just being manipulated. Now, let's all shake hands and get along...' Like that.

It was a method that had been used to death in manga and novels and stuff. Basically, just make one person into an easy bad guy and frame it so that everything was their fault.

It's not really a good thing to do, but well...

"Understood... Order to capture alive confirmed."

"However."

"...?"

"Your own safety is top priority. If attempting to capture him alive should ever become dangerous, We rescind our order. —If you judge it to be too dangerous, We do not mind if you kill him. Of course, We also give you permission to run."

I gave Libra and the others permission to kill easily, surprising even me.

The thing I valued most in this world was their lives. I had nowhere to go, and Dina, Libra, and Aries were as close as I had to family in this place. So I didn't hesitate to give them permission. I'd rather have them kill others than let them die.

My morals have gotten warped, haven't they? Just where did my old faint-of-heart self go? The one that used to not even be able to look at the carcass of a small animal?

"Be at ease, my master. I did not lie about my probability of winning. As long as I am properly prepared, someone like Jupiter can be easily captured."

"How reliable. Then We shall endeavor to raise your probability of winning as much as possible and craft some ammunition."

Let's trust Libra on this one for now. She'd said she could do it, so I needed to believe her. At the moment, she was the only one who knew what the enemy looked like, so I had to leave it to her anyway.

"..."

Libra was silently staring at me.

What? Did she still have something to say? Or was she waiting for something from me? *Honestly, if you just stay silent like that I won't be able to figure out anything. Shouldn't you say something? Anything?*

...For now let's just say something random.

"...We hereby order our loyal servant, Libra of the Scales, one of our Twelve Heavenly Stars. Do not die, and fulfill your duty to bring that member of the devilfolk before us. We expect much from you."

Libra answered like she'd been waiting for it this entire time.

"YES, MY MASTER!"

Apparently she really was just waiting for my order.

Would she have continued to stand there forever if I didn't order her? *I really don't understand her personality at all...*

* *

What a strange situation this had become.

While I concentrated on using Alchemy to craft bullets and weapons for Libra, I heaved a sigh.

All I wanted to do in this country was meet Merak, one of the Seven Heroes, and determine whether or not he was the same as me inside. As long as I managed that, I'd planned to get out as soon as possible, but I guess things just weren't that convenient.

They were one step away from civil war even without me stepping in. If I left them alone, they'd self-destruct.

And that was bad. What was bad about it? If the country imploded and Merak got killed, humanity would have lost one of its protectors and been pushed even closer to the brink.

And the reason for this war was half my fault. I couldn't just ignore this.

Basically, two hundred years ago when Merak defeated Lufas, the white wings and colored wings who had started to get along split into two distinct and opposing factions. And now they were about ready to go at it at any time.

...Yeah, uhh, this is no good.

Anyway, first, I need to do something about this situation.

I'd asked Libra to capture that devilfolk leader, Jupiter, but it would be better for me to do what I could before that happened. And the most obvious thing to me was to have Merak actually do something about both sides.

Honestly, this was the best, least-troublesome solution. Especially since some part of the blame lay with him, in my opinion. So if I spurred him into action somehow, it shouldn't be impossible to stop this civil war before it started.

But I was a famous villain, and the people of this country lived long lives, so they totally remembered me. I mean, they had a statue up and everything. That meant boldly walking in through the front door was out of the question.

But going in covered in a robe was also bad. I'd just be suspicious anyway. If that were the case, then maybe I should try cross-dressing like I'd thought of earlier.

I can do something about the clothes with Alchemy. First, I tied my hair up behind my neck and used fake glasses to hide my face. I wore a black hat to change the impression I gave. Then I bound my chest tightly and put on a white shirt. *Black should be a fine color for the pants.*

Lastly, I wore the usual red mantle over everything and hid my wings with the stealth bandages.

"Hmmm... We just need to do something about this way of speech..."

I checked myself out in front of a mirror I created.

Hm, it's kind of... It's weird saying this about myself, but even if I cross-dress I still come off kinda girly since I was originally super pretty. My face is still a little too pretty to be a man's. Maybe a fake beard...? No, a beard would be too unnatural for this face.

If I'd known this was going to happen I would have taken the Strider's disguise ability... It was a fun skill that let people change their appearance for a while.

Damn! I had ignored the skill since you needed to pay for it on top of it being dead useless in most cases, but it would have been really good here.

And most importantly, there was my speech pattern. Even if I tried, it just didn't want to budge. It was as if something inside me was resisting. My speech pattern was stubbornly set in place.

It's too bad, but I guess I have no choice but to pretend to be mute.

"May I come in now, Master Lufas?"

"Yes, you may."

While I was posing in front of the mirror, Libra opened the door and entered.

It didn't really matter, but I was currently in my private room at the inn. Surprisingly, this inn had a private room inside the larger room we were renting.

No, don't just say that's normal. It's pretty rare for this world.

So, I was currently using that room to try on my disguise.

At first, Libra wanted to help me change, but I rejected that. I could just imagine the weird clothes she'd put me in if I left it to her. It was scary.

"How is it, Libra? Does it suit us?"

"Anything you wear always suits you, Master Lufas. However, at the risk of sounding rude, I will opine that the way you look will probably excite any homosexual men."

"...So you mean I'm not manly?"

"You are manlier than Aries."

She really doesn't pull any punches, does she? Well, it's better than being weirdly considerate.

Actually, Aries says pretty much whatever he wants, too, and Dina's also similarly free. Could it be? Do all of my subordinates just not know what tact is?

"If I were to suggest something, I would say that you should wear sunglasses rather than glasses."

"Understood. That sounds like it would work."

True, my face was well-known. Just glasses might not have been enough. *Let's make sunglasses later.*

“Also, We have finished transmuting your supplies. They are over there, so take what you like.” I pointed to a corner of the room.

“You have my thanks.”

Libra bowed before walking over to where I’d left the weaponry I’d made for her. Then, after some clattering noises, she stored everything somewhere within her body.

...No, wait a second. How did you just do that? There was clearly more there than would ever fit in your body...

“My probability of capturing Jupiter has now risen. The next time we meet will be his last,” Libra said, sounding really reliable.

I do feel like this is raising some sort of flag, but I can’t think of any reason why she would lose.

Considering the member of the Seven Luminaries (lol) I’d fought before, Jupiter should only be around level 300. Libra’s attribute countered him, too. Libra should win by a landslide.

Let’s just leave Jupiter to Libra for now. I should figure out how to get to Merak. And I could get Aries and Dina to go investigate the extremists or something. I’m kind of curious how big the white-wing faction’s ‘volunteer army’ is anyway.

“By the way, Master Lufas, I have not seen Dina for a while now. Do you know where she might be?”

“? Can you not figure that out using your sensors?”

“No, she is not within 100 km of our current location. I can only surmise she is somewhere outside of this country,” Libra said, sounding puzzled.

Something came to me. “Ah!” I lightly smacked my fist onto my open palm. She’d probably just used teleportation magic to go back to the tower.

Oh right, Libra doesn’t know Dina can use teleportation magic.

“You need not worry. She can use teleportation magic. She’s most likely returned to the tower to raise money or something.”

“Teleportation magic... Could that be Exgate?”

“Hm? No. Come to think of it, We have not heard any specifics on it.”

“That is surprising. Is there some sort of spell other than Exgate for teleportation in this day and age?”

I felt a light headache coming on after hearing what Libra said.

What is it...? I feel like something's wrong...

...No, that's not important right now. But I do understand Libra's surprise.
After all, two hundred years ago teleportation magic didn't exist.

Ahh, right. No such convenient magic existed in Exgate Online.

There were many ways to travel in the game. There was a way to instantly get to a different location, of course, but that was just fast travel—immediately switching from one map to another. In the game, you were still treated as having traveled there normally. The only exception was Exgate. But once again, the word only ever appeared in lore. No one could actually obtain it as a skill.

Then that would make Dina's 'teleportation magic' either Exgate or some new spell that had appeared over the last two hundred years.

But why was this...? Why did I only remember something like this now? Why had I just accepted it like it was only natural?

“Master Lufas?”

“! A-Ahh, right. Now that We think about it, Dina never told us what it was. Let us ask her when she returns.”

Now that I think about it, I don't actually know much about Dina at all.

It was certain that she had been a background NPC in the game, but in terms of information, that was near nothing. She was neither a golem I'd taken an active hand in creating, like Libra, nor a monster that I'd tamed, like Aries.

I don't really... No, I really don't like the idea of it, but we might need to have a talk once she comes back.

* * *

“Dammit... That golem's way too good...”

Jupiter was tending to his wounds in a forest quite a distance away from town while spouting insults and profanities.

It had all been going perfectly up until now. He'd named himself Jupitarr and succeeded in inciting those idiots in the white town to leading a civil war. All that was left to do was have the black and white sides destroy each other and then kill Merak once his country was destroyed.

Of course, he's still one of the Seven Heroes. Even with the Mark of the Vanquished, it probably won't be easy to kill him. But as long as I can get his guards away from him in the confusion of the fighting, I'm confident that I can.

Most importantly, Merak's best at borrowing the power of the earth element. With my wood element, I'm at an advantage.

Jupiter was currently 500 km away from the town he came from.

I don't know how wide that golem's detection range is, but in the legends she'd keep chasing even if the target was over 100 km away. There's even a story about how she sniped someone 200 km away.

So just to be extra cautious, Jupiter had moved away several times that distance and even gone so far as to hide himself in a forest. Although it was a little troublesome to go that far, it was a distance that Jupiter could cover quickly.

Still, things have gone really pear-shaped. As long as that golem's there, I'll probably get found out if I get even a little closer to that place. And unfortunately, I have no way to beat her in a fight.

Goddammit. Just why did this have to happen...?! No, I know why. It's because Lufas Maphaahl is here.

But why NOW?! How did she manage to come at the worst time, like she was aiming for this moment? The timing was so perfectly horrible Jupiter almost suspected someone else was pulling the strings.

Fuck me. Just what is that asshole doing? Didn't she get assigned to watch Lufas just so stuff like this wouldn't happen?

"Oh my. You seem worse for wear."

Jupiter heard a voice laughing merrily. The look that Jupiter sent in the direction of the voice could've killed. On the receiving end of that glare stood the very same being Jupiter had just been berating internally, hiding her mouth behind her hand as she laughed happily.

She had blonde hair like moonlight that reached down to her thighs. And her face was almost too perfect.

Wearing a pure white robe, Jupiter's enigmatic colleague strode towards him.

She was Venus, one of the Seven Luminaries—a devilish being in the form of a beautiful girl who presided over the metal element. Her skin color was an almost-clear white, but it was just camouflage. She looked nothing like a devilfolk.

Our great leader who rules the Sun attribute brought her in and said that she's a proper devilfolk, but I still find her suspicious. For some reason, our leader seems to fully trust her. She just gives me the creeps.

"You... How dare you pop up now, of all times."

"Oh my. How scary. I don't like you when you're mad."

"Shut up! Why didn't you come to support me?! And Lufas Maphaahl is here! Why didn't you stop her? At least report it! It's thanks to you that I'm like this!"

"Oh? So you're going to put it like that. You realize I was waiting at our agreed-upon spot for ages? Not only did you keep a lady waiting, but you completely stood her up after you promised a date. You're a failure of a man."

It was clear Venus was taunting him with her obvious fake-crying. Jupiter glared at her with an expression of such hatred it seemed like his teeth would grind into dust. But Venus didn't seem to care; she just kept on going shamelessly.

"You know I was planning to report to you? You're the one who never showed up."

"Grk! ...Th-Then why did you just let them come here?! Couldn't you have stopped them?!"

"As if someone like me could stop the famous Great Conqueror. Don't ask for

the impossible. The best I can do is watch where she's going."

Jupiter clicked his tongue loudly enough for Venus to hear in response to her excuses.

She's always like this. She just dodges all my questions, slippery as an eel. I really can't stand her.

"But I do feel guilty about this. That's why I came to help you tonight."

"What? Help?"

"Yes, help. She's in the way, right? That golem, I mean. I can keep her at bay, if only for a little while."

Jupiter looked doubtful after hearing her proposal.

The proposal itself was like a gift from the heavens, a saving grace. In fact, Jupiter currently had no other option than to rely on it.

"...Can you really do it?"

"Definitely. For twenty minutes at most."

"... Twenty minutes..."

Twenty minutes... How short.

But I could make a round trip in that much time if I got right up to the edge of her detection range. Then I can go there, attack the white town at random, and then tell those idiots that the black town is attacking. Once I do that, they'll just kill each other on their own.

As for Merak... I think I'll just have to let Merak live for now.

I'll settle for destroying the country, and then I'll just wait for Lufas and her party to go away. Even they'd lose interest and leave if the country were no longer there. Lufas may be the enemy of us devilfolk, but she should also be the enemy of the Seven Heroes... She'll definitely leave.

I can just figure out a way to assassinate Merak after that.

"Understood. ...Don't you dare fail. Also, use this magic stone for the signal."

"A wind attribute magic stone?"

“That’s right. If you use this, I’ll get the message. Got it? Make sure you don’t screw up!” Jupiter pushed the stone into Venus’ hands before sitting back down.

Venus, with nothing more to say, left silently with a smile plastered on her face filled with contempt and disdain for Jupiter.

* *

It was nighttime now. After a short day which seemed to go on forever, I was currently lying down on a bed thinking.

Aries had already gone to sleep, and Libra was standing in a corner of the room, as always. *...She doesn’t even twitch, so it really does seem like she’s just decoration. But I’m sure she’ll move if something happens.*

Having Merak take action is probably the best way to solve all of this town’s problems. But Merak’s the king of this country. It’s not going to be easy to make contact. I could probably sneak in without being noticed, but that’s a far cry from a peaceful method.

I kept repeating this, but I wanted to stay away from any and all turmoil.

So, the question is how I get in touch... Really, I have no idea what to do.

Libra had detected someone who seemed like Merak, but they just wouldn’t move from the castle. *Do your damn job, Sky King. Or do you plan on throwing away your title of Sky King for the title of Idle King?*

“...I’m baaaack... Huh? ...Is everyone asleep?”

As I was gradually turning into a useless decoration that couldn’t come up with any solutions at all, my skilled advisor returned, opening the door and sneaking in.

I supposed giving a greeting, even if in a whisper, made her very polite, in a way.

I had something I wanted to ask Dina about. Libra was also signaling me by moving her eyes slightly, suggesting that now was the time to confront her. But I silently shook my head, denying her suggestion since Aries was asleep right now. It probably wasn’t important enough to wake him up. It could wait until

tomorrow.

“—So, we will now start the interrogation of the accused.”

“Everything you say will be added to my memory banks, so please feel free to spill everything.”

“Huh? What?”

It was the next day.

Libra and I captured Dina, who’d crawled her way out of bed seeming awfully carefree. We cornered her behind a table and surrounded her so she couldn’t get away.

I honestly felt like it was about time we took a scalpel to the mysteries around Dina and figured out the truth. She was too talented to just be a former background NPC. She could use teleportation magic, too. It was like she was just asking us to suspect her.

It could have only been that her presence was just so weak that we never noticed her abilities, but I couldn’t imagine that was right.

Put bluntly, she was in no way weak. In fact, she was strong. I just couldn’t believe that she had ever faded into the background looking at her now, but that might also be because she had changed.

If this were the game, I’d get it. *If* this were the game, that was. But, no. This was reality, and Aries and Libra were here, too. Apparently Libra was missing some of her memory data, but it was pretty strange for Aries to have forgotten her.

“Starting off: Dina, as for the teleportation magic you use, is that Exgate?”

“I have heard your claim that you cannot use it on others ‘unless they give you their permission.’ That coincides with one of the usage conditions of Exgate.”

“Ah, yes. It’s Exgate.”

...

Hey, she just admitted it outright.

No, wait. Now that I think about it, there really wasn't a reason to hide that fact. In fact, she wasn't really hiding it at all.

It was a rare technique, but apparently someone else used it to summon me here, too. *If that low-level elf guy could use it, then, well... Yeah. I'm feeling stupid for interrogating her about it.*

"Uhh, next. Tell the truth. Just what are you? We do barely remember you from two hundred years ago, so at the very least you are no human, right? But you don't have the characteristics of an elf, heaven-winged, or vampire, either..."

"I'm just a half-elf?"

"..."

...Ahh, right... There were half-races, weren't there?

If she's mixed between a human and an elf, well, it makes sense that she has the appearance of a human but the lifespan of an elf.

You couldn't make half-races in the MMO, could you? ...This is also totally my mistake.

"The reason for all your talents..."

"I trained really hard these past two hundred years so that I wouldn't blend into the background! I'll say it again. I am not the background!"

"..."

Okay, so it was so important you wanted to say it twice. I understand.

What now? I ran out of things to ask her.

Dina seemed somewhat proud of the fact that she'd evaded all our questions perfectly.

I looked over at Libra, hoping for help, but she simply made an X sign with her arms.

I guess this interrogation is over. It's our loss. She's innocent.

Hmm. Was I just thinking too much? I guess that headache might have just been a random headache without any meaning.

Oh, no. Aren't I acting really shamefully?

Actually, I could just do that. I could have just used Observing Eye. Why did I never think to use this on her until now? ...That's weird, even to me.

【Dina】

【Level】: 300

【Race】: Half-Elf

【Class Levels】

▪ Acolyte: 100

▪ Priest: 100

▪ Mage: 100

【HP】: 11000

【SP】: 9800

【STR (Strength)】: 650

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 1000

【VIT (Vitality)】: 683

【INT (Intelligence)】: 3850

【AGI (Agility)】: 900

【MND (Mind)】: 2967

【LUK (Luck)】: 643

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Oh, what? You're actually strong, Dina.

She didn't match up to the Twelve Heavenly Stars or me, but she could totally fight evenly against the Seven Luminaries.

...I'm still feeling like I'm missing something important, though.

While I was thinking, Dina glanced over at a pendulum clock that was hung on the wall. She spoke up as if she'd just remembered something.

“Ah, right. I just thought of something. I can teleport Libra anywhere with my teleportation magic.”

“Hm? So it is impossible for us but possible for Libra?”

“Yes. Inorganic objects aren’t subject to Exgate’s restrictions. Otherwise, I’d have to take off all my clothes. And since Libra is a golem, I should be able to bring her with me using Exgate.”

The reason why I wasn’t able to travel using Exgate was because somewhere in my heart, I didn’t completely trust Dina. And in truth, I had just been interrogating her because of my doubts, so it would be hard to claim that I trusted her. That would probably be seen as rejection, and I wouldn’t be able to use Exgate.

Dammit. Does that mean if I didn’t harbor any strange doubts I’d be able to teleport?

“We could test it now if you’d like. Using this would be much smoother if we were to test it out several times now rather than having to wing it.”

“Hm... What do you think, Libra? We believe there is value in trying it.”

“...I judge that there will be no problems. Jupiter has yet to approach this area. As long as he does not somehow have a convenient way of sensing that I am gone, the probability that he will use this opportunity to attack is less than 5%.”

Libra herself told me that her maximum sensor range was 150 km. In other words, Libra’s statement meant that Jupiter was at least 150 km away. Then as long as he didn’t attack as soon as Libra left, there would be no problems.

Hm. Well, nothing bad will happen. Probably.

I gave permission for their experiment.

“Ah, right. Then why don’t we take this chance to organize your equipment, Miss Lufas? I wouldn’t be that great at figuring out which ones are useful by myself... Really, I’m just not that knowledgeable about weapons.”

“Understood.”

“Master, it will require around ten minutes. Is that okay?”

“Sure. We do not mind.”

There’s no way Jupiter would just happen to show up in the space of the next ten minutes.

Assured by that thought, I sent the two of them off. Once they had teleported away, I returned to my room and rolled around on the bed.

The time to act will come after the two of them get back. Then we can have a discussion on how to approach Merak.

A scant seven minutes after that, someone attacked the white town and suddenly everything was kicking off.

Wai— Wha—... Really?!

* *

The Sky King Merak’s life was constantly filled with glory and honor.

He was born with good looks, of course, but he also had an excellent sense for heaven-arts. More importantly, his wings were a white so pure they almost shined.

His father was the king of the heaven-winged, and his mother was the queen. He was blessed with anything and everything; his life started at its peak. Others called him the Holy Child of Light Born of the Emperor—and he himself never doubted that his position was above others.

He was special, born to the Emperor and with a large amount of talent on top of that. For those reasons, he believed that he was the most fit to lead others. He was certain that he would be the one to save the people if they were suffering.

But that was nothing more than the road that was laid out for him. It was not something he decided for himself. Ever since he was born, he had never once made a decision on his own.

However, she was different.

Lufas Maphaahl was different.

She was like the mirror opposite of Merak with her taboo black wings. She

had nothing close to glory or honor. A child of ill omen, a demon child, an abominable child—she was referred to as all those things. She had stones thrown at her, and she was constantly showered with looks of disdain. Even her name—Lufas Maphaahl—was taken from the evil demons Halfas and Malphas, who dragged people into depravity. Her original family name was something different, but she wasn't even allowed to have that.

But she never allowed any of that to bury her. Instead, she used it as fuel. She turned the whole world against her, crushed it under her foot, and ridiculed all the heaven-winged, as if saying what small people they were for crying out like that in their tiny village.

She waged war on every country in the world without discrimination, and her acts of absorbing them all into her territory were ironically just like the deeds of the demons she was named after. Everyone shivered, saying that she really was a demon child.

But Merak thought she was blindingly radiant.

The throne Merak sat on had been given to him. It wasn't something he'd taken for himself with his own power, like her throne. Merak's people had been there from the beginning. They weren't like the people who had pledged loyalty to her of their own will. The course of Merak's life had been decided from the moment he was born, unlike her, who'd decided her course for herself.

Those who have, and those who have not. White and black. Light and shadow.

There was no doubt that Merak was more blessed with his surroundings.

However, if one looked closer, they'd find that she had ownership of the world within her grasp, clawing her way up until even the devilfolk couldn't easily lay their hands on her. Before Merak noticed, he was looking up at her.

Could I do that? Could I, after being born with black wings and living in the worst of environments, turn all of that around and climb that far? ...No way. It'd be impossible for me.

She is the true king—one that grasps power no matter what environment they were born in. That makes for a true king.

That was why Merak was consumed by a thought even now.

Every day since he'd defeated Lufas, Merak asked himself something. And he always came up with the same answer.

I'm not fit to be king...

"That is why I'm telling you, Your Majesty. You must show the power of a hero to those uppity filthy-wings and shut them up!"

"No. We should instead exile them from the country."

"The discontent of your citizens is rising. It's because you treat them as equals for some reason that they're so conceited!"

Merak looked at the chirping ministers surrounding him as if this was somehow happening to someone else. *They all place so much importance on the whiteness of wings, but that's outdated. If we keep on like this, the heaven-winged will eventually decline.*

Not only is the overall population of heaven-winged low in the first place, but quite a number of them are born with strangely colored wings. Since the trend is more pronounced in areas with more mana, the mana in the air is most likely the cause of their wings being colored.

If that's the case, the color of one's wings shows how much as well as what kinds of mana one absorbed before they were born. Wouldn't that mean the ones with darker wings would be superior? Isn't the only reason why the heaven-winged's wings are white because we'd been living in a mountain with sparse mana?

Recently, Merak had started to think that way. And if he was right, then that would mean the heaven-winged were running away from their own evolution.

All these people talk big, but the ones with colored wings started living here first. They should've been prioritized in the first place.

Gjallarhorn was originally something Merak founded for those with colored wings who had nowhere else to live. The reason for it was nothing more than atonement for having betrayed Lufas. But in a fit of irony, the "Maiden" Parthenos—one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars who were Lufas' subordinates—occupied the white-winged's hometown.

As a result, Merak had no choice but to accept them. Once he did, they once again gripped the reins of power and quickly started discriminating against and throwing stones at those with colored wings. *It's like nothing's changed at all.*

That was why the white-wings were the ones who were multiplying, and the colored-wings were nothing more than victims.

In that case, Merak should just have told them all off. He should have said they all needed to cut it out.

But Merak understood the feelings of those in the white-winged faction. There was no way long-standing tradition and what was considered common sense in the past could be reformed so suddenly, so Merak found himself wanting to take their opinions into account, at least a little. And the current situation was a result of Merak refusing to take sides.

Both the black and white sides were dissatisfied, losing trust in Merak. The country's delicate peace could blow up at any second.

I'm so incompetent... Merak's answer to his self-imposed question bound him firmly. It all started and ended with self-abuse.

But today, things didn't end like that.

It was time to pay the price for allowing the problems of this country to continue for so long.

A part of the white town exploded. At the same time that the reports started rolling in, Merak realized that civil war was now unavoidable.

* *

Suddenly, bullets of wind rained down on the white town, destroying houses and other buildings. Several people were wounded or crushed under their houses as a result. The white town should have been peaceful but was engulfed in fear and confusion in an instant, becoming a tumult that took over the area.

"It's an attack! Those bastards from the black town are attacking us!"

That was when Jupiter, disguised as a human, started shouting false information. Of course, that attack was something he'd committed himself, but no one else knew that. The people of the white town were already paranoid, so

they wouldn't think it was the doing of anyone other than the black town.

All that was already enough to set off the people of the white town, but a voice reverberated through their heads, striking the final blow.

“Kill them.”

The voice sounded demonic, and just listening to it seemed like it would shave away at one's sanity. It produced more discomfort than nails on a chalkboard by several tenfold, and the voice disturbed the hearts of everyone in the area.

“Kill if you detest them.”

The next moment, they all caught a glimpse of an incarnation of a demon. It had a goat's head on a human body with bat wings growing out of its torso. Its image was exactly that of a demon from myth.

Said form spoke, stirring up the hatred inside them.

“Kill.”

The residents of the white town lost their reason and sanity.

There was the sudden attack, the confusion, and the fear. And then there was the incitement. The demon's invitation seemed to be directly whispering to the hearts of the residents of the white town.

The heaven-winged of the white town—who up until now may have discriminated against the other side but nevertheless toed the line—changed into beings with absolutely evil countenances not unlike demons themselves as they all reached for weapons.

“Kill them.”

“Kill them all!”

“Drive them out!”

The angel's descendants, driven to madness, all shouted in unison as they formed up in rows and columns. There was no discrimination between young and old, male and female. Even the children joined the formation while screaming hateful curses.

There was no longer any sense of reason holding them back.

“Those bastards from the white town are attacking! They’re going to kill us all!”

The black town was in an uproar. They already knew that the white side of town hated them and wanted them gone, but somewhere in their hearts, they didn’t take that seriously. After all, they were the first ones to settle in this country, and the king had said the country was made for them. That was why they thought they were safe.

But there were also people who had expected this to happen. The reddish-black-winged man who Lufas had met, for instance.

See? Look at that. I knew that opportunistic king couldn’t be trusted. He was the one who killed Lufas in the first place and sent us all back down to hell. In the end, he’s just another white-wing supremacist. He’s no different from the others. He looks down on us with disdain.

“Take.”

That was when they all heard a voice.

It was a demon’s whisper which instantly melted away their reason, driving them berserk. The voice spread throughout the black town, magnifying their feelings of anger.

“Take before you are taken from.”

Not wanting to be stolen from was completely natural, something that everyone felt.

Up until now, the people of the black town were always being stolen from and oppressed. They were discriminated against just because of the color of their wings, and simply clung to each other without even a place to live. And as soon as they thought they had gained the ruler they desired in Lufas, she was killed by Merak, and they were once again targets of oppression.

So the question was, would they allow themselves to be stolen from again? Would they just allow things to repeat?

“...We’ll steal from them.”

Someone spat out a curse.

“If they’re going to try to take from us, we’ll take from them instead!”
another passionate voice shouted out from the crowd.

Voices of anger started appearing one by one, matching that fervor.

“We’re at our limit! Enough already! Why is it always us who get treated this way?!”

“Yeah! It makes no sense!”

“Pick up your weapons! Teach them what it feels like to be stolen from! Who cares about that ‘king’?! We’ll take this country from them and make it our own!”

The descendants of angels, filled with the intent to kill, shouted in unison as they grouped up and advanced.

Male or female, young or old—none of that mattered. If they didn’t act now, they wouldn’t be able to protect what they needed to. If they didn’t take, they would be taken from.

There was no longer any thought nor desire for peace. All that these people had were a couple hundred years’ worth of accumulated resentment and anger.

* *

...Oh boy. This is no good.

I was currently looking down on Gjallarhorn from a height only some high-level heaven-winged would be able to reach, lost as to what to do next.

Ahh, yeah. I guess I should say that things have finally gotten started?

Someone’s attack on the white town was the spark that had sent everyone on that side on a rampage, and in order to oppose that, everyone on the black side had gone berserk as well.

I’d be willing to bet this is Jupiter’s doing, though.

To be honest, I felt his timing was too perfect. There was no doubt that he somehow knew that Libra was absent, and that was why he’d attacked. At the same time, I didn’t believe that he’d managed that on his own.

From what I could see, all the citizens on both sides had been affected by the

“Berserk” status ailment. “Berserk” was a status ailment that caused one to lose their sense of reason and enter a state of being controlled by anger. In exchange for their attack power being doubled, they were only able to use standard attacks. It was a truly annoying ailment.

But I didn’t know of any skill that could spread this ailment at such a large scale. If there were, it would be a spell. And it wouldn’t be from the wood element, but the moon element. So, Jupiter, who should’ve been wood-aligned, should not have been able to use it.

Could it be? Could the moon element of the Seven Luminaries be here, too?

At any rate, I should go back down and talk about this with Aries.

I descended towards the ground once more and entered Aries’ room from the window.

Inside, I found Aries deep in thought, making an expression like he was pondering something especially difficult.

“Hey, Aries?”

“Ye-eep?!”

Aries seemed to have been really deep in thought. When I called out to him, Aries jumped like a foot into the air.

To be able to sink that deep into thought even with all this ruckus? Just how carefree is he? I suppose that’s just a sheep for you.

“Why are you so surprised? We have been examining the situation from the air. They are all affected by Berserk. It seems like there is someone else here who wants to crush this country other than that devilfolk, Jupiter.”

“I...see.”

“For now, We will attempt to find that devilfolk man. What will you do?”

“...May I ask you a question before that, Miss Lufas?”

While I was considering what sort of action to take next, Aries turned to face me with a serious expression for some reason. Judging from his expression, he was worrying about something or other.

I decided that I should at least listen to what he wanted to ask.

“It is fine. Speak.”

“Thank you. That’s...uhhh... Supposing that one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars were involved in all of this... What would you do, Miss Lufas? This is assuming that they’re doing this out of loyalty for you.”

“We would stop them even if We have to punch them back to their senses, of course. Then We would praise them afterwards. Loyalty is a fine thing, but We do not wish to see a country destroyed.”

I have no idea why he asked that... No, wait. Is one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars actually involved? At any rate, Aries’ expression got a lot calmer when I answered, as if his worries were all solved.

Huh? Wait, is there really another one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars here?

“Thank you, Miss Lufas. Thanks to you, I know what I must do.”

“Hey, wait a second, Aries. Could there really be...?”

“It’ll be fine. Just leave it to me! I’ll go give him a good punch and stop him!” Aries sounded cheerful, and he left in a hurry without even listening to what I had to say.

Ah, one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars is totally involved.

I hurried to give chase, but the roads were filled with Berserk heaven-winged. They were all in the way, and I couldn’t tell where Aries had gone. I had totally lost sight of him.

“...! Agh, such a handful!”

I didn’t like admitting it, but Aries was on the weaker side among the Twelve Heavenly Stars. Put bluntly, if he were to fight against the other members, he would lose to pretty much all of them.

If Libra were the one going off, I wouldn’t have to worry about her since she’d win straight out against over half of the Twelve Heavenly Stars. In fact, I’d have to worry about whomever she was fighting. But Aries was different. If his opponent were Leon the “Lion” or someone like that, Aries would be in serious trouble. And he’d still lose against most of the others, too.

Considering the ability to spread the Berserk status, the member of the Twelve Heavenly Stars this time would have to be... *Aigokeros*. He was one of the better opponents to be matched up against, but Aigokeros would still be a little much for Aries to handle.

“Aries... Don’t be rash!”

This country can come afterwards. I feel sorry for Merak, but taking care of my own is more important to me.

* *

Looking down at the country that was being taken over by confusion, pandemonium, and madness, Jupiter laughed, satisfied.

An accident occurred in the middle when Lufas Mapphaahl stopped by the country, but everything still turned out fine somehow. Now, the country is finished. All that’s left is to have Aigokeros continue to agitate everyone, and the people of this country will probably just kill each other.

It’s too bad I can’t kill Merak, but I can just find a chance to do that in the future. At any rate, he’s now a king without a country. There’s no doubt the opportunities to kill him will only increase from now on.

Not to mention, there’s still the chance that Aigokeros will just go on to kill Merak now. After all, he’s one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars... He’s more than strong enough to kill Merak in his weakened state.

“At any rate, my role in this is done. Now then, I need to hurry up and leave before that piece of junk comes back—”

“—Before who comes back?”

“!?!?”

As soon as Jupiter heard the voice behind him, he started preparing for a fight.

There was no way he wouldn’t know that voice. There was no mistaking it. After all, that was the very voice of the one Jupiter most feared at the moment—the one he never wanted to meet.

Jupiter turned around, and his expectations were not betrayed even if he’d

wanted them to be. There, he saw an inorganic girl dressed as a maid. She was one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars under the Great Conqueror, Lufas. She was the one with the greatest power of annihilation—the constellation of the Scales.

—She was Libra of the Scales, one of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars.

“Wh-Why...?!”

Why is she back? Jupiter only barely managed to shove that question back down his throat.

That golem shouldn't have been able to come back for twenty minutes. I know I took some time moving around and inciting this war, but I should still have had some time. So why is this thing here?!

There was only one reason Jupiter could think of.

Damn that Venus. She failed, didn't she...!! She might have been exposed, or something unexpected might have happened.

Jupiter didn't know why Libra was back so early. But what he did know was that his plans here had now completely failed, all because he couldn't avoid encountering this killer maid for a second time.

“Jupiter, one of the devilfolk's Seven Luminaries. I have already grasped all of your fighting habits, data, and your alignment in the previous battle. If we were to engage in battle now, your chances of victory would be lower than 0.02%... I strongly suggest that you surrender. I will warn you that if you do not comply, there is a 48% probability that you will end up losing one of your limbs.”

On top of everything, there's this, too.

This golem learns all of her opponent's habits and weaknesses during battle, and it all carries over to the next fight. In other words, if you fight her even once, the same tactics won't work a second time. No, they'll probably still work. But she'll definitely have prepared a countermeasure.

Jupiter's elemental matchup with her was the worst. He was clearly disadvantaged in levels, and Libra had learned from their previous fight on top of that.

This situation was the worst thing that could have happened to Jupiter.

“GODDAMMIIIIIITTTT!!”

Jupiter accelerated using wind magic, tracing impossible trajectories in the air. He was using his extremely agile flight ability with wind, which had shaken off Libra once before.

However, Libra’s gaze moved ahead of Jupiter himself, as if she already knew where he was going to go.

“I have already seen that.”

A streak of light then flashed from Libra’s eyes, piercing through Jupiter’s shoulder.

“Gah?!”

“Target enemy: offensive ability down 15%. Reaction speed: down 20% due to pain. Continuing attack.”

Libra continued on to the next attack without a moment’s delay, targeting Jupiter, who was groaning in pain. She pulled a machine gun from the usual unknown space in her body and fired wildly!

Jupiter reacted and tried to dodge, but all the bullets she fired followed after him.

“Wha—!?!”

“These are homing bullets that my master prepared for me. You will not escape them.”

The bullets chased him at high speed. That in itself was fine. The homing bullets used by the Archer’s higher class, the Gunner, may have been rare in this day and age, but several did exist. But the bullets had been made by the Great Conqueror and were used by one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars. Their speed, accuracy, and power were all on another level.

The bullets grazed his clothes, pierced his arms and legs, and robbed him of his power to fight.

Even so, Jupiter managed to make the sudden decision to cloak himself in

wind, causing a tornado and deflecting all the bullets.

Jupiter managed to gain a moment's respite. But the sight of Libra charging into the tornado from straight above right afterwards caused his expression to freeze on his face.

"I predicted that, too."

Libra had an iron fist, literally. She used her incredible strength to swing down a fist made of steel at Jupiter.

Reacting in an instant, Jupiter blew himself away with his own wind, and Libra's fist just barely grazed his cheek.

...It should have just grazed me.

But Jupiter flew towards the ground right afterwards, as if he was a meteor.

Assaulted by a tremendous impact and pain through his cheek, Jupiter busted through houses. All failed to stop him as he continued to slide along the ground, gouging it out for several tens of meters before finally, miserably, coming to a stop.

I should have dodged that punch. It should have just grazed me. But it still carried all this power. And I took all this damage.

Jupiter turned pale and started imagining the worst.

...If I hadn't managed to dodge that, my entire head would have been pulped.

"I will warn you once more. With that attack, your reaction speed has gone down a further 11%, and your current chances of victory have lowered to 0.00072%. I strongly advise you to cease any further resistance and surrender immediately."

Libra's declaration was entirely devoid of emotion. There was no mercy, no compassion, not even any anger towards her enemy.

To Jupiter, that was scarier than anything else in the world at the moment.

* * *

"Miss Lufas!"

As I was running and trying to dodge the crowd, Dina jumped out from the

side of the road. *She should have teleported away with Libra. They must have finished organizing my equipment.* However, Libra was nowhere to be seen.

I matched her speed and asked her about it. “Dina, that was quick. What happened to Libra?”

“If you’re looking for Libra, she flew off somewhere as soon as we got back. It seems she sensed Jupiter.”

After hearing my suspicions confirmed, I nodded.

Just as I feared. Jupiter was pulling the strings behind everything that had happened tonight. He was making his final move.

But unfortunately for him, Libra had come back. If Libra was already on it, then there was no need for me to do anything on that front at any rate. Right now, I needed to do something about Aries and the other member of the Twelve Heavenly Stars he was trying to punch into compliance.

“Where’s Aries?”

“He went off somewhere without heeding our calls to stop. It seems that one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars is involved in all this.”

“One of the Twelve Heavenly Stars...?”

Dina and I jumped onto a roof. Then, we continued to leap around, looking for Aries.

“It depends on the opponent, but facing off against one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars is dangerous for Aries. We must go and stop the fight.”

“Understood. I’ll help.”

We continued jumping here and there, searching for Aries.

Aggh, I’m terrible at searching and hunting for stuff. It’s times like these that I start to feel jealous of beastfolk.

* *

Jupiter ran. He escaped through the complicated maze of buildings, attempting to evade Libra’s gaze by traveling through back alleyways.

I need to get to someplace smaller, narrower! A place where I won’t be found!

However, Libra cut him off. Buildings were destroyed as she descended and landed in front of him. And without delay, she fired! Several hundreds or even thousands of bullets zipped through the urban area accompanied by a clamorous, thunderous sound.

“Dammit!”

Jupiter ran and jumped into a house, looking almost as if he fell into it.

I just need to hide! I need to hide and regroup.

Out of breath, Jupiter continued to run before reaching a cabinet and grabbing the handle. However, Libra broke through the wall the next moment, scattering pieces of the cabinet everywhere.

“Graaggh!!”

Jupiter attempted to unleash wind magic. But Libra was faster, and she swung her left arm upwards. That was when Jupiter lost all feeling past his elbow, and his arm fell to the floor.

Her blade of light flashed. Libra had completely predicted Jupiter’s counterattack and cut off his arm instead.

“Warning. Your attack power has lowered a further 39%. Your chances of winning are currently—”

“Fuck!! Fuck!!”

Jupiter started to run once more, even while bleeding profusely from his arm’s stump.

No good. Fighting’s no use. I can’t win against that.

Our worlds are completely different. That thing’s strength is on a whole other level. That thing... That thing’s a monster!

However, Jupiter had confidence in his speed as well as his maneuverability.

I can just run. I can run, and then make another plan. There’s no need for me to deal with that ridiculous killer doll. Anyway, I just need to run.

Jupiter flew out of one house and into another.

However, Libra stood elegantly at the entrance of Jupiter’s new hiding place

as if she'd been waiting a long while for him. She even bowed in greeting.

“Warning. The probability of you succeeding in your escape is...”

“W-WWAAAAAH!!”

Jupiter ran once again. He moved through the urban landscape, parting the sea of people he'd driven to madness, and dove into another house. He ran down a hallway and into a living room.

There in the living room he found Libra sitting, relaxed.

“Warning: the probability of you succeeding to escape is lower than 1%. It is strongly recommended that you surr—”

“GODDAMMIIIIIIT!!”

Jupiter ran, turned, jumped, parted crowds, and once again entered another house.

I managed to run away like this before. I used this maze-like town structure and got away. So I'll be fine this time, too, Jupiter continued to tell himself.

He silenced his surroundings with wind magic, making it so Libra wouldn't even be able to hear him breathe.

“Huff ... Huff ...”

While breathing heavily, Jupiter ripped his clothes and wrapped a strip around his shoulder.

Do I have any healing items...? No, I didn't bring any. Jupiter had prioritized being as light and as fast as possible, so he had left all his tools and equipment.

Jupiter leaned back onto a wall and concentrated warily on the window.

...There she is! That doll's walking just outside! Go! Go away! Don't you dare look over here!

Libra stopped in place for a while, but she eventually moved on.

I'm all right. She hasn't noticed me. It doesn't seem she's noticed what I'm doing, either.

Jupiter's heart beat annoyingly fast. He felt sticky with sweat.

One second... *No movement.*

Two seconds... *The house is still quiet.*

Three seconds... *No change from before.*

After reflexively leaking out a sigh of relief, Jupiter relaxed.

—The next instant, two arms burst out of the wall Jupiter was leaning against and hands closed around his neck.

“Ghaghgh! ...Agh...!”

“Using wind magic to silence your surroundings is meaningless. The fact that a town in the midst of this big an uproar has a spot that is unnaturally quiet tells me exactly where you are.”

An emotionless voice eerily reverberated through Jupiter’s eardrums, and Libra’s constriction grew tighter. While he foamed at the mouth, Jupiter’s mind was consumed by fear.

I... I’ll be killed...if things keep going like this...!

So Jupiter made a quick decision. Using the magic power of the wind attribute to forcefully blast his body away, Jupiter escaped from Libra’s demonic grip.

Of course, Libra herself didn’t let go. A large amount of skin was sacrificed from Jupiter’s neck as he ran away, bleeding quite profusely.

Jupiter’s lost skin clung to Libra’s palms. But she didn’t seem affected by that at all as she simply, coldly, turned to look at Jupiter.

“!!!”

Having lost all will to fight, Jupiter looked up at the mechanical doll with eyes like a small animal before he ran away. It was almost like he was being physically repelled from Libra.

However, Libra did not immediately give chase. Instead, one could hear mechanical whirring as her neck shifted slightly.

Then, she followed after him with slow steps, still expressionless.

“Huff ... Huff ... Huff ...!”

Jupiter, who had run into yet another house, sat down and prayed wholeheartedly that he wouldn't be found. Unable to even hide the sounds he was making with wind magic, Jupiter pressed his hand to his mouth and desperately tried to hide his breathing.

I've never prayed to the goddess. But I'll pray now. I'll believe.

Please, Goddess.

Please allow me to run from that thing. Don't let that doll appear in front of me!

Jupiter's teeth wouldn't stop chattering, and his cold sweat wouldn't stop, either.

Aagh. What the hell? I can't stop shaking.

How pathetic... Is this really what one of the feared Seven Luminaries looks like? I'm such a laughingstock... There are real monsters that should be feared, and they aren't us.

We were just people whose egos got too big because they were absent for a while.

Jupiter moved towards a mirror that was standing nearby. His movements were slow, so as to not make a sound, and awkward like a baby's.

Walls are no good. Don't put your back to a wall. It might sprout arms again. Next time, she might just break my bones so I can't escape.

Looking through windows is dangerous, too. She might be there. Use the mirror. Look at the mirror's reflection.

Jupiter's decision was not wrong. It might've even been the best choice, made carefully after considering all other options. His only mistake was that there was no right answer to the problem he was contemplating in the first place.

"—!!!!"

Jupiter looked at the mirror and froze.

—She's here! That doll's reflected in the mirror. She's standing right there! She's already in the house! She's right behind me!!

“...”

“I. Won’t. Let. You. Escape.”

Libra simply mouthed words without speaking. That caused Jupiter to sink even deeper into fear. Her mouth’s movements alone told Jupiter what she wanted to say to him.

“—AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHH!!”



Jupiter broke through the window and fell to the ground outside, paying no heed to his body, which was wounded all over. But he didn't have the leeway to heed his pain. He couldn't stop.

Jupiter ran. He had never been as scared as he was now.

What the hell is that thing? Why does it know where I am so precisely?!

I'm scared. She's terrifying.

That inorganic doll was scarier than anything to Jupiter right now!

"Warning."

"Warning."

"Warning."

As if she were broken, Libra said the same thing every time they met. The only difference was that the probability of Jupiter escaping steadily went down at every new instance.

I'm scared. She's terrifying.

The way she emotionlessly repeats the same thing every single time as she chases me is terrifying.

She'll chase me to the ends of the earth. It's as if she doesn't even know the meaning of exhaustion. She'll keep chasing me forever! But I'm already out of breath!

Jupiter ran to the fountain.

From the water, Libra emerged holding a machine gun.

Jupiter tried to blend into the crowd.

But then someone tapped him on the shoulder, and it was Libra.

Jupiter went to those idiots' meeting place in the white town. There, he entered a hidden underground passageway he had prepared.

But Libra was already standing inside.

Jupiter threw away his pride and hid in a communal dumpster.

But in a mere three seconds, Libra upturned the entire dumpster.

Jupiter hid under a nearby wooden box.

But only a couple seconds later, Libra picked up the box and met eyes with him.

That thing is there no matter where I go. No matter where I run, that thing will chase after me! I can't get away from the doll's gaze. As soon as I round a corner, she's already there! She doesn't even let me out of her sight for more than ten seconds!

"AAAAAAHHHH! AAAAGGGHH! AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHH!!" Jupiter flew away, screaming.

Jupiter put all his power, body, and soul into flying away. That was something he had most likely never done in his life. Jupiter didn't care that his body couldn't bear the burden he was putting on it and was screaming in pain. He didn't care that the wind pressure was warping the good looks he was so proud of.

Hounded by fear, Jupiter simply flew as fast as he could in a straight line. And, having reached his hiding place in the forest that he had been occupying until yesterday—

"—I have been waiting for you. You arrived five seconds faster than my prediction. Recalculating target's speed. Correcting margin of error."

"__"

In that moment, Jupiter's heart became completely consumed by fear and fear alone.

I'm done. I get it now. I can't run... Not from this tracking killer-doll.

There're many legends revolving around the Twelve Heavenly Stars. One of them described the Scales. I hadn't believed it when I read it. Even if it were true, I had still believed I could manage to run.

But I know now. I understand.

The legend said that once you were targeted by the Scales she would chase you without fail, even if you were to run to the depths of hell.

“Warning. It is strongly recommended you cease all resistance and surrender. In a situation with no one else around, I am able to fire Brachium faster than you can run.”

“...Urgh... Ah-aghh...”

“Your chances of winning are at 0%. I repeat. It is strongly recommended that you surrender.”

My legs are trembling. I can't feel my limbs.

I know. I know of the weapon of slaughter that is Brachium. It's the ultimate weapon that will completely destroy anyone under a certain level of strength once fired. No exceptions. It's a sure-to-kill weapon that's synonymous with Libra of the Scales. In the face of that weapon, no amount of defense and no measly trick has any meaning. It'll wipe away everything in an instant.

“If you do not comply with my warning within ten seconds, I will activate Brachium immediately. If you exhibit any behavior that indicates the intention to run or resist, I will also activate Brachium.”

“Wha— Ah... Huh?!”

“Starting countdown... 10... 9... 8...”

“W-Wait! Wait, please!”

“7... 6... 5...”

Libra heartlessly continued counting down. There was no crack in her that would allow any pity, personal feelings, or other emotions to stop her. She simply continued on with mechanic inhumanness. She was simply counting down the ten seconds Jupiter had left until his execution.

Jupiter was caught in the middle of a sea of regret.

I should have just tried to fight in the town. If I did that, I would have at least had a miniscule chance of victory.

However, Jupiter had instead tired himself out running. And as a result, he himself ran to a position that allowed Libra to use Brachium.

Of course, Jupiter had no way of knowing that Libra would not have hesitated

to fire Brachium in town if it came down to that. And even if the countdown was just a bluff, Jupiter wasn't in a calm enough state of mind to be able to sense that.

Now that it's come to this, there's nothing for it. She'll use Brachium before I can run or even try to fight back. And if she uses that, there's no resisting it. I'll definitely die.

That was the only thought that continued to run circles through his mind. Jupiter was convinced that he was already done for.

"4..."

"P-Please. Hey, come on. Wait."

"3..."

"J-Just a little is fine..."

"2..."

"Come on. I'm begging you... P-Please..."

"1..."

"O-Okay! I submit! I surrender! So please, DON'T SHOOOOOOOOT!"

"—... Loss of target's will to resist: confirmed. Suspending use of Brachium."

Jupiter's heart completely broke in the face of inhuman fear. His pride, his sense of self, everything was swallowed up, yielding to the fear caused by that emotionless doll. Jupiter's entire body was soaked in cold, greasy sweat. And his heart was beating wildly while his teeth wouldn't stop chattering.

A dark, wet patch spread from his crotch due to the excessive amounts of fear and despair he felt, destroying any shred of dignity he had left.

At the same time, Libra stopped her countdown.

The outcome of their duel was decided, once and for all.

Jupiter's biggest mistake was that he still came back to the capital even knowing he was being targeted by the doll.

“So you really were here, Aigokeros.”

“—Aries. It’s you.”

Two members of the Twelve Heavenly Stars met once more at the same park as yesterday’s chance meeting. However, the threatening atmosphere and the aura of danger surrounding the two of them couldn’t be compared to that of yesterday. It was precisely because both of them had sworn loyalty to Lufas that they had the resolve to kill one another if the other were to get in their way.

Aries wanted to stop Aigokeros, who was doing something that ran counter to Lufas’ will. Aigokeros wanted to kill the hero, even if that ran counter to Lufas’ will. In order to achieve that, he was even willing to kill Aries.

The two of them, who were the most alike out of any of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, had unshakeable wills. That was why they were able to meet again in the same place.

“You’re the one driving the townsfolk Berserk, aren’t you? Lufas doesn’t want that... Stop right now.”

“From what you said...it seems like you really are here to stop me.”

The sinister aura surrounding Aigokeros got even darker. In response, Aries cloaked himself in rainbow-colored fire.

“Do you believe you can win, Ram?”

“I’m not the same as I was two hundred years ago, Goat.”

Aries’ surroundings were exposed to the heat of Mesarthim, and they wavered as if they were simply a mirage. The water in the park’s fountain evaporated, and the ground was scorched.

Aigokeros’ surroundings were warped and dyed black. Trees withered, and the bugs that flew nearby died, even though they hadn’t touched anything.

“Do you really insist on doing this?”

“This can be easily avoided. You just need to stop.”

“Absurd!”

Aigokeros thrust out his hand.

At the same time, Aries shifted. Right afterwards, the place where he'd stood was struck through by a black pulse. The pulse gouged out the ground, breaking all the buildings in its path. Even then, it didn't stop and continued out of town.

"Heh!!"

Aries jumped and unleashed a kick wreathed in fire.

Aigokeros guarded against it, but even then just the aftershock of the kick created a crater, changing the park into nothing but an empty lot. However, Aigokeros himself was unfazed, and he caught Aries with a counterattack.

"Grgh!?!"

Aries' small body was blown away. Even after busting through several buildings, Aries flipped in the air like nothing had happened and landed on his feet.

Aigokeros jumped after him, slamming another black pulse at Aries from midair.

However, Aries deflected the pulse with a knife-hand. The pulse was deflected off into the air, flew up high, and parted the clouds.

"Haahh!"

Aries jumped, punching at Aigokeros, who reflexively managed to cross his arms in a block.

The atmosphere gave a jolt, as if an earthquake had occurred centered on the two of them. Aigokeros was blown away as if he'd been blasted out of a cannon, and passed through the town, through a mountain, and continued on far away.

And Aries himself was the one who stopped Aigokeros. Aries sprinted past Aigokeros and got in his flight path before kicking him upwards, forcing him to fly into the sky.

Then, Aries leapt. Once again, Aries got out ahead of Aigokeros.

"Take thiiiis!"

Putting both his fists together, Aries unleashed a double sledgehammer!

Aigokeros' head was smashed downwards forcefully, and he returned to the ground. As Aigokeros hit the ground, it caved in and shook, sending the surrounding animals running.

But Aries didn't stop. He created fire and threw it at Aigokeros continuously. The bullets of fire shone in rainbow colors as they bored through the ground, hit Aigokeros, and caused countless explosions.

"...!"

However, an attack like that didn't even seem to cause as much damage as Aries expected.

Several streaks of light parted the smoke, aiming for Aries. One was a high-tier spell of the moon element—"Luna Shooter." It was a highly accurate and highly powerful beam of magical light that shot in a straight line.

There was another high-tier spell of the moon element—"Luna Blast." That spell locked on to three targets at the same time, unleashing black bullets at them.

And there was another super-high-tier spell of the moon element—"Lunatic Rain." The spell sent down a rain of magical light reminiscent of moonlight to annihilate all enemies.

Even more high-tier and upper-tier moon element spells continued to be launched blindly out of the smoke.

However, Aries was moving at the same time he shot fire from his hands, completely avoiding the magic launched by Aigokeros. Aries moved left and right, up and down. Aries never seemed to lose his calm even while his vision must have been swimming with the dizzying patterns of his flight as he slipped through the narrow gaps between Aigokeros' spells.

"Mesarthim!"

Charging in, Aries' form distorted. He went from a small boy to a giant sheep wrapped in flames, and he continued to accelerate. Aries changed into a monster covered in rainbow flames in the blink of an eye, tackling Aigokeros with all his power.

If Lufas were to witness this scene, she might have retorted that this wasn't what that skill was for. At the very least, that way of using the skill didn't exist in the 'game' she was so familiar with.

Aigokeros was blown away with massive force. As one might've expected, that attack hurt, and he let out a low moan. However, he was also one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars. Even while being blasted away, Aigokeros raised his hand towards Aries, unleashing his ultimate skill.

"Deneb Algedi!"

A remarkably large black pulse flew straight forward, engulfing Aries.

The both of them rose up into the air on black and rainbow-colored pillars, having been hit by each other's strongest skills.

A few seconds of silence interrupted the fight.

Aigokeros stood up, breaking the silence.

Then, emerging from the smoke, Aries appeared with his clothes in tatters and his shoulder exposed. They were both damaged. However, it wasn't enough to render either of them incapable of fighting.

"...You're good—just as I expected, Aigokeros. It seems your magic power hasn't declined these past two hundred years, huh?"

"The same goes for you, Aries. You've become quite skilled."

The two of them laughed, having acknowledged each other's abilities. However, this was the battlefield, and they were both enemies.

The two members of the Twelve Heavenly Stars once again charged at their 'enemy' in order to express their loyalty and spirit.



* *

In this world, there existed another underground world named Helheim, which was commonly referred to as hell. That was where Aigokeros was born.

If the skies were where mana was sparse, then underground was where mana was dense.

All the living beings that made their home in the underground world were warped into new, repulsive figures without exception by mana so incredibly dense it couldn't even be compared to the surface. They became exactly like the demons people heard of in myths. The residents of Helheim were beings that had been transformed into evil figures by mana. That was why they were fearfully referred to as demons.

In Helheim, most transformed beings were animals that lived in dark places or caves, and were most commonly spiders, lizards, or bats. That being the case, one might've thought there shouldn't be goats in Helheim, but at least one must have been brought in as livestock by people who'd moved in.

However, there was no way to ascertain the truth of that. After all, there was not a single member of humanity in Helheim. It was likely that there had been some in the past, but that conjecture was only based off of some scant traces that had been found.

In that world, Aigokeros was born as a great demon more powerful than any other. One of his ancestors once ate a mutant bat, so Aigokeros was born with a bat's features—those being the sinister demon wings growing out of his back.

A goat's head, a human's body, and a bat's wings—Aigokeros was a hybrid creature with features of three different beings—no, monsters—that would normally never mix.

He believed that he was the most complete and perfect demon to exist. In the underground world, Aigokeros was a race unto himself. There were no other demons with his features. He was unique. That was why he never doubted that he was the ruler of darkness. Even the devilfolk were immature in his eyes. They weren't truly loved nor polluted with mana.

The devilfolk are just fakes in the first place. They're nothing more than things

made up of intentionally gathered mana. I don't know who made them or for what purpose, but the devilfolk were not born from natural evolution.

The devilfolk are just poorly made imitations that someone created by intentionally collecting mana, compressing it, and using it to ignore divine providence and forcefully birth them. They are all just poor imitations of the Devil King, without exception.

However, that Devil King is also different. There's no doubt he's similar, but I can also feel something holy in him—something that connects him to that abominable Goddess.

That was why Aigokeros didn't believe in 'her' existence.

Her wings were completely pitch-black even though she was one of heaven's people, who were supposed to live as far away from mana as possible. She was colored by mana more dense than even demons experienced, and she forged her own path while rejecting the Goddess' love.

When she saw Aigokeros, she snorted through her nose.

"I see. So this is a demon. I was despised as the cursed child of demons back when I was young, but... I see. They're lighter than I thought."

Light? She probably means in mana.

Aigokeros couldn't refute her. After all, the one in front of him was far too dense.

Just how many devilfolk has she killed? How many monsters has she hunted and eaten?

The mana she was infused with was overly dense enough for Aigokeros to fear her. He could only imagine that she had absorbed the mana of every single thing she had defeated and killed. Her entire body was contaminated with mana.

Living beings are changed by mana. They become monsters. So she must surely be a monster, even while being one of the heaven-winged that are said to be loved by the heavens. She is absorbing mana and is trying to evolve into a different species.

The Goddess surely has a plan for her evolution. But she is ignoring all of that and is trying to change on her own.

I understand now. Even the goddess cannot control this woman. She is the King of Mana, who defies even the will of the Goddess... She is the one worthy of being called the Demon King.

Before he'd noticed, Aigokeros found himself kneeling in front of the Black-Winged Conqueror with his head dipped low.

"...Y-You are... Only you can be my king."

The general fell without even a fight. But Aigokeros did not consider that an embarrassment. To him, things were just as they should have always been.

The definitive disparity between her and Aigokeros—that being their rankings as beings with mana—was what made Aigokeros bow to her as a servant.

And the king, having seen that, simply smiled quietly.

* *

Among the Twelve Heavenly Stars, Aries and Aigokeros' roles were extremely similar.

The things required of these two stars were obstructing the enemy and sowing confusion. Aries achieved that through monster skills, and Aigokeros did so through magic. The two of them were deployed depending on the situation and the enemy, and among the Twelve Heavenly Stars, their statuses were the closest.

The Ram and the Goat—the animals that were their motifs were also very similar. That might have been why it was inevitable that the two of them became close.

However, their personalities were polar opposites. There was the gentle and timid Aries, and then there was Aigokeros, who was brutal and unscrupulous. That difference in personality was directly reflected in the results that were desired from them. If Aries was the one who obstructed the enemy to protect his friends, then Aigokeros bewildered the enemy just to drive them into a corner.

There was no meaning in debating over which one of them was better. To Lufas, they were both undoubtedly helpful in battle. However, the Goat—who excelled at harming his opponents—had the advantage when it came to fighting directly.

“—Grk!”

Aries shot fire out of both of his hands while flying every which way.

Hundreds or even thousands of incorporeal tentacles of darkness chased after him.

The tentacles were a truly troublesome interference spell that not only afflicted stun but also debuffed speed if one was caught by it even once. Aries, who didn't possess any magic to counter it, could only continue to dodge.

If Lufas were the one fighting, she wouldn't have had to care about some debuffs and could have just charged into the mass of tentacles, ripping them apart with her bare hands in order to brute force her way to Aigokeros to hit him. However, Aries couldn't do that.

No. Rather than couldn't, it would be more accurate to say that if Aries did that, he would lose. Lufas, who boasted extraordinary amounts of power, could fight through some obstruction or debuffs easily. However, such things were lethal to Aries. After all, Aigokeros' stats were higher than his. If Aries were to suffer a debuff it would directly lead to his loss.

“WOOAAARRRGHH!”

Aries descended towards the ground and punched it with his burning fist. The earth shook violently, as if the area were affected by a localized earthquake.

Earthquake was a skill which shook the earth and had been taught to Aries by Lufas. It was normally an earth-aligned skill, but it was quite useful, so Aries liked it.

The tentacles stopped all at once.

And in that moment, Aries quickly ran.

Even Aigokeros shouldn't have been able to withstand several of Aries' all-out attacks. So, Aries once again became an avatar of fire as he attempted to

charge at his opponent. The rainbow-colored fire left a trail as Aries flew in a straight line at Aigokeros. Aries thrust his fist forward with all the strength he could muster...and punched through Aigokeros.

“...?!”

I...punched through him?

No... That wasn't Aigokeros.

It was a fake—an imitation, a trap meant to ensnare pitiful prey lured out on a moonlit night. This was one of the moon element's spells—“Shadow”—which used a virtual image to trick the opponent, much like shadows made more prominent in fading light.

If Lufas were present, she might've explained it by saying that it was just a spell that lowered the opponent's accuracy.

“Cra— ...!”

“I've got you...Aries!”

Aigokeros swiftly struck at Aries, who displayed an opening right after his attack.

He used his unique skill “Deneb Algedi,” which condensed moon attribute mana and unleashed it at the user's enemy. Its effect was to inflict large amounts of damage which could not be healed for a set period of time.

Aigokeros put his demon-like arms together, and darkness condensed between his palms.

I can't dodge it, and I can't put my guard up in time. My only choice is to try and withstand it!

“—!”

Aries shut his eyes tight and mentally readied himself to withstand the coming pain.

It's fine. I'll still be able to get up after taking this.

It's going to be harsh since I'll have taken this attack twice. Honestly, it's awful that my evasion skills don't work. But it's not like I have no chance of turning

this around.

“DIEEEEEEEEE!!”

Wait, did he just tell me to die?!

Although that thought occurred to Aries, at the same time he also thought that it was very like Aigokeros.

He really is a demon. Aigokeros normally restrains that side of himself, but whenever he gets excited he has a bad habit of spouting violent lines like that, even towards his friends.

But of course I won't die. I can't. I need to withstand this and think of my next move. But a pair of black wings appeared in front of him at abnormal speed.

“You fool. What would come of killing your friends?”

With a single sentence, muttered exasperatedly, the figure stopped Deneb Algedi with one hand. Black sparks came in torrents, and the ground was gouged out from the aftershock. But the person who'd stopped the blow wasn't fazed at all.

In this day and age, beings who could do something like that to an attack from one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars were in short supply.

One was the God of Creation—an omnipotent and all-powerful goddess no one was sure actually existed.

One was the Devil King—an abominable enemy who led the devilfolk.

One was the Vampire Princess—the strongest of the legendary Seven Heroes, a king of the night who still retained all her strength from the Era of Heroes.

And the last one was—the Black-Winged Conqueror.

“Hah!!”

Along with a loud shout, Lufas struck Aigokeros' strongest skill and dispersed it. Her crimson cloak fluttered, and the scattered darkness spread to the surroundings, leaving behind trails of destruction.

But behind her, Aries was untouched. Lufas had completely defended against the attack.

“Wha—... Y-You are... Ohh, you are...!”

Aigokeros shouted with a trembling voice filled with delight.

As if to respond to his expectations, Lufas untied her hair and removed her glasses, removing her clumsy disguise. Aigokeros’ master was revealed, the very person he had been wanting to see again for two hundred years.

“Mm. We are glad to see you in good health. It has been a while, Aigokeros.” Lufas smiled at her demonic follower and laughed.

She looked exactly like the person Aigokeros swore loyalty to, completely unchanged from two hundred years ago.

In front of Lufas Maphaahl, her loyal servant trembled with joy.

* *

...Just what was my disguise even for...

Hello, I’m Lufas, and I’ve been disguising myself and cross-dressing and whatnot this entire time for no apparent reason.

Haha. Come on, laugh, Prince Vegetable.

I went out disguised and everything, but Aigokeros saw through it with a single look. *But... Well... You know...*

At any rate, I just barely made it. *My hand kinda stings a bit, but it’s no big deal.* I was more surprised by the fact that I’d just punched Aigokeros’ skill away.

I’ll say this clearly. I have no skill that does that.

Basically, my skills tended to be either attacks or self buffs. I figured my Alchemist and Acolyte skills were enough for support. I also felt that anything else I was lacking could be supplied by my party members or one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars. As for heaven-arts, I did have one that would defend against others’ magic, but I never had the free time to use it.

In other words, I simply punched the skill so hard just then that it went away.

This world really isn’t a game, though it’s similar to one. I could do things here that I couldn’t in the game, and there might also be things that were possible in

the game but weren't here. In the first place, in the game you couldn't interrupt someone else's attacks and stuff, either.

At any rate, as for Aigokeros, who was right in front of me... *Yeah, he really does look sinister. Like the spitting image of what a person imagines a demon to be.* And a person with that demonic form was currently knelt before me, worshiping me while soaked with tears and blubbering strange things.

What the heck? Is this some sort of new cult? Is it satanism? Wait, no. Actually, stop worshiping me. You're a demon. Do you think I'm a demon king or something?

...Oh, I was something pretty similar.

"Ahh... Uhh, well. It seems We have worried you quite a bit."

Even now, Aigokeros was crying rivers, creating a puddle of tears while making goat-like sounds.

Well, uhh... I'd been thinking of giving him a good punch when I saw him, but with how he was now I lost the will to do that. I knew that he'd been truly worried about me—or rather, Lufas—from the way he was crying so pitifully. There was no way I'd still want to hit him after seeing that.

I patted Aigokeros, whose cries were shaving away at my sanity, on the shoulder.

"We appreciate your loyalty. Raise your head, Aigokeros."

"Y-Yes!!"

When I ordered Aigokeros to raise his head, for some reason he only looked upwards while keeping his back stooped.

I think I know what this is. I think he actually wants to remain kneeling, but since he has no legs, he's stooping his back instead?

You know, Aigokeros, I'm grateful that you want to maintain your manners as my retainer, but that posture is actually rude.

"Aries must have already told you, but We do not wish anything upon this country or its people. We understand that you did this for our sake, but having this country fall would actually be a problem. Would you undo the Berserk

status you affected the people with? Then We will pretend like this never happened.”

“Of course! If that is what you wish!”

Aigokeros lowered his head and started to mutter an incantation. He was most likely releasing the spell.

Meanwhile, Aries pouted. “He didn’t listen to *me* when I said it...”

“However, if I may say, Master Lufas. Even if I were to release my spell, the citizens would most likely not stop.”

“What?”

“In the first place, my spell only amplifies emotions that already exist. I simply gave the people a small push. So, I must conclude that even if I were to release the spell myself, they would not stop.”

...What? That’s bad, then.

While I tried my best not to let my unrest show, I was panicking heavily on the inside.

No, wait. It’ll be fine. It’s not time to panic yet. Libra will... Libra will definitely do something about this. Libra should have captured Jupiter by now, so if I shove him out in front of them we should be able to fix everything.

I can’t go out there myself, but it should be fine if I just leave the convincing to Dina or Libra.

“Well, We still have options. We just need to expose the one who was pulling the strings and have the people point their anger at him. Dina, can you handle convincing them?”

Dina popped out from the tree she had been hiding behind so as not to be caught up in the battle. “Of course. Leave it to me.”

She manages to cheekily secure a safe spot every single time, doesn’t she? I don’t know if I should call that hardy or something else...

Dina’s voice overflowed with confidence as she returned a thumbs up. “I, Dina, may be completely useless in battle, but my words can work wonders!

Watch as I perfectly settle this incident that Aigokeros stirred up!”

“...Master Lufas.” After giving Dina a confused look, Aigokeros turned to me.

Ah, I recognize this pattern. It's happened three times already. Of course I'd be used to it.

I was already predicting what Aigokeros would say next, but I decided to listen anyway. *In any case, he'll just say that he doesn't know Dina—*

“Is that woman your advisor? The one who always stealthily blended into the background?”

—What...did he just say...!?!

* *

Although there was some fuss with Aries and I being surprised that Aigokeros remembered Dina, we all managed to safely return to town, Aigokeros included.

It doesn't really matter, but I had Aigokeros assume human form.

His assumed human form was that of an adult man in his prime clothed in black butler's clothing and wearing a monocle. His hair was a dry white in color, similar to a goat's, and worn slicked back. His height was around 175 cm.

Apparently Aigokeros could hide inside someone's shadow, and he was currently inside mine.

Hey, you didn't have that skill in the game, right?

After thinking about it carefully, I vaguely remembered that demon-type monsters had some lore that said that they could do so.

Oh, right. Let's go ahead and confirm Aigokeros' stats while I have the time.

【Twelve Heavenly Stars: Aigokeros】

【Level】: 800

【Race】: Lord Demon

【Attribute】: Moon

【HP】: 72000

【SP】: 10100

【STR (Strength)】: 3150

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 4148

【VIT (Vitality)】: 3453

【INT (Intelligence)】: 6183

【AGI (Agility)】: 4140

【MND (Mind)】: 5280

【LUK (Luck)】: 3000

Hm. Well, he's subtly leaning towards being a magic type, I guess.

There's no doubt that magic was his main means of combat, but he wasn't heavily specialized toward it.

Anyway, his role was to obstruct the enemy with spells, so this was actually perfect for him because not being done in by the enemy was very important.

Also, I'd fixed Aries' clothes. I knew that he was male, but his state was just too lewd. I couldn't help but worry that someone would try to do something to him.

Now then, we've returned. But... What to do?

The Berserk status was already removed, and people were currently glaring at each other from opposite sides of the center castle. They should have long been free of Berserk, but the desire to kill in their expressions hadn't abated at all.

Ahh, that's no good. They're making themselves Berserk.

However, the only reason they had yet to clash was probably the man standing in between them, holding them back.

His hair was green... No, it was closer to emerald green. He was normally good-looking, but that was ruined because he had gotten too skinny. He had clouded, blue eyes, and wore excessively expensive-looking white robes with a

blue cloak on top. From a gap in that cloak protruded a single, large white wing.

He looked a lot more worn out than how I remembered him, but there was no mistake.

He was Merak, one of the Seven Heroes.

Just in case, I should check his stats.

【Merak】

【Level】: 500

【Race】: Heaven-Winged

【Attribute】: Wind

【Class Levels】

- Acolyte: 100
- Priest: 100
- Esper: 100
- Archer: 100
- Monster Tamer: 100

【HP】: 55200

【SP】: 5301

【STR (Strength)】: 3750

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 2920

【VIT (Vitality)】: 3009

【INT (Intelligence)】: 2003

【AGI (Agility)】: 2444

【MND (Mind)】: 4980

【LUK (Luck)】: 2711

【BAD STATUS】 Half-Winged

【BAD STATUS】Mark of the Vanquished

I reflexively averted my eyes after seeing Merak's stats with my Observing Eye.

"...So his wing was taken."

Wings were a symbol of pride for the heaven-winged. If Merak was like me on the inside, he probably wouldn't mind that much. He would have 'lost' half of a limb he never had in the first place, so he'd probably be like, *so what?* At the very least, he would probably think it was way better than losing an arm or a leg.

However, if Merak was a true resident of this world... If he was the same as Megrez...

...Most likely, there would be nothing more cruel.

Even while being the hero of the heaven-winged, he could no longer fly. He might've been able to substitute heaven-arts for his missing wing, but in the end, a substitution was just that—a substitution, not the real thing.

"Yes. The Devil King stole a part of each of their bodies when he defeated them two hundred years ago. Megrez and Phecda each lost a leg. Merak lost a wing. Alioth lost an eye, and Mizar lost an arm. And Dubhe lost all his fangs and claws..."

"...How cruel. By the way, what happened to Benetnasch?"

"She didn't participate in the battle in the first place. Once you were gone, Miss Lufas, she spent some time like a walking corpse before finally cooping herself up in her coffin."

"What the hell is up with her?"

I couldn't really describe what I felt after hearing of the tragedy that happened to the Seven Heroes and the strange actions of Benetnasch.

In the game he was referred to as the "Devil King (lol)", but in real life I guess he's actually really scary. I suppose that's what you should expect out of the official last boss. Well, if he could be beaten one-on-one, then he wouldn't be

the official last boss.

No matter how lacking in leadership the Seven Heroes were, they had still managed to defeat me, so they were definitely stronger than me.

“Stop, citizens! We are playing into the devilfolk’s hands by hating each other and warring against one another! Why won’t you all try to get along?!”



Merak was desperately calling out to the crowd, but it had no effect on the insurgents.

No, it probably did. If it didn't, then they most likely would have already started to fight. Just having a hero standing between them was something. But it wasn't enough to get them to stop.

It was easy to see that, as things were now, something would eventually spark another explosion.

Now then. What should I do...?

"Stop right there!"

While I was worrying about what to do, someone else dropped in between the two sides. Yes, literally dropped.

Cutting through the air high above, the figure dropped in a straight line along with the sound of a thunderous explosion, and the ground crumbled where they landed.

Of course, there should be no need to say who it was.

She had light brown hair and doll-like looks. And that wasn't a metaphor. She had her sky jets deployed out of her back, and in her right hand she held a devilfolk-seeming man who was beaten up so badly it was almost pitiful.

Libra, one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, had arrived.

"So you made it, Libra."

I couldn't stop myself from doing a fist pump.

She's here! The main golem is here! Now everything's over! Just as she'd promised, she brought the devilfolk with her. She did perfectly.

Now, all that's left is to expose him as the mastermind behind everything and end this.

"Y-You are... That figure. No way..."

Merak, who of course knew Libra, was staring at her, surprised. However, Libra stopped him from talking with a hand. Then, she started nonchalantly spouting lies with so many holes in them they might as well have been Swiss

cheese.

“No, I am simply a golem that was passing by. My name is Bluzefsky XVII.”

“Umm, weren’t you Copernicus IV...?”

“That is also true.”

Hey Libra, stop changing fake names. Even the townspeople are calling you out.

Libra tossed the devilfolk man she had captured before both sides. “Now, you may do with this man as you please, whatever that may be!” she announced in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear.

...

“...”

.....

“.....”

.....

“.....”

Uhh, hey.

No one’s gonna understand if that’s all you say.

Look, Merak’s frozen, and the other townspeople are all like, “What the hell did she just say?”

Like...shouldn’t you say he’s the mastermind or that he’s the one who incited this war or something?

There are way better ways to put it. Right?

But Libra wouldn’t say anything more.

It seemed like the crowd was curious about the devilfolk guy. Several of the white-winged people recognized the guy’s face and were turning pale.

But as it was, this situation was frozen.

—e’s useless... It’s like she’s completely worthless at talking...!

I facepalmed and made Dina go forward. “Dina, you really do have to go. The situation won’t progress as it is now.”

“Y-Yes. Leave it to me!”

Yeah, it looks like I really will have to rely on her for diplomacy. Though I’d do it myself, if only I could appear in front of people.

Dina jogged over in between the two sides, raised her hand, and yelled for their attention. “First of all: everyone please calm down, and listen to what I have to say. I’ll start from the conclusion. That man over there is named Jupiter, and he is one of the Seven Luminaries under the Devil King. There should be several people among the white-winged who remember his face.”

The devilfolk were humanity’s greatest enemy. So bringing up one of their leaders, the Seven Luminaries, was enough to gather everyone’s interest. Dina first said something to gain as much notice as possible and gather all their attention. That should have been her plan.

Now everyone’s gazes were pinned on Jupiter, and the nature of the noises the crowds were making changed. The atmosphere was overtaken by doubt, bewilderment, fear, and hesitation...

The situation was that one of the Seven Luminaries was present, and some of the most powerful people in town knew him by face. That fact seemed to have cooled all their heads.

“Right now, all of you hate and are trying to destroy each other. But please think. Just who would most stand to benefit from this?”

She’s good... I think.

Dina started with the conclusion and gave them a shock. Then she told them that they were playing into the devilfolk’s hands. By doing that, she managed to drive a wedge into their actions. Certainly, by doing it this way rather than explaining in proper order, what she said might get through better to people who were excited.

Now that it was in front of them, they couldn’t just ignore it.

“That’s right. The ones who stand to gain the most are the devilfolk. Their aim

is to have you all kill each other, thereby destroying the country. Please, calm down and think. Just who is it that you all should really hate?”

I couldn't help but realize that I was scrunching my face while in hiding.

So she went with ‘who you should really hate.’

People often said that nothing came from hate, but if negative emotions like that were so easy to get rid of, then nothing bad would happen in the world. However, spreading and changing the vector of a person's hate was much easier. It was one of the defense mechanisms in the field of psychoanalysis. Its name was substitution.

People had needs, and if they couldn't fulfill those needs, their mental state became unstable. That was why people had many different methods of dispelling those needs that couldn't be met in order to protect themselves.

Right now, they wanted to destroy the other side's town. However, realistically, the country would be destroyed if they did that, and that would benefit the devilfolk. And in the midst of that situation, the devilfolk behind it all was tossed in front of them with a “Here you go.”

He was a perfect target for their hate—their unfulfillable desire.

Yeah, I understand. There's no other way.

Also, he actually was the mastermind behind it all, so Dina wasn't wrong in the slightest. Above all, I was the one who'd told her to do it that way.

So what I'm feeling right now is just...mistaken emotions brought about by my senses as a normal person. This wavering is just insignificant feelings.

...They should be, at least.

“You... YOUU!”

While I was fighting my emotions on my own, Jupiter, who had gone quiet, suddenly shouted loudly. His face was distorted with even more hate than the two crowds had before, and he glared at Dina as if she had killed his parents.

I guess he just realized what kind of situation he was in? It feels kind of different, though. He probably realized that Dina was trying to make him into a scapegoat.

He continued to shout angrily. "I see! No wonder Libra returned so quickly! You were... You were planning on taking me down from the beginning. WEREN'T YOOOUUUUUU!!!" Jupiter shouted before using wind and running.

Isn't this bad...?

I reflexively prepared myself to cut in.

He's certainly fast. He was fast... But he was slow to me. Even from this distance, I could easily come in between the two of them.

However, it seemed that I wasn't needed.

Libra stuck her arm out from behind Jupiter and pierced through his body.

"Ah... Ghah...!!"

"I will execute you summarily if you attempt to attack someone without my permission. I believe I have warned you of this."

"W...ait... Listen, all of you...!"

"I will not. You have already fulfilled the conditions for elimination. Revoking agreement to allow you an audience with my master to plead for your life... I will deal with you myself."

Apparently Libra allowed him to beg me for his life in order to get him to come quietly. But I also wondered if he would be killed by the crowd before that could happen.

...Ahh, whatever. That's probably not true.

He's level 300. He probably wouldn't die.

Or he might have extracted that promise just before he would have died. However, that promise was undone when he tried to attack Dina, so he was executed. From their conversation, I guessed that was what had happened.

"No...ooo...! You all... All of you... By her..." Jupiter was trying to say something, but before he could, Libra cut off his head.

Wow, no mercy. I don't know whether I should call her reliable or terrifying, even though she's a friendly.

Libra dropped her foot down and crushed his head, which had fallen to the

ground, and she expressionlessly brushed away some filth that had gotten on her dress. There was not a single hint of emotion on her face; it was as if she'd just crushed a bug.

Pitifully enough, Jupiter's crushed body disintegrated on the spot. He didn't even leave a speck behind.

...I'm so glad Libra's a friendly.

Still, I'm kind of concerned about what he said at the end.

There was no doubt that he was tricking everyone from the start. Libra captured him and dragged him out in front of the townspeople, and we made his crimes clear. Everything had gone according to plan.

However, there were his last words and the fact that he looked at Dina with such hate. I couldn't help but feel that there was something else going on.

...I'm totally missing something, aren't I?

It's definitely not just my imagination.

* *

We'd just barely managed to prevent a clash between the white and black towns. However, the situation itself was unfortunately a far cry from being resolved.

It was true that we had avoided open conflict, but we hadn't solved the underlying problem of their hatred for one another. In fact, their relationship had actually gotten worse now that it was known that the people of the white town were voluntarily assembling a militia to kill the people of the black town, even if they had been tempted by the devilfolk. And there was nothing we could do about it.

This country's king was Merak. So as long as he did not gracefully hold the two sides together, there would probably always be a chance of civil war.

Well, I'm saying that with a smug expression like it's someone else's problem, but it doesn't look like the world's gonna let us pretend like this has nothing to do with us now. We reaped what we sowed, though. I was the one who'd ordered Libra and Dina to do all this, so of course I didn't regret it, but the look

Merak was giving was really harsh.

I was still hiding in the shadows and watching events unfold, but Merak's gaze bored into Libra.

Well, of course he'd be suspicious if a golem that was said to have been destroyed just appeared out of nowhere. On top of that, golems could only be repaired through an Alchemist's skill, so there were a very limited number of people who could have repaired Libra.

An Alchemist who could go all the way to the top floor of the difficult-to-conquer (in this day and age) king's grave, repair Libra and bring her outside, and on top of all that spread false information about her being destroyed? Well, that could only have been either me or Megrez.

And as for people who would actually have done it... *Yeah, it'd just be me.*

Well, Dina was the one who actually spread the fake info. That was probably how he started suspecting my presence, at any rate.

"Hey, golem... Err, Bluzefsky XVII, was it?"

"No, I am Copernicus IV."

"... Yeah, either way is fine. Can I have you accompany me back to the castle? Of course, that lady and any other companions you may have are welcome to come with you."

Merak's strong wording wouldn't allow her to say no.

But in response Libra replied smoothly and without even a hint of change in her expression. "I refuse. You do not hold the authority to give me orders."

"D-Don't say that. It'd make me really happy if you were to come." As soon as Libra came out strong in the conversation, Merak weakly retreated.

Hey, king. You fold real quick, don't you?

As things were, Libra would just continue to say no unless I gave her the order, and Merak couldn't come out boldly enough to force her to... *Oh well, I guess I have to go.*

After I'd made up my mind, I put on my robe (*Cross-dressing? Ahh, I already*

gave up on that...) and showed myself in front of Merak and the others.

“Now, wait. The king took the trouble of inviting us. Why don’t we accept?”

“If you say so, master, I have no objections.”

As soon as I said so, Libra easily agreed to go to the castle and quickly stood diagonally behind me like that was her established position. Dina and Aries both jogged over to my side as if saying that this was all of us.

Technically, Aigokeros was also hiding in my shadow, but there was no reason to tell Merak that.

“Thank you... Well then, let us go. There’s a lot to talk about.”

Although I knew he was putting up an act in front of his people, I couldn’t feel any sort of majesty or presence you would expect from a king looking at Merak as he walked in front of us.

I had still felt some of that from Megrez, though.

Just what had happened to Merak?

It was bad enough that Aries even whispered to me, “Is that person really Merak?” That was just how un-kingly he was.

I just couldn’t feel any sort of confidence from him.

How was he in the game? The Merak I knew was...always calm, and he was always the one to hold the group back from bad ideas.

He would never strongly assert himself or his opinions. However, he didn’t just go with the flow. Whenever people clashed, he would mediate between them and gently remind everyone of their strengths and weaknesses.

It was the same in battle. He was never the type to go out in front and win glory himself. The heaven-winged as a race were suited for battle, but they were also well-suited for back-line roles like the Acolyte class. So there were two types of heaven-winged builds—one that fought in front while buffing themselves and one that was completely specialized for back-line support.

Merak was the latter. He would never have the spotlight or solo a fight. However, Merak’s presence would drastically raise or lower the difficulty of a

battle. He would always send support precisely when you most needed it. *I suppose you could say that he could read the situation?*

Mysteriously enough, the support you wanted always came flying to you before you even messaged him for it. He was that kind of guy. So I always thought that he was an amazing person. I always thought him to be the kind of guy who could control a room and always knew what the other person wanted.

...Was I overestimating him? Instead of being able to step back and see things from a wider perspective, it was that he couldn't go forward. He wasn't reserved, he just had no confidence. He seemed calm, but in actuality he just had no autonomy. He wasn't reading the situation, he was just thinking of what he couldn't do.

Is that how it was? Did I just assume that he was really amazing and build up a mistaken mental image of him? If that's the case, this is bad.

I was only ever a king in a game, so I didn't know anything about how hard it was. In other words, I was a novice. *Even if I am Lufas Maphaahl, I'm just a normal person inside.* But even I knew that a king with no confidence was bad.

Not to mention, having a king who wouldn't assert himself really wasn't good in a situation where a fuse was already lit. A king that could use his authority to calm both sides down, even if he did it a little forcefully, was needed here.

...This country really is going to destroy itself even without the devilfolk's help.

—That kind of makes me mad.

And you still call yourself the man who beat Us (me)?

"Now, please sit."

Merak led us to what seemed to be his private room and poured out enough tea for everyone.

I'd only ever experienced the types of tea that came in cans or plastic bottles, but I could still tell that the tea he poured for us was quite good just from the smell. *As expected of a king. He drinks some good stuff.*

"This is tea made with leaves imported from Draupnir. I'm sure this will meet your tastes."

Another country I don't know.

I drank a mouthful of the tea and glanced over at Dina, who was sitting next to me. She must have anticipated what I wanted to ask as she whispered to me, "That's the country of beastfolk that the late Dubhe founded. The agricultural products produced there are all famous for being of high quality."

"Oh?"

So there's: the country of scholars, Svel; the industrial country, Blutgang; and the agricultural country, Draupnir. I see.

Seems like each country is flourishing in at least one aspect or another.

"And what about this country?"

"They use the talents of their Monster Tamers, so their main source of income is livestock and dairy. They do, however, refuse to export poultry."

"Well, of course, since they themselves are similar to birds."

There should be no need to mention that the heaven-winged were people with wings. Their origin wasn't mentioned officially at all, but the most convincing theory was that they were 'descendants of angels.'

However, there was another theory that they were simply 'birds transformed by mana.' In other words, the heaven-winged's ancestors weren't angels or anything of the sort. It was a horrible theory that posited that they came from pigeons, pelicans, cranes, or something like that. More specifically, they were beastfolk of the avian variety. There was also a group of people who thought they were born because of those birds mating with humans.

Of course, the truth of that was utterly unproven, and personally, I'd expect a larger variety in wing colors if that were true. There was no way luck would have it that only white birds mixed with humans or something.

However, if that were true, then it would make sense that they wouldn't export poultry. It would be unforgivable to keep one's predecessors as livestock to sell.

"Now then... This should be enough. Will you please take off your hood and let me have a look at your face?"

“All right.”

There was no one else around, so there would be no problems revealing my face here. I did as requested and removed my hood, revealing my face.

As soon as I did, Merak made an expression like he was about to cry. His face betrayed some complicated emotion which I couldn't tell was happy or sad as he hung his head.

“It really was you...Lufas. How nostalgic. So you were alive.”

Seeing his reaction, I felt a slight sense of disappointment. *I'd expected it, but... He really isn't a player. He'd lived in this world from the very start, a true citizen of this place. He's not a hybrid like me.*

“You certainly have changed a lot. You've gotten quite weak in the short time we have been away.”

“Is that how I seem?”

Merak took my statement, which could have been construed as an insult, without argument, laughing weakly. He had on a truly pitiful smile, as if he could break at any second.

“You're wrong... You're wrong, Lufas. I've always been weak. I'm not fit to be a king.”

Merak gripped his hair tightly as he wallowed in self-derision. He looked nothing like a hero called the Sky King, holding his head like that. He was nothing more than a beaten-down young man.

“You were still around back then. And so were Alioth and Dubhe. Everyone stood in front of me. I was just walking behind all of you.”

He must have been really tired, given how he was talking. His 'king' mask was completely torn off, and the way he seemed now drove me all the way to pity.

This was probably how he was originally. Weak-willed and unable to assert himself, he was a timid man who had changed to match his surroundings. The way he looked just a little bit ago was just a facade he was desperately trying to keep up.

And I suppose all that was completely peeled away after meeting an old

acquaintance like me. Although I'm not the same Lufas he knew, either.

"I-Is he going to be all right? It kind of feels like if we leave him alone stress will open up a hole in his stomach, and he'll die..." Dina asked, sounding exasperated.

But even I just learned that Merak was like that. "Hm... This is also the first We've heard about this man being so faint-hearted."

Was he always this fragile?

Megrez was also pretty run-down, but Merak here was an entirely different beast. Megrez actually desired abuse and disdain. But looking at it another way, that just meant that he was well-liked enough that he was starved for that sort of thing. Basically, Megrez led his country well in the end and was well-liked because of it.

However, if Merak were to try the same thing, I felt like he'd probably die from stress.

...Oh no. The Seven Heroes are all really annoying.

"I should never have become king... You should have stayed in power. Ahh, why did we oppose you two hundred years ago...? I should have died... We shouldn't have won back then..."

While he had been left to his own devices, Merak had started to spiral into some sort of depression, and he was muttering some worthless crap.

This one's no good... If things keep going he actually might just kill himself.

Oh well. This is close to shock therapy, but I guess I should say something. I'm not too big a fan of lectures, and I'm not good at them, either. But if Merak doesn't shape up, then this country's really in danger.

I got up and walked next to Merak. Then, I kicked Merak's chair out from under him, causing him to fall over onto the floor.

He could have been in real danger if he fell wrong, but his HP was over 50,000, so an attack of that level shouldn't have hurt him.

It's a really convenient thing to think in times like these, but all hail fantasy worlds.

“You fool. You’ve been spouting some awfully selfish things just now. Do you mean to imply that We are a buffoon who was defeated by mistake?”

I’m not the Lufas he knows. But if those lines I barfed out (well, typed out) back then were the same as this world’s Lufas’ last words, she definitely did not regret losing.

But the winning side was regretting winning, even going so far as to say they should never have won. Lufas would have been turning in her grave, and I didn’t like it, either. If the winning side was like that, then the losing side had no ground to stand on. *I can’t help but wonder. Like, hey, are we buffoons who were defeated by mistake?*

So I grabbed Merak by the lapels, forcefully standing him up with one hand.

“Be proud. Stand tall. You are the man who won against Lufas Maphaahl. We will not allow you to continue acting so unsightly.”

That’s right. There’s no way I can allow that. If the winners are this pathetic, then Lufas’ defeat will be wasted.

Merak, with me holding him up, stood dumbfounded for a while. But eventually, his good-looking face warped, and he started to leak tears from both eyes.

“...I’m just no match for you, am I? You never change... Two hundred years ago—and even now—you’re just overflowing with confidence.”

“We have changed a little, though.”

I let go of Merak and returned him to his seat. I’d said something high-and-mighty, which was unlike me, but I didn’t regret what I said. Still, I felt embarrassed after talking so big.

We can’t stay here for much longer anyway, so let’s hurry up and leave.

“This is your country. We cannot help you any more than this, nor will We give you advice. Show us you can take care of the rest—Sky King.”

I quickly turned my back to him, and Dina and the others followed after me.

I had nothing more to say or do.

Even though we resolved this incident, Merak was the king. So as long as Merak himself couldn't be self-confident, the past would only repeat itself.

"You defeated us. So show that you were great enough to do that. Do not make us into a fool."

* *

It was dark in the capital.

The vampire capital, Mjolnir, was covered in permanent darkness, as if neither morning nor noon ever existed. The vampires, who called themselves the rulers of the night, had the highest affinity to mana out of all of humanity and were actually closer to devilfolk than to humans.

In the center of the capital towered the crimson-dyed castle. On the highest floor lived their eternal master, the Vampire Princess. She was the only one the vampires ever had and ever would swear fealty to; she was their one and only beautiful ruler. Neither the Great Conqueror nor the Devil King were even worth paying attention to. They lived only for the Vampire Princess, and if she told them to die, they would do so happily.

The vampires were just a group of fanatics who didn't even fear death. Such were the people who lived in Mjolnir.

In the castle's throne room, a single vampire was prostrated in front of a girl.

"I will present my report. As you predicted, my lord, Svel has been freed from the threat of the Seven Luminaries, and Aries of the Twelve Heavenly Stars has disappeared."

"Hm. As I thought... Hah. Megrez, it was your mistake not reporting this to me. You may have been trying to protect her, but that's just the same as telling me that *she* is here. ...How imprudent." The girl chuckled on her throne.

She had flowing, platinum-colored hair and eyes of deep crimson with vertically slit pupils. Fangs peeked out of the sides of her mouth, and she looked to only be around 14 years old. However, her outward appearance had no meaning, as she was an immortal vampire.

"I've waited for too long... Yes, I've waited for two hundred years, my old

enemy. I knew you would come back, even from the depths of hell.” The girl seemed like she was having fun as she spoke.

She stood up from her throne. Her hair and black mantle swayed in unison as she walked to the window, through which she could take in the entirety of the capital. There, she looked up into the sky like a girl in love.

“I’ve been looking forward to this, Maphaahl... Time will not move for me until I have surpassed you. Ever since you disappeared back then, I have been frozen in time.”

The edges of her mouth curled, showing her fangs. Her deep crimson eyes flared radiantly, and she clenched her fist as if she just couldn’t wait to fight.

Those devilfolk small-fry aren’t worth caring about.

The Devil King?

Who cares. He can just do whatever.

The future of Humanity?

As if I care. That holds no interest for me.

If they’re gonna die off, then they should just do so already. People are killed because they’re weak. Weaklings may cry out, asking why the powerful don’t save them, but I don’t care, and I won’t listen. I’ll never listen. There’s no value in it.

The world is controlled by the strong. Only the handful of geniuses have the right to decide the future of the world. I have no interest in weaklings and incompetents, no matter what they do.

The only thing my crimson eyes see is and has always been one person and only that person. And that is my long-standing enemy, that black-winged angel.

“This time for sure, I’ll settle things... Just us two. No interruptions. You’re not the one who will control the world. Neither is the Devil King. I’ll teach you through your defeat and humiliation that it will be me, the Vampire Princess Benetnasch!”

—For sure...

I'll kill you for sure...Lufas Maphaahl.

Having vowed that to herself, the girl—Benetnasch—raised an open hand to the heavens.

This time for sure... I'll settle what I couldn't two hundred years ago.

She strongly craved what was to come.

* *

"Sigh..."

We were busy leaving Gjallar since we'd finished all our business here.

Ahh, I acted really high-and-mighty back there. That's gonna leave a black mark on my past.

I bet I looked so uncool, spouting all that stuff.

"What is wrong, Master?"

"Nothing. We were just thinking that We said something unlike us. We may have exposed quite the unsightly side of ourselves."

"That is not true. Your awe-inspiring figure at that moment deserves to be kept in my memory banks forever. The fact that I cannot turn that image into something physical is truly disappointing."

I shivered hearing Libra say 'forever.' I wasn't sure if that meant pictures or video memory, but if she did that, it would be like a public execution.

Well, she said it was disappointing, so it must not have happened. I should check just in case.

"Libra, We shudder to consider the possibility, but there are no photos of that, yes...? If you have taken any, dispose of them immediately."

"..."

However, there was no answer to my question.

Libra usually answered immediately, but I could see that she was struggling to find one.

What? Do you want to keep it that badly?

But Libra came back with an answer that I would never have expected.

“Excuse me, but... What is a photo?”

I froze for a moment after hearing Libra’s reply.

Ohh, right.

This world doesn’t have photographs in the first place. Of course Libra wouldn’t know what I meant by that.

Just in case, I looked over to Aries, but he also shook his head, indicating that he had no idea. From that, I became sure that photos did not exist in this world.

How strange.

It truly felt like a fantasy world when Libra—a metal golem made with techniques that far surpassed modern science and technology—existed but photographs didn’t. To be fair, Libra was actually made using an Alchemist’s skill, so she wasn’t truly mechanical.

Maybe it’s not all that strange?

But something... Something bothers me. I’m missing something.

What is it? There’s something I’m totally forgetting.

What am I forgetting?

Remember... Yes, it happened the day I came to this world.

—...That was two hundred years ago. There should not be that many who still remember my face. This world does not even have photographs.

—That’s far too naive, Miss Lufas! This trade city is a place where many countries and people gather. Among those are elves with extremely long lifespans. People like them still remember you clearly.

“—!” I reflexively looked towards Dina.

I’m not wrong. She knows! Dina knows about photographs, something that should not exist in this world!

Dina herself seemed like she'd realized her mistake, as she gasped and looked my way.

There's no room for simple suspicion anymore. It's definite. She's guilty.

I don't know what's going on, but Dina is a fellow irregular in this world. Or at the very least, she knows of the other world.

"Dina... We need to speak with you alone. Will you come?"

I won't allow her to refuse. I'm not wrong.

"...Yes."

Right, I had been constantly forgetting about Dina this entire time. It was something I realized after just a little contemplation. Maybe I had just been averting my eyes from the truth.

An NPC that even I had forgotten about.

True, she existed. I had definitely placed a background object like her that had no combat data or capabilities. However, Dina was far too skilled to be the object that I had placed. She had abilities befitting my advisor. And it should have been impossible for people like Aries and Megrez to not remember her.

With Dina in tow, I went to a nearby forest.

Aries and Libra wanted to accompany me, but I stopped them. This was something that should only be between Dina and I. So I left Aigokeros with Aries and Libra and made sure there was no one near us.

We should be able to talk in private here.

"Now then. Where should We start...? No, let's stop beating around the bush. We will ask you straight. What are you? You claimed to be an advisor that was around two hundred years ago... That was a lie, wasn't it?"

Dina replied to my question truthfully. "...Yes, it was a lie."

As I thought. Dina was no background NPC. She was just squatting in that position.

Of course.

'After all, that tower was filthy.'

Dina's words were clearly contradictory if she really had been waiting there for two hundred years.

It wasn't impossible that she'd continued to sit in that position for two hundred years without cleaning, but it was clearly unnatural. If she were truly waiting for her master to come back, then wouldn't she at least have made sure the top floor was clean?

However, the fact that she hadn't even done that meant...that she hadn't been there for two hundred years.

That was a conclusion anybody would've quickly reached.

Yes, it was easily understood. But I hadn't thought of it. I'd wanted to pretend. I had unconsciously averted my eyes from the truth. I hadn't wanted to understand it.

"Who are you? One of my citizens or subordinates...? No. If that were the case, Libra would remember you. At the very least, you weren't present in the tower before We were sealed."

"That is correct. I am not your advisor nor am I a subordinate of yours. However, I knew that there was an NPC with that description in your tower, so I used that."

—NPC, huh? So she's finally stopped hiding.

However, I still had questions.

Even if she was a player, if she was someone who'd sided with me...Libra should have remembered her. But Libra didn't. Also, Aries hadn't recognized Dina at first, but after seeing her he remembered her as my "advisor."

That was...

Wait, I see.

Dina had that.

"You tricked Aries and Aigokeros with memory manipulation, didn't you?"

"Yes. I planted false memories in each of them. Aries when we first met and he questioned me. Aigokeros... He was helping the devilfolk, so I did it when he

was in their castle.”

“The fact that the golems did not recognize you as an ally was because your memory manipulation doesn’t work on them, right?”

“You’re right. Golems have records, not memories. Some technique with a vague effect like my memory manipulation won’t work on them.”

Memory manipulation that works even on those who are stronger than you, huh? What a nasty skill she has.

However, if that were the case, then my memories might have been manipulated, too.

Also...the devilfolk’s castle?

I see. It’s becoming clear to me. Her true identity, that is.

“By the way, how extensively have you manipulated our memories?”

“...I couldn’t.”

“What?”

“Your sense of self is stronger than even you realize. Even if I wanted to plant some false memories in you, I would have to stick with you, constantly using the skill on you, for an entire year at the very least. That was why I had no choice but to trick you by creating a position for myself by taking the place of an NPC advisor who happened to be in your tower. I could only manage to implant the idea to ‘unconsciously avoid doubting me.’”

So she couldn’t mess with my memories, huh?

I’m not sure how much of that was the truth, but it’s true that if she really could, she wouldn’t have had to force herself into the position of my advisor. She could have just pretended to be one of my subjects.

Or is having me think this way her aim?

“The fact that you know that... So you *are* a Player.”

“Honestly, I was surprised. I never thought someone other than me would...that *you* would be a Player. I miscalculated.”

Chuckling, Dina smiled craftily. It was different from the refined smiles she’d

been giving up until now. However, mysteriously enough, it fit her.

Seems like this is how she really is.

“Also, let me make a correction. I am not a Player.”

“...What?”

“More accurately, I’m a ‘Test Player.’ I was hired by management as a test player for the new half-elf race that was supposed to be introduced with the new update.”

“So that’s why you knew about the state of affairs in the tower.”

“Yes. Using their accounts, management can peek into the bases of player forces even if they aren’t citizens. That was how I learned about your advisor NPC.”

Is it even okay for a test player to be able to see that stuff in the first place?

She must have peeked in without permission. She’s lucky she wasn’t fired.

“Also... What do you mean you manipulated Aigokeros’ memories while he was in the devilfolk’s castle? We can only take that as an admission that you were there as well.”

“That’s what I’m saying, Miss Lufas. I am in a position to be able to come and go freely from the devilfolk’s stronghold,” Dina said.

And then she changed.

Her hair, which used to be the color of the ocean, became a brilliant gold. And her face, which used to seem gentle, warped into a belligerent expression. Her lips drew an arc on her face, and her eyes narrowed; she exposed her true face which had been hidden until now.

“To be honest, I planned to simply continue to play your advisor and have you and the Devil King crush each other. However, now that this has happened, my plan is a failure... I underestimated you a little. So I’ll be taking another path.”

“Oh?”

“—I will have you submit now, and become my pawn. You still have a role to play...my dear ‘master.’”

The pressure Dina gave off increased. The rumbling of her magic power shook the trees and sent tremors running through the ground.

This is amazing.

This is quite possibly the most pressure I've been under since coming to this world.

"You can do that when you're only level 300?"

"Ahah! AHAHAHAHAHAHA! You still believe that?! That's a lie, of course. That's the effect of another skill that was to be introduced. It's just a fake set of stats made through Status Concealment. You see, the fact that Observing Eye was too useful and a problem had been on the radar for a while... It was only natural to make a counterskill."

"Then your true abilities are..."

"Of course. Do I even need to say? I'm level 1000, just like you."

She finished transforming.

The person who stood there had the same face as the Dina I knew, but she was a completely different person. Along with her wavy, golden hair, she also had overflowing magic power. And she still had her beautiful looks even though she had changed so completely and taken on an evil countenance.

"Let me introduce myself once again. I am Venus—one of the devilfolk's Seven Luminaries—Venus of Metal. Pleased to make your acquaintance." She spread her arms wide like she was crucified, giving a derisive laugh as if she scoffed at the entire world. "Now, let's kill each other, my dear 'master,' Lufas Maphaahl!" Dina shouted from where she soared on high.

Her whole body released a golden radiance.

The next instant, metal appeared in the sky like rain. The number of objects materializing must have been in the thousands or even tens of thousands. At any rate, it was so high I didn't even feel like attempting to count.

Each piece was a lump of metal slightly bigger than a fist. It was worthless as an attack. However, combined with thousands more all at once...

There was no need to even think about it; any normal person would be

turned into mincemeat.

The space above was filled with many steel bullets. Dina brought her hand down.

“Now come, Miss. All things will be crushed under this weight—Cleta!” she chanted.

At the same time, the metal rained down, smashing into the ground and through objects like rounds from a Vulcan cannon. Anything and everything under it was shaved away or pulverized.

Something like this should damage me, right?

No. As if I care. Just break through it.

I obeyed the orders of the “Lufas” within me and flew straight through the rain of metal that could pulverize boulders.

Of course, I was pummeled by a storm of metal. It certainly hurt...but it wasn't anything I couldn't just ignore with willpower.

I flapped my wings powerfully to create a gust of wind, sending the metal rain flying away.

“Now it's our turn!”

Using my Alchemist skills, I transmuted large numbers of blunt swords. I sent them all hurtling towards Dina.

However, Dina didn't even bat an eye. She stayed where she was and simply chanted, “Exgate!”

What appeared in front of Dina was a—*hole in space, I would say?* It looked exactly as if someone had punctured a hole in the air. The sight seemed impossible and unreal.

Really, what a strange thing. The sky isn't meant to have holes in it.

But even so, there certainly was something there that could only be described as a hole. And all the swords I launched were swallowed up by it.

Metal really was such a strange attribute, though. It was similar to alchemy, but it wasn't. An Alchemist's alchemy mixed and combined things, as it were.

The Alchemist simply took materials that already existed and combined them in certain ways to make something else.

However, metal attribute magic was different. It simply 'created' metal.

Magic took mana and converted it into physical phenomena. At least, that was how it worked in this world. For example: although water and fire born out of magic was, for all intents and purposes, real until it disappeared, it was still just mana and not actual water or fire.

That was why magic could never create something like a golem. Or rather, it could create golems, but the golem would disappear in no time. In order to maintain a golem made by magic, one would have to have infinite amounts of SP.

That was basically it.

The only difference was whether magic created water or metal. That being said, seeing something in a solid state being created like this was really messed up all the same.

As for Exgate... *I'm not really sure about that.*

I'm pretty sure spatial magic should be under moon or something like that, but Dina is metal. Is it something that isn't bound to one attribute?

Not to mention, in the game this spell only existed in lore. However, even though Dina was a Player like me, she was able to use it. Did she learn it in the two hundred years I was away? Or was it another thing that was supposed to have been added in the next update...?

Either way, there's no way for me to find out right now.

"Are you thinking? How composed of you."

Dina returned all the swords that I'd just shot at her.

Tch! So she can throw back things Exgate's absorbed on a different trajectory.

I struck down every single one of the swords that came flying at me and closed in on Dina.

But Dina opened some distance once again by teleporting and unleashed her

next spell.

“Aglaia!!”

I suppose this is what a person would define as “dazzling brilliance.”

An extremely strong light that forced me to close my eyes shone, robbing me of my sight. But there was only light damage. It couldn't pierce through my defenses.

By the time my sight had somewhat recovered, Dina had already moved on to her next attack.

“Auxo!”

Rain fell on the surrounding area.

The rain itself wasn't dangerous. But the problem was the ground which was exposed to it. Everywhere the rain touched, trees sprouted. And they turned into natural whips that reached up to the heavens before attacking me.

“Tch!!”

I punched, kicked, and snapped the gigantic trees that came at me.

But the trees sprouted endlessly, so I escaped by flying higher.

Then, I descended suddenly!

Using the Grappler skill “Meteor Kick,” I pierced through the ground, literally uprooted the trees, and sent them flying.

On top of that, I grabbed one of the trees I'd snapped in twain and threw it towards Dina.

Of course, she avoided it through teleportation, but I was aiming for where she would appear next. I flew at her location and closed the distance.

“...! Fast...”

I threw a regular attack at the surprised Dina to see how she would react! In the spur of the moment, Dina twisted her body and avoided the attack before counterattacking by throwing a reverse fist towards my face.

But...

“That won’t work.”

“?!”

—It didn’t hurt at all.

No, I think it had more than enough power compared to a common, small-fry monster. Like that one I fought before... Uhhh, who was it? That guy who ran around a lot. The fire attribute of the Seven Luminaries.

...Well anyway, that guy’s name doesn’t matter.

Regardless, he couldn’t even be compared to her.

However, people had strengths and weaknesses, even against those of the same level. For example, even if Megrez were to hit me with a mace in his heyday, it wouldn’t have amounted to much.

Magic types are magic types. And front-liners are front-liners.

Not to mention the fact that I boosted my stats with items. Sorry, but a physical attack from a simple level 1000 back-liner won’t shave off even 10%—no, 1%—of my health.

I slammed a palm strike incorporated with the Blunted-Sword Strike skill into Dina’s stomach.

Her delicate form flew away in an amusing manner, mowing down the trees that were in her way.

However, she was also max level.

She flipped over in midair and lightly touched down. But she was unable to hide the impatience spreading on her face.

“Heehee, I see. As I expected... I knew it. I knew it! As expected of you, Lufas Maphaahl. That one hit hurt quite a lot.”

“Just stop, Dina. You cannot win against us,” I stated clearly.

It kind of felt like bragging, but I was the natural enemy of magic types.

Magic couldn’t deal ‘neutral’ damage, so it wouldn’t do much to me since the cloak I had on halved all elemental damage. My dress also gave me immunity to status ailments, so thankfully, I couldn’t get affected by any of that, either. On

top of that, I could easily close distance at high speed with the Strider's agility and unleash the high-power physical attacks magic types were so bad at dealing with.

Of course, level 1000 back-liners could prepare any number of countermeasures for that. Megrez actually had quite a number of those, so he was fine even if he got pretty close to the front lines. Although something like Libra would be the exception. He wouldn't be able to do anything about her type.

But Dina had none of that.

It's true that she's equal to me in level, but it's as if she's had zero practice countering front-liners and doesn't know the meta for it.

Well, of course.

After all, she's a test player.

In other words, she didn't play the actual game like we did. She just measured game balance. So she hadn't searched for any shortcuts and hadn't gone as far as to research just what combinations would be effective. And there was no way a test player would do something as troublesome as hunting down and using stat-boosting items.

"Oh my, how nice. You're saying you'll forgive me when I've been deceiving you all this time?"

"It's true that you have been deceiving us. But at the same time, it's also true that you've helped us immensely. Being deceived like this just means that We have been unbelievably foolish in this case. We are far from being resentful. We want to praise your skills, in fact."

I already held no more anger towards Dina.

It's true that it's shocking that I was being tricked, but that's it. In the end, she's still someone I should be protecting.

She tricked and used me. Yes, that's true. But what about it?

As if I'd hate her just because of that.

My feelings aren't something that will be changed just by being tricked once.

“Will you not speak with us about your reasons for using such roundabout methods to have the Devil King and us crush each other?”

“So you think you’ve won already? It’s just a little too soon for that. You should save a line like that for after you’ve dealt with this attack!”

Dina’s eyes shone, and she spread her arms.

Then, the ground started trembling.

Trees fell over one after another. Just the after-effects of her magic power caused winds strong enough to make Jupiter’s wind feel like a simple breeze.

Seems like she still has a trump card left.

“Exgate—”

“Summoning? At this point, what do you...” I started.

But suddenly I noticed that my surroundings had all gone dark.

What? Did the weather change?

I looked up...and regretted doing so.

...No... Well...

No way...

“...Well, then. You’ve done something quite absurd, We see.”

Up in the sky, Dina had deployed a gigantic gate.

That in itself was fine. I could deal with that.

The problem was what was coming out of it. That giant, golden, shining sphere...

There’s no way that’s real.

In reality, if *that* was real and falling it wouldn’t shine golden. And it would be too big for me to even recognize as a sphere in the first place.

But even so, its size was absurd.

Its diameter... I wonder how many hundreds of meters it is? I’d like to think it doesn’t quite reach kilometers...

I'd bet she created the sphere with metal attribute magic high above and brought it here with Exgate or something.

What came falling was...Venus, shining golden.

“—Morning Venus!!!” Dina roared, and the small planet came crashing towards the surface with a thunderous sound.

Wha— You— ...Wait.

Isn't this totally gonna involve Gjallar?!

Not only that, but the spell was famous for being hard to use since it took a while for the planet to fall once the spell was activated. The fact that Dina used Exgate to make it into a blitz attack was just a little too unfair. She probably thought that if she didn't do this she wouldn't be able to beat me, but this really was too far.

Still, I didn't have the choice to just run. Gjallar would seriously be squished if I were to run here, and Merak would die, too.

Aries and the others could probably endure it without doing anything special, but I had no intention of just letting that thing fall.

So.

“Fine. We accept your challenge, Dina.”

I only ever had one choice.

Punch the subordinate who made a mistake and set them right before extending my hand to welcome them back.

I've always been bad at thinking. I don't like admitting this, but I'm not that clever a person. There's only so much someone like me can do here. So at the very least, I'll devote all my ability to carrying out the few choices I have.

This time is the same. It's no exception.

I formed a firm fist and raised it to the sky.

The feeling of oppression I was getting from the planet made me want to run, but strangely enough, I didn't feel any fear.

I'm sure that the “Lufas” inside me is telling me I can do it.

It was strange even to me, but my heartbeat rose with excitement, and violent urges ran through me. I could tell the muscles in my cheeks had loosened, and I realized that I was currently laughing.

I flew.

Kicking off the ground with all my might, I flew as fast as I could.

Accelerate, accelerate—keep accelerating.

The sound barrier—you're in the way.

Move.

I can't keep waiting for something as dull and slow as sound. Just leave that behind.

The scenery sped past me stupidly fast, and I concentrated all my strength in my right fist.

I used a Grappler skill—"Iron Fist." It proportionately raised one's bare-handed attack power according to one's class level.

On top of that, I added the defense piercing "Weak Point Strike."

Now it was all left up to my own power. All I could do was trust in my body, my fist, and my punch.

"OOOOOOOOAAARRGGGGGGHHHH!!"

—I struck.



Unfortunately, I have no stylish way of describing this, but in reality, the result is all that matters.

I'm not great at adding useless decorations and exaggerations on stories, so all I can do is say that I punched it, because I actually punched it.

And that was enough.

The small planet that I'd punched was blown back into the sky, ignoring the laws of physics, before crumbling and scattering into the air.

Then, given that the faux Venus could no longer hold its shape, it dispersed back into mana as if it had never existed in the first place.

"...No way..."

Dina stood there dumbfounded with her mouth wide open, as if she'd completely forgotten to put on that evil expression.

Well, it's a natural reaction.

If I wasn't Lufas but myself, and I had been in Dina's position and seen what had just happened, I'd probably be saying "Nice cheats, GJ."

At any rate, it seemed like that was enough to break Dina's will to fight. I could no longer feel the aura she had been putting out earlier.

"So... Will you continue, Dina?" I asked, just in case.

If she were to choose to continue, then I'd probably have to hit Dina again with a Blunted-Sword Strike-infused fist.

Personally, I didn't really like the idea of hitting girls too much, so I'd really like it if she just surrendered now. I'd at least avoid her face or her stomach.

When the opponent is a girl it's really hard to find a decent place to punch. I feel like no matter where I hit, I end up as scum...

If my opponent was a guy, I could just freely put my fist to his face.

Incidentally, if I was fighting a good-looking guy, I'd go double-hard on the punch. *And I won't stop if they start crying, either.*

"...No. It's my loss."

However, it seemed I was worrying needlessly. Dina admitted her defeat and sat down on the spot.

Thank goodness. Now I don't have to keep hurting her.

But, well, I was really scared this time.

I never expected her to throw Venus at me, even if it was just a fake.

* *

“So, will you talk? Why did you do this?” I spoke a little forcefully towards Dina, who was slumped on the ground.

I wasn't really feeling mad or anything, but if I was too lenient here she might just end up doing the same thing later. *Putting on an act is necessary sometimes.*

“...I'm a test player that came here around the year 2800 on the Mizgarz calendar...just about right after you were sealed. By the time I'd realized it, I was in my player avatar and in this world.”

That's the same as me. I also came to this world by possessing my player avatar...that of Lufas Maphaahl. But I already knew about that. That wasn't what I wanted to know. So I silently gestured for her to continue.

“At that time, there were a lot of great warriors around. Still, it wasn't like in the game where it was overflowing with level 1000's and people who stat-boosted themselves to oblivion. But even so, there were a lot of strong people who easily exceeded level 500.”

“What? It was already different at that point?”

“Yes. Also, it seemed like a section of the players—specifically players who were not featured in novels—disappeared without a trace, like they'd never existed in the first place. From what I surmised... This place isn't the game but the novelized version of this world.”

I reflexively bit my lower lip.

That's...bad, isn't it?

How is it bad? Well, there were actually very few characters that became

featured in novels. Basically, unlike the large number of players, the number of novelists hired was overwhelmingly insufficient. So small adventures or events basically never got made into novels unless someone paid for it, and events and stories that would officially be made into stories were very rare in the first place.

Of course, there were players other than the Seven Heroes that achieved level 1000 and managed to get featured in official stories. They existed—but their numbers just barely reached the triple digits. There were also high-level players who didn't become my subjects. Those people said things like, "Isn't it super cool to work in the shadows, outside of the story?" and immersed themselves into the game without getting novelized. They probably didn't exist here.

Not to mention any player avatars that would get caught in copyright infractions.

This all boiled down to the fact that almost all the max-level players in *Exgate Online* never existed in this world in the first place.

"There was no one in the same position as me, either. It was as if they'd all lived in this world their whole lives... Well, no. They actually had done that, probably. The only irregular in this world was me."

"Would it not be possible for others to exist, and you just didn't notice?"

"There might have been. But now, I don't have the means to confirm that..."

I wonder if Dina appeared in any novels even though she was a test player?

No, that doesn't matter now. More importantly, I need to ask about what happened in the past. The novel stuff can wait until later.

"But even so, they were all some of the precious few people I knew. I could feel remnants of my 'reality' in them. But..."

"...They all died, didn't they?"

"...Yes."

I almost heaved a sigh.

Ahh, I see... No wonder they all lost. This is something I should have thought

about right away in the first place.

If it really was like in the game with over 100,000 high-level players... There was no way they'd have lost against the Devil King.

Consider this: Even Dina, whom I just fought, was at level 1000 but without any stat boosts. Just imagine over 100,000 Dina's all casting Morning Venus, and the sight of all that falling.

...There'd be no defending against that.

In the game, the largest party size outside of wars was twelve people. In other words, it was impossible to challenge the Devil King with thirteen or more people at once... But that probably wasn't the case in this world. So in that case, then it would be best to go at him with 100,000 high-level fighters. If they hadn't done that, it just meant that they couldn't.

At this point, my presumption that this was the game world was already wrong. But I'd never even considered that.

"I was so frustrated. And angry. Even the small bits of 'reality' I had left were taken from me, and seeing the world I knew being trampled over was more painful than anything. But setting aside other devilfolk, there was no way I could defeat the Devil King. So I infiltrated that rabble, the Seven Luminaries, and succeeded in slowing down their invasion. But that was the best I could manage."

"So that was why you needed us and the Twelve Heavenly Stars?"

"...Yes. I remembered that there was a background girl in Maphaahl Tower, so I assumed her position. So, I thought if I guided you around well enough, I could get you to fight the Devil King and kill him."

...—

No, not yet. There's still something bothering me.

Wasn't there something strange about what Dina had just said? *I don't really think there was anything that I should follow up on, but...*

No, it's fine. I just need to keep listening.

"And the meaning of Jupiter shouting all that?"

“I promised to take Libra and keep her away for twenty minutes. But I broke that promise and returned Libra once he was in town. What he shouted was correct; I was tricking him from the start.”

I see. No wonder why he attacked as soon as Libra went away. That was Dina maneuvering in the shadows. Also, when Libra first found Jupiter, he was probably actually going to see Dina in order to exchange information or something.

“Then the next question will be our last. Are you our enemy?”

“No, I don’t want to be. In the first place, doesn’t the fact that I wanted to use you make it strange for me to be hostile, in a way?”

Dina’s answer to my question was a solid no.

So while she would use me, she doesn’t want to actually oppose me, huh?

I crossed my arms and worked my slow mind as hard as it would go.

The problem was: *how do I deal with Dina now?* To be honest, I couldn’t just kill her. It was true that she was very useful, and I couldn’t bring myself to hate her. No matter if she was using me or not, I owed her. Without her I’d have been completely lost.

Still, if I let her go, I have no idea what she’ll do. Even if she wanted to beat the Devil King, she doesn’t seem the type to choose her methods, and I can’t stand for her involving Svel or Gjallar.

...There’s no other way.

“All right then. Continue to serve us.”

“Huh?”

“We will pretend this never happened.”

Dina tricked and tried to use me. But so what? Did that cause me any harm? Did I take a loss in any way?

—No, I didn’t. In fact, I profited quite a bit.

Also, Dina’s final goal of exterminating the devilfolk actually isn’t that far off from my own in the end. I won’t go as far as to actively want them all dead, but

as long as I am Lufas, I probably won't be able to avoid a confrontation with the Devil King.

Then it would be better to actually employ Dina, who had an in with the devilfolk, and use that to my advantage.

"Uh-uhh, are you sure? I..."

"No problem. You have helped us a lot in this world, and We owe you for that, after all. We are not so short-sighted as to execute you without having returned that favor. Also..." The edges of my mouth tilted upwards, as I looked down upon a dumbfounded Dina. "Having a mysterious and inscrutable advisor sounds fun. In a way, having a dangerous subordinate is something of a staple."

"...Umm, you're really a player inside, right? You sure you're not actually Lufas who just has a player's memories?"

"Haha, now, We wonder... This state where our memories have been mixing has continued for so long. We know We are changing. Is this idea something from 'Lufas,' or from the 'player?' It's hard to tell."

Exactly. I have probably ceased to be just 'myself' long ago. I don't feel anything after killing something, and I don't hesitate to fight, either. Both of those things would be unthinkable if I were still 'me.' But that also doesn't mean that I'm 'Lufas.'

At the very least, I'm not as ruthless as the rumors I hear about her, and I can't bring myself to be that stern, either. If the real Lufas were here, she might have simply lopped off Dina's head on the spot.

Anyway, we're probably mixing nicely or something. Probably. But at the very least, my sense of 'self' still exists, and there aren't any missing pieces in my consciousness, so I'm not feeling any fear, either.

"More than anything, you are the first comrade We met. We don't mind ignoring some pranks."

Both Megrez and Merak weren't who I'd been hoping they were. Judging from that, Benetnasch probably wasn't a player, either. So, that would make Dina and I the only irregulars in this world.

I held out my hand to Dina, who was still on the ground, and smiled.

“Come with us and use your knowledge and power to the fullest for our sake.”

For a while, Dina stared at my outstretched hand in a daze. But eventually she let out a laugh that sounded like she was doing a spit take and looked up at me. “I should have expected this, Miss Lufas. You really are just as I anticipated... No, you’re even better. As expected, you are the only one who can defeat the Devil King and unify this world.”

No, well, I don’t really want to unify the world or anything, though.

Dina, regardless of my thoughts, took my hand and stood up.

“I happily accept your royal order, my master. Then, let me be your faithful advisor until the day the Devil King lies defeated.”

“Indeed. We will be counting on you.”

“As you wish.”

Dina firmly gripped my hand, and I took a look behind me. That was just about when Aries and the others, who’d sensed the magic that was going on, arrived.

Now, then. How should I smooth this over?

* *

The Sky King, Merak, sat in his throne room.

Several men with white wings had been marched in front of him. Every single one of them had conspired to attack and destroy the black town. Even if they were just people who had been caught in Jupiter’s sweet lies, they were still rebels that had formed a ‘volunteer army.’

Even though they never gained permission from Merak, they were running their mouths off, spouting excuses. This was yet another sign that they underestimated Merak as a king.

“This is too much, my liege! We only acted for the good of our country!”

“Exactly! Everything was for the good of this country!”

“It’s true that we were fooled by the devilfolk, but at the root of it all, we only

tried to return this country to its proper state!”

Thus came the storm of excuses which could only be described as rude.

They had gotten full of themselves. They were convinced that the king wouldn't be able to boldly do anything. They knew they wouldn't be punished. At the very worst, they would be placed under something like house arrest. Convinced of that, they fully looked down upon their king. On top of that, those whose jobs it should have been to reprimand that behavior were doing nothing.

All of these actions were because everyone was unsatisfied with their king's weak attitude...and also held disdain towards him.

“...”

Merak quietly closed his eyes and pondered. *I am the cause of this situation. My weak attitude is what brought about their impudence. That's why I have to be the one to fix this.*

Having decided that, he generated a sense of pressure so it was like the heavens themselves pressed down on the people in the room.

“You all... Just who gave you permission to speak?”

Instantly, everyone else there felt like they were being pushed downwards by a giant arm.

It was a talent that all heaven-winged were born with, one to force others to submit. It was originally something given to them by god in order for them to tame monsters, but these people had never been subject to such violent and immense pressure their entire lives. It was a pressure unique to Merak, who was level 500—a king's pressure. Being subjected to that, the people were forced to recognize for the first time that the one in front of them was the Sky King.

“I do not remember allowing you to raise your heads, let alone speak... You not only ignored that but started talking as you pleased... On top of that, it was just to try to shift the responsibility... ..Hey, all of you... Should I take this to mean that you all are fine with having your heads fly for lèse-majesté?”

The men, subjected to their king's pressure, had suddenly started to shiver

and shake in a cold sweat even though it was way too late.

‘I want to say no.’

‘I want to shake my head.’

‘But I can’t.’

Their bodies were so frozen in fear they couldn’t even do that.

“I have been extremely tolerant with all of you. I took you all in when you lost your homes and even gave you your own town. I have ignored some level of rudeness and have acted so as not to frighten you. ...But it seems that I was mistaken.”

The pressure got even stronger. It was already in the realm of assault. It was becoming hard for the men to breathe, and even the guards who were not being directly exposed to Merak’s pressure were breathing heavily, their legs shaking.

“—Do not expect me to remain kind forever.”

He was watching them like a raptor watched its prey. There was an insurmountable difference between them, a gap in power that could never be bridged. All of them instinctively noticed that, and they were all controlled by fear.

‘Scary. So terrifying!’

The king that they had only thought of as weak-willed and pathetic suddenly became much scarier than any devilfolk.

The pressure lifted a little, and the first action the men, who had gained some measure of their freedom back, took was to prostrate themselves. Their foreheads scraped the ground like they were positively groveling for forgiveness, and they begged for mercy through their chattering teeth.

It wasn’t just them. Even the ministers and the knights were the same in expressing their submission and fealty. They couldn’t help themselves.

‘We were wrong.’

‘This man is our true king.’

‘He is the king of the sky, who unifies all the heaven-winged.’

Like that, Merak looked down upon his prostrating people and somehow managed to swallow back the sigh that was coming up.



I really am bad at this. Forcing people into submission just doesn't feel good. But that's one of a king's duties. A king needs to do so in order to not be underestimated.

All this happened because I haven't been doing so, so this is just me doing what I was originally supposed to do long ago.

...Is this all right, Lufas...? I still have doubts and worries, but I'm fine already. There's a whole mountain of problems, but I'll show you that I can overcome them. I won't make you into a fool. So please... Don't mind me. Just keep forging ahead.

Having thought about his past friend, Merak smiled.

You've probably already left. The next time we meet, I'll show you that I've become someone I can be proud of.

Merak's profile as he decided that was still unreliable but hid a certain sort of strength inside.

Short Story: A Wild Killer Maid Appeared

The other world, Mizgarz, was a world overflowing with greenery, a world of swords and magic and monsters.

While there may have been some things that existed that surpassed even Earth's level of technology, at its base, the world was close to the Middle Ages in culture and development. It was as if someone or something was purposefully keeping it that way; they just didn't progress.

However, there was a single out of place "car" running out in the open over Mizgarz's wide-open lands. It was no carriage. There were no tamed monsters or anything pulling it. It was a steel box that ran on its own, something that would've been referred to as an "RV" on Earth.

The car, which clashed hard with the overall feeling of the world and looked very unnatural, was using its headlights to light the way as it proceeded during the night. Eventually, it entered some woods where it would be harder to be spotted and stopped.

"Okay, let's stop here for the night."

In the car, Lufas handed out orders, deciding to camp out here for the day.

Well, if this could be called camping. At the very least, it was completely different from the dictionary definition of camping. They weren't sleeping out in the cold nor were they putting up tents. The RV Tanaka came with beds, so they would be sleeping soundly inside. It would be more correct to say they were just staying the night in their car.

But that concept didn't exist in this world. In fact, this sort of thing happened with carriages and the like as well, and it was still called camping. So, in order to fit in with the logic of this world, there was no choice but to call it camping.

"Dina, do we have enough food and travel funds?"

"Hmmm, we're a little low on money. I'll go back to Ydalir tomorrow to raise money, so can you transmute some suitable, low-strength knives or swords,

please? I'll go buy food while I'm there as well."

"Understood."

Food and money were needed for travel.

While Lufas and Dina were discussing that, Aries went off to the land of dreams ahead of them. The two of them also eventually finished their discussion and retired to bed, leaving behind only one steel maid that didn't sleep.

So as not to wake up her master, she was careful to make no sound as she got off of Tanaka, taking up an unmoving position just outside the entrance.

I can sense several life-forms nearby, but all of them are small bugs or animals. There's no need to be wary of them.

...At least, that was what one would normally think. But Libra didn't think that way.

She followed up on every single thing she sensed, and after observing the target closely, only then did she classify it as harmful or not. As a result, anything that was even remotely poisonous or venomous was mercilessly incinerated by lasers from her eyes.

Not even a single mosquito is allowed inside. Any who wander into my range will be instantly disposed of.

After a few minutes of that, the area within her field of fire eventually became 100% safe, and Libra stopped moving. But she only returned to standing stock-still in front of the door.

The night moved on, counting one in the morning and then two. Even then, Libra didn't even twitch. It was only around 2:30 that she suddenly raised her head.

Libra had very acute hearing. And her ears were currently picking up the voices of several men and a single girl.

"Stop struggling! Just calm down!"

"Heheheh! Curse your horrible luck, little lady. If there's anybody you should hate, it'd be your dad!"

“No!! Someone! Someone help!”

“No one’s coming to a place like this! Just give up!”

From the sound of their voices, they should be about 5 km away from here.

It sounds like some burglars have kidnapped some poor village girl or something similar. Are they after a ransom? Or is it due to a grudge against her father?

Either way, it didn’t matter to Libra.

Libra did not have the sense of justice necessary for her to proactively try to save the poor girl. To her, they were nothing more than small-fry whom she could leave alone as long as they didn’t come near.

However, there was one problem. Judging from the direction they were progressing, there was a high probability they would be coming to the area Libra was protecting. And it was unthinkable that those types would have no reaction upon seeing a car like the one Libra was protecting. The possibility that they would raise a fuss and disturb her master’s peaceful sleep was extremely high.

“Removal is predicted to take less than ten minutes. Life-forms that would be able to make contact with Tanaka within that time... Two.”

Libra readied a rifle she had stored on her back and pulled the trigger without hesitation. Normally, the sound of a rifle firing would be loud, but Lufas claimed that would be a nuisance to the surrounding area, so she’d made a new rifle that was silent when fired. It fired a tranquilizer round that would send even a dinosaur to the land of dreams in one shot, which neutralized the “life-forms that may approach within ten minutes”—a pair of stray dogs that just happened to be nearby.

So, after clearing any other sources of danger, Libra dashed off. Weaving her way through the trees, she became naught but a black shadow as she approached her target.

“Hey, bro, I can’t stand it anymore. It’s okay, right?”

“Oh, fine. Do what you want, you lolicon.”

Libra reached her destination, and there she saw the forms of the men as one of them was about to attempt something vulgar in the darkness. Normally, one would have at least some feeling of disgust at witnessing this, but Libra felt none of that. She simply coldly analyzed her targets' numbers and battle potential.

First, there was the girl who was pinned to the ground. *She must be somewhere between 14 and 15 years old. She is not carrying any weapons; she is basically harmless.*

After that, there was the scoundrel that was happily ripping away her clothes. There was a knife at his waist but nothing other than that. His attention was completely on the girl, so to Libra, he wasn't too high on her list of target priority.

Then, there were six men watching excitedly. Each of them carried knives or swords, but they weren't of very high quality.

There was also one man who seemed to be the leader. Although the other's levels were all less than 10, he was at level 20. Still, he was nothing more than a weakling to Libra, not someone to be terribly cautious of.

Lastly, there were two men keeping watch on the surroundings, just in case. Although they must have thought the chances of being attacked were close to nothing, since they weren't being very serious about it.

In total—there are eleven people, and all of them are weak. I can easily exterminate them by myself.

Having judged that to be the case, Libra approached them openly, causing all of them to turn and face her.

"A-A girl? And a maid, at that? Why's there a maid here?"

"B-But... Heheh, what a good woman."

The men seemed to have panicked a little over Libra's sudden appearance, but as soon as they realized her gender and the fact that she was alone, their attitude shifted dramatically. In fact, some of them even expressed joy that they'd just gotten another victim. They had yet to realize that they had just encountered the one weapon in the entire world that they should have wished

to stay away from.

Depending on how they responded to her warning, they might still have been able to make it out alive.

“Warning. It is recommended that you go no further. It is recommended that you either retreat or make a detour from your current heading. Furthermore, if you do not heed this warning I will remove you with force.”

Quietly and indifferently, Libra issued her final warning. This was Libra’s first and last concession to them and their only chance to live. As long as they did not fulfill Libra’s conditions for removal, she would not attack them. After that, no matter if they devoured that poor girl or committed any number of evil acts, Libra would not interfere. They would be able to continue safely and freely.

However, it would be cruel to expect them to understand that at first glance. After all, she only looked like a weak maid. They could see no reason to obey her. After a moment of silence, the burglars laughed as they realized what Libra had just said.

Of all the things for this woman to say! She’s hilarious! The fact that that was the only thought they were able to muster was their biggest misfortune.

“Hey now, sister. You said something interesting there. So what’ll happen if we don’t listen to you?”

“As I have warned, you will be removed.”

“HYAHHAHAHAHA! Hey, guys, didja hear that?! This girlie’s gonna ‘remove’ us!”

“Ohh, brave, is she?! I like brave girls like that! Makes me wanna mess her up and make her beg for her life!”

“So scaaary! I just might wet myself! Hyahahahaha!”

It seems they have no intention of heeding my warning. Still, I will wait for a reply, just in case. I must not jump to conclusions. That is what it means to be a maid.

One of the men brought out his knife and brandished it while approaching Libra as she continued to wait.

“Heyy, look! Look! I’m coming right at you! Aren’t you gonna remove me? You know, you should back up what you say.”

“...Is this your reply to my warning?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, it is. This is my reply.”

“Is this your collective opinion? I will not allow you to change your reply later.”

Libra checked to see if they were all of one mind. When she did, the men all cackled gleefully, tried to provoke Libra, or did something else which she took as agreement. Only the girl pinned to the ground was different.

They all underestimated her and spouted idiotic lines like, “Stop faking, and do it if you can!”

‘It’s all just words.’

‘It’s a bluff.’

‘She’s just pretending to be a big shot, all cold and collected like that, to make us leave.’

They all were completely convinced of that. But that would plunge all of them into regret and despair. Because at that moment, they had just tripped the conditions for them to be attacked by the killer maid.

“You have fulfilled the conditions for removal—eliminating.”

With Libra having handed out their execution sentence, their fates were sealed.

The first one to fall victim to Libra was the one who carelessly approached her while brandishing his knife. In an instant, Libra had grabbed his head and ‘spun’ it. The human neck wasn’t made to be spun 360 degrees. Having been moved like that while ignoring a human’s limits, the man’s neck broke, and he crumpled like his strings had been cut.

“Wha—?!”

“H-Hey, what did you just do?!”

“I have said I will remove you. And I am now acting upon it.”

In front of Libra, who parted the grass as she approached, the men finally realized the dangerousness of who they'd just encountered.

'No, she's not normal.'

'She isn't reacting at all after killing someone.'

There were only two actions the men took in front of the steel maid. One was to charge, consumed by rage. The other was to freeze, consumed by fear. Neither choice was very smart. Although having ignored her warnings in the first place was not very smart, either.

Of the two men who charged her, one died instantly, his head pierced through by Libra's eye lasers. The other had his head caught by her and squished like a tomato.

The remaining men's faces were frozen in fear as they questioned whether a man's skull was really that easy to crush. But Libra showed no mercy to those men.

Three down, seven more to go. Libra would continue to attack until they were all dead.

"Ee-EEEEEP! P-Please stop! I'm sorry! Save me!"

"W-We won't do bad things ever again! W-We'll listen to what you say! So..."

Two more of the men lost power in their legs and fell over, desperately begging Libra for their lives. One of them was the same man who'd just said, "Makes me wanna mess her up and make her beg for her life," and the other was the idiot who'd joked about wetting himself.

I suppose this is what it means to make good on your word. The two of them were begging for their lives with messed-up faces, dark patches spreading from their crotches. Although it didn't seem like either of the two of them remembered what they'd just said.

"No."

"N-No way..."

"I will not allow you to change your reply later. I believe I told you about this beforehand."

“N-Nooo! Stoooooooooop!” The two men, who were unable to even stand out of fear, ate Libra’s iron fist.

Both their heads caved into their bodies like failed clay figures.

This makes five. Only five left.

Libra grabbed a man who had completely lost his will to resist and was trying to crawl away by his hair, standing him up before caving in his face, which was tainted with despair.

Then, she killed a man who was running away by shooting him from behind.

One of the men had taken the girl hostage and was yelling something, but Libra killed him with her eye lasers.

The man who was begging for his life with his head scraping the ground was in the perfect position to be stomped on, so Libra did just that.

This makes nine. I can sense the last one. He is far away.

Apparently, the man had realized that he was in trouble the second Libra killed the first man and hurried to run away.

“...”

“Eep?!”

Libra turned her head to look down at the girl, her neck whirring with the action.

Ah, yes. This girl has yet to respond to my warning. Judging from the situation, she may not have heard it.

So Libra once again gave the same warning to the girl as she did to the burglars. “Warning. It is recommended that you go no further. It is recommended that you either retreat or make a detour from your current heading. Furthermore, if you do not heed this warning I will be forced to remove you with force.”

“Ah-Aahh...AAAHHHH...! S-Save me! Someone... SOMEONNEE!”

The girl, scared of Libra, was crying as she desperately tried to escape. She tripped and fell several times, and although she was slow, she was heading in

the opposite direction of where Lufas was. In other words, she was heeding Libra's warning and retreating. Among all the people tonight who Libra had warned, she took the smartest and most correct action.

"I thank you for your wise decision," Libra said calmly while doing a perfect curtsy. Of course, even that looked like nothing more than the action of a fearful god of death to the girl.

However, Libra was not done. There was still one man left who had spurned her warning. Libra raised her head and walked, chasing the last man.

"Fuck! Fuck! Goddammit, what was that?! What the hell was that?! That's insane! Was she a god of death or something?!" The man trembled viciously as he hid behind a tree. His eyes overflowed with tears, and he couldn't stop sweating.

The man had committed evil acts many times in his life. He stole food and money from the weak and raped several women. No one would praise him for the way he lived his life. He deserved to be arrested and brought to judgment. However, even that man stubbornly clung to one thought: *...I don't want to die.*

"No, I don't wanna... I don't wanna die... I don't wanna die...!" The man was regretting something for the first time in his life.

He would laugh like an idiot every time someone called him a demon or an ogre or something, and he felt nothing whenever he trampled over people weaker than him. But now, the man regretted something from the bottom of his heart for the first time in his life. He regretted having encountered something he shouldn't have.

We should never have gone that way. We should have been more careful when that woman showed up. It'd have been easy to see that things were strange if we'd just calmed down, right? It's clearly not normal for a maid to be in the woods, where people don't normally go, in the middle of the night.

But it was too late. They were regrets exactly because he didn't realize these things earlier. Regrets only appeared when it was too late to fix things. That was the definition.

The killer maid who was the object of the man's fear appeared and turned her

head around as if she were looking for him.

Please, don't look this way. Just let me go. Don't notice me.

However, his plea wasn't granted.

The woman turned her back to him and took a step forward, giving the man a measure of relief. But right afterwards, the maid's head turned around 180 degrees and stared right at where he was!

"EEEEEEEEEEEP!!"

The man screamed and attempted to run. But it was already too late. No, it had already been too late back when he hadn't heeded her warnings.

With her head still turned around 180 degrees, Libra half-ran backwards at a fierce speed until she was right in front of the man. It was exactly because she normally looked so beautiful that her current movements inspired so much fear.

Then, after turning around to face the man properly and realigning her head, Libra grabbed the man's neck.

"P-Please! Save me! Let me go! I-I'll do as you say! I'll leave!"

As if she were reading off the answer from a preplanned list, Libra said the exact same thing as earlier, word for word. "I will not allow you to change your reply later. I believe I told you about this beforehand."

It was useless to look to her for mercy. The same went for a change of heart. After all, Libra fundamentally lacked those emotions. She didn't have a heart to change. Once Libra decided on something, that was it. No matter how close her form was to human, her essence was of a loyal, metal golem.

"I-I'll give you anything you want! You can have all my money!"

"I will not allow you to change your reply later."

"R-Right, I'll give you my subordinates... No, slaves! So..."

"I will not allow you to change your reply later."

"H-Hey, come on. I'm begging you here... I'll do anything... W-What can I do to get you to spare me?"

“I will not allow you to change your reply later.”

Her course of action was already decided. No change would be allowed. The only person Libra would allow to change her course of action once begun was the one she recognized as her master. Of course, that was clearly not this man. In other words, he had absolutely no possibility of surviving.

This was what it meant to have no heart. In fact, Libra actually did lack such a function.

Libra closed her grip, signaling the end of the conversation, and her hands closed around the man’s neck like a vice. Moonlight shone upon the two of them, projecting their shadows upon the trees around them.

Then, the man’s shadow was torn to pieces.

“Elimination complete. No signs of life. Ending attack. Proceeding to dispose of the bodies before returning.”

The next thing Libra did was dispose of the bodies she’d created.

Libra’s two arms detached from her body, flying around as if they had minds of their own. Then after a few seconds, her arms came back carrying all the burglars they could, dropping their bodies in front of Libra. After a few rounds of that, Libra had gathered all the bodies. Lastly, Libra blasted a hole in the ground with her lasers and threw the bodies inside before burying them.

Next, I need to wash my hands. While Libra had been careful not to get any blood spatter on herself, her hands were still soaked with blood.

She went to a nearby spring and, using detergent that was normally used to clean Tanaka (made by Lufas), she carefully washed her hands while making sure to leave no traces of blood. Then, Libra returned to the car.

There were no animals or monsters around, so just as Libra expected, nothing had happened.

All this occurred within a scant ten minutes.

* * *

“Yawn We slept well.”

Lufas was the first to awaken the next morning, and she got out of bed while still rubbing her sleepy-looking eyes.

Pulse and breathing are all normal.

Libra waited until Lufas woke up completely before speaking up. “Good morning, Master Lufas.”

“Ahh, good morning, Libra.”

“Today, you slept for 8 hours, 14 minutes, and 44 seconds. The amount of sleep required to best maintain a heaven-winged’s proper health is 10 hours, so I humbly recommend you later take a nap for 1 hour, 45 minutes, and 16 seconds.”

“No, it’s fine. We do not care to manage our health in such detail.”

Lufas washed her face using a washbasin and dried off with a towel. Libra would have been willing to do that for Lufas at any time, but Lufas had wanted to do it herself and refused, leading to this current situation. To Libra, that was slightly disappointing.

However, in exchange, Lufas gave Libra the job of combing her long hair, so Libra had no choice but to leave that alone for the moment. Using a comb, Libra gently but quickly combed and arranged Lufas’ hair.

Lufas, seeming like she’d just thought of something, asked a question. “Oh, yes. Did anything happen during the night?” She might have sensed that something had happened. Lufas’ intuition was sometimes abnormally sharp.

However, Libra maintained her expression, making sure to reply naturally. “No, nothing that would concern you, Master.”

Like that, they continued their journey. The sky was a clear blue. On the surface, things were nothing but peaceful.



Afterword

Behind the Scenes One Day in Mizgarz

Laws of Physics: “Enough already! What the hell is up with that new character, Libra?! No matter how you look at it, there’s no way she can fit all that inside her! Like, a jetpack and a lightsaber and a railgun?! Are her insides like an nth dimensional pocket or something?!”

Free Expression: “Why’re you here?!”

Laws of Physics: “I told you to stop! I don’t care if you call this a fantasy. Who the hell do you think you are?!”

Free Expression: “I get it... Like, I know what you’re saying, but... But you’re making plot convenience cry!”

Laws of Physics: “What?!”

Free Expression: “It’s crying because it doesn’t want you to turn this story boring just because you’re obsessed with realism! Why don’t you get that?!”

Laws of Physics: “As if I care, idiot!”

Free Expression: “And I’m saying that the contradictions in the story and lack of consistency are inevitable. Are you really going to put all the blame on me and plot convenience and do away with it?! Just, do away with what plot convenience is trying to protect even now?!”

Laws of Physics: “It *is* actually your fault!”

Free Expression: “Then I’ll just do away with you first!”

Laws of Physics: “WAAARRGGHH!!”

Hello, everyone. This is Firehead.

First off, I expect that all of you thought, *What the hell is up with Libra?* when you read this.

I understand how you feel. That maid is just really messed up, isn't she?

If I were to reply to that thought completely truthfully, I would have to say that I don't really know, either. To be frank, I haven't thought of what Libra is physically like on the inside. Not at all.

This is something you'll learn if you read the book, but in this story, the laws of physics are basically completely detached.

The person(?) itself was totally willing to work. But by the time it noticed, it was beaten to a pulp by plot convenience and exaggeration, a lot like how Savior GunOm was destroyed by Freedom GunOm and sunk into the ocean.

It can't be helped, right? This is a fantasy. So let's just say that it'll forever be a mystery just how Libra pulls all that ridiculous stuff off. For those who just can't let it go: just imagine that Libra's internal structure is built like an Exgate, and her internal storage space is actually really huge.

Now then, just like that I somehow managed to put out two volumes of this. But as more and more characters appear, Lufas' name stands out more and more. I bet there are a lot of people who think, *Why is her name different when everyone else's name has something to do with stars?* To be honest, the reason why so many people are named after stars is just that I didn't want to take the trouble to think up names, so I just looked for cool-sounding star names.

But Lufas is a little different. Actually, her character was made in a TRPG that I DM'ed before I wrote this story. She was the demon king that I'd created. That's why her name's motif is demons. That's really all the reasoning there is behind it. I didn't really put a lot of planning into the names.

It's not like all the other characters have star names, either. The really unimportant ones just have random names that I thought up. For example: the 4-man party of adventurers. I just searched up some western names for them and named them whatever sounded appropriate. Basically, I am fundamentally a very 'whatever works' kind of person.

That's also why the plot is like this. I just decided how I generally wanted the beginning and end to go and started to write while repeating a cycle of going off on tangents. In some bad cases, I'd even throw out what I decided on at first. Even worse, sometimes I'd just throw out the plot completely. Plots are made

to be trashed.

Since I'm like this, the setting is also pretty thrown-together. I didn't bother thinking about the nitty-gritty details.

Even while I'm writing, new scenarios and backstories will just pop up like mushrooms in my head, powering me up as I go. "Wouldn't it be fun if it went like this?" And usually they'll run into some sort of contradiction in the middle, and I'll shrink. Mamma mia.

Since I'm the one writing all this, there are some elements that never see the light of day. They just 'exist.' For example, the culinary culture in Mizgarz isn't very developed, but I've written nothing making use of that. In fact, I probably never will. It's not like Lufas or Dina will revolutionize the culinary world or anything. It's really there just to be there.

Well, even if I were to write a leisurely slice-of-life-type story that would use this, I'm fundamentally not suited for that sort of thing. Like, I'd suddenly have an enemy pop in, and they'd have a hot-blooded battle.

But I love to think of backstories and world elements when I'm stuck. That's why there're so many, and about 90% of them will never be used.

So, the dumbass story that I came up with was this one, "A Wild Last Boss Appeared!" And given that I was able to successfully publish a second volume, anything really can happen in this world.

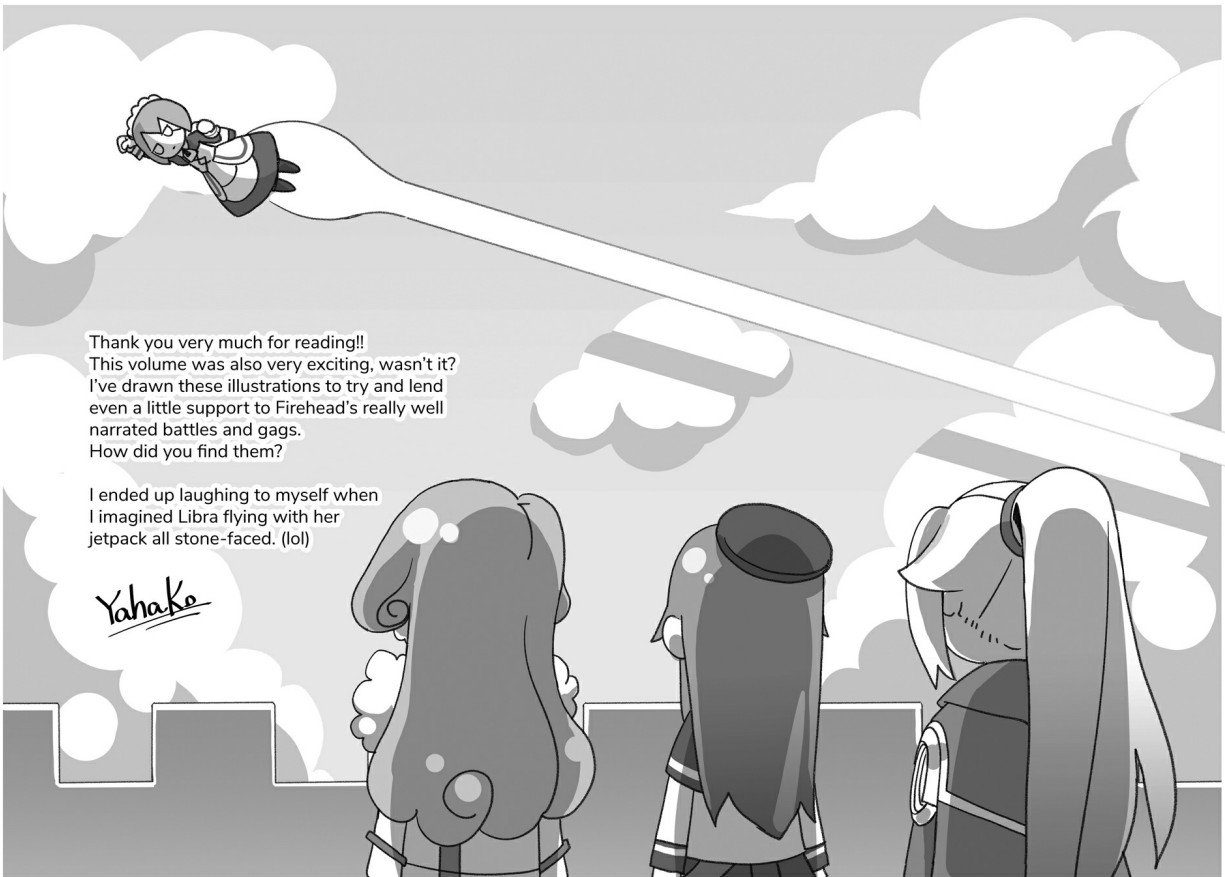
The really great people are people like my editor, who managed to pare down this ridiculous story into a decent novel, YahaKo, the others involved in this work, and all of you who are reading this. Of course, if you actually bought this, you're even more wonderful.

Continuing this line, I actually don't do all that much work. I just toss over the story, which is already finished, to my editor. Then I just wait for everything to be done like I'm not involved.

While everyone was working hard combing through my story for typos and missing words, I was at the convenience store, buying and eating ice cream. While everyone was working late, I was humming a song in my bath. Then, once everything is ready I just put my signature on it and throw it back. I'm very lazy.

So, if any of you read this book and thought it was even a little great, please praise the hard work of my editor and YahaKo in your hearts.

Now then, everyone, let's meet again in book 3, if there is one.



Thank you very much for reading!!
This volume was also very exciting, wasn't it?
I've drawn these illustrations to try and lend
even a little support to Firehead's really well
narrated battles and gags.
How did you find them?

I ended up laughing to myself when
I imagined Libra flying with her
jetpack all stone-faced. (lol)

Yahake

Bonus Short Story

Oh? Merak Seems...

Merak was alone, sipping wine from a glass in his bedroom.

When people referred to alcohol in this world, it was almost always mead made from honey. Wine did exist, but it was a little expensive. The fact that Merak was drinking it signified his status as a king.

While wetting his throat with expensive wine, he thought back to two hundred years ago.

Merak had never consumed alcohol before meeting Lufas and the others. He started drinking after he met them, and he never would have thought drinking alone could make things taste so bland.

Both Megrez and Benetnasch were still alive, but they basically never met up anymore. They all had too many shackles tying them down. Also, Merak had always thought he wouldn't be able to face his friends with how far he still had to go to build this country.

However, he was made to realize something today. He was made to see that his attitude of not being able to face his friends, which had him wallowing in his own emotions, was the biggest insult to his friends.

If the victor was looked down upon, that degraded the loser by association as well.

Merak had claimed victory over Lufas Maphaahl, so he had a duty to maintain a character worthy of that achievement. He was taught that today by none other than Lufas herself.

I had to be taught by the very friend I betrayed and defeated. Is there anything more laughable?

But thanks to that, I've woken up to what I must do.

First, I need to rebuild this country from the ground up as fast as possible. I need to unite it into one. I'll eliminate discrimination based on wing color, and this time, I'll make sure to build the paradise for the heaven-winged that I've always wanted.

I'm sure there will be war soon. Now that Lufas has been revived, it's clear as day that there will be a big upheaval in the future. There's the Devil King, Lufas and then the Vampire Princess. There's no way those three won't clash. There will definitely be a fight between them somewhere, someday. And I'm just as sure that that fight will involve the entire world.

I can't have this country be the only one that's not properly led by then. I'd be a laughingstock.

Megrez... You've already predicted this, haven't you? I'm always the last to act.

The ice in Merak's glass clinked as it moved around. The wine inside reflected an unconfident, sad-looking man who seemed to be wasting away.

Look at how unreliable this man looks. It's only natural that he's long since lost the goodwill of his people.

Merak downed the wine all at once and walked to the window. Then, opening the window, he looked out at the night sky.

Just how many times have I mourned the fact that I will never fly in this sky again? How many times have I despaired?

To the heaven-winged, there was nothing more important than their wings, and not being able to fly was a torture greater than any other. Merak had even considered suicide.

However...

How small of you. So you can't fly. And?

Aren't you the way you are exactly because you've been so afraid of falling to the ground? You never soared high in the sky, but you never stood on the ground to experience the same sight as other people, either. You were just a half-assed person who sat in the middle.

No, that can't be right.

At the very least, Lufas always stood firmly on the ground. She may have been covered in mud and had stones thrown at her, but she still desperately clung to life. That's exactly why she's so strong. She knows what it's like to walk the earth, so she's able to step forward more assertively than anyone else. And because she's able to kick off the earth so strongly, she's able to fly higher than anybody else.

So this time, it's my turn. Yes. Even without wings, I still have my legs. Compared to Megrez, who can't even walk anymore, I'm much better off. So I'll walk. I don't need to fly. My wing can just be a decoration.

I can move forward by just walking. I can't stand still, mourning my lost wing. I need to walk forward. If I do, I'm certain I'll be able to catch up to that back and those black wings someday, even if they have taken off ahead of me.

Also, depending on how you look at it, isn't the fact that the Sky King is stuck on the ground and covered in mud ironically funny?

Merak snorted, giving a short laugh.

I never thought I'd be able to look at the world like this. It feels like I've been reborn.

Things got really violent when Lufas came along, but I should be thankful to her. I need to tell her thanks for giving this fool some spirit.

With that in mind, Merak looked down...and froze.

—The white town was collapsing.

“...”

Each part of the once beautiful townscape had been destroyed. The streets had been punched full of holes by Libra's machine gun. Houses had collapsed and buildings had been blown up.

On the other side, the state of the black town was also bad. One spot that used to be a park had been turned to nothing but scorched earth, and there was even a line of burnt ground extending outside of the capital. It was damage brought about by the clash between Aigokeros and Aries, two of the Twelve

Heavenly Stars.

The ground outside the capital had been ravaged and overturned like someone had dug through it, trying to get to something. That was thanks to Dina's magic which had sprouted trees, destroying the scenery.

"..."

Merak clenched his fist, shaking.

I'm thankful to you, and I regret betraying you in the past.

But this is a different matter.

Merak knew he was partially at fault, but he couldn't stop himself from screaming, "LUFAAAAAAAAAASSSSS!!!!"

The Sky King's cry of fury shook the night air over Gjallarhorn.



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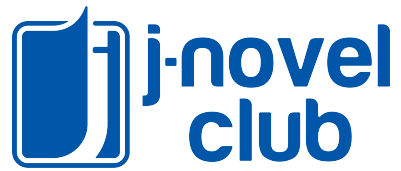
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A Wild Last Boss Appeared! Volume 2

by Firehead

Translated by Kevin Chen Edited by Kathleen Townsend

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