

High School

13

DXD

ISSEI SOS

**ICHIEI
ISHIBUMI**

ILLUSTRATION BY
Miyama-Zero

PARENTAL ADVISORY
WARNING
EXPLICIT CONTENT

High school

xD

13

ISSEI SOS





"Yes! You're
the **self-
proclaimed**
angel, right?
I've heard
about you!"

"There's
nothing **self-
proclaimed**
about me! I
am an angel!"
Irina protested,
already in tears.

Angel
Mode.

High School DxD

ISSEI SOS

13

ICHIEI ISHIBUMI

ILLUSTRATION BY
MIYAMA-ZERO


New York

Copyright



Volume 13

Ichiei Ishibumi

Translation by Haydn Trowell

Cover art by Miyama-Zero

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Warning!

The stories included in this volume were all originally published in magazines, so there are slight differences in chronology between the originals and the versions found within these pages. Thank you for your understanding.

This collection is replete with a deep appreciation of, and curiosity about, breasts. It is not, however, a reference book on demon breasts, so please be sure to use it appropriately.

Life.1

Silver Screen Demons

“I will avenge my friends, Red Dragon Emperor! I, Magical Girl Levia-tan, will destroy you!”

Booooooom!

A petite little witch waved her wand in front of me, triggering an explosion packed with massive destructive power!

“Gyaaahhh! I’m done for!”

Fully clad in my crimson armor, I ran away from her deadly barrage, screaming in genuine fear! Each blast of her demonic power was ridiculously potent—a direct hit would have been enough to blow away an entire mountain or level a huge forest!

Yes, I—Issei Hyoudou—was in the midst of a decisive showdown with a certain magical girl on a secluded peak. Sorry, not a showdown. It was more like a one-sided massacre!

After all, this was no ordinary magical girl. I was up against a real-life Demon King!

If you want to know how I ended up here, we’ll have to go back to when it all began—the start of second semester, right after the end of summer break...

“Issei.”

I was playing a card game with the other members of the Gremory Familia in the club room when the prez called to me.

“What is it?” I asked.

“You’ve got a personal request,” she answered with a thin smile. “From the Demon King Leviathan herself.”

Whoa! Leviathan, one of the Four Great Demon Kings, wants to see me personally?

“Seriously?! I’m honored!” I exclaimed joyfully.

There is only one woman among the Four Great Demon Kings, and she wanted me to help her...! She is a pretty unusual person, though...

“She’s asking to borrow you, Koneko, Gasper, and Xenovia,” the prez added.

“Eeep!” Gasper shrieked from across the room. “M-me too?! But I want to stay here!”

Unsurprisingly, he went running off into his cardboard box. Considering he is a massive shut-in with a horrible social phobia, it was little wonder he didn’t want to go.

“Why us?” Xenovia asked, pointing to herself.

Koneko nodded, undoubtedly wondering the same thing.

“It sounds like she needs some assistance that only you guys can give,” the prez answered nonchalantly.

Only us, huh? Well...I have the powers of a mighty dragon within me, Gasper was a vampire, Koneko was a feline *youkai* called a *nekomata*, and Xenovia was an expert with Holy Swords.

Considering all that, I guess we were pretty special.

“I wish I could go with you,” the prez said while stroking my cheek. “Unfortunately, Akeno and I have other business. We’ll have Yuuto and the others to protect us, so don’t worry. I’ve already informed Leviathan, and she’s fine with it. Asia, you should go with Issei. You might learn something.”

“Okay. I’ll study as much as I can,” Asia said with an eager nod.

“There you have it,” Kiba remarked. “Akeno and the president need me, so I’ll leave the rest to you.”

Ngggghhh! He’s the prez’s escort?! Damn him, that cursed pretty boy! For all my jealousy, Kiba had certainly earned his place as the prez’s ever-dependable Knight.

Plop.

An exquisitely soft sensation pressed against my back! Akeno was embracing me! Ah, there could be no resisting the sweet warmth of her breasts! Before I knew it, she traced a finger around my lips!

“I wish I didn’t have to leave you, Issei. But you shouldn’t disappoint a Demon King, you know.”

“O-of course not!” I stammered in as strong a voice as I could muster, though there was no stopping myself from breaking out into a nosebleed.

Ow!

The next thing I knew, the prez reached out with a loving hand and pinched my cheek! She had a bad habit of getting jealous when other women got too close to me, even her own Familia members. I guess she couldn’t stand the thought of anyone taking me away! It was a joy to be her servant!

“Just be sure not to cause any trouble,” she warned.

“R-right. Argh!” I nodded as she tightened her grip.

And so, Asia, Koneko, Xenovia, Gasper, and I agreed to the Demon King’s summons.

—○○●—

The next day, we made the jump through a teleportation circle and arrived at the shore on an island.

There was no sign of a dock, and the water’s edge was riddled with craggy reefs. There was nothing in the way of sandy beaches, that was certain. Everywhere I looked, the landscape was dominated by dense forests and rugged mountains.

Yep, it looked like we were on a deserted island.

“*Kee-kee!*” came the distant cry of some creature I’d never heard before...

I thought we were supposed to still be in Japan.

“So, uh... Where’s the Demon King?” I wondered out loud, glancing about nervously.

Boom! Thump! Thud!

All of a sudden, the ground shook violently. What the heck was going on?!

The next moment, some gigantic creature stomped through the forest! It was just like a dinosaur, a monstrous Tyrannosaurus rex! Hold on, *was* it a T. rex?!

“Yoo-hoo, Rias’s servant demons! It’s me, Levia-tan!” said a cute little girl riding on the dinosaur’s back. She was dressed in a magical girl costume, like some kind of anime or manga character! Yup, it was none other than Demon King Leviathan!

“Whoa there! Whoa!” she called, treating the T. rex like a horse as she guided it to a stop before us.

“Whee!”

She leaped off the creature’s back, spun through the air, and—*Thump!*—landed flat on her face. Having failed to stick the landing, her clothes were a mess, and her underwear was out for all of us to see. A Demon King’s underwear! Striped panties!

She quickly jumped to her feet, flashing us all a peace sign. However, her face was still covered in dirt.

“Ta-da! Serafall Leviathan has arrived!” she exclaimed.

As usual, she was ridiculously high-spirited and carefree...

Last time I saw her at school, the encounter had basically devolved into a cosplay photo shoot. Serafall Leviathan, it turned out, was a huge fan of anime and was particularly obsessed with the magical girl genre. She was even twirling a glittery wand.

“I-it’s been a while. S-so, what did you want us for?” I said, trying to keep the greetings short and to the point.

Why had she called us to a deserted island?

“I need your help, all of you. I’m shooting a movie!” she explained while pulling off a dramatic pose.

Hold on, a movie?!

Before we had time to be surprised, several individuals hauling all kinds of film equipment came running toward us, practically chasing after the T. rex. We were really here to shoot a movie? Was that what the dinosaur was for?

“Scene twenty-one, Lady Serafall! *The Little Witch Frolicking with Ancient Dinosaurs!* We got some great shots!” a middle-aged man shouted into a megaphone. Sporting a hat and sunglasses, he looked like your typical film director. He must have been in charge of the shoot.

Hold on, I’d never heard of any stories where magical girls ran around playing with ancient dinosaurs!

“Director! These are the kids I told you about!” Serafall said to him.

“Ah! The Gremory Familia! Yes, I remember you all from that match!”

He knew us? From a match? Ah, right. Our Rating Game battle against the Sitri Familia had been broadcast throughout the entire underworld.

“When the director saw your Rating Game, he practically did a song and dance,” Serafall explained. “‘This is it!’ he said. That’s why he wanted you to join the production.”

An offer...? So this is going to be our silver screen debut?!

The director nodded along with the Demon King’s every word before chiming in. “Actually, we’re currently shooting a tie-in film for Lady Serafall’s children’s program *Magical Girl Levia-tan*. I thought you would all make good antagonists.”

“A-antagonists...? *Levia-tan*?” I repeated in confusion. I’d never heard of that show before.

“...A superhero TV show in the underworld. It’s popular with demon children,” Koneko explained.

Right, a superhero TV show. We had similar programs in Japan. I guess this was the movie adaptation.

“It’s all about me, *Levia-tan*, friend and ally of all demonkind, going up against all sorts of angels, fallen angels, dragons, and evil church people! I’ll annihilate anyone and everyone who threatens demon life!” Serafall struck another cute

pose, but her remarks left me feeling a little anxious.

“I know demons have been at odds with angels and fallen angels for a long time, but we recently made peace. Won’t making them villains sour the whole political mood or something?” I asked.

The director’s lips twisted into a smug grin. “I try to weave a few antigovernment messages into all my works.”

But this was a kid’s program, right?! And he was using it for propaganda?! Talk about scary! Was Leviathan really okay with this?!

“But why us?” I asked, returning to the current mystery.

The prez came from a prestigious background. Everyone in the underworld knew her name. But that was her. There was nothing particularly special about us, her Familia members. We were just average low-class demons.

Well, the prez *had* said something about us being able to offer some kind of *special help*, but what exactly had she meant?

“You’re a legendary dragon!” the director exclaimed, giving me a thumbs-up. “And you, a Holy Sword wielder! And you, a vampire! And you’re a *nekomata*! Yep! we couldn’t ask for better villains! And to top it all off, there isn’t a kid in the whole underworld who doesn’t know your faces! Your Rating Game was the talk of the town! So please, battle Levia-tan!”

Basically, he was betting on our newfound fame to promote his movie. Well, we *had* made a bit of a splash lately, in several ways. Apparently, our reward was playing the enemies of a Demon King.

“Sounds interesting.” Xenovia seemed to be on board.

“I-it sounds scary... But if I can help a Demon King...” Even Gasper, who literally was hiding behind my back, was willing to give it a shot.

“What about you, Asia, Koneko?” I asked. “I don’t think we have much choice, though...”

“Yes. I’ll do my best.”

“If they think I’m good enough...”

It sounded like everyone was at least okay with the idea.

And that included me, too. Come to think of it, this might be my big break! The first step on a successful acting career! If I played my cards right, I might find myself a hit with all the lovely ladies of the underworld!

I could already hear their frenzied screams as my security detail fought to keep them from swarming me.

“Aaahhh! Issei!”

“Over here, Issei!”

“You’re awesome, Issei!”

Exultations positively filled the air!

“M-my life is complete!”

“Hey! Another one just fainted in awe!” a security guard shouted as he carried away one of my female fans.

I could feel myself breaking out into a shallow grin.

“Heh-heh-heh. Oh, I’m a sinful man!”

The ladies shrieked in uncontrolled excitement as I struck a cool pose.

...

Bwa-ha-ha! Awesome! Could I ask for anything more?!

Maybe I’ll be able to date my adoring fans one after the other... No, no, it would be even better to go on a secret rendezvouses with big-name demon actresses while paparazzi catch it all on camera and publish it in the weekly tabloids!

Ah, my imagination knows no bounds! I already spend my days dreaming of becoming a high-class demon and a harem king, but maybe I could add “lady-killer actor” to my list!

“Then I can work with nude models and do *this...*,” I muttered, poking at imaginary breasts while drool dripped down my chin.

“Kyargh!”

Koneko stomped hard on my foot! Ow!

“...Obscene fantasies are forbidden.”

So strict!

After wiping my chin, I decided to follow the prez’s instructions to the letter!

“Got it! The Gremory Familia will gladly act as enemy characters in this movie!”

With that, our cinematic debut was set.

-○○●○-

“I-it’s heavier than I thought...”

C-clang.

The sound of metal scraping on metal rang about.

No sooner had we agreed to take part in the shoot than we were ushered into the woods.

There, I changed into the outfit the costume department had already prepared for me.

Red plate armor covered me from head to toe. It looked to be a replica of my Boosted Gear Scale Mail.

Since there were a number of limitations when it came to my transformation, the biggest of which was my Balance Breaker’s time limit. We’d be using this prop for the majority of the filming.

Unfortunately, it was seriously heavy, like wearing chunks of solid iron. It was some demon material designed to be light and extremely sturdy, but it was nearly impossible to move in!

Appearance-wise, it matched the genuine article. I had to hand it to the costume department. It even had some kind of voice function in the jewel on my gauntlet and a retractable visor for the helmet.

However, when I transformed for real, I didn’t feel nearly so caged in. Then again, it was probably natural that an all-body suit of armor felt bulky, right?

“Kee-kee!”

I heard another of those strange cries. Man, it was creepy! Dinosaurs and weird animals? This *definitely* wasn't Japan!



“Issei,” Asia said.

When I turned around...

“H-how do I look?”

...there she was, sporting an incredibly sinister outfit!

“Asia? What’s that supposed to be?”

“I’m a shrine maiden bound to the Red Dragon Emperor.”

Ah, a shrine maiden. She looked closer to an evil priestess, though. I suppose it made sense for the movie’s story... But I was conflicted about seeing our pure and innocent Asia dressed in something so ominous.

“And I’m an evil Holy Sword user,” Xenovia declared. She was dressed up like an Amazonian warrior, a feast for the eyes! “Whoever heard of an *evil* Holy Sword user...? Heh-heh-heh. Then again, as a former Christian turned renegade demon, maybe I’m perfect for the role.”

Xenovia started mumbling some weird stuff...

“...I’m a maid.” Koneko... Huh?! Hold on! Cat ears, a cat tail, *and* a maid outfit?!

What unbelievably destructive power! I’d never seen such a cute sight before!

To recap, I was in full-body plate armor, Asia was dressed as an evil shrine maiden, Xenovia had been made up as an Amazonian Holy Sword user, and Koneko was a cat maid.

Hmm. Not bad. We made one heck of a team of enemies for Levia-tan to take down, that was for sure.

Apparently, the premise of the film was that I was an evil dragon sealed away on this deserted island, while Koneko and the others belonged to an evil organization intent on reviving me.

Levia-tan was trying to stop them. Very typical for a children’s superhero.

“...Gaspy?” Koneko asked, glancing around.

Ah, right, we were missing someone. Where had he run off to now? He was

supposed to be a vampire. What kind of costume would the staff have made for him?

“O-over here...”

That was his voice, all right, but I couldn’t find him.

“H-here...”

I continued to scan my surroundings. Eventually, my eyes found a large cardboard box, complete with a hole on the side. A pair of gleaming red eyes peered out through it.

I-it can’t be. Seriously?

“Hey, Gaspy. Don’t tell me you’re going out there dressed like that.”

“I am!” he replied cheerfully. “The director saw me hiding in here when we were picking my costume, and he said ‘Well, this is new! All right, let’s have you be a cardboard vampire!’ That’s what happened.”

“That’s what happened”?! Gasper already had a bad habit of hiding in boxes, and this was only going to make it worse!

“Are you really okay with that?!”

No one would be able to see your face! Gasper would stand out, but not in a good way!

“Yes!” came his response!

Ugh! Fine, then!

We were already a bizarre lineup! I guess we could add cardboard-box vampire to our members.

Undoubtedly, we’d stoke controversy with any vampire viewers! Gasper wasn’t even going to show his face! He was completely sheltered in a stock-standard cardboard box! Why even have an actor at that point?! If the director really wanted a character like that, he could just add it later with CGI!

“All right, everyone. Once you’ve finished reading the script, we’ll start filming,” said a member of the film crew.

It was time to get underway, despite the nervous knot in my stomach.

Scene A: Levia-tan vs. Nekomata and Cardboard-Box Vampire!

And so the shoot began. First, Levia-tan sprouted demonic wings to glide over a forest crawling with evil monsters.

“...I won’t let you through, Levia-tan.”

In came Koneko, dressed as an enemy *nekomata* maid! The director had asked her to act naturally, so she was her usual soft-spoken self.

“You must be with that group trying to resurrect the Red Dragon Emperor, sealed deep in this forest! What are you after?!”

Whoa, Leviathan’s going all in.

“...That’s none of your concern. If you get in our way, we’ll have no choice but to eliminate you.” Koneko stood firm. She wasn’t half bad at this acting stuff.

“Whee! Levia-beam!”

Leviathan unleashed a beam of demonic energy from her wand!

Whoa! They aren’t using CGI for that?!

“We try not to use digital effects on *Magical Girl Levia-tan*. The idea is to make it look as real as possible,” a member of the film crew quickly explained.

Demon powers were certainly convenient! Fortunately, the techniques Leviathan used were just for show, so even if she scored a hit...

Booooooom!

A powerful explosion tore through the forest, throwing trees and dirt high into the air.

...

What the...? Why’s she using so much power for a movie shoot?!

I doubted she was seriously trying to cause destruction, yet that Demon King beam of hers packed an immense punch! More importantly, Koneko was in real danger! At least, I thought so.

“...You’ll need more than that to take me down,” she said, deftly evading! It was a good thing she was a *nekomata*!

“Wow! Way to go, Gremory Familia!” the director praised.

Hold on. What would he have done if Koneko *hadn't* dodged?

Something told me it was best not to think too deeply about that.

Would I be able to survive a hit if it came to that? My only real choice was to trust in the defensive capabilities of this custom-made suit of armor!

It was a good thing Asia didn't have any action scenes. Given her lack of athletic ability, she might not be able to escape in time!

Uh-oh! One of the beams struck Koneko head-on! This was bad!

I almost had a heart attack...but thankfully, she didn't look too badly hurt. Her clothes were still intact.

“Don't worry. Lady Serafall weakens her attacks before they strike anyone,” the same staff member from earlier reassured me.

That was a relief. Basically, Leviathan went all out with her attacks when she knew her targets could evade and turned down the power when she needed to score a hit.

I would've been beside myself if Koneko got blown away.

“...Ugh.” Koneko dropped to all fours.

“You! Cat *youkai*! Do you still intend to fight?!”

Levia-tan leveled her magic wand at Koneko.

“...S-s-stop right there!” Gasper shouted. A cardboard box appeared between Levia-tan and Koneko!

A cardboard box! They were seriously going with a plain old cardboard box?!

“I-I-I'm a vampire! Eeep!”

Poor Gasper was so nervous that he stumbled over his lines. There was probably no helping it. For a shut-in like him, taking part in a film shoot must be a nightmare. If not for the box, I doubt he would've been able to go near the cameras.

“U-u-unlike our *nekomata*, I—I—I—”

Before he could say any more...

Whoosh!

...a huge black shadow descended from above!

Huh?! A monstrous bird?!

Was this part of the film production?!

“Kee-kee!”

That strange cry we’d heard earlier belonged to this creature. The giant bird gripped cardboard-box Gasper in its talons, and then...

“Kee-kee!”

...it took off high into the sky!

I-is this all staged...? Gasper was rapidly disappearing into the distance. Did the bird belong to Levia-tan? Maybe it was her familiar?

“What’s that bird supposed to be?” asked the film director.

“Beats me,” answered a crew member.

...

Huuuuuh?! Hold on a second! This isn’t part of the script?!

“Gasperrrrr!” I cried to the heavens.

By now, he’d vanished into the horizon.

In my mind’s eye, I pictured his smiling face as he soared through the clouds. Later, I learned that the creature was a legendary monster called a Ziz, a kind of celestial demon bird.

What was a mythological creature doing on this deserted island? And why did it only go for Gasper? The mysteries were piling up, but one thing was for sure—I’d never forget our lost little vampire.

Scene B: Levia-tan vs. Holy Sword Wielder and Cardboard-Box Vampire General!

“Wahhh! All of a sudden, my body felt all light and floaty and *whoooooosh!*”

Gaspar had been safely recovered. He sobbed endlessly in his cardboard box.

Incidentally, although that abduction was completely unscripted, it made for an extremely dramatic plot development, so the film crew elected to keep it in.

On top of that, the director was so moved by the sight of a cardboard-box vampire being hauled into the air by a giant bird that he decided to use Gaspar in the next scene as well.

Well, this was probably the only cardboard-box vampire in the whole world to be whisked away by a giant bird, which certainly made him unique.

Hold on, when did Gaspar's role in the script change to 'cardboard-box vampire general'?

Why did he get a class change?! Did he rack up a huge amount of experience points or something?!

Shortly after, the shoot changed location to some mysterious ruins up in the mountains. It looked like a set built exclusively for filming.

There, Levia-tan was pitted against Xenovia. I'd lent Xenovia Ascalon for the scene. After all, she still couldn't properly control Durendal, and with the amount of destructive power that Holy Sword packed, it simply wasn't safe for filming.

"Sword master! Step aside! I won't let you awaken the Red Dragon Emperor!"

"Oh-ho-ho. I think not."

Xenovia sounded like she was reading straight from the script!

We *were* all amateurs at this whole acting thing, so that probably wasn't particularly surprising.

"Here I go!"

"Bring it!"

The two moved at incredible speed, wand and Holy Sword shooting sparks in all directions as they clashed repeatedly.

This was shaping up to be one awesome fight scene! Demon King and Holy Swordswoman—they were both great at this! I'd been a little worried about

this fight, but things seemed to be okay. Levia-tan's wand somehow managed to hold up against the Ascalon. It was astonishing. Evidently, that wand wasn't just for show.

Levia-tan unleashed volley after volley of demonic blasts, Xenovia deflecting them all with her Holy Sword. Even the film crew got totally absorbed in the agile action.

Scenes like this would carry the movie more than the cheesy dialogue. If we could keep this up, we might have a hit on our hands.

As the fight reached its climax, Levia-tan's magic finally knocked back Xenovia's Holy Sword, sending it flying through the air until it stuck in the ground!

"Ugh. You're good, Levia-tan."

Again, Xenovia's lines were stiff and devoid of impact. Fortunately for her, an additional scene had been inserted into the script to spice things up!

"Save me, vampire," she called flatly.

Yup, the new scene involved cardboard-box Gasper coming to her rescue.

The camera panned across to where he stood, but...

Chomp-chomp.

...the T. rex from earlier grabbed ahold of the box, munched on it, and carried it away!

It was eating Gasper!

"Gasperrrrr!" My cry echoed across the set.

I will never forget you, Gasper!

Scene C: Levia-tan's Final Showdown, the Resurrection of the Legendary Dragon, and the Cardboard-Box Vampire God!

"Oh my gooosshhh! It was sooo stinky! The dinosaur's mouth was all squishy and warm and wet! It was so scary!"

Gasper wept nonstop in a fresh cardboard box after he'd been rescued from the T. rex.

Again, the director decided to keep the footage of the attack and incorporate it into the story. On top of that, he also revised the final scene to feature Gasper, too.

It didn't make any sense! Was the director trying to make Gasper the main character? Whisked away by a huge bird, nearly eaten by a hungry dinosaur—it certainly was a fresh and unprecedented portrayal as far as cardboard boxes were concerned, but, well...it wasn't something I'd pay to watch.

At this rate, all of vampire society is going to come out against us! And why is "cardboard-box vampire god" written on the cue cards? Gasper's leveled up to god tier now? Why does being eaten by a dinosaur turn you into a deity?!

Was I imagining things, or did that make him even more powerful than me, the guy playing the final boss? Gasper was on track to eclipse Levia-tan herself...

"This is gonna be a killer movie! The secret is all in the element of surprise!"

Well, I certainly hadn't predicted these plot developments. I mean, who could've anticipated a film about Levia-tan giving so much screen time to a vampire in a cardboard box? Would the kids be happy watching a cardboard box getting abused by birds and dinosaurs?

"Mr. Box! We've got your new lines!" the director said as he started writing something on the box's inside flaps with a marker.

...

Sneaking a peek, I saw *Die, angels!* followed by *Eat sand, fallen angels!* and then more anti-alliance messages!

"You can't include lines like that in a children's movie! And it doesn't make any sense to have a cardboard-box vampire say them! You're going to make all sorts of enemies!" I had to put my foot down. By following this script, we were basically taking part in antigovernment propaganda!

"I want it to be more than just a kid's movie. This film will change the world!" the director replied.

"It's not going to change anything!" I shot back.

What exactly did he think he was making?

Ugh. Whatever. Anyway, I was up next. I'd already committed my lines to memory, so after Asia summoned me at the altar in the ruins, it would be time to make my spectacular, explosive appearance.

Heh-heh-heh. This was going to propel me to superstardom in the underworld! I didn't really mind taking part in an antigovernment movie if it meant making all my dreams come true! Just think how many sexy encounters I'd get with beautiful actresses if this did well!

The most standout scene of all was the final battle in front of a massive dragon statue. Asia, dressed as an evil shrine maiden, was deep in prayer, working to break the seal containing the Red Dragon Emperor.

"O Red Dragon Emperor! O Red Dragon Emperor! Grant me this dark wish! Use your wicked powers to defeat the hateful Levia-tan!"

Her delivery may have been flat and robotic, but the sight of her doing her absolute best was nothing short of adorable! I'd have to congratulate her later!

After Asia's invocation, Levia-tan made her entrance.

"So this is where the Red Dragon Emperor is sealed! Uh-oh! It's already begun!" she said, confronting Asia. "Stop that!" she ordered, readying her wand.

Asia stood, lifting her arms up to the sky. After her next line, the dragon statue would split in two, and the Red Dragon Emperor—me—would appear behind it. I was a bundle of nerves here, but I would give it my all. Luckily, I had my lines down pat!

Honestly, I just wanted to get this done with as quickly as possible so I could get out of this armor. Seriously, it was the worst! So stifling and hot!

"O Red Dragon Emperor! Now is the time for your resurrection!"

That was my cue!

Crack!

There came a huge burst of light and a thunderous, earthshaking tremor. The statue split vertically down the middle.

All right! Here goes!

Amid swirling smoke effects, I leaped out from behind the broken statue.

“Bwa-ha-ha! It is I, the Red Dragon Emperor! I have received the prayers of the wicked and made my return! Bwa-ha-ha! As my first act, I shall destroy the underworld and those wretched demons who sealed me!”

I let out a cartoonish laugh. A perfect performance, if I say so myself. There was no way the director would cut this!

Next thing I knew, Levia-tan waved her wand in my direction.

“You’re back, Red Dragon Emperor! But I won’t let you harm the underworld! I’ll annihilate you right here, right now!”

“Bwa-ha-ha! You’re a fool to stand against the almighty Red Dragon Emperor, demon girl! Very well. You will be the first to fall!”

I was in my groove now! It was surprisingly fun playing the bad guy for once!

Next up was the big fight scene between me and Levia-tan.

Right, if memory served correctly, this suit of armor was supposed to be equipped with a demonic energy generator and a prop flamethrower...

Just as we launched into our pitched battle, a massive concentration of demonic power gathered at the end of Leviathan’s wand, crackling with electricity strong enough to send shock waves through the air.

Huh? Isn’t she going a bit overboard? That much energy...is beyond dangerous.

It seemed to me she was being far more aggressive than the situation warranted...

“I will defeat you, Red Dragon Emperor!”

The next moment, that mass of demonic energy exploded all around me, sending me flying through the air!

-○○●○-

With all that out of the way, let’s go back to where we kicked off—with me racing through the forest in my heavy, clanging armor!

Leviathan was going to kill me! There was no way I could survive such a

tremendous display of strength!

I noticed one of the film crew members holding up another oversize cue board...

THIS IS A CRUCIAL SCENE FOR THE FINAL BATTLE, SO YOU'LL WANT TO TRY TO FIGHT LIKE YOU MEAN IT.

“Fight like you mean it?!” Leviathan is a demon king! One sneeze from her is enough to level an entire mountain! Each time I dodged one of her attacks, part of the island scenery was blown away mercilessly!

“Stop! Fight me fair and square!” she shouted while chasing after me.

She was going to kill me! No one charged up an attack like she did unless they seriously meant to hurt their opponent!

Booooooom!

An explosion carved a huge scar through the earth! Whoa! And what was this? My armor, which was supposed to be shock-resistant, now had a huge crack running through it! I knew I wouldn't stand a chance going head-to-head with a Demon King!

All that just from the shock of an indirect hit! What would happen to me if I took a blow head-on?!

Wasn't the director going to call “Cut”?! Come on! This was turning into a one-sided massacre! I frantically glanced back to the film crew, yet all the director did was give me a thumbs-up!

Whaaat?! You want us to keep going?!

I was so taken aback that my eyes almost popped from their sockets, but Levia-tan wasn't about to let up! My only option was to run for my life! That would hardly make for an entertaining movie, though!

I had to do *something*, at least, so I spun around and activated my flamethrower!

Fwoosh! Crackle-sizzle!

The suit's so-called flamethrower was no more powerful than a Bunsen burner, shooting several weak bursts of softball-size flames from my right hand.

“That’s it?! No way! I can’t do this!” I wailed.

A member of the film crew held up another large cue board. WE’LL TOUCH IT UP WITH CGI IN POST.

“You’re willing to use CGI for *this*?!”

This whole project was a mistake!

“An impressive attack, Red Dragon Emperor! But I won’t lose!” Leviathan was reading her next line as though I’d just unleashed some tremendous technique! I guess they really were just going to digitally modify that last shot!

“Take this!”

Down came the killing blow...

Ba-dooooooooom!

A burst of demonic power launched from her wand and blasted me away in spectacular fashion...

Ooof. I tumbled through the air and hit the ground hard. Quickly snapping back to my senses, I scrambled on all fours to try to get away.

My whole body ached... My armor was barely even recognizable... At this rate, I really was done for! Why hadn’t that damn director called “Cut” yet?!

“I-Issei!” came Gasper’s voice.

Glancing around, I spotted a cardboard box.

“G-Gaspy...”

I willed my battered limbs to keep moving, hoping that Gasper would save me.

I was seriously wounded here...

“Ugh. I couldn’t beat her alone...,” I muttered, crawling to the box and poking a trembling finger through the box’s hole. I was bruised all over, my finger covered in blood.

“Take my blood... Use it to power up...,” I whispered in a quivering voice.

Yep, this was it... I was about to pass out...

“I-Issei! I—I—I—I—”

“Gasper... Maybe *you’re* what the world needs... A vampire in a box... Avenge meee...”

I fell flat on the ground with my finger still stuffed into the box. Uh-oh. I’d lost all strength to move...

“Isseeiii!” Gasper screamed.

I could feel him sucking on my finger... His mouth was so warm, so pleasant... Blacking out, it struck me that this was the kind of thing you might see in a BL manga...

Boom!

Through my blurred vision, I watched as the cardboard box was enveloped in an all-powerful aura. Evidently, my blood had unleashed Gasper’s full potential.

“Levia-tan! I’ll fight you!” Gasper shouted. The cardboard box shot through the air!

After changing trajectory a few times to avoid her attacks, it descended toward her at incredible speed.

“So fast! Are you a cardboard-box vampire god?!”

Levia-tan trembled in fear at Gasper’s turbocharged movements as the two coursed through the air, clashing again and again.

Gasper’s cardboard box gracefully evaded Levia-tan’s every projectile. Then, once he was ready, he started charging in at breakneck speed.

In the skies above this deserted island, Levia-tan and a cardboard-box vampire were engaged in nail-biting battle...

W-whoa... Somehow Gasper held his own against a real-life Demon King.

“Film that box! Get every angle! We won’t ever get another chance like this again! Look at it go, taking the fight to a Demon King!” The director was practically jumping for joy.

Heh-heh-heh, way to go, Gasper...

I blacked out while watching my courageous underclassman leap to my

defense.

And so fell the mighty Red Dragon Emperor, eclipsed by a humble cardboard box.

-○○●○-

“And that’s how I, Magical Levia-tan, defeated my greatest foe yet, the cardboard-box vampire god, and brought peace to the underworld!”

We members of the Gremory Familia, including the prez and everyone who hadn’t taken part in the shoot, found ourselves in a huge underworld movie theater for the film’s premiere.

“Thank you! Thank you!”



Leviathan herself was up on the stage, enjoying a standing ovation from the audience.

Asia, Koneko, Xenovia, and I had also featured in the film, but Gasper stole the show. The producers had even abandoned the working title, *Attack of the Red Dragon Emperor*, to shift the focus to his character...

Film critics and industry insiders were calling it *the best cardboard-box action of the year*, praising its creative combination of cardboard boxes and agile movement. Seriously, though, cardboard-box action?

Apparently, Gasper had already received offers from several other directors—for roles involving cardboard boxes, of course. Yep, the demon film industry was a complete enigma to me.

“You did well, everyone. Especially you, Gasper. That was incredible.”

Although I had mixed feelings about it, our boss, the prez, was delighted by our efforts. At least there was that silver lining. If she was happy, then so was I.

“U-um, Issei?” Asia said.

“What is it?”

“There are some girls here who say they’re fans of yours. They want to shake your hand.”

What?! Ha! So the film still helped convey my masculine charm! Maybe it wasn’t such a bad debut for my budding acting career!

“All right, then, fangirls! Run into my arms!

C-clang.

Clank.

Two individuals equipped in full-blown samurai armor approached.

Huh...?

“...They seem to be armor monsters,” Koneko remarked.

R-right. A-and what do they want with me?

“...They’re girls. They loved seeing you in your armor.”

The two armor-clad figures nodded, confirming Koneko's words.

Huuuh?! Girls?! You've gotta be kidding me!

Clang! They embraced me!

Ow! Ugh! That hard, cold iron was crushing me to a pulp!

"I'm never doing another movie again!" My screams reverberated through the movie theater.

My summer movie shoot ended with me being pulverized by a pair of adoring armor monsters.

Later, the film earned a modest reputation as my first onscreen appearance prior to my big break as the Breast Dragon.

Life.2

Issei SOS

Not long after we finished helping out with Leviathan's film, we received an unexpected visitor at the club room.

"Yo, Rias. I have a favor to ask. Do you mind if I borrow Issei Hyoudou for a little bit?"

This almost-high-handed request came from none other than Kiyome Abe, the captain of the school's tennis club. There had been a little trouble between her club and ours back in first semester...

The prez narrowed her eyes. "I'm tempted to say no, but I suppose I'll hear you out."

Yes, the last time Kiyome had dropped in, she challenged Rias to a tennis match with me as the trophy. Ultimately, our side had won, but I'll never forget the pain and torment this girl put me through!

Had the latent powers of the Red Dragon Emperor drawn her to me like so many others? Was that it?

Kiyome, oblivious to my feelings, went on. "Actually, my dad's dropping by on his way back from a business trip. I need Issei to help me deal with him."

She needed help? From me?

"Oh dear. Bullying Issei won't make it any easier, you know?" Akeno said.

Ah, her kindness knew no bounds. How touching!

"...Letting him help you could be sending him to his doom," Koneko added ominously.

Hey, Koneko! Maybe dial it back!

"But shouldn't we help those in need?" Asia wondered aloud.

She was such a gentle soul!

“So why exactly do you need Issei’s help?” the prez asked.

“My dad keeps trying to get me to agree to an arranged marriage. But I’m still in high school. I told him I don’t want to rush, but he won’t listen... He’s a stubborn old coot. He never changes once he’s made up his mind.”

Hmm. A meeting with a prospective marriage partner.

Kiba, our handsome pretty boy, nodded in understanding. “I see. You come from a prestigious line of skilled monster handlers, so your parents want to find you a suitable husband as quickly as possible. Right?”

“Spot on, Kiba.”

Yes, Kiyome was a monster handler... Just thinking about that stirred up unpleasant memories.

“Gasper,” Xenovia began, addressing a nearby cardboard box. “She says she’s a monster tamer. Wouldn’t *you* be better suited to helping her, since you’re a vampire?”

“Eeep!” the box shrieked in response. “N-n-no, I can’t! I won’t be any help at all!”

Gasper, our shut-in, was huddled in his box to keep from having to meet Kiyome face-to-face.

The fact the Occult Research Club was composed entirely of demons was a secret to the rest of the school. Kiyome only knew the truth because of a special agreement with the prez.

Apparently, there were several other students at Kuou Academy’s kindergarten, elementary, middle, high school, and affiliated university who knew the truth. I hadn’t met them yet, but the prez and the student council chairwoman seemed to know who they were. For the most part, they came from special backgrounds or possessed supernatural abilities of some kind.

“Basically, you want Issei to mess up your arranged marriage,” the prez said with a sigh.

“Yes.” Kiyome nodded. “I thought I’d have him be my pretend boyfriend. I’ve

already told my dad I'm in a relationship with someone to get out of this meeting. He said he might be willing to call off the arrangement altogether if my boyfriend satisfied certain conditions. Anyway, I only need him for a day... Hmm? Why does it feel suddenly cold in here?"

Sure enough, Kiyome was visibly shivering. Glancing around, I caught all the female club members giving her murderous glares.

Wh-what's the matter, everyone...?

"She wants Issei to be her boyfriend...?"

"Unbelievable. I haven't even had a turn with him yet..."

"I won't allow it."

"Damn right."

Asia, Akeno, Koneko, and Xenovia were positively seething with rage!

I wondered how the prez would receive this request. She adored me like a pet, so I doubted she'd gladly let me get caught up in anything dangerous. I got the feeling that those *conditions* Kiyome mentioned weren't going to be easy!

To my astonishment, the prez placed a hand under her chin and sank deep into thought. She didn't look the slightest bit angry.

"Okay," she said after a moment, glancing my way. "If you're willing pay the required price, I'll hear you out."

None of us had expected this!

And so, it was decided that I would play the role of Kiyome's boyfriend to save her from an undesired marriage...

I had a bad feeling about this. I mean, I still didn't know what those "conditions" were...

-○●○-

The following Saturday, the members of the Gremory Familia were summoned to Kiyome's home.

I was the only one who actually had to do any work, but the others—the prez included—were so worried about me that they decided to tag along.

My friends! Your concern is much appreciated!

Upon arrival, we found ourselves at a huge Western-style mansion, complete with spacious garden and a magnificent interior. Kiyome's parents were famous monster tamers who spent much of their time out traveling the world, and so Kiyome lived alone for the most part. Her father had recently returned from a long absence—which was when he first brought up all this talk about her getting engaged.

Over the summer, the prez had my own house transformed into a six-story mansion with three floors aboveground and another three below, so I couldn't complain.

After entering the building, we were led down a seemingly never-ending corridor to an indoor swimming pool.

For some reason, we were all provided with fitted swimsuits, so we changed into them before making our way poolside.

Whooooaaa! Akeno and the prez were both in extra-revealing bikinis! Their breasts bounced about with every movement! Then came Asia and Koneko, both in cute frilly swimsuits, followed by Xenovia, in athletic swimwear. Each of our female club members was a feast for the eyes!

Even Gasper was dressed in a cute girl's swimsuit...

"You don't need to wear that," I reminded him. He did look like a girl, though, so he pulled it off well enough.

"B-b-but if I wore men's swimwear, m-my chest would be completely exposed! I'd be humiliated!"

"Who would want to ogle a man's chest?!" I fired back.

That was enough fun and games.

"This way, everyone," Kiyome beckoned from a table by the side of the pool.

Once we were all seated, she outlined the conditions I would have to meet to help her thwart the arranged marriage.

"My dad's conditions...are basically all competitive matches between monster tamers."

“Huh? Come again?” I said with disbelief.

“There will be a total of three matches, one each for land, sea, and airborne monsters,” Kiyome explained, raising a finger for each challenge. “If you can best my dad in at least two, the marriage will be called off.”

“Land, sea, and air... You know I’m not a monster tamer, right?”

Heck, I didn’t even have my own familiar yet. And she expected me to command monsters to beat a real-life professional? Kiyome had to know she was asking for the impossible.

I cocked my head in consternation, and Kiyome pointed across the room.

“That won’t be a problem. I’ve already picked out the monsters you’ll be using. Let’s start with the land one... It’s okay now, you can come on out!”

“Hoo-hoo-hoo!”

The second that familiar roar and violent drumming reached my ears, my whole body tensed!

It can’t be!

Before I knew it, a gigantic white gorilla jumped out in front of me! I knew it! Those eyes staring at me positively burned with passion!

“Hoo-hoo!”

“For the land battle, you’ll be fighting with Christie the *yuki-onna*.”

“Stop calling her that! You’re ruining my fantasies!”

Did you know? The fabled snow women, the *yuki-onna* of Japanese folklore, weren’t actually a bewitching kimono-clad *yukai*, but instead hyper-muscular white gorillas.

Christie here was one such specimen. As far as I was concerned, she was a yeti. I wasn’t about to call her a *yuki-onna*!

During our tennis match a few months ago, the prez and I had played as a doubles team against Kiyome and this snow gorilla. Her frozen breath had certainly left us out in the cold, so to speak... I wish I could forget it ever happened.

“Your fur looks shinier than last time,” the prez observed, as if somehow impressed.

Seriously?! Why was her fur important?! She was a gorilla!

“For the land battle, I’ll need you to direct Christie against whatever monster my dad decides to use.”

I was supposed to fight with this Goristie?!

“Hoo-hoo...”

Don’t look at me like that! Damn that gorilla and her teary eyes! That ape has been in love with me ever since the tennis match! Why can’t I be popular with *human* women?! I mean, I don’t even have a girlfriend! Why was the world so unjust?!

“Next, I’ll introduce you to your sea monster companion. She’s a mermaid,” Kiyome said, snapping her fingers.

The next moment, a figure sped through the pool at incredible speed.

“A mermaid?! Really?!”

My face lit up in excitement. A mermaid was a lovely creature like a gorgeous woman from the waist up and a fish from the waist down!

“Mermaids have beautiful singing voices, you know,” Akeno said.

Wow! Something else to look forward to! I thought.

Splash!

The mermaid leaped high into the air!

“This is my mermaid friend, Estelina,” Kiyome said.

The creature before me was best described as a huge tuna that had sprouted legs.

“Glub-glub.”

Glub-glub?!

This was a mermaid?! It was a fish—a fish, dammit!

“What the heck is that?!” I was so shocked that my eyes could’ve popped

clean out of their sockets.

“A mermaid.”

Wahhhhh?!

“Cut it out! Quit ruining my fantasies! I’ve been crying nonstop since I got here!”

This was supposed to be a mermaid?! Seriously?! It had to be a joke! This was just too horrifying! It was even worse than a dream crusher! What good could a freakish creature with human legs do?!

“There’s no way that thing can have a beautiful voice! It’s a fish!”

“How rude. Would you sing for us, Estelina?” Kiyome asked the giant tuna.

“Glub-glub, glub-glub-glub!”

The next thing I knew, it started reciting some cursed song in a low, husky voice. What was “glub-glub” supposed to mean, anyway?!

“Stop! Please, stop! I don’t want to have to stab you with a harpoon!”

Why?! First the *yuki-onna*, now this so-called mermaid—why was the world dead set on punishing me?!

Honestly, I’d expected something like this. I’d seen it coming a mile away. Still, I’d hoped fate would show me some mercy. My tears flowed nonstop at this cruel turn of events.

“Such a cute song!” Asia muttered, her eyes sparkling.

The fish had left her utterly captivated.

“This... This is just too brutal...”

I collapsed to the floor. No matter how you looked at it, the mermaid was just some tuna with legs... If I ever accidentally hooked a creature like that while fishing, I would release it immediately and pretend I never saw it. After all, I didn’t want it to curse me!

“...There, there,” Koneko comforted me, patting me on the head.

Ah, Koneko!

Nekomatas were so cute. Why couldn't I say the same for this *yuki-onna* and mermaid...? I didn't want to live on this planet!

I sank into a deep depression.

Kiyome, meanwhile, sipped from her cup of tea. "Well, I've heard there are mermaids out there like you see in stories, but in general, this is what most of them look like."

"Like *that*?! You've got to be kidding me! I don't want *that* to be what comes to mind each time I try to imagine a mermaid!"

Estelina was lying next to the pool, opening and closing her mouth in what looked like agonizing pain...

"*Glub-glub...*"

"Oh dear. This is bad. She's dehydrated. She breathes through her gills, so she'll die if she stays on land too long."

Of course she would! She was a fish!

"Then throw her back into the sea! She'll have a much better life if she stays at the bottom of the ocean. And so will I!" I shouted.

As we returned Estelina to the pool, a fresh figure approached—a birdman, complete with a flared crest on his head, a beak for a mouth, and wings for arms!

"Milady. Your father will be arriving shortly."

"I understand." Kiyome nodded. "Apologies for the delay. This is Takahashi, my personal bodyguard. He'll be your partner for the aerial battle, Hyoudou."

"Takahashi?! Isn't that a Japanese name?! I've met several Takahashis!"

"He's from Kobe."

"Kobe?! There are birdmen in Kobe?!"

"Strange... I thought the legendary tribe of birdmen was native to Easter Island..." Xenovia, a living compendium of monster knowledge, tilted her head to one side in confusion.

Were there really birdmen among those Moai statues?!

“Ah, you must mean the Watanabe tribe,” the birdman answered. “My ancestors migrated to Japan and became the Takahashis.”

“Japan or Easter Island, I don’t care anymore!” I cried.

It was best not to think too much about it. Yep. There were birdmen in Kobe. If you happen to see one, let me know as soon as possible!



“You must be the boy Lady Abe requested, the one with the legendary Red Dragon Emperor? Oh-ho, I see. You have a virile look about you. I’m Takahashi Sky. *Sky* is written with the characters for *radiant* and *sky*. Nice to meet you.”

The birdman was a gentleman in every respect, even offering to shake my hand. Heck, even his name was dazzling.

“Yes, nice to meet you...,” I said. “Do you enjoy having an unnecessarily trendy and elaborate name? No one would guess that the characters *radiant* and *sky* would be pronounced like the English word *sky*.”

“Oh-ho, it’s good to be young. When I was your age, I had a special talent for forgetting things in three easy steps.”

“So you’re a birdbrain, too?! Well, I guess you *do* have a bird’s head! Are you sure it’s a special talent, though? Sounds more like a weakness! It’s definitely not a point of pride!”

This was the worst. A snow gorilla, a reverse mermaid, and a birdbrained guy. They were like enemies from some kind of Saturday morning superhero cartoon... Even their names—Christie, Estelina, and Takahashi—seemed fake. Yep, I was done for.

“Good luck, Issei. We’ll be rooting for you,” the prez said, trying to encourage me.

Prez! You’re too kind! Like a dependable older sister!

Why’d she ever agree to go along with this? Was there some special reason why Rias, who absolutely adored her servants, accepted such a crazy, unreasonable proposition?

“Hey, Prez, why’d you accept Kiyome’s request?” I inquired.

“I’ve had similar problems with my parents trying to arrange an engagement for me, remember?” she answered with a grin. “Understand?”

Right... Early last semester, the prez had been forced into an engagement with a partner her parents had picked for her.

The prez respected freedom of love more than anything and was absolutely opposed to arranged marriages. That was why we, the members of her Familia,

had made sure hers was stopped. She undoubtedly related to Kiyome's current predicament.

"Got it! I'll do my best!"

"That's my dear Issei," the prez answered, stroking my cheek.

Ah, it felt amazing.

"Now, don't get any ideas when it comes to Kiyome Abe, Issei," she added, her smile masking an intense, threatening aura.

Uh-oh!

"The president can tolerate you being with the female members of her own Familia, to an extent," Akeno whispered into my ear. "But she won't forgive any playing around with other women."

"I can hear you, Akeno," the prez snapped.

"Oh dear. I'm sorry."

Squish!

Whoaaa! Akeno pressed against me from behind while wearing no more than a bikini! I could feel her breasts directly against my skin! Ah, that smooth, pliable, supple sensation was going to give me a nosebleed. They were so soft! So irresistible!

"Issei...", the prez sighed as she pinched my cheek.

Ow! Ouch! She was a worrywart. I cared for her more than anyone!

Asia, Xenovia, and Kiba had entered the pool to play with an inflatable ball. Koneko and Gasper, meanwhile, were floating about on swimming rings.

Everyone had time to relax except for me. I had to prepare for what would no doubt be a difficult fight.

Seriously, guys, you'd better help out if I end up in a pinch.

"Okay. Let's get ready to see my dad," Kiyome said.

With that, the plan to break off her arranged betrothal was underway!

Dark clouds were gathering overhead when we assembled in the garden outside the mansion to wait for Kiyome's father.

The sudden arrival of swift, heavy hoofbeats signaled the approach of a strange creature near the gate.

A formidable man with a massive physique and an air of incredible danger appeared!

He was riding atop a huge, black horse, wore a horned helmet and a cape, and his gaze was piercingly sharp! Whoa! Had he just returned from some parallel universe?! A realm where violence reigned?! Was this Kiyome's father...?!

"So you're the miscreant who presumes to date my daughter?" he bellowed, glare practically impaling me.

Eeep! Had he already decided I was up to no good?!

"That's right, Father," Kiyome answered, entwining her arm around my own. "This is Issei Hyoudou, my boyfriend."

Ohhh. I could feel her breasts pressing against my arm... Th-they were so wonderfully soft...

My skin broke out into goose bumps. Glancing around, I saw the prez fixing me with a strained smile, a fiery red aura enveloping her head to toe! Uh-oh. She was mad at me! I thought she was going to back me up!

"Very well," Kiyome's father said without dismounting from his horse. "I shall judge you personally to gauge whether you are suitable to join the Abe family as my daughter's groom."

Ah! Electric sparks were all but shooting from the man! In other words, the showdown was on!

The first round was a contest between land monsters, the battlefield a rectangular space in the estate's garden.

"This shall be my first warrior! Step forth!"

His chosen monster was a snow gorilla, one much larger than Christie!

Whoa! Its whole body was covered in scars!

That thing had definitely seen a great many fights! It was like a battle-hardened warrior! And it had such an intimidating aura!

“That thing looks intense, Kiyome... Are you sure Christie’s up to this?” I asked.

Kiyome shook her head.

Huh? No? I almost flew into a panic. After a moment, Kiyome said, “That’s Christie’s big sister, Stephanie.”

Huh? Had I misheard?

“Sister...? Stephanie...? I-it’s a female...?”

“Yes. A maiden.”

“You want to have a battle between female snow gorillas?!”

And sisters, no less! There was no way this was going to end well!

“I, Yuuto Kiba, will act as referee,” Kiba said, making his way into the center of the battlefield before motioning for the two snow gorillas to approach.

It looked like Kiyome’s dad and I were supposed to stand at opposite edges of the field, issuing orders from afar.

“Begin!” Kiba announced. With that, the fight was underway!

“Stephanie! First move—Drumming!”

“Hoo-hoo!”

Thump-thump-thump!

The opposing gorilla wasted no time pounding its chest with its fists!

“A *yuki-onna*’s Drumming ability increases her attack power!”

What?! Thanks for the heads-up, Kiyome’s dad!

“Then we’ll do the same thing! Christie?”

“Hoo-hoo!”

Wh-wh-whirr!

Ignoring my instructions, Christie took off, racing around the battlefield!

What was she thinking?!

“...That’s a special *yuki-onna* technique called Snow Double Team,” Koneko whispered.

Snow Double Team?! I watched in bewilderment as Christie seemed to split into two separate selves, then three, then four, until countless gorillas took over the entire field!

An illusion technique! There were Christies everywhere! Talk about sending shivers down my spine!

“Have you seen this before, Koneko?” Akeno asked.

“...It’s an advanced technique. Only the *yuki-onna* in the Japanese Alps can learn it. They say that when mastered, each apparition can move independently of the others,” Koneko explained.

Seriously?! How was that physically possible?!

“Look at her go! Trying to pull the wool over my eyes, eh? Telling her to beat her chest but actually pulling off a Snow Double Team? Very clever!” Kiyome’s dad roared.

No, that wasn’t it! Christie was going rogue! That was all!

“Don’t let her show you up, Stephanie! Use your Ice Bludgeon!”

That sounded a little extreme, didn’t it?! A moment later, Stephanie rummaged through her knapsack and retrieved—a banana!

Friz-zzz-zle!

Her frozen breath turned the banana rock-solid as she flung it up into the air! That’s right, these creatures had ice breath!

“Hoo-hoo!”

Locking onto the frozen banana, the numerous Christie apparitions all over the battlefield lunged after it!

She was chasing after the banana?! Well, she *was* a gorilla...

But what was all that about a bludgeon? It was just a plain old frozen banana!

Christie took off after the falling fruit! Uh-oh! The distraction had caused her illusions to vanish, leaving her exposed!

Without missing a beat, Stephanie caught her sister in a violent tackle!

Thud!

“Hoo-hoo!”

Christie was thrown out of the battlefield, landing hard on the ground.

“...Using frozen bananas, a *yuki-onna*’s favorite food, as bait to distract her and launch an attack... A normal *yuki-onna* would be unable to resist the allure of the banana and would try to eat it. To use one against an opponent... A *yuki-onna* who can overcome her desire for the banana must be extremely well trained...” Koneko was muttering away to herself as if giving a live commentary. How long had she been into this? Was she secretly a monster battle enthusiast?

Christie lay flat on the ground, down and out.

“Stephanie is the winner! Round one goes to Kiyome Abe’s father,” Kiba declared.

Dammit! We’d lost! I hadn’t expected a gorilla showdown to be so intense! Maybe I should’ve incorporated bananas into my strategy, too!

Your death won’t have been in vain, Goristie! I hope not, anyway! Not that you’re really dead, of course!

“Ha-ha-ha! Too easy! If that’s all you’ve got, I won’t allow you anywhere near my daughter!”

Kiyome’s dad fixed me with a dauntless grin. Would I really be able to beat this guy? I had my doubts, but that didn’t stop me from getting fired up! I’d come this far, and I wasn’t about to give up now!

“Next, we shall face off with our sea monsters! I suppose the pool can serve as the battleground. But first, let me show you my next creature!”

Lightning fell in all directions as, with a thunderous roar, a giant fishlike monster appeared!

It was like an oversized shark with...human legs!

Huh?! A shark version of Estelina?!

There was a dangerous scent in the air! One look was enough to tell that going up against this thing with a mere tuna was suicide. Of course the shark would win!

And yet...the shark remained perfectly still, simply standing there with its mouth wide open.

“...”

Perplexed, Kiyome’s dad reached out to tap it on the back—sending it toppling over! What was going on? It still hadn’t moved a muscle!

“Ah. Sharks die if they stop swimming.”

Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?!

I was left flabbergasted by that absent-minded remark!

Kiba approached, checked the shark’s vital signs, then shook his head. “Round two goes to Issei!”

Somehow, I’d managed to snatch victory without doing anything!

Incidentally, the mermaid Estelina, who was waiting for us by the side of the pool, also died from a lack of oxygen without any of us noticing.

We had shark fin and fatty tuna for dinner—but that’s a matter for another time.

Now then, onto the final round!

—○●○—

For the sky monster battle, we made our way to a deserted mountaintop by way of a teleportation circle. There, deep in the mountains, our aerial monsters could fly around as they pleased without us having to worry about them being seen.

Kiyome’s dad and I faced each other across a wide-open and rugged space. The sweeping vista had nothing in the way of obstacles.

“We’ll ride on top of our monsters in a midair battle. Sound good?” Kiyome’s dad proposed.

All right. No, hold on! Before I could say anything, a massive bird arrived!

“Graaargh!”

What a terrifying squawk! If it attacked us with that huge, knifelike beak, it would literally tear our guts out!

Takahashi was my partner this time. He was basically giving me a piggyback ride.

“Oh-ho. This is the life, my boy. The cool touch of the wind on your skin. This is what battle is all about.”

“Why are you so hyped? I just want to go home...,” I groused.

“Right now, you might consider me even the opportunistic weathercock!”

This guy’s birdbrained rambling didn’t make any sense! I wished I could hit him over the head! And the luxurious soft touch of his feathers only served to anger me further!

Kiyome’s dad was already soaring through the sky, but he was still on his horse! That huge, sinister bird carried the giant steed, which in turn supported a guy as buff as Raoh from *Fist of the North Star*! It was utterly baffling, but nonetheless incredibly daunting! Could it really be comfortable to fly that way?!

Kiba positioned himself between me and Kiyome’s dad and shouted, “This will be the final round! Begin!”

Whoosh!

My opponent, the monstrous bird, took off through the air at high speed. Man, it was super quick! If it crashed into us at that velocity, we’d take serious damage! We had to ascend as fast as possible!

“Takahashi! Take off as soon as you—”

“Auuuggghhh!”

Ignoring me completely, Takahashi took off running! What was this crazed birdman doing?!

“H-hey! Takahashi?! Why are you running?! Aren’t you a birdman? We won’t stand a chance if you don’t fly!”

“Actually, I’m like the ostrich of birdmen. To put it simply, I *can’t* fly!” he answered, positively bristling with confidence!

“You can’t fly?! Hold on, an *ostrich*?! Like from Africa?! Didn’t you say you’re from Kobe?!”

“Kobe’s a big place!”

What was with this bird?! His ancestors had migrated from Easter Island to Japan, so where did ostriches come into play?!

“Are you just making this all up as you go?! You’re telling me your name is Sky, yet you’re a flightless bird?! You’re a con man, that’s what you are!”

“Not a condor—an ostrich!”

“You’re going to be chicken nuggets if you don’t take this seriously!”

“You’ve left yourself open!” While I was busy arguing with my good-for-nothing ostrich partner, Kiyome’s dad swooped down on us.

“Oops!” Takahashi leaped to safety. He couldn’t fly, but his dodging abilities were really something.

“You’re doing well! But we’re not done yet!”

The next moment, Kiyome’s dad gave his monstrous bird some kind of hidden instruction, and the creature opened its maw wide!

“*Graaargh!*” it cried, unleashing a superpowered fireball!

Whoosh!

It was heading straight for us!

“Ha! Maybe we *will* be chicken nuggets!” Takahashi quipped.

“What are you laughing at?! I don’t want to be made into dragon nuggets, dammit! Run!”

Following my instructions, Takahashi took off at a sprint to get away!

This didn’t look good! Seriously, what was the point of a bird that couldn’t fly?!

I fought to catch my racing breath. At this rate, we were toast. Deader than

dead!

We somehow managed to dodge that last attack, taking shelter behind a huge boulder.

Peeking out from our spot of safety, I saw Kiyome's dad scouring the sky, looking for us!

It was only a matter of time until we were discovered. For now, we needed to get our bearings and think how we were going to get out of this.

All right! Time to strategize, Takahashi! My avian partner was breathing so heavily, he was almost hyperventilating.

"At times like this, you've got to keep your cool. Three steps forward and two steps back to clear your mind. That's my family motto... Hold on. Where am I? Who are you? You kind of look like my cousin Yoshida. You're not Yoshida, are you?"

Did he have amnesia?!

"Clear your mind, huh?! You just deleted your memories, you birdbrained idiot! And who the heck is Yoshida?! He looks like *me*?! Are you saying I look like an ostrich?! Ugh, I don't care anymore! This whole thing has been a nightmare from start to finish!"

We were done for.

After retreating to the shadows, I clutched my head in despair.

"By the way, Yoshida, where are we?" that birdbrained fool asked, glancing around aimlessly.

There was no taming this idiotic bird... But just as I resigned myself to a dark fate, a cardboard box came into view.

I-it can't be?! Trembling, I opened the lid, and there was Gasper!

"...H-hello."

"Gasper! What are you doing here?"

"Th-the president sent me. Sh-she said you were in a rough spot..."

Of course! No one would suspect anything from a cardboard box! Who

could've imagined that a cross-dressing vampire kid in a box had braved this remote, rocky mountain to come to my rescue!

Maybe the prez had sent this special-order delivery by magic circle?

Gaspar's special ability gave him the power to freeze just about anything he saw. There certainly weren't many online department stores with something that powerful!

"You're on a roll lately, huh? Always coming in handy," I said.

"I—I don't really know what's going on, but I'll try to help!" Gasper was still his usual terrified self, but that didn't matter. With him around, we might actually stand a chance!

And there was a letter attached to his cardboard box, with the prez's name on it! My beloved Rias!

GOOD LUCK. I BELIEVE IN YOU, MY DEAREST ISSEI.

—!

I looked around for her from behind the boulder. She was with the rest of the club members up on a nearby cliff.

I was so moved I could have burst into tears. Yes, my beloved Rias was the best, no question about it. Her faith in me was unconditional, and that simple fact was enough to give me the strength to keep going, and to win!

I came up with a plan! Possibly the only plan that might give us a fighting chance!

"Takahashi!" I called out.

"What, Yoshida?"

I decided to ignore that for the time being.

"Get out from behind that rock and try waving to the huge bird over there."

"I don't really get it, but if you say so, Yoshida... Hey!"

Takahashi leaped out into the open without so much as a second thought!

Sorry, Takahashi, but I'm using you as a decoy!

Naturally, he was spotted immediately. The monstrous bird dove straight for him.

This was it! I raised Gasper's cardboard box high into the air and shouted, "Now! Freeze them, Gasperrrrr!"

"Y-y-yes! Oh m-my g-goodness!"

A brilliant red flash shined from the cardboard box, and in that instant, Kiyome's dad and his huge bird stopped.

Fwooosh...

Then, to my surprise, they started falling toward Takahashi!

Huh? Weren't they supposed to be in suspended animation? I thought Gasper's power froze its targets in place completely and would lock it in midair.

Was it because his abilities were evolving? Or had I misunderstood this one's effect?

Kiyome's dad and his monster bird hit the ground hard!

Whump!

Takahashi didn't even try to move to safety...

"Squaaawk!"

His cries reverberated throughout the mountains.

-○●○-

"I am defeated. I have no choice but to acknowledge your courtship of my daughter...and to call off the arrangement with the boy I had in mind for her."

Back at Kiyome's house, her father didn't seem happy with the way things had turned out.

Thanks to Gasper, that match had reached a swift conclusion. And that was only because of the prez.

Takahashi had been left in a critical condition after being crushed by his opponent. Luckily for him, Asia rushed to heal his injuries.

"I had a great time today. Let's team up again sometime, Yoshii," Takahashi said, reaching out to shake my hand.

Ha. If I had my way, I'd never see him again.

"Yeah, sorry Asia can't fix your bird brains. And it's Yoshii now, not Yoshida? How many times do I have to say it? The name's Hyoudou!"

After I exchanged farewells with Takahashi, Kiyome approached me.

"Thank you, Hyoudou. Looks like I don't need to worry about being married off anymore."

"I'm just glad I could help."

Maybe it was me, but she seemed a little bashful?

"I—I'm touched that you were willing to fight so hard for me on such short notice..."

Huh? What had happened to her usual high-handed attitude?

"Fighting with Takahashi and the others... Well, y-you were amazing..."

She was fidgeting a lot. Huh. I'd never noticed it before, but she was actually kind of cute. What could have triggered this change?

I raised an eyebrow in uncertainty. Before we could go any farther, a figure robed in crimson entered from the corner of my eye.

"If you like, we could have dinner to—"

"Prez!" I called, interrupting Kiyome.

She'd stormed right into our conversation!

"Go on," she said in a low voice, urging our host to continue.

Kiyome sighed deeply before forcing a smile. "I guess I never did stand a chance. Forget I said anything."

Huh? What was she about to ask me? Oh well. I gave her a polite bow before turning to Rias.

"Prez! We won! All thanks to you!"

"Yes," she answered with a glowing smile. "Well done."

"Where is everyone?" I asked.

Without my realizing it, the other club members had all disappeared.

“I asked them to take Kiyome’s payment back to the club room. We’ve received a particularly large haul of monster-related goods.”

Shouldn’t I be helping them?

The prez suddenly linked her arm with mine.

“Now then, let’s go back together. Maybe we can buy a snack on the way. *Taiyaki* would be nice. We could treat it like a date.”

The prez and I left Kiyome’s mansion on a date! Awesome! I was over the moon!

“...I feel like the happiest woman alive,” the prez whispered while holding my arm tightly.

“Huh? Did you say something?” I asked.

“It’s a secret,” she answered with a cute wink.

For whatever reason, her whole bearing struck me as incredibly cute! And that sight alone was enough to wash away my exhaustion.



Life.3

A Demonic Distemper

Let me tell you about something that took place shortly after we defeated that evil Norse god Loki...

Hi there, everyone. It's me, Issei Hyoudou...

Basically, I was feeling a little down-and-out...

"Achoo!"

Yep, I had the sniffles and a runny nose. I'd been under the weather since early morning.

After managing to brush my teeth, I wandered sluggishly to the dining table... My feet felt like they were encased in concrete, and my head spun...

"Oh, Issei. Good morning."

The prez had gotten up before me and offered a greeting. Ah, she was as beautiful as ever.

My parents and everyone else currently living with us were already sitting at the table. I was the last to arrive.

I tried to take my seat, but with every step I took, it seemed to move farther away...

Huh? My vision was clouding over. I rubbed my eyes, but it didn't make any difference...

I staggered forward, then back, feeling light and floaty and bloated...

Just as I began to topple over, someone reached out to catch me. Xenovia.

"Hey, Issei. Are you all right? Your face is red."

"Xenovia... Sorry..."

Asia hurried over and placed a hand on my forehead. Ah, it felt so cool to the touch.

“He’s burning up!” she cried out in shock.

This was all it took for the others to tense up.

Ah, I see... I’ve got a fever...

Everything seemed to be slipping away.

“Issei! Did you catch a cold?” the prez asked, placing her breakfast plate down on the table and rushing over.

“Is it a cold?” I heard Irina ask. “Hold on. Can demons even catch human illnesses?”

“No. It must be a demon one...,” Koneko answered.

Hey, don’t talk about demons in front my parents, you guys.

Rosswisse grabbed my hand and measured my pulse.

“His heart is racing. We should probably take him to see a doctor,” she said to the others.

Akeno turned to the prez. “Let’s call the hospital, Rias.”

“Good idea. I’ll call my family’s medical facility right away.”

A h-hospital...? In the underworld?

“Hey, hey! Issei? Do you have a cold, son?”

“You look awful! Issei, dear!”

Even my parents were worried...

That was when I blacked out.

When I came to, I was staring up at an unfamiliar ceiling.

It looked like I was in bed, my arm hooked up to an IV drip. Was this a hospital room?

Huh? How did I end up here? I remembered feeling sluggish while getting ready to go to school and heading downstairs. But after that... Well, whatever

happened, I felt a little better now. Did I have the IV drip to thank for that?

A wave of crimson hair entered my vision while I poured through my murky recollection.

“You’re awake, Issei,” the prez said, peering into my face with obvious relief.

“Issei! Thank goodness!”

“That certainly was a shock when you lost consciousness.”

Asia and Akeno were there, too. Asia’s eyes were swollen. Had she been crying? Had I caused her worry again?

“U-um... Where am I...?” I tried asking.

“You collapsed at home, so we took you to a hospital in the underworld,” the prez explained. “Don’t you remember?”

So I passed out... The underworld, huh? Well, I suppose that makes sense. A demon would hardly get the right treatment at a human hospital.

Then I really was in a hospital. Was my condition truly that serious? I didn’t want to die yet. I still had so much left to live for... I—I hadn’t even slept with the prez yet!

Hold on, if that was my biggest worry, maybe things weren’t too bad.

“I’ll let the doctor know he’s awake,” Rossweisse said as she stepped outside.

I glanced around. Koneko was there, as was Gasper, both of them were sound asleep in their chairs.

Gasper didn’t even live with us. Had he come all this way out of concern for me?

He and Koneko must have nodded off while waiting for me to come to. Sorry, guys.

“Apparently, reincarnated demons are particularly prone to this sickness. Be careful, Xenovia.”

“Okay. I don’t catch colds very often, but I’ll take precautions.”

“Yes, you’re always full of energy. I don’t remember viruses ever getting the

better of you. Maybe being a thick-skinned bonehead has its plus side?”

“I know you’re insulting me, but I don’t care. There’s nothing more important than keeping in good health.”

Irina and Xenovia were chatting to themselves while flicking through a thick book... A medical encyclopedia, maybe? Ugh, was this really a cold? The situation was making my head spin...

All of a sudden, there was a loud knock at the door.

“The doctor is here, President,” Kiba announced, entering with Rossweisse and a man in a white lab coat.

So Kiba was here too... What a good friend.

The doctor was accompanied by a young nurse... Evidently, nurses wore those pretty white dresses even in the underworld.

“This hospital was originally designed to cater to reincarnated demons. Specifically former human ones,” the prez whispered in my ear. “For the comfort of the patients, they try to adhere as close as possible to human standards.”

An underworld hospital for reincarnated demons. I suppose that makes sense. Lately, there were more and more former humans among demon ranks. It would be reasonable to assume medical facilities tried to ensure their facilities were familiar and comfortable for them.

The nurse took my hand and started measuring my pulse and blood pressure. I guess even demons started with the same basic treatment. Or maybe checking pulse was only for reincarnated demons.

“I’ll keep this simple,” the doctor said, addressing me directly. “You have a cold. One that only demons contract.”

A demon cold?

“At the same time,” the doctor continued, “you also have another cold unique to dragons, compounding your symptoms. Your body is human based, so coming down with both illnesses simultaneously has had a very detrimental effect.”

A d-dragon cold...? Evidently, not even the Red Dragon Emperor was immune to illness. This was no laughing matter!

“Will he be okay?” the prez pressed.

“The IV drip should help to alleviate his symptoms somewhat,” the doctor replied.

I did feel a little better compared to this morning.

“I can administer an antipyretic to help bring down his fever. With medicine and two or three days of bed rest at home, you should start seeing some improvement. That being said, please refrain from engaging in intense physical activity, even after the fever subsides. Self-fulfilled power generation is also off-limits, if you know what I mean... Just kidding!”

“...Vulgar conversations are forbidden.”

Koneko suddenly snapped awake to protest the doctor’s dirty remark.

It sounded like I would have to take a break for a while—including from *that*.

W-well, my libido was practically nonexistent right now, anyway. Not even the sight of the nurse had restored it. For someone as perverted as me, that was incredibly serious.

“Be sure to vaccinate any other demons living in the same building. You don’t want them to get infected, too,” the doctor instructed.

The nurse started going around the room to administer the injections.

Before I knew it, it was my turn.

“Now for you...”

Huh?!

My eyes almost popped from their sockets at the sight of the huge syringe clutched in her hands!

“It’s time for your injections.”

There was no other way to say it. It was simply too big! Heck, it was even taller than I was!

“Th-that’s a syringe?! It looks more like a weapon! It’s the kind of thing you’d see in a comedy sketch!” I shouted.

“It takes a very large dose to vaccinate a dragon... Don’t worry. See? The needle itself is very thin,” the nurse assured.

No, no, no! Impossible! I’m not here to be stabbed to death!

“It’ll be okay. It’ll only hurt for a moment.”

The next thing I knew, the nurse brought the syringe up to my arm and fixed me with a fearless grin... Eeep! Her overly soft voice was the polar opposite of reassuring!

“I’ll explode if you pump all that into me! Gah! Ugh... You’re making me feel even dizzier!”

The doctor nodded. “All of this is within expectation.”

That didn’t make any sense!

“What are you...? H-help me...”

I summoned up my last bit of strength in an effort to escape, but...

“Hang in there!”

“Sorry, Issei.”

“Just grin and bear it. Or would you rather I stab you?”

The prez, Kiba, and Xenovia all pinned me down. Wait, was that last one a threat?

“Phew.”

Whoa! Akeno blew softly into my ear!

“Oh-ho. This is most effective way to get Issei to listen.”

An erotic attack... I felt my strength waning... N-no fair, Akeno...

“Now that you’re relaxed, I need you to pull down your pants,” the nurse said, her eyes shining with a sinister glint.

The other club members quickly lowered my pants, exposing my butt for all to see!

“N-no! Don’t rob me of my innocence!”

Unable to bear the shame, I covered my face with my hands!

“Y-your bottom is very cute, Issei!”

“Good job!”

Were Asia and Irina trying to encourage me?! What did it mean for a cute ass to be doing a good job?!

“Relax. Your innocence is safe with me,” the prez said.

“Really?!”

I looked over my shoulder just in time...

“Here goes!”

...to see the huge syringe aiming straight for my rump!

“N-nooooooooooooo!”

Everyone watched on as a giant syringe was stuck straight into my butt cheek.

-○○●○-

After the injection, I was discharged and sent home. Now all I had to do was rest quietly in bed and take my prescribed medicine.

I was feeling much better compared to this morning, though I still felt dull and lethargic.

Ugh. Just trying to sit up was enough to make my head spin. It was a struggle simply to go to the bathroom, and I had no libido to speak of... Then again, if I felt horny at a time like this, it would probably be an altogether different problem.

“Ghck! Hack!”

I still had my cough, which felt somewhat stronger than previous colds I’d caught as a human.

This demon cold had one crucial difference from human ones—it completely nullified my demon powers.

Try as I might, I just couldn’t call upon my aura, the source of my demon

powers. Apparently, demon colds affected the body's ability to output energy, rendering one's abilities ineffective.

I was completely clueless when it came to demon powers even while healthy, yet I still felt a peculiar sort of chill. Unlike with a human cold, my sixth sense was buzzing, and I was ridden with anxiety.

To put it into words, it resembled the sense of unease that might keep you from going to the toilet alone after watching a horror movie. From what I gathered, this sensation was a regular consequence of a demon cold.

That frigid, fear-inducing sensation refused to leave me in peace... Maybe it was because of the illness, but I felt so desperately alone. I would have given anything to have someone just sit beside me...

As for dragon colds, I quickly learned they prevented one from breathing fire or using other techniques. Then again, I had a human body, so that didn't inconvenience me in any way. It just left me feeling sluggish.

To top it all off, I'd been told that I would have to sleep alone until my symptoms improved.

Ugh. I'd grown used to having the prez and Asia sleep by my side. Their absence left me wallowing in solitude.

I missed the prez's warmth, falling asleep in her arms, brushing up against her deliciously soft skin. She was perfection incarnate...

And her breasts... Splendid.

At that moment, there came a click from the doorway. When I turned...

"Are you getting enough rest, Issei?"

...I saw the prez in a white nurse outfit!

P-Prez! H-her legs were almost completely exposed!

Whoa!

"Ghhk!"

I was so excited that I broke out into a cough. Seeing her dressed like that, my heart felt like it might punch through my chest...

“Hahhh... Hahhh... Y-you’re the best, Prez... I-it hurts, but it’s worth it...”

My health was deteriorating, but I shed tears of joy nonetheless.

Sick though I was, my skeevy, perverted nature was alive and well.

“I-Issei? Are you all right? You seem to be in pain. Maybe I shouldn’t have dressed up... We all thought it might help perk you up a little...” The prez reached out to place a hand on my cheek.

Ah. I could die happy now...

“Are you okay, Issei?” This time, it was Asia calling out to me. I turned to look, and my eyes locked onto another goddess in a white nurse outfit! “I-is there something on my face?” she asked, tilting her head to one side.

For graceful Asia to dress in a nurse costume, an outfit symbolizing the utmost purity... Let’s just say I was mesmerized. Who could have known that such a perfect combination was possible?

Asia in a nurse outfit. It was more than perfect; it was positively therapeutic! And of course, she truly did have a gift for healing! Yes, it was much more than a good look. This was destiny!

I was convinced she’d become a real-life goddess!

I would store this sight in my memory for posterity, right alongside the prez...

“P-Prez! A-Asia! You look awesome! It wasn’t a mistake... You’ve rekindled my zest for life...”

Clutching my chest, I flashed them both a teary smile to express my gratitude. It seemed I’d also broken out into a nosebleed. I wasn’t entirely sure if that was due to excitement or if my condition was worsening, but it wasn’t healthy to lose much blood in my present condition.

“Issei! Hey! I’ve brought you some water and broth!”

“Don’t die, Issei!”

The prez and Asia each took one of my hands in theirs... Two nurse-cosplaying beauties were watching over me... I was in heaven.

“If I die...burn my erotic magazines... I mean it... The DVDs, too... Don’t keep

them as mementos, whatever you do...”

“What are you talking about?! Come on! At least have some water!”

“Oh no! Issei, you can’t...!”

“Don’t cry, Asia. He isn’t going to die from a mere cold. Are you, now?”

After drinking a glass of water and a little broth, I fell into a deep sleep.

By the time I woke up, it was already past midnight.

It was around the hour that most demons finished up with their work... Not me, though, not today. I had off from work. But for the record, I *did* enjoy a regular stream of clients.

Asia and the prez weren’t sharing my bedroom with me today. Without them, it felt awfully lonely.

Huh? Why does my chest feel so heavy? It wasn’t the lethargy of illness. Something was physically pressing down on me. A gentle something, soft and pleasant to the touch.

A quick scan in the dark revealed Koneko, complete with cat ears, a tail, and a nurse outfit!

“Zzz... Zzz...”

She was sound asleep, breathing quietly.

Hmm?

My body felt warm all the way through. Had she been using her sage arts to improve the flow of my inner energy? She must have been at it for a good while.

Koneko... She’d taken the time to tend to my body on top of her demon work...

She may be sharp-tongued, always ready with a jab or quip, but she was a good friend.

I reached out to pat her softly on the head.

“*Meow... Get better...soon...,*” she muttered in her sleep.

She really did care for me! I was tearing up!

Where on earth had I caught these colds in the first place? I didn't have Xenovia's fortitude, but that didn't mean I neglected my health.

"I must have picked them up somewhere....," I whispered.

"We gave it a good deal of thought. Most likely, you caught it from that underworld merchant who came to trade with Rias the other day," came a voice. "You know how we summon salesmen to the basement every now and then when we need to do some shopping?"

Ah, yes. That would make sense... Hold on!

Akeno had answered my question from a seat beside the bed!

I hadn't even noticed her, yet there she was, and in a nurse dress...! Her legs poked out enticingly from the high skirt, revealing skintight stockings!

Whooooaaa... A nurse costume and stockings...! The ultimate combo!

She sat there, one leg crossed over the other.

Whatever you do, Akeno, don't uncross your legs! Y-your thighs are too dazzling!

Her naughty gestures were too much for me in my current state... But I was grateful all the same!

What a joyous sight...! My heart was racing.

"Oh dear. Are you okay? Koneko and I will see to your every need all the way till morning."

M-my every need?! They would satisfy my cravings while dressed in nurse clothes?!

If only I were my usual, virile self, there would be no end to my raunchy requests...

Then again, they'd probably only dressed this way because I was sick.

Akeno drew closer... So close, my heart could've exploded.

Then—

“I’ll wipe your face,” she whispered into my ear.

With those words, she raised my pillow slightly to elevate my head and started rubbing my face with a damp cloth... Ah, it felt good.

But my mind was already somewhere else—captivated by the miraculous sight just centimeters from my eyes!

Each time Akeno moved to wipe my face, her breasts heaved up and down, swaying so incredibly close!

“How is it?” she asked.

I—I couldn’t really focus on her efforts right now... I was too preoccupied by the dreamy movements of her delectable breasts!

“Y-yes... T-to the right... And to the left...”

“Right? Left? You want me to wipe your cheeks a little more? Oh dear, you have a nosebleed...”

She wiped up the trickling blood... What a feast for the eyes! They were moving around in every direction! Falling ill might’ve been the best thing that ever happened to me!

Akeno leaned in with a sensual smile and said, “When you’re feeling better, Issei, maybe you’ll be up to play doctor?”

“P-play doctor...?”

“Yes. Like this...”

I wasn’t sure where she was hiding it, but she brought out a stethoscope and placed it on her chest!

Bah!

Seeing it burrow between her breasts, my nosebleed erupted like a volcano blowing its top!

“Maybe you could examine me...?”

Her lustful voice sent my brain into overdrive...! This was a situation taken straight from one of my erotic DVDs!

Before I knew it, a brand-new fantasy formed in my mind!

“Oh, Ms. Himejima. What seems to be the matter today?”

“I feel a tightness in my chest, Doctor. I must have come down with something...”

“Well, let’s take a look with a stethoscope, then. I’ll need you to unbutton your blouse.”

“Y-yes, Doctor. I’m in your hands.”

“Hmm. Over here, perhaps?”

“Oh! N-not there, Doctor... Gosh, you’re always like this!”

“Ha-ha-ha! How rude of me!”

I couldn’t take this. My erotic delusions were making breathing more difficult. I was supposed to be resting. Why did such a stock-standard fantasy have to be so painful?!

Akeno was going all out! I was trapped!

“Akeno... What are you doing...?” asked a new voice.

The prez! I turned my head, and there she was! She must have entered without either of us noticing. Whoa, she looked absolutely furious... Her crimson aura flared all around her...

“Oh, Rias. You’re here. You seem to have become quite adept at making silent entrances lately.”

“Of course. I need to protect Issei from you. I don’t know how, but I take it you’ve found a way to keep from being detected by Koneko’s sage arts?”

“You make me sound like I’m some kind of beast. How rude. Sometimes a woman in love can make the impossible real... And taking Issei all for myself... It’s quite a tempting dream, don’t you agree?”

The two of them glared at each other with ferocious intensity... This time, an altogether different chill shot down my spine... The atmosphere in the room could hardly be good for my health...

“...Koneko is asleep, and Issei needs his rest... Let’s settle this on the roof.”

“Yes, I suppose we should decide who makes the better nurse.”

The two were practically fighting already as they left the room...

A few minutes later, lightning illuminated the sky beyond my window while loud explosions shook the air. I pretended not to notice, sighing weakly as my Two Great Ladies went at it yet again.

A short time afterward, a new figure entered my room—the silver-haired Rossweisse.

“You’re awake?” she asked. “Did Rias or Akeno give you your medicine?”

I shook my head.

Rossweisse seemed disappointed by this response. She, too, was in a nurse outfit. I was touched by her consideration. Truly.

“I thought not. They seemed ready to explode when I passed them in the hallway, so I suspected they might have forgotten,” she said, pulling several pills from a bag and handing me a glass of water. “You shouldn’t take them on an empty stomach, so eat this,” she added, handing me several small crackers. “Valhalla-style health snacks. They’re easy to eat and contain a full day’s worth of vitamins and nutrients. Ideally, you should eat proper meals, but this is better than nothing right now.”

“Th-thank you,” I said, lifting the first cracker to my mouth.

It looked hard, but it was actually moist and soft. And slightly sweet.

“I added a spoonful of sugar to help them go down more easily.”



“You made these just for me?” I asked.

Rosswesse frowned. “Everyone is so depressed without you to lighten the room. You need to take care of your health and recover as soon as possible.”

Her voice was stern, but her cheeks reddened slightly... Apparently, even Rosswesse was worried about me... I’d have to get better quickly.

I didn’t know how useful I was for buoying everyone’s spirits, but I couldn’t afford to let my friends down.

“...Get better soon... Issei...,” Koneko muttered atop my chest, still sound asleep.

-○○●○-

When I woke in the morning, Koneko was gone. I hadn’t noticed her leaving.

I felt much better than the day before, even though only one night had passed.

My fever had gone down, and I could probably handle going to the toilet now... However, they did say the most dangerous time for any cold was right at the start of recovery. It was probably too early to let down my guard.

Just as I thought to lie down to return to sleep, a familiar pair stepped into the room.

“Oh, Issei. You’re awake?”

“Yoo-hoo, Issei! I brought breakfast!”

Xenovia and Irina entered, also dressed as nurses... All the girls in our Familia were going the full mile to tend to me.

“How do I look?” Xenovia asked, posing as she made a peace sign.

“...Ah. You both look great.”

This reply clearly pleased the two because they exchanged a high five. They had a lot of energy this morning, that was for sure...

I was over the moon to see them dressed up like this, but my excitement risked worsening my symptoms and sending me back to square one... There was nothing for it, I had no choice but to save this wondrous sight for posterity and

return to it later!

It probably went without saying, but Irina, the reincarnated angel, was literally angelic in her white dress! I sighed with raw admiration.

After a moment, Xenovia and Irina placed a tray on the table next to my bed—featuring a stomach-heaving off-color soup and a glass of juice that looked even less appetizing...

J-just what have they whipped up for me...? Fearfully, I turned my gaze to the girls, my eyes pleading, only for them to stare back, brimming with anticipation!

“Irina and I read up on medicinal herbs and the like. We put together as many as we could find.”

“It’s packed with nutrition! This soup and juice should give you an instant recovery!”

Their innocent smiles were all but blinding. Undoubtedly, they’d put a lot of effort into it, but to be perfectly honest, I’d never seen either of them cook before...

Is this safe to eat?!

All it took was a single look at the so-called soup to have doubts! Some weird *thing* floated just under the surface! A leg, maybe...?! And was that an eyeball...?! Didn’t they say they’d picked herbs?!

It was absolutely nauseating...! If this were on a TV cooking show, it would’ve been censored to protect the audience!

What could Xenovia and Irina have thrown in to make it so lumpy...? There were *definitely* more than just herbs in this thing!

“...”

The two girls watched me expectantly!

“I knew it; my cooking isn’t up to scratch... I can’t even manage the most basic household chores...”

“I’m a failure... Unworthy to call myself an angel... I’m a sinner, Lord Michael! I deserve divine retribution!”

I could practically hear their dour words already.

All right, fine. I just have to close my eyes, right?

I couldn't bring myself to hurt their feelings! Steeling myself, I dipped the spoon into the foul-looking liquid.

...

H-hey...

The moment I tried to scoop up some of the soup, a noxious gas bubbled up...

What the...?! My eyes stung! Was this safe for human consumption?! Nutritious didn't apply to this monstrous creation!

Just before I could bring the spoon up to my lips...

"I-Issei!"

...Gasper, also dressed in a nurse's uniform, barged through the door! He was dressing up, too?! Admittedly, it did kind of suit him...

"Wh-what's wrong?" I asked.

"A g-g-guest! When he heard you weren't well, he insisted on dropping by!"

Huh? A friend of mine? Who? Matsuda or Motohama? Maybe Saji?

The faces of my friends popped to mind, but all expectation was quickly dashed when I laid eyes on the figure just outside my door. The spoon slipped from my hand, and I groaned.

"I came to visit, Mr. Demon!"

Thick, burly arms! A massive chest! My guest was an unbelievably buff muscleman sporting a nurse uniform!

"Mil-tan?!"

Yes, he (or she?) was one of my regular clients, a young woman trapped in a man's physique. A brawny body builder who dreamed of being a magical girl!

R-r-rip...

His several-sizes-too-small nurse outfit couldn't cope with those bulging muscles!

Once Mil-tan was through the door, Gasper retreated to a corner, cowering and whispering, “I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die. I don’t want to die...”

Xenovia and Irina were equally stunned by Mil-tan.

“Who’s this guy? He’s certainly formidable... Like a mighty warrior. He almost looks like someone I teamed up with during a mission against a vampire clan while working for the Vatican...,” Xenovia remarked.

“...I’ve been through Heaven’s database, and I’ve never seen the likes of him before... He resembles a veteran nurse who’s survived dozens of battlefields. He *is* human, right...?”

They were both deathly serious.

You’re overthinking this, guys! He’s just a weirdo, like a buffed-up version of Gasper!

That being said, Gasper was cowering in terror...

The sight of me in bed caused Mil-tan to start bawling his eyes out.

“It’s my fault, isn’t it, Mr. Demon? You’ve fallen sick because I keep calling you every evening, right?”

Mil-tan definitely had the wrong idea... Despite his appearance, Mil-tan was ever the maiden at heart, so this must have weighed heavily on his mind...

He shook from anxiety, but that also meant his muscles were tensing threateningly! Xenovia and Irina, fearing for their safety, adopted battle stances!

“I—I’m fine, Mil-tan... It’s just a cold. All I need is a little rest. When I’m better, we can watch more DVDs and—”

“Mr. Demon!” he bellowed before I could finish.

His booming voice sent the furniture bouncing up into the air. It came down with a loud thud.

Mil-tan reached into his purse, and...

“I made you a potion from *Magical Girl Milky Spiral!*” he said, handing me a plastic bottle filled with an ominous-looking liquid.

My head was spinning again.

Please, let me pass out...

I had to chug down two stomach-heaving “miracle” drinks.

-○○●○-

That morning was marked by several hurried trips to the bathroom. Weren't the drinks and broth supposed to help me recover?

Frankly, I felt entitled to some degree of praise for surviving Xenovia and Irina's cooking and Mil-tan's special potion.

Lunch seemed to be out of the question, considering my digestive system had been rendered temporarily inoperable. As such, I passed the time by watching TV alone.

I'd taken the day off from school. Given my present state, I'd probably miss another couple of days, too.

Word reached me that the other demons at school—including the Sitri Familia—had all been inoculated, just in case. After all, I'd attended class in the days leading up to my falling ill, so you could never be too careful.

Everyone else was out of the house, but I didn't want for conversation. My two negative influences had both reached out via text message.

HOW THE HELL DOES SOMEONE AS THICK AS YOU GET A COLD?! MAYBE IT ONLY AFFECTS PERVS!

YOU'RE NOT RUNNING A SECRET MOVIE MARATHON, ARE YOU?! YOU'D BETTER GIVE ME BACK THAT DVD I LENT YOU, *SECRET HOT SPRING DISCOVERY VI: WELCOME TO THE BUSTY BATHS!* GOT THAT?!

Talk about rude. Once I was back to my usual self, I'd punch them both in the face. And I was never going to return that film to Motohama!

When I glanced over at my bedside clock, I saw that it was already time for club activities. Presumably, Matsuda and Motohama were having a good laugh over snacks right now.

There'd be no demon work for me tonight, either. I'd been working nonstop for months, a break from everything like this one was pretty rare. Maybe resting once in a while wasn't such a bad idea.

Dang, I was lonely, though. I would've much preferred to be with the others.

There was nothing to do but focus on recovering quickly, however.

A knock on my door pulled me from contemplation.

“Yes?” I called. A lone person entered.

—.

A young, slim, silver-haired beauty paced to the bed, complete with luscious curves and a small mole under her left eye. She had to be around the same age as me. Most importantly, she was garbed in a nurse’s uniform.

I knew her. Well, not *her*, exactly.

Not too long ago, Azazel had developed a certain tool that proved a hit with all the club members—a sex-changing ray gun.

“Kiba?” I asked.

The girl nodded shyly. “Yes.”

Azazel had whipped that thing up as a quick joke. Basically, when you were exposed to its beam, you were changed from male to female or female to male. It only lasted for a few minutes, though.

The club room had been downright pandemonium when Azazel first showed off the bizarre creation. Our beautiful female members were transformed into handsome guys.

At the time, I’d fired the device at Kiba as a joke, turning him into a girl who just so happened to be exactly my type.

Incidentally, Gasper hadn’t undergone any visible changes when blasted. The only transformation there had been completely under the hood.

Anyway, this was the Kiba from back then.

I pinched my cheek, thinking that I must have been dreaming...

Ow!

“Wh-why did you go and do that?!” I demanded, my heart racing as I pointed at Kiba with a trembling hand. “A-and what are you doing here? Wh-why am I so confused...?”

How could I not be all mixed up what with him dropping in alone as a beautiful woman in a nurse costume?!

What was Kiba doing here at this time of day?! He should've been busy with club activities!

"...Everyone was talking about visiting you in nurse outfits," Kiba said, fidgeting. "Azazel came up with the idea. 'Why don't you give it a shot?' he said. 'You saw how he ogled you the last time you changed into a woman. He'll lap it up. It might help lift his spirits. Whaddaya think?'"

That did sound just like Azazel...

Damn you, Teach...! Although I had to admit, female Kiba certainly was cute...

The man was a pretty boy, so naturally he made for a captivating woman. But I never thought he'd go through with Azazel's plan!

I wasn't *displeased*, not exactly. While far from necessary, gorgeous female Kiba was certainly a welcome sight.

Perhaps sensing my confused feelings, blood rushed to Kiba's cheeks.

"D-does it suit me?"

It was a nurse's outfit, so of course it did! But as tempted as I was to say that aloud, I stopped myself. I felt like I might end up losing something important.

My heart thrummed, but that was probably just the cold. It had to be. Otherwise, something was seriously wrong with me!

Ugh... I felt so heavy, like the world was spinning around me.

"Sit," I grunted, gesturing to the chair next to the bed. "Tell me what happened at school today. And what everyone talked about at club activities."

"Okay!" Kiba responded with an exuberant expression.

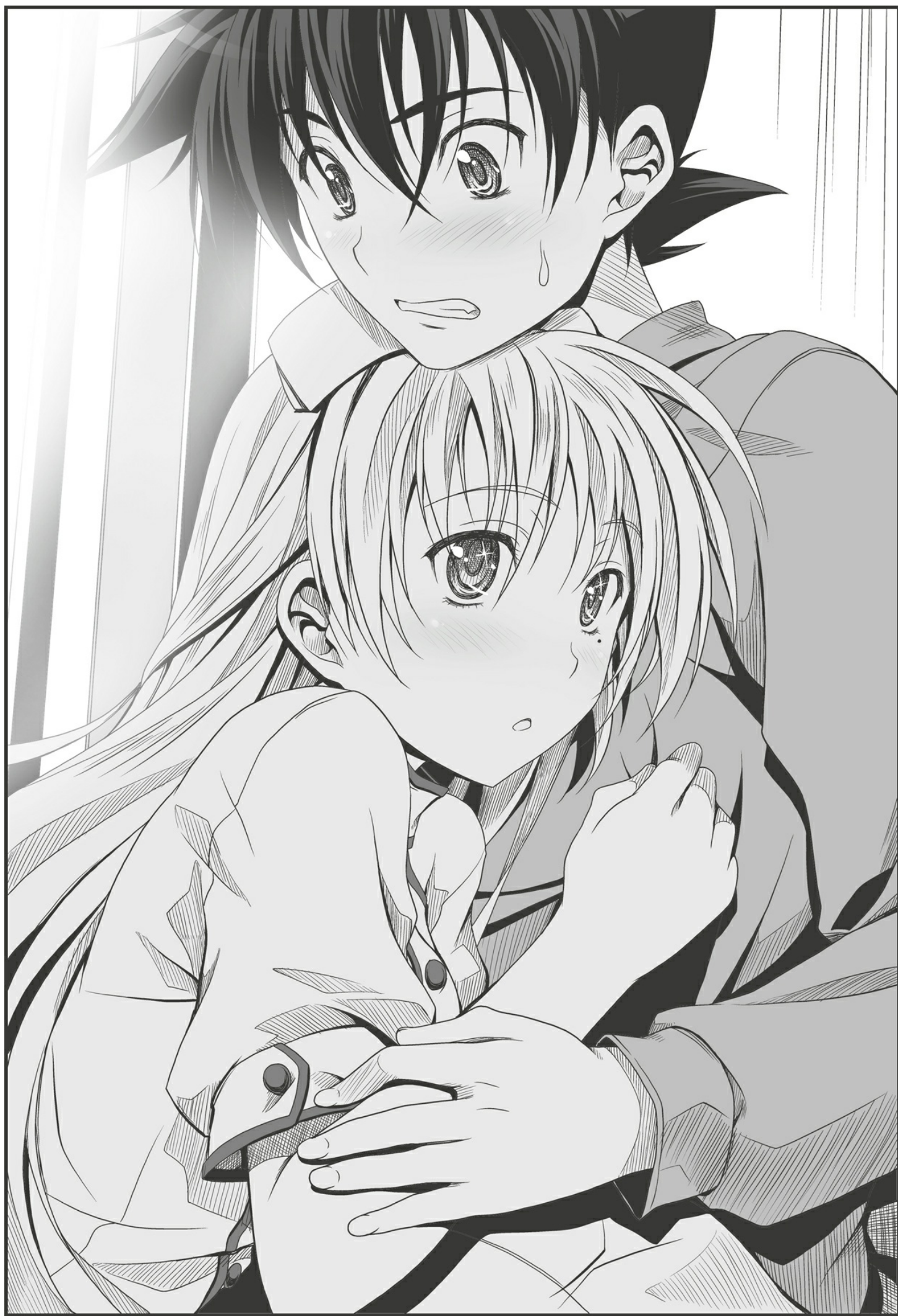
His methods were certainly unique, but it was clear he wanted to help. I was truly grateful. We were buddies, after all.

Kiba stepped forward.

"Ah."

He stumbled, likely because he wasn't accustomed to wearing heels, and fell right on top of me, still sitting in bed!

"H-hey! Are you all right?" I asked, peering into his gorgeous feminine face.



“...”

We remained that way for a moment that lasted a long time...

“U-um...”

Kiba averted his gaze, his face having turned scarlet.

Huh? A soft sensation pressed against my hand...

Shifting my line of sight—I realized that I was touching his chest!

“S-sorry!” I stammered, pulling away!

That soft, pliable touch still lingered on my fingertips. There was no mistaking a woman’s breast!

Kiba’s were wonderfully soft...

“No, no, no!” I shouted, shaking my head back and forth in an effort to dismiss the thought.

He was a man! He’d temporarily transformed into a woman, but he was a man! And my friend to boot!

Dammit! Why’s my heart racing?!

“...”

Kiba’s face turned bright red as he clutched his chest.

H-hey! Quit acting like that! Why couldn’t he just laugh it off in his usual pretty-boy way, with a wry grin and a blithe comment like “Oops, looks like Issei squeezed my breast!”

Don’t tell me that ray gun actually gave him the heart of a maiden, too?! Gimme a break! At this rate, I might end up falling for him!

I was already sick. The last thing I needed was to have my whole life thrown upside down!

“Issei? I...,” Kiba began, his moist eyes fixed on me.

“Issei! We were worried about you, so we decided to come back early.”

The prez and the others were home!

"I was thinking of making you something nice to eat before—"

Thump.

The second the prez beheld the scene, her schoolbag fell to the floor with a heavy sound.

“Rias? What’s wrong?” Asia popped out from behind the prez, puzzled, only then glimpsing Kiba and me on the bed.

“Eeep! Issei...and Kiba?!”

Her eyes started to spin!

Before I knew it, every one of our female club members had spilled into the room. It took them only a moment to cause a great commotion.

“““““What’s going on here?”””””

I hurried to protect Kiba, who trembled fearfully as the girls cornered him.

“Um. This is...”

“I never expected Issei and Kiba to get involved behind our backs...,” Akeno muttered with obvious consternation.

"No, it isn't like that," I protested.

"I—I came here on my own..." Kiba said.

“...Voluntarily. So they’ve already progressed that far...,” Koneko whispered. She was making a tremendous assumption!

“Kiba’s a man... And I’m just a woman...” Tears gathered in the corners of Asia’s eyes.

Xenovia placed a comforting hand on her friend's shoulder. "Perhaps Issei's just trying to open a fresh path we can't possibly understand."

“That’s right. I think this is called *double-dipping*. My, it feels so immoral and treacherous!” Irina added, nodding to herself.

"I—I could transform into a girl, too..."

Cut it out, Gasper! Don't make this any worse!

Rossweisse was a teacher, so she wasn't back from work yet. It was a small

blessing. I didn't want her to see me like this!

Suddenly, I felt dizzy again. I hoped I wasn't relapsing.

Regardless, I had to say something. At this rate, they'd all end up convincing themselves that Kiba and I were an item! I wouldn't be able to live with myself if that happened!

"...Um, er... Kiba and I aren't like that. He just came to check up on me, and, well—" My stomach interjected with a low growl.

All I'd had to eat today were those stomach-turning drinks and soup, which I'd promptly vomited back out. No wonder I had no energy...

"I understand that Azazel was behind this, but you aren't blameless either, Yuuto. You should have told us first. I wouldn't have stopped you," the prez chided him softly.

"I apologize. I wanted to do something to help Issei, and I..."

Hold on, he isn't the one at fault... Huh? Things around me were growing fuzzy.

"Our first priority has to be Issei's recovery. None of us will be able to relax until he's better... I've got to hand it to you, Issei, you're remarkably popular."

As the prez's voice washed over me, I suddenly blacked out.

-○●○-

"When you're feeling out of sorts, Issei, there's no beating a good old-fashioned bowl of miso soup with freshly grated ginger."

I gulped down the soup my mom had brought up for me.

"Ah...", I sighed with satisfaction. "I can feel it seeping into every corner of my body."

Yep, this was the stuff. Ever since I was a kid, my mom made this soup for me whenever I got sick.

There was no telling if it would prove effective against a demon cold, but drinking miso soup helped relax my mind and body. A strange sense of relief filled me. I might have been tense all night if not for my mom's cooking.

It helped to heal my wounded heart. Seriously, thanks, Mom.

Presumably, I nodded off after finishing the bowl. I quickly snapped awake not long after, ravenous and tired. Again and again, my mom dropped by with fresh bowls of soup.

The others watched on intently as I drank each one.

“Mother! Please teach me how to make that!” the prez said earnestly.

“It’s nothing, really,” my mom replied, a bit taken aback by the sudden request. “It’s just miso soup. Though I suppose I do add a few touches of my own...”

Next came Asia. “Th-that must be it! Please, Mother, teach me how to cook in the Hyoudou family style! I need to learn to prepare for the future!”

“I’ll learn, too.”

“...And me. I need to know the Hyoudou family’s secret recipes.”

Akeno and Koneko were also ready to know! We weren't harboring any secret recipes, ladies!

"This is all part of my bridal training. Chopping things is my specialty."

“Yes, you ought to study cooking a little, Xenovia. Please teach me while you’re at it, Ms. Hyoudou!”

Xenovia and Irina weren't about to be excluded! And if Xenovia wanted to embrace her feminine side a little more, I wasn't about to stop her.

"We should pay attention, too, Gasper."

“Right! I’ll cook a meal filled with love for Issei!”

Kiba! Gasper! What the heck is up with you guys?!

“Oh dear,” my mom remarked. “This is more serious than I thought. We’d best get started then.”

""""""""""Okay!""""""""""

My mom led the prez and the others back downstairs.

Fortunately, the first Hyoudou family cooking class gave me ample time to

rest.

Would everyone cook their own miso soup...? I wasn't *that* hungry...

It wasn't long before...

Thump! Bang! Thud!

An explosive litany of noises echoed up from downstairs, followed by a chorus of cries and shrieks.

Weren't they supposed to be cooking miso soup? Did all that racket have something to do with the top-secret Hyoudou family recipe?!

Come dinner time, I had a rich assortment of miso soups arranged before me. They ran the gamut from mouth-watering examples by Akeno and Asia to those comprised of unknown ingredients complete with a hint of sinisteress by Xenovia, Irina, and Gasper.

Did you really teach them how to cook it properly, Mom? She always stuck close to the miso's flavor and aroma. What kind of ingredients did everyone else use?!

This mealtime assortment was completely unstructured.

A cook needed to know their different types of miso! The darker variety might have tasted good, but it didn't do any wonders for the stomach!

""""""""""Please dig in!"""""""""" everyone said, each of them wearing an eager smile.

You know, I was a lucky guy. They all wanted to help me. However, I got the feeling that if I didn't recover soon, I'd be done for. My body couldn't take all this "care."

Hurry up and get better! I told my body while draining one bowl and moving on to the next.

Later, Azazel put his sex-changing ray gun under lock and key.

A tool like that one could cause no end of trouble. Personally, however, I could see it coming in handy. Turning rampaging enemies into ladies had a lot of potential!

Life.4

The Unresurrected Phoenix

An unlikely visitor stopped by my house one weekend in autumn.

“G-good morning,” stammered the beautiful young woman with a ringlet hairstyle.

I was more than a little surprised to see her at the door. The prez, who stood beside me, was equally startled.

“Good day, Ravel. What brings you here so suddenly?”

“I apologize for dropping by unannounced, Rias.”

Yes, our visitor was none other than Ravel Phenex, the beautiful young scion of the House of Phenex.

We’d bumped into her every now and then during our trips to the underworld, but never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined her visiting the human world, let alone stopping by my house.

The prez seemed caught off guard as well. What was the meaning of this?

Ravel had on a cute white lace dress. After fidgeting shyly for a few moments, she said, “Actually, I was hoping to talk to you about my brother...”

The prez and I exchanged measured looks.

Yep, this was going to be a complicated visit.

It wouldn’t do to leave Ravel out on the doorstep, so we ushered her to the living room, where Akeno prepared tea and snacks.

“You wanted to discuss Riser?” the prez asked.

Ravel nodded. “Yes. You must have heard how he sank into a deep depression after that last incident...”

Early during the first semester, we'd all been dragged into the prez's engagement, which was later called off. Rias's parents had arranged for her to marry Ravel's older brother, Riser Phenex.

However, the prez had wanted to marry for love, not duty. Thus, we'd fought with Riser to stop the ceremony.

A lot happened, and ultimately, the wedding was canceled, with everyone involved treating the incident as if it never happened.

The scandal became something of a hot topic among the underworld's upper echelons, leaving Riser in a bit of a bind. A marriage between pure-blooded high-class demons was more than just tradition; it was seen as a matter of survival. It's no wonder it sent shockwaves through demon society.

I had to accept my fair share of the blame. After all, I was the one who beat Riser to a pulp and then whisked away the prez from the engagement party!

I didn't regret my actions. I adored the prez, and I would go to any lengths to help her. Saving her from an undesirable fate was a point of pride for me. But as far as the Phenex family was concerned, I was practically their bitter enemy now. That was for sure.

A tense atmosphere hung over Ravel and the prez. Their parents had been key in organizing and then breaking off the engagement, so there shouldn't have been any animosity between these two personally. I'd seen them chatting normally on several occasions. This time, however, they faced each other in awkward silence.

The reason was obvious—Ravel wanted to talk about Riser, a guy I'd knocked flat on his ass.

Phoenixes were symbols of immortality and regeneration, and I'd defeated one by tapping into the powers of the Red Dragon Emperor inside me.

Ever since, Riser had been terribly depressed, having lost to me and missed his chance to marry the prez. Six months had passed, but rumor was that he still hadn't gotten over it.

Losing a fight for the first time in his life and then having his fiancée snatched from him. There wasn't much worse a man could suffer.

I listened to the prez and Ravel's conversation from the corner of the room, joined by Asia and the others.

"Riser, huh?" Xenovia muttered. "I've heard stories about him..."

"What kind of person is he?" Irina whispered back.

They'd joined us after that trouble, so they'd never had the chance to see him face-to-face.

"Well, he's from the House of Phenex, and...", Asia began, launching into an explanation.

Right, it all happened shortly after she joined the Gremory Familia.

"High-class demon society sounds awfully complex," Rossweisse mused. "But I would like to become a noble myself one day. Maybe if I can marry into a wealthy family..." It sounded like she was scheming something.

"His sister came here in person... It must really be serious," Koneko remarked.

I didn't know the details, but Ravel wouldn't have come all this way for nothing.

She seemed to have lost the prickly, standoffish attitude she'd had when we first met. She'd started so high-handed and arrogant, but with every interaction, she seemed more agreeable. Today she was unusually quiet.

It was the prez who finally broke the silence. "So Riser still hasn't bounced back?"

Ravel nodded. She would have been well within her rights to jump to her feet and blame the prez for this situation, but she did nothing of the sort.

I'd actually been wary of Ravel during our previous encounters for precisely that reason, yet it seemed that she didn't really mind how things had turned out. In fact, Ravel had told me more than once that losing had been a good learning experience for her brother. Still, it was natural to worry when it came to family.

Ravel paused to take a slow sip from her tea before responding. "I know it's probably out of line for me to visit. However, when I tried asking around in the underworld, several people suggested I speak with you. Nothing else we've

tried has had much effect...”

“Speak with *me*? What do you mean?” the prez asked.

“I’m trying to help my brother find his way again,” Ravel answered clearly. “One person suggested he might learn a thing or two from the resolute spirit your servants have, their indomitable willpower. Their grit.”

“Grit”? All of us, the prez included, stared back dumbfounded, a few weak laughs sounding here and there.

Ha... Well, we were nothing if not determined.

Er, why’s everyone looking my way? Yes, yes, I know I can be pretty stubborn and forceful at times!

Now that some of the tension in the room had eased, Ravel began to let her true emotions show. “Riser is just so pathetic! He’s been moping around for half a year, all because he lost one fight! Can you believe it? And he’s terrified of literally anything related to dragons now! He hasn’t taken part in a single Rating Game, and the gossip magazines have been laying into him nonstop... I’d understand if he was angry or held a grudge against you, but he’s just plain scared. A real man would learn from his defeats and use them to move forward! He’s pathetic, absolutely pathetic!”

...We all watched on wide-eyed at her rapid-fire insults.

It sounded like Riser was taking it pretty hard. Was losing really worth agonizing for so long?

“...But despite it all, he’s still my brother,” Ravel finished. No one present doubted that her concern was sincere.

This topic couldn’t have been easy on the prez. She couldn’t have refused Ravel at the door, especially not when she sought to help her brother.

There was only one thing for it. After making up my mind, I stood and addressed the room.

“Leave it to me, Ravel. I’ll figure something out.”

Everyone, our guest included, stared back at me.

“W-well, this is kind of my fault, so I’ve got to help make it right,” I continued, scratching at my cheek. “Besides, he needs determination, right? I’ve got that by the boatload. Ever since being reborn as a demon, I’ve survived on mountains alone, I’ve been through fight after fight, and I’ve seen more than my fair share of pain and hardship. I’m used to that kind of thing.”

“...He’s the living embodiment of grit, for better and for worse.”

Right on, Koneko!

“Issei... This is my—”

I lifted a hand to stop the prez. “I’ll do it. Really. I have a plan.”

That wasn’t just hollow bravado. I actually *did* have an idea, something that would instill determination, and at the same time, retrain his body and mind. Ha-ha-ha. After all the training I’d suffered lately, I knew more about exercises than I cared to admit. Still, it wasn’t without benefits. Having to work your way up from rock bottom because you lacked all talents wasn’t all bad.

Ravel’s face, I noticed, had lit up, though she quickly feigned a weak cough. “W-well, if you insist. I don’t mind leaving this to Issei. Rias? I—I thank you in advance.”

I resolved to give it my all.

The prez breathed a deep sigh, then gave a firm nod. “All right. Let’s put together a plan to get Riser back on his feet. With Issei front and center.”

And so it was decided we would set out to rehabilitate that good-for-nothing fried chicken.

—○●○—

“Whoa... It’s huge!”

We, the Gremory Familia, plus Irina, made our way to the Phenex family’s main residence, an enormous castle that towered high above us.

We took several jumps by teleportation circle, first from the human world to the Gremory territory, then to here. The prez’s family home was huge, too, but compared to this castle, there was simply no comparison.

The House of Phenex was said to be incredibly well off, largely in thanks to

sales of their highly profitable Phoenix Tears, and it showed!

The heavy gates swung open with a loud, grating noise as we made our way inside.

After passing through the inner gardens, we found ourselves in front of a large residential area. Ravel, garbed in a gorgeous and elaborate dress, awaited us in front of a splendidly designed door along with several servants.

“Greetings,” she said. “Welcome to the Phenex household.”

“Good day, Ravel. If I’m not mistaken, Riser lives in this section of the grounds, yes?” the prez asked.

Right, the prez had been here once as a child, so she probably knew her way around the castle and adjoining buildings.

“Indeed. I can take you straight to him.”

Ravel led the way inside.

Whoa!

The ceiling was sky high! And the chandeliers—I had never seen anything like them! The walls were covered with expensive-looking paintings, the corridors lined by statue after statue! In terms of luxury, it was up there with the prez’s family home!

“Lady Rias. It’s been too long. You too, Red Dragon Emperor.”

Glancing over my shoulder at the fresh voice, I quickly recognized the half-masked woman waiting in front of a flight of stairs. She was Isabella, a member of Riser’s Familia.

“It’s been a while, Isabella,” the prez responded.

“I’ve heard many rumors about you. I doubt we’d win a rematch.”

Hadn’t she said the same thing once before? Among the members of Riser’s Familia, Isabella in particular seemed to carry a good impression of me.

“Let me show you to our master.”

Isabella guided us up the stairs, deeper into the great complex.

“So... What does Riser usually do?” I tried asking.

Isabella breathed a tired sigh. “Lately, he holes himself up in his room, either playing virtual Rating Games or summoning skilled chess players from among the serfs.”

So basically, he was a shut-in.

I could hardly imagine that conceited, overconfident pretty boy locking himself away and avoiding all company.

We must have walked for a full ten minutes before reaching our destination. Seriously, the building was huge! *Too* huge! These high-class demons tended to go a little overboard when it came to architecture! If I got lost here, I’d never find my way back!

Eventually, Isabella and Ravel stopped in front of a massive door, complete with a stunning carved relief of a phoenix taking wing...

Ravel knocked on the door. “Riser? You have visitors.”

There was no answer. Was he asleep?

Just as I wondered as much, there came a response “...Ravel? I’m not in the mood to see anyone today. I had a bad dream...”

Ravel let out a tired exhale. “It’s Rias,” she added.

After a brief pause...

Thud!

...it sounded like a ton of bricks fell hard on the floor!

“—! R-Rias is here...?”

He sounded genuinely flustered. Evidently, he hadn’t been expecting us.

“It’s me, Riser,” the prez called from in front of the door.

“What do you want now, Rias? Come to laugh at me? Or maybe you wanted to tell me just how close you and the Red Dragon Emperor have become?”

His voice was low and dark. Resentful, even.

“Let’s talk,” the prez replied. “Won’t you come out?”

A loud flurry of footsteps rapidly approached the other side of the door. Not a moment later, it flew open violently to reveal Riser, his hair disheveled and his attire looking worse for wear.

“And why would you wanna talk to the guy you dumped...?”

His eyes were glazed over, his voice dripping with venom—until he saw me, that is.

“R-R-Red Dragon Emperor!” he shrieked, pointing at me.

“H-hello,” I answered with an awkward wave.

“...Eeep!”

“Eeep”?

“Kyaaaarrggghhh!” he screamed at the top of his voice, darting back into his room.

Seriously? What the heck had come over him?

He continued to wail even as he buried himself under the blankets of his luxurious canopy bed.

“G-get outta here! I don’t want to relive my worst moment! I’ve had enough! I don’t ever wanna go through that again!”

...

All present, except Ravel and Riser himself, were left shocked and appalled by Riser’s response.

I understood why he needed help...

How low he’d fallen. Once, he’d looked down his nose at us with an overbearing attitude, and now he cowered under his bedsheets.

“Master Riser!”

“Everything will be okay!”

The chainsaw-wielding twins leaped into action, hoping to calm him down.

However, Riser continued to shake like a leaf in a storm.

“Riser hadn’t lost a proper fight all his life until we came along,” the prez said

softly.

Ravel nodded. "That's right. Getting beaten up left him with deep scars, physically and mentally."

"But he's still strong," I insisted. "I don't even know if I could beat him in a rematch."

It was Kiba who responded. "Even in top form, Riser wouldn't be able to best you as you are now, Issei. Your willpower...your grit, is that much stronger, and going toe to toe with a heavenly dragon wears on any opponent. The pressure will lower the effectiveness of his immortality and regeneration powers. Those are a phoenix's chief advantages. Losing them would be a major blow."

Really? I had no reason to doubt Kiba. He was up there with the best when it came to analyzing battle situations.

"...Am I that scary?" I asked, pointing to myself.

Kiba flashed me a forced smile. "Facing a legendary dragon is already a scary notion. And with you, there's no telling what'll happen next."

Huh. W-well, sometimes even I was left on the back foot when unexpected developments occurred. Still, I found the idea of facing an immortal opponent quite terrifying. I mean, no matter how many times I beat one, they'd keep coming back.

"Riser. Rias and her Familia came all the way to see you, so please, get out of bed!" Ravel insisted, tugging at his blanket.

"G-get outta here! Go home!" he wailed.

"Um... I might need your help getting him out," Ravel admitted.

We worked with her and the girls of Riser's Familia to haul him from bed and drag him to the castle gardens. It took longer than anyone expected.

In the gardens, I put the finishing touches on my packing.

"What exactly is your plan?" the prez asked.

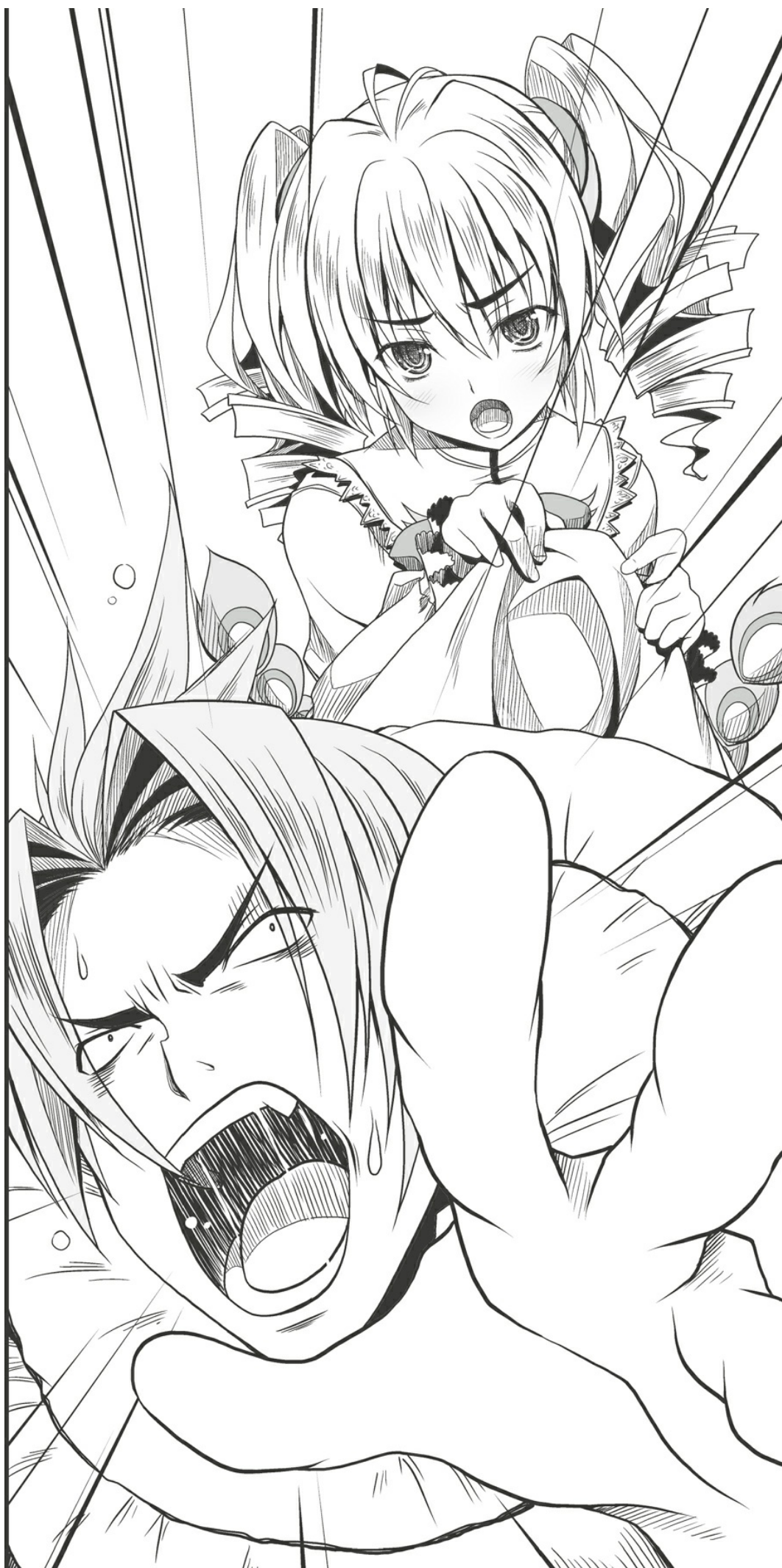
"He'll be here soon," I replied, pointing up to the sky.

I'd called him earlier, and he'd kindly agreed to drop by.

Sure enough, I spied a shadow approaching from the distance.

“He’s here,” I said.

In no time at all, he was directly overhead. With an earth-shattering thud, the huge dragon landed in the middle of the garden.



“Hey there. It’s been a bit.”

Our gargantuan visitor was none other than the former Dragon King Tannin!

“Thanks for coming, old man,” I greeted.

“A d-d-dragon! A legendary ultimate-class demon *dragon*...!” Riser screamed.

Evidently, he couldn’t even stand to look at one, now. He was so jittery his teeth threatened to fall out. Unlike me, old Tannin was a full-blown dragon in size and scale, so I guess I could forgive Riser for being a little nervous.

Tannin quickly fixed Riser in his gaze. “The Phenex boy, hmm? I’ve seen a few of your Rating Game matches. I thought you’d make a promising King one day... but clearly, you’ve run into some issues.”

I took a moment to explain the situation.

“Pathetic,” old Tannin muttered after hearing me out.

“Can we train him like you did me? His family wants him to learn some grit.”

Old Tannin broke into a wide smirk. “I see. Grit. Very well. You’re saying you want me to take you both up into the mountains?”

“Yeah. I think it’ll be good for him. I’ve already got our things packed,” I said.

“Hmm. You’re not usually so well prepared.”

“It’s all I could think of. So that’s the plan, Prez. I’ll be taking Riser with me to train in the mountains with old Tannin.”

We could go over the details later. Basically, we’d haul him off into the highlands for a change of scenery.

Tannin had done the exact same thing to me over summer vacation... It had been quite the experience. I still woke up at night with painful flashbacks.

“The mountains, huh? Sounds good.”

“It’s like something from a fairy tale, dragons and phoenixes training in the wilderness!”

Xenovia and Irina offered their approval. To be perfectly honest, this was going to be a huge hassle. I was only doing this for Ravel and the prez.

“N-noooooooooo!” Riser spread flaming wings in an effort to escape.

However, Tannin snatched him up in his massive talons. “Don’t even think about it. It’s time to start acting like a man.”

“Kyaaaarrrggghhh!”

From the sidelines, it looked like Tannin was about to devour that roasted chicken whole!

“I’m off, Prez, Asia!” I said as I climbed on Tannin’s back.

“Are you really going to be okay?” the prez called after me.

I nodded. “Of course!”

“Be sure to call us if you get into any trouble.”

“Got it, Prez!”

“And don’t do anything rash!”

“Sure thing, Asia!”

“I’m coming, too!” Ravel declared, stepping forward.

Huh? Since when? Taking a girl up into the remote mountains didn’t sit right with me, but before I could say anything...

“He’s my brother...and I want to help him get better!” Ravel insisted.

“—.”

Her eyes positively burned with determination. She was clearly worried about Riser.

“That’s a strong gaze you’ve got there. What do you say, Issei Hyoudou? She should be fine so long as you watch over her,” old Tannin said with a cheerful grin.

“Okay. Let’s go, Ravel.”

“Thank you!” came her enthusiastic reply.

Ravel quickly used her demon powers to change into a more comfortable set of clothes—a safari costume, as if she was setting out on an adventure.

“Be sure to take care of Ravel, Issei.”

“Got it, Prez!”

As for Riser...

“N-no! Why do I have to go off to the middle of nowhere?!”

...he thrashed in Tannin’s claws...

What was he thinking, giving such a sorry show in front of his younger sister?

“This is for your own good,” I told him. “You need to put your pampered lifestyle aside for a while to see the wider world. A change of scenery will help refresh your mind and body.”

He stared back at me with noticeably less fear this time. Actually, it was more like a glare.

“My servants! Help me! That’s an order!” Riser called to his Familia members watching from below.

“You can do it, Master Riser!”

“Come back soon!”

However, they only waved and cheered for him. Riser was left so stunned that his eyes shot wide.

“Y-you heartless traitors...!”

Fwoosh!

With a flap of his wings, Tannin took off. Ravel clung tightly to my back.

“Help meee!”

I felt like I’d witnessed this exact scene play out before, back when Tannin hauled me off at the start of summer.

Yep, being abducted by a real-life dragon was no laughing matter!

Azazel had first come up with this plan. He was a cruel teacher, that was for sure!

“Issei Hyoudou. I think I know where to take him. What do you say?”

It sounded like Tannin had an idea.

“What do you have in mind?” I asked.

“My own territory,” he responded with a chuckle.

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“Whoa! Incredible!”

I found myself gaping in disbelief at the scene laid out before me.

The place was practically crawling with massive dragons!

Old Tannin took the three of us to his own territory, a place home to more dragons than I could keep track of.

We were about to arrive at a massive canyon, its cliff faces covered in huge holes. Dragons more than a dozen meters long poked their heads from the apertures. There were others flying through the canyon itself, held aloft by their wide leathery wings.

Riser, Ravel, and I stepped off at the edge of one cliff face, just large enough for us all to find safe positions.

The canyon could have been a mile deep! Given that I couldn’t fly properly, falling down would be a bit problematic.

The resident dragons watched on in curiosity from their lairs. I’d never seen so many of them before! Tannin had told me that there were dragons who called the underworld home, but this was my first time seeing them for myself.

“This nest is where some of my kind live, although this makes up only a fraction of our territory,” Tannin explained. “This is about as close as you, in your small, human forms, can get to mountainous isolation. Luckily for you, those belonging to this particular dragon clan are capable of human speech.”

“D-d-dragons...”

Riser beside me had turned deathly pale... It would probably take a fair bit of effort to help him get over his dragon trauma...

“Master Tannin,” called a voice.

Two large dragons arrived.

“Did you summon us?”

One was covered in azure scales, while the other’s were a pale sky blue.

“I was thinking of leaving Riser Phenex with these two high-level dragons, Issei Hyoudou,” Tannin explained.

“Understood.”

“Got it, Boss.”

The two dragons didn’t hesitate to accept their mission. The second, the one with the sky-blue scales, seemed kind of overly casual, though.

“Riser Phenex,” Tannin began powerfully. “Here in this dragon gorge, we’re going to retrain your mind and body from scratch!”

“Ugh... Why is this happening to me?” Riser shook his head before burying his face in his hands.

You’d better prepare yourself, Riser! They might push you to the brink of life and death, but you’re immortal, so you’ll be okay.

I nodded to myself. This could work.

“You haven’t finished, either, Issei Hyoudou,” Tannin added. “We’ll start with some running.”

I knew he’d say that... It was a good thing I’d already changed into my climbing gear.

“Hurry up! You’re too slow!”

“Aaauuggghhh! It’s freezing! Even my flames are frozen!”

Whoosh!

High on a snowy peak, that fried chicken was being chased back and forth by an ice-breathing dragon. The sky-blue dragon had set to work on Riser as soon as the guy had changed into his mountaineering attire.

“Dammit!”

“You’re s’posed to shout *Dragon!* Mister Riser! Come on, let’s hear it! *Dragon!*”

“D-dragon!”

I was running through the snow a short distance behind. Luckily, the buildup wasn't too deep and the temperature wasn't quite cold enough to seep into my bones. The sun was shining, and there was no storm.

The sky-blue dragon, I learned, was of a high-ranking subspecies known as a blizzard dragon.

What a tragic sight. From behind, I could only see it as an innocent adventurer being set upon by a mountain dragon.

“Riser! Stop making such a fuss!” Ravel shouted from the winged creature's back, hoping to encourage her brother.

The first stage of any training regimen was a good run. To cultivate a healthy mind, one first had to cultivate a healthy body. Thus, we sprinted through the snow.

For Riser's trouble, I wasn't used to this, either, and I had a hard time finding my footing. It was tough, but it certainly made for a good workout for the legs and lower body. Thankfully, this was nothing compared to my previous training.

The azure dragon hovered overhead, humming a tune while fiddling with a supersize touch-screen display. He cut a sharp contrast with his sky-blue counterpart. Maybe I was slightly prejudiced, but seeing a huge dragon operating modern computer equipment felt anachronistic and disappointing.

The azure dragon chose to address me at that moment. “Whaddaya think, Red Dragon Emperor? How's the Phenex kid holding up?”

“Eh? Ah, well... It looks like he's having a bit of a hard time.”

“He's weak as hell, seriously. I thought being a high-ranking demon brat would make him more capable or something, but it turns out he's total pushover. Talk about lame.”

What a flippant attitude. Apparently, he was an azure lightning dragon, another subspecies—the same type as Asia's familiar. Would Asia's familiar be this mouthy when it grew up?

After around an hour of running, it was time for a break. While I focused on

replenishing my fluids, Riser collapsed to the ground, panting desperately.

“...I’m gonna die...”

His voice was weak, almost inaudible.

Hey, come on. Even I can keep going. How are you out of stamina?

“You know we haven’t been going all that long yet, right?” I pointed out.

“Sh-shut up!” Riser barked back. “G-going to some random mountain to play hermit is for barbarian reincarnated demons like you!”

“What are you going on about? Any demon can improve with practice. There’s no harm in giving it a shot.”

“I’m a pure-blooded high-class demon, dammit! We’re supposed to live like nobles, cherishing our lineages and inherited powers! And I was supposed to be good enough to marry a Demon King’s sister! Why do I need to be dragged through the mud...?!”

He really was a spoiled brat. Curing him of that would take time. Admittedly, I hadn’t taken to Tannin’s training at first, either.

There was still a lot more practice to go and trouble ahead...

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On our third day holed up in the mountains, Ravel presented me with a basket filled with food.

“K-kyaaarrrggghhh!”

In the distance, Riser sprinted across the snowy peak, screaming at the top of his lungs as a dragon chased after him.

Hang in there, buddy.

Ravel and I enjoyed a break on a large boulder that jutted from the snow. She even poured me a cup of warm tea from a thermos.

“...How’s he doing?” Ravel asked worriedly.

“I can’t really say. He complains a lot, but he’s still doing everything he needs to. I was pretty much the same when Tannin started training me, so if he can learn to adapt, I think he’ll be okay. My guess is the shock of not getting his way

is why he hasn't managed to get back on his feet yet."

Ravel's expression relaxed slightly. "I see... I'm glad you're here to help him."

"These pancakes are delicious," I praised as I sampled the various items Ravel had.

"R-really...? The dragons helped me find the ingredients, but there were some we couldn't get our hands on... I wish I could've made you something better..."

"Seriously, I'm not lying. They're delicious. Your cakes are better than anyone else's."

The second I put it in my mouth, the pancake's subtle sweetness, its smooth texture, melted across my tongue.

Ravel tried to hide her proud smile behind her hand. "O-of course! You're a lucky man to try *my* cooking, Issei! You should be grateful!"

"Yeah, yeah."

"Wh-what's with that response?! Geez! I woke up extra early just to make them especially for you!"

"Extra early?"

"N-no! I-it doesn't take me long to whip those up! I just happened to get up early today, that's all!"

Ravel sure came across as high-handed and domineering at times, but deep down, she was pure of heart.

"By the way...", I began "Which grade at school would you be in now? In human terms, I mean."

I'd been wanting to ask her that for ages. It was rude to ask about someone's age, though, so I'd thought maybe I could get away with it by framing it in terms of school year.

"I don't normally share information like that, but I'll make a special exception for you. In Japan, I would be in my first year of high school," Ravel said.

"Seriously?! That would make you my underclassman!"

Now, *that* was a surprise! A first year, the same as Koneko and Gasper. I

thought she would be older, considering she seemed more developed than Koneko in some areas, and was growing faster than Asia.

Before I knew it, I found myself ogling Ravel like a total sleazebag! Uh-oh, not good! All at once, guilt flooded my chest. I mean, she was my underclassman!

“I was thinking of trying on a Kuou Academy uniform sometime,” Ravel remarked idly.

“Oh. You should. It’ll suit you, I’m sure of it.”

“I will then! I’ll show you how to wear it properly! U-um, if you don’t mind me visiting you again, that is...?”

“No problem. You can drop by anytime.”

“Th-then I will! A high-class demon has a responsibility to understand the lives of everyday commoners in the human world!”

Oops. I’d gone and extended an invitation to Ravel without first asking the prez. Hopefully she wouldn’t get upset with me later. How could I have refused when faced with Ravel’s adorable excitement?

“By the way,” she abruptly said, “Rias and the others will be stopping by to visit later tonight.”

I raised an eyebrow. “They will?”

“Yes. Apparently, there’s a good hot spring nearby.”

A hot spring! Like a Japanese onsen?! And everyone will be going there...?

“Gyaaarrggghhh!”

Ah, Riser was screaming. Was the dragon chasing him again?

Another day came and went without much trouble.

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That night, as I lay inside my sleeping bag in the cave we’d picked as our shelter during this expedition, I found myself unable to sleep.

I mean, the prez and the others were going to take a dip in the hot springs!

Heh-heh-heh.

My brain was filled with dirty thoughts. A hot spring! And it didn't stop at thinking of the prez. My imaginings extended to Akeno and the others as well.

I could already envision it—a paradise of glorious breasts here in these lonely peaks! I was already at my limit after holding back for three days. I was at a delicate age, okay? If I didn't see any breasts soon, I might lose my mind!

I came here hoping to rehabilitate Riser, but all it took was that one term, *hot springs*, and now my head was filled with nothing but lecherous thoughts!

Yep, there was simply no helping it! There was no helping *me*!

I'd have to go there—to the hot springs! And that meant leaving the cave without Riser noticing.

I stole a glance in his direction. He'd been whining nonstop every night since we arrived, saying things like “What kind of noble sleeps in a cave?!” or “I hate sleeping bags!” Now, however, he seemed to have settled down. I found that odd.

I decided to climb out of my own sleeping bag to check on him.

—!

Staring back at me was a piece of cardboard with a face drawn on it! It wasn't drawn particularly well, for that matter!

What the heck?! Could he have...? No! Had he been listening in on my conversation with Ravel?! I'd completely forgotten how sharp his hearing was!

Riser couldn't be trusted, not one little bit! He was the kind of perv who'd already made a harem for himself!

“Damn him! I won't let you have them! I'll protect the prez's naked body! And Asia's and Akeno's, too!”

I was so enraged that I activated my Balance Breaker on the spot, equipping my Red Dragon Emperor armor as I dashed out of the cave.

Snowflakes danced quietly through the air as I spread my wings and set off after Riser at full speed.

That bastard...! Where'd he run off to?! I already had a rough idea of the hot

springs' location, having asked a nocturnal dragon I bumped into after leaving the cave. I'd just have to head in that direction and hope for the best.

Several minutes had already passed since I set out, when I caught sight of a pair of flickering flames.

Wings of fire! Riser!

I quickened my speed. He must have noticed me on his tail because he spun to face me.

"Tch! So you found me out?"

"...! So you *are* trying to peep!"

"What's so bad about that?! If there are women in there, it's our duty as men to sneak a look!"

"And you call yourself a noble?!"

I wouldn't allow it! That sick, perverted fried chicken! When it came to defending the women of my Familia—when it came to protecting their naked breasts—I wouldn't hold back!

He effortlessly dodged my swift charge! That chicken bastard had the advantage in the air!

"Your attacks are sharper than before! But I just wanna see Rias's breasts! It's not fair that you're the only one who gets to enjoy them!"

What kind of nonsense was he spouting?! Whoa! His wings shot a plume of massive flame!

"Are you out of your mind?! There's no way I'm letting you see them! The prez is *mine*!"

I swerved to evade Riser's attack, hurling spheres of demonic energy back his way. He evaded my counterattack, though.

Our fight littered the mountain range with deafening explosions, vaporizing mounds of piled up snow.

"She's *my* ex-fiancée! Do you really think I'm gonna give up without ever seeing them?! Put yourself in my shoes!"

That last remark gave me pause.

W-well, I suppose I wouldn't give up in his position, either.

But that was all hypothetical! Seriously, how much of a nasty guy did you have to be to go this far just to see some breasts?! I thought he was supposed to be depressed! Why couldn't he take his training this seriously?!

Forget what everyone else thought; Riser clearly had determination. He wouldn't even back down against the likes of me!

"And the Vestal of Holy Lightning! I'm gonna get an eyeful of those huge tits, too!"

"Akeno's breasts?! Not on my watch! You've done it now, Riser! That bountiful bust is *mine!*"

Whoooooosh! Hissssss! Booooooom!

A whirlwind of fire and dragon energy spun into overdrive high on the peaks as Riser and I exchanged blows on the way to the hot springs.

After more than ten minutes slugging it out, we both began to tire.

"Ngh!"

"Ugh!"

I couldn't say how many times I beat down that immortal chicken, but he just kept on regenerating. He may as well have been indestructible. For a depressed shut-in, he sure put up a good fight. I kind of understood why, though. His drive, his fighting spirit, was fueled by dirty thoughts.

Did he really want to see the prez's breasts that badly?! What about me?! Did he think I didn't want to?! It wasn't every day that I got to see such amazing boobs! And I wasn't going to share them!

"You've stepped up your game. Normally, I'm on top in any aerial fight, but you're holding your own. You're something else, Red Dragon Emperor!" Riser muttered.

Naturally! I had trained my ass off since our last fight! I wasn't about to lose to him twice! Sure, Riser's regenerative powers made him a fearsome

opponent, but I was too stubborn to let him have his way! From what I could tell, he was already starting to slow. If this turned into a battle of endurance, I might claim victory yet.

I could make out faint lights in the distance amid the snow. Undoubtedly, those were the hot springs.

We were close now, which meant we couldn't afford to unleash any fancy attacks. If the prez or the others saw us, they might finish up early. And, heck, I wanted to catch a peek, too!

An idea occurred to me. I knew how to beat this guy. It was an idea born of deep perversion, no different to what fueled Riser, but it might just work.

"Ah! The prez's breasts!" I called out, looking toward the hot springs.

The next moment...

"Whaaat?!"

...Riser took the bait, spinning around.

I felt a bit bad for the lie, but he fell for it completely.

"Your guard's down!"

Thud!

"Gwaaahhh!"

I kicked him square in the back of the head.

Unfortunately, I sent him hurtling in the direction of the hot springs! Uh-oh!

I'd hit him so hard he was flying straight for it!

Overcome with panic, I sped after Riser as fast as I possibly could.

"..."

Riser landed headfirst in one of the hot springs, leaving only his feet sticking out from the water. My kick, it seemed, had knocked him out cold.

I deactivated my armor and struck a victory pose.

Ha-ha! I beat him...! His perverted grit might have given him the determination to fight me, but he still wasn't back to top form. Plus, I was

definitely much stronger than I had been six months ago. To top it all off, I'd saved the prez from the clutches of evil! From him! Again!

Hold on a second. Didn't we come here to rehabilitate him?

And yet I'd gone and beaten him up all over again... I justified it by reminding myself that protecting the prez's breasts was absolutely necessary!

"...I thought I heard a noise," came a familiar voice. "Oh, Issei, so it really *was* you."

Turning, I saw the prez standing there completely naked. Whoa!

Bleh! I could feel a spurt of blood from my nose!

Ah, the prez's wondrous breasts! My breasts!

"Oh dear, Issei?"

"Is Issei here?"

"That's our Issei for you. Come to steal a peek, did you?"

Akeno! Asia! Xenovia! It was like a parade of magnificent boobs!



The sight of the Gremory Familia's female members in their bare glory moved me to tears.

"...Issei? Riser?"

Is that Ravel?! I dared to look, and there she was, naked as the day she was born. I didn't know *she'd* be here!

Her breasts were quite the sight. Very impressive!

Captivated by her bouncing bust, more blood gushed from my nose. Ravel flushed under my intense stare and covered her chest.

Wings of fire shot from her back!

"Issei! You disgusting lecher!"

Whoooooosh!

"Gyaaarrggghhh!"

An enormous gout of flame enveloped Riser and me, roasting us alive on the snowy mountains!

We somehow made it back from the hot springs and were presently lying exhausted and charred in the cave.

I was glad, at least, that Riser hadn't laid eyes on the prez's chest. That alone was good enough for me.

"I'll give up on Rias," Riser said suddenly. "So please, let me take a peek. Just once will be enough."

"Cut it out, you damn fried chicken!"

Yep, this guy was still my enemy! With that, our second duel of the night began, even though we were both charred and weak.

It did the trick, though. It wasn't long before Riser overcame his fear of dragons and made a full recovery.

Life.5

Armageddon at the Athletic Meet!

Not many days after returning from my mountain training excursion with Riser, Azazel pulled me aside on my way home from school.

“Yo, Issei! You like a little physical activity, don’t you? We’ve got a cool event coming up that you might like!” he said with a mischievous smile.

He was up to something. Definitely. That question, that knowing smirk—past experience had taught me that they were terrible omens.

“Count me out. There’s no way I’m going to like it, right? Look, everyone’s waiting for me, so let’s just drop—”

“Hold on! It’s a sports event! Don’t you wanna participate?” he asked again, grabbing my arm.

“S-sports...?” I repeated dubiously.

Azazel nodded, pulling a registration form from his pocket. “Yeah. My organization is sponsoring it as part of a bigger event. I wanted to invite you as our special guest.”

His organization—the Grigori. What kind of sports event did he have in mind? It sounded like he wanted the famous Breast Dragon to make an appearance.

“Er, this is all kinda sudden...,” I insisted.

“Come on, didn’t you say you wanna meet some fallen angel beauties...? Let me tell you, we’ve got a whole lot of real busty, sexy ladies among our ranks.” To prove that point, he pulled out a couple of photos.

Whoa! They were sexy, all right—striking bold poses with their black wings and daring outfits!

“S-seriously?! Wh-what should I do...?”

I took the photos and inspected them closely! They had such perfect bodies.

This one's chest is massive! And her waist is so slim! I couldn't get enough! If I went to this sports event, would I be able to meet these ladies? Maybe I should put my name down on the registration form...

Before I had the chance, though...

"What?! Azazel! I told you, Issei is on *our* side!"

...a crimson-haired man suddenly emerged from some unseen place!

Whoa?! S-Sirzechs?! What was he doing here?!

I never had time to ask the question aloud because Azazel clicked his tongue in annoyance and said "So the Demon King has decided to show his face? Bwa-ha-ha! See ya!"

Cackling to himself like some comic book villain, Azazel beat a hasty retreat. What was going on?!

Sirzechs sighed deeply as he placed a hand on my shoulder. "...You can't take your eyes off him for a second. To think, my future brother-in-law was almost recruited to play for the fallen angels. It's a good thing I came."

I wasn't following at all! What was Sirzechs doing here, and why had Azazel run off like that? Did it have something to do with the Grigori sports event?

With nothing else to do, I decided to ask the Demon King about it directly.

"U-um, Sirzechs? Wh-what was that all about?"

"Hmm. I'll explain everything once Rias and the rest of her Familia get here."

After arriving in the human world out of nowhere, Sirzechs held an impromptu meeting at my house.

""""""""""The three great powers are holding an athletic meet?!""""""""""
the members of Rias's Familia—myself included—exclaimed in unison.

"That's right." Sirzechs, having explained the situation in one of the Hyoudou residence's new guest rooms, nodded over a cup of tea. "We came up with the idea of an athletic competition as a way of fostering closer relations between our three factions through sports. As such, we decided to hold an athletic meet

instead of a more traditional sporting contest.”

An athletic meet with the three great powers... So that was what Azazel meant. But why did he lie about it being a fallen angel event and then run off when Sirzechs showed up?

“Ah, I heard about this from heaven a short while ago,” the reincarnated angel Irina said, raising her hand.

She was in constant contact with heaven. It made sense that she would be one of the first to hear about this odd event.

“I hope you will all consider competing for the demons,” Sirzechs continued with a smile. “This promises to be an important intercultural exchange, so I would ask you all for your help with it. Issei is particularly popular in the underworld, and the people will be very eager to see the Breast Dragon taking part.”

“An athletic meet, huh?”

“Sounds fun.”

The others all seemed to like the idea. Personally, I didn’t think it sounded half bad, either. Positive, harmless interactions between the three great powers could only be a good thing. And now that terrorists were targeting heaven and the underworld alike, if this kind of contest could help strengthen the sense of solidarity between the three factions, so much the better.

But there was one thing I didn’t quite understand, so I turned to Sirzechs, hand raised with a question.

“U-um, so was Teach trying to recruit me earlier?”

The Demon King flashed me a wry grin. “No doubt he wanted you on the fallen angel side. Your popularity and Sacred Gear could have a tremendous influence on the competition. I wasn’t expecting him to act so quickly. Grayfia told me to be wary, so I came to check on you all during my break. It turned out she was right to be concerned.”

R-really...? So I was almost recruited to play for the fallen angels without knowing the full picture! Ugh. Azazel was always so underhanded! But I had to

admit, I *did* want to meet those sexy fallen angel ladies!

“...You’re having dirty thoughts, aren’t you?” Koneko reached out to pinch my cheek from her spot on my lap.

Ow, that huwts, Koneko...

“Understood,” the prez said, rising to her feet. “If you think we’re right for this, then we’ll be glad to help!”

That’s how we wound up entering an athletic meet organized by the joint forces of demons, fallen angels, and the angels of heaven!

I didn’t get to interact with angels or fallen angels all that often, so boy was I looking forward to it!

-○○●○-

Boom! Crackle! Bang!

The day of the athletic meet had arrived, and the members of the Gremory Familia were seated in the stadium watching the opening fireworks!

The venue was a repurposed Rating Game field and quite a spacious one at that.

There were so many angels just like Irina, complete with golden halos and pure white wings, and countless fallen angels with their pitch-black wings, too! There were demons in attendance as well, of course, but it wasn’t every day I got to see so many angels and fallen angels in one place. It was kind of nerve-racking! Everyone wore T-shirts and jerseys in support of their respective teams.

The angels of heaven wore white, the fallen angels black, and demons red. Naturally, the Gremory Familia wore red.

Azazel was the lead representative on the fallen angel side, and Irina was playing for heaven. That made them our enemies. For today, anyway.

“Wow! It’s the Breast Dragon! And the Switch Princess, too! She’s so cute!”

“That’s the Red Dragon Emperor and Rias Gremory!”

“There’s Hellcat as well! Look how adorable she is!”

Just walking around was enough for us to attract more than a few curious glances... Members from all three great powers instantly recognized that. It was definitely thanks to that kids' TV show *The Breast Dragon Emperor*.

I spotted Irina talking to a figure exuding a noble aura, complete with glowing wings extending from his back...

Hold on, I recognize that angel.

Irina waved her hand as she and the man came to greet us.

"Rias, Issei, everyone! You came!"

"It's been so long," the man said, beaming. "It's me, Archangel Michael. I don't believe we've met since the peace negotiations."

Yup, he was Michael, heaven's top angel! We were face to face with a legendary archangel again! He looked so divine that I felt like I might take holy damage just by standing in his presence!

"A-apologies for not reaching out sooner!" I answered, unsure what else to say.

"Greetings, Archangel Michael," the prez said. "Thank you again for your help back then."

""""""""Hello,""""""" the others chimed in.

It sure was intimidating coming face-to-face with the leader of heaven!

"I'm so fortunate to meet *the* Archangel Michael! It's a good thing I joined the Gremory Familia!" Rossweisse, who was meeting Michael for the first time, seemed especially moved.

"Yes. Let's have a fair and enjoyable contest today."

Michael's smile was dazzling, devoid of all malice. This was a seraph's smile! It kind of felt like he was blessing us!

"Lord Michael! The opening ceremony is about to begin!"

Turning toward that new voice, I laid eyes on a gentle, angelic lady with wavy blond hair and several sets of wings sprouting from her back!

Whooooaaa! What a gorgeous beauty she was! Her figure was outstanding,

her bust huge—an angelic goddess with a massive rack!

Michael rested a hand on his chin as if in contemplation. “Ah, yes. Time flies when you’re greeting dignitaries and individuals of importance. Apologies for the delayed introduction. This is one of my fellow Four Great Seraphs. Please say hello to—”

“Good day. I’m the seraph Gabriel,” the beautiful angel greeted us with a radiant smile.

She was so elegant, her smile utterly divine! No wonder she was one of the Four Great Seraphs! She was amazing!

“She’s *the* Gabriel, the strongest female angel in all of heaven, and the most beautiful, too! She’s also extremely popular in the underworld, just so you know!” Irina explained, practically boasting.

Wow, so there were even demons and fallen angels who adored her? That made sense. With looks like hers, who wouldn’t adore her?

“Lord Michael *and* Lady Gabriel...”

“Yep, it’s a miraculous day...”

Asia’s and Xenovia’s eyes were positively sparkling. The two of them stood with hands clasped in prayer and faces awash in revelatory ecstasy.

For two former members of the Christian Church, meeting such heavenly beings must have felt like being on cloud nine.

W-well, angels do live up in the clouds, so there’s that, I guess...

“They say Serafall Leviathan sees Gabriel as her true rival,” the prez whispered in my ear.

Seriously?! Leviathan saw Gabriel as her strongest competition?

“Hey, is that Issei, I see there? And Michael, too!”

Azazel popped out of nowhere, wearing a black jersey. He was accompanied by a burly fallen angel.

The guy with him was actually Akeno’s father, Baraqiel! We last saw him during the trouble with Loki.

Michael offered his hand. “Greetings, Azazel. It’s been too long. You look to be doing quite well.”

“Ha-ha-ha. I’m hanging in there. We’re not gonna lose today, Archangel.”

“I believe that’s my line.”

The two of them wore friendly smiles, but beneath their facades, there was something more intense. A heavy pressure filled the air... The space around them seemed to distort.

Please, don’t fight! Not here! Azazel and Michael were last-boss level. They’d obliterate the entire competition area if they weren’t careful!

Perhaps an invisible battle of wills between the three great powers was already underway.

“...A-Akeno.”

“...”

The atmosphere between Baraqiel and Akeno felt strained, too. Given their respective positions, with Baraqiel being a high-ranking member of the fallen angel organization and Akeno having joined a demon’s Familia, they would be playing against each other today.

The two had been at odds for a while, but I thought they’d patched things up after that last big incident.

Unfortunately, Akeno spun around silently, averting her gaze. Baraqiel, meanwhile, could do nothing except watch in open-mouthed shock. Then, with a mischievous look, Akeno stuck her tongue out so that only we could see it.

Ah, so she was just teasing him. I was relieved to know she wasn’t really upset with him.

“All entrants from each competing faction, please make your way to the central ground for the beginning of the opening ceremony. I repeat, all entrants from—”

A PA announcement sounded throughout the venue. The athletic meet was about to begin.

Participants from each of the three great factions gathered in the center of the field before splitting into their respective teams. Naturally, we joined the other demons.

“Er...I pledge to compete fairly and honestly in a spirit of sportsmanship.”

Toward the end of the opening ceremony, every participant had to swear an oath to uphold the rules of the contest.

If I remembered correctly, this event was based on Japanese school athletic meets. The various sports had likewise been planned according to the same structure.

A quick look at the event program told me there’d be a scavenger hunt, a bread-eating competition, and other typical Japanese-style games...

“They’ve done it this way because the organizers thought Japanese sports days looked interesting,” Kiba explained. “Remember the Sports Festival at Kuou Academy? Representatives from each of the three factions snuck in to observe it. I heard they all had a really good time.”

Oh? So they saw the Sports Festival, had they?

Once the opening ceremony finished, we moved to the spectator stands, which, like the teams, were sectioned for each of the three great powers.

I’d be taking part in both the steeplechase and the scavenger hunt as an individual competitor.

On top of that, Sirzechs had asked me to join the relay race team and told me it was fine to use my Balance Breaker during it. I could hardly refuse a request straight from a Demon King.

I was also signed up for the ball toss and cavalry battle team events.

On my way to the spectator stands, I passed a team of fallen angels...and overheard Azazel’s rousing speech to his black jersey-clad group.

“All right, listen up. This is war disguised as a cultural event! You can raise all hell if you want today, and you won’t hear a word of complaint from me about it, you got that? Sure, we may be allied with the demons and angels, but I’m sure you’ve all got your own gripes with them, right? Like how everything in

heaven is so damn expensive, or how demons have that stupid obsession with bartering and trade. You've probably all got plenty to vent about, so go ahead and cut loose as much as you want. I fully endorse it!"

""""Yeah!""""

Roars and energetic shouts thundered from the fallen angel section. Why did they give off such a suspicious vibe? Maybe they still held a grudge against the demons and angels despite agreeing to a peaceful alliance?

A legion of angels in white T-shirts was gathered together beside the fallen angel rally. Michael watched the other team with a broad smile.

"Ha-ha-ha. Our fallen angel friends sure are lively, aren't they?"

Not all the angels shared his demeanor. There were more than a few voices of dissent from among heaven's representatives.

"They may lead us to ruin if we try to match them! We're at risk of falling, too!"

"Should that happen, it'll be all over for us. I hope the demons and fallen angels understand that!"

Evidently, the holy angels weren't without their prejudices...

"Listen up, everyone." Michael beamed while emanating a dangerous golden aura. "Follow our late Lord's teachings as you ever have. Bring divine punishment down on the heads of heretics. We must act in His stead. Let there be light!"

""""A-ha! Doomsday to them all!""""

L-light? D-doomsday...? Talk about scary! This athletic meet was basically turning into a proxy war!

We decided to join the group of demon contestants gathering around Sirzechs.

"Ah, Sona. There you are," Rias said.

"Rias. Let's put in a good showing today."

Chairwoman Sona from the student council was here as well. Given that she

was the heir to a high-class demon family, that wasn't surprising. Apparently, a good many famous aristocratic houses were participating in the athletic meet. Judging by her greeting, the prez had fully expected to find Sona here.

Saji was here, too. The second he saw me, he called out to say hello. "Hey, Hyoudou. Let's give it our all, you got that?"

"Of course. You better do your best, Saji."

While Saji and I were busy exchanging words of encouragement, Sirzechs launched into his speech. "The Grigori and our friends from heaven are all fired up, it seems. Let's give this everything we have and play to win. This event is meant to develop the relationship between our three peoples so it would be an insult to hold back. Let's make sure we go all out," he said with a pleasant smile.

Man, he sounds serious about this.

""""Armageddon!"""" the gathered demons shouted all at once.

Armageddon?! Could this be any more dangerous?!

The demons were incredibly worked up after listening to Sirzechs's speech.

Yet despite standing in the middle of a powder keg ready to explode at the slightest provocation, the Demon King wore one of the most peaceful expressions I'd ever seen.

I had a bad feeling about this.

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Despite my misgivings, the athletic meet got off to a smooth start.

At first, I sat on the edge of my seat, fretting that some small incident might end up sparking a full-scale war, but it wasn't long before I was cheering for the demon athletes.

"You can do it!"

Everyone shouted at the top of their voices for our team as competitors ran across the grounds. We busied ourselves doing warm-ups to prepare for our own events while in the spectator area.

I was doing a few exercises with Kiba. Incidentally, Asia wasn't with us. She had been stationed in a special tent set up to treat anyone who got injured

because of her unique healing abilities.

“Go! Go! Demons, go!” The Demon King Serafall Leviathan stood at the front of the crowd shouting louder than anyone. She was accompanied by a few other female cheerleaders.

Well, it was almost time for me to make my debut.

“All athletes participating in the steeplechase, please make your way to the starting area,” sounded an announcement over the loudspeakers.

“Okay, I’m off,” I said to the others.

“Yep. Go for it,” the prez encouraged.

“We’ll be cheering for you,” Akeno added.

After some support from my Two Great Ladies. I made my way to the starting line.

Steeplechase

I lined up with the other entrants... I’d been positioned in the very first row, meaning I’d be one of the first to leave the starting line. Talk about nerve-racking.

“The steeplechase will now begin!”

We were about to set off. I crouched down, ready to break into a sprint at a moment’s notice.

“On your marks... Get set... Go!”

With a shout, the entrants—six in total, two from each team—took off running! I kicked off the ground as hard as I could!

The obstacles were fairly simple. First, we had to climb onto a balance beam, then dive under a net, and hit and kick balls in the style of several different sports.

Things went well enough until I reached the final obstacle.

“Hissssss!”

“Graaargh!”

“Screeeeech!”

A nine-headed serpent, a monstrous three-headed dog, and a gigantic birdlike creature appeared!

What the...?! Is this some kind of monster exhibition?! I was so taken aback that my eyes practically shot from my head! And the other racers were equally confounded! Who could blame them?!

Wasn't that three-headed dog the hellhound Cerberus?! We'd fought it before, so I couldn't possibly have mistaken it!

“For the final obstacle, our contestants will have to get past three monsters! A venomous hydra, capable of effortlessly slaying angels and demons alike! The hellhound Cerberus! And the mysterious birdlike creature known as Ziz! Everyone, do your best to repel these mighty beasts!”

This is intentional?!

“Oh, if it isn't Issei Hyoudou,” a voice called out.

Wondering if one of the three creatures had spoken to me, I looked around and spotted a fourth monster, a giant dragon. It was Tannin, the former Dragon King!

“T-Tannin! What are you doing here?!”

The former Dragon King gave his head a good scratch before answering. “Well, I agreed to help with the athletic meet... This wasn't the job I expected, though.”

He'd been recruited to play the part of a monster! Well, dragons *were* monsters, but still... Wasn't it a bit demeaning to have an ex-Dragon King as the last obstacle in a steeplechase?!

“Auuuggghhh!”

“Squaaawwwk!”

“Help meee!”

Searching for the source of the cry, I spotted a fallen angel entangled in the hydra's heads and an angel had been snatched by the massive bird! Meanwhile,

Cerberus was attacking the other participating demon, practically mauling his head! At this rate, people were going to die!

“Oh, would you look at that! Our athletes are having such fun playing with beasts! What a peaceful sight!”

Shut up! This isn’t fun at all! Their lives are in jeopardy!

“All right, you’re with me!” Tannin said, before spewing a plume of superheated flame!

Boooooom!

A fiery explosion caught me head-on and sent me hurtling backward through the air like a comet.

Scavenger Hunt

Asia had to hurry out and heal me after the event because I was bruised and battered by the time I returned to my seat.

Somehow, I’d managed to come in first place, but I hadn’t beaten Tannin in a fair fight. All I’d done was run for my life and reach the goal. A good number of the competitors had been forced to retire midway through...

“””” ... ””””

A tense atmosphere hung over the three factions in the spectator section.

The steeplechase had gotten everyone fired up. Now they were ready for a fight. I guess the surprise monsters during the last event had been good for something.

At this rate, it was only a matter of time until this all turned deadly...

“All athletes participating in the scavenger hunt, please make your way to the starting area.”

Apparently, it was already time for the next round.

“It’s time for me to head out again,” I said.

“...Good luck,” Koneko said quietly.

“Hang in there, Issei!” Gasper cheered.

With their support backing me, I headed to the next battle.

I prayed this would be a normal athletic event as I took my place with other competitors. We all waited, ready to sprint off as soon as we got the word.



“On your marks... Get set... Go!”

All right! I was off to a good start!

I took off at a brisk sprint and reached down to snatch up an envelope.

“Who the hell is Professor Yakitori?!”

“Who’s the Twilit Songstress supposed to be?!”

Judging by their exclamations, my opponents had been given rather unhelpful clues.

What about mine, then? I tore open the envelope to read my instructions. My brain froze immediately.

“...”

Sister complex. That was all that was written on the paper.

With a hard swallow, I looked to the VIP seating area.

“Sirzechs!” I shouted. “Can you come with me?!”

“Oh! So I’m on loan, am I? Very well!”

Pulling him after me, I ran for the goal as fast as I could!

“The entrant from the demon team takes first place!”

At least I’d managed to take first place again. I struck a victory pose, and Sirzechs faced me with a smile.

“By the way, Issei. What did your clue say?” he asked. “‘Demon King,’ maybe? ‘Crimson-haired man’? Or ‘brother,’ perhaps? The suspense is killing me!”

“...S-something like that,” I mumbled, unable to look him in the eye.

“Ha-ha-ha! Whatever it was, I’m honored!”

He seemed happy, and that was all that mattered!

I couldn’t tell him! No matter what! There was no way I could show him the piece of paper with the words *sister complex* on it!

In hindsight, maybe I should’ve gone with Serafall instead, but I’d called out to Sirzechs in the heat of the moment. Look...it was true, okay? He loved his sister,

my master, Rias, with all his heart!

But there was no gentle way to tell him that! Ultimately, I decided I'd take this secret with me to the grave.

Ball Toss

Next up was the ball toss, which was for every participant from all three teams.

A tall pole had been erected on the field with a basket placed on top, the idea being that we had to throw balls with our team's colors into it. In essence, it was exactly the same as the Japanese schoolyard game.

We all took our positions, waiting for the signal to start.

"It's now time for the ball toss, featuring all competing angels, fallen angels, and demons in one chaotic game...! Begin!"

No sooner did the announcer give the signal to start than I started scooping up as many red balls as I could, preparing to throw them into the basket.

"Bathe those demons in light!"

Brrrzt!

"Revenge time!"

Grr-rrr-rrr!

"Then it's Armageddon, dammit!"

"You want us to sound the Gjallarhorn, do you?!"

Boooooom!

Everyone threw their balls aside and laid into the opposing teams. Explosions sounded from every direction! What were they doing?! Far from throwing their balls into the net, angels were busy firing beams of holy light into the ranks of the demons and fallen angels! The demons, refusing to be outdone, retaliated with their own powers! Amid the carnage, the fallen angels started attacking their heavenly counterparts as well!

"All angels and fallen angels, please stop casting holy light on your demon opponents! They'll be annihilated! You, over there! Don't even think about

throwing that light javelin! That's a completely different sport! Demons, you stop attacking as well! Ugh, are you all out of your minds?! Stop it!"

Even the announcer was at her wit's end! Yep, things had really gotten out of control!

"This is so fun, Issei!" The prez was really into it!

To my shock and horror, I saw two leaders participating in the madness, too.

"Ah, Michael. It feels like it's been forever."

"Oh-ho. That glint in your eyes. How utterly sinister. It reminds me of campaigns past."

Azazel and Michael were facing off, each fixing the other with a piercing glare! Seriously, they looked like they were about to murder each other!

"Ah, this brings back memories. I still owe you for showing everyone that stupid report I wrote before I fell from heaven!" Azazel hurled a ball with all his strength straight at Michael.

Teach! The balls are for throwing into the net, not at the other teams!

Michael dodged easily enough, placing a hand on his chin as his lips curled in a provocative grin. "Oh, *that*? Your compilation of data reports? 'The Strongest Sacred Gear Ever Conceived'? I seem to recall it contained hand-drawn illustrations. You have quite a talent for drawing, you know? I couldn't help myself after you left. I passed copies around to all our acquaintances during the war. I wanted everyone to see your work. What was that weapon called again? 'The Blaze Shining Aura Darkness Blade'? Oh, it was simply sublime."

Azazel's face turned deep scarlet, and he lobbed more balls at Michael!

"Shut up! My people called me names for years! They'd say 'Hey, Governor, care to bring out your secret weapon, your Blade Shining Aura Darkness Blade?' Or 'You're gonna use your Blade Shining Aura Darkness Blade this time, right?' Or 'Hey, Azazel, what happened to your table knife, your Blade Shining Aura Darkness Blade?' It took forever to live that down, and it was all because of you!"

"Ha-ha-ha! Do excuse me!"

Michael dodged again, retaliating with a volley of balls at Azazel.

It sounded like Azazel had been stewing over this for generations. I guess even he had done silly things when he was young. For all their bickering the two did sound like they were enjoying themselves.

Hold on, was that Akeno and Baraqiel?!

“A-Akeno...”

She pressed her hands together, tears in her eyes as she pleaded with her father—who was evidently at a loss as for how to respond.

“Father! Help us!”

What an adorable expression!

“...Ugh! Uggghhh!”

With an earsplitting wail, Baraqiel grabbed as many red balls from the demon side as he could carry and threw them all into the net!

“Baraqiel?!” Azazel gawked. “H-hey! What are you doing?! You’re supposed to throw the *black* ones, dammit!”

“Sorry, Azazel! This is for my daughter!” Baraqiel answered, continuing to betray his team for Akeno.

“Oh-ho-ho.” Akeno, chuckling under her breath, happily threw more red balls into the net alongside her father. It might have started as a prank, but she seemed to be legitimately enjoying this impromptu father-daughter activity.

“The three great powers seem to be getting carried away,” Rossweisse muttered.

Yeah. This had turned out to be quite different than what I’d expected...

Cavalry Battle

Next up was another team event, the cavalry battle.

Each team would divide into two groups. The first would be horses, who’d carry the second group, the riders, on their shoulders. Contestants from all of the three great powers were still fired up from the ball toss, and the venue had been turned into a battlefield heavy with hostility and tension.

The Gremory Familia had three pairs of horses and riders. The prez would lead from the front on Akeno's shoulders, I would take the middle riding on Kiba's back, and Xenovia would carry Gasper to support us from the rear.

"Let the cavalry battle begin!"

Following the signal from the loudspeakers, the many teams rushed onto the battlefield!

"Come on! How about we turn this around, huh?! An old-fashioned catastrophe! Time to die, angel scum!"

"You think you can belittle us?! This will be your own personal Last Judgment!"

"Angels, fallen angels—kill 'em all!"

Things rapidly descended into an all-out war, holy light and demonic energy flew in all directions!

Hey! You're supposed to be knocking off enemy riders' hats! That's all!

"Form up, reincarnated angels! Let's show what we can do when all our cards are aligned! Full House Formation!"

"I don't think so! Our reincarnated demons are gonna grind to your reincarnated angels into the dirt!"

"Reincarnation this, reincarnation that! Damn you both, always cheating to increase your numbers! How about *this*?! Step right up angels, fall into our arms!"

This was rapidly becoming a full-blown war! There were balls of light, holy spears, demonic flames, and even thunderbolts everywhere I looked!

"Hmph! I'm not about to lose to an angel, fallen or otherwise!"

Great Prince Sairaorg Bael blasted away angels and fallen angels faster than I could count. As to be expected, he was a powerhouse even in athletic contests.

"Wh-where do we attack?! We need to act before they take us down!"

"Calm yourself, Irina!"

Irina didn't know which way to turn—which only served to confuse the other

angel carrying her on her shoulders.

“Everyone, please refrain from reenacting the Great War! No, stop! One war is quite enough, thank you! I mean it, no more! Uggghhh!”

Even the announcer was screaming at the top of her voice! However, it sounded like she was secretly enjoying this.

“Aha! Got your hat!”

The prez effortlessly snatched an angel’s cap. She seemed to be the only one following the actual rules...

“Ah, Issei! There you are!” Azazel called out as he approached.

“What do you want, Teach? Y-you don’t want to fight me, do you?” I asked nervously.

Azazel shook his head, motioning for me to come closer.

When I was within range, he leaned close and whispered something into my ear...

—! Wh-what...? I—I never considered that! W-will it really be okay?!

His advice left me utterly shocked!

“I’m counting on you, Issei,” he said, patting me on the shoulder.

“What did he say?” Kiba asked from below, but I ignored him.

“Onward, Kiba!” I shouted. “Trust me!”

“O-okay! Hey, why do you have a nosebleed? He didn’t give you shady advice again, did he?”

Heh-heh-heh! Kiba was perceptive, that was for sure! Azazel had given me a wonderfully lecherous idea!

“I don’t know what’s going on, but I trust you, Issei.”

“M-me too!”

Xenovia and Gasper offered words of encouragement.

Thank you! You guys are amazing!

Channeling my demonic energy, I unleashed the full force of my imagination! Then, I thrust my hands forward and charged straight into battle, racing through the throngs of angels and fallen angels!

Only the female ones, of course!

“Sorry about this!” I apologized again and again as I ploughed through, but that didn’t stop me from reaching out to the women carrying their partners!

Once I emerged on the other side of the great crowd, I struck a cool pose, unleashed my power, and shouted, “Dress Break!”

Rrriiippp!

All at once, the jerseys and T-shirts of the female participants whose clothes I’d touched exploded to shreds, turning the field into a parade of naked bodies!

“Eeeeeeeek!”

“N-nooo!”

Their clothes flew off in a beautiful cloud of fluttering fabric!

Bah!

Blood spurted from my nose! It was incredible! From innocent, lovely angel women to seductive and sexy fallen angel ladies—they were all completely naked! Breasts, butts, and thighs—I was free to gaze upon them all!

“Whoa!”

The demon and fallen angel men looked just as pleased as I did. They all got nosebleeds as well.

“Ohhh! Th-the feminine form...! N-no! If I have indecent thoughts, I’ll fall from grace...!”

“Breasts...butts...thighs... Ugh! I’ll be cast down into hell! But their skin is so dazzling!”

The male angels were paralyzed, tormented by the erotic, suggestive view. Their wings flickered between white and black! Angels were pure of thought. When confronted by such a provocative sight, they risked falling from heaven! It was just like when Irina had been tormented by her own desires!

Life as an angel had to be tough! A single chest threatened to upend their lives!

I felt so relieved to have been reborn as a demon! No matter how many breasts I laid eyes on, I'd be fine! Yep, boobs all the way!

Azazel broke into a loud guffaw while watching from the sidelines. "Fall into my hands, my angel friends! Bwa-ha-ha! The fact that a woman's body is enough to push you to the edge of damnation means you've always harbored these desires! You've just been keeping them buried inside!"

How evil! How positively wicked! Had *this* been his true goal all along? He'd used me! What a sinister final boss! But, well, it wasn't all bad!

"Once corrupted, we fallen angels need not fear the light! We may have the fewest numbers in our faction, but in a situation like this, we are far superior to mere angels and demons! Ha-ha-ha! Okay, Issei! Time for your next target!" Azazel pointed to Gabriel of the Four Great Seraphs. "Don't you want to see heaven's most gorgeous feminine beauty naked?"

He was provoking me again! It was obvious, but...

"Of course I dooo!"

Driven wild by my unfettered desires, I urged Kiba forward! The naked flesh of heaven's most beautiful angel? The breasts of a seraph? Yes, please!

"This is wrong! Most definitely wrong!" Kiba said.

"Oh my God! Amen!" Xenovia prayed loudly.

"Auuuggghhh!" Gasper cried.

Still, they all followed me into glorious battle!

"Oh my! The Red Dragon Emperor is coming my way!" Gabriel remarked innocently, cocking her head to one side.

Ah, what I would give to gaze upon her bare chest! I readied another Dress Break.

Thump!

—!

Ugh, a surprise punch to the face...! The impact sent me flying off Kiba's shoulders. I fell flat on the hard ground.

"...Further indecent acts are forbidden. You sick dragon freak."

Koneko proceeded to stomp on my head as she cracked her knuckles.

K-Koneko...really knew how to throw a punch...

The cavalry battle ended more like a genuine melee.

The Final Battle: Baton Relay!

The athletic meet between the three great powers was finally approaching its climax, the baton relay.

"Each team's contestants have now reached their starting positions! It's time for this athletic meet's dramatic climax to get underway!" the announcer declared over the loudspeakers. The audience responded with appropriate fervor.

Surprisingly, the three teams were almost neck and neck in terms of score, so the baton relay would undoubtedly end up deciding the ultimate winners.

My job was to be our team's anchor, meaning I'd run the final leg of the race I'd already equipped my Balance Breaker armor, so I was ready and waiting to go.

"Heh-heh-heh. So I'm up against you, Issei?"

"G-go easy on me, please..."

Azazel was the fallen angel team's last runner. Naturally, I didn't feel great about going up against him!

"Let's all give it our best effort."

Gabriel was the anchor for the angels. I was still upset that I'd failed to use my Dress Break on her during the last event.

Naturally, Koneko and the prez had given me a piece of their minds afterward.

"Now then... Begin!"

Bang!

With the sound of the starting pistol, the athletes took off at a sprint, upbeat music playing over the loudspeakers! On the demon side, our first runner was Kiba, so with his godlike speed, we should have been fully equipped to come out ahead! So I thought—but the fallen angel athlete fired a beam of light straight for his back! Kiba was nimble enough to dodge it, of course, but what a despicable move!

“Huh? Isn’t that against the rules?” I wondered aloud, when— “I didn’t see nothin’,” Azazel answered.

So he was turning a blind eye?! How low of him!

Still, the race continued apace, the contestants quickly making their way across the field! At last, Kiba reached the next position—and Sirzechs! The Demon King took off!

“I won’t be outdone!”

Whoooooosh!

Sirzechs blasted across the ground at tremendous speed! Whoa! Talk about fast! The Demon King was going all out here!

“Arrrggghhh! I won’t lose! Not in front of Akeno!”

“I, the Flame of God, Uriel, will not disgrace the name of the Four Great Seraphs! I won’t be outmatched by a mere Demon King!”

Baraqiel was clad in holy lightning, while sacred flames raged around the seraph Uriel. They were keeping up with Sirzechs! Yep, this really was an ultimate showdown between final bosses!

In no time at all, Sirzechs reached me!

“It’s up to you, Issei!” he said.

“Right!” I grabbed the baton, ignited my back-mounted boosters, and took off!

“Hrahhhhhhh!”

I blasted toward the finish line at maximum speed!

“Take thiiisss! My secret weapon, perfected for this very occasion!” Azazel

was gaining on me from behind. He clutched a sword flickering between light and darkness in his hands.

“Take a bite of the very Blaze Shining Aura Darkness Blade you assholes mocked for years!”

He brandished the weapon this way and that, carving huge craters from the ground all around him and leaving the upper echelons of the other factions in abject shock!

“What?! He actually finished it?!”

“Ngh! So that’s the Blaze Shining Aura Darkness Blade!”

The next thing I knew, Azazel was attacking me with that absurd thing! Luckily, I managed to dodge, but the shockwave tore a massive gash in the ground beneath my feet! What incredible power!

“Hey! Are you trying to kill me?! You’re supposed to be my teacher! I thought this was just an athletic competition?!” I cried.

“It’s *war* is what it is! I won’t be second best to an Archangel or Demon King! *I’m* number one!”

This was bad! All this excitement must have gotten to his head, robbing him of his senses!

We’d nearly reached the end of the race, yet now we were exchanging blows. Me with my fists, and Azazel with that crazy sword!

“Would you look at that! A fiery showdown between Governor Azazel and the Breast Dragon right before the finish line!”

The announcer was just adding fuel to the fire!

“This is my chance to test your strength, Issei! Let’s see how much you’ve learned!” Azazel roared.

“What are you talking about, Teach?! Don’t make me punch you!” I shouted, already throwing fists at him.

“How dare you! You’ve gotta learn to respect your elders!” he shot back, delivering a sharp kick to my head!

“Owww! You’re in no position to act all high and mighty!”

While the two of us were busy fighting...

“Don’t mind me!”

...Gabriel sped past us both, breaking through the ribbon at the finish line!

“Goal! The angels of heaven come in first at the baton relay!”

““Arrrggghhh!””

Azazel and I were completely aghast! What the heck! I’d missed out on the top prize because of that fallen angel!

“What have you done, Teach?!”

“Hey, don’t look at me! You should have admitted defeat more quickly!”

The two of us scowled at each other. He was the worst, no doubt about it! Pure evil! It was no wonder he’d been made governor of the fallen angels!

“““Hey.”””

The atmosphere turned suddenly tense, almost leaden. When I glanced around...I noticed a group of fallen angels surrounding Azazel, all of them emitting menacing auras and staring at him looking furious... I decided to retreat to a safe distance, only for the prez to hurry over!

“Issei! What have you done?” she said with a deep sigh.

I felt truly awful! I’d put ruined our chance at victory because I’d fallen for Azazel’s goading. And now I’d let down my friends and the entire demon team.

Azazel tried to beat a stealthy escape—only to be caught by Vice-Governor Shemhazai, who pulled him back into the flock of fallen angels.

“We need to talk, Azazel...”

“S-sorry ’bout all that, Shemhazai! I—I got a bit carried away, huh? Ha-ha-ha... Forgive me?” Azazel said.

Shemhazai fixed him with a smile. “No.”

“Gyaaarrrggghhh!”

Azazel screamed as his comrades set upon him.

You'd better take some time out to reflect on what you've done, Teach...

"You should have been more careful, Issei," the prez chided, reaching out to pat my cheek. "Still, you did well today."

"Thank you!"

Ah, Prez! She was still proud of me!

That was enough to give meaning to this hard day's work!

The angels of heaven emerged victorious and won the athletic meet. Everyone from all three teams looked exhausted yet refreshed. I guess they were able to let off a little steam. There was even talk about doing it again next year.

Sure, it was a fun day, but I'd be glad never to attend another athletic meet again!

Extra Life

The Troubles of a Noble Heir

Shortly after breakfast one weekend following the trouble involving the anti-monster army in the underworld, I jumped at the sight of an unexpected visitor.

“Hi, everyone. It’s me, Millicas Gremory.”

It was a crimson-haired young boy with a backpack on his shoulders. He was Rias’s nephew Millicas Gremory, the son of the Demon King Sirzechs Lucifer and his wife, Queen Grayfia! He was also next in line to the House of Gremory after Rias. A true prince!

He gave a smile and bowed politely.

Rias had told us ahead of time that someone from her home would be stopping by, but I hadn’t expected Millicas. This whole time, I thought it would be Sirzechs or Grayfia.

After greeting my parents in the living room, he joined the rest of us upstairs in the VIP room.

It had been months since I last saw him, but his speech, behavior, and appearance were no less refined. He really was the embodiment of a well-bred young man! Seriously, his clothes looked like the kind of thing an aristocratic kid might wear!

When I was a child, I used to run around the neighborhood like an idiot alongside my two negative influences, dressed in a T-shirt and shorts. As my parents liked to point out, I was the kind of kid who hadn’t shown the slightest interest in studying.

“Tea?” Akeno asked, handing Millicas a cup perched on a saucer. “Two cubes of sugar, if I remember correctly?”

“Yes. Thank you, Akeno.”

I guess he didn't like his tea straight. It was reassuring to see there was indeed a childish side to him. Incidentally, among all Rias's Familia members, Millicas had the most contact with Akeno. Apparently, he'd come to see her as an elder sister.

All of us (the Gremory Familia and Irina) had assembled in the VIP room, even Kiba and Gasper, who'd hurried over as quickly as they could. Despite being the center of attention, Millicas didn't seem anxious at all, acting every bit the son of a Demon King.

He looked to Rias, and only after she responded with a smile and a silent nod did he open his mouth. "I'm here today because I want to see what you all do in the human world."

"Y-you want to observe us...?" I asked doubtfully.

"Yes!" Millicas answered, leaning forward with a grin. "I want to know how demons live outside the underworld!"

How we live? He came all this way for that?

Rias stood and rested a hand on his shoulder. "And there you have it. One of these days, Millicas will have to build a Familia of his own and enter into pacts with humans. He understands the theory, of course, but that's no substitute for genuine experience. Isn't that right?"

"Yes! You're all so famous! I want to see how you do things for myself!"

Even at a young age, this future head of the Gremory family was curious about the ways of demons. Like I said before, when I was a kid, I hadn't spared a passing thought to the future, so I was impressed. All I'd ever cared about were women's breasts.

Hold on. I hadn't changed one bit!

After hearing young Millicas outline his plans so proudly, I couldn't help but sob at my lack of growth.

"So, for the next few days, Millicas will be living here with us," the prez said. "Let's all try to show him the ropes."

"Thank you in advance!" the boy said with a bright smile.

“Of course,” the rest of us answered in unison.

How could we refuse? He was Rias’s precious nephew, the cherished son of the House of Gremory! Besides, this would be a great opportunity for us all to get to know each other better!

“Can I tag along with you today, Akeno?” Millicas asked, cocking his head to one side.

“Oh dear. If that’s what you want, of course you can,” she answered with a grin.

Judging by her expression, she was genuinely fond of the boy.

Millicas turned next to Asia. “Rias says you’re like a little sister to her. In that case, you’re like my *older* sister!”

Asia looked taken aback. I guess he hadn’t expected that. She seemed to have difficulty finding her voice, visibly trembling with emotion. “Wh-what should I do, Issei?! I-I’m honored! I’m so happy to hear the son of a Demon King thinks of me as family!”

I knew exactly how she felt. I was also delighted, and at the same time, more than a little embarrassed, that he considered me his big brother.

“It’s okay to feel happy, I think. So, Millicas. What about Xenovia and Irina?” I asked, motioning to the other two members of our Church Trio.

“Oh, this is stressful! What does our little demon princeling think of me?”

“As an angel, I’m both excited and nervous!”

Xenovia and Irina stood up straight, ready to hear the crimson-haired boy’s assessment.

“Xenovia’s the one with the Holy Swords, right? I saw you fight during Rating Games. You looked really cool when you took down all those enemies!”

Pleased by Millicas’s praise, Xenovia bobbed her head confidently. “Oh-ho. You have a keen eye.”

Millicas, however, wasn’t finished. “But you know, Holy Swords have so many abilities, I think you’d be better off adopting more of a technique-focused

strategy. Like, you could try cutting down your opponents by surprise with your transparent Holy Sword, or you using the mimic one to camouflage yourself with a huge aura while charging another attack, or maybe you could use them both together at the same time. Raw strength is fine, but if that's all you have, people will come up with counters quickly. You can't always rely on Gasper's support like in the match against Sairaorg Bael. To make sure you don't fall behind, you should try..."

...Millicas was basically outlining all of Xenovia's weaknesses! And his critique was spot on—painfully so! Xenovia, a power-type Knight, was literally shrinking back, taking a full-on scolding by this cute little kid!

"Y-yeah... I'll try to be more careful..."

She was in shock! It was like a dark cloud had fallen over her face!

"I couldn't have said it better myself. Thank you."

Kiba, on the other hand, looked quite grateful. Recently, he'd been trying to teach Xenovia the importance of employing different technique, but she always laughed him off, arguing she merely had to get stronger and smash through any obstacles. However, she and no response this time.

Irina nodded along in agreement with the stern assessment of her friend's performance. "Oh-ho, little Millicas is dishing out smart advice! You'd better pay attention, Xenovia! So, do you have any for me?" she asked, pointing to herself.

Millicas flashed her a smile. "Yes! You're the self-proclaimed angel, right? I've heard about you!"

"There's nothing *self-proclaimed* about me! I *am* an angel!" Irina protested, already in tears.

Right, so, lately, people had started referring to Irina as a "self-proclaimed" angel. Given that she went around introducing herself as an angel to everyone she met, it was little wonder people had begun to question that assertion...

Apparently, reincarnated angels were better suited to team activities than acting alone. Following the example of the Evil Pieces used in demon society, heaven had created a system of Brave Saints by which each seraph and high-

ranking angel was given twelve cards (rumor had it that the Four Great Seraphs had one suit each: Michael spades, Gabriel hearts, Raphael clubs, and Uriel diamonds). These cards, modeled after playing cards, could be used to have creatures reincarnate into angels. Like demonic Evil Pieces, most were given to humans. The key difference was that where demons tended to make deals with powerful beings irrespective of origin, angels preferred strong and capable believers of the Christian faith.

Each Brave Saint had a special ability of their own, and these were based on card games, one of which being blackjack.

I'd heard the idea was for a leader to gather enough angels to total twenty one points. For instance, if you acquired angels with card values of four, six, and ten, then added Irina, an ace worth one, their combined force would be capable of unleashing tremendous power.

The Brave Saints system also incorporated elements of poker. The King, being the seraph or high-ranking angel leader, could make a hand of five cards formed from anything from their Queen to their Ace. This opened up revolutionary new plays, as it allowed teamwork combinations within the same suit, not unlike a demon Familia, but also across suits. That said, the strongest pairings were those made of members from the same team. Word had it that the potential of a Royal Straight Flush was unparalleled.

There were a great many similarities with the demon Evil Pieces system, but that only made the differences more striking.

Then there was the trump card, the Joker, which apparently didn't belong to any one suit, but to all of heaven. According to rumor, it was just as powerful as the actual card is in a great many parlor games.

I remembered Azazel remarking once that a Rating Game between teams of angels and demons would ratchet up the entertainment value to eleven. I couldn't begin to imagine how it might play out.

Basically, Irina couldn't reach her full potential without her team, so she could hardly protest that people considered her only a *self-proclaimed* angel. Then again, she *was* getting stronger and knew how to put up a good fight.

"I'm afraid I haven't had a chance to properly introduce myself. I'm

Rossweisse, one of Rias's Rooks."

She was our newest member, and unlike the rest of us, this was her first time meeting Millicas. She'd probably seen him from a distance on a few occasions, but she hadn't had a chance to formally introduce herself.

"Yes, Rossweisse, right? My mother told me about you. She said you're amazing, that you have such good self-discipline! I hope I can learn a lot from you!"

Hearing this, Rossweisse proudly raked a hand through her hair. "Heh-heh-heh. I'm honored to hear Grayfia carries such a high opinion of me. She certainly has a keen eye. Wonderful! Millicas, I'll teach you everything you need to know about self-discipline! Let's start by visiting a one-hundred-yen store! I'll show you the marvels Japan has to offer!"

Stop! Don't teach him about the merits of Japan's one-hundred-yen stores! Look, they were convenient and a great value, but there was more to Japan than just bargain shops! She was giving him the wrong idea!

I knew that Grayfia thought highly of Rossweisse, but she didn't know that the Valkyrie was positively obsessed with one-hundred-yen stores! Rossweisse would be a bad influence on young Millicas, filling his head with all sorts of weird ideas! I mean, he was the son of a Demon King! It could be a huge problem if he started acting like a miser!

I could hardly say all that aloud, though. Instead, I said to Rias, "So Millicas will be staying with us to see what everyday life here in Japan is like...right?"

Rias nodded. "Yes. I know this will be a bit of an inconvenience for you and your parents, but I do hope you'll let him stay."

"I don't think it will be a problem. My mom and dad welcomed him with open arms."

Right, the second my parents laid eyes on him—

"Oh, how adorable! Rias's little nephew!"

"So you're Sirzechs's son? You could hardly be more different from Issei when he was a kid. It must be the result of a good environment and education... Yes,

we should have been more thorough with Issei's upbringing, shouldn't we, honey?"

"That's right, dear. We let him down, and now...now...he's turned into some evil embodiment of sexual desire...!"

Apparently, seeing Millicas filled them with regret over how I'd ended up. My mother was literally sobbing quietly, holding her hand over her mouth.

I can hear you, you know! Talk about rude! Admittedly they weren't entirely wrong. Maybe I owed them an apology...

They continued to stare at Millicas.

"...Do you think our grandchildren will look like him?"

"Hmm. That red hair and those elegant Gremory facial features... Yes, I hope Rias's genes win out..."

Only my parents would dare to say something like that aloud. I wished they could just watch over us quietly for a while.

I breathed a tired sigh.

"Anyway, please look out for Millicas," Rias said, glancing around at us all. "Please keep going about your daily lives as usual. He may be next in line after me, but there's no need to stand on ceremony around him. Let's just make the most of this time."

""""""""""Yes!"""""""" came our vigorous reply.

And so began Millicas's educational visit.

-○○●○-

"All right, let's get in some batting practice!"

Late at night on a sports field by the riverside, Xenovia readied a baseball.

"Got it, Coach!"

A young man in a baseball cap and uniform—one of Xenovia's regular clients in the demon trade—waited eagerly to receive against her pitch.

Millicas had expressed an interest in observing how demons interacted with their clients, so he and I had tagged along.

Basically, I was his escort, or perhaps his bodyguard. Not that he needed any protection, but it wouldn't do for him and Xenovia to head out alone. Besides, I'd just wrapped up my last job, so the timing couldn't have been better.

From construction work to acting as a practice partner in a wide range of sports, most jobs that Xenovia took on were physically demanding in one way or another. This time, she was helping a client practice their baseball swing.

"You can do it!"

Asia was with us, too, dressed as a cheerleader and shouting words of encouragement. Evidently, the client had requested a pitcher for his batting practice and a cheerleader to help with morale. As such, we'd called on Asia to give us a hand.

Her cheerleading costume sure was a captivating sight! It was late at night with winter coming on, and even though her breath clouded in front of her face with each exhale, that didn't stop her from energetically twirling her pom-poms through the air. She was so dedicated despite the cold.

Asia's jobs typically involved playing cards with clients or taking part in cosplay photo shoots or events. It was much the same for Koneko, as it happened.

Akeno's clients, meanwhile, included company executives and famous celebrities, for whom she offered a wide range of services from counseling on their everyday stresses to chatting with them over a cups of tea.

Kiba was popular with young to middle-aged women, especially working ladies. He specialized in listening to their troubles and cooking homemade dishes. He was supposed to be quite skilled at the latter. He didn't accept lewd or erotic requests—such a waste!

Gaspar worked remotely, via computer. He had a unique style, and the results to prove it. Being a shut-in, he was popular with clients who didn't want to meet in person but who still wanted to make a deal with a demon.

Rossweisse was often summoned by housewives, and she mainly listened to clients' concerns about everyday living and helped them find new ways to economize and save money. Recently, she'd even started giving introductory

courses on how best to capitalize on bargain sales...

Surprisingly, our master, Rias, didn't accept very many jobs. She only responded in person when there was a particularly demanding project that required the finesse of a high-level demon. Such cases often involved lifting curses from valuable artifacts or defeating monsters that, for whatever reason, happened to be stalking clients.

As for me... Well, I always got the weirdos and found myself caught time and again in the craziest situations. By now, I'd basically resigned myself to my fate. Not only did I have to put up with superstrong fighters chasing after me all the time, I couldn't seem to catch a break from perverts and eccentrics, either!

That's why I couldn't take Millicas along with me on my jobs. It wouldn't do for him to get involved with the folks who summoned me. He was Sirzechs's son! Think of the outrage in the underworld if people found out I'd taken the Demon King's son to meet the likes of Mil-tan!

"All right! Next up, ten thousand pitches!"

"You got it, Coach!"

Xenovia, fired up and rearing to go, offered an incredibly reckless suggestion. The client responded with a fierce smile, despite struggling to keep up. Would he be okay?

Don't push him too far, Xenovia... You'll be in all sorts of trouble if he kicks the bucket.

"This is nice... I hope I'll be able to have fun with my own Familia one day," Millicas said while watching Xenovia, beaming with joy as she threw one pitch after another.

"Do you have anyone in mind you want to ask to join your Familia?" I asked.

Millicas shook his head. "No, not yet. Just a few goals I thought might be nice."

Well, that made sense. No matter how clever and forward-thinking you were, it wasn't easy to decide on your Familia members ahead of time.

"So you're looking to Rias's Familia as reference?" I asked.

Millicas had taken an interest in our daily lives during his visit to Japan, so that was the natural conclusion to draw. All he did, however, was tilt his head to one side without saying anything one way or the other. “Everyone in Rias’s Familia is so nice,” he answered at last. “You’re so cool, Issei. I respect you a lot.”

I’d won his respect? Ah, that made me happy to hear!

“But I’m hoping to model my own Familia on my father’s.”

Sirzechs’s Familia... Yeah, that was no surprise. Sirzechs Lucifer was said to possess one of the strongest Familias in the entire underworld. I’d only seen its members once, from a distance during the anti-monster crisis, but it was as clear as day that they were a formidable team. Each person held tremendous abilities and demonic auras.

I got the sense that Sirzechs’s team was much more well-rounded than ours. We were capable of some great stuff under the right conditions, but that didn’t change the fact we were littered with weaknesses. I’d heard that Sirzechs’s Familia only worked together during special occasions, such as major crises in the underworld. Still, I thought it’d be nice to meet them all at least once. The only members I was acquainted with were Grayfia and the Kirin Pawn Enku.

While I was busy talking to Millicas, a girl in a black gothic Lolita outfit trotted over—Ophis.

Yes. She also had some free time and decided to tag along.

Ophis had been following me and the others around ever since she started living at my place. She emulated practically everything we did.

When I sat down to play a video game, she would ask if she could play, too. When Asia went to water the flowers in the garden, she offered to help. And when Rias whipped something up in the kitchen, Ophis would be there to watch. Basically, she’d taken an interest in our every activity.

Right now, she was throwing a ball to Asia’s familiar, Rassei, in a corner of the baseball pitch. The child-size dragon deftly caught each throw in its mouth and returned the ball to Ophis. The two seemed to get along well, and I’d spotted them playing together several times.

“I will train Rassei,” Ophis declared suddenly.

“Gah!” responded the miniature dragon.

Train Rassei?! The former Ouroboros Dragon herself?! Hey, hold on a second! This isn't about to turn into some kind of master-disciple thing, is it?! With the Infinite Dragon as its mentor, Rassei will turn into one extraordinary azure lightning dragon!

Maybe Ophis meant that as a joke, but I still couldn't shake the image of Asia's familiar one day turning into a mighty Dragon King.

“Rassei might be destined for greatness,” I said to Asia, who was still busy cheerleading. “Being Ophis's playmate's gotta count for something, right?”

“With Ophis teaching him, I'm sure he'll grow to be a splendid dragon!” she answered.

Ah, how could Asia be so sweetly innocent? If she thought so, then of course it would come true!

“You must have some kind of deep connection with dragons, Asia. You were the first one to really hit it off with Ophis,” I pointed out.

Asia blushed, fidgeting in embarrassment. “M-maybe. I befriended you, too, Issei, the Red Dragon Emperor... If there is a connection, I owe my deepest thanks to the Lord.”

Now I was getting embarrassed!

“I—I'm grateful I met you! We'll be together forever!”

“Yes! I won't leave your side! Not for a thousand, not for ten thousand years!”

“All right! I'm gonna come up with a thousand-year life plan for us!”

“I like Japan, but I also want to try living in the underworld for a while, too!”

“Okay, got it! Once I get set up on my own, I'll take you wherever you want!”

We worked ourselves up into such a frenzy that we were literally hugging each other, spinning around in a slight dance! Asia was just too cute!

It was at that moment that Millicas fixed Ophis with a suspicious look. “Who's that girl in black?” he asked.

Straight to the point! He'd been wary of Ophis all day. Unfortunately, there

was no way we could tell him the truth.

“Er, a relative of Tannin’s, I think, sir. She’s disguised herself as a human to learn about life here.”

That was plausible enough. I made a note to apologize to Tannin later and beg him to go along with the story.

“Ah, I see. Just like me!”

Millicas took the bait! That innocent sparkle in his eyes filled me with guilt, but this white lie was for the greater good! Please, forgive me!

Without warning, Millicas pulled at my sleeve. “Issei? You don’t need to be so formal. Can you talk to me more casually, like I’m your little brother?”

“I—I don’t want to be rude...”

I was taken aback by Millicas’s generosity! He’d already honored me by thinking of me as a brother, but asking me to drop the formalities around him... I’d addressed him humbly at our first meeting, and maintained that deferential approach ever since...

“It feels like you’re holding me at a distance, but you’re so close to Rias...” Millicas looked down at his feet.

I’d recently started addressing his beloved Aunt Rias by name, so he wanted me to speak plainly with him, too. Still, it was a little different. I loved Rias, and had told her as much directly, and she’d expressed her affections for me as well. We were deeply in love...although our relationship wasn’t completely established yet, and I still felt kind of embarrassed to think of her as my girlfriend.

The important thing was those feelings were mutual. Rias occupied an important place in my heart, and she cared about me in the same way.

Millicas must have been aware of that, and he wanted me to feel at ease around him, like I would be with family.

I remembered something Rias once told me. *“A lot of people have high expectations for Millicas, given his origins.”*

Yes, Millicas was the son of Sirzechs Lucifer, the mightiest of the four demon

kings, and Grayfia Lucifugus, widely recognized as the strongest of all Queens.

Add to that the extreme potential of his latent talents, and it was understandable why many leading figures in the underworld expected him to follow in his dad's footsteps.

There was even a Millicas faction among politicians who supported Sirzechs, with many demons keeping a close eye on the young man's growth.

Millicas had even put some consideration into his future, but when politics got involved, well...

Rias was proud of her origins, but she couldn't bring herself to give up on her dreams—to spend her life with a man she loved. However, circumstances and politics had thrown an arranged marriage in the way, causing her no end of trouble.

If the adults had their way, Millicas might be in for far worse...

One day, he'd come to understand what he'd been born into. He might even come to resent it. He would take pride in his background, but at the same time, struggle to move forward.

Perhaps that was the fate of children born to high-class demon parents.

"Okay, Millicas, I'll drop the formal stuff," I said.

A sudden chill fell over me. I was being watched by some unknown force.

I glanced around, but there was no one there.

"...?"

Xenovia must have sensed something too, because she also looked over her shoulder. Ophis was similarly restless. From the looks of it, Asia, Millicas, and Xenovia's client hadn't noticed anything.

Someone was observing from a distance. I was certain.

"Xenovia! Asia! I bought some sports drinks from the convenience store!"

Irina came rushing over, a shopping bag clutched in her hands. She'd also decided to help out with Asia's and Xenovia's demon work—without interfering with Millicas, of course. After all, it would be seen as a betrayal for an angel to

be caught directly assisting in the demon affairs, so she was merely observing. Still, she couldn't help but bring treats now and then. I guess that skirted the line enough to be acceptable. Despite being a demon, I didn't exactly know the precise rules of conduct.

"Ah, a delivery from our self-proclaimed angel!" Xenovia exclaimed.

"I'm *not* self-proclaimed! I really am an angel!" Irina protested, pouting.

Their banter really helped to lighten the mood.

Millicas's shadowing came to an uneventful close for the day, although that sense of unease still hung in the air.

-○○●○-

The following morning, we all gathered in the training room located beneath my renovated home.

I'd equipped my Boosted Gear Scale Mail, Kiba was armed with a sword, and Gasper waited on standby in the background. The three of us were facing off against the same opponent—Millicas!

The young demon had donned a training outfit, wore a valiant, albeit childish, expression. At Rias's suggestion, we were about to engage in a quick mock battle.

"Why don't you have a little sparring match with my boys?" she'd suggested out of nowhere.

"Sounds great!" Millicas had responded with earnest enthusiasm.

It seemed he'd taken Sairaorg's attitude of being a high-class demon willing to train and improve oneself to heart. He was also interested in seeing our determination or grit.

Rias sat in the corner with the other girls of the Occult Research Club and Ophis. She'd be keeping a close eye on our mock fight.

Kiba wielded a replica sword, one without a blade. A real one would've been too dangerous, especially a Holy Sword or one of his specialized Holy Demon Swords.

Initially, I'd suggested fighting with only my gauntlets, but Rias had advised

me to equip all my armor... Was the idea here to pit Millicas against the legendary Red Dragon Emperor?

Gaspar's role was to support Kiba and me from the rear, and though visibly tense, he remained steady.

"I—I'll do my best!"

Hang in there, Gaspy! We're fighting a kid here, so don't let him think you're weak, okay?

"Begin!"

With Akeno's signal, the mock battle began!

Kiba and I didn't budge an inch, the both of us waiting for Millicas to make the first move. After all, we didn't want to hurt him. This was all about matching him until he was satisfied with our performance.

Sure enough, our sparring partner leaped into action.

"Here I come!" he called, taking off at a sprint.

His speed left me positively dumbfounded—he was *fast*!

He dived forward with such momentum that it was hard to believe he was a child. Crimson power gathered around his hands, which he launched my way with a couple of feints!

Whoa! The destructive potential of those attacks was in no way inferior to his father or aunt!

What a shock! He was much stronger than I'd anticipated! I dodged the oncoming blast, but that left Kiba directly in its path.

Kiba tried to deflect the attack with a Demon Sword, but...

Screeeeeeech!

...a shrill grinding sound rang out and Kiba's weapon disappeared!

"—!"

Kiba looked stunned, and honestly, I was, too! Millicas possessed an extremely strong aura! Kiba didn't make his sword very strong, considering this

was a mock battle, but even so, to completely destroy it...

“Whoa. He’s quite something, huh?”

“Y-yep! I’m surprised, too!”

“...His powers are just like Rias’s!”

Judging by their reactions, Xenovia, Irina, and Asia were clearly impressed.

“His energy is so smooth and fluid. It’s definitely not the kind of thing you’d expect from someone his age.”

“He completely destroyed Yuuto’s sword...”

“I’d heard rumors of his talent. I suppose that’s to be expected of Lord Sirzechs and Lady Grayfia’s son.”

Rosswisse, Koneko, and Ravel were similarly astonished.

Apart from Rias and Akeno, the female members of the Occult Research Club were all quite surprised.

“Hyah!”

Millicas took full advantage of our surprise, rushing in and unleashing a fresh barrage of demonic energy—a shotgun blast of power of annihilation, sending countless small projectiles of raw destruction raining down on us!

Mere exposure to that stuff was enough to utterly destroy someone, making Millicas’s attacks incredibly difficult to defend against! The latest one resembled Rias’s powers in several respects, so it wasn’t like I was totally caught off guard. Still, this wasn’t fair. Why did I always end up fighting people who could annihilate me in one hit...?

My best course of action was to counter with an attack of my own rather than block it directly. I quickly unleashed a scatter-type Dragon Shot!

Before the two blasts collided in mid-air, Millicas’s changed trajectory!

I’d seen this before. Sirzechs had the ability to compress his power of destruction into a sphere the size of his hand and control it at will. Millicas’s technique was clearly modeled after his father’s.

I dodged the oncoming strike, but more quickly followed. Eventually, one

grazed the edge of my armor!

With a deafening sound, a large gash was torn through the plate protecting my shoulder! If it hadn't been for that armor, I could've lost an arm!

I finally understood why Rias had insisted I equip my Scale Mail. My body didn't stand a chance against Millicas's power.

This kid was on an altogether different level. I guess that was to be expected of the son of Sirzechs and Grayfia. He was still young, so for the time being, we had the advantage, but I had to wonder how powerful he'd be at our age.

I didn't dare imagine. This kid seemed to be gifted with limitless potential.

I hadn't felt this overcome with awe at another person's abilities since I met Vali... It was little wonder that politicians were already rallying behind Millicas.

I glanced at Rias, who responded with a smile and a nod.

She must have known what I was thinking. I'm sorry, Rias! I shouldn't have underestimated him!

This was an eye-opening experience. And now there was nothing to do but continue this mock battle knowing we were up against an incredibly exceptional child!

"Men of the Gremory Familia! Let's show Millicas our stuff!" I declared, thrusting my fist forward in a challenge.

"Please do!" he responded with a radiant smile.

Now, what should I do next?

I was kind of excited to battle Millicas, especially because he thought of me as an elder brother and so earnestly wanted me to teach him.

Was this what it was like having a younger sibling?

I didn't have any of my own, but sparring with Millicas made me feel like I might have found the next best thing.

"Hahhh... Hahhh... Hahhh..."

Millicas sat down on the floor, gasping for breath. He was clearly exhausted.

The mock battle lasted for a full thirty minutes. Kiba, Gasper, and I had held back, but the fact that Millicas lasted so long was a testament to his ability. He truly was the scion of a Demon King.

His attacks had been relentless. Millicas had unleashed everything at his disposal until his demonic energy finally ran out. No matter how many times Kiba or I knocked him down, he rose back to his feet and came at us again. I couldn't help but admire his courage, his magnificent performance. If I was his age, facing off against three overpowered big brothers, I would've started crying and quit long ago. All things considered, his resilience was really something else.

I'd given Millicas what advice I could while fending off his attacks, and he was quick to take my comments to heart, swiftly correcting his defensive stance... The way he adapted to each new situation was nothing short of terrifying.

Rias crouched down beside her nephew and handed him a towel.

"You did well, Millicas. It takes courage not to give in against the likes of Issei and the others," she praised.

I couldn't have said it better myself. We'd been tough on Millicas, and I'd expected him to get upset. Treating him delicately on account of his age would've been disrespectful. Children were really sensitive to that kind of thing.

"I'll go wash my face," I said after dispelling my armor and taking the towel that Rias offered me. Then I quickly stepped out of the training room.

I wiped the sweat from my face in the large, shared bathroom in the basement.

That was fun.

This must have been what it felt like to play around with a younger brother. Millicas's brave, adorable maneuvers and the way that he jumped into my arms for a warm hug filled me with an almost paternal sense of love.

A brother...or maybe a son? As a high school student, I couldn't quite grasp what it might mean to have a child. Recently, perhaps because of my interactions with Millicas and the childlike Ophis, it felt like some fresh sensation was budding in me.

“...Spending time with kids isn’t half bad,” I muttered.

“Oh-ho-ho. Indeed?”

Akeno was standing right behind me! I didn’t know how she’d pulled it off, but she’d gotten to be quite stealthy!

“I’ve been thinking lately,” she began, handing me a sports drink.

“About what?”

“After seeing Ophis and Millicas, I think a boy and a girl would be nice.”

“Yeah. Millicas is a good kid, and Ophis has a charm kind of like an adorable little pet. You never get tired around her.”

Those were my honest thoughts. The two of them were an inspiration.

Ophis had no real concept of gender. In the past, she’d presented herself as an old man—and before that, as something entirely nonhuman. She seemed to change her appearance on a regular basis. For now, however, she’d taken the guise of a young girl, and so we all treated her as such.

“When you get married, Issei, what would you hope for? A boy? Or a girl?”

“That’s a tough one... Twins, a boy *and* a girl, would be a dream come true, but I’m guessing it would be twice as hard to raise a pair of kids.”

Maybe it would be easier to have a boy first and then a girl?

Akeno placed a hand over her abdomen and fixed me with a soft smile. “I’ll be glad to have as many children as you want.”

...

Sh-she was too stimulating! Blood spurted from my nose, seeping into the sports drink that I’d raised to my mouth!

“Gah!”

Akeno’s unexpected declaration had me choking! Damn, I must have looked pathetic!

“Oh dear. There, there.”

Akeno rubbed my back! Ugh, talk about embarrassing! However, I wasn’t

flustered just because my drink had gone down the wrong tube.

I'd sensed a huge, wild aura form somewhere behind me!

Looking around wildly, I spotted a gigantic figure standing at least two meters tall, garbed in a thick overcoat and sporting striking orange hair standing on end, stepping through the bathroom entrance.

Hold on, who's this guy?! How did he get into the house?!

The huge man smirked at Akeno and me. "Oh. Oh, I see. The Red Dragon Emperor is having a coughing fit in the bathroom. I wonder what's going on in here?"

The bigger question is "Who are you?!"

"Second! Don't you know it's rude to walk in on people while they're using the bathroom?"

I struggled to catch my breath and reply because I was still coughing. Two more unfamiliar figures made their entrances. The first was a man sporting an elaborate crimson robe, while the second looked like a Japanese man in a *haori* jacket.

The latter was the one who'd chided the large orange-haired guy who was apparently called "Second."

Wait, I know these people! I saw them during the anti-monster incident, although only for a moment...

Akeno was likewise taken aback, and not just because of the group's abrupt intrusion. Judging by the look on her face, she recognized our guests, too.

"...The Lucifer Familia," she whispered softly.

Yep, we were playing host to a group of extraordinary people!

Akeno and I returned to the training room with our three visitors. Rias was the most shocked of everyone, even crying "Souji?! What are you doing here?!"

"It's been too long, milady," the man in the *haori* jacket—Souji—answered with a warm grin. "We're checking in on Master Millicas."

Souji paused for a moment, turning his gaze to Kiba. "I'm glad to see you're

doing well, Yuuto.”

Kiba offered the older man a polite bow and straightened up. “Our last lesson was during the summer, Master.”

Yes, the man in the *haori* jacket was none other than Souji Okita, formerly a captain in the Shinsengumi military unit active at the end of Japan’s shogunate period, and now a Knight in Sirzechs’s Familia! He was a real-life historical figure! Even an idiot like me knew his name! He was also Kiba’s swordsmanship instructor! Incredible! He wore his hair tied back like a true samurai! Which made sense, given that he *was* a samurai! He looked to be in his late twenties, but he had to be well over a hundred!

I’d asked Kiba about him after the anti-monster crisis, and his explanation had been one surprise after another.

Apparently, there was a trend among high-ranking demons to recruit famous historical figures into their Familias, specifically ones from after the creation of the game of chess. The game was a human creation, and demons had modeled the Evil Pieces system after it. For some reason, great human figures from that pivotal point onward were eligible for recruitment by a demon looking to build their Familia.

I couldn’t begin to imagine what other historical figures might still be alive serving demon masters.

“Ha-ha-ha! Yes! Far too long, milady!” The gargantuan orange-haired man let out a loud guffaw. He had to be taller than Sairaorg, and his aura seemed greater as well. His hands were enormous. They were easily big enough to wrap around my skull.

“Comport yourself appropriately...,” the man in the crimson robe scolded. “Lady Rias. You’re even more beautiful than when I last saw you.”

This last man appeared to be the group’s leader. His eyes were sharp, despite his slender frame. In contrast to his burly partner’s fierce and wild aura, he exuded a quiet, uncanny atmosphere that proved unusually difficult to read.

He and the giant were far beyond my ability to measure.

“Second and MacGregor, too...? And what brings so many members of my

brother's Familia here? You aren't normally seen together outside of emergencies... And this seems somewhat excessive just to protect Millicas."

Rias was on point, as always. What had brought these three to my house? Their actions during the anti-monster crisis made perfect sense, but why would three members of Sirzechs Lucifer's superpowered Familia feel the need to drop by our peaceful home?

The giant man gulped down a bottle of liquor in on one go. In his massive palm, the vessel looked like a miniature toy.

The next moment, plumes of fire spewed from his mouth! Whoa! Fiery breath?!

"Nothing much," he answered. "After that mess the other day, we thought it might be good to get the crew back together and go see the sights. By coincidence, the little master was already here, so we figured we'd pop in. Bahamut and that bastard Enku said they were too busy with other business, though."

That's it?! They just wanted something to do?! Looking out for Millicas is just an excuse?! It didn't make any sense to me. Surely there had to be a political reason or something for why so many superstrong members of Sirzechs's Familia showed up unannounced!

"Amazing. I haven't seen you three together since I was a girl," Rias remarked.

Seriously? This was a rare event!

"I'm surprised, too. I've never seen you all assembled in one place before," Akeno added.

Wow, today *was* special.

We in the Occult Research Club stood there in stunned silence. None of us except Rias and Akeno had any idea how to respond.

"Let me introduce you all properly," Rias said, perhaps sensing our unease.

She pointed first to the man in the *haori* jacket, Okita. "This is my brother's one and only Knight, Souji Okita. You're all likely familiar with him as a core member of the Shinsengumi, I assume?"

“W-wow!” Irina marveled. “You’re...a historical figure!”

Okita flashed her a faint smile. “That’s right. I was forced to leave the frontlines during the Boshin War due to illness. I dabbled in various dark rituals, hoping to escape death, and by some coincidence or miracle, I ended up summoning Lord Sirzechs. He was disguised as a black cat, as I recall.”

All that happened behind the scenes of history. Okita and the Black Cat would have certainly made for a memorable lesson! Good one, Sirzechs!

“He wouldn’t stop with those rituals of his, and it wasn’t long before his physical body was reduced to a hive of monsters,” remarked the robed man.

A creature, complete with a monkey’s face, tigerlike limbs, and snake’s tail emerged from behind Okita’s back! A chimera!

Okita patted the apparition on the head. “This here is a creature called a *nue*... You might think of it as a Japanese chimera. My flesh, you see, is inhabited by various *youkai*... I can even summon a hundred-demon night parade all by myself...”

They’d all made their homes in his body?! What was a one-man hundred-demon night parade even supposed to look like?!

“Undoubtedly, that’s why he required two Knight pieces to recruit. Souji’s *youkai* took the lead fighting the smaller anti-monsters birthed from the Jabberwocky,” the robed man explained.

So that one-man hundred-demon night parade meant that he required two Knight pieces. In other words, he could do the work of dozens all by himself. That a single person had been able to take on so many of those anti-monsters was nothing short of insane!

On top of that, he possessed an exceptional mastery of swordsmanship, to the point that he could probably take on several foes at once. Basically, Kiba’s swordsmanship instructor was in a league of his own!

“My master didn’t teach me swordsmanship as much as his general attitude to fighting with a sword. I’m not a proper disciple of the Tennen Rishin school of swordplay,” Kiba said.

That made sense. Kiba's style was hardly like that of an old samurai.

Rias motioned to the robed man. "Next is my brother's Bishop."

The head of the group gave us all a polite nod. His every movement was perfectly precise, elegant, and graceful.

Based on appearance, I would've guessed he was in his late twenties, similar to Okita. His hair, a mix of blond and black, was long and wavy, and his thin eyes and smile possessed an almost bewitching charm.

"MacGregor Mathers is a practitioner of modern Western magic and one of the founders of the Golden Dawn. He's also famous for having edited and translated the book describing the Seventy-Two Pillars."

The Golden Dawn? I tilted my head to one side at that unfamiliar term. However, Xenovia, Asia, and Irina all but jumped up in shock.

"Then he basically stands at the pinnacle of all things magic!"

"W-wow! They told us about him in the Church!"

"Yep! He's a superstar in the magic world!"

The three were incredibly excited, far more than they had been for Okita.

MacGregor's lips spread into a grin at their reaction. "Heh-heh. It seems the young master hasn't heard of me, milady. But I don't mind. Just think of me as a very capable mage."

O-okay...? He sounds like a lot more than that, though.

"Sirzechs needed both Bishop pieces to recruit MacGregor, so he's certainly no ordinary wizard," Akeno remarked.

I'd thought as much! Given that I'd seen him going toe-to-toe with the Jabberwocky, his powers had to be extraordinary!

"I would greatly appreciate it if I could talk to you about magic," Rossweisse said to MacGregor.

Evidently, she'd taken great interest in this guy. Perhaps she hoped to learn from him.

Now that Okita and MacGregor had been introduced, it was time for the

huge, burly man, who promptly stepped forward with a loud guffaw, pointing to himself with his thumb. “My turn! I’m one of Boss Sirzechs’s Rooks! The name’s Surtr Second! Come on, put ‘em up! Kneel before me! Gwa-ha-ha! Just kidding!”

His personality definitely matched his appearance! He had one rough and rugged temperament! By the looks of him, I would’ve described him as a well-built middle-aged man in his thirties.

Rias chuckled softly. “Surtr Second is a copy of the original Surtr, the fire giant from Norse mythology. It’s prophesied that he’ll lead a battalion of giants to set fire to the world tree Yggdrasil during Ragnarok.”

Surtr, huh? After the battle against Loki, I’d read up a little on Norse mythology, and I was pretty sure his name had come up somewhere. However, I only recognized the name, and didn’t know anything else.

A fire giant... No wonder he was so huge. He’d even spat a plume of flame moments ago.

What did it mean to be a copy of a legendary being, though? Was he a clone, a perfect replica down to the cellular level?

“The Norse gods somehow fashioned a copy of Surtr, only for him to end up going berserk,” the Bishop MacGregor revealed.

He really liked to explain stuff, I guess. Maybe he liked the sound of his own voice?

“Apparently, he grew too much for them to handle, so they cast him out. That’s when Lord Sirzechs stepped in and used one of his mutation pieces to recruit him as a Rook. Given that he’s a replica, Lord Sirzechs gave him the nickname ‘Second.’”

—!

A mutation piece?! And not just any mutation piece, a Rook one!

I could only guess at Sutr’s value in Rating Games. As Sirzechs’s Rook, he was already worth five, but that didn’t take into account his mutation piece!

Just what kind of abilities did this guy possess?! How many points was he

actually worth in Rating Games?!

The giant sighed, venting more fiery breath.

“Yeah, those Norse bastards tossed me out, leaving me to burn up in my own flames. But the boss found me. Thanks to Sirzechs, I’ve learned how to master these flames like a pro. Now I’m rolling with his group as the toughest Rook in the underworld!”

By saving a replica discarded by the Norse gods, Sirzechs had certainly found himself an incredible addition to his Familia.

Surtr Second’s respect and admiration for his master were writ large on his face.

Grayfia was the strongest Queen, and this giant was the strongest Rook! Sirzechs’s Familia was so overpowered that it threatened to make my head explode!

The Bishop MacGregor glanced at me with a wry expression. “That *all*-powerful Rook transformed into a proper giant at the start of the fight against the Jabberwocky and wasted his flames right when things got started. After running out of gas, he had to sit out the final stages on the sidelines. I’d even explained before the battle that the anti-monsters were on a completely different level to our usual foes, *and* that they possessed extraordinary regenerative abilities. We would’ve triumphed much sooner if he’d followed the plan and waited until Lord Ajuka’s countermeasures were ready. Nothing can survive Surtr’s flames at their full power, but that’s assuming he doesn’t slip up while getting ready.”

Sutr, incensed by this sarcastic complaint, marched right up to the mage. “Shut up! You always have to run your mouth, MacGregor! I’m the boss’s Rook! I’m supposed to do what I can *when* I can!”

“Bahamut is a Rook, too, and his contribution was far greater, both at the start *and* toward the end. He and Souji’s *youkai* wiped out the smaller anti-monsters.”

I’d heard the name *Bahamut* before. He was a legendary fish. Gigantic, radiant, and capable of swimming through the sky as easily as the sea.

Apparently, Sirzechs had recruited him as his other Rook...

“How many times have I got to tell you?! Don’t lump me in with that damn fish!” Surtr growled, grabbing MacGregor by the collar in a fit of rage.

MacGregor smiled at us, looking utterly unconcerned. “And there you have it. That’s all of us.”

R-right. Add Grayfia and Enku, and you’d have the entire Lucifer Familia.

Or so I thought. However, Rias was scanning the room as though searching for another.

“What about Beowulf? Is it just you three today?”

Okita, Surtr Second, and MacGregor stood mute at the sound of that name. Then, as if only now remembering something, they said as one, ““““Oh, right...””””

“He’s—” Before Surtr Second could say more, the doors to the training room were thrown forcefully open, the sound reverberating through the basement.

All eyes turned to the source, a brown-haired man, probably in his midtwenties, dressed in a suit. He looked a little out of breath.

“I—I finally caught up...,” he wheezed, resting a hand against the wall to support himself.

“You’re late, Beo,” Surtr Second muttered.

“Cut me some slack, Second!” the man shouted. “You’re the one who had me ferrying all those souvenirs from Japan back to the underworld! Send this, send that, send this, send that! Never a moment’s rest!”

MacGregor pointed to our latest arrival. “This is Lord Sirzechs’s other Pawn, Beowulf. He’s a descendant of the legendary hero Beowulf, but he challenged Sirzechs to a duel and suffered a most tragic defeat. After that, he begged Sirzechs to let him join his Familia.”

—! The descendant of a hero joined up with Sirzechs’s group?!

Beowulf cocked his head to one side. “Huh? Have you all already introduced yourselves to the young master?”

“You were too damn slow. We’re done. Why the heck are you dressed in a suit, all uptight and formal?” Surtr Second shot back.

“What?!” Beowulf cried tearfully. “Why couldn’t you wait for me?! I spent so much time trying to think of something cool to say to my fellow Pawn! I even bought a suit! First impressions are important, you know!”

Surtr Second ignored Beowulf and chose to face me instead. He was even formidable up close!

“Hey, Young Master. This guy here’s our lackey. If you need something done, feel free to pass it off to him.”

“Young Master”... Does he mean me? These weren’t the first people associated with the Gremory family to address me that way.

Hold on, their lackey?! Is it really okay to treat him like that?

“You’re so mean!” Beowulf exclaimed. “Enku is also Lord Sirzechs’s Pawn, but they don’t tell *him* to do anything! Only me!”

This was one pitiable Pawn.

Rias chuckled lightly. “Beowulf may come across as a pushover, but he’s actually one of the five strongest Pawns in the underworld. My brother recruited him for a reason. He’s a formidable warrior, far beyond what appearances might suggest. In fact, before his reincarnation, he even managed to wound my brother in single combat.”

One of the underworld’s top five Pawns?! I knew it. Any member of Sirzechs’s Familia had to be top notch! Pitiable or not, this Beowulf was a descendant of a legendary hero.

I wondered if he was on par with Cao Cao. Landing a strike on Sirzechs was no simple thing!

“All he did was cut Lord Sirzechs’s arm a little. After that, he was beaten to a pulp. Right?” MacGregor said.

Beowulf teared up again over the needless details. “What gives?! Lady Rias said nice stuff about me! Now you’ve gone and given the young master the *worst* first impression of me!”

This Beowulf seemed like an amusing guy. I guess even Sirzechs's Familia needed an energetic type who was always the butt of the joke.

"So Sirzechs only has two Pawns? Enku and Beowulf?" I asked.

Rias nodded.

He only needed two. That was impressive.

"That's his entire Familia," she added. "Grayfia the Queen, Surtr Second and Bahamut the Rooks, MacGregor the Bishop, Souji the Knight, and Pawns Enku and Beowulf."

It was a varied group, to say the least, and frighteningly powerful.

"Yep, ask me anything about life as a Pawn! I'm all ears, Young Master!" Beowulf declared, having quickly regained his composure.

"Ah, thanks. Definitely," I answered.

At this, Surtr Second and MacGregor broke into uncontrollable laughs.

"He's totally dismissing you! I knew it, Beo! You don't cut it! Ha-ha!" Surtr Second guffawed.

Poor Beowulf literally shivered in embarrassment!

Huh?! Should I have come back with something more thoughtful?! I was only trying to give a polite answer.

How was I supposed to think of a meaningful question right there on the spot? Should I have been more enthusiastic? Maybe I could've said something like "You got it, Beowulf, my man!"

Okita cleared his throat, obviously hoping to change the subject. "By the way, has Lord Sirzechs dropped by?" he inquired with Rias.

"No, not recently... Has something happened?"

The four members of the Lucifer Familia exchanged measured looks.

"Actually...", Okita continued.

A few days earlier, Sirzechs was enjoying a little father-and-son time with Millicas, when he'd abruptly said, "I've got some time off coming up. Do you

want to play Satan Red with me, Millicas?”

Supposedly, Sirzechs, Satan Red in the Demon King squadron known as the Satan Rangers, enjoyed role-playing with his son more than anything else.

Millicas responded, “No, Father. I’m off to visit Rias! I want to see what life is like for demons in Japan with Issei and the others!”

Sirzechs took this answer with pride and grace, openly praising his son’s enthusiasm.

However, his next question had invited a knife to the heart.

“Hmm. Yes, that would be a most valuable experience. By the way, Millicas. Which do you prefer, Satan Red or the Breast Dragon?”

“If I had to choose...the Breast Dragon! His armor comes in so many different variations, and they’re all so cool! I love the action figures, as well!”

“...”

I had no difficulty imagining Millicas’s cheerful, energetic response or how Sirzechs’s smile must have frozen in place.

Apparently, Sirzechs hadn’t been seen during his off hours ever since Millicas started staying with us.

Today, he’d disappeared the moment he finished his official duties.

His Familia assumed that he must have come to visit us, but there was no sign of a Demon King here.

A sudden chill ran down my spine. It was like someone was watching from a distance, focusing directly on me! I glanced around and spotted something out of place!

Behind a slightly ajar door leading into the training room stood someone watching on intently, a figure dressed in a superhero costume!

I recognized him at once! It was Satan Red!

It was Sirzechs himself! The ominous feeling washing over me was identical to what I’d sensed on the baseball field! Had he been spying on us all this time?!

“Millicas... You really like the Breast Dragon more than Satan Red?”

His voice, his entire being, exuded terrible sadness!

Look, everyone! A Demon King dressed up as a superhero is lurking in our basement!

Rias, knowing full well who Satan Red was, leaned forward to whisper in my ear. “He must think you’ve stolen Millicas from him, Issei...”

She rested a hand on her forehead, exasperated by this most recent development.

So that was it... The gaze I’d detected yesterday wasn’t a hostile one, but an envious one. Still, why was Sirzechs dressed up as Satan Red?!

Was this really how he wanted to spend his time off work, staring helplessly after his son while he socialized with the Breast Dragon?!

Surtr Second strode over to Sirzechs. “There’s no way around it, Boss. You’ll have to fight the Breast Dragon and settle this once and for all. If you don’t act now, you could lose li’l Millicas to him forever.”

Come on, don’t make this worse!

“This may be the decisive moment, Lord Sirzechs. Your only choice is to demonstrate to Millicas that his father’s authority is greater than that of breasts!”

Even MacGregor was fanning the flames! And what was all that about the authority of fathers and breasts?!

“Give me a break!” I shouted. “I don’t want to fight Satan Red again!”

“Issei!” Millicas called back. “My father is strong, but please, do your best!”

Don’t try to support me, please!

An aura of envious sorrow flared around Satan Red!

I seriously had to fight Satan Red a second time?! Before I fell into terrified despair, light exploded from the center of the training room, forming a large circle.

It was a magic array in the design of the Gremory crest!

This timing, this shape—there could be no doubt about it!

A silver-haired maid appeared with a blinding flash. It was Grayfia! Her arrival positively moved me to tears. My savior, my goddess, had arrived!

All members of the Lucifer Familia stiffened, and their faces paled. Only Okita managed to maintain his smile. Even Satan Red visibly trembled at the sight of the underworld's mightiest Queen!

Grayfia cast her gaze around the room, taking in everyone. She threw an icy look at the gathered members of the Lucifer Familia before her narrowed eyes settled on the Demon King.

She took a step forward, causing even the mighty Surtr Second to flinch.

"Tell me, what are so many members of the proud Lucifer Familia doing in a place like this?" Her words carried such incredible weight! They weren't even directed at me, yet I was trembling! She was scary—*too* scary! Asia looked ready to cry, and Xenovia was tense.

"G-Grayfia!" Beowulf stepped forward, ready with an excuse. "We just thought we'd stop by for a change of pace!"

She fixed her piercing, unrelenting gaze right on him!

"Eeep!" Beowulf cried, falling to his knees. "I'm sorry. Please, punish me however you see fit!"

Whoa, that was a quick change of heart!

"Damn you, Beo! You're going to bail on us just like that?!" Surtr Second blurted, before launching into his own litany of excuses. "What's the problem?! We just wanted to visit Lady Rias! Besides, someone's gotta look out for the kid!"

"In that case, you should have said something to *me* first," Grayfia replied smoothly. "It's poor decorum to intrude on another's home without announcing yourself ahead of time. This is the Hyoudou residence, not the Gremory one. And Rias and Issei are more than capable of protecting Millicas themselves, I would think."

Surtr Second had no response and turned sheepishly quiet.

Finally, Grayfia turned to Sirzechs. "For you to visit this town dressed like *that*

on your day off... I hope you have a satisfactory explanation, Lord Sirzechs.” Her voice overflowed with quiet anger.

Satan Red stepped forward, steeling his resolve...and promptly dropped to his knees.

“I apologize. I was in the wrong.”

He submitted!

The most powerful Demon King in existence...rolled over to his wife! Look, I expected as much, but it was a surprise nonetheless.

“My mother is the strongest of all,” Millicas said with a radiant smile.

Everyone nodded along in vigorous agreement.

We all saw off Grayfia, who practically dragged Sirzechs along with her.

“Well then, everyone. I leave Millicas in your care. We’ll be expecting you back in the underworld the day after tomorrow, Millicas. Be sure not to cause any trouble, okay?”

“Of course!” he answered, voice full of energy.

Grayfia responded with a warm, motherly look.

She disappeared into the light of the teleportation circle, leaving the other members of the Lucifer Familia behind.

Grayfia had allowed them to stay with us for a bit longer after reminding them that they all served important roles in the underworld and urging them to return with Millicas.

Later, they booked rooms at a hotel in town to see what Japan had to offer.

As for the rest of us, we enjoyed our time with Millicas until the very end of his stay.

We ate Japanese food together and went shopping at the local department store. Millicas was just as excited about the latest toys as any other kid his age. Rossweisse even took him to the one-hundred-yen store, which he also seemed to enjoy.

We used the large communal bath together during his stay for some

quintessentially Japanese-style naked socializing.

Soon, the morning of Millicas's departure was upon us.

The members of the Lucifer Familia waited for him by the front door. As we all said our goodbyes, the hulking Surtr Second motioned for me to come over. Kiba and Okita were engrossed in conversation only a few paces away.

"Hey, Red Dragon Emperor."

"Y-yes? What is it?" I answered, approaching the giant fearfully.

Surtr Second created a small magic array on his palm. "I thought I'd show you something fun."

An item resembling a flying machine appeared in his hand. It was different from any real-world blimps or airplanes, looking more like an airship from a fantasy role-playing game.

"Is this a remote-controlled toy, or something?" I asked.

That's what it looked like. Yet the airship started moving by itself before my very eyes, literally hovering in the air.

It didn't look like Surtr Second was doing anything. The airship seemed entirely self-powered.

Surtr Second grinned widely. "This thing here is called a Skidbladnir—a magical flying sailboat from the Norse world. It's a living airship, a masterpiece made by the sons of Ivaldi—the same guys who made Mjolnir, the famous hammer carried by Thor. I got my hands on it after a bit of trouble. These aren't exactly common. There's very few of them in all the world."

A living airship! Incredible! I never would've imagined that such a thing might exist! The Norse pantheon had amazing magic, that was for sure!

"Right now, this puny little boat is no better than a toy. But its kind is known to feed off an owner's aura and evolve in unique ways. So, how about it? Want to keep it as your familiar?"

...

The unexpected offer left me stunned. Was this really happening?

“F-for me, you mean...? This airship...?”

“Yeah, if you want it, of course. Consider it a present. You’ve thrown yourself into all sorts of trouble for the underworld, for my boss. You deserve a little reward.”

“Th-thank you! I’ve never had a familiar before...”

I still hadn’t found one of my own. The timing had never quite worked out, but admittedly I still wasn’t over the loss of Oogly and Squiggly.

Until now, whenever I’d needed a familiar for something, Rias had lent hers.

“Will it turn into a massive airship once it grows up?” I asked.

It was the Bishop MacGregor who answered me. “Indeed. Its final form will depend on the aura and personality of its master. Given your exceptional growth as the Red Dragon Emperor, it may well develop in never-before-seen ways.”

Surtr Second let out a hearty laugh. “Or you could use it for *that*—your very own flying harem! That’s what you’re aiming for, right? Well, you’re gonna need a palace, then. That’s where this guy comes in. Depending on how you use it, you could fashion it into your dream flying harem palace. How’s that sound? Gets the blood flowing, I bet!”

A flying harem palace?! W-was that even a thing?! It had never crossed my mind! But he was right! My goal was to become a harem king, so of course I needed a suitable palace! And what better castle than a *flying* one?!

“Ha-ha-ha. Palace aside, it will make for a good means of transportation in time. Even in its current form, it should still be quite capable of ferrying its master,” MacGregor remarked.

A harem palace that doubled as a transport! Whoa! That made it pretty much invincible!

“I’ll gladly take it!”

How could I refuse Suttr Second’s generous offer? I was deeply moved! A flying harem palace in a living airship! Bwa-ha-ha! I would make it my own in every way, shape, and form! I couldn’t wait!

After that exchange, it was time to say farewell to young Millicas.

“Thank you for taking care of me. I had a great time! Can I come back and visit again?” he asked.

“Of course!” we answered as one.

The crimson-haired youth flashed us an adorable, radiant smile.

“Please, do come again. Everyone here thinks of you as their little brother. Maybe we can go to Kyoto next time?” Rias suggested.

“Okay!” Millicas nodded, shining with enthusiasm. “In that case, I’ll see you all again soon!”

With a polite tilt of his head, he turned to leave with the Lucifer Familia.

I... Yeah... I ought to say it. He looks up to me, and all...

I took a long, deep breath. “Millicas! See you again soon!” I gave him a thumbs-up and a huge smile.

“I can’t wait, Issei!” he answered, his expression brightening.

Millicas Gremory—our little brother. There had been a bunch of unexpected visitors, namely Satan Red and those members of the Lucifer Familia, but that didn’t kill my excitement for Millicas’s next visit.

AFTERWORD

Long time no see. Just like last time, I may have gone a little off the rails with this short story collection.

Now then, allow me to introduce each of the episodes in turn!

Silver Screen Demons—Chronology: After Volume 5

This story deals with Serafall's underworld TV show *Magical Girl Levia-tan*. It takes place prior to Issei's *Breast Dragon* debut, so I was in a nostalgic mood during the revision process. It's also quite rare to see Gasper take a lead role in these stories. Now that I think about it, this may be one of the earliest demonstrations of his mysterious latent powers.

Issei SOS—Chronology: After Volume 5

This one occurs immediately after *Silver Screen Demons*, just before the start of volume six. It's a very memorable story for me because it was printed in *Dragon Magazine* back when *High School DxD* was featured on the front cover. Kiyome Abe, the monster tamer who made her appearance in an earlier volume, returns here. We also have a familiar snow gorilla, a legged tuna fish, and an ostrich. As usual, they embody a terrible worldview. By the way, the beautiful mermaid appears in another short story. If I ever get the chance, I'd love to include it in another short story collection.

A Demonic Distemper—Chronology: After Volume 7

At last, Rossweisse has joined the show! And yet, this one is mainly about Kiba. He hasn't had a chance to grace the cover art, owing to his being a man. Naturally, I thought to myself, *What if he turned into a girl? Then there would be nothing holding him back!* That was the inspiration behind this story. Kiba is a handsome pretty boy, so of course he makes for a gorgeous beauty, too—an incredibly buxom one at that!

By the way, there was another story where Azazel turned all the girls into handsome young men, a prequel of sorts to this episode. Unfortunately, it wasn't included in this collection.

The Unresurrected Phoenix—Chronology: After Volume 8

This one is the tale of Riser's comeback, which has been mentioned several times in the main narrative. Basically, it's his journey out of depression after Issei beat the living daylights out of him and whisked Rias away... Turns out his recovery can be attributed to perverted inclinations, at least in part. For some reason, this fried chicken continues to prove unexpectedly popular with readers.

Armageddon at the Athletic Meet!—Chronology: After Volume 8

I've written quite a few short stories in the *High School DxD* universe, but this is by far the most chaotic among them all.

Here, numerous celestial beings make a rare appearance, including Archangel Michael. Uriel is a new addition, making this his debut. Even Raphael shows up for a bit. The most interesting twist comes from Governor Azazel and his dark past. It turns out most artificial Sacred Gears were born from his adolescent fantasies.

The Troubles of a Noble Heir—Chronology: After Volume 12

This one is a new story that takes place after volume twelve, making it the most recent of the bunch. After the chaos of the last volume, I wanted to write about life in the peace and quiet of the Hyoudou residence, focusing on young Millicas, Sirzechs and Grayfia's son. As mentioned in the story, Millicas possesses incredible potential. He's unrivaled in the series when it comes to latent talent. By the time he's Issei's age, he'll undoubtedly be a demon without equal. After all, his parents are amazing people, as is his uncle (Issei—it's as good as confirmed), and an extraordinary environment is the perfect breeding ground for an extraordinary individual.

I'm thinking far into the future here, but I'd like to one day pen a new work in which he shines at an underworld school sometime after the events of *DxD*.

Also, for the first time in the whole series, we've received a proper

introduction to the Brave Saints. Their system is modeled on card games, not only the mainstays like poker and blackjack, but maybe other lesser-known ones as well...

Given the composition of a deck of playing cards, some of you may be wondering if there's an extra Joker waiting to turn up somewhere. That's a question for another time, so please don't expect an answer soon.

Now for a little on the Lucifer Familia, who have all finally made appearances!

There were a lot of requests from readers to bring this group into the story, so we decided to include them in this collection. They're practically monsters. All of them are outlandishly strong.

We have Grayfia Lucifugus the Queen, Surtr Second the Rook (mutation piece), Bahamut the deep-sea light-fish Rook, Souji Okita the Knight, MacGregor Mathers the Bishop, Enku the Pawn, and lastly, Beowulf the Pawn. Surprisingly, not a single one of them possesses a Sacred Gear. Beowulf's introduction may have been a little underwhelming, but he's still a very formidable descendant of an ancient hero. The fact that he doesn't even need a Sacred Gear should speak volumes about his power. He's garnered a reputation as a highly adept support fighter and is particularly impressive when working in tandem with his familiars.

As for Surtr Second, well, he has utterly unreal specs... If he'd gone all out against the Jabberwocky, he would've taken it down immediately. He's the strongest Rook in the underworld, bar none.

Bahamut's main jobs are reconnaissance, providing transportation to his other Familia members, and eliminating small fry opponents. Like the others, he's incredibly powerful, even when alone. MacGregor, on the other hand, is a leading expert in researching techniques forbidden by each of the major schools of magic (white, black, Norse, summoning, spirit, and so on). We'll cover magic in more detail in the series' fourth arc!

Lately, I've had some time to reflect.

Even though I put quite a bit of thought into the wider setting, I often forget to explain details adequately throughout the narrative, resulting in problems later on. For instance, it would have been best to establish that Kiba could create Holy Swords earlier than we did (it was mentioned in passing, but there

were no opportunities to show it off, seeing as his Demon Swords are more powerful). A more recent example would be Sakra's overall strength. In volume twelve, I wrote that he's as strong as each of the Four Great Demon Kings combined, but I've received several questions from readers asking if that included Sirzechs *after* revealing his true form. To put an end to such inquiries, let me say that comparison was *not* based on Sirzechs's true nature, nor does it count a fully unleashed Ajuka (which we've yet to see in the story). If Sakra were stronger than the Four Great Demon Kings including all that, then he'd probably end up breaking all measurement standards.

That's about it for each of the featured stories and my thoughts.

Unfortunately, several other chapters didn't make it into the final volume. These include a short tale about the Church Trio's outing to Akihabara, where they get a huge culture shock. There's also one about Issei losing his perversion after being hit by a ray beam from a mysterious UFO. So long as we keep featuring new short stories in *Dragon Magazine*, there will probably be more in the future that inevitably have to be cut from these anthology volumes for space.

Basically, it will be impossible to include everything. For those who don't want to miss a single moment of *High School DxD*, I hope you'll keep an eye on *Dragon Magazine*.

I'm truly very sorry that we won't be able to collect them all in books.

Now then, I'd like to take a moment to share some rambling thoughts and observations. The stories themselves were slightly shorter than usual this time, so to make up for it, the afterward is much longer.

All right, the first musing is about growth, I think. Or maybe change.

Comparing the earliest short stories in the *High School DxD* universe to my more recent ones, I found some noticeable differences scattered about. Rereading *Silver Screen Demons* and *Issei SOS*, I was surprised to find that they lacked descriptions in many places, and the writing was somewhat flat. My style undergoes a noticeable shift from *A Demonic Distemper* onward. I made a considerable number of revisions and edits for the sake of this collection, so you might not feel that they're all too different, but as the author of these works, I

was amazed by the transformation. Does this mean I've grown as a writer? Or have I merely changed?

Even my editor observed that my writing has become more relaxed lately, or perhaps more polished. I don't think I'm exceptionally *skilled*, but I hope I've at least improved compared to when I first started this series.

Second—the anime.

Thanks to tremendous support from the fanbase, the anime has become a smash hit. It's a truly remarkable result, one that has astonished everyone working on the light novels and the anime. Thank you for all your support!

Ever since the anime adaptation got underway, the workload for the original team (me, Miyama-Zero, and my editor) has increased significantly. I've been working on one thing or another related to *High School DxD* seemingly every day, even while writing this afterword. In fact, the situation has become more difficult since the anime season finished airing. The tasks are piling up, but I'm handling them somehow.

I'm honored to say that I, the author, was able to participate in the weekly anime script meetings during production. I paid careful attention to the series structure. The meetings were always friendly and warm, and I was consistently amazed by the staff's incredibly in-depth understanding of the original work. How fortunate I am to work with such talented animators.

I was even given opportunities to check the storyboards and let the production team know if I thought the various scenes were faithful to the original premise. I'm beyond grateful to the production staff for carefully listening to my comments on even the most minute details.

We were all mindful to ensure that the anime would appeal to the existing fans while working to bring in a wider audience. I'm beyond happy that so many have let me know how satisfied they were with the result and that we gained a significant following of new readers thanks to the anime. The anime has had a massive effect on our readership. By my estimates, we owe more than half of our current audience to it. In addition to the anime work, I also had to write scripts for drama CDs and bonus stories for the DVD and Blu-Ray releases.

Main series > Short stories > Drama CD scripts > Special tie-in stories for the

DVD/Blu-Ray releases > Anime check > Drama CD script check > Tie-in story check > Anime check > Main series check > Short story check > Drama CD script check > Anime check > Tie-in story check > Short story check > Anime check > Short story check > *Etc. etc.*

That was my life around the start of the new year. Even now, I spend most of my days writing *High School DxD* materials. I've lost count of how many times I've written the word *breasts*.

I was also in charge of writing some of the promotional videos for the anime. It was a whole lot of fun!

Third—the popularity of the characters.

I mentioned in a previous afterword that Issei ranked third when it came to how popular the various characters have been with readers. Right now, our number-one most popular heroine is Rias. She probably has the anime to thank for that. Prior to its release, Akeno was in the lead, with Rias coming in second. Rias was the main focus of the anime, so I suspect that's why she has shot to the top spot. In harem stories like this one, it's extremely rare for the main heroine to take the number one position. In other words, this shows how much the fans love her. Thank you, everyone!

To the members of the Gremory Familia, Rias is King, sister, and mother—oh, and the Switch Princess, of course. With her multiple roles and her position as the group's unifying force, it stands to reason that she would be such a hit with fans. Our top three most popular characters are Rias, Akeno, and Issei, in that order. Surprisingly, our male characters are pretty popular in their own right, too.

Fourth—some modest corrections.

I've been going through the previous volumes and fixing any critical typos and errors that stood out. The biggest mistake was back in the first edition of volume five, during the description of the ring around Issei's wrist. Given the situation, it would have been natural for the ring to be fixed to the same arm as his gauntlet. However, I inadvertently described it as being on his *right wrist*. This ended up inconveniencing Miyama-Zero, who faithfully placed it on Issei's right wrist... That was entirely my mistake, and I offer my deepest apologies.

From the reissue onward, this should be corrected to simply say *wrist*.

Several readers have also contacted me regarding some of Azazel's comments in volume four. In particular, there's a part where he speculates that Ddraig required seven-point-nine points to Issei's zero-point-one. That didn't make any sense, did it? I've updated it to clarify that he's talking about the eight Evil Pieces Rias needed to recruit Issei. There was another one in volume seven where I said there was a shrine maiden from a temple—but as we all know, shrine maidens are found at shrines, not temples! This has been corrected, as have several other minor errors. I encourage you to try to find them all.

Fifth—I'd like to answer some of the most common questions I receive from readers.

I get all kinds of supportive messages from fans, and they usually come with a variety of inquiries. Those that come up most often are as follows.

“Who would rank among the top ten fighters that Vali mentioned in the fourth volume?”

Apparently, this one is a source of much discussion among fans. Well then, let me share some details from my background world building.

In no particular order, and referring exclusively to the *High School DxD* universe, we have: Ophis, Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, Sakra, Thor, Typhon (or Fenrir), Hades, Aten, and Lugh.

The Great Red isn't included because he's a pacifist by nature (yes, I'm aware some of you may have your doubts!). Also, this list was compiled before Fenrir and Ophis lost much of their powers. You'll probably notice several names from Hindu mythology, which otherwise hasn't featured much in the series yet. Those familiar with Hindu mythology will no doubt understand, but to cut a long story short, these gods are armed to the teeth with cheat-level abilities. If they were to show up, we'd be left with *Dragon Ball*-like levels of destruction, so I've refrained from introducing them yet. Basically, the Hindu gods are absolutely terrifying, and they rank very highly on Vali's list. If the series keeps going, I'm thinking of doing a *Shiva the Destroyer* arc, but we'll see. I've no plans to introduce the Hindu pantheon until then. Just so you know, Sirzechs's true form and Ajuka, if he decides to get serious (which he doesn't), would also be

included on the list somewhere.

The next most common question I receive is whether other girls we've met, like Kunou, will join Issei's future Familia. I'm afraid those characters who aren't allowed to become demons due to their positions won't be joining Issei's group any time soon. Kunou is the princess of Kyoto's *youkai* faction, so that means she's likely out. She doesn't need to join his Familia to hook up with him, though, right? He could always take her on as a mistress.

One more thing. The Cthulhu Mythos won't be appearing in *High School DxD*.

Okay, it's time for some thanks. To Miyama-Zero and my editor H, thank you both for your support with these short stories. Unfortunately, we weren't able to include all of Miyama-Zero's illustrations, but if we get a chance, I hope we might be able to feature some of them in a dedicated *High School DxD* illustration collection one day. I'd love something like that. However, it depends on fan interest. I already have another short story in mind to serve as its special feature! So how about it, Fujimi Shobo? Maybe something like *High School DxD Miyama-Zero Illustration Collection*, Vol. 1?

Okay, now for a little teaser for the next book. It's finally time for the narrative's fourth arc! As previously announced, we'll be delving into the world of mages and vampires—and volume fourteen will be all about Ravel!

After receiving feedback that the male characters were featured too heavily in volume twelve, our female cast will once again take center stage. Will Xenovia and Irina, who sat it out for much of the last one, make a comeback? What about training for Asia and Koneko? Keep your eyes peeled!

ORIGINAL PUBLICATION LIST

Life.1: Silver Screen Demons

Dragon Magazine, May 2010 issue Life.2: Issei SOS

Dragon Magazine, July 2010 issue Life.3: A Demonic Distemper *Dragon Magazine*, January 2011 issue Life.4: The Unresurrected Phoenix *Dragon Magazine*, March 2011 issue Life.5: Armageddon at the Athletic Meet!

Dragon Magazine, May 2011 issue Extra Life: The Troubles of a Noble Heir First publication

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