



The background of the cover features a detailed illustration of a young man with dark hair, wearing a black and red military-style jacket with fur-lined collar and cuffs. He is holding a large, ornate silver sword with both hands, positioned diagonally across the frame. The scene is set against a dramatic sky with a bright sun or moon on the right and a cityscape visible in the lower half. The overall tone is epic and action-oriented.

# BERSERK

## OF GLUTTONY

NOVEL

# VIII

Written by  
Isshiki Ichika  
Illustrated by fame

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*"I wish I could  
have gone to the  
capital with you."*

MYNE

*"Don't do anything  
reckless, please."*

ROXY


*"We only have  
one chance."*

ERIS

*"Eris, stand back."*

FATE





*“What the hell, Greed?!  
Why’d you have to go and do  
something so reckless?!”*

*“There was no other way.  
But look, I’m back, aren’t I?”*



# BERSERK OF GLUTTONY

NOVEL  
VIII

WRITTEN BY  
ISSHIKI ICHIKA

ILLUSTRATED BY  
FAME



*Seven Seas Entertainment*



BOSHOKU NO BERUSERUKU  
-OREDAKE LEVEL TO IU GAINEN WO TOPPA SURU - VOL. 8

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## Chapter 1:

### A Quiet Morning

I WAS ALONE when dawn broke over Hausen. In the past, I would have simply watched as our lone sun rose on the horizon. But today was different.

Today, the rising sun was blocked by the floating continent of Galia. Sunlight streamed out from around it like a solemn halo. If I hadn't known what I was looking at, I might have found it just as beautiful and mesmerizing as Hausen's citizens.

"Hello, Fate."

"Laine?!" I cried.

"Why the look of utter shock?" she asked.

"When was the last time you ever woke up this early?"

"Even I wake up early every now and again. Everyone's been talking about this view, and I wanted to see it with my own eyes," said Laine, seating herself beside me on the courtyard bench. "I heard that you lost Greed. Nonetheless, I'm happy to see you looking well. Looks like I had nothing to worry about."

"I owe all that to Myne," I replied. "She helped me realize that it's too early to give up."

"I see. In that case, I have something for you."

Laine passed me an envelope.

"Who's it from?"

"Your father...Dean."

"Dad?!"

Without realizing, I crushed the previously uncrumpled envelope in my fist.

"He also asked me to give you a message. He said he'll be waiting for you in Galia's depths. What are you going to do, Fate?"

I didn't waver for an instant. "Like you even need to ask," I said.

"Like father, like son," said Laine with a somewhat troubled smile. "You two really are alike."

"We are?"

Those words might have brought me joy once. Now, they repulsed me.

My own father was trying to open the Door to Distant Lands, and as a result, monsters were coming back to life all over the world. Everywhere, people were in danger, and many small villages had already been completely decimated by monster attacks. The royal capital of Seifort was the most populous location in the kingdom, and monsters were steadily gathering there, drawn by the scent of prey. If they weren't stopped, a death parade was inevitable. Fortunately, Aaron and the white knights were fighting tooth and nail to keep the monsters at bay.

My father caused this, and I resented the implication that we were anything alike.

"Your father is...a prisoner of that which binds him," said Laine.

"Like Myne, you mean."

"Yes. Neither can betray their sacred marks...their Divine Revelations."

"Are you saying it's my dad's duty to open the Door to Distant Lands?"

"Based on the circumstances, it would appear so. He was obsessed with the Door, and when he started to open it, his sacred mark appeared on his cheek."

This didn't make any sense. Libra was trying to *stop* the door from opening—the exact opposite of what my father was doing.

"But doesn't that clash with what Libra wants?" I asked.

"It's possible that, though they are both Holy Beastfolk, their Divine Revelations differ."

"What?!"

"God's will is likely not a simple, solitary thing. It is almost certainly a multitude, and each Zodiac Knight is attempting to fulfill their individual duty."



It's worth noting that your father hated Libra—the two clearly have a shared past, but one unrelated to their Divine Revelations. It's personal."

*A multitude of Divine Revelations? Why complicate matters like that? Wouldn't it be more efficient to give all of the holy beastfolk a shared goal? If they were all assigned conflicting Revelations, there was every chance that nothing would be accomplished at all.*

"God works in mysterious ways," I muttered.

"So it would seem. If we understood exactly *how* they worked, perhaps we might live without pain and suffering. Instead, a variety of paths lay before us, and we are given the freedom to choose the one we walk."

"A multitude of options, too..."

"As a researcher, I must say it's far more intriguing this way."

"Do you ever think about anything other than yourself?"

Laine giggled. "A multitude of potential experiments is so very exciting."

I couldn't believe what I heard. "Laine..." I muttered, but then she put a hand to my chest. "Huh?"

I was shocked, but Laine's expression told me that she was no longer joking. "How have you been feeling?" she asked.

"Great."

"Liar."

"Why would I—"

"You've always been a terrible liar."

Guilty as charged. I froze. Laine saw this as a golden opportunity to do a thorough, hands-on inspection of me.

"Enough already!" I shouted.

"It's just as I thought," she muttered. "How long has it been like this?"

Laine had been keeping an eye on my condition—namely, my Gluttony—back in Seifort, and I wasn't going to conceal anything from her. Still, I had to admit I

was hesitant, especially now that the changes were visible. In a way, Laine's impromptu health check was something of a godsend.

"For about a week," I replied.

Laine groaned. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I was busy."

"This is why you're always so much trouble," said Laine. She turned me to face her and tugged at my clothes. "Come on. Off with it."

"Here?!"

"Relax. It's not like anybody else is here."

"That's not the point!"

But Laine was not so easily dissuaded. This was a bad habit of hers. When she wanted to know something, she had to figure it out right then and there. And if that meant undressing me in broad daylight, then so be it.

Even Laine froze the moment she saw my back, though. "Oh, I see," she said. "Like father, like son indeed. Dean has these too."

"He does?"

"Yes. But his wings are much bigger, and much more powerful."

"What are you getting at?"

"This is not the result of your Gluttony. This is the manifestation of your holy beastfolk genes."

"But why now?"

Laine gazed out at the floating continent of Galia for a moment. "Your father said that the power of the holy beastfolk is awakening in you. Your Gluttony made it possible."

"Really?"

"Yes. No ordinary human could bear such power. But thanks to your Gluttony, you've reached the Domain of E, which caused your holy beastfolk power to awaken."

My mother was a human, and my father was a holy beastfolk. I was a product of the two—a hybrid. I had lived the majority of my life as a human, but now, a dormant power within me had begun to emerge.

“That power within you is balanced by your Gluttony. You feel good these days, don’t you?”

“I feel amazing. I thought things were going to be much harder after I lost Luna’s protection.”

I still didn’t know if this was good or bad though. I hadn’t been back to the spiritual plane since Luna had left. I also hadn’t encountered my Gluttony in the form of the “other” me, either. I’d fought it once before and achieved victory by the skin of my teeth, but I didn’t know if things would go the same way the next time we met.

My Gluttony had always been silent, but now, it bubbled to the surface and asserted itself. I imagined it didn’t like the other power awakening within me.

“In any case, I’m going to need some time now that I have a great source of information on your body.”

“What do you mean ‘source?’”

“Your father gave me an ether blood crystal. It’s a kind of miracle stone formed from divine blood. Using its power, he purified the Philosopher’s Stone he took from Seifort’s laboratory.”

“The Philosopher’s Stone?!”

The stone was a part of the superorganism Shin, who I’d fought in the depths of Hausen. My father had indeed acquired a Philosopher’s Stone at the time. It didn’t look any different, but...

“Yes. I saw it with my own eyes. He purified the consciousness residing within it. It may be possible to do the same with the ravaging of your Gluttony, allowing you to control it.”

“Sounds like a dream come true.”

“I don’t think it is a dream at all. Dean gave me the ether blood crystal, but he told me it was for your sake. He doesn’t seem the type to lie.”

Would my father really do something like that for me?

“Don’t get your hopes up yet,” Laine continued. “It will take time to research the blood crystal. The machinery I need is located in the underground city of Grandol. I’ll go there to focus on my work.”

“You look thrilled.”

“I was born for this. It’s my calling. Come over and clean the place for me whenever the mood strikes.”

“Did you ever consider just doing it yourself?”

“And steal your job? I wouldn’t dare.”

“You do realize I’m the lord of Hausen, right?”

Laine ignored me. She had said everything she’d come to say, so she rose to her feet. “Well,” she announced. “I’ve got work to do.”

“Hey, have you told Mugan that you’re safe yet?” I asked as she walked away.

Mugan, Laine’s father, had been worried sick since she’d been kidnapped. I knew the kind of person Laine was, and there was a possibility that she had yet to contact him. I didn’t want to assume this to be true, but I had to ask.

As soon as Laine heard my question, her jaw dropped. “Oh no!” she cried. “I completely forgot!”

“The guy was practically in tears at the royal capital! Send him word you’re safe!”

Laine only ever made her poor father worry. She’d never change. But I was glad to have her by my side, helping and supporting me.



## Chapter 2:

### Wrath and Gluttony

I WAS RIGHT. Laine would never change. In addition to forgetting to tell her father that she was alive and well, she decided that informing him could wait until *after* she was done with her research.

*I should've seen it coming*, I thought. *I'll inform Mugan on her behalf*. Set was already sending a report to Seifort—we had to inform the royal capital about recent events at Hausen—so I called him over and asked that my message to Mugan be included.

“Not easy for you, is it?” said Set with a wry chuckle. “Oh, by the way, I haven’t seen Eris around recently. Do you know where she is?”

“Oh, she went off looking for a way for us to get *there*.”

I looked up at Galia, floating in the sky. It was no longer a place we could reach on foot. Roxy said she’d fly me there in her angel mode, but I knew the transformation drained both her and Snow’s energy. I didn’t want them to overuse their Valkyrie powers as a means of getting around only to land in the middle of a pitched battle too exhausted to fight.

Eris had said she had a plan in mind, and then she simply left. She never even told us what her plan was, so we were all left scratching our heads.

“It better be something good...” I muttered.

“You don’t put very much trust in Her Majesty Eris at all, do you?”

“Why would I? She’s got a dismal track record. It’s like there’s some new stupid thing to deal with every day.”

“Such as?”

“Like her getting naked and trying to force her way into bed with me every night. I’m barely getting enough sleep as it is.”

“What?! Ugh! How I yearn for such a blessing!”

Set was clearly enamored with Eris. I had to concede that she was a beautiful woman. But something about her behavior felt...off to me. *She's always throwing herself at me, sure, but she isn't doing so with any amorous intent. It's something else.* I hadn't yet worked out what it could be.

Eris still kept tons of secrets. She remained an enigma in many ways.

"Fate! You realize we're talking about the queen, yes? She's not only the ruler of our kingdom but a peerless beauty! If such a woman passionately offers herself to you, and you do not respond to her in kind, well...can you really call yourself a man? Why in the world would you complain about this, Fate?!"

"Calm down, Set. You're talking way too fast!"

I admit I was shocked the first time Eris showed up nude. My heart raced like crazy. After days and days of it, though, it became a familiar sight. Now I simply thought of her as an exhibitionist. Eris lying in bed naked was just a part of the mundane scenery of my life, and it was better just to let her go than make things worse.

"I'm so used to it these days that when I see her, I only think, 'Oh, she's naked again.'"

"What?! The majestic splendor! Our queen in all her naked glory! Outrageous! Simply outrageous! What is this envy within me?! Let me take your place, Fate! I demand it!"

"Set! I said calm down!"

Set's behavior made me suspect that he might be a target of Eris's Lust skill. He was practically out of his mind. I suspected that Eris didn't like how Set was so smitten by Roxy and had cooked up a little revenge. She often claimed this kind of thing was about keeping up appearances, but I wasn't going to stand for it in my own domain.

Even now, Set continued to heave deep sighs as he called Eris's name. Suddenly, the cold gaze of a child came to rest upon him.

"Papa... You're doing that thing where you moan about Eris again..." Anne, Set's daughter, said.

“Oh!” cried Set, snapping back to his senses. “Anne! I, uh...”

“You promised!”

“I’m sorry!”

He must have promised that the topic of Eris was off-limits. But he’d broken that promise and now faced the wrath of his young daughter. It was a pitiful sight.

“You still have work to do, right? Get to it!” Anne said.

“Yes, ma’am!”

Anne then dragged away the dejected Set. This was fraying their relationship, so I made a mental note to admonish Eris and demand that she stop toying with Set.

“I can’t believe it,” I muttered. “The stakes are so high, and she’s still got time to play with people’s feelings.”

The queen had some terrifying hobbies. I breathed a sigh and found arms draped around me. *There is only one possible culprit—Eris. She’s finally returned.* Or so I thought. But...something felt off. The body pressed against my back felt different.

“It feels...flatter...”

“Meaning what, exactly?”

I turned toward the voice and found a girl with tanned skin and white hair. “Myne?!”

Myne never did anything like this.

“*What do you mean?*” repeated Myne. Her grip tightened. The power was unbelievable.

“Myne... You’re hurting me...”

I felt like I was going to snap in half. Even with my Health Regen and Health Regen Boost, I wasn’t sure I’d recover from a broken spine.

“Mercy!” I cried. “I mistook you for Eris! That’s all, I swear!”

“Understood...for now.”

Just when I thought my bones were going to shatter, Myne released me.

*Talk about a close call. We're on the verge of battling the entire Galian continent, and I nearly got paralyzed by a hug.*

“What was that about, anyway?” I asked.

“I figure if Eris does it, then sometimes I will too.”

“Why?”

“I just felt like it.”

Myne had been doing this sort of thing more often lately. I wanted to compare it to a cat playing with a toy, but Myne was more like a tiger that merely resembled a cat. She was a wild beast. If I let my guard down, she would tear me apart like prey, so I kept my guard up at all times.

Until recently, Myne and I had functioned within a set distance of each other—not exactly together, not exactly apart. Since Myne had confronted her past, the distance between us had shrunk to nothing. It was like she was attached to me. She was always acting like this out of the blue. I wished she'd warn me ahead of time. *Can I get used to this? Will it eventually end up like Eris, the exhibitionist?* I had my doubts.

“Fate, have you heard anything I said?”

“What?”

I wasn't paying attention at all, and Myne wasn't happy about it. If she'd had her black axe Sloth in hand, she would have sent me to the stars with a single swing. Instead, her cheeks puffed up like an angry squirrel. I wasn't sure what was going to happen, but then she smiled at me.

Myne *smiled*.

I was starting to get used to Myne's smile. She had gone expressionless for so long, but she had regained her emotions when she confronted her past. Her sense of taste had returned, too. Myne said she wanted to try something new, so Roxy was teaching her how to cook, and I was usually the taste tester for her creations. While Myne may have been a prodigy in battle, that genius did not



translate to the culinary arts. She had a long road ahead of her.

“So, um...about what happened...” said Myne bashfully.

There was only one thing that she could have been referring to. Just a few days earlier, I was taking a bath when Myne pushed her way in to join me. Then she declared her love for me.

Given the situation, and the weight of the moment, I only did what was natural—I panicked. All of the girls then burst in: Roxy, Memil, Eris, and Snow. This quickly turned into an interrogation. They needed to know how exactly I ended up in the bath with Myne. Since then, things between Myne and I had been uncertain—we’d never finished our conversation.

“When you confessed your love to me, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“I, uh...”

*I love Roxy.*

I was just about to tell Myne this, but she pressed a finger to my lips. “I know,” she said, not allowing me to say the words aloud. “Does it make you uncomfortable? How I feel?”

“No. It makes me happy.”

“Then that’s enough for me.”

“What do you mean?”

Myne flashed me another grin. “I have time,” she said. “Endless amounts of time. Just like you.”

I should have expected this from someone who’d lived so long.

“Wait. You mean...”

Myne had lived for more than four thousand years. Apparently, it had something to do with bearing a Skill of Mortal Sin, which suggested that maybe I, too, would live for an unfathomably long time.

“You can have Roxy for now,” Myne said. “But a hundred years, maybe two hundred years from now, I’ll have you all to myself. And then we will be

together forever.”

“What?!”

“So it’s no big deal.”

*Whoa! Talk about a seriously long-term plan!* But it was true that Roxy was human and only had a normal human lifespan.

“Myne...” I muttered.

“My luck ran dry the moment you saved me. This is what I get.”

“Come on now,” I said. “There’s no need to be so hard on yourself.”

“In that case, it’s going to be a perfect example of reaping what I sow!”

With that, Myne happily wrapped me in another hug.

I didn’t know what was going to happen a couple centuries from now, but Myne had chosen to let go of the past and live in the present. I believed that, through it all, there would be a brighter future.

## Chapter 3:

### Angel Mode

MYNE WAS IN HIGH SPIRITS. So high, in fact that she was running circles around me.

“Is this some kind of ritual?” I asked.

“I’m trying my best to get you to notice me.”

“I have a feeling you’re going about it the wrong way.”

“Really? Sloth said that this was the best way...”

*Sloth again.*

Myne had been doing all sorts of weird stuff recently, and whenever I asked why, I discovered that Sloth was responsible.

“Is Sloth the reason you hugged me, too?” I asked.

“Hmm? I just did that because I wanted to. I’ll do it again soon.”

“Well, okay, but...let’s avoid nearly breaking my spine next time.”

Myne studiously avoided my gaze. “I will do my best,” she said.

I wasn’t sure I believed her. We’d been traveling together too long, and I knew her too well. Depending on the time and place, she would certainly go for a tight squeeze.

“Eris still isn’t back yet?” Myne asked.

“I’m still waiting. She said she was going to find a way for us to get to Galia.”

“Maybe she stopped somewhere to kill some time.”

“I doubt that.”

“Was she kidnapped?”

“Unlikely.”

Eris was the bearer of a Skill of Mortal Sin—she was *very* powerful. If

someone wanted to kidnap her, they had to be stronger than her. The only people capable of that were holy beastfolk.

She did have a history with one of the holy beastfolk—Libra. I didn't know what had happened between them, and Eris clearly didn't want to talk about it. Something inside her always seemed to wilt when it came to Libra, and I couldn't bring myself to force her to open up. Still, Eris had shared two pieces of information with me. First, Libra was also known as the Bringer of Balance. Second, his Divine Revelation was to “expel any and all who dare to disturb the order of the world.”

If what Eris said was true, Libra would not be content to sit back and allow what was happening in Galia to continue. He had something in mind for us bearers of the Skills of Mortal Sin, too...

Then we felt it. Myne and I were constantly searching for any magical energies approaching Hausen while we talked—we wanted to know as soon as Eris was on her way back.

“Fate!” said Myne.

“Yeah, I felt it too,” I replied. “Eris.”

*Speak of the devil.*

Eris approached Hausen at incredible speed. And she wasn't alone. Another powerful magical energy was with her.

“Wait... Is that...?” I uttered.

“It's Libra. I'm sure of it,” said Myne.

*But why are the two of them together?!*

Eris hated Libra so much that she said she was going to send him to the afterlife. So why were they together now? Something changed in Eris whenever she saw him. She stood strong and said she was prepared to fight, but her whole body shuddered with terror. Her trauma ran that deep. And now she was traveling with the cause of it.

“I don't believe it...” I murmured.

“But it's definitely the two of them,” said Myne. “And they're headed this

way.”

Myne took off in a flash to grab Sloth. Meanwhile, I put a hand to the sword that always hung at my waist.

The sword maintained its heavy silence.

In a recent battle against a holy beast—the Zodiac Aquarius—I had lost Greed. The battle was instigated by none other than Libra himself, so I now had a grudge to settle. It wasn’t just Greed, either. Libra had threatened the lives of all of Hausen’s residents. Perhaps he thought the sacrifice was negligible if it meant keeping the Door to Distant Lands closed.

“Fay! This magical energy!” Roxy ran over to me fully armed and armored, ready to fight at a moment’s notice.

“It’s exactly who you think it is,” I said.

“But why are Eris and Libra together?”

“I want to know that just as much as you do.”

“I can’t imagine the two of them ever working together.”

And yet, they approached us from the south. I looked in their direction but saw nothing.

“Do you think Libra is coming to attack Hausen again?” asked Roxy.

“No idea. The Door to Distant Lands is already open. All that remains is the underground city of Grandol, and there’s nothing there but the spirits of the dead.”

Bearers of Skills of Mortal Sin bothered Libra, so the idea of him working with one didn’t make sense. However, Laine *had* said Grandol was full of valuable and ancient information. Was it possible Libra was on his way because he didn’t want us uncovering those secrets? No, that didn’t make sense. He would have been here much sooner if that were the case.

No matter how much I thought about it, Libra’s motives grew no clearer.

“We can’t let Libra get to Hausen,” I said. “We’ll go to him.”

“Right.”

Just as we were about to take off, a voice spoke from behind us.

“In that case, I will remain behind.”

It was Memil, dressed in a spotless, starched maid’s uniform.

“I’m sorry, Memil,” I said.

“It’s fine. I can still watch your heroic feats from here. Besides, I am no longer a holy knight...nor even a warrior.”

“Memil...”

“As you can see, I’m a maid. And your little sister.” She held the hem of her skirt between her fingers, and smiled.

“Fay! We must hurry!” said Roxy.

“Now go, brother!” said Memil.

“We’ll be back,” I replied.

“Be safe.”

Memil bowed deeply—both as a maid to her master and a sister to her brother. I placed a hand on her head, but I knew this wasn’t the last time we would see one another.

“Take care of Hausen,” I said.

Memil looked up at me and nodded. “As you wish.”

I turned and headed back to Roxy and the two magical energies fast approaching our location.

“Let’s go,” I said.

“Right.”

Roxy and I unleashed our stats and took off in a flash.

“Let’s take the rooftops,” I said.

“That’s the best way out of the city,” Roxy agreed.

We leaped from rooftop to rooftop until Roxy let out a shriek of surprise. I turned to see the red-haired Snow clinging to her.

“I want to play too!” she cried.

She had to have seen us jumping across the rooftops and figured we were playing some kind of game.

“Don’t leave me out!” she pouted.

“Snow, this isn’t a game,” said Roxy.

“It’s not?” asked Snow, tilting her head as she looked at me.

“It’s not,” I said. “We’re heading south out of Hausen. Libra is there.”

Snow’s expression changed the instant she heard the name. She chewed her bottom lip with worry. “Libra...” she whispered. In an instant, Snow wrapped her arms tight around Roxy. “We merge!”

“What?! You mean right here? Right now?!” cried Roxy.

“Here we go!”

“But I’m not ready...”

Snow ignored Roxy and forced the two of them to merge. A blinding light enveloped them from which Roxy emerged in full angel mode! She had four wings of pure white, and a halo glimmered above her head. The only word for it was divine.

“Fay! Would you kindly stop staring and nodding at me like that?” Roxy asked.

“Sorry. You’re just so pretty.”

“While I’m flattered, this is really not the time or place!”

“Yeah, I know. But hey, since I’ve got you here, mind giving me a ride?”

“I suppose I don’t have a choice, do I?”

Roxy lifted from the ground with a single beat of her wings, carrying me in her arms. We rose from the rooftops, and I experienced the joy of floating in the air. It didn’t matter how many times I did it—flying like this always felt amazing.

“All aboard the Roxy Express!”

“Hit it!”

I readied myself. Roxy had trained in using her wings and was much more



capable with them than when she'd first become a Valkyrie. I knew firsthand; I had watched her skills progress. My ears popped as Roxy broke the sound barrier, unleashing a sonic boom in the skies over Hausen. If my stats weren't in the Domain of E, my body would have probably torn to shreds and fluttered away on the wind. *We'll reach Eris and Libra in no time at all*, I thought.

We needed to find out what was going on. It was possible that the two were locked in battle. Even though Libra positioned himself as a good guy, he was anything but. We had to be on guard. My hand gripped the hilt of my still silent sword.

## Chapter 4:

### A Reunion with Libra

WE SOARED THROUGH THE AIR on Roxy's powerful wings and headed directly for Eris and Libra. Suddenly, we saw a gigantic shape on the horizon, and Roxy brought us to a stop.

"Fay! What is *that*?"

"What the...?! It's massive!"

It looks like a ship, except ships were typically confined to the seas. This thing, however, floated through the sky, its pitch-black exterior sharply contrasting the bright morning sunlight.

"A black ship," I murmured.

"I sense the presence of both Eris and Libra aboard," said Roxy. "What should we do?"

I felt it too. There was no turning back now.

"Let's go," I said.

"Very well."

If we got close and were attacked, we'd be right in the thick of things. But if we *weren't* attacked, there was a good chance Libra would be open to parley. We had no idea what he was going to do, however, which made it difficult to settle on a strategy. Fortunately, the black ship was still far from the Hausen domain, so even if battle did break out, we were at least floating over empty wilderness. Nonetheless, I prayed that we could avoid a fight for now.

I asked Roxy to slow down as we approached. If we came in too fast, Libra might assume we were a threat.

"No signs of fighting," said Roxy.

"I can sense Eris and Libra, but they're just standing on the deck of the ship."

Were they there to welcome us? I didn't think so—that was probably too

much to hope for. Still, they didn't appear hostile...at least for now.

"I see them!" said Roxy. "And Eris looks safe!"

I had assumed that Eris would be restrained or otherwise held hostage, but she just stood right next to Libra as we drew close. She hated him with almost every fiber of her being, yet there she was, right beside him. It felt unnatural, all the more so because she was wearing a maid's uniform.

Libra smiled and waved when he spotted us.

"So he's not here to fight..." I muttered.

"Shall I drop you on the deck?" asked Roxy.

"Yes. While I'm down there, I want you on standby. Stay up high, clear of the ship."

"Got it."

I didn't trust Libra at all. He'd tried to destroy Hausen, so there was no way I was going to put any faith in him.

Dropping from Roxy's grasp, I landed on the deck of the black ship. Libra stood there waiting for me, Eris by his side. Something wasn't right. Her eyes were hollow and empty.

"Why hello there, Fate," he said. "I'm glad to see you in fine health."

"Why are you here? What did you do to Eris?"

"Straight to the questions, I see. Not in the mood to celebrate a joyful reunion?"

"How can you say that after everything you've done? Think about it for a second."

Libra put a hand to his chest and thought for a moment. "Nothing especially bad comes to mind," he replied.

"You son of a—"

I took a step forward, but suddenly found myself blocked. Eris stepped between us, her blue hair fluttering in the wind. She stood silently, as if she were protecting Libra from me.

“Eris?” I asked.

She didn’t reply. I tried to move around her, but she wouldn’t let me get any closer.

“What’s wrong with you? Eris, answer me,” I said.

Still, Eris did not respond.

“That’s enough,” said Libra. “Get back here.”

Eris shuffled back to Libra’s side. She wouldn’t respond to me, but it was clearly a different story with Libra.

“What did you do to her?” I asked.

“I merely returned her to her former state,” replied Libra. “I’d allowed her a certain degree of freedom before, and now she must repay my generosity.”

“Repay you?”

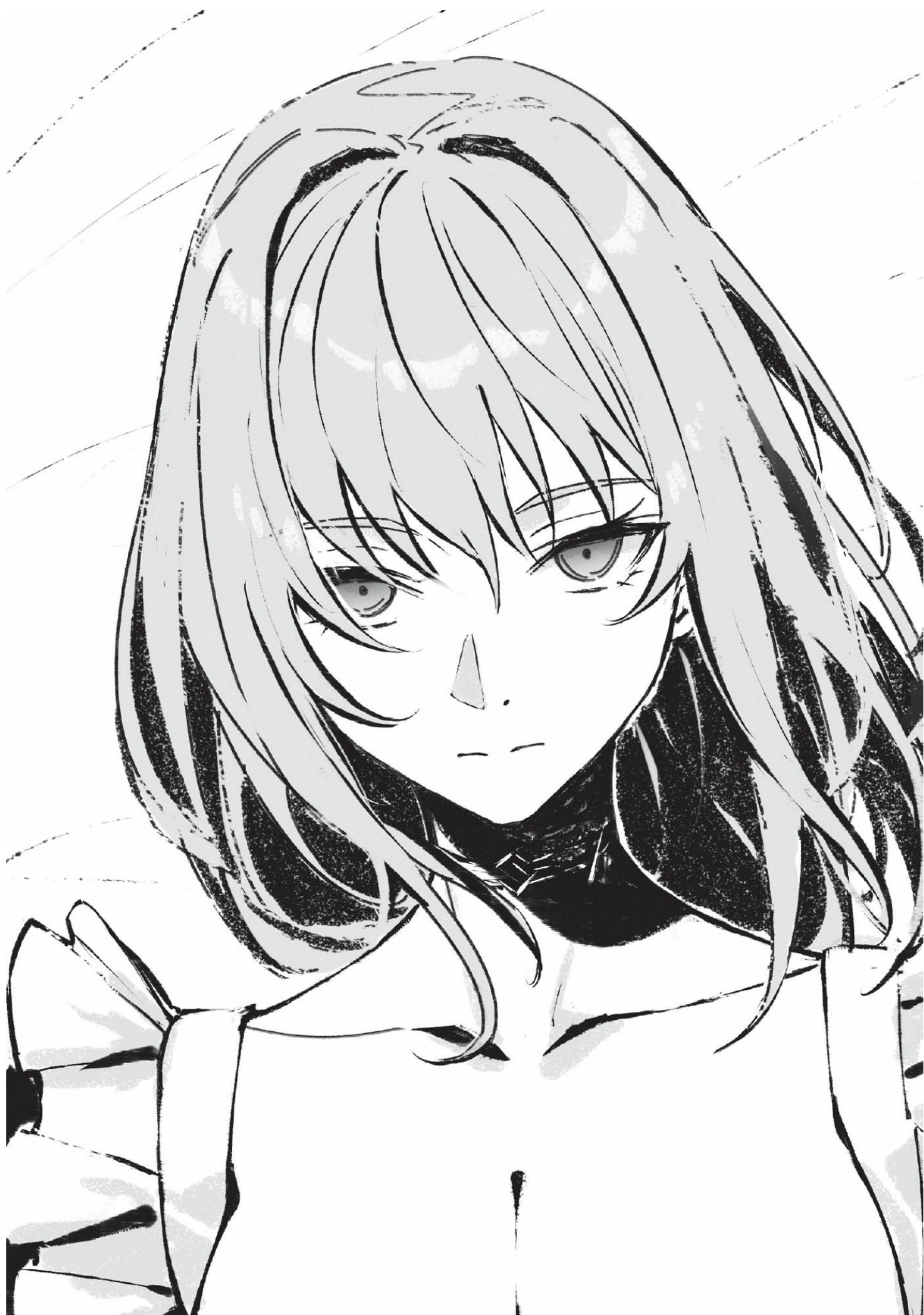
“She is my slave. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to call her my adorable pet. I put her out to pasture, so to speak, and she ran wild. She took my airship around the world and founded this kingdom.”

“You’d call a human your pet?!”

“Eris’s appearance is the work of careful breeding. Nonetheless, a pet that bites its master must be punished. It’s only just, after all.”

“Libra...”

I finally released my grip on the hilt of my sword. Unsheathing it would have been pointless as long as Libra could use Eris as his shield.





Libra nodded. "That's better," he said, walking closer to me. "As you can see, Eris is under my complete control. If I order her to die, she will do exactly that."

Eris drew her gunblade and pressed the edge against her own neck.

"I believe you," I said. "Tell her to stop."

"Good boy, Fate."

Libra glanced at Eris and she sheathed her sword.

"So she's your hostage, then?"

"Oh dear, you make it sound so sinister. I merely restored the status quo."

Libra turned his back on me and looked to the distant south. "Well then, what should we do about *that*? It is supposed to be grounded, part of the earth. What a pain, having it all floating through the sky like this. Don't you think it's a terrible eyesore, Fate?"

"You mean Galia?"

"What else could I possibly mean? Is there anyone around who might bring it down for me, I wonder?"

Libra gave me a knowing look. He evidently intended for me to do the job.

"Don't make it so obvious," I said. "You could've just asked."

Libra laughed. "Don't act so upset, Fate. Our interests align. Besides..." Libra grabbed Eris and placed her in front of me. "If you don't disappoint me, I'll give this to you. A fair exchange. Wouldn't you agree?"

"She is *not* an object."

"Half of the blood running in your veins is that of the holy beastfolk," said Libra. "That is why I am willing to compromise. But I do not recommend irritating me, Fate."

Eris was Libra's hostage, and as long as she was under his control, I could do naught but obey. Libra's help would also make getting to Galia and dealing with the situation that much easier. As far as I was concerned, this was strictly business. I didn't care for Libra one bit.

"Fine," I said. "I'll do as you ask."

“I knew you would. I’d expect nothing less from Dean’s son. I considered him my best friend once. To think he abandoned me and did all that... It truly pains me to think about it.”

“You were friends with my father?”

“A long time ago, yes, but not anymore. But you and I, Fate? I think we’ll get along just fine. I look forward to it, in fact.”

Libra stuck out a hand and, hesitating, I shook it.

“Brothers in arms,” said Libra, his grip firm.

I immediately engaged my Telepathy to read his thoughts.

*“You’re a naughty one, aren’t you? But I must confess, I quite like that quality of yours.”*

Libra had anticipated my telepathy and hid his true intentions.

“For starters, do you think you could call Roxy down so I can have a word with her? We’ll need to call Wrath here as well. She’s on the ground. I can tell she’s already fuming. She’s so intent on putting her axe in me that I have goosebumps.”

Libra could feel the same murderous intent from all of us—Myne, Roxy, and me—and yet, he didn’t even flinch. *Is this what it means to be truly powerful?*

“Let’s go, shall we? Onward. To Galia!”

Libra didn’t care how we felt in the slightest. His focus was on Galia, where my father waited. His face was like that of a child’s, looking at a new plaything.

## Chapter 5:

### The Airship Endeavor

ROXY, MYNE, AND I all stood on the deck of Libra's

black airship. The girls, too, had questions.

"Welcome to my airship, the *Endeavor*!" Libra said, spreading his arms wide and beaming. Whether his smile was genuine, we did not know. "Myne, it's been so long. Do you remember me?"

"I do. I thought you died, yet you still draw breath."

"You left me in quite a sorry state. I've been recovering ever since... It truly took an age."

"Really?"

"I'm no liar. You know that. No matter what you think of me, I am under the aegis of God. But you're aware of this, aren't you? Oh, how it pains me that you think me a liar."

Myne turned away, frowning. *So, she has her own history with Libra.* She'd lived an extraordinarily long time as the bearer of Wrath, so learning she'd clashed with him before didn't surprise me.

"Oh my. It seems you still hate me. You haven't changed a bit..."

Libra seemed to understand that his conversation with Myne was over, so he turned to Roxy.

"Well, well. Roxy Hart and Snow as a single entity. You should be proud, Ms. Hart. It's no understatement to say that *you* were instrumental in bringing down the Zodiac Aquarius. You caught me entirely by surprise."

"Am I to take that as a compliment?" asked Roxy.

"But of course. Your genes allow you to use Holy Sword Techniques, yet you have managed to remain pure of heart. It's a truly astounding feat."

"What do you mean 'genes?'"

“Oh? Did Eris never tell you? Holy knights are humans who have received a small fraction of the power of holy beastfolk. You are an heir to that legacy.”

“We received power from holy beastfolk?”

“Indeed. There aren’t that many of us, you see. We needed foot soldiers and agents to work on our behalf, so we created the holy knights. However, the power we shared seemed to cause mental aberrations.”

Roxy was shocked. “So the reason so many holy knights became cruel and sadistic... No...”

“When we granted them some of our power, we also gave them some of our mindset. That was a mistake. Those first holy knights were truly without mercy.” Libra sighed, as if the thought troubled him. “But you, Roxy, are such a relief. I can see that time has brought stability. Should you wish to serve me when this is all over, you need only say the word.”

“There is no need. I’ve already decided what to protect for the rest of my life.”

Libra stared at Roxy intently. “Such a pity. What a waste of a wonderful specimen.”

He hadn’t cared for her in the slightest when they’d first met, but her angelic form seemed to have elevated her in his eyes. Still, I wanted to put an end to this pointless conversation.

“If we’re brothers in arms, as you say, then why are you trying to sow discord?” I demanded.

Libra laughed. “I apologize. I have a soft spot for talented individuals, particularly when they also happen to be holy knights.”

For whatever reason, Libra had a thing for holy knights, and he seemed especially fascinated by Roxy and Snow’s transformation.

“Well then, shall we be off?” asked Libra. “Or should we relax here a little longer?”

“The sooner we get going, the better,” I said.

“I knew you’d say that. In that case, let’s depart.”

The moment he spoke, the stationary airship turned one hundred eighty degrees.

“Who’s steering this thing?” I asked.

“I am,” replied Libra. “I control it with my mind.”

“Huh? Is that even possible?”

It looked like Libra was simply standing around. I searched the airship for other presences, but the ship was deserted aside from those on deck.

“Do be careful. If anything happens to me, this airship will crash. Not that such an event would be fatal to anyone here.” Libra turned away from us. “We’ll arrive at Galia tomorrow morning. I suggest resting until then. I’ll be in the captain’s quarters if you need me. The rest I’ll leave to Eris.”

And with that, Libra disappeared into the airship, leaving Eris on her own.

“Hey! Eris!” I said, shaking her shoulders. “Snap out of it!”

Eris didn’t respond. It was as if something bound her thoughts.

“Myne, is there anything we do to help her?”

“Doesn’t look like it. Eris has become a living doll again. Kairos released her from it once, but she’s back to how she used to be. She got careless.” Myne pointed to Eris’s neck, around which was a seal that resembled a collar. “We can’t free Eris unless we break this.”

“How do we do that?”

“I don’t know. The only people who do are Libra and Kairos, who broke it once before.”

*Kairos...*

The former bearer of Gluttony and wielder of Greed. I hadn’t seen him since I’d encountered him in Myne’s past. I couldn’t return to that place now that Luna and the spiritual plane were gone. Willpower alone was not enough to see him again, no matter how much I may have wanted to. When we’d parted, he’d pointed at my chest and said he was a part of me. If that were true, we could still meet again. I just didn’t know when.

“Queen Eris,” Roxy said from beside us. “Please, wake up!”

Eris remained silent.

I tried asking her about what Libra had said instead. “You’re our guide on the ship, yeah?”

“That is correct. I have been ordered as such,” said Eris. She probably only followed Libra’s orders, which meant she wouldn’t listen to anything we said outside of questions about showing us to our rooms. “This way, please.”

She moved gracefully, leading us toward a different door than the one Libra had disappeared behind. Her mannerisms were normally the complete opposite. It was as if she were an entirely different person.

“The interior has quite a gentle and placid feel, doesn’t it?” said Roxy.

“Yes,” replied Eris. “Though the exterior is constructed with metal, the interior is of a wooden design.”

I had expected the pure white of the Galian laboratories, not something as relaxed as this. The airship’s interior wasn’t that different from a holy knight’s manor, complete with red carpets and stylish wooden walls.

“There are a great many guest rooms, so feel free to use any room in this area. Should you require assistance, please press the service button in your room.”

With her explanation given, Eris walked off.

“Eris, wait!” I called after her. But she was gone.

Roxy, Myne, and I stared at the doors lining the corridor.

“What shall we do about the rooms?” asked Roxy.

“Let’s share the same room,” said Myne immediately.

“I agree. That’s our best option,” I added.

“Okay.”

We couldn’t make plans if we were in separate rooms. Should there be any emergencies, we’d be slow to react, too. We took our time inspecting the different rooms and settled on the biggest one we could find.

“Here,” I said. “There’re four beds, so we can each take one.”

“I think I can sleep here,” said Myne, her mind on slumber.

She was born to fight, so she’d learned how to rest no matter the circumstances. It was an important talent for any warrior. Even Aaron had commended this skill of hers. Myne leaned Sloth against the wall and jumped into one of the beds. Within three seconds, she was out like a light. I couldn’t believe it. This was even faster than when we had traveled together.

Roxy was shocked, too, but that shock came with equal parts admiration. “Incredible,” she said.

“She’s an expert at falling asleep,” I said. “It’s the waking up part she’s terrible at.”

“Shall we go somewhere to talk?” asked Roxy.

“Yeah, good idea.”

Myne may have been asleep, but she was still ready for anything and would be fine on her own. There were also things I wanted to talk to Roxy about, so the two of us headed back up to the deck.



## Chapter 6:

### Memory Lane

EVEN THOUGH WE SOARED through the air at tremendous speed, the wind was surprisingly gentle as we stood on the deck of Libra's airship. I wasn't the only one to notice how strange it was, either.

"This airship..." Roxy said. "It's so perplexing. I didn't really notice it when we were talking with Libra earlier."

"Probably because we're used to ships that sail the seas."

"Exactly. It seems there's still so much we don't know. So many mysteries and surprises."

"Like you sprouting wings and soaring through the air."

Roxy chuckled. Then she turned her gaze to Galia, floating on the horizon. "Well, the wings are thanks to Snow. That's not due to any power of my own."

Roxy's wings were gone now. She couldn't remain merged with Snow for long periods of time, so the two had separated before Roxy and I had come up here to the main deck of the *Endeavor*. Snow had elected not to follow us. She was much more interested in exploring the airship. Being that it was Libra's ship, I didn't think it was wise to go digging around and tried to stop her, but Snow was a free spirit. She couldn't be repressed. In short, she had refused to listen and scampered off somewhere on her own.

"Are you worried about Snow?" asked Roxy, reading my mind.

"Yeah. I mean, you know what she's like."

Roxy giggled. "Energetic."

"Reckless, too. She's literally in enemy territory."

"So are we."

And yet here we were, casually hanging out on the main deck of Libra's airship.

“Snow is strong. She can take care of herself,” said Roxy. “And we have a connection now. I’ll know the moment anything happens to her.”

*A connection... Something the both of them feel, even when they’re apart...*

It made me think of the connection Aaron and I had formed through my Gluttony. As I grew more powerful, so too did Aaron. Though Roxy and Snow’s bond was of a different sort, it resembled what Aaron and I shared. I could sense that he was well and in Seifort, so I knew the effects of the Door to Distant Lands hadn’t gotten out of hand in the royal capital yet. That link between Aaron and myself was the reason I could stay calm, but I wondered if Roxy was worried. Her mother and resurrected father were in Seifort, along with the family’s servants. Now that the Door to Distant Lands was open, long dead monsters were returning to life, and danger was everywhere.

“Seifort will be fine,” Roxy said, noticing that I was looking in the direction opposite Galia. “My father is there, along with the white knights and Aaron. Have faith in them, Fate.”

“Roxy...”

“I’m getting a little nervous.” She smiled bashfully. “We’re heading to Galia, but it’s a floating continent now. I think that’s why I wanted a chance to talk to you, Fate. When I was young, my world was much smaller, and I was surrounded by those I liked. I was happy. But my whole world was just the Hart family estate. Everything changed the very instant it came to light that I was capable of Holy Sword Techniques.”

“You mean the holy knight skills?”

“Yes. My mother has no such skills, so my chances of inheriting them were fifty-fifty. My father was overjoyed to have an heiress, and I was sent to Seifort to train as a holy knight.”

When traveling, Roxy had never once slacked off training. It was all too easy to imagine that, even in the past, she had trained with an equally fierce determination.

“My father had very high hopes for me, but I was full of worry. I was in a place I didn’t know, and I didn’t fit in with the holy knights. I grew up in the

countryside and didn't know the ways of the royal capital. It was overwhelming. One day, I slipped away from an important party held at the castle."

"That doesn't sound like you."

Roxy's cheeks puffed as she pouted, and she flicked my nose. "Even I need to get away from it all sometimes, you know," she said.

I understood that feeling—the need for fresh air, space, and time to yourself. Since I started visiting the castle with Aaron, I'd had a chance to see holy knight society with my own eyes, and it looked anything but enjoyable. Most holy knights came from old, established lineages and were vainglorious and proud. Bring up anything that infringed on their power or authority, and they would vote it down in an instant. And if you were as young as I was, they wouldn't even lend you an ear in the first place. All I had to rely on was Eris, the queen, overriding their authority.

"Yeah, it's not easy," I said. "I can say that now that I've been there myself."

"Right? But I need you there, leading the way to a new future! That's why you have to apply yourself to your studies!"

"What?!"

Roxy looked satisfied by my reaction and turned her eyes to the sky above. "You haven't changed one bit, you know that?" she said. "You always put your entire being into facing the problem in front of you. Though I must admit that it can be a little frightening watching you go about it. Your only flaw might be your forgetful nature."

"Hmm? Wait... Did I forget something?"

"Like the fact that you and I actually met six years ago, you mean?"

"For real?!"

I didn't remember that at all. *Wait, but... There was something. There has to be. I can see it in the way Roxy's looking at me. Remember, Fate! Remember!* I put everything I had into combing my memories, but...

"You don't remember a thing, do you? That's so like you, Fate," Roxy said, exasperated. "But then again, you would have had so much going on at the

time. I suppose meeting me was just a small part of that whirlwind.”

“Roxy, that’s not—”

“When I slipped away from that important party, sad and dejected, it was *you* who encouraged me, Fate.”

*Me?! How could I forget that?! Why couldn’t I remember it?*

“That day, I wore an outfit sent to me by the people of our estate, so you mistook me for a castle servant.”

“Huh?”

Roxy’s words were like a key unlocking an old memory. I *did* remember a dejected girl sitting near the castle gates, and I *did* remember asking her what was wrong.

“Wait!” I said. “I didn’t mistake that girl for a servant. She told me that she *was* a servant!”

“Oh, that’s right,” said Roxy. “It seems you finally remember.”

The scene was coming back to me, though I couldn’t remember the servant girl’s face. I had never, ever imagined that she was, in fact, a holy knight. That’s why I never realized who the girl had been.

“I’m sorry I lied to you,” said Roxy.

“But why would you have to lie to me?” The answer hit me immediately. “Oh... I see...”

“If I told you I was a holy knight, I would only have frightened you.”

“Yeah. I’d only just arrived at the royal capital. Holy knights terrified me.”

“Exactly. I couldn’t just come out and say I was one of them. And I was very troubled by the thought at the time, too.”

I thought back to when I sat down next to Roxy, all that time ago. I had a feeling I’d said some pretty bold, arrogant things.

“I was down in the dumps, Fay, but your words perked me up.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t say anything more considerate,” I said.



“Don’t be. Simply having someone by my side was more than enough. Your actions spoke for you, and much louder than words could ever have.”

I remembered talking about how we were both the same, because we’d both just arrived at the royal capital. Then, I’d asked Roxy about her hometown. She’d asked about me, too. Back then, I still thought of my Gluttony as a pointless skill that only made me hungry—and the reason I had been expelled from the village where I’d grown up. Roxy even gave me some food, too. I should have known that there was something strange about her. There was no way a new servant at the castle could get away with bringing me food.

“Some years after our first encounter, I found you again. I tried to talk to you when I found opportunities to do so, but you always ran away.”

“I’m sorry. Now I realize why you always looked at me the way you did.”

Roxy giggled. “I’m so glad I finally told you. I know others might see it as no big deal, but it’s a precious memory for me.” Roxy looked once more upon the floating continent of Galia. “The night we met, you told me how important your father was to you. Is he still important?”

“I...”

For a time, I said nothing, simply staring in the same direction as Roxy. I stared toward Galia, where my father waited for me.

## Chapter 7:

### Prepare for Battle

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW I felt about my father. I couldn't put my emotions into words despite them being my own.

Roxy noticed and kindly changed the subject. "Anyway, let's focus on the problem at hand, shall we?"

"The problem at hand?"

"Eris."

"Oh," I said, feeling badly. She'd completely slipped my mind while I was lost in old memories and thoughts of my father. "We have to find a way to unlock whatever it is around her neck. There's no guarantee Libra will release her once this is all over."

"Indeed. He's not a liar, but I get the feeling he's never telling us the whole truth, either."

"Yeah, I'm sensing the same thing."

It was possible Libra had a goal beyond simply stopping my father. The fact that he also didn't think highly of any of the bearers of Skills of Mortal Sin made me believe he wouldn't simply let Eris go.

"I have to find a way to speak to Kairos again," I said.

"Ah, the former bearer of Gluttony, you mean."

"Yeah. He's in here somewhere," I said, tapping my chest.

Roxy knew what I meant immediately. "He's part of your Gluttony, isn't he?"

"He told me as much when I was on the spiritual plane. If I just had better control over it..." I muttered.

Roxy knit her brows in worry. "What is it?"

"Uh..."

“You’re not keeping things from me, are you?”

There was no use hiding anything when we would be fighting side by side. “Not anymore,” I said, taking off my jacket.

“Wait just a second!” Roxy cried, immediately beginning to panic. “Fay?!” Her words died on her lips when I showed her my back.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner,” I said.

“They’re...wings.”

“But they’re not like the ones you have as a Valkyrie. These are useless.”

“When did you first notice them?”

“My back started feeling strange just before we reached Hausen...”

“When we were in Seifort?! But I didn’t notice them at the Desert of Extinction...in the bath...”

That was when Snow had broken down the walls between the mens’ and womens’ baths. And Roxy was right. I hadn’t had them back then.

“I got them when I devoured the holy beast,” I said. “There’s one other thing, too... It started the day after I fought Aaron at the royal capital, and *it* appeared before me.”

“What did?”

“I met another version of myself on the spiritual plane.”

“Huh?”

Roxy looked confused. I was still confused myself. Was it my Gluttony, crawling to the surface and donning my form in order to take over my mind?

“Are you okay, Fay?”

“I managed to keep it at bay,” I replied.

But when I’d done so, it had spoken with a fierce hatred in its eyes. *You...are mine...* The words had been filled with deep emotion, as if they were spoken by another human. Was it even possible for a skill to harbor such feelings? I was so confused. However, I could only see things from my own point of view. I didn’t

want to say anything that would cause Roxy to fret even more.

She considered what I'd told her, as well as the wings on my back. "Is it possible that your Gluttony is activating in some way?" she asked.

"Probably... It may be because of these useless wings. I inherited my father's blood; it flows through my veins. Then again, it might have nothing to do with my Gluttony."

"Dean *is* one of the holy beastfolk."

"But I didn't expect it to manifest like this. I don't have any holy beastfolk powers like Dad or Snow. All I have are these wings, if you can even call them that."

I didn't know what to do. I put my jacket back on and sighed.

"I'm relieved that the wings don't appear to be anything serious, at least," said Roxy. "The problem is what's happening with your Gluttony. Controlling it..."

"It won't be easy."

Luna, who had once protected me from my Gluttony, was gone. My support, Greed, was gone, too. I had always relied on the two of them, but now, I had to face off against my Gluttony on my own.

"Fay..."

"I'll do the best I can to control it," I said.

The smile I showed her then was not meant to placate her; it was genuine and heartfelt. The words were as much for me as they were for her. I would need Gluttony's power more than ever. I was certain I would meet Kairos again when the time came.

"How long do you intend to stay out here?"

The voice took us both by surprise, and we turned to find Eris staring at us.

"Please take some rest immediately," she said.

It was clear that she would remain right where she was until we returned to our rooms. There was also the possibility that she would be punished in some



way if we didn't obey her. Fortunately, my conversation with Roxy had drawn to a close.

"Let's go, Roxy," I said.

"Okay."

"Hang on just a little longer, Eris," I said as we passed her.

Eris didn't respond, but the seal around her neck glowed a slight red.

Roxy saw it too. "Perhaps our messages are getting through to her," she said.

Like us, Eris was fighting in her own way. I thought back to the promise I'd made at the Desert of Extinction. Her carefree nature had wilted into fear in the face of Libra. I would never forget that face.

We left Eris on deck and headed back into the airship. When we got back to our room, we found Myne dozing contentedly.

"She's got such presence, even like this," I said.

Roxy giggled and gently covered Myne with a blanket. "That's Myne for you," she said. "She likes you very much, doesn't she?"

"Where did that come from all of a sudden?"

"I've been with her a lot recently," replied Roxy.

That was true. They were often together since Roxy was teaching Myne to cook. I was the designated taste tester. Myne still had a long way to go as a chef, and each taste test was its own life-or-death battle.

"I wonder how long it'll take for her to actually cook something decent," I said.

"She hasn't had a sense of taste for literally thousands of years," Roxy scolded. "You can't expect her to understand how to cook in just a week or two. Besides, she looks so happy when you're eating something she's made."

"Well, when you put it like that..."

When I first met Myne, she had been as expressionless as a doll, but now, she was beginning to change.

I gently put a hand on her head as I watched her sleep. “Thanks for helping me out again,” I said. “I feel like I’m always falling back on your power.”

“Not true,” replied Myne, her eyes flicking open.

“You were *awake*?” I asked.

“Of course. This is enemy territory. I’m sleeping with one eye open.”

“Quite the feat,” I muttered.

“You just haven’t trained enough. We can train now, if you need it.”

I felt suddenly flustered. “I-I’m good,” I stammered.

“It was a joke.” Myne laughed, another new expression of hers. “I have to take some responsibility for what’s happening. And I’ll do everything I can to help close the Door. That, and...I want to be with you, Fate.”

“Myne...”

Nothing made me more ready for what was ahead than having Myne with me. Ancient monsters now roamed Galia, resurrected by the Door’s power. Her knowledge of the past was essential in dealing with them, especially now that Greed was gone.

As I thanked Myne for her help, I felt a piercing gaze. I turned to it ever so slowly and found Roxy, her eyes narrowed to slits.

“Oh, don’t mind me,” she said. “The two of you have been awfully close recently, haven’t you? Not that I mind in the slightest.”

Roxy’s expression stood in stark contrast to her words.

Myne didn’t care in the slightest. She yawned and rested her head on my knees. “Don’t sweat the small stuff,” she said. “I don’t.”

Roxy let out a low growl. I felt like I was in the presence of a dragon facing a tiger. I didn’t know how else to describe it.

*Am I hallucinating? I certainly hope so.*

During this tense standoff, Snow bounded into the room.

“Everyone’s here!” she cried.

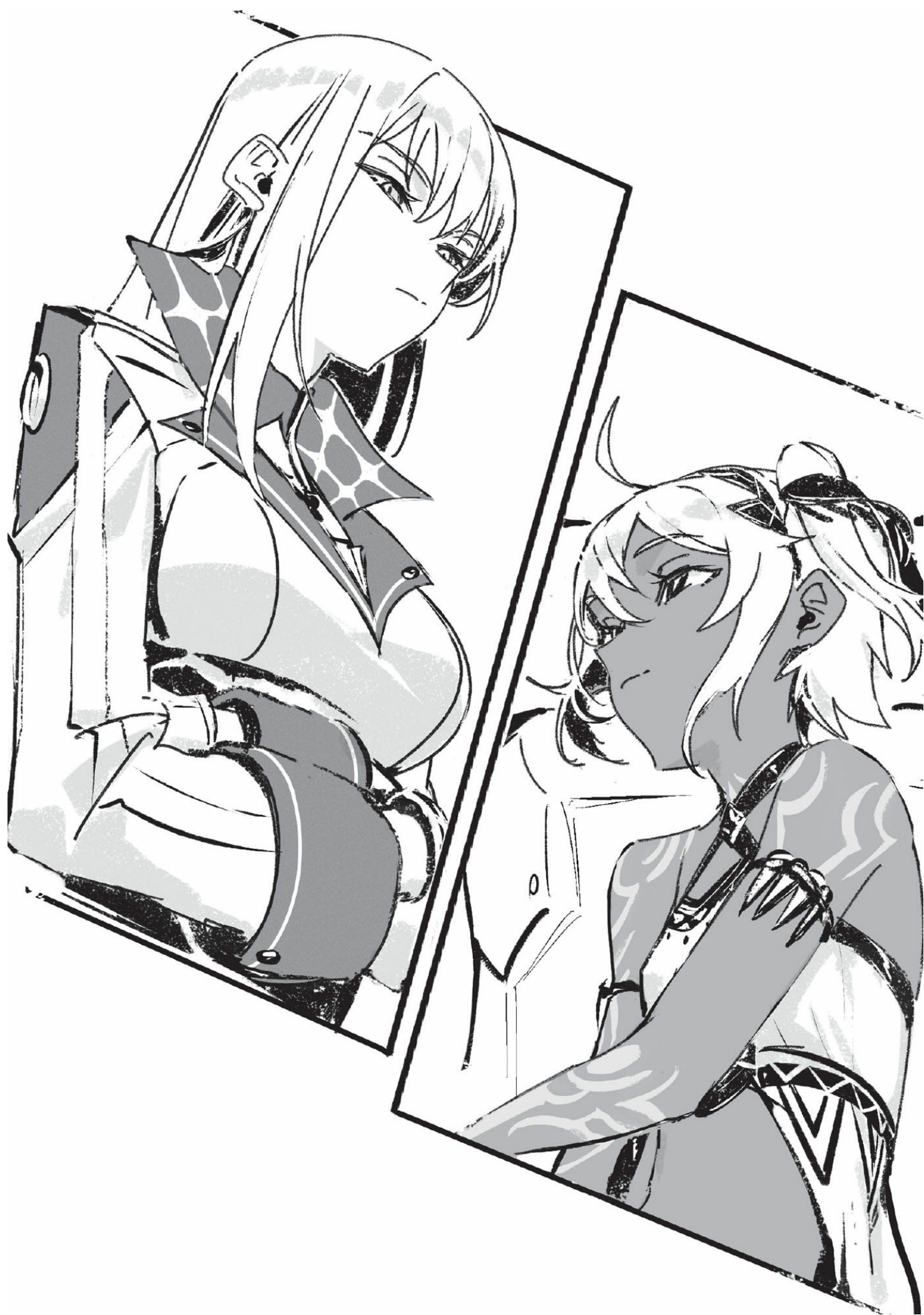
I was relieved that she managed to open the door without busting it off its hinges. Snow had a bad habit of losing control of her Domain of E powers whenever she got excited.

“Let me play too!” she shouted.

“Stop! You’re only going to make things worse!” I shouted.

“Never!”

The room was going to end up a huge mess. And yet, I realized that I was smiling. The tense, serious mood that had hung over me since talking to Libra had suddenly eased, and it was these girls—my companions—who I had to thank for it.



## Chapter 8:

### To the Land in the Sky

I COMPLETELY LOST TRACK of time as I honed and polished my still-silent sword. Hours flew by. The sword was in amazing shape when I finished. Even Greed would have had nothing to complain about. The blade was like a mirror, and in its reflection, I saw my own face.

My left eye glimmered red.

“Damn...” I muttered.

I hadn’t slept a wink due to fear. I didn’t want to face off against that other me on the spiritual plane. If I tried fighting it on my own, it was possible that my Gluttony would swallow me completely. I was terrified of facing it without Luna and Greed. I’d told Roxy I’d do my best, but it was still too reckless to do anything without some kind of plan.

I studied the red eye staring back at me from the black sword. I had not activated my half-starved state of my own volition. It had simply happened before I even realized it. This meant that the other version of me wasn’t going to just sit back and wait, even if I avoided the spiritual plane.

“You couldn’t sleep, huh?” asked Roxy.

I groaned in response.

Roxy had been asleep for some time. Her angel form really took a toll on her, and she’d collapsed on the bed not long after we arrived back at our room. I was pretty worried.

“How are you feeling?” I asked.

“As good as gold,” she replied. “The other two are still fast asleep.”

“Same as always.”

Myne and Snow made me think of the saying “a well-slept child is a well-kept child.” It was like they didn’t even care that they were. They were asleep in the



tiger's den, in a sense. How could they not be a little nervous? I chuckled wryly at the thought.

"What happened to your eye?!" Roxy asked, getting closer for a better look.

"Oh, this? Uh..."

Roxy listened quietly as I gave her the rundown, based on what I knew.

"So this is different from when your Gluttony is starved?" she asked. "It won't settle down once you've killed some monsters?"

"This seems like it's something different. If it was just my Gluttony, I'd have been hit by a really strong urge to eat, but I don't feel that way at all."

It was so strange. When my half-starved state kicked in on its own, the ravenous urge was usually there as well, but I didn't feel any hunger at all this time. Something wasn't right.

"Does this have something to do with the other Fate you mentioned? The one that attacked you in the spiritual plane?"

"Possibly... He could be plotting something." I put my sword back in its sheath and stood up. "Huh? Wh-what the hell?!" I stammered. My body felt so much lighter than usual.

"What is it?" asked Roxy.

"I feel fantastic," I said. "I've got the physical boost that comes with my half-starved state, but there's also a power welling in me beyond even that."

"I wish I could say that's a good thing..." said Roxy.

"It's too good to be true, and it creeps me out, even though it's my own body. This feels like the calm before the storm."

"I daresay some things are best left unspoken, no matter how you feel."

"Good point."

For better or worse, I was going to be in the best shape of my life heading into Galia.

Just as Roxy and I were about to wake Myne and Snow, the door to our room opened.

“Good morning. Master Libra awaits,” said Eris, bowing politely. She waited by the door in a dignified manner, still wearing the maid’s uniform from yesterday.

“Got it,” I said. “Just give us a minute.”

I turned to wake Myne and Snow, but I needn’t have bothered. Myne was prepped and ready to go, her trademark black axe in one hand. Snow yawned, but she, too, was on her feet. Myne was a warrior with a storied history, and we’d traveled together a lot, so it didn’t surprise me that she was ready for action in an instant. But Snow had changed since the battle at Hausen. She was just as childlike as ever, but she occasionally showed signs of deep contemplation and spoke like someone much older than her youthful appearance let on.

“Fate, let’s go!” Snow cried, leaping at me.

I caught her in my arms and did my best to smooth her unruly hair. “All right, all right,” I said.

The four of us nodded at one another and left the room. We followed Eris back to the airship’s main deck.

“I trust you’re all well rested?” said Libra, greeting us.

“You’re the last person I want worrying about our well-being,” I said.

Libra laughed. “We’re on the same side, Fate,” he said. “Let’s try to get along.”

“The same side? You don’t really believe that. You’re not even coming with us, are you?”

“Don’t be like that. Look, I’ve prepared a proxy.” Libra pointed at Eris. “You know for yourself how strong she is. And I’ve reconfigured her parameters a little, so she’s even more powerful now.”

“Libra...” I glared daggers at him.

But Libra was unfazed, remaining perfectly calm as he pretended to consider things for a moment. “Well, if Eris alone isn’t enough, then how about I throw this in with her?” Libra pulled a black weapon out of thin air.

“But that’s...”

“Envy, yes, which I also reconfigured. I only turned my back for a second, and look at all the mischief this weapon has gotten up to. Here, take it.”

Libra tossed the weapon to me as though it were no more than a piece of garbage.

“It’s only a support weapon, all told, so it’s not particularly powerful,” he said. “But Eris should be able to make full use of it now.”

“And you’re just going to watch from a safe distance?”

“You make me sound like the bad guy, Fate. I’ll be praying to the Lord Almighty that everything goes well. Rest assured, you are in very safe hands.”

“Don’t get in our way,” I spat. “Or I *will* send this ship plummeting to the ground.”

Libra laughed. “Oh, you say the most interesting things. Do that, and Eris’s head will plummet to the ground right along with it.”

I grit my teeth. There was no use talking. I picked up Envy and tried to reach it with my Telepathy skill. Nothing. Perhaps it was because of the “reconfiguring” Libra mentioned. Perhaps it was just as trapped as Eris.

“Eris, here,” I said, passing over the gunblade.

Once she had the weapon in hand, I turned my gaze toward Galia, which grew closer with each moment. It was incredible. To think that such a huge chunk of the earth now floated in the sky. Even from a distance, it was an intimidating sight, but I felt an even greater pressure from it now that we were up close. My skin prickled—a reaction to all the magical energy amassed by countless monsters.

“Looks like you’ll have quite the feast,” said Libra.

“I really don’t want to hear another word out of you.”

Libra shot me a satisfied grin and pointed down at Galia. “We’ll land there,” he said. “It’s always peaceful and quiet, no matter the era.”

“I know that place...” I murmured.

“It’s the great canyon,” said Roxy.

It was a place she knew firsthand. Rare ores were mined there and sent back to the royal capital. That was where Greed had asked me to go to find duskstone for his sheath. Roxy and I had gone to the canyon for unrelated reasons back then, but coincidence had drawn us together, and we’d ended up fighting side by side. The canyon looked like a lone oasis among the Galian wasteland from a distance, but in reality, the canyon was built on the piled-up fossils of monsters.

“Is the canyon really safe?” I asked. “A mountain of monsters sleep beneath it.”

“Nothing to concern yourself about,” replied Libra. “They all lost their souls and turned to fossils. They will not resurrect.”

“They lost their souls?”

“In other words, it’s safe.”

It was clear Libra had no intention of giving a detailed answer. But at the same time, he was telling the truth. I didn’t sense any monsters in the canyon. I glanced at Myne, who had remained completely silent this whole time. She nodded.

“So it *is* safe,” I muttered.

“Oh my. Don’t trust me, Fate?”

“Not a bit.”

Libra looked up at the sky for a moment, then grinned at me. “Prepare for landing,” he said, turning his eyes on Snow. “I have such high hopes.”

## Chapter 9:

### Eris Reconfigured

WE JUMPED FROM LIBRA'S AIRSHIP and landed on clean, green land. Fallen monsters slumbered beneath us as we trudged through the forest. The scenery hadn't changed at all since the last time I was here. The only difference was my traveling companions.

"We head south from here, yes?" asked Roxy.

"If what Libra said is true, then, yeah."

"What's to the south?"

"Mercadia, the imperial capital of Galia," Myne answered. She knew far more about the location than I did. I'd only seen it once from afar. "It will have recovered its original functions by now, meaning everything there has awakened."

"Do you mean the chimeras?" asked Roxy.

They were one of Galia's lost weapons. Roxy had fought one in the past, so it was probably the first thing that came to mind. It was the first thing I thought of, too.

"Yes. The chimeras are one of Mercadia's defense systems," Myne said as if this were no big deal.

Roxy and I were shocked, though. "Just *one*?!" we cried.

"The ones you and Fate have fought were mostly powerless and imperfect. Think of them like juveniles. The imperial capital has fully evolved chimeras, as well as even more powerful defenses."

"Ones surpassing the Domain of E, you mean?"

"No. That's all there is. I'm sure Greed told you already. The Domain of E is just a threshold."

"Yeah, he did. But now I understand what he said about Galia being absolute



and reigning supreme over the world.”

“Ordinary people looked upon Mercadia as a holy land. All they could do was kneel in supplication before its authority.”

If anyone entered the imperial capital without permission, it was very likely defensive systems would activate.

“I will take the chimeras and other monsters,” said Myne. “I’ll clear a path for you and the others.”

“Will you be okay by yourself?” I asked.

The look in Myne’s eyes told me I didn’t need to worry. She was the strongest being I had ever known.

“We’re counting on you,” I said. “But don’t be reckless.”

“I’ll do my best.”

My biggest worry was that Myne would turn into a war demon again. I’d fought her in that form once before, and the horned beast she’d become put me completely on the defensive. *They say the best defense is a good offense, and that describes Myne’s fighting style to a T.* I only ever managed to hold her off with Luna’s help, and I wasn’t about to forget that her insurmountable strength had even penetrated my black shield.

Myne’s war demon form manifested whenever she used her Wrath to the point of physical transcendence. However, there was a cost. Endless Wrath consumed the wielder’s heart over time. It was similar to Gluttony in that sense. Past a certain point, she would become a mindless berserker. That was why Myne always worried about the state of my Gluttony; she knew the costs involved all too well.

“But our real problem is Eris,” said Myne.

“Eris?”

I watched Eris as she followed us silently, showing no signs of joining our conversation. Her black gunblade rested at her side. Snow pulled at Eris’s clothes and poked her in the butt, but there was no response. Under normal circumstances, Eris wouldn’t have tolerated such impishness.

"Snow's doing whatever she wants," I muttered.

"Yep," said Myne.

"Don't just stand there. Stop her!" said Roxy, lifting Snow and pulling her away. "Have you both completely forgotten?"

"Forgotten what?" I asked.

"What are you talking about?" asked Myne.

"Eris is our queen!"

*Oh, yeah. That's right.*

In that respect, Eris was the most important person in the kingdom. All holy knights served under her. In other words, Roxy and I were expected to revere her, being holy knights ourselves. Roxy had been raised to become a holy knight, so I knew where she was coming from. Me, though? I'd been on guard from the moment I'd met Eris, because she used her Lust on me whenever she had the chance. That made up, like, 80 percent of my impression of Eris, so no matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't see her as the queen of our kingdom.

"She's being poked and prodded while trapped in her own body, and you're just treating her like you always do. It's beyond pitiful," said Roxy.

"Kind of like karma, isn't it?" I said.

"Agreed," added Myne.

"You two!" shouted Roxy.

Eris was Libra's proxy. Walking around unarmed wasn't safe—Galia was an extremely dangerous place, after all—so I'd given her the gunblade. However, we still had to consider the possibility that Eris had been given secret orders. This didn't seem to be the case, though, and I hoped that she would remain calm and obedient until we closed the Door to Distant Lands. At the very least, I wanted to make sure we'd be able to fight confidently together.

"Eris," I said. She had the appearance of a lifeless doll, but I tried speaking to her all the same.

"Yes," she replied.

It seemed she was at least allowed to speak to us while we were here in Galia.

“How comfortable are you with the gunblade?” I asked.

“My focus is on support duties. I will buff you all during battle to increase your abilities.”

I’d fought with Eris in the past and knew just how effective her gunblade buffs were. She only needed to stay within firing range, making her support radius huge. She could lock onto magical power even when it was out of sight and fire homing bullets that delivered buffs.

“My powers have returned since my reconfiguration,” said Eris.

“You got them all back?”

“Yes. Envy, too. I am now more capable than you are with that sword.”

“Ouch. Hit a guy where it hurts, why don’t you...”

With Greed gone, I couldn’t wield the black sword at full power. My Fifth Level gauntlets were particularly difficult to control. They were so powerful that they required a much higher level of focus than anything I’d ever handled.

“You will need my assistance when you face off against Dean,” said Eris.

“That I will.”

“I will be there when you need me.” Eris grasped the hem of her skirt and curtsied politely.

“Well then, would you mind giving us a demonstration of your special powers?”

We’d felt the presence of a magical power outside of the great canyon for some time now.

“Are those...people?” asked Roxy.

Myne was quick to respond. “No. Those are lamias, monsters that were once human.”

The top half of a lamia resembled a beautiful woman, but the lower half was that of a gigantic snake. They must have spotted us. Their piercing gazes tracked our movements. If I wasn’t careful, they would burst my eyes the

moment I tried using my Identify skill.

“Roxy, Snow, you two preserve your strength. Myne and I will act as our vanguard with Eris as support.”

Myne was off and running before I had even finished issuing my command. She knew how quick lamias were and just how fast they’d close the distance between us. I sensed three approaching from straight ahead and two more from underground.

“Fay!” shouted Roxy.

I was already aware of the other two lamias beneath the earth. I leaped aside as the ground split open at my feet, then sliced at a jumping lamia. I didn’t hear Gluttony activate, which meant I hadn’t dealt a killing blow. I wanted to pursue it, but the remaining lamia dove straight at me. I had to kill this one first.

At least, that was the plan.

Just as I was about to move, I heard a gunshot ring out from behind me, and the lamia’s head exploded as a black bullet pierced its skull.

*Didn’t she say she was just support? Eris is more than powerful enough to handle herself...*

Now I knew that Libra hadn’t been lying. I quickly took out the remaining lamia.

***Gluttony skill activated. Stats increased: Vitality +1.8E (+8), Strength +2.5E (+8), Magic +2.0E (+8), Spirit +1.2E (+8), Agility +2.5E (+8). Skills added: Poison Attack, Poison Resistance***

*These seem like common monsters in this area, but their stats are crazy! Poison?!*

I didn’t even want to consider what would happen if I took a special attack from a monster in the Domain of E. I was glad I told Roxy and Snow to hang back. Myne seemed to know these monsters fairly well, but I figured I’d tell her what I’d learned, just in case.

“The lamias have poison attacks,” I said, heading over to her now that she’d slain the first three lamias. “Be careful.”

Myne tilted her head quizzically at my words while she easily cut down a few more attacking lamias.

“I didn’t know that,” she said.

“I thought you were an expert.”

“These monsters are weak,” she replied. “They’ve never gotten close to touching me. New info!”

Myne’s eyes lit up at the knowledge she’d gained. It was a strange sight contrasted with the gore-splattered monster remains behind her. She was a warrior through and through, but she quickly ran over to me with a worried face.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“Hmm? You mean my Gluttony?”

“Yes. Whenever you devour a monster in the Domain of E, it always looks painful.”

“It’s weird, but I didn’t feel that at all,” I said. “I feel great.”

“I don’t think that’s a good sign,” said Myne. “It’s odd, especially now that Luna is gone.” I thought it might be a good chance for me to raise my stats, but Myne quickly shook her head. “Let me handle fighting. Try not to devour anything, Fate. Not until we reach Mercadia, at least.”

“But that will leave all of the battles on your shoulders.”

“It’s fine. Besides, it looks like you have other problems to deal with,” Myne said before walking on ahead.

Roxy and the others caught up with us. It was clear that something was bothering Roxy.

“Are you okay?” Roxy asked. “I can transform.”

“You have to hold off for now,” I said.

“But, Myne...”

“Do not worry. I will support her,” said Eris. “Libra’s orders.” She readied her gunblade before firing again and again. “All enemies within attacking range

have been slain. Area clear.”

Roxy and I searched for enemies but sensed nothing.

“Huh...”

“What the...?”

“Wow! You killed all of them!” Snow cried excitedly.

Myne was almighty, but Eris was no slouch. She spun the gunblade until the barrel cooled from all the firing, then slid it into her sheath.

“Shall we keep moving?” she said. Her voice was cold, as though what she’d just done meant nothing to her. “I promise to be the perfect escort to the imperial capital.”



## Chapter 10:

### The Holy Beast That Crawls the Land

CONTRARY TO WHAT I expected—endless battles all the way to the imperial capital of Mercadia—Eris’s long-range sniping smoothed our progress. Myne had been on edge about leaving things to Eris for a while, but anxiety soon gave way to boredom. In this way, our party traversed the Galian wastes, stepping over bloody monster corpses as we trekked onward. Myne tried to guide us along routes with fewer monsters, but even that didn’t stop the monsters from gathering around us.

Unlike my bow, Eris’s gunfire echoed across Galia. The quiet was punctuated by the ceaseless, resounding booms of the black gunblade, and there was little to prevent the sound from traveling. This caught the attention of monsters, who were drawn in like lambs to the slaughter. Eris remained entirely unfazed and continued to pick off each and every monster with cold, professional cruelty. This was nothing to her. She didn’t even break a sweat.

“Fay, how long until we reach Mercadia?” asked Roxy.

“If memory serves, we’re about halfway there,” I said.

“I see...” said Roxy, glancing at Eris.

“We’re drawing more monsters than I expected,” I said.

“I can feel it too.”

“I gotta say, these ancient monsters sure are persistent.”

Monsters instinctively ran when they knew they were in a battle they couldn’t win, but these were different. They refused to back down, and their eyes practically boiled with bloodlust. Had they returned to life ravenously hungry? Or was there some other reason?

“It’s so strange,” remarked Roxy. “Monsters don’t usually act this way when so many of them are being slaughtered like this.”

“What do you think, Myne?” I asked.

“We kill whatever comes. That’s that.”

*Hmm... Well, at least she’s into it.* I felt no magical energy aimed directly at us, which meant we were relatively safe.

Suddenly, Snow tugged at my sleeve. “It’s coming,” she said.

“What is?” I searched for magical energy, but found nothing.

“Fight!” cried Snow, diving at Roxy to transform into Valkyrie mode.

The ground exploded at my feet, but thanks to Snow’s warning, I leaped out of danger.

“The hell?!” I shouted. “You guys can’t get enough of my legs today!”

“What *is* that?!” asked Roxy.

I squinted at a translucent shape that just barely refracted the sunlight. I could hardly see it, and I couldn’t feel any magical energy emanating from it, either.

“Take this!” I cried, slicing at it with my blade.

Nothing happened. *Is it immune to physical attacks?*

I imbued my blade with fire magic, flames trailing the sword as I sliced at the shape again.

“What?!”

Still no effect. Even magic didn’t seem to work. The monster, some sort of translucent slime, leaped straight for me.

“Fay! This way!”

Roxy reached out to me as she flew through the sky, whisking me out of danger in the nick of time.

“Thanks!” I said.

“I don’t mind you testing out your enemies, but do be careful.”

“I will. I promise.”

“Good. However, we’re in some trouble. Snow remembers that creature. It’s a holy beast.”

“Physical and magical attacks are useless. What is it?”

“Give me a moment.”

Roxy shared her consciousness with Snow in this form, so she was probably gathering information. On the ground, Myne and Eris were locked in a fierce battle with our new translucent enemy, but their attacks were just as ineffective as mine. Slivers of Myne and Eris’s clothes melted as they fought, meaning the holy beast could hurt *us* even if we couldn’t hurt *it*. Myne was growing frustrated.

*Perhaps it only takes physical form in the instant it attacks?*

Myne seemed to think the same thing. She timed a counterattack to coincide with the moment the holy beast launched at her. Her black axe whistled through empty air, however, before colliding with the earth and leaving a massive crater in its wake. The holy beast suddenly seemed to shrink, pulsing like a heart.

“Everyone, get clear! Now!” Roxy shouted, her voice echoing loudly.

The holy beast froze for a split second, then exploded into countless feelers stretching in every direction. They targeted Eris, Myne, and even Roxy and me up in the sky. Roxy deftly weaved out of danger, flying circles around the feelers no matter where they attempted to block her. It left me dizzy. My eyes couldn’t focus. I wasn’t used to aerial battles at all.

On the ground, Eris and Myne dodged and leaped, evading the beast’s attacks. It was a piece of cake for Myne, but Eris was used to providing support and wasn’t as adept in a close-quarters battle.

The problem was that none of us knew what would happen if those feelers got a hold of us.

“Fay, I have some new information from Snow,” said Roxy. “That thing is the Zodiac Gemini. It’s a single creature split between two bodies. She says the monster attacking us is only one half of a whole being.”

“How do we kill it?”

“She doesn’t know.”

That wasn't surprising. Even fellow holy beasts wouldn't share their weak points with each other. *But a holy beast in two parts, huh? We can't do anything to the half that's attacking us here, but what about the other half?*

"Let's look for the other half," said Roxy.

"Exactly what I was thinking."

The question was how. If the beast's twin had the same skills, it would have attacked us as a pair. Perhaps it wasn't attacking us because it *couldn't*.

I had no choice but to use my Gluttony. I could apologize to Myne later. I still remembered what it felt like to devour a holy beast—the pure satisfaction. It was enough to make me forget the risk of going berserk. But that feeling powered my Gluttony; it hungered for the holy beast before of us. Gluttony's sense of smell would lead us to its twin. It reached out, and I found the Gemini attacking us, Snow, Libra, and much further away, my father.

*Got it!*

"This way leads to the imperial capital," I said. "That's where the other half of Gemini is."

"You're sure?"

"If my Gluttony is right, yes. It might be under my father's control."

Battle with the Gemini here was forcing us back, away from the capital. In a moment of indecision, we left a small opening, and the Gemini moved like a flash. It blocked off our escape route and whipped its feelers at us.

"Roxy!" I shouted.

I was certain we were dead, but the feelers stopped right before my eyes.

"That was a close one," I said, sighing.

"Almost fatal," added Roxy. "But why did it stop?"

"I don't think it can move any farther than this. Its area of operation might be limited to a certain region."

To test my theory, I stretched one hand out and watched as the Gemini immediately shot a feeler out. It still couldn't reach me.

“The holy beast isn’t going to let us get any closer to the imperial capital than this,” I said.

It felt like a warning from my father. *If you don’t want to die, turn around and go home*, he seemed to be saying.

“What’s the plan, Fay?” asked Roxy.

From what I could tell, the Gemini in front of us could melt whatever it touched, much like a slime. I’d used corrosion magic to counteract the omega slime, but magic didn’t work on this holy beast.

“We need to get to the capital,” I said, realizing that we only had one choice. “We’ll split into two groups. One will lure this Gemini away. The other will head to the capital to take out its twin.”

Roxy and I dropped to the ground where Eris and Myne waited. I shared the plan with them, and Myne nodded.

“We don’t have any other choice,” she said. “The team drawing the Gemini away have to be especially quick.”

“Then it’s decided. You and Roxy are best suited for the job,” I said.

Myne and Roxy looked at one another. This would mark their first battle as a team. Still, both were more experienced than I was, and they were more than capable of shifting their strategy mid-battle as needed.

“Got it,” said Myne. “But I wish I could have gone with you to the capital.”

“Please don’t do anything reckless,” said Roxy. “I know that simply being here is reckless in and of itself, but still, don’t overdo it.”

Our party’s fighting power was being split right down the middle. Roxy and Myne were one team. And Eris and I were the other.

“Can you fight?” I asked Eris.

“You need not worry,” she replied. “If it becomes necessary to sacrifice myself, so be it.”

The flatness of her affect was in grim contrast to her words.

“Can I issue an order?” I asked.

“As you wish. Libra said that I am to obey you.”

“Do *not* die,” I said. “Do not *try* to die. I do not think of you as someone to sacrifice.”

“I will do my utmost.”

The Zodiac Gemini lay in wait before us, silent. We had to find a way to kill it.

“Everybody ready?” I asked.

This battle was going to be easy. It seemed there was nothing left for me to do but lean on my Gluttony and devour whatever got in our way.

“Roxy, Myne, try to lead the Gemini east,” I said. “Eris, you are not to fire your gunblade until we reach the imperial capital. The sound will only draw the Gemini back toward us.”

I wouldn't be able to rely on anyone to forge a path to the imperial capital for me. I needed to carve it myself, just as I always had. Once again, I would have to test the limits of my Gluttony and devour anything and everything that blocked our way.

I could feel my other self grinning from within.



## Chapter 11:

### The Imperial Capital of Mercadia

ONE, TWO, THREE... Ten... Twenty... Thirty... Sixty...

Monsters fell in droves, but I was far from done. I could still eat. It was like I had a bottomless appetite. My power swelled as a steady stream of stats flowed into me.

Eris and I had split from Roxy and Myne and were steadily making our way to the imperial capital. Explosions echoed from the east. I imagined that Myne created her own paths of escape and places to hide by violently reshaping the land around her. If anyone could do that, it was her. The distant sounds also told me Myne and Roxy were still locked in battle. As long as I could hear them, I knew that they still drew breath.

“Master Fate,” said Eris. “Surely from this distance it would be okay for me to —”

She lifted her gunblade as we ran. She’d been doing this nonstop.

“I said *no*! No guns until we reach the capital!”

Eris’s hands shook as she gripped her gunblade. I got the feeling she was especially trigger happy and desperate to go wild. This wasn’t like the Eris I knew at all, and I wondered if it had to do with her reconfiguration. Perhaps it had given her a thirst for battle.

“I will not tolerate you collapsing before we reach Mercadia,” said Eris.

“Well, I’d love nothing more than your support, but that’s not an option because it would mean firing your gunblade and alerting Gemini to our position.”

“But I am bored.”

“That’s good, isn’t it? Coming to Galia and having all this free time on your hands?”

I sliced off the head of the monster that blocked our path. It had the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and a snake for a tail—a classic chimera. Even headless, however, it put up quite a fight. It closed the distance between us in a single bound so its tail could sink its venomous fangs into me. I was resistant to poison, thanks to the lamia's skills, but I still didn't relish the thought of getting bitten.

I activated my one-handed sword skill, Sharp Edge, and cut the chimera's body to pieces, decapitating the snake at its tail.

***Gluttony skill activated. Stats increased: Vitality +2.5E (+8), Strength +3.4E (+8), Magic +3.0E (+8), Spirit +2.4E (+8), Agility +3.4E (+8).***

The chimera's skills were just as delectable as its stats, and very useful, too. I was certain they'd come in handy during the battles ahead.

The chimera was a fearsome monster in its own right, but with my ever-growing stats, it felt like little more than a goblin. My body wasn't used to the overwhelming increase in stats, though, so I couldn't access their full power. Nonetheless, even I could feel how terrifying I was becoming. The monsters grew more and more powerful as Eris and I made our way further south, and my stats grew higher still.

An even greater roar sounded from the others' direction. The earth rumbled, and thick clouds of dust rose and obscured the eastern sky. I suspected Myne was responsible. She was single-handedly altering the Galian landscape.

"They're going wild over there," I muttered.

"We are very close to Mercadia," Eris said calmly.

"Just a little further then."

Contrary to Eris's cool demeanor, monsters swirled around us like a maelstrom, blocking our advance. Perhaps they'd been drawn in by the stench of blood from those I had already slain, or perhaps they'd been able to pick out our scent. Either way, we had to hurry to the capital. We didn't have time to waste on these monsters. With Myne and Roxy's battle reaching a fever pitch, we couldn't afford the slow and easy route.

I wasn't as loud or explosive as Myne, but I had tricks of my own. I

transformed my black sword into the black stave as Eris looked on with curiosity.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Ensuring us an easier path forward.”

Fighting all the monsters in front of us would inevitably slow us down. Our best bet was to make sure the monsters couldn’t block our path to the capital. The black stave filled with every bit of magical energy I had devoured. I then unleashed every drop, and cast a fire the likes of which I had never before seen.

“Onward!” I shouted.

A whirlwind of black flames flew from the end of the stave, growing as they sapped my magic. Thick, intense flames dripped with something that glowed blue—probably gas particles floating in the atmosphere around us.

“Master Fate!” cried Eris.

“I got it!”

Monsters leaped at us, mouths agape. I didn’t slow and sent my flames to consume the incoming enemies. As soon as the fire touched them, they were incinerated. They made no sound, and they left no scent.

The fire didn’t stop with the monsters, though. Instead, it stretched out toward Mercadia. Everything in its path was scorched to nothing as the flames cauterized the landscape before us into a pair of parallel black lines. I heard the toneless drone of my Gluttony informing me of my increasing stats, but there was another voice along with it.

*“More... More...”*

I slowed down for a moment.

Eris turned to me. “Master Fate? What is it?”

“No,” I said, shaking my head. “It’s nothing.”

I leaped onto the path between the two walls of flame. Only Eris and I could get inside here. Galian monsters were huge, several times larger than any human, but my black flames would consume them all the same if they tried to

push through. The same fate awaited them if they attacked from underground. They could destroy the ground itself, but they'd still be burned. The black flames would last as long as my reserves of magical energy did. Nothing could extinguish these flames unless I allowed it.

"I can't believe it..." I muttered. "Do these monsters not fear death?"

The monsters didn't let up their attempted assault. They kept coming in waves even as they were swallowed in the flames of a burning sea. Even the stampede that had formed when I'd fought the Heavenly Calamity had eventually fled in terror. Perhaps ancient beasts were made of sterner stuff.

"They're choosing to run to their own deaths?!" I cried.

I couldn't believe what I saw. The voice in my head droned on endlessly. The hand that gripped the black stave felt different somehow, and I looked at it.

I was trembling. I was afraid.

Could I keep this up? What would I do if my Gluttony crawled up to get me, right here and now? All the worries I kept in the back of my mind suddenly rushed to the forefront. I clasped my right hand with my left in an attempt to control my trembling.

"Now I truly know how important you are," I said to the silent Greed. "You always knew what to say to keep me on track in times like these."

The sword had a foul mouth, but he kept me steady whenever I felt lost. He said whatever he wanted—often too much—but in the end, he always assured me that I was capable of facing our foes. In the battle against the Zodiac Aquarius, he'd said that all he ever did was sit back and watch. That was all he'd said, but even that alone made me feel like we could overcome the battle ahead.

"The capital is in sight," I said. "We're almost ready to start our search for the other half of the Gemini."

"Understood."

I'd lean on my Gluttony for that. But I needed a deeper connection to get an accurate location.

“I need more,” I said. “Give me more power!”

I had never been deeper in my Gluttony than this.

“Master Fate, your eyes!”

She was no doubt talking about the crimson that filled both of my eyes. I had gone beyond my starved state to forge an even deeper connection with my Gluttony.

“Hrngh...” I groaned.

A deep pain shot through the vestigial wings on my back, but I ignored it and kept searching for the other half of Gemini. Mercadia was filled with delicious scents. I felt chimeras finally moving again after centuries of dormancy. Things I’d never eaten lurked in the capital. Among these souls, my Gluttony was drawn to one in particular. I focused on it. My heart leaped. It was my father.

*He’s underground?! Is he trying to open the Door to Distant Lands from there?*  
I focused harder. As I did so, my father turned toward me. *He noticed me?!*

“Do you really have time to concern yourself with me?”

His words rang like a warning, and I turned my attention to the presence I thought was the other Gemini.

“It’s been waiting...all this time.”

I had thought it was too quiet, and there was a good reason for it. It was ready and waiting, charging its power until we were in range. And it was just about to unleash it all. Could I stop it with the black shield? I thought back to the Zodiac Aquarius, the Artillery of God. If this holy beast was capable of something similar, let alone more, I wouldn’t be able to protect Eris. A defensive strategy would wear away at me. The best defense, then, was a good offense. I wasn’t about to adopt Myne’s style completely, but I knew I’d be at a huge disadvantage playing long-range defense.

I changed the black stave to the black bow and gave it half of my stats. The bow transformed ominously in my grip. I didn’t have Greed to assist in aiming anymore. I had to do this on my own. But thanks to my friends and their tutelage, my archery skills had greatly improved. I could also use my Gluttony to

change the nature and elemental attributes of my arrows. Now, I'd prove that I was even more accurate than when Greed guided my aim.

I took aim at the Zodiac Gemini from within the searing black flames. Much like its other half, it was translucent, like a slime. The Gemini was in a location completely opposite my father's. It looked down on us from upon the tallest of all the black buildings that filled Mercadia.

"Master Fate," said Eris.

She pointed her gunblade at me and fired. I felt the buff—a temporary stat boost and an accuracy increase—flow through me. When my bow had reached its limit, I unleashed its power.

"Bloody Ptarmigan Cross!" I shouted.

The instant I fired, I was hit by an incredible recoil. All the monsters trying to attack us were sent flying. Had I not been imbued with Eris's buff, I, too, would have been hurt.

The same moment I fired, Gemini unleashed a beam of pure white light. The two attacks collided. A spiral of black lightning met a pure white light, and I expected a battle of strength to ensue. But because the attacks were both so strong, or perhaps because the powers repelled one another, they deflected off each other.

Huge plumes of dust surrounded us in the aftermath. When they finally cleared, I found that the ground to the left of where I stood had been carved into a gargantuan crater, while the building the Gemini once sat upon had disappeared without a trace.

The Gemini didn't fall to the ground, however. It instead remained in the air, floating. Huge, angel-like wings appeared as the holy beast began to change form.

## Chapter 12:

### A Power That Rivals the Gods

I WASN'T GOING TO WAIT for Gemini to finish its transformation. I fed another 50 percent of my stats into the black bow. It was all too easy to make up for any stat losses here in monster-infested Galia. The Bloody Ptarmigan Cross I'd just fired had slaughtered a huge number of monsters alone. For better or worse, the monsters' persistent bloodlust did me a huge favor here.

"You won't transform on my watch!" I shouted.

This time, Gemini did not fire back. Without anything blocking the way, my arrow was sure to strike true. I rooted myself in place, readying for the shockwave as the arrow flew into Gemini's center, the exact spot my Gluttony wanted to consume most.

I felt the weight of the bow through my entire body. Black streaks of spiral lightning seared the sky. But the transforming Gemini didn't even move a centimeter. At this rate, the Bloody Ptarmigan Cross would leave a gaping hole in its gigantic body. And yet...

"I just knew something like this was going to happen..." I muttered.

Gemini wasn't a sitting duck at all. The Bloody Ptarmigan Cross dissipated the moment it impacted the holy beast, splitting into thinner arcs that spiraled off behind Gemini and devastated Mercadia's long-abandoned buildings. The light from those explosions only served to illuminate the now-transformed Gemini.

Six golden wings sprouted majestically from the holy beast's back. Its body was shaped like an egg, the translucent form glimmering with a rainbow iridescence in the light. At its core, a strange pattern moved like a living creature all its own. I sensed the Gemini was planning something. Two halos appeared above the holy beast when the pattern finally stopped moving, one of which spun at incredible speed.

"Here it comes!" said Eris, realizing it signaled an attack.



Her arms trembled slightly. Even though she was no longer completely herself, her fear of holy beasts still presented itself physically, whether she wanted it to or not. Nevertheless, Eris raised her gunblade to the sky and fired a single shot. The two of us were instantly showered in a green light, which wrapped around our bodies. It was similar to Eris's Phalanx Bullet, which drastically reduced the damage the target received from the next three attacks.

We leaped backward to put some space between ourselves and Gemini. The monster moved quickly with its new wings, but we needed a little time.

*"Your prey...is behind you."*

The voice inside of me spoke just as I felt Gemini behind me.

"Wha...?"

"Master Fate!" cried Eris.

The holy beast immediately fired a blinding light at me from point-blank range. In an instant, I moved in front of Eris and transformed the black bow into the black shield.

*That wasn't flight. It's like the holy beast teleported.*

I grunted, fighting to keep hold of the shield. Eris hit me with another defense buff.

"Damn it..." I grunted. "My feet are slipping..."

It wouldn't matter how sturdy my shield was if Gemini's blast eroded the ground I stood upon. Eris pushed against my back to try to keep me steady, but we couldn't hold on. The ground crumbled beneath our feet, and we were thrown into the depths of the imperial capital. Momentum carried us through buildings that stood in our way that crumbled and collapsed until we finally slammed into one and came to a stop.

"That would have torn me to pieces if I didn't have all these stats," I said.

"Thank you very much for protecting me..." said Eris.

"Don't mention it."

Right before we collided with the Galian architecture, I'd made sure that Eris

was in front of me, so I took the brunt of the impacts. We were both strong enough to handle it, so it wasn't really necessary, but I wanted to do it anyway.

"More importantly," I said, "how does Gemini move like that?"

"I believe it may be making use of portal jumps."

"That again..."

I'd dealt with portal jumps back when I'd fought Rafale Vlerick, who had used them with his black spear. The difference was that he'd only been able to send his spear through the portals he made. This half of Gemini could portal its entire being, and it could use the ability over a much longer range.

"In that case...maybe this will be effective," I said.

Greed had taught me how to interfere with portal jumping. Maybe it would work here, too. I changed the black shield into the black bow and readied an arrow. Then, I added sandstorm magic to it, aimed where my Gluttony demanded, and fired. The arrow zipped between the Galian buildings and made straight for the Gemini.

That was when I felt it. I knew Gemini was going to portal jump again. And if everything went according to plan, my arrow would shut it down.

"Ngh! Eris, get out of here! Quick!"

The arrow shattered into fragments before it hit Gemini, just like the Bloody Ptarmigan Cross.

"My attacks aren't hitting!"

But this wasn't like Myne and Roxy's fight with the other Gemini twin. We couldn't touch that one at all. This portal jumping Gemini in front of me was protected by something I couldn't see.

"It's warping what I throw at it somehow. I don't like this."

I couldn't hit the holy beast, but thanks to my Gluttony, I was getting better at anticipating where Gemini would teleport next. It wouldn't take me by surprise again.

*If long-range attacks aren't effective, how about getting up close and*

*personal?*

I transformed the black bow into the black scythe and sliced at Gemini right as it was attempting to fire off another blast of light. If the holy beast had a barrier powered by a skill, the black scythe would slice it in two.

My hands went numb as a high-pitched scream pierced our ears. I was knocked away. Or more accurately, my attack was completely denied. I scanned the area around Gemini with my blood-red eyes, seeking the flow of its magical energy. As I suspected, I found nothing.

The barrier wasn't powered by skills or magical energy. Was this a power unique to this holy beast?

"Master Fate, look out!" cried Eris.

She fired another buffing bullet at me, which knocked me out of the way of Gemini's blast. The attack opened a huge hole in the building behind me, through which we could now see the setting sun. I leaped to the buildings to the east, once again putting some distance between myself and Gemini.

"How can it keep firing such powerful attacks?" I asked. "Does it ever run out of energy?"

"I don't sense any magical energy in it, even with my magical eye. This is a different kind of power."

"What does that mean?"

"My future sight is being altered moment to moment."

"Future sight?"

"A magical eye that allows me to glance a few seconds into the future."

*Eris has been using her magical eye? But that puts a huge strain on her vision.* I could see that strain firsthand as blood dripped from her eyes like tears.

"This is an emergency," Eris said. "Do not concern yourself with my well-being."

"I guess that part of you hasn't changed at all..." I muttered. "So you're saying Gemini is altering the future?"

If it were, that would mean our chances were practically zilch.

Eris shook her head. “I said altered, but it’s more accurate to say that moments in time are wavering,” she said.

“I’m going to need more detail.”

“My best guess is that it does not have complete control over the future. It cannot alter it entirely. If it could, we would both be dead.”

“Makes sense. So the beast’s ability to alter the future is limited?”

We had managed to defend or evade all of Gemini’s attacks so far, which meant that it couldn’t apply its control of the future to its offensive abilities. Otherwise, we’d be nothing but ash already. This meant that Gemini’s control of the future was limited to defense. It was doing something the exact moment my attacks were about to connect.

“Master Fate, please fire another arrow at Gemini,” said Eris. “I will not let it out of my sight this time.”

“But any more and your eyes...”

I could tell that Eris’s future sight put more strain on her eyes than anything else she’d used previously. Even now, the whites of her eyes were beginning to grow bloodshot. If she used that magical eye again, she might go blind.

“It is of no concern. Gemini is analyzing us, too. Now fire!”

I glanced at Eris, but I knew it was no good arguing. Some things would never change. She was terrified of holy beasts—she even told me as much—but when it really mattered, she was as powerful as they came.

I took aim at the Gemini with my black bow and let loose another sandstorm arrow. Just like all the other times, the arrow shattered into particles that glimmered in the air as they were lifted by the wind.

Eris clutched her right eye as blood gushed forth from it.

“Eris?!” I shouted.

But as I tried to get close to her, she put up a hand and stopped me. “I saw it,” she said. A crooked grin crept across her face. “I know how Gemini works.”

Eris's emotions were supposed to be suppressed due to Libra's reconfiguration, but I could tell that something deep inside of her had fired up. Even now, she fought to regain control. Eris was doing everything she could to break the mental fetters that the holy beasts had bound her with.

## Chapter 13:

### The Second Coming of the Chimeras

COUNTLESS BUILDINGS COLLAPSED around us in the heart of Mercadia, the imperial capital—a place once renowned for its prosperity—as warred against Gemini. Unfortunately, the battle had gone on too long. Ancient beasts stirred from their slumber, beasts that should never have been woken. I felt it all around me. This aura was one I remembered from long ago, in my battle with Haniel. That same pressure now assaulted me from every direction. Haniel had been a juvenile chimera prematurely forced into an adult form, but what surrounded us now was different. These were true chimeras.

Waves of magical energy assaulted me, making it even more difficult to track Gemini.

“What is that?” I uttered.

Above us, tendrils of blue light reached up from the ground like tangled vines, smothering the sky and enclosing Mercadia in a dome. It stretched beyond the surrounding structures, and all we could do was watch as we dealt with this half of Gemini’s relentless attacks.

Eris and I stood back-to-back.

“The defense systems should have activated *before* we entered the capital, right?” I said.

“I do not understand this,” replied Eris. “The only explanation is that they were intentionally kept offline until now.”

“No... My father?”

It couldn’t have been Gemini. The holy beast would have started the defense systems the moment it sensed us. But why would my father want to trap us in here?

The sky was now completely covered, enclosing us in a blue dome. My energy started to deplete, just like when I gave up my stats to Greed. “My stats are

dropping?!” I exclaimed.

“The light covering the capital hits intruders with strong debuffs,” explained Eris.

I knew she was telling the truth. We were the intruders here, after all.

“The portal jumping is accelerating!”

“Gemini is growing even more powerful,” said Eris. “The dome must be acting as a kind of blessing for it.”

*Could things get any worse?!*

We were almost out of options. Eris’s eyes were at their limit. She could only use her magical eye one more time, if we were lucky. Her right eye was starting to swell shut as blood continued to pour forth.

“Eris, can you really do this?” I asked.

“Yes. Do not worry about me.”

“Eris...”

“I do not need your concern. We have no other alternatives. Focus, Master Fate. You must concentrate.”

I didn’t want to admit it, but she was right. With that light bearing down upon us, our stats were plummeting. If we left things too long, we’d lack the power to fight back, and any opening we created would be pointless. There was no more time for hemming, hawing, or grumbling. We had to hit it hard and fast.

“Right,” I said. “I believe in you... I believe in the Eris inside of you.”

“Then we will survive.”

Eris’s magical eye saw Gemini’s future splinter into two paths. Usually, Eris’s future sight saw only one possible future, but there were always two for Gemini—a future where my attack connected and a future where my attack missed. Both possibilities existed simultaneously.

I didn’t believe it when I heard it. I had always believed the future to be unwavering. The whole reason we struggled and fought was to choose the best path forward. That rule did not apply to the Zodiac Gemini, though, which could



select the better of two options. It wasn't quite altering the future. More accurately, Gemini altered probability. When I fired my sandstorm arrow, the future in which it hit was—in Eris's eyes—a flimsy, near-transparent image. The future in which I missed, however, was the opposite. She saw it as a stark, bold vision, one so clear it seemed to crush the future we hoped for.

This probability shifting was how Gemini had evaded all of my attacks. It seemed impenetrable, but it did have *one* tiny weakness. And that weakness was the very reason we called the ability “probability shifting.” Gemini could not guarantee any given future with 100 percent accuracy. If it could, Eris would not have been able to see two potential outcomes. Based on the clarity with which Eris saw those outcomes, the chances of our desired future were almost zero, though.

But if Eris saw two futures, then it was up to us to shift the odds.

“As long as the chances aren't zero percent, we've got a shot,” I said.

The chimeras in the sky headed toward us, readying long-range attacks. Gemini took up a position above them, ready to take aim at us after the chimera's unified assault. We were surrounded.

“Eris, stand back,” I said.

“We only have one chance.”

I sent a heartfelt message to the silent black sword. *Here we go, Greed...*

I transformed the sword into its Fifth Level, the level Greed himself had entrusted to me at the cost of his own existence. The black gauntlets unleashed a black thread that, at first glance, didn't seem as useful as the other levels. However, I had seen its potential in the battle against the Zodiac Aquarius. The gauntlets had shredded Aquarius, which was as big as Hausen itself, into little more than dust. In other words, the weapon was capable of widespread annihilation.

The range of attack was so large, however, that the gauntlets were difficult to wield, and subtle control was necessary to make use of its power. I had told Eris to get clear as a mistake on my part could mean injury on hers. Myne had helped me improve my control, but it was by no means easy. On a few

occasions, I had almost killed her. All I could do was apologize profusely afterward. It was thanks to Myne that I could wield the gauntlets in battle at all. There was still a chance I'd hurt my companions when I used them, but as long as they stayed behind me, we were all good.

"Master Fate, here they come!" said Eris.

A combined roar signaled the chimeras' attack. Offensive magic rained down on us. The variegated elemental magics looked like a giant flower blooming in the sky. I raised both of my arms up and poured everything I had into them.

"Cut it all to shreds!" I shouted.

Ten black threads shot from my fingertips. Each one split off into more black threads that reached out in different directions. In an instant, thousands of black threads soared toward the sky, multiplying exponentially. I had to control each and every one. I created as many as my magic allowed, turning the threads into something like a living creature all its own.

The black threads collided with the chimera's magic attacks. The string quickly enveloped the spells like a spider web, slicing them into nothing. That was the black gauntlets' specialty. They cut through anything, and they did not let go of their target.

As soon as the magic disintegrated, the black threads soared higher. The chimeras tried to evade, but it was useless. The black threads would not let them run.

"Devour them all!"

The black threads sliced through everything—legs, arms, wings, torsos, and heads. And still, they did not cease. If there was flesh to cut, they did so until the chimeras were nothing more than dust glittering in the blue glow of the imperial defense system.

The metallic voice of my Gluttony droned in my head as I devoured the chimeras' souls and gorged on their stats. I noticed a rivulet of blood dripping from my left eye. I felt fantastic, yet devouring these monsters still took a toll on me. But that wouldn't stop me. The chimeras were only an appetizer. I still intended to feast on the half of Gemini lording over us.

Using all the stats I had just received, I engaged the Fifth Level secret technique.

“Greed! Take my stats!” I shouted.

The black gauntlets morphed and transformed. Power flooded through the threads as a golden aura began to envelop them.

*Did you get them, Greed? Did you get my stats? This was the last thing you taught me, and now, I can control it.*

“Dimension Destruction!” I shouted.

The glimmering black threads of my gauntlets could slice through space itself. Gemini would not get anywhere with its portals now. I watched as the threads converged on the holy beast, surrounding it.

## Chapter 14:

### The Power of the Fifth Level

**F**OCUS... FOCUS...

The black threads of Dimension Destruction lashed out at the Zodiac Gemini over and over, but the holy beast continued to evade them with its probability shifting.

“We’ve got it where we want it. Eris, you’re sure about this?” I asked.

“It will not be a problem.”

“Got it.”

The first goal of the Dimension Destruction attack was to trap Gemini in an isolated space. The holy beast was capable of two extremely effective escape abilities—probability shifting and portal jumping. We had just rendered portal jumping useless.

It was time to move onto the next phase. Eris placed her hands on my shoulders.

I grunted as Gemini struggled in my grasp. “Would you please stay still?!” I spat.

The holy beast was shifting the future within the black threads, and the movements were incredibly violent. The shock rippled straight through the black thread, where I felt it from my fingers to my shoulders. Blood dripped from the gaps in the gauntlets, staining the ground at my feet.

“Eris, let’s do this!”

“Very well... Open your heart to me. Accept me.”

I closed my eyes and felt the warmth of Eris’s magic flow into me. It felt wonderful. It mixed with me, becoming one with my own magic.

“Perfect,” said Eris.

I opened my eyes to a world completely different from the one I had known. I

suddenly felt as if I saw the true nature of everything I looked at.

“So this is what the world looks like through your magical eye power,” I said.

“I will push my future sight to its limits to interfere with the Gemini’s probability shifting,” Eris said. “You will share my sight, so be ready for the distortion that occurs in its wake. That is your chance to shift the future in our favor.”

I saw two Geminis in the sky. This was the probability shift Eris had told me about. The two potentials—hit and miss—existed simultaneously. The “hit” future was barely visible, like an afterimage.

“Eris...”

I felt her magic increase, and, as it did so, I saw a change in the Gemini’s two futures. Color began to fill the weaker image.

“Master Fate!”

It was just an instant, but I was not going to let it slip from our grasp. I sent the black threads at the Gemini from every conceivable angle. A huge explosion rang out above us, and a sound like glass shattering echoed out. A torrent-like shockwave slammed into the defense system barrier, shattering it. The barrier dissipated around us, but I couldn’t see Gemini through the smoke of the explosion.

Eris was surprised at the fact that she could still see through her own eyes. “But this is...” She trailed off. “Wait, did you...?” She moved from behind me and looked into my eyes. “What did you do?”

“Sorry. I couldn’t let you take the brunt of that alone.”

I could barely see out of my left eye. While we’d shared our magical energy, I’d tried to see if we could share the load of her magical eye between us. By pouring my own magic into the magical eye, I’d been able to make even better use of its power, causing an even greater disruption to the Gemini’s probability control.

“But all’s well that ends well,” I said. “And the battle isn’t over yet. I still need you.”

“Understood...”

The Zodiac Gemini emerged from the smoke. A huge fracture now ran through its center. The pattern that had once moved and shifted inside of it had now come to a halt. We had successfully collapsed the timeline into a single future—a future we could finally grasp.

My Gluttony instinctively sensed that Gemini’s defenses were down. *Eat the holy beast*, it called to me. *Devour it*. The whispered words echoed through my very being.

“You don’t have to tell me twice,” I muttered.

I still had some power left in the Dimension Destruction technique, and the black thread had the Gemini completely trapped. Its portal jumping was useless.

“Now!” I shouted.

Gemini wrapped itself in its wings as if to defend itself, but I paid it no mind as I brought the threads closer and tore its wings to pieces. Now trapped, the holy beast let out a high-pitched shriek despite having no mouth.

*You beg for mercy? Now?*

“Too late!” I wrapped Gemini in the black threads and crushed it. “This is the end!”

There was no sound of glass this time, but I felt what happened.

“Is it done?” asked Eris.

“Not yet.”

I had yet to hear the familiar voice in my head. The beast wasn’t dead.

*But it had nowhere to run. What did it do?!*

I looked up. The black threads still had Gemini trapped. The feeling from the thread to my fingers had changed, and a liquid leaked from between the gaps in the threading.

“No, is...? Eris, move!”

“Huh?”

It was like an egg cracking open, and the contents within were about to drop right on top of us. A moment before we were hit, Eris and I leaped back to safety. The liquid that collided with the ground pooled, forming the shape of a slime. It was the other half of Gemini, the twin Roxy and Myne were fighting. The black thread hadn't hurt it at all. Going by my Gluttony's disgust, the prey we'd been after had escaped.

Had the Gemini twins somehow swapped places? I knew only one thing for sure. This was not a portal jump. Was it because they were two parts of a single whole? Was that how they were able to swap places?

"Master Fate?!"

Eris raised her voice, confused, because I was running straight for the Gemini. I transformed the unwieldy black gauntlets back to the sword and gripped it tight in hand.

I believed in Roxy and Myne. I was utterly certain of what they would do.

My attacks wouldn't work on the half of Gemini here before me. The other half of Gemini that was on the run, though—the half that would now find itself in front of Roxy and Myne—things were *very* different for that one. It had lost its defensive measures, its probability shift. All it could do now was flee. But Roxy and Myne would not give it that luxury.

A gunshot rang out behind me. Eris had hit me with Enchant Shot, which gave me a speed boost. I ducked and dodged the feelers Gemini thrust at me and kept closing the distance.

Gemini knew what I was doing. Countless feelers burst from the ground at my feet, surrounding me in much the same way my Dimension Destruction had done earlier. Gemini was closing off my paths of escape.

Eris screamed.

The feelers drew closer, but I refused to slow down. *Unified Mind...activate.*

For a set period of time, all of my skills were five times more powerful. I'd had difficulty controlling it back at the Desert of Extinction, but thanks to Myne's training, that was no longer an issue. With Unified Mind activated, I used the sword techniques that I was most skilled at and sent fire magic through the



black sword's blade. Flames billowed from its tip.

The feelers vanished just as they were about to touch me. What appeared before me then was not the slime-like Gemini but the huge, egg-shaped Gemini. It had lost every single one of its six wings, probably because Roxy and Myne had cut off what remained. A huge, diagonal crack also ran through its body, likely the result of one of Myne's mammoth strikes.

In its attempt to escape, the Gemini had found itself facing Roxy and Myne, and they had hit it with more than it ever could have expected. So, it had swapped places *again*. Even now, it suffered, screaming. But the moment it noticed me, it fired a ray of light.

Gripping my flaming sword in hand, I used my Gluttony to transform the fire magic I'd cast into an even more powerful flame. The fire illuminating the sword intensified, changing to a golden hue.

I *knew* Gemini would come right back, and I had made sure that I was ready for it this time.

"Welcome back," I spat.

Then, I summarily sliced Gemini in half. The holy beast was quickly engulfed in flames and turned to ash. But even then, I did not hear the familiar drone echoing in my mind.

Gemini's body emitted a bluish-white light. Was it trying to swap places again?!

My body moved automatically, slicing the holy beast entirely in half once more. This time, Gemini burned up, turned into ash, and disappeared. Meanwhile, I was left stunned. My body had acted all on its own.

A familiar voice echoed in my head.

***Gluttony skill activated.***

A searing pain flowed from my wings straight to my brain.

"Master Fate?!"

Eris's voice grew distant, and I lost consciousness.



## Chapter 15:

### The Spiritual Plane

I STOOD IN THE CENTER of a world of pure white. The first time I'd come here, I'd been lost and confused, but this was an environment I'd gotten used to seeing—the spiritual plane. When Luna and Greed had been around, the torture they referred to as “training” had livened the place up. With Luna and Greed both gone, the spiritual plane was now silent. The days of fun were over. All that was left was...*us*.

A pitch-black substance bubbled up from the floor of the spiritual plane like water. It stained the world Luna had left for me like ink on a white tablecloth. The black stain floated into the air and formed into the shape of a person. The being shook its head, color filling its features.

I could barely even breathe as I saw what stood before me. It was the other version of myself. He glared at me, his eyes such powerful red I could barely hold its gaze.

“I did *not* want to meet you again...”

The other me flashed a wicked smile, as if it had ached for our reunion.

The false Fate raised his hand toward me. Black liquid flowed from his fingers and dripped to the floor, making yet another pitch-black stain. The stain opened into a gaping hole, from which I could hear the cries of those who had been devoured by my Gluttony.

*What is he doing?!*

I waited cautiously as an ominous, black greatsword rose slowly from the depths. It was considerably bigger than the one I'd last seen him use. When I finally saw the whole thing, I couldn't help but be struck by its massive, overwhelming size. It was three times as big as my black sword.

This false Fate took the greatsword in a single hand and swung it with ease, leveling it straight at me. I took a few steps back while my enemy watched me,

his eyes full of disdain.

My weapon wasn't here; my black sword was gone. There was no way I could take that gigantic greatsword on empty-handed. But could I keep myself safe from Fake Fate until I regained consciousness in the real world?

I knew one thing for sure. Fake Fate was not going to make things easy on me.

"Here he comes."

Despite the size of his sword, Fake Fate was *quick*. I leaped backward and dodged his first strike by a hairsbreadth. As soon as I landed, I dove to the left. The black blade swung through the air formerly occupied by my neck. One instant slower and I would have been completely decapitated.

I was more powerful and quicker on my feet than the last time we'd faced off, and it seemed like all my work and training in the real world was reflected here in the spiritual plane. Despite that, I was still on the back foot, stuck on defense just like last time.

Picking up speed, Fake Fate stepped forward with a diagonal slash from the right. I leaned to evade the swing, but in that instant, I felt something like electricity flash through my head. I instinctively knew that the incoming strike was a feint, and that the other me was actually going to throw a horizontal strike.

*What is this feeling?*

As we leaped around the spiritual plane, I found that I could read Fake Fate's attacks before they happened every now and then. At the same time, dark, terrifying thoughts crept through my mind. A horrifying delight came from slaughtering monsters...people...all living things. Fake Fate took great joy in our battle. It wanted nothing more than to kill, kill again, and keep right on killing. Was he the embodiment of my Gluttony? Did he want nothing more than to destroy, to devour souls?

"Or is it *me* you want to eat?" I asked.

Fake Fate said nothing.

"Answer me!"

He silently brought his greatsword down toward me, as though that were answer enough. I dodged the slash and responded with a spinning kick aimed at his throat. Fake Fate flew backward, but quickly landed on his feet, glaring at me as though my attack were little more than an annoyance.

My kick had been anything but effective. However, it *had* served to enrage Fake Fate, who roared into the sky as if he were raising hell itself. He scratched his head, drool dripping from the corner of his mouth. He was as far from an intelligent human being as one could get. For a time, Fake Fate stared straight up into the sky, an absent-minded look on his face. I wanted nothing more than for him to just stay that way, but that was never how things worked out for me.

“Yeah, I just *knew* something bad was going to happen,” I muttered.

Four wings suddenly burst from Fake Fate’s back. He flapped them slowly, bringing his eyes to meet my own. The expression on his face had transformed. Before, he’d had the eyes of a feral beast, but there was now a sense of purpose in his gaze.

The first words he spoke shocked me to my core.

“You impostor,” he spat.

This was the last thing I wanted to hear from someone who looked exactly like me.

“Give me back my body,” he said.

*But it isn’t yours. It’s mine.*

This creature was little more than a proxy for my Gluttony, and now, it was spouting madness.

“You’re the impostor!” I shouted.

Fake Fate spread his four wings wide. Their power shook the white world upon which I stood. Just when I thought he was going to move, he appeared right before my eyes.

“He’s so quick!” I said.

I couldn’t dodge Fake Fate’s first strike, and it cut from my right side into my stomach. I did not have a physical body in the spiritual plane, but the direct hit

filled me with a searing, near-unbearable pain. Long ago, Luna had explained how damage worked in this world, and because I'd been hit by this imposter in our last battle, I believed that I could handle it.

*But this...* This was more painful than I could have ever imagined. It was just a single strike, but it was far heavier than expected. I howled in agony, barely able to stand.

As I wobbled on my feet, Fake Fate grabbed me by the throat. "You dare call me an impostor?" he said, lifting me off the ground.

I struggled to free myself, but he was far too strong. "Let me go," I sputtered.

"I am real...and *you* are the impostor. Understand that it is me... *I* am the real thing... *I* am Fate...and *you* are the impostor."

He repeated the words like they were a curse. My own words couldn't reach him, though I didn't think he would have listened anyway.

"Disappear..." he said.

"Gah..."

A black stain appeared on my wound, and I felt it start to slowly eat away at my body. The searing pain gave way to a pervasive, all-consuming numbness that was similar to when I gave my stats to Greed.

*Is he...is he trying to steal my very existence?! Damn it. If only Greed were here... We could fight...together...*

"Greed..." I spat.

"Enter the abyss," said Fake Fate.

"Greed..."

"It is over. From the start, you were only—"

Suddenly, I felt a weight sink into my right hand.

"Greed!"

I swung with everything I had. Fake Fate reluctantly let me go to avoid my strike. We then immediately collided, our weapons letting off sparks as we pushed against one another, glaring the whole time.

“What are *you* doing here?” I asked.

*“I’ll be honest. I don’t particularly want to be here. However, Eris wished it, and it is a weapon’s duty to obey their wielder, even when it happens to be for the sake of someone you can’t stand.”*

The weapon I had found in my hand was *not* the one I’d been expecting. It was a weapon I’d met when we’d tried to kill each other in Galia. It had a long and storied—not to mention complicated—history with Eris, but I’d heard that they were back on good terms. We hadn’t had a chance to talk since that fight in Galia, so our feelings toward each other continued to simmer.

“You are literally the last thing I’d expect to rescue me from trouble,” I said.

*“Well, this is the last thing I want to be doing, too. But here I am. Now it comes down to whether or not you can handle me.”*







The gunblade, Envy, had an attitude problem all of its own, one distinct from Greed's. Memories of the struggles I had endured when it'd been my enemy surfaced. Nonetheless, the gunblade had come to help me, and for that I was grateful.

"I'll wield you just fine," I said.

*"So you say. And you'd better, or we're both in deep shit. I need you to get out of this place and return to the real world to help me with something."*

I knew it was Eris; I didn't have to ask. The gunblade wanted me to free her from Libra's control. We had a common goal, and so long as we had a similar destination, we'd be able to fight as a team.

Power flowed into the gunblade and pushed Fake Fate backward.

"Here we go, Envy!"

*"Make it quick, Fate."*

I aimed the weapon straight at my enemy and fired.

## Chapter 16:

### The Fake Fate

SPARKS FLEW THROUGH THE AIR as the black gunblade and the black greatsword collided. For some strange reason, I could read and predict the movements of the other Fate. Of course, he could read mine, too.

*"If you don't make better use of me, you're dead."*

Surprisingly, the gunblade's trash talk didn't bother me. *But why? Am I enjoying this battle against my false self? Is it because I've finally found a sworn enemy to fight with my full potential?*

Whatever it was, Fake Fate appeared to feel the same way. I spied the hint of a grin amid the pure hatred visible in his features. With each clash of our blades, I felt his unbridled joy at being locked in battle. Every strike he threw was heavy. He was giving this his all.

The spiritual plane reflected one's strength in the real world, but that wasn't all. Greed and Luna had taught me that it also put your heart and mind to the test. It was easy to mistake levels, stats, and skills for physical attributes, but in truth, they all resided in the mind. To strengthen my resistance to Gluttony, Greed and Luna had helped me train my mental faculties. I didn't know to what extent I would be able to put their teachings to use here, but I could not let myself lose to the fake Fate.

I pushed the greatsword away again and took aim with Envy.

*"What the...? What the hell is this?!"*

But I didn't have time to answer the shocked gunblade, which was already transforming in my hands. My personality wasn't a good match for the weapon in its original form as a support weapon. I needed it to be one with my mind so I could fight with everything I had. I needed it to change.

*"This is how we're meant to fight together,"* I said.

*"I don't believe it. I don't even have any of Greed's transformative abilities."*

“Do it,” I ordered.

This was *my* spiritual plane. I knew the transformation would work.

I had no use for a support weapon. I needed something purely focused on attack, so I took Envy and shaped it into something far more dangerous and aggressive. I widened the barrel for better firepower, then lengthened and sharpened the blade to make it a better cutting weapon. The end result was so huge I had to hold it in both arms, but it put Fake Fate and I on an even playing field.

Envy now had a comfortable heft. I would not be pushed away so easily again.

“What do you think?” I asked. “Even *you’ve* got to be surprised.”

*“You people... You and your Gluttony... Or is this more than just that?”*

“Here he comes.”

*“Well, whatever. We’ll do things your way then.”*

Not even Envy fully understood what had just happened. But this new weapon fit me like a tailor-made glove. Was it because I created it? Or was there some other reason? Whatever the case was, I figured I could work it out after I took care of Fake Fate, who was mounting another attack.

I pointed the new gunblade at him and shouted words that came to me like they were meant to be. “Catastrophe Rain!”

Each section of the gunblade glowed as a tremendous energy built up within it. The gun was fully charged in an instant, and I pulled the trigger the moment it was ready. A torrent of blood-red bullets streamed out. The gunblade had been limited to single-fire, but now, it was different—the spread wider—and Fake Fate was at such close range that he didn’t have the time or the space to get out of the way.

His face twisted in disgusted shock. “You impostor!” he roared.

Stuck with nowhere else to go, the false Fate brought his sword up as a shield to block the hail of bullets. However, his makeshift shield only defended his vital organs, and he screamed as the bullets tore into him. His greatsword was a poor defensive weapon, and Catastrophe Rain shredded the flesh of his arms,

legs, and shoulders.

My own power swelled with each bullet that landed. I had been stuck on defense for most of this battle, and I reveled in Fake Fate's poor defensive decision.

"I will devour your strength," I said.

"Ridiculous... Why...you're just an...impostor..."

I was getting real sick of him using that word.

*"You're the impostor, damn it!"*

I swung the gunblade with everything I had, letting momentum carry it. It slammed into Fake Fate. A huge, high-pitched clang rang out as his weapon went flying, but Fake Fate only leaned back from the blow.

"I am the real Fate," I said. "Go back to Gluttony where you belong!"

I swung the sword back for a second swipe as my imposter took a step backward. He should have evaded but didn't. I roared as the strike hit and followed up with more. He couldn't understand what was happening. We'd been connected earlier, reading each other's movements. It seemed our connection was severed the moment Envy transformed, setting us on different paths.

Power swelled with me with each strike against Fake Fate.

"I need...more power," grunted Fake Fate. "I don't have...enough time. Just a little longer, and..."

Realizing that he was at a disadvantage, Fake Fate transformed into a mass of darkness, which quickly seeped through the white floor. Before that happened, however, I intended to cut him to pieces.

"What?!"

Or that had been the plan until the floor beneath my feet began to shake. I thought it was Fake Fate's doing at first, but he was busy putting distance between us. It wasn't just coming from below, either. The whole spiritual plane quaked.

From the corner of my eye, I saw the black stain disappear. As it did so, Fake Fate said, “The time for the Door to open has come. Next time...I *will* kill...you...”

*Damn it! He got away!*

Even with Fake Fate gone, the shaking didn’t stop. That meant he was not the source. But what did he mean about the Door?

*No!*

“Envy, what’s going on in the real world?” I asked.

*“Exactly what you think. Everything changed the moment you felled Gemini.”*

“Why didn’t you tell me?!”

*“Because it would have rattled you, and you needed to be fully confident against that thing.”*

The gunblade was right. This was the spiritual plane, and if I’d worried about anything else, I might not have beaten Fake Fate.

*“The capital has started to truly activate. It’s regaining its original functions. The chimeras and defense system are just the beginning.”*

“Are the others okay?”

*“You should know that better than anyone. However, we’re getting the worst of it.”*

The spiritual plane was warping; it was about to collapse. The world Luna had left to protect me from Gluttony was on the verge of disintegrating.

*“It’s trying to go back to its original form,”* said Envy.

“How do we leave?”

*“I don’t know. I thought you would. Guess I was wrong.”*

The ground was crumbling beneath my feet, so I leaped around, trying to buy us time.

“Usually, I’d have already left by now,” I said.

*“The world of darkness closes in. A storm is coming, as they say.”*

“The only way out is through, then.”

I took a deep breath. My every instinct told me not to drop into the world beneath my feet.

Envy cackled at the sight of me. *“So even you’re afraid of something. What a surprise!”*

“What did you expect?!”

*“To the depths of Gluttony... Never thought I’d live to see the day with my own eyes. Age brings all sorts of surprises.”*

“You sure are taking this lightly, seeing as we might not make it out of here.”

*“Well, I’m just a weapon in the end. It all comes down to you. It’s up to you to face a world from which you may not return. I’m just an observer.”*

“An observer...”

Those words made me suddenly lonely. They took me back to when Greed had given me the last of his power and disappeared. The Weapons of Mortal Sin were incredibly powerful, but they were never satisfied. That aside, was this even what they wanted? And if it wasn’t, then perhaps their world was not unlike the one into which I would soon be diving.

*“You scared?”*

“Are you?”

*“I don’t know what fear is. Even if the world down there is filled with the wandering dead, it’s just a new place. Makes no difference to me.”*

“We’re going to find a way back... Back to where Eris is waiting.”

*“Do that, and you’ll earn my respect.”*

The last bit of floor beneath my feet crumbled away.

## Chapter 17:

### Gluttony

FROM THE DEPTHS rose moans that echoed around Envy and I as we continued to plummet, sending shivers down my spine.

*"Shaking in your boots, huh?"*

*"Look who's talking."*

*"Me? I'm having a grand old time. So, this is the world of Gluttony, huh? How horrifying. Eris would probably be crying already."*

Flashes of sanguine red pierced the darkness. The farther we fell, the fresher and rawer the color became. I sensed death. Alarm bells rang in my head, urging me not to go any further. If I'd had better wings I might have been able to fly us away from this place, but the wings I had were useless.

*Envy said that this place would make Eris cry. She's been through so much... That's not easy to imagine.*

*"You think I'm lying?"* This was not Envy's usual, evasive tone. He spoke with thoughtful gravitas. *"We still have time before we hit the bottom. Shall I regale you with a story of the past?"*

*"As long as it's not just you bragging about your accomplishments."*

*"Then rest at ease, and listen."*

*Eris's past...*

I knew that *something* had happened between Eris and Libra, but I had never learned exactly what. The white knights at the royal capital refused to tell me, and Eris herself was hesitant to speak about it. It was traumatizing for her, and I couldn't bring myself to push the subject.

*"Eris has a timorous side,"* said Envy. *"She ran from battle. She ran from me. She even ran to a whole new world. But all she realized upon reaching it was that it was not her home. She did not belong there."*



Until I had awakened to the true power of my Gluttony, I, too, had done nothing but run from the world that valued skills above all else. I had never felt like I fit in, and no matter where I went, I had never felt at home. Perhaps Roxy would have found a way to save me if my Gluttony had never awakened, but even then, I still would have felt trapped. I would have continued to feel out of place, like I did not belong. If I had continued to run aimlessly, then things only would have gotten worse. Nothing good would have been waiting for me at the end of that road.

*“You intrigued Eris, and she began to change. It is unfortunate that she now has nowhere left to run.”*

“Libra...”

*“He is her creator, master, and parent.”*

In the past, a battle had broken out between Eris and Libra. According to Envy, though, the one who did the fighting was Kairos—the former bearer of Gluttony and wielder of Greed. I had met him once before when exploring Myne’s memories, navigating her past in order to set her free. Kairos had been there, and he helped lead me to what I was looking for. Even now, his soul was somewhere inside of me—somewhere inside of my Gluttony—watching over me. He’d said as much when we parted.

*“Kairos gathered allies and fought for independence from the holy beastfolk. Unlike someone I know, he was not a loner.”*

“Shut up. I like being by myself. So what?”

*“Actually, such solitude is common. Such is the power of those who bear the Skills of Mortal Sin. But a battle against the holy beastfolk cannot be fought alone. You now have allies and friends. Kairos, too, was a magnet for like-minded individuals with his bright, caring nature.”*

The holy beastfolk had been small in number, and Kairos’s forces had become harder and harder to control as they’d grown. Their spirits would not weaken, no matter how many were slaughtered. The will of the people could no longer be suppressed. They revolted against long years of oppression, and they wouldn’t rest as long as the holy beastfolk lived.

But the holy beastfolk didn't simply sit back and watch as the rebellion grew. Instead, they found a way to solve their problem without getting their own hands dirty. They implanted a part of themselves in humans, turning them into puppet-like soldiers that wielded fearsome power.

This was the origin of the holy knights. They were mass-produced, and their powerful skills were immediately put to use in battles against the rebel forces. The holy beastfolk were buoyed by the efficacy of the holy knights and the shifting tide of battle, and they poured even more of themselves into their research. The most passionate in this endeavor was none other than Libra himself.

Libra wanted to breed an even stronger, more beautiful, and more perfect holy knight. He realized that a higher percentage of holy beastfolk essence meant a more aggressive, unstable holy knight, but this was controlled through the use of special collars.

*"And as he continued to produce holy knights, a being that was not a holy knight was born."*

"You mean...?"

*"I do. Eris."*

We continued to plummet deeper into the darkness as Envy explored old memories.

*"She was a child with a skill nobody had ever seen before, and this intrigued Libra. He was utterly fascinated. He quickly realized that it was similar to Kairos's skill, so he used Eris as his personal test subject."*

Envy explained that Eris's magical eye skill had been implanted from a monster. That wasn't all Libra did, either. To make her stronger, he altered her body in numerous ways.

*"Eris is more monster than she is human," said Envy. "Perhaps that is why she has never had a place where she felt truly at home. The man who saved her life, Kairos, is also gone."*

"Do you know how to release Eris from the collar she wears?" I asked.

*“If I did, I would have already told you. All I remember is that Kairos touched Eris’s neck, and the collar came loose.”*

“He just touched it?”

*“I don’t know what he did. Then he left Eris there and marched toward his final battle with Libra. Neither of us knows what happened next. All Eris found after she was released was a world on the verge of destruction and holy knights who had been released from holy beastfolk control.”*

Eris and Envy had then worked together to rebuild. However, the holy knights were conceited and arrogant to a fault. Keeping them in order was no easy feat. Such a task would take a long, long time. However, two holy knights proved trustworthy, and they were made Eris’s kin—the white knights who now reside in the royal capital. But this only served to show how difficult it was to bring order to the holy knights. Only two among their vast numbers had been worthy of the honor.

I myself had been in and out of the capital as a holy knight and knew these troubles firsthand. When I had visited to report that Aaron had made me the lord of Hausen, I had been criticized *and* had a sword drawn on me during my royal audience.

*“To build a new kingdom and unite it, clear and simple rules were a necessity. Even the act of giving the holy knights preferential treatment was in the service of preparing for the inevitable battle ahead.”*

“The battle against Libra?”

*“Exactly. By creating a harsh environment, one in which skills are valued above all else, we sought to create a new, all-powerful being—another bearer of a Skill of Mortal Sin.”*

However, Eris had abandoned Envy and left the kingdom. She had said it was to prepare for the battle with Libra, but in truth, she could not see their plan through to completion.

*“Eris couldn’t bear to do to someone else what Libra had done to her. Did she not appear before you when I was trying to kill Roxy?”*

“Oh, that...”

Eris had told me not to get in the way of Roxy's murder, and I'd been furious.

*"That was very like her," said Envy. "Her methods are clumsy."*

"What does *that* mean?"

*"She couldn't stop me herself, so she used you."*

"Oh..."

So Eris had intentionally angered me in order to have me *save* Roxy.

"That's so convoluted," I said.

*"That's who she is. What she says and what she actually means are often two different things. In comparison, you are very easy to read."*

"Is that a compliment?"

*"Does it sound like one?"*

"Envy... You and I are never going to get along."

The voices of the dead grew louder, and the sickening, humid air against my skin grew hotter. I looked down into the darkness and clenched Envy tightly.

*"It's time. We'll save the rest for later."*

"So we're finally here, then."

We were just about to arrive at the core of my Gluttony.

## Chapter 18:

### The Cries of the Fallen

IT WAS STRANGE. I knew that I was still technically in the spiritual plane, yet I felt a stifling, humid heat. Perhaps it was made stronger by the fact that the world around us was rendered in shades of burning magma, or perhaps it was the fetid heat emanating from the dead as they lurched toward me.

*"Someone's scared."*

*"Look who's talking."*

*"This is so much fun. It's like a tour of Gluttony."*

This place was a literal hellscape—a world of eternal torment with no escape and no mercy. The souls here writhed in the heat as if they were burning alive or otherwise crawled along the ground. They focused solely on attacking me, their hearts and minds lost long ago. I cut down whatever drew too close.

*"They just keep coming."*

*"No matter how many I cut down, it never ends..."*

*"They're all dead anyway. I feel that they have all coalesced into a single entity."*

*"Which means what exactly?"*

*"Cut down one or two, and they'll simply regenerate. There is only one way to truly fell them."*

*"Annihilate this world entirely."*

*"Exactly. Though, I doubt that's even possible."*

If our assumption was correct, then the dead we saw here were little more than fragments of my Gluttony—infinitesimal slivers, no less. They rose again no matter how many I slew.

*"Is this a version of hell...?"*

“What?”

Envy’s words gnawed at me. So many of those attacking us cried as they did so.

*“Are they suffering, or...? Well, I don’t really care either way. Fate, are you prepared?”*

“Prepared for what?”

I had my hands full slicing the dead all around me and didn’t understand what Envy was getting at. But as the dead surrounding me fell, I noticed someone approaching. It was the first holy knight I had killed. And with the skills I’d received from him—the skills I’d taken, rather—Aaron had adopted me, and I myself had become a holy knight.

I’d taken everything from this holy knight—his skills, his stats, even his soul. And then, when I’d finally returned to Seifort, I’d found that he had been resurrected as a soulless nightwalker, consumed by a hatred directed solely at myself. He looked the same now as he stood before me. His hatred kept him from being completely consumed by my Gluttony, so he waited here, boiling with rage, for the day I would finally come.

“You just don’t give up, do you?” I muttered.

*Let’s put an end to this,* I thought. I had places to be, and I would not let him, or anything else, stop me. *I will not die here. Not at your hands.*

“Hado Vlerick!” I shouted.

“FAAAAATE!”

Hado had lost his human form long ago and was now reduced to a misshapen mess. His mutated body emanated a foul stench. Even his nightwalker form had been better than this.

He swung arms that were thick as logs, spraying ooze at me. I leaped backward and out of the way. The dead who were hit by the ooze fell to the ground, writhing in agony as they melted into pools of viscous liquid. That liquid then congealed and was absorbed back into Hado’s body.

“Did he devour them?!” I asked.

*“It would seem so. It appears that he has perhaps received a portion of your Gluttony skill, or is somehow able to mimic it.”*

Hado grew even more disgusting as he spoke. “Fate... Fate... I will...eat you. You will...release me!”

Flailing, haphazard attacks were sent my way as he lurched toward me, devouring more souls as he did so. His body ballooned, and he looked as if he were about to explode from all the hatred within him. At some point, he’d stopped calling my name, and his own cries joined the screaming choir of the dead.

*“Such a pitiful thing he has become. What will you do, Fate?”*

“I...”

I raised the gunblade and gripped it tighter. Hado continued to pull the dead into himself, absorbing them. He could no longer recognize me. In time, he would be little more than an enormous, fleshy mass. I let the gunblade drop to my side. Hado had even lost the ability to speak.

*“He could not control Gluttony, and now he is being consumed himself. How about it? Feeling hungry?”*

“Let it go. This is the end. Goodbye, Hado Vlerick.”

We would never see each other again. I watched as he fell into whatever his eternal slumber might be in this place.

Then, I heard another familiar voice.

“My, my, what a coincidence. To think I’d meet you in a place like this.”

The voice came from behind Hado. The man who’d spoken had purple hair, the same color as Hado’s and Memil’s. He was the oldest son of the Vlerick family, and he had perished at the royal capital. He had wished for a collapse of the natural order as we knew it and longed to bring an end to a world that revolved around skills.

“Rafale...” I muttered.

Rafale Vlerick slowly strode forward until he stood directly before me. He was no longer the undead archdemon created by Shin’s power. Instead, he

maintained his human form and was dressed as a holy knight.

He kicked the pile of flesh that was now Hado, his face contorting in disgust.

“Right up until the end, that oaf...” he said. “He was like a spurned lover, never able to let you go. You’re so very popular.”

“And what about you?”

“Me? Don’t be ridiculous,” Rafale said as I leveled the gunblade at him. “A battle? You versus me? Now why would we have to do that?”

“Because I killed you...”

“No, you didn’t. I was already dead. Shin had complete control of me by then. All you did was eat some leftovers.”

I said nothing.

“Well, in any case, that battle came to an end, and I ended up trapped in this place. And I must say,” Rafale grinned at me, and though he saw my grip on the gunblade tighten, he didn’t move. “I’m having a wonderful time.”

“You’re *what*?” I said, perplexed.

“Are you aware you look like a complete idiot right now?”

“Shut up!”

How could anyone say they were having a wonderful time in a place like this?! Had Rafale gone completely insane?

“Every soul consumed by Gluttony is gathered in this place, along with all of their knowledge.”

“Knowledge?”

“Indeed. I’ve always loved researching ancient times, but being born into the Vlerick family meant I was forced into the position of holy knight.”

So that was why Rafale had continued his research in secret, even after becoming a holy knight. And then, of course, he had discovered the slumbering Shin.

“Here, I’m free to live as I see fit. That said, I *do* wish we could do a little



something about all the noise.”

That’s *what he’s asking for? A “little something” to be done about the wailing of the dead and their burning souls?*

“You’re pretty weird, Rafale,” I said.

“That makes two of us. You look plenty weird from where I’m standing, too, and you can’t even see it yourself.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Oh my. I can scarcely believe it. You’ll never win Roxy’s heart with *that* attitude.”

“What?!”

“To think I lost to someone like you... How very embarrassing.”

“Those are two different things!”

*And why did the subject of Roxy come up anyway? Wait... No way... No way!*

“You’ve been spying on me?!” I cried.

“Finally, he gets it. Someone I know recommended it, saying it was interesting. So, I gave it a shot. There’s nothing else to do around here, really. You always leave me rolling around on the floor laughing.”

“Don’t treat me like I’m your entertainment!”

*Hmm? What did he mean by ‘someone?’ Who told him that?* I gave Rafale a puzzled look.

He turned and stared off into the distance. “I’m indebted to him. He wants to see you, too.”

“Who?”

“You’ll know soon enough. That’s why I’m here. You weren’t going to get to him on your own, so he asked for my help. I couldn’t refuse, even though it meant helping someone I despise.”

Rafale walked through the shambling hordes of the dead. They did not respond to him at all, perhaps because he was one of them. The moment /

neared, however, they lurched forward to attack.

“Do hurry up, would you?” said Rafale.

“Do you have any idea what I’m dealing with here?”

“Enough. Shut your mouth and follow me, or I’ll leave you behind.”

“You damn bastard.”

Here I thought Rafale had finally turned over a new leaf, but he was still a dick. Even now, I couldn’t stand him.

## Chapter 19:

### He Who Waits in the Depths

I PUSHED THROUGH THE DEAD that had gathered, hacking my way past them when necessary.

*"They never end."*

*"Nope."*

*"Not easy being popular, is it?"*

*"I don't know if I'd call *this* popular."*

Envy's comment did raise a question, though. *Why are the dead flocking to me like this?* They didn't even glance in Rafale's direction. It was as if I were the only thing they could see. Was it because I hadn't been devoured? Was it because I still wasn't dead? Or was it because I was the bearer of Gluttony? Was it possible that the dead gathered around me in the hope that I might save them?

*"What's wrong? Lost in thought?"*

*"I'm thinking about all the souls here. What do you make of it?"*

*"I have no way of knowing. Do you not feel anything yourself?"*

*"I..."*

Envy chuckled. *"I had thought you would be consumed by your Gluttony by coming here,"* said Envy. *"After all, this is its deepest depths. There is no place with a stronger influence than here."*

*"I thought the same, but..."*

I had struggled against my Gluttony all this time, but now that I was so close to it...

*"Your condition seems stable."*

*"I don't want to think about it, but you may be right."*

*"You mean to say that perhaps you are now capable of controlling it?"*

"No. Not when that false Fate is still able to attack me in the real world."

Fake Fate was like an embodiment of my Gluttony. Was it because I had driven him away that I could maintain a sound mind here? I didn't think so. In the end, I hadn't finished off the fake version of myself. He had merely escaped. Even now, I could feel our connection.

"We haven't settled things yet," I said.

*"We are layering conjecture upon conjecture. We have far too little in the way of facts. We don't even know what's going on around us."*

"Then all we can do for now is follow Rafale."

*"And yet, the dead refuse to open a path for you. You truly are popular."*

"If I could give it to you, I would."

I didn't want even a fraction of this kind of popularity.

I sliced through another of the dead, and a stranger's memory flashed through my mind like a bolt of lightning coursing through my skull. It was a pointless scene—a man who killed and killed only to be slain at the hands of Gluttony himself. That man, I realized, was the first person I ever killed. He was one of the thieves who had tried to break into the castle. His memories were filled with hatred, but they were now a part of me.

"I feel sick," I said.

*"What's wrong?"*

"It's nothing."

It wasn't something that happened every time I cut a soul down, but I occasionally caught glimpses of memories belonging to people I had never known, people I assumed had been slain by Kairos. They flowed into me, trying to become a part of me.

*"Something's wrong,"* said Envy. *"You shouldn't go on."*

"That's not an option."

Rafale was much farther ahead of me. I was in danger of being left behind.

“He’s not going to wait for us,” I said. “Besides, I feel like I have to see what’s up there.”

*“You will never change, will you?”*

As I ran, a long-deteriorated ancient monster appeared, barreling through the dead. I had defeated this monster on my way to the imperial capital. Its upper body was human; its lower body was that of a snake. It was a lamia, one as black as shadow.

*“That’s a big one,”* said Envy.

It dawned on me that I had killed far more—overwhelmingly more—monsters than people, though I couldn’t speak for Kairos.

“Is that an illusion?”

I couldn’t believe my eyes. The dead were transforming into monsters.

*What does it mean? All the dead here are humans who had been devoured by Gluttony. They have to be. But...*

“No. That’s no illusion,” I muttered.

The dead before me continued to change shape. They all took the forms of monsters I recognized, and all were completely black.

“Are these dead souls also monsters?”

*“You really don’t know, do you? Or is it that you’ve just avoided looking at the truth all this time?”*

I knew what the gunblade was getting at. The Gluttony skill activated when I killed humans and when I killed monsters. It didn’t activate for anything else, such as animals.

*“Only humans and monsters carry skills and stats. Have you ever wondered why that is?”*

“Because God gave them those powers, right?”

*“Yes. In which case, why was there a need to give those powers to monsters?”*

“Probably just one of those ‘trials’ God seems so fond of giving us.”

People raised their stats by killing monsters with their skills, and the spheres they received from that helped them to level up.

*“That’s not an answer. Defeating monsters earns you spheres. As does killing humans. Why?”*

The dead in front of me were changing form, becoming monsters. If there was a meaning at all to it, then...

“Are you saying monsters were once humans?”

*“Bingo,”* said Envy, complimenting me in its own belittling way.

“They were human?!” I asked, suddenly nauseous.

*“At their core, yes. You’ve seen the soul decay that can take place in the Domain of E yourself. If a person’s mind and power are not in balance, their physical appearance is affected. Skills are no different.”*

“But I’ve never seen or heard of that.”

*“Of course you haven’t. All these people here now were selected. Those who do not meet the skill requirements become monsters. Over the course of thousands of years, they’ve come to look like new types of monsters altogether.”*

So the heart and mind you were born with was different from the skills you were given. This meant that the weak skills the forsaken received were no accident, no mere whim of fate. If you didn’t meet the requirements of your skills, you became a monster. According to Envy, this was what was happening to the dead who stood before me.

*“That wasn’t very nice of Greed, hiding the truth from you like that.”*

Greed spoke his mind to a fault, but he was considerate in his own way. Omitting the truth had been an act of kindness on his part.

“It’s not out of character for him.”

*“So what now? Will the guilt keep you from fighting?”*

“No. I’m just glad to finally have an answer to a question that’s plagued me this whole time.”

It had never made any sense. Why did monsters see humans as their mortal enemies and attack so persistently? Why did they feed on humans? Perhaps it was deep-seated enmity. Their hatred remained, and it drove them in their battle for survival against the humans.

Unlike the dead that I cut down earlier, none of these monsters' memories flowed into me, no matter how many I cut down.

"I think monsters are a different kind of species," I said. "Their souls differ from human souls."

*"If you say so, then I imagine it must be true."*

There was something lonely in Envy's voice. Perhaps we'd touched on the gunblade's past. Not that it would tell me if I asked.

I ran after Rafale, cutting down the monsters before me without hesitation. A mountain of corpses piled at my feet before eventually melting into a black liquid that seeped into the ground.

I had no idea how much time had passed. When I looked back at where we had come from, a long, black path stretched off into the distance. The monsters were gone, and none of the dead souls remained. It was suddenly quiet, and only Rafale and I were in the burning red world of my Gluttony.

"This is the core of Gluttony," said Rafale, coming to a sudden stop.

"Rafale..."

"It's time. I owe you thanks for one thing and one thing only. You have my gratitude for taking care of Memil." Rafale turned to face me. "What will you do when you next battle your father, I wonder? I can't wait to see."

"What do you mean?"

Rafale didn't answer. He was gone. In his place was a man with bewitching purple eyes, tanned skin, and teeth so white that they gleamed when he grinned at me. However, his most striking feature was his fiery red hair.

"Hey, Fate. It's been a long time. Fancy meeting you here...is what I'd like to say if I hadn't been expecting you."

In his hand was the black sword, Greed.





## Chapter 20:

### Kairos, Wielder of the Black Sword

THE FIERY HELLSCAPE of Gluttony was cloaked in silence. The dead stood at a distance, waiting with bated breath but refusing to get too close.

“Sir Kairos,” I said.

“Didn’t I tell you to knock it off with the ‘sir’ stuff? We’re friends. That said...” Kairos pointed Greed at me. “I entrusted Greed to you, didn’t I?”

“I...”

He seemed angry that I had lost Greed. I understood how he felt. His passing the sword to me had been an act of trust—a promise—and I had broken it.

“You two sure are troublemakers,” said Kairos, slowly settling into a fighting stance. “So I guess we have to do this all over again. Don’t expect it to be easy. If you want Greed, you’ll have to take him from me.”



“You mean, I have to fight you for him?”

Kairos grinned in response, but his resolute gaze said he was deadly serious. “This is how things are done in this world. Nobody knows that better than you.”

“And there’s no other way?”

“This world has no need for two bearers of Gluttony. That means that the true bearer must be crowned.”

Kairos leaped at me in a flash, raising Greed before bringing the sword down with such speed that a blue light trailed behind it.

“It’s what Greed wants!” he said.

The high-pitched scream of metal against metal echoed around us. I’d somehow managed to bring the gunblade up in time to defend myself. Still, Kairos’s words left me confused.

“Greed too?” I asked.

“Indeed. Just like Gluttony, the black sword has no need for two wielders.”

“And we have to make that crystal clear?”

“Nobody wants that question left hanging in the air unanswered.”

The black sword and the black gunblade sparked as they fought for dominance, but Kairos was gaining the upper hand and growing in power.

*So, Greed is in on this, too, just like Kairos said...*

Kairos pushed my gunblade away. “Greed and I are coming at you with everything we have. Surpass us, or else!” he shouted in a rough voice.

His smile was gone. In its place was a look of such bloodlust that I felt Kairos’s gaze alone could impale me. If he was going all-out, failure here meant death. And death in the spiritual plane meant the complete negation of my existence. Kairos knew that full well, which was why he brought his blade back around to face me. The intent in his eyes was clear.

“That’s the spirit,” he said. “Let’s go, Fate!”

My body moved on its own, parrying the incoming black sword. All the

experience I'd gained in battle was embedded in my very being, and even here in the spiritual plane I could put it all to use. That was my strength. That was what I had earned through all my training here with Luna and Greed.

"Yes, that's the look," said Kairos. "Those are the eyes of a bearer of Gluttony. Pure red and glimmering."

"Kairos!" I shouted.

Each stab, each swing of the gunblade felt eerily light. I no longer cared about the horrifying place I was in, instead solely focused on the battle before me. As our battle raged on, I began to feel at one with this world. So much so that I could feel what was happening to it. I could read Kairos's every movement. He moved faster than my eyes could follow, but I evaded each and every one of his multiple slashes with ease.

"It's becoming a part of you," Kairos uttered. "You're different from me, just like I thought."

"What do you mean, 'different?'"

Our swords clashed once more as we pitted our strength against one another.

"You know so little about your true nature," said Kairos.

"What do you mean?"

"You came all the way down here to the depths, but you've retained your sense of self."

"So have you..."

Our fight continued without a clear victor. The two of us attacked, defended, and dodged as countless strikes sought a decisive blow. Kairos kept Greed in his black sword form, as if telling me that he didn't need to bother transforming it.

"You don't get it, do you?" said Kairos. "The reason that Rafale and I can keep our forms in this place is because of you. It's thanks to you, Fate."

"But how?"

"You heard it from Greed, didn't you? I was consumed by my Gluttony. And I know you know what that means."



“I...”

“Rafale wasn’t so different. He lost himself to soul decay. But upon being devoured, he returned to his former self. He couldn’t have done that on his own. So...who did?”

Gluttony? It couldn’t have been me. So why was Kairos saying that it was?

“You think it was Gluttony that created this world? No. It was the effect of a different power.”

I gasped.

“It was you,” Kairos went on. “It *is* you, Fate. You wished for it, so we came back to our senses here in forms that can exist independently.”

Was that possible? Rafale had devolved into something no longer human, but when I defeated him—when I devoured him—I had wanted him to watch what I became. *But what of Kairos?* When I went to save Myne from her own past, I had wanted help. Did that mean I had summoned Kairos from the depths of my Gluttony? Perhaps what Kairos said was true.

“We’re reaching our limits,” said Kairos. “Both of us. But if you try to return to what you were, then at some point...”

“What are you trying to say?”

“You must use me in order to know yourself, to understand who you really are.”

Kairos grinned and pushed me away.

“What?”

I felt a change in him. It was similar to soul decay—a transformation from man to monster. Two sharp horns sprouted from his head. They curled like snakes, their tips pointed directly at me as if to intimidate.

“This is what you fear, Fate. You fear being consumed by your Gluttony. You fear losing yourself... You fear becoming something that only...knows...endless...appetite...”

“Kairos!”

I stepped forward.

*“Stop,” said Envy. “You cannot save him. You can only kill him. Or do you have what Kairos said? Can you use your power to bring him back?”*

*“I...”*

I didn't. Kairos had put too much faith in me. If I could change him back, it would mean I essentially had complete control over my Gluttony. If I could do that, I never would have fallen into this world in the first place.

Ever since I had awakened to Gluttony, I had been at its mercy. Now I knew that I still was. Yet, Kairos insisted I was different. He told me to use him so I could understand who I really was.

I was the son of Dean Graphite, the product of a holy beastfolk and a human. Of all the skills that existed, I had received the sinister skill of Gluttony. What was my relation to the skill? I didn't know. Hadn't I received the skill by chance? What more meaning could there be?

*“Here he comes. Get ready, Fate.”*

There was no time to sit and dwell on it. Kairos closed in, his transformation complete, and swung his black sword straight at me. He was like a demon in human form, powered by enormous amounts of magical energy. I didn't want to believe it was even possible for such a creature to exist—a being consumed by Gluttony.

“Now I'm glad it never happened,” I said. “I'm glad that, back when I fought the Heavenly Calamity, I never lost myself and became *that*.”

*“Agreed.”*

“Don't act like you weren't a part of it! You were practically the cause of it!”

Envy chuckled.

*Don't try to shrug it off with a laugh!* Once we got back to the real world, I was going to make sure that Eris heard all about this. Still, for all its faults, Envy was a good, reliable weapon.

Kairos disappeared from sight. Greed flew straight for my neck the next instant. Before I was even aware of it, the black gunblade raised to block the

strike. Sparks flew as Kairos and I leaped away from each other.

*"I think I'm getting used to this place," said Envy. "I borrowed your right arm for a moment."*

"Envy, I'm warning you..."

*"Controlling my wielder's body is my specialty. You know that. And taking over their minds is my calling."*

"Thanks for telling me what I don't need to know. I'm grateful you saved my life, but do *not* take over my mind here in the spiritual plane. If you do, I'll..."

*"You'll die."*

"Why did you have to say that?"

*"I'm joking. Kairos is more than you can handle on your own. You might hate it, but I'm going to help you out anyway. You can thank me later."*

I could barely track Kairos's movements, but Envy was able to respond to his attacks on my behalf. Nonetheless, we were still wholly on the defensive and didn't have a chance to launch a counterattack. Kairos was far too fast and much too accurate. Each strike was a potential killing blow. It was hard to believe Kairos had lost his own will.

As the battle went on, the monstrous Kairos realized his sword alone would not be enough, and he began transforming it.

"He can do that?!" I cried.

*"This is...not good."*

It was the black bow, and Kairos was readying its secret technique.

"Not so fast!" I shouted, bringing the gunblade up and firing.

At the same time, the transformed black bow let loose a streak of black lightning. The Bloody Ptarmigan and Catastrophe Rain attacks collided. Red bullets met branching lightning, the two forces nullifying one another.

At that moment, I felt something mysterious flowing inside.

*Should I continue fighting the demon Kairos has become?* At the end of our battle, we both knew one thing for certain: The loser would be devoured. As

bearers of Gluttony, the inability to run was a core part of ourselves.



## Chapter 21:

### The Real Me

I WAS DEEP IN MY GLUTTONY, but this was not the sanctuary of white Luna had created for me. It was a place of strife and tension that threatened to corrode my mind. It was something I had to get used to.

Even though I was surrounded by a world of terrifying, magma-like red, I felt my heart calming little by little. Perhaps I was just imagining it, but I felt myself slowly becoming a part of the place, as though we were becoming one and the same.

*“What are you doing?! Prepare yourself!”* shouted Envy.

Envy’s shout ripped me from my reverie and reminded me that I was locked in battle against Kairos.

“Damn it,” I spat, annoyed that my concentration had slipped.

*“Something’s happening to you, Fate. I need you to stay focused right now.”*

“Yeah, tell me something I don’t know.”

The more I fought Kairos, the more I felt myself slipping into my Gluttony. It wasn’t something I could consciously control. It was more like I’d been brought here for it to happen. If Envy hadn’t been controlling my body, I would have been long dead, too. The gunblade was not impressed at my lack of fighting ability.

*“I am not going to die down here with you. We have to get back to Eris. And soon!”*

Envy had already told me the situation in the real world wasn’t good back in the real world. And it was because of something much more dangerous than the chimeras and the holy beast we had killed. I knew I had to focus on the battle at hand, but I had to ask... Who or what was back there on the surface?

Kairos unleashed another Bloody Ptarmigan, which I met with an attack of my own. It was then as the explosions rang out, that Envy answered my question.

*"You're going to kill her."*

"What?!"

That couldn't be... Could it? My consciousness was here in my Gluttony, but what was happening to my body back in the real world? Whenever I'd been with Luna, her world of pure white protected me, and my body in the real world simply slept. Circumstances were different now, though. My body was up and awake.

*"The imperial capital has regained its functions, and its defense systems are growing stronger,"* explained Envy. *"The battle is growing fiercer. More than that, it is you who is putting everyone's lives in danger."*

"You mean...back in Galia, I'm..."

*"You're going berserk. I told you before. It's not good for us to be here."*

I was a starved monster ready to devour any and every soul I could find. It seemed I had become the very thing I had always feared.

*"You turned into a monster when you devoured the holy beast. The Door to Distant Lands is the least of our troubles now. Not only that, but the imperial capital has awakened."*

The gunblade seemed to be enjoying all the chaos even though it was supposed to be worried about Eris. But we couldn't just sit here chatting with Kairos attacking with growing strength and ferocity.

*"Eris felt you inside of the monster, and she sent me here as her last hope."*

"So, right now..."

*"She's fighting you on her own."*

Eris specialized in support skills. She wasn't capable of keeping up a sustained battle against me, especially when I'd turned into something monstrous.

"What about Roxy and Myne?" I asked.

*"As far as I'm aware, they still haven't reached Eris."*

*Hold on, Eris.*

Eris was still under Libra's control. After spending time with her, I knew that,

even now, she fought to free herself from that very control. And on top of that, she had me to deal with. Eris was the type of person who was always outspoken except for when it came to what was most important. That was something she kept under lock and key.

“She’s got so much to deal with already, and now she has to fight me, too,” I muttered.

In Tetra, I’d told Eris that I would support and help her, but I ended up doing the exact opposite.

*“So, what are you going to do, Fate? Push forward or stop?”*

“There’s only one answer to that question.”

*“As I thought. Why else would I be here?”*

I cut through the incoming Bloody Ptarmigan. Kairos didn’t stop to rest, though, and fired Bloody Ptarmigan after Bloody Ptarmigan. Retreating never once crossed my mind.

That strange, mysterious sensation once again flowed through me as I cut down his attacks. I felt it fill in the gaps in my weaknesses and where I was totally lacking. I was no longer afraid of it. My body filled with power as I united with the world of Gluttony. The feeling only grew stronger as Kairos transformed the black bow into the black gauntlets.

The countless black thread that shot from his fingertips to form a shield around their wielder had the power to cut through anything. I had used the weapon myself and knew exactly how powerful it was. If I made even one misstep, I would be on the receiving end of innumerable attacks that would wrap around me like a spider’s web around its prey.

*“Fate!”*

“Let’s do this, Envy!”

Before the black threads overwhelmed me and we ran out of room to move, we rushed directly toward Kairos himself. Black threads moved like waves as I closed in, and I knocked them away with the gunblade. I fired countless times. The threads shot out in every direction. Within the chaos, power swelled within

me.

We were so close to reaching Kairos. However, he knew that just as well as I did. He let out a roar that made my ears ring, and the black threads glowed a golden hue.

*"This is so very, very bad,"* muttered Envy.

*"The only way out is through!"*

I was *not* going to back down. But if Dimension Destruction were fully engaged, we would have no way to escape.

*There's still time. There's still a way.*

The black threads glowed gold as they cut through the world of Gluttony and reached for me. I fired Catastrophe Rain in response, but the bullets were entirely outnumbered, and more and more threads gathered.

*This way,* said a voice in my head.

I followed the direction of the voice and saw a path to Kairos open before me. I took off without a moment's hesitation. The path would not remain open long.

*Run through it.*

I knew that voice from somewhere. It felt like ages had passed since I'd last heard it, but it hadn't actually been very long at all. My legs moved as if powered by it.

I closed the distance to Kairos in an instant. From here, he wouldn't be able to properly control his gauntlets. It was so powerful that minute, precise movements were extremely difficult. At this range, he was in danger of wrapping himself up in his own attack.

Kairos let out another roar as he canceled the secret technique and transformed the gauntlets into the black shield.

*He canceled Dimension Destruction in the middle of activating it! Is that even possible?!* But he hadn't merely canceled one secret technique. He'd chained it right into another. Kairos's ability with the black sword clearly surpassed my own. He used the third level secret technique, Reflection Fortress, which would allow him to reflect any attack back onto his enemy with its power multiplied.

But I wasn't done yet. I held the gunblade in a low stance.

*Knock it away.*

It was the voice again, a voice I knew well. It was always so arrogant and conceited, but it was always there for me when I needed it most.

*You can do it. You know you can, Fate.*

When I heard those words, I felt confident and in control of my power, just like always.

*Just you watch me.*

I roared as I aimed at Kairos's shield and swung the gunblade with everything I had. It didn't matter what kind of wall he put up; I was going to knock it down. The only person capable of wielding Greed was *me*.

The shock of the strike was more than I could have imagined, and it ran through my entire body to my very core. Wrapped in that energy, I struck the shield again.

"I hear you loud and clear. Come back to me, Greed!"

I pushed into the Reflection Fortress and knocked it free. The world around us rumbled, and the world of Gluttony beyond the Reflection Fortress shook wildly. High above us, the black shield flew out of Kairos's grasp and through the air.

## Chapter 22:

### The Return of Greed

EVEN WITHOUT GREED, the demonic Kairos didn't stop. Sharp claws stretched from his fingers as he raised his arms before bringing them down to slice me into pieces.

*"Fate! Up there!"* shouted Envy.

I evaded Kairos's claws and looked up. The black shield in the sky had transformed into the black scythe. Not only that, it was already morphing into the second level secret technique, Deadly Inferno.

*So Greed can do that even at a range this far from his wielder, huh?*

If Deadly Inferno even grazed its target, it'd be a killing blow. My father had stopped the attack with ease, but the same feat wouldn't be so simple for me.

*"Now! Finish this!"*

"Kairos..."

Even after all this, I hesitated. We were in the spiritual plane, in the depths of Gluttony. Was it really okay to kill Kairos here? Perhaps this was a battle from which there was no return for Kairos.

Deadly Inferno was not going to wait for me to make up my mind, though. It spun straight for me at high speed.

*"Fate!"* cried Envy.

The whirring of the scythe grew closer as it sliced through the air. I faced my foe head-on.

"Sir Kairos..." I said.

The next instant, I ran the black gunblade through his heart. The black scythe missed me by mere millimeters a moment later, its blade biting deep into the ground behind me.

The demonic Kairos began to crumble before me. His intimidating horns, his

flesh-ripping claws, the sharp light in his eyes—all of it disintegrated as if sublimating into the air. Kairos's memories flashed through my mind, though it was less memory and more a sensation.

It was as if I *were* Kairos. But the feeling was fleeting, fragmentary, and unclear. It was even hazier than what I had gone through to free Myne from her past, and much remained obscured as if by fog. All the same, I felt it. I felt that I had become Kairos.

"We're finally...linked..." muttered Kairos.

"Kairos! What is this?!"

Kairos had returned to his usual form, but his deterioration continued. He was disintegrating, blowing away like sand in the wind. I hadn't been able to do anything for him.

"Do not mourn this passing. I was dead anyway. Besides," said Kairos, reaching out with a weak hand to push a finger at my chest. "I'll always be here. And that will never change."

He'd told me that we were connected through Gluttony. That's what I thought he was talking about. Kairos must have known this because he shook his head.

"You've always been kind of thick, haven't you?" he said. "Then again, that's probably the reason you've made it this far. It's why Greed has had such a hard time with you." Kairos looked over at Greed, now back in the form of its black sword, and chuckled. "I'm returning to you, Fate. You'll understand then."

"Sir Kairos?" I said.

"I told you to knock it off with the 'sir' stuff. We've come *this* far, and you *still* insist on titles. Jeez. Anyway, don't lose Greed again, you hear?"

"Understood."

"I'm sorry that everything rests on your shoulders. But you'd never have been born otherwise. You really... You really don't get it, do you?"

I didn't know what Kairos was getting at, but he assured me I would understand soon. He had no reason to lie here in the very heart of my Gluttony.

“Until next time, Fate.”

“We’ll meet again.”

Kairos looked slightly shocked at my words, and then he was gone.

“Sir Kairos...” I said.

The sand-like grains of Kairos turned into motes of light that were pulled into my body. It was similar to a kind of fusion, but at the same time, it was as if parts of me that were once missing had returned to where they belonged.

A shockwave flashed through my head, hitting me so hard that I forgot to even breathe.

“So *that’s* what he meant,” I muttered, realization hitting me.

*That explains it. I finally understand.*

Now I knew why Fake Fate loathed me with such fervor, and what Kairos really meant when he’d said he was inside of me. I even knew why Rafale no longer had any reason to fight me. I understood it all. I understood everything. I now knew why it was that I’d been able to maintain my sanity and sense of self here in the depths of my Gluttony. I knew everything.

“I... I...”

“Now you know, Fate.”

The voice that called to me was one I knew all too well. It came from a black sword that was currently plunged into the ground behind me. The sword shifted into human form and approached.

“You sure know how to keep a sword waiting,” he said.

“I’m sorry.”

“It ain’t worth worrying about. Besides, I got a chance to catch up with an old pal.”

Greed yawned so casually that I couldn’t help but elbow him sharply in the ribs.

“What the hell, Greed?!” I said. “Why’d you have to go and do something so reckless?!”



“Because there was no other way. But, look. I’m back, aren’t I?”

“Greed!”

I elbowed him a second time. I must have hit a soft spot because Greed dropped to the floor, writhing.

“Come on, Fate! Is this how you welcome back your most trusted partner?!”

“Don’t give me that!”

This was nothing like a moving reunion. Yet, at the same time, it was very much in keeping with our relationship.

*“Hey, lovebirds. Don’t you think it’s about time we got back to the real world?”*

Envy’s tone let us know how unimpressed the gunblade was by our antics. It was still worried about Eris, who was trying to deal with me going berserk. She was definitely in a tight spot.

My berserker mode had cooled by this point, though. I knew this because when I closed my eyes, I could see the outside world. I’d stopped completely and now merely stood in place. But calm and quiet didn’t necessarily guarantee safety, so we had to hurry back.

“You heading back? Need a hand getting there?” asked Greed.

“No, I’m good. I know the way now.”

“I see... Then let me tag along.”

Greed reached out a hand. It brought back memories. We’d done this before. And now it was time to head back to a world where we all felt alive.

“We’ll go back together,” I said.

I took Greed’s hand in my own. There was much I wanted to ask my father. Like whether or not I should even call him my father. It was a doubt that nagged at me, something he would have to answer for.

The real me. Back when I had no space in my heart for generosity I may not have accepted the truth. Now that I knew, however, I felt somehow at peace. It was a peace of mind, an openness of the heart, that I owed entirely to the

kindness of those whom I called friends.

Light rained down on us, leading us back to the real world. This light filled us, became one with us, and when we lost our forms entirely, it lifted us from the world of red and carried us upward.

The quiet dead gathered where I once stood as if following after me. I watched them for a time, listening to their moans. They, too, were a part of me, a part I could never forget. I would think of them whenever my Gluttony devoured another life.

This place was a home for souls. That was what I was.

I looked up in the direction of home—the real world. It was no longer the blood-red world of the past but the bright blue of the future. And it was in that future that I found hope.

I was who I was because my mother had given her own life so that I might live.

## Chapter 23:

### Eris's Release

**M**Y SWORD WAS LEVELED at Eris's neck, frozen in place. *This* was why Envy had been in such a rush to get back, and we had made it just in the nick of time. Eris was on the floor, weak. Beside her lay the horns that had sprouted from my head earlier.

It seemed that—much like Kairos in my Gluttony—I had turned into some kind of demon. The overwhelming amount of magical energy in me had caused me to transform and go berserk. Then, I had turned on Eris and attacked her. Perhaps the demon-Kairos I'd faced in the spiritual plane had, in fact, been a reflection of what I'd become in the real world.

I looked at myself in the reflection of the black sword's blade. Both of my eyes were still a terrifying red.

"Eris," I said.

There was no response. I looked up at the sky and saw countless pitch-black cubes hovering above us. They must have been part of Mercadia's defense systems, but they weren't attacking.

Nonetheless, I took Eris in my arms and moved somewhere with cover just to be safe. I still couldn't sense Roxy or Myne anywhere nearby. They would have tried to get here as soon as they could, which meant that something may have gotten in their way.

"Dad..."

The black cubes began to form into a geometrical shape. It looked like a magical seal.

"We need to get to safety," I said.

*"How about that building over there?"*

Most of the buildings in Mercadia had been completely leveled in the battle against the holy beast and the chimeras...if not by me after I went berserk. The

buildings had once been a symbol of the intelligence and wisdom of those living in the capital, but they were now a sorry sight. However, Greed had found a building that was only half collapsed. The front of it had been broken, allowing us a way inside.

I shifted Eris's weight and noticed Envy firmly in her grip. Even unconscious, she had never let her partner go.

*"How admirable,"* said Greed.

"What do you mean?"

*"Do I have to explain everything to you? In order for Envy to reach the spiritual plane, the gunblade needed Eris's help. If Eris had let go of Envy, your weapon in the spiritual plane would have vanished. Not only that, but Eris never let that connection slip, even as she fought against the monster you became."*

"Eris, I'm sorry."

I hadn't noticed it at first, because Eris was dressed in black, but it was now apparent that she'd lost a lot of blood. She was probably still bleeding.

*"Let's hurry."*

"Yep."

I slipped inside the building Greed led us to and laid Eris on the ground. Then, I immediately transformed Greed into the black stave.

*"Just to be clear, this is what you want, right?"*

"Yeah. Do it."

*"All right then. Let me at those stats!"*

The Fourth Level secret technique, Twilight Healing. It required an exorbitant amount of stats, but it contained a healing power that otherwise didn't even exist in this world.

Just as I thought. Eris had sustained deep wounds trying to keep me at bay. So much so that I had to give Greed 80 percent of my stats to restore her to full health. Losing such a vast amount of stats was dangerous as I still had to face my father. But leaving Eris wounded was simply not an option.

As Greed soaked up my stats, the black stave changed shape. Instead of the destructive flames that usually flowed from it, Twilight Healing produced a restorative flame. I sent the white fire toward Eris, and they enveloped her. The countless wounds hidden beneath her clothes were healed in an instant.

There was only one thing left to do: burn the collar that bound her to Libra.

*“Ah, yes. The flames work for that, too.”*

“This secret technique is the key to unlocking her collar.”

When Kairos disappeared into me, I experienced his memories. Among them, I saw that he had burned Eris’s collar from her neck with the Twilight Healing technique. Kairos had always been poking his nose into my business, and this was no different. In the end, he’d left me with the answer to our dilemma.

When the white flames had extinguished, the collar on Eris’s neck was gone and color had returned to her face. I breathed a sigh of relief. She’d be fine.

“You used your secret technique to save me,” said Eris, opening her eyes slowly. “I’m sorry you had to use it at such a critical time.”

“Think nothing of it,” I replied, meeting her gaze. “*This* was a critical time, if you ask me.”

“Fate...”

“I made you a promise when we were in Tetra. I promised I would be there for you when you needed me. But it always seems like I just cause you more and more trouble. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, that’s true. You’re a real handful, you know that? No more berserker antics!”

It seemed that Eris remembered what had happened while she was under Libra’s control. That meant her heart and mind had been trapped within a body she could no longer control. She pretended to be furious, but eventually, she grinned.

“I caused you just as much trouble. Let’s call it even, shall we?” she said.

“Works for me.”

“Oh, and would you give me your hand for a second?”

“Hmm? Like this?”

“Perfect. Now, don’t move.”

Eris was suddenly in high spirits, and I couldn’t work out why. Still, I figured as long as it was making her happy, that everything was fine as long as she was happy. Then, she took my wrist and put my hand to her neck.

“I *never* thought Libra would enslave me again. I really screwed up. I did all that research to ensure it never happened again, too. It’s all your fault. You never gave me a chance to prepare.”

“What does *that* mean?”

“Just forget about it. Roxy and Myne aren’t around, are they? I guess that’s kind of a blessing in disguise.”

“Is this about something good? Is something good happening?” I asked.

“Oh, I’m just talking to myself. Don’t worry about it.”

Eris ignored me and began muttering in a language I’d never heard before. A moment later, a collar appeared around her neck.

“Wait, what the hell? You didn’t!” I cried.

“I did. It’s an enslavement collar.”

“Why?!”

“So Libra can’t snap one around my neck again. You can’t overwrite this.”

“No, no, no! So what you’re saying is...”

I was panicked. Eris loved it.

“Congratulations!” she said, grinning. “I’m *your* property now!”

“Huh?”

“There’s nothing you can do about it, either. It’s a signed contract, so to speak, so I’m living the rest of my life with you. That won’t cause any problems, will it?”

Eris wrapped me in a tight hug. Apparently, there was no getting out of this.

*Guess I better cast another Twilight Healing!*

Well...that was what I had wanted to do, but I couldn't afford to sacrifice any more stats. At the same time, I couldn't let Eris fall into Libra's hands again, either. The only choice I had right now was just to leave things as they were.

*How am I going to explain this to Roxy?* We were stuck right in the middle of a potential battlefield, and I had a whole other problem to deal with!

"You can order me to do anything at all, Fate. *Anything*. So, you can have me do this. Or this." Eris struck a number of very erotic poses in the middle of, yes, a battlefield.

"Fine. Here's my first order," I said.

"I'm so *very* excited."

"You are not to do *anything* that risks your own life."

Eris looked genuinely shocked. "Ugh, kill the mood, why don't you?"

"Hey!"

That was Eris for you, though. She played it cool, but she was all too happy to take big risks. My order was perfect for her. I could see that Envy also felt I'd made the right decision.

"Well, then," I said.

I looked out from the building. Things were eerily quiet. Far off in the distance, I spotted the black cubes, floating ominously in the air. Except there was now something different about them. They discharged a light of some kind and moved as if they were connected.

I got the feeling that, right now, they were opening the Door to Distant Lands.

## Chapter 24:

### Indestructible

COUNTLESS BLACK CUBES continued to hover in the air, moving in such an orderly way that it was clear they were seeing some kind of objective through. And I was not about to simply wait and find out what it was. I transformed Greed into the black bow.

“Eris, give me a hand,” I said.

I wanted her gunblade with its long-range capabilities.

“Envy is a support weapon,” she said, perplexed. “You know that there’s nothing I can do to help you against those things.”

With a shrug, Eris fired a buff bullet at me to raise my stats. I couldn’t stand to see her like that.

“Come here for a sec,” I said.

When Eris stood in front of me, I put my hand over hers so that we were both holding Envy. Then, I brought an image from the spiritual plane to the front of my mind.

“Uh... Fate?”

“Just a little bit more...” I muttered. Eris fell silent as her gunblade transformed before her eyes. “Envy has an Assault Mode. Hope I’m not being a nuisance by forcing it on you.”

“Not at all. I like it.” Eris wielded the huge gunblade with ease, and struck a pose. She thought very highly of what I’d just done. “Releasing me from my collar. Transforming Envy. Now I’m certain. You’ve awakened to your true self.”

By exploring the depths of Gluttony and battling Kairos, I’d been given the chance to reassess myself. As a result, I was finally able to fully accept it.

“So you knew?”

“Of course. I’ve been watching you for a long time.”



“I see. And Myne, too?”

Was she like Eris? Had she approached me because she knew about me? Thinking about it made me feel like a puppet and they were pulling my strings.

Eris laughed, seeing me sulk. “There’s no way Myne knows. All she knows is that you are both bearers of Skills of Mortal Sin.”

“Oh? Really?”

“Think about it. We’re talking about Myne here.”

That was a good point. I’d traveled far and wide with her, and she’d never been one to think about things too deeply. The only exception to that was when it came to her lost siblings.

“Well, I don’t think Myne would care, regardless of who I really was,” I said.

“That’s true.”

I pictured her face and laughed along with Eris.

“Myne... She and Roxy still haven’t made it here yet,” said Eris, worried.

“They’ll be fine. I can’t imagine those two ever losing a battle. Let’s focus on the task at hand right now.”

“Let’s do what we have to do!”

I readied my black bow while Eris took aim with her gunblade. Our targets were the floating black cubes. We poured our magic into our weapons and fired. The arrow and the bullets swirled together, growing in power as they collided with the black cubes.

“Damn, they’re tough!” I said.

The black cubes didn’t have a single scratch on them and continued to drift through the air.

“That color... I didn’t want to believe it,” she said, surprised.

“They’re made from the same material as our Weapons of Mortal Sin,” I said.

Part of me had felt it the moment I’d first seen them, but the sky was practically filled with them. I hadn’t wanted to believe that they were all made

of the same indestructible material as our own weapons.

*“Look at you two, puffing your chests out and getting all confident just to find yourselves stuck,”* muttered Greed.

Well, if we couldn’t destroy them, we could at least rely on Myne’s favorite hobby. I readied the bow for another shot.

“If we can’t break them, we’ll just have to smash them so hard they turn to dust,” I said.

Eris slapped her palm against her forehead. “You’ve clearly been spending too much time around Myne,” she said, her voice dripping with exasperation.

At least she knew the plan, though. I still had a decent reserve of stats due to everything I’d devoured along our way, so I fed 10 percent to Greed to engage the Bloody Ptarmigan.

*“Need my help?”* asked Greed.

“I’d love it.”

*“Atta boy.”*

Eris watched us, grinning.

It was time to put a stop to the black cubes. The black bow morphed into a new shape as it absorbed my stats and formed into a much more aggressive weapon. *This* was why I needed Greed. The burden on me was lighter now compared to when I activated an attack on my own. Yeah, I could do without his moaning, but he always had my back.

*“Ready when you are, Fate. How about it?”*

“Let’s do this.”

*“All right then. Ready, aim...”*

I settled on the center of the swirling black cubes and poured even more magical energy into the arrow I had nocked. My Gluttony took my fireball spell and altered it. Bloody Ptarmigan was engulfed in red flames. They glowed brighter and brighter until they were golden—so hot that they threatened to melt anything nearby.

“Ow! That’s really hot! Fire it already!” cried Eris, jumping back.

I took my time lining up my shot and reading the black cubes’ movements.

*Now.*

“Fire!” I shouted.

The arrow flew with enough force to pierce the heavens, and flames trailed behind it as it sped toward its targets. The black cubes may have been indestructible, but if I could disturb their movements, I could then stop them from doing whatever they were trying to accomplish.

“*Fate!*” Greed shouted in surprise.

Eris’s face echoed the weapon’s shock.

“Yeah, I see it,” I replied.

I had fired an arrow of incredibly intense heat, but it had been completely frozen. No wonder they were shocked.

I only knew one person capable of such a feat. My father, Dean Graphite. He stood on a black cube and looked down at us. In his hand was the black spear, Vanity, the weapon he’d used to freeze Bloody Ptarmigan. As if to make it painfully obvious, shards of frost danced at the tip of the spear.

My father was sending me a message: *If you choose to fight, I will not hold back.*

“Dad!” I shouted, louder than I had ever shouted before.

My father’s expression didn’t change. He merely pointed his spear in our direction.

“I told you not to come here,” he said.

A red shape slowly grew on his face—his sacred mark. It was a sign of his Divine Revelation, the source of his power as one of the holy beastfolk and a contract with God he was bound to complete, no matter how he felt about it as an individual. But what exactly were my father’s orders?

I had no such Divine Revelation. Was that because I was half-human? I already knew the answer to my question, though. I’d learned it during my battle with

Kairos. I had my suspicions about my father's role in all of this, and now, it was time to find out if I was right.

"I came to stop you," I said. "I will not back down. Besides, I need to ask you something."

My father looked me right in the eyes, then turned his gaze to the heavens. "There are things that are best left unsaid, for your own sake. What you want to ask is one of those things," he said.

"I still have to know."

My father muttered something, then pointed his spear at me. "Kids who don't listen to their parents get punished. If you want to stop me—and if you want an answer to your question—then you know what you have to do. You know I cannot stop, Fate. Not when it comes to this."

His sacred mark turned a deeper shade of red, as though it recognized that Eris and I were a threat to its objective. I felt my father's strength surge. It was overwhelming, and I felt like I was suddenly battling against stronger levels of gravity. I gripped the black bow tightly in my hand.

"Can you handle the black cubes for me?" I asked Eris.

"What about you?"

"I'm going to fight him."

Eris put her hand on my shoulder and turned me to face her. "We're stronger together than apart," she said.

"I'm sorry, Eris. This fight... It's between father and son. I have to do this myself."

Seeing this was true, Eris wrapped me in a hug. "Okay. Do what you think is best. Seeing you do this makes me happy, anyway."

Eris's reply took me by surprise. "Huh?" I asked.

"You're *always* fighting for somebody else," she said. "I wanted to see the day when you'd have something of your own worth fighting for."

"Eris..."

“I told you, didn’t I? I’ve been watching you for a long time. Now, you leave those black cubes to me. I can handle them now that I’ve got this bad boy.”

Eris hefted the Assault Mode gunblade up onto her shoulder and nodded at me. I took off, running up the fallen buildings to get closer to my father.

*“A family feud of world-shattering proportions,”* said Greed with a tired sigh. *“Does it get any crazier?”*

I heard gunfire from behind me as Eris took aim at the black cubes. Her bullets collided with them, momentarily interrupting their movements and keeping them from forming their magical seal. She was trying to buy me time, and it seemed to be working.

I pulled back on the black bow and loosed a magic arrow aimed straight at my father.

“We’re the worst,” I replied to the sword.

If anyone had known that it would all come down to this, then it really was all just as crazy as Greed said.

## Chapter 25:

### Father and Son

MY ARROW NEVER REACHED my father. I had no way of reaching him, either. Not as things currently stood, at least.

“I’m going to need some help, Kairos,” I said.

*“Fate, this power...”* said Greed.

When I fought Myne at Hausen, I was able to call forth the power of the chimera, Luna. I should have realized exactly *why* I could do that. I should have given it much more consideration at the time. Not that it mattered now.

Kairos had poked me in the chest and told me he was always within me. He’d told me that would never change. He’d always been by my side: From the moment I was born. Before I’d even known who I was, even. Him and all of those who had been devoured by Gluttony. Greed had probably known Kairos was there all along. Perhaps the reason he’d watched over me and let things happen slowly was because he knew that this time would eventually come.

“Greed,” I said, “how long have you known Kairos was inside of me?”

*“From the moment you first held me.”*

“Why am I not surprised?”

*“It’s what Kairos wanted. You are the true Gluttony. We were careful.”*

“Is that why you were so reckless against the Zodiac Aquarius?”

When the holy beast had attacked Hausen, Greed gave up his own existence to unlock the Fifth Level secret technique.

*“You are our hope. And anyway, I wanted to do it. We’re both quite guilty of recklessness.”*

I couldn’t help but chuckle. The sword was right. Our devil-may-care attitudes, disregard for our own safety, and rashness were how we’d survived this long.

Kairos’s power surged. Countless memories of battles he’d fought awakened

inside of me.

*"You're closing in on who you really are."*

"Not there yet, though," I said.

A scarlet aura surrounded my body, its fiery color reminiscent of Kairos's hair.

"From now on, we do this together, Kairos," I said to his spirit.

As if in response, even more energy surged through me.

*"Ready?"* asked Greed.

*"Always."*

I pulled back on the bow string and filled it with magical energy. I aimed the arrow at my father. He had the ability to stop my attacks by freezing them. If I wanted my questions answered, I had to find a way to overcome that ability. My aura transformed into magical energy, and I funneled its burning flames into my arrow before letting it fly.

My father spun his spear, trying to cut the arrow down. The air around him froze in an instant. The arrow slammed straight into it but didn't freeze. Instead, it continued to blaze. The freezing air around my father never weakened, however, and the two energies fought against one another.

"Dad!" I shouted.

I leaped from building to building in order to reach the black cube upon which my father stood. I was getting closer. I fired another scarlet arrow from the black bow and ran close behind it, transforming Greed into the black sword.

As expected, my father stopped both of my arrows. Keeping up the ice barrier was putting a strain on him, though, and the air surrounding it grew less chilly. I charged my sword with Kairos's crimson aura and jumped in with an attack. Now it was two arrows and a blade against a single barrier. I hoped it would be enough to knock my father from the black cube.

"Is that all you've got?" he asked.

In one swift move, my father knocked away both of my arrows and sent me flying. But my eyes were locked on the black wings that had sprouted from his

back. As I looked at them, my own useless wings pulsed.

“Those wings...” I said, trailing off.

“I’m not even close to giving you a hundred percent. Well? Will you keep going?”

“Are you always going to treat me like a kid?”

“If you’re not a child, prove it.”

My power was still building, but my father’s power surged in proportion. I took a deep breath to center myself, then threw myself into another attack with the currently scarlet-hued black sword. The black spear stopped it like it was nothing.

Compared to my last attack, this one had seemed the weaker of the two. I’d poured even more effort into that last strike, though. I had felt our energies struggling to overcome one another. But my father’s power now far outweighed my own. How had he gotten so strong in a mere instant?

*“Fate, it’s the wings! Look!”*

The black wings on my father’s back had changed.

*The tips of them are red.*

The wings stretched out wide, like the roots of a tree thirsty for water. The larger the red area on those wings grew, the stronger my father became. It wasn’t just that, either. The red hue of those wings was the same as my own aura.

“No way...” I gasped. “My energy...”

I couldn’t believe it. Before I could get a hold of myself, my father thrust his spear straight at me. With a black cube at my back, I couldn’t dodge out of the way, so I had no choice but to take the hit. White sparks showered us as his spear collided with my sword.

“Our powers are very similar,” said my father. “You devour strength. I absorb it. But there is one difference...”

“Damn it,” I spat.



Strength drained from my body. My aura was being absorbed by my father's wings. I could see it occurring with my own eyes now, perhaps because I was finally aware of it.

"The difference is in how our powers activate. You have to take your opponent's life."

"My power?"

"I can activate my power whenever I feel like it. Soon, you will no longer even be able to stand."

My father was siphoning my power. I used Identify to confirm my own stats, and my magic was plummeting, though there wasn't a huge change across the board. Not only would soon be unable to stand, but I'd soon be starved completely.

"Hngh!"

*How about this, then?! I put a powerful skill I had acquired here in Galia from an ancient monster into play, one that hit the target with a status ailment—Poison Attack. You want to absorb something? Absorb this.*

I let go of the black sword with my left hand and swung a poison-filled fist at my father.

"Whoa!" he said, jumping back, out of the way of my strike.

His power momentarily stopped absorbing my own.

"Don't like status ailments, huh?" I said.

"I don't know a single person who does. Where'd you get a skill so dangerous?"

"Just picked it up on my way here."

"How many times have I told you not to eat weird things you find lying around?"

"Guess I'm not picky like you."

"Sure seems to have toughened you up."

As long as I had the Poison skill running through the black sword, my father

couldn't siphon my energy. And as much as I wanted to buy myself time while my lost magic recovered, I wasn't about to be granted that luxury.

"Guess it's my turn to attack, then," he said, pointing the spear at me.

But I knew his stance. I'd seen it somewhere. I knew I had.

*"You fool."* Rafale's voice echoed in my head. *"Watch for the jump."*

He was the very last person I expected to stick his nose into things. I immediately understood the warning, and I focused my attention on the spear, waiting for it to move.

*Now!*

I just barely managed to evade the spear's attack on my right arm, but my father still stood a distance away from me. He hadn't taken a single step. His spear was a different story, though. Everything from the spearhead to his hands had vanished as the portal jumped to impale me. Rafale had used the exact same thing on me in the past.

"Good instincts," said my father.

"How do you know that skill?"

"It's a unique attribute of this weapon. It reads the wielder's heart and mind and gives it a physical form. And if the wielders of the past left it with any particularly strong feelings, their power remains in the spear. Makes you wonder about the person who developed this portal jump attack..."

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I heard Rafale click his tongue in disgust.

I ducked and dodged the black spear while I shot another question at my father. "Does that mean your freezing abilities come from someone else, too?"

"No, those are mine. I can freeze anything and everything, just like my heart," he explained, his loneliness plainly visible in his face. "Long ago, that wasn't the case at all. It was the just opposite, actually. I've changed."

His magic only continued to grow. It was so overwhelming I felt like I might be crushed beneath its power.

"Don't die on me, Fate. It won't be long before *this* will prevent me from

holding back.” My father pointed at his face and the sacred mark that glimmered ever brighter, staining his face blood red. “It has recognized that you are an obstruction to the completion of my Divine Revelation, and I can no longer control it.”

“Dad...”

“If you want to stop me, you have to be prepared to kill me.”

“But, I...”

“I’ve told you everything I’m capable of. You know the rest. If you fail here, you and your friends will die.”

My father’s black wings spread, multiplying from two, to four, then finally to eight. Then, a jet-black halo that seemed to suck all the light from the sky around it appeared above his head. My father’s face was gone, now concealed by an iron mask upon which glowed his sacred mark. The black spear also seemed to respond to my father’s transformation, growing even longer and sharper.

After a moment of silence, the thing that was once my father let out an inhuman battle cry and launched itself at me. It was the spitting image of the Angel of Death.

## Chapter 26:

### The Angel of Death

THE BLACK-MASKED ANGEL was beyond reasoning with. It was consumed by one task and one task alone—to see through its Divine Revelation. This meant it would instinctively purge anything that tried to get in the way.

The black mask and its red sacred mark stared at me for a moment, as if setting me as its main target.

“Dad! Why would you tell me all that? You’re always looking out for me, but... am I even really your...?”

I trailed off. My words never reached him, instead swept away in the winds that whipped through the imperial capital.

*“Fate! Prepare yourself!”* shouted Greed.

But the moment I looked at the angel, it vanished. *Is this like Gemini’s portal jumping?! No, it’s just speed, thanks to his extra wings!*

I couldn’t follow it with my eyes. All I saw were the afterimages it left between movements. I couldn’t focus on the angel itself. The most I could do was transform Greed into the black shield and keep myself protected. This didn’t stop the black angel, however, who lashed at me with its spear.

“Hngh!”

The shield seemed to scream in protest as the spear impacted it. Each hit was as strong as the Noir Destruction that Myne had used on me in the underground city of Grandol. The black angel was clearly just as strong as it was fast.

I lost my footing on the black cubes and was sent flying through the air. I slammed through several buildings before finally crashing to the ground, coughing up blood at the moment of impact. The black shield had actually taken the brunt of the strikes, but those hits were so powerful that the shockwaves alone left me with internal damage.

I crawled from the rubble and got to my feet. The black angel had turned its attention to Eris, who was keeping the black cubes from moving by constantly firing at them. It swung its black spear.

“Eris!”

The air froze the moment I shouted. I couldn’t move. I fought to look around and found the imperial capital covered in ice. I wasn’t frozen to the core, though, and I was able to melt the ice around me by raising my magical energy.

“Eris...”

She was underneath the black angel, enveloped in even more ice than I was.

*“It’s fine,”* said Greed. *“Don’t worry. She’s much stronger than you think. She was built that way.”*

Greed didn’t say *who* had made her that way. Both of us already knew.

Was Libra still waiting patiently at the great canyon? He was shrewd, conniving, and untrustworthy. I just knew he was going to pull something.

*“You’ve got more important things to think about, like yourself. Here he comes!”*

The black angel had just shown it had enough magic to turn the whole capital into ice, and it now turned its sights back on me. With Eris’s magic bullets no longer a problem, the black cubes once again began forming a magic seal.

The black angel flew for me at top speed, afterimages trailing behind it. I readied the black shield, but the cold bit into my hands, and my grip lacked strength.

Suddenly, the sound of metal against metal echoed around me. I hadn’t been overwhelmed this time. I could stand against the black spear. I could defend against it. Or, to be more accurate, we could defend against it.

“You are always doing this,” said Greed, speaking aloud and with my voice. “You always say you can handle it on your own, and then *this* happens.”

“Greed,” I replied. “You forced the Crossing on us, didn’t you?”

“You are the partner of the mighty Greed. By doing this, we become one.”

“One and the same.”

He was right. Whenever I couldn't overcome a battle on my own, we had overcome it together.

“You are here. I am here. And we have Kairos with us, too,” said Greed.

“The best of the best!”

I understood Greed like I understood myself now that our souls overlapped as if we were one. He enjoyed this moment right to his very core, even though he'd originally called this battle a family feud of world-shattering proportions.

“Now we fight back!” I shouted.

I pushed the black spear away and transformed the shield back into a sword. With the Poison skill still in effect, I slashed at the black angel. The angel, however, knocked away my attacks as if it had read them before they'd even happened.

“Don't you *dare* take us lightly!” I shouted.

I bent backward to slip away from a spear strike, then moved closer to the angel. The spear had a long reach, but that was also its weakness. I had the advantage when things got up close and personal.

The black angel flapped its wings in an attempt to put space between us, but it was already too late. With Crossing activated, Greed and I attacked without a single wasted movement, and the black sword grazed the angel's ribs.

“Got it!”

The timing was perfect. The strike should have opened up the angel completely, but it had deftly knocked my attack slightly off course. It quickly readied itself for a counterstrike, but then it seemed to realize the change in its own body and instead put some distance between us.

The Poison skill was already taking effect, and it wasn't pleasant. Even a graze was more than enough. The angel no longer wanted anything to do with close-quarters combat. It unleashed a blast of frigid wind from its spear, one powerful enough to freeze the entire capital to its core. A fierce chill even pushed out toward buildings that lay far from where we presently fought, which then

crumbled as the cold air froze and consumed them.

My hands began to freeze as they gripped the black sword. If I'd been hit point-blank, I may have crumbled, too, just like those buildings. Nonetheless, retreating never crossed my mind. Even so, my stats were not an endless well we could draw from. If I didn't come up with a plan of attack, I wouldn't be able to stop the black angel.

I transformed the black sword into the black gauntlets and attacked with the strongest weapon I had.

"Dimension Destruction!"

Countless black threads flew from my fingers. Each one formed something web-like and was surrounded in a golden aura as they collided with the freezing air. The threads cut through the cold like it was nothing, pulling the chilly air into the dimension opened in its wake.

*It works! The secret technique overpowers the cold! We can break through!*

At that moment, the black angel let out another inhuman roar, and the air instantly froze even further. It was more than even the black threads could handle, and my arms felt the heaviest they had ever been. Little by little, the black threads froze. This was how determined my father was.

"It's not over yet!"

As long as he still called me his son, I would give him everything I had. I called upon Kairos, and his power flowed through me. The black gauntlets were wrapped in a scarlet flame that blended with the golden aura of Dimension Destruction. The air began to steam, and the black threads were finally able cut through it. I could fight through this. But when the black threads touched the tip of the black spear, something changed.

"It's reversed!"

The cold morphed into icy flames, growing to a level of cold far, far beyond anything we'd ever experienced. My father had told me of the black spear's powers—the ability to freeze, portal jumping—but was it capable of something else, too? *Wait, he told me one more thing. That it used to be the opposite.* Even after the sacred mark's forced transformation...

“He tried to resist!”

But that was no longer the case. My father’s powers were now the black angel’s powers. Perhaps, his desire not to become the black angel was so strong that his power revealed itself as the ability to freeze everything, the exact opposite of what it had once been. There was no use asking him, however. He’d never answer me like this. It was just something I sensed as our weapons clashed.

The blue flames grew in strength, and, using the scarlet flames of my secret technique as fuel, burned even brighter. The heat was so intense that the air around me wavered and distorted. But the secret technique was still in play, and I could still fight. Even as the blue flames continued to expand, I pressed an attack. My arms felt like they would explode under the pressure, and my armor began to smolder as the blue flames neared.

Greed and I roared. It was so hot that the blood in my body seemed to boil. It was like my whole body was on fire. It was more than I could take. I couldn’t hold out any longer.

As soon as that thought crossed my mind, I felt two hands push me back up.

*What the heck are you doing? You’ve still got fire in you yet.* It was Kairos, his voice calm and confident. *And I don’t mean my own power. I mean the fire unique to the two of you. An inextinguishable flame.*

Was that even possible? Could I do that? Right here, right now? Could I call upon that strength *while* I wielded the black gauntlets?

*You are more than I was. The two of you can do it. So show me.*

Our two souls roared as one as Greed and I summoned the Fourth Level—the power of the black stave. The sound of flickering flames erupted from the gauntlets’ fingertips as black fire began to rise.



## Chapter 27:

### A Door Opened

THE BLACK FLAMES spread quickly. They wouldn't burn me, their caster, but they also wouldn't extinguish until everything else had been completely burned through. I had never once seen these flames extinguished except for when I myself willed it.

"Take this!"

The flames raced along the black threads and slammed into the black angel's blue flames as if they were alive. The black flames were pushed back for just a moment, but they quickly engulfed and devoured the freezing fire before speeding onward to the black spear.

The black angel let out another roar and looked straight at me. The sacred mark on its pitch-black mask grew an even brighter shade of red. It was not about to give up. In the air behind it, the black cubes were in the process of activating the magic seal they had formed.

I was running out of time, and fast.

The spear appeared behind me, racing from a portal jump to impale my heart.

"Saw that coming!" I cried.

I knew the black angel's attacks. As long as I stayed focused, evading its portal jumps was simple. But I let the blade stick into my side, so the black angel couldn't use its other spear attacks. If it was capable of combining its skills, then it would have used them long ago. The black spear's attacks were manifestations of its wielder's emotions, and it couldn't layer those emotions upon one another.

The black angel was defenseless. There was no way out.

"Press the attack!"

The black flames responded to my shout, engulfing the black angel before rising into a flaming crucifix. The explosion sent the black angel plummeting to

the ground. Its wings were charred as the black flames continued to eat away at both them and the angel's body.

"Hurry," I heard Greed say. "We have to blow up the black cubes!"

But as I watched the black angel fall from the sky, I saw its mask burn away and a fracture run through its glowing sacred mark. Through a broken section of that mask peered the pained face of my father. Before I could even think, I was already running toward him.

The black cubes released a light like that of the sun. As that blinding light fell upon me, I took my father in my arms. Greed and I separated from the Crossing.

"Dad!" I cried.

"What are you doing? There are much bigger things for you to worry about... than me..."

I extinguished the black flames.

"Damn it! You idiot!" I shouted, my words echoing into the sky.

My father simply nodded. As he did so, the black mask and his sacred mark both crumbled away. My father was free of what had bound him.

"I have completed my task," he said.

The moment he murmured those words, the sky above the imperial capital tore apart, revealing another world entirely. The black cubes fell from the sky like rain, their mission now complete.

"So this is how it's going to be in the end..." muttered my father.

He was beaten and battered. The black flames and poison had taken their toll. He'd used the black spear for far too long, too. It had sapped away his blood. Even if the wielder could suppress Vanity somewhat, it was impossible to subdue completely. Every Weapon of Mortal Sin came with a cost.

"I'll heal you," I said.

I transformed the black gauntlets into the black stave, but before I could do anything, my father stopped me.

"Don't," he said. He looked up at the huge wound that had opened in the sky.

“Don’t waste your energy. The battle’s not over yet.”

“But, Dad...”

“I told you that you’d have to kill me. In any case, I died a long time ago.”

The words froze me in place. I still remembered his death. But I had always wondered what’d happened. I hadn’t known for the longest time. But after facing my Gluttony, I understood.

The being known as Fate was, in fact, two people. Two separate personalities —my own and one other. The other Fate was aggressive and combative. At times, he had swayed my own behavior. That unstoppable rage had manifested itself in the spiritual plane as Fake Fate. Even now, my other personality despised me and waited for a chance to take over.

That Fate should have become the true Fate, but my father hadn’t allowed that to happen. I’d learned this during my battle against Kairos. My missing memories fell into place, and I finally understood who I really was. If Eris was constructed from a collection of monsters, then I was constructed from the souls Gluttony had devoured.

My father reached out and touched my face. “You look just like your mother,” he said. “You’re a man now... You’re all grown up, Fate.”

“No, Dad, I...”

“You have it all wrong, Fate.”

“I’m not your son. I’m a fake made by Gluttony...” I said, struggling to vocalize the words I never wanted to say. “Your real son is trapped within it...”

“*You* are my son,” said my father, shaking his head. “The Fate trapped within you is the holy beastfolk who inherited my power. You are no fake. You weren’t created by Gluttony. You are a human who inherited his mother’s traits. However, the Gluttony skill is far too powerful for a human to bear. The moment you were born, you were consumed by Gluttony.”

“But I’m here... I don’t... No...”

I had a memory of my mother being killed by my Gluttony. I had always thought it was the strain that the skill put on her.

“Yes. Your mother didn’t die giving birth to you. She gave up her soul to save you from Gluttony. With her physical connection to you, she was the only one who could do it.”

My father then pointed to my navel, indicating that it was the umbilical connection between us. At that point in time, my mother, too, had been connected to Gluttony.

“She paid the price of her own soul in order to lift you from Gluttony. But your soul was already mixing with those Gluttony had once devoured, and they could not be separated on such a deep level. Your mother formed a wall to protect you and keep you from it.”

“She protected me?”

I thought back to the day Gluttony had first activated. I’d been on guard duty at Seifort and had killed a bandit who’d snuck into the castle. I remembered the feeling of release and the voice that spoke as a new power flowed into me.

“Your mother wanted you to live an ordinary life. But this world is one where skills trump all, and lives are determined by the skills one inherits. It is not something that can be overturned merely by hard work. For one with a skill that is locked away and otherwise useless, it is a harsh, unforgiving world.”

Dad had always worried about me—about this very thing—right up until the moment he died.

“I could easily imagine your Gluttony awakening after I died. But it seems my worst fear never came to pass.”

“What do you mean?”

“You were not consumed by Gluttony. Instead, you have maintained equilibrium. Rest easy, Fate. You are a human at your core. You are not an imposter constructed from other souls. Your mother watches over you, even now.”

“Dad...”

I laid my father down somewhere safer to rest.

“Looks like your friend is here,” he said.

I turned to find Eris standing behind me. Her clothes were in tatters, and I wasn't sure where to put my eyes. But she had managed to survive the black angel's freezing power, at the very least.

"That was one hell of a family squabble," she said. "But I'm glad you managed to work things out. I know you've probably got stuff to talk about, but I don't think *that's* going to wait for us."

The tear in the sky was slowly widening. A bright-red light streamed from the opening. It struck me as a place not unlike my Gluttony—a place where the dead writhed. It was not a place for the living.

## Chapter 28:

### The Sixth Level

THE HOLE IN THE SKY was like a gaping, bleeding wound. It struck me as something fatal, something beyond repair. What were we going to do about it?

“That will not close until everything ends,” said my father.

He spoke as if he were wholly disconnected from it. None of this had been what he, as an individual, had wanted. His sacred mark had compelled him, forcing him to open the Door to Distant Lands. My father had no choice but to obey. And yet, he had given me a chance to stop the Door, which I had thrown away to be by his side.

He looked straight into my eyes as he asked, “Fate, will you still go, knowing what you do now?”

“That’s why I came.”

“Then take this with you.”

With a weak, shaky hand, he passed me the black spear, Vanity. I felt its heft as I took it in hand. The weapon was as heavy as my father’s own emotions. Vanity changed form to match its wielder, so the spear was no longer the ominous, aggressive piece of equipment that the black angel had wielded against me. It had returned to the form I was used to seeing all the times I’d encountered my father.

“What form will you have it take?” my father asked. “What power do you want?”

“I...”

I knew that I had been selfish and power hungry in the past. I would have wielded the spear exactly as it was if I’d been the same as I had been back then. But I was different now. I walked my path together with Roxy, Myne, Eris, and Aaron. And not just them, either, but those who served the Barbatos family, the citizens of Hausen—everyone had taught me the power of friendship and

camaraderie—as well.

I knew the power I desired.

“Come to us,” I said.

The black spear dissipated into small black particles, which were absorbed into Greed.

*“But this...? Fate...”* said Greed. *“Aha, I see! Great idea!”*

“Vanity’s power will help us to give form to the level Kairos never reached.”

*“That it will. We’ll reach a new power—the Sixth Level.”*

Unlocking a new level had never felt easier. This time, Greed did not require the usual exorbitant payment. All the power he needed came directly from Vanity.

The Sixth Level slowly began to take shape, transforming to suit Greed as well as my own needs. It was a black spear, and within it was the power I wished for—the power to close the Door that had been opened. Greed wasn’t going to like the way I intended to use the weapon, but he wouldn’t have any choice. The only reason he hadn’t realized it already was his shock at the Sixth Level’s transformation. But he’d understand when the time came.

I didn’t know if everything would go the way I wanted. The only way to know was to try. Nevertheless, I *had* to go to the Door, no matter what happened.

Dad looked up at the new Greed, impressed, but his face quickly turned serious. “Fate, you must be careful of your other half,” he said.

“The one in my Gluttony?”

“Yes. He’s dangerous, unstable, and violent. His resentment’s only grown over the years he’s been locked away. He may try to take over when you connect with your Gluttony to use its power.”

I thought back to the side of myself that I’d confronted on the spiritual plane. Every time we fought, his hatred of me grew. It was hard to think he would ever be willing to listen to reason, even though the two of us had been a single being at first. It seemed I still had problems of my own I needed to solve.

“I’ll do what I have to,” I said. “Just like always.”

“I don’t have to worry about you,” said my father. “Not after you’ve come this far. Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine.”

“Dad...”

“You’ve given me more redemption than I ever deserved.”

I knew he was putting on an act. I hadn’t realized it when I was a kid. Then, all of a sudden, he was gone. Those painful memories drifted to the forefront of my mind once again. Dad smiled at me as if to brush off my worry. It was the exact same smile he’d used when I was younger, and it meant he was completely free of his sacred mark.

“Now go,” he said, holding out his fist. “Fate! You must go!”

“I will!”

I bumped his fist with my own, then got to my feet and turned away.

“This is nice,” said Eris, leaning over to look at me. “Things were pretty icy between you two for a while there. And literally freezing for me.”





“You’re much tougher than you look,” I replied.

“Aren’t I just? Go on, hit me with more compliments.”

“Eris...” I said, looking skyward.

“That’s where you want to go, isn’t it?” she asked.

“I’d be there in an instant if I only had proper wings,” I replied.

“But you don’t, so I’ll just have to take you myself.”

“Huh?”

“When I saw you two fight, I realized something. It’s about time that I, too, shed the chains that bind me. I have to accept who I am.”

“Eris? What do you mean?”

“Libra told you himself. I am a mixture of monsters. No matter how I may look, I hope you’ll still treat me like the Eris you’ve always known.”

As she spoke, Eris began to morph into a gigantic white creature with eight enormous wings. *No way... This is...* The shape of the body wasn’t exactly the same, but the white dragon before me was indeed one I had seen before. *The Heavenly Calamity*. It was a monster so powerful it had become a creature of myth, the figurehead around which a religion had been built. Eris had turned herself into a dragon, one much more graceful and refined than that which I had fought long ago.

“What do you think?” Eris asked somewhat bashfully for being a giant dragon.

I leaped up on her body and patted her on the head. “I can’t believe how cool you look,” I said. “I never imagined the day would come that I’d get to ride the Heavenly Calamity.”

“The dragon you felled was another of Libra’s experiments. But it lost its human form completely and, unable to turn back, its mind as well. Long ago, there were many like us, but they all died.”

“I see...”

“But I’m glad, all the same. I’m glad this gave me the opportunity to open up to you about all of this.”

“We’re birds of a feather,” I said.

“Our bodies and our hearts differ, but, yes, you’re right. Now, hold on and ready yourself for flight.”

Just before we took off, I turned back to look at my father, who still watched me. We shared a nod in lieu of last words. This was how it had to be, yet I did not feel ready to say goodbye.

Eris opened her wings, and we took off, heading for the red gash in the sky. My father grew distant, and as he did so, tears streamed from my eyes.

“Fate,” said Eris. “Your father’s magical energy. It’s—”

“I know. He’s always been like that. He’s always putting up a strong front.”

“But, if we leave him...”

“We made a decision. And it’s final.”

My father’s energy wavered like the flickering flame of a candle, one so fragile that even the slightest breeze would extinguish it. But I refused to look back. I’d made him a promise. My hands gripped Eris’s horns tighter. She felt my emotions running through them and didn’t say a word.

“Father...” I whispered.

Finally, the flame of my father’s energy trembled and vanished. A voice rang in my head as it did so. It felt far hollower and lonelier than anything I had ever known.

***Gluttony skill activated.***

My father’s power flowed into me. This was not what I wanted, but as the wielder of Gluttony, it was the nature of battle—the difference between life and death. Eventually, the voice dissipated. I’d barely listened. I didn’t even know how many stats I had received. All I knew was that I had just devoured my own father.

*Fate...*

I heard my father’s voice echoing somewhere within myself. I couldn’t bear the emotions squeezing my heart. I let out an anguished shout and launched

the black spear at the Door to Distant Lands with everything I had.

## Chapter 29:

### The End is Nigh

BLACK LIGHTNING STREAKED across the sky as the black spear sped toward the Door to Distant Lands. With this much power and speed behind it, the spear would run straight through the Door.

“Finish it!” I shouted.

The Door had only just been opened. I knew there was still time. A strange energy emanated from the wound in the sky. Whatever was going to happen hadn’t started yet. I could end things here and now with the black spear and the power I’d inherited from my father.

Except, the black cubes suddenly formed a defensive shield, protecting the Door. The spear collided with the black cubes. It was the meeting of an indestructible spear and an unbreakable wall.

“What?!” I shouted. “How?! Why?!”

This was not supposed to happen. I was sure the cubes had been put to rest. I searched for the person controlling them. Then, I found him. He looked perfectly calm and totally at ease, white hair fluttering in the wind. His pristine white robes were completely out of place among the wasteland around him, and even without wings, he floated in the air.

“Libra!” I shouted.

This couldn’t possibly be what he wanted. *So why is he blocking my way?!*

I wasn’t about to give up just yet, so I called the spear back and pressed an attack. *Take my stats. Take whatever you need.*

“Greed! Run him through!” I spat.

The black spear grew bigger, sharper, and longer. As it did so, it began to crackle with reddish-black arcs of lightning. Even the black cubes would crumble to dust at its touch. That was what I intended. I’d turn them all to dust. Indestructibility meant nothing in the face of the Sixth Level secret technique—

Revolt Brionac.

The spear now had the power to erase existence itself and the ability to pierce any shield. It had formed from my desire to see the Door to Distant Lands eradicated, and even Libra could not stop it. I launched it from my grip.

Even though the black cubes and the wall they formed were on the verge of being completely annihilated, Libra's calm expression never faltered. He didn't even flinch. *Keep grinning. You're going to meet your end, along with all of this.* I poured energy into the spear.

Libra clicked his fingers.

"Fate, stop!" cried Eris.

"What?!"

I changed the spear's course just before it made contact, and it arced back to my hand.

*"That dirty son of a... This is exactly what someone like him would do."*

A crucifix of light was now before us. An angel hung from it, her blonde hair fluttering in the wind.

"Roxy..."

I glared daggers at Libra, who didn't care in the slightest. The black cubes settled into position behind him as he finally opened his mouth to speak.

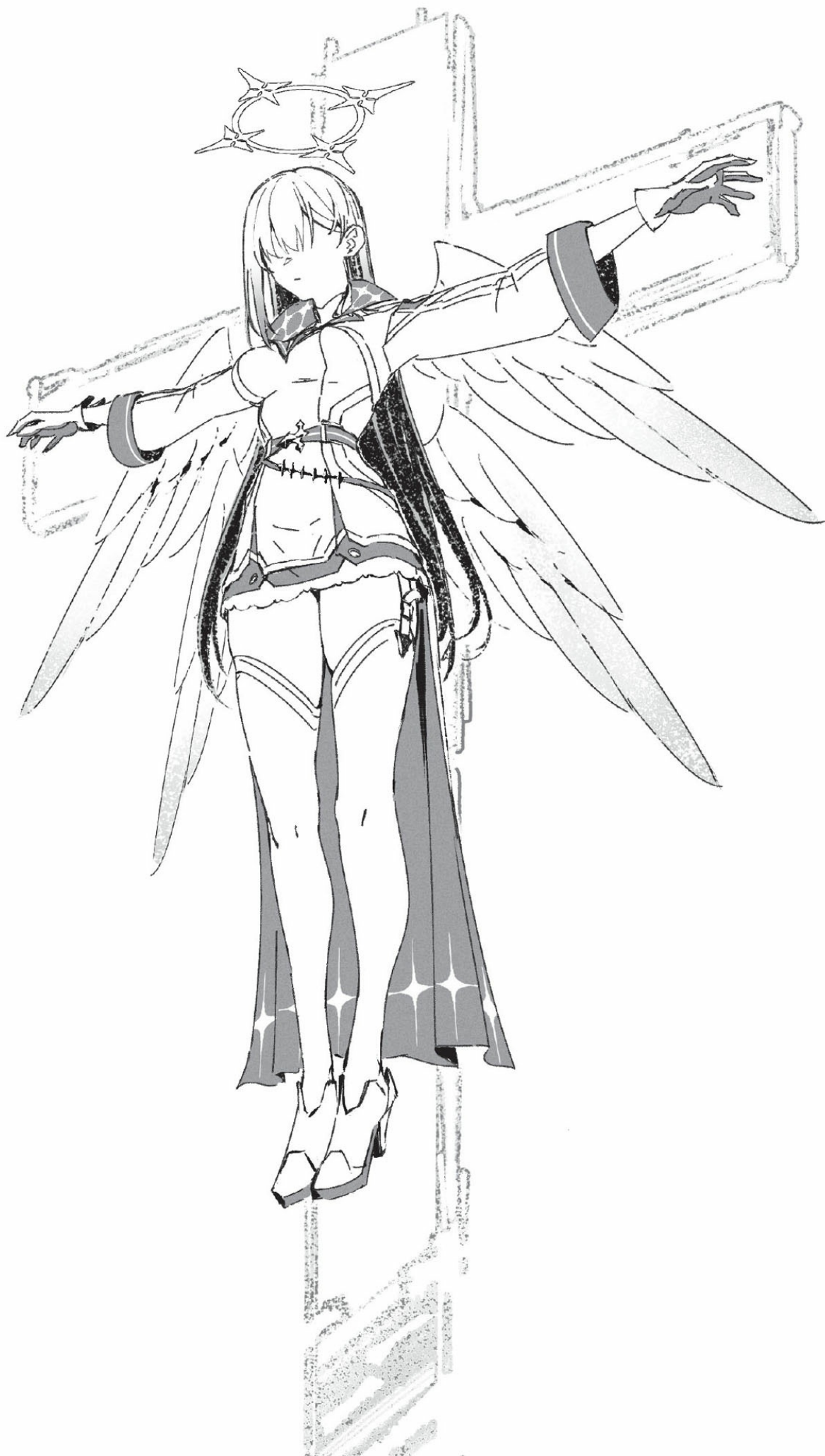
"Amazing," he remarked. "I didn't expect that you'd find a way to destroy these."

"Libra!"

"As you can see," said Libra, bowing in mock deference to Roxy, *"this makes the most effective shield."*

"Where's Myne?!"





Roxy and Myne had likely been attacked by Libra after their battle against the Zodiac Gemini. They'd been buying us time to get into Mercadia, so they had to have been exhausted. That was *exactly* the moment Libra had been waiting for.

Was Roxy even safe? She did not look hurt as far as I could see. I was worried about Myne, though. She wouldn't have stood by silently and let Roxy be kidnapped like that.

"How about you?" asked Libra, ignoring my question entirely. "How did it feel to devour your own father? Your own flesh and blood?"

I only growled in response.

"Was it a sentimental moment? Or was it *savory*?"

"Libra!!!"

"Oh? Did I hit a nerve?" Libra jeered. "I dare say I must have."

I was enraged. I gripped the black spear so tightly that I felt as if I were about to crush it into dust.

*"Calm yourself, Fate,"* said Greed. *"Letting him toy with your emotions only puts you at a disadvantage."*

"Greed..." I said.

Libra seemed to remember something and reached into his robes. "I brought you a present," he said, dropping the object onto Eris's back. "I do hope you like it."

"No," I murmured. "It can't be."

I took the thing and examined it more closely. It was a black horn, one I had seen before. It belonged to Myne when she became a war demon.

"I apologize for not answering sooner. I assume this tells you everything you need to know."

"What the hell did you do?"

"Easy now. You, too, Eris. I told you I hate it when you transform into that beast. You are so utterly useless."



A slight shiver coursed through Eris's giant body. I gave her a gentle pat to help calm her, never once taking my eyes off Libra.

"Compared to you, *she* is exquisite," said Libra, pointing to Roxy. "She wasn't created or farmed. She's completely natural. I wonder if it's the difference of choice? Free will? That's what you think, isn't it, Fate?"

"What are you even saying? What are you trying to do?"

"I'm sure you know the answer to that, given the circumstances we find ourselves in." Libra grinned. "I'm going to the other side of the Door as Roxy's escort."

The crucified Roxy moved directly in front of the gaping red Door.

"Roxy!" I shouted.

"Usually, only souls are allowed past this point," explained Libra. "However, exceptions are given to souls that have united with a holy beastfolk."

Roxy let out an ear-piercing scream, and I nearly launched the spear right then and there.

"It's okay," said Eris, stopping me. "Libra needs Roxy. You'll have your chance. Don't do anything rash just yet."

"But, I have to."

*"Fate, Eris is right."*

*So all I can do is watch and wait?*

The red world of the Door began to change. A golden color, the shade of Roxy's own hair mixed with its usual red.

"Only the chosen can proceed past this point," said Libra. "Only they can receive everything."

The sacred mark upon Libra's face glowed red. Was this his Divine Revelation at work? It was unclear, but it seemed like his destiny lay beyond the door, a destiny he couldn't deny.

"The girl will lead the way. And because I'm accompanying her, I, too, will be allowed entry. What about you, I wonder?" asked Libra, a daring glint in his eye

as he stared down at me.

The black cubes formed a circle. Were they going to summon something? The answer came immediately. Four gigantic creatures appeared from the empty space. I knew what they were from their sheer intensity and presence alone.

“I’m not going to hold back after coming this far,” said Libra. “Now you get to face off against all the holy beasts at my command.”

“Libra...”

“You have a decision to make, Fate. As half-holy beastfolk, you can pass through the Door. Do so, however, and Eris will die. You can destroy the Door with your spear once I have passed through, but then Roxy will never return. Make your choice, Fate.”

“Damn you...”

I raised my spear at Libra, but Roxy once again floated in front of him like a shield.

“Look at you, staring up at me. This is the way things are meant to be,” said Libra.

With a wave of his hand, the four holy beasts began to move.

“Fate,” said Eris. “I can handle this.”

“No, you can’t.”

Libra had traumatized Eris. Even now, she still hadn’t overcome her fear, and I knew her trauma went as far as other holy beastfolk and other holy beasts. The monsters spread out, surrounding us. Each one overflowed with tremendous power. I instinctively knew Eris would *not* be okay on her own.

“So, you’re staying then?” asked Libra. “Very well. Wait here until it’s all over.”

An explosive impact echoed just as Libra and Roxy were about to pass through the Door, and one of the holy beasts tilted violently. Libra looked over at it with a pained expression.

“Persistent, aren’t you?” he said. “I can’t believe you’re still alive after such a

perfect surprise attack. I suppose I should have expected as much from a war demon.”

She was missing a horn but was still as strong as ever. Her white hair made her stand out against the deep black of the collapsed imperial buildings. And with her axe at the ready, she was a terrifying sight to behold.

“Myne!” I shouted.

“Don’t worry. I’m fine,” she replied.

She was in her war demon form but hadn’t lost her senses. Confronting her past had strengthened her.

“Eris and I will handle things here,” she continued. “You have to go, Fate.”

And with that, Myne slammed the holy beast before her with yet another attack. Libra didn’t look pleased. He heaved a great sigh before silently stepping through the Door with Roxy and his black cubes.

“Eris, I’m going after them,” I said.

“I knew you would. I’ll get you up there. Myne, we’ll need your support.”

“On it.”

Myne leaped into the air and landed on Eris’s head. She readied her black axe as she stared up at the Door to Distant Lands.

“Sit back and conserve your energy, Fate,” she said.

“What she said,” added Eris.

“We *will* get you to the Door.”

“I’m counting on you guys,” I said.

Holy beasts blocked our path. One was still trying to catch up, though, having just been smashed by Myne. If we could make it past these three, we could make it to the door. Eris flapped her eight wings, and we sped through the air. She let out a roar and sunk her fangs into one of the holy beasts as it tried to get away, flying all the while.

“The rest are yours, Myne,” she said.

The struggling holy beast cut off one of Eris's wings, and she collided into the second one with a huge thud.

"Go, Fate!" cried Eris as she plummeted, carrying the two holy beasts with her.

We were so close to the Door. Myne leaped toward it, with me close behind. The last holy beast blocked our path. Myne had known this would happen, though, and her black axe was already transforming in her hands. A black light poured from it as it filled with power. It looked incredibly heavy as she swung it upward and brought it down on the beast—Noir Destruction.

"Now!" she shouted.

"Thanks!"

"Save the gratitude for when you come back."

"Until then."

The holy beast plummeted to the ground, Myne atop it. We exchanged a high five as she flew down and I flew up, using the holy beast as a springboard to leap straight through the Door.

The sounds of battle slowly faded below me.

## Chapter 30:

### Sea of Souls

A VOICE CALLED MY NAME. It wasn't a voice I'd ever heard before, but it was somehow nostalgic nonetheless, a certain melancholy echoing within me.

"Fate. Fate... Come on, sleepy head! Get up! You can't stay in bed all day!"

I opened my eyes and found myself in the house where I'd grown up in a small village west of the merchant town of Tetra and past several mountain ranges. The barren land made it difficult to raise decent crops, but we at least managed to grow the medicinal herb miel, which provided us with enough income to make a modest living.

My body ached when I tried to get up. All the farming yesterday had really done a number on me.

"Ouch..." I muttered. "I feel so strange."

It was like being wrapped in a cocoon; all my senses were dulled and cloudy. I felt as though I had forgotten something important. The impression stuck like a bit of food between my teeth.

"Fate! Are you out of bed yet?"

"I'm coming," I replied.

I put on my clothes and opened the door to find my father and a woman I'd never seen before. She looked puzzled by the expression on my face.

"What are you doing? Your breakfast will get cold."

"Oh, sorry, Mom."

*Mom? Wait, did I really just call her that?*

"What is going on with you today? Dean, say something!"

"Let him be. The boy's still half asleep. Sit down, Fate."

My father gestured to a chair, and I sat across from him at our well-worn

table. As soon as I did so, all my previous doubts seemed to vanish.

“Let’s eat,” said my father. “It’s nothing fancy, but it’s a home-cooked meal.”

“Looks great,” I said.

The scent of fresh-baked rye bread wafted through the air, and though the herbal soup was a touch bitter, it complimented the bread wonderfully.

“Once you’ve finished, we’re going straight to work,” said my father. “I’ve been hunting so much that I’ve neglected the fields.”

“I can’t help but worry about you, doing all that hunting all the time,” my mother said.

“No need to fret. It’s my job. There’ve been more monsters around recently, and the village chief won’t stop yammering about it.”

“But you’re the only one who goes hunting!”

“That’s because I’m the only one who *can*.” My father hugged my mother. “I’ll be fine. Don’t worry.”

“I suppose there’s Fate, too, right?” my mother said, looking at me.

“Me?” I asked.

*Me? Hunt? Wait, what skill do I have again?*

“Don’t tell me you forgot you inherited your father’s spear wielding skill. Are you still dreaming?”

“Oh, I did?”

“What are we going to do about you, son?” muttered my father, ruffling my hair.

Doubt nagged at me again. Was I forgetting something?

“All right, breakfast’s finished. Let’s get to work,” said my father.

“Come on, Fate,” added my mother.

The two of them left the house. I put a hand to the door to follow them but paused in the entrance. Something inside me wouldn’t let me go any farther. I heard my parents call out to me.

“Come on, Fate.”

“Hurry!”

Their voices were coming from right beside me even though I still stood at the door.

“I...” I started before trailing off.

Something wasn't right. Why was my mother's face so unclear? Why did it look like a veil covered it? Why didn't I know my own mother's face? My worries about where I was and what I was doing were magnified. *But why? Things are going so well.*

I was lost in a sea of incongruity. Then a toneless voice rang in my head. A voice I knew very well. A voice I had heard countless times. A voice I had even grown sick of. And yet, I couldn't bring myself to hate it entirely. I didn't know what it was saying yet, but I assumed it was just saying what it always said: *Gluttony skill activated...*

*Huh?* Memories flooded me, clearer now. *I remember. I remember! Where am I?* The village I had once called home no longer existed. It had been razed to the ground during a gargoyle attack. It was gone, and it would never return to what it had once been.

The world around me audibly crumbled away as my memories returned. The house of my youth disappeared like sand on the wind, and beyond its walls lay a blood-red world.

*“Fate, keep it together! You're going to be trapped here forever!”*

Greed's words shunted me back to reality. I must have fallen unconscious when I'd leaped through the Door to Distant Lands.

Everything around me was red, like the world of Gluttony. The two worlds were like two sides of the same coin.

*“You had me worried there for a moment.”*

“How long was I out?”

*“I have no idea. This place is different from the world we came from.”*

“Are Myne and Eris okay?”

*“Neither of them will go down without one hell of a fight. But you have more important things to worry about, like yourself. What happened?”*

“I had a dream. It was about my youth, but it wasn’t a nightmare.”

It’d felt so real. My mother was still alive. My father was fine. And I wasn’t the bearer of Gluttony. It was plain, boring even, but that was by no means a bad thing.

*“This world is interfering with you in some way. It may be showing you those kinds of dreams on purpose.”*

“All the souls, you mean?”

*“It was brought about by all of those who make up this place, I’d say. As a bearer of Gluttony, you’re especially sensitive to them.”*

It was almost as if Greed was talking about people. Did that mean that the lights floating around us were...?

I reached out and touched one of them. Someone’s memories flashed through my mind. They were just fragments, and I couldn’t understand them completely, but they were the memories of a warrior. I saw his last moments: He’d fought against and was eventually killed and eaten by monsters. I even felt his pain all the way down to my bones.

“Ugh...”

*“Didn’t get very lucky that time,”* muttered Greed. *“That ain’t a good way to go.”*

“Everything floating around here... They’re all human souls?”

*“No, not just that. Look at that one.”*

This soul was bigger than the one I had just touched. *Gah! This one isn’t even human!*

Overwhelming hatred flowed through me. These were the memories of a monster, its thoughts focused purely on hatred for humans and a desire to devour whatever it found. The monster had strayed from its pack, leaving its



turf to attack and eat humans. It traveled alone, wandering for reasons that were unclear. The monster was eventually surrounded by warriors and slain by a holy knight. But the monster's hatred never wavered for a moment, right up until its last breath. Even after the memories had ended, vestiges of that hatred lingered within me, making me feel ill.

The monster's desires had been instinctual. Monsters carried an inherent hatred of humans and an urge to devour them. This one in particular was more driven by these feelings than others.

*"How was it?"*

*"It was the worst."*

*"That's how the vast majority of monsters think, how they feel. Even after thousands of years, their hatred for humans has never waned. They have drowned in the emotion. There's no reason behind it anymore. And peace cannot be found for those who have lost all reason."*

*"Is that why humans fight monsters?"*

*"If that was how things were always meant to be, and if that were how the world itself had been constructed, what would you do?"*

*"But that's ridiculous. What reason could there possibly be for having us kill one another?"*

*"What you see here in his world are the results of that."*

I looked around. This place was overwhelmingly enormous and nothing but red as far as the eye could see. It was literally the size of a whole other world. But what purpose was there to all these countless souls gathering to construct this place?

*"As the bearer of Gluttony," Greed said, reading my mind, "you should already know the answer to your question."*

The sword then fell silent, waiting for my response.

I thought about the souls I had just touched, and the itch I had felt in my Gluttony as I did so.

*"Is that even possible? All these souls, they..."*

*“Yes. They carry stats and skills.”*

It was exactly like the world of Gluttony, though on a completely different scale. *But why do this?*

*“Fate, have you ever tended fields before?”*

*“Of course I have.”*

As a young boy, I had raised herbs and a small amount of vegetables. I plowed the hard earth, planted seeds, and gave them water and fertilizer. Not all of them grew. Some crops withered due to bad weather. Others rotted. The work took perseverance. And sometimes, no matter how hard you worked, it was all for nothing.

*“What if you could plant skills in order to harvest stats?”*

*“Greed...”*

*“And what if this was the place where harvested souls were stored?”*

Warriors and monsters fought using their skills. They leveled up, their stats growing through the process. And now Greed was telling me that battles of life and death were the same as farming produce?!

All living things eventually died, whether through battle, age, illness, or unforeseen accidents. The list of ways to go was endless. Skills and gathered stats formed the vessels we called souls, and this was where they gathered after death. As they continued to be stored here, the world grew.

*“By attempting to open the Door to Distant Lands, a small number of souls flowed in reverse, which resulted in resurrections of those who were once dead.”*

*“You mean...”*

*“Now that the Door is open, the flow will attempt to return to what it always was. And as long as the Door remains open, it’ll occur at a frightening pace.”*

Greed was right. A change had occurred in this world, and the souls were now moving slowly, as if drawn to something.

*“Let’s move. If we follow them, we’ll find Libra and Roxy.”*

*“Then let’s go.”*

I clenched Greed tightly and trudged toward the place where the souls were gathering.

I'd heard Gluttony's voice earlier. Why had it spoken? Why had it called out just as I was about to be trapped in this place? It never usually spoke to me unless my Gluttony skill actually activated. I had traveled to Gluttony's depths, and even now that voice was a mystery to me. Where in the world had it come from?

## Chapter 31:

### Where Souls Go

I TREKKED ON. Huge chunks of debris floated in the air that reminded me of ancient Galian edifices. Bottomless chasms sometimes yawned before me. This place didn't seem particularly stable. Whatever the case, the floating debris made for a handy means to avoid falling in.

I leaped onto the largest chunk of debris in the area and surveyed the path ahead. Souls flowed toward the horizon. The world around us may have been red, but a variety of other colors made it quite vibrant. As individual souls touched one another, they turned blue, yellow, and green, sparkling in a number of different shades and tones. When the souls were thicker in density, the colors they emitted grew stronger and more vibrant. Past the horizon everything blended into a rainbow. It was a sight unlike anything I'd ever seen. I was so astounded, so awed, that I couldn't help but stare.

"Did all this debris come from our battle earlier?" I asked.

*"Yes. It's since stopped, but a ton was swallowed."*

"And what about now?"

*"Now that the Door is completely open, it'll pull in something different, something it was always meant to harvest."*

The skills had been planted, and it was time to reap the stats. Under normal circumstances, this was something that happened slowly. Skills were allowed to grow on their own, and the stats they generated were gathered upon death. If Greed was right, then this natural process was now being sped up. Even souls that weren't yet dead would be drawn to this place.

*"Right now, all the souls present are meant to be here. But when this parade of souls ends, souls in the outside world will be absorbed."*

"Are you serious?"

*"This is just Micuria's hypothesis, but it all fits with what we're seeing. I think*

*she was right."*

*Micuria? Oh, yeah. The researcher who was close with Kairos.* Back when I'd fought to free Myne from her past, I'd met Kairos and glimpsed his memories. That was where I'd met Micuria and learned of her research into the Door to Distant Lands. From what I'd gathered, she'd died by Kairos's hand, even though her soul was not within my Gluttony.

I focused my senses and searched for her, but she was nowhere to be found. "Where is she?" I asked.

*"Micuria was never devoured by Gluttony,"* replied Greed. *"She took her own life in order to journey to the Distant Lands."*

"She killed herself?"

*"Indeed. There were two reasons. First, Kairos didn't want her devoured by his Gluttony, so she opted for a death on her own terms. But I think she also knew... She knew that this day would come."*

"That light..."

A soul whose light shone differently from the others ignored the flow of souls and drifted toward us. It began to orbit me.

*Micuria... Fancy meeting you here like this.*

I heard Kairos's voice inside of me, and as if in response to him, the golden soul glimmered and took on human form.

"Hello there, Gluttony. I am Micuria."

"Er, hello..."

I was stunned to have the person I was just talking about appear before my eyes. Kairos seemed just as surprised as I was. Micuria looked a little awkward in front of my puzzled expression.

"I'm sorry, Kairos," she said, "but this was the only way. We cannot come to this world in our physical forms, only as souls. I *have* been able to get a lot of research done since arriving here, though."

"You came here for research?!" I said, stunned.

*That's why she died?!*

I had to wonder if all researchers were eccentric. Laine was another person who would do almost anything for the sake of her research, and being around her meant nothing but stress and worry. I don't know how her father endured it without the anxiety eating a hole in his stomach. I sensed something similar in Micuria.

"I bet you thought I did for a moment, didn't you? I'm not *that* crazy," said Micuria.

"I can't believe we came all this way just for you to joke around," I said.

"Actually, I've been waiting for you."

"You have?"

"Yes. Think of me as a kind of insurance. I knew Kairos's successor would come one day. What's your name?"

"I'm Fate Barbatos."

"Ah, so that's what Dean named his son. Fate... It couldn't be more fitting."

"You know my father?"

I figured she had to know him pretty well if they were on a first name basis. That meant she knew both a bearer of Mortal Sin *and* a holy beastfolk.

"I, too, am a holy beastfolk," she said, staring at me. "Oh, you're not surprised? That's disappointing."

"I had a feeling you had to be."

"Well, that makes things easier. Having died and now existing as a soul, I am no longer bound by any sacred mark. I was able to discover that the Divine Revelation does not extend *that* far. It's strange to think of death as a form of freedom, however."

Micuria was no longer among the living, and yet, there was something lively in her expression. It reminded me of the look in my own father's face when he was finally free of his sacred mark. It showed just how absolute the power of the Divine Revelation was over the holy beastfolk.

I had yet to receive any kind of Divine Revelation myself. Perhaps that was something my other half shouldered. He was the one who had inherited the power of the holy beastfolk, which left me an ordinary human, albeit one carrying the skill of Gluttony. But I knew he was inside of me, even now, eagerly awaiting any opportunity to take control.

Micuria's expression saddened as she looked at me again. "Fate, what will you do if all that has passed was the natural consequence of a predetermined future?"

"You mean if everything from Kairos's battle to today unfolded the way it has because it was destined to be that way?"

"Yes, that's what it would mean."

"Even me talking to you here?"

"I am little more than a minor, fleeting resistance. My being here cannot turn the tables. You can dam things up, but that will only buy you time." Micuria looked over at the flow of souls. "As long as that flow of souls remains in motion, it *will* eventually break free. *That's* what you're up against."

"Then I'll keep fighting, right until the end," I said. "Even if all I get us is just a little more time, like Kairos, then at the very least, I can pass the baton. Perhaps my failure will lead to the next person's success."

Just as Kairos had entrusted me with the black sword Greed, I, too, may have to entrust another the same way.

"I promised that I would make it back," I said. "It doesn't matter if it's impossible. I *will* stop Libra, and I *will* return home with Roxy."

Aaron still fought to protect the royal capital. If the soul harvesting reached him, we would never make it home. But there was no turning back. Not anymore.

"You remind me of Kairos," said Micuria. "It's very reassuring."

"Really?"

I thought we were completely different, but even Greed agreed.

*"You really are alike. Neither of you ever gives up."*

“Exactly! No matter the circumstances, they’ll go down kicking and screaming, if they go down at all.”

“Uh, is that a compliment?” I asked.

“He taught me tenacity. That’s how I managed to wait here,” said Micuria. “It feels like it’s been an eternity.” She raised a hand and tapped me on the forehead. “We’ll restructure your soul and unchain you using the knowledge you’ve gained from the souls of others.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re a mix of human, Gluttony, and holy beastfolk. You were born a being unlike any other. All those parts of you are meant to be one, but you exist outside of the world’s defined system and can’t access your true power. Use my soul to bridge the gap.”

She was giving me her soul, and I could do nothing to stop her.

But was it even possible to unify the two sides of myself? I didn’t think my other half was open to the discussion.



## Chapter 32:

### Black Wings

MICURIA'S HUMAN FORM DISSIPATED, and the fragments of her soul swirled around me. I watched, waiting to see what would happen. It seemed restructuring my soul was *not* going to be a gentle process. Each shard of Micuria's soul formed a needle.

"You can't be serious. You're...?" I trailed off.

I already knew what was going to happen. Micuria was going to destroy my soul so that it could be rebuilt.

Countless needle-like soul fragments stabbed me from all angles. It was a sensation beyond mere pain; it was pure suffering. I felt her soul wriggling through my skin and into my organs. The pain of my soul was reflected through my body. It was unlike anything I experienced with my Gluttony.

Then, the change in my soul began to show. The once-useless wings on my back started to grow. They tore through the armor on my back and stretched toward the sky, spreading wide. My wings were the purest black. Then, just when I thought it was over, another two wings grew. The vestigial scars on my back had turned into two full pairs of wings. It was just like Roxy when she was in her angel mode. My wings were the opposite color of hers, of course, but these were proof that I was indeed my father's son.

"Hmm? I'm...I'm still me," I murmured.

My mental state had remained throughout the transformation. My other half was nowhere to be found.

*The other half of you does not wish to join you in becoming one whole being. I have merely paved a path between you. The rest is up to you, Fate.*

"Micuria..."

*Do not be afraid. You can do it, Fate. The two of you were once a single being, so trust yourself.*

"I just don't think that we'll work things out."

*I'll be watching over you, just as Kairos has been. Now, put your newfound wings to use. Hurry, before it's too late.*

Micuria's voice faded, but the warmth of her soul remained within me. It pulsed with faith in my abilities.

"Let's go, Fate," said Greed.

"Time to fly."

A slight pain flashed through my head when I spread my wings wide. It was as if my other half was resisting me. *That's exactly what he's doing. He's struggling against me.*

It didn't stop me from using my wings, though. I felt a bit sorry for him, but he wasn't going to stop me from using the power of the holy beastfolk. With a flap of my wings, my feet lifted off the floor. I was surprised by how natural it felt; I knew how to use my new wings instinctively. Just as birds were not taught to fly, my body simply understood how these new limbs were supposed to work.

"You can fly now?" asked Greed.

"Yeah, apparently I can."

We sped through the sky. My body grew light, as though I had become one with the wind itself. We weaved around the remains of old Galian ruins as we headed for the horizon—the final destination of souls. We went faster. And faster. And *faster*. Past all the ancient Galian buildings, we found ourselves looking at swirling souls that had broken away from the flow and created their own. Any souls passing nearby were absorbed into them. At the center of the swirling souls, black cubes spun at high speed.

"What are they?!" I asked.

*"I've no idea, but I don't like it!"*

*"I bet Libra put them there to slow us down."*

"Sounds about right. Here they come!"

The souls formed into transparent, fleshy red monsters without true physical

forms with the black cubes as their cores.

*“Those are some seriously ugly monstrosities,”* Greed remarked.

*“They’ve gathered monster souls...”* I murmured.

The monster souls were thrown together haphazardly. Each one was forcefully drawn to and then connected with a black cube. That was why the creatures we faced were deformed beasts with countless heads, arms, legs, and bodies. Every single one of their eyes stared directly at me, as if every beast within the malformed monster had a unified consciousness and knew exactly who its enemy was.

I transformed Greed into the black bow and fired an arrow. It was useless.

*“You’re fighting souls,”* said Greed. *“They have no physical form.”*

*“Are you telling me that my attacks are useless?”*

*“Looks like it. Which means we have to destroy the core the monster has formed around.”*

That meant those indestructible black cubes were built from the same material as Greed. I only knew one way to take them down.

*“The Sixth Level,”* I said. *“Revolt Brionac.”*

*“That’ll severely deplete your stats, Fate.”*

I couldn’t afford to lose too many stats before facing off against Libra. If I used the Sixth Level secret technique here, I wouldn’t stand a chance against him. Libra knew this. That was exactly why he’d prepared these soul monsters. Over thirty of them were in my immediate field of vision, and I could feel even more behind me. There were tons of them, and they had us surrounded.

*“They die. They become souls. And *this* is what they get used for?”*

*“Fate...”*

*“It’s just... It’s beyond sad. It’s pitiful.”*

It was, perhaps, the first time I had ever felt sympathy for monsters. At the same time, I knew that they had all once been humans. They had all been implanted with skills they couldn’t bear and had lost human form. Depending

on the skill, their very souls morphed, shifting into a form that matched what they had become. They lost their humanity, and all that remained was hatred for humans who were attuned to the skills they'd been given.

There was an unbreachable chasm between the chosen and the forsaken in our world—a world that valued skills above all else. Yet, even then, the people who had become monsters were the true victims. All the soul monsters standing before us no longer had the hearts or minds to even understand that, and yet...

*“Fate! They’re coming! Move, damn it!”*

I ignored Greed and continued to stare at the soul monsters as they moved in to attack. These weren't like any monster with a physical form, and I needed to know something. If they were all souls released from their physical bodies, then shouldn't it still be possible for Gluttony to devour them? Now that I had become one with my Gluttony, I knew that I was capable of more. I had come to this gathering of souls and received Micuria's support. And now, I felt something I had never sensed before.

With these thoughts running through my mind, I put a hand out toward the nearest monster. A metallic voice rang in my head the moment we touched. The soul monster dissipated in an instant, leaving only a black cube. The now released souls took off, racing in the opposite direction to the horizon.

*“It looks like your Gluttony activated. What did you do?”*

“I didn't devour their souls,” I said as I released more monsters from their black cubes. “I only devoured their skills and stats.”

*“Look at you. So dexterous all of a sudden.”*

The reason those souls had become monsters was because of the skills they carried. Stats were merely a byproduct. I'd surmised that, by taking both of these attributes from the souls, their power would vanish, and they would be released from the black cubes' control.

*“So you just took the skills and stats, huh? So why not take all the power from all the souls?”*

“Because it's impossible.”

*“Why?”*

“It seems like I can’t take a soul’s power without its permission.”

The souls that attacked me had been forced to do so by the black cubes. Hatred was in their eyes, yes, but I also saw something similar to those devoured by my Gluttony in them: the desire for salvation. By devouring them, I merely rid the monsters of that which weighed most heavily upon them—their skills and stats.

“I don’t know what this power means just yet, but...”

But I could see the souls that gave me their skills and stats ignored the flow and raced in the direction Greed and I had come from.

*“I see,”* said Greed. *“You’ve liberated them. Liberated their souls.”*

“What do you mean?”

*“Do you remember the Great Canyon?”*

It was a place in Galia where monsters had gathered as if looking for a place to die. Even now, countless ancient monsters slumbered there.

## Chapter 33:

### The Last Disciple

*“THE GREAT CANYON was where the final battle between Kairos and Libra took place,”* said Greed.

The black cubes raced to the horizon, running from me. I chased after them as I listened to Greed.

*“So that’s where it happened.”*

It was the only part of Galia with any sort of natural greenery. I knew it was no ordinary place from the moment I’d stepped foot there.

*“It was also the place where Kairos was consumed by his Gluttony.”*

I could hear the frustration in Greed’s voice, and I knew they were memories he would rather forget. But he’d opened up to me, saying there was no better time than the present.

Greed said that when Kairos had been consumed by his Gluttony, his last strike had given birth to the great canyon. It had delivered a near-fatal wound upon Libra and left a strange phenomenon upon the world. Greenery flourished there, and monsters seeking salvation were drawn to the place. I’d seen it with my own eyes and knew that, even now, this still continued.

Was it through my connection with Kairos that I had unlocked the ability to liberate souls?

*“Have you heard from Kairos?”* I asked.

*“Nope. Not a thing.”*

I tried calling for him myself, but there was no response. Nothing from Rafale, either. I hadn’t been able to feel them watching over me since passing through the Door. It was like something was interfering with their ability to do so.

*“Their voices aren’t getting through?”*

*“Nope. Do you know anything else about liberating souls?”*

*"Only one thing. It was the only way Kairos could stand up to Libra."*

So that was the only thing that was effective against Libra? I was suddenly relieved. At least I'd acquired the ability before confronting him.

Greed chuckled. *"That was what Kairos used, but you don't have to follow the same path."*

"Greed..."

*"The power is indeed effective against Libra. However, it didn't land a finishing blow. Now listen, because this is important."* Greed spoke quietly. *"Kairos is counting on you. He's always a handful, and he's never easy to deal with, and he never told you exactly what to do. Do you know why?"*

"Because he..."

*"Yeah. Because he believes in us."*

The words were out of character for the sword, as was the somewhat embarrassed note in his voice.

Kairos had given me his strength when I had fought my father after he'd turned into the black angel. It wasn't to tell us what to do but to lead us down the path we needed to walk. That was the kind of person he was.

"Ah... It's coming into view," I said.

*"The center of this realm."*

We were both seeing it for the very first time. It was a ball of light as incandescent as the sun, but strangely enough, it wasn't blinding. It absorbed the countless souls that flowed into it, its surface rippling with red as each soul merged, though it was never enough to overpower its natural golden hue. It seemed to deny souls their very existence, handling them as if they were merely cogs in an enormous machine. Even the Gluttony skill didn't handle its devoured souls this way, instead allowing each soul its individuality.

"So this thing grew this big by acquiring all these souls?"

*"Little by little, over four thousand years. It's bigger than I could have imagined."*

The closer we got, the more overwhelming its size became. I had never seen the two moons that floated in the sky up close, but I couldn't help thinking that they might be about this big.

"Hey, Greed," I said.

*"What?"*

"What would happen if I devoured this massive ball of light?"

*"Don't be ridiculous. You know what would happen better than anyone."* The black sword chuckled, but I could hear the worry in his voice. *"Fate, are you ready? It's showtime."*

I clenched the black sword tightly and looked where Greed indicated. There, I found two human figures against a backdrop of gathering human souls that looked like specks against the sun. One of the figures was the crucified Roxy. Next to her was Libra, his eyes closed as he waited quietly for things to begin. He knew Greed and I had arrived because he'd used the black cubes to try to stop us, which had since returned to him.

"Libra!" I shouted.

Libra smiled at the sound of his name. Even now, he wasn't the least bit flustered. He opened his eyes slowly and set his gaze on me.

*He knows I can't attack him yet.*

"I've been waiting for you," said Libra. "What do you think of the place? Wonderful view, wouldn't you say?"

"What are you trying to do?! Release Roxy!"

"A question and an order simultaneously? Quite a conundrum you've put me in."

*That son of a...acting all calm and collected...*

"Now, now. There's no need to get so mad. Look, I'll release the girl."

With a grin, Libra snapped his fingers, and the crucifix upon which Roxy hung crumbled into nothingness.

"Roxy!" I shouted.



I caught her in my arms and quickly looked her over. She was still unconscious.

“I’m a man of my word. She’s been released.”

“What did you do to her?!”

“I merely gave Snow an order.”

“No...”

“That is to say, I granted her eternal sleep. She’s bound by her sacred mark, with a little help from Snow. Merging with a holy beast will grant you tremendous powers, but it *does* come with risks.”

Libra gazed at the sleeping Roxy for a moment, then shifted his eyes to me.

“As someone constantly paying for the use of his power, surely you understand what I’m talking about. That’s simply what happens when you reach for more than you were given. Even this fight of ours is meaningless. I’m sure you’ve heard as much from Micuria already. All of this is part of the pre-established harmony. You coming here all tattered and torn to stand before me? The future has already been decided. You can’t change any of it.”

I pulled Roxy close to me and pointed the black sword at Libra. As expected, Libra still had complete mastery over his black cubes.

“I was born to protect this,” said Libra, pointing at the gigantic golden sphere behind him. “And I’m so very glad I got the chance to see it in person. I must say, it isn’t easy when you don’t even know what you’re supposed to be protecting. Like many of my holy beastfolk brethren, I have lived for far too long. Perhaps it would have been easier to rid myself of my human form and live as a holy beast.”

“Libra... You...”

He nodded, beaming. “But it’s exactly what I expected. It’s amazing, beautiful... So very worthy of protection.”

“What is it?”

“It is God.”

“What? This ball of light...is God?”

“Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that it *was* God. Everyone is blessed by God equally. They are given skills, level up, and cultivate stats. Upon death, their souls return to God—the place their power came from. They must return to God with offerings, or to put it more accurately, *as* offerings.”

“Why are there differences in the skills that everyone receives?”

“You know the answer to that already. It all depends on the power of an individual soul. The strong receive strong skills, and the weak receive weak skills. Even you and the other forsaken have your roles to play, you see.” Libra opened his mouth and pretended to chew on something before he went on. “You are monster food. You are provided as nourishment for monsters so they can level up. You know how rookie adventurers start their careers by hunting weaker monsters, like goblins? It’s exactly like that. Monsters start out with easy prey—that is to say, the weak—in order to grow stronger.”

“That’s the whole reason they exist?”

“It’s not particularly fair, is it? But that’s the only way to ensure things are balanced. Monsters were originally humans, anyway. If you look at the big picture, it’s all just humans killing one another. You humans love massacring your fellow man anyway, no? Change your point of view, and it’s no different, really.”

Libra plucked a human soul and a monster soul from where they were drifting nearby and showed them to me for comparison.

“In the beginning, there were only human souls. However, monster souls gave birth to a plethora of different skills, inevitably meaning more and more stats.” Libra threw the two souls at the giant sphere, which changed color slightly before returning to its usual golden state. Libra smiled. “But it’s still far too early. So, I opened the door and invited you in. Do you know why?”

“I doubt we’re welcome here.”

“Right you are. I’m going to have you rest eternally. Best seat in the house, though. Practically at the right hand of God.”

The black cubes that had been drifting around Libra now moved with

purpose, each one traveling in formation with the others.

“Given that this is all predestined, I’m going to do as I see fit. That starts by making sure Gluttony never reappears in the world you call home. I will not allow the same mistakes to keep repeating themselves. Otherwise, people like you will keep on emerging over and over and over.”

*“Watch out, Fate.”*

“Yeah, I know.”

This force was well beyond what I’d faced against my father. At least the black angel of death had retained a sliver of pity. What I felt from Libra was pure, unadulterated bloodlust despite his expression remaining completely unchanged. The gap between his attitude and appearance struck me as complete opposites.

“I am compelled to fight. It would seem that you are indeed a threat.”

The sacred mark on Libra’s face lit up with a blood-red glimmer.

## Chapter 34:

### At the Hand of God

IT WAS SO BRIGHT—a world of light where darkness did not exist. It was as if all became clear at the hand of God. The sphere grew ever more brilliant, as though announcing the beginning of the soul harvest.

“Now that the door has been opened, a reset is necessary,” said Libra. “And I will ensure that there will be none to interfere next time.”

Libra moved in front of the sphere he called God. He raised his hands high for a moment before bringing them down in my direction. The black cubes around him immediately drew nearby souls toward themselves.

*“Fate!”*

The cubes once again formed into soul monsters and moved to attack. I readied myself to release the souls and decimate the monsters as I had earlier, but then, I noticed the grin on Libra’s face.

“It won’t work,” I said.

*“Why not?”*

I leaped away from the soul monsters’ attacks, still carrying Roxy in my arms. The closer we were to the monsters, the more I felt it in my bones: These souls were not open to the idea of mutual understanding. They were not looking for salvation.

“I told you, did I not? I will not make the same mistake twice. These souls are under my complete control. I never expected the experiments I toyed with when creating Eris would come in so handy. When all this is over, I’ll have to thank her.”

“Libra!”

“Ooh, so scary. But this is your fault, Fate. You chose your father. And unfortunately, our promise is now void.”

“Eris isn’t just some ‘thing’ that you own!”

“Oh, but she is. I even gave you a chance to own her yourself.”

The soul monsters had me surrounded. There was no way out.

“I always wanted to watch a bearer of Gluttony get devoured. But don’t worry. *She’ll* follow the same fate. Think of her as an offering.”

“Damn it,” I spat.

My hands were full carrying Roxy, meaning Libra could do whatever he wanted. That was exactly why he’d released her in the first place.

*“We’ll have to handle this in one shot,”* said Greed.

“And there’s only one way we can do that.”

A shiver of anxiety ran down my spine. Libra had already said that he wouldn’t make the same mistake twice. There was nothing else I could do, though, so I quickly transformed Greed from the black sword into the black spear.

*“Take my power, Greed,”* I said.

*“Let me at it!”*

The black spear fed on my stats. Its point sharpened as it grew more aggressive and its form more intimidating. There wasn’t a more dangerous projectile weapon in existence. I activated the Sixth Level’s secret technique, Revolt Brionac. I poured all of my energy into it, then threw it. It was a spear of pure extinction, able to decimate even the indestructible black cubes. I erased the soul monsters blocking our way forward, completely, starting with their cores.

Each time a soul monster went down, my Gluttony informed me of my ever-increasing stats in its cold, toneless voice. It droned on and on, listing off my new stat levels and new skills. While I was grateful for the stats, none of the skills would be of any use against a foe like Libra. Nonetheless, their owners had thought the skills priceless, so I would show them the same respect.

“Greed!” I shouted. “Do it!”

*Libra can’t use Roxy as a shield anymore. How will this go down?*

A huge shockwave resounded around us. Libra had stopped even the Revolt Brionac, the spear of extinction. But the black cubes weren't capable of such a feat.

Then, I saw it. And everything clicked into place.

"It's exactly the same thing..." I muttered.

The Revolt Brionac had collided with an identical-looking weapon. It was a spear, one that was the spitting image of Greed in his Sixth Level secret technique. It had the same all-encompassing destructive abilities, too. The two spears struggled against one another. They were equal in power, and when that power dissipated, they simply drifted through the air.

"Greed, get over here," I shouted.

My black spear arced through the air like lightning and returned to me.

*"Never thought he'd mimic my powers,"* said Greed.

"Now I know why he looked so smug," I muttered. "It's the harvest."

The spear that returned to Libra transformed back into a black cube.

*He can do that with the black cubes?!*

"Oh, I'm capable of so much more than this," said Libra, seeing my shock. "I can do this. And this. And... Would you like me to go on? I wonder what you'd think if we went through all of them?"

It wasn't just the black spear. Libra could transform the cubes into all of Greed's unlocked levels—the black sword, the black bow, the black scythe... I had to assume he could transform the cubes into axes and gunblades as well.

"Have you ever thought about it, Fate? Have you ever considered who made the Weapons of Mortal Sin?"

The weapons were not people. They had not been born. Just as Libra said, someone had to have crafted and forged them.

"Only the truly stupid are arrogant enough to think that they alone have access to weapons so powerful. Though I must say, this data is marvelous. What a wonderful spear. So vastly different from Vanity. *This* is what the black spear

always should have been.”

“Using those weapons comes with a price, you know,” I said.

The secret techniques of the Weapons of Mortal Sin all came with a high stat cost, and those stats did not return to their owner upon use. Libra was no fool, though. He wouldn’t take such risks.

“What in the world are you talking about?” asked Libra as he sucked in and absorbed drifting souls. “Look at this plethora that surrounds us.”

*But he just called them offerings to God! This is ridiculous! Is Libra even allowed to do such a thing?!*

As if in answer, Libra pointed to the glowing sacred mark on his face.

“God allows it,” he said. “It is all for the greater good. We can make and raise more of them. I’m not quite as dexterous as you, so I just take them, souls and all. But there are so many others. Look at them all! It’s a veritable flood! An ocean! Even the souls ignoring the flow have returned.”

I turned and saw a wave of souls pushing back from the direction I’d come.

“What should I decimate first, I wonder? If you have any requests, Fate, now’s the time.”

I only growled in response.

I had successfully destroyed a few soul monsters, but not all of them. Those that remained were still after me. I weaved around their attacks while I checked on Roxy. She looked no closer to waking. Fighting against all of this while trying to protect her put me at too much of a disadvantage.

*If only she would wake...*

Black bolts of lightning rained down from above. I looked up and found Libra using the Second Level secret technique, Bloody Ptarmigan. I used the speed granted by my wings to narrowly avoid most of the lightning, but one bolt pierced straight through my left shoulder. Pain coursed through my body, but it wasn’t the sort of pain I was used to back in the real world. This was similar to the pain I felt on the spiritual plane when I’d trained with Greed and Luna.

Back then, Greed had told me that if my soul took too much damage, it would

destroy my mind. Libra wasn't satisfied with simply breaking me physically. He wanted to cut me down completely—body, mind, and soul. On top of that, he was toying with me, Bloody Ptarmigan raining down around me.

“Roxy!” I shouted. “It’s no good. She’s not waking up. Snow, please! Listen to me!”

Just then, a wave of souls appeared before us. If Libra’s words were to be believed, these were souls that had returned. There were so many I could barely see in front of me. They rushed into the giant golden sphere, but one among them changed direction, and it emitted a warm light as it drifted over Roxy. I was drawn to it, and reached out to touch it.

“Fate Barbatos,” said the soul. “I never imagined we would reunite in this form nor in this place.”

“Sir Mason!” I exclaimed.

“I died and returned. I saw my family once again. I no longer bear any regrets. However, when I returned once more as a soul, my consciousness remained. Is this a miracle? Or perhaps... Fate, will you lend me your power? My daughter’s soul is trapped. Ah, so this is what they call destiny... I see. Now that I am a soul myself, I understand.”

“What do I do?” I asked.

“You will guide Roxy’s soul by using my own.”

“But what will become of you, Sir Mason?”

“I will be fine. I am already dead, after all. And I will gladly give my soul for the sake of my daughter.”

I felt Mason’s determination. Greed, too, told me that there was no other way. He had done something similar in the past, so his words carried weight.

*“I’ll buy you time while you are in Roxy’s soul,”* said Greed.

“You mean...”

*“The Crossing. Now go, while we still have the chance.”*

Greed forced us to merge, and I became a soul. Led by Mason, I entered Roxy.



As I did so, Greed shot me a wink—a gesture that was completely out of character for me—as if to tell me he had things under control.

As my soul entered Roxy, I heard Mason’s soul crumble away as he spoke his last words. “Please, save my daughter.”

## Chapter 35:

### Soul Dive

I STOOD UPON a grassy plain, a gentle breeze drifting by. The sun had just begun to set over the horizon. Everything was clear and vibrant. I would have been thrilled to stay here for eternity. A deep darkness encroached, though, the sun's rays glinting dully off the blades of grass around me. Roxy's world was about to be enclosed in darkness.

"You're here, aren't you, Snow?"

My question was taken by the wind, traveling far and wide. The world around me warped as if in response, and Snow appeared. Now, however, she was an adult. This was who she really was. The sacred mark on her face glowed red, telling me that there was nothing she could do about Roxy's mental state on her own.

"I finally have the chance to speak with you, Fate," she said.

"Is there really no way for you to free Roxy?" I asked.

"It is impossible. You know this."

Snow pointed to her face, and the sacred mark glowed brighter. She was fighting against her Divine Revelation, but it still had her under its control.

*That means there's only one way...*

"You have to kill me," Snow said.

"Stop it. I'm sick of this. I don't want to fight the people I care about. I don't want to kill them."

"It's okay, Fate. I died once already. Besides, I must atone for my sins. You know why, now that you know who you truly are, yes? You remember."

"Snow..."

*Snow, please don't do this. Don't speak to me like my father did.*

"Why do you all want to die?!" I shouted. "Is that what happens to everyone

when they come back to life?!”

Snow smiled. “Devour me, Fate,” she said.

I did not want to do it again. Not like I had with my father. *Why? Mason... Micuria... My mother... Why do they all do this?*

But I already knew the answer. They all felt like I had, back when I’d fought the Heavenly Calamity to protect Roxy. Yet, I still couldn’t accept this reasoning. Snow’s voice felt so very distant, even though I was so close to her now.

“There are things that must be done,” said Snow, looking at the horizon. “And they must be done before the sun sets on this world.”

“Is this really the only way? Is this really our only choice?”

“Roxy will never return otherwise. You must do this while we still can.”

Snow walked up to me until we stood face-to-face. I thought back to the promise we’d made when I was young. The memory had been swiped from me by my other half. Back then, my mother was gone, and I was so very lonely. Perhaps I had felt Snow’s holy beastfolk power instinctually and felt a sort of kinship with her.

“Snow...” I said, reaching out to touch her cheek.

It was war. She was alive.

“We’re out of time. You must hurry,” said Snow.

She was right. If I devoured her now, I could force Snow and Roxy to separate. And if I didn’t do it soon, Roxy’s mental state would collapse. Then there was Greed, who was fighting Libra entirely on his own. However, I couldn’t save everyone. If I devoured Snow, she would be locked in my Gluttony for eternity, like my father. I knew that wasn’t what Roxy wanted.



*Is this really our only choice?*

I put a hand to Snow's slender neck. All that was left was to squeeze. Snow closed her eyes.

Then I heard a voice from somewhere.

*Is this really what you want?*

It was a voice that held great weight, and it sounded exactly like my own. It *was* my own. It was the voice of my other half, now clearer thanks to Micuria opening a path between us.

*I'll take that sacred mark for you.*

What was he talking about? This was completely out of character for the other Fate. I knew there had to be more to it than that. I didn't trust him. But when I said as much, he merely chuckled.

*I need power, enough power to break my shackles—to break you. I need a sacred mark if I am to exercise the powers of the holy beastfolk. So, I will take hers, and you get to release her. It's not a bad deal.*

"If you receive a sacred mark, will you try to take over?"

*It's what I've always tried to do. I want you to experience the suffering that I endure, locked in the depths of Gluttony.*

"And you think I'm going to agree to that?"

*If not agreeing means losing what's important to you, then yes, you will.*

I should have expected as much from my other half. If he received Snow's sacred mark, he would come at me full force to wrestle away control. I'd finally come to terms with my Gluttony only to have my other half to deal with.

*I'm ready. Touch the sacred mark.*

I remembered my father saying to be careful of the other me. He had probably expected that something like this might occur. But what other choice did I have?

I gently touched the sacred mark on Snow's face. It glowed brilliantly for a moment. Snow's eyes opened wide in surprise before she looked at me

pleadingly. The sacred mark shattered and dissolved, turning into particles that flowed into the back of my right hand like water.

“Ngh,” I grunted.

Pain cut through me like fire. Snow’s sacred mark carved itself into my right hand. I thought it would control me in some way, but nothing happened, even though it glowed red at the acceptance of its Divine Revelation. Then, my right hand shot up and reached for my neck. I quickly fought it off with my other arm. The other Fate was *already* trying to take over.

*Your Gluttony is getting in the way. How unfortunate... The sacred mark wasn't enough. There will be other chances, though, and I can't wait to act on them...*

My Gluttony was working to keep the other Fate at bay. Perhaps that was also why the sacred mark was locked. I had never imagined the Gluttony skill would one day provide me with protection, but I was glad. The long struggle had paid off.

I took a deep breath, then turned my eyes to Snow, who was still in shock.

“Why would you do something so reckless...?” she asked.

“Well, things worked out, didn’t they?”

Snow sighed. “That part of you will never change. I’m the reason Dean died... You know this now that you remember everything, don’t you?”

“Dad didn’t blame you. And his death... That was me...”

My mother died soon after I was born. My father secretly moved us to a small village in the mountains to raise me. At that time, my condition was unstable. I existed as both Gluttony and a holy beastfolk. If we’d been in a bigger town or city and something had happened, many would have been injured or even killed. We had also needed to hide from the holy beastfolk pursuing us.

“I was sent after your father,” said Snow, her eyes distant.

She’d had no choice but to fight.

“Dean defeated me,” continued Snow. “And it was you who took care of my wounds, Fate.”

It had been a place deep in the mountains, some ways from our village. I'd been playing by myself when I felt like I heard a voice and wandered off in search of it. It must have been my other half that'd felt the presence, now that I thought about it.

Back then, my other personality and I were on good terms. My father saw him as a potential threat, but he was like a brother to me. When the other Fate found Snow, he quickly saw to her wounds. I was so happy meeting another of my kin besides my father. I think my other half had always been lonely in that sense, so he took care of her in secret, afraid he would lose his new friend. I helped him as best I could.

Things didn't stay quiet for long. When Snow was well enough to move, my father found her, and another battle between fellow holy beastfolk broke out. Unable to stop it from happening, I broke down in tears. And as the fight raged on around me, my other half was affected by the energies at play and awakened to his holy beastfolk power.

"I awakened something truly terrifying," said Snow.

I was incredibly strong with my two halves plus the Gluttony. In my rage, I killed Snow and moved on to attack my father.

"Your father sacrificed his life in order to lock your other half in the depths of your Gluttony."

And then, I was alone. My father had always been by my side, but he was gone now. The majority of my memories from that time disappeared along with my other half, so I misremembered my father's death.

"Do you recall what the other Fate asked of me?" said Snow.

"Yeah. It was always so perplexing, but I finally understand."

He had wanted to be together. It was only now that I understood the depth of his request. That was the reason he had appeared. Even now, Snow still meant the world to him. That was why he'd accepted her sacred mark—the fact that he could potentially take over was only secondary to him.

Snow looked out at the horizon as the sunlight began to shine on the world again. It was warm and gentle.



“Roxy is waking,” she said.

“Snow! Your body!”

“With my sacred mark gone, I cannot give her strength as I once did. But there is one thing I can do.”

Just as with her sacred mark earlier, now Snow herself was dissolving into particles of light.

“But you can’t...” I said. “That would simply mean that you...die.”

Snow gave a bright, encouraging smile. “I will become one with Roxy’s heart. Don’t worry. Roxy will remain the same. She will be able to access the powers of the Valkyrie on her own now.”

“Thank you, Snow.”

“I should be thanking you. Rest easy. I will live on through Roxy.”

She said this not just for the benefit of the me who was physically before her but also for the me who had accepted her sacred mark.

Snow’s entire body was now particles of light that were spread out across the grassy plains. The vivid greenery absorbed Snow’s energy, and flowers began to bloom. Warmth flowed through Roxy’s inner world as the sun continued to climb through a cloudless sky, and a gentle, calming wind blew.

Roxy’s world had returned, meaning she was waking up. It was time for me to go back. The battle with Libra awaited.



## Chapter 36:

### The Final Judgment

ENDLESS ATTACKS RAINED DOWN around me as my consciousness returned to my body. Libra fired Bloody Ptarmigans like a cruel, callous child playing with its toys. Fortunately, Greed had kept me safe while I was away, narrowly avoiding the onslaught.

*"About time, partner,"* he said.

*"Sorry."*

*"I assume things went well."*

*"Yep."*

Roxy's mind had returned, but a price had been paid. Snow would not come back. However, she had made herself a part of Roxy's heart so as to lend us her strength.

Roxy's eyes fluttered open.

"Roxy!" I said.

"Fay..."

The moment I saw the tears rolling down her cheeks, I knew that she understood what had happened. Unfortunately, there was no time to mourn. And to make matters worse, I needed Roxy's immediate support.

"Can you fight?" I asked.

"Yes," she said without hesitation. She spoke in a clear voice filled with the strength of her heart, a power that had saved me so many times before.

Roxy took a few steps from me and flapped her white wings. She had six of them now—two more than before—and her holy sword glowed with a new light. The blade was even more divine than before. According to Greed, it was no longer just an artificial holy sword, but something close to the genuine article. The sheer power that emanated from her person sent a shiver down my

spine.

Roxy turned and smiled at me, now in her truest Valkyrie form. “All of this is a present from Snow. She will always be a part of me,” she said. “Now, let’s go, Fate!”

I felt as if not just Roxy but her halo, too, had spoken.

“Great. That means you, too, Greed.”

*“I got this.”*

I flew with everything I had and headed straight for Libra, who stood in front of the glowing sphere at the heart of this world. But even though I had brought Roxy back from her comatose state, Libra was still the very picture of calm. It was as if he were devoid of emotion. Was this because of the predestination Micuria had told me about?

“I won’t let that stop me...” I muttered.

*Not after I’ve come so far.*

I refused to stand down. Both my body and mind were resolved to finish this. Here, now, in this place, I no longer fought alone. Roxy and Greed fought by my side. Myne and Eris, too, were locked in a heated battle with the holy beasts in our home world. Aaron and Eris’s white knights were no different. They too fought to protect the kingdom. This was not my battle alone. My allies and I, we were all connected, and all of us shared the same desire to get through this. We would fight to the bitter end.

Libra raised his hand, looking as cool and calm as always.

*“He’s got something up his sleeve,”* said Greed.

The black cubes around him changed form, transforming into black spears. There were more than I could count, and every single one of them was ready to skewer us.

Libra dropped his hand. The spears sped toward us.

“I’ll handle this!” shouted Roxy.

She flew in front of me before I even had a chance to call for her and cast a

protective barrier. It was like the one she'd used to defend us from the fire of the Zodiac Aquarius, except this new barrier was on a whole other level. Surrounded in the warmth of Roxy's shield, my confidence grew. I was completely unafraid of the countless spears approaching us.

But it wasn't just the barrier. Roxy had always protected me, from the kingdom all the way to Galia. And now here, too.

I believed in her.

"Thank you, Roxy," I said.

"Fay?"

"For being by my side. Thank you."

The spears were repelled, useless against Roxy's barrier.

"But of course," she said.

The strength in her voice surprised me, but the joy I felt made me even more powerful. At this rate, we would make it to Libra in mere moments.

He narrowed his eyes, then let out an exaggerated sigh. "So, you have the power to deflect my spears... I must admit, I never imagined that Snow herself—the aegis of God—would betray me. To think that the only loyal servant of the almighty left is me."

"Libra!" I shouted.

Libra dropped his face into his hands, but I saw a crooked grin from between his fingers. "You'll get nowhere by merely defending yourselves," he said. "Resistance is futile. You will not reach me."

*You know how this ends*, he seemed to say. And I knew why. If I launched a full-power Revolt Brionac, it would be blocked. All I had was Greed, while Libra had a veritable army of black spears at his disposal.

"If you won't come any closer, then I'll finish things from here," said Libra. "We have offerings in abundance. Can your power of extinction stave this off?"

"You wouldn't..."

"A final attack, one of such magnitude that a mere Weapon of Mortal Sin

cannot hope to recover.”

The black spears surrounding Libra transformed as they absorbed nearby souls. They grew into sharper, more aggressive, and more ominous weapons. Each one had the power to destroy anything and everything. And every single one of them had transformed into the Sixth Level secret technique, Revolt Brionac.

“Surely the answer is clear,” said Libra. “Your weapon is vastly outnumbered. How about surrendering? Choose that path, and I will let the girl go.”

I turned to Roxy.

“Fay!” she said, her mind made up.

“Roxy!” I replied, as we shared a resolute nod.

Our promise was rock-solid. We would not be swayed. It didn’t matter if Libra claimed that fighting back was pointless. We would decide what was impossible, not him.

Libra saw our expressions and shook his head, exasperated. “Such a pity. To think you would throw away such a generous offer.”

Countless Revolt Brionacs flew toward us at once. They were repelled by Roxy’s barrier, but we could hear it fracture with each impact. Roxy poured more power into maintaining our defenses, but the spears were starting to overwhelm her.

*I won’t let it end like this.*

I transformed the black sword into the black spear, but...

“I’m fine, Fay,” Roxy said.

I knew she was simply putting up a strong front. That was why I had left on my journey to protect her in the first place. We had been through so much together, and it had brought us to this moment. The realization hit me that everything, all of it, had started from a place of reckless abandon. Why was I even hesitating?

“Greed, are you ready?”

*"I was born ready. No imitation will ever stand up to the real deal. Give me everything you've got!"*

"Do it, partner."

I didn't bother to think about the repercussions. Instead, I poured everything I had into Greed and our own Revolt Brionac. I aimed the spear at Libra, then launched it at him at full strength.

"Fay!" Roxy shouted.

Her voice grounded me as Greed collided with Libra's black spears. However, my Revolt Brionac was quickly swallowed in the hail of Libra's own. He chuckled, smirking. His face said it all: *I told you so.*

"You just can't help yourself," he said. "You're so incredibly wasteful."

But I could still feel Greed, even when he was out of my reach. Our secret technique wasn't over yet. And if Greed hadn't given up, then neither would I.

I had almost nothing left, but I couldn't bear to let Greed down. I didn't want to. Roxy could barely act as she focused on blocking Libra's black spears, each one probing for an opening. Libra had a major advantage over us and was pushing back.

"You've still got some energy left, don't you, Greed?" I said. "You won't lose to those imitations. You can't."

*"I feel you, Fate. Lend me your strength."*

Greed's voice reached me as if he were right next to me. This was the first time we'd been able to connect over such a distance, but it felt no different from the Crossing. What blocked our path was something we could overcome, something we could defeat. I just needed more power.

*Fate...*

I heard a voice, calling me from within. A voice I never thought I'd hear again. It was my father. His voice was calm and gentle, and for a moment, I almost forgot that I was locked in a fierce battle.

*You are not alone. I am with you. And not just me. Take a look around.*

Countless drifting souls filled my vision.

*The Skills of Mortal Sin defy the laws of God. They are taboo. Because of that, you can answer the prayers of those seeking salvation from those very laws.*

Souls broke away from the flow into the giant sphere and changed course, now coming right into me.

*The Gluttony Skill was born in the image of God itself. It was meant to be a place of peace, where souls do not end up as offerings to the sphere before you.*

“Dad!”

*You have faced your own Gluttony, and it has brought you to this place. You are Fate. You can accept these souls. And should he wish it, your other half can too... I did a terrible thing to my own son. I didn't believe in him. It was an awful thing to do.*

Power swelled within me as my father's words faded away.

*Dad... You're giving me your power. Again... Thank you. I will send it to Greed.*

But my father's power alone was not enough. We could resist the countless spears that Libra had unleashed but not overcome them.

“Hngh,” I grunted.

“Fay!”

At this rate, Libra was going to overpower us.

The next thing I knew, more and more power rose within me. It was not my father. So who was it? Unknown feelings and memories flowed into me, feeding my strength. They didn't stop. It was as if a countless number of people were holding me up and supporting me.

I thought of what my father had said and looked at the souls around us. Then, I stepped out of Roxy's barrier, allowing them to join me. I offered them a chance to unite. They were all such tiny, fleeting essences, but they surged in number, empowering me.

## Chapter 37:

### Level Zero

LIBRA HAD CALLED GREED a “mere” Weapon of Mortal Sin. His black cubes imitated the power of the black spear’s Sixth Level, a power I had inherited from my father.

“Maybe you’re right. Maybe it is little more than a weapon on its own,” I said. “But it can take the hearts and emotions of the souls here, the people they were, and transform them into power, all through Gluttony!”

It was the first time anything like this had ever happened. Gluttony had always caused me suffering, but now, things were different. Now, it led me in a new and better direction. From the moment I was born, it had been an obscure skill, an ill-omen that sometimes drew the ire of others. Now I was glad for all of the hardships. I *needed* Gluttony.

“Fay, you’re crying,” Roxy murmured.

I hadn’t even realized it, but I felt a tear run down my cheek. I was no longer sad. My tears came forth because of the endless feelings and memories that continued to flow into me. They moved me to my core, and I shouted the name of the Sixth Level secret technique at my partner, Greed.

“Revolt Brionac!”

Greed burst through and overpowered the crowd of black spears as if in reply, annihilating them one after another. Libra’s brow furrowed as he transformed his black cubes into shields to stop Greed’s onslaught. Even those were useless against the Sixth Level attack, though. Greed continued directly toward Libra. He would not let anything get in his way.

The previously moving souls around us stopped as if to bear witness to this moment.

“Unbelievable... How is this happening?” muttered Libra.

Greed’s Revolt Brionac pierced straight through Libra’s chest, leaving a gaping

hole in its wake. It was the power of pure extinction weaponized, and yet, even that wasn't enough to wipe Libra out completely. The wound would have been fatal for any human, but Libra was still alive. His sacred mark grew a deeper shade of red—his Divine Revelation pushed him to fight on.

The vast majority of Libra's black cubes had been completely destroyed. The few that remained no longer operated properly, letting out loud electrical noises as they flew around haphazardly.

"Fay, we did it!" cried Roxy as she drew closer.

I shook my head. "No, not yet. This is where it begins," I replied.

Four large souls flew from the direction I'd come from and swirled around the injured Libra as if spurring him to action. I knew instinctively that they were the souls of the holy beasts that had attempted to block our way into the Door to Distant Lands. It seemed like Myne and Eris had somehow emerged victorious in their battle. Eris must have confronted and overcome her fear of and trauma from holy beasts. Nothing could have made me happier.

Unfortunately, Myne and Eris had also unwittingly created a way for Libra to gain a new strength. Perhaps Libra himself had expected this eventuality and had planned for the four holy beasts to be a kind of insurance.

Libra laughed loudly. Perhaps it was the fact that his heart had literally been replaced by a gaping hole in his chest, but it was as if he were laughing at the horribly empty vessel he had become.

"Come. Face the horror I have become."

Libra's face rotted away, forming something twisted and wretched. His pristine white outfit discolored before beginning to disintegrate. A putrid liquid seeped from the holes in his clothing. It was his holy beast form, and just as Libra had said, he was horror incarnate. If my father had been the angel of death, then Libra was a mutated plague that spread death far and wide. He was a grotesque creature crafted from all that was awful and putrid in the world.

I finally felt like I understood why he was so enamored with the purity of Roxy's Valkyrie form.

"Now I am five holy beasts combined. Time's up."



The flow of resurrected souls was coming to a close. Once they were done, Libra would move on to harvesting the souls of the living. There was no time to hesitate. I turned my gaze on the giant sphere of light. I knew I could reach it before the worst were to occur.

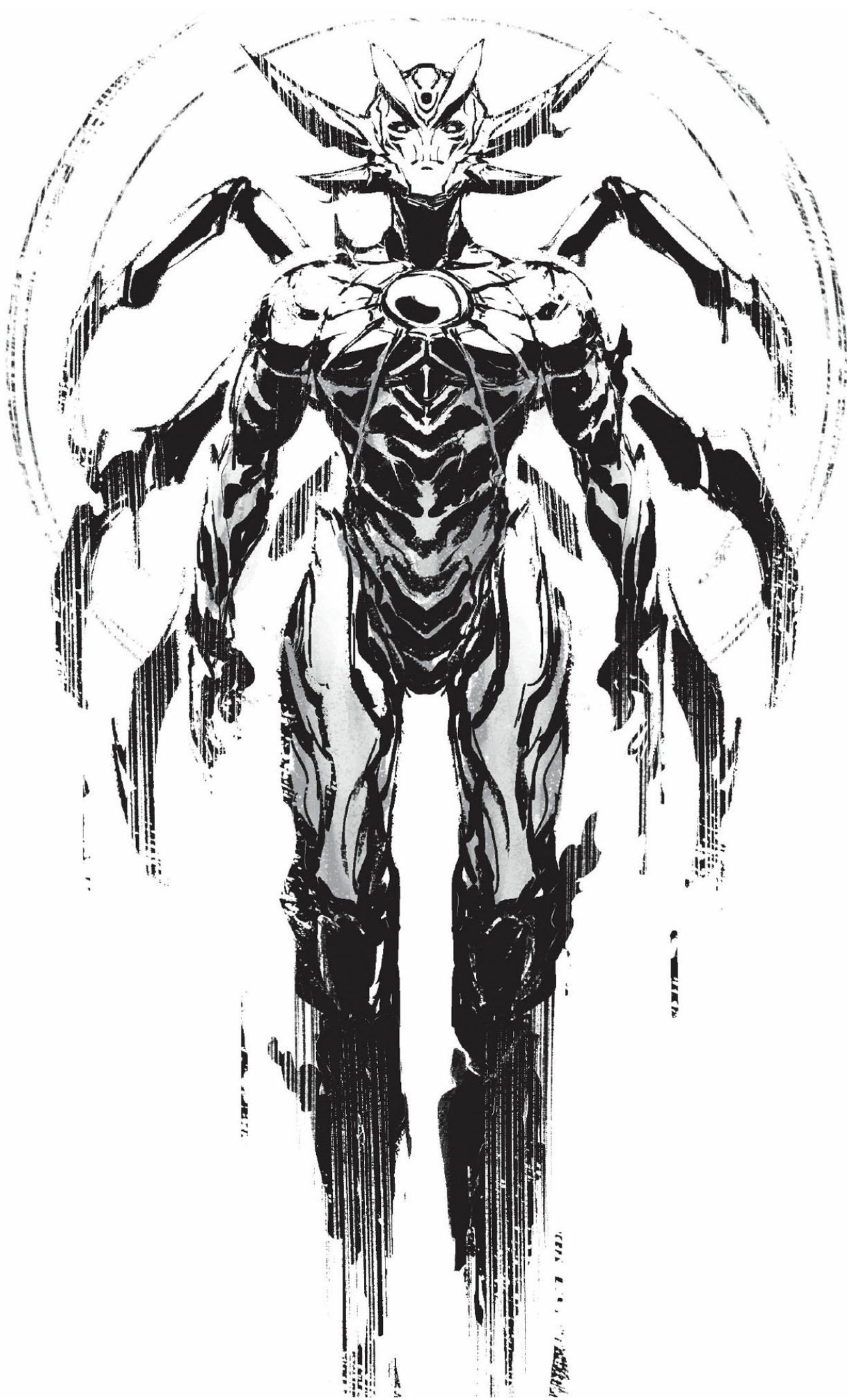
“Roxy, this is where it ends,” I said.

“Yes.”

“Greed,” I said.

*“Fate, don’t tell me... You’re...”*

Roxy still hadn’t realized, but Greed knew. He was my partner, after all. Even then, he didn’t say another word. He knew just as well as I that it was too late for that.



“I’ll keep Libra at bay. Finish it, Fay.”

“Thanks.”

Libra swung his hands and flung his effluvia at us. We managed to evade it, but...

“What the...?” I said.

“My goodness...” added Roxy.

The effects of Libra’s foul gunk made my blood run cold. The souls that were hit by it turned purple and withered into nothingness. That seemed to be Libra’s power—the ability to corrupt and decay whatever he touched. My own Corrosion spell was nothing in comparison; Libra’s decay would even corrode our weapons.

*“With the other four holy beasts within him, Libra is more powerful than ever,”* said Greed. *“And it is exactly as you thought. That putrefying liquid will damage even me.”*

“Greed...”

*“You don’t need to worry. How many times have I told you now, Fate? Have you forgotten? I am just a weapon.”*

“You’re more than just a weapon to me!”

*“You know how to make an old weapon proud, Fate. But I know that, in your heart, you understand what must be done.”*

“Yeah...I do.”

*“As it should be. That’s why you are my partner. We’re in this together.”*

I had known this time would come. Like it or not, this was the end. Our end. We were out of time. We had to hit Libra hard, fast, and with everything we had.

Roxy cast a protective barrier, but Libra’s power of decay eroded it quickly. As I closed in on Libra, I could tell that it wasn’t just some liquid he expelled from his body. The very air around him was a rancid miasma that stunk of rot.

“I’ll purify the air,” said Roxy.

She readied her holy sword and unleashed one of her tech-arts. At first, I thought it was the holy sword skill, Grand Cross, but the light that burst from her sword was on a scale I had never before seen. This wasn't just a cross of light but an eight-pointed star—the Sacred Cross. This was no mere holy sword art. It was a *sacred* sword art.

The purifying light was effective. Libra's pestilent body burned under the holy light. It was ironic to think that he was so vulnerable to such attacks in his holy beast form.

"Fay, now!"

"Cover me, Roxy!"

I beat my wings and ascended toward Libra, relying on Roxy to keep his noxious miasma at bay.

I couldn't rely on long-range attacks, like the gauntlets and the bow. They wouldn't have enough power to overcome the malignance that surrounded him. However, we couldn't just sit here whittling away at him, either. My only option was my trusted sword, the form with which I was most experienced.

I sliced into Libra with everything I had. I felt Greed cut into him, but Libra did not budge.

*It didn't work?*

It was exactly like what had happened with the Revolt Brionac. This strike alone was not enough to bring Libra down. To make matters worse, I heard steam hissing as it rose from Greed. He'd never once been damaged, but Libra was hurting him. My worst fears were coming to pass.

"Greed!" I shouted.

*"It's nothing. Keep going!"*

Roxy fired another Sacred Cross to clear the air, and I leaped back so as not to get caught in the crossfire. Libra was no longer concerned with me, instead moving toward Roxy, who he clearly saw as the bigger nuisance. Roxy would not be easily stopped, however. Her six wings carried her through the air as she continued to rain fire down upon Libra, evading his strikes as she did so.

Meanwhile, I was at a complete loss. I didn't have the power to go toe-to-toe with Libra. Even my last Revolt Brionac, which had been further strengthened by other souls, hadn't stopped him. And that was *before* he'd transformed into a holy beast.

But within the sea of doubt that swirled about me, I sensed another possibility. I needed more. Just a little more. When those souls had assisted me earlier, I'd felt Greed, even though he was separated from me. We were unified to an extent beyond that which we'd experienced during the Crossing. It was like I was him and he was me.

The souls in this world would still help me. Gluttony was sending me the support of souls now that we were united as one. I felt the ceiling of my own personal limits rising. I felt something more.

I knew then that Greed and I were still capable of greater things. I could feel it. We could surpass even the Sixth Level, which my father had given us. There was a level that existed beyond it, one that only Greed and I could reach. It was for us alone. No one else.

The souls were now unifying not just with me but with Greed, too. They called to us.

*"Fate...do you feel it?"* Greed asked.

*"I do."*

That gigantic sphere of brilliant light was what they called God. But Gluttony had been born of people's desire to be freed from God's tyranny. It was up to Greed and I to answer their call. Only, the black sword was not enough. It was time for us to wield the weapon that we truly needed.

Libra had Roxy cornered, but she never once showed a hint of fear.

*"Roxy!"* I shouted.

*"Fay!"* she cried in reply.

I gripped Greed tighter. "My Gluttony and your Greed combined," I said. "Are you ready?"

*"You bet."*

Our skills combined into a single Skill of Mortal Sin, a skill born of the desire for salvation. Two heretical skills became one as Gluttony flowed into Greed. It was something only Greed and I could ever achieve—a new Weapon of Mortal Sin.

The black sword glowed as I flapped my wings and sped toward Roxy. The light had engulfed me by the time I reached her, and I sent it out in a flash. Libra screamed in agony. He had completely ignored me in his hunt for Roxy, but he could do so no longer, because I had just lopped off his left arm.

“Get behind me,” I told Roxy.

“Fay, what are those blades?”

It was the black sword’s truest form: Level Zero, the dual blades.





## Chapter 38:

### Berserk of Gluttony

THE DUAL BLACK BLADES were slightly longer than the black sword, and their streamlined forms were specially designed for slicing attacks. They were like a more refined version of the black sword, essentially forged from the long path Greed and I had walked together. The blades were unlike anything I'd ever wielded. No black cube would ever be able to imitate these. That was impossible. The dual blades were truly one of a kind.

"If you think you can recreate these, go ahead," I said to Libra.

Libra growled in response, clutched at his missing left arm, and leaped backward to put some space between us. He glared at the new weapons in my hands. Fluids continued to leak from his wound, and a putrid stench permeated the air.

"Fay!" cried Roxy, worried I was defenseless.

But there was nothing for her to worry about. I shot her a smile, then turned to face Libra and launched myself at him. Everything he attempted to throw at us was blown away. His attacks meant nothing in the face of Level Zero.

At the same time, I was still receiving support from the souls that filled this world, and as such, my stats were practically infinite. There was still a price to pay, though. Not for me, but for the souls that granted me their strength.

"If that is how much you want to be with God..." I spat at Libra.

Even though I also knew the price, I had no choice but to take the power offered by the souls. That was what my Skill of Mortal Sin did. I couldn't help but think back to what Myne had said, all that time ago—that Gluttony commits the deepest sin. The souls moved me, empowered me, and guided me. To hold back, to ignore them, would have disrespected what they offered.

I put everything I had into the dual blades. This time, they didn't transform into something more menacing or aggressive. It was the opposite.



“Greed?” I asked. “What is this?”

*“It’s blinding.”*

“It’s the same for me.”

As I poured stats into the dual blades, their form became more divine. It was a far cry from the sword’s typical style, and Greed seemed unsure how to react. These blades were noble. I wanted nothing more than to believe this. The name of the Level Zero secret technique appeared in my mind. There could be no other name for it.

*Infinity Divide.*

I launched the attack on Libra. Stopping the path the dual blades cut through the air was impossible. Counterattacks were useless. While the dual blade secret technique was activated, I could go wherever I wanted in an instant. I landed strike after heavy strike unceasingly. Not a single slice missed its target.

There was no beauty in battle. In the end, it was little more than the clash of two opposing forces, no matter the reasons or excuses. That was what I felt as I looked upon the horrific holy beast that Libra become and the Divine Revelation binding him to the will of God.

“Where is all this...power...coming from?” Libra groaned through pained breaths.

Libra’s body was falling apart, and I wasn’t going to give him a chance to regenerate. My Gluttony skill swallowed some of his power with every slash. He was taking physical damage even as his stats plummeted. It was a never-ending death spiral.

“I don’t care how much power you gained from those other holy beasts,” I spat. “They don’t mean a thing!”

“Fate!” Libra growled.

Amid his suffering, Libra reached out and grabbed hold of my right hand. There was no need for me to lop it off with the other blade. A new level Greed and I could reach within Level Zero still awaited us.

A black bolt of lightning struck Libra’s remaining hand, sending it flying.

“What?!” he exclaimed.

I had used the always-trusty Bloody Ptarmigan, activating it from my right blade as I pushed Libra back. I’d used the power of more souls to do so, souls that would never return. I uttered a heartfelt apology, but I could no longer be stopped.

*“That’s it, Fate! Push through!”* cried Greed.

“Greed...” I said, realizing that we were pushing too hard.

Level Zero was the result of Gluttony and Greed coming together as one. Even the indestructible black sword couldn’t handle the sheer power of the dual blades, though, and Bloody Ptarmigan had caused a fracture to run through it.

*“This is the end, Fate! Let him know the true meaning of the word berserk!”*

*That damned sword... Always acting like a badass...*

Libra had lost both arms, but he was still a threat. He regenerated them, creating countless more, and sent them rushing at me in an attack.

“Fay!” cried Roxy, firing off another Sacred Cross.

The attack blinded Libra. I gave a battle cry as I leaped in close, scanning his body for the locus of his magical energy. When I locked onto it, I unleashed Level Three Deadly Inferno, carving into Libra’s weak point. Each slice contained a curse that ate away at him, forcing him farther backward.

“We’re not done yet!” I shouted.

I pushed Libra closer to the giant, sun-like sphere. In his struggle to deny me any more ground, Libra opened up his chest. An abundance of red cores were revealed, all of which fired blinding red beams of light.

“Your attacks are useless!” I growled.

*Give me power! Give me more power!*

I activated Reflection Fortress. The red beams of light bounced back at Libra, their attack power multiplied. I heard the dual blades fracture again, this time the one in my right hand.

*“Do not give him any time to regroup! Believe in me, the mighty Greed.*

*Believe in yourself, Fate!”*

Whenever Libra left an opening, Roxy hit him with a Sacred Cross, slowing his movements. The black dual blades were engulfed in white flames. This light usually healed any and all injury or illness, and they now burned with a fire that would purify filth and rot. I couldn’t help but wonder if Twilight Healing had been created purely to counter Libra.

“I will cleanse you of your decay!” I shouted.

Libra let out an ungodly scream as he was engulfed in flames that would not extinguish. Even now, his sacred mark glowed red, denying him rest or surrender. Perhaps Libra was no different from my father or Snow in the end. He couldn’t escape God’s will, either.

*“Keep it up, Fate!”*

The fractures stretched farther along both dual blades. We were out of time. I sent black threads from the blades, all of which were wrapped in golden light. They swarmed Libra, glowing as they surrounded him. Struggle and fight as he might, he wouldn’t escape the grasp of Dimension Destruction. The attack had the power to shred through space itself, but all it could do against Libra was hold him down.

*Is his power still rising?!*

“Libra,” I grunted.

Even though he was practically in pieces, Libra—or perhaps his sacred mark—fought against the threads of Dimension Destruction.

Libra wasn’t the only one in bad shape. I didn’t know if the dual blades could handle unleashing another attack of such magnitude. At the same time, all the feelings and memories pouring into me with each soul that offered itself up made me feel as if I were losing my mind. I was losing touch with myself.

I was changing. My own memories—good, bad, happy, sad, trivial, and otherwise—slowly blended with those of the souls that poured into me, like mixing paints on a palette.

*Father. One more... Please, lend me your strength one more time!*

I could no longer hear his voice, but I was certain he was still there somewhere, watching over me.

And I knew Greed and I could still fight on.

“Let’s do this, Greed!”

*“Bring it. You’re free, Fate!”*

It was time for our final attack, a combination of the Sixth Level and Level Zero secret techniques. The fractured dual blades began to illuminate until they were so bright I could no longer discern their color. All I knew was that it was a light bright enough to engulf this entire red world around us.

*Infinity Revolt Brionac.*

The two blades came together to form a single greatsword, which plunged into and through the red cores in Libra’s chest.

But this was not the power of extinction. It was the power of release.

I roared and pushed the sword deeper.

“That will...not work...on me...” said Libra between screams of agony.

“Let’s see about that.”

A fracture ran through Libra’s sacred mark, and I felt the red light in it weaken. The last secret technique plunged through Libra, and with a push, the two of us flew into the giant, glowing sphere. Somewhere behind me, I felt as though I heard Roxy calling my name. But I couldn’t stop.

I was suddenly warm and comfortable. I wanted nothing more than to stop thinking about the reality of the moment and the battle I was fighting. Then I noticed another change in Libra’s sacred mark—it was starting to repair itself. Libra himself was healing from all the damage he’d taken, too.

“God has chosen me...” Libra murmured. “I am the chosen one. This is the end.”





The dual blades were riddled with fractures, ready to break completely, but Infinity Revolt Brionac was still activated.

“But it won’t be my end. It will be yours, Libra!”

I would not let him heal or regenerate. I plunged the sword in deeper, and I heard my beloved sword—which had been with me from the start, through thick and thin—shatter completely.

*“It’s been a hell of a ride, partner,”* said Greed.

“For you and me both,” I replied. “I only ever got this far because of you.”

*“You’re going to end things. Are you sure about this?”*

“As sure as I always am.”

Looking outside of the giant sphere, I saw that Roxy wept. She understood what I was going to do. She was the kindest person I had ever known. All I wanted was for her to survive and be happy.

All the souls that had escaped harvest due to the battle between Libra and I encircled Roxy and, as if in response to my own wishes, began to draw her back to the world we called home. She couldn’t fight against them, and I watched as she was pulled away into the distance.

“Fay! Fay!” she cried. “I...”

My journey had truly begun the day I set out to save her. Though that same journey had brought us here, my desire to see Roxy safe had never wavered. In the end, I never got to tell her how I really felt, though.

I moaned. I was a fool. I knew I should have told her. I looked out to the other side of the sphere, hoping to catch another glimpse of Roxy, but she was gone. It was my one mistake I had never learned from, right up until the end. It was something Greed was fond of teasing me about.

“I guess I’ll leave with one regret,” I muttered.

*“That’s okay, though, isn’t it? It’s in keeping with your character, anyway.”*

“Yeah... I suppose it is.”

Aside from that, I had no regrets.

Now it was time to unleash the true power of Gluttony.

*Devour it all!*

I devoured the souls that had been built up over thousands and thousands of years. I devoured the failed god that had raised and harvested them, too. It was what Gluttony had always wanted to do, ever since the day it was born. As its bearer, it was my responsibility to see this through. Perhaps this was, in its own way, not unlike the sacred marks and the Divine Revelations that empowered the holy beastfolk.

I could not escape my destiny.

*Destiny... Why did my mother name me Fate, anyway? I wish I could have asked.*

My chest grew warm. A scarlet light began to glow, swallowing up the failed God. I felt my own reality slipping. I was losing myself. I had gone further than any one person could ever go on their own. I had made the impossible reality.

Aaron had told me to return to the royal capital, and I wanted to do that for him. I wanted all the people I had met to live happily for as long as their lives would let them.

The stats and skills of countless souls flooded into me. I couldn't stop them. It was so overwhelming that I felt as though I'd forgotten how to breathe. I couldn't even close my mouth. I was being constantly fed souls, and all I could do was gorge myself. All the power within me flowed into the Infinity Revolt Brionac.

"Fate!" shouted Libra one last time.

Whatever he had been about to say was drowned by his death cry. He couldn't handle the overwhelming power, and it erased his sacred mark entirely. He, too, disintegrated. And as he did so, I saw his expression relax.

So it was true. Libra was a prisoner of Divine Revelation, just like my father.

The dual blades combined into a sword of pure light, cutting through this very realm, this prison for souls. The flow of harvested souls from outside stopped and reversed, flowing back to where they had come from.

The world here was beginning to crumble and break down, and my partner was gone. I had used all the power I had. In doing so, the dual blades reverted back to the form of the original black sword, then broke from the center outward and shattered completely.

“You were always impatient and quick to complain. And you were the best partner I could have asked for. Thank you, Greed.”

Once I had spoken, I felt as though I heard the sword respond from somewhere distant.

*“No thanks necessary. I was nothing more than a weapon.”*

*I’ll try, just like you did. I’ll push a little further.*

I hadn’t devoured everything yet. The failed god still remained. The more I ate, the more I lost. All of my memories—everything I never wanted to let go of—began to slip away...

*Aaron... You gave me the title of Blessed Blade.*

*Myne... I’m sorry I can’t be with you any longer.*

*Eris... Thank you for opening your heart to me and showing me who you really are.*

*Everyone at the royal capital and the Barbatos estate. Everyone who believed in me and is awaiting my return.*

All of my memories slipped away, one after another. People’s names, their faces... Everything disappeared.

*Roxy...*

This was a memory I did not want to lose. Her name, her face... I wanted to remember it all!

*I... I...*

“I don’t want to lose any of it!” I shouted. “All of it is so important to me!”

I didn’t want to be a hollow shell.

“Then all you need to do is call for help. You are not fighting alone.”



A powerful, graceful voice came from my side. It was Roxy's voice. She was standing next to me. Had she somehow escaped the flow of souls and returned?

"I'll support you, Fay," she continued. "I don't want to merely be protected. I will play my own part."

"Roxy..."

"What you cannot do alone, we can accomplish together."

I felt suddenly calm and at ease. The flow of wounded, suffering souls changed. The red light emanating from my chest altered, too. It became gentler in color, strengthening me.

The souls within my Gluttony reached their hands up to make things easier for me, lightening my burden. They formed a circle including Kairos, Micuria, Rafale, and even my father. Even people I did not know lent me their power.

"It will be okay. You are not alone, Fay."

"I believe in you. All of you."

Roxy and I stood there as the world crumbled around us. It was us and the souls who had offered me their power who watched the end of this God and the world it had created. Everything was as red as the setting sun. A ray of light pierced the red horizon, revealing a clear, blue sky beyond. The souls danced freely, taking off for wherever it was they wanted to go. Was this the form that this world had always been meant to take?

***Gluttony skill activated.***

I heard the voice within me. It, too, had been with me from the start, but what it said next was different than usual. And now I knew whose voice it was. I had heard it in my dream, the moment I'd come here.

***You did great, Fate. I always believed in you.***

*Mother... It was you all along. You were always watching over me.*

Tears streamed down my cheeks.

"Fay?" Roxy asked, worried.

“All of you... You all taught me so much,” I said. “Thank you, Roxy.”

“What happened? Why this all of a sudden?”

“I love you, Roxy.”

“Wh-wh-wha...? You say that *here*? Now? At a time like *this*?” She stammered in surprise. Then, finally, she beamed at me. “I love you, too, Fay.”

We kissed as a new light shone upon the world, souls of different colors dancing around us in celebration.

## Epilogue: Of Those Who Remain

IT HAD BEEN SOME TIME since Fate and Roxy had entered the Door to Distant Lands. Myne and I had somehow managed to bring down the four holy beasts guarding it, but the battle had come down to the wire. Even the wound in my chest would mend, thanks to the improved healing abilities that came with my dragon transformation.

“Myne, are you okay?” I asked.

“No problems here.”

Myne, ever a woman of few words, was sitting on my head. Even in a situation as critical as this one, she was completely unperturbed. *I could probably learn a thing or two from that attitude.*

Although, on this particular occasion, perhaps not. Myne was just as banged up as I was. I could feel warm blood dripping from her leg onto my head. She had taken a countless number of attacks head-on, and when up against a holy beast, some damage was unavoidable.

*Forever putting up a strong front...*

“If only we could rush in there and back Fate up,” I said.

“Neither of us can get in.”

We were denied access. Myne had tried to jump in anyway and was thrown backward for her troubles. Even with all her power, it was impossible. That meant all we could do was wait.

The souls that had resurrected for a time were already flowing back through the Door. If Fate and Roxy didn’t defeat Libra, it would have enormous consequences for the world as we knew it.

“What’s going to happen?” I wondered.

I put a hand to the collar carved into my neck—a contract that bound me to

Fate. Power still coursed through it.

“Fate is still fighting,” said Myne.

“How do you know?” I asked, puzzled. “Ouch! What was that for?!”

“My hand slipped.”

*Like hell it did!*

Myne had dropped her black axe on my head. As expected from a Weapon of Mortal Sin, it was a hefty blow.

“Actually, it’s a punishment. For doubting Fate.”

“But I know he’s okay. I can feel it. So it’s going to be okay in the end...uh, right? Ouch!”

“Will you *ever* learn?”

All of the ancient monsters that had come back to life were now gone, and the imperial capital of Mercadia was cloaked in silence. Many called this place home, and with all the fighting and environmental destruction that had taken place, those monsters could well have run off for somewhere safer. In any case, there was nothing around us but the sound of the wind whistling through the ravaged capital.

We stayed in the skies, circling the Door to Distant Lands. For all we knew, Fate and Roxy might get thrown out of it, and we wanted to be ready to catch them.

“Look,” said Myne.

I looked up at the Door. “It’s closing!”

The hole that had opened in the sky was beginning to lose its color and fade, blue sky returning in its place. *No! Doesn’t this mean that Fate and Roxy won’t be able to return home?!*

As the torn sky repaired itself, the floating continent of Galia began to sink.

“The fight is over,” said Myne.

“But... Fate...”

I panicked, desperate, and flew straight for the Door, but...

“Huh?”

We passed straight through it. We weren't thrown backward, and we could no longer even touch it.

“There really is nothing more we can do but watch,” I murmured.

“No. Fate will return. He promised.”

Myne believed in him. I wanted to, too. I could still feel our connection. The Galian continent seemed to roar as it landed in water, the splash high enough to reach us in the sky. I felt it land on my body and lips.

“It's salty. This is the ocean!” I exclaimed.

We'd been so focused on battle that we hadn't realized the continent was drifting southward, leaving the capital, and ending up all the way in the ocean. We'd made it all the way to the outside world, which was where the Galian continent now resided. I knew we couldn't stay here too long, though. This world lived by different rules than the one we called home. I didn't like the idea of leaving the entire continent of Galia in such a place, but it was an impossibly heavy thing to move.

“Fate...” I whispered.

The Door to Distant Lands was now little more than motes of light dissipating into thin air. If that door was the only way into and out of the place they had gone, they were now trapped there.

*What now?*

I stayed there in stunned silence until Myne dropped from my head.

“Wait, where are you going?” I asked.

“To look for Fate.”

“But how? He's on the other side of the Door.”

She couldn't possibly intend to open the Door again. That was a fool's errand, and Fate himself wouldn't want it.

“I won't do what I did last time,” said Myne. I breathed a sigh of relief. “I'm

going to look for another way. There may still be information here that will tell us what to do.”

“Ah, I see.”

It was true that Fate’s own father, Dean, had released the seals on the door from somewhere underneath the imperial capital. Perhaps useful and valuable knowledge still lay sleeping in that very place. Collecting it and having Laine analyze it could indeed prove helpful.

Myne landed a little before me and sent the rubble around her flying with a strike from her black axe. It struck me as a bit hasty and short-tempered, but that was Myne in a nutshell.

*Heck, I thought, maybe I’ll lend a hand.*

“Get out of the way, Myne.”

In my dragon form, clearing away the debris around the capital was a trifle. A roar was all it would take. We would be in Galia for some time, but what we were doing was just one potential option among many. Fate had taught us that nothing was impossible. We had learned that from the way he held himself.

For all we knew, Fate might find some other way of returning to our world. And if that were the case, we would wait for him. But now that we had come to know him, we had to look ahead and keep on moving forward. Even Myne, who had once had her eyes set purely on the past, now looked to the future. And that meant I had to, too.

If Fate could not make it back on his own for some reason, then we would find a way to bring him back ourselves.

I transformed back into my human form and surveyed the land around us. The sun was beginning to set. I put a hand to my neck and the collar that linked me to Fate once more. Warmth spread through my body as if in response.

Across the vast sea was a world that even Fate didn’t know.

*Hurry back so we can set off on another journey.*

\*\*\*

“Master Aaron, where shall I put this?”

“Hmm... Put it in the guest room.”

“Okay.”

Sahara was once again putting her utmost effort into her work. Repairs to Barbatos manor in the royal capital were finished. It looked completely different now, and I felt like I could finally relax for a moment.

Six months had passed since Fate and his friends had gone off to close the Door to Distant Lands. The fallout from that battle—one in which the world itself had been at stake—was slowly healing.

Ancient monsters had attacked, and the dead had returned to life. Seifort had been in complete hysteria. When the ancient monsters began pushing toward us, I wasn't sure we would be able to hold them off and protect the kingdom for a time. The holy knights around me fled in panic and confusion. It was the two white knights to whom I was most grateful. Because of them, we held off the monster onslaught.

However, Fate still had yet to return. At what I assumed was the end of his battle, the southern skies had lit up, but after that...nothing.

Myne and Eris returned, though it was only to gather up Laine and several of Seifort's researchers before returning to Galia once more. Even now, technology lay hidden in the depths of the imperial capital of Mercadia.

As a man of the sword, it was all far too difficult for me to grasp its totality, but I at least knew this: They hoped to find a way to locate Fate and Roxy.

I was glad to have Sahara and Memil by my side, but I worried about Aisha, Roxy's mother.

“You'll be visiting Lady Aisha today, yes?” asked Sahara.

“Indeed. I'll need you to look after things while I'm away.”

“You bet! Memil should be back from her shopping trip any moment now. I can't wait!”

Sahara was in high spirits. She'd always been a sweet, gentle girl, but there was a special reason for her more recent joy. Though one's skill was something assigned at birth and was meant to be concrete, Sahara's skill had changed. Her

whole life shifted in an instant. Her skill had only caused her misery for so long. It was a true joy to see her so happy. I worried that even I might shed tears at the sight.

What was truly astonishing, however, was that her new skill was the holy sword skill. Sahara told me that the night before it changed, she heard Fate's voice in a dream. Therefore, she thought her new skill a gift. The claim was impossible to prove either way.

I had yet to hear Fate's voice myself. I didn't know where he was nor what he was doing.

"Master Aaron, forgive my tardiness."

"No, Memil, you're just on time. We're going to visit Aisha today, so we'll be leaving the capital."

"For the Barbatos estate, I presume?"

"Yes. I've been away for too long, and the people of Barbatos continue nagging me to return."

"It's proof of how much they love you. Please rest assured that Sahara and I will take care of the manor."

"Thank you."

The Barbatos estate had been supplied with technological advancements that Eris had discovered in Galia. Magitech, she called it. Though I knew little about it—old timer that I was—I knew that it would help build the cities of the future. With the true lord of Barbatos gone, it was up to me to take on the mantle of leadership.

Juggling all these new developments at my age was a handful, but it also brought much to enjoy with it. I couldn't complain.

"You look happy, Master Aaron," said Memil.

"You can tell?"

"Yes, especially recently. Is it because Sahara will become a holy knight?"

"She is nothing if not enthusiastic. She says she wants to use her power to



become a new Blessed Blade.”

“Aiming high, I see.”

“It brings a tear to this old man’s eye.”

There was much to look forward to. It was true that I felt a little lonely with all of my old sparring partners gone. Sahara was still growing and immature, but she had great potential. At our last lesson, I marveled at how quickly she absorbed what I taught her. She reminded me very much of Fate.

Just as I was thinking of her, Sahara appeared in a casual dress.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” she said, before pausing for a moment. “Is something the matter?”

“No, I was just thinking how pretty you look,” I said.

Sahara giggled. “Thank you.”

She was still very much a child, but it was nice to see her so happy.

Memil gave her a pat on the head. “Aren’t you lucky,” she said.

“Thank you so much for helping me choose the dress.”

Memil shook her head as if to say it was nothing, and a slight blush crept across her cheeks. I was glad to see that she, too, was now comfortable with her life as part of the Barbatos family. Peaceful days were truly good days, I thought. Then, the two girls promptly pushed me out the door so I could make my journey to the Hart family.

As I left, I noticed a pair of birds flying through the sky—one black and one white. Perhaps they were mates. They glided freely around the manor for a time, then headed south in the direction of Galia. Seeing them made me think of Fate and Roxy. For a moment I felt a tremor of worry, but I knew that, as long as they were together, they would be fine. I also knew in my heart that Fate was well. I knew because we had a connection, a special bond.

Memil and Sahara looked up and watched the birds as well. It seemed their thoughts went in the same direction as my own, for a single tear fell from Sahara’s eye.

“Master Fate... He’ll come back, won’t he?” she asked.

“That he will,” I said. “But his life is one of endless strife. Perhaps somewhere out there, he is still fighting for somebody.”

“Maybe, yes...”

I wrapped Sahara in a hug. “We both know Fate is not one to break his promises, yes?” I said.

“Yes! You’re right!”

Sahara, Memil, and I all had the same goal—to protect the Barbatos manor and domain so Fate would always have a place to call home. No matter how far we were separated, we would make sure that he always had a home to return to.

I believed in that. I believed in him.

*Come home, Fate, even if such a thing is impossible. I, and all of our people, await the return of the Lord of Barbatos.*

## Afterword

THIS IS ISSHIKI ICHIKA. It's been a while.

Finally, we get to Volume 8. This is where the story of Fate, his Gluttony, and his battles comes to an end.

It's been a long time. The story began serialization in 2017, and it feels like we've finally made it to the conclusion. *Berserk of Gluttony* was very much told from Fate's point of view, and although I tried to keep the cast of main characters under control, they seemed to grow with each volume.

In the final battle, we had a huge party consisting of Fate, Roxy, Myne, Eris, and Snow! They'd never fought as a party before. While I was writing, I did my utmost to make sure readers wouldn't get confused. I also tried to bring together all the plot threads and make sure everything was wrapped up.

How'd I do? I hope you were satisfied.

I'm sorry that this volume took two years from Volume 7. I always meant to write, but then illness, an operation, and rehabilitation got in the way. Not to mention changing jobs. My whole life was in disarray. I felt like I was going to break, and at times, I thought about just giving up. I always came back in the end, though, and I kept on writing. I think the manga was a big support for me in this respect, so thank you, Takino-sensei.

When the anime was announced, I then knew I had to write an ending. While I was overseeing the writing of the anime script, I felt like the ending was unclear, and the story lacked impact because Fate's journey wasn't clear. By overseeing the script, I had a chance to see the story from an objective point of view, and I could tidy it up. The results of that paved the way for volume eight.

I decided to go back to where the series started and just go wild with battles. I felt compelled to write. As you can see if you've read the story, the volume starts with a battle and ends with a battle. I also threw in two new levels for Greed that I'd been keeping on the backburner. I got the idea for Level Zero when I was talking to my editor before the paperback release. It's an idea that

was five years in the making.

As much as I'd like to keep on telling this story, the paperback version ends here. In closing, I'd like to bring out a couple of cast members from *Berserk of Gluttony* to look back on it. I've got more pages than usual for this afterword, so I'm sure we'll have lots to talk about. So without further ado, here's Fate!

FATE: "Huh? Where am I?"

ISSHIKI: "Welcome, Fate!"

FATE: "Again? This seems to be something you do when a paperback comes out. I think I'm getting used to it."

ISSHIKI: "That's good."

FATE: "Are you sure it's not just a case of having too many pages in your afterword to fill?"

ISSHIKI: "I'm not listening! Ahem, well then, now that you're here, please select who else I should summon."

FATE: "Wow, that's a tough call. Who's a good pick?"

ISSHIKI: "Surely there's only one."

FATE: "Oh, *that's* what you mean. So it's a business thing. Sorry, Roxy."

ISSHIKI: "You can read a room. I like that. Welcome, Myne!"

MYNE: "What?"

ISSHIKI: "Myne, I'd like you to rate Fate in this volume."

MYNE: "Hmm..."

FATE: "Uh..."

ISSHIKI: "You look quite nervous, Fate."

FATE: "Of course I'm nervous. It was the final battle! Well, how was I, Myne?"

MYNE: "Nine."

ISSHIKI: "Out of ten?"

MYNE: "No. Out of a hundred."

FATE: "Talk about harsh... What was so bad about it?"

MYNE: "You ditched me."

FATE: "You mean when I went to the Distant Lands?"

MYNE: "Yes. Also, it was just you and Roxy together in your own world at the end."

FATE: "You weren't even there! How do you know that?"

MYNE: "Eris is mad too. Did I mention I'm mad? Who do you have to thank for even being able to follow Roxy in the first place?"

FATE: "I owe you both a debt of gratitude!"

MYNE: "Yes. Well, I guess that's how it goes. When are you coming back?"

FATE: "Uh...shouldn't we ask the author?"

ISSHIKI: "Hmm... I guess we'll know when the Volume 9 paperback comes out."

FATE: "So it seems."

MYNE: "That's not an answer! In that case, I know what to do to bring Fate back."

FATE: "You've got to be kidding me. Nobody reading this even knows what you're talking about."

MYNE: "That's not true. It's standard now! You cannot refuse!"

FATE: "I'll explain. She's talking about wrath rice. It's food made by Myne, for Myne. She tricks people into trying it, and it always ends in tragedy. Nobody is allowed to refuse what she puts out. She makes you eat the whole dish. Every last bite. And she *always* uses the weirdest ingredients."

ISSHIKI: "Well, I'm not having anything to do with this. After all, this dish is designed to bring you back from the Distant Lands, Fate."

MYNE: "Seeing as you're here, you're eating it too, author."

FATE: "Well, you heard the girl. I recommend giving up. Not like you can do anything else."

ISSHIKI: "Seeing you tremble while you tell me that only makes me want to run away more."

MYNE: "I'll be right back. Don't go anywhere."

FATE: "What in the world is she going to get us to eat this time?"

ISSHIKI: "I pray it's not poisoned."

FATE: "Ha ha ha. You don't get it. I wish it was as simple as poison."

ISSHIKI: "I guess I really should make a run for it then."

MYNE: "I'm back."

ISSHIKI: "You were barely gone!"

Myne: "I figured this might happen, so I baked bread. There's three to choose from. Take your pick."

ISSHIKI: "Is one of these a trap of some kind?"

FATE: "Ha ha ha. You don't get it. They're *all* traps!"

MYNE: Argh!

FATE: "I'm sorry. I'll take this one. *Nom.*"

ISSHIKI: "I'll take this one, then. *Munch.*"

MYNE: "Then I'll take what's left. *Chomp.*"

FATE: "Mm! Delicious...is not the word I would use to describe this! What the heck?!"

ISSHIKI: "This flavor takes me back. It's filled with the tastes of *Berserk of Gluttony.*"

ISSHIKI/FATE: "We did our best... Waaaaaaah! We really did our best!"

MYNE: "I tried baking all my memories into it. Are you awed?"

FATE: "I never know what you're going to make. I guess I'm going to have to come back now."

ISSHIKI: "Yep..."

MYNE: "Mission accomplished. See you all in Volume 9!"

ISSHIKI: “Don’t say things like that when it’s still unconfirmed!”

MYNE: “Bye-bye.”

And there you have it. The trio of Fate, Myne, and Isshiki. I hope you enjoyed it.

Daisuke Takino is still working on the *Berserk of Gluttony* manga, which is at Volume 9 at the time of writing this. Memil has just joined the Barbatos family, and chaos is about to ensue. Even as the author of the series, I’m loving the manga when I get to see it.

Finally, thanks to fame for the cover and insert illustrations. They’re always so charming. Also, thanks to my editor for their support, as well as everyone else who helped.

I can’t wait for the anime to be released. I really did my best as I oversaw its production. It was my first time, so I wasn’t always sure what to do. Thanks to all the people supporting its creation. It’s in a good place. I’d like to thank everyone involved. It will be a while before the anime airs, but I really hope you’ll watch it.

I look forward to meeting you all again somewhere down the line!



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