

IZUSHIRO
ILLUST RURIA MIYUKI

RETIRED
PIAN

THE GREAT
MAGICMASTER'S

18



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THE GREATTEST MAGICMASTER'S

RETIREDMENT PLAN



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**THE GREATEST
MAGICMASTER'S
RETIREMENT
PLAN**



The Greatest Magicmaster's Retirement Plan

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Ninety-Ninth Chapter: A Small Bud

Before anyone knew it, enough time had passed to welcome in a new year.

One only really gets a sense of how fast time passes when they stop to look back on it. Just as the world never stops, the Second Magical Institute was no exception. If anything, time seemed to accelerate there.

Whether they liked it or not, the passage of time brought peace back to the Institute, and as if to overwrite the past, students were again swept up in lectures and training.

Today, a lot of students were making their way to the training field. For better or worse, they were driven to improve themselves whenever they had a moment to spare.

The change in their resolve, however, was brought on by the sacrifices of many, so it was questionable how welcome the training really was. Nobody ever mentioned the incident that had inspired their change.

Everybody told themselves there had been no spark for their change and that they had changed themselves simply because they wanted to. But the atmosphere was strange, and it created a heavy mood at the Second Magical Institute.

A girl who had finished a lecture was, like the majority, making her way to the training field. A few days had passed since Alus and Tesfia had left the Institute.

Alice alone had been left behind, and she spent all of her time studying the arbitration of nobles, the Tenbram. She'd voluntarily started her studies, but no matter how much knowledge she acquired, she herself wouldn't be joining the Tenbram. So didn't that make it all wasted effort for something that was just for her own satisfaction?

Once she became aware of that, Alice took a break and headed back to the training grounds.

The road there had become a familiar sight. It had been about a year since

she'd started at the Institute, and at this point, she could automatically make her way to the training grounds while thinking about something else.

Having given up on everything rational, she tried to start to train, but her pent-up feelings were holding her back. Nothing had changed about what she had to do or her passion for it, but a feeling of melancholy persisted inside her.

Alice absentmindedly arrived at the training ground and robotically entered the changing room. Even as she stood on the training field, no strong feelings really rose up.

"Cheer up, Alice," Ciel called, exiting the changing room. She had rushed over after lectures to train.

Perhaps because she was so small, Ciel always seemed to pop up out of nowhere, but one could tell how earnest she was by what she did.

If she didn't understand something in a lecture, she would immediately ask a teacher or friend. If they were minor questions, she would swiftly ask Alice or Tesfia, and if it was something more complicated, like principles of magic or constructing magic formulas, she would unhesitatingly walk up to Alus.

Her drive was something that Alice lacked, and it left her in awe.

"Ah yeah. I'm fine..."

"Maybe so, but Fia and Alus are both taking time off. Oh, and Loki too."

Ciel didn't touch on her vacant smile, but it seemed, correctly, to Alice like she saw right through her, and Alice was a little embarrassed that someone could see her longing.

Faced with Ciel's earnest stare, Alice tried to cover things up, scratching her cheek and giving the other girl a forced smile.

"I guess, but there's nothing I can do about it," said Alice. "And there's nothing I have to do either, so I wasn't sure what to do. But it's not as bad as you think. I'm fine!"

Since she was dealing with Ciel, she mixed in some truth, but Ciel's vigorous nodding caught her off guard.

"Yeah, I know how you feel! But aren't you brooding too much over this? It's

not like I ever really forget, but sometimes I am reminded that Tesfia really is a noble lady,” Ciel said to cheer Alice up.

But it also made her reaffirm reality. Their statuses were different. There was a wall between them.

And she didn't have Alus's or Loki's overwhelming power to climb over it.

Alice leaned against the training ground's wall and sighed.

“Yeah, she is. But noble or not, challenging things are still challenging. And when I see Fia's carefree attitude I can't help but worry.”

“Yeah. But you don't have to be so gloomy! Alus is with her, right?” Ciel asked. When Alice nodded in return Ciel flashed an innocent smile as if to say that everything would be okay.

Ciel shouldn't have known Alus's actual rank, but just from seeing him up close, she had a hunch about his true powers. So she knew Tesfia should be fine.

With Alus on the Fable family side for the Tenbram, it was pointless to worry, regardless of what was on the betting table.

That aside, based on Ciel's suggestive remark, Alice came to realize that despite also being a commoner, Ciel knew a lot.

“Ciel...how much do you know?” she asked.

“You can be so dull sometimes, Alice. Honestly, I am more worried about you than Fia.”

“What do you mean?” she asked, tilting her head.

Ciel grinned. Since Alice was typically the one teaching when it came to magic and lectures, it was a refreshing reversal of roles.

“Heh heh, you know how the Fable family are one of the three great noble families, right? And many of the students here are nobility, so there are a lot of people talking behind her back. Well, I just happened to overhear the nobles talking.”

She did have a point. There had been a ton of discussion brought about just

from Tesfia enrolling at the Institute, so there was no way the noble girls wouldn't gossip about a major event around her.

Ciel then whispered as quietly as she could, "While discrimination based on social standing is taboo on paper, it still exists in reality."

"Huh, really?" Alice replied, somewhat bewildered.

While she couldn't say it was nonexistent, she couldn't recall ever being treated that badly.

Although there was some difference in the social circles of a commoner and noble, that couldn't really be helped.

Ciel sighed. "Well, maybe that's the case for you. In fact, most nobles are treading carefully so as not to upset Fia. The people from smaller families can't act as pretentious around her."

Unlike Alice, who could be carefree, Ciel was rather keen-eyed.

"And then there's Alus, I guess. He's like a scapegoat, taking on all of the nobles' hate."

Alice frowned at that as well. Alus had definitely been more of a problem child when they first enrolled. He'd even picked a fight with the daughter of the Fable family after all.

Next, Ciel whispered into Alice's ear as if what she was about to say were a secret. "I only heard of this later, but Alus apparently did a lot of work."

"Work? Like what?"

"Like, you know...messing people up in the shadows. Like noble boys that he didn't like."

"Ah, oh..." Even Alice could easily imagine that.

There was no doubt that Alus had stood out at first. He didn't seem to mind being isolated, but if he was the victim of something malicious, he wasn't the type to take it lying down.

A lot of things had probably happened, but thanks to that there was no longer anyone openly hostile towards him. And Sisty was likely helping out in the

background as well.

While Alice felt a renewed gratitude towards the principal, Ciel continued, “Loki enrolling played a big part as well. Her glares are really effective too. Anyways, a lot of things like that made the nobles more obedient.”

“Huh... But isn’t that a good thing?” asked Alice.

“Well, now that restraint has weakened, both among the first-years and the seniors.”

Ciel frowned and looked towards the center of the training grounds. Alice followed her stare.

There, she saw several seniors with a lot of hangers-on. They weren’t wearing the Institute’s official training outfit but rather custom-made outfits.

They were shooting intimidating glares at the students training.

“Get lost already.”

The training ground was divided into several partitions, but the seniors showed no care for that as they invaded. They were even forcefully dragging out anyone who opposed them.

Students observed their selfishness from a distance. Some were even leaving the training grounds.

The arrogance of the upperclassmen made even Alice doubt her eyes. It was the first time she’d seen such a blatant act of barbarity.

The sight petrified Alice, but Ciel only shrugged. “So it begins.”

“Sh-Shouldn’t we hurry and get a teacher?” Alice asked, prompting Ciel to look sternly at her. She was normally as adorable as a critter, so this expression didn’t suit her.

“It’s already been reported to the manager in charge of the training grounds, but it’s just as you see. They’re not trying to improve things, let alone coming to check on them. Sure, I know that the teacher is really busy right now, but something is definitely up!”

By now the nobles had already secured a large part of the training ground.

They were also grabbing three nearby students and forcing them inside of one of the partitions being separated by transparent barriers.

“Wh-What are you doing?!”

A student’s panicked voice reached all the way over to the girls.

In response, one of the nobles loudly declared with an arrogant smile, “Stand in a line and don’t you dare move. I do apologize for making you help with our training. But no matter how hard the likes of you try, there’s only so much you could hope to accomplish. So it’s more important to the Institute for us to become stronger.”

Then the student with reddish-brown hair drew a sword-type AWR from his waist. “Considering the current state of things, training to fight against people is important.”

Like that was their signal, the nobles began constructing spells aimed at the students standing in line.

Ciel furrowed her brows and whispered, “There might be a damage-transfer system in the training grounds, but this is too cruel. I don’t think that teacher has even reported this to the principal.”

“Yeah, there’s no way Principal Sisty would allow this!”

Alice instinctively held her spear tighter. There was no way she could overlook this.

But before she could leap into action, Ciel whispered to her, “Alice, my dad is a grunt soldier. And the dad of the guy who just drew his sword is my dad’s superior officer. I’m sure there are a lot of students in similar positions.”

Realizing what she meant, Alice stopped.

Alice didn’t have any parents, but she could understand Ciel’s plight. Singles like Alus were highly valued by the military, but to some, military rank meant more than Magicmaster hierarchy.

And the closer to the end of the organization, the starker the difference in rank became.

While Ciel looked like she was desperately holding something in, Alice just

looked sad...as the vile acts of violence began in the form of firing magic at the students. Students looked on from a distance, but nobody said anything.

The poor victims were knocked down by magic attacks and forced to stand back up, their legs wobbling and their faces contorted as they held their heads. The damage-transfer system was preventing them from being injured, but they suffered from headaches and nausea.

Alice seemed to notice something and asked Ciel, "The leader of the seniors is probably a third-year student, right?"

"Yeah. But Delca has an informal offer from the military, so he's rarely at the Institute. So there's nobody that can stop them."

Ciel's trembling voice stung Alice's heart. According to her, nobody was speaking up because the first ones who had opposed him had become the upperclassmen's next targets.

Delca Base was from a distinguished family and controlled the third-years. He was known for his spotless integrity, but his absence alone was enough to invite a painful scenario like this.

Alice couldn't help but feel like something had been twisted since the incident at the Institute.

It was like everything had changed in the short time Alice had been away from the training grounds. Thinking about it, Tesfia was always the type to charge headfirst into situations like these without thinking. But now that she was gone, Alice had to make her own decision.

Alice turned back to Ciel and made her declaration.

"I'm sorry, Ciel. I understand that there are all sorts of things... But that doesn't matter. I can't overlook this, even if they're nobles or upperclassmen."

Ciel stared into Alice's eyes, and after taking a deep breath, she nodded and squeezed her staff-type AWR in her small hand.

She probably understood the emptiness of justice without power much better than Alice.

As a commoner, she had a realist side she couldn't seem to let go off.

However, there was no hesitation to be seen when she nodded.

Alice looked at her once more as if to confirm her intent, and Ciel nodded again with a forced smile.

Alice's expression turned serious, and she shouted, "Stop it!"

In that moment everyone's attention gathered on Alice and Ciel. The gazes were mixed with surprise and resignation that the girls would become the next targets. The problematic noble with reddish-brown hair glared in their direction.

"I was wondering who it was. If it isn't the Fable hanger-on. Have you forgotten your status?" The leader of the noble group sneered, glaring even more at them.

But Alice resolutely glared back. She wasn't going to look away no matter what. More followers peeked out of the partition to see what was going on.

There were six of them in total.

That was when one of the first-years met her eyes and spoke out with loathing. "Oh, so you refuse to step down? Very well. Normally, I'd never deal with scum like you, but I've gotten bored of these training tools."

"Mr. Renapold, that one doesn't have any parents. Despite that, she gets along with Fable," he reported to the reddish-brown-haired leader.

"I see. So that's how it is. You've been around a great noble for so long that you misunderstand your own position." A deep grin appeared on Renapold's face. "It's not unusual for orphans not to understand social status, but it's all the more clear that you're in no position to speak so impudently to us."

He then put his foot out. "Kiss it. That is how you properly greet a noble."

"Uhm, I think I'll pass," Alice replied after a short while. She hadn't hesitated because she'd considered doing it. She had been choosing her words carefully.

She'd never experienced a situation like this, but she modeled her reaction on how she thought Tesfia or Alus would respond. Alus in particular would never let that slide.

She imagined Alus giving him some personal punishment and let out a soft

sigh.

“Wha—?! Are you making fun of me?”

Renapold interpreted Alice’s sigh as underestimating him, but after realizing that Alus’s style didn’t really suit her, Alice hesitated for a moment.

That was when Ciel stepped in as if remembering something.

“That reminds me. You have been working hard on training lately, but do you have a job lined up yet, Mr. Renapold?”

The somewhat deliberate words greatly hurt his pride, and Renapold’s face turned red, but he was struck dumb.

Alice was the one most surprised by the sudden bombshell of a statement. Ciel had looked so scared just a moment ago, but it seemed like she was headstrong once she’d decided on something.

Giving Alice a secret wink, Ciel continued in a nonchalant tone, “I think I heard that you were rejected by all of the famous squads? Are you sure you’re okay?”

Renapold desperately held back his anger, because if he were to snap, he’d be admitting that Ciel was right. He feigned calm as best as he could.

“Th-There’s simply a lot of squads that don’t understand my value!”

“There it is, the argument that you’re a genius and it’s the world that’s wrong. But your time limit—or rather, graduation—is coming up soon, isn’t it? If there’s no squad that will accept you, couldn’t that mean that there was a problem with your personality during interviews?” Ciel casually replied once more.

Renapold lost control, grinding his teeth as he pointed his sword at them.

“So in the end it comes to using force,” he said with an exaggerated sigh.

“It was going to come to this eventually anyways,” said Alice, taking a step forward while Ciel shrugged. “If you could be convinced by logic, you wouldn’t be acting like a bully.”

She held her spear-type AWR Shangdi Fides at the ready as mana spilled from the enraged Renapold’s body without reserve.



A first-year was one thing, but a third-year's mana usually conveyed a degree of skill and threat. However, Alice's eyebrows didn't so much as twitch upon seeing his mana.

That seemed to enrage Renapold even more, and more mana violently swirled around his body.

Seeing how enraged their leader was, the remaining followers readied their own AWRs and released their mana.

In the next moment, Renapold let out an irritated shout, draped himself in wind, and leaped.

“Haaah!”

He made the first move using the intermediate acceleration spell *Cruseo Step*.

He had a slim sword covered in excessive ornaments, and his large body rapidly closed in on Alice. He held the tip of his sword forward as if to impale her as he moved rapidly for Alice's shoulder.

It was the move Renapold was the most confident in.

He would use swordsmanship and sudden acceleration to pierce his enemy's vital spots in the blink of an eye. If a master were to use such a move, their opponent wouldn't even know what had happened until it was too late.

Renapold wore a wide grin.

He knew that they were outside of the damage-transfer system, so he should have been enveloping his blade in a sheath of mana. However, he was hoping to play everything off as an accident.

He already had his plan and excuses ready. He had only intended to scare a rude junior, but the mana around the tip of the sword happened to be too thin.

As a student, he was sure everything could be excused by his “inexperience.”

He would make an example of her. Those of low birth needed to see blood to understand.

Even if she were to die, it would just be one of Alpha's rats being removed.

He felt certain his strike would surely accomplish his nefarious goal since Alice

didn't seem to be on guard or afraid. Just as he was convinced of that, a golden flash ran across his view.

A beat later an eardrum-bursting, high-pitched sound rang out. Renapold felt a heavy impact and like he was being dragged backward by a giant's hand.

He was stunned and unable to hide his impatience as he caught a glimpse of Alice. However, she was perfectly calm.

It didn't look like she'd just barely repelled his attack or managed to pull it off through chance. She was so calm it was like she had repeated the same motion thousands of times a day, and this was the expected result.

"Huh?"

As he voiced his bewilderment, the backlash from the impact kicked in, and he was sent flying backward.

It wasn't until Renapold saw his followers meet the same fate as him after launching their attacks shortly after him that he realized what had happened.

Some had swung down their weapons at her, while some had shot out ice arrows from the rear. They were all nobles with some skills for novice Magicmasters...yet their attacks had all ended in vain.

Or rather, they had all bounced back at the same time.

As his body flipped upside down, he could see his followers being blown back too.

"«*Reflection*»...! Phew, I knew using it against everyone would be rough." Alice's quiet voice seemed to reach the entire training grounds.

After rolling across the ground, Renapold raised his upper body and roared, "Ugh...don't get full of yourself! Do you have any idea who you're up against?"

Alice calmly faced his anger and showed a mischievous smile. "Who? Well... Oh. I'm sure I heard your name, but I've already forgotten."

That made the vein in Renapold's temple bulge. Driven by anger, he tried to get up, but his legs weren't listening.

When he looked down, he saw that they were buried in a lump of earth. His

followers were all in the same position and unable to move.

The culprit was the small girl behind Alice, Ciel.

“What?! Gaia’s Grasp?!”

Having looked down on them, he’d never expected an advanced earth-attribute restriction spell. Renapold was flustered, but when he realized something, a fearless smile appeared on his lips.

Just binding his body wasn’t enough. A Magicmaster’s strongest weapon, their magic, was still unrestrained.

“Everyone, use the strongest spell that you can!”

Without missing a beat, the followers raised their AWRs and gave their careless juniors a mocking look.

“Is that enough, Alice?”

“Nice work, Ciel. I’m still struggling with minute adjustments.”

Renapold could overhear the two talking.

In the next moment, the earth magic was undone, and a white light appeared in front of Renapold and his followers.

“*«Celestist»*”

Alice smacked the bottom of her spear against the ground, prompting blinding pillars of light to rain down on everyone’s AWRs, heating them up and causing everyone to lose their grip on them.

“Wh-What is that spell...?!” Renapold muttered, holding his hand in anguish. He was completely at a loss.

There was no longer any battle to be had, and he couldn’t even resist.

“You will never solve anything like that,” Alice quietly said as Renapold hung his head.

“I think that right now, the entire Institute is going through a difficult time. I’m sure there are a lot of things irritating you, like not finding a job and being unsure about the future. But if you use your position as a senior student and the status of your family’s name to console yourself now, you will only be more

miserable later.”

Alice neither spoke harshly nor angrily criticized him. She simply admonished him calmly.

There was nothing Renapold could say back to her.

“Besides, that’s not cool. Nobody is ever going to acknowledge you like that,” Ciel said, poking her face out from behind Alice.

“Wh-What are you...?!”

As Renapold’s voice began to raise again, Alice stepped forward.

“Let’s leave it at this. Real training is not about taking out your frustration on someone else. It’s about facing yourself head-on. At the very least, that’s the training we will be doing,” Alice said, noting with a gentle smile and soft tone that he was going to ruin himself if he kept that up.

Alice had reached out her hand with a smile, but he lightly brushed it aside to stand up on his own. Renapold was speechless, but he still had a final shred of pride.

“Have it your way! Come on. We’re leaving!” he said to his followers and headed towards the exit, but he suddenly stopped even though he didn’t know why.

“Mr. Renapold, we can’t let this slide! Don’t worry. We’ll gather more power and...”

The first-year student that had ridiculed Alice for being a parentless orphan looked angry and suggested that they get revenge.

But for some reason his expression irritated Renapold.

“Don’t mock me any further! And don’t do anything unnecessary!”

That anger came as such a surprise that the flustered first-year student lowered his head, but Renapold didn’t so much as glance at him. Alice and Ciel’s training had caught more of his attention.

He leaned against the wall next to the training grounds exit and crossed his arms with a sullen expression.

“Aren’t you coming?” a student asked. But he sent them away with a “You guys, go.”

After that, his focus was on the training grounds.



“I guess you could call this self-cleansing.”

In a corner of the training grounds, Principal Sisty was wearing an inconspicuous outfit. Next to her was a young woman dressed like a secretary.

“There have been a lot of changes today, Captain.”

“Don’t call me that, Elina.” Sisty gave her an exasperated look, but Elina looked serious.

She had been Sisty’s subordinate, but they had both left the army. However, they still had a personal relationship and she occasionally helped with business affairs.

“Still, since you’ve come all this way, shouldn’t you at least see Alus once?” asked Sisty.

Elina gave a soft smile and shook her head. “No...not yet. I think that would be better for him.”

Elina had a long and deep relationship with Alus. She had been in the same Special Fiend Attack Unit as Alus...which had been a rough period for him. So she didn’t want to appear before him and bring back unpleasant memories.

Even so, she wanted to see how Alus had grown, so she’d often ask Sisty about him.

“You should keep from taking your doting parenting too far. If you keep leaving your husband alone you’re going to be abandoned,” said Sisty.

“Of course not. I have the initiative. Besides, my husband is the one who’s never home.”

“Well, I guess so.”

Elina’s husband was the chief of the defense force, so there was no way he wouldn’t be busy. Plus, he also had a deep relationship with Alus, so he

wouldn't stop Elina from going to the Institute.

Sisty looked back at the training grounds.

A situation that had been bound to happen had occurred, but the students had resolved it themselves. Since the Institute valued independence, Sisty was secretly happy with the results.

If adults were to step in, the situation would appear fixed on the surface, but the fundamental problem would still be there.

Although the Institute had ostensibly abolished the antiquated status system, it was a place detached from the adult world, and the students weren't all free from the influence of their upbringing.

No matter how many ideals the principal might spout, the nobles weren't all going to accept it.

The actions that Alice and Ciel had taken had made the students themselves extinguish the spark that was smoldering between them.

"Ms. Alice has really grown. Ah, how moving."

"She was an orphan from the orphanage that the Governor-General is supporting," said Elina. "And she is receiving training from Alus, so that's to be expected."

"Maybe from a magical perspective, but when it comes to character it's the opposite," Sisty said. "Our problem child in question has mellowed out quite a bit lately. Also, your bad habit of overestimating Alus is showing."

"Please at least forgive that. I want to see his growth for myself." Elina smiled wryly, sapping Sisty of any desire to pursue the subject further. Elina gave the impression of a hen watching over her chick.

"Good grief...what an astonishingly doting parent."

"No, at least make it his older sister..." Elina cleared her throat and changed the topic to Alice. "But that aside, I wanted to ask about her."

Sisty had an idea what she wanted to ask about. It was likely about the light-attribute spell that Alice had used.

“Oh my, her growth really is outstanding.”

“You’re not going to be able to dodge the question like that,” responded Elina. “Spatial manipulation is well beyond what a first-year student can manage.”

“I can’t hear yooou... I’m sure it’s something you could manage if you tried really hard.”

“I can’t believe what I’m hearing.”

The spell Alice had used was probably a new spell that Alus had created and taught her. There were only a few light magic spells, so Elina could easily tell it wasn’t one that she knew.

But it wasn’t a completely original spell. It appeared to be a combination of existing spells that used the light element.

But the problem was what lay beyond, where Alice was headed.

Sisty and Elina could both tell that the spell Alice had used, Celestist, was just a simplified version of its complete form.

What would the final iteration of the spell look like? It was possible it would be too powerful for a first-year student to be allowed to have.

While it was a happy sight as an educator, it was a headache-inducing situation as a supervisor.

Sisty looked over at Elina with a sullen expression. “I wonder if Alus deciphered that.”

“Yes...one of the big four relics.”

Relics were remains of the past left behind by someone unknown. They contained magic formulas from before the seven nations arose.

In particular there was a relic regarding the light element that magic researchers had long attempted to decipher and had only failed.

Modern spells were made by copying Fiend magic, but nobody knew who had created the relics and ancient magic. They were only mentioned in old rare books or even stone tablets.

Not even Sisty had a good grasp of their entirety, but she believed one of them was similar to Alice's spell Celestist. And if it had been Alus who taught Alice the spell, doubts would naturally come to the surface.

"W-Well, I'm sure we'll find out eventually, so let's just leave it at that," said Sisty.

"You have it rough, Captain."

"Just call me Principal. Still, Alus still doesn't understand how to do things in moderation. Besides, your people have some responsibility in raising him to be like this... No, I suppose I shouldn't complain anymore. I'm sure he has his hands full with his own problems."

Sisty shrugged and continued. "I will just have to do what I can from here. The seeds that were sown have definitely started to sprout."

Renapold seemed deeply affected by what happened, and Sisty smiled.

"Yes, all that's left is to keep outsiders from doing something unnecessary," muttered Elina.

It reached Sisty, and she said, "Yes...Berwick can be a handful whenever it comes to Alus. I'll need to tell him not to act like a father meddling in his son's love life."

Like the exasperated Sisty noted, Berwick had even offered to act as a mediator between a young Alus and Tesfia.

"You can include Lord Vizaist in that. They should really just let things play out," Elina said with a giggle.

Sisty and Elina had long ago figured out how Vizaist felt about his daughter Felinella and Alus getting along.

Regardless of whether her emotions were closer to that of a mother or a sister, Elina prayed for the boy's future happiness.

That said, there was nothing to actually worry about if she could afford to fret about such minor things. All she could do was hope the problem on Alus's side would be fixed.

I owe Alus. And I hope I can repay him with this, Sisty thought as she looked at

her former subordinate's calm profile.

One Hundredth Chapter: The Tenbram Begins

A little more than two weeks had passed since Alus and the others had come to the Fable mansion, and it was finally the day of the Tenbram.

A lot of nobles had gathered at the Womruina family's vast grounds, where they would be watching the outcome of the Tenbram.

Regardless of outcome, the power balance of Alpha's noble society was going to greatly change, and noble families of all sizes would need to consider their courses for the future.

"What are they doing? Are they really coming?" Tesfia asked with an irritated sigh.

The order list had already been submitted, and anyone not present when the match began would be treated as absent.

And the Fable team was currently missing one of its members.

Even Alus, who did things at his own pace, hadn't expected this. Not only had they not participated a single time during the training, even now they were cutting it close.

Frose, the head of the Fable family, was also reaching her breaking point as she waited for the final person.

"Are they trying to rile up their allies before the enemy? Like you'd expect from the shrewd elderly, they sure are carefree."

At that, Selva suddenly spoke out. "Master Frose, it would appear that they have finally arrived."

Just as he finished speaking, a gust of wind passed and a small figure landed before them—a rather displeased-looking elderly woman.

"Who are you calling a crafty schemer? I've brought my elderly bones all the way to the Womruina grounds. You should be thanking me before you complain."

Selva cracked a rare joke with his usual smile. “My Master didn’t say that much. Perhaps your loss of hearing has gotten worse, Miltria.”

The woman standing in front of him with a cane was Miltria Tristen.

She had once run Aferka together with Selva, making a name for herself in the underworld. After Selva left, she’d remained as the last leader to support the organization. She had also been the one to teach and guide Lilisha, and even now, she remained on in the new Aferka as a consultant. Her abilities were formidable.

Frose wore a wry smile as she turned to face the elderly woman who was also the teacher of her old friend, Sisty. She walked to her and bowed.

“I would like to thank you for coming to Fable’s aid, Lady Tristen.”

Despite her history, Miltria was actually a noble.

Aferka had been the previous ruler’s right hand, and she’d been given her status back then, but she preferred to stay out of the public eye, so only a handful of people in Alpha knew about her.

Sisty had also asked Miltria, so she had completed some troublesome paperwork to temporarily become affiliated with the Fable family.

“Hmph, I was only responding to my disciple’s request,” she said. “It also seems like that kid took care of Lilisha.”

She harshly stared at Alus, but when she talked about Lilisha, she was serene, like a grandmother talking about her granddaughter.

“Good grief. If you do feel any obligation you could at least arrive sooner,” Selva said with a shrug, but his tone of voice wasn’t particularly harsh.

Although they had been like mortal enemies after Selva had broken the blood oath and left Aferka, the life-threatening challenges the two had gone through together left a certain comfort between them. At the very least, their relationship was complicated and delicate.

It was practically off-limits, and it wasn’t anyone’s place to intervene.

“That’s none of your business. Still, to think you were still alive, Greenus. Are you even able to walk on your own feet?” Miltria sarcastically asked.

But Selva remained gentlemanly. “That would be my line. It sure took you a long time to crawl out of your shallow grave.”

“Hmph, I am getting up in the years here. But to think I would receive an invitation to come here. It’s worth living a long life, even if you have one foot in the grave.”

As Miltria finished speaking, she looked around her surroundings and pointed her cane at Cicero Bronche.

“You there, young one, you will do. Come here for a moment.”

“Y-Yes, ma’am!”

Cicero was the father of Minasha, Tesfia’s personal maid, and was around fifty years old. He was a large, middle-aged man, but to the monstrous elderly woman, he was practically a greenhorn.

Cicero hurriedly ran over to her and took her hand to guide her to a nearby chair.

“Thank you, young one. This is a fine side perk.”

“It’s to be expected!” said Cicero.

Selva sighed in dismay at Cicero standing on ceremony.

“Lord Bronche, that old woman is not as decrepit as she might look.”

“Oh my. It’s been decades since we last met, and you are still merciless, heh heh heh.”

“And your suspicious laugh hasn’t changed.”

They were adjusting to Miltria’s pace, but at this rate these two would be catching up on old times until the Tenbram began.

Frose cleared her throat and began speaking. “Lady Tristen, I am truly grateful that you have come. Your aid is worth a million men. You have my deepest appreciation.”

Frose spoke from the heart, but she didn’t actually know how strong Miltria was. Sisty had given her seal of approval, but Selva was being tight-lipped about her, so she hadn’t heard much of anything from him.

“Oh it seems like you have grown up into an impressive head of the Fable family. But that is enough of these stiff formal greetings. We should move on to the main topic.”

Miltria waved her hand, prompting Frose to give her a light explanation before handing the lecturer role over to Alus.

Some time passed, and it was finally moments before the Tenbram began.

“These clothes are pretty stiff,” Alus complained, pinching the sleeve of his clothes, which were made of unnecessarily luxurious materials.

“You can’t help it with the place being what it is. We can’t show up poorly dressed,” Tesfia whispered in response.

The Fable family team had Alus and Tesfia at the forefront, and they were wearing uniforms specifically tailored for this battle. Prepared by Frose, who had military experience, the clothes were almost like formal wartime attire worn by nobles. They were intricately designed to be very functional and protective.

“I can give you that, but aren’t there too many onlookers?” Alus asked in exasperation, looking at the nobles who had gathered.

There weren’t as many people as had been at the Seven Nations Friendship Magical Tournament, but to someone who hated nobility as Alus did, it was an annoying situation.

“That can’t be helped. This is a fateful match for the Fable faction and the Womruina faction,” Tesfia explained, and Loki nodded.

“So it would seem. They can’t help themselves when their future is on the line.” Loki wouldn’t be taking part in the match, but she would stay by Alus’s side until it began.

Alus gave her a heavy sigh. “This isn’t some cheering match. How ridiculous. They come out here in a show of loyalty all to protect themselves.”

“It’s the nobles’ way to start by appearance... Anyways, it looks like the signing ceremony before the match is starting,” said Loki.

Tesfia, the leader of their team, nervously asked, “Al...are you sure you’re

okay? You're not distracted, are you?"

"There's nothing to worry about. Besides, even if I weren't, would Womruina really delay the match? You need to steel yourself," Alus told her.

"Y-You're right. All right, let's give it to them!"

"That's the spirit. Mrs. Frose is calling for you. Get to the signing already."

The signing ceremony was where the leaders of both teams gathered and reconfirmed the conditions and wagers for the Tenbram. Frankly, it was just a headache, but it was part of the official paperwork, so Alus could only obey.



"You two sure are talkative. Today is the perfect weather for the Tenbram," Aile von Womruina smiled calmly and called out to them, noting the pointlessly impressive signing ceremony.

Accompanying Aile for Womruina were Cicila and Orneus as well as a figure nobody on Fable's side had seen before.

Alus gave the figure a perplexed stare. It was a middle-aged man wearing a white vestment and a cheerful smile.

"I believe you've heard about this before, but this time there will be a two-judge system. Lately, the Frusevan family has been leaning more over to your side, so the process would be unfair for us. I trust you have no objection," Aile said, putting on airs.

Lilisha, as the Frusevan family representative, was meant to be neutral. She smiled wryly at his words, but Aile was telling the truth.

Lilisha had even received a very high-class AWR from the Fable family. It was unclear if Aile's side knew about that, but if they opposed him too strongly he could talk about the judge being bribed and bought out.

That being the case, they could only accept the conditions.

"Allow me to introduce this man. This is Archbishop Silvette of the Einhimmel sect," said Aile.

Silvette wore a good-natured smile and followed Aile's lead. "I am here at the

young scion's request. It is a pleasure to meet you. Please be at ease. In the name of the god I serve, I swear to be a fair and impartial judge."

Alus had no way of knowing his origin, but Frose's doubtful expression told him everything he needed to know.

He was a big enough fish, but he shouldn't be welcomed.

The Einhimmel sect, huh? Haven't heard much about them in Alpha. At the very least, I haven't heard about them when doing shady jobs. Even if such an organization starts out clean and innocent, they can easily be corrupted depending on the qualities of the people at the top. There have been plenty of evil sects.

When Fiends had first appeared, humanity had been terrified to their core. As the influence of Fiends further expanded, fear among people began twisting, until heretics appeared who worshiped them as messengers of god, gave them sacrifices, and even tried to get society to accept them.

The majority were designated as dangerous organizations and placed under strict control by the state. But Alus had heard plenty of ugly stories about horrific incidents through his work behind the scenes, so he couldn't shake off his suspicion.

If the leader was an upright person trying to save people, things were fine, but if they gave up on fighting for their survival and escaped reality by hoping for relief in the form of miracles, they were nothing more than an irresponsible harm spreading misinformation.

I can only hope that he's not a good-for-nothing. Well, if it comes down to it, Lilisha will just have to put in some effort, Alus thought.

"Now that introductions are over, let us get to signing. I hope this Tenbram will be fun, don't you...Fia?" Aile asked, and once done he looked over.

On the surface, Tesfia brushed off his stare like it was nothing, but Aile didn't overlook the bead of sweat that dripped down her forehead.

"Oh...have you changed your mind?" Aile asked as if that were enough for him to see right through her.

It was like he could tell that she had become tougher than before, but she still hadn't attained complete strength...

He gave her an unsettling feeling, like something inhuman was observing her. Tesfia desperately stopped her trembling legs and squeezed out her answer.

"What does it matter?!"

"That's more like it. We're about to fight it out, so we can't be defeated in mind before the match begins. Still, you seem quite motivated, as elated as a child. I feel bad for Alus, you must be causing him a lot of trouble," Aile said, implying he knew quite a bit.

He might have known that Alus was giving Tesfia all sorts of advice, but surely there was no way of knowing that he'd increased her mana...

"It's been an interesting experience for me too. I can only hope the match won't be a letdown," said Alus.

"Ha ha ha, I'd expect nothing less," Aile responded. "Perhaps we could have more fun if there was nothing on the table."

"Don't you mean that you're really feeling the pressure now?" Alus replied as if having seen through everything regarding his family.

Aile looked surprised for a moment before putting back on his usual smile. "You can say that again. But for better or for worse, we're able to hold this Tenbram."

"It would be a complete embarrassment if you couldn't after all that talk."

Cicila glared at Alus after his repeated rude remarks. Aile glanced slightly over his shoulder to get her to back off and smiled softly again.

"That is some good provocation from someone who is not even a noble. I don't hate that kind of incitement. But let's save the passion for the match," Aile joked and shrugged.

Seeing that the explosive situation had been defused Lilisha stepped in.

"Let's leave it at that... Can both sides reconfirm the conditions and apply your seals to the document?"

Lilisha was wearing a judge's uniform. She put the document down on a small desk. The document was on expensive parchment and detailed what the winner of the Tenbram was entitled to.

Lilisha read its contents out loud.

Tesfia's side wanted to officially annul the engagement to Aile.

Aile's side wanted to confirm the marriage to Tesfia Fable as well as the guarantee of Alus's freedom.

That meant that the military would lose any ability to command him. On the surface, that was something Alus would love, but there was naturally a hidden side to that condition—an unspoken agreement that once Alus was free, he would be forced to “voluntarily” affiliate himself with the Womruina family.

Of course, Aile didn't expect that much from Alus.

But just getting Alus to leave the military would mean depriving the Governor-General of his ace card.

It wasn't just Womruina either. Morwald, the leader of the old noble faction, was also supporting them in this prime chance to kick out Berwick, their political enemy.

Once Lilisha had read out the conditions, she looked at the two parties for the final confirmation.

Suddenly, Alus raised his hand and spoke.

“I almost forgot. Our side only having one condition while they have two is unbalanced. So I'd like to add another condition.”

As Aile stared at Alus with suspicion, Alus spoke with a smile. “If we win, I want you to never interfere with me again. Having you wandering about within my line of sight is an eyesore. Make sure to write that into the document and swear on it.”

Alus was going out of his way to remind Aile what they'd talked about at the Institute.

Aile looked exasperated for a moment, but shortly after, he looked like he was enjoying himself as he nodded at Lilisha.

Lilisha looked a little stunned but ultimately relented and wrote in the condition by hand.

After that, Tesfia and Aile pricked their fingers with a golden needle formally used for signings and stamped the document with a blood seal.

After confirming the seals, Lilisha held the document aloft and loudly declared, “With this, Lilisha Ron de Rimfudge Frusevan and Archbishop Silvette of the Einhimmel sect confirm the oath of the Tenbram under the agreement of both the Fable and Womruina families.”

Then both teams went through checking their bracelet devices for the competition as well as their Orb.

The grounds where the Tenbram would be held were slightly low. At the site itself dense trees separated the inside and outside, making the view from the outside somewhat obstructed. There was also a series of staircase-like spectator seats. Since the site was part of the Womruina family’s grounds, there were quite a few servants standing by.

Alus had figured that if the enemy was going to do anything, they would tamper with the equipment, but surprisingly Aile’s side wasn’t doing anything of the sort.

Lilisha is sensitive to any tricks relying on mana. Well, I doubt they would rely on any shallow tricks that would be found out right away, Alus thought as he looked at Tesfia, who looked more nervous than the others.

Finally, both teams took their places in their respective areas, and the match started.

The Tenbram’s Orb Struggle was a strategic battle of twenty-one versus twenty-one, when the commanders were included.

The most important task in the beginning was ascertaining the enemy’s strength and the location of their Orb. To do so, the commander and members would search the field and map the information to the virtual screen that each person possessed.

Once a mark was dropped on the map, the enemy or Orb would be visible as long as it didn’t leave each member’s search range.

Tesfia's team set out as instructed, spreading out in an orderly formation to more effectively search.

Meanwhile, Tesfia ordered a summoning spell be cast on the Orb as they had decided earlier.

Having trained their initial actions repeatedly, their combination was swift.

Cicero was the first to cast a summoning spell.

The stock default summons of the Guardian could be performed by anyone, but its performance would somewhat change depending on the skill of the summoner. Naturally summoning something of a different attribute would cause its power to drop considerably.

The light of mana burst forth from Cicero's hands, causing a spark of flame to erupt from the Orb, transforming it into a small firebird. This was one of the default summons available, a bird-form Guardian carrying the Orb inside of it.

Less mana was being expended than during the training, so it would last longer as well.

"Lord Bronche, be careful not to expend too much mana," said Tesfia.

"Understood, young lady."

If the Guardian and summoner were too far away, the spell would automatically be dispelled, so Cicero needed to stay by the Orb at all times, but if he was constantly on the defensive, that meant one less person searching.

In that regard, using a bird as a more mobile form, he would have an easier time to evade ambushes because he could constantly move around.

In the beginning the team would be more focused on offense... It wasn't just Cicero. Even the commander, Tesfia, would be joining the search to some degree.

Five minutes after the match began, their allies on the front detected a few enemies, and the virtual screen of the bracelet device was reacting. It was a stroke of fortune because they could guess from the positions of the enemy what their formation was and launch the first strike.

"But we still haven't confirmed the location of the Orb!" said Cicero.

Because of the rule, capturing the enemy's Orb was the top priority, discovering its location at the start of the match was the standard strategy.

If the Orb or enemy Guardian is still out of detection range, they must still be quite far away, thought Tesfia.

For the time being, both sides would be closing in on each other.

After some searching, both sides would naturally split up into an attack team and a defense team. The attack and defense over each other's Guardian would be key to the development of the match.

"Young lady, we received the signal!" Cicero pointed to the sky, where sparks were flying in the air.

"That's Fire Arrow, which means...!"

The location of the Orb was still unknown, but an enemy had been discovered.

The key forces on Aile's side were Cicila and Orneus, and the Fire Arrow was the sign that one of them had been discovered.

Tesfia hurriedly input the information into the virtual screen, and a red light symbolizing a key figure on the enemy side appeared on the map. It was still unclear if it was Orneus or Cicila, but having discovered just one of them was good fortune.

"Lord Bronche, it's begun! From here on this will be a battle against time."

Cicero and Tesfia spoke through the Consensor, and she was heading closer towards the front while paying heed to the defense of Cicero and the Guardian.



Meanwhile, elsewhere:

Alus was acting separately from the team members who were searching, circling around the outskirts of the field, advancing on his own into the right wing of the enemy.

The Orb Struggle focused on fighting for Orbs rather than wiping out the enemy. Because of that, there was a restriction on the spells that could be used,

and the device on their wrist would adjust the output of the spells.

Furthermore, the HP-system that substituted any damage in the name of safety functioned as a way to gap the bridge in ability between Alus and the enemy.

Even if their abilities were leaps and bounds apart, the damage they could deal to one another would be the same.

Meaning that even Alus could find himself at a disadvantage if he charged in alone and found himself surrounded by several enemies.

“There’s a signal already. Things are going well.”

Alus moved as swiftly as the wind, looking at the Fire Arrow in the sky out of the corner of his eye, and changed the direction he was traveling in.

At the same time he could hear Tesfia’s voice from the Consensor in his ear calling out to him.

“We found one! Head over there!” came a short message over the Consensor.

Since it was a one-way call Alus headed into the forest without replying.

Alus had seen a signal using Fire Arrow with his own eyes, so he knew that Cicila or Orneus would be at his destination.

A few seconds later he encountered the enemy.

“How kind of you to be waiting for me.”

As Alus came out of the trees, he was greeted by a lone man wearing a tailcoat. Orneus had possibly deliberately shown himself to have a fight with Alus. He took a few soundless steps forward and lightly bowed.

“Yes, everything has proceeded as I expected. But I didn’t think we would get a chance to exchange spells so soon,” Orneus said with a fearless smile.

“I would have preferred if you were with the girl and your commander. Destroying you one at a time will be a pain,” responded Alus.

“Oh my. I thought you would be aware that it is strategically ineffective to take out members. So to think that you would still use brute force.”

“It would take some effort, but it’s not impossible.”

“Knowing who you are, I somewhat expected you would use such a high-handed method,” said Orneus. “That said, my lord isn’t foolish enough to push his strongest pieces against you just to have them crushed. Moreover, with the restrictions of this match, even I will be a match for you.”

Orneus leisurely removed his white gloves and neatly folded them before putting them in his pocket.

“So it would seem,” said Alus. “Unfortunately, having one more of you might make for a decent handicap.”

Orneus smiled broadly at Alus as if he’d heard a funny joke and rolled his hands as if to warm up.

“Let’s begin,” he said and took a fighting stance Alus had never seen before.

However, Alus had a feeling it was an old martial arts style meant for fighting people.

An all-out magic battle was one thing, but in the rules of the Tenbram and in a one-on-one fight, it would likely be useful.

As if responding to the smooth movements of his upper body, Orneus’s mana smoothly covered his hands.

Alus’s expression turned serious as he felt the wildness of his enemy’s mana and the sharpness in his glare.

They were the opposite of his smooth behavior and gave off the impression of darkness and viciousness.

This guy has definitely killed quite a number of people, thought Alus.

Faced with that strange bloodlust, Alus unsheathed the AWR at his waist and ran mana through it.

In that same moment, mana light burst forth from up in the trees behind Alus. Several spells seemed to have been cast by Tesfia’s team, and explosive sounds rang out. They seemed quite powerful, considering the restrictions of the match.

However, despite sensing that, Alus didn’t move, focusing his attention on his opponent.

Orneus on the other hand interpreted the irregularity as a signal to begin their match and kicked lightly off the ground.

It was a step so seemingly natural that it escaped Alus's caution. He accelerated quickly with his next step and closed in faster than Alus had expected.

He's still not drawing at this distance. In that case...!

It was possible that Orneus was a martial artist who didn't have an AWR, and thus Alus, with Night Mist, his short sword AWR, should have had the advantage. But that was only against the usual opponent.

And who knew how it would play out when their spells were restricted like this?

Alus had momentary misgivings, but his opponent's speed was faster than any cunning thoughts. His body moved purely on instinct, and he reflexively thrust Night Mist towards Orneus's fist.

Surprisingly, Orneus didn't flinch; he simply moved his hand. It only slightly touched the side of Night Mist, but the sword was pushed aside like it had been shot by a bullet.

What is this?! thought Alus.

Even if it was some form of mana-control technique, Alus had been on guard for it.

Yet Orneus had easily repelled Night Mist.

It's not a spell or some sort of mana control?!

Alus didn't even have time to be lost in thought as his opponent made his next move. He skillfully wrapped his arm around Alus's, lifting the elbow up to constrict it. In one quick but flowing movement, he then thrust his palm against the fixed elbow.

Hmph, so he follows up with attacking a weak point.

Seeing the enemy go for his elbow, Alus followed the flow of his opponent's power and instantly moved his body to avoid a fatal blow.

While being lifted into the air, he pulled Night Mist back and slashed against the hand holding his arm.

Orneus let go, as Alus had intended, and deflected Night Mist with the back of his hand just in the nick of time. The unexpected force of the impact knocked Alus's arm backward.

Seeing his opening, Orneus thrust out two fingers like claws towards Alus's throat.

The accuracy and speed of Orneus's attack made it clear he was used to fighting. Moreover...

The shape of those fingers... Is he not covering them in mana so that he can thrust them through the barrier field?!

Orneus had found a loophole in the rules of the Tenbram. In the brief realization, Alus imagined his windpipe being completely crushed.

Breathing was important to keep your body moving and focus your mana, but he could see the future of it being crushed by his opponent's piercing claw.

The artificial HP that participants had acted as a barrier made from state-of-the-art technology. They reacted to magical attacks as well as impacts and blows with mana, but when the complex fields around participants overlapped and blurred, their ability to detect attacks were weakened.

Because of that, any sort of extended grapples were typically forbidden, but all of Orneus's attacks were instant. If he said that it had happened while they were tangled up, there would be no proof of the opposite.

If Alus had been a student who only fought according to the standard theories, he wouldn't have seen through Orneus's dark intentions.

Alus controlled Night Mist's chain in the air to block Orneus's clawlike attack. A simple physical attack would never be able to break the chain strengthened through overwhelming mana control.

However...just like water changed shape to follow a river, Orneus's offensive changed as well.

The chain, which was supposed to catch the two fingers, didn't even flex and

the force of the impact was all transferred to Alus. The explosive impact seemingly ignored the chain's defense, and before he knew it, Orneus's hand had changed from a two-finger claw attack to a palm strike. It struck Alus.

Having been blown back, Alus used a branch of a tree behind him to fix his posture midair. In the next moment, Orneus, who'd been pursuing him to follow up on his attack, seemed to sense something and jumped backward.

As distance opened up between them, Orneus took a deep breath.

He patted his bangs, where he was missing a few strands of hair as a result of the sharp kick that had passed in front of his face.

When he closed in, he'd been prepared for a counterattack if he could destroy Alus's windpipe. Since Alus had seen through his intentions in an instant, the No. 1 Magicmaster had changed to a frontal attack instead. Moreover, the kick had been faster than Orneus expected and too sharp for him to allow it to hit his head or neck.

Artificial HP or not, taking a critical hit would deal considerable damage and influence the future of the battle. The emergency evasive maneuver had temporarily stopped Orneus's offense.

"I guess it won't be that easy. Unfortunately, not even the barrier compensates for self-inflicted joint dislocations," Orneus said, looking at Alus's arm hanging from his shoulder.

Alus had forcibly twisted his body to kick at Orneus, but the chain had tangled around his arm and tightened. Alus had forcibly pulled his arm free, but as a result, his shoulder was dislocated.

One of the arms of his clothes had been ripped off, revealing a black-and-blue scar, the traces of where his chain had been around his arm.

"I imagine it was an unexpected price to pay for the counterattack. Your HP might not have been affected, but it must be very painful."

Orneus let out a low laugh as if everything were going to plan and took a fighting stance once more.

Meanwhile, Alus used his free hand to pop his shoulder back in place and

tried clenching his fist. After confirming that the joint was back in, he raised his hands to a fighting stance.

Tsk, what a dirty way to fight, thought Alus. He doesn't care that it's just barely not illegal. If he hits, he'll call it an unfortunate accident. And it looks like he changes his movements up to make it look like a "legitimate" attack. His offense is very calculated.

The attempts to crush his elbow and throat were nefarious, but the explosive palm strike using mana was not. Since it used mana, it was considered an effective hit and reduced Alus's artificial HP.

A glance at the device told Alus he had 76 percent left.

I thought he was only using quick strikes, but he has some big blows too... The damage is more than I expected.

Alus's own attacks were being repelled by Orneus's strange moves. It was similar to Alice's Reflection, but that wasn't all.

The level of the spell might be within the restrictions of the match, but its nature was nothing but normal.

There's something strange about his defensive technique. And considering his experience, I'm somewhat at a disadvantage in close combat.

Alus remembered the magic that had appeared in the air at the start of the fight against Orneus. It was probably from his team, but at that scale, there might be something unusual happening.

Based on the light and the attribute, it was probably a lone Magicmaster and someone who uses the wind attribute. When it comes to who could be that absurd...

Tesfia and Theresia used ice, and it was too much of a feat for the known members. That left only one candidate, the old woman Miltria.

Considering the power he'd seen, her opponent was likely the other target to watch out for, Cicila. Although Alus hadn't seen a signal for it.

Still, that was a ridiculous amount.

Alus could barely perceive them without relying on his eyes, but the sheer

volume of arrows of wind had been overwhelming and the control of their movements had been tremendous.

They were spread in different directions and had tracked their target. She had practically free-flowing control.

If Cicila could dodge all of those, she was very impressive too, but there was no doubt about Miltria's ability. She was a reassuring member for the Tenbram.

After taking all of that into consideration, Alus made his decision and muttered.

"Then I'll do this."

Wind enveloped him as he took off in a certain direction.

Orneus called out to him, "Oh are you running now? You won't be able to shake me no matter what you're after."

Tsk, I know that. Alus kept his cursing inside his mind and he focused on sprinting.

While evading the magic flying wildly behind him from Orneus, Alus listened to the Consensor in his ear, but all he could hear was the sound of battle. He didn't hear Tesfia.

It seems like they're in a free-for-all as well, Alus thought to himself while noting Orneus's bloodlust closing in from behind.



"Now then, how will Fia move...?"

Shortly before Alus and Orneus faced off, Aile had taken up position in a previously-decided-on area with the Orb and several subordinates in tow. He was now sitting on a protruding rock and looking at the virtual screen in front of him with an innocent smile like a child enjoying a game.

Surprisingly, they had quickly withdrawn the Guardian after moving the Orb, and it was now completely defenseless.

Ha ha, conserving mana is key for our ace card. If we blast off from the start, the summoner won't last.

As Aile smiled, red dots symbolizing enemies appeared on the map one after another. Through their position, he could anticipate their formation and guess the remaining enemies' positions to make assumptions about their strategy.

Moreover, seeing how Orneus had stopped, it was very likely that he was facing Alus, the strongest pawn the enemy had. There was no way there could be anyone other than Alus who could make Orneus concentrate that much.

It was a first for Orneus to make a request like the one he had. As a natural-born slaughterer who wanted nothing but blood and strength, this was likely his only chance to fight a Single like Alus.

However, Aile was composed and levelheaded. Restrictions or not, Alus was ranked first. He was literally the strongest. He probably had tricks up his sleeves, and Aile didn't believe in Orneus's certain victory.

Orneus probably won't like it, but this is a Tenbram. In a battle of information, the more pawns you can move the better.

From Aile's point of view, as long as he could stall Alus, that was enough. After all, he also had Cicila on his team.

Once Orneus is motivated, he can be very persistent. In the meantime, we will buy some time... thought Aile. Ha ha, you messed up your strategy, Fia. You shouldn't have sent your strongest force against Orneus. You should have made some strategy to keep him from sinking his teeth into Alus. I would have made full use of Alus's mobility to search and strike the moment he discovered the Guardian. That would be the only way to break the trump card that I have prepared.

Aile wasn't wrong. The Orb Struggle was not just a battle of strength; the key was to search for the location of the enemy's Orb.

Look, my scout has found your soldiers. But what about you, Fia? Aren't you panicking because you haven't even found a clue to the location of our Orb? Aile thought to himself and smiled.

They were in a large depression, concealed from sight. Not summoning their Guardian had been a daring tactic to hide their presence as well as save mana.

"Still, it looks like Orneus is planning on going all out. From the sound of it, he

didn't want any help...and if I try to help it could end up biting me. Hmm, trying to keep him under my thumb here would be a bad move."

Aile already knew the limits of his own strength when it came to magic, which was why he wasn't stepping out himself.

Still, that's not a good location. If they go all out there, it could get in the way of my plans.

Orneus was giving chase to Alus to the east side of the area filled with trees. Aile would rather not have the attention of the match gathered in a place filled with obstructions. But he couldn't expect that kind of consideration from Orneus, who was a combat junkie.

"Still, Fia," Aile muttered, "now that Alus has his hands full dealing with a hunting hound, there's a limit to the strategies you can pull off. Meanwhile, I have Cicila on my side, so it's only a matter of time until your Orb is found... At least try to endure for as long as you can. It would be boring if this was too one-sided."

Shortly after that, he saw the light of mana in the air, the sign that the battle between Alus and Orneus had begun.

"Huh? What is that?" Aile asked a man that looked to be his adjutant.

The man, who looked to be around his thirties, answered in surprise, "My lord, I believe that is multiple novice-level spells being used simultaneously."

"No, that's more than you could call multiple. Did they bring an entire army division of Magicmasters with them?"

"Based on the attribute and mana light, it's probably done by a single person... Regardless, since each spell is a novice-level spell, it's within the rules."

"That's close to where Cicila is. If that's not Alus, who Orneus has his hands full with, who is it?" Aile asked nobody in particular.

The man next to him opened his mouth.

"I would surmise that it's Miltria Tristen. I have heard that she researches how to manifest multiple spells at the same time."

“Ah right, but to think it’s to that degree... What an energetic old woman. Still, I never imagined that she would lend her strength in a Tenbram.”

It was probably thanks in some way to Alus for resolving the problem with Selva Greenus leaving Aferka to join the Fable family. Through his intervention, the problem between Aferka and Fable had been resolved in a matter that didn’t please Aile.

But that wasn’t all... That vixen Cicelnia, had unraveled the series of interconnected schemes. She’d skillfully used Alus and even the plot on her own life to take control of Aferka.

Miltria’s participation was an unexpected by-product of that.

Still, not even Aile could imagine that the history between Aferka and Selva could be resolved so cleanly.

“Should I be welcoming these sorts of unknown variables? Or should I perhaps lament my misfortune? Oh well, at least it’s getting a little more fun.”

Aile sighed to himself while the adjutant and several other subordinates cleverly kept their mouths shut.

Aile’s forces continued locating the members of the Fable team.

“It’s about time... Look, we finally found our main target.”

Seeing the mana light shooting up from an ally, Aile smiled in satisfaction. He’d estimated where the enemy’s Orb was based on their formation and had gotten it right on the first guess.

Moreover, their commander, Tesfia, was right next to it.

“I see... A wide line to expand your search radius. Fia is right there to not just keep the Guardian and summoner isolated, but also to inspire her allies...or rather, it’s to make up for her lack of forces. It’s a very proactive strategy. Now things are getting fun,” Aile said with an innocent smile.

“However,” he continued, his smile growing wider, “the more teased a motivated opponent has been, the easier they will fall for a trap. If a delectable feast appears in front of the hounds that have been kept waiting, they will gather while drooling.”

Everything would be determined when Tesfia and her team's bold offensive didn't go as planned.

"Still..."

Cicila's movements on the virtual screen looked poor. She was likely up against Miltria Tristen, and she appeared to be struggling.

Well, with that number even Cicila would struggle. But it should be fine.

At the moment, Orneus was chasing Alus, continuing his attack. So Cicila being slowed down shouldn't affect things too much. It could even be interpreted as Cicila stalling Miltria, who had launched an unexpected ambush.

Aile trusted Cicila a lot. She could be overly serious at times, but her loyalty was undoubtable. If she understood Aile's true intentions, she wouldn't screw up by dropping out right away.

"Now then, we've got an eye on their location, so it's about time I do some work too."

Aile stood up and lightly stretched before looking at his adjutant.

"Sure, Miltria Tristen was unexpected, but I'm sure Cicila will handle it. More importantly, now that Alus has his hands tied with Orneus, it's our chance. In a while we'll be using *that*."

The adjutant and other subordinates nodded. "Yes, sir, you can leave that to us. That is why we've conserved our mana."

"Ha ha, I can't wait to see the surprise on Fia's face. Still, we never know what could happen. I'll be making some preparations of my own just in case," Aile said to his subordinates with a confident smile.



Meanwhile, in the bleachers for Tesfia's side, Frose and Selva were nervously watching the match.

Loki was equally on edge, but she was keeping a vigilant guard of their surroundings just in case, as instructed by Alus.

There was no sign of anyone suspicious blending in just yet, but the place

being what it was, she couldn't use detection magic, so she was ready to move if she needed to.

Frose and Selva spoke in hushed tones in front of a large screen displaying a map of the whole field. The specially made monitor used the same confidential information retention system as military command did. As such, no information would leak to either team during the match.

"The front lines have moved up a lot because of Fia's aggressive strategy," said Frose.

"However, the young lady's team hasn't discovered their Orb yet," answered Selva.

"But the Womruina team probably has... This might be bad."

"Their side were the ones that supplied a map of the area beforehand. The disadvantage didn't appear that big, but they might have a sizable advantage."

"But their devices were checked ahead of time, so there shouldn't be any blatant cheating. Although the Orb's position might have a geographical advantage that's not visible on a map."

"That's true," said Selva. "While it may be inappropriate to say, I was somewhat worried about the composition of members. Although in overall strength, there shouldn't be a large disadvantage."

"Indeed, it's not balanced overall. Having Miltria join was a big help, but it's a top-heavy team."

Aside from Miltria, Alus was the team's ace who stood out by far. Compared to him, Tesfia, Theresia, and Roderich appeared lacking.

When contrasted with Womruina's team, which had Cicila and Orneus leading the flanks with an overall superior average strength of their forces, the balance was a little disheartening.

Alus had enclosed several summoning formulas for the Guardian in order to protect the Orb, but they had been adapted to the average capabilities of the members, with no outstanding abilities.

Moreover, although Alus was rank 1, Orneus was being surprisingly

persistent. The rules and restrictions made it impossible for Alus to dominate the Orb Struggle on his own.

“How long will Fia’s formation hold, I wonder. And will Lady Tristen aid her?”

Selva stroked his chin and feigned ignorance. “Perhaps the latest rules of Tenbram are a little too difficult for that senile old woman.”

“That may be, but that barrage of long-distance magic was impressive,” said Frose. “Despite her opponent being rather impressive, she’s perfectly controlling the distance, nor is she out of breath. It is truly a stroke of luck that she is participating.”

Miltria had a complicated relationship with Selva, and it was a strange connection that brought Miltria her to the Tenbram.

Lilisha was like a granddaughter to the old woman, and the girl had been saved by Alus, who attended the Institute where Sisty was the principal. And she was Miltria’s former student as well as Frose’s old comrade in arms.

Frose sighed as she thought about how a lot of people were helping them with this Tenbram. It was all the more reason they couldn’t lose.

Frose faced the direction of her daughter and closed her eyes to pray.

Do your best, Fia!

As she opened her eyes again...

“There’s movement!” Selva muttered, one eye opened wide.

Frose sensed the same thing and instinctively stood up and narrowed her eyes as she looked at the monitor that showed the movement of mana.

“It looks like they finally discovered the enemy’s Orb! But what is that...?!”

With the location of both Orbs discovered, the match shifted from a battle of information to a struggle for said Orbs.

Tesfia’s team had rotated between summoners, and was now back to being Cicero’s turn, who summoned a fire tortoise.

As for Aile...

“What, Jurai?! How...”

Loki had been keeping calm, but it looked like her patience was gone as she ran up to Frose and asked her while staring at the screen, “Do you know it Lady Frose?!”

“Yes, that is a lightning-attribute summoning spell. No, I suppose it would be called a Guardian now. But its size is anything but normal.”

“What do you...?”

Selva followed up to answer Loki’s question. “As she said, its size is far too different from normal. Guardians have a difference in the amount of mana they require, but there are strict limitations on the total mana. Yet that Jurai’s humongous size is abnormal.”

“It’s too big... What’s going on with the regulations if they can summon something like that?”

As Frose spoke, a giant lightning tree grew on Aile’s side. Its branches started to form, and sparks of mana shot out as the branches spread out. Before long a huge tree had taken roots and spread out like an umbrella of lightning covering the field.

“It’s less of a Guardian and more of a fortress! Most attackers won’t even be able to get close,” said Frose.

“Even a long range attack could be canceled,” Selva explained. “And did you notice? Using the wide effective range, their commander and summoner have gone under the Jurai’s umbrella.”

“What?! But then...!” shouted Loki.

“Then it would be impossible to take down the summoner or the commander to send their command into chaos! In that case, isn’t it impossible to get at their Orb...?” Loki asked.

And while Selva appeared collected, he furrowed his brow. “They’ve outwitted us. If the Jurai’s protection is perfect, then it will be impossible to target the commander or summoner, and they won’t need any guards. Which means that they can devote many more forces to their attack.”

Like Selva said, the Jurai looked sturdy and showed no weaknesses to exploit.

Meanwhile, enemy attackers were closing in on Tesfia's team's fire tortoise, and the defenders were at a disadvantage.

After all, Aile's team didn't need to devote anyone to defense.

Meanwhile, Tesfia's side wouldn't be able to strike at the enemy's Orb or commander until the Jurai ran out of mana. In addition, it would be difficult to forcefully defeat the summoner or pull them away from the Orb.

"Fia...!" Frose muttered with a pale expression.

"Hey, what are you losing your head over? A child is naturally a parent's treasure, but they are only able to shine because of your trust. She's your daughter, have some faith in her," a man suddenly roared.

His deep, dignified voice resounded and overpowered the restless atmosphere. Frose looked surprised, but soon sat down on a nearby chair. She then gave an irritated look to the large man resting his chin in his hand on the table where the monitor stood.

"Oh, how unexpected. I didn't think you would come, Vizaist."

Vizaist had suffered a serious injury to his stomach after a battle against Noir recently and was supposed to still be hospitalized, yet there he was. That should have been impossible if the rumors of the severity of the injury were true, but the giant had extraordinary stamina and resilience.

He was holding what looked like crutches, so Frose figured that he must have snuck out of the hospital.

Vizaist responded with a snort as if it were a matter of course. "That's quite a welcome. I heard you were so worried about your daughter that you even got your future son-in-law involved, and I couldn't even rest easily in my hospital bed."

While the word "son" bothered her, Frose looked back at the monitor as if ignoring him.

"If you're here to get in the way, then you can rest there. Once it's over, Selva will wake you up."

However, contrary to Frose's antagonistic remark, Selva had skillfully

prepared a large seat for Vizaist, who waltzed over and boldly sat down. Loki gave him a quick bow.

He lightly raised his hand to her and then entrusted his crutches to Selva.

Frose wouldn't so much as look at him as she exasperatedly spoke.

"I thought you would mellow out with age, but you are still an unruly child."

"Those at the time can be a little reckless on the front. But this time I screwed up a little."

"Is that so?"

Vizaist and Frose were both heads of two great noble families, but their relationship wasn't entirely positive.

During Frose's military service, she'd had overall command, while Vizaist had been doing as he pleased at the front lines, leaving her at a loss. Even so, they got along well enough to have an inseparable bond of sorts.

"So what business do you have?"

"You're as cold as always."

They sounded somewhat exasperated, but their back and forth was a bit nostalgic. Vizaist had a broad smile as he gulped down the cup of tea that Selva had given him.

"Despite how something looks, you might come across someone out on urgent business," hinted Vizaist. "A certain stupid major general leader of the old noble faction is on the verge of going ballistic. If he's going to make his move, it will be here, after the match is over."

"So it's in preparation for a flashy 'war'? The military spirit is alive and well I see."

Frose glanced at Vizaist, who raised his hands.

"I'm off duty today. In my state, I can't properly move, but I'll be present if something does happen."

So Vizaist said, but seeing how he was acting like normal even after giving away his crutches, he would probably be fine even if his wounds opened to

some degree.

“I am not particularly knowledgeable on Tenbram. What kind of trick did you use?”

“What are you talking about?”

“With Alus. He hates nobility and any trouble, so how did you get him to shoulder this situation? Don’t tell me you...” Vizaist asked with anxiety unbecoming of his face.

“Yes, I’ll have him get engaged to Fia,” Frose answered calmly, causing Vizaist’s eyes to shoot open.

He shouted, “What! I won’t let you get a head start! N-No, I mean... Ahem.”

Vizaist started but stopped himself as he glanced over to the silver-haired girl sitting diagonally across him, having taken her feelings into consideration.

That was when Selva interrupted.

“Lady Frose is only jesting. This was a suggestion from Womruina, and Sir Alus’s participation happened due to the flow of events.”

Vizaist let out a deep sigh of relief.

Seeing that Frose spoke in cynicism. “Unfortunately it is just as Selva says. Well, I wouldn’t have any problems with it, if it were to happen. That said, Fia is terrible at seduction, and it seems like she has a lot of rivals. Regardless, that’s a matter for after the Tenbram has been won.”

“That’s true,” said Vizaist. “The situation looks somewhat bad, but I’m sure that Alus will do something. That’s the kind of guy he is. Besides, even old lady Miltria was dragged out just in case things got out of hand.”

Frose snorted. He must not have known what was on the line in this match.

“Still, Womruina’s son really did end up like this.”

Frose didn’t respond.

“He’s surpassed his father, in a bad sense of the word. His older brother was a fool but he still had a cute side to him. Moroteon messed up his education policy when it came to the smarter younger brother,” Vizaist said like it had

nothing to do with him, but he had quite the sharp insight.

Having looked over a freethinker like Alus for so long, he could see through Aile's true nature from a glance. It was also in part due to his interactions with the Womruina as a result of being from one of the three great noble families.

In the past, Aile had been arrogant and very ambitious, and he had the air of a cunning old king. He was particularly skilled at maneuvering. He used his cards in the form of influence to get the best results, and if he saw any opening, he would manipulate the hearts and minds of people.

The atmosphere around the young Aile had struck Vizaist as bizarre.

Since their family was former royalty, the people around them abased themselves. And while it looked like he was being elevated through flattery, that wasn't the case.

He had a hard time believing that a child could be so intelligent. Vizaist still remembered the bad feeling he had gotten back in those days.

That said... Vizaist glanced over to the seats for Womruina's side and tightened his expression.

What he'd said to Frose wasn't an exaggeration. Depending on the outcome of the Tenbram, the Womruina family's authority could be greatly undermined. If their supporters sensed that they'd weakened, Morwald might come to his own conclusions and make some kind of move.

He hasn't shown up as a spectator, but who knows what he is plotting. Then there's that woman who cornered me at that mansion. She is probably a bodyguard or something that he hired, but just who was she.

Vizaist had infiltrated a mansion to get a lead on Morwald when he'd encountered the girl.

He recalled her cold expression and his expression turned bitter as the injury on his stomach stung.



“Archbishop Silvette! As judges, surely this is not something we can overlook! The Womruina team's Jurai might exceed regulations!” Lilisha shouted out from

the judge's seat, which was on high ground.

In contrast, Silvette calmly tilted his head.

"If you say so, I will support it, but what doubts do you have? The Orbs and devices were checked before the match, and there hadn't been any problems."

"Th-That's true! The amount of mana in the Orb had been within regulations..."

The Orbs for both teams had been limited to a set total mana—the combined amount of mana necessary to summon the Guardians within.

If a skilled Magicmaster was to fill the Orb with powerful Guardians without limit, the Orb Struggle would be unviable.

But there was a concern that the Jurai summoned was too powerful.

Lilisha furrowed her brows to think, while Silvette calmly spoke to her.

"The rules I read mention nothing about the numbers of Guardians loaded into the Orb. So isn't that what this means?"

Lilisha's eyes opened wide with the realization.

"Do you mean that the Womruina team has extremely few Guards...? And all of the mana is being put into that giant Jurai?!"

"Indeed. From what I can tell they must have spent eighty to ninety percent of their total mana on it. They probably used multiple summoners with an affinity for lightning."

"You mean it's not against the regulation, then."

It was only natural that Lilisha would be aghast. The Orb Struggle was a team battle with a lot of players, and the size of the field meant that situations could rapidly change. Since anyone might need to summon a Guardian, it was standard practice to have a variety of summons prepared.

Lilisha was spacing out when Silvette continued with a calm smile, "It might certainly deviate from typical strategies. But those with innovative ideas and plans will have an advantage in battle. As judges we must accept new strategies like these."

His attitude was mild, but his words left no room for argument.

Lilisha broke out into a cold sweat and, trying to avoid being swallowed by the pressure, shot back, “You have a point, Archbishop Silvette. But it is a move that could still be suspected of violating the regulations, so there is no doubt no small amount of confusion among the participants and spectators. So I believe the judges should announce their decision and their basis for it.”

Silvette rejected Lilisha’s proposal in a natural fashion.

“...Hmm. However, the Tenbram has a holy ceremony to it. So you could say that everything is as our Lord wills it. We are but mortals, there is no reason for our pretentious decision to put a damper on these events.”

Lilisha struggled to find the words, but she desperately latched on.

“With all due respect! If your god really is that omnipotent, would their divine will not naturally be apparent without us taking any actions! If so, then is there even any point in questioning that will through a Tenbram?!”

“Our Lord is always testing us. Is that not all there is to it?”

“Yes indeed. In which case it is important to strive to do something of our own and not leave everything up to God.”

“...Hmm.” Silvette groaned, having been tripped up.

Seeing her chance, Lilisha continued, “I am not a god nor am I well versed in the Einhimmel sect, but as a judge, I have a responsibility. That is why it is my duty to make a fair judgment of my own volition under these circumstances and communicate my decision to everyone!”

Lilisha rushed this out in a single breath and directed a particularly sharp stare at Silvette’s old face.

His soft smile stiffened up for a moment, but in the next moment, he returned to his usual good-natured smile and nodded.

“If you are going to say that much, then I suppose it’s unavoidable. Let us immediately issue a joint statement to the entire field.”

Lilisha gulped and nodded, while thinking as hard as she could.

That said, this should be a gray area. If I had looked closer at not just the overall mana in the Orb but how it's divided up between the Guardians, I might have been able to see it beforehand... I still lack experience.

Silvette was a judge who was there at the behest of the Womruina family. He must have either known beforehand or guessed something was up and let it go. He was surely grabbing every opportunity that he saw.

By publicly announcing the trick, she should be able to prevent them from taking things further, but it wouldn't have much of an impact on the future of the match.

After all, the statement was an act of acknowledgment, not an accusation of wrongdoing.

Lilisha felt embarrassed over her own actions.

Is there anything I can do?!

Lilisha's voice rang out among the restless spectators, announcing the judge's decision on the Jurai and their basis for it.

At the same time, a text message was sent out to the participants.

"This is an explanation from the judges regarding the Womruina side's summoned Guardian. It does not go against the regulations of the match. The reason is because the Womruina team has a very limited number of Guardians. The control of the Orb beforehand showed that its total mana did not exceed regulations..."

Lilisha was as calm as she could be as she made the announcement, but her words were slightly barbed towards the end.

"That said, if we consider the spirit of the Orb Struggle, there is room for doubt. We ask that they refrain from such actions in the future..."

Sensing the confusion in the venue settle down, Lilisha thought to herself. *I tried my best to criticize them, but Womruina is probably used to these sorts of methods. The best I could do is give them a warning and control the atmosphere of the venue.*

Having thought that far, she realized something.

*It's a loophole in the rules...but the performance of the Orb itself hasn't changed, so maintaining the Jurai should wear one out faster than usual...
Hmm?!*

With a start, Lilisha added another announcement from the judge's side.

"To repeat, the Jurai uses the capacity of several Guardians. Naturally, that means that it would require multiple people to maintain it, which is why it is not a regulation infraction. Also, please note that the irregular lightning is expected to cause atmospheric turbulence and strong winds."

In her attempt to resist, she hoped to reveal the details of the Jurai to Tesfia's team in her explanation to the audience.

Finally, the last part of her message, which was disguised as an alert, had the most advice that she could incorporate into it. She had carefully chosen her words, but nonetheless, she glanced over at Silvette's face. It didn't seem like he had noticed.

With a sigh of relief, Lilisha relaxed.

I hope they get the message. But the Womruinas might be reading into this closely and be on guard for them. In any case, considering my position, this is as much as I can do. The people on the field will have to handle the rest.

One Hundred-First Chapter: A Witch Among Witches

Shortly before the Jurai appeared, Miltria was on the left side of the field, muttering to herself.

“Heh heh heh, how many years has it been since I was in a Tenbram. This tension sure is nostalgic. Listening to the requests of my foolish disciple every now and then isn’t all that bad.”

Her husky voice was somewhat amused and in the hand of her withered arm was a likewise withered-looking staff. Above her were countless wind arrows to attack Cicila. At first glance, it was hard to believe that such an old woman was controlling all of them.

“Here, have a special,” Miltria said, firing off an arrow with even more mana.

Feeling a little dizzy she sat down with a “Heave-ho” on the root of a huge tree nearby. Then she raised one of her eyebrows.

“Oh, so you can even dodge that. Youth can be so dazzling. But you still have much to learn.”

Miltria let out even more mana. With that, the large arrow that Cicila had dodged immediately started tracking and turned around.

Miltria was a self-taught researcher who had honed her magic. While she’d been in the military for the guidance of future students, it had only been for a relatively short while.

Thanks to that, she’d absorbed a lot of the latest research in magic, and when it came to the area of decentralized management of mana control, she was unrivaled. Even at her advanced age, she maintained the ability to manage magic with perfect precision, and for novice spells she could control over a hundred.

So in situations like these, her ability to use the wind spell Air Map and detection spells to learn about the area was a large advantage.

“The lass seems to be struggling quite a bit with these projectiles. Well, she’s not that far away either, heh heh heh.”

Meanwhile, Cicila was struggling just as Miltria had assumed.

Ugh, there’s no end to them... Just how is she controlling these mana arrows from that far?! she thought.

Just evading the attacks was the best Cicila could do, but Miltria wasn’t actually that far away. Miltria was simply maintaining a reasonable distance and using the trees to hide.

Although it was only natural that Cicila would believe she was far away. The Wind Arrows that Miltria was using were being freely controlled, with each having different speeds and distances and trajectories, making it very difficult to guess where they were coming from.

From Cicila’s point of view, any direction she tried going in was blocked by fierce attacks, so she couldn’t move like she wanted.

She felt like she had been trapped in a small room out in the open.

She wanted to get a grasp of Tesfia’s location, as well as take out a few of the enemies.

That was what Aile wanted from her too, which was why she was getting irritated.

That irritation further disturbed her movements, until it eventually reached a fatal level.

An arrow that she’d failed to dodge scratched her shoulder and a warning light flashed from the barrier field. Her artificial HP had been further reduced.

Ugh.

She was continuously dodging the rapid arrows, but their numbers were only increasing.

Sometimes she’d leap at the last second, and when her hand reached the ground she twisted her body like a gymnast, but Cicila’s dodging was becoming more acrobatic.

I can't handle much more... I guess I have no choice!

Cicila covered her arm in mana and swatted away an incoming arrow. Since she wasn't dodging the arrow, she was using up her own mana, turning it into a battle of attrition.

While she was well aware of that, she had practically been forced to make that decision. That sensation put further pressure on Cicila.

She didn't even have the time to wipe the sweat of her brow as there was no end to the attacks. The rain of attacks had continued for over five minutes.

When they finally appeared to be slowing down, Cicila expelled her built-up stress and unleashed a spell.

A mist-like spell released from her body—Noble Lily.

Inside the mist, anything that moved was frozen.

Normally this was an expert-level spell, but Cicila had cast a simplified construct so that it would fall within the rules of the match. As a result, it was so weak it couldn't even stop novice-level arrows, but it was still extremely effective in the situation.

After all, Noble Lily froze everything in its space, albeit in a weakened form. So magic arrows that pried it open made the space ring out with a dry crack, which served as an exquisite warning sound.

Listening carefully, Cicila's impatience disappeared as if it never existed in the first place as she dodged magic arrows with ease. Cicila made use of the effective area of Noble Lily as an extension of her senses, erasing any chance of getting attacked from a blind spot.

Miltria was inwardly marveling at the measure. *Oh, she is rather excellent. That is a good response and her decision-making is fast.*

Even so, Miltria didn't move for the simple reason that this was the role that had been given to her.

Well, this is Miss Tesfia's and that kid's plan. The elderly can't afford to screw up their role that the younglings have drawn up.

That said, she still planned to act.

“It would seem that I underestimated her a little. I couldn’t stand for that senile Selva or Sisty laughing at me for wasting away, which is why I came all this way. Now, let me show you that I haven’t grown weak.”

Miltria slapped her hip twice before raising her arm and staff up high towards the sky.

Immediately, the fallen leaves danced and twirled on the ground. One after another, their numbers increased.

After the gentle breeze, wind gathered around her like something had burst. Miltria held her palm up high, moving her finger like an orchestra conductor.

As if in response to that, the wind grew even harsher.

Suddenly, her finger came to a stop and pointed up high.

In that moment, the wind looked like it came to a complete stop, but in reality it was turned into Wind Arrows that numbered over a thousand.

“This goes there, and that goes here. Now, which should I go with?”

With a delighted expression on her face, Miltria carried away the Wind Arrows on air currents while humming a strange rhythm not unlike a children’s song.

She was like a cat playing with a mouse. It was that side of her that brought out a frown on Sisty’s face, but she couldn’t stop herself.

After finishing shooting out spells at a fierce rate, Miltria flicked her finger at the last remaining arrow. It flew in a completely different trajectory from the other arrows, swallowed up by the sky.

Shortly thereafter, Cicila felt an ominous omen. When she looked up, she could see a terrifying amount of Wind Arrows in the air.

However, they weren’t headed for where she was.

Don’t tell me...!

An unease spread through Cicila’s mind. Her opponent was extremely skilled at attacking with long-range wind magic.

In which case, her plan might have backfired. By fortifying her defenses with

Noble Lily, her opponent might have given up on taking her down and redirected their firepower towards someone else.

Wind magic excelled at getting a layout of an area. They might even have located Aile.

Even if that wasn't the case, they might have received some instructions from their commander. But even if they hadn't pinpointed his location, the number of spells was more than enough for carpet-bombing.

They could bombard the area they believed Aile was at.

Cicila was deeply loyal and as his closest aide, she couldn't help but panic.

Oh no! Master Aile's true strength lies elsewhere!

Gathering mana in her legs, she tried to rush to Aile's side when it happened. Something cut through the wind and fell as if it were drawn to Cicila's back.

"Ack...i-impossible?!"

The single arrow fell from high up in the sky and shot through Cicila's back.

It was a single shot, yet it had a terrifyingly dense amount of mana. Her artificial HP was greatly decreased, and her next step stumbled.

Following the lead of the first arrow, countless more arrows changed direction.

I-It was all a feint...?!

Cicila gritted her teeth and looked up at the sky. Countless arrows were raining down. They exploded into magic light and covered everything in a burning brilliant light.

In the forest some distance away, Miltria was sitting on the root of a tree resting, a smile on her wrinkled face.

"Heh heh heh, Womruina's little brat is supposedly a natural-born player, but that went as well as expected."

The terrifying old woman had used information gained earlier, as well as the enemy's formation, to see through Cicila's state of mind. She'd crushed Cicila by using her loyalty against her.

Naturally, as an experienced veteran, she cautiously maintained a weakened version of Air Map to fit the regulations.

“A direct hit. Hmm, the artificial HP on the bracelet device is empty... She’s been taken out. Well, she might be knocked out, but I have no obligation to look after her,” Miltria muttered as if she’d lost interest.

She stopped her detection, but it wasn’t from a lack of caution. This was different from real life as even if Cicila was conscious, now that she’d lost all HP, she could no longer participate.

“Still, to think it would take this long to crush a single girl. Tenbrams these days are so soft with these bracelets and new rules. Back then, enemies would lose a limb or two, and there’d even be a few deaths,” Miltria complained, rubbing her shoulders.

“Still, for such a young woman, she has some skill. If she was a little older, she could have seen things with a clearer head.”

Besides, in an Orb Struggle, attacking the commander didn’t mean victory. A team would be at a disadvantage from having their chain of command disrupted, but the victory condition was purely to steal the other team’s Orb, and hold it for a period of time.

They would also need to insert their team’s mana code into it to seal its functions.

“Now then, with this I’ve saved Sisty’s face. I think I will leave it at that to avoid punishing my old bones any more. Good grief, here I was thinking she’d come to rely on me, but all she brought was trouble...” Miltria said, although she sounded like she was enjoying herself more than her words showed.

Planting her staff on the ground, she slowly walked towards her own team’s ground. Whether that was to leave the rest to the young or to protect her own team’s Orb, only Miltria knew.

She’d never really had any sense of urgency regarding the Tenbram to begin with. She might have thought of it as showing her face at the younglings’ village festival.

“Hmm...?”

That was when Miltria's face twisted into a dubious expression and her eyes fluttered as she looked up at the sky.

The wind serving her seemed to have sensed something and came to tell her.

She looked down at the message that her bracelet was projecting in the air.

"Ohh... Could this be Lilisha? Very good. It looks like she is doing her job as a judge just fine. Now what does it say...?"

The message showed what Lilisha had announced to the audience.

"Oh, a giant Jurai is it? That must be the presence I felt. Womruina's little brat is cheating just within the limits of what he can get away with. And then... Hmm, the last bit is a hint from her. I'm sure it's some fine advice."

The strong winds in Lilisha's announcement were a hint about the wind attribute.

It also suggested a means of defeating the Jurai with the use of an outstanding wind Magicmaster.

In short, if they were going to create an opening in the Jurai, which controlled the lightning in the atmosphere, they would need wind magic to manipulate the air.

The elderly woman let out a sigh and muttered, "I'm sure she has to consider her position, but it does sound a little too refined. I imagine only that brat would notice. It looks like I won't be able to get some rest."

Miltria snapped her fingers and flew away on the wind.



At the same time, on the right side of the field Alus and Orneus were squaring off.

The situation was the opposite of that of Cicila and Miltria. Their close combat was so intense nobody else could step in.

Alus leaped off a tree branch to evade Orneus's fierce attacks. His dodge was just in the nick of time, as Orneus's fist pulverized the branch.

However, that form of destruction was unnatural. It wasn't destroyed from an

impact, but rather it exploded from the inside.

That's not a normal spell or mana control.

As he realized that, a bad feeling ran down Alus's spine and righted his posture in midair.

Orneus's leg strength was astounding, even to Alus. After destroying the branch, Orneus leaped in pursuit of him and closed the distance in no time.

Alus was upside down, and in the corner of his view, he saw Orneus smiling sadistically, ready for a swing.

Using centrifugal force, Alus swung Night Mist. A blade formed of mana stretched beyond its tip, increasing its range.

In response, Orneus only lightly tapped the side of the blade. A dull sound rang out.

Alus's hand went numb from the impact, which felt like a hammer had hit the sword. But that wasn't all. It also felt like the blade had become hundreds of times heavier, and Alus's posture broke midair.

His arm was being pulled down. Alus didn't hesitate to let go of Night Mist, and it pulled its chain with it as it crashed towards the ground.

The first thing Alus did after losing his weapon was unleash a kick. Of course, Orneus naturally blocked it with his arm and moved to counterattack.

Orneus twisted his body in midair to kick Alus. Since it was covered in mana, it was strong as a hammer and flexible as a whip.

Despite Alus crossing his arms to protect himself, the impact was immense. While he endured the blow, Alus was blown into the trees.

Orneus immediately tried to give chase...

However, he sensed something and twisted his upper body and swung his arm behind him. Though Alus had dropped it, Night Mist was flying at Orneus thanks to Alus's skilled mana control.

Fist and blade clashed, yet the sound it made was like metal. Night Mist was repelled, but the chains pulled it into the trees where Alus had been sent flying.

Orneus clicked his tongue in irritation. He then ran after Alus like a hunting dog pursuing the bloodstains of its prey.

The two faced off once more at a slightly different location. This time it was Alus who was intercepting Orneus.

“Oh? What an honor to have you waiting for me,” Orneus spat out sarcastically.

But Alus replied with a fearless smile, “Well, I figured out your trick after all. Snapping mana with your arm is a strange technique though.”

“So you figured it out. But what about the principle behind it?”

“Repulsion.”

Orneus silently smiled, but that practically affirmed what Alus said.

It was no wonder Orneus was called a hunter. His ability was perfect for killing Magicmasters as it was a power to harness the repulsive nature of mana clashing to the utmost limit.

Orneus was so skilled with the technique that even the slightest amount of mana created enough power to blow away the opponent.

It was a talent that he had been born with, but it naturally came at a cost. He could only repel mana, and had no ability to convert it into spells. He couldn't even effectively use an AWR.

It was a massive handicap in the age of magic, but that was what led him to polish his technique.

Incidentally, the mana repulsion could even be used with the tip of his toes, but its strength lay in his two arms, which he had used to master the technique.

“I call this power Guilty Gift.”

“What a troublesome special ability.”

When thinking of special abilities, the first thing that would come to mind was magic eyes, but there were all kinds of innate abilities that deviated from the standard structure of magic.

Those powers that didn't belong to the basic attributes of fire, earth, wind,

water, ice, and lightning or the two elements of light and dark were all lumped into special abilities.

Dante, who Alus had killed in the past, had used gravity, which was also a special ability, but users of that ability were very rare.

“Besides, this was a blind spot. Who would have thought that there would be hand-to-hand combat at the Tenbram?”

The edges of Orneus’s lips rose ever so slightly at Alus’s words. “I will take that as a compliment. But even if you know the trick, there’s no point if you can’t counter it. All the flashy spells are banned because of the Orb Struggle. Which is why I will be able to take you down in close combat,” Orneus said somewhat provokingly.

But Alus only shrugged. “...Maybe so.”

“You are being very elusive. It’s quite different from the picture I had of you. Are you sure you’re not growing weary? At this rate your situation will only get worse.”

Alus didn’t respond, and Orneus narrowed his eyes. That was when their bracelet devices lit up.

“See, while we are preoccupied, my lord has brought out his trump card. The more time passes now, the more the tide turns in our favor.”

“A special Jurai adjusted for this occasion, huh? It’s certainly outlandish. It’s being summoned by a bunch of Magicmasters with an affinity for lightning, isn’t it? How exaggerated.”

Alus glanced at the message from the bracelet. “Hmm, a warning about strong winds. I see.”

Orneus, who saw the same message, laughed with contempt. “Ha ha, Ms. Lilisha, was it? She seems to be leaning to your side, but there’s no point in revealing the trick behind the Jurai now. It’s not cheating according to the rules, and even she has had to admit that.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure.”

Alus had finally gotten the signal that he had been waiting for. He heard

Tesfia's voice from the Consensor...and when he did, the atmosphere around him changed.

Seeing that, Orneus's expression turned serious. The pressure of the mana around Alus had dramatically changed.

"Now's the time, so let's end this," Alus casually said, rubbing his shoulder. "You guys are shrewd. So I can't ever let my guard down until you show all of your cards. Since you didn't tamper with the bracelet devices, I figured you would use a different method. Besides, if I was right in front of him, Aile would struggle to bring out his trump card, no?"

There was the Guardian as well as Orneus's special ability. Now that both cards had been played, there was no need for Alus to pin down Orneus and invite Aile to make his move.

Alus sighed and said, "You want to talk about being considerate? That goes both ways. What a waste of time... All because of these rules!"

Alus jumped, dodging Orneus's fist and seemingly danced in the sky. He then locked his knee around his opponent's shoulder and neck to strangle him.

"Ugh..." said Orneus.

"If you're going to break a human, you can use techniques like these that don't rely on mana," said Alus. "You showed as much yourself. When it comes to rough fighting, I've got some experience in it too. Your neck might accidentally break, but the pain will only last for an instant, so bear with it."

"Hmph!" With a grunt, Orneus put more strength into his body.

But sensing his intentions, Alus eased up on the choke hold and softly landed on the ground.

Orneus stared at him and spoke in a quiet tone. "Impressive. There was a lot of bloodlust in that move. But in the end, neither of us can go all out in this game. Why don't we remove the bracelets and restart the fight?"

"Don't be stupid. If you want to remove it, you go ahead."

"I see, it would be a shame to one-sidedly kill you."

"That would get you immediately disqualified," said Alus.

“You never know what can happen in a Tenbram,” said Orneus, then audibly gulped as he swallowed something.

His sharp glare lit up with a sadistic light and his arms started shaking. His joints cracked and bent unnaturally, and his veins stuck up on the back of his hands.

“Chemical Boost, huh... You really aren’t picky with your methods,” Alus said, furrowing his brow.

Chemical Boost was an illegal drug said to use a couple of components that Ambrosia used that forcibly stimulated the generation of mana. Since it could easily boost one’s mana, there were a lot of cases of Magicmasters using it, and it had become a problem in recent years.

“Don’t worry, I can separate out the particularly bad elements in my own body using my special ability later. With short-term use, the traces of it will be emitted together with my mana, and it won’t be caught in any inspections.”

“Through repulsion, huh... I see. That certainly has its uses,” said Alus.

“Besides, nowadays it’s hard to get your hands on stuff of this high quality. Since it’s my chance to exchange blows against someone strong, I will have you accompany me a little longer,” said Orneus.

Alus slashed in a semicircle, bringing Night Mist to a stop behind him. The trunk of a nearby giant tree slowly began to fall over.

“Will you be able to repel this?”

Orneus took those words as a challenge and simply stood still with his fists ready. The tree fell on top of him, but it didn’t crush him.

A sound like repeated explosions rang out. With each sound, a hole was carved into the tree, until finally wood chips scattered as the tree burst.

I thought so...

Seeing how Orneus had broken Alus’s choke hold, Alus had more or less expected that result. Orneus’s special ability was formed by mana repulsion itself. Therefore, it shouldn’t work against something that didn’t have mana.

But seeing the results of their battle and how the other man handled the tree,

there was only one conclusion.

His repulsion didn't just work against others' mana but also with his own.

If I'd continued trying to choke him I might have lost.

If the mana in Alus had been sent in reverse, the force of the repulsion would have been huge, and he would have been sent flying.

This ability was special and wouldn't be easy to overcome, not to mention that he was now under the effect of Chemical Boost. Since Alus had lost quite a bit of artificial HP in their fight already, he struggled to make a bold move.

As things were going, it would become a drawn-out battle.

Tsk... I might have to delay grouping up with Fia.

Alus clicked his tongue, a sour look on his face as Orneus's fierce onslaught continued. He closed in on Alus like a storm

Their clash of fierce attacks continued for over ten minutes, but the end was anticlimactic. Orneus just suddenly came to a stop.

It was as if the storm had suddenly vanished. Orneus wore a bitter expression but kept up his guard.

"Now, of all times...?" He sighed. "I was finally getting heated up. Talk about bad timing."

As Orneus muttered, his will to fight rapidly disappeared.

"What's the matter, already out of fuel?" Alus taunted.

But Orneus calmly replied, "Unfortunately I've hit the time limit. Now I have some other business to attend to. I got a message from my comrades, and supposedly, I can't show too much of our hand."

"Comrades? You mean your commander's calling?"

"Who knows? But if it's one thing I can tell you, it's not you that is the problem, Alus Reigin. If anything..."

Orneus deliberately turned, deliberately looked in a completely different direction.

That was where the spectator seats were.

“That suspicious Archbishop? Isn’t he on your side?”

“Hmm, I won’t say anything further. In the underworld, those who have a lot to say don’t get a long time to say it,” Orneus said with a profound smile.

“Like you, I have my own circumstances to consider. Then if you’ll excuse me, I will take my leave. I hope we can get a chance to fight a true battle to the death some day.”

“Huh? Do you think I’ll let you go?”

“You can follow if you want. If you want to be disqualified alongside me, that is. I no longer need to wear this nuisance of a toy,” Orneus said, raising his hand high up in the air. He then brought it back down against his other wrist, and destroyed his bracelet.

Naturally, that meant an immediate disqualification according to the rules. However, he showed no sign of caring about that as he turned his back to Alus and took off running. He leaped and disappeared behind the wall that served as a boundary.

Alus was left behind, dumbfounded, which was only natural with such unexpected events.

Orneus, one of the enemy’s two strongest members, disqualified himself. Alus couldn’t imagine any way that would be an advantage for Aile’s team.

It took Alus a moment to collect himself and remember his own job.

One Hundred-Second Chapter: The Pure Queen of Ice

I-I thought it was finally time for an all-out battle!

A bead of sweat dripped down from Tesfia's forehead as she stood aghast in the center of the field.

But no one could blame her.

Now that the Orbs had been located on both sides, the next step in the Orb Struggle would normally be an all-out clash. But the appearance of the Jurai on Aile's team had thrown a wrench into those plans. Its umbrella of lightning neutralized any sort of clever little tricks, and it appeared to be an impregnable fortress.

Meanwhile, Aile and the summoner were safely within the protection of the Jurai, requiring no other guards. With that, all other members of the team could join the offensive.

Tesfia's side had predicted that Aile's team was planning something. That was why Alus, their strongest player, and Miltria, an unknown, had been given the role of acting on their own as attackers.

Yet that plan was falling apart in the face of the Jurai.

I can't believe that's within the rules of the game! How many normal Guardians would you need to make up for that?! thought Tesfia.

The Jurai was like a fortress of lightning that had suddenly appeared on the enemy's side of the field, and Tesfia ground her teeth as she stared at it.

Lilisha's announcement had revealed how the enemy had accomplished such a thing, but Tesfia still couldn't believe it. The imposing appearance of the Jurai was just that impactful. Compared to it, the versatile Guardians that Alus had prepared looked like paper soldiers.

"Young lady! With the enemy's attack our Guardian isn't going to last any

longer!” Cicero reported in a fluster.

“I know, just hold on a little longer! Roderich squad, once the summon is undone, set up a new summoner and call forth a new Guardian!” Tesfia answered calmly.

While she’d studied the Tenbram as best she could, that was just a stopgap measure.

As a student there was no way she would be able to command as well as her mother, a former military commander.

During this exchange, another two defenders ran out of artificial HP and fell to their knees as they were removed from the list of allies.

Al! ...Are you still not back yet?!

Alus was supposed to be fighting against Orneus, but it was taking much longer than expected. After ascertaining Orneus’s strength, Alus was supposed to either defeat him or shake him off to return to the front.

Offense was more advantageous than defense in the Orb Struggle, which was why Tesfia had been the one to suggest that Alus moved freely.

However...that idea must have been too naive. The rule of artificial HP with the use of the bracelet device had put a limit on Alus, who would be unbeatable otherwise.

Perhaps that shackle had been much heavier than she’d expected. Not knowing about Orneus’s special ability or his use of Chemical Boost, Tesfia started blaming herself.

Did I over-rely on him without realizing it?! Phew, that’s right. Al is still a human. I need to do my best too!

Before she realized it, the contest was turning one-sided and her allies were falling apart.

“Lord Bronche is at his limit. Bring out another summoner!”

Tesfia gave a signal to the Roderich squad that was part of the defensive formation. They didn’t answer, but one of the less exhausted members retreated to the Orb.

“Now!” Tesfia ordered as an enemy spell caused the fire tortoise to disappear and the Orb fell to the ground.

There was a time limit until a new Guardian could be summoned, and combined with the time it would take to construct the spell, it would take dozens of seconds. During that time, the Orb would be completely defenseless.

“Defend, to the last...”

At those words, the enemy offensive increased and the Roderich squad was surrounded and about to be wiped out.

“Roderich, fall back!”

Tesfia firmly gripped her katana, Kikuri, and held it above her head. Without even being aware of it, she had already poured more than enough mana into her AWR.

“*«Icicle Sword»*”

Immediately, a massive sword of ice appeared in the air and slammed into the ground like a wall to separate the enemy and Roderich squad.

The enemies sensed the spell, and they weren't mere common soldiers. A group of Magicmasters with the same affinity chanted a spell and brought forth crimson flames with their intermediate-level spell.

“““*«Flame Burst»*”””

The Roderich squad took cover behind the Icicle Sword, but it wasn't enough to block all of the flames. A couple of members weren't able to completely hide behind the Icicle Sword, and their HP was slashed. Their devices glowed red to show that they were reaching a dangerous level.

Meanwhile, the Icicle Sword's blue blade was melting from the fire. The group of enemy Magicmasters grinned and turned their attention to Tesfia as they chanted.

Just as Tesfia had braced herself for the end, Roderich shouted, “Young lady, please forgive this being my last move! This is a do-or-die situation!”

He raised his arms up high and gathered as much mana as the bracelet would allow, before slamming his hands down into the ground.

“*«Grand Veil»*”

Just as Icicle Sword was destroyed, a wall of earth rose up from the ground to block the coming flames. Created in the nick of time, it spread out to protect Tesfia and the Orb as well. Making use of his ability to use two attributes, Roderich followed up with chanting an ice spell.

“*«Frost Pillar»*”

Spears of ice and earth shot out at the enemy Magicmasters from the ground at their feet, blowing them away before they could fire a second spell.

Breathing heavily, he turned to Tesfia, his face pale. “Haah, haah, haah...y-young lady, please—”

But before he could tell her to retreat, he was struck by lightning that fell from the sky.

In an instant, he lost all of his HP and collapsed.

Tesfia knew that lightning spell. It was the same as the Lightning Ray that Loki used.

Naturally, it was weaker due to the restrictions of the device, but it was enough to knock out Roderich, who was also suffering from mana exhaustion.

It had been fired by what appeared to be the leader of the attacking squad. Seeing his fearless expression as he approached, Tesfia made her decision right away.

“Ugh...fall back! Get some distance to buy time!”

They naturally needed to get back on their feet, but she also wanted to buy time in the hope that their ace, Alus, would return. But the moment Tesfia gave her orders, the female Magicmaster who was trying to summon their new Guardian screamed as she was blown away.

Tesfia saw the man from before with his hand stretched out. He had fired a powerful lightning bolt from his hand. Having been cornered, with no time to spare, Tesfia reached out towards the Orb instead of the female Magicmaster.

Fortunately, enough time had passed to allow for a new summon, so in the next moment, a Guardian was called forth. What appeared was a wind-attribute

rabbit that specialized purely in evasion.

It had very little durability and it wasn't even the element that Tesfia had an affinity for. It was frankly rather unreliable, but it was the only thing that Tesfia could instantly summon in the moment.

Next, Tesfia designated Lord Bronche as the leader over a couple of people to serve as the rearguard through eye contact. She gave them an apologetic glance before running away with the Guardian.

She weaved her way through the woods.

Tesfia breathed heavily. *They should have returned to their own side of the field by now. I can't sense any enemies nearby either, so even if they gave chase, they must have lost me...*

That was when she heard the sound of rustling leaves and a nearby presence.

"A...Al?!" Tesfia turned around with a smile to look at the levelheaded boy.

"I finally found you, Fia. Well, I figured that you'd return here if you were trying to buy time. I got sick of waiting."

"Ah...?!" Tesfia gasped.

Standing in front of her wasn't Al, but Aile von Womruina in formal wartime attire.

"A-Aile! Why are you here?! This is..."

"That's right, this is the depths of your territory. And you've been advancing the front line with even the commander in tow, extending your search area to its fullest. Normally there'd be no way for me to come all this way without being discovered by anyone."

Aile wore a composed smile. "But here I am. The answer is very simple. I was never discovered by anyone on your team."

"B-But how...? You mean that even Al and Ms. Miltria missed you?! Is there some kind of secret tunnel?!"

"Not at all. However, Alus was on the right side of the field, and Miltria was on the left, dealing with Orneus and Cicila. So I just boldly made my way

through the middle.”

“But we were in the middle!”

Tesfia furrowed her brow, but Aile acted nonchalantly.

“I’m in a great mood right now, so I’ll tell you. The source of transmission of this bracelet is the user’s mana. Its mapping functions the same way, and so does the base for the detection...so what would happen if someone who wasn’t even a Magicmaster was to wear it?”

“What?! Th-That’s not possible.”

“But it is. It’s common sense that everyone who takes part in the Tenbram is a Magicmaster or someone who can control mana. But I am the only exception. I am probably the only civilian in the Tenbram’s history.”

Tesfia was shocked speechless by the confession. While he might not have attended much at all, Aile was a student of the Second Magical Institute, and he was a son of the Womruina family, one of the most distinguished in all of Alpha. Was it really possible for him to have no talent as a Magicmaster?

Yet it was the truth.

Tesfia had no way of knowing it, but the testers had been bought out without Sisty knowing, and Aile had cleared all tests by either using a stand-in or using fake data. He didn’t think a diploma from the Institute would be worth anything, so he had used his feeble appearance to not show up to any lectures.

“My mana is so small that I only show up as a weak light on the device. Most veterans would only see it as some tiny noise during a battle. Not that it’s anything to brag about. But thanks to that, I was able to get to you without anyone noticing.”

Tesfia looked down at the device and shouted out.

“B-But! The mark for the commander is in a completely different place! According to this, you are still under the protection of the Jurai!”

“That’s right. But I am not there. After all, look...” Aile said as he raised his arm to show his wrist and the bracelet on it.

Tesfia’s eyes opened wide from the surprise. Aile wasn’t wearing the specially

made bracelet for commanders but one for normal soldiers.

“Do you get it now? I’m having someone excellent serving as commander while I’m out on a casual walk. Of course I’d only be able to fool any mana detection, and if I was spotted by vision it would have been all for nothing. Fortunately, there’s plenty of brushes to hide in, but it was a rather thrilling experience.”

Tesfia was at a loss for words.

What he was saying made sense, but it was so bold that a normal person wouldn’t have the guts to try it.

Tesfia did her best to overcome her confusion and spoke in a strong tone. “S-Sure it was surprising...but don’t you think you’re underestimating me too much?! You’re just hoping to be able to beat me here, right?! Even though you’re supposedly the weakest participant in the Tenbram history!”

Grasping the situation, Tesfia readied her AWR, but Aile spoke in a calm tone. “Maybe so. But it’s pointless...you won’t be able to defeat me.”

There was something ominous in his voice, and Tesfia gripped the handle of her katana harder. Her team’s front line might be on the verge of collapse, but Tesfia herself hadn’t been under fierce attacks so she still had plenty of artificial HP and mana remaining.

But she couldn’t feel any mana coming from Aile.

I thought he was bluffing about not having mana, but it looks like it’s true. So what’s up? How can he be so calm?!

Aile didn’t even flinch when the katana was turned on him instead he walked closer.

Two steps, three steps, and then four...

But four meters away from her, he stopped. In that moment, Tesfia hallucinated Aile’s eyes glowing an eerie purple. In the next moment he snapped his fingers, which sounded distant and muffled.



Ah...?!

Her vision wavered and a haze filled Tesfia's mind. With each snap of Aile's fingers, Tesfia's consciousness dimmed a bit more.

Tesfia gritted her teeth to resist the phenomenon happening to her. "Is this...hypnosis or something?! Hmph, it's a cheap trick that suits you just fine!"

Seeing her put on a brave front, Aile smiled and spoke with a whisper.

"Well, I suppose you could call it hypnosis. But this one is deep-rooted. The seed secretly implanted into you in the past has already reached the depths of your mind," Aile said and started walking again.

Forgetting her ability to use magic, Tesfia pointed her katana at Aile with trembling hands.

"I don't have the talent to be a Magicmaster. So I will make use of anything, even if it's unfair. That is the wisdom of a king heading into battle. But what about you? What use is the power you have achieved?"

Each one of Aile's words eerily reverberated in Tesfia's mind. Tesfia's face distorted as she resisted having her mind worn down.

Aile furrowed his brow at her resistance and muttered to himself, "Oh? Are the roots not as deep as I thought? No, I suppose the effects of the trigger word have weakened?"

He was using a form of hypnosis that he had taught himself. He'd slowly planted the hypnosis inside of a young Tesfia's mind over their meetings, with the idea of putting her in a deep state of hypnosis with a single word.

"I'm sure that the technique was perfectly complete, so this is strange," he said and tilted his head. Everything was Alus's fault.

Or more accurately, when Aile had met with Tesfia, Alus had noticed something abnormal and gotten rid of the seed within her. Even Aile couldn't discern that.

And in the next moment.

"Hmm? What?" Aile blurted, puzzled, and in that instant his domination

wavered, waking Tesfia.

As the light returned to her eyes, what she saw was a frowning Aile.

“What? The Jurai’s protection was broken?! It can’t be!”

The emergency report from the commander shocked him.

“But how...? If it wasn’t Alus Reigin, then who?”

According to the rules, transmissions using Consensors were one-way, and the lack of details caused Aile’s confusion, which then caused hypnosis to wear off.

Now’s my chance!

Mustering the strength that had waned, Tesfia swung her katana towards Aile, but he dodged it and slipped in up close to Tesfia.

In the next moment, his slender white finger touched Tesfia’s forehead.

“I guess it can’t be helped. It’s a bit of a pain, but I’ll have to plant another seed. I’m in a rush, so I won’t be able to hold back. Do forgive me if you end up breaking a little.”

“Ugh...ahh...?!”

It felt like a black mist was being directly inserted into her skull. Even though he didn’t use much force, Tesfia’s body was deprived of its freedom, and the light faded from her eyes.

“Fortunately, the roots aren’t completely gone. If I put a new suggestion on top of this...” Aile muttered while invading Tesfia’s mind.

“Say, Fia, I wonder who that power of yours is meant to kill. A blade swung down will always bounce back to hit someone precious. Who is that?”

Tesfia’s eyes were gradually turning more and more empty. Her knees trembled, and even holding on to her katana took everything she had... She did everything she could not to, but it was only a matter of time before she dropped her katana.

Aile continued with his technique, and his demonic whispers sunk into her mind.

“Who is going to die? Who do you think will die? But that can’t be helped. That’s what it means to have power. Look, you’ve mercilessly cut down your own mother. Ah, and that butler of yours has had his limbs cut off and is covered in blood. The people of the Fable family sure are unfortunate. But that can’t be helped. After all, nobody could stop you. Tesfia...it’s all your fault.”

“Ah...ahh...”

Tesfia’s knees buckled, and she collapsed, lukewarm tears staining her cheeks.

Aile exposed the depths of Tesfia’s psyche and implanted a seed of fear within her in order to destroy the barrier around her mind. He would then seize absolute control over her defenseless mind.

“What do you see? It’s the people you killed. Even if you only killed a few of them with your own hands, the seeds you’ve sown will lead to the destruction of everyone. Ahh, a group of men are pinning down Alice Tilake. They’re straddling and toying with her...exposing her breasts with a crude knife. Blood has started to flow, and it won’t stop. Nobody is coming to save her. All you can do is stand and watch...”

Guided by Aile’s words, Tesfia stared ahead with wide eyes as she hallucinated frightening and hopeless scenes within her mind. The strength to hold her AWR left her hands.

“Now, Fia. Let me tell you the only way you can be saved. I am the only one who can brush away the pressure and despair weighing down on you. Now say it... You’ve lost.”

This was what Aile was after. There was a rule in the Tenbram of declaring your defeat. While it had mostly fallen out of use, it was still a legit rule.

Eventually Tesfia started to drool as all light left her eyes. Following Aile’s orders, she brought her trembling fingers to her bracelet device.

One had to push a special button on the commander’s bracelet while declaring their defeat in order for it to count.

“I-I...lo...”

Aile smiled in satisfaction as Tesfia began to speak. But it was replaced with a

frustrated look because Tesfia wouldn't utter the last bit of the word.

Aile reached out with his right hand and grabbed her chin and ordered her again.

“What's the matter? Just say the words, Fia... Say 'I lose'!”

He urged her, but her lips only trembled. The sound of air left her lips, but no words that the bracelet could detect.

“Even my suggestion can't break through the final wall?!”

Aile hadn't expected this. When they'd reunited before, she had still been a mentally weak girl who hid behind her growth as a Magicmaster. That was why his suggestion had easily broken her mind.

What had happened in the short amount of time between then and now?

What had led to such a drastic growth in her?

Irritated, Aile gave up on acting like a noble, grabbing Tesfia and violently shaking her head.

“Say it! Say the words!”

“A...Al...”

Aile was astonished by the name that leaked out in anguish. Thinking about it, that made sense. There could only have been a single reason.

“Alus Reigin!”

As he said that, Aile didn't overlook Tesfia's eyelids slightly twitching. He gave a complex smile mixed with an emotion he felt for the first time.

It was a vulgar smile, which was extraordinarily rare for him, a display of human emotions.

“How sinful of Alus. No matter. If that's the last key to get to you, I have a different method.”

Aile grinned, and started speaking to Tesfia once more like it was a strange incantation.

“Ha ha... Alus Reigin will die very soon. It will surely be an untimely death.

With your own eyes, you will see him coughing up blood with a hole in his stomach. There's no saving him. All of the people close to you are dying in front of your very eyes. Look at their faces as they struggle and die in agony. There's no longer anything you can do. How does Alus Reigin look as he dies...?!"

"Ah...ahh...!" Tesfia groaned, but Aile didn't ease up on the application of his power. It was a very rough method, but Aile encroached on her mind, wrapping everything up in the roots of domination.

*Just a little more... I have almost reached the deepest depths of your mind.
The final door is opening...!*

Aile's smile grew deeper.

In that moment, a faint breath escaped from Tesfia's mouth. And at the same time, a gust of cold wind hit Aile's cheek.

Aile put his finger on his cheek, and gasped.

"Is this a droplet... No, an ice shard?"

Something was gushing out of all of Tesfia's body.

Snow and cold wind were blowing like a blizzard had suddenly appeared. Aile took a direct hit and rolled across the ground before staggering to get up.

"Wh-What is going...?! Ugh...!"

Having rolled so roughly across the ground, he'd sprained his arm, the pain from his shoulder twisted his expression as Aile looked at Tesfia.

Tesfia's collapsed body rose as if aided by an unseen servant in a vortex of mana and cold air. Her characteristic red hair had turned white like it was covered in frost.

"Ah...?!"

Aile stared in surprise at her obvious change and noticed how abnormally cold the air around him was. Aile's breath was white, and a stinging cold covered his entire body.

In the midst of the cold, with vacant eyes as if she were walking in her sleep, Tesfia's arm rose and stretched forward like a puppet.

Hmm, the bracelet is...?

The bracelet restraining her mana had been lost at some point.

Did she take it off herself...? No, it was destroyed!

As he noticed that, Tesfia's finger pointed towards him. A blue light of mana was gathering at her fingertip, and Aile felt a terrible chill run down his spine.

Not good...! I don't know what, but something is coming! Urk...!

Aile tried to dodge the attack, but the pain in his arm dulled his movements. In the next moment, a narrow, sharp icicle shot out from the tip of her finger.

"Agghhhh!!!"

The arrow of ice grazed his arm, freezing his bracelet and shattering it.

When he collapsed, Tesfia's expressionless gaze turned towards him again. As if putting him in her crosshairs, she lifted her slender finger once more, pointing it at the miscreant to be punished.

"Master Aile!"

But in the nick of time, a soft body leaped in from the side and pulled him out of harm's way. Cicila had leaped in to intervene.

Since her artificial HP had been erased by Miltria, and her bracelet was no longer functioning, she should have been removed from the field.

"...You're breaking the rules. Good grief. Those eliminated are meant to leave the field immediately," Aile said with a bitter expression upon seeing Cicila, but she replied with a serious face.

"Forgive me. When I regained consciousness, I had a terrible feeling...but that doesn't matter now!" With a fluster, Cicila glanced over at Tesfia before continuing. "This is no longer just a game. One misstep and you would have—"

The ground where Aile had been standing had frozen and shattered. It was like a bomb of ice had gone off.

"I suppose so. Thank you, you saved me," he said.

"I am just glad that you are all right. Truly, from the bottom of my heart."

“But what is happening? All I can tell is that I must have set off an extra-large trigger,” Aile, having regained some composure, asked Cicila.

“Is her mana running out of control?” Cicila came up with an assumption, but shut it down just as fast. “No, her target is too clear for that.”

Tesfia did indeed look like her mana was running out of control, but the intimidation and pressure she was applying was completely different. Normally a mana overload would be much more terrifying and hard to approach. Plus, as a fellow ice user, Cicila’s instincts were screaming.

“We have to hurry and get away from here! If that thing gets serious, not even I will be able to protect you, Master Aile!”

Even as she spoke, cold air from Tesfia was blasting them, depriving them of their body heat. Their eyelashes froze. The only heat left was in their mouths.

“Haah!”

Cicila decided to at least put up a protective wall, but what happened shocked her. The mana itself froze and shattered, just like everything else.

Cicila immediately realized that the space itself was becoming a frozen sanctuary. There was nothing she could do.

Mana typically ran out of control because of an abnormal trigger in the caster’s mind, but even then it was rare for it to be so powerful. This was something far beyond someone’s mana running out of control.

“This is looking really bad,” Aile said, breaking out in a cold sweat as he held his injured arm. “Ha ha, it is like a real incarnation of divine punishment has descended on the Tenbram meant to question divine will.”

Aile could see Tesfia’s pale face covered in a veil of cold air. A frosty design streaked down her cheeks like war makeup where her tears had flowed. Her eyes were a very deep blue but also the color of a void, nothing reflected in them.

The old Tesfia had disappeared.

Her chilling glance was turned towards Aile. Her hand moved as if inviting someone. And in that moment, Aile could hear a crackling sound.

Before he knew it, the ground had frozen over. He could feel all heat leaving his body. His instincts were screaming at him to run, but the overwhelming pressure from Tesfia, or perhaps the icy air, had turned his body into an unmoving statue.

To think, it ends like this... How pathetic, Aile bitterly thought.

Then something warm covered his body: Cicila. Like a hen embracing a frozen chick, she enveloped Aile's body in the warmth of life.

"Master Aile! You cannot be allowed to end. Not here! Please, please...!"

"...Cicila." A soft smile appeared on Aile's face as his vision started to blur. He thought about how foolishly loyal she was. If she'd tried to run away on her own, she could have probably made it.

In that moment, he felt the presence of someone near him just as he heard an exasperated (but unusually calm for the situation) voice.

"Jeez, what's going on here? I haven't heard anything about the climax being killing each other."

It was "him." He'd finally arrived.

Just as he noticed the arrival, Aile's surroundings got a little warmer. It was probably a magic fire, but it felt like there was more to it than that. Even the cold air that the now-inhuman Tesfia was emitting felt like it had changed in his presence. But maybe that was just a trick of the mind.

Regardless, when Aile von Womruina sensed the return of a hero, he also realized his defeat and lost consciousness. Alus had cast a barrier of fire to relieve Cicila and Aile from the deathly chilling air.

"Just get going," Alus said to Cicila, who was thanking him with her eyes before using the last of her strength to run off with the unconscious Aile in her arms.

After seeing that they had left in the corner of his eyes, Alus looked straight at the existence in front of him and furrowed his brows.

Fia...

Her hair had turned a white that was almost silver. Her usually lively eyes had

lost their vitality, as if even her own emotions had frozen. Tesfia was clad in a mysterious presence, like she was possessed by something inhuman.

Is she in some sort of trance? At the very least it's clear that this goes beyond the level of mana going out of control.

Even as Alus pondered, his breath turned whiter with each exhale, turning into frost and falling.

This will have an effect on the smooth movement of mana and spell construction.

The intense cold froze even the mana within the body, dulling the manifestation of all magic-related phenomena.

Tesfia's dazed vision unintentionally turned to Alus.

"Hey..." Alus called out to confirm how conscious she was.

In that moment, Alus's arm turned white from the cold. It felt like one step short of frostbite, similar to the recoil of using Cocytus.

She cast magic just by moving her eyes?! And there wasn't even any delay before manifesting!

Manifesting magic without any delay was something impossible even for Alus. No matter how much one shortened the magic formula or the time to construct the spell, it would never be zero.

A spell was like an advanced machine program, and some sort of process was unavoidable in order to manifest it. It was a limitation of being human, requiring a person to manipulate magic step-by-step in order to reach the rooftop.

Yet, it appeared Tesfia didn't require that right now.

Alus quickly looked over Kikuri, the katana-type AWR in Tesfia's hand. Kikuri's handle appeared to have cracked, revealing its core. The letters engraved in it were faintly glowing.

Apparently, the magic formula hidden on the core was functioning in some way.

The hidden power of Kikuri... In that case, is this phenomenon caused by inherited spells?

When Alus thought of that something clicked. Perhaps Tesfia was in the final stage of the inherited spell that he had heard about before. He didn't know what its completed state was, but perhaps its essence wasn't a physical phenomenon but drawing out a certain state in the caster.

"Either way, you sure are causing a lot of trouble."

Aile's hypnosis had likely been the trigger for the current situation. Alus had dispelled it once before, so he figured that Aile must have been much more heavy-handed this time. This was nothing so small as a hornet's nest. Aile had poked the Fable family's mystical sanctuary and awakened something best left sleeping. Hornets would have been much more preferable to the disaster that had appeared.

Now that this had happened, now wasn't the time for a Tenbram.

Alus swung his arm and broke the ice that covered the surface of his arm, freeing it up. While he was at it, he easily destroyed the bracelet and swung his arm to get rid of the debris.

"I won't be needing this anymore either."

Once he was done, Alus tapped his shoulder twice.

She's most likely being used by her AWR.

Alus intuitively guessed the cause for the phenomenon and quickly decided on the best means for the situation, and moved his fingers to construct a spell.

He chose Detonation.

Naturally, he poured an apt amount of mana into it, unlike Lettie. In the next moment, a bright spot that would serve as the point of origin of the explosion appeared behind Tesfia.

It immediately expanded and looked to burst at any moment.

Yet in the next moment, a bizarre phenomenon happened. The glowing spot containing fire and heat was replaced with an orb of ice the size of a fist...that then melted as if nothing had happened.

Being able to freeze an advanced-level spell with maximum firepower behind it wasn't something Alus had expected. It would appear that Tesfia...or rather Kikuri, which was controlling her, could easily bend the miracles that humans could call forth within its sanctuary.

"This is such a pain."

Was it a mistake to let her touch her mana territory during the mana vessel expansion? The manifestation of spells has transcended the laws of the real world and has been replaced with the laws of the mana depth.

Mana depth was the original way of using magic, and it was said to be close to the power that the Fiends of Origin wielded.

"Still, to think you could use one hundred percent completed magic," Alus muttered with a sigh. "Who could have imagined that you would be able to pull off something said to be impossible for humans."

Alus considered what he'd learned. He was gradually starting to understand what had happened to Tesfia and why she was able to reproduce the spells rivaling the Fiends of Origin.

It's a spell that freezes emotions and consciousness.

It was a little ironic. The power of magic could be temporarily influenced by human emotions. However those emotions were why humans couldn't bring out one hundred percent of a spell's power. This had practically proven theories that emotions were noise for magic.

A bug in a program could create an unexpected result, but if there were perfect programs, there would be no need to ever rely on chance. The program would always create the best and most optimal result, with no up-or-downturns. In other words, it was just there, continually producing the perfect result.

But looking at Fia...

Tesfia looked far away from the perfect being to Alus. If anything she was just a puppet.

So this is the completed inherited spell of the Fable family. It's an insane spell

on the same level as a taboo.

While Alus might have gotten a grasp of the principle, that alone wouldn't help him.

It's like the ultimate ice-attribute autonomous artillery. She's automatically eliminating mana or anyone hostile in her surroundings.

While Alus thought about what was happening, Tesfia reached her hand out towards him.

There were no signs of a spell manifesting as an arrow of ice suddenly shot out. Alus twisted his body, pulled on Night Mist's chain and repelled Tesfia's spell, but after repelling one, ten more suddenly shot out at the same time.

Alus somehow dodged them and used his chain to block the ones he couldn't dodge, but each shot felt as powerful as a cannonball and his arms grew numb from the impact. For each arrow of ice that he blocked, large shards of ice flew into the air. Then, they gathered in the form of a mist that coiled around Alus's arm as if it were alive.

Surprise came over Alus's face, and he could tell that his right hand gripping the AWR was freezing. He used his free left hand to emit fire and thaw his right arm, but the ice seemed to be made up of a lot of mana, and it wasn't working very well at the start.

Garb Sheep was supposedly one of the Fable family's inherited spells, but the same kind of alteration of phenomenon could be seen here. Or more accurately, that sort of event could happen far more easily due to the massive supply of mana granted to the caster.

Because she's come into contact with the mana depth, there's a possibility that the boundary of that place and the depths of Fia's consciousness have blurred. It's like there's an invisible pipe connecting Tesfia's existence with that world... She must have unconsciously met the conditions for triggering it.

Forming a direct link with the mana depth would put the Fable family's inherited spell at the very top of inherited spells.

It's like super technology from ancient magic. It's hard to believe.

As a magic researcher himself, Alus had extensive knowledge, but even he found it hard to believe that such a spell had been created half a century ago.

Still to make a human the connection between this world and magic. It's a grand idea, but it's repulsive at the same time.

Alus suspected that the person who'd experimented to create the spell must have had some sort of malice towards humans. Tesfia's consciousness being taken over and running rampant was proof of that.

Alus wanted to click his tongue, but he was partially responsible for letting Tesfia come into contact with the mana depth.

"I'll help you right now," Alus bitterly declared.

Meanwhile, Tesfia raised both mana-filled arms towards the sky. With just that motion, a massive ice sword was created and shot out like a speeding bullet. It was likely the same as Icicle Sword, but with Tesfia under the influence of the inherited spell, its power went without saying.

A normal Icicle Sword was incomparable in strength.

Alus glanced at the flying object approaching him and chose a spell to oppose it.

«*Dimension Thrust*»

With a slash of an indefensible attack, Icicle Sword was split in two, and based on the resistance, Alus realized he'd made the right choice.

It's a spell that Tesfia is good at, but it was far more complete than normal. So that's a perfect spell. If she can repeatedly fire those without difficulty this will be rather difficult...

After inwardly grumbling some more, Alus turned towards Tesfia. Despite the perfect Icicle Sword, she had a perfectly cool expression without any sign of running out of breath.

Maybe I should use Gra Eater to devour the mana itself?

The thought entered Alus's mind for a moment, but he immediately rejected it. His special ability might appear omnipotent, but it wasn't all that easy to use. Trying to devour all of the mana in the vast mana depth would be like trying to

drink all of an ocean's water by oneself. Alus's body just couldn't handle it, not to mention that Gra Eater was merciless, and Tesfia wouldn't come out of it unscathed.

While Alus was thinking, Tesfia unleashed a second and third spell.

"Who do you think taught you how to use that spell," Alus said with an exasperated sigh.

In front of him were a beautiful long sword and a sublime axe floating on either side of Tesfia.

"Ubiquitous and Istar. Both are said to be lost ancient magic."

Both were relics of the past said to only exist in name in the modern age. The two newly created sacred ice treasures showed characteristics similar to Icicle Sword. Tesfia's own abilities were reflected to some degree.

Of all things, those two, huh? Then perhaps you can reach one more...

Alus pondered and in no time at all, he was proven right. A third sacred treasure was being formed alongside a foreign mana, but Alus didn't have the time to quietly watch.

"If this is the result of your own growth, then I'd even be proud of you," Alus muttered as the traces of frozen tears on her cheeks suddenly looked so sorrowful.

She could be crude and careless at times, but Tesfia was earnest and put in more effort than anyone. She was more noble than anyone as she walked down the path of a Magicmaster on her own strength without being arrogant about her prestigious family.

Yet now she wasn't using magic. She was being used by magic instead.

Tesfia would never settle for reaching the peak of power while being a puppet.

"Sorry, but I won't be able to go easy on you. Besides, as your teacher I could never acknowledge getting stronger using such a loophole."

Alus closed his eyes and called out the name to ward off the two incoming sacred treasures.

“Damocles.”

A massive black sword appeared, the Sword of Damocles. As Alus held it aloft, its brutal mana welled up and swallowed the cold air. While he was at it, Alus kicked off the ground and closed in on Tesfia.

In response, the sacred treasures that had been exuding cold air started moving like they were alive. They cut through the air as if being wielded by invisible sentinels, swooping down on Alus.

Expecting that, Alus swung the Sword of Damocles and smashed them with a single swing. He then swung once more against the third sacred treasure being formed. The characteristic strange sound of the Sword of Damocles cutting through space stopped it from being completed.



It seemed that he'd managed to stop it from activating. The cold air in their surroundings rapidly dissipated and the raging blizzard cleared as if it had never even been there.

Alus moved closer to Tesfia as she started falling. He wrapped his hand around her back to support her, but even as he carried her, she didn't move. Alus could feel the coldness of the freezing air that still dominated her soaking into his body.

"It has to be cold over there... Come back to us already."

Suddenly, her body twitched. Next, the freezing air within her body began to steal his body heat as the infiltration of the final ice curse began. It started at his extremities and crawled up his body like a snake before eventually covering him in a thin sheet of ice like a coffin.

However, Alus wasn't perturbed in the slightest. He ignored the freezing curse as it reached from his chest to his neck and finally to his cheeks. He lightly tapped the back of Tesfia's head as if to calm her down.

"...There's never a dull moment with you," Alus said in a soft tone, and his lips curled up into a smile.

In that moment, vast amounts of mana surged up from within his body, like a small sun had erupted. The mana easily surpassed the limits of a Magicmaster. The mana blew away the cold air as well as the ice covering Alus and filled their surroundings.

A few seconds later, tears that looked like blood seeped from Tesfia's eyes, and the ice on her face dissipated and blew away. Kikuri slipped out of Tesfia's hand and stabbed into the ground. Some of her skin had frozen on the exposed core.

At the same time, color returned to her white hair like thawing snow, and before long, her original red hair had returned. The color returned to her lips, and with a final white breath, the cold air disappeared like smoke.

Alus gently put her back on her feet, her body shook ever so slightly, and Tesfia opened her eyes.

“A-Al...?” Tesfia muttered as if she’d just woken up from a dream.

And Alus replied as he gave her a piggyback ride and walked towards the outside of the field, “That was a pretty bad nightmare. The skin from your palm got ripped off, so don’t move it around too much.”

“Huh?” Tesfia frowned at her hand for a moment. As expected, she narrowed her eyes and looked away and frowned. “I don’t really feel much pain.”

“So do you remember what happened?”

“Kind of... I think I was stuck in Aile’s hypnosis? And then Al started bleeding, and then, uhm...”

“I’m doing just fine. Although both our bracelets are broken, and we’re disqualified.”

“R-Really?! But, wh-what about Aile?!” Tesfia asked in panic, but Alus shook his head.

“They’re in the same boat. That Cicila girl was defeated by Miltria, and Orneus just left on his own for some reason. And you did Aile in. Don’t you remember?”

“H-Hmm...”

“Still, I can’t imagine that there’s been a Tenbram where both commanders and all the strongest members were wiped out. I don’t know what the results are, but just get some rest for now. Even if the match continues, I’m disqualified, and you won’t be of any use either.”

“Y-You’re right... Ugh, I feel exhausted,” said Tesfia.

“If you’re going to bring that up, I’m far more tired.”

“Yeah, thank you, Al. Like I said, I sort of remember what happened.” Tesfia grinned and laughed mischievously. “And also, your line. About how there’s never a dull moment with me.”

Alus quietly furrowed his brow. He’d figured that Tesfia was still asleep, so he’d said it without thinking, but hearing someone else say it was embarrassing.

“Tsk, I never should have said anything.”

“Do you want me to repeat it again?”

“If you continue this I’m going to let go of you.”

Tesfia screeched and pushed her body closer, pressing her cheek against his shoulder.

Even if she was just putting on a brave front, Alus couldn’t figure out how she still had the energy. Considering the high-level spells that she had used, it was bizarre for Tesfia to even have a shred of mana left. He found it hard to believe.

“I’m happy that you’re looking at me. So I’m not going to forget a single word,” Alus heard Tesfia whisper.

But seeing how delighted she was, all he could do was sigh. “Save the sleep-talking for your dreams. I was sure you’d grown at least a little.”

“Ah!”

Tesfia must have misconstrued what he said in some way as she lifted her body and chest off of Alus’s back and shouted, “Th-They’re still bigger than they were! I might lose against Alice, but I’m definitely beating Loki!”

“What are you talking about?”

“Th-That’s...! They hit you, right. I can imagine what a teenage boy is thinking!”

“You’re dead wrong.”

“O-Oh yeah? ...Th-Then what did you mean? Give me a brief explanation.”

Tesfia frowned and Alus was at a loss for words after being thrown off his game. He’s said what he truly felt. Tesfia had certainly grown as a Magicmaster and probably as a woman too.

But saying it again, admitting it, was embarrassing, which was why—

“Well, you did well.”

Despite not really being an answer, he could feel the joy from Tesfia on his back.

“All right!”

Tesfia pumped her fists and rejoiced like a child, then instantly lost her balance and almost fell off of Alus’s back and hurried to find her balance again.

While listening to her flustered voice, Alus lightly clicked his tongue in his mind. He'd stopped feeling anything wrong with carrying Tesfia on his back after doing it so many times.

Alus pulled himself together and ignored that thought and walked off the field. Once he was out, he turned towards the judges' seat.

"Now then, all that's left is..."

Just as Alus finished muttering, a loud siren rang out from within the field. It signaled the end of the Tenbram, which had completely slipped his and Tesfia's minds.

Shortly thereafter, Lilisha's somewhat tense voice rang out.

"There were a lot of unforeseen incidents during the Tenbram, and while it looked like it might be suspended, the outcome has been decided. As such, I would like to announce the winner of this match."

I didn't think that this would be settled considering what happened.

Alus had more or less expected the Tenbram to be suspended, so he stopped, surprised, to listen. Tesfia also straightened her back and waited with bated breath for Lilisha's next words.

"The winner is—the Fable family. I repeat, the winner is the Fable family...!"

"All riiiiight!!! Al, Al, Al!!! I don't really get it, but we did it!" Tesfia exploded with joy, and she excitedly pulled at Alus's shoulders.

"Shut up and settle down, will you? She's going to go into the details."

Once they'd heard the details, the two returned to their own area, where they found the members of the Fable team celebrating their victory. When they saw Tesfia and Alus, they ran over with worry. Theresia proudly held up an Orb.

"I see, so you finished it in the end. I was sure it would have been Ms. Miltria," Alus said to her.

"Great job, Theresia! Just what I'd expect from you!" exclaimed Tesfia.

"Thank you very much, Lady Tesfia," Theresia replied calmly, but she couldn't hide a telltale blush. "But this is thanks to everyone's efforts. The plan had also

been made ahead of time, so I didn't do anything special. In the end we just barely managed to pick up the win."

Theresia turned to look at the biggest contributor.

"If not for Ms. Miltria, it would have been impossible to break through that Jurai. I can't thank her enough."

Miltria, now that the attention was suddenly turned to her, could only shrug and mutter, "You sure do work an elderly lady to her bones. My job was only supposed to be to stop that Cicila girl and take her their trump card after they show it."

"Until Lilisha's message, frankly, you and I would be the only ones that could read between the lines," said Alus.

"It would be impossible to do anything about it with an affinity for air and good mana control anyways. Sisty once asked me to give a lecture on countermeasures against lightning magic in the military, and Lilisha must have remembered that from who knows how long ago," said Miltria.

"Someone skilled with wind magic can dominate the flow of the atmosphere and create air pockets. In other words, using atmospheric pressure, they can create a gap in the electric field above the Jurai for magic to pass through."

It was a bit boorish to analyze what she'd done, but with restrictions on what magic they could use, she would have had to make effective use of the characteristics of her attribute.

"Heh heh heh... I suppose I should expect nothing less. If you weren't so unendearing, you would get perfect marks for that answer. The Jurai used a literal umbrella of lightning, and I blew away a part of it using wind. I am used to passing through pinholes, although this was a wind tunnel."

"But did you have the mana to spare after fighting Cicila?" asked Alus.

"I can't believe you'd ask that now," she said. "You made the choice to throw it all onto me."

Alus lowered his head with a wry smile.

"Sorry. I guess you saw through it. The situation was what it was. I had my

hands full with Orneus and I couldn't move as well as I wanted, and then I had to look after Fia. After the enemy took himself out, I wasn't sure if I should deal with the Jurai or back up Fia. But after seeing how you fought Cicila, I figured that you would be enough to deal with the Jurai."

"Oh, so you're saying that you could see it?"

"Seeing how you could handle those mana Wind Arrows on your own, I knew you were extraordinary," he said.

"Heh heh, you sure are overestimating these old bones," said Miltria. "However, I have been out of action for a long time, and that sort of attack eats up a lot of mana. My whole body is aching despite not doing anything in particular. Ah, the pain of old age."

Having finished having her palm healed, Tesfia bowed her head apologetically.

"You were a big help, Ms. Miltria. And thanks to you, Theresa got her chance," Tesfia said.

Miltria nodded. "Well, it is best for the elderly to let the younglings add the final touches. Still, this young lady has a good sense. She has a good understanding of decisive moments."

Even though she was trying to look serious, Miltria's lips couldn't help but rise into a smile.

The Jurai unexpectedly being defeated had left the Womruina team in a light panic. So even though they had the bigger force left, taking an overly cautious stance had backfired on them.

So they had summoned a mobile but fragile Guardian and tried to have the Orb fall back. But Miltria didn't overlook their movements and had launched follow-up attacks to guide them to where she wanted them.

As a result, Theresa, who'd had plenty of mana and been on the offensive could anticipate their escape route and then strike at their opening. Using all of the power she had, she'd secured the Orb before Tesfia lost control—just in the nick of time.

If Aile had been properly taking command, he wouldn't have allowed such a blunder, but fortunately for Tesfia's team, he had been trying to trap Tesfia. Of course, if he hadn't done so, Alus and Tesfia wouldn't have gone on the defensive, and they would have joined the frontline fighting. So it was probably a brilliant move.

Aile was far weaker than normal Magicmasters, so he didn't provide much in terms of pure strength. Instead their plan had been for him to act as a normal member and play the role of assassin. He was supposed to be a trump card against Tesfia.

"Well, it was a big gamble...so I'm glad things worked out," Alus summarized with a sigh.

And a jubilant Tesfia brought things to a finish. "A win is a win! Now let's go home and celebrate!"

As if exasperated by her, Loki, who'd appeared next to her, spoke sarcastically. "You sure are energetic. With how brazen you are being, I suppose your injuries were more minor than expected."

"Aha ha..."

Tesfia let out a dry laugh, and Loki continued in a quiet voice, "Still, you did show some guts. I guess I could at least accept you as the second wife..."

"Huh? What did you just say, Loki?" asked Tesfia.

"...Nothing!"

Seeing Loki and Tesfia's back-and-forth, Alus smiled wryly. He had a reason to not get carried away by the celebratory mood.

Tesfia's awakening? It is almost definitely because of the Fable family inherited spell. But the problem is that despite her using spells that used far more mana than she has...

Alus glanced over at Tesfia, who had a dopey look on her face.

She still has mana to spare. It's just barely, but she's far from being out of mana.

The incident had a lot of phenomena that should normally be impossible to

explain. But there was a lot of guesswork, and there wouldn't be any point in mere speculation.

There didn't seem to be anything abnormal with Tesfia's body, but if she'd continued on as she had been going, something would have broken. Magic wasn't just a convenient weapon. It always demanded equivalent compensation.

An overwhelming power would have rebounded on Tesfia.

So Mr. Selva's hunch was dead-on. But that gives way for a different problem.

Tesfia was the candidate to become the successor to the Fable family. The fact that she had manifested an inherited spell, albeit accidentally, wasn't necessarily a good thing. She was still inexperienced as a Magicmaster, and it wasn't something she could activate at will. She'd acquired a double-edged sword.

For now, Aile and Cicila were keeping quiet. They'd not only lost face, but couldn't anticipate the circumstances. All that was left was to hope that the only witness on the Fable side was Alus.

"But I guess that's not happening," Alus muttered and looked not at the enemy but at the allied camp.



"Master, you should at least conceal your mouth."

Frose jolted as Selva spoke to her. Despite being the head of the Fable family, she'd let a satisfied smile show.

The problem with the secret heir, the Ertlade, had always been stirring deep in her mind. Now that it had appeared in her generation, she could pass the reigns of the head of the family on without concern. The excitement made her want to shout with joy.

That said, she was the head of a great noble family, and Selva's whispered warning snapped her back to reality.

"I know. But don't you feel it too, Selva?" she asked. "I couldn't fully tell from the spectators' seat, but the cold air covering the entire area was without a

doubt the inherited spell. As her mother, it is a shame that I didn't get to see Fia's performance directly. With this, we can finally show why the Fable family has its name!"

Selva looked at his master seriously. His concerns around the Tenbram had finally been resolved, but he hadn't expected a new object of excitement to show itself.

It was too late, he thought. Or perhaps too early. Several generations had failed, but now Tesfia had succeeded while still in her teens.

He had once suggested that they adopt the spell that Alus had created as a new inherited spell, but it was too late for that now.

Kikuri, a sword that had been passed down the Fable family for generations, had been the key, and Tesfia wielding it, combined with receiving lectures from Alus, had sealed her fate.

However, the overwhelming power of the completed form of the inherited spell was sinister. Not even the head of the family had a complete grasp of the inherited spell and its unique magic that was perfected through a series of stages.

That said, what had happened couldn't be helped.

Even so, Selva had watched over Tesfia since her birth and couldn't help but worry for her future.

"Master Frose, we should prioritize cleaning up loose ends after the Tenbram. It won't be too late to deal with the inherited spell after everything else is done."

Speaking more harshly than usual, Selva finally got through to Frose. She nodded and changed her expression after taking a deep breath.



With that, the several-month-long conflict between the Fable and Womruina families came to a close.

Having settled in accordance with noble customs, nobody would raise any objections to the outcome of the Tenbram.

Naturally, that included Archbishop Silvette. His personal thoughts aside, he loudly praised the victory of the Fable family, and he and Lilisha confirmed the destruction of all the deeds on the part of Womruina's side.

But Alus didn't get a chance to catch his breath until after the final ceremony closing the Tenbram. Aile and Cicila were nowhere to be seen, and neither was Orneus.

Instead, the adjutant for the Orb Struggle was sitting at the ceremony looking bitter.

But why? It's not like he suffered a fatal wound. But I guess nothing will come from thinking about it.

While Alus was pondering this, enthusiastic applause came from the spectators' seats. Glancing over, he spotted some familiar faces among the nobles and instinctively frowned.

Even Lord Vizaist is here. But did he get injured?

Vizaist was in a luxurious-looking barracks, thanking Miltria for her efforts.

Part of the Fable team were so exhausted they needed medical attention, and they seemed to be in a deep state of relief and joy.

And before Alus knew it, a line of nobles had lined up in front of them, wanting to congratulate Tesfia and Frose.

They're so self-interested, Alus thought as he watched. Some cast their eyes down to the ground. Others slightly bowed in the hope of currying favor.

The Fables apparently felt the same way about having to deal with such snobs. Frose, having dealt with the lowly nobles in an appropriate manner by delaying the full-scale feast for a later date, let out a sigh of relief, as if she could finally take a break.

Tesfia headed over and dispersed her team.

"We did it, young lady," Cicero Bronche excitedly said, having scrambled to Tesfia.

She smiled awkwardly at the middle-aged man, who was moved to tears.

“Mr. Cicero, could you please stop it with ‘young lady’? You are Minasha’s father, and she is like an older sister to me.”

Minasha happened to be watching them with a bright smile and tears in her eyes.

“Anyways,” said Tesfia, “this is thanks to everyone’s efforts. Thank you so much.”

Tesfia deeply bowed.

Seeing her elegant and dignified gesture, Alus felt mildly emotional. The Tenbram itself must have caused a big change in Tesfia’s mind. There’d been a lot of unexpected developments, but now was the time to praise her growth.

Alus decided not to join the circle and instead head for a nearby pavilion to take a break. That was when the small silver-haired girl that had been sticking to him smiled wryly and tried to speak.

“I know, Loki. Jeez, that Major General never lets you down,” he said.

“Should I let everyone know?” she asked.

“No, that would be spoiling the mood. Why don’t we head out to meet him? He’s starting to get irritating.”

Without anyone noticing, they took off running towards the dense forest where Loki had been looking. A strange group with a disturbing presence was hiding there, though Alus had long since sensed their approach.

There were about twenty, and each one wore a black robe and a hood.

The match was settled in front of nobles. Not even Morwald can erase this result. So...is he after me? Alus wondered to himself while purposefully slowing down and walking over.

The group in black robes seemed to be a little confused by their target approaching them on his own, but they soon steeled themselves. The leader-like figure slipped out of the woods and came forth.

In their hand was a crescent-shaped great scythe.

The wind blew off her hood and the girl’s lips curled up. “Heh heh, it would be

boorish to play hide-and-seek now. We meet again, my senior..."

Seeing her, Alus narrowed his eyes and muttered, "Noir..."

"Al? Do you know her?" Loki asked, in position, ready to draw her AWRs at any moment.

She glared at the girl. She didn't know who the other party was, so she used the nickname Al to pretend they were classmates. But she was astonished and bitter.

"No, I just ended up showing her around a little during the campus festival...so she's a junior at the Institute. Of course, I didn't know anything about her job."

Loki looked like she feared another rival had appeared, and sensing the awkwardness, Alus honestly told her what he knew.

"Is that so? You should have told me before."

"Sorry. I didn't expect this would happen. Actually, I'd be able to foresee the future if I could."

If the Womruina family lost the Tenbram, the political balance in Alpha would greatly shift. In such a case, Alus felt it would be likely that Morwald would forcibly make a move.

In fact, if he was going to turn the tables, now was the time. But taking out Berwick's strongest pawn was a rather reckless scheme. And if Noir was his hunter...

I did think that she was extraordinary, and I did get worn down in the Tenbram. So I suppose this was a good and bold move by Morwald? Alus pondered.

Keeping his calm, he called out to the girl in dark robes. "Noir, this is Loki. She is also my partner."

If the information he'd gained while guiding her was correct, Noir was one year younger than him, making her the same age as Loki.

"Yes, of course. This might come as a surprise to you, but me and Loki are well acquainted," Noir said in a sweet voice before her expression changed.

She'd given off the impression of an innocent young lady at the Institute, but now her true, crazed expression was rearing its face.

Holding her index finger to her mouth in a lascivious manner, she scoffed and glared at Loki.

"Heh, heh heh... Loki Leevahl! Unfortunately, I am not interested in you right now! But, well, if you're fine with being an extra, I will kill you toooooo!"

"If you think you can do it," said Loki. "But to think I'd meet someone familiar here... I can't tell if I'm lucky or not."

"What is this, Loki?" Alus asked, and Loki gave him a frank answer.

"It's understandable that you wouldn't know. Noir is from the fourth generation of the Magicmaster-raising program."

"But that program was meant to be suspended."

"Yes, I heard as much too. In fact, my generation was the last to go out into the Outer World. But it was the fifth generation that was suspended while the fourth finished training in the facility. I had some mock battles with Noir during that time..."

After being suspended, the trainees had been left in the care of the military. Many were orphans or had no family and could stay at the special facility, which was similar to an orphanage, until they could become independent.

The others chose to go out into the Outer World and become Magicmasters.

Alus and Loki were such exceptions.

Many of them carried scars and distortions in their hearts. They had eventually started to see their value based solely on their ability to fight Fiends. It ground down their hearts and minds beyond their limits.

Only a few would be able to survive until they became aware of the distortion. Noir was one of them.

When Alus realized that, he felt unbearable bitterness well up.

In the end, we are just pawns to do the dirty work.

Since Noir was here, that meant she was almost definitely an assassin sicked

on Alus. Calling the work the group in black robes had done shady was probably underselling it by a lot.

Alus felt more than just a thirst for blood and grimness from them, as it seemed the smell of blood had deeply sunk into their black robes. It was the lingering scent of death that Alus could only differentiate because he was used to it.

And the scent from Noir was extra strong. She clearly showed no hesitation or mercy towards her targets.

Noir had long since discarded any sense of how humans were meant to be, and she was just remnants of a broken mind in the form of a human, smiling. She was coldhearted and took pleasure in killing, and she gazed at Alus with bewitching eyes as if hungry for her next feast.

“Let’s have a fun time killing each other. We’ll decide who carves up the other the best. We can start with the arms and legs, followed by the brain and organs. Well, the outcome is clear, after all, nobody can kill better than me.”

Noir had mastered magic for a single reason...to kill. And her sense of justice, no matter how twisted, was all she needed to bury her opponent. There were bad people everywhere, and she felt eliminating them was right and something to be celebrated. With that absolute sense of justice, any action could be justified.

Thinking back, it didn’t feel like it had always been like that in the distant past. At first, it had been about showing off what she could do and getting someone to acknowledge her.

But who? Why? She could no longer remember.

When she was small, she’d thought she wanted to be an amazing Magicmaster. It was really vague, and even her parents’ faces were faint in her memory.

Her mother and father had unconditionally loved their young daughter, giving everything they had for the future, believing in her talent. Or at least she felt like she’d received that love.

But there was no longer a point in thinking too hard about it.

So Noir had made a strong wish. Like someone with a dry throat wanting water, it was predictable. She simply wanted to be stronger than anyone else.

To do that, she had to acquire the power to take the life of an opponent at any time. She could kill whenever she wanted, and better and more brilliantly than anyone else.

After she came to that conclusion, she'd come to belong to Kruelsaith, who saw value in her... And with that Noir stopped thinking about anything else.

The only thing a hunting hound needed to think about was killing as ordered. So she would polish her technique and strength so that she would continue being wanted.

Either her special affinity had led her down that road, or it was all that was left to her. Not even she knew which it was. She'd already ended up where she was by the time she noticed.

She felt like someone had told her, "You are good at killing. You're more suited for that than anything else."

It was probably the man who swung his whip on her with a sadistic smile and ecstatic expression.

Anyways...none of that mattered when compared to the urge and joy of the hunt.

Noir's crazed stare looked to a point behind Alus and Loki. Alus followed her stare and found a person.

There stood a large man, holding up a single finger as if telling his hunting hounds to wait.

Morwald... I never thought he'd show his face in a place like this.

Alus was somewhat surprised, but decided to give him a sarcastic greeting.

"It has been a while, Major General. Still, what an admirable attitude to visit your hounds' hunting ground."

"Hmph, what a scandalous thing to say. I am just on a walk in a dark forest to get over the pain of the Womruina family's defeat. And I just happened to find a felon."

“Huh? Who are you talking about?”

Morwald simply replied to Alus’s dismissive question with a sly smile.

“So you’re going to feign ignorance until the end, Alus Reigin? But I won’t hesitate to judge evil in the name of justice. Still to think a Single of Alpha would do such things... It is truly a shame. Don’t you agree, Archbishop?” Morwald asked, prompting another figure to show themselves.

With a golden stole hanging down from his shoulders and a gleaming golden staff, Archbishop Silvette smiled and slightly bowed.

“Allow me to introduce myself, Alus. I am Archbishop Silvette of the Einhimmel sect.”

“I know you from the Tenbram. You’re the judge on the side of the losers,” said Alus.

“Oh my, it seems you always have something to say,” said Archbishop Silvette. “I will soon be establishing a cathedral in this land for the sake of a major missionary campaign in Alpha.”

“Huh? I don’t know what kind of scam you’re running, but if some heretical sect like yours is running things, Alpha is done for.”

“Hmm...there appears to be some understanding, but how rude! That has me convinced. He has no intent on reflecting. Morwald, Alus Reigin has a clear tendency of rebelling and dismissing the order of this nation. It is very likely that he is responsible for that mortal sin. He must be restrained and receive his rightful punishment.”

“What are you even talking about? Have both of you lost your minds?” Alus retorted.

Morwald roared back, “Shut up, you criminal! We have already completed our investigation! Alus Reigin, you have abused your position as Single Digit Magicmaster and secretly claimed the lives of many people! All while completely ignoring the proper order of law. What is this if not a crime against the nation and society itself?!”

Alus’s brows furrowed and Loki looked at him in surprise.

Morwald was likely referring to Alus's work behind the scenes to kill magic criminals. While it was secret to everyone else, it was officially recognized by the military. The orders were given by Governor-General Berwick, and as a senior military officer, so there was no way that Morwald would be unaware of that.

Morwald shouted in a high-handed voice as if deliberately trying to cover up that obvious doubt.

"I had no idea of such things! The Governor-General and even Vizaist are colluding to eliminate anyone who holds secrets inconvenient to you! That is unthinkable for a country governed by law. I will expose all of this, and depending on the circumstances, the ruler who appointed them may have to take responsibility as well!"

Morwald got heated and continued loudly, "We received an appeal from a noble through Archbishop Silvette! We also have bills of indictment from several other witnesses. It is clear that you have committed serious crimes!"

Before Alus could retort, Loki stepped in with resentment.

"You, a mere Major-General, are questioning Sir Alus's innocence?! This goes beyond your authority! And you're talking about people who hold secrets inconvenient to him?! Sir Alus has only put down first-class criminals that not even the military could reach! Those witnesses are probably just fake anyways! You're in bed with the Einhimmel sect and its noble followers!"

Loki shouted just as loud as Morwald, but he snorted and continued. "Hmph, you cheeky little brat... Still, your cooperation in giving testimony against the assassinations is welcome. As a high-ranking official, I have a special right to arrest people within the military. Not even Berwick or Vizaist can ignore this authority! Not even you can escape as long as you're in Alpha's military, Alus."

Alus said nothing.

Morwald seemed convinced of his victory...but he didn't understand something fundamental.

Rather, he thought he understood Singles in his narrow standard of values. True, they were the shield and sword of humanity, and they followed a set

standard of value. That was probably why Morwald thought that he could use them as pawns in political battles or entangled in cunning schemes like with materialistic nobles.

But that was merely a superficial understanding. From Alus's point of view, all Singles, even the most approachable of them, were monsters in the guise of humans. Trying to control or hold on to them with his own power was nothing but a fool's dream mixed with wishful thinking.

"You won't even have a chance to call for the Fables to help. Walking out into the forest of your own accord was the moment your luck ran out. I will judge your crimes and give you the proper punishment," said Morwald.

The farce was reaching its climax, and Morwald turned to Archbishop Silvette to make his closing remarks.

With a peaceful expression, Silvette spoke up. "Yes, indeed. If everything is as Morwald says, Alus Reigin's actions are impermissible. The official point of view of the Einhimmel sect acknowledges Your Excellency's decision. When the time of judgment comes, I declare that I too will be on the stand to testify."

"How reassuring. Many from the noble faction have become believers of late. Bringing their voices together will have a large influence."

Morwald grinned, but when he saw Silvette's expression he looked puzzled and asked:

"...Is something the matter?"

Silvette wore a faint smile and politely answered, "It is nothing in particular... I simply pray that Your Excellency's justice and our sect's justice will not differ in position in the end. Now then, I was only here as a judge for the Tenbram. So I will take my leave here. I am sure inquisitors from the sect will visit the military, and you can share the details with them."

"I understand. Then I will take it upon myself to arrest this villain. I am ashamed to have you see such disgrace within the military, but I hope to swiftly restore honor to the military."

Morwald bowed, and Silvette took his leave.

Morwald must have interpreted Alus's silence as an admission of defeat because he turned to Alus with an arrogant and insolent attitude.

"Now then, Alus Reigin, you will accompany us. You are still a Single of Alpha, so at least show your obedience to the nation."

With that, Alus finally spoke.

"Save your sleep-talking for when you're dreaming, vermin. I only have one thing to say. Do it if you can."

Alus's bloodlust was carried on the wind, and it brushed against Morwald's cheek, sending a chill down the man's spine.

Morwald's cheeks twitched as he put on a brave front.

"Ha ha ha...you're just an insolent brat until the end! Those of low birth are so irksome. They never know when to give up. That's enough. If you're going to resist, then there's no need to arrest or interrogate you. Noir!" Morwald exclaimed, and he followed it up with a coldhearted order.

"Kill him!"

"How foolish," Loki muttered to herself, but it reached Alus's ears.

He was in complete agreement. If he felt anything, it was something akin to exasperation. However...if his opponents were coming at him with the intent to kill, there was no need to hold back.

Perhaps it was because of the events in the Tenbram, but there was still a sense of excitement smoldering within.

I won't leave a source of trouble behind. All I have to do is kill everyone who wants to die.

Once he'd decided that, Alus calmly accepted the approaching group in black robes. He confirmed that his finger was on the switch in his mind. However, he didn't need to change gears until the middle of the fight. For now, he warmed up so he could act without restraint.

"Loki, get back."

Loki was shocked at his instructions, having been prepared to fight alongside

him, but Alus coldly continued, "It looks like our redhead busybody is looking for us. There's no need to hide it, but make sure she doesn't get in the way."

Just as he finished saying that, Kruelsaith surrounded Alus.

"Don't bother with that silver-haired nobody. Just make sure you kill Alus Reigin."

It was unclear if they even heard Morwald's orders. Based on how their eyes were clouded over, they were crazed hunters like Noir. They didn't feel a thing over taking a life... Which in a sense was close to Alus.

But since they didn't even seem to be conscious, they were more like murder puppets. As proof of that, there was no emotion in the glares directed on Alus. They had probably mechanically discarded any care for whether they won or lost, or whether they lived or died.

They had been thoroughly destroyed as people and had discarded everything. All that remained was their lethal skills, polished to their peak. They were made to be lethal weapons and nothing else.

This is just fine. Having to fight on a leash in the Tenbram wasn't enough for me.

Alus narrowed his eyes and let a fearless smile show. He was a weapon himself, and he could feel his emotions diluting.

That was when he had a bad feeling.

"Al!"

After winning the Tenbram, Alus and Loki had suddenly disappeared. Tesfia had come running down a pathway, looking for them, when suddenly someone dove at and embraced her, causing her to stumble.

"You can't!"

Loki was clinging to her arm and holding her still.

"What?! What's going on?! Let go, Al is...!" Tesfia shouted, sensing that something was wrong.

After a breath, Loki squeezed a response through her clenched jaw to soothe

Tesfia.

“Sir Alus will be okay... I was told to bring you.”

“B-But...then why are you stopping me?!”

“You are too careless. You might accidentally step into the blood-soaked darkness of the world. So please promise that you will only watch what’s happening from the forest and nothing else... This will be the revelation of whether you want to be with Alus from now on,” Loki said with the light of resolve in her eyes.

Tesfia was perplexed by Loki’s strength as she held her arm. Even so, her intuition as a Magicmaster was telling her to obey Loki.

“...Let’s see it through to the end,” Loki said with a somewhat sad expression.

Meanwhile, standing in front of Alus, Noir spoke in a bored manner.

“You could have just surrendered.”

“Don’t say something you don’t mean. You look ready to attack me at any moment,” Alus spat out.

But Noir only smiled happily.

“In that case you are resisting to the end, then? Then allow me to learn how a Single fights,” Noir said.

At that moment, a man among the black-robed murderers made the first move. He leaped at Alus like a wild beast, pulling iron rods from his robe. In the blink of an eye, blades slid out from them, and two small sickles appeared.

Anticipating his attack, Alus attacked with a palm strike. Space distorted and a ten-centimeter-square wall shot out and crushed the attacker’s head.

Taking an invisible attack directly to the head sent the man flying. Another assailant immediately appeared behind him, and he didn’t hesitate to use his fallen ally’s head as a stepping stone to gain height to strike with a short sword.

Hmm...that didn’t kill him? thought Alus.

After blowing away the first enemy, he felt a slight hesitation. If he had used Night Mist or a mana blade to strike at the opponent’s vitals instead of using an

invisible barrier, it would have been simple. Yet there was something that had stopped him from killing.

He was currently in the middle of battle, and perhaps it was just because he was in the process of switching gears, but he couldn't shake the feeling of discomfort.

I thought it wouldn't be a problem since they're coming at me with the intent to kill.

It was then that he became aware of a slight resistance in him, born from the fact that Tesfia might show up at some point. That was something that had been fostered inside him. Perhaps that was a way he'd grown since coming to the Institute.

Alus practically unconsciously handled the incoming attacks as a bitter emotion welled up inside.

Thinking about it, it wasn't just Tesfia... But he'd definitely prefer she didn't know about this side of him. Alus felt like mocking himself as he realized that he might have been holding on to the girls a little too deeply.

What a mystery it was. In the past, he hadn't felt even a fraction of these emotions. But now he wanted those girls to only see the good version of him.

To think there'd be a side that thought like that in Alus.

Vizaist had in the past mentioned that Alus had become more human, and this was probably the kind of thing he had been talking about.

If that conflict was a sign of growth, Alus was growing even now. However...that was only as long as he was able to entertain those thoughts.

In the next instant, a sharp sickle was brought down from a new enemy, and Alus swung Night Mist in reflex. The black blade cut deeply into the enemy's neck and scattered crimson blood into the air.

Alus reaffirmed his emotions as he took a life. This time he felt nothing, nor had he hesitated. There hadn't even been a need to close his eyes. As he confirmed the sensation, his heart sank into a quagmire.

As I thought...this is what I am in the end.

In that sense, he was no different from the crazed murders that were attacking him. He hated people like himself. And he hated himself too. Alus had come to that conclusion without even needing to think about it.

He avoided the incoming sickles and swung his lethal blade without mercy.

“Oh. So you don’t just have some petty assassination tricks but can form mana blades. I see you’re quite well trained,” Alus muttered, impressed that the enemy had at least some degree of skill.

Another man attacked with a mana blade extending from his arm, but a few centimeters before reaching Alus, his arm was stopped in place by Night Mist’s chain.

It wasn’t his short sword, but his mana blade that was the trick he’d hidden up his sleeve. If he’d measured distance between them relying purely on his weapon, the mana blade surely would have caught him off guard.

Night Mist’s chain wrapped up the man’s arm and then around his neck, then twisted them both off. But Alus didn’t seem to care. He could use the killer instinct he’d gained from experience to tell if an attack had brought down his enemy or not.

Alus sensed attackers from either side, but he suddenly looked up. He felt not the light of the artificial sun shining down on him but instead a burning red heat.

In the next moment, countless human-sized fireballs rained down. Kruelsaith had launched a wide area attack with no concern for their allies.

Volcano was an advanced spell, and its overwhelming mass and heat assaulted Alus.

So they don’t even care about the lives of their allies. This entire area is going to be covered in craters.

Pouring mana into his AWR, he compressed a massive quantity of water and deployed it as pale-blue barriers in the sky. This kind of fireball magic was basically the phenomenon of combustion, so it was possible to suppress it by responding in accordance with the laws of physics. In other words, water extinguished fire.

That said, two or three water barriers would be needed to extinguish this amount of fireballs.

White smoke rose up as Volcano lost power, and the spell was unable to be maintained.

Seeing a few black shadows fly past the white smoke, Alus narrowed his eyes. Some enemies had been hiding within the fireballs. With no regard to their safety, they had resigned to setting themselves on fire in preparation for Alus's response. And since there was no guarantee Alus would answer with walls of water, it was an insane tactic.

In total five people had hidden within the fireballs. Their bodies were wrapped in fireproof robes, but the hand holding sickles and the skin of their faces had been burned red. They could have protected themselves with magic, but they'd chosen not to in order to deceive Alus. He would no doubt have noticed any abnormalities created while protecting themselves.

That was why they'd settled for just covering their faces with their arms to catch Alus unaware.

The frightening enemies fell upon Alus with sickles in hand.

"So you're resolved."

Alus bitterly looked up as he sensed a different mana coming from his footing, and then he swiftly looked down.

It was a skilled attack from above and below, but which should he deal with first. He'd need to deal with both at the same time.

As Alus made that decision, spears of earth shot out from the ground, but Alus calmly swung Night Mist against the falling enemies, a vibrating sound emitting from the blade. The swing cut through space and swallowed the layered attacks of the enemies.

Dimension Thrust cut the world in half. For a moment, a strange scene of everything shifting to the left or right but in the blink of an eye space was restored.

Those enemies caught up in the attack lost their weapons and the arms

holding them, but it didn't look like they even felt the pain. Even so, they did flinch, then Alus turned Night Mist around and threw it into the ground. In an instant the earth spears were wiped out.

Railpine activated upon impact, and it destroyed all of the spears from the inside, yet the enemy had prepared a follow-up attack as if they'd predicted that.

In the corner of his vision, Alus could see a group of men in black robes kneeling on the ground with their sickles stabbed into the earth. That meant that Alus's response had been foolish.

As if to replace the destroyed spears, even more shot out from the ground. But unlike before, they weren't directly aimed at Alus.

The enemy had rewritten the destroyed formula and changed its purpose.

The light of mana came from the ground, and the spears transformed into earthen walls. They rose up and assembled like eerie bulbs of a plant to trap Alus in place.

They're trying to capture me...but this isn't nearly enough!

Alus felt that it was far too fragile for a prison of earth, but as he tried to destroy it, a mana blade grazed him. It had stabbed through the earth wall.

A second and third blade followed. Alus dodged in the narrow space, but his cheek and the back of his hand started bleeding.

It was like Alus was trapped in a small box with blades freely stabbing into it.

He clicked his tongue and swung Night Mist as fast as he could in a full circle. With the walls collapsing, his vision finally opened up. In that moment, he saw precisely what he'd expected, and he used his intuition to dodge.

What awaited him were countless sickles and mana blades all around him.

This is starting to get irritating.

Alus reconsidered his evaluation of Kruelsaith. His opponents weren't just blood-crazed combatants. They had cooperation and tactics as well. On top of that, they didn't look back on their allies' sacrifice, so their inhuman nature gave them forceful strength.

Then there were the feelings holding him back... He hadn't felt anything during his work behind the scenes or when dealing with Godma's experimental Dolls. The sense of avoidance brought about friction, like a foreign element had been mixed in and was fighting against the existing structure.

He'd already killed several, but his conscience wasn't smoothly shifting over to that of a pure combatant. Even now, whenever he tried to finish someone off he could feel himself unconsciously putting on the break.

Yet his thoughts were the same as always, prioritizing the most effective way of eliminating the enemy. It was like his heart and mind were moving in opposite directions.

This situation is a little bad...

When he realized that, Alus let go of his consciousness. With that, it was like his thoughts shifted to a sub-machine, and he began to automatically analyze the current situation like a program that used his many years of combat experience to search for the optimal move while eliminating all noise. His heart was being cooled by what felt like ice cubes being dropped into his stream of thought, one by one.

He had fractions of a second. He wouldn't be able to use any space distortion spells, nor deploy a barrier, which meant that he only had one thing he could do.

Alus closed his eyes, but naturally, he hadn't given up. His answer lay in his eyes.

The next moment, his eyelids opened, and a pain ran through Alus's right eye as he felt a mental oppression, like an overwhelming mass of something entering from the corner of his eye into his brain.

That was likely the price for bringing out knowledge he didn't have. He was forcibly compensating for information he lacked with information from the outside.

It was a similar sensation to when accessing the Akashic Records. An unknown magic formula was created in an instant, and it became ingrained in his mind like existing knowledge.

«Chrono Stasis»

He was assailed by a bizarre, infinitely expanding sensation, like time had stopped. The incoming blades slowed to the pace of a turtle. Everything within a certain distance of Alus was slowed down drastically, but they couldn't detect the delay. It was a space that only Alus realized existed.



The moment would only last for a fraction of a second.

Alus held his right eye, which was in intense pain, and swung Night Mist in all directions. The sensation of time was extremely distorted in this space, and Alus was the only one who was free from its effect.

Although it was knowledge brought in from the outside, the spell was similar to the Circle Port. It was said that the technology for copying coordinates that was the basis for the Circle Port was an application of extremely sophisticated magic. The coordinate-related structure was similar to Temple Fall, which had been used against Elise, if this spell were to be categorized as a spell that had complete control over space.

Anyways, a highly advanced spell that slowed down the time in the surroundings had been cast, and when the effect of the spell ran out, the black-robed figures collapsed, and blood flowed from their vitals.

Silence fell on the surroundings for a moment.

One Hundred-Third Chapter: The Merits of Insanity

A stinging pain ran through his eye from time to time, yet despite the pain, he could see clearly. This distinct pain was similar to whenever Alus used his special ability, Gra Eater, so in that sense, he was used to it.

It felt like something was swimming in his eyeball.

Alus exhaled and could feel his head clear up like when he shifted gears in his mind. The pain in the eye gradually faded as unnecessary information was being shut down.

It'd been a long while since he'd felt so refreshed.

The clearer his mind became, the more his body moved without hesitation. In fact, compared to before, he was able to effectively kill more enemies now. Alus was fully focused on himself and controlling the chain from his AWR.

He wasn't going to let go of his last bit of reasoning. If he did, he would be no different from Fiends. But even so, it was a simple process of repeating familiar procedures, just like when dealing with Fiends.

Night Mist's blade was covered in the Dimension Thrust spell, which was impossible to defend against by normal measures.

Even so, more enemies appeared, climbing over the corpses of their dead allies.

"Ah...it's easy to deal with enemies who don't speak," said Alus.

After cutting down an enemy or two, he casually thrust out his palm, which was covered entirely in mana, and his attack crushed the arm of a man holding a sickle, causing the bone to stick out.

Yet the man didn't so much as let out a grunt of pain. He just grabbed his sickle with his mouth and attacked once more. Several others followed his lead.

Alus wore a fearless smile, but had a doubtful look in his eyes.

The black-robed assassins attacked from all directions. Alus countered their

all-out attack, but in the next moment—

“What are you doing?!” Noir scolded them, causing the black-robed men to stop moving.

In the next moment, they stepped away, and from the center a torn-up body flopped to the ground.

But for some reason it wasn't Alus... It was the man with a sickle in his mouth, who'd leaped at him first.

“Good work...”

A cold voice rang out that caused Kruelsaith to look behind them. In the next moment, Night Mist's chain let out a light of mana and formed a circle to surround them all.

Alus used Shuffle to change places with an enemy and followed up by trapping multiple enemies in a barrier. The circular barrier expanded to the sky, trapping enemies in what was like a round tower.

All he needed was a few seconds. Skilled or not, they were mere assassins. It was easy for Alus to create a barrier they would never be able to break.

All that was left was to wipe them all out...

Nobody could stop him. That was the foundation behind the Magicmaster that was Alus.

His emotions had chilled to a freeze. And his cold consciousness swiftly searched for and constructed a more lethal spell.

«*Sword of Eclipse*»

A massive sword that looked like it was made out of stone suddenly appeared in the sky. As if manipulated by an invisible thread, the tip of the sword turned towards the center of the barrier tower Alus had made.

Next, the massive sword started falling. It crushed the trapped people and barriers all together.

The earth shook from the impact and shot upwards, and a deep low-pitch rumble rang out. The giant sword caused a small earthquake, and once its

objective was finished, it dissolved into mana particles.

A metallic smell blew in with a cloud of dust, and only those who'd been on harsh and brutal battlefields might have been able to tell that it was the smell of crushed flesh.



Loki and Tesfia saw the abnormal battle from the thicket.

It was such a ghastly sight they hesitated to watch. Loki could just barely look. The overwhelming pressure from Alus made her want to cast her eyes down. She barely felt fear when fighting Fiends, but the fear she felt now was like her body was petrified.

The thought of intervening just barely didn't occur to her. Nobody present wanted to get closer. The battlefield only had one outcome prepared for it.

There was no room to join in and help Alus. It wasn't the kind of situation where they could cooperate. All they could really do was watch over the fight.

That was why Loki refused to look away. Standing here meant that she was essentially facing a trial where she would witness Alus's dark side. The awareness that she'd made the choice was what supported her trembling legs.

Loki knew that there was no need for her to help, or rather there was *no way* for her to help. Alus's killing intent sent the message loud and clear that he didn't need any help. Alus himself didn't say anything, but Loki understood that he was preventing Loki and Tesfia from stepping down this blood-soaked path with him.

Tesfia was likewise quietly watching. Her shoulders were trembling, but she watched the gruesome scene. Alus hadn't forced her, but she had agreed with Loki.

So no matter how much her intuition rejected it, she couldn't turn away. In the past, she'd fought against Godma's Dolls.

She'd killed a few herself, but this was different. Against enemies who'd lost their consciousness and were nothing more than puppets used for evil, she could at least use the excuse that she was showing them mercy.

Tesfia's brain trembled, and the sight of the teachers at the Institute falling prey to the escaped convicts flashed in her mind. The scene in front of her was similar but different.

It was a one-sided stomp. It wasn't even a demonstration to make an example. It was just lives being erased. Because of the overwhelming difference in power, Alus had full control over life and death. No matter how brutal the assassins may be, they were nothing but small fry to him.

That much was clear seeing how he'd had Loki retreat and not even called the Fable family or Vizaist for help. With someone as strong as him, there's no way opponents of this level could touch him.

The Alus she saw right now was far from the Alus Reigin that Tesfia knew.

He didn't so much as hesitate to take lives. It was like he was a machine, mass-producing death as he quietly continued his slaughter.

If anything, it seemed like he was choosing cruel methods on purpose.

Tesfia's teeth clattered and she clenched her fists to the point that the skin turned white, but she managed to stay where she was. Even then...she finally unconsciously turned away from the sad sight of lives being taken in front of her.

"So you are like that too," said Loki.

Loki's sad voice jolted Tesfia's mind back.

"So you reject the path Sir Alus walked. This is the true form of the greatest Magicmaster. Were you perhaps seeing a dream? Do you think that a type of strength anyone would be jealous of could be used freely? That everyone would just praise and pamper you? How much black blood has been spilled and how many screams of the decimated has he heard as he walked across the depths of hell... This is reality. This is the truth. Lip service isn't going to save the world. When we first met, there was something I told you—that you didn't understand how much Sir Alus has contributed to this country. Did you think Sir Alus could get to where he is now without any sacrifice?"

The words stung Tesfia's chest, and she bit her lip. She might have vaguely realized that such a world existed, but was carefully and meticulously shielded

by the people who lived in peace.

Tesfia was probably facing something that everyone was looking away from. It was true that she probably hadn't tried to get a deep understanding of Alus. She'd just been satisfied with what she could see.

"...That is just too cruel," Loki's sorrowful voice swayed Tesfia.

She might have felt the most heartache in this situation because being at Alus's side meant accepting everything. Loki refused to look away from Alus's fight and forced out her words.

"That is too sad... He has carried this all on his own all this time. Nobody wants to kill someone else. That is why I want to lessen the burden on Sir Alus even if it's only by a little. I want to carry his karma and darkness together with him. But I..."

Loki spoke her mind, holding back her tears with a harsh look in her eyes. Indeed...Loki's reason for existing was to use her life for him. But she too had feared both Alus's darkness and his tremendous undertakings.



And she was well aware that she was still lacking.

It must have started after the Balmes incident—Loki's desire to save Alus had swelled to the point that she couldn't stand it. It had grown to the point that she would even defy his intentions.

It was surely some form of ego, but if it could be forgiven, she'd like to call it a form of love. After all, she wanted him to be happy more than anyone.

But she would probably be unable to save him on her own. She wouldn't be able to support the heavy baggage he carried. The scene playing out before her reminded Loki of how heavy the baggage he carried really was.

That was why she needed someone to help support Alus, someone who had formed a connection and spent time with him at the Institute.

It was frustrating to admit, but it was clearly the truth.

So Tesfia looking like she did now, even for a moment, was very sad to Loki, but she simply continued watching Alus's fight. She didn't look over to confirm that Tesfia's shoulders were still trembling.

Tesfia had to make her decision.

She took a big breath and tried to still her shaking body. Next, she spurred herself on and, as if to copy what Loki was probably doing, slowly opened her closed eyes.

She could feel the weight of her eyelids, and most of all, her heart was hot and hurting. She also felt ashamed of herself.

Following Alus meant seeing the same world he did. But looking away from that meant that she wouldn't be able to watch his back.

No matter how cruel and merciless the road Alus had walked until now, he was still paving the road, one step at a time.

So this time as she opened her eyes, Tesfia even opened her mind and clearly looked at Alus. She burned his every action into her eyes and recorded his way of life.

Tesfia's eyes shone with an honest and dedicated will.

She was gazing at the real world and watching his back in the true meaning of the word.



Wind blew across the bloodstained battlefield. The eerie silence was broken by the merry voice of Noir.

“Ha ha! What did you just do?”

Despite the splatter of blood dancing through the air, she seemed delighted. Despite almost all of her subordinates being wiped out, she was almost certainly insane enough to enjoy the situation.

“Who knows. I have no intention of revealing my tricks,” said Alus.

“Oh, how boring. Still there is one thing I have become certain of after seeing your performance,” said Noir. Clothes rustling, she rapidly closed in and brought her great scythe down on Alus from above. “I am the most suited to killing you!”

Alus immediately blocked the attack with Night Mist. Sparks flew and metal rang as the blades crossed, Noir suddenly looked insane, but Alus brushed it off with utmost serenity.

That was when his right eye started hurting again. Fortunately there was nothing wrong with his vision, but there was definitely something wrong.

Alus lightly backed off from their clash and turned his body to unleash his next slash. Noir skillfully front-flipped through the air and used the centrifugal force to swing down with a follow-up attack, causing another clash between her great scythe and Night Mist.

A metallic screech rang out as the weapons bounced off each other, and a fierce fight ensued. Noir’s great scythe was reminiscent of a crescent moon. At times she made use of its bent form to launch sharp attacks behind Alus.

Yet Alus predicted and dodged even those invisible attacks. That was somewhat unexpected, and Alus felt that something was off, but Noir’s killing intent was simply too pure.

When the opponent was a strong fighter like Alus, who had fought plenty of

battles in the past, they could easily read their opponents' intentions even when they mixed in feints.

Even now Alus used a reverse grip to block an attack from behind, feeling the impact he'd expected. He then sensed the next attack and ducked, and just as expected the deadly blade passed over him.

But when he saw a strand of hair fall, Alus realized that something was off.

That was an attack I should have been able to perfectly avoid three moves ago. Are the attacks gradually getting faster? No.

The distance between them was gradually shrinking. He'd felt she was very honest for an assassin, but that impression was starting to change. Noir was like a veteran hunter that was steadily cornering her prey with each swing.

Their weapons were a great scythe and a short sword. Noir had the longer range, but Alus had made use of the openings he had seen. Despite that, the advantage he'd built up had disappeared at some point, and by the time he noticed he was gradually losing his footing.

Something was wrong.

When he realized that, his mind kicked into high gear and started analyzing the situation.

Alus boldly attempted to close the distance. Noir's great scythe had a longer range, but that made it less maneuverable. Since it had a heavy blade and spear-like handle, it should be hard to fight someone close.

He realized if he took some sort of magical attack, he might be able to uncover the identity of what was wrong. For some reason, Noir allowed Alus's approach to go unchallenged.

And that instead made Alus somewhat anxious. There was no way that Noir didn't know about her disadvantage at such a close range.

As expected, Noir eventually responded to Alus's move. She changed hands, took a step back, and pulled in the great scythe. Pulling the weapon back directly led to an attack.

The blade gleamed as it approached Alus's neck from behind. If Alus stayed in

place, he would no doubt have his head cut off, but he took more steps forward, sticking close to the retreating Noir, and avoiding the fatal attack.

Noir excelled at close combat, but Alus was better. Alus judged that at best she was around the same skill level as Loki as he bent forward and brandished Night Mist.

A short sword had a clear advantage at this range, so it would be difficult for her to avoid the next attack. Yet when he saw Noir in the corner of his view, she was perfectly calm, neither struggling nor panicking. She showed no sign of regret over being naive...nor any fear of the approaching death.

If Alus were to describe it, it was the face of someone who had completely incorporated life and death into their daily routine.

It was like looking into a mirror.

All kinds of things were missing. She had little attachment to her life. Alus was looking at himself in a way, and he felt something akin to sympathy. But that wasn't going to make him stop.

Sentimentality was useless in a killing match.

But it was a bit of a shame. Alus was always close enough to never miss, and he wouldn't slip up. He already knew how easily it would end. His stepping in had just been laying down the groundwork.

Perhaps that was why the blank space in his mind turned into an opening in reality.

His sensation told him he was pulling his right arm back, cutting diagonally upwards, that would cut through Noir and end everything. With that Morwald's private army would be completely trampled.

The scenario and outcome were blatantly clear. Yet for some reason...Alus's arm wasn't moving. Despite becoming aware of the strange phenomenon, Night Mist's blade wouldn't move.

His hand had stopped before striking an enemy to be killed. Naturally such a stupid action was a big opening. Alus barely dodged the great scythe's counterattack, and his forehead was cut.

The blood flowed over his right eye. Alus looked shocked, not from the counterattack but from the bizarre phenomenon.

He backed away, but he was given no time to think as Noir pounced on him. The few survivors from earlier appeared from somewhere and surrounded him.

However, Alus wasn't perturbed by the adverse circumstances. He just thought, *What is this situation...?*

Like before, emotions that should never arise in a life-or-death situation were trying to forcibly mix themselves in. It was a sickening sensation, like everything about him had been unexpectedly transformed and his main components had been split into thoughts, heart, and body.

He felt like throwing up. He was sick of it.

He had started losing sight of who he was.

Sure, there had been a lot of pains with his new life at the Institute, but even with that his experiences had been new and refreshing. He couldn't deny that there had been moments where he'd felt that the Institute life might have been a portion of fun and happiness appropriate for his age.

But now they seemed like a hindrance. They must have been what created this situation.

Had it ever been like this before?

"No, that's wrong," Alus said, denying it.

Fiends were one thing, but when Alus had claimed his first human life, he might have felt something at first. After that...he tried not to think about it. He found no point in thinking about it.

Alus dove into himself and scooped up his essence of a Magicmaster from the mire of emotions.

Eventually, the atmosphere began to change. It was a sting even the non-Magicmasters could feel. Everyone present had goose bumps and cold sweat ran down their backs.

The pressure they felt was different from hostility or bloodlust. It was like they weren't even allowed to stand in the ring of life and death. It was like they

were nothing more than dishes on a plate, waiting to be consumed, not even allowed to shrink back in fear. It was an absolute superiority.

“Loki...you’re still here, aren’t you? Take her with you and fall back a little more.”

Loki’s shoulders jumped at Alus’s voice. “O-Okay!” she quietly replied by reflex, but fortunately her voice didn’t reach the enemy’s ears.

At the same time, the overwhelming killing intent around Alus swelled up. And Loki, who’d heard his voice, cold and sharp as a blade, was freed from the spell that bound her, and got moving. She picked up Tesfia next to her while leaping away.

As she ran away at full speed, Loki was very shaken. For the first time, she felt an unbelievable fear of Alus. That unknown side of him scared her out of her mind.

That fact was a source of shame, and Loki looked back, even when running.

The enemy was still staring at Alus and Alus alone. Swallowed by his overwhelming killing intent even the murderous Kruelsaith were unable to move.

In the next moment, his killing intent finally turned to reality as an extremely low temperature was released.

«*Despair Execute*»

It was an indiscriminate and cold stampede of death. Space itself iced over, and the compressed chilling air was turned into countless icicles. As if exploding, the icicles fell like rain and mowed down the enemies even as they collapsed, pinning them to the ground.

When the polar wind mixed with red blood blew past, Loki looked at the center of the storm and felt like her heart was being crushed.

His eyes were like a void, and looking into them was chilling.

Alus’s black eyes paid no heed to his dead opponents whatsoever. In them was a coldheartedness that was out of this world.

He had assimilated with the darkness so much that Kruelsaith looked cute in

comparison. He was like a death-dealing angel that proclaimed the end of everything.

The ice storm of death blew as Loki and Tesfia watched, holding their breaths. Then Frose and Vizaist arrived. Although late, they had sensed the unsettling atmosphere. Before seeing Alus, Frose noticed the raging spell.

“Th-That’s...Despair Execute?!” Frose exclaimed with wide eyes. “H-However, it is a little different from what is recorded in the spell encyclopedia...”

As a former commander and skilled ice Magicmaster, Frose knew what that meant.

“Did he change the construct halfway through?! To think that spell could be so perfectly arranged.”

It was there that she finally spotted Alus upon the gruesome battlefield, she shivered with dread and pulled at the outfit she was wearing.

Selva furrowed his brow. “Is that Sir Alus? I did think it would turn out like this eventually, but...”

Alus’s appearance far exceeded Selva’s expectations, and he held his breath.

“I knew that kid was extraordinary...but that goes beyond what a human can do. Or rather, it is like he has given up on being human,” Miltria, who’d slowly followed behind, said with a shrug.

“Even so, this situation is no good... Mr. Alus!”

Frose tried to step into the chaos when Vizaist stopped her, his tone sharp.

“Hold it, Frose! If you get close to him now you will only get caught up in this!”

While his words did stop her, she didn’t bother to hide her displeasure as she asked him, “Do you know what’s happening? Vizaist, what did you do to him?!”

She had vaguely guessed as much. Ever since he’d appeared as her daughter’s friend, she had looked into and learned about Alus quite a bit.

But to think it was to this degree.

The elderly butler beside her had once belonged in the darkness that was

Aferka, yet he had managed to return to the sun. But compared to Selva, the shadow Alus was wrapped up in was far darker. It was like something inside of him was shattered in a way that it would never return to normal.

“It is just as you imagine. Neither Berwick nor I have any justifications,” Vizaist said in sorrow.

In a way, it was inevitable that underhanded work had come Alus’s way. There were very few Magicmasters that could deal with not just Fiends but criminals as well.

It all started when dirty jobs were given to the boys and girls of the military’s secret training program. Some even ventured into inhumane taboo experiments and used test subjects as hunters.

All of that had come to light when Berwick became Governor-General, but Alpha still hadn’t fully cut its ties with those dark conventions. Berwick’s inauguration also coincided with a large invasion of Fiends, so it was considered a small sacrifice that had to be made.

Nobody in their right mind would want children to become murderers, but Alus was just too exceptional, even as a child...so he was perfectly suited for the job.

He was near perfect, and the completion rate for his jobs was nearly one hundred percent. Even Berwick’s political enemies, who detested his creepy existence, had no choice but to acknowledge his worth and give up on trying to get rid of him.

Which was why they could never truly put the brakes on using him.

In the end, Berwick had pushed him into the Institute out of a sort of parental affection, hoping it would be good for him. It came under the condition that he would still be sent out on missions, but if Alus were to reclaim what he’d lost, this would be his last chance.

However, it might already have been too late.

Alus had once been Vizaist’s subordinate, and he’d seen Alus smile several times. But as time passed his smile was lost, and a void started taking its place. But had he really not noticed?

Vizaist answered his own question.

No, that was why he'd once spat out a clichéd line about Alus becoming more human while being unconsciously relieved, feeling like the weight of his sins had become a little lighter.

Frose looked like she wanted to shoot Vizaist, and he quietly accepted it.

She had retired in part because of her daughter. And as a mother, she had been particularly against the Magicmaster training program. Thinking about it, she seemed to naturally have avoided the topic during any meeting between the Three Pillars.

"He just had too much talent. Not that it is much of an excuse." Vizaist spoke his mind, filling his expression with anguish.

"Is that so... I see." Frose was clever and that was enough for her to understand. "But cleaning up afterwards will be a pain. Especially since 'he' is involved."

Glancing over, Frose spotted a bitter-faced man with sweat dripping down his fat face. He was protected by a handful of guards, but it was rather impressive how he was still so arrogant, considering the predicament he was in.

"You sure made a foolish blunder, Morwald. But it's over now. Have your troops fall back before they're wiped out," said Vizaist.

"Don't be stupid!" Morwald fiercely retorted. "That mutt you and Berwick have been keeping is the one who jumped my men and is going wild! So many of my elites have lost their lives here, and how are you going to make up for it?!"

His obstinate insistence on being the wronged party exasperated not only Vizaist but Frose and the others as well.

"Good grief, is this some sort of fight between blood-starved pups? From what I can tell, that girl fighting Alus uses the dark element, or more specifically, mental interference magic... Is that not so, Major General?" Miltria casually pointed out while rubbing her shoulders. "Just because you are unhappy with the results of the Tenbram doesn't mean you can sic someone strange on him. Sure, with mental interference it might still be possible to turn this around, but

you picked the wrong opponent. Don't confuse your dirty little chess game for reality. Have you forgotten even the bare minimum of how to make your way through life?"

Morwald clicked his tongue as if he'd been seen through, but Vizaist nodded. "I see how it is."

He'd had a vague understanding, but with Miltria's explanation he finally realized that he'd fallen for Noir's trap in their previous meeting.

Irritated, Morwald roared, "Hmph, Miltria Tristen, I see you are still alive, you old hag! Even if you've realized the truth, you can't break Noir's spell. Besides, reinforcements have just arrived. Go!"

Morwald snapped his fat fingers. In response, a group in black robes appeared from between the trees. Part of them moved to assist Noir and surround Alus. And the rest...

"It doesn't matter what happens anymore! This is a good opportunity, so wipe out the witnesses as well!"

Kruelsaith's reinforcements rushed Vizaist, Frose, Selva, and Miltria. Despite the enemies coming to kill her, Miltria shrugged like it had nothing to do with her.

"Good grief, people like these are still clinging on to the military?"

"So it would seem," Selva answered in resignation as he was the first to move. "I will handle this."

Selva swung his arms towards the Kruelsaith attackers that had jumped up high. For a split second they were suspended in the air by something invisible, and in the next moment, lumps of their flesh fell to the ground.

A sharp sound rang out as Selva retracted his mana steel threads and wiped the blood off on a handkerchief.

"Now that is the Fable family's butler for you. It would seem that decline means nothing to you," said Vizaist.

"Oho ho ho, I am honored by your compliments. However, my skills have dulled." Selva humbly received Vizaist's praise, but Miltria had a different

opinion.

“You could say that again. When you were in your prime you could have taken them down more brilliantly. You have gotten old.”

“I have nothing I could say in return. It took a little too much effort to protect Master Frose and our esteemed guests from these dirty thugs,” Selva said and spread his handkerchief, having wiped not just the mana steel thread, but also the blood that had scattered into the air.

Thanks to that, there was not a speck of blood on Frose, Vizaist, or Miltria’s clothes.

“...Damn it!”

Morwald alone was covered in the blood of his subordinates, and he pulled out a handkerchief to wipe his face, and then threw it to the ground.

“Grrr...” Morwald ground his teeth and glared at Vizaist and the others while shouting, “Noir! Finish that brat off already and come back to me!”

However, Miltria answered almost out of pity.

“It’s no use. Don’t you get it? Now that the kid is like that, this fight is all but over.”

“Wh-What?! Don’t be stupid, Noir’s technique is still—” Morwald looked over at the battlefield with a dumbfounded expression. “Th-The reinforcements are all wiped out...?!”

“That’s what we told you. Now that Alus is like that, it would even be dangerous for us to get close,” Vizaist said solemnly, and Morwald’s face twisted.



It was what would be described as an instant kill.

Night Mist’s blade flashed, a dull trail of light followed its chain, and ran through the dark forest. In the next instant, the black-robed group trying to surround Alus once more all collapsed with the exception of Noir.

Alus exhaled slightly. His expression was that of a void. There was no emotion

to be seen, like all life were pebbles on the road.

In reality, Alus was basking in a thrilling sensation he hadn't felt in a long time—how to bring an end to an enemy as effectively as possible. Being in a state of mind where he could fully focus on everything was even somewhat pleasant.

Alus then turned his gaze on Noir and spoke.

“Now then, the nuisance is gone. So...what did you do to me?”

Having those emotionless eyes turned on her, Noir desperately ignored the urge to step back. Even as she realized that her opponent was far above her, she was still convinced of a certain something.

If not, he would not be worth killing.

If not, there would be no point in determining who was superior.

Seeing how Noir didn't care that her allies were killed, she was also in the same realm of insanity as Alus.

Instead it was praise that rose up in her mind, and the beautiful girl's lips lifted up into a twisted smile. She blushed and let out a sweet sigh.

“Haah, haah... This is good. You're the best.”

Noir rubbed her cheek against her great scythe's handle and obscenely writhed. Cheeks still heated, she looked directly at Alus with passionate eyes.

“Before, you said you wouldn't reveal your tricks. But I will give you special service. Please accept it as the greatest kindness.” Noir poked the side of her head. “It is dark magic. That said, it is different from Temptation that is not much different from plain hypnosis. This is one step above that. I call it Lost Paradise. I have entered your 'here,'” she said with a mischievous smile.

Her composure came from knowing that there was no way to block the spell even if you knew about it.

It had first begun quite a while, during the campus festival, where she had met him as her junior. Having sensed Alus's powers, Noir had so very carefully begun laying the groundwork. She began with a little bit of his sight and hearing. She let her impression slowly creep in, like moonlight through a door.

Humans created a picture of people based on the information that they had. Who they were and what they thought, their appearance and their voice. All kinds of information entered their eyes and ears, and they analyzed that before storing it as information. When a person was shown to be favorable or safe, either through beneficial actions or easy-to-understand rewards or through love and trust, they were input into memory. It was an instinct of animals that lived in groups that was hard to go against.

Simply put, Lost Paradise interfered with that sort of memory. It puts the target's image of the caster on the same level of trust as their parents, siblings, or loved ones.

It had been particularly effective against Vizaist because he had a wife and daughter he loved who meant more to him than his own life.

Having dove deep into his psyche, Noir had placed herself above Vizaist's wife or Felinella, so his body unconsciously rejected attacking her. On top of that, he even lost his resistance to revealing secrets as he completely fell for Noir's spell.

And it wasn't just Vizaist. Once Noir had reached that part of someone, any person was unable to kill her.

So even if Alus noticed, it was too late. Even after exposing her method, Noir knew with certainty that Alus was still in her clutches.

This is goodbye, my dear senior.

Noir said her farewells to Alus who was quietly standing motionless. Behind him, black mist, which embodied her magic, took on the form of a ghostly reaper. When she pulled back her great scythe she quietly muttered the spell's name.

“<<Crescent Reaper>>”

A scythe of death was swung down behind Alus, a soundless strike from a blind spot cut a few strands of hair.

But that was all. Alus had seemingly seen through the attack and closed in on Noir.

“Oh? Did you see that coming? I was hoping to painlessly put you to rest,”

Noir said in a detached manner. She continued as a matter of course, “But you won’t be able to kill me.”

Alus remained silent.

The only things in his black eyes were Noir. It was like a confession of his intent to kill, and she became aware of the thrill she was feeling. It was a fleeting but dense moment of exchanging thoughts and feelings through life. It made her ecstatic in a way that numbed her body.

But even then the outcome was decided from the start.

As long as Lost Paradise was functioning, Alus would be unable to kill Noir, even if he could turn his blade on her.

Noir was a little reluctant but she wanted to wrap things up quickly. Any more might cast him in a bad light as the greatest Magicmaster.

On top of that. If she could successfully finish off Alus here...

Noir was enraptured at the thought. If she was successful, she could reach that place she had imagined. She would become acknowledged by herself and others, and her life would truly begin.

She had been trapped in a cage in the darkness, but despite having been empty for so long, she would finally have a reason to exist. That was surely what it meant to stand at the top.

Because of their predecessors, the children of the Magicmaster training program were wandering the shady streets.

Noir might have been the only one who felt that way, but she had felt ashamed. Why would she, who was better than anyone else at killing, be unable to surpass him in the underworld?

While they had different chains of command, Noir and Alus both lived in the same world of shady jobs. It was a surprisingly small world, like a small village enclosed by a wall. Fear was like a plague, and the name of the person responsible spread like wildfire.

Alus Reigin was a massive wall for Noir, both as a fellow Magicmaster from the training program and as someone working in the shadows.

As someone who displayed her worth through killing, Noir, who could only live in the shadows, couldn't stand having Alus above her. That was why her obsession with Alus became greater than anything else in her mind. So now was the time for her to surpass a living legend, and she was the one holding the reins.

The blade of Alus's Night Mist would stop just before taking her life. She was convinced of that.

However...

Alus's black eyes seemed to be seeing through all of Noir and staring into the depths of her heart. Suddenly, a chill of dread ran down her spine before spreading through her entire body. Reacting to the intuition screaming at her, she jumped backward with her great scythe.

In the next moment, a streak of blood dripped down from her cheek.

What...? This has never happened before...!

The tingling sensation she felt was definitely that of a wound exposed to the air, the blood running down to her chin was real and warm.

And then—

“It hurts...it hurts it hurts it hurts it hurtsss!!!”

Noir's senses had been dulled, but in the confusion, they came back to life with a clear fear. It was the first pain she'd felt in years.

While she'd bled from the wounds Morwald had inflicted during her torture, she had never felt pain. Yet the injury on her cheek from Alus's blade spread an abnormal amount of pain through her body.

It wasn't much more than a scratch, which wouldn't even elicit a reaction from a trained assassin, yet Noir screamed out loud and squirmed.

“H-How?! How could you injure me...?! It hurts, it hurts, it hurts!”

How had he done it? Under her spell, he should have stopped. He shouldn't have even been able to move his AWR towards her.

While Lost Paradise was working, it should be very difficult to hurt her.

In the next moment, Noir saw the emotionless expression on Alus and muttered in shock, “D-Don’t tell me...?! No, there’s no doubt. Ha ha, so that’s what it is...”

Noir then let out an insane laugh.

“Heh heh, aha ha ha ha! To think you had such a simple weak point! No, that’s to be expected from you... You exceed all expectations.”

In contrast to Noir, Alus said nothing.

She turned to him with a bewitching smile.

“You can kill people important to you without batting an eyelid. That is all. You kill like it’s nothing, without feeling anything. How wonderful. I can’t help but be captivated—I’ll fall in love.”

Alus finally replied, but there was no arrogance or scorn in his eyes.

“...So what?”

There were no emotions whatsoever. He was like a machine.

When she sensed that true void, Noir felt almost refreshed. And the loneliness that had never completely gone away disappeared. It was the sadness of a heretic who would be alone in the world no matter where she went.

But she wasn’t the only one who was insane. In fact, Alus might be even crazier...

Feeling that, Noir wiped away the blood on her cheek. This was the first existence she’d discovered that held the same darkness.

Yet his welcome appearance might spell her own end.

As Alus moved once more with his black blade, Noir stated what she truly felt.

“Wonderful...” Noir said as fresh blood spilled from the slash she took on her upper arm. “This is amazing. The pain, the heat from this wound! This ferocity, these weapons! It is all sheer madness. We’re crazy, both me and youuuu!!!”

In a pool of blood from herself and her allies, Noir let out sweet sighs between shouting.

“Enough talking. Just die already!”

“Aha! Heh heh heh, do it if you can, that is!”

Mana turned into black mist and spread out around Noir. Two illusions of a god of death, Crescent Reaper, wielding scythes appeared.

She could create a total of three Crescent Reapers at the same time, and the remaining one silently appeared behind Alus and swung its scythe down.

But it was impossible. It was common practice for assassins to attack from a blind spot, so Alus easily saw through it and dodged.

Without even looking behind him, Alus swung his AWR backward and slashed the Crescent Reaper.

Noir grinned in her mind.

As expected... But it's no use!

As a spiritual body, its physical body was very undefined. It was a form of summoning magic, and the core that was its weak spot was too small to be seen with the eye, so just as it was pointless to swing at mist, physical attacks wouldn't work against it, which was its greatest advantage.

Yet contrary to her expectations, the cut Crescent Reaper had changed from its mist form into an ice statue.

He used ice mana to freeze it and then cut it?!

The composure left Noir's expression. Before her very eyes, the spiritual body of the Crescent Reaper crumbled into pieces of ice.

Taking advantage of that opening, Alus vanished.

Noir's eye moved at tremendous speed in an attempt to find him. She fainted to the sides before stepping back, but his approach was imminent.

Oh no!

She had a Crescent Reaper move in the way to fend off Alus. He would surely use the same method to deal with this one. So she predicted that and swung down her great scythe. She would cut down the reaper and opponent with a single swing.

“That seems like something you’d think of,” Alus sarcastically said, sounding ominous.

He ignored the reaper and stabbed his blade at Noir from its side. She realized that while she thought she was leading him, he’d been leading her.

She’d led on countless opponents by the nose, but this was the first time the same happened to her.

Noir used all the strength she had to twist her wrist and move the great scythe. As if taking out her panic and anger on her swing, she swung to slash through the Crescent Reaper and Alus once more.

“Fuuuuck! Just die, die, dieeee!!!”

However, that was an unexpectedly bad move, as the particles of the scattered spiritual body blocked her view instead. Panic and fear welled up as she recklessly swung her great scythe around.

“...Ugh?!”

Suddenly a blade was thrust towards the base of Noir’s throat at the bottom of her view. She repelled it with her handle and jumped back, but Alus had already sprang forward and was in range.

She tried to get distance, but the continuous attacks kept her on the defensive. Even so, Noir handled it well with her great scythe and avoided any fatal wounds.

However, she was barely dodging, and eventually the wounds she took became worse than just scratches. Her arms, legs, knees, shoulders... Blood stained her black clothes, and the bleeding gradually got worse.

“It hurts, it hurts, it huuuurts!” Noir screamed while swinging her great scythe.

Stinging pain ran through her body, but contrary to her words, there was a strange smile on her lips. The insanity filling the broken girl was blurring all sorts of borders. Not even she could tell if she felt pain or pleasure.

Right, no left. Next is...bottom, right...

She was fully focused purely on Alus’s blade, but that wasn’t going to improve

the situation. While barely fending off the attacks, she suddenly looked at Alus's face when he'd stepped in close.

She was in so much pain—and having so much fun—yet there was no emotion in his expression. He wasn't thinking of anything at all.

With more dread crawling up her spine, Noir glanced at Alus's shoulder and manifested another spell. It took less than a second to secretly construct Hell's Cry, a spell more powerful than Crescent Reaper.

Suddenly, a small baby appeared to cling on to Alus's left shoulder. It had clear, white skin and black eyes in endless sockets. It opened its mouth with an innocent smile, but even its mouth was pitch black.

Before long, a loud cry would ring out from its black mouth that would destroy the brain with its vibrations. Like Crescent Reaper, it used a spiritual body as a medium, so it was difficult to perceive by the enemy if manifested from a blind spot. Its effective range was somewhat large, so even Noir wouldn't escape unscathed, but she was prepared to pay the price.

It'll be too late once you notice, my dear senior.

The baby smiled and opened its mouth wide—

In the next instant, Night Mist stabbed through the forehead of the baby born from Hell's Cry. A vibration created from the blade shook the space before being swung up.

Space itself was separated and Hell's Cry's construction was severed. The cursed baby split in half and dispersed into mana particles, a smile still on its face.

“What?! How? It's impossible to detect that!”

Noir followed Alus's gaze and had a realization. Her glance at the top of Alus's shoulder just before manifesting the spell had backfired.

“No way! Just by following my glance...? Th-Th-That's not possible!”

Alus had no answer to give aside from another slash, this time diagonal, cutting into her shoulder.

“Aaaaaaaaahhhhh!!!! It huuurts, it hurts, it hurts so muuuuch!!!!”

Noir instinctively covered her mouth, and seeing the amount of blood on her palm, she gritted her teeth.

Even as unsteady on her feet as she was, she forced herself to move despite the pain. Though she wielded the great scythe deliriously, she adhered to the form ingrained to her, so her attacks were anything but monotone.

Yet—

“Why! Why can’t I hit you? It’s unfair that I am the only one in pain! You should be in pain with me, or it’s not fun! Why am I the only one in so much pain—”

Her voice cut out as the tendon of the arm holding the great scythe was cut and spewed blood. Unable to withstand it, she dropped her weapon, stepped back, and escaped into the air. She held her cut wrist while watching as Alus didn’t hesitate to close in.

In his hand was a vicious blade, gleaming black. He took a stance that only had the goal of piercing her heart.

With her spell overcome and her great scythe lost, she had no way of resisting.

“Ehe...”

Noir smiled calmly, like she’d become someone else. She opened her clenched right hand. In it was a black seed.

She spoke the spell’s name in a chirpy tone.

“*«Dark Lotus»*”

“Ha ha!!!”

A beat later it burst open. A crack formed in the seed, and red smoke spewed out from within, covering them both.

It spread fast, but not beyond a certain distance.

Before anyone realized, a wild rose that likely grew from the seed was spreading its roots into the ground, and more red smoke started spraying from its plump bud.

In the red smoke, Noir knelt and picked up the great scythe with her left hand. She wasn't used to handling it with her left, but it would have to do.

In the process she inhaled some of the smoke and let out a cough.

"Even though I have some tolerance, this is really effective. Although I'm sure my senior is in a little pain."

Dark Lotus was a spell that spread poison using a seed. Poison smoke was sealed in a shell of magic, allowing it to be stored for long-term. The smoke held a form of mana virus that was parasitic and multiplied through its victim's mana. It spread through the bloodstream to infect and destroy the entire body.

Though Alus was holding his breath, he had several injuries, and the virus was sure to spread through those.

You won't be able to block this. After all, I have been putting mana into that seed every night while thinking about you.

Dark Lotus didn't have the usual deterioration of the mana body, so preparation took more time. It especially took a lot of effort to multiply the virus inside of the seed, but because of that it could be activated like a surprise attack without relying on an AWR.

Noir scanned for Alus's silhouette within the smoke.

"Heh heh, where are you, my dear senior? It's time for you to vomit black blood. Please show me your twitching body as you are on death's door."

She madly longed to hear Alus's death throes and to see him die. Just the thought of it put her in a fantastic mood. So what would she do if she actually saw it?

The smoke started to clear after she picked up her great scythe, allowing her to see. The deterioration caused by the virus should start kicking in by now.

However...the smoke started swirling in front of Noir and gathered in a single spot. It was like the scene of the Dark Lotus being released was played in reverse.

In the center of the swirling smoke, Alus held Night Mist aloft. His expression was exactly the same as it had been before she'd manifested Dark Lotus. Or

rather, he looked more refreshed than before.

“Wha...?!”

Before she could even ask what happened he thrust his blade forward. Noir used her nondominant left hand to thrust out the great scythe’s handle to block the fatal thrust, but surprise had ruined her posture. Plus, she was unused to handling her weapon with the other hand.

She used all the power she could muster to prepare for the incoming impact, but she could still make it.

She didn’t want any more pain than this. Especially not when it was so one-sided. But that fear was a fatal mistake.

“Oh no—”

The tip of Alus’s sword was enchanted with Dimension Thrust, the spell to separate space. It was impossible to block physically. She should have focused on dodging rather than blocking it.

She had misread the situation, or rather, she had been dancing on the palm of Alus’s hand, being driven into a corner and forced to play a losing move. If she’d dodged instead, he probably would have used an attack suited for that instead.

Alus’s Night Mist easily gouged through the great scythe’s handle and headed straight to pierce through Noir’s body.

Ahh...! This is wonderful in its own way...the world doesn't need two people at the top. But...it is a little frustrating.

She felt almost relieved. In this moment, the pain in her body seemed to fade away, and the fear completely vanished.

Would she be seeing her life flashing before her eyes? For some reason, time seemed to extend.

She never imagined waiting for death would take so long. Even so, there was a dense instant of bliss. She felt like was submerged in a warm liquid as something filled her empty insides.

Rather than despair, she felt a twisted sense of happiness.

She slowly closed her eyes, with an innocent smile on her face.

However, just before the death in the form of a short sword touched her body, it unexpectedly stopped.

“—Ugh!”

Instead, she was assailed by an immense impact into her left flank. As she flew through the air, she realized she had been kicked away. She heard a few ribs break as she hit the ground and rolled like a rag doll.

Holding her body and cowering, she let out an anguished cry as she rubbed her face against the ground.

“Urk...aaaaahhhh! Can't...breathe...!”

She coughed, unable to properly speak or breathe. Blood and saliva leaked from the corners of her mouth.

While she squirmed in pain, Alus stood on one leg, still in his kicking posture, staring at her wordlessly.

Alus couldn't believe the hesitation he felt. He didn't know what he did. It wasn't intended as a feint either. Seeing how his victory was guaranteed there was no need for that.

He thrust his right hand out with the intent to kill, but just before he could finish the job he was stopped, by his own left hand.

And that wasn't all. Contrary to his killing intent, his legs moved on their own as if to let her escape. Naturally, it wasn't a gentle push, it was a mercilessly sharp kick, but it showed his intent not to kill her.

What exactly was the reason?

If he were to say, he wouldn't even need to search his memories. He could clearly remember the expression Noir had shown him. Alus must have still been under the influence of Lost Paradise, and that was what stopped his blade.

In his head, she hadn't worn the twisted face of an assassin with a broken mind but that of a sad girl with a future ahead of her. For some reason, to him it felt no different from Tesfia or Alice.

Like Alus, she had gone as far as she could even though there was no bright future supposed to be waiting for her.

While he knew that, Alus hesitated to kill her at the very end. Perhaps it was a wretched display of his own desires.

But it was all too late. Prolonging either of their lives would only end up with them killing someone else in the future.

Despite that, Alus hoped for a road for atonement. If he were to thrust his sword into that girl's body, he would likely never be able to return to that lively place where Tesfia and the others were.

At least that was how he felt.

Alus closed and opened his hand to confirm any physical anomalies. Even though he knew that there was no point, it was a decision he'd made himself as a result of the new life he'd cultivated at the Institute.

Thinking of it that way, he realized that he felt somewhat satisfied. But how much would any of that matter against someone completely twisted like Noir.

Suddenly, a shout thundered, breaking the silence.

"Noir! What are you doing! Finish him off already!"

"Ugh...haah, haah, haah..."

Noir had been blown away and rolled near Morwald, who was angrily walking up to her.

"What are you doing? That's enough playing around! When you kill him, you will be number one! And I will take over as the top of the military. Everything will work out!" Morwald hysterically screamed at Noir, who was writhing in agony.

"Haah, haah. Urk?!"

"Do you get it?! Are you listening?! There is no way you could feel pain, I made you that way! Those scummy parents, trying to sabotage me!"

Morwald pulled his foot back and then kicked at Noir's flank with the sharp tip of his foot.

“Aaaaaaaaaahhh! Ugh!”

Blood spilled from her mouth. An intense sharp pain caused her to shut her eyes, tears pooled around them and ran down her cheeks as if being squeezed out.

He mercilessly kicked her another two, three times.

Blood flew out of her mouth, and she couldn't even properly scream as Morwald grabbed her by the hair and forcibly raised her head.

“Aaahhhh...”

“You can still fight, can't you, Noir? You're just happy as always, aren't you? What a bad girl you are!”

Morwald smashed Noir's face into the ground over and over again... And by the time Morwald was roughly breathing, Noir could no longer even scream, having been reduced to a puppet that could only spit blood from her mouth.

Only the faint breathing escaping from her lips was the sign that she was still alive.

“You should know when to give up! Morwald, if you put pride in being a major general in Alpha, then know your place!”

Vizaist had a daughter around the same age as Noir, so he wouldn't overlook the pointless acts of violence.

“Haah, haah...hmm?!”

Either from his extreme agitation or exhaustion, Morwald's next kick missed. And when he tried to kick once again—

“...Huh?”

A strange vibration shook Morwald and his fat body started to tilt. Surprised, he looked at his right shoulder. A black blade had been stabbed through it.

An unbelievable pain ran through his mind, and he let out an unpleasant scream.

“Uaaargh!!! M-My aaarrmm!!!”

Blood spilled without pause, staining his military uniform. Night Mist was so

deep in his shoulder that it was a miracle that Morwald's arm was still attached.

Morwald fell to his knees, and soundlessly opened and closed his mouth like a fish on land. He wanted to get the short sword removed from his shoulder right away, but the extreme pain and panic prevented him from doing anything. In fact, any movements he made only hurt him even more.

He was used to hurting others, but he had not really felt pain himself. Especially not to such a serious degree.

Blood spilled out from his fat body as if it were pus. He desperately put his left hand over the blade to try and stop the bleeding, but it was like trying to use cotton to stop a broken faucet.

His body gradually grew colder. Before long he couldn't feel the tip of his fingers.

"Haaaargh! H-Hurry and call for a rescue team! H-Heal me right now!!!" exclaimed Morwald.

"Alus!" Vizaist shouted, using his judgment. Morwald was irredeemable scum, but they couldn't ignore the law and kill him here.

Yet his voice didn't shake Alus in the slightest. Morwald trembled as his eyes met Alus's cold stare.

"No?! W-Wait. I-I-I-I didn't do anything wrong...! I swear, I won't do anything again. So, okay? J-Just pull this out, help me, heal me. V-Vizaist, you say something too! Protect me!"

He begged for help. He had lost all sensation in his right arm. He was frothing at the mouth, desperately pleading.

Vizaist looked at the pathetic man as if there were nothing more he could say. He didn't feel much pity for the man, instead he felt self-loathing.

How much had Berwick predicted that Alus would enter this state and awaken his inner nature. Throwing him into the Institute should have prevented the worst from happening...but in the end, he'd failed to do anything to help this young man.

Vizaist clenched his fist.

“How unpleasant.”

A chilling declaration made so low it was hard to believe that it was a person's voice. However, despite how quiet it was, everyone could hear it.

The killing intent was purely directed towards a single man, but everyone present was on guard.

Vizaist spoke out with surprise.

“—Hey!”

He and Morwald weren't seeing a spell, and for that reason even the foolish Morwald could understand. He instinctively rejected the killing intent and an appeal left his trembling lips.

“S-Stop...it...” cried Morwald.

The chain undulating in Alus's hand was a death sentence. He was going to pour vast amounts of mana into the chain. If that went through the chain into Night Mist stuck in Morwald's body, the blade would easily bite through his flesh and his body would be torn apart.

A vibration prying open the wound in the shoulder was gradually getting stronger, and Morwald groaned in pain.

His teeth clattered in fear and his body turned stiff as his eyes shut. The dread he felt pushed him to his limit.

The biggest regrets always came in the worst situations. For the first time in his life, the arrogant man finally regretted his rash actions, and he prayed to God to spare his life.

In the next moment, mana mercilessly poured through the chain, and the sounds of the jangling chain rings rang out.

However—

As the undulation of the chain moved towards Night Mist's blade, a massive figure moved to Morwald's side.

It was Vizaist with his right fist pulled back, and he swung at a point in the chain. The mana-infused impact put a stop to the wave of death and also

knocked Night Mist out of Morwald's shoulder.

He then firmly grabbed hold of the chain and yelled out, "That's enough!!!"

The feat opened up the injury in his side, causing Vizaist to clench his teeth and exhale before he spoke to Alus.

"It's not the time for that yet. Don't forget that you are still partially in the military, and as a Magicmaster of Alpha, even you won't be able to get away with treason against a superior officer. You have to put up with it, Alus."

Alus said nothing, but Vizaist pointed to Morwald with his thumb.

"Don't worry, I will move to deal with him. This incident is especially decisive... Hmm, he passed out? He really lacks guts," Vizaist said with an exasperated expression and then glanced over to the edge of the forest. "That aside, Alus you've shown a little too much to them this time. It's not like you to slip up like this. Just back off from this. My subordinates and I will handle the rest."

At those words, the light returned to Alus's eyes.

After seeing that, Vizaist threw the chain of Night Mist, including the sword on the other end to Alus. When Alus quietly returned it to its sheath by his waist, it felt like the frozen time started moving once more.

Holding his flank, Vizaist looked over to Noir.

"Hmm? This girl still draws breath. If she gets medical treatment she might still..."

He gave Alus a glance telling him he'd take care of it, and he began examining Noir. From what he could tell, the kicks from the now-pathetically passed out Morwald, had caused the broken ribs to injure her organs.

He wasn't an expert on healing magic, but it was clearly an emergency. Vizaist groaned and wrinkled his rugged face. It was about time for the subordinates he'd called for to arrive at the scene.



Alus felt distant, like he wasn't there, as he returned Night Mist to his sheath. But his mind began to cool down from the heat of battle, and before long,

everything inside him returned to “normal.”

Still unable to settle down, Alus checked his surroundings.

They saw too much, huh? I see.

Vizaist wasn't talking about Frose or Tesfia and Loki. Someone else had witnessed the entire thing. Vizaist's look and attitude told Alus that the uninvited witness wasn't someone to let your guard down around.

Since they ignored the dilemma Morwald was in, it's not a subordinate of his or Kruelsaith. And considering Lord Vizaist's reaction, they're not from Womruina either. So who could it be? They might even have been watching since the Tenbram...

As Alus started to think, the observer's presence suddenly disappeared.

Seeing how they so skillfully stepped away, they weren't anyone ordinary.

Tsk, that really might have been a blunder.

Normally that was impossible, but this time Alus had been too focused on battle. Scratching the back of his head, Alus spoke to Loki, who was standing in silence.

“It's okay. Let's go.”

He was left with a bad aftertaste he couldn't explain.

Normally she'd run right up to him after battle, but until Alus spoke to her, she'd been standing next to Tesfia. The two of them had seen everything from beginning to end.

Of course Tesfia hadn't realized Morwald's involvement until the battle against Noir was over.

Tesfia was wiping away tears she hadn't realized she'd shed with her sleeve, and Loki was taking deep breaths to calm herself down.

“Do you understand now, Ms. Tesfia? This is as far as you can stay by Sir Alus's side without any resolve. You live in different worlds. That's why...”

Loki's words faded out. She struggled to say those decisive words.

Tesfia and Alice had already learned so much from Alus. Even though they

might not be disciples, they had a connection.

But if Tesfia was trying to go beyond her position as just a student, there was a line she had to cross. She had to get a deeper understanding of Alus. Even if the result was shocking, and she learned of the darkness of the world.

The past Loki wouldn't have been so vague. She would have no doubt coldly told Tesfia not to stay by Alus's side.

Loki was convinced of that. She used to be a faithful follower and arbiter, drawing a strict line between the ignorant girls and Alus.

But she could sense that was no longer the case.

During her stay at the Fable mansion, she had come to realize that the looks Tesfia would give Alus were that of a girl, not just a student, and they were similar to Loki's own.

So if Tesfia were to have even some romantic feelings for him, as someone who had equally wicked thoughts, she couldn't stop her. She had no right to do so. If anything, another person who could understand him was something that should be welcomed.

Still, there was one thing she had to say to the redhead who looked much more frail than normal. Those who couldn't take that final last step still had a form of happiness from being left behind.

"Well then, Ms. Tesfia. Goodbye."

Tesfia was unable to say anything in reply to those cold parting words. She knew what she must say and what she wanted to do, but the horrible nightmare she just witnessed had blotted out everything else on her mind.

Tesfia could only watch as Loki ran over to Alus's side. She lost all strength in her legs and collapsed on the spot.

Minasha and Theresia noticed that and called out to her from behind as they ran over, but their voices sounded so distant now.

"Ha ha...ugh..."

The chills she felt turned into a sickening mass, surging up from her chest. It felt like it might spout from her mouth, and she blocked her mouth with her

palm and crouched.

She just wanted to let it all out and be at ease. But she was rejecting that idea even as her face turned pale.

In the end she was just putting up some resistance. She knew it was too late to do anything. But what she would lose, what she would discard, was more than just a terrible feeling in her chest.

And she would never be able to forgive herself.

The meaning of Loki's unspoken rejection wouldn't leave her mind. She was correct. That rejection was the reason her emotions were tormenting her now.

She knew that. She understood that it was a betrayal against herself.

Seeing only what she wanted to see and rejecting what she didn't want to see was human nature, and she could comprehend that.

In the end, she was just a lousy human basking in the peace she had been given. She was just a foolish chick who couldn't leave her temporary bird cage, even after learning half of the world's important secrets.

Thinking about it, the days she had spent with him had been fulfilling.

She had thought that they would stand side by side against difficulties and the harsh world together. But that was only a trivial piece in the puzzle of getting to know the true Alus.

She couldn't understand how he could emotionlessly kill people, how he could stand in the center of a storm of slaughter like it was nothing.

It was beyond her comprehension.

And what she'd seen now was probably not all of him. In the end, the Alus she saw at the Institute hadn't been the whole picture of him.

Tesfia was so very frustrated. She felt like self-deprecatingly trampling over the shallow feelings of love she'd finally become aware of.

The tears pooled in her eyes blurred her view, and she could only vaguely see the boy standing in the distance.

Alus cast a glance back as he left, looking melancholic. But he would likely

never speak with Tesfia again. And with just cause. He himself was well aware of the bliss of not knowing the world's darkness.

Tesfia could clearly tell that Alus felt that she was better off in the light.

So who could blame her if she traveled a different path from him. It was her natural right, and the proper way of life for a normal person.

However—

Still crouched down, Tesfia grabbed the ground with her trembling hand. Her nails dug into the mud and she firmly grasped it.

How pathetic can I get...?! Just what did I think I was doing...

Tesfia had thought she knew quite a bit about Alus. Yet when she saw a glimpse of his true self, she was in this state. She really felt that she was a small person.

All kinds of emotions swirled together in her chest, and she couldn't breathe. Her regret overflowed, turning into warm tears that ran down her cheeks.

That was a sin by the name of innocence, and she was a criminal who didn't try to see the true appearance of the world. She was no longer allowed to chase after the parting back, nor reach out her hand towards it.

One Hundred-Fourth Chapter: Beyond Change

Alus left and Loki followed him like a shadow.

After seeing him off, Vizaist let out a heavy sigh. Exhaustion washed over him, and he couldn't bring himself to care about his opened wound.

Looking at it, he felt he had avoided the worst outcome.

That said, so many problems had piled up that they would need to slowly clear them up.

Morwald was naturally one of the biggest, but first, they needed to prevent Noir from dying, as she would be an important witness.

"She will need first aid before she is moved. If I recall, old Miltria could use healing magic..." Vizaist said, but he shrugged his shoulders as he felt bloodlust sent his way. "Ah! I didn't..."

"Who are you calling old? You should watch what you say," said Miltria.

"E-Excuse me. I was only thinking that you have a wealth of experience."

Vizaist's cheek twitched as he apologized, but seeing Miltria snort and walk over with her cane, he realized that her mood had been appeased for now. Or rather, she hadn't actually been angry at him to begin with.

At most she was just teasing a rude youngster.

"I am not a healing Magicmaster. I would not place your hopes on me. But I will do what I can."

Vizaist lowered his head. "Please do."

Miltria muttered as she walked up to Noir. She glanced over at the passed out Morwald and spat out, "That said, I will be prioritizing this girl. I have no intention of wasting mana on such a despicable scumbag. If that idiot dies, he dies."

"Th-That would be a problem..." said Vizaist.

“But it is not my problem. If you don’t like it, I won’t help at all. How about that?”

“I-I understand. Please do what you can.”

As long as they stopped Morwald’s bleeding, he could still make it. Vizaist bent his huge body and bowed to the petite old woman.

Miltria gave him a rough nod in reply and looked over Noir.

“This is bad. The tendon needs to be reconnected quickly. This is why darkness users are such a handful.”

“What do you mean?”

“Users of the elements light and darkness have a special constitution. Their mana, and the blood that contains it, travel throughout their entire body, making them resistant to the influence of others’ spells. And healing magic works from the outside of the body to heal wounds.”

Mana slowly flowed out from Miltria’s hand held over Noir’s flank, but like she said, the mana was flowing in slowly.

Sensing that, the old woman furrowed her brow.

“This might not even end up being worthwhile first aid. It’s not just her organs. Her lungs are injured too. Alus seemed to have held back a little, but that disgusting pig messed everything up.”

“The relief unit that Frose and Selva called will arrive soon. Try to make her last until then,” said Vizaist.

“Despite your lumbering size you have a delicate control over your mana, help out a little!” Miltria said.

“I don’t know anything about healing magic...”

“You can at least pour some mana into her. Get on the other side of her from me and prevent the mana from being repulsed. It will at least be a peace of mind for me.”

Vizaist did as she said and held his hand over the opposite side of Noir’s body.

Bodies typically rejected different mana from entering the body, but since

Noir had an affinity for darkness, that rejection was especially intense. As Miltria had said, it was extremely difficult to adjust the amount of mana required to soothe the repulsion of the mana poured into the body.

Yet Miltria was managing even while borrowing Vizaist's power. As someone who excelled at mana control, it might even be a result of her research.

"Phew, that clears up her respiratory tract. But I am worn out. I don't have any energy left for that pig."

"No, that's enough. It looks like we'll make it," Vizaist said with relief.

An elite team of healing Magicmasters that Frose and Selva had arranged ran over. There were a total of five of them, and among them were some skilled enough to work with Lettie's unit.

It was fortunate that the Womruina and Fable families had made preparations in case there were any accidents in the Tenbram.

They changed places with Miltria and set up a tent for emergency aid, promptly taking matters into their own hands. One of them was even casting some light healing magic on Vizaist's stomach, whose head was filled with thoughts of how to handle things afterwards.

"My subordinates have finally arrived too. We will handle reporting to Berwick and cleaning up matters here. In exchange, can you handle the political aspect, Frose?"

"I understand," said Frose. "Besides, Fable was part of this Tenbram, so we should be the ones to handle it. I will see to it that the nobles that came to spectate won't do anything unnecessary, let alone leak any secrets."

Naturally, since it was an incident that happened within Alpha, they would eventually cooperate with security forces to bring the situation under control.

Once Morwald wakes up, there are plenty of things that will need to be investigated... thought Vizaist.

Vizaist's unit might be skilled at covering things up, but it would be brutal work to deal with so many corpses and so much blood.

He glanced over to Noir who could finally breathe properly and frowned.

Still, this girl... To think that she is related to the Magicmaster training program that was supposed to have been ended. The corrupt ways of the previous generation are haunting us even now.

As a wind user and skilled intelligence agent, Vizaist had heard Alus and Loki's discussion.

Besides, aside from a very few people, relief measures were taken for those who were part of the program. Morwald might have done something on his end regarding that.

But it wasn't all bad.

If everything came to light, Morwald would be disgraced, which would make the noble faction still embedded into the military lose their core and cause the faction to completely collapse.

"We will first be investigating the Magicmaster training program," Vizaist ordered as if talking to himself, but it reached the ears of all his present subordinates.

He then looked over in the direction of Alus, who was practically like his son, with a worried expression.



A week passed.

Awakening from her slumber, she felt like she'd been submerged in mud. She could faintly feel light hitting her closed eyelids. Her eyelids felt strangely heavy, like they were stuck to her skin.

When she finally managed to open her eyes, a strong light flooded in. The painful stimulation shook her brain awake as well.

She could finally focus her eyes and the white walls came into view. Even though she'd just woken up, her body felt exhausted and heavy.

"So you're finally awake."

Heavy words beat at her eardrums, and the girl struggled to turn her focus to the figure. It felt like she was on her back, but her head seemed to be fixed in place and she couldn't move it. She had an IV needle in her arm, and a

mouthpiece in her mouth. It was like she wasn't allowed to do anything but breathe.

"How's your consciousness? Do you remember what you were doing?" the voice asked to confirm if she wasn't confused or having any lapse in her memory.

Noir could only blink her eyes at the middle-aged man's words. She then looked as far down as she could. Based on the thick clothing she could see, she was lying on top of a bed, wearing a straitjacket.

"Noir Valis Oud. You are the lone daughter of the Oud family, are you not?"

That was indeed her name. But it didn't really hit home until the man repeated it. To her, a name was just an identifier to differentiate between individuals. Yet for some reason, the Oud name made her heart flutter.

It was a family name. So naturally, it meant that she must have parents as well. That was all, but she felt a pain in her heart.

After enduring the pain for a while, she looked up at the white ceiling.

Noir no longer had any will to resist her situation. As she went over her latest memory, she recalled the intense pain and frowned.

Her battle with Alus was supposed to be a sweet moment, but it felt so distant now.

She sensed the man questioning standing up and approaching her bed. His massive frame entered her field of view, casting a shadow on her.

It was the man who had escaped her in the mansion's garden.

"It must be hard to speak like that," he said and removed the board that was keeping her head fixed.

He then skillfully put a finger in her mouth and pulled out the mouthpiece.

"Vizaist Socalent..."

Vizaist showed no reaction to her voice, instead she returned to his previous position and sat back down.

Noir was now able to move her head, but she was still staring up at the

ceiling. That might just be because she didn't have the strength to move her neck, but Vizaist had no way of knowing for sure.

"To be honest, I'm surprised you survived with those injuries," Noir said, but Vizaist replied with a faint smile.

"Being sturdy is my only merit. Now then..."

"What about His Excellency..." Noir asked, interrupting Vizaist, asking about Morwald.

Vizaist had more or less expected that. It was all but clear that the girl's abnormal mental state and behavior was a result of the foundation of her identity being a twisted form of loyalty to Morwald.

Although he'd been interrupted, Vizaist spoke without hesitation.

"You've been asleep for a long time. Sorry, but once your life was no longer in danger, the treatment was stopped. If you struggle you're just going to hurt yourself. But don't worry, if you answer my questions, I promise the treatment will continue."

Noir said, "That doesn't matter. Is His Excellency being treated like me?"

"Yes, he's in the room next to yours," answered Vizaist.

"I see. And he told you?"

"Yes, he confessed everything."

Morwald had run rampant, leading private forces in an effort not only to kill Alus but also to silence Vizaist and Frose. An extremely thorough investigation had been launched into him.

As a result, evidence proving his work behind the scenes, private misappropriation of taxes, and even his involvement in illegal drug refining had been found. There were so many crimes it was hard to count.

Naturally, his hidden torture chamber had been discovered as well. Numerous bloodstains painted the walls and floor black, as if evidence of his many sins and dark habits. That alone was enough of a reason to arrest Morwald, but there was a particular evil deed aside from that.

“There’s one thing I will need to tell you, and I do apologize if it will make it hard for you to sleep,” said Vizaist.

“It doesn’t matter what you tell me now,” Noir carelessly replied with hollow eyes.

It wasn’t a role he really wanted, but Vizaist resolved himself to say it, even if it was rather drastic. It was necessary to pull her out of her brainwashing that was causing her to depend on her lord.

“It concerns the strange accident that happened to the Oud husband and wife, eight years ago. There is a possibility that Morwald is involved in that. It happened a rather long time ago, but we still don’t have any conclusive evidence.”

Noir just stared up at the ceiling, so Vizaist continued.

While a small family, the Ouds had peerage, and Noir’s father had served as Morwald’s aide in the military. But one day, on their way home from a noble social gathering, they were attacked by robbers. The husband tried to protect the wife, but in the end they both fell to the robbers’ deadly weapons.

It appeared to be a crime motivated by money, but it could have just been disguised to look like a robbery. Vizaist spoke of how the trigger for the attack was likely when Noir’s father discovered Morwald’s secret accounts and discussed the matter with a colleague.

After he’d explained everything, Noir only had one thing to say.

“So? You have no decisive evidence right?”

Her parents might have intentionally been assassinated. And even after being told that it might be under Morwald’s orders, Noir showed no emotion. Or at least...that was what it looked like.

Vizaist closed his eyes. A burning anger welled up inside of him, but it was mixed in with pity for the girl, which helped cool him down. He was struck by how she was similar in age to his beloved daughter, Felinella.

Vizaist took a deep, calming breath.

“It seems you are still not feeling well. Let’s leave it at this for today. Get

some more sleep, the questioning tomorrow will last from morning to night.”

She did not speak.

“Also, the collar on your neck can detect mana being invoked. If you were to try and escape, neuroanesthesia will automatically be injected.”

“I know.” Noir said without even so much as checking the black collar.

Vizaist stood up from his chair and walked over to the exit door and entered his personal code. But before he left he turned around and spoke.

“That’s right, I almost forgot. I have a message from Alus: ‘If you want my head, you can come and get it any time.’”

Vizaist then left without waiting for an answer.

The sound of the door locking rang out. Even as the lights in the room turned off, Noir continued to stare up at the ceiling.

She slowly closed her eyes, and kept the sound of her breathing to a minimum as she sharpened her senses. She could hear the sound of footsteps moving away, and she was soon sure that there were no longer any people around.

Noir didn’t know if she was on the surface or underground, but she smiled slightly.

She then made a swift deliberate movement. Moving her body like a snake, she dislocated her arms and legs.

You’re too naive. You don’t have any surveillance cameras, and you think you could keep me locked down with this low level of restraints? Ha ha, I don’t understand why you wouldn’t kill me. You even went out of your way to heal me...ugh?!

But when she tried to move her body a little more forcefully, she felt a stabbing pain in her flank, and she bit her lip in response. Her senses were back.

Eventually, she exhaled a feverish breath from her trembling throat. Next, bones scraped audibly as they moved beyond their range of mobility.

She gathered mana into points no bigger than a strand of hair at the tips of

her fingers to create a file. They were stronger than they looked, and she used those to carefully cut into her restraints.

It was an assassination technique she'd been taught, but it was impossible without great talent.

She carefully observed her collar, but it showed no signs of reacting, which only made sense since the amount she was using was no different from what normally leaked out of Magicmasters. Since it wasn't enough mana to manifest even a weak spell, the collar's sensor wouldn't pick up on it.

Eventually Noir crawled out of her straitjacket and walked unsteadily along the wall in nothing but her patient gown. Reaching the authentication panel by the door, she moved her fingers.

She had watched Vizaist's fingers on the panel through the reflection in the glass cup next to the bed, so unlocking the door was simple.

The door silently slid open. The lights in the hallway were off, but as an assassin who used the dark element, she could see somewhat all right in the very dim light.

There was nobody around.

Without even questioning it, Noir walked along the wall to the neighboring room. She leaned against the wall, enduring pain with every step. Every stinging step was like a knock on the door to her memories.

I'd forgotten my parents. Why even bring it up now, it's no different from them ever existing to begin with. I was all alone until His Excellency picked me up and raised me. No...was I made to believe that? No, that's definitely wrong!

Her head was aching because of the discrepancy between what she believed and what Vizaist had just told her. Unnecessary thoughts popped up into her mind, one after another.

Noir shook her head to get rid of the idle thoughts. It felt like her brain was a mess.

She shouldn't have been thinking about anything unnecessary. That was how she'd always lived, not allowing anyone to invade her thoughts.

“I must hurry and save His Excellency...”

Noir arrived at the neighboring room, which had an authentication panel just like her room. The light on the panel was red.

She could forcibly destroy it and save her lord, but she decided to try the same code used for her room. As luck would have it, the light turned green, allowing Noir to let out a sigh of relief.

She had no plan. As if imprinted in her head, she was fully prioritizing a way to allow Morwald to escape.

She peeked in the room. Her eyes had gotten used to the darkness, so she could see that the room was no different from hers and she glanced on top of the bed. There was a bulge the size of an adult, but the person didn't seem to be restrained like Noir. In fact, he even had a soft quilt over him. But the ring on the fat finger sticking out from under the cover was familiar to Noir.

“Your Excellency?” Noir asked in a quiet voice, but there was no reply.

Was he still sleeping? Noir staggered over to the bed and slowly reached her hand out. She ran her hand across his cheek and chin as if to confirm the structure of his face.

“Aha. Your Excellency—”

Noir looked down at his feet and stared at what she was touching, the pair of luxurious shoes that he had been wearing. She didn't know why they were there. Some nurse must have forgotten them after undressing him, but even now, the tips of the shoes were covered in crimson blood.

As the smell assailed her nose, a voice rang out in her mind.

They were exactly the kinds of words that arrogant man would say, but she could clearly remember the distant sound of his angry voice when he'd been kicking her.

“Those scummy parents, trying to sabotage me!”

Morwald had unintentionally blurted that out because of his anger and panic. It was his mistake. Why would he even say that they had sabotaged him when they had supposedly been killed in a robbery.

After some time, a twisted smile appeared on Noir's face. But it wasn't a relief that Morwald was still alive.

Noir gave up on thinking deeply. She just found the fact that Morwald was in this room so amusing.

She climbed onto the bed and straddled the figure lying in it. The springs creaked a little and her unfocused eyes stared at the ugly fat man's face.

She'd come here in order to save him, but the smell of her own blood and memories of what he'd said changed everything. With the information that Vizaist had given her, everything added up and something inside her broke.

She whispered, her smile twisted, "Your Excellency, I will save you right now. Heh heh, give me another order. Who should I kill next, Your Excellency... Your Excellency? Oh that's right, you did something bad, didn't you...?"

The bed creaked each time Noir shifted her weight.

"That's fine, I don't even remember how papa or mama looked, so that doesn't matter. I forgive you, because it doesn't matter. But...people that have done something bad need to be punished. After all, that's the justice you told me about, Your Excellency."

The bed creaked and Noir clenched her fists and raised them up high. She then swung them straight down right where the face would be.

Over and over and over again...

She had come with the intent to save her lord but suddenly gave in to destructive impulses despite saying that she forgave him. Her emotions and thoughts were incoherent and contradictory, and there was no way to describe it as anything other than her being broken.

Some sort of red liquid splattered, but Noir ignored everything and continued. For a while, Noir continued to slam down on silent lump of flesh without any thoughts.

"Aha ha ha...!!!"



Eventually, her stifled laughter came to an end and she stopped swinging and stumbled back to her feet.

Mana flowed as she created a spell.

Her collar immediately reacted, but Noir didn't so much as react to the stinging pain of drugs being injected into the back of her neck. Before she passed out, a thin mist with a scythe appeared, and she turned that sharp weapon on the fat body lying on the bed. As she didn't have her AWR, the spiritual body's connection to the physical world was weak, but the scythe alone had a form.

Tears streamed down her cheek and dripped down from her chin.

Without hesitation, the scythe of death slid into the heart of its target. After accomplishing its goal, the spiritual body and scythe disappeared as if they'd never existed in the first place.

"Huh? His Excellency died...?"

The drugs finally kicked in and Noir lost consciousness, collapsing on the floor like a rag doll.

Her wet eyelashes would likely not dry for some time. Even unconscious, her tears continued flowing.



He felt like he'd vividly seen how people break down at the end of madness. At the same time, he felt a melancholic pain in his heart.

After clearing his throat for a moment, the man nearing old age gave his subordinate his sympathies.

"I'm sorry for pushing an unpleasant role onto you, Vizaist."

Even as he said that, the shameful emotions didn't disappear. He felt like he wasn't properly able to act as the coolheaded Governor-General he was supposed to be. When facing Lord Vizaist who'd been working with him for so long that they were closer to friends than subordinates, perfectly wearing that mask was even harder.

“Don’t say that, Berwick. I volunteered for it. We might have different jobs, but there’s only so much we can do on our own. So you don’t need to be so reserved.”

The two men had quietly watched the girl’s grotesque deeds in the hospital room that also served as a prison cell from the neighboring room through a magic mirror.

The aberrant behavior, the twisted thoughts.

This was Berwick’s oversight for failing to rescue everyone from the Magicmaster training program that he had suspended and taken apart. That was why he had taken special measures for Noir, without regard for the risks involved.

Despite knowing that it would be impossible to ever rehabilitate her, Berwick reached his wrinkled hand out towards the girl. It might be a bit conceited to call it hidden good deeds, but Berwick had scooped up several lives like that.

Even so, some would still slip out of his hands. There was a limit to how many one man could save.

However, Berwick would try picking up those who’d slipped out of his hands as well. That might be why Vizaist was still working for him. If two hands weren’t enough, then he could aid with a third or fourth.

Four was better than two.

This time he had acted with that in mind. Thinking of Noir, that was the least he could do. Perhaps because she was around the same age as Felinella, he even felt a sense of duty to save her despite her almost killing him.

Berwick stared at Noir, collapsed on the floor, through the magic mirror and let out a heavy sigh.

“Even in this position, there are so many times I feel powerless. I can only hope this frees her from Morwald’s spell.”

Looking at the calamity, it was clear that the chains that bound Noir were deep-rooted.

“That will depend on what happens next. She was subjected to long period of

torture and abuse, possible including the use of drugs to cloud her mind. Her lack of ability to feel pain might be a result of her mind defending herself, as well as using self-suggestion through her dark magic. That's not unreasonable to assume considering the torture room...which means, that girl is yet another victim, Berwick," said Vizaist.

"I know. I know that, Vizaist, but we can't afford the embers of the past to reignite. That might rock the very foundation of Alpha. As the old generation, we can't allow the karma of the past to be brought into the future," said Berwick.

"Yes, Alus is testing us by keeping her alive," Vizaist said with a wry smile mixed in with confusion.

Alus had given them the question of how to handle this girl who had gone through the same thing as him and Loki. As responsible adults, how would Berwick and Vizaist respond?

"I think you know this already, but it won't be as easy as with Loki Leevahl," said Vizaist.

"Stop dressing me up as the bad guy. She decided to go with Alus. I only respected her decision," said Berwick.

Loki was supposed to have been sent to observe Alus under Berwick's orders. As a result, she had ended up as his partner. By his side, she had seen meaning in her life, and it was definitely having an effect on Alus as well.

As far as Vizaist could tell, it was a good change.

"Hmph, I can't believe you'd say that with a knowing look on your face. That's why you're so suspicious. If you keep putting your nose in somebody else's business, you're going to end up getting burned."

"Now if anything's too late, that is," Berwick calmly replied.

Vizaist glanced over at Noir and spoke in a solemn tone. "She has already passed the point of no return. Even if the drugs leave her system, her twisted mind won't change back. Are you prepared for what comes next, Berwick?"

"Naturally. After Alus it might be painful, but it will be for her own good,"

Berwick said, looking down at his wrinkled, calloused hands. "My hands are already dirtied. Sometimes, I can't even tell who they belong to."

"Hmph, is this another case of the heartless old man pretending to be serious. Well then, I'll be going. I might be seriously injured, but work won't wait for me."

"Yes. I am sorry for letting this pile up, but I am relying on you."

As the two were in a hidden room, there was no obvious entrance or exit, but when Vizaist inserted his authentication code into the panel on the wall, a rectangular hole silently opened up in the wall leading to the hallway.

Vizaist entered the neighboring room and carefully picked up Noir and carried her away. After seeing him leave, Berwick headed for another special room in the hidden room.

Inside of a white room was a mind magic technician in a special military uniform.

"So...how is their memory?" The technician answered with a serious expression.

"I have done what I can, but this is the limit."

"I see."

Berwick glanced over. There was a strange chair half the size of a bed with all sorts of complex devices and tubes connected to it. Sitting on it, fixed in place by belts, was Berwick's old political enemy with his eyes closed.

Morwald was fast asleep.

"I have finished the mind manipulation. However, the old memories of the Magicmaster training program can only vaguely be extracted," said the technician.

"Hmm. So it will be difficult."

"There is something else that interests me... Lately, Morwald has been secretly meeting with somebody, but I wasn't able to extract those memories. No matter how I try to look into them, they're just like out-of-focus photographs... I have never seen anything like it before."

After the technician said that, Morwald's eyes shot open wide. He violently moved in an attempt to remove the gag.

"Mmm—hmmmm?!"

"Don't struggle like that or your wounds will open up again, former Major General," Berwick said, voice full of ridicule.

All the technician could do was shrug in pity. He had a fancy title of mind magic technician, but he was a dark element Magicmaster in charge of extracting memories and working for Alpha.

It was illegal to perform painful interrogations with dark magic in accordance with international law, but Berwick wasn't going to be picky when it came to dealing with Morwald.

Although, that was no longer necessary. His secret maneuvers had been a pain, but after this incident, Berwick's bitter enemy had taken a fatal hit. He had attempted to take the life of one of Alpha's Singles, and Vizaist's subordinate's swift movement had allowed them to secure evidence in Morwald's mansion that he wouldn't be able to talk his way out of.

That was in part because Kruelsaith had been sent out, leaving the mansion shorthanded, but also because Morwald had finally shown his true colors, allowing Berwick to strip him of his authority.

Berwick coldly stared down at Morwald, who was still struggling to get free.

"How disappointing. This is what happens when you play with fire at such an age."

It was clear what Morwald was asking for with his eyes.

"You want to complain about using a dark Magicmaster for interrogation? Hmph, like you're one to talk, Morwald. Now listen up. I don't care if you drop dead. We will be taking our time scrambling around in your head, so get ready."

There was still a long way to go. Morwald had a pipeline to the underworld. Then there was his connection to the Einhimmel sect. How far could they get in their investigation?

"...That's enough. Put him to sleep again."

“Understood!”

The mind magic technician pulled out a syringe from his pocket and stuck into Morwald’s fat neck, injecting him with sleep medication. Morwald’s eyes turned vacant, and he fell back asleep.

“Now then, how about that suspicious secret meeting partner... Was it someone who lit a fire under Morwald, or just one of his cronies?”

Morwald was close to the Womruina family, and it could have been someone from the family, but something felt off. Berwick was thinking about the strange observers that Vizaist had reported to him. Someone had witnessed the Tenbram as well as the battle between Alus and Noir.

“Governor-General, could it be Kurama?”

“I can’t say for certain. Even Morwald would shirk back from having a direct connection to Kurama. It is highly likely that the Einhimmel sect is involved. In which case, Morwald was likely being used.”

Morwald groaned, his face grim.

The Einhimmel sect was ostensibly a legitimate religious organization, but they had been strangely active lately, and there were plenty of rumors that they had ties to nobles in other nations. Orneus, who had been fighting Alus, had withdrawn because he had been concerned about Archbishop Silvette as well, but Berwick had no way of knowing that.

At any rate, information on them was lacking. Even Vizaist struggled to get a hold of something, as the wall protecting the sect was very thick.

It’s common for religion to rise during anxious times. That said, only Archbishop Silvette and a few other bishops show themselves in public. The cult is practically a secret organization.

After thinking for a while, Berwick made up his mind and muttered, “The Einhimmel sect...it sounds like they need to be investigated.”

After the incident, the cult had cut ties with Morwald. Although they had acknowledged a connection to him, they issued a formal statement and apologized to the public for any misunderstanding, saying that they had the

same shallow relationship with the military high command that other religious groups had.

Messengers appeared before Berwick and Cicelnia as well, bearing gifts in hopes of resolving the misunderstanding.

It was possible to turn them down, but the goods they had brought were a problem. They offered precious relics, just like Minerva, which was finally showing signs of being clarified.

There was no doubt that Minerva was the origin of all AWRs, and it also had historical value. Some of the offerings were key items that could shed light on the origin of Fiends, so not even Berwick could ignore them.

Besides, there was no clear evidence that they had been involved with the incident. Moreover, Archbishop Silvette didn't try to hide it. Instead he confessed his own failings, claiming that he and some of his followers had sided with Morwald because they had been tricked and that the incident had nothing to do with the cult.

He even took on a modest attitude and took responsibility by suspending himself.

Berwick was astonished by how well they handled the aftermath, but he didn't forget to keep them in check. As part of political negotiations, Berwick confiscated some of the Einhimmel sect's missionary bases and temporarily prohibited them from expanding. Investigation into and surveillance of the Einhimmel sect would also be stepped up.

It was fortunate that the girl, Noir, could be put under protection in the chaos of the incident.

So we found some results. But we can't move any further than this. There's nothing but faults with me.

Berwick felt himself getting depressed. He felt fully fed up with it, but he couldn't abandon the path he'd chosen to walk down alone. Any massive political decision required sacrificing something to accomplish something else.

In order to stay sane, Berwick was always looking to atone. Hence Alus as well as Loki and now Noir were his targets.

Whether he saved or abandoned someone depended entirely on his own self-centered reasons. Despite that, he couldn't stop himself.

Berwick exhaled and pushed the light switch on the wall.

Dim light lit up the room that Noir had gone wild in. In the bed was a bulge with its face smashed in, and red stains splattered on the white walls.

The scene was a disaster, the direct result of years of pent-up feelings that when unleashed lessened the horrific karma coiled up within her. That's what Berwick decided to tell himself.

"Besides, it's just the blood of an imitation. The stained walls can be cleaned just by wiping them."

Berwick hoped the same could be true for the girl's heart. In the room, what had been destroyed by Noir's destructive impulses was an accurately made dummy filled with artificial blood. Vizaist had secretly prepared it, but Berwick chose not to ask about its origins.

Being sensitive to the workings of the underworld, Berwick imagined that it was a Kruelsaith corpse that Vizaist had collected from that gruesome battlefield. That was in pretty poor taste, but with how driven by insanity and abnormal excitement Noir was, she wasn't going to look at the details in the dark.

There were also skilled Magicmasters positioned at all exits in the event that she tried to escape.

Even so, the scenery in the room stirred his heart. If they didn't do this, Noir would be forever dependent on Morwald as his puppet. It was a dirty and dreadful solution, but there was meaning in it.

At least, that was what Berwick wanted to believe.

A big obstacle to unifying the military had finally been removed. His authority was greater than ever, and his foothold to launch all sorts of plans was all the sturdier.

However, the mental strain that assailed him caused Berwick to let out a long sigh, as if getting rid of the poison built up within him. His face then brightened

as if to encourage himself.

There was still a long way to go. If he let his exhaustion show here, he wouldn't be able to overcome the countless difficulties in the future or contend with the many problems that would arise.

The adversity that came his way was his greatest chance, which was why he would use it to reform the military.

Mustering the remaining strength in his aging body, Berwick headed for his office.

Afterword

Hello everyone, Izushiro here. Thank you for picking up this volume.

This story brings the end of the Tenbram arc—or, if I were to put subtitles on volumes for convenience, that is the title the last few volumes would have.

There were quite a few areas that were personally very challenging. In that regard, it was refreshing to write a different kind of magical battle than I had been able to write before, in the form of a competitive game.

Aside from writing, another challenge was that for quite some time last year I wasn't in the best condition. I should have been paying more attention to myself from the beginning of spring... I hope you are all more careful with your health.

Getting back on topic, this volume has not only the fierce Tenbram battle but also battles beyond that, and, personally, I am quite satisfied with how it turned out. This afterword is a bit longer than usual so I can talk some about the theme and plot.

(From here on, I will be talking about the contents of the volume, so those who haven't read it yet should be careful.)

The biggest change between the light novel and the web version is the structure of the story. The incident with the escaped prisoners was inserted into the middle of the match, which was adjusted considerably, and the connection between the Fable and Womruina family has been settled.

There might have been a little too much content stuffed in, but that is just part of the charm. At the very least, the end of the Tenbram moving into the Noir battle was a must in my mind.

Of course not everything has been perfectly resolved. I intend to write about some connected things in the future volumes, such as inherited spells, what happened to the Womruina family afterward, and how the Fable family deals with the aftermath. Even as the author I'm looking forward to it.

I also went deeper with the changes to Tesfia during the Tenbram than in the web version. From the next volume onward, I hope to write more about the subtleties of her mind.

Look forward to what Tesfia and Alice, who are still just students, will think and decide regarding Alus and Loki, who are soldiers with proper abilities (although Tesfia did get a big power-up). Growth isn't only about getting stronger as a Magicmaster, and perhaps they will show thoughts like that.

Also, another highlight might be Alus getting serious, which we haven't seen in a while. He's been working in the shadows since the start, but surprisingly few scenes have showed it. At the end of the story, he transformed into his original form, a silent killer of a sort. However, thanks to everything he'd experienced, he didn't quite revert to what he'd been before.

Noir and Alus had received similar treatment growing up, which was one of the themes I wanted to cover with this volume. I believe you will be able to better get a grasp of Alus' change by watching him in this volume. Be on the look out for Noir in the future as well!

That said, I am getting concerned about the gender ratio as of late...

However, beautiful girls and women gathering around Alus is just an inevitable rule of the world, so please kindly watch over him—although there are also quite a few old men. As the author, I would love to give time to each of the heroines. But if I do that I won't be able to wrap up the story, so I endure that emotion as I head for my PC every day.

Ah, yes, I was also thinking about changing the stage of the next volume, so please look forward to it.

From here on, I would like to move on to thank-yous.

Thank you very much to my editor for your cooperation in all sorts of changes for this Tenbram. Your opinions were a great help.

And thank you Miyuki Ruria for your illustrations, which are as beautiful as always. I believe that I am often asking for difficult elements due to my selfishness, so I can only thank you for responding to every single one of my requests with such high quality. I look forward to working with you in the

future.

I am also very grateful to the proofreaders, designers, printers, operators, sales representatives, and everyone else who helped produce this book.

And most of all, I would like to thank the readers for your continued support and for picking up volume 18 of The Greatest Magicmasters Retirement Plan. I strive to keep working to earn your continued support!

Well then, I will see you in the next afterword.



**THE GREATEST
MAGICMASTER'S
RETIREMENT
PLAN**

18



Aile von Womruina

A formidable foe who is also Tesfia's political fiancé. A noble from one of the three great noble families, he is a cunning schemer with a tremendous amount of authority.

Tesfia Fable

Alus' classmate of noble background who had large potential. She has her engagement on the line in the coming Tenbram but may be caught up in an abnormal incident...

Alus Reigin

He is the world's greatest genius Magicmaster, but he is currently a student. He joins the Tenbram in order to help out Tesfia, but what awaits them...?!



Tesfia's finger pointed towards him. A blue light of mana was gathering at her fingertip, and Aile felt a terrible chill run down his spine.







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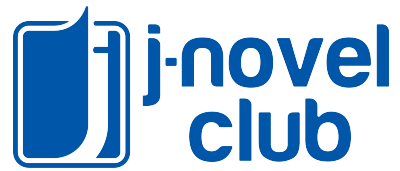
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The Greatest Magicmaster's Retirement Plan: Volume 18

by Izushiro

Translated by Warnis Edited by Heidi Ward

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