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ILLUSTRATOR: YUUNAGI

# THE INVINCIBLE SUMMONER

WHO CRAWLED UP FROM LEVEL 1

Wrecking **Reincarnators** with My **Hidden Dungeon**



1

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An anime-style illustration of two characters. On the left, a young woman with brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a white coat with a yellow bow, holds a glowing wand. On the right, a young man with dark hair and purple eyes, wearing a dark hooded cloak, stands behind her. The background is a soft-focus scene of pink cherry blossoms and green foliage. The wand has a golden ring at the top and a small golden ring at the bottom. The characters are standing in front of a white fence.

Alice Cecil

“Hold the wand like this,  
and put your hands out.”

My face flushed even more  
because our hands were touching.

Shinobu Iijima



“...Shinobu...  
Good morning.”

Tsukuyomi

“Killing ‘easily’  
is what I should avoid,  
yes?”

Gabriel

“Do not  
speak to me.”

Kuroinu





"Tell me. Do you hate me?"

A white tailcoat and white gloves. Despite his white hair, he looked to be in his late twenties. He was laughing.

"I want...to kill you."



# 01

He was top ranked among the free-to-play players of a mobile game. Despite losing his parents early on and being abused by his foster father, he studies hard and plays the game without losing faith. His younger sister is dear to him, and his motto is *“Do everything positively and diligently”* (as he’s done in abundance with the mobile game, unlike those who spend a ton of money on it). He was reincarnated within the game as a **[Summoner]**, a solo-oriented class. He’s invincible compared to the natives of that world, but loses out to the whale reincarnators. His character data was completely erased by his foster father right before his reincarnation, so he had to start again from rock bottom. But thanks to that, he’s the only one in this story with these parameters:

- ▶ Repeated the tutorial over and over
- ▶ Preapplied update
- ▶ Update dungeon

Taking advantage of its **“no death”** system, he grinds through the tutorial by repeating it over and over, almost giving up from having to experience the pain of death again and again.

But remembering that his sister will be reincarnated in this world as well, he “positively and diligently” runs through death’s door as many times as he needs to get stronger for her sake.

Though he’s seemingly invincible to the natives after finishing the tutorial, the whales are the invincible ones to him, since they’re aiming for rapid power leveling once the **update** bonus level-cap increase and the **update dungeon** are released. (Close calls against whales also occur.)

Despite being a summoner, his individual combat skills are still top class in this story.

In order to fight against the whales, he goes to look for a native comrade (apprentice) to accompany him through the update dungeon.

(Because summoners depend on their familiars for strength, they cannot level up even if they’re brought along.)

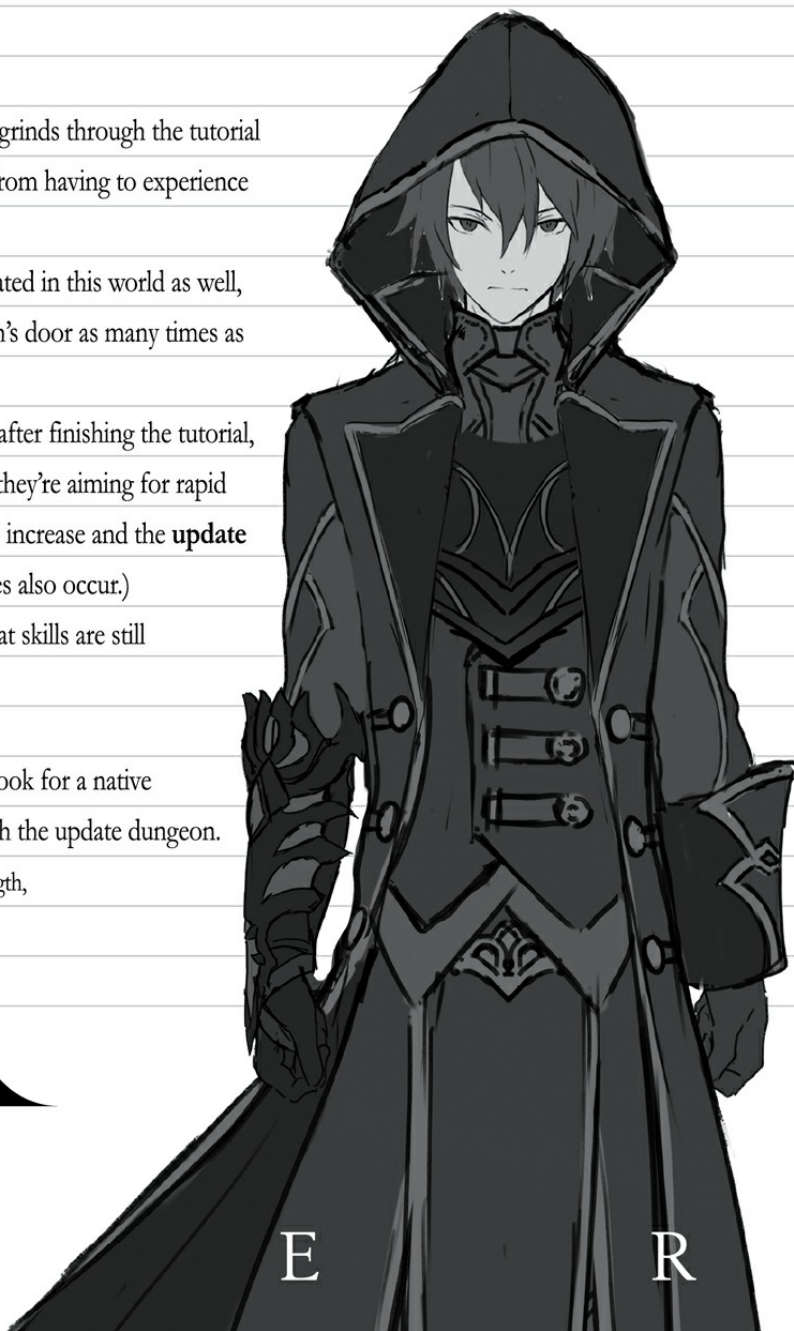
**Shinobu Iijima**

C

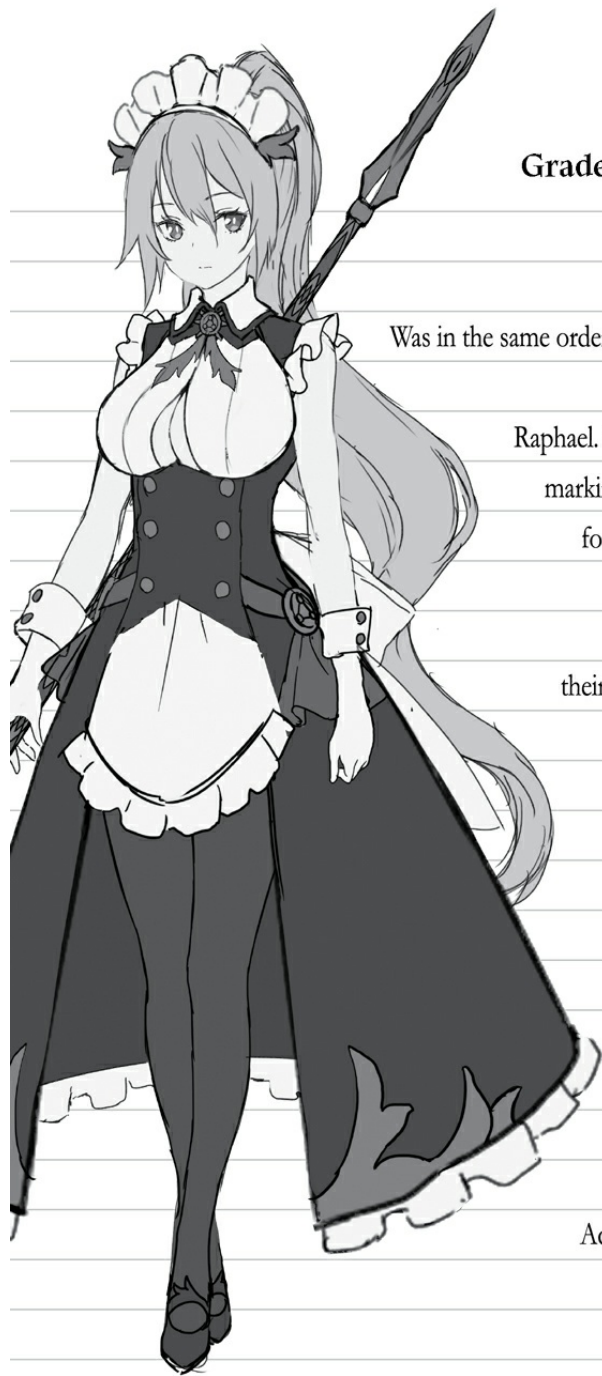
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## Grade 6 Summon

# Seraph Gabriel

The highest seraph among the nine orders of angels. Was in the same order as Lucifer before he fell. One of the three archangels of Christianity, alongside the chief of the angels, Michael, as well as God's repose, Raphael. Said to have announced the conception of Christ to his mother Mary, marking their name in the New Testament alongside Michael. Spokespeople for the will of God, these two are well-known angels within Christianity.

Angels pledge absolute faith in their absolute gods, therefore their personalities are stubborn and serious, or, better said, tactlessly frank.

They blindly, fervently believe in their god, their master. Therefore, any being that dares not devote respect to them must be censured, attacked, destroyed, and murdered posthaste. They are often too strict.

However, this one in particular is a fujoshi. Her hobbies include writing BL (boy's love) novels. Lucifer/Michael fiction is her favorite. Michael is the bottom, Lucifer is the top, and she specializes in snake torture fantasies. According to her, "Fallen angel/seraph pairings are easy to fangirl over." She is also an extreme shota connoisseur, and will get horny just from imagining older man/younger man pairings.

(Caution: Note that everything in the last paragraph is merely hidden character traits that the development team of La Vita Online included for fun; they have not been made public, and of course, Shinobu does not know about them.)

# 02

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# 03

## Tsukuyomi

The god of the moon who governs the night.

One would usually imagine a male god first, but there is no ancient record that clearly states their gender.

She was implemented into *La Vita Online* as a goddess, and her attire was designed quite removed from traditional Japanese clothing, instead with a Western twist. The devs say they went for a gothic lolita outfit to differentiate her from her older sister, the lolibaba shrine maiden Amaterasu.

Since she governs the night, she holds the highest level of divinity and power among other night-dwelling beasts.

Not only can she wield Grade 5 Dark Magic, she's also a necromancer and shikigami user, and has the ability to mass-produce meat shields.

Her summons, creations, and familiars can only go up to Grade 3, so if you encounter a party with her in it, the general theory is that you should focus all firepower on her first.

### ► Inherent Magic

#### Grade 5: Toy Box of Rotting Death

Through continuous necromancy rituals and shikigami summonings she **overruns the entire screen** with Grade 3 Dark summons.

The undead monsters she calls forth are not only good for being shields, but are also capable as arms.

It's a heinous magic that crushes her opponents to death through the violence of numbers, even if her opponents are max level. The best ways to deal with it are to either render her

powerless before she gets the chance to use it or, as a requirement, have at least one expert Exorcist (class) who can use Grade 5 large-scale Purification Magic with you.

Without a plan to counter this spell, all hope is lost the second she casts it—you're dead.

C H A R A C T E R





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## Prologue: My Foster Father's Confession

My name is Shinobu Iijima. I'm eighteen years old, and in my third year of high school, I lived in a fancy apartment building near the train station. It made my classmates suspect I was some sort of rich kid, but that couldn't have been further from the truth. My foster father was the one who just happened to be super rich.

Allow me to prove it: my sole hobby was playing a social game called *La Vita Online*, and I'd busted my way through to the endgame having barely spent any money.

I didn't get any allowance to speak of, and it had been decided that when I go off to college, I'd have to pay for it myself, without any help or scholarship recommendations. Sure, I was in no way living life on easy mode, but I always reminded myself that there were people out there who had it harder than me. I made "stay positive and work diligently" my motto, doing my best to get through high school every single day. Because of that, I got into college through recommendations and snagged a part-time job thanks to an acquaintance. In my case, at least, hard work paid off.

If I started saving now, I'd probably be able to move out with my little sister eventually.

And when it came to *La Vita Online*, I'd been persistent with doing tons of event quests, so I managed to climb my way up to top player status among those of us who were mostly free-to-play. For reference, the money I *did* spend on it, I scraped together by skipping out on lunch sometimes.

All I can really say is that at the end of the day, social games always come down to either how much money or how much time you put into it—just don't ask me how much I played it. Though, that also means I'd never really be able to compete with the people who could put both in, naturally. Even so, the fact that the game was so balanced that us free-to-play players could compete with whale players in the same ring with enough time indicated that the developers



were really competent.

Anyway, enough about that. The day my scholarship application for college went through, my foster father said some absurd things to me.

“You know how your real dad died in an accident?” he asked from the living room. He was a man in his late forties with middle-aged pudge.

“Yes, what about it?” I treaded carefully.

He shrugged at me and sighed softly. “Your mom also died young, so you two had nowhere to go. Your dad sought me out to take you two in since I was his only friend. That’s what happened, right?”

“Yes.” I was a bit exasperated. “Dad was drowning in debt, and you took us in without asking for anything in return. We’re grateful, Mr. Ayumu.”

Yeah, the truth is, we were genuinely thankful for that. Even though he *was* weirdly antagonistic and often said mean things to me.

If my dad had any money from life insurance, that would’ve become our child support funds. But there wasn’t any, so our foster father had been using his own money to raise us. I mean, he was living on a huge piece of land in the best area in the city, and he owned the entirety of it. He didn’t have to work at all, making billions of yen per year from the parts of the land he rented out. A normal person in his position wouldn’t take in their friend’s children.

“Yeah, about that. I became the recipient of your dad’s life insurance money. It was about fifty million yen, I think.”

“Uh... What?”

My head went into a frenzy as soon as his words hit my ears. The reason I’d accepted not getting any allowance was because I thought he hadn’t received anything in return for taking us in.

“If that’s the case, then isn’t it a little weird that you don’t give us allowances?”

“No, of course not. This is my revenge, you see.”

I paused, confused. “Revenge?”



“You know, your mom was actually my first love.”

“Er, wait, wait. I don’t understand what you’re getting at.”

“Just listen. I’d always loved her, ever since we were in elementary school. But she never paid attention to me. You know how bad boys tend to get popular around middle school?”

“I guess?”

“Right? But once you become an adult, you start to understand the power that money holds. I figured she’d eventually come to realize how much power I had, and that’s when I’d make her mine. So I pretended to be her goody-goody childhood friend and didn’t get too close for a while.”

That sure is, uh...an awful thought process he had there. I understood pretty damn well why mom didn’t choose him.

“What are you getting at?”

“I think I was about twenty-three years old when I heard she was going to get married. You get it, don’t you?”

“Get what, exactly?”

“Fourteen years. Fourteen freaking years I loved her. And then your father barged in out of nowhere and swiped her from under my nose!”

He slammed his fist into the table as he yelled, glaring at me intensely.

Okay, I gotta be honest. I didn’t have a single clue what this guy was going on about. Up until now, I had just thought of him as some weird rich guy. But with this, it started to dawn on me that he wasn’t just weird—he might’ve actually been insane.

“And then Shoko died twelve years after she got married?! She obviously got sick because she had to live in such poor conditions! Your dad is the one who killed her, and you know it! This wouldn’t have happened if I had been the one to give her a comfortable life!”

*This is bad.*



*He's actually insane. I have been living with a complete monster for the past four years.*

"So I vowed to get revenge. Your dad was so stubborn that he didn't have any friends, which made it easy to get close with him and claim the sole spot as his best buddy. I took control of his bank accounts, and suppressed his little construction company all the while."

"Excuse me, what?! You 'took control of' and 'suppressed' what now?!"

"Gradually, your dad started to lose clients and sank deeper and deeper. As the final nail in the coffin, I did one last thing to his bank accounts, and forced him to take out loans. And, just as I'd planned, he got pushed so far into the corner that he turned to the shady ends of the business world for money. Expensive loan sharks, that is."

"So... Wait a second..."

"Most people think he fell, but the truth is he committed suicide. He had one last request for me before he died: 'Raise my children with the insurance money.' Begged me with tears in his eyes."

A deafening silence filled the room before he continued.

"I thought he'd try to declare bankruptcy, but to think he'd turn to *suicide* for money! Gave me a good laugh, that's for sure."

"You bastard! A human being took his own life!"

"Ha ha. Your rudeness, and that expression full of despair and rage... You look just like him. Let me ask you this, Shinobu. Why do you think I kept you and your sister around?" he spewed, a sickening grin twisted on his face.

"It's because I wanted to see that exact expression, with that face that looks just like his. This is my revenge on him for stealing Shoko away from me."

"Why are you telling me this now?"

"You're about to go off to college, that's why. Don't think I didn't know you don't like me. I figured it was about time to pull back the curtain before you take your sister and leave."

"You son of a bitch."

“Oh, come on. You should be grateful.”

“Grateful? For what? What on earth is there to be grateful for in *anything* you just said?!”

“Megumi... Your sister... It’s like I’m seeing Shoko all over again. When she had her birthday last month, I had plans to finally get my hands on her, now that she’s sixteen.”

“You bastard!” I spat, barely containing myself from flat out punching him.

“In the end, I decided not to. I don’t know why, but she just won’t open up to me. Wouldn’t want the police on my case either.”

“Of course you wouldn’t, you idiot!”

“It’s too bad, honestly. Why do sexual assault laws exist, anyway?”

*That’s just...awful.*

I couldn’t bring myself to believe that scum like this actually existed out in the world.

“Ah, right. I got you a gift to celebrate your getting into college. You know that game you play on your phone all the time? Well, I deleted all your character data on it.”

“Huh?”

“That’s another part of my revenge. You’ve built up all that data since you started high school, right?”

“...”

“Do you know who ‘Step’ is? They’re fifth in the player rankings right now.”

“Step?”

He lifted up three fingers. “Thirty minutes a day. You got yourself to ninety-third in the rankings by playing diligently every single day. And I obliterated all that hard work just by paying a bunch of money! This is the difference between me and you... Me and your father.”

*Step... A step... His name is Ayumu, which means “step,” so... Is he trying to tell me that’s him? He’s got that smirk on his face that’s telling me he thinks he’s*



won, so...

I was already halfway done with his childish behavior, but beyond that and the anger... The only thing I could feel was fear.

"I have a present for Megumi too."

"A present?"

"Remember how I bought a cat for her when you guys moved in?"

"Yes, Mocha. Megumi loves it."

"I took it out with the trash the other day."

"What?" I said after a pause.

"I put sleep meds into its food and then threw it in the garbage bag when it collapsed."

"W-Wait... I don't understand."

"I don't need precious little animals who won't love me, whether that be cats or women."

I was going to punch him, but I knew that I shouldn't. First and foremost, I shouldn't continue being involved with this thing at all. *Just look at him, he's been smiling this whole time. He's...*

*A complete psychopath.*

I could never understand the feelings of crazy murderers who kill for fun. And this guy's mind worked exactly like theirs. Even if I punched him right then, I didn't know how he'd make me pay for it. What made everything worse was that he hadn't crossed any actual legal lines yet.

*For now, let's just think of what I can do. I can escape with my sister without attacking this psycho, and then never contact him again. What should I do to make that happen?*

Just as I was thinking that...

*Boom!*

The ground began to shake.

The next thing I knew, my body was thrown by a huge impact, pinning my back to the window.

After that came the sound of an explosion.

The door blew open and flames entered the living room.

“The house is on fire?!”

As if to answer my question, the hallway became engulfed in flames, catching fire to the furniture in the living room.

I saw a figure spinning wildly as fire danced up its form right in front of my eyes.

“Ah! Argh! Ahhhhhh! Help! Help me! Heeeeelp!”

I pretended not to hear the flaming son of a bitch.

I’d probably gotten lucky. I didn’t know what had caused the explosion, but I was able to avoid the incoming flames thanks to whatever pushed me back.

At any rate, the least I knew was that this was no time to be saving some old man on fire. That’s right, what I needed to be doing was— “Megumi!”

I sprinted to my sister’s room, screaming at the top of my lungs. My leg kicked the door open, letting me stumble inside.

“Shinobu?! What’s happening?! I think something blew up!”

“The house is on fire! We need to run—”

Another explosion cut me off, and smoke started to fill the room. I hastily took note of the hallway, which was now a sea of flames.

*This... This is so bad!*

I was pretty sure the most common cause of death during house fires was



inhaling smoke. Apparently it wasn't unusual for one to pass out after just a few breaths too.

*If that's the case, then...*

Grabbing Megumi's desk chair with both hands, I roared out with my entire body.

"Raaaaaauuuuuugh!"

I hurled the chair at the window with every bit of strength I could muster, the glass shattering with a clean crack.

I grabbed Megumi by the hand. "The hallway's covered in flames! We have to jump!"

"Jump?! But we're on the twelfth floor!"

"The roof of the parking garage is right beneath us. It won't be much, but it should be enough to cushion the fall!"

"But Shinobu—"

"I'll take the brunt of it! We're dead for sure if we stay in here; we don't have a choice but to jump!"

"Wait—"

Without giving her time to respond, I bundled her in my arms...and jumped out of the window.

The scenery rose and fell with us. Leaving our bodies to gravity, we sped farther downward. It was like being on a roller coaster with the safety bar breaking off halfway through.

*Ah, I'm going to die, aren't I...?* It couldn't have been any clearer.

If I was going to die anyway, I really should've punched that bastard while I had the chance.

His ugly mug pervaded the back of my mind. *This isn't the time to be thinking about him.*

*Please, at least let Megumi live...* As I clutched her thin frame to me, I felt an impact and extreme pain crashed into my back.

A robotic voice chimed in my ears.

—Congratulations on completing the Ranker Convening Event.

—This national event transports all players who died during the convening to another world, regardless of whether or not they were in the rankings.

—Your rewards for completing the event are as follows:

—Your stats within the game will be carried over.

—Nonpaid items will be carried over.

—Paid items will be carried over.

—Acquired magic will be carried over.

—Acquired skills will be carried over.

—Starting now, your character's data, which was ninety-third in the overall rankings, registered under the handle "Shinobu," will now overwrite your real life... A? RbT4O? Csv3RM1b-?

—Data loading. Player number 209738... Data not found.

—Data reloading... Player number 209738... Data not found.

—Data re-reloading... Player number 209738... Data not found.

—Data re-re-reloading... Player number 209738... Remaining paid data recovered. Summoner Class Skills recovered and rebuilt.

—Full recovery of data is not possible. Irregularity detected.

—Following game terms of service. Reregistering player. Beginning tutorial... QWEEWQSDFSDFSDF? AAA? ASDASDW%CCXW.

—This transport system is used for accounts already registered in the database; therefore the in-game tutorial cannot be applied.

—Tutorial-rial-rialrialrialrial.

—Tutorial FDSSDFASD ;? MNLKJLK#JFD?, case undefined within transport system LKJLKJPOOPWXCCXW? FDSFDSLK ;? ;? ###.

—IGW37/OJ.//RTTGUYBDsU.

—E4NN;E? s6YYxp? 8rSIEH?

—IO? MWJ=t6\5RipEL.

—Loading demo version of tutorial data... Completed.



You will now begin the tutorial.

# Chapter 1: Tutorial

A huge plain, as far as the eye could see. Small clouds dotted the sky.

“What? Where am I?”

If I recall correctly, I jumped out of the window in my apartment, and became ground fodder for Megumi.

*Why am I seeing a big field upon waking up? Not to mention, the weird dragon-wyvern creatures flying throughout the sky.*

“Wait... Dragons? Wyverns?”

That’s when a thing that looked like a dialogue box floated up in front of me, making a whirring sound. This was written on it:

Welcome to the world of *La Vita Online*!

Now, let’s begin the tutorial.

I stared at the box in silence. The gears in my brain weren’t keeping up with the situation at hand.

*No. No, no, no. No.*

*Wait. Wait! Just hang on for a sec.*

I mean, I got it. Yeah, like... It’s not like I wouldn’t get it. This was the exact situation that had been trending in a certain subculture I was well-versed in. I’d even heard something that sounded like the “voice of God” before I’d passed out.

*But there’s no way. It can’t be... Don’t tell me this is real?*

*First, take a deep breath. Let’s just calm down for now.*

I pinched my cheeks with considerable strength. The pain was too real to deny.



I plucked a flower blooming near me and smelled it. *Yeah, that sure smells like a flower*, I thought. Which meant it was a *real* flower, not a fake.

I flailed my arms and legs around as I jumped up and down. No issues there.

“Thirteen times ten is one hundred and thirty. Eleven times thirteen is... One hundred and forty-three? I think?”

*Looks like I can still do math. Now let's check my memory...*

*My name is Shinobu Iijima. My parents are deceased, and my kindergarten was Himawari Kindergarten. I went to Miyako Municipal for elementary school, and my middle school had the same name. Then I moved on to Otenzaka High School, a public school.*

*Okay, it seems like my memories are intact.* With this realization, the chances of this being a dream or illusion, or me being taken to a hospital and then put into an intoxicated state by anesthetics, were pretty much gone.

“You have got to be kidding me... Did I get reincarnated into another world, like the famous trope?”

No, this wouldn't be another-world reincarnation. I was transported into a game. It was different. Although, I did die, so more specifically, I'd been reincarnated into a game.

Judging by the voice of God I'd heard before I died, something sent me here intentionally, and there seemed to be a lot of other people who were transported into this game as well.

*Then... What happened to Megumi?* Looking around, I didn't see her, nor anyone else for that matter.

*Actually, wait. There's a chance she didn't even die. There's no point in speculating when I don't know anything to begin with.*

“I've got a lot of questions, but the first thing I'm wondering is what exactly the goal was for reincarnating so many people into this game?” Upon whispering that, the voice of God resounded in my head once again.

—*La Vita Online* is a game in which you can live freely in a new world. You can become a blacksmith, an adventurer, or even a king. Please enjoy your second life in this land to the fullest.

“I got that part. But why did you send us here in the first place?”

—*La Vita Online* is a game in which you can live freely in a new world. You can become a blacksmith, an adventurer, or even a king. Please enjoy your second life in this land to the fullest.

“Just gonna say the same thing over and over, huh?”

The voice chimed in my head yet again.

—Your player name has not been set yet. It will be officially registered once the tutorial ends, so please set it before then.

—If you do not set one by the end of the tutorial, your data will be deemed foreign and subsequently deleted. In other words, you will die.

—Incidentally, after you have been officially registered within the game, dying will result in your data being deleted as a penalty.

“My data will be deleted? And I’ll *die*?”

*This has to be a joke.*

—Let’s begin the tutorial. Follow the path along the plain that leads north.

“You can’t just throw me into it like that...”

It just told me that if I died in game, I’d die for real. I’d like to avoid that at all costs, especially considering this was a world where monsters were constantly lurking around.

After finding no imminent danger upon scanning the area, I put my hand to my heart and let out a sigh of relief.

I looked down at my body. *There’s no mirror around here so I can’t see everything, but I’m wearing light armor, typical of an adventurer. As for a weapon, I have a short sword on my back.*

That’s when it hit me. *Show menu window*, I thought.

Sure enough, a rectangular, translucent board appeared in front of my eyes with the same whirring sound. I'd say it looked roughly forty centimeters on all sides.

"There it is... Yeah, I've definitely been reincarnated. Show my stats."

Name: N/A Race: *Human* Class: Summoner / Level: 1

HP: 225/225 MP: 350350

Power: 5 *Strength*: 5 Speed: 10 / Magic: 15

Acquired Magic: Grade 1 (Magic Class Initial Bonus)

Seeing these stats, I knew my account really had been reset after all. Which meant that everyone else probably had their stats carry over too. If only that bastard hadn't erased all my data.

"I guess I'll just go ahead and clear the tutorial, then. Nothing I can do about this." I heaved another deep sigh. *Where should I go from here?*

I knew I had to follow the directions and progress through the tutorial, but it was all so much to take in that my head was spinning.

*Let's take a break and get everything in order.* I sat down on a conveniently placed boulder.

*Well... Thinking rationally, the highest possibility is that this is a dream.*

I gazed absently at the scenery before me as I thought that. That's when the whirring noise brought a skeleton in front of me.

"An Undead Knight?"

Just as its name implied, an Undead Knight was a skeleton that wore beat-up armor and wielded a spear.

A text box appeared over its head.

Undead Knight / Recommended Level: 7

*...It's written in red.* If this was just like the game, that meant that I wasn't



able to take this thing on yet.

Which meant I should turn tail and run. *But why would an Undead Knight show up here?*

“Ah, wait. The answer’s obvious. This is what I get for trying to rest.”

A voice resounded in my ears.

—You are being penalized for not following instructions. A monster has been sent after you. You have encountered an enemy.

*That’s right... Your character’s initial setting is that they’re “a new adventurer who wandered into some ruins.” They release the seal on some dangerous item and get chased by an undead monster... Or at least, I think that’s how it went. I’m pretty sure the tutorial begins while you’re running to the north from the ruins in the south. And if you stray from the path, an Undead Knight is sent after you.*

As the thoughts crossed my mind, the Undead Knight lunged at me with its spear aimed in my direction.

*H-Hang on! This is way too much right off the bat! Guess I don’t have a choice—I’ll try to counterattack for now! I don’t know how to use magic, but I’ll just try saying it out loud!*

“Grade 1 Fire Magic: Fireball!”

*Oh hey, something hot flared up in my heart, flowed into my hand, then shot out like a flame!*

*Undead monsters are weak to fire magic. They should stagger right after they’re hit... Nice, it’s stiffening up because of the fire! This is my chance!*

I pulled the short sword off my back.

*Thwack!*

The sword collided with the staggered Undead Knight, just as I’d planned. It

hit its right elbow, causing its forearm to fall to the ground with a thunk.

*All right, I did some damage!*

*Stagger it with magic, then strike it with my blade. The typical solo techniques for magic users seem to work here too. Plus, Undead Knights can have their limbs torn off, so this thing should be a lot weaker now. Really lucky that this battle went exactly as it should have in the game.*

*La Vita Online* was very action-oriented. Even if you were underleveled, your battle techniques and ability to target an enemy's weak points could turn the tide in your favor.

"I'm gonna keep at it!" I shot Grade 1 Fire Magic and then followed it up with another blade strike. The Undead Knight's left arm was sliced off; then I gave it a good kick to the knees. Its joints broke with a crack. I jumped back after it fell to the ground.

"Did I manage to win my first fight...?"

The fallen Undead Knight attempted to stand, but all that resulted in was the clicking of its bones to no avail, since I'd destroyed all of its arms and legs.

But right as I let out a sigh of relief, an extreme pain struck my neck, and I was hoisted into the air.

"An Undead Rock Bird?!"

Looking up, I could see the shape of a gigantic bird. *Oh, right. Undead Knights and these birds come in a set.*

Its feet had grabbed hold of the scruff of my neck, and it was letting me dangle as it steadily raised its altitude.

Then it dropped me to the earth.

I would say I fell roughly twelve meters. On the intense impact, I felt like every part of my body was being stabbed.

“Ow...” My lungs let out a hoarse noise. Sure enough, my right hand was twisted in a direction it shouldn’t have been.

*This pain...*

*This isn’t a dream...*

*It’s real.*

“How much HP...do I have left...?”

When I opened up my status screen, all of the words were red, meaning *danger*.

Name: N/A Race: *Human* Class: Summoner / Level: 1

HP: 1/225 MP: 340350

Power: 5 *Strength*: 5 Speed: 10 / Magic: 15

Acquired Magic: Grade 1 (Magic Class Bonus)

The number 1 shined next to my HP.

*This is the same way I died in Japan too.*

*There’s nothing funny about this.*

As the number dropped from 1 to 0, my consciousness melted into the darkness.

†

A huge plain, as far as the eye could see. Small clouds dotted the sky.

Upon opening my eyes, a dialogue box floated in front of me. This was written on it:

Welcome to the world of *La Vita Online*!

Now, let’s begin the tutorial.

Yep. That sure was written on it.

“What in the world is going on?” I whispered as I tilted my head.

*Oh... I remember now.* If you died during the tutorial, you didn't get penalized for it. So I was revived back to the starting point with my stats intact.

"So... This really is the world of *La Vita Online*?"

But this wasn't a game. If nothing else, that pain I'd just gone through was real.

It really, *really* hurt when I died. Which meant...

I clicked my tongue. "That bastard..."

In the world of *La Vita Online*, once you reached level 50, you stopped being a human and became a Transcendent. So I should've been able to turn that Undead Knight and Undead Rock Bird to dust with one finger, with how high my stats were.

Before my account was deleted, I'd hit the level cap—99.

That's right. I worked diligently, every single day, and finally reached level 99.

In the game's story, it's said that I would've had the entire army of a small kingdom in the palm of my hand, and could have redrawn an entire map with my Destruction Magic. I was supposed to be the outlier of all outliers.

"Show me my stats."

Name: N/A Race: *Human* Class: Summoner / Level: 1

HP: 225/225 MP: 350350

Power: 5 Strength: 5 Speed: 10 / Magic: 15

Acquired Magic: Grade 1 (Magic Class Bonus)

As you can see, I was back at level 1. This was what I'd been reduced to because of that bastard's childish tricks.

In the story, a proper adventurer would be around level 10. Knights and civilian warriors were around that level. Once you reached level 30, you'd be considered a master swordsman, or famous enough to have bounties put on



you.

To put it bluntly, at that moment I was, for sure, the smallest fry of all small fries.

The voice played in my head.

—Your player name has not been set yet. It will be officially registered once the tutorial ends, so please set it before then.

—If you do not set one by the end of the tutorial, your data will be deemed foreign and subsequently deleted. In other words, you will die.

—Let's begin the tutorial. Follow the path along the plain that leads north.

“I'm just going to have to hurry on before another Undead Knight shows up.”

Despite being level 1, my situation wasn't all bad. I had knowledge of *La Vita Online*, so that would probably come in handy, at least a little.

*Although, I can actually die once the tutorial ends. That's the worst part.*

†

I followed the tutorial instructions as I was ordered, walking along the straight path through the plain that led north, into a mountain range.

If I'd been playing the game with my phone, I could've traversed that length with the click of a button. But actually being *in* this world, I had to physically walk the whole way.

It took about two hours. I even encountered monsters along the way.

Slime x3 / Recommended Level: 0

Goblin x7 / Recommended Level: 1

That's mostly the order they came at me in. Naturally, they didn't pose much of a threat since I already knew the basics of combat. Didn't help that I beat them in order of the Recommended Levels either. Though, to be fair, putting my knowledge of the game to practical use was certainly hard. But my basic tactics of striking at their weak points with magic first, then slicing them with

my blade seemed to be working as it did before, so all was well that ended well.

After I defeated the first goblin, I heard a voice in my head.

—You leveled up!

—A Recovery Orb will be sent via Present Box.

Recovery Orbs were bonuses you received from leveling up—typical stamina-recovery items found in mobile games. “Stamina” referred to how much movement you’d need for action sequences, such as fighting an enemy. The number would recover after a couple of hours, etc., etc.

In this world, however, there was no indication of how much stamina I had. Probably a technical change, because I’d been reincarnated here. Even so, the Recovery Orb would most likely still recover all of my HP and MP, as per its secondary effect.

Hm? Are you asking me why I said “most likely”?

Because I wasn’t going to test out a super rare full recovery item when I wasn’t in danger, duh. I couldn’t even die during the tutorial, so if I was going to use it at all, it would be after completing it.

Anyway, I proceeded to the final battle of the tutorial after crossing the mountains.

“The last boss isn’t the leader of the Goblins? It’s an orc?”

The end of the tutorial. I remembered it well—the difficulty spiked, and it threw a goblin leader at you. Every beginner had to go through it.

*Thinking back on it, when I was reincarnated, the voice said it was loading the demo version of the tutorial... Right? It seemed like it was bugging out, so does that mean it used the data from the beta version (the public testing version before the game went live)?*

I’d heard that the bosses in the beta weren’t too hard. “I was ready for a goblin leader, but...”

Orcs weren’t exactly noob-killers. The Recommended Level was only 2 too, so

it would've been pretty ridiculous if I couldn't beat this one considering all of my expert knowledge of the battle system.

Sure enough, I easily took down the orc by following up my magic with my short sword.

—You leveled up!

—A Recovery Orb will be sent via Present Box.

Name: N/A Race: *Human* Class: Summoner / Level: 1 → 3

HP: 225/225 → 265/265 MP: 350/350 → 440/440

Power: 5 → 7 Strength: 5 → 7 Speed: 10 → 14 / Magic: 15 → 21

Acquired Magic: Grade 1 (Magic Class Bonus)

*Nice, now I'm level 3. Though that's still low enough to where it's obvious that I'm a brand-new adventurer, typically called a "little chick that could die any second now" in-game.*

"All right, it's about time I end the tutorial."

I began searching through a dilapidated mountain hut. On a table in the attic, I found a crystal ball that gave off a faint glow.

—Please retrieve the Transport Orb. Once you do, the tutorial will end. Great job!

*Er, hold on.* I was pretty sure that once you finished the tutorial, you got sent to a random area with low-level mobs. After that, just as promised, there were "as many lives to live as the number of players." You could become a blacksmith, an adventurer, or even work your way up to becoming a king. You would start your new second life in this land and enjoy it to the fullest.

The usual play style would be to register with an adventurer's guild and level up the normal way. But there was no such thing as a player who'd never seen the words "You Are Dead" when playing this game before.

So, as you'd expect, I wasn't the least bit confident that I could live as an

adventurer without dying.

*What should I do...?*

*Thankfully, magic users can craft spells. I should be able to live somewhat comfortably if I register with a laborer's guild.*

I always ended up thinking of the “buts,” though.

Truthfully, there existed a way for me to level up without dying. I realized what it was when I got a taste of death that first time from the Undead Knight.

I won't beat around the bush—you can't die during the tutorial.

It was a well-known way to play the game among a certain subset of players. There was a walk-through video titled something like, “Doing a Zombie Attack during the Tutorial! Trying to Get to Level 99 by Killing Undead Troops and Dying Over and Over Again!”

Undead monsters were the only enemies that appeared during the tutorial, so the cost-return for EXP was supremely bad. Most people would prefer farming *after* the tutorial, but there was a reason as to why that certain subset of players existed.

If I recalled correctly, it had taken the uploader of that video three hundred hours to pull it off. Once you started the main story after the tutorial, you could get to the level cap in less than half that time. Plus you could buy from shops, get item drops, and do a whole bunch of other stuff. Really, the only people who would do a “Zombie Attack” were those with a *ton* of free time.

“But what about me?” I pulled my sword out and lightly sliced my fingertip with it. “It hurts... Grade 1 Recovery Magic: Heal.”

The pain started to dull as I watched the wound close up. I cut my finger again, then healed it.

It genuinely hurt the same as when I was in Japan. Even though I could now mend wounds in an instant, pain was still pain at the end of the day.

“If I died over and over... Wouldn't that mean...?”



Once in Japan.

Once here.

I've died twice now. You'd be asking way too much of me if you wanted me to do that multiple times.

I'd never been tortured, but I was certain no one from any planet would willingly do that to themselves.

Besides, I was a summoner. Though I could use Attack Magic and Recovery Magic, my skills didn't even come close to those who specialized in them.

For summons, I had to form contracts with my familiars, and then I would need certain events to happen or to pay for in-game skills. I couldn't do any of that during the tutorial.

Though, if we got technical about it, the voice of God had said that my paid data was recovered when I got reincarnated, so I still had some of my contracts. It would be possible for me to summon them once I got my level up and fulfilled the usage requirements. Possible, but not likely, since all of my summons' conditions were currently *"Dead."*

To revive a summon, your only option was to go to a specific facility and use in-game currency. That facility existed in several different locations, but you couldn't access them during the tutorial.

All in all, if I was going to get my level up at this point, I'd be doing it with a severe handicap. *As if this game's battle system isn't torturous enough... But it's not like I have a choice.*

"Ah, well. My best option is probably just to live as a civilian."

I extended my hand toward the Transport Orb, when Megumi's face crossed the back of my mind.

*There's no point in thinking about things I don't know for sure. She might've even been saved.*

Those thoughts had been moving me forward, but in reality, what was true?

"The other players... Can I learn about the other players?"

In response to my question, a menu window appeared in front of me. A section titled “Friends List” was glowing, so it probably wanted me to look there.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me...”

I hadn’t added anyone as a Friend, but three hundred or so player names were listed there.

Name: Ronaldo (Real Name: Ryu Nishijima)

Current Location: The Holy Empire of La Vita

Status: Alive

Log-in Status: Logged In

“Not this one.”

Name: Director Itachi (Real Name: Ichiro Sakagami)

Current Location: The Lilic Empire

Status: Alive

Log-in Status: Logged In

“Not this one either.” The roster continued on, but partway through I noticed a name written in red.

Name: Mr. Taka (Real Name: Takashi Saito)

Current Location: Lost

Status: Death by Monster

Log-in Status: Logged In

*Death...*

I gazed at the name for some time. It didn’t show any signs of revival.

Players were supposed to revive back at a hub town after a period of time,

but the name stayed red no matter how long I waited for it to change.

*Well, I know what that means.*

Just as I thought “Oh shit” to myself, I let out a yell without realizing. Why? Because a few names turned red, one after another, right in front of my eyes.

One, two, three, four... It continued for about fifteen minutes. I stared dumbfounded at the roster. Once thirty-four names had turned red, it finally stopped.

“What happened? How did so many people die in just fifteen minutes?”

If the list was anything to go by, then there were around three hundred reincarnators here. Thirty-four of them died within fifteen minutes. That meant around a tenth of them were dead.

The worst part? Most of them had *this* written beneath their names:

Status: Death by Player Kill

That could only mean that the reincarnators were killing each other.

Chills and sweat flowed down my back.

*This is so bad! If Megumi ends up here during this situation...*

That’s when my eyes landed on the worst possible name.

Name: Step (Real Name: Ayumu Imabayashi)

Current Location: The Holy Empire of La Vita

Status: Alive

Log-in Status: Logged In

“That bastard... He’s logged in too!”

Of course he was, and that made things even worse.

*Uh... Wait a second. Didn't he say he paid a ton of money to become a high-ranking player? And doesn't all this mean that the world outside of the tutorial is a lawless one, where players can kill each other as they please?*

*What if...Megumi encounters that man here?*

*"It's like I'm seeing Shoko all over again."*

*"Why do sexual assault laws exist, anyway?"*

The feelings of hatred and vomit crawling up upon remembering his words was unbearable.

He'd do it, without a doubt. He'd force himself onto Megumi no matter what it took.

*This is terrible. This is absolutely terrible.*

*But wait. There isn't any guarantee that Megumi is here yet. In order to be reincarnated, she'd have to have died in Japan first. If she's still alive after that fire, she won't be here.*

I flipped through the Friends List as if I was praying.

*"Oh, thank god."*

My eyes were as wide as dinner plates while scrolling, but Megumi's name wasn't on the list. I let out a huge sigh of relief as I felt the tension leave my body.

That's when I realized, tilting my head in confusion. "Wait a second, I don't think my name was on there either."

I had a bad feeling about that. "Is there a list of unregistered accounts?" I whispered.

The menu screen changed, and two names appeared:

Name: N/A (Real Name: Shinobu Iijima)

Current Location: In Tutorial

Status: Alive

Log-in Status: Logged In



Name: N/A (Real Name: Megumi Iijima)

Current Location: Daikokuji Hospital, Tokyo Metropolitan Area

Status: Vegetative

Log-in Status: Logged Out

Expected Log-in Time: In 252 Hours, 56 Minutes Japan Time

*Japan time? Does that mean time flows differently here?*

*No, forget that for now... Things are worse than I thought!*

*“So Megumi was put into a vegetative state after the fall?”*

*They even put a countdown to her death on there, those polite bastards.*

*Ugh, I can’t believe this! That bastard... What would that fucking psychopath do if laws didn’t exist? I already know the answer to that.*

*He’d get his hands on Megumi, that’s for sure.*

*And what about me? What should I do? That’s obvious too.*

*I’ll go to the ends of the earth searching for Megumi and protect her from him.*

*But he’s definitely hit the level cap, and probably has a boatload of paid equipment too.*

*Can I really protect Megumi from a player like that?*

*There’s no way. It’s impossible. I’m just some shitty level 3 small fry...*

*So what should I do?*

*“I don’t even have to ask!” I clenched my fist as I shouted out.*

*“Hey, you! I don’t know if you’re God or what, but listen up. I’m going to register my player name now.”*

—Player name registration request accepted. Please choose carefully, as you will not be able to change it afterward.

“Shinobu. Shinobu Iijima. Since our real names are on the Friends List anyway, there’s no point in hiding it or running away. I’m going to protect Megumi from that fucker!”

—Player name registration complete. Please obtain the Transport Orb and end the tutorial.

“I’m not going to take the orb.”

—You are being penalized for not following the instructions. A monster has been sent after you. You have encountered an enemy.

Just like in the game. I’d known that if I didn’t take the orb, this would happen.

“Let’s do this, Undead Knight.”

The Undead Knight that appeared in front of me made the first move, stabbing its spear at me without a word. I didn’t get a chance to stagger it with Fire Magic, and I couldn’t recover fast enough because of the level difference.

“My time limit is 240 hours. I’m gonna work diligently... And you’re gonna help me level up!”



Its spear stabbed through my chest, and an immense agony followed.

I experienced my second death in this world.

†

The battlefield was crawling with the undead, their rotted flesh filling it up with a burning scent. I brandished yet another blow, not knowing how many it had been.

“Living Elder Armor. After you’re knocked back by a physical attack, you always—”

It tried to uppercut me from below. Evading it with a sidestep, I counterattacked with Grade 4 Holy Magic. There wasn’t any time to check if the undead had been purified, and I swung my sword without looking back.

“And these Wights always come in a set with you. In which case, you won’t come at me with magic. You’ll come at me from behind with your scythe!”

Unfazed by the screams of death from the Wights, four Bone Demons tried to strike at me from the sky. I knew they would, so I sent Wind Magic from my palm above my head.

“You monster hordes... I’ve fought you guys twenty times on my eleven go-arounds. You know I have your attack patterns memorized by now.”

These were all high-level monsters. Their Recommended Levels:

Living Elder Armor: 85

Wight: 80

Bone Demon: 77

Every number was written in red, which meant they were stronger than me. However, one of my strong points was being able to repeat the same attacks and defenses in the same situation multiple times. I knew the enemies were going to make the same moves in response every single time.

*I die, bear with the extreme pain, learn from it, and revive.*

*Die, bear the pain, learn, revive.*

*And then...*

*Die, bear the pain, learn, and revive.*

Repeating that process again and again, my level rose as I began to recognize each enemy's movement patterns.

After defeating the horde of undead, I'd cross over their corpses and move on to even stronger enemies. Then I'd get stronger, wrestle them down, and move on, and on, and on.

That was all I could do.

At first, after that Undead Knight killed me at the mountain hut, I only went after the tutorial monsters for a while. Once I hit the expected level of 7, it felt harder to level up, so I changed my approach.

In other words, rather than going north on that road in the field toward the mountain hut, I went south instead. An Undead Knight and a Bone Rock Bird would be sent after me as a penalty, but once I hit level 15, they weren't really worth the EXP anymore.

In the story, these monsters were said to be chasing you from the ruins to the south. Naturally, the closer you got to the ruins, the stronger your foes became. That's what the uploader of "Doing a Zombie Attack during the Tutorial! Trying to Get to Level 99 by Killing Undead Troops and Dying Over and Over Again!" did too.

"All right. On to the next horde." After defeating the pack of Living Elder Armors, I walked farther south.

Once a building I assumed was the ruins came into view, a mass of undead suddenly showed up in front of me.

"What a sight."

Jammed into my peripheral vision, about four hundred Undead Knights had spawned around me. Crossing the sky were another four hundred Bone Rock

Birds.

“Unlucky for you all, I’m good against numbers. Grade 4 Fire Magic: Mini Nuke!”

In this game, mages—or rather, humans in general—who reached level 50 were referred to as “weapons of war.” In other words, they were so strong that they could upheave a local skirmish by themselves.

Magic classes were able to use Grade 4 magic spells at level 50. The spell I just used had a range of five hundred meters with me at the center, and could incinerate all normal soldiers within radius in one hit.

“Annihilation complete.” No matter how many of those Undead Knights bundled up together, they were no match for me anymore. The higher your level, the stronger you were. It was common sense for RPGs.

The voice of God spoke into my ears.

—You leveled up!

“I didn’t think Undead Knights were worth the EXP, but with how many there were, they were sure to provide me with at least a little.”

*Okay, on to the next batch,* I thought.

I ended up at the entrance to the ruins after continuing my journey southward, allowing me to encounter the final group of monsters.

You were supposed to come to these ruins at the end of the game, so I couldn’t go any farther than this. So long as I was still in the tutorial, this same group of monsters would spawn endlessly.

I turned to face the boss of the group—the No Life King.

Unlike the Wights, who wore worn-out robes, this guy donned brand-new, fancy robes and wielded a staff.

And its strength? The Recommended Level was 95.

Its followers were The Troops from Hell, which I’d fought before. There were twelve of them, each with a Recommended Level of 85.



“This’ll be my fourth try. This time for sure...”

As soon as the curtains rose, the No Life King faced me and let out its Grade 5 magic, Death Sentence, a black laser beam that was said to be so strong that it could even damage the impregnable World Tree. In the game’s story, if it unleashed this move with its Troops around, it would melt and split them like Moses did the sea, and then they’d explode.

“Saw it coming!” I barely evaded the laser, then managed to dodge the second one that came right after.

What followed the lasers was always—

*Upper Grade 5: Rose of Hades.*

—An explosion of flames as black as the night, the load of magic that burst right before it landed was in the shape of a rose, giving it its name.

“Grade 4: Magic Guard of the Four Holy Beasts!”

The explosion was an area-of-effect attack, so this was my only chance of defending against it.

“Ugh...!” Even with my Guard, over half my HP was taken out. Taking the hit head-on wasn’t a good idea after all.

Having used three high-grade spells one after the other, the No Life King stopped moving briefly, which gave me the chance to lunge at it with a war cry.

*Okay, everything’s according to plan thus far. Same as last time.*

*I’m aiming for the No Life King’s throat. Only one thing to worry about!*

The No Life King had a skill that buffed all of its undead underlings’ stats by a multiple of five. Which meant I had to get rid of it at all costs.

The one spell I had that would work against it was—

“Grade 4 Holy Purification Magic: Seraphim Call!”

A magic spell that released a vast amount of Holy Magic power at the undead came straight from my hand. It was the most effective spell against them in

Grade 4, but it was pretty unhandy to use because you needed to specifically aim it at the target.

Once you landed the hit, however, the effect was monstrous.

I tried to grab the No Life King's head with my right hand, but I ended up grasping at the air.

"It must've used the higher-level undead's special skill Shadow Play to hide. Where did it go?" I let my shoulders flop along with a sigh.

"I mean, I know the answer. In my shadow, right?"

I could feel the No Life King behind me. From the flow of magic, I could tell that Death Sentence was about to come. I shook my head and gave up.

"This is my only chance. There's a bit of time before your attack goes off. That's when I'm gonna shove Purification Magic right into you."

I unleashed every bit of magic I had in me.

"Grade 3: Suicide."

The greatest spell that a magic user could learn at Grade 3. It used up all of one's HP and MP, or rather, their life force, and exchanged it for a huge explosion that consumed everything.

It was exactly what it said it was. A suicide.

With a blinding light, the explosion burst with me at its core.

—You leveled up!

Last time I only managed to catch two of the Troops from Hell in it, but this time I got four.

In the light of the blast, as my vision darkened, I could only think about one thing. "It really, *really* hurts!"

My organs had swelled like balloons with the magic and then were ripped to

shreds with the burst. No matter how many times I did it, I never got used to it.

My consciousness melted into the darkness.

Name: Shinobu Iijima *Race: Human* Class: Summoner / Level: 72

HP: 1,645/1,645 MP: 3,200/3,200

Power: 76 *Strength: 76* Speed: 152 / Magic: 208

Acquired Magic:

Grade 1 (Magic Class Bonus)

Grade 2 (Level 10 Bonus)

Grade 3 (Level 30 Bonus)

Grade 4 (Level 50 Bonus)

Fixed Class Skills:

Eye of Judgment (Level 10 Bonus)

King of a Thousand Demons (Level 50 Bonus)

Name: N/A (Real Name: Megumi Iijima)

Current Location: Daikokuji Hospital, Tokyo Metropolitan Area

Status: Vegetative

Log-in Status: Logged Out

Expected Log-in Time: In 36 Hours, 20 Minutes Japan Time

†

And with that, I was finally able to defeat the No Life King on my nineteenth try. After that, they spawned endlessly, so I kept going until my MP ran out and they killed me.

I spent the better part of two hours doing that, then went back to the mountain hut with the Transport Orb.

“I’m on a time limit, so it’s about time I end the tutorial.”

Undead monsters didn’t provide much EXP, and nothing stronger than the No Life King spawned, so it’d be hard to level up much more than this.

Besides, I needed to get a grasp on what the world of *La Vita* outside of the

tutorial was like before Megumi arrived. I'd made it to level 77, so for now I wouldn't need to be afraid of most of the monsters and humans there. It was said that people are no longer human at level 50, so apart from those otherworlders, I was most likely one of the strongest out there.

Despite that, it would still be a disaster if I encountered another reincarnator.

I might not have been a shitty small fry like I used to be, but compared to those at the level cap... Let's just say they wouldn't need to do much to take care of me. But at least I wouldn't be murdered immediately, and I might even be able to get away if I were attacked.

My circumstances were a little special, though. I was a summoner, but up until this point I hadn't used a single summon. The voice of God told me they'd recovered my paid summon data, but all of them were currently dead, so I couldn't use them even if I wanted to. I would need to go straight to a revival facility after ending the tutorial so I could expand my forces in battle.

That was my ideal condition for myself upon Megumi logging in. If I beelined for a facility as soon as I got out of the tutorial, I'd probably make it in roughly two hours.

"Okay, let's go!" I whispered. I grabbed the glowing orb on the table. The voice of God I'd gotten so used to floated in my head.

—Tutorial complete. Great job!

—As a bonus for completing it, you will receive a Class Skill Orb.

—You will be transported in two minutes.

Bonus for completion? "Class Skill Orb"? Did you usually get that after the tutorial? I'd never heard of a Class Skill Orb before.

I called up my menu. Delivered to my Present Box, there were seventy-six Recovery Orbs from various level-ups and a Class Skill Orb.

"Use Skill: Eye of Judgment. Judge the Class Skill Orb."

The Eye of Judgment activated as I'd instructed, and a message box appeared.

**Judgment Results**

Class Skill Orb

Rarity: SSS

An orb that grants a summoner a one-of-a-kind skill.

Skill Granted: Release of God's Might

HP and MP will be fully recovered upon use as a secondary effect.

*Uh, so it's kinda like an upgraded Recovery Orb? And what's this skill? I think I've heard of it before, but I don't remember...*

I shook my head. "No... I know what this skill is."

It was a new skill that was set to be given to summoners in the next big update. An extremely broken one that would buff their familiar's stats by a multiple of seven. There were new skills for other classes that would give them a hilarious amount of strength too. All of which seemed to be gifts for the players.

So they were giving me this skill. The fact that I was receiving it after the tutorial wasn't the issue. "Why am I getting it at all? The update wasn't supposed to happen for another two months." I tilted my head.

The space in front of me began to warp like a heat wave.

The transport had begun.

†

A stark white, mysterious space.

When I opened my eyes, I was standing in a huge room filled with nothing but white.

—Player Shinobu Iijima. Confirmed to have completed the tutorial with a log-in over level 50.

—You will be the first player to log in to the 1,000 Player Campaign [The Key to Agartha.]

—As per the campaign, you will challenge the 13 Floors to Utopia upon logging in.

“What’s that? The thirteen floors to what now?”

*And what is this white space, anyway? Wasn’t I supposed to be thrown out into some big field, seashore, or wasteland after the tutorial?*

Wait a second. “1,000 Player Campaign,” “13 Floors to Utopia,” “Key to Agartha”... I’d heard these names before.

That’s right! They were new content to be included in the big update. The “Key to Agartha” was supposedly the key to a new dungeon that hid a bunch of prizes in it. The promotions said that at the end of the dungeon, in the “Utopia Agartha,” you could buy items that usually cost real-life money with the in-game currency.

I remember thinking that the devs put a lot of effort into this update, probably because the game itself was so old. The Key to Agartha was a perishable item that you could only get once a day or once a week or something like that. Time in the real world would have to pass first. If I remembered correctly, the other ways to get it were: to pay for it, to receive it as a drop from a special enemy, and by being one of the first thousand players to log in after the update.

“But why am I the first to log in?”

You had to be over level 50 to get it, but over a hundred reincarnators were around that level, so...

“Oh!” It hit me. “I remember now. When I was reincarnated, you told me that you loaded my account with the beta version of the tutorial, right?”

My data had been erased, which had made the voice of God sound perplexed about what to do too. If I had to guess, the tutorial probably hadn’t been part of the reincarnation system, so they hastily pulled out the beta version for me.

“By ‘beta version,’ I thought it meant the version you guys used all those years ago for testing. But you actually loaded the new update to my account, didn’t you?”

The voice of God responded.



—Special dungeon: the 13 Floors to Utopia. The death penalty in this dungeon is no different from other dungeons, but all players will be given a campaign reward upon death. When revived, you will be given a valuable item worth more than your revival, or an EXP orb via Present Box. Please enjoy.

*Huh? What? Hang on there, voice of God.*

In the game, you'd lose one level's worth of EXP, and pay money to be revived. But in this postreincarnation world, you died for real. There was no point in receiving items or EXP orbs if you were dead.

—Now then. Use the key to Babylon and challenge the 13 Floors!

“What?! Hold on a second!”

—Special Quest: [*Utopia at the Center of the Planet*] will now begin.

—To the Special Dungeon: The 13 Floors to Utopia. Player Shinobu Iijima will now be transported.

“Wait, wait, wait! Do I not get a choice?!”

As tears filled my eyes, the space in front of me warped like a heat wave.

†

*The 13 Floors to Utopia: Floor 1*

A dark, narrow limestone cave. As I progressed through, the smell of ammonia from bat droppings made my face scrunch up. I found myself in a place that was kind of wide. It was an underground lake that stretched about twenty meters on all sides. The breeze chilled my skin.

There were only two ways to leave, or rather stop exploring, a multifloor dungeon like this: complete a floor or die.

And for dungeons of this caliber, the first floor always had the unsavory gimmick of having super tough enemies to scare off the players.

So even this lake had a horde of monsters in it.

“Just Goblins?”

There were seven of them about twenty meters in front of me. Even at level 1 I could’ve beaten them. The only difference I could see was that these ones had knives. The seven pathetic small fries were checking me out from the shore.

*Maybe for this dungeon, the first floor is set with easy monsters like a bonus stage, instead of super hard ones? But that would make these goblins the bosses here. That can’t be right. The real boss could be inside the lake.*

I figured I’d use the Eye of Judgment on one of them anyway.

“There’s no way...”

I stood there balking at the screen. This is what it looked like:

Name: Legendary Goblin Race: *Demon* Class: Fighter

Recommended Level: 105

Detailed data cannot be shown due to your difference in strength.

“What do you mean, ‘Legendary’?”

*And the Recommended Level is 105? Isn’t the level cap 99?*

*No... Wait.*

The level cap was supposed to be raised with the new update to 130. And since it was applied to me, I could theoretically reach that level too—if I lived.

But these Goblins were thirty levels higher than me! I was able to beat the No Life King, who was twenty levels higher, but only after I managed to memorize its attack patterns after dying nearly twenty times to it.

I didn’t have that luxury anymore.

As I thought that, a single word crossed my mind.

*Death.*

I couldn't stop myself from shivering as the reality of that word began to dawn on me.

*This can't be real. It's impossible.*

*What does "dying" entail, anyway?*

*What does it feel like to not be conscious?*

*I'm not going to be myself anymore. I'm going to return to the earth. What does any of that mean?*

I used to think about stuff like that before I fell asleep when I was a kid. It was nothing but a pointless, unfounded fear that would stick to the back of my mind.

Now it was a part of reality that had fallen straight into my lap.

My eyes met with one of the Goblins.

"...Oh."

It grinned. A cold smile, like that of a butcher aiming for a pig lined up in front of him.

It started running toward me at an undetectable speed before I could react.

*I can barely see it, but I don't know what to do!*

A hot impact struck my torso. I knew I'd been cut by its knife. It ran another stab into my back.

The Goblin swiveled around me with a kick. I flew backward, getting pinned to the wall of the cave, then I slid down to the ground.

"It brought me right to death's door...with just one attack."

Checking my HP, the number had gone all the way down from 1,600 to 100.

*I'm done for.*

The rest of the Goblins were closing in on me. I didn't think I could defeat even one of them. *They're going to gang up on me and kill me in an instant.*

I had to use my all-too-familiar trump card.

“Grade 3: Suicide!”

The ace up my sleeve in the tutorial. The greatest spell a magic user could learn, gained at Grade 3. It used up all of one’s HP and MP, engulfing everything around them with an explosion in exchange for their life.

Just as the name implied, it would kill the user without question.

However, there was one way to evade death. It was a method often used in low-level walk-through videos.

“Recovery Orb!”

The item that was given to you with each level-up. The only full recovery item in the world of *La Vita Online*, it was a rare potion that you could use straight out of the Present Box in your inventory. It also didn’t have the usual cast time typical of recovery items during combat.

Essentially, I was cheesing the system.

It wasn’t easy to get the timing right, but if you managed to use the Recovery Orb quick enough, you could avoid the instant death from Suicide.

My intention was to use Suicide, over and over again.

People knew this technique as one you’d spam in ultradifficult areas. A lot of players used it when faced with unbelievably hard monsters during highly rewarding quests and dungeons.

That was exactly the situation I was in at that moment.

“How do you like this?!”

As I got up and recovered, I prepared my next bombing and scanned the Goblins. The explosion had charred their skin a bit, and they looked like they

were in pain.

*Nice, it worked!*

“Grade 3: Suicide!” Another blowup followed.

I wasn’t sure why, but the cave walls seemed to be made of some special material. There wasn’t a hint of falling debris in sight.

Right before my consciousness clocked out—

“Recovery Orb!”

The blast faded out, and I could see the Goblins had deeper burns than before.

*I can beat them if I keep it up!*

This marked the first time I used my stock of Recovery Orbs. I had seventy-four left!

“Grade 3: Suicide!”

A blinding explosion. My flame of consciousness almost blew out.

The sound of the Goblins’ screams of pain brought me back.

“Recovery Orb! And Grade 3: Suicide!”

It might’ve seemed like it was a one-sided battle, but truthfully, I was also at my limit. If I was even just a little too late recovering, I’d be kicking the bucket.

“Grade 3: Suicide!”

Release my magic, then recover.

Release my magic, then recover.

Release my magic... Then recover!

“Grade 3: Suicide!”

Release my magic again, then recover.

If I were playing a game, all I’d have to do is tap the screen at the right time. Even if I died after my hand slipped and missed, I could always retry without issue.

But in this world, death itself was waiting for me. Mess up, and I was dead.

I slapped my cheeks with both hands to rid myself of the great anxiety. As if running through a minefield, I focused all of my energy into a single, well-timed point, and shot repeatedly.

*I can't die here.*

*Die, Goblins.*

*Die, die, die!*

*Just die already!!!*

An endless cycle of destruction and revival. And *extreme* pain.

An endless cycle of giant bombs and Goblins screaming.

And then...

—You leveled up!

The announcement frolicked through my brain.

“Did I do it?”

Opening my eyes, I saw one Goblin on the ground. All the others were still breathing. I gathered up everything in me and shouted out for my last attack.

“The final blow—Grade 3: Suicide!”

—You leveled up!

—You leveled up!

—The 13 Floors to Utopia: Floor 1: All enemies defeated.

—Class Skill Orb: Familiar Rescue has been sent to your Present Box.

Reached Level 80 as a magic class. Grade 5 magic unlocked.

Familiar Rescue?

I was pretty sure that was the new skill added to the update that made up for a summons' weak point. Revival Magic didn't work on summons, even during



battle, so you had to go elsewhere to revive them. It was always the downside to the summoner class. This new skill was created to get rid of that drawback, allowing summoners to directly revive their summons.

“It wouldn’t do me any good to get killed by another player right after leaving this dungeon. I’ll use the Skill Orb and revive all the summons I have right now.”

Opening my list of summons, the grayed-out names that indicated death all changed to white. The skill ate up a disgusting amount of my MP, but that could be easily fixed with a Recovery Orb, of which I had sixty-one left.

Having repeatedly committed suicide and barely revived myself, my nerves were understandably worn out and my head was in a daze.

“I’m just tired.”

Collapsing right then and there, the space in front of me warped like a heat wave.

“You’re really gonna transport me without letting me rest?”

The voice of God let me know.

—Notice regarding the next large-scale update.

—This announcement is for all players who have come to *La Vita Online*.

—This update consists of these new features:

—The unlocking of a special dungeon.

—The raising of the level cap, and the unlocking of new Class Skills.

—The update will commence once all of the convening players have logged in.

—In *La Vita Online* time, the final player is scheduled to arrive in 10 months, 23 days.

Name: Shinobu Iijima Race: Human Class: Summoner / Level: 72 → 80

HP: 1,645/1,645 → 1,825/1,825 MP: 3,200/3,200 → 3,280/3,280

Power: 76 → 84 Strength: 76 → 84 Speed: 152 → 168 / Magic: 208 → 232

Acquired Magic:

Grade 1 (Magic Class Bonus)

Grade 2 (Level 10 Bonus)

Grade 3 (Level 30 Bonus)

Grade 4 (Level 50 Bonus)

Grade 5 (Level 80 Bonus)

Fixed Class Skills:

The Eye of Judgment (Level 10 Bonus)

King of a Thousand Demons (Level 50 Bonus)

Release of God’s Might (Update Skill)

Familiar Rescue (Update Skill)

Equipment:

Legendary Assassin Knife (Dropped by Legendary Goblin)

The Death Sage’s Wand (Dropped by Wight)

The Elder’s Armor (Dropped by Living Elder Armor)

The Gauntlet from Hell (Dropped by the Troops from Hell)

The Enlightened’s Overcoat (Dropped by No Life King)

The Ring of Death (Dropped by Wight)

## Chapter 2: In the World One Hundred Years Later, Humanity Has Declined

“Now then.”

I stood in the middle of a fiery, mountainous zone after exiting the 13 Floors to Utopia: Floor 1. Once the tutorial ended, I was supposed to be transported to a random area with low-level monsters. This place, the Dengey Active Volcanic Region, was one of the places I’d had in mind.

Since players had been killing each other while I was stuck in the tutorial, I’d prepared myself to get attacked immediately by campers, but there didn’t seem to be anyone around.

*That’s a relief, at least. But what was that announcement earlier?*

Judging by the Friends List, the final player to log in was undoubtedly Megumi. Apparently, it would be in ten months and twenty-three days in *La Vita Online* time. What did that mean? It was supposed to be two hours in Japan time.

“Why did it become ten months?”

I figured it out rather quickly and nodded my head with a grunt.

This world’s time must have flown differently than Earth’s. The tutorial took place prior to the actual game, so it used Earth time. But wouldn’t that have meant that two hours equaled almost a year in this world? And there were 250 hours left the first time I checked, so...

“Over a hundred years have passed since the *La Vita* I knew?”

Calculating it, I concluded that about that much time had passed since the reincarnators first arrived here. However, if that were true, keeping in mind the lifespan of a human, shouldn’t my Friends List be filled with *Deads*?

“Actually, wait. In *La Vita Online*’s system, death itself may exist, but death due to old age might not.”

That added more problems onto my plate. Would my knowledge of the game even be applicable anymore?

There was still time until Megumi logged in, thankfully, so I decided it would be best to start by gathering information. There were four things I wanted information on: the other reincarnators, the current political and guild climates, and my current abilities.

And more than anything, what that bastard had been doing.

Unfortunately, he was definitely level 99 by this point. Taking him on by myself was already a daunting task, but if he grouped up with other reincarnators, I'd be forced to come up with a plan in advance, lest I get killed in two seconds.

At any rate, I needed to know how strong I really was. In this volcanic region, mana and magma were both active in the earth. All that activity frustratingly made the mountains move around a lot in the span of a few days.

"I doubt anyone would notice if there was one more eruption than usual."

That's when I noticed a giant boulder flying at me. I'd seen smoke in the distance earlier, so this had probably come from a volcanic bomb.

"Let's check my physical strength first."

The boulder seemed to be about fifty meters in diameter. It was most likely going to land a bit away from me.

"Hrng!" Digging into the ground with my feet, I jumped toward the boulder. "Yup. I can jump a few tens of meters pretty easily."

I punched a straight blow right on the boulder with about seventy percent of my strength.

*Smaaaaaash!*

It exploded and scattered into pieces, ringing out with the sounds of

destruction.

I landed on the ground with a light tap. “Okay. Next up, magic.”

I turned toward a rocky mountain that looked about as big as Ayers Rock and took a wand out of my pocket.

*“Not a censured human, but a censured god. Slaughter such a god and manifest the crimson lotus to this land. Grade 5 Nuclear Magic: Kagutsuchi of Fire!”*

Something hot seared through my heart. I could feel my magic flow toward my nuclear wand. This was the Grade 5 super magic Kagutsuchi of Fire, which used the name of the fire god who was renowned for killing other deities.

Grade 5. In other words, lost magic that was forbidden knowledge, hidden from the masses. The power to kill the gods, passed down through tradition. That’s how it was described in *La Vita Online*, but its actual power really was a sight to behold.

A heat ray shot from my palm. Imagine, like, a manga or anime where naval space soldiers are shooting lasers at each other, or blond superhumans are blasting light energy from their hands. Things like that, where the planet is in danger; you know how it is. Basically, something obviously dangerous shot out of my hand.

A shining beam of light.

A resounding roar.

And a continuous hot wind.

The biggest piece of the broken boulder blew up. I could see parts around the heart of the explosion evaporate.

“Huh.” I nodded deeply. “I think I get it. *This* is what level 80 is like.”

I used Flight Magic to float in the air. “I wonder what the reincarnators are doing if they’re this strong.”

With a touch of anxiety, I set off toward the nearest kingdom: the Lilic Empire.

Flying about three hundred meters up, the scenery flew past at an incredible speed. I exited the volcanic region and entered the rock lands. Eventually, the edge of the land turned green, and before I knew it, I was flying above grasslands.

I noticed a man who looked like a soldier fighting a group of monsters partway through. I used Judgment on them.

Race Description: Ogre

Recommended Level 20

An evil monster deemed to be disastrous. Even an entire local knight unit has trouble defeating one.

A tough upper demon that, if found in a group, would usually require A-rank adventurers and large knight units to exterminate.

Name: Ogre *Race: Upper Demon (Final Form)* Class: Warrior

Belongs to: None *HP: 880880 MP: 00*

Power: 85 *Strength: 45* Speed: 10 / Magic: 1

“It’s said to be disastrous?”

Ogres were usually hard for beginners that were just starting out. But for veterans, or even adventurers with decent skills, they shouldn’t have too much of a problem defeating one. I couldn’t imagine dispatching a whole unit of knights being necessary. A description like this might fit a level 50 Fire Dragon, but not an Ogre.

“Still, I can’t just leave him like that.”

The soldier was being chased around. I checked his stats just in case.

Name: Jack Olcott / Race: Human *Class: Soldier* Level: 10

HP: 250/250 *MP: 00*

Power: 12 *Strength: 12* Speed: 6 / Magic: 3



In the story, the usual weapon wielder was around level 10, so this guy was a normal soldier. Even so, I felt his stats were a bit too low. Melee classes were supposed to have around 500 to 600 HP at level 10.

“If nothing else, I know I have to save him.”

I couldn’t shake the “buts” from my mind.

I was probably considered super strong in this world. It would be bad if the other reincarnators caught wind of me before I got any information on them. I would need to save this guy without standing out too much. *With Grade 5 magic being out of the question, what should I do?*

If I remembered correctly, in the game, the order of strength went something like this:

- Grade 5: Godly
- Grade 4: Inhuman
- Grade 3: Really strong
- Grade 2: A veteran
- Grade 1: Beginner mage

*It should be fine if I use just enough to defeat the Ogres.*

“Grade 2: Large Fire.”

Five bursts of fire shot out, landing precisely where I had aimed—right in the middle of the group.

“Graaaaaah!”

“Gwaaaaaah!”

“Bwaff!”

Howling as they died, they became balls of fire, then turned to ash and fell to the ground. Grade 2 magic usually did average damage to them, so it wouldn’t kill them in one shot. Although, it depended on one’s magic stat.

“The soldier guy should be fine now.”

If someone found out about this, they’d probably say an unknown mage saved an imperial knight. I’d only used veteran-grade magic, so it shouldn’t have

been a big deal. It wasn't too strange for a veteran adventurer to save a person in passing, right?

"But still, I gotta be careful not to stand out. Any more meddling could be dangerous. It's almost night too. I'd better set up camp."

I flew for a while, before landing at the edge of a lake in a forest.

There was a reason I chose this place. This was the Grand Forest of Skasaha, famous for having hordes of High Orcs. High Orcs were weak and often sold for their meat, so spots where they spawned were known as good locations for beginners to farm EXP. In the nearby town, the NPCs all had dialogue pertaining to how delicious High Orcs were.

"I kinda wanted to try that High Orc roast."

I didn't want to take any prey away from newbie adventurers, so I had to be careful not to kill too many.

I took my first step into the forest.

†

*Regional Captain of the Knights, Robert Smith*

The inside of the carriage swayed in time with the rattles of the wheels. I donned a suit of plate armor, complete with a helmet.

I clicked my tongue for the umpteenth time. Here in the Skasaha Territory, it was completely unheard of for a horde of over one hundred High Orcs to appear.

It could only be described as an unprecedented monster hazard from out of the blue.

High Orcs were synonymous with fear here in the borderlands. Not only that, but unconfirmed reports stated a herd of Ogres had also been spotted. A group of High Orcs was already bad enough for us knights, but Ogres on top of them? All I could do was let out a weak chuckle. If the Ogre report turned out to be

true, this situation would be scaled at the worst level: a disaster.

The silver lining was that *this* great man would be accompanying us.

“For you to grace us with your presence on this monster hunting mission, we’re nothing but thankful, great B-rank adventurer Jacob the Scorched!”

The man in front of me gave a nasal “hmph.” He was in his early twenties, wrapped in blue robes.

He spoke without lifting his gaze from the book he’d been reading the entire ride.

“Time is money. I’m busy reading this sorcery tome as part of my training. Could you not interrupt?”

He was reading a book called *Black Forbidden Arts*. A tome deemed to be type-2 dangerous and said to have been written by demons. Normal human brains would burn up and go insane upon reading the first page. However, this man could read it without needing Defense Magic or support from infused items. The shocking truth was that he could handle it without issue, putting up a perfect resistance purely through his own magic power.

“Terribly sorry, Master Jacob.”

“Good that you’re humble. Time is money, but I’ll give you some of my precious time and engage in a conversation with you. Be grateful.”

“Y-Yes sir! Thank you very much, Master Jacob!”

“High Orcs, was it? Most of the knights sent out on these missions are nothing but muscle up to their heads, but as their captain, you should at least have enough brains to explain the situation, yes? I hereby permit you to speak of the current results from your reconnaissance.”

I let my expression drop for a moment after being verbally battered. But I had to remember that Jacob could only be described as a genius sorcerer.

“Master Jacob, you’re going to use *that* magic, aren’t you? It’s the reason you’re called *the Scorched*.”

“Indeed, I am. It’s not something you get to see every day, so please be grateful. It’s the ultimate Fire Magic, hailed as the peak of humanity.”

He was talking about a spell that only unmistakable geniuses could arrive at after putting themselves through harsh training. It was called—

Grade 2 Ranged Fire Magic: Normal Fire.

Just thinking about top-rank magic that tested the limits of humanity made me gulp. “So it’s true. You really can use Normal Fire!”

“That’s not where I’m going to stop either. One day, I’ll climb my way to the height of all magic: the Flame Dragon King!”

“The Dragon King...?” I was at a loss for words.

This man had already arrived at Grade 2, the peak of humanity, during his twenties, yet he was aiming even higher. He was going for the best spell in Grade 2—

Sigh of the Flame Dragon King.

Yes, he had indeed told me he was working toward becoming unparalleled among sorcerers. Had a normal mage claimed this, they would have gotten scoffed at and called a bragger. But gazing at Jacob’s deep, all-seeing blue eyes, I let out a bitter laugh. “Truly, I feel like you could accomplish something like that.”

“So? The situation?”

“O-Oh, right! As you’ve heard, a horde of High Orcs was spotted. Ten or so Ogres were also reported, but that information is yet to be confirmed...”

“Ogres?”

“Ah, you don’t have to worry about those. Someone was probably just mistaken. We haven’t had Ogres appear around these parts in a hundred years. Although, even if they *did* show up, we wouldn’t have anything to be afraid of with you here, Master Jacob!”

“No. Even I wouldn’t be able to exterminate them all if Ogres are in the mix.”

“Not even you, Master Jacob?”

“I’ve seen them once before, when I was working with A-rank adventurers on a disaster relief job. If you wanted me to defeat one with only a single blow of magic, I’d need Grade 3 or above.”

“Grade 3? But they say that only exists in fables...”

“Correct. It’s beyond the realm of human logic. No one who uses it can be called human. It could have been feasible a hundred years ago, but no one in this day and age could possibly achieve it.”

“Even you, Master Jacob...?”

“Even a genius like me. It might not be possible even if I dedicated my entire life to it—without external help, that is.”

I gulped down another few breaths. “Would it be possible...with Ritual Magic?”

He smiled at me to confirm. “A ritual prepared by a large kingdom, with a ton of people and magic tools. Together they would manifest an occurrence that could only be called a miracle in this world. That’s what Grade 3 magic is.”

“In that case, what should we do if there really are over ten Ogres like the reports say?”

My question caused him to smile once more. “Then I would run away while you all get slaughtered. I would then go to the imperial center and request a large dispatchment of knights. That would be the most reasonable line of thought.”

“Ha ha! That’s hard to laugh at even as a joke, sir! There’s no way Jacob the Scorched would use knights as meat shields and run away.”

“Time is money. Life is also money. The two hundred lives of yours versus my single life. You shouldn’t have to think too hard about which is more valuable, yes? It would be a great loss to the world if I were to perish.”

He didn’t change his expression a single bit as he spoke. I responded, utterly confused. “Master Jacob... Are you telling the truth?”

A clamor started outside of the carriage. Hearing the soldiers echo the words

“High Orcs,” Jacob nodded deeply.

“It begins.”

He poured water that he’d warmed with Daily Life Magic into a container filled with ground coffee beans.

“Y-You’re taking a coffee break *now*?”

“It’s best to stay calm in the midst of chaos. The battle hasn’t even begun yet. Would you like a cup?” He gave his usual grin and brought the coffee to his lips. After finishing this regal-looking movement, he turned and called outside.

“Could I have a status update?”

“H-High Orcs are...in the thicket...” replied someone from outside. “They spread out and have surrounded us! The reports said there were only a hundred of them, but there must be two—no, three hundred at least!”

Jacob’s face clouded over for the first time. “If I hit them with Grade 2: Normal Fire as soon as the battle starts, I should be able to vanquish about a hundred of them. But I would need about twenty minutes to recharge before I can cast it again. It’s a Grade 2 spell.”

Hearing that, I whispered, “It’s over...” as I let my shoulders drop. “We’ll use our bodies to protect you, Grand Sorcerer!”

Jacob snickered. “I’ll use one ranged spell. Then, I’ll take my leave from the battlefield.”

“Huh? What are you saying? You’re supposed to be escorting us. Exterminating the High Orcs is your job! You’ll be going against our contract!”

He jeered at my pleading. “You lot are going to die no matter what. Breaking a contract is a proper method of defense in cases where the enemy severely overpowers you.”

“H-Hang on!”

“Well then, why don’t we head outside?”

“We’ll buy time for you! If you work with us, we should be able to defeat at least 250 of them!”

“You’re so demanding. Time is money, you know.”

The foliage above us began to rustle. The next moment, a man in a black cape jumped down from the trees.

†

*Shinobu Iijima*

It had been roughly an hour since I’d stepped into the forest, following the presence of High Orcs. I’d found a rather large group of them, but there seemed to be other people who’d gotten to them first.

They looked to be knights out on a pest extermination mission, but I was shocked when I saw their stats through Judgment. Half of them were about level 10, while the rest were maybe 5 or 6. They were probably a local militia that didn’t have much experience, but even then, their average stats were way too low. Despite being level 10, their numbers were like that of level 1. I didn’t know how to react. The level 3 soldiers also had stats lower than that of level 1.

*What on earth is going on?*

At any rate, I wouldn’t be able to sleep at night if I saw a hundred humans get killed right in front of my eyes, so I leaped into the fray.

“Who are you? Where did you come from?” asked a middle-aged man with a beard. He was probably the captain.

I decided it would be best not to answer. Lying wouldn’t get me anywhere. Besides, High Orcs could be taken care of with just a few spurts of Grade 2 magic. I would simply clean them up, then fade out without revealing my identity, and let them think I was merely some mysterious, powerful mage.

I turned toward the High Orcs, ignoring the knight captain. He grabbed my shoulder with a rough hand. “Are you an adventurer? State your guild and rank. And if you’re thinking of helping us, don’t bother. We’re up against High Orcs. These aren’t the sort of numbers that adventurers around here can deal with.”

I tilted my head. *Huh?* Sure, there were a lot of them, but they were just High Orcs. Get a few veteran adventurers, and they’d be taken care of real quick. Ah,

but wait, we were in the borderlands. Maybe veterans didn't really come near here.

"Hurry up and state your guild and rank, just in case. We'd welcome you if you happened to be a B-rank or higher adventurer, like Master Jacob here."

The man in his midtwenties who seemed to be "Jacob" smirked. "You don't need to check his guild or rank, Captain Robert. Heh, I don't know what small village this adventurer came from, but look at his clothes. He can't hide his poor upbringing."

"My poor upbringing?" I couldn't stop myself from responding. "Is there something wrong with my clothes?"

He jerked his chin at me with a snort. "Seeing as how you aren't reacting to my presence, you really must be from the backwoods. Even adventurers from outside these lands know who I am!"

Hmm. What should I do about this? It had been a hundred years since the *La Vita* I knew. It bothered me that there was something wrong with my gear. Was there some sort of smithing revolution that happened while I was in the tutorial? I could die in one hit if I wasn't protected against cursing or petrification.

And this Jacob guy seemed really uppity and full of himself. I didn't think I'd ever met anyone as overly confident in my entire life.

*It might be a good idea for me to hear what he has to say about my equipment.*

"Ah, I'm sorry. I didn't know you were famous."

"It's common sense for you to greet me first when you're graced by me. How rude. How about you start by bowing your head and apologizing?"

*Excuse me?* I couldn't believe how full of himself he was. But that confidence couldn't have come from nowhere—he must've really been powerful to get that famous.



Apologizing with empty words wouldn't cost me anything, so I figured I'd do as he asked. "I'm very sorry for being rude to you right after meeting you." I bowed my head.

He nodded, satisfied. "Oh, obedient, aren't we? I'll rank you up from countryside raw garbage to countryside big garbage."

"So, what's wrong with my equipment?"

He took some time to think before he grinned and replied. "There's nothing necessarily *wrong* with it. Rather, it makes it plain as day that you're a low-ranking adventurer."

"How so?"

"You're wearing a pure black cape. You're practically boasting about being bottom of the barrel in your guild, aren't you? A guild member's appearance is part of their sale, you know. They're supposed to dress themselves with bright, expensive dyes and glittering accessories. If you're part of a guild, then you should know that's basic adventurer etiquette. Your clients would worry if they hired you when you look so coarse. They might think you're just in it for the money or that you don't have any actual experience."

*Oh, that's what he meant.* I gave him an ambiguous smile, slightly confused since I wasn't an adventurer in the first place.

"Time is money," he continued. "That's the end of our conversation. My time is expensive, and you just received a lesson from me. Be grateful."

He left it there with a snide "meager adventurer" and a nasal laugh.

*Well, at least I learned about this world's adventurer culture. I'll be grateful for that, as he told me to.*

Jacob clapped his hands together as if he remembered something. "All right then, Captain Robert. I believe the High Orcs are about to engage us."

"Are you really only going to attack once?" The captain looked heartbroken.

"You're so insistent. You should be praising me for even doing one spell when this situation has defeat written all over it. Anyway, where would you like me to release my ranged magic?"

Robert silently pointed to the left.

The High Orcs were spread throughout the forest. The knights were focusing their numbers in one direction. I could sense about a hundred of the Orcs there.

“But Master Jacob, we’ll be decimated after that! Please, have mercy on us! We shouldn’t have trouble holding out until you’re able to fire a second blow!”

“You’re so demanding! I’m not here to do charity work. Oh, I still have some coffee left. It would be a waste not to drink it.”

Jacob slunk back to the carriage and pulled out a coffee cup. Lifting it with an elegant swish, he stood there and gulped it down.

*Why on earth is he drinking coffee?* Not only did he not make any sense, but he also had a giant stick up his ass.

“Whatever,” I asserted. “I’ll do my own thing.”

It wouldn’t be the easiest task since the Orcs were so spread out, on top of their sheer numbers. Grade 2 would take a lot more effort than necessary. I could probably get away with being called some random powerful mage if I used Grade 3, so I wouldn’t stand out too much.

*Yeah, let’s go with that.*

†

*Jacob*

“Whatever. I’ll do my own thing.”

The man clad in black uttered those words before walking toward the forest, where the High Orcs lurked. Robert panicked and grabbed the man’s right hand to stop him.

“You! As Master Jacob said, you’re just a low-level adventurer! There’s a difference between bravery and recklessness!”

The man in black didn’t respond, sticking his hand into his cape. He pulled out a short staff he’d been hiding.

*Now then, what could this low-level buffoon of a mage be planning to do? I*

put my cup to my lips. That's when he—

*“Burn away! Grade 3: Breath of the Flame Dragon King.”*

It happened in an instant.

The man in the black cape revealed his true colors.

A hellfire that set everything ablaze spread in a cone of about 120 degrees, hitting one-third of the area.

The shrubbery evaporated, the tree trunks turned to ash, and the High Orcs fell to the ground and died without any time to even scream.

If I had to guess, I would say the shot had a range of about a hundred meters. Everything within that span was enveloped by the Breath of the Flame Dragon King and had its life reaped.

“Wh...? Wh...? Wha...?”

This man... I was sure he'd said Grade 3. Breath of the Flame Dragon King was the most powerful spell in that Grade.

I'd been dedicating my life to acquiring the best spell in Grade 2, Sigh of the Flame Dragon King. Yet, he had just used the even higher Breath.

To make things worse, the man in black had turned to face the opposite direction, and opened his mouth yet again.

*“Burn away! Grade 3: Breath of the Flame Dragon King.”*

The fan-shaped calamity doubled itself in size. If this area was a circle, then two-thirds of it had been recolored.

All I could do was stand there, shaking down to my bones.

An act of God had just occurred before my eyes.

Grade 3 was said to be inhuman. This spell had been the highest of it, no less.

Impossible. This wasn't something that should be believed.

Yet the scene before me was forcing me to believe it was real.

The man didn't stop there. He turned to the final section that hadn't been suppressed by fire, and the same words fell from his mouth.

*"Burn away! Grade 3: Breath of the Flame Dragon King."*



I fell to the ground without realizing it.

*Impossible.*

*Impossible, impossible, impossible!*

*It can't be, it can't be, no, it absolutely is not real!*

The situation had left my grasp and flown to a realm I couldn't understand.

*This... Yes, this must be a fairy tale.*

Captain Robert had also fallen, letting out a hysterical yell. "Grade 3...? *Three* times?!"

Having seen the work of a miracle, I let the coffee I'd been drinking completely slip from my lips.

†

*Shinobu Iijima*

Rain.

To prevent the fire from spreading to the rest of the forest, I used Grade 2: Water Fall. It was drenching the area in a downpour.

The sorcerer Jacob's coffee seemed to have gotten caught in his windpipe. He began violently coughing it up. "*Cough! Hack! Gah! Agh!*"

When that calmed down, he began muttering to himself with a blank expression. "From the standpoint of a mage's typical operation speed, three shots of Grade 3 magic would require the maximum operation abilities from ten C-rank sorcerers. Most humans don't have that. Theoretically, a human that can use Grade 3 magic hasn't been born in over a hundred years. Even if using it were possible, one would have to have special, godly staffs and magic circles for support to use in Ritual Magic—and that would barely be for the most low-level spell in Grade 3... Ah, I get it. This is a dream. It's all a dream! Or the man in the black cape used Illusion Magic on me. But wait, for Illusion Magic to affect someone like me, the user would need to use at least Grade 3 Hallucination Magic. In which case..."

Staring far off into the sky, he kept muttering like a machine gun with a blank gaze.

Barely giving him a glance, the knight captain turned to me with an astonished look.

“Lord Great Sage... I am at my utmost honored to be in your grace.”

“Great Sage? Why are you calling me that?” I tilted my head.

The captain tilted his head back at me. “You just used Grade 3 magic. Which makes you a Great Sage.”

“Right, I only used Grade 3. I’m sure that’s impressive to you, but ‘Great Sage’ is an exaggeration no matter how you look at it.”

Several characters in this game were called Great Sages, but all of them were over level 50, in the inhuman range. Grade 3 was mostly used by people from levels 30 to 50, so, yeah, it was impressive, but there were definitely people better than that.

“No sir, Grade 3 means you’re a Great Sage, doesn’t it?”

“How would that make sense?”

*Hm. We’re not on the same page here.*

I pointed at Jacob. “By the way, what’s up with him? He started drooling and muttering to himself right after choking on his coffee. He’s on a completely different planet right now.”

“Ah, yes, him. His name is Jacob, a B-rank adventurer. He’s able to use Grade 2 magic despite only being in his twenties. He’s a genius among geniuses.”

“Grade 2? B-rank? You can’t be serious. Er, wait a second. What magic does Jacob actually use?”

“He uses the lowest spell in Grade 2, said to be a super magic: Normal Fire. That’s why he’s a B-rank adventurer.”

Cold sweat ran down my back. It was in the words: *Normal* Fire. How could that be considered super magic?

*Why? Why? Why is this happening? I’m not getting it.*

“Is something the matter, Lord Great Sage?”

*Calm down. Let's put together what we've learned.*

As far as I knew, B-rank adventurers were supposed to be even better than the usual powerful adventurer. In the *La Vita Online* that I played, they were around level 50, just one step short of becoming inhuman.

“Adventurers are ranked, right?” I inquired.

“Yes, sir. Guild members are ranked as such: S, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, and then anything lower than that is Unranked.”

“If Unranked is the lowest, then S, A, and B wouldn't be the starting points, would they? Though a *lot* would make sense if they were.”

“I'm not sure what you mean, but... The highest rank is S, with A being the next. A-ranks and above are considered outside of the realm of humans, while B-ranks are stated to be barely within it.”

“Remind me again. Mr. Jacob is B-rank, supposedly barely human, but the magic he uses is...?”

“Grade 2 Magic: Normal Fire, sir. A super magic.”

I was going to not stand out, so that the other reincarnators wouldn't notice me. That's what I'd decided when I landed in this world.

I'd tested out Grade 5 magic at the volcano but only used Grades 2 and 3 in front of other people. I thought I was being careful.

*I must not make a mistake.*

*Or I wasn't supposed to, at least.*

*But now...*

Stealing another glance at Jacob's dead eyes confirmed it for me.

*Oof. I fucked up.*

*Yeah. This is really bad.*



I calmed myself down and looked around. The knight captain had been gazing at me with admiration for some time now. Not just him either; I noticed that tens of these soldiers' eyes were sparkling in my direction. Jacob was the only one who wasn't gazing at me in awe. Thinking about the effect this would have on my future, I suddenly felt super worn out.

I was pretty sure I was about to be taken to the capital of this kingdom or empire, or maybe to an adventurer's guild, paraded around for my deeds, or something equally as bothersome. In that scenario, my existence would get noticed by people with power in this world despite me having no information on them. So the other reincarnators from Earth and the unseen strong natives would be able to find me. Player Kills were already rampant, so death could be awaiting me.

The worst outcome would be that bastard finding out about me.

*The first thing I need to do is not stand out, that's for sure. But word of mouth spreads fast, so even if I make my escape here, tons of these people have seen me. Rumors will spread like wildfire.*

"No choice, then," I whispered. I smiled kindly at the captain. "Your name was Robert, right?"

"Yes, sir. What can I do for you?"

"Don't you wanna see more?"

"See what, sir?"

"Grade 4 magic. If you haven't seen Grade 3, you definitely haven't seen this yet."

"Ha ha! Very funny, sir! Only gods can use Grade 4. You're quite the jokester, Lord Great Sage!"

I pulled my staff out while listening to his chuckles. My magic life energy flowed from my heart into the staff, pulling out the four great spirit energies of fire, earth, water, and wind, as well as the two great elements of light and dark. I was about to use a spell in the Dark category.

I put my intent into it and gathered up the dark elements into the staff.

You know what? The reincarnation system was actually really convenient. A person from this world would probably have to study a lot of things about how to use magic, but for me, my brain and body automatically learned how to use it all just by leveling up. Jacob talked about magic charging and operation speeds, which told me that I had an advantage as a reincarnator.

“Lord Great Sage? I don’t use magic, but I can tell that you have an absurd amount of magic stored in that staff, along with dark elements. What exactly are you going to do?”

The captain had goose bumps all over his body from the intense pressure I was emanating. As for the people around him, some of them had fallen down, some were soaked in sweat, and some were even vomiting.

Jacob took one look at the amount of magic energy surrounding me and laughed as if a fire had been lit under him.

“Ha ha! Impossible! This amount of magic energy is impossibl!!!!!! Aha ha, aha ha ha hah!”

*Jacob, it’s a little scary how you’re crying while laughing hysterically.*

“What am I going to do?” I began. “It’s obvious. I did something you all shouldn’t have seen, after all.”

“Shouldn’t have seen?” the captain whispered.

“Yes. Anyone who knows about me is in my way and will be erased.”

The knight captain’s face hitched in an instant.

“Don’t worry.” I smiled. “It’s just Brainwashing Magic.”

“Brainwashing? What do you mean?”

I finished preparing just as he started to look confused.

“It gives me direct access to your cerebrum. I’m going to change the makeup of the nerves in your brains and rewrite your memories. Grade 4: Brain Jack.”

†

The stone path continued endlessly along the plain. Cotton candy clouds dotted the vast sky. The sun had sunk just below halfway in the west, and a

refreshing late autumn wind was blowing through.

“Phew, that was close. I didn’t think soldiers were so low-level in this world. They’re much weaker than they were in the game. I wonder why?”

I’d rewritten their memories with Brainwashing Magic as an emergency measure. They should have all thought I was just some mildly strong adventurer by now. I made it so that, in their minds, Jacob had been able to defeat the High Orcs with their support.

I was only able to change their memories of the past hour, hindered by the fact that the difference in our levels was so large. If someone were to call back their original memories, my spell would wear off. I was only able to do that trick because everyone who’d seen me was gathered in one place. It wasn’t something I’d be able to use over and over again. From here on out, I would have to steel myself and try my best not to get noticed.

First and foremost, I had way too little information. Had I known that the soldiers were so low-level from the start, I wouldn’t have had to rewrite their memories at all.

*Whatever I do, I need information first.*

What was really upsetting was that Flight Magic was Grade 3, meaning I couldn’t use it. Traveling on foot was frustrating, but what else could I do?

I made my way toward the biggest town in these borderlands.

*And here I am, at an adventurer’s guild.*

I figured adventurers would be the best source of information, so I visited the town’s guild. I’d asked adventurers I met along the way to give me basic information about it.

I took a deep breath and put my hand on the entrance’s doorknob.

“Whoa. This place looks exactly like what you’d think an adventurer’s guild would be.”

There was a bulletin board right in the lobby. Tons of job requests were posted every which way on it. People who looked like adventurers crowded around it, scrutinizing to try and find a decent job.

I noticed some of them glaring at me with disdain. The types of glares that poor people were used to getting. I'd gotten plenty of that from B-rank adventurer Jacob the other day.

*So he was right. People really look down on black capes around here. Whatever. I'll start with registering.*

I looked over at the front desk. There were two receptionists, one with over ten people in the line in front of her, and the other with none.

"Why is no one lined up for that one?" I wondered as I made my way toward her.

I made my request to the elf receptionist. "I'd like to register as an adventurer."

Her elf ears perked up at my words. She was blonde and had glasses, and must have been in her late twenties. She was probably somebody's dream girl, an incredible beauty.

She didn't answer me, nor did she even look in my direction.

"Did you not hear me? I'd like to register as an adventurer."

Her ears moved again, yet no answer.

"I'd like to register as an adventurer!" I raised my voice and repeated myself.

Her face finally moved, and she opened her mouth to speak as if she were sighing.

"I don't know what tiny village you came from, but I am an elf. This blessed appearance of mine fetched me a high wage too."

"Uh... What?"

"Hm? Is your head as poor as your clothes? I'm telling you that I am a high-class receptionist."

"Uh, so what?"

“I suppose I must spell it out for you. What I’m trying to say is—someone like you, who only has trash stats and might not even be able to use Daily Life Magic, has no right to speak to someone of a high-class species like me, idiot.”

She took a coffeepot from the counter and heated it up with Daily Life Magic. Pouring the coffee out with a fancy flourish, she jerked her chin at the other line. “So please go line up with the low-class receptionist next to me.”

“Okay, I’ll do that.”

Right. Elves were a rare species. A lot of them were indeed visually blessed, so they were usually put to work with higher-class characters. This lady was probably hired here for that reason.

I lined up for the other receptionist. After waiting over half an hour, I finally got a chance to speak with the freckled, animal-eared woman.

“Oh, uh...” I’d zoned out, so I tried to shake myself out of it. “I’d like to register as an adventurer.”

“Pardon me,” she started, “but wouldn’t it be better for you to value your life a little more?”

“What do you mean?”

“If you’re only able to afford a black cape, you’re probably a slave or something similar, correct?”

“Er... Are black capes really that bad?”

“You’ve probably seen how people clad in all black are treated out in the town. I can only assume that you haven’t received any proper lessons or training. I’ve seen tons of people like you die out there. I won’t say any more. I think you should look for a cleaning job at the worker’s guild.”

I pulled out a few silver coins from my pocket and set them on the counter. “I was told that the registration fee is five silver coins. This should be good enough for me to get registered.”

“I see you’re set on working as an adventurer, then. Understood.” She heaved an exaggerated sigh and sadly took the coins from me. “What class will you be registering as?”

“Uh. A mage, please.”

“Then you will need to take the measurement exam with a crystal ball. Is that acceptable? You’ll also have to pay the certification fee, and you won’t be refunded if you fail. Allow me to ask again, are you really sure about this? You’ll be putting your life on the line for this job. You still have a chance to back out.”

Cold sweat dripped down my back.

*They’re going to measure my magic with a crystal ball? Oh no.*

*This is that trope that happens in isekai series, isn’t it? A crazy number shows up, the crystal ball explodes, everyone panics, and then the guildmaster comes running to see what the fuss is about. Every single time. That’s sure to happen in my case. Goddamn it. The adventurer I treated to lunch before this didn’t tell me this would happen!*

“Ah, um... Ha ha, sorry. Yeah, I’m not doing this.” I laughed dejectedly.

The receptionist nodded approvingly. “Yes, that’s the right answer. Your life is important.”

I gave up to avoid causing a scene and wondered what my next move should be. As my heel hit the ground to leave, a familiar face came in through the entrance.

The man had pale, smooth skin, long hair, and blue robes. His cold gaze and sleepy demeanor, unbefitting of his young age, left an impact when you saw him. He was the B-rank adventurer Jacob.

“Master Jacob!” The elf receptionist jumped out of her seat and ran over to him. “Would you like me to bring black tea to the guildmaster’s office today? Or would you prefer coffee?”

“I feel like having tea today. Also, I was wondering if the cleaners had gotten to my office yet. It would ruin my dignity to live in a dirty space, you see.”

“Yes sir, it’s sparkling clean!”

*I see. So Jacob is the guildmaster here.*

He caught sight of me and his eyes widened up. It was fine, though, since I'd already changed his memories. In his mind, I probably had "mildly good skills."

"Why has this man come to our guild?" he asked the receptionist.

She puffed her chest up. "This filthy little rat from god knows where came to register as an adventurer, so we were just throwing him out."

"Time is money. It's worth getting to know this man. Bring him to my office. Don't forget the highest quality tea and sweets we have."

"...Huh?"

"So you tried to throw him out, like the fool you are. You leave me no choice but to think less of you," Jacob said with a chilling smile.

"Wh-Wh-What do you mean?!"

"A good receptionist would have been able to judge his worth correctly. Am I wrong?"

"You're right, sir... But *this* man is worth knowing?" She scanned me up and down, trying to figure it out.

Jacob nodded. "He's very strong. I just returned from an outing, myself. We need to prepare the reception for him immediately, so as to not be rude. Bring him to my room in ten minutes."

"Master Jacob called you strong? I-I-I'm so sorry!" The elf receptionist bowed her head to me, her attitude making a complete one-eighty.

*Hang on. I'm only supposed to be "mildly skilled" in Jacob's mind. Isn't he doing a bit too much for me?*

As if he'd heard me, Jacob placed his hand on my shoulder, leaned in, and whispered in my ear. "You used Grade 3 magic. You're a *reincarnator* too, aren't you?"

"...Reincarnator?"

I stiffened up on reflex, then shuddered when I realized what he meant.

"We'll talk later." He disappeared into the room behind the front desk.

“I cleared everyone out and used soundproofing magic so we could relax and speak freely here.”

We were in the guildmaster’s office, which was decorated with fancy furniture. We sat face-to-face on two sofas with a table in between. Jacob had spoken first.

I went ahead with the most pressing question. “Why didn’t my memory rewrite work on you?”

“Oh, that. I used an in-game item.” He pulled a shining, rainbow-colored jewel from his pocket.

“That’s the Mysterious Stone: Alexandrite.”

“You’re well-informed.”

I nodded after confirming the item. This guy was either a reincarnator himself, or he knew one. This item was super resistant against status effects like confusion and sleep.

“Do you know the phrase ‘time is money’?”

“What are you getting at?”

“Life is made up of people and births. Not everyone is equal upon birth, whether that be in talent, status, or assets. I figured that out when I was a child. The only thing equally given to everyone is death.”

A brief silence formed between us.

I was at a disadvantage here, not knowing anything, so speaking freely of my circumstances wouldn’t do me any good. Besides, this guy was a chatterbox, so keeping silent would be easy.

“I was surprised too, you know,” he continued. “I thought death was fair, but there turned out to be a race of people that doesn’t age.”

I remained quiet.

“My family was given this in-game item a hundred years ago, from a reincarnator like yourself. Ah, I should mention that I’m from a powerful family of nobles. But I was ousted for being a degenerate son who pretends to be an



adventurer.”

I didn't respond to his monologue.

“Not much of a talker, are you? That's all right. The Gods who appeared one hundred years ago have been kept a secret by the upper echelons of the Imperial Court and Holy Church. They control the entire world from the shadows, putting a stop to wars that were occurring in several of the kingdoms, and causing new, bigger ones in other areas. They've done quite a bit.”

*He's really giving me a lot of important information in these spiels of his.*

I volunteered a question of my own. “Who are these ‘Gods’?”

“Tiger's Eye, who control La Vita Empire's Imperial Court. Dragon's Roar, who control the Holy Church. Soaring Deities, who control the Border Union. And the Crimson Moon Brigade, who control the adventurer's guild. There's also the Lions of Patriotism, who control the Merchants' Alliance. You've heard of them, haven't you? You're a God yourself, after all.”

Yeah, I had. Those were the names of the most famous guilds in *La Vita Online* who participated in the guild competitions. There was no way the civilians in this world could have heard of them, though.

*Man, I didn't even have to work as an adventurer. I got all the information I needed right here. So what I've learned is that the reincarnators are calling themselves Gods and doing whatever they want behind the scenes. I guess that makes sense, since some god gave them these powers in the first place.*

“By the way...” Jacob cleared his throat. “I'm at a bit of a crossroads here.”

“About what?”

“You're an incredible mage, yet no one knows about you. If I don't report you to the main branch of the adventurer's guild or the imperial capital, it would be considered a breach of trust.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“I understand that you're a reincarnator, which is why you prefer to remain unknown. You've been found out, though, and you haven't revealed what makes you a God yet. You're hiding it, aren't you? Your true nature.”

He grinned, staring intently at my face as if he were trying to look through me.

*I really messed up.* Staying silent had told him everything he needed to know. He blabbed on so that he could observe my reactions.

“So? What exactly do you want from me?”

Jacob made a big show out of shrugging his shoulders. “I figured it would be best to develop a good relationship with you, since you’re a God. But if you’re trying to hide, then I’ve accidentally uncovered one of your secrets and can lord it over you. Therefore, I’d like to take advantage of your tremendous power... I mean, suck up to you as much as possible.”

“You’re telling me you’re a gigantic piece of shit, then.”

“Ha ha, I’ll take the sudden change in tone as a compliment.”

“You’ve got some nerve trying to take advantage of me when I’m much stronger than you.” I put my foot down. “You know I could kill you in one hit if I felt like it, right?”

“You would have done so in the forest to keep me quiet, no?”

“I guess.”

“Which means it’s not something dumb like you sparing me out of the good of your heart.” He talked down to me. “You have some sort of restriction on killing, don’t you?”

*Not really. I just didn’t feel like killing someone simply to keep them quiet. It would leave a bad taste in my mouth.*

But still, things weren’t looking good. He had the whole conversation moving at his pace. My only option was to wait and see what his next move was going to be.

“I’m aware that you wouldn’t hesitate to kill me if needed, though. That’s the problem.” He leaned in. “I have a proposition. Let’s have a duel.”

“I don’t see where you’re going with this.”

Jacob pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket and began writing on it with a

quill. “Contracts with blood seals on them must be obeyed. That applies even to you Gods as well, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, I think so.”

In game, adventurers were asked to sign contracts with their blood when taking on a big request. It was also used to prevent people from running away from their debts. I’m pretty sure your soul would explode and you’d be forced into a Game Over if you broke a blood contract. Well, you couldn’t actually do most of the stuff that would lead to that happening in the game anyway. If the deadline for your debt passed, more interest would just be piled onto it as penalty.

In this world, however, it was reasonable to think that your life could actually end if you broke your promises.

“What is your name?” He continued scribbling.

“Shinobu. Shinobu Iijima.”

“And your profession?”

“Summoner.”

“All right, then. It’s complete.” He handed me the parchment. “It’s up to you whether you duel with me or not. But if you don’t, I’ll use every route available to spread word of your existence to the public.”

The contract he wrote was simple:

Should Summoner Shinobu Iijima lose in a duel with Sorcerer Jacob Highzen, he will live as his slave for the rest of his life.

Jacob Highzen will decide the location for the duel.

Note that even if Jacob Highzen wins the duel, he will not be allowed to reveal Shinobu Iijima’s secret for the rest of his life.

“You’re going to tell the whole world about me if I don’t accept?”

“Correct.”

The other reincarnators were an issue, sure, but the biggest one was *that* bastard. Even though I didn't know what he'd been doing these past hundred years, I did know how persistent he was. He'd rush to Megumi's location to capture her as soon as she logged in. And he definitely knew that I'd try to stop him. If he found out where I was, he'd no doubt come to kill me.

"I don't have a choice, then."

Jacob whistled with fake astonishment. "You're so sharp!"

"Do you think you're going to beat me?"

He nodded with a face full of confidence. "That's why it's important that I pick the battlefield."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you forgotten? I have in-game items."

As soon as he pulled something out of his robe, the space in front of me began to warp like a heat wave.

When I got hold of my bearings, I was in a completely white room, as far as the eye could see. The space had a radius of about a few hundred meters...no, kilometers.

It looked like the place I was sent to after the tutorial. Even the heat wave right before it was the same. Did that mean this was a world outside of the system?

I blinked. "This is the power of paid items, huh."

"Indeed. It's the work of Gods. I'm up against one, after all. I have no choice but to use your own power against you." Puffing his chest up, Jacob's lips slung upward. "I saw you use a supreme Grade 3 Fire Magic, and then an unknown Brainwashing Magic. I unfortunately would not be able to beat you with normal methods."

I went ahead and asked him what I was curious about. "What happened to the knights back then, anyway? The captain was nice to me."

That captain had been friendly, treated me to a meal, and even gave me rations for my journey. He was a good guy.

Jacob played with his hair, answering me with a bored look. "Them? I killed them all."

"...What?"

"You heard me. You changed their memories, but they still remembered your existence. I couldn't let that happen."

"What the hell are you saying?"

"With a mage who can use Grade 3 here, my value goes down proportionately. Instantly, might I add. I must be on top of the food chain at all times. Anyone who gets in my way should be eradicated from this planet. Am I wrong?"

*Wow.*

*I don't understand a single thing he's spouting.*

It reminded me so much of my foster father's words that it made my head hurt.

"Why did you have to kill them?" I didn't want to know the answer, yet I still went for it.

"What would happen if their memories returned for some reason?"

"That doesn't give you an excuse to kill innocent people like they're bugs!"

His next laugh sickened me. "You and I are both in places much higher than humans. Are you genuinely trying to tell me that you think all people are equal, or that lives are that important?"

His hands clapped together with a pop, signaling him changing the subject. "Now then, let's begin. Although, I should tell you, what's about to happen is not a duel but a one-sided tragedy."

Jacob snapped his fingers and cackled gleefully. "Come! Cower before me! You're about to witness an absolute blessing granted to me only within this space!"

"An 'absolute blessing'?"

"That's right! In this space, I am able to summon beings who are beyond fairy

tales, who stand atop all of the mythological beasts, who are firmly equal to that of the gods!”

I gulped. It was true—he seemed to be holding an item similar to the ones summoners could get from Class Quests. They’d get faced with endgame bosses when they were only at the midway point, and could use such items to summon high-level beings to turn the tables on certain-death events.

*I have a really bad feeling about this!*

“Heh heh. So even you, a God, are surprised? I don’t blame you.”

Chills and sweat flowed down my back against my will. As a summoner, I knew better than anyone what it meant to summon a top-class mythological creature. The goose bumps lining my body also gave away my dread.

Jacob guffawed at my visibly panic-stricken face. “The curtains are about to close. Live as my slave forever! Grade 3 Summon: Fire Salamander, Grade 3 Summon: Water Undine, Grade 3 Summon: Earth Gnome, Grade 3 Summon: Wind Slyph!”

In time with his calls, flashes of red, blue, yellow, and green lights gave way for the four summons. They looked just like they did in the game and manga, ranging from about fifty centimeters to maybe two meters.

I had to gulp again. I knew all too well why Jacob summoned the low-level Four Great Spirits to start off with. He wasn’t a summoner, so he had to prepare for Sacrifice. Next, he was going to summon a Grade 4, then use that one for another Sacrifice.

Then would come a Grade 5... Or something higher. That was how he was going to achieve a godly monster.

Worst-case scenario, he would use an event item from a summoner Class Quest and summon a yet-unimplemented god: Lucifer.

If that happened, I wouldn’t be able to win even if I summoned every unit I had.

However, I had one single advantage. I was a summoner by trade.

*Level 50 Class Skill: King of a Thousand Demons.*

With this, it was possible for me to conjure a high-grade summon without Sacrifice. I wasn't stupid enough to give him time for his Sacrifices as long as I knew his plan. I began building up my magic inside me as fast as I could, in hopes that I could respond to his moves without any delay. As soon as he showed signs of using Sacrifice, I would unleash it all at him. It was either that or defeat.

"Heh heh. You've lost all that assurance you had earlier."

"I can't exactly play on easy mode if you're going to summon top-class creatures."

"Indeed. As you can see, these here are the Four Great Spirit Gods, unthinkable monsters that only appear in mythology."

"...Spirit Gods?"

I had a sneaking suspicion that one of us was misunderstanding something, but I didn't let that get my guard down.

Jacob had summoned the Four Great Spirits, which were nothing but dirt cheap, normal summons. If he were to summon a higher-grade one, there were no better sacrifices than these.

*All right, when's he gonna do it? I'm all ready now. Come on, give me a hint that you're gonna use Sacrifice. I have to nip you in the bud before you even get close to Lucifer.*

"Oh? Are you going to retaliate? You're no match for me in this space, see, because here I control the highest, greatest Spirit Gods!"

I couldn't help but be confused.

"Heh heh heh! Allow me to sear despair right onto your face! My great beasts become even more powerful in this area. These Four Great Spirit Gods don't

stop at Grade 3 here—they become Grade 4. Heh heh, ha ha, ha ha haaaaaah! I've surpassed you! It might only be in this space, but here I've surpassed even the Gods themselves!"

*...Wait a second.*

*There's no way. He could be bluffing.*

*But even if he was...*

*What would be the point of gloating about Grades 3 and 4 to someone like me?*

*No. The fact of the matter is, he has a paid item. He's going to beat the life out of me if I make any assumptions.*

My plan remained the same: give him everything I've got. I wasn't in the tutorial anymore. Losing because of a little mistake wouldn't be any laughing matter.

Jacob put his palms together, as if he'd come up with a bright idea. "Oh, right. You're a summoner too, aren't you? Perfect. Call up as many monsters as you wish. I wouldn't want you to become my slave without having given it your all."

He still hadn't shown even a single sign that he was going to use Sacrifice. No point in dwelling on it, though.

I pulled my wand out of my pocket and held it above my head. "I can't afford to play around so long as you have a paid item! I'm not gonna hold back!"

A whirlwind of magic blew around me, electrical currents spiking between the gusts, warping the air with them. An overwhelming torrent of light followed. It melded together and turned silver, and it was so bright that I couldn't open my eyes. All I could hear was a deep rumble that resonated to the bottom of my lungs.

"Grade 5 Summon: Flame Emperor Bahamut!"



When the light dimmed, a red dragon emperor stood in the middle of the white space.

*“Roooooooooaaaar!”*

The Flame Emperor’s war cry could have brought about the end of the world. It was around fifty meters tall, and hundreds of meters wide if it were to spread its wings. Legend had it that its breath alone was enough to dry up an entire lake and scorch a whole small kingdom in a single night.

Jacob’s Four Spirits gaped at it, their legs shook as if they were little lambs, and tears filled their eyes. The word *retreat* showed up on their irises, which they turned to Jacob with, begging him to give the order.

“Ha hah... What is that? Ha hah. Ha hah. G-G-Grade 5? Ha hah. No, really, what? Th-The h-highest...? That’s... Even for a God, that’s... There’s no way a human could... Ha hah. Ha ha ha ha ha hah!”

Ignoring his dry laughter and muttering, I continued to well myself up with magic.

“Grade 5 Summon: Sea Emperor Leviathan!”

A giant sea serpent over a hundred meters tall revealed itself.

“Grade 5 Summon: Lightning Emperor Indra!”

Jacob’s soul had already left his body, but I couldn’t stop now. There was still a chance he could win with his item. He left me no choice.

“Grade 5 Summon: Earth Goddess Gaia!”

*Time for the finale! The summon that I’d painstakingly saved up my lunch money to pay for!*

“Grade 6 Summon: *Reign down!* Seraph Gabriel!”

Huge, shining wings. Dressed in a maid outfit, with crimson eyes set deep into a chiseled face. Her silky, silver hair tied up behind her head left a profound

impression. Not to mention her voluptuous chest. She was around 160 centimeters tall, looking to be in her midtwenties.

*So this is what she looks like in real life. She's just as gorgeous as I'd imagined.*

Grade 6. The ultimate magic that exceeded even the gods. Before the update, players could only pay to use spells that high.

I had about five other Grade 6 summons. I'd suffered without lunch for so, so many days. All of Grade 6's beasts were Seraphs or other celestial beings, so it was weird to call them "beasts" in the first place.

Jacob screamed with an odd voice when he laid eyes on her.

"Uooooooooorrrgh?!"

I'll start with my conclusion. This guy seemed to know *of* reincarnators, but didn't know anything *about* them.

His Four Great Spirits had already disobeyed him and run away about the time Leviathan showed up.

"Not much of a threat, are you, Jacob?"

As I spoke, Gabriel lightly lifted her hand.

That was all it took for my other summons to bow their heads to her in unison. They were following the summon rankings. Plus, Gabriel was a Seraph. Seraphim were said to be the highest level of being right under God himself in Christianity. Lucifer had been one himself before he fell and ruled over Hell. Seraphim were archangels, the true superior celestial beings.

Gabriel turned to me and said with an icy voice, "Master Shinobu. I'm going to borrow Leviathan."

"Huh?"

Her fingers made a clacking sound as they snapped together. The unbelievably tall serpent Leviathan twisted around. The sound of dying, "*graaaaaagh*," rose from the space where Jacob had been, accompanied by a disturbing crack.

I sputtered at Gabriel in disbelief. “I know what you’re going to say, but... You killed him, didn’t you?”

She nodded without even blinking. “Yes, sir.”

“Uh... Why, though?”

“He was your opponent. There is no other reason.”

Silence.

Then, hesitation.

I shook my head and opened my mouth in distress. “Ah, I forgot, that’s how you are. So it’s my fault for not stopping you.”

Yep. Gabriel’s personality was someone who killed without a second thought. Often called stone-faced, her character would do tons of horrific things one after the other without batting an eyelash. She considered her master to be God and had no mercy for those who opposed them. This was an example of what would happen when she turned into an automatic slaughter machine.

“Is there a problem?” Still no movement from her face.

“Er, no. He’s already dead, there’s nothing we can do anymore.”

Jacob *was* pretty much an actual psychopath. He would only continue being a burden to other people had he stayed alive. The emotion I was experiencing was indescribable.

I had to set some ground rules with Gabriel, though.

“Just so you know, Gabriel.”

“Yes, Master Shinobu?”

“You shouldn’t kill people so easily.”

Surprisingly, she stopped to think about that for a moment. But as you’d expect, she responded without any change in expression. “I see. You are correct.”

*Oh, good.*

She was an ace even among Grade 6, so I was definitely going to keep using

her from here on out. It would be very helpful if she had the same views on killing as I did: *even villains should not be killed without question.*

“Phew, I’m glad you understand.”

“Killing ‘easily’ is what I should avoid, yes?”

“Huh?”

“Enemies are heretics. Therefore, they should be trampled, oppressed, and crushed, much like witches being hunted, correct?”

*What the? She’s saying some really scary things right now. Plus, her face isn’t moving at all, like she’s wearing a Noh mask.*

“Uh. Gabriel. Killing is bad. Torture is also bad. If a time comes when those things become necessary, you have to ask me first. Be aware that I will not approve either.”

“Understood,” was her one-word answer. “Just to be sure, Master Shinobu, you are ordering me to operate with the sense of morality natural to that of current-day Japan?”

“Yes, that’s right. That’s very honest of you.”

“Honest?”

“I was prepared for it to take longer to convince you, since your way of thinking seemed to be beyond repair.”

“I do everything according to your wishes, as you order. That is the ultimate priority for my existence.”

“There’s no need to exaggerate. Would you die if I told you to?”

She conjured a knife into her hand, then stabbed it through her own chest.



“Yes, sir. As you can see, I would be grateful to do so. Unfortunately, my body is fortified, so it will take quite a bit of time before it completely stops moving.”

Her face as blank as ever, she ripped her heart out of her chest and held it in front of my eyes.

*What the fuck? What’s wrong with her?* was all I could think. I took it to mean her loyalty stat as a summon was cranked up to max.

“You don’t have to die. Use Recovery Magic on yourself. Immediately.”

“As you wish.”

Casting Grade 5 Full Recovery Magic on herself, her wounds sealed up.

*Today’s been nothing but surprises.*

“I’m sorry for saying that to you and making you hurt yourself, Gabriel.”

“I do everything according to your wishes, Master Shinobu. You may use me, Gabriel, both day and night. Battles, cooking, cleaning, even accompanying you in the evenings. I will not refuse a single thing.”

I had to ask. “Accompanying me in the evenings?”

“Yes, sir, as you heard. When a female summon’s loyalty stat reaches 80, their mind and body become their master’s possessions in their entirety.”

*Whoa. Does that mean I can do it with this gorgeous woman?*

I pressed further. “So you mean I can do ‘things’ with you?”

“If you so wish.” She gave a small nod, but immediately followed it up with a small gasp. “I was not expecting this.”

“What’s wrong, Gabriel?”

“You are seventeen years old, Master Shinobu. This version of *La Vita Online* is not the unrestricted 18+ version.”

*Ah, right. This game has an explicit version.*

“This is the 15+ version, so I can only strip my top half. What would you like me to do?”

“No, I just asked to make sure. You don’t have to do anything.”

“As you wish.”

My heart skipped a few beats, and I tore my eyes away from Gabriel’s too-voluptuous chest. Personally, it would make me feel bad if I was only able to do it with her because of her loyalty stat. Wasn’t there an option in my menu for me to switch from the 15+ version to 18+? I didn’t think I could change it until I turned eighteen, anyway.

*Whoops. I keep thinking about how I could do what I want with Gabriel by just changing the settings on my birthday.*

Not that I had any intention to do so.

“At any rate, what do you plan to do from here, Master Shinobu? Is saving your younger sister your most pressing goal?”

“Yes, but I don’t have enough units for battle yet.”

“Units? Are we not enough?”

“I’m a summoner in *La Vita Online*. There’s a limit to how many Grade 6 summons I can conjure at once, and I’d get killed effortlessly if the level cappers came at me in droves. You guys alone wouldn’t be able to be both my sword and shield.”

Her expression turned sour. “It is truly pathetic to admit, but against a party comprising level 99 players, that would be true.”

“And they’re no doubt already teaming up, taking into account what Jacob said earlier and what I’ve gathered from my travels.”

“Indeed. The reincarnators possess a tremendous amount of power but have not yet caused a large-scale war or changed the structure of government.”

“They were apparently at odds with each other when they first arrived, but they’ve found an equilibrium since then. To explain, they split into their respective guilds and have been controlling different sections of the world from the shadows. None of their factions have gotten more powerful than the others.”

“In other words?”

“They probably argued about things at first, which is why they killed each

other. We can glean from that that a lot of them are probably hotheaded. They're balanced now because they're keeping each other in check. I think they're waiting for something."

"Are they waiting for the large-scale update and the raising of the level cap that comes with it?"

"All of the communities these otherworlders control are ones that have easy access to famous EXP farms within the game. So it's gotta be about the level cap. They plan to get there as soon as possible after the update."

"I see."

"To sum it up, there's a high chance that they're going to use the update as an excuse to overthrow the equilibrium and cause chaos. It's cynical, but that'll happen at the same time my sister logs in, so our time limit is ten months."

"How do you plan to deal with it?"

"I need to hide, first off. What do you think the factions will do if I show up out of nowhere?"

"They would either try to recruit you or eradicate you."

"Exactly. If they find out I'm against them, they'll come at me all at once. Or if I let them pull me in, I won't be able to do what I want. Then my sole advantage of having the update applied to my account in advance would be worthless."

I didn't know what would happen if that bastard found me either. I needed to get stronger and find out what that *thing's* been up to. If he captured me before I had the means to retaliate, I'd be dead for sure, and even that was the best-case scenario.

"You're going to use the 13 Floors to Utopia?"

"I am. I need to prioritize powering up as long as I can get to level 130."

"That would make it difficult to increase your allies. You don't seem to have any intention of communicating with the other reincarnators."

"I'm going to take in one of the natives here."

Gabriel raised her eyebrows. "A human from this world? I only have pieces of



information from your mind to go off of, but as far as I know, the people of this world are far too weak. I do not believe it will be physically possible to increase their abilities.”

I shook my head to disagree with her. “I’m going to make some of them my apprentices.”

“Your apprentices?” She tilted her head slightly. “Raising the weak will not make them strong.”

“There’s a reason as to why the people of this world are so weak.”

“What would that be?”

“There’s something fatal stopping their growth. I think the reincarnators decided they themselves would be the strongest people here and did what they could within their factions to make that happen. Something can be done about that. I have the 13 Floors to Utopia, and you know about the NPC party system, right?”

“The NPC party system?” Gabriel’s eyes widened up as she gasped.

“There are certain events where NPCs can join your party. I should be able to use that.”

“During dungeon crawls, six people max are allowed to enter a battle at once. Are you saying...?”

“I’m going to team up with five people from this world.”

“I see.”

“There’s a concrete possibility that if I find special humans who fit the criteria, I should be able to raise them up to our tier.”

“What is that criteria?”

“It depends on the area, but I’m targeting people from ages twelve to fifteen. Kids who are mages but can’t use magic correctly yet. If my hypothesis is correct, I should be able to turn them into talented apprentices if they’re considered outcasts to society.”

“I see. As you wish.”

And so, we went on a search for my first apprentice.

After all that had happened, I altered the guild receptionists' memories a bit. Sorry to them, but it had to be done. On the official records, Jacob had become an adventurer who didn't return from a mission.

I seriously had not expected him to kill all of the knights. The killing itself was already a big deal, with a chance of the sparks landing on me as a result. *That* many people had been murdered; of course it would cause a ruckus. Me being present at the scene didn't help.

As a precautionary measure, I summoned Gabriel as my guard against any otherworlders. I would've preferred not to have her out, since she ate up my MP, but I didn't have much of a choice.

Anyway, at that moment, we were walking around a slave market.

"This place is horrible."

We were in the back of an outdoor marketplace, known as a slum for thieves. Iron cages littered the place, humans with heavy metal balls attached to their limbs. What made it worse was that the female slaves were dressed up, complete with heavy makeup, the scent of perfume wafting around them.

"I get that they're sex slaves, but still..."

I felt like I was going to get lightheaded seeing a scene filled with the disgusting whims of humans.

Gabriel spoke with a bored tone. Ah, I should mention that she could hide her angel wings, so at the moment she was just a simple, fiercely beautiful blonde maid with a voluptuous chest.

"You know, Gabriel," I interrupted. "We're here to look for a native to make my apprentice."

"Yes, I'm aware."

"I haven't told you what my specific criteria is for finding one, but if it were you, what kind of person would you choose?"

"My only option would be to use my intuition. Why might you be asking?"

“Because you’re a famous god.” *Way more famous than the little Japanese gods, that’s for sure.*

“Generally, Seraphim cannot be defined as gods. But if you were to compare us to gods from all mythologies, we would indeed be ranked in the upper tier.”

“I have guidelines for this apprentice, you see.”

“Hm?”

“But I’m human. I was thinking you’d have a different point of view, or intuition, that would lead you to what I think is the right answer. Some extraordinary power like that.”

“I see.”

“So, why don’t you try choosing one?”

“By intuition, then. The choice will be made solely according to my judgment, prejudice, and inclinations. Would that be acceptable?”

“Yeah, go for it. The important part is that you’re the one picking ’em.”

It would be seriously impressive if Gabriel was able to choose the right type of person without my input. Should that happen, I’d be able to use her intuition when coming up with future plans. Gods should be able to do anything, right? That was the theory behind letting her choose as she pleased without knowing my criteria.

“As you wish.”

She began surveying the cages around us. Her eyebrows lifted up at one, which she pointed at.

“Master Shinobu. Wouldn’t this seven-year-old boy work well?”

“Hm? Him?”

Lookswise, he was a rather beautiful boy. He was dressed up too, so he was probably a male prostitute.

“I, Gabriel, feel a strong aptitude for magic from that boy’s eyes.”

“But remember that I’m looking for a kid between twelve and fifteen.”

“But my intuition. I felt it. An overflowing torrent of magic from that boy.”

*How should I say this...? She seems very confident and is pushing for him.*

I tried using the Eye of Judgment on the boy since she was so adamant.

“No good. He’s not fit for this.”

“Then what about him over there? He looks about nine years old. I think he would do well.”

“And the reason?”

“Intuition.”

“He doesn’t seem right for this, but I’ll take a look. Nope, no good.”

“How about that five-year-old over there?”

Another Judgment, another miss.

“Wait a second. You’re only picking cute boys.”

“I am simply using my intuition, as you ordered. I have no ulterior motive.”

*Well then, I’ve found out that Gabriel’s intuition will be of no use to me, so I’ll go with my original plan.*

“This one here seems fit for us, Gabriel. Ah, but I’ll ask. What does your intuition say?”

“This one...?”

In front of our eyes was a girl with brown hair and animal ears, wrapped in dirty clothes, who looked like she could drop dead at any moment from magic-inflicted infections and petrification.

After we chatted about her, we approached her cage. The sign on it said “Alice Cecil.”

†

*Alice Cecil*

My name is Alice Cecil. Fifteen years old.

I'm 155 centimeters tall, and my weight is a secret. I'm insecure about my small chest and my skin that is so pale, it's weak to the sun. My hair and eyes are a deep brown.

I'm proud of my perky cat ears. Everyone says they're too big, but the bigger the cuter, I say.

In the Grand Forest of Skasaha, as part of the cat-eared race who lived there, I was raised to be a guardian, just like the rest of my family. This forest hid over a hundred settlements, housing tens of thousands of my brethren.

I was born to a family of combat mages in the countryside. My father was able to use midlevel Grade 2 Wind Magic, and my mother used low-level Grade 2 Recovery Magic. Naturally, both of them were given the most important positions in the defense and security organization, since they were so talented.

As their daughter, I was treated like somewhat of an elite in our colony. It was customary for kids like us to study abroad at the imperial magic academy when we turned fourteen.

My people had been living in the forest for a very long time. We were maliciously called "natives" within the Lilic Empire because of that.

I mean, sure, we lived in the countryside. No doubt about that. But I liked living in the friendly countryside more than the city, so it was partially a compliment. Even though I had to deal with the glares of prejudice during my study abroad, I still had a fun school life surrounded by friends.

The incident happened right after my fifteenth birthday.

Sorcerers in this world had a custom: between the ages of twelve and fifteen, when we still didn't have full control over our souls despite not being totally inexperienced, we were to form contracts with the spirits. The age differed depending on where you went, but the magic schools in this region admitted students at fourteen years old.

For one year, we would take basic classes, with the curriculum designed to make us capable of accepting the spirits. We could use Daily Life Magic without the spirits' blessings, but if we wanted to use any proper magic higher than Grade 1, it wouldn't be possible with mere human capabilities. Aid from the

four spirits was a *must*.

Those four spirits were said to be Grade 3 summons, the Four Great Spirit Gods: Salamander, Undine, Gnome, and Sylph. That was the reason humanity was said to only wield up to Grade 3.

Well, duh! We were already receiving aid from the gods themselves; there was no way we'd be able to use anything higher than them. In theory, humans could use other Grade 3 spells too, but in this day and age, those people were said to be miracle workers who'd need Ritual Magic anyway.

Ah, I got off topic. Let's get back to the contract rituals.

The principal of our academy, or another faculty member, would use Grade 2 Ritual Magic to contact the spirit world and ask the spirits to bless the first-years. It was considered unusual for someone to be unable to form a contract with any of the spirits. Sorcerers-in-training aside, even normal people had over a ninety percent chance of being able to form contracts with each of the spirits. It was a partial requirement for mages to contract with all of them. I'd heard that some unlucky people could only get two or three of the spirits, and even I pitied them, since that was quite bad for a mage.

Still, there were figures throughout history who'd only formed contracts with three out of the four. They probably had to put in much more work than the usual person to handle it. From a different perspective, these people proved that you could still manage to survive as a mage even with only two or three contracts.

If you couldn't contract with *any* of the spirits, however, you could not live as a sorcerer since you couldn't use any actual magic, point-blank.

On the day of my ritual, that unusual occurrence happened to me.

Salamander, Undine, Gnome, and Sylph. Not a single one of them lent me their power.

Branded as “useless,” my status within the academy fell off to the extreme.

I was able to handle the gossip and bullying at first, but they gradually escalated to the point where my hometown was brought into it. They told me, “Go back to Domie Village and cry to your fellow savages,” not behind my back, but directly to my face.

I would’ve been fine if they’d only talked about me. But to call all of the people in my home “savages” was just too horrible.

That was the first time I let my anger take over and I punched someone.

I ended up even more ostracized at school because of that, and the bullying got even worse. The academy didn’t protect me—in fact, they treated me like I was a nuisance.

Then one day, with the long summer vacation right before me, I was called to the principal’s office.

They put me on special leave.

Why? Because they wanted me to go back to my hometown, tell my relatives that I didn’t want to go to school anymore, and write a dropout letter of my own volition.

My tuition and exchange program fees were paid for by the people of my colony, through their hard-earned blood, sweat, and tears. The day I left home, they celebrated for me, seeing me off all together. They watched over me with expectation as their pride and joy, since I was supposed to become a guardian of our forest who would surpass my mother and father.

Yet, I couldn’t use magic.

*I wonder what they’ll think when they hear that.*

Father, mother, my childhood friends, the kind old ladies and men in my neighborhood. I was deeply, firmly connected with each and every one of these

people. They were family.

*They'll probably look a little sad and welcome me back with kind, warm arms.*

I knew that, which made it hurt worse. The regret and sorrow that came with being unable to live up to everyone's expectations...

*The first thing I should do is apologize. Then I'll work as hard as I can.*

I might not have been able to use magic, but I could still fire arrows and wield knives. I knew I could do well as a sentinel when I grew up.

*Even if I can't use magic, I'll always be a guardian of this forest.*

A long journey, traveled on foot for one week straight. At the end of it, I had finally reached my hometown.

I was welcomed back by my father, my mother, my childhood friends, the kind old ladies and men in my neighborhood—greeted by all of their...

Burning corpses.

That day, the central plaza was engulfed in red.

People smiling, warm sunlight, the thick scent of foliage—those things that made up a calm forest colony were mercilessly doused in smoke and flame.

†

A man clad in all white looked down at me sprawled out on the ground. I wasn't sure how many times he'd punched me at that point.

Against the blurry background, the only thing I could see clearly was my own red blood spattered on his white clothes.

"Tell me. Do you hate me?"

A white tailcoat and white gloves. Despite his white hair, he looked to be in his late twenties. He was laughing.

"I want...to kill you." I could only barely speak.



He scoffed and violently shook his head. "You can't. Do you know why?"

I didn't respond.

"Because you're weak. Me? I was able to murder everyone in this settlement with ease. Do you know why? Because I'm just too strong."

"Why...did you kill us...?"

He sighed without answering my question. "Hate me. That will become your strength."

I looked at him questioningly.

"You'll become strong. You could even come up to where I am, one day. That's how much potential you have."

I had no idea what he was talking about.

*If nothing else, I can't lose emotionally.* I glared at him with that in mind.

"I couldn't even form contracts with the Four Great Spirits, yet you think I can get to the same place as a monster like you, who can use Grade 5 magic?"

"I'd heard the rumor that you can't use magic. That's why I had to blow this place up."

"It's my fault?"

"With this, I am able to plant the seed of hatred into you. You'll take it and become strong."

"You did this because of me? This whole tragedy is...?"

The man put his white silk hat back on and heaved a huge sigh.

"I'm all alone," he said.

"Alone?"

"As you can see, no one is any match for me. I'm unparalleled. And yet, there exist those whom even I cannot reach."

I had no response.

"Now that I'm in possession of an area with strong monsters in it, what do you think my options are for gaining EXP, realistically? It's hunting high-level

humans. So I'm creating tough enemies with my own hands. You and the others will use your intense hatred for me as a basis for you to improve yourself."

I remained quiet, and he continued.

"That's enough for our chat. Grade 5 Situational Abnormality: Pandora."

My body was coursing with pain as soon as he cast that spell. Struggling to overcome the impulse to scream, it took everything I had to keep my voice down.

*I'm not going to scream. The last thing I need is for this man to get what he wants. He may be physically stronger than me, but not emotionally. I refuse to let him break me!*

"I've put a multitude of status effects onto you, including petrification. The likelihood of death is quite high if you don't get healed. I'm going to take you to a slave market and have you sold."

"A slave market...?"

"Just another seed of hatred I'm planting in you. Should you manage to live through the abyss of death, the worst status effects, you'll still be nothing more than a sex slave at best. You'll fight your way through to escape, and in the end, you'll hate me so much that you'll become stronger. You'll appear again in front of me one day as nothing more than a culmination of EXP. If you live, that is."

My fingers had already turned to stone. My body was slowly getting weaker and weaker. The poison must've been affecting my nerves, because the pain was dulling, and my head started to float.

"Your...name... Never...forgive..."

"It's up to you whether you die here or not, but just so you know, I treasure souvenirs from the underworld. Allow me to answer your question. Unfortunately, I do not have a name. I threw mine away the day I was almost killed."

All I could do was stare at him.

"Don't look at me like that. People call me the God Killer here, you see. I actually quite like the title. It's the name of the man who is going to massacre

all of the reincarnators one day.”

The scenery in my vision narrowed and darkened.

Then finally...

The man whispered into my ear. “I still don’t have enough to get past the level cap—level 99. I pray for the day you appear in front of me once more as a high-level warrior.”

My consciousness faded, and the next thing I knew, I was trapped inside a cage in a slave market.

†

*Shinobu Iijima*

“Oof, this is awful,” I whispered as I looked through the metal bars at the girl who was lying limp.

What I saw through Judgment was a bargain sale of status effects.

Petrification(light)

Cursed(moderate)

Rotting(light)

Poison(moderate)

Confusion(light)

Silence(light)

Numb(light)

Weak(moderate)

Berserk(light)

Infection(heavy)

Exhaustion(moderate)

Emaciation(fatal)

“It really is pitiful.” A slave merchant came up to me. He had a beard and his head was wrapped in a turban, and his fat belly was protruding out.

“What’s pitiful? The kid?” I asked.

“Yes. It’s a child of the Domie race.”

“Domie?”

“They all have dark brown hair, brown eyes, and cat ears. They’re countryside demihumans who dwell in the Grand Forest of Skasaha.”

“Why is she here?”

“Its colony was destroyed and burned to the ground recently. I heard it ended up becoming a slave after that mess.”

“How much does she cost?”

The chubby merchant smiled in amusement at my question. “No need to make such a joke, sir! I’m sure it’s a virgin, but you’d be risking your life trying to copulate with it when it has all of those status effects. Until just a bit ago, its statuses weren’t too bad, so a few people tried to buy it, but...”

“People already tried to buy her? Yet she’s still for sale?”

“Indeed, they were rather perverted, those ones. But they got punched.”

“Punched?”

“Yes. This little girl started with punching, then spat, scratched, even kicked them. Quite the wildcat, this one. As you can see, the infection has spread so much that it’s now on its last breaths. We don’t have to feed it, so the maintenance cost is low, but lately I’ve been worried about the cremation costs once it dies...”

I nodded to myself as the merchant’s eyebrows furrowed in concern.

“Got it. She fits the bill.”

The merchant raised his brow.

“Can I buy her for one piece of silver?”

“Honestly, I’d like to give it away for free, if I could. Are you sure about this, though?”

“Sure about what?”

“It’s ailed with so many status effects.”

“Oh, that.” I nodded again. “That won’t be a problem.”

I whispered to Gabriel. “Gabriel, how many seconds do you need?”

She whispered back to me, “She can be cured within three seconds, sir.”

Gabriel was categorized as an angel, so detoxification and curse-breaking were a piece of cake for her. I wouldn’t blame anyone for thinking status effects of this severity would take lots of time and effort to heal, though, knowing what was considered normal in this world.

I pulled out a single silver coin from my drawstring pouch and handed it to the slave merchant. Then, I opened up the cage and extended my hand out toward the girl.

“Alice, we’re going to save you now, but we have to make sure of something first.”

“Of what?” she whispered.

“Well, I’m apparently a pretty strong mage. I’m looking for an apprentice right now, for a few reasons. If you want to join us and become strong, then I want you to grab my hand.”

Even to me, I could tell my request was a bit far-fetched. But I had to check her will first.

“You don’t have to take my hand if you don’t want to. If you don’t, then I promise we’ll heal you up and take you to a safe place. So, what’ll it be?”

That was all she needed to hear. She stretched her arm out with what little strength she had left. Though all she could manage to do was limply touch her palm to mine, she made it clear that she was grabbing my hand.

†

We were in a facility intended for buyers to test out their sex slaves and change their clothes, among other things. The place had simple beds, chairs, tables, and partition curtains. In my world it would’ve looked akin to a big hospital room. A horrible thought, but at least it wasn’t too dirty.

“I’ll wait here,” I said as I closed the curtain.

I could hear the sounds of Gabriel wiping Alice down with a damp towel to get rid of the grime as she lay on the bed. After a while, Gabriel called out with an “all finished,” so I opened the curtain. Alice was still lying down, no strength to get up.

“I...don’t know why you two bought me.” Her breaths were very short, barely overcoming the status effects.

“What do you mean?” Gabriel engaged her.

“I’m about to die from an infection... I’m petrified, cursed... So many status effects were cast on me... I could die any minute now. If you wanted to break my curse...you’d need Grade 3 Ritual Magic. That would cost so much money... Or even if you had money...you’d have to go to the Imperial Church...”

“Rest assured, Master Shinobu asked me how many seconds it would take. I answered with ‘three seconds.’ Therefore, it is my duty to heal you within three seconds.”

I chuckled at her absurdity. *I mean, you could even take ten or twenty seconds, and it would still be fine.*

“Grade 5: Seraph’s Blessing: Perfect Heal.”

Gabriel’s wings fluttered open with her words. That was what usually happened when she actually put effort into something.

Her lips touched Alice’s, whose eyes widened as far as they could. Then her upper half shot up with a *whoosh*.

“No way... There’s no way. All those status effects are... And... My body...was completely healed?” She blinked rapidly.

Gabriel shrugged, exasperated. “That is indeed what I said. Perfect Heal.”

Alice’s expression was dazed and airy. After thinking for a bit, she whispered, “Grade 5...”

“Ah!” She seemed to have realized something. She leaned toward Gabriel and began babbling. “A... A... A miracle! It’s a miracle! This was...a miracle, you know?! I thought you needed a Grade 3 Ritual to undo curses and petrification,

but not only did you get rid of them along with everything else, you also brought all my energy back!”

“It was not a miracle. That is the exact effect that Grade 5 magic is supposed to have.”

“I-It really was Grade 5?!”

Alice’s eyes suddenly started blinking again as she noticed the wings on Gabriel’s back. “Wings... Are you...an archangel...?”

Gabriel nodded with her usual expression, though she seemed to be tired of this line of questioning.

“Grade 5... Which must mean... You’re...close to a god... No, maybe such an archangel that you’re...even like a god yourself...”

Yet another nod.

“The highest angel... That only exists in legends... Your name and rank must be... One of the ‘Powers’... I think?”

That was enough to break Gabriel’s stone face. “Powers? Ah, right. I think the ones ranked sixth in the angel hierarchy, fourth from the bottom, were called that. But they must be at the top in this world. No wonder you’re surprised. It’s hard to believe the highest Seraph is considered in the same league as the six Powers.”

She looked troubled for once, a rare sight. I couldn’t blame her. If this was all it took to surprise Alice, she was in for a ride for sure.

†

“Ah, right. You haven’t eaten anything, have you?”

We left the slums and knocked on the door of an eatery we saw near the main street.

When I settled into a chair and began perusing the menu, I quickly noticed I was the only one sitting, with Alice and Gabriel standing awkwardly by the table. I gestured for them to sit.

“Alice, is there anything you can’t eat, like for religious reasons or

something?”

She shook her head nervously without saying anything.

“Excuse me, waiter?” I waved at a nearby server. “We’ll have a plate of your most expensive beef, two plates of bread, and three glasses of water, please!”

I would’ve preferred all of us to have beef, but I didn’t have enough money. There were several kinds of gold, silver, and treasures at my hideout, but I still hadn’t visited it yet. For now, all I had was the prize money I’d gotten when I cleared the tutorial. I’d used quite a bit of it during my travels, so with this meal, my funds would go down to about zero.

The waiter prompted me to pay after I ordered. It seemed you had to pay in advance at this restaurant. He gave me change once I coughed up the money.

“Um...” Alice fidgeted. “Why am I eating at the same table as you, Master Shinobu? Is this okay?”

“What do you mean? Are we not supposed to eat together?”

“Uh... Um... But I’m your slave. Slaves can’t eat with their masters...”

The waiter arrived and placed our meal onto the table while Alice tried to rationalize the situation.

I swung my arm out above the food to urge her on. “You’re hungry, so you gotta eat up before it gets cold.”

She shook her head again, her hair making swishing noises. “I should not be accompanying you when you bought me as a slave. I cannot. Besides, you’re also a great sorcerer, and she’s an archangel. Someone useless like me could never receive the honor of sitting at a table with such people...”

“But you’re not useless, Alice.”

“I’m a failure who couldn’t form a contract with even a single one of the Four Great Spirits.”

“If you say so. Okay then, as your master, here’s your order. We’re going to eat together, so no more whining. Happy now?” I said with a wink.

Alice curled up in her chair and slowly reached her hand out to one of the



bread plates.

“Nope, your meal’s over here.” I handed her the plate stuffed to the brim with beef, vegetables, and bread.

“Huh?”

“I know you’re starving by now. Meat’s the best for times like this. Meat!”

“I-I can’t! If I eat this then all you and Lady Gabriel will eat...is...just bread!”

“Come on, you haven’t eaten in days.”

She let herself be dumbfounded for a bit before whispering to me hoarsely. “But... I thought I was a slave.”

“Oh right, you were marked with a slave tattoo. Why don’t we remove that for you?”

Slave tattoos were basically another status effect. They caused your master-servant relationship to become permanent, meaning if you rebelled against your master, you’d be afflicted with a strong near-death curse as a penalty.

“Huh? Ah? Uh? Remove my tattoo? You can do that? But it’s a seal that was forcibly made by an Artifact using lost magic from a hundred years ago!”

Her eyes had widened up to perfect circles in disbelief.

“I’ll leave this to you, Gabriel,” I ordered. “I’m not able to work with intricate stuff like this.”

Gabriel took a step toward Alice. “As you wish. The Perfect Heal had not recognized her tattoo on her hand as a status effect, and therefore let it remain. My deepest apologies, Master Shinobu.”

With a snap of Gabriel’s fingers, a bright beam of light shot out from Alice’s palm.

“Huh?” Her reaction was a bit delayed. She turned her hand over repeatedly, shock running through her face. “It’s gone?”

She began wildly shaking her head. “Slave tattoos...can be...removed...?”

“They’re approximately Grade 4 Curse techniques, after all. Wouldn’t make sense if they couldn’t be undone.” I shrugged.

“No, but... It’s said to be an absolute binding contract. There are other ones like it too. And, um... If one’s put on a national treaty or business transaction under the assumption that it can’t be broken... But in truth it actually *can* be, then world order would crumble...”

“Even we can’t break blood seals, but most other curses are fair game, probably.”

“...What?” Her entire body stiffened up as if her back had frozen over.

†

We headed outside of the town after eating and walked for about two hours, avoiding the highway and leaving the side road that led to the Grand Forest of Skasaha. Eventually, we strayed so far that we ended up following the animal trails.

I paused after we’d progressed enough. “I doubt anyone’ll see us here.”

Gabriel closed her eyes and softly nodded. “Kuroinu has also confirmed that there are no foes present.”

“Damn, you summons have it good. You can communicate with each other within our home base.”

“That is because we are essentially melted together within your soul, Master Shinobu.”

Alice let her curiosity get the best of her. “What are you all talking about?”

“I’m saying we’re going to fly now.” I cast Flight Magic onto myself and Alice.

*Whoosh.*

Our bodies began to float up, the speed slowly accelerating.

Alice couldn’t bring herself to speak at first; then she began shaking her head. “Grade 3... Aerial Swimming? No... I’m not going to let this surprise me...”

Acceleration was a strange thing. No matter how slow you went at first, you’d really end up going faster and faster exponentially.

Ten meters, twenty meters, fifty meters, a hundred meters. Eventually we were so high up that the people on the ground looked like grains of rice.

And then—

Five hundred meters.

A thousand meters.

Three thousand meters.

“Um, aren’t we too high? Grade 3 Aerial Swimming is only supposed to go up about two hundred meters...”

“Nah, this is about right. Because I’m using Grade 4: Gravity Invalid.”

“What?!”

Five thousand meters. The speed kept rising. We blasted through the low-hanging clouds, aiming even higher.

“Huh?! Huh?! The clouds... It’s misty... Huh?! Huh?!”

We finally breached ten thousand meters.

Alice screamed loudly as we overlooked the sea of giant clouds.

*“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?!”*

The earth was far below the clouds, surpassing twenty thousand, thirty thousand, then fifty thousand meters. Our rise just wouldn’t stop.

After enough climbing, the horizon curved to the shape of the planet. Looking up, we could see a canvas of black, an unlimited number of stars spread throughout. Looking down, the blues of the ocean, the whites of the clouds, and the greens and browns of the earth colored our view. We were still well below the edge of the atmosphere, but the scene was still pretty science-fictiony, even fantastical.

I should mention: I’d put up a barrier around us with magic, so no issues with temperature or air pressure there.

“What is this? You even control archangels... Are you a god, Master Shinobu?”

Alice probably didn’t even know that planets were round, much less anything else about space. No wonder she couldn’t describe this as anything other than

the work of a god.

“This is...amazing! You’re amazing, Master Shinobu!”

“Did you know the world was round, Alice?”

“The world is round? Ah... You’re right! It’s round! It’s round!”

“And did you know that the space above the sky is jet-black?”

She did her signature headshake.

“During our meal today, you called yourself useless. But you’re not, not at all. There are things you can’t see until you change your perspective, just like this. There are tons of things you still don’t know.”

“...Yes, sir.”

“Also, you’ve gotten shocked at every little thing up until now, but you’ll get tired real quick if you keep that up. Make this your last surprise.”

Alice couldn’t help but laugh. “I don’t know what else I could be surprised about after seeing this.”

I chuckled as I agreed.

Gabriel flew up to us from the earth. “Master Shinobu, according to those stationed at Izanach, our home base, our spatial-fixture preparations for the material world are complete. I shall connect us whenever you are ready.”

“Got it.”

“Well then, let us begin.”

“Ugh, if this were a game, all I’d have to do is press ‘Base’ to get there.”

“However, in this world, you are able to embody it in many places. Does that not make it also convenient?”

“You’ve got a point there.”

Having settled that matter, I pulled out a revolver, and put my intent into it.

“Grade 5: Dimension Slicer Excalibur.”

A black line with a width of three centimeters and a length of five hundred meters appeared in front of us about four hundred meters away. As the spell

stated, I'd sliced through space.

"Grade 5..." The color had all but drained from Alice's face, but she didn't freak out. She even smiled weakly. "I'm not going to be shocked anymore. This is just who you are, isn't it, Master Shinobu?"

Gabriel began focusing on the dimensional thread. It split open into a round portal like a black hole with a diameter of about four hundred meters.

*It appeared from its depths.*

It would probably be best described as an old castle from the European Middle Ages on a floating island.

This was my first time seeing it in person too. *Wow, that's cool.*

It was so big, it could barely fit through the black hole, with a four hundred meter width and a three hundred meter height from top to bottom. Depth was probably about two kilometers.

"It's long and narrow," I whispered.

I could hear Alice gulp. She pointed at the island castle. "Master Shinobu... What is that...?"

*I mean, there's only one answer to that.*

"That's my house."

Alice's mouth dropped open as the rest of her body stiffened up.

*"Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?!"*

*Wait a second, doesn't this mean that players who can't use Grade 5 can't get to their home base?*

That's what I wondered as we floated down to the Heavenly Palace Izanach.

†

Sitting atop a floating island in the sky, the Heavenly Palace Izanach was the home base for me and my familiars. It was super fancy, to briefly describe it.

We opened up the front doors and started down the straight hallway, but it was so long that I couldn't see the end of it.

The carpet was soft and fluffy, and the rest of the interior was lined with furniture that looked like works of art. Of course, there were actual works of art, like paintings and sculptures as well. The ceiling stood about thirty meters above our heads, and jeweled chandeliers decorated the place.

Truthfully, I'd never had anywhere to spend my in-game currency, so I traded it in exchange for expanding my base and its interior design. But if I was able to make it *this* grand without paying real money, then I had to wonder about the bases owned by the whales who actually spent money.

"Master Shinobu, this is your house?" Alice's eyes were sparkling. "It's incredible... Incredible!"

Next to me, Gabriel spoke. "Now then, Master Shinobu. What shall you do? Will you gather your other Grade 6 summons in the center of Izanach? Or..."

I shook my head. "No, we're going to keep going through the corridors like this and get to the security office, for starters. Alice is still level 1, and we don't know what'll help her level up yet. Tell the security chief to gather everyone in the northern office."

"I see. So long as the level cap remains..." She nodded in agreement as she looked up at me.

"That's right. Getting her to the level cap is an absolute *must* for the future. But with the way things are now, leveling her up would only lead to more losses."

Watching us cautiously, Alice's voice shook. "The northern office? Level up? The level cap is an absolute must? The level cap... You mean level 99, right? Are you saying that you're going to get me to level 99? What do you mean by that?"

"You'll see soon. Relax."

"I haven't been able to ask this yet, but... Master Shinobu, what are you going to have me do? I'm useless."

"I already told you, Alice. You're wrong about you being useless."

“But I—”

I roughly grabbed her head before she could do her little headshake to deny me.

Giving her a smile, I ruffled her hair. “I’m about to explain everything.”

She gulped down her reservations.

†

Watchtowers were set on all four edges of the island. The northern one stood in the middle of a stone garden filled with hydrangeas.

I turned to Alice. “You’re going to make a contract here.”

“A contract?”

I confirmed. “You didn’t form contracts with any of the Four Spirits, right? Or rather, you couldn’t.”

“Yes, sir. That’s why I’m useless.”

“That’s exactly why you’re not.”

She tilted her head in confusion. “I’m sorry. I don’t understand at all.”

“You don’t have to. Let’s get to business, shall we? First, about the concept of levels. Do you understand that, Alice?”

She thought about it a moment before she nodded. “My grades at the magic academy were good enough that they taught me upper-level materials. I believe I understand the general concepts of statistics and levels.”

“Explain them to me.”

“Humans are able to defeat enemies, such as monsters, and steal their life energy, exchanging it for EXP to raise the rank of their souls. That is what ‘levels’ are.”

I approved, then asked my next question. “Then, what exactly does the phenomenon generally known as ‘stat upgrades’ indicate?”

“The raising of one’s stats accompanies the raising of their level. Their physical prowess grows, aided by the spirits because of the strengthening of

their soul, called a ‘boost.’”

“So, here’s another question. Why do you think you’re useless?”

Her quizzical expression told me she didn’t understand my intentions for asking. “So long as I am not contracted with a spirit, I do not receive their aid, therefore my stats cannot grow. As a result, even if I level up, my stats will remain indigent.”

“And how many spirits is a person able to contract with?”

“Four of them: Salamander, Undine, Sylph, and Gnome. The Four Great Spirit Gods.”

I did my biggest nod yet. “My class is summoner. I’m done explaining why you’re not useless.”

Her confused stare bored into me.

She put her hand to her chin, desperately trying to parse all of that information.

“Think carefully. You should be able to arrive at the answer just with the things we talked about.”

“Um, Master Shinobu, you’re a summoner who can use Grade 5 magic, yes?”

Goose bumps ran up her skin.

“...Ah!”

She shakily knelt down on both knees. I offered my hand to her.

“Precisely. You can break through what this world believes is common sense. Don’t you want to get revenge on the people who destroyed your hometown, and those who spoke ill of your family?”

Alice grabbed my hand with force without saying a word. Unlike the weak touch she’d given me at the slave market, this one had all of her strength in it.

And so, Alice’s contracts with the gods began. Not with the shams of Grade 3 spirits called gods in this world, but the *true* gods I called forth for her.



*Alice Cecil*

Guardian of the East, the Flame Emperor Bahamut.

Guardian of the West, the Sea Emperor Leviathan.

Guardian of the South, the Lightning Emperor Indra.

Guardian of the North, the Earth Goddess Gaia.

These were the four gods I formed contracts with.

All I could do was stand there in shock when we finished.

They were all Grade 5 summons, and I found out that Lady Gabriel was Grade 6. Speaking of Lady Gabriel, Grade 6 summons do not have affinities of fire, earth, water, or wind; therefore, humans cannot form contracts with them. That applied even to Master Shinobu, but he'd been able to form contracts with Bahamut and the other gods at level 1. He said that it "just kinda happened," but he also said he's a "reincarnator," so he must be fundamentally different from people like me.

As you would expect, my stats' growth potential had changed drastically now that I had formed contracts. Leveling up even once would widen the gap between me and noncontractors—like the space between heaven and earth.

*So what would that mean for the difference between contracts with Grade 3s vs Grade 5s?* Just thinking about it made me gulp.

Lady Gabriel and Master Shinobu began talking among themselves.

"What shall you do next, Master Shinobu? Will we take her to the center of Izanach?"

"No, about that. Doesn't she need to be level 20 before she forms contracts with spirits of light or dark?"

"I believe so."

"I have Amaterasu and Tsukuyomi doing other stuff right now. I'd feel bad

interrupting them just to introduce them to her.”

“Indeed, there is no need to rush.”

“We should just do our business and focus on leveling for now, quick and easy.”

That piqued my curiosity. “What is your business?”

Master Shinobu stuck his hand into his pocket and handed me his short staff.

“Huh? What is this for?”

“Just take it.”

He pulled something else out of his pocket and placed it around my neck. It was a collar. Placing himself behind me, he reached his hands around as if he were giving me a hug.

“Hold the wand like this, and put your hands out.”

*This is my first time being so close to a man.*

*So it's not weird that my cheeks are burning up, right? That's a normal reaction, right?*

Putting my thoughts aside, I did as he told me and held the short staff out in front of me, facing forward.

Master Shinobu placed his big palms on top of my knuckles. I knew he was just helping me hold the staff, but my face flushed even more at the fact that our hands were touching.

*Urgh... What in the world is this situation...?*

“Look up, Alice.”

I followed his orders and saw a snake with wings at the end of my vision. It looked about ten meters tall and two meters in diameter.

*I think I've seen that in a monster encyclopedia before. That's a...*

“A... A... A Sky Dragon?! If one appears, it's a disaster that only happens every ten years or so in human villages! They can only be defeated if the imperial mages and the Knights of the Round combine forces and fight it for hours!”

“Have you ever used magic, Alice?”

“Ah, yes... Daily Life Magic.”

“Okay. Leave the magic control to me. I’m about to send some of my magic from my hand through yours, into the wand.”

“Huh? What does that mean?”

He didn’t explain. “You’ll get it when it’s over.”

He moved the tip of the short staff toward the Sky Dragon above.

*“Not a censured human, but a censured god. Slaughter such a god and manifest the crimson lotus to this land. Grade 5 Nuclear Magic: Kagutsuchi of Fire!”*

A beam of light shot out from the staff and into the sky. It burned into the Sky Dragon with a comedic punting sound, melting it, slicing through it, and then finally splitting the dragon in half.

“You defeated it in one hit?! B-But... What was the point of doing that?”

“Don’t think about it, Alice. Aim the wand over there.”

I did as he said.

“Flow your magic through it, then say this—Grade 1: Small Fire.”

I tilted my head. “But I’m level 1. You were the one who defeated that Sky Dragon, so I didn’t receive any EXP. Being level 5 is required to use Small Fire.”

“Right, you natives can’t use certain spells until your stats hit specific numbers.”

“Therefore, I cannot use Small Fire.”

He chuckled, a bit exasperated. “Just try it!”

*But the impossible is impossible. I wonder what Master Shinobu is trying to prove here.*

I let my magic flow into the short staff and whispered, “Grade 1: Small Fire.”

A flame about the size of my fist appeared with a whooshing sound.

“Ah. It... It appeared!”

I couldn't believe my eyes. I rummaged through my pocket to look for my stat plate that I made when I became a student at the magic academy. The shock I took upon glancing at it was enough to make me fall helplessly to the ground.

“Master Shinobu?”

“Hm? Yeah?”

“Why am I...level 5? And aren't these numbers...a little strange?”

Item Description: Friendship Necklace

Essentially an item that makes power leveling possible.

Usually, one must steal life energy from a target and turn it into EXP. However, with this item, one splits their EXP with their party members, and vice versa. In order to prevent game-breaking, the level cap for power leveling is level 5.

Stats

Name: Alice Cecil *Race: Human* Class: Magician

Level: 1 → (Grade 5 Contract Bonus and Level-Up) → 5

HP: 110/110 → 305/305 MP: 175/175 → 510/510

Power: 2 → 9 / Strength: 2 → 9 / Speed: 2 → 18 / Magic: 3 → 27

Acquired Magic: All Grade 1 Magic (Adjustments to MP drainage due to contracts with upper beings of four elements)

But the usual student at the magic academy would have stats like these:

Race: Human / Class: Magician *Level: 5* HP: 150/150 MP: 255/255

Power: 4 *Strength: 4* Speed: 6 / Magic: 9

Acquired Magic: Certain Grade 1 spells.

†

*Shinobu Iijima*

It was night by the time we finished, and Alice fell asleep as soon as she was

taken to her room. It was only natural for her to be tired after everything that happened today.

Gabriel and I had been walking around Izanach to make sure everything was in order. We found ourselves in the inner garden.

“What do you plan to do with Alice?” Gabriel asked.

“I don’t know for sure, but I have a general plan.”

“And what would that be?”

“It’s basically the same as making one of your IRL friends play *La Vita* because you want to get them into it.”

“Hm?”

“It’s not that complicated. Give them the appropriate items and the appropriate advice, then watch them flourish. You’d essentially be having them start from level 1, then getting them to level 99 through the fastest route possible, so that they’ll become useful party members for you in the future.”

Gabriel slapped the bottom of her fist flat onto her other palm. “May I pose a question, Master Shinobu?”

“Hm? Yes?”

“Statswise, Alice will most likely be able to use upper-level magic after a short period. Will the way she learns such magic be...?”

“That’s right, you got it. That’s the biggest difference between what we’re doing here and playing with IRL friends.”

“Natives like her are unable to automatically learn how to use spells. There are two requirements for them: having their stats reach certain values, and...”

“And they have to memorize the proper techniques beforehand through magic tomes. Alice was able to use Small Fire because she’d studied how to use Grade 1 magic at her academy, before our contract rituals. Gabriel, do you have any idea where we’d be able to find tomes?”

She shook her head. “I do not. Also, they are apparently called Scrolls here, rather than magic tomes.”

“She should still be registered at the academy, right?”

“I believe so.”

“We’ll have her attend school for now, while she lives here. I think that’s our only option.”

“So you’re going to have her gather intel, then.”

I gave her a small nod.

†

*Alice Cecil*

I was on the exercise grounds of Altena Academy of Magic.

Today was the exam that would determine what class us first-years would be in after our long break. The subjects were two simple things: can we use Small Fire, and how many times can we use it in a row?

The first question was a matter that would determine the absolute minimum disposition for us as mages. Anyone could do it if they just hunted monsters and got their level up after forming contracts with the spirits for a few months, so this task wouldn’t show any big differences between our skills.

And in my case specifically, a lot of stuff had happened.

The second question, on the other hand, was meant to gauge how much MP—or rather, magic power—we had. First-years were set to get their stats up and learn lots of Grade 1 magic from then on out, so this was about all they could test us on for now.

The students’ voices of excitement and nervousness resounded throughout the wide campus grounds.

Half of these students were the lazy sons and sheltered daughters of nobles. Most of their families had donated large sums of money when they were admitted to ensure that they’d get a good standing. Though these kids didn’t necessarily *not* care about this exam, it just really wasn’t important enough to put their futures in jeopardy.

The other half of the students were from commoner households, with all sorts of backgrounds. The one thing they all had in common was that they trained to death in hopes that it would make their future prospects even just a little bit better.

Since this marked our first screening exam since we enrolled here, the sense of gravity made the students' conversations about it feel that much more heavy.

I stood out among those taking the exam, so much so that I could feel tons of stares from around me. Why? Because I shouldn't even have been able to take this test in the first place. Yet here I was, standing in line like everyone else. The kids from my class were side-eyeing me and whispering among themselves.

A high-pitched voice called out to me from behind.

"Oh my! Well, if it isn't Miss Alice Cecil! Good day to you!"

She had blonde hair, curled into little rolls. I knew her face well.

"Ah, Beatrice. Hello."

"By the way!" she cut me off. "Why on earth is a useless piece of dirt who couldn't even form contracts with the Four Great Spirit Gods here?"

My silence made a smile float up her face, as if she'd won something.

"You were born to the uncivilized indigenous beasts of the Skasaha Grand Forest in some village, yes? I heard it was destroyed. Your people are called the 'Domie' or something, correct? Hee hee, it was all over the news here."

I felt a bit like vomiting. My chest and head started to hurt as the scene doused in flames crossed the back of my mind.

"I heard it was already burned to the ground by the time you got there. That's why you came back here, because you had nowhere else to go. Is that right?"

I remained silent.

"The academy isn't allowed to kick you out until you've finished a set amount of the curriculum, unfortunately. But I suppose there are dorms here, so you could receive food, clothing, and shelter should you ask to live in one."

Her next delighted laugh let me know that there was a *however* to her spiel.

“Too bad for you! Today is the class sorting exam! Our fixed curriculum ends once the results are out, and we will advance to the next year and the next courses. Do you understand? That means you’re expelled as of today! There’s no other end to this!”

She smiled sadistically at my lack of a response. I already knew this, but this girl really did have a special personality.

“You’re dressed so poorly too,” she continued. “Could it be that the rumors about you being sold at a slave market were true?”

Beatrice took my silence as affirmation. She twisted her face into a repulsive grin and exaggerated herself, bending over laughing.

“Hee hee! Pft! It hurts, my stomach, my stomach hurts! Your cape is so cheap-looking!”

Indeed, I was wearing a black cape, but it was precious magic equipment that Master Shinobu had given me. There was no point in saying that to Beatrice, though.

“The filthy village of indigenous savages was filthily burned down so you became a filthy vagabond girl, captured by filthy bandits to become a filthy slave, where your filthy virginity was filthily dispersed by your filthy slave master! You must have run away and come crawling back here, right? Hee hee, ha ha, aha ha hah! Sooo funny! Kya ha haaah!”

As I ignored Beatrice, my turn to take the exam came around. It was held in groups of ten students at a time. It was super simple: stand in your designated spot, face the wooden doll ten meters away, and shoot your magic at it. That was it.

When my group was called by the exam proctor, Beatrice plainly clicked her tongue. “Hmph. I finally found a toy, yet it’s being taken away from me.”

She then smiled suddenly, as if she’d come up with a great idea. Pulling out a heavy knit bag filled with coins, she shoved it into the hand of the girl next to me.



“It’s not my turn yet, but I want to take the exam with my friend here. Could you switch with me?”

†

Ten of us were lined up in our designated spots. Ten meters ahead, ten wooden dolls were evenly spaced in front of us.

Having secured her position, Beatrice’s golden curls looked like they were smiling along with her.

“Miss Alice! How do you feel?”

I chose not to respond.

She tried again. “Miss Aliiice! How do you feel?”

I was trying my best to display my full intention of not talking to her, but I sighed and caved.

“Your words made me remember something unpleasant earlier, so I don’t feel good.”

“I wasn’t going to ask you something boring like if you were upset about remembering your fellow indigenous savages being massacred in front of your eyes. I was going to ask how it feels to be about to show a pathetic display of Daily Life Magic at this academic exam.”

I raised a brow at her.

Her eyes narrowed to say she knew everything. “No matter how stupid you may be, even you must know that you’ll never be able to move up from Daily Life Magic. You’re probably just plotting something miserable, like trying to appeal to the teachers that you’re pitiful and you want them to hire you.”

I didn’t want to engage with her, but she just kept going.

Beatrice pulled a fan out of her pocket and began to elegantly fan herself with it. “It’s just too bad, though! You will not be showered in pity and kindness, but by bursts of laughter and the glares of scorn! They would never hire you here, you know.”

“...”

“Well, there is a one-in-a-million—no, one-in-a-*billion* chance that you’d be stupid enough to try something like that. But it’s just too bad! I’d ask my father to close off any potential jobs you could get here. I’ve never liked having to share a desk with a savage indigenous. You’d be getting just what you deserve.”

I sighed even deeper than before, then turned to her.

“Beatrice?”

“Yeees?”

“I was actually sold at a slave market. I almost had my virginity sold too.”

Her eyes glistened as she begged me to keep talking. “So the rumors were true?! Then what happened?! Were the rumors about your chastity being stolen away in a pigsty true too? Really? Really really? Was your first night in a pigsty?!”

“I’m still a virgin. I punched, scratched, and kicked the men who tried to buy me as a sex slave. No one was able to buy me.”

Beatrice hid her mouth behind her fan and cackled gleefully. “Hoo hoo hoo, hee hee hee! Kya ha! Kya ha ha! So, you’re not only useless dirt, but you couldn’t even be a proper sex slave? You indigenous savages are deplorable, no matter what you do!”

I looked up to the sky.

“But even with this personality of mine, my savior still praised me.”

Puffing up my chest, I kept going. “Right now, I’m going to tell you what I think. Honestly, just as I mean it.”

“Oh really? The last of the savage indigenous dirt wants to say something to me, a member of a higher-class noble family? Well, I suppose even useless low-births like you have opinions. I’ll listen to you, then, and use it as reference for the future. So? What are you thinking? Oh, and keep in mind that if you say anything rude to me, I’ll ask my father to crush you down to rock bottom. No pressure.”

“Shut the fuck up already.”

“...Huh?”

I beamed at Beatrice.

“You’re getting on my nerves, so shut the fuck up. *That’s* what I’m telling you.”



## Chapter 3: Counterattack

*Alice Cecil*

“Why don’t we see who can shoot Small Fire better?” Beatrice sneered, red-faced after being told to shut up.

The other students in our group had already finished their exam. As the last ones left, Beatrice and I were catching everyone’s attention.

“You just insulted me, so now I’m going to embarrass you in front of a crowd.”

“I don’t mind competing with you.”

“Hee hee, we all know who’s going to win. I’m going to use Small Fire like it’s nothing, while you won’t be able to use it at all! The ending’s obvious, but lions still give their all, even if they’re up against cockroaches. Prepare yourself!”

“Other people are waiting for their turn too. Let’s just get this over with already.”

I aimed my staff at the wooden doll in front of me. Beatrice took a small wand from her pocket and positioned herself facing her own doll.

“Hmph, well at least your stance is proper.” She gave me a once-over. “Let’s begin.”

Our voices chimed in unison.

“Small Fire!”

The heads of both wooden dolls exploded. The dry sounds of the blasts resounded around the area, causing a commotion among the bystanders.

“Isn’t that Alice? I heard she was so useless that the Four Great Spirits didn’t even pick her. So how did she do that? There’s no way.”

“Yeah, I heard the same thing. She isn’t contracted with any of the Spirits, so how come she can use Grade 1 magic? That should be impossible.”

“The diameter of her fire was bigger than Beatrice’s too. Doesn’t that mean she has more magic power than her? But wait, we only recently formed our contracts. So, realistically, it’s still too soon to see such a big difference in strength.”

The crowd fell silent.

After a long pause, Beatrice’s face hitched into confusion.

“...Huh?” Her voice was weak, then her shoulders started to shake. “Hee... Hee hee. You obviously put gunpowder into the doll and then lit it with Daily Life Magic. Whatever trick you used, we aren’t being tested on the size of the flame anyway.”

She puffed her chest, as if she were boasting about her empty front, and erupted with laughter. “We’re only being tested on whether or not we can use Grade 1 magic, as well as consecutive shots to see how much MP we have. Did you know I can cast Small Fire seven times?”

I let her ramble.

“Oh? Are you so shocked that you can’t even speak? Ignoring the monsters selected from the scholarship class, if you wanted to find me in the rankings, it’d be faster to count from the top. I suppose since you can only use tricks to make people think you used Grade 1 magic, you can’t use spells consecutively at all. Ah, I know! Why don’t we see who can shoot more in a row?”

I nodded without saying anything. One of us might be humiliated by this battle, but there was no need for me to give her what she wanted.

And so, we competed to see who could cast the most Small Fires in one go.

“Small Fire!”

By the third shot, Beatrice’s brows were creased.

Small Fire. Our fourth shot blew up the wooden dolls. The bewilderment was

plain as day on her face.

Small Fire number five. The blood drained from her face.

Small Fire number six. Her expression had warped.

Maybe she'd just run out of MP, but there was cold sweat running down her forehead. Not from emotional effort, but from obvious physical exhaustion.

Small Fire.

The seventh shot. Beatrice hit her limit and fell to her knees, her shoulders heaving up and down with her breaths.

"You didn't use any tricks? But how? Did you really...? No... There's no way!" Her voice shook as she partially screamed.

I looked down at her and sighed. "Beatrice. Allow me to tell you a fairy tale about the world of legendaries."

"A fairy tale?"

"In this story, people who can fire Grade 5 spells one after the other exist. Compared to that, there's nothing surprising about me being able to use Grade 1 spells consecutively."

A person like that existed outside of fairy tales too.

I threw my staff to the ground and held my right hand out to the wooden doll.

"Small Fire!"

I pulled that hand back and did the same thing with my left. "Small Fire!"

Left hand back, right hand out. "Small Fire!"

Right hand back, left hand out.

Right, left, right, left, right, left, right, left, right, then left.

The Small Fires didn't stop.

My first shot had caused the crowd to roar, but now none of them could even speak.

Small Fire.

Beatrice's mouth had dropped to the shape of a giant circle. "...Th-Th...Thirty shots...?"

I acknowledged that. "Beatrice. I figure I might as well say it now. Your view of me is wrong."

"V-View?"

"First off, as you know, throughout history the Domie race has produced many talented sorcerers. We are neither uncivilized savages nor are we useless beings. We simply hated the overabundance of destruction brought about by fire and metal, so we chose harmony with nature over it."

I continued. "And my savior—no, my teacher—told me I am not useless. So I can say this for sure."

Beatrice stared at me dumbfounded.

"I am not useless anymore."

And so, I was promoted to the scholarship class of Altena Academy of Magic.

†

### *Casin Highzen*

The full moon cast a bluish-white light over the garden.

"Tonight's looking to be fun," I whispered.

Standing in the middle of the marquess's office, I turned my eyes toward the fifteen beautiful boys lined up along the wall.

On paper, these fruitful boys were all hired to serve as my butlers in this manor. However, it was an open secret that they were mere toys here to satisfy my sexual whims. Male prostitution was a matter highly looked down upon by the thickheaded members of the church. If you partook in it, you wouldn't know what sort of faults they'd pin on you to make you their political enemy.

But for me, there was no one in this entire empire that could speak out against me.



It was always spring in my world.

I couldn't help but smile at how in-my-favor the tides were. My family used to be lower-class nobles, but within the last hundred years, we had climbed the ranks up to high-class ones.

It was all thanks to the power that the "reincarnator" gave me.

"You, you, and you. Come to my bedroom."

The boys looked thirty percent scared, ten percent hateful, and sixty percent flattered at their selections. They bowed their heads to me and said, "Yes, sir."

A scream pierced through the walls of the room from outside.

"F-F-F... Fatheeeeeeeeeerrr!!!"

It was the high-pitched voice of my daughter Beatrice. She burst through the door with tears streaming down her face.

"*Hick... Hick... Father... Alice... She's nothing more than a lowborn commoner... But she... She...!*"

"Oh, my cute Beatrice! Your pretty face is stained with tears. What's the matter?"

"Um, so, Alice..."

†

"I see. So a commoner defied *us*, the Highzen family?"

From what Beatrice had claimed, a commoner had used dirty tricks on an exam at the magic academy. This Alice girl had apparently used an illegal item that blocked magic. My poor Beatrice had fallen for her trap, couldn't show what she was made of during the exam, and was bullied in front of a crowd.

*Oh, my dear daughter. How could she lie so brazenly?*

No one should be stupid enough to do such a thing to grand nobles like us. I

was exasperated from the bottom of my heart, but Beatrice was just too cute!

I nodded after figuring it out. “Then we’ll just have to purge her.”

She nodded back at me seriously. “That’s right! We must purge her!”

I really couldn’t have cared less about a commoner or two. I was well-known within the judiciary organization. In this empire, if I said the word, black would be white and white would be black.

“Indeed, commoners who defy nobles must be put in their place. Thoroughly, so that they’ll never plot to rebel again.”

A sudden chill ran down my spine. I whipped around to face my office desk.

A sickly looking man with a pale face sat there. He was clad in black formal clothing, and his overcoat was lined in deep crimson, matching the red hair flowing down his back.

I bowed as deeply as I could when I saw him.

“M-M-Master Vlad?! It has been so long! What brings you here tonight?”

“No need to be so formal, Casin.”

“This isn’t the right season for you to be awake, is it, sir? Why have you awakened now?”

“I felt a disturbance in the empire.”

“A disturbance?” I tilted my head.

“Yes. I detected a figure with power that even I cannot measure.”

It took me a minute to register his words. Fright colored my face when I did. “There’s someone out there who rivals even you, the Original Vampire? Please do not jest, sir.”

“This is no jest. I formed a contract with your ancestors a hundred years ago, and have been lurking in the shadow of your daughter because of it. That’s where I felt it—the presence of someone powerful around her.”

I gulped without realizing it.

*Impossible.*

The only people who could rival this monster were reincarnators or God Killers.

“F-Father? I’ve never met this man before. Is he the one you told me about?”

I nodded at Beatrice. “One hundred years ago, my ancestor was the sixth son of our poor noble family. We received this great man from a reincarnator. I’m sure you understand, but this is a highly confidential matter for our family.”

Vlad crushed our political enemies whenever he awoke, so it was more of an open secret than anything. The Highzen family had an unknown assassin, one that even the imperial knights could not fight, in our possession.

Beatrice knelt and bowed her head with an elegant flourish. “Master Vlad, the Original Vampire. I am honored to meet you.”

“By the way, Casin. For my first meal upon waking, I would like to suck the blood of that Alice girl.”

“A commoner?” Beatrice’s voice cracked. “My lord, someone like yourself should not have to do something so boring!”

“Boring, hm?” Vlad whispered. He began to chuckle, though I’m not sure at what. “I’m already having to work for the likes of you. I think that’s boring enough.”

Beatrice and I couldn’t bring ourselves to respond.

He sighed and kept going. “At any rate, I said this earlier, Beatrice, but I’ve been hiding in your shadow. That Alice girl is incredibly strong.”

“A-Alice is? No way...”

Vlad walked to the window, still muttering to himself about “something boring.” He looked up to the sky.

“It really is boring. Unbearably so. My master lent me to the Highzen family as their ward, but I’m bored of it.”

“Bored, sir?”

“Assassinating your enemies, slaughtering their families. I’ve oppressed many of their personal militias as well.”

“Y-Yes, you have, sir! We very much appreciate it!”

“That is why I’m bored. Can you feel it? The overwhelming power flowing through this form of mine. For me, who owns this body, to only be used as a trash cleaner for the likes of you... Do you get it?”

I couldn’t muster up an answer.

“I am looking for someone strong. A place with strong foes bordering the blood-boiling, ruthless line between life and death—that is the place the Original Vampire belongs in. That’s why I’m happy about this development.”

A grin floated up his face. His eyes sought out the moon as he spoke gleefully.

“Hmph. What a great moon. How I wish to cross blades with the god of the moon, Artemis.”

Vlad opened the window, transformed into a swarm of bats, then disappeared into the night sky.

“Father...” Beatrice had been taken over with fear, and I couldn’t blame her. When I’d first seen that as a child, I had also felt true fear.

“Thankfully, Vlad is on our side. Do not worry, Beatrice.”

“No! B-Behind you!”

“Hm? Behind me?”

Turning around, a man in a white tailcoat stood before me.

“G-G-God Killer?!”

I’d heard he’d burned down the Domie colony in the nearby Grand Forest, but I never thought he would show up in my home. I choked on my words.

“Long time no see, Highzen.”

“Why are you here?! It’s still not time yet! We haven’t had contact with reincarnators in over thirty years!”

“I know that.”

“But you’ve kept your promise, yes?” I tried to keep the conversation favorable.

His voice was smooth, but his words were chilling. “I will erase every one of your enemies from all sides, so long as you provide me with information that leads me to where reincarnators are. You could even order me to annihilate all of the powerful forces in this empire.”

“Even Vlad can’t take on the entire empire, after all. You’re a big help in that regard. So, why are you here?”

“Because I was curious.”

“Curious?”

“About Alice Cecil.”

The name Alice again. First Vlad, now this God Killer. Just *who* was this girl?

“Hee hee. It really made good bait.”

The smile on his face as he whispered could only be described as ghastly.

“Wh-What do you mean?”

“If it managed to catch the person I’ve been aiming for, then it will be a bit too much for Vlad to handle.”

“Too much for Vlad? But he’s the highest Grade 3 summon! He’s even higher than the Four Great Spirit Gods.”

“And I’m telling you that it’s too much for him. He was demoted by his reincarnator master to a place like this, after all. The person behind Alice cannot be dealt with by someone like him. It has to be by someone like *us*.”

“‘Us’?”

Just as I tilted my head in doubt, I yelped. Three people suddenly stood before me. Only one person had been there before, but now two more men were flanking the God Killer.

I hadn’t taken my eyes off of him for even a second, yet there they were.

“Do you know why we’re called God Killers?”

“You all have continued living since a hundred years ago... Unreal gods, called the Three Supreme Sages. They say you have killed countless reincarnators.”

“Not just any reincarnators either. The level 99 ones, which makes this case that much simpler, Highzen.”

“Simpler?”

“As the strongest in this land, we are obligated to fight against these reincarnators, who flail about with reckless abandon. You understand, don’t you?”

The God Killer... No, the White Matryana of the Three Supreme Sages grinned.

†

*Shinobu Iijima*

We were in Izanach’s big dining hall in the morning.

This place was just massive. So massive that it was more like a small public gymnasium, rather than a dining hall. You could hold a banquet with five hundred people here. Several maids stood in each corner of the room. Not to mention, they all looked like they could be gravure idols. It was so intense.

Each maid was a mighty warrior, great mythical creatures of various kinds that were all Grade 4 summons or higher. Because of the way ranks worked here, Grade 3 summons and lower were essentially behind-the-scenes workers who weren’t allowed to be seen by me. According to Gabriel, the ones who *could* be near me had to clear a pretty narrow gate first.

Anyway, this dining hall was super wide. Alice, Gabriel, and I were all seated at one end of the table.

Usually, the table would be full with a buffet of gourmet dishes akin to a five-star hotel, so fancy that you’d go pale. But today it was filled with Alice’s homemade food.

That homemade food was curry, of all things.

“It—it’s so good!”

Apparently, the Domie people had access to a ton of spices in the Grand Forest. We had a lot of those spices in Izanach’s kitchens, so she made this.

“I never thought I’d get to eat curry in this world...”

I shoveled Alice’s curry down my throat at an extreme speed, unable to suppress my noises all the while.

*No, seriously, this is so good.* It had kind of a nostalgic taste to it, like curry from a pouch, different from authentic Indian curry. Nostalgic, like the curry my mom used to make all those years ago before she died.

Gabriel’s spoon was moving at an incredible speed too, though no expression was on her face. She must’ve been enjoying it.

“How has Alice’s training been going, Gabriel?”

As we’d planned out beforehand, we were currently doing research on how natives learn magic to help strengthen Alice. We couldn’t exactly throw her into the 13 Floors to Utopia when she can only use Grade 1, so our first matters of course were leveling and spells. Gabriel and I were doing the research out here, and we had Alice attending the academy so she could find information there too. Gathering intel was of utmost importance since we knew far too little.

Alice was using Transport Magic to get to the academy from here, and she underwent training before and after school every day.

“Her work is progressing smoothly, without delay.”

Work? That word gave me anxiety, so I asked for details.

“Specifically, what kind of training is she doing?”

“Natives are able to acquire an extraordinary amount of pure muscle strength and physical combat techniques regardless of level.”

“Right, I heard. That’s why I left her to you before we focus on getting her level up.”

“I have her run with weights first thing in the morning. We start off strong with fifteen kilometers. The purpose of this is to increase her basic physical capabilities.”

“...That’s pretty rough.”

Gabriel agreed. “Next, I have her do push-ups, sit-ups, and squats with

weights put on top of her. Aiming for ten each, I make sure to choose the weights that will push her muscles to their limits.”

“I think that’s a good approach. Muscle-building is more about getting to your limits within a few reps rather than about how many you can do. Apparently, it’s effective if you do three sets to get your limbs all shaky.”

“On that note, the fifteen-kilometer run consists of her sprinting one hundred meters, one hundred and fifty times. As for muscle-building, the weighted push-ups, sit-ups, and squats pushed to her limits; she does ten sets of those. We repeat those steps and continue until she collapses, as you said. This morning she did two hundred sets each.”

“Er, wait. Isn’t it physically impossible for her to do two hundred sets of limit strength training?”

Gabriel answered my question with a cool face. “I am using Recovery Magic on her. By instantly recovering her, her muscles are undergoing super recovery. Though, it is indeed stressful on her body. So two hundred sets in both the morning and the evening is as much as she can handle.”

“Are you serious?”

She was saying all this with her signature blank expression, which meant she really was going crazy with Alice. Looking at Alice herself, her face did look somewhat haggard.

“Hey, you okay, Alice?”

She nodded at me. “Applied training after foundation training is tough.”

“Applied training?”

“It’s just self-defense training.” Gabriel nodded too. “We have been using Earth’s aikido and judo as the basis. Randori, in general. With two hundred rear naked chokes and four hundred vital point hits, Alice has lost consciousness just as many times. Naturally, she is forcefully recovered by magic before she becomes unable to continue fighting.”

“Alice... Are you really okay with this?”

I couldn’t help but be worried at this point.



“It’s hard, but I can do it!” Alice’s eyes were filled with determination. “I wanna become strong!”

“You’re a hard worker, then.”

“Lady Gabriel is an archangel, but she’s very physically active.”

Gabriel acknowledged that.

“That’s because heretics are meant to be physically punched down whenever they level up.”

Her statement was more of a declaration, accompanied by some kind of pressure.

“Uh... Yeah,” was all I could vaguely respond with. “Anyway. Alice?”

“Yes, sir?”

“Have you found out anything about Grade 2 or Grade 3 tomes...I mean, Scrolls, at the academy?”

“The Grade 2 Scroll search is going well. Anyone can get them as long as they fulfill the school’s requirements. Well, I say ‘anyone,’ but nobody’s received one in thirty years. Thinking of the stat requirements, realistically, there’s no one who can fulfill them.”

“What about Grade 3?”

Her sigh was deep. “No information. It’s all treated as imperial secrets. I was thinking that if I worked at the imperial magic college, I may be able to find something. And Grade 3 isn’t exactly something that the average person can use, so...”

I let my shoulders droop since she was right. *If this were the game, they’d just have to get their level up to learn how to use it automatically.* There was no point in complaining, though.

“We’ll let that be for now.”

If we weren’t making progress with spells, then should we focus on leveling? I

still felt like it was too early to jump into it. Level-ups were complicated in this world because of the Four Great Spirits. As for the Grade 3 techniques being kept a secret, reincarnators were probably involved somehow. They could do whatever they wanted if the natives were kept weak. They could've even put some kind of trap in the leveling system.

"We'll keep gathering intel in the meantime. Aren't you going to eat, Alice?"

"Ah, you hadn't given me permission to."

"I told you not to worry about stuff like that. You can think of me as family, no need to hold back."

"Yes sir! I'll dig in!"

She put some of the curry into her bowl, dipped the white bread from the table in it, then bit into it.

"It's...really good."

"Yeah, your curry is delicious."

"N-No, sir! The curry itself was well-made, but that's because the quality of the spices in the kitchen were so amazing, and... And..."

"And?"

"I've never gotten the chance to eat such high-quality bread before. It really is good!"

Alice giggled. No wonder she ate it with bread instead of rice.

"Eat up, as much as you want."

"Thank you so much!"

I watched her chow down on the bread and curry. It wasn't a wonder why she was eating so well, since she'd just finished her morning hard training.

"By the way, Master Shinobu." Alice looked around at the maids in the hall. "Isn't everyone else going to eat too?"

"Hm. What do you think, Gabriel?" I had no idea how game characters actually lived.

“We essentially do not have to eat, because we receive the amount of magic power we each need from Master Shinobu.”

“Huh, really?”

“Yes, sir. But just because we do not *need* to eat does not mean that we do not. We get hungry as well. More so for enjoyment than anything else, but it is surely rather painful if we do not consume anything.”

“So basically, you eat like everyone else?”

“Indeed. That does not apply to the dragons and giants who reside in Izanach, however. As you would expect, it is not possible to obtain nourishment that would satisfy such large creatures, and it would not be wise to let them hunt outside of the palace grounds.”

“Yeah, of course. But now I feel kinda bad for them.”

“Please rest assured, humans are the only beings who eat purely for the taste.”

“That’s true. There are a lot of obese humans, but not many obese animals out in nature.”

“In the same manner, nonhuman summons do not have much of an appetite, so you do not need to agonize over it.”

*Well, that settles that.* Though, I should probably still treat them to belly-stuffing meals sometimes.

Alice was fraught with worry. “Then what about Izanach’s gatekeeper? The swordsman who stands at the entrance?”

“Swordsman?”

Gabriel and I exchanged glances. She must’ve been talking about Kuroinu.

“You told me that he doesn’t move at all from the gate, right, sir?”

“Kuroinu asked to be assigned as the gatekeeper himself. He’s got a good sensing skill, and he was originally one of Izanach’s pivotal guards anyway.”

“He has a sensing skill?”

“Yup. It’s called Demon Clairvoyance. Think of it like an Aegis... Ah, wait, you

wouldn't get that reference. Basically, he can detect the movements of all animals within a fifty kilometer radius."

"He can detect all that?"

"As long as they're moving above a set speed, to be precise. He can do a detailed analysis of a foe or ally's movement coordinates if he locks onto them beforehand."

"That's...not just good— isn't that a really powerful skill?"

"I mean... He's kind of a god himself."

"I see."

She seemed to be satisfied with that description, so Alice must have finally been getting used to how we worked here.

"But if he's the gatekeeper, he doesn't leave the gate, right? So, then, um... Wh-Wh-What about the bathroom?"

I had to laugh at seeing her cheeks turning a bit red as she asked so shyly.

"Kuroinu is a god; therefore, he does not need to go to the bathroom," Gabriel answered. "And of course, I also do not."

That made me laugh too. *What, are you guys old-time idols or something?* I mean, she was probably right, though I wasn't sure how that would work.

"Does he really not leave the gate at all?" Alice seemed quite concerned with this.

"He's pretty straightforward with how serious he is. He prefers being alone and isn't that great at communicating. The guy may not like to admit it, but he's cute like a dog."

Alice's face scrunched as she contemplated. "But human gods get hungry, don't they? So wouldn't that mean Master Kuroinu is hungry right now too?"

"I wonder." I turned to the maids. "Do we provide food for Kuroinu? Or does he come to the dining hall himself?"

They looked back at me, confused themselves.

"Master Shinobu, it would appear that Kuroinu does not leave the gate, at

least in part because he does not require meals to live.”

“Probably. He’s just so serious.”

No, really. Kuroinu believed it was his role to be the gatekeeper, so he actually did not move from the entrance at all. If I told him I needed to talk to him, he’d say, “I will move if you order me to, but I would like to fulfill my role as the gatekeeper; therefore, if possible, let us speak here.”

“Then I’ll pack up some of the leftovers and take it to him!” Alice announced.

“Why don’t you ask one of the maids to do that for you?”

“I can’t, all the maids here are gods!”

“I’m not sure about that, but I think they’re minor gods or famous creatures like nine-tailed foxes or something.”

“That means I’m the lowest ranked here.”

“Hm. Well, I guess you can if you want to.”

She smiled and disappeared into the kitchen. *She’s a good kid.*

The doors to the dining hall opened up. Checking who came in, I saw a small girl dressed in gothic Lolita nightwear carrying a giant plush doll.

“Oh, Tsukuyomi.”

She was a Grade 6 god, just like Gabriel. Three gods from Japanese folklore—the sun god Amaterasu, her younger brother Susanoo, and the next sibling Tsukuyomi—were said to form the three noble gods. Amaterasu, incidentally, was another one of my top fighters, but we’ll get to that later. She was a woman, and Susanoo was a man, or at least that’s how they were usually depicted in fictional works. Tsukuyomi, on the other hand, was often depicted as either, most likely because they were the moon god. In *La Vita Online*’s case, she was portrayed as a woman.

The huge doll she had in her arms had limbs that were cut from several other stuffed animals and sewn to it, like a chimera. Combined with Tsukuyomi’s gothic Lolita outfit, you could definitely see the designer’s preferences bleeding through. She had that kind of personality to match.

“Good morning, Shinobu,” she said with an airy voice.

Her long black hair swishing behind her back, she walked straight toward me and didn’t hesitate to sit next to me. Taking my right hand in her left, she yawned lethargically. Her pale skin behind her purple rouge was almost transparent. She gave off an icy feeling, but anyone who saw her would still think she was beautiful.

The maids started rushing around us as Tsukuyomi sat down, quickly bringing her a plate of curry.

“Curry?”

“Alice made it.”

Without removing her hand from mine, she maneuvered her free hand to take a bite with a spoon.

“It’s good.”

“I see. That’s good. But could you stop massaging my thigh?”

She’d slipped her left hand down to my leg.

“It’s my morning greeting to you. In truth, I would have preferred touching beyond your thigh, but...”

“But?”

“Unfortunately, this is the 15+ version of the game, so this is as much as I can do.”

“So it applies to you too, huh?”

Japanese gods were uninhibited when it came to sexuality, so tons of them had inclinations like this.

“If you tell me to strip, I will.”

I didn’t quite like that the loyalty stat equaled their affinity stat. Even the fact that their affinity stat was equivalent to how willing they were to have sex with you felt... I don’t know... Cheap?

“By the way, Tsukuyomi. I’m planning on giving Alice a charm from Matsunoo-taisha. You know what that means?”

After thinking for a moment, she nodded. “It’s an order for me to protect her from the shadows.”

The Kyoto Matsunoo-taisha Auxiliary Shrine, also known as the Tsukuyomi Shrine, was an ancient, honorable shrine from over a thousand years ago. As a summon, Tsukuyomi’s core was a charm from there. She was perfect as a guard because she had a lot of stealth abilities as a follower of the night.

“I’m glad you understand. The situation’s starting to smell of smoke, what with the reincarnators and that guy calling himself a God Killer.”

“Shinobu? Is this really an order? Or a request?”

It took me a second to decide. “It’s a request. You can refuse if you don’t want to do it.”

“You really are mysterious.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re surrounded by such beautiful women, but you haven’t done anything to us, nor had us do anything. There’s so much you can do even in the 15+ version, if you wish.”

She giggled and wrapped herself around my right arm.

“Stop that. I told you that I have no intention of making you guys do stuff just because of your affinity or loyalty stats.”

“And why not?”

“Because the only reason you’d be...physically intimate with me would be because of your natural loyalty parameters as female characters.”

That made her giggle even more. She put her index finger on my lips.

“I don’t hate people like you, even without my parameters.”

“What does that mean?”

She lightly kissed my cheek. “It means I like you.”

Tsukuyomi sleepily clutched her doll and left through the dining hall doors again, leaving behind nothing but a yawn and an “I’m sleepy. Mornings aren’t my thing.”

*Alice Cecil*

He was a man clad from head to toe in a full suit of black plate armor. His sword was as big as he was, stabbed into the ground in front of him. He stood, silent and alone, at the edge of the gate of the Heavenly Palace Izanach.

The first thing Master Kuroinu said to me was, “Do not speak to me.”

“Huh?” I froze up at such a statement.

*Um, what does he mean?* I knew I was the lowest ranked in this palace, but since I became a resident here, Master Kuroinu had let me pass through this gate without issue, which meant he knew my circumstances. So I should be able to talk to him.

I gave it a try. “Um, I thought you might be hungry, so I brought you some food.”

“I do not need it. We do not require oral intake for nutrient supplement.”

“But you can still eat, can’t you?”

“As I said, I do not need to. My duty is to patrol and watch the gate. I cannot let my guard down for even a second. Distracting myself with meals is out of the question. I will not repeat myself a third time. Do not speak to me.”

So this was what it meant to be utterly helpless. Without any means of rebuttal, I turned on my heel and crossed the gate to head back to the dining hall.

Master Kuroinu sniffed.

“...What did you bring?”

“Huh?”

“The food. I am asking you what you brought.”

“Curry, sandwiches, and a few other things.”

“Curry?”



“I thought it would be good to bring you, but if I’m just a bother, then I’m very sorry. I’ll take my leave—”

When I turned once more, he grabbed my shoulder with considerable strength.

“I’ll have some.”

“What?”

“One cannot fight on an empty stomach, as they say.”

†

The simmering curry pot made bubbling sounds. I was heating it up in a simple, portable kamado with Daily Life Magic.

We were sitting on a big cloth, like we were having a picnic. As a snack while the curry cooked, I was going to give Master Kuroinu some of the pizza toast that Master Shinobu taught me to make.

There were three kinds of sandwiches too. Master Kuroinu took off his helmet to eat them. Since he had such a huge sword and looked like what you’d think a dark knight would be, I’d thought his face would be very rugged, but he was actually an incredibly beautiful man. He had long silver hair, and his face was sharp, as if it’d been drawn with thin lines. He was somewhat androgynous, which was the opposite of what my type was, but I figured he would probably be quite popular. Feeling like I was looking at a sculpture, I couldn’t help but gulp.

“How does it taste?”

“It is not bad,” he said bluntly. His brows were furrowed, so maybe he didn’t like it?

I pressed further. “Would you like more?”

“I will have some.”

He swiftly took the sandwich bag out of my hand, as if snatching it from me, and silently munched. At an incredible speed, might I add. He must’ve been really hungry.

He finished off the sandwiches, so I handed him the pizza toast.

Master Kuroinu didn't reach for it. *Wait, I thought he was hungry?*

"Do you not like pizza?"

"I do. It's my favorite after curry."

"Then, why won't you eat this?"

He looked up, far off into the sky, and whispered.

"I do not like bell peppers."

"Huh?"



“However...I like pizza.” Master Kuroinu sighed as he stared at his palm with a melancholic expression.

*Uh...* He was covered in plate armor, including his fingers protected by sheet metal. Was he telling me that he couldn’t take out the bell peppers because they were so small?

He violently grabbed the pizza toast as soon as I removed the peppers for him.

“How does it taste?”

“It is not bad.” Same response as before. It didn’t look like he liked it.

“There’s more here.”

“I will have some.”

The curry finished heating up as he ate.

After putting the rice and the curry on a plate, I handed it to him with a spoon.

He tried it, then whispered quietly. “...It’s spicy.”

*Well, yeah. It’s curry.*

That’s when I realized. This man...

...had the taste buds of a child.

Proving me right, he put the plate down on the ground and didn’t pick it back up. He looked kind of sad about it.

I handed him some water to cheer him up. “Want some water?”

“I do.”

It didn’t seem like he’d be eating any more, so I figured it was about time for me to leave.

I stood up. “All right then, I’ll bring you more next time.”

“...Alice.”

“Yes, sir?”

“I will not tell you not to speak to me anymore. But do not do so as freely as this. I do not enjoy getting friendly with people. Also...”

“Also?”

“What will you bring next time?”

“Curry, sir! I’ll make sure it’s less spicy next time, so please let me try again! And Master Kuroinu?”

“What?”

“I won’t speak to you freely, but please at least let me greet you when I pass through the gate. We’re comrades who live in this palace together, after all.”

“We are not comrades.”

“Huh?”

“We have never stood on the battlefield together. To me, comrades are brothers-in-arms. You are still far from that designation.”

*I guess he’s right.* Bringing him food once wouldn’t make us friends, especially not to him.

Turning dejectedly to leave, I heard him speak again behind me.

“Make it sweet, please.”

“Huh?”

“The curry. Not just less spicy—make it sweet. I may eat it if you do.”

“Yes sir!”

He might have been a little complicated, but he wasn’t a bad guy.

With that in mind, I returned to the dining hall.

†

Later that evening, at the magic academy...

I stood out in a bad way among the scholarship students as the end-of-day bell rang throughout the classroom. Just like when I’d still been useless, my

classmates stared at me from afar, whispering among themselves. Nothing had changed, except that this time it wasn't about whether or not I was useless.

There was only one reason; I'd disobeyed Beatrice Highzen.

There was not a single person who'd want to befriend somebody that picked a fight with the grand noble Beatrice. It was well-known around the school that she had a terrible personality. If they got involved with me, who knows what would happen to them. I couldn't blame them for such a reaction, but it still made me feel a little lonely.

All eyes turned toward the girl with wide ringlets who'd just walked through the door.

"Why is the school plague here?"

"She's gotta be here to get back at Alice Cecil, duh."

Beatrice paid the murmurs no mind and walked straight toward me. "Why, good day to you, Lady Alice."

"Hello, Beatrice. What do you want?"

She smiled. "Won't you walk home with me?"

"What if I say no?"

"Then I'll do everything I can to get you expelled."

*Ugh, so annoying.* I sighed and relented.

We were walking on the outskirts of town at sunset. Having left the stone street, the path became more and more desolate.

"How far do you plan on taking me?"

"Hee hee. You'll find out when we get there."

"Is it okay for you, the daughter of a grand noble, to be walking on a dirt road like this with only me around? There's barely a path. Wouldn't this be a good opportunity for enemies of the Highzen family to try to kidnap you?"

“No need to worry,” she giggled with a wink. “All of the people on this path are those hired by the Highzen family.”

With a snap of her fingers, the road became filled with people. They all closed in on me, blocking any means of escape.

“So this was your plan.”

“Now then! You’ve become an indigenous savage trapped in a cage. How does it feel?”

“Not very good. I assume you’re going to attack me? Or will you stuff me in a sack and take me somewhere else? Perhaps you’re going to bring me into one of the houses around here?”

Beatrice pondered that for a moment, then crossed her index fingers together to make an X. “Too bad, so sad, you got it wrong! The correct answer is that you’re going to be transported with the Transfer Magic that we set up!”

A magic pentacle shone on the stones of the road.

“Kya ha hah! Are you shocked, Alice? Shocked? This is a Grade 3 Transport spell! Believe it or not, it only took one hour for a single person to set this trap up! That’s how serious my family is about crushing you. Hey, hey, are you shocked? How does it feel? Someone who can use Grade 3 on their own is putting forth the effort to cull you! Hee hee, ha ha! Kya ha haaah!”

She used my silence to drive it in further. “That’s right! The only future you have is a bleak one. And don’t think your death will be quick either. We could throw your naked body to a horde of Orcs in heat, or cut off your limbs and torture you. Kya hah, kya ha ha haaah! So, why don’t we get started?”

A white light flowed from the magic circle and enveloped the area.

†

*Beatrice Highzen*

Alice looked around as the light settled down.

“We’re in an abandoned church?”

Indeed, we were. The stained-glass ceiling was full of cracks, and the walls were rotting. It wasn't a place for a noble like me to be in, but that didn't matter anymore.

In the middle of the church's sermon hall, Master Vlad was sitting atop a pile of corpses.

"Master Vlad, what are these bodies?"

He sighed and answered languidly, as if my question was a bother. "One A-rank adventurer and five B-ranks. They sensed my awakening and attacked me. They were probably enemies of the Highzens."

A-ranks outranked even my famous brother, who was the outlier of all outliers; one who could use Grade 2 magic. If Master Vlad managed to suppress five B-ranks, it meant he was as strong as an entire unit of knights—no exaggeration.

*He really is unrivaled! Unparalleled!*

He was a phantom who came and went as he pleased, with the ability to assassinate enemies without a trace. *Other families no doubt consider it unfair that we have him!*

"Even A-rank adventurers are no match for you. You really are the legendary Original Vampire! Ha ha, kya ha hah, kya ha ha hah! I'm so lucky to have been born into my family! With your protection, our power could surpass even the emperor's. Hu hu, kya ha hah! Kya ha ha ha hah!"

"I would like to suck this one's blood. Can I drain her and then dispose of her?"

"No, just render her unable to move, please. I plan on sending her to the Highzen manor. It's mating season for my pet Orcs."

"Quite bad taste you have there." Master Vlad let his shoulders down.

"You're the Original Vampire, aren't you?" Alice asked.

"I am."



“In legends, you’re said to be the highest figure of darkness. What are you doing obeying a human?”

Master Vlad put his chin into his right hand. “It’s rather complicated. At any rate, I am not interested in *you* yourself, but rather the one that’s hiding behind you.”

“Behind me?”

“I’ve become bored of simply trampling on others. My power is one to behold. Yet, it’s only being used to satisfy the pointless whims of these little animals. The pain is unbearable. But I believe that if I fight with the person behind you, my blood will begin to boil once more.”

He clapped his hands together. “That is the end of our talk, girl.”

Master Vlad walked over to her, grabbed her throat with his right hand, and pulled her whole body off the ground. The color drained from her face as circulation from her carotid artery was cut off.

*Hee hee. This is fun to watch.*

“You’ll probably be locked in the Highzen manor after I suck your blood. How pitiful. Ah, well, you humans are nothing more than worms to me, so it doesn’t concern me.”

With a shaky hand, Alice grabbed the unattractive necklace that rested against her chest and squeezed it hard.

“Master...Shinobu...!”

Darkness flowed out of it. A black flash surrounded Alice, sending Master Vlad flying back about ten meters.

“Hrng... A...girl?”

He’d landed on his feet cleanly with a slide. At the edge of his vision, next to Alice, stood a girl in excessively frilly clothing with a composed expression on her face. Her clothes seemed to be based on noble fashion, but—despite the flashiness—they gave off a very dark impression. In my eyes, she looked like a sleepy girl in strange clothing.

“Oh my, there aren’t any signs of battle or resistance anywhere,” she spoke.

“Were you completely at his mercy? I would’ve thought you’d bite him at least a little before calling for me. Oh well, no matter. We wouldn’t want you put in that much danger, anyway. It was a good decision for you to call me without fighting back.”

“You there!” Master Vlad demanded. “What is your name? I am Vlad, the strongest, Original Vampire.”

“Oh really? If you’re the original, then I’ll have to put my best foot forward as well. All right then, I’ll tell you my name.”

Sucking in a deep breath, the girl puffed up her chest. “I am one pillar of the three gods of the Land of the Rising Sun. The goddess of the moon, master of everlasting darkness: Tsukuyomi. *That* is the name of the one who will deliver you to death.”

I could only tilt my head at that statement. *It can’t be... Is this girl really planning on standing up against Master Vlad?*

*Reckless. She’s nothing but reckless.*

I didn’t know what to think of her being the strongest master of the night or what have you. But this wasn’t your average village gossip, that was for sure.

“Kya ha hah! Hey, you there. Are you going to fight Master Vlad? Are you stupid? So stupid you’re going to die? Just what do you know about this high-class being? He’s the Original Vampire—the *True* Vampire. The strongest, unparalleled—”

Tsukuyomi turned toward me and blatantly furrowed her brows.

“You’re very noisy.”

Her arm shot out.

The back of her hand collided with my face.

“...Huh?”

Blood spouted from my nose, followed by immense pain.

“Ow, ow! It hurts, it hurts, it hurts! It huuuuuurts!”

I fell to my knees and screamed while holding my nose.

*My nose... It's broken!*

*My nose!*

*My beautiful face is...!*

*The face of the beloved daughter of the Highzen family!*

*Impossible! This can't be happening!*

I glared and cursed at her. “I’ll kill you, I’ll kill you! I’ll cut off your limbs one millimeter at a time, force you into prostitution, and throw you to Orcs in heat! Die! Die! How dare you—?!”

“I told you you were noisy in order to get you to shut up. I’m sad that you don’t seem to have gotten the message.”

As soon as she raised her leg, something in my chin rang out with a cracking noise.

“Eeeeeek! Aaaaaagh!”

My jawbone had undoubtedly turned to dust. All I could do was writhe on the floor and screech.

Tsukuyomi ignored me and turned back to Master Vlad. “Where were we? May I ask a question about what the blonde curly girl said?”

He took a moment to think. “Hm. Yes?”

“You said you were the Original Vampire, so I named myself for you as well. But something’s wrong.”

“Wrong?”

“I thought the Original Vampire was supposed to be the ‘True’ Vampire. Who’s the true one?”

He tilted his neck at her because he couldn’t grasp what she was asking.

*Come on, Master Vlad! Who cares about what she has to say? Hurry, hurry*

*and make something bad happen to her!*

“The Original Vampire is me.”

She tilted her head at him. “I didn’t hear you very well. Who’s the original?”

Master Vlad appeared perplexed. “I just told you. It’s me.”

Tsukuyomi’s mouth fell open, her face twisting in amazement. “Are you able to create followers?”

“Well, of course. Those whose blood I’ve sucked become zombies.”

Her face changed from amazement to astonishment. She swayed backward as if she were about to fall over, but stopped herself with her foot.

“Why would the Original Vampire suck blood from people to make them his followers... But then they become *zombies*?” she asked with a straight face.

Master Vlad took some visible damage from the question and recoiled.

“What?”

“If you’re the ‘original,’ then you’re the origin, the first of all vampires. You became a vampire, then began birthing other vampires. Or at least, you were one of the first, like Alucard or Carmilla.”

“Well...”

“So when the Original Vampire sucks the blood of his followers, why do they become zombies rather than vampires themselves? I can’t comprehend this.”

“You...may have a point. What is the meaning of this?! Now that you’ve brought it up, I also think this is strange!” Vlad said.

The girl bumped her fist into her palm. “I’ve figured out who you are. No wonder you ended up like this. That’s your backstory.”

“Backstory?”

“Even the Original Vampires don’t compare to me, the goddess of the night, but I think they can at least put up a fight. In other words, they’d be the real kings of the night. After all, my acquaintance Carmilla can’t be summoned without Grade 5 magic.”

“Carmilla? Who is that?”

She didn’t answer and shrugged. “If I’m the goddess of night, and Carmilla is the king of night, then you’d be the monarch of a night town at most. Maybe Kabukicho.”

“K-K-Kabukicho?” he parroted her words. “You... What are you saying?”

“Allow me to tell you. Long, long ago, in a land far away, an artificial vampire was made by an alchemist of darkness. That vampire is you, to be exact.”

He was at a loss for words.

“You were created as a result of a lifetime’s worth of research, meant to surpass the Original Vampires. But you turned out to be a failure, a fact that broke the dark alchemist’s soul.”

“What are you talking about?”

“With his soul crushed, he came to believe that you truly were one of the original vampires. He gave you the name Vlad to back up his delusions, and put false memories into you. That led to ‘The Fake Original: Zombie Hazard.’ It’s one of the most basic events in midgame.”

“That means... I’m...”

“Precisely. Your vampire scent is even thinner than that of American coffee, which means you’re not even a proper Vampire. You’re just a Lesser Vampire.”

“Lesser... Lesser? The failures of vampires?”

He could only stand there with his mouth agape.

Master Vlad began to cackle. “Kha ha ha... I see. So you’re the god of death I’ve yearned for!”

“God of death? What?”

“You’re where I’m going to die,” he proclaimed. “But even so, with this I can finally understand why my reincarnator master gave me to a family of insignificant animals.”

“Okay? It bothers me that I’m apparently your god of death.”

“I’ve become bored of living. I knew my master had thrown me away. When I

awoke, I'd become a handmaid to these animals. I've been looking for a place to die, as I'm despairing at it all."

He looked overjoyed.

"A worthless handmaid, worthless battles, worthless suppressions. Even though I didn't know why I was alive, I could not age, as I am a vampire. It's not a mystery why despair would befall upon me. Having to live for eternity as a handmaid! But, now that I know the truth, I can say for sure that in my soul, I am an honorable king of the night. I'm grateful! I've finally found the greatest place to die. By a beautiful—no, a beloved god of death such as you!"

"I see. I understand. Please stop calling me that. It's gross."

Master Vlad laughed to himself. "I shouldn't be saying this as a vampire who dwells in the darkness, but I will give my first and final thanks to the gods here. Let us begin, beloved death god. Grade 3: Aerial Swimming!"

"This is my final battle!" he declared as he floated into the air. "Even if I cannot defeat you, the least I can do is stain your skin with the evidence of my existence!"

Closing his eyes, he began to adjust the magic within himself. Many spheres of black darkness surrounded him, forming the shape of a rosary, revolving at high speeds.

"Grade 3 Highest Fire Magic: Dark Soul!"

One of the spheres shot toward Tsukuyomi. It landed with a huge sound, sparking an intense, black explosion with her in the center. The wind gushed around the church, shaking the walls of the entire building. I had to gulp at the sheer power of Grade 3 magic.

Master Vlad snapped his fingers once more. The remainder of the spheres flying around him shot in straight lines at Tsukuyomi, one after the other.

*Bam, bam, bam, bam!* More explosions and sounds of destruction. More blooming flowers of black flames.

When they finally finished, the area had been pulverized into dust, and I was covered in fallen wood debris that blocked my vision.

As the dust settled, my eyesight finally focused on a silhouette that stood in the middle of the impact site.

Master Vlad looked horrified.

“You...weren’t harmed at all? But I used the highest spell in Grade 3!”

“I am the greatest figure of darkness. Grade 3 dark spells will not work on me. Had you used Grade 4, you might have ruffled my clothing a bit.”

“Wonderful... This is wonderful! Ah, my beloved god of death! Truly the strongest of them all! Please, release me from this prison known as life! Indeed, this, this blood-boiling battlefield here with you is perfect for my final moments!”

Tsukuyomi had enough. “You’re misunderstanding something,” she said lazily.

“Misunderstanding what?”

“Do you think I’m fighting you? What an unfunny joke. I didn’t even need to recover after your attacks. I’ve just been standing here, doing nothing.”

“What do you mean? Are you...not going to give me death?” He sounded so sad.

“I will. You hurt Alice, after all. Your worst sin was picking a fight with a follower of Izanach.”

“Oh! So you will fight me! And give me death!”

She snapped her fingers.

“Grade 5: Toy Box of Rotting Death.”





A huge red coffin appeared standing up in front of Master Vlad's eyes. It looked to be about three meters high and two meters wide.

"This coffin is connected to the underworld. It's a gate that allows one to summon an infinite number of residents of darkness over to this world. Today, I am going to invite you to the underworld while you're still alive. *That* is where you're going to wither."

The coffin opened, and countless hands of the dead reached out toward Master Vlad.

"This...is the underworld? Everything I see in there? No, wait! You're supposed to be the one to give me death, beloved god. I cannot die in a place like that!"

"I already told you. Stop calling me that. It's so gross, it gives me goose bumps."

She went on to speak as if she were having fun. "A link to the underworld. In truth, an endless hell of Grade 3 summons is supposed to come through here, but I'll fulfill your request. I made sure this field only has Grade 1 minor summons spawning in it, so that you'll be strong enough to handle it. I don't think you'll die right away. But in a few days, or maybe a few weeks, I don't know... You'll die for sure, just as you wanted."

The blood had all but drained from Master Vlad's face.

The hands extending out of the coffin took hold of his leg, toppling him over onto his stomach, facing away from the coffin.

"Help... Help me! No, kill me, god of death! With your hands! For my final moments to be through this coffin, consumed by millions of low-level, dirt-cheap zombies... I can't let that happen!"

"Do you still not get it?"

Tsukuyomi reached around her head and tied her hair with a black string.

"You're one of those low-level, dirt-cheap small fries."

That's when Master Vlad was dragged into the coffin completely.

“I’m sorry.” She glared down at him. “I’m not very nice.”

“Gaaaaaaaaah!”

“You’re at fault here. I told you so many times to stop calling me that gross name.”

The lid to the coffin closed with a quiet thunk, and the whole thing disappeared in an instant.

My only reaction was—

*Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?!*

My heart had been hollowed. All I could do was open and close my mouth repeatedly. I’d already been dumbfounded by the middle of the whole ordeal, only able to stare at the unrealistic scene before me.

*Who is this girl?! Who is this Tsukuyomi?! And why does Alice know her?!*

*I don’t understand any of this!*

“All right then, let’s go home, Alice.”

Tsukuyomi paused, then looked confused.

Alice wasn’t responding to her.

“Alice?”

Alice didn’t move or say a word. Tsukuyomi touched Alice’s right cheek, then clicked her tongue.

“A puppet.”

Alice melted into a puddle, spreading across the ground like slime.

“I’ve been had. They changed her insides during the transport, leaving only her clothes and the charm, my core.”

A faint hint of panic crossed Tsukuyomi’s face.

“The spell was only able to last for about five minutes, but they managed to replicate her memories and personality perfectly. No such magic exists in *La*

*Vita Online*. By complexity, it would be about Grade 5, maybe Grade 6? This isn't looking good, Shinobu."

†

*Alice Cecil*

The foothills rolled along the seashore. We were on a steep cliff that trailed off into the vast ocean behind me. In front of me was Beatrice's father, Casin Highzen, weeping loudly.

A familiar figure cloaked in a white tailcoat proclaimed, "With this, I'm done with this piece of garbage as well!"

"Ah, ah, aaaaah!"

Casin Highzen's entire body became a flaming scarecrow thanks to the God Killer's Grade 2 magic.

"Gaaaaaargh!"

Flailing past me, screeching bloody murder, he sped over the edge of the cliff to fall about one hundred meters down to the water's surface.

He must have been searching for water to relieve him of the pain caused by the flames.

Unfortunately for him, this part of the sea was very shallow. One could see plain as day that the distance between the surface and the stones beneath was only some ten centimeters.

There was no hope for him.

I offered a question to the God Killer.

"Why have you appeared in front of me again?"

"Because of your owner, the reincarnator."

"Reincarnator'?"

"I treasure the words 'souvenirs from the underworld' as offerings to the dying. It's the least I can do. Very well then, I'll tell you. There are two reasons

as to why I'm creating people like you around the world."

"You said something about making us into culminations of EXP."

He nodded deeply. "The reincarnators who appeared a hundred years ago went around culling our divine protectors and revising our starting stats. They stole those things from us, the *residents* of this world. The next thing they did was occupy spawn sites and all the high-class monsters."

"You mean, they were intentionally trying to make us weaker?"

"Precisely. As a result, excluding exceptionals such as us, most natives of this world have had their fangs ripped from them."

"'Us'? There are more people like you out there?"

As soon as I whispered that, two men appeared at the God Killer's side. They popped out of thin air so fast that I could only assume they'd teleported.

"We, the God Killers, are the Three Supreme Sages. Or at least, that's what we were once called, before we were reduced to what you see today."

I'd heard of them. These legends were said to have appeared one hundred years ago. Apparently, they were so strong that they could split the earth and slice the sea, and their levels were past 80. At the time, they were—without question—the strongest of all humanity, even before we'd become weaker as a whole. They could only be described as the true peaks of strength.

"Eternal youth wasn't so rare back then. Many humans had managed to reach level 50 and higher as well. Alas, all of my comrades and friends...were killed off by the reincarnators. In the world they sought to control, people like us were nothing but obstructions."

"So, you want revenge?"

"We do, but not just that. To put it simply, we find it distasteful. These reincarnators suddenly invaded out of nowhere, then subjugated us with their overwhelming power. The strong were eradicated, leaving only the slaves they surrounded themselves with. Therefore, so long as those like us have the power to resist them, it is our duty to become the shields of this world."

"That's why you're making people like me, and hunting down other humans?"

To make yourselves stronger?”

“Exactly. Those who hate us will become stronger whether they want to or not. Armed with only extended periods of time and persistence, they’ll use each and every method they can come up with to gain EXP, and show their faces in front of us once more at the heights of their physical prime. That is how you all, the culminations of EXP, will become complete. Our method works; every one of us has passed level 90 within these hundred years.”

“In theory, your motive is applaudable. In practice, you’re doing the absolute worst.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment. As for the second reason... Well, honestly I’m surprised it actually worked,” he chuckled to himself.

I didn’t know what he meant. “What worked?”

“The reincarnators don’t all agree with each other, you know. As it stands, most of them slither beneath public society, far from view. You wouldn’t expect them to reveal themselves, but sometimes they do... The Seceded.”

“The what?”

“There are organizations different from guilds like the ones adventurers form. I don’t know why they’re called guilds, but those organizations will generally align themselves with one of the many factions that the reincarnators have integrated themselves into. Some will secede from those guilds, gain independence, and try to create a force of their own. Do you know what one step to doing so would be?”

“They’d take us in. The residents of this world.”

“That’s right. They’ll seek out things like you, who couldn’t form contracts with any of the Four Great Spirits, and level you up. And since even we God Killers cannot oppose guilds full of reincarnators, we have decided to chase after the lone reincarnators who don’t associate with the guilds.”

I was pretty sure I had the picture at that point. They’d used me as bait to catch a reincarnator, and it worked. I’d met Master Shinobu.

“Then, why were you in contact with CasinHighzen?”

“We’ve massacred nine reincarnators up to now. Every single one of them had left a guild. People like them had broken the rules of noninterference with public society, with a lot of them having backdoor connections to the powerful native nobles here.”

“I see. So you were using Casin Highzen to gather intel on the reincarnators. Earlier, you said you were done with him, but to me it doesn’t sound like that was really the case.”

“He’d lost Vlad. The reincarnator he was in contact with has probably lost faith in him, and likely won’t contact him any further.”

“Then, on to my last question. I already managed to catch a reincarnator, so why did you kidnap me instead of killing me? Shouldn’t my role be finished now?”

“The answer is simple. I want information on the reincarnator you now belong to. We need everything we can get—how many of them there are, how many subordinates they have. Even *we* can’t assault a foe we know nothing about. And, even if we could, we’d still need to make a plan.”

I placed my hand on my chest to feel for the Artifact Master Shinobu had given me, the charm that called forth Lady Tsukuyomi.

“There’s no point in trying to call for help. Even the extremely high-level summon that you had with you fell for the decoy.”

I dropped my hand from my chest.

“Also, from this cliff to about a hundred meters out, communication by magic and sensing abilities are being blocked by a barrier. It’s useless.”

*Okay, so the tides are not in my favor.*

I turned around to get a better grasp of my surroundings. Behind me was nothing but a cliff, so there was nowhere to run. To my front was the God Killer. This wasn’t the sort of situation that I could do something about.

“I won’t order you to give me any information,” he sighed. “You’re stubborn to your core.”

“You bet I am. No matter how much you torture me, I would never do

anything that would put my comrades at a disadvantage—”

“Torturing you might not yield any worthwhile information anyway. It would be much faster to crack your skull open and check your brain with magic directly.”

*Yeah, this is really bad.* The issue had spread beyond whether I willingly gave him information or not.

*If this is how it's going to be, then he leaves me with only one option.*

“All right then, we’ve chatted for long enough. Have you had enough of the souvenirs from the underworld, girl?”

I whipped around and sprinted toward the cliff.

“What are you doing?!” he yelled after me.

*“Dead girls tell no tales!”*

I was going to die either way.

I was not going to hold Master Shinobu—no, I wasn’t going to hold anyone from Izanach back!

If my options were to either spill intel and get killed, or not spill and get killed, then my choice was obvious.

I didn’t hesitate at all to leap into the sky once I reached the edge.

“Ha ha! Stupid girl! Do you think we can’t extract information from corpses?!”

“Huh?!”

I did.

If he wasn’t bluffing, then my death really would be all for naught.

But it was too late.

The sea sped closer and closer at an alarming rate.

Ah, it’s... It’s all over.

“I’m sorry... Master Shinobu.”

“No, this is all my fault. I’m sorry you had to go through something so terrifying because of me.”

When I opened my eyes, I was floating in the air.

I was held in Master Shinobu’s arms as he lofted into the sky.





“...Huh?”

I could see Lady Gabriel and Master Kuroinu at his sides.

“You...came to find me? But Izanach is way above the sky—no, wait... That’s just who you are, isn’t it, Master Shinobu? You make the impossible possible.”

“That’s not true. Not even I can do literally anything. Even Gabriel and Tsukuyomi can’t find someone from tens of kilometers away.”

“Then how did you find me?”

“Kuroinu, through his Demon Clairvoyance. He can find anyone he’s locked onto beforehand outside of a barrier, at any time. You really sealed the deal when you jumped outside of the blocking barrier.”

I turned my eyes toward Master Kuroinu.

*“We have never stood on the battlefield together. To me, comrades are brothers-in-arms. You are still far from that designation.”*

*Isn’t that what you told me, Master Kuroinu?*

*Ah, but Master Shinobu had said, “The guy may not be honest with himself, but he’s cute like a dog,” so I think I get it now.*

I giggled. *He really didn’t want to admit it.*

We flew back up to the edge of the cliff and landed with a light tap.

As we positioned ourselves to fight with the God Killers, Master Kuroinu spoke softly.

“Szechuan-style mapo tofu, Alice.”

“What?”

“My favorite food. The recipe for it is somewhere in Izanach’s library. Look for it.”

*Uh, is he asking me to make that for him?*

He muttered yet again, “But no bell peppers.”

“Yes sir! I’d be glad to!”

Master Kuroinu placed himself in front of me as a shield and readied his huge sword.

†

*Shinobu Iijima*

After Alice briefed us on the situation, I glared at the disgusting man in the white tailcoat.

“You’re gonna have to pay a high price for this one, bitch.”

Hearing that natives like him had killed quite a few reincarnators was shocking to me, but more than that—

That was the reason he’d burned an entire village to the ground and sold Alice to a slave market.

Just thinking about it made me so angry, I could barely contain myself.

It was true that the reincarnators were doing as they pleased in this world, and of course I had my own opinions on that. But even so, this guy’s actions were nothing but selfish.

“It seems we’re three against three now. What shall we do, reincarnator?”

*You know damn well what we’re about to do.*

One of the men by his side cackled, silver-white blade in hand. “Matryana! I’ll take the dark knight one-on-one. My poor magic sword has been rusting without a proper opponent.”

Kuroinu glanced at me. I nodded and gave him permission. “Show us what you’re made of.”

“As you wish.”

He’d probably be a good match against a foe like that one.

I swiveled to my other side. “Gabriel, I leave healing duty to you if anything happens to me.”

“Just to be sure,” she asserted, “you’re ordering me to prioritize recovery?”

“Yeah, let’s go with that.”

Kuroinu was already engaging with the magic knight a ways off. Their blades clanged together repeatedly, the impacts reverberating through the air even though they were a hundred meters away.

The man in the white tailcoat laid his eyes on Gabriel. “Hm. So that maid is a healing-type angel.”

“I have no idea what you’re supposed to be, though,” I spat.

His clothes were just so disgusting. *A silk hat? Really?* Even Lupin and Holmes didn’t wear stuff like that.

As I got ready to deal my first round of damage, the man was suddenly behind me.

“Urgh!”

*Kidney Blow.* I was punted backward and ended up rolling on the ground. I flew forward as soon as I tried to get up.

I knew I had to try again after gaining some distance, but...

I couldn’t see his attacks...no, his *movements*, at all.

According to Alice, this guy was over level 90, whereas I was only 80. But even if he was at the level cap, I should still at least have been able to see him. Which meant— “That’s right. I’m using Grade 5: Teleportation.”

Once he showed up behind me again, I could tell he was about to do another Kidney Blow. If this were a boxing match, he’d be carded for such a dangerous move, but there were no rules in real fights. Kicking, punching, biting—anything went. In fact, hitting vitals was the only way.

I adjusted myself. “It’s usually more for quick evacs, like this—Grade 5: Teleportation.”

I dodged his attack from behind with my own Teleportation, then instantly

regretted it.

“If you’re asking me why I’m using it with my attacks,” he huffed, “then it’s because I go against the ‘usual’!”

*He teleported behind me again right after I disappeared?!*

Another Kidney Blow whacked me.

*Are you telling me he predicted I’d use Teleportation too and knew where I’d land?*

He closed in on me where I’d been thrown back yet again. I tried to haul myself up, but only one of my knees responded. I managed to get that foot on the ground.

The man in the white tailcoat laughed, as if he’d already won. “I covered my bases when it came to research on reincarnators, since I’m destined to oppose you. I discovered hand-to-hand combat was the best method for close-range battles.”

“You bastard... How did you know where I’d land?”

“It’s a by-product of learning hand combat. You keep track of your opponent’s eye movements, muscle movements, and breathing. Your body very eloquently told me everything.”

*What the hell...? He’s talking like he’s an expert fighter straight out of a manga! Kuroinu looks like he’s getting pushed back over there too, so none of this is good.*

“You invaders rely far too much on the powers you were granted upon arrival in this world. It’s no mystery why I know how to exploit your weaknesses.”

I pushed all my strength into my legs to stand, then Teleported without moving my eyes at all.

“Grade 5: Teleportation.”

I was pretty sure I hadn’t used any unnecessary muscles for that one. If even this didn’t work, then—

The Kidney Blow struck me ruthlessly.

Then a second one pounded into my back.

“Agh...!”

*Oh boy, what do I do about this?*

*There's only one way left.*

I dug my teeth into my lip, planted my feet into the ground, spun around, and grabbed white tailcoat man with every bit of my strength that I could.

“Grade 5: Mini Suicide!”

This was an upgraded version of the Grade 3 self-destruction spell that served me so well during the tutorial. The amount of power was the same, but the explosion diameter was limited to a certain area, about three meters. Though it took about a third of my HP and MP with it, there was no offensive spell with more power than this one.

“How do you like that?!”

I put some distance between us with a few backsteps and observed the scene. I could see the man's face twitching and his body charred. *Nice, he took some damage!*

Though, naturally, I was also burned in certain places and in a lot of pain.

The next moment, my jaw dropped. He had immediately fully recovered from his injuries. Not by himself, but with the help of another guy who'd sent the Recovery Magic from afar. The one who was supposed to be fighting Gabriel.

Peering over, I could see that guy mounted on her, hitting her with a flurry of punches.

“I think we know who's won, reincarnator.”

“You guys are supposedly sages, but you're all pretty good at close-range combat, aren't you?”

“They don't call us the God Killers for nothing.”

Since Kuroinu wasn't doing so well himself, it was time for me to square up...

...is what I thought, but I fell to my knees once more. I'd taken too much damage.

At this point, standing was its own monumental task.

"Could you tell me one last thing before I die?"

The white tailcoat man took steady breaths. "You're rather understanding for a reincarnator. The others must have been spoiled as children. Every time they realize they're losing, they begin pathetically begging for their lives, but you're different."

"You all are unbelievably strong. What's the difference between us and you?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I at least want to know why I've lost... Or rather, why I've died."

He took a moment to select his words before nodding slightly. "It's your determination."

"Determination?"

"Do you know the void one feels upon having their comrades all murdered? The void of having your entire world subjugated? Those things polished us to this point, to these heights."

"That makes sense. Just one more question. We otherworlders naturally learn how to use magic after leveling up, but you guys don't. How does that work for you? I feel like that contributes to how much stronger you become."

"For the most part, we engrave each and every character written in the spells of the Scrolls into the magic pathways of our brains. Though, in my case it's a bit different."

"How so?"

"They called me a heretic at one point because I'd used the Forbidden Records."

“You mean the ones in...the Grand Library of Aquatic Wisdom?”

“Very good. The tomes in the Labyrinth there live on. They either feed on the spirits of humans who seek them out for power, or grant them with magic. Though, most of those humans get eaten for being too greedy.”

“Thank you for the information.” I smiled as I gave him my gratitude.

Alice had once told me about this man, that he “treasured souvenirs from the underworld” as an example of him being gentlemanly at weird moments.

Players could get Forbidden Records from monsters in the Grand Library of Aquatic Wisdom, but I didn’t know that’s how they were used.

*We gained some great knowledge today.*

“What? What does that mean?”

I ignored him in favor of my menu window. Since Gabriel and Kuroinu were getting knocked around, it was about time for me to release them.

*I’m gonna use my Class Skill Orb!*







Class Skill Orb

Rarity: SSS

An orb that grants a summoner a one-of-a-kind skill.

Skill Granted: Release of God’s Might

HP and MP will be fully recovered upon use as a secondary effect.



*Oh hey, I even got a description for it without having to use Judgment.*

I’d gotten this item during the tutorial, but didn’t want to waste the full recovery effect, so I hadn’t used it.

The skill it gave me, Release of God’s Might, was an absolutely broken one that increased all of my summons’ stats by a multiple of seven!

I got to my feet and shouted out to my two companions.

“Gabriel! Kuroinu! I used Release of God’s Might! You can put an end to this now!”

†

*Kuroinu*

The conditions weren’t looking good. Our blades had crossed hundreds of times by that point.

My master had ordered me to show what I was made of, but it was all too clear that my prowess didn’t even come close to that of my opponent’s.

“Augh!”

Air rushed out of my lungs. I’d taken his blade straight to my torso.

I was blown far to the side. When I checked on the damage, his blade hadn’t breached my armor, so nothing was sliced, but the impact had taken one of my

ribs with it.

*The end is nigh. How should I handle this?*

Right as I was about to come up with a plan, the magic knight in front of me opened his mouth.

“Your strength... It’s something to be marveled at. Your close-range combat techniques are in the same league as mine.”

I didn’t respond.

“The sad part is that blade of yours. It’s just not fit to keep up with someone as talented as you.”

It was as he stated; my sword was in tatters. It seemed he’d noticed that I was being careful not to swing it too hard in fear of it crumbling.

“The strength of your weapon adds to your own, as you know,” he rambled. “Which means we’ve reached the end.”

“That we have. Playtime is over.”

“Playtime?”

The man didn’t seem to have heard my master’s voice.

No matter.

I had been told to “put an end to this,” so all that remained was to finish my mission with every fiber of my being.

I leaped backward in a huge stride.

“What’s the point in widening the gap between us? You’re a swordsman, I’m a magic swordsman. Ranged combat isn’t exactly either of our fortes.”

“My master has informed me that I may use my abilities to their fullest.”

Magic welled up within my body, flowing out and expanding my muscles, enlarging them, allowing them to burst through their restraints—my jet-black

armor.

I switched from my bipedal form to my true quadrupedal one.

“Wh-What is that form?!”

“My name is Cerberus! The guardian canine of Hell!”

“What? I-Impossible... So I was sword fighting with...a magic beast?”

I lowered all three of my heads at the man who was dizzied with dismay. “My apologies.”

“For what?”

“Your swordplay that you’ve refined for so long, your valor, and your hard work, they’re things to be praised. As a fellow warrior, I apologize for the situation escalating to the point where I shall play with you like a toy.”

“...‘Warrior’?”

“Should I call myself a gatekeeper, I would’ve had to have dabbled in combat techniques native to that of a magic beast.”

Strength flashed through my feet, shooting me forward in a straight line. As soon as those feet touched the ground, I kicked out once more and ended up at the man’s back, having formed an arrow shape with my path.

“Wha—?! Such speed?!”

“Skill: Instant Gait.”

My front claws stopped his blade as he swung it behind him. A high-pitched clink rang out, and the blade split in half and spun through the air.

“Skill: Blazing Claws.”

“Huh?!”

“Allow me to make it up to you. I will vanquish you with everything I have as a warrior. Skill: Three-Headed Dragon Rush.”

The only thing that remained after my three heads bit through his skull were the echoes of his death cry.

“Heretics are meant to be physically punched down whenever they level up.”

The tables had turned. Gabriel was mounted on the guy this time, using him as a punching bag. I couldn't find a single trace of emotion on her face. The guy's blood was splattering onto her, but she wasn't reacting to it at all, just violently hitting him with blunt force. *Oh my god, she's scary.*

But let's face facts here: it was sheer stupidity for him to have challenged her to hand-to-hand combat. Gabriel was an archangel, so she was superior in terms of healing magic. Yet that didn't stop her from being close-range oriented by nature. I wonder if saying that she “shaves her foe's armor down to its limits with firepower chocked full of speed and strength” would be enough to describe her. She could even do high-speed Recovery Magic right after being shot.

“H-H-How did you do that?!”

The man in the white tailcoat's mouth hung open. I couldn't blame him for being shocked since his absolute advantage had just been obliterated.

In hindsight, I might not have needed Release of God's Might after all. The reason my summons were struggling was partly because I'd told them not to give it their all.

“Y-You're just a summoner! Those beasts will disappear as soon as I kill you!”

He was backed into a corner, which meant he was going for the one move he was confident in.

Kidney Blow.

He might have been able to teleport, but I wasn't stupid enough to fall for the same trick that many times.

“How did you evade that?!”

“I’m sure you know this, but as a summoner, part of my familiars’ stats add to my own as buffs, so long as they’re deployed on the battlefield.”

And in this case, Gabriel and Kuroinu’s stats had been multiplied by seven because of Release, so mine followed suit.

“Which means I’m stronger now.”

I pulled a knife off my back, which glinted in the dim light.

I used it to dig out his carotid artery. His blood danced out, following the arc left by the blade.



“I got this Legendary Assassin Knife from a Legendary Goblin. No wonder it works well.”

I listened to the sound of white tailcoat man collapsing with a thud. I had to gulp... *I can't believe it only took one strike.*

—You leveled up!

—You leveled up!

—You leveled up!

*Nice. They weren't some of the strongest natives here for nothing. Bagged me three whole levels.*

“Master Shinobu?”

“I know.”

Gabriel had regrouped with me, prompting me to check what the enemies were carrying. If they were calling themselves the Three Supreme Sages, their items must have been worth examining. Wouldn't want anything useful going to waste.

I ransacked the Three Unmoving Carcasses for their gear.

“Use Skill: Judgment.”

I judged their swords and light armor. Nothing in particular stood out, but there were some pretty fearsome effects on these things as far as natives went. Alice could probably use a few of these equips, so I took them just in case.

“Let's take all the weapons, armor, and accessories to Izanach,” I ordered Gabriel.

“Understood.”

That was when I noticed white tailcoat man's right eye glittering.

“Use Skill: Judgment.”

Evil Eye of the Three Sages



A sorcerous enemy search tool created by the Three Supreme Sages.

Based on analyses done on the Friends function of the Reincarnation System, it grasps the wavelengths emitted from the special souls of reincarnation and determines the positions of ones with weak magic resistance.

Specifically, once this magic tool is equipped as an accessory or the like, the positions of most reincarnators under level 20 can be determined.

Note that at present, four reincarnators have died as a result of this tool.

An analysis done on the Friends function? So that's how they made a radar to track down the otherworlders. These God Killers were actually pretty impressive. They really were top-class natives.

My gaze dropped down to the still corpse. I could feel myself getting a bit sentimental.

Despite everything, these guys were just trying to defend themselves against those they considered "invaders." It was just that their methods were the absolute *worst*. If only they'd been people with morals, I might've been able to get along with them.

No point in pondering what-ifs, though.

"They can find most reincarnators under level 20, huh?"

Judgment said four people had died because of this tool. It wasn't hard to imagine the God Killers were the ones to do it.

Chills ran down my back as I imagined what would happen if Megumi ended up in this world at a low level once she finished the tutorial. Even if *that bastard* didn't find her in time, one of these guys could've been the one to kill her.

...Hm?

Electricity ran through my brain.

*Whoa, whoa, whoa whoa whoa!*

*Wait, wait, wait wait wait!*

So, with this item, I could find Megumi as soon as she landed?

“Great! I can be there first once she logs in!”

Up until now, reuniting with Megumi seemed about as realistic as grasping a cloud, but this was a huge development.

This item would give me the strength to protect Megumi from the ultimate bastard.

I clenched my fist with determination.

# Epilogue: The Invincible Otherworlder Who Crawled Up from Level 83

*Alice Cecil*

“I-I could very well become your friend, you know!”

Beatrice visited the scholarship classroom one day after school.

It'd been two weeks since then. One way or another, the Imperial Court of the Lilic Empire had found out that the vampire Vlad had disappeared, and now it was practically official. Plus Casin Highzen died, making his family's status plummet. The Imperial Court was in an uproar due to all of this. The Highzen family had made a lot of enemies too, so that also added to the chaos.

Master Shinobu fabricated new memories into Beatrice, by the way. To her, we'd done some great things.

“I'd love to.”

“So you'll be my friend?! O-Of course you will! Because I'm a grand noble—”

“But I can't. I'm sorry.”

As you can see, Beatrice's attitude had made a complete one-eighty. Now that I'd started garnering attention for getting good grades in the scholarship class, she was trying to cozy up to me. I heard she'd been taken in by one of her family's rivals, so she was going through a lot herself.

Sure, I felt sorry for her, but...

“D-Don't say that, Lady Alice! W-We both need to let go of the past. I won't call you a savage, and I'm no longer concerned about bloodlines—”

“That's not the problem, actually. I'm dropping out.”

“Dropping out?” Her voice was hysterical.

“Yes. The headmaster had told me to do so even before my long break. I

didn't think they'd really go through with it, though."

"B-B-But why?! Lady Alice! Without you here, I... I...! What would I do?! Both school and home are like beds of nails right now!"

*Beg all you want, but I have my own business to take care of. And school being a bed of nails for you is your own fault. You ran around like you owned the place, all because you had your "lineage" backing you up. Now that it's gone, this is what happens.*

"Well then, thank you for everything."

"Wait, wait, wait, please! Lady Aliiiiiice!"

That day, I gathered my things and finished all the paperwork for my dismissal from the magic academy.

†

*Shinobu Iijima*

We found ourselves on the main street of Amrogild's town. I'd never been in such a big crowd since being reincarnated.

"Um, Master Shinobu?" Alice asked. "I thought our first objective was that dungeon."

"Yep, we're going for the Forbidden Records in the Grand Library of Aquatic Wisdom."

The dungeon that the man in the white tailcoat had mentioned. Looking it up, general admission was supposed to be granted to high-ranking adventurers. But let's face it, a difficult dungeon governed by the adventurer's guild wouldn't be open to even high-class people, much less the general public. That applied to any EXP farm out there too. The library was said to be sealed shut for being too dangerous. But in truth, it was probably left up to the whims of the otherworlders.

"This town is huge."

It was probably a marvel to Alice, since this town was several times bigger than the one where the magic academy was located. It boasted a population of

over one million, so it was most likely the largest independent city in the world.

Alice looked back at Cerberus.

“By the way, Master Shinobu. About Master Kuroinu... I mean, Master Cerberus...”

“Just accept it.”

See, trailing behind us was a black dog, so small that he could’ve fit into your palm.



One bad thing about Cerberus was that he got weaker after transforming. At his most powerful, his strength rivaled that of even Gabriel and Tsukuyomi. But as you'd expect, he didn't come close when it came to divinity. So after going all out, he was set to revert back to a puppy. And for some reason, he went back to having only one head instead of three.

He looked up at me. "Thank you very much, Master Shinobu."

"No problem, Cerberus. We all have things we're sensitive about."

"Yes, sir. I am a warrior. Aside from you, having Alice see me in such a pitiful state... At any rate, please do not speak of this matter to her any further, *woof*."

He gasped, his eyes widening at his *woof*. Alice giggled and pulled out some dried meat from her pocket.

"Aren't you hungry, Mr. Cerberus?"

"I am not, *woof*."

We could see him grimacing in embarrassment. Alice wouldn't stop grinning, and to be honest, I was also struggling to stifle my laughs.

"You know what?" Alice brought herself up to my ear to whisper. "Isn't Mr. Cerberus cute like this?"

"You realize he's still stronger than you by leagues, right?"

"Huh?" Her eyes darted back to Cerberus. "How much stronger?"

"I'd say about thirty levels higher."

"I see. I suppose he isn't Izanach's gatekeeper for nothing."

"I'm actually also curious about how he fights when he's so small."

He could quite literally fit into one of our palms. His stats, on the other hand, told a very different story numberwise.

"Speaking of which, Cerberus, we're gonna have to put you in the bag now. It'll be uncomfortable, but try to bear with it."

"As you wish, *woof*."

We were about to head inside a facility where even beast tamers weren't

allowed to bring in their monsters. I stuffed Cerberus into a traveler's bag and handed it to Alice. As of right now, his job was to guard her. I could afford to have him out and about like this because he didn't eat up much MP in this form.

After walking for a while, our destination was upon us.

"Whoa..." Alice couldn't help but be amazed when we got there. "Master Shinobu! I've never seen such a huge building!"

It was about seven stories tall, roughly the size of the average apartment building in Japan. But it still looked twice as big as all the other buildings around it.

"It's gotta be big. Amrogild's adventurer's guild is the headquarters for all adventurer's guilds around the world."

That it was. Which meant that it was also the headquarters for the Crimson Moon Brigade, who ran these guilds behind the scenes.

These reincarnator organizations were a source of anxiety for me, to be frank. But I had to get into the Grand Library of Aquatic Wisdom no matter what, to get Alice stronger. And since that dungeon was under this guild's jurisdiction, we couldn't just waltz right into it willy-nilly.

"We're going to register as adventurers here."

We couldn't bring any of my other summons, since the guild would probably find out they were monsters through one of their various verification systems.

And so, Alice and I opened up the doors to the adventurer's guild.

†

The guild's lobby looked unbelievably vast, exacerbated by the fact that there weren't many others present. Although, it would probably still look grand even if it were filled with people. Pretty convincing for the adventurer's headquarters.

Several request boards were lined up along the walls. I assumed it would take at least an hour to look at them from end to end. *Damn*. There was even a drink bar in this lobby, slightly splitting the place into the request board area and the alcohol area. All in all, this place was huge. Just walking from the entrance to



the reception desk made me exhausted.

A woman called out to me from the drink bar.

“Hey, you!”

“Yes?”

“I’m the guildmaster here.”

Guildmaster? Why would someone so important call out to me specifically?

“...Do you need something?” My guard was up.

She looked to be a female fighter, with light blue hair and a friendly smile on her face. “I’m not the guildmaster of this specific guild—I’m the master of the Crimson Moon Brigade.”

The atmosphere switched in an instant. Every single person seated at the bar tables had turned to us, and everyone else in the building had locked their eyes onto me.

*I think there’s about ten of them.*

“This building is filled with nothing but reincarnators right now, Shinobu Iijima.”

*I messed up.* I should’ve realized how suspicious this was from the moment I noticed that there weren’t many people in here.

“I didn’t think reincarnators would come after me so quickly.”

I’d done my best to avoid getting noticed by the Brigade, but it seemed none of my efforts had been worth it.

“I’m surprised,” said the woman. “You look exactly like how Mr. Imabayashi said you would.”

Imabayashi... *Oh, you mean my bastard of a foster father.*

“So what do you want from me?”

“It would take too long to explain. The Council of Gods has been arguing

about what to do with you.”

“The Council of Gods?”

“You don’t know anything, do you? It’s a council of reincarnators, which has representatives from every guild faction out there. Your father is part of it too, of course.”

“...So?”

“Your existence was nothing but a mystery to us for the longest time. You were the only reincarnator whose whereabouts were unknown. So we argued about what to do with you, but our conclusion...”

The blue-haired woman stood up, and everyone around her responded to her movement by surrounding me and closing in.

“Our conclusion was to *kill Shinobu Iijima on sight.*”

“That’s quite the solution.”

“All righty then, here we have five people at level 99, and seven people over level 70. Nothing but death awaits you now. What will you do, Shinobu Iijima?”

An ominous smile donned her face.

## Bonus Short Stories

A message from the author:

As I mentioned in the afterword, this story was originally a novel that I'd published online long before my debut.

A lot of the settings have been changed since that version, but I'll leave them untouched to give you a taste of that novel through this short story. I hope you'll enjoy finding the differences.

One thing to note is that, at the time, Gabriel's character was one who wholly endorsed shota BL.

### Right after the Battle with Jacob

"Surely you aren't suggesting that we should have tried to escape with the corpse still lying around? We killed their guild leader, so there was going to be an uproar either way. Nothing would've changed, no matter what we did. With that in mind, I came to the conclusion that this would be a good opportunity to experiment and have a little fun."

*Er, no. I really did intend to run away.* Ryuya stayed silent, unable to put his thoughts into words.

Gabriel nodded slowly, a ghastly smile forming on her face as she spun horrifying words into a song. "Direct access to the target's cerebrum. A rewrite of the neural nervous network composition. Those are the effects of Level 5 Brain Melt: Seraph's Tidings."

Ryuya turned his gaze to her, an indescribable expression coursing through him. "I thought I told you brainwashing was off-limits."

"That order became inapplicable after murdering the guild leader. Furthermore, because this incident involves murder in the first place, I determined that you'd approve of brainwashing in this instance."

He didn't have a response for her.

"Please punish me if I was mistaken. However, the brainwashing was minimal, simply rewriting memories. I will burn the guild leader's body and leave no traces, not even ash. As a result, the situation will be wrapped up and adjusted, the story being that he mysteriously disappeared."

Ryuya kept quiet.

Gabriel took Ryuya's silence as sanction for her actions. A smile bloomed on her face like a flower, but her brows furrowed the next moment.

"Ah, my apologies," she whispered. "It may have been a smarter decision to murder all of them instead of just the leader."

Ryuya heaved a deep sigh. "Please... Anything but murder."

He took a look around. "Is it okay for us to leave now?"

"It is. Incidentally, the guild exam you took earlier has been voided from everyone's memories. I also plan to register you as the top-ranked adventurer here, Master Ryuya."

"The lowest ranked, please."

"I couldn't possibly make my master the lowest ranked among scum like these. That's too much..."

Gabriel looked like the world was ending, but Ryuya's face was even worse. "No, really. The lowest ranked, please."

"But anyway," he continued, progressively looking like ectoplasm was going to burst from his body. "We can leave, right?"

"There shouldn't be a problem with doing so. Where will we be going?"

"To search for an apprentice," Ryuya nodded. "One about fourteen or fifteen. It wouldn't necessarily be bad if they were younger, but let's just stick with that age range for now. We're going to go to a slave market to search for a kid who can't use magic. If they already know how to use it, then unfortunately they will never be able to get stronger."

Gabriel's eyes sparkled. "Fourteen or fifteen?" Her words were barely audible.

“And younger than that is acceptable as well...? I see, so you’re going to buy a pretty shota boy, then. I would not disapprove of a super shota around ten years old either...”

“Huh? Did you say something?”

Coughing to cover up her frankly suspicious behavior, Gabriel tried her best to compose herself. “No, sir. Nothing.”

She licked her lips and laughed, bewitched, turning to where Ryuya couldn’t hear her.

“Fuck, I’m wet.”

## Meal Scene

*Yep, I’m gonna eat the whole thing.*

Ryuya stood up and reached out to the empty bowl in front of Alice to get seconds. She desperately pulled her own, not-yet-empty bowl close to her, like she was protecting it with her life.

*Huff! Huff!* She glared at Ryuya while chewing rapidly and breathing heavily through her nose. She seemed to think he was trying to steal her portion.

His eyebrows shot up. “Dang, are you really that scared?”

“*Gobffrew,*” she said, still chewing. “*Hybfshaybhonnyanee!*”

“Swallow first!” Ryuya had to chuckle. No one made jokes like these anymore.

Suddenly, Alice’s face turned blue and she began smacking her chest with her fist.

*Figures she’d get something caught in her throat,* Ryuya thought as he handed her a glass of water. “Calm down!”

She snatched it from him and used it to wash down the rice caught in her throat. Finally able to breathe again, her eyes popped open.

“What is this? This is so good, I don’t think you can even call it food!”

“There’s this thing called shogayaki sauce in my hometown. There’s a ton of it stored here in Izanach. Though, I guess you wouldn’t understand if I explained that they were gacha misses for me.”

“...Are you really human, Master Ryuya?”

Taken a bit back by the question, he tilted his head. “What do you mean?”

“You can use Level 6 Summon Magic, and you live in a huge palace in the sky. The only thing I can see you as is a god from a heavenly kingdom, like in a fairy tale.”

“A *god*? That’s an exaggeration. I’m just a regular human. I mean, I guess I *do* control godlike beings.”

“And this meal is the pinnacle of that... Now that I’ve eaten this miracle product that only gods could eat... I can never go back to what I was eating before!”

“Come on, no more exaggerations.”

Alice fervently shook her head. “This pork and onion stir-fry... Each and every one of these ingredients is a precious jewel. That’s right... This is... It’s like—”

She nodded brightly and switched to a Kansai accent.

*“A treasure box full of pork and onions!”*

“Why do you know a joke from Hikomaro?!” Ryuya felt like he’d been thrown a curveball.

Just as he started experiencing a light headache, Gabriel coughed to alert them of her presence. “Alice? You mustn’t be surprised at a dish of this caliber. I also cannot quite condone you saying that gods would eat this.”

Prefacing it with a “sorry to say,” she took her own bowl full of rice in her left hand, and piled on the shogayaki from the serving plate with a fork. “Master Ryuya. I was a celebrity in Heaven.”

“Yeah, I’d assume. I mean, you’re a seraph.”

“To be frank, I am also a gourmet specialist. Although this dish does indeed have an enticing fragrance, it is much too strong, putting it further and further

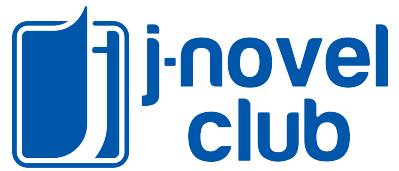
off from being high class. And more than that, the presentation is a little *too* fancy, like a faux-fancy meal.”

“Honestly,” she sounded exasperated. “Something like this couldn’t possibly be so delicious that you’d make a fuss about it.”

She picked her spoon up and ate the bite whole. After munching for a minute, her brows formed a crease between them, and she looked quite unhappy. She wiped her mouth with a napkin, a Kansai accent spilling out as if she was throwing it up.

*“It really is a treasure box full of pork and onions!”*

“No, seriously, why do you guys know who Hikomaro is?!”



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The Invincible Summoner Who Crawled Up from Level 1: Wrecking Reincarnators with My Hidden Dungeon Volume 1

by Shiraishi Arata

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