



HOW
NOT TO
SUMMON
— A —
DEMON
LORD

VOLUME

4

Yukiya Murasaki
Illustr. Takahiro Tsurusaki



"S-ST...

STOP...

IT..."

Having received the first shame of her entire life, Lumachina's head went blank, tears forming in the corners of her eyes.



"W-WELCOME,
BACK...
MASTER?"

"I'M ALL
SPARKLY! ☆"



"I'M
GONNA
START
RUBBING,
OKAY?"

She began moving her
body up and down, the
soft sensation moving
up and down with her.



c o n t e n t s

The Story so Far

Prologue

Chapter 1

Pest Control

Interlude

Chapter 2

Flying Sky High

Chapter 3

Heading to a New Town

Interlude

Chapter 4

In Hot Pursuit

Epilogue

Cover Art & Illustrations / Takahiro Tsurusaki

Design / AFTERGLOW

Editor / Satoshi Shoji

The Story So Far—

In the MMORPG Cross Reverie, Takuma Sakamoto was overwhelmingly powerful, and was able to role play so well that his performances were more boss-like than the actual bosses of the game. For this reason, he came to be known as the “Demon Lord.”

By defeating the 《Demon Lord of the Mind, Enkvaros》 faster than anyone else, he obtained the super rare item, the 《Demon Lord’s Ring》. It was one of the ultimate pieces of equipment in the game, able to reflect all types of magic.

Then, one day, Takuma found himself summoned to a world that looked exactly like Cross Reverie! Having performed the ritual magic at the same time, the Pantherian, Rem, and the Elf, Shera, fought over which one of them was his Summoner:

“...I am the one who summoned him. Your magic was a failure.”

“You’re wrong! He’s mine!”

But thanks to the Demon Lord’s Ring he wore, the magic was reflected, so the 《Enslavement Collar》 meant for him had clamped onto the two girls instead!

Faced with Rem and Shera arguing, Takuma was at a loss of what to do. While he may have been a superior player back in the game, he couldn’t talk with other people even if his life depended on it. After struggling over what to say, the words that came out of his mouth were from the Demon Lord role play he had used in the game:

“Cease your pointless squabbling. You are in the presence of Diablo.”

The three of them have since made the town of Faltra their home base. As it turned out, Rem held a great secret: The 《Demon Lord Krebskulm》 had been sealed inside of her body. Rem despaired that no one would be able to help her... But that’s when Diablo made a proclamation to her:

“Leave everything to me. No matter your circumstances, a Demon Lord will be

able to accept it all.”

The next day, Diablo and the others became full-fledged Adventurers. Their first quest turned out to be a trap, and they were attacked by a squadron of elite Elf soldiers trying to capture Shera. It turned out she was the princess of the Kingdom of Greenwood!

But Diablo repelled the attack with ease; the gap between their levels was quite enormous. This was the moment Diablo came to understand the difference between raising one’s levels in Cross Reverie, a game with infinite revives, and this world, where death was permanent.

A Fallen named Edelgard then led an army of one hundred of her brethren in an attack on the Bridge of Ulug. At the same time, the powerful Fallen Gregore appeared in the middle of Faltra. Showing off his true power, Diablo completely routed Edelgard and her army. Using a “Return” spell, he made his way back to Faltra instantaneously, and in an overwhelming display of magic, Diablo destroyed Gregore. Thanks to his efforts, he managed to save Rem, Celes, and the entire city of Faltra.

Diablo later found himself the recipient of a quest from the governor of Faltra, Galford. Prince Keera of the Kingdom of Greenwood had demanded Shera be returned to him, threatening open war with Faltra against the country of Elves should compliance fail. The details of Galford’s quest were simply to find a way to avoid the war. The bespectacled, straight-and-narrow Imperial Knight, Alicia, was assigned to the group as an observer to watch over their actions.

Yet Shera still ended up being taken away from Diablo; but after defeating the squadrons of Elves, Prince Keera’s Summon, and even Galford himself, Diablo managed to regain their peaceful everyday life.

Then, in cooperation with Edelgard, the group set off to resurrect the Demon Lord Krebskulm trapped inside Rem. But in the process, Krebskulm had lost a portion of her memories as a Demon Lord, and instead appeared as a biscuit-loving young girl, who was then nicknamed “Klem.” As such, they spent an enjoyable number of days together...

Suddenly, due to Alicia's betrayal and being subjected to torture by the Paladin, Saddler, Rem was brought to the brink of death. This tragic event became the catalyst needed of awakening Klem as the Demon Lord Krebskulm, thus flying her into a frenzied rage. In the end, Diablo used one of his ultimate spells, bringing the Demon Lord a swift defeat. Rem, who had managed to escape death, called out to Krebskulm as well, somehow managing to return her to normal.

In order to ensure she did not go on another rampage, Diablo cast enslavement magic upon her. At the same time, Alicia and Edelgard were now being pursued by the Fallen, who blamed the failure of their plans on them...

Prologue

A purplish-red fluid ran along the small scales that lined her skin, dripping off her.

The monster's feet pounded across the ground. The grand dragon sped along, going faster than even the swiftest horse. Alicia kept a firm grasp on the reins, which were lined with thorns.

“Hah...hah...”

If she had let her guard drop even the tiniest bit, it seemed like she would be thrown from the back of the beast at any moment.

Alicia's official position was that of an Imperial Knight, but in her heart of hearts, she wished for the destruction of all the races, and had been secretly supporting the Fallen. She had thought resurrecting the Demon Lord would help her reach her goal—

But she never imagined that Krebskulm would suddenly disappear after being revived!

The Fallen felt their time had been wasted, and were on the verge of killing Alicia in retaliation. As a result, Alicia and Edelgard had ended up mounting Edelgard's grand dragon to make their escape.

When they finally managed to flee from the mob of Fallen, Edelgard had sustained a grave injury. Her strength had left her, and she was being thrown around on the back of a grand dragon like she was a piece of luggage. The purple-red blood that flowed from her head showed no signs of stopping.

Though Alicia was highly knowledgeable of the Fallen, the amount of blood loss they could endure before it threatened their lives varied between each individual, which meant she couldn't say anything for certain about Edelgard. But there was still no denying the gravity of the situation.

“Lady Edelgard, please, just hold on!”

“...Ah. All...right...”

She had received this injury from protecting Alicia; if Edelgard had been by herself, she would have probably made it out without a scratch on her.

Though Alicia continuously seethed with hatred for the races, and rebelled against the unreasonable nature of her surroundings, the only thing she thought of at the moment was how she wanted to save Edelgard.

The sun had already set, and their surroundings had grown dark. The grand dragon could see perfectly well at night, which meant it would not crash into any rocks or stray far from the road.

“Nonetheless, we cannot just keep heading toward the city gates.”

“...Oh...really?”

Alicia could barely make out what Edelgard was saying. She shook her head in response.

“No matter my position as an Imperial Knight, if I were to come riding through the gates on the back of a monster with a Fallen in tow, they would arrest me on the spot.”

“...I see.”

Alicia turned to look over her shoulder. “It does not seem like there are any Fallen pursuing us.”

“...Because, this one...is fast...”

“Very true... I’m quite astonished.” The grand dragon had indeed seemed to be much faster than a majority of the Fallen.

“...Also...they are scared, probably?”

“Quite. The rest of the Fallen are unaware as to why the Demon Lord’s presence suddenly disappeared.”

To them, it must have seemed like there was a high probability of something inside the Stronghold City of Faltra that could defeat a Demon Lord, which was why they couldn’t just approach carelessly.

“...Why? Why...did Demon Lord, disappear...? Dis...appeared?” Edelgard whispered.

Alicia had not known the reason for Krebskulm’s disappearance, but she had a vague idea of what could have happened.

“I would assume it is something of Sir Diablo’s doing.”

“...Oh...him...”

Her voice was frail. Edelgard, who had seemed like such an indomitable presence, now looked like she was about to fade away. When Alicia touched her skin, it was as cold as ice.

Edelgard’s cracked, purple lips opened: “...What...do, now?”

“We are being pursued by the Fallen, so our only recourse is to return to town. However, I am seen as a traitor now, not to mention that your appearance is quite conspicuous. What shall we do, indeed?”

“...Don’t, know. Edelgard...might, die?”

“I-Is it that bad!?”

“...At, this rate...yes.”

“No, you can’t! That is unacceptable!”

“But...no place, to go, back to. If return, to Demon Lord’s castle, Eulerex and others, will—guh!” She coughed up a mass of blood.

“A-All right! I will do something about this, so please, speak no more!”

Pulling back on the reigns, Alicia brought the grand dragon to a halt in a spot where they could just barely make out Faltra’s southern gate. She remained wary of the area behind her, but no Fallen had followed them here. She lowered Edelgard down, who was exhausted. Taking off Edelgard’s cape, she wrapped it around Edelgard’s body.

“It won’t be able to hide your legs, but considering how dark it is, this should at least make the scales on your body unnoticeable.”

“...What...are you, doing?”

“We are entering town.”

If they remained outside, their only choices were to be either finished off by the Fallen; to be set upon by wild beasts; or for Edelgard to succumb to her wounds and lose her life. She wouldn't, and couldn't, be saved out here.

“But, why?”

“This is all a gamble on my part, but if the Demon Lord wasn't defeated, and had simply reverted back to her childlike form...”

“Demon Lord...is, alive? Really?”

“*If* she is, then she can heal you. That is something within the realm of possibility for a Demon Lord, correct?”

“...They...can. But, maybe...won't?”

In order to awaken the true Demon Lord Krebskulm, Alicia had betrayed Diablo and the others. She had waited for Rem and Shera to treat Klem as if she were a part of their family, only to turn them over to the Paladin, Saddler. Because of that, it looked like Rem had been killed in front of Klem.

The hatred born from losing someone important would thus awaken the Demon Lord in her purest form.

If Klem were alive, she would most likely bear a grudge deep enough to kill Alicia. She was sure to have earned Diablo's ire as well.

Even Alicia thought Rem had died. If she hadn't, then Krebskulm would have never awakened as a true Demon Lord, even if it were only temporary. The instant she showed herself in front of Diablo and the others, she could end up as cinders; there would be no time for negotiations.

—But even still...!

“Please, leave it to me. I will figure something out.”

Alicia wrapped the now immobile Edelgard with her own cape, holding Edelgard in her arms. Though Alicia's arms were thin, they had been put through such training that would make it so she wouldn't lose to any man. It was entirely possible for her to carry someone as thin as Edelgard.

“...All...right... Can't move, anyways... Leave, to you.”

Carrying Edelgard like luggage, Alicia headed toward the west gate. The grand dragon looked on as if it were concerned for them, but due to its appearance, it was impossible to ride into town on it.

After Alicia and Edelgard had gone far enough away, the fleet-footed steed turned around, disappearing into the plains covered by the black of night.

Chapter 1: Pest Control

Stretched out on the bed, Diablo let out a deep sigh.

—Today was a friggin' rough day...

It was always like this whenever there was an accident or trouble of some sort, but today was especially bad. Just remembering it was a pain for him, so he wasn't going to recount it here. He had, after all, managed to expend a drastic amount of his MP, and had taken the most damage of his party since coming to this world.

In Cross Reverie, Diablo wore the most powerful equipment that could be found in the MMORPG, and had maxed out their stats by reinforcing them. Attacks that would kill a normal person instantly were for him a mere notice he had been hit.

But right now, he had taken on some serious injuries. Though the Demon Lord Krebskulm's attacks had consisted of irrationally throwing objects at him like a child, the attacks had managed to easily break through the damage-reducing effects of his ultimate equipment.

—I guess I should have expected that from a Demon Lord. If Krebskulm had completely regained her memories, then my equipment might not have been enough to win.

“.....”

“Why the long face, Diablo?”

The left side of the bed creaked; laying by his side was an Elf girl. Her soft, golden hair spread out like a flowing river, touching Diablo's arm, tickling a little.

Her name was Shera L. Greenwood. Not only was she part of the race considered the closest related to the Celestials of old, but she was also a

princess who had left her home in search of freedom. Diablo was pretty used to being around her, but if she were to approach him unawares like this, he would still get a little nervous even now.

But the truth of the matter was that he was nothing more than a socially inept gamer who spent all his time holed-up in his room. He sucked at talking with people, and the only way for him to communicate here was to use the Demon Lord role play he used in Cross Reverie. This went especially so for women as he had almost zero experience talking with them.

Sprawled out only fifteen centimeters away from this solo player with zero resistance to girls was a golden-haired Elf who looked like a CG image had come to life. His heart was almost beating out of his chest, but letting this pathetic side of him show was unbecoming of a Demon Lord.

Throwing himself into Demon Lord-mode, Diablo declared with great self-importance:

“Why the long face, you ask? Heh, it should be quite obvious... That is because I peer into an abyss so unfathomably deep, someone like yourself would never even be able to *begin* imagining it.”

“Wow, that sounds kind of amazing! But, what does ‘abyss’ mean?”

Perhaps it was because she was so innocent (or simple-minded), but Shera’s level of thinking was roughly on the same level as that of a child. She looked at Diablo, awestruck.

But in reality, the only thing Diablo was peering at was the unusually abundant cleavage of a certain Elf girl...

“...His use of ‘abyss’ is a metaphor for something so profoundly deep, it is impossible to know how far down it goes.”

Sitting opposite Shera on the right side of the bed was another girl—Rem Galleu. If Diablo were to move his hand in the slightest, he would touch her rear where a black, cat-like tail unfurled from a hole in the back of her spats.

Rem sported glossy black ears and a tail similar to a black panther, as well as

black hair, all a result of a rare trait among her race. Yet she was in possession of quite the slender figure for a fourteen-year-old: the faint outline of her ribs along her sides, the shapeliness of her arms and legs, and a lean body that all came together to draw one's gaze to her and keep it there. Her long, black hair spilled over her body like ink.

"...Diablo, a lot has happened today, so why don't you rest up now?"

Rem would always think a little bit before she spoke; she was a rather intellectual girl.

"Hm, then I guess I'll do just that."

"...All right."

"Sleepytime, sleepytime, time for sleepytime ♪

"When nighttime is over, it's time for breakfast time ♪

"We'll dream of donuts n' marshmallows n' cake ♪"

While singing one of her strange homemade songs, Shera pulled a small child up on the bed. The child in question had cream-colored hair, and two thick horns growing out of either side of her head. Her ears were larger than an Elf's, and her eyes, slightly tinged with a sense of trepidation, were a brilliant amethyst purple that would almost never be found in any of the races. This was the youthful body of the Demon Lord Krebskulm, or Klem for short.

"A-Are you sure? Having me here, too..."

"Why not?" Shera asked, head tilted. "Do you not want to sleep together? Is it because the bed's too small after all?"

Klem screwed up her eyes. "I *killed* some of the races, you know!? I even tried to kill Diablo... Do you not think I'm dangerous!?"

"Ahaha! The only one really worried about that stuff was Sylvie!" With a laugh, Shera pat Klem on the head.

Sylvie was the leader of the Adventurer's Guild. Due to the position she held, Sylvie had stated that, even if Klem was just a child, she could not be allowed to remain in town. It was a fact that Klem had turned into the Demon Lord Krebskulm and rampaged about town, and if Diablo hadn't faced her, it would

have been reduced to rubble.

But there were extenuating circumstances surrounding this series of events. For one, the person she had killed was the Paladin, Saddler, a psychotic individual likened to a murderous demon. Both Rem and Klem had narrowly avoided being killed at his hands.

—Allowing a guy like that to stay in town while not doing the same for Klem is just wrong. She's just a kid right now... Being so uneasy of her despite that makes me feel pretty bad for her.

But offering kind words to a young girl wasn't exactly what a Demon Lord would do. So, raising himself up, Diablo went to tell her that she didn't have to worry, while still maintaining his air of dignity.

"Hmph... You claim you tried to kill *me*? Do not make me laugh. Attacks such as those would never work against someone like myself, for I am a *true* Demon Lord! If you doubt me, just try and face me again; but be warned: I shall not hold back this time. I will reduce you to nothing but ashes."

Shera and Rem both wore uneasy expressions on their faces.

"Aww man... I don't wanna see any more fighting, OK?"

"...Please, calm down, you two."

Diablo was sweating on the inside. Had he gone a little overboard with his challenge? Was this another display of just how much he sucked at talking with other people? If she were to say, "Then bring it on!" or something similar, it would be a tremendous pain in the ass for him to deal with.

"Uheheh, then I'm glad!" Klem leapt onto him. "You're pretty tough, huh! I'll praise you for that!"

She wrapped herself around him; perhaps it had something to do with her being a child, but her body temperature was high. Faltra's temperate climate was also to blame, but the little girl he was wearing like a muffler was making him feel a little warm.

Crude chains jangled around Klem's neck. As well, Rem touched the collar that was wrapped around her own. "...Thinking about it, since you cast enslavement magic upon her, Klem wouldn't be able to fight with you anyway."

To put Sylvie's fears to rest, Diablo had cast the magic on Klem to make her completely obedient to him. As proof, an enslavement collar was clamped firmly around her neck. The particulars behind how she had received it were different from Rem and Shera, but the collars were all pretty much identical.



Diablo once again leaned back into the bed. “We’re going to sleep.”

“Okey-Dokey!”

Though Shera had the most adult-like figure among the group, she acted the most childish. She snuggled in closer with her voluptuous body.

Klem was still hanging off him, as per usual. He was a little hot because of that.

“Very well, time to sleep! Well, a Demon Lord like myself doesn’t really need to sleep, though...”

Rem hesitantly laid down at the edge of the bed. “...Then good night, everyone.” Reaching out to the wall-mounted candle, she covered it with something resembling a metal ladle, extinguishing the flame.

As the room darkened, Diablo was immediately assaulted by a sense of drowsiness.

He didn’t notice it, but from a crack in the wall, a terrifying presence was observing him...

†

Scratch, scratch, scratch...

Diablo heard an unfamiliar sound above him. It was like the sound of a tiny devil scraping its claws against something.

The first to jump to their feet was Rem, who smacked the bed.

“Diablo!”

“Wha—!?” After hearing the smack right next to his head, Diablo woke up with a shout.

The room was enveloped in darkness. Back in the game, if you found yourself in the darkest depths of a dungeon, no room was completely pitch-black. Even in particularly dark areas of the game, if you just slid the brightness on your monitor to full-blast, then you would never fail to notice something that could

be the deciding factor of you winning or losing. But this was another world, not a game. Darkness was just that: darkness.

—I had a feeling something like this might happen, so I thought up a countermeasure for fighting at night!

Diablo thrust his arm towards the ceiling: “《Light》!”

A ball of light flew up to the ceiling, bursting apart as it made contact and brightened the room. It was a beginner-level spell, one that he had practiced using in his spare time. It looked like his training had yielded good results.

Shera rubbed her eyes against the sudden brightness. “Mmm~? What’s going on?”

“Zzz... Phew...”

Though Klem had said a Demon Lord didn’t need sleep, with all the commotion and how bright it was around her, she was still knocked out.

“Diablo, over there!” Rem pointed toward the wall.

“Hm!?”

A small creature scurried up the wall. It was a shade of ashen-gray so dark it almost appeared black, and had a long, thin tail. It disappeared inside a crack between the ceiling and the wall; it was a little mouse.

Just as Diablo was about to yawn, convinced it was only a mouse, he suddenly realized something.

—Wait, wasn’t there some kind of noise right by my head!?

“W-Was it chewing on my horns!?”

“What!?” Rem and Shera both stared at him intently.

—A Demon Lord who gets his horns chewed on by a mouse would be stupidly lame, wouldn’t it??

He broke out in a cold sweat.

“I don’t see anything different about you,” Rem sighed.

“Yeah, you’re the same Diablo as always~” Shera gave a sleepy smile.

He wanted to collapse he was so relieved, but for now he put on a face that made it seem like this was exactly what he was expecting.

“W-Well, there is no feasible way a mere mouse could cause me any kind of damage. Hm.”

*—Oh thank god...!! I was in danger of ending up like Do**emon for a second there!*

Rem turned to look at the gap the mouse had disappeared into. “It wouldn’t be strange for it to have caused damage to our provisions or equipment. Let’s go buy some tools for pest extermination tomorrow.”

“Hmph. The next time I see it, I will blow it away with my magic.”

“...It seems like we would lose the ceiling as well if you did that.”

“Then we could see the stars in the skies, too~ Fwahhh~” Shera yawned, a smile on her face. Then she suddenly asked him: “Hey, Diablo? When will this bright light thingy go away?”

“Hm?”

The Light spell he cast earlier was still in effect. Now that he thought about it, though he had practiced for a countermeasure to fight at night, he never thought of a way to get rid of it. Either way, he wore a composed smile on his face as he answered.

“Heh. If you call yourself an Adventurer, then you should be able to sleep in bright places as well.”

To be perfectly honest though, even Diablo thought it would be hard to fall asleep like this.

—Damn you, stupid mouse!

Never before had he wanted to murder a rodent so badly.

Seemingly not troubled in the slightest by all this, Rem was already laying down.

“...Personally, I find that brighter is better. Now I don’t have to worry about

being ambushed during the night, which makes it easier for me to sleep.”

“Whaaat~? But it’s so briiiight.” Grumbling to herself, Shera slid off the bed and headed toward the door.

“Where are you going?” Diablo reflexively asked her.

—*She’s not just going to up and leave because she’s fed up with this, right...?*

Shera’s cheeks turned red. “Bathroom...”

“I-I see. I shall allow it; be on your way.”

“Yeah...”

As Shera walked out into the hallway by herself, she let out a shriek.

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This time, Klem was the one who leapt out of bed. “What the heck’s going on!?”

With the effect of “Light” still continuing, Shera re-entered the room—along with one other person. Her arm was being twisted behind her back, and she had a dagger pointed toward her chest. Her face was frozen out of shock and fear.

The assailant was someone Diablo and the others knew all too well.

“Alicia!?” Rem shouted.

“Miss Rem...!? Y-You’re still alive!?” It seemed the Imperial Knight was equally shocked.

“...Yes... Because of your lies, I was almost killed by Saddler, but I was saved by Diablo and Shera.”

“I see...”

An expression of relief came across Alicia’s face; however, the tense atmosphere once again returned to the room.

“Do *not* move a muscle! I am completely serious!” The tip of the dagger touched the part of the clothes that covered Shera’s voluminous chest.

“Eek!?” Shera seemed like she was on the verge of tears.

Standing in the doorway of the room, Alicia was holding Shera hostage. Diablo and the others got out of bed, steeling themselves; they couldn't afford to make any careless moves in a situation like this.



Klem fixed a blistering glare on Alicia. “You’ve got some nerve showing yourself in front of me. Let Shera go; afterward, I’m going to tear you limb from limb.”

Though she had the appearance of a young girl, the killing intent emanating from Klem was the real deal. It was almost enough to worry about her becoming the Demon Lord Krebskulm again.

“...Once I finish my business here,” Alicia shook her head, “I will release Miss Shera. Please feel free to do whatever you like with me after, tearing me limb from limb or otherwise.”

“Oh...?”

“I have heard the Demon Lord has the power to heal other Fallen.”

“Well of course I can.”

“Then, could I have you come this way?”

They moved to the room next door; the room Alicia was renting was still there. They never thought she would actually come back, so they had never bothered to go check it out.

Splatters of purplish-red liquid dotted the floor. There was a girl lying in the bed—

—it was Edelgard.

“A Fallen!?”

Rem was on high-alert, but it was obvious Edelgard’s injuries were serious. Red and violet blood was spreading over the sheets, and the color of her skin was turning deathly pale. If this was one of the races, Diablo would have suspected it to be a corpse. The Fallen turned into particles of light when they died, so she still had to be alive.

It all made sense now to Diablo.

“Now I see... So you two were connected. Back when we met with Edelgard at Starfall Tower, she never once asked who you were, despite the fact we had

brought you along on such short notice. I thought it was strange back then, but... So, that means the reason Edelgard never confirmed whether or not I had the ability to transfer magic energy was because you had already relayed the fact I learned the technique from the slave trader.”

Not just Alicia, but Rem and Shera seemed surprised as well.

“As to be expected of you, Sir Diablo.”

“That’s incredible... I never thought you would notice all of those minute details.”

“I never noticed any of that!”

—Am I just the kind of guy who worries about small things too much? Or is it that the girls are just more careless than I thought?

Whatever the case, while he had been concerned about the connection between Alicia and Edelgard, he never said anything about it, and that had almost gotten Rem killed. He couldn’t exactly brag about this.

Klem stood in front of the bed. “So, who was she done in by? I thought her to be a pretty strong Fallen.”

“This was done by the others.”

“What? Why is a Fallen getting beat up by other Fallen?”

“I formulated a plan to bring about your true resurrection, Lord Krebskulm, thinking the barrier surrounding the town would be destroyed when it happened...” Alicia then told of what happened with the rest of the Fallen, keeping her dagger pointed at Shera as she pleaded.

“Please, Demon Lord Krebskulm, please...save Lady Edelgard.”

Arms crossed, Klem turned toward Diablo. “What do you think?”

“Help her.”

—I’d feel kinda bad letting her just die like this...

Thinking that everyone valued life, no matter who they were, was just another side-effect of his peaceful life in Japan. He never thought to forcefully

change his way of thinking.

—After coming to another world like this and killing monsters, some people might lose their resistance to other people dying. Some of them may even get used to taking the lives of others, eventually.

Diablo was different, at the very least. If there was someone actually about to die in front of him, he wanted to help them in any way he could. He wasn't the kind of idiot who would say it was better to be killed rather than kill someone else; but if he had the choice, he thought it best if no one had to die.

"If you say so," Klem nodded, "then I'm not against healing a Fallen either."

She placed her small hands against Edelgard, dark blood sticking to them.

"Hahhhhhhh!!!"

As Klem began to put some effort into it, Edelgard began to stir.

"Ngh... Mmgh..."

"Heeyahhhhhhh!!!"

Rem looked toward the door, concerned. "...Will this be all right? It's already fairly late."

"It should be fine. After all, it was fine whenever you would shout out loud before."

"Mmph..."

Diablo attacking her ears, Shera pouring magic energy into her... Rem's screams had resounded throughout the inn quite a few times already.

Klem's yells and Edelgard's moans of anguish continued.

"Hoyaaaaargh!!!"

"Agh! Ngh...guh!"

"Yeeargh!!!"

"Hah! Mghm, ahhhhhhhh!!!"

“Hergahh! Ahh... I’m pooped...so I’m gonna be quiet now,” Klem said, wiping the sweat from her brow.

“If you could do it without yelling, then you should have done it like that from the beginning!” Diablo snapped back with a retort.

“Mmm... I mean, I *could* do that...”

“Would there be any problems?”

“If I don’t, then it doesn’t seem like I’m doing something all that amazing, right? I *am* amazing, you know!?”

“Yes, yes, so amazing. But you should do it quietly, or else we’ll get kicked out of the inn.”

When she was angry, Mei, the receptionist for the Peace of Mind Inn, was downright terrifying.

Klem shut her mouth and concentrated. Letting out an especially loud cry, Edelgard arched her back—and then fell back down, exhausted. It seemed like the bleeding had stopped.

Shockingly enough, Edelgard immediately lifted herself up, even though it seemed like she could have died at any moment up until now. Stepping down from the blood-soaked bed, she took a knee and knelt on the floor.

“Demon Lord... Edelgard, is honored! Thankful? Thankful!”

“Of course, of course.”

“Um... Demon Lord, alive? Why, did you, turn back? Like this?”

“Something very sad happened to this Demon Lord...or at least, I thought something sad had happened. The whole world turned red... But I was wrong. Nothing happened, so I turned back.”

“I, see.”

“As long as I can keep on eating biscuits, then that’s all I need. What’s so wrong with that?”

Edelgard deeply bowed her head. But then—

“Do not, understand... Don’t, understand? Don’t, understand! Fallen, kill the races. Destroy them. Why?”

“Who knows?” Klem cocked her head to the side. “I’ve already decided I will live in this town, so just stop doing these sad things. If you won’t listen to this direct order from the Demon Lord, then know you will no longer be my subordinate.”

“I, swear... Will never, go against...Demon Lord’s will, again,” Edelgard gave her assent.

It seemed like there would be no problems on this end. Edelgard had always been the reasonable type; her loyalty to the Demon Lord was much more important than killing the races.

†

Alicia released her grip on Shera, sheathing her dagger. “My humblest gratitude... Now, as agreed, how will you be dealing with me?”

“...Will you tell me your reason for doing all this?” Rem asked.

“The reason I handed you over to Saddler? Why, it was for the sake of reviving the Demon Lord. I am a Demon Lord worshiper who desires to see the Demon Lord be resurrected after all.”

“...So it seems. But what I want to know is how an Imperial Knight, who is also the daughter of an aristocratic family, became a Demon Lord worshiper.”

Alicia grit her teeth. She had an unpleasant look in her eyes, and a vaguely wild expression had taken over her face. This was completely different from the sociable, goody two shoes persona she usually showed. It seemed her current state exemplified her true nature.

“Have you ever thought that humanity should just perish? Have you ever screamed, ‘I’ll fucking murder you, you piece of shit!’ on the inside before?”

“...Putting aside the severity, yes, I have been angered by others before. Probably a lot more than you would think.”

“I was forced to continue abiding by this sense of what is ‘right,’ one that I could never accept...”

“...Considering your standing, are you referring to your time back in the capital?”

“My parents, the other Imperial Knights, the ministers in the royal court...even the king himself. Of course I would begin thinking of the races as unseemly—enough for me to wish for the whole world to go up in flames.”

“...Did something happen?”

“On the contrary; it may have been for the best if nothing special *did* happen. If it hadn't, I may have been able to consider it all as some sort of extraordinary 'accident.' I believe I have spent too long pretending that all my self-interests were virtuous, and spending time with people who are admirable only in title alone.”

“...I see.”

“Perhaps it would have been better to throw away my country and become an Adventurer instead,” Alicia said as she looked at Shera.

After a moment, Shera finally realized she was the one being referenced here.

“Oh, yeah! I went through some bad things back home, but now I'm having a lot of fun! Being in the forest at night was scary...but thanks to Rem and Diablo, things are fun now!”

“Why did you not destroy the country of the Elves?”

“Huh!? W-Well, I mean, that kind of life just didn't fit me, that's all... I may have left everyone behind, but as long as they were still happy, then that was fine with me...”

“Do you not think the thing you hated so much should never be allowed to exist in this world?”

“Nope, not really.” A completely laid-back response from Shera.

“I could never forgive it,” Alicia said through clenched teeth.

“...So you grew to hate the races, becoming an Imperial Knight in order to destroy them all?” Rem asked, a pained look on her face.

“Yes. I thoroughly believed the most efficient way to bring about ruin to this

country was to revive the Demon Lord.”

“Good lord...”

They never could have imagined that harbored inside the righteous and respectable Alicia they thought they knew was actually a cesspool of hatred and vitriol.

If Alicia had a more flexible, looser personality, then maybe she could have been saved. Even if something terrible happened, if she had been able to blow off steam by doing something else...

—Maybe I’m kind of like that, too? If I had a better way of releasing all my negative emotions, maybe I could have been a bit more positive about my own life. Maybe I would have tried a bit harder... Maybe I wouldn’t have run away to an online game, playing it to the point I could be called an addict...

Alicia was a serious person, there could be no doubt about that. She would always apply herself fully to what she did, never compromising. As a result, when faced with her hatred of the races, she was completely serious in attempting to erase them all—and that was by making her end goal to resurrect the Demon Lord.

Alicia fixed her eyes on Klem. “Demon Lord, do you truly not wish to destroy the races?”

“You talk too much. I wouldn’t feel despair over what happened with Rem if I hated them as much as you did. Besides, the only people I know are everyone here, and Petre.”

“Petre’s” was the name of a bakery located in the southern district of town that sold mouthwatering biscuits. The shop was run by three Grasswalker brothers, but they all came together under the moniker “Petre.” It was more like a unit name, rather than an individual name.

Alicia nodded. “...I see. Well, then...it appears there is nothing left for me.”

Hanging her head, she once again unsheathed her dagger—and pressed it against her own neck.

“Wh-What do you think you’re doing!?” Rem said, panicked.

“I believe you will never forgive me for betraying you... If that is indeed the case, then I should bring an end to this myself.”

“Don’t do something so stupid!”

“Do you really think so? It’s true that you will not forgive me, correct? I was not threatened, nor was I ordered by anyone to do what I did. I turned you into a sacrifice, Miss Rem, all because I was expecting the resurrection of the Demon Lord to bring about a mass killing of the races.”

“...I am amazed at how sincere you can be about this, even when you are so wrong! You do realize there is no one else like you in this world, right?”

“Of course. It is because of how different I am that I harbor these feelings of ill will for everyone around me.”

“...Then please understand that I do not wish for your death.”

“What!?”

Even Diablo was surprised to hear this. The one who had it the worst in this whole incident was Rem, after all.

“What do you mean?” Alicia asked, a look of disbelief on her face. “Do you consider me a friend because I helped to save Miss Shera? Then you are sorely mistaken. The only reason I assisted then was because the prospect of victory was sufficient enough; not to mention my cooperation would help me earn your trust. I am an enemy to all the races.”

“...If that is the case, then why did you let Shera go unharmed?”

“Huh?” Alicia seemed perplexed by Rem’s question. “Because...that is what I promised...”

“If you truly wanted to kill the races, and you were even prepared to off yourself, then you should have stabbed Shera.”

“Th-That’s scary!” Even if it was only an example, it made Shera break out in shivers. She hid herself behind Diablo.

“There is no need to be concerned. The fact she did not do as such proves

Alicia's claim of wanting to kill the races as false."

"Hmm... Then, does that mean Alicia doesn't really hate the races?"

"I'm sure she has someone she loathes more than enough to kill. At the very least, however, it appears you are not one of those she desires to kill no matter what before she meets her own death. Good for you, Shera."

"Yay!" Shera threw her hands up in the air.

Rem pointed at Alicia with her index finger. "...Alicia, I am sure you feel a great hatred toward someone amongst the races. Even so, you felt relief knowing that I was safe, and even left Shera unharmed. There is a dissonance between what you say and what you actually do."

"I see... That may be true."

"...Well, how about it? Do you really want to kill us?"

"It is just as you have said, Miss Rem. Though I am a bit hesitant to do so, we may have our fight here."

"If you are so hesitant, then please, stop this!"

"But, leaving things unfinished like this is not proper... I-I have to follow through on what I said..."

"...Why are you so needlessly diligent? Do you not find the things coming from your own mouth to be quite strange?"

"I am no normal person, after all. I... I've had enough of this! I never expected for anyone else to understand... After all...! I am alone!"

In the end, without any attempt to cut Rem down, Alicia made as if to thrust the blade into her own neck. Rem reached out to stop her, but she would never make it in time.

Shera let out a small scream and shut her eyes.

On a fundamental level, Klem and Edelgard held little regard over general loss of life and looked on, unperturbed.

“《Arms Scrap》!” Diablo chanted.

The tip of Alicia’s dagger made contact with the white skin of her throat. At that instant, the blade crumbled away. As if it had been made of sand, the dagger turned into silver granules of dust and fell to the floor.

“Wha...!?”

Not just Alicia, but almost everyone in the room was shocked as they looked at Diablo.

†

Diablo had saved Alicia out of nowhere. He had to say something; the silence was killing him.

“Ah, that...was a weapon-destroying spell... Though it only affects unenchanted weapons.”

The first thing he had blurted out was an explanation of his magic. He knew this wasn’t what everyone was expecting him to say, but if he could just throw out something suave in a situation like this, he would have been able to live his life a whole lot better off.

Back in the game, “Arms Scrap” had no effect on equipment that was Rare level or higher, so it was basically useless against other players. It was, however, effective against monsters that carried weapons, and would deal a significant blow to their attack power.

“...Um... That was a very impressive spell and all, but...” Rem wore an expression of bewilderment on her face.

Alicia looked at Diablo, an imploring look on her face. “Why did you interfere? What are you thinking, Sir Diablo?”

—I wasn’t thinking about anything! I’m sorry!! I just didn’t want to see someone die in front of me, even more so considering she was our ally for a short period of time...

...But a Demon Lord who valued human life just seemed out of character.

Edelgard, who had stayed silent while kneeling down this whole time, suddenly stood up.

“Pointless, to die.”

The question marks were almost visible on everyone’s faces. No one knew what she was trying to say.

Realizing that her explanation was a little lacking, Edelgard continued: “Even, if you die~ No benefit, for them. That’s why, pointless, probably? Pointless!”

“So you’re saying I should make it up to them,” Alicia spoke, turning to look at Diablo. “But how?”

—Don’t ask me, I never thought about the pros and cons of keeping someone alive or not... Fallen sure are scary.

Even so, Diablo never lost his composure. It would take much courage on his part to reveal that he didn’t really have an answer for her.

“Hmph... You ask what you should do? You are thicker-skulled than I originally thought if you can’t even understand that much.”

—I have no idea myself, though...!

After thinking it over for a bit, Alicia nodded. “So, you’re saying...that I should die after being of some sort of use to you, correct?”

“Y-Yes.”

—Well, die from old age, that is...

“But is there anything I can still do?”

Rem tilted her head. “...You are an Imperial Knight, Alicia. In order to help us, you’ve already stopped troops from being dispatched, haven’t you?”

“I do not know if I will still have my position as an Imperial Knight. I am unsure how the incident of me handing you off to Saddler has been reported back to the capital.”

“...Is there even anyone to make such a report? Saddler and his subordinates are dead, and we were the only ones who saw the fight between Diablo and Krebskulm...in addition to Sylvie and Emile.”

“It seems that His Majesty, Delouche Xandros, has his own personal information network outside of commands like the army and Imperial Knights.”

It was the first time Diablo had heard the name of the king. The only time he had been mentioned in the game was as “the king of Lyferia.” Cross Reverie wasn’t part of the military genre, so it would gloss over information pertaining to the royal family and the country.

If Alicia was reported as having plotted to resurrect the Demon Lord, never mind losing her position as an Imperial Knight, she would most likely be hunted as a traitor to the country.

“That is inconsequential,” Diablo said as he shrugged.

“What...?”

“I am saying that your position is of no importance.”

“But... But if I am not an Imperial Knight, I am completely worthless...”

Diablo wasn’t a fan of status or position, or whether something was useful or not.

—What’s so wrong about being a shut-in and a NEET! It’s society that’s wrong! It’s the world’s fault for being a place where you have to work to live! If the world is going to make me work, then it should just be annihilated altogether!

But it seemed like they hadn’t taken what he said as the venting of a shut-in NEET. Just as he was deliberating over how to explain himself, Rem nodded, apparently satisfied.

“It is just as Diablo has said.”

—Huh...? No, calm down, me. She wasn’t talking about what I just screamed on the inside, but probably what I said about not caring about Alicia’s position. Right...?

“...Your position as an Imperial Knight was something decided upon by the higher-ups of this country, correct?” Rem asked Alicia.

“Naturally.”

“So the ones you hate are not actually us, but those higher-ups, no?”

“Y-Yes... Yes, that would be correct. But, I still don’t know...what it is I should be doing?”

“...I don’t know, either.”

They both looked at Diablo. Asking him all these tough questions like what do about the country or what to do with one’s life... He didn’t have the kind of vast wisdom that would let him just throw out answers on demand. The only thing he had to draw from were his experiences back in the game.

But it was unacceptable for a Demon Lord to just say “I dunno”; it would ruin his image. So Diablo twisted his lips into a bold sneer.

“Then the only option is to destroy it all!”

“What!?”

“Th-That’s...”

Alicia and Rem were flabbergasted, and rightfully so. The look on Shera’s face showed she had no idea what was going on.

Despite all of this, however, Klem had given a profound nod.

“That’s right! It doesn’t matter if it’s a king or a country; if you don’t like it, then you should just destroy it!”

“Ohhh! Demon Lord...finally, motivated? Motivated! Finally!!” Edelgard’s eyes were sparkling.

The conversation may have taken quite the odd turn at some point here.

Alicia clenched her fists tightly. “...Understood. Then I will put all my efforts into bringing down the country, as long as it is useful to you, Sir Diablo!”

—*Whazzat...!?*

Somewhere along the way, it seemed Alicia thought Diablo had wanted to bring down the kingdom of Lyferia.

Rem and Shera had equally confused looks on their faces.

“...I-Is that true, Diablo?”

“He *is* a Demon Lord, so maybe he just has to fight against the races, I guess?”

—*Wait ,wait, wait, hold on a second, please!! That’s bad, right!?*

No matter how dedicated he was to his Demon Lord role play, he certainly wasn’t expecting to be pulled along by Alicia and her grudge against the big-wigs of the kingdom in order to bring down the country.

—*I-It’s not exactly what I’m aiming for right now...but wouldn’t it be just like a Demon Lord to do something like destroying an entire country just because he was bored!?*

...But at a time like this, Diablo couldn’t just nod and go along with it all.

Diablo’s mouth twisted into a grimace. “W-Well, if they dare defy me, I will show them no mercy. But right now, I do not know much about the Lyferian Kingdom, you see. No matter who it is, I will not hesitate to annihilate someone—but only if they oppose me. Like, *only* if they are against me.”

“Just as you say, Sir Diablo. If we do not have a clear understanding of our enemy’s fighting strength, then our victory will remain uncertain.”

“Well...”

—*I didn’t mean it like that, though!!*

But there was no way for what Diablo truly felt on the inside to get through to her.

“I know not of what has become of my own position, but I will do everything in my power to gather information.” Alicia was really getting into the idea of overthrowing the Lyferian government.

Though he wouldn’t be joking if he said it, he couldn’t just say “peace is best” on account of his Demon Lord role play.

“I see. W-Well, do your best to work toward that goal—but do feel free to do so slowly...and carefully...and only if you feel like it.”

Alicia knelt down.

“Thank you, Sir Diablo. I almost pointlessly threw away my own life. I thank you deeply for showing me the path I should continue to walk; I swear my undying loyalty to you.”

“Good.”

To be completely honest, Diablo hadn't shown her jack squat. Everyone else just went off and interpreted what he had said however they pleased.

—That said, if we managed to postpone the problem for a bit, then I say mission accomplished.

This was a much better result than ending up with a dead Imperial Knight in the room.

Rem offered an outstretched hand to Alicia. “...I cannot simply forgive you for betraying us, but I wouldn't be happy about you dying over it, either. I also cannot agree with wanting to bring down the kingdom of Lyferia... But if there are those in the upper echelons of the kingdom that need to be punished for their crimes, I will offer my assistance.”

“True. At this point, one would be bound to think this is all nothing but my own one-sided grudge. I will be sure to gather sufficient evidence to the contrary.”

Alicia grasped Rem's hand. Though they had done so through a rather turbulent conversation, the fact that Alicia and Rem seemed to have made up brought a smile to Shera's face.

“Isn't this great, Diablo?”

“I suppose it is.”

—What's really great is that this didn't turn into us assaulting the capital right away.

Edelgard was pouting, as if this whole thing bored her. Klem looked sleepy, probably because she had been woken up in the middle of the night.

Suddenly, Diablo became aware of a pair of beady eyes looking at him from the crack between the wall and the ceiling. They belonged to a small, ashen-gray creature; it was the mouse again.

Diablo was getting ticked off. “Tch... Damn mouse, sneaking around like that. Maybe I’ll blow away the ceiling along with it...”

He wasn’t serious about this, of course, but still raised a hand in the direction of the rodent. As if it could understand what he had said, the mouse fled in a panic. Just when Diablo thought that would be the end of it, however, he heard a tiny scream of agony that signaled the mouse’s death.

—*What!? Is there something back there!?*

The twisted remains of what was once the mouse fell to the floor. A viscous, black fluid poured out of the gap between the wall and the ceiling, oozing toward the mouse’s body.

†

“Ku-ku-ku... To see through my 《Shadow Sneak》 like that... It seems you are no mere Sorcerer after all!”

After the tar-colored fluid had gathered on the floor, it raised itself up. This black mass, the size of a child, changed into the form of a person that carried a katana on the back of its black outfit. An iron mask covered its mouth, making its expression indiscernible.

Its very appearance was something almost synonymous with Japan.

—*A ninja!? Why is there a ninja here!?*

The others in the room seemed shaken up by the sudden appearance of the person wearing a strange outfit. Shera, with her keen senses, was particularly shocked.

“I-I couldn’t sense him at all! You’re amazing, Diablo!”

Diablo was surprised as well, but he maintained his air of composure using the Demon Lord role play that was ingrained into his being.

“Hmph... And who are you supposed to be?”

“I am the eyes and ears of His Majesty...as well as his sword.”

Alicia clenched her teeth upon hearing this. “Impossible! That is the role of the Imperial Knights, and I have never seen such a suspicious Knight as you before!”

“Ku-ku-ku... Well said for someone who was just prattling on about bringing down the kingdom. I bear not the token title of Imperial Knight, but am nonetheless a shinobi, an agent who moves in the shadows at the behest of the king. I am called Kuzukage.”

Cross Reverie’s setting was based on European fantasy, but the game had also implemented ninja outfits as joke costumes. There were also samurais, and gunmen straight out of a spaghetti western as well. Diablo thought those kinds of things were exclusive to the game only, but for it to exist here, too... It was far too out of place in a world like this.

Rem and Shera looked at the shinobi suspiciously.

“Wh-What is with this person!?”

“He dresses like a weirdo!”

—*Seems like it is a strange outfit in this world after all.*

Diablo readied 《Tenma’s Staff》. The space between them was only five paces wide. Judging by the katana on his back, Diablo’s opponent was most likely a Warrior. He was at a disadvantage in terms of where he was fighting and where he was starting, but Diablo couldn’t afford to retreat now.

“Hmph... So you’re a spy of the king. I can’t so easily let you go back alive.”

“Ku-ku-ku... And the same goes for myself. I cannot allow you to live after seeing me.”

“You fool. Think about your situation before opening your mouth.”

“My situation? One traitor, three Demis, two Fallen... Faced with my ninjutsu, you are all mere numbers.”

“Hmph, who said it was a problem of numbers?”

“Oho?”

“You stand before the Demon Lord Diablo, and you say you cannot let *me* live? Know your place, foolish whelp.”

“Ku-ku-ku... What an amusing Demi. Allow me to show you who the *real* whelp is here.”

Kuzukage suddenly disappeared.

—*Instant teleportation!?*

That’s just how fast the ninja had rushed by him. A gush of blood spurted from Diablo’s right arm; the upper portion of his 《Ebony Abyss》 had been slashed. From the opposite side of the room, he heard the sound of a katana being sheathed.

“*Nin.*”

Kuzukage held two fingers in front of his mouth. Diablo whirled around, glaring at him.

—*He’s fast. Really fast.*

In terms of speed alone, he was faster than Galford; but even so, Diablo couldn’t show any weakness now.

“What? Is that it?”

“Don’t spout such drivel. There is no feasible way for a Sorcerer such as yourself to keep up with my movements!”

Kuzukage came rushing at him again. A deeper slash this time, made on Diablo’s left arm. He came back again, continuing with another blow. Kicking off the walls, the ceiling—Kuzukage sped about the room as he pleased, swinging his katana. Diablo’s wounds continued to increase, his blood spilling to the floor.

“Fuahahaha! How do you like that, Sorcerer! This is what it means to be a shinobi!”

As Kuzukage came rushing toward him again, Diablo thrust Tenma’s Staff forward, slamming it into his assailant’s face.

“Gobebilegh!?”

He was sent flying backward. Just as his back was about to crash into the wall, Kuzukage changed his position at the last second, planting his feet on it instead. He descended to the floor.

The mask fell off his face, crushed to pieces. Blood the color of tar poured out of his nose, dripping onto the floor.

Diablo shrugged.

“And? Weren’t you going to show me who the real whelp was, you *whelp*?”

Kuzukage ground his teeth together. “How could a Sorcerer see through my 《Shadow Running》 technique!?”

“It seems you are gravely mistaken about something. I have said it before, but I am no mere Sorcerer: I am a Demon Lord from another world!”

—Sure, you’re fast, but the usual counter to a Sorcerer is a bow and arrow. The rain of arrows I usually have to deal with are way faster than you.

No matter how fast they were, Diablo could always see through a Warrior’s rushdown techniques. If he didn’t have those kinds of reflexes, he would never have been able to face off against Archer-mains.

—If your movement was a bit more complex, it would’ve been harder to get my counterattack in, though.

He really wanted to use magic, but it was too dangerous to keep himself fixed in place to cast a spell against an agile opponent like this. He would at least want to take this fight outside first.

“《Flying Kunai》!!” Kuzukage swung his arm.

Klem was the aim of his sudden attack, of all people. A diamond-shaped blade similar to multiple tips of spears flew through the air, striking her in the forehead. With a high-pitched clang, the kunai was bounced away.

“What the...!?” Kuzukage’s eyes widened.

Klem glared at him. “You’ve got some nerve throwing something at a Demon Lord. Very well... I will teach you the true meaning of fear.”

Flashes of black lightning coiled around Klem’s hand. Was it part of a spell? Some kind of special skill?

Before Klem could unleash her attack, Edelgard rushed forward, burning with rage.

“Dare, do that, to Demon Lord! Will, kill you! Sacrificial Charge!!”

It was the name of a Martial Art unleashed by using a spear. Edelgard was unarmed at the moment, however, so she had thrust forth her fist instead. Kuzukage twisted his body to avoid the attack as it grazed across his cheek.

“Gaaahahh!?”

“Charge, Asulau!”

Rem had called forth her Summon, an enormous steer with three horns growing out of its head. At almost the same time, three arrows had been fired in the direction Kuzukage was fleeing. It was 《Triangle Shot》, a technique unique to Archers; it was Shera. Diablo knew she was proficient with a bow, but he had no idea she could even use Martial Arts as well.

“Hurting Diablo, aiming for Klem... I won’t forgive you for that!”

Although Kuzukage managed to avoid every attack thrown at him, as far as Diablo was concerned, it had bought enough time.

—I’m not used to fighting as a team with friends, but it’s true having them on the front lines makes things easier for me.

His spell was complete; he pointed Tenma’s Staff.

“I am not so softhearted as to be careful with the life of an enemy who attacked me with the intent to kill. Regret your decision to oppose a Demon Lord from the depths of hell! 《Burst Rain》!!”

There were times a speedy enemy could dodge spells that had a limited range. This, however, was an AoE spell that hurled countless balls of fire.

Kuzukage spread out some kind of scroll. “《Concealed Water》...!”

A wall of water appeared in front of him, but it was meaningless. An infinite hail of fireballs pelted against the wall, boiling the water and turning it into steam. They easily penetrated through. On the other side of the water wall, the balls of fire found their way directly to Kuzukage. It was one direct hit after another.

“OOOOARGH!?”

He was smashed to pieces, changing back into a thick, tar-like substance. Burst Rain pulverized Kuzukage, even going so far as to vaporize the wall behind him.

“Hmph...”

Slamming his staff into the ground, Diablo glared at where the enemy once stood. The wall had disappeared, with specks of black fluid scattered over the scorched wood. The cold sweat returned to his back.

—Oh crap, did I screw up!?

There was a knock on the door behind him—

“Oh dearest customers~? You’re being a bit of a nuisance. ☆”

It was the voice of the inn’s receptionist.

Before anyone could answer, the door opened. With a sparkling smile, a Pantherian girl wearing a maid outfit entered the room and saw that the wall had been blasted away.

A demon had descended upon them—

—the demon of extremely expensive bills.

†

Mei, the receptionist, was all smiles.

“Oh, Mr. Customer? It’s quite a problem for me to not have a wall there. ☆” She may have been smiling, but you could almost see the sound effects for “rumbling” appearing behind her.

There was no doubt about it: She was pissed. He had blown away part of the inn's wall, so of course she'd be angry.

Rem bowed her head. "...I'm terribly sorry... But there is a reason for this."

"Oh, no, it's fine. Totally fine. Little ol' me is used to this by now. I mean, this is the third time it's happened, right?"

"...Please allow us to reimburse you."

The first time this happened was when a Fallen demolished the first Peace of Mind Inn, the cost of which was apparently taken care of by the country. The second time, the wall had been destroyed by other Adventurers. Since they were the ones that broke it, Diablo and the others made them foot the bill, of course.

But this time the incident was caused by one of the king's spies. Not only that, but Diablo had completely demolished him using magic. They were going to have to pay for this one out of their own pockets.

Alicia stepped forward. "I am incredibly sorry for the trouble we have caused here. I don't think this alone will be enough, but..."

She pulled a small pendant with a crimson jewel set in it from the pocket of her clothes. Taking it, Mei checked it using the candle stand she held.

"Hmm... It looks real, but I don't think just this will be enough to cover it all~☆"



“I-I see.”

As one might expect from Alicia, she possessed quite a hefty amount of savings, her being the daughter of an aristocrat and all; but it still seemed like the price for repairing a partially destroyed building was in a whole league of its own. Diablo and the others were seriously lacking in financial power. They were already in the red with just the amount they spent on Klem’s biscuits.

“...This is a problem. If we cannot pay this, we’ll probably be chased out of the inn. For the sake of public order, it is forbidden to make camp inside the town, which means we would have to leave the city...” Rem whispered.

“What!?”

“...Not only that, but she might even call the guards. If that were to happen—ah!”

Realizing their blunder, Rem’s eyes opened wide. Diablo noticed it as well, but it was too late. At almost the same time, Mei let out a scream of shock.

“Ngyah!? Wh-Who are those girls...!?” She was staring straight at Edelgard.

—*We screwed up!*

Because of all the troubles they had just been through, they were late in thinking of how to deal with Edelgard. There was no way Mei would just overlook there being a Fallen in town. And since Klem was wearing pajamas, her tail was completely exposed as well.

Mei backed away. “A-Are they... Fallen!? And they’re going to eat me because I’m so cute I look delicious!?”

“.....”

Edelgard stepped forward, reaching out with her hand.

—*Wait, you’re not planning on killing her, right!?*

He thought back to how she had cleaved the five bandits in half when they had seen her. Panicking, he went to stop her...but it wasn’t necessary. What Edelgard held in her hand was not a weapon this time, but a large gem about the size of a coin.

“Need...this? Have, lots.”

“Nya!?”

“Sparkly, and pretty. Fallen, trade this...for food. And weapons.”

—So the Fallen have their own currency, too... No, I guess it would be more like bartering for goods with jewels.

Even Rem and Shera’s eyes were glittering.

“...It... It’s amazing... Such a large, sparkling diamond...”

“It’s so pretty! Like, super pretty!”

“Just as I would expect from Lady Edelgard,” Alicia said, smiling.

Though Mei’s face had been contorted with fear up until now, it was now replaced with seriousness as she took the jewel and stared at it.

“Th-This is incredible, nya... I can’t be sure without taking this to a specialist...but I’m certain this thing is worth enough to rebuild this busted-up inn and *still* get change back, nya...”

Letting her true colors show, she muttered under her breath. With a short gasp, she returned to her usual business smile.

“Aha. ☆ Please, enjoy your stay here, everyone! Oh, and that’s right, I’ll make sure to get another room ready for you until this wall is fixed. ☆”

It was a wonderfully abrupt about-face from Mei.

“A-Are you sure!? These people are Fallen, you know...!?” Rem asked, astounded.

“As long as they’re paying, they’re customers to me~”

“...Are you not afraid? The town just came under attack by the Fallen not too long ago!”

“Rem...being in a business means risking your life, got it? *Wink.* ☆”

—It looks like the Peace of Mind Inn’s management was in more dire straits

than I thought. Guess that means it's tough for everyone trying to make a living here.

Mei turned her sparkling business smile toward Edelgard. “Ehehe. ☆ I’ll serve you breakfast, too, so make sure you come to the dining hall in the morning. ☆”

“Got...it.”

“Oh, but what do Fallen eat, anyway? Frogs and stuff?”

“Edelgard...likes, fish.”

Thinking about it, Klem’s favorite food was biscuits, so maybe a Fallen’s palate wasn’t all that different from the rest of the races.

“That’s A-OK by me! ☆ I’ll fry that fishy right up for you!”

“Also, boar...and, deer...and...”

“Whatever you want!”

“Cat.”

“Eeeeeek!?”

Both Mei and Rem shrank back. It really gave the feeling she was a wild animal from the forest who would eat just about anything.

“But Edelgard, wouldn’t it be bad if other people saw you?” Shera spoke, worried.

With a flick, Mei raised her index finger. “It’s all good. ☆ Just leave it to Mei, nya!”

Several minutes later—

“Y-You! You were actually a Sorcerer all this time!?”

Diablo was dumbfounded. That’s just how good Mei’s makeup techniques were.

Mei stuck out her chest with a smug look on her face. “How do ya like that! Girls transform, you know! ☆”

“Ohh...?”

Edelgard’s skin, usually covered in small scales, was now completely smooth. She wore black tights on her legs, with white gloves covering her hands. Her reptilian eyes were hidden behind thick glasses and by how her bangs now hung down in front of her face.

She awkwardly tried saying the line she was taught: “W-Welcome, back...Master?”

Klem, on the other hand, was wearing an outfit that made her look like a pop idol. Her almost transparent skin required no makeup, but she wore eyeshadow on her eyelids, with eyeliner underneath. She also wore a hat to hide her horns, which almost looked like a decoration, and a skirt shaped like a parasol in order to hide her tail.

Klem made a sideways peace sign. “I’m all sparkly! ☆”

“Ehe! ☆ Very sparkly, nya!”

†

The next day—

Alicia was heading back to the Royal Capital. Though Diablo had disintegrated Kuzukage, the king’s spy, they didn’t know what kind of information had already been relayed back to the king. It was too dangerous to risk.

Even so, her resolution was firm.

“I will certainly find evidence of the king’s misgoverning for you, Sir Diablo, as well as gather information on the capital’s military might and how they are dispersed.”

“G-Good...but your own life takes priority; I am in no rush, after all. In fact, I was just thinking how it might be better to take things slow from here on out...”

“By bringing down the Lyferian Kingdom, right!”

—*Like hell that’s what it means to take it slow!*

Firing off a retort in his mind, he put on a bold smile fitting of a Demon Lord and saw Alicia off.

After, the group took Edelgard to Petre's, where she became addicted to the fish sandwiches there. They were made by frying up some freshwater fish, which were then stuck between two slices of bread. To be honest, it wasn't a very popular item... Perhaps a Fallen's tastes were unique after all.

"Amazing... Just like, magic energy...Demon Lord, gave, to me! Sweet? Sweet!"

Though she was complimenting it, these weren't exactly words that he could let the guys at Petre's hear. Otherwise, developing a deep appreciation for other dishes as well, Edelgard was completely engrossed by the cuisine of the races.

As for Klem, it seemed she finally realized that you could get biscuits and other treats like them at places other than bakeries. Trying out food at different places became a hobby for the two.

"Listen well, for I have discovered a whole new truth! A new path to the most supreme dark powers has opened!"

Shera nodded as she listened to Klem's little speech. "Yeah, chocolate biscuits are pretty good, too, right?"

"They're the best! Buy more of them! Buy them all!"

"We're only spending 500 friths a day on sweets, OK?"

"Mmnggh... Chocolate is amazing, but the fact it's so expensive is not!"

It was a truth that reeked of common knowledge. After all, cacao was a rare commodity in Faltra, with chocolate being a product that commanded an extravagant price.

But Diablo considered cheese bread to be the ultimate food here. The surface of the bread was crispy, and it contained melty cheese and tomato in the middle.

Their peaceful lifestyles continued like this for half a month...

Interlude 1

A girl ran through the forest—

Her breathing ragged, she dodged the trees in her path through the gaps between them. Her silk dress caught on the branches as she ran, tearing it off in pieces. She had already thrown away her high-heels, since they made it harder to run, but her face twisted in pain as she stepped on a jagged rock with her bare feet, drawing blood.

Just ahead of the girl was Tria, a female Paladin.

“This way, Lady Lumachina! If we can make it out of the forest, we will arrive in town!”

“A-All right!”

“Ngh!? Look out!”

The ground burst open; Tria embraced Lumachina, saving her from the danger.

“Haugh!?”

“Ngh... So, they have already caught up to us...” Tria muttered as she drew her sword.

Lumachina screamed as a gigantic worm appeared from the earth, blocking their path. It had slimy, green skin, and a mouth large enough to swallow a person whole. It didn't appear to have any eyes or a nose, but it had a precise understanding of both their locations.

“Don't stray far from me, Lady Lumachina!”

“I-I can fight as well!” she said, clutching the holy symbol she carried.

With a smile, Tria nodded. “All right... Then I am counting on you for healing, though I have no intention of losing to an enemy like this...!”

Brandishing her sword, she stepped forward, but the ground in front of her

suddenly caved in.

“Wha—!?”

What looked like an opening of a pitfall in the ground was actually an enormous mouth.

—*A gigantic worm!?*

It seemed this worm had been placed there as a trap, separate from the first.

“Tria!” Lumachina cried out.

The female Paladin struck out at the second worm, her silver sword tearing through the mouth of the monster. However, in the face of this damage, the enormous mouth closed on her.

“Wah!?”

The lower half of Tria’s body was forcefully taken into the worm’s mouth. Her armor was crushed, her flesh was torn, and her bones were broken.

“GuAaAhhhAargh!?”

The worm began dragging Tria into the earth with it as Lumachina desperately reached out with her hand.

“Tria, grab on!”

But the Paladin made no attempt to do so. If she had, they would both most likely be devoured by the worm.

“R-Run, Lady Lumachina!” These were the parting words of the devoted female Paladin as she disappeared into the dark depths of the hole.

“...Tria...”

Shoulders trembling, Lumachina stared at the gaping hole in the ground. She could no longer hear the female Paladin’s voice; the only thing that reached her were the tremors of the earth.

—And then, footsteps. Slowly, steadily, they approached her from behind.

“Oh my, my, my... Done with your little game of tag, Lady Lumachina?”

“Mgh...”

Standing up, she turned around. From the depths of the forest appeared a “man,” a Summoner, wearing the armor of the Paladins—Gewalt. He was of tall stature and rippling muscles, carrying a longsword at his waist that was left in its sheath.

“Oh? I wonder what happened with little Miss Tria? Ohh, did she get eaten by one of my cute little 《Trap Worms》? Mm-hm-hm... She was just a girl, after all. My lineage isn’t the only thing wonderful about me, let me tell you.”

He was a man with a strange way of speaking.

Lumachina thrust forward her sacred symbol as she questioned him.

“Can you swear to God that your actions are moral and correct!?”

“Who knooows. But those big-wigs at the Church are paying me handsomely for this; makeup and dresses cost money, too, you know.”

“You wicked, nondevout man...!!”

“Mm-hm-hm, oh trust me, I’m *very* much a believer, darling. I just believe in gods who give me money! That silly little God you are oh-so-devoted to is useless, so I’m not afraid of him.”

“You dare call God incompetent!?”

“The miraculous healings and answering prayers for a bountiful harvest are amazing, of course... But in a fight, *power* is everything.”

Paladins were instruments of the Church, and usually held deep conviction in their faith. However, it was painfully obvious that this man did not have a shred of piety in his entire body.

Lumachina clutched the holy symbol she held as she knelt down. “...Oh, God...”

“Mmm? Ahaha! Praying at a time like this? Hoping for some ‘divine punishment’ to make me disappear, is that it? Kuhaha, you are just *too* much! Oh, God, you religious types! Ahyahah—*cough cough*! ...Phew, are you *trying* to

make me laugh myself to death!?”

“O great Lord in heaven, hear my voice: bring destruction to the wicked. Purge the land in cleansing fire, and save those who believe in you...”

Lumachina’s body was wrapped in light—but nothing happened to Gewalt.

“How worthless. Vishos was the one who ordered me to end you, and he prayed, too, you know. Said something like, ‘This will be a holy battle...’ In the end, that’s what ‘God’ is. It simply means there are as many gods as there are people.”

Vishos—the name of someone Lumachina knew. Suppressing her feeling of shock over learning this truth, she continued to pray.

“O great Lord, there is one here who cannot hear your voice. Please, reveal your power and shine your righteous light upon this land. Just as the flowers bloom in the fields, as the fish swim in the streams...”

Gewalt looked down upon Lumachina as she knelt in prayer, his eyes dripping with impurity. “Mm-hm-hm, such beautiful skin you have... It’s making me jealous—jealous enough to tear it right off your body!”

He took out a crystal, dropping it at his feet. Then, a noise like shattering glass—it was a Summon, and a plant-type one at that. Once it settled into the ground, it transformed into a mushroom several times the size of Lumachina, squirming tendrils growing from where its roots would be.

Light enveloped Lumachina’s body as Gewalt’s mouth twisted into an unpleasant grimace.

“Th-This is...”

—*So, this is a bona fide miracle, is it? Well, isn’t she something special.*

As far as Gewalt knew, there weren’t any others who could cause an actual, visible phenomenon simply by praying. There could be no doubt that Lumachina excelled when it came to the power of miracles. Many people of faith even believed her to be a “child of God.” It was not as if he *couldn’t* understand why Tria had betrayed her superiors in the Church and tried to help her escape.

“But, orders are orders. I’ve already been paid, you see.”

Gewalt licked his lips. Being able to break a girl called a child of God... He was ecstatic at the thought of being able to fulfill this dark desire of his.

“Go and finish this, my 《Beast Mushroom》!”

The Summon stretched out the tentacles growing from its roots.

“Eeeeeek!?”

The thin tendrils wrapped around Lumachina’s arms and legs, suspending her midair. Gewalt’s breathing grew wild with excitement.

“Gufufu... Oh, yes! Just like that! Tear off all that nasty clothing in the way!”

“Wh-What are you doing!?”

“If gods do exist in this world, they’re nothing more than little pieces of shit that like to play favorites, that’s for sure. You were born beautiful, while I’m stuck in the body of a burly man... Truly an injustice. That’s why I’m going to defile that body of yours and send it straight back to the heavens!”

“Huh? Defile!?”

“Ahaha! And by using a Summon, of course! I hear it’s better than you’d think!!”

“Eek!? S-Stop this folly at once!”

“Oh my, now *that’s* a nice reaction. You’re getting me all hot and bothered here!”

The tentacles found their way underneath Lumachina’s dress. Her body stiffened up as they rubbed against the sensitive parts of her body normally covered by clothes.

“Hyagh!?” Lumachina’s back quivered with disgust. Her hands and feet were bound, and she couldn’t use offensive magic. There was nothing she could do.

At last, the Beast Mushroom’s tentacles began tearing her dress to pieces.

“Nooooooooo!!”

“Mm-hm-hm... We’re only getting started, honey. I’m going to have these tentacles pierce riiight inside you. A holy woman losing her precious virginity to a Summon—oh, it’s just too much!!” Gewalt let out a vulgar laugh.

Having received the first shaming of her entire life, Lumachina's head went blank, tears forming in the corners of her eyes.

"S-St... Stop...it..."

"Looks like you have what it takes to be a prostitute as well. Oh my, yes... Make that face at them, and any guy would want to get it on with you."

"That's not my inte—!?"

"Well, your first—and last—partner is going to be a Summon! Now, go and get her, my Beast Mushroom!"

"N... No... God, please... God...!!"

Chapter 2: Flying Sky High

Early afternoon on a sunny day—

Diablo had taken a trip to the Eastern Lakefront forest, in a spot a bit farther east from where Shera had made a contract with her Summon. This time, he was out and about with only Rem and Shera. No matter how good their disguises were, he didn't want to risk taking Klem and Edelgard through the gates if he didn't need to.

—It's been a while since just the three of us did something...

Klem and Edelgard were always together at the inn, and since there were still no quests that called for Diablo to be sent out, he would leave everything to Rem and Shera.

They came out to a wide-open grassy slope. A gentle breeze was blowing, and the smell of grass was in the air.

Shera gave a big stretch as she raised both arms in the air.

"It feels amazing here!"

"...I agree," Rem said as she nodded. Though they would usually bicker with each other given the opportunity, right now, both girls were smiling.

"Ehehe, so you feel the same way, Rem."

"Hahh... Yes, as strange as it seems."

"Makes you wanna go sunbathing naked, right~"

"Excuse...!? It does *not*, you perverted Elf!"

"Whaaa—!? But there's no reason to go sunbathing with all your clothes on!"

"Wanting to take your clothes off outside is strange in the first place!"

"It's sunbathing, so it's not embarrassing!"

"Nudity is nudity! That is NOT happening!"

Being of different species and different upbringings, it seemed there was a deep divide in their lifestyles.

“This will do.”

Diablo found a dead tree trunk toppled over on the ground. Shera came over and clung to him.

“What do you think, Diablo!? Wearing clothes while sunbathing is weird, right!?”

Rem glared at Shera with scornful eyes. “...You say something to her, too, Diablo. Taking off your clothes outside shows an extreme lack in one’s sense of danger.”

“You two sure like to fight, don’t you. I’m going to test a new spell now, so don’t get in my way.”

As if they completely forgot their argument from earlier, the looks on Rem and Shera’s faces had shown immense curiosity.

“...And what kind of magic would that be?”

“New magic!? Oooh, what kind!?”

“《Flight Magic》. But, since all spells are reflected away from me, I plan on casting it on a physical object and trying to ride on that.”

Players couldn’t do things like this in Cross Reverie. In this world, however, there was a broad range of use for magic. It was worth giving it a shot.

There was the chance his experiment wouldn’t end well, though. Yet still, he was confident his relationship with the girls was strong enough that it wouldn’t crumble away due to a failed experiment, which is why he explained his intentions to them beforehand.

Diablo had gear enchanted with Flight magic back in the game, but since he’d been summoned from his dungeon in Cross Reverie to the top of a tower in this world, he didn’t have it equipped. All his other equipment was locked away in his Storage.

The “Storage” system was a feature found in Cross Reverie and others of

these types of games. It wasn't something that could be carried, so it couldn't be used just anywhere; but regardless, it was capable of storing an enormous quantity of items. Diablo kept countless rare and fantastic items inside his Storage, things he had no idea how to obtain in this world.

—Thinking back to the game's setting, I'd say it's probably all inside the treasure vault within my dungeon.

Players who achieved a fixed amount of results in Cross Reverie were given a plot of land to call their own. As such, Diablo turned the area he had been given into something that resembled the dungeon of a Demon Lord. It was located in the west, near a town within the Demon Lord's Domain. He'd thought about it before, but it might be a good idea for him to try and seek it out at least once.

Thinking about it rationally, it would only be appropriate to assume he was the only one who had been summoned here from the game. But Diablo had a separate reason for thinking his dungeon might exist here.

The Demon Lord of the Mind, Enkvaros, had once existed in this world as well. They'd already been defeated, but it was unknown exactly who they were defeated by. Back in the game, Diablo was the first one to defeat Enkvaros. There was a chance that what he did in the game could have had an effect on this world as well.

He didn't know the logic behind it, but if something as abnormal as being summoned to another world with the same appearance as a character from a game he played could indeed happen, then it wouldn't be strange for the dungeon he created to exist here as well.

Putting his speculations aside, he returned his attention back to his original objective.

He touched the fallen tree using the tip of Tenma's Staff. The spell needed direct contact to work, and took a while to activate on top of that. To put it bluntly, this wasn't the type of magic to be used in battle, but specifically for moving around the map.

If you couldn't use some means of flying transport in Cross Reverie—whether that be by magic, a Summon that could fly, or some kind of item—then you

couldn't fully progress in the game. Basically, this meant obtaining a means of transportation acted as a test for players to graduate from being a noob.

—Never thought that I'd be going through that test again...

Diablo chanted: "Obey my will and change to the position I desire—《Adzet》!"

The dead tree trunk was lifted upward, swaying side to side as if it had been suspended in the air by a crane.

Rem and Shera both shouted: "I-It's floating!?" "Wow, amazing! It's floating! It's really floating!!"

"...So magic like this exists as well."

"That's so cool! Like, super cool!"

"...Diablo surpasses our common knowledge so easily, doesn't he."

"Cool! So coooooool!!"

It was a bit embarrassing to see them that surprised by what he had done. In any case, the important part started now.

"You're in the way. Back up, both of you."

It was dangerous, so he had them step away. He placed a hand on the tree, which was floating at about waist-height. The surface began to crumble away.

—It may be more rotten than I thought...

He climbed onto the dead tree. Back in the game, Diablo was a level 150 Adventurer, which gave him strength far beyond that of a normal person, so it was a simpler task than he thought.

"Mmgh...!?"

The tree shook. This was a magic experiment, so of course it was possible he would fail, and that was perfectly acceptable. He didn't think the girls would lose faith in him over a failed experiment.

However, what he *did* want to avoid was making himself look lame here. Falling off the tree mid-air or having it flip around while he was still riding it like it was some kind of comedy routine would be too hilarious for him to recover from.

Diablo cautiously balanced himself. It was unstable, but he managed to get on top of the tree without falling off.

—*All right! I'm flying!*

It was only at a waist-high level, so it was more “floating” than “flying”... But, even so, Rem and Shera were in shock that he was actually staying afloat off the ground.

—*The experiment is a success!*

Diablo was striking victory poses on the inside. That being said, however, there wasn't much practical use for this as it was. It wasn't much different from standing on top of a big rock; being on a horse would probably be better.

“Guess I'll try going a bit higher.”

He tried moving the dead tree around. First, he raised it up to a higher elevation, about three meters in the air, just so he wouldn't die if he fell off. It slowly lifted him, swaying the entire time but not enough to make him fall off.

—*Maybe I can keep going?*

He rose even higher. Being at a height where his view was unobstructed by the leaves and branches of the trees around him was a fresh and enjoyable feeling, almost as if he was seeing everything from a Ferris wheel or some sort of viewing platform.

“Ohh... Now *this* is something.”

“Woow, Diablo! That's so coooool!”

Shera was jumping around like an excited kid, but Rem looked concerned.

“...Um, if this is supposed to be your first experiment, then please do not overdo anything...”

“I know,” he said. But as he got used to it, the shaking was kind of like being on a boat rocking in the middle of the water, which was actually a nice sensation. It wasn't half bad as a form of entertainment, but if he wanted to use it as a transport, he would need to be able to move it more freely.

He went up even higher, the wind growing stronger once he was up above the

trees. It became easier to lose his balance whenever he moved in any direction, which was making him nervous.

—Would the safest thing to do here be to move it up and down like an elevator, to find spots where there isn't as much wind? Seems like it'd be dangerous to use this thing as a transport, either way... Putting some kind of lifeline on this thing would make it safer, but a Demon Lord who puts safety first just seems a little...off.

“Hm?” Glancing to the east, he saw a section of the forest glowing. “What’s that? A light?”

It was only a small light at first, but soon it extended out toward the sky, piercing through the clouds and beyond.

“C-Could it be... Is that magic energy!?”

The magic energy had become a pillar of light, cutting directly through the sky.

It seemed Shera had noticed as well, and started making a commotion. Rem couldn't see magic energy, so she could only look on in curiosity.

Diablo reconfirmed the location.

—It's a bit far to walk, huh.

They would be going through the heart of the forest so it would take longer than usual; probably more than an hour if they were traveling on foot. While it was still a bit unstable, Diablo decided to try heading over there using his Flight magic.

Diablo called out to the two girls below: “Rem, Shera! I’m going to see what’s going on!”

“Aw, whaaaat!? C’mon, take us with you!”

“...Let’s stay put, Shera. If something happens, we would just end up getting in his way.”

“Booo!”

—Sorry, but I don't have my flying license just yet. It would be dangerous if you got on this and lost your balance.

“Hmph, head back to town before me!”

Using his Flight magic to manipulate the dead tree, he approached the pillar of light. Since Shera and Rem should no longer be able to see him, Diablo collapsed to his stomach, hugging the tree for dear life.

“Damn, this is scary...!”

It was going about the same speed as a bicycle, but it was shaking like crazy. He should be able to go faster if he wanted, but he would be thrown off the tree for sure.

—I thought flying in another world would be more exciting, you know? Like, something where I could go “ooh” and “ah” while I did it... Like hell I could do that here!

It was taking all he had to cling to the vibrating tree so he wouldn't be thrown off. He didn't even have time to look at his surroundings.

Since he was so high up, the cross winds were blowing something fierce; it was enough to make him think it would be better to fly at a lower altitude... But his altitude wasn't stable, either, which meant it wasn't out of the picture for him to crash into branches if he got too close to the treetops.

Somehow, he managed to get closer to the pillar of light.

—As I thought, this is all magic energy.

He was stunned. From the impression Diablo got, a normal Sorcerer (like Rem) had about a cup's worth of magic energy. Using that amount effectively meant they could control Summons. As for himself, he had something around a bathtub's worth. This pillar of light, on the other hand, was a torrent of magic energy several times the amount Diablo possessed. The only other thing he could think of that wielded this kind of bottomless magic energy was Klem, a.k.a. the Demon Lord Krebskulm, and that particular Demon Lord should have been back in town with Edelgard right about now.

The type of the energy was different as well. Klem was of the “Dark” element, as was fitting for a Demon Lord. But this pillar was a radiant, shining white that seemed like the “Light” element.

“...Just what is going on here?” Muttering to himself, he brought the dead tree closer to the pillar of light, peering below him. Suddenly, the tree lost the force that kept it afloat.

“Ah...?”

—*The effect’s over!? Didn’t that happen way too fast!?*

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!”

†

He heard a girl screaming for God as he crushed an enormous “something” with an audible squish, it seemed like there had been something below him. Because of that, Diablo had managed to make it through the fall without taking any serious damage.

At his feet was the smashed up rotten tree. Not only that, but there were also the remains of some kind of plant-animal hybrid scattered all over the ground.

“What the hell is thi—AH!?”

Looking to the side, Diablo doubted his own eyes.

There was a stunning beauty of a girl before him.

She had almost-translucent platinum blonde hair that unfurled in gentle waves, with hazel eyes that seemed like they would suck him in. Not even an Elf’s skin seemed as smooth as hers; she maintained an exquisite balance between her mature beauty and innocent sweetness.

—To top it all, she was naked.

It seemed like she had been wearing a dress at some point that had been destroyed to the point where she was almost fully nude. She was collapsed on the ground, her legs spread wide open as she faced right at him. She had her hands behind her, using them to support herself.

An absolutely beautiful girl—who was practically naked.

—Is she sunbathing!?

There was no way that could be the case. The last bit of cloth that had been fighting to hold on finally fell away, leaving all her most important places exposed.

Diablo made an audible noise as he gulped. It was the first time he had seen a girl's... "womanhood"... head on in as bright a place as this—and of a drop-dead gorgeous girl, no less; though this was the first time they had ever met.

Tears in her eyes, she asked him:

".....A-Are you...God...?"

—Right, so, she's starting off with "God." Super. Now that I think about it, I feel like I heard her scream something like that... Uh-oh. Is she the kind of girl that has a few screws loose!?

While he was at a loss over what to do, the piercing shriek of a man came from behind him.

"AHHHHH!?! My poor Beast Mushroom!"

"Hm?" There was a familiar emblem etched onto the man's armor.

—This guy's a Paladin.

"Hey, you! Mister 'I just fell down out of nowhere'! What the hell is your problem!?! And what are you going to do about my Beast Mushroom!?! I only had the one!"

The splattered remains of what looked like some kind of plant dissolved and faded away, turning into a blackened crystal. It seemed like it was a Summon.

"Hmph... As if I care about your mushroom."

Hearing the obvious hostility in his words made it easier for Diablo to get into it as well. The thought of how he crashed by misjudging how long his Flight magic would last had been erased from his mind, as he boldly fixed his glare

onto the Paladin. He was planning to follow up with his usual, “I am a Demon Lord from another world!” when the girl interrupted him.

“My Lord!”

“Wh-What...?”

Turning around, he saw the girl prostrating herself in the nude. He saw her grasping the holy symbol of the Church in her hands.

“So you have finally graced me with your presence! I always thought it a bit lonesome to only hear your voice without being able to see you! I, your humble servant Lumachina Weselia, have always offered my prayers to you!”

“Th-That’s fine and all, but wouldn’t it be better if you put some clothes on?”

“Huh?”

The girl finally realized the state of her own appearance. She quickly hid the lower parts of her body and chest with her hands.

“Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeek!? D-Don’t look! Please, God, don’t look!”

Her face was bright red. Even Diablo’s cheeks were beginning to flush a little.

—“God”? *Is she talking about me?*

At the very least, it was Diablo this girl “Lumachina” was prostrating herself for.

—*I have no idea why, though...*

Nonetheless, it was obvious she was embarrassed. Diablo removed his 《Curtain of Dark Clouds》, offering it to Lumachina.

“Use this.”

“Huh...!? Th-Thank you so very much... Being given clothes by God... Truly, I am blessed...”

Carefully taking the cape from Diablo, Lumachina wrapped it around herself. She was completely naked under that cape... a “naked cape,” like the girls with nothing but an apron on. He couldn’t help but think of that as somewhat kinky.

The Paladin gave a snort. “And just *who* do you think you’re calling ‘God’!?”

This is nothing but a grubby little Demon! He stinks so bad my nose is going to fall off. You merely jumped down from the trees or something, didn't you!"

"Hmph... That is where you are wrong. I am—"

"He *is* God, I can tell! My prayers have reached the heavens!"

—*Girls really don't listen when other people are talking, do they! ...But what's this about "prayers"?*

He had been a bit distracted by her looks...and the fact she was naked...*and* by her "womanhood" ... But when he concentrated, he could sense a vast amount of magic energy coming from Lumachina. It wasn't enough to create the pillar of light from earlier, but he could still see it overflowing from her.

It seemed there was no mistaking it: The tower of light he saw had been created by this girl, Lumachina.

"Please be careful, my Lord. Gewalt may be a sinful man unworthy of being a believer, but his abilities are held in high esteem!"

"No, like I said, I'm no 'Lord' or 'God' or anything of the sort, I'm—"

"Oh, who CARES!" Gewalt screeched. "Smashing my Beast Mushroom like that! I am seriously PISSED OFF! No playing around this time; I'm killing the *both* of you!"

Diablo cocked his head to the side. "What do you mean by that? From what I've heard, Paladins are in service to the Church, and only kill Demon Lord worshipers. This Lumachina girl seems to have profound faith in the gods, does she not?"

She was hiding herself underneath Diablo's cape at the moment, but even after being stripped of her clothing Lumachina never let go of her holy symbol. Her faith seemed to run much deeper than the average person's.

Gewalt laughed scornfully. "As if I'd know about the decisions of the Church! If they tell me to kill someone, I kill them! I need no other reasons!"

"I see... So that's the kind of person you are, then. You're no different than a mercenary."

"Uh, that's where you're wrong, sweetie. I charge *much* more than that!"

—At least he's aware of it.

Gewalt threw a crystal on the ground...

—More summoning magic!

...with a worm quickly appearing.

“Hm... A level 60 《Hunter Worm》, I see.”

—I guess I should expect that from a Paladin. Just like Saddler, they're on completely different levels than the Adventurers back in Faltra.

But he was still no match for Diablo. He readied Tenma's Staff...

“Wind is best to deal with Earth elementals. 《Aero—”

He was unable to complete his spell, as the ground beneath him crumbled away.

“What...!?”

“Eeeeeeeek!?”

A gaping crater appeared in the earth, with both Diablo and the girl falling inside. A gigantic mouth came at them from within the depths of the hole.

—A level 80 Trap Worm!? And he summoned them both at the same time!

Despite how much of a sleazeball he was, Gewalt was a formidable opponent.

A smile crept onto Diablo's face.

“Do not underestimate my agility!”

Kicking off the corner of the worm's open mouth, he jumped up and grabbed hold of the girl who was naked underneath his cape. Though she seemed like a bit of a problem child, having her eaten by a worm right after he saved her in the first place would be kind of sad.

With the girl in tow, they escaped from the hole together.

“Not bad, Demon! But this is it!!” Gewalt shouted.

The Hunter Worm drew near.

“It’s not worth it if something like this doesn’t happen. Now, be ripped to shreds! 《Aero Shredder》!”

With a thunderous roar, a green flash of light wrapped around the pursuing Summon. Chunks of flesh were scattered everywhere, changing back into a blackened crystal.

Gewalt’s eyes flew open in shock. “What...is...this...?”

“Oh? So you know of it.”

—Though, after breaking through the level cap, you can learn even more powerful spells than this.

“Of course I know. There are other Paladins who can use it as well.”

“I was under the impression Elemental magic was so weak it was unthinkable for you to use.”

“...Yes, it’s weak... But it’s a different story if you can master it. Elemental magic is best when you need a lot of *oomph* packed into a single attack.”

“It seems you’ve studied well.”

Diablo was somewhat glad to hear this. It seemed he had reached the same conclusion as everyone else who leveled up their characters until they approached the level cap.

“So how about it, Demon? How many shots of that ultimate magic can you fire off, hmm!? My Summon is still rarin’ to go!”

“Hmph... With a spell like Aero Shredder, I can fire off at least a hundred without breaking a sweat.”

“D-Don’t you dare lie to me!”

“And don’t *you* try to measure me using your own standards, novice.”

—Why do people like him think no one else in the world can do something just because they can’t?

It was the same thing when he saw a post on Cross Reverie’s wiki saying 《Bloody Dance》 could be avoided, and people called the guy a liar. Stuff like

that was a piece of cake.

Diablo wasn't good at writing things out, so he didn't make a comment back then... But it was stupid to decide that an attack with a whole six frames of delay (0.1 seconds) between when the motion for the move started and the actual damage was dealt was "impossible" to dodge. He wanted them to try saying it was impossible only after they at least practiced inputting the command for a dodge as soon as they saw the attack coming. It was no good if your fingers were still moving like a human; to any normal person, a masterful player's movements couldn't be followed with the naked eye. The optimal movement was like that of the assembly robots that could be found in a factory; with no excessive movements, they were the ideal.

—If you want to win, then reject your humanity!

Diablo pointed Tenma's Staff at Gewalt. "I am a busy man... I have no intention of taking on each and every one of your Summons. A Summoner's shortcoming is their weakness to attacks that cover a wide area! 《Cross Blizzard》!!"

Two tornadoes burst into existence with everything they touched turning to ice, which was then torn to shreds by gale force winds. As soon as the trees were turned into frozen sculptures, they shattered to pieces. This was a spell learned at level 110; for those who hadn't broken through their level caps, they wouldn't even know it existed.

Gewalt's face contorted. "Wh-What... WHAT THE HELL IS THAAAAAAAAAAAAAT!?"

Shards of ice danced in the air, creating a fantastical sight. Gewalt's screams were drowned out in the ferocious whirlwinds, so all that was left was the sound of the wind's fierce howling.

Finally, the wind died down. The ground had been completely frozen over, and not a tree remained around them. Diablo had ended up changing the terrain itself, but it looked like the Paladin was defeated. Lumachina had watched everything unfold from behind him, and was shivering.

—Oh crap! I used that freezing spell even though there's a girl here wearing

nothing but a cape...!

“H-Hey, are you all right!?”

“Yes. God...having you save me...I’m...”

“Hold on—and let me be clear on this: I am no god! I am Diablo, a Demon Lord from another world!”

“Huh? B-But...”

“I am a *Demon Lord*.”

“...Even though your soul...is so...pure...” Lumachina swayed, and began to collapse.

“What!? Hey!” Diablo barely managed to catch her in his arms. Luckily, she was still breathing.

—*So, is she just sleeping?*

He didn’t exactly understand the logic behind it, but of course she would be exhausted after expending enough magic energy to make that tower of light earlier.

“I guess...I can’t just leave her here, huh...” There were wild beasts in the Eastern Lakefront Forest, so leaving her out here was as good as feeding her to the bears or wolves.

Reluctantly, Diablo decided to carry her back to town. It was at a time like this that his Flight magic would come in handy, but using it while carrying another person was plain impossible, no matter how small she was. The memory of his screw up causing him to crash was still fresh in his mind, so he elected to go back along the roads on foot.

After Diablo left—

The frozen earth caved in, a Trap Worm appearing from the newly formed hole and spitting something out of its mouth. The Paladin, Gewalt, tumbled along the ground.

“Euuuughh! The inside of a worm REEKS!! That damn Demon... I’m going to

crush his filthy Demon balls!”

And then, one more—though she was unconscious, the female Paladin, Tria, fell out onto the ice-covered earth as well.

†

“Tria!!”

Lumachina bolted upright. She had seen a dream of the female Paladin who helped her escape, watching as the Paladin fell down a hole in the earth.

—No, that wasn't a dream.

Lumachina looked down at herself; someone had dressed her in a brown hemp one piece, like the ones she usually saw around town. On the inside, she was just glad she wasn't naked anymore.

Next, she looked around at her surroundings. She was in an unfamiliar room with cold, stony walls, and a roof that seemed like it would leak if it rained. Candles lined the walls, the only light in the room coming from their flickering flames.

It seemed it was already evening, since what she could see of the outside, through a tiny window in the room, was pitch-black. If there hadn't been anyone else in the room with her, she would have probably worried if she was in jail.

There were two girls around the bed: an Elf, and a Pantherian.

The Elf came over to Lumachina. She had a profoundly ample bust, but judging from her long ears and facial features, she was most definitely an Elf.

“She woke up! Thank goodness.”

“...Are you all right? We healed the cuts on your legs, but is there anything else that hurts?”

The Pantherian's ears, tail, and hair were all black, a rarity among the species. She was looking at Lumachina with an expression of concern on her face.

“Huh? Ah, um...”

They weren't just good-looking, but cute as well. However, Lumachina was concerned about the iron rings around their necks, which were most likely slave collars.

“...Are your memories mixed up? Can you tell me your name?” the Pantherian girl asked uneasily.

“My name is...” The fog in her head rapidly cleared. “Ah, Lumachina Weselia. It's all right, I remember.”

“...That's good. My name is Rem Galleau. I am a Pantherian, as you could probably tell, and an Adventurer as well.”

“I'm Shera, and I'm an Elf!”

“...I know this is short notice, Lumachina, but there are a many things we want you to explain to us... But before that, there is a very important question I must ask.”

Rem's expression was exceedingly serious, which caused Lumachina to get nervous. “Wh-What could that be?”

“...Did Diablo do anything weird to you? Specifically, did he touch you in weird places, or pinch you, or lick you...or use his fingers to, um...” Rem blushed as she spoke, her voice becoming smaller and smaller.

Lumachina's face began burning up as well. She remembered quite clearly how she was saved while being almost completely naked.

“W-Would Diablo happen to be the god who saved me? If so, I can swear that he did not perform such...i-impure taboos with me...” She was unconscious at the time, but she was positive God would never do something like that to her.

Rem let out a deep sigh of relief. “...Thank goodness.”

“Ahaha! It was a big shock when Diablo came in carrying you, Lumachina. We thought he attacked you or something!”

“...I thought it wasn't possible for him...but since he wouldn't outright deny it, I was worried that something had happened.”

“Sometimes, Diablo will just say nothing but ‘yeah’ and stuff.”

“...It does seem like there are times he does not like to speak, much to our chagrin.”

This time Lumachina tried asking a question. “Um... What kind of relationship do you have with God?”

“...What do you mean by ‘God’? Are you talking about Diablo?” Rem asked to confirm.

Lumachina nodded. “He is the one who saved me.”

“Mm, I guess you could say Diablo is kind of like our owner,” Shera said as she touched her collar.

“What!? God keeps slaves!?”

“No, you’ve got it all wrong! This isn’t a ‘slave collar,’ it’s an ‘*enslavement* collar.’ Erm, let’s see... When Rem and I tried summoning a Demon Lord at Starfall Tower, our magic was bounced back at us, and...”

She was doing her best to explain everything, but Lumachina didn’t really understand what was going on.

Rem stepped in and summarized everything for her: “Diablo is the leader of our party of Adventurers, and our friend.”

“I...see.”

—*God is their friend? And an Adventurer?*

She wanted to confirm, just to be sure. “Um... So this ‘Diablo’ is God, correct?”

“...He’s an Elemental Sorcerer, one so strong that his power goes beyond all common sense.”

“He always says he’s a ‘Demon Lord from another world.’”

“G-God has to be the one who saved me... It’s a problem for me if he isn’t...” Lumachina cradled her head in her hands.

“...And why is that?” Rem asked, tilting her head.

“Because...he saw my skin...” Lumachina muttered, blushing furiously.

“...And?”

“We usually show our skin around him, so—” Rem quickly smacked Shera for blurting such details.

There was one thing that Lumachina had always decided upon in her heart: “The only person you should show your skin to is the man who will become your spouse.”

“...What?”

“That’s why, if this ‘Diablo’ is not God...then I have no choice but to become his wife.”

Rem’s tail shot straight up. “What in the—!? What is this naked cape-girl getting all carried away for!?”

“Th-That’s right, there’s an order for these things! Like, I would be first in line, right!?”

“Huh!? What do you mean by that!? You two are only his party members, no!?”

Rem averted her gaze. “...That’s right.”

“W-Well...maybe? But I feel like Diablo likes ‘em bigger, you know?” Shera said, lifting up her chest with both hands.

As they were talking, who else but Diablo would walk into the room.

†

The ones in the room at the moment were Diablo, Rem, Shera...and Lumachina, who was keeping herself propped up in the bed. Since they weren’t sure what the story behind Lumachina was, Diablo had gone to tell Klem and Edelgard not to leave their room, but since it was nighttime, they were already asleep. Eat, sleep, and play; the two Fallen really were living the easy life. It was enough to make him jealous.

Diablo kept the panic raging inside him from showing on his face.

—Just what does she mean she has to become my wife!?

He could hear their voices leaking out into the hallway, so he ended up eavesdropping on them. This was a girl who asked him if he was God while naked, and was apparently being hunted by Paladins.

—No matter how much of a stunningly beautiful girl she is, let alone the fact I've seen every last nook and cranny of her body... Oh man... Having her as a wife might be a bit of a problem for me...

Diablo grit his teeth to avoid becoming slack-jawed.

—No, no, life is more important right now.

It wouldn't be a problem if it was only the one Paladin he was dealing with, but if more were to join forces and band together, then his outlooks were a bit more hazy. At the very least, he knew them to be stronger than the Adventurers in Faltra or the Elven army he had faced. There were mechanics implemented in Cross Reverie that compensated for one-versus-many fights, but there probably weren't any saving graces like that in this world. He had even gotten involved with Saddler's death, who was himself a Paladin...

To put it simply, he wanted to avoid any kind of confrontation with the Church, seeing as they had power that rivaled even the king of this country.

—There's no benefit to doing that! Like, none at all! ...That said, I guess I can at least hear what she has to say. It'd be a little sad to drive her out of the inn without doing at least that much.

Arms folded, Diablo leaned against the wall as he looked down at Lumachina. "It seems you have finally come to."

"Yes. Thank you again for coming to my aid... Um, Diablo... You are a god, right?"

*—It's not really normal to think that God themselves came to save you. I don't know just how deep your faith runs, but just thinking God will save you because you prayed to him? I mean, come on... Just try writing that on Tw***er, I dare you. People would treat you like a stupid troll account in no time.*

But in more ways than one, it would be bad to shut her down like that now. It

seemed like she was under the impression she had to marry anyone who saw her naked, as long as they were one of the races.

—She doesn't look like she's a kid anymore...but maybe she's a huge yokel? Does she think babies come from the stork, or that they grow in cabbage patches or something?

She was undeniably cute, so much so that if she were to actually confess to him back in the real world, he would think it was some kind of marriage fraud scam. However, he didn't sense any kind of danger from this. So he put his plan to avoid all this into action:

“Due to certain circumstances, I am choosing not to reveal my identity while here in this world. Presume whatever you will as to why.”

With a gasp, Lumachina's eyes opened wide, and she scrambled to get down from the bed. Her legs were still wrapped in bandages, so he thought she shouldn't push herself that hard. She then knelt down on the floor.

“Please, allow me to refer to you as Lord Diablo.”

“V-Very well!”

This way, he could avoid being called “God” all the time while also dodging the “Marriage END” route.

Rem stayed quiet, seemingly having caught on to Diablo's intentions. Shera, on the other hand, tilted her head. She looked pretty unsure about what was going on.

Lumachina now appeared to believe Diablo was a God who was hiding his true identity.

He tried questioning her again. “Lumachina...why were you being pursued by a Paladin? Judging by what happened, I assume surely it was not because you are a Demon Lord worshiper?”

The words caught in Lumachina's throat. Whatever it was, it seemed hard for her to talk about.

“...It’s for your own good to talk about any secrets as soon as possible. If not, something could happen to you that you won’t forget for as long as you live,” Rem said softly.

She was most likely referring to how Diablo attacked her ears in order to find out her secret. Diablo would never forget the voices she made that night as long as he lived, either.

It was unknown how Lumachina interpreted that, but she nodded. “Right, it is no use keeping secrets from Lord Diablo, after all.”

“...If it’s hard for you to talk about, should we go wait outside?”

“No, on the contrary. If you are friends who Lord Diablo has placed his faith in, then I would be grateful for you to hear this as well.”

“Oka~y!” Shera threw both her hands in the air.

“...It seems like quite the complicated affair,” Rem said with a nod.

Staying silent, Diablo indicated for Lumachina to continue. Standing up from the floor, Lumachina clasped her hands together. A light came into existence by her chest, with a dazzling brightness spreading throughout the dim room. What appeared was the sacred symbol, the same kind often seen at churches or elsewhere. It was a radiant, almost blinding pure white.

“I occupy the most paramount position in the Church: I am the High Priest.”

Rem’s eyes turned round. “...High Priest!? You mean the highest position in the Church!?”

Shera was making small, strange noises out of bewilderment.

“...I heard they were a young woman, b-but that is you!?”

“The real deal!?”

“Yes,” Lumachina said, nodding.

Keeping his arms crossed, Diablo slowly nodded as well. He made it seem like he knew all along, but on the inside he was so surprised it felt like snot would

start dripping from his nose.

—I get it now! So that's why she thought God had come to save her! I guess that's just how important the position she holds is.

“...W-Wait. According to what we heard from Diablo, you were being pursued by a Paladin, correct?” Rem asked.

“Yes, that is correct.”

“...That can't be... Paladins only follow the will of the Church, which means they should follow *your* will as the High Priest. How can that be?”

Vexed, Lumachina bit her lip. “Unfortunately, I do not possess that kind of influence. There is a group called the Cardinal Authority who have complete control over the Church. They are comprised of the head cardinal and six other cardinals who are selected by the High Priest...or at least, that is how it should be. Really, the ones who decide the candidates are the cardinals themselves.”

“...So the ones who actually have influence over the Church are these cardinals, then.”

“While I have been granted all the authority that comes with the position of High Priest, it is the Paladins who possess absolute military might, and all of them follow the orders of the Cardinal Authority.”

Even if one did have power, it seemed there was no point to it if they couldn't get anything done.

Rem nodded. “...That explains why a Paladin was after your life.”

“It does appear the Cardinal Authority has decided to eliminate me.”

“...What exactly happened?”

Lumachina placed a finger on her lip as she thought. It was an almost childlike gesture. “Mmm... Could it have been because I inquired about a possible illicit flow of money and goods being used for the patronage of church rites? Or perhaps it was because I gave the order to look into the rumors of improper conduct by Paladins? Or maybe, was it because I made a proposal that prohibited priests from employing other people they knew through personal connections?”

“...Those are all certainly things that cannot be overlooked... But did you receive any sort of warning before they began making attempts at your life?”

“I did. Some of the cardinals indirectly... No, they made it quite clear they were threatening me.”

“...And even then, you didn't do as they said.”

“I cannot turn a blind eye to such wrongdoings.”

—That's a strong sense of justice she's got there. Seems like she's the kind of person who values morals more than their own life. But as a result, she was almost killed... This girl is an idiot, an unmistakable idiot... And yet, I don't hate that about her.

Rem nodded. “...What you are saying is correct, Lumachina, which is most likely why these people are after your life. We live in a society where it's hard to do the right thing, after all.”

“That is why I have decided to do something about it on this expedition.”

“...Expedition?”

“Yes. Rumors have been spreading of the Demon Lord having been resurrected in Faltra. In order to put the minds of the people at rest, I decided to come to the city as a sort of ‘visit from the High Priest.’”

“Th-The resurrection of the Demon Lord? Something like that would nev—”

“—Did happen, yeah.” A smile on her face, Shera spilled the beans and finished the sentence, causing Rem to kick her square in the butt.

Lumachina cast her eyes downward. “Faltra has been hit by one bout of turmoil after the other, and I am worried about those who live there... But there is a different reason as to why I have taken action now.”

“...And what reason would that be?”

“My goal is to travel to a town in the former Demon Lord's territory, and report what is going on to Batutta, the captain of the Paladins.”

Rem looked off in the distance as if she were remembering something. “...I have heard of Batutta before. He was supposed to be an influential presence in

the Great Human-Fallen War, and a man of great integrity.”

“That is what I have heard as well. Half a year before I was made the High Priest, Batutta was sent to the former Demon Lord’s Domain.”

“...Just as they came for your life, could they have also banished him to that remote city?”

“I believe that to be the case. If I can inform him of what is going on within the Church, I am sure he will take action and protect me—or at least, that is what another Paladin, Tria, told me.”

“...Is this person someone you can trust?”

“If she hadn’t helped me...then, in this very moment, I would be...”

“...Where is Tria now?”

“She protected me from another Paladin, to save me... And then...” Tears welled up in the corners of Lumachina’s eyes, and her shoulders began to shake.

“O-Oh, I see...” Rem was at a loss for words.

Shera was moved to tears. “That’s so sad, something like that happening to such a good person... You don’t need to worry anymore, Lumachina! We’ll protect you for sure!”

“...There you go again, saying whatever you like... But it is true that we can’t leave you alone.”

Both of the girls seemed intent on helping Lumachina.

—Was there anything suspicious about her story just now? Were there any contradictions? Couldn’t she just have written a letter to this Captain Batutta guy?

...No, there would be no point to that. As long as the Cardinal Authority was in control, Lumachina would eventually be killed at their hands. Running away took precedent over relaying what was going on. In that case, were there any other ways?

“Can you not rely on the country for anything?” Diablo asked. “It’s true the

Paladins are strong, but there are skilled people in the military as well.”

According to his own analysis, Galford, the governor of Faltra, was somewhere around the level 110 mark. Paladins like Saddler and Gewalt were definitely strong, but they didn’t give off the feeling they had broken through their limits yet. That would make them around level 99 or lower.

Lumachina had a troubled look on her face. “I am not aware of the internal affairs of the Church, and do not have even the slightest idea of what could be happening in the royal court. If the person I went to for help was actually connected with the Authority...”

Shera leaned forward. “Can that actually happen!? I mean, they’re bad people, right!?”

“...Those in power who act corrupt tend to have money saved up,” Rem said with a sigh. “As long as they get paid, there are also quite a lot of people willing to support this corruption.”

“That’s unforgivable!”

Rem seemed like she wanted to say something to the indignant Shera, but she got back on topic. “...It’s only natural Lumachina would be anxious about all this, and I can certainly understand why.”

“Hm.” Diablo nodded.

He wasn’t sure what kind of position people like Galford or Sylvie took when it came to the Church. In fact, he even thought it was obvious for someone to support the side that has money and power. If there was anyone who would take care of this High Priest (in name alone), they would have to be a person of exceptionally profound faith.

†

“...What are you planning to do now, Lumachina?” Rem asked. “If the Paladin who attacked you doesn’t return to the capital, then the cardinals will most likely think the assassination was a failure. They might make another attempt on your life again.”

“Even if that comes to pass, I will not run or hide. I must journey to the town

Batutta was dispatched to and gain his assistance.”

“...The one in the former Demon Lord’s Domain?”

“Yes. The remote town of Zircon Tower.”

Diablo had heard of that name before as it was an area from mid-game in Cross Reverie. It was implemented as another town on the front lines in a major update two years ago. At the same time, it had become a base for all the high level players in the game. Of course, it was a town Diablo had used for a while as well.

—That was around the time I got my own personal area.

Diablo’s dungeon should also be found near Zircon Tower. In the game, you could never just walk around and end up wandering into another player’s personal area. What was it like in this world? Could you actually walk there, or did it not exist at all?

Rem sighed. “...Zircon Tower, one of the outposts in the former Demon Lord’s Domain... I know how to get there from Faltra, but it takes a good amount of luck for those who aren’t Adventurers or merchants to even make it there.”

“I am fully prepared for that. I cannot afford to give up now.”

“Couldn’t you just write a letter to this Batutta guy?” Shera asked.

“A letter would not be enough to call him to action,” Lumachina said with a frown. “Helping me would mean facing off with the Cardinal Authority, and I can’t simply ask for something like that with a mere letter.”

“...He would be doubtful if you were actually the one who wrote the letter, too,” Rem said, nodding along.

“I am against the idea of entrusting my destiny to someone I have never met before. It’s not just my life that is at stake, but the future of the Church as well—not to mention the future of the country.”

“...I understand.”

The conversation was getting a bit out of hand, but Lumachina was in a position where she had to think about matters such as this. The power of the Church was said to rival the king’s, after all. Not to mention that originally, her

role as High Priest meant she was supposed to control the Church.

“No matter the hardships I will face, I must reach Zircon Tower!” Lumachina declared.

The conversation was getting pretty stretched out here, so Diablo went to organize everything in his head:

Lumachina was the High Priest, the most important person in the entire Church. But it was the Cardinal Authority who were truly in control of the Church. It seemed the Authority was making money through dishonest means, and using their ill-gained capital to maintain their grip on the Church. There was no doubt they were the ones who ordered the Paladins to assassinate Lumachina after she found out about their wrongdoings. Because of that, Lumachina decided to request help from the Paladin Captain Batutta, who had been dispatched to the remote town of Zircon Tower.

—Well, if it's a problem with the Church, it's probably best to have someone from the Church solving it.

Rem made a suggestion: “Diablo, what do you think about us taking Lumachina there ourselves?”

“Hm...?”

“Oh, that sounds good! Yeah, let's do that!” Shera was all aboard for the idea.

Surprised, Lumachina made as if to stand up. “I would be grateful...but wouldn't that be too dangerous for you...?”

“...We are Adventurers. If we avoid danger, we wouldn't be able to do anything. Besides, I'm sure you have seen Diablo's power, haven't you?”

“Y-Yes... That is true, it would be foolish to worry about God—ah, I mean, Lord Diablo's well-being. It seems I still lack faith.”

“What do you think, Diablo?”

They all looked at him.

—I do feel Lumachina's sense of justice is noble, and I can sympathize with her

circumstances... But still, I want to avoid a confrontation with the Church. Unlike the game, if you die in this world, that's it. No matter how much of an Adventurer I am, I don't want to jump into something I know is gonna be too dangerous.

“...We should also be able to look forward to the reward as well,” Rem continued. “Lumachina is the High Priest, so if we can restore her authority in the Church, she should be able to prepare an amount appropriate to the work we will put forth.”

Lumachina nodded in agreement. “I do not have much on my person at the moment, but if you deem it necessary, Lord Diablo, I will prepare whatever I can.”

Lumachina still thought of Diablo as some kind of god. Not just a reward, but they may be able to count on her support from now on.

The way things were going, their party was going to be brought to bankruptcy due to how much they were spending on biscuits. Though Shera said they only had 500 friths to spend on treats per day, the truth was they needed an amount several times more than that. He didn't know what would happen if they ran out of biscuits for Klem, and Rem and Shera would surely indulge her whenever she would beg for more.

—If we only have to get Lumachina to Zircon Tower, then maybe I won't have to end up fighting with the Church.

The Church most likely didn't have a grasp on the current situation, either. As long as they didn't figure out how strong Diablo was, they wouldn't send any sort of significant firepower their way. A Paladin or two would be no problem for him to handle.

Diablo twisted the corner of his lips into a smile. “Heh heh heh... So you desire power. Then I shall lend you mine, as a Demon Lord from another world!”

Lumachina knelt down, clasping her hands together.

And so, in order to earn money for biscuits and avoid marriage, such was how Diablo began impersonating a god.

The next morning—

Diablo and the others headed toward the inn's dining hall. Klem and Edelgard had woken up early, getting there ahead of the group, which was quite rare.

Lumachina's eyes opened wide. "Wh-What is this sinister black power coming from those two...!?"

"Nwagh!?" Klem stood on top of her chair. "What's with this girl!? She smells like one of *them*!"

"And who exactly is this 'them' you are referring to?"

"God!" Klem shouted in response.

—*Damn. They're both the real deals.*

It seemed Lumachina could see the Demon Lord-type magic energy emitting from Klem. If Diablo was actually a Demon Lord, and not just some guy role playing as one, he would've never been mistaken as a god.

It also seemed that Klem was able to sniff out that Lumachina, being the High Priest, was the person closest to the gods. Klem held no malice toward any of the races, but she did bear a deep-seated grudge against the gods for sealing her away for so long.

—*Oh boy, there's gonna be a fight at this rate. I have to stop them!*

As the two glared at each other, Diablo placed a hand on each of their heads.

"You wouldn't dare think of fighting in front of me, I would hope. Black magic energy, the stench of the gods... Are those things worth earning my displeasure?"

Lumachina's shoulders slumped. "M-My deepest apologies for causing a commotion..."

"Hmph, this is making my biscuits taste bad. Sit somewhere far away from me."

Klem sat back down. Edelgard, who looked ready to pounce at any moment, lowered her fists as well.

The dispute having been settled without incident, Rem and Shera heaved sighs of relief. Diablo mentally wiped off his cold sweat as well.

—These two have the worst compatibility...!

Since Diablo's group had more people now, they ended up using the table next to Klem and Edelgard. As they had breakfast together, Rem conveyed everything that had been discussed in last night's conversation to Klem and Edelgard.

"...And so, we have decided to help Lumachina reach the town of Zircon Tower in the former Demon Lord's Domain."

"Mm-hm, I see."

"...We have to prepare for the journey, so we will depart tomorrow morning."

"Roger dodger." Klem nodded as she stuffed her cheeks full of biscuits.

Edelgard sheepishly raised a hand. "Have, to go...no matter, what? Might, be...a problem."

"...Is there something you need to do?"

"Edelgard, has work." It was like the excuse you would get from a player with an actual life outside the game after they were invited to an online event.

Rem tilted her head. "...Could you explain that in a little bit more detail?"

"Here." She presented Rem with a flier; it was a help wanted sign for Petre's.

"...D-Did you...get a job?" Rem questioned, dumbfounded.

"Edelgard, will fight! For Demon Lord! Will also, make biscuits, for Demon Lord? Will make them!" She puffed out her chest proudly; that was some serious loyalty.

"I admire your ability to take action, but do you understand what kind of position you're in here?"

"Servant, of Demon Lord?"

“...Never mind. Please just make sure to be careful.”

“Leave, to me.” Edelgard then made a gesture with her hand that could never be shown on television.

Lumachina seemed sufficiently bewildered, unable to keep up with the conversation. There wasn't any way she would be able to guess, either, that there were actually two people who called themselves Demon Lords, with one of them being this young girl, and the maid who accompanied her being a Fallen. Explaining it all was also a pain in the butt.

Diablo spoke up about what he had been thinking of since last night:

“Klem and Edelgard shall stay here.”

“...Even though Klem is wearing an enslavement collar?” Rem placed a hand on her own neck.

“This will also be an experiment. There's no condition that states we cannot be separated from each other, correct?”

“...Will that be all right?”

“We will be passing through many towns on our way to Zircon Tower...”

It was dangerous just to bring them along through the gates. Edelgard's makeup in particular was a problem, since it was applied using Mei's skills, so it wasn't something that could be easily imitated. They would be in big trouble if it rained. On top of all that, she was being pursued by the other Fallen.

“Faltra may be protected by a barrier, but once we are outside it, who knows what will happen. Zircon Tower doesn't have a barrier, either.”

“Is that true!?” Rem raised her voice in surprise.

“The barrier is the thing that keeps out Fallen and the monsters, right?” Shera asked, looking confused. “Are they okay without that?”

—Is it different in this world? The town didn't have those big castle walls back in the game.

Diablo shrugged. “We’ll know once we are there. At any rate, it would be safest to have Klem and Edelgard remain here. It seems they have even found work, after all.”

As he turned to look at Klem, she gave a firm nod. “Mm-hm. I won’t be going anywhere that doesn’t have biscuits.”

—I thought of it more for her own safety...but since she’s just a kid, I guess she can make it through all this without fighting anyone. I won’t sweat the small stuff.

“Klem, I am going to pass down an order to you, so listen well and take this to heart: First and foremost, protect yourself. Second, protect the people around you. Finally, while staying within the limits I just told you, do the best you can to listen to what people at the inn tell you to do.”

“Very well! Leave it to me!” she said, cheeks full of biscuits.

He worried if she was actually listening or not.

“Hm? I heard you, loud and clear. Don’t die, protect everyone, and follow orders, right? Usually you would leave this kind of stuff to one of the Fallen underlings, but since I am such a generous Demon Lord, I will accept it for you.”

It seemed like she understood...but he didn’t sense any flow of magic energy.

—This makes me worried whether or not this stuff actually has the power to compel her to do anything. She has the slave collar on, but it’s still possible its power doesn’t work on a Demon Lord.

Rem raised a hand and Mei came over from the counter.

“Need something? If this wasn’t enough, I’ll bring you more. ☆”

Rem gave a simple explanation of what was happening: “...Diablo, Shera, and I have received a request that is going to take us away from Faltra for a long period of time. Klem and Edelgard will be remaining here, so I was hoping to ask if you could watch over them for us.”

“That’s A-OK by me. ☆”

“Bye Klem!” Shera hugged her. “We’re going off on a job!”

“I see. Rest assured, for even on my own, I’ll be all right! I’ll be practicing my singing in the meantime. I’ve already learned up to the 32nd verse of the biscuit song!”

“That’s great!”

“Teach me the chocolate song when you get back, OK?”

“I’ll be sure to make it up!”

“I’m a bit worried about you, though, since you’re always so unsteady on your feet. I shall grant you a small gift of my power.”

“What...? I’m not a Fallen, so I can’t get power from you, Klem.”

“Not you, this—”

Klem reached out, touching Shera’s bow. The magic energy of the Demon Lord flowed into it—Diablo was able to pick up on it this time. Rem went to stand up, while Lumachina held her holy symbol tight; it was even making Diablo secretly reach toward his pouch. That was how immense the amount of magic energy was that Klem had just released.

The wooden bow, which was once a color close to white, had now changed into a jet-black weapon wrapped in an ominous magic energy. Shera’s eyes were open dazzlingly wide.

“Whoa!? It changed into something that just *looks* strong on its own!”

“Hm-hm-hm! You should be fine with this!”

“Yeah! It kinda seems like it’s been cursed or something...but thanks, Klem!”
Shera hugged her again.

From the beginning, Shera’s bow had been slightly endowed with magic energy. It seemed to be quite the treasure in this world; but back in the game, it was something Diablo would sell to the weapons shop without a second thought. On a scale of N (Normal), R (Rare), and SR (Super Rare), it was probably an R... But the black magic energy coming out of the newly enhanced bow was by no means normal. It wasn’t as powerful as Diablo’s equipment...but maybe an SR? No, SSR (Super Super Rare) seemed more appropriate.

—If the people who went crazy with joy after managing to snipe an SSR with a

less than 1% drop rate could see this, they would be crying right about now.

It was one hell of a cheat on her part. Now more than ever, he was truly grateful that Klem had never wanted to start a war with the races.

Chapter 3: Heading to a New Town

Two weeks later...

Lyferian Kingdom, year 164, on the afternoon of the twentieth day of the seventh month—

Catching a breeze in its sails, the sand boat sped along. It was a small yacht made of wood that could carry about ten people. But instead of running along ocean waves, it swam through the desert. The hull of the ship was reinforced using magic, allowing it to cut through the waves of sand.

Shera was over the moon, this being her first time riding on a boat like this. Rem was terrified, while Lumachina kept praying to God the entire time. Diablo already experienced this back in Cross Reverie, but...

—This feels amazing!

He was sitting down, arms crossed just like a Demon Lord would, but it was an ordeal trying to keep himself from smiling.

Their head wrapped in a black cloth, the ship's captain pointed forward. "Zircon Tower, dead ahead!"

"Good!"

On the horizon of the endless brown sand, he could see a twisted, distorted tower with numerous tents surrounding it.

There was a lake in the middle of a desert (or, in other words, an oasis). And in the center of that lake stood a tower the same color as the sand. Upon closer inspection, it appeared to be more like stone than sand, and a precious kind of stone of that. It was slightly transparent, reflecting light within itself in some complex manner and dispersing it. This tower wasn't a structure made by any of the races, but was said to have been built by the Fallen.

This was the former Demon Lord's Domain...

It was merely thirty years ago when the Demon Lord reigned over this land

that other Fallen made their homes here, and all sorts of monsters crept about.

The boat began slowing down, which finally allowed Rem to regain her composure.

“...I thought we were going to die.”

“Heh... You’re more of a scaredy-cat than I thought.”

Her cheeks flushed red. “...It might be hard to imagine for someone like you who has flown in the sky before, but I am not a fan of moving without using my own legs. Things like wagons, and boats...”

“You just have to get used to it.”

“...Sure. That aside, we arrived fairly easily.”

“Should it have been harder?”

“No, absolutely not... You spoke like you were quite knowledgeable of the Demon Lord’s Domain, but is this not the first time you’ve gone there?”

“Mhm...”

Diablo called himself a Demon Lord “from another world,” so it would be a bit strange for him to know about the Demon Lord’s Domain in *this* world. To be blunt, that made zero sense for his character.

“That is...because... Wh-While I have never been, I still know about it. Because I am a Demon Lord.”

Oh, the agony... It was the sort of response that would warrant people making fun of him online.

Rem nodded. “...So Demon Lords have those kinds of abilities as well. I see.”

Good girl! Diablo was filled with the almost irresistible urge to pat her on the head.

Hiding the unrest inside him, Diablo leaned back, arms crossed and acting full of himself. “Of course I would be knowledgeable of a Demon Lord’s Domain, for I am a Demon Lord myself.”

It was a lot harder than he had expected, with them getting lost, the weather

taking a turn for the worst, and having trouble finding a captain... The map for this world alone was far different than the one in Cross Reverie.

—It was just plain massive.

It was the same thing with the distance between Faltra and Starfall Tower. Compared with the game, everything was much more vast and open here. Because of that, he kept going the wrong way until he had gotten used to it. Even dungeons that were a straight shot to get through back in the game were all over the place, design-wise. They were natural caves, after all, so maybe that shouldn't come as a surprise.

Diablo had also forgotten a portion of the map, which was part of the reason why he had so much trouble. Ever since he became high-level, he would just use the 《Move》 feature to get around, so it had been a good long while since he went through the area after leaving Faltra on the way to the Demon Lord's Domain.

Normal players may have passed through here countless times with some newly made companions who were just starting out...but Diablo never partied up with anyone before.

—*Oh... I guess I am now, though.*

Lumachina was more like someone he was charged with protecting rather than a friend; but it was Rem and Shera's first time coming here.

“So maybe this is what it's like...”

The words he unintentionally muttered were drowned out by the sound of the ship scraping against the sand.

The boat approached the pier as they entered the town. Though Diablo called it a pier, it was different from the kind that stuck out into the ocean from the land. They had just crossed a desert to get here, but the sand continued on through the town as well. There wasn't much difference between here and what they had just crossed over to get to this town.

The pier formed a slope that would line up with the tall sides of the sand boat, allowing for passengers to climb down to the ground below. Right as

Diablo gathered up a particularly large piece of luggage and got ready to jump off the boat—

“We’re here!” With a shout, Shera leapt from the boat before he could do the same. With a plop, she sank right into the sand where she landed, buried up to her knees.

“Agyah!?”

“.....We’re going to leave you behind.”

“A-Are you all right?”

Rem and Lumachina used the pier to disembark; Diablo decided it would be smart for him to use it as well.

“Wait, wait, wait! I can’t get out!!”

The more she struggled to free herself, the more she would sink deeper into the sand. It was harder to break free than it looked when a ton of sand got on top of your feet.

Diablo ultimately grabbed Shera by the collar, dragging her out. Sand came pouring off her, with even her boots being full of the stuff. Because of the difference in their body types, Diablo managed to get through the ordeal by only sinking a little.

“Hmph.”

“Th-Thanks, Diablo~” She squeezed him tight.

†

After they had gone some distance away from the sand boat—

They arrived at a place that looked to be the main road. Tents as round as fluffy pancakes lined both sides of the street, the sandy road continuing on into the heart of the town.

A swarm of kids came bustling over to them.

““We’ll carry your bags! We’ll carry your bags!””

—*There was nothing like this in the game...*

Just as Shera seemed like she would take them up on their offer, Rem stopped her.

“You can’t. If you have them carry your things, they’re going to demand you pay them for it.”

“I-I see...”

“We don’t have anything heavy enough to warrant them carrying it for us, so let’s just do it ourselves.”

“Yeah!”

Lumachina looked heartbroken. She was probably empathizing with these impoverished kids.

Rem spoke up. “...They are wearing those rags on purpose. Looking at their faces, you can tell they are actually eating well. This is just a way for them to earn some pocket money for themselves.”

“Is that true!?”

“...There are children like this in every town. It’s not limited to just the former Demon Lord’s Domain.”

A look of shock on her face, Lumachina looked around. The greedy kids in question were currently keeping their distance from Diablo. His horns and the pitch-black outfit he wore made it hard to approach him, it seemed.

Diablo started walking toward the tower. There were no changes to be found along the sandy ground, but the amount of buildings around them kept growing. He never thought about it back in the game, but it came as a bit of a shock that people could build these stone structures on top of sand you would start sinking into if you weren’t careful. They must have come up with some kind of trick to make that work.

“Oh, flowers!” Lumachina exclaimed as she pointed.

In the midst of this barren land, there was a flowerbed in front of one of the buildings.

Rem smiled. “...It seems easy to get water around here.”

“It does smell like water here, after all,” Shera said, and pointed ahead of them.

There was a lake at the end of the road. Gentle, sparkling ripples spread through the water. Zircon Tower existed in Cross Reverie with almost the exact same layout, but instead of a lake, there was only a moat surrounding the tower.

—Well, since it was a game, it was a small location that only had the buildings you needed for gameplay purposes.

The city of Zircon Tower in this world had children, and parents for those children. They even had restaurants and clothing stores, too.

“What the hell’s this!? It’s way different than what you said!”

Diablo heard a high-pitched voice.

—A kid?

Taking a look for himself, four guys, obviously Adventurers, were arguing with a rabbit-eared Grasswalker boy. Judging by his appearance, he seemed to be an Adventurer as well. He wore lightweight leather armor, and had a shortsword strapped to his back. Though Grasswalkers always looked like children no matter how old they got, he was most likely no child.

As the Grasswalker stormed closer, a Pantherian shoved him back by the shoulder.

“You were useless, so of course you’d get a lower reward!”

“What the hell, I was useful! I guided you around! I opened the lock for you! There was even treasure, wasn’t there!?”

“You mean how all those strong as hell monsters jumped in out of nowhere and got us all *killed!*!”

“What!?”

—A monster room, huh. One of the standard traps.

Diablo even used them before in his own personal dungeon.

There were numerous dungeons to be found in the former Demon Lord's Domain, and it looked like these guys were a party of Adventurers who had just cleared one of them. Items and experience were automatically distributed in Cross Reverie, which meant there was no way to forcibly steal them from others. Even so, there were some people who claimed leechers who didn't contribute anything should hand over their rewards...

But Diablo was always a solo player, so that never concerned him. Thank goodness for that, since it let him avoid all that grief.

—If you're gonna play an MMORPG, then you gotta do it as a solo player!

The Pantherian was showing off some type of longsword.

"This is a pretty slick sword. I'll be putting it to good use."

The blade was wreathed in flames. The other Adventurers were jeering and making a big deal over it.

"Woo, that's sick!" "Nice one, man!" "Let's try it out right now!"

—Is that a 《Red Sword》?

Diablo had seen this weapon before. He always thought it to be an R-rank piece of trash back in the game, but it seemed to be quite a valuable weapon in this world. Players would try all sorts of reckless things to try and gather rare materials in the game, risking their lives without a second thought. The penalty for dying wasn't a light one, but it wasn't like your whole account got deleted or anything.

But dying in this world meant that was it for you. There were a limited amount of people who would risk going out to gather rare materials, which meant this world was flooded with low-tier weapons.

—Now that I think about it, I left a Red Sword in one of the monster rooms I built in my dungeon. This is just a coincidence...right?

"That sword's worth something like 10,000,000 friths, right!?" the Grasswalker persisted. "What's the deal with only giving me a single silver piece

then!?”

One silver piece was worth 4,000 friths. It was definitely no way to treat someone who had braved a dungeon with you.

The Pantherian bared his fangs. “If we weren’t there for ya, you’d be monster food right about now!”

“And if I wasn’t there, you would’ve never made it to the treasure in the first place!”

“Oh, so ya wanna go, huh? I’d be okay with trying this baby out on ya first, ya know?”

He pointed the sword at the Grasswalker. The flames were only an effect, so it didn’t actually give off heat, but the Grasswalker still backed off in a panic.

“Mhgh...”

“That’s just the right amount for a Grasswalker who only snuck around and hid the whole time.”

“...But you said we would split everything equally.”

“What was that!?” Intimidating him, the threatening tone of his voice made it seem like he would slash the Grasswalker at any second.

The Grasswalker nodded begrudgingly. “N-Nah... This is fine.”

“You shoulda just said that from the beginning. If you’re fine with that, then we’ll end up usin’ ya again. Gehahah! See ya!”

Guffawing all the while, the four Adventurers disappeared into a bar. It was still early afternoon, but bars usually kept their doors open while it was light out, serving lunch to customers.

After the other Adventurers were gone, the Grasswalker raised the silver coin above his head.

“Like hell it’s fine, you cheating bastard! Get bent!” He made to hurl the coin to the ground—but ended up shoving it into his pocket anyways.

After seeing the whole incident play out alongside Diablo, Rem shrugged her

shoulders. "...You see things like that everywhere."

"Even back in Faltra?"

"...There were times I was given a lower reward than everyone else just because I was a girl."

"That is utterly idiotic."

"...Yes, it is. I didn't hesitate to use my Summons on those people, however."

"As you should."

Shera and Lumachina were having an animated conversation about the proper way to raise flowers as they stood in front of the flowerbed. It seemed they hadn't heard a word of the other Adventurers' conversation.

†

"Are you guys Adventurers?" The Grasswalker from before called out to Diablo and the others.

Because of his quirky short hair, his sharp voice, and the animated expression on his face, he looked extremely cheerful. His rabbit ears swayed from side to side, and judging by his other looks, he was an explorer. It looked like he had a surprisingly unabashed personality.



“What?” Diablo crossed his arms as he answered.

Sensing that this could lead to trouble fast, Rem interjected. “...We’re Adventurers who have come from Faltra, but what about it?”

“Faltra? Aw, so you’re just here on a shopping trip?”

“...We are in charge of protecting a certain person, though that will end after today.”

“Oh, gotcha! Hey, do you wanna head to a dungeon? You’ve already come all the way to Zircon Tower, so I don’t think there’s any harm in taking on a new dungeon while you’re at it!”

“...A new dungeon?”

“Yeah, I found a really good one pretty recently! You can just tell by the weird entrance, the place ain’t normal. The treasure you can find in there is in a league of its own, I tell ya!”

“...It certainly sounds interesting.”

“How ’bout it? I’ll even introduce you to a well-experienced dungeon guide who’s also a pro at getting locks open—that’s me!” He stuck out his thumb, pointing at himself.

—Taking on a dungeon, huh.

True, it would be ridiculous to go back empty-handed. Diablo thought it might not be a bad idea to go after they finished their job of protecting Lumachina.

“...What is this ‘weird’ entrance like?” Rem asked.

“That’s just something you’ll have to look forward to after partying up with me... Is what I want to say, but I’ll let you know, just for you.”

“The lion statue in front of the doors can move and attack people.”

The Grasswalker spoke with an air of grand importance. Hearing this, the breath caught in Diablo’s throat.

—What was that!?

“T-Tell me more!” He suddenly grabbed the Grasswalker by the shoulders.

“Ah!?”

“You! Does that dungeon have thirteen floors to it!?”

“I-I don’t know about that, we only went to the third floor...”

“The third floor, which means... After you defeated the green, black, red, blue, dark green, dark yellow slimes in order, they must have dropped a key, right!?”

“What, is that for real!? I mean, yeah, there were a bunch of different colored slimes hanging around and all...”

“Was [F43] written above the door to that floor!?”

“I think so, yeah... Probably...?”

“Ah...!!”

—*That’s my dungeon, isn’t it!?*

The old retro game he took that from didn’t exist in this world, so it may have been a bit too hard for them to figure out.

The Grasswalker started asking questions of his own. “Hey, just who are you!? Is everything you said true!? You know about a fourth floor!?”

“Well, about that...”

It would be stupid to tell the Grasswalker everything here. If this really was Diablo’s dungeon, his Storage would be on the bottom floor. It was a treasure room that contained all the items he had collected in the game, and he had no intention of letting anyone else have them.

He let go of the Grasswalker’s shoulders. “You should forget about it.”

“Wha... Like hell I can! You’re some kinda amazing Adventurer, aren’t’cha, mister!? C’mon, let’s go do that dungeon together! I can be useful, you know!”

Picking up on where this could be going, Rem changed the topic. She was truly a clever girl.

“...Pardon me, but do you know anything about Batutta, the captain of the

Paladins? We've come here to meet him."

"Huh...? That big-wig from the Church? Mmm... Yeah, he lives on the western side of town..." The Grasswalker frowned.

—Does he have some kind of beef with this guy?

As they were talking, Shera came running over.

"Diablo, over there!"

"Hm?"

Lumachina stood in the middle of the street, exchanging heated glares with some Human man wearing armor.

—Uh-oh, trouble!? Crap, I got too caught up in talking about the dungeon!

Rem hastily sprinted over to them.

"D-Did something happen!?" she said as she got in between Lumachina and the man in armor.

"This girl came over and started pickin' a fight with me!" He spat out in frustration. He pointed toward Lumachina, who didn't take a single step back from the towering giant as she glared at him.

"I cannot simply overlook you striking a woman who was asking for help!"

There was a woman to the side of them, a Pantherian, who looked to be about thirty years old. She was sitting flat on the ground, and held a baby wrapped in cloth tightly to herself. As Lumachina and the man argued, she seemed too shaken up to do anything else.

"If you want the priest's help, then get in line and pay a donation!" the man said with disgust. "It's the same as if you took the sniveling brat into a place where people are eating; you're just causing trouble for everyone! Someone who's causing trouble for other people is gonna get kicked, that's just how it is!"

"Do you think you are without sin? If you think you can get away with doing anything to those less fortunate than you, then you will be punished in excess

for your transgressions.”

“Hah! Like hell I have sin! I’m part of the Paladin Brigade, after all!”

Lumachina made a curious face. “Huh? What is this Paladin ‘Brigade’?”

Now that she mentioned it, the insignia of the Church was emblazoned on the man’s armor. His armor wasn’t anything as fancy as what Paladins would normally wear, and looked to be a bit more on the cheap side, like something an Adventurer would sport. That said, anyone who wasn’t related to the Church wouldn’t be able to wear that symbol on their armor.

Something tugged on Diablo’s cape; it was the Grasswalker from before.

“You’re still here?”

“That’s cold, man! But this is bad, that guy’s part of the Paladin Brigade!”

“And just what is that? I know of Paladins, but not this ‘Brigade’ part.”

“I’d say they’re trying to copy them. These guys are soldiers of the Church, and rough ones at that. They’re pretty much like bandits. I don’t know what it’s like in other towns, but they sure like to throw around their weight here.”

“I see.”

They had come to ask Batutta for help...

—But we may be out of luck on that, seeing as his subordinates act like this.

From what he could figure out from the argument between this guy and Lumachina: It seemed like the Pantherian was a mother who had come to request a miracle from God to heal her baby. This guy saw her as a nuisance and kicked her. Lumachina saw what happened, and started giving him an angry lecture.

Her life was in danger, so Diablo didn’t want her going around causing trouble... But if she was the type of person who could pretend not to see when violence was being used against the weak, then the Cardinal Authority never would have been after her life in the first place.

Lumachina was in the middle of her sermon on how “there is sin in everyone.”

“This was written in the third chapter of the Scriptures of Genesis, that all persons are born bearing sin...” It seemed she had these things perfectly memorized.

If this man claimed to be part of the Church, it had to be a verse he heard at least once before.

A faint light began emanating from Lumachina’s body. As she recited the scriptures, magic energy overflowed from her being. This was a phenomenon caused by prayer, so it would be more accurate to say it was something completely different that was coming out of her.

The wind grew stronger, and sand danced in the air. These abnormal incidents caused birds to fly away from the lake and, in the distance, Diablo could hear dogs howling.

Nothing about the Church’s doctrines were made clear in Cross Reverie. Considering the game was a European fantasy, he thought it was probably based off the usual religions... But not going too deeply into religion or politics was the standard for this sort of mindless entertainment.

And as the man from the Paladin Brigade was losing the mental battle with Lumachina, he finally snapped.

“Acting all high and mighty, just shut *up* already!”

“You will listen to me!”

“No worthless Adventurer can force *ME*, a member of the mighty Paladin Brigade, to listen to your stupid lecture!”

Tightening his hand into a fist, he threw a punch at Lumachina.

Tenma’s Staff smashed into the man’s face, sending him flying away in spectacular fashion.

He flew back about five meters, sliding another five as he scraped along the ground, coming to a stop after being buried halfway in the sand.

“Hmph...” Diablo shrugged. “Seems like it was a case of ‘in one ear and out the other.’ There isn’t anything you can say to someone like him.”

Arguing must have been a regular thing around here, since most of the people around them hadn’t paid any mind beforehand. But he definitely drew their attention after sending a member of the Paladin Brigade flying ten meters away, as a commotion broke out among the bystanders.

Surprisingly enough, the man stood back up. Sand spilled off his armor, and blood trickled down from the side of his mouth.

“Ugah... You... You bastards...!!”

“Well, well. Aren’t you a tough one.”

—His level might be even higher than Emile’s... But that’s what I’d expect from someone living out here in the former Demon Lord’s Domain.

“You just defied the Church, didn’t you, asshole!?”

“This again... Weaklings are always so quick to make themselves seem like they are one and the same with whatever organization they claim to belong to. Or perhaps it’s because you identify yourself with such a large organization that you think you can be so arrogant?”

“It’s too late for you now! I’m gonna purge you where you stand, right here, right now!”

The man drew his sword. The onlookers that gathered around them let out gasps of shock and backed away. Now that Diablo didn’t have to worry about them getting caught up in the fight, this made things easier for him.

Rem and the others were already well-versed in how he fought, staying behind him and backing a short distance away. The mother and child at the center of all this turmoil were being taken care of as well.

—Good grief... Now, how should I hold myself back this time? Should I break out the 《Prototype Great Scythe》? ...No, I’m up against someone who’s more capable than a level 50 Warrior. There’s a chance using that weapon could cause me to struggle when I fight against him. I’ve got someone I need to protect, too, so I can’t take any chances here, no matter how small.

The basic rule for any escort quest was to never let the enemy get close.

Diablo took aim with Tenma's Staff. "Be blown away! 《Explosion》!!"

Though it was only a spell you would learn at level 50, Diablo's high-level stats gave it more oomph than usual.

He unleashed the spell at the ground. Standing with his sword drawn, the Paladin was blown away by the aftershock of the explosion. Even though they were a good distance away, even the townsfolk were in a panic from the hot wind it gave off.

The plumes of black smoke cleared and an enormous hole laid open in the ground. The townspeople...all appeared to be okay.

—Phew, thank goodness for that. I don't want to cause so much trouble for everyone if I can help it.

The man from the Paladin Brigade was once again buried halfway in the sand, but he bolted back upright.

"Augh... Agagh!?"

"Hmph... So you're still alive. Consider yourself a fortunate man."

"Wha...!? You're...an Elemental Sorcerer!?"

"So you want another taste, do you? Very well then, this next one will turn you into ash!"

A threat, of course, but an effective one. When he pointed his staff at the Brigade member, the color drained from the man's face, and he threw his sword away as he fled.

"Eeeeeeeeeek~~!!"

"Heh heh heh... What an incredibly dull weakling he was."

Though he was acting full of himself, on the inside, Diablo heaved a sigh of relief. He didn't know what he would have done if the guy didn't run away.

†

Everyone around them was in a complete uproar.

—Was that bad? Was it a mistake to use magic in the middle of town in broad daylight!?

He was acting as if he was detached from it all, like a Demon Lord would, but a cold sweat broke out along his back. Rem and Shera were having trouble with how to cope with the current situation.

Lumachina spoke to the Pantherian mother. “You said earlier that you needed the Church’s help, correct?”

“Y-Yes! My baby!”

She had to have been rattled after seeing an explosion go off so near to her, but even so, she made it seem like there wasn’t much time left when it came to her child.

—A mom, huh...

She unwrapped the cloth covering the baby. There were eight black “X” marks on their leg, as if someone had drawn them on there. Diablo couldn’t help but react with a short yelp of surprise. He had seen something like this in Cross Reverie as well.

Lumachina looked at him curiously. “What is it?”

With great difficulty, the mother plead her case. “It’s the Death Knell disease, an illness that has been spreading around this town... Marks keep appearing on the afflicted, and once the ninth one appears... Th-They die...”

“What was that!?”

“It can be healed if they receive a miracle from a priest, but...”

“Then let’s hurry and head to the church!”

“I can’t...”

“Why not!?”

“Th-That’s because...” It seemed hard for the mother to get the words out.

“She doesn’t have the money.”

His teeth gritted, the Grasswalker boy from earlier cut in. “These Church guys can do all these amazing miracles, but they charge crazy high prices for them. And not just for the Death Knell disease, they do the same thing for other sicknesses, too.”

“How can that be...! This child’s life is in danger!”

“I don’t know how other towns do it, but that’s just how it is here. You saw it yourself, that Paladin Brigade jerk kicked her because she asked for help, even though her kid’s in trouble.”

Shoulders shaking, the mother hugged her child tight. Once there were nine “X” marks, the afflicted would die. The baby already had eight.

Diablo tried to speak up—but what could he say? His knowledge of the Death Knell disease was something he learned from the game. The cause and treatment for this world’s version of it might be completely different.

Lumachina clenched her hands. “I understand! I will heal them!”

“...Huh? Look, it’s not that simple...” the Grasswalker said, looking doubtful.

Taking out the holy symbol from around her chest, she turned toward the child.

“It’s the first time I have seen a disease such as this, but the gods will be sure to protect them; our prayers will certainly reach them. Isn’t that right?” She turned to look at Diablo.

—She still thinks I’m a god, huh. No matter how much you pray to me, though, I can’t even cure a sniffle.

“Hmph...” Diablo gave a magnanimous nod. “You should be able to do it, considering it’s you. Ah, but...hm... Do not worry about me, and just do everything like you normally would.”

“All right!” She nodded, her eyes brimming with confidence.

“Would you happen to be a priestess...?” the mother beseeched her.

“An inexperienced one, but yes.”

Despite the fact she was on sand, the mother threw herself to the ground, her head bowed low.

“Please! Please save my child!”

“Very well. Then let us pray together. God will be sure to save them.”

“P-Please!”

“Of course!”

Lumachina knelt in front of the baby, reciting words of prayer.

“O great Lord in Heaven, let the voice of those who seek salvation reach you. Heal this child of the wicked disease that ails them. Grant them your gracious compassion for their sins, and allow them life...”

Trembling, the mother clasped her hands together. The townspeople watching began kneeling down one after the other, Rem and Shera included.

Diablo started to feel uneasy. He was the only one standing, which made him stick out like a sore thumb. But him kneeling down somewhat went against the whole Demon Lord image he was going for, not to mention that he tricked Lumachina into thinking he was a god himself.

Diablo put some distance between himself and the prayer circle, cooling himself off in the shade of one of the nearby buildings.

“Phew...”

“You not gonna pray?”

“Mm?”

The Grasswalker boy had followed him, an amiable grin on his face. “My name’s Horn. What’s yours, boss?”

“I am Diablo, a Demon Lord from another world.”

“Eh...?” He seemed a bit surprised, but he didn’t pry any further, probably thinking it was just a joke or a nickname.

“Are you not going to pray, either?”

“Not a big fan of ‘God’ and all that. Never even been to church.”

The people of this world were deeply religious, so it was rare to find someone who had never even been to a church before.

Horn gave a bitter smile. “They make you fork over those ‘contributions’ if you go, right? But I’m dead broke.”

“Hm...”

“I came to Zircon Tower ‘cause I thought I’d be able to strike it rich here...but that’s not working out too well.”

“So it seems.”

“That’s why we should head to the dungeon together, boss!”

Diablo barely managed to stop himself from agreeing.

—It’s dangerous to let myself get tricked by his childlike appearance. He’s a Grasswalker, so he may be even older than me.

“I’m busy at the moment.”

Considering how the guy from the Paladin Brigade acted, and the fact they would abandon the life of a child, demand contribution to help, Diablo felt Batutta couldn’t be trusted. He never thought Lumachina would be the one to handle all this. If that was the case, then what should they do to protect her from the Cardinal Authority?

“Hm?”

He turned around after sensing an intense magic energy that was being caused by Lumachina’s praying. A pillar of light reached up into the heavens, giving off a light even more brilliant than the last time he saw it. Was the effect being enhanced because of all the other people who joined in prayer with her?

Horn craned his neck, looking curious. “Is there something up in the sky?”

“Well...” It seemed like normal people weren’t able to see it.

Suddenly, cheers and applause erupted from the prayer circle.

“All right!” “The marks are gone!” “This is friggin’ amazin’!”

As she hugged her child close to her, the mother kept bowing her head as if she were trying to bury her forehead in the sand.

“Thank you! Thank you! Thank you...!”

The baby began crying a healthy cry.

Lumachina wiped the sweat from her brow. “I’m so glad. I really am.”

Rem and Shera exchanged smiles.

“...Just what I would expect from her.”

“Yay! All right!”

The calls of admiration and praise from the townspeople didn’t stop; someone started singing a hymn, and eventually, it turned into a chorus of people singing along.

—Man, thank goodness for that!

Diablo’s face broke into a small smile.

Horn went slack jawed. “Holy crap! It takes the priests hours of praying to even start making the marks disappear! Did she actually do it!? Sh-She’s amazing! She’s the real deal, an actual priestess!”

“Heh... Of course she would be able to do that much.”

If this was something even the local priests could cure, then the High Priest should be able to do it, too—is what he had been thinking, but there was a chance the healing process required special know-how or tools as well. Either way, he was relieved to see she had been able to cure the child after all.

—Seeing as that’s taken care of, the real problem is over here...

Diablo turned his attention to the road ahead of him. “So, they’re here.”

A look of shock overtook Horn’s face. “Waugh!? They’re here *already*!? Y-You guys should scram, and fast!”

A group of about twenty Paladin Brigade members advanced toward them, with the guy Diablo had sent flying earlier leading the pack.

Diablo stood in the middle of the road to greet them.

“Hey, Horn, or whatever your name is... If you do not want to get caught up in

this, then get—”

He was already gone.

—Damn, he runs away fast!

That was a Grasswalker for you. Though they were fragile and lacked power, they were a race that specialized in covert ops and possessed high agility.

“Well, the less people around, the easier it is for me to fight, so it all works out.”

Diablo readied Tenma’s Staff.

†

Diablo anticipated that he would have to beat up another twenty guys from the Paladin Brigade. However...

—What’s going on here?

The townspeople formed a wall in front of Diablo and the others. It was all the people who prayed with Lumachina earlier.

This wall was standing in the way of the Paladin Brigade, and every single one of the people wore a look of determination on their faces.

“Get out of here, Paladin Brigade!” “Yeah, that’s right!” “We’re not gonna let you lay a finger on them!”

Diablo was shocked.

—So this is the influence of the High Priest!

He never thought she would turn everyone around her into believers with just a single prayer. They had no idea of the status she held; they simply admired what she had done, and became a shield to protect her from the Paladin Brigade. They didn’t even have any weapons.

—They’re risking their lives for people they’ve only just met... That’s like a cheat in and of itself. This was so easy that I couldn’t even use it as material for a nation-building story if I wanted to. It’s on the same level as having the

influence of a king.

This was a far cry from Diablo, who had never even been in a party, let alone been able to make a single friend in-game.

If the Paladin Brigade were to back off because of the repeated calls telling them to get lost, they never would have been labeled as being almost like bandits.

A Pantherian several times larger than the others stepped forward, though he looked more like a bear than a panther at this point.

“Gufufu... Well ain’t this interestin’. I don’t know what the hell happened here, but I’m gonna remind you of the power of the Church!”

He was carrying a spear that was bigger than his entire body—a lance. It was usually something you would use while riding on the back of a horse, not on foot, but this guy swung the thing around like it was a cane. He wouldn’t know unless he actually fought the guy, but Diablo pegged the lance-wielder to be someone he wouldn’t have to hold back against.

There was no one in the group who was dressed like a Paladin, which must have meant Batutta hadn’t shown up.

—Now then, what to do?

There was a wall of people between Diablo’s group and the Paladin Brigade. He appreciated their mettle in becoming a shield for them, but at this rate, they would only get caught up in his spells.

—It takes a second to get ready, but maybe 《Volcanic Wall》? That way I can make a wall of fire between the people and the Brigade.

Should I throw in a Burst Rain on top of that? Would I kill them if I scored a direct hit?

From what he could gather of his enemy’s HP and POW (their magic resistance), he could calculate the kind of damage he would do to them.

The sound of a warning bell broke through the tensions.

Though the Paladin Brigade and the townspeople were staring daggers at each other until now, pandemonium broke out on both sides.

—*What just happened!?*

Someone shouted:

“It’s a monster, a gigantic monster! It’s a 《Sand Whale》!!”

Those words were tantamount to the coming of a great disaster.

†

There existed a sand ship that could have more than a hundred people riding on it, known as a “Galleon-class” ship. It had three sails, with three masts to go along with them, each mast standing sixty meters high. The sails of the giant ship were fully spread out as it moved ahead at full speed.

It was running away from something.

There was an enormous crossbow on the deck of the ship, its drawstring operated by a handle, but no one bothered to use it to fend off their pursuer—and that was simply because there was no point. All they could do now was pray to God and the wind.

The Galleon-class ship, a vessel much larger than the one Diablo and the others had taken, was being chased by a monster several times larger than even that, throwing clouds of sand in the air as it pursued them. It was a beige-colored whale, swimming through the ocean of sand. Its exterior was as hard as stone, and could even rival dragon scales in toughness. It was said the weapons of the races couldn’t put a single scratch on it. The length of its body totaled more than 300 meters long, and it boasted the largest mouth of any monster in this world. If it plunged itself into the town, it could devour the buildings in droves. Large enough that it could be described as a mountain or an island, it was a monster that rivaled a Green Behemoth or Sea Serpent in size.

The townspeople, the Paladin Brigade—none of that mattered anymore. Screams of terror, cries of indignation, and public outcry all mixed together.

“Why is it heading toward town!?” “We hafta get outta here!” “To where!? We’re not gonna make it now!” “The Paladin Captain might be able to do something!” “Someone hurry up and get him!” “Oh gods, it’s already this close! It’s overrrrr!!”

Since Batutta was the governor of this town, it seemed the people thought he might be able to do something about this.

It was considerably close now, and they could all see the Sand Whale clearly. It probably wouldn’t even take it ten minutes to arrive.

Someone with good eyesight was squinting at the horizon, and Diablo managed to overhear the ensuing conversation:

“Oh, goddammit! Those idiots are heading toward the town on a sand ship!”

“They’re running away to *here*!?”

“No, they’re a bit off course for that! Sunnuva—they’re trying to force the monster into town so they can get away!”

“Whaaaaat!?”

The sand along the ground began to shake, making them feel the tremors in the earth. Was it because the Sand Whale was approaching? He could have never experienced anything like this back in the game.

Rem and Shera came running over to him.

“D-Diablo, how should we handle this!?”

“Waaaaah! Whadda we do, whadda we do, whadda we dooooo!?”

Lumachina was with them as well. She was staying stoic and keeping a stiff upper lip, but he could tell she was afraid by how her knees were slightly trembling.

Even though they knew it was pointless, the townspeople began to flee for their lives. The Sand Whale was approaching from the east, so they were all running to the west.

—If I use that Flight spell I practiced earlier, I could get only us out of here...

The townspeople staggered over to Lumachina, gathering around her. There were about thirty of them kneeling around her in prayer.

“God...” “Save us...” “Please, O Lord...”

Lumachina was at a loss; she didn't know what she should be doing. But that was understandable. They were all suddenly put face-to-face with a situation that could be called a calamity, after all.

Diablo sighed.

—This is why I'm so bad when it comes to religion. Whenever something beyond your control happens, everyone just starts turning to God for help. Even if you can't do anything by yourself, there are so many other things you could do, like cooperate with other people, or find someone else you can rely on.

Though they knew it to be pointless, even the other people who were running westward were better than these believers.

—But the reason I think like that may just be due to how little a presence religion actually has in Japan.

In any case, running away by themselves using Flight magic was probably out of the question. Lumachina wouldn't be happy with that, for sure.

Diablo stood on the sand, fixing his glare on the Sand Whale. It kept getting closer, kicking up clouds of sand as it moved.

—Ah, well, guess I'll get to it!

“Rem!”

“Y-Yes!”

“I'm going to use Multiplex Magic, so be wary of our surroundings! This leaves me fairly exposed.”

“Understood...! I will send out Summons that you can use as a shield.”

“Shera, you protect Lumachina. Don't let any suspicious characters get anywhere near her. If they do, shoot them.”

“A-Alrighty, will do! I'll send out my Turkey Shot to keep a lookout, too!”

Lumachina stood surrounded by believers (at this point, it should be all right to call them that) who were all offering prayers to God. He didn't think they would try to approach her, but this was all just to be on the safe side.

Shera pulled out her black bow, positioning herself next to Lumachina. She sent her round, plump Summon flying in the air. Though it was slow and weak, it had the ability to observe everything that was happening from up in the skies.

Rem sent out her 《Stone Golem》 and newly acquired 《Iron Gorilla》, two Summons that excelled in tank roles.

Diablo concentrated on his target, but his hands were shaking.

—Damn, this is making me nervous...

This was a spell he used even less than Apocalypse Abyss, after all. He was locked in place until it activated, and he wouldn't be able to cast other spells. He learned it because of how much of a punch it packed, but for a solo player like Diablo, he didn't really get the chance to use it.

—Can I use a spell I don't really have that much experience with in this world?

He remembered the first time he used magic, right after he had been summoned to this world. His pulse was pounding.

Diablo aimed Tenma's Staff at his target.

—Multiplex Magic!

It was a technique that layered three spells on top of each other, firing them as one. It took an inordinate amount of time to prepare, and would be canceled if the caster took damage while in the middle of it, draining them of a huge chunk of MP. On top of that, it was treated as a "special ability" which meant he couldn't use it multiple times in a row. If it didn't activate now, it would be a little while before he would be able to try again.

Basically, this was a make-or-break battle.

Diablo began chanting the first of the three spells:

"Darkness blacker than black, born from the gloom of the underworld, congregate and form into an arc... 《Dark Arc Seek》!"

The tip of his staff acting as a central point, a black light extended both above and below it. It now looked something similar to the bow Shera carried, but its size was incomparable. The lower end of the arc was entering into the ground, while the upper portion was several times taller than Diablo's full height.

“Void that swallows all of creation, come to me... 《Black Hole Arrow》!”

A pitch-dark sphere appeared from the top of his staff. It was a hole, one that devoured everything, light or otherwise.

The tremors were growing more intense, and the tents were starting to collapse. Cracks appeared in the stone buildings as the fleeing ship passed along the side of the town. They really were trying to push the Sand Whale into the town so only they could escape.

—But I need to ignore that for now.

A monster as large as the city itself was approaching them. The Sand Whale cracked open its cavernous mouth.

Diablo's heart rate skyrocketed. Terror welled up inside him, and his breathing became more uneven. This was far different from what he remembered seeing on his computer screen!

—W-Will a single person's magic...even work on a monster that's as big as a mountain!?

Doubt appeared in his mind.

—No, now's not the time to falter! This is just like when I first used magic here! Believe in yourself, me! No— believe in Diablo! I am Diablo, a Demon Lord from another world!!

“Arrow of the void, pierce through and wedge between the boundary of heaven and earth! 《Gravity Abyss》!!”

He bellowed with all his might and sent the sparkling black arrow flying toward the gigantic monster.

The atmosphere itself trembled as the crystallization of these three ultimate spells scored a direct hit on the tip of the Sand Whale’s nose.

Then the spell activated. A black hole ripped away the monster’s tough hide. The skin tough enough to rival dragon scales was being torn from its body, sucked away into a hole so small that it couldn’t even be seen from a distance.

The monster’s advance was stopped.

—Oh, hell yeah! It worked...!!

While posing victoriously on the inside, Diablo kept his gaze fixed on the monster, a cold expression on his face. Before long, there came a reverse shock wave, and a force that pulled everything toward the monster reached the town. It felt as if something were pushing him from the back.

Sand was starting to gather toward the Sand Whale. Tents went flying, and small objects were knocked all over the place. A portion of a broken stone wall went sailing toward it. Even people were almost dragged away by the vacuum, but the others around them managed to grab hold and pull them back in.

The typhoon-level winds continued to blow with tremendous fury. Diablo could hear the sound of solid objects breaking in rapid succession as the Sand Whale was slowly falling into the super-miniaturized hole.

The air shook.

“OOOOOOOOOOOOOOORRRHHHHHHHHHN!!”

—Is that the scream a large monster makes?

At any rate, this thing was huge. *Too* huge.

The spell’s effect was going to run out soon, and it still hadn’t brought down

the enormous beast.

Diablo mulled over what other magic he could use. He wouldn't be able to use anything like Multiplex Magic for a while, so another high-damage spell that would be effective against a Sand Whale would have to be...

†

A flash of light came from a corner of the town. Diablo could sense that it was imbued with a substantial amount of SP.

It was a long range Martial Art.

He didn't know what weapon the user was wielding, so the name of the technique was unclear, but it was definitely a Martial Art, no doubt about it. It didn't have the same power as the Multiplex Magic Diablo used since spells were the only things that possessed enough power to change the terrain itself. Warriors, however, were able to use their special attacks one after the other.

Flashes of light were fired off in quick succession. Its advance halted and the plating on its snout stripped away because of Diablo's Gravity Abyss, the Sand Whale was taking steady damage from the assault.

On top of that, the next he knew, the sound of gunfire was coming from behind him. It was a noise that shook Diablo to the core, like he was listening to a tank fire its main gun. Not only did it reach his eardrums, but it was something he could feel with his skin.

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

The sound kept repeating. And then, about ten seconds later, the Sand Whale's body exploded. A chain of explosions rocked the monster's hardened exterior, as if someone planted bombs under its skin.

BAM!

BAM!

BAM!

—Could this be...a magi gun!?

One of the higher level classes available for an Archer who invested in their Magic stat was called a 《Magi Gunner》. Considering the average level of this world was so low, he thought they might not even exist... Yet here they were.

Magi guns were a unique type of weapon used by Magi Gunners that fired bullets imbued with magic. By adding more magic when firing, they could unleash attacks which had enough power to rival that of Elemental spells.

When the class was first implemented in Cross Reverie, it was so overpowered that it had to be constantly nerfed. Players bashed Magi Gunners when they were first introduced to the game, being called everything from “broken,” to “official cheats,” and even “balance breakers.”

—If the original version of the class exists in this world, they’d be a real pain in the ass to deal with.

The air shook once more at the scream of the Sand Whale. Writhing in agony, it sank down into the sand.

—Did we beat it? Or did it just run away? There aren’t any post-battle results to see like in the game, and you don’t get any EXP or item drops, either.

Because of this, he couldn’t confirm the outcome of his battle just now; but at least the tremors were growing smaller, and the sense of oppression that gripped the town was slowly disappearing. One thing was for certain: The Sand Whale had left the vicinity of Zircon Tower.

“Hmph...” Diablo snorted. “What a nuisance that was.”

“...You really are...unbelievable...” Rem wiped the tears from her eyes.

Shera came rushing over to him, throwing her arms around him.

“Yay!! You’re amazing, just like I thought you were! You’re really amazing, Diabooooo!!” As she pressed her chest up against him, it felt like he would slip into a goofy smile at any second.

—Ah, this is bad! A Demon Lord can't get dopey over having a busty Elf all over him!

Gritting his teeth, he peeled Shera off of him. As he tried to push her away, he ended up grabbing a handful of something soft and squishy.

“Mngh...” Shera moaned softly. “Diablo, you perv.”

—Th-That wasn't on purpose, I swear! But making excuses isn't like a Demon Lord at all. A Demon Lord would never get flustered over boobs! Never! But...then, what do I do!?

As he stayed deep in thought, his fingers stayed latched onto Shera's chest, pushing and pulling against it. She turned red all the way to the tips of her long ears.

“Ah, mm... Diablo, you can't... Not when we're outside... Everyone's watching...”

—So as long as we're not outside, then it's OK!?

Rem pulled Shera off of him. “Just how long are you going to keep doing that! It's indecent!”

The soft sensation left his body. He was relieved, but also somewhat sad, in a way...

Diablo cleared his throat, avoiding eye contact with Rem's reproachful gaze. At the very least, he was glad that he protected the town.

Turning around to look—Lumachina was kneeling down, her hands clasped together.

“My God... Thank you! You have my sincerest gratitude!”

Those words were meant for Diablo, it seemed. But the people around them would never think that Lumachina was referring to the Demon in front of her as if he were a god. They simply joined hands and looked upward, offering words of gratitude to the heavens.

Any normal person may not have even understood that Diablo had used magic. After all, the only thing people thought Elemental magic could do in this world was conjure up a slight breeze.

Despite everything, the Paladin Brigade still remained.

Diablo shrugged his shoulders with a snort. “Hmph. You’re all still here?”

“Hngh!?”

When he called out to them, they finally broke out of their collective stupor. Putting himself in their shoes, they were probably all prepared to die after the sudden appearance of the Sand Whale. Then came along this Sorcerer who dared to stand and fight, and who actually managed to repel the beast using Elemental magic with power that surpassed their wildest expectations. It wasn’t hard to imagine them freezing up in shock because of that.

—Well, I guess there was also that Martial Art and the barrage from the magic gun.

Diablo aimed his staff at the Paladin Brigade.

“I will say this now...but I won’t be holding back. For those prepared to turn into ash, take up your swords.”

In a panic, the bear-like Pantherian threw his lance to the ground. He fell to his knees, head bowed; the other members of the Brigade did the same.

““W-We’re sorryyyyyy!!””

“...Very well.”

It looked like they now understood the difference in their strengths.

But it didn’t end with this. In a way, something even more troublesome than the Sand Whale had just appeared.

†

They arrived on horseback and dismounted—a Paladin. Not one of those fake-looking Paladin Brigade members, but an *actual* Paladin. They wore a familiar set of armor, and carried a spear that was practically overflowing with magic energy. It was a man in the golden years of his life, somewhere around the

same age as Galford. He sported a plentiful beard that came down to his chest.

I thought he might be a Dwarf...but I guess he's Human.

Discrimination against the races was particularly strong back in the capital, with only Humans being appointed to any office of importance. There were no Dwarves among the Paladins, most likely.

The Paladin looked at Diablo, his already stern expression becoming even more grim. If Galford had a “strict teacher” vibe going for him, then this guy was more like an “ornery boss.”

The Paladin opened his mouth. “Was it you who used that magic earlier...?”

Before Diablo could answer, the Paladin Brigade sprung back to their feet.

“Boss!” They started to get cocky again.

The man Diablo sent flying earlier swaggered toward him. “Heh heh... Hey, Sorcerer! You acted like you're such a big man, but all that's over now! This is the captain of the Paladins, the great Sir Batutta! Whaddya thinka that!”

“So, it's as I thought.”

Diablo was half-disappointed. The captain of the Paladins they went through all this trouble to meet was the leader of a group of thugs.

Batutta stayed silent.

—That's right, I guess he asked me a question.

Diablo gave a shrug. “If you are referring to the spell that drove off that Sand Whale earlier, then yes, that was my magic. And you, did you use some kind of Martial Art?”

“Aye. That was my 《Seven Star Blast》.”

“Hm!?”

—A level 130 technique!?

There was still a gap in their stats, but depending on the situation and how he conducted himself in battle, there was a chance he could overpower Diablo in a fight. Considering how much MP Diablo had lost, he anticipated it to be an extremely uphill battle for himself.

His palms were getting sweaty; it had been a while since he felt this tense.

The Paladin Brigade wore smug looks of triumph on their faces.

“Get on your knees, Sorcerer! Know your place! Even if God forgives you for speaking so lightly to Sir Batutta, we won’t!”

“Tch...”

The Brigade was absolutely ecstatic, getting carried away more than ever before. In a world like this where level 50 was considered “the strongest in town,” Batutta was level 130 or higher. The Brigade members were making the mistake of thinking that their boss was peerless.

—Doesn’t look like I’ll be able to avoid a fight.

As he glared at them all, Lumachina came to Diablo’s side.

—Whoa, whoa, whoa, that’s too dangerous!

“Is this person Batutta, captain of the Paladins?”

“Bow down, woman!!” One of the Paladin Brigade members shouted at her, his eyes bloodshot.

Lumachina ignored his screams of fury, looking only at Batutta. “What is the meaning of this, Captain? What is this Paladin ‘Brigade’ these people claim to be a part of? I do not remember giving permission for anything like that to come about. Did the Cardinal Authority allow it? Or is this something you went and created of your own accord?”

Batutta had a curious look on his face in response to what she said. He stared at her intently; suddenly, beads of sweat began to form on his forehead.

“You... You are...”

A member of the Brigade unsheathed his sword. “Leave this to me, Boss! I’ll show them how they should be acting toward the captain of the Paladins!”

“...Could you be...the High Priest? You are the High Priest, are you not!?”

“I believe this to be the first time we meet.”

“I’ve seen you once when you were just a babe! Th-There is no one else who could possess such divine light!”

“I see, back when I was an infant... Forgive me for being impolite.”

Lumachina joined her hands together. The sparkling holy symbol of the Church appeared in front of her chest, emanating a warm, gentle light that spread through the area. The townspeople watching from a distance let out voices of wonderment, joining their hands together and kneeling down.

“O, Lord...” “She’s the High Priest...” “Truly a venerable sight to behold...” Diablo could hear them whispering.

“M-My humblest apologies! I cannot apologize enough for my disrespectfulness!” Batutta knelt down as well.

“Wha!? Huh!? Huh!?!?”

Seeing their boss bow his head to someone else completely flustered the Brigade members. Their eyes kept darting back and forth to Lumachina. Seeing how bad they were at catching on, Batutta roared at them.

“You insolent fools! Are you aware just who you stand before!? This is the saint who delivers the word of God to all churches—the High Priest, Lumachina Weselia! Know your place and prostrate yourselves, NOW!!”

“Eeeeeek!?”

They seemed more afraid of Batutta’s threatening attitude rather than the meaning of what he said. With both hands on the ground, the members of the Paladin Brigade placed their foreheads against the sand.

Lumachina breathed a sigh. “God is watching you... Rather than bowing your heads to me, I am sure they would rather you reach out and help those who seek it.”

“Urk!? E... Eep...”

The breathing of the man from before grew wilder. He was sweating profusely as his body shook uncontrollably. It seemed like he finally realized just what they were guilty of doing, and who they had done it to.

—You reap what you sow, guys. That should be a good pill for them to swallow.

Diablo let out a scornful laugh as Rem and Shera huddled up on either side of him.

“...Well, I feel a bit better now.”

“Ahaha, me too!”

Diablo couldn't disagree with that.

“...Would this be the end of our escort, then?” Rem asked.

“She should be fine with this guy, right?”

Diablo decided not to answer that question just yet.

†

“Seems like you have some amusing visitors, you swindlers.”

“Hm!?”

Batutta took up his spear, looking above him. Diablo glared upward as well, only to see someone standing in the middle of the air. They stood in the sky with nothing to stand upon, their red cape fluttering in the breeze.

—*Is that...《Crimson Wings》!?*

It was a piece of equipment that was about as rare as Diablo's Curtain of Dark Clouds, and was imbued with Flight magic. Resting on her shoulder was a gun almost as long as the entire length of her body.

—*Was she the Magi Gunner from before!?*

“Say what you will about me, but any insults to this person and your head is as good as mine, Laminitus!” Batutta thundered his response.

“You will add ‘the Great’ when referring to ‘the Great Laminitus,’ you petulant swindler.”

It was then Diablo finally noticed—

—*A woman's voice...!?*

The Magi Gunner with the vivid red cape descended from the air.

—Yup, they're definitely a woman.

She alighted softly on the sandy ground, showing her perfect mastery of Crimson Wings. You could almost smell the sex appeal coming from her when she landed. She looked to be about the same age as Diablo—and just as arrogant, judging by her attitude.

With only a glance at Batutta, she turned her attention toward Lumachina.

“We are the governing sovereign of Zircon Tower, Fanis Laminitus. And you would be the High Priest, We assume?”

Her scarlet lips curled ever so slightly.



Something felt...off about the way she acted.

“...Given the way she talks, it seems she thinks of herself more as a ruler rather than a governess,” Rem whispered into Diablo’s ear.

“Hmph, so I see.”

Galford acted self-important in his own right, but he still acted like someone in service to the royal court. Laminitus, on the other hand, had the attitude of an empress.

—I don’t remember someone like her being the governess here, though...

Lumachina joined her hands together. “It is just as you have said. I am Lumachina Weselia, the High Priest. A pleasure to meet you, governess.”

“Heh... To think the leader of this group of swindlers was just a young girl.”

“What do you happen to mean by ‘swindlers’?”

“Though they do nothing of significance, these whelps still demand donations. We do not allow parasites inside our domain, which means We do not approve of religion here.”

“Huh!?”

“However, We would allow them to do business if they paid they’re due taxes.”

“What are you saying!? The king of Lyferia, Delouche Xandros, ordered that it was the duty of all governors to build churches and make them exempt from taxation...”

“Hah! As if We care about that useless coward here! If the king has a problem with Us, then he can try coming here himself!”

—I see... The king has never come to the dangerous former Demon Lord’s Domain. He wouldn’t be so easily able to stop Laminitus’s rampage like that.

Not only that, but Laminitus was quite the capable person herself. Based on her magi gun assault from earlier and how she acted with Batutta, Diablo would

say she was level 100 or higher for certain. Even when he'd gone against a party of six level 150 players in Cross Reverie, Diablo still managed to come out on top. But even then, the fight had been adjusted for the number of people he was facing, and he was able to use a near infinite number of items. He'd already used up the rarer potions that were left in his pouch.

—I wonder how Magi Gunners work in this world. I can't just take her on if I don't know at least that much.

The whole foundation Magi Gunners were built on was the ability to “shoot bullets infused with magic, and for the effects of those spells to activate when the bullet was fired.” When the class was first implemented, they could fire as many of them as they wanted in a row, rapid-fire. Though bullets were consumable items, the destructive DPS they packed was in a league of its own, enough that they threw off the balance of the game.

Diablo also suffered from being slapped in the face with the wads of cash the pay-to-win players threw at the game because of it.

—Thinking back on it, I faced off against a couple of rankers who went on a shooting spree while dual-wielding magi guns specced out for damage. That was a bit dicey since they took down half my HP in an instant... But they were a couple wearing 《Wedding Rings》, so I annihilated them, of course!

After various tweaks and rebalances, the latest versions of magi guns had their rapid-fire ability toned down, and took a huge nerf to their damage. But since they didn't cost MP to use in battle, Diablo still considered them to be fairly powerful.

“I understand you have your own opinions on the king, but the people under your governance are suffering, are they not?” Lumachina said in return.

“That is because these swindlers are making demands for their much undeserved ‘donations.’”

Batutta grimaced, the conversation having been turned back to him. “After having our church taken away, and considering how you're determined to tax us one way or another, asking for donations from our followers is our only recourse. Priests have their own lives to live as well!”

“Hmph... Wasn’t God supposed to be someone who handed out wine and bread?”

“Th-That’s...”

Lumachina shook her head. “Even if it is possible for God, it is not for people. We are believers in God, not gods ourselves.”

“Oho? So you think to lecture Us... High Priests sure seem to think the world of themselves. If you really are such an important person, then let’s test if you truly do have the protection of God on your side!”

Laminitus took the magi gun from her shoulder, aiming it at Lumachina.

“What are you...!?”

“Tch!”

Diablo prepared to use a spell—but Batutta already thrust his spear forward. Close quarters combat was where Warriors truly shined.

“You insolent fool!”

The tip of his spear was met with nothing but thin air. Laminitus landed softly about ten paces away from him.

It happened so fast—before Diablo could even unleash his magic, Batutta charged ahead with his spear, while Laminitus jumped away from him.

—These guys are pretty strong.

Their speed was something to be admired.

Laminitus boomed with laughter. “Ahhhaha~! It seems you do not believe in God after all! That is why you tried to protect Miss High Priest over there. If there really was a god, they would protect her without you having to do anything, would they not!?”

“What falsehoods!” Batutta roared.

On the inside, Diablo was almost convinced as well.

Lumachina shook her head. “You are mistaking God as some sort of all-powerful armor. Someone with an understanding as shallow as yourself lacks the qualification to speak on the subject.”

“We are mistaken...you say? And *shallow!*?”

She sent a vicious glare at the High Priest, but Lumachina stayed calm and composed.

“Listen well—God is *always* watching. Whatever ill deeds you perform will eventually beget disaster, either for yourself or for your descendants. But say, for example, you were to shoot me here and I were to die because of it, that may be God bringing his judgment down on me for my own sins. Or, it may be that God is calling me back to them in the heavens. It is impossible for people to fully understand the way God works.”

For the briefest of moments, Lumachina glanced over at Diablo.

—I see now... Since she thinks no one can understand how God works, maybe that's why she accepted my ridiculous story?

No, based on the way she conducts herself, Lumachina's a sharp one. Did she maybe catch on to my lie by now? If so, how much does she know? Did she figure out I was a shut-in gamer who was only pretending to be a Demon Lord!? ...No, there's no way she could... I'm really bad with people I can't get a read on what they're actually thinking...

“Hmph...” Laminitus snorted. “Then that just makes you a fool who depends on such trivial things! Is there anyone who would trust in an unreliable weapon on the battlefield? And you claim disaster will eventually befall Us? What absolute trite! We'll just shoot down that ‘disaster’ as well!”

“That isn't what—”

“You're only a bunch of swindlers, taking advantage of the insecurities of the masses to relieve them of their monies.”

“But miracles for healing and bountiful harvests do indeed exist, you know?”

“You should receive appropriate compensation for things that have actual use. That's what it means to do business, and We would allow you to do so—as long as you paid your taxes!”

Lumachina sighed. The conversation between the deeply pious Lumachina and the utilitarian Laminitus wasn't going anywhere. If this dragged out any longer, she might just end up with a magi gun pointed at her again.

Batutta stepped between them. "Lady Lumachina, let us leave it at that for today. Laminitus, we don't use the church here, and we aren't evading our taxes. I should think we've done nothing to earn the scorn of the governess, don't you agree?"

"Hmph... We never had business with you to begin with, and that High Priest is nothing but an extra headache as well. The only reason We arrived was to search for whomever used that curious spell against that monstrous beast earlier."

—Wait, that's me...!!

An unintentional scowl came over Diablo's face. Judging by the way Laminitus acted, anything would probably cause a headache for him.

With acting that could only be called a sublime performance, Batutta shook his head. "I came here looking for them as well...but it seems no one knows who it was."

"Oho~h?"

Laminitus fixed her eyes on Diablo. It felt like he should avoid looking at her. It was like getting dirty looks from someone who looked like trouble while you were walking around town. But acting like a chicken wasn't something a Demon Lord would do, which is why he glared right back at her.

"What do you plan to do after finding this Sorcerer?"

Laminitus twisted her mouth into a grin. "If We can use them, then We will make them into Our subordinate, of course! If they won't listen, however, then We will teach them the difference between our powers by force!"

"Aren't you a nasty piece of work."

Without meaning to, he let how he really felt slip out. He thought she would

fly off the handle at him, but instead she gave him a playful smile.

“Hm-hm-hm... If they truly are such a powerful person, then surely they would stand before Us someday.”

—*They already are, though...*

She was most likely already aware of this. However, Laminitus cut the conversation short, turning her gaze to the west.

“It seems Our subordinates have caught the idiotic sand ship that caused a scene earlier. We shall continue our conversation another day.”

She rose back up into the air, whipping up sand as she did, and flew off toward the western area of Zircon Tower.

“...Phew... It seems you’ve had quite a troublesome person set their sights on you,” Rem said, sounding drained.

“Don’t say that. You’re just going to make me even more exhausted,” Diablo said with a shrug.

“I had no idea what she was saying most of the time!” Shera said with a giggle.

—*Man, I should learn how to be that carefree...*

Batutta knelt before Lumachina once more. “Allow me to apologize again for my impoliteness. It seems the ineptitude of my subordinates has caused you trouble as well. May I invite you to join me at my estate?”

“Thank you. I have something I wish to discuss with you as well.”

“I’ll prepare a sand skimmer at once.”

Diablo and the others, or rather, Lumachina and her supposed attendants, were led aboard the camel-drawn skimmer and headed toward the northern area of town.

†

For the time being, they continued to travel along peacefully.

The camels stomped along the sand with their thick legs. The wheels of carts and wagons would sink in the sand here, so it seemed they used these sand skimmers instead.

Batutta held the reigns while Diablo and the others were sitting down in their seats. They came upon a giant building that faced the main road. It was made from stone just like everything else around it, but was also built upon a firm stone foundation, and had a bell tower that rose up into the sky. Though it was located in the middle of a desert, stained glass lined its walls.

It was quite the imposing church, and was surrounded by a perimeter of local guards, preventing anyone from coming close.

Lumachina placed a hand over her mouth. "Is that the church?"

"Yes. It was closed at Laminitus's orders, though..." Batutta answered.

The governess labeled the Church as a bunch of "swindlers," and granted them no special privileges.

"Why would she order it closed?"

"That church was constructed by the former governor in accordance with the king's decree, so ownership of the building falls to the governor. We were told if we wanted to use it, we would need to pay rent for it. We were quoted a price at the going market rate, but...it was still too much to pay from just our donations..."

"Which is why you don't use it, I see."

"There were some townspeople who voiced their desire to let us use the church, but... Well, you have already seen what kind of person Laminitus is like."

"Yes, that is a problem." Lumachina cast her eyes downward.

"...I have never heard of a governor saying anything like that to the Church before," Rem whispered. "I find asking them for rent to be a perfectly reasonable request, however."

"Yeah, you're right," Shera agreed.

“...What were churches like back home for you in the Kingdom of Greenwood?”

“Hm? We have the Sacred Tree and stuff, I guess?”

“...Umm... What about sleeping quarters for the priests?”

“They sleep back in their own homes. The priest right now works a tea house as their main job. They only do priest stuff during festivals or when someone needs prayer.”

“...Is that enough?”

“Yup, pretty much.”

Since the two didn't exactly seem to be on the same wavelength, Diablo cut into the conversation.

“The reason they can get away with being a priest as their secondary occupation is because of how small Greenwood's population is. That, and they don't have many ceremonies to speak of. Elves are long-lived, but the birth rate among them is low.”

“...I see. So that's why they can be a priest as a side job.”

“Churches in the Kingdom of Lyferia are not only for prayer, but can also provide services like accepting cash deposits and providing education for children. Though it may be the same in name, churches are given different functions depending on a country's population and the systems in place for that country. It just means there is no use in simply comparing them.”

“...As I should expect from you, Diablo, you possess a shocking amount of insight for these things.”

“It's only normal.”

“...It's embarrassing to admit, but I only know of Faltra and a few of the neighboring towns. I have never left the Lyferian Kingdom, after all.”

“Hm, I see.”

TV and the Internet didn't exist in this world, and the price for books was expensive to boot. Though Diablo only possessed general knowledge of the

government and the economy, the chance to have learned about them was a valuable one.

“You can’t lead worship or do much of anything else without a church, correct?” Lumachina asked Batutta.

“We have set up tents in the northern part of town as a replacement for a proper chapel.”

“May I see them?”

“It’s...a bit out of the way. Perhaps after taking a rest first?”

“Right now, if you please.”

“Understood.”

If he was being honest, since he used so much MP already, he wanted to grab something to eat and dive into bed as soon as possible. But still, he understood how Lumachina felt. He stayed silent, being jostled about in his seat as the sand skimmer kept moving.

Zircon Tower was a small town compared to Faltra. It took them almost no time at all to reach the northern part of the city. There was a multitude of small tents set up here, about one hundred of them in total.

Lumachina made as if she were going to stand up.

“All of these are Church tents?”

“Only about half of them. The rest were set up by Adventurers, merchants, and the like.”

“Even so, there are quite a lot of them.”

“But it is still not enough... My apologies, Lady Lumachina, but it would be a problem for us to get any closer.”

“And why is that?”

The sand skimmer turned around.

“That is the line for people waiting for prayer,” Batutta said as he pointed.

There was a line of around three thousand people milling about in front of one of the tents that was a size larger than all the rest. It was composed of all sorts of men, women, and children, including Humans, Elves, Dwarves, Pantherians, and Grasswalkers.

“There are a ton more of them at the moment because of the disturbance with the Sand Whale earlier. Usually, there are about a thousand or so waiting.”

“Do you really have that many people of faith waiting?”

“There are some who don’t have a chance to pray, even if they wait the entire day. It gets chilly at night, so we tell them to come back the next morning...but most of them never leave the line.”

“But why would they do such a thing!?”

“Not only is this the former Demon Lord’s Domain, it is not a rare occurrence for monsters like the one from before to make an appearance. There is no barrier to protect the town, either. There are many people for whom this is a necessity and because of that, we get lines as long as the one you see now.”

“I see...” Lumachina nodded in response.

Diablo scanned the surroundings. As he did, he spotted a tent that was a bit removed from the others, with about three people lined up in front of it. Judging by their appearances, they seemed to be rather well off.

“Hmph... Tell me, is that also a line for prayers?”

“...It is.” Batutta seemed reluctant to answer.

“What is the meaning of this?” Lumachina asked him.

“That line is only for those who make large contributions. Lady Lumachina, I ask that you do not misinterpret this. Not only are we lacking in priests, but this is a very dangerous area we live in. We cannot cater to everyone that wishes for prayer. It is only natural higher priority would be given to those that offer larger donations, since that is a sign they require prayer moreso to give such amounts.”

Lumachina kept her head down as she thought in silence. She was smart, so she understood that she couldn’t simply judge Batutta as corrupt because of

this.

“Isn’t this kinda weird!? Shouldn’t you just start with the people who lined up first!?” Shera said with a frown on her face.

“...If that were the case, what would you do if those who weren’t in a hurry held up the line for those who were?” Rem answered in a low voice.

“Mmm, I mean, I would feel bad for them and all, but isn’t it more fair for them to just line up faster?”

“...That just means people with more free time on their hands would be treated better. Would you call it fair for those who work hard and offer their money to be given the cold shoulder over those who don’t work and invest only in their time?”

“Oh, hmmm.”

“...The Church would be happier for people to give them larger donations rather than have them line up earlier. That’s why the people who give the most are given preferential treatment in return.”

Rem had an accurate understanding of the matter at hand. What Lumachina was struggling with probably had to do with the incident of the mother and child from earlier. Though they requested a modest donation for prayer, there were still those among the line of three thousand who couldn’t afford to pay even that. But would it be appropriate to say that to Batutta now? The lack of priests was a fundamental issue for them; it wasn’t something that would be so easily solved by her speaking the honest truth alone. Not only that, but she had come here to ask him for shelter from the Cardinal Authority.

—Good people really aren’t suited for managing these kinds of operations

“This should be enough, is it not?” Diablo spoke up. “I grow weary of staring upon these lines of believers.”

Batutta nodded. It seemed he didn’t want to drag out the topic of the lines any more than needed.

“You all must be tired after such a long journey. Though I can only provide modest arrangements, I will prepare food and a place to rest for you.”

“Yay!” Shera raised her hands in the air with a cry of glee.

The Church’s policies aside, Diablo was honestly grateful for food and a place to sleep.

“...To have one thousand people lining up as a regular occurrence really is just too much,” Lumachina muttered.

†

Leaving the collection of tents behind, they returned to the center of town. They arrived at the building where Batutta and the other priests were staying in.

“We’re renting this place at a low price from a merchant. He’s a man of profound faith.”

The sturdy stone walls of the house were enormous. It was enough to make one think the place was big enough to use as a church...

But there was no spacious place for worship to be found, as it was built just like a normal house. It had an entranceway and a lobby with the dining and living rooms at the center, and rooms for personal use located around it. The windows were kept closed to not let the sand in, keeping the inside of the house dark. Because of that, the oil lamps that hung from the ceiling were kept lit even during the daytime. In this town, it was easier to get hold of oil rather than candles. There were paintings adorning the walls, and a white cloth covered the table. It was almost easy to forget they were in a town in the middle of a desert.

Ten maids bowed deeply in greeting. The one standing at the head of the group was a raven-haired beauty with a large chest. She was a stunner, and looked to be a bit older than Diablo.

“Welcome, High Priest Lumachina Weselia. I am the head maid, Shiliu. If you should need anything, please let us know.”

“Very well,” Lumachina responded with a nod.

Seeing her so composed in these kinds of situations really gave the impression

she was a part of the elite of society. If a maid were to ask him “if he should need anything” as a greeting, Diablo would have become a nervous wreck. Mei’s shtick back at the Peace of Mind Inn made him think of the place as more like a maid café, but that made him feel more at ease.

Now that he thought of it, they’ve been away from Edelgard for about two weeks now, but no one figured out who she really was, right? She wasn’t causing trouble for anyone, was she? Was Edelgard doing all right with her job?

—If only they had phones here or something...

The head maid led them into the dining hall where Lumachina sat at the head of the table, with Batutta sitting beside her. Diablo was sure they were going to be treated as lowly guards or attendants or whatever, but they were treated as guests, to his surprise.

Thinking back on it, Batutta pretended not to know Diablo was the Sorcerer Laminitus was looking for earlier. Maybe he was treating Diablo well for bringing Lumachina here and repelling that Sand Whale from earlier?

—But still, I don’t know if I can trust him just because of that...

Just as he was wondering what kind of food they would cook up in the middle of a desert...a reddish soup made from beans was served.

—/Is this...!?

Lumachina and Batutta brought their hands together. Diablo did the same.

“O Lord in heaven, we thank you for this blessing today.”

He never prayed at mealtimes before, but it became a habit after he began traveling with Lumachina. Whenever she prayed, the rancid smell would disappear from old meat, and dirty rainwater would turn fresh and crisp, so he didn’t mind it.

He used a silver spoon to bring the soup to his mouth. An intense tingling sensation and the fragrance of the spices reached the inside of his nose and caused his brain to go numb.

—*Th-This is really...!!*

“Spicyyyyyy!!” Shera yelled.

Rem nodded. “...Yes... But it’s quite good.”

“This is curry!” Diablo suddenly blurted out. “And rice, too!”

This flavor really brought back memories. It was different than the curry he had back in Japan, of course, but this was definitely curry. The soup had no thickness to it, as well as a strong, invigorating scent of herbs. It was something closer to a Thai curry. The rice was fluffy and the grains were firm; when drenched in the soup, it became the perfect texture.

“How do you like it, Lady Lumachina?” Batutta asked with a smile. “I’m sure this must be quite different from dining in the capital.”

“It’s delicious.” She downed her third cup of water as she answered.

“Was it spicy?”

“Y-Yes, just a little... But it’s still very good.”

In the end, Shera managed to get down three servings of the curry, still making a commotion over how hot it was, while Diablo ate five.

†

After they finished eating—

Diablo was kicking back in the living room drinking tea when Lumachina came over, along with Rem and Shera. Lumachina changed into the garments of the High Priest, which Batutta apparently prepared for her. It was a flowing robe that used a white and red base for its colors. The long cloth covered her down to the knees, but he could see her smooth skin from between the gaps.

“Wh-What do you think?” she asked, a slight blush in her cheeks.

“Hm. It suits you,” Diablo said with a nod.

Looking delighted, Lumachina broke out into a smile. Rem and Shera were happy, too, as they had apparently helped her change.

The High Priest outfit Lumachina wore back when she and Diablo first met had already been torn to shreds by the time he ran into her, so this was his first

time seeing it like this. And while he knew he probably shouldn't look at it that way...it was a pretty alluring outfit.

—At any rate, who would have thought there would come a time in my life where I'd be complimenting a girl's clothes. I thought these sort of things only happened in dating sims.

He suddenly noticed that Lumachina was holding the back of her left hand with her right.

“What's wrong with your hand?”

“Oh, it's nothing to worry about...”

It was scraped up and had turned red.

“...Back when you were fighting with the Sand Whale, it seems she fell over trying to pull people back in when they looked like they would be sent flying away,” Rem followed up.

“I see. That seems like something she would do.”

—Oh crap... That was because of my magic! I'm sorry!

Lumachina gave a bashful smile. “It doesn't hurt anymore.”

“Can you not use healing miracles on yourself?”

“Ah... Actually, miracles of recovery or healing do not work on me. No matter who I have praying for me, it does not even heal a scratch.”

“What!?”

“Usually miracles work on priests as well, but strangely enough, they have no effects on me... I wonder if this could also be called part of God's plan.”

—Is that the price she pays for using such powerful miracles? That's a pretty harsh restriction.

“What about healing potions?”

“I have used one, a long time ago when I was hurt, and it did heal me.”

“I see. Then you should carry this.”

Diablo took a potion from his pouch and offered it to her. Lumachina's eyes

opened wide. With trembling hands, she took the potion from him. To her, this was a blessing from God himself.

“Th-Thank you so much! I will treasure this my entire life!”

“No, use it when you need it, all right?”

Diablo leaned back in his chair. Rem and the others sat down as well. In almost no time at all, the maid, Shiliu, brought out tea for everyone.

Batutta led the group to four bedrooms that were prepared for them. As the most important person among them, Lumachina was allocated a special room in the innermost part of the house.

—We’ve been treated pretty well so far... But if anything were to happen, it’s gonna be harder to deal with if we’re all split up.

“Go with her,” Diablo whispered into Rem’s ear.

With a small nod, she stepped forward. “I have been instructed to attend to Lady Lumachina’s every need. I don’t plan on interfering with any of the other maids’ duties, but may I have your permission to stay in the same room as her tonight?” she asked Batutta.

“That’s right!” Lumachina picked up on what was going on. “I would be terribly inconvenienced if I don’t have Rem close by me.”

Batutta looked Rem up and down. “The High Priest needs a slave?”

“...Y-You are mistaken. This is the result of an accident when I tried using Summoning magic. I am not a slave,” Rem insisted.

“It’s true!” Lumachina added in her defense.

There was no way the captain of the Paladins would doubt the word of the High Priest.

“So you’re a Pantherian... Adventurer, I would assume? Or a Summoner?”

“...Yes.”

“Normally, anyone who doesn’t possess the qualifications of a priest wouldn’t be allowed anywhere near the High Priest... But I will make a special exception.”

Though he seemed reluctant, Batutta allowed it. He promised to move Rem's bed into Lumachina's room. Diablo was relieved.

—I guess I'll just leave her to Rem tonight.

Nighttime—

Diablo had a tub and a jug of water brought to his room. By sitting in the tub, he would use the cool water to wash away the dirt from his body. It was a bit of a luxury to bathe as such in this world; usually, he would just wipe himself down with a wet cloth and that would be it.

"I just want to soak in the tub every once in a while... Maybe I should make myself a proper bath sometime?" he thought, taking off his clothes.

A knocking came from his door, and he started to get strangely nervous.

"Who's there?"

"Ehehe... You up, Diablo?"

"Shera, is it? Enter."

Diablo sat cross-legged in the tub, his back facing the opening door as Shera came inside.

"Oh, you were taking a bath."

"Yes... Did you already wash yourself?"

"Nope, not yet."

To think she would come see him before washing away the sweat from their long journey...

"Was there some sort of problem?"

"I just can't calm down when I'm by myself is all."

Shera got lonely pretty easily, so much so that she even became a Summoner just so she wouldn't have to travel alone.

"Hmph... Do as you like."

"Yay!"

He heard the sound of rustling fabric. Wondering what it was, Diablo turned around to look at Shera: She began taking off her clothes.

“Wh-What are you doing?”

“Huh? I haven’t washed yet.”

“I’m using it right now, so...”

Shera really seemed like a princess when she did things like this. It wasn’t that she was taking things at her own pace, but more like she wasn’t paying attention to what was happening around her.

“Then let’s use it together! I’ll wash your back for you!”

—Oh no no NO! Taking a bath with a girl just means breaking out in a cold sweat for me, you know!?

“I-I can do this much by myself.”

“No need to hold back!”

“...Not, it’s not that I’m holding back...”

Shera already stripped down as he was talking, getting into the tub.

“Is this a little too cramped?”

“...Ah, hng...”

He could feel her coming up behind him. This wasn’t the time for his role play; right now, he was completely alone in a room with a naked girl. He couldn’t get any words to come out of his throat.

Shera, on the other hand, seemed to be in a good mood as she hummed a little tune.

“Hm~ Hm-hm-hmm~♪ Oh, where’s the towel?”

“...There isn’t one.”

Now that she mentioned it, he forgot to ask someone to bring him one.

—It would probably be best to call for the maid in a situation like this. I kinda wanted to avoid that...but maybe I’m overthinking it? Is it normal for men and women to bathe together in this world? There’s no way that could be right...

They didn't have a "bathing" feature in the game, so he had no idea.

"Then I'm gonna wash you without using a towel, okay?" Shera said casually.

"...Huh?"

"Using someone else's skin to wash yourself makes your own skin smoother and shinier than if you use a cloth, you know?"

He never heard of anything like that before...

To him, Shera's skin was smoother and more beautiful than silk. Shera scooped some water out of the jug, using her wet hands to stroke Diablo's back. They were cool and soft, and felt amazing. It was completely different from using a wet towel to wipe himself down.

"How's that, Diablo?"

"Ah, yes... Not bad, I'd say."

It was somewhat embarrassing since they were both naked, but this was the first time he had a bath as pleasant as this.

Shera poured water over herself as well. "Ehehe, I got sand on me, too."

"No helping that, considering where we are."

"How about I get us both clean all at once?"

"Mm?"

Right when he was wondering what she was going to do, he felt two soft lumps press up against his back as she poured water over them.

Diablo froze up.

—Th-These things being pressed against my back... Are they...!?

"Mm..." Shera let out a soft moan. "Your back is so rugged, Diablo."

"Ah... Hm..."

"I'm gonna start rubbing, okay?"

She began moving her body up and down, the soft sensation moving up and down with her. Diablo's heart rate jumped up in leaps and bounds, and he could even feel Shera's pulse. Her body was getting warmer.

“Hah... Mn... Diablo... You’re not giving off magic energy or anything, are you?”

“Y-You could tell if I was just by looking.”

“I’m starting to feel all warm now... I wonder why?”

“Hwah!?”

It felt like he would let out a weird voice at any moment. For someone like Diablo, who lacked experience with girls, there was no way he would keep his cool as Shera rubbed her chest against his back making those seductive noises.

—What would a Demon Lord do now? What would a Demon Lord do after having a girl press her boobs against him and say she’s getting all warm!?

No Demon Lord he could remember went through an experience like this.

“I’ll wash the front of you, too, okay?” Shera said softly.

“Ah...!?”

—I can get the front by myself, thank you very much. Or, wait, would a Demon Lord pass on an offer like this? What would they do!?

While he was still trying to figure out what to do, Shera reached around as if she were going to embrace him, stroking his muscular chest with her wet hands.

“Mnh... Your body is so solid, Diablo. It’s all...muscle.”

“Th-That’s because I’m level 150.”

“Oh, gotcha.”

—I wonder? Is there actually a connection between muscles and levels?

He no longer knew if she was trying to wash him or do something else entirely. She moved her smooth hands over his chest...

She touched his neck...

Her hands went down to his stomach—

Then even lower.

“Ah... Wai— Th-That’s...” Diablo could no longer make words. The breath

caught in his throat.

Shera's hands had reached a very sensitive spot.

"Hm? This is pretty stiff, too..."

"...!?"

"Is it a tail? Do Demons have tails? It's really hard...so maybe it's a horn? You have them on your head, too, after all."

"Yes. That's. True."

"Um, let's see... I should probably wash this, too. Here...we...go..."

He couldn't speak anymore. The only sounds left were Shera's breathing and the noise of her wet hands sliding over his skin. As she rubbed, a burning heat kept building up inside of him. An electric current ran through the recesses of his brain.

The muscles in his back twitched and spasmed, the convulsions passing on to Shera.

"Oh, did that hurt? Was I doing it too strong?"

".....No."

"Really? Thank goodness!" Shera hugged him close. "Ehehe~ Taking a bath together is pretty fun!"

"Oh. Yes. Very."

The strength left his body. Though they had only been rinsing off together, it felt more like he got dizzy after spending too much time in a hot bath.

—Wow... It feels reeeeeeally good to have someone else wash you by hand.

It was more of an arid climate here, which meant they both dried off right away. Brushing the sand from his clothes and putting them on, he laid down in bed. Already in her pajamas, Shera jumped in as well, wrapping her arms around him. Remembering what happened earlier, Diablo looked away, on the verge of blushing.

“It’s been a while since we did anything like this, right, Diablo?”

“Because we had to camp outside for a while, yeah. Hurry up and go to sleep.”

“Yeah!”

He closed his eyes. He fell asleep almost immediately, thanks in part to how much MP he already used.

If only this peace could last forever...

Interlude 2

Right before bedtime, Lumachina's room—

Rem was inspecting her equipment on top of her bed. She returned her Summon crystals to her pouch, leaving her knife and iron gauntlets near her pillow.

“Rem... Thank you.”

“Where did that come from, Lumachina?”

“I was able to make it this far thanks to all of you.”

“...If you want to show gratitude to anyone, then you should say it to Diablo—and make our payment in gold coins, if possible.”

“Oh, yes, that's right.”

“...Well, we can worry about that after everything has calmed down.”

Rem felt a presence on the other side of the door. She quickly took up the knife and hand protectors she left near her.

Batutta had come to visit, carrying an oil lamp with a candle in it. Perhaps because it used some kind of plant-based oil, but there was a faint floral scent coming from it.

The room was just big enough that you could walk from end to end in about ten steps. There was a large bed for Lumachina, and a smaller bed for Rem to use. It was also furnished with a stylish, round table with two chairs. The window was closed, hidden behind velvet curtains.

Rem stayed on top of her bed. She summoned her Shadow Snake in secret, having it hide in the shadows of her bed. This took a drain on her MP, but the one thing she had to avoid more than anything else when going up against a high-level Warrior was being defeated before getting a chance to summon

anything.

—Now I can get the jump on him in case anything should happen...

Even if she couldn't win against him, she could get Diablo's attention if she made enough noise; he would come for sure.

Lumachina sat in one of the chairs.

"Have a seat, please." She offered Batutta the chair opposite her.

"My thanks." Placing the candle on the table, he slowly sat himself down as well. He bowed his head. "My apologies for disturbing you in the middle of the night."

"I do not mind. It was a great help to have you prepare food, clothes, even sleeping arrangements for us. Thank you."

"I'm happy I could be of use to you."

"I have something I wish to speak with you about."

"Yes, I have come here exactly because of that. I would think it better to not have any outsiders present, though...?"

Batutta fixed his icy gaze upon Rem, but Lumachina held up a hand to stop him.

"Rem is trustworthy, and the same goes for the others."

"They have my trust for bringing you to the former Demon Lord's Domain, but... Very well, then. Now, what's happened? Why would someone as important as the High Priest show up in a place like this unannounced, without an envoy of Paladins, and wearing civilian clothes?"

"Well, you see..." Lumachina had a pensive look on her face. After thinking it over for a moment, she opened her mouth again. "Batutta, please answer what I asked you this afternoon: What is the Paladin Brigade? Who gave approval for it?"

"My deepest apologies, but that is something I created of my own accord."

"You know that is not allowed?"

“I shall humbly accept any punishment in store for me. However, these are dangerous lands. The priests cannot walk through the town on their own, and even their own families are put in peril.”

“Is that true?”

“Because the priests are able to use miracles of God, there are things that appear much more frequently here compared to the east side of the kingdom, like monsters, people who would force them to assist with exploring dungeons, and bandits that would come after their savings.”

“So I see.”

“At first, I employed Adventurers in order to protect them against such threats... But there were even those among them who attacked the priests.”

“How could they...!”

Adventurers belonged to the Adventurer’s Guild. If they were to commit a crime such as assaulting the person they were supposed to be protecting, not only would they be banished from the Guild, they would have a bounty on their heads with wanted posters put up all over the country.

Batutta let out a sigh. “There is no shortage of those who come here without considering the danger, putting their want of money in the short-term above their own lives.”

“I see... So that’s how it was.” Lumachina looked down, disheartened.

His story made sense to Rem. The former Demon Lord’s Domain was teeming with danger. You had to be a bit abnormal to think of coming here without being forced to.

“In order to protect the priests and the defenseless townspeople,” Batutta continued, “I hired competent people I could trust. Those are who I came to call the ‘Paladin Brigade.’ The sense of privilege that came about because of it, as well as their violent behavior, was a result of my lack of leadership. Please understand that asking for people with manners on top of all that is difficult in a place like this.”

“It’s more like they are lacking in morals than manners...”

Lumachina turned to look at Rem. The reason she didn't ask anything of a complete outsider like Rem wasn't to make it seem like she didn't believe what Batutta was saying. The fact she turned to look at Rem was most likely because she was unable to come to a decision herself.

Rem gave a small nod.

—I don't think he's lying...

There was an exceedingly small chance that anyone with proficient combat skills in a region like this also possessed a decent moral compass. It was impossible to compare them with people who lived prosperous lives in safe towns.

"So that's how it was." Lumachina placed a finger on her lip. "I'm sorry for not knowing how the world works."

"N-No, not at all... In fact, I should be the one apologizing for employing people using methods outside the policies of the Church... And for the numerous indignities caused by my lack of leadership."

"I understand now that you had your own circumstances to deal with."

"You have my gratitude for that."

—Maybe he's more trustworthy than I expected...?

Rem's impression of Batutta had changed significantly since she first met with him. She originally thought him to be the leader of a group of bandits, so it didn't exactly leave a stellar impression on her. They came so far just to meet him, so she was definitely let down by it.

But after hearing his reasons, everything he told them made sense. The reason they requested donations was a combination of their lack of priests and because of the strange governess of this town; even the oppression caused by the Paladin Brigade could be explained due to how dangerous the region was. Using violence against the town's citizens was by no means a good thing, but it was probably better than having the priests be assaulted by evildoers or monsters.

It seemed Lumachina trusted Batutta as well.

“Are you aware,” she brought up a different subject, “of the current state of the Church back in the royal capital?”

“I wonder? It’s been thirteen years since I was sent here to the former Demon Lord’s Domain. Back then, they were a bit ‘forceful’ when it came to collecting donations, I suppose... That’s the only thing that truly bothered me.”

“Do you know anything about demanding for undeserved donations?”

“What’s that all about?”

“I have heard rumors of those who go around claiming certain houses to be cursed, performing unnecessary exorcisms, and providing charms to ward off evil. Then they demand exorbitant donations in exchange, as well as things like accepting bribes from merchants.”

“That is outrageous!” Batutta folded his arms.

“I have also heard talk of a certain group of Paladins murdering those they accuse of being Demon Lord worshipers in the name of ‘purification’...”

“Impossible! Surely that must be some kind of fabrication!?”

“It would be nice if that were the case...”

“At the very least, there were no such deviants among the Paladins when I was still at the capital!”

Rem almost cut in to the conversation. It was only half a month ago that she barely managed to avoid being killed by Saddler after he accused her.

The wound on her right arm grew hot.

But what would happen if she were to claim she was suspected of being a Demon Lord worshiper and almost killed, without any evidence whatsoever? Not to mention Saddler was “missing” ever since the turmoil caused by the Demon Lord’s resurrection. He was killed during Krebskulm’s rampage, and because of Diablo’s ultimate spell, not even his corpse remained. If she were to let anything bad slip out, she could end up drawing unnecessary suspicion to herself. There was also the danger of worsening Lumachina’s position.

Rem stayed silent and continued to listen to the conversation.

Lumachina opened her lips. “Not all Paladins are people of deep faith... That is the unfortunate truth. There was someone among them who would do anything for the sake of money.”

“Are you certain of that?”

“I... Well, I was almost killed by a Paladin, one who had received orders and payment from Head Cardinal Vishos to carry out the deed.”

“Wh-Wh-What did you say!? Is that the truth!?” Batutta half-rose to his feet.

“Do you accuse me of lying...?”

“N-No, of course not! Oh, how could something like this happen...” Batutta’s face flushed red in anger, a vein bulging out on his forehead. His brawny shoulders and clenched fists were shaking. “Those fools! Has the Cardinal Authority really become so corrupt!?”

“Sadly enough...”

“Damn them!” His rage didn’t appear to be an act.

Rem still didn’t trust Batutta completely. Something about the Paladin Brigade was still bugging her.

—But at least it doesn’t seem like he’s connected with the Cardinal Authority...

If he was actually after Lumachina’s life, there would be no reason to keep up this act.

“In order to escape from the threat of an assassination,” Lumachina continued, “as well as to have you become a force to reform the Church, I have come here to Zircon Tower to ask for your help.”

“I see.”

“I know I am being unreasonable in what I ask of you.”

“No, not at all. I am grateful you trust me so much. Rest assured, be they Paladin or Cardinal Authority, I will not let them lay a hand on you, Lady Lumachina!”

“Thank you.” An expression of relief crossed her face, and she breathed a sigh.

As if she was reminded of something, Lumachina also asked: “There is something called the ‘Death Knell disease’ here, right? Something that causes ‘X’ marks to appear on those afflicted.”

“That’s correct. Once nine marks appear, their life is forfeit. It is a truly terrifying sickness.”

“Sickness? Do you think of it like that as well...?” Lumachina asked, a dubious look on her face.

“What do you mean?” Batutta cocked his head to the side.

“That is not a sickness, but a curse, is it not?”

A chill ran up Rem’s back. Goosebumps covered her skin, and the fur on her tail bristled.

—*A curse...!?*

Batutta put a hand on his forehead. “It can’t be... Are you sure that isn’t some sort of mistake?”

“No, I have heard the voice of God, and that is no disease. I could also smell water, and the only thing that comes to mind for water in this town is the lake.”

“That is true...”

“I have also seen a darkness lurking deep underground... It seems there is something beneath the town.”

“I see... So you’ve seen that much.”

“There is a large-scale curse threatening the people of this town, Batutta. We must find a way to deal with it as soon as possible.”

Rem kicked off the bed, leaping forward. “Why didn’t you tell that to

Diablo!?”

“Huh!? Eek!”

Rem yanked Lumachina out of the chair, dragging the priestess behind herself as protection. At the same time, she sent out her Shadow Snake.

At this Summon’s level, it wouldn’t even work on someone like Saddler, which is why she wasn’t expecting it to be able to “Bind” Batutta. But this would give her time to call forth one of her more powerful Summons. Even if he managed to defeat one of her mid-tier Summons, it should still be able to cause a considerable uproar.

—Then Diablo will be sure to notice what’s going on...!

But then, Shadow Snake managed to wrap around Batutta’s body; it hadn’t been destroyed.

“Hm.”

“What!?”

The Bind was successful, leaving Rem bewildered. Batutta looked at her, curious.

“What kind of nonsense is this, Adventurer?”

“...Based on what Lumachina has said, if there really *is* someone putting a curse on this town, then only you could be the culprit,” Rem asserted.

Lumachina let out a gasp in shock.

“...For the love of...” Rem raised her voice. “Are you supposed to be smart or idiotic!? You have too little regard for the greed of other people!”

“Huh?” Lumachina let out.

“Just who benefits from having the curse spread!?”

“Wha? B-Benefit...?”

“The people suffering from the Death Knell disease are the ones offering donations to the Church!”

“Ah...!!”

Lumachina's eyes opened wide. It seemed she never imagined the reason behind the curse was for gathering donations; but how could she? That pure innocence was exactly why she was the High Priest.

The expression on Lumachina's face said she couldn't believe what was going on, so she turned to look at Batutta for answers.

"What...does this mean?"

"This is all just the ravings of that Adventurer over there. Me, using curses? Impossible! If it truly is a curse, then it's most likely the work of someone who bears a grudge against the people of this town."

"Someone who bears a grudge...?"

"Yes. A person's hatred can be frighteningly unimaginable at times."

Rem shrank back.

—He's a tough one...

She thought him to be the main perpetrator, but she couldn't say anything to refute his excuse.

"Person..." Lumachina wore an unhappy look on her face.

"Hm?"

"Why did you think it was a person doing this?"

"Ngh..." Batutta was speechless.

"All I said was that the Death Knell disease was a curse. Why did you think one of the races is the caster?" Lumachina asked again.

Batutta gave a wry smile. "That is—how should I put it... After hearing it was a curse, my first instinct was to suspect it was the work of one of the races, that's all. This is the former Demon Lord's Domain, so of course there is the possibility it could be the Fallen. Forgive me, I merely jumped to conclusions."

He still continued to reject their suspicions. For him to keep denying it after coming this far almost made Rem think this could just be a misunderstanding on her part.

Lumachina joined her hands together. "Is that true? Can you swear to God?"

“Of course. I swear to God I am not taking part in any curse.” Batutta joined his hands together as well.

“Very well... Then I shall believe you.”

“I’m relieved to hear your understanding.”

Rem was conflicted. Of course it would be for the best if he was someone they could trust. She didn’t want to think someone this strong in a position like this was the perpetrator in such an incident.

—But he was all too suspicious.

That said, if Lumachina trusted him, then there was nothing that could be done. Even though she finally managed to Bind him, she had to call off her Shadow Snake now.

“Now then, call Sir Diablo and Shera here, if you please,” Lumachina said with a smile.

Batutta was stunned. “Why would you want to do that?”

“We are all going to visit with the victims of the Death Knell disease. You said they still line up in front of the tents even at night, correct? If we were to heal all those people, I am certain I would be able to receive even more tidings from God. With a curse that strong, we are sure to find where it is coming from in no time at all.”

“I-Impossible!”

“Do you think I am not capable of doing so? Batutta, the one standing before you is the High Priest.”

“Mngh...”

“What is the matter? Would there be trouble calling for him...? Never mind, we will go ourselves. Rem, let’s get ready to head out.”

“Heh... Just as I would expect from you, Lumachina, you sure can get things done when they need to be.”

Rem was on high alert. Her fingers slowly reached toward her pouch where she kept her Summon crystals.

“I see,” Batutta let out a sigh. “So you can do even that... You have surpassed my expectations.”

He fixed his glare on them.

Rem’s vision wavered.

—What’s happening...!?

She was overcome with an intense drowsiness. She fell to the floor, hands first, and Lumachina quickly collapsed behind her. Her concentration was severed, and the summon spell for Shadow Snake was broken. It turned into a crystal, falling to the floor with a thud as well.

—What’s going on!? I have to hurry and use my next Summon...!

Rem managed to grab another crystal, but couldn’t gain the focus needed to complete the summoning.

—Just what is happening...?

Rem lost her fight with Saddler when he used his Subtle Chant on her; because of that, she had Diablo instruct her on their journey here to take countermeasures against it. Even if she couldn’t see magic energy, she trained herself so she could sense when someone was using a spell.

“E... Even though...you haven’t done, anything...”

“You’re right, I haven’t. I did manage to slip you some sleeping drugs, though.”

—The candle on the table. He must have done something with the oil it used, and made it so it wouldn’t work on himself. His strange excuses were just a way to buy time, to render them powerless without raising a commotion.

“Ngh...”

—I hate this...

Batutta came closer. He stood over Lumachina, who was already unconscious, and stomped on her head with his leather boot.

“Insolent girl!”

“St... Stop...” Rem said with a whimper. She reached out and grabbed Batutta’s ankle—but that was just about all she could do.

Batutta glared down at her. “I will not kill you here. Your magic energies are strong, and you have a sense of justice as well. You are both very promising.”

“Ngh...”

What does he mean by “promising”...?

Without getting the chance to ask him, Rem fell into a deep sleep...

Chapter 4: In Hot Pursuit

Diablo was dragged out of his slumber by something shaking him.

“Mmnggh...?”

“Diablo, someone’s here... Hey, wakey-wakey~”

His brain was still muddled.

“Mmnggh... I already said I wasn’t going... And my stomach hurts, and stuff...”

“Wait, it does!? Are you okay, Diablo!?”

The high-pitched voice worked its way into his consciousness like sand. The fog cleared from his head, waking him up.

—What the hell did I just say!?

“Whoa!?”

Diablo jolted upright, and Shera’s eyes went round.

“Waah!”

“O-Oh, it’s you.”

“Does your stomach hurt?”

“Urk... Um, no... Th-That was...an expression from my world...! I don’t know how you heard it when I said it in this world’s language! I guess it just kinda came out!”

“Oh, gotcha! Thank goodness.” Shera smiled in relief.

The light of an oil lamp flickered in the corner of the room. The window was shut, and there was no light coming through the gaps.

“It’s still night, no?”

“Yeah, it is... But it looks like there’s someone else here.”

“What?”

Shera pointed toward the roof. A small, shadowy figure was perched on top of one of the beams.

—*They’re inside the room!?*

It felt like he would freak out at any second, but he feigned a calm composure. A Demon Lord never panicked.

He picked up Tenma’s Staff from the side of the bed. “Hmph... So you look down on me. You must have a strong desire to be turned to ash, don’t you?”

“Wait, wait! It’s me, boss!” The person waved their hands frantically.

The shadowy figure clambered down from the darkness of the ceiling, standing on the floor in the light of the oil lamp. It was the Grasswalker, Horn. Diablo kept his staff pointed at Horn, not letting his guard down.

“Just who are you?”

“Aw, don’t be like that! I said I was an Adventurer, right?”

“Oh? Do Adventurers around here go exploring in other people’s homes, is that it?”

“No, you got it all wrong! I came here to meet with you, boss!”

“He’s got curry smudged on the corner of his mouth!” Shera pointed out.

“Oop—” Horn wiped his mouth.

“You were *absolutely* stealing right now!”

“I-I just happened across some leftovers in the kitchen when I was looking for your room, that’s all! No harm in snatching a quick bite to eat, right? Ahaha...”

“You’re not exactly inspiring confidence in me. I’m not going to any dungeon, not until things settle down first.”

Not to mention, if the newly discovered dungeon was Diablo’s personal area, it would have all the rare items he stockpiled from Cross Reverie inside it. Judging by the sub-standard equipment he saw everywhere else, his treasures were powerful enough to throw the military balance of the world into disarray. If they were to go there together, he would have to give Horn a share of the

rewards. He didn't think he needed anyone else's help, anyway.

"Leave. *Now.*"

"Just hold your horses, chief... I've got another killer story, just for you."

"And just what would that be?"

"I saw Paladin Captain Batutta load up your friends on a sand skimmer."

Diablo's heart pounded against his chest.

"What...was that...?"

"Are you talking about Rem and Lumachina!?" Shera's eyes were wide open as well.

Horn puffed out his chest proudly. "It's not every day you see a female priest and a flat-chested, black-furred Pantherian, so it's gotta be them. Mm-hm-hm, so you didn't know, did you! See? I can be pretty useful after—"

Diablo leapt out of bed and advanced on Horn. "When was this!?"

"A-About thirty minutes ago. It all looked kinda against their will since he was using the Paladin Brigade, so I thought I should let you know about it..."

"I'm tearing you limb from limb if you're lying, you got that!?"

Grabbing Horn by the arm, Diablo burst into the hallway. Two maids were out there, wearing expressions of shock on their faces.

"Wh-What seems to be the matter? If there is something you need, then we —"

"Move! If you don't want to get hurt, then *stay out of my way!*"

"Eek!?"

He ran through the hallway, dragging Horn along with him. Shera chased after the two, begging them to wait up all the while.

The members of the Paladin Brigade had formed a wall in the middle of the

hallway.

“Beyond here lies the sleeping quarters for the High Priest! We will not allow you to pass, no matter who you are!”

“I’m only here to confirm her well-being!”

“We will not allow you to pass if you do not have Sir Batutta’s permission! We have this place firmly under our protection, so leave this to us!”

“Don’t think for a second you’ll make it out unharmed if you get in my way!”

“Boss, above you!” Horn yelled.

There was a hole in the ceiling of the hallway, with Paladin Brigade members lying in wait inside of it. They jumped down, swords drawn.

“Yeeeeeargh!!”

—*You* fools!

“《Air Block》!!”

Diablo unleashed a spell in which the air itself turned solid as concrete, forming an invisible barrier. Those who dropped from the ceiling crashed into it, their swords breaking with a high-pitched clang. Their faces took a good beating as they smacked into the invisible wall, teeth flying everywhere.

“Ngwah!?”

The other Paladin Brigade members drew their swords.

“All right, he shouldn’t be able to use another spell right away! Kill him!!”

“Just who do you think you’ve made enemies with, you fools! 《Freezia》!!”

Unlike the other Elemental Sorcerers here, Diablo could rapid-cast mid-tier spells up to level 99.

As Freezia activated, a shock wave of cold spread throughout the hallway. The entirety of the Brigade was frozen on the spot.

“Woooooargh!? Guh, gah...!?”

The white wave of frost even enveloped Diablo and the others, stinging their cheeks and ears. The walls shattered from the radical drop in temperature,

slanting the building, while the crystals of ice formed a bud, which bloomed into a frozen flower. Diablo thought freezing everything would have been better than causing a fire, but this may have turned into a bigger disaster than he hoped for.

—Well, it's fine. I guess. As long as they're still alive, they can get the priests to heal them.

“We’re going!”

“R-Right!”

Dragging Horn along with him while Shera shivered from the cold, they all headed deeper inside.

He kicked down the locked door—

The beds were empty, and there was a crystal on the floor. One of the chairs had been knocked over, and an oil lamp still burned on the table, some sort of flowery scent coming from it.

Diablo clenched his fists. For Batutta to carry off a Summoner of Rem’s caliber without making any kind of disturbance...

“You’re better than I gave you credit for, Batutta...”

“Wh-What do we do!” Shera’s shoulders were shaking. “Are Rem and Lumachina gonna be, k-kill—!?”

“If he just wanted to kill them, there would be no reason to take them away.”

—He also would have done it sooner.

According to Diablo’s theory, Batutta wasn’t a part of the Cardinal Authority. He had so many chances: back on the sand skimmer, when they were eating, when they were changing... Of course, Diablo had been on guard for that, but...

“If he was going to make some kind of move, I would’ve thought he’d do it a bit later. I didn’t want to stir up trouble yet, either.”

“What do you mean, Diablo?”

“First, I needed to recover... Not to mention the Death Knell disease.”

“Huh?”

“It’s no disease, but a curse.”

“Whaaaat!?” Both Shera and Horn raised their voices in shock.

Diablo had seen a curse that caused the same effects during a limited time event back in Cross Reverie where “X” marks would show up on NPCs. If players didn’t destroy the enemy stronghold within a period of nine days, a great deal of people would die. It was a serious plot line that he remembered the message boards getting all worked up over. Players would tackle the specified dungeon and defeat the event boss there, which would fill the “event gauge.” The plot of the quest line would change as they filled the gauge.

It should go without saying, but Diablo completely cleared the event, of course, snagging himself a “Death Knell Disease Charm” as a reward.

—It didn’t have any effect in battle, but was just an item that got you an in-game movie of all NPCs thanking you...

According to the quest in the game, the curse was the work of the Fallen, with there also being a dungeon located underneath the church. But in this world, the church was closed off by the local guards, so there was no way any Fallen would be lurking underground there. Not to mention that, in-game, the governor of Zircon Tower wasn’t a woman with such a “colorful” personality like here.

There were a bunch of things that didn’t quite match up. But at any rate, Diablo couldn’t ignore the Death Knell disease.

Batutta never showed hostility against them, so Diablo thought it would be all right to have him take care of Lumachina as they solved the mystery behind the sickness.

—Why did he decide to make his move now?

He could have never guessed that Batutta revealed his true colors as a result

of Lumachina pressing him earlier.

“In any case, right now, bringing Rem and Lumachina back takes priority.”

The incidents with the Death Knell disease would have to wait. According to what Horn said, the girls were put aboard a sand skimmer, which meant they were most likely somewhere far away from the mansion.

Sand ships couldn't be sent out during nighttime since there were gigantic monsters out in the desert, and they were generally much more active at night. The ships would have to sail at full speed to get away from them, but there were no kinds of powerful illumination equipment in this world. That just meant they would be sailing along at breakneck speeds through a pitch-dark desert, which pretty much only ended with the ship crashing into a sand dune, a rock, or some other obstacle.

That signified Rem and Lumachina having been taken somewhere else within this town.

“We don't have time to mess around... Guess I'll have to make one of them spit it out.”

Diablo returned to the hallway. Freezia's effects had begun to fade, with the members of the Paladin Brigade suffering from the sub-thermal damage cowering on the ground.

Picking out someone who looked like they could still speak, he pointed Tenma's Staff at them.

“Now choose: Tell me where Batutta has gone, or have this place become your grave.”

†

Rem opened her eyes. The flame of the lamps around her flickered. She tried to move her hands, but quickly realized she couldn't.

—I'm tied up with rope...!?

Rem's arms and legs were bound to a cross-shaped post, as if she had been crucified.

"Wha—!?"

"Good, you've finally come to..."

Hearing a voice coming from next to her, Rem turned to find Lumachina strung up the same way as her.

"Lumachina!? Wh-What is this...!?"

"I only just came to my senses myself, so I'm not too sure..."

"...I see."

Rem looked over their surroundings. The ceiling was remarkably high; so much so the light from the lamps didn't reach all the way to the top. It seemed they were inside some sort of cone-shaped building. This cylindrical building had an interior wide enough to fit an entire church inside of it. There was a platform in the center of this space, which was where Rem and Lumachina were being forced to stand. They were captured by Batutta, who seemed to be involved in conducting some kind of curse.

—Does that mean he wants to use us as some sort of sacrifice...?

A chill ran up her spine at the thought.

They were surrounded by giant lamps in all directions, each aglow with wavering flames. She couldn't see beyond those lamps due to how bright they were, but her eyes were slowly getting used to it.

Something was out there, moving around. That's when she became aware of the ragged breathing sounds around her.

"...What could that be?"

"I do not know." Lumachina's voice was firm. "But I have quite a bad feeling about this..."

Rem focused her gaze beyond the light of the lamps: a person. She could see the shadowy figures moving around, illuminated by the flames. They were many, and seemingly of all different races. There were many more than she

previously thought.

—And a majority of them were naked.

“Wh... Wha...!?” Rem cried out in shock.

“Huh? Just what is it they are doing...?”

Lumachina’s eyes adjusted—

There was a mass of men and women entangled with one another, enough to cover the entire floor.

Rem reflexively averted her eyes. “...A-Are they... Are they doing...what I think they’re doing...?”

“What do you mean?” It seemed Lumachina was completely oblivious to what she was talking about.

Rem’s cheeks flushed red. “...I can’t explain...”

“Huh?” Lumachina asked, bewildered.

Rem couldn’t bring herself to say what it actually was. Just what was going on here?

The breathing of the people here grew even more ragged. The building was filled with the moans of the men, and heavy breathing of the women. The sound of flesh hitting flesh mixed with the slopping noise of sweat and fluids, and an almost bestial smell hung in the air.

Someone walked up the staircase to the altar...

It was Batutta.

He was still wearing clothes, which brought a modicum of relief to Rem. The girl that came along with him, however, was almost completely naked.

“I-It’s...you...!?”

It was Shiliu, the head maid with long-black hair. There was no trace of the maid outfit she once wore as nothing covered her chest or waist; though she

still wore a corset and shoes.

“Y-You’re indecent!” Rem’s shoulders were shaking.

Batutta threw his shoulders back as he laughed heartily. “I see you’re finally awake. I was wondering what I would do if morning came and you still hadn’t woken up.”

“Ngh... You deceived us!”

“If you wish to detest someone, then let it be Lumachina. She should have known that a sense of justice would lead to her own destruction.”

“I’m sorry, Rem...” Lumachina said in a feeble voice. “It looks like I’ve gotten you caught up in all of this.”

“...By no means. Our current situation was my mistake, and I’m sorry I couldn’t protect you.”

Rem had experienced many things during her time as an Adventurer, but she continuously fell for tricks and others’ deceptions.

—Am I just more naïve than I expected? Shera should be the only one in charge of being stupid around here...

With that slightly harsh thought floating around her head, she searched for a means of escape. But the restraints on her hands and legs remained tight, almost impressively so.

Rem ground her teeth. “...What are you planning to do with us, Batutta!?”

“Why, a ritual.”

“Huh...?”

“This is an altar, as you can clearly see for yourselves.”

“...You are absolutely vile.”

“I have never seen an altar as repulsive as this one,” Lumachina followed up. “This is a place full of wickedness, is it not!?”

“It is as you say,” Batutta answered with a nod. “This place is filled with nothing but ‘corruption.’” It seemed he no longer intended to keep it a secret.

“...So, it *is* a curse...”

Batutta took the jar the maid was holding and removed the lid. Inside was a thick, blackish-green fluid.

“This is the concentrate responsible for inducing the Death Knell disease.”

“What!?”

“By pouring this in the lake, the disease takes hold in a considerable amount of the townspeople who rely on its water to live here. Those people come to the church for help, which amounts to a large sum of donations coming our way.”

“...You are despicable.” Rem spat the words at him.

Lumachina was unable to bring herself to speak. She seemed to be in shock over how the person she once trusted was this much of a degenerate.

“How do you think this concentrate is made?” Batutta asked them.

“...As if we would know.”

“Can you not even guess? It seems you are lacking in imagination, Adventurer.”

“Mmph.”

This remark ticked her off something fierce, especially since she was just thinking over how she was getting tricked far too often. Batutta hitting the nail on the head like this was absolutely infuriating.

“The Death Knell disease concentrate is made from the essence of evil. Now, how do I get that?” Batutta let his gaze wander around the room. “Look at them... Just like wild beasts, right? Those people were once pious and devout believers. They were men pure of heart and chaste women, all possessing a deep faith and a strong sense of justice.”

“...Your point?”

“With just the slightest push, people fall so easily.” He looked at the lamps surrounding the altar.

—*Was there something mixed in with the oil of the lamps...?*

Concentrating, she smelled a sweet fragrance coming from them. Rem instinctively stopped breathing—but it was impossible to stay like that.

Batutta spread his arms out wide, the expression of pure ecstasy on his face lit up by the flames of the lamps.

“Adultery... Bloodshed... Gluttony... When people fall, they lose their divinity, which is when this very essence of evil is born!”

“Th-This is a place...to make people commit sin...?”

Rem looked around once more. It was true there were people doing things other than just intercourse. There were gluttonous people eating great quantities of the food left there to the point of vomiting it back up. There were also people with sharp, wicked instruments, raised high and ready to strike at others.

“S-Stop—!” But as Rem was bound to the altar, there was nothing she could do.

“This... This is just...too wrong...”

Tears dripped from Lumachina’s face. It must have been much more of a shock for her, having lived a pure and proper life thus far. Her body was shaking.

“Grab hold of yourself, Lumachina! This *is* wrong! What your sense of morality is telling you is not mistaken! Keep strong!”

“Oh, God... God...” she muttered as tears spilled from her eyes.

A faint light enveloped her body, the same as when she prayed.

Batutta shrugged. “According to my research, the stronger the divinity of a person when they fall, the thicker the evil essence they create. I should be able to make a much more potent formula from that.”

“...D-Do you really want to inflict that many people with the Death Knell disease?”

“No, there’s only one person I am truly after...”

“One...?”

“Laminitus.”

Rem was shocked. She wasn't expecting to hear the name of the governess of Zircon Tower in here.

“That woman is a danger, always acting as a hindrance to me. She also seems to be slowly catching on to this curse as well. This is why I must have her come under the effects of the disease.”

“...All just for that?”

“Laminitus doesn't drink the water from the lake. It seems she only uses it for her cooking, but it's harder for the curse to take effect like that. If I used a much more powerful concoction, then it should finally take hold in her.”

“...And what will happen to the townspeople when they drink the water!?”

“They'll all come down with the disease, most likely. That is when our priests will heal them—but only if they pay the proper donations first!” A twisted smile came over Batutta's face.

“Why...? Why would you commit such a grave sin!?” Lumachina glared at him with tear-soaked eyes. “I heard you were a pure and noble person... What has happened to you!?”

“Would you like some sort of tear-jerking story, will that satisfy you? Like if my family was killed, or I was betrayed by a friend, or maybe threatened by the Fallen, something along those lines? You imbecile, there's no reason as to why people fall. People are born as sinful creatures, full of avarice.”

Just as she surmised from his actions, Batutta was no longer a part of the Cardinal Authority; but that didn't matter anymore, seeing as he was a vile, loathsome man all along. To think he was spreading a curse that targeted people without discrimination, all for the sake of money and power.

“No matter what a person's true nature may be like, it is also those same people who are capable of putting themselves back on the path of righteousness!” Lumachina shouted.

“I'm looking forward to seeing the High Priest who believes she's so high and

mighty enough to lecture me giving in to lust and desire... Do teach her what true pleasure is, Shiliu."

"Hm-hm-hmm..." A seductive smile appeared on the almost naked head maid's face. "Is it all right for me to make her fall?"

"I have a visitor coming for me soon; I do not have the time to screw around here any further. This is not going to an easy person to handle."

"It almost sounds like you're waiting for a lover, Master. You're making me jealous."

"Just finish things up here. I'll be back for you after."

"Oh, I can't wait! What shall I do about the Pantherian?"

"She is his slave, so we may be able to use her to slow him down. Don't kill her, but do play with her however you wish."

"Understood, Master."

The only maid-like thing about the almost completely naked woman in front of them was how she bowed. Rem spat all manner of curses she could think of at her, but they were ignored. Flexing her fingers, Shiliu approached Lumachina, letting a prolonged, sensual sigh escape her lips.

"Ohh~... I'm getting so turned on thinking about making a beautiful girl like you fall."

"D-Do not get any closer!"

Shiliu's white fingers grabbed Lumachina's chest over her clothes. "You have quite the bulge here, don't you?"

"Ngh!?"

"And so *sensitive*! You always talked like such a stiff, I thought perhaps you were just one giant sexual dead zone."

"S-Stop... Let go!"

"Though you say that now, once you get a taste of my caressing, you'll be begging me for more."

She revealed a long, dangling tongue, with a length so monstrous, it was

enough to make you question if she was actually Human herself. It was longer than any Dwarf's, who were known for the lengths of their tongues, and looked like it reached down her entire throat.

“Mmn... I'll lick the deepest parts inside you...”

Shiliu reached toward Lumachina's clothes, sliding a hand up her skirt and tearing away her underwear.

“Eeeeeek!?”



Suddenly, the ground began to shake.

The cylindrical building swayed, sand trickling down from high above. Rem looked up toward the ceiling.

—*An earthquake...?*

There was some kind of uproar going on above them. Then, somewhere close to the ceiling, a door opened. Lumachina did mention there was something underneath the town... That must mean they were somewhere underground.

Rem had a feeling she knew what was coming. The despair that took hold of her chest cleared away, just like the clouds in the sky after rain.

“...Diablo...”

†

According to the information Diablo squeezed out of the Paladin Brigade, Batutta’s whereabouts were somewhere on the western outskirts of town. There were a seemingly infinite number of tents there, with countless believers lined up even though it was the middle of the night. He couldn’t afford to search each tent one by one, so he devised a plan.

“Shera, call your Summon. You will observe everything from above with your Turkey Shot.”

“Huh? But it can’t see that much at night... It’s pretty much blind in the dark.”

“It’s going to become bright soon enough.”

Diablo raised Tenma’s Staff and pointed it toward the cloudy night sky. He unleashed his spell—Explosion.

A detonation appeared in the air, illuminating the surroundings. Merchants and believers alike started to raise a commotion, and the same went for the people from the Church who were guarding the tents.

“There’s bound to be one of them who will let Batutta know of this!” Diablo announced to Shera. “Search for them from the sky!”

“Y-Yeah!”

One or two shots of this spell wouldn't be enough to make them rush to report to Batutta, so Diablo kept the blasts coming one after the other.

“Explosion! Explosion! Explosion...!”

In doing so, he was able to locate the tent the priests and Paladin Brigade members entrusted with guarding them were heading to. There were guards posted there to protect the entrance to the underground, but he held nothing back as he scattered them like leaves.

After descending the lengthy staircase, he kicked open a stone door. He was in some sort of cylindrical area. A sickly sweet fragrance clung to the air, mixed with a bestial stench so pungent that Shera covered her mouth with her hand.

“What's with this place... I'm getting a really bad feeling about it!”

Diablo recognized this place as the last stage of the limited time event back in the game. This was where the boss monster would appear.

—Just how similar is this world to the game!?

Going on from the entrance, a spiral staircase that ran parallel with the stone walls extended down into the bottom of this place. The size differed for the stones used in the walls and the staircase, where, on average, each one was about fifty centimeters tall, with their length and width reaching more than a meter. They were formed almost like a trapezoid in order to create the building's cylinder-like shape. The only light came from down below.

Getting down on all fours, Horn peered downward. Diablo told him he didn't need to come underground with them, but the Grasswalker came along in the end.

“H-Hey, boss, there's something out there.”

Diablo stared at the bottom of the room where he could make out the outlines of several people.

In the flickering flames of the lamps, he could make out the men and women

who were participating in a feast of moral depravity.

Diablo smirked with a snort. He was trying to show this was no big deal, but on the inside, he was completely panicking.

—Just what in the hell is this!?

Cross Reverie was a wholesome game suitable for all ages, so it should go without saying there were no erotic scenes like this to be found anywhere.

Looking toward the bottom as well, Shera's face turned pale.

“Diablo! Rem and Lumachina!”

“Hm.” He turned his gaze to the direction she was pointing.

There they were, both strung up on an altar at the center of this place. Lumachina had been reduced to a very un-ladylike appearance, with her clothes having been stripped from her upper body, and her chest laid bare for all to see. Her underwear had fallen around her ankles.

Diablo's face went beet-red.

Next to her was the head maid Shiliu, her hands creeping all over Lumachina's body. She was almost completely naked as well, only wearing a black corset, netted stockings, and high heels. It was like one of the designs for an outfit you'd see on one of those boxes for games they sell at ***map or **dio. The boxes were normally quite large even though there was only a single disc inside them.

—That's taking it way over the top, right!?

Shiliu's tongue was creeping across Lumachina's skin. Though he couldn't see it from up top, he could tell Lumachina was trying to escape, but couldn't due to her hands and feet being bound.

Diablo sprinted down the stairs. “Shera, Horn, you wait here! I'm bringing those two back!”

“Y-Yeah!”

“Roger that, boss man!”

After coming halfway down the stone staircase, with about fifty meters left to go—

There was someone else climbing up those very same stairs.

†

Batutta—

Unlike the others in the nude, he was wearing his full armor, and he carried his spear, which was enveloped with magic energy. There was a sharp glint in his eye.

“I was waiting for you, Diablo,” he boomed in a solemn voice.

Being confronted like this was really getting Diablo fired up. He felt a heat bubbling from deep inside him. Now more than ever was the time to act like a Demon Lord.

Diablo pointed Tenma’s Staff toward Batutta.

“Ahhhahaha... Regret the fact you were careless enough to stand before me.”

But still, he couldn’t stop thinking about it: With someone as proficient as Batutta, he should be able to guess the difference in their abilities. Why was Batutta acting so confident? Was it a trap? Some sort of bluff?

Diablo’s attitude, haughty and overflowing with confidence, was all just a bluff, of course. It was just a Demon Lord role play, after all. Unlike the game, he was always suppressing his nervousness and fear when he fought in battle here.

“Batutta, how do you explain all this?” he demanded.

“If you truly are a first-class Sorcerer, then surely you must already know the answer.”

He was just a gamer. He didn’t really know any information about things other than the battle system. But if the purpose of this place was the same as it was in the game, then...

“So, you had a hand in producing the curse of the Death Knell disease.”

“Hm... I see you heard about that from Lumachina.”

“You say she knew as well?”

A scowl appeared on Batutta’s face. “You’re telling me that not only the High Priest, but even a Sorcerer caught on?”

“Hmph. I am no Sorcerer—I am a Demon Lord who has come from another world!”

“What drivel are you spouting...”

—Not many people believe me when I say that, huh...

Though, it was actually pretty cute how Rem and Shera believed him so easily.

“Do those pitiful fools crawling around down there have something to do with this curse...?”

“If you come work under me, then I will tell you whatever you wish to know.”

“Said like a true egotist, Batutta. But the truth is, you learned this curse from the Fallen, didn’t you?”

“Wha—!?” Batutta’s eyes flew open. “How do you know that?”

“Heh heh heh... I have already said it: I am a Demon Lord!” ...He couldn’t say it was because this was the same curse the Fallen used back in the game.

He still didn’t completely understand what this world was, but he thought of it as the inspiration for Cross Reverie. The X-rated parts of the curse were omitted in the game, however, with Batutta most likely having brought Rem and Lumachina exactly to do those types of immoral things to them.

“Release the girls,” Diablo ordered. “If you are to atone for your vulgar misdeeds on top of that, I will spare your life.”

“Oh, Diablo...” Batutta’s shoulders shook as he laughed. “So youthful. It is quite intriguing to think how you obtained such strength while being so young... But even then, you are still so very inexperienced.”

“What was that?”

“You have never lost a battle, correct? You are going into this fight with the conceit that your victory is absolute. Even now, I assume you view this situation as having ‘cornered your enemy.’”

“Hmph... Because it is the truth.”

He acted high and mighty, but he was sweating bullets on the inside. Just as Batutta said, though, he was thinking he would definitely win in a one-on-one fight. Despite how much MP he had lost, he was still the one on top level-wise, and there was a huge difference between their equipment. Batutta’s spear was wrapped in magic energy, and was at most an SSR weapon. Diablo, on the other hand, had reinforced his SSR equipment to their maximum limits, and could probably be classified as EX-rank gear.

He held an overwhelming advantage. But not just that, Diablo possessed superior skill as a player, never even losing to other level 150 rankers in battle.

—If I was to explain it with my own made-up logic, my parameters should be level 150, with my equipment also being at 150. If my player skill is 150, too, then that should make 450 altogether! Considering Batutta is level 130, that’s a gap of 320!

If they fought, Diablo was all but guaranteed to win.

Batutta stroked his beard. “Now, you may be an Elemental Sorcerer strong enough to defy common sense...but what type of magic can you use here?”

“Hm...?”

Batutta rapped the back of his hand on the stone wall. The fragments of rock fell of the block he had knocked against; they were more fragile than Diablo thought.

“We are underground here, deep enough that we should be surrounded by bedrock. If the ceiling breaks, however, a mountain of sand should come raining down on us.”

Diablo swallowed, though his throat was bone-dry. “That’s a bluff... You would be buried alive as well.”

“I would risk my life if it meant victory; it is only natural. I am sure you are the

same... But what will you do about your companions' lives?"

"You bastard!"

Diablo had come to rescue Rem and Lumachina; them being buried alive in sand would mean losing everything. Batutta obviously couldn't care less about the lives of those around him.

"That should seal away the spell you used against the Sand Whale quite nicely. Next is your footing... Is fighting on stairs a strong suit of yours? Just how much can you evade while fighting on this terrain, I wonder..."

"You're the only one who will suffer from being unable to evade this!"

A detonation appeared out of thin air—

Explosion.

The stone staircase crumbled away, fragments of stone dropping on top of the writhing mass of humanity below.

"Ngh!?"

This place was even more brittle than he imagined. They were also in an enclosed space, which meant the effect of the shock wave was much stronger than when he used it out in the open. Sand immediately poured down from the ceiling in a grand fashion.

—Even a spell like that was too much!?

Batutta leisurely dodged backward, landing further down the staircase. Diablo wanted to use magic with a wider area of effect to suppress that speed...but if he did, the ceiling would give way.

Diablo looked toward the altar. He was relieved to see Rem and Lumachina unaffected from the damage caused by his Explosion.

But there was something wrong with the people here. Though both sand and stone were falling from above, they stayed intoxicated by their mad feast, making no attempt to run away. They didn't even seem to perceive the danger around them. It seemed they were no longer capable of normal thought.

Batutta laughed. “You act without thinking, I see.”

“Hmph... I was only testing the actual worth of getting serious or not.”

“Is that so? Then this time, I’ll be the one making a move.”

Batutta took up his spear, pressing the assault. Diablo had to repel him with magic, but...

—What kind of magic can I use that won’t break the walls!?

“You hesitated, greenhorn!” Batutta shouted.

He closed the gap between them all at once. The spear was aiming directly for Diablo’s heart; Batutta made it clear he was after Diablo’s life.

“Too naïve, Batutta.”

The 《Ground Mine》 Diablo placed at his feet exploded. It was a spell that unleashed an explosion once someone stepped within range of the mine. It was an elementary Earth spell with little power, but at least he wouldn’t have to worry about the stone walls breaking.

Still being engulfed in the explosion, Batutta didn’t stop.

“This battle is your loss!”

“Ngh!?”

Batutta’s spear was heading straight for him. He had to get out of the way—but a stone wall was on his right, and he would just fall if he went left. The spiraling stairs weren’t suitable to make a rapid descent in a hurry, either.

As Batutta advanced, the only things his attacker would be looking at were Diablo and the staircase, which meant he would just have to rely on his memory to get down from here. But the length and height of each step in this staircase was uneven; it would be all over if he tripped.

“Hah! Never underestimate a Demon Lord!”

Diablo repelled the spear’s attack using his left hand. Though close combat wasn’t exactly a Sorcerer’s forte, his basic parameters were considerably high thanks to his level.

He fended off the spear... Is what should have happened, but the spear

disappeared from his sight.

A shiver ran up his spine.

—What the—!?

This was different from what he expected.

His hand wasn't where it needed to be...

Shouldn't it have parried the spear so he could prepare his next attack...?

A massive splattering of blood gushed all over the stone staircase...

Diablo's left arm had been severed right through the bone, barely hanging on by some skin.

—AAAAAAAAAAGH!?

It took all he had to resist screaming out loud.

He was slick with cold sweat. His eyes were flickering from the intense pain.

Shera, who was watching the fight from the staircase above, let out a scream in Diablo's stead. Rem also let out a scream from below, even though she shouldn't know what was going on.

—What's happening with Lumachina...?

He didn't see Horn.

—Did he run away...?

Diablo still had the composure to worry about what was going on around him. Under normal circumstances, he would be writhing around in pain, crying and screaming bloody murder; but he could chalk this up to how tough his level 150 body was.

He managed to stand himself at the ready.

“Heh... Heheh... Not bad, Batutta...”

“You overestimated your own strength, and now you find yourself in a place where you cannot use your spells. You may have been gung-ho about charging in here like it was a secret base or something, but you never once suspected that it could have all been for the purpose of luring you here. If I left you a letter saying I was waiting in this underground facility, then you would have been much more on guard, and most likely taken sufficient measures to prepare yourself before coming. Since you came here because of my subordinate’s ‘leaked’ information, you instead entered here completely unguarded.”

He couldn’t deny that. But instead of clicking his tongue, a sneer crossed Diablo’s face.

“You’ve thought of everything, haven’t you, you weakling.”

“Certainly. I do not think of myself as strong, nor am I prideful of myself. I make sure my preparations are flawless, and deal with powerful foes by having them play into my hands then defeating them in situations where I have an absolute advantage. Relying on equipment, skills, or even powers is something only a novice would do.”

There were terrain effects back in the game, along with special conditions that restricted the way you played as well. But the player would almost never be the ones to set those conditions. Usually, it was the game devs who prepared the special terrain, and it was the player’s job to think up strategies to work around it.

Diablo curled his lips.

—It’s true, I may have been a bit prideful... My thinking was too shallow. I’m taking what you said to heart, old man.

No matter how much he needed to avoid damaging the walls, using a spell like Ground Mine against a level 130 Warrior was a mistake on his part. It was so weak it didn’t even slow him down.

Batutta seemed like he had undergone training with movement on stairways; he could even dodge spells like Explosion. But if Diablo used anything more

powerful, the stone walls would come crumbling down. He really really did think through this anti-Sorcerer plan so thoroughly.

—Even so, I'm gonna come out on top!

“There are some spells in this world that even you do not know about, Batutta! 《Lightning Sphere》!”

Crackling purple electricity flashed through the air. A sphere wreathed in lightning appeared, measuring about three meters in diameter. Any who dared touch it would be met with a violent electric shock, which meant he should be able to fry Batutta without damaging any of the walls.

The only downside to this spell was how sluggish it was when it moved. It slowly floated toward its target. Usually it would be a simple matter to dodge it...but they were on a staircase. There was nowhere to dodge.

“I see, so magic like this exists as well.”

Would he just make his way to the bottom of the stairwell? Probably not. With his level 130 footwork, Batutta should easily be able to jump over a ball three meters long.

—Come on!!

His plan was to lure Batutta to the Ground Mine he planted on the wall, using that to send Batutta hurtling over the edge of the stairway.

The orb of electricity slowly approached its mark.

—What, he's not jumping out of the way...?

Batutta suddenly vanished without a trace. He wasn't above Diablo; in fact, he jumped over the edge himself.

—You gotta be kidding, right!?

“It's too easy to see what you're aiming for, greenhorn!”

Though it looked like Batutta had fallen, a single hand remained grasping the stone steps; he was simply hanging from the edge. After the Lightning Sphere passed him by, he pulled himself back up and onto the staircase.

Batutta was in a disadvantageous position, which meant it could be effective

for Diablo to attack him directly. But, that said, Diablo was a Sorcerer who focused all his firepower on spells. It would be reckless of him to go picking a fight at close range, not to mention that it took everything he had just to try and dodge Batutta's spear.

Diablo moved to back away, when the heel of his right foot caught on the stone staircase.

“Oh cra—!?”

“Careless! Time to end this!!”

Batutta thrust his spear forward, a shining, rainbow-colored effect spreading out from it. It was the Martial Art 《Rising Spear》, a technique that activated quickly and boasted immense power. On top of that, it also ignored any effects that reduced physical damage. Batutta had probably noticed the damage-reducing effects of Diablo's armor when he cut through his arm earlier.

The spear stabbed into Diablo's chest.

The razor-sharp spearhead tore through his Ebony Abyss, rending flesh, smashing bone—and piercing his heart.

A massive amount of blood vomited from his mouth. The pain was so much that he couldn't even realize what it was, feeling like his consciousness would leave him at any moment as his brain deflated like a slashed tire.

Death.

He was falling into darkness...

His heart was crushed by Batutta's high-level technique. This was lethal damage, enough to kill him in an instant.

Tenma's Staff fell from Diablo's right hand, landing in the pool of blood that had spilled on the ground.

He crumbled to his knees. Someone let out a high-pitched scream; Shera, probably.

Assured of his victory, a sneer enveloped Batutta's face.

Diablo grabbed Batutta's left wrist with his right hand...

Panting like a wild beast, with his eyes filled by a burning fury, he opened his bloodstained lips.

"You finally, stopped... Senile old fool."

"...Wha... How are you still alive!?"

Batutta tried to get away, but the strength of Diablo's grip wasn't so weak as to let the man escape that easily. To do so, he activated a spell that required him to be in contact with his target.

"Everything shall vanish...into a world of complete stillness... 《Absolute Zero》."

Batutta's arm started turning white from where Diablo was touching.

This was one of the most powerful Ice spells. It would cause the kinetic energy of whatever it touched to disappear eternally. It only targeted one person, and could only be activated at point blank range.

"Woooooargh!?" Batutta's eyes were wide open.

"Now, become an ice sculpture!" Diablo bellowed, blood spurting from his mouth.

Batutta quickly activated a Martial Art with his right hand. Using the technique 《Finger Blade》 to turn his hand into a naked sword, he brought it down—

†

Batutta's left arm, white and frozen, fell to the ground— He had amputated one of his own limbs using a Martial Art. If he hadn't done anything, he surely

would have been an ice sculpture by now. The guy's quick thinking and grit were something else, but it had to be a fatal blow for a Warrior to lose not only their weapon but an arm as well.

Pulling the spear from his chest, Diablo threw it away from the stone staircase. Blood spurted from the hole gouged in his chest.

“Heh heh heh...” A demonic smile crept onto his face. “What’s wrong, Batutta? Was it also part of your plan to lose both your weapon *and* arm?”

He kept a composed smile on the outside—but was screaming on the inside.

—THIS HURTS LIKE A BITCH, GODDAMNIIIIIT!!

The wound was only on his chest, but it felt like all his limbs were going to tear themselves apart as the pain surged throughout his body.

Though he managed to pull himself back from the brink, it was something he never wanted to do again. Taking a blow that would cause instant death just to create an opening to strike—definitely a plan that was better said than done. He truly thought he was going to die once the spear pierced his heart.

Diablo's cape, the Curtain of Dark Clouds, had an effect that would leave him with 1 HP even after taking an attack that would normally reduce it to zero. He almost forgot about it, but it was just like he had confirmed back when he was first summoned to this world.

To be frank, he was certain he would never be able to use it here. Being left with 1 HP could mean barely being able to move for all he had known.

—It's true I'm having trouble breathing, though. I might die if a mosquito bit me right about now...

The instant death protection from his Curtain of Dark Clouds wouldn't activate if he was at 10% or less of his HP. If he were to take another attack right now, that would spell actual death for him this time around.

He had never tested this effect until now because of how dangerous it was, making it a gamble whether or not he would still be alive after taking Batutta's

attack.

It seemed that even after being stabbed through the heart, he wouldn't die—but it still hurt enough to feel like he would. If no one else was here he would be screaming and sobbing his eyes out.

Despite the severity of his injuries, the hole in Diablo's chest slowly began to close; even his left arm was starting to heal. Though it had only been hanging on by mere strands of skin earlier, his bones and muscles were knitting themselves back together.

This was also an effect of his equipment: The 《Distorted Crown》 he wore on his head would automatically recover his HP over time. It wasn't any significant amount when he was in any other fight, but it was actually possible to see how fast his injuries were healing now.

Blood was still spurting out from Batutta's wounds. Though, he had severed his limbs from the upper arm down, so that was only to be expected. Unless he took some kind of surgical action or received a healing miracle, the bleeding wouldn't stop.

“Are... Are you supposed to be...immortal...? Not dying, even after I pierced through your heart...” His brow was slick with sweat.

“Heh heh... I already told you—I am a Demon Lord.”

“This cannot be...”

“Did you actually feel like you knew everything this world had to offer? That was where your pride laid, in your supposed ‘wisdom’ from having lived thus far. All your knowledge amounted to was just a tiny *fraction* of what there is to know. Now then, shall we keep going? We both have one good arm left, after all...”

The truth of the matter was that it was a miracle Diablo could still stand, though.

Regardless, he thrust his hand out toward Batutta. Tenma's Staff was still at his feet, but if he tried to bend down and pick it up, it would feel like he would collapse as he did so.

The fact that he could make it seem like his wounds were no big deal, that he didn't need a weapon, that he could still keep going, no problem—that was all because he was putting everything he had into his Demon Lord role play. He would never show any weakness in front of anyone.

Batutta's face contorted into a grimace. "Shiliu!" he shouted toward the pit below them.

"Yes, Master!"

When Diablo turned to look at her, the almost naked maid had pulled out a dagger, bringing it close to Rem's neck.

Diablo's blood was boiling.

"I'll kill you, you whore!"

Unperturbed, Shiliu kept the smile on her face, a sign of the advantage they now held over him.

"This is a sign for you...*not* to move..." Batutta said in a hoarse voice.

They were unabashedly using Rem as a hostage and holding it over him. He could try and bluff that there was no point in using hostages against a Demon Lord, but the fact he had come all the way here to save them meant that wouldn't be a convincing argument.

Shiliu wiped the drool from her mouth. "Hehe... In the end, it seems like this is a strategic victory for my Master."

"Diablo! Don't worry about me—just fight!" Rem yelled.

"Hah... Hah... Do not worry about me either...Lord Diablo!"

Lumachina shouted, too, short of breath and her face flushed red. It seemed she had been subjected to Shiliu's groping before he came here to rescue her.

Diablo clenched his fists tight, his body shaking in rage.

—If I could just abandon those two then I wouldn't have even come here in the first place.

What can I do? How can I save them!?

A single arrow sped across the cylindrical building—

An arrow that Shera had fired.

It cut across the empty space, leaving behind a trail of pure darkness, most likely a result of the magic enhancement Klem had done to it. It traveled at such a speed that even Diablo was having trouble keeping track of it.

The arrow headed toward the altar. By the time Shiliu had noticed, it pierced clean through the hand holding the dagger, severing the tendons of her fingers and causing her to lose her grip on the weapon as it was sent flying away.

“GAAAHHHHHHHHHH!!” Shiliu let out a guttural scream.

“That’s my 《Angel Shot》!” Shera shouted down after the fact. It was the name of a Martial Art.



“AGAHHHHHHH!!”

Shiliu’s right hand began making crackling noises as it turned an ashen gray. This wasn’t the effect of Angel Shot, which was a technique that was only supposed to greatly increase the user’s accuracy. What was going on?

Soon enough, the maid could no longer make a sound as her entire body turned to stone.

This could very well be the effect of the magic energy Klem put into Shera’s bow.

“K-Klem...” Shera was visibly shaken. “This is so scary it makes it hard to use!!”

—It packs way more of a punch than I thought...!

Diablo was quite shocked on the inside.

While the bow she used was souped-up thanks to Klem’s magic, Angel Shot was a level 60 technique. He hadn’t expected Shera to be such a high-level Archer.

Thinking back on it, she did say she was determined to be level 40 as a child...

Because of her happy-go-lucky attitude and ditzy nature, he never thought to rely on her in battle. He noticed when she used a Martial Art back when they were fighting against the shinobi, but this could be the first time he had seen her get serious when using her bow.

Batutta was in a daze. “Shiliu...? Why won’t you answer me, Shiliu...?”

There was no response from the maid turned to stone. Who knew how long the petrification effect from a weapon enhanced by the actual Demon Lord Krebskulm would last.

A shadow stealthily moved along the altar, sporting a pair of rabbit ears that bounced to and fro— Horn.

“Ehehe, gotta show off my usefulness to the boss up there, right?”

“How did you manage to get here!?” Rem said in shock.

“All I did was jump along those jaggedy walls back there, straight down.”

Horn unsheathed the shortsword on his back, cutting through the binds around Rem’s arms and legs; she was finally free again.

“Th-Thank you!”

“Hm-hm-hmm~ Feel free to thank me more!”

The two of them immediately went to help Lumachina as well.

“I do not know who you are, but thank you so much!”

“Oh yeah, guess I didn’t introduce myself yet, huh. I’m Horn! Let’s go conquer a dungeon together!”

†

—Looks like I managed to win...somehow.

He breathed a sigh on the inside.

“Hmph... What’s the matter, Batutta? Are you not going to make your move? Then I will reduce you to ashes with my magic,” Diablo said as threateningly as possible.

“Th-This cannot be...”

“For losing to have that much of an impact on you... That only shows how prideful you really are. All your prudence and caution is nothing but your own misguided assumptions.”

“Ngh... Curse you... Curse you...!”

“Hmph. There is no worth using my magic against someone who has lost their will to fight.”

Diablo lowered his hand while Batutta fixed his glare on him.

“You will all fall...into the depths of despair...”

“Oh?”

“I regret...not being able...to see the looks of anguish on your faces when that happens...”

He made a fist with his right hand.

—*This guy still wants to fight!?*

Diablo focused himself on casting a spell.

Batutta's hand began to glow, and he was able to get his technique off faster.

“Woooooooooargh!!”

Just like Finger Blade, this was a Martial Art that could be performed when unarmed. Diablo couldn't be sure what move he was using without actually seeing it in action, but he didn't have the luxury waiting around to find out. If Diablo took another attack as he was now, that would be the end for him.

Batutta thrust his fist forward. An SP-infused ball of light was sent flying toward Diablo; judging by the look of it, this was probably 《Shining Blow》.

“《Darkness Cannon》!!” Diablo shouted.

An advanced Dark-elemental spell that unleashed a condensed mass of pitch-black magic energy.

He didn't have Tenma's Staff, so it turned into a clash between the almost exact same techniques, even though Dark and Light were the polar opposites of each other, element-wise.

The two techniques crashed and grinded against one another, a shock wave spreading out from the impact. The stone walls creaked and grated against themselves, with rocks and stones falling down from the ceiling, followed by a veritable waterfall of sand. The stone walls might not be able to take any more...

Diablo declared:

“Both my level and equipment outclass you! In a simple clash between our techniques—I have no reason to lose!”

Darkness Cannon overcame Batutta's sphere of light, striking him while he was still locked in place after using an advanced technique.

“Gohahhhhhhhhh!!”

He was sent flying away, where he violently crashed into the stone wall, causing it to collapse much more than Diablo thought it would. The impact caused even more sand to pour down from above.

Batutta was no longer moving.

An unpleasant noise resounded throughout the chamber, as if the whole building was groaning. It looked like Diablo had dealt significant damage to the structure itself.

“Diablooooo!!” Shera clambered down the staircase.

“Y-You fool! Why did you come here!?”

“Cause you looked like you were in trouble!”

“Can’t you see the building is coming down!?”

“Yeah! That’s why we have to hurry up and get out of here!”

It seemed the option to escape by herself just didn’t exist for Shera.

She picked up Tenma’s Staff off the ground for him. Then, a loud crashing noise came from somewhere above the staircase.

Turning to see what it was, he could see the entrance crumbling away, right where Shera was standing before.

“Eeeeeek!?” Shera let out a scream.

If she had thought about keeping herself out of harm’s way, she would have been lying at the bottom of a pile of rubble by now.

“Phew...” Diablo steadied his breathing.

Shera had tears in her eyes. “Wh-What do we do now!? We lost our way out!!”

“We’re heading to the bottom, and fast.”

“Fweh!?”

“I don’t have time to explain.”

The amount of sand falling from the ceiling just kept increasing; the building really wasn't going to last much longer.

One of his arms was still on the verge of falling off, so that made it a chore to run...but the 《Demon Lord's Ring》 was on his left hand. If all else, he couldn't afford to lose that.

They rushed to the bottom, Shera holding on to Tenma's Staff as they ran.

Making his way to the bottom of this place, Diablo dodged around the others still indulging in their sinful pleasures as he ran. Even as they were buried in sand or crushed by the falling rocks, they wouldn't come back to their senses.

He made his way to the altar—

“Diablo!!”

Rem jumped into his arms. For someone as calm and collected as her to get this emotional...

A solemn expression suddenly came over his face. “Th-They didn't go all the way with you, did they...?”

“Wha—!? What kind of nonsense are you talking about!? They did not lay even a single finger on me!”

“Then what about Lumachina!?”

Lumachina's face turned so red he thought it might burst into flames. Coupled with the fact that it looked like she had bawled her eyes out, everything became awkward very fast.

“N-Nothing of the sort was done to me! Th-There was some touching...and licking...but that was it! They didn't do *that* to me, right, Rem!? Please, you say something to him, too!”

“...Let's hurry up and get out of here, Diablo,” Rem said with a dead serious expression on her face.

“Reeeeeeeem!?” Lumachina looked like she was on the verge of tears again.

Though it was important to make sure the two of them were still mentally

sound after their ordeal, they could worry about all that *after* they escaped from being crushed by falling rocks and sand.

“H-Hey, boss! Wh-Wh-What do we do now!?” Horn jumped into the conversation.

“So you’re still here. I thought you already ran off the first chance you got.”

“That’s harsh, man!”

Taking Tenma’s Staff from Shera, Diablo thrust it directly into the altar. This spell needed direct contact to work, and required some extra time for him to concentrate on casting it.

—Don’t everything come crumbling down on me now, got it!?

As Horn continued to freak out, Rem managed to shut him up by putting him in a full nelson. Shera and Lumachina stared at him with earnest eyes.

Diablo chanted his spell:

“Obey my will and change to the position I desire— 《Adzet》!”

The altar rose up into the air—

—when the ceiling collapsed.

Countless rocks and a mountain of sand plummeted toward them.

“D-Diablo, HELLLLLLLP!!” Shera screamed.

“Just leave this to me.”

—I’ll put every last drop of my MP into this next spell!

“Twist and howl, O mighty air, and transform into a spiraling vortex that shall pierce through both heaven and earth! 《Grand Tornado》!!”

Epilogue

In the western side of the town of Zircon Tower— It was right before daybreak, and the sky was clear. Light began to hit the tents gathered here. There wasn't a soul to be seen where the usual throngs of people would line up. The mysterious explosion during the night, combined with the repeated bouts of cryptic rumblings, caused the people to back far away from the collection of tents.

One of the tents was even sucked into a hole that opened in the earth.

Another hole opened in the ground. Sand continued to fall down the crater as the hole continued to grow in size.

The people watching from afar screamed as if it were the end of the world, or as if the gates of hell had swung wide open.

A raging tornado burst from the pit.

Rocks, sand, and even a portion of the tent that had sunk into the earth earlier were sent careening toward the sky, then strewn all over the place as they fell back down. Massive, weighty objects that would take a crowd of people just to lift up came back down like rain.

The people screamed, trembling in fear. That's when they saw it— An altar rose up from the depths of the hole in the ground, with a group of girls huddled on top of it. There was a man standing at the center of the altar, cloaked in an outfit of pure black with horns growing out of his head.

Someone whispered breathlessly:

—A Demon Lord...

“W-We’re floating!? Like, holy *crap* we’re floating!?”

“...Don’t make a fuss. You’ll ruin Diablo’s concentration.”

As Horn showed no signs of calming down, Rem covered his mouth with both her hands.

“Mmh!? Mmph!?”

“...Just be quiet.”

Weak at the knees and unable to stand from the shock, Lumachina was holding onto Shera’s shoulders for support.

“Th-This is...so amazing...”

“You okay there, Lumachina?”

“L-Lord Diablo...really is God after all...”

“Like, seriously, are you okay!?”

—Looks like Shera became more big sister-like after spending all that time looking after Klem. Now that I think about it, we also set Shiliu (still petrified) on a corner of the altar... Wonder what’s gonna happen with her?

This was his second time using Flight magic, and it was definitely more stable than his first venture.

Looking over everything from above, he could see the enormous cave-in below them.

“Guess I’ll put us down a bit farther away from here.”

He still wasn’t very good at moving side-to-side, but landing near the sinkhole seemed dangerous. Not to mention that it was hard to do with all the townspeople staring at him. Although they were already standing out like a sore thumb now...

Having all those eyes on him was getting him more antsy.

He gradually moved the altar to the outskirts of the town. Rem was staring off in the distance.

“...It’s beautiful.”

“Hm? Oh, yeah...”

The morning sun had just climbed over the horizon. The clouds turned a deep red as they were set aflame by it rising into the sky.

Rem’s eyes glistened as she looked at him, a slight blush in her cheeks. He always thought she was pretty cute...but right now, he wanted to just pick her up and take her back home with him.

—Well, I guess we’re already both going back to the same place, aren’t we.

It all made him think again how glad he was able to save her.

Her hands were still covering Horn’s mouth, who looked like he was about to die from the lack of oxygen.

“Mmph... Mmmmmmph...!!”

“D-Diablo!” Shera suddenly shouted, an expression of alarm on her face.

Whirling around to check, Diablo found Lumachina with a pained expression on her face, her breathing wild and erratic.

“Hah...hah...”

“What!? What happened!?”

“This!”

Shera rolled up a piece of Lumachina’s clothes; there was a blackish-purple mark on her thigh in the shape of an “X.”

“...But why!?” Rem exclaimed.

Diablo felt the goosebumps crawling over his skin.



“The Death Knell disease...”

Though the words had left Diablo’s mouth, they sounded so far away it was like someone else entirely had said them.

Miracles had no effect on Lumachina. She said it herself: No matter who she had pray for her, it wouldn’t even heal a scratch. Even if they had a priest pray for her, this wouldn’t be healed.

Diablo clenched his fists.

—*So this is what Batutta was talking about!*

—*“...You will all fall into the depths of despair.”—*

He must have done something to her while she was captured. That place was being used to perform curses, after all.

Shera was shaking. “No... L-Lumachina is going to...die...? Diablo, save her...!” Tears spilled from her eyes.

Though she was in anguish, Lumachina managed a smile.

“Please don’t cry, Shera. It... It is all right... If I am to die, it just means it is part of God’s will...”

“Exactly. That is why you will not die yet.”

“Huh?”

“You’re going to reform the corruption in the Church, aren’t you? That’s the entire reason you came here, to ask that Paladin captain for his help. Am I wrong?”

“No... That is exactly right.”

“Was the point of this journey to hide from the Cardinal Authority? Or to oppose them?”

“T-To oppose them...”

“Then stand tall! Don’t be daunted by a mere curse. And if you deem it necessary...then I shall lend you my power!”

The life returned to Lumachina’s eyes, and her ragged breathing became somewhat steadied. Though she was still being supported by Shera, she propped herself up and joined her hands together.

“Yes... I will not lose to a mere curse.”

“Good! All you need now is have faith in me, for I will rid the curse that plagues you.”

“Of course I believe in you,” Lumachina answered with a nod.

“What are we going to do, Diablo!?” Shera asked.

Rem and Horn were both staring at him as well.

Diablo’s lips curled, forming a twisted smile.

“We’re going to a certain dungeon, a place we’re sure to find what you need!”

The “Death Knell Disease Charm” he acquired from the limited time event should be locked up in the treasure room of his personal area.

Horn pumped his fists in the air.

“Awww YEAH!!”

Afterword

Thanks a lot for reading the fourth volume of *How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord!*

I'm the author, Yukiya Murasaki.

A brand new volume, and the start of a brand new arc! I was planning on having our new heroine Lumachina be one of those really smart characters, but she ended up being a bit of an, um, “interesting” girl instead, huh. I'm happy if you like her, though I guess she is on the verge of death all of a sudden...

I stuck a lot of battles into this volume, to the point where I was thinking it was almost too much. I'm relieved I was able to squeeze it all into a single volume.

In the last volume, we had the Demon Lord Krebskulm, who was a character with super high stats but fought like a child; so for this volume, I had an enemy with inferior skills, but was a cunning tactician. Here's hoping you enjoyed it.

We'll finally be getting to Diablo's personal area in the next volume! Now he'll have to conquer a dungeon that he built himself!

Special thanks—

Tsurusaki Takahiro, thank you for the wonderful illustrations. It always feels like we're pushing the limits with this series, but this time especially!

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Yukiya Murasaki









Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[The Story So Far](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1: Pest Control](#)

[Interlude 1](#)

[Chapter 2: Flying Sky High](#)

[Chapter 3: Heading to a New Town](#)

[Interlude 2](#)

[Chapter 4: In Hot Pursuit](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Bonus Textless Illustrations](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

[Copyright](#)



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How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord: Volume 4

by Yukiya Murasaki

Translated by Garrison Denim Edited by Kris Swanson

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