HOW NOT TO SUMMON A DEMON LORD
VOLUME 6
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Laminitus gasped.
"AAAH, NNNGH... HOW'S THAT?"

"...STOP IT WITH YOUR NONSENSE. MY CLOTHES ARE MERELY 'EASY TO MOVE IN.' IF ANYTHING IS INDECENT HERE, IT'S THOSE OVERGROWN LUMPS OF MEAT YOU CALL 'BREASTS.'"
"REM'S OUTFIT IS PRETTY MUCH LIKE SHE'S WALKING AROUND NAKED AFTER ALL!"

The fabric fluttered weightlessly to the floor, exposing her buttocks to the air. A pair of black string panties barely covered it— just barely.
"BUUUFHA!?"
"MASTER... KEEP GOING... ROSE ASKS OF MASTER, DO IT FROM BEHIND..."

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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 at what to do. While he may have been a superior player back in the game, he couldn’t talk with other people 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: Within her body was sealed the soul of the《Demon Lord Krebskulm》. Trembling with fear deep down, Diablo’s Demon Lord role playing drove him to promise he would find a solution to her plight.

Diablo soon after found himself foiling an invasion of one hundred Fallen, lead by a Fallen named Edelgard. Diablo then later found himself the recipient of a

quest from the governor of Faltra, Galford. Prince Keera of the Elven 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. Despite the numerous obstacles in his way, however, Diablo was successful in rescuing Shera.

After her rescue, 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, being reduced to a biscuit-loving young girl, who was then nicknamed "Klem."

Peaceful days passed by...

Suddenly, Alicia betrayed the group! Now awakened as a true Demon Lord, Klem went into a destructive frenzy. But thanks to one of Diablo's ultimate spells and the sound of Rem and Shera's voices, Klem was subdued and reverted to her biscuit-loving form. To ensure Klem would never go berserk again, Diablo bound her with the same enslavement magic afflicted upon Shera and Rem.

Through a string of coincidences, or perhaps God's own guidance, Diablo found himself rescuing Lumachina, a holy woman, from the Paladin Gewalt. Being a《High Priest》, Lumachina was the highest ranking member of the Church. However, due to her attempts at ridding the Church of corruption and avarice, she was nearly assassinated. Still seeking to reform the corrupt Church, Lumachina sought the help of the Paladin Captain Batutta, setting out to meet him in Zircon Tower.

Located in the perilous expanse of the former Demon Lord's Domain, Diablo's group of Adventurers accompanied her as bodyguards. After a long journey, they arrived at their destination, and were greeted by Batutta.

However—

Batutta had been culminating the spread of a cursed illness known as Death Knell disease, and extorted donations in exchange for treatment.

Diablo fought hard, defeating Batutta and toppling his underground altar. But all of a sudden, Lumachina collapsed, the mark of the Death Knell disease having appeared on her body.

Avoiding pursuit from Laminitus, Zircon Tower's governor, Diablo's group made their way to a dungeon Diablo made in *Cross Reverie* to get an item that could cure the Death Knell disease. Eluding many traps, they finally reached the dungeon's lowest level, where they also met the《Magimatic Maid》, Rose. Diablo then obtained the item he sought, along with many pieces of new equipment for himself and his team.

The Fallen Varakness marched the Demon Lord's Army against Zircon Tower, crushing the races' army under their superior strength. Diablo quickly rushed on the scene and, exhibiting《The Demon Lord's True Power》for some reason, saved Zircon Tower from the invasion.

Prologue

Calamities, wars, crimes... People live their lives, thinking these dangers will never disturb them, however often they're warned of them. Believing that irrational, unfair crises will never befall them...

And yet, disaster does come upon man at times. However virtuous and hard working, selfless and modest you may be... No matter how strong, cautious, and wise you are... People can find themselves driven against the most unforgiving of odds for no discernible reason.

Misfortune—

People easily lose their lives for no reason other than the absurdity known as misfortune. The town of Zircon Tower, in the former Demon Lord's Domain, found itself driven to the brink of destruction in such a merciless fashion.

The Demon Lord had apparently awakened, and the reorganized Demon Lord's army had attacked the races' town. The races' army fell, failing to evacuate the citizens in time. Their slaughter seemed imminent.

All seemed to be lost...

But the town was saved.

Defeating the Demon Lord's army's commander-in-chief, Diablo had routed the invaders and turned the tide of battle.

The races were saved!

The town celebrated until sunrise to commemorate this great miracle. Even though they had just fought a war that very same day, and the people were likely exhausted, as soon as the date changed they switched gears to a passionate celebration.

—Can they pipe down? People are trying to sleep here... But I guess they're just that happy...

It felt pretty nice realizing their joy was the result of his own actions.

“It’s a good thing I protected them...” Diablo dove into his bed.

In light of their achievements, the governor had prepared lodging for them in one of Zircon Tower’s highest class inns. Diablo found, to his surprise, that his bed had springs. The bed creaked and squeaked as he entrusted his weight to it.

“So soft...” Diablo spoke in his natural voice, as he had the room all to himself.

The Pantherian girl, Rem, the runaway Elf princess, Shera, the《High Priest》, Lumachina and the (twelve-year-old) Grasswalker, Horn, all had rooms to themselves. Rose, the《Magimatic Maid》, couldn’t stay at the inn since her weight would likely make the floor cave in under her feet. Having her sleep outside simply wouldn’t do, so Rose alone returned to Diablo’s base,《The Demon Lord’s Underground Labyrinth》. Since Diablo destroyed most of the traps, she needed to have those fixed, as well as appoint new guardians to the treasure vault.

So now, here he was, all by himself—for the first time in a long while.

He could hear the sound of his voice rebounding against the wall.

Before being summoned into this world, Diablo was always alone. Freely spreading his hands out on a large bed like this gave him a liberated...and lonely, sort of feeling.

Diablo yawned loudly. The people outside began singing in chorus for what felt like the thousandth time. He didn’t know if it was a national anthem or some kind of army cadence, but he was just about to have the melody memorized.

But even with things being as noisy as they were, sleep began overtaking him. His HP and MP had recovered thanks to the potions, but several days worth of exhaustion weighed down on him.

Diablo closed his eyes, his consciousness sinking softly into the quagmire of sleep...

Knock knock!

A sound different from the hustle and bustle going on outside jolted Diablo up from his sleep.

Someone had knocked on the door.

Taking a deep breath, Diablo focused on taking on his Demon Lord persona, to hide his true self away...

“Heheheh... Who dares disturb a Demon Lord’s slumber?” he asked in the deepest voice he could muster.

Diablo was inept when it came to speaking to other people, and extra-inept when it came to talking to girls. If he were to reveal his true self, the words would probably never come out, so he chose to hide behind the mask of the Demon Lord he acted out in the game, *Cross Reverie*. Thanks to that, he could just barely talk to the people around him.

Though, his Demon Lord role playing had landed him in a fair load of trouble, too...

Trying to talk with his real voice would only result in stuttered “uhh”s and diffident “errr”s.

“It is Us,” a voice replied from the other side of the door. “If you’re awake, We would wish to speak with you.”

—Us!?

He expected Rem or Shera, but it wasn’t either of their voices, or any of his other companions, for that matter. It was the voice of a more mature woman, and there was only one person in this town who would refer to themselves in the royal “we.”

But she had her position to consider. With that in mind, would she really come to his room this late at night?

Still half in doubt, Diablo rose from his bed and unlocked the door to his room, opening it to be greeted by a figure in a black robe. A graceful face looked back at him from within the hood, her eyes, crimson like a scarlet flame, locking with his.

It was the person Diablo had guessed after all.

†

The mystery guest was the ruler of Zircon Tower—the governor, Fanis Laminitus. Her lips, adorned with rouge, curled up into a smile.

“Are you not going to invite Us in, Diablo?”

—The governor came to visit me on her own!?

He was taken aback, surely, but a Demon Lord would never show respect to a mere governor.

“What are you here for, Laminitus?” he asked, feigning coolness.

“Did you not hear Us? We wish to speak with you.”

She was a regional governor, but was bold enough to fashion herself as “The King of the Desert Lands.” Her spirit was valiant and unrelenting.

She entered the room, not bothering to wait for his approval.

“Hmph, so be it...” Diablo scoffed. “But be prepared for the consequences. Should I find your words tiresome, you will pay the price.”

“We won’t bore you.” Laminitus took off her robe and sat down on a chair.

She wasn’t in her usual armored appearance. Instead, she wore a lavish, low back evening dress. Its cleavage was so deep Diablo could swear her breasts were about to burst out.

He tried and failed to tear his gaze away from her chest in a flustered panic.

Laminitus folded her arms, pushing her voluminous chest up in the process, accentuating her bosom further.

“We understand you weren’t in the festivities?”

“I dislike noisy places.”

—Because being in such a conspicuous place is so nerve-wracking. I’d go nuts if I stayed there.

“Heheh... We figured as much. Have you eaten?”

“I’ve no need of your concern.”

Rem and the others brought back Horn’s and his share of the food, so they did

indeed have dinner, albeit a late one.

“Then, how about this?” Laminitus popped off the cork of a wine bottle she had been carrying.

“I’m sure you don’t need my company if you want to drink booze.”

“Don’t be so cold. This is some of the best wine in the region.”

The inn being as luxurious as it was, there was glassware they could use in the room. Laminitus took two wine glasses from a shelf and poured the thick, maroon liquid into them.

The drink’s aroma permeated across the room, and the scent alone proved that, true to Laminitus’s words, this wasn’t just any normal wine. The fragrance was so entrancing that even Diablo, who was usually uninterested in alcohol, became curious as to its flavor.

“The least you can do is join Us for a toast.” Laminitus offered him one of the wine glasses.

“Hmph... Troublesome woman.” Diablo took the wine glass by the bowl.

The woman motioned her own glass to his. Wine glasses are fragile, so you don’t click them together when making a toast. It appeared these manners held just as true in this world.

Diablo continued holding his wine glass by its bowl. From what he knew, one only held the wine glass by its stem during tasting.

“To today’s victory.”

“Hmm.”

—It’s yesterday’s victory by now, though.

Each of them held the wine glass up softly before carrying them to their lips.

Diablo drank the liquid as its rich, fragrant aroma filled his nostrils. Sweetness and sourness blended together seamlessly, but there was very little bitterness to speak of. The liquid passed through his throat softly. Truly, this wine was pleasant and easy to drink. He had expected a thicker, more dense flavor, but he could get used to drinking this.

After a pause, the aroma left his nostrils, leaving only a pleasant feeling behind.

“Ah...”

He involuntarily let out a small sigh of satisfaction, like a character in a manga might. He could feel heat emanating from the core of his body. It was easy to drink, but its alcohol concentration was probably strong.

“We see you like it,” Laminitus said, after having heaved her own sigh of contentment.

“It’s quite the drink.”

“Let’s have a seat and talk, shall we?”

The room had both normal chairs and a bed, but Laminitus elected to sit on the bed, urging Diablo with her eyes to take a seat next to her.

The governor came to him late at night, gift in hand. Surely she had something important to discuss. She treated him to excellent wine, too, so it seemed wrong to refuse.

Diablo took a seat next to her, but made sure to leave a gap wide enough for someone else to sit between them. He’d gotten used to Rem and Shera, but he had to keep this much distance from a relatively unfamiliar adult woman. Having her any closer would stress him out and render him unable to talk properly.

“What are your plans after this, Diablo?” Laminitus asked after giving a small giggle.

“A snack to have with the alcohol sounds nice right about now.”

“We can have something prepared for you. But, that’s not what We meant...”

“Hmm...”

Diablo realized what she was after, and knew what she expected out of him.

The governor of Zircon Tower wanted Diablo and his group to stay by her side. He had defeated the Demon Lord's army's commander-in-chief, Varakness, but the Demon Lord was still at large. While they still didn't have all the details, the Fallen's words and their strength stood as incontestable proof of the Demon Lord's awakening. So long as the Demon Lord remains, his army will attack again, and Laminitus would need forces to defend this town.

"Retreat as soon as possible, Laminitus."

Having lost such a significant chunk of their forces, the Demon Lord's army wouldn't be able to stage another invasion for the time being. In that case, they should take this chance to retreat to a town like Faltra, which has a barrier.

The Demon Lord's revival...

Events like that happened before in *Cross Reverie*, with decisive battles that were held every so often. They were usually during the winter holidays or during Golden Week. The players would fight waves of mooks to gather items and gain the right to face the boss, join up with their companions, and fight the Demon Lord.

—I went solo, though...

Either way, those events were frequented by other level 150 adventurers equipped with legendary-class weapons. They would trade information online, with millions of active players putting their minds together to figure out the boss's stats and think of the best way to beat it.

This world, sadly, had no such adventurers; at the very least, Diablo never met anyone like that here. There was also nothing along the lines of, "Beat the boss within the event's one week run," either. Diablo had no idea where the Demon Lord even was.

Of course, there was always the possibility the Demon Lord was weaker compared to the game, but...

In the past, Diablo had fought a partially-awakened Demon Lord Krebskulm. Judging by his assessment at that time, Diablo had surmised that if it was

weaker than the game, it wasn't by much—in other words, this town's army wouldn't stand a chance.

They must retreat.

"But wouldn't a certain absurdly powerful Sorcerer, hypothetically speaking of course, defeat the Demon Lord?" Laminitus asked, frowning.

Would Diablo be able to beat the Demon Lord...?

"Perhaps I would win."

"Oh..."

"But that's assuming it's a one-on-one situation. The Fallen wouldn't simply stay put while I fight the Demon Lord, now would they?"

"Of course not. They would certainly interfere."

In the game, mooks would never show up in the middle of a last boss battle. That one-on-one scenario was part of the battle's production and aesthetic.

But reality was different. In all likelihood, he would have to fight through countless Fallen to even reach the Demon Lord. Diablo wasn't conceited or reckless enough to claim he could beat both the Demon Lord and his army at the same time.

"Then, if nothing else, could you defend this town?" Laminitus asked, heaving a sigh.

"If you were to retreat from this town, I would help cover for you while you do. But as an Adventurer, I have no intention of taking up permanent residence in this desert town."

"We said nothing about permanent residence. But We do have other options besides retreating. Perhaps we could bolster Our forces?"

"If an army of the same size as yesterday were to attack, you would need one hundred warriors, each roughly the strength of a Paladin. Or ten with the strength of Faltra's governor."

"That reminds Us... That Paladin Captain Batutta has been missing for a while now. Do you happen to know anything?"

“He’s dead...in all likelihood,” Diablo answered, after a moment of hesitance.

“What!?” Laminitus exclaimed, her eyes wide in shock.

“You can ask Lumachina for the details. She knows the whole story, and she is surely the most trustworthy.”

“True, the High Priest would never give a false testimony...”

“Is that all you need? If that’s the case...”

“We understand you do not wish to remain in this town for long, but you haven’t decided when to leave yet, have you?”

“That is true.”

First, they would have to rest. Diablo was tired, and his companions were exhausted as well.

They made their way from Faltra to Zircon Tower, passing through the former Demon Lord’s Domain, and challenged Batutta without a breather in between. Soon after, they had to escape Laminitus, and made their way to Diablo’s dungeon without time to return to town. Then they went straight from clearing the dungeon to yesterday’s war.

—My HP and MP are fine, but I’m definitely getting worn out...

“As far as We are concerned, We would prefer for you stay as long as you can. We will provide the finest hospitality possible to get you to do so.”

Diablo suddenly noticed the gap between them had suddenly shrunk. Laminitus had scooted over silently, drawing close enough for their shoulders to touch.

—Huh? Wh-What’s going on here?

Diablo was gradually losing his composure. In this world, he was a handsome, robust Sorcerer who commanded powerful magic, but on the inside he was a chaste, inexperienced, shut-in gamer. He couldn’t keep his bearings straight when approached by a woman in such a revealing outfit.

He lowered his gaze, only to be greeted by Laminitus’s deep cleavage. From the slit of her disheveled skirt, Diablo got a good look at her exposed thighs as

well.

—Holy...

But a Demon Lord would never let a pair of boobs or an exposed thigh or two distract him!

Laminitus leaned against him heavily. Diablo's arm fit snugly into her cleavage.

"Aaah...!?"

"Mmm... You're very...robust, aren't you..."

—Sh-She's talking about my arm, right? Definitely my arm. Nothing else she could be talking about!

Demons were a race that didn't excel very much when it came to their physical stats, but his level 150 body made him stronger than the common warrior.

"O-Of course." He just barely managed to stammer a reply.

"That reminds Us, you wanted a snack, no?" Laminitus's lips curled into a mischievous smile.

"Y-Yeah..."

"We brought chocolate..."

She took out a round, black bead. Chocolate was a fairly expensive, high-class confection in this country.

"That's...very thoughtful of you."

"Now, open your mouth..."

"I can eat without your help."

"Oh, forget about that... You can regard this as a side show..."

"Ugh..."

Arguing any longer felt foolish, so Diablo obediently opened his mouth. Laminitus put the chocolate—right into her own mouth.

Just as he was wondering if Laminitus was pulling his leg, her rouge colored

lips drew closer to his. Diablo's mind went completely blank as a soft feeling enveloped his lips. Something sweet slipped between his parted lips...

Chocolate.

—Is this...her tongue!?

Laminitus pushed her lips against his, and extended her tongue into his mouth.

A woman was licking his tongue. It felt as if his entire body was floating on top of her soft tongue. Her tongue toyed with his mouth as his hand was pushed against her breasts.

To top it all off, Laminitus's free hand crept down to Diablo's lower half, stroking him over his pants, as if to confirm the shape.

"Hmm... You're quite hard here..." Laminitus purred between their adhered lips.

—She means my leg! My thigh! My quadriceps muscle!

The stress made him brace his legs, which strained his thighs' muscles.

There was nothing else hardened to speak of! Only a perverted mind would assume there was any other perverted thing she was referring to.

Laminitus's rubbing became gradually more vigorous and daring.

"Heh heh... You're so big..."

—She means my height! I'm 1.88 meters, after all!

Laminitus was roughly 1.70 meters tall, making her tall for a woman, but still small compared to Diablo.

The sounds of fabric being rubbed, of something wet being stirred, and of Laminitus's labored breathing all mixed in Diablo's ears. Their lips were so close together he felt like they were going to melt together.

"Hnnng... Aaah..."

"H-Hey..."

He finally pulled away from Laminitus. They'd probably spent five minutes

kissing.

Diablo realized he'd held his breath the whole time, and breathed in deep, sending air into his lungs.

"You're not very experienced with kissing, are you, Diablo?" Laminitus asked, gazing at him with intoxicated eyes. "Surely this isn't your first time, is it?"

"Hmph... Of course it isn't."

When he first arrived in this world, Rem and Shera kissed him as part of the《Enslavement Ritual》, and he had just kissed Klem the other day when he put an《Enslavement Collar》on her. But it was his first time outside of a ritual, not to mention it was his first serious kiss...

Laminitus licked her lips. The candle light gleamed against her moistened lips.

"That's a shame. So how about your experience...over here?"

"Wait, what are you doing?"

"Did We not say We would provide the finest hospitality possible to get you to stay? Don't you worry, We're one to always strive for perfection. We promise it will feel just like heaven."

—What heaven, what are you talking about!?

This wasn't a matter of good or bad anymore, this was blatant seduction!

"I don't, hmm, appreciate, that..."

Back in his world, Diablo didn't have a job. He would spend all day gaming, but that was just because society didn't need someone like him. He wasn't unemployed out of sloth, and was actually a fairly serious type of person. So his overly serious disposition geared him toward thinking that seducing someone to get your way was the wrong thing to do. In no way, shape, or form was he "hesitating because a chick was hitting on him."

Totally. Definitely.

Diablo lifted his arms and made some space between him and Laminitus. His arm was still shoved snugly between her breasts.

"Uhn..." Laminitus cried out nasally.

“Ugh...”

“Do you want to touch them...? Heh, you can do as you please...”

“N-No. That’s not it...”

“No need to be timid. Or maybe, you’d prefer this?”

Laminitus leaned her body against Diablo’s, pushing him down onto the bed.

“L-Listen to me.”

“Try it. I promise it’ll feel good...”

—Seriously!?

No no no no no, no good. Feeling good is no good.

“That’s not the issue here...”

While Diablo was struggling to find a non-forceful way to reject her, Laminitus began nimbly undoing his belt.

“Heh heh... You really are robust... So long...and hard...”

As if confirming the shape of what she had exposed to the air, Laminitus enveloped it with both her hands. The belt was, of course, the clasp of his《Monarch’s Bangle》, and what was exposed into the air was his right arm.

It can’t be stressed how important this is.

Then her long tongue began crawling along his right arm. It was ticklish, but, like she said, it felt good.

Her lukewarm tongue felt different compared to the touch of a hand. That unique sensation sent shivers down Diablo’s spine.

“Aaah...”

“Heheh... So, you like it here?”

Her tongue licked the thick part—that is to say, the joint of his right wrist—relentlessly, making Diablo take a single, sharp breath. Having moistened it sufficiently, Laminitus placed his arm between her two swellings. Supporting her two mounds with her arms, she pressed down on his arm like a hotdog and began moving and rubbing it.

Lubricated by sweat and saliva, his long and hard “arm” moved up and down, enveloped by Laminitus’s two breasts. It was unlike the ticklish, soft stimulations of prior; a definite sense of weight and pressure continually pressed down on him, then retreated.

“Aaah, nnngh... How’s that?” Laminitus gasped.

“I-It’s, hmm...”

There was no denying it: It was amazing.

But no Demon Lord would ever just say, “It feels good” to such a thing.

The longer he remained wordless, the more aggressive Laminitus’s servicing became.

“Nnngh, aaah, mmm, still not satisfied...? Then, We’ll do this...”

“Ugh...”

“Aaah, mmm...” Laminitus began moaning peculiarly.

“Wh-What’s wrong?”

“M-Me, too... The tips, they’re rubbing!”

“The t-t-t-t-tips!?”

“Aaa! Nnng, mmm, aaah, nnng!”

She moved her chest up and down, using her waist and knees. The heat was slowly making her more and more excited.

—This is bad. This is really, really bad.

Diablo unintentionally half-rose up from the bed, when...

Knock knock...

A knocking sound issued from the door, clearing away the fog that had taken hold of Diablo’s mind. He had snapped out of it, as if cold water was spilled all over him.

He hurriedly put his (bangle’s) belt back on. Laminitus, too, readjusted her

disturbed dress.

“Hmph... Who dares disturb me?” Diablo asked with his Demon Lord’s voice.

†

“Umm... Pardon for coming to you this late at night, Lord Diablo,” a small voice said from the other side of the door. “I saw the light was still on and thought you might still be awake.”

It was Lumachina’s voice.

Normally, he would let her into the room, but Laminitus was still here, and in a rather revealing dress, at that. The room was full of the smell of alcohol, too, along with another, more obscene smell.

Even a prim and proper girl like Lumachina wouldn’t judge a jolly drinking bout during such a joyous occasion too harshly—but Diablo didn’t know if what they had just been doing could be considered a “jolly drinking bout.”

Diablo opened the window to air out the room.

“Is something wrong?” Diablo replied, eventually electing to keep the door closed.

“It is nothing urgent, but...there is something I must discuss with you.”

“I’m listening.”

“I think I will be going back to the Royal Capital soon,” Lumachina said through the door.

“What!?”

“Of course, not immediately. There are still many here who require treatment, and beginning tomorrow we will be able to use the church, so I intend to lift the《Death Knell disease》then.”

“R-Right.”

The Paladin Captain Batutta’s sorcery spread a terrible curse called the Death Knell disease around Zircon Tower. But thanks to an item brought from Diablo’s personal base, the《White Ox Statue》, they were now able to dispel the curse from the townspeople. Lumachina wasn’t the only one capable of using the

statue, but, without her to manage the dispelling, the process would probably be reduced to havoc and unrest.

With Batutta gone, there was no one to lead the church in this town. If Lumachina were to leave, she would have to appoint someone trustworthy to run the local church. But once that was done...

“You say you want to return to the capital, but won’t that mean going back into the hands of the people who tried eliminating you?” Diablo asked. “Do you have a chance of winning against them?”

Lumachina was the highest-ranking member of the Church, the High Priest. Yet, the key figures who should have been serving her—the members of the Cardinal Authority—instead attempted to claim her life because she tried ridding the Church of corruption.

Lumachina may hold the highest position in the Church, but the Paladins, who serve as the Church’s arm and sword, obeyed the Cardinal Authority. They used their authority to embezzle funds and keep the Church under their thumb.

Without any power to defend herself with, the Cardinal Authority would dispose of her. Realizing this, Lumachina made her way to Zircon Tower, hoping to enlist the Paladin Captain Batutta to her side. However, while it was rumored he was a noble man, Batutta, too, had fallen to villainy. Lumachina’s situation hadn’t changed in the slightest.

As for the Paladin sent by the Cardinal Authority to assassinate her, Lumachina had saved him from death’s door in the depths of Diablo’s dungeon...

—There ought to be a limit to how naïve you can be...

For all his Demon Lord role playing, Diablo was still only acting. He didn’t actually want anyone to die. But, if someone were to threaten his life, he doubted he would go so far to save them. He prioritized his friends’ lives over those of his enemies, and he wouldn’t hesitate to kill anyone who attacked him with the intent to kill, either. That much should be obvious.

But it was exactly because battles where life and death stood in the balance were so common in this world, that Diablo felt Lumachina’s caring disposition

was a precious thing worth defending.

“As I am right now, I will probably fail,” Lumachina admitted. “It is very possible I will not even create a chance for people to even want for a reform.”

“So you do understand.”

“I do... But I still intend to leave in a month.”

“Why are you in such a hurry to return?”

“Because the Demon Lord has been revived. I am afraid the Church will not have the power to defend the people in this time of plight, not when it is led by those who only act to fulfill their own greed.”

“I doubt that it will.”

“You think so, too, Lord Diablo?”

“Expecting the corrupted bastards at the top of society to simply reform and do away with their greed because of an impending crisis is something that would only happen in a fairy tale. Reality is much colder and crueler than that.”

“So will they do nothing, then?”

“Oh no, they’ll act, all right... As soon as they catch wind of the Demon Lord’s revival, they’ll transfer their funds and families to another country. Once the front lines are lost, the rich and the privileged will be the first to turn tail and flee the capital.”

“No... That’s awful...”

“Villains never change their ways. No matter the situation, they always try finding out how to best exploit others to maximize their gain.”

“Yes... You are right. I think so, too. Nothing would be better than to see them reform... But the way things are, the only thing I can see happening is the death of the innocent.”

“Indeed...”

Diablo understood why Lumachina was in a hurry now. But she had no means of stopping the Church.

—I’ve got a bad feeling about this...

“I beg of you, Lord Diablo! Please lend me your help, and protect me!”

She had believed Diablo to be “God who had taken the guise of an Adventurer claiming to be a Demon Lord.” No, maybe she did before, but had already seen through his lie by now...

—Should I go to the capital to defend Lumachina?

It would mean charging into the Cardinal Authority’s stronghold, exposing their lies and corruption, and restoring Lumachina to her rightful position and authority. To do so, he would have to contend against Paladins, who were all roughly level 100.

It would be difficult...

“What would you do if I refused?”

“In that case, I would go back to the capital alone.”

“You’ll die.”

“Living without doing anything to change things would be much worse.”

“Aren’t there others you could ask for help?”

“I doubt I would find someone stronger and more dependable than you if I scoured Lyferia up and down, Lord Diablo. And even if I did, it would be uncertain they would cooperate with me. I will not cling to such slim prospects. I would rather go back to the capital and try reforming the Church in whatever way I can, even if it costs me my life.”

Diablo’s lips curled up into a smile with a “Hmph.”

Maybe before he would have believed facing scores of Paladins would be “difficult,” but now, things were different.

“Very well.”

“Huh?”

The items he had collected from his treasure vault were the strongest, without match. Things weren’t the way they were before.

“I shall grant you your wish. My endless power will destroy all those who

stand in your path.”

“Oh... Oh, thank you so much! Thank you so very much!”

Lumachina prostrated herself on the corridor floor and bowed down repeatedly in reverent gratitude, though Diablo couldn’t see her through the closed door.

Having made his imposing statement, Diablo’s gaze fell to Laminitus, who had glared at him, pouting in displeasure. Diablo winced despite himself.

“What?”

“Was Our hospitality lacking? Will you really be leaving in a month?”

“You heard what we said. The reason should be clear.”

“We see you prefer...younger girls...”

“That’s not it!”

Diablo carelessly raised his voice, which made Lumachina ask him from the other side of the door, “Is anything the matter, Lord Diablo?”

“Ah, ahem! No, all is well. It has gotten quite late and you have much to do tomorrow. You should head back and rest.”

“Yes... Umm...”

“Is there something else you need?”

“No, it’s just... Thank you so much, God.”

Lumachina went back to her room, leaving those words behind.

—She still believes that!?

†

“Did she just call you ‘God’?” Laminitus asked, her head tilted curiously.

“It just means I’m that powerful.”

“We thought the Church forbade worshiping anyone except for the one true God written in the scriptures.”

“Quite knowledgeable, aren’t you?”

“We are not foolish enough to stand up to someone without looking into them.”

“Well, the thing is...Lumachina seems to believe I’m the lord’s avatar.”

“Is that girl slow in the head?”

“Does she strike you as a particularly bright one?”

“No, you are right... She is an uncompromising, sentimental fool—she would have to be, if she truly seeks to change the Church from within.”

“That’s right.”

Laminitus giggled. “Come to think of it, perhaps you being God’s avatar would make more sense than you just being some talented Sorcerer.”

“Hmph, do not mock me, fool. I’ve already told you before—I am a Demon Lord from another world.”

“Quite the interesting man, you...”

“And you, the peculiar woman.”

Dealing with Laminitus weighed on his nerves, it seemed. She gave him the unpleasant feeling she could see right through his Demon Lord persona. Perhaps that was what set a mature woman apart...

Laminitus grabbed her robe from the chair and put it on.

“It seems We have been rejected in favor of another woman, so We will be taking our leave.”

“What about the town?”

“We are no fool. If you leave, We have no option left but to evacuate.”

“I see... I thought you would be stubborn about not leaving.”

“We are. This town is our Kingdom, after all. But, once word comes out that you’ve left, all the Adventurers and mercenaries We’ve gathered—hell, even the soldiers—would flee.”

“They...probably would.”

The Demon Lord's army left a powerful impression. Everyone was well aware it was Diablo and his group who turned the tide in the races' favor. If the heroes who saved the day would leave town, so would everyone else.

"We see no reason to fret." Laminitus shrugged. "A town can always be rebuilt so long as there are people to live in it. Had it not been for your deeds, all would have truly been lost. We really cannot thank you enough."

"I don't really... I do not care for that. I am a Demon Lord, and a town of the races interests me little."

"In a month, We will take our civilians and retreat from Zircon Tower. Our sand ships can go until the edge of the desert, so you may take sail with us. Until then, keep this town safe."

"Well, if you offer us passage, we may wait."

"Heh... Should you change your mind, come visit Us in the tower. We can continue what we started tonight then..."

Diablo stiffened, the memory of what they had just done resurfacing.

"Wh-What are you saying, fool?" Diablo folded his arms and averted his gaze. "Do you truly believe I have interest in such things?"

"We regret to inform you that We've developed quite an interest in your...thing..."

—Calm the hell down, woman!

Diablo had to invest all his composure into holding back the blush which threatened to creep onto his face.

Diablo turned his back to her and looked out the window, letting the cold night air chill his burning face.

"Hurry back already."

"Good night, Diablo."

He could hear the door close shut behind him. It seemed he wouldn't be able to go back to sleep for a while...

Chapter 1: The Royal Capital

A thundering rumble shook the air. A massive serpent writhed in pain, scattering the desert sands to the four winds, and eventually stopped moving.

It was a Sand Worm, and an offensive spell had blown it away. It was a powerful monster, but, after taking this much damage, it surely wouldn't attack them again.

"Whoa, amazing!" Horn shouted, leaning over the ship's guard rail. "That was amazing, Boss!"

"Naturally," Diablo replied, returning the dagger in his hand into its scabbard.

His main weapon, the staff《Tonnerre Empereur》, multiplied his firepower several times over, but took a massive toll on his MP consumption to compensate.

What Diablo had used right now was a dagger called the《Garuda Edge》. It increased his maximum HP and had a high probability of cutting through an opponent's physical attack, nullifying it.

Weapons that had effects better suited for armor were unpopular in the game and were treated as trash drops. Increasing one's DPS was what mattered, since it helped clear quests more efficiently.

But in this world, dying in battle meant real, actual, uncompromising death. There was no respawning, and no continues. The chance of a sneak attack from an unknown direction was always a very real possibility, so Diablo had kept this piece of equipment to stay on the safe side.

Diablo's Demon Lord role playing made him appear fearless on the surface, but, on the inside, he was still a gamer. Experienced gamers were, in many cases, so cautious it nearly crossed the line into outright cowardice.

It was then when a pair of sizable breasts rammed into him. Two soft swellings clashed against Diablo's stomach.

The Elven girl, Shera, clung to him in an embrace. Elves were typically thin and lacking when it came to their busts, but Shera had the unusual physique of being slender with a pair of rather godly breasts. As she squeezed against him fondly, he could feel their softness through the fabric of her clothes.

“You did it, Diablo!”

“Y-Yeah... Are you unharmed?”

“I’m fine!”

Diablo’s gaze wandered around the sand ship. The corpses of flying-type monsters had littered the ship’s deck, some of them petrified by the effects of Shera’s bow. Most of the sailors and soldiers, who were under Laminitus’s command, were apparently unharmed, though the treatment of the injured and the repairs to the ship meant they still had quite a job cut out for them.

Diablo’s gaze fell on a Pantherian girl eying him and Shera grumpily.

Rem.

He’d given her new equipment recently, so her appearance was significantly different from what Diablo was used to. This outfit was somehow even more lacking in fabric than her previous one. When it came to female-only equipment in MMORPGs, the higher the level needed to equip it, the more revealing the outfits tended to become. But Rem didn’t seem to mind how scant her clothes were. If anything, she said she was glad to wear something so easy to move in.

Maybe this idiosyncratic sense of appeal was characteristic of Pantherians.

“...Stop clinging to him like this over every little thing, Shera. It’s indecent.”

“You sound like my mom or something, Rem.”

“...I think anyone would agree with me on this.”

“But but but, when I feel happy or excited, I feel like I just goootta express this feeling somehow!”

“...I fail to see how what you just said is in any way related to you hugging him all the time.”

“It means our hearts are closer together!”

“In your case...you’re just looking for a reason to push those useless lumps of boob lard against him, aren’t you.”

“That’s so mean!”

“...I would just prefer it if people didn’t doubt our integrity because of your antics.”

“F-Fine, I get it... We just have to all hug together, right?”

“How in the world did you come to that conclusion, you stupid, dumb elf!?”

“Whaaaaaaaaat!? I thought it was a good idea!”

Rem and Shera were, as always, bickering, and someone was staring at them from the side, gritting their teeth in frustration.

It was Rose, the Magimatic Maid.

She was unable to move from the sand ship’s main mast, which stood right at the center of the ship. Rose was naturally extremely heavy, but would become even more so during times of battle when she summoned a massive, mechanical hand out of nowhere. That hand was, of course, unbelievably heavy, and if Rose were to carelessly move to one of the ship’s sides, the whole sand ship would tilt over in that direction due to her weight.

Having taken the game’s settings deeply to heart, Rose adored Diablo. Her feelings were so profound they went beyond common sense, which made her jealousy and spite be only in direct proportion to her unwavering loyalty.

Diablo, being a fundamentally pacifistic person, didn’t want to see his party members fighting each other.

“Where’s Lumachina?” Looking around, Diablo cocked his head in

contemplation.

"...Lady Laminitus called for her earlier, in the cabins," Rem answered. "I believe she was asked to tend to the wounded."

"Hmm."

Lumachina's healing skills were extraordinary, so it made sense Laminitus would call on her for that.

"You can count on Lumachina!" Horn pumped her fist.

"...Wouldn't it be better if you waited in the cabins, too, Horn?"

"Huh? Why?"

After a hesitant pause, Rem said, "I think it would be best if you stayed where it's safe when there's fighting going on."

"H-Huh?" Horn stiffened.

"That's right~ When you hang too close to the monsters, it's really hard to hit them," Shera, who was terribly slow to pick up on the mood, said lightly. "I can't aim properly when it feels like my arrows might hit you."

"...It's hard for me to deploy my summons, too. And you're not strong enough that we can let you handle the monsters on your own."

Horn retreated with a crestfallen moan...

Diablo felt bad for her, but Horn was a Seeker, after all. While it was technically a physical attacker class, it was more geared for support and unsuited for combat. On top of that, Grasswalkers were a race that retained their child-like appearances regardless of age, and close combat was their weak point. In *Cross Reverie*, Seekers could compensate for that with equipment that augmented their fire power, as well as rely on magic. It was by no means considered a bad class.

—Besides, Horn is twelve years old and only at level 20.

Diablo and his party were a group of comparatively high-level Adventurers. Comparing herself to them wouldn't paint Horn in a good light even without all those factors to consider.

Diablo also thought it would be better if she stayed in the cabins, out of harm's way, and helped in any way she could there.

He opened his mouth to speak...but decided against it. Someone as tongue-tied as Diablo would more than likely just hurt Horn more with a careless comment. Diablo intended to learn from his past mistakes.

While she wasn't quite a stand-in for him, Rose spoke her own opinion...

"Useless tools get thrown out with the trash, don't you know?" Rose said with a brilliant smile on her face.

"Heee!!!" Horn squealed with tears in her eyes.

—No no no, what are you saying!? Anything I come up with (probably) wouldn't be as bad as that!

Diablo flapped his cape with an audible snap. "Hmph! What are you fools saying? When did I ever depend on you during battle? Compared to me, the strength of you all is nil! You are all equally powerless to me!"

—So just get along!

He'd hoped the feeling behind his words would come across—but everyone just hung their heads dejectedly.

"It is all as you say, Master..." Rose moaned morosely. "Compared to Master, Rose is but a speck of dust polluting the wayside with Rose's presence. Forgive Rose for Rose's wretched existence..."

Rem and Shera looked depressed as well, while Horn's expression remained as dark and gloomy as ever.

Diablo internally panicked.

"Th-That is precisely why you should endeavor to at least not get in my way!"

Rem shrugged. "You're the same as ever, Diablo."

"I gotcha, Boss!" Horn raised her fist enthusiastically. "I'm'a work super hard so I don't get in your way!"

"That's the spirit. Do your best, girl."

—It's a good thing I somehow managed to get that across... Effort pays off.

Rose opened her mouth to speak with a pensive expression. “If Master desires it...Rose could—however unwillingly—propose a way to draw out Master’s underlings’ potential.”

That was an unexpected offer...

Diablo cocked his head curiously. This world greatly resembled *Cross Reverie*, with a few exceptions. Diablo had never heard of any methods of drawing out a party member’s strength. Of course, there were ways to temporarily buff one’s companions in battle...but that’s not what Rose meant here.

“Speak, I’ll allow it.”

“As Master wishes. We can use this treasure Rose has here to form a《Subjugation Contract》. In so doing, the Thrall’s abilities will increase in accordance with the Lord’s. Even insignificant pebbles like them may become paperweights that are of use to Master.”

Rose took out a black, leather collar. Magic glyphs were etched onto it, which gave it a certain indecent, Gothic-Lolita sort of appeal.

“A Subjugation Contract?”

Diablo tried recalling the game’s mechanics. Nothing like that was ever implemented.

—No, wait... Didn’t a rival game have a feature like that?

It was something along the lines of an apprenticeship system, where existing players could help guide newbies through the game. The stronger the mentor, the stronger the effects of its support. Put simply, it was a “mercy system enabling your friends to play at the same level as you.”

Maybe *Cross Reverie* had a similar system planned for it that was never implemented? Or maybe the devs wanted to take successful mechanics from other games, and planned to implement them in the future?

Diablo originally thought this world was based on *Cross Reverie*, and he was still fairly convinced this was true. But what if elements from other games influenced *Cross Reverie*, and the Subjugation Ritual was a reflection of that?

What was the nature of this world to begin with...?

Abandoning this question, as he had no way of answering it right now, Diablo turned his concerns toward Horn.

“If it strengthens Horn without any repercussions, that’s fine, but is there any sort of price she would have to pay?”

“There is none,” Rose proclaimed. “The collar already has Master registered as the Lord, so the Grasswalker would only need to put it on.”

—It already has me registered? I don’t recall signing up for anything like that... That sounds like something a conman would say to cheat people into a bad deal... Damn it, she’s scaring me!

“Wait a moment!” Rem forced herself between them. “I’ve heard of this contract before. I’ve never seen this odd collar, but from what I know about Subjugation Rituals, the Thrall does receive the Lord’s protection—but in exchange, if the Lord dies, doesn’t the Thrall die, too?”

—That’s a pretty hefty price!

“What of it?” Rose tilted her head quizzically. “Should Master pass away, Rose would never be able to live on in this world. Rose would end her own life either way, so Rose sees no demerit to this.”

“...Please only speak for yourself...” Rem sighed.

Shera grimaced. “I don’t want to imagine Diablo dying...”

“How much stronger would it make me?” Horn asked.

“You would become a servant to Master, who is unmatched by any and all on the face of this world,” Rose said, her lips curling up into a smile. “The effects of the contract will without a doubt be so great, no tongue the races have ever conceived could hope to describe them.”

“Whoa... That sounds amazing! Super awesome!”

“...Calm down and think about this rationally,” Rem chided Horn. “You’re only twelve, and Diablo is obviously older than you. While it’s true the prospect of dying of old age is preposterous for Adventurers, it’s not an idea you can simply disregard.”

“O-Old age!?”

“...Besides, if you put on the collar, what would you do when you got married?”

“M-Married? U-Uhm... I, uhhh...”

Diablo’s stare linked with Horn’s, and the girl averted her gaze, her cheeks flushing red. Seeing this, Rem and Shera blushed as well.

—What’d I do this time!?

None of this made sense...

Rose furrowed her brows. For being sold as furniture, Magimatic Maids were certainly quite expressionable.

“Rose retracts Rose’s offer, after all. Rose will never allow it. Rose will never allow foolish rabble like you near Master!”

“Huh!? Why, all of a sudden!?”

“In the first place, Rose intended to have Master put the collar on Rose... Rose will never relinquish this honor to anyone else!”

“...Will the collar even have any effect on you?” Rem asked scornfully. “You’re a machine, no?”

“I-It will not, but... Why are you the only ones to have collars on!? Rose says this is unfair!”

“Huuuh!? It’s not like we want to have these things on, you know!” Shera placed a hand on the collar for emphasis.

“To be forced into enslavement to Master... Aaah, Rose cannot suppress the envy... Is this your attempt at showing off?”

The girls’ boisterous bickering was gradually escalating.

“Enough!” Diablo cut the conversation short. “I have no complaints regarding Horn’s contributions to our group. There is no need for this Subjugation Ritual.”

If it turned out there was no actual strengthening effect, it would be a huge, irrevocable mistake. Even if it did make her stronger, sending Horn, who was unsuited for battle, to fight after she had grown stronger through such questionable means only filled Diablo with dread. Besides, having someone

else's life on his shoulders was too heavy a responsibility!

Seeing that Diablo had come to a conclusion, Rose smiled, seemingly pleased, but quickly returned to her expressionless face and bowed before him.

"As Master wishes."

"All right..." Horn still seemed to have her qualms, but regretfully stepped down.

"...It is for the best. You are still young, and honest effort will do you well."

Rem placed an encouraging hand on Horn's shoulder.

"Let's all do our bestest-best together, okay?" Shera said, enveloping Horn in a hug.

Half a month later, the party had returned to Faltra...

†

Having returned, Diablo was able to confirm Klem and Edelgard's safety. Quite a bit happened that probably deserves to be told, but the story moves on far too quickly to dwell on that.

Laminitus and Zircon Tower's citizens settled down in some towns near Faltra. Laminitus did say quite a few things that would amount to treason against the crown, after all, so she probably preferred to keep her distance from the capital. That said, she didn't seem to mesh very well with Faltra's governor, either...

After a short rest, Diablo and his group left for the capital.

†

“...I can’t...take anymore...” Rem said, her face white as a sheet. “Thank you for...everything...and goodbye...Diablo... I leave...the rest...to...you...”

“Hold on, Rem! Stay with us!” Shera hugged her frightfully.

The carriage jolted with a bang.

“Heee!?” Rem gave a short shriek, and fell completely silent.

“Aaah, Reeem!” Shera wailed in despair, as if she had just seen her feline friend breathe one last breath.

Diablo shrugged. “She passed out again. Just let her sleep for a while.”

“Yeah, you’re right...”

Lyferian Calendar: Month 9, Day 22, Year 164—

Gently sloping hills dotted the terrain around them. It was nearly sunset, which had come a bit later than they had thought. The sunlight was gradually turning crimson.

Their carriage ran along the highway. It was a simple, roofless carriage with a bench set on top of the compartment. Rem, who was usually bad when it came to vehicles, seemed to take even worse to an open carriage like this. She would panic at the slightest jolt, and was repeatedly slipping in and out of consciousness. When she was awake, she was in a state of constant stress, and whenever anything happened, she would pass out like a marionette with its strings cut. Diablo and the others were worried about her at first, but, after spending thirty days with her in this state, they’d learned to ignore it.

She was, at this point, completely exhausted.

Lumachina, who was sitting at one end of the bench, fixed her gaze forward.

“We’re almost there.” Her expression was strained with stress.

—Of course she’s nervous... She’s heading into the stronghold of the very people who tried to take her life.

“Is that the capital!?” Horn stood on top of the bench and stretched, her long

rabbit ears swinging enthusiastically.

Horn's personality was that of a curious, adventurous person. Her eyes were shining with excitement, filled with anticipation for her first visit to the Royal Capital.

The carriage crossed over a hill, and massive fields spread out before them. They were divided by canals into square fields, with different types of crops being cultivated within each one. Diablo could see a great number of people working the fields, presumably farmers. As it was already sunset, they were packing up their tools and preparing to head back into town.

Fences were set up around the road to ward off beasts, and brawny soldiers stood guard along them.

Diablo's eyes widened in shock.

—What's...going on here...?

It was completely different... In *Cross Reverie*, the royal capital, Seven Wall, was a beautiful city that lay beyond the gently sloping hills, and was surrounded by a lake. The royal castle, Castle Grandiose, was surrounded by seven layers of walls and ramparts, but the castle town was protected by a barrier instead, and the citizens were free to come and leave as they pleased. At least, that's how Diablo remembered it...

But this looked like a completely different city. A large wall towered over the fields, and, from within the wall, several spires were built, standing like spears pointing skyward.

"Lumachina, do you know when that wall was built?"

"Hmm... I don't recall it having been built yet when I was first brought to the capital, fourteen years ago. Ah, I believe it was twelve years ago. When the current king of Lyferia, His Majesty Delouche Xandros, took the throne, he ordered its construction immediately."

"The King of Lyferia, you say..."

The king was never named in the game, so Diablo had no way of knowing if Delouche Xandros was the same king he knew from *Cross Reverie*'s story.

Perhaps the town's appearance was set to change after a future update. Personally speaking, Diablo preferred the more peaceful atmosphere of the town he knew to this more war-like appearance.

But in either case, increasing their defenses now that the Demon Lord had been revived was wise. The people in charge were capable, if nothing else.

"Is something wrong with the wall, Diablo?" Shera asked.

"No... I was just thinking that it almost feels like they predicted the Demon Lord's awakening."

"Ah, I see..."

"Wooow, it's so cool! So that's the capital!" Horn exclaimed, bending over the carriage's compartment.

She was almost about to fall, so Diablo pulled her back by the collar.

Incidentally, Rose was too heavy to be next to them, so they had her sit on top of the back wheels' axis, hugging her knees silently.

And so they arrived in the capital.

†

"Hey you, suspicious Demon over there! Get off."

Their carriage was stopped at the gate, and a pike was suddenly thrust in Diablo's direction.

—Oh, this brings back memories...

This exchange reminded him of when he was first summoned to this world.

Diablo got off from the carriage's compartment and glared at the soldiers.

"Since you dare direct your blades against me, I assume you've prepared yourselves for the retribution you're about to receive."

"Ugh... Th-This guy... He's a Fallen!?"

True to what one would expect of the royal capital's guards, as soon as they noticed a disturbance, a group of thirty or so troops gathered around. For weak mooks, they were rather well organized.

Most of them were warrior types averaging a level of 30, and while they weren't of much use against the Demon Lord's army, they were more than enough to maintain public order.

—So...how do I get out of this one?

Having talked back to them the way he did, it was doubtful they'd let Diablo into the city. When he got in trouble on《Bridge of Ulug》, he managed to convince the guards because they had known Rem and Shera. When he needed to get through Faltra's inner gates, the Adventurer Guild's guildmaster, Sylvie, had vouched for him. Throughout his journey, Diablo had to go through city gates, and, each time, Rem was able to smoothly handle negotiations... But Rem was, unfortunately enough, passed out at the moment...

—Huh? So no one's ever let me pass through a city gate while I kept my Demon Lord persona?

Diablo broke into a cold sweat.

Left with no choice, Lumachina stepped forward. She was in a position where she would have to hide her identity right now, so she wore a hooded robe, often worn by followers of the Church, and covered her mouth with a white fabric. If she were to reveal her identity, Diablo and his group would likely be allowed to pass through the gate, but that would also alert the Cardinal Authority to the fact the High Priest had returned to the capital. That was one thing they would have to avoid...

Shera was the Elven princess, but had nothing on her to prove her identity. Horn was just a common Adventurer, and Rose seemed to be radiating an aura of palpable malice at the soldiers for pointing their spears at Diablo. Rose was, without a doubt, the worst possible person to depend on here.

"Pardon, could you please let him pass?"

So said a young woman in a high class dress, who had appeared from the inner side of the gate. The soldiers gave a startled "Huh!?" at her words.

Her black hair was curled at the sides, and she wore a white, wide-hemmed

dress. She seemed oddly familiar...

The young woman bent her knees and bowed in a lady-like manner.

“It has been some time, Sir Diablo.”

“Yayyy!!!” Shera hopped out of the carriage’s compartment. “Alicia! It’s been foreeeverrr!”

She sighed at Shera’s embrace. “Heheh... I am glad to see you have not changed, Miss Shera.”

Diablo couldn’t immediately tell because her glasses were missing, and her hair color and outfit were different, but the lady in the dress was none other than Alicia Cristela. She was daughter to a duke and an Imperial Knight, which meant there were none more reliable than her to vouch for them in this city.

Thanks to Alicia, Diablo and his group crossed through the gate without further incident.

Despite it being the Royal Capital, there were quite a few demis walking around the streets, of all races and dispositions. Diablo had heard before that the discrimination against demis ran quite rampant in the capital, but, just from looking at the main street, there were more than just Humans walking around. Elves, Dwarves, Pantherians, Grasswalkers, Demons... But with that said, there was indeed a majority of Humans.

Their carriage rode through the main street lined with all manner of stores. The road itself was made of stone tiles, which made the carriage rumble and shake as it rode through the street. The buildings’ architectures were reminiscent of Faltra’s, but there were far more billboards around, which accentuated how much more passionate the residents of this city were when it came to business.

Sitting on the compartment bench, the group exchanged greetings. Alicia had put her glasses on now, since, without them, she would have trouble discerning the others’ expressions.

“It is a pleasure to meet you...” Alicia bowed respectfully before Lumachina. “I am Alicia Cristela, an Imperial Knight. It is a great honor to make the acquaintance of someone as venerated as you, lady High Priest.”

Lumachina had removed the cloth over her mouth for the sake of introductions. “I, too, am glad to have met you. I am Lumachina Weselia. I thank you greatly for your assistance at the gate.”

“Nothing could please me more than knowing I have been of help to you, your Eminence.”

They were both well-mannered ladies of nobility, so their dignified exchange began and ended without a hitch. Following that, Alicia bowed her head to Horn and Rose.

“I have heard Diablo and his company have made new companions. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

“I’m Horn! You can count on me if you ever need to clear a dungeon!”

“Heheh... I will make sure to call on you when the time comes.”

“Yep!”

In contrast to Horn’s outgoing attitude—

“May Rose inquire as to what manner of relationship you have with Master?” Rose fixed a cold glare in Alicia’s direction.

“If Sir Diablo were to order me to die, I would gladly do so. Does that explanation suffice?”

Alicia gave a bold answer, her expression not changing in the slightest. She pushed the bridge of her glasses up with a poke of a finger.

“Are you... Is Rose to interpret this as you claiming to be one of Master’s belongings?” Rose raised an eyebrow.

“For as long as he does not cast me aside.”

“Understood. You may refer to Rose as Rose. Rose is the safekeeper of Master and Master’s belongings. Therefore, Rose will protect you from all threats.”

“Why, thank you very much.” Alicia smiled silently as Rose bowed deeply before her.

Those who lord over others must treat those beneath them with proper respect. Good communication skills require more than just lowering one’s head

and nodding to everything.

As always, Alicia's social skills were outstanding. Even though she'd never met them before, she was able to form cordial relations with two contrasting figures like Horn and Rose. The way she handled Rose was especially impressive.

It was probably the first time Rose hadn't treated someone she had first met with something that wasn't blatant hostility. She'd even tried preemptively attacking Klem and Edelgard...

Diablo decided it was probably best to consider the mess that took place in Faltra some other time, and decided instead to focus on the present.

"Good job greeting us at the gate, Alicia."

"Your gratitude is wasted on me, Lord Diablo. The letter Miss Rem sent me said you would arrive within these next few days, so I've stayed put at the gate, awaiting your arrival."

—Wait, she's been waiting for us at the gate this whole time? For days!?

Diablo was so surprised his eyes were about go so wide that...

"Whaaat!? This *whole* time!?" Horn exclaimed instead.

"Of course. That much is to be expected, no?"

No one else refuted her words.

—Come to think of it, Shera's a princess and Lumachina's a High Priest. They're probably used to people being this devoted to them. Even Rose spent months in the dungeon just waiting for me.

The most sensible person in this party, Rem, was still sleeping away several days' worth of fatigue. She was as pale as a cadaver earlier, but the color was gradually returning to her cheeks.

Now that Alicia mentioned it, Diablo had remembered Rem saying something about sending Alicia a letter when they were in one of the adjacent towns. Diablo wasn't sure if that was necessary at the time, but, thanks to that, they'd made it through the gate. He should thank her later...

Lumachina planned on going back to the Church as soon as she made it back

to the capital, but that was far too risky. They should rest first, using that time to also gather information about the Church. If they were to expose the top brass's corruption, they would have to gather that intel without making it known Lumachina had returned to the capital.

Alicia had taken a seat next to Diablo.

"Pardon me. I never imagined you would be accompanying the High Priest... As always, you surpass my most wildest imaginations, Sir Diablo."

"That much is to expected. What of you, though?"

Alicia was a Demon Lord worshiper, and a traitor to the races. She had tried killing Rem once but was forgiven, and was now one of Diablo's followers. Even still, her enmity toward the races—and particularly toward the higher-ups in the capital—remained as strong as it ever was. If her betrayal had become known, she would have been executed the moment she set foot in the capital, but...

"Due to certain...circumstances, I am currently on leave, but I have not been relieved of my position as an Imperial Knight," Alicia said, pinching the hem of her dress. "The particularities of my current situation are a touch complicated, so I suggest we discuss it after dinner, at our leisure."

"Very well."

Alicia was a secretive one, and had a mindset the races would find unwelcome. If the fastidious Lumachina were to overhear something that would give away Alicia's tendencies, things would no doubt become troublesome. There was the carriage's coachman to consider, too. So it was probably for the best if he asked her for the details later.

Alicia changed the subject. "I have prepared lodgings for you and your group, Sir Diablo. Too many people come and go at my family's mansion, and with it being in the first district, demis would be too conspicuous. So I thought the sixth district... Ah, pardon me. Here, you can see it on this map."

Realizing Diablo and his group probably didn't have a map of the city, Alicia handed one over. Taking the map from her hands, Diablo spread it open.

The city was in the shape of a circle, divided into thirteen districts. The city was designed like a clock, with the most northern section being the twelfth

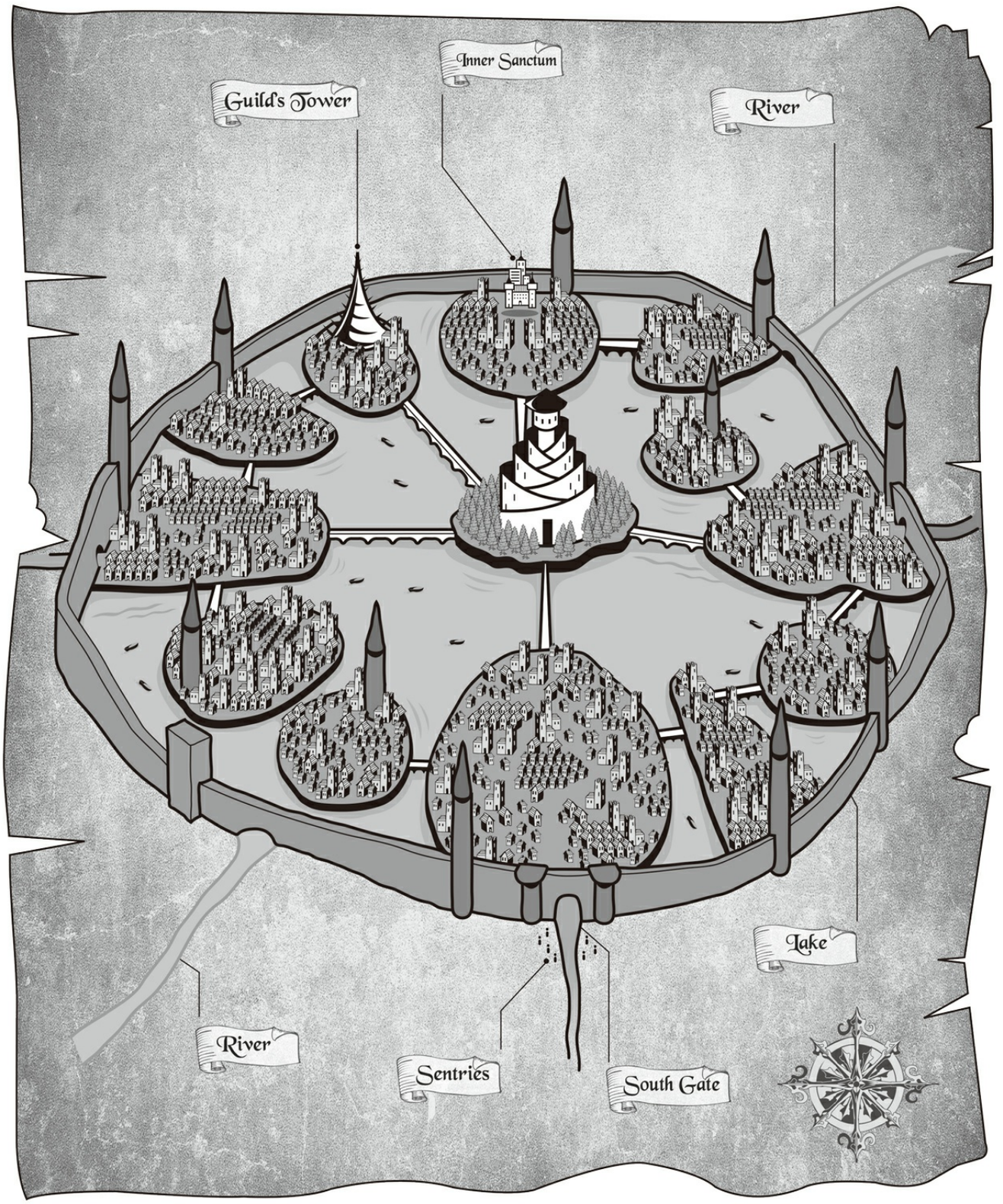
district. Going clockwise from there were the first, second, and third districts, and so on, with the sixth district being in the southern section of town. At the very center of the city was the royal castle. The huge castle was the size of a district by itself, with its rumored seven walls and ramparts. An extensive network of canals ran between the districts, and it was possible to go from one district to another via bridges and small boats.

It was truly an elegant, beautiful city. But, though the climate was pleasant, since it was located in a basin, it was often foggy.

Having passed through the city's western gate, Diablo and his group were currently in the ninth district. If one were to include the ones around the central district, each of the thirteen districts was enclosed by walls.

There was a barrier in place as well, to prevent a possible Fallen attack. To maintain the barrier, each district housed a large tower. It was as if the barrier surrounding Faltra was erected thirteen times over, all gathered in one place.

The Seven Wall Map



The central district was the king's castle, and served as both the dwelling of the king and his family as well as the center of the city and country's national politics.

The first district was populated by aristocrats and wealthy merchants, so its security was also tight compared to other districts. Its population was entirely Human, so, if Diablo or his companions were to approach the first district, it would certainly result in a dispute.

The ninth district, where they currently were, served as the capital's wholesale town. Wholesale stores dealt with large merchants and businesses, and didn't bother with private clients. Transactions were done by the crate or barrel. With a population as large as the capital's, trading would have to be done on such a grand scale, too.

There were plenty of inns in the ninth district, but, since they were aimed at merchants, the meals were questionable and the beds were small, all while the lodging prices were high. This was because lodging also came with stables for carriages and a warehouse to store one's merchandise in. Security expenses figured into the lodging price, as well.

The sixth district, where Alicia had prepared Diablo's lodgings, was also known as the Entrance to the capital. The territories of the Kingdom of Lyferia were spread out from the south of the capital. Since most people entered and left the city from the southern gate, most of the stores aimed at the common person were there. It was also the district Adventurers frequented the most—which was also true in *Cross Reverie*.

—I guess this really is fundamentally the same Seven Wall I know.

While its appearance was significantly different, the map was pretty much the same one Diablo knew. The biggest difference was the city being much, much larger than it was in the game.

In-game, all the shops the Adventurers would use were in the sixth district, while the city's quests were spread out across the different districts. Diablo didn't know how identical it was to the game, but some of the quests included looking for lost cats, or taking out bandits... Reminiscing of all the quests he'd completed filled Diablo with nostalgia.

In *Cross Reverie*, the royal capital (and, more specifically, the sixth district) was where the game began; the first town.

Spreading out the map, Diablo confirmed a single location, on the off-chance it was different from what he knew.

“Where is the Church based, then?”

The one who answered his question wasn’t Alicia, but rather Lumachina who was seated next to them.

“The twelfth district, due north—that is where the Cathedral is.”

Lumachina clenched her fists nervously.

†

The sixth district’s main street was also awash with people. The roads were so congested with them the carriage couldn’t advance, as it could have very well run someone over. Even sitting on the carriage, Diablo felt dizzy from looking at the crowd.

“Going on foot would be faster than this...” Diablo whined.

“No kidding~” Shera agreed, her tone tinged with exhaustion.

“But if we got off, I feel like we’d just get separated and lost,” Horn said with a concerned voice. “And Rem’s still sleeping, too.”

“Right...”

Diablo wasn’t used to acting in a group, so the danger of “getting separated and lost” never crossed his mind. That on its own was fairly dangerous.

The bad traffic reminded him of a commuter train.

Rose whispered, “If Master wishes it, Rose could eliminate all those who stand in Master’s—”

“Calm down and don’t do anything rash. Down, Rose.”

“Woof...”

“Paw.”

“Woof woof.”

“Good girl...”

“Master will not ask Rose to beg?”

“That’s enough, just sit down.”

“They all seem terribly worked up... Did something happen?”

Lumachina’s face was covered with a cloth so Diablo couldn’t tell what expression she was wearing, but the tension was obvious from her voice.

“True, traffic shouldn’t be this bad...” Alicia cocked her head quizzically. “The sixth district is normally a rowdy place, but this is unusual. I’ve patrolled the district many times as part of my duties, but I’ve never seen the streets this congested unless there was a festival... Oh? What’s that?”

Alicia pointed ahead. There was a dark-red object carrying something on the road ahead, large enough to take the whole width of the street, and was covered in spikes.

Shera rose to her feet. “That’s a Dragon!”

“What!?”

Diablo fixed his gaze on the end of the street. His eyesight was no match for Shera’s, but the figure was large enough he could recognize it even from afar.

There was no doubting it: The figure was a Dragon.

Its scales were a yellow hue that were closer to gold. It was a Thunder Dragon, known as the fastest among all Large-class monsters. But it was just its head, placed on a wagon slowly making its way across the street.

A flag of red, white, and purple adorned the wagon as well. The citizens were pushing and pulling at each other in an attempt to catch a glimpse of the giant dragon.

“I believe standing in that display’s way could be troublesome,” Alicia told their carriage’s coachman. “Please move the carriage to the side of the road. I think the road should clear up once they pass.”

No one seemed to object to her reasoning, and, considering Lumachina’s circumstances, staying out of sight for as long as possible was probably wise.

Diablo and his group waited on the wayside, surrounded by the crowd, watching the dragon head being carried through the street.

The wagon drew closer to them.

“It’s...big,” Diablo whispered.

It was bigger than the Large-class dragon they met in his dungeon, which meant it was probably a Huge-class. Once dragons reached Huge-class, they became too big to live in a cave or a burrow, and tended to live in ravines or rocky areas. Their strength was, of course, in proportion to their size.

Six men and women stood on the wagon, receiving cheers and excited shouts from the crowd. They were dressed like Warriors and Wizards.

—So those guys slayed the dragon.

The crowd cried out their names repeatedly in praise.

“Who are they?”

“They’re newly appointed knights,” Alicia answered. “They wield special equipment no one has ever seen the likes of before, and complete the most challenging of quests with overwhelming power.”

“So they’re not Adventurers?”

“No, they’re known as the《Order of Palace Knights》, and the seven finest Warriors in their ranks are called the《Seven Heroes》.”

“There’s only six of them, though... Was one of them injured when they fought the Dragon?”

Only six of the knights stood in front of the Dragon’s head, waving at the crowd.

“True, Sir Alan doesn’t seem to be present. I doubt someone like him would get hurt, though...”

“Alan?”

“Yes, his name is the same as the great hero who defeated the Demon Lord many years ago, so he is said to be his reincarnation.”

“Is he truly the great hero’s reincarnation?”

“It is beyond me to know, but...I believe it to be mere coincidence. It is not unusual for parents to name their sons after heroes.”

Quite a confusing story, but he must be strong if people respected him enough to laud him as the second coming of a hero.

“What kind of person is this Alan?”

“Hmm... He’s a bit of an unusual one. I can never tell what’s going through his head...”

On top of being a duke’s daughter and an Imperial Knight, Alicia was a Demon Lord worshiper who wished for the extinction of the races. She ranked fairly high on the list of “people you could never tell what was going through their minds.” Diablo assumed Alan would have to be quite the person to receive that sort of evaluation from her.

“At any rate, Sir Alan is, without a doubt, the strongest Knight among everyone in service to King Delouche,” Alicia proclaimed.

“Ohoh... Tell me, what does he look like?”

“I see you’re interested in powerful warriors, Sir Diablo.”

“Of course.”

—I gotta make sure I stay out of his way so I don’t have to fight someone like that!

Diablo had no desire of throwing himself into adventure and testing himself against Warriors stronger than him. In the first place, he was the type of person who preferred to shut himself in his room and never come out if he didn’t have to. If some crazy strong knight was walking around town, Diablo wanted to know what they looked like so he could avoid them.

“Well, let’s see...” Alicia said pensively. “Sir Alan’s hair is...hmm, about that shade of platinum...”

Alicia fixed her gaze at a certain point, and stiffened. Standing between the crowd, a young man in a red robe stood close to their carriage. His silver hair was spiked, like a character Diablo saw in some manga. He was apparently a Dwarf, and had pointy dog ears, like a Dobermann’s. He looked to be about

seventeen, so he wasn't bearded yet, but there were already long hairs extending from his face despite being so young.

He grinned at them. He couldn't exactly be called handsome, but there was something childish to his expression that made him seem amicable.

"Heya, didja guys call fer me?"

Alicia seemed to have been shocked speechless. Diablo felt uneasiness creep over him as well.

"Is that him...? Alan, the leader of the Seven Heroes?"

"Hmm? Yeah, I'm Alan, but I ain't the leader."

"Weren't you the strongest, then?"

"I just don't dig all this stiff, formal stuff. The cap'n talked to the king, see, and they decided we need to make this big speech in front of a crowd. But I can't, man, I'm no good with talkin' to people," Alan said with a laugh, itching the root of his wrinkly dog ears.

The young man seemed rather friendly, but Diablo was still cautious. Alan was a Knight of the kingdom, and a fairly powerful one at that. Judging from the longsword at his waist, he was probably a Warrior.

Diablo didn't mind close quarters combat, but this range put him at a disadvantage. Rem and the others were behind him, too. He wanted to avoid hostilities, if possible.

He silently reached into a pouch on his back.

Alan's eyes narrowed. "Yer strong, ain'tcha?"

—Did he sense my level!?

In-game, the status screen would give a great deal of information, but this world didn't have anything as convenient as that. Instead, it had something that didn't come across from a computer screen: a player's presence and atmosphere. Once one got used to that, it was possible to discern another's strength.

Diablo hadn't felt this stressed out in a while. But no matter who he was up

against, he couldn't let his Demon Lord role playing slip for a second!

"Heh heh heh..." He curled his lips into a vicious smile. "Would you like to experience that strength on your flesh?"

Alicia looked shocked. Noticing something was wrong, Shera also turned her gaze toward Diablo. Lumachina had to keep her identity hidden, so she only followed what was going on with her eyes. Rose half-stood to her feet. Leaning over the cart, Horn kept looking at the Dragon, her eyes sparkling like those of an excited child.

"Sure thing! Today's quest was more of a cakewalk than I figured it'd be," Alan said with a grin. "Kinda left me unsatisfied, know what I'm sayin'?"

Brushing off his cloak, Alan reached for the sword at his waist.

—What is this guy, some kinda combat junkie!?

Diablo clicked his tongue internally. He couldn't back down now and say it was a joke and he didn't really want to fight. Considering Lumachina, Diablo didn't want to do anything that would draw attention to them either, but...

—No choice but to fight him now...

Then a large man appeared behind Alan, just as he was about to draw his sword...

"You complete and total idiot!"

Bang!

A huge fist rammed its knuckles against the top of Alan's head, making a sound as if he'd been hit with a metal bar.

"Yeouuuuuuuuuch!" Alan turned around in a hurry, looking up with a confused expression on his face. "Wh-What's the big idea, ya doofus!? What if ya break something in there and make me stupid!?"

"I doubt anything I could do would make you any more of a hopeless idiot! Why are you picking a fight with the crowd in the middle of our victory parade!?"

Alan poked his finger in Diablo's direction. "Naw, it's just this guy, he looked kinda strong..."

Diablo's gaze clashed with the giant's. The man was tall and gave an impressive, muscular impression, but the cloak hanging from his shoulders and the armor he was clad in hid any particular details from view.

Race-wise, he was a Human. He had a macho build, but his face reminded Diablo of a science nerd. His black hair was parted to the side, and he wore black-rimmed glasses, with a face that would fit a math teacher.

Noticing Alicia standing at Diablo's side, surprise washed over his expression.

"Oh, aren't you the Cristela's...? A-Are these your guests?"

"Thank you very much for subjugating such a dangerous beast."

"I see we've caused you some trouble again..."

"Oh no, perish the thought..."

The bespectacled, nerdy giant turned toward Diablo. "I serve as commander and captain of the Order of Palace Knights. I go by Marquis Maximum Abrams."

"I think your subordinates could use some discipline, captain."

"I beg your pardon... It seems subjugating the beast left him with more vigor than he has use for. I apologize deeply on his behalf, so please forgive his disrespectful conduct."

"Hmph... I've lost interest in you," Diablo said with a bored tone, sitting back on the carriage's bench.

It wouldn't be odd if Diablo's disrespectful attitude would earn him the Knight's ire, but Abrams was apparently a reasonable man.

"I thank you for your understanding." Abrams bowed respectfully, and returned to the wagon with the Dragon's head on it, dragging Alan by the collar.

—I'm lucky I didn't have to fight him... It's a good thing Captain Abrams is an understanding man.

It appeared the crowd noticed the presence of the two heroes who had stepped on the wagon. Aged citizens who clapped respectfully, women who

burst into tears from the excitement, young lads who raised their voices enthusiastically... The crowd, made up of such people, stirred to life once more.

Atop the platform, the women of the group of heroes apparently said something to Alan who laughed in embarrassment while Abrams sighed.

The Seven Heroes had great synergy as a party. It was obvious they trusted each other and got along well.

—Damn, now I wish I fought him!

“While I understand your anger, please try staying composed for the time being,” Alicia appealed to Diablo. “Causing an uproar here would only complicate things later.”

“Y-Yes... I am aware. I’ve lost interest in them.”

Shera and Lumachina still seemed nervous, saying things like, “That was scary,” and, “Are you unharmed?”

Rose was suppressing the bloodthirst she’d been silently harboring at what had just happened, while Horn tilted her head quizzically, only just now realizing something was wrong.

“Did something happen?”

†

At the《Firebird Inn》, in the sixth district—

While it was called that, the Firebird Inn was more of a large, high-class hotel. As one might expect from the capital, even lodgings aimed at Adventurers were extremely impressive. Of course, there were cheap inns around, but the building in front of them was luxurious and extravagant.

“Amazing!” Shera squeaked in excitement as she looked up at the building.

“Super awesome! C-Can I come in, too!? I can, right!? They’re not gonna arrest me, are they!?” Horn seemed ecstatic, too.

“...If we lodge here, our travel expenses would be gone before we know it.” Rem, who had finally woken up, shuddered in terror with her eyes wide.

“Did we not just receive a bounty from Lady Laminitus, though?”

“...A High Priest like you may not know it, but once you start spending money, it disappears before you know it.”

“I-I do understand that much...”

“...No, you do not. Spending this much just for a place to sleep is a waste of money.”

Having finally regained freedom of movement after being confined to one place on the sand ship and carriage, Rose drew closer to Rem.

“Whatever do you mean by ‘waste of money’? This is where Master will be resting, so anything below the absolute best would be unacceptable.”

“...Are you trying to drive your ‘precious master’ into bankruptcy? I suppose whoever made you forgot to add a calculation function... All you’re good for is cleaning.”

“Rose now sees your wallet is as lacking as your chest.”

“Wha...? What does my chest have to do with this!?”

Alicia tried calming the two down with a “Now, now...”

“Pardon me for not making it clear earlier, Miss Rem. I’ve already handled the payment for your group’s lodging fees and meals. You may stay here without worrying about travel expenses.”

“...Are you sure you are all right with that? There’s six of us, you know?”

Trying to count them, Diablo realized there was someone missing: Diablo, Rem, Shera, Lumachina, Horn, and Rose were all here, along with Alicia.

Alicia’s face took on a pensive expression for a moment—then she clapped her hands together.

“I believe I have already told you before I am the daughter of the Cristela family, correct? While I may not be the family’s heir, I have already begun managing several businesses. In terms of private property, I believe I should be about as wealthy as a regional governor.”

“...What?”

“Should you deem it necessary, Sir Diablo, I could buy this entire inn for you.”

“...Wh-Wh-What?” The worldly and wise Rem asked, her eyes as wide as saucers.

Having come from an entirely different world, Horn couldn’t even keep up with the conversation. In contrast to that, Shera and Lumachina didn’t seem too terribly surprised as they were never pressed for money.

Diablo was relieved, though.

—It’s a good thing we don’t have to pay for the inn...

There was no telling how many days it would take to resolve Lumachina’s situation. Like Rem, Diablo believed in the whole “once you start spending money, it disappears before you know it.” He had the sort of frugal, middle-class perspective telling him that, even if they had money saved up, staying in a high-class hotel is a luxury they probably couldn’t afford to make.

“It’s nearly time for dinner,” Alicia said, checking her pocket watch.

“Yay, food!”

Shera ran off into the inn. Horn followed after her, and soon enough the whole group had made their way into the Firebird Inn.

The lobby was even fancier than the building’s exterior, with phoenix statues decorating the otherwise empty hall. For dinner, they were served many luxurious dishes, apparently made from the best ingredients gathered around the kingdom. There were many Diablo had never seen before, and it was all-you-can-eat, too.

Two hours later—

“I can’t...take anymore...” Shera said, her face as white as a sheet. “Thank you for...everything...and goodbye... Diablo...Rem...when I die...please take me back to the...forest...”

“Stay with us, Shera!” Rem said, rubbing Shera’s back.

“Ugh, blurg...” Shera covered her mouth with both hands, her eyes tearing.

“You shouldn’t overeat.” Diablo shrugged.

“...You gluttonous idiot.”

They were in one of the inn's rooms. They each had a room for themselves, but they were in a large common room for get-togethers. Apparently, Alicia had reserved the whole top floor for them.

—Sure is something a rich person would do...

Shifting his gaze, Diablo spotted Horn knocked out on the bed, having eaten so much the outline of her belly had changed shape.

"Uuu, I can't eat another bite..."

"How troubling," Lumachina said with a perplexed expression. "Even my healing would not be able to help you with this..."

Rem sighed. "Gluttony is considered a cardinal sin by the scriptures... I doubt even a miracle could spare them from this divine retribution."

"It seems so."

Only Rose wasn't in the common room, having remained in her personal room. She didn't need to eat, and their waiters—the inn's specialists—did a flawless job of tending to them. As a result, Rose was left with nothing to do and secluded herself in her room.

"Do you have time for me, Sir Diablo?" Alicia asked. "I will have to leave for home soon, and, before I do, I would like to..."

"Yes, we did agree to speak later."

Leaving Shera and Horn to Rem and Lumachina's care, Diablo and Alicia returned to his own room.

†

It was a single room, but it was large enough to easily host six people. The place Diablo thought was the room at first turned out to be his room's entrance hall. Diablo didn't know why his room needed an entrance hall, but that alone was wider than a normal inn's room.

Passing through the entranceway, Diablo was welcomed by a luxurious, extravagant room full of paintings and expensive-looking vases. Diablo went straight beyond surprise and into the realm of utter astonishment.

“This looks like a room befitting a king.”

“Hehe... Well, honestly speaking, if you ignore the ornaments’ quality, the room’s design isn’t far from that.” Alicia smiled wryly, drawing closer to him.

“What is it?”

“I thought I should take your cloak.”

“Ah, yes... That’s very considerate of you.”

He removed his cloak, the《Sojourn of Darkness》.

The cloak he previously burned, the《Curtain of Dark Clouds》, had an effect preventing any negative status effects, and also provided HP regeneration. However, his new cloak, the Sojourn of Darkness, inflicted the《Fear》status on all opponents.

In *Cross Reverie*, high-level monsters were immune to negative status effects so the Curtain of Dark Clouds was more useful. In this world, however, he faced low level enemies fairly often. According to the game’s settings, Fear would freeze the opponent in place, and that came across by having the inflicted opponent be unable to attack for a set period of time.

Alicia hung his cloak on a coat rack.

“Do you like the place? This room is where Adventurers who became rich and successful would make their lodging. Living in such luxury helps them realize the success they have earned with their own two hands. I believe that is why this room is extravagant to such an exaggerated degree.”

“In that case, staying here when someone else paid for it rather defeats that purpose.”

“Hehe... Another reason is because this hotel often protects people of great importance. So long as you remain at this inn, the High Priest’s safety should be guaranteed.”

“That is most important.”

“They can buy anything you would need in your name, and you can call doctors or beauticians to your rooms. There is no reason anyone in the Church should ever catch sight of you.”

“You seem to have quite the grasp on our situation. Did Rem really write that much in her letter?”

“No, she only mentioned the date you would arrive, that you had three new companions, and asked that I ‘tell her if I know any safe inns.’ Besides that, I just happen to know what the High Priest looks like.”

“I see...”

His Demon Lord persona made him feign coolness, but he was honestly surprised. She inferred that much out of something as vague as, “We’re accompanying an important person who needs protecting.”

“No, wait... Lumachina’s face was covered.”

“Heh... From that distance, I could tell just from her eyes.”

“Is that right...”

Diablo was terrible with remembering other people’s faces, so recognizing people just from their eyes seemed impossible to him... But maybe Alicia was different.

Alicia poured Diablo a cup of water from a nearby pitcher, squeezing a lemon into it for fragrance before placing it on the table before him.

“Here you are.”

Diablo sat on a sofa.

“Let’s begin with your circumstances.”

“It would be hard discussing this aloud, so would you mind if I sit next to you?”

“I’ll allow it.”

“Thank you kindly.”

Alicia took a seat at Diablo’s side, sitting so close their shoulders were touching each other. Diablo had approved it because she probably couldn’t speak of those matters with someone listening, but...

She was sitting really close to him.

Nervousness sprouted in Diablo's heart. She was completely messed up on the inside, but Alicia was a gorgeous woman, and, right now, she was dressed like one would expect of a duke's daughter. Her refined dress didn't expose much skin, but that was exactly what made it all the more of a "virgin killer."

"Virgin killer" clothes weren't, in the normie sense, clothes that were hard to take off. It was the opposite of a slutty outfit: clothes that accentuated a girl's femininity while maintaining a pure, innocent appearance. Inexperienced virgins like Diablo were actually rather turned off by women who boldly exposed their skin, if only because they lived in a far different world.

—Not like girls who dress modestly live in the same world as me...

Diablo's thoughts were about to spiral down into dark territories, but Alicia's voice dragged him back to reality.

"Heh heh..." she whispered into his ear. "Thanks to you getting rid of the king's spy, my actions went undetected, Sir Diablo."

A dark smile played on her lips. Her glasses glittered with an orange tint, reflecting the candle light, while her expression shifted from that of a refined lady to one fitting of an evil villain.

—She's crazy...

"I... I see..."

By the king's spy, she must have meant the ninja who attacked them at the inn in Faltra. Diablo thought going easy on the ninja would end up hurting his friends later down the line, so he blew the ninja away with powerful magic. But when Alicia praised him for it with such a vicious smile, Diablo wondered if he had done the wrong thing. Being a timid person at his core, Diablo was overtaken by anxiety.

"Command praised the fact that I stopped the Demon Lord's revival in Faltra," Alicia said, bitterly biting her thumbnail. "But they held me accountable for relying on Adventurers' cooperation to do so, and for being absent during the emergency itself and Saddler's death."

"Hmph... Hopeless fools."

A court-martial can be a terrible thing. Diablo failed to see how something as grand as preventing the Demon Lord's revival failed to compensate for a few blunders. Relying on Adventurers when she didn't have troops to help her was perfectly reasonable, and Saddler was a terrible man who was actually the cause of the Demon Lord's revival in the first place.

—Alicia was the one who plotted to have the Demon Lord revived, though...

That was an act of treason against the races as a whole. If the King were to learn of that, being held accountable for trivialities would be the least of Alicia's concerns, for she'd be executed on the spot.

The part about her being missing when the Demon Lord revived was true as well, because she was marching with the Fallen to attack Faltra at the time.

"Life hasn't been easy on you, either. The Fallen condemned you for failing to revive the Demon Lord, and a king of the races holds you accountable despite having helped stop the revival."

“You may say that, Sir Diablo, but was it not you who changed my fate after I failed to revive the Demon Lord?”

“T-True... Either way, what happened next? They held you accountable for those things, and...?”

It felt like continuing that conversation would only stir up trouble, so Diablo put the conversation back on track.

“They held me accountable, but...I assume they believe punishing someone who made such an achievement would lower everyone’s morale.” Alicia pinched her dress’s skirt. “So in recognition of my feats, I’ve been put on extended leave.”

“In other words, you’re under house arrest?”

“No, I am not to wear my Imperial Knight uniform. I may leave the house freely in civilian clothes, otherwise I could not be here with you, Sir Diablo.”

“Fair enough.”

“I was lucky to have gotten away with just an extended leave... Some among the Imperial Knights were transferred to the countryside or demoted to soldiers, and some were even discharged altogether.”

“Why? What’s going on?”

The Imperial Knights were like police. Was the capital really so peaceful they could cut their numbers like that?

“It is because of the Order of Palace Knights.”

“Hmm... I see.”

Diablo recalled the Seven Heroes he had almost gotten involved with in the street: Alan, the combat junkie hero with the dog ears, and Abrams, the bespectacled macho man. There were also those girls in their party...

“The Order of Palace Knights already number more than one hundred, with the Seven Heroes as their core, and their ranks are only growing.”

“How are they different from Imperial Knights?”

“Imperial Knights stress the importance of pedigree and race...”

Come to think of it, the Imperial Knights were almost exclusively male Humans, with Alicia being the exception. Alan, on the other hand, was a Dwarf; a demi. They were gathering Warriors from a larger population, so the Palace Knights naturally outnumbered the Imperial Knights.

“That makes sense... But still, it’s odd.”

If they really wanted to bolster their ranks, they just had to accept demis into the Imperial Knights. Why go through the bother of forming a new order?

“I’m sad to say I do not know the circumstances behind that...”

“We should look into it. Something about this story bothers me.”

“As you wish.”

Rising from the sofa, Alicia bowed her head, then sat down next to him again.

As always, she was so strict about these sorts of things...

“You do have the leisure to do that, now that you’re on leave, after all.” Diablo set the conversation back on track.

“Hehe... It’s been years since I got to enjoy summer vacation.”

“You do seem to be enjoying it, all things considered.”

“Of course. It gives me plenty of time to focus on looking into the higher-ups’ corruption. Though I will admit being out of uniform makes it hard to access military facilities and keeping track of soldier placements...”

—Is she planning a coup or something!?

It seemed Alicia was planning to overthrow the Kingdom of Lyferia, and was using Diablo as her banner.

Diablo’s Demon Lord role play was just that; he may have taken it seriously, but it was still acting. Diablo wasn’t a real Demon Lord, and didn’t have any plans of destroying the races’ kingdom.

“W-Well... You can, uhhh, take all the time in the world with that one.”

“I thank you for your advice. If the top ranking officers were to notice me, all would be for naught. I will certainly take my time and do this with caution.”

“That’s not what I... Never mind...”

If nothing else, Alicia seemed to be making full use of her leave.

“Did you come to the capital because of the problems surrounding the High Priest, Sir Diablo?” Alicia asked.

“Yes...” He explained Lumachina’s circumstances to her briefly.

“That’s inexcusable!” Alicia said with a stern expression. “The corruption of those in power is one of the things I loath most! To think it extends to not just the royal palace, but to the Church as well!”

“We don’t really know where the money’s coming from or going to, but we do know there are Paladins who would stoop to murder to line their pockets, and some higher ups who would contract them for assassinations.”

Alicia listened pensively to Diablo’s words.

“Personal vice and corruption on an organizational level may not be unrelated, but there are different methods of dealing with each. A corrupt person can be removed from power and replaced, but I believe reforming an organization requires changing its rules from the bottom up.”

“Y-Yes, you’re right.”

This was getting complicated. Diablo didn’t mind repetitive work, or work involving numbers, but when it came to work involving many different people, that was where his head stopped working.

It was all because other people had far too many unpleasant aspects to themselves. There were far too many people who would trample on others’ rights just to feel better about themselves, even if there was no actual gain involved in doing so. Being in the frame of mind where he was trying to fix some of the world’s vices, that was something Diablo couldn’t understand for the life of him.

“Let me investigate the Church,” Alicia proposed. “Could you give me a bit of time to do that?”

Speaking honestly, it would be a huge help. Diablo and his group had no means of investigating the Church, and, while he didn’t suspect Lumachina was

lying, she was one to possibly jump to conclusions.

Diablo needed proof this wasn't some sort of misunderstanding. Alicia was an Imperial Knight, something like a police officer here in Lyferia, and was skilled enough to get a special promotion despite her age and gender. Her ideology was questionable, to say the least, but there was no doubting her skills.

"Very well. I leave it to you."

"I will prove your trust in me is not misplaced, Sir Diablo." However, the girl proceeded, saying, "Assuming I do find proof of their corruption, what will you do then?"

—I didn't think that far ahead, to be honest...

But Diablo couldn't say something so pathetic. He thought of something Demon-Lord-esque enough on the spot.

"If we could present proof of their sins, they would surely be tried and punished, no? That much would be obvious."

"I agree that is how it should be, but we have no one to present our evidence to."

"What?"

"The Church is granted a unique right called《Religious Jurisdiction》. Matters involving religion are all to be judged within the confines of the Church. Even if we were to take this matter to court, it would likely end up being transferred to the Church's jurisdiction instead."

"How absurd!"

"No matter how incriminating the evidence we present might be, if the judge is a member of the Church, they would never be found guilty."

"And this country's legal system allows this?"

"The same holds true to the palace and the kingdom's higher brass. Even if you found evidence of any crimes, there's no point in issuing a complaint. Which is exactly why those in power have become so corrupt."

Diablo recalled the history he had learned in his original world. This world was

behind his, and there was no segregation of government, court, and religion. This world was still roughly in the Middle Ages, an age where laws weren't properly documented yet.

"This is horrible."

"That is why we need your power, Sir Diablo!"

"My power...?"

A smile bloomed on Alicia's face as she spread out her hands and placed them on her cheeks gently.

"A purge by spilt blood! Using your power, we will be able to rain justice on these terrible fiends in human form, and return the world to its rightful form! It is the time of awakening! Of retribution and reckoning! Join me!"

"O-Oh... Um, yes... But I should go to bed soon..."

"Oh, pardon. How inconsiderate of me... You must be exhausted after your long trip. Please, take your time and rest."

It wasn't exactly news that Alicia had a few screws loose, and Diablo couldn't help but sigh on the inside.

†

Late at night—

Alicia had returned home, and everyone else had retired to their rooms—or so it should have been.

Rose lowered her head before the person in front of her in a deep bow.

"Pardon Rose for disturbing Master at this late an hour. If Rose has interrupted Master's slumber, Rose is prepared to receive any punishment Master deems fit."

"Pay it no mind. I assume you've come here for a reason?"

"Yes... The truth is, Rose's magic reserves are running quite scarce. They have been depleted to below 30%."

Being a Magimatic Maid, Rose used Diablo's magical energy to operate. Magical energy was, in other words, this world's MP.

“Is there some sort of problem? Doesn’t it recharge naturally when you’re in The Demon Lord’s Underground Labyrinth or near me?”

“Rose was away from Master most of the time on the way here...and it appears the amount Rose has depleted in battle was greater than what was recharged.”

“Hmm... Just how close do you have to be for it be considered ‘near’ me?”

“Within arm’s reach.”

That was very close, indeed...

Diablo’s sides were Rem and Shera’s usual spots, and, since they required his protection, Horn and Lumachina always remained at Diablo’s back. They had kept Rose, who was skilled at both offense and defense, at the head of the line, but that meant she had remained out of “arm’s reach.”

—I figured her being in the same party as me would be enough for her MP to recover...

This whole situation gave Diablo a newfound appreciation for the status screen. Not being able to check it was terribly inconvenient. To make things worse, Rose wasn’t one to let her exhaustion show on her face.

Unable to be frank with those around her as she was, her values were skewed and she refused to make it known when she was having trouble. She was the type to go ahead of everyone else and not even notice.

“You should stop trying so hard.”

“Oh... Forgive Rose, Master...”

She was giving Diablo a serious run for his money when it came to being socially inept.

—Well, I guess it makes sense since she was an AI in the game.

If anything, thinking he was as bad as an AI when it came to this made Diablo pretty depressed.

Pulling his thoughts together, he continued the discussion.

“In that case, I permit you to stay by my side tonight. That will do, yes?”

“Rose has considered that, and tried to stay by Master’s side while Master sleeps...”

“O-Oh...”

—She was next to me while I was sleeping!? I never even noticed!

Imagining Rose looking down on him night after night as he slept was quite honestly a horror-inducing image. Though, she would probably make for the trustiest night watcher imaginable.

“It would seem Rose’s magic energy does not recharge if Master is sleeping,” Rose said apologetically.

“So it’s no good if I’m asleep. There are more limitations to this than I thought.”

“Uuu... Rose cannot believe Rose is such a burden on Master... Rose is a defective maid. Please dispose of Rose however Master sees fit. Be it by kicking, or punching...”

“I-I won’t do any of that!” He used his natural voice without noticing.

“Y-Yes, Master...”

“Ah, no... Ahem! Considering your abilities, those limitations seem like a cheap price to pay. I do not mind staying up and being by your side until morning if need be.”

“Oh, no, Master cannot. That will put Master’s health at risk.”

“Hmph... You underestimate me, you fool. A lack of sleep has no effect on me!”

He hadn’t pulled an all-nighter in a long while, so the thought of it seemed nostalgic. In his own world, he would spend consecutive all-nighters in-game. It may have been a problem if, during the next day, they would have to go on a long march or if there were an important battle, but right now they were just waiting for Alicia’s report.

There was no problem at all. Rose didn’t seem convinced though.

“The idea of Master harming Master’s own health for Rose’s sake goes against

Rose's reason for existing. Rose's cognitive circuits are on the verge of overheating."

"Is it really that bad...?"

As far as Diablo was concerned, an all-nighter didn't even count as a bother. If he didn't get the rare drop in a limited time event, he would pull an all-nighter trying to get it without a second thought. It had gotten to the point where other players suspected he was using some illegal tool or running multiple accounts.

Rose shook her head. "Sleep deprivation may impact Master's health. It increases the probability for contracting serious diseases and may shorten Master's lifespan in the long run."

That sounded like one of those messages the admins would sometimes send players who were playing for too long. The kind that required filling in a CAPTCHA to close the window.

"Then we have no choice. Stay by my side tomorrow then."

"There is another method."

"What is it?"

Rose's cheeks flushed at Diablo's question.

"Rose suggests Master perform a speed charge on Rose."

"A 'speed charge'? What's that?"

"A mere thirty minutes of the act will grant Rose a week's worth load of Master's... No, a week's worth charge of the Master's magical energy."

"Is that true?"

"Hmm... Does Master doubt Rose's words? Claim Rose would lie to Master? Suspect Rose's cognitive circuits are defective?"

"No, you're right. You would never lie to me, Rose."

Her speech may have been eccentric at times, but everything this Magimatic Maid did was out of consideration and concern for Diablo.

"Rose thanks Master very much."

“So, what should I do?”

“Put concisely, Master must transfer Master’s magical energy by contact rather than by being in proximity.”

“Hmm... Indeed, that way should provide you with more magical energy. So I should just touch you?”

—Maybe I should pat her on the head?

“Yes.” Rose nodded. “In that case, can Rose ask this of Master?”

“I’ll allow it. It should be done in thirty minutes, right?”

“That depends on Master.”

“Heh... You underrate my magical energy, do you, you fool? I’ll fill you up with so much magical energy you’ll be fit to burst!”

“Aaahn... Rose’s knees are shaking with anticipation... Hnnn...”

Hearing her erotic gasps, Diablo’s heart skipped a beat. However, Rose was a Magimatic Doll; a machine. There was no way Diablo would look at a machine with impure intentions in his eyes. Same as how he wouldn’t feel lust for his vacuum cleaner.

Taking a deep breath, he calmed his excited nerves.

“Where shall we do this? The bed, maybe?”

When he transferred his magical energy into Shera and Rem, they needed a place to lie down.

“Pardon Rose, Master... The bed is...” Rose shook her head.

—Oh, crap...

Telling a girl to lie down on a bed was perhaps the creepiest thing he could say. He didn’t imagine how embarrassing it would be to have her say no. He wished he could bury himself alive!

“Aaah, O-O-O-Of course! The bed’s no good!”

“Rejecting Master’s goodwill grates at Rose’s emotional circuits... But if Rose were to get on the bed, it would surely break...”

“Oh... Ah... Right...”

Rose was very heavy, after all. When they were on the carriage, she was heavier than a fully armored, fully armed knight. However large and spacious the bed here may be, it wouldn’t be able to support her weight and would surely cave in.

Rose turned around and placed her hands against the wall.

“Master... Hmm... If it is permitted, Rose would have Master do it from behind...”

Her face becoming even more flushed, Rose stuck out her buttocks.

—So l-lewd...

Diablo was nervous, but this was nothing more than transferring magical energy to a comrade. It was—how did she call it, again? Yes, speed charging. Associating anything else to this would be completely and utterly wrong.

“Should I touch your back...? Hmm? Come to think of it...that huge hand isn’t out now.”

“Huge hand, Master...?”

“Whenever you get serious about fighting, it comes out of your back. That cool mecha-like arm that holds your double-bladed sword.”

“Ah... Master means the《Magimatic Sol》. It is currently on standby in the interstice between worlds.”

“So it’s not in this world right now?”

“Affirmative. That would be the case.”

“Then...why are you so heavy?”

“Hmmm... Rose’s weight is due to the《Dimensional Transcendence Device》built inside Rose.”

“What? So you’re this heavy even without that hand?”

“The Magimatic Sol has a weight comparable to a Type-10 Tank, so therefore... Huh...? What...is a Type-10 Tank? Pardon Rose, Master, Rose seems to have detected unusual lexicon in Rose’s memory banks...”

“No, you can stop. Don’t let it bother you.”

“V-Very well...”

It appeared the game’s setting and her knowledge from the other world were conflicting with one another. Diablo wasn’t a tank enthusiast, but, having played some FPS games with modern weaponry, he had some rudimentary knowledge. Japan’s newest model, the Type-10 Hitomaru, had a weight of 44 tons.

—If she’s that heavy with the sword out, no wonder she would make a sand ship tilt...

If it was just her weight alone, she would be able to ride on a carriage, but, when she was fighting, the Magimatic Sol would make her considerably heavier.

“Whatever the case, you’re not carrying it now, right?”

“Correct.”

“Let’s begin then.”

Diablo stood behind her and reached out to touch her fair, unblemished back. Her skin was clear and transparent, but there were bits of metal on it here and there. They were buried into her skin, not attached by stickers. They were probably grafted into her body by some unique fixation method, or maybe they just all connected somewhere deep within her feminine frame.

As Diablo caressed the metallic segments, a shiver ran down Rose’s spine.

“Nnngh...”

“It doesn’t hurt, does it?”

“It does not. But if it is done by Master’s hands, Rose would not mind any pain inflicted upon Rose...”

“N-No, if it hurts, then say so.”

“Rose is grateful for Master’s consideration... Master is far too benevolent and kind...”

“Let’s transfer that magic energy as quickly as possible.”

Diablo was able to discern the flow of magical energy within others by

touching them. He had learned how to do it from a slave merchant shortly after arriving in this world.

Rose, in terms of magical energy, was entirely different from the races. For the races, magic would swirl within the body like a vortex, with magic being richer or thinner at different points of the body. While there were individual differences between different people, the vortex's center was usually around the heart or the navel. For Magimatic Maids, the center of the magic seemed to be in their abdomens.

—If I let magic flow through these metallic bits, will it reach her core?

He tried emitting some magical energy from his hands, but...Rose didn't seem to particularly react to it. Maybe it wasn't enough?

"Hmmm... That's, aaah, where the Dimensional Transcendence Device..." Rose said in between labored sighs.

"Oh, I see."

"Rose begs Master's pardon... That place is very sensitive, so if Master pours magic in there...it's, hmm..."

"I-I get it. Just say what you want me to do, and I'll do exactly that."

"Master doing as Rose says... Oooh..."

Rose's face flushed an even deeper shade of red. Diablo could hear her gulp audibly as she looked at him with a feverish gaze in her eyes.

"Speak your will then," Diablo said, realizing Rose's infectious tension was affecting him as well.

"V-Very well... Pardon Rose..."

Rose unfastened a button hidden in her skirt and the fabric fluttered weightlessly to the floor, exposing her buttocks to the air. A pair of black string panties barely covered it—just barely.

"Buuufha!?"

"Master...keep going... Rose asks of Master, do it from behind..."

"Buha!?"

“Ah! M-Master!?”

“Wha!? What are you saying!?”

“Ah... Forgive Rose, Master. Rose did not realize Master is inexperienced with this. Rose was referring to Rose’s rear entr—”

“I know what you meant! I might be inexperienced, but zip it! Rose, do you really need that!?”

Cross Reverie was rated all-ages. All of the 18+ aspects of this world were apparently cut from the game.

If this’s what Magimatic Maids are like, it’s no wonder they were never implemented!

“So long as Master makes contact with the proximity of Rose’s《Magical Energy Core》, any part of Master’s body should work,” Rose said, going red up to her ears. “However, Rose does not have any practical experience of this either, so Rose is only speaking theoretically...”

“I-I see...”

Her Magical Energy Core was probably the center of the magical energy swirling in her body that he saw earlier.

“So long as it reaches Rose’s deepest part, any part of Master’s body will do.”

“Hmm.”

“But should Master insert Master’s wrist, there’s risk of damag—”

“I won’t!”

“Y-Yes. Pardon Rose...” Rose’s shoulders were trembling.

—Crap, I think I might have been too forceful there...

Rose was only explaining how to handle the problem. But why did everything surrounding this maid have to be so damn perverted!? Unfortunately, this world didn’t have a menu, much less a button, that would let him file a complaint to the admins. If only this world had a “Contact Us” button, he’d send an inquiry with a whole list of game-breaking bugs preventing him from completing the main quest that was currently his life.

Diablo took another deep breath to quell his nerves. Looking at this situation a bit more calmly...

—This is all sorts of crazy...

Rose stuck out her butt, placing it at right about the same height as Diablo's waist. Her intimate parts were hidden by nothing but a pair of string panties. Diablo stood speechless.

"H-Hmm... Master... Feeling Master's gaze upon Rose's body fills Rose with so much joy. Rose's sensory circuits may climax... But if Master does not touch Rose, no magical energy will be transferred."

"I-I-I know that!"

Diablo grabbed Rose's waist with both hands.

—Damn, she's so soft!

Her skin was slightly moist from sweat, and Diablo could feel a heat emanating from within her. The magical energy flowing just from Diablo's hands made Rose jolt, her spine shivering.

"Ahnnn!"

"Wh-Whoa..."

"Aaahn... This is...amazing... Rose feels...Master's magical energy, so close by..."

"That's good."

"Hnnng, amazing... Aaahn... If this comes in, Rose might just...go over the edge!"

—She probably meant the edge of her magical energy capacity! Right? Right!?

"Aaah... Mmm... Hnnng...!"

Try as he might to take deep, steady breaths, Diablo was far from being composed.

—Screw staying calm, this is impossible!

If he was the type of person with the guts to stay calm while touching a

woman, he'd be leading a totally different life right now. Diablo could barely respond to a female cashier asking him if he wanted his food heated up with a garbled "nofankyu." There was no one worse than him when it came to interacting with other people, girls in particular.

—No! That's wrong! Right now, I'm Diablo! A Demon Lord from another world! A Demon Lord can do it! I *can do it!*

This was something he had done in a ritual once before. When he had unsealed the Demon Lord Krebskulm's soul sealed inside Rem's body, he had poured his magical energy into a "deeper place."

Diablo drew his middle finger closer to Rose's behind.

"Prepare yourself, Rose!"

In contrast to his assertive words, Diablo's knees were shaking and faint tears clouded his field of vision. Refusing to look directly, he scried with his finger, trying to shift the panties aside and find the "Magimatic Maid's Magical Energy spout," when his finger finally found its way to an opening.

—I-Is this it!?

"M-Master!? That's—" A jolt ran through Rose's spine.

"I-I-I-I'lltakecareofit!"

He jammed his finger into the tight hole which constricted around his finger so much it hurt.

—It wasn't this bad last time! Wait, maybe there's some individual differences... Besides, Rose is a machine. Of course she'd be different from the races!

Those thoughts were swirling rapidly in Diablo's feverish mind as Rose was writhing in agony.

"Aaahnnng... M-Maaaster... Aaah... That place is..."

"You want me to go deeper!? I can't reach the core if I don't go any deeper, right!?"

"A-Aaah... Rose can't...can't stand anymore..."

Her legs shaking, Rose fell to her knees. Her fingers dug into the wall, leaving scratch marks.

“H-Hey, Rose! Are you all right!?”

If it was an ordinary woman, Diablo would support her with his free left hand to stop her from falling. But Rose had the weight of a fully equipped soldier. Even at level 150, Diablo couldn’t hope to support her with one hand, so, his right hand, with a finger inserted, naturally clenched as well.

Rose’s weight had pressed down against him. His fingers had penetrated so far Diablo was becoming anxious, unsure if he was even supposed to go that deep.

His finger finally touched the Magical Energy Core in the depths of Rose’s body. Rose’s spine bent backward like a bow.

“Aaa, aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!!”

She let out a high-pitched scream. He had a feeling this would be what happened when transferring magical energy came up, but her scream was loud enough to reach the other rooms in the inn.

Rose fell back, exhausted, this time entrusting her whole weight to Diablo.

“Aaah!?”

A normal Human would have had his arms crushed, but Diablo was somehow able to carry Rose down to the floor.

“Ugh, ngh... You’re very...heavy, Rose...”

Rose lay prostrate, sleeping.

A “Pi!” sound suddenly rang out. It was an electronic sound Diablo had heard before, when Rose ran out of magical energy and was as still as a statue.

“Profound contact with master confirmed. Current charge at 120%.”

“Right... So you’ve got a full belly now, right? That’s good.”

Heaving a deep, relieved breath, Diablo sat on the sofa, looking down at Rose who was sleeping on the floor. Her expression was peaceful and filled with joy.

Chapter 2: The Cathedral

One week later—

Alicia, who had not appeared for a while, suddenly came by one afternoon, carrying a bundle of packages with her. She had carried a wagon's load of wooden boxes into the room, with the help of a few servants.

She was once again in her white dress today, and had her glasses on.

"Pardon me for taking this long, Sir Diablo!"

"I see you've got a few leads, from the look of things."

"I do indeed."

For starters, she called the inn's employees, and had tea prepared for everyone, white steam rising from the teacups set on the table. With Diablo in the center, they sat in the order of Rem, Shera, Lumachina, and Horn. Rose stood along the wall.

Alicia opened one of the wooden boxes, revealing a large amount of documents inside.

"I've been looking into the Church's flow of finances over the last few years."

"Ohoh..."

"In particular, I investigated the personal funds of the Church's heads, the seven members of the Cardinal Authority. They received a great deal of donations to the Church, and seem to have misappropriated them for their own personal funds."

"And it's still considered a crime under religious jurisdiction? That's just outright theft and money laundering."

"Yes, since it all takes place within the Church."

"Just how did you get this information!?"

Hearing those words, Lumachina had risen from the sofa. Alicia smiled faintly.

“That is probably not something you would be pleased to hear, Your Eminence...”

“Please, tell me. I have tried for so long to investigate this matter, but I have never been able to lay my hands on any clues.”

“Hmm...” Alicia’s expression took on a pensive shade.

Diablo shrugged. “One must be willing to play dirty at times if they are to pursue an ideal. This would be a good chance for Lumachina to learn that. No one here would leak what you’re about to say, so tell her. I’ll allow it.”

“Understood. I have used several methods to obtain this information, but...for the most part, I employed bribery and incitement.”

“So, just money and words...?”

“The members of the Cardinal Authority wouldn’t sell out their comrades for a token amount of money, of course. But does that apply to those around them?”

“The believers in the Church all carry out their daily duties loyally. They would never act just for the sake of money.”

“True, the believers would not do anything that goes against the way of God.”

“Only those who have been deemed particularly pious and true of faith are allowed to tend to me or the Cardinal Authority. A select few are ever allowed in the Inner Sanctum.”

“Indeed, and that is precisely what made discerning that secret location so simple.”

“Simple!?”

“Those select believers who are allowed to enter the Inner Sanctum are known within the Cathedral as White Masks. That’s because, as their name implies, they wear white masks in the Inner Sanctum.”

“Yes... That is to erase one’s individuality, as we are all equal in God’s eyes, without discrimination of gender, race, or outwardly appearance.”

Horn raised a hand. “So all you have to do is put on a mask and you can come

and go all you want!”

Alicia shook her head. “The Church is well aware of that, of course. You may only put on a mask at a particular chamber, where they confirm you are not an outsider.”

“Then it’s super impossible!”

“Heheh... And these believers are all very pious, very passionate men and women of faith, correct?”

“That’s right.” Lumachina nodded at Alicia’s words. “They would never accept a bribe.”

“No, they wouldn’t. Which is where the incitement came into play.”

—This is getting complicated...

Diablo looked around at everyone else. Rem was silent, apparently having somewhat realized what Alicia’s methods were. Shera didn’t seem to understand...or rather, she’d lost track of the conversation a good while ago. She was also a bit sleepy, having eaten a big breakfast. Lumachina and Horn were listening to her attentively, but didn’t seem to have gotten at what she meant yet. And Rose was, as always, expressionless.

“I don’t intend on drawing this out much longer, so allow me to explain from the start,” Alicia said, trying to speed things along. “Firstly, I approached the White Masks and proposed a bribe. However, it wasn’t I who approached them, but a trustworthy middleman. The proposal was, ‘I wish to bribe the Cardinal Authority. Please serve me as my intermediate to them.’”

“What!?” Lumachina’s eyes went wide.

“A few of the White Masks obliged to the offer. They were willing to cooperate in something that would be of aid to the Cardinal Authority, it seems. There were far more of these kinds of cooperators than those who wished to ‘expose misdeeds.’”

“That cannot be... No, that goes against the teachings of the Church...”

“One’s position within the Church depends on how the Cardinal Authority views you. There are many believers who would gladly go against the teachings

if it would help them curry favor with the Cardinal Authority."

"Ugh... No... It cannot be..."

"What was truly important were the sincere believers who refused. The ones who rejected it despite the money they could gain and the recognition of the Cardinal Authority they would receive. The stubborn believers who would insist the teachings are the most important thing."

"There were believers like that, too?"

"Finding them was surprisingly easy. I would then approach them personally and offer they assist me with investigating the briberies."

"Ah!"

"The bribes weren't to seek out the Cardinal Authority's cooperators, but to sniff out the stubborn believers who would refuse to take them. I used that to find those who would prioritize fair play and the law over personal gain."

"So that's why!"

Lumachina seemed quite convinced, and nodded a few times enthusiastically. Rem and Shera were visibly impressed, too.

—That was a pretty good idea.

But something still bothered Diablo...

"How many of those stubborn believers did you find?"

"Heheh... I thought you might notice. Unfortunately, there were quite few of them."

"You had so little people to help you, and had to do this in the course of a week without attracting attention to yourself. How did you investigate and gather this many documents?"

An evil smile played on Alicia's lips. "Your wit is as sharp as ever, Sir Diablo. I had many other pawns working for me, using another method: greedy White Masks who demanded an even larger sum as compensation for helping with the bribes."

Lumachina's breath had audibly stuck in her throat. It appeared the

knowledge that people this greedy were recognized as pious believers came as a serious shock to her.

Alicia continued her explanation.

“I had offered these greedy individuals to ‘sell me evidence of the bribes’ in exchange for large sums of money.”

“I’d assume many of them agreed.”

“Let us say it was more than just a few.”

“It’s like you created a cabal within the Church that gathered evidence for you. Having money to bribe people lets you get away with almost anything...”

“Had the Cardinal Authority been compensating their underlings more generously, things might not have gone this smoothly... Not that I would expect greedy pigs who accept bribes to act in such a manner.”

“They haven’t been paying them?”

“Believers are expected to live frugally. And just like that, the Church received great sums of money in donations, but the majority of it would go to the pockets of those in the higher echelons, leaving the Church as a whole in deficit.”

“That’s absurd...”

“You can find similar corruption in other places as well. The grand priests’ embezzlements are why the chapel’s repairs are going so slowly, for example.”

“Hmm.”

“However, the Imperial Knights cannot judge what happens inside the Church.”

“You can leave that part to me.”

“Heh heh heh...”

Alicia had a very pleased expression on her face. Diablo had no intentions of delivering the bloody retribution she was imagining, but...

—I’m still not sure what to do.

In games or stories, you could usually just defeat the enemy and get your happy ending, but that wasn't how reality worked. That said, Alicia had made good use of the believers.

In any case, Diablo decided to confirm the documents she gathered. Pulling a document from the box, Diablo found it had a date, a sender name, and the amount of money written on it—as well as what was delivered. Rights to set up shop in religious festivals, the selling of plots of land belonging to the church, preferential treatment when it came to dispatching priests to other regions... Those were only the tip of the iceberg. The making of false prophecies to convince businesses to shut down, withdrawing priests from neighboring regions because of disputes... Things that would amount to curses. There were even terribly disgusting requests to "give the love of my life a prophecy that I am the one for her."

The Church served more than just a religious function in Lyferia: It also served as a medical facility, a school, and a bank. An organization this important was so completely and utterly corrupt...

Diablo narrowed his eyes. "This is horrible."

"What's even worse is the Cardinal Authority keeps everything documented like this. It goes to show how confident they are that, even if someone were to expose these acts, they could crush those claims easily."

"You mean the Religious Jurisdiction?"

Alicia nodded.

Rem rose to her feet, her clenched fists shaking in anger. "Unforgivable..."

"That's right!" Shera also seemed uncharacteristically mad.

"Look at this, boss!" Horn raised a surprised voice. "It says they didn't send any priests to Zircon Tower because the governor refused to give donations! That's terrible!"

Rose alone seemed indifferent to the whole affair while Lumachina covered her eyes with both hands.

"Uuu... Ugh..."

—Don’t tell me you’re crying...

While Diablo and the others were outraged at these discoveries, they didn’t see them as particularly saddening. Maybe they didn’t feel as involved, or perhaps it was just a difference in their personalities.

“I... I’m so...frustrated!” Lumachina moaned.

“Huh?”

“I... I couldn’t stop this... I couldn’t do anything to prevent this...”

She crumpled the document in her hand. Her voice squeezed out of her throat, as if every single word caused her pain.

“I hate this... I hate this, I hate this, I hate this, I hate this, I hate this, I hate this, I hate this, I hate this...”

“Calm down.” Diablo laid a hand on Lumachina’s trembling shoulders.

“Uuu!”

Looking at Diablo’s face, tears began streaming down Lumachina’s eyes. It was the first time he had ever seen such intense emotion on the girl’s face.

“Lord Diablo, why do people...?” she began asking him with a tearful voice. “Why can they not be grateful for the fact they can awaken every morning with bread to eat? Why must they crave more?”

A long silence hung between them.

“She’s right...” Shera whispered. “Having fruit to eat is enough...”

Rem sighed. “...Wishing for more than what you need to live. That’s greed.”

Horn was silent. Perhaps she was overwhelmed by the sight of tears.

Alicia stepped in front of Lumachina, speaking with a kind expression on her face.

“Do you finally understand? The mortal races are such an ugly, unseemly existence. The only salvation that’s available to the races is through their destruction.”

“Destruction...”

“They must be cleansed at the hands of the Demon Lord.”

“Cleansed...” Lumachina whispered.

“Cut that out.” Diablo delivered a chop to the back of Alicia’s head.

“Ow!?”

“Listen.” He then turned to Lumachina. “Striving further and seeking more is part of what it means to be human. One can never stay put in the present. People always strive to reach where no one has been before them. It isn’t true for everyone though. Only very few are like that... But there are those who can never be satisfied. Their ambitions, cravings, and persistence always drive them forward, spurring them to always achieve new heights. That is the essence of human potential, of progress, of challenge. But that mentality can sometimes lead people astray, making them abuse their vested interests and trample others, stealing from them, tormenting them. The villains of the Cardinal Authority and the heroes who stand valiantly against the Demon Lord are, in a way, both bearers of ‘endless ambition.’”

“I do not understand... Sir Diablo, are you saying the Cardinal Authority are not evil?”

“No, they’re evil, all right. Just thinking of everything they did sickens me. But they’re evil because they’ve ‘sinned,’ not because they couldn’t be satisfied with bread to eat. Ambition isn’t a sin. What they should be punished for are the sins of taking bribes and misappropriating the Church. You mustn’t mistake that.”

“Yes... Yes, you are right. I... I’m not sure what came over me.”

“When one is shocked to the core, their thoughts go in extreme directions at times. This sometimes leads them to punish others too harshly.”

“I shall remember that, my Lord. I... I am ashamed of myself.”

“Hmph... You need only improve yourself. There is no need to feel shame. That, too, is proof of your passion to correct the Church, another product of ambition. It’s because that emotion drives you that everyone is willing to help you.”

“Thank you so much...” Lumachina wiped her eyes and smiled. “Just hearing you say those words has saved me more than you could know.”

Lumachina brought her hands together in front of her chest and performed the holy sign. The girl still seemed convinced Diablo was, in fact, God.

—I talked a big game, but in the end I’m nothing more than a huge liar...

He’d finally felt terribly embarrassed of this sermon he just gave her. He was gradually becoming anxious that the others would sneer at his words.

“...Impressive as ever, Diablo.” Rem nodded, impressed. “Your views are quite profound.”

“I don’t really get what you said, but we just have to beat up the baddies, right!?” Shera was as simple-minded as ever.

“I’m gonna be super useful somehow, too!” Horn pumped her fist, glad the heavy mood had finally cleared.

“Heheh... It’s just like you say...sins must be punished...”

Diablo wasn’t sure if Alicia actually listened to his words properly, but that dark smile was still on her face.

She pulled a sketch sheet, which turned out to be meticulously drawn blueprint of the Cathedral.

“Sir Diablo, we’ve gathered evidence, but the law will not be able to help us in this matter. You will need to lend your power for this.”

“How tiresome... So it comes to this, after all. Things may end up taking a turn for the rough then.”

“Please wait.” Lumachina raised her hand beside him. “Could you please give me one more chance to resolve this?”

“Hmm?”

“What are you planning on doing?”

Lumachina’s response was filled with firm resolve: “Based on this evidence, I will excommunicate the Cardinal Authority!”

†

They had decided to set out after lunch—however, Alicia brought more than just documents.

“Please use these.”

It was a set of deep brown robes with green fringes. They had gone down to the ankles, and had a hood to cover one’s face. It almost felt like the sheets kids would wear when they dressed up like ghosts. The Church’s believers seemed to wear these types of robes.

Rem nodded. “...Yes, we would definitely need these.”

“How come?” Shera tilted her head.

“We can’t escort Lumachina to the Church with our current outfits.” Horn seemed to have understood, too. “They’re indecent!”

Shera clapped her hands together. “Oh, I get it! Rem’s outfit is pretty much like she’s walking around naked after all!”

“...Stop it with your nonsense. My clothes are merely ‘easy to move in.’ If anything is indecent here, it’s those overgrown lumps of meat you call ‘breasts.’”

“They are *not* overgrown lumps! It’s not my fault, they became this big on their own! Besides, Lumachina’s are as big as mine!”

“Huh!?” Apparently not expecting to be brought up in the conversation, Lumachina covered her chest with her hands.

“...I would think that curvy figure is unbefitting for a clergywoman...” Rem cast an icy glare in Lumachina’s direction.

“I-Is it really...that bad...?”

“I suppose Lumachina would be fine since the believers should recognize she’s the High Priest. However, if we escort her, we would have to leave behind our swords and bows, as well as relinquish any armor we’re wearing, as those would appear too menacing. Otherwise, there is a risk the believers’ words may become biased.”

“That is indeed the case.” Alicia nodded. “Miss Horn is a child, and Miss Rose’s outfit is unbefitting of the Chur—”

“Are you claiming Rose is lacking in some way?”

Diablo doubted he was the only one holding back a desire to point out how her outfit was open at the back and revealed a good deal of sideboob.

“I am sure Lord Diablo would wish for this, as well,” Alicia explained, trying to pacify Rose’s foul mood.

“Ah! Is that right, Master!?”

He was taken aback by the sudden question, but, if Alicia was suggesting as such, it was probably a well-thought-out idea, and something they would need.

“Well, it is true you sometimes need to change your equipment in accordance to the enemy’s traits.”

“Very well then. If Master orders it, Rose will gladly wear any outfit necessary! Whatever state of dress or undress Master demands, Rose will oblige! Especially a state of undress! Haaa, haaa...”

“We’re...going to a church, you know?”

The buttons on the Magimatic Maid’s clothes were as loose as the screws in her head, it seemed.

Alicia smiled pleasantly. “I’m very glad you understand. I had thought you would be more opposed to changing out of your clothes, Sir Diablo.”

“What...? Me, too?”

Rem’s expression seemed to imply that was only the natural thing to think. “...If anything, you’re the most suspicious of us all.”

“Yep yep! If you came along looking like that, everyone would think Lumachina had brought a Demon Lord to the capital.”

Rem and Shera were on the same page, for once.

“Yeah, that’s probably what they’d think!” Horn nodded. “It’ll be like, ‘Revenge of the High Priest’! A dark High Priest!”

—An SSR Dark Lumachina with the Dark element skill ‘Demon Lord Summoning,’ huh? Sounds like something I’d roll the gacha for.

Bringing his thoughts back on track, Diablo looked down at his outfit: a

diabolical looking armor, a pitch black cloak, and, most devilish of all, the horns. Even someone as socially inept as Diablo knew his Demon Lord role play would be problematic when they were trying to infiltrate the Church. He would have to hide the horns on his head to prevent trouble from happening.

—Though I can remove them if I want, not even Rem and Shera know that.

The right timing to share that secret had gone a long, long time ago. Diablo had an item called the《Distorted Crown》equipped. It not only provided him with an HP Regen effect, but also had the added effect of altering his appearance so it would appear that horns were growing out of his head.

“Hmph... So be it. I’ll make do with wearing a hood. If Paladins attack, you alone would be hard pressed to handle them.”

Lumachina had both the evidence and the authority she needed, so there was a good chance the Cardinal Authority would try to drive her out by force. It was Diablo and his group’s job to defend her from that threat.

“Everyone, thank you so very much.”

And so it was that everyone other than Lumachina had to change into robes. The only exception was Alicia.

“I am afraid I must retire here.”

“Huuuh!?” Shera looked shocked.

“...Is there some sort of problem?” Rem asked.

“If it became known I had interfered with the Church’s matters while on leave, my position as an Imperial Knight would be jeopardized. Should word come out someone of royal authority had interfered with the Church’s matters, it would not be beneficial for Lady Lumachina’s standing either.”

“...True enough.”

It was a convincing reason.

Lumachina stood up in front of Alicia. “Thank you very much for all the effort you invested in helping the Church.”

“I merely did what I could to be of use to Sir Diablo and Miss Rem. The debt I

owe them is just that steep.”

“I see. But still, my gratitude to you remains unchanged.”

After a long moment of hesitance, Alicia opened her mouth to speak.

“May I...ask you one question before I leave?”

“Of course.”

“If I may be frank, I doubt the believers in the Cathedral, or the people in town, even the king, the nobles, or the commoners... I doubt any of them could be considered pious. Are they not egoists who only pray for peace of mind? Why do you think there’s any value in saving them?”

“Love thy neighbor as thyself,” Lumachina answered, without a hint of hesitation. “Those are the words of God. One does not need a reason to love others. No matter who it is, if I can help them in their time of need, I will reach out and do so.”

“Are you not saving your believers in the name of self-satisfaction?”

“Perhaps you could say that. The fact that people can live on knowing they were saved does make me happy.”

“Would you be willing to die in the name of salvation?”

“If I could, I would wish to remain forevermore and ensure the people’s well-being, but...”

Lumachina’s reply came without bashfulness or boasting.

Alicia smiled. It wasn’t the smile of a villainess, but a fleeting, powerless expression.

“Indeed, you’re far too different from me...”

“Do you really think so? I think you and I are very much alike, Miss Alicia. Really, quite similar.”

“Is that...so...?”

Not continuing the conversation any further, Alicia brought her right hand over her left breast and thanked Lumachina silently before returning to the mansion.

†

When they left the Firebird Inn, a chilly autumn breeze greeted them. Diablo hadn't realized it until now, but it was already October. The area around the capital turned cold as winter approached, and the wind was especially strong on the bridges connecting the districts.

Diablo held down the hood covering his head. Rem, Shera, Horn, and Rose all wore similar robes, as did Lumachina. She had intended to confront the Cardinal Authority as a High Priest, but if a commotion came up around her before that, it would make things problematic. So, for the time being, she hid her identity under the robe.

They had carried the documents proving the Cardinal Authority's misdeeds in a horse-drawn cart, with Rem gripping the reins.

"...This should be the place."

The twelfth district—

Crossing the bridge, the entire district was considered the Cathedral. There was a gate, but its doors were open and there wasn't a guard in sight. This was apparently to signify that everyone was welcome in the Cathedral. It was closed at night, however.

The Cathedral's town was surprisingly normal. There were hardly any billboards so it felt significantly different, but there were restaurants and shops selling trinkets and clothes all over the place.

"These shops are run by the believers, and the majority of their sales are donated," Lumachina explained. "There are many visitors who come here to shop from other districts."

"...There are many shops that deal with clothes and footwear. It's all very cheap, too, almost half the market value."

"You're right! Maybe I should get those sandals!"

Rem and Shera seemed surprised, and excited.

"That is because the believers are the ones producing these items. The Church provides them with the shops, and does not require rent."

“...If their production, sale, and labor costs are all minimal and they don’t need to pay for rent, I can understand why it’s so cheap.”

“The Church also provides them with a place to live and food to eat. Everyone who lives here has a role appointed to them, and in return they are tended to so they would not need for anything else.”

“That’s amazing!” Shera clapped.

“Seriously!? You get food and a place to sleep for free!? That’s like heaven!” Horn seemed enthusiastic as well.

“...Weren’t Elven villages similar to this? If I recall, your forests are blessed by the gods, and you can eat as much fruit as you need.”

“Yep yep, and we sleep on tree branches. But it’s not like just anyone gets to stay. If you can’t prove you’re useful, you can’t stay at the village. Some people have to work away from home.”

“Useful?” Rem asked.

“The Elven Kingdom has to drive away enemies if they attack, so young men either have to be strong, or they go work outside the village.”

“...I see. I wonder if you have to gain some sort of qualification to stay in this town, too?”

“The majority of the people living here are all under thirty years old; seminar students who are studying to become priests,” Lumachina answered. “Perhaps it would be more accurate to say they have to live here because they are not qualified to be priests yet.”

“...Now that you mention it...”

Rem looked around, and Diablo shifted his gaze as well. Most of the people walking around looked to be rather young. It was hard to tell their ages from their races, but they all indeed seemed to be under thirty.

“There are many places to study in the royal capital,” Lumachina said. “There are the Mage’s Association and the blacksmith’s town, martial arts training grounds, and combining laboratories. Aspiring students from across the country gather here.”

“Ah... You can learn magic here?”

“Of course. The capital’s Mage’s Association is aimed at advanced practitioners, but they do have a campus for beginners as well.”

“Is that right...” Horn said pensively, sneaking a look in Diablo’s direction.

—Is something bothering her?

Rem observed the people walking around them. “...There’s quite a few elderly individuals about, too.”

“They are craftsmen and teachers. The young cannot establish a society on their own, after all. They have priestly qualifications, and serve as mentors and guides.”

“...The Cathedral is like one big school.”

“Yes.”

“Surprising...”

“Is something the matter, Master?” Rose reacted to Diablo’s whisper.

“I thought this would be more lifeless and cold. I mean, all they do here is pray.”

At the very least, that’s what the Cathedral was like in *Cross Reverie*. It was apparently a place you visited pretty frequently if you chose the Priest class.

Lumachina smiled sadly. “You are not wrong... The townspeople may make the town different...but the Inner Sanctum is certainly as you describe. All people ever do there is pray.”

“Hmm, I see.”

Cross Reverie probably simplified the urban aspect of this district. If it replicated this town down to the minor details, it would become an entirely different type of game.

But even if *Cross Reverie* were based on this world, there was no way it would replicate the Church’s inner section perfectly. For example, if Diablo were to return to his world, how much of this world would he be able to replicate in a game? Putting aside his lack of talent in game design, even if he were to spend

his entire life working on it, he'd never be able to grasp everything about this world. In which case...what type of person made *Cross Reverie* in the first place?

Diablo's gaze fell on one of the many holy signs adorning the Cathedral's town.

—No...it couldn't be...

Diablo decided to stop thinking about it. Keeping Lumachina safe was top priority right now. He couldn't let his guard down.

While they were unmatched in terms of firepower, Sorcerers were weak when it came to ambushes. Reacting even a second too late could be the difference between life and death.

"We have no reason to take any detours. Let's head for the Inner Sanctum."

Lumachina nodded, and no one else seemed to disagree.

They walked through the town, when a young Pantherian approached them.

"Pardon me, please let me offer prayer for you."

"Sorry, we're in a hurry here."

"Whaaa!?" The Pantherian looked terribly surprised at Diablo's curt reaction.

—Damn, I just responded like he was one of those survey people that walked up to you in front of the train station.

This was a town for believers. Everyone standing around looked flabbergasted. Even Shera and Horn went pale.

"What do we do? What do we do?"

"This is super bad!"

"...Don't." Rem stopped Lumachina from stepping forward. "If they find out who you are, it will only cause an uproar."

Lumachina stepped back, covering her face. "I-I'm sorry."

Rem stepped forward to calm the Pantherian boy. "...I apologize for that."

"No problem at all, but, umm, who is that person...?"

"...We've come from the former Demon Lord's Domain to ask for a Priest's

help at the Inner Sanctum. It's been a very long journey. We're terribly sorry for being disrespectful, but he is very impatient after the long trip."

"Ah, I see! But you came all the way from the former Demon Lord's Domain!? That sounds awful!"

"...Not at all..."

If they were to believe the Fallen's claims, the Demon Lord had already been revived, which meant the former Demon Lord's Domain was just the Demon Lord's Domain now. But there was no point in going to the trouble of bringing that up.

People began hustling around them with a bustle.

"W-What's going on...?"

"You've done well to come from that far. Accept this with our feelings of hospitality."

An unfamiliar dwarf handed them a loaf of bread wrapped in leaves. Someone else asked them if they needed any water, then everyone began praying. At this rate, the people would keep them pinned down here until nightfall.

"Th-Thank you all very much!" Rem said, trying to force her way out of the situation. "But we really are in a hurry! Farewell, and our gratitude to you and to God!"

Then they all squeezed through the crowd, running in an attempt to escape.

"Please, wait! We're not done praying..."

The Pantherian boy ran after them. Rem's eyes flared up, her gaze becoming that of a carnivorous beast.

"《Shadow Snake》," she muttered under her breath, dropping a crystal from her robes to the ground.

Seriously!? He's a civilian! Diablo thought as he ran, carrying Lumachina in his arms.

Frozen in place by the Summon Beast's《Bind》effect, the boy had stopped

chasing them.

†

They arrived in the central plaza. A small chapel stood there, with a few people praying solemnly.

—Gotta admit, that made me pretty tired...

They had been running ever since they entered the Cathedral. Having carried Lumachina the whole way, even Diablo's considerable stamina was beginning to run out.

"...What is with this town!?" Rem exclaimed, perplexed. "They lined up to force their charity on us!"

Shera, on the other hand, smiled happily. "This is such a nice place!"

"It really is!" Horn was in agreement.

Their hands were full of bread, dumplings, and skewers they had received from the believers. In the end, they left Rose in charge of the carriage.

"Rose did not detect any enmity toward Master. Rose must admit seeing so many people approach Master did leave Rose rather disconcerted, however."

"These good people love their neighbors," Lumachina said on behalf of the believers.

"...You call it love..." Rem said, tilting her head pensively, "but it felt more like a sense of duty or compulsion to me."

"Aaah, I'm tireeed... So, where's the Inner Sanctum?" Shera asked.

"The entrance is over there."

Lumachina pointed at the chapel. It was, frankly speaking, rather small. Diablo doubted a hundred people could fit in there. It had beautiful stained glass windows, and the red marble doors were quite impressive as well, but that was it. It didn't seem abandoned, though, since believers and people carrying packages walked in and out occasionally.

"Isn't it kinda small?" Shera frowned.

"It's shabbier than I thought." Even Horn was commenting on it.

But, true enough, no matter how Diablo looked at it, it was hard to believe this was the Church's most important building in the Kingdom of Lyferia.

"...That can't be true." Rem tilted her head. "That's the entrance? Oh, does it maybe go underground?"

"It's up."

Diablo shifted his gaze upward, and Rem and the others looked to the sky quizzically.

A white sphere was floating there.

"Huh!?" Rem squealed in surprise.

A platform had descended from it, eventually landing in the chapel's small courtyard. After a few moments where people and packages gathered on top of it, the platform levitated back up, going back into the sphere through the hole it left behind.

"That Floating Corridor connects the Inner Sanctum with this chapel, which serves as its entrance," Lumachina explained.

"...Wha... A Floating...Corridor...!?" Rem's eyes were as wide as saucers.

"It's floating! That's so super awesome! How come it doesn't fall!?"

"That's because this is one of God's miracles."

"Wow, that's amazing! I'm super impressed."

Shera seemed shocked, but her reaction was surprisingly light. She wasn't one to be very concerned about what went on around her one way or another.

Rose looked up with a bored expression.

"Did you know about this?" Diablo asked curiously.

"Not at all. Rose is simply incapable of finding anything that does not involve Master impressive."

Diablo faltered at this unexpected response. "O-Oh. Right."

The sphere was about one hundred meters overhead, and it was surrounded by a mist that covered it in a white haze.

“...So we couldn’t see it from afar because of that.”

“If you know it is there, you may be able to identify it.”

While Rem and Lumachina had this exchange, someone ran up to them. Shera turned her gaze in that person’s direction, and Rose observed things unfold in a state of alert.

It was the Pantherian boy from earlier. He was wheezing and gasping in total exhaustion.

“Aaa, aaah, finally...I caught up...”

“...How is this possible!? I’m sure I bound you!” Rem said with an expression of utter shock.

“Huh? You what? Well, I couldn’t move for a while...but you said you had business at the Inner Sanctum...so I came here...”

“Just who are you!?”

“Aaah, phew... I’m a...seminar student in my sixth year...”

“A student...?”

Steadying his breath, the Pantherian boy continued. “I was still in the middle of praying! Please, let me finish my prayer for you!”

He seemed desperate.

Rem took a cautious step back. “...What are you saying? You’re not making any sense.”

“I’ve instructed myself to ‘pray for ten people every day.’ That is an obligation I have cast on myself. I report how much I’ve succeeded in class, and that influences whether I qualify in becoming a Priest or not.”

“...Then pray for someone else. It doesn’t have to be us.”

“But I’ve also instructed myself to ‘never quit halfway through.’”

“...Don’t you understand other people have their own circumstances to consider?”

“O-Of course I do. And I do feel sorry about that... I didn’t know you were in

such a hurry. But please, just give me five more minutes."

"...Why not leave us alone and tell them you prayed for us anyway?"

"I can't lie!"

"Why not?"

"Because God can always see what I'm doing!" he said with an earnest expression. "The obligation to myself is a promise I've made with God. I can't go against this task."

Rem rubbed the bridge of her eyes tiredly. "...That's a pretty terrible life you've chosen for yourself."

"It is all as you say!" Lumachina stepped out before him. "Even if no one else is watching, God is always there to witness our deeds! Please, feel free to pray for as long as you need."

"Th-Thank you!"

"Allow me to join you. Your pious deeds will surely reach the Lord."

"Yes!"

The two began praying once more.

—I swear, she's really too nice to people...

Everyone else seemed to have submitted to the boy's tenacious request and waited for them to finish.

While that was happening, the people around them had begun making a commotion. Something was going on.

Rose, who wasn't interested in praying one bit, warned Diablo.

"Master, several highly menacing targets are approaching!"

"Someone's coming!?"

Several figures dressed in blue armor were descending down from the Inner Sanctum. They exited the small chapel moments later.

—Paladins!

Three of them, to be exact. Diablo tensed up while the believers fell to their

knees and faced the ground.

Surrounded by the Paladins, a single man, dressed in a silver cloak, lorded over everyone else. It was obvious at a glance that this person was of very high standing.

“Vishos...” Lumachina muttered with a tense expression.

The silver-robed man turned his gaze their way. His lips were hidden behind his bushy black beard, but Diablo could tell he was smirking.

“Welcome home, Lady Lumachina... We’ve been awaiting your return with *bated* breath.”

He approached Diablo’s group calmly. The believers were riled up by those words, if only because they were in the presence of not just the head of the Cardinal Council, Vishos, but also of the High Priest Lumachina. They had all kept a dignified distance of ten steps, but the plaza had filled up with hundreds of people by now.

Lumachina took off her robe.

“Th-The High...!?”

The seminar student who stood next to them squealed with surprise and fell to his knees. Rem dragged him away so he wouldn’t get involved in case something happened. As plain of a solution as it was, it was a good idea.

Vishos and Lumachina remained five steps apart, a distance close enough to speak and far enough to draw a sword if need be.

Diablo stood beside Lumachina, while the Paladins were poised to act at a moment’s notice at Vishos’s side.

Horn was panicking behind Diablo.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-What do we do, Boss!? Do we split!? Fly off and splitity-split!?”

“Nay, you little fool. This situation is exactly what we wanted.”

“Ah... Yeah, it was...”

Their idea was to slam the evidence they had in the Cardinal Authority’s faces,

and have Lumachina excommunicate them on that basis. If the Cardinal Authority turned on Lumachina and sent Paladins after her, it was Diablo's job to guard her.

The believers all gulped in suspense, waiting to see what these two great figures would say to each other. Even the constant murmur of prayer couldn't be heard anymore.

Lumachina was the first to break the silence.

"You do remember my face and title, correct?"

"Of course, Your Eminence... We've been anxiously awaiting your return."

"An assassin had made an attempt on my life while I was on my way to Faltra."

"How horrendous..."

"And that assassin was the Paladin, Gewalt—whom you sent after me!"

The surrounding believers all gasped in disbelief. The unrest spread among them like a wave. Vishos made no attempt to dispute her words, merely listening quietly.

"And that is not all. I have records of our finances over the last few years," Lumachina continued, "and there are several transactions in your name I would like to inquire about." She stuck out a sheet of paper in front of Vishos's face. "Can you prove yourself innocent of taking bribery, Vishos!?"

Vishos remained silent. The argument was far too one-sided. Maybe he simply had no way of arguing back?

Lumachina thought the silence strange, but continued speaking, reciting the words she had rehearsed countless times before coming here.

"If you plead guilty, then I proclaim: Vishos, head of the Cardinal Council, and all other members of the Cardinal Authority... I hereby excommunicate you from the Church!"

The believers gasped in shock once again, even more surprised than before. Their surprise was perfectly understandable; what had just transpired was inconceivable. Leading individuals they had looked up to until now as teachers

and even father-figures were the sort to hire assassins and launder money. And those great figures had just been banished from the Church.

“How deplorable...” The head of the Cardinal Council, Vishos, finally opened his mouth to speak.

“...What do you mean?”

“You abandon your duties as a High Priest, loiter about as you please, and tarnish your soul with debauchery... I was relieved to see you return, but then you provoke me with allegations and forged evidence, and have the audacity to banish the Cardinal Authority that was once at your service at every step of the way...”

“What!? Are you trying to accuse my claims as false!?”

“They could never be true. We of the Cardinal Authority have devoted all we have to the Church. All that we could, and all that we have. We would never accept bribes. Did you think your absurd claims would fool our good believers?”

“But I have evidence right here!”

“Forgeries, fakes, all of it! How crude!”

“No!”

“A base girl who prioritizes pleasure over her duties is unfit for the station of High Priest, after all.”

“This evidence is true! Read it carefully and see for yourself!”

“Whatever those foolish scraps of paper may say!” Vishos bellowed, drowning out Lumachina’s voice. “Our believers will see the truth! We would never go against the scriptures! It simply cannot be! If it ever were to be true, all the faith these believers have put in over the years will have lost all meaning!”

“What...!?”

The believers’ responses this time were quiet ones, but they felt far more grave and heavy.

“...This is going badly, Diablo,” Rem whispered.

Shera looked around anxiously. “I’m scared...”

The believers' eyes had become savage and enraged, as if they were out for blood. If the Cardinal Authority were so sinful as to deserve excommunication, what of themselves, who had been acknowledged by the Authority? What of all the faith they had fostered over the years? Their fear of loss turned into animosity against the one who had tried ruining all they had built up.

Lumachina's knees were trembling.

"Even if... Even if all is lost, sin must be answered for!"

"Quite right, Your Eminence, the High Priest... No—former High Priest!"

"Wha—!?"

"You have neglected your duties and left without informing anyone. God's voice could never reach someone who abandons their sworn duties!"

"But that was because of that assassin—"

"A Paladin's job is to defend the High Priest! No one would believe such an obvious lie! Do you plan on bringing the Church to ruin in the name of your sloth and debauchery!?"

"This can't be..."

Lumachina's eyes had turned red.

—No, don't cry. The moment you cry, you lose this dispute.

No matter how in the right you may be, once you let emotions take over your claims lose all validity. But Vishos continued hurling abuse her way, as if to say none of that even mattered.

"Do you have any perception of how important your role is!? While the town of Faltra faces crisis after crisis and awaits a High Priest's presence and support, you dare come here to slander our name with false accusations!? If you would cast doubt on us, first hold true to your own duties!"

"Aaah... Nng..."

Come to think of it, Lumachina had broken away while heading to Faltra for a sympathy visit. But if she hadn't done so, the Paladin would have killed her... Try as she might to explain it, however, Vishos would just dismiss it all as mere

excuses.

“Lumachina Weselia... We will have you resign as the High Priest” Vishos proclaimed. “Moreover, we will have you answer for your sin of neglect toward your sworn duties.”

“How can you... What right do you have to do this!? The Cardinal Authority do not have the right to dismiss the High Priest!”

“You foolish girl! You think your position would let you get away with anything!? If so, you have no right to claim you speak God’s words! Reflect on your misgivings in the confessional!”

“I am not! But the Church’s regulations were set forth by the Lord...”

“All of you, apprehend this heretic! Let this be proof of your great faith!” Vishos bellowed at the believers.

And that was the end of that. The believers who had stood around them all began advancing on them like zombies.

Diablo clicked his tongue.

—I didn’t wanna do this, but I have no choice... I have to blow them away.

He reached inside the pouch in his robe, intending to take out his staff, the Tonnerre Empereur. Rem and the others also took battle positions, but Lumachina spread out her arms before them.

“Please wait!”

“We’ve lost the debate. We have no choice but to fight, Lumachina!”

“Forgive me, Lord Diablo...but I cannot allow blood to be spilled in the Cathedral!”

“...That’s very much like you.”

That moment of hesitation had decided the battle.

The believers all rushed to Lumachina. At this rate, they’d drag her away by force, but Diablo wasn’t about to let that happen. He’d have to play along with Lumachina’s wishes, and make it so no one got hurt...

Diablo raised his hand to the sky.

“Come forth...《Lightning Strike》!”

A flash ran across the empty sky. A rumbling sound echoed, and he could feel the air tremble against his skin. A bolt of lightning fell from the heavens and struck the entrance on the ground—the small chapel—blowing the holy symbol on top of it to pieces.

The sound and impact of the blast froze the believers in place, halting their advance.

Perhaps he could have been able to use this time to load all his companions onto the cart and escape with flight magic, but Lumachina hadn’t wished for that.

“If it will save all of you...I will not resist,” she told the believers. “I will go to the confessional. Could you please open the way?”

Her voice was quiet and clear. The believers moved aside, clearing the road leading to the chapel Diablo had just struck with lightning. Lumachina walked down that road calmly, with Diablo following behind.

“Your cohorts will not go any—” Vishos said with a condescending tone, but Diablo glared at him.

Diablo didn’t say anything. He still had to sort out his emotions, while his head still seethed with anger. But he knew reducing this man to cinder right now wouldn’t do anyone good.

Rem spoke on his behalf instead.

“You were the only one who told Lumachina to go to the confessional. In that case, guarding her well-being will be your responsibility. If any harm comes to Lumachina, we’ll assume you silenced her to keep the ugly truth from being exposed.”

“Heh heh... That’s an odd assumption to make, my dear. The confessional is a place for reflecting on one’s own sins... No harming will be done there.”

“...If anything happens to her, you will regret it.”

Shera and Rose followed after Rem. It was then Diablo noticed...

“Where’s Horn?”

“The Grasswalker ran away,” Rose answered with a flat, even voice.

Diablo smiled wryly—that was a wise decision she had made there.

The interior of the small chapel was filled with boxes and packages, and its central plaza was underneath an open section with no roof, the Floating Corridor coming down to greet them.

Diablo and his group had become prisoners.

Chapter 3: Horn's Battle

Horn ran with all her might. She was so afraid of the believers that went after them, she had found herself running as fast as she could before she even realized what had happened.

"That's crazy! Totally impossible!"

She rushed across the city, screaming, and had no idea how she made it back, but...

Horn found herself in front of the inn. It was after sunset. She had always entered the inn after Diablo and the rest, and was anxious going into such a high-class establishment by herself. However, as she made her way into the Firebird Inn's lobby, a dwarf girl bowed before her politely.

"Welcome back, miss."

"Ah, yeah...I'm back."

"Here is the key to your room. We've been told to cancel your reservations for dinner, but would you like for me to prepare it now?"

"N-No, it's fine."

She didn't have much of an appetite. They had planned to storm the Church, and knew that, whatever the result would end up being, they wouldn't be back for a while. In a manner of speaking, she was the one out of place here.

Horn grabbed the key and ran up the stairs, throwing herself on her bed as soon as she entered the room. She had only stayed here shortly, so it didn't...quite feel like she was at home here, but she had gotten used to the room. She almost wondered if what had happened during the day was just a dream.

Her eyelids fluttered shut...and when she opened them again, a knock on the door jolted her awake. She thought Rem had come to call her to join everyone in the large room so they could tell her what happened in the Church, but that

was just a dream. An optimistic illusion born from her belief that no matter what, they would always pull through. After all, they had Diablo on their side. He would defeat any powerful enemy that might come their way—or so she believed.

The real result was...a crushing defeat...

“He should have just...” Horn mumbled, lying on the bed. “Boss should have just beaten that jerk who tricked Lumachina and the believers who tried capturing her...”

She had said it so bitterly, but knew that wouldn’t resolve the situation. That would just be the “Purification by the Demon Lord’s hands” Alicia had talked about. Not being able to convince anyone with words, and just forcing the people to do their will by violence... That wasn’t the reform Lumachina was trying to achieve.

Diablo and the others were probably captured because they decided fighting wasn’t the right thing to do, and Horn couldn’t think of anything else.

“I’m sure Boss’ll think of something... Yeah, if I just wait, the Boss’ll come back looking like nothing even happened!”

She closed her eyes again. She heard another knock, and once more thought she had dreamt it.

—*That’s not a dream...*

Jumping from her sleep, she unlocked the door.

“Yes!?”

A dwarf girl was standing on the other side of the door. It was one of the inn’s employees, but she wasn’t smiling like always.

“Miss...people from the Church are...”

“Aaah!?”

“Believers have come here, asking to take your luggage. What should we...?”

“Y-Y-You can’t!”

The believers knew they were in this inn, or maybe someone in the group had

talked.

The dwarf girl nodded sternly.

“Understood, miss. The Firebird Inn will do everything in its power to protect you and your luggage.”

“Thanks so much!”

“I recommend you go outside from the back door, however. For your own safety.”

“D-D’you mean I should run!?”

“Were it just the believers, we could turn them away, but there are people from the Church here, too. If a Paladin were to come here...I’m sad to say our establishment’s security is ill-equipped to handle them.”

“Heee!?”

She could feel tears welling up in her eyes.

Paladin were about level 100, if she recalled correctly, and Horn was only level 20 or so. She was also a Seeker, which meant she wasn’t geared for battle.

The dwarf bowed deeply. “There’s a mirror at the end of the third floor’s corridor. Press down on its frame from the right. It should open a hidden door.”

“Aaah, yes...”

The employee left, having told Horn what she needed to know. The door closed with a heavy, solemn sound. Horn jumped at her gear.

“Gottagofast!”

Squealing that positively meaningless phrase, Horn grabbed her rucksack and began cramming it full of her belongings. But it occurred to her she should probably leave behind whatever she wouldn’t need first. Turning the rucksack upside down, all sorts of items fell onto the floor and rolled around. Horn reached down and grabbed a silver cup from the floor.

“Oh...”

She had borrowed it from the《Treasure Vault》, and “soiled” it due to certain circumstances, so she took it to give it a vigorous washing before giving it back.

But she was still too embarrassed over it and hadn't returned it to Diablo yet.

The memories from their adventure at the Demon Lord's Underground Labyrinth, the dungeon they explored in the desert, flashed in her mind. It was an exciting adventure, the kind she thought she could only dream of.

It was the absolute best! But me...I'm weak... The kind of weakling who runs off, shaking at the knees just from hearing the word "Paladin!"

Hot tears streamed down her cheeks, the drops dripping into the silver cup.

"B... B-But...they're...they're my friends!"

"Do ya, like, wanna save 'em?"

"You bet I do!" she shouted back, then noticed. "Wh-Who was that!?"

"Oh, I'm here, over here, girlfriend ♪"

The only thing Horn could see was the goblet she was holding in her hands, but a pretty girl was sitting on its rim, small enough to fit in Horn's hand. She had green, fluffy hair and was wearing clothes the likes of which Horn had never seen before. She was like a fairy, and, in any case, was small.

“Who’re you!?”

“Whoa, rude! You’re, like, talking to the great and wise goddess of the Holy Grail! You don’t wanna cross Lady Babalon, girlie!”

“Holy Grail...?”

“Like, this thing you’re holding?”

“Heee!?”

She never knew this thing was so important!

“Hehehe... So you didn’t know? Well duh~ This is a Regalia from another world!”

“Another world...?”

This was insane. Last time, she couldn’t help herself—and used this thing as a toilet! Horn felt all the blood drain from her face.

“I think it’s been, like, a hundred years or something? Since I manifested last time, so I’m in a really good mood. I’ll do ya a little favor, sister! I’ll level you up!”

“What? Honest!?”

“Hehehe... I mean, I’m supposed to be a level up goddess and all? And your level’s kinda sucky, so it’ll be a piece of cake.”

“So I’ll be able to go save Diablo and the others!?”

“Well, I dunno, that’s not on me.”

“Oh... Well, I don’t care, whatever goes! Do anything you can, but hurry!”

“Haaa... I kinda...don’t feel like it anymore~ You’re gonna have to ask me like you’re worshiping me and all that. Like, I know I’m from another world, but I’m a pretty big deal, y’know?”

Setting the Holy Grail down, Horn got on all fours and rubbed her forehead against the floor.

“Please help me, Goddess-Boss!”

“Aaah, I cracked a nail.” Babalon examined her nails with a bored expression,

not sparing Horn a look. *“Feeling some pretty bad vibes here~”*

Horn beat her head against the floor with a *bang bang*.

“Please, I’m begging you!”

“Wha!? Gawd, you’re bleeding, sis! Doesn’t that hurt!?”

“It doesn’t...because if I don’t do something now, if I just keep running, my...my heart will hurt so much more...”

“Okay, okay, I get it. I said I’d raise your level, didn’t I? And you gave me compensation already.”

“Compensation...?”

“Yep, yep. Hehehe... A virgin’s fresh blood, to maintain my good looks!”

“Heee!?”

“It kinda tasted funny, but it was still good!”

“Wh-When!?”

“Uhhh... A month and a half ago, maybe?”

“Wh-Wh...at...?”

But that was when Horn borrowed the Holy Grail... Fresh blood? What she spilled in the Holy Grail wasn’t blood. It definitely, definitely wasn’t blood. But, now that she thought about it, the...liquid she spilled into the Grail had disappeared before her eyes back then. Was that because the Goddess residing in the Grail drank it!?

Horn was sweating bullets.

“Alriiighty. So sit tight, and watch me perform a mi-ra-cle ♪”

For a miracle, it was pretty laid back. Babalon fluttered her hands in Horn’s direction, and a small light emanated from her hands, flying toward Horn. It hit Horn’s chest, then disappeared. Horn clenched her fists and tried jumping up and down a few times.

“Did I...level up? I can’t really tell, but...my body’s feeling kinda light. Aren’t my hands moving faster than ever!?”

She flung her hands, brandishing an imaginary dagger with a *whoosh*.

Babalon shrugged. *“It was a no-go.”*

“Buha!? What do you mean!? Did you scam me!? You scammed me, right!?”

“It was totes a miracle! I don’t really know what happened either~ This is a total bummer.”

“Oh noooooooooooooo...”

Horn cradled her head helplessly. Did it not work because she gave it urine instead of blood!?

Horn was, thankfully, still a virgin...at least, as far as she could remember.

“So...how much blood do you need?”

“Around two liters?”

“Oh, it’s that much... Will it work!?”

“Aaah, you’ll kinda die, so I don’t really recommend it.”

“I’ll die!? Then it’s super pointless!”

“Usually I, like, get sacrifices.”

“You can’t do that! Sacrifices are a no-no! That’s not being a goddess! Demons do that!”

“Kyahahaha! You took it so seriously! What a dork.”

“Hng... I knew I shouldn’t count on some phony goddess... I’ll have to do it on my own!”

“Wha!? Excuse you!? *I am* not *phony!”*

“But you couldn’t level me up...”

Giving Horn a scornful look, Babalon shifted her gaze away grumpily. It had probably failed because Horn gave her a liquid that wasn’t blood, and besides, it wouldn’t work in the first place if Horn hadn’t given her a lethal dose.

“Then I’ll just give you another way do it! Kyaha!” Babalon clapped her hands with a popping sound.

“What other way?”

“I’m a gifted level up goddess, so I can sniff out things that give you the potential to grow. And lemme tell you, this place reeks. It totes reeks of potential.”

“Please stop telling girls they reek, it’s bad for my heart...”

“Not you, dummy, the other room! The next room over smells like potential!”

“Huh... What are you saying...?” Horn grumbled, but then it dawned on her.

—The other room, that’s Rose’s room!

Unlike Diablo with his weird pouch, everyone else left all their belongings in their own rooms. This meant most of Rose’s things were still in hers.

—The Subjugation Contract!

Horn grabbed the Holy Grail and rushed out into the hallway.

†

Horn grasped the adjacent room’s doorknob.

“It’s locked!? Awww, I should have known!”

The way she talked and acted may have been odd, but Rose was still a maid. She would never do something as careless as leave without locking the door behind her.

“Why don’t you, like, pick the lock?”

“Right...”

Horn’s fingers crept inside her belt, pulling out a small wire she then promptly inserted into the keyhole. The lock clicked, as if she’d just used a key.

“Wow, you’re quick!” Babalon exclaimed, her eyes round with surprise. *“For how low your level is, your《Unlock》skill is, like, crazy good!”*

“Nah, I’m pretty average at that. Teach could do it even faster...”

Horn entered the room.

“Hehehe... I’m getting my hopes up, y’know? Your level is low but your abilities are this polished... That means ya got talent, y’know?”

“Where did she put her luggage!?”

“Listen to me when I’m talking to you, gawd! I just said something that’s, like, totes important!”

“Here it is!”

Horn pulled a rucksack from under the bed. The thought crossed her mind that Rose may just kill her when Rose found out about this, but she decided saving her friends would have to do for her excuse.

The rucksack was secured with a lock, but Horn picked it in seconds, finding the black leather collar after a moment of rummaging. All she had to do was put it on and she’d level up quickly. But if the Lord, Diablo, died, so would she, the Thrall.

—That’s the price...

Horn swallowed nervously.

“That thing’s, like, the real deal,” Babalon said. *“Putting that thing on will make your level spike like crazy, no doubt about it... But as a level up goddess, I gotta warn ya. It’ll cut your lifespan short.”*

“For real...?”

“Getting cold feet?”

“No, not that; will it really level me up!?”

“Puh-lease, I’m a level up goddess. I don’t make mistakes when it comes to leveling.”

“You failed earlier...”

“Ugh, a split hair~ Feeling some bad vibes~”

—Believing her is a lost cause... I gotta do something, fast.

Horn took a long, deep breath, her heart beating loudly and frantically in her ears. Her breathing had become erratic as her fingers clenched the leather collar tightly.

“Aaah!”

—Who cares about my lifespan!?

“Just do iiiiiiit!!!”

Horn clasped the collar around her neck.

Her vision turned black.

She was standing on top of a gray tower, the wind battering her mercilessly. A dark-brown sky hung overhead, the stars nowhere to be seen despite there not being a single cloud to hide them.

Below her was a breathtaking, sparkling sight. Countless buildings stood, making up the visage of an unfamiliar city. People walked along the surface, smaller and more numerous than ants, with horseless, box shaped carriages moving in tow. The whole place was illuminated by a light stronger than anything a torch could hope to produce.

A “floaty” feeling enveloped her as the ground rapidly grew closer.

—I’m falling!?

“Bwha!?”

When Horn came to her senses, she was lying face down on the ground. The Holy Grail lay tumbled over before her eyes, and Babalon poked at her nose.

“Hey, you’re alive~ I know I said it’d shorten your lifespan, but I didn’t mean it’d cut it by this much.”

“Ah... Ugh... I’m alive...”

“Nice.”

Horn rose to her feet. “I gotta go...”

“Ah, take me along. I’m, like, super bored... Er, I mean, I’ll be super useful to have around! Guaranteed or your lifeblood back!”

“Huh... But if I’m sneaking into the Church, you’re way too loud to take along...”

“Gawd, can you get any ruder!? I’ll be quiet, promise! ‘Sides, only you can hear

my voice, remember?”

“Oh, right... But if I answer you, they’ll still spot me.”

“I’ll curse you if you leave me behind.”

“What even are ‘goddesses’ anymore... Fine, I’ll take you along.”

“Oh you, don’t you know cute boys, like, go crazy for goddesses like me?”

Horn picked up the Holy Grail from the floor and left Rose’s room. Just then, she could hear footsteps approaching.

—I can tell, somehow...

It didn’t sound like the staff or the other guests. It was three men, carrying weapons. But she couldn’t just run. She would have to go down to the lower floors and confront them.

†

The men stood there, their eyes bloodshot. They were dressed in shirts and trousers; normal attire, with the exception of chains depicting the holy mark dangling from their necks and the maces in their hands.

“Hey, isn’t that one of Lumachina’s lackeys!?”

One of them pointed in Horn’s direction. Horn couldn’t believe the believers would call the High Priest by her name so plainly like that. The men were obviously looking for everyone’s luggage.

“There’s still some forged documents missing...” another man said. “Don’t resist, and give them to us, all right?”

Horn frowned. The group had taken all the evidence with them. The only other thing that came to mind was Alicia, who may not have given them all the evidence she had found. She may have done so to stay on the safe side, in case Lumachina’s negotiations would fail and the evidence be taken away.

“I’m probably right, but I’m still in hot water here!”

“What are you saying, sis!?” Babalon exclaimed, pumping her fists. *“They’re only level 10! Whack these mooks, girl, whack ‘em!”*

“What? N-No... I can’t just do that out of nowhere...”

“Stop mumbling to yourself and give us those documents!” One of the men drew closer to Horn.

—If the documents are fake, how do you know some are missing? It makes no sense! How can these people not doubt it!?

But they probably weren’t thinking straight. They obeyed the Head of the Cardinal Council, Vishos, blindly, like puppets on strings. Lumachina was obviously in the right, but Vishos’s clever words kept the believers under his thrall.

—If I could do that, I’d be able to get out of this situation! If I could just manipulate them like that...

~Level Up Bonus Skill selected~

“Huh?” Horn turned her gaze to Babalon.

Babalon shook her head. *“That wasn’t me.”*

The voice echoed in Horn’s head once more.

~《Charm》Skill increased to level 8 ~

“What was that!?”

“I told you, it’s not me. It’s kinda confusing, I know, but it’s not.”

“What does ‘Charm’ even mean!?”

The moment she shouted those words, a pink heart jumped from Horn and toward the men who stood in her way. It flew at them with a wheezing sound and disappeared with a “Pop!” when it reached them.

“Haaah!?”

The men squealed with odd, high-pitched voices, then their faces flushed with an odd blush. It was, honestly speaking, pretty creepy.

The men opened their mouths to speak, one odd sentence coming out after

another.

“Heee, hehe... We’re sorry, missy, we didn’t mean to be so harsh... We don’t want you to hate us, okay?”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

“If you hate us, missy, I... I don’t know if I can live on...”

A creepy chill ran down Horn’s spine.

—What are these people saying!?

Meanwhile, the little goddess was cackling uncontrollably.

“A Charm skill! Kyahahaha! Imagine you, being that popular with the guys! That’s hilarious!”

“Wha!?”

“Well, anyway, if you already got them charmed, why not use ‘em to your advantage?”

“Huh... I really wanted some sorta super magic like the Boss uses...”

“Mmm? Well, yeah, I think you’ve got the talent for that, too.”

“Hmm... Could you please not take our things away?” Horn asked the men. “There’s no more evidence here.”

Would those words do anything to move these angry men? Horn was half in doubt, but the men happily nodded.

“That right? Well, if you say so, missy, we won’t take them.”

“If there’s no evidence here, there’s no point taking it back. It’s not like we disobeyed Vishos’s orders.”

“Yeah, we did exactly what he asked.”

It seemed their loyalty to the Cardinal Authority hadn’t changed any, but Horn’s Charm was enough to get them to believe her excuse and “obey.”

“What are you doing, girl? Ya gotta act cuter than that,” Babalon egged her on. *“You know how with swords and magic, there’s a right way to ‘swing’? That goes for skills, too. If ya slack off, the effect’ll go away as soon as you’re outta*

their sights.”

The idea seemed pretty gross to Horn, but she decided to endure.

Horn brought her hands together and tilted her head a bit to the side, forcing her lips into the biggest smile she could muster.

“Kyaaa, thanks a bundle, misters! You made Horn sooo happy!”

—Kill me.

The men’s faces steamed over.

“Bufh! Y-Y-You can leave everything to us, Miss Horn!”

“We’ll keep your luggage safe!”

“Oh god, my nose won’t stop bleeding...”

“Please, misters! And thanksies~” Horn exclaimed enthusiastically as she got away from them.

She ran through the third floor corridor, where the hidden passage should have been, wiping her mouth with both her hands.

“I think I’m gonna hurl...”

“Eeew, TMI! I’ll curse you if you throw up in the Holy Grail, ya got that!?”

Horn made a mental note to never tell Babalon she had used it as a toilet once already.

†

“I need you to take me up there! P-Pretty please!”

It was already dark out when Horn made it through the secret passage. It seemed even during the night there was a great deal of traffic heading toward the Inner Sanctum. Horn had attempted to Charm a man driving a wagon to the Church, secretly beckoning him into a building and making her request.

“Oh, uhm, no, but...” the man stuttered, red like a tomato. “I’m only delivering vegetables to the White Masks...”

—So, is it impossible...?

“Hold it, girl. Horn, are you some kinda stick in the mud nun or something?”

Babalon spoke up in a provocative tone. *“You gotta show some skin if you wanna get in people’s heads! Don’t think the world will cut you any slack just ’cuz you’re twelve!”*

So said the goddess, displaying the same tenacious chagrin one might expect from a creepy cameraman. Apparently no one could see or hear her except for Horn.

Horn grit her teeth in embarrassment and grabbed the hem of her skirt, slightly revealing her thighs.

—My skirt’s short enough as it is, but doing this, too... I’m so embarrassed I could die right here and now!

“P-P-Please!”

“Gufu!? I g-g-g-g-g-guess I can help you... They only inspect the crates at the top, so you can hide in the cabbage crate near the bottom... It should get you to the Inner Sanctum...”

“Thank you so much, mister!”

“As a level up goddess I hereby bequeath upon you the title of《Geezer Seducer》,” Babalon chuckled triumphantly.

“You can take your stupid title and go on a hike with it...”

“Beg pardon?” The man, who was busy opening the cabbage crate, turned to her quizzically.

“Aaah... It was totes nothing! Teehee!”

Horn was filled with self-loathing as she squeezed out the cutest voice she could muster from her lungs.

—One Hour Later—

Using Babalon to check that there was no one outside, Horn made her way out of the crate.

“Ewww... I smell like cabbage...”

“Can you, like, not get any of that on the Holy Grail? It’ll, like, ward off all the cute boys if it smells like cabbage.”

Ignoring Babalon’s words, Horn inspected her new surroundings. It seemed to be some sort of warehouse. There was no source of light, so the place was pitch black, but that wasn’t much of an issue. With nothing more but the starlight streaming through the room’s small windows, Horn could see the environment clearly. Her night vision was so keen, Horn herself could hardly believe how good it was.

When she was hiding in the crate, she could feel it ascending, so this should be the Inner Sanctum’s storage room. She tried recalling the way here...

“Huh...? I... I remember it?”

She could clearly remember how far the box was carried and how many turns in which direction it made. Her sense of perception and memory were never this keen before. Horn was confused by the changes she was going through.

Doing her nails with a makeup kit she had pulled out of nowhere, Babalon opened her mouth to speak.

“Mapping is, like, basic for Seekers, right? At level 80, you could probably fall into a trap hole and still have your bearings straight.”

“Level 80...?”

“That’s your level.”

“My level...?”

“Yep, that’s what it’s at now.”

“Fuwhaaat!?”

“The Subjugation Contract’s an item that elevates the Thrall’s level to one where he could benefit the Lord, remember? It just means your Lord’s level is

crazy high. His level should be, like, eighty times two.”

“Whaaat!? 80!?”

Horn fixed her gaze on her hand. Several memories floated up to the surface of her consciousness.

“I used to live in a town called Zircon Tower. It was in the former Demon Lord’s Domain, so a lot of strong people lived there, and the person everyone said was the strongest warrior around was level 80.”

“Hmm? That’s nice.”

“You don’t sound impressed...”

“Well, you can’t really impress level gods unless you break the level limit. You’ve got a ways to go until that happens~”

“Level limit?”

“Hehe ♪ For the races, the limit is level 99. Until you reach that, you can level up at a normal pace. But you break the limit once you reach level 100.”

“Oh... So what about Paladins?”

“I dunno about them. But leveling up over level 100 takes ten times the effort it takes just to even reach that point in the first place.”

“Ten times!?”

“Yeah, but thanks to that, the power gap between being level 100 and level 110 is, like, crazy large.”

“Seriously...?”

“Totes. The martial arts and spells you get at those levels are some real hot stuff, strong enough to face armies and large-type magical beasts.”

“Hot stuff, huh...”

The difference between her now and how she had been this afternoon was like heaven and earth. Breaking the level limit and going over level 100 felt as far away as the moon.

—The boss probably broke the level limit then...

“Aaah, someone’s coming~”

Horn hid in the shadows. At her current level, there was no chance she would be spotted in such a dark storeroom. But hiding alone wouldn’t help fulfill her objective.

One person entered the storeroom, donning a white mask. Based on his physique, it was probably a male Dwarf.

“I’ll try asking that guy if he knows where the Boss and the others are!”

“Oh my gawd, you’re gonna seduce someone again? With your smooth, cute twelve-year-old body and level 80 techniques?”

“Please stop putting it like that... I’m just making the most use outta my Charm skill...”

The very moment she cast it was always the most nerve-racking.

She stepped out of the shadows, right before the man. Noticing her presence, the White Mask turned his gaze in Horn’s direction.

“Charm, on! Teehee~”

Horn gave the widest, most dazzling smile she could muster.

†

The White Mask Dwarf provided Horn with all sorts of interesting information. Apparently, the Inner Sanctum was divided into four sections: The storerooms, kitchens, and other essential facilities were in the lower stratum, and the White Masks would volunteer to work there. The central wing was a chapel where large-scale rituals were held, and it was frequently used every day for prayer. The eastern wing was the high ranking officials’ bedrooms, which was also where the High Priest’s bedroom was; but that probably wasn’t of much importance right now. There was also a library and reference room in that wing, which were probably where Alicia’s cooperators had stolen the documents regarding the bribes. A small lecture hall and a dining room were in the Inner Sanctum’s west wing. The confessional was there as well.

Lumachina had been locked away separately from Diablo’s group. The so-called “confessional” was more of a prison in that regard. The White Mask

Dwarf had told her as much, but sadly didn't know exactly where each was held prisoner. It appeared they were spread out in random parts of the large building she was currently in. Horn decided to go the west wing, and find someone else to ask there.

Horn ran through the hallways, their walls and floors a pure white. Were they made of stone, or of earth? She couldn't really tell. This was a building kept aloft by the power of God's miracles, so it was probably made of some type of special material. There were small windows along the corridor, starlight streaming through them and illuminating the place dimly. There were no other sources of light. The place gave a clean, well-kept impression, but the darkness made it a bit creepy.

—The old me would probably be scared stiff being here...

She'd made it out of the lower stratum and into the west wing. This place had a more frugal design, with the walls and floors being made of wood. There were also latticed windows which lit this wing up more than the lower stratum, albeit with the windows set so they couldn't be opened.

"All you do is run... What a bore," the Holy Grail's goddess whined. *"I'm getting sorta hungry. You feel like giving me your blood, sweetheart?"*

"Aaah... Phew... The floor where the confessional is should be pretty close..."

"I can't believe it, you're ignoring a goddess!?"

Horn spotted a shadow ascending the stairs and stuck out her hands.

"Charm!"

"Huh!?"

A thin White Mask turned his gaze at her, surprised. Their orange hair was long, and their chest was round and looked soft.

—A Pantherian...woman!?

A pink colored heart flew at the woman, making a wheezing sound as it traveled through the air...but nothing else happened.

"A-Ah..."

Horn opened her mouth to speak fearfully, but the woman only reacted as Horn feared.

“Kyaaaaaa!!!”

“Oh crap... That really backfired!”

“Hehehe... It probably depends on their inclination, but I guess your Charm skill doesn’t work on girls, Horn. I don’t discriminate on the basis of gender though.”

Horn strafed to the Pantherian woman’s side and broke into a sprint.

“If you knew that much, why didn’t you say anything!?”

“It’s common sense, you shoulda figured that out on your own.”

“I-I mean, you’re right, but...”

“Don’t let it get to ya, girlfriend. Letting your power go to your head and messing up comes with the territory ♪ Y’know, like Sp0derman and that one line?”

“I don’t have any idea what you’re talking about! Messing up could get me killed!”

She’d gained information from several White Masks, and had the place pretty much mapped in her head. She rushed to the Key Room where the keys for the confessional were held.

—Please make it so there are no girls in there! And that there aren’t too many people in there, too!

The more people there were, the less Charm would be effective on each individual target.

The Key Room—

There were only two people in there: A Pantherian man, naked from the waist up, and a Grasswalker boy—no, probably an adult—reading a book. Grasswalkers were a race who looked like children even as they grew older. Even Horn, who was the same race as him, couldn’t discern his age, but, given

he was here, he was probably an adult.

They didn't have White Masks on, and they weren't dressed in modest robes, either. The Pantherian had a pair of leather pants while the Grasswalker was dressed in all black and had a pair of glasses on. The only ones who could be in the Inner Sanctum other than the White Masks were...

Horn's eyes widened. "Oh no..."

—Paladins!?

"Hehe..." The Pantherian's lips curved into a smirk. "She actually showed up. Just like you said, Grun."

"Obviously..." the Grasswalker muttered, not lifting his eyes from the book.

The Pantherian grabbed a war axe that was lying nearby and rose to his feet.

"Heh... So you came here to save your friends, huh?" he said, motioning toward his crotch. "Well, the key to the confessional's over here, little bunny rabbit."

"Wha!? Why'd you put it in there for!?"

—Paladins are scary!

"You're pointing the wrong way, Gatreth," the Grasswalker sighed. "It's behind you."

"Hmm? Aaah, right! Thanks, Grun!"

Gatreth the Pantherian pointed again, this time at a bundle of keys hanging from his waist. Horn sighed in relief, despite the dangerous situation she was in. Each of the keys seemed to have a number on them.

"Kehe... Your buddies are in the thirteenth confessional. If you wanna meet 'em, I can bring you right over."

"Wow, really? I didn't think someone with such a scary face would be so nice! Thanks!"

"The frig does my face have to do with that!?"

"Aaah!"

“What I’m saying is, if you sit still and let us catch you, we’ll lock you up along with your friends, keheheh... A great guy like me’s got a real heart of gold, eh?”

“Oh, so that’s what you meant... Then I’m taking that ‘thanks’ back!”

“Whoa, lame! Who calls himself ‘great’ like that nowadays? Dork. He’s pretty hilarious though.”

“Ayup...”

Horn recalled what Babalon had said when she first appeared.

You’re, like, talking to the great and wise goddess of the Holy Grail! You don’t wanna cross Lady Babalon, girlie!

Either way, this guy didn’t seem very cooperative, so Horn stuck out her hands toward him.

“Charm! Hee hee ☆”

The skill activated, and, like always, a pink heart flew toward the man, swiftly wheezing through the air...

“Aaah, hnnng!”

Gatreth stuck out his exposed chest, flexing his pectoral muscles. The heart popped like a soap bubble and dissipated when it hit his solid chest.

“Whaaat!?”

“Kuhahahaha! Cheap tricks don’t work on great men like me!”

“Do you swing the other way or something!?”

“No, you little doofus! I only care about busty, curvy kitty-cats! I won’t get it up to a washboard kid-rabbit like you!”

“It’s got nothing to do with your sexual preferences,” Grun mumbled behind them. “The Charm skill doesn’t work on someone stronger than the user.”

“Seriously!?”

“Oh yeah, I was thinking of telling you that,” Babalon said, as if suddenly

remembering. *“Charm doesn’t work on higher level opponents, you can only use it on people who are a lower level than you. Oh, and, of course, the success is based on your charm rank as opposed to the opponent’s resistance.”*

“You should have said that sooner!”

In other words, Charm wouldn’t work on Paladins.

Horn took a frightful step back and bolted out of the room.

—I can’t fight in such a cramped room!

Gatreth chased after her immediately.

“Yahoo! It’s rabbit season!”

Having been left alone in the room, Grun flipped through his book’s pages wordlessly.

†

Gatreth swung his war axe around, severing everything in his path, the wall’s wooden boards included, in two.

“Aaaall riiiiiiiight!”

“Uwa!?”

Now that she’d become level 80, Horn’s dodging skills had significantly increased. Gatreth may have exceeded Horn in power and speed, but Pantherians weren’t as dexterous which allowed Horn to just barely avoid his attacks. The axe’s swings packed so much force, even the slightest touch would cut Horn into pieces. But with so many needless motions to Gatreth’s swings, they were easy enough to predict.

Still, even if she knew they were coming, it took Horn everything she had to simply dodge, and those attacks were coming her way in waves.

“Ahahahaha! This is crazy, crazy dangerous!” Babalon called out with a shrill laugh. *“You might die, Horn! Think you’ll die!?”*

“What makes you think any of this is fun!?”

“Hee hee! Because level gods are also gods who govern over combat!”

“That’s convincing, but I’m begging you, keep it down! You’re distracting me!”

“Awww zip it, we’re not in a movie theater!”

The massive war axe once again skimmed through where her head was just a moment ago. If Horn had crouched even a second later, everything above her nose would have been on the other side of the room.

“Yikes!?”

“Come on, come on, come on! What’re you doing here, huh!? I thought you came here to save your friends!” Gatreth roared.

He had split the wooden walls again, launching splinters in the air which pelted over Horn’s face, spilling blood.

“Ouch!”

The blood dripped into the Holy Grail dangling from Horn’s waist, hooked onto her belt.

“Hnnng! This is the BEST!” Babalon cried out ecstatically.

“I’m gonna die at this rate, you know!”

“Hehe... Ugly machos like him aren’t my thing, but if he splits open a virgin’s heart and offers it up to the Holy Grail, I’ll have no choice but to manifest~”

“To that Paladin!?”

“I mean, that’s just how the Holy Grail works, y’know?”

“How much of a treacherous tramp can you be!?”

“Teehee~”

This no-good goddess clearly wasn’t going to be of any help.

Horn jogged through her thoughts. Even if the gap between her and a Paladin wasn’t as impossibly wide as it was before, beating one would still be difficult. A twenty level gap was still steep, and Horn’s《Shadow Knife》was a weapon made for beginners. Gatreth didn’t have any armor on, but she still doubted she’d be able to beat him with nothing more than a knife. She instead decided to devise a plan, relying on the structure’s map in her memory to think of a way to come out on top.

“You annoying little—!” Missing attack after attack, Gatreth was becoming increasingly more annoyed. “Heh, but...”

There was a wall at the end of the corridor. Horn was running toward a dead end. She rushed to the nearest window she could find, but, as she had thought, it wouldn’t open. She could see the starlight outside, and the sparkling luminescence of the city below.

Gatreth stopped his gait, standing five steps away from Horn. They weren’t standing too far apart from another, but it wasn’t a range the war axe could cover either.

Gatreth held the war axe with both hands, positioning it vertically before his face, the blade aimed at Horn. It was an odd stance.

—I don’t really know what he’s thinking, but that’s probably a Martial Art!

From his perspective, he probably thought he’d finally cornered Horn after she scurried around all this time. He was confident he’d be able to kill her here. Usually, the worst result for him would be her dodging his strike and slipping by from the side. So, to stop that, he’d have to use a long range attack with a wide reach!

Gatreth waved his war axe.

“I’ll crush you into mincemeat! 《Axe Impact》!”

A shock wave spread out around them, pressuring and crushing the walls, floor, and ceiling.

“Aiya!”

Horn kicked the window frame behind her, launching it out into the air. Then she jumped out the window, surrounded by a shower of splinters.

“Let’s gooooooooo!” Horn screamed out.

Starlight, the sparkling luminescence of the city below, the death that approached her rapidly, along with the debris of the window that had been blown away by the force of Gatreth’s attack...

“Aaaaaah!”

Horn reached out with all her strength, grabbing onto the lower floor's windowsill. She managed to grab on! ...Or so she thought, but the next moment the window frame bent under her hands and snapped loudly. The broken frame tumbled further down, falling softly in the direction of the entrance to chapel's square. Debris from the broken wall and window were falling, too... Horn tried reasoning there shouldn't be anyone out this late at night. Hopefully...

Grabbing onto a different window frame, Horn had narrowly escaped death from crashing down.

"Aaah... That was crazy!"

"Way to go! Huge props for that quick thinking and agility, girl!" Babalon cheered.

Grasswalkers were a race who prided themselves on their agility, and Seekers were a class focused around nimbleness. It was a bit of an absurd feat of acrobatics, but her level 80 body pulled it off.

"Horn, look up! Up!"

"Huh!?"

Gatreth cocked his head out of the broken window.

"You're not dead yet, you shitty little rabbit!?"

He swung his war axe again, its blade beginning to glow.

—Another Martial Art!

If he were to throw his axe her way, that would be the end right there. But him using a Martial Art with a long wind up time gave Horn the chance she needed to escape unscathed. Before the war axe could reach her, Horn rolled into the lower floor's corridor through the window.

—I can't stay put!

Horn jumped to her feet and broke into a run. Gatreth rushed down the staircase, hot on her trail.

†

The White Masks were moving to and fro in confusion.

“Oooh, Sir Gatreth, whatever is going on...?”

“Where’s that damned rabbit!?” Gatreth grabbed the collar of the man standing in the front, panting heavily.

“Ahhh!?”

“Answer me, or I’ll twist your head off!”

“Th-The intruder!? The Grasswalker is... She’s over there, she went that way!” The believer pointed down the hallway.

“I’ll turn that that sneaky little snot into a stain on the wall!”

“Aaah!?” Gatreth threw the believer to the floor.

“What were you just standing there for!? The least you could do was hold that little bitch down!”

“I-I’m sorry... Sh-She went in the third door.”

“Then say so sooner, you idiot!”

Gatreth approached the door with heavy steps, then kicked it down with all his might. The door flew inward, its hinges detaching forcefully from the wooden frame. Suddenly, white smoke burst out of the room.

“The hell!?”

A White-Masked-Grasswalker who was sitting inside pointed to the end of the room. “The intruder’s getting away!”

They could hear the sound of a door being opened on the other side of the curtain of smoke, and barely made out the form of a small figure running out of it.

“You shitty little rabbit!” Gatreth roared. “I’ll skin you and turn you into stew if it’s the last frigging thing I do!”

“That sounds like it’d hurt!” Horn’s voice echoed from above.

Gatreth lifted his gaze to look up, only to be greeted by a pair of boots to his face. Leaping down from the ceiling, Horn kicked him squarely in the head. However light Horn’s small Grasswalker body was, it would still deal some damage.

“Gah!?” Gatreth fell back, cradling his face in pain.

Horn Charmed the believers, enlisting them to help in this little performance. Ordering them to fight a Paladin would be impossible, but getting them to distract him would work. The White Masks were all civilians, below level 5. As she was right now, Horn was capable of “asking” them all to help at the same time.

Gatreth rose to his feet, waving the axe around to fan away the smoke.

“Pieces of shit, every single one of you!”

But by the time he finished, Horn was already out of the room. Veins popped on Gatreth’s forehead one after another.

“Hng...?”

He looked to the left, then to the right, but she was gone. Then he cried out in surprise, reaching out to his waist.

The bundle of keys was gone.

“That thieving little runt!!! Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Gatreth’s cry of wrath shook the room’s walls. At that same moment, Horn was sprinting up the staircase, already making her way to the upper floor. She had the bundle of keys in her hands.

“I gotta free Boss quickly!”

“You’re on a roll, girl!”

“Hehe... It’s the first time I used my《Thieving》skill, but at level 80, it still works.”

“That’s not in the Seeker skill set, though. Are you sure you’re not a Thief?”

“Uhn!?”

“They’re similar, but still different classes. If you try to spec into another class, you’ll notice a pretty big gap in abilities at a high level. Gotta watch out for that, or you’ll get burned later down the road.”

“My teacher was a Thief... He always told me, ‘Never become a Thief!’ and never taught me how to steal... Am I a Thief, after all?”

“Do you like your teacher, Horn?”

“Of course! I love Teach...”

“Then why not be the same as him? Ya don’t have to be, like, the classic image of a Thief. Be the kind of Thief you want to become!”

“Ah...” Horn found herself smiling naturally.

“Whoa, look at me being all smart like!” Babalon said with a triumphant expression. *“I just said something real smooth, didn’t I? Moved you to tears and all that?”*

“Ah... Ayup!”

†

Horn used Babalon to check the key room. Apparently, they could still communicate if Horn was five meters away from the Holy Grail. Horn thought it was extremely useful for dungeons and indoor explorations. Maybe that’s just what one should expect from a goddess of battle.

“Aight, I checked it out for you. But just so ya know, nobody’s ever pushed me around this much before, ya got that?”

“I’m really grateful for this...” Horn answered with a whisper. Only Horn could hear Babalon’s voice, but had to answer softly so she wouldn’t be heard.

“So, ya wanna know what I found? Do ya? Huh? Hehehe... I’ll let ya know if ya take off your panties!”

Horn wordlessly stuck her hand out a window, dangling the Holy Grail in the night air.

“Eeeeeeeee~ I was kidding, just kidding! You’re so ungrateful, gawd!”

“Well?”

“He was there! That Paladin, Grun; he was sitting there and reading a book!”

“All right.”

Horn hooked the Holy Grail onto her belt.

“I can’t believe you’d treat the great mistress Babalon like this... You’re a scary

girl, y'know that!?"

"Pipe down."

Horn put all her concentration into muffling her footsteps. She passed across the door to the key room and moved onward. The corridor beyond was made of stone bricks, like a dungeon.

—There's no one here?

She'd expected to see guards, but no one was around. Maybe because it was so late at night?

A number of doors filled the corridor. If Gatreth hadn't told her earlier, she'd have been at a loss as to where to find them. According to him, Diablo and the others were in the thirteenth confessional, but she still didn't know where Lumachina was. The White Masks had told her Lumachina was in another room...but she'd have to think about that later.

Checking the numbers on each door, Horn headed deeper down the corridor.

"Here it is!"

"Woohoo."

It was a large iron door, unfitting for the image of a confessional, with a large plaque that said "013."

"Boss, you there!?" Horn called in a husky whisper, running up to the door.

No response.

She tried knocking on the door.

Silence.

—Did he lie about them being in the thirteenth confessional...?

Gatreth didn't strike her as someone bright enough to lie that well, but...

There were so many doors. Horn didn't think it possible to check each room without alerting the Paladin in the key room. She could feel herself sweating from the suspense.

"Boss!"

“...Is that you, Horn?”

Rem’s voice came from the other side of the iron door.

“Ah! Yeah, it’s me!”

“...Impossible... How did you get all the way here? Did they capture you?”

“A lot of stuff happened...”

She could hear others talking on the inside.

“What!? Horn’s out there!?”

“Wow! Did she come to save us!?”

It was Diablo’s and Shera’s voices.

Horn looked in the bundle for the key marked “013.”

“Just gimme a sec. I’ll get this door open, then we can run!”

She inserted the lead-colored key into the keyhole, but then she heard a child’s voice behind her.

“—Helena’s Tome, Chapter Three, Fourth Passage—《The Merciless Claws》.”

Horn wheeled around her head rapidly, coming face to face with a massive black tiger that filled her entire field of vision.

“Aaah!”

Horn dodged, twisting her body to the side. She tumbled over, the world spinning rapidly as a shock wave knocked all the air out of her lungs. Before she could even process what had happened, Horn was crumpled down on the floor, leaning against a wall at the edge of the hallway.

She couldn’t feel her left hand.

“Ah...”

Turning her gaze to her left, her arm had been deeply shredded.

“Aaah!”

Her warm lifeblood dripped to the floor, drop by drop.

“Hang on, Horn!” Even Babalon—with her usual flippant attitude—sounded terribly alarmed.

Horn realized perfectly well: The way she was bleeding was fatal.

“Uuugh...”

It was seeing the amount of blood she lost, more than the damage to her body, that really made Horn go into a panic.

“I’m...dying...?”

She could hear the sound of boots walking toward her from the down the hallway.

“Of course you are. I attacked you with the intent to kill.”

It was Grun. He still appeared young, as was typical of Grasswalkers, but he now had his blue armor on, a sword sheathed at his waist. He still had his glasses on, and his eyes were fixed on the book in his hands.

“So you gave Gatreth the slip after all. Stands to reason I suppose. He always did have rocks for brains.”

“Uuu...”

“Try not to hate me for this. I don’t have anything against you, but Vishos’s orders were quite clear...”

“Vi...shos...”

Horn finally realized just how fearsome the enemy she had picked a fight with really was. She hadn’t regretted acting to help her friends, but...did she overestimate how strong she had become by leveling up? What made her think challenging such strong Paladins was a good idea?

Her eyes filled with tears, fogging her field of vision.

“This stench of blood... Your bleeding is quite severe,” Grun pointed out, never tearing his eyes from his book. “With wounds that deep, you won’t last much longer. I’ll just put you out of your misery.”

“Eeek!?”

“—Helena’s Tome, Chapter Four, Second Passage—《The Starved Canid》...”

A pitch black wolf appeared from inside his book. At that same time—

A voice bellow from behind the “013” door.

“Wither away!《Last Burst》!”

It was one of Diablo’s incantations.

The iron door suddenly changed to a brown color, cracks rapidly running through the stone wall. The door had become brittle and was kicked away from the inside, shattering as it crashed against the floor.

Diablo stepped out from behind it.

“I will never allow you to harm my belongings any further...you Paladin whelp!”

Grun lifted his gaze from his book for the first time, pushing his glasses up with his middle finger.

“Who do you think you’re calling a whelp? I’ll have you know I’m turning sixty this year. Now then, lad, since you seem so hellbent on leaving your cell, how about I really do send you down to hell?”

Chapter 4: The Demon Lord Awakens

Stepping out into the corridor, Diablo confirmed the situation at hand: To the left of the door, he could see a Grasswalker Paladin; his name was Grun. A black wolf had manifested in front of him, probably a Summon of some sort, but it was partially transparent. Was it some sort of magical illusion? It seemed similar to a Summon, but Grun didn't seem to have used a Summon crystal, and the monster he summoned wasn't any type of Summon Diablo knew of.

It was some ability Diablo didn't know about. Perhaps it was another feature that hadn't been implemented in *Cross Reverie*. Did Grun summon them with the tome in his hands?

Diablo then shifted his gaze to Horn, who lay crumpled at the right side of the hall. A large amount of blood had seeped out from her ravaged neck.

"Uu...uuu... B-Boss..." Blood trickled down from her lips. It appeared the injuries extended from her lungs.

"Don't talk."

Slipping his fingers into his pouch, Diablo turned to face Horn.

—Will I make it in time?

It was the first time he had to use it on someone this grievously wounded, but, if the game's logic still applied, it should work so long as she wasn't dead.

The Paladin clicked his tongue. "So, you're leaving the confessional after all? And after I warned you... You will come to regret that."

"Wait just a moment, you fool. *You* will come to rue the day you crossed me."

Diablo knelt before Horn, pulling a potion tube from his pouch and bringing it to her lips. Horn wasn't even able to properly drink anymore, however. Recalling the potion should work if spilled over one's head, Diablo decided that perhaps it would be better to do that, but...

Horn sluggishly moved her lips, swallowing the potion slowly.

“You’re telling me...to wait?” the Paladin spoke to Diablo’s back in irritation. “Do you truly have no idea as to what position you’re in right now...? Aaah, so be it. You would have been executed along with the High Priest anyway. I’ll dispose of you here and now instead.”

The Paladin raised a hand, when suddenly—a green shining projectile, a《Tempest Arrow》, flew from within the confessional in his direction.

“I won’t let you hurt Diablo and Horn!”

Shera had fired at him, the arrow piercing the wolf. The spot the arrow hit cracked, its outline distorting, but it was hard to tell if it had actually dealt any damage. Shera’s bow was enchanted by the Demon Lord Krebskulm to have a《Petrification》effect, but it didn’t activate. The wolf either resisted the petrification, or was perhaps immune to it in the first place.

The Paladin turned to look at Shera. “Are you planning on standing in my way?”

“...Of course we are,” Rem answered him, throwing a crystal to the ground.

“Come forth...《Saber Tiger》!”

A tiger with sword-like teeth appeared. However, its fur wasn’t a tiger’s yellow with black stripes, but rather dark with other shades of black as its stripes. It was a new Summon Rem had acquired in Zircon Tower.

“...Hmph.”

Rem’s Saber Tiger lunged in Grun’s direction. Her high level equipment, like the《Gemstone Gambeson》, increased its abilities, and it sunk its fangs into the wolf in front of Grun. The wolf tried to counterattack, of course, but the Saber Tiger’s attack power was higher, and, after a short exchange of blows, the wolf disappeared.

The feeling of victory was quite pronounced, and Rem, who was usually calm during battle, clenched her fist enthusiastically.

“...What is it, Paladin? Wasn’t I too weak to pose a threat to you?”

Grun flipped through the tome’s pages. “Your Summon is of the earth element. Will it be able to withstand attacks of the wind element? Frey’s Tome,

Second Chapter, First Passage —《The Cantering Arm》.”

Three green weasels appeared from within the book this time, their front teeth glittering dangerously. Rem’s eyes widened in surprise as the magically summoned weasels rushed around her Saber Tiger rapidly, gradually mangling and tearing it to bits with their teeth. The Saber Tiger was a fairly durable Summon to begin with and had its stats increased as well, but its HP was still being rapidly depleted. The Summon was beaten, leaving only a black crystal in its wake.

“Hng... He’s strong...” Rem groaned in frustration. But, to her surprise, the Paladin continued reading the book, summoning yet another wolf along with a bear and a large ape.

Shera fired her bow and Rem deployed more Summons, but there were too many opponents to deal with. Rose, who was standing at the edge of the room, manifested her dual-bladed sword out of nowhere.

“Rose will fight to defend Master!”

But Rem jumped before her, just as the Magimatic Maid’s killing intent became palpable.

“...Wait. You’re not thinking of using that thing of yours, are you?”

“Rose will use《Asterismos》to tear these would-be animals to shreds.”

“...That would be foolish. The floor here is wooden. At worst, you would collapse through it and fall all the way down from the Inner Sanctum.”

Rose stiffened at those words. While her weight right now was equal to that of an armored soldier, she wasn’t quite that heavy. But, if she were to manifest the Magimatic Sol, there was a decent chance the floor wouldn’t be able to withstand her weight. Even Rose wouldn’t be able to survive a fall from the Inner Sanctum unscathed.

Left with no choice, Rose began cutting down the beasts with the dual-bladed sword in her hand.

“Everyone seems to call Rose heavy all the time... Rose is honestly becoming quite aggravated by this.”

“...It’s the truth though.”

Rose swung her sword, as if trying to distract herself. She was plenty strong even like that though...

Their battle raged on, and Grun turned his gaze to Diablo once more.

“However unwillingly, I believe I’ve given you ample time. Are you ready now?”

“Heh... You struggle to handle these women, yet have the gall to challenge me?”

Diablo rose to his feet, trying to intimidate and overpower his foe.

Horn coughed heavily, the warmth returning to her face which had been deathly pale mere moments ago. The potion seemed to have worked.

“Ack... Ah... Th-Thanks, Boss...”

“You’re a mad one. I never thought you’d storm a fortress guarded by Paladins.”

“Ha...haha... I did think it was kinda reckless at first...”

“But, that thing on your neck... Is that the Subjugation Contract?”

Horn nodded silently.

“Do you understand what you’ve done, you little fool? Do you know what this means...?”

“Of course I do. If you die, I’ll die, too.”

“You’ve done a truly idiotic thing... You’ve paid such a steep price, yet you’re not even strong enough to beat a Paladin...”

“That’s not true! I’ve gotten stronger than I could ever become in my whole life! It’s just because I was up against someone I was a bad match against, and he took me by surprise, too!”

Diablo had no means of knowing what Horn’s level was at the moment. If she insisted on it that much, it was probably considerably effective, but...

—Don’t drop this kinda responsibility on me!

He couldn’t restrain his internal terror. He was seriously wondering if the damn collar didn’t have some sort of cooldown period. The Subjugation Contract was never implemented in *Cross Reverie*, so Diablo didn’t know the particulars of how it worked. But a Demon Lord wouldn’t fret over having more followers. If a Demon Lord died, the Fallen would significantly lose their power and the population of Magical Beasts would diminish. A Demon Lord was always a being who carried the weight of many lives on his shoulders.

—But I was always the type to get depressed when my in-game pets died...

Horn hung her head. “Am I a bother to you, Boss...?”

“Mm?”

“I... I wanted to save everyone...so I thought about it real hard, and tried my best to act on it, but... Heh... I’m so stupid. You could have come out of that cell whenever you wanted, Boss. You got caught because you had a plan...”

True, an iron door wouldn’t be able to hold Diablo back. That was probably why the Church stationed Paladins to watch over their cell. They had Lumachina closed in another room so they could hold her hostage as well.

Horn’s words made a low-pitched laugh escape Grun’s lips.

“Heh, heheh... Your actions were more than just a fool’s errand, girl. You dug your friends’ graves with your own two hands. They wouldn’t have left the cell if it weren’t for you coming here. If you hadn’t come... they’d have been spared from dying by my hand.”

“Ugh, uuu...”

“Your thoughtless, wasted efforts only brought trouble upon your friends. You’re worse than powerless—you’re a burden. Though, I suppose you realizing that now does come a few moments too late...”

“Nnng!” Tears rolled down Horn’s cheeks.

“Wrong! That’s not true!” Diablo shouted, clenching his chest as his fists shook with anger.

“Wh... What?” Horn’s crying expression turned to one of shock.

“Pay him no heed, Horn. There is no doubt that you’ve saved us!”

“Saved you?” Grun scoffed at those words. “How? Even if you try covering up for your friend’s flaws, your words make no sense. Nothing that good-for-nothing girl did has helped you in any way.”

“No. She has awakened me and opened my eyes.”

“Huh?”

“I believed this whole matter is the High Priest’s problem. I was merely lending Lumachina my aid, which is why I prioritized her wishes. But she’s too kind, to a fault, and far too weak to fight against these vipers you call ‘leaders.’ Her purity is precious, and should be protected. But it can’t serve her when fighting others. I already knew that, yet...I acted like I was some kind of follower, a believer! I had lulled my senses and beliefs to sleep.”

“While I do agree the High Priest is sheltered and ignorant... You claim your so-called ‘awakening’ can change things. Can you not see how overblown your confidence is?”

“Oh, my awakening will definitely change things around.”

“Nonsense. You’re going to die right here.”

“Come to think of it...I did promise to make you rue the day you crossed me, didn’t I?”

“You can keep your pathetic delusions to yourself. I’ve no intention of playing along with your meaningless bravado.”

“Heheheh...” Diablo chuckled with a low voice, then turned to Horn. “You thought things out on your own and acted upon your decisions... It wasn’t your results, but your desire to act that opened my eyes. Take pride, little one—you have awakened the Demon Lord!”

“Boss...” Horn wiped the tears from her eyes.

—I really did dull my senses...

Diablo was filled with bitter shame. If he had the《Return by Death》ability, he would redo this morning to undo this pathetic approach of his. A peaceful approach like trying to thrust evidence before the eyes of the corrupt was terribly un-Demon-Lord-like of him, and they were all naïve to think the crafty

felons of the Cardinal Authority didn't have a plan to talk their way out of every accusation.

They were far too naïve; pathetically green. Greener than a slime hiding in a patch of grass! Diablo had all the experience in the world when it came to fighting enemies, but no knowledge at all when it came to winning power struggles, and that cost them the initiative they had had. But he wouldn't hesitate anymore. He would take the best possible route to secure victory.

"Let me show you how a Demon Lord resolves problems."

"A Demon Lord? All I see is a laughable idiot. You're not fooling me; you're a mere Elemental Sorcerer."

A shiver ran down Diablo's spine. Grun's taunt filled him with fighting spirit. When he was playing *Cross Reverie*, he had run into opponents who ridiculed him like this before while he was role playing as a Demon Lord. Diablo answered those fools who couldn't realize the elegance of his act saying:

"Then I will show you with actions, not words, the true meaning of power...like this!"

Diablo aimed the Tonnerre Empereur at his opponent. But Grun wasn't about to let him do as he pleased, of course.

"You prattle too much, bungling Sorcerer. I'm already more than prepared! Come on out, Noah's Tome—from the preface to the epilogue, I call forth all the beasts!"

A horde of black beasts appeared, appearing less like a group and more like a writhing mass of claws and fangs. As it drew closer, cracks immediately formed along the walls, floor, and ceiling as they were gouged and scratched at, rendering the scene into a terrible, gruesome sight.

The mass lunged at the two.

"Eee!?" Horn gave a small screech of terror behind Diablo.

"Your paltry party tricks do not impress me, Paladin! 《Flare Burst》!"

It was a fire element spell that served as the improved version of 《Explosion》. Diablo tried curbing the spell's power since they were inside a building.

Grun's lips curved up into a smile. A screech rose from the lump as the spell made contact, but only a few beasts fell from it, burning to death.

Diablo's eyes widened in surprise. "Only the beasts on the outer layer took damage...!?"

Normally, any group of animals would be completely eradicated from taking that spell at point-blank range. But the spell didn't scatter or penetrate the lump of beasts. It was as if the few beasts it did hit had absorbed the blast. The logic behind it wasn't quite clear to Diablo yet, but it appeared it was a special type of monster, like it had multiple life bars.

The writhing mass had drawn closer to Diablo, charging before his very eyes.

"You're far too inexperienced, Sorcerer!" Grun cried out. "Now be consumed by my beasts and die!"

"Diablo!"

"N-Nooo!"

Even Rem and Shera had screamed in terror.

—Stop panicking, will you? Don't you know there's no way I'd lose to something like this?

"《Chain Lightning》!"

It was a lightning element attack that jumped from one target to the next. Since it moved at lightning-fast speed, the spell gave the impression it annihilated several opponents at once, and, with each individual beast's HP not being particularly high, sparks flew with a distinctive buzzing sound, a few of them screeching in pain. Countless beasts collapsed on the corridor floor, eventually dissipating. Like Diablo had thought, they were something like Summons created by magic.

"My Summons!?" This time, it was Grun whose eyes went wide with shock.

"Heheheh... What's wrong? Wasn't I a bungling Sorcerer? Your tricks are unusual, I'll admit, but are nothing special."

"Me!? Not special!?"

“That’s what I said. Is your hearing shot, old man?”

“I’ll kill you!”

Grun kicked the ground, his blade drawing closer to Diablo. At some point, he had drawn the sword at his waist.

—He’s quick!

Unable to block the blow, Diablo stepped back reflexively. It wasn’t a conscious attempt at evasion, but rather the reflexes he had developed in his everyday life. He should have been able to avoid it—but the sword suddenly extended in his direction, cutting Diablo across the chest.

“You little...!?”

Grun’s whole stunt with the book and the beasts was just a sideshow. His true abilities were that of a speed-type Warrior!

Grun’s eyes were opened terribly wide, the blood vessels in them sticking out as the white of his eyes turned red. His mouth was also open wide, revealing rows of diagonal, sharp teeth as his saliva frothed in rage. He was in a completely berserk state, the opposite of his former, intellectual appearance. He was more feral than any of the beasts in his books.

“Gaaah! You dodged iiit! You dodged my《Sword Smite IV》! Doooooodged iiit!”

“You did it now, you crazy geezer!”

“Your head, I’ll have your heeeeeead!”

But as he screamed, he lowered the sword to his waist. He had pulled a feint on Diablo, pretending to strike from above when he actually slashed from below.

But there was no way such an experienced swordsman would make do with such childish tricks. Drawing on the experience he had gained from countless battles, Diablo already knew what Grun was planning. He’d have no choice but to step backward if he was to dodge a horizontal slash to his knees, all while Horn stood a short distance behind him. Horn’s back was to the wall, and she had nowhere to run. While the Subjugation Contract may have increased Horn’s

level, she still probably didn't have the agility to dodge a slash from a Paladin. Grun would, in all likelihood, aim for Horn, and Diablo would have to take the blow to protect her. That was his plan.

"You underestimate a Demon Lord's strength, Paladin!"

Diablo didn't dodge, and Grun's sword cut into his right knee.

"Fool!"

"You're the only fool here! 《Absolute Zero》!"

Withstanding the slash with his massive HP pool, Diablo used a spell that required contact with the target. It was the same tactic he had employed against the Paladin Captain Batutta and the Fallen woman with the ability to attack from the shadows.

Diablo flung a fist at a speed surpassing that of the average warrior and—touched only air.

"What...!?"

Grun had slashed at Diablo's knee, and at the last moment moved away.

—This guy's the fastest Warrior I've ever faced in this world!

Grun pulled another sword from his waist; he was a dual-wielder.

"Playtime is over, boy. This time I really will claim your head."

"Heheheh... Good... Terrific. Anything less would bore me. Give me more! Show me everything you have at your disposal!"

"I'll assume this insipid drivel is your last will and testament."

He charged at Diablo again, chaining his already swift attacks into a flurry of combos. Keeping track of his slashes was becoming increasingly difficult. On top of that, Grun had added yet another attack into the mix.

"Helena's Tome—from the preface to the epilogue, I call forth all the beasts!"

He now had yet another mass of beasts at his back. It was impossible to discern just how many were there.

Diablo smirked indomitably. "I've been waiting for that, Paladin."

“What!?”

“Now I can fire my spells without concern. After all, if I unleashed my full power, I’d blast through the building.”

So long as he didn’t know where Lumachina was, he couldn’t afford to take that risk. However, even a powerful attack would only defeat the monsters on the mass’s surface. Still, Diablo chanted his spell all the same.

“《Rock Cannon》!”

A rock large enough to fill the hallway appeared, heading toward Grun who had leapt toward Diablo. When he fought an earth element Fallen once, she had pelted a pebble at him, which was a level 70 spell called《Sling Diamond》. What Diablo had just used was the improved version of that: a level 130 earth element spell.

The rock’s impact shook the entire Inner Sanctum. Even Horn, Rem, and Shera raised terrified screams. Rose was the only one who remained calm.

“Aaaaaaaaaaah!” Grun slashed at the massive stone rolling his way with his blade.

He was quick—very quick, but speed alone wouldn’t enable a sword to cut through stone.

The blade snapped—

Scrunch!

—and a faint crunching sound filled the hallway. The giant rock hit the mass of creatures that was behind Grun’s back, and, leaving behind the crushed corpses of several of the monsters, disappeared as the spell wore off.

Diablo then finished off what monsters remained with Chain Lightning. They were easy enough to handle once you realized how to deal with them.

Grun lay collapsed on the crumbling floor.

“U... Ugh...”

“You’re still alive. You’re tougher than I thought.”

“Impossible... Magic can’t produce a rock I’d be incapable of cutting... That’s...completely unheard of...”

“Hmph. If we weren’t in such a cramped space, I’d have decimated you with a spell powerful enough to level a town.”

“A Demon Lord... I thought your words to be shallow, but it seems...you really did have such power. It seems my assumptions were mistaken... But, you will still lose...”

“Oh?”

“You still don’t know the High Priest’s whereabouts, do you? Vishos will show you no mercy... That’s the type of man he is. He will take her hostage...and dispose of you fools...”

“So, you know Vishos is a villain. Then why side with him? Money?”

“Once you know the truth, it becomes impossible... Having seen those kind-hearted, pure fools... I could no longer stay on the side of those who are devoured...”

“Now you’re on the side that devours others.”

“But I misjudged my powers...and the plans for my life...went awry, it seems. I planned to retire comfortably...but that’s gone now, isn’t it...? Well, either way...you’ll never beat Vishos... You’re all fools...”

“Heheheh... Did I not tell you? I am a Demon Lord! If you lowlifes would deceive and wrongfully use the believers, I’ll simply take advantage of them through even more nefarious methods than you could ever think of!”

“Take advantage of the...believers? What are you sayi—ack!” Breathing wildly, Grun’s expression contorted in agony. “Aaah... Aaah... I would have wished...to see the shame in your eyes as you fail... But it seems...this is the end for me...”

After pausing in thought for a moment, Diablo parted his lips to speak. “I have a healing potion here, like the one that saved Horn from death. If you beg for your life, I might—”

“Surely you jest. As if I would ever do something so shameful...and besmirch my final moments... That’s why you’re a...whelp! The Tome of Erma, Epilogue. Fangs of the Night, devour me!”

“What!?”

One of the books scattered across the floor had flipped open, and a maned black dog burst out of it—a hyena. It began consuming Grun’s body, as if to devour him.

“Explosion!”

Diablo pointed his staff at the creature, blowing it away. The beast disappeared, but Grun’s body was gone as well, along with Grun’s books.

“Is he...dead...?” Horn whispered.

“So it would seem.”

Rem and the other two stepped out of the confessional.

“...This is what fighting to the death means. The enemy may be one from the races, or some sort of monster, but if we don’t defeat it, we’ll be the ones to lose our lives. Getting stronger means choosing to stand on the side of those who kill. Do you understand that now, Horn?”

“Y-Yeah...”

“...I honestly hope you do.”

Shera pointed down the hall. “Anyway, we have to go find Lumachina!”

Rose stepped out of the cell as well, the floor creaking in protest with every step she took.

“Is Master hurt?”

“Just a scratch, nothing a potion can’t fix. Besides, it seems like the floor can’t withstand your weight for long, Rose. Let’s go.”

Rem asked him what he was planning to do now, and he simply replied with a daring smile that showed he was going to do something worthy of a Demon Lord.

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The night sky above the plaza suddenly filled up with countless orbs of light. A black cloaked man with horns on his head levitated in the air with his back to the light.

“Hear me, foolish children of the races!” Diablo called out. His voice, magnified by magic, made anyone who was still asleep jolt awake in surprise.

The twelfth District’s civilians, the believers, all rushed into the square with a surprised, “What’s going on!?” The White Masks in the Inner Sanctum also leaned out their windows, looking over what was happening. Diablo directed the magical illumination their way, making sure he had everyone’s attention.

—Aww, dammit, I’m getting cold feet here...

Diablo was actually incredibly bad when it came to appearing before large crowds like this. When he realized so many people were looking at him, his mind went blank and his breath got stuck in his throat. A cold sweat ran down his spine. But he needed to have everyone’s attention if his performance was to work.

He could hear his heart beating like drums.

—Gotta calm down... Right now, you’re Diablo, the Demon Lord Diablo. A Demon Lord would stand in front of a crowd proudly. A Demon Lord never cowers, never flinches away! Now laugh!

“Fuahahahahaha!!!”

He could hear people whispering around him but ignored it. The moment he let it get to him, he would lose.

Diablo continued his Demon Lord role play. “I am the Demon Lord Diablo! You have lost sight of your true faith and desired destruction. In doing so, you have beckoned me to this world!”

“Th-The Demon Lord!?” “It can’t be!” “The Fallen could never break the city’s barrier!”

The believers all voiced different opinions and objections, but Diablo knew words alone wouldn’t convince them. So, before beginning his speech, he drank a booster-type potion.

“You fools who cannot even tell friend from foe—I have no reason to forgive your existences any longer!” Diablo brandished the Tonnerre Empereur. “《Lightning Meteor》!”

Bolts of lightning tore across the night sky. Electricity rained down on the surroundings, hitting the trees, statues, and works of art that adorned the plaza. Lightning hit them repeatedly, for Diablo had designated them as his targets ahead of time. The believers screamed in terror, running about in a panic. Many others knelt down, devoting themselves to prayer, hoping the Lord would protect them and banish this evil that had descended upon them.

—Having them rely on prayer is all part of the plan. Everything’s going smoothly...

There were also some among them who possessed fighting capabilities, sending flying Summons toward him or firing arrows his way.

But Diablo merely silenced them. “One more—Lightning Meteor!”

This time the lightning struck at the ground beneath the believers who had attacked him. There were many targets, so even a slight miscalculation would have gotten someone hurt... But these followers had captured and intended to execute him just a short while ago, as well as attacking him right now with the intent to take his life. Ignorance and helplessness were no excuses, and no reasons for him to defend them; but he did, if nothing else, make an effort to not kill anyone. Though, he did think anyone unlucky enough to get hit would have no one to blame but their own misfortune. He may be a level 150 Sorcerer, but he wasn’t almighty.

The believers, who had no way of knowing the effort Diablo was putting in, ran around in a panic, believing themselves to be in the middle of a massacre. Many tried running, while others simply prayed. With every spell Diablo fired, more and more people became convinced they were beholding the Demon Lord’s advent.

Someone stepped out of the Inner Sanctum, shouting loudly from the balcony.

“The frig!? Who do ya think you’re fooling, ya idiot!”

It was a Pantherian Paladin, with a war axe in hand. If Diablo recalled correctly, this was Grun's partner, Gatreth. He had seen Gatreth when they were kept away in the confessional.

"Finally... Wasn't sure what I'd do if they didn't come out..." Diablo murmured under his breath, then raised his voice, continuing along his script. "Fuahahahaha! You sic your puny, would-be Paladins on me, believing they could be my match!? Fools! If you wish to defeat me, nothing but a High Priest would do! Or have you relied on the Cardinal Authority instead!?"

"Who d'ya think you're calling puny, peabrain!?"

It was evident he was the type of person who didn't listen to people the whole way through. This Paladin was clearly all brawn and no brains.

"I'll knock ya down from there, ya stupid jester!" Gatreth swung his battle axe with a roar: "《Slash Axe》!"

A blade shining with gold flew Diablo's way. Gatreth's level was rather considerable, it seemed, but a Martial Art launched from such a long range was easy enough to avoid. Or so Diablo thought, but the blade curved about after he dodged it, once again flying his way.

"It can track me!?"

"Drop dead, moron!"

"Hmph! 《Sylph Shield》!"

The air around Diablo coalesced into a shield, deflecting the martial art.

—That's a pretty neat trick for a dumb Pantherian.

Diablo smirked. The desire to challenge Gatreth in close quarters combat itched at his heart, but now wasn't the time to struggle in a battle against someone. A Demon Lord would have to be overwhelming; only a being as indomitable and immense as that could strike terror in the hearts of men.

Diablo recalled the Inner Sanctum's structure, trying to remember Gatreth's current location compared to those who were around him. There shouldn't have been anyone near him now, so Diablo surmised destroying some of the area shouldn't be too terrible, but also didn't have the leisure to hold back.

“Know a Demon Lord’s true power! Hear me, darkness, eradicate all that exists!《Darkness Rain》!”

Countless black arrows appeared, raining down on Gatreth.

“Guaaah!?” Diablo heard him scream.

—Hmm? The effect’s more plain than I imagined it’d be...

He used dark element magic because he figured it’d be more fitting for a Demon Lord, but the effect was much tamer compared to the game. You couldn’t even see black arrows in the night! The spells that gave off sparkling, blinding lights were much more, well, flashy, after all.

“《Lightning Escalation》!”

Diablo chanted another spell. Several balls of light, made from condensed magical energy, flew into the air. They sparkled brightly, and, accompanied by the rumbling of thunder, filled the hearts of all who watched them with terror.

Having been brought to his knees by Darkness Rain, Gatreth rose to his knees with an “Oooh!” and began swinging his war axe at the balls of light, fanning them away.

—No, don’t move them, you idiot!

The balls struck the Inner Sanctum, making pieces of it crumble down spectacularly. Diablo was gunning for making a show of things, but not this much.

The believers all screeched in terror, as if their very bodies were being injured. The Inner Sanctum just meant that much to them. Seeing their reactions, Diablo sent another spell into an abandoned section of the Inner Sanctum.

“Fuahahaha! Cower in the face of the Demon Lord!《Lightning Arrow》!”

Small bullets of light gradually chipped away at the Inner Sanctum.

“Stop and fight me like a man, ya coward!” Gatreth lunged at him again.

“Be quiet, small-fry! Flare Burst!”

“Ugaaaaaa!?” Gatreth screamed, being blown away by a spell powerful

enough to defeat even the Fallen.

—Whoops, was that too strong? Well, I can't exactly hold back against a Paladin...

That said, he couldn't just go all out and end everything in the blink of an eye. If he did things too quickly, the civilians wouldn't be able to keep track of what was going on. He would have to take time and make his power abundantly clear to the believers.

A white light enveloped Gatreth, who had fallen to his knees; it was a healing miracle.

—Oh, here come his buddies.

Three other Paladins had appeared, the ones who had protected Vishos as he descended from the Inner Sanctum when Diablo found the plaza earlier. They all drew their swords, each preparing their own techniques and Martial Arts.

"What damned soul would damage our holy Inner Sanctum!? Just who are you!?"

"Heheheh... I am the Demon Lord! I have descended upon this plane to bring about the end times you've so desperately wished for! You Paladins are but a speck of dust to me! If you wish to defeat me, bring forth someone closer to God!"

—Just bring out Lumachina already... Or Vishos, he'd do as well. Either of them will let me advance to the next page of the script.

Gatreth had fully recovered, after he was silenced. The number of Paladins challenging Diablo had now increased to four. If every one of them was as strong as Grun, beating them might be difficult, but using a spell too strong may bring the whole Inner Sanctum crashing down. Diablo would have to be careful.

He swung his staff. "Crush them—《Dark Press》!"

"Nughaaaaaa!?" Gatreth moaned as he was being pressed against the floor. "My super pecs won't looooooose!"

But then, one of the Paladins waved his hand. "Save us, oh Lord! 《Dispel》!"

A flash of white light undid the effects of the Dark Press spell.

—Alrighty, that's their healer.

"I'll start with you!" Diablo took aim. "Flare Burst!"

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Having taken several blasts of magic, the Paladins all lay defeated.

—Gotta admit, that was kinda anticlimactic...

Apparently, that was all a group of level 100s could amount to. The Paladin Captain Batutta and Faltra's governor Galford were a different story, but normal Paladins couldn't hope to match Diablo. Grun was surprisingly strong, but...

Either way, the Paladins didn't get up to challenge him again. The believers all raised screams of despair, seeing the Paladins—the powerful knights that protected the Church—defeated.

"Wahahahaha!" Diablo laughed loudly. "Is that all you've got!? So I suppose you fools don't mind meeting your ruin by my magic!"

—Now!

Diablo flapped his cloak, the Sojourn of Darkness. It had the effect of inflicting the Fear status ailment on all opponents. It was the first time he would use it in this world, and wasn't sure how that would exactly come into play here...

But the believers began crying and moaning in despair, their behavior turning into a panicked pandemonium.

—Isn't the effect a bit too strong?

Diablo thrust his staff in the Inner Sanctum's direction; that was his primary objective. He needed to make the White Masks begin to act. The White Masks, who had looked down at what was going on, shivered in fear when they realized they were his targets now, and ran further inside. But, since the Inner Sanctum was levitating in the air, they didn't really have anywhere to hide, and using the Floating Corridor would be the same as offering themselves up to Diablo. Of course, Diablo didn't have any intention of destroying the whole place... But, that said, he had to rush the White Masks to act. Otherwise, he'd have to wait until morning as they cowered. Was it time to use something even more aggressive? But if his spell hurt Lumachina by mistake...

As Diablo deliberated, the believers began stirring in surprise.

“Oooh... It’s the High Priest!” Diablo heard them say.

He shifted the magical illumination around, seeking the source of the disturbance.

There she was...

“Lumachina!” he found himself calling out to her.

She had appeared on the balcony where the Paladin lay toppled, surrounded by White Masks. They had apparently taken her out of the confessional.

“Is this the outcome our deeds have brought about?” she spoke in a strict tone, directing a severe look at Diablo.

—Does she hate me now? Makes sense if she does... I did wreck her precious Inner Sanctum and knock a few Paladins out of commission...

Seeing a friend look at him so coldly was harsher than he imagined it would be, but this was the best solution he could think of.

—Now for the most important part!

All the actors had finally assembled. He would have wanted Vishos or the rest of the Cardinal Authority to be here for this, too, but since the believers couldn’t bring them out, he’d have to make do anyway.

He’d still make use of their absence; leaving no stone unturned was part of his pride as a Demon Lord—no, as a gamer!

“Heheheh... So you finally show your face, High Priest! What about your friends from the Cardinal Authority!? I thought they’d be here, with how self-important they always make themselves to be!”

“Th... They’re gone...” one of the White Masks answered with a shaking voice.

“They’re what?”

“Uuu... When the Cardinal Authority heard the Paladins were fighting the Demon Lord...they...they fled the Inner Sanctum! They’re long gone!” the White mask whimpered.

“Fool, do you speak the truth...!?”

“I wouldn’t lie to the Demon Lord, would I!?” the man shouted, then removed his white mask. Exposing his face meant he was willing to take responsibility for his words. “The Cardinal Authority swore me to secrecy, but I can’t... I have to tell everyone! They fled the Inner Sanctum! They left us behind...and ran from the Inner Sanctum all on their own!”

The believers’ commotion became far louder than when Diablo used his magic, or when the Paladins were defeated. The Cardinal Authority were even worse scum than he imagined them to be.

—Even a shut-in NEET like me thinks they’re nasty...

To think they used the Paladins’ fight as cover to turn tail and run away... Even Diablo couldn’t notice what was going on in the depths of the Inner Sanctum in the midst of battle.

Someone had jumped out of the Inner Sanctum—it was a large, flying insect Summon known as《Dragonfly》. A black-haired girl—Rem—grabbed onto it and flew down from the Inner Sanctum, though her descent was so rapid it was more like she was falling.

As always, she was extremely agile. Rem choosing to act now, at this timing, meant she was probably pursuing the Cardinal Authority. Diablo decided he can leave that matter to her, and focused on his performance at full force.

“Kehehehe... Fuahahahaha!!! The fools! You’ve all lost sight of your true faith! You worshiped God while failing to uphold his teachings, and revered the type of jackals who would abandon you in your time of plight!”

“And that is why you have descended upon us as the Demon Lord?” Lumachina asked.

Finally, the performance became “The High Priest vs The Demon Lord.” Everything was going swimmingly so far.

—Now it’s time for me to lose spectacularly!

It was all going according to plan: A powerful Demon Lord would beat the Paladins, scare off the Cardinal Authority (though he hadn’t exactly planned for that), then be defeated by the High Priest. That would make the believers realize who was truly the head of the Church—such was the plan.

Lumachina was innocent and naïve, so she probably hadn't realized Diablo was acting. But, if he would use some powerful magic, she would no doubt rush to protect the surrounding believers. Diablo would then drop a bolt of lightning on himself and pretend to have been beaten.

—*The perfect plan.*

Diablo found himself praising his own idea. It was important to make himself seem like a terrible, indomitable Demon Lord to make Lumachina's victory over him be all the more impressive.

Diablo tightened the grasp on his staff.

"You fools who pretend to be believers...you should have noticed. It was never a matter of who was speaking... It was a matter of what they said! You interpreted the Cardinal Authority's shady words in a way that benefited you, and turned your eyes from the true words! You ignored the words of God and dyed your hands in vice!"

"That's wrong! They deceived us!" "That's right, it's not my fault!" "What would a Demon Lord even know!?"

The believers shouted back at him. And true enough, they were indeed deceived. There was room to sympathize with them...but Diablo instead decided to drive them into a corner, emotionally. That would only make them all the more grateful when they were saved.

"Heheh... So you claim it was deception. But you fools never even tried discovering the truth. You chose to side with villains, clinging to their comforting words over devoting yourselves to the greatest penance possible: thinking on your own! What else could it be but blasphemy against God!?"

Many believers hung their heads shamefully. They knew Lumachina had confronted the corrupt Cardinal Authority with evidence of the Authority's crimes, but still allowed Vishos to incite and turn them against her. Now that it had been made clear the Cardinal Authority were all villains, the only emotion in the believers' hearts was deep regret. Breaking them was incredibly easy.

"Your greatest sin was never stopping to examine the words you've been told. You let others do all the thinking for you!" Diablo proclaimed.

Some fell to their knees, praising the Lord reverently, while others mouthed words of apology to the High Priest. That would do for preparations.

“I am a Demon Lord...” Diablo turned his gaze to Lumachina. “I have come to pass judgment on those who have abandoned their faith in God. All of you, equally, will die.”

The believers screamed in sorrow and fear, and Lumachina would calm them —at least, that was the plan.

She nodded. “Very well.”

—Whaaa!? Did she just call my bluff!?

A crack ran through Diablo’s perfect idea. He could almost hear the sound of the cogs of his master plan fall out of alignment.

“Hear me, everyone,” Lumachina spoke in a clear, loud voice so all those present could hear. “Lord Diablo is the Demon Lord, and our God, both at once. He has come to pass judgment on us. He presents us with truth, to test our faith. The result of that was...as you all sadly know... Many of us have sinned and erred in our ways. The time to atone is upon us now. We will all equally ascend to Heaven, and I will go alongside you, if that will save your souls. We mustn’t bemoan this fate, because we will all be granted salvation. The Lord loves all that live equally. Even if our bodies may be lost, it is but a chance for our souls to atone, to be reborn and start life anew as a blank slate. Our souls will be purged of all sin, so we must not despair, but show gratitude... We must know that this great ordeal has shown us the error of our ways, and put us back on the right path! Hallelujah! For we have all come one step closer to our God’s great will. Hallelujah, to our new start! Let us give thanks for our new life, and set out on this great journey together!”

The believers shed tears, weeping with gratitude. Even Diablo found himself stirring with emotion.

—Wait, no! At this rate, I'll have no choice but *to slaughter everyone!*

Taking his Demon Lord role play to the point of massacre went far beyond being a joke. Diablo could tell he'd broken into a cold sweat, and his breath was becoming more and more erratic. The words *"Aww crap aww crap aww crap"* were running around in his head. There was no way he could actually kill these people, but the believers were all convinced dying by his hand would be their salvation. He certainly couldn't turn Lumachina's words into lies, for if he'd do that, the Church truly would be left without a leader. The Church was one of the pillars that supported Lyferia; an upheaval now, when the real Demon Lord had awakened in the west, would spell doom for the mortal races.

—My role playing is going to doom the races!?

Diablo felt as if the distress and panic would make steam come out of his ears. But, he simply laughed.

"Fuahahahaha!!! You have done well to surmise my true intentions!"

There was no plan to follow anymore. He instead tried talking his way into escaping this predicament. In other words—subterfuge!

Diablo prattled on, leaving no place for anyone to say anything.

"I see my intentions weren't lost on you! I've longed to see you acknowledge your sins, repent and rekindle your faith in God's endless love! That is what I've sought! The emotion now burning in your hearts! That is your true faith!"

—I'm making a fool of myself, aren't I? Embarrassing myself in public! There's no way they won't see through such a shoddy lie!

The believers' gazes all swerved in Diablo's direction. He'd expected cold, jeering leers...but they were all choked with tears of gratitude. They all wept, praising God without exception.

"Oooooh, our great God! Shine your light upon us!"

Everyone's eyes were pure and repentant. It was such an obvious lie, but they all believed it, shockingly enough. Filled with emotion, some of the believers all began singing hymns. Others, hearing that, began singing out loud, thanking God as they did.

"Aaah, My Lord..." Lumachina knelt down on the slanted balcony. "I shudder at your love for us all!"

—And I'm shuddering at the cringe-worthy thing I just said!

The time was right, and knowing when to retreat was crucial. Diablo levitated upward to the sky.

"Take what happened here to heart, children of man! Should you ever stray from the right path again and repeat your sins, I shall descend once more to set this world ablaze!"

There was no need to rush, but if he lingered too long, it would make his performance less credible. It was the first time in his life he had ever thought so much about God.

—How does God make his exit, anyway!?

His boots consumed his MP and allowed him to fly. That on its own was fine, but Diablo never flew so high up with them. Getting up to the clouds was probably too much, but, for now, he flew to the east.

The dark clouds cleared away, and sunlight streamed down on the plaza, undisturbed. A single ray of light shined down, as if forming a trail up to the heavenly sphere.

Interlude

The seven members of the Cardinal Authority ran through an underground tunnel, each carrying a leather sack in both their arms. It was an escape route they had prepared in case something happened, and it connected to a subterranean aqueduct.

“Is it this way!?”

“It’s to the right... No, left, go left!”

“Keep it together, fool! If you make a mistake, who knows where we may end up!”

“What did you say!?”

“Stop that, now’s no time for us to bicker!”

The men glared daggers at each other, filled with irritation.

“Who even was that suspicious Sorcerer?” one of them cursed under his breath. “Claiming to be the Demon Lord... Such balderdash...”

“Gentlemen, there’s no need to be so irritated.” The head of the Cardinal Council, Vishos, attempted to pacify them. “We each have decades’ worth of riches stocked up. We could spend our whole lives in luxury and not have to worry about it running out, and a return to the capital later on isn’t impossible. So for now, let’s focus on getting away safely.”

“O-Oooh, you’re right!” The other members of the Cardinal Authority nodded.

Making it past the cramped tunnel, they found themselves in a place filled with the sound of running water. It was an underground aqueduct, and a small boat was docked before them.

The men sighed with relief. “This should take us out of the twelfth district...”

But it was then that someone stepped out from the shadows, blocking the Authority’s way to the boat, stepping noisily on the gravel as they moved.

—An ambush!?

“Who’s there?” Vishos hung out his lantern, trying to illuminate the place.

“Why, it’s just little ol’ me ♥”

The light reflected off a suit of blue armor; it was the Paladin Gewalt.

A stir came across the members of the Cardinal Authority.

“Gewalt!” One of them stepped forward. “What are you doing here!? You Paladins are supposed to be protecting the Inner Sanctum!”

The others also shouted angrily at him.

“And yet you stand brazenly before us! If you had only killed Lumachina like we told you, we wouldn’t be going through this debacle, Gewalt!”

“Ohohoh... I am ever so sorry, gentlemen.” Gewalt shrugged. “That girl was more troublesome than I had ever imagined.”

Vishos stepped forward, soothing the other members’ anger. “Leave the man alone. Now’s no time for pointing fingers in accusation, friends. More importantly, a Paladin’s assistance would be rather dependable in escaping the capital, would it not?”

The other members nodded in agreement.

“Oh my, am I being depended on again for another job here?” Gewalt placed a hand on his cheek in a coquettish gesture.

“You’ve failed your last job. That much is fact. But I am offering you a chance to make up for that failure.”

“How much are we talking then? How much are your lives worth to you?”

The other members of the Cardinal Authority were about to flare up again, but Vishos silenced them by holding up his hand.

“We don’t have much time. We’ll pay whatever you ask for...but only upon completion of the job.”

“A generous offer! I do love clients who don’t skimp out on their prices.”

“Good.”

But then Gewalt snickered, a wry smile on his face. “But see, there’s a teensy problem... I’ve recently decided to resign from being a Paladin~ Sorry about that, boys.”

The Cardinal Authority all winced at his words.

“What do you mean?” Vishos furrowed his brows.

“What I mean, is that you old coots are finished. You really dug your graves when you brought that gentleman’s ire.”

What gentleman? The members of the Cardinal Authority cocked their heads in confusion.

“Not yet... I won’t, not yet...” Vishos said through clenched teeth.

“Things have been going so well for you until now, no? You could take advantage of your position to live in luxury for as long as you wish. Yes... You really could do whatever you wished. A dreadful story if there ever was one.”

“I paid a small fortune!”

“You know too much.”

Vishos gasped nervously, then grabbed one of the other members standing beside him.

“Huh?”

Vishos shoved the man who had exclaimed in shock at Gewalt, then took off, running back to the tunnel they had all just come from.

He ran off.

The others members of the Cardinal Authority finally realized he had sacrificed them to get away. Countless years of luxury and sloth had dimmed their wits, it seemed.

“You should know, I’m not one to forgive men with nasty breath like you,” Gewalt hurled insult in Vishos’s direction.

The walls of the underground tunnel crumbled, and a giant, thin worm burst out of them. A sickening sound, like that of rubber being stretched to the point of tearing, filled the place. Then, fountains of blood gushed forth as the

members of the Cardinal Authority crumpled to their knees, their heads missing. Four decapitated corpses littered the ground, and, from deeper in the tunnel, a scream could be heard.

“Aaaaaagh!?” Vishos grappled with a worm biting into his shoulder.

“Well, color me impressed. I never imagined you would survive a hit from my《Snipe Worm》,” Gewalt said, seemingly surprised.

“I-I’m begging you! Help me! M-Money! I can give you money! As much as you ask! I’ll pay three times what he gives you!”

“Ohoh, are you being honest now?”

Gewalt snapped his fingers, and the Snipe Worm turned back into a crystal. Vishos laughed dryly, bleeding profusely from his shoulder.

“Heh, haha... Not a bad offer, yes? If you let me go, I’ll reward you with enough money to spend the rest of your days comfortably.”

“That’s all you ever think about. You’re boring me.”

“Huh? But...”

“Besides, you’re beyond saving now. Why don’t you take a closer look at yourself?”

“Buah!?” Vishos lowered his gaze, finding a worm poking out from his abdomen. The worm’s maw gaped open, revealing a mouth full of his internal organs.

“Guh, give them baaaaaaaaack!”

Such were the final screams of the man who stole so much from the believers—the Head of the Cardinal Council, Vishos.

The dry sound of unenthusiastic applause filled the tunnel.

Another man rose up from the boat moored in the aqueduct.

“An impressive skill. Just what I’d expect of a Paladin.”

The man was so muscular and tall you might be forgiven for not recognizing

him as a Human. His face, by contrast, left a more intellectual impression. His ebony hair was parted at the side, and he wore a pair of black-rimmed glasses.

“You mean ‘ex-Paladin,’ no?” Gewalt said, his lips curling unpleasantly. “Guys who care too much about the past don’t have luck with the ladies, you know?”

“I see. Well, I beg your pardon then. As such, I welcome you once again to our Order of Palace Knights!”

That man’s name was Maximum Abrams.

“The captain himself is welcoming me. Oooh, the joy~”

“I’ll introduce you to your new colleagues soon... But, before that, you should probably change out of that armor. It may attract attention.”

“True, true... Hmm? Wait just a moment...”

Gewalt noticed the sound of footsteps coming from the tunnel.

A Pantherian girl was running in their direction. She had a small build and uncharacteristically black hair.

She was one of Diablo’s group.

—Her name is Rem, if I recall?

“Wha... They’re all dead!” Her eyes widened in shock upon discovering the corpses of the Cardinal Authority.

“Ohohoh, good job coming this far. This tunnel can be quite a maze.”

“...The stench of the blood is so thick here, but... You’re Gewalt, the Paladin. What happened here?”

She cautiously kept her distance. She knew he used Worm summons, so she stood away from the walls and kept her knees low, ready to jump away the moment the ground rumbled. Just the level of caution you’d expect from a high-level Adventurer.

Gewalt didn’t have any intention of closing the gap between them either. Judging from her equipment, Rem wasn’t as weak as she was last time they had fought.

“Ohohoh, sorry to disappoint, but I’m not a Paladin anymore.”

“...You betrayed them.”

“Oh, you. Why do you always have to make things sound so nasty?”

“...Why did you kill them? After we last spoke, I didn’t think you had much of a grudge against the Cardinal Authority. Which means whoever your new employer is...ordered you to silence them.”

“For how clever you are, you’re quite dumb. Are you just trying to get yourself killed?”

“Ngh!?” Rem braced herself, clutching crystals in both her hands.

Things were about to spiral into battle—but Abrams called out from behind Gewalt’s back.

“Don’t mind her. She’s a demi and an Adventurer; no one will take her words to heart.”

“Oh really?”

“And besides, I’d rather not square off against the Sorcerer who single-handedly toppled the Church.”

“Are you being honest with me now?”

“As frank as I could be. Best to keep one’s foes to a minimum and one’s friends at a maximum.”

“I see... Well, I’d prefer to keep things that way as well, personally. I do have a debt to repay to this girl...or rather, to the High Priest.”

Gewalt took a small iron key out of an accessory case dangling from his belt. The number “714” was etched on it. He showed it to Rem, then placed it at her feet.

“You can have this.”

“...Is that a key to a confessional?”

“You catch on quick. It’s a little present from me to Lumachina. With a little luck, she should still be alive.”

“...Huh?”

“Does a Paladin called Tria...ring any bells?”

Tria was a female Paladin who had helped Lumachina escape the Church. She was marked as a traitor to the Church for opposing the Cardinal Authority, and was imprisoned. She could be considered the only remaining “real” Paladin by now. It was thanks to Tria’s pious heart and her courage of going against the Cardinal Authority that let Lumachina escape and meet Diablo.

“Is she still alive!?” Rem’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Should be ♥ Well, I’ll be going then. You’re not going to try and stop me now, are you?”

“...I don’t think I have the power to do so.”

“Ohohoh... You should be a little less strict on yourself, darling. Toodles~”

Gewalt stepped on board the small boat floating in the aqueduct. The large man already sitting in the boat removed the mooring rope and began rowing an oar.

“Let’s head back then! Between a job well done and gaining a trusty new ally on my side, I’d say today gets a perfect score indeed!”

“Mmm, this is like a date on a boat! Absolutely ro-man-tic!”

“Hmm... Perhaps I should rethink my decision...”

With Gewalt wiggling oddly and the large man looking at him dubiously on its deck, the small boat sailed along the aqueduct.

Epilogue

Diablo opened his eyes. He was at the high-class Firebird Inn—on his bed. The room was decorated with embroidered cloth from the walls all the way up to the ceiling. He consumed an MP potion earlier, and, physically speaking, he wasn't very exhausted. Maybe he was in this much of a daze because of something like burnout syndrome?

—I'm starved...

With his famished stomach as his excuse, Diablo got out of bed. He had to acknowledge he'd changed somewhat since his days as a gamer. Back then, even hunger wouldn't get him to budge. Rather, he couldn't budge. Only a game's time-limited event and its deadline could spur him to move.

Shifting the window curtains with one hand, Diablo was greeted by an orange sky.

"Aww, it's sunset already..."

After the battle in the Inner Sanctum—

Diablo had landed in the third district and walked from there all the way back to the inn, after which he waited three long hours filled with anxious fidgeting. After seven in the morning, Rem, Shera, Horn, and Rose safely returned to the inn, and Diablo finally regained his peace of mind. They all had a breakfast that was more like a midnight meal, then Diablo went to lay down in his room...

Leading him to the here and now. The clock mounted on the wall showed that he'd spent half the day asleep. Diablo rang a bell that came with the room, and, before long, an employee came to his doorstep.

It was a polite, Dwarven girl.

"You called, sir?"

"Aye. I'd like to request a meal and a bath. Also, do you know where my companions are presently?"

“Yes, they left this for you.”

She handed him a piece of stationery, which apparently had everyone’s status written on it.

Rem, devoted as ever, went to Alicia to inform her about what happened.

Shera went shopping in the city with Horn. After everything that had happened, Shera up and went sightseeing the next day; did anything faze that girl!?

Rose was on standby in her room. It seemed she told the staff, “No need to prepare dinner for Rose. If anything comes up, please tell Rose first and foremost, and please let Master sleep.” He never imagined her to be so hands-on, but he appreciated the fact she was worried for him, if nothing else. Either way, there were no problems in particular.

“I’ll begin preparing your meal and bathwater immediately.” The dwarf girl bowed.

“Make the water hot, please.”

This being a fairly high class hotel, each room had a dining table and even a bathtub. One had to ask to have the water brought over, but you could basically take a bath whenever. In his old world, Diablo didn’t really like bathing that much, since any time he couldn’t spend “gaming” felt like a waste to him. But by now he could only think of baths as total bliss.

Speaking of, he recalled hearing something about a hot spring in Faltra.

—A trip to a hot spring might be a good idea...

While he still didn’t quite know all the details, the trouble with the Church had been resolved, and, either way, he couldn’t interfere anymore. After all, he went around claiming he was God and the Demon Lord, so he couldn’t go anywhere near the Church. Even staying at the capital was risky at this point. If any of the believers found him... Well, there could only be trouble.

For the first time in a while, Diablo had a meal alone. His meal consisted of freshly baked bread, soft roast beef, and finely cut pickles, with grilled fish and some fruit on the side. It was great, but eating alone made it feel somewhat

stale.

—Maybe I could call Rose? But she can't eat, normally...

Having her stay with him like this when she couldn't eat felt like it would be sort of cruel.

—Never thought the day would come when I felt lonely eating alone... But, well, being able to take it easy is pretty great!

As he ate, the employee entered, having prepared the water for his bath. It was the first chance he had to soak in hot water since he had arrived in this world. The water heated him up all the way to his core, melting away any fatigue he had.

"Aaah, this is heaven..."

It was then he heard a knock from the door.

"...Diablo, are you awake?"

Rem.

"Come in!" he called out from the bathroom.

"Pardon me." Rem opened the door.

"I'm over here. Did something urgent happen?"

"No, nothing urgent... Are Shera and Horn still out shopping?"

"Indeed."

"Oh..." Rem arrived in the bathroom. "You were bathing."

"It's a hot bath. Are you not used to bathing in hot water? You should try it too, it's very pleasant."

Diablo, of course, meant she should try it in her own room, but despite those implicit intentions, Rem froze stock still, her face turning red like a lobster.

"...V-Very well... I shall take you up on that offer. I've been thinking I should...wash off all this sweat too..."

"...Huh?"

Rem began undressing in front of him.

—Oh-my-holy-on-a-pogo-stick!?

He thought to stop her in a flustered hurry, but realized that was a bad idea. Most people in this world, not just Pantherians, would bathe in streams and rivers. Washing off a work day's sweat with one's family and friends wasn't all that unusual. Diablo had even bathed with Rem and Shera once before. Correcting that misunderstanding now would be like telling Rem he didn't want to bathe with her, which was equal to rejecting her as a companion. He'd have to find some way of making her understand without hurting her feelings...

But, as always, no such words came out. And while Diablo was helplessly contemplating all that, Rem had finished taking off her clothes. She concealed her modest chest with both her hands, and hid her lower half by coiling her cat tail around it.

—That's just making it better... Worse, I mean, worse!

A beating in his ears made Diablo abundantly aware of the fact that his pulse was skyrocketing.

Rem winced backward.

"...Hmm... It's a bit embarrassing when you keep looking at me like that."

"O-O-O-Oh!"

Diablo tore his gaze away from her direction, leaning his back against the bathtub. Rem went in after him.

—I can't believe she's actually getting in with me...

She went in with her back turned toward Diablo. Facing him was probably too embarrassing, and if she were to sit like this, all he could see would be the back of her head, her thin neck, and slender shoulders. If her chest had more volume to it things would be different, but it wasn't visible even from this position.

However!

He could feel her skin against his. Rem's behind had sunk in between Diablo's legs, and her small, soft body rested between his arms like a kitten. Her cat ears twitched before his eyes, flicking water from their fur.

"...Hmm, are you sure I'm not bothering you with this...?"

“P-P-Pawsitive!”

“Huh?”

“Ahem! Positive!”

“...That’s a relief...”

Rem leaned her body backward, her small back nestling against Diablo’s chest and her buttocks touching the inner side of his legs.

—She’s so soft...

Diablo’s sense of reason was about to abandon him. Rem glanced back at him with cheeks rosy, a happy, if slightly awkward, smile on her lips.

“...Heehee... We’re taking a bath together.”

“Y-Yeah.”

—Hot damn, she’s cute...

He never knew she could make that sort of expression. They had been traveling together for some time, but it felt like the first time he’d seen her act like this.

“Mm...” A nasal voice escaped Rem’s lips.

—Huh?

Diablo’s arms had wrapped around Rem without him noticing, as if trying to embrace her.

“Wait, I...!?”

“...Mm... Bathing in hot water really does feel good...”

Rem inclined her head to the side, resting it against Diablo’s arm. It was a good thing she didn’t get mad at him...

—I thought my sense of reason was going to abandon me, but apparently it’s been gone a long time now! I doubt anyone could take me seriously here, but what am I supposed to do when a cute little catgirl is smiling at me like that!?

Diablo’s sense of reason had, sadly enough, taken the day off, which led Diablo to hug Rem as he did.

“Aaah... Hmm, Diablo...?”

“Aaah, no, this is...”

“...Diablo, there’s...something touching my back...”

“Huh!?”

“...Something hard...”

“Y-You mean one of my horns?”

“...Is that what it is...?”

Rem wiggled her butt restlessly. He had thought she was uncomfortable, until —something soft wrapped around him.

He caught his breath in surprise at the unfamiliar stimulation.

—Wait, is this her tail!?

Rem’s cat tail coiled around Diablo’s “horn.”

“Uuu, oooh...” A tingle ran up Diablo’s spine.

“Nnn... Mmm...” Rem sighed into the air as well.

“Oooh, aaah...”

The water’s surface splashed audibly. Having spent a long time in the bath, not just their faces, but their whole bodies were flushed red. Unable to contain himself, Diablo embraced Rem’s body closer, reaching out to her modest chest and tweaking the tips.

“Aaah!?”

“This is...bad...”

Diablo felt like jolts of electricity were rushing up his spine. Rem covered her mouth with both hands, trying to hold back her moans.

“...Mmm!”

Locked in his embrace, Rem convulsed silently.

—Pantherians are amazing...

It was then that the sound of metal snapping echoed in their ears. It had come from the room’s entrance!

Diablo and Rem both jolted. They could hear the sound of creaking footsteps as someone approached the bathroom. Rem’s shoulders shivered nervously. It was a different, more frightened sort of shaking compared to earlier.

“Master, there’s a guest looking for you,” a voice came from the room.

“O-Oh... Rose, it’s you. What was that noise just now?”

“Pardon Rose, Master. Rose felt a suspicious presence about, which caused Rose to momentarily apply too much force to Rose’s right hand. It appears Rose has destroyed the door’s lock.”

Rem shivered like a kitten being stared at by a wild dog. True, Diablo didn’t want to imagine how Rose might react if she saw what they were doing just now...

“I’ll need to prepare myself, so have them wait in the common room! You wait there too, Rose,” Diablo declared.

“Rose proposes to help Master in his prepar—”

“Seriously...? Ah, I mean... Do not baby me, maid. I need no assistance with getting dressed!”

“Pardon Rose, Master... Rose will await you in the common room then.”

Rose left the room and Diablo sighed in relief. Rem rose from the tub, hot water dripping from her flushed skin and black hair. Diablo blushed, his eyes fixed on her long tail.

She sighed. “...I thought I would have a heart attack...”

“Are you scared of Rose?”

“...I’m an Adventurer too. No matter how strong she is, I won’t let her scare me. But being caught like this is... Well, it’s embarrassing...”

“R-Right.”

“...And...I wanted this to be just our secret.”

As if trying to hide her shame, Rem hurried out of the bathroom, leaving behind Diablo, who sat there shocked. She got dressed in a hurry, her hair and skin still wet, then turned a severe, blushed glare in his direction.

“...I have no desire to ruin this party’s peace and unity. So I think this was...a wrong thing to do.”

“Y-Yeah, you’re right...”

“...B-But...it did...make me happy... It felt good...”

Her voice trailed off as she ended that sentence. Then, having said just that, Rem turned her back and left. Not even leaving the sound of her footsteps behind, Rem left the room.

†

Diablo changed back into his clothes and headed for the common room. Rem and Rose were waiting with the guest, and Shera and Horn had apparently just returned as well. The guest was a rather familiar face, to the point where it felt like it’d be natural for them to be part of the group by now.

“Thank you for last night, Lord Diablo.”

Diablo was surprised to see Lumachina here.

“Are you sure you should be here? What about the Church?”

“Of course, there is no end of things to do there... But I came since I cannot invite you to meet me at the twelfth district, and I had a feeling that, if I did not come see you today, all of you may have left before I even knew it.”

Rem nodded. “...We have no need to stay in the capital after all.”

“Huh!? But there’s so many shops I haven’t visited yeeet!” Shera whined.

Horn just smiled wryly. Between all the clothes, little trinkets, and snacks, the two of them had done some pretty passionate shopping. They’d received a hefty reward from Zircon Tower, but, from the looks of it, they were going to waste it in no time.

“...What would you have done if the believers noticed you and found out about Diablo!?” Rem snapped at them.

“Uuu...”

Lumachina smiled. “That should not be a problem.”

“...You’re being too optimistic.”

“I have already explained to the believers that Lord Diablo acts as if he is a normal adventurer.”

“You what!?”

“They all seemed rather convinced.”

Apparently, the scriptures had quite a few examples of “God becoming an animal or someone of the races to watch over us.”

“...I can’t believe that excuse actually worked...” Rem moaned, cradling her head in exasperation.

But it was a good thing they wouldn’t have to hide away in fear of being seen by the believers... Though, that did bring up another problem. If they did find Diablo in town, would they treat him as God, or a Demon Lord?

—Both of those sound like headaches honestly...

There would be no changes in their plans to leave the capital as soon as possible—so Diablo had informed his friends.

Lumachina nodded. “I thought you might say that. Here—it is not much, but I hope this will help cover your travel expenses.”

She handed them a leather sack, and Rem confirmed its contents.

“...This much!?”

“I am sorry... The Cardinal Authority’s money laundering has left the Church’s finances in shambles. They even reached so far as the funds people had entrusted with them... I sadly do not have much in the way of expandable income I can spare...”

“...N-No, this is more than enough.”

Shera peeked into the bag as Rem put it away, her eyes widening in surprise. Horn’s hand sneaked toward it, only to have it slapped away by Rem.

“While some of the believers were injured, none were killed...” Lumachina reported the situation. “We really cannot thank you enough, Lord Diablo.”

“H-Hmm, I see! Well, a Demon Lord doesn’t even regard the lives of a few of the mortal races!”

Diablo folded his arms in an attempt to hide his embarrassment, and sunk into the sofa. They’d been traveling for so long, it would make sense for Lumachina to see through his act already... But if he didn’t pretend to be someone else like this, he couldn’t hold a conversation with anyone.

Rem and the others looked relieved, and only Rose remained unfazed and indifferent as ever.

“We have begun repairing the Inner Sanctum already,” Lumachina continued her report. “On paper, it has been reported that lightning struck the Inner Sanctum. People have been coming in to help with the repairs from outside the twelfth district, and there have been fundraising activities as well. I can truly feel the people’s good faith and desire to help one another through this.”

“Hmph... How do the prospects of repairing the place look?” Having been the one who destroyed it, Diablo felt some responsibility.

“We will definitely repair it,” Lumachina guaranteed.

“Good.” That was a relief.

“It has also been publicly announced that the Cardinal Authority all passed away in the underground tunnel. They are, however, omitting Miss Rem’s testimony.”

“...Probably because I’m a demi and an Adventurer.”

“No, that is not the reason. The Church simply cannot afford to antagonize the king at the moment. They may have been terrible villains, but the Order of Palace Knights had no right to eliminate such important persons without trial... Making that public would cause problems.”

“...I see.”

“According to what you have heard, Vishos was somehow connected with someone in the palace, and had to be silenced because of that.”

“...Yes.”

“After appropriating the Church, Vishos embezzled donations, but...the question remained, where did the money he used to appropriate the Church in the first place come from? I think we have the answer to that question now.”

“...I’m surprised. I always took you for someone who wasn’t so mindful of those details.”

Lumachina smiled sadly at Rem’s words. “In all honesty, I am still rather bad at this. But if I am not cautious...the same thing might happen again, and this time the world will be put to the flame.”

Diablo tilted his head, surprised at those odd words, but then remembered what he had said during the speech earlier. He was just trying to say something that sounded God-like, but...it seemed Lumachina still believed in what he wasn’t after all...

As anxious as that made him, he had to acknowledge she was trying hard in her own way, and that genuine purity of her heart was part of what made her so charming.

“Oh, did you dispose of the Paladins?”

“We are in the process of deciding whether they are guilty or not, and, if they are, how to punish them.”

“True enough, there were many villainous scum among them, but not all Paladins are wicked.”

“Yes.”

“Are the believers angrily demanding a public execution?”

“Yes, they are... But it is like you had told me once before, Lord Diablo: When people are subjected to great shock, their thoughts tend to go in extreme directions, so one needs to know not to punish excessively... Right?”

Diablo nodded. Lumachina was treating the matter of dealing with the Paladins cautiously.

So concluded Lumachina’s report about the going-ons in the Church. But it seemed she only had even graver news to give them next.

“It seems that King Greenwood of the Elves has passed away.”

“What!?” Diablo rose to his feet in surprise.

“No...”

Shera’s knees were shaking. The autonomous state of the Elves—the Kingdom of Greenwood—was Shera’s homeland, and its king was, in other words, her father.

“I have tried checking the authenticity of this news several times, but multiple sources confirm this...” Lumachina said sorrowfully. “It seems to have happened about a week ago.”

“No!”

Shera looked like she was about to fall. Rem supported her by the shoulders in a hurry. Even a bright girl like her fell silent, unable to find the words to console Shera. Horn was quiet as well.

“The Kingdom of Greenwood has three heirs, correct?” Diablo asked Shera. “But two of your brothers have passed away now, making you the only remaining heir. If your rule is hereditary, you would need to claim the throne...or marry someone who would become king... What will you do?”

“I don’t know!” Shera shook her head. “But, Father... I... I never thought about that at all!”

Her tears fell listlessly to the floor.

“...Elves have very long lifespans, after all...” Rem nodded. “It must be harder for Elves to imagine a family member passing away compared to the other races.”

Having said as such, she sat Shera back down on the couch.

Horn nestled up to Shera. “I cried a lot too. I never knew my real mom and dad, but when Teach died...”

“Horn...”

The memories of it made Horn’s eyes fill with tears. Rem wept silently as well. She had told Diablo her parents passed away once.

Diablo placed his hands on Lumachina’s shoulders. “You had to take on a difficult role.”

“No, it is fine...” Lumachina wiped the corners of her eyes.

“Did you happen to hear of anything else?”

“I did... Apparently, since the sole heir’s, Miss Shera’s, whereabouts are unknown, the question of who will inherit the throne has become a problem...”

“So even the Elves would fight over the throne...”

Simply ignoring Shera’s situation and position would be far too irresponsible. Even if she chose to run away from home, if she simply let things be, her country would be divided into civil war.

They couldn’t do that. Diablo thought it best to talk things over with Shera when she calmed down, but he had already steeled his resolve.

—Let’s head for the Kingdom of Greenwood!

“Like I thought, you truly are...” Lumachina nodded, gazing at Diablo’s profile.

“What?”

“To be honest, I had intended on asking if you could stay here. I hoped you could stay by our side...but now, I am convinced. You are not one to be contained by this small sanctum in this small kingdom. Your true place is out

there, in the great wide world, saving us all.”

“That’s not true, I merely...”

—I merely...what? What do I want to do? Be a shut-in NEET again? I could just stay at Laminitus’s side or be with Lumachina if that’s what I really want. Why did I fight off that army of Fallen, or stop the Paladins? What do I want to do in this other world?

Diablo’s gaze fixed on Shera and the others. Seeing their tears weighed heavily on his heart. What was his objective? He still had no idea what he was summoned to this crazy world for, but one thing was clear to him, without a doubt:

—I can’t stand seeing Shera and Rem cry...

He wanted them to smile. This time, there wasn’t much he could do to stop this news, but he wanted to make it so bad things never happened to them again. But he didn’t put those feelings to words. He couldn’t; not yet...

Instead, he asked something else that bothered him.

“Lumachina... Do you believe in me?”

“Of course.”

“But would you still believe me if I said I wasn’t God after all that has transpired?”

“If you would say so, you probably are not God, Lord Diablo. But faith is not an emotion one feels toward a title or a name. If I had to describe faith in a word, it is what I feel toward you right now.”

Lumachina said so without faltering, as if mouthing an answer she had recited to herself countless times before.

A bell tolled outside the window, heralding the passing, the changing, of time...

To be continued...

Afterword

Thank you very much for reading Volume 6 of *How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord*.

I'm the author, Yukiya Murasaki.

This volume concludes the Demon Lord vs Church arc. This time, not just Diablo, but his companions got some time in the spotlight too. When I was thinking of the plot, I didn't intend for Horn to make such rapid progress, but, as I wrote, that weird goddess popped up... It's probably all because of her.

Babalon's a very idiosyncratic character of sorts, but how did you like her? This volume had a lot of comedic bits, so I wanted to tackle some serious themes as well to balance it out. Nothing would make me happier than to know you enjoyed it.

The next volume should kick off the Elf Kingdom arc. I'm also considering including the parts that were omitted from this volume, if there's demand for it. Would you like to see Edelgard's adventures at her workplace, and the climactic Klem vs Rose battle...?

Now for some thank-yous:

To Takahiro Tsurusaki, thank you so much for your wonderful illustrations as always! Talking to you really helped me put a spin on Horn's story.

To Ooishi, the designer from Afterglow, thank you for putting in work on the capital's map as well.

To my editor, Shouji, thank you for yet another volume's worth of work. Thanks to your help, we got another book out.

To everyone at Kodansha's editorial department, and all those involved with the work, to the family and friends who supported me, and to my many readers, who read this book: I offer a thank you of the highest level!

Thank you all very much!

Yukiya Murasaki

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How NOT to Summon a Demon Lord: Volume 6

by Yukiya Murasaki

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