

Yusura Kankitsu

Illustrator
Ruria Miyuki

vol. **7**



Reincarnated Mage *with Inferior* Eyes

Breezing through the Future as an Oppressed Ex-Hero

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Activating
the strongest
and **highest**
ranking
magecraft,
which can
eliminate
everything
without a
trace!

Abel

A genius mage with Amber Eyes—the strongest one can have. He reincarnated into this world from two hundred years ago.

I used this moment to construct an even more powerful magecraft—Big Bang, which was the strongest magecraft in the Fire Magecraft repertoire.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

In the next moment, a massive explosion erupted, with Zeke at the epicenter.

“Big Bang!”

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Prologue

A Typical Day

My name is Abel, and I'm a mage who reincarnated two hundred years into the future. In my day, those with Amber Eyes like me were heavily discriminated against. One day, I decided that I'd had enough of that treatment, and developed reincarnation magic to send myself to my ideal world in the future. In that regard, I succeeded, and found myself waking up in a peaceful world. Even now, I was having another calm day at Arthlia Academy of Magecraft, one of the nation's most distinguished magecraft schools.

"In other words, Ashen and Obsidian Eye magecraft have different—special—properties, more than other magecraft types. There are very few people in the world who possess these eyes, and in all of modern magecraft, the demand and importance of these eyes is the highest," our teacher explained from his podium, with his bulbous nose and usual monotonous voice.

He didn't care about students falling behind, and insisted on speeding through class without giving students a chance to catch up. As such, all the students were frantically doing everything they could to not fall behind, trying to write down every last word he said. They didn't even have a chance to talk to each other.

Hm. No matter how many times I've sat through his lecture, I've yet to get used to how boring and rudimentary it is.

"Dammit! His lecture hasn't slowed down even a little. It's too fast!"

"Yeah, but the high level of this class is proof that Arthlia Academy of Magecraft is a gathering of elites."

Hm. Our teacher's ridiculous, but so are the students. Just because he was talking quickly, without any regard for his students, didn't make any part of his class "high level." The students seemed to be misunderstanding that. Up until recently, I'd probably sigh and think, "good grief," but this class had become a

convenient way to kill time. As such, I didn't really feel too strongly about it.

"Whoa, look. Abel's reading a weird book again."

"No way... It's so thick! How many pages are in there?!"

It seemed that the other students in the class had become distracted by what I was doing and had begun to fuss over it. I was currently trying to work on one of the assignments that Emerson had given me.

"Heh heh. It's a loss to humanity if your precious time is wasted on that garbage class, Abel. That's why I will give you some work to do."

I've gotta say, Emerson is useful every now and then. After a series of events, I'd become Emerson's student for Modern Magecraft. Though it was hard for me to admit, Emerson's knowledge of Regalia development was far superior to mine. The most efficient way to learn Modern Magecraft was to stay under his tutelage for the time being. I'd decided that it was most logical for me to learn from him.

"Rrgh! Rrghh!"

Seeing me so blatantly ignore his lecture infuriated our bulbous-nosed professor, but he didn't call me out on it. Most likely, Emerson had said something behind the scenes to make it so nobody would disturb my self-study. Though it felt like this professor would call me out at any minute, he did his best to hold himself back, and instead began furiously writing magecraft equations on the board.

"Pay attention, please, Mr. Abel! Try solving this problem!"

I see. Since he can't directly tell me off, he's using a roundabout way to try and punish me for ignoring his lecture. It doesn't seem like this problem's anything that's covered within the range of his class.

I'd already more or less grasped the curriculum of the school, and if I remembered correctly, the problem he was giving me was from the fifth-year classes. In other words, he'd given me a problem from the most advanced classes the school had to offer.

"Uh, do you understand the meaning of the magecraft equation he just

wrote?”

“No... Not a single clue.”

The others in the class seemed to have caught onto the difficulty of the problem and were left stunned.

“It seems that Professor Emerson is giving you special treatment, Mr. Abel, but I don’t think you deserve it whatsoever! A lowly commoner like you doesn’t belong here at the sacred grounds of Arthlia Academy!” the bulbous-nosed professor said, irate.

Hm. As I thought, he’s getting angry over Emerson allowing for my self-study in his own class. Even though Emerson holds a high position in the academy, he’s far from being well-liked.

“Hmph. It seems that you lack respect towards your professors. I’ll thoroughly educate you on how to treat your betters!”

Good grief. Does he actually think I can’t solve this? He’s really underestimating me. All in all, this almost made me feel nostalgic. Recently, the number of people who’d been berating me as a commoner had significantly decreased. I guess I don’t have a choice. It’s a little annoying, but I’ll play along with this farce.

“Does this about do it, Professor?”

“Urk!”

The bulbous-nosed professor bit his lip in frustration as I quickly solved the problem and dusted the chalk off my hands.

“Also, there was a little bit of a contradiction in the original problem you wrote, so I fixed it for you. Perhaps since this material is something that won’t be covered for some time, you haven’t had time to brush up on it yet, Professor?”

“Wha...”

Hearing me point out his mistakes made the bulbous-nosed professor’s face pale, a sign of his quickly crumbling composure. *Hm. I know I was the one who did this to him, but I might’ve gone too far. But also, this might result in him*

leaving me alone from now on. It was a small sacrifice on the way to a more comfortable life at the school.

“Dammit! How is he always so perfect?!”

“Don’t get so worked up about it. He’s special. It’s a waste of time to try and compare yourself to him.”

Hm. It seems like even the really obstinate classmates who didn’t want to accept me and admonished me as having “Inferior Eyes” have begun changing their tune. I turned to look out the window.

I guess it makes sense that things have changed. I enrolled in the spring, and now summer and fall have passed.

My first day of school here had been graced by cherry blossom petals falling, but now, the trees were completely barren, creating a lonely atmosphere. It’d already been almost a year since I started here. After this much time, it only made sense for interpersonal relationships to change as well.

“Look at that!” someone said, pointing out the window.

“Whoa! It’s snow! Snooow!”

“It’s snowing so hard!”

Good grief. Even though they’re children of nobility, they’re all still just children—just teenagers. Seeing the snow had apparently made them very excited.

“Be quiet, please, students! Direct your attention to my lecture!” our teacher’s yell echoed across the room.

This was yet another ordinary day in the books.

Chapter 1

Almost Christmas

Class ended without any other problems, and it was time for lunch.

“Master! Class is finally over, huh?”

As soon as our lunch break began, Ted, a familiar face, called out to me. His unique features included dirty blond hair and a toned body. For the record, at no point in time had I ever taken Ted on as my student, but due to a series of events and such, ever since I saved him, he started calling me “Master” and following me wherever I went.



“Your hair...” I said as I realized something unexpected about it. “It’s completely back to normal, huh?”

Recently, Ted’s hair had been changing, in great frequency and style. In order to attract girls, he’d recently tried styling it in a weird fashion (internally, I call this style “Afro Ted”), but in order to restore Barth’s body to its original state, I’d essentially shaved all his hair off. Now, however, it was back to its usual, short length.

“Heh, I’ve realized something. Being a guy isn’t about what’s on the outside. It’s all about polishing what’s on the inside! *That’s* the shortcut to becoming popular!”

“I see... Glad to hear about your epiphany.”

I was sure things weren’t really that simple. One’s appearance was the best form of self-expression, and consequently, what was on the inside. If he didn’t have an appealing appearance, nobody would want to see what was inside, no matter how much he polished his personality. *It might take some more time before Ted’s able to attract any girls.*

“Well anyway, let’s get the uzhe!”

For the record, “the uzhe” was slang kids these days used instead of the “usual food.” At Arthlia Academy of Magecraft, there were two ways to get food. One was to eat at the cafeteria, and the other was to go to the school store. Since all students were required to live at the dorm, it was hard for anyone to make their lunches.

“Phew, when aren’t classes a drag, am I right? Well, whatever, time for food!”

The next guy to call out to me was a fellow classmate, Zyle. Ever since the school trip where we stayed in the same room, he’d sometimes strike up a conversation with me.

“Sure. It’s our cafeteria day, so it’s okay if you join us.”

There wasn’t enough space in our school’s cafeteria to fit the entire student body, which was over a thousand in number. As a result, there were certain days where different grades were given priority for the cafeteria. This was the

one time a week that we, as first years, had priority, and as such, our classmates had already left for the cafeteria.

“By the way, Abel, have you been taking on any quests recently?” Zyle asked on the way to the cafeteria, as if he’d just remembered.

“No, I haven’t. I got a decent amount of money from the quest I did in the fall, so I don’t really plan on doing any more for a while. I’ve got more than enough money for now.”

After reselling the Regalias I’d gotten from that sneaky shop owner, Edgar, I’d accumulated quite the sum of money. Though I wouldn’t be able to buy anything too extravagant, I had more than enough to live a normal life.

Hearing my response, Zyle sighed. “Abel, you seriously don’t get it, do you?”

I’m not sure why, but Zyle seems disappointed by my honesty.

“You’re gonna be left wanting for money in the winter,” he continued. “You should start saving up as soon as you can!”

Hm? Is there some kind of special event in the winter? If anything, I would think that the cold weather would encourage people to stay inside and not spend as much money.

“Oh, true! Zyle has a point!” Ted said, agreeing with Zyle for once. “Roasted chicken, meat buns, hot pot, stew, cake... There are way too many good winter foods! No matter how much money I save, I never have enough!”

As usual, it seemed that Ted was as carefree as ever. In Ted’s case, he’d had a similar problem in the fall where he lacked enough money to buy all the food he wanted. I doubted that his problem was limited specifically to winter.

“No, that’s not it at all, you dunce!” Zyle snapped. “It’s all about *girls*! This is the time to be talkin’ about the gifts you’re gonna get girls for Christmas!”

Hm. So that’s what he meant. Oh, now I remember. For some reason, there was a culture of exchanging presents on Christmas. It wasn’t an event that I was especially used to, so I’d completely forgotten about it.

“Heh heh. Merry Christmas, Master Abel.”

Hm. Now that I think about it, I got a present from Lilith last year. I’m pretty

sure it was a hand-knitted sweater. Up until last year, I didn't even know this kind of event existed, so I hadn't really given her a present in return, but this year, I felt like it was practically required that I do so.

"You're such a jokester, Zyle. When you're as popular with the girls as Master is, you don't even need to think about them. But...maybe it's something you have to think about if you're as unlucky with girls as *you* are, Zyle."

"Hmph. Listen, Ted, you shouldn't look down on me. I already have someone to give a present to."

Maybe it was just my imagination, but hearing this, Ted seemed to have fallen into a state of extreme shock.

"Wh-What?! I thought our bond as the Unpopular Guy Alliance was forever!" Ted cried.

Even though the alliance that he was speaking of was supposedly made up of Ted, Zyle, and me, I don't know a thing about it: when it started, what our purpose is, etc. That being said, there was one thing I could speak to regarding the alliance—it frequently fell apart.

"Sorry, Ted. I've crossed over to *this* side," Zyle said smugly, while sitting next to me.

You're acting as overly familiar as usual, aren't you? The impudence from both Ted and Zyle were as good as any first-rate mage.

"Ugh... Don't tell me I'm the only one who's gonna be forever alone on Christmas..." Ted groaned.

Being "forever alone" on Christmas was another thing that kids these days were talking about. Truly lowbrow conversation.

But I guess Christmas is coming up soon. I should start thinking about what present to get Lilith.

As I slurped the noodles of my favorite kitsune udon, I started thinking of gift ideas.



While Abel, Zyle, and Ted were having lunch, over two thousand kilometers

away from Midgard in the southeast, two people—a man and a woman—were making their way across the Austra Archipelago.

Up until recently, demons ruled over humans. It was one of the few places in the world this way, and was one of the few areas that demons still ruled. After several hundreds of years, the demons had converged here and fought against the native humans, and as a result it was also one of few places in the modern world filled with powerful demons.

“So this is the Demon King’s castle? Despite being uninhabited, it’s in pretty good condition,” the woman, Ayane said.

She was a mage who’d been a part of the magecraft company Chaos Raid with Abel two hundred years ago. Though she’d been very sociable back then, the current Ayane was much more callous, and had eyes cold as ice.

“Heh. Of course. The demons here have done everything they can to preserve the Demon King’s castle. It’s a special place to them—a symbol of their past glory,” the man said.

The man’s name was Cain. Two hundred years ago, he was known as the Hero of Ash, and was lauded as the only one who was as strong as Abel out of the Great Four. Currently, Cain and Ayane were on the Austra Archipelago to explore the Demon King’s Castle that’d been sealed off for so many years.

“Master Cain, are you up to no good again?”

After many years of being by Cain’s side, Ayane could tell by his expression that he was in a very good mood. It was during these times that he began thinking up sinister designs.

“Heh heh. I can’t get anything past you, can I, Ayane? I’m thinking of undoing the seal on Zeke.”

Ayane had heard of Zeke before. He was known as the strongest of the Demon King of Twilight’s subordinates.

“Zeke was the one demon we weren’t able to defeat back then. I’m sure Mr. Abel will be overjoyed to be reunited with him,” Cain said.

“Are you sure about letting a demon fight him? I thought that’s what *you*

wanted to do.”

Upon his release and, drunk with rage, Zeke would most likely make an immediate beeline for Abel in order to kill him. Zeke’s hatred for Abel was bottomless; Abel had been the one to seal Zeke away, after all, and after two hundred years trapped in darkness, his desire to kill Abel had only grown.

“Heh heh. I’ll be meeting Mr. Abel for the first time in a hundred years. In order to prepare our lavish reunion, don’t you think Zeke’ll make a perfect appetizer?”

Abel’s reunion with Zeke would make for the perfect opportunity to assess his strength; sending mere assassins wasn’t enough to draw out Abel’s full strength. But since Abel’s body wasn’t fully mature, Zeke might be even more than what Abel could handle—that’s how strong Zeke was.

“Understood... When should we set things in motion?” Ayane asked.

“Hm... Christmas would be a wonderful time, wouldn’t you agree?”

This took into account the decent amount of time they’d need to undo the seal on Zeke. Abel had used Obsidian Eye magecraft to seal away Zeke. As an Ashen-Eyed mage, Cain was not well-suited to deal with Obsidian Eye magecraft.

“It doesn’t matter if my compatibility with Obsidian Eye magecraft is low. There’s nobody in this world who understands how his mind works better than me.”

The telltale sign of a talented mage was their ability to use magecraft they weren’t familiar with. Though he might not have been as proficient as someone with Amber Eyes like Abel, Cain was still a mage of great talent with other types of magecrafts.

“Mr. Abel, I hope you enjoy my Christmas present to you.”

As Cain stood alone in the darkness, an innocent smile crossed his face—the same one he made centuries ago.

Chapter 2

A New Quest

A day had passed since Zyle had told me I needed to buy a Christmas present, and now, Ted and I were heading to the quest bulletin board in the school's lower level to find a way to make some money.

Arthlia Academy of Magecraft had a system where students could take job requests from people outside of the school. There'd been a similar system two hundred years ago where quests could be posted at Adventurer Guilds, but a little over ten years ago, the adventurer profession had been abolished. It was a strange feeling seeing the nostalgic system from the Adventurer Guilds living on in this school.

"Whoa! It's just as crowded as usual!" Ted exclaimed.

Most likely, as Zyle had explained, with Christmas around the corner the students wanted a way to earn money. This theory was proven by how many students were crowded around the bulletin board.

There was a job that was looking for students to help shovel snow for a day that paid twelve thousand cols. Then there was another job looking for students to help deliver packages for ten thousand cols, but this amount would be increased if it was snowing.

The only problem with all these quests was that they were very different from the quests that I remembered from two hundred years ago.

Hm. None of these pay much. Though they're much more seasonal jobs than the last time I looked at these quests, I don't think they're any better.

Back in my day, most of the quests would be centered around defeating magical beasts, but it seemed that quests had essentially become equivalent to part-time jobs.

Good grief. This is sad. It almost feels like they're playing dress-up adventurer.

At this rate, no matter how many of these quests I took, I wouldn't be left with that much money.

"Hm... Where's that job I heard about..."

Suddenly, I saw a certain girl in front of the bulletin board: Eliza. She was the descendant of the Hero of Fire, Maria, and also someone I seemingly kept running into ever since the entrance exam.

"Oh, there it is! Yay!" Eliza's eyes sparkled as she found what she'd been looking for.

Hm? I wonder what kind of quest she's looking for. It might not have been my business, but I couldn't help but be curious. I peered over and saw that it was a job looking for part-timers to help sell cakes. They advertised themselves as a cozy, youthful workplace, and the compensation was seven thousand cols.

Yeah, that's just a straight-up part-time job. I got the feeling that despite being a quest posted at a school for mages, it had nothing to do with magecraft. Though one could at least say that the quests involving shoveling snow or helping with deliveries might have helped to train the body, I failed to see how selling cakes would train a person in any regard.

"Are you sure you're good with that quest?" I asked.

"Wah! A-Abel?!" Eliza jumped, hearing my voice. "D-Do you need something from me?"

It seemed that me suddenly calling out to her had made her unable to hear my initial question.

"Are you sure about that quest?" I repeated. "The pay is pretty low. I have a hard time believing there aren't quests out there better suited for you."

Eliza was an outstanding student compared to the others at this school. Even if she accepted a higher paying quest that required magecraft, she'd be able to complete it without any difficulty.

"Well...it's true that the reward's low, but apparently, you get to eat all the unsold cakes!" Eliza's eyes suddenly sparkled as she said this.

I see now. So the reward isn't her priority here. It's more of a secondary goal

for her.

“I’ve always wanted to try working at a place that sells cakes! The reward isn’t my main objective here! Working to earn money isn’t even a thought in my head!”

Hm. Eliza’s thoughts towards working—not for money, but for something else—is new. It might be interesting to work not because of the reward, but because the details of the quest sound interesting.

“All-you-can-eat cake? That sounds pretty good!” Ted muttered, impressed after hearing our conversation.

“Do you already know what you’re gonna do, Ted?” I asked.

“Yeah! I’m gonna try the snow-shoveling quest! It’s right up my alley! My granny praised me a lot when I helped back home!”

Hm. It’s true that it snowed all year around in the Rhangbalt Region. I guess another option here is to go for something that I’m suited for.

“So what’re you gonna pick, Master?!” Ted asked.

“Hm, I think I’ll...”

Now that I think about it, Lilith will be happy even if I don’t give her an expensive gift. With that in mind, I’ll put the reward as a secondary goal and instead choose a quest that interests me.



Before I knew it, days had passed. Classes had ended for the week, and the weekend was upon me. Coincidentally, today was also the day that I was scheduled to go on my quest.

Hm. Being a student is such a chore. Students couldn’t leave the Arthlia Academy campus without submitting an excursion form and having it signed by a teacher.

Usually, these forms were easily approved, but were occasionally denied if given to one of the more fickle teachers that just so happened to be on duty. At the very least, since I had a very good reason for leaving the school grounds—my quest—I was fairly confident that I would be able to get my request

approved without any difficulties.

“Are you going out, Master Abel?”

Oh, it looks like Lilith is on duty today. Well, seems like there's no need to worry about a teacher rejecting my excursion request. I couldn't imagine Lilith giving me any trouble.

“Hm? That scarf...” she whispered happily, noticing what was around my neck. “That's the one I gave to you a while back, isn't it? I'm so glad you've taken such a liking to it.”

Hm. It's true. This was the same scarf that Lilith had given me when I first reincarnated into this world. I didn't wear it *because* she'd given it to me, but one way or another, I found myself taking good care of it. This year was especially cold, so I'd brought it out from the back of my dresser.

“It's definitely seen better days though, huh?” she remarked.

I don't think it's that worn out. It's nothing I need to be concerned about. Then again, Lilith was always very sharp on the small details.

“Oh, I know. How about I give you a new scarf this year as your Christmas gift?” she suggested.

Hm. She's also thinking about Christmas. I'm not sure what's so special about this holiday, but it seems that the people of this age greatly value it.

“I'd prefer it if you got me something else,” I said.

“You...don't like the idea?”

“No, it's because I like this one. If possible, I'd like to keep using it for years to come. It's the first gift you got me, after all.”

Lilith fell silent. I didn't know the reason why, but after hearing how I honestly felt, all Lilith did was stare at me for a bit.

“Oh, Master Abel!”

Of all the things I thought she'd do, I hadn't expected her to embrace me, smothering me with her chest.



“Hey, what are you doing?”

“My apologies! You were just too adorable!”

Good grief. She really has no restraint. Of course, our relationship was a secret at the school. To everyone else, we were nothing more than siblings. Even if there weren't any other students around, if we weren't always careful, we'd end up in a situation that couldn't be simply glossed over.

“I have plans, so I'm gonna head out,” I said.

“Of course. What kind, if you don't mind me asking?”

“Just some errands. I'll be back before dark.”

“Understood... I'll be sure to tell the school something they'll accept.”

Hm. Though I'd run into a potentially sticky situation, it looks like I'll still be able to leave. I wasn't about to tell her my true objective, which was earning money to buy her a present. After all, spilling the beans would ruin the surprise.



After successfully leaving the school, I headed towards the requester's location. I'd accepted a job to help at an orphanage for five thousand cols. Apparently, they were looking for help with preparing a Christmas event, but they would give me the full details once I arrived.

Sure, the pay for this quest was lower than the others, but apparently, their financial situation wasn't too great to begin with.

“This must be it.”

The building I was asked to go to was far behind the church. *Hm. The building's old, but it's well kept.* The orphanage itself was way in the back, off the main path. It was the perfect place to be hidden from public view.

“Oh? Are you the student we hired?” an old lady—probably at least seventy years old—asked from the doorway.

Her hair had mostly turned gray, and she was wearing a habit.

“Yes. My name is Abel, and I've come from Arthlia Academy of Magecraft.”

“Oh, what a well-mannered young man,” she remarked softly, seeing me bow after my introduction. “I’m Kikuko. You don’t have to act so formally.”

Hm. It seems that this Kikuko lady’s very mature. It was a marked difference from the personality of my previous client, Edgar the recycling shop owner.

“The youngster we had helping out here recently quit, so we’d like your help with the students until we can hire a replacement.”

I see. So I’m essentially a stand-in for the previous person. It might seem strange that I’d accepted this quest out of all the ones I could’ve taken, but it wasn’t all too surprising when considering that, in my younger years, I lived in an orphanage. As a result, I was curious to see how modern orphanages differed from what I had experienced.

“I will be trusting you with looking after the children. They’re all very energetic, so it might be a little difficult, but please do your best.”

Babysitting, huh? No doubt, this is not my area of expertise. Then again, only doing what I’m good at won’t broaden my horizons. It’s good to challenge myself by stepping out of my comfort zone every once in a while.

“This way. I’m getting older, and each year it’s more and more difficult to look after the children,” she said, sighing, as she led me to the first floor of the building.

Even before we entered the room, I could hear a commotion from the inside. When I finally did open the door, I was met with a surprising sight.

“Take this! You’re done!”

“Nuh-uh! I got you!”

It’s even more chaotic in here than I expected. Though the room was fairly large, as a result of almost ten kids sharing it, it was so messy inside that there was barely any space to walk.

“Children, calm down! Your new attendant is here!” Kikuko said loudly, making all of the children turn towards us.

“Aw, man. The girl from before quit already?”

“I wonder how long this guy’ll last.”

The moment they laid eyes on me, the children immediately unleashed their cheeky comments my way. *I see. Looks like orphanages these days are much nicer than they once were. The children look well-fed, and they're living in a fairly good environment.*

None of them looked on the verge of death or like they had to steal to simply survive. Compared to the ones of my time, modern orphanages were extremely blessed.

“Whoa, look! This guy has yellow eyes!” one of the kids said, pointing at me.

“Oh, the Pleb Eyes! I’ve never seen them before!” another said.

Once again, I was given a refreshing reaction. My Amber Eyes were apparently the object of ridicule in the modern age, and were known as “Inferior Eyes.” Another way to mock them was with the nickname “Pleb Eyes.” Ted had called me that when we were kids, so this might’ve been something that kids said a lot in general.

“Lame! We got a Pleb Eyes here?”

“Unbelievable! So gross!”

Upon seeing my eyes, the other children started reacting about the same way. *Good grief. If I stay quiet, they'll just keep going on and on, saying whatever they want.* Because they hadn’t yet developed a sense of self control, kids could say the cruelest things.

“Well, I’ll leave the rest to you, Abel,” Kikuko said. “They might be a little rude, but they’re good kids.”

They are, huh? I’d say they’re a lot more than just “a little” rude. She might just be biased—after all, she’s the one who raised them.

“Sure. You got it,” I said.

Now then, what should I do? It seems that modern orphanages are more lax than I thought, and are filled with rowdy children. Managing this unruly bunch of troublemakers might be the most annoying quest I’ve ever taken in my life.



Afterwards, the quest had begun.

The minute Kikuko had stepped out for groceries, a particularly high-strung boy stepped forward and said, “Heh heh. You’ve got guts stepping into *my* territory!”

Coincidentally, he’d also been the first kid to ridicule my eyes. I could tell from his appearance that he was a little ruffian.

“Hmph. Trying to play it cool? Don’t get a big head just ‘cause you’re older than us!”

Good grief. He doesn’t know how to talk politely. Usually, it was best to simply ignore these kinds of people, but unfortunately, I couldn’t do that this time. Since I was getting paid for this, I had to interact with them.

“Listen up, newbie! I’ll teach you the law of this place! It’s survival of the fittest! Strongest person stands at the top!”

“If you want our respect, show us what you got! Let’s have a mock sword fight!”

The kids spoke confidently, pulling something out as they did.

Hm. They’re using rolled-up newspapers as swords. I don’t think they’ve reinforced them with magecraft or anything, though. But even if they had, they’d still be nonlethal objects—nothing to worry about.

“Let’s go!”

“Yeah!” After hearing their leader’s call, all the kids yelled, jumping towards me at once.

Despite being children, they were surprisingly coordinated with their movements. Most likely they played this game daily, which essentially equated to training.

“Take this!” One of the kids cried.

“Over here, Pleb Eyes!” yelled another.

What a rambunctious bunch.

To be honest, it felt like a waste of time to actually take on the three children charging at me. *Hm. I might as well use this time to look over the job papers that*

Kikuko gave me. Back in my day, finding ways to efficiently use your time was the mark of a good adventurer.

“Dammit! I can’t hit him at all!”

“He’s faster than I thought!”

Though they were more coordinated than I’d expected, in the end, they were just children. Dodging their attacks required such easy, simple moves that I ran the risk of putting myself to sleep. But, at the very least, it gave me time to go through all the documents.

“Hey! Fall back!” their leader cried out. “We’re gonna switch to ranged attacks!”

Hm. They changed their strategy after determining that simple close combat isn’t effective? Not a bad choice. Their fatal flaw, though, is the fact that they’re challenging me.

“Focus fire!” their leader commanded.

The kids pulled out pillows from the closet and began throwing them at me at the same time. *Good grief. Seems I don’t have a choice.* I was the type of person who didn’t discriminate between sex, age, or appearance. Despite my current opponents being children, it’d be rude of me not to go all out when they were.

“Infinite Domain.”

The magecraft I’d used was the strongest one from Obsidian Eye magecraft’s repertoire. As soon as I used it, the space around us warped and was painted black.

“Wh-What’s going on?!”

I couldn’t blame the children for being so surprised. After all, this was a magecraft of the highest difficulty that I’d only recently developed successfully.

“The pillows are frozen in the air!” one of the children cried out.

Infinite Domain was a magecraft that deployed over a specified area. Inside this area, space and time didn’t exist. Anything inside the field came to a complete stop.

“Uh...are we in trouble?!”

“This guy’s no pushover!”

It seemed that the kids had caught on to the abnormal situation they were really in.

“Release,” I said.

Guess it’s time for my counterattack.

After releasing Infinite Domain, the pillows that’d been frozen in the air flew back at the kids, eliciting yelps and grunts as they were struck with the high-speed pillows strongly enough to knock them to the ground. Though my attack might’ve seemed flashy, I’d tweaked the force so that they wouldn’t be hurt.

“You brats are taking your games too far,” I said.

In the end, children are simple creatures. Once you teach them who’s boss, everything else gets easier.



A few hours later, I found that my task had become a lot simpler. As long as the kids behaved themselves, this might not have been too bad of a job.

“I don’t get it! This doesn’t make sense!” one of the kids groaned, not able to accept what’d happened.

This was the result of my brand of education. The kids were now reading books, drawing pictures, and overall, passing the time without causing any trouble. This was all after I had them quickly clean the room *and* inspect the facilities. Thanks to that, I was comfortably enjoying a book.

Kikuko later returned from grocery shopping with two giant bags. “I’m back, kids!” she announced.

“Oh? What’s the matter? You’re all so quiet today,” Kikuko commented, tilting her head at the room that, curiously, had become as silent as a library.



At the same time, just a little ways away from the orphanage Abel was working at, there was a business district where a certain cake shop had recently

opened. Due to it being a new shop, and with Christmas around the corner, it was getting lots of business.

“Thank you for your purchase! We hope to see you again soon!” a girl with crimson hair said.

It was Eliza. After recently accepting the quest to help sell cakes, she had begun working at this new shop.

“Eli, thanks for helping out today! The store’s so lively because of you,” the owner of the shop said to Eliza.

“O-Oh no, I haven’t done anything special,” Eliza demurred. “I still have a long way to go.”

Eliza was very well-liked at this shop; she was very cheerful, pretty, and could smoothly speak with anyone. As such, she’d already earned the trust of the shop owner.

“Oh, by the way, we’re going to have a new part-timer starting today. Is it okay if I leave it to you to show them the ropes?” the owner asked.

With Christmas coming up, the demand for cakes was much higher than normal, and so it was only natural that the shop would need additional help besides Eliza.

“Of course. No problem,” Eliza said.

“Thank you so much! She’s a cute girl from the same school as you. I’m sure the customers’ll be so happy to see the two of you working together.”

Eliza started to wonder if this might be her chance to make a new friend. Since they were from the same school, she had high hopes.

“Heh heh. With two poster girls at my store, there’s no doubt we’ll make a killing! Let’s rake it in!”

Eliza fell silent after getting the feeling that she was hearing the store owner’s true motives. For now, she decided to not comment on it.

“The new girl should be done changing any minute now,” the store owner said.

Eliza was curious: what kind of person *was* this new part-timer? The store was new, and its cutesy decor everywhere and stylish employee uniforms made it popular. If the new part-timer was also a cute girl, then there was no chance that she wouldn't pull off the uniform. While Eliza contemplated all this, the door to the changing room suddenly opened.

"Ugh."

Both Eliza and the girl reacted at almost the exact same time. Eliza couldn't hide how shocked she was to finally see her new coworker, mouth hanging open at the sight of her fellow Research Society member: Noel.



After an unexpected run-in with a familiar face, Eliza's shift began once more.

"I'm surprised. I didn't think I'd ever see *you* here," Eliza remarked.

"That's my line," Noel quipped. "I didn't hear anything about you being here. How unfortunate."

Eliza and Noel were descendants of the Hero of Fire and the Hero of Water, respectively. As such, they'd known each other since childhood, and were constantly pitted against each other. Their subsequent rivalry was imbued with two hundred years of history.

"Oh, look. Here comes a customer," said Eliza.

"Huh?" replied Noel.

But right now, they were at work. They needed to leave their pride and circumstances at the door. Noel tottered over to the new customer.

"W-W-Welcome! H-Hello..."

She was unbelievably stiff. At first, Eliza had thought her actions were some kind of prank, but she soon realized that Noel wasn't at all joking.

"Uh, could I have the strawberry tart and also a shortcake?" the customer asked.

"S-S-Sure! C-C-Coming right up!"

Noel opened the display case, and with a pair of stainless steel tongs pulled

out a cake.

“Wait, that’s the Mont Blanc!” Eliza said.

“Ah...”

Hearing Eliza snap at her made Noel suddenly freeze with nerves, and the chestnut topping of the Mont Blanc fell to the ground.

“So sorry!” Eliza said, stepping in after seeing Noel struggle. “Here’s your strawberry tart and shortcake.”

Eliza was great at customer service, and ultimately, thanks to her help, Noel was saved from the difficult position she’d found herself in.

“Thanks...Eliza...”

“Get it together! We have another customer!”

“Ah...”

Since this was a newly opened store, customers came so frequently that there was barely any time to breathe. To Noel, this might have been the most difficult quest that she’d ever accepted.



A few hours later, Noel had finally finished the grueling experience that was her first day at a new job. The sun had set, and the store was closing for the day.

“I’m...so exhausted...” Noel said, slumped in a chair inside the employee changing room, expression extremely disheartened.

“You okay, Noel? Here,” Eliza said, putting a chilled drink that she’d grabbed from the refrigerator against Noel’s cheek.

“Yeah... Thanks...”

Though Eliza and Noel fought like cats and dogs, they didn’t actually hate each other. When it was necessary to work together, they could be friendly.

“So... I’m not sure if you’re cut out for all this,” Eliza said, expressing her true thoughts.

No matter what, people had things they were and weren't good at. For Noel, who was more introverted, she wasn't especially skilled at communicating with people she was meeting for the first time. Customer service work was thus very poorly suited for her.

But even in Arthlia Academy of Magecraft, a gathering of the most elite upcoming mages in the country, Noel stood at the top. For that reason alone, surely there must be better jobs out there—ones that'd be more in her wheelhouse.

"I'm...gonna keep trying."

Truthfully, the reason that Noel had chosen this quest *was* because socializing was her weak point, and she wanted to try overcoming it.

"Why are you even working? Your family's rich. If you need money, you could just ask your parents," Eliza asked.

As a family of generations of merchants, they'd amassed a large fortune. If Noel wanted, she could've bought the entire cake shop.

"I won't do that," Noel replied. "There's a reason why I need to make money on my own."

"What do you mean?" Eliza asked.

Eliza sensed that Noel possessed certain motivations, but couldn't figure out what exactly they were. So she had decided to soothe her curiosity and ask outright.

"I'm planning on asking Abel out. I'm going to give him a present and tell him my feelings."

Noel's answer shocked Eliza. "Oh... You've made up your mind, huh?"

"Yeah. I think I'll be disappointed in myself if I don't tell him now. I don't expect him to say yes. But even so, I won't regret telling him."

Hearing Noel's words made Eliza rethink things. *I need to do my best too! I can't let her get ahead of me...*

Thinking about it, Christmas was the perfect opportunity for guys and girls to become closer to each other. After Christmas, Arthlia Academy would enter

into a long winter break. Becoming second years meant changing classes, so it was possible that there'd be fewer opportunities to see Abel.

"Abel..." Eliza said the name of the person on her mind, not to anyone in particular.

It really had been love at first sight. Ever since their duel during the entrance exam, she couldn't stop thinking about Abel. *Okay. I've made up my mind. I'm gonna ask him out too! Sorry Noel, but I'm gonna strike first!*

Unbeknownst to Abel, Eliza had gained a newfound determination.



At the same time, on the Austra Archipelago, far to the southeast of Midgard, Cain—the Hero of Ash—was deep in his work at the Demon King's castle.

"Phew. Just a little more."

Cain was currently touching the magic stone that Zeke had been sealed in. This magic stone had been under strict lock and key two hundred years ago. But after defeating the Demon King of Twilight, humans turned on each other, with brutal fighting spreading all over the land they themselves once ruled.

While the humans fought amongst each other, the demons used that chance to steal this magic stone and secure it within the Demon King's castle.

"I expected nothing less from Mr. Abel. Even an Ashen Eyes like myself couldn't have activated this many magecraft equations during battle."

There wasn't anyone else who was as proficient with Barrier Magecraft as Abel was. An Obsidian-Eyed specialist might have gotten close, but Abel was still a cut above.

"Back then, I was so impressed that all I could do was simply watch in awe, but now, I can at least undo his seal."

By using Ashen Eye magecraft, Cain had learned Immortality Magecraft, and had spent all that time improving his magecraft skills. As a result, he'd essentially become a master in all fields of magecraft.

"Come on out, Zeke."

As soon as Cain called him, the multiple magecraft equations surrounding the magic stone cracked, and an intense, dark mana seeped out.



Then, from inside the stone, a colossal evil dragon demon spanning over three meters tall appeared.

“Foolish human. You woke me from my slumber just to die by my hands?” Zeke muttered, in a truly bad mood.

“Oh, I’d rather not die. Instead, I have a favor to ask of you,” Cain said.

“Silence, you human trash! You dare order me around!” Zeke roared, releasing his killing intent.

“If you work with me, I’ll tell you where the golden-eyed black cat, Mr. Abel, is.”

“What...?”

It seemed Zeke remembered Abel’s nickname. His memories of Abel were truly detestable; after all, Abel was the one legendary mage who’d handed *him*, the strongest member of the Demon King’s army, a loss.

“Hmph. Fine. You’ve got a deal. You’ve bought yourself some time to live.”

In Zeke’s eyes, Abel was the highest priority. Abel was the one to rob Zeke of his freedom all these years, so it was Abel he held the largest grudge against.

Just you wait, black cat. After all this time, I’m gonna get my revenge, Zeke thought to himself in the darkness, finally awake after so many years of sleep.

Chapter 3

A Dull Ring

It had been several days since I started working at the orphanage, and I was now being tasked with going out to buy Christmas gifts for the children.

“Sorry, we don’t have a lot of money. I feel awful, but would you be able to do something with this amount, Abel? I know it’s not much, so I won’t expect anything fancy. Any gift will do so long as they all get something.”

I held in my hand some copper coins that amounted to about a thousand cols. *Hm, this is their budget? It’s really quite small.* With this amount of money, it’d be hard to get each child a gift.

But that was only thinking conventionally. If I thought out of the box here, this amount of money was more than enough for me to get some quality presents.

I arrived at my destination, Edgar’s Recycle Shop, owned by the very same person who’d given Noel, Ted, and I the warehouse cleaning quest. In a lot of different ways, we really *owed* him for what he’d done. Specifically, he’d locked us inside a warehouse infested with rats and shorted us on the reward. Edgar truly was a shady guy, but he had his uses.

“Urk! You’re that brat from back then!” Guilt filled Edgar’s face as he saw me. “What do you want? Let me guess, you’re here to get in the way of my business! Get outta here!”

How rude.

He stood at the entrance of his store, effectively blocking it, and proceeded to mimic throwing salt at me as if I was some kind of evil spirit to be exorcised.

“Don’t be so quick to jump to conclusions. I’m here purely as a customer, and good customer service is important,” I said, before slipping past Edgar and entering his shop.

“Whoa! How’d you do that?!” After I’d gotten past him without him noticing,

Edgar was shocked.

Hm. As I thought, nothing's good here. And the inside itself looks just as bad as what's for sale. The products were things that regular stores would never sell: dirt-cheap pieces of garbage.

"Oh?"

Once I entered, I spotted something that was perfect for my purposes—a box of toys. Edgar had most likely just gotten these. The toys inside were a mess, not in great condition at all. But with some work, they could be fixed up as presents for the children.

"I like the stuff in here. How's a thousand cols for all of them?"

"Hmph! Why should I sell them to you for such a cheap price?! Listen, I bought all these from a big-name noble for two hundred thousand cols! Each one is a precious, one-of-a-kind item, and they're all going for a premium," Edgar spoke, uncharacteristically loquacious.

"Yeah, right. I bet you got them from some random family for free."

"Ha ha ha! Where's your proof that I'm lying? Show me!"

Good grief. He's as abrasive as usual. Zero hesitation in showing who he really is.

"Fine. I'll show you proof. I've recorded all your evil deeds from start to finish on this Regalia. Might be fun to release this to the world."

Edgar gasped as I pulled out a Regalia equipped with a recording function. The last time Edgar and I met, I had actually recorded him, thinking that it'd come in handy one day.

"The school told me you were coming. The name's Edgar, and I'm the owner of the neighborhood Regalia recycle shop."

"Sure. So, as you know, I need you kids to clean the warehouse. If you can clean it all up by the designated time, and leave it sparkling clean, then I'll give you the money I promised."

"Okay, well in you all go!"

“Ha ha ha! Later, kids! Don’t worry, I’ll let you out at sunset. Work hard, ya hear me?”

I’d recorded what he’d said to us when he’d locked us in the warehouse. Since the details of the job were already suspicious, I decided to record him since I figured that something like what had actually happened to us was likely to occur: he’d locked students in his warehouse to exterminate rats. If this truth got out, it was hard to imagine that he’d come out unscathed.

“Wh-What?!” Edgar stuttered, surprised, his face going pale as he heard his own words recited back to him. Apparently, he hadn’t expected that he’d be recorded. “Hmph... Fine. You scratched my back, so I’ll scratch yours. Listen, this is a once in a lifetime act of generosity from me! I’ll let you buy the contents of that box for a mere thousand cols!”

How transparent. *But his profit-first personality makes him pretty easy to manipulate. This deal is a win-win for both of us.*

“All right. Sounds good. We have a deal. Oh, by the way, there’s a bag charge. After all, I’m a recycle shop. Gotta look out for the environment. Gah ha ha!”

I fell silent, in disbelief over this man’s greed. I had doubts that charging a fee for a bag would do anything to really help the environment. But since I’d practically strong-armed him into this trade, I figured it’d be okay to just pay for the bag.

Well then. Now that I have the toys in tow, I’ve completed my objective. All that was left was to bring them back, fix them up, and then we’d have toys for the kids.

“Hm?”

As I went to leave, another item caught my eye—a ring, dull and set with amber. But with some polish, it’d be pretty nice.

Hm. It’s a hundred thousand cols? A bit too much for a student, but if I use the money I’ll get from this quest, I’ll have just enough.

“Hey, so this ring...”

“Oh, yeah, that? Just so you know, I can’t sell that for cheap! Unlike the other

stuff, I actually paid for this, so I'm not gonna sell it at a loss."

I didn't respond. *You pretty much just confessed that you got these toys for free, but whatever.*

"I'll come back to buy it when I have the money. You mind placing it on hold for me?"

I'd have my reward money from my quest soon, so I could use it to buy this ring. It'd make for a good present for Lilith.

"Hmph. Sure, I guess. What's a student like you need with a ring anyway?"

I fell silent. It was a hard question to answer. Even if I didn't answer him honestly, guys generally didn't have many uses for rings.

"Oho. I got it. It's for a woman, isn't it?" Edgar asked, sounding as if he was making fun of me. He stuck up his pinky.

A woman, huh? Well, I guess she might be a demon, but Lilith is a woman. He's right, so there's no point in denial, but it's annoying that it's Edgar, of all people, pointing this out.

"Shut up. Pry anymore and you die."

"Wh-Whoa. I was just joking around! You're oozing killer vibes right now..."

Good grief. After many twists and turns, I'm finally set for Christmas. Hm... I doubt she's expecting that I'm getting her anything. I can't wait to see her surprise when I give her this.

Chapter 4

Christmas Day

A few days later, Christmas Day had arrived, and everywhere I looked was drenched in holiday spirit. Unfortunately, I still had work to do. Today was also the day of the Christmas party at the orphanage that I'd been preparing for. I finished getting ready for work, and by the time I left for the orphanage it was early evening.

"Oh, are you heading out, Master Abel?" As I tried to leave, I ran into Lilith, who just happened to be walking nearby. "It appears that you've been hard at work, but what do you need money for?"

"Nothing really. Pretty much just killing time these days."

Of course, I was lying. Truthfully, I was working in order to buy Lilith's gift. After I got my reward today for my work at the orphanage, I planned to stop by Edgar's shop and buy the ring. It'd be cutting it close, but I would have just enough to buy the ring.

"Did you know that today is a special day?" she asked.

"Hm? Oh, right. What's it called again? Christmas?"

"Yes, impressive knowledge. You must be getting used to modern-day culture."

Well, if anything, I'm more than just used to it; by getting Lilith a gift, I've become an active participant. Regardless, spilling the beans now would only serve to ruin the surprise. It's better for me to keep it all under wraps until the very last second.

"I'll be waiting for you with a cake, so please do your best to return as soon as you can," she said.

"Got it. I'll be back before it gets too late."

“Heh heh. I’ll be waiting.”

Good grief. I’ve somehow managed to keep her present a secret. She’s pretty sharp, so I was worried she’d sniff out what was really going on here.

Now then, everything is going smoothly so far. It looks like it’s gonna be a busy day.



Once I left the academy and began my walk to the orphanage, I immediately felt something cold touch my neck.

Snow? I thought it was just cloudy, but it’s actually snowing now? Looks like it’s a so-called white Christmas. Due to the lights that’d been hung up, the royal capital seemed much more vibrant and colorful than usual.

“Hey! Master!”

After walking a while, I was called out to by a friendly face: Ted. As he waited for me at the agreed-upon spot in front of the fountain, he was holding what looked like a steamed bun.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“A meat bun! You want half?”

“No. Sorry to rush you, but we don’t have much time. Let’s go.”

“Whoa! Wait, Master!” Ted cried, chasing after me and stuffing the remainder of the steamed bun in his mouth.

I’d recruited Ted as a helper for today’s Christmas party. It seemed that today we’d need some extra hands, and Kikuko had asked if I knew anybody who might be a good fit at the academy. With his friendly personality even towards strangers, I thought Ted fit the bill perfectly.



When Ted and I got to the orphanage, we went inside and changed into our outfits for the event.

“Master! Pfft! That outfit really suits you!”

Since Ted was kind of a class clown, he pulled off the reindeer costume

perfectly, while I was in a Santa costume complete with a fake white beard.

“Are you ready?” I asked.

“Yep! Good to go!”

I was fully aware that the Santa suit wasn’t really in character for me, but since this was a job, I had to do my best to meet the expectations of my employer. The outfits that’d been prepared for today had a new-clothes smell to them.

“Let’s have the star of today, Santa, make his appearance,” Kikuko said, signaling that it was apparently my time to come out.

Hm. It hurts to see how excited the kids are. I’m worried if this costume will be good enough to satisfy them.

“Let’s go, Master!”

Hm. It’s in moments like this, as rare as they are, that I envy Ted’s shamelessness. Ted energetically opened the doors and jumped in front of the kids.

“Wa ha ha! ’Tis me! Santa!”

The kids didn’t respond because Ted was obviously a reindeer, and not Santa. But I held myself back from saying anything; this wasn’t about me, this was about the kids. It might’ve been uncouth to let my own personal commentary out right now.

“No! Who are you?!” one of the kids said.

“Hey! That’s not Santa, that’s Abel!” said another.

I guess it’s not surprising they saw through my disguise. It’d be one thing if it was Ted—a total stranger—in this costume, but since they’ve been seeing me quite often, it’d be hard for me to fool them.

“I hear Santa’s brought gifts for everyone, kids!” Kikuko called out.

Everything so far is going according to what we planned earlier. *Now that Kikuko’s said her line, I’ll put the bag of presents that I have slung over my back onto the ground.*

“They’re presents from me! Take good care of them!” Reindeer-Ted announced bombastically. He seemed to have Santa and the reindeer’s roles in all this reversed.

“If you *insist*, I guess we’ll take ’em.”

“They better be normal presents, or else!”

Hm. The kids seem like they actually really want these presents. I thought they were just cheeky brats, but they can act like cute kids too.

It might’ve just been my imagination, but after passing out the gifts, it was as if all their excitement had disappeared. The room went silent for a bit.

“Sheesh...what’s with this shabby doll?” a kid sighed, picking out a doll from the bag.

“Lame! So outdated!”

“Dang. Why isn’t it food?!”

Good grief. Orphans these days have high expectations. Must be all that guaranteed food and drink. Back in my day, orphans had to drink dirty water every day just to survive. That being said, their reactions didn’t surprise me at all—I’d been anticipating them, in fact.

“Don’t jump to any conclusions just yet. These aren’t normal dolls.” *Well, I guess I should do the reveal now before they get too discontented.* “Try pressing the button on the back of yours.”

“Hm? Like this?” One of the kids asked, following my instructions while still fully unconvinced, proceeding to press the buttons on one of the dolls—a tin soldier.

Of course, I had no intention of simply giving them dirty dolls as presents. I’d used Obsidian Eye magecraft to outfit them with my own little tricks.

“Welcome to the city of hopes and dreams!”

“It talked!” the kids yelled, surprised at how I’d tweaked the doll. I’d made it so that this doll would say a different line at random every time you pushed the button.

“Whoa! How’s this work?!”

“It’s magecraft! I bet he used some amazing magecraft to do it!”

Hm. Their reactions are much more positive than I expected. These are the perfect things to get them interested in magecraft.

“Hey, Abel, my robot doesn’t talk!” A different kid complained, already quite unhappy.

But even so, there was no problem. Each of the dolls had a different type of function installed in them. The one I’d given him didn’t have a speaking function.

“For that one, push the lever on its arm down.”

“Hm? Like this?” the kid asked, pushing the lever down, still doubting me.

In the next moment, a high-speed beam shot out of the robot’s hand, the air around the robot trembling from the force of the beam.

“Whoa!”

All the kids froze with surprise after seeing what’d suddenly happened.

“Holy cow! What was that?!”

“So cool! What happened?!”

Hm. Seems like the beam attack is a hit. The beam itself didn’t do any damage—it was an elementless mana pellet that I’d tweaked to only make a loud sound. Though it didn’t serve any purpose outside of being a kid’s toy, it was arguably the best kind of present a kid could get.

“Hey, Abel, what does this one do?!”

“What about mine?! What’s it do, Abel?!”

The kids came to me one after another, asking me about the functions of their presents. *Good grief. What a mercurial bunch of kids. But making something for others to enjoy doesn’t feel too bad at all. It looks like Emerson’s lessons on Regalias actually came in handy.*

“Amazing... Are all students your age this talented?” Kikuko asked Ted.

“Oh, no. Master’s just in a league of his own. I’m so proud to be his student!”

It seemed that Kikuko and Ted were talking about me by themselves. But either way, this was how Christmas ended—with full smiles.



After successfully finishing the Christmas party, I started getting ready to leave. *Hm. That took longer than I expected.*

But now, with the orphanage quest completed and the envelope of reward money Kikuko had given me in hand, I was ready to head to Edgar’s shop to buy the ring.

“Thanks for today, Abel,” Kikuko said, giving me a drink. “Because of you, this Christmas was a great success. I’ve been doing this job for thirty years now, and I think this is the most lively it’s ever been.”

That makes sense. To me, the money for the job wasn’t my primary goal. I’m just glad that she’s satisfied with my work.

“By the way, you mentioned that you grew up in an orphanage, didn’t you?” she asked.

“Yeah. Though it was a while ago.”

“It’s hard for me to believe that even you were a child once. I’m still surprised by how mature you are for your age.”

I fell silent. Kikuko wasn’t wrong at all. After all, if you added up the years I lived before and after my reincarnation, I’d lived for over forty years. My mind had matured to that of an adult’s. But when I said that I’d grown up in an orphanage “a while ago,” she was probably only picturing just a few years back.

“I’m sure that whoever raised you must’ve been a wonderful person,” she said.

I paused before answering. “Yeah... He was.” *I see. I guess I did talk to her about the one who raised me: Garius.*

I couldn’t help but recall the day I’d killed him—how he’d called me a monster. That tragedy was still fresh in my mind, like it had happened yesterday. On that day, I’d killed the man who’d essentially been my father.

By no means had he been what the public would consider a good person. Sacrificing kids for your own research might've been in line with what others were doing then, but it was still an unforgivable act.

Even so, what I didn't understand was that despite the fact he betrayed me so terribly, I just couldn't bring myself to hate him.

"Abel, you're going already?!" The kids—who I had spent so much time with and who were now familiar to me—asked, overhearing my conversation with Kikuko. "When are you gonna come again?! Don't tell me you're just gonna leave forever!"

"It's not goodbye forever. I'll stop by when I feel like it."

From what I learned, Christmas wasn't the only event that the orphanage had. In the spring they went flower viewing, and in the summer they had a barbeque. If they ever were shorthanded again, it would be the perfect opportunity to get some pocket change.

"It's a promise, okay?! I'm still practicing the magecraft you taught me!"

"You have to come again! I'm gonna become an amazing mage like you!"

Good grief. It's no surprise they'd get attached to me, considering how much I took care of them. But surprisingly, it doesn't feel too bad at all.

Was this how Garius felt, raising me?

Chapter 5

The Christmas Incident

After I finished my job on Christmas, I started walking back to the school.

“That was fun, wasn’t it, Master?!”

Most likely, Ted had gone through the kids’s rough “baptism.” The proof of it was on his face, which still held traces of the scribbles the kids had drawn on him.

“But still, I had no clue you were working at an orphanage. The pay wasn’t that high, was it?” Ted asked.

“Yeah, not really,” I replied.

“Do you have some kind of ties to orphanages?” Ted asked, suddenly cutting right to the heart of things.

“Not really... Working there was just a simple way to kill time.”

I’d never revealed the secret of my reincarnation to Ted, even though I’d grown up with him. Of course, I had no intention of revealing it to anyone in the future either. I doubted anyone would understand me, and I was sure revealing the truth would only lead to more headaches down the road.

“That makes sense! I can’t even imagine you taking care of kids!” Ted cackled.

In this guy’s case, he never really thought too deeply about my circumstances, so it was easy to be around him. For those with a troubled past, like me, it was easy to have a long relationship with people like Ted, who were simple and straightforward.

“Hm? Isn’t that...”

As we walked and talked, Ted noticed a certain familiar silhouette. It was Zyle, our classmate whom we’d recently started spending more time with.

“Hey, Zyle, whatcha up to?!” Ted called out.

Zyle was acting strange; his head was hung low as he trudged through the snow, and overall he seemed completely lifeless. In each hand he held a bouquet of flowers. *Those flowers look fresh. I’m guessing he just bought them.*

“Oh... Ted... Abel...”

Hm. This is the first time I’ve seen Zyle so down in the dumps. For some reason the way he acted made it seem as if both the bouquets were withering.

“Ted...women are stupid. You can’t trust them!”

“What happened?! Are you okay?!” Ted exclaimed.

It seemed that something *had* happened. *Now that I think about it, Zyle had cryptically said that he had plans today.*

“Dammit... I was used!” Zyle exclaimed. “She asked for all these presents and then she said that she has plans on Christmas so she’ll be taking off from work! Who does that?!”

“O-Oh that really sucks, Zyle. By the way, who was she?” Ted asked.

“She works at the neighborhood maid café. She’s the most popular girl, and the one customers ask for the most.”

Both Ted and I fell silent. *It seems like this girl has her own circumstances. If so, then I don’t think we can really blame her for how she acted.*

“It’s okay, Zyle! There are so many more fish in the sea!”

“Ted... You’re gonna forgive me after how cocky I was acting about having plans today?”

“Of course! The Unpopular Guy Alliance is forever!” Ted declared, sticking up his thumb.

“T-Ted... You’re such a good guy!” Tears began pouring out of Zyle’s eyes.

Good grief. I thought the alliance fell apart, but now our bond has apparently deepened further? This alliance is all over the place. Then again, I was growing used to this farce.

“Zyle, let’s go out and just eat everything!”

“Hell yeah! I’m gonna eat so much Christmas chicken!”

Hm. The atmosphere’s getting kinda weird. I’m gonna leave before things get too annoying. I actually have plans.

“Hey! Where did Abel go?!”

It seems that Zyle noticed, but you’re too late. I was already making my way to the next destination, and had already moved pretty far away from the two of them.

“Dammit! Abel, you traitor!” Zyle screamed out.

“I can’t believe you, Master! I thought our bonds as the Unpopular Guy Alliance were forever!” Ted cried out.

Sorry Ted, sorry Zyle. Unfortunately, I never had any intention of joining your strange alliance. I’m going to prioritize the plans that I’ve been putting off.

After leaving Ted and Zyle, I went to buy the ring that I’d had Edgar put on hold for me.

“Hey, kid! I’ve got the item you want. You should be thankful for my generosity! Ga ha ha!”

Good grief. As usual, the way he speaks aggravates me. But I’ll let it slide today.

After finally buying the ring, I left his shop and began my walk back to the dorms. Night had fallen, and the town was illuminated in lights, granting it a charm that seemed to enchant everyone who saw it.

“Abel!”

Just as I entered the city shopping district, two familiar faces called out to me—Eliza and Noel. *It’s rare to see the two of them together, especially in the city at this time of night.*

“Do you have a minute?” Eliza asked. “We have something we want to talk to you about.”

Hm. Looks like there’s more to this situation than meets the eye. This might be the first time I’ve seen the two of them act this seriously.

“Sure. What’s on your minds?” *There’s still some time before I said I’d meet with Lilith. I can spare a moment for these two.*

“Um, so, Abel, I like you.” Noel’s words took me completely off guard.

“I feel the same way. Ever since we met...ever since the entrance exam, I think I’ve been drawn to you the entire time...” Eliza said as well.

Good grief. Even I could never have expected that the two of them would profess their feelings for me at the same time, right here and now. But, hm. What should I do?

Of course I had noticed their feelings for me, but it would be impossible for me to reciprocate them. In this case, it would be best to act in a way that didn’t hurt them.

“Sorry, but the wind was kinda loud, so I didn’t catch any of that.”

After thinking hard about what I should do, I came up with something that even I wasn’t too impressed by. *Not much I can do about this though. I have to resort to making up such poor excuses so I don’t hurt them.*

“Don’t try to run away!” Noel said, her strong will clear in her voice.

“The two of us are serious. Don’t treat us like kids!”

Eliza seems serious too. Hm... I don’t think I can fool my way out of this anymore.

It looks like it’s time for me to say exactly why I can never return their feelings for me.

“You two are very important to me, but no matter how much time passes, I doubt that we’ll ever enter a romantic relationship.”

“Why...?”

Good grief. I had hoped to take this secret to my grave, but that seems impossible now. “Because I’m a mage from two hundred years ago who’s been reincarnated in the present,” I declared, making sure to say it in a way that they knew I was completely serious.

I never thought there’d be a day where I told them the truth of who I was.

Despite my caution, it seemed like I'd slipped up—I'd come to care for them so much that I ended up telling them my most closely guarded secret just to spare their feelings.

"Both the Hero of Fire, Maria, and the Hero of Water, Daytona, were my disciples as well as my comrades. As their descendants, you two are more like the kids of my relatives than anything else. And it's because of that I don't think I'll ever have romantic feelings for either of you."

The two of them fell silent at my explanation, looking utterly bewildered. They seemed to believe my words, but were still processing them.

"Huh? How...?" Noel stammered.

"You weren't born in this era? But how's that possible?" Eliza asked.

They still looked doubtful, but I couldn't blame them. That was the normal reaction. Reincarnation Magecraft was an original spell that I'd created two hundred years ago. Being the first of its kind in magecraft, it'd be difficult to fully explain it.

But suddenly, I felt an ominous presence coming from behind me—the presence of an unparalleled, powerful, and dark mana. A mana so evil that it was rare even two hundred years ago.

"Eliza, Noel—get back." *It looks like the enemy has business with me; it's approaching extremely quickly.* "Seems like it's time for me to prove that I'm a reincarnated mage," I said.

I can tell that this opponent is the first one in a long time that I'll have to go all out against. In that case, one might say that this was the best time to reveal my identity.





Around the time that Abel was finishing his work at the orphanage, a mysterious entity was hurtling through the sky above the western gate some ways from the Royal Capital of Midgard. It was a demon, crashing through the clouds and plummeting to the ground at unbelievably fast speeds, sparkling in the night sky like a shooting star. He landed just like an asteroid would, gouging a deep crater in the earth.

“Hm? What is that...?”

The first person who noticed that something was wrong was one of the guards stationed at the western gate. “Captain, I think something crashed around the gate, but I’m not sure if I was just seeing things...”

“Huh? Something suspicious? What was it?” the captain asked.

“I’m...not sure. But I could feel some kind of evil mana.”

The demon’s dark presence was so immense and strong that even this guard—a new recruit—could sense it, enough to know it was bad.

“It might be a demon...” the new recruit said.

“A ha ha ha! A demon?!” the captain guffawed. “There’s no way somethin’ that dangerous would pop up now, in these peaceful times!”

“Y-Yeah. That’s true.”

For these guards, their biggest disturbance was from the occasional violent drunk. It was hard to even imagine anything remotely dangerous, let alone fatal, happening to them. But as they conversed with one another, something unexpected happened.

There was a loud explosion and, in the next moment, a hole appeared in the wall, sending dust flying everywhere.

“Weak... So weak.” An evil dragon—named Zeke, and over three meters tall in height—had broken through the wall. “Why are the mages of this age so frail? They won’t even serve as a warm-up for my fight with the black cat,” Zeke said, dragging along the guards that had been stationed in front of the gate and were now beaten to a pulp.

“Eek!”

The other guards froze, paralyzed by fear. The usual protocol for emergency situations such as this was to immediately alert higher command, but the monster in front of them was so fearsome that they couldn't even take a single step.

“Hmph... This form is too unwieldy. How unbearable.” His evil dragon form made it hard to move indoors without becoming smaller. Decision made, Zeke morphed into his human form. “It's been quite some time since I've returned to this form.”

After transforming, he'd become a human male, about a hundred seventy centimeters tall. Aside from his wings and tail, he looked like a regular young man. Demons were a combination between humans and monsters, but Zeke was the kind of demon who preferred his monster form.

“Damn you! You'll pay for this, monster!”

“For our fallen comrades!”

The fear of the guards lessened after seeing him shrink in size, so they picked up their arms and tried to launch a counterattack.

“Hm. Like this?” Zeke muttered, bored.

He swung his tail and in a flash, it flew out and sliced the guards' heads from their shoulders.

“Gah!”

Before any of the guards could even pull the trigger on their guns, his tail had killed them all, sending them flying before they could do a single thing against him.

“Just you wait, black cat. It's your turn to die next,” Zeke declared, alone in the room now drenched in blood, holding the severed heads of the guards.



Not too long after the incident at west gate, news of the ancient demon Zeke spread quickly through the Royal Capital. Protocol dictated that whenever there was an incident in the city, the nearest knights would rush to the scene, with

one notable exception: when the enemy was a demon.

Fully aware of the severity of the situation, the Royal Capital of Midgard dispatched their strongest forces—the Magecraft Company Chronos. Upon receiving their orders, two of the strongest individuals in the Numbers raced through the night.

“Sheesh... When was the last time something so big happened all of the Numbers had to assemble?” asked a tall guy, known as Bardo of the Wind.

Bardo had mastered the eastern land of Ametsuchi’s Ninja Arts, and was the fifth strongest member in Chronos. As one of the more prominent fighters among the Numbers, he was one of the few modern mages who had experience fighting Abel.

“It’s a demon! A real demon! How exciting is this?!”

The other guy was a young man known as Kuina the Noble, and was currently wearing sunglasses. By modern standards, Kuina might’ve been one of the strongest mages. He’d entered Chronos at a young age and was considered a prodigy after shooting all the way up the ranks to claim the Roman numeral III.

“Why are you so happy about this, Kuina?” Bardo asked.

“Whaddya mean? If I defeat a demon, I might get promoted again!” Kuina said, with a lofty attitude. “I’m aimin’ for the number one spot! As a guy, I *gotta* aim for the top!”

Bardo fell silent, thinking about how Kuina’s honesty came from his innate talent. As a mage born with an unprecedented talent for magecraft, he didn’t know the meaning of defeat. Even if his opponent was a demon, there wasn’t a single thought in his mind that he could lose.

“Sheesh, is this your youth talking? All this optimism’s too bright for an old fart like me.”

“Your lack of ambition is why I was able to swoop in and pass you in the ranks,” Kuina replied.

“Shaddup. Leave me alone.”

In Chronos, the number one was given a special meaning. With the Roman

numeral V, Bardo was ranked lower than Kuina in regards to combat.

“Let’s kill the demon real quick before everyone else shows up! It’s best to hog the glory!”

Bardo said nothing in response to Kuina’s seemingly bottomless positivity, expression remaining stiff. *What’s our captain doing? Doesn’t she know it’s an emergency?* Bardo thought, the disappearance of their captain a few days ago still weighing on his mind.

The member who possessed the Roman numeral I was in a league of her own, and it was something that a veteran member like Bardo keenly understood. Even after ten years, their captain, Rio, had stayed the same beautiful woman Bardo had met her as. If there was a mage more talented in Chronos than Kuina, it was maybe only her.

But with the top spot currently unoccupied, the situation at large—a powerful demon let loose in the city—only served to further feed into his sense of danger.

“Come on, pick up the pace!” Kuina exclaimed. “It looks like that creep Emerson’s squad is close. I’m not gonna share the glory with that gloomy glasses-wearing freak!”

Kuina viewed Emerson as a rival instead of a comrade despite belonging to the same organization. If Kuina was a prodigy of the body, Emerson was a prodigy of the mind. The reason that Chronos had such powerful international influence was due to the contributions of these two young members.

“Oh! Over there!” Kuina said, pointing to the rubble the demon had left in his wake.

Bardo sensed a mana more ominous than any he had ever sensed before—their target, then, wasn’t too far away.

“Yah! I’m first to the party!” Kuina said excitedly, before increasing his speed and disappearing from Bardo’s line of sight.

Though he himself was known for his speed, Bardo felt that Kuina’s was an entire level above his own.

It's a bad habit of mine to be so pessimistic. This guy is another monster with unlimited potential. Even if their opponent was a demon, chances were low that a genius like Kuina wouldn't be able to catch up to it in skill.

At the very least, that's what Bardo had thought.

"Oh? So you're the demon everyone's talking about? Nice to meet you, the name's Kuina. Despite what I might look like, I'm one of the good guys," Kuina proclaimed flamboyantly.

Zeke shot Kuina a cold glare. "Weak..."

"Hm?"

"You're also terribly conceited," Zeke continued. "If the best mages of this age are at your level, then it's as I thought—mages really have become much more fragile."

Kuina began thinking that this wasn't the time to be chatting with the enemy. After all, his rival, Emerson, was coming with his squad. With this in mind, he decided to ignore Zeke's words.

"You sure won't stop yapping to yourself! How about I make you disappear in lieu of a greeting?"

Kuina's weapon of choice was a gun, and he was skilled at using the various elemental bullets the gun could be loaded with to fight. He was a Verdant-Eyed mage who was proficient with Wind Magecraft, but he could use Fire and Water Magecraft at about the same level. That was what really earned him his title as a modern mage prodigy.

"True Shot: Burning Bullet!"

The bullets he'd loaded into his gun were special; they caused a powerful explosion upon contact.

In the next moment there was a loud boom as his bullet hit its target. The impact was so strong that it blew away nearby buildings.

"You idiot! Why'd you make it that powerful?! You know how much paperwork we're gonna drown in?!" Bardo shouted.

"Ha ha!" Kuina cackled. "Well, our opponent is a demon. I'm sure they'll cut

us some slack. We'll get an exemption!"

Regardless of how sturdy their opponent was, the power of the blast should have ensured that not even a trace of them remained. Confident that their opponent had been defeated, Kuina and Bardo shared a brief moment of reprieve.

"Phew... I'm relieved. I guess there are some moderately decent mages after all," Zeke said.

Because of how lax they'd become, they were even more shocked when they realized their opponent hadn't taken any damage. It was the first time both of them had witnessed anything like this. They couldn't stop trembling after seeing an opponent of this caliber—whose strength seemed bottomless.

Kuina, realizing that the enemy was still alive, fired another round. "True Shot: Icicle Bullet!"

It was an attack meant to help him buy time by freezing the opponent in place.

"Too slow."

Zeke's next move surprised Kuina even more. He moved at a speed faster than his bulky body suggested it could and weaved past the bullet, immediately closing the distance between him and Kuina.

"What an interesting toy," Zeke mused.

Before Kuina knew it, he'd been disarmed. Zeke began inspecting the weapon and analyzing its structure.

"Urk! Celestial Legs!" Kuina said, enveloping his legs in wind mana and flying into the air using Chronos-made Regalia boots.

By fueling the Regalia with wind mana, Kuina could move at high speeds. One of Kuina's strong points was his ability to use powerful magecraft in combination with his high mobility granted by his Wind Magecraft.

"Don't get cocky, brat."

"Wha—"

Though Kuina had thought he could put distance between them, before he knew it, Zeke had already wrapped around him.

Huh? How did he get behind me?!

Kuina, now suddenly in a tight spot, was filled with despair.

“There were hundreds of mages like you two hundred years ago, and I killed every last one of them.”

Zeke was telling the truth. Though Kuina was a rare prodigy by the standards of modern times, two hundred years ago, he would’ve been just a run-of-the-mill mage.

“Hmph.” Zeke grunted before he attacked, smacking down Kuina with his hard-as-steel tail.

“Ack!”

Though Kuina had been able to use his Body Fortification Magecraft at the last second, Zeke’s attack had been so powerful that it had nullified it entirely. He’d been knocked unconscious before he even knew it.

“Kuina!”

At the very last second, Bardo just barely managed to catch Kuina, saving him from slamming into the ground.

“Hmph. Saved by a comrade? Fine...” Zeke said, looking down from high above.

Before leaving Kuina and Bardo to make for the academy—where Abel and the others were—Zeke muttered, “Mages of your caliber aren’t worth the stain on my claws. I’ve but one objective: the black cat.”

“Dammit... Could this get any worse? I can’t believe how shitty this situation is,” Bardo said, forced to retreat with an unconscious Kuina in tow. “Dammit! Who the hell can win against that monster?!”

Bardo couldn’t imagine a world where he could fight Zeke and win. As a veteran member, his intuition told him that even with all the members of Chronos attacking at the same time, it wouldn’t be enough to win. Even with all the mages in the country working together, Bardo believed there would be no

chance of victory—that's how much stronger Zeke was than everyone else.

Man, I must be losing my edge if I'm remembering that kid's face at a time like this. If there was one person in this world who could fight Zeke on even footing, it'd be the Amber-Eyed boy that he'd met once. That boy was the type of person to never reveal the full extent of his ability, making it impossible to judge just how strong he really was.

Maybe, just maybe, Bardo thought, if it was that boy—if it was Abel—maybe even that monster would meet his match.

Chapter 6

Memories from Two Hundred Years Ago

Hm. It seems that the enemy this time around is on a different level entirely. Judging from its presence, it's a demon. Even two hundred years ago, demons who could release mana this evil were few and far between. And it looks like he's raring to go. I doubt he'll wait to attack me.

"Huh?"

"What?"

I grabbed both Noel and Eliza, and jumped off with them in my arms. The wind whipped past us as we leaped through the spaces between the buildings to get out of the vision of the enemy. As soon as I did, there was a loud explosion.

Good grief. He has no common sense if he's using a powerful Fire Magecraft in the middle of a city.

"There you are, golden-eyed black cat!" the demon rejoiced as he found me.

That's a pretty nostalgic nickname. I guess I'm not too surprised he remembers me. He was the same demon our party had had the most trouble fighting against two hundred years ago. His name was Zeke, and even in the Demon King's army, he was known as their strongest warrior.

"After all these years, I've not forgotten my grudge against you! Being sealed by you two hundred years ago was beyond humiliating!"

He was the one demon our party couldn't fully defeat, and since we couldn't beat him, we had to seal him away instead.

"Now, black cat, I will have my revenge, two hundred years in the making!" Zeke yelled, activating a powerful Fire Magecraft from his hand.

Hm. I won't be able to block it with a normal Defensive Magecraft. Barrier

Magecraft: Defensive Domain.

This Obsidian Eye magecraft was a barrier designed to alter the vectors of oncoming attacks. Regardless of how powerful an attack it was, if I could change its direction, I could avoid it.

In the next moment, our vision was filled with crimson. *It's still pretty hot.* Even with the defensive powers of the barrier, it didn't seem that I could completely block out the heat of his magecraft; my uniform, despite it being fortified, began to burn at the hems, letting off a unique smell.

Eliza and Noel froze in place in face of the enemy's attack. *Good grief. This really brings back memories from the past, whether I want to remember them or not.*

I began recalling a scene from two hundred years ago.



A few years after I'd left Chaos Raid, I'd ended up being brought on to join the group of people who'd later be known as the Great Four on their journey to defeat the Demon King of Twilight. Back then, demons were boastful of their great power, and to humans, were the ultimate symbol of fear.

Yet demons were just barely able to coexist with humans, for no other reason than the fact that they weren't a monolith, and each demon primarily acted on their own. But everything changed once the one called the Demon King of Twilight came into existence. Under him, all demons came together as one organization and began pushing humans into a corner. The hearsay back then was that humanity was at a huge disadvantage.

But as if to reverse that opinion, our party steadily made progress. Before we knew it, people began calling us heroes, and looked to us for hope. When we got close to the Demon King's castle, our battle with the demons intensified. In what would later be known as the Grand Quartz Battle, a sudden mortal combat began between us and the Demon King's army.

"Ha ha ha! You weak humans! Feel the true strength of demons!"

The demon standing in front of us was named Guilltina, and worked at the Demon King's side as his tactician. Today, he was riding on the shoulder of one

of his giant demons while looking down at us.

“Crumble in despair, heroes!”

At his order, the giant demon swung his hand down towards the ground, and when it made contact, the earth shook, cracks formed, and sent fissures all around us.

“Abel!”

“Sir!”

My comrades screamed in worry. *I see. The enemy's aim is to split us up.* Thanks to Guilltina's machinations, I'd been separated from the rest of the party.



After a little bit of time had passed after Guilltina's plan had separated our party, I heard someone calling out my name.

“Sir... Sir!”

Who is it? It's too dark.

“Oh wait! Maybe this is my chance!”

Oh. This stupid-sounding voice belongs to Ayane.

She'd been a fellow member at Chaos Raid, but after it fell apart, there were a lot of twists and turns, and she ended up accompanying our Hero Party frequently.

“Time for a kissy-kiss!”

When I opened my eyes, I saw Ayane's gross lips getting closer to my face. Sensing the danger of them making contact, I flicked her on the forehead.

“Gaaah!” she screamed as she rolled away from the force, skirt and all. “Sir! What are you doing to a young maiden like me?!”

Hm. As usual, she's got a sturdy body and mentality. If she's this energetic, then I don't think I have to worry about her.

“Ayane, give me a report on the situation.” At this point, the first priority was

confirming the state of things.

“Hmph! Don’t go all serious mode on me so quickly! It seems that due to that huge demon’s attack, the Hero Party’s been separated. Apparently there was a teleportation barrier set underneath the ground. Maria, Daytona, and Cain were all sent to different areas.”

I see. That old general got one on us. Each of us had a magecraft we were proficient at, and by working together, we could take down demons. In other words, now that we were split, our chances of victory were slimmer.

“By the way, I’ve been wondering this, but did I lose consciousness?” I asked.

“No, you were simply put to sleep,” Ayane replied. “It’s not like you to be so careless, Sir,” she added.

I fell silent, not having any words in response. She was right. I couldn’t believe that I’d been put to sleep during a battle.

“You work too hard, Sir. You should rest a bit or you won’t last the entire battle.”

It’s true that I’ve been fighting to my limits a lot recently. Maybe after getting wrapped up in this teleportation barrier, my body decided to switch to sleep mode.

“My shikigami, Chirpy, found a village nearby. How about we take a break there before we meet up with Maria and the rest?” Ayane suggested.

Chirpy was a bird-type shikigami that Ayane had made. She mostly used Chirpy for scouting from the sky.

“Sorry, but it doesn’t look like we have the time to take things so leisurely.”

“Huh?”

This isn’t a human’s presence. It’s obviously a demon that bears us ill will.

“Wha— That’s—!”

Ayane noticed what was going on after I did. Looking up into the sky, we saw what was known as the dragon platoon—the Demon King’s strongest forces. There were easily over twenty demons screaming at us from above.

“I’ve been counting the days until we could meet, black cat!”

The one flying at the front was an evil dragon whose body was over three meters long. That was my first meeting with Zeke, and something that would later become the catalyst for the Hero Party to permanently part ways.

Chapter 7

Emerson's Squad

While erecting a defensive barrier against my opponent's fierce attack, I couldn't help but remember the past. Zeke had already been a heinous demon two hundred years ago, and even back then, I couldn't completely defeat him. My only option had been to seal him away.

Though the Hero Party boasted that there wasn't a single demon we hadn't beat, he was the one demon that we couldn't completely vanquish. *What is Zeke doing in the modern world?* There were so many questions, but now that he was here, I had no choice but to exert the utmost caution while fighting him.

"Eliza, Noel, you two need to run." *It's too bad, but this time, I won't have the luxury of fighting my opponent while defending others.*

"What are you gonna do, Abel?!" Eliza asked.

"Take him out. I'm probably the only one in the world that can do that."

Zeke's objective seemed to be purely revenge, so in that case, it was better for me to fight him alone in order to keep casualties to a minimum.

"Ha ha ha ha! You've gotten pretty tiny in the time that I've been asleep, black cat!" Zeke cackled before launching another attack, this time rapidly shooting multiple Fireball Magecraft from his hand.

Hm. It's a sloppy barrage focused more on quantity than quality, but still, the force behind each Fireball is staggering. I analyzed his attacks as they viciously exploded upon contact. If I messed up my defense even the tiniest bit, I'd incur critical damage. But I was able to redirect their trajectories with my Barrier Magecraft and avoid getting hurt.

Now then. I think it's best to determine our power differential. After all, I haven't been blessed with the opportunity to fight at my full strength since I reincarnated. I'll have to warm up a bit first.

“Ha ha ha, what’s the matter?! We’re not gonna get anywhere if you keep scurrying around!”

His firepower was on a whole other level. If the battle dragged on, it’d only be a matter of time until the city turned into a sea of flames.

Just as I was thinking that, something unexpected happened.

“Nothing to fear, kid! I’m here!”

Hm. Looks like other mages have come running. A man suddenly jumped down from a nearby building.

“The name’s Blade! I’m the man with the Roman numeral IV at Chronos!”

Good grief. Looks like I caught the eye of a weirdo. Chronos was the very same organization that Emerson was a part of, and also the successor to Chaos Raid, the organization I’d been in two hundred years ago.

It seemed that among modern mages, there were some mages more skilled than the rest, but I suspected these mages were out of their element here. Blade was a middle-aged man covered from head to toe in a tight bodysuit.

“What a cowardly demon, aiming for the life of a frail, young lad! Allow me to deliver justice!” he said, striking a very uncouth pose.

Hm. Looks like this guy is completely missing the big picture. But to be fair, I don’t think a modern mage would get what I was planning to do. It must’ve seemed like I was trying to run away from Zeke’s attacks.

“Robelle, keep him busy!” Blade requested.

“Roger that!”

Hm. So Blade wasn’t the only mage to arrive. She doesn’t have a human presence at all, so it took me a while to notice. Robelle’s unique appearance was due to her fully mechanical body. It wasn’t clear if she was actually human, but the Roman numeral VIII was engraved on her shoulder.

“Firing immobilizing nets!” Robelle shot out over ten Regalias, each resembling a small ball.

When they burst open, they unleashed countless nets that restrained Zeke’s

body.

“Rrgh!”

The Regalias weren't so fast that Zeke couldn't react to them. But since he'd just woken up in the modern world, he probably didn't even know what Regalias were. As a result, he simply got hit by the attack.

“Hm. What a strange magecraft.”

For a moment, Zeke stopped moving. His wariness was reasonable—even for me, it was my first time seeing a Regalia like this. I could tell that it'd been imbued with high level, intricate magecraft equations. And for some reason, it seemed familiar.

The way the magecraft equations had been written were shrewd and foul. If my suspicions were correct, Emerson had been involved in the development of that Regalia. After all, if it *was* Emerson, then he was definitely observing this battle from somewhere.

“Heh heh. Intriguing. What a very interesting turn of events!”

A brief survey of the area revealed Emerson, as I had predicted. In a lot of ways, Emerson was someone who always lived up to your expectations.

“I'm so lucky to be able to have a real demon to experiment on. I'll have it test out the powers of my subordinates!” Emerson said to himself, adjusting his glasses.

I see. These two are Emerson's underlings. If they sent three whole members to deal with just one enemy, they must've seen Zeke as a big threat.

“Whoo!” Seeing opportunity in Zeke's current immobility, Blade cried out and jumped, soaring above the surrounding buildings.

“This hero suit that Chronos made for me makes me ten times stronger, and I'm already ten times stronger than the average mage! You see what I'm getting at?!”

It's a suit-type Regalia, huh? It's my first time seeing something like this. Just like the robot from earlier, the suit must've been made by Emerson.

“It means that I'm a hundred times stronger now! So take this, my one-

hundred-times-stronger kiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiick!” he yelled, leaping and aiming a kick at Zeke with all his might.

The force of his kick is honestly not bad. It’s relatively exceptional compared to the standards of modern mages, and with the suit strengthening his attack even further, he could make it incredibly powerful.

But even so, Zeke took his powerful kick without even flinching.

“Ridiculous,” Zeke scoffed.

“Wha—?!”

In order to clearly demonstrate just how different they were, Zeke most likely held back from fighting for real, and had instead stopped Blade’s kick with a single finger, much to Blade’s complete and utter disbelief.

“Hmph. That guy earlier and you are the same... Why are modern mages so confident despite being incredibly weak? I just don’t understand.”

As a counterattack, Zeke punched Blade, sending him flying.

All I can say is that Blade’s picked the wrong opponent. Even two hundred years ago, Zeke was considered to be so strong that he was recognized as a natural disaster. It’d be difficult for modern mages to take him on no matter what plans they came up with.

“Gaaaaaah!” Blade yelled, flying through the air before crashing into a building.

Doesn’t look like the impact killed him, but I’m sure he broke some bones. It was lucky that he survived the attack, but that meant I probably couldn’t expect much help here.

“Whoa... What’s happening? Are demons really this powerful?! They’re such intriguing subjects to study!” For some reason, Emerson seemed extremely excited and was leaning forward. “If I take data on his vitals, I can revolutionize the industry! This is wonderful! This’ll lead to the ultimate innovation!”

Good grief. Your own ally is in trouble, but this is how you’re acting? How inconsiderate. Then again, it was just like Emerson to put his curiosity over the safety of others.

“Looks like we have no choice, Robelle! Don’t hold back! No need for a preamble, hit him with everything you have and eliminate him!”

“Yes, my master!” the robot said, accepting Emerson’s orders.

Robelle was clearly no match for Zeke, so what was Emerson’s scheme here? The next thing she did took even me by surprise.

“Releasing limiter. Booting up Buster Mode!”

Robelle’s body suddenly started to transform. She was probably receiving external energy from somewhere; her mana levels had risen rapidly.

“Eliminating target. Fire!” she said, voice even and emotionless. A cannon emerged from her back and fired a laser.

It was the first time I was seeing a magecraft like this. It was using Fire Magecraft as its base for the attack. It was one of the more powerful Modern Magecrafts, but in terms of pure strength, it was many times more powerful than Blade’s kick with the suit.

“Lukewarm... You’re gonna make me yawn,” Zeke grumbled.

As a counterattack, Zeke activated magecraft of his own—Fireball. It was a plain, average, and rudimentary Fire Magecraft, but the power Zeke used to fire off the attack was in a league of its own, strong enough to push back and suppress the laser beam that’d been fired at him.

“That’s not possible! He’s pushing back the attack?!” Emerson cried in disbelief.

It seemed that Robelle’s attack wasn’t able to beat out Zeke’s Fireball. If anything, his attack completely overpowered hers, and flew towards the robot girl unimpeded.

“Guh!”

Though Emerson had quickly tried to use a Barrier Magecraft to protect himself, it couldn’t stop all the damage. There was a deafening explosion and, in the next moment, the buildings that had taken a direct hit from Zeke’s attack had been half-blown away by the powerful blast.

“How is that possible?! My foolproof plan is in tatters!” Emerson moaned in

despair.

Emerson not having a good read on a demon such as Zeke—the strongest of all demons even two hundred ago—wasn't a surprise.

“Grr... How?! This isn't supposed to have happened! My perfect plan...” Emerson bemoaned.

Hm. By deploying a shield Regalia just in the nick of time, he was able to avoid sustaining any major injuries. You really can't ever count him out.

But even so, he wasn't able to completely prevent the damage. Due to the wind from the blast, he'd been blown away, and from the looks of things, he didn't have any more will to fight.

“I guess I'll start by cleaning up the rest of the garbage around here,” Zeke said.

Zeke knew Emerson and Blade were still alive. He kicked off the ground, flying towards the crumbled building where Blade was lying.

Good grief. Far too optimistic of me to think I could avoid all the hassle of fighting if others could handle him. Of course things didn't go that smoothly. At this rate, Emerson and the others were certain to be wiped out.

“Hmph. Curse your own weakness, human...” Zeke said.

“Guh... Agh...”

Blade was really hanging on by a thread. Clearly it was the suit's defensive capabilities that barely saved his life.

But now that Zeke's focused on the others, it's time for me to get ready to take him out. Seems like my only option is to fight him. I erased my presence and approached to land a surprise attack on him.

“Combination Magecraft: Broken Blade!”

Using the pieces of rubble at my feet, I created a long sword with a blade honed to the maximum possible sharpness. I'd made it in the likeness of Mumei, my favored blade two hundred years ago. If I was going to fight with a weapon, it was best I used a familiar shape.

“Gruh?”

Thanks to his attention being occupied by the Chronos members, I was given a golden opportunity. I jumped off of the roof of a nearby building and swiftly stabbed my blade through Zeke’s back and into his heart. It was a smooth attack that’d resulted in Zeke’s dark red blood spurting out, and Zeke stopping in his tracks.

“Urk! Black cat... You’re resorting to such dirty tricks?”

Hm. I know I pierced his heart, but it doesn’t look like this is enough damage to kill him.

“Die!” Zeke yelled, whipping his blade-sharp tail at me in retaliation.

The speed of it told me that my attack hadn’t been very effective. But at least I’d succeeded in diverting his attention to me. I deflected his tail with my sword.

“Hmph! You really think you can defeat *me* with that blunt sword? Don’t make me laugh!”

Good grief. He’s still such a pest. Looks like he hasn’t lost his insane regenerative abilities from two hundred years ago. The hole I’d pierced through his heart was already mostly closed up.

“Come on! You’re slow—too slow!”

In a fit of blind rage, Zeke began furiously attacking me.

Wow, this is nostalgic.

Even two hundred years ago, there weren’t many individuals that I could have a true, all-out battle with.

What made Zeke unique was his ability to heal. No matter how strong my attacks were, or how much I could cut him up into little shreds, he could regenerate to full health in the blink of an eye.

Though it was theoretically possible to kill him once and for all by draining his mana through repeated attacks and thus preventing him from regenerating, the bigger issue was how much mana he had. Zeke’s latent amount of mana was much higher than other demons. As such, two hundred years ago, I’d used a sealing barrier to immobilize him.

“Ha ha ha! What’s the matter, black cat? Is this really the extent of your power?! Let me have some fun at least!”

I don’t get it. The seal on him was the ultimate, highest level of Obsidian Eye magecraft. There weren’t any mages I knew who could’ve undone it, which left the following questions: who did, and why would they release Zeke?

Suddenly, I began remembering something from my time at Chaos Raid.

“*Waaah! I was so scared, Sir!*” Ayane, my junior at the organization, had cried on our past mission.

If it’d been Ayane, she might’ve been able to do it. I knew that she was alive from what’d happened during the school trip. She was the only one I knew who was on a similar level to me in terms of Obsidian Eye magecraft.

“Break!”

Zeke’s patience must’ve run out, after finally getting to fight the person he’d been wanting to kill for so long. I could sense that there was a very slight opening in Zeke’s large attack. I hadn’t been simply running around this whole time—I’d been waiting for this moment.

“Burning Bullet!”

I tried a counterattack of my own, using a magecraft with a short incantation speed. Though it was a basic magecraft, in my hands, it became fairly powerful.

“Gah!”

Looks like my hit landed, but didn’t do much damage. Of course, an attack of this level wasn’t going to buy me too much time, but it was more than enough. I used this moment to construct an even more powerful magecraft.

“Big Bang!”

Big Bang was the strongest magecraft from the Fire Magecraft repertoire. A massive explosion suddenly erupted, with Zeke at the epicenter. I’d been sure to make sure nobody would be caught in the blast radius, and had even made sure not to hurt the buildings. As a result, a huge crater had appeared in the middle of town.

“A-A-Ah...”

Seeing me fight like this up close must've left Blade, who'd been nearby, struggling to speak. His jaw dropped in disbelief.

"I-I can't believe it... You overpowered a monster of that level? Wh-Who—*what*—are you?"

My identity, huh? I didn't expect him to ask me such a philosophical question.

"I'm nobody worth remembering. I'm just a simple magecraft student."

There was no need to reveal that I was a mage who'd reincarnated two hundred years into the future, not right now.

"Ha ha... Wow... Is this a nightmare?" Blade muttered under his breath as I saved him.

Now then. Even with Zeke's body in pieces, I can't let my guard down. Though his body may be gone, I can still sense his mana and his soul nearby.

"Heh heh... Not bad, black cat!"

He really is still alive. The pieces of meat that'd been blown away began swarming in one place—Zeke's body had begun regenerating.

"I should've known challenging you in my human body was taking you too lightly."

As soon as he said these ominous words, Zeke's body transformed into the shape that I was familiar with.

"Word of warning, I still have two more transformations. One is my demon form, and the other is the form I take when I'm fighting for real!"

I had no doubt he was telling the truth. Demons typically only had two forms—a demon form and a human form—with their demon form being the more powerful of the two. Him saying that he was going to get serious with a third form might've sounded like a bluff, but it was more than possible that it wasn't. Two hundred years ago when I sealed him, even then, I thought that he'd still had an ace up his sleeve.

"I'll play the tune of your death!" he yelled, transforming from his human form into his demon form before launching an attack.

All right, I've finished my final preparations. Sorry, Zeke, but it doesn't seem like you'll get an opportunity to show me what your "serious form" looks like.

"Th-This is—" Zeke stuttered out, as the hand he was using to attack was caught in a net.

I'd used the Regalia that Robelle had used earlier. I had the thought that they'd come in handy at some point, so I took them and set them up for a trap. I'd used Big Bang not to defeat Zeke, but to buy the time I needed to set up this trap.

"You bastard! You set me up!"

He tried breaking out of the net in a fit of rage, but the quality of the build was typical of Emerson, so it was pretty strong. Even so, his strength was unbelievable; I could see him getting out of the net in a matter of seconds. But those seconds were more than enough to complete the magecraft that would allow me to completely defeat him.

"You've lost, Zeke."

In the next moment, I used a magecraft that I'd developed recently—a magecraft of the highest class among Obsidian Eye magecraft. "Barrier Magecraft: Infinite Domain."

A black barrier swarmed to cover him. The weak point of this magecraft was that it took a long time for it to activate, but thanks to Emerson and the rest buying me time, I was just able to make it.

"Urgh! Back to what you're best at—childish tricks?! I'll burn it all down!"

Zeke, noticing the strangeness of what was happening, immediately tried breathing fire to break the barrier, but his struggling was pointless. Time and space meant nothing in this barrier. Everything that happened inside it only happened if the caster allowed it to.

"What...?!"

Zeke's fire breath disappeared. From his standpoint, I could only imagine the total despair he was feeling. Once inside the barrier, there was absolutely no chance to counterattack—he was completely suppressed.

“My turn,” I said.

First, I created a sword out of the rubble at my feet. There was about fifteen meters between me and him, but that didn’t matter. Inside Infinite Domain, no matter where I attacked, it would become a critical hit.

“Rrgh!”

I ran my sharp blade through his left arm, separating it from his body.

“This is where you die,” I said.

Though his regenerative abilities seemed to be functioning as normal, it didn’t matter. Inside Infinite Domain, time didn’t exist. In other words, I could keep cutting him as much as I wanted, and get close to exhausting his troublesome close-to-infinite mana supply.

“Why don’t you show me your second transformation—your full strength, or whatever.”

“You bastard! Don’t get carried away!” he howled loudly.

Before I could blink, his body had transformed and he was showing his true power—it seemed that his dragon form had a second part to it. As a result, he was now over ten meters in height, and he was releasing an unworldly pressure proportional to the near infinite mana that he had.

“Can you handle my strength?!” he roared.

Zeke was no doubt powerful, but what was about to ensue was a one-sided match. He didn’t seem to understand that any attack I made was guaranteed to hit him, and that none of his attacks would ever reach me.

As our battle progressed, the expression on his face slowly turned to that of desperation.

“H-How... How am I, the strongest demon of all, losing to a human?!”

The answer was obvious. It was true that two hundred years ago, I had no way of dealing with him on my own, but that was in the past. I was stronger now. I’d learned about modern magecraft and grown even more. I might have grown past how strong I’d been at my peak.



After the battle, I wasn't sure how long it took to kill him. Probably after thousands of cuts, I began to notice that his regeneration was slowing down. When I'd cut him over ten thousand times, it'd stopped completely.

Hm. That took a lot longer than I thought, but it looks like I've finally defeated him.

And that was how I successfully put to rest a two-hundred-year-old grudge.

Chapter 8

Reunion with Cain

After successfully defeating Zeke, I released Infinite Domain and exited the barrier. Though it felt like days had passed inside the barrier, time flowed normally outside of the barrier. All in all only a few seconds had passed.

Suddenly, I heard a voice calling to me. *But who? I can tell they're calling my name, and it's a familiar voice... Oh. I know who this is.*

"It's you, isn't it, Cain?"

I looked over to where the voice was coming from and saw a familiar silver-haired boy. His name was Cain, my junior when we were still a part of Chaos Raid. After the organization fell apart, we traveled together as a part of the Hero Party to defeat the Demon Lord. He was an old friend of mine.

"It's been a while, Mr. Abel."

Seeing his familiar face, I felt a lot of things falling into place. *I see. So he's definitely the one who undid the seal on Zeke.* Even two hundred years ago, he was the only prodigy-level mage who could stand at my level. If all the weird things that'd been happening to me had been his doing, it made sense.

"I'm so relieved to see that even after two hundred years, you're still just as proficient as you were back then. So befitting of my eternal rival."

He's a really cocky guy. Now that I think about it, he's the only one who really committed to trying to surpass me.

"Why are you alive?" I asked.

He was talking to me like it was the most natural thing in the world, but he was the very same person that I had traveled with two hundred years ago. Normally, there was no chance that he should've been able to live this long. His body should have turned to dust by now.

“It’s simple. I completed my Immortality Magecraft. I won’t age nor will I die.”

I see. Just as I completed Reincarnation Magecraft, he completed an Immortality Magecraft, which allowed him to stay alive all these years.

“Would you like to spar with me for old time’s sake?” Cain asked, throwing the rose he’d been holding up until now towards me.

“No. There’s no reason for us to fight.”

Considering how he was a crafty guy, always plotting something, I could only imagine that he’d been up to all kinds of mischief these past two hundred years when I was reincarnating.

But none of that mattered to me now. We were living in an age of peace. If possible, I wanted nothing more than for things to stay that way.

“Heh heh. I figured you’d say that, Mr. Abel,” he said, eerily smiling before snapping his fingers.

In the next moment, an unexpected view filled my eyes. Out of the darkness came a familiar black-haired girl.

“You called, Master Cain?”

Her name was Ayane. She was my junior two hundred years ago in Chaos Raid and an excellent Obsidian-Eyed mage. Her talent far exceeded even the best mages two hundred years ago. After the organization fell apart, Ayane helped as a supporting member of our party. She was one more person I knew two hundred years ago who I was seeing again.

“Did you finish the job?” Cain asked.

“Yes. I’ve captured that witch as you asked.”

My eyes widened as in the next minute, an unexpected—and the worst possible—sight was shown to me.

He got me. While I was fighting with Zeke, Cain used the distraction to secure a hostage.

Out of Ayane’s barrier appeared Lilith, the very same person I was planning on meeting later.

“Master Abel...”

It looks like they've done a number on her.

She looked battered; covered in injuries—most likely from a fight—and left crucified, Ayane's venomous shikigami snakes wrapped around her limbs and able to kill her at any time.

“If you don't agree to what I ask, I will kill this woman.”

Doesn't look like this is gonna resolve peacefully. Cain doesn't make empty threats. He'll take a life if necessary, and without care for how anyone else would feel about it.

What is this feeling inside? Oh, it's anger. It's been a while since I've felt this dark, muddy emotion. It was strange, knowing that I still had a humanlike emotion left inside me.

“Truthfully, I'd like nothing more than to kill her right now. After all, it's too dangerous to keep her alive, especially since she's corrupted you,” Cain said.

He just keeps saying whatever he wants. It's too dangerous to keep her alive? I get the feeling that the same applies to you. Now then, with the small talk out of the way, I should get ready to kill him. I obviously wasn't so carefree that I'd get carried away with reminiscing in the middle of a battle.

“Infinite Domain,” I said, deploying my magecraft.

In the next moment, a black barrier spread from my feet, capturing Cain's body inside it. Even if he was immortal, it didn't matter so long as he was kept inside this barrier.

“I see. This is your new move, huh?”

Despite being caught in the barrier, Cain didn't lose his cool at all. *Hm, his face tells me he's got something planned.* I shoved my sword into Cain at once, still worried about what he had planned.

“You can stop that. This magecraft has no effect on me.”

I thought as much. Despite being cut in two, Cain is the picture of calm.

“I can see right through you, Mr. Abel. The one you see here isn't my real

body. It'll be destroyed soon enough."

Hm. It seems he's telling the truth. After being cut, his body turned back into dirt. It's a really good replica to have been able to fool my eyes.

"If you want to kill me, then follow me. I'll be waiting at the place our journey began—that unforgettable place."

With that being said, Cain's body melted into the ground, disappearing.

Good grief. What a selfish guy. But there, huh?

What Cain was referring to was, most likely, the place where our destiny changed forever.

Chapter 9

Abel's Past, and the End of Chaos Raid

Two hundred years ago, when I was still a part of the magecraft organization known as Chaos Raid, I was an assassin. It didn't matter when or where—if I was working, the stench of blood and smoke followed me wherever I went.

“Eek! Stay away! Please!”

“Hey! Someone stop him!”

“How's this brat movin' like that?!”

It was my job to take the lives of people who I didn't even know. I had no memory of how many people I killed. I stopped counting when it hit the double digits. It just felt pointless.



After completing my mission today, I made my way back to the Chaos Raid headquarters to receive new orders from Grim. Our base was located in a place called Gensokyo.

Gensokyo was a unique area of the world due to its incredibly high concentration of mana, and as a result, all the trees grew at an alarming rate. The scenery constantly changed; even if you memorized the route to get to the entrance once, there was no way you'd be able to retrace that path to get there again. The area was also known as the Lost Woods.

The magic beasts that also roamed the wood were naturally incredibly strong. All this meant that only a few people could safely traverse the forest. Overall it was an inconvenient place to live, but a perfect place to hide the organization.

After getting through the Lost Woods, I reached a building of modern design, a stark contrast to the rural landscape surrounding it. This was our base. A barrier erected around the perimeter made it so that the chance that any outsiders would find us was close to zero.

“Hey, did you hear rumors about the newbie?”

“Oh yeah, the silver wolf? I hear he’s shooting up almost as fast as *the* black cat!”

The moment I entered the building and made my way through the halls, the gossip of other organization members reached my ears. The “silver wolf” they were talking about was Cain, who’d recently entered the organization. Everyone in the organization was given an animal codename, and silver wolf was his.

“Sheesh, our organization’s full of monsters. It’s rough.”

“Yeah, we gotta step it up. I wanna try working with black cat someday!”

Good grief. The very person you’re talking about is right next to you. I barely worked with any other members, so nobody really knew what I looked like. But as I was thinking that, I heard a familiar voice.

“Gaaaaaaah!”

This scream... Ayane. She was a year older than me, but I was higher ranked than her, somehow making me her senior.

“Save me, Sir! I’m being attacked!” Upon seeing me, Ayane immediately screamed her vague pleas.

As usual, she says the most incomprehensible things. Who would do that to you in the middle of our base? That’s when I realized that it was Cain chasing her. He was a rare case—a human raised by demons. Ever since we rescued him from captivity, I’d left Ayane to look after him.

“Oh, Mr. Abel!” Cain exclaimed.

“Attacked,” huh? I suppose the term is accurate here, for a lack of a better word.

Cain was chasing Ayane around while holding a bloody knife. It’d been about a year since Cain joined Chaos Raid, and now he was in the midst of puberty; he was taller than when I’d first met him.

“What are you doing, Cain?” I asked.

“Oh. Well, in order to develop a new magecraft, it just so happens that I need

the blood of a live, young woman. I thought that I'd have Ms. Ayane share some of hers with me." Cain smiled while he spoke, as if what he said was the most natural thing in the world.

"This isn't a joke! Sir, please tell him to stop! He doesn't know how to hold back!"

For better or worse, being raised by demons had deprived Cain of any notion of common sense. Saying that he was innocent would be a nice way to describe him, but it was more like he had no clue what was right or what was wrong. To put it simply, he would do anything—*anything*—to get what he wanted. Some might say his willingness to sacrifice everything he had for his own ends was a mark of insanity.

"Well, it's good to be passionate about your research," I said.

"I know, right?" Cain replied happily.

"Aaagh! How could you?! You bastard!" Ayane yelled.

I decided to ignore Ayane's plight. It'd be okay if Cain was a little rough as long as his target was Ayane. After all, her mentality was a lot stronger than most people.

"On your way to see Grim, Mr. Abel?" Cain asked.

"Yeah, I gotta tell him I completed my mission."

Grim was my supervisor who'd shown me the ropes when I first entered the organization. Usually he was in his owl form, hiding his true self, so I never really knew too much about him. The only thing I could say for sure was that without him, Chaos Raid would fall apart.

"Be careful," Cain said. "He smells just like me. I'm sure he's up to no good."

I fell silent. It was true that I didn't exactly trust Grim. Though I owed him for his help when I first started, I had no clue what he was thinking, and it was hard to really judge what his true intentions were.

"You're overthinking things, Cain," Ayane said leisurely, hearing our conversation. "Grim's adorable. He's not a bad person at all."

Cain's warning touched on something I'd been thinking for a while: Grim was

hiding a big secret from all of us. It made me grow less trusting of the organization day by day.

In fact, today, I was planning to talk to Grim about something important.



Once I finished my paperwork, I headed over to where Grim was waiting for me.

“Good work on your mission, black cat.” As soon as I noticed the tree branch move, I heard his voice. Perched in his owl form on the branch, he continued speaking. “Black cat, we’ve heard of both your and the new member, silver wolf’s, achievements. The higher-ups are very pleased. It’s time for your next missi—”

But before he could finish his sentence, I threw some papers at him from out of my breast pocket—paperwork for my resignation. Seeing what was written on it, Grim looked at me with doubt.

“What are you playing at?” he asked.

“Nothing. I’d like to leave the organization as of today.”

“And why’s that?”

I paused, taking a moment to put everything I’d kept bottled up into words. “You told me this before, Grim. I’m a first-rate mage, but a second-rate assassin. I’m just not cut out for this job. So instead, I’m going to devote myself to my research.” I’d said this without any hint of it being a lie.

From the very start, I’d wanted to join Chaos Raid because of Garius, the man I’d met—the one who raised me in his orphanage. Back then, I simply didn’t see any other path to go down.

I didn’t regret a single thing about joining Chaos Raid; I had grown exponentially as a mage because of it. But staying here forever wasn’t going to help me keep growing. In order to reach new heights, I had to leave.

“When I leave, I’ll be taking Cain with me,” I added. “I’m pretty sure that’s what he wants too.”

In a way, I might’ve been somewhat responsible for him. I had a feeling he’d

be in danger if I left him by himself. Maybe it was a side effect of his demon upbringing, but Cain was missing the vital qualities that normal humans possessed. Things like common sense, and empathy. I couldn't help but feel that I'd be making a big mistake if I left him in the care of the organization. For Ayane, well...I was pretty sure she'd be all right.

"You're leaving Chaos Raid, huh?" Grim repeated my words. He sounded less surprised and more exasperated. "This'll be the seventh time I've heard those words come from your mouth. I'm getting tired of this, Abel."

In a rush, memories I had been completely unaware of flashed through my head.

What is this? Oh. I remember. I've spoken with him about leaving the organization before.

My head hurt. It was like a fog descended on my mind and obscured my memory. *Does this mean that my memories were manipulated? Grim's an Ashen-Eyed mage. Distorting my memory and arbitrarily using me as his pawn is more than possible for him.*

"People are so mysterious. A strong ego can disturb the balance of an organization, yet a strong ego is also necessary to encourage one's growth. I might've left too much of your ego in you, Abel, hoping for your growth." Though Grim said this softly, his words were filled with zeal. "But I'm done. This is over. You've grown more than enough. From now on, I'll make you a puppet that moves solely for the aims of Chaos Raid."

Grim's aura changed—he was ready to fight. Right then, another memory I didn't remember having flashed through my head.

I see now. It looks like I've challenged Grim six times before—and lost every single time.

At the end of every fight, he manipulated my memories so that I could remain a convenient pawn for the organization.

"Allow me to show you who stands at the top." Grim spread his wings and flew towards me.

If I didn't take him down here, I'd be a prisoner to the organization forever.

“Howl! Mumei!” I said, using Mumei, my favored sword.

I wasn’t a big fan of using weapons, but one rule at Chaos Raid dictated that all members had to carry around the weapon they were given. This blade was light, sturdy, and made of a special alloy that was a good conductor for mana. It was pretty useful, so I had no issue carrying it around. Its name had emerged from what other people called it; another apparent rule was that all weapons had to be named. I’d stubbornly ignored doing that, but before I knew it, my sword’s name had become Mumei.

There was a slice and in the next moment, my blade had cut Grim’s body in half. Yet I felt that it had happened too easily. Though that should’ve ended things, I didn’t get the sense that the battle was actually over.

“I see. You’ve gotten a little better.”

He’s behind me?

The moment I realized it, a colossal monster stood in my way. It was over three meters tall. He’d used the sand in our surroundings to create it.

“It’s too bad, but you can’t defeat me. You probably don’t remember, but that’s how it’s always been.”

I see. I seem to have cut nothing more but a vessel. As an Ashen-Eyed mage, Grim could transfer his soul to other vessels. Usually, he was in an owl’s body, but when he was fighting, he transferred his soul into a more appropriate form.

“Now then,” Grim said. “I wonder how many times you can kill me.”

Grim began attacking, swinging down his huge, sand monster arms. Despite his large body, his movements were surprisingly nimble. I dodged his attack right before it could hit me, and cut his arm with my sword.

“Interesting. You’ve grown a little, Abel.”

It looks like even cutting off an arm doesn’t actually do any damage to him.

As proof, the arm I’d just cut off immediately regenerated. At this rate, it’d be hard to deal any lasting damage. Next, I decided to use my Body Fortification Magecraft to analyze him. Using Inspect, I looked for any vulnerabilities, and found one.

I see. Looks like his core is around his heart. If I get to that, I can make his body crumble.

I proceeded to evade him as much as I could while targeting his weak point. It was a tall order, but for me, not impossible.



What ensued was a back and forth battle, one where I couldn't allow myself to lose focus for even a second. We were evenly matched—no, I was always a little ahead. But even so, there was a huge problem.

“Heh heh.” Grim chuckled. “You live up to your name, golden-eyed black cat. You’re really the strongest soldier I’ve raised.”

After I had struck the core, the sand doll that Grim possessed fell apart, but immediately reformed.

Is this the power of an Ashen-Eyed mage? Ashen-Eyed mages were seen as only second to Amber-Eyed mages, and I was starting to see why.

“Let’s kick it up a notch, shall we?” Grim said.

The annoying thing about my opponent wasn’t just his regenerative abilities. Every time he revived, he’d optimize his vessel and come back even stronger. Destroying the core wasn’t the game changer I thought it would be. If anything, it was just pushing me more into a corner.

“You’ve killed me seven times now? Your growth amazes me.”

Good grief. I’ve already taken him down multiple times, but the fact he regenerates so easily is depressing. I’d started this battle at an advantage yet, slowly but surely, I was being put on the backfoot.

“Now then, let me guess what you’re thinking. You’re thinking you should aim to exhaust my mana, aren’t you?”

I’m not surprised he read my strategy. No matter what manner of being I was facing, it was hard to think that *anything* could regenerate infinitely; there was only so much mana that any being could have. Making him exhaust all of it on his Regeneration Magecraft should’ve been possible.

“Unfortunately for you, you won’t have the time to try. I’m going to end

things here.”

There was no mistaking it: Grim’s next attack would be for real.

“Phew,” Grim exclaimed, “it’s been a while since I’ve fought in this form.”

On his seventh regeneration, his appearance was a little different. Compared to the other forms, it was a little smaller, but the pressure he exerted was magnified to an unbelievable degree.

So this is the final form of his sand doll?

He’d gotten rid of any unnecessary parts and streamlined his form.

“Now, accept your fate! From today onwards, you’re *mine!*”

He’s fast. His speed was on a completely different level from before. If I wasn’t able to block his attack, I’d live the rest of my years as the organization’s attack dog.

When Garius found me, I’d been left for dead. I’d already been as good as dead once, and I didn’t have anything keeping me tied here. Being Grim’s puppet might not be the worst possible thing to happen.

“No.”

Before I realized it, those words had spilled out of my mouth. If I died here, then what would happen to my allies? How would all the people in my life feel about what happened to me? In that moment, I truly wanted to live.

I will surpass Grim! For everyone’s sake—for all the people I had met and for everything we’d been through—I put everything I had into my next attack.

“Wha—?!” Grim gasped, astonished.

Maybe my wish had been granted; I had executed the strongest attack I’d ever been able to in my life. Before I knew it, my blade had pierced his core.

“I’m surprised. Once again you’ve surpassed my expectations,” he mumbled, shaken, his core finally pierced. In our past encounters, he’d probably never been cornered like this from me. “Maybe I let you grow too much... I need to regroup. Threats like you need to be weeded out.”

After saying these ominous words, his body crumbled.

This is strange. These past six times, he immediately regenerated, but I don't sense him doing that now. Is he trying to run?!

If I didn't kill him here, the tides of battle would turn again. I didn't have enough mana to continue fighting, but on the other hand, at any moment Grim could order all the members of Chaos Raid to come after me. I understood his intent, but now that Grim was just a soul, I had no way of tracking him. The magecraft he used wasn't anything I was familiar with.

"I'll lend you a hand, Mr. Abel."

It was then I heard a familiar voice: Cain. Apparently, he'd come running here, sensing my fight.

"Gotcha."

As soon as Cain muttered those cryptic words, I sensed that where I thought there was nothing, he'd caught something with a dull outline.

"You can see souls?" I asked.

"Yep. I told you, didn't I? He's the same kind of mage as me. I've already learned the magecraft he uses."

I fell silent, surprised. To start with, I'd always thought Cain was more talented than me in Ashen Eye magecraft, but Cain's potential for growth was exceptional.

"And now it's all over," Cain said, crushing his hand into a fist, making the silhouette he'd caught fade.

So he crushed his soul? Looks like Grim can't regenerate anymore.

"It looks like you can see souls too, Mr. Abel," Cain remarked.

"Not as clearly as you."

I'd just barely been able to see the shape of Grim's soul after Cain had caught it. But Cain had most likely been able to see it in detail.

"The most important thing is to love the dead like you would your neighbor, Mr. Abel."

Good grief. You really like saying nonsense. Ashen Eye magecraft was far more

intricate than other magecraft, and was overall more difficult to use. Even for me, there were many mysteries.

But as soon as I thought that, something strange happened.

Hm? Why's it so noisy at the base?

The emergency siren was going off, making a loud racket.

“Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, Sir!” Ayane ran over, pale.

“What happened?”

Ayane was always all over the place, but she seemed even more panicked today than usual. “The base’s emergency self-destruct switched on! The entire place is gonna blow to smithereens in a few minutes!”

Hm? Why? If I’m not mishearing things, she just said something pretty dangerous.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“Right, let me explain,” Ayane said. “So, I was curious about something once and hacked into the security magecraft program. What I figured out is apparently, in the event the person in charge of the base dies, the whole base is rigged to blow! It’s to destroy evidence!”

I see. We’ve secretly accepted requests from the government. To keep things under wraps, they did this in order to prevent an information leak. It was their fail-safe to make sure that all the evidence never saw the light of day.

“This isn’t good. I wonder if something happened to the person in charge...” Ayane said.

Said person in charge is in a nearby mound of sand... But there’s no time for explanations. I’ll do that later.

“Um, Ms. Ayane, I’m pretty sure hacking into the hideout’s system is forbidden,” Cain added.

“Well then keep it a secret! It was a sudden impulse! I was just curious!”

Ayane made it sound so easy, but the security here was no joke. It wasn’t so simple a task to hack it.

Hm. I might have underestimated her abilities a bit. She might possess a higher talent than me for using Obsidian Eye magecraft to process information.

But we no longer had time to chat. We were approaching the time limit. It seemed that the mana energy was rapidly building up, and it was primed to explode.

“Let’s go, you two.”

Staying here would only get us caught up in the blast. For now, it was better if we all fled, and quickly.

“Huh? Go? Where?” Cain asked, confused.

It seemed that since he was still young, Cain had yet to develop a sense of self-awareness. At any rate, killing our direct superior meant that we didn’t have a place in Chaos Raid anymore. Most likely, we’d be branded as traitors.

“Anywhere but here,” I said.

We then started running towards an uncertain future. I wasn’t sure what awaited us, but I doubted it’d be peaceful. Even so, no matter what obstacles were ahead, I was sure that, with Cain and Ayane at my side, I’d be able to get past it. That was the one thing the three of us truly believed in.



After that, we successfully escaped from Chaos Raid, and were free. From there on out, Cain, Ayane, and I set forth on our journey which would eventually lead to the defeat of the Demon King, but that wouldn’t happen until much later.

Chapter 10

Versus Ayane

Upon reuniting with Cain after two hundred years apart, I was now heading towards a certain place—what Cain mentioned as the place of our memories. I was sure that it was at Gensokyo, where the Chaos Raid base had been.

The journey from Midgard was far, and perilous, so I borrowed a dragon from the school named Leonhart. I'd met him previously when I visited the Dragon Riding Research Society. He'd warmed up to me, so I figured he'd be good to use in a hurry like this. After a long bout of flying, the location finally came into view.

"Thanks, Leo. You can drop me off here."

From here on out, this was my own personal battlefield. I wasn't about to let someone like Leonhart—someone with no relation to this—get caught up in this battle.

"Gyuooooar!"

Am I just imagining things? It kind of looks like this old dragon is reluctant to leave.

But either way, a little while after I parted with Leo, a familiar scene came into view.

Wow, this is nostalgic.

Though so much time had passed, Gensokyo hadn't changed at all. After I walked for a bit through the forest, an abandoned building came into view: the old Chaos Raid hideout. Most likely due to the effect of the explosion, its exterior looked very run-down.

"Took you long enough, Sir."

Hm. Looks like there's already someone in there. It's Ayane, huh? I don't think

Cain's nearby.

She seemed poised to intercept me by herself.

"Move. I have no reason to fight you," I said.

How is she still alive?

I had no way of knowing the answer to that, but since Cain was still alive, I could come up with a guess. Most likely, Cain had used some sleazy Ashen Eye magecraft to extend her life.

"Heh heh. You sure about that? You're not getting past here without beating me first," Ayane said.

Hm. Doesn't look like I can just chat with her. Ayane was an Obsidian-Eyed mage. Usually, their role was to support others from behind. They weren't especially well suited for one-on-one battles. There was no reason why she would ever get a leg up on me.

"Now that I think about it, I don't think I've shown you my serious magecraft," Ayane said.

Hm. It's true. I've never really seen her fighting seriously. But also, she mostly occupied a support role, and has never really been on the front lines.

"Activating Magecraft Equation: Release All Mana!" Ayane shouted.

In the next minute, a complicated magecraft equation appeared above the floor of the building.

I can tell that I'm already in her territory.

Ayane continued. "Activate Barrier Magecraft: Shikigami Domain!"

Hm. She's right. I've never seen this magecraft before.

This was a unique magecraft, one that Ayane had developed herself.

"All right, it's experiment time!" Ayane eerily grinned.

In the next moment, it was like my surroundings had been doused in ink.

This is a pretty large Barrier Magecraft. This might be my first time seeing a barrier of this scale. It had most likely taken a few days to prepare.

“All my shikigami in this area have souls, and will hit with a hundred percent accuracy. Think you can deal with me when I’m serious, Sir?”

If all attacks will hit without fail, then this Barrier Magecraft is probably similar to my Infinite Domain Magecraft. Well, Ayane, show me what you got.

“Shikigami Magecraft, Second Form: Crane!”

As soon as Ayane said this, many bird-shaped shikigamis appeared. I’d seen this magecraft even two hundred years ago, but their shape seemed even more lifelike than before.



“Thousand Crane Formation!”

There are a lot of them—at least several thousand. Before I knew it, they completely surrounded me.

“Fire all rounds!”

Receiving their orders, the shikigami began flying at me all at once. I surrounded my feet in wind mana and started dodging their attacks.

“That’s not gonna work! There’s no getting away from them!” she jeered.

I see. In this barrier, each shikigami has their own will, and each one will endlessly pursue their target. It doesn’t look like she was bluffing when she said that they all would hit with a hundred percent accuracy.

“Activate Barrier Magecraft: Inverse Barrier!” I said.

If my opponent was using Barrier Magecraft, then I just had to use Barrier Magecraft of my own. Decision made, I reflected her attack with my Inverse Barrier Magecraft.

“That’s not gonna work! You can’t beat me in this barrier!” Ayane said confidently.

I see. The annoying part about this barrier isn’t just the shikigami endlessly tracking me. There’s no point in deflecting their attacks.

Ayane’s attacks relied on origami as its medium, which meant that she could summon an unlimited amount of shikigami in this barrier. It’d be difficult to continue dodging her attacks forever. The moment I realized this, I was cornered.

There was a loud bang as the shikigami that’d come into contact with me exploded. It was the same as before; Ayane’s shikigamis were rigged to explode.

“That’s some monstrous defensive barrier ability you have, Sir. Can’t even say I’m surprised.”

At the very last second, I just barely defended against the attack, but if this kept going, I’d be in trouble. In the blaze from the explosion, she continued to summon shikigami.

“Shikigami Magecraft, Sixth Form: Mole!”

Hm. First, she attacks me from the sky, now from the ground?

It seemed that she’d stopped trying to break through my defenses and instead launched a frontal attack on me. I immediately activated Body Fortification Magecraft, but I couldn’t fully block the damage. Though I was able to avoid being critically hurt, I’d taken some blunt damage to both my legs.

“Shikigami Magecraft, Eighth Form: Poison Bees!”

Good grief. It seems that inside this barrier, the caster can always control the flow of the battle.

I was impressed, plain and simple. Though Obsidian Eye magecraft wasn’t really geared towards battle, she used it to its maximum potential. Among Obsidian-Eyed mages, there hadn’t been a single one who could go toe to toe with me. I wasn’t sure why, but there was something strange about all this.

I get the feeling that the Ayane I know is different from the Ayane I’m fighting right now.

Right then, a memory from the past flashed through my head.



A few years after I’d left Chaos Raid, I’d ended up being brought on to join the group of people who’d later be known as the Great Four on their journey to defeat the Demon King of Twilight. Back then, demons were boastful of their great power, and to humans, were the ultimate symbol of fear.

Yet demons were just barely able to coexist with humans, for no other reason than the fact that they weren’t a monolith, and each demon primarily acted on their own. But everything changed once the one called the Demon King of Twilight came into existence. Under him, all demons came together as one organization and began pushing humans into a corner. The hearsay back then was that humanity was at a huge disadvantage.

But as if to reverse that opinion, our party steadily made progress. Before we knew it, people began calling us heroes, and looked to us for hope. When we got close to the Demon King’s castle, our battle with the demons intensified. In

what would later be known as the Grand Quartz Battle, a sudden mortal combat began between us and the Demon King's army.

"Ha ha ha! You weak humans! Feel the true strength of demons!"

The demon standing in front of us was named Guilltina, and worked at the Demon King's side as his tactician. Today, he was riding on the shoulder of one of his giant demons while looking down at us.

"Crumble in despair, heroes!"

At his order, the giant demon swung his hand down towards the ground, and when it made contact, the earth shook, cracks formed, and sent fissures all around us.

"Abel!"

"Sir!"

My comrades screamed in worry. *I see. The enemy's aim is to split us up.* Thanks to Guilltina's machinations, I'd been separated from the rest of the party.

After a little bit of time had passed after Guilltina's plan had separated our party, I heard someone calling out my name.

"Sir... Sir!"

Who is it? It's too dark.

"Oh wait! Maybe this is my chance!"

Oh. This stupid-sounding voice belongs to Ayane.

She'd been a fellow member at Chaos Raid, but after it fell apart, there were a lot of twists and turns, and she ended up accompanying our Hero Party frequently.

"Time for a kissy kiss!"

When I opened my eyes, I saw Ayane's gross lips getting closer to my face. Sensing the danger of them making contact, I flicked her on the forehead.

"Gaaah!" she screamed as she rolled away from the force, skirt and all. "Sir! What are you doing to a young maiden like me?!"

Hm. As usual, she's got a sturdy body and mentality. If she's this energetic, then I don't think I have to worry about her.

"Ayane, give me a report on the situation." At this point, the first priority was confirming the state of things.

"Hmph! Don't go all serious mode on me so quickly! It seems that due to that huge demon's attack, the Hero Party's been separated. Apparently there was a teleportation barrier set underneath the ground. Maria, Daytona, and Cain were all sent to different areas."

I see. That old general got one on us. Each of us had a magecraft we were proficient at, and by working together, we could take down demons. In other words, now that we were split, our chances of victory were slimmer.

"By the way, I've been wondering this, but did I lose consciousness?" I asked.

"No, you were simply put to sleep," Ayane replied. "It's not like you to be so careless, Sir," she added.

I fell silent, not having any words in response. She was right. I couldn't believe that I'd been put to sleep during a battle.

"You work too hard, Sir. You should rest a bit or you won't last the entire battle."

It's true that I've been fighting to my limits a lot recently. Maybe after getting wrapped up in this teleportation barrier, my body decided to switch to sleep mode.

"My shikigami, Chirpy, found a village nearby. How about we take a break there before we meet up with Maria and the rest?" Ayane suggested.

Chirpy was a bird-type shikigami that Ayane had made. She mostly used Chirpy for scouting from the sky.

"Sorry, but it doesn't look like we have the time to take things so leisurely."

"Huh?"

This isn't a human's presence. It's obviously a demon that bears us ill will.

"Wha— That's—!"

Ayane noticed what was going on after I did. Looking up into the sky, we saw what was known as the dragon platoon—the Demon King’s strongest forces. There were easily over twenty demons screaming at us from above.

“I’ve been counting the days until we could meet, black cat!”

The one flying at the front was an evil dragon, one whose body was over three meters long.

“The rest of you take on the girl,” the dragon ordered his underlings. “Don’t mess up!”

“Yes, Sir!”

It seemed that the forces he brought were split into two, with their leader focused on me and the rest of the small fry focused on Ayane.



Fighting Zeke two hundred years ago had been extremely difficult, a match of unprecedented proportions. At the time, he and his lackeys had been known as the strongest of the Demon King’s army—the highly revered Dragon Battalion. As their leader, Zeke was in a league of his own, more powerful than any of the demons I’d faced up until then.

“Hmph...not bad. Never did I even dream that there’d be a *human* who could match me,” Zeke spat.

The battle had been a constant back and forth, but without a doubt, I’d been the one in control. Despite that, his regenerative abilities were as strong as ever, and I was in a tough spot.

“Urk... I’m in a bit of a pickle too, Sir, even with how amazing I am.”

It seemed that Ayane was having trouble too, due to the incredible amount of enemies she was against. Though they were all small fry, handling over twenty demons alone was backbreaking work.

“Heh heh, I know you humans’ real weakness,” Zeke said cryptically, before constructing a large-scale magecraft.

Is he trying to end this battle in one attack?

“Black Spear!”

Upon Zeke chanting the spell, thousands of black spears appeared in the sky.

“Think you can survive this?” Zeke taunted.

I see. It's powerful magecraft, but not something that'll stop me.

There was a loud, sharp whoosh as the spears rained down from above. Though I was able to dodge them, I couldn't help but find it strange that despite how powerful the attack was, it didn't feel like he was trying to kill me. Instead, it was as if he was trying to distract me.

Then it hit me. His attack wasn't meant for me.

His cryptic words from before flashed through my mind, and it became clear that he wasn't aiming for me at all—his target all along had been Ayane.

By the time I turned around, it was already too late. One of the spears shot towards her, incredibly fast, and since she was so busy fighting off all the other demons, she had no idea.

The sickening sound of tearing flesh filled the air as the spear pierced through her back.

“Wh-Wha...” A surprised sound escaped Ayane as her blood splashed on the ground, a pool of red spreading at her feet.

“The weakness of a human is their heart,” Zeke declared. “How does it feel to see your comrade killed in front of you? You can't even construct magecraft properly anymore, can you?”

I don't have a clear memory of what happened after that. All I can recall is a blind rage that I'd never felt before.

“Th-This isn't possible! How am I being pushed back by a mere human?!”

This was the last line from Zeke, one that I could just barely remember. His hubris didn't allow him to accept failure. It was a pathetic ending for him.

“Shut up,” I said, after I had defeated him.

I didn't have the time to keep fighting him and deal with his regenerative abilities, so instead I sealed him away. But I was still too late to do anything for

Ayane. I ran over to her, but her body had already gone cold, her soul starting to leave her body. At this point, even using Revival Magecraft wouldn't have been able to bring her back.

A time before Chaos Raid came to mind, of when I lived in the sewers—the day I found the corpses of my friends. All of them dead, mercilessly killed by Haoran, a foreign mage.

“Again... I couldn't protect anyone again...”

Something like a fog clouded my eyes. It was as if all my emotions had been kept in a bucket, filling it to the brim, and that bucket had just been violently kicked over. I could distantly sense that I'd broken down crying.



After that, I have no idea how long I held Ayane's cold body for.

“Mr. Abel... What...” Cain said as he came running over, most likely after finishing his own battle. He understood the situation at once.

“You've been through a lot, Mr. Abel,” he said sympathetically. “But it's okay. I'll erase these memories for you. After all, you're not meant to stop here. You're supposed to become stronger than anyone else,” he said mysteriously, placing his hand on my head and activating his magecraft as I listlessly knelt on the ground.

In my current emotional state, I'd more likely be a burden during our fight with the Demon King than anything else. Before I knew it, my consciousness had faded to black.



Oh. I finally remember. This entire time, something had been nagging at me—why hadn't Ayane been counted as one of the Great Four, despite having traveled with us? Because she'd died during our travels. And it'd all been because of my own weakness.

“Shikigami Magecraft, Ninth Form: Spider!”

In the next moment, Ayane had restrained my limbs with her shikigami's spider's silk. The magecraft it used didn't seem especially strong, but its true

purpose was to slow its target.

“Shikigami Magecraft, Finale: Dragon!”

I see. This is Ayane’s ace in the hole. It’s a very well-constructed Dragon Shikigami. It was over ten meters long, and I was almost certain that it’d be impossible to avoid getting hurt, no matter what Defensive Magecraft I used.

“Checkmate, Sir! Any last words?”

Last words, huh? Yeah, I’ve got a few. If this is the real Ayane, then I don’t think there are enough words in the world to convey everything I want to say to her.

“You’re not the real Ayane, are you?” I locked eyes with her and asked this explosive question.

“Huh...? Are you okay? I’m me—bona fide, good ol’ Ayane. Nobody else would be able to corner you like this!”

It’s true that the person before me is a perfect recreation of the Ayane I knew, down to her appearance, voice, and magecraft. The accuracy is frightening. I’m honestly surprised that it’s possible to even recreate someone this faithfully.

“Don’t lie anymore. The real Ayane wasn’t this weak.”

“Heh heh. You trying to knock me off my game? Not happening! I always keep my cool. The person who used to chase you, always trying to catch up—I’m not her anymore.”

It makes sense that a fake wouldn’t openly admit that they’re anything but the real, genuine person. No more talking, I guess.

“Is that so? Then how about I give you some proof,” I said.

After analyzing her magecraft, I used Negation Magecraft to get rid of it. It’d taken quite a bit of time, but I’d succeeded at the very last second.

My Negation Magecraft activated, and at once her barrier broke as if a glass shattered, resulting in all the shikigami she’d been commanding reverting back to regular origami.

“What? How...?”

Seeing all of her magecraft be negated morphed her face with disbelief. This hadn't been in her calculations at all. In order to use Negation Magecraft, one needed to be able to perfectly analyze their opponent's spell and then create the exact inverse magecraft of it. Such a thing was usually impossible if one was seeing a spell for the first time.

"I know every last bit of your magecraft. After all, I've watched you for more than a decade."

I knew everything, from how her magecraft was composed down to her bad habits. She was the comrade I'd spent the most time with in my past life, and that was exactly why I could analyze her Shikigami Barrier at an unbelievable speed.

"Sorry Ayane. Thank you for everything."

If Ayane had still been alive, this was what I'd most wanted to tell her. But that was a wish that couldn't be granted. The real Ayane had been killed without a chance for me to say anything, not even goodbye.

"Really? *Now* you say that? That's not fair...Sir."

Maybe it was just my imagination, but I could've sworn I heard Ayane mutter something, tears in her eyes.

Soon after her body cracked, crumbling into dust that disappeared into the wind.

Hm. It seems that I didn't even need to attack her.

The weakness of a perfectly created imposter was that if they realized that they weren't the real person, it'd create a paradox too powerful for them to survive.

Chapter 11

Versus Cain

I wasn't sure why, but even after winning the battle, I didn't feel the least bit happy. I felt empty inside. Even though it hadn't been the actual Ayane, in all other regards, she'd still been herself. That's why all I felt was emptiness.

"Well done, Mr. Abel."

A little bit after Ayane's body disappeared, I heard Cain's familiar voice. He must've been watching our battle from somewhere.

"She was the strongest of all the dolls I've made so far—a masterpiece. What'd you think? Did you have a good time?"

As usual, he has zero emotional intelligence. "From the bottom of my heart, I can say it was incredibly unpleasant. Looks like you're still into playing with dolls," I remarked.

"Yep! And thanks to that, I've only gotten better. Wow, this really brings me back. I remember when you first complimented me on my Necromancy Magecraft."

When we first met, one of the first things Cain could do was control the dead with his magecraft. The reason that he'd been invited to join Chaos Raid in the first place had been because the polish of the magecraft had been so exceptional.

"Take a look at my collection! I'm sure you'll be happy!" Cain said with pride, before putting his hand on the ground and activating his Ashen Eye magecraft.

He was using the ground to create new dolls. *This is the Necromancy that he's so good at, huh?* The new dolls he was making had familiar faces.

Good grief. I never thought that I'd come face-to-face with these people now. It's been two hundred years.

Cain had made three individuals: Roy, Maria, and Daytona—the very same people that I’d traveled with so long ago.

“Sorry, Abel, but could you die? It’s for world peace,” Roy said.

“I challenge you, Abel! I’ll show you how strong I’ve gotten!” exclaimed Maria.

“I think it’s time you get a hard lesson!” added Daytona.

This development really irked me. The three dolls he’d made had the exact same appearance, voice, and personalities of their originals from two hundred years ago.

“How stupid,” I said.

I immediately activated magecraft to immobilize my enemies, creating a barrier of gravity using Obsidian Eye magecraft. The three of them grunted with surprise, but I wasn’t going to show them any mercy. After all, they were just dolls. I wasn’t interested in experiencing any more of this farce. In the next moment, no sooner than they’d sprouted out of the ground, they’d been crushed to pieces and returned to it.

“Aw, that’s not a very nice thing to do to your precious comrades,” Cain said.

What a disingenuous guy. The fact that he’d been able to so faithfully recreate them meant that he’d taken their corpses and tampered with them—more precisely, extracted their genetic data. I had no way of knowing if the three of them had died of natural causes or if Cain had murdered them. But trying to discuss the ethics of it all was probably pointless.

“Mind if I ask? Why are you trying to anger me?” I said.

“Hm? No real reason. I just wanna play with you,” he said, flippant and intentionally inflammatory. “Like I said before, I completed my Immortality Magecraft. But the price I had to pay for eternity was an unquenchable monotony. In a world without you, I’ve just been so bored.”

Such ego. But, thinking about it, he’s always been like this. Though our party’s objective had been to defeat the Demon Lord, Cain had always been the only one with a different objective.

“Let’s talk about the past a bit—about everything I’ve seen in this world up

until now,” Cain said. Admittedly, this had been something I’d been a little curious about. Cain had used Immortality Magecraft to stay alive all this time, and so, he had a first-person’s account on all the history that’d transpired. “After you activated your Reincarnation Magecraft, all that was waiting was a long civil war between humans.”

As Cain talked, images began appearing in front of my eyes. I’d heard about the war he was referring to. Two hundred years ago, the Great Four defeated the Demon King of Twilight who’d ruled the world, and brought peace. But problems arose almost as soon as that’d happened. In the aftermath it was unclear how the land once singularly ruled by the Demon King would be divided, eventually resulting in the humans devolving into civil war. The war lasted for a century, and resulted in a great number of victims.

“I grew to loathe humans from the bottom of my heart,” Cain said. “Can you blame me? The Hero Party didn’t save the world so that we could witness humans fight each other so shamefully.”

A part of me sympathized. The number of victims in the civil war vastly outnumbered those who’d lost their lives during the Demon King of Twilight’s rule. Saving the world only for it to immediately fall back into chaos...I had complicated feelings about that.

“That’s why I turned every important person in the world into my own doll. I did it to stop the war—so I could realize my goal of a truly peaceful world.”

Hm. This is the first time I’m hearing about this. But, in a way, it makes sense. Cain could manipulate the dead with his magecraft, so it was completely possible for him to control every politician in the world.

“Humans are fundamentally idiotic creatures. No matter what, they repeat mistakes of the past. Despite being haughty and powerless, it’s the selfish ones whose voices are the loudest. I hate it.”

Most likely, Cain was saying these words from a sincere and heartfelt place; as someone who’d been raised by demons after his family had been killed, he held values that normal people couldn’t comprehend.

“Mr. Abel, I have a proposal... Would you help recreate the world with me? In my ideal world, even Amber-Eyed mages wouldn’t be discriminated against,” he

said. His eyes held the same pure innocence that he had as a child.

Recreating the world, huh? I'm not interested in that at all. Cain saw this entire world the same way he'd seen everything since he was a kid—as a toy to be played with.

"No thanks. I have no reason to work with you," I said.

All I wanted was to live a peaceful life. Even if his goal was to make a peaceful world, I couldn't approve of the lengths he'd go to in order to accomplish that.

"I see," Cain replied. "In that case, you leave me no choice. You'll be the last one of my *friends*, Mr. Abel."

Good grief. Doesn't look like there's a way for us to avoid fighting each other.

"Come. I'll play with you, after all this time."

Negotiations have failed. As his mentor, it's my job to properly educate this foolish pupil of mine.



“Heh heh. I knew you’d say that,” he said, the same innocent smile on his face while he began composing his magecraft.

Cain was an Ashen-Eyed mage. Among all the magecraft he was proficient with, controlling the dead was what he was best at. There wasn’t anyone else alive who could claim they were better than him at that.

At once, Cain revived Roy, despite Roy having been crushed by gravity just seconds earlier. *What a fast revival rate.*

“How rude, Abel. I guess I was right about expelling you from the party,” Roy said. “Tempest!”

Roy used the highest difficulty Wind Magecraft, causing violent, sharp blades of wind to fly towards me, gouging out the ground upon contact.

“I’m gonna fight too! We’re the only ones who can stop Abel!” Maria said.

“Just you wait, Abel! I’m gonna help open your eyes!” said Daytona.

In the next moment, both Maria and Daytona revived as well, and then proceeded to use their best magecrafts.

“Flare Buster!” shouted Maria.

“Snow World!” shouted Daytona.

It was a barrage of powerful fire and ice, combining to create a large explosion around me.

How annoying. It looks like Cain can pretty much perfectly copy their combat abilities from when they were alive. Two hundred years ago, the three of them were each weaker than I was. But in return, they were each better at their respective eye magecraft than me.

“Gungnir!”

That being said, I won’t let this battle be so one-sided that I’m always on the defense. So I used a Crimson Eye magecraft, Gungnir, which was of all Crimson Eye magecraft the hardest to compose. I’d made it to be the fastest and most powerful version possible.

“Inferno Blade!” Maria said, casting her next magecraft—a colossal blade of

fire.

In the next moment, Maria cut my attack apart with it.

“Whaddya think of my magecraft?” she asked.

This is getting rough. There wasn’t anyone better than Maria when it came to Crimson Eye magecraft. It was only natural that I’d be at a disadvantage if I tried to compete with her by using the same type of magecraft.

“Heh heh. I know your weakness, Mr. Abel. It’s actually the fatal flaw of Amber-Eyed mages—generalists—like you,” Cain said.

My weakness, huh? It’s not something I want to admit, but it’s true that special cases like this make it more apparent.

As an Amber-Eyed mage, I could use all the elements, but never at a level as strong as someone who specialized in that area. If, for example, Maria could produce a Fire Magecraft at a hundred percent, I could only get to about ninety percent at best. The same went for everyone else.

Inferior Eyes, huh? Now that I think about it, that name hits the nail on the head. I was a jack-of-all-trades, but compared to the respective eye users, a master of none.

“Now, Mr. Abel, it’s time for you to become my next *friend*.”

Cain’s ultimate goal seemed to be killing me and then keeping me by his side as a doll. As a mage who excelled at controlling corpses, he could easily remove my memories from my corpse and control me as he wished, just like the three heroes here.

“How stupid,” I scoffed.

Now then. I’m ready for my counterattack. In the next moment, I activated the magecraft I’d set up in advance. The second that it activated, the three dolls froze.

“What are you doing?! He’s right there!” Cain screamed, not having expected that his dolls would stop moving. It was the first time in a very long time that I’d seen him so riled up.

“Huh? What am I...” Maria trailed off.

“What’s happening...? We’re friends. Why are we fighting?” Daytona asked.

The magecraft I used wasn’t one that dealt damage to the opponent. After all, I was sure that whatever injury I dealt, Cain could immediately heal it.

“I see... You’re manipulating their memories with magecraft? Not bad,” Cain said.

Bingo. I figured this out when I fought Ayane. The dolls that Cain had created were perfect replicas, but their fatal flaw was when they realized the paradox of their existence. It seemed that he’d manipulated their memories to view me as an enemy, but I used magecraft to return them to their senses.

“Ugh... What were we doing?” Roy groaned.

Their senses now returned, they couldn’t keep their identities intact for too long. It was the weakness of these fakes. Once a doll couldn’t maintain its sense of self, it’d fall apart on its own.

“Well done, Mr. Abel. This is why I revere you so much! You’re the only one who can cure my boredom!” Despite the dolls he’d made crumbling right before his eyes, Cain still spoke as if he was in complete control of the situation.

“How long are you gonna act like you’ve got nothing to worry about? It’s your turn to disappear,” I said, pointing the blade I’d made at him.

Honestly, all this time I’d felt guilty; two hundred years ago, it was I who had been unable to guide him down the right path.

“Heh heh. Fine, then. Allow me to show you the difference in strength between us after two hundred years,” Cain said. He eerily smiled as his right arm began transforming into an odd shape.

I’m sure of it. His arm has the same presence as the demons we fought two hundred years ago.

“I’ve achieved my ultimate, ideal body!” Cain declared, brandishing his strangely shaped arm.

He’s fast. Ashen-Eyed mages were proficient at healing themselves as well as using Body Fortification. They were known as the second strongest mages after Amber-Eyed mages because they were able to utilize both offensive and

defensive magecraft.

But this level of attack is something I can easily deal with. I effortlessly cut off his hand with my blade. Yet in the next moment, a surprising thing happened. Despite being sure that I'd cut it off, it regenerated instantly.

"Not bad, but how about if I attack like this?!" Cain exclaimed.

Hm. Now his left arm is changing? It's a lot more concentrated of an attack than before. I realized it'd be difficult to withstand it with Body Fortification Magecraft alone.

It's best if I end this with one quick strike. I surrounded my feet with Wind Magecraft to slip past Cain's attack and then swung my blade, scoring a critical hit from his shoulders to his torso, slicing through bone and all. For a human, this kind of hit would normally spell their end, but despite being dealt a fatal blow, Cain immediately regenerated.

"I see. So this won't work either? You really are a monster on the battlefield as always, Mr. Abel."

Good grief. You're calling me the monster? That's like the pot calling the kettle black. Cain was using the most basic Ashen Eye magecraft, Heal, to completely regenerate his severed body.

"I guess it's time for me to get a little serious," Cain said, creepy smile still in place as black wings sprouted from his back.

Hm. Most likely, Cain inserted demon cells into his own body. Every time he released more of his power, Cain's figure slowly shifted further from a human's.



What ensued between me and Cain was a life-and-death battle. At present, the two of us were evenly matched, but no matter what attack I landed on him, Cain immediately regenerated. I couldn't land a single decisive blow.

"I told you, didn't I? I completed Immortality Magecraft. All your attacks are useless against me!"

It's true. Defeating Cain will take a backbreaking amount of work. He had extremely powerful Healing Magecraft. The addition of demon cells additionally

granted him bottomless self-regenerative abilities. If I was able to activate my Infinite Domain as I'd done with Zeke, then all his regeneration would become negligible, but the barrier took too long to compose. It wasn't a magecraft that could be completed unless the opponent was taken by surprise. Since Cain had already seen it before, it wouldn't work on him.

"Let's get to the finale!" Cain said, taking the initiative to kick things up a notch.

His attacks became faster. It was clear that he was trying to end things quickly.

"And...now I've caught you," he said.

I couldn't believe how fierce his attacks were. His speed was unreal, and with his countless arms, I couldn't continue to dodge him. He'd inevitably caught me between his transformed hands.

"Don't fret. It only hurts for a second. But since you'll be able to live with me forever, it'll be totally worth it!" Cain said.

I see. He really thinks that he's surpassed me with this attack.

But during his bout of confidence, my body crumbled to dirt.

"This... This is my magecraft!" he exclaimed.

That's right. This is the same magecraft he used to create those dolls from the ground. Granted, I mimicked it on the fly with barely any time to analyze or practice it, so it took me everything I had just to make it in my likeness.

Regardless, it still gave me the opening I needed to get behind him and begin my counterattack with my blade.

"It's pointless! That won't work on me!" Cain shouted.

You think so? I'm fully aware that cutting you only buys me some time, but won't lead to victory.

"Absolute Blizzard!" I said.

With that in mind, I used the strongest magecraft from the Azure-Eyed repertoire: Absolute Blizzard. Unfortunately for him, my objective wasn't to cut him into bits—it was to inflict necrosis onto his cells.

“Urk... This magecraft...” he groaned.

Hm. Looks like it’s finally kicking in.

Once a body’s internal temperature is lowered past a certain degree, its cells will begin to die. This rule was universal, and applied to all creatures. It didn’t matter how amazing one’s regenerative capacity was if I destroyed their cells entirely. With his body’s temperature lowered to a hundred below freezing, Cain’s body itself began to crack.

“It’s over, Cain.”

Ever since reincarnating into this world, I’d been racked with guilt that I couldn’t teach Cain anything important. But now, I could stop him from the wrong course he’d set out on. All I’d learned from the modern world had, at some point, become priceless knowledge.

“Burning Bullet!” I said.

By heating the rapidly freezing cells, one could completely eradicate them. Since my magecraft couldn’t compete with specialists who’d honed their skills, I relied on my strength as a generalist to be able to use *all* types of magecraft—together.

“Urk... I underestimated you... This is your strength, Mr. Abel?!”

These were Cain’s last words as he turned to ash.

Well then. This is the important part. I’m sure that killing Cain won’t actually kill him for good. I knew that better than anyone.

“I’ll have to use my trump card...” I heard Cain’s voice from somewhere, and in the next moment, the world shook.

There was a large, fearsome explosion of mana. The ground began to split to the point that even simply standing became almost impossible. The rubble that was strewn around began to start flying at me. I knew that Cain, being reduced to nothing but a soul, was using his final attack.

Even after losing his physical body, as long as he still had his soul, he could revive as many times as necessary. It was the same as my old enemy, Grim. Most likely, he was using this as a way to buy time so he could move to a new

body.

There you are. After looking hard, I saw a dimly glowing shape.

Suddenly, Cain's past words played in my head. *Treating the dead as if they're your neighbors, huh? Good grief. Without even realizing it, I've really grown as a mage.* It seemed that I'd finally become able to see human souls despite not being able to in the past.

"Rest in peace for eternity, Cain,"

I kicked off the unstable ground, dodging the rubble flying at me until I got close to his soul and cut it in two. I could feel my blade slice through his soul.

Magecraft had a lot of intricacies, and Cain's past advice had come in handy. It seemed that by raising my abilities as an Ashen-Eyed mage, I became able to interact with the world of the dead in a way that I'd never been able to previously.

"Impossible... How could I...lose?!"

Even if Cain was an Ashen-Eyed prodigy, after losing both his body and soul, he had no more tricks up his sleeve. The outline of his soul that I'd split in two began to fade.

"No... How could I lose?! I should have gained the ultimate body! This isn't possible!!!" Cain screamed, his death throes becoming faint echoes as he faded away.

Goodbye, Cain. You went down the wrong path. I should've guided you down the right one sooner.

Finally, I understood why I reincarnated two hundred years into the future. Cain was by far the most talented of all the mages I'd raised, but also the biggest calamity. Stopping his rampage was the biggest duty I had in the modern age. With this, I'd successfully laid my past regrets to rest.

Epilogue

My Daily Life Afterwards

I'd like to talk about what happened after defeating Cain. A few days passed and the impact of his death turned out to be far greater than I'd expected. With him gone, the world was thrown into chaos for a while.

There were headlines topping the newsstands such as *"Members of Churdrea's Government Missing with No Leads!"*

I guess Cain wasn't lying about having people in places of power. As a result of Cain dying, the people he'd made living corpses of—the people who conveniently controlled the world—disappeared. Now, everyone else was trying to deal with the fallout. I didn't think Cain was a saint or anything, but I could see how ironic it was that the world enjoyed such a long era of peace while I was reincarnating. Now that his grip on the world had disappeared though, I had no doubt that the next two hundred years would be a trying time for humans.

But there was no use crying over spilled milk. No matter what difficulties awaited us in the future, I was confident that it'd be better than Cain's world—where peace was only an illusion.



It's been five years since I defeated Cain, and it was now early spring, contrary to the currently chilly weather. As I walked down the path to school, the sight of cherry blossoms in full bloom accompanied me, and I was reminded of both meetings and farewells.

"Congratulations on your graduation, Abel," Emerson said. "Let's have a grand celebration for your new path!"

I graduated from Arthlia Academy of Magecraft without any issues, and, currently, Emerson was putting a crown of flowers upon my head.

Graduation, huh? To be honest, it doesn't really feel like it at all. But that mostly had to do with the fact that starting from second year, I had earned the right to be exempt from classes, and since then had holed myself up in the school's research facilities.

"Heh heh. Now that you've graduated, maybe calling you by your first name is a little disrespectful. How would you feel about me calling you *President* from now on?" Emerson asked.

"Pass."

I'd founded a new company while I was still a student at the academy. In order to earn money in peacetime, the fastest way was to make my own company. I'd long since realized that I wasn't suited to work under the instructions of others. Now that I'd graduated, I planned to make my way in the world as the president of my small company.

"How's the progress of the project?" I asked.

In a truly lamentable development, this creepy guy had become my business partner. I'd had multiple ideas for new Regalias, but as a student, it was impossible to mass manufacture them myself. In the end I decided to partner with Chronos so that I could put out my products to the world.

"Heh heh. Thanks to your help, we're getting tons of preorders. I knew you had it in you to become the best Regalia inventor in the world Abel. If my predictions are correct, when this product hits the markets, the status quo will be turned on its head!"

Our current project was the joint development between my company and Chronos of a new kind of communications device.

"However, I *highly* recommend that you change the name of the product as soon as possible. 'Cellular communications display with built-in touch panel' is way too technical a name! From a marketing perspective it's completely ridiculous!" Emerson exclaimed.

"I don't care," I replied. "None of that concerns me. Just make up something for all I care."

When I was thinking of a new Regalia to make, the first thing that came to

mind was a communications device. There were already various models in the world, but all of them were too unwieldy to be portable, and as a result weren't widely used. The cellular communications display with built-in touch panel was an improved version of current communications devices that also solved their existing problems. And on top of that, this new Regalia had functions that the other communication devices simply didn't have. Individuals using this Regalia could access information they couldn't previously. If this device was spread across the world, I was thinking that it might be possible to even ease the prejudice against Amber-Eyed individuals...at least a little.

"Oh, by the way, Elon wanted me to tell you that though it's a bit early, he wants you to start working on the next version of the product. Apparently, preorders of the current model are already being sold out."

Elon was the very same vice president of Chronos who I'd fought previously during the school trip. He'd since been promoted to the representative of Chronos. The previous representative had apparently disappeared around the same time Cain had. I could make a guess as to what really happened, but decided not to pry.

"With all that out of the way, let's get down to the nuts and bolts! I've already compiled all the features I think Version 2 should have," Emerson said, smacking down a pile of papers onto the table, his breathing turning ragged with excitement.

Good grief. I kind of already have other plans...

But that being said, there was nothing I could do when Emerson got fired up like this. I stayed with Emerson until I had just barely enough time to arrive at the meeting place.



After I parted ways with Emerson, I went straight to the send-off party at the Olden Magecraft Research Society, where I'd get to see the members I'd been with all these years.

"Master, congratulations on graduating!" Ted said, greeting me as soon as I arrived.

Over the past five years, Ted had grown to be quite burly. He was now close to 180 centimeters tall, and, by modern mage standards, pretty capable. There was only one huge, glaring problem in his otherwise smooth life.

“Please contribute to society enough to make up for me...” he sniffled.

Ted had to repeat his final year of school. Though there was no problem with his proficiency with magecraft, he was completely lacking in academics. Though I’d tried to help him pass, my efforts alone weren’t enough to turn things around, and so, in an awkward turn of events, Ted ended up having to repeat a year.

Well, hopefully this’ll motivate him to try harder next year. Ted’s life up until this point had been too easy—this setback might prove a good challenge for him.

“I swear to get revenge on this final year with Zyle!”

Zyle, who’d been in our class as first years, also had to repeat a year. Though he had no problems with the academic side of things, he lacked in the practical exams. For better or worse, Ted and Zyle lacked what the other had, but together, filled in the other’s shortcomings. This really was inevitable; Arthlia Academy was still a prestigious school, despite its failings, and so had the high standards of one. It was to the point that the overall ratio of people who actually graduated compared to people who simply attended was quite low.

“Five years, huh... It really flew by,” Eliza said.

“Yeah... It’s time to say goodbye to this room,” added Noel.

In contrast to Ted, the honor students Noel and Eliza graduated without any incident at all. Noel had gained an exemption to classes from her first year, while Eliza got it in her third year. Ever since then, they’d both been helping me with my work.

Both of them asked to join my company to grow themselves as mages, but I turned them down. As it stood now, my company didn’t need more staff, so them joining wouldn’t really be conducive to their growth. I introduced them to Chronos instead. Though Chronos was a shady organization, they were by far the most prestigious place to be for modern mages. I was pretty sure the two of

them would be all right there; I made it clear to Emerson that neither of them were to be assigned anything too dangerous.

“Abel, you still remember our promise, right?” Eliza asked.

“Yeah, I do.”

I had promised the two of them that if they did well enough in Chronos to be recognized, I’d let them join my company: The Black Cat Guild (its registered name). I found them strange for wanting to throw a big company like Chronos to the wayside in order to join my small business.

“We need to work hard to get close to Abel!” Eliza proclaimed.

“Yeah,” Noel agreed. “I’ll make sure my ancestor’s love won’t stay unrealized for much longer.”

Eliza and Noel muttered to themselves. I couldn’t hear what they were saying, but whatever it was I could sense how passionate they were about it. Though their mutterings did make me curious, I decided to not delve too deep.

“Oh that reminds me, I hear that Ms. Lilith is quitting as of today.”

Perhaps sensing the intense auras that Eliza and Noel were emitting, Ted decided to change the subject.

“Yes, that’s right,” Lilith said. “It’s been a pleasure teaching all of you.”

The only reason Lilith had been a teacher was because I had been a student. Now that I was graduating, there wasn’t a reason for her to continue teaching.

“Have you already decided where you’re gonna work next?!” Ted asked.

Hm. It seems that Ted’s asked the worst possible question he could’ve asked. I had hoped he wouldn’t, but now that he has, I need to make sure Lilith shows some tact.

“Lilith, just brush him off,” I whispered.

She silently smiled back at me. Judging from her expression, I had every reason to believe that she was up to no good.

“Actually, I’m going to get married,” she said.

In the next moment, Noel, Eliza, and Ted all gasped with surprise.

And of course she lets the cat out of the bag.

“Married?! To whom?!” Ted asked.

This is about to get much worse, isn't it? But there's no way she's going to spill everything right now. Right?

“Master Abel!” she said happily, clinging onto my arm.



Perhaps in an effort to make that proclamation ring more true, she'd added her usual way of addressing me instead of just "Abel." This only served to put the room even further in shock, especially Eliza and Noel, whose faces were stuck in expressions I'd never seen them make before.

"B-But aren't you two blood siblings?!" Ted asked, his shock turning to fear.

The idea that two people he knew since childhood as siblings were getting married must've been horrifying to Ted.

"I'm sorry, Ted, but we've been lying to you. We're actually not related at all," Lilith revealed.

"What?!"

Good grief. I wanted to take this secret with me to the grave, but after graduating, I always planned on marrying Lilith.

I didn't really have any interest in the institution of marriage, but in this country, married couples were taxed lighter, and folks who were married had an easier time getting public subsidies as well. With the future of my company in mind, getting married was the most logical choice to make.

"N-No way... Abel's getting married?!" Eliza sputtered.

"She got one over us. I didn't expect there to be a secret obstacle so nearby..." Noel said, trailing off.

It was as if their earlier fiery passion had been doused. Now, they were stock-still, in disbelief, eyes practically spinning in shock.

"Heh heh. I don't mind him having a second and third wife," Lilith said cryptically to the two of them.

Good grief. Looks like a peaceful life is going to take a bit longer to arrive than I thought.

Chronos Side Story

The Legendary Man by the Name of Blade

There was a man who was a bit of a legend among a certain graduating class of students at Arthlia Academy of Magecraft, and his name was Blade. Ever since he was little, he'd been better than others. In school, he placed first on every test—a first in Arthlia Academy's entire history. And his superiority didn't just stop at his grades; he was student council president, and was very popular among his peers. Upon graduating, he decided to join the Royal Capital's Knight Order. He himself was from nobility, and so it was his desire to join and protect the weak commoners.

"Great job, Blade!"

"You're the pride and joy of our country and order!"

As a knight, he was competent in every aspect of the job, and so became the youngest knight commander in history. Up until then, his life had been nothing but smooth sailing. He was living the picture perfect life of an elite mage, but that all changed when he was summoned by his superior officer.

"The...Numbers?" Blade asked.

"Right. It's a very honorable position," his superior explained. "If you become one, you'll be the first knight in history to have done so."

Blade fell silent. He'd heard of them before. The Numbers were Chronos's twelve strongest mages. The organization itself was said to have been around for over two hundred years. The Numbers were sent out on the most difficult of missions that the knights could only dream of. Despite Chronos being a private company, they held the government's complete trust.

"I understand. I will accept this request," Blade said.

He was confident that no matter what kind of environment he was in, he'd thrive. Wherever he went, applause was sure to follow.

But of course, Blade had no idea that this would be the decision that would change his life forever.



Two weeks had passed since Blade joined the Numbers. On his first mission as the number XII member of Chronos, he was sent out on a large-scale expedition.

“So this is the Chinogras Archipelago? Uncharted territory for humans.”

The mission Blade was currently on was to hunt down the large magic beasts that lived in the Chinogras Archipelago. Though he’d been a part of the knights, he’d never fought a large magic beast before. Over the past two hundred years, humans had been steadily decreasing the population. The Numbers had taken on this responsibility at the behest of the government.

After a little while of searching, he heard the sound of *something’s* footsteps. In the next moment, a magic bearlike beast—over three meters tall and towering over the average human—burst into view. Blade had never dealt with an opponent of this size in the royal capital.

“Don’t falter. I’m the legendary man known as Blade. There’s no reason to fear a mere beast,” Blade said, psyching himself up as he unsheathed his sword to courageously face the magic beast. But even though he’d put the full force of his body into his attack, the large magic beast easily deflected it.

“What?!”

Blade was in disbelief. He’d trained in the way of the blade, and had earned high praise for his noble-like technique.

“Eek!” he cowered from the magic beast’s roar.

He found himself falling to the ground, trembling in fear of death after being cornered. He couldn’t comprehend how things had ended up like this. But just as he was asking himself this question, Water Magecraft enveloped the magic beast’s body, sealing its movements.

“Come on, seriously. What’re you doin’ old man?!” a young man said exasperatedly.

His name was Bruno—the member with the Roman numeral XI, and also known as the Demon Dragonfly.

“Eliminating target.”

Then in the next moment, he heard a young woman’s voice, and a single arrow pierced the large magic beast’s head, killing it in one blow. Having its brain pierced, the magic beast collapsed to the ground.

“Seriously, you’re one of us, right? You can’t be this pathetic,” the woman, Kanaria, called out to him, also exasperatedly.

She was in her late teens and had recently joined the Numbers. She’d been given the Roman numeral IX, and was known as Hawkeye Kanaria.

“H-How did you two...”

After witnessing these two people who were younger than him so easily take down the powerful magic beast, Blade felt even more shocked.

“I-I can’t believe that you were able to take something that powerful out in a single shot! Is this the power of the Numbers?!”

At this point in time, Blade saw these two as incredible prodigies, but in reality, they were on the lower end of the Numbers.

“Kanaria, we’re retreating!” Bruno cried out.

“I know,” Kanaria acknowledged. “Seems wise.”

It confused Blade at first—why it seemed like these two changed their tune so quickly and left the battlefield so soon after joining it. But he realized their reasoning not too long later.

Suddenly, a huge—over twenty meters long—lizard monster dropped in front of Blade. It was a magic beast called a Salamander, and many stories were told about how they were so powerful that just a single one of them could raze an entire city to the ground.

It opened its large mouth and went to eat its prey, the weakling who’d been too slow at getting away: Blade. The evil aura it released was incomparable to the bearlike beast earlier, and it served to completely paralyze Blade.

“Yay! Dibs!”

At the very last second, Kuina saved him. A young man with blond hair, Kuina was known as the strongest modern mage alive, and had worked his way up the organization to achieve the Roman numeral III—the fastest ascent in the organization’s history.

“All right! That’s number thirty!”

After dispatching the Salamander in a flash, he immediately ran into the forest to find his next prey.

“Kuina’s the same monster as always...” Bruno muttered.

“We can’t fall behind. Let’s hurry up and find the next magic beast,” Kanaria suggested.

Bruno and Kanaria discussed their next steps in front of Blade, but without any acknowledgment that he was there.

Wh-What’s going on... Nobody’s paying me any attention. It was then that he realized the truth: he was a small fish in a big pond. When he was with the knight order—considered the capital’s elite fighting force—his strength was seen as above average.

Ha ha... So this is the strength of real prodigies, huh? In general, Blade’s abilities were not on the lower end of modern mages whatsoever. But in Chronos—a gathering place for all the best mages in the world—they were. It was on this day that Blade lost any and all confidence he had.



Several months had passed since the large-scale expedition, and Blade had fallen into a severe slump. He’d submitted a leave of absence due to his health conditions and spent each day lazing around, holing up at home. Perhaps as an effect of slacking on the daily training regimen that he’d kept for many years, he’d become thinner, and the muscles he’d been so proud of had started to weaken.

This might be it for me... There’s nowhere else to go but down.

Despite many attempts to reinvigorate himself, Blade inevitably fell back

down into the dumps. He kept having flashbacks to the time he was nearly eaten by a magic beast—evidence of his weakness. That vexing memory made Blade lose all his steam.

“Oh, I see. So you’re Blade.”

One day, a guy suddenly showed up. He was tall, but hunched over, and had terrible bedhead. He looked like he barely trained his body; in martial arts, he would’ve ranked dead last.

“You’re...” Blade said, trailing off.

Even when Blade had been a part of the knights, he’d heard of the young lion named Emerson. Even among all the prodigies in the Numbers, he was a special case that stood out. Despite only being in his midtwenties, he was unparalleled in his achievements in the realm of Regalia development. At this point, Emerson had become so crucial to Chronos that it would fall apart without him.

Despite being a man of many accolades, his reputation wasn’t great. There were rumors that he was conducting unethical human experiments that couldn’t be disclosed to the public, and that he’d joined forces with demons to develop a new type of Regalia. Many more similar outlandish allegations existed to smear his name.

“Do you want to be strong?” Emerson asked, straight to the point.

Emerson’s expression was so eerie, it made it impossible to read what he was thinking. Blade couldn’t help but be afraid of his mysterious proposal.

“I have data on you from when you trained. It’s a shame that all the data didn’t even equate to what I’d consider average. At this rate, you’re either gonna die like a dog mid mission or be kicked out of the organization. Chronos isn’t so kind as to keep someone useless around forever.”

Emerson was right. Though Blade was currently refusing work due to his health conditions, he couldn’t stay on leave forever.

“What’s your point?” Blade asked.

“Team up with me and let’s make a comeback. The timing is just right; I’ve been wanting a test subject and you’re the perfect healthy, sturdy adult male I

need,” Emerson explained in a voice that was pragmatic, lacking any evil intent. “How close can the average guy get to becoming a monster? Don’t you think it’s an interesting theme to explore?”

Blade fell silent for a bit. Before, he’d been ready to immediately decline Emerson’s proposal. A shady guy like Emerson was in direct opposition to Blade’s personal brand of justice.

But even so, Blade was at his wit’s ends. By agreeing to this devilish offer, he just might be able to get out of his hopeless slump.

“Fine. I agree. Tell me what I need to do,” Blade said, throwing away his pride as a knight, and making a deal with the devil.

Miraculously, this was the day that Blade’s life completely turned around. By undergoing severe training and doping by Emerson’s instructions, he returned to Chronos as a rising star. His sense of justice was always strong and he was diligent, so he racked up achievements at a stunning pace. Though he’d begun as Roman numeral XII, he shot up to IV, and his confidence was revived.



Blade went out for his mission in high spirits, wearing a newly developed hero suit. His current mission was one that greatly excited him—defeating a demon. Plus, according to the information he received, it was a stronger one than anyone had ever faced before. Apparently, Kuina and Bardo were both having a difficult time with it. If Blade was able to complete this mission, he might advance in Chronos even further. When he first joined Chronos, it felt like all he could do was watch the backs of prodigies from afar, but now, he felt like he was finally about to catch up.

“Emergency! Detecting a demonic presence. Displaying the fastest route to target,” a robot, Robelle, said from beside Blade as she searched for the enemy.

She’d been developed by Emerson, but aside from that, there hadn’t been any details released about her. She was a mysterious existence that’d been given the Roman numeral VIII.

“Hm... Over there?” he said, following Robelle’s instructions and heading to where the demon was located.

It seemed that it was persistently trying to chase after a student—one with a nostalgic uniform. He could tell that the demon was chasing after a student from his alma mater, Arthlia Academy of Magecraft.

“Nothing to fear, kid! I’m here!” Blade said, dashing quickly over to the boy to stand in front of him, his arms spread wide in his hero pose. Using one’s power to enforce one’s justice was Blade’s ideal self—one that he’d achieved.

Soon after, Blade was summarily knocked out by Zeke and, once again, lost all his confidence, with Abel completely ignorant of both his backstory and his plight.

Afterword

Yusura Kankitsu here. Thanks for all the support up until now! As I announced in the previous volume, this is the final volume of the series. Endings can be viewed negatively, but let me be clear that this had nothing to do with sales—thanks to all of you, this series has never had that problem!

I said in volume 6 that we'd sold nine hundred thousand copies of the series, but by the time that volume 7 went on sale, we'd more than doubled that amount! I've never seen explosive sales like this in my life. To be fair, however, about ninety percent of the sales are from the manga version.

I felt like it was a good time to end the novel version. My editor was telling me that this volume didn't have to be the end, and I could put out another volume or even two. At first, I was planning on splitting volume 7 into two parts, but after reading over my manuscript, it felt kinda bad to read them split up like that. So, I decided to fit everything into one, even if that made the book a bit thicker than usual. I think that combining the past and the present arcs in this way was the best way to go about things.

There's nothing I had to leave out in regards to the main story, but if I'm being honest—and a little greedy—I wish I could've written a bit more about the past. In my opinion, the arc focused on Abel's past is a masterpiece, but it seems that readers didn't like it as much. I remember freaking out after sales went down after volume 4.5. It was a moment where the opinion of the author and the readers totally diverged. But personally, I think the past arc was done in a great way in the manga, so I have absolutely no regrets.

It's been five years since I began this series in 2018, but I'm so blessed by the staff I worked with, and I was able to end the story on a very great note—something I'm proud of.

[Advertisement]

Sorry to announce this at the end of the light novel, but a webtoon version of

Reincarnated Mage has been decided, and it's been well received as it streams on DMM Books and other platforms. For those that don't know, webtoons are colorized manga in portrait mode that are made so that you can read them on your phone. As far as I know, there are over ten people working on this grand project. It's such amazing quality that it doesn't feel like an exaggeration to say that it looks like an anime adaptation! I definitely urge everyone to check it out!

Lastly, thank you so much for supporting this series! It's thanks to all your support that we made it this far. I hope to meet again on another series!

Yusura Kankitsu

Yusura Kankitsu

Illustrator
Ruria Miyuki

vol. **7**

Reincarnated Mage *with Inferior* Eyes

Breezing through the Future as an Oppressed Ex-Hero

Activating
the strongest
and **highest**
ranking
magecraft,
which can
eliminate
everything
without a
trace!

Boom!

I used this moment to
construct an even more powerful
magecraft—Big Bang, which was
the strongest magecraft in the
Fire Magecraft repertoire.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

In the next moment,
a massive explosion erupted,
with Zeke at the epicenter.

“Big Bang!”

Abel

A genius mage with Amber Eyes—the strongest one can have. He reincarnated into this world from two hundred years ago.



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Reincarnated Mage with Inferior Eyes: Breezing through the Future as an Oppressed Ex-Hero Volume 7

by Yusura Kankitsu

Translated by Geirrlon Dunn Edited by Dan-Tran Cong-Huyen

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