

Nephy's relaxed expression stiffened up with bewilderment. Zagan was about to ask her what happened but then remembered what he had experienced himself. Taking a closer look, there was not just one but two beads halfway up the straw. They appeared to be stuck, and she wasn't able to suck them up because of that.

She might have been panicking because Zagan was watching her. Nephy's pointy ears stiffened up, and the beads in her straw remained where they were. However, this was dangerously cute to Zagan, and he was near his limit of wanting to hug her and rub his cheek against hers.

Mm. Let's keep a record of this with Memorandum later. This was the sorcery he created with Gremory and Barbatos to store memories on a medium like paper. He really was glad they had managed to complete it without any difficulties.

"Ugh...!"

Nephy's efforts eventually bore fruit, and the jammed beads shot up the straw. And just like Zagan, she rolled them around on her tongue before biting into them full force.

"Ah...! What a mysterious sensation."

"Mmm... Shall we order it again after we go out to town?"

"It's caught your fancy I see."

"Maybe so. I'd like Foll and the others to try this too."

Actually, his desire to see Nephy troubled at trying to drink it was stronger than that, but he glossed over it skillfully.

Nephy squinted and took a closer look at the tapioca.

"...Is it possible to make myself, I wonder? The raw materials do seem rather special though."

"Hmm. It wouldn't be a bad idea for us to look into opening a trade route."

"A trade route?"

"Yeah. It's possible to get sorcerer-made goods like paper, perfume, silk and

even tools made for sorcery. We may be able to acquire these at a low cost."

If he opened a trade route, it would be simple to acquire goods from elsewhere. However, the church would have their eyes on him if he overdid it, so they could end up fabricating an excuse to suppress his trade.

And yet they use sorcerer-made goods like paper and pens themselves. Well, as long as they were sufficiently antagonistic in public, it was an adequately lucrative market for them. That was why there were plenty of sorcerers who used this as a source of money. Zagan decided to see if any of his subordinates at the castle were familiar with this once he got back.

Unfortunately, there was nobody present to stop the Archdemon from wanting to open a trade route to his castle just to acquire tapioca. And as Zagan pondered over how to accomplish this, Nephy let out a curious laugh.

"You seem to be having fun, Master Zagan."

"Starting something new is fun. Well, we'll only get started once Chastille's problem has been resolved though."

"By that, do you mean about how Chastille is isolated in the church?" It was natural for Nephy to be worried about her good friend.

"Yeah," Zagan replied with a nod. "That said, I sent Barbatos along with her. It'll surely get settled soon."

"Lord Barbatos is rather serious when it comes to Chastille, isn't he?"

"That's true, but when it comes to eavesdropping, he's second to none. It's impossible to get away from him without the protection of an Archdemon."

Even if he had to brave the danger of exposing himself each time, the moment he confirmed someone by sight, he could connect to their shadow. It was like being under watch even when in the bath or using the latrine. So when one was unable to use sorcery, like the people of the church, it was almost pitiful.

As such, Nephy inevitably strained a smile.

"I feel a little sorry for them, but it's their fault for messing with Chastille."

She was one to be firm about her statements when it came to it.

Actually, I'm sure Nephy is annoyed by it as well... One could even say that she looked cheerful. Taking a closer look, he could even spot a vein popping from her forehead. The fact that she could properly show her anger was also a major point of growth from when he first met her. And watching over her with a wry smile, he opened a map of the Holy City.

"Now then, where shall we start looking around?"

As he brought this up, Nephy began twiddling her fingers together in a troubled manner.

"Um, Master Zagan. Are you not searching for somebody? How about walking about while focusing on that?"

"Huh? Oh, that's fine now. We met that woman named Oberon yesterday, right?"

"Yes."

"We can just leave it to her. Let's enjoy the Holy City since we've come all this way."

"Is that so ...?"

Nephy didn't look fully convinced, so Zagan simply smiled.

"Well, it's not like I don't have any other goals."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah. It seems there's a treasure called Azazel's Staff stored in the church. I want to confirm what it is. If possible, I'd like to acquire it too."

"So should we head to the church first?"

Nephy clapped her hands like it was a great idea, but Zagan shook his head.

"No, it's the church's treasure. If I went to go steal it, we'd end up starting a war with the Holy City."

"...Oh, right. That's true."

"Well, if we could sneak in skillfully, would you like to try taking a look? The

treasure room of the church headquarters really isn't something we need to pay respect to. It could serve as a good sightseeing spot."

"Yes, I'm also quite interested."

"I see. Then let's put all the people of the church to sleep with sorcery and—"

"Master Zagan. We can just go sightseeing normally."

Zagan began muttering about a grand plan to break into the church in a completely serious tone, and just then...

"What...?" Zagan and Nephy both looked up and said that at the same time. They were on the top floor of the inn. The only thing above them was the roof, but they sensed a strange flow of mana... or rather, a strange distortion.

Seems like something is about to fall onto the table. They still had tapioca juice left. Zagan grabbed the table to move it, and Nephy realized the same thing and grabbed the other side. And while his heart fluttered at the thought of such cooperation, something fell from the distortion.

"Please run away, Lady Oberon!"

It was a familiar voice. And several seconds later, a lump of armor fell where the table was. And looking down at it while it made a clunk, Nephy and Zagan were both left staring in wonder.

"You're... the boy we met yesterday...?"

"Huh...? Oh, the couple from the carriage?"

The one to fall to the floor, covered in wounds, was for some reason the young Archangel boy that they had picked up yesterday in the carriage.



Several minutes earlier.

"We finally found you! You thieving rats!"

Ginias drew his Sacred Sword as he gallantly roared at the intruders. Eleven Archangels and Oberon formed six groups of two to suppress the intruders. And the first to find said intruders were Ginias and Oberon.

"I, Ginias, offer my thanks to God for granting this opportunity at vindication

for what happened the other day!"

The intruders looked truly fed up at his stuffy monologue.

"Ugh, what a pain. How did you get back already?"

"Aristella is shocked."

The intruders were two young girls. However, Ginias learned not to be deceived by their appearance.

"Lady Oberon, I shall hold back the dual-sword user! Please take care of the longsword user!"

The one who had sent the two of them into the middle of the Katachnia wasteland was the girl wielding two scimitars.

The longsword user didn't use sorcery last time. There was no mistaking that she was a sorcerer, but her sorcery likely wasn't suited to battle. Meaning it was logical for the one wielding a Sacred Sword to suppress the dual-sword user. Oberon didn't reply, but Ginias confirmed that she nodded slightly at the corner of his vision.

"I won't hold back! Sing — Raziel!"

Ginias addressed his Sacred Sword, and a green wind flooded from his blade.

"Ugh..."

"Aristella!"

The girl wielding a longsword yelled, but Oberon prevented her from getting in the way.

How reliable! Ginias sealed the movements of the girl using the wind from his Sacred Sword and closed in on her. It was perhaps possible to escape his wind using the physical abilities of a sorcerer, but sorcery couldn't compensate for sword skill. Ginias was the youngest to ever be entrusted with the role of Head Archangel. He wouldn't fall behind with a sword.

The girl held her two scimitars at the ready and muttered something, but no sorcery activated.

"It's useless! The winds of purification can easily blow away any sorcery!"

I won't kill you! Ginias drove the flat of his blade into the girl's body... Or he'd planned to anyway.

"Huh? She's gone?"

The girl in front of him vanished without any prior movement. Ginias didn't feel his sword strike anything either, so she wasn't blown away by it.

"Behind you Ginias."

The young Archangel realized it upon hearing Oberon's voice. His sword was heavier than usual. The tip of his blade wouldn't move at all, as if it were sewn in place. He turned his head in shock and saw the girl standing on the tip of his sword with a languid look on her face.

"Impossible..."

"It looks like you didn't hear Aristella because of the wind. I'll say it once more. Here's a freebie. You can have the first move."

Those words were the same ones she had muttered while within the winds of purification.

So it wasn't even sorcery...? Ginias froze in shock, and the girl twisted her body as if dancing. Immediately following that, her scimitar came sweeping in from below.

"Ugh!"

Even if he tried to dodge it, the girl was still standing on his sword. It wasn't possible to evade while still poised for combat. Ginias let go of his Sacred Sword and rolled across the ground.

"Good boy. You let go of this troublesome sword."

The girl kicked his Sacred Sword and sent it flying down the opposite side of the passageway. She then dashed in without giving Ginias the time to stand back up.

"I'm not done yet!"

Ginias caught the blade of the scimitar closing in on his neck with the palms of both his hands. The girl's expressionless composure broke upon seeing this, and

her eyes shot wide open.

"An Angelic Knight is more than just their sword!"

"Mm. How unexpected."

It wasn't clear whether she was actually surprised or not, but the girl thrust out her other scimitar. Ginias required two hands to stop just a single blade, so he had no way out.

"Come! Raziel!"

As he called his Sacred Sword, it jumped up into the air on its own and attacked the girl's back.

"Tch."

It was now the girl's turn to let go of her sword and roll across the ground. The Sacred Sword she kicked away settled itself in Ginias' hand as if that was where it belonged.

"This boy is the most loved by the Sacred Swords in all history."

This was the reason Ginias sat at the head of the Archangels at his age.

As for Oberon, she was crossing blades with the longsword wielder using her pale thin sword... No, that was no longsword.

"Idiot! Moron! You think I'm just gonna play sword fighting with a knight?"

The blade of the longsword broke apart with a clink. It moved through the air like a whip and assaulted Oberon from a direction that was impossible for a sword.

"A chain sword? How skillful."

Such was the case, but Oberon twirled her thin sword and dealt with the whip-like blade. If she tried fending it off simply, the chain sword would wrap around her own and close in on her neck. That was why Oberon flicked away the very tip of the chain sword to make it lose control.

It wasn't as simple as it sounded, however. The tip was the fastest point of a whip in motion, so a human eye could not follow the tip of a real whip. The fact that she deflected the attack despite her sight being obstructed was impressive.

The girl flinched upon seeing this but immediately smiled with an unyielding spirit as she swung her chain sword once more.

"Not bad. But how long can you keep it up?!"

The chain sword closed in while slashing away at the labyrinth's walls, floor, and ceiling. It was pretty reckless swordsmanship which managed to seal all paths of retreat.

"That's quite the number of attacks."

Oberon accurately repelled each and every blow individually. Neither of them was able to take another step forward, locking them in a stalemate.

I must assist Lady Oberon! Ginias stabbed the scimitar he was holding into the ground and turned to face the young girl before him.

"It seems you possess more skill with the sword among the two of you as well. Though you may be a sorcerer, I shall praise your swordsmanship. However, this is where it ends."

The girl let out a listless sigh.

"Aristella is the sword specialist."

"Huh ...? What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said."

And just a moment later, Ginias suddenly realized the meaning behind her words.

"Lady Oberon! Get away from her!"

"Kyahaha! Too late!"

The chain sword appeared to be flying around recklessly, but it was actually weaving together a precisely detailed magic circle. And Oberon was standing at its center.

"Dexia is the sorcery specialist."

Ginias charged in before thinking it over. He pushed Oberon away with a shoulder tackle and managed to get her out of the magic circle. And just as the sorcery completed...

"Have a nice flight, dumbass!"

The scenery around him warped. It was the same teleportation sorcery he'd been subjected to three days before, but he only came to understand this a moment too late.



Back to the top floor room in the Jewel of Raziel.

"Wh-Why are you two here?"

The young boy raised his voice with both shock and vigilance, to which Zagan shook his head in astonishment.

"Why? This is our room. I should be asking you where you flew in from."

Zagan questioned the boy as if he had no idea where the young boy had appeared from.

"Your room...? Sorry, where am I? Are we in Raziel?"

Zagan walked over to the window reluctantly and threw open the curtains.

"This is an inn called the Jewel of Raziel. You can see Raziel's central cathedral over there, right?"

After explaining it, the boy seemed to come to grips with his situation. He looked around his surroundings restlessly, and upon spotting Nephy, he bobbed his head down.

"My apologies. I'll get out immediately."

He still had his Sacred Sword gripped in his hand. He got back up to his feet in a panic as Zagan kept him from leaving.

"Wait. You're injured. I don't know what happened, but at least allow us to treat you."

"But—"

"Can that mission or whatever you're doing be accomplished in this state? Isn't it the duty of an Angelic Knight to challenge their missions in as flawless a state as possible?"

After being admonished, the young boy turned silent, unable to object at all.

"I'm in your debt."

"Can you do it... h-honey?"

"Yes, dear."

It really was still embarrassing, but Nephy replied right away while the tips of her ears turned red. Though, the boy covered his face as if unable to bear watching that exchange.

"I've been causing you nothing but trouble."

"Don't worry about it. Isn't it the obligation of the people to cooperate with those who possess Sacred Swords?"

Humans were capable of smiling all the more gently when they were thinking of bad things. Zagan smiled as if it was the most natural thing in the world, which made the boy's eyes shoot open.

"You noticed?"

"Wouldn't any pious believer notice?"

He left out the detail that he wasn't one himself, but he wasn't lying.

The boy smiled in admiration.

"You've really been doing nothing but surprising me. Both back in the carriage and here with the depth of your refinement."

"No need to flatter me. It makes me feel itchy."

Zagan shrugged his shoulders in an exaggerated manner, and the boy forced a smile, having loosened his vigilance significantly.

He looked quite dirty, but his wounds didn't seem particularly serious. It was likely more a result of him falling earlier than anything he got in battle. His treatment ended quickly, and after they'd finished, Zagan addressed him again to calm him down some more.

"So? What happened?"

"Our treasury has been infiltrated by thieves. Lady Oberon and I went in to

subjugate them, but I suffered an embarrassing defeat, just as you can see."

The boy seemed to have relaxed his guard considerably after being treated. He let slip exactly what had happened upon being pressed for information.

Hmm. So that's really what happened... Orias was also supposed to be on her way to take back the staff. She was moving in secret, but there was no way the church wouldn't make a racket over an Archdemon taking action. Well, Shere Khan and Bifrons also seemed to be cooperating, so the likelihood that this was their handiwork instead was quite high.

Zagan shifted his attention to the ceiling.

I don't know who it is, but they're quite the skilled sorcerer... The traces of the sorcery that the boy had fallen through remained above them. They were more skillful with teleportation than the novice Zagan was. It was likely they had not only designated a change in elevation but chosen a random destination as well. Useless in terms of effective movement, but perfect for repelling an enemy.

There weren't all that many sorcerers who could activate flight sorcery before hitting the ground, and it was almost unrivaled against Angelic Knights. The fact that the boy had ended up here could have been thanks to tremendous luck, or perhaps...

The Sacred Sword could have guided him here... Thanks to his fight with Andrealphus, Zagan was fully aware that an entity called a seraph was sealed within all Sacred Swords. It wasn't all that strange for it to perform some sort of miracle to save its wielder. It may have been the reason this young boy was chosen as an Archangel.

In any case, by the time his treatment was over, Zagan finished analyzing the structure of the sorcery which had sent the boy flying away.

It'll be difficult to wrench open, but I should be able to connect to where he came from by using the same sorcery. Zagan was able to mimic sorcery by using his ability to devour sorcery without actually devouring it. Ultimately, sorcery was something that anybody could use as long as they knew the theory.

Hence Zagan had developed his ability to reflect and absorb sorcery to the point where he could imitate it. Andrealphus' advice was rather useful,

although it vexed him to admit that.

The boy struck the floor in irritation.

"Ugh. It's a small mercy that I came out in Raziel, but how much time will it take to chase after them from here?"

"Hm. I don't know your exact circumstances, but can't you return using that?"

Zagan pointed up at the ceiling like he had just noticed it. The teleportation circle that Zagan had repaired and connected back to its source was shining brilliantly.

"It looked to me like you fell from there..."

The boy shot up to his feet with his eyes wide open.

"Oh! I can go back!"

Just as he was about to plunge through, the boy stopped and turned to Zagan.

"I must apologize once more. I will definitely repay—"

"Enough already. You're in a hurry, right?"

"Right!"

"Good luck."

Zagan waved his hand, Nephy bobbed her head down, and the young boy leaped gallantly through the magic circle. After seeing him off, Zagan pointed Nephy to her hat and coat.

"Well then, shall we get going ourselves?"

"Huh...?"

"To Raziel's underground treasury. You said you wanted to go see it, right?" With that, Nephy smiled like a blooming flower.

"Yes!"

Thus the unprecedented incident of three different Archdemons being allowed to infiltrate the church headquarters was headed to its climax.

## Chapter IV: Archdemons and Archangels Have Gathered, so We Decided to Have a Party

"...Hmph. It seems the intruder before me has been rampaging about."

Clouds of dust fell from the ceiling, accompanied by a chain of intermittent tremors. It seemed that someone was fighting above this giant armored man in Raziel's great underground labyrinth.

It was none other than Raphael. After escorting Zagan and Nephy to Raziel, he had infiltrated the great labyrinth once he had permission to act on his own. His artificial left arm glimmered dimly and illuminated the area around him.

His goal was, of course, to make contact with Archdemon Orias. If his alreadyaging body could gain more power, then he would even rely on an Archdemon to do so.

This place is truly easy to infiltrate for members, after all. In fact, the keys to the treasury were the Sacred Swords themselves. The labyrinth was set up so anyone not carrying a Sacred Sword was assaulted by a countless number of traps. Meaning the only ones who could enter the treasury directly were the twelve Archangels.

Even as the oldest Archangel, excluding Michael, Raphael only knew of the entrance at the central cathedral. The people who built this place likely never considered the possibility of a traitor Archangel. Well, in a sense, the betrayal of an Archangel spelled the demise of the church. It was somewhat meaningless to hypothesize such a scenario.

Such was the case, but by the time Raphael had infiltrated the place, it had already turned into a labyrinth and was flinging traps at another intruder.

I've heard Archdemon Orias was somewhat smarter about this, though... In that case it would be appropriate to consider the existence of another intruder. One week had passed since Orias had vanished. He was worried that she had perhaps already come and gone, but judging from the current state of things,

there was still some hope that she hadn't. At the very least, she hadn't returned to her hideout two days ago.

There was Raphael, Orias, a third intruder, and depending on the circumstances, it was likely that Zagan would sneak in while sightseeing too. Raphael had already turned his back on them, but this day seemed like it would be a disaster for the church.

He continued to proceed through the treasury by relying on his old memories and found people tumbling on the ground further down the path.

"Ugh... Keep it together, Aristella... Everything... will be fine..."

"...Hak... Ugh... Who the hell is that woman...?"

It was two girls who appeared to be sorcerers. They were hurt quite badly and were bleeding from the head with wounds all over their bodies. The girl dressed like a bandit was lending her shoulder to the girl dressed in frilly clothing. Judging by their wounds, they'd been injured by a sword rather than any form of sorcery.

Are these two intruders? He had no obligation to save them. On the contrary, they were more like rivals. Having said that, delivering the coup de grâce to women and children on the verge of death pained his heart somewhat.

Raphael at least kept himself on guard so that he could draw his Sacred Sword at any time, and when they finally noticed his presence, one of the girls looked up at him.

"Eep, an Angelic Knight..."

Her hand lit up with sorcery. She likely wouldn't die if he hit her with the flat of his blade. But just as Raphael was about to grab his sword, a jarring shriek ran through the air.

A pale shadow appeared before him. It didn't really have the shape of a person and was likely some manner of ghost. It seemed to be saying something, but it didn't have a jaw and was largely unintelligible.

Is this one of the treasury's traps? Though it was largely triggered by these two girls, it was still reacting to Raphael. And with no other choice, Raphael swung his artificial arm in the air.

"GWAH?!"

The ghost, which somehow or other resembled a cardinal, slammed into a wall and vanished.

"Hm? Does that ghost perhaps have some manner of grudge against me?"

People with a grudge against Raphael were basically a dime a dozen, so he had no idea who it could possibly be. He then shifted his attention to the girls cowering at his feet. And seeing their sullied faces, Raphael's eyes shot open.

"...Hm? Why the hell are you here?"

It was definitely someone he recognized.

"Huh...?"

"Hm...? Am I mistaken?"

The girl looking blankly back at him had the exact same face as the girl next to her. They appeared to be twins. Both of them reacted like they had no idea who Raphael was. Well, that was perhaps understandable since he was hiding his face, but a sorcerer would surely be able to recognize him by voice. The time they met was back at Zagan's castle, after all.

Meaning this is someone else. They look very similar though.

Having sensed hostility from Raphael, the girl put her brow against the ground.

"Judging from your ability to defeat a ghost without sorcery and that armored figure, you are the former Archdemon candidate, Apparition Valefor, correct?"

He was wearing armor different from Valefor's, but apparently the girl decided this based on his height and appearance.

I suppose I'm using that name when outside, so it isn't wrong. And after hesitating over how to answer her, Raphael nodded.

"Indeed. And who the hell are you lot?"

"Sir! I am Archdemon Shere Khan's subordinate, Dexia. And this one is called Aristella."

The bandit looking girl was Dexia, and the frilly looking one was Aristella. The latter was suffering from serious wounds, and it was clear that her consciousness was hazy. Raphael cupped Aristella's chin.

"Can you not use healing sorcery? If you can, then treat her. I'll at least wait that long."

"R-Right! Hang in there Aristella. I'll heal you now."

Dexia was moved to tears and began treating the other girl. Ghosts popped up here and there while she was doing so, and since they were annoying, Raphael swatted them all away. Shortly after, her treatment was complete. Dexia wiped her brow and looked up at Raphael.

"Are you done?"

"Y-Yes. I've only stopped the bleeding, but she should be fine for now."

Dexia gingerly placed her on her lap and replied with a relieved look.

"So? What the hell are you two doing here?"

Dexia straightened herself up in a panic and bowed her head.

"Sir! We've infiltrated this treasury at our master's command. Judging from your presence here, I assume you share the same goal?"

"Indeed. So?"

The sorcerer was telling him her reason for being here. There was no way she had entered aimlessly. Dexia gulped from the tension, and her next words were...

"We can guide you to the treasury. Can we enlist your cooperation?"

Unfortunately for them, Raphael already knew the path to the treasury.

Still, I suppose my liege wouldn't abandon them here. On the off chance that they became an obstruction to Zagan, everything would be fine as long as Raphael took responsibility and dealt with them. Besides, it was true that he had business in the treasury to attend to.

"Very well."

Aristella, who had shown no signs of being able to stand up until now, raised her right hand.

"Eek!"

"Awawa! Aristella?!"

The girl must have been cornered pretty badly earlier, and she began trembling in Dexia's arms violently.

"Don't lose your mind over every little thing. I said I'll cooperate."

"Oh... Right."

The two of them calmed down, and Dexia rose to her feet.

"Th-This way."

They still seemed to be nervous, but the girls began guiding him to the treasure.

"So? Who did this to you?"

The others present in the labyrinth were likely Archdemon Orias and any Archangels who had noticed their intrusion. He wanted to get an idea of who was there. And yet, Dexia's answer was completely unexpected.

"It was an Angelic Knight named Oberon or something."

It was one of the two knights they picked up in the carriage the other day. Raphael knew that this was the name used for generations by technicians behind the creation of Anointed Armor. In fact, the first time he'd heard the words "Azazel's Staff," that was the first person to come to mind. It was likely that she had taken action to defend the staff after sensing that it was their target.

Raphael had never seen Oberon for himself while he'd served as an Archangel. Up until yesterday, he'd believed that the technician known as Oberon was just a fabrication of the church.

"Oberon? Not an Archangel?"

"There was also an Archangel, but we dealt with that one."

"Hmm..."

He didn't know who they had dealt with, but apparently, these girls possessed enough power to defeat a wielder of a Sacred Sword.

It'd be nice if it wasn't Chastille. That girl was the bridge between the church and the sorcerers. He pinned the hopes of the Unification Faction on her, making her the person Raphael had to protect the most, right next to Foll. Although Zagan also attached a bodyguard to her, so she likely wouldn't die.

"But... that woman... was hiding... her power..." Aristella added in a weakened voice.

"She wasn't using a Sacred Sword, but..."

"She cut down... Aristella's sorcery... It doesn't make... any sense..."

Raphael nodded back at them.

Hmm, is it something like Kuroka's short swords? Those swords were one of Liucaon's Holy Treasures, which possessed power similar to that of a Sacred Sword. The history of the church was quite long. It wouldn't be strange if they had other such relics hidden away.

Actually, it's more likely that it's something made by the technician who makes Anointed Armor. As a high elf, Nephy was capable of manufacturing more powerful Anointed Armor than the church. Meaning there was a high likelihood that other such relics of the elves existed. Back when Zagan had visited Nephy's hometown a few months ago, he'd found a legendary weapon that wasn't quite on the level of a Sacred Sword. And considering all those possibilities, Raphael nodded once more.

"I have some knowledge of such weapons. I didn't think they'd exist in the church though."

"There ares other things like that out there?" Dexia asked while trembling.

"But... her skills are scarier than her sword. She's way stronger than the

Archangel. It looked like she was hiding her real skills while they were together,
but the moment we let our guard down, we were done in right away..."

Well, they were powerful enough to boast of defeating an Archangel.

"Allow me to ask. Who was the Archangel you defeated?"

"I don't know his name. It was some little brat."

"He said... he was... Ginias..."

"Oh! Right! That!"

Raphael let out a silent sigh.

Ginias' orphan, huh? He was a youngster with potential, so Raphael found this somewhat regrettable. But it would be barking up the wrong tree to blame these two girls. On one hand, there was an Archangel, and on the other were two sorcerers. Enemies meant to fight each other fought. It was his fault for being too weak.

And with no way of knowing what Raphael was thinking about, Dexia continued speaking.

"But I heard the other ten are in here too, so just taking care of one of them doesn't get us anywhere."

"What? All ten?"

Raphael had heard that Chastille had come to the Holy City for a meeting of Archangels, but he never would have thought that all eleven Archangels had actually convened.

It's said that if all twelve Sacred Swords are gathered, they could even defeat an Archdemon. He didn't think it was remotely possible against an Archdemon of Zagan or Orias' caliber, but the gathering of Sacred Swords and Archdemons here in this labyrinth was somewhat ominous.

"...Good grief. It's become quite troublesome."

As such, he was unable to keep himself from sighing this time.



Around the same time, Chastille and Valjakka were progressing through the labyrinth.

"The tremors have stopped. Have things been settled?"

"It was likely Ginias or Diekmeyer who was engaged in combat. The

Juutilainen brothers wouldn't be making such gentle sounds."

The sounds that had been resounding throughout the labyrinth had come to a halt half a minute ago.

It'd be fine and all if the thieves were suppressed, but if not, that means one of the Archangels has fallen. Chastille cast her eyes to the floor.

"Worried?" Valjakka asked.

"Of course I am. Even if we're opposed in opinion, they're still my comrades."

"I'm relieved to hear that."

Chastille knit her brows.

"What do you mean by that, Lord Valjakka?"

Valjakka shrugged his shoulders in an exaggerated manner.

"I believe in you, but there's no way I can loosen my guard after hearing the rumors about you, right? At any rate, it's said that you're connected to Archdemon Zagan, who's been the topic of our recent troubles."

"I feel like it isn't great that such rumors exist, but it's true that I have indeed bound myself to him with an oath."

"An oath?"

Valjakka suddenly narrowed his gaze, to which Chastille replied with resolution.

"That's right. There will be no future for this world if the church and sorcerers are to continue fighting each other until one of us perishes. Just like the church is a necessity to serve as a deterrent against sorcerers, sorcerers are required by the weak. That's why I want to grasp that boundary line that we are both unable to yield and find a way to live across that line from each other."

"...Do you truly believe the church will acknowledge such a thing?"

"If they won't acknowledge it, I'll just need the church to change until they do. I'll become as strong as I need to until it does."

The two of them stared each other down and the first to give in was Valjakka.

"Such nonsense... is what I'd like to say. However, it seems you're serious."

"You believe me?"

He looked up at the ceiling helplessly.

"After seeing that you even have an elf on your side, I have no choice but to accept it, right? I'd wager that even Diekmeyer will cooperate with you. In which case you're already an influence in the church that they cannot possibly ignore."

Chastille never thought he would accept, so she was left staring in wonder. Valjakka then bowed to her.

"Allow me to apologize in exchange for acknowledging you as a full-fledged Archangel."

"...What do you mean?"

"It's about Sylvester, your brother. I was an incompetent superior for allowing him to die."

"That's not..."

Valjakka shook his head.

"That day, we were handling an incident called the rare species hunt. However, we were caught in Archdemon Shere Khan's trap, and I lost many of my subordinates. If not for Sylvester's devotion, I would also have died there."

Stopping for a moment there, Valjakka bowed even more deeply.

"The reason I'm able to live while bearing my shame is thanks to Sylvester. I swear to cooperate with you as a means to atone for what happened to him."

"Lord Valjakka..." Chastille shook her head. "Raise your head, Lord Valjakka. Both my brother and I have been saved just from your regrets over what happened."

"You'll say that for me?"

And as tears filled his eyes, a great tremor ran through the labyrinth.

"Dammit, woman! How long are you planning to follow us?!" Kaltiainen roared in a boisterous voice.

And finding this trouble tiresome, Stella looked up at her teacher.

"You hear him? Hey, can I leave already?"

"Haah... Do you plan on leaving me all alone in this stuffy place? I'll cry?"

"I also want to cry, though."

Michael and Kaltiainen had ended up forming a group for entering the underground labyrinth. However, even Stella was forced to come along, maybe out of pure harassment. A vein could be seen twitching about on Kaltiainen's head.

"It seems like you really want to fucking die, woman."

"Hey teach, why'd you team up with this geezer anyway?"

Stella completely ignored the roaring middle-aged Archangel. There were ten partners to choose from. Stella would've been far more at ease if he'd just paired up with Chastille.

Michael ruffled Stella's hair up roughly in high spirits.

"Don't be so mean. Kaltiainen's a good guy, ya know? He just hates sorcerers so much that they disgust him."

"I also hate you so much that it disgusts me though."

"See?"

Stella didn't know what she was supposed to get from that, but Michael had apparently put some thought into this in his own little way... or at least she hoped he had. And as she held back a headache, Michael suddenly made a serious face.

"Well, let's cut the jokes out already. Kaltiainen's about the only one I can trust unconditionally in this case."

"What about Chastille?"

"Well, she's also the honest type and won't lie, but when it comes to Zagan, it all goes in one ear and out the other. So I refrained from grouping with her this

time."

Michael boldly exposed the connection between Chastille and Zagan, to which Stella nodded.

So he plans to finish this geezer off here... It was the first she'd heard of it herself, but her teacher planned to have her inherit a Sacred Sword. Meaning the plan was probably to finish off Kaltiainen and steal his sword. Frankly speaking, it was an unwelcome favor for Stella, who preferred to just punch things rather than use a blade.

And yet Kaltiainen snorted as if he wasn't agitated by any of this.

"Hmph. I don't like how she's currying favor with an Archdemon, but the way she will go to any means to struggle for survival is splendid."

Stella mysteriously didn't sense any hostility from him as he said that, and she was left cocking her head.

Huh? Didn't he want to use that as a reason to finish Chastille off? That girl was Zagan's, or more specifically, his bride Nephy's friend. She was someone who deserved Stella's protection. And that was why she was on guard against this man, but judging from his reaction just now, it seemed to be unnecessary. Michael also agreed with a bitter smile.

"Well, with that incident a year ago, the Archangels are just filled with youngsters."

"I don't care about their age, but that lot are all eager to die. Those who struggle to live in filth become far stronger than those who want to die a clean death."

"Going by that logic, won't the world just get filled with trash?"

"Are you saying reality is different?"

It was as if he was saying he was proof of that very fact. Stella felt like she finally understood why Michael had chosen this man as a partner.

He's aware of the fact that he's a villain... Thinking back on it, he'd used the word "holy" with irony during the meeting. In that sense, this man's thought process was closer to sorcerers. He wasn't an ally, but perhaps he could be

trusted.

Kaltiainen glared at Michael.

"More importantly, Diekmeyer. The fact that you invited me means that you damn well noticed, right?"

"Hm? Oh, you mean about how it feels like there's a traitor among us?"

"A traitor?"

Stella knit her brows.

"Yeah. There's someone in the church working with those damn sorcerers. If not, there's no way even an Archdemon could breach the treasury so easily."

"Plus, it's probably their fault Azazel got annihilated."

It was the name that had come up during the meeting. Stella had been driven out right away, but she naturally eavesdropped during their conversation. And unable to understand what was going on, she cut into their conversation.

"Hey pops, didn't you suspect Chastille?"

"I did, but she's not capable of such tricks."

"Well, she is a crybaby."

Unexpectedly, her non-work-mode behavior during the meeting proved her innocence. But Stella was still confused.

"Hmm, I still don't get it. It's no good to collude with sorcerers, but it's fine to openly collaborate with them? How is it any different?"

Kaltiainen looked truly exasperated upon hearing this.

"It's a huge difference. Foolishly working with them in the open is done at your own risk, whereas a traitor sells out their comrades. How many Angelic Knights do you think died because of this traitor?"

Stella thought that the boundary between those two was just a matter of individual opinion, but she understood what he was trying to say.

Umm, so basically, Chastille isn't getting other people involved, so it's fine?

And the problem with the traitor was that they caused other knights to die, so

they were bad.

Is it the same guy who's harassing Chastille? Both Zagan and Chastille seemed to be planning to settle things, but Stella thought it'd be fine if she at least helped look for them. Apparently, Michael had teamed up with Kaltiainen so that he could look for them too.

"So, what do you think?" Kaltiainen asked.

"Let's see... The ones who reacted during the meeting were Valjakka, the Juutilainen brothers, and Junior. I don't know much about Hartonen, but he probably doesn't know anything."

"Ginias is a newcomer. I bet he doesn't know much."

"I wonder about that. It's possible that he's being used without even realizing it, right?"

They were likely referring to the boy who had come in at the end. He really did look far too honest and easy to trick. On the other hand, Chastille's non-work mode was basically a ticking bomb, so there was no need to suspect her.

That girl's amazing, huh? Her crybaby behavior is actually working for her to avoid a crisis. That could be said to be a miracle of sorts. It was something that she even wanted to analyze and research as a sorcerer.

And just then...

"Mrgh?"

"Whoa? An earthquake?"

The underground labyrinth shook greatly.



"Lady Oberon! Ugh... I hope she's still safe taking on two sorcerers at once."

Zagan found himself in a dimly lit stone passageway after teleporting. He could hear Ginias' flustered voice further ahead. It seemed Oberon was no longer here. The walls themselves gave off the slightest bit of luminescence, which was enough for a sorcerer to see clearly, but anyone normal or an Angelic Knight would likely need another light source.

Zagan sensed something beneath him and shifted his focus to the floor, where he noticed some sort of crest carved into it. There were tiny letters inscribed within each crest.

Sorcery... or not... is this Elvish? He couldn't sense any power from the letters or crests, but he could guess it was a portion of some manner of elven device.

There was an uncountable number of lacerations on the ceilings and walls, giving a glimpse of the flashy fight that took place here. And as he confirmed the situation, Zagan muttered to himself, full of interest.

"Hmm. This seems to be the underground treasury of Raziel. Or I suppose the underground labyrinth leading to it."

"What a mysterious place. Somehow... it feels nostalgic."

"Nostalgic?"

"Yes. The air here resembles that of the air in the hidden village I lived in just a little."

"I see. Well, this is a church. Elves may have an affinity with such places. Since we're here and all, shall we take a little walk?"

"Yes."

"But it's somewhat cold here. It's better to put that on and keep warm, honey."

"Yes, dear."

Zagan adjusted his mantle, and Nephy put on her overcoat and hat. And now that they were both dressed warmly, they felt like their hearts had warmed up as well.

"...Wait a minute. Why are the two of you so calm...? I mean, why are you here?"

Ginias finally came to his senses and questioned the couple with a dumbfounded look, to which Zagan simply shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not sure how to answer myself. We were here before we even realized it. I'd actually like you to explain things to me."

When he teleported, he'd ended up here. He specifically wanted to know where in the labyrinth he was, and how close to the treasury they were.

Ginias gripped his chest with a pained expression.

"...I see. So you were caught in my teleportation. I don't even know how to apologize for that."

Zagan was doing his best to placate him, but the way this boy trusted him without any hint of hesitation had Nephy holding her hands to her chest with a guilty conscience.

"It wasn't your doing, right? There's no need to apologize."

Zagan made a show to be surprised, and Ginias smiled with a small sense of relief.

"It relieves me that you would say so."

Zagan was truly sorry for this endlessly honest boy.

"Now then, this doesn't appear to be a place we should be treading upon. I'd like to get out, but which way is the exit?"

Ginias put his hand to his brow, holding back a headache, and shook his head.

"It's useless. This is Raziel's treasury. If you move around carelessly, you'll activate the traps. Please follow me."

"But won't we be a hindrance to you?"

"I can't possibly allow the two of you to die."

As such, Zagan nodded like he had lost out to Ginias' persistence.

"Very well. Sorry about this, but allow us to accompany you. The two of us will hide if it gets dangerous. It's still not safe here, right?"

"Indeed. You truly are wise," Ginias said, then held up the hilt of his Sacred Sword. "O light."

A small amount of light poured out from his hilt and illuminated the dim passageway. It didn't reach all that far, but it was just bright enough so that walking around was possible.

It was unexpected that they'd have company, but Zagan held his hand out to Nephy, and she timidly squeezed his hand with a bashful smile.

Ah, she's wearing her gloves today. They were the gloves Zagan had gifted to her. They matched her coat well and just looking at her wearing them filled him with happiness.

And so, as they followed behind Ginias, Zagan threw a question his way.

"By the way, is this place related to elves? As you can see, my wife is an elf. It seems she senses something here."

Nephy's ears turned bright red upon being called his wife. Ginias looked around awkwardly then cleared his throat with a cough.

"I wonder about that. I haven't ever heard such stories, but the elves are a sacred existence to the church. They may have been involved here."

The crests on the ground clearly had Elvish letters written in them, but it appeared Angelic Knights were unable to read it.

Well, I guess there aren't all that many sorcerers that can read it either. Nephy also appeared to have an interest in the letters on the floor, and she walked along as she stared at them. And suddenly struck with an idea, Zagan called out to Nephy.

"Oh yeah. Are you able to read these letters on the floor, honey?"

"Huh? Me?"

Nephy had only had a basic grasp on reading and writing before meeting Zagan. She only really recognized numbers and her own name. When Zagan had taught her to read and write as a supplement to teaching her sorcery, he had also ended up teaching her Elvish. In short, this was like a test to see whether Nephy was properly studying or not.

Ginias turned around with a surprised look.

"Can you read it?"

"Umm, to an extent."

Nephy nodded, and Ginias directed his light to the floor. After she stared at

the crests for a moment, Nephy's pink lips trembled as she began reading it aloud.

"—Please save the endlessly pitiful one — If you are the one who wields the thirteen swords and Sigils, we shall yield the path to you—"

Those were all the words carved around the crest. Nephy took a glance up at Zagan. Her translation was somewhat literal in places, making it hard to interpret its meaning, but he nodded back to her, indicating that she was largely correct.

The first half required no adjustments, but the second half stated that only those who possessed a Sacred Sword or a Sigil of some sort had the qualifications to pass. Zagan's face slackened at the sight of Nephy smiling with relief, while Ginias muttered in bewilderment.

"Is that everything?"

"Yes. All the stones in this area are engraved with the same words."

"Hmm. The swords here likely refers to the Sacred Swords, but why thirteen?"

"I've heard there are only twelve Sacred Swords, right?"

Meaning there was a thirteenth regardless of the seraph?

Or perhaps a Sacred Sword which sealed Azazel once existed. He could understand what was written here if that were the case. However, Zagan's focus was on another word.

Thirteen Sigils... It was unreasonable to assume that this referred to the Sigils of the Archdemon. However, there was a ridiculous Archdemon out there like Andrealphus. He couldn't deny the possibility that there were others affiliated with both sorcery and the church.

"Alshiere Imera..."

And that was the name to leave Zagan's lips as he pondered over it.

"What about Alshiere Imera?"

"Oh, nothing... It's supposed to be the anniversary of a legend where a girl returned from the dead, right?" Zagan researched the legend of the church

after the incident on Alshiere Imera. "I was just wondering where that girl vanished to after resurrecting."

"She returned to heaven, of course. Isn't it only natural for a saint who brought about such a miracle to be welcomed into heaven?"

It was a truly exemplary answer for the church.

"So she died again despite resurrecting?"

Zagan obviously knew that this girl still existed, as she had started freeloading at his castle recently. Ginias likely didn't possess a clear answer to this though. All he could do was shake his head.

"Does that have something to do with the words written here?"

"Just a bit. Hearing 'that endlessly pitiful one' simply reminded me of the story of that girl is all. Wouldn't you find her pitiful if she was still wandering around this world where nobody recognizes her?"

Making such a statement was bound to buy the animosity of the people from the church, but Ginias nodded in admiration.

"I see, I never thought of it from that perspective." Ginias held up his Sacred Sword. "So these inscriptions may imply the need to save her."

"They just might."

Zagan didn't know whether to make this boy an enemy or an ally, but he honestly nodded along. He then looked around him in an annoyed manner.

I've had a bad feeling ever since coming here. It felt like he was being watched. It was a discomfort that he knew quite well. He felt the same thing back when Kuroka had come to town. And the identity of the one watching him at that time was...

"Heeheehee, looks like all the actors are in place, so let's get this party started, shall we?"

It was basically just as he'd expected. A familiar and irritating voice resounded in the air, and Zagan couldn't hold back a sigh.

"Who goes there?!"

Ginias gallantly brandished his blade, while Zagan scooped Nephy up by the waist. And almost as if that was a signal for things to begin, the floor of the labyrinth suddenly broke apart.



There seemed to be another level of the labyrinth beneath them, and with no more floor at their feet, Zagan, Nephy, and Ginias were now falling through the air.

"We're jumping. Nephy, hang on tightly."

"Yes, Master Zagan."

Zagan whispered in Nephy's ear as the ground collapsed, and she tightly wrapped her arms around his neck. And with his beloved embracing him, Zagan kicked off the fragments of the crumbling floor and escaped into the air.

This much should be possible for someone who isn't a sorcerer. That's because Zagan didn't use any sorcery to reinforce himself. And so, after safely escaping from the rubble, he heard a scream beneath him.

"UAAAAAAH!"

It was Ginias. As one would expect, this situation was difficult for a thirteenyear-old boy to deal with.

What a troublesome brat. At the current rate, it was likely he would get crushed by the falling rubble, so Zagan reluctantly stretched his arm out towards the back of Ginias' neck. Immediately following that, the rubble crashed onto the ground. And with a cloud of dust rising around him, Zagan safely landed atop the rubble.

Okay, Nephy wasn't hurt at all! After immediately confirming this, he dropped the young boy and corrected his grip on the beloved girl in his arms.

"Uwah!"

"Oops, sorry. Are you okay?"

Ginias toppled over the rubble, and Zagan apologized for his carelessness.

"Wh-Who are you? That manner of movement isn't something a normal

person can do."

"Huh...? Is that so? I think it's perfectly natural for someone to do so for the sake of protecting their wife though."

At any rate, Zagan needed to surpass the entirety of the church and every sorcerer. This much was nothing to boast about. Nephy, on the other hand, was turning redder and redder and buried her face in Zagan's chest.

"Hmm. The footing here is poor. Be careful."

Zagan carefully lowered her on top of the rubble, and Nephy took uncertain steps as she stood herself upright.

Mm. It's dangerous, so we should hold hands! Zagan gripped her right hand, and Nephy timidly wrapped her fingers between his. And watching the two of them do so, Ginias smiled bitterly as if giving in to Zagan's logic.

"I see. So it's a necessary strength for you."

However, Zagan wasn't looking at Ginias. The space they had fallen into was a large room. It was about the same size as his throne room back at the castle. There was enough room to stand over a hundred people in a line.

At the center of the room stood a stone pedestal, somewhat like a throne, with a single staff sticking upright out of it. It gave off a pale glimmer like silver, but that glow was mana — or by the church's definition, aura — and wasn't a property of silver.

Mithril... Is that Azazel's Staff?

And noticing Zagan's gaze, Ginias raised his voice.

"This can't be... Is this the treasury? Did someone break through our labyrinth?"

This was apparently the treasury. Taking a closer look at the floor, there was a colorful assortment of jewels and gold which was ruthlessly crushed by the rubble. It was somewhat comical that all this treasure they hoarded by collecting forced donations from the public was so splendidly put to waste like that.

The area around the staff was no exception either. About half the pedestal

was missing, and there was even a dirty broom tumbling about on the ground. Zagan simply didn't notice all this because of the sublime glow of the mithril.

And seemingly brought to their senses by Ginias' shocked voice, groans could be heard all over the room.

"Ow... Are you hurt, Lord Valjakka?"

"I'm fine... You also appear unharmed, Chastille."

Zagan's body stiffened up with a jolt. He turned to the familiar voice and spotted a girl with red hair getting to her feet a short distance away from him.

Ah, I didn't expect the crybaby to be here as well... It was pretty much guaranteed that Zagan's identity would be exposed. Well, he had been informed that she would be in the Holy City, so it was careless of him not to foresee this situation, even if he was all giddy on his fake honeymoon.

Chastille immediately noticed Zagan and raised her voice.

"Huh...? Ah! Why are you—?"

"Hm? Is that Ginias?"

Chastille was brought to her senses by the voice of the Angelic Knight next to her and covered her mouth in a panic.

"Gah! No way! Why is that brat still alive?"

"Dexia, you're too loud. It'll be tough to take on so many Sacred Swords at once right now."

Zagan took a look over to the whispering voices and spotted two girls who looked like sorcerers hiding in the passageway's shadows, as well as a fully armored Raphael. He didn't quite understand their grouping, but they seemed to be the intruders who had snuck into the treasury.

Taking another look around the room, there were signs of people stirring all over.

The one hiding behind the rubble there is Oberon, I think. It seemed that she didn't want to be spotted here and took up a position where the other Angelic Knights couldn't see her. Among the others in the room was Michael, who was

shamelessly giggling, and for some reason, Stella was with him.

Huh? Why's she dressed like an Angelic Knight? He didn't know what her current circumstances were, but Stella also looked speechless upon spotting Zagan.

Ginias' Sacred Sword then began to tremble with a jarring hum. And it wasn't just his, even Chastille and Michael's swords were humming.

One of the Angelic Knights then muttered in disbelief.

"They're resonating? Does that mean all twelve Sacred Swords are gathered here?"

And with that, all gazes naturally gathered on Zagan.

Well, I guess I'm the only outsider here. In other words, all twelve Archangels, including Raphael, were gathered in this room. Zagan couldn't help but sigh.

Twelve Sacred Swords and four Archdemons. This is going to become a ridiculous uproar... And after observing the faces of everyone present, Zagan was left somewhat confused. There was a strangely large number of young Archangels. He heard Raphael was the oldest, but the gap between him and most of the others was quite large.

How odd... Still, now's not the time to get all curious... And the moment he began considering how to deceive them all, another voice rang through the air.

"Heeheehee, that's right! That's because the man standing right there is none other than the one who possesses the lost Sacred Sword! Right, Archdemon Zagan?"

Ah, that damn Bifrons really does the most hateful things... It may have been better to just listen to Barbatos' warning at the time and kill the Archdemon instead of doing something so halfhearted as trying to punish them. Barbatos was surely rolling in laughter himself, seeing that the shadow at Chastille's feet was squirming about.

Tension ran through the bodies of all the Archangels as they focused their gazes on Zagan. Bifrons' goal was likely also the staff. Having said that, it wasn't all that simple to outwit twelve Archangels and Zagan at the same time, even

for an Archdemon.

So the best plan was to stick one's enemies against one's other enemies. Zagan was planning on doing that himself.

And the first to step forth at this revelation was none other than Ginias.

"Don't be deceived! These two are but simple civilians! Is the owner of that voice not the Archdemon here?!"

"But what are civilians even doing here?! Isn't it strange?!"

One of the young Angelic Knights pointed out something perfectly obvious.

"That's because..." Ginias faltered. In any case, Zagan managed to get some information out of him and got some use from him to get here too. It really was pitiful to fool him any longer, so Zagan spoke for himself as if it wasn't all that big a deal.

"Oh, now that I think of it, I never named myself. I'm Zagan. I've taken residence near Kianoides and serve as a king among sorcerers."

Ginias' face froze over as if he had just been betrayed.

"No way... You're lying, right?"

It was somewhat pitiful, but this would also serve as a lesson not to trust sorcerers. It felt like this might serve as an impetus for him to build a grudge against sorcerers, but Angelic Knights and sorcerers were enemies to begin with. This was how it was supposed to be.

Zagan removed his right glove and revealed his Sigil of the Archdemon. A storm of mana suddenly broke out, and the Archangels all gulped.

Ginias was completely stupefied. Whereas Chastille was surely getting ready for battle. She was looking at both Zagan and the Angelic Knights vigilantly. Stella was keeping silent, but she was wisely keeping watch on Michael's movements. As for Michael, he was simply averting his gaze indifferently like this had nothing to do with him.

Zagan then steadily spread out his arm and pushed it into his chest pocket. And while he made that exaggerated gesture to overpower the room, he shot a look to Raphael. Don't move from there... It would be bad for the knights here to find out Raphael was still alive. Zagan was the one to bring out this situation, so there was no need to take on any further risks. The remaining uncertain elements were Oberon and Bifrons, but it was probably fine to leave Oberon at large.

Now to smoke Bifrons out. Zagan removed his hand from his pocket, retrieving his pipe.

"Ugh, it must be some tool for sorcery!"

"Don't let your guard down, Julius!"

The Angelic Knights put themselves on guard with sweat on their brows, preparing themselves for some sort of atrocious sorcery. And as they did, Zagan idly held up his hand and turned his attention over to Nephy at his side.

"Oh yeah, Nephy. Now that I think of it, what's the proper way of holding this?"

"Ah, right."

Nephy lined her fingers over Zagan's and guided his thumb and index finger into the correct positions.

"The elegant way of holding it is to place your finger on the bottom here around the center."

"Hmm. It'll require practice to get used to."

"It suits you, Master Zagan."

The two of them then began giggling.

"What exactly are you showing us?"

"Is this also some manner of sorcery?"

Several of the Angelic Knights groaned, unable to bear it any longer. Even so, Zagan put tobacco in his pipe with calm motions and lit it. After puffing out some smoke, he suddenly turned to Michael as if he just noticed him.

"Ooh, isn't that Archangel Michael Diekmeyer over there?"

Zagan went out of his way to name Michael, who was trying his best to pretend not to know him.

"Ah, idiot, don't look this—"

Michael raised his voice in a fluster, but it was too late.

"I've truly come to fancy this tobacco you recommended to me as a sign of our friendship."

"Y-YOU ASSSSSSSSSSS!"

"Ahah! Ahahahahaha! You look hilarious, teach!"

"Quiet, you!"



Michael's resentful shrieks were truly pleasant to the ears.

Hmph. Just be glad I didn't call you Andrealphus. Now the Angelic Knights would have to be vigilant about covering their backs. They surely hadn't forgotten about Bifrons either. There was no way Zagan would let them all get along happily. Stella, on the other hand, was still cackling loudly.

Zagan then finally turned his attention to the remaining Archangels.

"By the way, gentlemen, is this place not sacred to the church? You've got intruders here. Shouldn't you be capturing them?"

"H-He's coming!" Chastille exclaimed.

Zagan raised his index finger, and a black flame appeared above it. Surely aware of what he was about to do, Chastille turned remarkably pale as she screamed.

"S-Seriously?! Everyone take cover!"

It wasn't clear how much they trusted her, but the other Angelic Knights could tell from her desperation that something serious was about to happen. They all leaped out of Zagan's way.

Mmm, they've been properly trained... Zagan made sure to avoid any of the Archangels and pointed his finger steadily at the staff.

"Heaven's Phosphor — Single Petal."

A single black nail shot out from his finger.

This is a miniature version of the Fivefold Flower... Firing five of the needles at the same time was what made up the Fivefold Flower. This sorcery was capable of destroying even a demon, but it had a flaw in that its destructive power was too high, and it obliterated anything and everything in the area. The Single Petal was an experiment of sorts to help progress his research, but it had just enough destructive power to take care of whatever he wanted dead. And his aim this time was pointed at the church's staff.

"Oh no! The staff!"

"Now's not the time for that! Get out of the way!"

They all managed to get out of the effective range of his spell. The needle made direct contact with the staff, but it showed no signs of breaking.

"...You really are an unpleasant guy. What did you plan on doing if I didn't protect the staff?"

A glass-like wall took shape in front of the staff. It was likely a terrifyingly high-level defensive spell, but it crumbled away while Zagan was trying to observe it. And as it did, a sorcerer who couldn't be identified as a boy or a girl appeared behind it.

"Hmm, to think you managed to defend against Heaven's Phosphor, even if I did hold it back. You really are an Archdemon, Bifrons."

Zagan clapped his hands for show, which made Bifrons reply with a spite filled smile.

"Hey there, Archdemon Zagan. All I did was tease you a little, and you tried to break the treasure. You're like a child throwing a tantrum, you know?"

"Nothing of the sort. I simply believed you would block it."

"Aah, nevermind. That's not what I want to talk about." Bifrons grinned. "Let's talk about your cute little daughter. She was coughing up blood, you know? Is she okay?"

"F-Foll!"

Nephy gulped, and Zagan gently embraced her shoulder.

"Don't worry. She's gotten stronger. Strong enough for this bastard to bestow her a name."

Zagan was aware that Bifrons attacked Foll.

This guy's vision is unexpectedly narrow. Zagan completely thought Bifrons withdrew upon noticing that Zagan was watching, but apparently, the Archdemon just ran away normally.

Bifrons smiled like an innocent child.

"Hehehe, and you came here to play despite knowing that? It doesn't suit the rumors of how much human emotion still burns within you. What are you

getting all merry for?"

"My daughter sent me off with her best wishes. What kind of parent would refuse that?"

This was the reason Zagan had gone to have fun on a little vacation despite it being baffling to everyone around him.

I'd be hopeless if I was the one to cause her to worry. He had to show that he was capable of playing around properly once in a while, or those around him wouldn't be able to relax. Having said that, it pissed him off that Bifrons said that in front of Nephy and caused her to feel shaken.

Zagan laughed lightly.

"Well, let's stop our talks of human emotion there."

"Oh? What's this? Did something happen?"

"I actually intended to be quite considerate to you though?"

Bifrons likely didn't understand the meaning behind this. The Archdemon knit their brows, and Zagan answered with a gentle smile.

"Didn't the big sister you loved so much leave you precisely because you couldn't understand human emotions?"

And with that, it felt like one could hear something snap in the air.

"...Wait, isn't that really bad?" Michael said as he scratched his head.

At the same time, Bifrons' body vanished.

"Don't get ahead of yourself youngster!"

"Aren't we both youngsters?"

Sand-like crystals gathered in the air and squirmed about as if being sucked into Zagan's body. And just at that time, Zagan swung his fist.

"Ugh!"

Both Zagan and Bifrons groaned.

This guy is disconnected from the sorcery! The movement of the crystals couldn't be stopped by devouring the sorcery. Even though it was being moved

with mana, it was different in nature from sorcery.

The crystals slipped through his clothes, stuck to his body, and pierced into him, attempting to gouge out his heart. It seemed there was no need to even change the crystals into the shape of a hand or a blade or anything if Bifrons was serious. And if Zagan had been just a moment too late, he likely would've had his heart gouged out.

Zagan used the crystals as a medium to slam his mana into Bifrons' very existence. The Archdemon's body appeared in mid-air, red in the face, and fell to the ground. And at the same time, Zagan fell to his knee.

"Master Zagan!"

"...We were just fooling around a little. This is nothing."

However, in the short amount of time it had taken Zagan to respond to Nephy, Bifrons' body once more crumbled away into debris.

"Raphael!" Zagan reflexively yelled. The crystallized Bifrons wasn't heading towards Zagan but was crawling toward Raphael, who was hiding secretly in the rubble.

"Burn to ash — Metatron!"

Raphael immediately drew his Sacred Sword and unleashed the flames of purification, but Bifrons' crystals advanced on him despite being burned. However, the one to scream at that point wasn't Raphael.

"Aristella! Gah!"

The two girls who were with Raphael were swallowed by the swarm of crystals.

"Heehee. I have a promise with Shere Khan, you see. So I'll be retrieving these."

After that, both Bifrons and the girls vanished without a trace.

"Tch!"

Dammit! I've been had! Bifrons didn't get goaded by Zagan's provocations at all. Attacking Zagan, getting punched, everything was part of a plan to abduct

those two girls. All that was left behind was Raphael, with his identity now exposed. Bifrons had claimed complete and utter victory, while inconveniencing Zagan at the same time.

One of the middle-aged Archangels timidly raised his voice.

"That sword... Not just that... The fact that Metatron replied... Is that you, Raphael?"

It was impossible to explain their way out of this situation, so Raphael let out a small sigh and removed his helmet.

"It has been a long time, everyone."

The Angelic Knight next to Chastille then raised his voice in shock.

"Impossible! A man of your caliber betrayed us?!"

"Betrayed? Hmm, I suppose I have. I did kill a cardinal and flee, after all."

"That's wrong!" Chastille screamed. "Cardinal Clavwell was assassinating Archangels for generations! That's why Lord Raphael had no choice but to cut him down! It was the church who betrayed him!"

And this was where Michael finally decided to chime in.

"So, he ended up living under the patronage of Zagan, who had a cordial relationship with the Unification Faction, right?"

Raphael said nothing and simply shrugged his shoulders. That itself was a sufficient reply for those gathered. Over half of them, especially the younger knights, were clearly perturbed. They all began hesitating, unsure of who they should be pointing their swords at.

And yet, Zagan was still unable to hold back a grimace.

Ugh, dammit. It's just getting more and more complicated... He really just wanted to get back to sightseeing with Nephy. There was also Foll's matter, so it was about time that he finished up their trip. In any case, he just wanted to leave already.

It would probably have been fine to just take Raphael and leave, but Michael likely didn't plan to let him leave so that he could recover his position. And

above all else, it didn't seem like these Archangels were going to let him go after the treasury had been reduced to such a state.

If there was one person capable of breaking this situation, it would be Oberon, who had yet to say anything until now.

But I doubt she'll do anything... She had relaxed her body and showed no signs of wanting to participate.

They were in a complete stalemate. However, something unexpected broke the stalemate in an instant.

"Master Zagan, shall we return to the castle? I'm worried about Foll."

"...You're right. I've got to punch Bifrons anyway, so let's head back."

Zagan nodded without hesitation at his beloved bride's suggestion. And seeing that the one who could be considered the primary culprit behind this entire incident was planning to leave, the Angelic Knights stiffened with anger. The stalemate had crumbled ever so easily.



"Don't ... screw with us!"

Several Archangels drew their Sacred Swords and pointed them at Zagan at once.

Mmm... There's no need to hesitate. It's nice and simple. He just had to punch everyone who got in his way and go home. That would solve everything.

"Geez! Why do you always do whatever you want?!"

Chastille also took action while looking like she was holding back a headache. And the first to let loose their sword was...

"Shine — Sacred Sword Azrael!"

A burst of light was let loose the moment she drew her sword from its sheath. The light wasn't directed at Zagan, but at the Archangels. Several of the knights had the swords knocked out of their hands, while the others blocked the blow with their own swords or dodged out of the way.

"Damn you, Lillqvist! So you really have betrayed us!"

The Angelic Knights directed their anger at Chastille and tried to pick their Sacred Swords back up, but they were once more blocked by her light.

"Don't misunderstand me. You're the ones I'm protecting here." She then looked down at the Archangels who had dropped their swords. "All the ones who dropped their swords failed. Were you planning on challenging an Archdemon despite being unable to withstand that? I couldn't possibly abandon my brethren to a dog's death, now could I?"

This even had Zagan wide-eyed in surprise.

She really is talented when in work mode... This was the ideal solution for the Unification Faction to shave down the number of Zagan's enemies while protecting the Angelic Knights. It looked like three of the Archangels were rendered powerless. She managed to stop three of them on her own, so that was more than enough effort put in by her. However, the remaining Archangels were still gripping their swords.

"It's not like I trust you or anything, but I agree with that opinion. We don't need hindrances here."

"Kaltiainen?!"

A middle-aged Archangel swung his sword at Chastille. He appeared to be quite skilled, and it took Chastille all she had to keep his attention. However, he wasn't her only opponent.

"My apologies, but I, Hartonen, do not acknowledge one who is connected to an Archdemon as my ally."

A young man slipped to her side and tried to slam the flat of his Sacred Sword into Chastille.

"Whoa there. Why don't you knights fight like knights and do it one-on-one?" "Gah!"

Stella kicked the Archangel right in the face before he could do anything. And watching that, Michael held his head with both hands.

"Hey, you! What the hell are you doing when my position's in such a shaky state?!" Chastille exclaimed.

"Chastille's my friend. Was the power you gave me meant for ignoring my friends?" Stella inquired.

"Haaah... That damn Zachariel, why choose someone so damn troublesome?" Michael said as he let out a sigh, took off his sword belt, and tossed it at Stella.

"Then give it a go. Paths are meant to be cut open with one's own strength, right, Zachariel?"

Zagan's eyes shot open in shock.

Stella's... the next wielder of that Sacred Sword...? Stella herself also stiffened up with her mouth wide open.

"You're giving it to me?"

"Yeah. Try it out however you like. Don't use anything but that sword though, okay?"

This was apparently better than having her use sorcery here. Zagan held back his confusion about all of this and turned a refreshing smile towards Michael.

"Are you not going to fight yourself, Michael?"

"I'm neutral, ya know? In times like these, all of you can do whatever you want."

As if to prove this, Michael took a box of tobacco from his chest pocket and began smoking. The unification and neutral factions were falsely similar. The difference in action taken by Chastille and Michael demonstrated this full well.

Michael then turned his attention to the three Archangels who had dropped their swords as if suddenly remembering something.

"Oh yeah, you three who failed just now. Sit down on your knees right here. You'll be restarting your training starting tomorrow."

The three young Archangels were speechless but timidly followed his orders.

Tch. That damn Andrealphus. I'll have him properly explain all this afterwards... And as that went on, Stella shouted in a completely out of place, cheerful tone.

"Thanks, teach! I was super pissed at this geezer!"

"...Don't look down on me, woman!"

"Ahahah! It's all right. I'm no good with sword, so I'll hold back. Oh, I guess I can't really do that since I'm not very skilled, huh? Well, whatever. Let's do this — Zachariel!"

Stella drew the Sacred Sword while laughing as she usually did and a black flame poured from its blade.

"What?! She really...?! Gaah! Howl — Zadkiel!"

The middle-aged Archangel who was crossing swords with Chastille switched targets over to Stella. In his stead, the Archangel who had called himself Hartonen began fighting Chastille. And those weren't the only sword fights to begin.

"It's been a long time, Valjakka."

"Lord Hyurandell. Why would a man of your caliber... Ugh?!"

"Does it displease you?"

"I can't possibly forgive you!"

It appeared that the young man named Valjakka had some sort of grudge with Raphael and was locking swords with him.

It seems there are people here who are on par with Chastille and Raphael...
The first three knights to drop out looked rather inexperienced. With them,
Chastille, Stella, Raphael, and the three they were in combat with, made up
nine Sacred Swords.

As for Ginias, it didn't seem that he had recovered from the shock of being tricked. He was simply standing there, dumbfounded. However, there were twelve Sacred Swords in this room. As for the remaining two...

"Our opponent is an Archdemon. Don't let your guard down for an instant, Julius."

"I know, brother."

Two young men who appeared to be brothers stood before Zagan.

"Nephy, stay a good distance back from me."

"Yes. Do be careful, Master Zagan."

"Mm."

Having her see him off like this felt somewhat fresh, and Zagan's face unintentionally slackened. The Archangels before him apparently took this as a provocation, and the brothers screamed while their cheeks convulsed with anger.

"Archangel Arvo Juutilainen! Archdemon Zagan! I'll be taking your head!"

"Archangel Julius Juutilainen! Here I come!"

The brothers named themselves in a stuffy manner and came charging in from both sides at the same time. They got along quite well as siblings and were well coordinated.

Zagan lowered his pipe. It would have been a waste to put it out, seeing as there was still some tobacco left, so Zagan bent his body in a way that avoided their slashes without letting it get extinguished.

"Your swordsmanship isn't bad. If you accumulate a little more experience, you may be able to reach Michael and Raphael's level."

Zagan honestly praised them, which only fanned the brothers' anger further.

"Don't make light of us, Archdemon! Flutter — Sandalphon!"

The elder brother called to his Sacred Sword, and a cold chill that felt like it could tear one's skin poured from his blade as it shined a radiant blue. In fact, it could do exactly that. The skin on Zagan's cheek froze in an instant, and a small line of blood ran down his face. And there was no way an Archangel's attack would end at just a scratch.

"With me, Julius!"

"I know! Dance — Gabriel!"

The younger brother's Sacred Sword let loose a stream of water. A wave of cold and water, and when the two of them combined...

"Hmm, now this is splendid."

An enormous mass of ice was born, then went to envelop itself around Zagan.

He really was glad that he'd had Nephy get away from him.

The mass of ice was wrapping around Zagan and growing in size, looking to crush him within it. To add to that, upon coming into contact with the aura from the Sacred Swords, it was impossible to weave sorcery. It was likely impossible for an average sorcerer to escape this technique.

But they still lack experience. And what Zagan chose to do... was stomp his foot. That was all. The entire treasury shook from that simple action. And underneath his foot was the unstable pile of rubble.

The ice was enveloping the rubble as well, but it didn't change the fact that his action had introduced foreign substances into the block of ice. By sending a shockwave into those pockets, even the ice would be unable to withstand it. Ice with cracks in it was ever so brittle. So the enormous block of ice began crumbling into pieces.

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"We've got you now...!"

"Hrm...?"
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The shattered ice turned into sharpened blades and rained down on Zagan.

"I see. So this is all one technique which includes having the ice shatter. Well done."

Even an Archdemon wouldn't be able to escape this combination from a crushing block of ice to a rain of frozen blades. However, Zagan stomped on the rubble and shattered it to pieces earlier. The fragments were thrown in the air all around him. After finding a sizable piece of rubble within all that, Zagan gave it a good kick.

The stone was about the size of a fist, and it slammed into a blade of ice that was aimed at Zagan's head, changing its course. The blade crashed into another blade, and the stone that he'd originally kicked also ricocheted and slammed into yet another blade. The chain repeated itself again, with blades slamming into stones slamming into blades one after the other right over his head.

Before long, all the blades of ice succumbed to gravity and fell to the ground. Zagan of course started by confirming that Nephy hadn't suffered a single scratch, then he enjoyed another puff from his pipe.

"A wonderful technique. However, it isn't sharp enough to cut an Archdemon."

"No way... Completely unharmed...?"

The brothers were dumbfounded. Zagan didn't suffer a single scratch from what could be considered a shower of blades. The single rock that Zagan had kicked had knocked down every single blade like a rampaging billiard ball.

This would probably be hard for even someone of Kimaris' level to handle completely... He probably would've been fine if he had wrapped his body with sorcery in advance, but it was too late to ward against it now. The only other Archdemon who could come out of this unharmed was Andrealphus, since he could manipulate time.

The reason Zagan had been able to completely break through this technique was because he was a sorcerer who specialized in observing sorcery and imitating it an instant. In other words, he specialized in observing and analyzing the flow of things.

One could say that he was the worst opponent for these two Archangels. And yet, the brothers didn't give up.

"Don't think you've won, Archdemon!"

The older brother, the one who called himself Arvo, fiercely charged in.

Hey now, you'll crash into Nephy if I dodge this! Zagan made sure to stand in a way so that he was covering Nephy behind him this entire time. There was no way he could dodge this attack. That being said, if he punched someone charging at him so defenselessly, he would end up killing them.

"What a stuffy fellow."

And with no other choice, Zagan grasped Arvo's face like a hawk to stop him. He might suffer a serious shock to his neck from this, but he'd have to put up with that much. It should have been quite painful, but Arvo was smiling.

"That... arrogance... has proven... fatal!"

"What?"

Immediately following that, ice began spreading out with Arvo at its center.

With Zagan grabbing his face, his arm was swallowed by the ice before he could even let go. Taking a closer look, the Archangel had stabbed himself with his own Sacred Sword.

Does he plan to take me along with him?

"Now! Do it, Julius!"

"B-Brother..."

"We'll be able to take down an Archdemon with just our lives! A cheap price to pay!"

"Ugh... Damn it all! Gabriel!"

After hesitating for but a moment, Julius quickly resolved himself to his fate. Arvo had a Sacred Sword thrust through his body already; there was no saving him. The water streaming out of Julius' sword wrapped around his own body, and a giant spear of water pointed itself directly at Zagan.

He completely ignored all defenses and plunged toward Zagan like a loosed arrow. The swirling vortex of water at the tip felt like it could even pierce through Heaven's Scale with a direct hit. But most of all, the water current even began swallowing Julius' body. It was like he was caught between rotating cogs. Even if they somehow managed to defeat Zagan, they would surely never wield swords again.

It was likely that aside from Confession, there wasn't a single Archangel that was capable of unleashing this powerful of an attack. It could be said to be the ultimate spear. Its only weakness was that if it was dodged, they would be dying in vain. But they managed to overcome this with Arvo's sacrifice. Not that Zagan would ever choose to dodge this move anyway, seeing as Nephy was behind him. And with such a crisis before him, Zagan simply let out an astonished sigh.

"I approve of your resolve, but you two don't have enough attachment to your damned lives."

He then thrust forth his right hand, still holding his pipe.

"Heaven's Scale Eastern Sky."

A massive right arm made of Heaven's Scale manifested at Zagan's side.

Michael, who was sitting on the sidelines while watching everything, whistled in admiration.

"Not bad at all. They got Zagan to use his right arm. You guys should learn from them."

"What are you saying, Lord Diekmeyer?! Go save the Juutilainens!"

"What do you think this old man can do without a Sacred Sword? Well, just sit there and watch."

One of the young Archangels clung to Michael for help, but he simply sat there laughing.

Heaven's Scale was the invincible shield Zagan had created to fight the church.

Unfortunately for you, I never planned to belittle the Sacred Swords... Zagan had had this prepared the moment he was first confronted with the Archangels. He had simply stopped providing it with mana, and the moment he'd let his mana flow once more, it activated instantly.

And so, the ultimate spear and invincible shield collided. The Eastern Sky grabbed Julius' Sacred Sword. An ear-grating creak rang through the air as cracks ran down the Eastern Sky, but the sorcery known as Heaven's Scale fed on mana and aura to strengthen itself. The damaged portions repaired themselves, and the Sacred Sword lost more and more power. And with a sound like shattering glass, silence spread throughout the room.

The surging current of water from the Sacred Sword came to a stop, and all that was left was the brilliantly shining Eastern Sky. The invincible shield came out on top. Having used up all his strength, Julius fell to his knees. His entire body was covered in bruises and lacerations. It felt like his limbs would tear off at any moment.

"Impossible... We Juutilainens couldn't even manage a single blow when staking our lives on it?"

Arvo was completely taken aback, to which Zagan replied in astonishment.

"You actually did pretty well. I didn't plan on using the Eastern Sky here at all.

You may pride yourselves in having forced me to use it."

He then tapped the ice with his pipe. Black flames flew out like fireflies and shattered Arvo's ice. Both Zagan and Arvo were unharmed by the flames. Only the ice was destroyed.

Heaven's Phosphor Will-o'-the-Wisp. I thought the lack of destructive power was a flaw, but it can be used for something like this too, huh?

And as he reevaluated the usefulness of Will-o'-the-Wisp, Zagan grabbed the Sacred Sword that was in Arvo's dying body.

Hm? Nothing's happening. Zagan was prepared to burn his hand, but the Sacred Sword didn't reject him. Well, it was a pleasant miscalculation that he was fine after touching it, so Zagan pulled the Sacred Sword out mercilessly.

"Gak!"

Perhaps thanks to freezing his own body, there was no blood loss from pulling out the sword. Having said that, it surely didn't feel good, and Arvo lost consciousness. Zagan then took the dying Arvo and tossed him over to Nephy.

"Can you heal him, Nephy? It's a bit of a waste for him to die here."

"Yes! Please leave it to me!"

Nephy was tense from all the suspense just now, but her smile had returned wonderfully.

It's difficult to heal wounds from Sacred Swords with sorcery, but Nephy's mysticism can handle it. He wasn't sure whether a complete recovery was possible, but they could likely keep Arvo from dying. And seeing that conduct from Zagan, Julius raised his voice in bewilderment.

"Why? Why are you saving my brother? No... before that... you should have been able to avoid it!"

Even if he didn't go out of his way to use the Eastern Sky, Zagan could have broken the ice using Will-o'-the-Wisp, taken Nephy, and gotten away from the blow with ease.

After savoring his pipe for a moment, Zagan let out a puff of smoke as he replied.

"Well, first, I have a debt to Chastille. That crybaby is running about getting her Unification Faction or whatever it is going. I can't possibly do something like that in front of her."

The other reason was because he was only here for sightseeing, but if he'd said that, Julius was sure to get angry. The young Archangel then dropped his blade in resignation.

"Hm? All done?"

"Not only did you hold back on us, you even saved my brother. How exactly am I supposed to keep fighting? It's... our loss."

With that, the Juutilainen brothers were rendered powerless. Taking a look around, the others had also brought their fights to a conclusion. Or rather than bringing them to a conclusion, it was more like they had gotten tired of fighting and were watching Zagan in silence.

"So we're done?" Zagan asked as he shrugged his shoulders. "Then I'd like to get going already."

"We're not... done here!"

And the final one to roar... was Ginias.



Having finally come to his senses, Ginias held his Sacred Sword at the ready and stood before Zagan.

"I cannot understand you."

"Hmm, so?"

Ginias gripped the blade of his Sacred Sword and let his blood run as he shouted.

"However, what I must do is clear — Angelic Confession Raziel!"

Zagan spontaneously let out a sigh of admiration.

So there's someone other than Andrealphus who can use that. The difference from Andrealphus' Confession was that Ginias' was made of green armor, and the weapon in its hand wasn't a spear but a sword. The Confession was about

twice the boy's size and wielded a two-handed sword even larger than that.

The Confession then pointed its blade at Zagan.

"Cut down sorcerers, defeat the Archdemons. That's the duty of the Angelic Knights."

Zagan nodded along, praising his courage.

"That's correct. If you understand that much, then don't hesitate. The one standing before you is your enemy."

Zagan answered him in a composed tone, but he was secretly panicking within.

I need this guy to try his best here or he won't be able to continue living in the church. At the current rate, this boy would become the one responsible for guiding an Archdemon into the treasury, who also happened to be the primary culprit behind its collapse. It wasn't something for an Archdemon like Zagan to be worrying about, but he really couldn't help but feel a little responsible for it.

"Why would a man like you...?!" Ginias yelled as he ground his teeth.

"...Hmph, now that I think of it, she said the exact same thing to me before."

Zagan reflexively strained a smile. Chastille had screamed the same words when he first met her. It seemed he resembled her in more ways than one.

Or maybe that's the type of person the Sacred Swords prefer? If that were the case, the ones who were fighting them in rage earlier may have also possessed similar facets to them. And as Zagan mused over such thoughts, Ginias held his sword at the ready.

"Head Archangel Ginias Galahad II! Archdemon Zagan, I challenge you!"

"Yeah, come at me. Show me your power."

The green Confession brought down its greatsword, and Zagan held up the Eastern Sky to stop the blow.

Andrealphus' power is far greater... It may have been pitiable to compare him to a monster who wielded the power of both a Sacred Sword and Archdemon, but that's the assessment Zagan gave his strike. However, he then realized that

Ginias was not there beneath the Confession.

"Hmm?"

Zagan turned around and found Ginias already swinging his sword.

"Sing — Raziel!"

Wind blew violently from his blade. This was apparently the Sacred Sword's power. Several sorceries that Zagan had prepared were blown away with ease. He was now in a defenseless state, unable to use sorcery. In this respect, the battle before him overlapped with the time he'd seen Alshiera training in the castle.

How would I fight someone faster than the invocation of sorcery? It wasn't something he could consciously move against.

"Huh?"

Ginias was the one to let loose a killing blow, but he flipped over and was now rolling about in midair. Zagan grabbed the back of Ginias' wrist, threw off his center of gravity, and chucked him away. Ginias tumbled to the ground and had a look on his face that made it clear he had no idea what had happened. However, Zagan didn't look at him with a victorious smile.

"...In the end, I ended up using arts in the final moment... I can't really complain about Decarabia anymore."

The first technique Zagan had learned to survive with was arts. He was thankful that Marc had taught him this, but there was nothing pleasant about using it here. And with a sigh, he turned his back to Ginias.

"Hey, that's enough. It's my loss."

Seeing that Zagan was completely disappointed with himself, Ginias yelled in anger.

"Do you mean to mock me?!"

"Aah, no, it's a personal matter," Zagan replied as he scratched his head. Then he continued by saying, "An Archdemon relying on power other than sorcery is like they're denying their own sorcery, right? That's why you win." This was something Zagan fussed over. If he couldn't maintain his principles, then he was nothing more than the vanquished.

"...Don't screw with me..." Ginias said with a trembling voice. "What do you mean you lost? Do you think you're that strong?"

"That's right, what of it?" Zagan arrogantly replied, to which Ginias returned a sneer.

"How can someone who can't even affirm themselves be strong?! You are weak. Pitifully weak! Very well. Tuck your tail and run. Cutting down such a pitiful Archdemon is nothing to boast of."

He might have been right on the mark. That was why it was somewhat effective in irritating Zagan. However, it was still only enough to change his opinion from, "I tricked you, so I'll let you save face" to, "I guess I can kill you." But in this case, it was the difference between life and death for Ginias.

That's because Zagan simply decided not to kill anyone in front of Nephy. It wasn't his creed not to kill. The only reason for going out of his way to keep the Juutilainen brothers alive was because having people die on his fake honeymoon would leave a bad aftertaste. That's all there was to it.

Zagan simply thought of it as somewhat bothersome to deal with them without killing them. That was just the difference in terms of ability between them.

Whether I like it or not, he may not get it since he's a brat. And taking one moment to think it over once more, he decided to give Ginias a single warning.

"Are you maybe under the assumption that I don't kill people? If so, that's a major misunderstanding."

"You can't kill people. Someone as weak as you will run away even from killing others."

The air froze, and Michael stiffly raised his voice.

"Hey, cut it out there Ginias. I don't have Zachariel with me, I won't be able to help, ya know?"

"Looks like you're a little late to stop them."

This boy likely did not intend to beg for his life, and Zagan simply found him tiresome and was planning on ending things quickly by killing him. Zagan had turned his back on him already, but he turned to face him once more.

"I don't really care about your reasons, but I don't understand your actions. I'm telling you I'll withdraw. Well, I suppose your precious treasury is in this state, and you'd end up with two Archdemons getting away at once. The church's honor will be able to maintain itself, right? Why are you going out of your way to hasten your death?"

Zagan could at least understand the Juutilainens being willing to give up their lives. They thought Zagan was aiming for their treasure, and their honor had been smashed. But above all else, there was hope that they could defeat him by doing so.

However, their honor was able to maintain itself now, and the difference in power between them was clear. More importantly, Zagan had already said that he would leave. There was no meaning in dying here, and the result wouldn't change even if he won.

Ginias ground his teeth loudly.

"Are you sorcerers unable to even understand this much? Giving up on a fight, yielding over victory... What would you call this if not humiliation?!"

Zagan nodded in understanding. Even though he'd shown his power, he'd never launched an attack of his own. The Juutilainen brothers' injuries were self-inflicted. One couldn't even call it a fight.

"Hmm. You certainly have a point. Sorry about that."

Zagan would probably do the same if someone had made such a fool of him. He ended up being unable to understand the feelings of the weak before he knew it. Zagan was in the wrong for this. Well, Zagan had gained power because he hated the thought of becoming such a weakling, so it could be said to be a perfectly natural outcome.

That's why Zagan decided to wield his full power to crush this boy, as a form of apology.

It'll leave a bad aftertaste, but I quess I'll accept this as my responsibility. He

would have to apologize to Nephy later. And as a minimal show of pity, Zagan made his declaration.

"Then here I come. At least try to keep your eyes open until the very end."

"Co-!"

Ginias couldn't even say that one word. Everything was over by the time Zagan swung his arm. The Eastern Sky formed its hand like a blade and crushed both the Confession and Ginias altogether.

Just how many people were able to perceive that motion? It was probably just Michael and maybe one other. Even Chastille and Stella were holding their breaths and completely stiffened up.

However, there was one person there who slowly got up.

"...Good grief. It's not like you at all to kill a child in a fight like this."

It was a voice like a tumbling bell, belonging to none other than the one who had obstinately refused to do anything in this grand melee: Oberon.

She had Ginias in her arms. She apparently covered for him at the last second. However, there was no way she had gotten out of the strike from the Eastern Sky unharmed. A crack ran down her helmet, and it split in two.

"Huh? That face is..." Chastille muttered.

The face revealed from beneath the helmet was that of a young girl in her teens, just as her voice implied. Her large slanted eyes had azure pupils, she had little pink lips, and her hair, now released from her helmet, went down to her waist. Pure white hair. And her ears, just like Nephy's, were pointed to a tip. The ears of an elf.

I couldn't stop it. Zagan knew that Oberon had jumped in. However, after having launched a strike from the Eastern Sky at full force, he had been unable to stop the strike.

Even as a trickle of blood ran down her forehead, she laughed curiously.

"However, the way you've grown angry over something so trivial truly is human. I rather like it."

Zagan was unsure of how he should reply for a moment, and just as he was about to open his mouth...

"You've fiiiinally showed an opening."

That filthy voice belonged to none other than Bifrons, who everyone thought had already left.

"Crap!"

By the time anyone realized this, the mithril staff had crumbled away like sand.

What a pitiful state of affairs... Zagan ground his teeth, but Oberon shook her head like it wasn't a big deal.

"We're fine here. In any case, get going already. Things have gotten a little out of hand."

She then picked up the dirty broom that had fallen near the pedestal.

"...Sorry. I'll leave this place to you."

Zagan bowed to Oberon, then turned to Raphael. He had also stopped his blade, and upon noticing Zagan's gaze, he returned his Sacred Sword to his artificial arm.

Zagan walked over to Nephy's side. It seemed she had treated both Arvo and Julius while she was at it. The Juutilainen brothers were both laid out by her side.

"Shall we?"

"Yes."

Zagan stretched out his hand, and Nephy settled herself in his arm while Raphael followed behind them.

"Nephy, what would you have thought if I had killed Ginias there?"

"I would have found it pitiable, and a bit sad, but..." She then leaned against him. "If it's something you're worried about, Master Zagan, then I shall carry the burden with you. So it's all right."

I really can't beat her. And before leaving he took one last look at Ginias.

A weakling who can't affirm himself... huh?

He was an irritatingly impertinent brat, but that statement was so on the mark that he couldn't refute it at all.

Zagan looked down at his own hand.

Arts were a power he'd been granted during his childhood, which he had discarded upon becoming a sorcerer. Was it really all right to rely on them after becoming an Archdemon?

Having lost his temper at having that nail hit right on the head was surely his loss. However, some would say he was better off that way.

And with a slightly bitter aftertaste to end their sweet journey, the curtains came down on Zagan and Nephy's fake honeymoon.

# **Epilogue**

"It's rare to see you out of the shadows, Barbatos."

A few days later, back in Kianoides. Barbatos was lounging around on a sofa in Chastille's office.

"Huh? Even I'll come out when I need to take a crap."

"...You really would be better off learning about the concept of tact."

Chastille looked at him in astonishment but didn't say anything else, seeing that this was just the same as usual.

"You done cleaning up?" Barbatos asked as he stifled a yawn.

"Yeah. The Juutilainen brothers managed to survive. They'll likely get reinstated to the Archangels, too. Lord Michael... well, he was criticized, but he'll surely slip by one way or another."

"And that ass. Decarabia?"

"That's the complicated part... Stella showed she could use Zachariel's power during that fight, meaning she was acknowledged as the Sacred Sword's wielder. However, they can't possibly take it away from Lord Michael either."

"So they're basically sharing?"

"That's how it is. Both Stella and Lord Michael are being called Zachariel's Archangel."

In general, Sacred Swords only chose their next wielder after their previous one had died.

"Well, he is an Archdemon, so it's probably some kinda setup, right?"

"How many Archdemons are loitering around inside the church...?"

Chastille had somehow managed to keep it to herself during the incident, but it was still perplexing.

Well, I guess her little faction got a bit bigger thanks to that. He wasn't sure

how much of this was calculated, but because of Zagan's declaration of owing a debt to Chastille, it was proved that the Unification Faction had a certain amount of influence over an Archdemon.

Having directly confronted Zagan, the Juutilainen brothers even showed adoration for the Unification Faction. In short, this was a result worth celebrating for Barbatos, who was entrusted with guarding Chastille.

Watching that ass Zagan get talked down to like that was a masterpiece too! He then recalled that he didn't hear what had happened to the one who had done so.

"So? What happened to that brat?"

"Ginias? Setting aside his thoughts on Zagan, he lost without being able to do a single thing. I think it will take some time for him to recover."

Ginias won from the perspective of damaging Zagan's self-respect, but the difference in their actual abilities was like heaven and earth.

That ass... He's been making leaps and bounds lately. That last strike he showed them was several times faster than Barbatos would have expected. If he wasn't fixated on devouring sorcery and had used that right away against Andrealphus, he probably would have overwhelmed him. It was curious how few people had realized that sooner.

Those were the same movements as Decarabia... He dropped his center of gravity, planted both feet firmly on the ground, pulled back his left hand and brought his right straight down. Those were the exact same arts that Decarabia used. It was the power that Zagan had rejected as being something shameful to use.

This proved that if Zagan used it with Heaven's Scale, modeled after his own fist, nothing would be able to deal with it. Even Alshiera likely wouldn't be able to deal with it using her speed if he used that power. It was a sorcerer's principle to use everything at their disposal, so it truly was foolish of him.

In any case, Zagan had gotten even stronger. Barbatos would have to build up his strength even more if he hoped to kill him in his sleep.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Haaah, what to do ...?"

That was one of the reasons Barbatos was just lounging about here in exhaustion. And Chastille once more looked at him in astonishment.

"Are you planning to pick a fight with Zagan again?"

"Well, it is kinda impossible... How'd you know that anyway?"

"How long do you think I've known you? I can tell by the look on your face."

Barbatos covered his face in a fluster. Did it show on his face so much that even the crybaby could tell? If so, that was a major issue.

Actually, what is this? Am I feeling embarrassed? It was all Chastille's fault for saying things like Zagan did with a straight face. And as he agonized over this in confusion, Chastille changed the topic.

"How about things on your end? You said you had an idea of who the traitor among the Archangels was, right?"

"Hah? That's been dealt with already."

"Huh?! D-Did you kill them?"

"Hmm, he's probably still alive? I don't really care."

"Well, you should! Explain it properly!"

"Haaah... What a pain."

And after yawning back at Chastille, Barbatos recalled what had happened immediately after the incident in Raziel.



"Damn you... Damn you! Damn you, Raphael! You traitor! I believed in you!"

Valjakka walked through the moonlit streets of the Holy City while cursing in anger. A proud Archangel had been reduced to nothing more than an Archdemon's hound. Especially one like Raphael, who was popular among Angelic Knights like Valjakka and Kaltiainen due to his mercilessness.

He was sure Raphael would sooner have killed himself than capitulate to an Archdemon. That's why the young Angelic Knights continued fighting under such assumptions. This all made the shock of Raphael's betrayal even greater.

Two Archdemons known as Zagan and Bifrons broke into the treasury, and Raphael's betrayal was made clear. That in itself was an irrecoverable shock to all the Angelic Knights who had witnessed it, which is why Valjakka was wandering the streets with a bottle of liquor in hand. He had to drown himself in alcohol to accept such a truth.

And as he held back his urge to vomit, Valjakka suddenly came to a stop.

"Hrm? Is that Ginias?"

Ginias was also quite the pitiful boy. He had been deceived by Zagan's crafty words and ended up guiding him right to the treasury. After challenging the Archdemon to take responsibility for that, he was completely and thoroughly defeated.

Archdemon Zagan... can he really be defeated? Even Valjakka, who'd served as an Archangel for over ten years, had his confidence shaken by what he saw. As Ginias' elder, it was appropriate to encourage him while he was down. And just as he'd cheered himself up with that sense of responsibility...

"Oops, my bad."

It seemed some drunk bumped into him from the side.

"It's fine. Be more care...ful?"

Just as he replied, he realized something was out of place.

How did this man get so close to me...? Even if he was drunk, someone managed to step within the range of an Archangel without him noticing. And as he was about to turn to face the man, he sensed something out of place in his abdomen.

"What... Huh?"

As he looked down, he saw a dagger deeply planted in his stomach.

"U-UWA-OMPH?!"

Just as he tried to scream, a piece of wood was jammed in his mouth. Standing before him was a young man with a sickly face. He had a countless number of amulets dangling from his neck. Valjakka could tell that this was a sorcerer at a glance.



"Shut your trap. I've got a headache from a lack of sleep. Don't squawk like that. If you get it, then blink. Just once."

Who is this man...?! Valjakka tried to resist, but he suddenly realized the situation he was in. The thing that defined him, his Sacred Sword, wasn't at his side. It was jammed in his mouth by the hilt. The dagger that he usually carried wasn't on his belt. It was lodged in his stomach. And above all else, even though he could feel something stabbed into his abdomen, he terrifyingly couldn't feel any pain.

And now, having come to a full understanding of just how cornered he was, he began to tremble violently. After blinking once in a panic, the man before him stifled a yawn.

"Ah, how'd it go? Oh yeah... You're the one who isolated the crybaby and leaked information to Shere Khan, right?"

Valjakka shook with a start, and the sorcerer continued speaking while languidly scratching his head.

"Frankly, I think it'd be way easier just to kill you. But my employer requested we give you a simple warning. Well, I guess the crybaby will be suspected if I kill you here."

Valjakka had no idea who this crybaby the sorcerer kept referring to was. And ignoring his confusion, the sorcerer pulled a small piece of paper from his pocket. It seemed to be some sort of memo, and he began reading it aloud while clearly finding it tiresome.

"Anyways, here's your warning. Umm, let's see... First. You're prohibited from taking any action that would put Chastille at a disadvantage. Second. You're prohibited from taking any action that would put the other Archangels at a disadvantage as long as you don't violate the above. Third. Devote yourself to the people, as long as you don't violate the above. So it says."

The sorcerer cackled.

"Well ain't that nice? All you gotta do is live a nice and clean life. Just be a nice little church boy. Oh yeah, one more thing. This is just a warning, so you got no obligation to follow along. Meaning it's fine for you to ignore it."

Valjakka had no idea what was so funny. The sorcerer began laughing heartily and slapping his thighs as he tightened his grip on the dagger.

"Anyway, this here is my sorcery. This dagger is passing through your stomach. It both exists and doesn't. Oh, looks like you don't get it. Basically, it only half exists in this world. Kinda like a ghost."

With that, the sorcerer twisted the dagger and pushed it up toward Valjakka's heart. There was no pain, but he could feel a foreign object moving through his body. The feeling was driving him mad.

"Whoa there, don't move a muscle. This is quite the delicate sorcery. Messing it up will mean death. For you. Get it?"

The dagger went from his heart to his neck, and from his neck to his face, where it stopped, piercing into his head through his brow.

"So, here's your problem. This thing sticking outta your head will materialize just from me being in a bad mood. The same goes if I croak. The moment the sorcery is undone, your head will split in two. So if you go and ignore the warning I went outta my way to give you... well, I won't be in a good mood."

Valjakka couldn't even breathe from the sheer terror. A shamefully wet feeling spread out from his crotch, and a nasty smell shrouded over him. The sorcerer plainly grimaced upon noticing this.

"...Don't piss yourself. How pathetic. Well, you do get it then, right? So, next."

There's more?! He almost wanted to beg this man to kill him if this were to continue. However, at the same time, he knew that if he opened his mouth now, he'd be begging for his life.

And as the sorcerer coldly looked down on Valjakka...

"Hey, you've known the crybaby for a while, right? Oh, you can talk now."

The sorcerer pulled the Sacred Sword from Valjakka's mouth. And holding back his urge to vomit, Valjakka replied.

"C-Crybaby? Wh-Who's that?"

"I'm talking about Chastille, you idiot. You don't even know that?"

There's no way he would. Valjakka trembled in anger from the irrationality that was thrust before him.

"Th-That's right. I've known her... since we were children!"

The sorcerer nodded in satisfaction.

"... Then answer me. Um... she got... a favorite food or something?"

The sorcerer making a villainous expression seemed to be setting Chastille as his next target. He was telling Valjakka to sell out the girl that he thought of as his own little sister.

I've already sold her out once! Like that matters! So Valjakka spoke of everything he could think of.

"Sh-She really cherishes stuffed bears! A-Also, the food in her house was terrible! So even slightly good food gets her excited! And... and... she's extremely open around children! She especially likes anything cute!"

Even Valjakka was wondering what on earth he was saying, but the sorcerer took out a pen from his pocket in a hurry.

"H-Hang on! I need to write this down. Uh, she has stuffed bears? Huh? Never seen any... Also, good food? Guess she likes sweets... Shit, what a blind spot. And cute things, huh? As for kids... Well, whatever."

He was talking like a man trying to buy a present for the girl he liked for some reason, but Valjakka believed this to be some dreadful scheme of a sorcerer and didn't suspect a thing at all. The man then pulled out some sort of metal ornament. It was likely some tool of sorcery, though it looked like a hair ornament modeled after a butterfly wing.

"Last question. Do you think this matches the crybaby's taste?"

"I-I don't... Wait! I mean, I think she'll like it! I'm sure it suits her!"

"Th-That so? She'll like it? Mmm... Looks like my choice was right. Mmm..."

The sorcerer began nodding his head repeatedly in relief for some reason. He then looked at Valjakka as if he had forgotten he was there.

"Oh, I'm done with you. You can leave now."

He let go of the dagger, and it fell to the ground with a clunk. Though, the handle had no blade, and Valjakka could still feel a foreign object in his head.

*I-I'm being spared?* He fell to his knees, while the sorcerer began sinking away into his own shadow.

"P-Please wait! I was threatened by Shere Khan! Wh-What do I do?!"

It began five years ago, during the rare species hunt. The company of Angelic Knights Valjakka led encountered Archdemon Shere Khan and was annihilated. That was also when Chastille's older brother died. However, as the wielder of a Sacred Sword, Valjakka was kept alive at Shere Khan's convenience in exchange for delivering him information from within the church.

After five years, he thought Shere Khan had died and he was released from his obligation. And yet, he appeared once more. That's why he'd guided the twins who called themselves his emissaries into the treasury, and why he'd worked to isolate Chastille to weaken Zagan's influence. The sorcerer looked completely exasperated, almost as if he was looking at trash.

"Like I care. You'll die either way, so just pick whichever way you wanna go."

"Wh-Why?! Why is Raphael forgiven while I have to go through all this?!"

That's what he couldn't understand the most. Even though he was being reduced to such a miserable state, why was Raphael trusted like he was the right-hand man of an Archdemon? Both of them were defeated by an Archdemon, so why were they treated so differently?

"It's a difference in... what'd you guys call it? Chivalrous spirit, ain't it? Not that I'm one to talk about that crap."

And with that, the sorcerer vanished without taking another look back at Valjakka, who was left sobbing in shame.



Back to the present, there was one other thing that had Barbatos exhausted.

I got intel on her tastes, but how do I hand this over? He had the butterfly hair ornament in his pocket. Over ten days had passed since he'd gotten it. There was surely something wrong with him for worrying over this to begin with. And

the more self aware he was of it, the harder it got to hand it over.

With no way of knowing of Barbatos' suffering, Chastille gazed at the clock as she muttered.

"I think it's about time for Kuroka's treatment to start. I hope it goes well..."

"Aah, Zagan and his elf are doing the healing, was it? Well, won't it just work out?"

To put it bluntly, Barbatos didn't really care what happened to the cat lady. She was brimming with bloodthirst any time she saw him, so he would even prefer if she just stayed over at Zagan's castle while she was there and settle down. Nephteros was over there with her too, so the church was rather quiet today.

In short, this was the best opportunity to hand Chastille her present. That's why Barbatos had come out of the shadows and was in a fluster.

"You're right. I need to believe in her as her friend."

Chastille seemed to be trying to persuade herself, but she looked restless and fidgety while sitting at her office desk.

"Hey crybaby, if you gotta take a piss then you're better off going now."

"Even I'll get angry you know?"

"Hah? You don't have to? Then what's got you all fidgety?"

After having that pointed out to her, Chastille's face suddenly turned red.

"Th-That's, um... haven't you... noticed anything?"

"Huh?"

Barbatos sat up on the sofa and straightened himself up. He then took another look at Chastille.

"You've got a new medal on your lapel?"

"Huh? Yeah. It was for my deeds during the defense of Raziel the other... Not that!"

Apparently, his guess was wrong. He couldn't see anything else about the way

she was dressed, so he stood up and took a closer look at her face.

"Then... the string you're using to tie up your hair is different from usual?"

"The one I usually use just happened to snap this morning, so... W=wait, why can you tell?"

"I mean, I can tell that much from being stuck with you every day, right?"

If Zagan, or any of the Angelic Knights for that matter, were around, they'd surely answer, "Like anyone could tell." However, they were the only two in this room, so Chastille simply touched her hair in a fluster.

"I-I see. So you can tell because we've spent so much time together..."

It was like she was relieved, and surprised. Her tone was quite complicated. She then suddenly shook both her hands in front of her.

"Ah, wrong! Why don't you notice the scent when you can tell stuff like that?!"

"Scent?"

Chastille stood and bent over her desk, and Barbatos got even closer. Her eyes were twirling about in circles as she raised a shrill voice.

"I-I mean, when I asked you if I smelled sweaty last time, you brushed it off in a weird way! S-So, um, I borrowed perfumed oil from Nephy, and, and..."

"Huh? Now that you mention it, you kinda smell sweet, huh?"

"D-D-D-D-Don't sniff me, you idiot!"

"Ugh!"

Chastille thrust him back with all her strength, and Barbatos tumbled back over onto the couch.

Why'd she flip out on me?

Seeing Barbatos flip head over heels so splendidly, even Chastille turned pale.

"Oh, uh, s-sorry... I didn't mean to."

He didn't really get it, but this likely meant there was still some female sensibility left within this amazon. That was surely something to be happy

about. Probably. Barbatos let out a sigh and sat back up.

"So, you've been trying to up your charm?"

"I-I haven't thrown away my sense of being a woman or any— Huh?"

Chastille averted her gaze and tried to make an excuse when a metal ornament was placed snugly in her hand.

"If you're trying to look more charming, then at least wear something like this."

"What...? Uhhh, you're giving it to me? Why?"

"Huh? Well, 'cause I saw a real hottie wearing one the other day!"

"Why are you getting angry?"

Chastille was confused by his unreasonable anger, but the flow of their conversation was the same as usual. She then put the hair ornament on where her hair was bundled up.

"How is it?"

"...Not bad, I guess?"

"If you're saying that, then I'm sure it suits me. Heehee."

"Quit twisting my words!"

The season had completely passed, so he couldn't get Chastille to notice that this was a present for Alshiere Imera, but she took out a hand mirror and smiled as she looked at it.

Well, whatever. I managed to hand it over. Looks like she likes it, too... Seeing that smile of hers was reward enough in his mind.



"I'll be in your care."

Around the same time, in the throne room of Zagan's castle. The day to treat Kuroka's eyes had come. Shax was standing by her side, and the two of them were tightly squeezing each other's hands. Other than them and Nephy, who was doing the treatment, Zagan, Nephteros, and Raphael were all present in

the room.

Nephy quietly took a few deep breaths and sat down in front of Kuroka. In the end, she was unable to find any other means than to depend on mysticism.

It's all right. Master Zagan even took me out for a change of pace. Nephy's body stiffened up from the tension.

"...Are you okay? You're white as a sheet."

"I'm fine, Nephteros."

Zagan was of course right next to her watching over her attentively. She was in peak condition. All that was left was to believe in herself. Nephy suppressed her rapidly beating heart and gathered her resolve.

"Then let's begin."

The essence of mysticism was prayer. It was a technique where one prayed to the countless spirits and waited for them to be granted. That was why Nephy threw away all hesitation and earnestly prayed. And yet...

Will the spirits really answer me? This power wasn't one she acquired because she wanted it. That's why she never tried to properly face it. And yet, if she only relied on it at times like these, would the spirits truly answer her so conveniently? Such doubts welled up within her for but an instant. Nephy drove out her weak self from her heart in the next moment and focused on her prayer.

However, that instant of hesitation gradually encroached on her mysticism. Her chest grew cold, then...

"That's not how you do it. You need to direct your prayers within yourself."

A voice like a tumbling bell resounded in the air. Nephy was taken aback by this and opened her eyes when she noticed a girl with white hair was right there next to her. The girl wearing the armor of an Angelic Knight placed both her hands atop Nephy's.

"There is no god in the world. If there is, it only exists within you. That's why you direct your prayers within yourself. Believe in yourself. That's the way to use mysticism."

This girl was someone Nephy had only met once or twice, and this one instant was the first time she'd seen her face. And yet, her words resonated within Nephy's heart to a surprising extent.

"Right!"

I need to believe in myself... Nephy stayed by Zagan's side, she made friends with Chastille and Manuela, she gained a daughter in Foll, and she even had a sister, Nephteros. She was loved by many. And so, she prayed. She prayed that she wouldn't feel shame in being loved and faced forward.

I see. That's the part of me that I want to believe in... Nephy wanted to be someone suitable for all the love she received. Surely, that Nephy would not stumble over something like this. She would surely heal Kuroka's eyes perfectly without leaving any after-effects. The mysticism that was beginning to waver stabilized and became calm like the surface of a lake. The throne room sank into silence.

"I-Is it over?" Shax timidly asked.

And after Nephy nodded, just as Kuroka was about to open her eyes...

"Oh, please wait a moment."

Nephy stopped her, then turned Kuroka toward Shax.

The first person Kuroka should see, and the first person she should have see her, is this man... He looked flustered for a moment, but he immediately worked up his courage. Then, he kneeled before Kuroka and lined his sights with hers.

"Okay, Kurosuke."

Kuroka's cat ears quivered with a twitch. Her red eyes were then slowly revealed. And upon reflecting the exhausted young man, large tears formed within them. Unable to bear it any longer, Kuroka covered her face.

"H-How'd it go...?"

"I can... see... It's still a little blurry. But I can properly... see your face," Kuroka said as she returned a small nod to Shax.

"Ah—! Thank goodness."

"Eep?"

Faced with Kuroka's heartfelt smile, Shax embraced her without hesitation. And as a scruffy feeling scratched against her face, she timidly wrapped her arms around his back. Behind them, Raphael seemed to be trying his best to endure something and was gripping his arm so hard it felt like he would tear it right off. However, Nephy didn't have the spare energy to ask him what was wrong.

I managed to heal her... And as Nephy gazed over that unbelievable scene, Zagan plopped his hand on her shoulder.

"You did well, Nephy."

"...Thank you."

Nephy was so happy from being praised that her tears began to flow.

"Congratulations, Kuroka. And good work, Nephelia."

Nephteros also praised her with a smile, but Nephy's gaze was already affixed on the girl standing still next to Zagan. It was precisely because of her advice that Nephy's mysticism had succeeded.

"Um, thank you very much. Lady Oberon... right?"

She wasn't wearing her helmet today, so Nephy asked to confirm. As she did, Zagan looked somewhat troubled, while Nephteros was astonished.

"Nephelia, Big Bro gave you a pendant, didn't he?"

"A pendant?"

It was true that she'd received a mithril pendant from Zagan at one point. It was back when they were in the city at the bottom of the ocean. He'd told her it was a memento from her mother. Nephy pulled up her pendant from her chest and popped it open, revealing a single picture. It was a portrait of an elf with her child. The child was supposedly Nephy, and the words "To my beloved daughter" were engraved within. But the face of her mother was the most startling fact... it was the very same one as the girl before her.

"...Huh?"

She couldn't keep up, so her mind went blank. Zagan then urged the girl in front of her forward.

"Nephy, allow me to introduce you. This is Titania Nimueh-Oberon. She also currently goes by the name Orias, but... she's your mother."

"Mo...ther...?"

Oberon smiled with a troubled expression on her face.



"I don't think I have the right to be called that after all this time, but that is our relation by blood, yes."

Nephy had no idea how to respond. Nephteros had once said that her mother was alive, but Nephy didn't even understand the concept of family before meeting Zagan, so she didn't know how to regard her. She looked up at Zagan for help, and though he looked a little troubled, he eventually smiled and answered her.

"I've never even met my own parents, but she seems to feel the same way about you that you and I do about Foll."

After worrying and worrying even more about how to put it, he ended up stating it exactly as it was, leaving Nephy with a smile of her own. She then finally faced Oberon once more.

"Um, I thought my mother would be somewhat older."

Oberon looked down at her own figure.

"This is how I looked when I gave birth to you. I thought this way would be easier to understand..."

Nephy vaguely felt that her mother would be someone terrifying, but she looked truly anxious and didn't show the slightest hint of rejection on her face.

"Even if you suddenly tell me that you're my mother, I don't have a real feeling of what that means. So, um... I'd be happy... if you could teach me that... from now on."

Nephy somehow managed to put her feelings into words, and Oberon's eyes shot wide open when she heard the unexpected answer.

"I came here planning to be struck by you, though..."

"Do you think I've grown into a person who would do such a thing?"

And having that thrown back at her, Oberon formed a strained smile.

"I see. We certainly don't know each other, do we?"

"Yes. That's why, um... I'd like to know you more... Right, Nephteros?"

"Ah...! Well, I suppose so, Nephelia."

Nephteros, who had a worried look all this time, finally smiled. Nephy wasn't sure whether this was the correct choice. However, just like Foll had accepted her through all her fumbling, the three of them surely had no choice but to accept each other as they fumbled along as well.

Oberon then held out a broom hesitantly.

"Take this."

"This?"

It looked vaguely familiar.

Oh, right. This was the broom that was in the Holy City's treasury... It was the one Oberon had picked up after the staff was taken.

"This is Azazel's Staff. It's something I used when I killed Archdemon Orias."

Both Zagan and Nephteros stared at the broom in shock.

"Huh? This was the staff?"

"Sh-Should it really be called a staff?"

Oberon shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know the reason for its name. But it is quite useful, you know? It makes mysticism and celestial mysticism easier to use. And look, you can even use it to fly."

Oberon began trying to explain things in a fluster. She then held the broom sideways and sat on it, and she mysteriously began floating in the air.

"Oh, a witch like this showed up in one of the picture books I read to Foll."

"A witch...? Well, that's not wrong, but do you have any other examples? This is the first thing I'm giving my daughter, you know?"

The tip of Oberon's ears suddenly turned red, and Zagan pinched his brow as if a headache was coming.

"...Sorry, but could you return to your usual form? This is throwing me off."

"Unlike Gremory, even her tone changes, huh?"

Nephteros was also shrinking back, having a hard time accepting it as well.

And with that first meeting between mother and daughter going on, Shax and Kuroka whispered to each other just a step away.

"Seems like we should excuse ourselves."

"You're right... But... Lady Nephy looks so happy. I'm a little relieved."

Kuroka had only recently given her final farewell to her own mother, so she replied in a truly happy yet tearful voice. And just as the two stood up, something came tumbling out of Shax's pocket.

"Oh crap—"

"What's this?"

The moment Shax froze, Kuroka picked up the object that fell to the floor. And that was... a pair of underwear. Women's underwear. And scattered around it... was the clothing that Kuroka usually wore.

Now that Nephy thought of it, she hadn't been wearing it lately.

So... is that Kuroka's...?

Shortly after, Kuroka appeared to realize it was her underwear. She began to tremble violently in place with tears in her eyes, her face turned red, and her two tails stood on end.

"Wait... H-Huh? Why? This? Mine...?"

"Wait, you're wrong. Calm down, Kurosuke. This is, um, right, that," Shax mumbled those words, turned pale, and what eventually came out of his mouth was... "I-I've been taking proper care of it as research material."

"MYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Kuroka put all her strength in her claws and began to tear Shax apart. She never thought she would see the light again. And despite thinking this, immediately after regaining her sight, the benefactor she idolized had her underwear on his person. None could blame her.

"M-Master Zagan! Please don't look!"

Nephy suddenly blocked Zagan's sight with both her hands.

"I get that, but someone stop Raphael. Shax will die."

"S-Stop that, what are you doing?!"

After turning her focus to Raphael, Nephy spotted Nephteros clinging to Raphael by the waist, desperately trying to stop him. It didn't appear to be doing much, though.

"Don't stop me, Lady Nephteros. This is beyond what a parent can permit."

"...When you put it like that, it becomes harder to stop you."

Oberon agreed with Raphael's reasoning and hesitated to stop him. Her miraculous reunion with her daughter had become quite a mess, but at least Nephy was smiling. However, a certain thought passed her mind.

What manner of people are Master Zagan's parents, I wonder...? She couldn't help but be curious, both as a parent and as a daughter.

#### **Afterword**

It's been a long time, everyone. I have come to deliver *An Archdemon's*Dilemma: How to Love Your Elf Bride Volume 9. My name is Fuminori Teshima.

This time, we've shaken off Granny Gremory and eloped! However, obviously, our couple has no idea what to talk about when they're all alone! And so, we've got married couple play, flirting, sneaking into a secret treasury, and fighting with the angry Angelic Knights! But the main topic at hand is Nephy and Orias' reunion along with Kuroka's eyes being healed!

By the way, I know I said I'd be careful not to make these volumes any thicker. But, well, I lied.

So, sorry. As you can see, it's quite thick. I really did do my best to shave down as many pages as I could. I had stuff like Zagan and Raphael loitering around in front of Orias' house, and what happened between Foll and Alshiera, and what happened to Dexia and Aristella, and all sorts of things, but we've got a lot of good things coming up too, so it all got cut entirely.

Still, despite all that, I think I managed to progress all the things that came up in the previous volume.

Let's stop talking about the excess here and move on to two announcements!

First is the launch of volume 3 of the manga version! This one has the "Guess who?" scene from volume 2. We've also got a raffle for an adorable acrylic keychain, so everyone please buy your entries!

Second announcement! A drama CD for Elf Bride has been announced! Yay! We're going to hear Zagan and Nephy talk! The drama CD is going to cover some things from before meeting Marc, so there's tons of stuff to focus on.

It's actually my first time writing a script for a drama CD, so I was quite worried. As a result, the bath scene that I never actually wrote in the books ended up being the longest part.

Other than that, well, it's not like I'm out of work, but I still can't report on

any of it. I think it'll start trickling out soon enough in 2020. Can't say if that'll be before the next Elf Bride volume, though.

Now then, allow me to offer my gratitude to everyone who has assisted me.

To my chief editor, K, who saw the number of pages this time and took my manuscript without any complaints. To the illustrator, COMTA, who also drew some lovely new costumes for us (the date outfit was super cute). To the chief editor at Comic Fire. To everyone involved with the cover design, proofreading, publicity, and such. To everyone who came to my last autograph session. To my children, who always give me more energy. And to you, my dear readers, who are holding this book in your hands at this very moment.

Thank you very much!

July 2019: Now that I think of it, this is my first Reiwa era book. —Fuminori Teshima

### **Bonus Short Stories**

### **Childhood Friends**

"Oh, Lilith. Is it okay for you to be up?"

"Yeah. I talked to His Majesty already. I'm fine now," Lilith said as she smiled back at her childhood friend Selphy. She had seen a strange dream in the morning and was in bad shape, but she returned to work in the kitchen come the afternoon.

"Don't push yourself too hard, you hear? Sir Raphael said that getting some proper rest is, like, totally part of the job."

"He's pretty good at taking care of others despite how uncaring he looks, huh...? Wait, what are you reading there?"

It was, in fact, time for their break, but strangely enough, Selphy was reading a bulky book.

"It's a novel Miss Gremory lent me. It's pretty neat, actually. It's, like, a story about two girls, but they're all worried about whether they're friends or lovers."

"...Can you tell me more about it?"

"Sure thing? Does this sort of story interest you?"

"Th-Th-That's not what I mean! Well, um, there's a need for me to understand the interests of the masses as the princess of the noble succubi, right?" Lilith denied being interested in a fluster, which made Selphy curiously cock her head.

"I don't really understand, but I'm sure you've got a point!"

"...Aren't you also royalty? Actually, what do you think about it?"

"Huh? It's totally okay, isn't it? I mean, aren't Miss Nephteros and Miss Chastille in that kind of relationship?"

"Huh? Isn't that Angelic Knight in a relationship with His Majesty's friend, Ba... Bar... Bearbatos?" Lilith grimaced as she tried to recall his name, and Selphy sat down next to her nonchalantly.

"Well, you know I love you, right Lilith?"

"What?!"

"I mean, we're childhood friends, right? I wanna be with you forever!"

"...Hmph. Well, I suppose that doesn't sound all that bad."

The uplifting conversation made it feel like Lilith's languid feeling from the morning was a mere dream.

## **Avoiding More Questions**

"By the way, Mister Shax, are you here to make a report today?" Kuroka and Shax were in front of Zagan's castle as she posed that question.

"Yeah, something like that. The boss wanted to know how things have been going since Alshiere Imera."

"...Is that all? Even from the hallway, I could tell he was pretty angry."

"Apparently his relative got caught in the incident."

"Is that so? Is that also the reason you were panicking earlier?"

"Huh? Uh... Oh! Yeah, that's it!"

"I see. But... you're lying, right?"

Kuroka could hear Shax's face cramp. She was fairly confident in her ability to read others. And with someone as simple as Shax, tone and presence were more than enough to catch a lie.

"A-A-A-About that! Uhhh..."

Cold sweat ran down Shax's face, making Kuroka even more suspicious. She wanted him to properly talk to her about things if he was in any kind of trouble... Not that she thought that Zagan would ignore his subordinates in their time of need, but that man's awkwardness surpassed her imagination.

And, as she puzzled herself over what the issue was, for some reason, Shax suddenly grabbed her shoulder.

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"Kurosuke!"
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"Eep? Y-Yes?!"
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"I swear! I don't plan to ever let you go through anything dangerous! And I don't plan to leave your side! So, um, don't worry about it!"

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"U-U-Uhhh..."
```

Kuroka's knees gave way due to his suddenly serious words that also pretty much sounded like a confession.

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"H-Hey? You okay?"
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"I-I mean, you just..."

"Oh well. Come on, I'll carry you, so let's get back to the church already," Shax picked up Kuroka without any hesitation as he said that. Plus, he wrapped his arms around her knees and back, in a so-called bridal carry.

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"A-Ah..."
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Kuroka suddenly forgot to push him for answers because of his sudden counterattack. She only got her answer several days later, with the absolute worst possible timing.



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An Archdemon's Dilemma: How to Love Your Elf Bride: Volume 9

by Fuminori Teshima

Translated by Hikoki Edited by DxS

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