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NOVEL

# Reincarnated as a sword

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Reincarnated  
as a **Sword** 3





































































































































































































































































































































































































“Come on, now. You must sleep in bed, not on the floor. You too, Fran.”

“Kaaaay.”

“Hm.”

Our hideout didn't have enough beds to go around, and our room only had three beds in total. One for the maid, one for the two boys, and one for Fran and the girl. This would be the first time Fran had ever slept in a bed with another human being. Would she be okay?

*Can you sleep?*

*No problem. We slept side by side when I was a slave.*

*I see.*

*Yeah. We'd die from the cold if we didn't.*

That was a much more practical reason than the one I was thinking of. *I-I see. You'll be fine then.*

*Uh-huh. Good night, Teacher.*

*Good night. I'll keep watch tonight, so get plenty of rest.*

*Thank...you...*

In an instant, Fran was fast asleep. She never did have sleeping problems. They say kids grow like weeds when they're asleep. Fran's ability to fall asleep under any circumstance was a huge advantage, then.

*Can you sleep in the shadows, Jet?*

*Woof!*

I took that as a yes. As expected from a Darkness Wolf, he was able to maintain mana output even while asleep.

*Zzz.*

*You fall asleep as fast as your master, Jet.*

*Ah, well. Guess I'll be alone on my watch.*

There were people around me today, so I couldn't float around the complex. I



killed time by playing word association by myself.

## Chapter 4:

### Betrayals and Revelations

It was the morning after Fran and the others had been broken out of prison. The guardhouse would be in an uproar by now. Close to thirty people had escaped, after all, so they must have been looking for us. Eluding their search parties would be up to Miriam's ingenuity.

Miriam's men were calm, so I didn't think the royal guard had found our hideout yet.

"Sorry for the wait. It's time for breakfast."

"Hm."

Our guide from last night showed up at our door with a wagon. I doubted this enclosed area had a canteen, so we were going to have to eat our food in our rooms. Our breakfast was fish soup and a piece of bread. There was also a sizeable pile of sautéed clams, each decently large. That said, there wasn't a single vegetable in sight. It couldn't be helped; fresh vegetables were hard to come by in the kingdom of Seedrun.

The kids loved it, of course. I had expected some of them to be picky with the clams, but they all gobbled it down with smiles on their faces with compliments to the chef. That's what I loved about orphans, they were tough.

When asked what they usually ate back in Dars, they said they would eat spoiled leftover meat from the adventurer's guild. They also ate animals they found at the beach, like clams and starfish. When they couldn't find any, they would resort to eating sea roaches. They tasted terrible, but eating them was a matter of survival.

"Sea roaches..."

*F-Fran? May I know what's on your mind? You are not having sea roaches, all right? I won't allow it! Not when we still have good food on hand!*

Eating in our rooms worked out to Fran's advantage. Our breakfast wasn't going to be enough to sate her, and so we topped it off by taking more food out

of Pocket Dimension. Everyone in our room was already aware of our stock, and they quite liked the sandwiches and punch. They weren't going to tell on us as long as we shared.

"Here."

"Again? Are you sure?"

"Hm."

"Yes!"

"I'll take this one!"

"May I have this one?"

"I have some punch, too."

The sandwiches and punch were exactly like the ones from last night but everyone loved it, all the same.

"Don't tell anyone."

"Okay!"

"You got it."

"I won't tell."

"Hm. If you keep quiet, I can give you more."

"Oooh!"

"In that case, your secret dies with us!"

"Yeah!"

"I swear on it!"

Even the maid was getting as excited as the children she was looking after. She was more than willing to cooperate. I had better remember to feed them all later, though. People get a little crazy when you cheat them out of a meal.

There was nothing for us to do after breakfast time. The main point of being in a hideout was, well, to hide. I couldn't leave, at least not without leaving Fran behind, and going out in broad daylight would be too dangerous for me. I couldn't risk being seen. I thought about making a clone and having it

investigate, but it would probably stand out and capture the attention of the slum's residents. I couldn't take risks even if I wanted to.

Fran was playing a game with the other children. Something that looked like Othello, which I didn't know existed in this world, as well. There went my plans of introducing Earth games into this world and making a lot of money from it.

This world already had games like chess and shogi, and I didn't think a similar game with different rules would sell; igo was a viable option if I actually knew the rules to it. This world also had something that was identical to snakes and ladders.

*Hmm, I may have underestimated this world.*

I had expected the existence of magic to hinder the development of science and therefore delay the development of games, but that clearly wasn't the case. This world used a cornucopia of spices, and its cooking was quite advanced. Their simple yet delicious cooking was thanks to monster ingredients and the Cooking Skill, I imagined. They didn't have much in the way of deep fried foods, but that was only because cooking oil was hard to come by.

At first glance, this world looked like Earth back in the Middle Ages, but far more advanced at the same time.

"Urgh."

"Hehe! I win."

Fran had lost her game of Othello. She was quite terrible at it, in fact. Not a single black disk was left on the board, and the 8×8 playing field was covered with white disks.

"Rematch."

"No, it's my turn next!"

"Mmph."

Despite her losses, Fran still had fun with the game. She had never experienced playing board games with friends before. I didn't want to become the kind of parent who butted in when his kid was losing in a board game. I was so good at Othello in my previous life that I was dubbed the Monochrome

Monster; said monster's otherworld debut would have to wait for another day.

The maid joined the kids in playing Othello, anyway. She wasn't holding back, either, winning most of the matches against the kids. Doubtless she was adjusting her skill level so the kids could still have a fun time playing against her.

Oh well, I guess I could do some skill management in the meantime.

According to the P.A. who took over my body during Unleash Potential, most of my skills had been consolidated and evolved into Advanced Skills. Honestly, I still didn't understand most of what these skills did. I couldn't ask the P.A. for details, either, since she had reverted to her usual task of announcing nothing but essential information. I would have to experiment with these Compound Skills by myself. The short session I had in Jean's backyard after conquering the dungeon of the dead was nowhere near enough.

*I should start with something inconspicuous...*

Which left me with Omni Radar (a product of detection skills like Presence Sense and Danger Sense) and Being Sense (a product of sense skills like Mana Sense and Trap Sense). These were the easiest to practice.

These skills were alike, although the detection skills were passive since they were always on, and the sense skills were active skills since I had to activate them manually. Concentrating while using detection skills had its benefits, of course. It widened its effective range and increased its accuracy. No harm in practicing these skills.

Skills I wanted to try out aside from those two were Water Manipulation (a product of Swim and Water Current Manipulation), Wind Manipulation (a product of Air Current Manipulation and Air Hike), and Poison Manipulation (a product of Drain Poison and Generate Poison). So far, I had not managed to use any of these three skills successfully.

I could use them as their pre-compound form, like using Wind Manipulation to reproduce Air Hike or Water Manipulation to reproduce Water Bullets. However, using them required more mana and attention, likely due to them no longer being their own individual skill. Honestly, I felt that they were weaker in this current form, as well.

But that couldn't be the end of the story. According to the skill's name, I should be able to manipulate water and wind more liberally than before. There was a world of applications to explore, but I lacked the imagination to find these new applications and was therefore stuck grasping at straws.

Now, I was thinking of trying out a new form of Water Manipulation. I wondered if I could vibrate water particles. It would make for one hell of an attack if I could. Golems and undead aside, the bodies of monsters—and humans—consisted mostly of water.

What if I could send vibrations to that body of water from afar? Would the vibrations result in a concussion? That was the first thing that came to mind when I saw Water Manipulation.

The idea was far from original, of course; I read about it in a manga in my past life. Still, the ability to create shock waves within another creature's body was an attack that would be impossible to defend against. My crude imagination thought of a vibrating massage stick lodged throughout the target's body. It would be hard to fight in that situation.

I turned my attention to the pitcher of water that was left in a corner of the room.

*Vibrate... Vibrate...*

I used the skill and pictured the intended result in my head. I was rewarded with ripples of water. Close, but far too weak to be a success. I wanted something finer, something that would be able to make the pitcher of water itself resonate and whistle.

*Finer... Stronger...*

I concentrated again. The water rippled stronger this time, which was why I considered it an even bigger failure. It looked like I was just stirring the water with my hand.

*This is hard...*

It wasn't a trick I could learn in a day. The splashing pitcher of water was beginning to draw the kids' attention, too.

“Did you guys hear something?”

“I think so, yeah.”

“It came from the direction of the water pitcher...”

“It’s probably only a rat, children.”

Thank you, maid lady. That was it for Water Manipulation practice, I guess.

I switched gears and started experimenting with Wind Manipulation.

*I should probably focus on perfecting my current repertoire of skills than trying to learn a new skill right off the bat.*

I was still at the stage of learning the basics. Skipping ahead to the advanced tech was only going to be a detriment.

I started with something simple. I focused on the air in front of me and started compressing it. The kids weren’t able to see it, of course, but since I had Omnidirectional Radar, I was able to see the effects of my Wind Manipulation. I had formed a small ball of compressed air.

Now that I had a ball of compressed air, I tried reversing the operation and slowly decompressed it. Releasing it all at once would cause a conspicuous pop which would draw the children’s attention.

I expanded the ball of air, alternating between gentle compressions and decompressions. I was starting to get the hang of this wind manipulation business now. My mana consumption decreased despite creating more pressurized air than before. My skill level remained the same, but I had just gotten more efficient at using it.

*Nice. Let’s try out Omni Radar this time.*

Omni Radar was a difficult skill to use. Understandable, considering its greater application compared to ordinary detection skills. It could detect anything and everything; even I thought it was a little much.

I doubted I could use it at its full potential at all times, though. The skill detected everything, resulting in a deluge of indecipherable data. No human could possibly process all that data at once, myself included. I remembered the trouble it gave me when it would pick up all of the noise in the vicinity back at

the slaver hideout. Blocking out all unnecessary data was crucial while using this skill. I wasn't sure if it came with using the skill or if I was just using it wrong. What was certain was the fact that I couldn't use the skill very well. The best I could do was parse through the array of data and pick out the bits of information that I wanted.

Time to get to work!

My earlier session with Wind Manipulation had given me the ability to perceive air currents. I could see the flow of air in the room through a combination of air current and vibration perception. Doing so would grant me sight even in pitch black darkness, which made for a perfect countermeasure against any ambush.

I turned off my vision and concentrated. I would start by trying to pick up on the children's movements. My sightless vision wouldn't amount to much if I couldn't sense my immediate vicinity.

At first, I only heard the clicks of Othello discs being placed on a board. I then focused on the airflow around me. With it, I was able to map out a rough layout of the room. I knew there were people inside, although I couldn't tell their exact details like their faces, size, and what they were doing at the time. At least I could tell when they were moving...

Being Sense would be much more appropriate in this use case. There was no need to read the room's airflow with it.

*I'm going to have to put more hours into this before it becomes useful.*

I continued practicing my skills for a time, until I sensed a change in my surroundings. Fran and the others were still enjoying Othello even after lunch when a guard came in our room to ask for her.

"Is the Black Cat Fran here?"

"Hm."

"The princesses are calling for you."

"All right."

She got up and smiled at the worried-looking kids.



“I’m off.”

“H-hey, you better come back in one piece, you got that?”

“Be careful out there, Fran.”

“Um, good luck.”

“Thanks.”

The guide knew the kids were feeling uneasy. She didn’t want to make them cry or fuss and was more than willing to wait for them to say their goodbyes.

The kids were playing Othello to calm their anxieties. Knowing this, Fran had played along to humor them. There was the possibility that Fran had fun playing it herself, but I was guessing at this point. I had never seen Fran be that kind to anyone other than myself until now. The kids were now her friends, people worth protecting. I always thought she could do with more socializing, so this was a step in the right direction. I hoped she would interact with more people and take an interest in them.

“Let’s go.” Fran nodded towards our guide from last night, and she responded with a bitter smile before leading the way.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Right this way.”

She led us to Sellimea’s chamber from last night.

“Ah, you’re here.”

“Very good.”

Sellimea and Miriam were waiting for us inside. The female fighter we saw after our prison break, Carla, was also present. No one else was in the room.

“Just me?”

“Yes. You are the strongest among the Phyllian crew. Briefing you on our plans first would make our lives easier.”

I see. There were other soldiers, of course, but none who were crazy strong. Rengill’s crew members were used to heavy lifting, but they weren’t exactly trained for combat.

“We’ve made contact with our man on the inside.”

Miriam began the briefing; she was the woman in charge of such matters, it seemed. Sellimea was quiet and listened to her sister. She wasn’t avoiding responsibility, but she knew Miriam was best suited for the job.

“We’ve found a new conspirator willing to help us.”

“Conspirator?”

“Yes. It’s the prince’s bodyguard.”

“Salut?”

“That’s the one.”

Salut was a reliable conspirator if there ever was one. He was a force to be reckoned with on the battlefield, and he had his heart set on protecting the royal twins.

“The royal twins are currently being entertained in one of the royal villas.”

“Entertained? Not captured?”

“Yes. They are still captives, but they haven’t been thrown into a dungeon and retain their freedom of movement to a degree.”

I guess it’s because they’re still royalty. But that wasn’t the whole story.

“It would appear that they are worried about the rumors circling the Phyllian royal family.”

“Rumors?”

“You don’t know? The Phyllian royals are under the protection of their Divine Sword, and a curse might befall those who dare harm them.”

A curse... Really?

The whole thing sounded like mere superstition to me, but the room was silent. Fran, Sellimea, Miriam, and Carla looked serious. They really believed in this curse. After all, this was a world of Magic and Skills, a world where its denizens firmly believed in the existence of gods. I had never met one before, but I wouldn’t be too surprised to find out they did exist. The Divine Swords were weapons wrapped in mystery, their power seemingly coming from the

gods themselves. It wasn't too much of a stretch that a curse would befall on the enemies of its owners.

A piece of information about the Phyllian Divine Sword had been making the rounds.

"What are you talking about?" Fran asked.

"Do you know what the Divine Sword of Phyllius can do?"

"No."

"I see. The kingdom of Phyllius is in possession of the Divine Sword of the Demon Lord, Diablos. It is a weapon capable of controlling demons."

"Demons? Like actual demons?"

"I'm not sure what demons you are talking about..."

"Like the ones you find in Dungeons."

"Yes, those demons."

Really? It could control literal demons? That would make it dangerously strong. Even that Daemon we fought back in Alessa's Goblin Dungeon was a B-Rank Threat. Although the one we fought had all sorts of restrictions on it which made it closer to a C- or D-Rank Threat.

Still, if it could command an entire army of demons, that would make Phyllius demonically strong.

*Why is it still a small country?*

Even Fran thought it was odd for Phyllius remaining as small as it was.

*They probably can't use it indefinitely.*

*I see.*

There had to be some restrictions on its usage, like a set number of uses, or the time it could be used. If Phyllius could summon hundreds of demons for long periods of time, they could take over the continent in no time at all.

As a defensive countermeasure, however, it would do just fine.

"These beings called demons are wrapped in mystery to begin with."

“There are researchers who study them, but even they haven’t made much progress.”

Demons only spawned in Dungeons. As long as you weren’t willing to enter one, your chances of a demonic encounter was slim to none. Research was slow, to say the least.

“We don’t know the details, but rumor has it that demons would come for and curse those who would attack the Phyllian royals.”

“My brother is appropriately fearful of the possibility.”

That was why he didn’t dare put them in chains or treat them like actual prisoners. He didn’t know what to make of the validity of the rumors, demons being the mysterious beings that they were.

“I suppose that is why he’s keeping them at the royal villas instead of the royal palace. My brother must not want to chance a demonic encounter.”

“I think he’s already doing them harm by lying to them and selling them out to Raydoss.”

“We also thought of that at first...but I think we’ll be fine on that front if only by a fraction.”

“It all depends on whether he is swayed by Raydoss’s compensation.”

This whole talk about “harm” was fuzzy to begin with. I thought lying to the royal twins already qualified as “harm,” but I guess it was all right as long as they weren’t physically hurt. To take the argument further, would harm also befall those who gave the order to harm the Phyllian royals? There were many ways to interpret the rumor, but the fact of the curse remained.

“In any case, we have that rumor and my fool brother’s paranoia to thank for the Phyllians being placed in the villas and granted some freedom of movement.”

“Although I’m sure he would continue lying to them until the moment he hands them over to Raydoss.”

“We’ve been able to establish contact with Sir Salut because of it.”

They had made plans for Salut to be our inside man during the time of our

escape. Although the prince and princess were carefully monitored, he would be able to take them and lead them down the unlocked hidden paths to freedom.

“We’ll carry out our operation tonight. We shall infiltrate the royal villa with the aid of Sir Salut and rescue the royal twins. You’re coming along. Stealth will be the main focus of our mission, but I can think of no better fighter to have by my side in case things go wrong.”

“You got it.”

“We’re counting on you.”

It was the dead of night before we knew it.

Fran and the others had infiltrated the noble housing complex which was located next to the royal palace. They were currently in the courtyard of one of the mansions in the far eastern corner.

The mansion used to belong to some lower class nobility who were once Suarez’s political opponents. Its owners long since expelled, it was now deserted. There were many estates that shared this mansion’s fate in and about the complex.

The deserted mansions weren’t well secured, and so Miriam took it upon herself to use one of them as our base of operations tonight.

“The five of us will make up the infiltration party. The rest of you will secure an escape path for us.”

We began our final debriefing in the mansion’s courtyard. Miriam led our rescue party which consisted of Fran, Carla, and Byke—the latter two being Miriam’s subordinates. There was also a Phyllian soldier who was one of Salut’s charges.

The Phyllian called Yorth wasn’t a great fighter, but it couldn’t be helped. As much as Fult and Satya believed that Fran would save them, the same couldn’t be said about the rest of the Phyllians. They asked that we bring a Phyllian along with us for peace of mind.

Truth be told, I would’ve taken the royal twins’ attendant over Yorth. The

royal maid was born to a lesser house of Phyllian nobility, but she was nobility nonetheless. She would be much more persuasive in a negotiation compared to an ordinary soldier. But I suppose she would get in the way of a sneaking mission, so we didn't take her with us.

We also had Sellimea's personal guards on our team. They used to be part of her imperial guard but deserted when Sellimea left. We also had double agents in the royal palace posing as Sellimea's traitors and spies posing as ordinary fishermen. Sellimea had more influence than I thought.

"We will infiltrate the villas upon the diversion squad's signal. Sir Salut will have opened one of the backdoors for us, and we will use that to escape with the Phyllian royal twins."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Understood."

"Hm."

"I-I'll do my best."

Yorth did not look dependable, and it would be up to the rest of us to help him make it out of this mission alive. I would secretly give him an extra boost if he needed it, too.

"We shall then use the hidden routes located under the mansions to bring them back to Sellimea's safe house."

With the mention of the safe house, Miriam concluded the briefing. Even then, the briefing she just gave was nothing more than one final rundown. A rundown which Fran hadn't needed to attend since she already knew the ins and outs of the plan...

But Miriam's aim was to ease poor Yorth's nerves. He was visibly less tense compared to before the final briefing. Miriam might seem callous, but she kept a close eye on all her men. She was Sellimea's right hand man, after all, and I imagined that she had picked up the habit of close observation from all her dealings with military men.

"Let's have a look at the map again. We won't get a chance to open it on the

field so pay attention.” Miriam laid out the simplified map of the royal palace along with the map of the island of Seedrun on the table.

The island of Seedrun looked like a gourd which lay on its side. Most of its land was concentrated in its fat eastern part, which contained the royal palace, military facilities, and the noble housing area.

The constricted northern and southern parts of the islands were made into ports, and also the general residential area for ordinary citizens.

The western area was rocky and hard. This was where the lower classes lived, all of them bunched together in terrible living conditions. The slums, in particular, were highly susceptible to high tide, and many houses were left behind because of it.

As a side note, the escape route Fran used to get out of the guardhouse ran from the southeastern part of the island all the way to the residential areas.

The royal palace was built on the east coast which was prime real estate. It also came with its private port, usable only by the royal family, underlining Seedrun’s maritime heritage. The royal palace was where the king carried out his duties of governing Seedrun while the royal villas were used to entertain guests, something of a resort. The royal villas lay to the north of the royal palace.

Fran would first head to the royal villas where the security was lightest, as the villas were fortified with two walls. Once they got past those, they could easily infiltrate the villa’s interior.

As Miriam was wrapping up, the sound of bells rang through the air. This was the military’s call for support. Our diversion had begun their operation.

“Here we go.”

Our diversion was straightforward enough. Miriam’s operatives were to attack the naval base and cause enough of a stir to force the military to send in backup from the palaces. There was no need for the operatives to capture the naval base since their main goal was distraction, as long as we managed to fool the navy into thinking we wanted to conquer their base. Still, if we dawdled and missed the timing of our escape, the distraction squad might end up completely

eliminated, so it was quite the risky operation.

I didn't think we needed a distraction as long as we could remain hidden, but...

"We must prevent the Phyllian royals from falling into the hands of Raydoss at all costs."

Once Miriam put it that way, Fran had no more objections. All we could do was pray for the safety of our diversion team.

"Let's move to the rendezvous point."

And so we began our operation.

I didn't feel too many life signatures coming from the royal villas, although the double walls were higher than I expected. Scaling them would be a challenge which I didn't think Yorth was up to.

Miriam then took something out of her pouch.

"What's that?"

"It's a grappling hook. We'll use this to climb up."

It was an analog way of doing it to be sure. The walls were equipped with a barrier which triggered upon detecting magic in its vicinity, so this was the safest way of doing it.

We would have to do something about the lookout before we can hook the rope up there, though. Fortunately, there was only one lookout patrolling the wall. Knock him out, and we could continue our infiltration.

"I'll do it."

"Thanks."

Miriam casually thanked Fran for her volunteering. This act of nonchalant relegation highlighted Miriam's royal lineage. She was more than ready to give the assignment to the right man, or beastgirl, for the sake of the mission, age requirements be damned.

*Here we go, Teacher.*

*Ready when you are.*



Simple skills didn't seem to trigger the wall's alarms. Fran flung me upwards and I put some extra Telekinesis into my flight. I cut through the darkness of night and headed towards the patrolman. I then delivered a knockout blow to his head, rendering him unconscious. The only thing the poor guy was guilty of was following his orders of dull patrol work; there was no reason to kill him. However, if he became a threat to Fran's safety I would be more than ready to cut him open.

Miriam then threw her grappling hook and fastened it to protrusion in the wall. Granted, I gave her a bit of Telekinesis assistance.

"I'll take point."

"Be careful."

"Thanks. Be on the lookout for any patrols."

"Ma'am."

Miriam grabbed the rope and started scaling the wall. Her movements were so smooth that she made the operation look harmless. It was clear to all of us that she didn't need any help. Fran wasn't much different; she climbed the wall so fast it made Miriam widen her eyes in surprise.

And so we came to Yorth, who didn't seem like he would be able to pull himself up against the wall, but Fran took care of the problem. She tied him up with the bit of rope and pulled him up. This gained another surprised stare from Miriam. She had expected Fran to be skilled with the sword as a product of speed and skill, not brute force. And here she was, towing a full grown adult up by herself.

"You really are strong..." Miriam muttered, high praise coming from her.

"Eek..." Yorth, an acrophobic, was pale the entire duration of the trip. He did a great job of keeping his voice down, though. He let out a tiny squeak towards the end, but I cut him some slack and let it pass.

In the meantime, Miriam tied down the guard I had knocked out. No problems so far, but we had to be quick before his replacement came in.

We let down the rope from the grappling hook and climbed down to the

other side of the wall. Then, we climbed the second wall. Yorth looked like he was having second thoughts about the operation, but we gave him no time to really reconsider. As much as we wanted to let him have a moment to steel his resolve, now was our only chance. The second wall was absent of patrols, likely thanks to our diversion squad. If we let this chance go, we might have to deal with more guards down the road.

We had to be quick.

“Let’s go.”

“Hm.”

Fran pulled Yorth up as the latter was making inaudible squeaking noises. No patrols showed up during her tow of him, and we all scaled the second wall without a hitch.

We were now in a corner of the courtyard of the royal villas, still some distance away from the main building where Fult and Satya were kept. The courtyards were quite spacious seeing that it was originally designed as a waiting area for guests of honor.

“Over here.”

Miriam led our way. We passed a huge garden which had bushes and tall trees that made for decent hiding spots. The closest Japanese parallel I could think of was our Imperial Palace in Tokyo: a building complex surrounded by nature.

“Not a single soldier so far...”

Miriam was right. Security was exceedingly thin tonight with about less than ten guards making the rounds. The operation was going surprisingly well.

“They must’ve sent them all to deal with our diversion team,” she mused.

“Yes. It doesn’t look like there’s much security left.”

“Let’s hurry up and get this over with.”

“You’re right.”

Even as I used my skills, I didn’t detect many life signatures coming from

within the royal villa. They really loosened security here.

“Come on. We’ll sneak in through the backdoor.”

“Hm.”

We made our move, careful not to unknowingly rustle the surrounding foliage. We were going to have to be more cautious from here on. There was a soldier making the rounds on the other side of this wall. Fran and crew quietly and carefully headed to the backdoor while suppressing their aura to remain undetected.

“It should be over there...”

As its name suggested, the backdoor was a small door located behind the royal villa. It was originally used as an entrance for palace servants. Miriam quietly walked towards it and pulled on the door handle; the door was unlocked, just as planned. Salut had carried out his mission.

Miriam signaled us to come in once she made sure the coast was clear. A familiar figure was waiting for us when we entered the villa.

“Lady Miriam, I presume.”

Dark Knight Salut.

“Sir Salut?”

“At your service. You’ve done well to make it this far, Yorth.”

“Not at all, sir!”

“Come. I shall lead the way.”

“Please.”

We would now meet up with the prince and princess and break them out of the royal villa. We would then use the underground passage to escape to the slums, hopefully losing any pursuers in the process. Miriam seemed relieved now that she had rendezvoused with our Phyllian contact and breathed a sigh of relief.

“Hopefully the rest of our operation will proceed just as smoothly...”

“We’ve made it this far, so I think we’ll be all right.”

“I think so, too.”

Carla and Byke both agreed as they walked down the villa hallway, but...

*Fran!*

“Hm!”

Fran stopped, drew her sword, and readied herself. She stopped concealing her presence and was now in full battle mode. If there were any guards who had the ability to sense her presence, it was a matter of time before they swarmed us.

“F-Fran, what are you doing?!”

“Do you want to lay this whole operation to waste?!”

Miriam and the others yelled at her while still remaining quiet—which was no small feat—but Fran remained firm, sword in hand, poised to attack.

“What is it, Fran?”

Salut stopped to see what the commotion was about. But Fran had no time to respond to his question.

*Teacher, there's someone here!*

*I know. They must be professionals from the way they can conceal their presence.*

The aura came from behind a door in the middle of the hallway. That was enough to alert us. They weren't just holding their breaths, they were using skills to cut off their aura. If we weren't around, they would've gotten the jump on Miriam and the others. Our ambushers were waiting for us.

“There might be someone here,” Fran declared in a soft voice.

“What are you talking about, Fran?”

“I don't see anyone...”

“Come on now, this is no time for jokes.”

Carla and Byke were skeptical of Fran's findings, but Miriam nodded grimly.

“No, Fran is stronger than we are. She's also a beastman with finer senses

than us. It would be of no surprise if Fran was the only one who could sense them.”

“But to say they’ve been waiting for us... Impossible.”

“Yeah, what she said.”

If the enemy had been lying in wait for us that meant they had completely seen through our plans; we might have a traitor in our midst.

I scanned our crew’s reaction. Miriam and her allies seemed genuinely surprised. There might still be a traitor among us, but Carla and Byke had asked to be put on this assignment by their own volition. But then again, leading right into the trap they had laid out for us beforehand would be the easiest way to do us in. They weren’t off the hook yet.

What we knew for sure was that it was dangerous for us to carry on.

Fran intimidated our attackers, forcing them out of their hiding spots.

“...Show yourselves.”

“Aah. I knew you’d notice.”

The door in the middle of the hallway responded by opening itself. Out came a familiar looking man in black clothing along with his charge of soldiers. The man in black looked so intimidating that just looking at him was enough to send chills down your spine and make you run a cold sweat. He was the last person we wanted to see. He stood there with an air of sharpness forged only by years of adventuring. A seasoned veteran who had seen plenty to last a lifetime.

“B-Black Fang Valuza! What is he doing here?!”

Miriam seemed to know the man as well. I guess fame was difficult to escape when you’re that strong.

“You know him?”

“Of course. He is the captain of Seedrun’s elite fighting force, the Dragon Fangs.”

He was much more of a big deal than we thought.

“They are the strongest Seedrun has to offer.”

That's right, "they." Valuza wasn't alone, and had brought his men along with him, all of them excellent fighters in their own right. They weren't so strong that they would give Fran and Valuza trouble but were more than a threat to an ordinary soldier.

There were six of them.

I thought the lack of security was odd, but they more than made up for it in quality.

"You're kidding..."

"Those are Dragon Fangs standing behind him!"

Carla and Byke paled as they gazed upon Valuza, despair was clearly written on their faces. They were only decent fighters, and Valuza's men would be a difficult challenge for them.

Salut broke into loud cursing when he saw Valuza and his men.

"Damn it! That bastard Sellid! He betrayed us all!"

"What are you saying, Sir Salut?!"

"I saw the bastard conversing with him!"

Salut gritted his teeth while pointing his finger at Valuza, his face anguished.

"I thought he was just blasting one of his idle complaints at anyone in the vicinity but..."

"That damned chamberlain! I thought he was annoying, but I didn't think he'd actually betray us," gasped Yorth, the Phyllian soldier, looking just as hurt as Salut. Their already low opinions of Sellid bottomed out upon the realization he had betrayed them.

"Hah. So you noticed. That's right, that man Sellid gave us all the information we needed." Valuza grinned.

Upon hearing those words, Miriam and the others immediately prepared themselves to withdraw. We wouldn't be able to escape with the prince and princess now that our plan was completely leaked.

*Fran, we're getting out of here!*

*But!*

Fran hesitated, feeling Fult and Satya's presence from within the villa. She didn't want to give up when she was so close. We couldn't afford to stay here, however. Reinforcements from the outside were already closing in on the villa.

"You're not getting away that easy."

Valuza and his Black Fangs did the most logical thing and attacked us. Valuza took on Fran while two of his men faced down Miriam. Carla, Byke, Yorth, and Salut all had to take on one each.

*This guy knows Fran's the strongest one here!*

"Ugh..."

"You really are as strong as I thought."

"You too."

"Heheh."

The sound of clashing swords rang throughout the hallway. Fran's Sword Mastery level was higher than Valuza's, but he was still putting up one hell of a fight. Their difference in skill level made up by his combat experience and preemptive attack.

"Gyaa!"

"Yorth!"

Yorth had fallen. It was inevitable considering the Black Fang operative he faced.

*Teacher!*

*No! He's already dead! You need to focus on Valuza!*

Though Fran had barely known the man, he was still part of the team, and her swordhand wavered because of her fallen friend. Valuza wasted no time in exploiting the opening.

"I'm sorry, Yorth."

In contrast to Fran, Salut, his immediate superior, was unnaturally cold as he

muttered Yorth's eulogy.

*Fran, focus!*

"Ungh...!"

Fran re-established her footing, but the loss had left her shaken. With Yorth dead, the Black Fang who killed him was now free to move to another target. Salut was doing well in fending off his Black Fang, but the difference in skill wasn't so stark that he was able to dispose of him immediately.

Skilled fighter that Miriam was, she was barely handling the two Black Fangs she was facing, but Carla and Byke were barely scraping by. If Yorth's killer started attacking either of them, they would die instantly. Carla and Byke knew the predicament they were in, and with knightly resolve they shouted, "Lady Miriam, you must get out of here!"

"We'll buy you time to escape, ma'am!"

"I am not leaving by myself! And we must still rescue the Phyllians..."

"It is not possible for all of us to escape! You must save yourself!"

This was bad. The more time passed, the more we would be put at a disadvantage. We needed to do something, fast, but it was hard. We were more than willing to use our big skills and magic, but the enclosed hallway made it difficult. Miriam and the others were fighting beside us, and they might get caught up in the skills themselves.

Fult and Satya were also still in the royal villa. Any skill that had the potential of harming them was out of the question since it would defeat the whole purpose of the rescue operation. There was also the matter of the rumor. Fran might be counted as an ally, but what if she hurt them by accident? That curse or whatever it was might fall upon us.

"Damn it! Carla, Byke, retreat! Fran, you go help Salut!"

"Not so fast!"

"Urgh!"

As we tried making our escape, Miriam was surrounded by three Black Fangs. It would seem that all hope was lost.



But Fran and I weren't dumbly exchanging blows with Valuza, either. We were slowly moving, counting down to an opportune time to make our escape.

*Now!*

"Jet!"

"Grooooar!"

"What the—Gah!"

Fran set herself up so her allies wouldn't be in the line of fire while making sure all of our enemies were. She repositioned herself while deflecting Valuza's sword strikes. Seizing the opportunity, Jet attacked Valuza from within the shadows.

As seasoned as Valuza was, I don't think he had ever experienced having his ankle bitten by something in the shadows. Jet was still in his speedier, smaller form, but a monster bite was still a monster bite. You could hear the sound of Valuza's greaves being crushed along with his ankle.

We were still up against a veteran swordsman, though. We'd be underestimating Valuza if we thought he'd be slowed down by a mere monster bite. I activated Telekinesis, focusing its powers on the space in front of us, to push our enemies away. They all fell down, and Fran, not letting this opening go to waste, knocked Valuza's sword out of his hand.

"Haa!"

She aimed for his neck on the downswing, but—

"Too slow!"

She was no match for his reflexes—even when he now only had one leg to stand on. He dodged her slash by a hair's breadth. My blade, which was originally going to lop off his entire head, only produced a thin cut on his neck.

That was enough for me.

"Guh... This is..."

I had activated Venom Fang. Poison crept through Valuza's system, decreasing his life points. It wasn't going to kill him since he had Poison

Resistance and Dull Pain, but the heaviness brought on by the poison was enough to slow him down.

*Wind Blower!*

“Wind Arrow!”

“Grroaaar!”

Then we launched a barrage of spells. Wind Blower had no attack value by itself, but it let out a strong gust of wind which blew away everything caught up in it; nigh impossible to avoid in a tight space such as this. With Valuza and his men’s footing lost from Wind Blower, Fran and Jet proceeded to fire Wind Arrow and Shadow Magic at them for good measure.

Even if it didn’t kill them, it would be enough to buy us time.

“Now!”

“Y-yeah! We’re getting out of here!”

“Damn it. I’m sorry, Yorth. Rest in peace.”

Salut threw one last mournful look at Yorth’s body, shook off his grief, and made his escape.

In the distance, a disheveled Valuza grinned nihilistically. “Let’s kill each other next time.”

“One win, one loss. I’ll win the next one for sure.”

“Heh.”

Fran turned and ran after her companions.

Upon leaving the villa, we saw a lot of soldiers marching in our direction. They would have us surrounded if we dawdled for even a second. I guess we could use one of our flashier moves now that we were out of the villa.

*Flame Servant!*

“Flame Servant!”

“This is...!”

“Amazing. A flame sprite?”

The spell elicited inevitable shocked gasps from our companions. It was hard not to look in awe at two three-meter-tall giants, their bodies wrapped in flames. The flame sprite could carry out our orders, too.

*Don't cause any damage to the royal villa, but attack those soldiers and mess up their formation.*

The flame servants moved according to my will. Although the spell was a spectacle to behold, it wasn't actually that strong. For starters, the flame sprite's stats weren't all that high. Putting all my mana just yielded a flame sprite that was only as strong as an average orc, its flaming body mostly for show. It could shoot bursts of flame but at the cost of consuming its own body, which decreased its staying power in a long fight. It did have high defense values to make up for its less than stellar attack power, though. The fact that its body was composed of flames also made physical attacks ineffective against it. The Flame Servant was at its core a defensive spell used by mages to cover the rear line of a squad.

The flaming giant still looked intimidating, though, enough to make our pursuers flee in terror. And it worked great on the Seedrun military, most of them turning pale upon looking at the Flame Servant—not bad for a defensive spell. There was no way for them to tell how strong the flame sprites were by looking at them, so we should be fine as long as they remained ignorant. The soldiers couldn't afford to let Valuza and the Phyllian royals die either, of course, and the sight of a flaming sprite next to the royal villa must have made them hot around the collar.

"Now's our chance."

"Y-you're right. This way."

"Damn, you're good at this, little lady."

"She is as skilled with magic as she is with the sword. I expected nothing less from a D-Rank adventurer."

The rave reviews Fran received as we made our escape did not make her feel better.

"We still couldn't save Fult and Satya..."

She regretted leaving her friends behind when she had gotten so close.

“Don’t look so down. It’s not like we’ve completely failed,” Salut said.

“That’s right. We haven’t given up, either. All we have to do is rescue them before they get handed over to Raydoss,” Miriam added.

“Yes. I will save Their Highnesses if I have to give up my life for it.”

Miriam and Salut’s consolation seemed to have revived Fran’s resolve.

“Yeah. We’ll save them.”

*Damn right we will. I have a plan cooked up. I’ll tell you about it later.*

*Okay! I can’t wait.*

*No problem.*

Our top priority was to get as far away from the villa as possible. Fran and the others hurried to the front gate, taking care of any patrol guard that got in their way. We were originally going to quietly leave the way we came in, by scaling the double walls, but we abandoned all pretense of stealth now that our plan was completely exposed.

We did the complete opposite of our plan now, charging out the front gates instead of quietly leaving from the back. Normally, the front gates would be tightly secured, but we might catch them off guard by our unexpected frontal escape.

Salut initially opposed this plan but ultimately deferred to Miriam, who knew more about the villa’s security. He still couldn’t shake off his worried expression, though.

“There! All we have to do is make it past that, and we’ll be back in the city!”

“Hm... Someone’s there.”

“Is that...Gladio?!”

“Who?”

“A piece of garbage!”

Miriam was concise, but we didn’t know what she was talking about.

Fran tilted her head, prompting Carla to elaborate.

“The cousin of Lady Sellimea and Lady Miriam. The son of General Julius who serves under King Suarez. He currently serves as the General’s aide.”

Miriam grew more murderous with each word of Carla’s explanation. Her initial rage was soon replaced with a bubbling fury. She was trying to suppress her anger, but I can’t say she was doing a good job of it.

“Enemy?”

“Yes! The biggest enemy!” growled Miriam as she reached for her sword. She must really have a bone to pick with him.

Gladio himself was not a spectacular fighter, but he was surrounded by a group of armed soldiers who were well trained. He must have noticed us, too, because he shouted to his men, “There she is! Miriam, the rebel! Apprehend this fool who would disobey our king!”

“Hah! Big talk for an idiot lackey of my fool brother!”

They were prepared to go at it, but Miriam was definitely the more furious between the two of them. She had drawn her sword and was now charging headlong at Gladio and his crew, clearly unable to hold back her anger at seeing her mortal foe. Miriam was already cutting down enemy soldiers without Carla getting a chance to calm her down.

Compared to her, Gladio was calm and collected. The expression he wore was still as resentful, but he was at least cool enough to give out orders.

“There will be a great reward for whoever manages to capture the rebels! Look alive, men! Hunt them down!”

With his loud voice, he motivated his men with promises of fortune. It also reached its intended effect of attracting all other guards who were within earshot. His provocation would render Miriam unable to ignore Gladio. She would keep fighting until she was eventually outnumbered and surrounded.

*We need to calm Miriam down somehow.*

*Hm.*

As if on cue, more soldiers came from the outside of the villa.

“Lord Gladio, let us assist you.”

“Aah, Sir Galloudie. Bring me the head of Miriam. You are free to do as you please with the rest.”

“I understand.”

The man called Galloudie must’ve been important if Seedrunian royalty addressed him as “Sir”. Who was he?

A quick Identify revealed that he wasn’t much of a fighter; decent but only slightly stronger than the average soldier. His titles and skills on the other hand... They stank. His Class was Fraud. His skills were Threaten, Lie, Assassinate, Counterfeit, Swindle, and Identify Jammer, skills no honest man would ever need. His titles were no slouch, either: Sadist; Joyful Killer; Illegal Slaver. The man was pitch black, an indefensible scumbag among scumbags.

He brought along with him his own crew of scumbags: Assassins, Mass Murderers, and Illegal Slavers. Most of his crew were Kidnappers and Illegal Slavers, more than half of them belonging to the Blue Cat Tribe.

To Fran, a member of the Black Cat tribe who fell victim to the Blue Cats’ deception, he was her mortal enemy. We might have found our link to the illegal slavers. Although, now was not the time to be thinking about that. The enemy soldiers had nearly overwhelmed Miriam, and we couldn’t afford to lose her here.

“Miriam!”

“Haaaa! Gladioooo!”

Fran suppressed her anger towards the Blue Cats and shouted to warn Miriam. But it didn’t work. Miriam’s rage had gone to her head, and she could think of nothing but destroying Gladio. He was now walking towards her, sword in hand, as she was nearly subdued after being surrounded by more than ten men.

We had to cool Miriam’s head somehow and get out of here.

*What can we do...?!*

Rushing into the fray to her aid wouldn’t necessarily calm her down...

*I got it.*

*Do you have a plan?*

Fran nodded, brimming with confidence. I should let her handle the situation.

*All right, I'm counting on you.*

*Hm.*

*Uh, Fran?*

The spell Fran started casting was a spell that I used all the time. It proved its usefulness in the goblin raid when it blocked off nearby attackers from continuing their advance. I didn't understand her logic of using it here, though. I sure wouldn't use it.

"Fire Wall!"

"Whoa!"

"Gyaa!"

A wall of flame appeared between Miriam and the soldiers, separating them. The flames had burned some of the soldiers, which was good, but the flames also set Miriam's cloak on fire!

They stopped fighting, all right, and there was a good deal of distance between them now, too, but I thought the Fire Wall might have been a bit excessive.

"Aqua Create. Mid Heal."

Fran calmly doused the flames and healed any burn wounds that Miriam might have suffered.

"Wh-what was that for, Fran?!"

"Th-that was unnecessary!"

Carla raised her voice along with Miriam, now dripping wet. Fran calmly looked at Miriam and asked her.

"Did that cool your head?"

Miriam pursed her lips at Fran's question, subtly acknowledging the fact that

she had lost her cool. Fran had purposely used a dangerous spell to chill her temper. That the spell in question was Fire Wall only made it more ironic.

Or maybe Fran was picking on Miriam since she was doing her best not to fly into a rage at the slavers while the Seedrunian princess went off cutting down soldiers.

“We have to focus on escaping.”

“You’re right. I apologize.”

“L-Like we’ll let you! After them!”

Galloudie’s men had circumvented the Fire Wall and were getting ready to make their attack. The flaming wall managed to slow them down for a bit, but now they were on the move again. They weren’t any threat to Miriam now that her senses had returned to her, though.

We made our escape, Fran laying multiple wall spells to obstruct our pursuers’ chase. In the end, we were able to escape the royal villa without a single straggler coming after us.

Jet had assisted us while remaining in the shadows by pelting our enemies with Shadow Magic. The ensuing bolts of shadow startled our enemies, causing them to suspect that we’d had snipers posted to cover our escape. Quite a number of them ran away after that. That was a top notch assist.

“What now?”

“Escaping through the city will be dangerous. We’ll use one of our escape tunnels in the noble district.”

“Is it safe?”

Wouldn’t that reveal the location of our safe house?

Miriam had it covered, though.

“Don’t worry. The tunnels here only go as far as the port.”

The escape tunnel we were using tonight was completely separate from the one we had used for our initial escape. The tunnel itself was located in a mansion that once belonged to a supporter of Sellimea. They had been chased



out, leaving the property abandoned, but the escape tunnel remained. There was also a high possibility that king Suarez didn't know about the tunnel.

"That's the one!"

Fortunately, there were no guards in the vicinity of the mansion. We climbed over the wall, landed in the courtyard, broke through the backdoor, and infiltrated the mansion. The place was derelict after a few years of abandonment. There had been intruders, coming and going as they pleased, some of them even tracking mud with their shoes. Granted, we weren't ones to talk at the moment.

Miriam walked deeper into the mansion without hesitation before stopping in front of the fireplace. She didn't waste any time looking for the hidden tunnel.

"It should be under this tile."

Miriam used her sword to pry open one of the tiles in the hearth. It popped open, revealing a staircase which led down to the underground tunnels.

"Do you remember where all the tunnels are?"

"Of course. I learned them all precisely for moments like these."

*Really? That's amazing. I know I wouldn't be able to do that.*

Miriam didn't falter when faced with the fork in the road back when she broke Fran out, either. She might be smarter than I made her out to be. I thought she was one of those strong but stupid types. Sorry about that, Miriam.

"I'll take point. Carla, you take the rear."

Miriam gave Carla her orders. It felt like it was a few moments ago that Miriam was screaming bloody murder, but now she was back to her reserved self.

As we traversed the underground path, Fran asked her something that had been on her mind.

"Who was that Galloudie person?"

"Him? He is the messenger from Raydoss."

"He's the one?"

I didn't expect him to be the messenger we had been discussing. What was Raydoss thinking, making a guy like him an official? Then again, Raydoss wasn't exactly known for being upright, either, what with its tradition of invading neighboring companies and clandestine plotting. What an awful country to deal with.

Also, Galloudie had the Fraud title along with the Fake Identity skill. We couldn't know what his real goal was from one encounter.

"He was the one who originally urged my fool brother on to make a mess of our country. If negotiations with Seedrun goes well, he will be installed here as an ambassador. The mere thought of it irks me."

Well, that was bad. If a guy like him had control over Seedrun, he could supply an endless amount of slaves to Raydoss from Granzell.

*Teacher.*

*Yeah, you don't have to remind me.*

*That one's mine.*

If Miriam had an eternal grudge with her brother then Fran's nemeses were illegal slavers. Galloudie seemed to have deep ties with the slaving ring, too. She wouldn't be able to let him live for long.

*I don't mind you targeting him. Just don't forget your priorities.*

*I know. Saving Fult and Satya is still more important.*

*Good.*

*I have to save my friends.*

*That's right.*

That was the only thing she needed to remember. It eased my worries that she put her friends ahead of her vengeance.

"We must stop our country from falling into the clutches of Raydoss," Miriam said.

"Hm. We have to save Fult and Satya, too," Fran replied, as if to remind herself.

"I trust we can count on you as well, Sir Salut."

"Of course."

Miriam had not lost heart, and she was now determined to make our next operation succeed. I'd been cooking up some plots of my own, too. We were going to trap them this time.

*We're going to have to do some prep work, though.*

Preparation was an essential part of any operation. We should start with whatever we can immediately do. This place would be our crux, actually.

*Now, hear me out, Fran—*

"Uncle Julius. Is everything proceeding as planned?"

"Yes. I doubt those fools have noticed."

"Excellent! There would've been no point in letting them escape otherwise! Oh, if I could only see the look on Miriam's face when she heard of the betrayal. Unfortunate!"

"Indeed, my lord."

"And what of Sellid? We've no further use for him, have we? Shall we cut off his head and feed him to the fish?"

"Yes, my lord. We plan on disposing of him within the day."

"Hehehe. Pitiful man. His betrayal of his masters will now be rewarded with death. This would spell the end of them, too."

"We are close to finding where Sellimea is hiding."

"It would seem that your son is taking different measures, however."

"All for the sake of perfecting the plan, my lord. You must understand."

"Really? I thought he hated Miriam enough to kill her on sight. Tonight would've been his best chance."

"Your Highness, you know he would never knowingly oppose you."

"That's 'Your Majesty', to you. You might be my father's brother but remember that you serve under me now."

“My apologies, Your Majesty.”

“Hmph. Consider it your final warning.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“So where are they now?”

“The underground tunnel they used in the manor leads west. If they keep going further...”

“They’re hiding out in the slums.”

“There is no other place for them to hide.”

“I thought we did a thorough search of the slums. We didn’t find anything back then.”

“Apologies, Your Majesty. We did not break the slumlings enough.”

“Mobilize the military. Search every house and smoke Sellimea out. If she dies, I shall be able to establish a contract with Warnate. Then, I shall have all the Sea Dragons under my control.”

“I’ve sent Dwight to the slums, Your Majesty.”

“I see. That was quick.”

“Hahaha. I can only carry out your orders before you give them because I am Your Majesty’s most loyal subject.”

“Hmph. Say what you want. But the slums... My sister has fallen on hard times, indeed. I would’ve chosen death over living with dirty slumfolk. She has no respect for the dignity of her royal bloodline.”

“Indeed, she doesn’t.”

“How many people live in the slums now?”

“I believe...a little over three thousand.”

“Three thousand rats who can’t even pay their taxes. Much better to sell them off as slaves. Have you sent out the slave hunters?”

“Yes, Your Majesty. We’ve captured a hundred slaves per Lord Galloudie’s request. They will be shipped off to Raydoss along with the Phyllian royalty.”

“Muahaha! I’m sure those useless fools are proud for finally being of some use to their king in their final moments.”

“Indeed, Your Majesty.”

“Still, we must strive to capture the foreigners that were a part of the Phyllian royalty’s crew. Raydoss seems to be collecting all sorts of people.”

“They appear to be in hiding with Sellimea. I’m sure we’ll capture them along with her.”

Two hours later.

The streets were in a heightened state of alert with the number of soldiers that now patrolled it. Still, trying to spot five people among the masses proved impossible for them, and we slipped past undetected and returned to the slums.

“Right this way, Sir Salut.”

“Thank you. Is Princess Sellimea present? I would like to have an audience with her if possible.”

“I apologize, but she is not here right now. She moves from time to time to avoid detection.”

“I see. When shall I be able to meet her then?”

“Tomorrow. I’m afraid you must stay in these cramped halls until then...”

“That is all right. I merely wanted to thank her for aiding us in saving the prince and princess is all.”

“How proper of you.”

As Miriam showed Salut his quarters, Carla accompanied us back to the children’s room. Everyone greeted us with a smile as soon as we opened the door.

“Fran, you’re okay!”

“We heard some crazy stuff happened in town.”

“We were so worried!”

“Thanks, but I’m all right.”

“Good. By the way, where are Fult and Satya? I thought they’d be with you.”

“Sorry.”

Fran could only apologize. She promised she would save them and had returned empty-handed. She must’ve felt ashamed of not fulfilling her promise.

Fran’s apology was enough to make the children understand the mission’s failure, and their mood visibly darkened. Their spirits didn’t remain low for long, however, and they smiled again to encourage Fran. They were good kids and even better friends.

Now that Fran had been reunited with her friends, she proceeded to hand them out sandwiches and juice. They were quite hungry by how fast they gobbled down their food. The maid was the only one left whose face was still darkened.

“So...are Prince Fult and Princess Satya all right?”

“They should be fine for now.”

“I see...”

She was worried over the failed rescue operation of her masters. Yorth had failed to return as well.

“It’s okay. Miriam hasn’t given up, and neither have I.”

“Really?”

“Hm.”

Fran gave the worried maid a sandwich. She forced a plate of it into her hands before she could react.

“Fran...”

“You need to take care of Fult and Satya when they come back. Can’t do that on an empty stomach.”

“I... I suppose you’re right.”

“Hm.”

“Thank you.” The maid smiled awkwardly at Fran and bowed her head.

“I’m going to go hand these out to everyone else, too.”

*Fran?*

*You don’t mind, do you?*

*No. And you’re right. We can’t expect anyone to fight on an empty stomach. And our biggest fight’s coming right up.*

*Hm.*

And so Fran visited the other rooms and gave them all food out of her own Pocket Dimension. Stews, sandwiches, rice balls, and even her favorite curry. She would usually guard her stock of golden curry, but today she took out an entire pot of it to distribute to the others.

*Are you sure you want to give them curry, too, Fran? If you give it out to this many people, it’s going to actually affect our stock.*

*It’s fine,* Fran replied, looking longingly at the pot of curry. She had reservations about giving away part of her hoard, but she didn’t stop. *They can fight harder if they have good food in their bellies.*

*So, curry?*

*Hm.* To Fran, curry was the finest the culinary world had to offer. *Your cooking’s delicious, Teacher. I can do anything once I’ve had your cooking.*

*That’s an exaggeration, don’t you think? You’re putting a lot of pressure on me here.*

*Your food’s the only reason I can fight so hard. I’m sure everyone will feel its effects, too.*

Fran continued setting the table after giving me the highest of praise. The secret base was shorthanded because most of its men had been allocated to assisting the diversionary forces. Thus, they didn’t have enough time to allocate to preparing a satisfying dinner. Fran had been served some salted ham and cheese sandwiched between a piece of stale bread, and dried fish. The rest of our forces weren’t as fortunate, only being served plain, salty soup. They were still starving.

Everyone ate Fran's offerings with beaming smiles on their faces, thanking her the entire time. Miriam returned as well, having just shown Salut to his quarters. I expected her to scold Fran for handing out food without her permission, but she thanked her instead.

"I thank you for assisting us in our time of great need."

"Yes. Now, we can fight."

"We owe you a big one, little lady."

Having been on rations for so long, they were grateful to Fran who had gone through the trouble of exposing her skills and was now offering them food out of her own stock.

"Thank you, Fran."

Sellimea, who had returned with Miriam, smiled as she ate Fran's curry. She had refused special treatment and insisted on eating the same amount and quality as her men; she must've been hungry, too. She cleaned up her plate politely and elegantly, at quite a rapid rate, too.

"This really is delicious, though."

"Hm. Curry's the best."

"So this mysterious dish is called a 'curry'. I've never even had it in my days at the palace."

I guess the princess liked my cooking. I must've been one hell of a chef. Not that I would amount to much without my Cooking skill.

"Hm. This is my teacher's greatest dish."

"My goodness, your teacher came up with this all on his own?"

"Yeah."

"That's amazing."

"Teacher is the world's greatest teacher. He can do anything."

I was glad that I had won Fran's great respect, but it made me slightly worry about what kind of Super Sword she thought I was. I didn't think I could live up to all her expectations. Although, I would do everything in my power to grant



her wishes, of course, so long as she didn't make like Princess Kaguya and ask for the robe of a fire-rat and a jewel from a dragon.

Then again, they might just exist in this world. I was reasonably sure that we could look for fire-rats and dragons. A jewel which grew on the branch of a tree and a bird that laid pearls didn't sound like too much of a stretch.

Could Princess Kaguya have been an otherworlder? One that was transported to Earth from another world, that is. Would that make the legend more of a historical fact?

*Something on your mind, Teacher?*

*Huh? It's nothing. I was just running some hypotheticals.*

*You're thinking up a plan to save Fult and Satya?*

*I-I guess you could say that?*

*Oooh. Give me the details.*

*All right, sure.*

Fran was going to have to relay my plan to Sellimea and Miriam so I needed to tell her sooner or later. I explained to her my battle plan.

*First you take Salut—*

*I see. You're a genius, Teacher.*

*Ain't nothin' really—*

A few minutes later, Fran understood the strategy.

*Well?*

*Yeah. I think that'll work.*

*Right? You're gonna have to explain it to Sellimea and Miriam. I'm counting on you.*

*You got it.*

Fran ran our plan to Sellimea, and to my surprise, she accepted it. Miriam had explained the gist of it to her on their way here, so she had already been half-convinced about it.

Sellimea and Miriam looked determined, eager to carry out their given roles.

One hour later, Fran was in a meeting with a couple of men who were serving in the secret base. They were Miriam's subordinates who had also pledged their loyalty to Sellimea. One of them was even the former leader of the imperial guard, and each of them used to hold a high office in their own regard.

All of them were tall, well built, and had frighteningly hard faces. They all looked intimidating just standing there. Then again, I guess that could be one of the requirements to make it in the imperial guard. In any case, they looked reliable.

"Understood. We will carry out this plan no matter what."

"Even if it costs us our lives. The prospect of a frontal assault on the royal villa does make me shiver with excitement."

"It sets my blood on fire, that's for sure! I've always wanted to try attacking Suarez head-on."

The meeting played out like a scene in an old movie about knights. It startled me that these terrifying men would be so loyal to Sellimea. Miriam declared our earlier operation a failure after the casualties incurred during the distraction at the harbor. One of the men present had bandages wrapped around him, his injuries still fresh. I had expected some of them to voice their complaints.

But these men looked at Miriam without a shadow of doubt in their eyes. Their intense gaze would seem more like a glare to an uninitiated observer, but their eyes signaled trust in their leader.

"I'm sorry. I would like to tell you the rest of the plan, but..."

"That's all right, Lady Miriam. The fewer people there are who know the full plan, the less likely it is to leak."

"We have no intentions of leaking the plan, but it's better to be thorough about these things."

"We're at your service, be it as decoy or diversion."

"Heheheh. We can dispatch right now if you want. We're always ready for a revolt."

“Young lady, we leave Lady Miriam in your hands.”

“And we’ll take care of the front lines,” the men said, puffing their chests. They didn’t doubt Fran’s words either despite her young age and looking like a weak little girl. They were strong themselves, of course, so they must have figured out Fran was no ordinary girl. Their belief was only amplified by Miriam’s own trust in Fran’s strength.

“I’m sorry. And thank you.”

Miriam looked over the room with eyes that were overwhelmed with emotion. Her men’s words had moved her.

“We’ll need your help to make this operation a success.”

Miriam’s men bowed towards her, when—

*Bam! Bam! Bam!*

“Hey! Open up!”

Someone was banging on the door of the secret base. I had sensed people approaching earlier, but I didn’t expect them to hone in on our particular room. The banging continued.

“There’s a possibility that there are criminals using this place as a hideout!”

“Open this door if you’ve got nothing to hide!”

Suarez’s hands had finally reached the slums. The information was probably leaked by the traitor we had. All they needed to know was that we were hiding somewhere out in the slums. An exact address wasn’t necessary.

“Lady Miriam, you must go to the safe room at once.”

“Will you be all right?”

“We’ll be fine. We’ve lived in these slums for years. We’re used to this kind of stuff.”

“This way, hurry.”

“Sorry about this.”

Fran went to an underground room, led by Miriam’s men. The room was

simple as it was carved out of hard rock. Considering how tight its dimensions were, it was more akin to a makeshift storage area under the floorboards. The rooms ceilings were reinforced with wooden planks, but I worried whether they would hold up. We could clearly see whatever was going on up there, and I wondered if they could see down here, too. Fortunately, night had fallen, and we were safely hidden under cover of darkness.

The large burly men, formerly of the imperial guard, really were used to sudden raids by Suarez's men. Once they had made sure Miriam and Fran were safely hidden away, they quietly opened the door, leading the man who was in the process of giving the door another solid bang to almost trip from his own momentum. The timing was so perfect that he must've planned it.

"D-don't just open the door like that!"

"Sorry 'bout that."

"We heard some criminals were hiding out here. We'll show ourselves in."

"Criminals? We haven't seen any criminals."

"That's for us to decide. Out of the way!"

The two soldiers pushed the man out of the way and strutted into the safe house. They acted more like thugs looking for stuff to rob than policemen in search of fugitives. They examined a candlestick that was left on the table, and I overheard one of them say, "Looks cheap. Leave it." Miriam's men must've overheard them, too, but they remained quiet and showed them the rest of the room.

Miriam's men immediately changed their attitudes once the pleasantries were over, though. They surrounded the two soldiers and began pressuring them. They folded their arms over their chests to show them their bulging biceps.

Anyone could tell by the way the two soldiers were putting on airs that they were nothing special. Weak, in fact. Compared to them, we had five well-built, well-trained men on our side, all of them glaring the two street thugs in soldier clothes down.

That was enough to scare the two soldiers. They must've been terrified over

what would happen should the five men decide to get aggressive, and while they tried acting strong, they weren't convincing with how pale they had become. Soon, they left the room.

"Hahaha, did you see the look on their faces?!"

"And they expect us to hand over our Ladies like that?"

"The quality of recruits has gone down lately. I can't believe that scared them away."

Well, I don't know about that. These old guys looked like full-blown outlaws, each of them capable of leading their own legion of military rebels. Compared to them, those two guards looked like thugs who had freshly graduated from high school. There was no contest. I honestly felt sorry for our intruders and had almost warned them to run away.

"Hm, I wonder if the other hiding spots are doing okay," Miriam muttered.

Sellimea should be fine considering her quarters could only be reached via a passage of underground tunnels. The same could not be said of our other companions who were hiding out in a shack located deeper in the slums. There was a possibility the soldiers had found them by now.

We had a bad feeling about it. Fran hurried Miriam along and broke into a light sprint to the other safe house. We were almost spotted by some patrolling soldiers because of it.

Fran's instincts were unfortunately correct.

We immediately concealed ourselves in the shadows and observed the situation. Soldiers were banging on each door, yelling at whoever inside to come out. I really hoped they would ignore them, but...

My prayers were left unanswered, and someone opened one of the doors.

Tomorrow was the day we were finally going to rescue the prince. They must've wanted to get the racket over with and let the soldiers in. I hoped that the soldiers would be satisfied after their random inspection...

We would be in trouble if we raised their suspicions somehow, although I do think it was unavoidable. There were over thirty foreigners crammed into this

tiny shack, you see. It didn't take a genius to put two and two together and figure that we must be connected to the mass prison break from the other day.

*Should I kill them?*

*Not here. Everyone can see you. The other soldiers would spot you instantly.*

The soldiers came out again as I thought about our next step.

*Well, that was fast and uneventful.*

That proved to be wishful thinking, however.

"NO! Let go of me!"

"Shut up! Come over here!"

One of the soldiers had gotten hold of the little girl. She was crying as he dragged her by the arm, struggling every step of the way.

"Stop! Stop it!"

"I told you to shut up, you little bitch!"

"Gya!"

Fran's intent to kill burst out of her the moment the soldier struck her friend. This was worse than the time she was mocked for her Black Cat lineage. Her murderous rage was palpable, enough to send shivers down the spines of the guards posted outside of the safe house. They looked around, wondering what ghost must've passed them by. They brushed it off as mere fancy and returned their attention to the safe house.

"Hey! Don't be rough with the merchandise!"

"Heheheh. Come on, no need to be so strict. There are still a lot of people inside. What's a broken slave or two?"

"That's right. You're all getting the death penalty for escaping prison anyway. Might as well make yourselves useful."

The girl started wailing after hearing the guard's words, prompting him to hit her again. He struck her other cheek this time making her cower in fear.

"Heheheh. You know what, I always wanted to make a punching bag out of

kids.”

“Gyahaha! You’re a nutjob, you know that?!”

“Ya hear that, Punching Bag? You’re my punching bag now! Good for you!”

“Then I’ll take the woman that’s inside.”

“Go for it, go for it!”

That was an awful conversation. I wish Fran didn’t have to hear that. It was too late now, though. Her body was shaking with anger. As hard as I found that conversation to listen to, the effect it had on Fran was staggering. Her emotions overwhelmed her, and she gripped my hilt so hard her hand started shaking.

*Fran?*

Fran didn’t answer.

*Fran!*

But she was too far gone with anger to listen to me now. All I got for a response was the gnashing of her teeth. She leapt out of the shadows, ignoring all the other soldiers who had surrounded the little girl to watch her cry. The only ones Fran could see now were the crying girl and the bad man who hit her. She dashed close to him and uttered with a chilling voice.

“Die.”







“Aah—”

“Urgk?”

Fran slashed me twice, a merciless, all out strike. She ended the lives of two adult men in a mere flash. One of them was sliced clean in half, from top to bottom. The other’s skull was cut horizontally across the bridge of his nose.

Fran sheathed me, the men’s corpses falling gently on the ground. I doubt they felt the pain of their death because of how fast it all went by.

“You’re okay, now.”

“Huh?”

Fran held the girl close and jumped away. Doing so allowed her to gain some distance from the men’s corpses before they hit the ground and splattered their guts everywhere. She didn’t want the girl to see any of that.

Fran talked to the girl in a soothing voice while she healed her, all traces of the cold-blooded killer gone from her face.

“Are you okay?”

“Fran?”

“Yeah. Sorry I’m late.”

Fran hugged her gently. The girl started crying again, big drops of tears streaming down her cheeks. They weren’t tears of fear, however, but tears of relief.

“Fran...! Waaah!”

“It’s okay.”

“I was scared! So scared!”

“I know.”

“It hurt so bad!”

“Mhmm.”

The boys who were hiding in the safe house came out, probably because they heard their friend wailing into Fran’s chest. The maid followed suit, along with

the other adults.

This might be bad.

Our crew weren't the only ones who had taken notice of the girl's crying.

"Wh-what's this?!"

"Who did this?!"

The other soldiers, close to ten in total, had found their friends' bodies. Some of them started throwing up on the spot. I can't blame them, the scene was quite grotesque.

"Y-you did this!"

"Hey, they're the ones we're looking for!"

"It's the prisoners!"

It didn't take long for us to be exposed. There were a lot more soldiers around us now. Among them, there was one figure who clearly was no ordinary soldier. He wore gold armor, with equally gaudy gold robes. A short, flabby man who looked more orc than human. I didn't think we'd meet him again here. This man was the main reason we got roped into the chaos of Seedrun in the first place. The pig of an admiral who wanted to make a slave out of Fran, Dwight.

"Lord Dwight!"

"What's all the ruckus about? Have you found Miriam and Sellimea?"

"S-Sir, some of our men have fallen and—"

"Be quiet, you. Do you think I care about dead people who couldn't make themselves useful and find the target? I'm glad those bastards are dead."

I agreed on calling soldiers who would dare lay their hands on a little girl "bastards," but wasn't that a little much considering they were his own men? The soldiers seemed to agree with me too as they glared daggers at their superior. If only looks could kill. Dwight didn't stop with his harsh comments, however.

"This is why you army men are useless."

"I-I'm sorry, sir."

“These slumfolk are far more valuable. At least I can sell them off as slaves!”

“Uhm...”

“Hmph. No matter. It infuriated me when I heard the foreign slaves I went through the hard work of securing escaped prison, but now you are here in front of me. I’ll sell you off to Galloudie this time. He’s going to pay a pretty penny for you, too. If I use that money and the fact that I was the one who captured the Phyllian royalty, the day where I become the general isn’t far off!”

He had his mind set on using money to buy the General’s seat.

“You’re with Sellimea and Miriam, aren’t you? You know they plan on saving the Phyllian royalty who left you behind.”

“No one believes you. Fult and Satya would never leave their people behind.”

“Hmph! Such blind faith. That’s where you’re wrong. They sold you out to save themselves!”

“No? You’re clearly lying.”

“You refuse to understand, little girl. What proof do you have?”

“Why do I have to believe a talking pig?”

“P-pig...!” Dwight’s face reddened with anger. I guess he was sensitive about his weight among other things.

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“Sorry?! It’s too late for apologies! I’ll make an exception for you. I’ll spare you the life of a slave and kill you right here!”

“I’m not apologizing to you. I’m apologizing to the pig.”

“What?”

“It wasn’t fair of me to compare a pig to the likes of you. You’re closer to a pseudo-orc than anything else.”

Fran was getting witty, a clear sign of her anger. Dwight just declared his plans of making slaves out of us, so it was only expected.

“I didn’t know pseudo-orcs could speak human. You must be a mutant.”

“Silence! That’s right, it was all a lie! I wanted to see you all tremble at the prospect of becoming slaves for a few cheap laughs, but none of that matters to me now! I’ll just torture you into despair myself! You lot, grab them! Bring them to me!”

The soldiers looked troubled, knowing full well there was no way of apprehending all of us, especially Fran. Dwight didn’t seem to care, though. He glared at his soldiers and continued barking orders at them.

“You better have them tied up by the time I come back with Sellimea’s head. Understand?!”

“B-but, sir, we can’t... Not when there’re so few of us—”

“Then go call for backup, you useless fools!”

“Y-yes, sir!”

“So have you found where Sellimea is hiding?”

“N-no, sir. We are still searching the area—”

“Enough. You have made your incompetence very clear. How long do you think it would take if you used the human wave to search the area? Do they teach you nothing? Think!”

“Then what should we do, sir?”

“This. Slumfolk! I know you can hear me. Bring out Sellimea before I set fire to your houses!” Dwight shouted, his terrifying voice amplified with Wind Magic. No doubt the entire slums could hear his threats.

“S-Sir, what are you saying?! We can’t do that!”

Despite their enthusiasm of capturing locals to sell them off as slaves, the soldiers apparently drew the line with arson. Personally, I thought both deserving of the death penalty, but at least they still had standards.

“And what are *you* saying? Do you have reservations about burning down this dump? I am not a complete monster! Bring me Sellimea and I won’t burn down your homes! I’ll even throw in some reward money for you! 1,000,000G alive, 500,000G for her head!”



No matter how well hidden Sellimea was, the slumfolks could still sell her out. There had to be at least a few people who knew where the princess was. These slum people must have been hurting for money, too. Bribing them was a great way of winning them over.

I felt an unrest among the people of the slums as Dwight finished his announcement. We were surrounded then, mostly by onlookers who were just hanging around the vicinity. There were close to a hundred of them in total, and I could tell they all watched the spectacle with bated breath.

*This is bad...*

*What should we do, Teacher?*

*We have to break through.*

We didn't want to expose the underground tunnels by using them so that way was out. Our only option left was to break through the crowd of slumfolk.

*It shouldn't be a problem if you're the only one here, Fran...*

But we were going to have to protect our allies on our way out, increasing the level of difficulty. What was supposed to be Normal difficulty immediately shot up to Hell.

"What, are you just going to stand there and watch! Fine, give me information on Sellimea's whereabouts! I'll buy it for a high price!"

Dwight shouted again. And then—

"Oh, would you shut up!" someone shouted back, and Dwight was pelted with stones. Soon, the barrage of rocks came from all directions.

"Wh-what are you doing?! Don't you know who I am?! I am Dwight, Admiral of the Seedrunian Navy!"

"Tell it to someone who cares!"

"S-stop that! You're supposed to give me Sellimea! Why are you stoning me?! Do you want to die?!"

Even as he was being stoned by the masses, Dwight kept up his arrogance. It was odd that he still expected them to follow his orders after mocking and

threatening them so much. I guess the slumfolks had cooperated in the past despite of it, but their patience had run dry with the pig admiral.

“Burn down our house and home will you? Well, here’s how we feel about that!”

“Do you really think the Princess would hide out in a place like this?!”

“This is what you get for running your mouth! A pig like you calling us pigs? How dare you!”

“Even if she were hiding out here, we’d never hand her over to you!”

“That’s right! We owe the princess our lives ten times over!”

“Get outta here!”

Soon, rubbish and sticks were added to the arsenal of throwing stones.

“D-damn it! You, little girl! Come o—Gurk!”

Dwight must’ve wanted to use Fran as a hostage. She casually killed him as he tried to grab her. A tiresome fellow, he deserved it. I stored away his corpse for now to get rid of the evidence. We could just toss it out somewhere later.

“Get outta here, little lady! While you still can!”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, don’t you worry about us. We’re on your side.”

“Good luck out there.”

“Take care of Lady Sellimea for us!”

“And Miri, too!”

The slumfolk had been on Sellimea’s side all along. Thank God we didn’t start panicking and cut all of them down.

“You lot, over here!”

“Hm?”

“Come on!”

A little old lady was calling out to Fran.

“What is it?”

“Use this to clean yourself up.”

The old lady gave her a wet rag as she pointed to the girl that was on Fran’s back. Fran took the rag and used it to wipe the girl’s face.

“I got a fresh one for you so don’t worry, it’s clean.”

“Thanks.”

“Ain’t nothin’. Anything to repay what Sellimea’s done for us. You should get going. We’ll take care of the king’s dogs.”

“Will you be okay? You’re up against soldiers...”

“Hahaha! We won’t lose to the fool king’s sycophantic army. Don’t worry.”

“Okay. I’ll give you back this rag after cleaning it.”

“You really don’t have to.”

“No. I’ll be back. And I expect to see you again.”

“Hahaha! I suppose I could still use that old rag. I’ll be seeing you again, little lady.”

The slumfolk sent Fran off with smiles on their faces and big thumbs up. Fran bowed her head, and took the kids back to the safe house.

She closed the door before giving her surroundings one final glance. There was close to two hundred slum dwellers now, and she could hear the sound of yelling somewhere off in the distance. It sounded like the sound of people fighting, most of it the pained cries of Seedrun’s soldiers. The slum dwellers were ganging up on them quite well.

“Are you all right?”

It was Miriam and Carla. They had come to check the situation after hearing Dwight’s declaration.

“Yeah, we’re fine now.”

“I see. Did something happen?”

Fran explained the situation to them. The kids helped her whenever she



lacked the diction to describe a certain scene.

“I see. So you killed some soldiers,” Miriam said, weighing the situation. Even if she had killed some soldiers to save her friend, the fact remained that Fran killed some Seedrunian soldiers. The incident was going to draw Suarez’s attention to this place, and another envoy of soldiers wasn’t out of the question.

Fran looked down, knowing that she had gone too far this time. “I’m sorry.”

“Hm? No, no need to apologize. You did nothing wrong, and I’m not particularly upset.”

“But...”

“It’s all right. I’m sure my sister wouldn’t blame you, either.”

“I agree.”

“We fight in order to protect the little things that are important to us.”

“Thanks.”

“I was just thinking about how the people of the slums might just rush the royal palace at this rate.”

I see. There was a possibility our small riot would turn into a full-scale revolt because of all the harbored resentment. That would work perfectly in our favor.

“Let’s speed things up a bit. Our initial plan was to take the palace by ourselves, but now—” Miriam grinned. “We have the support of all the citizens living in the slums. I can see my fool brother panicking now.”

Miriam and I were thinking of the same thing.

“Hm.”

“Commence operation.”

## Chapter 5:

### The King of Seedrun

A few hours had gone by since the slum riots started, and it was now midday. Fran could be seen among the people, two thousand strong, all armed and all marching towards the royal palace.

Sellimea and Miriam could be seen at the head of the crowd. They were protected by their envoy of bodyguards, but the fact remained that they were at the front lines. Among their guards were Salut, Fran, Carla, and some other cloaked figures.

The masses were mostly composed of slum dwellers. After Sellimea and Miriam bowed their heads to them after their assault on the soldiers who had invaded their homes, the slumfolks immediately pledged their cooperation to the princesses. Sellimea explained that going up against Suarez's soldiers was going to be dangerous, but their minds were made up.

"A small risk as long as we get to be useful to you, Lady Sellimea."

"Without your help, we would've died that year we couldn't get any fish."

"You gave my mom free medical treatment when she was sick."

Sellimea had gone out of her way to help these people during the reign of the previous king, and they all expressed their gratitude to her. The slums now stood with her, eager to repay her kindness.

After a little digging, it turned out that the slumfolk had known of Sellimea's whereabouts all along. Still, they had continued to cover for her and protect her without her even knowing. Thinking about it now, it was impossible to keep the hidden paths a secret from the people who lived near them. The slumfolk all agreed that they wouldn't let any information linked to Sellimea leak to the outside.

Sellimea and Miriam were completely oblivious to this fact, thinking all along they had done a good job of keeping their operations a secret from the civilians around them. Both of them blushed when the slumfolk told them the truth.

They were undoubtedly embarrassed upon finding out their efforts at subterfuge only succeeded because they were helped by the people around them.

Their subordinates who had been tasked with blending into the slums knew about it but kept it a secret from their masters anyway. They didn't want Sellimea to think that her presence was a bother to the people she lived among.

The princess loved her people, and her people loved her back. There was a bond of kindness between them.

Truth be told, I didn't think royalty would be able to rule a kingdom based on good intentions alone. Still, I wanted to see Sellimea heal this broken country, and Fran felt the same way. On the other hand, a ruler like Suarez, who abused his power to milk his people dry, had stirred up resentment among the masses.

If you were to look at the reason behind the slum people's revolt, eighty percent of it could be attributed to their love for Sellimea, but twenty percent of it was anger towards Suarez. Seedrun's citizens weren't the only ones up in arms, either. They had helpers like us thrown into the mix.

There were about two thousand of us when we started out, but the mass started accumulating more people by the time we got closer to the palace. Now, there were about three thousand of us in total. What goes around comes around, as they say, and this mob was the embodiment of it. Every act of kindness and evil would be repaid.

Suarez had prepared three thousand soldiers to respond to Sellimea's mob. It wasn't much, but it couldn't be helped given the current circumstances. Suarez had to increase security for the royal palace, but he still had to safeguard the military ports as well. Three thousand was the maximum number of soldiers he could mobilize on such short notice.

Not that Suarez was necessarily going to lose. Although we were about equal in terms of number, our mob still consisted mostly of civilians while Suarez commanded an army of troops. His men were also better equipped and better trained. Sellimea's militia had no chance of winning.

At least, under normal circumstances.

“We have the upper hand,” Miriam said, noting how the tide of battle was in Sellimea’s favor. Seedrun was originally founded by pirates, after all, which amounted to most Seedrunians being quick tempered, hot-blooded fishermen. Most of them worked menial labor all their lives, and it showed through their thickly muscled bodies. Untrained as they might be, they could wreak quite a bit of havoc when left to their passions as the Seedrunian soldiers were quickly learning.

Compared to the civilians, the Seedrunian soldiers were clumsy and unmotivated. Their superiors were stuck in petty conflicts for power which decreased the quality of their physical training. They were hated by Seedrun’s people, and their compensation was cheap. No wonder their motivation was through the floor. There were some scumbags in the army who did atrocious acts, but most of the soldiers only stayed in the army to put food on the table. Motivation and drive made up for the difference in equipment. The end result was Sellimea’s followers ragdolling most of Suarez’s forces about.

Things might have played out differently had Valuza’s Dragon Fangs and the palace’s imperial guard been a part of the battle, but they were nowhere to be seen. Having former imperial guards on our side bolstered our troops’ morale as it meant Sellimea was among her followers. We weren’t going to lose this charge.

I was going to have Fran help with the assault if it came down to it, but there was no need so far. She continued to stay by Sellimea’s side as her guard. Sellimea was supposed to wait in the safe house, at first. She was our commander, after all, and we weren’t going to lose as long as she remained alive. And yet, she had insisted on coming along to the frontlines. She said letting the people fight for her while she stayed hidden in her safe house didn’t sit right with her. Miriam tried to convince her otherwise but Sellimea’s mind was set. The younger princess meekly conceded to her older sister, in fact. If Miriam wasn’t opposed to it, then we weren’t going to muddle things further.

Besides, there was no guarantee that hiding out in the slums was a safe choice. There was no place to run if someone torched the place, as the late Dwight had suggested the other night. There might be traitors in the midst, too. Therefore, it was much easier to safeguard her where we could see her.

“They’re running away!”

“Serves ’em right!”

“Do not pursue! Killing soldiers is not our main goal!”

The mob quickly vanquished Suarez’s troops who were now retreating. Miriam prevented the mob from chasing the soldiers down in their fever pitch. She couldn’t stop them all, however, and the more hotheaded of our number strayed off to terrorize some terrified soldiers. At least most of the mob listened to her orders.

“Onwards! To the royal palace!”

“*YEAH!*” The mob roared as they resumed their advance towards the palace. We were now passing through a residential district. Military resistance had decreased to the point of being inconsequential; they weren’t even attempting to stop us at this point. A lot of civilians joined the mob upon seeing Sellimea in the lead, further bolstering the mob’s morale.

Suddenly, Fran stepped out of the mob.

*What is it, Fran?*

“There.”

Fran pointed to several men who appeared to be surrounding a shop. As we got closer, I figured out what they were up to.

“Give us all your money, old lady.”

“O-oh no...”

Having people like this in the mob was inevitable as our numbers grew larger. They had been warned beforehand that they would be punished if they acted violent toward any civilian.

Still, I suppose some people joined the mob so they could have an excuse to loot and plunder when things got frantic. The men had surrounded a shopkeeper who was in the middle of running away and was now stripping her down for cash. One of them skipped the formalities and was in the middle of looting foodstuffs from the shopkeeper’s store.

“What are you looking at?”

“Hey, that girl’s part of the princess’s guard.”

“This kid? You serious?”

The men looked down on Fran with the same unpleasant eyes as the soldiers she had killed.

“Let go of the old woman.”

“What’s that? You ordering us around?”

“Sellimea wouldn’t allow this.”

“We’re helping our princess out, you know. For free! She’d let this kind of petty behavior slide.”

“That’s right. How about we give you a piece of the action, too?”

The things they said and did were no different from Suarez’s men. Men like them would only get in our way and sully Sellimea’s good name. Fran seemed to be thinking the same thing.

“Haa!”

“Gah!”

“Blurk!”

She closed her distance with a speed too fast for the eye to see, and knocked the men out with her bare hands. She delivered excellent liver shots, and the men crumpled to the ground, silenced by the intense pain. She took out the other two men and then turned to the old woman who was trembling in fear. Fran’s youth worked in her favor for once, as her looks had a calming effect on the old shopkeeper. She bowed her head to thank her.

“I’m so sorry about this.”

“Oh, there’s no need for you to apologize, young lady. The fault lies in no one but these bad men. Why, I can’t believe they would dirty Lady Sellimea’s name like that.”

The shopkeeper was too old to fight, but she was squarely on Sellimea’s side.

“Thanks. You should close early today.”

“I was just about to do that.”

“See you.”

“Aah, hold on. Take this with you.”

“Are you sure?”

“Consider it my way of saying thank you.”

The old lady gave her a rice cake wrapped with leaves. Fran took it, bowed her head, and left the store. She dragged the men along, of course. She brought them to Sellimea and Miriam, who were too far ahead for the rest of the crowd to see.

“I took care of some idiots.”

“Well done.”

“Good job, Fran!”

“There might be others.”

“True... These can’t be the only fools trying to take advantage of the chaos of a revolution.”

“Hm.” Sellimea darkened at Miriam’s statement. She must be thinking that it was somehow her fault. The corners of Miriam’s eyes raised upon seeing her sister’s grief-filled expression. We finally approached the men as their pain subsided and they were able to regain their footing.

“Princess, hand her over to us!”

“Why?”

“Why?! Look at what she did to us!”

“We are volunteer soldiers for Princess Sellimea. That girl shamed courageous men like us!”

“You lot were the ones who started looting innocent civilians!”

The men smirked at Miriam’s judgment before blurting out their dirty excuses.

“Perhaps, but surely you understand our reasons.”

“That’s right. We’re working for you without compensation here. Surely you don’t expect us to walk away empty-handed?”

“You guys think so, too, don’t you?”

The men started inciting the people around them. Most of them looked disgusted at the men’s behavior, but there were some among them who nodded in agreement. They might have disagreed with robbery, but looting seemed all right in their books.

Punishing the men would tell the mob that the princess disapproved of such uncouth behavior. We might lose a lot of followers if that happened. Did Suarez send these men specifically to turn the mob against us? That couldn’t be. Fran only caught them in the act by pure chance. However, the fact that they were stirring up trouble remained.

Miriam showed no hesitation.

“I see... Hmph!” Miriam brought the blunt side of her lance down upon him.

“Aiee?!” “Wh-what do you think you’re doing?!” the remaining men shouted at Miriam for knocking their friend out cold.

“What, you ask? I am merely bringing justice upon the fiends who hurt the innocent!”

“S-stop! Gyaaargh!”

Miriam knocked the second man out. The wound was heavy, albeit not fatal. Miriam was furious despite her calm exterior.

“Please, stop! Gyaaa!”

“Justice must be dealt. That goes for you, too!”

“Ow, argh!”

“Noo!”

Miriam had all four men crawling on the ground in a matter of seconds. The sudden burst of violence silenced the heretofore restless crowd. They watched Miriam with bated breath. As bad as the men might have been, she still beat



down people who were on their side. It wouldn't be out of the question to think that they saw Miriam as ruthless and heartless.

I looked over at Sellimea, expecting the sheltered princess to find scenes of public caning excessive and distasteful. However, I found no trace of fear on her face or trembling in her stature. She seemed prepared for the contingency and stepped forward with determination. She stood in front of Miriam as if defending her and raised her voice to the people without so much as a flinch.

"People of Seedrun, lend me your ears! We are not here fighting to fulfill our selfish desires."

Her tone wasn't forceful, but it still reached the ears of her citizens.

"We fight to restore law and order to our land. We must uphold law and order no matter the cost."

Sellimea moved her hands and body to appeal to her people. Her silver-purple hair glowed as it danced in the sunlight. The effect was enough to draw the mob's attention. She had taken hold of her audience's vision and hearing; all of them looked upon her as if entranced. The riotous air which was bubbling up within the mob dispersed completely as they all leaned in to listen to Sellimea.

She had gained complete control of her audience.

"We must stand tall, maintain our dignity! We must do the right thing!"

Sellimea's tone of voice and expression were not manufactured, reaching the hearts of her citizens. Perhaps, it only touched their hearts because she was so genuine.

"You have been oppressed for too long. I understand that you must want to oppress in return. But that is precisely why we cannot afford to become oppressors ourselves..."

Sellimea's words struck a chord with her people as they tried to digest them. Her words even touched my heart despite my slight cynicism. The people felt like they must think through what she was saying.

"We do not live on good intentions alone. Unfortunately, there will always be people like these who live for their own selfish desires."

Sellimea had managed to win her people over in such a short period of time. She looked upon the men pitifully, and most of the people followed suit. This was proof that many agreed with Sellimea's genuine words and actions.

"But we shall not look to them for help. We, upholders of justice, will not turn to those who seek to ignore it."

Her hair blew in the wind as beads of sweat trickled down her cheek. She looked divine, like a goddess in a play. The people continued to listen, then knelt to her. I could understand why.

"I implore you! Stand tall! Stand tall that no one may dominate us and that righteousness may flourish!"

The crowd exploded as soon as Sellimea finished her speech.

"YEAAAAAH!!!"

They pumped their fists to the sky with a look of exaltation on their faces. The fear of battle and resentment towards their king had been wiped clean, and it was now replaced with a strong look of passion. Now they no longer fought because of their love for Sellimea or their hatred for Suarez. They were now fighting as the proud Seedrunians that they were.

*All right, time for a bit of insurance.*

*Insurance?*

*Yup.*

Using dirty tricks right after Sellimea's impassioned speech felt a bit wrong, but I was a dirty kind of guy who didn't mind resorting to trickery to win. Although I did feel like I had to apologize to Fran for involving her in my scam.

*No problem. I'm an adventurer. As long as it doesn't break the law, it's all good.*

*Heheheh. True that.*

Fran waited for the excitement of the mob to die down before opening her mouth.

"I've seen these four before. They're Suarez's men."

I had figured out that they weren't, of course; we had run into them by pure coincidence. But even if it was coincidence, it was much better that they were thought as such. It wasn't like anyone could verify the truth at this point anyway.

"What? Are you sure?"

"Hm. No doubt about it."

"Did you hear that, everyone? The fool king sent his spies to rile up unrest among us! Do not be deceived by his dirty tactics!"

"OOOH!" went the crowd.

The effects were immediate. Sellimea's moving speech had united her citizens, and now their anger towards Suarez was sharpened to a point. There was no way the mob would betray us or run away in fear now.

Miriam nodded at us. She knew the game we were playing, but she was prepared to play dirty so Sellimea wouldn't have to. They really made a good team.

"All right... Advance!"

"Julius, how goes the rebels' advance?"

"My lord. They are headed towards the royal villa as expected."

"Do we have enough guards for the royal palace?"

"Of course. We've laid out our troops for an ambush as well. We'll apprehend them all in one fell swoop."

"Very good. According to our agent, they plan on making a show of attacking the royal villa before diverting to the royal palace to capture me. A brilliant plan had it not been leaked!"

"Indeed. It seems they've ordered their followers to attack the royal villa, as well."

"Heheheh. How unfortunate that they have not realized the traitor is still in their midst."

"Indeed. But is it all right for us to leave the Phyllian twins there?"

“It can’t be helped. Not now. If Sellimea’s spies spot them in the royal villa, they would know of our plot. My life would be in danger.”

“Are you basing it off the information our Raydossian spy gave us? That demons would protect the Phyllian royalty if their lives were in danger?”

“We have no way of verifying the truth... Galloudie seems unaware of it, so why would that man know?”

“They say he’s been spying on the Phyllians for a long time now.”

“I see... Well, I’m not going to put my life on the line to verify the rumors. It would be calamitous if demons started raiding the royal palace.”

“Indeed. Our Water Dragons would be ineffective against them as well.”

“Exactly. You’ve posted some of our elite troops in the royal villa, yes?”

“I have, Your Majesty. Thirty of our most loyal men, none with any sympathy towards the Phyllians. We’ve also told them not to leave the royal villa in case of unforeseen circumstances.”

“So the Dragon Tail are securing the villa?”

“Yes. Their numbers may be few but they are an elite fighting force as strong as Dragon Fang.”

“I heard the man called Sellid has disappeared. Do you know of his whereabouts?”

“Apologies, Your Majesty. However, we managed to chop off his left arm, and he leapt into the sea under the cover of night. He should be dead as dead can be.”

“Very well. All this will be over in a day. He is irrelevant to us should he survive anyway.”

Sellimea’s combined forces, which consisted of the initial mob plus defectors from the enemy’s side, now totaled over five thousand people. We had run into a few skirmishes here and there, although none of them was an all out battle. Most of our enemies lost their will to fight after seeing the congregation of the masses. Some of the noblemen still tried to go after Sellimea, setting up ambushes from within their mansions, but they couldn’t get through the wall of

people in the end.

The mob was well armed now, too, equipped by the weapon store vendors who had pledged their allegiance to Sellimea and the enemy soldiers who had defected. The sailors, who made up our frontline, were particularly fierce combatants. They even made trained soldiers look like pansies. Did this country even need a military? I didn't think its people needed defending, and it was unlikely they could be occupied by invading forces. Having gone through the fires of battle, it was as if the fishermen had changed classes to pirates. Not that the class change actually took place, but it sure looked like it did.

We got closer to the royal palace and villa.

"We're almost there," Salut called out to Miriam.

"Yes. Although I must apologize to you in advance."

"It is all right. As long as we get to save the prince and princess in the end."

"Indeed. People of Seedrun! We are almost to the royal villa! Break through and free its prisoners! Then, the royal palace!"

"YEAAAH!"

"We're almost there, Sir Salut."

"Indeed, Madam."

We carried on marching for thirty minutes before Salut approached Miriam again.

"We are almost to the royal villa, Lady Miriam."

"Indeed."

"Lady Miriam?"

"Worry not. This is all part of the plan."

"Right..."

He dropped back again, dissatisfied. I could understand why. We had leaked our plan of making a show of attacking the royal villa, but now we were actually attacking it. We had told Salut that we were going to turn and attack the royal palace in order to ambush Suarez and seize the country. Despite that, Sellimea

and Miriam were continuing their advance towards the royal villa; it was no surprise that he was beginning to get suspicious.

Thirty minutes later.

“Lady Miriam, what is the meaning of this?!”

“Why are so upset, Sir Salut?”

“Th-this is not how it was planned!”

“There are too many people in our forces, now. It would take too much time to carry out our plan exactly as we planned it.”

“What... So what are you planning to do now?!”

“I’m afraid we have to give up on killing the king for now. We shall carry on our advance toward the royal villa.”

“I will not have it!”

“What’s got you so upset? Is this not better for you? You will be able to save the Phyllian prince and princess sooner.”

Salut looked anxious despite his masters’ liberation being close at hand.

“I-I see. Right!”

“Very good. Cheer up, Sir Salut. I believe things are better this way. The lie we told our people ended up being the truth, after all.”

“Urgh. I suppose so. Hahaha.”

Another hour passed since the exchange.

Sellimea’s forces overwhelmed the royal villa with little trouble. It wasn’t heavily guarded to begin with, so the military gave us little resistance. All it took was a wooden battering ram we had prepared earlier to break down its gates.

There were fifty archers guarding its courtyard, but Fran and I deflected their arrows with our Wind Magic.

Some of the villa’s defenders were decently strong, but they were nothing compared to Valuza’s men. Their stats were pretty good, though not good enough that Fran wasn’t able to dispose of them with a single cut. Perhaps they

increased their stats by using magical drugs to intimidate their enemies. To make matters worse, their combat experience and skill levels were awful.

Still, they bragged about being stronger than Dragon Fang. Don't make me laugh. Do you know how excited Fran was when she thought she'd get a challenging fight? She was in a terrible mood after being so let down. It took me a while to cheer her up.

"All right, let's go save the prince and princess."

"Hm."

"Sir Salut, you take point."

"What? Why me...?"

"Look at the confusion around you, man. The prince and princess might be on their guard right now. If they see a familiar face leading our crew, we would be able to avoid any unnecessary conflict."

"B-but..."

And so it was decided that Salut would take the lead; Fran and Jet close behind him. We had summoned Jet by now, mostly to guard Sellimea by sheer force of intimidation.

We went through the royal villa at a quick pace. Fran had located Fult and Satya using her Presence Sense, and all she had to do was instruct Salut on which way to go. We carried on until we reached a large room located in the center of the villa.

The door itself spelled luxury. It looked like the doors to an expensive wedding venue. Not that I had ever gone through one! The only weddings I'd ever gone to were of my boring supervisors.

"In there."

"I-I see."

"What's wrong? Open it."

"Yes. Excuse me!"

Salut made up his mind and gave the door a forceful push. The ones we had

been looking for were waiting for us inside.

“Salut! Where have you been?!”

“We were looking for you.”

“Well, I...”

Prince Fult and Princess Satya looked the same as the day we were separated. Some of their attendants were with them, too.

“I think that should be enough, Fran. It’s time to bring this operation to a close. I trust you can do it.”

“Hm.”

Miriam gave Fran their agreed upon signal, and Fran narrowed her eyes.

Miriam called out to Salut.

“What’s this? A moment, Sir Salut. You seem to have something on your back.”

“My back?”

“Fran, take it off for the man, if you will.”

“Got it.”

Salut bent down, plainly showing Fran his back.

“What are you doing, Fran?!” he yelped when Fran suddenly pinned his hands behind him. She removed the object in question—a magical device which allowed for long distance communication—and tossed it to Jet.

“Jet.”

“Woof!”

Jet retreated to the shadows, the device still in his maw. As expected, I couldn’t pick up the device’s mana signature once Jet was in his realm. I wasn’t able to send telepathic messages while I was in there myself. The device was rendered useless now, even if it was able to continuously eavesdrop on conversations.

“Y-you...!”



“It seems we have angered you, Sir Salut. Or should I say, traitor?”

Salut’s face tightened upon Miriam’s remark. “Traitor? What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about you, Sir Salut.”

“I-I don’t know what makes you think that... Are you not jumping to conclusions?”

“Still trying to get away with it even now?”

“Such slander... What reason do you have for calling me a traitor? This is an act of slander towards the kingdom of Phyllius itself!”

He sure had nerve to bring up the name of the kingdom he betrayed.

We had figured out Salut was the traitor in our midst from the time we first infiltrated the royal villa. I thought he was on our side until then. I found out about his betrayal not by deduction or any suspicious act on his part, but by pure chance. I immediately activated Essence of Falsehood and kept it on upon finding out there was a traitor in our midst. I didn’t know whether the traitor was in our infiltration party, but I turned it on just in case.

I just happened to find out when Salut declared Sellid as the traitor and confirmed it again when Valuza supported his statement.

Everything Salut said after that had been a lie. Everything from his eulogy of the slain Yorth and his promise of saving the prince and princess. Salut was our Raydossian mole. His goal was to infiltrate the kingdom of Phyllius.

I thought of a way to use this situation to our advantage. I found out early on that he had a device which allowed him long-distance communication. I let him leak false information to Suarez to manipulate his strategy. Everything worked according to plan by the looks of it. Believing Salut’s false information, Suarez had tightened the royal palace’s security.

We had told Miriam of Salut’s betrayal during our escape from the royal villa. I took the risk of talking to her via Telepathy. I left out the part where I was a talking sword, of course, and instead used Jet as my cover. Talking to her in broken grammar had been exhausting.

*“Me, Jet. Lady Fran’s familiar.”*

Now expand that to span an entire conversation. I only told her the vital details, such as Salut being the traitor and that he had a device which allowed him to communicate with his masters. Seeing that Miriam had believed me, my broken language paid off.

By the time we left the underground tunnels and returned to the slums, Miriam made up various excuses to prevent Salut’s audience with Sellimea. She had also sent him to a more cramped room to hinder him from sending out information.

We had seen through his deception thanks to the power of our Skill. The unique skill wasn’t one we used perpetually, so it was by pure chance that the circumstances lined up perfectly. Miriam asked me for more details but I didn’t tell her everything, of course. Fortunately, it was common courtesy in this world not to expose one’s strong skills, and so Miriam didn’t press the matter.

“We’ve saved Fult and Satya, but you don’t look happy. Why?”

“Preposterous! I’m ecstatic! These accusations will not stand!”

“The plan we told you was a complete lie. Suarez seems to know about it since the royal palace is packed with soldiers. Why is that?”

“I-I can’t be the only one who could’ve leaked it!” Salut frantically denied Fran’s questioning.

“But the only ones who know about this plan are Sellimea, Miriam, myself, and you.”

“Wha—” He knew he had been caught in his contradictions. Salut’s face flushed with anger. He now turned to the Fult and Satya to appeal to them.

“Your Highness, there has been a mistake! Sellid was the Raydossian spy, not me!”

Salut was now talking like a perpetrator in a detective story. Fult wasn’t falling for it.

“Sellid was the spy? Is that what you’re saying, Salut?”

“Yes! And I have proof!”

That was another lie. He didn't have a single shred of evidence. Although, he must've figured he could make stuff up since he thought Sellid was more or less dead.

"They seem to think that I have betrayed you... Perhaps they are trying to drive a wedge between us. You must not believe their lies! Not when it is clear that Sellid was the Raydossian spy!"

What a bad sport. Before Fran had a chance to defend herself, Fult immediately denied Salut's accusations.

"Sellid would never betray us."

"What...? Wh-what makes you so sure? We're talking about Sellid!"

"Yes, Sellid can be loud and overly concerned about social hierarchies, but he would never betray the kingdom of Phyllius, let alone the royal family."

"How do you know for sure?" It was Fran's turn to wonder now. It wasn't that she didn't believe Fult's statement, but she had wanted an explanation.

"I can't tell you the specifics... Let's just say it has to do with the Divine Sword's protection."

"It is something only the royal family understands. Sellid will never betray us."

"Besides, we have evidence for our accusations."

It was upon Fran's declaration—

"Give it a rest, Salut."

—that the cloaked man revealed himself.

"Wha..."

Salut's eyes bulged upon the sight of the man who was missing his left hand. His shock drained the blood from his face.

"S-Sellid! You're alive?!"

The mysterious cloaked man was Sellid, who had managed to escape all by himself. He had been separated from the prince and princess, and confined ever since we got off the ship. Valuza had been sent to kill him afterwards, but he managed to muster up enough strength to escape, though he ended up

falling into the sea, in the end. His left arm was cut off, and although he took a dive into the winter sea, he still managed to survive. Impressive, but his survival seemed linked to the Divine Sword's protection Fult mentioned earlier. It must've been triggered when Sellid's life was in danger.

Sellid escaped to the slums to go into hiding, and that's where we found him. It was right after we escaped the royal villa and Fran was in the middle of handing out meals. Right about the time Fran explained my plans to Sellimea. I have to say, I was quite shocked at the time when I sensed his familiar aura.

Sellid responded to Salut with his usual regal stature. "Who are you calling a traitor?"

"Y-you! How can it be anyone else?!"

"Then I ask that you produce your evidence."

"I-I don't have it with me..."

Everyone in the room directed their piercing stares at Salut. He knew then that he had no allies left. He tossed glances left and right, but he soon hung his head as he figured out the jig was up. Had he also realized there was no escape?

"Salut, we won't hurt you if you don't resist."

*P-Princess Satya, you shouldn't just approach him like—*

"Don't move."

As Salut feigned a fainting spell, he rushed towards Satya to attack her. I knew this would happen. We should've been more careful...

He drew the knife which hung from his waist and instantly brought it up to Satya's neck. Black mana emanated from his entire body. He had used his Class Skill, Shadow Aura, which greatly increased his strength and agility at the cost of halving his health. I didn't expect him to be able to use it so quickly and for the buff to be so significant. I didn't have enough time to react.

"Enough of this farce!"

"You really are the traitor."

“That’s right! And you naive Phyllians never suspected me for a moment! Prince, take out a slave contract if you will!”

“An item bag?”

Salut tossed a leather bag which hung from his waist at Fult. I could feel mana emanate from it.

“And take out a slave collar while you’re at it. And once you’ve signed your name on the contract, go ahead and wear it.”

“What... Salut, stop this foolishness!”

Miriam and Sellimea tried to stop him, but Salut wasn’t having it.

“Silence! Get on with it, Prince! I don’t have to kill her, you know. I can pop one of her eyeballs here and now...”

Salut edged his knife from Satya’s neck to her eyes. We couldn’t afford to be brash with the knife so close to her. Even if I could manipulate the knife with Telekinesis, the slightest miscalculation would leave her severely injured.

“All right.”

The prince nodded, signed his name on the contract, and immediately wore the slave collar without a trace of hesitation.

The refined boy with golden hair now had a heavy iron collar hanging from his neck. Young ladies with certain peculiar tastes would have blood gushing out of their noses by now. Lacking those peculiar tastes, I just found the sight pitiful.

“Brother...”

Tears welled in Satya’s eyes. The guilt of having done this to her brother was too much for her.

“Satisfied?”

“Bring me that contract.”

“Here. Now, let go of Satya.”

Having received Fult’s contract, however, Salut only laughed. “Fuhahaha! I won’t!”

“That’s not what you said earlier.”

“And you think I care?! Why should I listen to you after receiving such great power!”

Great power? Fran tilted her head, wondering what the madman was talking about. Fult had received full combat training and so was quite strong compared to other youths of his age, but the fact remained that he was still a thirteen year old boy. His stats were much lower compared to an adult male, and his skills were only slightly better compared to the average soldier. I didn’t see why enslaving the prince would grant Salut great power.

“That’s right. Power! Fult, Satya, kill everyone here except for me!”

Still, Salut confidently ordered his newly attained slaves.

*Fran, I don’t know what’s going to happen here. Keep your guard up.*

*I know.*

Fran didn’t blink and dropped into her usual fighting stance. She was covering Sellimea, who was standing behind her, and kept her eyes on Fult and Satya, her hand already gripping my hilt.

“You might not know this, but the Phyllians have the blessing of their Divine Sword. They’re demon users! And now this terrible power is mine to command! Muhahaha!”

“...”

The Divine Sword of Phyllius, of course! I remembered that it had something to do with summoning demons, but I didn’t think they could use it without the sword being physically present. This might not end well. Were we going to have to cut Fult down? I didn’t think Fran would let it come to that.

*Fran, if you see any demons, we’re going to have to let loose the strongest spells we have!*

*Got it.*

*Get ready...!*

But then, nothing happened.

“...What are you doing? I told you to slaughter them all!”

“That’s enough, Satya. There’s no need to show this man any more sympathy.”

“I see... What a shame.”

“Why won’t you do what I say?! Your name is on this contract, Fult! You are my slave!”

“As you have said, the Phyllian royalty is under the protection of the Divine Sword’s blessing; demons protect us. It protects us from severe harm and eliminates whatever it is that causes it.”

“S-so?”

“Why haven’t you been eliminated? Because your actions are not severe enough to warrant the demons’ protection. Protected by the Divine Sword, these slave collars are little more than iron necklaces to us. We have no need to obey your commands.”

“What...? Then how were you captured in Dars? Were you doing it for fun?!”

They were wearing slave collars when we found them in the slavers’ hideout, although I was now beginning to suspect that the contracts had no effect on them.

“The men who captured us had the other children in captivity. We let ourselves be captured so we could free them.”

“So the Divine Sword has the power to do even that? I thought it was limited to controlling demons...”

“We didn’t need to unleash any demons on our captors because Fran came and saved us. Oh, I see now. Were you the one who hired them? I apologize for your wasted effort.”

Salut screamed, furious at Fult’s words. “Damn it all!”

He brought the point of his knife into Satya’s eye.

And that’s when it happened.

A dim light prevented the knife from going any further, stopping it a hair’s

breadth away from Satya's eye. Salut angrily pressed down on the knife harder, but he couldn't penetrate the dim light.

Was this the demonic protection of the Divine Sword? Now, black mist emanated from behind Satya, blowing Salut away.

*Good! The princess is away from Salut now!*

*Fran, Jet, now's your chance!*

Fran leapt forward, taking advantage of Salut's carelessness as the latter was preoccupied with Satya.

"Haa!"

"Argh! You little bitch!"

Fran lopped off Salut's right foot, and I blew away his sword as he crouched down in pain. That should greatly reduce his combat capabilities. However, Fran ignored him and instead went to stop Satya from falling to the floor. The black mist was gone from her now. It seemed that it only interfered when it sensed its masters in danger.

"Satya, are you okay?"

"Thank you, Fran... I'm all right."

"Hm. Are you sure?"

"Haha, I'm sorry. I suppose I'm not as all right as I thought," Satya said, shifting her gaze to Salut. Her longtime protector, to whom she had entrusted her life, had just tried to take it from her. There was no one who wouldn't be hurt by the experience. Fran continued holding the princess as she trembled and tears welled up in her eyes. Fran then gently patted her back.

"Thank you..."

"Hm."

Miriam had captured Salut in the meantime. His life was already halved by Dark Aura, and he was close to bleeding out because of Fran's abrupt amputation of his foot. Miriam poured some potions on him. The low-tier potions only served to close his wounds, though.



“Sellid, take care of Satya.”

“I shall. And I thank you. Truly.” Sellid bowed his head. We hadn’t spent too much time together, but I could tell he wasn’t a bad guy. He was just a little too concerned about his country and the royal family’s authority and social standing. His primary concern was appearances, but even then it wasn’t so much his own but of the royal family of Phyllius.

He acted the way he did towards Fran and the other kids out of sheer respect of the royal bloodline. In fact, it felt as if Sellid had to compensate for the prince and princess’s lack of concern about the thing. He protected the nobility of the royal bloodline by playing the role of the mean noble. Someone had to toot Phyllius’s horn, and if the royal twins weren’t up to it, Sellid was. Maybe that’s just how he was naturally, but this natural trait served him well in his role as royal horn-tooter.

“Hm.”

Now, it was time to have a chat with Salut.

Traitor that he was, he still served the Phyllians for a long time. We didn’t want to show Satya the pain that awaited him. Sellid understood this, so he took Satya to another room while consoling her.

And Fult? Well, he would be all right. The prince was a man, after all. It was a good lesson for him, and he said confidently that he preferred to stay. His eyes were calm; he didn’t look like he was squeamish enough to have to go to another room.

“Salut, I’m going to question you now. You have served us for many years, so in return I will not kill you as long as you tell me the truth.”

“Just kill me...!”

Things were proceeding as expected. The only question now was how resilient Salut was.

Or so I thought...

“Eaaargh! P-please, no more!”

It didn’t take ten minutes for him to start squealing. Not to say he was

spineless, but the prince had been merciless. With all due respect, he was very knowledgeable about intense torture methods. He even made Fran cover her ears at one point. He made stabbing Salut with a sword and healing him perpetually look like a cakewalk.

I won't describe the prince's methods of torture, but suffice it to say that it had to do with fingernails, eyeballs, and needles. The pain inflicted went beyond excruciating and right into demonic.

It made me realize that countries with long lifespans had with it an equally dark history.

"Aah, I see."

*Fran, no! This is nothing to be impressed about! You are not to imitate Fult! If you do, my cold steel is going to start streaming hot tears!*

As I was frantically explaining the virtue of kindness to Fran, Fult finished gathering the information he needed.

"I see. You've been working us for a long time..."

Salut had infiltrated Phyllius over ten years ago. His mission was to enslave the royalty and steal their Divine Sword. Aside from his periodic reports to Raydoss, he was a loyal servant of Phyllius and slowly worked his way into their inner circle. He had even gone so far as to apprehend the errant spy or two. It was a long story, but it underlined the value of a Divine Sword.

When Salut had failed to capture and enslave the prince and princess in the city of Dars, he was forced to change his plans. The assassin who had snuck into our inn afterwards was under his employ. He didn't expect him to succeed and instead planned for him to get caught to cause suspicions of betrayal and conspiracy to fall onto Sellid.

In any case, once the Dars operation failed, Salut planned to kidnap the royals in Bulbola instead. However, the storm and an encounter with the Midgardsormr forced him to change his plans again. Our spy was terribly unlucky. He refused to give up, though, and his refusal to yield made me think of a cockroach.

The greatest crisis for him came when we had a run-in with the pirates. The

prince might have demons under his command, but all of it would be for naught if the ship he was on sank to the bottom of the ocean. Salut's goal was to capture the prince and princess alive to turn them into slaves for Raydoss. He couldn't afford to let them be captured by the pirates, either. Phyllius would pay any amount of money to have their prince and princess back, and they would immediately be returned to their homeland. He wanted to avoid that if at all possible.

However, Salut thought of a way to turn that crisis into an opportunity. He would get on a lifeboat with the prince and princess and escape while letting Sellid and the other hindrances deal with the pirates. This plan failed when Fran defeated all the pirates and brought their captain to our boat. We really got in the way of every step of Salut's plan.

One unexpected circumstance piled on top of another until we were captured by the Seedrunian navy. He contacted his superior, and fellow Raydossian, Galloudie. At the time, Salut didn't know that Raydoss was trying to get its hands on Seedrun. He had cooperated with Suarez so Seedrun could play right into Raydoss's hands. He told them he would trick the prince and princess and ship them over to Raydoss; doing so would make Suarez complicit.

Dwight was the one who originally suggested this idea, and he came up with it when he captured Fult and Satya. He wanted to sell them to Raydoss as slaves and initiate the honeymoon period between Seedrun and Raydoss.

This plan would undermine Salut's labor. In fact, it would make Galloudie, the Raydossian envoy, look like the hero instead. Salut didn't seem to care, though. As long as it served the empire of Raydoss, he didn't mind taking a hit to his status.

As much of a traitorous snake that Salut was, his loyalty to Raydoss had been genuine. Maybe they brainwashed him. Even so, his loyalty shattered in the face of Prince Fult's torture course.

"Fult, are you okay?"

"Oh, I'm fine."

"Okay. Good job."

“I am the prince of Phyllius. This is not enough to break me.”

“Good luck.”

“Haha. Thank you.”

Fult may have laughed, but he sounded lonely. Fult was a prince, after all, and being betrayed by his aide had definitely been a blow to him. He put up a front, and Fran had seen right through it. She had grown so much ever since she met Fult and Satya... She had grown not as a warrior but as a human. It was necessary to get stronger in general, and I was glad that she was getting the opportunity.

“Fran, Prince Fult, I would like to hear your opinions on our next move.”

We let Carla watch over Salut as we discussed what to do next. We had successfully saved Fult and Satya, but we were far from our happy ending. We still needed to overthrow the king to save the oppressed people of Seedrun. Our fight wouldn't end until the king either abdicated or died. If we stopped our rebellion and escaped, the king would snuff out the people who had been involved.

“Allow us to be of service. It brings shame to Phyllius to have been led around this long.”

“I thank you. The power of a demon user is worth over a hundred men.”

“Oh no, please don't expect too much from us. Satya and I are able to borrow the power of demons, yes, but only under extreme circumstances. And we can't use them forever, either. It would be difficult for us to strike the king by our own power.”

“I see...”

The soldiers at the royal palace were going to be our major obstacle. They were an impenetrable wall which protected the king.

While we were thinking of a way to get around this problem, Fran said, “Hey, what if we used that long distance communication device Salut had on him?”

Fran explained her plan. By the sound of it, it had a pretty good chance of working.

We asked Salut how his device worked. Not only could it constantly listen in on conversations, charging it with mana allowed the user to talk to another holder of the device for several minutes. Its effective range was ten kilometers which made it a very useful tool.

We ironed out the details of Fran's plan. Then, we resumed the march of our mob. It was moving from the royal villa to the royal palace now, with Sellimea and Miriam leading the charge.

"Now is our chance to retake the undefended royal port! People, lend me your strength!"

"YEAAAAH!"

*Sir Galloudie, can you hear me? This is Salut.*

"Salut? What's going on out there?! The mob is not assaulting the royal palace! King Suarez is furious!"

*I apologize, sir. The mob has grown too big and Sellimea couldn't put them in order. Th-they changed courses and headed straight for the royal villa instead.*

"Damn it. I can't believe they would change their battle plan over such a petty reason. She really is letting her people rule over her."

*Y-yes. In any case, they have saved the Phyllians and are now headed to the royal port. Once they've captured it, they plan to hijack a ship and flee Seedrun immediately.*

"What?! Really?"

*They say they're going to destroy all the other ships save their own. Afterwards, they plan to flee to Phyllius and seek asylum there.*

"All right, I shall inform the king immediately. Good work!"

Thirty minutes had passed since the exchange. Fortunately, Galloudie was in too much of a panic to notice the trembling in Salut's voice. We were intimidating Salut the entire time just in case he tried to warn his superior, but it didn't seem necessary in the end. I guess he really didn't want to be tortured by the prince a second time.

We tied Salut up and let Sellid handle him. We had a few of Miriam's men

guard him, just in case.

“Now, I think Suarez will redistribute some of his men to secure the royal port.”

“It should work. The royal port is vital to the strength of this kingdom. The threat of the destruction of the royal navy should be enough to divert them.”

“True.”

“It would be to our advantage even if he still focused on defending the royal palace. It would make it easier for us to capture the royal port.”

As Miriam and Fult discussed our battle plans, Fran was talking to Satya on the side. It was an innocent conversation regarding the princess’s hunger. Fran was trying to cheer her gloomy friend up. Fran ended up slightly jealous over the luxurious amount of food served in the villa, and Satya ended up soothing her instead.

You’re supposed to be doing the soothing here, Fran. Well, Satya did seem better for the conversation, so all’s well that ends well.

Soon, the royal palace was within our sight. We would sneak in once we had made sure that the guards were moving to the royal port. We needed as few soldiers in the royal palace as possible to make our assault.

“Huh, the gates are open.”

Fran pointed towards the palace gates which had indeed been left agape. What followed was an outpouring of soldiers; five thousand of them, all frantic. They needed all the soldiers they could get to suppress our fisherman uprising.

If Suarez was part of this mass of soldiers, our plan would fail. Fran pointed this out, but it didn’t seem that Suarez was part of the offense.

“You can spot my brother’s gaudy armor a mile away.”

“Not to mention the gaudy golden armor of his personal guard. He would be impossible to miss.”

“Hm. Good.”

We carried on sneaking into the palace as per our original plan. Infiltrating

any royal palace would've been reckless, but we had two princesses on our side. They knew the ins and outs of the hidden paths, and even the danger rooms, making it possible for us to sneak in.

"Now, let's go. It is time to bring my fool brother's reign to an end!"

"Hm."

"Yes. Let's go."

"We shall help however we can," Fult said.

"I shall aid my brother as well," Satya added.

Now that I thought about it, we had a lot of royalty in our party of seven. Aside from Fran, Carla, and Byke, the remaining four were all royals. The aristocracy was the majority for once.

"There is an emergency path here. If we take it, we'll make it inside in no time."

"Are you sure you can tell us such confidential information? We're not even from this country."

"Not a problem. We have no time to fuss over such petty matters. If we don't act quickly, more innocent lives will be lost."

"I apologize, and I respect the love you have for your citizens."

Miriam touched the walls and found the hidden escape tunnel. She pushed one of the bricks to open the wall next to it. She led us down the path until we exited into a large anteroom. The room looked intimidating with its red carpet and grand chandelier hanging from the ceiling. We looked to be close to the center of the royal palace.

"The royal waiting room is beyond this, which leads right into the throne room."

"Come. Brother is definitely sitting on his throne."

"He's always loved the spotlight. We'll definitely find him there."

I felt the presence of a few people in the large room ahead of us; most of them on the way to the waiting room and the throne room. One aura in

particular felt familiar to me. Their strategy reminded me of our initial raid on the royal villa. There weren't many guards stationed here, but all of them were elites.

When Miriam burst into the waiting room, she was met with the intense gaze of a man we knew all too well.

"Valuza," Fran muttered.

"You remember me? I'm honored," Black Fang Valuza answered, sounding genuinely honored to be recognized. Seedrun's strongest man had been waiting for us in this room.

"I'll take this one. You guys go ahead."

I agreed. It looked like Satya and Fult had used up their demonic protection for the day. It really was a trump card they could only use for a short amount of time. We'd reduce our odds of incurring casualties if we let Fran keep Valuza busy instead of relying on the twins' capricious ability.

*Jet, go with Sellimea and protect them.*

"Woof!"

"But..." Miriam looked worried, but Sellimea made her mind up for her.

"All right. Come, everyone."

"B-but she's going up against Valuza!"

"Miriam, are you going to undermine this honorable duel?"

"...Understood. I'm sorry for doubting you, Fran."

"That's okay."

"No, it's not. We'll eat some good food once this is all over. I'll treat you to one of my favorites. Stay alive until then."

"Good food? Details?"

"You'll have to live on to find out."

"Okay! I can't wait!"

I kept my eyes on Valuza as they had their conversation, but he seemed to be



content with waiting.

“Are you ready?” he asked with a grim steadiness, sensing the end of our conflict.

“Yeah.”

“Good.”

Valuza let Sellimea and the rest of our crew pass without a word. His seeming negligence perplexed me, and even Fran looked suspiciously at him.

“Are you sure?”

“You wanted me to let them pass, right?”

“Yeah.”

“I don’t see any problems then.”

“Uhh, I guess?”

“Besides, I only signed up with Suarez so I could get a chance to fight powerful quarry. I’ve been waiting for someone strong to make an attempt at his life.”

This guy was a bloodthirsty knight, too. He didn’t care what happened as long as he had the chance to fight someone strong. I understood his position, since Fran was more or less the same. He wanted to fight her with no reservations. That’s why he didn’t ambush her and why he let Sellimea pass. He needed Fran to be at the top of her game without any distractions.

None of this meant that we were going to start thanking him. In the end, Valuza still acted to satisfy his own lust for battle.

“Now that the distractions are gone, let’s start killing each other.”

“Hm!”

The intense fight began with a clashing of swords.

“Hah!”

“Hahaha! You’re good at this!”

One lethal slash followed another while both sides managed to either dodge or parry them all. The harsh sound of clanging metal echoed throughout the

room. It was accompanied with the high-pitched shatters of broken pottery and furniture.

It didn't take long for the room to look like an absolute shipwreck. It was like a tornado had blown through it. Still, Fran and Valuza remained relatively unscathed save for some scratches on their cheeks. The scratches hadn't even been produced by their swords, instead by wooden shrapnel their intense fighting threw up into the air. Effectively, the damage they had dealt each other was still zero.

Fran had the higher Sword Mastery level, while Valuza had more battle experience. The situation produced a stalemate.

“Raaah!”

“Hahaha!”

Valuza was excited, howling with laughter. His initial nihilistic smile had been replaced with bloodcurdling cackling.

The death match grew more intense, but the tide was slowly turning in Fran's favor. You see, there was a slight difference in how each combatant handled their dodges. Having shifted into high gear, Fran had definitely received more damage compared to Valuza. The Black Fang had landed several cuts on her, and it showed.

On the flip side, Valuza had dodged every attack Fran had attempted. In fact, that was her goal. Fran had taken several of Valuza's cuts on purpose. She kept dodging so as to not fall into a critical state, but she always made sure to launch a counterattack afterward. I would heal her superficial wounds, so there was no problem there.

Meanwhile, Valuza focused only on dodging Fran's attacks. He was cautious of her sword thanks to his previous encounter with the Venom Fang. Against an opponent who fought so adeptly, being poisoned once would turn the tides of battle in Fran's favor. Dodging all of Fran's attacks was taking a toll on his stamina, however, and Fran slowly managed to pressure him.

“Muahaha!”

Not that it stopped his beastly cackling. I think he knew he was in a bad spot,

though. He threw the sword he had been using at Fran and jumped back. This was the last thing we expected, and we made blocking the projectile blade our first priority. I wondered what he would do after disarming himself.

That was when Valuza produced a sword out of the item pouch on his belt. He managed to protect this blade against Identify by leaving it inside.

Name: Soul Drain

Attack: 900; MP: 300; Durability: 300

Mana Conductivity: A-

Skill: Drain an opponent's power to make itself stronger.

The power the sword obtained would go to the sword itself, not Valuza. It was an interesting ability. Kind of like myself, I suppose.

"This is an enchanted blade crafted by a disciple of the Godsmith. With this, I can evenly match the strength of your sword! So, let us begin round two!"

Now brandishing an enchanted sword, Valuza leapt into battle.

And with that, the bloodthirsty battle to the death resumed.

"Uncle Julius, Gladio, where is my brother?"

"A very good question. Still, I'm impressed you were able to infiltrate the royal palace with so few people. Very brave of you."

"They may be few, but they are stronger than you will ever be. This is the end. Might I ask you to surrender so we can avoid further bloodshed?"

"The end of what, exactly? All we need do is kill you and that will put an end to your little revolution. Or do you think your peasants will be enough to overthrow us? They have yet to face the full strength of our military. The sight of your severed head will stop your revolutionaries cold in their tracks."

"You are not the only ones who have means of communicating through long distances. Prince Fult has a similar ability. If he were to request the aid of the kingdom of Phyllius, you will be on the receiving end of their wrath, not us. I'm sure the ambassador of Granzell would likely agree with them."

"Wh-what?! You mean you would ask for the assistance of another kingdom

for the sake of your revolution? Have you no shame?! This is treason!”

“My act of ‘treason’ pales in comparison to your wishes of being ruled by Raydoss. In fact, both Phyllius and Granzell have agreed to lift their sanctions if the current king steps down.”

“You...you whore! I’ll kill you for that!”

“I would like to see you try.”

“How dare you! You were raised in the safe confines of the royal palace... Don’t think for a second that you can beat a war veteran such as I!”

“I am a member of the Seedrunian royalty. I know how to fight.”

“It looks like things are heating up between Father and Sellimea. Perhaps we should engage in light conversation.”

“Hmph. Quiet, Gladio. I have nothing to discuss with you.”

“What an awful thing to say.”

“I told you to be quiet. The sound of your voice is enough make my ears rot.”

“Careful now, little girl... Do you want me to do you again?”

“What a bad joke. ‘Do’ what exactly? The little girl you tried to rape kicked you so hard in the bollocks that I’m pretty sure you don’t have them anymore. Oh, the tears you cried as you ran away. I’ll never forget how pathetic you looked that day.”

“Silence! I never would’ve attempted it had Father not ordered me to! I will enjoy beating you to a bloody pulp... I’ve always dreamt of this day!”

“The feeling is mutual. Do you know how I felt when the Water Dragon which was rightfully mine was bequeathed to you? I’ve regretted not taking your life when I had the chance many times over!”

“I am better than you! What madman would give the Water Dragon to a little girl? If not for your royal bloodline, you are nothing more than a mere brute!”

“And you would be nothing more than a rapist if not for your father’s connections! Enough talk! We will settle who is the stronger between us, here and now!”

“Have at you, Miriam!”

“Wind Arrow!”

“Hahah!”

*Wind Blower!*

“Useless!”

Fran and Valuza’s duel had become a game of avoidance. We couldn’t use fire magic in the palace for fear of burning it down, so we were limited to wind magic. However, his sword kept absorbing all of our spells and reflected it back at us. This fierce battle was going to last for quite some time.

At least that’s what I thought before the stalemate was broken. It happened without warning.

“Urgh!”

“Fuhahaha! What’s wrong?!”

*What happened?!*

His sword disappeared out of sight and a gash appeared in Fran’s shoulder the next instant.

No, I knew what had happened. Valuza’s sword had struck too fast for our eyes to see.

*Heal!*

“Kahaha!”

“Argh!”

*Heal! Back off, Fran!*

“You’re not going anywhere!”

“Ugh!”

Valuza had activated his Class Skill, Flash Sword! As its name implied, it allowed him to wield his sword at blinding speeds. However, its mana cost was so great that he shouldn’t be able to use it repeatedly. It was a skill reserved for the deciding moment of a battle.

And yet, Valuza had used it five times in such a short amount of time.

*It's that sword of his.*

Valuza was using the mana Soul Drain had absorbed. The enchanted sword acted like his external mana tank. The damn thing really was like me!

"I see your sword is quite powerful! The large amount of mana Soul Drain absorbs every time our blades clash is proof of that!"

It was my fault! I thought his mana regeneration was abnormally fast, but he had been draining my mana to fuel his attacks!

"Tch!"

"I've seen that move before! You're getting slow, little girl!"

"Raaah!"

"Much too slow!"

This was bad. Fran's movements were beginning to slow down. Valuza had also memorized Fran's attack patterns. The difference in experience was going to be our downfall.

Valuza got stronger every time we clashed swords, and he was the better swordsman. Our spells would only feed his enchanted sword. Not only that, but Valuza was not shy in immediately using our freshly drained mana.

*He'll have the upper hand if this goes on for much longer!*

*Hm...*

*What should we do...?*

As I thought about our next move, a mysterious power begins welling up inside me.

*Uh, what's going on?*

I wasn't doing anything, and yet, my blade began glowing with a jet-black light. The light grew more intense, and eventually, my blade was glowing pitch black.

*Wait, uh. What's this? Hello? What?!*

*Teacher?*

*I'm not doing this, Fran! I'm not the one causing this!*

*"What's that you have there...?"*

Valuza backed off, growing cautious.

I would be quick to praise myself if any of this had been my doing. Instead, the automatic amalgamation of energy raised fear in my heart.

A similar thing had happened at the Floating Island, although my blade glowed blue that time. It was a result of my and Fran's powers growing stronger at the same time. We hadn't activated it by our own will, and it activated automatically when we were deeply focused in the fight. We only knew because Jean had told us afterwards.

The black light emanating from my blade was similar to the extent that we weren't in control of it. The aura it gave off was absolutely ominous, however.

Something bad might happen if I let go of it.

In fact, I didn't even know how this great power was going to release itself.

*Teacher? Are you all right?!*

*Fran, you need to—*

"You need to let go of me," was what I intended to say before the world fell silent. Fran and Valuza were now frozen in time. Not frozen, I suppose, but they had been slowed down to the point of only moving a few millimeters at a time. The scene felt similar to Spacetime Magic albeit at a higher level.

*What the hell is going on?!*

I looked at my pitch-black blade as I desperately tried to figure out what was happening. Then suddenly, a voice called out to me.

*Hey, there! It's been a while.*

*That voice...*

It was the first voice I heard when I came into this world. I remembered talking to it that time I had used Unleash Potential.

*I'm a lot stronger now, what with the Festival of the Moons coming up. Still, I can only keep up this conversation for three minutes! We don't have much time, so listen up!*

The voice sounded distressed. It seemed to recognize that we were in a state of emergency. I decided to listen.

*A-all right.*

*Things have taken a turn for the worse. The vital seal inside you has been suddenly weakened!*

*A seal...? Am I sealing something away?*

*Something like that! Anyway, this seal has no business being undone! But because of that episode with Unleash Potential last time, their powers have been weakened!*

Their? Was the voice talking about the P.A.?

*Cracks have begun appearing in the seal, and the seal is weakening because of that! I think it's because of that enchanted sword that guy's using!*

*I see. So when Soul Drain absorbed my mana, it took away mana that would've gone to reinforcing the seal.*

*Well, it's too late to do anything about that, now. Anyway, we have to release this energy otherwise it's going to go berserk!*

*B-berserk?*

*Yeah. It'll blow the roof right off this palace.*

*Oh my God!*

*I know. So we have to release this pent up energy somehow!*

*Wh-what are we going to do?*

*Give me control of the sword for now!*

*Like the time I gave P.A. the reins during Unleash Potential?*

*Yeah! It won't take long!*

*A-all right! I trust you!*



*No worries!*

Time began to flow again.

*Fran, listen to me!*

*Hm? Who are you? You're not Teacher! There's so much energy coming from him!*

*You could call me a friend of his. Things have gotten bad, so I was talking to Teacher about it here on the inside.*

*Huh?*

*He'll explain it to you later! We don't have time!*

Wait, they couldn't expect me to explain something I barely understood!

*Anyway, I'm going to release a crazy strong attack. Huddle yourself in a corner and try not to get caught up in the blast!*

*Okay.*

*Good girl! Let's go!*

I felt the wolf crest on my hilt squirm as soon as the mysterious voice finished talking. It was as if something was crawling out of it. The serpentine entity wrapped over my blade, cocked its head, and glared hatefully at Valuza.

The jet-black entity my wolf crest sealed away was large enough to swallow a man whole. The sight of the black thing wrapped around my blade was otherworldly.

"Wh-what is that? Is this your secret weapon? Hahaha!" Valuza jerked back, his laughter wavering.

But of course. Although Valuza lacked Mana Sense, he had enough Presence Detection to know that this thing was a dangerous threat. The energy it emanated was great enough to match even that of the Lich. Being in its mere presence was overwhelming.

No man could stand against it. In fact, I'd applaud anyone who could stand straight in its presence.

*"GROOOOOOARGH!"* The jet-black thing howled, opening its giant maw. Then a

great beam of light burst out of its mouth. The black beam tinted the entire room.

I saw Valuza try to block the black light with his sword, and when the beam hit it, his body was flung backwards into the wall like a pinball. The impact of Valuza's collision cracked the sturdy palace wall.

The black beam carried on its trajectory, through the palace walls, until it eventually disappeared into the horizon. The beam's shock waves had left the room in absolute ruin. If Fran hadn't braced herself against a corner, she would've been caught up in it.

The wall was gone, and we could see the outside.

I saw a gigantic explosion go off in the direction of the naval base. Even underwater ordnance wouldn't be able to make a pillar of water that gigantic. It was closer to the level of an underwater volcano. The explosion capsized the naval ships that had made port there, and the soldiers were washed away by the ensuing tidal wave.

W-well, the enemy took the brunt of the punishment, so all's well that ends well, I suppose.

If that attack had been allowed to go berserk, Fran and I would probably not be left standing.

*I think that should do it. I'll get back to reinforcing the seal. You won't have to worry about it anymore.*

*A-are you sure?*

*Ye—See—yo—la—er—*

*Hey, wait! At least, give me your name!*

—

Every time with these people, I swear!

Well, they'd helped me out each time I was in a pinch, so I guess they were on my side...

*Teacher?*

*Fran? Are you all right?*

*Yeah, I'm fine. Who was that?*

*I'll explain later. You have to focus on Valuza!*

*All right.*

Well, that bought us time!

“Your blade...has such terrifying power...”

Valuza emerged from the rubble in shambles. He was still alive, after all. However, the blade of his enchanted sword had been broken. The only thing left of it now was its hilt. The man himself was broken and battered, his left arm twisted at an odd angle, his left eye blinded.

“Do you still want to do this?”

“Of course. I intend to keep fighting until my last breath.”

His battlelust raged on despite his broken frame. I expected nothing less from Seedrun's greatest warrior.

“All right.” Fran nodded, intent on living up to the man's expectations.

“Ready?”

“Hm.” Valuza picked up an ordinary sword from the floor and dropped into his battle stance. Fran did the same with me. “Haaa!”

“Kaaah!”

The duel lasted all but a second.

Valuza took Fran's slash with his broken left arm and put his weight into thrusting his sword. He was trying to take the win with a counterattack, but before the tip of his blade reached Fran, it was stopped by an invisible barrier.

I got the idea for a barrier of compressed air after seeing Satya's barrier in action. We had been using it this entire time, but we only managed to block Valuza's expert sword handling by focusing all my mana into it. I guess practicing Wind Manipulation paid off.

His sword broke, and Fran wasted no time in exploiting the hole in Valuza's

defense.

“Haa!”

My blade plunged right through Valuza’s body.

“Gaaah...”

“I win.”

“Yes...you did... That was a brilliant fight to the death...”

“I lost to your swordplay.”

“Hah! The winner...is the one left standing...at the end.”

“Hm...”

“A beautiful fight, indeed...”

“I had fun, too.”

Valuza died with a satisfied smile on his face. The man loved his deathmatches. I couldn’t resent him after seeing his smile.

*Sorry about that, Fran. I got in the way of your fight.*

“It’s okay. It’s not your fault, Teacher. I would’ve won the fight on my own if I were stronger. I’m the one who had to rely on you in the end. Besides, you and I are one. This victory is ours.”

*You think so?*

“Yeah!”

Once the fierce battle with Valuza was over, we decided to go over to Sellimea to provide backup. We left from the giant hole in the wall, never thinking about how costly the repairs were going to be. Soon, we saw some familiar faces on our way to the throne room.

“Fult. Satya.”

The prince and princess of Phyllius. They were probably holding the line here so Sellimea and Miriam could go ahead. The twins weren’t the dainty little royals my Identify had made them out to be, but I knew that already. They could defeat a whole host of enemies with their power to control demons.

That being said, they were still quite ruthless. All of the corpses littered about the floor were in odd states of disarray. There was a corpse which was cut vertically in half, a corpse which had countless holes in it, a corpse which looked withered away for some odd reason; all of them looked like they died horrible deaths. One thing that all of the corpses shared was the expression of fear on their faces.

It didn't look like a fight had broken out here as much as a torture session.

Not a drop of blood had gotten onto either Fult or Satya, further underlining the battle prowess.

"Fran? I sensed great magical energy just now, are you all right?"

"No problem."

"So that was your secret weapon that went off."

"You could call it that."

They asked no further questions. They weren't about to talk about their Divine Sword, either, so they must've known the importance of keeping your powers and abilities a secret.

*This is quite a sight, though.*

"Hm." Fran agreed after looking at the state of the dead around us.

"Um, Fran... You must understand that we didn't do this because we wanted to."

"Satya!"

"Look, if Fran thinks I'm some kind of pervert who enjoys torturing her enemies, I'll..."

"Oh, fine..."

We didn't think that for a second. These were all Raydossians; Galloudie being among the dead. It was tough to pick him out with Identify, though, since he died with his eyes and mouth stretched open to their absolute limit. His death didn't seem easy.

The only thing that crossed our minds was they had resorted to torture only

to extract information from these men.

“We only did this because we have a reputation to uphold.”

“Reputation?”

“That terrible things would happen to people who would dare lay a hand on Phyllian royalty. We must appear to be ruthless and merciless.”

“I see.”

They had to demonstrate the power of Phyllius’s Divine Sword somehow. What better way than to have their enemies die horrifying deaths?

“So please don’t hate us...”

“Don’t worry. I can’t imagine hating you two.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Thank you!”

Satya smiled and hugged Fran. Fult let out a sigh of relief. Oh, you little tsundere! Don’t think you can start dating Fran so easily! If you really fell for her, you’ll have to go through me without your demonic lackeys!







“We should go help Lady Sellimea.”

“Hm.”

“Y-you’re right.”

“That said, we will be of no further use in battle. We’ve exhausted the Divine Sword’s blessings for the moment.”

“Got it.”

We would have to settle any encounter we ran into by ourselves from here on out. Fran took the lead as we rushed to the throne room. When we got there, the bodies of the Dragon Tail—also present at the royal villa—littered the floor. Their bite marks indicated that Jet made quick work of them.

“Sellimea, Miriam!”

Two battles were ongoing within the throne room. Miriam and Gladio were one of the two, and we walked in just as Miriam was driving the point of her spear through Gladio’s body.

“Gurk...”

“I win, Gladio!”

“Dammit...! Why...why can I never...?!”

And with that, Gladio crumpled to the ground.

Now, we were left with Sellimea and Julius. I never thought the princess would actually get her hands dirty. She was covered in wounds, and she looked like she was about to fall over. Still, Sellimea continued blocking Julius’s sword with dogged determination.

“Gladio! Useless boy! I can’t believe he let himself get killed by a woman!”

“Careful, Uncle Julius. The same thing might just happen to you.”

“It’s all that damned wolf’s fault!”

Julius tossed multiple glances at the walls around him. He was getting ready for Jet to lunge at him. The sight of Jet slaughtering his men seemed to have made quite an impression on him. The fear only made Julius’s movement

sloppy.

“Don’t worry. I told him not to interfere in our fight.”

“You expect me to believe you?!”

The line sounded like little more than a paltry threat despite coming from a man of Julius’s stature. He wouldn’t be able to defeat Sellimea in a battle of strength. Despite being a general, he was awfully weak. He must’ve been granted the position solely by the accident of his birth. He wasn’t weaker than Sellimea, but he wasn’t able to focus on attacking her since he was distracted by Jet.

Now that Fran and the Phyllians were here, he knew there was no way out. His eyes began to rove around. Unfortunately for him, Fran and Jet blocked off all his escape routes.

“Damn it! Damn it all!”

He flailed his sword wildly at Sellimea as a last ditch effort; his panic only left him open to attack.

She was able to parry the foolish strike and knocked the sword out of his hand. Julius fell on his bottom, and Sellimea pointed the sword at his neck. The fight was over.

“I...have lost...”

With that, he uttered his miserable surrender.

“Now, where is Suarez?”

“The naval port.”

“How? It didn’t seem like my brother was part of that battalion.”

“Avoiding detection in that large of a force would be easy enough if he wore plain military armor. I advised him to take a small boat and head to the naval port. We would be able to crush this little rebellion so long as we had the power of a Water Dragon.”

Julius spilled everything without the hint of a lie. He was banking on the chances of escaping with his life as long as he told Sellimea the truth.

Julius had initially planned to benefit from a battle between Suarez and Fult. He had cajoled Suarez into using his Water Dragon to crush the rebel forces—us. He was hoping the ensuing battle would've been enough to crush both Suarez and Sellimea at the same time.

At that point, he would make a deal with the Raydossian ambassador and ask them to have his back on this matter. In the end, they would possess Julius and Gladio's Water Dragons and use them to dispose of Suarez's and Sellimea's, thereby securing Seedrun for themselves.

"Such foolishness."

"I am royalty as well... Is it wrong for me to want to be king?!"

He had been resentful of the previous king ever since a young age and watched hungrily for a chance to usurp the throne. How many years must it have taken? Julius wasn't physically impressive nor was he of noble demeanor, but I had to give him credit for holding on to his grudge for so long.

"Let's go to the naval port. We have not won this battle until we've captured Suarez."

"Yes. It's quite a distance from here. We must hurry."

"Fult, Satya, you can take a break if you want."

"I could say the same for you, Fran."

"I'm an adventurer. I'm fine."

Fran struck a double flexed biceps pose to underline her point. She was strong all right, but there wasn't much muscle on her arms.

"I don't want to put you two in further danger, as well."

"I understand the risks...but leaving us out when we've come this far is quite rude."

"I agree. We're coming with you."

Well, when they put it that way...

"Okay. Jet."

"Woof!"

“Take care of Fult and Satya.”

On Fran’s orders, Jet sat down behind the twins. Sellimea nodded and clapped her hands, agreeing to the plan.

“That’s a load off our shoulders then.”

“Woof!”

“And thank you so much for earlier. You saved me.”

“Arf!”

The two had grown close during the battle in the throne room. Sellimea stroked Jet’s chin with her slender arms. A single stroke was all she needed to melt the direwolf’s expression. Sellimea was indeed a force to be reckoned with.

It was nice that neither Satya nor Sellimea were afraid of him.

“Coochie coochie coo!”

“Arf...”

Okay, you’re enjoying yourself a little too much there, Jet.

“Sister, we should get going.”

“Ah, you’re right. Over here.”

Sellimea went over to where Miriam was standing. She wasn’t at the exit, rather she was behind the throne. Miriam began fiddling with the wall there. We had seen her do this many times before. Soon, another hidden passage opened up. It revealed a spiral staircase which went down deep under the earth.

“Let’s go.”

We followed Sellimea down the staircase and were greeted with an odd sight.

We were now in an underground lake. However, the ceilings and shoreline were too organized, hinting that it was man-made.

I didn’t expect to find a place like this underneath the royal palace.

Comparing it with an Olympic swimming pool wasn’t going to be of any use.

To put it simply, you could fit two Tokyo Domes in this place.

A gigantic ship had made port here. I thought Dwight's battleship was big, but it looked like a dinghy next to this ship. The hull was plated with gold, and there were cannons on the ship's sides and deck. This ship was made for warfare, no doubt about it.

The ship was a glory to behold, as well. The statue of a goddess which graced its bow looked like it belonged in a place of worship, and carvings of trees and vines wrapped around its hull. Was there really a need to decorate a battleship to this extent? The cost of fixing this thing if it got damaged made my head hurt.

"Are we going to use this to get to the naval port?"

"Yes."

"But operating a ship of this size..."

Fult was justified in his doubts. You would need lots of experienced sailors to man this ship. A bunch of inexperienced neophytes couldn't hope to get this ship out of port.

"There's something here...!"

*Yeah.*

I knew why Fran was keeping quiet. We had been sensing a great amount of mana coming from beneath the water ever since we got here. The mana signature was terrifyingly huge. If I had to classify it, it would belong to a B-Rank monster.

The main reason we didn't drop everything and run was because it wasn't hostile towards us. It didn't feel murderous or violent. On the contrary, it felt gentle.

"Come out, Warnate!"

"Kuooooon!"

A giant dragon broke the water's surface.

"Whoa."

“W-wow!”

“So this is a Water Dragon?”

“That’s right. This is my Water Dragon, Warnate.”

“Kuoon!”

“Oooh, it’s been so long! I’m glad you’re doing okay.”

“Kuon!”

The light red dragon drew its head near Sellimea. Was this all right? Even its smallest fang was the size of the princess herself.

I had expected a Water Dragon to have the smooth skin of a plesiosaur, but I was mistaken. It did have the shape of a plesiosaur, but its scales were rough and bumpy. It also had wings which had been repurposed as giant fins. Its tail was very long, and its limbs looked like a cross between hands and flippers, much like a sea lion. It could probably move about on land.

“Warnate’s going to take us where we need to be. We should be all right as long as it moves at its lowest speed.”

“We’ll use this to make it to the halfway point. Come on, everyone!”

“Hm.”

“A-all right.”

“W-will it be okay?”

We hopped on the Water Dragon and had the best boat ride of my life. The Water Dragon had the ability to manipulate water, so it was very hydrodynamic while making for a smooth ride. The sea was quite wavy that day, but the Water Dragon barely swayed. It was really fast, too, like the ferries back home on Earth. And this was its slowest speed?

“This Water Dragon’s great.”

“Yes, I’ve heard rumors, but now I see why fighting Seedrun is a fool’s errand.”

Fult looked out at sea with a grim look on his face.

The Water Dragon was fast, had tight handling, and had the guns to level a small island state. It was indeed the strongest vessel at sea.

I understood why this boat was so gloriously decorated, too. It was hard to imagine this thing getting hit with anything to begin with. The maker of this ship was confident that it could dodge any barrage that came its way. Also, the brilliant decoration served to intimidate any enemies that came within sight of it.

Soon, we reached the naval port.

“I can see it! We’re almost there!” Miriam declared.

“But it looks like something strange is occurring...” Sellimea said, peering through a magical device which worked like a telescope. Had she spotted something out of the ordinary?

“Is that...my fool brother?! He’s all wrangled up!”

“What...?”

The Seedrun princesses were right. In the distance, we could see a man dressed up in gaudy armor, hanging upside down by his legs. I think the mob had repurposed a pulley ordinarily used for big fish for this public shaming. It was quite the hilarious sight.

Next to them was a Water Dragon which had been anchored to the port. It looked more or less like the Water Dragon we were riding, only that the ship part of it was in tatters. Only a third of its mast was left standing. The Water Dragon part was washed ashore, looking quite the worse for wear. Its back was badly wounded, covered in scrapes and burn marks. It looked like it had taken a large cannonball to its back.

“What on earth...” Miriam muttered, dumbfounded.

I might know what happened to it. Actually, I was sure that it had taken the brunt of the black beam I shot off. I could only see the column of water from the royal palace, but now I knew that the Water Dragon had suffered a direct hit from my black beam. The mysterious voice sounded like it was able to see the things that occurred around us, so it might have aimed it at the monster for our sake.

Even a Water Dragon wouldn't be able to brush off such a powerful attack. I was more amazed by the fact that it was still alive.

"Sister, we must hurry!"

"You're right."

We docked the Water Dragon at the naval port and were greeted with loud cheering courtesy of the people of Seedrun, Sellimea's supporters.

Miriam hurried to find her subordinates to get an explanation of what had happened. They had rushed to the naval port, ready to put their lives on the lines, but the battle was over before they even got there. Half of Suarez's forces were wiped out by the explosion and the ensuing wave the eruption produced. Meanwhile, the other half was too terrified to organize themselves into a fighting position.

The people made quick work of the frightened soldiers but not before witnessing the impossible.

Next to the collapsed Water Dragon, thought of as the guardian of Seedrun, was a familiar man in a sorry-looking state.

"So that's where they found my fool brother."

"Yes, ma'am."

Led on by their fury, the people of Seedrun proceeded to tie Suarez up and hung him like the big fish that he thought he was. Not that the people thought much of him; they only wanted to make it easier to stone the tyrant.

Suarez was already covered in bruises by the time we got to the naval port. The stoning didn't do any favors for his face, either. He would've been difficult to identify if not for his gaudy armor. At least, that's what Miriam told me. I just took her word for it having never seen the man in my life.

Suarez was arrogant, notorious for never apologizing to anyone. But he was very meek by the time we got him down from the fish pulley. The wrath of the people had broken not only his face, but his pride. He was tearful and thankful when we stopped the public stoning.

"Hank hoo... Hank hoo ho huch...!" he bawled, prostrating himself before



Miriam.

The final boss of this kingdom had been beaten and reformed before we even got to him. I was kind of disappointed. The black beam shot out of me, but it wasn't as if I wanted to fire it. Happy as I was for the people of Seedrun, I was left unsatisfied by the conclusion.

Now, Sellimea went up to the people of Seedrun, and began.

"Good people of Seedrun—"

The angry mob stopped, hanging on Sellimea's every word.

"The king has fallen."

She walked over to Miriam.

"The conspirators involved with his tyranny have been duly taken care of by Commander Miriam."

She took Miriam's hand and held it up. The crowd burst into applause for Miriam. She was quite popular among the island nation's women; the higher-pitched voices seemed to eclipse the lower pitched ones.

"The royal family of Phyllius have also helped our nation in her time of need. I owe these people my life."

Fult and Satya gracefully bowed their heads. They looked good doing it, too. I expected nothing less of royalty. The people of Seedrun accepted them with thunderous applause. This act pretty much sealed an alliance with Phyllius. Raydoss would think twice about invading Seedrun.

"Furthermore—"

Sellimea looked over to Fran. It was her turn now.

*Wait, is she serious?*

Sellimea walked over to Fran and rested her hand on her shoulder.

Fran immediately shook her head and made an X with her hands with a look of alarm on her face. "I don't like standing out."

Fran's refusal startled Sellimea. The princess must've found it hard to believe since she herself was raised with a lot of attention on her.

Sellimea respected Fran's wishes, however, and carried on with her speech.

"Furthermore, we have our brave soldiers to thank for opening the path to victory for us."

Carla and her knights shouted a cry of triumph, prompting the mass of people to do the same.

*Are you sure? Folks would've recognized you as a hero as soon as tomorrow.*

*I'm sure. I just wanted to save my friends.*

*True.*

*Hm.*

To Fran, saving her friends was top priority. She just happened to save Seedrun in the process.

Which was very much like her, I thought.

"And finally... I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to those without whom all of this would be impossible."

Puzzled murmurs broke out among the people. "Deepest gratitude? Who could that be?"

Sellimea waited for her words to sink in before continuing.

"Who is it?"

"Not Lady Miriam?"

"Then who—"

She broke her silence then, and bowed deeply, her hands resting on her lap. The crowd's gaze immediately fixated on the man who was in front. Said man could only wave his hands in front of his face, sternly denying that he had anything to do with it.

"My deepest gratitude goes to the people of Seedrun, the courageous and glorious people who captured the king and saved our kingdom!"

The crowd exploded into a thunderous roar then. One that seemed loud enough to shake the earth itself. The people thrust their fists in the air,

punctuating their victory over their corrupt government. The joyous celebration could not be stopped.

And then someone in the crowd began to sing Seedrun's national anthem. It was a cheerful song, one that you could imagine Seedrun's old pirates singing as they fared the seas under a clear blue sky.

Everyone was smiling as they belted out their anthem. Even Sellimea and Miriam were clapping their hands to the beat. Fran swayed to the rhythm, enjoying the song with a calm expression on her face.

The singing kept going, spreading throughout the harbor, reaching the nobles' district, and eventually making it all the way to the slums. All of Seedrun joined in the celebration of her liberation.

Seeing the people standing side by side, singing their songs of praise loudly to the sky, made me think that Seedrun had a wonderful future ahead of it.

## Epilogue

**O**n March 29, 3627, the First Princess Sellimea overthrew the corrupt government of her brother Suarez with the help of her people. In doing so, she started a new page in Seedrun's history.

The battle wasn't long enough to be considered a war. In fact, the conflict lasted for only a day.

That is an understatement, however. In fact, the uprising began and ended in a little under half a day.

Were the revolutionaries experienced combatants? No. Further research indicates that the massive mob that occurred was purely coincidental.

So were Suarez's forces incompetent? Here, the facts are much clearer on the matter.

There weren't enough soldiers to hold back the revolutionaries on the day of the uprising. This is a great deciding factor on why the uprising succeeded to begin with.

So what happened?

As a result of Suarez's heavy taxation on his citizens, many of them left Seedrun to become pirates. Seedrun's navy was kept busy keeping the pirates at bay. As a result, he didn't have many soldiers left to defend the royal palace and the island of Seedrun itself.

Still, he should've been left with a few thousand soldiers, at worst. However, they proved helpless against the revolutionaries on the day of the uprising. Were they that weak? Or were the revolutionaries that strong?

The evidence of history suggests that defeat was inevitable for the leftover Seedrunian soldiers.

At the time, the majority of the Seedrunian military were made up of people who bought their way into the position and had likely never seen the heat of battle. Morale was low, to say the least. Meanwhile, the experienced officers with half a conscience had left the military of their volition after seeing the

corruption of their superiors. Soon, the corruption of the kingdom trickled down to the training of their military, worsening the quality of their fighters. They were no match for the intensely motivated revolutionaries, no matter how well equipped they had been.

The story gets more interesting when you get to the rumors surrounding the uprising.

Some say that Sellimea enlisted the help of disgruntled adventurers who were planning to leave Seedrun because of Suarez's corrupt government. There are even more absurd accounts of a great beam of light erupting out of the royal palace itself. Some claim that Princess Sellimea was the source of this great beam of light, although confirmation proves difficult because there seems to be some degree of concealment regarding the facts of the matter. Suffice it to say there were forces at work on the day of the uprising which helped the revolutionaries.

Sellimea was crowned queen soon after Suarez was captured. Members of the Phyllian royal family were present at the coronation, which implied their intervention and also led to speculation that this was Seedrun's declaration of hostility towards Raydoss. The specifics remain unclear.

The one thing that is clear within this otherwise opaque revolution is the people's reception to Queen Sellimea. She became a main pillar of government administration ever since that day.

Once seated on the throne, Queen Sellimea proceeded to not only restore Seedrun to her former glory, but actually surpassed it. That she did it with such amazing speed was beyond anyone's speculation at the time.

She was a merciful ruler of her people, and her people worked hard for her in kind.

Commander Miriam took apart the corrupt military and bureaucracy. Known as the Blade of Queen Sellimea, she worked to get rid of unnecessary taxes and laws that previously served to oppress their people.

The impoverished revolutionaries who were at the front line of the uprising were elected as Seedrun's soldiers and continue to guard the nation to this day.

Queen Sellimea's rule marked a golden age for Seedrun. It was a time of great wealth, strength, and happiness. Perhaps the key to such a harmonious kingdom lies within the cooperation between a king and his people.

—Excerpt from "Records of the Maritime Nation,"  
by Willow Magnus, High Elf historian.

"We're almost there!"

"Wow, really?"

"Of course. I told you Water Dragons can go really fast."

"I expected nothing less from a Water Dragon."

"Indeed."

The Seedrun revolution had settled down, and so we decided to resume our journey to Bulbola. At top speed, the Water Dragon was able to take us to Bulbola within a day. It was at least ten times faster than the ship we were on. Fult and Satya appreciated it since it meant they would make it there in time for the Festival of the Moons.

"Water Dragons are amazing."

"I know. Aren't they just?" Miriam puffed out her chest, proud of her birthright. Sellimea had appointed her chief of the Water Dragons the other day. She had always wanted to be captain of a Water Dragon ever since she was a child, and she excitedly told Fran all about it last night. Fran listened to everything Miriam knew about Water Dragons as she treated the beastgirl to her favorite island strawberries that she'd promised. She told her about how Gladio took her Water Dragon from her, which I supposed was the root of the bad blood between the two.

"Yes, indeed. My Aquois is the best there is!"

"Kuooo."

"Aah, you adorable creature, you!"

She was so close with her Water Dragon that it was almost enviable.

"But that means we have to say goodbye soon..."

Fran had been asked whether she wanted to stay in Seedrun as a fighter. Upon hearing this, Fult and Satya raised their complaints that it wasn't fair that Seedrun got to keep Fran all to themselves. Had Fran chosen to stay, I would've agreed, but she refused every offer she received.

Her encounter with Valuza had invigorated her desire to increase her abilities.

"I need more training to get stronger. For that, I'll need to go to Ulmutt."

Considering how unfitting Fran was for a desk job, I thought that was the right choice.

"I'll come visit."

"You will?"

"Mhmm."

"You promise?"

"Of course. I don't lie to my friends."

Fran considered Miriam one of her friends now, and Sellimea, too, by extension. Her brazen ignorance of their status didn't upset Miriam, unlike the first time they met.

"Friends... I suppose you're right. We are friends."

"Hm. So I'll come again."

"We'll be waiting for you."

"Hm."

"Well, what about us?"

"Friends."

"Heehee. Good. I'm sure my brother is happy to hear that, too."

"Wha—No, I'm not."

"What are you getting embarrassed about, Brother?"

"I'm not embarrassed!"

"Hehe."

“Hahaha! Even you are no match for Lady Satya!”

Fran made a lot of friends today, and I thought it was good for her. I hoped she would continue making more friends down the road.

*Teacher.*

*What’s up?*

*Bulbola’s going to be fun.*

*Sure sounds like it. It’s a port city. I’m sure there’s tons of good food there.*

*Yeah. And I can’t wait to see what the people there are like.*

*Heh, you said it. I hope you make friends with them, too, Fran.*

Fran really had grown up. She was still excited about food and killing monsters, but now she had gained an appreciation for human contact. Our detour at Seedrun was well worth it.

Still, her appreciation for human contact also meant that goodbyes were going to be that much more difficult.

I knew she was crying as she lay in bed last night.

But encounters like these were what made people grow. I hoped that goodbyes wouldn’t discourage her from saying hello.

Speaking of last night, I had to explain to Fran who the mysterious voice was. It was difficult considering I didn’t know anything about it, either. I couldn’t answer any of her questions if I tried.

So I settled with telling her that the voice was something that helped me seal something dangerous inside of me. She was satisfied with it. Satisfied enough for now, anyway.

I asked her then whether she wanted to keep using me. I was a sword which held a dangerous secret, after all. I wouldn’t want to use myself, if it came down to it.

Fran hit me when I said that. She hit me so hard that it left a slight dent in my wolf crest. Blood trickled from her knuckles as she told me with a straight face, “I trust you, Teacher. I won’t let you go no matter what.”



*But...*

“We’ll be fine.”

*No, but...*

“We’ll be fine. If you go out of control, I’ll stop you. You just need to make me strong enough to do that,” Fran said as she hugged me. Any more of that and I might have cried and rusted myself to pieces.

*All right, if you say so. It’s going to be hard from here on out, so you better hold on tight.*

“Of course! We’re the ultimate team, Teacher. We’ll be fine no matter what happens.”

Remembering our conversation made my imaginary eyes water. Then, Miriam’s voice boomed from the deck.

“I can see Bulbola now!”

“Oooh, where is it?”

“Really?”

“We’re finally there.”

Fran and the royal twins stood side by side by the railing and looked towards the spot Miriam pointed at.

“Right there!”

She pointed to a city on top of an island. It was quite a big city, too. That must be Bulbola.

What adventure awaited us this time?

*Man, I’m getting excited!*

*You too?*

*I guess that means you’re as excited as I am, Fran.*

*Yeah!*

We really were the ultimate team!





READ ME ←  
RIGHT-TO-LEFT



EXTRA CHAPTER

## Fantastic Delusions in the City

STORY: Yuu Tanaka

ART: Tomowo Maruyama







## Afterword

**H**ello, this is Yuu Tanaka.

I'm sure this isn't our first time meeting each other, but if it is, please give the first and second volumes a shot, too.

As for the rest of you, it's been half a year since we last met. Sorry for the long wait. There's a lot of new content this time round, so those of you reading the online version should get a fresh experience reading it, too.

I end up expressing my gratitude here every time so bear with me.

Thank you Micro Magazine for publishing three volumes of my work thus far and to my gracious editor I-san, who kept cheering on this anguished writer.

Thank you Llo for the wonderful illustrations. This work wouldn't be here without you!

Thank you everyone involved in the publishing and printing process.

*Reincarnated as a Sword* also got the manga treatment recently, and I hope those of you reading the manga enjoy it.

Until we meet again in the fourth volume.

Thank you for reading.



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