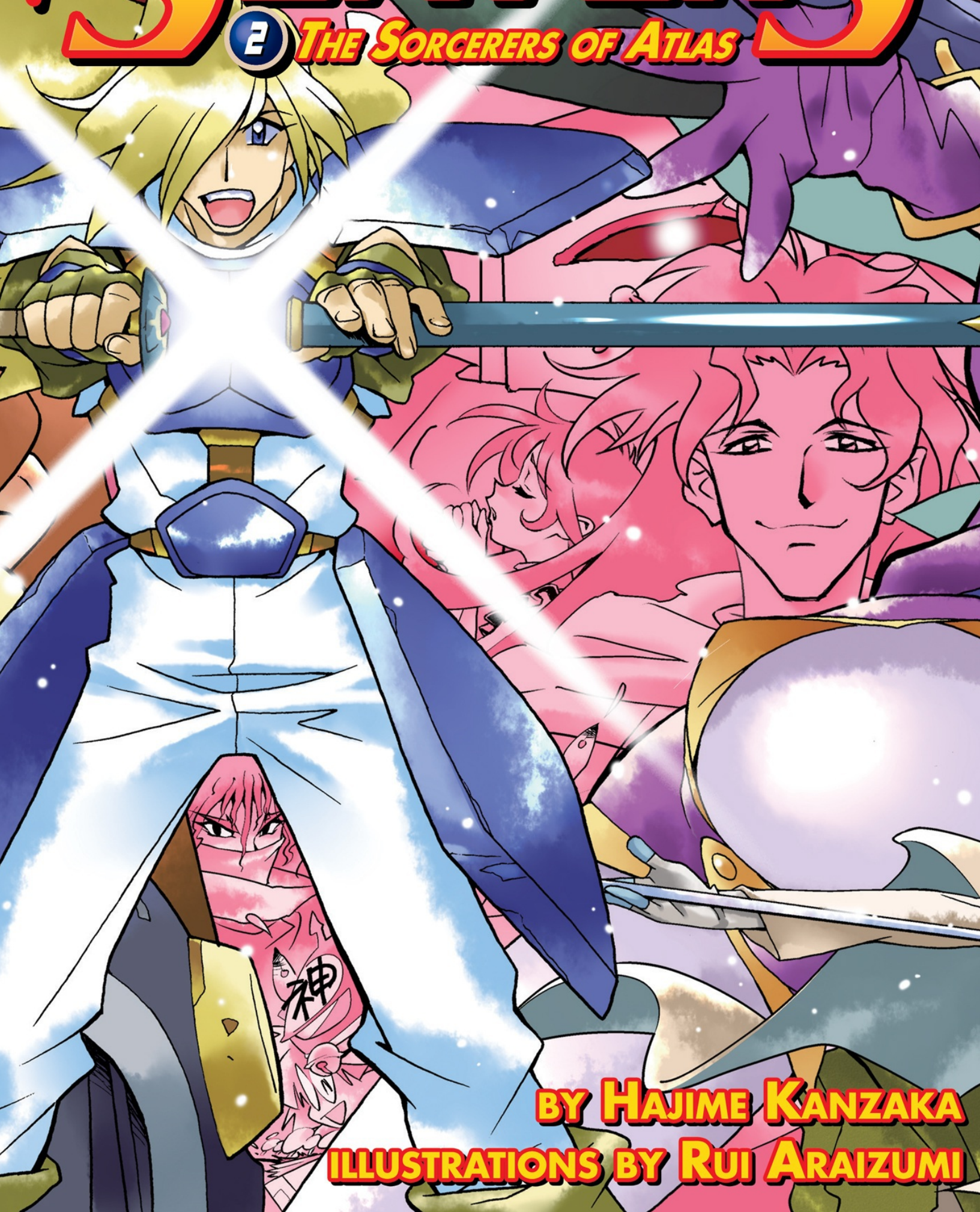


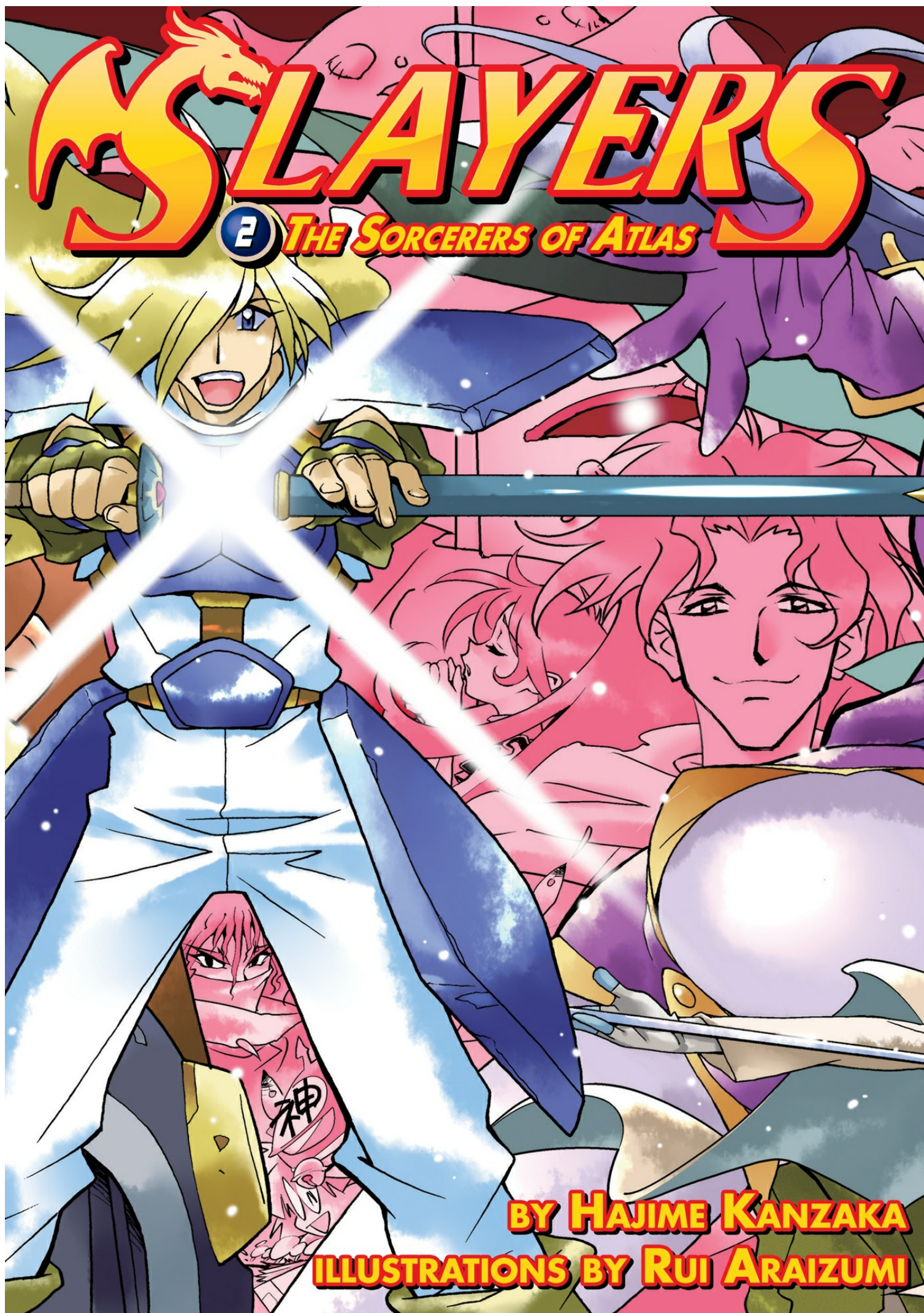
SLAYERS

2 THE SORCERERS OF ATLAS



BY HAJIME KANZAKA

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RUI ARAIZUMI



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1: How About Not Taking Every Job That Falls Into Our Laps?

The tavern was a war zone.

Hey, I see you over there, leaping to conclusions. This one wasn't my fault, okay?

It *was* like a scene straight out of hell, though. Punching, kicking, biting. Overturned tables. Food flying everywhere—some still on the plate.

What a tragic waste...

See, we were in this little joint here in Atlas City, and while the dining wasn't bad, the diners were bottom-of-the-barrel. Seriously. Mercenaries, punks, and lowlifes, the lot of 'em. There are certain places that just draw those kinds of people naturally, and this was apparently one of them. The melee had become self-sustaining at this point, and didn't seem like it would be winding down any time soon.

Ah, there's another one down.

Oh, and so you don't go getting the wrong idea, I'm not any of those things I just said. I'm no mercenary, I ain't no punk, and I'm certainly not a lowlife. I just wanted some good food. This place gets rave reviews, and a brawl just so happened to break out while I was there. I was under no obligation to participate. I'm a pacifist, see? So, like any good pacifist, I was crouching under a table in a corner, munching on some chicken and watching the show.

How'd this all get started, you ask? Well, it was the silliest little thing. See...

"Hey. You on your own, babe?"

The guy making a pass at me chose to do it while I was sitting at the counter, polishing off my fourth bowl of noodle soup. He was a redhead and not especially good-looking, though I guess he wasn't without his charm. I pegged the bastard sword on his back as his weapon of choice, and his outfit consisted

of a rough-hewn tunic, pants, boots, and leather armor. Basically your typical mercenary type.

I gave the guy a once-over, then turned back to my now-empty bowl.

“I’ve got a companion. I’ll try the chicken sauté next, if you please,” I responded flippantly as I put in my next order with the cook.

The man let out a whistle, then tutted at me with a wag of his finger. I guess he thought it made him look cool.

“Hey, don’t be an ice queen. If this companion of yours is leavin’ a charmer like you on her own, he ain’t much for me to worry about, is he?” he said, brazenly putting a hand on my shoulder.

I wasn’t gonna object to the “charmer” part (I am extremely charming, obviously), but if I humored every guy who laid a line like that on me, I wouldn’t last a month.

“So, what’s your name?”

“...”

“I’m Lantz.”

“...”

“C’mon, say somethin’.”

Brush.

I felt a strange sensation on my backside. Wait, did he just cop a damned feel?! My hand moved before I knew it, snatching a nearby tray from the counter and slamming it down on his head. I was expecting a proper “thunk,” but instead I got...

Crack!

Huh, that was louder than I expected... Oh, crap, I nailed him with the corner of the tray! But this was legitimate self-defense! I swear! I mean... wasn’t it?

“Blarghragh!” Lantz let out an overdramatic scream, reeled around in an exaggerated fashion, and crashed into a nearby table.

Of course, there were people sitting at that table.

“Hey! The hell’re you doin’?!”

One of them shoved Lantz hard, sending him flying... right into another table. Naturally, the same kind of ruckus repeated itself there.

And soon enough, the whole place had broken out into a brawl.

See? When you break it down step-by-step, this Lantz guy was really the one who started it! I was an innocent victim of circumstance! Don’t you agree?!

“Say, Lina, why is the person who started all this hiding down here?”

A familiar voice abruptly interrupted my thoughts, and I turned to see a good-looking blond guy wearing a black breastplate and a longsword. He was crouched down next to the table, peering at me suspiciously. This was my aforementioned (recently-acquired) traveling companion, Gourry.

“The person who started all this? What’re you talkin’ about?” I asked as I took a bite of some fried fish.

Gourry promptly reached for some of the on-the-bone meat I’d been saving on my plate and took a bite himself.

“I’m talking about you. You knocked that guy out with the corner of a tray, didn’t you?”

“You saw that?!”

“As I was coming back from the washroom.”

“Hey, I was the victim! He started hitting on me, and then he touched my freakin’ butt! My butt! And without even paying!”

“...You let people pay for that?”

“That’s not what I’m saying!”

“Do you even know what you *are* saying?”

“Of course not!”

“Look...” Gourry sighed, putting his fingers to his temples. “You could’ve shown a little restraint. That way, I could’ve laid him out later in a more discreet manner.”

I glared at him.

“There are times you absolutely should *not* show restraint, not even for a second! You only talk so high and mighty about it because you’ve never had your butt fondled by some weirdo jerk!”

“Well, I suppose that is true...” Gourry scratched his head, looking troubled for a moment before turning his attention back to the intensifying brawl. “Still, you can’t just let this go on.”

“What? You think my involvement would *deescalate* things?”

I mean, it’s true that rushing out there with a Fireball would give everyone something bigger to worry about... But I had one small reservation about that plan: I came here to eat, not to get arrested.

“Yeah, you’re right. You’d probably just make things worse.”

“Then it’s best if I just wait it out here, see?”

“Hmm...” Gourry fell pensively silent.

“Actually, maybe you’re right. I should do my part to try and break this up... Oh, I know!” I raised a declarative finger. “How about this? I’ll suddenly scream and fall over. Meanwhile, you’ll be standing over me, sword in hand, and say something like, ‘Heh, too easy.’ I bet everyone’ll stop fighting to gawk.”

Gourry scowled at this idea. “And you’ll clear me of murder afterwards... how, praytell?”

“Eh, well... we’ll figure something out.”

“I need a better plan than that! I could end up arrested!”

“C’mon, that’s just part of the fun!”

“It most certainly is not!”

“Jeez, you’re a stick in the mud. But, hmm, in that case...”

Just as I was about to share my next great idea, a sudden gust of wind blew through the pub and quickly quieted the chaos within. Traveling like a wave radiating out from the door, it hushed the shouts and jeers of combat into shocked whispers.

Gourry stood up and looked toward the pub entrance, letting out a curious hum. Intrigued by the commotion, I also got to my feet behind him and peeked out to see the source of the new disturbance.

At the door stood a man who appeared to be cloaked in darkness. He had long, ebony hair and wore some kind of black tunic made of a material I didn't recognize. A scarf covered his mouth, and he wore a kind of longsword on his back that I wasn't familiar with.

He looked about the same age as Gourry, not much over twenty or so... but rather than Gourry's noncommittal air, he had a menacing quality about him that sent a chill up my spine. That was precisely what had hushed the other patrons so suddenly.

It was immediately apparent that this man was a skilled swordsman—skilled enough for Gourry to take note of him, anyway. In summary: dude was good-looking enough, but definitely also the kind of guy you want to give a wide berth at all times.

"I'm looking for bodyguards," he said.

His voice was exactly what you'd expect, cold yet crisp... Yeah, like an over-sharpened blade, you could say.

"If you want money and have confidence in your skills, then speak up. Master Talim is the sponsor. The job pays well," he continued bluntly.

Hmm... I'd give him a C minus on his pitch, but an A for clarity. Nevertheless, the inside of the pub remained as quiet and still as a wasteland.

See, there was currently a bit of a kerfuffle going on here in Atlas City. The chairman of the city's sorcerers' council, Halciform the White, went missing about six months ago. His two vice chairmen, Talim the Purple and Daymia the Blue, had been fighting for his seat ever since. Mr. All Black was apparently here recruiting for Talim's side.

Obviously, I wasn't interested in getting drawn into someone else's power struggle, but...

"I'll hear him out," I said, standing up.

“Wait, you’re—”

The guy who cut in was the jerk who’d started the brawl by touching my butt, the vile and villainous Lantz. After his afore-described inauspicious opener, he’d spent most of the fight getting knocked around in a similar fashion. His face was accordingly in rough shape.

Aw, poor baby! Hee hee hee...

But though Lantz cut in on me, one look from the man in black silenced him.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

Wait, so did this guy and Lantz know each other? Sheesh, pick better friends! Both of you!

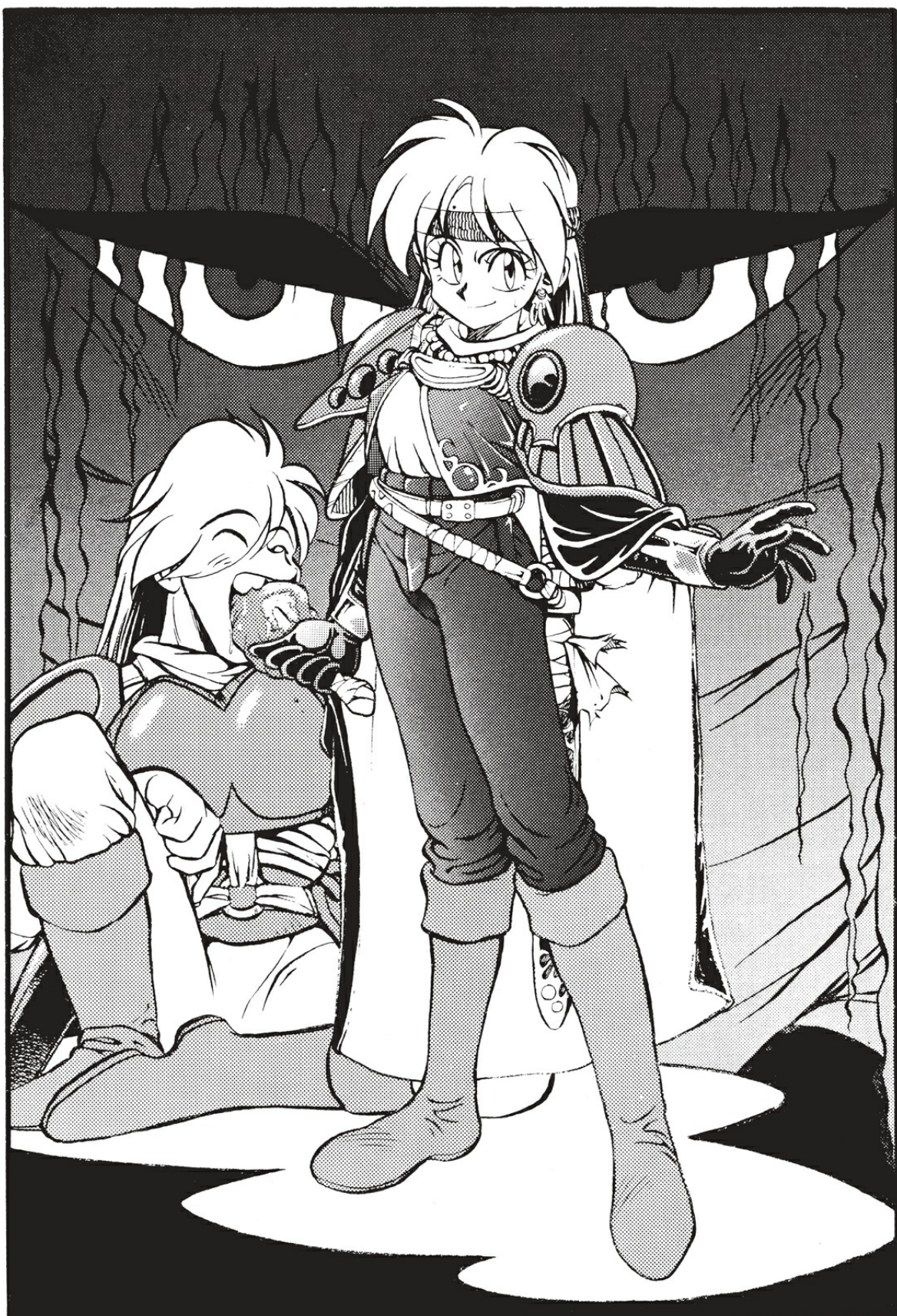
“M-Master Rod...” Lantz stammered. “Well, see... Master Talim sent me on a little errand, and I—”

“If your errand is finished, you can head back now,” the man in black replied bluntly.

Then, without affording Lantz so much as another look, he turned to me again. I felt another chill run up my spine as his grim eyes stared directly into mine.

“You’re a sorcerer?” he asked briefly.

I was currently wearing a new outfit I’d just bought in town: a cream-colored tunic with an indigo robe and matching pants. I also had a black bandanna, my sword on my hip, and my shaved-down turtle shell pauldrons on my shoulders, complete with a black cape hanging from them. Everything was studded here and there with jeweled amulets too, so, yeah... The whole getup just kind of screamed “sorcerer.”



Of course, I'd met one idiot who'd thought I was a fishmonger or a waitress...

"You have fire in your eyes. What's your name?"

"How these things usually go is, the guy doing the hiring introduces himself first," I said breezily, even though I knew his name already.

Of course, internally, I was totally sweating bullets. He seemed like the kind of guy who would jump you over the slightest offense. But I couldn't let myself be intimidated.

"Rod," he answered, more readily than I'd expected.

I let out a quiet exhale. This guy was exhausting!

"I'm Lina."

"Oh?" I picked up a faint tone of interest in his voice. "So you're Lina, are you? I've heard the rumors."

Bad ones, I assumed. You know, Bandit Killer and Queen of Destruction and all that jazz.

"Very well. Follow me," Rod said, then turned around.

I figured I'd play along for now.

"Shall we, Gourry?"

"...What, me too?" he asked while standing up unceremoniously.

And just as he did... Rod leaped right at us, his hand on his sword hilt!

I was sure he was going to draw, and I clearly wasn't alone in that. The whole pub was expecting a bloody swordfight to break out.

Everyone except, apparently, for Gourry.

Either he was oblivious to what was happening or he was just playing dumb, because the second Rod was about to strike, Gourry bent over, plucked a fried dumpling I'd been saving off of my plate, and popped it into his mouth.

The air of hostility hanging about Rod receded, though he still had an intensity about him that was far beyond that of your typical swordsman.

"Not bad," he remarked.

“Well, I like to think I’m above average, at least,” Gourry replied modestly to Rod’s assessment.

Okay, so... My boy Gourry here might be lacking in intelligence, common sense, mental acuity, and brains, but he’s also a top-class swordfighter. I’d like to think I’m above average with a blade myself, but I knew I couldn’t hold a candle to Gourry.

Rod must have made him for a swordsman in an instant.

“I’d love to duel you sometime,” he said.

“But work comes first, right?” Gourry responded breezily.

“That’s right. Work first, then violence!” I quipped.

“Could you pick a less incendiary way of showing support?” Gourry quipped back as he bonked me on the head.

Atlas City was a prosperous castle town built around Castle Vale, home to Duke Litocharn, and was something of a nexus of commerce. At noon, its streets would be crammed with market stalls and carts. You know, the fun kind of place where people loved to fight, where thieves and pickpockets ran rampant, and where mob justice against suspected thieves and pickpockets ran equally rampant.

But by this time of day, all that hustle and bustle had died down. The stall merchants were packing up their wares while young girls skipped home, showing off their beautiful new hair ornaments. And sitting above it all atop the hill looking over town was Castle Vale. Burning crimson in the setting sun, it was a picturesque sight.

We walked through the streets toward it, the buildings growing conspicuously taller and taller as we went. This setup was common in castle towns like Atlas City. Public facilities and whatnot increased as you got closer to the castle. Profile and quality of life were accordingly much higher here.

As for the sorcerers’ council building, it had the privilege of sitting quite close to the castle. Any big city like this probably had a church, a sorcerers’ council, and a warriors’ guild, all of which held some sway in local politics, but... the

sorcerers' council here in Atlas City was special. While not quite on the level of the Saillune Priesthood, it was particularly influential. Sometimes even more so than the local lord, Duke Litocharn.

Given all that, I wasn't surprised at all to hear there was infighting over something as prestigious as the chairman's seat. It's just... Okay, look, sorcerers are supposed to live their lives "seeking truth," you know? And frankly, being a sorcerer myself, I found all this open grasping for power just the slightest bit gauche.

Hmm? How exactly am I seeking truth, you ask? Never you mind that!

As the town began its descent into darkness, sorcerers in the employ of Duke Litocharn were casting Lighting spells along the streets. Hmm... Given that I'd arrived at the pub some time after noon, that meant lunch and the ensuing brawl had taken up about half my day. Not a very productive afternoon, huh?

"Say, Lina," Gourry said, lowering his voice so he could whisper to me without Rod overhearing. "What made you want to take this job? You're the one who said you weren't interested in working while we were here."

He was right. I had intended for our stay in Atlas City to be all about R&R. I was still pretty worn out from a certain major incident I'd gotten wrapped up in not long ago (through no fault of my own whatsoever, mind you). I'd thusly told Gourry pretty firmly that I wouldn't be up for any work while we were in town. But...

"It was the only way to get out of there scot-free," I whispered back. "Besides, I haven't agreed to anything yet. All I said was that I'd hear him out. So, once I do, I can just say, 'Oh, okay. Thanks but no thanks.'"

"I dunno about that..." Gourry scratched his head. "Given what I've heard about Talim, I don't think he's the kind of guy who's going to take no for an answer."

"So we fight our way out. If it comes down to that, I'll be counting on you, Gourry,"

He gave me a sulky scowl.

"Traveling with you doesn't bode well for a person's life expectancy, does it?"

“Sure doesn’t,” I said with a grin.

But that grin quickly faded. I whipped around in a daze. There were nothing but crowds of people passing by, yet...

“What’s wrong, Lina?” Gourry asked.

“I, uh, just got this feeling someone’s watching us...”

“Oh, you felt that too?” he asked like it was nothing.

Ugh, come on, man...

“...Let’s take the back way,” Rod muttered.

My nose was met with a rank odor and my ears were treated to the sound of a dog barking somewhere nearby. We were currently in an alley behind a row of dingy brick rental houses where the sun’s rays barely penetrated. We were just one road off the main avenue, but the change in atmosphere was quite stark. Of course, that was fairly typical in a big city like this.

We appeared to be the only people traveling along the dank, stagnant street. It was pretty obvious why Rod had chosen to come this way: he’d also sensed watchful eyes upon us. By moving to a deserted area, he was trying to lure the watcher out into the open. Talk about hotheaded...

Rod came to a stop all of a sudden and announced, “That’s enough.”

I knew who he was talking to.

“He’s telling you assassins to drop the games already,” I added loudly.

I sensed movement. Several men then appeared from behind nearby buildings, pouring out into the street to block our way forward. I turned around to see several more boxing us in from behind as well. Their dress was ostentatious enough that it practically announced them: “Ladies and gentlemen, we are bandits!”

Wait a minute...

I’d felt quite a few gazes on me before, but one was chilling enough to give me goosebumps. It clearly hadn’t come from any of this riff-raff. Who was it,

then? I was certain it hadn't just been my imagination...

"You workin' for Talim?" one of the bandits asked, bringing me back to the situation at hand.

"Well, we hadn't worked that out yet, exactly..." Gourry said, playing dumb.

"I'm sure they mean to kill you either way," Rod said coldly.

The assassins all responded with a knowing chuckle.

"There's no backing down now, so I guess you'll have to show me what you can do," the swordsman in black said to us—well, more specifically, to Gourry.

No backing down now, huh? How presumptuous of you, sir! Just who was it that led us into this mess in the first place?

"Sorry, but I'll pass," I said breezily. "I haven't agreed to take your job yet, and fighting these guys here and now will basically lock me in. So if you concocted this little setup, sorry, but I'm not falling for it."

"You think I set this up?" Rod asked, looking me up and down with cold eyes. "I'm hoping you *won't* take the job."

"Huh?"

"After all, I can't fight my own allies," he said, staring past me, right at Gourry.

Talk about scary!

"But your assessment is otherwise correct," he continued casually. "I'll dispose of them myself."

A murmur of excitement ran through the group of assassins. One man against ten—it was easy enough to say, but impossible to pull off without a monumental disparity in skill. Still, I had a feeling that Rod might be able to hack it. I could get a good read on a person's ability just by watching their posture, and if I'm being honest...

These assassin guys just plain sucked! Talim's rival, Daymia, must have been the one who hired them, but holy cow, talk about craptastic! They probably weren't any more competent than rookie soldiers, *if* that.

Upon completing my assessment, I pointed at Rod and addressed the

assassins: “You heard the man! If you wanna kill us, you gotta kill him first!”

“Darn... That’s harsh,” Gourry said with a wince.

He’d surely realized that these guys were no match for Rod too. He wouldn’t have been so calm about the whole affair otherwise.

“Dammit! Don’t take us so lightly!” one of the men shouted.

And with that completely unoriginal and lackluster line, he charged straight at Rod. Following his lead, perhaps, the other assassins drew their weapons. Rod watched them keenly as he reached for the sword on his back. He too then took off in a run.

One assassin crossed blades with the black gale that was Rod, and not a moment later, his head popped into the air. Rudely awakened to the power of their foe, the man behind the first victim flinched... It was too late. Rod passed him by and, just like that, the man was dead. The remaining assassins were rightly shaken.

“Tch! Retreat!” one of them shouted from the back.

Some might argue that was a coward’s line, but it was also probably the smartest idea any of these dolts had had all day. Nevertheless, as the assassin in the back turned to run, a man with a bastard sword and a face covered in welts blocked his path.

It was Lantz, the tavern jerk.

“Geh...”

The assassins all froze in place. One tried to charge Lantz, but was easily defeated after one or two exchanges.

Huh, wasn’t expecting this loser to actually be decent...

Rod—who’d already polished off his own immediate attackers—then joined up with Lantz. From there, it was a completely one-sided slaughter. The whole thing was over before either Gourry or I could get a comment in edgewise. Rod unceremoniously used his scarf to wipe the blood from his sword, then glanced over at Lantz questioningly.

“A group of guys left the tavern after you did. Looked kind of like they were

following you,” Lantz rattled off before Rod could even ask. “I ended up tailing them, and it turned out I was right. I’m sure you didn’t need my help, though...”

“I didn’t,” Rod said bluntly.

Lantz was taken aback for a second, but decided not to press the issue. Instead, he turned to look at me and Gourry with disdain.

“Still, Master Rod...” he began. “You really think Miss Pint-Size and Mr. Pompous here will be useful?”

P-P-Pint-Size?!

“Lantz,” Rod hissed before I could object myself.

A visible shudder ran through Lantz’s body.

“I’m the one who recruited them.”

In other words, questioning our ability would be questioning Rod’s judgment. Realizing his mistake, Lantz turned pale.

“S-Sorry, Master Rod...”

“Never mind that,” Rod responded in his typical dour tone as he began walking once more without sparing Lantz another glance.

We followed, of course, and from behind us, I could hear the distinct sound of Lantz clicking his tongue. I whipped around with my hands on my hips. I was about to tell him to speak up if he had something to say, but before I could get the words out—

Blub!

The ground beneath my feet transformed!

“Wh-What the heck is this?!” Lantz screamed.

He’d already sunken down to his shins. The street below us, you see, had abruptly transmogrified into a sea of mud.

“Looks like this one’s on you, Lina,” Gourry said nonchalantly as he too sank into the mud.

“Way ahead of you,” I replied.

Incidentally, Rod was watching with calm interest as he also descended into the mud. I, however, turned my eyes toward the new player on the scene.

“Oho... A sorcerer, eh?”

The speaker was a man floating in the air overhead, backed by the darkening sky above. He wore a black hooded cape, a jeweled amulet around his neck, and beautifully crafted pauldrons styled after the heads of brow daemons. Though, I have to say, he was kind of on the pale side... In other words, pretty much your archetypal sorcerer.

“So, let me guess: You sent those guys after us to see what we could do, right?”

“That’s right. And they served their purpose well,” the sorcerer said with a grin.

“Entreating bephemoths—spirits of the earth—to convert the ground to mud and hold us in place while you attack from above... Not a bad plan. Too bad I’m here,” I said, looking up at the guy.

I myself was casually standing atop the sea of mud courtesy of a Levitation spell. I’d cast it the moment I felt the ground change under my feet, and it had kept me from sinking like the others.

“Your presence is irrelevant. All who oppose Lord Daymia will fall before Caluath the sorcerer!”

“Don’t go promising things you can’t make good on,” I said, floating into the air before incanting another spell. “Lei Wing!”

In a flash, I was right beside Caluath.

“What?!” he shouted in surprise.

Lei Wing was a spell that created a barrier of wind around its caster to allow for high-speed flight. It wasn’t too popular these days because it was harder to control than Levitation and wasn’t especially practical, but I personally liked it. It was quite useful in certain situations.

Caluath was currently occupied maintaining both his spell that turned the ground to mud and his own Levitation spell. And since not even the most

powerful sorcerers could keep up more than two spells at once, that meant his hands were already full and I had nothing to worry about.

I was, however, so focused on controlling my Lei Wing that the best I could probably muster was a casting of Lighting. Offensive spells were out of the question. But at the very least, that put us on equal footing.

The sorcerer turned to face me...

“Die, impudent girl!”

...And a set of Flare Arrows appeared in front of him!

What?! No way!

“Ack!” I shouted as I dodged the incoming projectiles.

They were weak enough that I could have deflected them with ease by altering the strength of my wind barrier, but I was too shocked to think straight.

“Heh. What’s wrong, girl? You seem rather surprised,” Caluath said with a high-pitched laugh, his pauldrons laughing right along with him.

Wait a minute. Pauldrons don’t usually laugh, do they? Unless...

“That’s right,” he proclaimed triumphantly. “These are no mere pauldrons. They’re living things!”

Living things? Those brow daemons on his shoulders? I knew that brow daemons could use some mid-level magic, and their heads *were* about the size of the ones on Caluath’s shoulders right now. But... where the heck were their bodies, then?! Brow daemons were quite a bit smaller than humans, but certainly not small enough to fit under this guy’s cape.

“They’re no ordinary brow daemons, you see. They’re chimeras Lord Daymia made as a gift for me. Charming little slaves, aren’t they? They allow me to maintain three spells at once!” Caluath conveniently explained.

Of all the things to brag about! Eesh...

All this really meant was that he was totally dependent on the brow daemons to get anything done. The spell turning the ground to mud, Levitation, and whatever spell he attacked with—that was one spell apiece for him and his two

chimeras. If he hadn't spelled that out for me, I would've assumed he was just that good... Guys like him really burn my bacon.

"Light, appear!" I called, launching a Lighting spell at Caluath.

Levitation didn't allow for much in the way of agility, so I figured he wouldn't be able to dodge it.

"Gah!" he screamed, proving me right.

The ball of light I released must have blinded him good.

"Wh-Where have you gone, girl?!" Caluath moaned.

"Skyeek!" the brow daemon on his right shoulder squealed.

"Above me?!"

Caluath must have understood whatever language it was speaking. He turned to look upward, even though his vision was still compromised.

Slam!

I landed right on his face. After using Lighting to blind him, I'd used Lei Wing to soar directly above him... And then I'd dismissed the spell.

Splat!

I dropped the sorcerer into his own mudpit, head-first. His upper half sank right in, while I stood victoriously atop his protruding rear end. See, I'd already started reciting my next spell on the way down.

"Freeze Arrow!"

I shot the subzero arrow I'd conjured right into the ground, freezing the mud hard in an instant. A single shiver ran through the sorcerer beneath me before he froze in place. The brow daemons on his shoulders—apparently defeated just as easily—were forced to drop their spells, thus returning the sea of mud to solid ground.

For such a dramatic entrance, Caluath had gone down pretty easily. His undoing was probably thinking that being able to cast multiple spells at once made him invincible. Everyone knows it's not about the number of spells; it's about how you use them!

“Easy-peasy.”

I turned back to face the other three, and... Oh.

“Yeah, great. Awesome. Now... you think you could do somethin’ about *this*, please?” Lantz asked.

He and the other boys were still up to their waists in the frozen ground, teeth chattering.

What delicious Loania lamb rolls! Perfectly spiced meat in a green vegetable sauté, complemented by a delicious and fragrant diluted honey wine. And these fried moule shrimp? To die for!

The dinner laid out for us was a truly luxurious feast. If I wasn’t here on business—and if Rod and Talim weren’t around—I’d be in hog heaven.

Talim the Purple, seated at the head of the table, was a portly fellow in the first years of old age. Appellations such as “the Purple” and “the Blue” were sort of like titles handed down by sorcerers’ councils—along with appropriately-colored robes and capes—to those who held important positions or had performed great service. It wasn’t a ranking system, so there was no “best color” to have.

If you’ll indulge me on a little tangent here, I myself was once given a color title by the local sorcerers’ council as a special guest. When participating in official council events, you were supposed to attend in the robe you were given, but... Like hell I’d ever done that.

Why, you ask? I wouldn’t be caught dead in that stupid outfit. It was pink! Freakin’ *pink*!

When I brought it home, my sister had a good laugh at my expense.

“Lina the Pink?! You know what men say about a girl who wears pink!” she’d crowed.

Shut up! It’s not my fault! I didn’t pick it!

The council had assured me it was “a befitting color for such a charming girl.” But seriously, what the hell kind of black magic practitioner wants to go around

wearing pink?! I couldn't exactly throw the robes in their faces and storm out, though, so I'd put on my best strained smile and oh-so graciously accepted them at the time, but...

Ah, I digress. The point is that Talim's purple was also a real piece of work. Nothing against purple, of course, but it's gotta be on the right person. Slender, mysterious bad boys could pull it off. But this fat old guy shoveling food into his mouth, clad in those dazzling purple robes? Well, all I can say is, it wasn't exactly an appetizing sight.

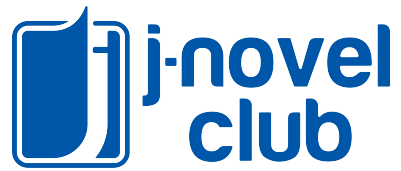
Talim was completely bald, with beady eyes that were constantly blinking. But worst of all, he was smoking a cigar! At dinner! Maybe he was having it in place of wine.

The wolf launched all
of its spikes right at me!
Yikes!



I used my wind bubble to draw close
to the giant underwater jewel.
What lay inside was unmistakably
a human figure...





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Slayers: Volume 2

by Hajime Kanzaka

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