

STORY LIGHT TUCHIHI
ILLUS. Saori Toyota

2





...Okay,
that is
way too
many!"

"You
were
wearing
weighted
bracelets
to hold
yourself
back?!"



SEIYA RYUUGUIN

The overly cautious hero
summoned by Rista.

MITIS

The drop-dead gorgeous
Goddess of Archery. While
she seems pure...

RISTARTE

A novice goddess
who summons Seiya
to save Gaeabrande.

VALKYRIE

The Goddess of Destruction.
Enjoys painting.



ARIADOA

A seasoned goddess.
Watches over
Rista and Seiya.

ADENELA

She may not look like
a deity, but she's the
Goddess of War. She's
also in love with Seiya.

CERCEUS

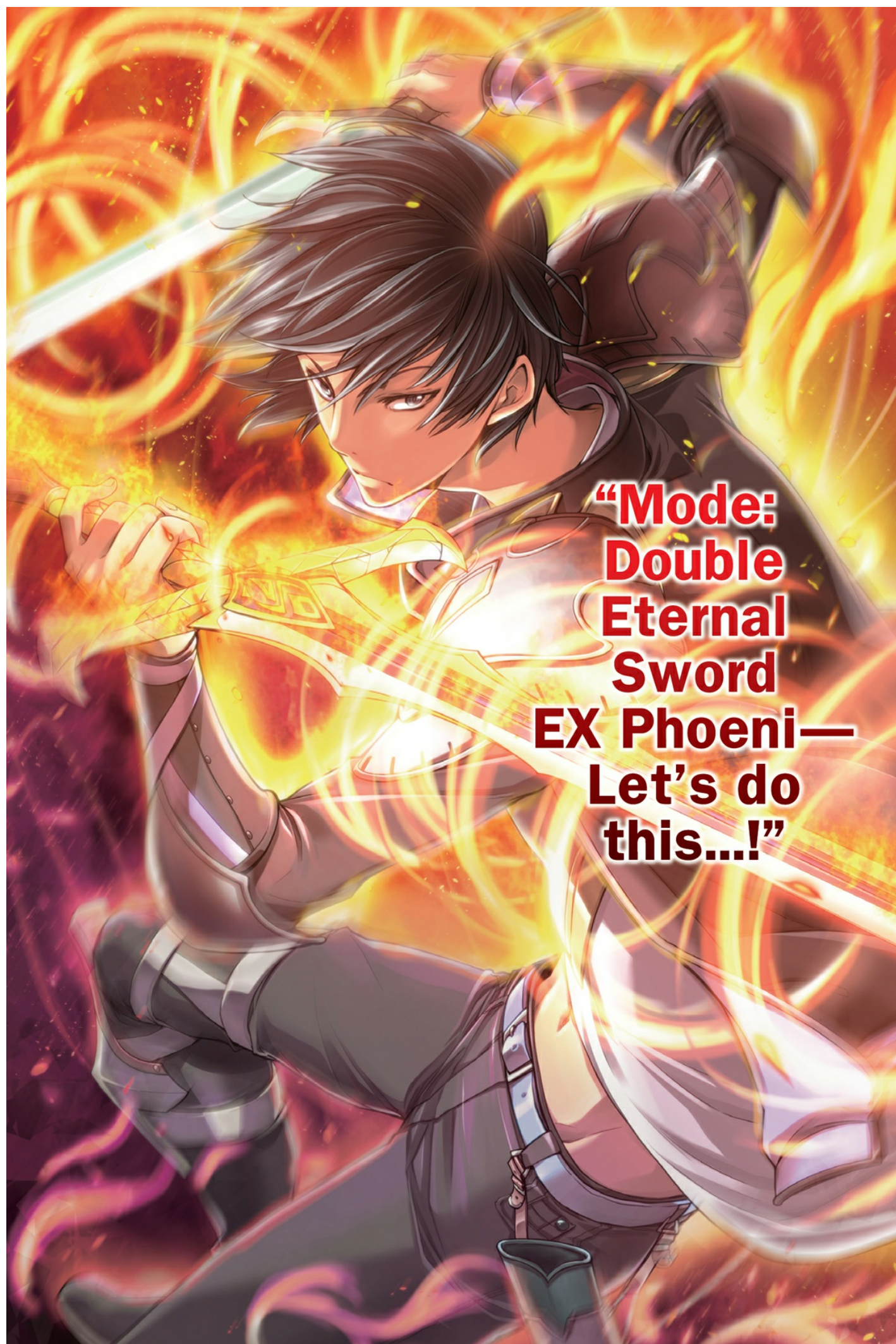
The muscle-bound Divine
Blade. Actually mentally weak.
He enjoys baking cakes.

WOHLKS ROSEGUARD

The emperor. He's said to be
the strongest warrior in all of
Gaeabrande.

ROSALIE ROSEGUARD

The daughter of the emperor.
She fights to protect the
country.



**“Mode:
Double
Eternal
Sword
EX Phoeni—
Let’s do
this...!”**

THE HERO IS
OVERPOWERED
BUT
OVERLY CAUTIOUS

STORY

LIGHT TUCHIHI

ILLUS.

SAORI TOYOTA

2

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TRANSLATION BY MATT RUTSOHN

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KONO YUSHA GA ORE TUEEE KUSENI SHINCHO SUGIRU Vol. 2

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First published in Japan in 2017 by KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo.

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Yen On

150 West 30th Street, 19th Floor

New York, NY 10001

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First Yen On Edition: November 2019

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Names: Tuchihi, Light, author. | Toyota, Saori, illustrator. | Rutsohn, Matt, translator.

Title: The hero is overpowered but overly cautious / Light Tuchihi ; illustration by Saori Toyota ; translation by Matt Rutsohn ; cover art by Saori Toyota.

Other titles: Kono yuusha ga ore tueee kuse ni shinchou sugiru. English
Description: First Yen On edition. | New York : Yen On, 2019— Identifiers: LCCN 2019013049 | ISBN 9781975356880 (v. 1 ; pbk.) | ISBN 9781975356903 (v. 2 ; pbk.) Subjects: GSAFD: Fantasy fiction.

Classification: LCC PL876.U34 K5613 2019 | DDC 895.63/6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019013049>

ISBNs: 978-1-97535690-3 (paperback)

978-1-9753-5691-0 (ebook)

E3-20190918-JV-NF-ORI

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Reverse Fireworks

I readily agreed to assist the imperial knights, who came scurrying for help after being attacked by the Demon Lord's special forces, as one would expect from a goddess. However, what I really want to do is relax. Even Mash and Elulu of the dragonkin look exhausted, and I don't blame them. After all, we just finished fighting the Great Mother, Queen of the Dragons. I turn my gaze to Seiya Ryuuguuin, the overly cautious Hero I summoned, to see how he is doing.

Yep. Just as I thought. Even Seiya's exhaus— Hmm? W-wait... He doesn't actually look that tired... I mean, I guess he looks sort of tired when I squint? Wait. No. I think it's just my imagination... Ugh, I don't even know anymore with that guy. As always, the Hero's expression lacks emotion.

"Allow us to take you all to Olga Fortress!"

With great enthusiasm, the soldiers begin rushing over to their horses waiting nearby. However...

"That won't be necessary."

After stopping, Seiya sends me a look.

"It's an emergency. Open a gate. We'll take a shortcut to the fortress."

"W-we can't! Besides, I don't even know where Olga Fortress is! I'm not allowed to create a gate to a place I've never been without getting Great Goddess Ishtar's permission!"

Seiya's expressionless glare is reminiscent of a Japanese Noh mask.

Wh-what's his problem?! I bet he thinks I simply *can't do it!* It's written all over his face!

However, the next words Seiya mutters defy imagination.

"A dead light bulb... An empty bottle... Dust beneath a table... All those things

make me think of you, Rista.”

“...?! All those things are garbage!”

Nevertheless, Seiya turns to the soldier as if he’s given up.

“You said the fortress was due north-northeast, right? Exactly how far are we talking?”

“It wouldn’t take more than an hour on horseback!”

“That’s not far at all. Let’s fly.”

Thereupon, Seiya’s body begins floating in the air, and the soldiers let out gasps of admiration.

“My God! The Hero can fly!”

“I can’t believe I’m seeing a human fly! The Hero really is on another level!”

“Now this is someone who can defeat Beel Bub!”

“...‘Beel Bub’? The hell is a ‘Beel Bub’?”

The moment Mash asks, the soldiers clench their teeth through grim expressions.

“It’s a monster that looks like a giant fly! Its army has been periodically attacking Olga Fortress, causing numerous casualties!”

“...So it’s going to be an aerial battle.”

With a finger on his chin while floating in the air, Seiya appears to be pondering something, but...

“First, we need to confirm the enemy’s position. Mash, you come with me. Rista, you take Elulu.”

“All right.”

After using Order, I receive Great Goddess Ishtar’s permission to manifest my white wings before taking Elulu’s hand. Seiya grabs Mash’s hand as well.

“Master! Are you sure?!”

“We have no other choice. Don’t let go.”

“You got it! I can’t believe I get to fly with you! I’m so pumped!”

Mash explodes with childlike joy as they take to the sky. With Elulu at my side, I follow along as we head toward Olga Fortress, leaving the soldiers behind.

After ten or so minutes spent following the superspeedy Seiya, Elulu pipes up.

“Hey, Ristie! What’s that?”

I notice a black cluster up ahead in the sky.

“Maybe it’s a rain cloud?”

At least, that’s what I think while gazing at it from afar. However, the closer I get, the clearer it becomes. It looks like a large cloud of black *things* gathering together.

“Um... That isn’t a rain cloud! That’s... That’s a swarm of flies! It’s the enemy!”

The hundreds of flies each appear to be roughly the size of a human as they vibrate their transparent wings and hover in the air. The collective sound of their horrid buzzing can be heard from relatively far away.

“Yuck! That’s so gross!”

Elulu’s hand begins trembling as she holds my arm. Slightly ahead, Seiya turns around and looks at us.

“Rista, we’re descending.”

“O-okay!”

Seiya swiftly descends into the vast forest below, and I immediately follow.

After arriving in the woods, Seiya hides in the trees while looking at the enemies far away in the sky. His eyes become even sharper as he stares at the swarm. He appears to be using Scan.

“Each fly exceeds level thirty. There are around three to four hundred of them. This may end up being worse than the army of the ten thousand undead depending on how you look at it.”

Seiya is spot-on with his analysis. A few hundred swift, airborne, high-level enemies is perhaps a far greater threat than an army of slow-moving undead.

“Let’s continue watching them for now.”

“Good idea.”

But as we turn our solemn gazes to the sky...

“Hff! ...Blaarf! ...Uweeeh!”

With his hand on a nearby tree, Mash starts barfing all over the trunk directly in front of him, returning the nutrients to nature. Elulu gently rubs his back.

“A-are you okay, Mash?”

“Mm...! I—I feel sick...! *Blllp...!*”

I guess he got motion sickness from his flight with Seiya. I know how he feels, though—painfully so, because the same thing happened to me once before. It was a miserable plight. Seiya, on the other hand...

“Yeah, flies are disgusting.”

It seems he misread what Mash was trying to convey.

He isn’t throwing up because of the flies. You made him sick...!

Everyone is thinking the same thing, but no one can bear to mention it while the Hero is staring down the enemy so intensely. That’s when, out of nowhere, a massive, earsplitting explosion erupts from above!

“Kneel before me, humans! You are no match for the devastating power of my Aerial Assault Flies!”

I peer into the sky to see the source of the colossal voice, which could even be heard from lands far, far away. It was different from all the other flies. Because of my supreme vision, which surpasses that of a human, I can easily tell that it’s a monster. While it has the face of a fly, it stands on two feet. Its multiple large red eyes are the size of a fist, and its hands remind me of pointed scissors. It is more than obvious that this irregular monster is the leader of this swarm. I use Scan to check the enemy’s stats just like Seiya did.

BEEL BUB

LV: 76

HP: 18,963

MP: 8,751

ATK: 7,877

DEF: 5,969

SPD: 487,562

MAG: 883

Resistance: Fire, Water, Ice, Lightning, Poison, Paralysis, Sleep, Status Ailments

Special Abilities: Evade (LV: MAX), Flight (LV: MAX)

Skills: Acid Spit, Rolling Dodge

Personality: Cruel

It doesn't appear to be one of the four generals, and its stats aren't even that impressive...or so I thought. I take another look at Beel Bub's speed. It wasn't just my imagination.

"Wh-what is up with its speed?! It's in a completely different league!"

"Unbelievable..."

Even Seiya gasps for a change.

"How can it talk with a face like that? Where are its speech organs?"

"Who cares?! Look at its speed stat!"

"H-hey, Ristie, Seiya! Look over there! It looks like the Roseguard soldiers are trying to attack it!"

Squinting, Elulu points not at the sky but at the surface. On a faraway plain stands a group of archers, preparing to shoot the airborne enemies. Beel Bub seems to notice as well, but the monster doesn't run away. In fact, the swarm of flies decreases its altitude.

"Come on, give me your best shot! I even lowered myself so your arrows could reach."

Arrows pour into the sky like inverted rain, all closing in on the smug leader. It's a brilliant, unified attack. However...the enemy's formation remains stalwart. Even watching from afar, it is clear the archers' attack doesn't reduce the enemy forces in the least.

Seiya mutters:

"It's not just Beel Bub. The other massive flies seem to have high evasion as well. It doesn't look like a single arrow connected."

Once the barrage of arrows comes to an end, the flies instantly descend and begin attacking the soldiers. The archers who fail to escape are captured by the flies' six legs like prey. Then the flies immediately ascend into the firmament once more until they're around fifty meters high. After coming to a complete stop with the soldiers in their arms, Beel Bub bellows: "It is time! Today we will be having yet another *reverse fireworks display*!"

R-reverse fireworks?! Don't tell me...

The bad feeling I have becomes a reality. Beel Bub gives the order to the giant flies to release the soldiers at once, and in the blink of an eye, gravity hurls them straight to the ground. Elulu looks away while Mash clenches his teeth. Beel Bub, on the other hand, sounds amused.

"Ah, the view from up here is truly superb. Just fantastic. Brains and intestines gushing out; beautiful bloody flowers, all in full bloom, spreading across the ground! It's a shame you all can't see it—since you're all dead!"

After the cruel joke, Beel Bub strains its voice even more.

"What is taking the Hero so long?! Someone, bring me the Hero! This massacre will not end until I end him!"

By my side, Seiya calmly mutters to himself.

"This was all done to lure me out..."

"Master, I can't wait anymore! Let's get him!"

As Mash hastily assumes a battle-ready stance, Seiya holds him with a hand on his shoulder.

"Calm down, Mash. You can't underestimate flies. They can move faster than

we can blink. Plus, they're monsters in this world, which means they can probably move faster than we can even imagine. I sent out three Automatic Phoenixes to confirm, and they were almost instantly destroyed."

"Y-you mean those powerful firebirds?!"

"Yeah. And that fly is asking for the Hero, despite knowing that I have already killed two of the Demon Lord's generals. In other words, it has complete confidence in its ability to fight in the air. We can't approach it without a plan, so just focus on observing the enemy for now."

Beel Bub boisterously buzzes as if it were roaring with laughter, satisfied with the human fireworks.

"Bzzz, bzzz, bzzz!"

It then takes its army and disappears into the northern sky.

We leave the forest after the enemy is out of sight. Then we slowly walk toward the large fortress we can see up ahead. Olga Fortress's sturdy outer walls are made of brick, but it's damaged here and there due to the enemy's attacks. But the real tragedy is what happened on the plains around the fortress. It's hard to even look.

"Elulu, get behind me."

"Okay..."

I watch out for Elulu. Seeing the dead bodies on the ground—or what remained of them—would be a sight far too gruesome for a young girl. Once soldiers, they became "reverse fireworks" that were dropped from dozens of meters up in the air and reduced to puddles of blood and viscera. It's hard to believe that these terribly mutilated husks used to belong to living human beings. I also catch glimpses of corpses that appear to have been dissolved by the flies' acid spit.

Elsewhere in this vision of hell is a soldier kneeling in prayer in a pool of blood. As if having taken note of our approach, the figure glances in our direction. Wearing armor with golden inlays, the soldier's eyes open wide at the sight of the white wings on my back.

“At last... You have come...!”

The soldier removes her helmet to reveal long azure hair. While beautiful, her face shows unyielding determination.



Olga Fortress

“Men! The time has come! The Hero and goddess are here to save the world!”

The azure-haired knight raises her sword into the air and yells to her allies, who are completely fatigued from battle.

“Now, on your feet! We must invade their nest!”

However, she is the only one filled with such passion. A white-bearded, elderly soldier advises: “Madam Rosalie! Please calm down! We need to return to the fortress and regroup!”

“Are you mad?! The time has come to avenge our fallen comrades!”

“Please, open your eyes! The only soldiers left are exhausted! They are in no shape to fight!”

Rosalie looks around at the wounded warriors. Then, as if she has finally come to face reality, she groans before falling into a deep silence.

“We have lost many men, so I understand your eagerness to exact your vengeance. However, the Hero has only just arrived. I feel it would be rude to immediately drag him off like that...”

Rosalie turns her gaze to Seiya and me. Although different from Seiya’s, her eyes bear sharp insight as well. After a few moments, Rosalie nods softly, seeming calm.

“You’re right, Carlo. Let’s return to the fortress. There, we will hold a meeting with the Hero and come up with a plan to get rid of the flies.”

The elderly soldier looks relieved, but Rosalie almost immediately reiterates her unyielding determination.

“However, after the meeting, we will head to the enemy’s territory! Today!

Do I make myself clear?”

Rosalie spins around in an exaggerated manner, then strides alone toward the fortress.

As Carlo lets out a sigh, I turn to him and ask:

“Um... About that knight...Rosalie... Who is she?”

“She is the captain of the guard for the Olga Fortress.”

Elulu’s face instantly lights up.

“She’s a captain! A female captain...! She has wonderful azure hair, she’s tall, and she’s so beautiful!”

Elulu’s right. Rosalie has a certain dignified charm about her.

“She is beautiful, isn’t she? Not only her appearance but she has this certain... mysterious aura.”

We chat with Carlo as we walk to the fortress. The soldiers behind us converse while sluggishly moving forward as well. That’s when...

“What are you doing?! There’s no time! Hurry!”

Rosalie looses a terrible roar as she waits up ahead. Thereupon, everyone zips their lips and picks up the pace until they reach the fortress...

Mash is awestruck the moment we cross under the gate attached to the outer wall.

“This place is huge...!”

Olga Fortress looks almost no different than a giant castle. There are watchtowers, wells for prolonged battles, and storage areas for food. Carlo cheerfully grins.

“Olga Fortress was originally used as a station on the border, after all. Along with its robust outer wall, there are also archers placed at the top of the fortress. In addition, there are living quarters that can house a few hundred soldiers.”

While the elderly soldier speaks proudly of the fortress, Seiya simply lets out a “hmph.”

“Doesn’t look like it’ll be hard for the enemy to break through, judging by what just happened outside, though.”

“Y-yes, you are correct. Currently, we have no way of defending ourselves against Beel Bub’s flying army.”

“Carlo, won’t the empire itself be in danger if the flies get past the border?”

“Their objective is to lure out the Hero. Therefore, they will not go any farther than this border. In the remote chance they do decide to go to the empire of Roseguard, the imperial mage of lightning, Flashika, will be there. Lightning spells are very effective against flying enemies.”

“Oh, so there’s a powerful mage stationed in the empire itself. In that case, why don’t we call him over here?”

“Flashika is the only person in the empire who can use high-level lightning magic. If he comes to the fortress, then the imperial capital will lose its greatest defense against airborne assault. We cannot afford to have him leave.”

While following Carlo to the meeting room, Seiya argues:

“Even if this mage is as powerful as you say, I’d bet that the Demon Lord’s army could easily crush your empire if they wanted to.”

Ack... He just says whatever’s on his mind, doesn’t he?

But when thinking back about how powerful the two generals Seiya fought were, I can’t help but feel that he’s right. However, Carlo replies with absolute calm: “The empire will not fall.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because Roseguard has the Warmaster on our side.”

“The ‘Warmaster’?”

Mash suddenly chimes in.

“Oh, I’ve heard about him! He’s Roseguard’s emperor and the strongest warrior in the world! They say his sword can cut through the heavens and slice open the planet!”

“I doubt it. If that were true, then you wouldn’t need me to save the world.

They're baseless rumors. They were probably circulated to give people the illusion that their country is safe."

Carlo softly shakes his head in response to Seiya's analysis.

"Not at all. Other than the Hero, the emperor is undoubtedly the strongest warrior in the world. The empire will not waver as long as he rules Roseguard."

Wh-what confidence...! The Warmaster must be really strong!

"However, just like with Flashika, the emperor has his reasons for not leaving the capital."

Just when I want to ask Carlo what that reason is, he starts walking into the building in the center of the fortress.

"We're here. This is the meeting room where we come up with battle strategies. I believe Madam Rosalie is already waiting inside."

The moment the elderly knight opens the door, I hear the bitter voices of a man and a woman arguing.

"Madam Rosalie! How many times do I have to tell you not to go to the front line of battle! You are the next successor to the throne!"

"That's exactly why I stand on the front! True warriors do not fear battle! Just like my father, I will stand before the soldiers, fight, and raise the morale of our army!"

"Then at least bring me, your assistant Bhat, with you! How would I ever explain myself to the emperor if something were to happen to you?!"

I finally understand why I felt Rosalie was different when I hear her argue with the muscular warrior Bhat. She is the daughter of Roseguard's emperor and will become the empress who rules over Roseguard after her father passes away. No wonder her aura is different than the rest. At any rate, she appears to be quite the tomboy, perhaps due to looking up to her father. After Carlo clears his throat by the door, Rosalie and a few dozen others take seats at the round table before looking this way.

"Everyone, the Hero and his allies have arrived."

Carlo bows deeply to us.

“I will be on my way, then.”

“Thank you, Carlo!”

After Elulu and I thank him, he gently smiles back as he closes the door on his way out. I look ahead once more when...

“Oh...! So this is the Hero and his allies who have come to save us!”

“So that’s the Hero! Simply awe-inspiring!”

Everyone in the room stares at us as if they are overcome with emotion. Seiya’s aura is no less impressive than Rosalie’s. Tall with refined features, anybody could sense there was something special about him.

After being guided to the empty seats around the table, Seiya, Mash, Elulu, and I sit side by side together. I look at each of the people sitting at the round table. Everyone seems to be someone important, which I guess is something you would expect at a meeting to discuss strategy like this. There’s the muscle-bound warrior Bhat with whom Rosalie was just arguing, a mage with a robe decorated with the empire’s emblems, and even an elderly person with a staff. High-ranking officials must have come to Olga Fortress because the successor to the throne is here as well.

Rosalie nudges the slim mage, who then speaks up in a high pitch.

“I would like to begin our meeting with the Hero! Our objective is to defeat the flies!”

But at that very moment, the Hero interjects in a well-projected voice.

“Wait. Before that, I want to ensure my safety.”

“...What?”

“This place is dangerous.”

I can feel the tension among the gathered imperial officials—including Rosalie. Before long, an old man with a beard, who could pass for a sage, asks: “Hero...what exactly do you mean?”

“One of the Demon Lord’s henchmen is probably in disguise and hiding among us.”

“A-are you sure?!”

Those few words from the Hero cause a commotion at the table.

“Well...it’s a possibility at least.”

“O-oh, you were talking about a hypothetical situation...”

Everyone sighs in relief after hearing Seiya clarify things. I poke Seiya in the arm.

“Hey, Seiya, it’s okay. I don’t sense the presence of any monsters here.”

“Hmm... I see. So the Demon Lord’s army isn’t here. However...,” Seiya continues with a solemn expression. “There’s probably an explosive somewhere in the room.”

“A-are you sure?!”

Their relief is short-lived. The officials start panicking again. However...

“Well...it’s a possibility at least.”

Everyone sighs in relief upon hearing that utterance. But Seiya then looks up at the corner of the room with a piercing gaze.

“Both things I said just now were merely speculation. What I really wanted to discuss...is up there. Someone is secretly listening in on our meeting.”

“A-are you sure?!”

Rosalie’s expression instantly changes as if the third time is the charm.

“Hurry! Go investigate the ceiling!”

A couple dozen soldiers head out under Rosalie’s orders.

...Ten minutes later.

“We have returned from our investigation! All twenty-three soldiers searched every inch of the area over this room, but we didn’t find even one speck of dust!”

After the soldier leaves the room, Rosalie and the other officials stare at Seiya with bated breath.

“Well...it was a possibility.”

BAM! All of a sudden, Rosalie violently slams her hand against the table.

“Enough! We will be here all night if we persistently worry about every possibility!”

Rosalie’s face turns bright red as she tells Seiya off in my place.

...Yep. She kind of sounded like a young girl there. It looks like she normally tries to lower her voice to project a certain image. But, well, judging by her appearance, she actually does appear to be around twenty years old—give or take a year.

As if she noticed me watching her with a hint of joy in my eyes, Rosalie reverts to her previous tone and raises her voice to overcompensate.

“W-we don’t need a meeting to discuss strategy! All the Hero and I need to do is take the lead and infiltrate the enemy’s base!”

“Madam Rosalie! That is far too dangerous.”

While the imperial officials try to persuade her to reconsider, Seiya firmly nods in a favorable manner.

“I agree.”

Thereupon, Rosalie sends Seiya a fiery gaze as if having changed her opinion of him.

“The Hero feels the same way I do! Perfect! Then there is no time to waste! We must prepare to attack!”

“Don’t get the wrong idea. I was agreeing that we don’t need a meeting to discuss strategy because I’ve already decided what I’m going to do.”

“A-and what is that?”

A deep silence reigns over the meeting room, and everyone waits for the Hero’s next words with apprehension. A few moments go by before Seiya makes his plans clear as can be.

“I’m leaving.”

““““What?””””

“I am going to return to the unified spirit world and train until I learn a skill

that rivals the enemy's. Now if you will excuse me.”

Mash, Elulu, and I are already used to how Seiya does things, but...

“““Whaaaaaat?!”””

Rosalie and the others turn black in the face as they scream.

Slap

The warrior with a masculine build, Bhat, lets out a bitter laugh when he hears Seiya's response.

"Su-surely, you're joking!"

"I'm not. I'm leaving."

The robed female mage yells:

"You can't! You're just going to abandon us?!"

"I'm leaving, and that's final."

The officials' expressions in reaction to Seiya's stubbornness are a mix of astonishment and sorrow.

I—I have to do something! They probably think his training is going to take days!

I speak up in order to clear the air.

"Please settle down, everyone! It's going to be a very short training session!"

"Exactly. I only need about three days."

Seiya's reply causes each of them to scream individually.

"You're going to be gone for three whole days?!"

"Since when does 'three days' count as 'very short'?!"

"The fortress is going to be in ruins if we wait that long!"

The officials are so taken aback that they yell out in rage one after another. Then, as if realizing they are behaving in an undignified manner, they clear their throats as their faces turn red.

I turn to them and plead:

“P-please listen to me. Three days in the spirit world is barely an hour in your world, so...”

“An hour...? R-really?”

Just as everyone is on the verge of being persuaded, Rosalie, who has been quiet this entire time, makes her voice heard.

“Is training really even necessary? Earlier, I saw white wings on the goddess’s back! The goddess can fly! So we already have a means to attack, do we not?!”

What?! M-me?! What does this girl think she’s saying?!

While I’m taken aback at being suddenly called out, Seiya almost immediately sets forth a counterargument.

“That won’t work. The goddess can only provide backup. She can’t fight.”

S-Seiya...! Thank you so much for standing up for me!

“Besides, she wouldn’t be any help anyway. She can barely float with those wings. She has about as much use as a balloon—or maybe even less than that.”

“...! I can’t believe you! You went too far this time!”

Being told that I am even less useful than a balloon makes me pop with rage, but Seiya simply ignores me as if it’s nothing out of the ordinary.

“By the way, I can fly as well.”

“Oh...! Then...!”

A voice from the round table starts to speak, but...

“But we have no chance of winning like that. Trying to have an aerial battle against the enemy would be the height of stupidity. That’s exactly what they want.”

“Hero, aren’t you being a little too timid? How can you say that without even trying?”

“I carefully observed the enemy before coming here, and its speed is extraordinary.”

Seiya’s casual response causes Rosalie to furrow her eyebrows.

“Wait... Hold on. What did you just say? You were ‘carefully observing’ Beel Bub? Don’t tell me you watched my men get slaughtered from afar and didn’t do anything to stop it.”

Rosalie glares at Seiya fiercely, so I butt in, sensing that things are going south.

“You’ve got the wrong idea! Even if we wanted to save them, it was already too late...!”

Rosalie slams her fist on the table, and I let out a shriek.

“I am not asking whether you saved them or not! I am asking if the Hero saw what happened yet still decided to do nothing!”

Despite Rosalie’s extremely threatening attitude, Seiya manages to maintain his composure.

“You’re saying some pretty strange things. If you can’t save them no matter what you do, then nothing can be done about it.”

“People are dead! They were slaughtered by that monster! What kind of Hero can see that and not feel anything?!”

“How would feeling something change anything exactly? It’s at precisely times like this that you need to remain calm and proceed carefully. You cannot let yourself be influenced by your surroundings, and only when you remain collected can you do what’s truly necessary during crucial moments.”

It is like fire and ice. Two completely opposite personalities like this would never compromise. And eventually, Rosalie’s gaze turns to contempt.

“This man is no good! He is but a fool and only a Hero by name!”

“M-Madam Rosalie! You cannot say such a thing to the Hero!”

“A Hero—by definition—means that you are heroic, but this man is nothing more than a coward!”

Rosalie is exploding with rage, but I find myself becoming slightly annoyed by her.

For some reason, it’s aggravating when someone else says it! Seiya may not

look it, but he puts a lot of thought into his actions! I used to think like Rosalie and get mad at him, but now I know that Seiya's cautiousness is of a completely different nature than cowardice.

"Excuse me, Rosalie! Seiya may be slow to act for a Hero, but we have weathered the storm over and over again thanks to him being so well prepared!"

I look at each member gathered in the meeting room before assuring them: "I promise you that the moment this Hero has finished training and is completely ready to go is the moment that Beel Bub's Aerial Assault Flies will be vanquished!"

The room is overcome with silence. I follow up by saying to Rosalie: "So please...? Just wait an hour for him to train, okay? Rosalie..."

I thought she would just say, *Fine. Do what you must.* But I was naive.

"...Do you honestly expect me to believe you?"

Rosalie is excessively more stubborn than I even imagined.

"I have lost a little over one hundred men to Beel Bub. Do you understand how I feel?"

"O-of course I do! It's painful. It's sad and—"

"A being that transcends humanity can never truly understand the preciousness of human life. According to the legends, goddesses are blessed with eternal life. Am I wrong?"

"W-well, yeah, but..."

"Then stop talking."

Tch...!

As I grind my teeth, Seiya murmurs:

"You have no right to talk about the preciousness of human life, either."

"Excuse me...?"

Rosalie speaks in a deep voice as she scowls. However, as if not to be outdone, Seiya glares back at Rosalie like a hawk.

“Your soldiers weren’t killed by the enemy. You killed them.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your lack of planning is what created that mountain of dead bodies.”

“You bastard...! Take that back!”

Rosalie walks all the way over until she is standing right in front of Seiya.

“M-Madam Rosalie?!”

The imperial officials are panicking, but...

“Take that back! Take that back or...!”

Acting on impulse, Rosalie draws her right hand far back without even a moment of hesitation.

Ack! Seiya’s gonna get punched by a girl!

It looks like Rosalie’s right hand connects with Seiya’s cheek, but an instant before she actually hits him, he grabs her arm at a blinding speed. But if anything, what surprises me is what comes next. After fending off her attack, Seiya slowly gets out of his seat, then smacks Rosalie’s cheek with his left hand.

SLAP!

A loud pop echoes throughout the meeting room.

“Ufff?!”

An uncharacteristically strange sound escapes her small mouth. Seiya’s right hand is already in the air, prepared for a counterattack.

“OKAY, THAT’S ENOOOOOOOOOUGH!!”

I slide in between them and start making excuses for Seiya.

“Th-this isn’t what it seems, Rosalie! He thought he was going to get punched, so he naturally countered! It’s basically a conditioned reflex for warriors! Seiya didn’t mean to hurt you!”

I immediately turn around and scold Seiya.

“I don’t care why you did it! You should never hit a girl!”

“But she tried to punch me first. It was self-defense.”

Despite my effort, though, Rosalie’s fury has already reached the point of no return.

“I—I can’t believe you...!”

She pushes me out of the way and throws another right hook at Seiya, but it ends up being a replay of what happened a moment ago.

SLAP!

“Ouch...!”

A high-pitched scream of agony slips between Rosalie’s lips once more. But it’s not over yet.

“Take this...!”

SLAP!

“Ahhhn!”

She lets out an adorable cry...

“Y-you’ll pay for that!”

SLAP!

“Unf!”

She audibly pants...

...I tried sticking up for Seiya by saying it was nothing more than a conditioned reflex and that he meant no harm. Nevertheless, it has come to my attention that nothing about that was reflex, and he definitely did mean to do harm. Seiya is slapping Rosalie as if it were nothing.

Every time she tries to punch his right cheek, he slaps hers before she can, and the left side fares no better, either. Therefore, only Rosalie is getting slapped silly, causing her cheeks to swell like plump red apples. I audibly swallow my saliva in the midst of the dead silence.

At any rate, he has hit her *way* too much! Get with the times, you pig! This isn’t the fifties! Wait... What era is he from anyway?!

I shudder at the fact that the Hero doesn't even have a speck of decency. That's when, with tears rolling down her cheeks and a runny nose, Rosalie suddenly unsheathes her sword.

"I-I'm going to kill you! S-s-say your prayers...!"

"M-M-Madam Rosalie! You can't...!"

"You...*sniffle*...are no...*snort*...Hero!"

"S-S-Seiya!! Apologize to her this instant! I mean, look at her! Can't you see she's crying!"

"I'm not...*sniffle*...crying! Mm...!"

"Seiya! Hurry up and apologize!"

"No. I didn't do anything wrong."

"I didn't ask if you did! Just look at how much she's crying!"

"I told you...I'm not...*hic*...crying...! I'm not...crying...*sniffle*...one bit...!"

"I'm not apologizing. I did nothing wrong."

"You two are acting like children! I don't care who's wrong! Just say you're sorry!"

But neither apologizes. Eventually, Rosalie breaks the silence while still sobbing.

"I've had...enough! I don't...*sniffle*...need any Hero! I'm going...*hic*...to go to the enemy's hideout...by myself!"

Seiya glares at Rosalie as she tries to hold back her tears. Wait... I don't think he's glaring at her. He's using Scan.

I decide to use Scan as well to check Rosalie's stats for future reference.

ROSALIE ROSEGUARD

LV: 23

HP: 6,780

MP: 0

ATK: 4,120

DEF: 3,655

SPD: 3,987

MAG: 0

GRW:

48

Resistance: Fire, Water, Dark, Poison, Paralysis

Special Abilities: Light's Blessing (LV: 3)

Skills: Knocking Sword

Personality: Impulsive

She has very high stats for a human, but...they aren't that impressive compared to those of the flies.

Seiya then says:

"You're the so-called Warmaster's daughter, so I thought you'd be at least halfway decent, but...*sigh*. Your attributes are painfully mediocre. You'd die a meaningless death if you attacked their base like this."

Just then...

"Grrr...!"

Grunting, Rosalie's face turns as red as a tomato. She shakes her disheveled azure hair as the mountainous tears fall ceaselessly to the floor. Rosalie then begins quivering as she tightly clenches her fists.

...Ack! I've never seen someone get this angry before!

From my side, Elulu shrieks:

"S-something isn't right! Rosalie's growling like a dog!"

"Just ignore her, Elulu. She'll bite you if you get too close."

"Grrrrrr...!"

As the captain of the guard growls even more after being insulted, Mash anxiously pokes Seiya's arm.

“M-Master Seiya...! Maybe apologizing would be for the best...?”

“I’d rather die. More importantly, we should be going now. Rista, create the gate.”

“Ah... O-okay...”

I create a gate because it seems like things are only going to get worse here. But even then, I can still hear Rosalie behind me...

“Grrr...! Grrrrr! *Grooowl!*!”

Sh-she won’t stop growling! She really is acting like a dog! I almost want to put a muzzle on her and give her belly rubs until she calms down.

“A-anyway, we’ll be back in an hour! So don’t go anywhere, okay?! That means you, too, Rosalie! Sit! Stay!”

And just like that, we turn around and return to the unified spirit world, despite the fact that Rosalie looks like she could bite us at any moment.

The Goddess Who Lives in the Forest

“Listen, can you stop doing that? That’s no way for a Hero to act...or anyone for that matter. I mean, I get that it was her fault, but...”

I waste no time after getting back to the unified spirit world to lecture Seiya. Meanwhile, Seiya doesn’t look like he even cares what I have to say...

“Seiya, you were really scary back there...”

“Yeah...those were some insane slaps...”

Being reprimanded by Elulu and Mash, Seiya stares hard at his hand, then clenches his teeth with a bitter expression.

“Before I even realized it, I was hitting her. Just looking at her annoys me.”

“...Seiya?”

I’m kind of surprised. While he’s high-handed and has a filthy mouth, he never shows much emotion in front of others.

“Even the way she thinks pisses me off. She recklessly tries to move forward, despite having no chance of winning...and without even considering how many will die because of it.”

Rosalie’s reckless personality is the complete opposite of Seiya’s cautious nature. That’s probably why he’s so angry.

“At any rate, how about taking a short rest?”

I don’t think suddenly training with this much tension is ideal, so I offer Seiya some time to calm down, but...

“No, that won’t be necessary. I want to start training.”

His frown from moments ago is nowhere to be found. He’s absolutely calm, as if nothing happened.

How can he bounce back so quickly like that?!

“I knew it! Seiya, you’re such a good person!”

Seiya seems to be confused as to why Elulu is smiling at him.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because you’re training to save Rosalie! That makes you a good person!”

“I’m not doing it for her. I’m doing it because I was apparently called to your world to save it.”

Hmm... Seiya isn’t all sunshine and rainbows, but he’s really dedicated when it comes to things like this. He has a strong sense of justice...and he doesn’t let personal feelings get in the way.

Seiya pushes back his glossy, black hair.

“I already know which deity I need to train with to defeat the flies.”

“Oh, really? I can introduce you if it’s someone I know! Just tell me who it is!”

“Bring me the god of missiles.”

“The god of...? There is no missile god!”

“Fine. I’ll settle for the god of guns.”

“There...might be a god like that, but Gaeabrande isn’t that kind of world...”

“If it means defeating the enemy, then who cares?”

“Because it’s impossible! It doesn’t matter how skilled you become with a gun because they don’t exist in Gaeabrande! Even if you got a gun here, you wouldn’t be able to bring it there!”

“Tch.”

Seiya clicks his tongue. *What does he want me to do about it, though?! This is a rule of the spirit world!*

“Hey, Master Seiya...how about lightning magic? I think that geezer at the fortress said something about it being effective against flying enemies. Maybe you could get a god that’s good at lightning magic to teach you...?”

“When I checked Beel Bub’s stats, it was resistant to lightning. It might work

against the generic flies, but it wouldn't work against our main target."

"Oh..."

After talking with Mash, Seiya's eyes start wandering off into space.

"If I won't be able to use guns or missiles...then my only options are bows and arrows. Rista, do you know anyone?"

"I know the Goddess of Archery. It's a little walk from the sanctuary, but I have seen her a few times in the Divine Forest."

"Then let's meet her. Lead the way."

After walking around ten to twenty minutes away from the sanctuary, the scenery starts to change until we find ourselves making our way down a narrow path between lush trees. The crisp air tickles my nose. Small animals resembling squirrels draw their heads back as if they noticed us coming. We journey into the depths of the Divine Forest—an untouched, primeval forest in the unified spirit world.

"You come to places like this often?"

"Yeah, I sometimes come here with Aria to have a picnic. We bring sandwiches and stuff."

"A picnic, huh? How about doing a little work sometime, you bum?"

"Wh-who are you calling a bum?! What do you think I'm doing right now?! I'm working! So what's wrong with having a little picnic every once in a while!"

Before long, the small path disappears until only trees stand before us.

Aria once said, *"The Goddess of Archery, Mitis, trains alone in the open slightly up ahead, so let's have the picnic here. We wouldn't want to bother her, after all."* That's why, whenever I hang out with Aria, we never go any farther than this. The only time I have seen Mitis was passing by her on the narrow trail.

"...Let's go."

Pushing through the trees and bushes, we make our own path and advance forward. After some time goes by, the dense trees gradually become sparser.

Aside from the largest tree, enshrined in the middle of the Divine Forest,

there are few trunks around the open space. Like a beautiful work of art, Mitis is pulling back the arrow fitted on her bow. Her pure-white hair flows to her hips like silk, and her narrow eyes have a sophisticated air.

A goddess of refined beauty. That's the impression I get when I see her.

The moment Mitis releases the arrow, it cuts through the wind before immediately disappearing among the trees. Feeling this is the perfect time to say something, I speak up.

"I apologize for interrupting your training, Lady Mitis."

"Oh my... Ristarte, was it? How do you do?"

She speaks in a polite, unique manner.

I want to say *Nice shot!* and strike up a conversation with her by complimenting her archery skills, but all she does is shoot at a row of trees. As I stand there at a loss for words, Mitis smiles at me.

"There is a target between those trees in the distance."

"O-oh...I had no idea..."

I squint in the direction she indicates, but all I can see is lush vegetation. Despite having good vision, I cannot see any target for the life of me.

"A-anyway, this Hero here was hoping you would teach him archery and—"

Seiya sticks his arm out and cuts me off midsentence.

"Seiya...?"

"Before that, I want to see if you're really as good as they say. Look up."

I gaze up at the sky to find three colossal firebirds soaring in circles. They're Automatic Phoenixes that Seiya created with his magic.

"I see you can hit a nonmoving target from afar, but what about something that darts through the sky? If you can't do that much, then you're wasting my time."

"S-Seiya! You're being extremely rude!"

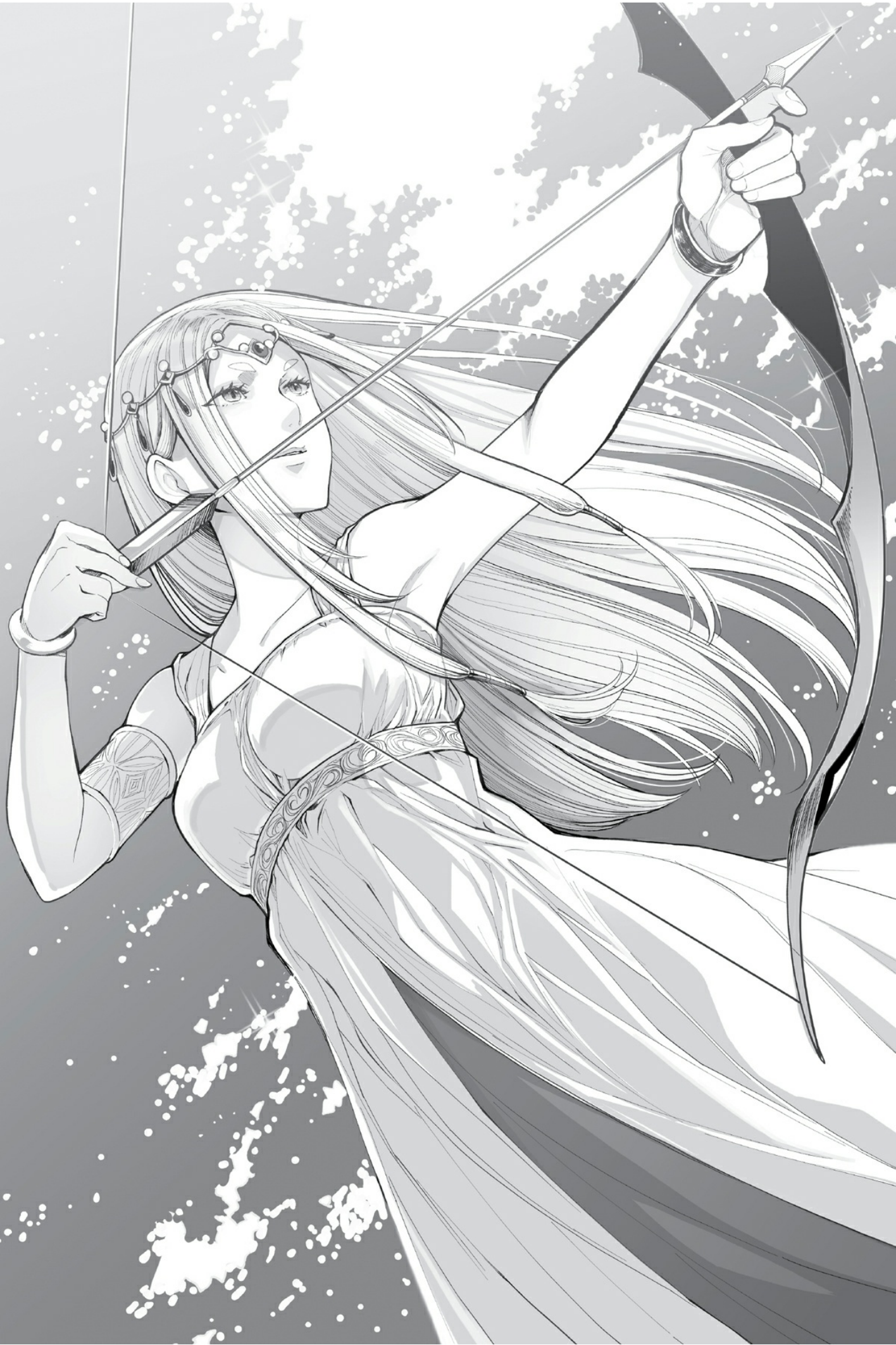
But Mitis simply smiles with kindness.

“You wish for me to hit those magical birds, yes? Very well.”

Thereupon, Mitis places the bow she was holding on the ground.

“This is merely a practice bow. I use a magic bow for battle.”

As she sticks her glowing left arm straight out, she says: “Shining Arrow...”



Before I even realize, she's holding a bow of light in her left hand. Simultaneously, in her drawn-back right hand is an arrow almost indistinguishable from a beam of sunshine—in addition to a thin, glowing bowstring between her fingers.

The arrow of light points to the sky, but the phoenixes are circling at an incredible speed. Just when I thought she was hesitating, her eyes, previously narrowed like threads, open wide.

Thereupon, she lets go of the arrow, which is instantly followed by an explosion in the sky so powerful that I can feel my eardrums shaking.

...I have no idea what just happened, but when the smoke clears, there isn't a single phoenix in the air.

What the...?! I'm positive she only shot one arrow! So why are all three of them gone?!

As I stand there in blank astonishment, Seiya starts analyzing the situation.

"She waited until the phoenixes were lined up over one another before shooting...thus, destroying all three with one shot..."

N-no way! She was able to predict and see the moment they all overlapped?! I didn't think such a feat was humanly possible! I mean, I guess she isn't a human, but whatever!

Seiya nods with an air of satisfaction.

"Hmph. I should be able to kill Beel Bub with this... All right, I'll let you train me."

It's as if Seiya were the one doing Mitis a favor. However...

"I have one condition if I am going to train you. Hero, what magic type is your forte?"

"Fire magic."

"Then have you acquired the magical bow of flames? In other words, have you already learned Fire Arrow?"

"No, not yet."

“I see. Then first, you must learn Fire Arrow before we train. I shall teach you my abilities after that.”

What Mitis is saying is perfectly reasonable. If you can't create a magic bow with your specialty, you're never going to be able to learn a divine archery ability.

Mitis's eye creases even more deeply as she smiles.

“However, even if you are unable to acquire Fire Arrow, I am sure we can find something else in which to train you.”

A different kind of training...? What is she talking about...?

But Seiya shakes his head.

“No, I have to learn how to use a bow, or it'll be meaningless.”

He then turns to Elulu, who is standing behind him.

“You know how to use Fire Arrow, right?”

“Y-yep!”

“Teach me. Right now.”

“N-now?! I know you're talented, but I don't think it's something you can easily learn! It took me about a year!”

“Just teach me. We don't have time.”

“O-okay. First, extend your left hand...then imagine that the fire magic coming out of it symbolizes a bow...”

Elulu lets out a dry chuckle as she gives instruction.

“Don't worry about not being able to do it at first. It's normal. But after practicing hundreds, thousands of times, I'm sure you'll be able to—”

“Like this?”

However, a fiery bow is already materializing in Seiya's left hand.

“...Huh?”

Elulu's eyes open wide.

“B-but this is where things get difficult! Next, you need to materialize an arrow in your right— No way?!”

Seiya holds an arrow made out of fire in his right hand as he pulls back the fiery bowstring.

“B-b-but this is really, *really* where things get difficult! I’m sure you won’t be able to shoot the arrow even one meter, but don’t let that get you down. You just—”

Seiya aims the fire arrow into the sky and releases. It soars into the heavens before disappearing into the great blue yonder.

“H-h-hitting your target is *really* what’s difficult, though. Even I still can’t—”

The next arrow Seiya shoots hits a narrow tree, a few dozen meters ahead, right in the trunk, causing it to catch fire.

“I hit my target. This is easy.”

Following that, Seiya looks back at Mitis.

“Is this good enough?”

“Y-you are a quick learner, Hero—marvelously so.”

Mitis wears an astonished expression, but before long, her lips mirthfully curl upward.

“However, that is exactly why you were the chosen one. Very well. Let us begin training.”

Leaving Seiya behind in the forest, Mash, Elulu, and I return to the sanctuary. Of course, I don’t forget to cheer Elulu up on the way back.

“Aagh...! I’m sooo depressed!”

“Don’t let it get to you, Elulu! He’s an anomaly!”

Mash suddenly taps me on the shoulder.

“Hey, Rista, what should Elulu and I do while we’re here?”

“Hmm... Did Seiya say anything?”

“I asked him before leaving the forest, but he just said, ‘*How about you go to*

the cafeteria and have a snack or something?”

“W-wow... I don’t know why I expected anything different...”

“Yeah, there’s no way I’m just gonna sit around and eat snacks for the next three days. We wanna get stronger, too, you know? Anyway, is there any god you could introduce us to so we can train?”

“Hmm... Well, you trained with Cerceus last time, so how about training under Adenela? That would be the same order Seiya trained in as well.”

I recommend the Goddess of War, Adenela, who is a rank above Cerceus.

“Taking the same training path Master Seiya took...! Good idea! Let’s do it!”

“What about you, Elulu?”

“I don’t feel like training today... I’ll just eat snacks in the cafeteria...”

“O-okay! No need to rush! Let’s go get some macarons together!”

Setting aside Elulu’s training for tomorrow, I go out in search of Adenela, but when I arrive before her room underneath the sanctuary, the door is locked. Nobody answers when I knock, either. With no choice but to give up, I wander around the sanctuary with Mash until we run into the muscle-bound action figure, Cerceus.

“Yo, Cerceus!”

“Hey, Cerceus. Have you seen Adenela anywhere?”

His face changes color when he hears Mash and me cheerfully greet him.

“S-seeing that you two are here, does that mean the Hero is here, too?!”

“Yeah, but he’s training in the Divine Forest right now. Why do you ask?”

“Because Adenela is a mess! You know how she’s always been a little sick in the head, right? Well, now she’s even sicker thanks to that Hero of yours!”

...I completely forgot. Last time we came to the spirit world, Adenela cried tears of blood and made a scene at the courtyard because Seiya turned her down.

“S-so how is she right now?”

“Every day, she repeatedly mutters to herself: ‘S-S-S-Seiya. I-I-I’ll n-n-never forgive youuu. I’m going to k-k-k-kill you...’ The first time I heard her, I thought she was humming a hip-hop song or something.”

“I-it’s seriously that bad?!”

“Yeah, so watch your back. I’m serious. You never know when she might pop up...and shove a knife in your back.”

I shudder as Cerceus warns me with a dead-serious look on his face.

N-not only can I not have Mash train under her, I have to make sure we avoid her entirely!

I imagine Adenela sharpening a sword, her eyes overcome with insanity, as she quietly laughs to herself, *Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh...* A shiver shoots up my spine.

Darkness Intensifies

“I heard what happened. I tried to cheer her up, but she wouldn’t listen...,” Aria says before letting out a bitter laugh. I’d brought Mash and Elulu to her room to talk about Adenela.

“Hey, Aria, what do you think I should do? Do you think Great Goddess Ishtar could help me if I told her what happened?”

“Hmm... I don’t know about that... I mean, first Adenela was dumped, then she was scolded by Great Goddess Ishtar afterward. Getting the Great Goddess involved would be too cruel.”

“Yeah...I guess you’re right. But if, by any chance, she ever stabbed Seiya...”

“Oh, you and Cerceus have the wildest imaginations. Adenela would never do something like that. Even if she did by chance try something, Seiya will know what to do.”

Aria then takes a sip of her tea.

What?! Is it just me, or is Aria being a little too calm? What if something happens that we could have prevented? What if that gifted Hero is killed by not the enemy but a goddess? I have to make sure that doesn’t happen. I should probably find Adenela first so that we can have a long talk. Then I’ll tell Seiya to stay clear of Adenela...

Right as I’m coming up with a plan, the door to Aria’s room flies wide open.

“Master Seiya!”

“Oh...! Seiya!”

The Hero himself is standing at the doorway. I’m just as startled as they are.

“Seiya?! What are you doing here?! What happened to training?!”

“I’m taking a break, so I came here to talk to her.”

Seiya approaches Aria.

“You called yourself the Goddess of the Seal before, right? Is there any ability where you could seal away a monster for an eternity?”

Aria lowers her head to Seiya.

“I’m sorry, but I do not possess such an ability. I’m good at breaking seals, though...”

“All right. Got it.”

Huh? An ability to seal away monsters? Why would Seiya even ask her that?

While watching their exchange, it suddenly hits me.

O-ohhh! Seiya is looking for something to replace Igzasion. He’s searching for a way to defeat the Demon Lord since he couldn’t get the strongest weapon in Gaeabrande! Deep within my heart, I find myself proud of my cautious Hero, who is considering the big picture instead of obsessing with what’s in front of him. I just have to put these feelings into words.

“You’re amazing, Seiya! Even during your break, you’re trying to come up with ways to defeat the Demon Lord!”

Seiya instantly casts a piercing gaze at me. That’s when I realize I said something I shouldn’t have.

“Huh? A way to defeat the Demon Lord? But we have Igzasion.”

“Yeah, Ristie, what are you talking about?”

Mash and Elulu stare hard at me.

Ahhhhhh!! I’m such an idiot! Wh-what should I do?!

Before long, Seiya chimes in to help me.

“We don’t know what will happen during the final battle, so it’s only natural to search for another way to effectively attack the Demon Lord. Plus, if possible, I don’t plan on using Igzasion until then. Wouldn’t want to chip the blade.”

Elulu tilts her head to the side.

“I don’t know if it’ll chip... I mean, it’s the strongest weapon in the world...”

They both give dubious glares, but...

“Well, that’s my master for you! Always being cautious!”

“That’s so Seiya!”

A smile tugs Elulu’s lips.

Th-thank goodness! That would have sounded like the strangest excuse if it were anyone else, but it does sound like something that Seiya would do! Elulu and Mash seem to be persuaded at the very least!

Seiya points the sheathed Igzasion—the platinum sword-plus—at me.

“So, Rista, hold on to this for me.”

“O-okay... Ouch, ouch, ouch?!”

Seiya vigorously shoves the sheath into my chest as if he were saying, *You just had to open your mouth.*

“Gyaaaaaah! My boobs...! You’re crushing theeeeeem!”

Aria giggles.

“You two sure get along, don’t you?”

What?! This isn’t some heartwarming scene! He’s literally trying to crush my boobs!

“...I need to get back to training.”

Seiya turns on his heel after finally giving up on destroying my chest.

“Ugh! That hurt, you know!”

Rubbing my half-smooshed chest, I call out to the Hero before he leaves the room.

“Seiya! Watch out for Adenela!”

“Why?”

“She’s mad at you for being mean to her last time!”

“What did I do to her? I can’t remember.”

His expression is the epitome of indifference as he shuts the door. After Seiya

leaves the room, Mash lets out a sigh.

“*Sigh...* It doesn’t sound like that Adenela person is going to help me train, either... What am I gonna do now?”

“Let’s eat snacks together, Mash!”

“Dammit! Is eating snacks for the next three days really my only option?!”

That’s when Aria approaches Mash.

“Oh my... It seems you have a hidden power within you.”

“Are you talking about my ability Dragon God Metamorphosis? Yeah, I can apparently turn into a dragon if I really try, which is one of the reasons why I want to train more and raise my level...”

“Hmm, the limit seems similar to a seal. Would you like me to break it for you?”

“...! Seriously?! You can do that?!”

Even I’m surprised.

“Aria...! Are you sure you want to do that?! Do the spirit world rules even allow that?!”

“All I am going to do is unlock a power that he already has. It won’t be a problem. Besides, I am simply going to teach him how to do it. It isn’t something that can be done in a day, so this will be part of his training.”

If a high-level goddess like Aria says it’s okay, then it’s okay. I guess I can leave Mash to Aria, but Elulu...

As I stare at Elulu, she sends me an awkward smile.

“Don’t worry about me, Ristie! I’ll just hang out in the cafeteria and eat some sweets! I love sweets!”

Elulu seems to have lost some confidence after everything that’s happened.

Aria places a hand on her shoulder.

“You have great potential as well. I will be able to awaken this power within you. What do you say? Would you like to give it a try?”

"R-really?! There's even something I can do?! P-please help me...!"

I'm impressed. Aria could even sense the hidden power within Elulu as well. Seeing them so happy really lifts a weight off my shoulders. They're in good hands now.

I find myself slightly optimistic after leaving Aria's room. Maybe Aria was right about Cerceus overreacting, and Adenela probably isn't even that angry after all.

It's just a hunch I have.

But just in case, I walk down the sanctuary's stairs and head over to Adenela's room one more time to check on her. In the midst of the darkness, I knock on the wooden door at the end of the hall, but no one answers. Before leaving, though, I randomly decide to place a hand on the doorknob. It doesn't appear to be locked.

“H-hey, sorry for bothering you, but...”

I walk inside the dim, dull room, but when I look around, Adenela is nowhere in sight. Right when I'm about to give up and leave, a certain pattern on the left-hand wall catches my eye. There appears to be something written. Engulfed by the darkness, I approach the wall and squint, trying to make out the writing... and I freeze.

[illegible]

It's written in tiny letters and packed together. Her pent-up resentment for Seiya is painfully obvious! Th-this isn't good! I have to tell Aria! But the instant I turn around...

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh.”

Adenela is standing, hunched forward, right before my eyes.

“Eeeeeeeek!”

I fall to my knees. With bags under her eyes, Adenela leans in toward me as I sit paralyzed with fear.

“R-Ristarte, s-seeing that you’re here tells me th-that Seiya—heh-heh-heh-

heh-heh—m-must be back as well, right?”

“N-no, I came back myself this time! Seiya isn’t here!”

I promptly spit out a lie.

“O-oh, he isn’t? R-really?”

“R-r-really!”

“Th-then did you n-need me for something?”

“Nope! Don’t need a thing!”

I’m panicking so much that my lies are starting to not make sense.

“Th-then why are you in m-my room?”

Adenela regards me suspiciously, which causes me to panic even more.

“I-it’s, um... I just... I just wanted to see the inside of your room! I—I like looking at other people’s rooms! Wow, I like what you did with the place!”

“...R-really?”

For some time after that, Adenela and I stare in silence at the wall with “Kill” scrawled all over it.

“Aria, Aria, Aria! We’ve got trouble! This is bad! This is *really* bad!”

I frantically return to Aria’s room and cling to her.

“Take a deep breath, Rista. What happened?”

“Adenela...! Go to her room and see for yourself! She wrote ‘Kill’ all over one of the walls in her room! I was so shocked that I accidentally even told her she had a nice place for some reason!”

But Aria gently smiles.

“Oh, she didn’t write that because of Seiya. That’s always been there. It’s what they call street art.”

“*That’s* street art?! You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“At any rate, the wall has been like that for a long time now. You must not have noticed before, since her room is so dark.”

So she actually designed her room like that?! Unbelievable! Who does that?!

“You worry too much, Rista.”

“B-but, Aria...!”

Before I can argue any further, Aria sticks up her index finger with a “shhh.” I look to my side to find Mash and Elulu sitting on the floor with their legs crossed as if they are meditating.

“I’m having them deeply concentrate right now, so could you be a little quieter?”

“S-sorry.”

Not wanting to get in the way of their training, I reluctantly retire from Aria’s room.

Aria’s sweet. She probably thinks of both Adenela and me as little sisters. But...

But Adenela is a threat right now! My only choice is to protect Seiya myself!

The next day, Mitis and Seiya diligently continue their training in the Divine Forest.

“Seiya, the eye is what is most important in archery. Focus your attention on your eyes. Having vision that can see the enemy’s position from far away is important.”

Taking Mitis’s advice to heart, Seiya aims the arrow of light at a distant tree before shooting. He seems to have already mastered the magic bow of light. Seiya follows with a question next.

“Would it be possible to shoot multiple arrows at once?”

“Just because it’s a magic bow— No, because it is a magic bow, shooting requires mental concentration to the utmost extent. That is what gives it power and allows the arrow to shoot distances far greater than normal. Therefore, the most you could do is rapidly fire the shafts and mimic shooting multiple arrows at once. However, three shots in a row are the most a human would be able to shoot at that speed.”

Mitis points an arrow of light toward the sky. The moment she shoots, another magic arrow has already been formed in her hand. She immediately launches that one as well. She creates and discharges multiple light arrows one after another, but she's so quick that it looks like she shoots seven beams of light into the blue yonder.

"As you can see, even I can only shoot seven arrows in a row. If I use Order and am able to unlock my true powers, then I could perhaps shoot ten in a row, though..."

"Seven arrows, huh? Let's imagine you aimed those seven shots at an enemy. What's the possibility that they'd dodge?"

"If I use Shining Arrow, which surpasses all other magic arrows in both precision and firing range, and spread out all seven...then it would be absolutely impossible to dodge all seven of them. Such a monster doesn't exist."

"Are you sure?"

"I swear on my honor as the Goddess of Archery. It would be impossible."

Mitis breaks into a cheerful smile.

"In any case, rapidly shooting seven arrows in a row is beyond human boundaries."

"I was just asking."

After I wait under the shade of a tree for a while, Mitis bows to Seiya before disappearing into the depths of the woods. Looks like they're taking a break. I approach Seiya and hand him the lunch I made.

"So how's training going?"

"As planned. I should be able to master rapid-fire by tomorrow."

"Really? That's great. By the way, if possible, make sure not to go near the sanctuary until we leave tomorrow. Who knows what Adenela will do to you if she sees you."

"What do you mean?"

"I told you yesterday. She's pissed at you."

“You can’t tell me not to see her.”

“I mean, yeah, you’re free to do whatever you want, but I’d prefer it if you didn’t see her right now...okay? I’ll bring Mash and Elulu here tomorrow and create a gate, so we can return to Gaeabrande directly from here.”

“Rista, why are we even having this conversation?”

“What...? I’m just watching out for you so that you don’t run into her.”

“You’re not making any sense.”

Seiya points to the area behind me.

“Adenela’s been behind you the entire time.”

...*What?*

I slowly look back.

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh.”

Adenela is ominously grinning so closely behind me that I can almost feel her breathing.

“Gyaaaaaaah!”

I scream, then my legs give out from under me just like yesterday, causing me to drop to my knees!

“Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh. I knew y-you would never come back all b-by yourself, so I’ve b-been following you e-ever since you left the sanctuary...”

After saying that in an amused manner, Adenela slides the sword from the sheath at her waist.

“A-Adenela?! P-please control yourself!”

“I—I can’t. I will never f-forgive that m-m-man.”

Her long, messy black hair begins standing on end like a Japanese ogress out for revenge. She lowers her hips while facing Seiya.

I-I’ve seen this stance before! This is the stance for Eternal Sword! She’s really planning on fighting Seiya...!

“D-draw your sword, Seiya. I-I’m going to show y-you the real Eternal

Sword...!”

Bloodlust radiates from her body, ready to explode at any second. Seiya, however, looks as indifferent as ever.

“Long time no see, Adenela. How have you been?”

Both Adenela and I are taken aback by his greeting.

“Wh-what do you think y-you’re doing? What you did to me was u-unspeakable. I will never f-f-forgive you.”

“Your hair is damaged.”

Seiya defenselessly approaches Adenela, then touches her hair as it stands straight up.

“Wh-what do you th-think you’re—?”

“S-Seiya?! Watch out! She’s going to stab you!”

But Seiya simply strokes Adenela’s head affectionately, as if he were petting a cat.

“S-s-stop. I-I’m going to m-make you pay...”

But even then, Seiya doesn’t stop, and before long, her hair slowly softens before returning back to normal.

“Yes. That’s a good girl.”

“Seiya...! Cut it out!”

I jerk Seiya over by the arm, stopping his reckless behavior. Then I look at Adenela, who is faintly shaking.

“I-I’ll never f-f-f-forgive you...”

Ack! She’s furious! How am I going to stop her?!

However, Adenela just stares at the ground as she mutters: “I—I...f-f-forgive... you...”

“...What?”

It wasn’t my imagination, though. After doing a complete one-eighty, Adenela lifts her head. Her eyes, once burning with bloodlust, have transformed into

hearts as if she were in love.

“...! What happened to never forgiving him?!”

“I d-don’t know, but I c-completely forgive him now... In fact...I’m in l-love...!”

The sword drops to the ground, and Adenela wraps her arm around Seiya until Mitis returns. Seiya suddenly casts a piercing glare at Adenela.

“Adenela, I need to train now, so stop being an eyesore and go annoy someone else.”

“O-okay. I l-love you...!”

...?! Did she even hear the awful things he just said?! Did the head pats make her so happy she doesn’t even realize he’s insulting her?!

From under a tree, Adenela watches over Seiya in rapt admiration as he trains. I regard her disdainfully until I suddenly remember what Aria said.

“Seiya will know what to do.”

Sh-she was right. *Huh, Aria understands Seiya even better than I do...*

I feel so stupid for getting all worked up over nothing, and my body turns into jelly. I limply plop myself down next to Adenela.

...Little did I know that true fear was lurking just around the corner...



Nympho

“I told you he’d be fine, didn’t I?”

“I feel stupid for worrying.”

The next day, I stand before Aria’s room as she smiles after hearing what happened.

“You can say whatever you want about Adenela, but she’s still a goddess. She would never take the life of a human who was summoned. Besides, Seiya can take care of himself for the most part.”

Sigh. Aria’s better than me at everything. But...even then...

“Why do you understand Seiya so much better than me, even though I’ve spent more time with him? It’s frustrating...”

I’m just venting, but Aria begins stressing her words for some reason.

“Th-that’s because you always talk to me about him, you know?! Telling me he’s cautious and strong and whatnot! That’s why I knew he would be able to figure something out!”

“O-oh yeah. That makes sense.”

“More importantly, check out Elulu and Mash! I’ll show you how much their training has paid off!”

Aria reaches for the doorknob and opens the door. Then she calls out to Mash and Elulu, who are quietly sitting while they train.

“Hey, Mash! Show Rista what you learned!”

Mash is slightly startled by the sudden voice, but he stands and extends his right hand in my direction. My bewilderment is short-lived, as Mash’s right hand gradually transforms! The transformation is different from that of the other dragonewts, though. Mash is still a human, and only his right hand has changed,

into a massive dragon claw covered in scales.

“A-Aria?! What’s going on?!”

“Part of the Dragon God Metamorphosis’s seal has been broken through mental concentration. The dragon claw has raised his attack power considerably.”

“Whatcha think, Rista? Pretty cool, huh?!”

Seeing Mash brimming with confidence with his newly found skill brings me so much joy.

“Yeah, it’s amazing! Good job, Mash!”

“Heh!”

“Your giant dragon hand doesn’t fit the rest of your body, so it’s kind of gross...but I’m really proud of you!”

“Hey?! Whaddaya mean ‘gross’?!”

“Ristie! It’s not gross! If you just look at his hand, it’s really cool! But I guess as a whole...it’s a little...”

“‘It’s a little’ what?! Say it!”

“Come on, you two. Don’t be like that. Mash was able to learn his special ability, Laughably Large Right Hand, in a short period of time solely due to his hard work.”

“Hey! Are you making fun of me, too?!”

Elulu places a hand on Mash’s shoulder before he bursts with rage.

“Now, now, Mash. Relax.”

But for some reason, Elulu maliciously smirks, albeit faintly. Following, Mash says: “Whaaat dooo youuu thiiink yooou’re doooing?”

...What? Why is Mash talking funny all of a sudden?

“Eluluuu! Youuu liiittle...! Geeet baaack heeere!”

He tries to grab Elulu, but he moves like an old person.

I-is this what I think it is?!

Aria smiles.

“This is Delay, a support spell that slows down your opponent’s movement.”

“W-wait. Does that mean that Elulu’s hidden talent was support magic?!”

“Yes.”

Finally caught by Mash, Elulu apologizes.

“I—I said I’m sorry! I’ll turn you back to normal, so please forgive me, Mash!”

She touches his shoulder once more, and he instantly starts moving around nonstop.

“CutItOut!NowI’mWayTooFastHurryUpAndTurnMeBackToNormalOrI’mNever GonnaTalkToYouAgainOrEatWithYouOrListenToYouYouJerk!”

Flailing his arms and legs around, Mash machine-gun talks without even taking a second to breathe.

N-now she used Haste! She learned Delay’s opposite spell, too!

Aria pats Elulu on the head as if deeply moved.

“This ability is something you acquired through your environment. I am sure your wish to help everyone is what gave you this power. It’s truly beautiful.”

“Hee-hee!”

Elulu is glowing.

As she should be! Both Delay and Haste are powerful tools that will surely help Seiya! I’m happy for you, Elulu!

After Haste wears off and Mash turns back to normal, Elulu profusely apologizes as he sulks. Wearing a serious expression, Aria says: “Come back again next time. I am sure Mash will learn how to completely turn into a dragon and Elulu will be able to learn even more support magic.”

“We’ll be back!”

“Yeah! Thank you so much!”

I gaze at Aria in admiration.

“I would have left them with you from the start if I knew this would happen!”

As I start to regret that I might have done things the hard way and not the smart way...

“No time or effort was wasted. Only because they have had various experiences were their talents able to bloom.”

“You really think so? *Phew...* Anyway, I feel pretty confident about this next battle, now that Mash and Elulu are stronger and Seiya’s archery training is going smoothly!”

Aria suddenly freezes in response to my casual chatter.

“‘Archery’...?! Rista, don’t tell me that Seiya is learning archery from Mitis right now!”

“Of course he is! There’s only one Goddess of Archery, is there not?”

All of a sudden, Aria grabs me by the shoulders and yells:

“How could you be so stupid! You don’t know how frightening she can be!”

Her face turns completely pale. It’s hard to believe this is the same person who was so calm and collected when I was panicking about Adenela.

“Wh-what?! Even more frightening than Adenela?!”

“You cannot even compare the two! Do you know why she’s in the Divine Forest? Because she kidnapped every summoned Hero one by one and used them to satisfy her sexual urges! Great Goddess Ishtar sent her to the forest to calm her down! Bringing men to that forest is taboo!”

“What?! Y-you’re kidding, right?! If that’s true, then why did you keep bringing me to that forest to have picnics?!”

“Because we’re goddesses! *Sigh...* What are we going to do?!”

“B-but nothing strange has happened so far! They’re just training! I’m sure Mitis has changed her ways and—”

“Mitis knows today’s Seiya’s last day of training, right?! I bet she was saving herself for this moment, and she’s about to explode!”

“O-oh no...!”

“You know it’s absolutely prohibited for a goddess and a human to have

sexual intercourse, right?! You won't be able to save Gaeabrande anymore! You have to make sure he doesn't blow it!"

"Tell that to Mitis!"

"Rista...?! This is no time for jokes! Go get Seiya! Hurry!"

"O-okay!!"

I fly out of Aria's room.

"R-Rista, wait!"

"Ristie...! We'll come with you!"

Mash and Elulu follow behind me. I think about just how severe the situation is as I run.

That one-in-a-billion talented Hero is going to have sex with a goddess, and then it'll all be over?! No, I won't let it end like this! At the very least, it should be me that he— Ack! What am I thinking?! At any rate, I'm not going to let Mitis have her way with him!

After sprinting all the way to the training area as fast as we could, Elulu, Mash, and I witness a horrific sight. Hanging from a thick branch of the largest tree is Mitis. Beneath the goddess, whose entire body is wrapped in rope, stands Seiya.

"S-Seiya?! What's going on?!"

"Don't ask me. She told me to meet her here in ten minutes, but when I got here, she was like this."

"...Hee-hee-hee."

I suddenly hear laughter from above. Hanging from the tree, Mitis begins to speak.

"Seiya, this is your final rapid-fire test. You must shoot three light arrows at the exact same spot on this special rope tied around me, or it will not snap. Your target is the rope over my head."

Ohhh! So this was just part of his training! But why did she tie herself to the branch?

“If you successfully cut through the rope, my bonds will come undone as well, leaving me completely exposed as I fall to the ground. From there, you are to catch my nude body and make passionate love to me. This shall be your reward for passing the test.”

“...! Does this goddess have no shame?!”

I shudder, taken aback by how she could say such a thing with a straight face. Aria is right. She’s a total nympho! What are you going to do, Seiya?! If you shoot her down, then all that awaits is an unwanted reward! Maybe we should just leave her! B-but I feel like that might come back to bite us in the long run, too!

“I have patiently waited...and waited...and waited these past three days, for Seiya’s beauty has pushed my libido beyond climax.”

Despite restricting her own freedom by tying herself to a tree, Mitis wears an expression burning with ecstasy.

“Now come, Seiya! *Shoot* through the rope with your arrows, so you can shoot your load into me!”

Sh-shoot his *what*?! This goddess is a real creep!

“Seiya! What are you going to do?!”

“There’s only one thing to do.”

Seiya materializes a magic bow of light without even a second’s hesitation! He’s aiming it at Mitis!

“Y-you’re going to shoot the rope?! But if you do that, then Mitis is going to jump you! And she’ll be naked! Are you sure about this?!”

“There’s nothing to worry about.”

Thereupon, Seiya immediately fires the arrow of light at an incredible speed... but he doesn’t hit the rope over her head. Instead, it hits Mitis right between the eyes!

What...? Whaaaaaat?! D-did he just shoot a goddess right through the head?!

“Oh...! Fff...”

Mitis groans oddly. The arrow of light is stuck between her eyebrows and is protruding through the back of her head!

The grotesque sight gives me shivers throughout my body.

What kind of person shoots a goddess in the head just because they know goddesses won't die?! This goddess might be crazy, but this Hero isn't so normal, either!

However, Mitis opens her narrow eyes wide and stares at Seiya.

"You mustn't play games with me, Seiya... Hmph!"

Exerting her strength, the nymphomaniac goddess snaps the ropes constraining her and drops to the ground, entirely disrobed.

"Hee-hee... If needed, I could have escaped from these bonds whenever I wanted to."

Her sexy hourglass figure causes Mash's face to turn completely red.

"Wh-whoaaa!"

"Mash, don't look!"

Elulu covers Mash's eyes with both hands. Following that, Mitis grabs the light arrow sticking through her head.

"This was supposed to be rapid-fire practice. You are going to fail the test at this rate."

Then she slides the arrow out of her head. The gaping hole between her eyes immediately begins to heal.

"You'll need to take a makeup test."

"A-a makeup test...?"

Still stark naked, Mitis gets into a crouching position to sprint.

"Seiya! I am going to attack you and have my way with you! If you wish to stop me, utilize the rapid-fire technique I taught you! This is an important part of training!"

No, I don't think this kind of training exists!

There are so many things wrong that I want to point out. But before I get the chance, Mitis dashes forward, utilizing her arms and legs like a wild animal. The lustful goddess's hair violently flutters in the wind as she charges, but the Hero doesn't even blink! Seiya calmly gets into a fighting stance, aims the bow at Mitis, and draws the arrow. His gallant pose is reminiscent of a statue of a god. Seiya releases the shaft as if renouncing all worldly desires. Before I even realize it, the arrows of light have already pierced Mitis's eyes and mouth without even making a sound!

"Uwooooh!"

With an arrow that starts from her mouth and goes all the way down to her throat, Mitis instantly stops in her tracks and groans. Then Seiya mutters by my side: "Shining Arrow!"

Ooo! These are the fruits of his efforts! A three-shot rapid-fire magic bow of light attack! B-but...! The goddess who taught him that has magic arrows sticking out of her eyes and mouth!

Eek! The horror! It's so gross! I can't look...! B-but now Mitis can't see anything, either!

However, my relief vanishes with a passing moment. Mitis begins chewing the light arrow in her mouth, crunching it into little pieces before swallowing. Despite both of her eyes being pierced, she lowers her posture and begins charging like a beast once more! Laughing like a maniac, she plunges toward Seiya!

"Oo-hee-hee-hee-hya-hya-hya! Goddesses...can't...dieeeeeee! This isn't enough to stop meeeeeee!"

"What the...?! Even with those arrows sticking out of her eyes...?!"

Mitis continues barreling toward Seiya without slowing down in the slightest. Trembling as the shrieking, nude monster swiftly approaches, Elulu screams: "I-I'm scared! Is that really a goddess?!"

"She looks like one of the Demon Lord's goons!"

The instant Mash mutters that, Mitis suddenly changes directions! She's heading straight for Mash!

“Wh-what?! She’s going after Mash?!”

“I shall save the main dish for later and start off with an appetizer! As long as there is grass on the field...!”

What kind of goddess says something like that aloud?! The spirit world is no place for that kind of talk!

“I’ll be on you in three seconds! I shall tear off your clothes within one, have my way with you in two, and finish you off by the third!”

“Ahhhhhh! M-Master...! Help me!”

Nobody could have suspected this would happen! Wh-what are we going to do?!

However, Seiya points an arrow right at Mitis just moments before she attacks.

“I figured you might go after Mash instead of me, given your excessive libido.”

Instantaneously, multiple arrows shoot out of Seiya’s hand one after another like beams of energy. When they strike Mitis...

“Guuuboooooooo?!”

She lets out a scream beyond description before slamming into a huge tree trunk behind her. I stare hard at Mitis in utter astonishment. The backs of her hands, ankles, and heart are all skillfully pierced with arrows of light like wedges.

Sure of his victory, Seiya makes the magic bow disappear before musing: “Five-Shot Shining Arrow!”

Despite being crucified like a criminal, Mitis suggestively grins from ear to ear.

“N-no longer...can I move...! Not only did you predict my moves...but you—a human—rapidly fired five light arrows in a row...! Bravo...! What a beautiful...display...!”

After the sex-crazed goddess’s head droops down, Seiya slowly turns. Then, bathing in the crimson evening sun with the stark-naked goddess nailed to the tree in the background, Seiya eloquently states: “I’m perfectly prepared.”

“...?!”

As I watch the surreal scene, mouth agape, the perverted goddess suddenly regains consciousness and begins panting.

“Hff... Hff... It’s like my entire body is being penetrated by something thick and long... Hff... Hff...”

Elulu taps me on the arm.

“H-hey, Ristie...? What is Mitis talking about?”

Mash nods in agreement as well.

“Yeah, why is she panting with a smile on her face after being shot with five arrows?”

“D-don’t look! Mash, Elulu, we have to get out of here! Let’s go back to Gaeabrande!”

I cannot let these two innocent kids watch this filth any longer, so I create a gate to Olga Fortress. Then, holding their hands as if I am their guardian, I leap through the gate with Seiya.

Swatting Flies

“Phew... What a sick, twisted, vulgar goddess... Huh?”

Just when I thought we could catch our breath after running away from Eros, the other side of the gate is chaos. Waiting for us outside my gate before Olga Fortress, soldiers are frantically running around, as is the elderly soldier Carlo, who rushes over the moment he sees us.

“Oh, you’re back! I—I need your help! It appears Madam Rosalie went to the flies’ nest alone!”

What?! She really did it?! Even after we told her to wait?! And she went alone, at that! How reckless can you be?!

“We have to go after her!”

“Sir Bhat and his men have already gotten on their horses and gone after her, but we can still catch up if we leave now!”

Carlo and I are panicking, but...

“Relax. Everything is going according to plan.”

Seiya, on the other hand, is perfectly composed.

“Judging by her personality, it was easy to predict she’d do something like this. It hasn’t even been an hour since we left, so she won’t have run into Beel Bub yet.”

“B-but there are massive scout flies circling the giant tree that their nest is in! She might be attacked by them...!”

“Don’t worry. I’ll catch up with her in no time.”

And just like that, Seiya begins to gently levitate. While floating in the air, he glances my way.

“Come on, Rista. We’re flying.”

After getting the location of the nest from Carlo, Seiya and I take flight, carrying Mash and Elulu, respectively. Following Seiya, I do my best to keep up with his blistering speed. A colossal tree a few dozen meters wide eventually starts coming into view.

Due to the countless number of giant flies, the tree serving as their nest has become a jet-black wood perch. Scout flies are patrolling the surrounding skies just like Carlo said they would. Getting close isn’t going to be easy. In fact, there are already a few scout flies lurking around here, despite being relatively far from their base.

Before the scout flies notice us, Seiya turns around and gives me the signal without saying a word. I nod, then descend shortly after him before landing in a grove with a cluster of trees. Seiya looks up at the sky while silently walking past the few meter-tall trees until he comes to a sudden stop.

“Hmm. This spot should do. It’s hard to see from above, and we have a sweeping view of their nest.”

Just like he said, we have an extensive view of the giant tree they use as their base, but at the same time, I can’t believe what I see.

“Huh?!”

Someone is heading straight for the nest, which is swarming with countless buzzing flies. It’s a woman with azure hair and gold-inlaid armor: the Warmaster’s daughter, Rosalie.

Ack! How reckless...! But in a way, it’s so brave...!

The giant flies keep an eye on the intruder, but they cannot approach her. After a closer look, I notice a pale aura of light emitting from Rosalie’s body. I checked her status once earlier, but it looks like she’s using the special ability Light’s Blessing to ward off the weaker flies.

Nevertheless, before long, the swarm surrounding Rosalie splits into two and makes way...for the Aerial Assault Flies’ leader—Beel Bub. The tension causes my heart to race, but Seiya sounds as calm as always.

“She turned out to be a good decoy. I can snipe Beel Bub from here.”

When I look back in disbelief, Seiya has already materialized Shining Arrow.

“‘Snipe’...? D-don’t tell me...you knew this was going to happen, too? You... expected Rosalie to get angry and head toward their nest?”

“Flies are easy to swat when they’re preoccupied with food, after all,” Seiya casually remarks as Mash and Elulu squint behind him.

“Man, I can’t see a thing...”

“M-me neither...”

It seems ordinary humans’ eyesight isn’t good enough to see Rosalie or Beel Bub from here. Seiya’s vision must have considerably improved during his training with Mitis.

“We don’t have much time. Look over there.”

Seiya points at a swarm of scout flies gathering in the sky above.

“Eek! But why...?”

“Flies have an exceptional sense of smell. They must have smelled Rista’s goddess stench.”

“...! What do you mean ‘goddess stench’?! Are you implying I smell?!”

I sniff my armpits. I don’t think they smell...but I have to make sure just in case.

“Hey, Mash! Elulu! I don’t smell, right?!”

“Y-yeah, you don’t smell *that* bad!”

“Y-yeah! It doesn’t really bother me at all!”

“...?! Wait! So I do smell a little?! What kind of smell is it?! Come on, tell me!”

“Shut up. They’re going to find us if you don’t be quiet.”

Seiya then points the magic light bow in Beel Bub’s direction.

“I only have one chance. I’ll aim for the head.”

“C-can you do it?”

“I won’t miss.”

What confidence! If Seiya is that confident, then I’m sure he’ll be able to do it! Beel Bub will be dead before we know it! It’s going to be an anticlimactic end to the battle, but I guess that’s what sniping is all about!

But out of nowhere, we are unexpectedly ambushed. Galloping into the grove comes Rosalie’s right-hand man, Bhat, and a few dozen of his men on horses.

“Oh, hey!! If it isn’t the Hero! I had no idea you were already here!”

The flies soaring above all stop in unison in reaction to his deafening cry.

“K-keep your voice down! The flies are going to find us!”

Elulu scolds them, but she’s loud, too.

“What?! How could I be so stupid! I am terribly sorry about that!”

Bhat apologizes even more loudly than before, triggering Mash to panic and turn to Seiya.

“M-Master! The flies are heading this way!”

“Relax. I can still snipe.”

Seiya remains calm, even after being interrupted by our allies and spotted by the flies overhead. His magic bow is still aimed at Beel Bub.

“...I expected this to happen.”

“Seriously?!”

It’s a little hard to believe, but it’s probably true if Seiya says so.

But at the very next moment, standing before Beel Bub near the enemy’s base in the distance, Rosalie shouts in a voice so loud that we can hear her from here.

“I am the daughter of the Warmaster, Rosalie Roseguard! Beel Bub, I challenge you to a duel!”

Ack! Sh-she told them who she was?! What in the world has gotten into her?!

Just then, Seiya’s nose appears to twitch slightly.

“Seiya?!”

“...It’s fine. I expected this to happen. Yep.”

“Wait! Why did you add a ‘yep’ at the end?! You don’t have to force yourself! You can be honest with me if you want!”

Seiya lets out a sigh, then gradually lowers the magic bow to his waist.

I—I figured this was unexpected... He’s so stubborn...

That’s when Beel Bub starts hauling Rosalie away.

“Y-you bastard! What is the meaning of this! L-let me go!”

How didn’t she see this coming? Of course you’re going to be taken hostage if you tell them you’re the emperor’s daughter!

But even if we want to save her, we have our own problems to deal with now. Ten giant scout flies have surrounded us.

When I turn to Seiya for guidance, he’s looking right back at me as well. Then, without saying a word, he begins aggressively poking my breasts with his sheath.

“Gyaaah! That hurts! My tiiits! They’re gonna cave iiiin! Don’t take your frustration out on me!”

“I’m not. Rista, go.”

“Huh?”

“I’m telling you to fly. Get over there before they take that stupid woman away.”

...A-all by myself?

“I’ll catch up after taking care of these flies. Until then, buy us some time.”

“Wh-what...?! Even if I do somehow catch up with them, how do you expect me to slow Beel Bub down?!”

“Hmm... Say, *Nice weather we’re having today.*”

“‘Nice weather we’re having today’?! Is that really going to work?!”

“In any event, don’t take your eyes off Rosalie. That’s all you need to remember.”

“F-fine! I’ll do it!”

With grim determination, I spread my wings and take to the air when a giant, grotesque fly’s face appears right in front of me!

“Eeep?!”

But by the time it tries to grab me, Seiya has already put a magic arrow through its head.

“I’ll open a path for you, so don’t worry. Now go, balloon woman.”

“O-okay! Thanks! ...Wait! Who are you calling ‘balloon woman’?!” I yell as I take off alone, chasing after Beel Bub and the kidnapped Rosalie.

Heading north, Beel Bub holds Rosalie tightly in its arms as she struggles. Noticing me, it grimaces and laughs, “Bzz, bzz, bzz!”

“Heh-heh-heh! Well, look what we have here! Those white wings—you’re a goddess from another dimension! Which means that the Hero has finally made his appearance!”

“Yeah, and I have a message from him! Let her go this instant!”

“No problem! After all, I was just planning on using her to lure the Hero out! I have no use for her anymore!”

I inwardly chuckle to myself.

Seiya won’t be able to shoot while you’re holding her! So hurry up and let her go so I can catch her! After that, you’re dead meat!

“Bzz, bzz, bzz, bzz! I’m going to become one of the four generals once I kill the Hero!”

However...contrary to what it said, Beel Bub ascends even higher without releasing Rosalie.

“Huh?! H-hey...!”

I’m taken aback but pursue Beel Bub.

“You said you would let her go!”

“I am! Right after I fly a little higher! Gotta celebrate the Hero’s defeat with

some amazing reverse fireworks!”

Wh-what did it just say?!

“Stop right there!”

But Beel Bub only continues to fly higher. I somehow manage to keep up as it soars toward the heavens at an incredible rate until eventually coming to a sudden stop, flapping its wings in place.

“What do you think?! Quite the view, huh?! Your body would literally explode when it hits the ground from this high up! Splat! I can only imagine the beauty!”

Even then, Rosalie cries out with strength in her voice:

“You’re despicable! Apologize right now for what you did to my men!”

“Huh? Do you understand the situation you’re in? You’ll be meeting them soon enough!”

“Gr...!”

Unable to move and seething with rage, Rosalie grinds her teeth, then fixes her gaze on me.

“Hey!! What happened to the Hero?! Where is he?! Did he not leave to train?!”

“Y-you idiot!”

Beel Bub quizzically tilts its head.

“Hmm? Training, you say? Is he going to try to shoot me with a bow and arrow from the surface, by any chance?”

C-can things get any worse?! It saw right through our plan! Why does this woman always say things that put her at even more of a disadvantage?!

“Looks like I’ll just have to fly even higher before I let her go!”

Thereupon, Beel Bub begins ascending once more with Rosalie in its arms. I try to go after them, but no matter how high they go, there is no sign of them stopping.

J-just how high is it going to take her?!

I suddenly glance down while chasing them and turn completely pale. All I can see below is a sea of clouds. The surface visible between them looks no bigger than a tiny speck of dust.

You've got to be kidding me! Even a magic bow won't be able to reach this high! More importantly, does Seiya even know where we are?!

Beel Bub eventually stops when we've reached an elevation where it's hard to breathe. Then, with a note of amusement in its voice...

"Bzz, bzz, bzz! Not even a magic arrow will be able to hit me this high up! Now, let's see you gloriously splatter!"

Beel Bub starts to unhand Rosalie but then glances at me and buzzes in laughter.

"Oh yeah! I'm gonna have to throw as hard as I can so the goddess can't catch her!"

Shit, shit, shit, shit! Beel Bub has predicted every single one of our moves! I'd be able to catch her if it just dropped her but not if it throws her!

"Y-you cowardly monster! Return to the surface and fight me one-on-one with honor!"

Beel Bub lifts Rosalie over its head, ready to throw her at any second.

Ahhhhhh! What am I going to do?! O-oh yeah...!

Seiya's advice replays in the back of my head, and I decide to give it a try.

"N-nice weather we're having, huh?"

A brief moment of silence goes by before Beel Bub responds, annoyed.

"...What are you doing?"

Yeah, what am I doing?! Have I lost my mind?! Ahhh! I can't save her! Seiya, do something!!

...Just then, I see a faint light out of the corner of my eye. A ray arises from the sea of clouds below before instantly passing by my ear without making a sound.

"Uwooooh...!"

Beel Bub softly moans...while gradually falling off-balance. Instead of launching Rosalie into the ground, its hands unconsciously let go of her. Gravity begins drawing Rosalie back down to the surface, but...

“Rosalie...!”

I immediately reach out to her. The moment she touches my hand, I pull her straight into my arms.

Ack! Her armor is heavy! B-but I managed to catch her! I don't take my eyes off her for even a second, just like Seiya told me!

“...I-I'm sorry,” Rosalie whispers in my ear, but I'm more focused on trying to process what just happened.

...That must have been Shining Arrow! The magic arrow made it all the way up here! So Beel Bub must have been startled and accidentally let go of Rosalie! Anyway, I can't believe he was able to reach this height. It's almost as if he used a sniper rifle with an enhanced scope—no, it was even more precise than that!

I'm moved by Seiya's talent, but still, I gulp.

“Hey now, you've gotta be kidding me. A magic bow? Even though I'm this high? That's impossible...”

More surprising than the arrow reaching this far up is that Beel Bub was able to dodge it...

Sniper

Beel Bub lowers its gaze in the direction from which the light arrow came, then cautiously mentions: “I’ve done a lot of research about magic arrows. You could say it’s the only thing humans can use to oppose me, after all... But something’s not right.”

“What do you mean ‘something’s not right’?!” I yell out to it while holding Rosalie in my arms.

“I wasn’t just randomly flying up. I was doing so with magic bows’ effective range in mind. I don’t care how far light arrows can go. There is no way it should have made it this high from the surface. Plus, not even magic arrows can completely ignore air resistance.”

“Hmph! Do you want me to tell you why the arrow made it this far? It’s because Seiya is a Hero of extraordinary talent that’s one in a billion!”

After a few moments of silence, Beel Bub finally opens its mouth.

“...Lucifer Crowe.”

“Wh-what...?”

“It’s the name of a legendary demon who existed in Gaeabrande long ago. They say Crowe could shoot a magic arrow from the Aness Plains to the top of Mount Glastora. But from the surface to where we are is much farther than Crowe’s magic bow’s effective range.”

“Th-that’s because Seiya is far more gifted than any demon—”

“Wait, wait, wait. That’s a little hard to imagine. I mean, Lucifer Crowe’s a legend. For the sake of argument, even if he was somehow as good as Crowe, there is no way a human would ever be able to surpass a demon. And yet, his arrow made it all the way here and with force, too.”

“Just get to the point! What are you trying to say?!”

Beel Bub lets out an ear-wrenching, roaring laugh.

“There’s only one conclusion possible! The Hero shot that arrow while flying, and he’s closing in on us as we speak!”

“What...?!”

The fly monster points at the sea of clouds below with its pointy hand.

“Just like a hunter crouching in the bushes, he’s hiding somewhere inside this vast sea of clouds! Wait. Actually, he’s probably moving around while concealing himself to make it harder to find him!”

I-it’s just a stupid fly, yet it’s calmly analyzing the situation just like Seiya!

Taken aback by Beel Bub’s surprising intelligence, I glance at the blurred surface in the distance and clench my teeth.

It’s probably spot-on with its analysis of the situation! There is no other way to explain the precision and power of the arrow that almost hit Beel Bub! After taking care of the flies on the surface, Seiya must have noticed that we were out of his magic bow’s effective range, so he flew after us! Then he must have hidden in the clouds somewhere just like Beel Bub said...!

“Hey, Goddess! Do you know what this means? I am the fastest being in the sky in the Demon Lord’s army! There is nobody who can defeat me in the air! In other words, he will have no way to defeat me once I find him! The moment I do is the moment he dies!”

I put on a bold face, but my heart is violently hammering against my chest.

Wh-what are you going to do, Seiya?! You’ll be in serious trouble if you miss!

Beel Bub looks down and taunts Seiya in a powerful voice.

“Yo, Hero! Show me what you’ve got! I won’t run or hide!”

The monster talks a big game, but it’s paying close attention to the clouds so it’s ready for Seiya’s arrow. I secretly use my goddess powers, increasing my dynamic vision. Then I survey the clouds below. Rosalie looks up at me as I hold her in my arms.

“Goddess! Is the Hero going to be okay?! Can he beat that thing?!”

“I-it’ll be fine! Seiya said he was perfectly prepared! He’s going to win! Of course he’s going to win!”

...But a few moments go by and nothing happens. The silence slowly drifts along like the clouds below. Just when I am about to relax, though...the inside of a cloud illuminates continually in the distance! Immediately, I notice something about the luminous points reflecting in my eyes...

S-seven points?! That means there are seven arrows! This is... Don’t tell me it’s...!

“Seven-Shot Shining Arrow!”

This is what makes him one in a billion! Despite being human, he’s already at the Goddess of Archery’s level! And Mitis said that if you use Shining Arrow and spread out all seven arrows...then it would be absolutely impossible to dodge—such a monster doesn’t exist! The luminous points I see in the sea of clouds are all over the place! I bet he calculated and spread his shots so he would hit Beel Bub’s head, arms, legs, and wings! There’s no way to dodge this! It’s like a human trying to dodge a shotgun fired point-blank! It isn’t possible!

I am sure of our victory, but...

“Bzz, bzz, bzz! Rolling Dodge!”

With my goddess-enhanced dynamic vision, I see Beel Bub twist its body like an acrobat before spinning and dodging each ray of light, in spite of them traveling faster than the speed of sound.

Rosalie freaks out even before I do.

“I-it dodged all of them?!”

“Th-that’s impossible...!”

Th-th-this can’t be happening! The Goddess of Archery gave this seven-shot rapid-fire attack her stamp of approval, and yet...!

So this is what it means to be an S-ranked world! The difficulty is beyond the common sense of the gods!

And with that, a sense of despair hangs heavily over my shoulders. The once boundless sea of clouds slowly opens...right where the powerful magic arrows were shot, and before long, the sky is crystal clear. Just as Beel Bub predicted, soaring there is the Hero holding a bow of light.

“There you are, Hero!”

Th-this isn't good! Seiya is at a huge disadvantage in close combat in the sky! B-Beel Bub is going to kill him...!

Beel Bub instantly speeds in Seiya's direction as if planning to tear a defenseless human apart. But out of nowhere, the monster suddenly vomits a purple liquid.

“Gwa...ha...!”

“Huh?! Wh-what's going on?!”

It looks like Beel Bub has no idea what just happened, either. However, it doesn't take me long to figure out.

There's a gaping hole in its stomach! After a slight delay, copious amounts of purple liquid begin pouring out of its body!

Before I even realize it, six birds are flying around Beel Bub. They're similar to the Automatic Phoenixes Seiya creates using fire magic, but they're moderately different. These are brilliantly shining birds of light.

Beel Bub coughs up another pint of purple liquid.

“L-light magic birds...! Where did those come from...?!”

Seiya must have created them, and one of them must have torn through Beel Bub's stomach! B-but when did he conjure six birds out of light magic? ...W-wait! Six birds? If you count the one that drilled through Beel Bub's body and self-destructed, then that makes seven in total—the same number of arrows Beel Bub just dodged! It all makes sense now! After Beel Bub dodged Seven-Shot Shining Arrow, the arrows transformed into Garudas! Then they must have flown back and attacked Beel Bub when its guard was down! In other words...

“Transform: Automatic Garuda!”

Beel Bub probably realizes now what Seiya's strategy was.

“You...little piece of...!”

The monster’s utterance drips with spite, but those end up being Beel Bub’s final words. As the demon starts slowing down, the birds of light ram into it, exploding at an ultrahigh temperature and emitting a blinding flash. The only thing before me when the light fades is Beel Bub’s charred remains as they plummet to the surface.

...My entire body is riddled with goose bumps.

Wh-what is with this Hero?! He isn’t satisfied just learning the divine skill Seven-Shot Shining Arrow, despite it apparently being an impossible feat for humans? He even considered what to do if all the arrows missed?! Even though Mitis said no monster would be able to dodge the attack?! I mean, what kind of person would doubt the Goddess of Archery?! I-it’s like... It’s like he doesn’t even listen!

Floating in the distance, Seiya watches Beel Bub drop to the surface, but without showing even a hint of satisfaction, he disappears into the clouds below.

But it’s fine! It’s absolutely okay! If he didn’t pursue the monster’s charred remains, he wouldn’t be Seiya Ryuuguuin! The only one who can save the S-ranked world Gaeabrande is this man—a man who won’t even let the words of the gods sway him from his overly cautious ways!

I descend back into the woods where Elulu and Mash are waiting, taking the emperor’s daughter with me. When I see Seiya, the first words that come out of my mouth are: “I saw what you did! Transform: Automatic Garuda! That was amazing!”

Thereupon, Seiya twists his head.

“Trans-what? What are you talking about?”

“Oh...sorry! I came up with that name myself! Hey, what was that move you just used? The one where the light arrows transformed into magic birds!”

“Oh, you mean Birdie Boom Boom?”

“...! What kind of name is that?! Since when did you start naming things like

that?!”

“What? I’ve never put much thought into it.”

“Th-then you can use the name I came up with. Take it.”

“Hmph. That ‘transform’ something or other? It’s just long and drawn out. It’s not even a good name.”

“It still beats Birdie Boom Boom at the very least!”

Mash and Elulu push me out of the way to rush over to Seiya.

“Master Seiya! That was insane!”

“Yeah, seriously, nobody can beat you!”

As they shower Seiya with praise, Bhat and the other soldiers crowd around Rosalie.

“Ah, Madam Rosalie! I am so glad you’re safe!”

But she bluntly tells the moved soldiers to get out of the way and approaches us. I think Rosalie is going to thank us for saving her, but she pins Seiya with a frigid stare.

“You are no Hero, just as I thought. There is no honor in winning with a surprise attack like that. A true Hero would risk their life to confront the enemy head-on in a fair fight. Just like my father.”

Rosalie wastes no time in vilifying Seiya, causing me to lose all sense of propriety as a goddess.

“Listen here, you! The only reason you’re alive is because Seiya saved you! Would it kill you to show some respect and thank him?!”

But Seiya sticks his hand out in front of me as I rage.

“Seiya?! Say something to her!”

“Just let it go, Rista.”

“B-but...!”

“Just let the dog bark.”

Rosalie’s face immediately turns red.

“Wh-who are you calling a dog?!”

Wh-whoa...! This Hero is amazing...! He dealt more damage with just five words than he could have yelling at her a hundred times!

“Mn...!”

Rosalie is on the verge of tears, but...

“Ah! Rosalie’s going to start acting like a dog again!”

Seeing Elulu’s eyes glowing with expectation forces Rosalie to swallow her tears and twitch her nose before walking away in silence. Bhat and the others bow before following after her as well.

Seiya lets out a deep sigh.

“...All right, then. Let’s go take care of the leftover flies.”

Oh yeah. Beel Bub may be dead, but there are still over a hundred of its giant underlings flying around their nest. We can’t afford to ignore them.

While I stare in admiration at the stoic Hero who doesn’t even let his amazing victory go to his head, he places his hand on Elulu’s and Mash’s shoulders.

“Mash, Elulu, you’re up.”

We’re all surprised by what we hear.

“I’m not blind. I know you two trained and acquired new abilities.”

“M-Master...!”

“S-Seiya...!”

“Let’s go. Show me these new skills of yours.”

“Y-you’ve got it!”

“I’ll do my best!”

With mirth in their steps, they follow Seiya in high spirits until they reach the nest...where Seiya repeatedly uses Seven-Shot Shining Arrow and annihilates the remaining flies in the blink of an eye.

“U-um... Master Seiya...?”

“Seiya...?”

Elulu and Mash stare at the hundred or so dead flies in muted shock. Seiya then shifts his focus to Elulu.

“Perfect. Now, Elulu, use Haste on Mash to increase his speed.”

“Uh... O-okay.”

After Elulu casts Haste, Seiya instructs Mash to transform his hand into a dragon claw.

“Next, I want you to use that giant hand and bring the dead fly carcasses over here.”

“O...kay...?”

Mash restlessly starts carrying the dead flies to a giant circle Seiya drew with a tree branch.

“Hmm. Haste really helps speed things along. It’s extremely satisfying to watch.”

After Mash finishes, Seiya—as pleased as can be—burns the gathered fly carcasses with Hellfire until they disintegrate into nothingness.

“Good work, you two.”

While Seiya is genuinely complimenting them from his point of view, they drop their shoulders and hang their heads low, clearly dejected. Staring hard at his hand, Mash mutters: “What am I, a broom?”

While I try to come up with just the right words to cheer them up, I hear the sound of horses’ hooves from behind. When I turn, Rosalie is staring down at us from a white horse.

“Hmph. You disposed of the remnants of the enemy’s army? The Roseguard Imperial Knights could have taken care of that without your help.”

I glare at Rosalie before Bhat suddenly chimes in.

“M-Madam Rosalie! We must tell them about *that*!”

“I—I know! You’re an irritating bunch, but I suppose I’ll tell you.”

Rosalie takes in a deep breath as if trying to calm herself down.

“...Are you listening? The legendary armor is being kept in a shrine near Izale village. You will need it to defeat the Demon Lord.”

“‘Legendary armor’...?”

Bhat nods.

“It is said that, in the days of yore, the great sage Mustaf prepared the armor, for he believed that one day a great danger would befall Gaeabrande. We were planning on telling you earlier, but we didn’t get the chance to once the flies attacked the fortress.”

“The people of Roseguard have been carefully watching over this sacred armor for generations just for this moment. Make sure to show some gratitude when you take it.”

Seiya quizzically responds:

“You better be telling the truth. This armor isn’t cursed or anything, right?”

“Did... Did you not listen to anything we just said? It’s legendary armor that the great sage prepared for us! The people of Roseguard have been watching over this sacred equipment for generations! There is no way it would be cursed!”

“It could be ‘the sacred, legendary, cursed armor’ for all I know.”

“...?! Don’t be ridiculous!”

Rosalie violently shakes her head after screaming.

“Why does the Hero have to be someone so morbidly paranoid...? This is the height of absurdity! That armor was meant for the strongest warrior—such as my father...!”

After her brief complaints, Rosalie tugs the reins and turns her horse around. Then she rides off without even glancing in our direction. Only Bhat and his men express their gratitude before disappearing into the distance as well.

“So, Seiya...”

I look back at Seiya.

“Since we’re going all the way back to Izale village to get that armor...how about resting for a bit while we’re there?”

We were originally planning on doing that after leaving the Dragons’ Den, but we were immediately summoned to fight the flies.

“Come on. We need to take a break every once in a while! Let’s just sit back and relax today!”

Elulu’s and Mash’s faces light up the moment I suggest it—Seiya’s, too, surprisingly.

“Okay. I’m running low on MP thanks to the magic bow, so let’s go to the inn and rest a bit.”

He genuinely agrees with me for a change. I don’t know if it’s because I’m tired, but I feel a little chilly, so I’m relieved to hear Seiya say that.

“Then to the village we go!”

I chant a spell and create a gate that will take us to Izale village. It’s a small town, but the warm atmosphere will surely bring us the peace and rest we need. However...the moment I open the gate and arrive at the village, I freeze.

...I wasn’t feeling chilly because I was exhausted. My goddess intuition was just trying to warn me.

The ravaged fields...

The horribly devastated houses...

Izale village has been destroyed.

Hero Slayer

Izale village is no more than a shell of its former self. For a moment, I thought I had created a gate taking us to the wrong place. The village looks as if it were hit by a powerful natural disaster.

“The hell happened here?!” Mash utters in a daze.

Elulu, on the other hand, is speechless and covers her mouth.

Did the Demon Lord’s army do this?! But why would they attack such a tiny village?!

Seiya simply points into the distance. When I follow his gaze, I see a pillar of smoke rising in the sky.

“Someone’s there, but it’s probably a trap. Be careful.”

Seiya has a point. It’s highly possible that whoever did this to the village is over there. We quietly begin advancing toward the smoke.

It becomes clear where the smoke is coming from when we get close enough. The dwarf’s item shop where we bought torches before is on fire.

“Guys...! L-look at that!”

Elulu strains her voice, and our eyes are immediately fixed on the monster beside the smoldering building. It’s a gigantic turtle with ashen, hard-looking skin underneath its rooflike shell. The monster closely resembles the Great Mother of Dragons in size after she transformed into a dragon. The turtle opens its mouth, baring its fangs, as it reaches out to kill the owner of the shop.

“Th-this isn’t good! It’s gonna kill that old dwarf!”

“We have to save him!”

Mash and I instinctively lunge forward, slipping in between the giant turtle and the shopkeeper.

“Are you okay, old man?!”

When Mash looks back, the plump dwarf puts on a smile and claims: “Yes, I’m fine. There is nothing to worry about. That monster won’t attack me, for I’m the one who summoned it.”

“...What?”

“Adamantoise. It’s a monster I summoned from another world.”

Before I even realize it, Seiya has already unsheathed the platinum sword. However, he is pointing the blade not at the monster but the dwarf.

“...Just who are you?”

With an unchanging, mirthful smile, the short dwarf introduces himself.

“A member of the Demon Lord’s army and one of the four generals... Summoner Kilkapul.”

“O-one of the four generals?!”

I grunt.

“Eek!”

Elulu takes a step back. Then Kilkapul gently rubs Adamantoise’s throat.

“Hero, I have been watching your success through my crystal ball ever since you first visited this village. And let me tell you: With awe-inspiring power like that, it’s almost hard to believe you’re human. You’re attentive and smart as well—a true threat to us.”

“So is that why you summoned that turtle?! To defeat Seiya?!”

“Oh no. This is for something else. I summoned Adamantoise for this...”

Kilkapul knocks on Adamantoise’s throat, causing the turtle to open its massive, fang-filled mouth. Immediately, something falls to the ground with a thud. The fragment that fell from the beast’s maw glitters even shinier than gold.

“The legendary armor in Mustaf’s shrine was created using adamantite, the strongest material on Gaeabrande—thus, it is also known as adamantite armor. Not even the Demon Lord’s attacks could destroy it. In fact, a way to destroy

the armor doesn't exist. That is, except for Adamantoise, whose body is made of the very same material."

"D-don't tell me you...!"

I cast my eyes down at the metal fragment that Adamantoise spit up.

"That's a fragment of the legendary armor that Adamantoise just ate. I broke the shrine's seal and destroyed the armor before you got here."

Wh-what?! Not only did we not get the monster power weapon Igzasion but the legendary armor was destroyed as well?! Does that mean we can no longer...?!

"The Demon Lord is the strongest being in the world. However, if even the slightest chance that you could defeat him exists, I am going to need you to die."

Adamantoise unleashes a mighty roar.

We brace ourselves in preparation for the attack, but Kilkapul cheerfully smiles while shaking his head. He places a hand on the monster's thick leg.

"Your work here is done. You may go."

Thereupon, the giant turtle starts fading out of existence as if it were dissolving.

"Wh-what...? Don't tell me that you plan on fighting Seiya yourself."

I send the tiny dwarf a piercing stare, but he calmly smiles as expected.

"Of course not. He isn't someone I can defeat. Of course, that goes for Adamantoise as well. I told you. I have been watching the Hero and studying him."

Kilkapul continues with a philosophical attitude.

"The final general after me, Eraser Kaiser—a god incarnate—boasts an attack and defense that exceed two hundred thousand. However, not even he would be able to defeat your Hero."

...Huh? Wh-what is this dwarf trying to say?

"I sense a strong power from the Hero that surpasses both logic and reason. It

is the same power possessed by the Demon Lord. It is hard to put into words, but you could call it the power to control the fate of the world—something that lackeys such as ourselves do not possess. That is why...”

Kilkapul picks up the two bundles by his side, then places them before us.

“Please have a look.”

I look inside the cloth, thinking he’s offering us fruit or something, when...

“Ahhhhhh!!”

Elulu screams. I am trembling internally, as well. Inside are the heads of the old woman and the small boy who we met before, at the item shop.

“These are the heads of my wife and son.”

“Th-this can’t be happening! These must be fake!” I cry out, but Kilkapul affectionately rubs the head of the young boy.

“He looks just like me, doesn’t he? These are the actual heads of my wife and son.”

“But why?! Why would you do such a thing?!”

“Because I must defeat the Hero at all costs...using the heads of the ones I love and the lives of the Izale villagers as catalysts to awaken my most powerful summoning sorcery...!”

I catch a glimpse of the madness hidden behind Kilkapul’s smile, which gives me chills.

“This isn’t normal! This is insane!”

“Yes, the only way to win is to stray from what is normal. That is the conclusion I came to, for that is how much of a threat this Hero is. Even monsters have emotions. It was heartbreaking. It was painful and nauseating. But even then, the Demon Lord said to me: *‘Kilkapul, you will be the one who kills the Hero.’* It was an honor. Of course, my wife and son understood and died for me. Please see for yourself. Look at the cheerful expressions on their faces. Isn’t it wonderful?”

“Wh-what did you have to summon so badly that warranted all this?!”

“An evil that will defeat the Hero. Intelligence, talent, and even power are meaningless before it. Even the Igzasion you obtained at Dragon Village would be powerless.”

He even knows about Igzasion?! B-but at least it looks like he doesn't know this one is a fake!

“M-Master! We should probably take care of him now while we have the chance!”

“No, it's probably already too late. The summoning is going to happen regardless if we kill him or not. That's why he showed himself before us and isn't even worried.”

“That is correct. It is too late for anything... Crossed Thanatos, I call thee forth from another dimension. I offer the lives of the villagers, my loved ones, and even myself! Oh, one who is beyond concept, hear my calls! Arise unto me, God of Death!”

God of Death...?! Crossed...Thanatos?!

Kilkapul pulls a dagger out from his pocket and slits his throat!

“Wh-what...?!”

The sinister black monster blood spills out from his gaping wound and onto the ground, creating a puddle. With a fatal wound, the dwarf falls to his knees, but even then, he gazes up at the sky with a sense of satisfaction.

“Demon Lord...! Please transform this world...into the netherworld...we have longed...for...”

Kilkapul falls facedown onto the ground, never to move again.

“I-i-is he dead?”

Without even checking the body, Seiya whispers to me:

“Rista, open a gate to the spirit world.”

“What?! Now?! But nothing has happened yet!”

“Just do it. His confidence wasn't normal, so I'm telling you to open a gate just in case.”

Thinking I must be seeing things, I use Scan again, but I am still unable to decipher Crossed Thanatos's status.

"Wh-what is going on?! I can't see his stats! Is something like this even possible?! Seiya?!"

"It's all corrupted text for me as well."

"Could he be using Fake Out like you do?!"

"No, it doesn't appear to be that. Those are probably his actual stats."

"What?! This illegible gibberish?! B-but what does this mean?!"

"...It means it defies common sense."

While we are talking, Thanatos sticks the bottom of the large cross into the ground. Immediately, a massive fissure tears the ground apart.

"E-earth magic?!"

While I scream, the crevice shoots straight for Seiya with blistering speed before the crack tries to swallow him. However...before it can reach him, Seiya is already floating in the air!

Wh-whoa...! Even though he doesn't know what the enemy's abilities are, he still decides to float! What cautiousness!

But my admiration for Seiya's precognitive, overcautious demeanor is short-lived, for lightning immediately shoots out of the cracked ground! It's heading right for him!

As the lightning magic roars out of the surface...

"Double Wind Blade!"

Promptly unsheathing the platinum sword, Seiya cuts through the air with a double tempest strike, creating a gust of wind that changes the direction of the lightning. Then he immediately creates another tempest and launches it at Thanatos. As if he were taken by surprise, the God of Death is easily hit, and his body is split in two.

Mash and Elulu rush over to Seiya.

"Master Seiya! Are you okay?"

“I’m fine.”

“B-but what was that?! Lightning shot out of the ground! It doesn’t make any sense!”

Lightning magic that shoots out of the surface after earth magic is used... Elulu is right. That attack seems to have defied the laws of magic. But...

“At any rate, it looks like it’s dead.”

Despite my relief, Seiya is looking at the bisected God of Death with a piercing glare.

“Rista, what are you doing? Create a gate.”

“Huh? B-but—”

“Now. Create one and open it.”

“O-okay.”

When I finally create a gate and open it, Thanatos’s severed torso slowly rises into the air before his lower half instantly regenerates. To make matters even more surprising, his severed lower body creates a new upper body as well.

“The hell?! It split into two monsters!”

“Wh-what is going on?!”

One of the Death Gods immediately aims the cross at Seiya, shooting a ray of light similar to Shining Arrow! Seiya tilts his body to the side and dodges, but the other God of Death lifts its cross into the air and charges right for him! This time, it’s going to use the gigantic cross to hit Seiya with like a weapon. Seiya backsteps, creating a considerable amount of distance between them to dodge, but the cross expands. The ever-growing cross almost reaches Seiya’s chest until it suddenly comes to a complete stop. However, just when I think he missed, icicles begin to shoot out of the tip like bullets!

“Hmph...!”

Seiya grunts. He tries to knock the icicles away with his sword, but there are too many. A single crystal of ice hits Seiya in the stomach, powerfully knocking him back and causing him to roll on the ground.

“S-Seiya?!”

This is the first time I have ever seen Seiya hit by the enemy. However, he immediately gets back up to his feet and recovers.

The two Thanatoses slowly walk into each other as they head this way until they eventually merge back into one monster. After sheathing his sword, Seiya points both of his hands at Thanatos.

“Maximum Inferno...”

A furious explosion swallows Thanatos. Nothing can survive the power of that wicked Hellfire, but nevertheless, Seiya immediately rushes over to Mash as if he knows that won’t be enough to defeat the God of Death.

“Huh? Master...?”

Seiya lifts Mash up onto his shoulder, then hurls him into the gate I opened!

“Ahhh!”

Mash soars through the air before disappearing into the gate. Seiya immediately lifts up Elulu in the very same way...

“W-w-w-w-wait...!”

Then he swiftly pitches her into the gate just like Mash. Following this, Seiya charges at me as well.

I-is he going to throw me, too?! Okay! But be gentle! Also, if possible, I want you to hold me in your arms like a princess before lightly dropping me through the gate! Please...!

But Seiya kicks his right leg into the air. Then, at the very next moment, the ball of his long foot sinks into my stomach!

“Bwaaaaaafff!”

I am launched to the other side of the portal, nearly fainting in agony due to the vicious kick! Almost immediately following, Seiya plunges in after me. I immediately close the gate the moment we arrive in the unified spirit world.

Rolling around in the spirit world’s public square, I...

“Heeey!! What was that for?! Why am I the only one who gets treated like

garbage!!” I scream at Seiya, but he isn’t himself. He clutches his stomach where Thanatos hit him, then crouches down without saying a word.

“S-Seiya?! Are you okay?!”

“Yeah, somehow. But...I’ve been seriously wounded.”

I-I’m such an idiot! Seiya was severely injured by Thanatos’s attack and was just barely able to keep himself together to escape. And yet, he brought us with him even though he could have simply abandoned us.

“This is the first time I’ve taken damage. I have to heal.”

“Let me see the wound! I’ll heal you!”

“Be quick, if you can.”

Seiya takes off his armor and shows me the wound.

“...Huh?”

I’m taken aback. Seiya’s injury looks to be nothing more than some slightly red skin, as if his armor chafed his stomach.

“Um... Seiya? How much damage did you take? Like, give me the number of HP.”

Seiya puts on a distressed expression, then utters:

“I had 300,000 HP before, but now...I only have 299,900...”

“...?! What part of that is ‘seriously wounded’?!”

I try to point out how ridiculous he’s being, but Seiya’s face is the epitome of seriousness.

“I don’t feel comfortable not having max HP. At any rate, hurry up and heal me.”

While staggered by his usual overcautiousness and astonished that he has three hundred thousand HP, I use my magic to heal his scratch.

“Although it wasn’t much, I still can’t believe he was able to damage Master Seiya at all... Just what is that thing...?”

Elulu seems to agree as well.

“That was crazy. It’s like it ignored the laws of magic and the laws of nature...”

I can sense the fear from their voices, so I decide to cheer them up.

“For now, let’s just stay here until we come up with a plan! We’ll be safe here since the unified spirit world’s in another dimension!”

The moment those words slip off my tongue...gods and goddesses in the public square begin making a lot of noise.

“Wh-what is this feeling...?”

“Is this perchance...malice? Wh-what is going on?”

The gods and goddesses start looking around with panic-stricken expressions.

“Wh-what’s that?!”

I look in the direction that a god is pointing to find a black vortex appear over the fountain.

Th-th-this can’t be happening!

But my gut is right. From the black vortex, a giant iron cross emerges, and the God of Death soon comes crawling out after it!

“What?! It came all the way to the unified spirit world after us?!”

I was just trying to cheer up Mash and Elulu, but now I’m the one pale and shivering.

Th-that’s impossible! It can break through dimensions?! This creature... This is a mythic-class monster!

Now it’s Elulu and Mash who speak up as if to calm me down.

“B-b-but...! It doesn’t matter how frightening that thing is! All monsters have weaknesses, right?!”

“Y-yeah, Elulu! There’s no such thing as an invincible monster!”

Yeah! What am I freaking out about?! We have Seiya on our side! He’ll be able to do something about this monster! In fact, I bet he has already...

“Seiya! What’s Thanatos’s weakness? Surely, you’ve figured it out by now!”

Showered in our desperate gazes, the Hero softly mutters: “I don’t know.”

“““What?!”””

“...I have no idea how to defeat it.”

“S-Seiya?!”

“Master?!”

Ahhhhhh! Say it isn't soooooo! What happened to the confident Seiya I know?! We're screwed! We are completely screwed!

...The unified spirit world is filled with screams and cries at the appearance of the sudden monster.

...After it crawls out of the vortex, the God of Death picks up the cross, then slowly walks toward us. Just like the shrieking angels trying to run away in the public square, our minds go blank as well.

Gate of Valhalla

The God of Death, Crossed Thanatos, is drawing near, ripping through dimensions to find Seiya. We helplessly shrink back.

However, a ray of light appears in the midst of the emerging darkness.

“Stop right there, creature of darkness.”

Before Thanatos stand numerous deities, speaking with strong voices as they surround the supremely evil being in the public square.

“I do not know where you wandered here from...”

“...But this is no place for evil such as yourself.”

“You shall perish for your sin!”

Whoa! The Goddess of Wind, Fraala; the God of Lightning, Orand; and the God of Ice, Kiorne! Three well-known deities have come to help! Looks like we got lucky! They’ll take care of that monster for us!

As if they are trying to live up to my expectations, Fraala casts a wind spell, Orand throws a bolt of lightning, and Kiorne shoots a crystal of ice...but Thanatos continues its methodical approach as if nothing happened.

“N-nothing’s working on it!”

Fire doesn’t work and neither does wind, lightning, or ice! Does any magic work on this thing?!

“Hey...Ristie...”

There is a hint of worry in Elulu’s voice. I want to tell her everything is going to be okay, but I’m not even confident I can force a smile onto my face right now. I hesitate when...

“Rista! Rista, you in there!”

Now Mash is shaking me.

“Look! Master Seiya’s...!”

“Huh...?”

When I look in the direction they’re pointing, I see Seiya already hastily running away without us.

“...?! Th-that jerk...! Where do you think you’re going?”

We chase after Seiya, who appears to be running in the direction of the sanctuary... *Hold up. I’m getting some serious déjà vu!*

“Wait up for us, you jerk!”

But even then, Seiya doesn’t slow down. When he arrives at the sanctuary, he throws open the door and dives in.

I arrive at the sanctuary’s entrance, struggling to catch my breath. Curious, I suddenly look back and find that Thanatos is already close behind, dodging the deities’ magic while floating in the air.

“Eek! Ristie, he’s right behind us!”

“H-hurry! Get inside!”

After plunging inside, we immediately close the entrance door. Thereupon, I hear footsteps. When I look up, I see Seiya running up the staircase to the second floor. However, right as I try to follow him, the entrance bursts open with a *bang* and the God of Death comes in.

“Eeeeeep! He even followed us into the sanctuary!”

But a god with masculine features standing near the door steps in front of the God of Death as if he were a guard.

“Begone evil! How dare you step foot inside the sanctuary! I, Arx—God of the Fist—will crush you into a fine powder with my unrivaled— Blaaargh!!”

“Y-you shall pay for what you did to Arx! I—the God of Sumo—shall be your next opponent! Divine Hundred Hand Sla— Blaaargh!!”

One after another, various gods within the sanctuary valiantly challenge Thanatos, but unsurprisingly, nothing works. They’re at least doing a good job

slowing him down. We sprint up the stairs.

“Seiya! Come on, wait for us!”

We somehow eventually manage to catch up with him.

“That monster is esss esss esss esss esss esss esss esss esss esss esss esss esss

“H-human—!”

“Gi-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh-geh!”

The Demon Lord’s reproachful cries are drowned out by the laughter of the goddess atop the Gate of Valhalla. And just like that...as the gate slowly releases a miasma, the doors slam shut with a booming *thud*.

Mash utters:

“H-he did it...! The gate closed!”

Then Elulu yells:

“Seiya!”

Floating in the air, Seiya unsteadily descends to the surface. Then, like a marionette without strings, he collapses to the floor.

“Seiya...!”

We rush over to him. In addition to the wound the Demon Lord gave him, his entire body is cut and bleeding all over. Thirty seconds have already elapsed since he used the Gate of Valhalla, so his body is starting to break down.

Paying no heed to the blood spewing out of his body, Seiya stares at us in a daze. When I hold him in my arms, he speaks to me in a drowsy voice.

“Rista, you took a shortcut to the Demon Lord’s throne room, didn’t you? What happened to the rules of the spirit world that you were always going on about?”

“You idiot! That doesn’t matter right now! If you die here, you’ll never be able to return to your world!”

“I know. But I defeated the Demon Lord,” the Hero says with an air of satisfaction.

I continue to go off on him.

“If you were truly cautious, you would’ve figured out a way to do it that didn’t involve killing yourself in the process!”

Usually, he would say something back or hit me, but Seiya’s ravaged body can

no longer do even that. He simply remains silent...until his eyes close heavily. The pool of his blood on the ground already suggests that it's too late.

"Seiya...!"

"Master Seiya...!"

Elulu and Mash cry as they shake his body, but he's unresponsive. In just a few more seconds, the Gate of Valhalla will take the rest of Seiya's life force as compensation.

In the midst of their screaming and crying...

"I won't let you die...!"

Mash and Elulu look up at me with bloodshot eyes.

"Who said you could die anyway?! What's your problem?! You said you'd be back by nightfall, you liar! We were supposed to go to the casino, then have a drink, then go to the hot springs where I'd show you my funny bathing suit... There are still so many things I want to do with you!"

After pelting the Hero with my words, which he probably couldn't even hear anymore, I scream in a voice loud enough to shake the darkness of the abyss.

"Order!"

Then I pray to the Great Goddess Ishtar of the unified spirit world.

"Please grant me, Goddess Ristarte, all my divine healing powers!"

"Ristarte, you have already violated the rules of the spirit world by warping yourself to the scene of the final battle."

The powerful voice resonates throughout my entire being, as if the Great Goddess Ishtar is speaking directly to my soul.

"Ristarte, what you have done has already conflicted with the rules of the spirit world. Not even I will be able to protect you any longer if you continue violating them. You could be tried by the innermost layer of the spirit world and lose your title as a goddess."

But with firm resolution, I reply:

"It's fine. I'm prepared for whatever happens. Besides..."

I continue with such a tranquil tone that I surprise myself:

“I believe this moment is the reason why I became a goddess in the first place.”

After a few moments of silence...

“Very well. I will grant you the full extent of your divine powers...”

Ishtar’s voice radiates.

Then...

“R-Rista?”

“Ristie?”

Mash and Elulu are astonished. All of a sudden, a blinding light wraps my body like a sun wrapped in darkness.

I’m sure that my regret for not being able to save you in my past life is what granted me this power. Just you wait... I’m going to show you just how superior my divine healing powers are to the destruction wrought by the Gate of Valhalla.

I tenderly caress Seiya’s blood-streaked face.

Because this time, even I...

“I’m perfectly prepared!”

Happy Ending

Seiya continues losing blood at an alarming rate, as if he is being cut by countless invisible blades. I place a hand over his body. The moment I touch Seiya's skin with the light pouring from my palm, the wound instantly heals. However...

"Rista, this is bad! The wounds just keep appearing no matter how much you heal him!"

Mash is right. New cuts keep emerging as if to counter my divine powers. But even then, there is still a chance I can save him. The Gate of Valhalla's recoil damage doesn't last forever. Valkyrie proved this when she used Order to increase her vitality to prevent paying the ultimate price. If I can keep the damage from going past a certain point with my healing, then I should be able to save him.

I lay Seiya in my lap, then continue to heal him while making sure to focus on his brain and heart. I've already used so much healing energy on Seiya that I would have run out of magic long ago if I were human. Elulu gives me a worried look.

"Ristie... Are you okay?"

"Don't worry. I'm fine."

Elulu smiles. It isn't all talk, either. This divine energy, far different from magic, is endlessly flowing from the depths of my body. There is no concept of anything like MP to express it in numerical form, for this power is eternal.

I can save him. I will save him. We're going to have a happy ending this time. Right, Seiya?

I don't know how much time has gone by. In a way, it feels like an eternity and yet also as if no time has gone by at all. As the wounds appearing on Seiya's

body begin decreasing, Mash's and Elulu's faces radiate with hope. I continue concentrating on healing without letting my mind wander. And eventually... fresh wounds stop showing up.

"Is it over? Rista?"

I give Mash a nod.

I tell him that the trade-off for using the Gate of Valhalla is over. However, Seiya still doesn't open his eyes. Their faces are racked with concern as they watch over him. But after completely unlocking my divine powers, I can feel a faint hint of life coming from Seiya. And before long, he slowly opens his eyes.

"I... I'm still alive...?"

After hearing the Hero speak, albeit in a daze, Elulu and Mash hop up and down with joy in their hearts.

"Master...!"

"Seiya! Thank goodness! Thank goodness you're okay!"

Thereupon, they look up at me with admiration in their eyes.

"Ristie, you're amazing! I can't believe it!"

"You're such a badass, Rista! You're like a goddess!"

"...?! Because I am a goddess!"

Seiya gazes up at me as his head rests in my lap.

"You saved me?"

"Yes..."

The corners of my eyes start to burn. The man I loved most when I was human is going to live.

"Seiya..."

I lift Seiya's head up and bring my lips closer to his.

...And he immediately places a hand on my forehead, pushing me back and rejecting my kiss.

"What?! B-but... Hey! I...! Why?!"

“That’s what I want to know. What do you think you’re doing?”

Seiya swiftly rises to his feet, then turns his head away from me.

“S-Seiya?! You don’t need to feel embarrassed! I’m the love of your life! It’s me, Rista, who you love so, so, sooo much! So it’s fine if we kiss!” I shout while trying to embrace him, but he grabs me by the arm and pushes me back.

“Stop. Get away from me. I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I won’t stop! I won’t get away from you! Now kiss me! Goddess’s orders!”

“Cut it out! I’m going to punch you.”

“That’s not going to fool me anymore! I know you’re just trying to hide how you feel! But in reality, you love me so much you sacrificed your life to protect me!”

WHACK! An unbearable pain shoots through my head.

“...Owww!”

Blood gushes down the side of my head. I place a hand over where I was punched by the abnormally strong Hero.

“I-I’m bleeding...!”

“I told you I would punch you.”

The Hero’s gaze is ice-cold, and I can no longer control my faintly trembling body.

“Did you seriously have to hit me that hard?! I won’t be able to resurrect if you kill me here, you know!”

“Good.”

“Th-that does it!”

Ishtar, are you sure?! Was I really the love of Seiya’s life?! People treat their garbage better than he treats me!

While I regret breaking the rules of the spirit world to save him, Seiya scratches his cheek with a finger.

“But, well...good job healing me in spite of the circumstances.” Seiya then

looks at me while smugly saying, “All right, allow me to promote you from low-level off-brand herb to mid-tier potion.”

“...?! I can confidently say that doesn’t make me happy one bit!”

I can’t help but feel disheartened after fantasizing about a passionate embrace and kiss. Elulu suddenly tugs at my arm as I stand there, unsatisfied with our happy ending.

“Ristie... Why is...?”

“I-I’m sure he’s just embarrassed! In reality, he really cares about me—about us. I’m sure of it...”

But anyway...it’s time to shift emotional gears! After all, the Demon Lord is dead, and I was able to save Seiya! So I’m going to count this one as a win!

But Elulu keeps tugging at my arm.

“No, Ristie... Not that...”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

“Why...is the...?”

Elulu then screams in a shrill voice:

“Why is the Gate of Valhalla still here?!”

Startled, I look in the direction of Elulu’s trembling finger, and just as she said, the Gate of Valhalla is still eerily floating in the air. At the very least, the gate is tightly shut, so there doesn’t seem to be a problem, but...

“Gi-geh-geh... Guh-gah-geh... Gi-goo-geh...!”

The goddess’s face on top of the gate contorts in agony. Then, with a deafening screech, the Gate of Valhalla flies wide open! The demon’s skull is shattered by the Valhalla Blade, its body torn to shreds and broken down by the Spikes of Destruction and the underworld’s miasma—only bones and chunks of flesh are left...and yet, the Demon Lord extends his skeletal arm toward us. A dark light shines in the palm of his hand.

“If I must perish, then I’m taking you all with me! The end of the world is now! ...Judgment Zero!”

...It all happened in the blink of an eye. After regaining my true powers as a goddess, I was instantly able to sense the power of the Demon Lord's attack—unfortunately so. The dark light in his hand has the power to split the world in two. All life on Gaeabrande will be reduced to ash without even feeling pain... including us. The moment the Demon Lord starts casting his ultimate attack, I suddenly think to myself: *Even at a time like this— No, maybe it's because it's a time like this, I feel at peace for some reason.*

Sigh. After all that, we're going to lose? This turned out to be a lot different than the happy ending I envisioned. I guess if there's one thing I can be happy about, it's that I get to die with the one I love... Wanting to burn the image of Seiya's face into my memory one last time, I look back...

And I find myself even more surprised than when the skeletonized Demon Lord crawled out of the Gate of Valhalla.

"It's over, Demon Lord."

...Not once did he let his guard down or relax. It was as if he knew this would happen—as if he realized the battle wasn't over yet! The overly cautious Hero already has his left hand on his right wrist, aiming it at the Demon Lord! Before the demon can even cast his final attack—before I can even yell out "Stop!"—Seiya casts the final Valkyrja attack once again with no concern for his life, as if he were simply throwing it in the garbage despite miraculously being saved.

"Gate of Valhalla: Encore!"

Thereupon, another Gate of Valhalla appears over Seiya's head while releasing more miasma. Atop the gate is the face of a dignified god! And inside the gate...

"No...! I must kill you before I go...! Human...!"

The Demon Lord has already been captured, spewing out his resentment. He tries to unleash the dark light, but the first Gate of Valhalla comes back to life! The Demon Lord is dragged into the gate from behind, arms and all.

"Guhaaa! Hee-hee-hee-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

With his lips twisted widely from ear to ear, the god's face on the gate cackles in a maniacal frenzy as blood drips down his chin. The gate swallows the Demon

Lord, dragging him into its depths along with the first Gate of Valhalla. With a violent clatter, the doors to the second gate slam shut. Instantly, Judgment Zero goes off inside, and the intense explosion causes the doors to swell and protrude. Although the gate warps, the doors still do not open.

...Time goes by, and a deep silence reigns over us all as we stare hard at the new gate with bated breath.

“I-is it over? I-is it really over...this time?”

A deep voice echoes from above as if to answer Mash.

“Guhe-hee-hee! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! You can relax now! I swallowed him along with the first Gate of Valhalla!”

“Th-the gate’s talking?!”

Trembling, Elulu falls back on her bum.

“Guhe-hee-hee! Heh-heh-heh-heh! He has been destroyed and returned to nothingness!”

All of a sudden, the bloodstained goggling eyes of the second gate turn in Seiya’s direction.

“Now, it’s time to pay up, caster! Your life belongs to me!”

“I—I won’t let you have it!”

I walk over to Seiya as he stands completely frozen.

“Don’t worry, Seiya! I’ll save you again!”

I was able to save him once, so I’m sure I can do it again!

I start casting my healing in preparation, but...

“...Huh?”

No cuts or wounds appear on Seiya’s body. Instead, his cheek starts to crack.

“Wh-what’s going on?! This is different than last time...”

I touch his cracked cheek, immediately healing it. But his arms, legs—every part of his body starts to crack. No matter how many times I heal him, another part of his body begins to crack until they spread all over his body.

A-am I not going to make it in time?! His body is being destroyed faster than I can regenerate it!

The second gate laughs at me as I panic.

“Guhaaaa-ha-ha-ha-heh-heh-heh! I hope you don’t think a pathetic human can avoid paying the ultimate price twice in a row!”

“Sh-shut up! Silence, you!”

Faster... Faster...! I have to heal him faster than he’s being destroyed...!

I pour all my focus into healing, but even then, the countless cracks only continue to spread.

I scream to the god on the gate:

“Don’t do this! Stop! Seiya saved this world! Don’t do this to him!”

But the god’s vile laugh drowns me out.

“Gu-hee-hee-hee-ha-ha-ha-ha! I am the Gate of Valhalla! Neither god nor demon, I am an agent of the realm of death! The trade-off is just and will be collected as such!”

A white mist spews out...before the Gate of Valhalla abruptly disappears from the abyss. Elulu shakes my shoulders.

“Ristie! Create a gate to another world! If we get away from the Chain Destruction, then...!”

Mash backs Elulu up.

“Y-yeah, if we do that, then Master Seiya will just return to his world even if he dies!”

Even then, I cannot even take one step away from Seiya. The awe-inspiring aura of destruction is swallowing his body.

“I can’t...! If I stop healing him for even a second, then he’ll shatter!”

“Wh-what?!”

Despite our hysteria, the Hero calmly stares at Elulu with his usual composed expression. Seiya then begins to speak as if he were making small talk.

“Elulu, thanks for helping against the emperor.”

“S-Seiya...?”

“I probably would have died then if I hadn’t had your support magic.”

“No...Seiya...! Because you saved me—because you didn’t turn me into the holy sword, you...! That’s why I...!”

Seiya looks to Mash next.

“Mash, now that the Demon Lord and the four generals are dead, there’s probably no one left in this world who can defeat you. Work together with Rosalie and protect Gaeabrande.”

“Master Seiya...! No...! I still haven’t even gotten the chance to pay you back yet...!”

The dragonkin children weep with stifled voices. That’s when I face everyone and yell: “Enough! Stop talking like that! Listen, I am going to save you! I am going to save you no matter what!”

I tightly embrace Seiya with both arms in order to unleash all the power I have. But even then, his skin only continues to crack. The small crevices soon give rise to large fissures that spread across Seiya’s entire right leg. And before long, his right leg falls to the ground and shatters like glass, causing him to fall to one knee.

“Why?! Why isn’t my healing working?! Why...?!”

My cries soon turn into shrieking. Seiya then whispers into my ear: “It’s okay, Rista.”

“No, it’s not okay! This is not how it’s going to end! I wasn’t able to save you then, so I became a goddess! So not again...! I can’t...”

I suddenly feel something warm touching my back... Seiya is gently holding me in his arms.

“Rista, you’ve already done more than enough.”

Tears immediately well up in my eyes. I tightly hold Seiya back with everything I’ve got.

“I wasn’t able to do anything in the end... Even after becoming a goddess, I was useless. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry I was such a terrible goddess...”

Seiya gazes at my tearstained face.

“It’s strange. This feels so familiar for some reason.”

Seiya’s expression suddenly changes, then he wipes the tears running down my cheek with his finger.

“Oh, you’re... So that’s why I...”

Seiya smiles with his hand still on my cheek. This is the first time I have ever seen him smile.

“I’m so glad I was able to save you this time.”

Seiya’s hand falls off my cheek before his face limply drops onto my chest.

And just like that...

The love of my past life...and the overly cautious Hero I summoned...shatters into dust in my arms.



FINAL CHAPTER

Crime and Punishment and One More Thing

A contingent of soldiers are lined up in the throne room of the castle. Empress Rosalie Roseguard rises from the throne, approaches me, then looks at me with an air of sorrow.

“...Do you really have to go?”

Her words seem to come not from a place of duty but out of genuine concern.

“The Demon Lord has been defeated, and Gaeabrande has been saved thanks to you. Normally, I would grant you a nation and offer you a reward of some sort...”

I softly shake my head.

“Don’t worry about it. Besides...the one who contributed the most to the Demon Lord’s defeat...is no longer with us...”

Rosalie starts to say something, but...

“Yes...”

As if to swallow the words welling deep within, she nods a few times before casting a serious gaze at me.

“Let me just say this. No matter what others thought about him, Seiya Ryuuguuin always fought for what he believed in. He was a true Hero. I know that now.”

I look Rosalie right back in the eyes.

“Yes. And everything he did was a series of miracles that no other Hero would be capable of.”

I walk over to Mash and Elulu, who are standing behind Rosalie. Mash is wearing the armor of an imperial knight, and Elulu is dressed in beautiful noblewoman attire. Rosalie invited the two dragonkin to join the imperial

knights for their contribution in saving the world. It was Seiya's final wish as well, so Mash agreed. Elulu also decided to stay by Mash's side.

I reach out to shake Mash's hand.

"Mash. Good luck."

"Rista..."

Mash takes my hand with a serious expression, then says: "I will protect this world that Master Seiya saved..."

He already looks so much more grown up than he did only a few days ago. Mash firmly squeezes my hand.

"I know you can do it."

"I'll be here with him to keep him in line!"

Elulu giggles by his side, causing Mash to seem somewhat embarrassed. Neither Rosalie nor I can keep our lips from curling upward.

"Elulu, be there for Mash, okay?"

"I will!"

Her reply is full of energy, but now there's a sorrowful hue to her expression.

"Ristie... You're really leaving, huh?"

"Yes... I have to go."

Elulu immediately throws her arms around me.

"Come visit us sometimes...okay?" Elulu requests as she gazes up at me.

"Let's go to a hot spring next time, okay?"

Mash sends me a smile as well.

"Yeah! We still haven't even gone to the casino yet!"

I smile right back at them.

"Yeah, you're right. We have to go next time."

"It's a promise then, okay? We're going."

"Sure. One day."

I tightly embrace Elulu. Then...

"I have to go now. Take care."

I let go of Elulu, then search for an empty space in the throne room before casting the spell. I create a gate to the spirit world and start to walk inside when...

"Goddess Ristarte."

Rosalie suddenly calls my name.

"You're strong. I still haven't come to terms with my father's death."

"I'm not strong. But...I have to become a better goddess for Seiya's sake as well... That's how I feel right now."

"I have a lot to learn from you. As the ruler of this nation, I must become a vessel fit for my role."

"You'll be fine. More importantly, look after Mash and Elulu for me. Please don't make them do anything reckless, okay?"

"I won't."

Rosalie smiles at Elulu and Mash, and they smile back. Seeing that lets me know they're going to be okay, and I place a hand on the gate.

"All hail the Goddess of Salvation!"

Rosalie's voice echoes from behind, and the soldiers stomp the ground in unison. Listening to their calls in the background, I part ways with Gaeabrande...

The portal leads me to my room in the unified spirit world. After closing the gate, I quietly stare at it for a while. I send my heart out to the world beyond it once more and bow before finally making it disappear. Taking a seat at the end of my bed, I think about Mash and Elulu when they saw me off. They were so grown up. When did they get so strong? All of a sudden, Seiya's confident expression appears right before my eyes.

Hmph. As I expected.

"Seiya..."

But when I reach out to touch him, the illusion immediately disappears. All

that's there is a lonely, empty space.

Ristarte, you're strong.

I firmly shake my head as I think back to what Rosalie said. Then I get off the bed and lock my door. Nobody will bother me in here. Nobody can see me. That's why I don't have to hold back anymore.

...I collapse on the bed, then start bawling my eyes out like a small child.

I continue to ignore the rapping at the door and don't even touch the food slid under it. Two days pass. As usual, I keep blocking out the knocking until I hear a *ker-chk* accompanying the door opening. Aria stands in the threshold, having opened my chambers with her seal-breaking ability.

"I'm sorry, Rista. But the Great Goddess Ishtar is calling for you."

"...Okay... I'll be right there."

I sluggishly sit up and get out of bed, and Aria grins slightly when she sees my face.

"Oh my. You look terrible, and your hair is a mess."

She takes my hand, despite me not even reacting.

"Rista, come here."

She walks me over to the dresser in the corner of the room. Then, without saying a word, she starts combing my hair.

"...Perfect. Now you're beautiful again."

When I look into the mirror, my hair seems to be in good shape, but my skin is rough and some exhausted-looking woman is staring back at me.

Aria places a hand on my shoulder and stiffens her expression a little.

"Rista, I am positive that Great Goddess Ishtar is going to talk to you about taking responsibility for unlocking your goddess powers."

As she regards me solemnly, I say indifferently:

"That's fine. I'm perfectly prepared to accept any punishment I'm given. After all, I'm at fault."

The graceful words I spit out don't match how I really feel. After losing him, I don't care what happens to me anymore. Whether I'm scolded, severely punished, or even lose my goddess status—it doesn't matter anymore. If anything, I would be thankful for some punishment if it could change how I feel right now.

But with a face set with determination, Aria says:

"Don't worry. You saved the S-ranked world Gaeabrande. Your punishment won't be severe."

While following Aria down the hallway, I run into the Goddess of War, Adenela. Slouching as always, she bobs over to me.

"R-Rista, a-are you okay?"

"Yeah. I'm hanging in there."

I try to force a smile onto my face, but I'm not confident it works.

"What about you? You really liked Seiya as well."

"F-forget about me, Rista. I h-heard everything. Y-you're the one in the m-most pain right now."

I find myself having trouble answering until I hear a barbarous voice coming from my side.

"Yo, Rista! I don't know what happened, but you look down! How about trying some of this! I'm sure it will make you feel better."

The Divine Blade Cerceus holds a cake out to me on a plate.

"I decided to make an ice cream cake for a change! It's nice and cold—and delicious, of course!

Adenela glares at Cerceus with heavy bags under her eyes.

"Th-this is not the t-time for something like that. A-are you stupid o-or something...?"

"Huh?! Wh-why?!"

Cerceus is taken aback. I feel a little bad for him, so I pick up the fork and take a bite. I don't taste anything. I'm sure it's actually delicious, but my tongue has

lost its sense of taste.

But even then, I smile at Cerceus, who eagerly awaits my opinion.

“This *protein cake* is delicious.”

“...! It’s *ice cream cake*! There isn’t any protein powder in it!”

“Oh, sorry. *Frozen protein*, yes?”

“No! That would just be protein powder frozen in the freezer!”

As Cerceus freaks out, Adenela takes the fork and holds it up to his neck.

“Eeeeeep!”

“Sh-shut up! Th-there’s protein in this cake! R-right?!”

“Y-yes, of course! I poured a whole bag of protein in the batter!!”

It actually didn’t taste like anything, though. However...

“I think it would taste even better if you put less protein in it.”

After giving Cerceus some ridiculous advice, I continue on ahead without them.

Aria and I walk into Ishtar’s room. She is sitting in her chair as usual, but her expression is somewhat stern.

“Rista, congratulations on saving Gaeabrande. I am very happy you returned home safely. However, regardless of how I feel, you violated the rules of the gods. Therefore, you are to receive an official notification from the innermost layer of the spirit world. You must take responsibility for your actions.”

She speaks with an air of dignity, but nothing I hear connects with me. It doesn’t even seem real—as if it has nothing to do with me.

Aria, on the other hand, changes colors.

“Great Goddess Ishtar! I understand what you’re saying, but Rista saved the S-ranked world Gaeabrande! You should at least consider that when deciding her fate!”

A few moments of silence pass before the Great Goddess continues: “Rista’s punishment will be...saving the SS-ranked world Ixphoria.”

“What...?!”

Aria is speechless.

“I-Ixphoria has already been conquered by the Demon Lord! After defeating the Hero, the Demon Lord turned it into a netherworld with his newfound powers! Trying to save that world now would be...!”

Aria freezes, but Ishtar goes on.

“Therefore, Rista, I will be sealing your divine healing powers during your journey to save Ixphoria. Then, if you are unable to save the world, you will be permanently stripped of your goddess title.”

“To make matters worse...that world is already a source of trauma for Rista...”

Aria slams her hand against the desk as if she can’t bear it any longer.

“This is too much! If you seal her divine powers, she won’t even be able to support her Hero! There is no way she’ll be able to save such a frightening world like that!”

This is the first time I have ever seen Aria so straightforward with her feelings. But Ishtar replies in a carefree tone: “I wouldn’t be so certain about that. I do not think it’s impossible at the very least.”

“What are you basing that on?! What kind of Hero could save a world that has already fallen into the hand of the demons?!”

Great Goddess Ishtar slowly gets out of her chair, then glances over the courtyard outside the window.

“When the second Gate of Valhalla swallowed the Demon Lord...it devoured the effects of Chain Destruction along with it.”

Unable to grasp what she is trying to say, Aria asks: “Wh-what exactly do you mean?”

“Usually, there is no returning to fallen worlds. However, this will be an exception.”

After the Great Goddess turns around and picks up a piece of paper on her desk, she walks over to me.

“Ristarte, I will allow you to summon a Hero from this list to take with you on your journey to the SS-ranked world of Ixphoria.”

The moment I take a glance at the Hero list, I immediately wake up from my daze.

SEIYA RYUUGUIN

LV: 1

HP: 385 MP: 197

ATK: 124 DEF: 111 SPD: 105 MAG: 86 GRW: 188

Resistance: Fire, Ice, Wind, Water, Lightning, Earth

Special Abilities: Fire Magic (LV: 5), EXP Boost (LV: 2)...

His stats have been reset and are now one-thousandth of what they once were. But even then, there is one thing on his résumé that hasn’t changed.

The moment I see that, the tears begin flowing again.

...It’s a power granted by past regrets.

...It’s a power that defeated the Demon Lord and saved the world.

...It’s a power that protected me and our allies.

Written at the very end of his status.

PERSONALITY: OVERLY CAUTIOUS

(Gaeabrande Arc—Fin)

AFTERWORD

Thank you so much for reading Volume 2 of *The Hero Is Overpowered but Overly Cautious*. It is I, the author, Light Tuchihi. My name may be spelled 土日月, but it is not pronounced Donichigetsu as some may assume. It's Tuchihi. However, you are free to pronounce my name however you'd like. Oh, um...I talked about the same thing at the end of the first volume, didn't I? So, uh... To everyone who read the first volume, long time no see.

By the way, I had a pleasant surprise after the first volume was published... It was almost immediately reprinted! I've heard stories about reprints, but I never thought I would get to experience one for myself. So thank you so, so much to everyone who bought it!

Now, I would like to explain my outline for Volume 2. But before that, there is something I'd like to say to people who are reading this and thinking, *I liked Volume 1, but I don't know if I should buy Volume 2...* I believe there are no absolutes in this world. But I am confident that if you liked Volume 1, then you will definitely like Volume 2! Therefore, while I know this is pretty shameless, I really hope that those who read Volume 1 will read Volume 2 as well. If Volume 1 is heads, then Volume 2 would be tails. Once you read both, you can finally say that you really read *The Hero Is Overpowered but Overly Cautious*.

Almost all the foreshadowing in Volume 1 is addressed in Volume 2, and the second half of Volume 2 explains why the Hero Seiya Ryuuguuin became so cautious. The enemies are even more fiendish, and the events become more serious the closer you get to the second half. On the other hand, I still believe I filled this volume with even more comedy than its predecessor.

Incidentally, when I wrote this story, I wanted to make it a mix between comedy and touching moments because I myself wanted to read a story that made me laugh a lot and sometimes cry. Therefore, as an author, nothing

would make me happier than if you were able to laugh a little and cry a bit.

Now, I know I touched on the “English” in the novel during the last afterword, but one of my friends pointed out something else strange, so I would like to talk about that this time. In regard to part of the Japanese title, *Ore TUEEE Kuse Ni* (俺TUEEEくせに), he was like, “Dude, I think your Japanese is wrong.” He was telling me that I should add a *no* (の) between the *TUEEE* and *Kuse* or at least a *na* (な). So I told him to shut up and mind his own business. He brought up a fair point. That probably would be more grammatically correct.

And it’s not just with the title. I am sure some of the English terms I frequently use in the novel would make native speakers go, “What the hell...?” I majored in English during university, so honestly, even I know some of it is weird (lol). But I prioritize linguistic sense over the correct meaning of words when I write. *Ore TUEEE Kuse Ni* has a kick to it that *Ore TUEEE **No** Kuse Ni* doesn’t have, and I think “Ready Perfectly” (レディ・パーフェクトリー / Perfectly prepared) gets the meaning across better than “All set!” Of course, this is all just how I feel as a writer.

...So if you’re reading and find something strange, I just want you to remember (pretend) that this is just one of the author’s unique “properties” (traits).

Now, I would like to end this by giving thanks to the people who deserve it. First, I would like to thank Saori Toyota. Thank you very much again for your wonderful illustrations. The characters are only blurs in my mind until Toyota brings life to them. I especially like the illustration of Valkyrie this time around. She’s cool and came out kind of punky, which really blew me away. Saori Toyota is a veteran illustrator who can really differentiate between serious and comedic scenes. I am truly lucky to work with such talent.

Next, I would like to thank my editor. When the cover was being made for Volume 2, I was wondering how it would turn out and tried imagining it, but I couldn’t even do that much (lol). But I remember when I saw the rough sketch for the cover, I was like, *This is it!* It shows how badass Seiya is in the front... along with another important character—Valkyrie. You can also see an emotional side to Rista as Mash and Elulu give off a comedic vibe. There is so much of Volume 2 squeezed into just one picture. When I heard that it was

none other than my editor who came up with the cover's composition, I was floored. He is helping this story not only through sentence composition but with his artistic sense as well.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who purchased this book. I am already extremely grateful that the story I came up with could be printed, but it brings me unparalleled joy when I think about how this work could be on the shelf at bookstores throughout Japan. I don't think many people just buy the second volume without the first, so I believe most people who have the second volume have the first one, too. So when I think about how two stories I created are somewhere in the world together on someone's bookshelf in their room, I just want to explode with joy aaand...I should just shut up now.

Anyway, thank you so very much! The S-Ranked Gaeabrande arc ends with this volume, but the next story, SS-Ranked Ixphoria, will continue online as well as at KakuYomu. Please wish me good luck and support me in getting the other stories published as well.

And last but not least, I just want to thank everyone once more who made this novel come to life. I am wishing you all the happiness in the world.

Tuchihi

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