

III

Magic Knight of the Old Ways

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“I want to be
proud of myself.”

Magic Knight
of the Old Ways

“A warrior living by the rules of the past”









A Knight Tells Only the Truth

Their Bravery Glimmers in Their Hearts

Their Swords Defend the Defenseless

Their Power Sustains Virtue

And Their Anger... Destroys Evil



Alvin

The prince of Calvania. Alvin trains under Sid to become a knight and inherit the throne to save her declining kingdom.



Sid

A man known as the strongest knight of the legendary era. Now resurrected in the present day, Sid mentors the collection of misfits known as the Blitze class.



Isabella

A half-human, half-fairy woman. Due to an ancient pact, Isabella offers her divine protection to the Calvania royal family and assists them as the leader of the Ladies of the Lake.



Tenko

A girl of the demi-human species called the noble-tailed people. Tenko was found by Alvin's father and grew up like a sister to Alvin.

STUDENTS

Christopher

A boy from a farming family in a rural borderlands village. Christopher excels in a strength-focused fighting style where he acts as a shield for his allies.

Elaine

A girl from a prestigious aristocratic family headed by a knight. Although Elaine's sword may be of the lowest rank, her book smarts and swordsmanship are some of the best in the school.

Theodore

A boy from an orphanage in an impoverished area. At odds with his seemingly intelligent appearance, Theodore is quite the delinquent and is skilled at pickpocketing.

Lynette

The eldest daughter of an aristocratic family that fell into ruin. An animal lover, Lynette is the most skilled horseback rider in the whole Blitze class.

KEY TERMS

Fairy Swords

Friendly fairies known as Good Fellows, who, in accordance with an ancient pact, have transformed into swords. Knights use these swords to perform all sorts of magical abilities, such as enhancing their physical strength or healing themselves.

Blitze Class

One of the classes at the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy. Prizing liberty and good conscience, the Blitze class emphasizes students' personal beliefs and sense of justice. As the class is newly established, its student culture is hard to define apart from being highly individual. The class is named after the "Barbarian" Sid Blitze.

Calvania Castle and the Fairy World

The Ladies of the Lake and titan artisans combined their ability to build Calvania Castle. The castle serves as the threshold between the material world, where physical creatures like people and animals live, and the fairy world, where immaterial creatures like fairies and monsters live.

Chapter 1: A New Conspiracy

“Surrender! We won’t stand for your vile acts any longer!” a *boy* said, his dignified voice echoing across the plaza of a rural village.

The *boy*, who wore the squire uniform of the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy, had downy blond hair and sapphire-blue eyes. Though his beautiful and delicate features, as well as his small and dainty build, made him look like a girl, he gave off no hint of hesitation thanks to the dignified spirit he exuded.

The *boy* drew his lavishly ornamented rapier from its scabbard, then majestically pointed it at the ruffians before him.

“And yet, I am benevolent! On my name as the next king of the Kingdom of Calvania, Alvin Noll Calvania, I proclaim that any person who surrenders will have their sentence lessened! What will you do?!”

The ruffians, members of the Gayle Bandits, went red with rage from being asked to capitulate.

“That blasted whelp is looking down on us!”

“I’m gonna kill him!”

The bandits readied their swords, axes, spears, bows, and other arms. These were no ordinary weapons and were the reason they didn’t surrender.

A young knight with black hair and dark eyes—Sid—watched the scene from the roof of a windmill away from the plaza.

“Let’s see what you can do, my lord,” he said, some amusement creeping into his voice as he reclined and munched on an apple.

In the Aroll region—the southwestern portion of the Kingdom of Calvania—was a village called Noire sandwiched between the Lemo Valley and a dense forest. Though the village’s location normally would have made life difficult, thanks to the previous king’s policy to cultivate new lands with large fields and the provisions they could harvest from the forest, they had plenty to eat. Or, at least, they *should* have.

The Gayle Bandits periodically attacked the village, and this was one of those assaults. The band of brigands—formed of dozens of ruined knights, former mercenaries, and famous criminals residing in the Lemo Valley—plundered the villages in the Aroll region without exception and even kidnapped the villagers. Their recent acquisition of *special weapons* from a certain source had made the devilish scourge a force even the villages’ vigilantes could no longer cope with.

However, this time, the bandits’ usual attack was greeted by an unusual sight. In front of them were students from the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy—the Blitze class.

“Wh-What should we do, boss? Knights showed up,” a

member of the brigands, who was rather neurotic, asked.

The crass, bearded boss, Gayle, snorted as he looked around with irritation. The bandits had been led into the central plaza and were now surrounded by knights. He looked at his opponents one by one. They were all young. There was a boy with a pretty face like a woman, readying a rapier, and a half-crouching noble-tail girl, holding the scabbard of her sheathed katana with one hand and the hilt with the other. Next to them was a boy who looked like a bumpkin, shouldering a claymore next to a noble-looking girl, readying a bastard sword while putting on airs. A timid girl, trembling as she clung to her spear, petrified. A boy with glasses, taking a pose with his short sword.

“Ha, they’re nothing. Just brats, and there’s only six of them,” Gayle spat out. “They’re not even knighted. They’re just squires.”

“So?”

“That means they’ve got nothing on us,” Gayle explained with a smirk, shouldering his weapon—a sinister black axe. “And look. The women are all beautiful. They’re gonna sell high.”

“But before that, we should enjoy them,” a bandit said with a vulgar smile.

Gayle returned the smile, then ordered his men loudly. “Let’s go teach these ignorant brats how the world works!”

The men answered with a battle cry, then charged toward the apprentice knights surrounding them. Their beast-like movements showed they had an abundance of physical strength. Of course they would, after all—their weapons

were black fairy swords. Thanks to being of a low rank, the swords weren't powerful enough to corrupt their minds that much, but given they were scum anyway, there wasn't that much difference.

“Even if they have fairy swords, they're just brats! Just surround them and beat them like we usually do, and it'll be easy!” Gayle yelled.

They weren't amateurs but a group of hardened fighters. They had far more experience than the knights of this era, who had grown complacent in the peace and absence of war. In fact, they already had defeated a few fairy knights, so they had nothing to fear from unknighthed children. They had the kind of vigor and intensity found in people convinced they would win, coupled with the bloody malice of scumbags who were truly rotten. Their presence loomed over the boys and girls like an incoming tsunami.

The squires gasped, seemingly overwhelmed by their first life-or-death confrontation against the dark side of humanity. Then, the next instant, six special rhythmic breaths could be heard, and—

“Ha!”

“Hyaa!”

Two students attacked with a shout, sending two yelling bandits flying away.

“Wh-What?!” Gayle opened his eyes wide. The children he had seen as whelps blew away his men with a single stroke of their weapons.

“Let's go, everyone! Don't let a single one of these ruffians

threatening our people run away!” the *boy*, who looked like a girl, ordered with a clear and dignified voice as he charged in.

“Yes, Alvin!” the noble-tail girl answered as she charged in from the opposite direction.

“Th-They’re coming!” a bandit shouted.

“Surround them!” the bandits yelled and nimbly encircled the two students.

Though the bandits failed to act first, their dexterous movements were so in sync and polished that it was hard to believe they were simple bandits.

Even a knight wielding a fairy sword could only see what was ahead of them. If their attention was focused on the front, even knights wouldn’t be able to resist attacks from the side and behind.

So this is what they did. Two bandits restrained the feminine boy from the front while others swung their weapons from the sides and behind. Their coordinated assault and their black fairy swords were a real threat.

And yet, as if the feminine boy, Alvin, had eyes on all sides, he—no, *she*—reacted to all the attacks from the bandits with her rapier. First, she warded off and blocked the sword strikes coming from her left and right. Then she twisted to repel the axe coming from behind. Each time the weapons clashed, the sound of metal rang out and sparks flickered.

Alvin’s movements were swift, as if she were dancing.

“Tayweed!” Alvin activated her fairy magic by shouting the words meaning “Tailwind” in Espirish, the ancient fairy tongue.

A gust of wind enveloped her, and her movements became faster. She weaved her rapier between the gaps of the bandits’ storm-like assault and stabbed them in their arms, abdomens, and legs. One by one, the bandits screamed as they collapsed when faced with Alvin’s swift footwork and swordsmanship.

“Hya!” On the other side, the noble-tail girl—Tenko—was in a similar situation, acting as if she had eyes all around. “Barnig!” While ordering her katana to burn in Espirish, she slid it from its scabbard using the rotation of her hips, explosively accelerating her sword’s strike. The slash broke the weapons of the bandits surrounding her, leaving behind a crimson trail of flames.

“What the...?”

“What happened?”

The strike was so fast and powerful that the bandits could only stand dumbfounded amidst the swirling sparks.

Tenko followed up with swift attacks, mercilessly cutting down three bandits, then another two.

“Wh-Who the hell are they?!”

“Th-They’re strong!”

“And the way they can see all around isn’t normal!” The bandits trembled with fear.

“We’re used to training with Sir Sid, after all!” Alvin said.

“Right, master always attacks us from all directions with incredible speed!” Tenko said, her back against Alvin, who she joined up with during the fight. Then they charged together at the agitated bandits, slaying them as if they were scarecrows.

What’s more, Alvin and Tenko weren’t the only frightful ones.

“Don’t get carried away, you brat!”

The girl who looked like a noble lady—Elaine—was locking swords with a bandit, her back arched backward because of the height difference, immobilizing her.

“You fool! You’re just a woman. When we close in, you won’t stand a chance!”

“Now! Do it! And don’t hurt her face. That’d spoil the mood later!”

“Yeah!”

The bandits assaulted Elaine from all directions. The men had vulgar smiles on their faces from the joy of tormenting a beautiful woman. However...

“As if,” Elaine whispered impishly with a wink. “Flowanslaa.” She said the words for “flow and tear them up” in the ancient fairy tongue.

The next instant, water overflowed from her bastard sword, becoming a sharp blade and extending like a whip, tearing through the screaming bandits. It was the blue

magic, Water Dragon Sword, which required no preparation, nor any sword swing. The water simply slashed at the enemies on its own at high speed.

The bandits collapsed, blood spilling from their wounds.

“My apologies, but close range is actually my forte,” Elaine said proudly while shaking dripping water off her sword. “I won’t lose as long as I use this graceful and ever-changing way to fight. Unfortunately, there is a certain gentleman who I have yet to reach even with this.”

The ever-changing water blade swung again at the back of the bandit trying to run.

“Take that!”

“Die, stupid brat!”

The bandits swung down their weapons from all directions, seizing the boy who looked like a bumpkin—Christopher. An axe aimed for his head, a sword for his abdomen, and a spear for his back. Unlike the other students, he was slow and looked amateurish. Thinking he wouldn’t be able to react, the bandits attacked all at once—and their strikes reached him. Yes, they hit him, but...

“That freaking hurts, you bastards!” he screamed.

“Wh-What?!” a bandit exclaimed.

Christopher glared at the bandits who hit him. Though imperfect, the men’s weapons were black fairy swords, far stronger than normal arms. And yet, they didn’t cut through him. Stone slabs covered the parts where weapons hit.

“Though, it’s nothing compared to our instructor’s stupidly heavy attacks!” Christopher grinned and shouted, “Gifmiadia!” which was Espirish for, “Give me the strength of diamond,” and he used it to activate the green fairy magic, Diamond Strength.

Christopher’s arms filled with the power of the earth, strengthening them. Then he swung his claymore in one big slash with a yell and crushed the bandits’ weapons. The men screamed in pain as the force sent them flying.

“D-Damn it! They ain’t normal brats!”

“Don’t get close! Use your bows! Shoot arrows at them!”

Panicked by Alvin and the others’ fierce attack, the bandits decided to change tactics and shot arrows with their bow-shaped fairy swords. The arrows rained down on the students with frightening speed and accuracy.

However, before they could hit, they were reduced to ashes by a firestorm.

“Hmph. They’re sly like I thought.” The boy with glasses, Theodore, was posing with his short sword, which had fire rising from its tip.

A bandit clicked his tongue. “What a pain. He has a fire-type fairy sword!”

“Doesn’t matter! We just need to endure one blow and get close!”

“He’s got a short sword! If we just get close enough for our blades to reach, we’ll win!”

As expected of experienced fighters, the bandits had good judgment. They scattered, making themselves more evasive, and rushed toward Theodore. That way, if the kid's firepower was insufficient, he wouldn't be able to defeat them. After all, fairy swords granted a high defensive power against magic, so they could endure a few blows. Even if Theodore could beat a bandit or two, the rest would be able to reach him.

“That is *if* my firepower is insufficient,” Theodore said with cold eyes as he pushed up his glasses. Then he thrust his sword and chanted, “Krimetewifry,” which meant, “Be cremated by flames” in the old fairy tongue.

The tip of his sword filled with overwhelming heat and created a sphere of fire, illuminating the surroundings with a red glow. Then he shot it, making it draw an arc in the sky as it flew at high speed before landing in the middle of the group of bandits and exploding. The large explosion created a pillar of fire and a fierce blast, scattering flames and blowing the bandits away in all directions. It was the red fairy magic, Cremation Sphere.

“I-It's hot! Ahhh!” The bandits screamed in pain, their bodies covered with flames.

“His firepower is incredible...” The other bandits cowered in fear after seeing how strong Theodore was. They didn't dare to approach him anymore.

“Should be good enough, right?” Theodore whispered with a sigh, thinking about his class's instructor, who was watching them fight from afar.

Then he produced more fire with his sword and continued to attack the bandits.

“Eeek! No, stop!” a girl’s piercing cry echoed around the battleground. “Please, forgive me! Don’t kill me!”

Nobody in the history of warfare, where people’s cruelty and inner darkness were exposed, had ever had their life spared just by begging for it. Thus, it was easy to imagine this voice full of dread and despair belonged to a woman approaching a pitiful and tragic death. And yet, the owner of the voice, a girl named Lynette, was wielding her spear while sobbing.

“We should be the ones saying that...”

The bandits around her moaned, their voices and faces full of despair.

They were all in a different state of anguish.

“Nohe, hihe, uhihi, hyahya...” a bandit mumbled. He looked like he was inebriated, a mushroom sprouting on his head.

“I can’t move...not even a finger...” Another was limp on the ground, paralyzed by poisonous roses.

“Hmm?! Mmm?!” Another was covered with foliage, round enough to be rolling around.

“Nooo! Take me down!” Another was bound by ivy, hanging upside down.

And finally, the one that had been put to sleep by the fragrance of the sleep-inducing flowers surrounding him might have been the luckiest of them all.

Everything was the result of Lynette's fairy magic.

The bandits thought she would be an easy target, given how timid she looked, and yet, here was the result. Each time Lynette swung her spear while crying, calamity struck. In a way, considering the unpredictable nature of her attacks, it could be said that she was the most troublesome one among the squires.

“Just how many plants are you going to use with your fairy sword before being satisfied?!” a bandit shouted.

“Eeeeeek! Get back! Stop! Don't get closer!” Lynette yelled while swinging her spear. A whip made of thorns sprouted from the spearhead and hit a poor bandit who was lying down, restrained by ivy, making him scream in pain. “Please! Save me! Don't kill me!” Lynette hit the bandit again and again with the whip of thorns as she begged for her life.

“Stop! You're going to awaken something in me!” the bandit screamed as he felt the beginnings of something other than pain.

“Damn! They're all monsters!”

“And they're just squires?! That's a joke!”

“Calvania's supposed to be famous for its weak knights!”

Three bandits at the outskirts of the village had realized their disadvantage and ran away, managing to skillfully avoid detection.

“I’m outta here!”

“Yeah! Let’s flee—” The bandit didn’t finish his sentence because as they were going to leave the village...

“Yo,” a young man said, munching on an apple and standing as if he had been waiting for their arrival.

“Who the hell are you?!”

“Sorry, it’s a dead end. Go back,” the young man—Sid—crunched the apple core and swallowed it. “For you scumbags who plundered innocent people and sold the women you kidnapped, today’s your end.” He cracked his neck, then faced the bandits. “Basically, it’s time to pay the piper. You should become the fertilizer for my students’ growth.”

“Shut up! Don’t screw with us!”

“Get out of the way!”

The three bandits assaulted Sid, but he disappeared before them like a mist. The following instant, he flicked his fingers three times at great speed, which left afterimages behind and sent the bandits flying away screaming. They rotated vertically midair, going back along the path they came from, before finally falling into the manure tank together.

“Yeah, no... That’s not what I meant by becoming fertilizer,” Sid said, scratching his cheek with a troubled look.

“How did it go, everyone?” Alvin asked.

“I’m done here!” Tenko answered.

“I didn’t have any problem either!” Elaine added.

Alvin and the others had joined up at the center of the village’s plaza. The fight was completely one-sided, and dozens of bandits were lying around, piled on each other. About ten bandits had been defeated by each student.

“I-It was scary...” Lynette moaned, nervously looking around.

“But we won!”

“Yes, we did! We won’t lose, even against black fairy swords!”

Christopher and Elaine were proud of their victory, and they wiped the sweat from their brows.

“We’re not done yet,” Alvin said. “We’re still missing their leader, Gayle. As long as he’s free, we can’t say the battle is over.”

“But where is he? Don’t tell me he ran away.” Tenko stood on guard as she looked around vigilantly, when suddenly—

“You damn brats... You really got us.”

“Eek!”

A man’s hoarse voice and a girl’s painful shriek reached Alvin and the others, who immediately turned.

“What?!”

It was Gayle, and at the end of his log-like arm was a village girl, seized by her neck.

“Heh heh,” Gayle laughed while putting his axe against the girl’s throat.

The village girl was called Yuno and was a little younger than Alvin and the others. She had been the one in charge of helping them prepare for the bandits’ attack. And now she was a hostage even though the villagers should have been evacuated before the fight.

“I-I’m so sorry, Prince,” the girl said with a cough, her face ghastly pale. “I...I just wanted to see you all in your glorious moment...”

“Ha ha ha!” Gayle laughed loudly. “I’m really lucky! You understand, right? If you don’t want her dead, throw your weapons away!”

He was wielding a black fairy sword, meaning his strength was far above a normal man. He would break Yuno’s neck before Alvin and the others’ attacks could reach him.

“A-Alvin...” Tenko peeked at Alvin’s profile anxiously.

Alvin stayed silent for a few seconds, then finally, she threw her fairy sword on the ground in Gayle’s direction and glared at him.

“If that’s what you decided...” Tenko said.

“Damn it!” Christopher said.

The Blitze class respected Alvin’s decision and threw their fairy swords too.

“N-No! Prince!” Yuno’s face turned even paler, full of despair.

“Heh heh... I like obedient kids,” Gayle smirked unpleasantly. “Hey, you! The brat who looks like a woman! Come here! As for the others, back away!”

Tenko gritted her teeth as she and the others slowly stepped back. Alvin, on the contrary, slowly walked toward Gayle. They were all moving away from their fairy swords still on the ground.

“Sir knights...” Yuno let out painfully.

Gayle chuckled. “Good. You knights are nothing without your fairy swords.” He approached Alvin, still holding Yuno hostage. “Oh yeah, you called yourself Noll Calvania, right? So you’re really the prince of this country, huh? The kid of that damned previous knight king.”

“That’s right.” Alvin nodded.

Gayle clicked his tongue. “You’re just a puny prince in the pocket of the three ducal houses... Well, whatever,” he spat, holding Yuno in one hand and pointing his axe at Alvin with the other. “You did your best destroying my gang, but it’s useless. I’ve got the support of an amazing patron.”

Alvin stayed silent.

“I’d like to say goodbye for today and start reforming my gang, but...yeah, can’t bear having you underestimating me. So I’m gonna kill you, Prince.”

“Wh-What?!” Yuno cried, her face twisted with grief. “N-No, you can’t! You shouldn’t abandon your life for someone

like me! Please...fight! Don't worry about me—”

“Shut it! If you say another word, I'm gonna strangle you, girly!”

“Arg!”

Gayle strengthened his hold on Yuno's neck to silence her, making her complexion darken by the second. Her bones creaked and were on the verge of breaking.

“Stop!” Alvin yelled. “Isn't it my life that you want?!”

“Oh, you're right. No point in having a hostage if I kill her.” Gayle said and released his hold.

Yuno coughed violently. “Prin...ce...” She didn't have the strength to resist anymore, and her body went limp.

Using his threatening physical strength and Yuno as a shield, he continued to approach the empty-handed Alvin until she was in his axe's range.

“Heh heh, don't move. If you do, I'll break her neck,” Gayle said.

“N-No...run away...Prince...” Yuno pleaded.

And yet, Alvin stayed silent and unmoving. She had her eyes closed and was clenching and unclenching her hanging right fist while breathing with a strange rhythm.

Then finally—

“You resigned yourself to your fate?! Great! I'm gonna make your head decoration for my axe!”

Gayle raised his axe overhead.

And, at the same time...

“Gayle,” Alvin muttered. “Let me teach you something.”

“Die!” Of course, Gayle didn’t listen and swung his axe, aiming at Alvin’s slender neck.

“N-No! Prince!” Yuno screamed.

The next instant, a fountain of blood spurted, and Alvin’s head spun in the sky—or at least, that’s what Gayle imagined.

What happened instead was the sound of metal breaking. It wasn’t Alvin’s head that was spinning in the air but broken fragments of Gayle’s axe.

“Wh-What?!”

“Huh?”

Both Gayle and Yuno were bewildered by the unimaginable scene—the axe breaking against Alvin’s slender neck.

Suddenly, Alvin opened her eyes and said, “A knight’s anger destroys evil.”

She quickly stepped forward and swung her right hand, using it like a sword, and cut Gayle’s tendons in the arm that held Yuno. Blood spurted, and Yuno fell on the ground with a shriek, now released.

Gayle screamed in pain. “Y-You freaking brat!” But the

agony brought him back to his senses, and he raised his broken axe overhead once again, his face flushed with rage.

“Alvin!” At the same time, Tenko leaped forward and picked up Alvin’s fairy sword. Then she jumped and threw it toward Alvin’s back.

As if she could see everything, Alvin rotated, grasped her rapier’s handle in midair, and used the momentum to thrust her sword at Gayle with a yell. Gayle didn’t care and continued to swing his axe with a scream. And the result of this skirmish was...Alvin’s victory.

“Gah!” Gayle coughed in pain. Alvin had evaded his axe by lowering herself, and her thrust pierced through his throat. “That’s...impossi...ble...” He coughed one last time, his eyes wide, before falling to the ground.

Alvin confirmed his death, then wiped the blood from her sword and placed it back in its scabbard.

“Are you all right?” Alvin offered her hand to Yun0, who was still bewildered.

“P-Prince...”

“I’m sorry you had to go through such a scary experience. I’m glad you’re okay.” Alvin said with a bright and gentle smile.

“Th...thank you...very much...” Yun0 said. Her face suddenly became bright red, her eyes moistened, and she looked at Alvin as if she was attracted to her.

“Hell yeah! You did great, Alvin!” Christopher said.

“Truly, you shouldn’t make us so anxious!” Elaine complained.

Everyone cheered as they rushed toward Alvin.

“Jeez, you were seriously reckless this time!” Tenko said, her face red with anger. “It might have been a low rank, but it was still a black fairy sword! If your Will had been just a little too weak, you’d be dead!”

“Aha ha ha...” Alvin laughed wryly. “Sorry for worrying you.”

“Also, what was *that*?! Did you use your hand like a sword to imitate master?! You shouldn’t try to copy somebody as abnormal as that! You idiot!”

Yuno looked at the Blitze class blankly as they all raised their voices.

“Good grief,” Sid, sitting cross-legged on a tree branch, grumbled with a wry smile as he watched his students.

A flash of lightning made a line from the tree to the plaza...to Gayle’s feet, without anyone noticing it. Sid snapped his fingers and the line disappeared.

“As always, she’s pretty reckless. But, well...” he sighed but had a somewhat proud look as he took a peek at his students one by one. Alvin, Tenko, Elaine, Christopher, Theodore, and Lynette. “You’re all growing nicely,” Sid muttered with deep emotion.



After the fight, Alvin quickly gave clean-up orders to the soldiers who had come with the Blitze class from the capital.

“Hmm...were my instructions good enough, Sir Sid?” Alvin asked.

“Yeah, you’ve become quite good.” Sid gently nodded. “You’re finally understanding how someone at the top must act. Good job.”

“R-Really?!” Alvin giggled bashfully.

“But getting delighted like a puppy when I praise you shows that you still have a long way to go.”

“Ah...” Alvin hung her head, depressed.

Around them, some of the soldiers were restraining the surviving bandits and carrying out the dead ones. As for the others, they followed the Blitze class with Tenko as their head toward the bandits’ hideout. Their mission was to save the kidnapped girls and retrieve the goods stolen from the surrounding villages.

“Prince, Sir Sid.” As everyone was working, Isabella, a Nimue—the half-human, half-fairy race—serving the royal family as per their pledge, came to Alvin and Sid.

“Yo, Isabella. Did you find anything?” Sid asked.

“Yes. Just as we expected, the bandits received aid from the Dark Order of Opus.” Isabella shook her head sadly. “I used magic to force the surviving bandits to talk, so there

shouldn't be any doubt.”

“Of course there wouldn't. They were flaunting their black fairy swords around.” Sid commented.

“Indeed. Considering how black fairy swords were distributed among the small criminal groups in the kingdom recently, I suppose it confirms that the Dark Order of Opus is actively moving behind the scenes.”

“Well, even if they're just of Yetsera-rank, black fairy swords are still a threat for this era's knights. So distributing them everywhere is an effective strategy to weaken the kingdom.”

“Exactly. What's more, the three ducal houses are being stingy with the number of troops they send and are using the occasion to impose an outrageous tax on the attacked villages in return for defending them... I can only shiver as I think about what would happen without the Blitze class.” Isabella took a short breath. “You truly had a brilliant idea, Sir Sid. Who would think of using the monthly assignment quests of the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy to make the class subjugate bandits?”

“Alvin's still a prince who hasn't inherited the throne yet. He can't move a large number of soldiers on his own without the three ducal families' agreement. But there's no problem if it's a quest assigned by the school. In that case, he can brazenly move me and the apprentice knights I trained.” Sid grinned. “Alvin and the rest aren't going to lose to some small fries with black fairy swords. If the dukes don't want to protect the kingdom, then Alvin, who's royalty, just needs to do it himself. That way, the country is defended, the Blitze class gets some combat experience, and the royal family's

authority rises, killing three birds with one stone.”

“Thanks to you all, most of the small criminal organizations that were rampaging in the kingdom were crushed. Now, it’ll be my turn to deal with what’s left. Normally, protecting the country should be the duty of the three ducal houses and their fairy knights, so they are probably going to complain since they are losing face. However, as the chief of the Ladies of the Lake, protecting the royal family as per our ancient oath, I won’t allow them to interfere with us.”

“You’re pretty reliable, Isabella,” Sid said with a grin.

“I will leave the prince and the other students in your hands, Sir Sid.”

“Yeah, I’ll take care of them.”

As Isabella left, Sid noticed something about Alvin.

“Why do you make such a long face?” Sid asked.

“Excuse me. It’s just that the sensation of cutting...no, of killing someone, just won’t leave my hand...” Alvin muttered while looking at her right palm.

During this quest, the Blitze class went around the kingdom fighting bandits and thieves who were helped by the Dark Order of Opus. However, this was their first time fighting against humans and not monsters. In that sense, it had been their first true battle—their first campaign.

Thanks to Sid’s training, they didn’t have any hardship or loss, and everything went well. And yet, for the students who had been living in peace until now, it was an oppressive

feeling. They learned the harsh truth about what being a knight, which had been the target of their pure yearning, truly meant. And the other students were probably feeling the same as Alvin right now.

“I killed quite a few people during this campaign, and...my hand just won’t stop trembling...” Alvin looked quietly at her shivering right hand. “I feel like I did something that can’t be undone... Though, I guess a knight should be ashamed to think like that.”

Sid smiled lightly and put his hand on her head.

“You don’t have to feel ashamed. What you’re feeling is natural. If you lose this feeling, you won’t be a knight but a demon.”

“A...demon?” Alvin asked, looking up at Sid, who nodded.

“You guys are knights, so you should get used to it. But never lose this feeling. Always think about what it means to kill people. Even if the opponent is scum, it doesn’t change the fact that you’re stealing his future and his possibilities. The true conflict a knight must continue to face is this question: for what purpose must a knight swing their sword?”

“Y-Yes!”

“Fortunately,” Sid grinned, “your fight this time had a clear purpose.”

“Huh?” Alvin blinked.

“Prince!” The villagers called out, assembling around Alvin.

“Thank you very much, Prince!”

“Thanks to you, the village was saved!”

“We won’t have to pay that outrageous tax to the greedy dukes!”

“And we’ll be able to live at peace!”

“Just now, my kidnapped daughter was saved by your retainers and returned to me safely. How can I express my gratitude to you?!”

“If you become the king, the country will be at peace!”

“Prince Alvin!”

One after the other, they all thanked him with tears in their eyes.

“Prince...” Then finally, Yuno approached Alvin. She had her hands on her heart and her cheeks were dyed pink as she stared at Alvin as if worshipping her. “I’m truly grateful for your help! The way you fight for your people, as well as your kind heart for saving somebody like me... I was deeply moved! You are a king among kings, Prince! I’m sure of it!”

“Err... I...” Alvin was bewildered.

“Prince... I made my decision. I will become a knight!” Yuno declared with determination.

“Huh?”

“I have always admired knights, but everyone in the village said it was impossible for me... Still, I want to become

one! I want to become a knight and, one day, use my life for you, Prince!”

The villagers hurriedly tried to calm her.

“Yuno! Restrain yourself!”

“You’re being rude!”

“Being a knight is different from playing with swords!”

“In the first place, I doubt a simple village girl like you could help the Prince...”

“Please stop, everyone. I don’t mind,” Alvin said, then looked straight at Yuno. “I’m delighted to hear you say that when I still have a long way to go.”

“Prince...”

“But it’s a severe and difficult path. It’s not just pure light. It’s also darkness you will want to avert your eyes from. You might regret your choice.”

“I-I’m prepared!”

“I see. Well then, if your determination is true and not just temporary, let’s meet again at the Blitze class of Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy. I’ll be waiting for you.” Alvin smiled gently.

“Prince! Yes! I’ll definitely come!” Yuno nodded, her eyes moist with overwhelming emotion.

As for Sid, he was watching over them with a peaceful smile.

At the continent's northern extremity, far from the Kingdom of Calvania, and beyond the wall of the Death Palace Mountains, was the old demon kingdom of Dachnesia, a country entrapped by hellish freezing air, snow, and ice all year round.

“It’s boring! So, so boring!” The master of the Dachnesia Castle complained, displeased, as she was sitting on her throne cross-legged. Her name was Endea, and she looked just like Alvin. “Even though we bothered to distribute trash black swords all over the kingdom, they all lost! Aaaah, just when will I be able to send Alvin to hell?!”

“You’re not very patient, my adorable master,” Flora, the witch, chuckled while combing Endea’s hair with her hand. “The preparations are going steadily. An irreparable hole was opened in Éclair’s protection around the capital, and we’re gathering the catalysts needed for *that* ritual...”

Murders, thefts, abductions, slave trading, drug dealing, and trying to destroy the kingdom—everything the Dark Order did for the past few years had been to collect the magic catalysts necessary to perform a certain ritual...or at least, that’s what Endea was told.

“Indeed, we only need to wait now, my master,” Flora affirmed with a giggle.

Endea, who wasn’t that interested, snorted and turned away.

“You know, I don’t really understand what your ritual will do, and I actually don’t care. My only wish is to make Alvin’s life a mess. I want to destroy that irritating country and this

irrational world!”

“Yes, I know. And my way will surely please you. I promise you, my adorable master.”

“And I trust you. After all, you’ve never said anything wrong so far.”

“Your words are more than I deserve.”

“I’m so bored. If only Tenko became mine, then...” Endea muttered in an inaudible lonely voice. Then, as if she came up with a great idea, she clapped her hands. “Hey, why not just attack with all our dark knights? We could at least destroy two or three villages in Calvania!” she said, looking just like a child playing with a toy. Her malice was so pure that, coming full circle, you could almost call it innocence. “Ha ha! I’m sure Alvin would be so sad and angry! That would be quite a sight! If I can cloud that composed face, I —”

“This isn’t a bad idea, but I wouldn’t recommend it.” Flora shrugged her shoulders. “Indeed, we have strong knights in our Dark Order of Opus. However, the Kingdom of Calvania currently has Sir Sid, the strongest knight of the legendary era. Even if they grouped together, mere dark knights wouldn’t be a match for him.”

“Sir Sid!” Endea gritted her teeth, annoyed. “Then we just continue to distribute black fairy swords and wait for the kingdom to exhaust itself? That’s boring!”

“True, that’s not very interesting,” Flora said with a smile. “Sir Sid is likely to become the greatest obstacle in our plan. I suppose it’s time for us to take some countermeasures.”

Just as Flora was starting to think of something—

Voices rang out.

“Then...it should be fine as long as it’s not *mere* dark knights, no?”

“Yeah, exactly.”

“Indeed.”

The darkness in the place suddenly became far heavier.

Endea gasped as she felt a great pressure and cold sweat forming on her brow. Before she could realize it, three people had appeared in the throne room.

The first one was wearing black plate armor, a black overcoat, and a black helmet with a cross-shaped mark on its visor. The design of their armor resembled a lion.

The second one was wearing the same things, but the form of their helmet and the feather decoration on their shoulders brought to mind an owl.

The last one was, of course, also wearing the same armor and cloak, but their helmet had a horn just like a unicorn. The plate armor was refined and beautiful, giving off the feeling of a swift horse.

The three dark knights were wearing full-face helmets, so nobody could see their faces. But even then, it was obvious that the beings hidden behind these helmets weren’t people belonging to this world. After all, these dark knights had an overwhelming presence and were clad in a tremendous amount of dark mana. People who could crush and break the

spirits of anyone who looked at them couldn't be humans from this world.

They were so abnormal that even Endea felt her knees shiver in front of them. And, even though it hadn't been a true battle, she did confront Sid, so she understood—the mana she felt from these three was of the same level...no, maybe higher than the so-called strongest knight from the legendary era.

“We're back, our master.” The three dark knights kneeled in front of Endea, showing their respect as her retainers.

“S-Sir Lion...Sir Owl...and Sir Unicorn!” Endea showed the backbone of a lord and greeted them with fortitude.

These three dark knights were the strongest of the Dark Order of Opus. Sir Lion, leader of the Black Lion Knights; Sir Owl, leader of the Black Owl Knights; and Sir Unicorn, leader of the Black Unicorn Knights. Endea's three strongest knights—the strongest of the dark side—were here.

“There is nothing to fear, my adorable master,” Flora whispered to Endea with a giggle. “These three have sworn absolute loyalty to you, the one who will become the true king of this world. If you ordered them to die, they would with pleasure. Just be confident and do not show any hesitation.”

“I-I don't need you to tell me that...” Endea snorted, then, after taking a deep breath, turned toward the three dark knights. “So? What did you mean earlier, Sir Lion?”

“Just as my words implied, my master.” The dark knight with a cross-shaped mark on his helmet—Sir Lion—answered solemnly. “If a mere knight is too weak, then you

just need to send forces that aren't mere knights."

"In other words—us," the dark knight with a horn on his helmet—Sir Unicorn—agreed. "Please, order me to take the life of Sid Blitze the Barbarian, who is serving the false king, Alvin Noll Calvania. If you do, I will fulfill it even if it costs me my life."

Sir Lion and Sir Owl immediately protested.

"Wait, Unicorn. Sid Blitze is my prey and always has been since the past. If you plan to take him from me, even if it's you, I..."

"What are you saying, Sir Lion? I swear on my pride that I'll be the one to kill him. If you interfere, I'll kill you too."

Still, Sir Unicorn warded off the pressure they sent his way.

"Shouldn't you be acting on our master's order, and not your own, you two?"

The following instant, the atmosphere became even heavier. Sir Lion stretched his hand toward the large sword on his back. Sir Owl grasped the handle of the longsword on his waist. Sir Unicorn grabbed the spear on his back. The three prepared themselves silently with their weapons.

The air creaked from the fierce killing intent they sent to each other, not wanting to give in. The situation was truly critical. However, just before a grand battle to the death could start, just at the moment when a normal person would be killed for interrupting them—

"Calm down, servants. You're in front of the king," Flora

ordered, her tone unusually stern.

The three dark knights fell silent and dispelled their bloodlust.

“Truly, your loyalty is getting out of hand,” Flora added, this time in her usual tone as she chuckled. “In the first place, didn’t you have an important task to accomplish?”

“You mean hunting an ancient dragon?” Sir Lion asked.

“Yes. Then after killing it, you need to return its immense amount of mana to the earth,” Flora explained.

“In that case, it’s done.”

Sir Lion raised his hand, then a few phantom knights came pulling a cart with a gigantic horn on it. It was, of course, a dragon’s horn. Endea stood up from her throne, her eyes wide.

“D-Don’t tell me this is...the horn of Shavniguth, the dragon from Lake Cerizanne in the remote region of Rolanne?! You already hunted it?!” Endea shouted.

“Hmph. I’d have been fine alone,” Sir Lion said.

“Indeed. The three of us were too much for prey like this,” Sir Unicorn agreed.

“Ancient dragons were stronger in the legendary era... I guess this is more proof of the passage of time,” Sir Owl commented.

Hearing this, Endea couldn’t help the cold sweat forming on her neck.

Can you really hunt an ancient dragon that easily...? she thought.

Ancient dragons had lived almost an eternity and acquired wisdom exceeding the human race. They were said to be close to gods, as they could control the laws of nature in the regions where they resided. There were countless countries in history that were destroyed for trying to make a move on one. One could only feel an unfathomable fear from the three dark knights who could hunt an ancient dragon as if it were a deer.

If it's those three, they might be able to defeat Sir Sid... Endea mused, as she could easily imagine it happening, feeling the incredible pressure from the three knights. She could see the scene where they offered her Sid's head. *Huh?* However, imagining the scene made her chest feel uncomfortable. *Just now, did I...not like what I imagined?*

He was Alvin's knight, and she hated Alvin more than anyone. He wouldn't save people who fell into darkness and were completely dyed by it—like she was. Then why did she feel conflicted? Just as Endea was trying to seek an answer inside her...

“That's an excellent idea,” Flora said. Endea must have vocalized some of her thoughts without realizing it. “If we could kill Sid Blitze, Alvin's most trusted knight, Alvin would certainly grieve heavily. Would that satisfy you a little, my adorable master?”

“Y-Yeah! Aha ha ha! I'm sure Alvin's crying face would be really unsightly!” Endea said, somewhat flustered.

“Then that's decided.” Sir Lion nodded. “The next hunt will be the Barbarian. Who will be going?”

“I will ask just in case, but can’t we all do it together?” Sir Unicorn asked.

“Never,” Sir Owl declared. “That small fry of a dragon was one thing, but *him*? My pride would never allow it.”

“Indeed,” Sir Lion said. “In the first place, if you joined me in a fight, I would be too preoccupied with the possibility of one of you catching me unguarded.”

“Truly, it’s as you say...as well as how it should be.” Sir Unicorn let out a small chuckle as if he knew the answer the other two would give from the beginning. “Well then, to be fair, let’s have our respected master decide.”

“I approve.” Sir Lion nodded.

“Hmph,” Sir Owl snorted.

The three dark knights peered at Endea from inside of their visors.

“Huh?” Endea stiffened, being suddenly asked to choose someone.

“Now, my adorable master. The time has come for you to give your order as their king,” Flora whispered in her ear, making Endea gasp. “You have to do it. You have to order them, or else you will lose your qualification as a king. Now, who will you choose?”

Endea quickly looked at the three dark knights in turn. Sir Lion, Sir Owl, Sir Unicorn. They were all great men, the strongest knights with inhuman powers. Without a doubt, even a single one of them could kill Sid.

“I-I...” Endea hesitated for a while, then said, “Got it. Here’s my royal decree...”

As the king, she decided on the knight that would be sent to fight Sid.

They have nothing to do with me. I don’t care, Endea thought as she gritted her teeth some time after giving her order. I don’t care what happens to Sir Sid and this country! To kill Alvin, to make Alvin despair, to take everything from Alvin... That’s why I’m living in ruin! So I...

In the northern lands of the continent, a new conspiracy full of malice began.

Chapter 2: Rivalry

Having finished their assignment quest, the Blitze class, Sid, and the soldiers who accompanied them came back to the royal capital. Just when they trotted through the castle gate on their horses, they came upon an unexpected sight.

“Prince Alvin is here!” the people shouted.

Alvin was royalty, but she was only coming back from a school assignment. Yet, the people of the capital came to greet her in great numbers even though no announcement was made. Some of them were holding little yellow flags with a dragon on them—Blitze class’s coat of arms. They brandished the flags and raised their hands, cheering for Alvin and everyone else.

“Wh-Why are they doing this?” Alvin blinked, bewildered on her horse.

“I guess the advance party must have spread some exaggerated rumors about what you guys did,” Sid said.

Tenko and the rest of the Blitze class were astonished too.

The people of the capital didn’t take notice of the students’ surprise and continued to cheer at them excitedly.

“Prince Alvin! Congratulations on your first campaign!”

“I heard you made a great show of strength!”

“For you, the prince, to fight for your people directly at

the head of your troops...it's as if you're the second coming of the previous king Auld!”

“Did you know?! In the recent practice battles and jousting matches, the Blitze class never lost against the three legacy classes!”

“Seriously?! They became that strong?!”

“No wonder they managed to get rid of the Gayle Bandits!”

“Maybe Prince Alvin isn't the second coming of the previous king Auld...he's the second coming of the Holy King Arthur!”

“The future of this country is promising!”



Sid and the rest made a triumphant return to Calvania Castle and were praised by the people. They crossed the stone bridge above the valley separating the castle town from the castle itself, went through the front gate, and entered the castle premises.

The first things one could see when entering the castle premises were the three small, fortified mansions, their flags depicting their coats of arms. The red one with a lion was Durande class's, the blue one with an owl was Ortol class's, and the green one with a unicorn on it was Anthalo class's. These mansions were the three legacy classes' schoolhouses—the main school buildings at Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy.

Hidden by them was a little annex that had a yellow flag

with a dragon on it—Blitze class’s coat of arms. This building was the Blitze class’s schoolhouse.

Sid took Alvin and Tenko with him, separating from the other students, then continued to walk to the castle. Then they headed to its middle level, where the shrine of the Ladies of the Lake was. There they reported the result of their quest, received a lot of achievement points, then left. Afterward, they were on their way to the dormitory tower of the Blitze class.

“Tonight is going to be a feast, Alvin!” Tenko declared with a chuckle. She must have been in a really good mood, as her tail was flapping left and right. “With the points we just got, we should be able to greatly improve the quality of our student life!”

“Mmh...yeah, you’re right,” Alvin answered, looking a little dejected.

Tenko sensed it and inclined her head to the side, examining Alvin’s face anxiously.

“Wh-What is it, Alvin?”

“I’ve been thinking about the villagers during the campaign and the people from the capital who greeted us...” Alvin smiled wryly, then continued. “I think they’re all overestimating me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I know I’m doing my best and all, but...I’m no match for my father as a king. Also, I’m relying heavily on Sir Sid, Isabella, and everyone in the Blitze class. I can’t do anything by myself,” Alvin said.

“It shows that everyone is expecting great things from you,” Sid said while putting his hand on Alvin’s head. “You, the child of a king who was extolled as a hero, got spectacular results and protected your people. Between the demon kingdom in the north, the country’s unstable domestic affairs, the pressure from the surrounding nations, and more importantly, the absence of a king, everyone is finding hope in you.”

Alvin kept silent. Sid made a small smile seeing her like that, then asked, “Too much responsibility for you?”

“No,” Alvin answered with resolution and lifted her head. “That’s what being king means. I’m ready for this.”

“Well said. That’s my lord.” Sid nodded, satisfied. “Still, you don’t have to force yourself. When it’s hard for you, don’t hesitate to speak. I’m your knight, and I’ll share the burden with you.”

“Yes, I’m counting on you, my knight.” Alvin smiled sweetly.

Looking at the two showing off their trust, Tenko pouted and butted in.

“I-I’ll share the burden too! I’m also Alvin’s knight, after all! It’s the only thing I’ll never yield to you, master!”

“Aha ha! Thanks, Tenko. Of course, I had no intention of ignoring you. You’re just as important as Sir Sid as a retainer, and...you’re my best friend,” Alvin said.

“Really?! Recently, I feel like the way you see master is crossing the boundary between a lord and their retainer!” Tenko pointed out.

“What?! T-Tenko, what are you saying?!” Alvin’s face became bright red, and she started to act flustered.

And, at the same moment, a hostile presence suddenly appeared ahead of them and was getting closer.

Noticing it, Sid stopped walking. Alvin and Tenko did the same, suppressing the frivolous mood they had been in until just now. Finally, the one who appeared before them from the castle passage was...a red-haired girl wearing the squire uniform from the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy.

“Hmm? That woman is...” Sid realized he knew her.

She had been part of the meeting two months ago, before the four classes competed in the interclass games. Though they did meet, they hadn’t had the opportunity to talk. However, he did remember that she had been chosen by an Atzilt-rank fairy sword and that she had been looking at him with sharp eyes full of hostility. Her name was—

“Hey, if it isn’t Louise Thedias. Haven’t seen you since the interclass games,” Sid said, lightly waving his hand.

However, Louise didn’t return the greeting. She stopped in front of them, and after glaring as if she would bite them, she spat.

“Hmph, the garbage-heap class instructor and his students.”

“What?!” Alvin and Tenko gasped, indignant.

Louise didn’t hide her displeasure and continued. “You’ve been doing whatever you want recently.”

Alvin and Tenko stayed silent.

“Your failures colluded with the Ladies of the Lake to get favorable assignment quests, scoring points by protecting the people from puny bandits... I’m sure you felt great, good-for-nothing Prince Alvin.”

“What?! How rude!” Tenko shouted.

“I...didn’t have such intentions...” Alvin said weakly.

As they both answered Louise’s criticism, Sid stopped them with his hand.

“Ha ha ha, you say some scandalous things, Louise. What’s the problem? You’re in a bad mood?”

“Scandalous?! I’m only telling the truth!” Louise declared, glaring at Sid. “Recently, only the Blitze class has been assigned quests with easy gain and fame! If that’s not favoritism from the Ladies of the Lake, then what is it?!”

“You do know that the chief of the Ladies of the Lake, Isabella, is also the school’s principal and that she’s always fair, no?” Sid shrugged his shoulders. “True, for various reasons, the Blitze class has had priority on these quests, but that’s not favoritism. That’s because they have the ability to do them. Isabella only assigns quests she thinks the students can handle. She has to consider it carefully because, after all, the students’ lives would be in danger if she gave too difficult a quest. Also, even if there are some disagreements between her and the three ducal houses, as well as the three legacy classes, she wouldn’t act on her personal feelings. She truly is a good woman, you know.”

“You’re lying!” Louise cried. “Then why...why is it only the

Blitze class getting the glory while the other three classes only get boring quests nobody cares about?! Why don't we get quests that would raise our honor like you?!"

"I mean," Sid looked at her blankly, "you guys are weak."

Louise gasped.

Of course, Sid wasn't trying to provoke her and was just telling the truth. Still, Louise couldn't understand that, so it just felt like he was bluntly provoking her. She was shocked speechless.

"If you were assigned the quest the Blitze class just did, there'd have been quite a few deaths. Don't you think it would be unscrupulous to give a quest that leads to such results?" Sid asked.

"Don't make fun of me!" Louise shouted. What Sid said was based on a *certain fact*. However, Louise couldn't accept *that fact*, so she could only raise her voice to reject it. "I have an Atzilt-rank fairy sword! We proud students of the three legacy classes would never lose to some bandits! Don't insult us, scum!"

"Hmm? Telling the truth is considered an insult in this era?" Sid turned toward Alvin and Tenko and asked them honestly.

However, Louise drew near him, grasped his collar, and made him look at her.

"W-We're different from you and your useless Asher-rank fairy swords!"

"Life-and-death battles are different from matches."

“If you failures can do it, then we can too!”

“I keep telling you that you can’t,” Sid said, finally becoming exasperated. “You guys are too weak.”

Louise gritted her teeth, her anger on the verge of exploding as Sid shoved *that fact* in her face—that the three legacy classes were inferior to the Blitze class.

“You’re right that when I first came here, the three legacy classes were stronger than the Blitze class. But that’s old news, you know? For now, you should accept that fact.”

Louise stayed silent.

“Don’t worry. You might be too weak now, but once you get the necessary strength, Isabella will assign you similar quests.”

Louise still didn’t say anything.

“Hmm? Wait...actually, does that mean you were jealous that Alvin and the rest, who are the same age as you, did splendid work during their quests and were praised by the people? Ha ha ha, so you *do* have a cute side,” Sid frankly said as he laughed.

Alvin and Tenko looked at him nervously.

As for the proud Louise, her patience ran out. The fury she had somehow managed to stifle—since the person in front of her was an instructor—finally erupted.

“You bastard! How dare you mock me?!” Louise drew out her twin blades-shaped fairy sword hanging at her hips.

“Huh?!”

“Louise?!”

Alvin and Tenko stiffened, their eyes wide.

“Haaa!” With a yell, Louise acted at lightning speed and attacked Sid with her dual blades crossed in an X-shape. However—

“Hmm?”

“What?!”

Louise opened her eyes wide in shock. Sid had stopped her attack by pressing his finger against the intersection point of her swords. Of course, Sid’s finger didn’t have a single scratch even though it touched the front blade.

Louise groaned as the back blade ground against the front one. She had the mana supply from her fairy sword and was pushing with all her strength, and yet, Sid didn’t budge. He was so stable and firm that it was like going against a giant castle.

Sid grinned. “In all times and places, using a duel to settle personal grudges is the way of the knight. I like that, Louise.” He smiled at her. “Still, with your current skill, you’re a thousand years too early.”

Sid flicked his finger against the front blade. That was all it took to repel Louise’s twin swords and make her float in the air a moment before landing a little away.

“D-Damn...” Louise cursed as she pulled back her swords and withdrew, trembling.

She wasn't an amateur, but a knight aiming at the pinnacle of the sword. What just happened was enough to make her realize that even if she tried to attack him thousands or even tens of thousands of times, there was absolutely no chance that her sword would reach Sid. Louise came to understand the meaning of being the strongest knight of the legendary era.

“Hmm, your strike just now wasn't bad, and you have talent. It would be a shame to leave it at that.” Sid looked at the trembling Louise, who was hanging her head, and continued without any malice. “If you're fine with it, I wouldn't mind training you. I'm sure you'll improve greatly.”

Even though Sid had her best interest in mind, his words only served to shatter what was left of Louise's pride.

“Shut up! A knight without a fairy sword, like you, shouldn't speak as if you know me!” Louise cried as she struck the floor with her swords in frustration. “Sid Blitze, the Barbarian!” She glared at him as if he had murdered her parents. “You're cruel and inhuman! You're a vicious knight who does as he likes on the battlefield, and you use your twin swords to kill people! It's said that you piled up so many crimes and corpses that the heap is higher than any mountain. You were executed by your lord, the Holy King Arthur—a disgraceful end! You're unworthy to be a knight!”

“Oh? And?” Sid asked, somewhat amused.

“I...I'll never approve of you!” Louise shouted. “Why?! Just why can you do as you please in this country, as if you're a knight among knights, even though you are unworthy to be one?!”

Sid listened silently.

“I’ll never approve of a barbarian like you, who has neither pride nor honor as a knight!” Louise declared, then turned toward Alvin. “And you too, Prince Alvin!”

Alvin gasped and blinked, being suddenly involved in the conversation.

“You’re just part of the worthless and weak royal family! I’ll never approve of how you use the Barbarian, who you just got by chance, to raise your influence! A disgraceful lord and a disgraceful knight! I’ll never approve of any of you!”

“Well, I don’t care about myself, but don’t say that about Alvin. He’s trying his best, you know?” Sid said.

“Shut up! You and Alvin will one day cause the end of this country! People like you, who look down on a knight’s pride and honor, will definitely bring a calamity to this nation!”

Sid stayed silent.

“I swear on these swords and my pride as a knight that, one day, I’ll defeat you both! Just wait for me, you barbarians!” Louise declared.

Then, irritated, she sheathed her swords, turned back, and left with her shoulders squared, showing her resolve.

“Good grief. Girls of her age are hard to deal with,” Sid muttered seriously as he watched Louise’s back.

“Rather than Louise, I think the problem is your manner of speaking, master.” Tenko sighed while staring at Sid.

“It might be because the old era was different from today, but still, you just provoked her as if it was the most natural

thing in the world.” Alvin smiled wryly.

“Hmm?” Sid tilted his head to the side. “Well, whatever. By the way, all the First Squires are going to have a training camp together in the fairy world, right?”

“Yes.”

“Now that you mention it...”

Alvin and Tenko nodded.

“Even if we’re doing our assignment quests properly, I think there are a lot of students who think like Louise,” Alvin said.

“And we’ll have to train together with them for an entire month... I just know that some trouble will happen.” Tenko sighed.

“I know that this training camp will be the last quest of this term for us First Squires, but still... I feel a little depressed.” Alvin sighed too.

“Hmm, I see. Well, that might be a good opportunity,” Sid muttered, taking a glance in the direction Louise had left.

Chapter 3: Training Camp in the Fairy World

The fairy world, where fairies lived, was another realm connected to the material world like two sides of the same coin. Normally, the two realms didn't mix. At most, fairies born in the fairy world would come to the material world to calm or surprise people. And yet, special places existed where these two worlds, that shouldn't mix, actually came together. These places were called the fused world, and Calvania Castle was one of them. The castle served as a curtain between the two worlds. As such, inside the castle were gates that connected the material world and the fairy world, allowing people to travel between them.

For example, the pond inside the castle's courtyard.

Or doors and stairs that would only appear at a certain time during the night.

Possibly, a painting in the castle's long gallery.

Or even a full-length mirror inside the dressing room of the castle.

All the entrances disseminated inside the castle were connected to different layers and places in the fairy world, allowing people to travel between the realms as they wanted.

Of course, exceptions existed, like a forbidden book inside the castle's underground archive that would send the reader to a special location in the fairy world.

The castle being a living magical building, sometimes

people would find an undiscovered entrance by chance and go missing.

And this time, the entrance used was one that all the squires in the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy knew, as it was the entrance they used the first time they went to the fairy world. It was on the middle level of Calvania Castle—a small door hidden behind an idol of Éclair inside the Ladies of the Lake temple.

Once someone passed through this door, what would greet them was...



Jany in the Year 1447 of the Fairy Calendar

“Mmmmh!” Sid stretched and filled his lungs with the morning air.

Looking around, one could see a lake that seemed as wide as the sea, and countless floating swords stuck out of its clear water. The strange lake was surrounded by a thick forest, and morning mist was drifting around. At the lake’s center was a small island with an old shrine standing on it. If one paid attention, they would be able to feel the presence of fairies here and there.

However, only the outskirts of the lake were peaceful. If one went deep inside the forest surrounding the lake, the sunlight would stop reaching them, and inhuman beings shrouded in darkness would hold their breath, patiently monitoring their prey while waiting for a chance to eat them... Or at least, it gave such an impression.

“What a great morning,” Sid said as he looked at this place, which mixed both light and darkness.



“You are the only one carefree enough to say that here, master...” Tenko said as she rubbed her sleepy eyes and slowly rose from lying next to the open-air fire and unwrapped the blanket she had been using.

“Yeah, it’s the first time I found camping so scary...”

“Truly... During the night, I even heard strange monsters howling in the forest.”

“I-I almost couldn’t sleep...”

“Damn. If we’re like that now, it’s going to get harder later.”

Christopher, Elaine, Lynette, and Theodore slowly got up too.

“I wonder if we’ll get used to it...” Alvin said hesitantly. She had woken up before everyone else and just returned from washing her face at the lake, but she was just as sleepy as the others.

“What are you guys saying? If this was the battlefield, the tension would be far greater,” Sid said as he started to cut through a rabbit with a knife. “The training camp came at the right time. Use the opportunity to get used to it.”

“Y-Yes...” Alvin nodded, then looked around.

On the bank of the lake, camps made from the Durande, Ortol, and Anthalo classes’ students were scattered about. Just like the Blitze class, all the other First Squires were waking up and slowly starting their day.

Two months had passed since the interclass games. The year changed, and the season was well into winter. The ground was covered with snow, the air was freezing cold, and all living beings were enduring it as they waited for spring to come. This was the kingdom's most severe period of the year.

Because the snow and the cold were obstructing the squires' training, it was decided that during this period, the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy would give its students a certain quest. That was the training camp in the fairy world. The whole school would spend a month in the fairy world, where the climate was more accommodating, to train. It also served as practice for camping during wartime, as the students had to procure food and other things by themselves locally. Basically, it was also survival training.

It was a difficult quest, different from simple training, so some students who couldn't endure it gave up midway. It was the last obstacle of their school year.

“When we're done, you guys should be stronger. So do your best,” Sid said.

“But...why are we doing it around the Lake of Swords?!” Christopher shouted, displeased. “There are safer places, like the first layer of the fairy world, the sunlit sea of trees, no?!”

“You idiot,” Theodore chided, exasperated. “A safe place wouldn't help with our training.”

The training camp of the First Squires was at the Lake of Swords—in the *ninth* layer of the fairy world. It was a rather deep layer, and the deeper one went in the fairy world, the stronger the monsters became, increasing the danger. For a

certain reason, this place was directly connected by a Fairy Road to the temple area of the Ladies of the Lake in Calvania Castle. But normally, squires didn't come here.

“Well, you guys already know that the Lake of Swords is a sacred and important place for Calvania's knights, right?” Sid asked.

“Yes. When first enrolling at the academy, we have to come here to get our own fairy sword.”

“You could say that it's our starting point as knights.”

Alvin and Tenko looked at the swords floating on the lake—all of them were fairy swords. They had been so anxious about their future, but being selected by an Asher-rank fairy sword was now a fond memory. Maybe the reason the First Squire training camp was at the Lake of Swords each year was to make them remember how it felt when they started as knights.

“Exactly,” Sid gently said. “That's why there's a holy barrier around the lake to repel monsters. Being the ninth layer, there are some strong monsters here, but thanks to the barrier, you're fine as long as you don't leave the lake's outskirts. *Only* if you don't leave, that is.”

The students groaned. They understood with their heads, but being in such a dangerous place wasn't good for their hearts.

“Honestly, I'm more worried about you than the danger in the layer,” Tenko whispered to Alvin, who could only smile wryly in return.

Alvin was a woman posing as a man. Hiding her gender

for a whole month while living with her comrades wasn't going to be easy.

“Well...Isabella gave me lots of magic tools, and you and Sir Sid are here too. I should be fine,” Alvin whispered back.

“I hope so...” Tenko was truly worried about her best friend.

“By the way, I'll handle today's breakfast, so just go already.” Sid spread an ample amount of herbs and spices on the rabbit meat and started to roast it over the bonfire.

“Thank you, instructor!”

“Th-Thinking about it, we *are* hungry...”

Lynette and Elaine smelled the fragrant odor of roasted meat and swallowed their saliva.

“Yeah, yesterday we just came here directly through the Fairy Road during the night. The forced march and setting up camp didn't leave us much time to eat.” Christopher, too, was fidgeting, enduring his hunger. “Thank you, instructor! I'm gonna wash my face fast!”

But just when Christopher happily started to get up—

“Hmm? Wash your face? Why would you do that?” Sid flapped his hand left and right to show they were wrong.

“Huh?”

“What do you mean?” Elaine asked while tilting her head to the side. “Aren't we going to eat breakfast?”

“That.” Sid pointed at the stacks of heavy armor. There was enough for everyone.

The students fell silent. Considering all the training they went through, they should have seen this coming. What’s more, the armor looked way heavier than the ones they usually wore.

“Err...Sir Sid? When you said to go, you meant...” Alvin asked with a stiff expression, fearful.

“Of course. Just go already.”

“We’re doing it here too?!” the students cried in despair.

“Ah, it’s only the first day, so just one lap around the lake is enough,” Sid explained.

“One lap?! Around that freaking big lake?!”

“Just how many kilometers do you think that is?!”

“By the way, if you’re too slow, there won’t be any meat left. So no breakfast,” Sid warned them as he started to eat the roasted meat.

“You demon!” the students shouted with tears in their eyes as they hurried to wear the armor.

“Still, the Lake of Swords, huh...”

After seeing off his running students, Sid looked into the distance nostalgically while chewing meat. Beyond the dense forest on the opposite bank of the lake were a few mountains—one especially high. Sid looked at its peak and muttered.

“Brings me back...in various ways...”

Thus, the training camp in the fairy world started.

The training camp was divided into three parts—early morning, morning, and afternoon—just like the usual curriculum. During the morning, each class would train individually under their instructor’s guidance, and during the afternoon, all the classes would train together.

“It’s really a good place,” Sid muttered as he calmly walked around the lake.

After breakfast, he had told his students to run again, ignoring the despair in their faces when he said to do at least ten laps before noon.

“After all, the deeper you are in the fairy world, the more abundant the mana is. The more they run and breathe, the more the mana will settle in their bodies and strengthen them. In fact, it might even be better to just make them run during our entire stay here.”

If Alvin and the rest had heard him, they would cry and go pale.

Sid watched them run along the bank, so far away that they looked tiny. At the same time, he could see the other classes training. They were all earnestly following the zealous guidance of their instructors.

“Still, now that I can take a look at all of them, each class trains pretty differently,” Sid mused as he observed them.

The Durande class students, wielders of red fairy swords, were all firing fire magics on the bank of the lake.

The Anthalo class students, holders of green fairy swords, were all meditating quietly under the shade of trees, their swords planted before them.

The Ortol class students, users of blue fairy swords, were all speaking in Espirish to their swords, trying to create new fairy magics.

All these training methods were basically emphasizing one point.

“In the end, they’re just trying to bring out more power from their fairy swords, huh...” Sid scratched his head and made a complicated expression. “Of course, that’s important too, but...that can’t be all.”

Put in another way, they were just pushing their fairy swords hard instead of pushing themselves to their limit the way Alvin and the rest were. Of course, they were all serious and doing their best to become great knights. Just looking at their earnest faces was enough to understand that they truly were trying to become stronger. And yet, Sid couldn’t help thinking that the fairy sword wielders themselves lacked training, that this era’s knights were too half-hearted.

And it was because they were all so serious and earnest that they would send *a certain kind of gaze* toward Alvin and the rest, who were running around with heavy armor.

Why are you all doing that kind of recreation-like training?

A dumb way of training for weak fairy swords.

Why are guys like you achieving such good results?

How did you guys become stronger than us?

Even though we train more seriously and more earnestly than you.

Even though we...

“You can’t understand the intensity of doing long runs without trying, after all.” Sid smiled wryly. “It takes me back. I also puked a lot in the past.”

All the other students were looking down on the Blitze class’s training because they were all taught that bringing out the power of their fairy sword was the most important thing. For example, the heavy armor Alvin and the rest were wearing was only heavy for normal people. Using the mana from one’s fairy sword would make it feel as light as a feather. That’s why it looked like the Blitze class was playing.

However, Sid had forbidden them the use of their fairy swords. He had also forbidden them the use of Will, the skill that allowed them to take the mana from the air into their body and burn it to strengthen themselves. To be able to refine their Will better, they needed to strengthen their hearts and lungs. That’s why they had to temper their bodies to their utmost limits. If they tried to cheat and use Will, Sid would mercilessly punish them by firing lightning at them. In fact, Tenko and Christopher hadn’t been able to endure, so they cheated a few times, resulting in Sid’s punishment. Thanks to that, no student in the Blitze class tried to take it easy anymore.

“Well, each class must follow their instructor. I can only teach the ones who believe in me,” Sid said as he started

walking again.

Still...it won't be enough if they continue like that... Sid thought.

Of course, Sid didn't think that it was useless for the other classes to train in mastering their fairy swords. Becoming stronger was important. However, there was something more important that needed to be trained.

And taking into account my lord's end goal... Well, what to do now?

Sid continued to walk around the lake, then stopped suddenly when he caught sight of a red-haired girl whom he remembered. A little ways away from the Ortol class's training location, she was alone, swinging her swords continuously.

"Louise," Sid called.

She should have noticed him, and yet, she ignored him and continued to swing her swords. Her strikes were sharp thanks to the mana that her fairy sword provided. She was truly earnest, large beads of sweat flowing from her brow.

Sid approached her, raised his hand slightly, then asked, "What are you doing alone here?"

"Isn't it obvious? I'm training," Louise answered after a long silence, irritated and still swinging her swords.

"Why alone?"

"Why?" She put more strength into her swings as she cried, "Because I'm an Atzilt-rank! I'm a chosen one! I won't

earn anything by doing the same training as these small fries! They would only hold me back!”

“Really?” Sid looked at Louise and the other students. “I mean, you guys are pretty much all the same, you know?”

Louise gasped and stiffened, stopping her swings.

“Sh-Shut up!” She shouted, attacking Sid with her twin blades.

Two sword slashes cut through the air at lightning speed. However, Sid evaded them easily.

“You’re right that when near the master level, there are times when it’s more efficient to train alone. But you’re far from reaching that level. It’s inefficient for you to train alone,” Sid pointed out with a sigh. “You should work hard together with the others. It’ll be helpful to you. After all, humans can learn a lot from people inferior to them.”

“I said shut up! What do you know about me?!” Louise cried in rage. She swung her swords against the ground with irritation, vexed by not being able to put a single scratch on Sid, just like the last time. “I have to become strong! On my pride as a knight, I must become the greatest knight in the kingdom! I don’t have a single second to waste on the ramblings of an abnormal person like you!”

Louise completely rejected Sid.

“I see. I don’t know why you want to become a knight, nor what you’re burdened with, but...I understand that you’re serious from the bottom of your heart,” Sid said, which made Louise gasp. “And that’s why it’s a shame. Hey, Louise, you’re sure you don’t want to try training under me? Your

current training isn't enough. If you continue like that, you'll end up weaker than what your true strength should be."

"I refuse! Get lost!" Louise shouted, thrusting a sword tip at Sid's nose.

She was now rejecting hearing even a single word from Sid. He realized she was building a wall around herself and becoming unapproachable, so it was a waste of time to try to continue talking with her.

"Sorry for bothering you. Do your best," Sid said as he shook his head with disappointment. Then he turned back and continued his stroll.

"Still...this era's knights aren't that bad," Sid muttered with a smile as he continued to walk around the lake. "True, they're weaker compared to the legendary era's knights, and they forgot the knight's code. A lot of them are depraved and just want the title, not caring about their duty." Sid shot a sharp glance at some students feigning training while secretly taking it easy. "And yet, the foundation of a knight's spirit and soul—something similar to pride—is still living within them. It's just that it's misdirected. Something must be done about that..." he said, then suddenly, he stopped walking.

He turned his head and squinted, looking far away for a while.

"I imagined it?" he muttered, then he cracked his neck and continued his stroll.

“Hmph, I guess I got a little too close.”

Far away from the students’ campground, outside the barrier protecting them from monsters, and beyond the forest, a knight was standing on the cliff of a mountain, looking down at the lake.

“Almost got noticed. You’re still as alert as ever, Sid the Barbarian.”

The knight wore black plate armor coupled with a black overcoat, his face covered by a full-face helmet of the same color. The helmet’s design, as well as the feather decoration on his shoulder, gave the impression of an owl. His overwhelming dark mana—which could make someone hallucinate they were falling into the abyss just by getting close to it—overflowing from his entire body proved he wasn’t a normal person.

He was the one called Sir Owl, the dark knight from the Dark Order of Opus, sent by Endea to kill Sid.

“Still...Sid, huh?” he whispered.

The area around him became darker, and space distorted. Overwhelming hatred and rage exuded from his body.

“I won’t ever forget the days full of hatred and disgrace I lived through because of you...”

He started to recollect distant memories of the past.

It was around a thousand years ago, during the legendary era...



“You all did great in this fight!” The young golden-haired man’s voice resounded. He was my great lord—the Holy King Arthur—and he wore a crown and gorgeous armor and mantle.

We were in the audience room of Calvania Castle. Brave knights who served the king were standing in a row with dignity, listening to my lord’s words silently.

“The fact that we could protect our people from the barbarian nation in the east, Barbaria, is thanks to your bravery and loyalty, gentlemen! As your lord, I compliment you from the bottom of my heart!”

The assembled knights answered.

“We’re not worthy of your words!”

“Our swords are for you!”

“Becoming the king’s sword and protecting our nation and its people is our wish!”

“It’s our desire as Calvania’s knights!”

Hearing them, my lord’s eyes became moist, overcome by emotion.

“I’m truly lucky...to be able to receive the loyalty of true knights like you.” He took a breath, then looked at everyone. “Of course, I will reward everyone’s loyalty amply. As for the special reward given to the most distinguished during this war...well, I think you all know the knight among knights who contributed the most to our victory, no?”

Everyone nodded to each other with a look saying that it could only be one man.

Who did the most in this war? Of course, it was me. It could only be me, possessing the most wisdom and courage in the kingdom.

And yet—

“Sir Sid, come,” my lord ordered.

Once again, my lord unjustly called the wrong person. Even though he was noble and perfect, it was his only fault—his bad eye for people. Or was it favoritism?

“Yes.”

The barbarian—Sid—passed in front of me and walked to the throne, kneeling in front of the king with his head bowed.

His unconcerned face—as always—seemed to tell me, “See how you’re totally ignored?” which made me grind my molars.

That man would be no match for me if I showed my true abilities!

“So it’s really Sir Sid!”

“Of course it is! He was amazing this time too!”

“Sir Logass, Sir Luke, and Sir Rifis were amazing too, but Sir Sid was above them!”

“He was truly as fierce as a lion!”

“Sir Sid saved us many times!”

“As expected of the Lightning Knight, one of the four great knights of the kingdom!”

Shut up, you rotten-eyed fools! Why can't you understand that our king's judgment is influenced by you praising that barbarian?

“Sir Sid, your achievement this time was truly splendid. If you weren't here, incompetent as I am, I would have lost many of my retainers and people. For your meritorious deed, I want to give you a special reward. What do you want?”

“Nothing.”

His immediate answer made my guts boil.

“Becoming the king's sword and laying out his path is my chivalry.”

Hearing this, the king gave a broad smile. It wasn't a king's smile, no, but one given to a friend—a treasure more valuable than any reward. The thing I desired more than anything.

“Aha ha! You're the same as always, Sir Sid! But you can't decline, you know? If you, who did the most, refused, everyone else wouldn't be able to accept their rewards.”

Sid groaned. “Well, yeah, you're right.”

Everyone else was excited by their conversation.

“Ga ha ha ha! Indeed, we would be troubled!”

“Sir Sid! Just accept it!”

“If you don’t, I’ll take it!”

“Hooray, King Arthur! Hooray, Sir Sid!”

They laughed. The fools laughed.



What was happening? It was strange. Something was wrong. Why were they laughing? They're praising the wrong person, giving him honor and rewards beyond his means.

That's wrong. It shouldn't happen. If things continue like this, the country will collapse. Does my great lord understand that?

"Now, let's start tonight's feast! Let's all drink, eat, and talk until dawn! Let's all talk about the promising future of our motherland!" my lord said, and everyone else cheered in agreement.

With my king as the lead, everyone started the banquet. They were all fooling around. Lots of food and drinks were prepared, troubadours were singing, beautiful dancers were dancing, and clowns were making people laugh. As I glared at that barbarian having a friendly conversation with my lord, I realized how hypocritical it all seemed.

I'm smarter and stronger than Sid! I'm a better knight and exceed him in everything! So why?! Why does my king only care about Sir Sid?!

Being next to the king meant that he was his most trusted knight—his best knight. It was the greatest honor for a knight to receive this position. And it should be me—a noble and one of the chiefs of the renowned knights of our country—not some filthy barbarian.

After all, I knew his true nature. I knew that he was a true "demon." Someone like him, unworthy to be a knight, was less suitable than anyone to stand next to our great

king. He might be acting like he was a knight among knights, but I knew his true colors and what he really was.

Certainly, he didn't believe that just by throwing away that sword, he could make a fresh start.

That was impossible. No matter how much time passed, his true nature was that of a fiend. His existence was that of a lowly and vulgar barbarian. That's why I couldn't forgive him. I couldn't forgive the idea that such a man could be above me, the greatest knight in the world.

Sid the Barbarian...one day, with my own hands, I will...!



Sir Owl's consciousness came back to the present. Then, using magic on his eyes, he once again observed Sid from afar.

“Ha, what a joke,” he said with a scornful laugh. “Is this really Sid the Barbarian? Just by dying once, he became *that* weak?! Just as I thought, he doesn't amount to much! It's clear who's stronger! It's me! Be it now or in the past!”

Sir Owl's body trembled from delight and pleasure.

“And yet, it's too soon to kill you.” He spat, grasping his fist so tightly his gauntlet creaked. “Just killing you isn't enough. You don't know just how much you wounded my pride in the past.”

So much anger exuded from Sir Owl's body that the forest became astir because of the pressure.

“I’ll take back all the pride you took away from me in the past. I’ll deny everything about you as a knight and show everyone that I was our lord’s greatest retainer! I swear on my pride! Ha ha ha ha!” His laugh, full of darkness, echoed continuously in the dim forest.

Thus, thick malice distilled since ancient times started to move.

Chapter 4: A New Commotion

It was now lunch break after the four classes finished their morning training. Blitze class's students, who had exerted their bodies to their utmost limits, forced themselves to eat, then lay down on the bank of the lake to rest in preparation for the afternoon combined training.

In this tranquil moment, Sid was silently standing alone on the shore of the lake. He wasn't looking at the old shrine on the small island at the center but at the water's surface where countless fairy swords were sticking out.

For a while, he watched the swords as if yearning for something. Then—maybe he had a thought—he suddenly stretched his hand toward the swords.

The next instant, as if running away from Sid, all the fairy swords dived into the lake.

“It's really no good, huh... Still hurts my feelings every time,” Sid said with resignation as he scratched his head with a wry smile.

“Ah, Sir Sid.”

“What are you doing?”

Alvin and Tenko approached him.

“Ah, well, I told you how all the fairy swords of the Lake of Swords rejected me, right?” Sid asked them, somewhat embarrassed.

“Yes, you did say that the first day you came to our class, master.”

“Yeah, well, I just wondered if it would work now,” Sid said.

Tenko and Alvin blinked.

“Why would you try again? In the first place, you don’t need a sword, master,” Tenko commented.

“Indeed. You fight empty-handed with your body strengthened by your Will, mastered to its limits. Didn’t you say *you* were the sword, Sir Sid?” Alvin added.

“Well, yeah, I said that, and, in fact, that’s the case, but...” Sid shrugged his shoulders with a sigh. “Oh well, that doesn’t matter. It’s not like I could find a sword that could match the one I had before.”

Alvin and Tenko cocked their heads.

“Hmm? Master, it’s like you’re saying you used a sword in the past...”

“Mmh? What are *you* saying? Knights use swords, no?” Sid answered, his eyes blinking in surprise. “My true fighting style is using dual blades. That’s why I was also called the Dual Wielding Knight.”

Hearing this, Alvin and Tenko kept silent for a good ten seconds before yelling together.

“S-Sir Sid, you use swords?!”

“It’s that surprising? I’m a knight too, you know? Also, if

my Barbarian alias is known, the Dual Wielding Knight should be too, I think.”

Thinking about it, Alvin remembered that this alias was circulating among the people, and that when she had first met Sid, the dark knight Jeeza had said that Sid’s twin blades were unmatched.

“I just thought you were called that because your empty-handed style uses both hands...” Alvin muttered.

“Huh?! Th-Then, does that mean you’re even stronger with a sword, master?!” Tenko exclaimed.

“Well, yeah, I guess.”

“Nooooo!” Tenko screamed. She regretted the impulsive promise she made—that she would tell Sid *something* once she won against him. She was already being played with when he only used his hands, so she felt that even if she had multiple lifetimes, she would never reach him if he used a sword. She could only groan at this realization.

“What’s the deal with Tenko?” Sid asked.



“Who knows?” Alvin ignored Tenko, who was crouching teary-eyed with her hands on her head, and continued. “But, in that case, why are you fighting empty-handed instead of using swords?”

“It’s quite simple, actually. Rather than using this, I’m stronger empty-handed.”

Sid drew the steel sword hanging at his waist for the sake of appearances. Then, while breathing, he burned his Will and wrapped lightning over his empty left hand and the sword in his right hand. Sparks of lightning cracked as they flickered violently around the sword and his hand.

“A normal sword can’t handle my lightning and my mana, so I might as well just use my hands,” Sid said as the sword in his right hand crumbled in a split second.

“A-Aha ha ha... To think you could burn out a steel sword in an instant... You really are abnormal.” Alvin laughed wryly as she reaffirmed how inhuman Sid was. “But wait, you weren’t chosen by a fairy sword, right?”

“I wasn’t.”

“And a normal sword wouldn’t be able to bear your power...so I suppose it wasn’t a normal sword?”

“It wasn’t such a special sword, or rather, swords,” Sid said with nostalgia and a fond look on his face. “I used twin swords made of obsidian iron.”

“Obsidian iron?”

Both Alvin and Tenko had heard of it. It was different

from normal iron. It had a black metallic luster like obsidian, and it was said to be incredibly hard and tough, to the point that blades made from it could cut through rocks like butter. However, it was rare and extremely difficult to process. In the current era, Titans had lost the means to process and forge it, making obsidian iron a useless metal branded as scrap iron. A legend said that the only way to process it was to make lightning fall from the sky on it.

“Well, even in the legendary era, I was the only one using a sword made from obsidian iron.” Sid shrugged his shoulders. “Obsidian iron seems great and all when you hear about it, but, in fact, it just makes really hard swords. It’s not like a fairy sword that allows you to use magic or improve your physical abilities. Still, it was the only sword that could endure my lightning,” Sid said with a somewhat distant look.

“It was an important sword to you?” Alvin asked.

“I wonder...” Sid answered vaguely for some reason, confusing Alvin.

“What happened to it?” Tenko asked.

He kept silent for a while, then replied in a joking tone. “One day, when I wasn’t paying attention, it was stolen by Gremlins.”

“What?! You let such an important sword get stolen?!” Tenko shouted, startled.

Gremlins were a bat-winged fairy with a pointed tail, a small hairy body, and charming big eyes. They weren’t like monsters and didn’t have any ill will toward people, quite the opposite actually, but they did like to prank them. They loved mischief, like piercing holes in canteens and shoes,

putting insects inside people's clothes, or ringing doorbells. They also had the bad habit of stealing humans' belongings.

"Yeah, really made quite a blunder," Sid said exaggeratedly.

"Y-You did!" Tenko exclaimed.

On the side, Alvin noticed something as she glanced at them. *Why did you lie, Sir Sid?* she thought. Indeed, having one's favorite sword stolen by Gremlins was so strange it could only be a lie. Also...

Just when Alvin was going to express her doubts to Sid—

"I-If you want a sword made of obsidian iron...there is one," a voice said suddenly, coming from the lake.

Surprised, Sid and his two students turned toward it. There, fairy swords peeked out shyly from the water, with semi-transparent little girls hugging them.

"Oh? It's rare for fairies to show their true appearance," Sid commented.

"Whoa, so cute!" Alvin exclaimed.

"Th-They're what our fairy swords really look like?!" Tenko shouted, comparing them to her fairy sword, then she broke into a smile.

"Err...you just said there's a sword made of obsidian iron, right? What did you mean?" Alvin asked the fairy as she approached and kneeled to get closer to their level.

One after the other, they answered.

“Uh-huh... Just like I said.”

“In this layer, there has been a sword made of obsidian iron since long, long ago...”

“Really long, long, long ago...long before I became a sword...”

“Really? Where?” Alvin asked.

“At the top of the mountain that gives water to this lake...”

“Where a very scary monster lives...”

The fairy girls pointed far away, beyond the opposite bank of the huge lake, and beyond the dense forest where a few mountains were—at the summit of the tallest one.

“It’s at that mountain’s peak...”

“That’s...very far.”

“I-It’s not even close to being within the anti-monster barrier. We can’t go take it.”

Alvin and Tenko grimaced as they squinted to look at the distant mountain.

“Hmm? The sword is there? Can you tell me more?” Sid asked suddenly, approaching the fairy girls.

The next instant, all of them went bright red and dived into the lake as if fleeing.

“Oops, forgot they hated me.” He shrugged his shoulders. “What a shame. Fairy swords rarely show their true selves,

and we had the opportunity to hear more. If only they didn't hate me," Sid said exaggeratedly.

"Huh...?"

"Hated...?"

Alvin and Tenko were confused. After all, no matter how one looked at the fairy girls' reactions...

Alvin and Tenko nodded at each other silently, then they went near enough to be able to put their heads in the lake. There, they heard...

"Kyaa! Oh my god! Who was that dreamy knight?! Who?!"

"He has such a strong soul and mana! I feel so attracted to him!"

"What's more, he's free! He. Is. Free!"

"I want to be his sword! B-But..."

"Impossible! No way! We could never show such disrespect! The likes of us have a sword rank too low to suit him!"

Alvin and Tenko took their heads out of the lake after hearing what the *Atzilt-rank* fairy sword girls said, then silently looked at each other, droplets of water dripping from them. Then, after a while, they turned back to Sid.

"Hmm? What?"

"You fairy-killer," they both declared.

“...Why?” Sid made a truly confused face.

“Anyway, what do we do, Sir Sid?” Alvin asked.

“About what?” He cocked his head.

“Didn’t the fairy girls just say a sword made from obsidian iron was at the top of that mountain?”

“Ah! Maybe it’s the sword the Gremlins stole from you!” Tenko added.

“It’s impossible for us, but you should be able to do it,” Alvin proposed.

Sid kept silent for a few seconds, then said, “No, that’s fine.” He shook his head gently. “My sword was stolen by the Gremlins. I won’t get it back.”

“B-But...even if it’s a different one, it’s still a rare sword made of obsidian iron!” Tenko pleaded hurriedly. “If you get it, you will be stronger!”

Then, suddenly, Sid started to pat Tenko’s head.

“Whoa?!” Her fox ears stood up, and her face became bright red.

“I understand you’re saying that for me. Thanks.” He stole a glance at the mountain, then looked back at Tenko. “However, the current me doesn’t need a sword. Don’t worry. Even without one, I can protect you and this country.”

“I...see...” She couldn’t agree completely, but if Sid said so, she could only back down.

However, Alvin somehow understood.

As I thought, Sir Sid is hiding something...

Why did Sid refuse to go to take the sword at the top of the mountain? In the first place—why didn't he get chosen by a fairy sword?

It's weird... True, based on the fairy girls' reactions earlier, I can kinda understand that there isn't any sword matching him. But it's said that fairy swords in the legendary era were stronger than now. If they liked him as much as I just heard, by taking some time and searching carefully, he should have been able to find a fairy sword who would choose him. And yet, why didn't the Sir Sid of the legendary era get chosen by a fairy sword?

Alvin couldn't put her finger on the truth. But glancing at Sid, who was gazing silently at the mountain with a distant look, she couldn't bring herself to question him further.

“Anyway, lunch break is going to end,” Sid said as if just remembering it and turned back. “The afternoon combined training is going to start. Go wake up the ones who are still napping and quickly assemble.”

“Y-Yes...”

Thus, they separated from Sid without being able to settle their doubts concerning the sword.



It was now time for afternoon training—combined practice between the four classes.

The three legacy classes' instructors and students didn't like the Blitze class because its existence was an irregularity that broke the traditions of the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy, and more than anything, its students were all failures with Asher-rank fairy swords. In fact, at first, they had been failures worthy of being called the garbage-heap class and had been inferior to the other classes. But since the knight named Sid Blitze had arrived, they had started to stand out and showed excellent growth. In recent training matches, the three legacy classes hadn't been able to win against the Blitze class at all. And now, the Blitze class was easily carrying quests that would be too difficult for the three legacy classes, showing great results and achievements.

For the three legacy classes' students, who thought they were the chosen elites, it wasn't great news. They even felt their position threatened.

Of course, Alvin and the rest knew that, which was why they had a bad presentiment about this combined practice. And that hunch splendidly hit the mark.

“Cleaning up the monsters with the four classes?”

The students were lined up in rows a little ways away from the lake in a forest glade. Sid was asking about the meaning of the other instructors' proposal.

“Yes, it's a tradition to clean up the monsters around the lake during the first day of training camp,” the young woman with braided hair—Marie—said. She was the Anthalo class's head instructor.

“Yeah, we're going to live here for a month, so assuring the safety of the place is our priority,” the large wild-looking

man—Zack—spat. He was the Durande class's head instructor.

“After all, the anti-monster barrier's effect lessens the more we distance ourselves from the lake,” the young man with a monocle—Kreis—added as he glared at Sid with hate. He was the Ortol class's head instructor. “Also, the barrier mainly works on strong monsters, so the farther away from the lake we are, the stronger the monsters become. Inversely, that means there are a lot of weak monsters near the lake.”

“Ah, I see. I get it now.” Sid clapped his hands. “Basically, by subjugating the weak monsters around the lake during the first day, the rest of the month will be safer. And we're making the students do it.”

“Exactly,” Kreis agreed with an arrogant snort.

Apparently, Kreis was holding a grudge for his class's loss during the interclass games and didn't even try to hide his hate toward Sid. It was the same for Marie and Zack. They were cold and spoke with harsh tones.

“I see. That's a great tradition.” Sid nodded, not caring about their hostility. “It's also good practice against monsters. Let's start already.” He eagerly agreed to the proposal.

“But...don't you think that just subjugating monsters is boring? Why not make it a contest?” Kreis said in a provoking tone.

“Hmm? What do you mean?”

Kreis took a booklet from his breast pocket and thrust it

to Sid, who took it. He went through the drawings and read the text aloud.

“Let’s see... Black dog: one point... Red cap: three points... Goblin: two points... Kelpie: seven points... What’s this?”

“It’s a booklet listing the monsters in this layer and their point value based on the level of danger,” Kreis answered.

“Basically, we’re going to make the classes compete to see who gets the most points,” Zack said.

“Aren’t contests the best way to raise people’s spirit?” Marie added.

Sid was reading the booklet pensively and didn’t pay attention to them.

Kreis and Marie continued.

“And the instructor of the winning class would be proven to be the one giving the best guidance, no?”

“Meaning that this year, that instructor would become the general knight instructor supervising the training of all the classes...or at least, that is what we concluded. What do you think?”

Alvin, who was listening, gasped in shock. “P-Please wait! That’s—” She had noticed how unfair the rules were.

Elaine, Theodore, and Lynette had noticed too.

“I-Indeed, in that case, we would be...”

“Hmph, how stupid. Instructor, no need to accept.”

“Y-Yes... This is too unfair...”

“Interesting, let’s do it.” Sid accepted right away, ignoring his students’ protests, which made them hold their heads and cry.

Tenko and Christopher were cocking their heads, not understanding why their friends were so panicked.

“Ah, just in case, I need to confirm something. Any monster not listed doesn’t count, right?” Sid asked as he showed the booklet.

“What are you asking? Of course not,” Kreis answered.

“Meaning that the contest includes all the monsters noted here, right?”

“Why are you asking all these obvious questions?”

“Okay. Duels and contests are the way of the knight. Let’s do it fair and square,” Sid said with a joyful smile.

“Whatever happens, it won’t be our fault...” Alvin sighed.

Thus, on the first afternoon of the training camp, a monster subjugation contest between the four classes started.



It was decided that the contest would be held from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. with a rest from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the base where a progress report would be given. To avoid danger, students were forced to form teams of six. A messenger pixie, summoned by the Ladies of the Lake, would supervise each

team to know how many monsters each class killed and count the points they earned. These pixies were very obedient to their summoners and transmitted information without any lies, meaning that it wasn't possible to cheat.

“Still, the rules are a problem...” Alvin sighed as she prepared herself at the base.

“Alvin, don't tell me you're still nervous about the class being Asher-ranks,” Sid said while putting his hand on her shoulder.

Tenko and Christopher were pretty hyped up as they encouraged Alvin.

“Yes, we're different from before, Alvin!”

“Yeah, we've become stronger thanks to our instructor! Even if the other classes have higher ranks, we won't lose!”

Theodore and Elaine both sighed.

“Ha... Is our class full of idiots?”

“Please, don't say that.”

The Blitze class's students had various reactions as they prepared.

“Alvin,” a voice called out. Two students were approaching them.

“Olivia and Johan?” Alvin blinked at their sudden visit.

Olivia and Johan were Durande and Anthalo classes' presidents, respectively. They didn't fight against the Blitze

class during the interclass games, but they were elites with Beriah-rank fairy swords. In fact, they both had shown their strength during the event, and Johan had even been selected as the best newcomer of the year.

“What is it? Did you want to tell me something?” Alvin asked.

“I came to declare war. I’ll never lose to you,” Johan said, making Alvin gasp. “You guys have been growing with great vigor recently, but we have our pride as Beriah-ranks. We can’t be left behind by you Asher-ranks!”

“Indeed!” Olivia exclaimed. “Until now, you’ve been lucky, and we’re going to prove it during this contest!”

They said whatever they wanted and left without hearing Alvin’s answer.

“Th-That’s a little creepy...” Tenko muttered with disgust in her eyes.

“Th-They were kinda blood-curdling... That was scary...” Lynette whispered as she trembled.

Christopher, Theodore, and Elaine, who had been watching from the side, also noticed the unrest around the contest and kept silent, feeling unpleasant.

“Whew, that’s what I call being young. Great, do it more.” Sid was the same as usual. “Thinking about it, we were young and passionate like that in the past too...though we were a little too young and passionate, and we stabbed the person we challenged at the same time.”

“Is that really something you should do?!”

“If you win before the fight, then you win,” Sid explained.

“I know I say this a lot, but the legendary era was truly full of carnage!”

“Well, I said ‘we,’ but I didn’t do it. There were a lot of hot-blooded knights like that, though.”

“That’s not being hot-blooded but murderous!”

“The legendary era really was...”

The students were all shocked.

As the atmosphere became more relaxed, the simple belfry’s bell that had been installed at the base’s headquarters rang once. One time during the afternoon meant it was 1 p.m., the starting time of the subjugation contest.

“Oh, it’s finally time. You know what that means, guys. Do your best.” Sid saw them off.

“Y-Yes...” Alvin and the rest said before running deeper into the forest.



Just like Alvin had thought, the rules were unfair, and they soon came to bare their fangs at the Blitze class.

In the dim forest, boys and girls sprinted as they trampled down the underbrush.

“Here! It’s a treant!”

“It’s worth five points! Let’s kill it!”

Christopher and Elaine dashed toward a big tree with their swords out. The tree had countless limb-like branches and roots, and it had a huge mouth with big fangs in the middle of its thick trunk. It was called a treant, the result of a plant fairy being turned into a monster. It was terribly dangerous, as it would capture people with its branches and devour them.

“I’m gonna cut you and transform you into firewood!” Christopher yelled, running toward it without fear.

He burned his Will, passed mana through his legs, and accelerated fiercely in the treant’s direction. However—

“My apologies, but I will go first.”

“What?!”

Elaine burned her Will, passed mana through her legs, and overtook Christopher in an instant, causing him to scream.

“Damn it! I’m stronger, but she’s faster!”

“Oh ho ho! Well then, let me show you how magnificently I will kill i—”

Just as Elaine was boasting, before she could finish her sentence, someone overtook her like a gale.

“Tayweed!” Alvin shouted “Tailwind” in Espirish to activate the green fairy magic, Gale, which enveloped her in wind and accelerated her movements. She truly was like a gale as she splendidly weaved her way between the trees.

And yet—

“Danwisflay!” Tenko yelled “Burst and dance” in the ancient fairy language to activate the red fairy magic, Flame Dancing Legs, allowing her to catch up with Alvin by flying at high speed with bursts of flames. It was magic that worked by provoking an explosion under her stepping foot. She used the propulsive power to greatly enhance her movement speed. Tenko had become quite proficient at it recently.

Alvin had the most maneuverability, allowing her to be fast and nimble, while Tenko had the highest instantaneous acceleration.

“What?! The both of you are unfair!” Elaine cried, left far behind the other two.

Hunting the treant became a one-on-one match between Alvin and Tenko.

However, just as their blades approached the treant...it was bisected by an axe from behind.

“What?!”

“Y-You’re...?!”

What they found on the other side was...

“Heh heh, that’s five points for us.”

A vulgar boy with blond hair—Gato, a First Squire from Durande class—was standing there with his axe-shaped fairy sword. He was the vicious boy who had tormented Tenko when she still couldn’t use Will during the interclass games.

Remembering it made Tenko frown.

“What are you doing here?!” she asked.

“Me? Hunting monsters, of course. Yeah, hunting monsters, heh heh.” Gato laughed crassly as other students, who were most likely his teammates, showed up from the forest.

“Good kill.”

“Ha ha ha, as expected of you, Gato.”

“You’re late, Wein, Ladd. I already killed it.”

The three of them were talking as if showing off.

Then Elaine and Christopher arrived, followed by Theodore and Lynette a few seconds later. They instantly understood the situation and glared at Gato and his crew.

“Th-The treant was our prey!” Tenko shouted angrily, her ears standing up and her sharp canines showing.

“What? You didn’t hear the rules? You stupid fox. It’s first come, first served.”

“Wh-What?! You—” Tenko lost her cool and reflexively reached for the hilt of her katana but was stopped by Alvin, who grabbed her arm.

“Stop, Tenko.” Alvin then turned toward Gato. “You get the points for the treant. We don’t want to quarrel with you.”

“Yeah, and we don’t either. After all, students are prohibited from fighting with each other... Gotta follow the

rules, right? The rules,” Gato said in a provoking way, frustrating the Blitze class. “Well then, let’s continue fair and square. Okay? Ga ha ha ha!”

Gato and his team left.

“Damn! We’ve been had again!” Christopher struck his claymore on the ground. “It’s not just them! How many times has it been now?!”

“As I thought, we’re being watched.” Theodore sighed as he pushed up his glasses.

Each time the Blitze class had been going to kill a monster, one of the other three classes nabbed the kill from them.

“The reason this contest is unfair is simply our difference in numbers,” Theodore said as he watched his classmates.

The Blitze class was new, only established this year. There were only six students.

On the other hand, the three legacy classes each had nearly forty students. In other words, if a team was made of six students, they had around six teams per class. Their chances to encounter monsters and get points were multiplied by six. Furthermore, some of them were watching over the Blitze class, making the contest totally unfair.

“True, we should be stronger than them individually. However, this monster subjugation contest is more about numbers than individual strength...” Theodore explained.

Tenko clicked her tongue. “To think this would be such a trap!”

“I didn’t see it coming at all!”

Tenko and Christopher were trembling in frustration.

“You didn’t notice it?! It was obvious from the start, you idiots!” Theodore retorted as if it was his duty.

“Still, we’re in a pinch...”

“Yeah, at this rate, our training camp is going to be a mess.”

Alvin and Theodore sighed together.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Tenko, remember how the instructor of the winning class will become the general instructor knight of all the students?” Alvin said.

“Meaning that they’ll have control over everything we do. At worst, they might not let us train at all... They can even make us only do the chores like supplying food and doing the laundry,” Theodore explained.

“Well, it clearly is the other instructors’ objective,” Elaine concluded.

“What?! How cowardly!”

“I didn’t notice at all!”

Tenko and Christopher were trembling in frustration.

“You didn’t notice it?! It was obvious from the start, you idiots!” Theodore retorted *again* as if it was his duty.



“Then why did our instructor accept?!” Christopher asked.

“D-Don’t tell me that master didn’t notice either?!” Tenko cried while shivering.

“Nah, don’t put me on your level. Would be my greatest shame ever,” a voice said from above.

When the students looked up, they found Sid sprawled on a tree branch, looking down on them with a wry smile.

“Sir Sid!”

“Jeez... I was observing you silently, and look, just what are you guys doing?” Sid grumbled, exasperated.

“Err...we’re hunting monsters...” Alvin answered.

“But the other classes are interfering, and we haven’t managed to kill a single one!” Lynette complained with teary eyes as the other students kept silent.

As for Tenko, she was crouching on the side, holding her knees and muttering, “Being on my level would be his greatest shame ever...”

“Well, of course that’d happen if you hunt here.” Sid took out the booklet that listed monsters and points, then after turning a few pages and finding the one he wanted, he tore it off and let it fall toward Alvin and the rest. “*This* is your prey.”

Alvin caught the fluttering page and read it. The other students did the same from behind and beside her. And when they saw the information about the monster on it...

“Huuuuuuuuuh?!” Six hysteric shouts resounded in the forest.



The afternoon bell rang three times, meaning it was now 3 p.m. The first half of the contest was done, and all the students were coming back to the base to hear the progress report.

Kreis, who was waiting at the headquarters, chuckled. “No matter how strong the cheeky brats from the Blitze class became recently, they can’t do anything when numbers are more important than individual strength.”

What’s more, Kreis’s Ortol class had Louise, who held an Atzilt-rank fairy sword. Her power to use cold waves to attack in wide areas was perfect for killing many monsters at once. In other words, the winner was decided from the start. Kreis couldn’t wait for the progress report to be announced.

“You’ll see, Blitze class! With this, I’m going to clear away the humiliation you gave me at the interclass games!”

Just in case, he had made an arrangement with the other instructors. No matter who won, they would humiliate the Blitze class for a whole month. Working the Blitze class students like slaves, not giving them the chance to use their time to train as knights, was the greatest revenge they could have against Sid.

“Mwa ha ha ha! It’s all because you made a fool of me!” He laughed as each class’s teams were returning one after another.

Then, finally, the last team to return was the Blitze class’s.

Looking at them, Kreis frowned. *Wh-What happened to them? Why are they all so worn out and exhausted?*

Alvin and the rest didn't have any injuries, but they were all covered in mud, and their squire uniforms were in tatters. Seeing them like this, the other students laughed with scorn.

“There shouldn't be any monster necessitating such a hard fight in this zone.”

“So their recent successes really were a lucky fluke.”

“In the end, they're just the garbage-heap class.”

Kreis smirked secretly, thinking the same as the students. Now sure of his victory, he demanded to have the progress report.

“Oh, messenger pixies who observed each team! Announce the number of monsters each class killed and the points they earned!”

The first one to answer was one of the pixies who had observed the Anthalo class.

“Anthalo class: twenty-four kills and seventy-two points.”

The other students raised their voices, impressed. Based on the previous years, having so many points by this time was a very good result.

“I see. It seems like they balanced killing big and small monsters. Let's all praise them. Now, the next one.”

The second to answer was one of the pixies who had observed the Durande class.

“Durande class: nineteen kills and seventy-four points.”

That was a good result too.

“A lot of points for a few kills means they must have hunted a lot of big monsters. Good. Next.”

The third to answer was one of the pixies who had observed the Ortol class.

“Ortol class: forty-two kills and ninety-eight points.”

Hearing this, the students stirred.

“Ninety-eight? Seriously...?”

“A-Amazing... The Ortol class is really amazing...”

“I heard that Louise hunted twenty-four monsters alone...”

“As expected of an Atzilt-rank... We know the winner this year...”

Everyone was looking at Louise with respect and envy while she stood confidently.

“Hmph,” Louise snorted, her arms folded as if saying the result was obvious.

“Bravo, Louise!” Kreis, Ortol class’s instructor, said. “Your prowess truly is fitting for an Atzilt-rank! Truly impressive!”

Atzilt-rank fairy swords really were above the rest.

Everyone was starting to think that Alvin's win against Louise during the interclass games really was a mistake or a fluke.

Anyway, the Ortol class was on top with quite the margin. Kreis grinned, satisfied by this result, and urged for the last announcement with a triumphant face.

“Then, finally, announce the Blitze class's results.”

The only pixie who followed the Blitze class came flying up and answered.

“Blitze class: one kill...”

One kill. Hearing this, the other students sneered. Even Kreis was on the verge of not being able to hide his smirk anymore. However, everything changed the following moment.

“...and two hundred points.”

Everyone fell silent.

“What...? Two hundred...?” Kreis muttered, shocked.

“Huh...?” Louise, who thought she had been the best, was speechless.

Marie, Zack, and all their students stiffened, with similar looks of incomprehension.

“N-No...that must be a mistake. This is...” Kreis complained.

“The Blitze class earned two hundred points. With this,

our report is finished.” The messenger pixies bowed and went away.

Everyone was dumbfounded, thinking the results were lies. They couldn’t believe them and wondered how such a number had even been possible.

“S-Sir Sid!” Kreis shouted as he drew near Sid. “Wh-What did you do?! How did you cheat?!”

“I didn’t cheat,” Sid said.

“Th-Then how?! Such a result should be impossible!”

“No, it’s written here,” Sid said and gave Kreis a torn page of the booklet listing the monsters and their points.

Kreis took it and read it. There was a drawing of a monster as well as the following text: “Kirimu: two hundred points.”

“A-A kirimu?!”

“What?!” the students shouted after Kreis’s cry of surprise.

“D-Don’t tell me that...the Blitze class hunted a kirimu?!”

“They sure did. It’s the only monster giving two hundred points, so they must’ve,” Sid said.

A kirimu was a gigantic dragon-like monster that had seven heads, each with seven horns and seven eyes. Even though it was hard to imagine because of its size, it could move furtively and nimbly to catch its prey. It was an atrocious and violent monster predated the forests of the

fairy world's deeper layers. Usually, a whole squad of skilled fairy knights was needed to kill one.

“I-Impossible... There shouldn't be a strong monster like a kirimu inside the barrier...”

“If there isn't one *inside*, you just need to go *outside*. It wasn't prohibited, right?” Sid said.

“Outside?! Are you out of your mind?! It's far too dangerous!” Kreis shouted, his eyes wide from the shock.

A little ways away from Sid and Kreis...

“Jeez... Our instructor's really absurd,” Christopher said.

The other Blitze class students complained too, all exhausted.

“I didn't think we would fight against a monster that had nearly killed us in the past...” Tenko said.

“Indeed...” Elaine agreed.

“I-It was so scary...so terrifying...” Lynette whined.

“But just as Sir Sid has told us, if we act as a team, we can do it,” Alvin said.

“I guess we're really improving, huh?” Theodore muttered.

“Still, that was a pretty hard fight...” Christopher complained once again.

Back to the instructors, Kreis started to protest against Sid fiercely.

“It’s a lie! You’re lying! There is no way students could kill a kirimu!”

“You know that messenger pixies can’t lie. Just accept it already,” Sid said.

“That can’t be...” Kreis could only open and close his mouth, speechless.

However, this time Marie and Zack came to complain.

“Was going out of the barrier your instruction, Sir Sid?” Marie asked.

“Yeah.”

“You’re disqualified as an instructor!” she shouted angrily.

“Yeah, she’s right!” Zack agreed. “You don’t have the right to call yourself an instructor!”

“How could you have your students do something so dangerous!” Marie continued.

“Just what went through your head to have them go out of the barrier in such a deep layer?!”

“You should be ashamed, you Barbarian!”

Hearing Zack and Marie’s claims, Sid made a carefree smile.

“So you are seriously thinking about the students’ safety, huh? Glad to hear that.”

“What?!” Marie and Zack screamed.

“However, let me say this. That’s not a problem.” Sid puffed out his chest with confidence and looked at each of his students one by one. Then he declared, “There’s no way the students I’m so proud of would lose against the likes of a kirimu.”

Hearing this, Kreis, Marie, and Zack gasped and became speechless, not knowing what to say anymore.

The second part of the contest started with a gloomy atmosphere, as most of the students had already given up.

In the first half, the Blitze class had managed to get more than double the points of any class even though they were outmanned six to one. What’s more, having hunted most of the weak monsters inside the barrier, it was now difficult to get points. They had no way to win against the Blitze class.

They had always thought they were the elites and the Blitze class the failures, and yet, before they realized it, the Blitze class somehow surpassed them. Having that fact thrust into their face, most of the students lost heart.

However, some students were still fighting against such a cruel reality.

“Damn it...damn it...damn it!”

One of them was Louise, who shouted just after cutting down a black dog.

“I’m going to lose again?! I’m going to lose against them...against Alvin *again*?! Never! I’ll never accept that!”

Indeed. Louise couldn't lose a second time. She had to recover her pride as a knight.

“I...I have to...”

She ran through the forest, her emotion in a frenzy as she hunted down one monster after another. And as she did, she remembered her starting point—the reason she wanted to become a knight.

Louise's father, Rodrig Farre, was an exemplary knight. He had irreproachable conduct, was just and upright, was truly loyal to the royal family, and was adored by the people of his fief. And, more than anything, he had been chosen by an Atzilt-rank fairy sword and was praised as the greatest and strongest knight of the kingdom back then.

So, of course, even as a young child, Louise thought her father was a knight among knights, and she dreamed that, just like him, she would become a proud and strong knight. However, one day, that dream crumbled away suddenly like broken glass. Her father had his title as a knight stripped and his fief forfeited, ruining the Farre house.

During a certain war, of all things to do, her father abandoned his post as the king's guard and went to save the town that was under the enemy's attack. Thanks to that, many lives were saved. And yet, he was blamed for his actions. Indeed, according to the knight's law, what he did was considered high treason against the king.

Of course, the king declared that he didn't mind, and many righteous knights had approved of her father's actions and protected him. But still, the knights and nobles who didn't like her father continued to blame him, seeing it as a

chance to make him lose his standing.

Seeing that the country might be torn apart, and that the royal family's rule might be overthrown, her father decided to give up his fief and his title as a knight.

And finally...he died of the injuries he received during that war.

“I have no regrets.”

“The fact that I protected the people who were going to be killed...and that King Auld supported my choice...this is my pride as a knight.”

“However...I am truly sorry for the situation I put you in... Please...live strong...”

Those were the words left by her father before dying.

Louise couldn't understand them. Why was he proud of saving the people at the cost of ruining himself? If he was going to apologize to his family for his deed, then why even do it? She respected him, but...she couldn't understand his dying words.

Still, there was something she understood.

She had seen her grandfather lamenting, full of disappointment and despair.

“To think we would lose the house and fief we inherited for generations... What should I say to our ancestors? Ha...the Farre house is done for...” He followed her father in death because of illness.

She had seen her kind mother, who was in pain and prone to illness as, after falling from noblewoman to commoner, she did her best doing needlework she wasn't used to.

“Cough...cough... Don't worry...everything will be fine. My dear children...even if I have to use my own life, I will raise you to be splendid people... I promised Rodrig...”

She had seen her younger siblings live in poverty, enduring hardships as they shivered from the cold.

“Sis...I'm hungry...”

“It's cold...so cold...”

She had seen the retainers, that were like family, leave...no, be obliged to leave after serving her house until the very last moment.

“We apologize, milady!”

“We have a family and livelihood to protect!”

“We have been under the care of the Farre house for generations, and yet... Forgive us, milady!”

She had seen knights and nobles cruelly abusing and insulting her and her family after their ruin.

“Ga ha ha ha! Look at what the Farre have become!”

“That's what you get for believing you were above the rest because you had the strongest knight!”

“Serves you right, idiots!”

“Don't come near me. Your peasantry might rub off on

me.”

That’s why...

“I have to take it back—our lost pride!”

The knight title, their nobility, their house, and their fief. For her family and her father, whom she respected, she had sworn to recover them all and restore the knightly pride of the Farre house. That was why she had buttered up Duke Ortol and aimed to become a knight recognized by everyone. She had to become the strongest knight.

Fortunately, she had been chosen by an Atzilt-rank fairy sword, just like her father. That meant, just like her father, she should be able to become the strongest.

For that reason, she took her mother’s family name, and as a simple girl, as Louise Thedias, she aimed to become a knight. One day, she would become a splendid knight and rebuild the Farre house.

“Even though I have to take back our pride!”

She had to be recognized by everyone. She had to become the greatest and strongest knight. And yet, Sid Blitze, the strongest knight of the legendary era, as well as Alvin and the rest of the Blitze class, were a wall obstructing her way, and it was far too tall.

What’s more, the favor of Duke Ortol, which she had won thanks to being Atzilt-rank, was waning recently. The Duke had become cold toward her, disappointed by her loss against Alvin.

“Why...why isn't it going well?! Even though I'm working so hard... Aren't I a chosen Atzilt-rank?! Don't I have talent?!” Louise screamed at herself. Then she noticed that people were approaching. “You guys are...?”

They were students, each among the best in their classes. One of them, Johan, from the Anthalo class, walked before Louise.

“Let's join forces, Louise.”

She frowned at his proposal. “What do you mean?”

“Just what he said,” Olivia from the Durande class said. “Don't you see it? We assembled the best of each class!”

“Yeah! We're going outside the barrier too,” Johan said with a blood-curdling expression. “If they could hunt a kirimu, there's no way elites like us can't do it too!”

“I see your point.” Louise sighed. “However, if we team up, we won't get any points...”

“Who cares?!” Johan shouted toward the sky. “You get it too, right? That it's about our pride as knights!”

Louise gasped, her eyes wide. Looking around, she saw that everyone else was nodding at Johan's words, meaning he had voiced what they all thought. Louise kept silent for a while, thinking, then...

“Got it. Let's do it,” she said. “Yeah... I can't back down after such disgrace. I'll never accept that! We can do it too! There's no way we can't!”

“Yeah!” the other students agreed.

“Let’s go before the instructors notice us,” Olivia urged.

“Yeah, we should hurry.”

Thus, the elite team made of Louise, Johan, Olivia, and the best students in each class started to move. Their wounded pride only served as fuel to boost their excessive youthful recklessness. They were in high spirits, spurred on by their previous gloominess and feelings of inferiority as they ran toward the outside of the barrier.

“Let’s go! We can do it too!” Johan shouted.

“I won’t lose... I *can’t* lose!” Louise said to herself.

In their hearts, they all felt almighty, a characteristic of youngsters going through adolescence.

We’re the elites. The best of each class assembled.

We can do it too.

A kirimu is nothing. We can beat it.

We also became far stronger than when we enrolled.

We can draw out far more power from our fairy swords than before.

So if the inferior Blitze class could do it, there’s no way we can’t.

We’re different from the average fairy knight.

We’re the elite.

Such were the prideful thoughts of the students as they advanced.

The elite team, made of around ten students, arrived outside the barrier. They continued their advance confidently in the forest as it became darker and darker. Their objective was either a kirimu or a monster that gave more points.

Unlike near the lake, which was full of life, the outside of the barrier was so silent it was uncanny. There wasn't even a bird chirping or a single insect buzzing—it was as if they were in the depths of the sea.

Still, the students didn't lower their guard. They readied their fairy swords and sharpened their senses to their limits. They paid attention to all directions and slowly advanced without showing any carelessness. Yes, they truly didn't show any negligence, but they did underestimate the gravity of their situation.

It happened suddenly. Screams resounded as the two students at the rear of the group were blown away and violently slammed against a large tree. Many of their bones broke, and they fell to the ground, unconscious.

“What?!”

All the students turned back, and there, they saw it. A gigantic monster with seven heads—a kirimu. Its ominous eyes were staring at its prey—the students.

“I-Impossible!”

“J-Just when did it appear?!”

Even though they paid so much attention to their surroundings, nobody noticed the kirimu approaching. Most of the students couldn't hide their shock and fear.

“I-It's here! Surround it!”

“Yes, it'll be fine if we all attack it together!”

Johan and Olivia, who recovered their calm before anyone, ordered the other students, but...the kirimu disappeared.

Then, the next instant, more screams resounded as two students on the right side of the group were bitten by the monster and lifted.

“Huh? Wait...it's too fast...”

“My eyes can't follow it...”

Not caring about the bewildered mutterings, the kirimu swung the students in its mouths against the ground. The impact was so great they left human-shaped indents in the ground. They both had most of their bones broken and weren't in any condition to fight anymore. They groaned in pain.

Louise watched all this happen, dumbfounded.

“Wh-What the... A kirimu is that strong...?” she muttered.

The other students stepped back, trembling with fear as the kirimu's seven heads glared at them.

From there, the one-sided slaughter started.

“Aaaaaaah!”

“Gyaaaaaaa!”

“Nooooooo! Help me! Save me!”

The students screamed, faced with the kirimu’s unimaginable power and speed. They couldn’t believe such a gigantic monster could be so fast and attack them from their blind spot each time. It used its fangs, its limbs, and its tail to defeat one student after another.

There was such a vast difference in their levels that it was like trying to face down a raging tempest. Realizing this, the students tried to flee, but the kirimu wasn’t going to let them. It moved so fast that it was almost like teleportation, and it overtook the students and bit them one by one before slamming them against trees.

The difference in power between the predator and its prey was so huge it couldn’t even be called a hunt anymore.

In a few seconds, almost all the students had been defeated. And yet, even in such a situation, there was one person who tried to fight against the kirimu. They yelled, generating courage in their almost broken heart.

“Waaaaaah!”

It was Louise. She used all the strength and magic she could muster and attacked the kirimu. Aiming for a small opening after the kirimu smashed her teammates, she sent a freezing wave toward it—then closed in and swung her swords.

However, her prized twin blades—an Atzilt-rank fairy sword—easily broke without even leaving a single scratch on the kirimu. Even the cold waves she had sent only left a thin layer of frost on the monster’s scales.

“...Huh?”

Louise looked at her broken swords with shock before being violently blown away by the kirimu’s tail, breaking her left leg and right arm.

In a really short time, all the students were defeated, and nobody could stand up anymore. They were all lying in tatters on the ground, groaning in pain and half-conscious.

The kirimu let out a shriek as it observed them. This particular monster had a certain habit: it liked to eat its prey while they were alive. That meant that it never killed its prey—it only injured them enough to immobilize them. Looking at the state of the students, the kirimu confirmed its hunt had ended. It was now time for its meal. It slowly lowered one of its heads toward Louise, who was the closest to it.

“Huh...?”

Louise was bewildered, not understanding what was happening. But finally, the cruel truth hit her. She was going to die here, without being able to clear her father’s regrets nor take back her family’s honor. Her meaningless life was going to end without being able to accomplish anything. The moment she understood that...

“Nooooo!” she screamed as her usual mask of confidence peeled away.

Louise shamefully cried, her face full of fear and despair,

as she struggled to move her broken limbs. The gigantic kirimu standing before her looked like the devil.

“L-Let me go... Please...let me go... I beg you!”

She tried to join her hands together to pray, but the devil wasn't one to accept such a request. It opened one of its seven mouths, showing off its fangs as it approached her. It looked just like the entrance to hell.

“S-Save me... Someone, save me! N-Nooooo! No, no, no! F-Father! Save meeee!” she screamed.

And, just as the monster was going to bite Louise...a thunderclap resounded, and a fierce flash of light appeared before her.

“...Huh?”

In front of the bewildered Louise, the kirimu was crying in pain as it bent backward, and one of its heads, which had been cut, hit the ground.

“It feels like I saw a similar situation before...”

Before she knew it, a young man appeared before Louise. He had his back to her with only his face half turned in her direction. That young man—that knight with lightning flickering all over his body was...

“S-Sir Sid?!”

“Yo, Louise.” Sid grinned. “I can guess why you guys are here. Man, you really risked your lives for something as boring as pride, huh?”

Louise gritted her teeth, her face full of humiliation. Her body was in tatters and her face wet with tears, a truly unsightly appearance. Moreover, she had been so panicked that she had even begged for her life to a monster who couldn't understand human language. She felt so miserable and pathetic.

“Sniff... Why...why am I...? Sniff...” Louise could only hang her head in shame as she cried over the harsh reality.

And yet, as if trying to demonstrate something with his back toward her, Sid spoke without showing any contempt for Louise.



“A knight tells only the truth. Their bravery glimmers in their hearts. Their swords defend the defenseless. Their power sustains virtue. And their anger...destroys evil.”

Louise looked at his back, her eyes full of tears as she blinked.

“What was that...?”

“The old knight’s code,” Sid answered. “Hey, Louise. Why do you think the old knight’s code doesn’t have anything about pride?”

“Huh?” She didn’t understand the intent of the question and could only let out a perplexed voice.

The next instant, the kirimu recovered and attacked them with its remaining heads.

“Upsy-daisy,” Sid said as he took Louise under his arm and easily escaped the kirimu’s jaws that bit empty air.

“Wah?!” Louise let out a surprised voice.

“We can’t really talk leisurely right now.” He moved to a safe distance with Louise, then shouted. “You guys can fight now! Don’t worry about the fallen students. I’ll take care of them!”

“Yes!” six voices answered.

Six people—Alvin, Tenko, Elaine, Christopher, Lynette, and Theodore—came out of the forest and surrounded the kirimu.

“Everyone, let’s do it like the previous fight!” Alvin ordered. “The kirimu’s scales are tough, so only Tenko, Christopher, and Theodore can attack and wound it! The rest of us shall support them!”

“Got it! Leave the vanguard to me!”

“S-Still, to think we would fight another kirimu in the second half...”

“Aaaah, jeez! I’m gonna kill it!”

Tenko, Lynette, and Christopher answered as all of the Blitze class’s students moved.

The first one to go was Alvin. She used Gale to rush toward the kirimu.

“W-Wait! If you heedlessly get near it, you will...!” Louise screamed.

Just when Alvin’s rapier was going to reach the monster—the beast disappeared like mist. The kirimu moved at a speed far exceeding what the human eyes could follow and instantly appeared behind Alvin before mercilessly attacking her with its fangs and claws.

However, she twisted her body and managed to avoid the attack. The students from the other classes hadn’t been able to react, but Alvin could do it.

The kirimu was surprised but didn’t give up. It followed with a tail swipe. Alvin managed to see the blow coming just in time and used her rapier to ward it off and back away swiftly. Still, the kirimu followed her at great speed and continued to attack with its fangs and claws, scattering

shock waves around, their power so strong it was almost like they tore apart the atmosphere. And yet, Alvin evaded them all, moving in all directions like a gale. Then, finding a chance, she thrust her rapier as a counterattack at the nose of the closest head of the kirimu. It didn't do any damage because of its tough scales, but still, it enraged the beast. It had received an unexpected counterattack from an inferior being, and it couldn't even seize it. The kirimu continued its fierce attacks, and Alvin kept evading them thanks to her dexterous movements and footwork.

Johan and Olivia, who had somehow managed to keep their consciousness, muttered to themselves.

“A-Alvin is...incredible...”

“B-But...he shouldn't be able to move like that for long!”

And, just as Olivia had predicted, Alvin was soon cornered with her back against a tree. The kirimu's remaining six heads savagely aimed their jaws from all directions toward Alvin and—

“Heideheiden!” Elaine shouted in Espirish, ordering her magic to conceal Alvin's form.

A white fog appeared between Alvin and the kirimu. Then it enveloped Alvin and made her disappear, making the kirimu bite the empty air. It was the blue fairy magic, Foggy Veil.

“Look here,” Elaine said with a fearless smile as she pointed her bastard sword at the kirimu.

Of course, the kirimu wasn't going to miss such easy prey. However, as it observed her with its sharp senses, it

realized...that Elaine wasn't real and was only an illusion created by magic.

It howled fiercely, blowing away the thick fog, which made Elaine gasp as she appeared on the opposite side. Judging that she was the real one, the kirimu immediately moved toward her and bit her...only to let out a cry of surprise. The kirimu's attack had missed again, and the Elaine in front of it disappeared.

“This is the blue fairy magic, Reflecting Water.”

“Creating illusions is one of my fortes.”

“So even if you have sharp senses, you won't...”

“...be able to catch me that easily.”

Multiple versions of Elaine talked, surrounding the kirimu as it stiffened, bewildered by the scene. Its sharp senses told it that they were all real. It couldn't discern who was an illusion and who wasn't. Not knowing who to attack first, the kirimu stiffened, leaving it defenseless for an instant.

“Legtop!” Lynette shouted in the old fairy language, which meant “Stop it in its tracks,” making countless ivies bind the kirimu and restrain it. “Retriffsdansin!” Then she followed with the words for “Make the leaves dance.”

Countless leaves arose like a storm and rushed toward the kirimu, clinging to its body and eyes, stealing its sight. However, it only took a second for the kirimu to shake its body to tear off the restraints and blow away the leaves with a shriek.

It might have only been one second, but it was more than

enough.

“Hyaaaa!”

“Take thaaaat!”

Tenko and Christopher attacked, not missing the opportunity.

Tenko was using the red fairy magic, Homura Tachi, which enveloped her katana in crimson flames.

Christopher was using the green fairy magic, Diamond Strength, which gave his arms transcendental strength as he swung his claymore.

Both their attacks burned, cut, ripped, and smashed the scales of the monster. They weren't fatal wounds, but compared to the other students, who hadn't been able to do anything, they actually injured the kirimu.

The monster cried in pain as it shook its heads violently.

“Krimetewifry.”

A big sphere of fire was thrown toward the kirimu. It was the red fairy magic, Cremation Sphere, used by Theodore, who had been on standby a little ways away. This was the same magic he had used against the bandits a few days ago, but this time, the power behind it was different. He had used the time bought by his friends to knead a large quantity of mana with his Will to create an extremely powerful fire magic using all his strength.

The moment it hit the monster, it exploded, creating a pillar of fire so tall it could even burn the heavens. The

kirimu's body was mercilessly burned, and its scales became bright red from the heat. It cried in anguish, scorched by unimaginable firepower, but it didn't stop moving. The predator of the forest immediately understood that the most dangerous of the prey surrounding it was Theodore and that it had to kill him first. It rushed toward Theodore, who was tired from using a strong magic.

“I won't let you!” Alvin shouted as she appeared before the kirimu to stop it.

She jumped to avoid the monster's tail swipe, then nimbly rotated midair before thrusting her rapier in the wound inflicted by Tenko.

“I will help!”

“M-Me too!”

Elaine and Lynette positioned themselves on the flanks of the kirimu and started preparing their magics.

“Hyaaa!” Tenko yelled as she kicked the air to propel herself with the red fairy magic, Flame Dancing Legs.

She jumped behind the kirimu. Then, rotating her entire body like a windmill, she swung her katana and slashed the monster's back.

“No, you won't!” Christopher said as he used his claymore to protect Alvin from a tail swipe.

As Alvin and the rest were fighting together, Theodore ran silently through the forest, searching for the best position to fire his magic again.

The kirimu howled in rage toward the students attacking it. Having come this far, it realized that they weren't its prey—it was *theirs*.

“Alvin! I just poisoned it with my poisoned roses!”

“Good job, Lynette! The kirimu will weaken soon! Everyone, prepare to attack!” Alvin ordered.

Tenko, Christopher, Elaine, Lynette, and Theodore answered.

“Yes!”

“Yeah!”

“Understood!”

“Y-Yes!”

“Hmph.”

A little ways away, Louise, Johan, Olivia, and the other tattered students watched the Blitze class's fight with bewilderment.

“S-So strong...” one of them muttered.

They couldn't be dishonest anymore and had to accept the truth.

“My class is quite strong, right?” Sid said to Louise and the others. “Say...what is a knight's pride?”

“Th-That's...” Louise couldn't answer.

Johan, Olivia, and the others couldn't either. Nobody could respond even though, just a little while ago, they would have answered easily with confidence. But now they couldn't. The reason was...

“You get it, right? That your pride's easily broken just by fighting against someone stronger than yourself. Not to mention that it would just disappear if you died, anyway.”

Louise hung her head in shame, not being able to refute him.

“But my students are different. Even if they're defeated and ragged, their pride won't break. Never. Do you understand why?” Sid asked, but Louise could only cock her head. “If you want to know, come to me. It's fine even if it's only during the training camp.”

His speech done, Sid turned back and left. Even though his students were in a life-or-death struggle, he didn't have any doubt about their victory.

Finally, after a long fight, just as Sid had believed, Alvin and the rest had piled up injuries against the kirimu and cornered it. It had weakened, and its movements became duller and duller as it lost its heads one after another. And then—

“Hyaaa!”

Tenko's flame-katana cut off its last head.

Chapter 5: Reform and Looming Darkness

In the middle of the night, inside the dark forest far away from the lake, the sound of something being destroyed rang out.

“And one more,” Sir Owl said.

In front of him was a broken stone monument. Something had been marked in Espirish on its surface, but it was impossible to read now that it was in pieces.

“That was the fifteenth. With this, almost all the catalysts of the barrier are broken. At the rate I’m going, my fight with *him* isn’t far off.” He chuckled an instant before frowning. “Still, the last one isn’t going to be easy... What to do?” He pondered his next move for a few seconds. “Oh well, I guess I don’t have any other choice. Time to use a little trick. Fortunately, that’s my forte.” Sir Owl grinned inside his helmet, hidden from the world.

Inside the darkness, as a scheme was carried out, something steadily started to move.

In the end, the winner of the monster subjugation contest was the Blitze class. Their victory was flawless, and the difference in points compared with the other classes was so big it was ridiculous. Thus, Sid became the general knight instructor with the right to decide how to train everyone during the training camp.

The students were trembling with fear as they wondered what kind of unreasonable orders and chores Sid was going to give them. However, Sid said something unexpected.

“I won’t do anything. You can just continue to follow your own instructors.”

That was all. Sid didn’t order anything that would be unfavorable for the other classes. But he did add one thing.

“Also, you’re free to participate in the other classes’ training if you wish. That’s it.”

And then, one week passed.



“Haaa...haaa... I’m dying... I’m gonna die!”

Under the morning sunlight, a group of heavily armored students was running—or rather, walking—around the lake unsteadily. Some were coughing, and some were complaining as they panted heavily. They weren’t from the Blitze class, but from the other classes, with Louise, Johan, and Olivia at their head.

As for the Blitze class...

“We’re going ahead! Don’t try too hard,” Christopher warned Louise and the rest as he and his classmates passed them casually, even though they were wearing heavier armor.

Seeing the Blitze class students running ahead of them, Johan and Olivia muttered in shock.

“N-Now they’re two laps ahead of us... I can’t believe it...”

“What are they...? Are they really not using their fairy swords?!”

One after the other, the students reached their limits and fell, exhausted. Louise wasn’t an exception, as she was prostrated on the ground, panting heavily. Her whole body felt like lead, and she couldn’t move anymore.

“They’ve been...doing this...every day...?” Louise muttered in between her breaths, saying aloud what everyone else was thinking.

One after the other, students who had been saved by Sid and the Blitze class started wanting to participate in the Blitze class’s training. They had accepted the fact that Sid’s students were stronger than them.

They started wondering how the ones who should have been failures became so strong, and they wanted to know the secret behind their growth. Of course, the instructors and other students weren’t pleased by this, and the ones who decided to participate in the Blitze class’s training were aware of it. And yet, they really wanted to know the truth of the Blitze class’s strength. They wanted to become stronger.

So they made up their mind and came to Sid.

“Well, for starters, put these on and run until you feel like dying,” Sid had said with a smile as he thrust heavy armor at them, which made the students scream in shock.

Once running was done, the Blitze class started one-on-one practice matches. The current match was between Alvin and Elaine. They both burned their Will and exchanged blows relentlessly.

Alvin used her rapier to make consecutive fast attacks, while Elaine fought in an ever-changing way with her bastard sword. Both blades clashed again and again. Alvin was swift like a gale, while Elaine was moving as if she were dancing. They both moved around freely, swinging their swords at each other without wavering.

Seeing how high the level of their battle was, the other classes' students could only groan in frustration.

Finally, Elaine barely managed to win against Alvin, ending their match.

“It’s my loss, Elaine. I didn’t expect that last attack.”

Elaine chuckled. “Today, victory is mine!”

“Don’t be so proud, Elaine. Alvin has more wins on you than losses.”

“Shut your mouth, Christopher!”

Christopher and Elaine bickered.

“I didn’t think they were *that* much stronger...” Louise muttered regretfully after watching the match from a little ways away.

She wasn’t the only one. Johan, Olivia, as well as the other students who joined the training held the same feeling, ashamed. After all, they couldn’t participate in the practice

matches. Their difference in strength was one reason, but the main one was that they were too tired from running and couldn't even hold their swords. Though, in the first place, Louise didn't even have anything to use, as her swords broke in her fight against the kirimu.

“Well, don't mind it. We were also like that at first,” Tenko said to encourage Louise.

Louise looked up at Tenko, who was standing next to her. She had heard that this noble-tail girl had poor results during the interclass games, and yet, now she was the ace of her class. Having watched how Tenko fought in her practice match, Louise understood that, in terms of close combat, Tenko was the strongest among the First Squires. At her current strength, she wouldn't even be able to block a sword strike from the noble-tail girl. Naturally, she was aware that she wasn't a match for the other students in the Blitze class either.

“You guys are amazing...”

“Huh? Why the sudden praise?” Tenko blinked from seeing Louise so meek.

“I just said what I thought. Still, Will, huh... From what Sir Sid told us when teaching the principle, it's an amazing technique. Of course, we would lose if you use it,” Louise commented as she watched Christopher and Theodore starting their practice match.

“Are you calling it unfair?”

“I'm not,” Louise answered with a self-deprecating smile. “I now understand more than enough that you need great determination and training, to the point of spitting blood, to

learn it. I realize how diligent and earnest you must have been so far.”

“Well...yeah.” Tenko nodded with a distant look as she scratched her cheek. “I had to overcome many hardships to get where I am.”

“However, there is something I don’t get.” Louise looked straight at Tenko. “Why did Sir Sid teach us about Will?”

Tenko stayed silent.

“Will is the technique that allowed you to surpass us. If you had continued to hide it, the Blitze class would have been able to reign over the academy.”

“Well, yeah, I guess.”

“That’s why I can’t understand why you told us. The three legacy classes have been tormenting you until now.”

Tenko kept silent for a few seconds before finally opening her mouth. “Sir Sid... Master doesn’t care about that kind of thing.”

Louise gasped.

“Master doesn’t care about the rivalry between the factions or being at the top of the academy. He only thinks about protecting this country and Alvin.” Tenko glanced at Sid, who was a little ways away, watching over a practice match. “His objective is to make the kingdom strong enough so that even if he weren’t here, there wouldn’t be any problems. That’s why he isn’t interested in prestige and status.”

Hearing Tenko's speech, Louise felt strange. Sid's behavior was the opposite of the knights she knew, who esteemed prestige and status. And yet, for some reason, she thought he was more noble and proud than anyone. *What about my pride as a knight?* she asked herself as Tenko continued.

"That said, master has a good eye for people. He wouldn't teach anybody who would cause trouble to the kingdom in the future. That means he must expect great things from you, and there isn't any problem with teaching you."

"R-Really?"

"Well, personally, I'm not too pleased. After all, if helping you to get stronger from your current weak state is going to make you look down on us like before, I wouldn't know what to do."

"Uh... Sorry..." Louise muttered, ashamed, as she was confronted with Tenko's resentment.

"But I guess we would just need to get stronger, then. In the first place, we're still on the starting line. I have a duty as a knight, and to carry it out, I'm planning to walk through the thorny path from now on. And I'm sure everyone else is the same," Tenko said as she looked at her friends.

Louise felt that Tenko was noble from looking at her profile. She felt that she was far more of a knight than herself.

"I see... I wonder if I'll be able to become as strong as you all..." Louise whispered, anxious. "I understand how Will works, but I don't feel like I'll be able to learn it..."

“Don’t worry! It’s not a special technique or anything! Everyone can learn it as long as they train correctly! Just have a strong determination and continue to train your body. Then you’ll definitely make it yours one day! I guarantee it!” Tenko exclaimed with sparkles in her eyes.

“S-Somehow it feels like you’re speaking from experience...?” Louise said, surprised. “But you’re right, thanks. I’ll try my best.” She nodded, renewing her determination.

Days flew by as everyone did their best during the training camp.

“Damn it!” Gato spat in frustration and clicked his tongue.

He was seated in front of the bonfire inside the Durande class’s campsite, set up on the lakeshore. The fire was the only source of light stopping the darkness surrounding them in the dead of night, and the flickering flame made the trees’ shadows in the back move as if they were monsters.

The bonfire illuminated two students other than Gato. A plump boy, Wein, and a short boy, Ladd. They were also in the Durande class and were Gato’s followers. Even if the surroundings of the lake were protected by a barrier, it didn’t stop all the monsters—in particular, the weak ones. Thus, a night watch was necessary, and it was their turn.

“The guys in the Blitze class were just trash you could blow away easily, and now look! Even that stupid fox became absurdly strong!”

Gato annoyingly threw wood into the bonfire, making sparks burst fiercely for an instant.

“But Gato...they really became stronger,” Wein muttered in irritation. “During today’s combined practice, we couldn’t win a single match against them...”

“Y-Yeah. What’s more, as unbelievable as it is, they’re getting even stronger thanks to the training camp!” Ladd grumbled, his body shivering.

“Shit! Shit! Shit!” Gato swore as he remembered the practice match he had with Tenko in the afternoon.

It had been the complete opposite of their match in the interclass games. Gato hadn’t been able to follow Tenko’s speed or deal with her attacks. Until now, he had believed that the Blitze class defeating a kirimu during the monster subjugation contest had either been a joke or that they had cheated. But after that practice match, even if he loathed it, he had to accept that it was the truth.

“Damn it! Why?! They’re just Asher-rank failures! How come they’re stronger than us?! We should be the ones above them!”

What pissed him off even more was that students from other classes had started to participate in the Blitze class’s training to receive Sid’s guidance. From what Gato had heard, Sid was teaching them a technique from the legendary era called Will, which was the secret to the Blitze class’s strength. So naturally, Gato had decided to try doing the Blitze class training for one day and had gone to Sid to learn Will. However, contrary to what he had heard, Sid didn’t teach him anything and just told him, with a smile, to run while wearing armor. With nothing to lose, Gato did it,

but he only ended up completely exhausted, wondering what the point of running like this was when using a fairy sword would make it a breeze. Feeling that the training was stupid, he stopped there and never returned.

“That Will thing doesn’t exist! I’m sure he’s lying! That Barbarian is making fun of us!”

“B-But Gato...it’s a fact that they’re becoming stronger thanks to it,” Ladd said.

“They must be using a magic tool or something! There’s no other way these Asher losers would become that strong! I’d never accept it!” Gato took his axe-shaped fairy sword and started to strike rocks on the ground with it. “Damn it! If only my fairy sword was stronger! The hell’s a Beriah-rank good for?! You’re trash! Shit! Shit! Shit!” He continuously struck the ground with his axe.

“Yeah, you’re right. Recently I’ve been seriously thinking that I wanted a stronger fairy sword,” Wein said.

“If we had stronger fairy swords, we wouldn’t lose to these failures!” Gato shouted.

Ladd giggled. “Yeah, if only we had Atzilt-ranks.”

“Beriah-ranks aren’t good enough for us,” Gato said.

“Yeah, we really got trash fairy swords,” Wein agreed.

“Then, do you want stronger ones?” a voice suddenly called to them.

They immediately turned back and saw a woman coming out of the dark forest. And when she got close enough for her

face to be lit by the bonfire...

“Isabella?! You’re Isabella, the chief of the Ladies of the Lake?!”

She was the chief of the Ladies of the Lake, the Nimue assisting the royal family as per their ancient oath, as well as the principal of the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy. Seeing such an unexpected person come to them, Gato and his followers could only blink in surprise.

“Wh-Why are you here, Lady Isabella? Shouldn’t you be in the castle...?”

“Were you supposed to come here?”

Wein and Ladd asked, but Isabella ignored them.

“Do you want stronger fairy swords?” she said with an unreadable expression.

Gato and his followers looked at each other, confused.

“I-I don’t get what you mean,” Gato said.

Isabella chuckled. “Just as my words imply. If you could obtain Atzilt-rank...no, fairy swords even stronger than that, what would you do?”

“What? Stronger than Atzilt-rank? That’s impossible...”

“It isn’t. Fairy swords stronger than Atzilt-rank exist here, in this Lake of Swords.”

Hearing this, Gato, Wein, and Ladd fell silent for a few seconds before opening their mouths.

“Wait, you think I’m gonna believe that?!”

“Y-Yeah, I never heard about that...”

“S-Same here!”

However, Isabella didn’t pay attention to their words. She just looked straight at them, her eyes shining a bewitching light. It was as if she could directly peer at their souls and sneak into them.

“Of course you wouldn’t know about it. This is a secret passed down among the Ladies of the Lake since ancient times.”

Her explanation had some credibility.

“R-Really...?”

Gato and his followers started to believe her.

Isabella gave a bewitching smile. “The current royal family isn’t strong enough to shoulder the future of this country. Don’t you agree?”



“W-Well...yeah...” Gato muttered.

“The truth is that, after a long discussion, we, the Ladies of the Lake, have decided to abandon the useless royal family and break our old pledge. Instead, we will support the three ducal houses, who are stronger.”

“Seriously?!”

“I-I see! Well, of course you would! In fact, I wonder why it took you so long!”

“I thought you were annoying, always talking about your old pledge, but in fact, you’re pretty smart!”

Gato and his followers smiled.

“Well then,” Isabella continued, “didn’t you find it strange that the Blitze class became so strong even though they should only have Asher-rank fairy swords?”

“Of course we did,” Wein said.

“Wait, you don’t mean that...” Gato muttered as he realized something.

“Indeed, just as you are thinking. They obtained fairy swords stronger than Atzilt-rank,” Isabella declared.

“What?!”

“W-Well...that would explain their strength.”

“So, you mean that they act all high and mighty, but they’re just relying on their swords?!”

“Those little shits... They lied to us! The hell is Will?!”

Gato and his followers became enraged after learning the shocking truth.

“Then the reason that Barbarian’s so strong...”

“Yes, his abnormal power is from a fairy sword stronger than Atzilt-rank. After all, someone can’t be so strong with only their body, don’t you agree?” Isabella answered with a smile.

“I knew it!” Gato gritted his teeth.

However, neither he, nor the other two, noticed that Isabella’s eyes were shining in the darkness, and that this mysterious and eerie light was entrapping their souls.

“This secret has been kept since the legendary era. We gave the swords to the Blitze class as a test, but this isn’t necessary anymore. Now, the time has come for the three legacy classes to know the truth. And in priority, students like you, who are among the few with the required qualities, should get new swords first.”

“W-We have the required qualities?”

“Y-Yeah, of course we would.”

Gato and the other two nodded, feeling exalted.

“With this, we’ll be able to teach a lesson to those cheeky guys from the Blitze class.”

“Heh heh. They’ve been quite arrogant recently. I can’t help but laugh when I imagine their faces once they’re back

to being losers.”

“Yeah, gonna be amazing!”

They totally believed Isabella’s story. After all, people didn’t believe the truth, they believed in *what they wanted to believe* as the truth. In this case, they didn’t want to believe that the Blitze class was better than them. They wanted to believe that there was a way for them to beat the Blitze class.

Isabella used her magic to skillfully control their minds and amplify these feelings. It was a magic that could manipulate people’s minds to deceive them. It was the ancient magic used by the dark side—The Line Between Lie and Truth.

“Well then, let’s go take your new swords,” Isabella declared, then started to walk.

Gato, Wein, and Ladd, who couldn’t resist the temptation, followed her with unsteady steps.

“Thank you for your guidance today,” Alvin said.

“You did well,” Sid answered.

They were both inside the Blitze class’s campsite on the shore, seated on logs around a bonfire. In front of them was the lake, with the moon reflected on its surface, and behind them was the dense forest.

“I’ll stand watch tonight, so you should sleep,” Sid said and glanced at the side where three tents were.

One was for Christopher and Theodore, another for Elaine and Lynette, and the last one, set a little away, was for Alvin and Tenko. Christopher, Theodore, Elaine, and Lynette were exhausted from the afternoon training and were sound asleep inside their tents. As for Tenko, she was supposed to be on night watch with Alvin, but...

“Mmh...I can’t eat anymore...” Tenko mumbled in her sleep, holding her sheathed katana dearly while seated next to Alvin. Her ears and tail swayed from time to time.

“I can’t,” Alvin said as she put a blanket around Tenko. “This training camp is also to practice camping on the battlefield. Besides, I can’t rely on you for everything, Sir Sid.”

Alvin put some soup powder in a cup, then added hot water from the kettle hanging above the bonfire before giving the cup to Sid.

“Thanks.” He took it and sipped the instant chicken soup slowly.

It might not be winter in the fairy world, like in the material world, but it was still colder during the night. A warm soup was more than welcome.

“Say, Alvin. You don’t have any problems?” Sid asked hesitantly while drinking his soup. “I mean, in your case, living outdoors with everyone must come with its share of troubles.” He was worried about her being a woman.

“I’m fine,” she replied, somewhat glad. “You help with a lot of things, and Tenko is here too.” She smiled as she looked at the sleeping Tenko.

Originally, only Tenko and Isabella had known that Alvin was a woman, but by chance, Sid discovered the truth. Since four months ago, after the dragon attack on the capital, the three of them had been sharing this secret.

“Tenko is always helping me. Be it now or in the past.”

Tenko had been Alvin’s aide and guard since her youth. Knowing this, everyone easily accepted that they shared the same tent. Thanks to that, Alvin had been able to live more smoothly than she had expected. However, it increased the number of people thinking that they were in *that kind of relationship*.

“W-Well, Alvin’s a guy and royalty. I’m so envi...I mean, yeah, can’t be helped that you end up together!”

“Y-Y-Yes! This is natural! In various ways!”

Maybe Christopher and Elaine had been trying to be considerate, as they had set up their tents a little ways away from Alvin and Tenko’s.

“S-S-S-Say, Tenko! Th-That thing men and women do during the night...w-well, umm, h-how is it?!” Lynette had asked, full of curiosity, her face bright red.

“Huh? HUUUUH?! W-Well, err...i-it’s...incredible, I guess...?” Tenko had answered, her face flushed as she fiddled with her tail. This caused the rumor to spread, and it excited Lynette even more and had made her imagine even wilder things.

Well, rather than trying to hide that she’s a woman, I guess it’s easier to make people think she’s a man with a rumor like that, Sid thought with a wry smile as he sipped

his soup.

For a while, Sid and Alvin continued to talk, but little by little, they ran out of things to say and fell silent. Looking up, the sky was full of stars different from those in the material world. In the stillness of the night, the sound of the wind, the singing of the insects, and an owl cry echoed. And in this peaceful moment...

“U-Umm...Sir Sid...” Alvin suddenly said.

Sid looked at her as she glanced left and right restlessly.

“What is it?”

“Well...can I sit closer to you?” she asked in a voice more feminine than usual.

Sid stayed silent.

“Umm...it’s a little cold...so...” she muttered as she turned her blushing face away.

Sid remembered how Alvin had once said that she wanted to get back to being a girl from time to time.

“Yeah, you can,” he said with a wry smile and gentle eyes as if he was a grandfather watching his cute granddaughter.

“Th-Thank you very much!” Alvin exclaimed with a wide smile. Then she moved next to Sid and sat.

Sid put a blanket on her shoulders.

“You’re so spoiled, my king. If you’re like this, I fear for the future.”

“Don’t say that now...” Alvin pouted, snuggling her head on Sid’s shoulder.

But her expression quickly shifted to relief as she felt Sid’s warmth. The tension she had built up for the past few days left her as she slowly closed her eyelids.

The descendant of Arthur, my best friend, huh... I wonder if it’d be like this if I had a daughter or a granddaughter, Sid thought as he lent his shoulder to Alvin.

Time flowed in the tranquil night. It was a truly peaceful and tender moment.

However, Sid, who would never let down his guard even in such a peaceful time, noticed *it*—the smell of an approaching crisis. The presence of a bloody fight. He immediately stood up and stared sharply toward the lake.

“Wah?! S-Sir Sid?!” Alvin said in surprise, having been suddenly woken up. “Wh-What’s happening?”

“Go wake everyone. Be fully armed and prepared to fight. Pay attention to your surroundings until I get back. If the situation asks for it, you take command. Got it?” Sid said before running off like a gust of wind.



Inside the verdant fairy world, at the center of the Lake of Swords, was an island.

Using a small boat, Gato, Wein, and Ladd landed on that island and stood before the old shrine made of stones, where a single sword was enshrined. The sword was faintly shining with mana, and words in Espirish were written on its

surface.

“Th-This is...”

“The seal guarding fairy swords stronger than Atzilt-rank!”

“If we break it, fairy swords stronger than Atzilt-rank will start appearing inside the lake! Heh heh, it’s just as Isabella said!” Gato said as he cracked his knuckles and approached the sword.

“B-But Gato, can we really break it?” Ladd asked.

“Did you forget that Isabella explained how to do it?” Gato snorted. “There is a magical seal that allows three people—not one, nor two, nor four, but exactly three people—to attack it together at the same time and easily break it.”

“O-Oh, yeah, I remember now. I don’t really get how this magic thing is working, but we’re three and perfectly in sync, so it should be fine!”

Wein giggled. “Never thought we’d get swords stronger than Atzilt-rank.”

The three of them readied their fairy swords and pointed them toward the enshrined sword. Then they all attacked—resulting in three intermittent sounds.

“Idiots! Be in sync with me!” Gato shouted.

“Ladd! You’re too slow!”

“It’s you who’s too fast, Wein!”

“Shut up and concentrate!” Gato cried.

Having three people attack at the exact same time was more difficult than they had thought. However, after trying many times, finally...

“Take that!” the three of them screamed in unison.

By chance, the three attacks landed at the same time, and the enshrined sword easily broke.

“Hell yeah!”

“With this, we’ll have fairy swords stronger than Atzilt-rank!”

“Yeah! We’ll be able to teach a lesson to the eyesores of the Blitze class!”

Gato and the other two cheered. But...

“Huh?”

The sound of water resounded. All the fairy swords that had been floating on the lake dove into it as if fearing something.

And then...



Isabella was standing at the harbor on the lakeshore, looking at the center island, when someone suddenly appeared behind her—it was Sid.

“Oh, Sir Sid. Good eve—”

Just as Isabella turned to greet him with a smile, Sid sped toward her in a flash with lightning wrapped around his thrusting right hand. His speed truly was that of lightning, and nobody in the current era could avoid a serious attack from him. Or at least, nobody *should have been able to*.

“To think you would attack me so suddenly... You truly are a cruel man, Barbarian.”

Isabella easily dodged the attack by jumping back and was now standing on the lake’s surface, as if floating on it.

“Shouldn’t this woman be your friend?” the person taking Isabella’s appearance said with a cold smile.

Sid stayed alert, ready to fight, as he glanced at her.

“You didn’t manage to conceal your dark mana. There’s no way you could be Isabella.”

“Hmph. I guess I don’t need to continue this farce if you found out.”

Darkness overflowed from Isabella’s whole body, changing her appearance to that of a knight in black armor wearing a mantle of the same color. His face was covered by a full-face helmet, and its form, as well as the feather decoration on his shoulder, gave the impression of an owl.

“A dark knight, huh...”

“Sir Owl is the name,” he said with a low chuckle as he drew his longsword.

The sword had an ominous shape modeled on an owl’s eyes, and dark mana leaked from its blade. One could

understand at a glance that it was a black fairy sword with a high rank.

“So...” Sid started to say, having guessed the identity of Sir Owl thanks to his armor and sword, “you’re alive.”

Sir Owl wasn’t surprised that Sid recognized him.

“Well, I guess calling myself Owl in front of you was pretty meaningless. Right, Barbarian?”

Sid stared at him in silence.

“Hmph. Normally, I would like to have a toast for our reunion, but...”

“Step away,” Sid said sharply. He was looking at the center island where he could see people and a small boat. “What are you trying to do?”

“Who knows? But considering how discerning you are despite being a barbarian, you should be able to somehow understand.”

“Don’t joke around. I won’t let you say that you don’t know what the sword enshrined there is for.”

“Of course.”

“Then—get out of my way.”

The next instant, a line of light ran along the ground. Sid used Lightning Legs to transform himself into lightning and assaulted Sir Owl with his hand like a sword. And yet...

“Ha ha ha! So slow! You’re so slow, Barbarian!”

Sir Owl evaded it. Moreover, he swung his sword at the same time, inflicting a wound on Sid's chest.

“Don't look down on me, Sir Sid the Lightning Knight. I've been stronger than you since the legendary era.”

Sid stayed silent.

“Oh well. I guess we should start with a little skirmish. After all, you only just woke up in this era. You need some warming up,” Sir Owl said as he readied his sword. “This is an Atzilt-rank black fairy sword, Guardian Owl of the Scales. Remember that name and die.”

“Your sword is crying,” Sid muttered as he observed Sir Owl's blade with a distant look. “It was the strongest blue fairy sword and could govern over all states of things, and now...it's like *this*.”

“Say whatever you want. Everything I do is for that person. I couldn't care less about the words of a filthy traitor like you.”

Darkness—overwhelming darkness overflowed from Sir Owl's sword, transforming the space around him into the depths of the abyss.

Opposite him, Sid silently readied his right hand like a sword, making the lightning around it stronger. The bursting light stopped the infinite darkness from spreading further.

The fierce fighting spirits and mana of the two confronting men strained the atmosphere around them, and when the tension reached its limits, the sound of something exploding on the center island resounded into the night.

Back to the Blitze class's campsite.

“Wh-Why...?” Alvin muttered, looking at the night sky in shock.

“S-Seriously...?”

“What's happening?”

Christopher, Theodore, and the other students were astonished too. Thanks to learning Will, they could sense the mana inside themselves and in nature, so they understood—that the sacred barrier around the lake was slowly vanishing. The protecting barrier that defended the students from the dreadful monsters of the deep layers was disappearing. It happened quietly without warning.

Everyone gasped. The surroundings became silent, and the insects and birds vanished. It felt like a kind of darkness different from the black of night was coming from the forest.

The ominous silence made everyone nervous. Then, as if they had waited for this moment, a great number of *things* approached at great speed from the forest—from the darkness behind them.

“Everyone, they're coming!” Alvin shouted, and everyone readied themselves.

The next instant, countless black dogs appeared, barking as they bared their fangs, claws, and bloodlust at Alvin and the rest. However, the Blitze class wasn't at the level to be threatened by black dogs anymore.

They all formed a circle, protecting each other's backs, and readied their fairy swords. Alvin her rapier, Tenko her katana, Elaine her bastard sword, Christopher his claymore, Lynette her spear, and Theodore his short sword. They wielded their weapons and slashed, waved, mowed down, struck, and swung until finally defeating all the black dogs.

“Is everyone all right?!” Alvin asked.

“Y-Yes! Even I wouldn't lose against such weak monsters!” Lynette answered with a strong nod, readying her spear with some nervousness.

“Alvin, the situation is bad,” Theodore said as he calmly assessed the situation. “The barrier vanishing means that the other classes are going to be assaulted by monsters too.”

And, as if to prove his words...

“Eeeeeeeek?!”

“Waaaaaah?!”

Screams came from the other classes' campsites with sounds of battle. The assault being a surprise night attack, it wasn't difficult to imagine that they weren't prepared to face the monsters and that, at this rate, a lot of people were going to get injured.

“We're also in danger if we stay here. I'm sensing a dangerous presence coming from deep within the forest. I don't think it's as strong as a kirimu, but still...” Theodore said, not being able to hide his impatience.

“Wh-What should we do, Alvin?” Tenko asked.

“Let’s make groups of two and go support the other classes! We’re going to lead everyone to the layer’s entrance, and once we’ve checked everyone is here, we’re getting out! Without the barrier, we shouldn’t stay in this layer anymore!” Alvin ordered.

“Understood!”

“Got it! Nobody dies, okay?!”

“Good luck, everyone!”

Tenko, Christopher, and Elaine replied.

Then they all followed Alvin’s orders without hesitation. They made groups and ran toward the other classes’ campsites that were in turmoil.



Hearing the screams and roars that suddenly came from the lakeshore, Gato trembled.

“What the...what the hell’s happening?!”

“Hey, Gato! Weren’t we supposed to get strong fairy swords by breaking this sword?!”

“Something really bad is happening!”

“Sh-Shut up!” Gato shouted at Wein and Ladd.

“H-Hey...Maybe we’ve been tricked...?”

“In the first place, why was Lady Isabella here? She’s supposed to be in the castle, so there’s no way she’d be here...”

“Then we...”

“I said to shut up!” Gato cried at Wein and Ladd, who were flustered. “It’s not the time to talk! Let’s stealthily get back!”

“Ah! Wait for us!”

Gato rushed to the small boat and pushed it into the lake. Wein and Ladd followed him in a hurry and got on the boat with Gato, then started to row with everything they had.

“Damn it! Why is this happening?!”

Gato was a fairy sword user. Thanks to his spiritual senses, he somehow understood what was happening and *who* was at fault. He realized they had been made to do something really bad.

N-No...it’s not my fault! It’s not our fault! We’ve been tricked! It’s not our fault! Gato screamed in his mind as he desperately rowed toward the opposite shore. For now, they needed to get back to their campsite secretly and act as if they didn’t know anything.

Currently, the only thing he was thinking about was what kind of excuse to give and how to push the blame away from himself.

“Eeeek?!”

Being suddenly attacked, Louise could only scream and run away. No, it wasn’t only her. All the students from the Durande, Ortol, and Anthalo classes were doing the same.

Many monsters had come out of the forest and assaulted them. They were far stronger than the ones they fought against when the barrier was working. Fortunately, there wasn't any monster as strong as a kirimu among them, but three types, in particular, were dangerous.

The first were ferocious monsters with big and muscular bodies—ogres.

The second were dog-like monsters, except they had three heads and bodies as big as lions—cerberuses.

The third were monsters ruling the skies thanks to their lion bodies and eagle heads, limbs, and wings—griffins.

In addition, a lot of other weaker monsters came out of the forest one after another.

Each instructor roared instructions to their students, but none reached as they faded into the chaos.

“W-Waaah! Don't come! Stay away!”

Inside the turmoil, Louise desperately swung her swords. She countered the ogre's leg that was going to crush her and rolled to the side to avoid the rushing cerberus spouting fire.

Louise's fairy sword was still damaged from the fight against the kirimu. Generally, even without repairing them, fairy swords could restore themselves with enough time. In this case, enough time had passed for her fairy sword to reconnect the broken fragments but not enough to entirely mend them. That meant that it couldn't use all its strength. No matter how powerful an Atzilt-rank fairy sword was, it couldn't do much in this state.

“Damn it...damn it!”

Still, Louise continued to fight with her damaged swords. She wasn't the only one with a damaged fairy sword. It was also the case for the other students who had participated in the reckless fight against the kirimu. Because of this, each class had less fighting power and had more difficulties against the assaulting monsters.

I...I'm this weak without being able to use my fairy sword?! Louise gritted her teeth, being toyed with by monsters she could usually easily defeat.

Suddenly, three black dogs attacked her from behind, making her gasp. If she had her usual strength, they would be small fries. However, not only her fairy sword was weakened. She was currently blocking an ogre's stick with her dual blades above her head and couldn't move away.

N-No way... I'm going to be killed by these weak monsters?! Just when Louise prepared for her death...

“Haaa!”

Someone appeared next to her and swung their rapier three times, blowing away the three black dogs.

“Hyaa!” someone else yelled. Then a vertical crimson line appeared, cleanly bisecting the ogre.

The black dogs and the ogre dissipated into mana mist and vanished. Then, appearing from behind the fire sparks was...

“T-Tenko?!” Louise turned back to see who had protected her. “And Alvin?!”

“It was a close call, Louise! We’re here to help!” Alvin said.

“To...help?”

They should have been in a dangerous situation too. They should have had their hands full with protecting themselves, and nobody would have blamed them for not caring about the other classes. And yet, they came to help. Knowing full well the danger, Alvin and the rest had come to help the other classes.

“Wh-Why did you come...?” Louise asked.

“Louise, now isn’t the time to care about the discord between our classes! If we don’t cooperate, a lot of people might die!” Alvin said.

While Louise was still bewildered, Alvin and Tenko started to fight other monsters. They slew a group of cerberuses that were attacking other students.

“Are you all right?!”

“You are...Tenko from the Blitze class?”

“Th-Thank you...sniff...I thought I was done for...”

“You can thank me later! Get up and run toward the layer’s entrance!” Tenko scolded the crying students and urged them to move.

Louise looked at her in a daze.

“What are you doing, Louise?!” Alvin shouted. “I know your fairy sword is still damaged! But you should still be able

to fight!” Alvin yelled as she slew the monsters in front of her.

“Y-Yeah...you’re right.”

Louise readied her sword and joined the fight. Even if damaged, her fairy sword was of Atzilt-rank. She was stronger than the other students. However, compared to Alvin and Tenko, who were fighting fiercely by using Will, Louise felt weak and powerless. She could only try her best to not stand in their way.

Damn it! I...I’m... Louise felt so worthless and miserable that she couldn’t help the tears falling from her eyes as she swung her swords.



Alvin, Tenko, and Louise continued to fight in the chaos, protecting the students. They went from campsite to campsite, slaying monster after monster to let the students run away.

They didn’t know how many monsters they had killed. Just how long was the assault going to go on? They could only mechanically continue to fight as they saved the students.

Until finally...



After fighting numerous battles and saving all the students they came across, Alvin and the rest finally arrived at a certain part of the lakeshore, panting heavily.

There was a stone circle—a gate to go back to the material world. Assembled around it were the First Squires who had participated in the training camp. Some were wounded, but they were supported by other students who lent them their shoulders.

“Alvin! Tenko! You okay?”

“I-I’m so glad you’re fine!”

“Well, I knew they would be all right, so I didn’t worry.”

Christopher, Lynette, Theodore, as well as Elaine, reunited with Alvin and Tenko.

“Louise! Are you all right?!” Johan shouted and rushed toward her with Olivia.

“Johan... Olivia... You’re safe too.”

“Yes, we were also saved by the Blitze class,” Olivia replied.

Most of the students assembled here had been rescued by the Blitze class. Gato, Wein, and Ladd were among them.

“It wasn’t us... It’s not our fault... We just...”

Maybe they went through a really scary experience, as the three of them were crouching while holding their heads and grumbling something.

“There shouldn’t be any remaining students! Did you do a roll call?!” Alvin asked.

“Yeah! A lot are injured, but everyone’s here and alive!”

Christopher answered.

“Good!”

Alvin then ran toward the instructor of each class—Kreis, Marie, and Zack.

“Instructors, everyone is here! Please, open the gate quickly, and let’s go back to the material world!” The three keys needed to open the gate were kept by the instructors of the three legacy classes. “Please, we must be fast! Monsters are coming!” Alvin urged them while keeping watch on the forest.

“We...can’t...” Kreis muttered, his face completely pale.

“Huh?!”

“It won’t open! Someone broke it...”

Alvin observed the stone circle and noticed that the stone monument in the center was broken. The damage didn’t look old, so it must have happened recently.

“We can’t get out of here!”

“Wh-What?!” Alvin exclaimed in shock.

Then, suddenly, a fierce sound emanated from the lake. Everyone turned toward it, and they noticed a fierce fight was happening on the lake’s surface. Under the light of the abnormally huge moon, two knights were exchanging blows, running on the lake’s surface as if it were hard ground.

“Th-This is...”

“Sir Sid?!”

Sir Owl ran on the lake’s surface at terrifying speed as he attacked Sid incessantly. A downward slash from the overhead vom Tach position, an upward cut from the low alber stance, then he rotated and did a horizontal strike. His furious attacks were so fast it was like they were cutting vacuums into the air.

Sid gritted his teeth as he avoided them by bending his body and jumping back, each time with a paper-thin difference.

“Ha! What, you can only escape?! Bring it on, Sid!” Sir Owl suddenly stopped running and stepped strongly on the lake’s surface, creating a pillar of water that blocked Sid’s vision. “Dieee!”

He did a horizontal strike to bisect both the water pillar and Sid. The water pillar scattered from being cut, and behind it, Sid—wasn’t there anymore. Instead, there was a flash of lightning cutting the black of night. A thunderclap resounded and a line of lightning ran on the lake’s surface. Sid used Lightning Legs to transform himself into a flash of light and run at lightning speed. He took three turns and arrived behind Sir Owl’s back in an instant and then thrust his hand like a spear.

Sir Owl...didn’t avoid it. Maybe he gave up, or maybe he couldn’t react in time. He just stood and received Sid’s merciless thrust that...didn’t pierce him. Sid’s hand, clad in lightning, *did* reach Sir Owl. However, it didn’t show its usual formidable power and instead looked just like a slight poke with his fingers.

“Your attack is light,” Sir Owl sneered. “Did you forget? My fairy sword’s ability allows me to control the gravity and the weight of everything around me.”

Sid gritted his teeth.

“Which means I can control the strength of everything around me. In this case, I made your strike lighter.”

Sid squinted, and Sir Owl turned his head halfway toward him.

“No matter how powerful your attacks are, to me they’re like the touch of a feather. And, conversely...”

Sir Owl turned back and casually swung his sword down. Sid immediately avoided it by stepping back. However, the tip of Sir Owl’s sword grazed his chest. Yes, it grazed Sid. It only grazed him, and yet, a large cut appeared on his chest, and blood spurted as he was sent flying.

“I can make my attacks extremely heavy! Do you understand?! You, Barbarian, can’t win against me! Ha ha ha ha!” Sir Owl laughed loudly.

Sid, who had been sent flying, bounced on the lake’s surface repeatedly like a skipping stone until he arrived at the lakeshore where Alvin and the rest, who had been watching the fight anxiously, were.

“S-Sir Sid?!”

“A-Are you all right?!”

The Blitze class students hurried toward Sid.

“I-I can’t believe it... How could that dark knight receive master’s attack and be unharmed...”

“Not only that, it’s the first time I’ve seen our instructor wounded like that!”

“D-Don’t move, instructor! I’m going to make healing flowers bloom!”

Tenko, Christopher, and Lynette said one after the other.

“...No, step back.” Sid stood up with an unusual stiff expression.

Blood flowed from the deep cut on his chest and fell to the ground. The wound must have been serious, as Sid’s legs were trembling, and his breath was erratic.

“Hmph. Didn’t even need to use a Greater Incantation. It’s my victory. Just as I thought, I’m stronger than you,” Sir Owl said as he leisurely walked on the lake’s surface until arriving in front of everyone.

“Huh...?”

Face to face with Sir Owl, they all stiffened and started trembling. Be it Louise, the other students, the Blitze class, or even the instructors. By seeing him up close, they all understood how overwhelming his presence was. Just by being near him, they felt like their souls were being crushed by the pressure of his overflowing dark mana. They felt dizzy from the deep darkness.

“A...ah...”

Everyone’s soul understood...that this dark knight was *too*

strong.



They couldn't believe that the man before them was human. He was too different from them. He was on a whole other level. Be it strength, skill, fairy sword, or mana, his were all abnormal, overwhelming, and absolute. He was in an entirely different category. It was as if—

“He's as strong as Sir Sid...?” Alvin muttered. The dark knight was evil, but his strength reminded her of Sid, a knight of the legendary era.

Most of the students trembled and fell to their knees, losing their will to fight after seeing the dark knight. Louise, Johan, Olivia, and even the instructors were in a daze and dropped their swords.

However, Alvin, Tenko, Christopher, Elaine, Lynette, and Theodore somehow managed to stand with their fairy swords ready, though they were trembling and hyperventilating a little.

“Oh? I thought you were all small fries who couldn't even resist that little amount of mana pressure, but it seems a few people in this era have some backbone.” Sir Owl chuckled.

“Wh-Who are you?!” Alvin asked, thrusting her rapier.

“Y-Yes, wh-who are you?! How could you overpower master like that?!” Tenko asked while trembling.

“Well, I guess there isn't a need to hide it anymore. Allow me to follow the knight's etiquette and present myself.”

Sir Owl threw off his helmet, making it roll on the lakeshore. His face was now exposed, revealing a young man around the same age as Sid. He had blue hair and blue eyes,

and his beautiful face was like ice. He gave a stern impression, just like his tone. Naturally, Alvin and the rest didn't know his face.

“My name is Rifis. Rifis Ortol.”

But they knew his name.

“Huh? Rifis...”

“Ortol...?”

In the Kingdom of Calvania, there was a legend about three great knights.

They were the heroes said to be the first three knights that pledged their allegiance and fought for the Holy King Arthur, the ancestor of Calvania's royal family. They were the founders of the current Order of Fairy Knights, as well as the ancestors of the three ducal houses.

They were peerless knights said to be unmatched, and their names were always given alongside Sid Blitze when asked who was the strongest knight of the legendary era. They were...

The Crimson Lion, Logass Durande.

The Blue-Eyed Unicorn, Luke Anthalo.

And finally, the Azure Owl, Rifis Ortol.

“You're lying! You can't be Rifis Ortol!” Alvin stared at Sir Owl—Rifis—in shock. “It's impossible for you to be Sir Rifis!

Sir Rifis is a knight from the legendary era. He can't be in this era! The three great knights served my ancestor, the Holy King Arthur! There is no way one of them could be a dark knight!”

“But, Alvin...only someone from the legendary era could win against master...” Tenko said in a trembling voice.

Nobody believed what they just heard. They didn't want to believe it. And yet, Sid stayed silent, not refuting anything. Moreover, the man calling himself Rifis showed abnormal strength capable of overwhelming Sid, a knight from the legendary era. It was harder to prove that he wasn't Rifis than the contrary.

“Hmph. I don't care whether you believe me or not,” Rifis snorted, then glared at everyone. “I came here to kill Sid Blitze. If you're going to hinder me, I'll start by making you disappear!”

The Blitze class students gasped and were paralyzed by Rifis's dreadful bloodlust.

“Why? Rifis, why are you doing this?” Sid stood in front of Alvin and the rest to protect them. “You were his...the Holy King Arthur's loyal knight. Your swordsmanship was masterful, and you were the kingdom's wisest knight. Your ingenuity protected the country many times against the other nations' invasions. I respected you, the ideal knight, accomplished in both the literary and military arts. And yet, why...why are you doing this?”

“Isn't it obvious? To deny everything about you as a knight,” Rifis replied with a low chuckle. “Just as you said, I was the greatest knight of the kingdom. I was the one most fit to be next to that person...next to the Holy King! And yet,

it was always about you! Everyone unfairly praised you! You were the one he trusted the most!”

“Rifis...”

“Why, you ask? Isn’t it strange? How could a man like you, and not me, be his best knight?! Even though you’re just a barbarian!” Rifis turned toward the petrified students. “You know about it too, right?! The legend of Sid the Barbarian must still be passed down!”

“What...?”

“A vicious barbarian who is cruel and inhumane and kills people as he wants, until finally being executed by the Holy King. Just so you know, there is no exaggeration or falsehood! Everything is the truth!” Rifis ignored the dumbfounded students and glared at Sid anew. “Indeed, you’re unworthy to be a knight! And yet, you unfairly got appointed by the Holy King, and you even betrayed him! Even though you received his favor, you betrayed him, your comrades, the people, and this country! Even though I was there, you made him go through terrible hardships!”

“Huh...?”

Alvin and Tenko were dumbfounded hearing the shocking truths revealed by Rifis. They looked at Sid as if pleading for him to refute what had been said. However, Sid kept silent. That silence was more than enough to show his agreement.

“I-It’s a lie... There is no way Sir Sid would...” Alvin muttered.

Until now, she and Tenko had been together with Sid and had a certain image of him. Was this image true, or was it

false? They weren't sure about it anymore.

Rifis continued. "Hey, Sid...do you know how much you hurt my pride as a knight?! There is no way a vicious and lowly barbarian like you would!"

"I knew that you hated me," Sid said with an unreadable expression. "However, there is something I don't get. Couldn't you just come at me? Be it in the past or now, I'd never run away. If you have something against me, I'm ready to accept your challenge anytime. However, Alvin and the rest, who are the young knights bearing the future of this era on their shoulders, are unrelated. So why did you involve them?"

"Didn't I say it? To deny everything about you as a knight." Rifis sneered fiercely. "This is the ninth layer of the fairy world, where the Lake of Swords, the birthplace of fairy swords, is. There was a barrier to protect this place, but the twenty-seven stone monuments around the lake, as well as the sword enshrined at the lake's center, were all destroyed, making the barrier vanish. Without the barrier, the weak knights of this era won't be able to defend themselves against the strong monsters that are soon going to assault them, and I already destroyed their path of retreat." Rifis pointed at the broken stone monument at the center of the stone circle. "So, Sid. What are you, someone who acts like he's a knight among knights, going to do? You like to pretend to be a knight, so of course, you're going to protect them, right? These apprentice knights who shoulder the future of this era."

Sid stayed silent.

"I'm going to show everyone your true character, Sid. That

you just make yourself look like a knight, but in fact, you're just a cruel and inhumane battle junkie—the Barbarian. You fought and slaughtered people tirelessly from morning to evening, and you only lived to fight and kill more. Surely, in an extreme situation, you wouldn't disregard yourself to save other people. You *will* abandon the weak. Just like back then...just like when you were the Barbarian!”

Still, Sid didn't say a word.

“By killing you, after you fall from knight to barbarian, I'll finally be able to take back my pride as a knight. The pride you wounded! Ha ha ha ha ha ha!” Rifis laughed madly, ignoring the students looking at him, dumbfounded. Then, suddenly, he sheathed his sword. “Well then, our little skirmish ends here.”

Sid kept silent.

“Let's meet again later, Sid. We'll bet our pride as knights and settle everything. That is, if there is still some pride left in you by then.” Rifis laughed.

Then dark mist came out of his body and covered him until, finally, he disappeared, as if melting into the black of the night.

The students were bewildered, and Sid continued to silently look at where Rifis vanished.

“S-Sir Sid...” Alvin muttered as she watched Sid's back, which looked somewhat lonely.

Chapter 6: The Whereabouts of Pride

Finally, the long, long sleepless night ended, and dawn arrived.

A thick fog surrounded the makeshift campsite, and it was cold—abnormally cold. Maybe that was caused by the disappearance of the barrier too, but the fog blocked the sunlight and, even though it was supposed to be dawn, it looked like it was dusk. The scenery and climate that seemed like spring until the previous day felt like a lie. The lake, the forest, and the sky were all eerily calm as if they feared something.

“The situation turned for the worse...” Isabella said.

Sid, Alvin, and Tenko were talking with Isabella’s reflection on the lake’s surface, away from the rest of the Blitze class, who were watching over everyone else. Naturally, it was only a projection, as the fairy world layer that contained the Lake of Swords was currently cut off from the material world, leaving the helpless students at a loss, unable to get in touch with their realm. However, Isabella somehow sensed that something had happened and used magic to contact Sid.

“Still, to think that Rifis Ortol, a knight of the legendary era like you, Sir Sid, would become a dark knight and appear before you... Why?” Isabella said.

“Who knows? Don’t have any idea,” Sid answered after a short pause.

Alvin watched Sid silently. To be honest, from what had happened the previous night, she had a hunch that Sid knew something. However, for some reason, he didn't want to speak about it. Moreover, it wasn't the time to think about Rifis's true identity. What was important right now was to prepare against the imminent threat: the monsters of this layer—and Rifis.

“The Fairy Road's gate connecting to our world has been destroyed. Can't you reconnect it, Isabella?” Sid asked.

“This is going to be difficult. The path was made in a really special way. I won't say it's impossible, but it will take some time,” Isabella replied.

“How much?”

“At least two weeks...”

“That's too slow.” Alvin groaned feebly as she looked at Isabella's reflection. “With our strength, we won't even be able to survive one week against the monsters of this layer...”

“A monster or two is one thing, but fighting continuously in such a deep layer is impossible. We won't last long...” Tenko gritted her teeth.

“Can we really only watch while Sir Sid protects us...?”

“Isn't that the objective of that terrifying Sir Rifis...?”

“My apologies... I cannot help you...” Isabella gritted her teeth in frustration.

“What to do, Isabella, Tenko...” Alvin muttered, only to be met with silence.

“The answer is simple, Alvin,” Sid said with a smile and approached her.

“Sir Sid?!” Alvin exclaimed as she watched him kneeling in front of her as if prostrating. “Wh-What are you doing so suddenly?!”

Ignoring the bewildered Alvin, Sid kept bowing as he humbly spoke to his lord.

“There is no doubt that the current situation that brought you, my lord, and your comrades to danger, is entirely my fault.”

Alvin, Tenko, and everyone looking at Sid from afar gasped and opened their eyes wide with surprise.

“Even though I should be protecting you, the failures from my past exposed you to danger, which brings me extreme shame. Hence, I implore you to give me a chance to redeem myself.”

“Th-This isn’t your fault, Sir Sid...”

“Give me your royal decree. You only need to order me to protect everyone.”

Alvin gasped.

“If you do so, on my pride as a knight, I swear to accomplish it.”

Alvin stayed silent. Indeed, the current situation had happened because Sid had been Rifis’s target, and everyone else had only been dragged into it. So it was natural that Sid would feel responsible.

As Sid's lord, receiving his complete trust, Alvin had to answer his wish. Even if that meant her order would push him into hell. Even if that meant doing just as Rifis expected. After all, if she didn't do it, Sid would stop being her knight, and she would lose the qualification to be Sid's lord.

"...Got it." Alvin made her decision with a bitter expression. "Sir Sid! This is my royal decree! Protect us!"

"Certainly, my lord. Thanks." Sid made a respectful bow to Alvin, who was hanging her head. Then he grinned and cracked his knuckles. "Well, seems like my work is starting already. A kinda strong monster is approaching."

A second didn't even pass after Sid's words before an ominous howl resounded. The roar was so repulsive that the students felt like it was grating their brains directly, making them cover their ears and crouch.

"I'm going," Sid said and kicked the ground, rushing outside the campsite.

But before he could...

"Wait, Sir Sid!" Alvin called, making him stop. "You won't talk, so I don't know what happened to you during the legendary era! I don't know if Sir Rifis's words are true or not!"

Sid stayed silent.

"Still—I believe you!"

Sid's eyes narrowed slightly.

"So please...please, don't die!"

“I’m unworthy of these words,” Sid muttered and left.

Thus, as Rifis wanted, Sid fought alone against monsters assaulting the campsite day and night.

Against a behemoth, a giant turtle monster with a shell as hard as diamond. Worth: 255 points.

Against a catoblepas, a terrifying giant hippopotamus monster bringing death to everything around it with its poisonous breath. Worth: 280 points.

Against a phoenix, a giant bird monster that controlled flames. Worth: 230 points.

Against a canhel, a giant snake monster clad in a storm. Worth: 235 points.

Monsters from the deepest layers, far too strong to be defeated by students, just kept coming one after another, and Sid fought them all, never stepping back. All so he could protect everyone.

He crushed every monster approaching and defended the students without rest.

It was coming. Tyranny incarnate was coming, making the ground tremble with each step. It was a mad boar, a giant boar monster clad in azure flames, whose charge could trample anything.

“Waaaaah!”

“Eeeeeek!”

“It’s coming!”

The students screamed in fear as the giant monster approached the campsite from the forest, knocking down the trees in its path.

But then—a flash of lightning ran through it. It was Sid, who cut the mad boar’s head with his hand like a sword, making the monster disappear into mana mist.

However, because he rushed without caring about himself, he didn’t manage to stop in time and crashed into the mad boar, sending him flying away and bouncing multiple times on the ground.

And yet, Sid stood up as if nothing had happened, cracked his neck, then took a deep breath in order to prepare for the next approaching monster.

“Waaaaaaaah?! It’s here!”

“Heeeelp!”

A pillar of water rose from the lake as a crab monster as huge as a mountain, known as a death scissor, appeared. Despite its gigantic body, it was fast and nimble as it approached the students and raised its giant pincers to attack them. And, just as it was going to bisect countless students—a flash of lightning ran through it.

Sid used his hand like a sword and cut the giant crab’s pincers as well as a few of its legs. However, because he had

rushed to save the students, he didn't manage to stop himself and crashed into the monster, who was rampaging from pain, and he was sent flying high into the sky. Finally, gravity did its job, and he fell into the lake, creating a pillar of water mixed with blood.

And yet, Sid just swam silently to the shore and stood up. Then he breathed deep in order to prepare for the next incoming monster.

He killed a monster.

He defeated another.

He crushed another. And another. And another.

And another. And another. And another. And another. And another.

Sid just kept killing monsters without rest, day and night. Sounds of battle echoed around the clock without stopping.

Sid never complained. He didn't try to make anyone feel like they owed him something. He just did his duty. And as if to prove it through his actions, he kept fighting, even as he continued to pile up injuries.

All the students could do was watch his back.

“Ma-Master...”

“Damn it... Why are we so weak?” Alvin muttered, as she and the others could only watch Sid in frustration.

A day passed. Then another. Time flowed horribly slowly.

“Ha ha!” Gato suddenly laughed. “We’re being targeted because of him, right?! He’s the one who dragged us into this! So of course he should be the one to fight! Isn’t that obvious?!” he said to the students around him, asking for their approval while they watched Sid fight.

Sid was fighting against a fenrir, a wolf monster who could transform its surroundings into a freezing hell. It was only a little bigger than a lion, so it was far different from the giant monsters Sid had fought against until now. However, its silver fur was far tougher than steel, and the cold waves emanating from its body could freeze the lungs of ordinary people. Its agility and ferocity put the kirimu to shame. It was a dangerous monster listed as having a worth of 355 points, and Sid was fighting it alone.

The fenrir hid itself by provoking a blizzard, then attacked Sid with abnormal speed, using its claws and fangs clad in ice. Sid used defensive body movements to deal with the attacks, but the fatigue and injuries accumulated by continuous battles had weakened him, so he couldn’t avoid them all. Before long, Sid’s whole body was covered in frozen wounds.

Still, he endured and...finally, using the brief break between the fenrir’s attacks, he swung his hand like a sword at lightning speed and cut off the monster’s head.

Most of the students heaved a sigh of relief at Sid’s victory. However, that wasn’t the case for everyone.

“Jeez, for a knight of the legendary era, you’re having a hard time dealing with a monster! You should kill them all in an instant! What are you going to do if we get injured?!” Gato complained.

“Yeah! Considering all the trouble he’s causing us, he should do at least that much!” Wein said.

“Yeah! He really deserves his Barbarian name! Don’t you all agree?!” Ladd asked.

Other students started to agree.

“Y-You’re right...it’s his fault...”

“He’s the one who dragged us into this...”

“Do a better job at protecting us!”

“And you call yourself a knight?! You’re supposed to be the strongest knight of the legendary era!”

Everyone was crushed by their anxiety. Even if Sid defended them, being under the threat of abnormally strong monsters put great pressure on their minds, and they were reaching their limits. They couldn’t help but vent their stress at Sid.

“I always thought he was suspicious!”

“Yeah, after all, he’s the infamous Barbarian!”

“I’m sure his evil deeds justify Sir Rifis’s anger!”

“In that case, he’s a real nuisance!”

Naturally, the Blitze class wasn’t happy to hear the other

students' complaints.

“The hell they think they’re saying?!”

“This is unforgivable!”

Christopher and Elaine shouted in indignation.

“Leave them. In a way, they *do* have a point,” Theodore said, though the look in his eyes was opposite to his words.

Even the meek and timid Lynette had her eyes closed and was trembling from anger, trying her best to endure the insults from the other students.

Unfortunately, in groups, the mood leads the flow of conversation. In this case, the mood was leading the flow of the conversation toward insulting Sid, and just like a snowball rolling down a hill, it gained momentum and weight. Slandering Sid became the right thing to do, and everyone kept saying more and more abusive things about him. Thanks to that, they created a sense of unity. Nothing could stop the current flow anymore.

“Don’t stop me, Alvin,” Tenko said as she suddenly stood up with sharp eyes and showed her canines. “I can’t endure it anymore!”

However, just as she was going to head toward the students insulting Sid...

“Cut it out!” A girl’s angry voice rang out. It was Louise.

“H-Hey, Louise...”

“Wh-Why are you angry so suddenly...?”

“Because you’re all such cowards! And I am one too!” Louise shouted, her eyes wet with bitter tears. “True, Sir Sid is the enemy’s target! And true, we were dragged into it! Still, isn’t Sir Sid fighting to protect us?! If he wanted to survive alone, he could abandon us and preserve his strength! And yet, he didn’t! He’s protecting us and fighting to the point of being in tatters! Be it day or night, without even sleeping! Even if it’s his responsibility, it’s not something just anyone can do! Don’t you feel anything seeing him?! Isn’t he leaving a deep impression on you?! Barbarian?! No, he is a true knight!”

“Sh-Shut up!” Gato screamed, irritated for some reason, then grabbed Louise’s collar. “It doesn’t change the fact that it’s his fault! So of course he should protect us!”

“Indeed,” Louise started, returning Gato’s glare resolutely, “that would be the case—if we were powerless people! But we’re not! We’re knights!”

Hearing her words, all the students gasped, feeling like someone had stabbed at their hearts.

“Look at each other’s faces. Do you see knights? Are the people who are in a safe zone and slandering the man who is protecting them really knights?”

Everyone stayed silent.

“We’re not defenseless people, *we’re* the knights protecting them! And yet, here you are, forgetting your own weaknesses and insulting Sir Sid, who’s sacrificing himself for you! Aren’t you ashamed as knights?!”

Everyone gasped.

“I’m ashamed! Of my weakness! Of how useless I am!” Louise shouted.

Hearing her words, the students realized—that they felt guilty. They all felt proud to be knights chosen by a fairy sword. They all believed that they were the chosen ones, different from normal people, and that they were special and destined for greatness. However, that pride had been torn to shreds. They discovered how small and powerless they were and that people way stronger than them existed. The pride they had inflated with no basis was completely meaningless. Still, their pride didn’t let them admit it. That was why they insulted Sid and put all the blame on him. They just wanted to protect their shallow pride.

“What is your pride as knights?”

“Why do you think the old knight’s code doesn’t have anything about pride?”

Suddenly, Louise remembered Sid’s words. She felt like she somehow understood them now.

“Louise...”

“You...”

Alvin and Tenko looked at Louise, blinking in surprise. They didn’t expect someone as prideful as Louise to say something like that.

Louise glanced at them. Then she said with self-deprecation, “I know that I’m weak... At my current strength, I can’t fight next to Sir Sid... I understand this

much... Still, I'm a knight and want to act like one. I want to at least act in a way that wouldn't make me feel ashamed as a knight...that would make me proud of myself. Isn't there a way? Isn't there something we can do?!"

The Blitze class students stayed silent for a few seconds, then...

"There might be a way," Alvin suddenly muttered, making everyone look at her.

"Are you going to tell them, Alvin?" Tenko asked, to which Alvin nodded.

The other students from the Blitze class must have known about it too, as they stayed silent with knowing faces.

"Of course, we can't help Sir Sid by fighting with him. We're far too weak compared to the deep layer's monsters and Sir Rifis, a knight from the legendary era. Being determined or courageous won't help. We would just stand in Sir Sid's way. Still, there might be something that even *we* can do to help him a little," Alvin said, making everyone gasp in surprise.

Alvin took a small glass bottle from her chest pocket and showed it to everyone.

"What is this?" Louise asked.

"This is Birch's Holy Oil that Isabella gave me just in case. By applying some on yourself, it'll repel monsters for a while. Unfortunately, it only lasts for a few hours, and there isn't enough for everyone."

"And? It won't help much to survive against the

monsters.”

“It’s not to survive,” Alvin said while looking at the bottle. “If we use it well, we can avoid monsters and go to a certain place. That way, we might be able to help Sir Sid win.”

“What do you mean?” Louise frowned in incomprehension.

“Actually...we’ve been wanting to do that from the start, but...the Blitze class alone isn’t strong enough,” Tenko said.

“Not strong enough?”

“Yes. Honestly, with the six of us, defeating a kirimu—which is worth two hundred points—is the most we can do... So that’s not enough to go where we want.”

“Well, in the end, we planned to just bet it all and go with the possibility of dying, but...” Christopher said, scratching his head.

Alvin looked at everyone, then continued. “Anyway, we thought that if other people helped, we would have a higher chance of success. But we can’t force you and, to be frank, it’s quite reckless. We’ll be too busy protecting ourselves, so...you might die.” She said the harsh truth clearly. “Still, this is the only thing we can do for Sir Sid, as well as the only way for everyone to survive and get back. If Sir Sid loses...we’ll die. It’s impossible for us to survive in this layer until Isabella comes here with help.”

The students held their breath.

Alvin looked at them, then declared, “I...I want everyone to return alive. After all, even if our classes and factions are

different, we're still comrades from the same country, no?"

Hearing Alvin's sincerity, everyone murmured between themselves. Then, after a few seconds...

"I think I finally understand why you guys looked more like proud knights than us, as well as the reason for my inferiority complex..." Louise said with a self-deprecating smile. "The answer's really simple...so simple that I forgot it without noticing."

"Louise."

"Let me show some obstinacy. Even if I'm like this, I'm still a knight. I'll help you," Louise declared.

"I'll help too!"

"M-Me too! I don't want to die here!"

Johan and Olivia, as well as a few other courageous students who had participated in the Blitze class's training, raised their hands.

The stiff mood changed again, and this time it veered them toward a way to break out of their current situation. They didn't care about the discord between classes anymore. Right now, they were young knights working together toward the same goal.

"Thank you, everyone," Alvin said, deeply moved.

And then—

A giant wyvern vanished into mana mist after having its head cut off by Sid.

“Haa...haa...” Sid panted heavily as he tried to calm himself. He’d been fighting for the whole day.

How many days had passed since he started to fight? How many monsters did he kill?

Ha ha ha, I wonder if I passed a hundred thousand points? Sid thought as he wiped the blood on the corner of his mouth and regulated his breathing.

He looked around. He was inside the thick forest in the middle of the night and could see the huge moon in the sky between the treetops.

It was calm. *Too* calm. The only thing that could be heard inside the eerie silence was the cry of insects. Sid didn’t feel the presence of monsters near him. He could somehow sense none were left. He had probably hunted all the monsters around here, so there shouldn’t be new ones appearing for a while.

“I guess that means it’ll be tonight...” Sid realized what this meant and started walking deeper into the forest.

While walking, Sid checked his condition. He was in a truly horrendous state. His body was in tatters and had so many wounds that it was hard to find an uninjured place. He was losing a lot of blood, making him feel dizzy and cold.

His body was heavy. He’d never felt so tired. He was way past his limits and only managed to barely stand thanks to his willpower.

As for his Will, it was weak. His soul was in a worse state than his body, making it harder for him to burn his Will, even though he could usually do it without thinking. His spirit was exhausted, having used all his energy.

And yet...he continued to walk.

Alvin and everyone are safe. I didn't have the room to check them, but I didn't let a single monster pass, so they should be fine. He protected them all. He accomplished the royal decree—the knight's oath he had made. *No, not yet...* No, there was still one thing left to do. He had to take care of it.

Sid thought as he continued to walk inside the dense forest.



Before long, Sid arrived in a wide-open space inside the forest. In the middle was a field of blooming flowers of various colors with a dark knight standing at its center.

“Yo, Rifis. Long time, no see,” Sid said with a thin smile.

Rifis stayed silent.

“I protected them all, and there won't be any new monsters for a while. So let's settle everything before new ones are born from the darkness of the abyss,” Sid said as he stood calmly.

“...Why?” Rifis asked, and his voice felt like it came from the depths of hell. “Why did you, the Barbarian, protect all these kids at the cost of your own health? Why didn't you show your true nature?!” Rifis clenched his fist, making his

gauntlet creak. “Do you think you can win against me in this state?”

“Well, to be honest, I don’t think I can. Still, I don’t intend to lose.”

“You could just have abandoned them! If you had, you could have preserved your strength and had a chance against me! So, why?!”

“Because I’m a knight. I have to accomplish the oath I swore to my lord in this era,” Sid answered.

Rifis gasped. His eyes opened wide, and he gritted his teeth.

“That’s it... This is what irritates me about you!” He glared at Sid and shivered with rage. “I really can’t stomach it...that behavior of yours!”

Sid stayed silent.

“You’re always like that! Acting like you’re a knight among knights, deceiving the Holy King and the idiots around him! Is showing off that important to you, Barbarian?!”

Sid didn’t reply.

“Even though you’re just a traitor who turned his sword against the king! Even though you’re just a slaughterer who betrayed his allies and killed them! I will never forgive you!”

“You changed, Rifis,” Sid said, somewhat sadly. “Well, of course you would, after something like *that* happened.”

“What?!”

“The Rifis Ortol I know is a wise and courageous man, a knight among knights, completely loyal to his king. I always knew you didn’t like me. Still, I thought of you as a friend and respected you.”

Rifis gasped.

“However...it seems like the Rifis I knew is no more.”

Even Sid’s Saint’s Blood couldn’t save people who chose to fall into darkness of their own volition. That’s why—Sid made his decision.

“Let’s end this, Rifis,” Sid declared as he slowly took a stance. “You said I was a traitor, right? Well, I won’t deny it. After all, it’s true that I pointed my sword at Arthur. It’s a real shame that I had to break off with you all. But...” Sid’s eyes, shining with a strong will, looked straight at Rifis. “But that doesn’t change what I have to do. Be it now or in the past. I’ll accomplish my duty as a knight and follow my chivalry.”

“What?!”

“Rifis, the students are this country’s treasure. Right now, they might be fledglings, but in the future, they’ll be the hope supporting the kingdom. They shouldn’t be involved in the discord of old fossils like us. So, even if what you said was right, I’ll stand my ground and deny you. I won’t die. I’ll protect them. So come, Rifis. On my pride as a knight, I’ll defeat you.”

“Shut up!” Rifis shouted in rage, seeing Sid’s unclouded eyes, and struck the ground with his sword. “You, Barbarian, shouldn’t talk about a knight’s pride! That disgusts me!”

Sid stayed silent.

“I expected you to reveal your true nature, but...fine! I won't allow your existence in this world for even another second! Your sole existence hurts my pride! So, on my pride as a knight, I'll destroy you, Sid! And then, finally, I'll be able to proudly declare that I am the greatest knight in the world!”

Rifis readied his sword, and overwhelming dark mana overflowed from his body. The mana pressure was so intense it distorted the atmosphere, assaulting Sid. However, Sid easily warded it off and calmly asked Rifis a question.

“Say, Rifis. What's a knight's pride? Do you know why there isn't anything about pride in the old knight's code?”

But Rifis didn't care about what Sid was saying.

“Don't make me repeat myself! You, Barbarian, shouldn't talk about a knight's priiiiiide!” He shouted in rejection as he slashed at Sid, using the full power of his dark mana.

To Sid, who was wounded all over his body, it was the start of a hopeless battle. And, just when Rifis was getting near...something suddenly came flying between them and pierced the ground.

It was so unexpected that Rifis stiffened and stopped moving. The something...was a sword. A blackish sword full of rust. Still, for some reason, Sid felt nostalgic looking at it.

“That's...” Sid muttered, then looked toward the direction the sword came from. There was...

“Sir Sid!” Alvin shouted.

She wasn't alone. The Blitze class, as well as Louise, Johan, Olivia, and many students of the three legacy classes, accompanied her. And, for some reason, they were all wounded and exhausted.

"Use that sword!" Alvin screamed, making Sid realize what had happened.

"This sword is...don't tell me you guys..."



A few hours earlier:

"So this is the lake's source..." Alvin said, having reached the tallest mountain in the layer with the other students.

"I-Is *that sword* really here?" Tenko asked anxiously.

"If not, we're in trouble. It's our last chance..." Alvin answered as she looked around, praying she would find something.

"I-If you want a sword made of obsidian iron...there is one."

"In this layer, there has been a sword made of obsidian iron since long, long ago..."

"At the top of the mountain that gives water to this lake..."

"Where a very scary monster lives..."

As she remembered what the fairy sword girls said, Alvin started to think about something. *That reminds me, Sir Sid said that his sword had been stolen by Gremlins...* Sid had been a little strange when hearing about the sword that should be here. *Sir Sid's sword and the one the fairy swords talked about... I'm sure there must be a relation between the two.*

“Here! I found it!” Elaine shouted, interrupting Alvin’s thoughts.

Elaine pointed under the water, where a sword was stuck in stone. Surely, this sword that had been here for an eternity was...

While Sid was protecting the campsite, Alvin and the rest had made their move.

Having a limited amount of Birch’s Holy Oil, the suicide corps was made only of the best students, and the rest were left at the campsite with the instructors to protect them in case something happened.

Alvin and the rest discreetly left the campsite, then using a small boat, they crossed the lake until reaching the river supplying it. They followed the river as they climbed the mountain while avoiding the powerful monsters thanks to the holy oil.

Finally, at the end of their march, where a single mistake would have meant death...they reached their objective. It was the place that the fairy sword girls mentioned—the spring at the top of the tallest mountain, where it was said that a mysterious sword made of obsidian iron had lain since ancient times.

Alvin and the rest had finally found it.

“Th-Thank god...” Alvin muttered as she saw the sword, and her eyes became hot. “With this sword, Sir Sid will be stronger! It might be the key to turn the situation around!”

“Unfortunately...it might be difficult to get it,” Tenko said as she readied her katana, cold sweat dripping from her brow.

Then, on the surface of the spring just in front of where Tenko was keeping her guard, a large quantity of foam started to form, and a giant *something* rose from the dark water. A gigantic monster appeared with a roar as if to block the way to the sword.

It was the spring’s master, a giant snake monster with silver scales and nine heads with fins on them. It spread its nine necks as if to cover the sky, making its huge body look like a giant tree. It was a hydra, a monster worth 325 points. Its peerless regenerative ability could instantly heal wounds, and its ferocity and appetite made even kirimus its prey. It was one of the monsters at the apex of the fairy world’s aquatic ecosystem.

“A hydra! So there really was one!” Alvin screamed, gritting her teeth as she looked up at the monster.

The booklet that listed monsters and their points also had a map of where they generally appeared, and a few decades earlier, it had been reported that a hydra had settled here.

Even if the students were using Birch’s Holy Oil, which monsters hated, the hydra wasn’t generous enough to let them roam free in its territory. Its eyes—two per head, for a

total of eighteen—were filled with rage and bloodlust as they glared at the students.

“Calm down, everyone! There’s no need to fear it just because it’s worth a lot of points!” Alvin shouted to calm down the students who were shaking while looking up at the violent beast. “It’s worth a lot because its regenerative ability makes it hard to kill! However, we didn’t come here to defeat it! We just need to pick up the sword!” Alvin said, pointing with her rapier at the obsidian iron sword hidden behind the hydra. “Unfortunately, it’ll be impossible as long as it blocks our way. We have to create an opening so someone can go fetch the sword!”

“I know!” Louise shouted with determination. “We’ll leave the vanguard to the Blitze class while the other students support you from behind! Then, when I see an opportunity, I’ll go get the sword. Good enough?!”

“Yeah. But you’re sure about it? You’ll be in the most danger, Louise,” Alvin warned.

“You’re tedious!” Louise yelled. “Only you guys from the Blitze class can somehow manage to fight it! So someone else has to go fetch the sword! Even in this state, I’m still an Atzilt-rank! You guys aside, I’m the one with the most mobility!”

“...Got it. I give my utmost respect to your resolution,” Alvin said. Then, raising her sword, she turned toward everyone and ordered, “Let’s start! Follow me!”

“Oooooooh!” everyone screamed.

Thus, almost twenty students, Blitze class included, made their move to accomplish their objective. Slashing sounds,

weapon noises, yells, magic explosions, splashing water, and the hydra's howl continued until, finally, after a long mortal battle...



“I see... You guys did something really reckless,” Sid said with a small smile, having realized everything that had happened for the sword to get here. Then he narrowed his eyes and looked at the rusted sword stuck in front of him.

“Sir Sid! I believe in your victory...my knight!” Alvin shouted. “I don't know why Rifis Ortol became a dark knight, nor what happened in your past for you to be called Barbarian!”

“Still, I...we believe in you, master! So please win!” Tenko gave a heartfelt yell.

“Sir Sid! Please win!”

“Don't lose!”

“Sir Sid!”

“Please, Sir Sid!”

“Don't win for us...win for yourself!”

All the students encouraged Sid.

“Why...?” Rifis said, his lips trembling with frustration from not understanding the students. “Why? Just why?! Don't you guys know it?! Isn't the legend passed down? The legend of the cruel, inhuman, and vile Barbarian who kills people as he wants?! That man isn't who you think he is!” he

shouted, making the students hold their breath. “I’m repeating myself, but all the anecdotes about him are true! That man was a heartless slaughterer. He was true scum! Right, Sid?!”

Sid stayed silent.

“A knight tells only the truth,’ right?! Then your pride as a knight shouldn’t allow you to lie! So answer, now!”

“Yeah, you’re right. I—” Sid started to say something, his expression unreadable, but...

“I don’t care!” Alvin yelled. “Sir Sid is my knight! A lord should always trust his retainers!”

“To those who have observed him for months, master is a knight among knights!” Tenko followed. “He’s always noble, more knightly than anyone, and always watches over us!”

“I don’t know the truth about his past, but I believe in Sir Sid!”

“A knight’s power sustains virtue’! Master is virtuous! So I don’t care about the three great knights or whatever. I’ll just fulfill my duty as a knight!”

Alvin and Tenko were unwavering as they overwhelmed Rifis with their words. And...

“Sir Sid! Didn’t you say that you were going to teach me what a knight’s pride is?!” Louise shouted. “I’ve yet to learn anything from you!” She was more wounded than the other students and needed Johan and Olivia to lend her their shoulders, or else she would have been unable to stand. “So win! Please win!”



Seeing Louise like that, Sid realized something and smiled.

“I have nothing to teach you anymore.”

“...Huh?” Louise blinked, surprised.

Sid slowly walked toward the sword, took its hilt, then pulled it out. He raised it above his head and looked at it, somewhat nostalgically.

“To think I would use you once more. Back then, I swore to never swing you again, but...now, I want to fight with you anew. They said that they believed me. As a knight, I have to answer their trust, right?”

Suddenly, Sid noticed that his mana was regenerating after grasping the hilt of the sword. It was only a little, but the sword contained mana.

Ah, I see... He understood that the students had loaded the mana of their fairy swords into it. It wasn't only one or two. Most likely almost all of the students here had done it. Naturally, it was a small amount against a knight from the legendary era like Rifis, but...

“That'll be enough. Thanks, I'll use it well.” He nimbly rotated the sword hilt and held it in a reverse grip. “‘A knight tells only the truth.’ I'm going to win,” he declared.

Sid turned toward Rifis and readied himself in a very low stance.

“Why...why is it only you?!” Rifis said with hate. “You're always the only one who's praised! People always extol and

support you! Why am I the only one who isn't acknowledged?! Why? Just why?!"

Sid stayed impassible in front of the torrent of hatred and rage thrown at him.

"Ha ha ha ha! Well, whatever!" Rifis readied his sword and fiercely raised his dark mana. "What do you think you can do with the rusted junk the small fries painstakingly brought?! You think you can win against me with it?!"

Sid didn't reply.

"I'm going to kill you, Sid... On my pride as a knight, I'm going to kill you!"

Suddenly, Sid opened his mouth. "Say, Rifis. Let me ask again. What's a knight's pride? Don't you get why there isn't anything about pride in the old knight's code? Even after seeing them, you still don't understand?" Sid said, pointing at the students, which made Rifis stiffen. "A knight's pride is for other people. By no means is it for themselves."

"What?"

"Also, knights don't boast about pride. You want to know why? Do birds boast about being able to fly? No. Do lions boast about their strength? No. Then knights, too, shouldn't boast about the obvious."

"Wh-wh-what...?"

"What you've been talking about isn't pride, Rifis. It's vanity."

Sid's words were like a knife, and they gave a fatal wound

to Rifis.

“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?!” Rifis screamed with rage, resentment, and bloodlust. “You Barbariaaaaaaaaaan! Don’t talk like you know everythiiiiiiiing! You think you can win just because you have a junk sword noooooow?! I won’t go easy on you anymore! I’ll use my strongest fairy magic... I’ll finish you with my Greater Incantation!” He raised his sword and started to shout in Espirish. “Yu A Wan Kontyle Balace...”

The next instant, something started to appear from empty space. It was water, dark water like ink. It spouted like a geyser, ignoring the laws of space and physics and filling the world, submerging it in black.

“Owawim Pus Feath On Platto Ratto...”

The water level rose little by little. First, it reached Sid’s ankles, then his knees, then his waist, then his chest... As for Sir Owl, his presence and dark mana continued to swell endlessly.

“Kracks Everin Wize Platto Letto!” He finished the Greater Incantation, which meant “Thou art the owl ruling over the balance of everything. Thou art the one who can put your feather on the right plate on a whim, and crush everything with the left plate” in the ancient fairy tongue.

The world was now completely submerged under the dark water, immersing Sid and Sir Owl in it. It was as if they were in the dark depths of the sea, but instead of being shrouded in darkness, they could clearly be seen, as if they were cut off from the darkness itself.

“Ha ha ha ha! See that? That’s my Greater Incantation,

The Concept of Evil's Birdcage! This is the strongest power I obtained by serving that person with my everlasting loyalty back then! You've already lost, Siiiiid!" Sir Owl declared as if he had already won. "The way the world works is now for me to do as I please! I can freely control the gravity of anything submerged in that black water! Do you get it, Sid? That means that with a single thought, I can crush you with infinite gravity!"

Sid stayed silent.

"You can't flee anywhere! This is truly the ultimate magic that never fails! So, do you finally understand the difference in strength between us, Sid?! Ha ha ha ha ha!" Rifis laughed in triumph.

"So what?" Sid muttered, somewhat bored. "You're just drowning in your own worthless power. The old you was stronger. Your incredible swordsmanship was far more terrifying than that boring magic."

"You always have something to say!" Rifis glared at Sid, his eyes narrowing further. "But I won't listen to your nonsense anymore! I'm going to make you close that mouth forever! Be crushed and diiiiiee!" he shouted while swinging down his sword.

The next instant, a heavy sound rang out as the world applied great gravity over Sid. Sid's weight instantly increased by hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, and continued to increase exponentially. Just when Sid was going to be crushed flat by the extreme gravity...

"Kam!" Sid yelled "Come" in Espirish, making a light flash with a terrific sound.

A streak of lightning fell from the sky on Sid's sword. The dazzling light from the thunderbolt tore the darkness to pieces. The darkness easily scattered, and the world came back to normal.

“...Huh?” Rifis muttered, dumbfounded.

Sid looked at Rifis, holding his sword in a reverse grip while it was bursting with fierce lightning.

“I-Impossible... Y-You can't break my invincible Greater Incantation so easily...”

“It's time to end this farce, Rifis. Here I come.”

Sid transformed into a streak of lightning and rushed toward Rifis.

Rifis immediately swung his sword with a yell, but Sid met it with his own. They clashed head-on, creating an intense sound on impact. The pressure from their swords and the shock wave created by the impact transformed into a storm that blew away everything around them.

“What?!” Rifis said, astonished.

Even if his Greater Incantation had been defeated, it didn't change the fact that he could make his sword extremely heavy and Sid's extremely light. So normally, Rifis would crush Sid. And yet...their power was equal. Far from losing, Sid was actually pushing Rifis, almost even blowing him away.

“Impossible! Why...how can you do that?!” Rifis screamed.

Rifis tried to think about the reason behind that strange phenomenon while swinging his sword at Sid, and each time, Sid met it with his sword gripped in reverse. However, it didn't take long for him to reach the answer—Sid's sword strikes were so strong and heavy that they surpassed Rifis's magic.

“Impossible... That's impossible! How can you become so much stronger just by using a sword?!”

In a brief moment, their blades crossed hundreds of times. Each time they clashed, impact sounds echoed. Rifis tried to push back Sid by increasing the magic in his sword, but...he couldn't. He just couldn't win against Sid. On the contrary, he...

“What...? Your sword is...?!” Rifis widened his eyes.

Each time their blades clashed and made the atmosphere tremble, Sid's sword was being polished. The rust that had been covering it for an eternity fell, and the damaged blade was being honed and refined. It was being reforged. Sid's sword, covered in lightning, was being regenerated and born anew, retaking its former shape.

“The only way to process that black shining iron is for lightning to fall on it from the sky,” Sid quoted.

“Don't tell me that sword is...?!” Rifis realized the truth about Sid's sword. “Damn it! Why did these damn brats bring you that?!”

The situation was bad. He had to beat Sid before his sword retook its former shape. But he was lost in his thoughts and continued to clash swords with Sid, which only helped to reforge it. Then, finally...

“Aaaaaah?!” Rifis screamed seeing Sid’s sword back in perfect condition.

It was a longsword with a jet-black blade shining like obsidian. Its design was plain and simple, but there was a certain beauty to it. The sword didn’t have a name, but there was no doubt that it was the obsidian iron sword used in the past by Sid Blitze the Barbarian.

“Sooooooooo whaaaaaaaaaaat?!” Rifis yelled.

Was this stubbornness or the result of what he called his pride? His dark mana swelled far more than before, suddenly increasing the power of the magic on his sword. He made his even more heavy, and Sid’s even more light. Thanks to that, he finally managed to push Sid back.

Sid gritted his teeth, enduring the blow as he was sent dozens of meters away, his feet shaving the ground.

“My swordsmanship is invincible! No matter how strong your attack is, I just need to make its power lighter! By making it close to zero, I can deal with it easily! You will never be able to win against me!” Rifis shouted.

In this dire situation, Rifis increased his power and became even stronger. Indeed, it looked like the power balance reversed once again, but...

“It’s useless, Rifis. It’s your loss.”

Sid took a really low stance, holding his sword in a reverse grip. The way Sid acted as if he knew everything kept getting on Rifis’s nerves, and he couldn’t handle it anymore.

“Shut up! I’m stronger than youuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!”

Rifis cried, like a child throwing a tantrum.

He raised his sword and rushed at Sid. He used all his mana, making this attack the fastest and strongest so far.

However, Sid only watched him calmly. He was so focused that it looked like time was slowing down around him. He just kept staring at Rifis, who was approaching him at terrifying speed.

...My friend, he thought as he recalled scenes from the legendary era. *My blood can't save you, who chose to become a dark knight of your own volition*. In these scenes, he saw Arthur, the lord he respected and loved. Next to him were the three great knights—Rifis Ortol, Logass Durande, and Luke Anthalo. Naturally, Sid was there too. These were everyday scenes of them constantly fighting together on the battlefield. The nostalgic and passionate days where they shared their pain, joy, and sorrows. However, these days were now in the distant past, and he couldn't get back to them. That's why... *Farewell*, Sid thought, heartfelt, as he ran.

“Heaven's Song.”

The sound of thunder echoed, and everyone's sight flickered violently. Sid glided on a track made of lightning to Rifis's torso and passed through him at lightning speed. He swung his sword in reverse grip with all his strength at matching quickness. He swung his sword at lightning speed while running at lightning speed—it could only be called divine speed.

Rifis coughed blood as his body was bisected in two. Even if Sid's attack had been made lighter, it didn't change its sharpness. Basically, Sid had cut through Rifis by only using

the transcendental speed and sharpness of Heaven's Song.

The duel ended, and Rifis vanished into particles of mana, leaving no trace of his existence behind.

Sid remained in the position he used for swinging his sword as he offered a prayer to the dead. They may have gone on different paths, but they were once comrades in arms, serving the same lord. Sid mourned his friend disappearing behind him and offered him his condolences.

“This transient world is a cradle. In the long journey of mana that goes through everything, death isn't the end, but the beginning. Sleep in peace.”

Thus, the trouble that had happened during the training camp came to an end.

The thick fog started clearing away from where lightning had fallen, and the morning sun shone through it, signaling the arrival of dawn.

Epilogue: A New Beginning

Time flowed...

“Oooooooh!”

Today, students were running around the training ground wearing armor. It had become a regular sight in the academy, but it wasn't only the Blitze class anymore. Johan, Olivia, and students from other classes were participating too.

Given what had happened during the training camp, the three legacy classes' instructors realized the importance of Will and even went as far as bowing their heads to Sid, asking him to teach the students who wished to learn the technique. In exchange, they would teach the Blitze class students about the different colored fairy magics. Naturally, Sid readily accepted.

Unfortunately, a lot of students and instructors couldn't discard their vanity and were still looking down on the Blitze class. That was mostly the case for people who didn't interact with Sid much, such as students from higher grades and their instructors.

However, it was also a fact that the number of students who were able to put their prejudices aside was steadily increasing.

“Haaa...haaa...cough, cough!”

“L-Louise, you shouldn’t force yourself like that... Though, well, it is an unreasonable training,” Alvin said to Louise, who was following behind her.

“Sh-Shut up! I finally, cough, became able, cough, to run at the same pace as, haaa...you! I can...” Louise tried her best to speak in between her panting and coughing.

“Sh-She’s really stubborn...” Tenko muttered, amazed.

“Well, that just means that we can’t rest on our laurels,” Christopher said.

“Indeed,” Elaine agreed.

“Hmph... Just let her do whatever she wants,” Theodore said disinterestedly.

“But I’m so glad we’ve got new comrades to run with!” Lynette cheered.

“Sh-Shut up! Enjoy your composure while it lasts! Then watch! I’ll quickly overtake you low-rank small fries!” Louise yelled.

“Hmph! Bring it on! I won’t lose!” Tenko shouted, accepting the challenge.

“Aha ha...” Alvin watched them with a troubled smile.



Sid watched them calmly.

“I guess the academy’s knights are changing little by little, huh?” he muttered, then took a glance at his waist, where a sword was hanging.

It was the sword made of obsidian iron that he had obtained in the fairy world. And, looking at it, Sid recalled a certain memory...



At the top of a certain mountain, at the Lake of Sword’s source, a sword was stuck in a stone.

“Are you really throwing your sword away, Sir Sid?” my eternal lord and friend—Arthur—said with regret. “Is this my fault? Because I broke one of your twin swords and you can no longer be known as the Dual Wielding Knight? Even though these swords were so important to you, a man who can’t use a fairy sword, I...”

“That’s not it,” I replied. “You didn’t destroy the Dual Wielding Knight. You destroyed the Barbarian.”

“Sir Sid...”

“True, that sword is important to me, as I’m feared and rejected by fairy swords because my hands are smeared with blood. It’s my lifeline as a knight. Still...I won’t use it anymore.”

Arthur stayed silent, so I continued.

“From now on, I’ll be the sword. That way, I’ll be able to

feel the weight of life and won't forget the meaning of using a sword against someone. A demon still resides inside my heart, but...I won't make the same mistake. I'll never become a demon again."

"I see... So you're that determined."

"Yeah. Thanks, Arthur. The current me exists thanks to you. I'm really grateful that you gave meaning to my uselessly strong power. I can't erase my past, but...I swear that I'll fight for you and this country from now on," I declared and turned to leave.

"Then tell that to everyone," he said, making me stop. "My sword was stolen by Gremlins."

"By Gremlins? Why?"

"Gremlins steal people's important belongings, but they always lose interest in them and give them back one day."

I stayed silent.

"If someday everyone, as well as yourself, believes in you as a knight from the bottom of their hearts...if such a future happens, won't you take it back? After all, when you use a sword, you're so strong and cool that it's mesmerizing."

I still said nothing.

"Don't worry. When that time comes, I assure you that you won't become a demon anymore."

"...I'll think about it."



“Even a hopeless demon like me managed to change. There’s no way students with infinite possibilities can’t.”

Sid lay down, crossed his legs, then started to munch on an apple.



The season changed.

Alvin and everyone else completed the First Squires’ curriculum and became Second Squires.

At the same time, new First Squires enrolled.

A new wind blew through Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy and a new beginning was about to start for Sid and all the apprentice knights.

Afterword

Hello, I'm Taro Hitsuji.

Magic Knight of the Old Ways: Volume 3 has successfully made it to print! A big thank you to my editor, all the people involved in the publication process, and to all the readers!

Now, about this volume. The story is slowly progressing, and this time it's about a knight's pride. Knights aren't mere soldiers. They're beings who risk their lives for their lord and the people, as well as heroes admired by everyone. When you think of knights, generally you think of people who value honor and loyalty to their lord more than anything, and that pride is as important as their lives.

However, the old knight's code, which this story's protagonist, Sid, often recites, doesn't have anything about pride. Even though it's supposed to be the most important thing for a knight... Why is that? Well, this time, too, Sid shows the answer through his actions! So, if you want to know what a knight's pride is, confirm it with your own eyes by reading this book! The characters are increasing, and the story is becoming more and more enlivened, so I hope you will continue to enjoy the series.

Anyway, Sid is really strong, right? It feels like everything will be fine as long as he is here, giving an incredible sense of security. Actually, you could say that his enemies are the pitiful ones... I think it's pretty fun to write such a protagonist sometimes. Well then, what will happen next? I have a lot of ideas, so please look forward to them!

Also, I post status and life updates on Twitter, so if you send words of encouragement or opinions about my work there, it would make this little sheep very happy and work harder. My username is @Taro_hituji.

With that said, thank you very much, and see you again in the next volume of *Old Ways*!

Taro Hitsuji