

## Turning 671

### Chapter 671

As the bell signifying the start of the fight rang out, Yudrain slowly raised his hands above his head. Jack, startled, flinched noticeably.

A boy, whose ears sprouted like a dog's atop his head, hastily revealed his claws and teeth, readying himself to attack. However, Yuder paid him no mind. His gaze was fixed not on the boy, but on the sword in his hand, and its blunt sheath pointing towards the ceiling of the fighting arena.

The gamblers who had come to bet, unaware of the significance of this small gesture, excitedly shouted.

"Kill him! Finish him off!"

"Let the beast tear apart and ravage the second gender Awakener!"

"I've staked all my money on you! If you can't cough it up, you won't get off easy!"

The first to notice something amiss in Yudrain's actions was Nukijo.

"That guy, he's a fire user, right? I thought we had gotten rid of his sword. Who allowed him to use it?"

"Well, about that..."

"Wait a moment. That sword... It's the one I told you to sell off yesterday! That red gem!"

Nukijo was shocked to see Yuder holding the tacky, ostentatious sword they had confiscated and ordered to be sold. No matter how much Nukijo rubbed his eyes and looked again, it was indeed the same weapon from yesterday.

Until a moment ago, Nukijo had been quite pleased with Yuder, who had thrown off his hood to reveal his face, transforming from a gloomy, unimpressive figure to a sword master straight out of

an ancient painting, dressed in attire reminiscent of the classical Holy Fire style. This transformation was arresting, owing to his unexpectedly well-trained and sturdy physique, with an uncommonly straight posture and body lines. Even to Nukijo, accustomed to seeing all sorts of extraordinary beings, Yuder's physique seemed quite valuable.

People are naturally excited by the sight of a young, strapping body, especially one with hidden, scandalous secrets, soon to be covered in blood.

However, Nukijo was furious that such an unworthy sword would join in on today's historic first performance. It was not meant to be this way. He had envisioned a fiery first fight, a brutal clash between flames and beasts, culminating in the fiery side's defeat and a bloody spectacle of torn clothes and shattered limbs for the excited audience, not a clumsy sword fight.

"What use is a sword he can't even wield! Which idiot gave it back to him?"

The second gender Awakener's secrets, meant to be exposed in a bloody, heated battle, were supposed to be as thrilling and humiliating as possible. Nukijo had meticulously chosen the attire for this provocative performance, and the thought of it all going to waste in a dull sword fight made his blood boil.

"Did I give too much medicine to the second guest yesterday, preventing his flames?"

Even so, it didn't explain how the sword had reappeared. Someone ought to have informed him...

"Who is it! Who brought him that damned sword? Hex and Bout, where are you now? They're in charge of the third basement level today!"

"They haven't returned yet. Maybe they're still backstage?"

"Tell them to come here now!"

Nukijo's subordinates, who had been standing by, hastily ran towards the backstage area. Unsatisfied, Nukijo gestured frantically to others around him.

"Tell him not to use that sword! If he resists, snatch it away by force!"

The bell that had been sounding the start of the competition suddenly ceased. As the announcer fell silent, Nukijo's usually steadfast subordinates, unnerved by his agitated demeanor, began to murmur and show signs of discomfort. The atmosphere around them gradually deviated from its usual state. Jack, who had been hesitating about how to attack Yuder with his ears and claws extended, looked around in confusion.

"What's happening? Why are they acting like that?"

"Isn't it starting? Are we still waiting?"

Just at that moment, when the guests were murmuring their dissatisfaction at the unusual turn of events, Yuder turned his head and looked directly at Nukijo.

Then, he smiled distinctly, the corners of his lips curving upwards in undeniable mockery.

"...!"

Nukijo was struck with such a shock that his head reeled.

"Is that bastard mocking me...?!"

As all eyes now focused on him, Nukijo's disarray caused even his subordinates to lose their composure. This small breach was precisely what Yuder had been waiting for.

He gently swirled the sword he was holding, tracing a perfect arc as if from a textbook. The sheathed blade descended gracefully, then rose again, its tip once more aiming at the ceiling. Simultaneously, a spiral of flames climbed from the hilt, shooting explosively upwards along the sword's body.

Of course, the flames could not surpass the height of an ordinary tree. They were suppressed by the translucent protective magic circle that had been activated around the stage.

The entire stage began to shake with a rumbling sound as the two forces collided. Usually, the power of Awakeners is confined to the inside of the stage. When power tries to extend beyond the stage or someone attempts to escape, protective magic circles are designed to stop it.

However, as Elpkins had initially informed them, the magic circle's power could not withstand the strength of a sufficiently powerful Awakener.

And Yuder, naturally, was confident he could break the restraining power of the protective magic circle.

As he gripped the sword handle more firmly, the flames, twisted by the barrier, became more ferocious, thrashing as if trying to break through.

The spectacle was so astonishing that everyone was stunned. When finally the magic circle cracked and burst, spewing out a massive wave like blood, everyone could feel the impact. The obstructed power dissipated, and the liberated flames shot unrestrainedly even higher.

Screams of panic and alarm echoed as the gamblers cried out, "The protective magic has been broken!"

In the midst of the chaos, Nukijo hastily extended his hand to command his subordinates.

"Damn it, someone stop...!"

Boom!

At that moment, the flames finally burst through the ceiling of the auditorium.

Like a light arrow shot by the Sun God, the flames pierced through the ceiling and continued their relentless assault, floor by floor, like a cavalry charging without mercy.

Bang. Bang. Bang. The flames, having penetrated three levels, finally reached the real ceiling.

And then, with a deafening roar...

The flames broke through to the open sky.

A brilliant flame, shooting up from the underground as if to swallow the sky, spiraled around the sword. This awe-inspiring scene, reminiscent of the advent of a divine sword, was recreated by the second guest with his human form.

After witnessing such a tremendous spectacle, people find themselves unable to act.

Nukijo stared blankly at the man standing confidently, his sword entwined with flames.

'Broken? The barrier that no one has breached since we reinforced it with a hefty sum... shattered by mere formless flames? And even the ceiling is pierced... Am I dreaming?'

This was a smaller version of the column of fire Yuder had used to break Nahan's illusion in the East. Though its range was reduced and its size smaller, its power had become incomparably stronger, reflecting Yuder's increased strength.

Yuder, confident that his flames could now be seen from not just around the Black Orca Tavern but anywhere in Charloin, withdrew his power.

Finally regaining his senses, Nukijo shouted, "Protect the guests! Capture him! Stop the match!"

"Understood!"

Nukijo's subordinates, too stunned to move from witnessing the incredible scene, finally managed to stir their trembling limbs and dashed forward.

'Where do you think you're going?'

Yuder began to confront Nukijo's subordinates climbing onto the stage. Armed and trying to look fierce, these back-alley thugs, who had never received proper training, were no match for him.

Every time Yuder swung his sheathed sword without even drawing it, those attempting to strike were sent flying or tumbling with screams. It was inexplicable how the sheath could repel the swords, but this was reality, not a dream.

Yuder struck one man on the head with his scabbard and kicked another charging at him, while with his other hand, he controlled the iron swords of his enemies, flailing them about.

"What, what is this! Why is my sword...!"

"Aaah!"

Those startled by their uncontrollable swords dropped them. Foolishly unarmed, they became easy prey for Yuder.

Having almost dealt with all those who had climbed onto the stage, Yuder was considering moving beyond the surrounding ring when he noticed Jack, pressed into a corner and clueless about what to do. Yuder tripped the last man rushing at him, punched him in the face, and then strode purposefully towards the frightened boy.

To Jack, Yuder's approach seemed like a sentence of death.

"Who are you? I just came here to earn some money... Please don't kill me."

"If you have the mind to say that, then open your eyes wide and go back behind the stage to take care of your friends."

Yuder, clicking his tongue, picked up a sword from one of Nukijo's fallen subordinates and tossed it to the boy. Jack reflexively caught it.

"This place will be closed down after today. Look after yourself, and if you meet any members of the Cavalry on your way up, ask for protection."

"Huh?"

"The imperial army or knights are fine too."

"Huh?"

"If you pass the test and manage to enter the Cavalry, never think of setting foot in a place like this again. You probably won't have the time, anyway."

"...Huh?"

"Go!"

Before Jack could ask anything more, he scurried away, like a startled puppy that had been prodded in the rear.

Chapter 672

In the moments just before chaos erupted on the stage, a tall man with ordinary brown hair and a strangely blurred appearance was addressing the first arrivals, who had just come to participate that day.

"So, it seems everyone has come here for money, right?"

"Well... yes..."

This included young Awakeners, friends of Jack and members of the Star of Nagran, and a few Awakeners who had been tempted by the promise of paying off their debts. Their stories were diverse, but their ultimate goal was the same: money.

Despite their grave resolutions in coming here, they couldn't hide their tension in the face of the unusual atmosphere they encountered on the day itself. However, the man before them, with his extraordinary eloquence, had quickly interjected himself into their midst, easing the mood. Before they knew it, they were spilling details about why they were here, their ages, and even where they were from.

A question arose in their minds: should they be engaging in such intimate conversation with someone they were supposed to fight? But the tall man made even these concerns feel trivial. In hindsight, they hadn't even discussed anything particularly special.

"Then, what do you think is more important, life or money?"

The tall man's manner of speaking was peculiar. Despite dressing in ancient-style clothes, no different from the others, and wearing only a shabby overcoat, his noble-like manner of speaking seemed as if he had been using it all his life, making it impossible to guess his age or identity.

One of the participants who had come with Jack hesitantly spoke up.

"Obviously... it's life."

"And the others?"

"If I really had to choose, it would be life, but..."

"You have to be alive to make money, don't you?"

Everyone naturally responded that life was more important than money. The tall man nodded and smiled as if that was the answer he had hoped for.

"Ah. That's a really good answer. It's one of the most important things we should never forget in life."

"But... why do you ask?"

"It's simple."

The man rose from where he had been comfortably leaning, speaking in a cheerful voice. The moment his gaze moved towards the stage, the various noises that had been reaching the waiting room began to fade away.

What's happening? The first arrivals exchanged puzzled looks, while the man continued speaking calmly.

"Everyone here won't be fighting today. This place is about to shut down."

"What are you talking about..."



"Hex! Bout! Where are you? You guys!"

Just then, the door burst open as if it would break, and men with fierce looks rushed into the waiting room.

At the same time, the original participants who had been silently keeping their seats stood up all at once, following the tall man. Before the first arrivals could even react, the tall man effortlessly spun the worn-out sword he had been casually resting on his shoulder, seizing it with grace.

"What's this? Where are Hex and Bout, and why are you guys here?"

"Wait... those guys aren't supposed to be here!"

One of Nukijo's henchmen, upon spotting Reneve and Elpkins in a corner, pointed at them. The atmosphere instantly turned cold. The henchmen all imagined their boss's reaction upon learning of this situation, picturing his fury.

'If he finds out they all escaped, we're all dead!'

The most powerful among Nukijo's henchmen yelled out loud.

"You fools... have you lost your minds? Daring to escape? You must be craving death! Who's responsible? Who brought you here?"

"It was me," declared the tall man, raising his hand.

"I freed them because they were pained and loathed being forced into combat. Is that a problem?"

"What...?"

"No one has the right to imprison free people here, you know."

His smirk was infuriating, completely undermining the severity of the situation. Nukijo's henchman, momentarily stunned, finally managed to shout.

"You know there's no way out of here! Except for this madman, the rest of you can still turn back now and be spared! If you don't want to die, get back now! Especially you, woman! Don't you want to see your friend? Huh? Why cause trouble when you barely manage to obey? Do you really think you, a frail woman, can leave here alone?"

"..."

"Come over here now, while I'm still asking nicely!"

They naturally expected Reneve to comply.

However, Reneve didn't move. Nukijo's henchman, suspecting she might be deaf, reiterated, "Don't you want to see your friend?" It was a mere ploy to get her to obey, without even knowing who her friend was.

But Reneve, who had always been docile at the mention of 'friend', for the first time, stiffened and retorted.

"You've never shown me Cyril. Why should I return to a hellish place like this?"

"What?"

"Why should I?"

A deep-seated anger resonated in her vehement outcry, echoing through the waiting room.

Reneve, trembling with rage and her face flushed red, yelled.

"I have no reason to listen to you. I won't heed the words of scum who kidnap people and force them to fight and die. Go ahead, kill me! I don't care if I die! I'm leaving! I will leave!"

Nukijo's henchman concluded that Reneve had completely lost her mind.

"That woman has gone mad. Fine. Just kill them all! Go tell the boss right now...!"

In that instant, a flash of light sliced through the waiting room.

Nukijo's henchman didn't even realize what had happened to him. As he turned to speak to the others, he was struck down.

"...Aaagh!"

The other henchmen screamed a beat too late. Amidst the chaos, the man with the unstained sword calmly sheathed it over his shoulder and addressed the Awakeners watching him.

"Now, I believe everyone understands why this place needs to shut down. Shall we try to escape now?"

Even those with the slightest sense knew that this was no ordinary fighting arena. The first arrivals, trembling and wordless, nodded their heads.

At that moment, a thunderous sound and impact, as if something on the stage had shattered, shook the waiting room.

"Ugh!"

"What, what's that?"

While Nukijo's henchmen panicked, the tall man gazed towards the stage with a slightly different look. It was a tender and caring gaze, filled with concern and trust, yet fleeting. He then returned to his composed and confident demeanor.

"Now, Elpkins. Lead the way. It's your turn. Leave the rest to us."

"I understand!"

In the midst of a tremendous vibration that shook the entire building, Elpkins let out a powerful scream and, flapping his wings, rushed towards the stage.

"Where do you think you're going? Capture that man!"

Nukijo's remaining henchmen shouted as they grabbed their weapons.

Despite seeing one of their own already fallen, they were not overly frightened. In their perception, the Awakeners were always powerless, bumbling weaklings, inept in using their strength and helpless before debts and money.

The person who fell had fallen to the sword, so they thought that as long as they were cautious of that madman, everything would be fine. But they were wrong.

Familiar perceptions create traps.

Rushing in without considering that this was no longer the third basement floor, and that threats and coercion no longer affected the Awakeners, they soon paid a painfully high price for their oversight.

"Who says they're capturing who?"

"You will never leave."

Quiet until now, the Awakeners erupted in fury, charging in. The swords wielded by Nukijo's gang were no threat to the physically superior Awakeners.

The Awakeners, screaming in rage, freely vented their frustrations on Nukijo's gang. Their cries of anger echoed in the lounge for a long time.

Victory, of course, belonged to them.

Elpkins, leaving the other Awakeners behind and rushing forward energetically, passed by Jack, who was heading towards the lounge, and soon arrived on the stage.

Whenever he stood there, he always wished he could rather die. Pain and the smell of blood were all he remembered from the fighting ring.

But now, it was different.

In this place where everything he remembered had crumbled, Yuder, standing proudly with a sword in hand and his fist and face stained with the blood of others, turned towards him.

"You've arrived."

A single emotionless sentence, yet hearing it strangely made him feel like crying.

Chapter 673

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A single emotionless sentence, yet hearing it strangely made him feel like crying.

Amidst the overwhelming surge of emotions, Elpkins struggled to contain himself. Around him, chaos reigned supreme. Yuder scanned the scene quickly – the coarse shouting of Nukijo, the murderous intents charging from all sides, and the frantic movements of the VIPs attempting escape – before leaping down from the stage.

"Elpkins. Begin as soon as you're ready."

Yuder wore no armor that could provide significant protection, but he didn't consider this a major hindrance. After all, being armored didn't necessarily guarantee an advantage over an unarmored opponent.

Upon landing below the stage, Yuder effortlessly parried the onslaught of attacks using the forces of nature, his sword, and his entire body. Despite facing numerous opponents, he was not only unyielding but occasionally overpowered those who dared approach him. Elpkins watched, reminded of a predator leaping amidst herbivores.

Yuder quickly froze and then melted the spilled alcohol, causing Nukijo's henchmen to slip and collide with each other. Without even looking, he sent a would-be attacker flying with a single back kick. Attempts to ensnare him were futile, whether it was breaking iron weapons with a flick of his hand or catching and accurately returning thrown daggers to their throwers.

Among them were those who resorted to despicable tactics, like scattering sharp shards of broken glass or blindly lunging to grab ankles or hair, aiming for the eyes. Yuder remained undaunted by such attacks, simply exacting a devilish retribution twice as fierce.

Several thrown daggers aimed at Yuder in mid-air suddenly changed direction, striking Nukijo's other henchmen instead. Elpkins almost laughed, witnessing them scurrying under tables in terror. He had never imagined he'd live to see such a spectacle – it was truly magnificent.

But he had his own role to play, a task only Elpkins could undertake, as mentioned by Yuder the day before.

Yuder had asked, "Can you fly tomorrow?"

"Excuse me?"

"I mean, at the moment the signal drops, can you soar to the sky without looking back?"

Elpkins possessed a massive pair of wings. These wings were severely damaged, once broken at the joints due to Nukijo's gang's antics, and further twisted and cracked through numerous battles, rendering them grotesque.

Although possessing regenerative abilities, the extent of damage had once led him to fear he might never fly again. Kishiar had miraculously healed them to almost perfect condition, yet healing the bones and regrowing the feathers didn't guarantee immediate flight.

Elpkins had truly flown only once since he had grown his wings – a moment of awakening as he fell from a cliff. In that instance, he had been too distraught to realize he had grown wings or that he had flown desperately back to the ground. Since his awakening, the fear in people's eyes had kept him from using his wings at all.

But now, to rise swiftly into the sky at the signal – was that really possible?

Elpkins tentatively flexed his wings, feeling a throbbing pain due to their recent healing, and a suppressed groan escaped his lips. But still...

"I can do it. I'll try whatever it takes."

The direction in which to fly was inconsequential. If his benefactors wished it, Elpkins was determined to succeed.

"Yes. If it goes as you've instructed, one of us will be in tomorrow's first match. The moment the fight starts, we'll immediately stop everything and create a straight passage from underground to the outside. And you..."

With eyes as dark as the abyss, Yuder continued.

"You are the one who can use that passage faster than anyone else here."

That was why this task was meant for Elpkins alone.

Upon hearing Yuder's explanation, a shiver ran down Elpkins' spine.

No one had ever acknowledged his wings as useful. But now, it was different.

After being trapped on the third underground level, Elpkins spent a comfortable night for the first time, practicing moving his wings throughout. Initially, they barely twitched as if the bones had solidified. Even by this morning, there wasn't much improvement, but persistent effort gradually elicited a response. When he exerted strength, his wings flapped noticeably differently than before.

Elpkins took a deep breath and looked up at the hole Yuder had opened in the ceiling. It was just large enough for one person to pass through.

‘I can fly. I must!’

As his wings fluttered more vigorously, like birds practicing flight, Yuder defended the stage, ensuring no one could approach Elpkins.

In battles where one faces many, the lone fighter is typically at a disadvantage, but Yuder's situation was somewhat different.

His fists struck vital points with precision. His swordplay effortlessly deflected weapons wielded by much larger opponents before slicing tendons in an instant, rendering them powerless. With the elements of fire, water, wind, and earth, his movements were a flash here, a flicker there, upending his enemies' tactics in the blink of an eye.

Yuder moved with the freedom and ferocity of a fish in water, using his entire body as a weapon. If there were ever a person born to fight, using every part of his body as a weapon, it was him. His movements were so predictive of enemy attacks, it was hard to believe he wasn't actually forewarned.

Was he born for combat?

Everyone thought so, observing his perfect, restrained movements, never wasting a moment, never superfluous.

This was entirely different from the knights who performed their pretty, demure swordplay. This monster was too accustomed to this ruleless melee. The cruelty with which he wielded an unconscious man's body as a shield against incoming attacks made even Nukijo cringe. This was a being closer to a demon than a paragon of justice.

Absolute strength. An existence like a natural disaster, without hesitation or mercy.

Though many of Nukijo's men still remained, they began to fear Yuder.

No matter how numerous the herbivores, they cannot overcome a single predator. This black-haired monster was a born predator, and they were mere prey, a realization that struck them to the bone. Once they acknowledged they could not overcome him, fear and anxiety spread through the group in an instant.

"Damn it! Don't back down! How can we not take down that one man! Not even a scratch on him, how is that possible!"

Nukijo, seeing his men falter and lose spirit, screamed in frustration.



"Hold on! Kill him by any means! Anyone who retreats will die by my hand!"

"With the roof blown open, it must be noisy outside by now. I hope those on the other side are keeping the intruders at bay."

Yet, as if sensing Nukijo's thoughts, Yuder, who had been fighting fiercely, shouted.

"Elpkins! Is it not ready yet?"

"No, it is done now!"

Done? What was done?

Preoccupied with Yuder, Nukijo had only just realized Elpkins' presence.

"Why is he here? Wasn't he scouring for us till yesterday?"

Gone were the terrible wounds. Elpkins' body was now as clean and healthy as the day he first stepped foot here. A pair of giant wings, densely feathered, stretched from his back like unfolding arms. As everyone momentarily lost their gaze in awe,

"Uaaaah!"

Elpkins finally kicked the ground and soared, wings flapping vigorously.

As he ascended shakily toward his target, Nukijo quickly realized where he was headed. He was flying towards the hole in the ceiling.

"Shoot him, shoot!"

As Nukijo yelled, his men, who had been busily firing crossbows at Yuder, panicked, not knowing what to do.

"We've used all the arrows on that one...!"

"What? Already?!"

In Nukijo's astonishment, Elpkins soared powerfully. The more he flapped, the more stable his movements became.

"I've found one!"

"Shoot quickly!"

As one of Nukijo's men found a remaining crossbow bolt from afar and aimed, Elpkins did not stop. Just as he reached the hole Yuder had made, the loaded arrow was fired.

Elpkins braced for pain but did not alter his course or relax his wings.

"...Aaaah!"

But the pain did not come. The scream came from elsewhere. As he passed through the ceiling hole, Elpkins saw the arrow, redirected, pierce Nukijo. The feat was clearly Yuder's, with the power of the wind in his hand.

"Go up!"

As their eyes met, Yuder mouthed the command.

Elpkins responded, never looking back, only upwards, as he powerfully flapped his wings. Pieces of the broken ceiling and floor grazed him, leaving wounds, but he paid them no heed.

For the first time since being trapped underground, the sky was suddenly close, then filled his view.

Elpkins was now atop the Black Orca Tavern's roof.

"What is that?"

"My goodness. A man with wings!"

As people below pointed and gaped in shock, Elpkins gasped for air. His wing joints ached as if they would break, but he felt no pain.

He inhaled the cold, sweet air outside deeply and then shouted,

"I am an Awakener! I've just escaped from an illegal fighting ring below! Please help!"

This was the line Kishiar and Yuder had instructed him to shout as soon as he emerged.

At last, everything was accomplished.

Shivering with the tremendous sensation of having accomplished what he once deemed might be impossible, his own mission, Elpkins shed tears.

It was, at last, an escape.

Chapter 674

Those loyal to Nukijo were not only present in the Black Orca Tavern but existed everywhere in Charloin.

On days when the Awakener fighter betting matches, which Nukijo had been particularly attentive to lately, were held, his subordinates would temporarily cease their usual activities. They would linger around the Black Orca, vigilantly keeping watch to ensure the safety of the patrons and prepare for any unforeseen incidents.

Nukijo, intuitively certain that the success of today's fight would significantly impact his future business expansion, had instructed his men to prepare more rigorously than usual.

"Did I hear that an unprecedented number of VIPs have come today? Incredible. Are the fights of the Awakeners that entertaining? I wish I could go down and watch for myself."

"If you want to do that, first do this job properly. Don't you know that people like us, who have nothing, need to show our faces consistently for months before getting a chance to work inside? It's truly ruthless."

"Damn it. It's cold out, and I wish I could go in and have some Parka beer."

"You fool. If you see someone passing by with a bottle, just hit them and take it as tribute. Then we can drink here too."

"Oh, is that so?"

The South was much warmer than the northern regions, but that didn't mean winter was non-existent. Grumbling about the chilly weather and making crude jokes, two of Nukijo's subordinates suddenly felt a strange rumbling beneath their feet.

"Huh? Is my stomach rumbling because I'm hungry? It feels like the ground is shaking."

"No, I felt it too."

"What's going on?"

In that moment, the roof of the Black Orca Tavern exploded with a loud bang, and fiery red flames shot up into the air.

"Aaaahhh!"

Screams erupted from all around. Nukijo's men instinctively covered their heads and dropped to the ground. The flames, scattering debris and illuminating the night sky like day, eventually subsided, but the shock remained.

"What in the world...!"

"What's happened?"

Fortunately, the Black Orca Tavern was not in operation today. The main fighting arena on the first floor had been closed in rotation to focus on the Awakener fighter match in the basement. The surrounding taverns under Nukijo's influence had also closed early, sensing the need for caution.

However, the flames soared so high they were visible from anywhere in Charloin. People who felt the massive shock and saw the red glow filling the sky started to emerge, thinking there was a fire.

"What's happened at the fighting arena? What should we do?"

"First, stop anyone from entering the tavern! Don't you know why the boss left us here? It's to keep the door shut and prevent unnecessary people from entering in situations like this! Even if everyone knows what we do here, there are still things that must not be revealed, you fools! Get a grip!"

A long-time right-hand man of Nukijo shouted orders as he moved around. Following his command, Nukijo's subordinates hastily surrounded the Black Orca, preventing others from approaching.

It was a wise decision. As soon as they secured the tavern, others began to appear.

"What? You say there wasn't a fire? Really?"

"Yes, I'm telling you! Look, there's a hole, but no fire!"

"Well, that's true."

"Ah, you all know what we're doing here. It was just a minor accident, but it will be sorted out soon."

The first to appear, unsurprisingly, were members of the public safety patrol, who had been on duty nearby. Most of them were already acquainted with Nukijo's gang and had a rough idea of what was going on under the tavern. Accustomed to turning a blind eye to criminal activities in exchange for bribes, the patrol members clicked their tongues upon seeing the giant hole in the roof of the tavern but didn't force their way in.

"Tsk. Even so, this is a first, isn't it? A hole in the roof? I wish they'd keep it down. There are limits to how much we and the Lord can overlook."

"I know, I know. We'll sort this out quickly and clean it up. When have we ever let you down? Let's not make a big deal of it since we all know what's going on. If you overlook this just this once, our boss won't forget to return the favor!"

As Nukijo's men made a money-gesturing sign, the patrol soldiers' expressions softened.

"Ahem. Alright. Clean this up quickly, then, and we'll be on our way."

The hole in the roof was quite something, but since the area was mostly empty and it seemed no one was hurt and quiet below, why stir things up?

No one here wanted to do more than necessary.

Just one blind eye, and Nukijo would, as always, show the utmost sincerity.

The patrolmen coughed and smiled, even extending the kindness of waving off the crowd that had gathered with Nukijo's gang.

"There's nothing to see here, everyone can go! No one's hurt, and they'll have it sorted soon! The show's over, alright?"

Amid the tense atmosphere, as people, intimidated by the menacing figures, began to disperse, a particularly tall man bumped into the hand of one of Nukijo's gang members.

"What's with you? Didn't you hear me tell you to leave?"

"..."

The man met their gaze silently. He had the distinct features of a Southerner, with a sword at his waist. His strong and cold eyes briefly intimidated Nukijo's subordinate, who then straightened up and pushed him again, feigning toughness.

"What? A rotten tomato, huh? Don't you understand the Imperial language? Eh? Get out of here."

'Rotten tomato' was a derogatory Southern term, mocking the reddish hue of the Southerners' skin.

The Southerner, having been subjected to such a blatantly offensive insult, finally showed a bit of a reaction.

"Over here."

However, his response was not directed at Nukijo's gang. Instead, he calmly raised a hand towards something behind them. Immediately, the presence of many others was felt from behind.

'What? They don't seem like ordinary people... When did so many gather here?'

An eerie and wild aura surrounded them, impossible to notice how and when they had come so close. The atmosphere tensed rapidly as dozens of these imposing figures, radiating such a presence, gathered around the tall Southerner.

"You're here. I saw the signal just now. How are things?"

"As you see."

The Southerner responded curtly, and the unidentified figures nodded gravely. Nukijo's men could not fathom what these people, diverse in gender, age, and size, and seemingly unrelated, were doing converging here.

"Who are you people? Where did you come from?"

Faced with these unfamiliar faces, one of Nukijo's men, his face marred with scar marks and particularly fierce-looking, shouted. Usually, his roar would intimidate anyone, but not this time.

Excluding the peculiar group before them, everyone else had seemed ordinary.

Unflinchingly, they endured his shouts. Some even smirked, as if they found it hardly amusing.

'...Smirking?'

Then, one man, whose appearance was reminiscent of a bear, pulled out a shining silver button from his pocket and spoke.

"We are the Cavalry. I've come here after hearing about the presence of Awakeners. Move aside, we need to check inside."

"The Cavalry?"

It was common knowledge that the Cavalry had come to establish a southern branch, but no one really knew who they were.

Only then did Nukijo's gang realize that the shared trait among this odd, disparate group was that they were all 'Awakeners.'

'Damn it. Troublesome lot. Why now?'

Naturally, Nukijo's men had no intention of letting them in. They were determined to guard this place until they received permission from Nukijo himself.

"So what if you're the Cavalry? This is our land, our establishment. We don't just let anyone in because they want to enter! Even the proud Charloin guards here have agreed it's fine. Who are you to barge in?"

As always, they employed a strategy based on law, rights, and shamelessness. This was their homeland, their land. The guards, knights, officials, and numerous VIPs they had colluded with over time had taught them that they had the 'right' to refuse visitors without a legitimate reason.

The Charloin guards, catching the imploring gaze of Nukijo's gang, intervened with annoyance.

"Are you really the Cavalry?"

"Indeed."



"Why don't you just leave? This is Charloin. Matters in Charloin are dealt with by Charloin's people. You have no right to interfere here."

"You heard him. Now, scram!"

But the Cavalry were not ordinary either. The man, who had been standing firm and silent, responded indifferently to the hostility thrown at him.

"That's true. However, His Imperial Majesty has stated that incidents involving Awakeners are to be prioritized by the Cavalry. So, we can enter."

"That fire just now wasn't caused by an Awakener!"

Despite the shouts and threats, the Cavalry member repeated the same words, seemingly impervious to any intimidation.

They were impossible to communicate with. Nukijo's men exchanged glances and muttered curses among themselves. It was Nukijo's men who finally snapped.

"If you won't leave nicely, then we have no choice!"

Just as they were about to resort to violence against the Cavalry, something happened.

"What's that?"

A cry from the onlookers, who had been watching from a distance, coincided with something soaring up through the broken roof.

"Good heavens! A man with wings!"

It sounded absurd, but it was true. There, hovering high in the sky, was a man with giant wings on his back and antlers like a deer's, gasping for breath.

Amidst the crowd's astonishment, the man inhaled deeply and then shouted loudly.

"I am an Awakener! I've just escaped from an illegal fighting ring below! Please help!"

After his desperate cry echoed, the bear-like Cavalry member slowly smiled and spoke.

"...Now we can go in, right?"

Chapter 675

Several days ago, Kishiar La Orr had accurately anticipated this entire situation during a conversation with Yuder.

"Charloin has a distinctive character, blending the exclusive temperament of the South, forged through prolonged battles with the Southern tribes, and the mercantile spirit developed through long-standing trade with foreigners. It's a peculiar mix of both attributes."

In Charloin, there was a pervasive attitude that anything goes for the sake of making money. At the same time, there was a staunch loyalty among those who considered themselves allies and a marked disdain for outside interference. This was the prevailing demeanor among Charloin's lord and others.

"They know the people involved in illegal betting rings and drugs are at fault, but they won't let us intervene unless there's an undeniable justification. They see these issues as internal matters, as long as the perpetrators are among them."

"Yes, I have encountered them in the 'previous game.'"

Yuder, too, had much to say about the frustrating attitudes of the Southern people. In his previous life, even in the most remote rural areas of the South, where the Cavalry's branch was tucked away, they refused to open their doors to external organizations, insisting that issues like gambling and drug rampant should be dealt with internally.

It was only after the drug-related incidents grew so severe that they caught the attention of Emperor Katchian that their stubbornness was finally broken.

Yuder didn't mention all the irritating incidents from that time. A mere mention from him that he had dealt with them before was enough for Kishiar La Orr to understand the whole situation.

Understanding Yuder's feelings, the man smiled softly and continued, "Forcing our way in and then cleaning up afterward is one option, but it would make it extremely difficult for the Cavalry's southern branch to operate properly afterward. That's why I think it's better to prepare in advance."

"Prepare in advance?"

"Create a situation that gives us a legitimate reason to act."

This approach of creating a pretext might seem slow and pointless at first. After all, isn't it true that words are distant and fists are close?

However, Kishiar understood the necessity and effectiveness of this seemingly slow and pointless act. "Throughout history, a single small pretext has led to the death of many and the salvation of others. It's likely that they'll use long-standing customs and rights as their pretext to obstruct us. So, we'll do the same, creating an irrefutable pretext based on our own rights. A perfect pretext will serve as both our sword and shield."

Indeed, Kishiar La Orr's judgment was correct once again.

In Charloin, it was customary to handle matters internally, and those who claimed their right to deny outsiders access to their tavern and land were silenced by the proclamation of Elpkins.

Elpkins' declaration provided the Cavalry with the perfect pretext to act. As an Awakener acting on the Emperor's orders, he had priority over any other organization, and he made this clear in his own words. Once he mentioned what lay beneath, no one could obstruct their path.

As the guards of Charloin's security force were rendered speechless, the leader of the Cavalry's Southern branch, Kurga, declared powerfully, "An Awakener has requested assistance, so from now on, this is our responsibility! Let's bring down the Awakener to help, and the rest will proceed downstairs! If anyone tries to stop us, it's considered defying the orders of His Majesty the Emperor and our Commander, and we can push through!"

"Good!"

"Sir Zuckerman and all members of the Southern Army's Awakener Brigade, please join us!"

"Understood!"

The soldiers of the Southern Army's Awakener Brigade, including Sunz, shouted with vigor. Nathan Zuckerman also quietly drew his sword, standing by their side.

"Awakener Brigade... what? What are those people saying now?"

"Damn it. Just block them! Don't let them through, no matter what!"

Amidst the shouts of frustration, Nukijo's subordinates, casting aside any concerns for their dignity, drew their weapons. Even as they charged ferociously, the members of the Cavalry's legion remained undisturbed, calmly readying themselves for battle.

The two groups clashed amidst the astonished screams of onlookers watching from afar.

Shortly after, everyone present witnessed a fight with such an overwhelming disparity that it was hard to believe even with their own eyes.

"Alright. Please come down this way. Relax your wings, it's time to fold them in. Good. The rescue is complete."

Elpkins, who had climbed up to the half-collapsed roof to help, was slowly lowered to the ground, guided by the hands of the Cavalry who had used their abilities to assist him. Upon touching the ground, a numbing pain coursed through his wings, as if they had been waiting for this moment. However, the excitement still pounding in his heart prevented him from feeling it as pain.

The scene around him was chaotic, no different from what he had seen underground. The Cavalry swiftly subdued Nukijo's men who had tried to block them, leaving only a few to guard the area as the rest descended below. Those few managed the situation and dealt with Nukijo's other subordinates who arrived late. Despite being outnumbered, their overwhelming skill meant they were hardly threatened.

"Ugh!"

Amidst the screams of Nukijo's gang, flung about by the Cavalry's attacks, those who had rescued Elpkins passed through the corridor, treating his wounds and speaking with smiling faces.

"When the Commander and Yuder said they'd send someone recognizable as a signal, I couldn't quite picture it. But I never expected to meet someone giving such a clear signal. Your wings still seem to be hurting, are you alright?"

"I'm fine. What about the others...?"

"They've all gone down; it will all be over soon. You've done your part, so don't worry about what comes next."

Elpkins had long realized that his appearance stood out even among other Awakeners. Yet, the Cavalry didn't seem the least bit intimidated by him, reminiscent of when he first met Yuder.

'Well, that makes sense. We're all part of the same Cavalry, right?'

Technically, it was more about the influence Yuder had on the Cavalry. However, Elpkins was still unaware of this and simply thought as much. Overwhelmed by the emotion of feeling ordinary for the first time since his awakening, his throat tightened with emotion, but he managed to voice his concerns.

"Do you think... I've been of help to everyone? Will the others be rescued soon and come up too?"

As Elpkins asked tentatively, his face flushed with excitement, the Cavalry grinned and patted his shoulder.

"Of course. Who do you think is down there? There's no need to worry at all. It's hard even for trained people to act according to instructions in a sudden situation, but you managed to do it all in one go. You should be proud of yourself. Oh, by the way, didn't Yuder ask you to join the Cavalry?"

"Indeed, he had. But..."

"Oh, I knew it."

The Cavalry, faces alight with excitement, exchanged a few words among themselves before turning their gaze to Elpkins. Unlike the cold, evaluating stares he was accustomed to in the fighting pits, these looks were more akin to those of friendly neighbors, welcoming a new member into their midst.

"Hmm. Since we have some time before the others return, how about you listen to an explanation and write an application?"

"But... I can't read or write."

"That's alright. None of us knew anything about reading or writing before we joined the Cavalry. We learned everything after joining. We'll help you with the application form; you just have to answer the questions. You're going to apply, aren't you?"

Despite telling himself it was time to stop crying, Elpkins once again wiped the tears welling in his eyes and nodded emphatically.

"Yes. I want to apply..."

In the background, the shouts and curses of Nukijo's gang, fleeing from another attack of the Cavalry, filled the air. The Charloin security guards, who had once tried to protect them, had long since fled in panic.

The people of Charloin, who had almost been forced to return by Nukijo's gang, were now eagerly taking their places to watch the spectacle.

"Wow. Never thought I'd live to see the day Nukijo's gang gets what they deserve."

"Is this even allowed?"

"They defied the Emperor's order. Even the security guards couldn't say anything and just left."

"Serves them right. I knew something like this would happen eventually. Remember when that person lost their son here and got arrested for speaking out? They never got punished then, but now, they're finally facing divine retribution."

"Those people are part of the Cavalry, right?"

For the first time, those who had previously considered even mentioning the Cavalry's Southern branch a taboo began to openly discuss it.

This was the sound of the Cavalry gaining a legitimate standing for their future activities in the South, and at the same time, a signal of the success of their plan.

"These bastards. Where do you think you're going...! Ugh!"

A few of Nukijo's men, who had been hiding in a broken passage and were about to charge out energetically, were sent flying against a wall by a single punch from Kurga, knocking them unconscious.

"Thank you. Knowing in advance where they were hiding made it easier for us."

"Ah, no problem. Glad to have been of help."

Sunz, who had informed the Cavalry of the hidden foes' location, scratched his head with a smile. They continued their journey towards the underground fighting pits.

Chapter 676

Yuder's straight drilling from the underground left the path downwards in disarray, with many parts shattered and collapsed.

In the darkness, devoid of even a lantern, the situation of treading an unfamiliar path was hardly favorable for the Cavalry. However, their rigorous training and abilities, ingrained in their bones, allowed them to swiftly overcome these obstacles, significantly aided by the cooperative efforts of the Southern Army's Awakener Brigade.

The most invaluable assistance came from Sunz, a vision ability user. Initially, when Yuder first encountered him, his ability was merely to see something that was obstructed. Now, it had evolved to discern the layout of paths enveloped in impenetrable darkness and even count and locate hidden enemies.

Leading the way, Sunz surveyed the surroundings, discerning and pointing out the presence and location of hidden foes, enabling the others to prepare preemptive responses. The ability to react first, regardless of where the enemy appeared, was incredibly advantageous.

Emon, standing beside Sunz, also drew attention. His rapid, precise bursts of flame, like sparks from a flint, were remarkably efficient in combat.

Although the Cavalry members, with their longer training and varied experiences, were more seasoned as a group, the individual prowess of the Awakener Brigade was equally formidable.

Intrigued by the reputed skills of the Awakener-only special force, the Cavalry members couldn't help but admire the Awakener Brigade's prowess.

Similarly, the Awakener Brigade members were continually astonished by the capabilities of the Cavalry, only previously known through hearsay.

They wondered how the Cavalry could so efficiently engage in combat without verbal communication, perfectly discerning friend from foe, as if they had trained intensely to respond in any situation with their eyes closed.

Considering the Awakener Brigade's recent formation, the Cavalry members initially thought that they would be worse than them. Seeing how amazing the Awakener Brigade actually was, the realization dawned on the Cavalry members that complacency could lead to intensified training if Yuder noticed them falling behind.

As they advanced swiftly, keeping an eye on each other's capabilities, Nathan Zuckerman, arguably the most powerful among them, silently followed.

Kishiar allowed Nathan Zuckerman to use his strength only when the Cavalry's power alone seemed insufficient against formidable enemies. Otherwise, his role as the adjutant was to observe and act as Kishiar's eyes and ears in his absence. To an onlooker, it appeared as though he was being protected, but in reality, the opposite was true.



"Hmm?"

Leading the way, Sunz suddenly halted, tilting his head as if sensing something amiss, and squinted into the distance. Emon inquired:

"What's wrong? Is someone hiding ahead?"

"No... Not ahead. But..."

His eyes, veiled in a faint mist, scanned the darkness beyond human sight.

"It seems someone is approaching from beyond the wall."

"Beyond the wall?"

"A secret passage, perhaps."

Kurga muttered to himself. Continuously scanning the wall, Sunz slowly nodded.

"Yes, that's right. It seems to be a secret passage. Several layers of walls inside this one made it hard for even my power to detect at first. Now that I can see the figure, I understand."

Sunz approached the wall and, without hesitation, closed his eyes to concentrate. His hands trembled slightly, and sweat formed on his brow. He revealed crucial information: to enter the passage, they had to breach a very thick wall, and those using the passage to approach their location would still need some time to arrive.

"There are quite a few escaping through the passage, at least 20, I'd say. Their slow and disorganized movements suggest they're untrained. There are guides leading them at the front."

That was all Sunz could discern. Exhausted, he withdrew, gasping for breath. The Cavalry members discussed how to deal with those ascending through the secret passage.

"It's obvious who they are bringing up through the secret passage in such a situation. They must be the ones the Commander told us to capture, right?"

"Breaking through the wall is easy, but who will do it?"

"Me. I'll do it!"

"Your power causes too much aftermath. Do we need to collapse the entire building just to break a wall? This is my specialty."

After a brief discussion, one of the Cavalry members approached the wall. Astonishingly, as he tapped a few spots on the wall, the stones at the touched points vanished as if they never existed and reappeared behind him, clattering to the ground.

The Awakener Brigade members couldn't hide their amazement at the effortless creation of a human-sized hole without any shock. Kurga briefly explained:

"He has the ability to relocate objects he touches. Initially, he could only move a leaf from front to back, but now his skill has improved significantly. He can even dislocate limbs to unnatural positions with that power. It's quite painful, I must say."

The unnecessary addition to the explanation made them wince, imagining the pain.

'It sounds like he's experienced it firsthand. Do they really train so ruthlessly, attacking each other like that?'

'That's chilling... The Cavalry really is relentless.'

"It's done! Let's go!"

The Cavalry member who had made the hole cheerfully announced. Pushing aside their thoughts, they promptly entered the passage.

They soon encountered the escapees in the passage that Sunz had foreseen.

"Who are you!"

The subordinates of Nukijo, escorting the VIPs, shouted in alarm.

The VIPs, being carried up by their servants with strained faces, were startled. The Cavalry members greeted them with smiles.

"Ah, you look like distinguished people, but to take a stroll in such a place. It seems the trend for walking paths has shifted to dust-filled secret passages."

They were no longer the people who once feared the nobility and remained silent. Hearing their mocking tone, Nukijo's subordinates couldn't hide their confusion and shouted again.

"Who are you!"

"We are the Cavalry. We received a report of an illegal gambling ring involving Awakeners here, and we've come for a rescue."

Their faces changed dramatically upon hearing Kurga's calm reply. One of Nukijo's subordinates bit his lip and turned his head.

"Protect the VIPs! Make an escape route!"

"That won't be possible."

In the narrow passage, Nukijo's subordinates and the Cavalry clashed. Although the Cavalry members anticipated an easy victory, this time, there was an unexpected variable they hadn't foreseen.

The unforeseen variable emerged when Sunz, who had overexerted his powers, gasped for breath at the back and suddenly appeared before everyone, shouting a warning.

"Emon! Watch out behind!"

"What?"

Reacting to his friend's shout, Emon instinctively turned around. Immediately, his shoulder and chest were sliced as if attacked by something sharp. Fortunately, the sturdy leather vest he wore protected his chest, but his arm inevitably bled.

"There was nothing there before... What is this...!"

"Fall back! To the right!"

Following Sunz's cry, a Cavalry member to Emon's right yelled in pain from a stabbing attack. In the blink of an eye, several others were also wounded by these sudden, seemingly airborne attacks in the cramped and dark space. The short duration of these unexpected assaults resulted in considerable damage.

"Damn it!"

"What the hell is this?"

Sunz's eyes glowed bright blue, veiled in a mist-like energy. He quickly identified the nature of this mysterious assault.

"There's someone else here who can use abilities! You can't see them, but I can! However, they're too fast... Argh!"

He abruptly rolled to dodge an incoming attack, narrowly escaping harm. Others quickly surrounded and protected Sunz.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes, yes! Thank you. Anyway, it's certain there's another Awakener here! They can attack even while hidden, so everyone be careful!"

Tension surfaced on the faces of the Cavalry members. However, none showed any signs of retreat or fear. Kurga quickly assessed the situation and spoke.

"Our first priority is to prevent them from escaping. Captain Sunz and the Awakener Brigade will cover our rear and block the path, informing us of the enemy's location. We'll handle the rest."

The Awakener Brigade members were significantly injured due to the unexpected attacks. In contrast, the Cavalry members, thanks to their deep-rooted training, were almost unscathed.

Everyone deeply felt the true value of their arduous training in such a situation and swiftly moved to positions as per Kurga's orders. Tension filled the passage, alert to the invisible attacks that could come at any moment.

Once again, Sunz, sensing something, looked up and shouted.

"Someone else is coming from that direction!"

Chapter 677

Once again, Sunz, sensing something, looked up and shouted.

"Someone else is coming from that direction!"

The already tense atmosphere shifted once more at his cry. The faces of the Cavalry members and the Awakener Brigade members lost their composure, showing distinct rigidity, while on the other hand, the faces of the guests and Nukijo's gang, who were just waiting for an opportunity to escape, lit up with relief and hope.

Whoever was coming, only a few people on Nukijo's side knew and could use this secret passage.

'Has the boss sent additional personnel to protect us? That's fortunate.'

'Maybe the boss himself is coming here. Since the building is in such disrepair, we'll have to escape as soon as the situation settles...'

'If Nukijo comes, we'll find a way to break through these guys. No matter how strong, one can't take on a thousand.'

Nukijo's men, their spirits visibly lifted, didn't miss this opportunity, nor did the stealth Awakener among them. Suns, noticing the silent onslaught about to start again, struggled to open his mouth and yell.

"They're coming again! Crouch down and defend your lower body!"

It was a difficult task for many to move haphazardly to avoid the attack of one who was hidden. The Cavalry members cursed and grumbled aloud, dodging the attacks with great difficulty based on their instincts. The pressure of potentially attacking a comrade if they made a wrong move was immense.

"This is maddening. I need to see something to fight it."

"Dammit. I wish I could burn them all like Yuder!"

Suns and Emon both thought the Cavalry members were truly remarkable as they managed to avoid fatal injuries while screaming, yet dodging quite skillfully.

'In fact, that they can curse while avoiding unseen attacks means they have some leeway... To be able to do this much just on instinct without the ability to see through things, how much effort must they have put in their training.'

In truth, it was just a habit developed by the Cavalry members accustomed to extreme training. But they did not realize this.

The most emphasized thing in the hellish training of the Cavalry was one thing.

'Increase the chance of survival in any situation.'

Combat does not choose the situation. How nice it would be to always fight in favorable circumstances, but situations like now, where they can't use any of their abilities, are bound to occur.

Therefore, Yuder trained his members mercilessly under various hypothetical situations. Throwing a fire user into water, making someone who needs a weapon fight empty-handed were just a part of it.

Thanks to those times, the members could hold on in this deadlock situation where no solution seemed visible. They were surprised themselves that their bodies moved before they could think, avoiding attacks by just the slight change in air flow caused by the movement of the hidden assailant.

'This is crazy. I can't believe I'm dodging this.'

'I don't know what's happening, but my body just rolls and dodges on its own... Reminds me of our training.'

The members didn't see the current situation, rolling on the ground to dodge attacks due to an unfamiliar ability, as a humiliation. If they ended up with mere scrapes instead of fatal wounds, that was indeed a job well done.

The only frustration was not being able to find a solution before Nukijo's reinforcements arrived.

In the midst of the turmoil, a realization dawned: "This can't just end with us dodging attacks, there must be a way out...!"

As urgency crept into their minds, the movements of the members began to falter. Eventually, a couple of them, trying to evade the attack of the stealth Awakener, collided with each other in the darkness.

"Ugh!"

The enemy didn't miss this opportunity and launched an attack. It was at that very moment, as the members bit their lips and tried to dodge with all their might, that a blade, its arrival unnoticed, clashed sharply against metal, perfectly blocking the invisible attack in mid-air.

At the end of that blade, the one clutching the hilt was none other than Nathan Zuckerman, who had been quietly observing the situation.

"Sir Zuckerman!"

The Southern knight, who had forcefully pushed back the invisible attacker's weapon, glanced at the Cavalry members and spoke.

"I've roughly figured out the attack pattern. I'll hold them off, so step back for a moment, assess the injuries, and regroup."

"But...!"

"We are all starting to lose our composure and get weary. If we don't act now, someone will definitely get seriously injured..."

Clang. Mid-sentence, Nathan Zuckerman moved like lightning in another direction, his sword raised.

With a short burst of sparks in the air and a collision sound, it was evident that Nathan Zuckerman's opponent, unable to handle the difference in the skillfully deflected force, was flung away. Zuckerman turned his gaze in the direction of the sound, feeling no mercy.

The Cavalry members, who had thought of Nathan Zuckerman as an ordinary knight they had to protect, were shocked at his agile response and piercing gaze, moving as if he could see through the darkness.

"What? It was fast, but didn't seem like a forceful move...?"

"He figured out the invisible attack pattern? How?"

However, the rigorous training of the Cavalry had also honed their ability to make quick judgments in battle.

"If someone else can do what I can't, don't try to help unnecessarily. Just step back. Clumsy help can sometimes be worse than a hindrance."

Recalling this lesson, they set aside their questions about Nathan Zuckerman's mysterious strength and quickly withdrew, following his request.

"Understood, Sir Zuckerman! Everyone, fall back! Assess your condition first!"



Meanwhile, Nathan Zuckerman engaged in several more light exchanges with the opponent. 'Light' by his standards, as the opponent was repeatedly thrown against the ceiling or walls, yet stubbornly not making a sound and quickly hiding again, making it hard to pinpoint their location.

Nathan Zuckerman, opening all his senses, walked slowly, deeply exhaling as he tried to determine the opponent's location.

'A foe more difficult to capture alive than to kill. Quite tricky.'

Even he, who could elevate his senses far beyond that of ordinary people, had never encountered an enemy who could erase their presence so completely. It seemed certain that the opponent was not professionally trained, yet it had taken a long time to figure out the pattern of their attacks.

Based on what he had deduced so far, the stealth Awakener was definitely small and not particularly strong. They were likely keeping low to maximize the effectiveness of their attacks in this invisible state, but they didn't seem accustomed to this kind of approach. Their movements and attacks were simple, lacking anything extraordinary, which only confirmed his suspicions.

If only their forms had been visible, the Cavalry members could have easily dealt with them. However, that extraordinary ability to erase not just their presence and sound, but even their weapons into the darkness, compensated for all their vulnerabilities. This very weakness made predicting their movements all the more challenging.

'Even so...'

It wasn't impossible to find them.

Even the Cavalry, honed by training, could narrowly evade the attacks with their heightened senses. For Nathan Zuckerman, whose senses were intensely sharpened, the slightest changes made by the enemy's movements were as clear as thunder and storms.

'It's coming from that direction this time.'

Nathan Zuckerman, catching the subtle shift in the air, turned his head. Realizing that he had roughly pinpointed his location, the stealth Awakener tried a different attack this time.

'If they can make their weapons invisible, it's likely they've hidden something like a magic-infused dagger or a poison dart as a last resort.'

In a brief moment, Nathan Zuckerman, anticipating the enemy's possible actions, raised his sword to protect the Cavalry members.

Just as a bright blue aura began to emanate from his hand, a sharp voice echoed from somewhere.

"Stop!"

Along with the voice, things previously unseen revealed themselves before their eyes.

Nathan Zuckerman boldly discovered a woman, who had approached close enough to launch a dart, and swiftly lowered his raised sword, retreating back. The dart she fired helplessly embedded itself in an empty wall.

"What's happening? My power isn't working!"

"Sir Zuckerman! Are you alright?"

The Cavalry members behind Nathan Zuckerman, intending to assist him, cried out in surprise.

The stealth Awakener, realizing she was visible to others, was just as shocked.

Chapter 678

"Sir Zuckerman! Are you alright?"

The Cavalry members behind Nathan Zuckerman, intending to assist him, cried out in surprise.

The stealth Awakener, realizing she was visible to others, was just as shocked.

Suddenly, the power that had cloaked her vanished. Her attempts to become invisible again were futile, as she couldn't muster her strength properly.

The stealth Awakener, now exposed for all to see, looked much as Nathan Zuckerman had anticipated. She was short and slender, with long hair tied up. Clutching her injured arm, she bit her lip hard.

Amid the tense and bewildered situation, a voice of salvation reached the Cavalry members.

"It seems we've arrived just in time."

"Commander!"

The members shouted in unison, like children reunited with long-lost parents.

Shortly after, many figures emerged from the dark passage. Initially, everyone assumed they were Nukijo's men, as sensed by Sunz's vision ability. But they were wrong.

Kishiar, leading the group, revealed his true face, smiling at his comrades. His striking beauty shone even in the darkness, or perhaps it was the solemn and serious Awakener behind him. Their arrival felt like a scene from a mythological painting.

As the escaping VIPs and Nukijo's underlings momentarily lost touch with reality, the Cavalry members joyously called out to another figure.

"Yuder!"

Only then did people notice the man in a long cloak with black hair standing beside Kishiar. His pale, blood-smeared appearance was eerily ghostlike.

Those familiar with Yuder knew better than to mistake his appearance for serious injury.

"How many did he fight to be so bloodied? A hundred?"

"I bet he beat one by himself to death."

"This isn't the time for such talk."

Hearing his comrades' whispers, Yuder spoke quietly, his gaze as sharp as ever. The members quickly offered awkward smiles and apologies.

"Oh, sorry, Baron. It's not that we didn't want to handle the situation, it's just..."

"But no one's seriously hurt... probably... not yet...?"

Their faces, now relaxed and joking in the presence of trusted allies, were bright and cheerful. Yuder eventually softened his piercing gaze, sighed quietly, and looked away. It was a signal of his tacit forgiveness.

Kishiar, where Yuder's gaze rested, took over the conversation.

"It's fortunate that no one's gravely injured, but we must act swiftly as there are still wounded. To begin with..."

His red eyes slowly scanned the Nukijo gang, the exposed stealth Awakener, and the combatants from the arena.

"Dealing with these individuals is our first priority."

One of Nukijo's men, his voice trembling, cried out.

"What in the world happened? Only our people should have access to this passage... Are... are all those below dead?"

"The master of this place sought only to save himself and met his demise. Not all others are dead, but they will face their retribution."

"It can't be..."

Kishiar's succinct explanation left Nukijo's underlings shouting in disbelief, the VIPs equally shocked.

"Nukijo is dead?"

Despite their desire to flee, with the Cavalry surrounding them both front and back, there was nowhere to go. They desperately claimed their innocence, causing an uproar.

"I don't even know who this Nukijo or whatever is! These people here, they kidnapped me!"

"Yes, I was only threatened. I don't know anything about this place. Truly!"

"Damn it. Regina! What are you doing? Use your power to break us out!"

One of them shouted at the dazed stealth Awakener, Regina, who had been motionless since hearing of Nukijo's self-destruction, perhaps even before that. She simply stared blankly into the distance.

"Regina!"

"Urging that Awakener will gain us nothing. This place is under a power-suppressing influence, disabling any Awakener from using their powers," Kishiar explained with a smile, reminding everyone of the voice they had heard earlier, commanding them to stop.

It was after that voice that the stealth Awakener, previously perfectly hidden, was suddenly revealed.

The power-suppressing Awakener, Reneve, appeared among them, following Kishiar's gesture. She was dressed in flamboyantly mismatched clothes, with disheveled hair and a gaunt, skeletal figure, wearing clunky, oversized boots. Her gaze had been fixed on one spot even before she stepped forward.

Reneve was looking at Regina.

And Regina, bleeding from her limbs, was looking back at Reneve.

Without a word, they just stared at each other, until Kishiar spoke.

"Reneve. And Cyregina. Fortunate that we could reunite those who were held here for so long, trying to save each other. Without my assistant, the whole truth would have remained hidden."

The other Cavalry members and bystanders looked curious at his words, but Kishiar offered no further explanation, instead calmly ordering the binding of Nukijo's other subordinates and the VIPs.

Even without their powers, the task was well within the capabilities of the Cavalry members present. Yuder, amidst the chaotic scene, watched the two women staring blankly at each other, recalling the events just before his arrival here.

"Aaaah!"

"Boss!"

Right before Elpkins was about to pass through the hole, Yuder had successfully diverted an arrow aimed at him, embedding it into Nukijo's shoulder instead. As Nukijo crumbled with a scream, his men were struck with terror.

"A monster..."

The thought that further attack was futile dominated their minds. Yuder, facing those dropping their weapons and looking at him in fear, spoke expressionlessly.

"Drop your weapons and kneel. If you surrender willingly, I won't attack further."

Silence.

"I am with the Cavalry. Reinforcements will soon arrive from outside. The VIPs you helped escape won't get a chance to return home. Surrender while I'm asking nicely."

Could it be true? Someone, upon making eye contact with Yuder, involuntarily dropped their weapon and then abruptly kneeled, hunching over. It was the one closest to Yuder. He glanced at

them briefly before moving on. Realizing he wouldn't attack, others nearby also began to drop their weapons one by one.

Of course, there were those who did not surrender, but Yuder dealt with them without a word of excuse, striking them down and sending them flying. Nothing could block his path.

Nukijo, realizing the monster's footsteps were approaching him, clutched his arrow-pierced shoulder and muttered to himself.

"The Cavalry...? That man?"

He had thought him a mere fool, but he was mistaken. That man had infiltrated this place from the beginning to bring it down.

When exactly had the Cavalry, thought to be busy recruiting new members, set their sights on this place? And why had he only realized it now? Why had no one hinted at it?

Regret filled him for not keeping his secret weapon close, instead of sending it away for the VIPs. But it was too late for such thoughts.

A person cornered often feels as if all their misfortunes were part of a deliberate plan against them. Nukijo felt the same. Overwhelmed with a sense of injustice, he speculated that perhaps someone among his enemies had secretly passed information about this place to the Cavalry.

"Then...!"

"I'll give you money...!" he offered desperately.

Chapter 679

"...I'll give you money!"

The cry, born of desperation, flowed out, causing Yuder's footsteps to momentarily halt.

"How much would it take for you to just leave? A hundred thousand gold coins? No, maybe half a million would be better. That's a fair amount for a mutual benefit, right? It wouldn't be a bad deal for the Cavalry either, would it?"

Nukijo played to his strengths. Convincing people to turn a blind eye to their deeds was one of his easiest tasks. Not a single soldier, knight, administrator, or mage remained unaffected by his propositions.

Slowly, Yuder's eyes narrowed. The sight of blood dripping from his stained fingertips was terrifying, yet since Yuder had ceased moving, Nukijo believed his approach was working. He hurriedly began another proposal.

"Listen. If receiving a lump sum is too much, how about we take a little from our earnings each month? If you want women, we'll send women; if men, then men. Besides, we can bridge a connection between the Cavalry and the high officials of Charloin! Isn't that enough?"

Nukijo was met with a gaze as dark and bottomless as a deep abyss.

After a moment, Yuder slowly spoke. "To think that the Cavalry, created for the Awakeners, would turn a blind eye for mere money and connections... You dream big."

What? The Awakeners? Nukijo's mind raced.

"The Awakeners? Ah, right. If the Awakeners are the problem, then we won't hold these Awakener fights. I'll abolish it right away. Will that suffice?"

A faint twist formed at the corner of Yuder's lips. "You expect me to believe you'd give up so easily."

"Look, the supply... I mean, finding talented participants has been tough lately. It hasn't been very profitable. Managing the risks is exhausting, and I was even considering closing it down. I was so desperate, I even thought about killing those who advised me to build the second and third underground floors... to make them take responsibility."

His skill in swiftly changing his words upon seeing Yuder's expression was evident.

"..."



"Even if some Awakeners occasionally insist on participating in the regular fighting pits, we can't stop them all... but if you dislike that too, we'll make it stop. It's easier for us too!"

Of course, it was a lie. But there was nothing he wouldn't say to deceive.

"Awakeners who insist on participating? Those trapped here would have laughed to hear that."

"Trapped? Who are you talking about? The one with wings? Do you know how much debt he's in? Of course, those in debt would curse me! I've always been a man of my word!"

Nukijo had even forgotten the name of the Elphins he had ruined. Yuder gazed at him intently before speaking.

"You. Do you remember the Awakener you've imprisoned here for over a year?"

"Imprisoned...? Ah! That Durban girl. What nonsense. I've been paying her salary and even provided her with expensive clothes and a room."

If one had not seen the conditions in which Reneve lived, Nukijo's confident tone might have made them believe his words.

"Since arriving here, she's been searching for a friend who came with her. Why didn't you show her? Is she already dead?"

"Dead? Who said that? All those girls are alive and well."

Yuder's gaze shifted subtly. Nukijo quickly noticed his interest in the matter. The man who had shown little concern for money or connections was now reacting, and Nukijo swiftly surmised this could be the key to saving both his life and the fighting pit.

"Yes, were you curious about this? The two women from Durban are both alive. I don't lie. They were alive and did their jobs quite well here."

"But why didn't you show them?"

"Because..."

While clutching his head, dizzy from the loss of blood, Nukijo simultaneously sent a covert signal to his subordinates.

'Open the passage between the first and second floors. I'll escape then; help me.'

The faces of his men, knowing what lay there, momentarily turned pale. Nukijo, undeterred, continued to babble.

"The problem was that both women had awakened. You understand, managing staff is no ordinary task. It's troublesome if they start having other thoughts instead of focusing on their duties here. One had the power to suppress power, and the other one..."

He stopped mid-sentence and fumbled in his pocket, pressing a button on a magic tool and signaling his men.

'Now!'

With a loud thud, a passage next to the stage behind Yuder opened.

"Screams of terror and panic filled the air as Nukijo's men, previously kneeling in surrender, began to flee in absolute fear.

Yuder turned his head. From the dark, gaping maw of the passage, something approached at a rapid pace. It carried a cold, dark aura, as if it was not of this world. The pungent stench of decay and blood hit his nose. His instincts as an Awakener, honed by countless similar situations, immediately recognized the entity.

It was...

"The boss has opened all the monster cages!"

Emerging from the passage were monsters with countless writhing, octopus-like legs, stained with ominous colors and glistening grotesquely. Their bodies and heads were hard to discern amid the tangled mass of limbs.

Although the monsters didn't appear large or fast, Nukijo's men were desperately fleeing for their lives. The reason soon became apparent.

“Aaaa...”

A scream echoed as a limb of one of the monsters suddenly stretched out, shooting forward like a harpoon to grab one of the fleeing men. The captured subordinate of Nukijo struggled in vain, trying to tear away from the monster's grasp.

In the blink of an eye, the continuously extending limb pulled the victim into a writhing mass of legs, engulfing him. His limbs, flailing in resistance, twitched as they were drawn between the monster's legs, soon withering away as if all his fluids had been drained.

Yuder swiftly approached and swung his sword, wrapped in flames. The monster, emitting a bizarre cry, writhed but did not release its victim. Yuder's strength seemed formidable but was not enough to intimidate the monster.

Only after slicing through several legs with a sword that was more effective than his strength did the monster finally regurgitate its victim. However, the man was already reduced to a skeletal, perforated corpse, desiccated from head to toe.

Silence fell as a sense of danger crawled up Yuder's spine. Turning, he saw Nukijo, supported by his men, already disappearing into the distance.

‘He released all the monsters brought in for the fighting pit... Such a move would not leave him unscathed either.’

"Save me!"

“Aaaa...”

Amidst the screams, another monster near Yuder extended its limbs towards him. He leaped over it gracefully, but there was more than one monster, and they had even more limbs.

Like starved creatures, the monsters swarmed, endlessly stretching their limbs. They didn't mind getting tangled with each other, harshly pulling and swallowing anything they caught. Simply put, they were the perfect monsters for creating a terrifying spectacle in the arena, grabbing and sucking blood and fluids before spitting out when their prey was gone.

'I've never seen these monsters before, but... I can tell they're hunting by sound.'

For the first time in a while, Yuder's past life experience proved useful. With so many types of monsters, it was impossible to know everything at a glance, but with experience, he could guess their characteristics just by a brief confrontation. Meanwhile, Yuder exerted the power of the earth to ensure Nukijo couldn't escape. Although the monsters were difficult to kill, he had no problem destroying other things.

'Did you think I would let you escape easily?'

With a loud crash, the door in the direction Nukijo's men were heading shattered, blocking their path. The men yelled something, and the monsters, recognizing the direction, extended their limbs mercilessly, chasing new victims.

Yuder contemplated whether it would be better to just bring down the entire place as the monsters, having fed plentifully, moved faster and more relentlessly, their numerous reappearing limbs making it difficult for him to keep up.

Before he could slice off another silently approaching limb from behind, something from the opposite side seemed to grab and tear it away, and someone landed beside him.

"Are you alright?"

Kishiar straightened up from his landing pose, surveying Yuder from head to toe. The other Awakeners, who had stopped in their tracks upon seeing the monster, indicated that Kishiar, having finished organizing the backstage area, had rushed here first upon noticing the situation.

Yuder quickly explained to the man inspecting the blood on his body.

"Of course, it's not my blood. I haven't been injured yet."

"There's a scrape here."

"Such a scratch can be caused by a mere fingernail."

Kishiar faintly smiled at Yuder's blunt rebuttal.

"So, how did this situation arise?"

"I was almost done dealing with Nukijo and could have finished everything. But I got distracted by something troubling, and during that moment, he opened the monster cages."

"Monsters are beings beyond human control. He blinded himself to the danger, making the worst choice of using his men as sacrifices for a brief escape."

"Fortunately, you arrived quickly."

Yuder knew that to deal with the monsters using his strength alone, he would need to employ indirect methods rather than attacking the monsters directly, inevitably causing more damage to the property. Already having created a hole in the roof, he hesitated to cause further destruction, considering it risky. But with Kishiar's arrival, he no longer needed to worry about that aspect.

"Let's quickly clear this up without causing any more damage to the building than necessary."

"Agreed."

Kishiar then loudly commanded the other Awakeners, who were standing frozen in fear at a distance.

"Mer, Daila! Check! Bet!"

"Yes, yes?"

The ones specifically named by Kishiar reacted with surprise.

"Since these monsters respond to sound, create as much noise as possible with your abilities to distract them. Everyone, except for Reneve, be cautious not to get caught by the legs and deal with the monsters accordingly. I'll tell you what needs to be done from now on..."

Kishiar's commands were quick and precise. In just a brief conversation, he had managed to identify and remember the names and abilities of each Awakener. As he called out each Awakeners, instructing them on how to counter the monsters, the fear-stricken faces gradually shifted.

The thought that it might be worth a try began to emerge.

"Avoid separating, and assist each other to prevent getting caught by the legs. Stay vigilant."

"Yes!"

The Awakeners responded reflexively, exchanging bewildered glances before mustering the courage to dash forward. Kishiar and Yuder, as if by agreement, stood back to back.

Yuder gripped his sword, feeling Kishiar's warmth through their touching backs.

Even knowing that monsters were his weakness, the man didn't ask Yuder to step back. He knew Yuder could handle it, however challenging it might be.

His trust and emotions flowed distinctly through their connected skin.

'I can do this.'

No longer did anything seem worrisome.

Chapter 680

Until just yesterday, the Awakeners trapped on the third underground floor were in a position where they had to fight each other upon encounter. In the face of the harsh reality that not killing the other meant their own death, any friendship or dialogue was meaningless.

However, now they were using their powers not to kill each other, but to save one another.

"Watch out over there!"

"Ah, thank you... Thank you."

"No, it's nothing..."

An Awakener, who almost got caught by a monster's extended limb, was saved by the power of another Awakener. Both the rescuer and the rescued awkwardly avoided each other's gaze, but did not forget to express their gratitude.

As time passed, the greetings they exchanged gradually gained more sincerity. Helping each other led to more shared glances, and strangely, a warm and tingling feeling grew inside their hearts.

It was a camaraderie born from facing the same enemy and enduring the same hardships.

Until Kishiar reminded them to forget that they were once enemies, such feelings did not exist. The Awakeners, who understood his words intellectually but not emotionally, eventually began to accept them sincerely.

They fought shoulder to shoulder outside the arena they thought they could only leave in death, effectively countering the monsters. Despite being new to this style of combat, they were surprisingly effective by simply following Kishiar's instructions. Though some were in danger due to unfamiliarity with their powers, there was no significant concern.

Two members of the Cavalry at the forefront, back to back in battle, were performing feats worth a hundred soldiers.

Their fight was truly remarkable. Armed with nothing more than an ordinary sword, the attacks they unleashed were incomparably powerful. Watching them, each guarding the other's back, fighting more monsters than anyone, one could forget what they were doing, so captivating was the sight.

A tall man would entangle a monster's approaching limb, while a man with black hair would find and precisely strike a hidden weak point amidst the writhing limbs. Conversely, when the black-haired man used his powers to manipulate debris and elements to thwart the monsters, the tall man would return from slaying others and swiftly dispatch them with concise movements.

The black-haired man, though not directly attacking the monsters with anything but his sword, was still a formidable threat to the enemy. This was possible because the tall man moved in perfect harmony with him, like a pair of smoothly functioning weapons.

Without a single word exchanged, they assisted each other's movements so quickly and accurately that most Awakeners could not fully grasp what abilities they were using or how.

Despite their seemingly different styles, there was a peculiar similarity in their fighting, perhaps because they both belonged to the same Cavalry.

It was an enigma, but their fearless and overwhelming combat inspired courage in others.

With a screeching cry, the last of the monsters fell. It had been thrown into disarray by the Awakeners' sonic attacks, losing direction and rampaging, only to be taken down by a combined attack from the black-haired man and the tall man.

“Wow!”

As the monster fell with a thud, the Awakeners, as if by some unspoken agreement, let out cries of joy and embraced each other.

The surroundings were a mess, but no further damage to the buildings and no casualties among the Awakeners meant it was indeed a perfect victory.

Yuder, looking back at the cheering Awakeners, sheathed his sword. Kishiar, standing where he turned, smiled silently at him.

Yuder deeply exhaled, still feeling the aftermath of the battle. It was rare for him to feel good after a fight, but this time was different. The sensation of his blood boiling from head to toe, fiercely pounding his heart, was an incomparable thrill and pleasure.



It was undoubtedly because of Kishiar La Orr.

He had undergone various trainings with the Cavalry, but never had he fought in sync with someone like this. It was the same in his previous life.

However, the sensation of their backs meeting for the first time wasn't the slightest bit awkward, and the warmth brushing by his side allowed him to immerse deeper into the battle. Kishiar, not using sword aura but merely an old, rusted sword and the push and pull power, perfectly matched Yuder's pace.

Considering Kishiar's scarce experience in direct combat, it was truly unbelievable.

“Is it strange to say I feel good after directly engaging in battle for almost the first time?”

Then, Kishiar quietly whispered something not much different from Yuder's thoughts.

Yuder, feeling as if his thoughts were read, slowly shook his head.

“It's not strange. ...I feel the same.”

A clear, refreshing smile soon appeared on Kishiar's face, who had his eyes slightly widened.

“Right.”

For a moment, Yuder wished to see the real face of the smiling man.

But part of him was also relieved it didn't happen. If he had faced that face while his blood was still hot, he might have kissed him, unable to resist. A fierce satisfaction and ravenous longing simultaneously scratched the pit of his stomach before fading away.

It was partly due to the scream heard from afar.

“Aaargh!”

Yuder turned his head.

Due to his power, the movement toward the exit was blocked. A commotion arose from Nukijo and his subordinates, who had been evading the monster's attacks.

Approaching, he saw Nukijo stabbed and collapsed, the perpetrator being one of his subordinates who had tried to flee with him. The man, battered and bruised, glared at Nukijo.

“You tried to save yourself by sacrificing us...?”

Throughout the battle with the monster, Nukijo had pushed his subordinates to death to save himself whenever he felt endangered. The one who stabbed him had been the last remaining, having nearly been caught and killed by the monster in Nukijo's stead.

In a desperate struggle to not die, he wrestled with Nukijo, who was pushing him towards the monster. In the chaotic fight, both nearly faced death several times, but the younger and stronger subordinate seized an opportunity first.

Taking advantage of the moment when Yuder, Kishiar, and the other Awakeners had finished off the monster, he pushed Nukijo down, grabbed a fallen sword, and stabbed him with all his might. It was a fatal wound, right in the center of the chest.

As Yuder and Kishiar approached, he discarded his weapon and surrendered, saying that he had taken care of Nukijo, who deserved to be killed, so please spare him.

Yuder looked down at Nukijo, who seemed on the verge of losing his breath, and furrowed his brow.

‘Reaping what he sowed.’

"Please... save me... I beg you..."

Recognizing Yuder approaching, Nukijo, with a hand pressed over a blood-gushing wound, begged for his life. However, considering the flow of blood and the wound, even a priest with healing powers akin to Lusan would struggle to save him.

When Yuder remained silent, Nukijo continued in a gasping voice.

"The information... you wanted... I'll tell you... That Durban, those women..."

"..."

"The name... Re, Regina... she, can, make herself invisible... wouldn't let her escape... she just, went outside... Save me, and I'll tell you who..."

Nukijo, struggling to speak, suddenly fell silent. Yuder waited, but no further words came. He realized that Nukijo had stopped breathing and frowned.

To die mid-sentence, eyes wide open - it was a pitiful and hollow death.

Yuder, looking down at Nukijo's corpse, turned to his subordinate, who still held a posture of surrender.

"Nukijo mentioned a person named Regina, an Awakener with the ability to become invisible. Do you know anything about her?"

The subordinate, unaware that Regina was an Awakener, knew quite a bit about her. To save his own life, he revealed everything he knew.

According to him, Regina's real name was Cyregina. He did not mention her being from Durban, but the name itself was common there, so those who heard it guessed her origin.

"She never listened to anyone but Nukijo. She said following Nukijo's orders was the only way to gain permission to descend to the third basement and get promoted, so she did all kinds of dirty work. She often got beaten for not doing well, though..."

Regina was competent in handling VIP guests but showed little enthusiasm in recruiting new Awakeners. The Awakeners she managed often failed to show up at the arena or realized something was amiss and tried to escape, causing trouble.

As a result, Regina was frequently beaten by Nukijo. Sometimes to the point of breaking bones, but she never cried or ran away, stubbornly obeying Nukijo to an exasperating extent.

'Permission to the third basement. The abilities of Reneve and Cyregina... Yes. I'm beginning to understand.'