

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

**And here we are, the Empire Arc finale. We are going back to the kingdom and, oh boy, many things have changed while the group was away.**

**I hope this chapter doesn't feel rushed since I had to cover a bunch of stuff before ending this arc, but I didn't want to have to write another chapter.**

**Some people were worried I was shifting the story toward Lakyus more than Satoru and Renner and, while it may seem so, this isn't the case. Lakyus will be an important character, yes, but she will remain secondary. This mini arc is just here as needed development for her and to set where she stands at her current level.**

**Will Lakyus be the next Climb for Renner? The answer is yes and no. The thing is that Renner is incapable of loving something or someone in a healthy way. Her affection is shown in a distorted and extreme way but being a genius child that still hasn't experienced puberty, her approach to life is very pragmatic when Satoru isn't involved. He is the illogical sparkle in her life, someone that brings out something she cannot understand and such a thing is exciting in her mind. Lakyus, she can easily be manipulated and understood in her existence, still Renner is creating a bond with her nonetheless, a first in her life, a bond**

**based on honesty and genuine affection on Lakys' part, something young Renner thought unrealistic until this point.**

**So yes, in conclusion, Satoru's existence defies the logical order in Renner's grey and boring world, while Lakys is a unique existence who manages to bend what should be considered common sense in Renner's view of the world.**

**Beta Reader: Don Orbit (go check out his amazing works!); SirWertsalot (I've fallen down the rabbit hole of web novels to tide me over until the new season starts, but this will do an even better job. Time to get warm and fuzzies from Renner's awkward attempts at affection.)**

## Chapter 25: Reforged Blade

The retired swordsman looked at the giant before him with nothing but contempt. It was his fault this happened. He had no wish of being recognized and have all those eyes on him. He just wanted to grant his first and last student a final wish before he retired forever to become an anonymous wood carver. But everything had to go to shit! This damn demi-human had to stand in his way and blow away his cover. The cover he had to ask for from that monstrous magic caster.

At the thought of that man, Brain's hand instinctively went for the blade by his side that was still hidden by his cloak. He still managed to stop himself before grasping the hilt though. 'No, I will not fall to temptation again. My days as a swordsman are done... I should just... retire... damn it! Damn this beast for forcing my hand and that caster for giving me this cursed blade!' he thought furious with both entities. He remembered how he had to accept the blade otherwise the bloody caster would not give him the magic cloak either. According to that man, the cloak

would enhance his speed and stamina while the blade was given to him due to the curiosity of the caster who wanted to see how well Brain could use it, even after the blue haired man told him he would not use it.

While he was pondering what to do next, the War Troll used that time to recover from his previous blow and jump out of the crater he just created.

“SO YOU HAVE FACE! AH! NEXT TIME I TAKE YOUR HEAD!”

Roared the still enraged demi-human before charging Brain once more.

Not wanting to give in to the troll’s provocations, Brain limited himself to staring him down blankly until he was forced to dodge another swing of his club. Brain felt kind of disappointed by now. The technique behind the strikes was laughable, just average in his eyes. The only reason that troll reached this point of the tournament was only due to his natural gifts. ‘proving once again how humanity is doomed to be inferior to other life forms more gifted in the natural department’ he added in his head as he crouched to again avoid a wild swing from the enraged troll.

“RAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHGGGGGGG!”

Loosing all kinds of control, the demi-human swung a fist at him, taking the human by surprise and forcing him to jump back instead of dodging as usual. Disregarding any personal defenses, the troll pressed his attack continuing to use his weapon alongside his fists and legs to pressure Brain into making a mistake. This would normally leave him defenseless against any retaliation from his opponent, but the troll was aware that the blue haired swordsman would not strike him.

As the troll was consumed by his bloodlust and rage brought on by Brain's humiliating behavior, the swordsman himself felt some tiredness catching up to him after a whole day of battle. The cloak could only do just so much for his depleting stamina.

It was just a matter of time before he was going to get hit or the troll completely depleted himself of energy. The former seemed more likely as the foot of the troll slammed into Brain's side, sending him flying meters away until one of the arena borders stopped him.

He could hear the booing of the crowd, no doubt caused by his poor performance and his unwillingness to fight. 'Utter fools... all of them... they feel safe on their precious stands, as if a possible death battle was a spectacle to behold... they have no idea of what truly means to feel death close up on you...' he thought as the troll closed the distance between them, slow but powerful feet marking the sandy ground. But between the cries of the crowd and the heavy thumps of the demi-human, another sound made its way to Brain's ears.

Words, words spoken by a voice he knew and grew up to like over the time.

**"MASTER BRAIN! DON'T GIVE UP! YOU MUST GO ON! PLEASE UNSHEATE YOUR BLADE!"**

The voice of the young blonde Re-Estize noble known as Lakyus echoed into his concussed mind. He apparently was thrown just next to the entrance of the waiting area, where a teary Lakyus was standing as she shouted not even a meter away from him.

'Shut your trap, will you?' rhetorically asked the blue haired swordsman. By now the war troll towered over him and with one

of his large hands he pulled the downed Brain up, his mace held in his other free hand, ready to end him.

“YOU MUST FIGHT OR YOU WILL DIE!”

The brat still shouted at him as if such a thing still mattered to him. ‘Who cares... maybe in death I will find some peace at least’ as his final thoughts went through his head his eyes wandered until they locked with a pair of sapphire gems engraved in a black mask.

“Even in death you persist on haunting me... damn magic caster...”

He whispered and against all odds those words reached the troll and made him pause for a moment and then he began to laugh lightly, something the blue haired didn’t consider possible due to his opponent size and demeanor.

“So, you felt as well? The stench of death! Is it not magnificent? When I felt it, I could not stand, my skin start crawling, my instinct tell to run! That stench brings out my will to live!”

The demi-human said far more calmly. Brain could now feel the hand restraining him trembling. He said nothing and instead limited himself to taking away his eyes from the magic caster and instead fixing the giant before him. A moment of silence passed between the two as even the cheering of the crowds and Lakys’ yelling faded into the back of his mind.

“I see, the stench takes you away... your fighting spirit, gone... I thought you better... I thought you strong... but you weak... no worthy of a warrior death.”

The troll said in what seemed to be disappointment as he dropped the motionless ex-swordsman. The demi-human rose his armored foot, ready to crush Brain's head.

“FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!”

He could still hear Lakyus' desperate screams for him to react.

“DON'T BE A COWARD!”

In her desperation the girl yelled her last resort 'really? Trying to rile me up with insults? How desperate are you?' but despite thinking those words, something changed a lump created in his stomach, and he could not for the life of him understand why. His hand twitched as if his body was trying to take control and save him anyway despite his wishes. And as the foot began to descend, he recognized the familiar feeling for what it was, regret.

In a swift movement he slightly rolled to the side, just enough for the foot to impact the sandy ground instead of his head. Without even knowing why, he rose on his feet once again. He just felt like there was still something he needed to do. Someone he had a last lesson for.

“So, you have dignity to ask for a warrior's death?”

The troll grunted as he took a stance, preparing to unleash all his power once more, and this time there would be no range to dodge. Brain's brown eyes locked with Lakyus' emerald ones. There was no need for words to convey what her whole body was screaming at him.

Fight!

‘I really hate you brat... you are ignorant, even obnoxious sometimes... you dream of impossible goals... you grasp things others took years to master... you are infuriatingly stubborn... annoyingly single minded... and yet, yet you are also inspiring, you cannot seem to be ignored by the ones around you, and you always manage to get your way... and in the end, even I...’ as his internal monologue went on, his right hand slowly grasped the hilt of his new blade. ‘I have nothing less to lose. My will, my pride, my honor. All gone... and it is for that reason, that I will fight, without holding anything back!’ the metallic mace descended upon him.

“[STRONG STRIKE]!”

The demi-human roared but this time his blow didn’t reach the ground as a flash of darkness dashed before him. The two pieces of metal that were previously forming a mace fell limply on the ground as the troll looked in confusion at his hand which was almost fully split in two, red blood flowing out like a river. Even Brain himself was stunned by the blades power. He just meant to deflect the blow, countering with his own [Vertical Strike]. Instead, he not only cut the weapon in half, but he also split part of the troll’s hand, armor and bone, as well.

With a roar, the demi-human sent a sloppy punch with his good hand at a surprised Brain who was sent flying back into the wall while his opponent jumped back to create distance between the two of them.

The punch, being not as powerful as the previous ones, didn’t break any bones fortunately for Brain, even if he felt his ribcage ache. He looked down at the blade he now held in his hand, free

of its sheath. The blade itself was as black as midnight, with dark purple ripples growing all over it like veins in an arm.

“Why?... why not heal?”

He heard the demi-human mutter in what seemed to be shocked and surprise. Brain wasn't sure how to exactly react. He has seen troll's regeneration before but this was clearly not the case, and, judging by his opponent's reaction, this wasn't supposed to happen.

He looked down at the dark blade, and by squinting his eyes he could see a small drop of dark essence emanating from it. ‘You are really terrifying... magic caster...’ he thought as he glanced up toward the VIP box.

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

‘Umu, it seems like it works just fine even in the hands of a weak wielder’ the undead known as Satoru thought in amusement at the scene going on underneath him. At first, he was quite annoyed at Brain's refusal to use his friend's blade, but the wait was certainly worth the result.

‘Takemi wanted to throw it away after the shitty devs changed how regen worked... to think a failed, half-baked experiment could do such a thing with the aid of Martial Arts... this is truly intriguing’ he thought in contemplation as the battle below seemed to come to a stalemate.

“I-Is that another champion of yours, S-sir Satoru.”

Asked the voice of Osk who sat next to him, breaking the silence which descended upon the VIP box since Brain's reveal.



“Ah... I guess you could say so, but not really... he is a very strange fellow. I simply limited myself to providing him with the right tools. I had no idea of what he wanted to do with them.”

Satoru spoke, as if giving away magic items to people was the most normal thing in the world, but even in the absurdity of the situation Osk could not help to be worried for what was transpiring down in the arena.

“Why is Go Gin not healing as usual? His regeneration should have already begun to close the wound.”

He softly said to no one in particular.

“The blade is filled with negative energy, the very opposite force of life. It is only natural for it to stop any kind of regeneration.”

The magic caster explained to a dumbfounded merchant who didn't seem to have heard anything like this in his whole life. ‘Or at least that was the case before the devs updated the game after numerous complains. Nowadays negative energy can only block basic regeneration skills... it's truly a shame... Takemi put a lot of effort in it, trying to use it to counter Touch-Me's insectoid regeneration...’ Satoru reminisced in his mind.

“D-Did you plan in advance for this?”

Asked a very displeased Osk/ Satoru just shrugged his shoulders.

“It was purely coincidental. I do not possess the skills to use a katana, so, in my curiosity, I left the blade in hands which could make the best out of it.”

His explanation wasn't really anything. He may as well say that he didn't want to tell Osk, but quite strangely the merchant seemed to accept his answer.

'Now then, show me what that blade can do'.

{Go Gin's P.O.V.}

The injured troll was still looking at his hand in bafflement when the crowd started urging them to continue, but they did not understand, they did not understand at all, this battle was likely already over.

Go Gin was a war troll and, while aware that his kind wasn't known for their intelligence, he was no fool. He knew exactly what this last clash meant for him.

He fought his whole life by exploiting his natural gifts; his body helped him in overpowering his opponents and his regeneration helped him to outlast both their pain endurance and stamina capacity. These were his two pillars; he was skilled and diligent in his training as well but that was nothing above the norm in his eyes.

He created his fighting style around what he took as assured his whole life. He charged with minimal care for his defenses, and who would blame him? He could just regenerate if his opponent did manage to hurt him at all after he overpowered them with his superior strength. But this time, this time, he could not do so.

For every hit received by that sword he would start bleeding out without the possibility of the healing he took for granted until then. His huge body and superior strength meant nothing if he couldn't hit his target at all and could even be a handicap as he was only a larger target for his opponent to hit.

He was forced into a metaphorical corner, and he could only adapt or die. But even if he tried changing his fighting style completely, what would change? He was fighting a skilled opponent with as much experience as him. The difference was that his opponent actually had to adapt to overcome his weaknesses, while Go Gin only limited himself to make the best of what he already had from birth. 'I am no different from my kin... I am truly a fool... father, I finally understand' in that moment his father's words came back to him. He mocked Go Gin for his desire to go and fight humans, calling him a fool if he thought that the humans could be fought the same way he fought his own kin. The young war troll dismissed his father's words and proved him wrong on many occasions, but now, now that he was in front of a true human warrior, he could not help but call himself a fool too.

His best option would be to try and maintain his distance, to avoid having more unhealable wounds inflicted on him, but that option went out of the window once his weapon was rendered nothing more than a disfigured piece of metal on the ground.

He gulped as a guttural, primordial and horrid feeling crawled out of his stomach enveloping him; in that moment he truly felt like a cornered rat looking up at a towering lion. 'Is this fear? The fear of death?' For all of his bravado, Go Gin didn't actually want to die but at the same time he could not just forfeit. That would make him a coward. That would be the death of his pride. There was truly just one last option for him. Fight to the bitter end!

“RAAAAAAAAAUAUUUUAUUUAUUGGGGGGGHHHH”

With his most ear-piercing roar he charged his opponent.

“[FLOW ACCELERATION] [STRONG STRIKE]”

He activated both his best Martial Arts at the same time, mixed together with his natural bloodlust, enhancing his body to its limits.

“[Ability Boost] [Capacity Building] [Cutting Edge]”

He heard his opponent doing the same thing as he did, and that brought happiness to him even in the face of possible death. Finally, finally he was being treated seriously. He could die proudly.

The blue haired human assumed a stance he didn't recognize. His almighty fist flew toward the blue cloaked man, but he simply crouched, making the killing blow pass just centimeters from his head.

“[Severing Blade]”

Those were the last words he heard before falling. His body impacted the ground as a boulder would. He immediately tried to stand to get away but when he tried to point his feet, he could not feel anything. Using his only healthy remaining arm, he tried to rise just enough to look at the damage he received. He gasped as he saw both of his legs lack everything beneath his knees. The severed parts of him lied just a few meters away behind him. With no possibility to heal and the mental fatigue of using all those Martial Arts, his arm gave away, making him fall flat on the ground once again, and from there he knew no more.

{Lakyus' P.O.V.}

She could do nothing but look in awe at how her teacher took down the seemingly unstoppable demi-human. '2 slashes, that's all it took to take him down' she was of course aware of the fact that the blade he used was probably a legendary item to say the

least, but still, the bare skill and mental power to use those Martial Arts to such a degree was baffling to the young lady.

The body of the troll was immediately brought away. She wasn't even sure if he was alive after losing so much blood. Her teacher stood there, looking into the void for few seconds before sheathing his blade and marching away, careless of the crowd acclaiming him, the same crowd that booed him a few minutes before.

She wanted to speak to him. She wanted to know why he was here, why he changed his mind, and why he refused to meet her eyes.

But, alas, there was no time for them to even meet as she was escorted alongside her opponent into the arena.

The filthy young woman glanced at her with a blank gaze, her only visible grass green eye peered into her soul intensely. Lakyus gulped nervously as her grip around the hilt of her sword tightened, the golden ribbon gently caressing her sweating hand 'Renner, protect me' she gave a silent prayer to her mistress. Her opponent seemed to do the same with her spear. 'She will charge. I will need to counter that, take her by surprise and get a nice hit. I have no idea what else she has up her sleeve' her lack of information due to her opponent's short matches was a huge handicap right now. 'Information is power' those were the words she heard Satoru say once, when he told her and Renner one of his tales.

“BEGIN!”

The referee announced. The young woman stood there for only a moment before using her speed to charge. Lakyus immediately

prepared to roll left to avoid her plunge. Too bad the blond woman known as Leinas did not plunge at all, instead her blade went for a side slash which nearly costed Lakyus her head if it wasn't for her short stature. The woman grimaced before jumping back.

'Did she miss on purpose?' Lakyus wondered, not understanding how the skilled woman could miscalculate such an easy strike. She nonetheless was grateful to still have her head attached to her body.

Without waiting to be attacked again the young noble retaliated in kind with a pair of swings of her own which were deflected by her opponent's spear. Unfortunately for the woman, her spear could not stand when compared to the power of Lakyus' enchanted sword and just after that exchange the steel was beginning to crack.

"Damn rubbish."

Leinas muttered as she used a ponderous kick to send her opponent back.

"[Sanctify]"

The tall woman muttered as the point of her spear began to shine in divine light. Lakyus didn't panic though. She knew that such a spell would not harm her since she was no undead or demon. 'She probably used it to strengthen her weapon's endurance... blessed steel is said to be almost indestructible... we will see...' The Re-Estize noble analyzed as she began to circle around her opponent, hoping for an opening. Her opponent began to do the same. They studied each other like two animals ready to strike at the first sight of weakness.

In a shining flash, Leinas was on her. She moved with clear experience. It was like fighting Gazef or Brain but without them holding back... ok, maybe not that bad but still, she was by far the strongest opponent Lakyus ever faced before. This was a warrior. A warrior that already shed much blood ever before entering the arena.

Lakyus' armor was made of good materials but not enchanted. The lance didn't manage to completely pierce but there was no way it could endure much more.

With a wild swing, Lakyus forced Leinas to back away. Her armor was in no way able to sustain a single strike from Lakyus' sword, and she was aware of it.

“[Flow Acceleration]”

As a way to keep up with her opponent speed, Lakyus was forced to once more rely on her only mastered Martial Art. But this only served to get even on one field. She still remained inferior in both skill and brute strength.

Their exchange continued with Lakyus being able to keep up but sooner or later her Martial Art would take its toll on her mind. It didn't help that her opponent was a master of deception, often faking an opening on her left so she would try to plunge and instead get outmaneuvered. That is how she received a particularly devious punch on her temple which made her spin as the world spun around alongside her. She found herself on all four trying to roll away from her opponent.

As she regained her balance, she found herself face to face with her teacher. Without knowing it, she rolled all the way to the

entrance of the waiting area. His brown eyes pierced her with his hard gaze.

“Give up.”

That was the only thing he said to her, which, in a way, hurt far more than the actual punch she just received. But something was different. His tone was far colder and not at all like the tone he used when ordering her around during training. Furthermore, he was lightly scratching his right cheek in a seemingly unnatural way. Lakyus' emerald eyes widened at what her teacher was trying to convey.

As if possessed, she spurred around just fast enough to block the spear directed at her back with the blunt side of her sword. She used this lock to direct a kick to her opponent's right knee, who strangely, didn't seem to realize it until it was too late.

As the stalemate was broken in her favor, she continued to press her attack, focusing largely on her opponent right side, it was like fighting a completely different person. Her parries and blocks were clumsy at best and her previously shown precision was nowhere to be seen. But still, Lakyus' was well aware that her time was up and once she lost her speed it would be all over, left side or right side.

With a faint attack, she aimed at her right upper arm just to shift the trajectory and instead cut in half the lance Leinas rose to defend herself. But this didn't seem to be enough as the woman simply discarded the useless half and continued to fight with what could only be referred to as a weird dagger by now.

In a last effort to win, as her time was running out, Lakyus let her opponent plunge her blade in her left shoulder while she used



her momentum to strike directly at her face. If Leinas reflects weren't as good as they were, she would have half of her head missing by now. Instead, the only thing that was lost were the bangs of blond hair covering her face's right side, which fell on the ground, leaving her visage fully exposed.

Lakyus felt like gagging at the sight of her marred side. Pus was flowing through what seemed to be rotting flesh that was somehow still attached to a living being. Her eye was no better, swollen and seemingly blind as the white had vanished, replaced by yellow.

The crowd that was cheering till that point silenced before people began to gag in disgust, crying out in indignation and even shouting horrible insults at the poor woman down below. And before Lakyus knew anything else, Leinas was already running away, desperately trying to cover her mangled side with both her hands.

The young noble stood there, unmoving, with her opponent's blade still half stuck in her left shoulder. As she came out of her daze, she immediately removed the blade from her shoulder, uncaring if it still was bleeding and, without even waiting for the announcement of her victory due to her opponent running out of the arena, went after Leinas.

It didn't take much to find the older woman. She was near the washing basins, scrubbing furiously at her face with a towel which was already filling with disgusting yellowish puss. Lakyus could swear that, between the sound of splashing water and vigorous scrubbing, she heard a sob. To say she felt horrible would be an understatement. She not only exploited the weakness brought by that illness during the whole match, even if

unknowingly, but she also exposed said illness to the whole arena to see.

“Excuse me.”

She tried to begin in a shy tone which was far too soft compared to her usual bold behavior. Leinas froze where she stood. She slowly turned with the towel still covering most of her face, so to hide the disgusting sight beneath. When green met green, the woman’s gaze hardened and Lakyus could almost see the hatred emanating from her.

“I wanted to apologize. It wasn’t my intention to bring such shame to you, or exploit your illness to defeat you... I am certain I would have lost if it wasn’t for it. You are a very skilled warrior... if there is anything I can do for you, please tell me.”

She blurted out all that came to her mind in order to apologize and the woman’s gaze seemed to lose some of her hostility, replacing it with resignation.

“There is nothing you can do.”

She whispered harshly.

“Wait! I am sure that I could use my name to try and have a priest take a look at that!”

Those words were apparently the wrong thing to say as the woman clenched her teeth and slammed a fist on the water basin, shattering it.

“The temple! They even refused to examine me since I could not afford it once my family disowned me due to my disfiguration! My fiancée took my funds as reparation for having to break up

the engagement to such an ugly woman! And no one else dared to employ or even come near me in fear of contracting my curse! And you! You think you can just come here and solve everything?! You naïve child who didn't even shed her blood yet! Do you fancy yourself a miracle worker?! Or maybe a saint?!"

The harsh words full of anger butchered Lakys' spirit like a sharp knife would her skin. She only recently began to understand what a horrible place the world really was. Discrimination, famine, suffering and senseless torture. She had been shielded and hidden from the truth all her life, and when the illusion fell, when the world confronted her, she had no words but empty promises for it. 'how foolish'.

"You are right... I cannot help you. I cannot give you back what you lost, but I know someone that could at least be able to take away that burden you carry."

She said, her tone as serious and solemn as it could be. In a last attempt of defiance, the woman removed her towel, exposing once again her horrid visage, but this time the young noble didn't flinch or avert her gaze. She focused her emerald, green eyes on the rotting flesh, and the various disgusting fluids running down her chin.

"Meet me here and then we will see what we can do about that."

Lakys said while passing Leinas the address of the inn she and her group were staying at, before leaving the disowned noble alone with her thoughts.

{Renner's P.O.V.}

"Oh my, it seems like the only remaining participants are from the Re-Estize Kingdom, who would have guessed?"

She innocently said to the irritation of most of the nobles and ministers present in the VIP box. No one dared to challenge her unspoken claim though. The emperor simply offered a nod, still refusing to meet her eyes.

“An unforeseen development I must admit, but with such an experienced swordsman and young raw talent, I can’t say I am too surprised.”

He offered in his usual cordial tone which was not matched by the empty look in his eyes. Satoru remained silent even if most in the room knew that he was the major reason for that outcome in the first place. There was no denying that his equipment played a primary role in the previous matches.

The magic caster had been silent ever since the merchant he brought back with him left to tend to his protégé after exchanging a few words with Satoru.

“Sir Gazef, do you think Lakyus has the slightest of chances?”

Asked a hopeful Arche, a strange girl in Renner’s mind. She didn’t seem all that interested at first, but the princess could not help but notice how the young caster’s eyes always wandered toward Lakyus every time she fought. ‘Lakyus is mine anyway’ the third princess dismissed any kind of worry from her mind.

“No.”

To her surprise the answer came simultaneously from Gazef and Satoru.

“She is tired, and it is still a miracle she can stand with all the strain her young body went through today. Brain is a skilled

warrior and didn't use as much of his energy as Lakyus did. He also has an incomparable amount of experience in battling."

The Warrior Captain stated in complete seriousness, leaving no opening for arguments. 'Surely Satoru is responsible for Lakyus power boost, but everything has limits I guess' the princess thought in a little bit of resignation. She would truly have liked it if Lakyus could win this tournament in her name.

"The quality of their blades is also a big factor in this, and, while Lakyus' was enchanted by me, it is by far not one of my greatest works, while Brain's katana was forged by one of my dearest friends with the ultimate goal of being a bane for all living things."

Satoru confirmed Gazef's statement by adding his own opinion. 'This was certainly fine advertisement for you, my Satoru. I would not be surprised if people came from the empire to the kingdom only to buy your magic items' In her mind, she thought that showing his better quality was the only thing Satoru could do at this point. After all, to start a business in the empire would be like going against the emperor's authority. The cons would by far outmatch the pros.

Arche's head sank at the two men's explanations. It seems like she really liked Lakyus for some reason. Satoru didn't waste time and, being the gentle soul she knew, petted the blond caster on the head a few times, eliciting a slight jealousy from the princess.

"Do not worry, she has already done far more than anyone could have expected from her. She will lose to one of the strongest swordsmen of the kingdom. There is no shame in that. As long as she learns something useful, she will always grow stronger."

Satoru said with certainty in his reassuring voice. The young caster rose her gaze once more to look directly at him.

“L-Lord Satoru, I-I was really moved by your s-speech at the Academy. I-I have a request! C-Could you take me in as an apprentice?! I k-know you have had n-none yet! B-But I would be honored to learn from someone I-like you!”

Arche requested to the surprise of many who knew already of her position among Fluder’s students. To think she would walk away from that life was unthinkable for many. Renner, of course, was already prepared for such an event and didn’t even shift her expression a little. ‘Jircniv would have never accepted defeat so easily... oh well, let him play all the games he wants, after all... Satoru is already mine and no one else will have him’ her heart pounded loudly against her small ribcage at that thought. She slightly flushed red for a moment before calming down.

“Ah, young Arche, that was... an unexpected request, aren’t you part of Sir Fluder’s elite students already?”

The masked magic caster seemed taken aback by the request, his acting skill as good as always in Renner’s view.

“Y-Yes! I already spoke with L-Lord Fluder about this, and he agrees with me... he has far too m-many duties to give the appropriate time m-my Talent would require to me... t-these were his own w-words, he a-adviced me to find a t-teacher with less students a-and you are surely a b-brilliant caster, if not on the same level as L-Lord Fluder himself!”

She said with a nervous tone. Satoru brought his right hand to his mask as if in deep concentration.

“I... I will think about it... I will let you know tomorrow.”

He finally said, making Arche's eyes shine in hope. But the moment was ended when the final match was announced.

{Lakyus' P.O.V.}

'So, this is it... going in the finals with a pierced shoulder and a sore body... augh...' she lamented inside. She had just enough time to stop the bleeding and bandage up her injured shoulder before a staff member of the arena came to collect her. Both her and Brain were given different rooms so as to avoid any possible altercations before the match, not like such a thing would happen, but still she was annoyed at the forced separation. She really wanted to speak with her teacher.

As they were escorted through the corridor leading to the arena, her teacher didn't even glance at her, refusing to meet her eyes. They entered the battle area as they did many times before, even if now it was bathed in the dwelling light of the sunset. The crowd was shouting their names again and again with equal vigor.

They took their positions without uttering a word to each other, and soon after the referee announced the beginning of the final match.

Lakyus gripped her sword's hilt with her good arm, the golden ribbon shining in the dwelling light. Her teacher instead made no move to even reach for his blade. He just stood there, defenseless. 'I-is he looking down on me?' she thought, more depressed than angered at the thought.

"Come now child, strike me down, end this farce."

The quiet words barely reached her as her eyes widened.

"Wha-"

She almost shouted, confused by such an absurd request.

“I even broke my vow to renounce fighting for this... if there is anyone who should end me, that is you... use what I taught you to deliver me a good final rest.”

He continued, while fury built up in Lakyus' heart. ‘Was this your goal... all this time?’ she slowly paced toward him.

And as soon as she was in front of him, she swung her hand and slapped him as hard as she could. Due to her height she could barely hit his chin but that was enough for her.

“DON'T MESS WITH ME! WERE YOU PREPARING YOUR EXECUTIONER ALL ALONG?! WAS EVERYTHING A LIE?! WELL THEN! YOU ARE RIGHT! YOU ARE WORTHLESS AND DESPICABLE! BUT THAT ISN'T BECAUSE YOU LOST TO SATORU! THAT IS BECAUSE YOU GAVE UP ON EVERYTHING!”

She shouted at him in absolute rage, his wide brown eyes met hers for the first time in the whole day.

“DID YOU FEEL DESTROYED WHEN YOU LOST?! HOW DO YOU THINK I FELT EVERYTIME YOU MANAGED TO DEFEAT ME WITH A SINGLE HIT! EVEN IF I WAS ARMED AND YOU WERE NOT!”

She continued blurting out all her frustration.

“That's different-“

The blue haired man tried to defend his point but Lakyus didn't want to hear anything else from him.

“LIKE HELL IT IS! YOU BASTARD MADE ME FEEL WORTHLESS NO MATTER HOW MUCH I TRAINED AND PRACTICED! I SPENT DAYS



FROM DAWN TO DUSK TO BETTER MYSELF AND YET IT ALL SEEMED USELESS EVERY TIME I FACED YOU!”

She continued to rant as she struck him with her small fists everywhere she could reach.

“YOU ARE NO TEACHER OF MINE! AND I AM NO PUPPET TO BE MANOUVERED! NOW TAKE UP THAT FUCKING BLADE AND STRIKE ME DOWN IF YOU CAN!”

With those words Lakys took a few steps back, not enough to get out of range and took a stance, a stance her teacher knew well. She perfectly pointed her feet one behind the other as she crouched.

“You...”

He muttered in surprise and anger.

“That stance... is completely wrong, a mockery of what it should be.”

He grinded his teeth as his hand twitched in annoyance.

“Then show me how it’s done, if you can do any better.”

She challenged back further aggravating the man’s ego ‘after all it is a stance of his own creation’ she regretted having to go so low as to mock him to his face, but she wanted him to react.

And maybe her plan had gone too well since the swordman took her own stance, albeit with some slight corrections to his posture. ‘Here goes nothing!’ she thought as she tried to use the Martial Art she previously practiced in secret after looking at it multiple times.

“[Instantaneous Flash]”

She cried out as her, admittedly, sloppy version of the true Martial Art was unleashed, followed by the same shout from Brain who unleashed a far more perfect execution of the technique.

The two enchanted blades clashed unleashing a mixture of electric sparks and dark drop of miasma. The power behind her teacher’s blade was unreal she felt like her arm was being teared apart and she had no option but loosen her grip. Her blue blade instantly flew away from her grasp as she fell on her back, the mental strain finally hitting her with all its might and the last thing she saw was the orange sky looking back at her and then nothing more.

{The next day}

{Satoru’s P.O.V.}

“Is the young miss recovering well?”

Asked Osk the merchant as he sat in his study on the opposite side of the arcane magic caster Satoru. The masked man limited himself to nod.

“Indeed, she is just sore and exhausted. Nothing too extreme.”

He said in a calm but hard tone.

“I believed that would be the case. Those potions of yours seem more like miracle workers than anything the temple ever came up with.”

The man sighed.

“Go Gin is recovering just fine as well. He is glad that his natural regeneration returned as usual. That potion really saved him from bleeding out to his death. For that I am in your debt.”

The merchant continued with a deep bow aimed at Satoru who just shrugged in uneasiness at the amount of respect shown.

“Do not thank me. I felt partially responsible for giving out the blade that caused him so much pain in the first place.”

He said trying to shift the matter to a more even field.

“It is only natural for a patron to equip their champion with the best gear they have available, and speaking of which, Go Gin already requested me for some of your magic items to use in the future... it seems like our partnership will be further extended.”

Osk rebutted to Satoru’s interest ‘being an official sponsor of one of the future famous fighters in the arena may just be worth the travel to the empire I guess’ he thought in satisfaction.

“I hope our partnership will be lucrative and pleasant in the future.”

The magic caster finally said, offering a gloved hand to the shorter man who grasped it and shook it eagerly with a big predatory smile.

“I hope so as well. Speaking of other matters, I have the coins from your credit toward the arena right here.”

The human produced a coin purse filled to the brim in gold and platinum coins from his desk. But the caster’s attention already diverted toward the walls of the merchant’s office. They were filled with what seemed to be enchanted items or rare weapons,

one in particular grabbing his attention. An axe with what seemed to be three glowing symbols on the blade, or at least that would be what an untrained eye would see. What Satoru saw was a weapon with runes on it, runes he only thought belonged to Yggdrasil.

“Ah, did my little collection grasp your attention?”

The merchant asked after following the caster’s gaze.

“Indeed. May I inquire the origin of that runic weapon?”

The undead asked. Osk shrugged.

“That is one of my best pieces, a masterpiece of Rune craftsmanship from the Dwarven Kingdom.”

That managed to pique Satoru’s interest.

“Oh, Dwarven Kingdom? I never heard of it.”

The magic caster tried to get all he could squeeze from him.

“Oh, I don’t really know all that much, just details.”

The merchant said with a glint in his eyes and a clear innuendo in his voice. ‘Merchants will be merchants I guess, and trading in information is a sign of great expertise in the field’ Satoru admitted as he himself was one of those people.

“I may be willing to lift transportation costs for future items in exchange for useful information.”

He conceded to the merchant who now sported a cat like grin on his face.

“It’s a pleasure doing business with you Sir Satoru.”

{Hours later}

The arcane caster just returned to the inn when Brain came up to him and told him Lakyus wanted to see him. 'It seems like those two have reconciled with each other' Without anything urgent to do, he decided to see what the recovering girl wanted.

Once he entered Lakyus and Renner's room, he immediately noticed two people inside. One was, of course, the recovering Lakyus, still in her bed, but the other wasn't Renner. She apparently was called for a meeting with the emperor. No, the other woman had blond hair and a poorly made mask covering her face.

"Ah Satoru! Welcome back! I must ask you for a favor!"

The young noble greeted him with her usual smile which slowly disappeared from her face as she continued.

"Could you see if you can do anything about Lady Leinas'... problem?"

She asked unsure of what to say. He immediately recalled that name. It was hard to forget a skilled warrior but even more a person with half of their face rotting away and still alive was hard to miss.

As if catching his thoughts, the blond woman slowly took off her mask, revealing the disgusting spectacle behind it. He once again had to thank his undead body which made gagging impossible and his Emotional Suppression for preventing him from flinching at the sight. Instead, he took a chair, silently reinforcing it with a spell, and sat in front of the disfigured woman.

"How did you exactly end up like this?"

He asked as he faked examining her face's ruined half.

"I killed a monster, and I was cursed for it."

She said coldly. 'A curse, eh? I have some good ones up my sleeve myself. They are mostly for roleplay though. After all, they all got nerfed over the years' Satoru pondered as he thought for a solution. Curse builds were totally broken in the early years of Yggdrasil. They could easily be spammed and stacked, miserably crippling even level 100 players. After a ton of complaining, they were officially nerfed, and most were unable to stack nowadays.

Satoru used one of his fingers to poke her rotting cheek. Leinas immediately flinched.

"Does it hurt if I touch it?"

He asked curiously.

"N-no, but no one ever touched me there since..."

She didn't have to finish her sentence for Satoru to understand.

"I see. I would like to try something and see how this curse reacts, just to assess how powerful it actually is."

He explained. There should be no reaction to an appraisal spell though. In Yggdrasil, killing certain enemies could curse certain races, but the worst curses were all given by high level monsters if not Raid Bosses. This curse shouldn't have been anything special.

He proceeded to cast a [Status Analysis], a high tier appraisal spell which could only be countered by at least a 5<sup>th</sup> tier anti-information spell or an item with the same effect. 'Uhm, she even got a level in Cursed Knight. It must be a rare class. It would be a

shame to risk it being removed, but still...' the hopeful light in Lakyus' eyes went against his more pragmatic on collector instincts. He sighed inside his own mind. 'Oh well. No point in forcing someone into a path they don't want to follow. Such a shame...' he finally resigned himself.

"I may be able to lift that curse, but you may suffer from a loss of strength. For how strange it may seem to you, curses do not only take from your body, but they give as well. Part of your strength is linked to that curse. Are you ready to sever that bond?"

He asked the surprised knightess.

"Yes, I will do anything to get rid of it. I do not even care for the cost. I will be your servant if you need me to be... just, please... remove it."

She begged, desperation now prevalent in her tone. 'If I wasn't an undead, I would definitely feel bad for her' Satoru mused to himself before raising his hand. [Break Curse] was a 7<sup>th</sup> tier spell and, while the name might misinform, it wasn't a spell restricted to divine magic casters. Instead, many who specialized into the curse classes, or had some good ones at least, could learn it.

As he cast the spell, the puss and rotting flesh began to melt away until it splattered on the ground with a disgusting sound. He immediately used a silent [Clean] to remove the disgusting mess. In place of it all now was a rosy type of flesh that reminded Satoru of the one on newborns. Leinas' right eye was still closed as she gasped for air. The removal of the curse seemed to have its effects on her, or maybe it was just the loss of a class? Satoru would have really liked to experiment on that.

Almost a minute passed before Leinas moved both her hands up to her face and touched her, now free, flesh. Then as slowly as it was possible, her right eye began to open, revealing a perfect eye identical to her left one. She slowly stood up and stumblingly approached the mirror in the room to look at her reflection.

The undead took advantage of this and cast again his spell.

(Status Analysis)

‘A shame, the class seems to be gone... oh well...’ Disappointed, he approached the blond knight intent on examining her reflection in all its details.

“I am sorry for the flesh; I am sure it will come back to a more normal color soon.”

That was all he managed to say before the knightess fell on her knees grasping tightly his black gown. Copious amounts of tears were running down her cheeks.

“T-thank y-you... T-thank y-you...”

She continued to whisper her thanks to him while her whole body was shaken by a violent fit of sobbing. Feeling quite embarrassed and wanting to shift the troublesome situation on someone else, his gaze fell on the only other occupant of the room.

“Do not thank me. Thank Lakyus instead. The only reason I did this is because I held this young lady in high regard.”

That seemed to work as Leinas went to an embarrassed and blushing Lakyus, allowing him to flee the scene.

{Emperor’s private study}



{Jircniv's P.O.V.}

He was once again alone with the Devil herself, as a partner in crime with her this time. 'Subordinate would be more accurate' he thought bitterly even as he couldn't deny the future benefits her plan will bring to him and the empire as a whole.

'Consolidating my power and getting rid of those nobles in one swoop' he told himself as even he could not deny the devilish genius behind the plan.

The box full of documents was shut close in front of him as Renner applied a lock to it. She glanced at him forcing the emperor to avert his gaze.

"I hope you are satisfied."

He said in his business-like tone, irritation bubbling behind it.

"Oh, don't be a crybaby Jir, you will profit just as much as me from this, if not more, and you know it well."

He bit his tongue to avoid giving her a snarky remark that would have done nothing more than concede his defeat.

"I just have one question... why spare that one? He surely is a dangerous liability to simply be left around."

He asked, this time curious to know the devil princess' reasoning.

"Ah, your majesty, you should know it by now. A country cannot be led by one person alone. We all need competent subordinates to carry out our tasks... and, we could say, he will receive a slap on the wrist for the troubles he caused."

For some reason that didn't sound assuring at all for the emperor.

“We will be in touch, right Jir? We are such good friends after all...”

She said in a slightly louder worried tone so that the guards outside could hear her. ‘What an actor, as expected from a devil’ Jircniv limited himself to mental insults for lack of a better way to convey his displeasure.

“O-Of course Renner, I feel like I found a friend in you!”

He continued the farce as they agreed before ‘thank the Gods, I will not see her again anytime soon...’ he mentally added as a mere consolation.

“Yes, let’s be friends forever!”

She gave him one of her fake smiles while saying those words cheerfully. ‘The scariest thing is that she might fool almost everyone with that acting... she really seems another person...’ he felt the need to facepalm but refrained due to his etiquette. But even the most set-in stone manner went out of the window when she got in his face, those horrible, lifeless, all-devouring, blue pools fixed on his eyes.

“And remember, don’t mess with Satoru.”

She whispered in his ears, a symphony of death that would have made lesser men wet themselves.

“Gazef!”

She called and immediately the Warrior Captain, without any weapon, of course, entered the room followed by his imperial guard just in case.

“Take the box and guard it no matter what until you can give it to Satoru for safekeeping... it is a matter of kingdom-level importance.”

Many would have laughed at the 8, almost 9 years old princess saying something so grim and serious, but apparently Gazef Stronoff wasn't among them as he proceeded to do as instructed with the upmost diligence. ‘A real waste, having such a man working for such a worthless country’ the emperor lamented once more the loss of such a man.

It was only an hour later, when they were far gone that he allowed himself to relax and call for one of his favorite maids ‘Roxy will cheer me up for sure... I need to sleep...’ he sighed again.

{Few days later}

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

“So, what will you do now?”

The blond noble asked her ex-teacher.

“No idea. Explore here and there, see the world, fight something or someone along the way.”

Answered the blue haired man.

“I am glad you are recovering just fine.”

Interjected Gazef who just received a scowl from his rival.

“Don't push it Stronoff. I just had to unsheathe my blade again because this damn brat is so fucking stubbornly relentless!”

Brain mocked even if the affection could be heard behind the harsh words.

“By the way magic caster, are you sure it is fine for me to keep that blade? You aren’t going to hunt me down for it later, are you?”

He asked Satoru half joking and half serious.

“My name is Satoru, and no, I will not hunt you down for it later... unless you lose it... in that case your life is forfeit.”

He answered in what he thought to be a joking tone, but all his companions seemed to take his words very seriously. ‘Uhm, I think this is the right thing. Takemi would have much more liked for his experiment to have a cool story around it instead of rusting in my inventory... I just hope this doesn’t backfire somehow’ the undead mused, his paranoia kicking in.

“My Lady, I will reach you as soon as my business is done here.”

Those words were spoken by the ex-cursed knight Leinas as she gave a bow to Lakyus who blushed intensely.

“D-D-Don’t call me t-that! J-just call me Lakyus a-already! And you don’t have any obligation towards me, just do as you want!”

The Re-Estize noble protested but the empire’s knight seemed to ignore her comment.

“I just need to crush some cockroaches and teach a lesson to some people... then I will come to you to repay my debt.”

She elaborated. ‘Ah! I am just glad I avoided all this crap! Sorry Lakyus, but you must take responsibility for your actions’ the

undead magic caster justified as he got on his cart which was far less full than when he arrived.

After the arena spectacles, the whole city went crazy for his magic items and many workers or arena fighters came to him for them. He almost sold everything in just a few days. 'And to think this should have been my vacation after a year of hard work in this new world' he sighed again.

"S-sorry for the w-wait!"

The blond Empire's noble named Arche just arrived with her chest, full of personal items probably. She immediately used a spell to make it float and set in the cart. The additional weight should be no problem for the horse golem.

"T-thank you again for accepting me a-as your student Master! I promise I will do my best!"

She proclaimed while giving him a deep bow before getting on the cart herself. 'Ugh, what did I get myself into? I know I should have refused... but the occasion of observing how a magic caster advanced through their studies in this world... it was really too much to pass on' he reasoned with himself, trying to make sense of his previous choice.

In that moment, he felt someone jump on his lap, and who would it be if not the affection starved princess? He calmly began to pet her head as she flashed him one of her smiles, her affection clear all over her face, like during their alone time among the stars. 'Well... I guess this was still fun...' the undead finally conceded before giving the mental order to the horse golem to move once all were in position.

And so ended his adventure to the empire. The time to return was upon them all, and it seemed like destiny had already planned far ahead for all there is to come next.

**A.N.**

**Yep, longest chapter again... almost 10k words this time. That is going to be hard to beat...**

**Okay, just to avoid any confusion, Go Gin lost due to his lack of magic items and the hard counter which was Brain's sword. If the battlefield was even I would have not known who could have won. Lakyus of course should have lost that match but, yet again, Satoru came in to save the day with his superior equipment and his buffs. Also, Leinas was cursed not long before this point so yeah, she still had a long way to go if she wanted to master combat with just the use of her left eye. This is my explanation for the result of the matches, feel free to disagree but I am sticking with my reasoning.**

**For all the Renner/Satoru fans out there, you are going to have a blast during the next chapters I am sure. We are coming back to the kingdom and those two will certainly be the center of attention for a while.**

**For all those who didn't like the Lakyus centric chapters, it is over (for now), but keep in mind, she is a big secondary character, maybe the biggest one, and her personality and choices are going to affect the future, so I think it is only fair for her to have her own spotlight and give her appropriate development.**

**That said, I am very glad about how the empire arc came out as a whole. I hope you all liked it too. Make sure to let me know in a**

**review. I love all reviews! It is a big part of what keeps me writing as I love to share my work with all of you.**

**Again, a huge shoutout to my betas for their great work during all these months, for the adjusting of my, sometimes, clumsy grammar and for sticking with me through this arc as well.**

**Have a nice day and leave a review, will you?**

**And stay safe!**