

A promotional image for Devil May Cry 3: Deadly Fortune 1. It features Dante and Vergil in a close, intense pose. Dante is on the left, smiling slightly, while Vergil is on the right, looking serious. A blue starburst graphic is positioned between their faces. The background is dark with falling white particles. The text 'DEVIL MAY CRY' is written in a red, stylized font across the middle. Below it, the subtitle '- Deadly Fortune 1 -' is written in a black, italicized font. At the bottom center, there is a logo for 'THE ORIGINAL DEVIL MAY CRY' with a red triangle above the word 'ORIGINAL'.

DEVIL MAY CRY

- Deadly Fortune 1 -

THE ORIGINAL
DEVIL MAY CRY

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BINGO MORIHASHI

ORIGINALLY TRANSLATED BY

THE ORIGINAL DEVIL MAY CRY

REWRITTEN BY

***VERGIL APOLOGIST* ∞**

THE ORIGINAL DEVIL MAY CRY

[HTTPS://ORIGINALDMC.GITHUB.IO/DIVINITYSTATUE](https://originaldmc.github.io/divinitystatue)

A WORD FROM THE ORIGINAL DEVIL MAY CRY

The Devil May Cry 4: Deadly Fortune novels have been greatly reworked by Vergil Apologist, with both the Japanese inconsistencies fixed and the English issues being improved. The translation has finally left the 'rough' status, and now you can experience it with coherency and the way that it was meant to be understood.

Muhammad Junaid

- THE ORIGINAL DEVIL MAY CRY

A WORD FROM REWRITER

This is actually more of a rewrite than a retranslation, mostly based on the previous translation so that it reads more coherently - though I did double check with the original Japanese version to make sure I got the correct interpretation of things and I'm confident enough in my understanding of the language. I apologize for any inaccuracies!

Valentino De Luca

- VERITAL APOLOGIST



大人気ゲーム

完全バライズ!

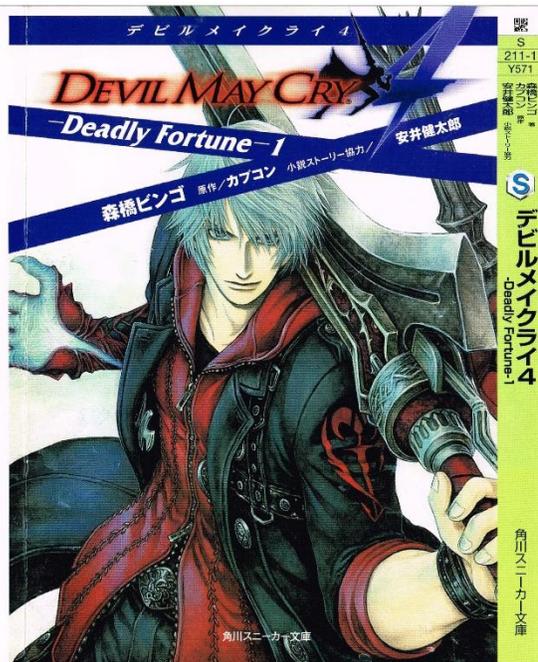
スニーカー文庫 若き戦士、ネロ。デビルハンター、ダンテ。
ふたりの邂逅が、世界を揺るがす!

●森橋ピンゴ

2002年から4年間、株式会社カプコンに在籍、「デビルメイクライ」シリーズの開発に関わった後、小説執筆活動を行う。現在はカプコンを退社し、フリーランス。

この本が出る頃には東京への移住が完了している予定。さよなら青春の大坂。

カバーイラスト/THORES炭本
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デビルメイクライ4
Deadly Fortune 1

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城塞都市フォルトナ。そこで信仰される魔剣教団の若き教団騎士ネロは、ずば抜けた実力を持ちながら、その孤高の性格ゆえに周囲から疎んじられていた。任務をこなしながらも鬱屈とした日々を送っていたネロだったが、ある日教団の教皇が暗殺されるという事件が起こる。犯人は、深紅のコートに身を包んだ銀髪の男。ネロは男を追跡するが――。全世界でヒットした超人気ゲームシリーズの最新作が、待望の小説版で登場！



NERO

ネロ

「魔劍教団」に所属する若き教団騎士。その抜きんできた実力と、他者を容易に近づけない性格から、周囲からは距離を置かれている。

デビルメイクライ4

DEVIL MAY CRY

-Deadly Fortune- 1

GLORIA
グロリア

「魔劍教団」の幹部。教団に入信後、わずかな期間で幹部になったという事実から、教団内ではよからぬ噂もささやかれている。

SANCTUS
サンクトゥス

「魔劍教団」の教皇。

AGNUS
アグナス

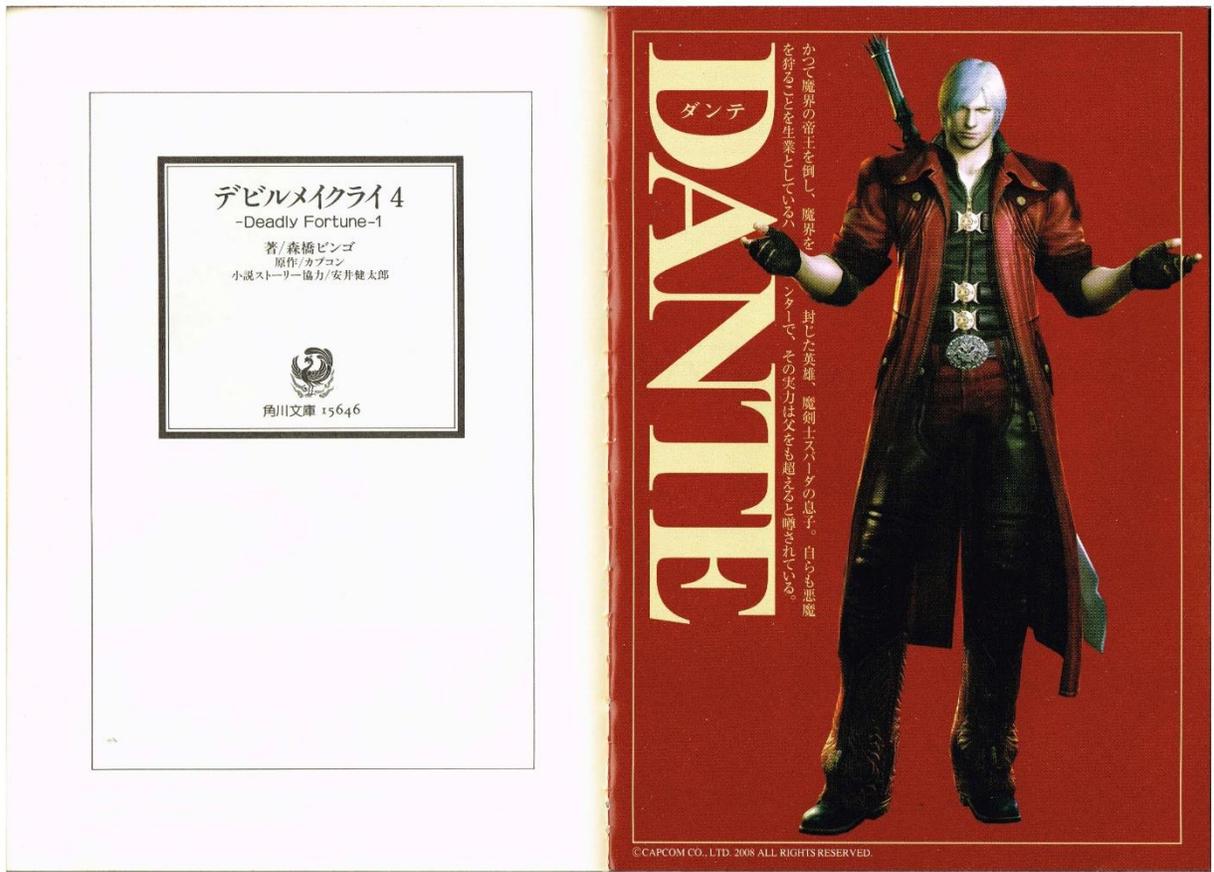
「魔劍教団」の技術局長。悪魔に対抗するための武器を開発しているが、研究に没頭しているためにその姿を知る者は少ない。

KYRIE
キリエ

騎士团长クレドを兄にもつ少女。ネロと家族同様に育ち、彼にとつては姉、あるいは母親のような存在。

CREDO
クレド

キリエの兄。「魔劍教団」の騎士团长を務め、その実力と統率力から人々も厚い。



デビルメイクライ4
-Deadly Fortune-1

著/森橋ビンゴ
原作/カプコン
小説ストーリー協力/安井健太郎



角川文庫 15646

ダンテ

DANTE

かつて魔界の帝王を倒し、魔界を
浄化することを生業としているハ
ンターで、その父は父をも超えろと囁かされている。
封じた英雄、魔剣士ハートの息子。自らも悪魔

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SUMMARY

In the walled city of Fortuna, Nero, a young Holy Knight of the Order of the Sword, lives a lonesome life due to his brash, abrasive personality.

One day, the head of the Order is assassinated by a mysterious silver-haired man in a red trench coat - and Nero is the one tasked to hunt down this mysterious man and bring him to justice.

STAGE 01



Moonlight shone down on the streets of Fortuna, covering them like a thin film.

As demon activity was rampant on the island no resident in their right mind would be going out in the middle of the night, and that particular evening, the moon shone an ominous red.

A lone blonde woman walked the streets, as if mocking that very notion.

Her black leather bodice and tight pants stood out starkly against the background of the highly religious town as she walked towards a tree by the side of the road, and leaned against its trunk.

“You couldn’t choose a better place to rendezvous?”

The woman, Trish, spoke softly as if she was talking to herself. The man she was addressing jumped down from the branch he was perched on, his bright red leather coat also

incredibly out of place when compared to what was customary to the people of Fortuna.

"No way, I can't think of a better place to get a real good look around."

After listening to him speak, Trish sighed a little.

"Forget it, I don't have time to argue. Do you want to hear my report or not?"

The man, Dante, nodded.
He was a demon hunter from a place far, far away from Fortuna.

He shrugged.

"By all means, but make it quick, all this walking around has tired me out."

Truth to be told, Dante wasn't tired at all, which Trish knew all too well, but she didn't comment on it.

"...the cult is called the "Order of the Sword", and they're doing experiments to attempt to imbue humans with demonic power. The current leader started it all."

"...and?"

“Ultimately, it seems his goal is what these types of villains always want: world domination. But it’s always more unpleasant when they’re the religious type. The leader and his cronies, they all think they’re doing the right thing and saving the world, or whatever.”

Dante sighed in boredom.

“This again...? How are there guys like that still around?”

“Well, if you don’t want to take this job, I can do it myself, you know.”

Trish smirked mischievously. She was just teasing him; she knew Dante wouldn’t turn down any demon related job. She knew that with certainty.

“...I'll take it. I have no reason not to.”

Trish pointed in the direction of a large building; her expression solemn.

“Tomorrow, they’re going to hold the Festival of the Blade, right over there. The most prominent Order members will all be present, the Vicar himself included.”

While listening to Trish, Dante looked at the Opera House, which looked like it was built in some nondescript old-timey era. It fit right in with the whole town’s quaint, dated

landscape, yet still managed to be eye-catching. It was the main place of worship for the religion that the Order preached.

“Festival of the Blade? Is there going to be a party or something?”

Trish shook her head at Dante’s words.

“The ceremony itself is nothing special. Apparently, they have someone sing hymns to Sparda, the Vicar’s going to give a sermon and people will pray... that’s it.”

Dante scoffed.

“Do people really like this sort of thing?”

“It’s a very important ceremony for those who believe. If you had to compare, I’d say it sounds more like a church event than anything.”

Dante, who wasn’t particularly religious, muttered something under his breath about it being no fun.

“The point is: the Vicar, who usually stays holed up in the Order headquarters, will be at the ceremony.”

“...Well then, let’s make sure this opportunity doesn’t go to waste.”

As he said that, Dante pulled a gun of dark, carved metal out of its holster. He toyed with it - its name was Ebony - for a little bit before squinting.

“...so, the Vicar is no longer human, are you sure about that?”

Trish nodded gently at Dante's question. Somewhere in the distance, dogs howled at the red moon.



STAGE 02



When I opened my eyes, my right hand was still the same as it had been ever since last month. No matter how much I'd like to believe it was all just a dream I'd wake up from, unfortunately that was the bitter reality. I removed the bandages wrapped tightly around it, revealing hard, armor-like scales, which definitely didn't belong on human skin.

I couldn't even tell if what I was looking at was my own arm anymore, even though it moved and acted as I willed it to. Is that really my hand? That same question buzzed around my head every morning when I woke up.

While I was lost in these thoughts, I heard a knock at my door. I hastily redid my bandages in a blind panic. No one can see this arm. If anyone saw it, they'd surely think I was a demon.

Yeah... definitely a demon.

Ever since that day, my arms looked just like a demon's.

I rose from bed to open the door, and found Kyrie standing at the threshold.

Since the incident, she'd been coming to look after me every day - since, well, officially what I told everyone is that my right arm had been injured.

Truth to be told, the injury itself wasn't a lie, it really did happen. But instead of healing normally, it turned into that thing. I had no idea whether I had been injected with some type of demon poison, or was possessed or something freaky like that. It didn't matter, because I definitely couldn't let Kyrie know what had happened - I didn't want her to worry.

"Good morning, Nero."

Kyrie smiled as she greeted me.

".....You're early."

I scratched my head as I replied, and Kyrie laughed:
"Why's your hair all messy?"

"Well, I just got up."

“Come on, go brush it, you have to look your best today...”

Kyrie’s hand moved to touch my hair.

“I know... I’m not a kid, I can do it myself.”

I gently batted Kyrie’s hand away.

I’d known Kyrie since we were kids, but since she was one year older than me, she tended to baby me at every given chance.

“Well... is your right hand, okay?”

She looked at the bandages wrapping my arm, and I shrugged.

“...It's fine.”

“But it’s been taking a long time to heal...”

Hearing Kyrie sound so worried made something unpleasant spike in my heart, but I absolutely couldn’t tell her the truth, or she’d only have gotten even more concerned.

“Instead of worrying about me, shouldn’t you be getting yourself ready for the ceremony?”

Kyrie bowed her head, looking away.

"...I admit I'm a little nervous."

That day was the day of the Festival of the Blade. Every year, the entire Order attends the ceremony... it's just the vicar giving the same sermon every time, but this year, Kyrie was chosen as the singer, so there was no way I could miss it.

"Isn't the song you're singing one you've practiced a lot in church?"

Kyrie smiled a little uncertainly.

"Well, it's not the same, I've never sang in front of so many people."

I really wanted to say something comforting to help her get over her nerves, but nothing would come up that seemed up to task.

"...but I already feel a bit better after talking to you, thank you."

Kyrie had to have known what was going on in my head, and reassured me so I wouldn't feel bad. Honestly, being thanked for having done basically nothing left feeling me a bit embarrassed.

“Are you going to come listen?”

“Yeah, I will.”

The Festival of the Blade is a big deal, but attendance is not mandatory, so every year I tried to find a new excuse to skip it. If I had to be honest, I wasn't the most devout believer - and the way they talked about it in the Order really rubbed me the wrong way, sometimes. But I had nothing bad to say about Kyrie's pure, honest belief.

Kyrie nodded, and I watched as she left and closed the door behind her.

Somehow, I managed to keep my hand from her today too, but I was still left with a sense of deep unease.

Could my hand be fixed, somehow?

As I untied the bandages, I could see the blue light coming through the cracks in the scales flickering softly in time with my breathing, as if it really had been perfectly incorporated with my body.

Surely this had to be an effect of that injury?

My mind wandered back to the events of last month.



It all started when a demon appeared in the forest at the edge of town.

It probably has something to do with the fact that the Legendary Dark Knight used to rule over the island, but whatever the reason, Fortuna's always had very high demonic activity, much more than other places. Demon encounters are a not unusual part of everyday life, here.

That's where The Order of the Sword comes in. It's said that they've been fighting to protect the island from demons for a very long time, ever since the town's founding.

The Holy Knights, just as their name implies, all wear big heavy armor that could honestly pass as some kind of costume, and that's been the tradition since pretty much forever.

Thanks to the knights' presence, demon attacks aren't usually cause for worry. As soon as the Order's notified they will

dispatch their forces to deal with it. When the incident of last month happened, that's what was supposed to happen as well, but for some reason there were way more demons than normal.

Usually, the demons that make it to Fortuna are just small fries, so the Order only sent three knights to deal with it.

That day, I was in a small studio, far from where the attack was taking place. Though I'm also a Holy Knight, I'm never given tasks like that, mostly because I'm not really a team player.

I don't like to dogmatically believe everything the church preaches and I refuse to wear my uniform, so if I were to be seen with the other knights, I'd make the whole Order look bad. A knight is supposed to be a hero in shining armor... and I'm as far from that as can be.

Well, it's not like I have no use there. I might have no business with tasks that require teamwork, but there's plenty of solo tasks to take care of. Even the Order has its secrets - demons it needs to dispose of quietly.

Sure, most demons look like it at first glance, but sometimes, a human can be possessed by a demon and go unnoticed by the people around it.

It's not really clear how it might happen, either. All that's important is that the people of Fortuna would never believe

it possible that anything like that could happen to them, because they're so sure their belief in Sparda will protect them from all evil.

For the Order, that belief is the most important thing. If it came to light that even a staunch believer could still be possessed by demons, the Order would lose all credibility... therefore, human beings possessed by demons must be disposed of in secret.

In secret, working alone and without making a scene - that's my job. The Order's dirty work.

In no way am I a cold-blooded murderer, but when someone's been possessed, there's no other way to save them. It's not pleasant, but someone has to do it, and I'll do it if no one else will.

Besides that, I don't really have much else tying me to the Church.

As I was saying, that day I was in a small studio, because I had no business dealing with the ongoing attack. I was busy working on my gun - another reason why I didn't get along with the people in the Order.

As the name would suggest, the Order of the Sword has a bit of a thing for swords.

Sparda, the demon they worship as God and Savior, was said to have defeated the armies of hell using only a sword. And since the Order's preaching's were based on his legend, they took that to heart. Guns are seen as too modern, almost like cheating.

Honestly, I don't really get it. If you end up getting yourself killed by demons because of some weird handicap you put on yourself, won't it all be pointless in the end?

Though having said that, regular guns don't work on demons. So, there I was, modifying a gun to be a viable demon hunting weapon. I would've liked to have gotten some professional help to do so, but there's no one willing to deal with guns here, so I had to do it all by myself.

The base of the gun was a modified large caliber revolver, but you wouldn't be able to tell at a first glance because of the two barrels I installed. I used a double-barreled derringer pistol as point of reference for the design, but not the function - while a derringer can only fire one bullet per barrel, my modified gun can fire two bullets at almost the same time.

The reason why is something I observed after much trial and error.

It's not that two shots at once hit harder - my gun can fire two bullets at almost the same time. Key word being, "almost" - there's an interval of a few fractions of a second between each shot. Since most demons have a tough outer hide, a single bullet from an ordinary gun won't hurt them. You need to pack some serious punch to deal with those types of demons.

Like for example, I considered shotguns. They're mainly used for hunting, and can unload a large spread of small bullets, which at close range can do devastating damage if they hit the same target all at once - but while as long-range weapons they might work with deer and ducks, they're useless against demon. If all you're looking for is raw destructive power and don't care for the ability to fight from a distance, what's even the point of using a gun?

I also thought of sniper rifles, but that wouldn't work. Yeah, the long-range damage is enough to kill even demons, but you'd never have enough time in combat to aim properly. Plus, they're too big to carry around.

I even considered using a missile launcher, but that would be way overkill. If I destroyed the city while trying to protect it,

what kind of Knight would I be? And besides, as I said before, I can't make too much noise in my line of work.

So, at the end of it, a pistol is the only real option. It's easy to carry and handy in combat - however, alone it still wouldn't be strong enough to use against demons.

Which is why I adding the two barrels.

The two bullets it fires are two different kinds - One is a bullet to cause a wide area of damage to the enemy, and firing it first means the demons' outer hide will crack. It's not very strong, though it can take out weaker demons by itself. Its main purpose is to break through armor.

The second bullet is meant to pierce, right after the first one, so that no matter how tough the demon, it can still be hit.

It took me quite a bit of experimenting, but I got the hang of it eventually. To summarize, I finally had a gun I could use to hunt demons.

The hard part now was just loading the different types of bullets in the magazine. It got a bit better after I installed an automatic loader, and maybe it would have been better to use an automatic gun, but my expertise on guns ends at revolvers.

I was messing around with the gun a bit more that day. I was at the point where I was pretty much done with modifying it,

so I was carving some rough decorative motif on the barrels. Obviously, it's not like making a gun prettier will make it shoot better, but I wanted to give it some personality. Nothing to lose by doing so.

I named that gun "Blue Rose".

I read somewhere in a book that blue roses aren't possible in nature - my gun, too, is one of a kind. In a way, there's no reason to modify it to this extent, and if demons didn't exist, there would be no reason for it to exist either. So I thought the name was kind of fitting.

I'd decided to carve a rose pattern on the gun - but if the carving's too deep, it'll affect the gun's structural integrity, so I was being very careful. My right hand that held the tool was soaked with sweat. Yeah, you heard that right, my right hand, because at that time it hadn't turned demonic yet.

By the time I was done, the sun had already set.

Suddenly, I was interrupted by Sesta barging into the studio.

Sister Sesta is the dean of the orphanage I'd been raised in. I have no idea how old she is, just that when I was a kid, she was already ancient. Nowadays, she looked no different from back then.

Sesta usually wears her full nun uniform, as is proper for a priestess of the Legendary Dark Knight, but back then it was all ruffled and out of place from running.

"Nero!"

She shouted.

To protect my eyes from sparks and shrapnel while working on my gun I wore goggles, so I began taking them off while she caught her breath. What reason could she have to be so panicked?

"What's wrong?"

I put my tools down while getting up, and just then Sesta staggered up to me to grab my shoulder.

"Kyrie... Kyrie, she's... in the forest..."

That day, Kyrie had taken the children from the orphanage on an outing to Mitis Forest. She'd also invited me to come with, but while I didn't like rejecting her kind attempts to make me feel included, I also didn't really do well with that kind of social setting, so I stayed behind.

"The forest... did something happen? Wasn't she there on a walk?"

Sesta vehemently shook her head.

“The forest is crawling with demons... the Order sent some knights to deal with it, but I’m so worried... Nero, won’t you go and check on them?”

Sesta was still gasping for breath, and that made her words come out intermittently, while her hand gripped my shoulder as hard as she could. I wasn’t too happy to intrude on the knights’ business, but if Kyrie’s safety was at stake, I couldn’t just sit there and do nothing.

“...Alright, I’m going right now.”

“...thank you, Nero. She brought the children with her, if anything happened to them- “

I knew that before anything else, she cared for all the children in the orphanage like her own.

I stopped my work with only the last finishing touches left to do, grabbed Blue Rose, and holstered it right above Red Queen - my Order-issued demon hunting sword.

"Be careful, Nero. May the Savior bless you."

Behind me, Sesta began to quietly pray.

If such a thing as God exists, then where the hell is he when stuff like this happens?

That’s the kind of thoughts I was filled with while rushing towards Mitis Forest.

It seemed that word of the attack had gotten out in town, and the streets were deserted.

The forest's pretty far from the urban area of the city, but since most demons can move pretty quickly, it cannot be assumed to be safe. Whenever a demon appears, the whole town will retreat.

As it were, the emptied streets suited me just fine. It meant I didn't have to deal with dodging the crowd.

I could run through the roofs with no complaints from the residents, either.

From the roofs, you get a better view of the streets. That way, I could easily spot the demons. Just as I thought, they had made it out of the forest and into the city. But they were still pretty far away, and I couldn't tell whether I could hit them with my gun from that distance.

A familiar sound rang from the otherwise quiet streets. Each Holy Knight is assigned a demon hunting sword - one of the features some of these swords are equipped with is a charging system that sprays fire propellant, meant to make its strikes stronger. My Red Queen's one of those. The hilt of said swords resembles a motorcycle throttle, and rotating it makes the fuel burn. Pressing the clutch lever causes the propellant to spray out.

When that happens, the charge will roar like a motorcycle engine. That's the sound I heard, one that I could recognize anywhere. I couldn't see them from my spot on the roofs, but the Knights had to be nearby.

Was Kyrie still in the forest? Was she with the knights? Every passing second that I couldn't answer those questions, I grew more and more anxious.

I held Red Queen in my right hand, and revved the handle.

Just as the engine roared, I heard the sound of children crying out. That made my heart feel a tiny bit lighter, and even if a new type of fear gripped me, at least that was a good indication that Kyrie had managed to get back to town.

I vaulted the roofs one by one, until I finally spotted them.

There they were, three knights shielding Kyrie and the children. I quickly looked them all over, all the kids seemed well and had no sign of injury.

On the other hand, one of the knights had been wounded, and his hand, while still gripping his sword, dangled limply at his wrist. His shoulder was dyed red with blood. His helmet covered his face, but it had to be Josh. Among the knights he's the smallest and shortest, so he's easy to recognize even wearing full armor. Then the team of three that was sent had

to be Josh, Sagan and Tonio. They joined the knights at about the same time as I did. We didn't really get along all that well.

Surrounding them were demons called Scarecrows, which are basically cloth bags filled with bugs. From experience, one or two of those aren't very hard to deal with, but there were easily over thirty of them. That's not a job for just three knights. I'd never seen so many demons at once.

A scarecrow from the group jumped Josh, just as Sagan and Tonio were too busy dealing with the demons in front of them so that they couldn't get to the children.

"Josh! Watch out!"

I didn't have time to land, so I shouted in midair while raising my gun.

As soon as he heard me, Josh looked at me and put his head down. Thanks to that, I could safely shoot the Scarecrow.

As I pulled the trigger, the blowback made my left-hand shake. Two bullets fired at almost the same time, hit the demon in an instant, and blew it away.

As soon as my feet hit the ground, I rushed to Kyrie's side.

"Nero! Why are you here?"

Tonio, the team leader, yelled at me as he hit the next scarecrow. Just as it went down, more rushed to attack.

“Now’s not the time for that! Let’s take care of them first!”

I shouted and ran to cover Tonio’s back.

"Nero..."

Kyrie called out to me, but I had no energy to spare to have a chat.

"Kyrie, get back! I’ll get rid of them! Don’t move!"

After making sure that Kyrie was safe, I took a step forward and revved Red Queen.

Usually, Order swords equipped with a charging system only spray a small amount of propellant, because if there’s too much, the entire sword will be coated in flames. Then demons would be the least of your worries.

But I had a modified charging system - which I called “exceed” - that went well past that critical point - it might sound like a lot, but I’m confident in my ability to wield it properly.

There are a few tricks I’ve learned to make sure the amount of fire doesn’t damage the sword - for example, when it

combusts, it fires a lot, very quickly, all at once. But that also means that if I activate it too close to other people, they'll definitely get burned.

Therefore, if Kyrie was near, I couldn't use the exceed how I would've wanted to. But just a gun isn't good for taking on many enemies at once. I couldn't do it without my sword.

I ran while kicking a scarecrow and shooting another. I turned around and considered the distance, but I still couldn't be sure whether it was safe enough to use Red Queen. I had to get farther away. Revving the handle, Red Queen began burning. I used the scarecrow in front of me as a trampoline, to jump straight in the middle of the gaggle of demons.

"There, now it's fine."

I grinned as I pressed the lever, exceeding the gauge and ripping through the scarecrows. I hit as many demons as I could to distract them from Kyrie. Regular order swords only stay charged for two, maybe three strikes, but if I recharged the exceed right after an attack it could easily last over a dozen hits.

"Go back to where you came from!"

I shouted while revving the handle, making the sword spit out more flames.

While keeping up that momentum I got as many scarecrows as I possibly could away from Kyrie, and as I ripped them to shreds, many of them dispersed into black mist. That's the filthy color of demons' blood.

I turned to Kyrie, who was still bent over the children to protect them.

Even at a time like this, she could think of nothing but risking her life to protect those around her. It's something I deeply admire about her, but still, it's the sort of thing that's bound to end up hurting you, and secretly, it does bother me a bit.

As I finished off the remaining demons, I walked to Kyrie and Josh's side.

"...is it over?"

I asked Tonio as he removed his helmet.

"I don't know... they didn't tell us how many demons there were when they called us. Now, why did you come here?"

Even among the knights of the Order, Tonio's a pretty old-fashioned guy, and naturally that makes him quite uncomfortable with dealing with me. Knowing this, I try my

best to avoid him during work hours. If I had to choose, I wouldn't have met him at all, but I couldn't stand idly by during an emergency like this. So, the condescending tone he used while questioning me was honestly starting to piss me off.

“What, can't I take a walk?”

I shrugged as Tonio's eye twitched.

“We could have done it without you.”

“Maybe so, but with Kyrie and the kids you looked like you needed an extra pair of hands at least.”

Having no rebuttal to offer, Tonio remained silent, though he was still visibly fuming.

I really didn't care about interfering with Tonio's mission, I just wanted to protect Kyrie and the kids. But in the eyes of Tonio, that just looked like me trying to hog the spotlight. Not everyone in the Order is as obsessed with honor and glory like him, but all those who are only thinking about making a name for themselves as some kind of big-shot hero.

Frankly, I find it quite pathetic.

I may not be the most loyal believer of Sparda's tales, but those who claim to be, like Tonio and those other knights, shouldn't they be trying to emulate his heroic deeds? Shouldn't they be all about protecting humanity from the forces of evil? Instead of being worried about having one's thunder stolen, shouldn't they be thinking about comforting the terrified victims of the attack?

The air between me and Tonio was starting to get tense, so when I saw Kyrie glancing at me in distress, I patted her on the shoulder.

"C'mon, let's go home."

Kyrie and the kids bowed to the knights. After she'd gathered them all and we started on the way back, some of the kids hung back to ask the wounded Josh -

"...are you okay?"

Looking at Josh's blood-stained uniform, Kyrie tore off part of her dress sleeves, and I could only sigh in response.

That's how Kyrie always is, only worried about other people and never herself, always ignoring her needs to instead worry about making other people feel better.

Often, some of the knights compare her to an angel. Since Kyrie's the sister of Credo, the general of the Knights, many

within the Order have met her. Sometimes, she'll bring the recruits gifts, or visit them when they're injured.

"I'm sorry... you got hurt because of us..."

Kyrie said softly while wrapping the torn piece of cloth around Josh's shoulder, who looked to be a bit bashful, but didn't try to stop her.

Right at that point, I noticed a faint light behind Kyrie's feet.

A portal.

When demons want to come into the human world, they have to go through a portal. But that is never a process that occurs by itself - not without some type of magic or sorcery, and someone to perform it.

As I was still processing that thought, it meant my reactions were slower.

A demon appeared behind Kyrie. Not a Scarecrow, but some type of lizard-shaped creature I'd never seen before - it walked on its hind legs, with pieces of armor covering some of its hide, and a round shield clutched in its talons. I could tell at a glance that it was a much higher order demon than a simple Scarecrow.

“Kyrie, run!!!”

I yelled and took off running.

As soon as it appeared, the demonic lizard let out a deafening roar. Kyrie was clearly terrified by it.

Josh, who'd spotted the demon first, hacked and slashed at it with his sword, but he was injured and sluggish. His attacks were easily repelled by the demon's shield.

The creature lunged with razor sharp claws at Josh, and as the blow connected, he spit out blood.

Kyrie was frozen in place with terror - she could do nothing but cower in fear.

Immediately, the lizard turned its attention onto her, claws at the ready for another attack.

“Kyrie!”

I couldn't fire my gun - the demon was too close to Kyrie. I could've been the sharpest shooter in the world, but with my dual type of bullet there was no guarantee I wouldn't accidentally hit her. But I couldn't do nothing.

I revved my sword handle to the max, so that it would spray the propellant in the opposite direction. This technically makes the sword incredibly powerful, but it also becomes

very hard to control and move properly - but I had no other option.

“Kyrie!!!”

I shouted again, once more revving my sword fully, which propelled me even faster forward.

I almost sighed with relief when I managed to put myself in the trajectory between Kyrie and the demon. I couldn't perfectly control where I ended up going, but as long as I could shield Kyrie with my body, it would work out.

Me and the demon were both engulfed with flames, and just like that it meant Kyrie was out of the immediate danger zone. But that put me right in the path of the creature's claws, and since I couldn't control my sword enough to block the hit, I reflectively shielded my head with my right hand. Instantly, my arm exploded in sharp, intense pain.
"Nero!"

Kyrie, who hadn't been able to look away, screamed as I kicked the demon away from me.

“Kyrie! Don't worry about me! Take the kids and run!”
I'd managed to send the demon flying, but it vaulted in midair to right itself and pounce. I shot it to stop it, but the

two bullets were both stopped by the shield. Sparks flied where the materials collided - but the shield remained intact.

I revved my sword once again, but it gave no reaction. It seemed that I'd overdone it, and the charging device had broken from overuse.

I rubbed at my nose, giving up on the mechanism, and charged straight at the demon.

But without using the exceed, and with an already damaged sword, the sword's hits were essentially useless, doing nothing but ricocheting off the thing's shield. I had to stop my assault and retreat.

The demon roared again, and it really ticked me off.

I looked back to assess the situation: Josh had managed to lead Kyrie to a safer area, but Tonio and Sagan were still right behind me.

“Sagan! What are you doing?! Aren't you going to protect the kids?!”

As I yelled, Tonio and Sagan ran up to me.

“Nero, this task has been assigned to our division. You have no business ordering me around.”

“How can you still say that?! There’s a demon here, what else can I do? You think Josh can protect everyone by himself?!”

Right at that moment, the demon stilled, and we all nervously took our fighting stances, not knowing what the eerie calm meant. The demon, however, did not attack us, but rather made to run after the small group that Josh was herding to safety.

“Shit!”

Me and Sagan chased straight after it, and Tonio ran to Josh’s side. The demon howled, and shot its claws at us like they were bullets. Even with my sword, I only managed to block one of them.

Sagan yelled and charged at the demon, but not only was he stopped by that infernal shield, he even got hit by a claw.

“Josh! Watch out!”

Tonio yelled and ran, Josh ducked his head, and the lizard’s claws were inches away from hitting Kyrie, too. Josh seemed like he desperately wanted to join in the fight, but he could barely hold himself upright because of his injuries. If this

went on, the demon could very easily get to the kids. That must've been Kyrie's train of thought as well, because she jumped between them to use her body as a shield.

I hate how part of me is still relieved by how things unfolded. Because right then, that thing's claws only grazed Kyrie's shoulders, and instead stabbed right into Josh's body. Josh fell limply to the ground.

“Josh!!!”

Tonio was paralyzed with shock. Me and Sagan took the opportunity to exploit the demon's moment of weakness to finish it off. I fired at the creature the moment it was still enough to do so, and finally, it was dead.



This all happened last month.

The Order decided to cover up the incident.

One of the three knights that were sent to deal with was supposed to be a minor inconvenience had died, and civilians had been put in grave danger. If anyone were to catch word of that, it would greatly impact the Order's image.

Even so, all of those kids had witnessed what really happened.

To avoid as much trouble as possible, this was the official story as per told by the Order:

I coincidentally happened to meet with Kyrie while out on a walk-through Mitis Forest, and by pure chance, a demon had come out and attacked us. We'd both been injured, but I managed to kill the demon. Nothing to be concerned about.

They had sent knights to deal with the attack, but they didn't get there in time to do anything, and no dead man named John had ever existed.

Just like me, Josh was an orphan with no one to ask about him, and besides, people disappeared with no reason all the time, in Fortuna. No one would care to look into it.

Me, Kyrie, Sagan and Tonio were all strictly forbidden from ever mentioning what happened, and I believe the kids were all under similar restrictions.

At least, Kyrie had shielded them in her arms, and they didn't get to see the moment that Josh died.

But this, all of it, was only to the benefit of the Church. Josh was dead, and Kyrie's been hurt. Nothing could change that. No matter what lies they manage to spout, even the Order can't defeat every demon that crosses its path, and I wasn't strong enough to protect Kyrie.

If I only I could get stronger, then nothing like this would happen again.

Surely, this was what Tonio and Sagan thought, as well.

They'd always looked down on me, and made fun of me - but they hadn't spoken a word to me since it all happened. They'd been spending all their time training, and while I didn't see them nearly enough to know, I was pretty sure they were at it even then.

Even people like them, on a day like this, will put on their Knight's uniform and attend the Ceremony. They've always been way too serious about this sort of stuff, unlike me.

After I rolled the bandage onto my right arm again, I walked out of the room. Keeping Kyrie's words in mind, I started heading towards the Old Headquarters building.

The Old HQ used to be the knights' actual headquarters up until ten years ago. Nowadays, though, a new Faculty Headquarters has been built, so it's been replaced and is instead used as a dormitory for most knights.

I pushed open the thick wooden doors, misplacing all of the dust trapped inside. The courtyard of the building was completely silent. The knights that usually milled about the place during the week should all have been stationed somewhere around the Opera House because of the Festival of the Sword.

As I stepped on the wooden staircase, each plank cried out as if in pain under my feet.

Every single time Kyrie's brother, the general of the Holy Knights, Credo, called me into his office, I had to mind my step so I didn't accidentally smash right through those goddamn stairs.

As I finally reached the top office, I gave the door a knock. Credo sat at his desk, and levelled me with a distinctly unimpressed look.

“...how come you’re so late?”

“...I overslept.”

I replied and sat in the chair right across from Credo. He stood up and softly closed the door I just came through. Seemed like what he was about to tell me wasn’t meant for outside ears. Right, there it was again... my usual dirty work.

“A demon’s been spotted in the forest.” I whipped my head to look at him as soon as the words left his mouth.

“Again? Do you know why? I dunno about you, but to me, it sounds like a weird coincidence.”

The whole month, no demon sighting had been reported in Mitis Forest, nothing since my injury and Josh’s death. Nothing had happened - yet something still felt off.

“The investigation bureau tells me nothing. All I can do is deal with problems as they arise...do you understand, Nero?”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. Just got to hurry up and get rid of the demons, as usual.”

If it was a job that could be done in plain sight, there would be no need to call me in, especially as I was supposedly injured. But even if Credo didn't mention it, I also knew that it was the Festival of the Sword, and that most of the order forces are supposed to act as guards at the ceremony's venue, so they were a bit understaffed. And even more than that, if people noticed less guards around them than is usual for the festivities, they'd probably end up worrying.

“Be sure to get things done as quickly and discreetly as possible.”

In other words, even on that day, I was left to deal with the order's dirty laundry. Even though I had promised to Kyrie that I'd come to the ceremony, I wasn't even sure I was going to be able to make it in time.

Credo looked at my bandaged arm, and asked in a distant tone:

“How is your injury?”

“If I said it was bad, would someone else get things done in my place?”

Credo lowered his eyes at my sarcasm.

“Red Queen’s still under reparations, so I will give you a temporary replacement sword.”

During the past month’s attack, the internal combustion engine had failed, so I had to hand in my sword to the technical bureau for repairs. Red Queen was heavily modified when compared to your regular issue order sword, and many parts were made specifically for it, so it’d been taking a while to fix.

“I don’t want a Cliburn, they’re too slow to deal with even the scarecrows.”

As I spoke, my line of sight fell on the sword hanging at Credo’s waist.

“If I really have to, why don’t you lend me your Durandal?”
“Stop joking around.” Credo glanced at me as he said it. The Durandal is a special issue sword that only the high-ranking knights are permitted to use. According to the Order’s teachings, swords are holy weapons, and letting someone else use your swords is seen as a sign of disrespect. Not only that, but Credo’s a really religious sort. That joke was in bad taste, I admit it.

“I was just kidding, if you gotta glare at me like that I’d rather you just yell at me...”

I scratched my head, thinking of a way to change the subject.

“I hope you already understand, Nero, but you shouldn’t bring your gun.”

Credo told me, just to be sure I’d gotten the message.

“Yeah, I know... gunshots are too loud. Plus, I wouldn’t want my noise to get in the way of Kyrie’s singing.”

If people were to hear gunshots during the Festival of The Sword, it would definitely cause a commotion.

“Besides, I still can’t shoot with this banged up arm... seems like this won’t be any fun at all.”

I jokingly complained. I had received way more unreasonable tasks from Credo in the past. It was just that on that day, Credo seemed off from his usual self.

“Sorry...”

He whispered. I didn’t reply to that. The reality was, Credo was pretty hung up about the incident of last month. A knight had sacrificed his life, yet he had to hide the truth

from the public. I'd known him since we were both kids, so I understood his feelings pretty well.

"I'm going."

I walked out of Credo's office without waiting for a reply. People had already started heading for the Opera House. I went against the current of the crowd, and headed to Carl's store. There was something I had to get before going to deal with the demons in the forest.

Carl looked like he'd been waiting for me to appear. After spotting me through the half-closed store doors, he sighed heavily.

"The next time you tell me to meet on a given day, I'm not going to wait for you this long. You're late."

Honestly, it was pretty reasonable of Carl to be mad. I looked at the clock, and an hour had already passed from our agreed-upon meeting time.

"Sorry... I'll be more careful next time."

I bowed slightly, and Carl took out a tiny nondescript box and put it in my hand. I'd ordered it prior, and had already paid for it.

“I didn’t do this for you, it’s just rare to think of you buying a gift for somebody. The festival’s about to begin, it’s almost time for Kyrie’s performance to start.”

“I know, thank you.”

I put the box in my pocket and kept walking towards the forest. I looked behind me to see Carl’s taken aback expression. After all, the forest was in the opposite direction to the Opera House. I wasn’t surprised by his reaction, but I had no time to explain.

As soon as I stepped into the forest, my right arm began pulsating with pain.

Whenever a demon is nearby, my right-hand aches. This, too, started after last month’s incident. I have no idea why. It just seemed like another point towards the “demonic possession” theory.

But I had no time to think about all that - If I didn’t get this over with as fast as possible, I wouldn’t make it in time to hear Kyrie sing. I removed my arm’s bandage and stuffed it into my jacket’s pocket. In the gaps between trees, I could see scarecrows moving.

Two or three... if that was all, it was much less than I’d anticipated.

“Hurry up and get out of my way... I got no time to waste.” Just as I spoke, I stretched my right hand towards the scarecrows, and it began glowing faintly blue. Then, a spectral arm made of pale blue light shot out from my wrist.

I call that my “devil bringer”.

When last month my arm was injured by that demon, it gradually started changing shape to look more and more demonic.

It also became insanely strong.

At first, I had no idea that it would turn out to be this useful - but at some point, while carrying out the many secret jobs that Credo issued me, I discovered the power this new arm held, though that’s another thing I have no clue about why or how it came to be.

My devil bringer caught one of the scarecrows’ legs, and I began throwing it around - I can move the glowing arm as I want it to, as if it’s just an extension of my own hand.

The straw creature swayed back and forth in my grip, and I smashed in against another one. They both dissolved in a huge cloud of black smoke upon the violent impact.

I could feel one more scarecrow behind me, but I wasn't worried. I turned around and grabbed it tight. The trapped scarecrow struggled in the hold, but it couldn't escape my devil bringer.

“Go to hell!!!”

I smashed the scarecrow to the ground, and the bag of insects made a gross hissing sound while the rest of it vanished in smoke.

I gingerly shook out my right hand while looking around. It seemed that there were no demons left, and I couldn't feel anything in my right arm either.

“Nothing...”

I rolled my bandage back on. If I ran back as fast as I could, maybe I could still make it in time to see Kyrie. I immediately took off in the town's direction.



Right behind the city's high walls, a large medieval castle stands in the distance - Fortuna Castle. Legends say that this is the place where Sparda lived, back when he was Lord of Fortuna.

The castle's interior hasn't been changed for all those years, and is currently being used as a museum. The town's citizens are free to visit it as they please.

But deep in the bowels of the castle, there's a place that everyday civilians don't know about. Unlike the ancient building that conceals it, it's been built very recently and is fully equipped with modern technology. It's where the so called "technical bureau" stands, a place specifically created to develop demon hunting weaponry.

And in a special wing of the technical bureau structure, a tall, hunched man was taking notes. The head of the technical bureau, Agnus.

Even though something as important to the Order as the Festival of the Sword was to take place that day, Agnus wasn't attending. He was too busy with his own research, despite being particularly fascinated with the teachings and

ideology of the Order's current Vicar, Sanctus. For that reason, he was trying to get his most recent hitch dealt with as soon as possible.

“I don't understand, what's the issue?”

He whispered as he gazed into a great glass tube. Inside it, a broken katana floated, suspended in midair. That was the problem he currently couldn't seem to solve. The sword's name is Yamato, and according to legends, it's one of the swords wielded by the Dark Knight Sparda.

Agnus found it a year ago on the outskirts of Fortuna.

The sword itself had only been mentioned once or twice in ancient literature. But Agnus prided himself in being able to recognize it with a single glance, thanks to his extensive research. One of the main goals of developing anti-demon weaponry is to be able to manufacture a man made “devil arm”: To be able to do that, it follows that one would need to study a real, genuine devil arm. After Sparda left Fortuna, many centuries before, little is known about the devil arms he wielded, and to happen to find one in the wild was a huge opportunity for Agnus, one he absolutely couldn't pass up.

But that was also where many of his problems began.

The sword, you see, was split cleanly in half.

There are many types of devil arms that have existed throughout history.

Some of them are made from a demon's soul at the moment of defeat. Since most demons able to turn into devil arms have great regenerative abilities, the weapons they turn into are also able to repair most damage on their own. Some of those weapons run on particular magical substances, and as long as that substance is present, the weapon can be easily repaired.

However, this sword didn't appear to belong to either of those categories.

Agnus had tried numerous different methods to try and repair it, but nothing seemed to work.

“Does this sword belong to a demon...?”

If the Yamato had become tied to a specific demon that was defeated in battle, it would be reasonable to think it was going to be impossible to ever restore it. But in that case, the sword's broken pieces should have lost all of its remaining power. And yet, the sword maintained strong demonic energy, even despite being currently broken beyond apparent repair, which left Agnus bewildered.

“Why.... W-w-w-what is it that you’re lacking?!”

Agnus stuttered in his frenzy, mumbling similar words over and over, gesturing wildly and sending many pages of his notes flying.

“This is so inconvenient... if only I could fix you, our plan would-be set-in motion...”

Before he had a chance to finish that though, Agnus realized that someone’d come into the room.

In fact, there was a woman standing at the door.

“G-G-Gloria... do you need something?”

The woman known as Gloria chuckled, retrieving Agnus’ notes from the floor and handing them back to him. Agnus was peeved at her irreverence.

“You’re in a bad mood.” Gloria laughs.

Agnus despised this woman. To be fair, Agnus generally disliked women as a whole, and Gloria in particular irritated him, her and her revealing outfits. Her skimpy dress left her cleavage, back and thighs exposed, and little to the imagination. Her way of using her womanly attributes as if they were weapons made Agnus feel sick to his stomach.

“How’s your research coming along?”

Gloria looked at the sword.

“As well as it looks to be going! Don’t be so impatient!”

The thing about Gloria that Agnus disliked most was her attitude. Unfortunately, there’s a good reason why this newcomer who’d only been part of the Order for a month was able to talk to Agnus like she ran the whole business.

A month ago, Gloria had appeared in Fortuna out of the blue. In theory, the entire town is pretty wary of foreigners, and that could be especially said of the Order of the Sword. Higher ups in the order take great pain to look into the family tree and origins of those who wish to join their ranks. Obviously, that meant that when an outsider like Gloria suddenly requested to speak to the vicar, she was immediately refused.

Except, she’d brought one thing with her.

The Devil Sword Sparda.

The sword wielded by the Dark Knight himself, and a relic of his power.

How did she get her hands on it?

The tale that Gloria had told was that she used to be a treasure hunter for a living. By chance, she managed to find the Devil Sword Sparda. And after hearing of the heroic deeds of the Order of the Sword, she wanted to dedicate her life to their cause. It was an offer the vicar couldn't decline.

The Dark Knight Sparda is revered as a god by the Order. That would logically make the Devil Sword Sparda a holy relic. Having something of that caliber would not only increase the Order's public image, but also be a useful tool to further their plans.

Gloria had asked for nothing in return. All she'd said was:

“My only wish is to witness the utopia that His Holiness the Vicar wants to bring about.”

And that meant that nowadays, she walked the Order's highest ranks. Many of the young knights were very puzzled by Gloria's sudden appearance. There were rumors being spread that there might be something fishy underfoot - like her being secretly the Vicar's mistress. Agnus cared not for any of that.

What really rankled him is knowing that she was the one to get her hands on the Devil Sword Sparda. That the sword of

their god, the strongest weapon known to mankind, a legend come to life, was something only Gloria was blessed with receiving. Agnus didn't like that one bit.

In addition to the Devil Sword Sparda, Gloria had brought with her an array of various devil arms - each of them a necessary key to powering the artificial hell gates present on the island, though the main gate remained sealed.

“Be sure to figure out how to fix this sword, you know as well as I do that without it you can't open the main gate.”

Having said that, Gloria left.

Agnus threw his researches notes at the test tube in a fit of rage.

“And j-j-j-just who are you to talk to me like that!”

Gloria's words, however, weren't unfounded.

The main Hell Gate was once used as a passageway between the demon world and the human world, and a gate of that magnitude is unmatched by any of Agnus' smaller replicas. There is no way to open that gate but to use Yamato.

The Dark Knight Sparda had used that sword to separate the worlds of mankind and demons, but that same sword was the key to opening real, genuine gates to hell.

Agnus sighed, and slammed his remaining notes on the floor.



STAGE 03



While I made my way through town, some demons appeared to have crawled out of the forest, and I clashed with them in a narrow alleyway. I wasn't scared of those small fries, but in broad daylight, I couldn't just casually use my devil bringer on them.

The Festival of the Sword had already begun, and while I was alone in the deserted streets, I still preferred to be cautious.

By the time I finally got to the venue, I was panting, and Kyrie's song had just come to an end on a beautiful treble note. I regretted not having been able to appreciate the entire performance, but I'd already heard her practice those same songs before, and I did manage to keep my word and at least show up.

I leaned back on an empty bench and looked at Kyrie. Just as the song ended her eyes managed to track me, and she gave me a little tense smile. Probably because she noticed I'd only just gotten there.

As her performance came to a close, Kyrie stepped off the stage to the audience's resounding applause.

I scooted over to make space for her to sit, since after her song was over, I knew Kyrie would want to listen to the rest of the ceremony. I took both my headphones and the gift I bought from Carl from my jacket pockets.

People on the stage were making way for the Vicar to start his sermon, and I honestly couldn't give less of a rat's ass about it. All I cared about was to keep my promise to Kyrie, I never planned to listen to the preaching's.

The man in the seat right next to mine stared at me with open disbelief. Anyone who'd come to the ceremony was a believer, and to imagine someone would be present only to tune the sermon out with rock music was unthinkable.

Well, as far as I was concerned, all of the Order's ideals of salvations were utter bullshit.

But Kyrie and Credo didn't see it that way. They believed staunchly, same as their parents had. They really do believe there's a kind and righteous god out there, that being Sparda, and they fully believe the tale of how he saved the world from demons. That's the main reason why I got to know Kyrie and Credo even while living at the orphanage, because their parents, not some make believe God, often came by to give

care and compassion to me and all the other abandoned children.

I have no idea why they cared so much about me. Perhaps it was because of my hair, pale silver that no one else in Fortuna shared.

According to the legends, it is said that Sparda had the same hair color as mine. And since I had no parents, no family to speak of - maybe deep down they believed me to have some kind of relation to Sparda himself.

I personally have no idea if really, over two thousand years ago, the Dark Knight existed. It seems too farfetched for me to believe. But Kyrie and Credo's parents did believe it, with almost blind faith. But even regardless of their religion, they were just really good people.

And just like all good people eventually do, they met an undeserved, gruesome end.

When it happened, I wasn't a knight yet, nor did I have any particular ties to the Order, so all I know is what everyone else's been told. Long story short, they were investigating some ruins in Mitis Forest, and were killed in a sudden demon attack.

That was the moment I realized the Order's preaching's were all one giant lie. Why did they have to die? They who believed with all of their heart that the savior would protect

them, yet were still mercilessly slaughtered by demons. I would understand if it had been someone like me instead of them, it would make sense for a just god to do that. But people like them, they deserved none of it.

And yet, they still died. That's the sad reality.

For that reason, I don't believe in the savior. The only thing in life worth believing in is power.

That's the long and short of it. Without power, you can't protect anything.

Though I didn't agree with the knights, I joined them in order to be able to protect Kyrie. After we lost them, that became my resolve. I must protect her.

I glanced to the left, and saw Kyrie standing next to me. Her gaze fell onto the small package, and she smiled softly. It's not like it was anything expensive, I just felt like I wanted to give her something back for always checking on me during the week, and to celebrate her being chosen to sing for the festival. I may not believe in a god, but still, I didn't want to take good things like that happening for granted.

Kyrie picked up the box and sat next to me.

On the stage, the vicar's sermon droned on. I wasn't listening at all. He said something about chaos, and the day of

reckoning when the gods will come to earth, or something like that. Finally, he seemed to reach the end of his speech, because he stopped talking and put up his hands in prayer. As he did that, so too Kyrie clasped her hands together, and I could tell everyone was also about to start praying.

Honestly, I felt like I was about to fall asleep. Without thinking much about it, I took off my headphones and stood up, but when I made to leave, I saw Kyrie look at me with an uneasy expression.

“Nero... what’s wrong?”

I looked at her, and to myself I thought it would had been obvious.

“I’m out here.”

Fortunately, both the vicar and the civilians and even the knights on the stage were all deep in prayer. No one would see me leaving, so naturally it was the perfect time to slip away unnoticed.

“But it’s not over yet...”

In the eyes of someone like Kyrie, leaving at that point would be preposterous, but my patience had reached its limit. I’d already participated in the ceremony, kept my promise to

Kyrie, and gave her my gift. As far as I was concerned, I was done there.

“All of this preaching is putting me to sleep.”

I walked away after saying that. Kyrie chased after me.

Just then - I froze.

My right hand had started aching.

As if sensing whatever was approaching, the pulsating pain in my hand under the bandage steadily got clearer and more intense.

“Is there a demon...?”

I whispered low enough that Kyrie wouldn't hear.

There definitely were demons nearby, but with the place crawling with knights, I'd thought it would be nearly impossible for them to get this far. No matter how I tried to rationalize it, the pain in my hand didn't get any fainter. If there was a demon here, within the range of where I'd be able to perceive it - well, it would have to be on the roof, seeing as it was the knights' only blind spot.

Just as I turned to look at the ceiling, a man broke straight through the stained glass.

He was tall, all dressed in red from head to toe, with pale silver hair and a huge sword strapped to his back.

The man in red landed on the pulpit right in front of the vicar, and in a blur of motion grabbed something from behind his back.

By the time I realized it was a gun, the shot already rang through the theatre.

For a second there, everything stood still and silent.

I still hadn't processed what I'd just seen. The man had his back to me and was blocking my view, but I had heard the vicar gasp.

The man stood up and slowly turned his head around to look at the people around him, his face covered in blood.

“Your Holiness!”

As soon as Credo shouted from his place at the side of the stage, the audience began screaming and running all over each other to try and escape from the building.

An assassin -

It honestly would have been a bit funny if taken out of context, but that was what had just happened. A man in red appeared out of nowhere and shot the vicar.

Why would he do this, what would he gain from it? There was no time to think about things like that - Credo and the other knights had immediately drawn their swords and rushed to attack.

I grabbed Kyrie's hand and made for the exit. In the general chaos, Kyrie dropped her gift on the ground, but I could care less about that. If she liked it, I could buy her a new one.

The Holy Knights who had surrounded the man in red on the stage dared not make their move.

As if facing off roughly a dozen of enemies all by yourself was no big deal, the man massacred the men in front of him with only his sword.

Kyrie stood frozen looking at the display with terror in her eyes, and I really wished she would look away so she wouldn't have to see it happening.

I badly wanted to jump into the fight and help the knights, but before that I really needed to get Kyrie somewhere safe, and maybe get reinforcements while I was at it too.

“Kyrie! Let's get out of here, quick!”

I shouted at her, but she didn't move an inch. She was too worried about the knights being injured by the man in red, I could see that, and Credo who was kneeling by the Vicar's body.

It was total and utter chaos. Knights were screaming and shouting, people had crowded by the exit trying to run away. We couldn't get to safety, not really, until the people currently at the door managed to evacuate. I turned to the stage in irritation. More than a dozen of knights lay still on the ground. The only ones left standing were Credo and another man I didn't know the name of.

In less than a couple minutes, an entire order squadron had been decimated. This was completely insane. The holy knights were specially trained to hunt demons, and since many demons are humanoid in shape, they're the best fighters around when it comes to hand-to-hand combat. No one is more skilled with a sword than a holy knight.

That's what I'd grown up believing anyway, and this very basic principle of life had just crumbled under my feet.

In my shock, I didn't notice Kyrie letting go of my hand - right as the man in red had started walking towards Credo.

“Credo!”

Kyrie screamed, and immediately took off running to get to them.

“Kyrie!!!”

I tried to follow after her, but I got caught in the throngs of people fleeing the place. I picked up my pace when I noticed Kyrie getting closer to the stage.

The last knight left standing lunged with his sword at the man’s back, but he was easily caught and thrown off. His limp body fell on Kyrie, knocking her over.

She made a soft pained sound and fell to the ground. This seemed to catch the man’s attention, who turned to look at her.

“...Kyrie!!!”

This was the worst-case scenario.

As the man approached Kyrie, I ran as fast as I could, and jumped.

Driven by pure instinct, I turned so my feet kicked the man straight in the face as I landed. The impact sent him flying off.

But he clearly didn't go down easy, he wouldn't have managed to defeat so many knights otherwise after all. As soon as I was back on my feet, I grabbed Blue Rose and shot at him while he was still in midair.

He easily parried the bullets the huge sword he was wielding, and I knew as soon as he did that that it wasn't going to be an easy fight. The fact itself that he hadn't even considered avoiding the bullets, and instead used his sword with no hesitation spoke to the man's confidence in his own abilities.

However, the force of the impact did seem to catch him off guard, and the blowback to his sword sent him hurtling backwards towards the statue of the Dark Knight Sparda. It appeared that to avoid smashing into the statue, the man had stabbed his sword into the statue's head. I ran after him, jumping onto the hilt of his sword. It was embedded pretty deeply so I used it as a stepping stone to get to the statue's shoulder. The man in red stood on the other shoulder, a gun in each hand.

His physical strength was, frankly, ridiculous.

I've always been a lot stronger and faster than others around me, but this man alone appeared to surpass me with ease.

"...Nero!"

Kyrie looked up at me. Thankfully the man's attention was one me now, and she was far enough from him for her to be able to escape. I also noticed with a hint of relief that Credo was uninjured. I shouted at Kyrie:

“Kyrie! Go with your brother and get outta here!”

If Kyrie was alone, she might've protested, but thankfully Credo was by her side, and I could count on him to protect her. He put his arm in front of her, and replied:

“I will return with help! You stall him until then!”

I knew I could rely on Credo, and by now, headquarters should have gathered their forces to help with security. The more knights to deal with this threat, the better.

While Kyrie left, I readied myself to shoot at the man in red. He smirked a little - clearly, he wasn't there to blindly massacre everyone, because he made no move to stop Credo and Kyrie from leaving.

I could have stood there and thought about why that would be, but truthfully, I don't give a shit about the way a murderer thinks.

“I won't hold my breath.”

I whipped my head, throwing my headphones off and sending them smashing to the floor.

When I did that, the man's smirk grew wider. I immediately pulled the trigger. As I expected, he jumped, and I latched onto his body so he wouldn't get away. We shot at each other while locked in midair, and I thought that this up close, surely one shot or two was bound to hit, but it perhaps was naive to think so. Then he kicked me, and we separated. The man gracefully landed on top of the statue's head, and made to pull out his sword. If I let him get it it would've been really bad, so I jumped, hitting the sword at the hilt. The statue's head cracked under the impact, sending the sword flying, and with lightning fast reflexes the man caught it. I'd completely lost my balance and rolled down between the statue's body and its sword, but I managed to stop the fall with my feet. The man was now standing on top of the statue, sword in hand.

"I'm not letting you get away!"

I shot at him, even though I was clearly the one in the unfavorable spot. He dodged with ease, and moved to stand on the hilt of the statue's sword.

"I'll wipe that smug look off your face!"

I didn't want to disrespect Sparda like that, but I didn't have a choice. I put all my weight into my lower body and pushed, and with a resounding crack, the statue's wrists snapped, sending the sword toppling down. I meant to knock the man down, make him lose his balance, and put us on equal ground again.

But that didn't happen, he stood upright on the hilt as the sword fell, keeping his balance perfectly and looking at me with a calm expression. I changed approach, and charged up the falling sword to face against him. I shot at him once I was close enough, but even at almost point-blank range, he avoided it easily.

The stone sword was almost done falling, so with a final kick at the man, we both bolted backwards.

While still in motion, I let the bullet casings out of my gun's wheel and threw in new ones. When my feet hit the ground, it was fully loaded once again.

When the man landed as well, I pointed my gun at him. My odds weren't good. This guy was freakishly strong, I couldn't use my right hand, and even though we hadn't stopped moving for even a minute and I was still panting harshly, he looked like he wasn't even slightly out of breath.

He still looked so damn relaxed and smug, in fact, and it infuriated me to no end. Maybe I should have used my right hand after all, but I still wasn't sure.

What if Credo came back right then? If I managed to stall him long enough, reinforcements would eventually come. Then I'd have to fight alongside Credo and dozens of other Holy Knights. How would I explain my arm to them?

We'd been standing for quite a bit, and the man showed no signs of attacking. Maybe that could be my chance to catch him off guard, or so I thought - but before I even had time to properly finish that thought, he had started to move.

He put his guns away, and stabbed with his sword towards me, way too fast.

Before I could even realize what I was doing, I'd shielded myself with my right hand. The sword caught on my arm, only one limb away from skewering my heart. The blade ripped up the bandages wrapped around it.

"You got a trick up your sleeve. What's that arm made of, titanium?"

I was a bit shocked that my arm was completely unharmed, but even more shocking was hearing the man speak, he hadn't made a peep up until that point.

“I thought the cat had your tongue.”

For whatever reason, his expression went gleeful at that.

“What, I ever said I couldn’t talk?”

I wanted to talk back to him, but his sword was still trying to stab me in the arm, so I grabbed it with that same hand. The man tried to pull the sword free, but apparently my right arm was stronger. It wasn’t my choice to expose it, but now that it was out, I wouldn’t hold back.

Maybe with this arm’s power, I could win.

“Well, if it’s a trick you’re looking for... then try this!”

I launched the sword, and the man along with it. Without waiting to see him land, I ran back, towards the broken statue and the massive stone sword on the ground. I lifted it up with my devil bringer, and hurled it at the man.

He just moved to the side and dodged, and then turned to look at me.

“Looks like you, too, are a...”

“A what?”

I didn’t get what he was trying to say.

“No, that’s not right, you don’t smell that bad.”
“What the hell are you talking about?!”

My hands clenched.

“Doesn’t matter. I want to wrap this show up before the cavalry arrives!”

I shouted and stretched my devil bringer towards him, sending the glowing blue limb to grab him.

I caught him by the foot, so as not to let him escape. I pulled him up to me, as fast as I could. In my haste to get things done before the rest of the knights came, I was desperate.

I’d finally managed to make the man lose his balance, so I smashed my right fist into his face with all of my strength. The impact was so strong that his head made a deep indent in the stone floor, but I didn’t register it. I kept beating him, over and over - I had to win.

I might have killed many people who were possessed by demons, but I’ve never killed a human being. But this man, he clearly couldn’t be human.

Even when he went limp and stopped moving, I didn’t stop hitting him.

It was as if right then, something had awakened inside me. I couldn't explain why, but every time my fist connected with the man's face felt right. Like I was about to kill an old enemy.

In this state, I didn't even realize it as I launched his body into the ruined statue, picked up his own sword and threw it right at him. As soon as the man's back collided with stone, the sword pierced through his chest, nailing him to it.

That was when I snapped out of it, and found myself staring at the aftermath of what I'd done - the gruesome scene of that man, impaled on the statue like an insect specimen pinned to a wall, a large puddle of blood forming at his chest.

My right hand couldn't stop shaking.

I felt lightheaded with guilt at how cruel I'd instinctively been. I turned around, refusing to look at the man for a second longer. I pulled down my sleeve over my right hand, and made to leave. Credo could deal with it then. It was my last resort, I had to kill him, or I would've been killed. That's all there was to it, now if only I could just leave -

“Getting better...”

From behind my back, I heard him, a dead man talking. I turned in horror, and saw the man staring at me from his spot on the wall.

“I would even go as far as to say I underestimated your abilities.”

He sounded like it hurt to talk. He slowly pushed himself off the statue, but the sword remained embedded in his chest. There was absolutely no way he should've still been alive. This guy really was something else. If I wasn't convinced, he was a demon before, I sure as hell was now.

“You aren't human, are you?”

He gave a wry smile at that, and only then started pulling the sword out of his chest, as if he'd only just remembered it was there.

“We're the same...”

The sword slowly came out of his chest with a gross squelching noise, followed by a concerningly large spray of blood. Blood that was red. I'd never seen a demon with blood that red, before, it usually was darker if not outright black. Once he managed to get the sword out, he pointed it at me. Specifically, at my arm.

“You... and I...”

I hid my right arm behind my back in a panic. His words had shaken me - no one had ever seen my arm like this, and all the enemies who had before weren't able to talk to me about it.

“No... I'm human...”

He shrugged at my words, and then pointed right behind me:

“And them.”

I looked back, and saw him staring at the bodies of the Holy Knights he'd killed. But though they all wore the knight's uniforms, with their helmets off you could see their faces which had nothing human left in them, all purely demonic. I whipped my head back towards the man, but he was no longer there. I looked around the room, but he seemed to have vanished into thin air.

“Though I suspect you carry something different from the others.”

The voice came from up ahead, and I looked up. The man was up there, sitting on the edge of the broken glass ceiling that he'd smashed before.

“What are you talking about?!”

The man gave a bitter smile at my confusion.

“You will come to learn the meaning soon enough.”

Having said that, he stood up and stretched.

“But... business beckons.”

“Hey!”

I shot at him, but he was already gone. My bullet hit the ceiling, leaving dust and smoke flying through the air. Once it dissipated, the man peeked his head in from the hole in the ceiling.

“Adios, kid.”

With that, he finally left for real.

I was pretty unsettled.

The fact he survived an impaling like that, or how carefree and smug he'd remained throughout our fight - all of it pissed me off. Was he really a demon? It's said that the highest order of demons can understand human language, but I'd never encountered one before. Is that what they look like?

And besides, if that man was a demon, then what does that make me? The man's words echoed in my head. My right hand is, for sure, not human anymore. The strength and power it holds are certainly demonic in nature. If that man's a demon, does that mean I'm one too?

It all left me confused, and concerned. I looked back at the bodies of the holy knights - the demons' bodies. Just as I was checking to see whether I'd seen them correctly before; an order squadron broke through the door. I made a beeline for Credo. I had to make a report to him - had to tell him that the man in red had escaped, and that he was definitely not human.

As I was sorting my thoughts and what I was going to tell Credo in my mind, the other knights came up to the bodies to wrap them in white cloths, without saying a word. At that point, I assumed what I'd seen must've been an illusion, because if that were true, some of them had to have noticed and said something about it, right? I got face to face with Credo, and spoke.

“Sorry, he got away.”



Dante had researched the, frankly, way overblown tales the people of this place talked about the Dark Knight Sparda. Not particularly because he wanted to do a thorough job in there, but because the Legendary Dark Knight was his father.

Sometime two thousand years ago, a demon grew to feel sympathetic towards the humans who were being decimated by other demons, and he helped to defeat them. He was recorded as a righteous demon who saved mankind, the strongest swordsman in the world, and a lonesome hero. As for what happened after, eventually Sparda settled somewhere, fell in love with a human woman, and had Dante. But at the time, he hadn't known any of it. After all, when his father was still with him, he'd been too young to really understand. Even to this day, Dante didn't particularly care for the myths and legends related to Sparda. As far as he was concerned, his father was a hero, his mother a good woman who his father probably died to protect, and he was the product of their love. That's all there is to it, and all that he needed to know.

There were a number of legends surrounding Sparda. The one about him defeating the demons was only the beginning.

What did he do during those two thousand years? Allegedly, somewhere along that line, he'd been the lord of Fortuna. Dante had heard those stories, but honestly, he didn't believe them. To the general public, Sparda's myth is almost like a fairy tale, and it's hard to distinguish real historical facts from pure fiction. He was pretty sure the legends they spouted in Fortuna belonged to the latter category.

But then again, he wasn't so sure anymore after he'd met with that mysterious young man. That boy... he had the same eyes as him. He who, unlike Dante, had been almost frantic in his research of Sparda and his previous life. It wasn't unlikely that he might have come to Fortuna, at some point. As he walked towards Fortuna Castle, Dante caught himself getting tangled in these thoughts, and then laughed at himself.

"...Nah, I must be imagining things, forget it."

Dante whispered, and started running. After all, he had a rendezvous planned with his business partner who'd already sneaked her way into the castle. She was always nagging at him to meet on time.

Though her face looked exactly like his mother's, her attitude didn't match at all.



I could only stand and wait while they finished cleaning up the horrible aftermath. I really wanted to go back to my room and have a nap, but I had to wait for further orders from Credo instead.

There's no way the Order could let the man in red escape. If someone that powerful and ruthless were to remain on the loose, who knows how many more he could attack? Plus, the church couldn't let the man who'd just assassinated the vicar get off scot free.

After cleanup was over and me and Credo were left alone, he started speaking.

“He's heading in the direction of Fortuna Castle. You must go after him.”

So, he said, but I couldn't just up and chase him in my current state. I didn't think I could win.

“Then lend me your sword. I'm not kidding this time. I fought him; I can't beat him without a sword.”

If Credo refused then, I couldn't be sure I'd have agreed to go on the hunt. Not even my devil bringer was enough to fight him off.

But Credo shook his head.

“That won't be necessary.”

I didn't get what he was trying to say at first, but then I heard the door open and saw Kyrie entering and understood.

Kyrie was, with some difficulty, dragging behind her a heavy suitcase. Red Queen's case. I quickly caught up to her, lifting the heavy item with ease.

“You brought this here for me?”

Kyrie looked briefly at Credo before replying,

“Credo requested. She yearns for your touch.”

I was happy to have my sword back, but my enthusiasm was dampened slightly by the realisation of why Kyrie had to bring it to me herself. The inside of the Opera house was smashed to bits, and the man in red had managed to kill a substantial number of Holy Knights. There was probably no one currently available to carry supplies.

I shut down that line of thought and smiled at Kyrie, then opened up the case.

“Thanks. This blade’s the best battle companions a swordsman could wish for.”

Credo’s Durandal is also a very powerful weapon, but there was no replacing my own custom-made Red Queen.

I began reassembling the sword. The pieces that had been entirely replaced had this unique, oily smell that I’d grown to be fond of.

“Fortuna Castle, huh?”

I picked up my previous conversation with Credo after I finished assembling Red Queen.

“That’s what the witnesses said.”

Well, at least he wasn’t trying to make a run for it. The entirety of Fortuna’s surrounded by a solid wall, and there’s only one way out on land, in the opposite direction from the Opera House and the docks. While him trying to make a getaway from boat wouldn’t be impossible, the Order would be sure to thoroughly inspect any suspicious looking vessel in the port. That begged the question though, why wasn’t he trying to run away? When he left, before, he’d mentioned

“business”. Was the business he was referring to tied to Fortuna Castle, somehow?

“Guy just came from hell, he’s gotta hit up a couple tourist spots.”

I jokingly said to lighten the mood, but Credo turned to me with a scowl. He’d never been one to crack jokes at times like that.

“You just so lightly in a time of crisis?! You must capture him.”

Credo had always been the calm and collected type, and it was rare for him to shout like that. He’d been greatly shaken by the vicar’s death, it seemed. After I made sure that Red Queen was properly assembled and every piece was in its rightful spot, I stood up and shrugged.

“Trust me, I’ll get it done.”

“Nero... are you sure you’re up to this?”

At the sound of Kyrie’s anxious voice, I turned around to look at her.

“There’s no time, and duty calls.”

Kyrie's expression turned downcast after I spoke.

"Please be careful... you still haven't recovered."

This was the crux of it, why Kyrie was so worried. The thing was, the injury had already healed - but I couldn't tell her that. It would've relieved some of her worries, but then she'd see my arm, and only start worrying more. That's just the kind of person she is, I would never even have thought about lying to her otherwise.

After all, this is how she acts every time I get injured on the job.

I looked to Red Queen.

"Can't pass on an emergency. And besides, with this sword, I'm more than strong enough, even one handed. Trust me."

Kyrie's expression stayed the same, but she nodded. When looking down, I saw that she was wearing a necklace with a wing shaped pendant, the one I'd bought from Carl. It fell down during the chaos of the attack, and she must've picked it up while I was talking to Credo. I thought it suited her. When she noticed me looking, Kyrie smiled at me, and I smiled back.

"I must return to headquarters and report."

Credo said, and exited the room. I brushed some hair from Kyrie's face, and told her:

"I'll walk you out of here."

But just as I said that, the ground started shaking, and we all looked around, then ran outside when we couldn't find the source of the ruckus. It was rare for demons to get this far into the city, but my right hand faintly ached from where I'd hid it my pocket, which meant somehow, they'd managed to get in, and were nearby.

"Someone help me!!!"

The quiet of the plaza was broken by a man's shout. I turned towards the voice, and saw him limping under the plaza's fountain, likely injured.

Credo pulled out his sword, and I took out my gun. No matter how far away the man was, he clearly needed help. But as we started running in his direction, a scarecrow leaped from behind the fountain, like a big, ugly bug. I readied to shoot, but it was already too late. The scarecrow had stabbed its blades in the man's back, and used it to lift his limp body in the air and throw it like a ragdoll. We heard more people scream in the distance, and then, a whole pack of scarecrows started emerging from multiple streets, forcing the passersby to start fleeing.

Demon attacks in Fortuna are frequent. Just that morning I'd killed quite a bit of demons in the forest and the nearby streets. But the opera house was in the dead center of town, it wasn't the forest or the suburbs. In my years as a knight, I'd never seen a demon in the town center before.

"Is this because of him...?"

I asked Credo. The guy had only just assassinated the vicar and then demons started showing up, anyone would think the two things were somehow related. Credo raised his sword in a battle stance, and replied:

"I... I'm not sure."

The displaced people were likely all trying to get to HQ to go ask the holy knights for help. The plaza was teeming with people trying to get away and demons going after them.

It was the worst-case scenario. If I went in, guns blazing, I was sure to hit an innocent civilian with a stray bullet or two, and if I used my sword, someone was bound to get burned by the flames.

In the few seconds it took to assess the situation, the scarecrows had already slaughtered tons of citizens. Kyrie hid behind me, silently praying and shaking like a leaf.

“Credo.”

I turned to look at him, grimacing.

“Evacuate the citizens and take care of Kyrie. I got this.”

I revved Red Queen’s hilt, sending the blade’s flames blazing, and ran to the plaza right as more demons appeared through a portal. I tried my best to avoid the escaping people, and cut through the scarecrows instead. I wasn’t going in for the kill, my main intent was just to get their attention away from the crowd.

“We must evacuate the residents back to headquarters. Report back as soon as you can, and be careful!”

Hearing Credo’s reply, I turned around while slashing at the scarecrow right in front of me.

“I got it already!”

There were way too many demons. Even after what happened with the man in red, it was weird. But at least once all the citizens were evacuated, there’d be no need to keep hiding my hand, and it would be a much easier fight.

While fighting the scarecrows, I kept an eye on the fleeing crowd, and saw a child standing still, crying. There were several dead bodies at his feet, and among them were probably his parents who'd just been killed by demons. As soon as Kyrie, who was helping with the evacuation, noticed the kid, she immediately ran in his direction just as a group of scarecrows started approaching him.

I jumped towards them. Kyrie was shielding the child with her body, but if it came to it, the demons would've easily sliced through them both.

The creatures prepared to pounce. I charged with Red Queen and drove them back. Kyrie, who'd kept her eyes closed in fear, realized what had happened and turned to me.

“Nero!”

“Go! Get out here!”

I sighed in relief when I saw Kyrie leading the kid to headquarters. I respected the sentiment, but really, what good could come out if to save someone else you sacrifice your own life?

Kyrie wouldn't agree, because she doesn't do what she does to get anything out of it. No matter who could have been there in place of that kid, an old man, a woman, or even me -

even if it was someone who had personally wronged her, she would've still jumped in and tried to protect them, without hesitation. That's just the kind of person she is.

Personally, I don't get it. Thinking that you, alone, could protect everyone regardless of circumstance sounds too naive. Compassion's all well and good, but without power to back it up, it doesn't mean anything.

Kyrie's compassion might be a beautiful thing in theory, but in practice, it's useless by itself.

That's why I have to be strong.

So that her compassion isn't in vain, so that I can help her achieve what she wants.

Everyone had finally left. I smirked and took my hand out of my pocket.

“Not so fast...”

I said as a scarecrow tried to charge at me. I grabbed it by its foot with my devil bringer and swung it high up in the air. I had nothing to fear with both Red Queen and my devil bringer at my disposal, even that many demons at once were

no issue. That being said, there was no guarantee that more wouldn't keep spawning indefinitely from portals.

“Got to block the road!”

The road that leads to headquarters started with a stone arch, so I threw the scarecrow right into it. The arch collapsed on impact, crumbling down to block the street. One could probably still pass through if they tried hard enough, but it was at least better than leaving it wide open.

I had more than a dozen scarecrows around me. I'd just cut them off from the larger amount of prey, and now only had me as their target. I smashed one on the ground with my devil bringer and shot another right in the head. The next four all attacked at once, and I caught them all with one strike of Red Queen, but it couldn't cut through the bulk of them - this is the part where you'd give up on landing the hit, and try again.

If I'd had a regular sword, that is.

I couldn't help but laugh as I revved the handle, setting all four scarecrows ablaze. When I sent Red Queen for repairs, this time, I made sure to improve the exceed even further - it was now able to spit out even more flames.

“C'mon...!”

The gauge was filled to the max, and I attacked. The momentum of the spray of fire sent my sword hand back, and when I swung it back forwards, it cut the demon in front of me cleanly in half, both pieces disappearing in a cloud of fire and black smoke.

One of the scarecrows tried to get me from behind, so I jumped on top of its body, stabbed it with my sword, and revved the handle.

The power of the flames sent the demon skidding on the floor, and I rode it like a makeshift hovercraft. It crashed into the remaining scarecrows, which I then shot at and smashed into the ground with my devil bringer. It got rid of them faster than just cutting them up, and worked pretty effectively as a temporary tactic while my sword was still embedded in the demon under my feet.

It took only a few minutes until all of the scarecrows were dealt with. The only one left was the one I'd used as means of transportation - I picked it up, it was pretty roughed up but somehow, still alive.

“You don't give up easy, huh?”

I said, and threw it against the gate to the town plaza. The open gate fell right on the demon, squishing it and dealing the final blow.

“It should be safe now...”

I rolled my shoulders and neck a few times to stretch them. I was supposed to go to the castle next, but with both roads blocked, I had to go through the cathedral instead. It was a bit of a bother, but there was no other way. Guess I'd have some time to warm up before facing the man in red. I didn't really feel like I needed it, I was already fully raring to go - though whether I'd be able to hold a candle to him even at my best, I had no idea.

STAGE 04



In the uppermost floor of the Order's HQ is the bedroom of the vicar, Sanctus.

Because a terrorist had just shot him in the head and, ostensibly, assassinated him, he was lying in his bed. According to the Order's tradition, a white cloth was to be placed over the face of the deceased - but Sanctus had no cloth over his head, and the bullet hole on his forehead had vanished.

The General of the Holy Knights, Credo, stood by his side quietly, like a loyal dog waiting for an order. Or it could be said that, more precisely, in this case, he was waiting for his master to return.

Sanctus' eyes remained closed, but his back raised suddenly. It might have alarmed an outsider, but to Credo, things were proceeding as expected. Sanctus' expression looked pained for a short while, and when his eyes opened, they shone a distinctly inhuman red. But after a few seconds, he blinked, and they were normal again.

“You have awakened.”

Sanctus turned in Credo's direction, looking at him.

"Credo."

He whispered, and Credo respectfully bowed his head to him.

"My men are currently in pursuit of Dante. It is only a matter of time before his location is revealed."

Despite hearing Credo's words which were meant to be reassuring, Sanctus' expression remained sour.

"What an awful individual..."

Sanctus had already known that Dante would attack him, but he hadn't anticipated it to happen under the eyes of the entire Order. For that reason alone, he felt like his opponent had gotten one up on him.

"It was fortunate I was able to participate in the Ascension Ceremony."

Sanctus said, to distract himself from the anger brewing inside him. He was already awake by now; it was no use to dwell on it. It didn't matter that he'd been shot in front of all the church's believers, he could still turn the fact in his favor.

Right then, another man came up to Credo. He was reading over his notes while walking, and muttering to himself. Once he noticed that Sanctus was up, his face lit up and he hastily put away the notes. Agnus, the director of the Order's technical bureau.

“His Holiness...! You look magnificent!”

Agnus said from behind Credo's shoulder, as if he hadn't been able to help himself, but then shut up. His mouth moved as if he was trying to say more, but no words would come out - though that could be because he was simply too ecstatic to speak.

Sanctus, still tired, smiled slightly in Agnus' direction. Agnus beamed back.

Credo put his body between Agnus and Sanctus, bumping into Agnus with his shoulder, indicating that he still wasn't finished talking to the vicar. Agnus found that gesture terribly rude, and when he turned to scowl at Credo he seemed to remember what he was initially planning to talk to him about.

“You sent that cocky kid Nero to find Dante?”

Credo didn't seem perturbed by Agnus' question.

“You question my command?”

In Credo’s honest opinion, not only was there no issue with handing the task to Nero, but there was no one better suited within the knights to do it.

Agnus didn’t seem to share that sentiment though, for he began shouting:

“Yes!”

Credo had known that he and Agnus would have probably clashed over this, but he didn’t expect it to happen in front of the vicar. He sighed, as Agnus launched into a tirade.

“What shall befall me s-s-s-s-should he stumble upon my research facility?! The brat hasn’t even gone through the Ascension Ceremony!”

“Our priority is to capture Dante.”

Credo’s words held a finality, almost as if to anger Agnus on purpose.

Nero’s public opinion among the Order’s ranks wasn’t great, but Credo felt that it was just a matter of time. With Nero’s innate almost superhuman strength, he was sure to make it through the ascension ceremony - even though on average, only one in ten people survived the process. This was also the

real reason why he'd sent Nero to pursue Dante, to prove his worth to the rest of the Order.

But no matter what he tried; Agnus may never be convinced. In Credo's own experience, after having to deal with him way too many times, trying to reason with Agnus was a lost cause.

Credo was the type of man to say what he meant concisely and to the point. But that just angered Agnus until he was too flustered to speak properly, and words stopped coming cleanly out of his mouth. It was like they spoke two different languages.

“Why you t-t-t—!”

He was probably trying to insult or threaten Credo, but because of his speech impediment which got exponentially worse with strong emotions, the words got stuck in his mouth. It was also part of the reason why he generally avoided people, and remained secluded in his own lab to continue his research.

Sanctus looked between the two, and spoke.

“Credo.”

Credo bowed at him when addressed.

“Gather everyone. I must ease their minds on this matter.”

Sanctus said.

“Of course.”

Credo bowed again, and left the room. Agnus stared at him in dismay.

“Agnus...”

Despite his earlier sour mood, as soon as he heard himself being addressed, Agnus whipped around to face Sanctus.

“Yes? Does your Holiness require anything?”

Agnus really didn't get why Sanctus always put so much faith in Credo. True, he might be well liked enough among the knights, but in addition to being the General of the Holy Knights, he was always getting new missions of the highest priority.

On the other hand, similarly to his introverted nature, Agnus' tasks were also always to be assigned and dealt with in secret.

“I want some adjustments done to the Saviour, could you do that for me?”

Agnus was overjoyed.

“B-but of course! I am always at your disposal!”

“Yes... then please get it done. After all, no one but you can do it.”

Sanctus added the last bit specifically because he was talking to Agnus, who now seemed on the brink of crying from joy. Credo is a proud man who values honor - to wrap him around his finger, all he has to do is praise him in front of others and delegate important, hard to deal with tasks to him.

Agnus, instead, thrives when thinking what he's doing is unique and irreplaceable. He's the kind of man who can be won if he thinks he's being let in on a secret, and that he's the only one capable of getting the specific task done.

The animosity between the two was indeed a problem, but as long as they could be wrangled, it wouldn't be an issue. As a vicar, one has to deal with all sorts of people, and Sanctus, who kept his deepest thoughts only to himself, though he had quite the hang of it. And if it ever got to the point where the hostility between them started interfering with things, he could always get rid of one of them.

A cryptic smile appeared on Sanctus' face, one that Agnus completely missed.





Demons had been appearing all over town.

In the warehouse, the cathedral, the streets, the back alleys.

I still didn't understand what the hell happened. On the way to the castle, I'd lost count of how many demons I'd cut through, yet their numbers didn't seem to dwindle in the least.

The only possible explanation was that some gate to hell had to have opened. That's where the demons in the forest probably came from, too. The human world and the demon world are separated, and it's impossible to go from one to the other - but if a gate that connects the two worlds is opened, then demons will come pouring in.

I'd heard from the guys in the technical bureau that there's places where it's easier to open gates or portals than others. Demons often appear in the general area of Fortuna, because it's one of those places. There was also talk of man made, artificial gates, but - that's all it was, talk. There weren't supposed to be any physical gates nearby, at least that I knew of.

But I still couldn't entirely rule out the possibility that this was all the doing of the man who had assassinated the vicar. I don't know how to describe it, but when I touched that man's sword, I felt something, a strong demonic power. I had no evidence to back it up, but I had a hunch that that sword had to be somehow involved.

To get to the castle, I had to get through Ferrum Hills. There stood an abandoned iron mine, where the mountain had been hollowed out into a cave leading to Lamina Peak, and at the top of the mountain is where the castle is located. The castle's a very important landmark, but it remains out of the way and in a very difficult to reach place. That's because the people of Fortuna aren't very keen on disturbing the landscape - even the streets have been mostly kept the same as they've always been. Perhaps it's all in an attempt to preserve the Fortuna that Sparda once lived in.

If I had to give my two cents, I really didn't think Sparda would be upset if anyone changed the city layout for convenience's sake, but no one among the locals would agree with me there.

When I was still in town, something felt off, and I thought I'd seen something in the distance - a huge black slab. I was sure I'd been mistaken, at first, because it looked the exact same as the Monument we have in the city. This replica stood in the middle of the hills, and when I got to the foot of

the mountain, I narrowed my eyes to get a better look. Sure enough, I'd seen it right. If I stared long enough, I thought I could see the surface of the slate shift in color.

“This isn't good...”

As I kept staring at it, I noticed several scarecrows emerging from the stone surface.



“Let me guess, more demons?”

It was a surreal sight, but it was right in front of my eyes. I prepared myself to deal with this horde before I got to the castle, but just as I was about to move, the scarecrows were engulfed in flames. Suddenly, my right hand began hurting. Whatever was coming next had to be big. The slate started glowing brightly, and if I looked hard enough, I could see another world from the other side.

“That’s a gate...!”

A torrent of flames erupted from the gate, and with them, a huge demon came out. It was the biggest demon I’d ever seen. It had a horse-like lower body and a vaguely human torso, but its face resembled more a cow than anything else. In one of its hands, it held a sword, and its face looked grim.

The giant demon jumped from the hill to the foot of the mountain, curled in on itself and then let out an animalistic roar. As it did that, the entire surrounding area was soon lit ablaze with the same fire that burned on the creature’s body. It looked around itself, and started walking.

“Ahh, the human world, it’s been a while...”

That demon could apparently speak human language, but it no longer surprised me. After all, so did the man in red, and he was also a demon. Who would've guessed, but some demons are the chatty sort?

The demon's footsteps made the earth shake and sway as he slowly approached me, but he wasn't looking at me, like he hadn't even noticed my existence, like I was nothing but a bug by the side of the road.

That thought pissed me off, and I started walking towards him.

The fire caused by the demon made the air unbearably hot, he was probably thriving in it, but I've never been a big fan of heat. Nevertheless, I kept getting closer, but he still ignored me. No problem, it's not like I'm in a hurry or anything. Just as I was thinking that, the demon passed by me. He was probably so big that he ignored all humans by default. I should probably let him know that he wasn't dealing with any ordinary human.

As I looked at the demon getting farther and farther away, I took Red Queen from my back. I revved it to the max, and used the momentum to swing the blade around me in a circle. The movement sent a gust of wind all around me, instantly blowing out the fire. That seemed to get the demon's attention, who finally turned to look at me:

“How curious...”

I hefted Red Queen over my shoulder, and shrugged.

“Fire’s bad for the complexion. I burn easily, never tan.”

The demon cocked his head slightly, and puffed out a flaming hot breath as he stared at me.

“When I came to the world 2000 years ago, there was no such human as the likes of you.”

“Wanna make it another 2000?”

The demon’s voice rumbled in his chest, and he waved his sword high over his head:

“Silence!”

He shouted as his sword descended on me. If I hadn’t met the man in red, I might’ve been a little scared. Could I really win against an enemy so massive? Against a sword that big?

But I’d already faced off against that man. After only a few rounds fighting him, I knew a demon like this one wouldn’t pose a real threat. His sword work wasn’t even half as fast or deadly as that man’s.

As the tips of our swords clashed against each other, I didn't panic. I made a movement to thwart the demon's sword, and he staggered backwards. Once he'd found his footing, he stared at me.

“Futile pest, you will suffer the wrath of Berial!”

He proclaimed, then waved his sword around, generating more and more flames, covering his entire body. He crouched and continued,

“I, the conqueror of the Fire Hell!”

Berial's massive sword slashed the ground towards me, and I jumped back to avoid it, all the while shooting at him with Blue Rose. For an enemy of this size, my bullets were as good as trying to stab him with pin needles. Not just that, but the fire around him worked almost as a protective shield, and the heat was such that most of the bullets melted outright, rendering them useless.

“That contraption you call a weapon... is nothing but a useless toy!”

Berial once again swung his sword at me, the whole blade was on fire so when he moved it it left a flaming trail in its

wake. Red Queen's flames paled in comparison, and that only pissed me off more.

I used the exceed to light up Red Queen, and jumped up onto the roof of the nearest building. Berial was huge, so the best course of action was to go straight for the head.

His sword crashed into the building, crushing it to smithereens, and before I could be caught in the devastation, I jumped, ready to hit him over the head with my sword.

“Here goes nothing!”

I pressed the clutch just as the sword connected with his forehead. If it had been a run of the mill demon, it would've been cut in two - but as things stood, even though the blade embedded itself in his flesh, the damage was far from fatal. Berial shook his head, and grabbed for me with his right hand. I parried with my devil bringer.

I could feel this was doing the trick in gaining me the upper hand, but his flames wrapped around my body, until the fire itself, as if sentient, seemed to push me backwards and off of him.

Berial was on me in an instant, charging with his sword, and I used my right arm to block it - but the impact forced me back. I stuck my landing and managed to stay on my feet.

“That’s no everyday house fire.”

That was to say - Berial’s flames were way bigger and hotter than regular fire, and they seemed to hold some type of demonic power - something similar to my devil bringer. I shook my head as I thought about it.

I’d been trying not to think about what these powers say about me. I called it “devil bringer” almost to make fun of it - I really didn’t want to consider the possibility of literally having some sort of demonic power.

After his last hit, Berial had stopped trying to attack me, and was just looking at me in silence. I put my guard up, not knowing what he was up to.

“Your arm... you are not human!”

I could do nothing in response but sigh.

“Don’t ask. Damn thing drives me crazy though.”

“Enough nonsense! Such power is not human in nature!”

I didn’t wait for him to finish before attacking. I didn’t want to listen to his theories, or hear him call me a demon.

“Shut up!!!”

I ran to him and hit one of his legs. That staggered Berial slightly, and I started revving up my sword.

“Maybe you should take a nap!”

This time, when I jumped, I calculated my trajectory in detail. My main aim was to get to the guy’s upper body, and hit where he was vulnerable.

“One!”

One hit was just the start. I immediately recharged the exceed, and used the next strike to propel me further upwards.

“Two!”

I revved again... almost there.

“Three!”

After the last blow, I was at eye level with Berial. He reared back, as if preparing to attack, and I launched my strike.

“Go back to hell!”

My own fire engulfed me, protecting me from Berial's flames. Gravity brought me sharply down, and I put my whole body into the strike, smashing my blade between Berial's eyebrows.

He made a pained sound, and the flames around him weakened visibly. That was my chance.

My mind was racing, planning my next move. I grabbed Berial's face with my devil bringer. As if to adapt to Berial's humongous frame, my hand's projection also massively increased in size. I'd never tried doing that before, didn't even know that I could, but it came to me so naturally.

I jumped high in the air, dragging Berial with me, and neither he nor his freaky flames gave any resistance. The fire must have weakened now that its master couldn't hold himself up.

Berial tried weakly shoving me off, but he was no match for the strength of my devil bringer.

The hand projection slammed him into the ground from where I was up in midair. The impact he made when crashing sent dust clouds flying everywhere.

I let go of Berial, and once the dust settled, I saw him swaying on his feet, trying to get up. Not only was this guy big, he also didn't know when to give up.

“What, you still want to go? There's plenty more where that came from.”

Berial didn't pay any mind to my taunt, and instead just looked at my right hand.

“Indeed... that's demonic power...!”

“Hey, I'm human. I'm not a demon, don't lump me in with you guys.”

Berial gave a wry, bitter laugh at my reply, finally seeming to have gathered the strength to get back up.

“Neither demon nor human... you are just like he was.”

“And “he” would be...?”

Berial didn't answer.

“I must restore my powers...”

Just as he said that, his body was once again engulfed in flames, until he was indistinguishable from the fire itself.

“Hey!”

He ignored me. The flame that once was Berial flew back towards the slate, and disappeared into the gate.

“Coward!”

I snorted at the lifeless looking slab of stone. I wanted to shoot at it, but it would’ve probably done nothing. I highly doubted I could destroy it myself.

“Forget it, I got to get going anyway.”

I’d wasted enough time already.

But Berial’s final words echoed in my head, and for whatever reason, the images of the man in red and the mysterious “he” that Berial had mentioned overlapped in my mind.

STAGE 05



Dante was wandering the halls of Fortuna Castle, searching for his partner, Trish, who he was supposed to meet up with. Thing was, Trish had only told him when to meet, and never specified a location. So, he had to look around everywhere she might possibly be.

Many rooms in the castle had been turned into museum exhibits. There were all sorts of ancient items, weapons and suits of armor, and weird looking statues, but Dante wasn't interested in them, at all.

“Unbelievable... did the old man really live here?”
If this was truly Sparda's home once, he was sure he'd find some type of devil arm, or magic artefact - but no matter how you looked at it, the castle was filled to the brim with regular, ordinary human clutter.

The whole place was eerily silent.

Demons did appear from time to time, but they were few and far between. Dante didn't even have to take out his sword -

Rebellion - to deal with them, just a few bullets from Ebony and Ivory did the trick.

“Just where is she...”

Dante walked into the next room with a sigh, but stopped after making it past the threshold. The whole place smelled like old, moldy books - a library. He couldn't smell any demons nearby, but he still looked up and around. He took random book from a shelf and opened it. He couldn't understand the language it was written in.

He tsk-ed.

“Well, that's just boring.”

He put the book down on a nearby table. Right as he did that, he began feeling a presence somewhere behind him. Not human, but not an enemy demon either. This one felt familiar. He turned around but didn't see anyone, his view apparently blocked by a shelf.

“What, you playing hide and seek? Don't tell me you forgot to do your make up and now you're too embarrassed to show your face.”

Behind the bookcase, a slightly mischievous giggle answered Dante's questions.

“Not at all. But I’m in disguise right now, I wouldn’t want to startle you.”

Trish, Dante’s partner, remained hidden, but still seemed intent on carrying on a conversation. This, then, was the place she’d chosen to meet with Dante. He had only happened to walk in this room by chance, but thinking about it, it was just the type of place that Trish would like, what with her curiosity and thirst for knowledge.



“So, how’s your search going?”

Since Trish seemed to have no intention of showing herself, Dante went straight to the point. Though he was a bit curious to see what she looked like, she’d been having to mix in with the Order for a while, and he wondered what “fitting in” with them looked like to her.

“I know where it is.”

“Alright. So, tell me.”

“There’s an underground facility hidden within the castle... but getting it back isn’t going to be child’s play.”

Initially, Dante only came to Fortuna to destroy the order. But Trish, who’d been a step ahead and had already sneaked into the Order, had sent him a message, and now he had another goal.

That is the thing that Dante and Trish were discussing right now:

Yamato, the sword that belonged to Dante’s father, and had then been passed onto his brother, that had been missing for years. To Dante, that sword was not only a keepsake from his father, but a memento of his brother. He had to destroy the

Order and take back Vergil's sword. He couldn't back away from this, not anymore.

"The sword's broken, and the Order isn't able to restore it with their current technology, so they won't be able to use it."

After Trish was done explaining, Dante shrugged.

"Then I'll take care of those guys first. Where should I go next?"

"From the back of the Castle you can get into the forest, and from there you'll reach the Order's Headquarters."

"Got it."

Dante sighed and made to leave the room, but then paused. He couldn't see Trish, but his senses told him she should still be behind the bookshelf.

"Do you think I have time to look around the castle a bit? There's a few things I want to check out."

"Knock yourself out, but I doubt you'll find any significant information about Sparda here."

Trish answered, having seen right through Dante's intentions. Deep down, he wanted to at least confirm whether his father really had lived in this castle or not.

"Maybe I could find something I recognize... have a bit of a tour of the place."

Trish snickered from behind the bookshelf at Dante's words.





When I exited the tunnel in the hills and started my trek on Lamina Peak, I was assaulted by a wave of wintery weather. And sure, many mountains have high enough altitudes that the top is covered in snow year-round, but it shouldn't be possible for the mountain road to be already like that from the bottom at this time of year.

I started climbing, all nerves on alert.

Maybe this snow was the same as Berial's flames, some kind of demonic phenomenon. But I couldn't feel any demonic presence nearby.

In the middle of Lamina Peak, the mountains give way for a depression in the middle, which is where the foundation of Fortuna Castle is built - the former lair of the Legendary Dark Knight Sparda.

It's the most popular tourist attraction of Fortuna, though it's not like we get a lot of tourists, what with the island being a pretty closed off place. But those few odd times that foreigners manage to come to the island, they're naturally drawn to the place. It's probably also because you can see it from everywhere.

To get to Fortuna Castle, one has to climb the mountain up to its midpoint. Then there's a very long bridge that crosses over the gap between two mountains, and after that, on the opposite side, is the road that reaches Fortuna Castle. Making the place so hard to get to must have been a strategic decision to defend against enemies in ancient times.

As I carefully stepped on the snow-covered bridge, I heard a loud noise. It sounded like some type of beast, or rapacious bird - and at the same time, the bridge suddenly started shaking violently.

I had no idea how, but the bridge that had managed to stand intact for thousands of years was now collapsing. I tried rushing to the other end before it could crumble entirely, but unfortunately, it was too late.

The bridge split in two halves, the large pieces of debris falling down into the mountain river below. I got caught in that ravine. To dampen my fall, I used one of the pieces of the bridge as leverage to jump and end up landing with a roll in a spot where the snow was thick.

Despite falling from such heights, I was unhurt. My body might be tougher than most people, but this time it was definitely only due to luck.

Another unexpectedly lucky outcome was that now, I didn't have to climb the whole mountain road to the castle. Huh, I

hadn't thought that jumping off the bridge might've been the most time-saving way of getting there.

I was getting close to Fortuna Castle. But just as I prepared myself to continue onwards, my right hand started hurting.

I looked at the wreckage around me. Surely, such a sturdy bridge wouldn't collapse all of a sudden by chance, not to mention the unnatural, off season snowy weather - a demon must be responsible.

I looked up to the gate of Fortuna Castle, and on it stood a type of demon that I'd never seen before.

At first glance, it looked a lot like the lizard I encountered in the forest, but it had a layer of ice wrapped around its body like armor, and on its fingers were daggers of ice in place of talons.

The creature let out a noise similar to what I'd heard on the bridge, and sent ice blades shooting at me. I jumped to dodge, and took out Blue Rose.

The demon had become incased in an icy block, presumably to protect itself from my shots. From that alone I could tell that this was definitely a higher order demon than a scarecrow.

Once I landed, the demon raised its arm and sent more ice bullets my way. I didn't react fast enough, and the projectile grazed me on the arm, and I grimaced at the sudden sharp pain. It wasn't as much a bullet as it was a throwing dagger,

just a little touch and it cut through both my clothes and my flesh.

I stepped forward, slashing horizontally with Red Queen, but the creature jumped back, launching more ice projectiles. I rolled and avoided them easily this time, but when I stood up, the ice demon had put a lot of distance between us.

“I’m getting fed up with this...!”

I shouted, clenching and unclenching my right hand on instinct. This wasn’t an enemy I could deal with lightly. If I let it see through my strategy, it might make things difficult. That’s why I’d been using mainly Blue Rose - I didn’t want to show my hand all at once. I stopped under the ice barrage, and shielded myself with my arm. I had to get things done quickly.

I shot at the thing’s arm, and immediately shot out my devil bringer towards it. The demon seemed to realize what I was trying to do, and attempted to escape.

“Gotcha.”

I grabbed it by its tail, swinging its body high in the air, making sure to slam it into the surrounding rubble while I did so, and the creature let out a pitiful wail.

“Fuck off!!!”

I launched the demon as hard as I could, and it hit the top of the castle gate. The ice around its body shattered, revealing the lizard-like body underneath, before falling limply and fading away.

I was pleasantly surprised it was already over, but when I looked up, the snowstorm continued on despite the ice demon having been dealt with. It seemed that it was a different demon causing this weather.

“Of course, it wouldn’t be that easy.”

This ice demon might have been stronger than a scarecrow, but it didn’t even hold a candle to Berial, it wouldn’t have the power to control the weather.

“So, what is it then?”

I sighed, and continued on my way to the castle.

After going through the gate, the way was pretty straightforward. There weren’t any demons around either. But before I could even begin to feel at ease, I had an off feeling pricking at the back of my neck, and looked up. Something shot out from behind the castle walls, and I immediately took out my gun, readying myself to shoot, but

when I looked better, I saw that the figure looked human - it was a person, leaping through the air with a scarecrow on its back.

I stared in awe as the person smashed the demon to the ground, and slowly stood up.

It was a woman with dark skin and neatly trimmed silver hair, and she was dressed pretty strangely. She wore a white dress, but with a very plunging neckline that showed her ample cleavage. She had no trousers under that, only tall boots that highlighted the thighs where they stopped.

I didn't know that woman, but I was instantly sure she wasn't from the island. No girl from Fortuna would dress like that.

Just as I was about to ask her who she was, a pack of scarecrows that had to have been chasing her from before surrounded her.

Already one step ahead, the woman saw through the demons' plan. She instantly neutralized their attacks, and started decimating them with sword-like daggers that she seemed to have pulled out of thin air.

I couldn't do much but shoot away a demon that aimed for her back.

“I owe you thanks.”

She said it without hostility, but for whatever reason, my right hand still hurt despite all the scarecrows having been dispatched - so that meant she was likely a demon.

“You’re from the Order...? I’ve never seen you before.”

I didn’t let my guard down, but I still put my right hand in my pocket to hide it, just in case she was just another Order member.

“I’m new. Gloria.”

Gloria said, extending her right hand. She apparently wanted to shake my hand, but I couldn’t do that with my freaky arm. I turned away slightly, ignoring her.

Gloria giggled mischievously.

“You’re Nero, right? I heard rumors.”

She did seem to be from the Order. Otherwise, how would she know my name? My hand probably hurt from some other demon nearby. Or maybe it was left over from the last battle?

“Hasn’t everyone?”

I shrugged, and Gloria replied with laughter in her voice:

“Quite a few in fact, and none too flattering. They say you’re an atheist, arrogant, and hard to get along with.”

Yeah, just the type of judgement I expected.

“...nothing I haven’t heard before.”

I said, and heard Gloria let out a barely suppressed sigh. I looked around, and asked:

“So, what’s the deal? Where’re they coming from?”

“It’s strange... no matter the number you kill, more will come.”

“Then I’ll leave that chore to you. I got some personal slaying to take care of.”

I looked back to Gloria, and saw her kneeling before me, folding the daggers in her hands and putting them into her boots. As if she didn’t care that anyone else might be looking, her legs were spread open, letting her skirt ride up and giving an eyeful, uncaring if her audience didn’t want to actually see it. I sighed and turned away.

“I’ll join with the others; we’ll take care of them.”

Her words were said in a pleasant tone, but her expression looked slightly off. She hadn't given me a very good impression. It was the first time I'd ever even heard of her within the Order, and sure, I might not be involved in what goes on in the higher ranks - but still, it was rare for someone to have joined and not be immediately introduced to everyone else.

“May the Savior be with you on your journey.”

Gloria left after having said that. I looked at her back, and snorted.

“Savior, huh...”

It was a bit funny to me that a woman like her would be the religious sort.

When was the last time I'd been to the castle? I couldn't remember the specific occasion. Maybe when I went with Kyrie and the kids from the orphanage? I wasn't a knight yet back then, so at least over three years ago. Though in theory it's a historical and religious place, there's no need to ever come here for business, and the damp, stuffy air of the building made me uncomfortable.

The castle was empty, with the only sound being the thud of my boots on the floor. The man in red had already been there. For what reason? Did he come to steal art and ancient artefacts? It wasn't an outlandish theory, but then wouldn't he have just sneaked in here in the first place? It wouldn't make a lot of sense to steal things after having already made a big ruckus.

Since I had no clue of the man's aim, I blindly searched the entire castle, defeating the odd demon here and there. Gloria hadn't mentioned anything like that, but there had to be a strong demon that came through a gate in the castle, otherwise there'd be no explanation why there were other demons at all.

How had the man in red activated the gate?

I followed his trail, and found only more demons. Eventually, I ended up in the library.

This place looked different from the other rooms - it was a mess, and there were a bunch of books thrown over the table, like the guy had just come by and sat reading for a while.

I looked at an open book on the table. It appeared ancient, and it wasn't in a language I could read. But I was familiar enough with it for me to pick up the odd word or two, enough that I was able to tell it was a book on demonology.

“Didn’t figure this guy for a bookworm... demonology, though?”

I muttered as I turned the pages, when suddenly I felt a presence behind me. I whirled around, threw the book away and took out my gun. Behind me was a knight in strange armor, holding a heavy looking shield and a spear. His body language didn’t look familiar, but the armor was indeed engraved with the Order’s insignia, so I figured he was just another holy knight. I let myself relax, smirked and hid my right hand.

“That’s one way to get yourself shot.”

The knight didn’t reply, just stood there in silence.

“So, you after this guy or just there to catch some demons?”

I turned my back to the knight, picking the book back again. If that’s what the man in red was reading, then I’d better figure out what it was about, it could be a clue as to what he’s going after.

The guy still didn’t speak a word to me, he hadn’t even bothered to say hello.

“Silent type, huh? Well, that’s... annoying.”

I said it deliberately louder than before, so that he could hear me. I heard him move closer, but instead of answering, the knight raised his spear towards me. I snorted and caught the weapon with the open book in my hand.

“So much for friendly banter!”

I threw his spear off, and dodged as he struck out again. He took a few steps back, and looked at me, clearly having made me his target.

“If you want a fight, then come on!”

I said while revving Red Queen, truth be told I didn't really think it was the right time to drop everything and have a spar, but he didn't retreat, so neither did I. The spears of the Holy Knights are strong weapons, on par with their swords. My blade roaring, I continued making rapid slashes at him. I dodged and parried, but each hit was blocked by the guy's huge shield.

When the blowback from the impact forced me back, he took the opportunity to stab at me again. But a spear's trajectory is straight and easy to dodge, and I attacked again at his side - his huge shield, once again, stopped me in my tracks.

Fighting him and his spear wouldn't be a huge challenge, the real issue was that shield.

Not only could it perfectly block Red Queen's hits, but I'd never seen or dealt with that piece of equipment before. It must be some sort of new weapon for the Holy Knights, but I had no time to spare to mull that over while in the middle of battle.

In theory, the easiest way to win this fight would be to attack the guy's unprotected right side, or even his back - but I couldn't do that, not after he challenge me first. If I wanted to truly win, I couldn't be a coward, and it would only count if I totally crushed the guy's confidence.

The next time I struck with Red Queen, I put my whole body into the hit. And even when it bounced back on his shield, I went at it again and again - after several hits, there was finally a crack on the knight's shield. I concentrated my strikes on the crack, and sure enough, the shield shattered in an instant, and he was blown away by the impact.

I chased after him, ready to strike him now that he was down, and Red Queen stabbed right through the armor. But that felt incredibly strange - it felt like inside, the armor was empty.

The knight swayed and went down like a sack of potatoes, and the armor pieces scattered to the floor. Sure enough, once I came up to inspect them, there was nobody inside it.

The pieces became enveloped in green light, and my right arm had a faint reaction.

“A demon.”

As the armor vanished, so did the pain in my arm. I picked up one of the pieces left over, but my hand didn't react.

“It possessed the Order's armor...”

I had no evidence to back up that theory, but that seemed like the more likely option.

“Can't waste any more time here, got to hurry.”

I threw down the armor piece and sighed deeply. I went through all the rooms I hadn't been in yet, and it was like all the demons that were there before had been replaced by those weird possessed armors, which instantly attacked me on sight. Every time I defeated one, I'd look at it and it would be empty, same as that first one. Now that I knew they definitely weren't human, at least I could fight without hiding my devil bringer, which made things a lot easier. However, it was worrying that so many order armors were apparently possessed by demons. If these suits held new pieces of weaponry, wouldn't they be stored in headquarters? That implied that the building had been invaded by demons.

“That’s not a good sign.”

I whispered, standing up. Credo should have been in Headquarters too, and he was strong enough to drive most demons back, he wouldn’t have let them get in without a fight - but just to be safe, I had to deal with the man in red as soon as possible, then run to Headquarters to see the situation for myself. Unfortunately, other than the library, I seemed to have lost all traces of him.

I anxiously entered the castle courtyard, which was covered in incredibly thick snow, and I could only see a few meters through the storm.

In the middle of the blizzard, two women-like glowing blue silhouettes appeared to be floating in some sort of dance. They definitely weren’t human, but didn’t look like particularly strong demons either, more like some type of fairytale snow creature.

“This blizzard must be their doing.”

As soon as I approached, the creatures waved at me, as if tempting me to come closer. But I could sense their rancid smell, and stopped dead in my tracks. Suddenly, the ground started shaking, and from out of my range of sight appeared something huge, with a giant mouth full of teeth, making some type of gross noise.

As I jumped away, the snow stopped, and my line of sight gradually became clear.

“So, this is what you really look like...”

What had appeared in front of me was a frog, a ridiculously large frog. It had two tentacles dangling from the top of its head, which is what the smaller creatures were connected to. It probably used those “fairies” to lure humans and eat them. But that was a dumb strategy, when the whole thing was so clearly suspicious.

“You’re stronger than you look, with a smart-ass mouth to match!”

So, the frog said. The sounds it made that attempted to mimic human language were accompanied with disgusting wet smacking noises, and it made me want to cover my ears. I couldn’t grasp every word it tried to pronounce because its speech was so garbled.

“Cut me some slack, I’m just not big on toads.”

I replied, and the thing let out a big breath, opened its huge mouth and started shouting:

“Fool!!!”

As it screamed, waves of disgusting spittle spewed out of its mouth. I raised my arms to my face so it wouldn't get on me. It must have had at least enough IQ to speak in human language, but it still seemed like nothing but a big dumb demon to me.

“You think I care what you say? Me, the mighty Bael?!”

I had no patience for this. Honestly, in the face of such an unpleasant enemy, I wanted nothing more than to leave someone else to deal with it, but I just couldn't, for two main reasons.

First of all, I couldn't continue chasing after the man in red without passing by the courtyard, so I had to get it out of the way first.

And second of all, right behind Bael stood a black slab, same as the one on Ferrum Hills.

After I'd defeated Berial, the thing stopped spawning demons, so hopefully the same would happen with Bael.

“If we don't finish this quickly, it's goanna scar me for life.”

I muttered, and as Bael again opened his mouth to speak, I quickly covered my ears with my hands.

“I will crush you!!!”

Even with both ears blocked, his voice was almost enough to give me a headache.

Bael shivered, and from his icicle-covered back pieces of ice shot out like bullets. It was similar to that ice demon from earlier, but instead of aiming them straight at me, he launched them into the air, letting them rain down on me with gravity. It was harder to dodge this way, because I couldn't fully predict where the ice would fall. All I had for a clue was the shadow of the ice on the ground to avoid being hit. While I was busy dodging, Bael suddenly opened his mouth, screaming and leaping straight at me. I jumped to avoid him, but when I landed, I accidentally cut at his foot with my sword, and as soon as it hit, it squirted out that same disgusting fluid that came from his mouth.

“...Ew!”

I immediately pulled back without thinking, I really wanted to avoid getting dirty with his fluids. I might not be wearing my finest clothing, but I still had to keep wearing it for the rest of the mission.

I jumped behind him, and tried shooting. Compared to Berial and the ice demon, Bael's body was a lot softer, and

firearms were more effective, but he was still too big to properly be damaged by bullets.

“So, you want to play games? How’s this?!”

Bael howled, contracted his body and the leaped up into the air. My eyes widened at the sight. He had longer legs than it seemed, and his jumping abilities were incredible. I watched as the huge body raised up high, tens of meters above me.

If I had to categories this type of attack, I guess I’d say it was similar to the ice throwing from before, but on a much, much bigger scale. I quickly ran out of the range of Bael’s rapidly falling shadow. At the last possible second, I rolled on the ground, out of his attack just as his gigantic body slammed into the ground, causing it to shake. That also made the snowflakes around us raise up into the air, blocking my line of sight. All I had as a clue to where he was were the two glowing spots of light.

The woman shaped appendages in front of me weren’t dancing anymore, instead they too started attacking me.

“So, this was another trick.”

No matter what weapons I used against them, it was still hard to attack them both because they kept leaping out from me just as I was starting to do some damage. Clearly, Bael was controlling them from wherever he was.

That was another thing to watch out for - I might not have been able to see him, but Bael was still out there, hidden behind the snowstorm, looking for the slightest bit of hesitation from me to pounce.

I felt his breath at my back, and quickly jumped.

Unsurprisingly, when I looked back, I saw Bael right at my heels, trying to take a bite out of me. I shot at its back, but the layer of ice seemed to also serve as defensive armor.

“Fuck off!”

Bael yelled and shook. I screamed loudly, but it was too late. He started shooting out his icicles just as I was in point blank range, on top of his head. I could jump, but it wouldn't matter. Several ice projectiles hit me at once.

The blowback from the impact sent him flying against the wall of the courtyard. As soon as I landed, I got back up into a fighting stance. Bael seemed to inflate all of a sudden, and then with a big breath out, he spat out a huge amount of snow that again made it impossible to see. I saw the appendage creatures preparing themselves to attack me again.

The ice projectiles hadn't done a huge amount of damage, but trying to avoid them distracted me from dodging his jumping attack. So, I wouldn't repeat the same mistake again, I had to take him out before he attempted the same thing twice. That's what I was thinking as I hit the glowing creatures. They might not be vital organs that cause serious damage when hit, but it would at least slow him down. I managed to grab one of the things' foot. It struggled and tried to get away, but I wouldn't let go.

“Enough playing hide and seek... time for the real games to begin!”

I shouted as I slammed the appendage into the ground, forcing Bael, who was hiding behind the snow, to show his face.

“You bastard!”

I jumped into his mouth as he screamed. I was tired of this fight, and wanted to get it over with as quick as possible. So instead of trying to cut him up from the outside, better to do it from the inside.

I maxed the exceed and swung Red Queen around like a madman. Bael's gross bodily fluids now covered me like I'd been bathing in them, but I'd have time to complain later.

“Go back to hell!!!”

I opened up his stomach with Red Queen, and jumped out. Bael fell to the ground weakly, and when I landed in front of his face, he glared at me while in his death throes.

“You think... you’ve... beaten me?”

So, he said, but he was clearly on his last breath.

“Hey, I should be the one complaining, now my coat’s all gross!”

I casually replied. It’s not like a demon was going to be paying for a new coat anyway.

“My brothers... will come! They...”

I got tired of hearing his ugly garble, so I stopped listening, and just decked him in the forehead with my devil bringer. Bael’s body skidded on the icy ground due to the impact, and bounced off the wall behind me. Seeing him hurtle around lightened my sour mood a bit.

Bael struggled a couple more times before going still.

“C’mon, that’s just nasty.”

I grabbed a handful of snow from the ground and rubbed my hair and coat clean with it. It was no substitute for a real shower or a good wash, but it made me feel a bit better. I was about to move on, when I suddenly realized something.

“Wait... did he say “brothers”?”

I quickly turned to look at the slate at the end of the courtyard. Just like in Ferrum Hills, a hole stretched on the smooth surface, through which you could see glimpses of the underworld.

I took a good look at the slab of stone. The gate was filled to the brim with demons that looked just like Bael.

“Oh, that’s fair!”

I ran up to the slate and slashed at it with Red Queen, but it only slightly scratched it. It would take too much time to destroy it, and by then, these guys would have had plenty of time to come out.

“Now I’ve got to fight a whole herd of these things?”

My mind was racing trying to think of a way to stop the device from working, but it only ran in circles.

The more I thought of it, the more it just irritated me. I ran up to Bael's body, lying limp on its side, and used it as a trampoline to jump. His soft and elastic body worked very well for that purpose, and I flied towards the incoming demons.

When I got there, their faces were clear and right in front of me - and well within my reach.

“Sorry pal. We're closed!”

I shouted, using my devil bringer to punch the closest one, before they had any chance to react. The one I hit was pushed back with great force, and knocked all the ones behind it down. As they were all scrambling to their feet, I frantically looked around the slate.

At the bottom of it was a small device. It looked something like a power switch. I had no proof of its purpose, but I instinctively pushed it with my right hand. Instantly, the light on the slate started closing up, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

“At least I won't have to go through a repeat of that.”

I turned around to continue on, just in time to see Bael's body disappear along with the snow

STAGE 06



Though I kept searching the castle, I still found no trace of the man in red. Just as I was thinking of going back to Headquarters to report, I happened upon a weird passage.

I'd been to Fortuna Castle several times, but I didn't remember ever seeing it before. It looked off from the castle's vaguely medieval layout. It was clearly built recently.

It all seemed very suspicious, but I still decided to go that way. It looked like it had been built specifically to avoid people seeing or noticing it in any way, and that probably meant I was not at all supposed to be there.

I passed by a few rooms, then stopped when I came upon a weird open space, and my breath hitched.

It looked like some sort of laboratory. It had a glass wall in the middle, and a desk and chair behind the glass. Right in next to it there was a huge test tube-like device, with a broken sword floating inside. It looked surreal, and for whatever reason, seeing that sword made an inexplicable feeling of nostalgia well up within me.

My right hand had also started hurting, so much that it was almost unbearable. It was very similar to what I'd felt right before meeting the man in red. I couldn't help but look around, thinking that he might be nearby, but instead who appeared was someone I'd never seen before.

“So, you've come. Just as I'd expected.”

The unfamiliar voice came from the speaker-like setup above the room, and looking back at the glass wall, I saw a man approaching it. He wore a white coat with the insignia of the Order, and had a face I'd never seen before.

“Who the hell are you?”

The man gave an exaggerated curtesy at my question.

“I... am Agnus.”

His voice droned on from the speakers.

“Working in secrecy, very few are p-p-p-privy to my existence. “

I had indeed heard his name once or twice. The head of the technical bureau - the basis for both the regular propellant system and my exceed were designed by him.

“Funny, to figure an Order official out for a stroll in a hellhole kind of place like this...”

Before I could even finish, Agnus suddenly turned towards me and jabbed a finger in my direction.

“” Hellhole”?! Watch your words!”

It seemed I’d pissed him off, but I couldn’t figure out why, so I shrugged. Agnus continued his muttering from behind the glass wall.

“Just as foul mouthed as I had heard... the rumors prove true.”

“Sure, whatever, but what the hell is this place? Does the Order own it?”

Agnus was interrupted by my question, and stared at me. Then, his grimace gave way to a small smirk, which was honestly creepy beyond description.

“...That’s none of your business.”

“Is this some kind of secret lab? You can stop worrying, I’m not goanna pry, just tell me If the guy who killed his Holiness came by, I’m chasing after him.”

From what I could tell, the only way in or out of this place was the one I took. There didn't seem to be any way into the room behind the glass wall from here, but Agnus had to get in there somehow, and the possibility that the man in red was somewhere nearby was high. If he wasn't, well, I'd just have to leave and look somewhere else.

"I'm afraid your little chase has to come to an end."

Agnus didn't elaborate any further, leaving me confused.

"What?"

"After all, this will be your dead end. The new rumors about your d-d-d-demise shall prove as true as those about your language."

If he had threatened me with a sword or a gun, I might have had the good grace to pretend to be a little scared, but his words were hollow coming through a speaker from behind a wall.

"Don't you think it's a bit harsh? Killing me because of the way I t-t-t-talk?"

I imitated Agnus' way of speaking to rile him up, and his angered expression was hard to look at. He pulled out a box

shaped device from his pocket, and pressed a button on it. When he did that, something suddenly started flying out everywhere in the room.

At first, I thought they were swords. However, it looked more like they were creatures that imitated the shape of a sword, because they easily switched between that form and a more bird-like one.

“Demons...?”

Agnus laughed like he'd already won.

“I have named them “Gladius”, doesn't that sound excellent?”

At Agnus' explanation, three Gladii rushed towards me. Though I easily dodged two of them, the third one swiped at my cheek. It stung, and I rubbed at it with my hand. When I looked at it, I saw it came away bloody.

“When mixing together reptilian demons with swords from the underworld, such a magnificent creature is born... its blade is sharp enough to cut a person in two with ease.”

If I had any doubts Agnus was from the technical bureau they were gone now. He was the same type of guy who starts

going on and on about the results of his research, and I just can't stand any of them.

I shot down a Gladius with my gun. It reverted to its sword shape and embedded itself in the ground. I thought it had died, but it wasn't long before it looked bird-like again. I couldn't make heads or tails of these creatures, less of all why the technical bureau might have an interest in them.

“What the fuck are these things? Are they supposed to be weapons for the Holy Knights or something?!”

I cried out while fighting the Gladii, and Agnus's voice reverberated from the speakers.

“Nothing you need to concern yourself with... this, this is all Credo's doing. It was Credo who ordered you to follow Dante... it was Credo who brought you here!”

“Dante...?”

Agnus had said that Credo asked me to follow this “Dante”. Logically thinking, that would mean “Dante” is the man who killed the vicar. The real question was, why would Agnus know his name? Wasn't he just a random demonic terrorist of unknown origin?

“Why do you know his name?!”

Agnus completely ignored my question. He kept staring between me and the notes in his hands, going back to write who knows what.

“Stop treating this like your little science project!”

Honestly, I was wasting my time with those Gladii. I slammed one in the ground, and it turned back into a sword and stabbed into the floor.

“What, you only used to guinea pigs that don’t talk back?”

I picked up the Gladius with my devil bringer while Agnus was too busy writing something down to notice my hand.

“Catch this!”

I threw the sword out towards the glass wall, and Agnus visibly shrunk on himself when he noticed.

“Ah!”

He cried out when the Gladius bounced against the glass. The creature made a loud crashing noises as it ruptured, but the glass wall remained intact.

“It’s f-f-f-futile! This tempered glass could withstand the force of a cyclops! You can’t break it with brute force!”

So, he said, but I could tell that he was nervous.

“That so?”

I squatted, catching another Gladius and throwing it. The glass shook, but still didn't break. Agnus had been sneering, but his smile gradually dissipated. Maybe he'd seen my right hand. He wasn't taking notes anymore, but he was staring at me with his face almost plastered to the glass. The third time I threw a Gladius at the wall, the glass started cracking, but Agnus was so focused on my right arm that he didn't even notice it.

I clenched my right hand and jumped towards the wall. I swung my arm, putting all of my devil bringer's strength into hitting the crack on the glass. Sure enough, more cracks began spreading like spiderwebs from it.

“What?!”

Agnus, who'd been distracted, couldn't stop himself from screaming. At that point, the glass completely shattered. Agnus fell from the ground from the impact, and I pointed the tip of Red Queen at his throat. Agnus stared at me; his expression inscrutable.

“Tha-that-tha-that's demonic power! How can it be...?!”

I snorted as he yelled.

“Look who’s talking, jackass. Answer my question, what the hell is going on here?”

Agnus didn’t answer. It was like he didn’t even care that he had a blade pointed at him, and instead stood up to take a closer look at my arm.

“How profound...”

Agnus whispered, and he made as if to grab my hand. I pulled it away from him in disgust.

“It’s magnificent!”

Agnus kept trying to get closer to me, so I attempted swinging Red Queen towards him to stop him.

“Ok, did you even hear me?”

I tried pointing Red Queen at his neck again, but he grabbed the blade with the points of his fingers. I tried pulling it back, but his grip was surprisingly strong, and it didn’t budge an inch. Agnus continued gawking at me in amazement.

“If you want answers, then I shall give them to you.”

Agnus suddenly let go of Red Queen, and I staggered back. I still wanted to keep my distance, so I put Red Queen away to instead point my gun at him. But Agnus continued on, as if talking to himself, not an ounce of fear in his body.

“It has only been a few years since I began this research... could we isolate and bind demonic power; it could enable us to conquer the world!”

He kept going on and on uninterrupted, almost like he'd rehearsed the lines.

“That the weak and defenseless might be guided by those chosen few who can wield such power... that, that is the wish of his Holiness.

The whole thing sounded so dumb I was honestly shocked.

“What a crock... and you may as well ditch the efforts, pal, because his Holiness is dead.”

Agnus smiled cryptically at my words.

“Ahhh... but his Holiness has been reborn. As an angel!”

“An angel...?”

“Indeed, if someone of righteous mind and pure spirit were to gain demonic power... then the result would not be demonic in nature, but angelic.”

“An angel born from demonic power? Are you out of your fucking mind?”

I didn't want to hear any more of his inane drivel. I'll knock this guy down and report him to Credo. Surely, Credo wouldn't stand for this madness.

“His Holiness isn't the only one who has ascended, you know.”

At his words, Agnus' body started radiating some type of strong energy.

It caught me by surprise, and I took the full impact of the blast. Somehow, I was slammed into the wall, and immediately after something knocked into me at full force, taking the breath out of me. It was one of those hollow armors that attacked me in the castle, and soon enough two more joined, and they all pierced my body with their spears.

“Ah-!”

They stabbed me in the arms and the stomach, and I grimaced in pain. I couldn't fight back as they pinned me to the wall.

I coughed, and blood poured out of my mouth. The knights stood lined up neatly behind Agnus, who looked on with a satisfied expression.

“See what just a small fraction of my research has yielded? Look! How beautiful this white armor stands!”

I was fading in and out of consciousness as he spoke, and my vision dimmed bit by bit. But that seemed to piss Agnus off, because he began twisting the spear in my torso, jolting me awake.

“Agh?!”

I could feel my innards getting scrambled, and the pain was so bad my whole body shook with it. It seemed to go on forever before he stopped, looked at me and said:

“Didn't you say you wanted answers? I'm not finished with my explanation.”

I didn't like the crazed look in his eyes one bit.

“It was only thanks to a tiny, priceless little thing that I managed to acquire by chance, that these armors could be completed. Do you know what that is?”

Agnus paused, as if he was waiting for my answer. I shook my head weakly. The only thought in my head was how to escape the situation, how I could possibly manage to get out of there.

Agnus droned on, his expression ecstatic.

“It was a shard... a shard of the legendary Black Angel’s armor! That something so fortuitous could happen... that the Black Angel was defeated, and such a magnificent piece of its armor washed up on Fortuna’s shores!”

Agnus turned and pointed at the tube-shaped structure in the center of the room, where the broken sword lay.

I’d lost all strength to move, it was like my entire body was paralyzed, and each breath became more and more painful. What could I do...? How could I leave...? I kept asking myself similar questions, but no answer came to mind.

“Surely, I must have been blessed by the Savior, to find a legendary devil arm and a piece of armor worn by the Black Angel! It must be the Savior’s way of telling me that our path is just. That’s why I made those armors! You have no idea the hardship to make just one armor come to life. I had to

capture and control countless demons to harness their souls. Summoning them alone was almost an insurmountable task! But it was worth it in the end... to create these glorious, beautiful Bianco Angelos.”

I didn't give a rat's ass about how he made those armored things, but something in his spiel caught my attention.

“Summoning...?”

Agnus looked at me as I struggled to ask.

“So, it was you... who made the gate?!”

I thought back to the black slates in Ferrum Hills and Fortuna Castle that caused those enormous demons to appear.

“Yes, yes, the Hellgate!”

Agnus replied with a frenzied smile.

“Hellgate...?”

According to the legends, Sparda used a seal to close the Hellgates that connected the human world to the demon's... through my waning consciousness, I thought of the huge monument in the middle of the city. The stories do say that

it also used to be a gate that Sparda sealed, but I thought it was just more of that fairytale nonsense.

Two smaller copies of that monument, in a high place like Ferrum Hills or Fortuna Castle - but if all of that were true, then nothing that came through them could even begin to compare to what could enter through the massive, enormous gate in the middle of the city.

I almost didn't want to believe it.

"I created it merely as a reference in substitution for the real Gate, but after utilizing an extremely powerful Devil Arm, it proved sufficient..."

I had absolutely no idea what he was going on about. Well, to be fair, I almost couldn't hear him anymore. I only managed to catch bits and pieces. The Hellgate. Smaller gates. Summoning demons. White Angels.

His words went in one ear and out the other as I gradually lost my grip on reality.

Agnus was still excitedly prattling on, but his voice kept slipping further and further away. I tried to move my hand, but all I could manage was a few halfhearted twitches, and even attempting to use my devil bringer was out of the question.

I must have really been losing it, because suddenly, this whole entire situation seemed so funny that I had to laugh out loud about it. Agnus stopped mid monologue when he heard me.

“...what’s so funny?”

I replied very quietly on purpose, so that he couldn’t hear me without coming closer.

“What is it? Speak properly, boy.”

“I said you’re full of shit!”

I spat a glob of bloody saliva at his face, and Agnus glared at me while he wiped his cheek furiously with his sleeve.

“It seems y-y-y-you haven’t quite realized the position that you’re in...!”

He once again twisted the spear that stabbed me, but this time, I couldn’t feel it anymore, I couldn’t even make a sound. My body followed the movements of the weapon, but I couldn’t move on my own.

“You should be honored - soon you shall be my next subject of experimentation, so that I can learn a little something from you... and that arm.”

What I wanted more than anything was to deck Agnus’ stupid fucking face, but my body wouldn’t move at all. If only I had more power. More power...

“Never, you freak...”

I had no strength left to do anything but utter those words. Agnus grimaced, pulling out the spear that pierced my torso without a word, and pointing it at me.

“A foul mouth like yours won’t be of any use to my research.”

He stabbed the spear in my chest, and it probably got me dead in the heart. But I was too out of it to notice, and if I was dying, I wouldn’t be able to tell.

“T-t-t-take him out!”

I heard footsteps, very far and very heavy, enough to make the ground shake. Bit by bit, I felt my heartbeat weaken. I hadn’t had enough power to save myself, let alone to get away.

Of course, the idea of power is important to me. Without it, you can't protect anything. If it had been offered to me, I would have taken it.

I need strength.

I need more power.

I couldn't change a thing. Everything was still the exact same as the night when Kyrie's parents were brutally killed, not a single thing had changed. It's all my fault, all because I wasn't strong enough. I desperately wished to be stronger.

If only I had been stronger, then I could have protected them, saved the people I care about, and made sure they never lost anything again.

I have to protect them.

Power. I need the power to protect them.

That's what I believed with my whole being.

"Kyrie..."

I murmured to nothing in particular. My heartbeat stopped.



It was after Dante had climbed to the top of Fortuna Castle, looking through the master bedroom, that he began feeling a shifting in the air. He'd been in the middle of putting on a weird hat he'd found and checking himself out in the mirror, just for the hell of it.

The current of energy passed through the bottom of the floor, from the soles of his feet to the top of his head, and it felt like it had gone through his entire body, like this energy was trying to echo with his own. It called Dante's demon to the surface in a flash of red, but only lasted a second before he was able to school himself back to his human self.

Dante stared at his feet, and when the hat fell off his head he didn't even notice.

That was the desperate call of a soul, the type that only another soul of the same blood would be able to answer.

Dante had experienced something like this once before, from a very similar feeling soul, but it couldn't be the same person - that man had long since left the land of the living.

Vergil, Dante's brother, had deeply admired their father, Sparda, blindly pursuing his demonic power. Despite being

twins, they had to tragically part ways. And whoever it was who had just cried out shared an incredibly similar soul to his brother's.

“This... is getting more interesting than I expected.”

Dante whispered, gathering the hat from the ground and launching it like a frisbee so that it landed back in its proper place.

“Though I should probably deal with those pesky Order rats first.”

Dante brushed his hair back, and continued on towards the forest.



A month ago, I'd had a dream. It was the night after I'd just fought that demon and gotten my hand injured. I was mad at my own uselessness, thinking that if only I'd been stronger, none of it would have happened.

I couldn't protect Kyrie like this, I didn't want her to grieve again. If someone could smile so kindly at even someone like me, they deserved to never have to be sad again.

I need more power - that was my last thought before falling asleep.

That's when the dream started. I'd forgotten it as soon as I woke up, but I remembered it so clearly now. Right at the edge between life and death, I remembered it.

There was a man standing in front of me. I couldn't recall his face, but that was fine, because I knew I'd never seen him before.

His eyes were cold, but I felt that behind that, there was a gentleness too - and loneliness.

He looked at me with those eyes, and I couldn't think of anything to say to him, even though I desperately wanted to say something - but no words felt right.

He spoke first.

“—can you hear it— “

“—can you hear it, your soul’s crying out— “

Perhaps the man hadn’t really spoken, but I could still hear his words inside my head. What a peculiar voice... cold, dry... yet strangely soft.

“—your soul, what is it— “

I interrupted his questions, to ask one of my own.

“...and you? What is it that you’re crying out for?”

The man chuckled.

“—I need more power— “

My reply was simple.

“Well, that works for me.”

Then, I woke up. Why did I remember that dream, then? I had no idea; my most pressing issues were obviously unrelated. After all, I had already failed to protect myself. But for some reason, I think it was necessary for me to remember.

My right hand was shaking. It slowly opened, and I felt something approaching it, and caught it in my palm. In an instant, I was back to full awareness, and my sight was dyed blood red. It couldn't have been very long, after all, the Bianco Angelos were still approaching me, but it felt like time had slowed down. I looked at my right hand - it was holding a sword. It was the broken blade in the test tube - only it was now perfectly repaired, and it was firmly in my grasp.

I couldn't figure out why, but it felt like power was radiating off of me in waves. I still couldn't move my body properly, and my heart was still silent.

And yet, I was alive, and strong.

The Bianco Angelos came up to me, and I yelled out. I knew I had more than enough power now. The energy surrounding my body exploded outwards, destroying the Angelos - even Agnus got caught in the blast, launching him to the other end of the room.

Agnus shouted as he collapsed, a lot of the equipment in the room had been damaged and it was now enveloped in smoke. I'd returned from the dead, holding a new weapon in my hand, and walked forward. There was a presence at my back, I could feel it even without looking. I knew, somehow, that it

was a projection of myself, of my soul - a demon shining in bright blue light.

I searched for Agnus through the smoke, fully intent on killing him.

“How...!”

Agnus shouted, giving himself away before I could find him myself.

“Not even I could succeed in restoring it...!”

Agnus had taken on an ugly insectoid form, which I’m assuming is what he’d call “angelic”.

“S-s-s-s-such a thing... is impossible, it should be impossible!”

I took another step forward towards the fallen Agnus.

“From that day forth... my arm changed... and a voice echoed... “Power!” “Give me more power! “And if I become a demon, so be it, I will endure the exile... anything to protect her and those I love.”

I was speaking almost on autopilot. My right arm felt incredibly hot.

“What...?”

Agnus shouted in fear. I sent a shockwave towards him, but it missed, instead hitting the wall behind him. I still couldn't control well these new powers. I couldn't move of my own will; it was too overwhelming. Part of me was afraid it would make me lose my mind completely.

“This is preposterous! Preposterous!”

Agnus escaped through the crack in the wall, but I couldn't chase after him, because right after I saw it happen, I collapsed to the floor.

STAGE 07



Dante is the son of Sparda, the son of the Legendary Dark Knight Sparda, and, much like his father, sealed again the Demon Emperor when he attempted his return. Someone of his caliber and lineage would no doubt prove to possess strength beyond compare.

And on the other hand, you had Nero, who might be exceptionally strong, more than any other Holy Knight, but was still just a common young man who hadn't even gone through the ascension ceremony. It was reasonable, then, for Credo to be uneasy with the situation.

To imbue oneself with demonic essence and obtain power beyond regular human capabilities, one has to go through with the ascension ceremony. And in order for the ceremony to be successful, one has to be strong in both mind and body - otherwise, the demonic nature will take over, and the candidate will lose one's sense of self entirely. They might gain the strength, but will have become little more than a beast.

Credo had witnessed the ritual failing a few times before, seen his brothers in arms become incoherent and go on a violent, murderous rampage.

When such things occurred, the ritual was deemed a failure and the candidate quickly disposed of, but it had happened on occasion that a failed candidate escaped the facility and attacked the civilian population. That is how Credo's parents died.

Of that day, Credo best remembers his naive little sister's grieving tears, and a small Nero shaking at her side.

From a young age, Credo had been steadily climbing the ranks of the Holy Knights with near blind dedication. So that the perfect world that his Holiness, Sanctus, sought to build would come to fruition, he could not stop to reminisce on the deaths of innocents.

To build said utopia, he didn't know how many more would be hurt or lose their lives. It was a nagging thought that made Credo wonder whether the path he was on was truly the righteous one.

“Credo, you have to have patience... once we attain our heaven, no one will have to suffer anymore. Some innocent lives might have to be sacrificed in the process, but they, too,

are being saved from this unjust, cruel world... such martyrdom, then, is sacred.”

Those were the words Credo clung to escape his doubts. Yes, a few lives might be lost, but if Sanctus’ utopia were to be realized, no one would have to live in fear anymore, and those lost souls would not have been sacrificed in vain.

Even so, Credo’s first priority was always his sister Kyrie. He hadn’t told her the truth, and had made sure that those who did would not allow her to know it. Kyrie had inherited their parents’ devoutness, and she believed in the Savior wholeheartedly. A person who is always selfless and compassionate to anyone who might stand in her way, many Holy Knights considered her an angel.

Credo absolutely couldn’t let someone like that come to realize their church’s gruesome history. She might never blame him ever if she came to know, but he desperately wanted to protect her innocence. So, he had to make sure that whatever mishaps happened on the way to realizing his Holiness’ dreams never touched Kyrie. And, of course, he’d never allow her to suffer the same fate as their parents.

Who, more than her, deserved happiness, after all? To Credo, Kyrie was both his only family left, and a symbol of all the innocent people in Fortuna who would be saved by their plans.

“...and that’s the situation so far.”

After he made sure no one had any objections, Credo sat back down in his seat.

Suddenly, there was the sound of someone loudly and quite rudely slamming a door open somewhere behind him. He turned around just in time to see Agnus as he immediately began shouting at him with a thunderous look on his face.

“Credo! You knew it all along!”

Agnus strode up to Credo while yelling, and Credo just sighed, rising up and straightening his back.

“W-w-w-why didn’t you mention it sooner? What’s the meaning of this?!”

Credo didn’t get what Agnus was blabbering about, at all, and was very irritated by his conduct in what was supposed to be an official meeting. He sighed again.

“How dare you raise your voice in the presence of his Holiness!”

At his words, both of them turned to look at Sanctus, who narrowed his eyes. He just levelled a neutral gaze at them

both, and said nothing. Perhaps he wished to hear what Agnus had to say. Agnus, in turn, took his Holiness' silence as his cue to continue yelling at Credo.

“That arrogant kid possesses d-d-d-d-demonic power!”

“What arrogant kid?”

Agnus' mouth opened and closed several times I response, likely too riled up to speak properly.

“Who are you referring to?”

At this second question, Agnus took a deep breath to calm himself enough to answer.

“T-t-t-t-the brat, Nero! He possesses demonic power like I've never seen before!”

That was too outrageous to even consider, so Credo responded with no hesitation.

“Absurd.”

“Absurd?! D-d-d-d-don't play me a fool! Is he not your subordinate? He resurrected Yamato! It's your fault! It's your responsibility! It-t-t-t-t- “

Agnus was once again too fired up to talk properly, and Credo could only guess what he was attempting to say next. He seemed to only be spouting nonsense, either way.

“Credo.”

Sanctus’ voice cut through Agnus’ stammering.

“Yes, your Holiness.”

Credo turned towards Sanctus, who had a slight smile on his face. For some reason, that expression started raising his alarm.

“Can you apprehend this boy?”

“If that is your wish...”

If his Holiness truly believed Agnus that letting Nero wander would be bad for their plans, he couldn’t dispute it. But he still continued:

“Though who will then track Dante?”

At first, Credo himself didn’t think Nero could catch Dante on his own. He intended to lead Nero to him, and then come to his aid at the last minute. That way, it could probably be

done. However, if Credo was to be busy apprehending Nero, it would all be moot. If Nero couldn't catch Dante on his own, and no other knight measured up to Nero's strength, well, it was likely that sending just one person on the job would end in failure.

“Hm...”

Sanctus stroked his beard, and his eyes glanced over at the other officials gathered at the round table. Each subtly bowed their head away, trying to escape his scrutiny. They had all witnessed Dante fighting at the Opera House. They all knew what they would be going against. And besides, it would be unwise to mobilize all efforts that were going to finding Dante to give priority to apprehending Nero. It didn't matter how true Agnus' words were - Nero hadn't been through the Ascension Ceremony, so he couldn't be in possession of demonic power. He could have been possessed, true, but then he'd be the same as the failed ascension candidates. Possession meant losing oneself completely. This all didn't make any bit of sense, so Credo decided he didn't believe Agnus.

Nero had never seen Agnus or his lab before, so it wasn't unlikely that he'd probably tried to attack him on sight. Probably Agnus had been provoked by Nero's brashness, and provoked him in turn - they both had explosive tempers, after all.

In any case, subduing Dante should still be the main priority. All the other recruits had agreed that only Nero and Credo in combination could take Dante down. They had seen him in action, and knew that going against him would spell death for them - and they didn't want to lose their life before seeing their dream come to fruition. So, really, there was no reason for a change of plans.

Credo was just about to explain all of this to Sanctus, when someone stood up from the round table.

“I will find Dante.”

It was Gloria.

She was the only one present who hadn't been born in Fortuna. She'd suddenly appeared a month prior, presenting Sanctus with several priceless relics. And as a reward, she'd been instantly promoted to an Order Official.

At her words, Sanctus smiled.

“You can guarantee his capture then?”

Gloria smiled back.

“Absolutely.”

She immediately began walking towards the exit. As if she'd only just remembered something, she stopped at the door, turned and addressed Sanctus.

“It’s good to see your Holiness has recovered.”

Gloria bowed respectfully, and left the room.

“Is she reliable?”

Credo couldn’t help but ask.

“She once brought to us the sword “Sparda” and hastened the completion of our Savior.”

Credo had mixed feelings about that. Did Sanctus truly believe Gloria was strong enough to capture Dante? Or was he still wary of the suspicious, foreign woman?

“But she remains almost a stranger to us all...”

Sanctus smiled cryptically at Credo’s words.

“Which will only concern us should a situation arise. As for her identity, I have already investigated...”

Before Credo could ask for further elaboration, Sanctus continued.

“Now, find us Nero and Yamato and bring them back to me. You’re the only one capable of doing that. Will you do that for me, Credo?”

Sanctus pinned Credo with his stare while speaking. To have such words come out of someone like his Holiness’ mouth, to deem him, an inferior being, worthy of such esteem... Credo couldn’t refuse. He nodded respectfully.

“It shall be done, your Holiness.”

Credo left.
He left on his way to arrest Nero.

This was almost too much, but it was all in the name of their dream.

Even though Nero was like a younger brother to him, Credo didn’t allow himself to falter. In order to live up to his Holiness’ expectations, in order to achieve their goals, he had to capture Nero. That was what Credo kept repeating to himself as he left the room.



I don't know how long I was out for, but eventually I woke up. I was completely alone, and the air around me was still.

“It wasn't a dream...”

I still had the sword in my hand, indicating that it all had, indeed, happened. Agnus called it a devil arm, and through it, I gained power.

I looked at my chest where I'd been stabbed, and though my clothes were torn, my body held no sign of injury. Back then, my heart had been pierced, I should have already been dead.

Yet, there I was.

“I really am not human, huh...”

Even before my arm changed, I'd always felt different from people around me. Now that I'd taken a spear to the heart and was still alive to think about it, I couldn't deny it anymore.

But right then, I was alright with it. As I had said, I needed the power. I would have gladly sold my soul if it meant being able to protect those important to me.

“It feels too good to be true.”

I now had more power, my devil bringer, and this new sword. But would it be enough? I couldn't fully accept not being human, either. I might be ok with the strength it gave me, but the thought still made me uncomfortable.

To ease some of the pressure in my chest, I started laughing. It echoed in the empty room, a hollow sound.

I did that until my mouth hurt, then stood up.

Whatever, this was my lot in life now. I had other things to worry about.

“Got to go back to Headquarters...”

I still wanted to chase after the man in red- Dante, but Agnus deeply concerned me. Surely, there must be more going on under the surface. I had to ask Credo what he knew, and if he knew what the hell was up with me, and the real identity of this Dante.

I walked away, sword in hand, and at some point, it began glowing faintly blue, and it was like my hand absorbed it. It didn't vanish, I could still feel it within me. When I tried calling out to it, the sword quickly appeared in my hand.

“Is this another demon power...?”

I muttered to myself as I headed towards the road that led to headquarters.





Once Credo had left, Sanctus beckoned Agnus to come closer.

“...what do you say? Is this threat one Credo can neutralize?”

He had probably assumed that Agnus had, at some point, fought Nero. But having not done that, Agnus hesitated before answering. Nero’s power was truly beyond his wildest speculation, but Agnus didn’t have the hands-on experience to say just how far it went. All he had was what he’d observed from his fight with the Bianco Angelos.

“It’s hard to say... Credo is also quite strong...”

Though they might not have gotten along in the slightest, Agnus still had very high esteem of Credo’s abilities. Truthfully, the powers one can achieve through the Ascension Ceremony are far more influenced by the candidate’s personality rather than their physical body, or the concentration of demonic energy that’s put into them. The form they receive after a successful ascension, too, shapes itself to their subconscious desires.

So, what that meant, was that Credo’s resulting powers were all in accordance with his resolve.

To Agnus, it was all dreadfully boring, but still, he was a professional in his research, and he would give credit where it was due.

“But on the other hand, the brat, Nero, his powers are still largely a mystery... and he-he-he-he even managed to steal Yamato...”

Agnus was pretty nervous to say it out loud, terrified that Sanctus would blame him for letting him get away with the sword. He wanted nothing more than to beg for forgiveness, but he couldn't do that in the room full of Order officials. He had no choice but to endure whatever his reaction would be.

However, Sanctus didn't say anything of the sort. Instead, he asked in a whisper:

“Then, what would you propose we do, going forward?”

When Agnus heard that, he was sure Sanctus didn't think Credo could win. It was clear he intended for Agnus to step in should Credo fail, but that would have been a problem - Agnus' angelic form wasn't meant for fighting. And while certainly more than enough to subdue a regular human, there was no guarantee he could go head-to-head with Nero and win. So, he had to come up with a different strategy - one where he could catch Nero by surprise. After thinking it through for a while, he remembered something.

“That menace Nero appears to be quite close to Credo’s sister, Kyrie. More than once he called out her name...”

Sanctus smiled enigmatically after hearing Agnus’ words, but Agnus immediately knew what that expression meant. After bowing respectfully, he left the round table from the same way Credo had. But his destination was different - to where the people of Fortuna had gathered to seek refuge.





As soon as I left the castle and stood on the cliff that overlooked the entire forest, my breath caught in my throat. Mitis forest was mostly made up of evergreens and conifers, and a few bits of shrubbery of that kind. It used to be a very lush forest, and from the cliff, the dark green looked almost like a quiet black sea.

The sight I was met with, instead, looked more like a subtropical forest, full of bright, unfamiliar colors. So, lamina peak had that blizzard, and now some other demon had affected the forest as well? As if to confirm that theory, my right hand began aching. I prepared myself before entering the forest, ready to encounter more demons, when someone suddenly broke through the window of the castle behind me, landing straight in front of my face. The other person didn't even look at me, instead staring straight ahead at the forest:

“What the hell is this? What happened to the forest?”

Dante, his Holiness' assassin, the man I was on the hunt for. I pointed my gun at him but didn't shoot - I had questions I

wanted answers to. Yes, I was on a mission, but finding out the truth had become my main priority.

“You think another demon did this?”

Dante finally looked at me, craning his neck in my direction. But he didn't reply.

“You... why are you here?”

Dante, again, didn't answer, merely shrugged.

“You mean in this here forest? I got tired of that stuffy old castle. Think I got lost in there for a bit too.”

His smug, laid back attitude hadn't changed. And sure, I might be one to talk, but it was all incredibly grating, and both his words and actions rankled me.

“Stop bullshitting and answer me!”

I shouted, irritated, and Dante raised his hands up and took a step back.

“Sorry kid, this is goanna have to wait.”

Dante's feet were already at the cliff's edge, but he confidently took yet another step back.

“See you later, devil boy.”

With that, Dante let himself fall backwards with a shit eating grin on his face. The cliff he'd jumped from was very high up. He was probably confident that even if he were to fall from such a height, he wouldn't die. I wanted him to teach me how to do that. I didn't know if I could. I mean, I'd survived getting stabbed through the heart, so falling from a cliff might not kill me. But still, it had to hurt, right? It went against all logical reason.

“Dammit!”

In the end, I still went the old-fashioned way, through the forest road.

“How much could he really know?”

Everything about the guy pissed me off - how he acted like he knew something I didn't, how he jumped from the cliff without a care, but deep down, I felt drawn to him - I longed to have someone like him in my life. And that, in itself, was what pissed me off the most.

I stomped through the forest to vent out my resentment. Sure enough, it was teeming with demons, not just scarecrows, but tons of those lizard-like creatures (that, after

reporting to the Order, had been named “Assaults”) which seemed to have made the forest into their home.

I fought them off while moving forward, but the forest seemed to change its layout at will, and I kept losing my way. Just as I’d seen from the cliff, nothing in the forest looked like it used to, in many unexpected ways - roads that were taken usually were blocked, and places you couldn’t pass through before were now open, throwing off my sense of direction entirely. No matter which way I went, I always seemed to end up right where I started.

Not only that, but there were weird insect-egg shaped objects scattered all over the forest, which was a problem in and of itself. There were weird plant-like demons hatching from those eggs, which wasn’t the real issue - they were pretty weak, and would die quickly when smashed. The real problem was that they would attach themselves to other demons, like scarecrows or assaults, and control them through these freaky tentacle things, which made them way more aggressive than before. Then I had to deal with not just the original demon, but also the parasite’s tentacles which attacked in unison with the host, like some kind of weird demonic plant chimera. Damn things were stronger than they looked, too.

At first, I tried attacking them head on, but the tentacles took me by surprise. After that, I knew I had to keep my distance - though only attacking with my gun would take too long. I

didn't want to be stuck fighting those things any longer than I had to.

After the umpteenth fight with a chimera, I realised something. The plant-like demons from the eggs were probably some kinds of seed. At first, I assumed they were just simple parasites, and that for whatever reason, they attached themselves to smaller demons like scarecrows and assaults to make them stronger. But then I walked a bit further and something weird: it was one of those parasite demons, but instead of being attached to a demon and wildly waving its tentacles about, it just sat there motionless. It looked like it had somehow warped itself into a tree. I tried touching it, and sure enough, that's what it felt like.

I thought that was probably how the weird trees came about. The plant demons (which I dubbed "chimera seed") were parasites that turned its host into a chimera. It probably didn't just do it for the sake of it, but to absorb nutrients - and eventually, it would grow into a tree from the host's carcass.

That had to be why the forest looked like that - those chimera seeds were probably able to attach themselves not just to demons, but to regular animals and plants as well.

But if they were seeds, that begged the question - where were they coming from? There had to be some bigger demon

producing them, a “mother” of sorts. And if mommy dearest were to be cut down, it would probably restore the forest to its original shape. And that meant, being actually able to navigate the forest back to HQ.

After realizing that, finding the mother was easier than I thought. I just had to look up to see something kind of like a flying serpent dragon, wandering the sky above the forest and scattering seeds all over the place.

I ran in its direction to find myself in a clearing in the middle of the forest.

Sure enough, there was a big black slate, right there. It had to be what Agnus had called a “hellgate”.

“Here too, huh...”

I sighed, there wasn’t much to do while I waited for the creature to descend but crush the seeds it was sowing. They might have been hard to deal with after they’d found a host, but they were incredibly easy to squash as eggs, enough that one bullet did the trick.

That seemed to alert the dragon to my existence, and it started flying in my direction at breakneck speed. Right before I thought we were goanna collide; the dragon opened its maw wide. A woman-like figure emerged from it, and initially I thought she was just part of the dragon, but instead,

what before looked like a head had now unfolded like a blooming flower, and in the middle of that flower was the woman's body.

That had to be it, the chimeras' mother.

"My children! You bastard!"

Children, huh... it seemed demon society was more complex than I thought.

But serpent lady's face, I just shrugged.

"Sorry, but having you around is more than enough."

The serpent shrieked in response.

"Your insignificant insults have no effect on me. Though I will tear your body to shreds!"

That didn't leave room for much arguing. The dragon mouth closed again around her, and she rushed towards me. I rolled and dodged, shooting back right away, but though bullets worked well on her seeds, her huge scaly body wasn't even scratched by them.

Should I try grabbing her when she charged at me? But that would've been too risky, her flying speed was way too fast, if it did hit me, it would've caused massive amounts of damage.

The snake lady hovered above me, waiting for the right time to strike. She laughed at me.

“Come, join my children... become one with the forest!”

She shot seeds out like bullets, not aimed at the forest floor, but straight at me.

“Show my children some love!”

I managed to smash the seeds, but she took the opportunity to strike. I barely managed to avoid her, and while I wanted to counter her attack, I had no time to.

She was too fast to fight with my regular sword.

I had fought flying demons before, but most of them were smaller and easily knocked down, and just my gun usually did the trick. Now, it would've been pointless. The serpent woman wasn't only huge, but also incredibly fast. Even trying to reach with my devil bringer was moot, as she was too far away to reach.

I was thinking up strategies while refilling my gun. Both Red Queen and my new sword could cause enough damage if I could hit her with them, so I had to get her on the ground. As for when she was airborne, I could really only use my gun.

It was a pointless loop. Could I stop her and get her down just by shooting? I couldn't just try it out and see if it worked, or I might waste all my bullets for nothing.

The serpent rushed at me once again and I raised my gun - unconsciously, I also raised my right hand to support my left.

“Maybe all this demonic stuff can be useful for once...”

I concentrated on my right arm, and it started glowing. If I truly wasn't human, if this arm really was proof of demonic power, then I should be able to harness said power to my will.

“Then... with just one bullet- “

The blue light from my right hand passed into my left that held Blue Rose.

“Fire!”

I pulled the trigger, and the blowback sent my entire body reeling. The bullets that shot out were enveloped in pale blue light, and rushed at the snake lady. When they hit her in her dragon face, they made a huge explosion. It was, thankfully, big enough to stop her dead in her tracks.

I might have finally found the key to winning this fight - fire was spreading across the demon woman's petals.

She must have not been able to bear the flames, because she finally opened up that maw to reveal her actual body. It was my only chance. I ran up to her, concentrating hard on my right hand. The devil arm appeared instantly. Now, to try this baby out properly.

“You’re going down!”

When I was face to face with the demon lady, who was still on fire, I took the sword out of the scabbard and pulled it out as fast as I could. When the sword was out of its sheath, I immediately got slashing, again and again.

I cut her repeatedly, but the serpent still hadn’t gone down, so with my left hand I began hitting with Red Queen as well. She was much tougher than I’d imagined, though. Just as I was about to put even more elbow grease into my attacks, she screamed.

She’d risen up high into the air, and I lost my footing and fell to the ground. She kept flying around and shrieking. I looked towards the smaller hell gate. Just like the others, this one, too, had a portal open right on it.

Just as I was thinking that, the snake lady started rushing towards me, but I knew she wasn’t trying to attack - she was trying to give me the slip and escape through the hellgate.

“Don’t even think about it!”

I yelled, reaching out with my devil bringer to stop her from escaping. The huge glowing hand caught her tail, and she writhed in my hold.

“How shameful to be beaten by a human...!”

I pulled her back so she wouldn’t get away, but before I could cut her with one of my swords, she screamed and pulled her tail away, without giving me any time to react. Before I could catch her again, she’d disappeared into the gate. Just like with Berial, the gate closed as soon as she’d left.

After the fight, I had to admit that the power of my new sword was incomparable to any other weapon I’d used before, but it also felt volatile and hard to control, and like I wasn’t using it to the best of its abilities.

I stared at my right hand.

“What form of power is this?”

Was this power really for me to take? Though I asked myself that, I didn’t want to let it go. My feelings were mixed.

I instantly felt a change in my surroundings. I looked up to see all the new trees begin to wither.

All the weird plants that the snake lady had sown were probably going to die without her there.

“Now I can go ahead.”

I whispered as I looked at HQ’s building in the distance.

Berial, Bael, this snake demon. If what Agnus said was true, then they had been summoned by the Order. All those demons invaded at once, and at the same time, Dante appeared, so at first, I thought the only logical conclusion was that the gates were his doing. But to think the Order might be behind all this... why?

Agnus had said that he summoned the demons, captured them, and used their souls to make Bianco Angelos. But now, the Order wasn’t capturing those demons, just letting them roam free and attack the population.

“Is this all supposed to be a distraction or something?”

If all those demons appeared at once, they would have to be fought. And even for those who can’t fight, they’d still be pretty busy trying to avoid getting killed.

I, myself, had been led on a wild goose chase, from the city to the castle and the castle to the forest, and now, from the forest to HQ... it took quite a while to get there.

“I don’t like him being this close to Headquarters...”

Dante came to kill his Holiness. Why, though, I still had no idea? If Dante and the Order had some kind of beef, then he was definitely going to cause trouble in HQ.

This might be exactly what the Order wanted, and why they let all these demons roam around. That nagging thought just wouldn’t leave me alone.

“Just what the hell is going on here... what is the Order up to?”

So that I could ask all those questions to the one person able to answer them, I kept walking.

STAGE 08



When Dante invaded the Order HQ, he assumed the place would be teeming with knights waiting for him, but there was no one there. He thought it might be a trap, so he very carefully made his way through the entrance, then stopped when he arrived in the first room.

“What, we playing hide and seek again?”

The room was empty, but Dante could still feel a presence, and he knew immediately that it was his partner, Trish. She stood somewhere in a far corner of the room, but didn't show herself.

“Is the place empty because of you? No, wait, don't tell me they dislike me so much they all left. That's rude.”

Dante muttered, leaning on the table in the middle in the room. Trish still didn't show her face, but her voice carried over to him.

“You're half right there. All the guards are busy guarding the evacuated citizens, so the building was already largely empty.

There were a few guards by the entrance, but I sent them away, since, well, I could hear you approaching.”

“Alright.”

This felt like an unnecessary step to Dante. After all, he’d come to destroy the Order - he wasn’t certainly looking to avoid conflict. As if sensing his thoughts, Trish smiled ruefully.

“I didn’t do it just to make your job easier, I had another reason.”

“Another reason?”

“I’ve just discovered this, but... Yamato’s been restored.”

When they met in Fortuna castle, she’d said they didn’t have the means to repair it. How could the situation have changed so quickly? But Dante didn’t raise any questions at her words, accepting them as fact. He kind of suspected something like this would happen - the wave of energy he’d felt in the castle, the blood calling out to him. If Yamato had been restored on top of that, then it all had one explanation.

“Well, who would’ve thought...”

Trish interrupted Dante’s muttering.

“You seem awfully unsurprised.”

“I had a hunch it would happen.”

“The one who restored it is a young Holy Knight, his name is Nero. He doesn’t seem to know of the Order’s machinations... I have no idea how he managed to do it.”

Dante remembered Nero’s name. The striking young man he’d met in the opera house. That girl, was she his girlfriend? Either way, that’s what she had called him.

“This Nero... a boy with silver hair, right?”

“You’ve met him?”

“Once or twice. But when I saw him last, I had a weird feeling...”

If he really thought about it, the feeling had been there since the very first moment Dante met and clashed with him. It was a feeling that only another demon of his bloodline would provoke, but at the time it had been too faint, and he had no real way to confirm. But the last time they’d met, it was after the castle, and after the wave of energy that Nero had surely been the cause of, their relation was not one Dante could question or deny.

Though he had to admit that he nearly didn't notice the kid's newly intensified familial feeling, due to the overpowering energy of Yamato being nearby - he almost hadn't believed it, chalking it up to it being the aftershocks of the earlier explosion.

"The Order wants to arrest him to take back the sword, so they sent the General of the Knights after him. That's the reason I sent the guards away, so you wouldn't get tangled up fighting them - you have to get it back. Once we have Yamato, they won't stand a chance."

Trish had said with a smile. Maybe she hadn't realized it, or hadn't met with Nero. Well, even if they had met, the feeling was only there for the related parties, so it was understandable that she wouldn't be able to tell.

"That kid... I think we might be related."

Dante said with some uncertainty, and Trish responded after a beat.

"Related... you think he's another son of Sparda?"

Dante's father, Sparda, suddenly vanished from one day to the next, and no one knows what happened to him. But he wouldn't have returned to Fortuna, that's for certain.

"I don't know... don't think so. I think I have the answer, actually..."

Trish didn't seem to have caught Dante's drift, but he had no intention of explaining further.

"...what are you going to do, then? You want to go rescue the boy? You might still have some time if you hurry up." In contrast to Trish's energetic attitude, Dante smiled and stretched lazily, still leaning on the table.

"Nah... I'll wait. If the Order gets their hands on him, I'll kill them and take back the sword. If he wins, he'll have to pass through here sooner or later, and I'll very politely ask for the sword back."

Dante yawned. Trish was silent for a few moments.

"...Don't tell me you think he's your illegitimate child?"

Dante closed his eyes and yawned again, muttering in response:

"C'mon, you know that joke's not funny."



As I neared the edge of the forest, after a few more steps on the beaten track, I could finally see the tall white HQ building. Now I wouldn't get lost anymore. All I had to do was go straight ahead, towards that building.

But when I reached the large open space in front of HQ, I stopped. A man was slowly approaching from inside. I couldn't see him from that far away, but just from his uptight and strait-laced posture, I could tell it was Credo. As he got closer and closer, his face was stormy like he was headed to war. I put my right hand in my pocket to hide it.

“That’s a look you shoot your enemy.”

Credo stopped a few paces in front of me, and didn't speak a single word in reply, only stared at me.

“What, don't tell me you believe whatever Agnus said about me? He provoked me first, anyone would've been a little pissed.”

I said, partly joking, but Credo remained silent, and if I wasn't already sure he wouldn't be playing some weird prank on me, his serious expression told me all I needed to know. I sighed and gave up the friendly banter, but I couldn't stop myself from asking what had been weighing heavily on my chest for a good while.

“Ok, well, then let me ask you this... what exactly is the Order after? And who the hell is Dante?”

Credo took a step towards me, then another, all while slowly putting his hand at the hilt of his sword.

“You do not demand answers from me.”

He carefully pulled out his sword, and pointed it at me.

“Hand over the sword, Nero. It’s not yours to keep.”

Honestly, if Credo had given me a single good reason why I should have given him the sword, I would have. Hell, if I thought it reasonable, I would’ve yielded right then and there. But I couldn’t stand having things kept from me, and being treated like just some common thief.

“Answer me, Credo!”

As I shouted, Credo swung his sword at me. I jumped just barely in time to avoid being hit, and he immediately attacked again. I took out Red Queen to defend myself, but he was too fast, and I instinctively grabbed his sword with my devil bringer to protect myself.

When he saw it, Credo frowned?

“You possess the power of a demon...”

I put my sword down, and shook my head.

“Back down! I don’t want to hurt you.”

Credo laughed at my words.

“” Hurt me”? You don’t get it, do you?”

As he said that, his body started glowing with pale gold light.

“You’re no longer human, so I don’t have to hide it anymore...”

Credo’s body gradually changed into something decidedly inhuman, though different from Agnus.

“You too...”

I whispered and took a step back. I didn’t want to believe it. I wanted to think that Credo was just as oblivious as I was, or that he’d been coerced by Agnus. I didn’t want to believe that this man, who’d been like a brother to me for years, had given up his humanity same as Agnus did.

Credo was holding himself up in midair with a single golden wing in a defensive pose.

“I have been chosen to take the next step in evolution, to become something far more than just human. I am an angel!”

Angel... just like Agnus had said, but-

“Wrong, Credo. All that you’ve become is a demon.”

Credo raised his sword to point it at me. Suddenly, I was surrounded by countless blades, all their tips aimed straight at me. As Credo waved his sword around, commanding them, they launched towards me.

I jumped to avoid them, but Credo didn’t give me any quarter, and slashed at me - I held him back with Red Queen, and though I successfully blocked his hit, the collision sent me skittering away. When I landed, Credo once again pointed his sword at me.

“As the Captain of the Holy Knights, you are now under arrest. It is the wish of his Holiness!”

“His Holiness this, his Holiness that! Do you listen blindly to everything he tells you to do?! If he told you to kill people, would you?!”

It was as if Credo didn’t even hear me, instead rushing at me with his sword.

“Credo!”

I revved Red Queen to the max, and met his strike straight ahead. The blades sparked where they clashed, and if I were to let go, I'd surely be sent flying backwards.

When was the last time I'd had a sword fight with Credo? I couldn't remember. Credo himself had taught me how to fight.

I could never seem to be able to connect with the people around me. I had no family, and to the adults in my life, I was nothing but a burden. I was desperate for so many things I couldn't have, yet I was powerless to change things. Credo had been a light in the dark. When I had a sword in my hand, I could forget about all of my problems, and I would have followed him blindly to the ends of the world. I became a knight by his suggestion, and it had garnered me unexpected praise from others around me.

I'd always wondered whether I deserved it in the first place. Even though I'd been abandoned and isolated, I would still do my best to help others. Credo taught me as much.

I might not always have understood or liked the uptight, too diligent and honor bound parts of his personality, but I still admired him. As rigid as he might be, I still thought he deserved to be widely respected and liked.

“I don’t want to fight you!”



I shouted at Credo over our joined blades.

“Do you think I’m happy about this?! You betrayed us!”

Credo suddenly pushed harder, and I staggered back. Credo gave chase, and his blade cut my side.

“Ugh...!”

I endured the pain, looking for an opening, but Credo jumped back and avoided me with ease. As I pulled out Blue Rose, I said:

“Betrayed you? I just want to know what’s going on!”

I shot at him with a charged shot, but Credo blocked it with that huge shield of his. It might have worked with the demon lady, but it wouldn’t here.

“And why would it matter if you knew? You’re already possessed by demons!”

Credo shouted, and stabbed his sword in the ground. He lifted his hand high over his head, and a huge spear appeared out of thin air. Credo took it and threw it at me. I rolled to dodge the incoming spears, but new ones kept appearing at an alarmingly fast rate.

I waited until he hesitated for the slightest second, and when the next spear came, I didn’t dodge it - instead grabbing it with my devil bringer.

“Right back at you!”

I was the one throwing the spear this time, and it appeared that Credo hadn't expected that. He didn't notice it fast enough to dodge, so instead he put his shield up to block it. I breathed a sigh of relief. Credo tried to put distance between us, but I shot out my devil bringer, which caught his shield.

Credo tried to pull it back, but my arm was stronger.

"This. this is all the demonic power's doing!"

"Like you're one to talk!"

I took Credo's shield with my devil bringer and flung it away. While he was still staggered, I started hitting him with my right hand.

"Am I really the only demon here?! What about you?!"

Without his shield, attacking Credo was easier. When my fist hit him hard enough, he slammed into the ground. I pressed on.

"Give it up!"

I hit him with an uppercut to the jaw, and the impact sent him flying.

I had no idea how much damage I'd need to deal. Credo staggered back up to his feet, still holding his sword. It seemed he still had some fight left in him. I could never kill him, but if I were to pull my punches, I'd definitely lose.

“Nero!!!”

I hesitated for a moment when he called out to me, and he took the chance to charge at me at lightning speed. He swung two times upwards and once downwards, and even if his face no longer looked human, I'd have recognized that sequence anywhere. It's been his signature back to the days where he taught me with a wooden sword. It always caught me by surprise without fail - yet now I could see right through it, like in slow motion.

When he swung upwards, he was twisting his body to avoid incoming attacks. And at the last downward strike, he'd jump back and dodge.

As he landed, I prepared Red Queen, and crouched. I concentrated all my energy within my right hand.

“Its goanna be a gamble.”

I didn't think I could ever come out unscathed from a real fight with Credo, so my only option was to charge with all I had. I revved Red Queen to the max, and called on the powers from my right hand. My whole body was enveloped

with blue light, and I could feel that presence behind me, that blue demon, the devil bringer made whole.

“I’m counting on you...”

Credo seemed to raise up his guard. He stood still, only staring at me, keeping his distance.

I couldn’t hit him with a sword from that far away, but I didn’t care. I picked up Red Queen.

“Blast!”

At the same time as I pressed the clutch, the blue demon swung the other sword. Red Queen’s flames mixed with the energy released by my right hand, sending a cross shaped energy blast at Credo.

“What...?”

He tried to block it with his sword, but I sent a barrage of spectral blades his way that he was powerless to avoid. He became engulfed by the mix of flames and demonic energy.

Credo yelled, but stood still and took it without backing down or letting it topple him over. I slowly approached him, panting. I hadn’t expected this kind of attack to take that much out of me, but I was still in far better shape than

Credo, and I was confident that I could end it within the next blow.

I stood in front of him, and he shrunk back to his human appearance. That was the Credo I knew.

“Your strength has increased!”

I pointed Red Queen at Credo.

“Now, tell me everything.”

To make sure he knew he’d lost, I put the blade up to Credo’s throat, like he always did to me at the end of our sparring practice.

Credo looked up at me, but right at that moment-

“...Credo!”

A woman screamed behind me, one whose voice I couldn’t mistake anywhere. I turned around and, sure enough, there was Kyrie.

“Kyrie...?”

I had no idea why she was there, but if she only came at that second, it would’ve looked like I was about to kill Credo.

“Nero...why?”

Just as I feared, Kyrie shrunk back. I wanted to explain, but as I tried approaching her, she took a step back, clearly terrified.

“No, wait...”

Kyrie stared at my right hand while I spoke.

“This isn’t what you think...”

I couldn’t help but put my hand behind my back, though it didn’t really matter - she’d already seen it, but I still didn’t want her to look at it.

Kyrie was speechless, just staring at me with shock and upset written all over her face.

Right then, Agnus appeared from behind her, smiling his ugly, creepy grin.

“It was our intention to protect you from the truth... Nero is a demon.”

Agnus stared straight at me as he whispered into Kyrie’s ear.

“You son of a- “

I rushed at him, but had to stop because he was hiding behind Kyrie, holding a Gladius at her throat.

“Not to worry, I have no intention of harming her... yet.”

While I stood there helpless, Credo pushed past me, putting himself between me and Agnus.

“Agnus! How dare you use my sister! This is my fight, and I will finish it! Let her go.”

Agnus smiled without a hint of remorse.

“I’m sorry, I’m just executing the order of His Holiness.”

“What?!”

Credo was obviously shaken by this revelation, as if he didn’t know where to go from there. Looking at the fear on Kyrie’s face, I thought the answer was obvious.

“His Holiness predicted your defeat and so ordered that your sister be utilized.”

Agnus said smugly while Credo looked like he was about to fall over from shock.

“...how could this be?”

“What, you don’t believe it? That’s a pity, because it’s the truth.”

Agnus turned his mocking gaze to me.

“All of this fuss over a mere woman... is she really that important to you?”

“Let Kyrie go or I’ll kill you...!”

Agnus wasn’t even in the same ballpark of strength as me, but with Kyrie hostage I could do nothing. She was the one I wanted to protect the most - I wouldn’t be able to bear losing her. Everything I’d done so far would have all been for nothing.

“What, you still don’t get it? Well?”

Agnus drew the blade closer against Kyrie’s skin, spilling a couple drops of blood from her pale neck.

“Stop!!!”

I shouted in panic, but my voice broke. Agnus smiled.

“What are you going to do, hm? And please speak up properly this time.”

I couldn't help but collapse much like Credo had.

"Please... let Kyrie go!"

I begged.

"If you want me to do that, hand over the sword... and don't even think about playing any funny tricks."

I did as he told me, I took the sword and put it on the ground. Agnus turned to Credo.

"Now, credo... bring the sword to me."

Credo held his head down, and stood up just as Agnus had told him. He picked up the sword.

His eyes went from me to Agnus, and back and forth again. Agnus grinned like he'd already won.

"Agnus!"

Credo roared and slammed into him. The impact jolted Kyrie out of Agnus' hands. I immediately ran to her side. She began leaning into me, but all of a sudden, my body was hit by a shockwave.

I fell to the ground. I looked up, searching for Kyrie, and she too was on the ground. She was unconscious, probably an effect of the demonic energy, but she appeared unharmed.

“Credo, you bastard!”

Credo had fallen much like I had, but he was a lot closer to Agnus, who walked over to him to put his boot over his head.

“Y-y-y-y-you just betrayed his Holiness!”

Credo pushed Agnus’ foot away, trying to stand up, but Agnus kicked him back down. I was afraid that the reason he was so weakened wasn’t due to Agnus’ powers, but his earlier fight with me.

“His holiness used Kyrie... I cannot accept that.”

“Your words mean nothing, and his Holiness’ command is a-a-a-absolute! You’ll go down like a dog!”

Agnus shouted as he kicked Credo. I ran to Kyrie while he was busy with that, but he was still a step ahead of me. He grabbed her before I could.

“Credo! I will report your actions to his Holiness!”

Agnus fanned his insect wings and rose up in the air, looking down at us.

“Getting the sword should be my priority, but it would be unwise to not deal with you two first... if you want this woman back, then come and get her, for I cannot guarantee her fate...”

Agnus made to leave after he spoke, and I jumped after him. I was reaching for Kyrie, hoping to grab her at the last moment with my right hand.

“Kyrie!”

The moment my fingers touched the necklace hanging at her neck, I was surrounded by Bianco Angelos.

They all hit me at once, sending me hurtling in the opposite direction, and I fell heavily to the ground.

Agnus and the Angelos disappeared from my sight while I could do nothing but watch, still holding the broken necklace in my hand.

“Credo... are you still alive?”

I asked as I stood up. Credo was still lying down, and it seemed like it took all of him to even just speak.

“...I think so.”

“Where is he taking her? Back to Headquarters?”

“I would assume so... probably to the restricted officials only area.”

Credo finally managed to stand up, though he swayed on his feet.

“I think I know why his Holiness wants to catch you... I’m afraid he suspects you might be a descendant of Sparda.”

Credo looked down at his sword.

“A descendant of... Sparda?”

“The Savior lies in the Advent Chamber... in order to complete it, only two more things are required... one is the devil sword Sparda. The other, a blood descendant of Sparda himself.”

The savior? Sparda? I didn’t understand.

“Why would I be a descendant of Sparda?”

Credo didn't answer my question, just threw my sword back to me.

“There's no time to explain. We must get Kyrie back. Go ahead, I'll join you later... I have to find out his Holiness' true motive.”

“Right.”

I nodded and entered HQ.



STAGE 09



HQ was completely empty, devoid of all Order personnel, not even a demon in sight. But everywhere I went looked like someone had been there before me, and as I passed forward, my hand began hurting more and more.

That guy had to be somewhere in this building. And I would have to get past him to reach my destination. It was a bit ironic - when I was chasing after him, he was nowhere to be found. Now that I have a bigger issue to worry about, I have no choice but to run into him.

Was he waiting for me? Why? I had no clue, but there was no point thinking about it. All that mattered was that there was only one way forward, and he stood smack in the middle of it.

“What took you so long?”

I had entered a strangely empty room, and Dante waited for me in the corner. He shrugged towards me.

“I don’t have time for this.”

I pushed Dante aside as I spoke, meaning to get around him and out the room. But Dante grabbed me by my shoulder with too much force for me to resist, and turned me around to face him.

“Aw, and I even waited for you to come by.”

This guy... everything about him pissed me off, his laid-back attitude, his smug tone, his over the top style.

“Don’t touch me!”

I slapped his hand away, but he just smiled.

“You’re in a bad mood, huh? Did something happen? Do you want to talk about it?”

I couldn’t help but clench my fist at his light-hearted tone. Dante’s eyes moved to my hand, and he scratched his head.

“Forget it, I don’t have time either. So, I’ll cut to the chase: I’m here for Yamato.”

When I heard his words, I instinctively covered my right hand with my left. For some reason, I knew that by “Yamato” he meant the sword. Why did he want it? If he’d been another Order recruit, I could’ve chalked it up to Agnus, but Dante definitely didn’t have anything to do with the Order,

so how did he know about it? And he'd even looked right at my arm as he said that he wanted it, meaning he already knew where I held it.

“How do you know about the sword...?”

I asked.

I had the devil arm and had gotten a lot stronger, but I could feel how Dante had power beyond what I could possibly imagine.

“It was originally my brother's.”

“Brother...?”

For some reason, that surprised me a bit. I couldn't imagine Dante having a family.

He was still lounging by a pillar in the middle of the room, when he took out his big sword and pointed it at me.

“My brother is gone, so it's mine now. I don't know how it got here, but... it's not the sort of thing you can leave in any old fool's hands. It's got to stay in the family. That's all.”

So, Yamato's original owner was no longer in this world. Standing in front of me was said owner's brother, asking me for the sword back. If it was someone else, I might have

laughed in their face at the absurdity of it all, but when Dante said it, I believed him. But it didn't matter if he was telling the truth, I couldn't hand it over. Now I really needed it. I couldn't save Kyrie without this sword. The Order needed Yamato for their plans. If I didn't have it, they would have no beef with me, and no reason to fight me.

“I'm sorry... but I can't give it to you.”

I concentrated on my right arm as I said that, and the sword appeared in my hand. Dante's expression went tight when he saw it.

“I would have let you go if you've just given it to me.”

He said that, but he still took out his sword and made a step towards me.

“Well, c'mon kid. Fighting you might not be so bad.”

Here it was again, that arrogant attitude. I rubbed at my nose and readied my sword.

“Kid? Well... If that's how you see me I think you'll blush a pretty pink when I kick your ass.”

I shouted and rushed at him, picking up Blue Rose with my left hand and firing a couple shots. Dante didn't even bother trying to avoid them, instead just calmly retaliating with his sword like it was nothing, and I quickly parried, though the impact sent me bouncing back. Honestly, I expected it to happen, but for it to be so quick and so soon it actually hurt my ego a little bit.

“What’s wrong, I thought you’d improved a bit on your little trip?”

Dante said as he put his sword behind his back, and instead grabbed his two guns and started pelting bullets like they were machine guns.

I jumped and tried to dodge, but it was like trying to avoid the rain. I quickly picked up my sword and used it as a barrier to block the incoming bullets.

Dante stilled for whatever reason, and started laughing.

“...what’s so funny?!”

Dante just shook his head.

“Oh, nothing... this is just giving me a bit of Deja-vu, that’s all.”

I had no idea what the fuck he was talking about. I focused my energy in my right arm.

I held the gun in my right hand and fired a charged bullet. Dante got in a defensive stance, ready to block it, but my target wasn't him - rather, the stone pillar right next to him. The bullet hit the pillar, but that, too, was just the start.

“You missed.”

Dante said with a cocky smile as he looked at the pillar. I chuckled.

“You sure about that?”

He probably had figured out that something was up, but instead of moving away, Dante just stared at the pillar motionlessly as the bullets violently exploded within it.

“Oh...?”

For some reason the demonic energy causes the bullets to explode with a slight delay. I have no clue as to what causes it to happen, but I could use it to my advantage.

I didn't expect it to be a major hit or anything, but it could at least make a dent in my favor. Once I revved Red Queen to the max, I charged at Dante.

First, I tried swinging at his jaw, but he blocked my attack with his sword. He left a gap wide open where I could slash at him horizontally, and it would definitely get him.

However, Dante swiftly caught the blade with his unoccupied hand. His palm got cut and was dripping with blood, and that made me think I had the upper hand for a second, but it was just the opposite. When I went to pull the sword back, Dante's grip held it so tight I couldn't even budge it no matter how hard I tried. If he was a regular person his fingers would have long since been sliced off, but instead I couldn't move one inch.

"Maybe I was a bit hasty in my judgement, you're not so bad at this game, kid."

Despite the current situation, Dante's gleeful expression didn't change. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't seem to get under his skin.

"I'm not a kid!"

To escape his clutches, I slammed my foot into his abdomen. His grip on my sword loosened slightly, but he stood firm. The impact sent me backwards.

“Nice kick, but you lack the proper strength to land it. I recall your punches hitting a lot harder, do you want me to teach you some martial arts to get better at it?”

He didn't show any sign that he'd felt any pain whatsoever, instead he kept throwing jokes around, and putting himself in an intentionally bad kung-fu pose.

Was he a foe I could ever defeat? Despite gaining demonic power, despite all my desperation, I couldn't get past the opponent right in front of me. Should I give up? Knowing that there was no way for me to win, should I continue fighting? I still needed more strength, more power, it still wasn't enough.

“I need more power!”

I clenched my right hand, and once again, that light surrounded me. The demon within me.

I fired a few bullets at Dante, and with them came the spectral swords from my demonic aid. They hit their mark.

“...Alright, that was kinda cool.”

This newfound power might have felt overwhelmingly strong to me, but to Dante it still was a walk in the park to avoid. Still, I couldn't give up. I sent the same cross shaped energy beam that I had with Credo, but it didn't seem to make a difference with Dante. He looked a bit caught off guard by it,

but he still didn't falter. I knew, deep down, that there was no strategy that would work, I could just charge at him with my all and hope it would be enough.

I tried lunging at him, putting my whole body into it, but he dodged me like a matador. I was going too fast to stop or turn around, so I just fell heavily to the ground. I attempted to stand up as soon as I could, but Dante stepped on me to hold me down. He pressed on my arm and neck with his sword.

At that point, I had to give it up. I stopped resisting, and just glared at Dante. He cocked his head with an unreadable expression on his face.

"You cooled off yet, kid? What's the matter? Why the glare?"

I looked away.

"You look as if you've just been playing me from the beginning."

I said that, but it almost burned to get out. I didn't want to admit to how vast our difference in strength was. Dante removed his sword to lean on it.

“I won’t lie, I’d like to agree with you. But I wasn’t pulling my punches, I swear - I haven’t had a workout this good in a while.”

“But I was trying to kill you... and you weren’t.”

I dusted myself off and stood up. Dante looked away.

“It’s a matter of experience, kid. I’ve been doing this way longer than you.”

Dante sat on the table next to him, and pointed at Yamato in my hand.

“That sword... was used to separate our world from the demons. I told you, I can’t have it end up falling in the wrong hands. And it’s kind of important to me.”

I couldn’t win against Dante. I had no excuse after admitting his abilities. I should have returned the sword without protest... but even if his argument made perfect sense, I didn’t want to give this power up. The thought of losing it made me incredibly anxious.

I wanted to save Kyrie, yes, that was one of the reasons. But the truth was that something about this sword called to me. If I lost it, I would be forever incomplete - I feared that with my entire being.

“Still... I need this...”

I whispered. Even without looking up, I could hear the slight smile in Dante’s voice.

“Then keep it.”

I looked up at him in disbelief.

“Keep... it?”

“Yeah, why not. I said it shouldn’t fall in the wrong hands, and you look like you can handle it for a little while.”

I wanted to say something, but my mind was blank. Dante looked at the room’s exit door.

“Now that you're calm and cool... Get going.”

As he said that, I started heading to the exit. But before I could leave, Dante blocked my way with his sword.

“...what, changed your mind?”

Dante shook his head.

“I just want a little something, consider it rent for letting you borrow Yamato. Could you tell me your name? I know it already, but I want to hear it from you.”

I hadn't expected that question. It suddenly made me a bit self-conscious.

“...Nero.”

Dante laughed in response.

“Nice to meet you, Nero. I'm Dante. You'd do well to remember that in the future, kid.”

I laughed too.

“Not a bad name.”

After that, I continued moving forward. Behind me, I could hear Dante muttering.

I'll take that as a “thank you”



As if she'd been waiting for Nero to leave, suddenly, Gloria appeared. She showed no intention of hiding, and stopped right behind Dante. He slowly turned around, and realization dawned slowly on his face.

"...Nice to meet you."

Gloria said. Dante looked like he wanted to play along, but couldn't help himself from bursting out laughing.

"You were hiding for so long I was worried what you were goanna look like! That regal look suits you, though."

Gloria's real face, much like her true identity - that is, Trish - was pretty far from her disguise that she'd used to sneak into the Order. She couldn't help but want to cause a bit of mischief in this religious, uptight place with her appearance. To Dante's laughing face, Trish immediately turned back into her original form, and stared right at him.

"I wasn't hiding. This spell is pretty easy to perform, but it takes time to recharge it. I didn't want to have moments of vulnerability while I waited to cast it again."

So, she said, but in truth, she just wanted to mess with Dante. She would never have admitted to that, though, so she made up a reason.

“Are you sure you want to let the kid go?”

Trish looked at Dante, who was still laughing. She wanted to remind him of the purpose why they were here in the first place - to get Yamato back. If Nero left to fight the Order, not only could that not be done, but the sword might fall into their hands.

According to Trish’s intel, Nero was now an enemy of the Order. His main goal, right now, would have been to rescue the girl that Agnus had taken hostage (his girlfriend?).

Dante, who had finally managed to calm down, looked in the direction that Nero went.

“Yeah, I see no issue with it. I think the kid’s even stronger than I initially thought. In fact, I gave him the sword myself.”

Hearing that, Trish was a bit uneasy. If Nero lost, then Vergil’s Yamato would definitely fall into the hands of the Order. Which wasn’t an issue in and of itself, the real problem was the weapon they called “The Savior”.

Trish knew the Order were secretly working on completing it, but she didn’t know the details. Though Gloria had become an Order Official, they still hadn’t let her in on the

Savior plan. Perhaps the vicar didn't trust her, after all. But she still managed to gather some info about it - namely, that to complete their project, they needed the devil sword Sparda, and a descendant of Sparda's bloodline. With these things, the Savior would be complete.

"If those kids really related to you, it could be bad. Things could get ugly."

Dante snorted at Trish's concern.

"Well, if the kid screws up, I'll jump in to help. Especially if we really are related."

Trish shrugged.

STAGE 10



Lower ranking recruits like me were never allowed into the restricted area of HQ. I used to think it was ridiculous. They went all the way to build a whole separate building, yet they only let a handful of people in it. What could be going on in there, away from everyone else's eyes?

I had a few wild theories - like maybe they were discussing actually banning foreigners from the island for good, or they were keeping the citizens monitored, or there were some shady business deals they might have been involved in - but while I was correct in assuming there was something they wanted to keep secret, I grossly underestimated the magnitude of it.

There were many things along the way, but the most horrible of them was a room filled with cages. Each cage had a number on it. There were demons held inside these cages like lab animals - some of them looked partly human.

“Are these demons? Or...”

I thought back to what Credo had said, how he'd been blessed by God or whatever to evolve into an angel. Looked like now I knew what happened to those who weren't as blessed as him.

As I passed by the cages, none of them spoke a word. Was it because they had nothing to say? Or could they not talk at all anymore?

I didn't like this place one bit, but before I could reach the exit, I paused in front of one cage.

“...Tonio?”

His entire left half had become beastly, but it was indeed him. I pressed closer to the cage, and took a proper look at him. Tonio looked frightened, and shrank back to the opposite corner of the cage. I remembered him as a haughty, arrogant man who'd always sneer at me and have a few choice words to throw - yet now he was shaking like a scared defenseless animal.

I looked around at the other numbered cages, and the now inhuman creatures in them.

“That one over there... it's Sagan, isn't it?”

Tonio and Sagan, ever since last month's incident, had been working twice as hard. I'd seen their faces around a few times, but they looked human, my hand hadn't reacted to them.

“Just what the hell is going on...?!”

I was suddenly so angry that I couldn't stop myself from punching the wall. Tonio cried out from inside the cage, and it just sounded so... animal-like.

It fully sunk in then, that the Tonio I'd known was gone. I had no idea what had happened to them, maybe Tonio was so desperate to get stronger that he asked first to go through this “ascension ceremony”.

However, it might have went, it made me furious at the Order.

I'd never particularly liked Tonio or Sagan, and they certainly didn't like me. I've never been one to stick to the rules, but I think they assumed that because I'd grown up with Credo, I'd never gotten properly punished for it. And also, because I was close to Kyrie - I could see clearly that they both had a thing for her. But truthfully, the only reason we were so close in the first place was because her parents liked me enough to adopt me, and raised us together like siblings. It would be natural then that we'd grow to be close, especially since I always get in trouble and Kyrie is such a worrywart.

I laughed bitterly at those thoughts.

“Yeah, we didn’t get along but... not like this...”

I whispered. Tonio looked at me curiously, but didn’t speak.

“Well, maybe I shouldn’t use family as an excuse... yeah, Kyrie’s parents were always so nice to me... but she’d probably still be dear to me even if we weren’t family, just like for you guys.”

I really had to go save Kyrie. She’s a really important person to me - not just because we were raised as family, or because her parents were kind to me.

I have feelings for her.

I’d never told her this, because honestly, I wasn’t sure of it myself until recently. Would it disgust her, to learn that someone like me felt that way about her?

Well, whatever the outcome, I had to sort out these feelings before I went to rescue her. For some reason, seeing Tonio and Sagan like this made me make up my mind.

“Don’t worry, I’m going to save Kyrie... and get revenge from those who did this to you.”

When I said that, the thing that used to be Tonio looked like he was smiling. My sentiment must have gotten through, somehow.

“So, root for me, guys.”

I walked out of the room. There was nothing I could do for them; I couldn't let them out of their cages in that state. But I didn't know if there was even a way to get them back to normal. If I spent any more time thinking about this, it would've made me feel miserable and useless, so I just stuck with my resolve to save Kyrie. I should be strong enough to do it. Or at least, so I told myself as I set foot on the stairwell that would take me to the Advent Chamber.



Agnus was now inside the Savior.

The Savior - a giant weapon that the Order would use to herd the world towards utopia.

In principle, it functioned much like a Bianco Angelo - demonic energy trapped within an artificial shell. But the Bianco Angelos only need one demon's soul to animate them, whereas the Savior's structure was a bit more complicated - after all, the Angelos could be mass produced, while the Savior was completely unique.

To power the Savior, Agnus had specifically cultivated various types of demonic cells, only those of the highest strength, power conduction and regenerative abilities. It also featured an internal generator called the Sacred Heart, that the Angelos didn't have. It functioned like a human heart, pumping demonic energy from millions of demons like blood to activate the Savior's gargantuan form.

Because of the efficiency of the power generating system, and the high-quality materials that formed the outer casing of the statue, the Savior wasn't just big, but also incredibly agile, and able to strike harder than the world's strongest weapon. It was, truly, the culmination of all of Agnus' research, a true masterpiece.

However, it wasn't without its flaws - no matter how much demonic energy was used to power it, it was still not enough to truly make it come to life. And no matter how strong the demons used to create it; Agnus still couldn't achieve the Savior's maximum destructive potential. For that reason, Agnus had, once, given up on perfecting the Savior. That was, until Gloria had appeared Devil Sword Sparda at her side, which was exactly the missing piece that Agnus had been looking for. The sword that once belonged to the Legendary Dark Knight himself, in itself a symbol of Sparda's power - its energy enough to supply the Savior with all the demonic power it needed.

Or so Agnus had thought, but there was still an issue - the Devil Sword Sparda held an almost terrifying amount of power, yes, but it was the kind of power that only Sparda himself could wield.

But after hearing Agnus' report, the vicar, Sanctus, had asked without missing a beat:

“Well, could a son of Sparda do it?”

Because Sparda did, indeed, have a son. There was no doubt that he had once again sealed the Demon Emperor when he tried to return. And since then, he'd continued hunting demons all over the world. The Order had been keeping tabs on him.

At first, when they learned of his existence, some suggested luring him to Fortuna to worship as a living God. However, that idea was completely dashed once they'd looked into him more.

He was too human - a man who ran his business from the town's seediest alleys, who listened to rock and that ungodly noise that people like him called music, who drank too much and ate basically nothing but pizza, and worst of all, who fought with swords, yes, but also guns and an array of other types of weapons - so unlike any of their church's preaching's.

Such was the son of Sparda - Dante.

He had inherited Sparda's blood, that much was clear. And with it, he could easily be used to harness the Devil Sword Sparda's power.

After that, their plan became thus - to capture Dante and use him to power the Savior's core.

And now, at the final stage of their machinations, the plan was revised once again.

They wouldn't use Dante, but another of Sparda's kin, a young man named Nero. Agnus might not have been able to restore Yamato, but Nero did it with ease - there could be no other explanation for it outside of him sharing Sparda's genes.

There were no clear records, but Sparda had lived in Fortuna centuries ago - it wasn't unthinkable that he might have some descendants there. At least, Agnus thought so.

Moreover, Dante had proved far too difficult for the Order to capture. As for Nero? He was definitely far from weak, but nowhere near as strong as Dante. He also had very obvious weaknesses, like Kyrie. In the end, he would be far easier to catch.

Purely speaking about raw potential power, Nero appeared to have even more than Dante did - but he was too young and didn't know how to use it. And that would play in their favor, too, because using such power to complete the Savior, the result might even be enough to go head-to-head with Dante and defeat him.

Agnus, who sat in the control room of the Sacred Heart, giving it its final adjustments, smiled faintly.



Once I reached the Advent Chamber, I had to do a double take. In the middle of it stood a gigantic statue, about a hundred meters tall... no, wait, probably taller. It looked a bit like Sparda's statue in the Opera House, but not exactly. Honestly, it looked a bit tacky, in my opinion.

I climbed the spiral staircase that surrounded the statue and reached the open area on top.

When I stopped, I was facing the statue, right in front of its chest.

My right hand hurt like hell. There had to be demons was nearby, but wherever I looked, all I could see was the statue. I looked up to its head, and on top of it stood the vicar. While I was climbing the stairs there was no one up there, or was he there all along and I just couldn't see him?

Either way, he must've been the source of the pain in my hand. Dante had shot him in the head, yet there he stood, right in front of my eyes. There was no questioning whether he was still human at that point.

“Is it not beautiful? Marvel at the glory of the Savior.”

The vicar looked down and around himself at the statue he was standing on. So that was the infamous savior. I snorted.

“I think we've got a difference of opinion on that one.”

The vicar looked down at me with contempt in his eyes. I'd never really interacted with him before, only seen him from afar, but from what I could remember, he'd never given anyone a look like that. But the cold stare suited him far too well - it felt like I was finally seeing his true nature.

I slowly pulled out Blue Rose and pointed it at him.

“Where's Kyrie?”

At my question, the vicar smiled and waved his right hand. I thought he was about to attack me, but while I was getting into a defensive stance, the Statue he called the savior moved, and from the sapphire on its forehead, Kyrie's body slowly emerged.

“Kyrie!”

I called out, but she was unconscious.

“Is it not your wish to become one with her?”

The vicar had suddenly started speaking. I didn't know how to respond to that, so he continued.

“Within the Savior your mortal bodies will combine, melting into one to manifest and create his core! A thing of utter and pure beauty.”

I didn't want to listen to his mad ravings. My fingers tightened on instinct on the trigger, but if I shot now, I could have injured Kyrie by accident. I grit my teeth and spat at the vicar.

“Go blow yourself!”

The vicar's expression only slightly shifted, and as he waved his hand again, Kyrie was reabsorbed into the savior.



But at the last second, she seemed to have come to, and looked at me.

“I'm here to save you... Please trust me! I- “

Before I could finish talking, Kyrie's body had disappeared into the jewel.

“I'm afraid you are too late. But although still incomplete, this is your chance to catch a glimpse of the true power of our Savior!”

I shot at the vicar's creepy grin, but he manifested a glowing barrier around his body, and the bullets bounced off of it.

“You presume to win this fight with a mere toy like that? You cannot beat me without using that devil arm of yours... but you can't, can you?”

That had to be his plan. He might have been trying to bait me, but I still called on Yamato.

“If you want it then come and take it!”

I focused my energy in my right hand and swung the devil arm. The resulting energy blade flew towards the vicar. He saw it coming, and disappeared into the savior. I had no clue how, but it looked like he could freely go in and out of the statue like it was incorporeal. That had to be the same principle that allowed him to trap Kyrie in there.

The blast I hurled hit the savior's head, but it didn't even put a dent in it.

Just as I was pondering how sturdy this thing had to be, the savior began vibrating faintly, steadily growing in intensity like an earthquake, and the room began to collapse.

“Got to move...!”

Before I was even ready to dash, the savior raised its right hand up in the hair and swatted at me with unbelievable speed. I just barely managed to jump back and avoid it, but I lost my footing. Then it used its left hand to hit me horizontally, and while I was ready to jump and avoid it, at the same time it had already begun preparing another hit with its right hand. If I jumped it would definitely hit me, so instead I used Yamato to attack its left hand.

Despite the clear force behind the savior’s hits, the slice from Yamato forced its left hand back. That way I could jump on the right hand, and began running towards the savior’s face. I had no idea if it would work, but I had to - if I didn’t, I might not be able to save Kyrie.

I jumped and put my whole body into slashing downwards. The blade embedded itself in the savior’s head, but the damn thing was too big to ever be damaged by it. It must have been little more than a mosquito bite to it. And already, when I pulled back the sword, the small scratch had been repaired.

I jumped back to the ground, thinking hard about what would be my strategy.

The vicar appeared again from the savior's head, and looked down at me like he'd already won.

"This is all fruitless. The Savior cannot be stopped by your childish attempts!"

"...that's true."

I sighed as I muttered to myself. I couldn't seem to find a way to smash the humongous fucker.

The savior was still - perhaps it could only move while the vicar was inside it. Then, if I could get him, I might be able to stop the savior - I had to take the chance.

I focused my energy in my right hand, and looked up at the vicar.

"What's wrong, are you giving up?"

After he spoke, I fired at him with my charged shot. Though he had already put up the barrier, I aimed at his feet. That was the same trick I had tried with Dante, but I couldn't think of a better way. The vicar looked down at where I'd shot.

Three, two, one...

I counted down in my head, and slowly made my way forwards. When the count reached zero, I jumped up, sword at the ready. At the same time, the charged bullets exploded at the vicar's feet, which shocked him enough to give me an opening. I put my whole body into the hit.

“Scum!”

My sword hit something hard, and it ricocheted through my entire body. The barrier around the vicar stopped my blow, but he didn't look as smug as before. Perhaps it was effective against Blue Rose, but not so much if it was attacked by a sword.

The vicar yelled when the sword cut through the barrier a little bit. If it had gone only a little deeper, it would have dealt some real damage.

“Don't think you've won, foul demon...!”

I thought he was talking out his ass to sound bigger, because at that moment all he could do was desperately try to keep the barrier up to save his life and waste my time.

“Demon? Me? Have you looked in a mirror recently?”

As I wielded my sword, ready to strike, suddenly Kyrie appeared from the savior's shoulder. The vicar smiled wickedly as he spoke.

“Oh my, what would happen were she to fall from so high up? I would save her in a heartbeat, but it appears I'm otherwise preoccupied...”

While he talked, Kyrie's body gradually emerged, hanging towards the ground. If she came completely out, she'd definitely have fallen.

“Damn it!”

Without thinking, I withdrew Yamato, rushing towards the savior, reaching my hand towards her, but instead, I got caught as well.

“Ugh...!”

A giant hand squeezed my whole body, and struggle as I might have to escape it, it wouldn't work.

“Held back by love. Such a shame.”

Kyrie's body looked like it was holding on right on the brink of falling, and the vicar appeared right next to her.

He pointed at me, and forced Yamato from my hand, drawing it towards himself. It floated on its own towards him, and the vicar smiled.

“You will now be joined with your loved one in the Savior’s core. What fate would be more divine than that?”

I shouted as I desperately tried to wriggle free from the savior’s hand. The vicar stroked his beard as he continued talking.

“Yes... I remember it vividly. You should be seventeen or eighteen, right? Eighteen years ago, the same year that I became the vicar... That year, I met a man who came to Fortuna...



Eighteen years before, Sanctus had been chosen as the Order's new vicar after their previous leader, Sullyman, had died of a mysterious illness.

He had been steadily climbing the ranks among the Order's Holy Knights, eventually ending up Captain. Sullyman and Sanctus were almost the same age - it was a matter of who would die first, whether Sullyman would leave the throne to Sanctus or he'd pass away while still waiting.

At first, he'd almost given up the thought of inheriting that position, but... his ambitions were too strong, his desire to shape the world to his desires too compelling.

Nowadays, the world was polluted, poisoned by mindless people who forgot to be grateful to the god who created them, instead rolling around in filth and chasing only after their own pleasures. Someone had to do something about that. Sanctus believed that this was the mission his god had assigned him. To do that, he had to become the vicar.

Sanctus thought Sullyman mediocre. He would never have agreed to such a plan, no, he wouldn't even have understood the mere idea of it.

Therefore, in order to achieve his utopia, he had to sit on that throne himself, to get people to believe his words, build their trust in him, and use them to further his mission from God.

It started with killing Sullyman, which took two years. And kill him he did, though not as directly as with a sword or a gun. No, what he did was merely supply him with a small amount of poison over time.

As a bishop, Sanctus often had the pleasure of dining at the same table as the vicar. So, when he wasn't looking, he added toxins he'd extracted himself from various herbs to the vicar's meals. It was nothing that would ever be discovered or traced, not even if the food were to be investigated. And once tragedy struck, there was no evidence that could be pinned on Sanctus.

Sanctus' poisonous hands slowly broke down Sullyman's body, and after two years, his soul was called back to the Lord with no one being the wiser.

As the vicar's left and right hand, and the oldest bishop, no one objected to Sanctus' ascension.

On the day of his ascension, Sanctus lay down in the master bedroom of Fortuna Castle.

Since that was said to have been Sparda's room, it was tradition for a new vicar of Sparda to spend their first night there to receive his blessings.

As Sanctus drifted off to sleep, his mind filled with visions of his utopia coming to life, the door creaked, signalling someone had entered the room. At first, Sanctus had assumed it was a guard, but if that were the case, they'd have knocked on the door before coming in, and wouldn't have snuck in like common thieves.

Sanctus grabbed the dagger he'd hid under his pillow in case of emergency and jumped out of bed. He might have been old, but he used to be the Captain of the Holy Knights - he would have no need to call for help.

What Sanctus saw was a young man, not in a fighting stance, just eerily staring at him.

The moonlight that streamed through the window lent his silver hair an almost ethereal quality, and he wore a very peculiar outfit that looked a bit dated for the time.

He held an unfamiliar sword at his side.

“Who are you?”

Sanctus pointed the dagger at him, but the man didn't look the least bit threatened, instead looking away from Sanctus and around the room.

“I’m not here for you... don’t mind me.”

He spoke like he owned the place and Sanctus, instead, were the intruder, and he began walking around the room to look at the furniture and various objects.

Sanctus thought he was trouble, so he pointed the blade at his back.

“Stop right there.”

The man didn’t even turn around to face Sanctus as he replied.

“If you don’t get in my way, I won’t kill you. I’m just here to look into Sparda’s past.”

Somehow, Sanctus knew deep within himself that were he to attempt sneaking up behind the man’s back, it wouldn’t work. The instant before he could even move his dagger, he could feel on an instinctual level this man’s pure murderous intent.

Like a prey animal responding to a predator.

“You aren’t human, are you?”

Sanctus asked before he could stop himself, and the man slowly turned towards him, with a humorless smirk on his face.

“If I said I wasn’t, what would I be then? A demon?”

Demons do appear frequently around Fortuna, perhaps due to the strong demonic energy of the area. The Holy knights are a very real necessity there. Without them, who would protect the people when demons attack?

Sanctus, who used to be the Captain of the Holy Knights, had fought demons’ numerous times before. And he could tell that this man was different from any demon he had encountered in the past.

“Not a demon... perhaps... a god?”

Sanctus said in a low voice - just then, the room echoed with the sound of footsteps.

“Your Holiness! Are you all, right?”

That was the voice of the guards. They had to have felt something was amiss within the castle, so they’d come to check. The man had moved to climb the window.

“Wait...!”

Sanctus ran up to him, wanting to know his true identity.

He had opened the window, and whispered while looking at Sanctus:

“I don’t mind you lot revering Sparda as a god, you’re free to do as you please. But you best remember that your so called “god” will be surpassed one day... and when that day comes, you should think long and hard about who you should be worshiping. Your god, or his son who transcended him.”

With that said the man jumped out of the window and disappeared into the night. At that moment, the guards rushed into the room.

Sanctus couldn’t tell them about what he’d seen, instead assuring them that nothing had happened.

What had he meant by “son of god”?

Many years later, when Sanctus learned of Sparda’s son, Dante, he’d finally come to understand the meaning.



“It all makes sense now. That man must’ve been a descendant of Sparda. He must have impregnated a woman from Fortuna...”

The vicar pointed at me when he was done spouting his nonsense.

“What, you telling me my dad was a ghost?”

He must have imagined it all. No matter what he said, I’ve never met my parents - neither of them.

“I had originally intended to absorb Dante into our Savior, but circumstances presenting, I’d rather choose the option at hand. After all, you’re also a descendant of Sparda.”

“Dante...?”

It was all too much to process. To power the core of the savior they needed a descendant of Sparda. That meant Dante - Dante was the descendant of Sparda, right?

The vicar stared at Yamato.

“When your Sparda blood and this sword are combined, we will be able to proceed to the final stage of our ultimate goal.”

While the vicar was busy with his speech, a white blur suddenly appeared in the sky, launching itself at the vicar at top speed. I held my breath - it was Credo, in his white winged demonic form.

He smashed into the vicar, who lost his footing, so that the fist holding my body slightly loosened.

“Nero! Run!”

Credo shouted as he turned towards me. I managed to get my right hand out, but the savior’s hand squeezed once again.

While I was struggling, I heard Credo cry out in pain. I immediately looked over in horror.

What I saw was Credo, his chest having been pierced by the vicar with Yamato.

“Credo!!!”

Credo trembled and tried to grab the vicar by the neck. The vicar ignored him, instead just stabbing the sword deeper in his body.

“Argh...!”

Credo leaned back, losing his demon form.

“You have betrayed us. I received Agnus’ report, but I never expected you too actually do so... why?”

Credo spit blood at the vicar’s question, looking to Kyrie’s body which hung halfway out of the savior.

“I served the dream of a world you spoke of, the Savior you preached of... But you used my sister, Kyrie, who has nothing to do with this, and that is beyond forgiveness.”

Credo tried to grab the vicar’s neck again, but he couldn’t muster the strength to do so. The vicar retracted the sword, and Credo’s head fell forwards weakly.

“Credo!”

The vicar smiled.

“Love...? For a sibling? How foolish. All that is needed is absolute power!”

After that, he pushed Credo’s body away - he could put up no resistance, and fell backwards.

“Credo! Grab my hand!”

I strained my devil printer towards the falling Credo, but I couldn't catch him. I could only turn away so I wouldn't have to see him hit the ground.

Suddenly, I saw a blur of red jump up and catch Credo's fall.

"...Dante!"

Dante held Credo firmly, and landed on the ground. He smiled at me before putting Credo down at his side. At his other side was a blonde woman. I'd never seen her before, but somehow, something about her attitude rang familiar. The vicar also looked at her, and sighed.

"Oh, it's you... Gloria."

"What an unhappy reaction. What, am I a little underdressed for the occasion?"

The woman, who must have been Gloria, shrugged. It seemed this was her true identity - though I had no way of knowing, I assumed she must've been a friend of Dante's. The vicar looked down at her with a victorious smile:

"Unfortunately, you did not anticipate a descendant of Sparda's blood, and because of this boy, you have been outwitted! And the Savior will be completed!"

I secretly focused my energy in my right hand, doing my best so that the vicar wouldn't notice it. This was my only chance. His attention was on Dante, so this was my only opportunity to kill him.

Right now, before the savior's grip became crushing again.

The vicar slowly turned to look at me, but it was too late. I'd already gathered all the strength I needed. I grimaced, but Dante smiled, leading the vicar to turn towards him again.

"I don't know, I'd wager those kids still got some life in him."

The vicar stiffened at his words.

"Break down!"

My devil bringer became huge and stretched to hold the vicar much like the savior was holding me. I couldn't crush him in my current state, so I could only take the gamble and smash him against the body of the savior. This shook the savior's structure, but the vicar disappeared from my hands. My whole arm tingled, and the sensation caught me off guard.

"Ah...?"

I looked up and there was the vicar, standing over me on the savior's hand. He took Yamato and stabbed my right hand with it.

“You fool! Escape is now impossible! The creation cannot be stopped!”

I hadn't forgotten that he could phase in and out of the statue, but I didn't have many other options. If I'd thrown him at Dante, then maybe he could've taken care of it, but that thought didn't sit right with me - I didn't want him to think I was dumping my problems on him. I wanted to end this by my own hand. Otherwise, wouldn't all my talk of saving Kyrie be nothing but empty words?

The vicar laughed and entered the savior. At the same time, Kyrie was also absorbed. I could feel that my body was being swallowed up, as well. I had no way to resist.

“Hey, kid! You giving up so soon?”

Dante asked, still grinning. How could he laugh at a time like this? He must be touched in the head or something.

Despite that, deep down, I felt I could trust him. No matter what came next, Dante would be able to deal with it.

“My options... are limited...”

That's the last thing I was able to say before my body was swallowed up. Truthfully, I wanted to call out for help, but that would've felt worse than actually dying.

“So melodramatic. Besides, if you die without giving my sword back, I'm going to be pissed!”

I so badly wanted to talk back to him about it, but unfortunately, the vicar had Yamato. I knew he knew that. Well, I might not be able to save myself, but I still wanted to have the last word.

“Then come and get it.”

I said, and as my body sank, I lifted my right hand high and gave him my middle finger.

The last thing I heard before I was completely engulfed was Dante's wry laugh.

STAGE II



I couldn't tell whether I was dreaming or awake.

When I was absorbed into the savior, Kyrie was right there, standing in front of me.

“Kyrie. I failed to save you.”

I hung my head. In order to protect her, I swore I'd give it my all - yet I wasn't able to do so. I was beyond ashamed.

“Nero...”

Kyrie slowly reached out to me. I hesitated for a second before reaching back, but when I did, her body began slowly disintegrating into golden light.

“Kyrie!!!”

She smiled sadly at me while I could still see her face.

“Nero...I'm so sorry. This was all my fault-“

Before she could finish talking, she was gone, leaving me alone in the darkness.

“Kyrie!”

I shouted as I looked around.

“I swear it! I swear I'm going to get us out of here! Together!”

I could feel my body as it began dissolving like Kyrie's had. I thought I recalled Sanctus calling this the savior's core. I probably wasn't going to die - then, there still was hope. As long as I was still alive, I could save Kyrie. I let my eyes close with this faint hope in my chest.

Then, it all went black.