

Makai Senki Disgaea: Revelations

written by Kamishiro Sou (神代創)

illustrated by Chou Niku (超肉)

Translation by Yinza



Contents

- Translation Notes
- Characters
- Prologue
- Chapter 1
- Chapter 2
- Chapter 3
- Chapter 4
- Chapter 5
- Epilogue
- Afterward

Translation Notes

Thanks first off to the minds behind Jim Breen's WWWJDIC and 漢字そのまま DS 索引辞典, the two dictionaries I made excessive use of for this translation.

Overall, I have tried to keep the translation as literal as possible without making the English too stiff. In some cases, this means the sentence structure has been altered to reorder clauses, or to split them up to avoid run-on sentences. I have also translated the narration into past tense, since this is the most comfortable for English.

Nippon Ichi Translations

For consistency's sake, I've used some of Nippon Ichi's established translations, even if they aren't exactly literal.

- **Prince:** The word Etna and the prinnies use to refer to Laharl is not Prince (王子 *ouji*), but 殿下 *denka*, which is more equivalent to the English "Your Highness," the appropriate title for a prince. His proper title, 陛下 *heika*, is occasionally used in this novel, and I've typically translated it as "Your Majesty" for emphasis, though in some instances I've translated it as "King."
- **dood:** I'm not sure how they decided on this particular translation. The prinnies almost always end their sentences with つす *-ssu*. This is a sort of compressed form of です *desu*, which is just the polite form of the verb "to be."
- **Defender of Earth:** Gordon's title is more literally "Hero of Earth." What was translated as "Slayer of the Netherworld" is really just the same title but with "Netherworld" in place of "Earth." This, I've translated as "Defender of the Netherworld."
- **Love Freak:** Laharl calls Flonne 愛マニア *ai-mania*, so it could also be translated as "Love Maniac."
- **spell names:** These are actually written in English in the novel. That is, Giga Fire is written ギガファイア *gigafai*. The only exception is Ice, which is written as "Cool" (クール *kuuru*).

Dialogue

All of the Disgaea characters speak in distinctly different ways. In the novel, dialogue is almost always in its own separate paragraph, and frequently the only indication as to who's speaking is the manner in which the line is said. Unfortunately the different speech patterns are very difficult to translate into English. I've done my best, but a lot is lost in translation, so here is a general idea of how the characters speak:

- **Laharl:** If you've heard his Japanese voice in the games or anime, he probably sounds rude and obnoxious even when you can't understand him. And he generally is. However, his speech patterns actually have more in common with characters like FMA's King Bradley than with your average mannerless male protagonist. He speaks like someone in a position of authority, who does not use respectful language towards others because he doesn't have to; he's at the top. He will also sometimes use phrases that are archaic by modern standards. One thing he does that's very distinctive is to refer to himself as *ore-sama*, elevating his own importance. Otherwise he never uses any suffixes, always referring to people by their names only (or simply as "you").

- **Etna:** Etna's speech actually reflects more awareness of rank than her tone implies. When speaking to Laharl, she uses standard polite endings, while with most of the other characters she speaks casually. She refers to herself as *atashi*, but otherwise her language tends to be a little more masculine than feminine. When acting as Laharl's vassal in welcoming Yasurl and the others, she actually uses *keigo*, honorific language, which is about as polite as you can get. She will also use Laharl's proper title on occasion, depending on who she's speaking to.
- **Flonne:** Flonne's speech is the closest to standard polite Japanese out of any of the characters, though with some feminine endings. You could find some of the things she says in textbooks. She generally speaks to everyone with polite forms and refers to them all with *-san*. Children, she will refer to with *-chan* and use casual forms, which is also the accepted norm. She seems to use *keigo* for Lamington and refers to him as *-sama*. Laharl's mother also gets *-sama*, though not his father.
- **Baal:** Baal uses casual masculine forms, but also sometimes speaks a bit like an old man. That is, he refers to himself either as *washi* or 我 *wa*, and his word choice and verb construction at times tend towards older Japanese.
- **Yasurl:** Yasurl typically uses casual forms and feminine language. She sometimes addresses Laharl with polite language, but it comes off as even more insincere than Etna.
- **Vesuvio:** Vesuvio speaks like a very feminine woman. I have no idea why, but it's a little creepy.
- **Shas:** Shas uses casual, very childish language with everyone, and calls everyone *-chan*. Her parents are the exception, both of whom get *-sama*.
- **Kira:** Kira uses polite language similar to how Flonne speaks, but slightly more masculine, and since most of the characters are older than him, he only uses casual forms with Jane and Shas, or when talking to himself. He also manages to use Laharl's proper title. Evidently he's the younger twin, as he refers to Shas as 姉さん *nee-san*.
- **Gordon:** Gordon speaks like the defender-of-justice type hero you'd expect from his character. He refers to himself with the standard *watashi*, and uses casual, masculine forms.
- **Jennifer:** Jennifer uses casual forms and feminine language. Additionally, although all the characters use English loan words, Jennifer uses some English that hasn't become common to the Japanese language.
- **Jane:** She speaks like a little girl, similar to Shas but generally not quite so childish. Sometimes they can be hard to differentiate, though.
- **Thursday:** Thursday uses plain/casual forms with Gordon and Jennifer, but polite *desu* forms with Flonne and Laharl. All his speech is written in カタカナ *katakana* and *kanji*, which manages to make it *look* stilted and robotic. A similar effect is achieved in English by using all capitals.

Onomatopoeias

Japanese has a ton of these and it can be very difficult to translate them. For example, when describing Yasurl, there's an onomatopoeia that essentially indicates an hourglass figure. A lot of the time there is no good English equivalent, so instead I've resorted to related adjectives or verbs. In other instances, the verb and the onomatopoeia both translate to essentially the same thing. E.g., *こんこんとドアに叩いた* is literally

something like "He knocked on the door with a knock-knock." Consequently, in some cases I've collapsed the onomatopoeia-verb combination into one phrase.

Characters



Prologue

It is said that it lies in a place deeper than any ocean, and blacker than any darkness.

A world of dark, where sinister beings enthralled by darkness gather...

Where is this land?

The answer is uncertain.

But, deep within everyone's heart, he believes in its existence, and fears it.

That, is the Netherworld—

A world of wicked darkness which together with Celestia, and the human world, comprises the three worlds.

For a long time, that is what had come to be believed.

However, one chain of events sparked a change.

Events beginning with the death of King Krichevskoy, and the coronation of his son, Laharl.

With that, the circumstances that enveloped the Netherworld itself, and then all three worlds, began to change them.

But, there remain things which, still, have not changed...

1: The Decisive Battle of the Netherworld

1

Kabam, baroom.

"Prince! Prince, I said!!"

Above the thunderous roars and tremors that seemed to boil up from the depths of the earth, a loud voice was calling.

"Uhhh, I'm still sleeping....." came the sleepy reply from inside a polished black granite coffin.

The girl who had apparently come to wake him was scantily dressed in black leather clothing that could only just be said to cover her body. But, her chest was completely *unremarkable*. Without even looking at the black wings extending from her back or her tail, she was clearly a demon. Her red hair was gathered tightly on either side of her head, and stuck out like twin explosions.

"Maybe I'll change my plans and stick him while he's sleeping~"

Her fang-like canines glittered, and the girl pulled a dagger out of nowhere.

And, perhaps having heard her voice, the boy lying in the coffin gave a low groan and sat up. He seemed not to have woken up yet. Rubbing his eyes, he stretched.

Judging by appearance, his age was not much different from the girl's. He was perhaps 12.

His deep-blue-tinted black hair stood up from his head exactly like two antennae, and his entire body was hidden by the long red scarf wound about his neck. As he sat up, though there was no wind, the scarf lifted up of its own accord and fluttered about the boy's shoulders.

"What is it, Etna? I can't even settle down for a nap!"

As though he had finally realized that there was someone beside his coffin, the boy raised his voice in annoyance. But then, he did not seem as angry as his words implied.

"Forget about that. Something awful's come out and is messing up the town." The red-haired girl he had called Etna clicked her tongue and, hiding the dagger, told him the disturbing news as though there were something fun about it. Behind her, her heart-shaped tail waved in delight.

"What did you say?"

"I *said*, the town's being turned into a total mess!" Turning to the side, Etna muttered, "Why is it he's so slow to get this?"

"Did you say something?"

"Nope, not a thing," Etna replied cheerfully, playing dumb, and then she continued to herself. "Anyway I wish you'd stop taking these naps already. Next time it won't be just two years, but I might make you sleep for two *hundred*. And if I do *that*, I'll rule this Netherworld completely."

"Did you say something?"

"Nope, I was just muttering a little about my ambitions."

"Hell, you can't keep dreaming about something you're never going to accomplish." Acting the completely lenient boss, he shrugged it off lightly, and the ruler of the Netherworld, Overlord Laharl, flung out his scarf and leapt to his feet.

"At this rate, it looks like I'll realize it in another 10 years," Etna said.
"Like you could. There's nothing that I'm afraid of." Taking the time to let out a loud laugh, Laharl leapt nimbly from his coffin. "So, what've you come for?"

"Oh, that's right. Forget about all that!"
Etna clapped her hands together, and at the same time the door was flung open with a loud bang.

"Prince, we're in trouble, dood!"
Those who had come in were, any way you looked at it, a bunch of good-for-nothing stuffed penguins. They were lesser demons called prinnies, a lot which specialized in household chores and battle support—essentially, they did odd jobs. It was said that inside them were the souls of sinners.

"Even you lot, it's not 'Prince'! It's been 10 years since I claimed the throne, and I'm a full-fledged king!!"

"It's probably because you don't have any dignity, Prince. Well, it's only been 10 years, so that's to be expected. Until you've been Overlord for 5,000 years like King Krichevskoy, you just won't have the same majesty."

For something so difficult to say, Etna said it bluntly.
"Oh, Etna-sama is here, too, dood."
Not the least concerned with Laharl's anger, the prinny squad saluted Etna smartly.
"And your height hasn't changed at all," Etna added.
"I've grown two centimeters," Laharl boasted, puffing out his chest.

"But, you're not gaining on me or Flonne-chan at all."
Laharl glared sullenly at Etna, but just then, another tremor roiled up like an earthquake. From above, dust and fragments of the ceiling rained down in a patter.

"Well, what is this? Explain it to me fully."
"Showing would be quicker than explaining," Etna said.
She gave Laharl a push from behind, and they left his room.

On the way to a castle tower, a voice called out from behind Laharl and the others.

"Laharl-san!"
The owner of the voice wore frilly, pure white clothes, and a large red ribbon bobbed atop her head. Just like Etna, she had black wings.

"If it isn't Flonne. What's going on? You're out of breath."

"What's going on— Laharl-san, don't you know about the commotion outside?"

"I'm going to have a look now. Hell, I'd only been napping for two days at the most, how did this problem come up?"

"Laharl-san, you sleep too much!"
"You can't call that a nap!"
At Flonne and Etna's double-scolding, Laharl scowled.
"Don't get so upset. It's much shorter than two years.

And that time was someone else's fault," Laharl said, throwing a glance at Etna.



"Uh....."

Etna had poisoned Laharl, and thanks to that he had not woken for two years; it had already become a well-known incident throughout the Netherworld. The mastermind, Maderas, had become a servant in the castle, and had been completely forgotten.

"Prince, everyone in town has been clamoring for you to do something, dood," the prinnies cried, raising their voices.

As it was the prinnies' job to do *every* chore, handling the complaints of the Netherworld's inhabitants also fell to them.

"I get it, I get it. I'm going to see from the tower. You come, too, Flonne," Laharl ordered her coolly, and climbed on to the tower.

She accompanied him, and they began to hear loud noises from outside. At intervals came tremors like an earthquake.

In a space some distance from the castle sprawled a town. As it was common practice for demons that a lot of them did not much like to live in buildings, it was not a large town. The shapes of the buildings, too, were a considerable hodgepodge. One might see a zombie graveyard right next to a building made of stone, or towers rising from the trees where winged gremlins and gargoyles nested.

From the very beginning, everyone outside oneself was an enemy. With the demons never thinking of anyone else, it was a miracle that the town had grown even this big.

Right in the middle of that town stood an enormous demon.

His stature reached the height of the castle tower, and with every step of his two legs he awoke earthquakes. With his strong arms, he toppled towers, and his cloak stirred up tornadoes. Two horns rose from his head, and his eyes burned with the pure red of a furnace. Moreover, he seemed to be headed straight for the castle.

"What the hell is he doing to my town!? Who is that and where did he come from!?"

"There's no record of him," Etna said.

"Did you even check?"

"We checked all the records in the Netherworld library, dood!"

The prinnies put their voices together as if to say 'please believe us.'

"Hm, an attack from an unknown enemy. Somehow it seems like the climax," Laharl said, and even so he let out a loud laugh.

"Why would the climax come this early?"

Etna tilted her head, and Flonne, her eyes brightening as though Etna had voiced her thoughts exactly, began to explain.

"Well, let's see, with this pattern, the hero's special move is repelled, and, temporarily beaten, he undergoes special training in Hell to learn a new special move."

"Hell'— Flonne-chan, this is the Netherworld....."

"Why do I have to undergo special training?"

Disregarding Laharl's apparent displeasure, Flonne declared, "That's the thing, you'll use that new special move to gain a comeback victory."

"So, what? You, you're saying I'm going to get beaten here, and then it's going to be one long scene of special training?"

"It isn't 'you,' it's Flonne."

"For someone who's going to talk about such pointless crap, 'you' is plenty!" Laharl let loose in response to Flonne's complaint, and then as if the thought had just

occurred to him, he addressed the prinnies. "Ah, that's right. Call Gordon, too."

"Right now?" Etna asked curiously.

"I'll punish any manservant who won't come immediately during an emergency."

"That's our Prince, right at home being a demon."

"A demon among demons, dood!"

"Hmph, of course. Don't make such a fuss." Laharl brushed at his bangs. It seemed he was decided.

"He's come right on into the hall, dood."

"To make an example of him, I'll instruct him thoroughly on his body!"

"Prince, that... sounds indecent."

Etna turned an intense stare on Laharl, and Flonne tilted her head.

"Um, which part sounds indecent, Etna-san?"

"It's fine for you not to know. Now, let's get going!" Dodging her question, Laharl pumped his fist assertively.

2

"This guy's amazing," Laharl spoke up in admiration as he looked at the upheaval of the town.

"Which part is amazing!? He's made a disaster of the town that we've worked so hard to build!" Flonne flung out her arm to indicate the town.

Towers were being broken off in their middle, and houses were being kicked flying, their roofs landing atop other houses. The stone-paved streets were caving in, huge footprints stamped into them like seals.

"No, it's really artful the way he's breaking things," Laharl said.

"Eh, I don't think he measures up to you, Prince," Etna laughed.

"Don't flatter me. It's embarrassing."

"I don't think it's flattery," Flonne said sullenly, shaking her head. "Destroying such a creation is not something that can be forgiven."

"I don't want to hear that from someone who's obsessed with stories about giant robots fighting each other in the human world."

"There is love in those fights!" Flonne replied indignantly.

"Wasn't your love for those brats piloting the robots?"

"T-that's not it at all!" Flonne cried, shoving Laharl with both hands.

Her outstretched hands hit Laharl in the face. The impact sent him flying back.

"Flonne-chan, since you fell to the Netherworld, you've really become extreme.

Laying the Prince out like that, I can't even do that."

"I- I didn't mean to....." Surprised herself, Flonne appeared somewhat puzzled by Etna's teasing.

Laharl returned from the 20 meters' distance that he had gone flying, and declared to Etna in irritation, "S-she's always been extreme. Don't go blaming it on the Netherworld."

"Yeah, yeah. But, for Flonne-chan's attack to send you flying, you've really gotten weak, Prince." Gleaming in Etna's eyes was an unmistakable bloodlust.

"Don't be stupid. I just wasn't in combat mode, that's all."

"Is that *so*? Then, shall we test that out?" Etna said in provocation, and the two glared at each other.

"Um, Prince?" Recklessly, the prinnies broke in timidly.

"What?" Laharl responded, his temple twitching.

"He's coming your way, dood."

With their penguin-wing arms, the prinnies pointed towards the huge demon just before their eyes and noses. He was close enough that with his next step, he could crush Laharl and the others.

With his legs speeding along, the demon approached.

As though it had been arranged, everyone scattered right and left, and ran.

Spreading his scarf and flying into the air, Laharl rose up in front of the towering demon's face, and jabbed a finger at his nose.

"Oi, you there!"

"Me?" The dark-blue-skinned demon continued for a few steps, until he finally noticed Laharl and stopped.

"Who else is there besides you?" Laharl said.

"You're so tiny I can barely see you."

"By whose permission are you destroying this place?"

"I'm not destroying anything. I'm only kicking down the obstacles to get to the castle."

"That's the destruction I'm talking about!" Feeling that he was being made a fool of, Laharl's tone became demanding. "Who are you?"

"My name is Baal. I've come to settle a score with the Netherworld king who sealed me away."

Laharl grimaced. "By Netherworld king, you mean my old man?"

"You're his kid? Where is Krichevskoy?"

"Too bad for you, but my old man's already dead. I, Laharl, am King of the Netherworld."

"What did you say!?" The demon called Baal grew purple in the face, and his whole body quivered. "He sealed me away, and then he just up and died!? That's unforgivable!!" he declared, and took a deep breath. He sucked in air in a whirlwind, and his chest expanded like a balloon.

In the next moment, he let loose a howl of anger.

A sound so deep as to make one think his cells were splitting apart shook the area for 10 kilometers all around. Everyone who had gone flying now fell like leaves in their state of shock, and in the midst of it, Laharl plugged his ears and cried back, "Stop!"

Laharl delivered an open-handed smack to Baal's forehead, knocking him back. His balance destroyed, Baal took half a step back.

"Aah, now you've done it," said Etna. "This is getting interesting."

Although Etna's eyes had brightened, Flonne raised her voice in protest.

"Laharl-san, you mustn't use force!"

"And that from the one who delivered the final blow to the Defender of Earth," Etna said.

"T-that was in the heat of the moment! Please don't bring up things that happened 10 years ago!!" Flonne objected, turning beet red.

"Sins aren't erased in just 10 years." Etna laughed unpleasantly, and she looked sideways at Flonne.

"Flonne-san, once you've let Etna-san catch on to a weakness of yours, she'll toy with it for a hundred years, dood. You'd better brace yourself, dood." Too late, the prinnies offered this insight.

Meanwhile, Baal's great bulk had been staggering about, and he now regained his balance.

"Oi, you big lout!" Laharl thrust out a finger and declared, "This is my town and my kingdom. I can't let you continue to do as you please."

"What did you say?" Baal growled in displeasure, gripping his forehead.

"I'll force you to stop."

"What do you mean to do?"

"This." Laharl laughed through his nose, and, just as when he had struck before, he brought his hand down on the crown of Baal's head.

With a boom and a deeply-reverberating crash, two nearby towers the height of Baal's head broke apart.

"What was that just now?"

"Oh, just a shockwave," Etna said in reply to Flonne's question, as if it were no big deal. "Got it?"

Baal remained standing where he had been. His skull had not broken open, nor was there even blood flowing from his forehead. He had only lost consciousness for a moment and staggered.

"You... brat!" Having recovered from his faint, Baal let loose a roar of anger. "I'll pulverize you so that not even atoms will remain!"

Baal brandished his right arm. Flames whirled around his fist, and he let out a howl.

"Wasn't that your intention from the beginning?" His arms folded, Laharl calmly withstood the heat of the flames.

"I'll smash you to pieces!" Baal cried out, and struck at Laharl with his fiery fist. Together with the flames, the huge fist twice Laharl's size closed in on him.

"Laharl-san!?" Flonne shrieked as Laharl did not seem about to dodge.

The fiery fist struck just in front of Laharl's face, and a loud noise shook the air. The shockwave thrust past Laharl, and three houses went flying.

"What was with that rookie punch?" Hovering in midair, Laharl had stopped the punch with nothing but his left hand, and without moving one millimeter.

"W-what did you say!?"

Indifferent to Baal's astonishment, Laharl clicked his tongue. "*A punch* is like this, as if you mean to gouge out someone's side." As he lectured Baal, Laharl drew back his right arm and, twisting his body, shouted, "This should do it!"

All at once, his right fist thrust upwards.

Laharl's tiny fist flew for Baal's face, 10 meters or more away.

No, it didn't just fly, Laharl's fist literally shot forward with a demonic strength.

His fist drew closer, and thrust into Baal's jaw in an uppercut. Not even able to avoid it, Baal took the blow and went soaring high into the air.

"I wonder if he'll become a star?" Etna said.

"Ah, he's falling back down, dood."

During Etna and the prinnies' conversation, Baal came crashing back down to the earth. Tremors like those at the epicenter of an earthquake shook the ground about him.

Not even looking at the fallen Baal, Laharl ordered the prinnies, "You lot finish

him off."

"Roger that, dood!"

The prinny squad raised their voices in unison and saluted, and as one they commenced attack on the toppled Baal. Showy attack raids, explosions, and bombardments rose up in succession, and screams continued like the rumbling of the earth. Once that died down, silence reigned over the town.

"Hmph, that didn't take long." Laharl dusted off his hands with a loud clap.

"Well, Prince, you haven't gotten any weaker." Although Etna's voice sounded impressed, she was thinking, *I wish he hadn't been so reckless just now*, and deep down she was relieved.

"Have you forgotten that I'm younger than you? There's no way my power would wither in just 10 years."

"Oh, is that it?" Etna replied, laughing.

"By the way, weren't you saying something earlier, Etna? About defeating me, or something like that?"

"Huh? Did I say that? I don't remember." Etna's laughter faded. To escape, Etna took some distance from Laharl.

Meanwhile, Flonne was staring dumbly at the fallen Baal. "Um, is it the end already? What about the humiliating defeat? The special training in Hell? The new special move?"

"There is none of that! There's no way *I* could ever lose!!"

"Ohhh~....." Flonne lowered her voice, sounding disappointed. "And it was going to get really good from here....."

"You, you've had a real personality change, haven't you?" Laharl muttered, throwing Flonne a sidelong glance.

"N-no, I haven't." Flustered, Flonne let out a small cough.

And then, behind the two of them, the fallen Baal rose to his feet. Seeing that Laharl and the others had their backs to him, he tried to sneak away making his great bulk as small as possible.

But, Laharl was not so soft as to overlook that. Finding himself glared at, Baal thrust out his chest and spoke with as much dignity as he could muster. "I understand that you all are strong. I will withdraw. Well, then."

The battered Baal turned as if to leave, but Laharl checked him with merciless words.

"Oi, you. When the guy who caused so much trouble to his subjects says he's pulling out, what kind of idiot would just say, 'Yeah, all right'?"

"Y-you're saying you won't let me no matter what?" Baal asked timidly.

"Fix the town back the way it was. And then I'll have you pay 100 billion in restitution damages."

"Ugh, this is so much worse than the previous generation..." Baal suddenly hung his head so that he looked as if he had shrunk to half his height.

"Just be grateful I didn't take your life. Now hurry up and get to work!"

So scolded, Baal tottered back in order to fix up the town which he himself had destroyed.

Seeing this, Laharl muttered sullenly, "My old man, why the hell did he seal this guy away and let him live?"

"See, Laharl-san? It's just as I thought," Flonne said proudly, clapping her hands.

"What do you mean, just as you thought?"

"Krichevskoy-san had love, too. That's why he let Super-Overlord-san go and decided to just seal him away."

"My old man had love? There's no way. He just knew this was well beyond his ability, so he sealed him away and left it to me to clean up his mess."

"Oh, Flonne-chan, you're the same Love Freak as ever. Why don't you give up already and become a demon, body and soul? It's *fun* being a demon~" Etna teased.

"Even if I've fallen, I'm still an angel!" Flonne declared indignantly to Etna, but then she tilted her head. "But, is it really true about the seal?"

"Of course it is," Laharl asserted, full of self-confidence. "All right, we're done here!" Laharl pumped his fist triumphantly.

Flonne was looking in the direction from which Baal had come. Maybe she intended to wait to see whether he would return again.

"We're going home, Flonne."

"But, I wonder why the seal broke now?" Flonne murmured curiously.

"Obviously it's my old man's fault. It must have been some sorry excuse for a seal."

Letting out a snort, Laharl took his leave. Flonne remained, staring at the sky for a while as though she could not accept that explanation, before she finally turned back to the castle.

"My, my, this is just no good at all."

From the top of a hill considerably far away, that is to say, so far that the battlefield could barely be seen, a disappointed-sounding voice arose.

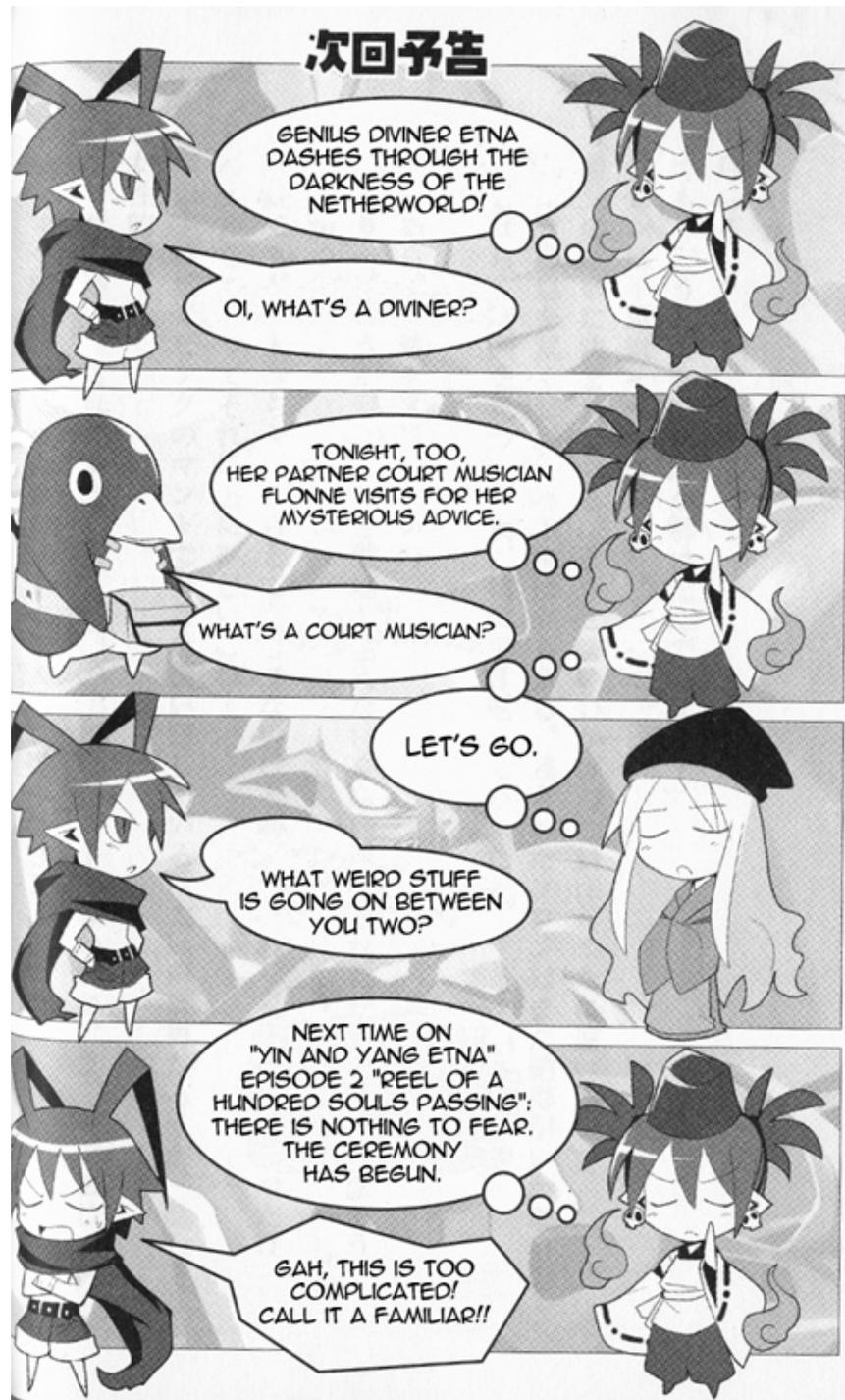
"Once he enters combat mode, we simply cannot win. Big brother was the same way, but Laharl-chan is even worse."

A florescent pink cloak concealed the speaker's entire body. His deep voice had to be a man's, but he spoke like a woman.

"At this rate, the opposing faction won't be able to do anything for at least a thousand years. Well, now that I know a frontal assault won't work, why don't I try another method?"

With a wave of his cloak, the figure became a pink whirlwind and his shadow disappeared from view.

Next Time's Preview¹



1 I'm glad Laharl and the prinny seem confused, too, because I'm not completely confident in the translation here. The words used here for "diviner" and "court musician" aren't ones I'm familiar with, and "court musician" especially is written in *hiragana* when the prinny asks about it, so they may also be uncommon to a native speaker.

2: Unfortunate Company

1

"Prince— Prince—!"

Etna came running down the corridor. Throwing the door open, she entered Laharl's room.

Today, too, things in the Netherworld castle were off to a boisterous start first thing in the morning.

"What's with the racket? Is there an alien attacking this time or what?" Laharl responded, sitting up in his coffin bed. "Or maybe someone from another dimension?" Whatever he was imagining, Laharl seemed to be enjoying it.

"Nothing like that! Even if this *is* the Netherworld, we're not going to keep having invasions and attacks one right after the other."

"Then what is it?" Laharl asked, his expression clearly disappointed.

"Someone's come who says he's a relative of yours. He says he's your uncle. Hadn't you better go greet him?"

"What? That's nothing to make such a fuss over. Find him something to eat and send him—" Laharl was just about to flop down and go back to sleep when suddenly he sprang up again. "What did you say!?"

His violent reaction made Etna draw back. "What is it, Prince?"

"He said he's my uncle?"

"That's right."

"Is he wearing a pink cloak?"

"Yes. And it's bright enough to make your eyes pop."

"Is he alone?"

"No, there are three of them."

"Three?"

"He seems to have come with his wife and daughter."

The moment he heard this, Laharl pulled his scarf over his head and flung himself into bed. "I- I'm seriously ill! Got it!? I'm refusing visitors!!"

With a clatter, his coffin lid moved on its own and slammed shut. From the outside, nothing could be seen of him at all.

"Prince!?" Etna pounded on the coffin, but there was no response. "Well, that's funny."

For Laharl, who until now had always expressed the attitude that he would fight any enemy head-on, this kind of behavior wasn't trivial.

"Hmm, something's up~" Etna's eyes shone with delight. "Hmhmm, why don't I investigate the cause?"

Moving as lightly as though she were dancing, Etna ran out into the hallway. Her aim, of course, was the guest quarters.

"I'm very sorry to have kept you waiting."² Etna entered the guest quarters and bowed her head slightly.

The guest quarters were in the southeastern part of the castle, and from the windows was an unbroken view of the town and the mountains beyond. There were four

2 During this conversation, Etna is using *keigo*, very respectful language.

rooms, comprising a living room, two bedrooms, and of course a bathroom.

When Etna entered, two of the guests were seated on the sofa in the living room. Laharl's uncle—that is, the younger brother of the previous Overlord Krichevskoy—and his wife. Their names were Vesuvio and Yasurl.

"Where's Laharl?"

It was the wife, Yasurl, who asked, her voice cool.

Her hair was an even more brilliant red than Etna's, and she wore it short in a style that looked as though she had mussed it up with her hands. It looked altogether like flames. Even more that, what caught the eye was her body. From head to toe, she had hourglass proportions. It was difficult to see her body clearly while she was seated, but it had to be incredible. To say the least, her clothes were such that whether she undressed or not, the effect was the same.

If it were the Prince, he'd say, "Don't come within 10 meters of me!" She's even worse than Jennifer. I wonder if this is why he didn't want to see them? So thinking, Etna continued on calmly and officially.

"Please call him 'His Majesty,'" Etna requested, ignoring the fact that she never did so herself. "It has been 10 years since his enthronement."

"That's right, now that I think about it. Not that I went."

There's no way anyone could forget if this bunch had shown up.

Laharl's uncle Vesuvio was also someone remembered with one glance—or rather, the impact was to want to erase him from memory.

At any rate, that florescent pink scarf was seldom what caught the eye. Even worse, beneath that he wore only a pair of underpants—no, on that body they were exactly like bikini bottoms. It was as if he intended to swim in the ocean, or train at a gym. He wore his black hair in a crew cut, and kept his arms folded to show off his muscles. Certainly, his arms and his broad chest were unusually thick. Finally, there were his eyebrows which extended far to either side.

"So then, where's Laharl-chan?"

It seemed that no matter what, Yasurl had no intention of calling him 'His Majesty.' Etna put an emphasis on it as she spoke.

"Unfortunately *His Majesty* has come down with a sudden illness. I'm sincerely very sorry, but he is in no condition to give an audience."

"Oh, well in that case, we had better pay him a get well visit."

"He is refusing visitors, so I must ask you to refrain."

"It's because he doesn't like us. Even though we doted on him so when he was small," Yasurl said with a laugh.



That laugh is the epitome of a demon's laugh, Etna felt immediately. It was a laugh that showed when her thoughts were the complete opposite of her words. Despite appearances, demons were quite honest.

This woman is the origin of the Prince's fear, huh? Etna was certain.

"By the way, what's your name?" The deep-voiced question was Vesuvio's. His strange intonation which did not match his voice gave Etna the sensation of insects running along her spine.

"It's Etna."

"Etna-chan, hm? How cute. I'd like you to call me Vesvie."

"V-vesvie— you said?"

"Yes. And say it cutely, okay?" Wriggling his body, Vesuvio blew her a kiss.

"I- I understand. I will try." Dodging the kiss flying her way, Etna looked around the living room. "Wasn't there another young lady with you?"

"Yes, Shas. Kira's probably come with her, too," Yasurl replied.

"Were there two of them?"

"That's how it turns out." Yasurl looked at Etna, a smile floating on her lips that was full of some hidden meaning.

"Where might they be now?"

"Who knows? Perhaps they're walking around the castle. They went off somewhere while we were on our way here."

"I see. I will go search for them."

"They'll be fine on their own," Yasurl replied casually as Etna turned her back.

"But, they could run into problems within the castle."

"There's no need to worry. I've brought them up so that they'll be fine no matter what happens."

Yasurl's expression was composed, and Etna did not press the matter further.

"Well then, if there is anything you need, please ask the prinnies outside," Etna told them in parting, and then she left the guest room.

Shas and Kira— those two are part of this ridiculous lot, too, aren't they?

Even so, she was awfully cold concerning her own children. No, that's normal for a demon. Have I been influenced by Flonne-chan, too, without realizing it?

Greatly troubled by this possibility, Etna left the guest chambers behind.

"Ah, he's still sleeping. That's no good."

A high-pitched voice characteristic of a child fell upon Laharl as he lay shut up in his coffin bed.

The lid of the coffin was suddenly flung open, and Laharl glared at her from where he lay.

"Hello!"

The owner of the boundlessly cheerful voice and bright smile was a girl of about 10. Holding up the lid of the coffin, she peered at Laharl.

Her black hair was stuffed beneath a round hat with hexagonal edges, and curled back up from beneath. Notably, her eyes were different colors, gold and silver. This happened occasionally among demons. It delighted them to have them called demon's eyes or evil eyes.

"Who the hell are you? How did you get in here?"

Not the least bit timid in the face of Laharl's strong displeasure, the girl replied cheerfully, "It was open. Me, I'm Shas. And *onii-chan*³ is—?"

"Open? That Etna, what a careless....." Laharl grumbled in response to the girl named Shas. Still lying down, Laharl folded his arms and growled with an air of great self-importance, "I'm the King of this Netherworld, Laharl."

But, she seemed not to have comprehended his majesty at all. Looking like she was enjoying herself, she waived her tail—of course, as a demon girl she had a tail—and asked, "Is a 'king'⁴ important?"

"O-of course. The most important in the Netherworld."

"More important than Mother?"

Laharl's expression grew strained. "'Mother'— You don't mean that you're Yasurl's —"

"Yasurl is my mother."

"Nggh....." Instantly, the color drained from Laharl's face. His breathing grew rough, and he reached out his hands to grip the sides of the coffin. It seemed he was in enough pain that he wanted to hold on to something.

Unconcerned with his reaction, Shas continued with her questions. "Ne, ne, are you more important than Mother?"

"O-of course I am."

"Then, are you stronger than Mother?"

"Uhn....."

"Father can't win against Mother. Could you win, *onii-chan*?"

"I- I could—" As though finally reaching his limit, Laharl grew evasive, and he shouted, "Go back to your parents already! I'm tired!!" As he spoke, he flung his arm towards the door.

"Okaay!" Giving this unexpectedly obedient reply, Shas raised both her hands and let go the coffin lid she had been holding up.

The heavy granite lid dropped onto Laharl's hands which were set on the edges of the coffin, catching his fingers.

"Ow—!"

Laharl sent the lid flying with a loud clang and raised his voice to a shout. "What the hell are you doing, you brat!?"

The color returned to his pale face and he grew beat red. But, feeling no fear, Shas kept a calm face and tilted her head.

"You're pretty weak, *onii-chan*."

"You just caught me off-guard! You caught me by surprise, I wasn't prepared!!"

"Just that much won't kill you."

"As if I'm going to die caught in my own bed!"

His raised voice brought a steady knock at the door. It was the prinnies who were posted in the hallway for security.

"Prince, what happened, dood?"

Two prinnies entered in a strangely leisurely manner. Because no one thought there could be anyone who would try an impossible thing like attacking Laharl, they weren't at all concerned.

3 Shas is recognizing that Laharl is older than her and is referring to him as "big brother." She doesn't know at this point that they're cousins.

4 'King' here is written in *hiragana* rather than *kanji*, as though Shas doesn't know the word.

"Huh?" The prinnies saw Shas and their beaks clacked open in surprise. "Prince, no matter how much you like flat-chested girls, you shouldn't go after little kids, dood."

"You idiot—!"

One of the prinnies was hit by a fire spell thrown by Laharl, became enveloped in flames, and rolled about.

"What kind of guard lets some kid slip past and come in!"

"That's weird, dood. No one went in, dood," the uninjured prinny answered while putting out the flames on its colleague.

"Maybe because you were half-asleep. Keep a better watch!"

Then, having heard the disturbance, Etna came peering into the room. "Ah, the Prince is awake."

"Oi, Etna. You're in charge of security within the castle. Retrain these guys!" Laharl ordered her, holding his injured fingers.

However, Etna's gaze was focused only on Shas.

"Shas-chan?"

"Here!" Paying no mind to Laharl's injury, Shas raised a hand energetically.

"Let's go see your mother."

"Okay!" Shas scampered on over to Etna.

"Where's Kira-chan?"

"I dunno."

"Weren't you together?"

"Yep. He had something else to do."

"My work's just piling up, isn't it?" Etna muttered under her breath. Then she raised her voice. "In that case, I'll guide you back to the room first, Shas-chan."

"Thanks. Let's play again!" Shas waved a hand to Laharl.

Together with Shas, Etna left Laharl's room.

"Oi, are you ignoring me?"

Left behind, Laharl took out his anger by hurling flames at the prinnies following after Etna.



2

"To think that we'd wind up coming back here again."

Looking at the reddish sky shown on the main screen, the man in the navy blue space suit let out a sigh.

He was called the Defender of Earth, Captain Gordon. He was a hero who had

been in a 20-season TV series and big-hit movies. He was already 45, but he was on active duty, working hard to secure Earth's peace.

"What are you saying, Gordon? He's the person—no, the demon we're indebted to."

His assistant Jennifer was in her mid-thirties, but she hadn't lost her perfect proportions. Her hair was still shining and golden.

"THAT'S RIGHT. GORDON WAS ABLE TO MARRY JENNIFER, THANKS TO LAHARL. EVEN THOUGH THURSDAY WAS AGAINST THE MARRIAGE," said a robot, noisily turning the two arms that stuck out from his egg-shaped body. It was the invincible all-purpose robot, Thursday. 'MK-2' was printed on his body.

"GORDON IS A GOOD-FOR-NOTHING. JENNIFER GROWS UNHAPPY. HE IS A DRUNKARD, GAMBLES HEAVILY, ABUSES HER, AND HER BODY⁵—"

"Wait, what kind of cheap melodrama is that? Jennifer, he hasn't been infected by some sort of virus, has he?"

"That's odd. His protection should be perfect." Jennifer tilted her head. If a genius scientist said it was perfect, then it had to be perfect.

"THAT WAS A JOKE. RELAX, GORDON." Thursday walked over to Gordon, extended an arm with a whir, and clapped him on the shoulder.

"I can't laugh at that, Thursday."

"BEING UNABLE TO LAUGH REALLY MEANS THAT YOU ARE HURT SOMEWHERE, OR THAT YOU ARE TIRED."

"Something's definitely wrong," Gordon said.

"But, it really doesn't seem like anything's wrong."

"Jennifer....." Gordon looked at his wife as though he were about to cry.

"It's a joke. Here, why don't you fly?" Switching over the controls to Gordon, Jennifer smiled.

When I had been living according to my father's way, he is the one who taught me the true path, and gave me a reason to live. There's no way I could regret marrying him.

With a gentle gaze, she looked at Gordon who had taken over the controls.

Ten years prior, Jennifer's father, General Carter of the Earth Defense Force, had plotted to invade the Netherworld. When he had used her and brainwashed her, it was Gordon who had saved her. And then, after the whole incident was resolved, the two had gotten hitched. After that, they had continued to work together as heroes and partners. They had had a child, and their movies and series had become big hits, and it had been a good 10 years. Until suddenly being summoned by Laharl—

"Here, we've arrived."

Gordon had landed the spaceship in the courtyard of the Overlord's castle, and it was now about time to disembark.

"Papa, Mama, are we there?" asked a very young voice from the door of the bridge.

"Yeah, we're there— buh, huh?"

Gordon turned to look behind him, and standing there was a girl who might or might not have been 10 years old yet.

5 To be clear, Thursday isn't saying "he abuses Jennifer's body." Japanese puts the object before the verb, so he gets cut off before he can say what Gordon is doing to "her body."

She looked like a miniature Jennifer. The only thing she shared with Gordon was the shape of her bangs.

"Jane!? What are you doing here!?"

"She stowed away." Jennifer calmly realized what had happened. "Do you know where this is?"

"It's the Netherworld, right?"

"That's right," said Gordon. "It's a very dangerous place."

"But, you're always talking about the Netherworld. I wanted to come."

"It's dangerous, so go home."

"How?" she replied, completely confident in herself.

"Ah, darn it! This is the only ship that can make the dimensional warp!!" Gordon could only groan, at his wits' end.

"Right? So let me come with you." Smiling triumphantly, Jane looked up at Gordon and put her hands together. "Please, Papa! I'll be a good girl!!"

Gordon didn't look happy about it, but seeing his daughter's face, he could only nod in assent. "It can't be helped. Listen closely to what Papa and Mama tell you."

"I will! Thanks, Papa!!"

Spreading both arms, Jane flung herself at Gordon's waist.

Gordon's face couldn't help softening. Consequently, he didn't see Jane sticking out her tongue.

"Well then," said Jennifer, "you absolutely mustn't go ahead of us, but be sure to follow along behind. Okay?"

"Okay."

With Gordon in the lead, the three descended from the spaceship.

They called it a courtyard, but it was an enormous space which could fit 1,000 baseball fields, soccer fields, and ping pong tables. There was plenty of room for one little spaceship.

Gordon descended the gangway to find a group of prinnies already there waiting to receive them.

"This way, dood. The Prince got tired of waiting and forgot he called you, dood." It was a very frank way of putting it.

"He forgot?"

"That's right, dood. It was two days ago. The Prince is fickle, dood."

"Could he just be messing with us? What on Earth happened?"

"Ask the Prince, dood."

The prinnies walked on and on ahead. Gordon went along without harboring any doubts, but Jennifer, following along at his side, tilted her head.



"I wonder where we're going? This isn't the way to the audience chamber, is it?"
"The Prince hasn't left his room for a whole day, dood."
"Oi, oi, tell me it's not some kind of weird sickness. We have our daughter here, too, you know," said Gordon.
"If there was a sickness the Prince could catch, the whole town would have been annihilated by now, dood."
"Oh. That's true, huh." Smiling at this assurance, he continued down the corridor.
"You're late, Gordon~"
As soon as they entered Laharl's room, they were greeted by Etna's cheerful voice.
"Etna-chan, it's been a while."
"You're looking well, too, Jennifer. You've gotten a little old, though."
For an instant, Jennifer's temple twitched.
Pretending not to notice, Etna shifted her gaze to behind Jennifer. "Who's that?"
"Our daughter."
"So that's it, in the human world a kid can get this big in 10 years, huh."
Etna looked at Jane as though she were looking at an unusual animal. Not at all frightened, Jane held out a hand.
"I'm Jane. I'm eight years old."
Reflexively, Etna extended her hand and introduced herself. "I'm Etna. 1480 years old."
"Hmm~, you're a *really* old lady."
With Jane's one remark, the surrounding atmosphere froze instantly. The prinnies, preferring to let sleeping dogs—no, sleeping demons—lie⁶, silently evacuated from the room.
Only Gordon looked from Etna to Jane to Jennifer in turn, panicking. This was really bad, but he did not know what to do.
"Um, Etna-san? I wonder if you could explain the reason we were called here?" Humbly offering a change of topic was Gordon's limit.
"Ask the Prince," Etna said curtly, and pointed within.
"Jennifer, let's go."
To escape from that atmosphere, Gordon lifted Jane into his arms and went on farther into the room.
"Uhh, Your Majesty. It's the Defender of Earth, Captain Gordon." Bowing obsequiously from the waist, he went into the interior, where Laharl was seated in his coffin bed.
"You've come too late! The enemy's already been defeated!!" Laharl said high-handedly, at the same time mumbling that a more worrisome enemy had settled in the castle.
"Even so we came as fast as we could. It takes a while to open the super space gate, you know. And that's not all. We had to submit documentation asking the government, and listen to the admiral's lecturing, and the spaceship's—"
"You talk too much for a manservant."
"M-manservant....."
"That's right."
"I'm still your manservant?"

6 The Japanese idiom used here is more literally something like "One will not be cursed by an untouched god," which probably fits a little better. The narration pauses to replace the word "god" with "demon."

"Of course you are. You've proven that yourself by coming without even asking the reason."

"Uhn....." Having no reply, Gordon could only groan.

"Laharl-chan, what's wrong?" Looking worried, Jennifer came closer to Laharl and peered into his face.

"Mm, it's no big deal."

"It is a big deal. For me to come so close, without you getting flustered....."

No one knew the reason, but Laharl showed a strong reaction to women with sexy, buxom bodies. However, even looking at an embodiment of sexiness like Jennifer, he was calm.

"Unless... because I'm older now, my proportions are no good anymore?"

Jennifer staggered in shock. Without a moment's delay, Gordon embraced her from behind.

"That's not it at all, honey. No matter how much time passes, your body will always be perfect."

"Gordon....."

The two gazed at each other.

"Cut the married couple talk! It's disgusting!!" Laharl shouted.

"My, Laharl-chan, are you jealous? Now that you've become king, won't you be needing a queen before long? Don't you have anyone? Though Flonne-chan would be a good choice, I think."

"M-make F-flonne my queen, you say!? W-who would ever choose that Love Freak!?"

"He got embarrassed. Laharl-chan, you're so cute."

"Don't come any closer."

Laharl thrust out his palms, restraining Jennifer who seemed about to come closer and hug him.

"Laharl-chan, that's still no good? I wonder if it's because you didn't have your mother."

"My mother wasn't that busty."

"Is that so? Then, Flonne-chan is best, isn't she?"

"What about her is 'best'?"

Scowling, Laharl looked past Jennifer and noticed Thursday there. On Thursday's body, he saw letters he did not recognize.

"What's this MK-2?"

"Jennifer remodeled him," said Gordon.

"Remodeled? Nothing stands out." Laharl stared at Thursday.

Then, suddenly, there came flying a white figure.

"You've converted Thursday into a new model!?"

It was Flonne.

"FLONNE-SAN, IT HAS BEEN A WHILE."

Without reacting to Thursday's greeting, Flonne began inspecting his body. But, three minutes later, she looked at Jennifer with an expression of disappointment.

"He hasn't changed anywhere~ And I was hoping you'd given him four arms, or changed his coloring, or made him a transformer....."

"I rewrote his operating system. See, he's talking a little more smoothly, isn't he?"

"Is that all?"

"His operating speed is three times faster."

"Oh, I see....." Crestfallen, Flonne's shoulders slumped.

"By the way, Flonne, why have you come to the castle?" Laharl asked.

"I saw the spaceship, so I knew that Gordon-san and the others had come."

"And yet you still haven't even said hello?"

"Ah, I'm sorry." Flonne bobbed her head towards Gordon and the others. "It's because I heard about the remodeling from just outside the room."

"Jeez, your *otaku* style hasn't changed at all."

"I am not an *otaku*⁷! It's love directed towards things!!" Indignantly, Flonne approached Laharl where he sat in his coffin bed and went off at him. Her face was suddenly close.

Taken by surprise, Laharl grew flustered. Involuntarily, Jennifer's earlier words floated into his mind.

My queen? Flonne?

Somehow or other, Laharl imagined that possibility.

Seeing Laharl's face, Flonne abruptly stopped and tilted her head. "Laharl-san, what's wrong? Your face is red. Are you sick?"

"I-it's nothing!"

"Do you have a fever?"

Flonne was about to lay her hand against his forehead, but Laharl hurriedly shoved her away.

"I'm fine! I said I'm all right!!"

Averting his gaze from Flonne, Laharl ordered everyone gathered in his room, "You lot, go on and get out! This isn't an assembly hall!!"

Seeing Laharl in his distress, Jennifer smiled in amusement. "Isn't this getting interesting? Since we went to all the trouble of taking time off, why don't we stay a while, dear?"

"Jennifer, since when did you like looking out for others?"

"Well, once you've taken care of yourself, you start to worry about other people. And it'll be a while for Jane."

"I will never let Jane be anyone's wife."

"Yes, yes."

At Jennifer's half-hearted reply, Gordon said again in a stronger declaration, "I will never ever let any man have her!"



⁷ *Otaku* has a more negative connotation in Japanese than in English, so Flonne is rightly taking it as an insult.

"Ah, Gordon-san." Flonne called out to Gordon, who had been thrown out of Laharl's room. "I took the liberty of using those things. Would you like to have a quick look?"

"Ah, those. That's right. I'd like to see how you've used them."

"What are you talking about?" It was the first Jennifer had heard of it, and she turned an accusatory eye.

"No, it's nothing important."

Gordon was dodging the question, and Flonne offered him a helping hand. "Jennifer-san, would you like to see, too? It's about my missionary church."

"A church? In the Netherworld? It's a little like having Jesus in Hell, isn't it?" Jennifer said.

"That's right. Laharl-san let me build it so I could spread the teachings of love."

"Laharl-chan gave you the OK on it, did he?"

"He acts like that, but Laharl-san is really very sympathetic to love. I can tell."

"I wonder if he realized it from his experiences 10 years ago?"

"Yes, he did."

Flonne nodded, smiling, and Jennifer smiled back.

"If that's true, then he might just realize *that*, too."

"Realize what?" asked Flonne.

"Nothing, I'm talking to myself. Let's go," Jennifer urged the puzzled Flonne, and the four of them left the castle and went outside.

"Here it is."

They walked through the town, which had been fixed up so that no one would think it had been almost completely destroyed two days earlier. What Flonne had led them to was a building whose style did not at all match the Netherworld.

A church—Gordon and Jennifer could not see it any other way.

From the outside, they could see complex, geometric-patterned stained glass, and above hung a large bell. The pure white walls were something practically never seen in the Netherworld.

In the human world it would have been an ordinary building, but in the Netherworld, it could not be described as anything but conspicuous.

Flonne House of Love

That was written on the entrance.

There's something unseemly about that, Gordon thought, but he did not have the courage to say so.

"It's free time now, so I think they're working."

"Working?"

It's like a shady new religion that's actually a money-making scam, thought Jennifer, but she did not dare say it aloud.

In a small garden there were flower beds which boasted colorful—well, not colorful, but morbidly-colored blossoms. Grass waved back and forth, and the fang-like blades appeared to be eating each other.

"I tried gathering Netherworld flowers, but it's hard getting them to look cheerful. Next time I'm thinking about bringing some flower cuttings from Celestia."

"You can't really call these flower beds." Gordon kept his distance as he walked to

avoid being bitten.

Upon opening the front door, the interior image was completely different. The benches lined up facing the altar and the statue of Christ at the front were the very picture of a church, but crammed into the room were tens of demons bending over low tables.

"Th-this is....."

A strange and foul odor hung in the air.

"This smell is—"

About twenty demons slumped as if lifeless, their eyes vacant.

"Flonne-chan," Jennifer began, "don't tell me... the sinners have stopped brea—"

"Ahh, jeez. And I told them to air the church out properly when it's time for painting."

"Painting?" Jennifer asked, looking around without the slightest comprehension.

"Look, look, do it properly!" Flonne said.

"Ahh~, if it isn't Flonne-saaan." Roused by Flonne, the zombie children spoke up with bewitched voices.

Scarecrows, hobbits, and other such demon children were absorbed in some kind of work just before the face of the Ascension.

"What on Earth are they doing?"

"It's just as you see. I'm teaching them love."

"What?"⁸ Jennifer knit her eyebrows together, her expression saying she did not understand.

"It's this." Flonne took down some things displayed on a shelf and held them out in both hands.

"Dolls?"

"They're figures!"

In her right hand, the heroine from a big-hit anime in the human world struck a sexy pose. In her left hand, a robot from a mecha anime leveled its gun.

"Because these are a huge craze in the human world, I'm using them to teach love."

"Um, Flonne-chan. I don't see where you're going with this."

"So there are things even our genius Jennifer doesn't understand." Gordon spoke with some sense of triumph.

"Before love, the people of the Netherworld have no concept of valuing things. That's why, I decided first to start with teaching them how to treasure things."

"So that's it. You thought maybe if they assembled them themselves, painted them themselves, had something made only by themselves, then they would treasure them," Gordon said.

"Is it going well?" asked Jennifer.

"Umm, we're still in the middle of it....." With a troubled face, Flonne forced a smile. "But, love is steadily being introduced," Flonne answered, full of confidence.

"Love..... hm."

When she looked at the demons holding the figures, Jennifer got a slightly—no, quite a different feeling, but she didn't dare say anything.

More than love, I think it's an attachment.

Making a troubled face, Jennifer shifted her gaze to Gordon. "So, you arranged for these then?"

8 She says this in English. ワット *watto*.

"That's right. I had the movie staff tell the retailer."
"But, figures....." Jennifer looked like she wanted to say something.
"Is it strange?"
"There are plenty of other things that could be hand-made, like stuffed animals or accessories," Jennifer said, looking at Flonne while she spoke. "Although really, now that I think about it, this is just like Flonne-chan."
I wonder if that's all right, Jennifer thought, and smiled weakly.
"I mean to teach love little by little."
"Do your best, okay?"
"I will!" Flonne answered, a smile with absolutely no ill intent on her face.
"I have a souvenir for you." Gordon held out a small box to Flonne.
"What is it?"
"It's a new release not yet on sale. A series called 'Space Hero Captain Gordon' in which you have a minor part."
"Minor—"
From the box, Flonne took out a figure whose parts were not assembled and which had no color. Staring at the face piece, she murmured glumly, "I am after all a minor character....."
In Flonne's hand was her own face. Her rune staff was there, too, but the figure looked like the angel version of her; there was no tail piece, and the shape of her wings was different.
"N-no, the Laharl and Etna in this are minor characters, too. Movies are just set like that, and, what should I say, that's—" Gordon hastily seized at Laharl and Etna's heads.
"It's okay, I'll just... have to try harder. I'm definitely in the background, aren't I?" Flonne said in what was undoubtedly a misunderstanding, and she put the lid on the box.
Just then Jane pulled at Jennifer's clothes. "Ne, Mama. Can I play here?"
"Eh?"
"There's a Ham-chan doll."
Jane was pointing at an incomplete figure—the hamster main character of an anime. Girls were struck by the way he rolled around.
"Y-you shouldn't, here—" Gordon said hurriedly.
"It's all right. There are still more of them," Flonne said, beaming, but of course that was not the parents' concern.
"That's right, it's all right."
It was a good thing not to be cowardly, but whatever anyone said this was the Netherworld. This was not a normal Sunday church service.
"Why don't we do it together?" Jennifer could only make that proposal.

Alone in his room, Laharl lay in his coffin bed glaring at the ceiling.
"I can't stay shut up in here forever," he said, but he showed no signs of moving.
"This isn't like me....."
He knew that, but his body would not move because of the influence his childhood memories had on his instincts.
"I'm the Overlord. I have to get that through their heads," Laharl muttered, trying to persuade himself, and then he continued firmly, "Tomorrow I will. Tomorrow."

And, at that moment, a voice called out to him from the recesses of the room.

"Your Majesty."

In the semi-darkness, he caught sight of a familiar hat.

"You again, Shas?" Once the words left his mouth, he stared hard at the figure. "No, that's not right. Your aura is different."

"You've surmised correctly. That's right. I am her brother Kira. Nice to meet you."

"You're twins?"

"It is just as you see." Kira spread his hands. His height and his clothes were no different from Shas's. Only, he did not appear to have a tail.

"You seem different from your airheaded sister."

"My sister is just that kind of person," he replied, chuckling.

"What do you want? Are you lost?"

"By no means. I have come to introduce myself. I'm sure you're aware, but Mother is very particular about etiquette."

Laharl's forehead twitched slightly. But, so as not to let Kira notice, he replied, "I see. In that case you've finished your errand."

"Yes."

"Well then." Still lying down, Laharl coolly waved a hand.

Kira went to the door and returned the wave. "Flonne-san, she's cute, isn't she?"

Just one beat late in replying, Laharl asked, "You have a thing for older fallen angels?"

"No, that isn't it." Laughing at the outrageous idea, Kira added, "Just—"

"Just what?"

"Seeing someone like her, as a demon, doesn't it make your blood boil?" he said in a voice devoid of emotion, and then Kira opened the door and stepped out.

"What was he getting at, that brat?"

With an expression of displeasure, Laharl stared at the door through which Kira had left.



Next Time's Preview



3: Angelic Demons

1

"Let's play, Laharl-chan!"

It was morning, and just like the day before, Laharl was woken by Shas's voice calling.

"Why are *you* coming to wake me up?" Laharl got up, glaring at Shas in a foul mood from being woken. But, it had absolutely no effect on Shas.

"I got to switch places," Shas replied cheerfully.

"That Etna, she's slacking on my wake-up call."

Laharl clicked his tongue, and Shas clapped her hands as though she understood.

"You'd rather have Etna-chan. You like her," Shas teased, and Laharl's cheeks reddened.

"I-idiot! She's just my subordinate!! And there's no way I could like anyone who makes attempts on my life!"

"The person who calls someone an idiot is the idiot, Laharl-chan."

"Laharl-chan!?"

"Is that wrong? That's what everyone calls you."

"It's not 'chan'! It's 'sama'! It's 'Your Majesty'!!"

"That's too hard, I don't understand."

"Hell, I'd like to see the faces of this one's parents— No, I don't want that," Laharl corrected himself hurriedly.

"You want to see them?"

"No."

"If you want to see Mama, she's outside."

"Outside?"

"Outside the room."

Laharl cautiously turned his head towards the entrance. His neck made a grinding noise like a door which had not been oiled.

Standing there was a woman whose body went beyond 'nice'—in fact, it was dynamite.

"Hi, Laharl-chan."

Laharl's face froze. "Yasurl....."

"Addressing me so casually, I wonder when we became so close? And I took such care to look after you when you were little."

Just hearing Yasurl's voice, Laharl's entire body became completely unable to move. He took several deep breaths, and was only just able to ask in a stiff voice,

"Would 'aunt' be preferable?"⁹

"That's no good either."

Shas was clinging to her leg. Laying a hand on her head, Yasurl instructed her in a cold voice, "Shas, Mama is speaking with Laharl-chan, so go play outside."

"Eh—" Shas puffed out her cheeks.

"Don't complain."

9 Laharl switches to the polite *desu* form for this one line, and says 'aunt' as *oba-san*. He normally never does this.

"Okay." Shas looked up at Yasurl's face, and ran out with surprising obedience.

"I'll hear your business," Laharl said.

"I don't have any business. I just came to see how my adorable nephew was doing."

"If that's all, then why didn't you come to my coronation? I sent a messenger demon with a written invitation."

"Sorry about that. We had other plans and couldn't go."

"Hmph. Don't tell me you lot from the opposing faction came here without even one complaint. I know you all were against how my father did things."

"You have that wrong."

"How am I wrong?"

"The reason we were against him was because he mixed base human blood with the lordly demonic royal house," Yasurl said smoothly.

Laharl ground his teeth.

"And then, that filthy one, that mixed brat assumed the throne."

With the viciousness clear in this remark, an unmistakable anger came to Laharl's face.

Just then—

"Prince, Flonne-chan is—"

Etna came running in. Beside her was Flonne.

"Wait your turn!" Yasurl ordered them sharply in a voice like a whip.

"Ah, you have company."

In defiance of the threatening atmosphere, Etna answered with her usual amused attitude. Yasurl's face twisted as though that grated on her nerves.

But, before Yasurl could say anything, Laharl raised a hand. "It doesn't matter, Etna."

"Ah, but if we're in the way—"

"I, the ruler of the Netherworld, Overlord Laharl, am telling you it's fine. Wait there."

Once he had said this, Laharl returned to his conversation with Yasurl.

"Yasurl, if you had any objection, then you should have said so before my coronation."

"It's still possible to correct it afterwards." Because it appeared it appeared that correction would take some time, Yasurl's expression in turn was irritated and displeased.

"If you were going to do something like that, then you should have usurped the throne while I was asleep for two years."

"Unfortunately, those in opposition weren't united then. And there were idiots who tried to show off and were beaten at their own game."

She was referring to the incident when Maderas stole Etna's memories and conspired to poison Laharl.

"Poisoning you was nonsense," Yasurl continued. "I wonder how many centuries ago it was that I tried that?" In front of the person in question, Yasurl voiced such an awful thing calmly.

"Hmph, I declare that I accept challenges at any time. If you have a complaint, then defeat me."

"Do I look like a woman who carries things out with that kind of brute strength?" Chuckling, Yasurl fixed her gaze on Laharl.

Laharl's heart thudded in his chest.

That's it. That gaze. When that hits me, I can't do anything to defy her, or even breathe. Since when was it— I don't want to remember.

Feeling like his heart was being squeezed tightly, Laharl became unable to move.

Then, he heard a deep voice let out a bizarre phrase.

"Aahn, darling, there you are."

"Oh, it's you, dear." Yasurl turned, and freed from her gaze, Laharl fell forward like a stretched rubber band when cut. His forehead faintly coated with sweat, he drew in rough breaths.

When he saw the pink scarf that had appeared, Laharl seemed like he was about to feel even worse. Although, compared to a moment ago, this was incomparably better. In fact, that absurd color may have jarred him to his senses.

"Uncle Vesuvio, it's been a while."

"Ah, Your Majesty, how do you fare? I suppose you're finally past the time of diapers and bibs." Vesuvio bowed deeply, and from his manner one could not tell whether he was teasing or not.

Laharl looked up at his uncle with a face that was unamused.

With only panties and a scarf over that mass of muscle, looking down at himself could not possibly be a fun situation for Vesuvio. Furthermore, he was an uninvited guest who had just suddenly shown up.

"So, how long do you two plan on sticking around?" Laharl asked angrily.

Vesuvio began, "Well, of course, until we've succeeded at—"

Yasurl jabbed Vesuvio's side in rebuke and smiled.

"Succeeded?" Laharl asked. "Succeeded at what?"

"Dear, we're going."

Without letting him reply, Yasurl pulled Vesuvio, who bore the pain, dripping with a cold sweat.

"Well then, *Your Majesty*."

Putting a sarcastic emphasis on the 'Your Majesty' part, Yasurl turned quickly. As she took her leave, her eyes fell on Flonne standing at the door, and she said a word.

"Ah, so you're the rumored fallen angel."

"Rumored?"

"They say you're trying to assault us spreading doll's play throughout the Netherworld."

"It isn't an assault. It's love I'm sprea—"

"Ohh, how repulsive. It's a useless effort at best." Letting out a mocking laugh, Yasurl left the room at a smart pace.

"That was harsh," Etna muttered after shutting the door. "Prince, what was the poison your aunt spoke of?"

"It was probably something she tried when I was a kid."

"You don't suppose it's thanks to that that you developed a resistance to poison?"

"I dunno, maybe."

"In that case, maybe that's the reason my poisoning you didn't work. And in that case, you really should be grateful to your aunt."

"Don't be stupid."

Then, having been quiet until now, Flonne suddenly sighed and murmured, "How awful....."

Laharl stared at Flonne in startlement. "It bothers you that she laughed at you?"
"It isn't that. It's just that, those people are your aunt and uncle, aren't they? How is it that they can say such terrible things to you, Laharl-san?"

"Because they're demons."

"Flonne-chan, you still don't understand the nature of demons? Most demons are like that. Even if they're family, if you get the chance, you stick 'em."

"I live looking forward to that," Laharl said.

Flonne pondered this with a troubled expression, and then murmured with a sigh, "Their children don't know love, do they?"

"Shas and Kira?" Laharl asked. "Probably not."

It's not limited to them, but most of the Netherworld probably doesn't know it,
Laharl continued in his mind.

"I will save those children," Flonne said firmly, clenching her fists, and like that she ran from the room.

"Oi, oi," Laharl said, but he had no time to stop her.

"Flonne-chan's ablaze, isn't she?"

"However it works out it's not my concern."

"Prince, you're worried, aren't you?" Grinning broadly, Etna peered into Laharl's face.

"About what, you idiot? What can Shas do?" Laharl said, although he looked at his hands which had been injured the day before. The fingers that had been caught under the lid of his coffin bed. Naturally they had already healed.

"Some kind of accident might happen, but..... She'll probably be all right," he muttered to persuade himself.

Meanwhile, out in the hall, Yasurl put her hands on her hips and glared at Vesuvio.

"Dear, I told you to be more careful of what you say."

"I'm sorry, darling," Vesuvio said, but he showed absolutely no signs of regret. In fact, for no reason he flung up his arms and struck a pose. Of course he did this to show off his tempered muscles.

"Hell, you're such a musclehead."

"Forgive me, darling." Making a circle of his arms to show the bulge of his huge pectorals and biceps, Vesuvio laughed.

"Even so, I'm trusting you because you do as I ask, dear."

"Of course, darling."

"For the rest, we'll see whether that child will do well or not." Yasurl laughed in amusement.

2

"I wonder where she went?"

Flonne was walking along the hall looking for Shas.

Being raised by those parents, it's too sad. Even if this is the Netherworld, I

thought at least children would be raised with love.

Flonne was feeling a complex mix of sadness and anger.

"Even now it's not too late. I must teach those children love."

With that determination, she walked down the hall.

And, ahead of her she caught sight of a familiar hat. It was the hall leading from Laharl's room to his office. The figure was seated right in the middle.

"Ah, there she is."

Running up, Flonne called out from behind, "Hello, Shas-chan."

Looking at the one who turned around, Flonne felt a sense of unease. The figure and countenance were the same, but somehow there was a different air.

"That's my sister. I am Kira," said the person who had turned and stood, his voice calm. It did seem that Flonne could not see the tail a Netherworld girl should have had.

"I'm sorry," Flonne apologized. "You are twins, after all. Pleased to meet you." She held out her hand.

Kira chuckled.

"What is it?"

"You're Flonne-san, aren't you? I've heard about you from His Majesty."

"From Laharl-san?" This unexpected idea surprised Flonne. She had never thought that Laharl might speak about her to someone else.

"Yes. He said you're an adorable fallen angel. It's true."

"Eh?" Her eyes widened as though this caught her by surprise. "You shouldn't tease your elders," Flonne said, and extended a hand for Kira's face.

Slipping away from her hand, Kira laughed. "It's true. Calm down, I like you, too."

"You shouldn't tease."

"But I'm serious." Kira unexpectedly seized Flonne's hand.

"Eh?"

As though waiting upon the astonished Flonne, Kira kissed the palm of her hand.

"Well then, if you'll excuse me, *onee-sama*." A smile floating on his lips, Kira walked off down the hall.

Flonne stood dumbfounded. She stared at her hand where she could still feel the touch of Kira's lips and murmured, "Ohh, children lately—"

She said this with a troubled face, but it seemed she did not altogether feel that way. *Even with parents like that, he was raised with the proper manners*, she thought approvingly.

"Ah, Shas-chan, I need to look for her."

As if just realizing this, she looked around, and in a rush she ran down the hall.

"Hmm, I don't feel like it."

Looking dispirited, Laharl was making his way to his office.

If Yasurl came even when he stayed in his room, then it made no difference, so he had given up on it. His reluctance was because he knew his work was piling up.

"Etna's going to criticize me relentlessly," he muttered, seeming displeased enough with that to make it seem there was nothing else.

She had come after him with things like 'You know if these documents don't have the Overlord's signature, they won't get to the right department.' And yet, most of those so-called documents were the Netherworld inhabitants' arbitrary and never-ending

requests. If he didn't read them one by one and validate them, then there might be something absurd inside. Especially with the recent attack by the super-Overlord, slipped in with the damage claims were impudent demands for compensation for the burning of masterpieces that couldn't have existed.

More than demons, they're just scoundrels. It's deplorable.

There was no way he could be in the mood to read that stuff with Etna glaring at him all the while.

"Instead of doing paperwork, I should be fighting enemies, or at the very least breaking rock to make the stones for building a mansion. That'd be refreshing. However you think about it, stuff like signing papers doesn't suit me."

Walking down the hallway, he nodded to himself.

"That's right! Signing documents is too pathetic to be the work of the Overlord!!"

In the instant he said this and raised a fist, Laharl's body was suspended in air.

"O-?"

No, to be exact, he was falling. Hurriedly he grasped at the air with his scarf, and tried to fly up, but it was too late.

There was a rough, unpleasant sound, and Laharl looked down at his foot.

A spear was sticking out from the bottom. The tip had perfectly pierced through his shoe.

"Wait a second! Why the hell is there a pit in a place like this!?" he yelled, smashing the spear and pulling his leg free.

Luckily the spear had pierced the very tip of his shoe. His foot was unharmed.

"That was a close—" he muttered, and at the same time he felt something off and looked over his shoulder.

"Uoh!? My scarf!"

His crimson scarf had been pierced by another spear, and a hole had opened near the edge.

"T-this— Who the hell did this!?"

"What are you playing?" a cheerful voice came down from above.

"Playing— is that what this looks like!?" he shouted reflexively, and then realized who he was talking to.

"Shas? Did you do this?" Laharl yelled, looking up and catching a glimpse of the characteristic hat. He leapt up and came down before Shas, thrust a finger at her, and demanded an explanation. "Digging pits in the halls of my castle, what are you plotting!?"

"Let's play, Laharl-chan." Shas wasn't listening at all.

"Listen, do this sort of thing with a zombie or something!!"

"What are we doing next?"

"We're not doing anything! I have work!! Go play with your brother or something," Laharl said, and Shas pouted.

"That boy, he won't play with me. I'm going with you."

Covering his face with the palm of his hand, Laharl groaned tiredly, "Oi, prinnies!"

In succession, six prinnies appeared from the shadows of pillars.

"What is it, Prince?"

"Fill in this hole. Immediately," he ordered the gathered prinnies, and they raised their voices in admiration on looking down at the hole. It took up the entire width of the passage—the square hole was about three meters on a side. The depth, too, was about the

same.

"When did this get dug, dood?"

"That's what I'd like to know!" Laharl shouted in frustration, and Shas jumped at his back.

"Play—"

"Shut up! Go play over there!!"

"I don't wanna....." Shas lifted moist eyes to look up at Laharl.

"Oi, give me a break." Finally, Laharl gave up and ordered the prinnies, "Oi, you lot, play with Shas."

"Is it all right to play, dood?"

"I'll allow it this once."

"We'll do it, dood!"

Not just one or two, but all of them raised their hands. They were full of a desire to skip work and play.

"I'm leaving it to you." Turning to face Shas, Laharl pointed at the prinnies. "It looks like these guys are going to play with you. Go ahead and play whatever you want."

"Yay!" Shas threw up her hands and then caught the prinnies' penguin-like hands and bounced up and down.

"What'll we play, dood?"

"Demon-slaying!" Shas exclaimed.

"That's *sake*, dood."¹⁰

"It's tag, isn't it, dood?"¹¹

Laharl watched the group run out into the courtyard in a clamor, and then finally took a breath.

"I guess I should get to work."

His breath came out as a sigh.

"It's *really* big, huh?"

Watching Jane run around the town in good spirits, Gordon felt his face breaking into a broad grin in spite of himself.

Ah, this must be what they call everyday happiness. A precious time when I can forget my responsibilities as Defender of Earth for a little while...

My young daughter. And, beside her, my forever beautiful wife.

With that magnificent sight so unlike the Netherworld before him, he felt like dancing.

"Jennifer."

Jennifer slipped out of Gordon's arms as he tried to embrace her.

"J-jennifer?"

When Gordon looked, he saw that Jennifer was looking in the direction of the castle.

"My, I wonder what child that is?"

In the direction of her gaze stood a small girl. She looked perhaps two years older

10 The original text is そりゃ酒つすよ. I thought this must be some kind of expression, but I can't find anything on it. Unless that prinny is suggesting they drink sake for fun, I really don't know.

11 The game Shas suggests is *oni-goroshi* or "demon-killing." The prinnies mistakenly assume she means *oni-gokko*, which means tag. In Japanese, the person who is It is called the *oni* or "demon."

than Jane. But then, the people of the Netherworld lived a hundred times longer than humans, or more, so one could not tell from appearances.

"We're about to have lunch," said Jennifer. "Do you want to eat with us?"

"Oi oi, she looks like a child, but she might really be some unthinkable monster."

"Dear, are you really such a narrow-minded person?" Jennifer said, giving Gordon a sharp look.

"No, that isn't the issue, it's just that Jane is here, too, so....."

"Can't you even protect Jane, dear?"

Whatever he said was no use, so Gordon gave up, and gripped the ray gun that was his last glimmer of hope.

"Please, come. Let's all eat together." Not at all worried about anything like that, Jennifer beckoned to the child.

"Yay!" The girl wearing the six-cornered round hat threw up both her hands energetically and came walking over.

"What's your name?" Jennifer asked, crouching down.

"Shas!"

"Shas-chan, is it? What are you doing here?"

"Mm, let's see, I came to the castle to play."

"You're Laharl-chan's guest?"

"That's right. I played a whole lot and I got hungry."

"That's good then, because I made a lot. I hope you like it."

Jennifer began her preparations right away. Spreading out a sheet, she lined up the *bentō* she had made the previous night in the spaceship's kitchen. There were sandwiches and fried food, stew, Peking duck..... Not one of the dishes was ready-made, but all of it was home cooking.

"You made all this?" Gordon asked.

"That's right. Is it all right?"

"No, it's fine," he said, but inwardly he was baffled. What sort of thing was Peking duck to put in a picnic basket? *Geniuses sometimes have areas where they have none of a normal person's common sense*, Gordon felt even now.

Shas let out a cry of delight and sat down on the sheet, and beside her Jane struck up a conversation.

"I'm Jane. Nice to meet you."

"I'm Shas."

Shas held out a hand, and Jane, looking at her face carefully, asked, "And the other person is?"

"It's only her, Jane," Jennifer chided, and Shas tilted her head.

"Uh-uh, I'm a twin."

"My, is that right? Jane, you must have seen him somewhere." Jennifer smiled and handed the two of them plates.

"My brother's called Kira."

"Nice to meet you." Jane smiled brightly and bowed to Shas.

"Now then, let's eat."

At Jennifer's signal, Jane and Shas raised their voices.

"Is this really all right?" Even now unable to trust Shas, Gordon sat in a position where he could protect his wife and child.

"That's enough for now....."

It was lunch time, and Laharl came out of his office looking exhausted. His level of weariness was so strong that he had dark circles under his eyes.

As he had expected, it had been nothing but worthless petitions. He had wanted to give it up and incinerate all of them in a Mega Fire, but that wouldn't do either. Just as Etna had told him, he'd looked them all over, and put his signature on half.

"I'm eating something and then I'm taking a nap." That was the only thing on his mind.

"Do you want me to bring your meal to your room?" Etna called out to him from behind, and Laharl nodded.

Walking down the hall, he turned towards his room. *That's right, there was a pit,* he remembered, and turning in the middle of the hall, he made his way towards the courtyard. With the square-shaped courtyard directly in the middle, his room and his office were on a diagonal from each other. Going through the courtyard made it a shortcut.

Laharl noticed prinnies lying about near Gordon's spaceship. Six of them.

"What are you doing? Weren't you lot playing with Shas?"

At Laharl's voice, the prinnies who had been reduced to corpses twitched.

"It was demon-slaying, dood....."

"We were half-killed, dood."

The prinnies' penguin forms were costumes, inside of which were souls, so they could not die from reckless treatment. But, be that as it may, this beat-up they weren't much to look at.

"So 'tag' is really that dangerous a game. I didn't know that." Folding his arms, Laharl snarled, "I thought all you were doing was kid's play."

"Prince, it wasn't like that, dood—!"

"We were seriously almost killed, dood—!"

"Well, if you played with her that much, then Shas must be satisfied. Good work." Complacently ignoring them, Laharl nodded coolly and crossed the courtyard.

"Prince~, please give us a raise, dood....."

The prinny's feeble voice demanding a salary increase faded before reaching Laharl's ears.

Laharl reached his room, but before his hand could reach the door, it opened on its own.

"Welcome back, sir~" the door greeted him in an overly-polite voice.

He nodded and took one step inside.

At that moment, he felt an incredible pressure above his head.

Immediately he wrapped his scarf about his body and flew forward.

Just after, a huge block came falling from the ceiling with a thud and shook the floor.

"Shas again!?"

Laharl's cry roared throughout the castle.

"Pretty impressive," Etna spoke up in admiration.

It was Laharl's room. She was looking with a sense of murder at the six-sided block which had completely shut up the entrance. The length of one side was three meters. Since this block had assailed Laharl, 20 minutes had passed.

"If you look closely, this block, it's the piece missing from the hole in the hallway, isn't it?" Laharl said.

Certainly the bottom was earth and stone, but the top-most part was the stone paving with which the hallway was laid, and jammed below that was gravel.

"Oh, I see. It isn't that she dug a hole, she just pulled the whole thing out."

"This isn't the time to be impressed." Passing by Etna, Laharl went up to the open door and kicked it. "Hey, door! You let Shas in, didn't you!?"

But, the door only answered sulkily, "I did not."

"You liar!"

"It's most certainly true."

"Then who set the trap?"

"I did not see, so I do not know."

At this unmotivated reply, Laharl chanted a spell, summoning a flame to the palm of his hand.

"I'll burn you to cinders in the flames along with this block!"

"Ohh, Prince, you're such a demon~ You're really the worst." Etna praised him in the manner of a demon, and Laharl furrowed his brow. "That's right, it's just too bad you'll have to burn up your own room."

The raging Laharl clapped his hands and erased the flames, then crossly gave out orders. "Anyway, I'm going to the cafeteria to eat something. While I'm doing that, remove this and fill in the hallway. With this stuff around, I can't relax and eat a meal!"

"Understood."

Incredibly ill-tempered, Laharl left, and Etna turned her gaze to the block in front of her. "Well then."

She folded her arms.

Although it was easily said, transferring the thing as he intended was going to be a real pain. Magic was not as all-encompassing as it was thought to be, and it greatly depended on the power of the one using it. It took great concentration. But, if it was just getting it outside, then that by itself was not much trouble.

"I'll transfer it to the hallway, and after that I'll make the prinnies return it to the hole."

Just as she muttered this, a voice came unexpectedly from behind her.

"It looks like you're having a hard time."

Etna turned around in surprise.

She saw the characteristic hat. "Shas?"

Etna stared intently at the other person, who shook his head.

"No, I am Kira. Her brother."

"You really look alike."

"That is what they say." Kira chuckled as though there was something funny.

"You're so much more composed that no one would think you were the same as Shas."

"Don't they often say that? That the younger sibling is more level-headed."
"They do, don't they?" Etna nodded, and with her reply brought the conversation back to where it had begun. "So, did you do this?"
"Why am I being suspected?" Kira replied without so much as a tremor.
"I didn't feel much magical power from Shas. And I can't quite read you."
"Is that a bluff?"
"Yep. Though I was fishing a little, too."
"You're a bad person."
"Well, which is it then?"
"Which, I wonder?" Kira only chuckled.
A shrewd brat, isn't he? Etna thought, scowling inwardly.
"My sister is skilled, too, isn't she?"
"At what?"
"She controls His Majesty very well. I was impressed."
"Could you not say bad things about his reputation? I'm just giving you a little advice."
"You know His Majesty's personality well, and say it's the other way around."
Narrowing her eyes and glaring at Kira, Etna advanced on him. The tone of her voice changed. "What the hell are you trying to say?"
"Please don't glare at me with that face. I'm timid, you know."
"In what way?"
Shamelessly ignoring her words, Kira raised his voice in amazement. "I like demons like you, *onee-san*." Kira continued further, "It's too bad. If I weren't the way I am, I could have you."
"Yeah, too bad. My tastes are a little different."
"You mean His Majesty?" Kira said teasingly, and Etna froze. "You suit him well. Much better than that half-wit of a fallen angel."
"Don't talk nonsense. I'm getting mad." Etna mercilessly brought her hand down.
"Scary, scary. It's only a joke." Kira quickly evaded her hand, and, laughing, dashed for the door.
"What was he aiming at.....?" Etna muttered, following the sound of Kira's footsteps with her ears. "For the Prince to be my taste, even jokes have limits."
Snorting through her nose, Etna returned her attention to the block in front of her. She began reciting a magic spell. Unlike attack spells, this was complicated and difficult.
But I wonder, what does the Prince think of me?
The thought floated up unexpectedly, and disrupted her concentration completely. Affected by the disorder in her heart, her control of the spell went awry.
The next instant, a loud crash of destruction resounded.
"Oops, I screwed that one up....."
The block had torn clean through the wall and flown out into the corridor.
"Etna-san, what happened, dood?"
With a patter of feet, prinnies had come gathering. *For brats who always come leisurely when called, why were they so fast just this one time?*
"It's nothing! Go back to your posts!!" Etna shouted, her face going bright red.

Having finished their picnic, Gordon and his family returned to the city, and headed for Flonne's House of Love.

"Flonne-chan."

Jennifer called out from the entrance, and Flonne came from within. Inside, as before, the demons were absorbed in their figures.

"She says she wants to play again, so is it all right with you?"

"Of course, I don't mind." Smiling, Flonne invited Jane inside. Jane went in, and looked at the figures lined up on the shelf.

Now that she had confirmed, Jennifer asked Flonne, "By the way, do you know where Shas-chan is?"

"I haven't been to the castle today, so I haven't seen her yet."

"Oh. She ate lunch together with us, but she left suddenly and I'm worried."

"I think she'll be all right. She might be small, but she is Laharl-san's cousin, after all."

"Is that right? No wonder she didn't seem at all timid."

"See? Even though she's a child, she's still a demon. There's no need to worry," Gordon interjected from beside her, but Jennifer said nothing.

From inside came the familiar figure of a child.

"Oh, Shas-chan?"

Jennifer addressed the figure, and Flonne replied, smiling, "He says he's called Kira-kun."

"Ah, you're the twin brother, aren't you?"

"Yes." Kira nodded.

"You wouldn't know where Shas-chan went, would you?" Jennifer asked, leaning down.

"I only saw her this morning. Sister has the sort of personality where she can't really settle down."

"I see. You seem like the complete opposite."

"That is what they say," Kira replied with a smile. Looking to Jane, he whispered, "So you're Jane. How interesting."

His tone had changed as though he were another person, but Jennifer did not hear it.

"Interesting?" Jane asked.

"Next time, I'll have you with me when we play with King Laharl."

Looking at Kira's smile, Jane's face froze. Looking like she was about to cry, she shook her head. "I'm not going."

"I can't have that."

All the while staring at Kira, Jane backed away from him. "Mama....." she murmured in a voice that scarcely came out, seeking help.

"What is it, Jane?"

The instant she heard Jennifer's voice from behind her, Jane clung to her mother's legs without saying a word.

"What's wrong?" Jennifer surveyed the surroundings, but there was no one there. "Where is Kira-chan?"

At her mother's question, Jane only stayed silent and shook her head.

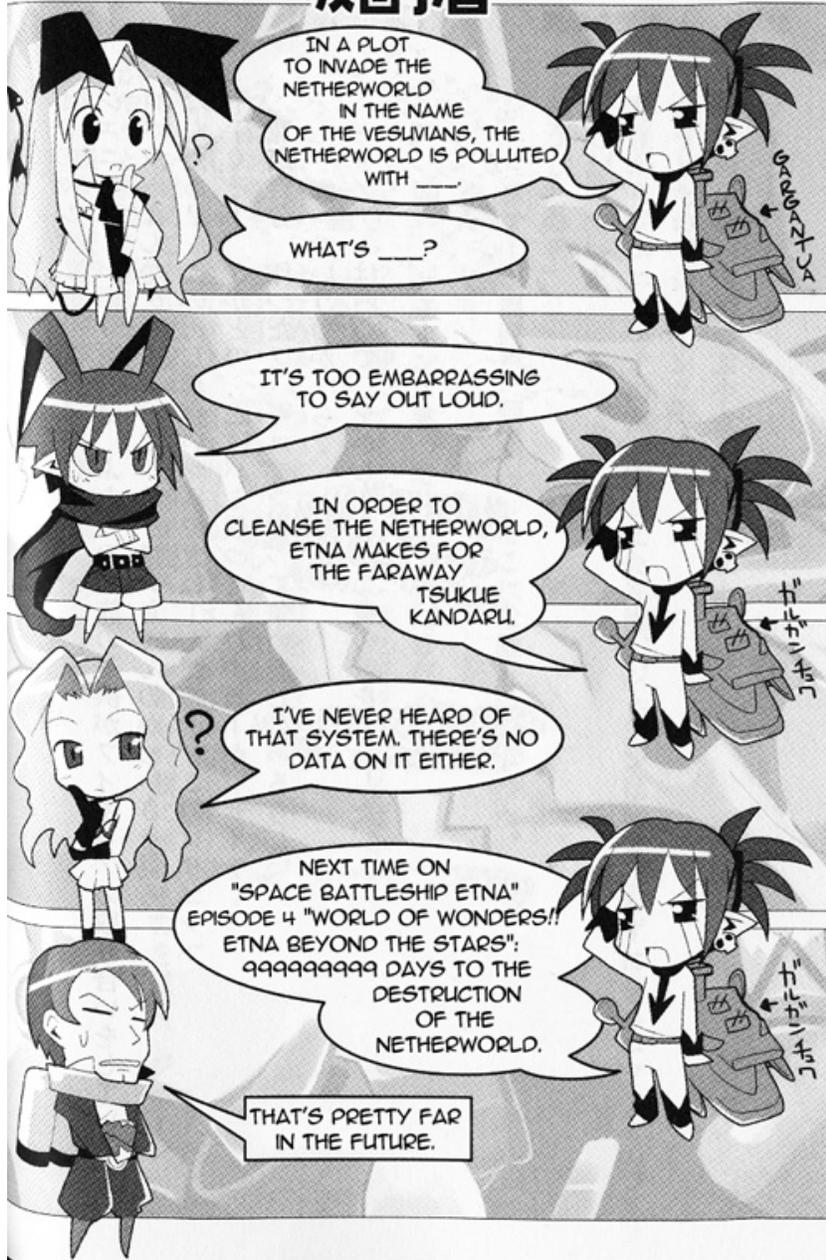
"You were playing, weren't you?" Jennifer asked, but Jane just kept shaking her head.

"I'm staying with you, Mama."
Jennifer sighed and called out to Flonne, "Flonne-chan, never mind about today. Sorry."
"No, it's okay. I'll see you again tomorrow, Jane-chan."
Flonne waved cheerfully to Jane. Seeing her tail wave, too, Jane's expression finally relaxed.
And, from inside, the voices of the demon children could be heard.
"Give me back my Mundam¹² robot!"
Jennifer looked over her shoulder, and two demon children were struggling over a figure.
"Forget your robot whatever. Look at how cute my Rian-chan is."
"What? In that disgraceful condition, it doesn't look a thing like her. You lolicon."
"Oh, give it up. You missed a spot on the bottom of the shoe. You suck at this."
It sounded like the demons were fighting over the figures they had made themselves.
I wonder if you call that, too, love?
Wondering to herself, Jennifer left the House of Love.

¹² *mandamu* - This is probably a spoof on Gundam (*gandamu*).

Next Time's Preview

次回予告



4: The Death Game

1

"Laharl-chan."

He was just about to enter the cafeteria when a voice called him from behind, and Laharl stiffened. He recognized the owner of the voice immediately.

"Aunt Yasurl."

Laharl's joints creaked loudly as he turned around.

Yasurl was approaching from the opposite end of the hallway, wearing her costume that hid little of her body.

"What do you want?" Laharl's tone was strong, but his legs wanted to turn and run for the cafeteria.

"Can I not say hello to my adorable nephew without wanting something?" Yasurl asked in reply, raising her thin eyebrows ever-so-slightly.

"An Overlord doesn't have the time."

"My, they do say that, don't they?"

Fixing Laharl with cold eyes, she struck her left palm with her fist. The motion was precisely as if she were grasping something and pulling it out, and Laharl gave a shudder. In his eyes was a fear he did not even try to hide.

"What's wrong?" A smile that said she understood everything floated on Yasurl's face. "It's because I took such good care of you back then, isn't it?"

Yasurl moved even closer, and Laharl's entire body froze.

"And you used to listen so well to what I said back then, too." Yasurl stretched out her right hand and touched a finger to Laharl's cheek. "Who was it who raised you, with that inferior human blood, so well?"

At those words, strength returned to Laharl's eyes.

An intense anger and a hatred like flames.

"Yeah, that's right," he said. "The emotions characteristic of a human. The power of a strong will."

Yasurl moved nimbly away, and smiled coldly. "But, that's also your weakness."

"What did you say?"

"Exactly what I meant," Yasurl replied with a laugh, avoiding the question, and she went on to say, "Well, you just aren't right, for the Overlord."

"My musclehead of an uncle doesn't seem appropriate either."

"Of course not. I'm not that unrealistic. Well then, Laharl-chan." Yasurl walked off down the hall.

Laharl glared at her back, and once he could no longer see her, he turned and rushed into the kitchen.

"Get me a meal!" Laharl shouted, and sat down at the table where prinnies and those who worked in the castle normally ate their meals.

"Huh? Prince, what happened, dood? I thought someone brought you lunch, dood," a prinny's voice replied from inside.

"Forget that and just get it already!"

"Aren't you in a bad mood, dood."

From the kitchen came the clatter of the prinny gathering leftovers. He wore a

cook's hat on his head.

"This is all we have, dood," he said as he placed a plate on the table.

"I don't care!"

It was simple fare: bread and stew, cheese, ham, and a salad. He stuck the proper things between the bread and then started in on the soup.

"Hm?"

The spoon held in his mouth, Laharl's hand stopped.

"Oi." He went towards the kitchen and raised his voice.

"What is it, dood?" The prinny cook came running back out.

"Try some."

"Was it bad, dood?"

"Just eat it."

Looking skeptical, the prinny ladled out some of the soup and spooned it into his mouth.

"P-P-P-Prin—"

Immediately, he opened his beak wide, his eyes rolled back in his head, and he fainted.

"Poison, like I thought," Laharl said simply, watching the prinny rolling around frothing at the mouth.

"Trying to kill me with this weak a poison is ridiculous. But, who the hell was it?" he spat, glaring at the soup.

"It's obvious that it wasn't this guy." Looking at the prinny in agony on the floor, he tilted his head.

"Yasurl is the most suspicious, but she should know that poison is useless....."

As he watched the group of prinnies that had come running shoulder the fallen prinny cook and carry him away, Laharl left the kitchen behind.

Maybe I'll go question Yasurl, he thought, but he thought better of it and went outside. That won't work no matter what. Better to relax or something. And she wouldn't be out in a place like this. Maybe I'll go to Flonne's place or something, he thought.

He had just come to the steps leading down when he was suddenly shoved from behind.

"Uoh!?"

His body swam in mid-air.

At once he tried to spread his scarf, but it did not open.

When he realized that the threads of his scarf were tangled, he pitched far forward and tumbled down the stairs.

"Wha!?"

He went tumbling head-first down the 30-step staircase. With his scarf entangled, he could not use it to protect himself.

When at last he thought he had reached the bottom, there came the sound of something loosing from either side.

From both sides of the passage, arrows came flying.

Faster than he could confirm it, Laharl leapt up and ran through the hallway.

"I think I dodged them....."

Before he could catch his breath, there was an ominous thump.

When he looked up, he saw a boulder about to roll towards him.

"Who made all these traps!?"

He did not have the time to chant a spell.
Aiming for the stairs from which he had come, he ran back.
The rumbling sound of the boulder closed in on him.
Once again the arrows shot out at him all at once.
An arrow pierced through his scarf and struck his body. But, he did not even have the time to cry out in pain.

At the same moment he leapt onto the stairs, the boulder crashed into them with a great noise. Just as one would expect from something that rolled into a place it could not climb.

"T-they made sure of this trap," he muttered in amazement, looking at the state of things below from the top of the stairs. The hallway's decorations were completely destroyed, and the boulder had dug a trench into the floor where it had rolled.

Pushing aside his scarf, Laharl pulled out the arrow that had pierced his side.

"Tch, so this is poisoned, too." Clicking his tongue, he threw the arrow aside.
"Just as you'd expect, the double-punch is working....."

That instant, Laharl stumbled, and gritted his teeth.

"Damn it, I can't show weakness, not now....."

The effect of the poison was strong, making his legs unsteady, and he was growing unable to stand.

"Maybe— I'll hide somewhere....."

His scarf fluttered, and Laharl's body ascended. Coming out of the castle, he turned towards the town, and alighted at Flonne's church. Because the spread of the poison was so fast, he could not knock on the door. He rolled forward so that he could hurl his entire body against it.

"I'm intruding."¹³

As soon as he entered, he collapsed with his limbs sprawling. The demons inside looked at Laharl in astonishment.

From within, Flonne came rushing out, and with one look she recognized the abnormality.

"Laharl-san!?! That wound—!?"

Helping the fallen Laharl to sit up, Flonne touched a hand to the wound in his side.

"It's poison. After I rest for a while, I'll go back."

"Please wait. I'll remove the toxin right away."

"Thanks..... Sorry, Flonne."

Flonne doubted her own ears. It was the first time she had heard Laharl say anything in gratitude.

"Ahh, my beliefs weren't wrong, Seraph." Without thinking, Flonne put her hands together and offered up a prayer.

"F-forget the prayers, I'm asking you, just go ahead....." Laharl breathed in a pained groan, and he collapsed limply.

In a panic, Flonne broke off her prayer and began chanting the spell for Espoir.

A green light surrounded the unconscious Laharl, and neutralized the poison.

"For an Overlord, this guy's pretty careless."

"Sensei, how about we do him in?"

The demon children who had gathered spoke of disturbing things.

13 Laharl is using the casual form of a phrase that's used like "sorry to bother you."

"What are you saying?" Flonne admonished them, but their bloodthirsty talk did not stop. On the contrary, it became increasingly extreme.

"Well, he's weak, this guy."

"If I defeat this guy, I'm Overlord?"

"That'd be awesome. Come on, do him in."

The young vampires crowding around nudged at Laharl.

Flonne wavered over whether or not she should use magic to protect Laharl. *As someone who teaches love, I must not attack those who have come to my church*, she thought, and her arms stopped. Instead, it was as much as she could do to lay Laharl's head on her lap and so protect him.

Then, a quiet voice broke in.

"Don't go that far."

"What?" asked the demon children.

"Kira-chan....." Flonne looked at the owner of the voice in surprise.

"You've learned a little of what Flonne-san's been telling you, haven't you?" As he spoke, Kira took several of the figures in his hands. "These things you made, this is it."

"It's what?"

"This is what you're doing." With the figures in the palm of one hand, he held his other fist above them, flames emanating from it.

"S-stop!"

"It's the same as what you were trying to do to His Majesty."

"We get it. We weren't serious, so stop already!"

Hoping to escape, the vampires moved away from Laharl.

Kira looked at the figures as though wondering for an instant what to do, but in the end he opened his hand and let the flames go out.

"Thank you, Kira-chan."

"You're soft, Flonne-san. But..." As he walked towards Flonne, Kira smiled.

"Maybe that's what His Majesty is attracted to."

"Attracted— It isn't like that."

"Is that so? If that wasn't the case, I don't think that he would have run to your side at a time like this, Flonne-san."

"I- I wonder....."

Flonne looked down at Laharl's head upon her lap, and her cheeks reddened.

He is cute like this, isn't he? Flonne found herself thinking.

And, just then, Laharl turned his head and let out a moan.

"Laharl-san, have you come around?"

The poison was gone, but his face was still pale. Flonne held a hand to Laharl's forehead.



"Your strength is gone, so I'll heal you, too." Flonne said, and chanted the words for Heal.

Then at last Laharl became aware that he was making a pillow of Flonne's lap, and hurriedly he tried to sit up.

"Please don't strain yourself!" Flonne said sharply, and she returned Laharl to where he had been.

"Have a little patience," she said soothingly, and Flonne began casting Heal anew. A bright green light surrounded Laharl's body, and strength flowed into him.

"Just now, I was dreaming," Laharl murmured with his eyes closed, as though he had suddenly remembered it.

"What sort of dream?"

"I dreamt I was playing with my mother, then got tired and fell asleep. When I woke, your face was there."

"I'm sorry."

"Why are you apologizing?"

"Wouldn't you rather it be your mother's face?"

"No, what is it....." Looking off into the distance, he whispered a single phrase. "It isn't like that."

"Eh?" Flonne asked in return, and Laharl got to his feet.

"It's nothing. It's about time I got back. I have to look for the guy who's been setting traps for me."

"Laharl-san." Flonne spoke up, looking worried. "Please don't overdo it."

"I won't," Laharl replied as he turned around, and spreading his scarf to either side, he flew off.

"You *really* looked good together." Wherever he had been until now, Kira revealed himself.

"You shouldn't tease your elders."

"I am not teasing. It was beautiful, just like a painting," Kira objected in dismay, and Flonne smiled a little.

"About Laharl-san, I don't think of him that way."

"You talk about love every day, but when it comes to yourself, you don't know it, do you?" Chuckling, Kira regarded Flonne. "Your feelings are something else, right?"

Kira smiled warmly.

"Etna!"

Returning to the castle, Laharl raised his voice.

"What is it, Prince?"

Etna came from the direction of Laharl's room. *Now that I think about it, I did tell her to put the traps back the way things were,* he remembered.

"Are you still thinking to turn me into a corpse?"

"Me? I'm thinking about it single-mindedly, but I haven't done it yet, you know."

"Really?"

"Come on, when I kill you, there's no question that it'll come like a knife from behind."

"There *was* a shove from behind....." Laharl muttered, remembering earlier.

"It wasn't me. I mean, you aren't going to die that easily, Prince."

"But, after the shove there were poisoned arrows and a boulder."

"Eh? That's pretty elaborate, huh."

"Anyway, someone is after me. Reinforce the prinny security detail."

"Got it. But, more than someone being after you, I get the feeling they're playing."

"Shas?"

"Don't you think?"

Laharl grimaced deeply. "And her parents being the way they are, I don't want them scolding her."

"You should get straight to it and complain to her parents."

"Even if I could, I wouldn't bother!" Laharl spat in disgust. "Anyway, at least one thing is certain."

"That there's someone in this castle besides me who's after your life."

At Etna's words, Laharl nodded.

2

"Etna-chan."

Someone called out to Etna just as she was nearly done putting Laharl's room in order, and in the middle of making the finishing touches.

Laharl had called her away in the middle of it to tell her of something dangerous, but it hadn't been outside the range of her expectations, so she didn't feel that it was a huge problem.

Putting that aside, he didn't look so good. I wonder if something happened, she thought, but from that conversation it seems like he just fell into a trap. If he's moving around without any trouble, then it didn't wind up being anything big. Until I move in on him, I'll have him in good health.

Laharl had gone to his office without stopping by his room, so Etna returned with a feeling of relief. That was where, per her orders, the prinnies were now shoving in the six-sided block which she had pulled out of the room. She had had the door repaired first, from when she'd missed in moving the block and destroyed it, and it was no longer noticeable.

"Etna-chan, you said~?"

Who the hell is calling me 'chan'? Etna turned around with an extremely grim look on her face.

A face looked back up at her, a smile splitting it in two.

"Oh, it's you, Shas-chan."

Certainly she wouldn't have thought it was anyone else, but strangely, until she saw the face, she hadn't brought it to mind.

"What do you want?"

"Play with me."

"I'm working right now." She had meant to be angry, but once she opened her mouth, her tone wasn't very forceful.

"That's boring," Shas said with a pout.

"Whether it's boring or not, there's no helping it. Go play with the prinnies over there."

"But the prinnies are so weak."

"So you really are the culprit..... Six of our prinnies are laid up and now we're short on hands. They won't die even if you kill them, but go easy a little."

"But if I play easy on them, it's no fun." Shas looked up at Etna earnestly. Then, she pointed at the prinnies in the hallway. "What are they doing?"

Four prinnies were pushing the six-sided block of earth.

"They're putting it back in the hole in the hallway."

"I'll do it, too!"

Leaving no time to stop her, Shas leapt in amongst the prinnies pushing the block of earth.

"Don't get in the w—"

Etna's words cut off in the middle. The huge block which the prinnies had been struggling to push slid right along with one push from Shas, and fit into the hole with a ker-thump. The prinnies, not able to keep up with its momentum, flopped forward onto their bellies.

"I guess that's the difference between prinny underlings and a real demon," Etna muttered, amazed by the difference in power.

"That was fun! Let's play more!!" Cheerfully, Shas came running up to Etna.

For all her weariness, Etna felt a smile come to her face.

I must be weak against this type.

An existence like a light, devoid of malicious intent. It was an unusual type, not found in the Netherworld.

Now that I think about it, I can't say I'm that strong against Flonne-chan either, she thought, and then she said something which had suddenly come to mind.

"Why don't you go play at Flonne-chan's place?"

"That's no good. Kira-chan said he likes Flonne-chan."

"Precocious, isn't he," Etna laughed in reply, at the same time thinking, *I'd never expect that kid to say something like that.*

"And then, he said that Laharl-chan and Flonne-chan look good together. It's too bad for Kira-chan."

"The Prince and Flonne-chan? They look good together?"

"Uh-huh! He said that Flonne-chan likes Laharl-chan, too."

"Huh, I see....."

Peering into the face of the muttering Etna, Shas asked, "I know! Etna-chan likes Laharl-chan, too, right?"

"T-that's ridiculous," Etna replied reflexively, but she looked flustered and shaken.

"You don't like him?"

"He's the king, so there's no liking or disliking him."

"Really?"

"Really!" Etna asserted forcefully.

Shas looked at her and nodded repeatedly as though she understood. "A girl's feelings are complicated. Don't give up!"

As soon as the words left her mouth, Shas dodged.

"Are you mocking me!?"

Frolicking away down the hallway in a run, Shas called back over her shoulder, "Did I get you?"

That one phrase from Shas as she darted away jabbed into Etna's heart.

What are you so shaken about, Etna? she asked herself. *The Prince and Flonne-chan seeming like a good thing, isn't that old news? Why do I have to be aware of something like that?*

Thinking about it awoke in Etna's mind a scene from 10 years prior.

When Seraph Lamington had punished Flonne for going against the laws of Celestia and turned her into a flower, the anger Laharl had shown. Everyone had been there—Etna, Gordon, Jennifer, and Thursday, too, had felt that anger, but that had not been the anger of having just a friend killed. It had been the anger of losing someone irreplaceable.

It has to be because the Prince has half-human blood running through him that he reacted like that. Or, like Flonne-chan says, do demons know love, too? And if that's true, then could I, too?

"Ahh, what the hell am I thinking!?" Without thinking, Etna raised her voice at having considered something so outrageous.

"Etna-san, what's wrong, dood?" The prinnies spoke to her cautiously, staring at her.

"It's nothing!"

"Etna-san's snapped, dood!"

The prinnies ran off, scattering like baby spiders.

"Who's snapped?" Etna spat with a frown, folding her arms.

But— she continued in her innermost thoughts, I wonder what the Prince thinks of me?

"Later, sensei!"

The demon children who had been playing at the House of Love waved and went on home. Flonne saw them off, waving in return, then closed the door and returned inside.

"Phew....."

Just as one would expect dealing with that many children, the fatigue both physical and mental piled up. On top of that, because Laharl had come flying in, she had used her magic, and the degree of her weariness was considerable.

"Flonne-san, are you all right?"

A voice came suddenly from within, startling Flonne.

"Kira-chan, you're still here."

"Am I in the way?"

"Not at all, but is it all right for you not to return to the castle?"

"They don't mind. No one pays me any attention."

Kira smiled self-deprecatingly, and Flonne shook her head chidingly.

"I wouldn't say that. Even so, you're always alone. You could come together with your sister once in a while."

"Do you want to see us together?"

"Well, you are siblings, aren't you?"

"We look so alike that you can't tell us apart. It's unsettling, isn't it?"

"You think so?"

"Our parents can't tell the difference either, so we're treated the same. The two of us are one. That's why, I try not to be together. With my sister, or with our parents."

At Kira's words, Flonne froze and stared at him.
"What's the matter?" Kira asked, puzzled.
"Doesn't that make you sad?" Flonne murmured, her eyes growing red.
"No, I have never felt that."
"You've numbed your emotions so much that you're not aware of it, haven't you?"
Tears spilling from her eyes, Flonne stretched out her hands to embrace Kira.
But, Kira escaped from them and drew away. "I'm fine," he asserted to drive her away.
His unexpectedly forceful tone surprised Flonne, and she hesitated on what to do next.
"That's it. If you're not going home yet, are you going to play?" Flonne said, going to take a figure in her hand.
"Never mind that. What's that statue?" What Kira pointed to was the church's far back wall—below the stained glass, a statue was on display.
"That's the Seraph."
"So that's Lamington."
"You're well-informed."
"That incident 10 years ago is famous."
"It is, isn't it? And, this is a cup into which Lamington-sama poured his power. When I fell down here, it was given to me by Lamington-sama."
"Huh."
To show Kira, Flonne took hold of the cup and lifted it. The inside was filled to the brim with water. Because it was a holy chalice, it was water gifted with power—it was holy water.
And, Flonne's toes caught on on a figure rolling on the floor. It would not do to crush one of the figures the children had made, so Flonne quickly averted her foot and tried to twist her body.
"Ah!"
At that moment, her foot slipped and she lost her balance. She stretched out her hands in search of something to hold on to.
The cup flew from Flonne's hands.
"Ahh! The chalice!!"
As she fell, Flonne reached out her hands to try to grab hold of the cup. But, caught in its momentum, the cup was out of reach even of her fingertips. The water filling it came flying out.
In front of her eyes was Kira. In an instant, Kira reached out his right hand to try to grab the cup, but instead the exposed skin of his right leg was splashed.
"Ow....."
There was a noise like water suddenly being dashed on a burning-hot iron plate.
"Kira-chan, are you all right!?" Having caught up the chalice, Flonne immediately hurried towards Kira.
"I'm all right, this much—"
Grimacing, Kira covered his leg.
"Let me see."
Flonne tried to take his arm, but Kira turned his body around, trying to hide it.
"It's fine."
"It's not fine. Just wait a minute." Forcibly taking him by the arm, Flonne dragged

out his right leg that had been splashed with holy water.

"How awful....." Flonne could find no more words.

His skin festered as though it had been scalded. Even more, it was still spreading. The power to destroy evil was the power in exact opposition to demons. For a child not yet grown, it was like a strong poison.

"I'm sorry. It's because I'm a klutz....."

"It's all right. It will heal after a little while."

"That's no good. I'll heal it for you right away," Flonne said, and began to cast Heal.

"Please stop!" Kira cried out suddenly. He shoved Flonne away, turned around, and ran away.

"K-Kira-chan!?"

Flonne stared dumbfounded and uncomprehendingly after Kira's running figure, and then ran after him in a panic. But, Kira was already nowhere to be seen.

3

It was nearing evening, and Laharl, who had been looking over the bothersome documents in his office, suddenly lifted his eyes and stretched.

"This is tedious....."

It was work, not play, and it was both tedious and uneventful, but Laharl did not care about that as he stood.

Originally he had retired to his office to avoid contact with the apparent assassin, but now escaping from work was the only thing on Laharl's mind.

"Where might you be headed?" the door asked him in a low voice as he turned towards the doorway. The door's voice and character were both different from its construction.

"Why am I getting asked that by you?"

"Etna-sama instructed me, 'ask where His Majesty is going.'"

"Food, I'm going for food!"

"Did you not dine earlier?"

"Oi, that's getting detailed. For an unmoving door, how do you know that?"

"All of the doors are in contact with one another," the door answered triumphantly, and Laharl clicked his tongue.

"What I had before wasn't enough. And I didn't have any dessert either."

And, suddenly sensing something behind him, he whirled around. "Who's there?"

His scarf fluttered, and he stood ready to attack at any moment. But, there was no one there.

"Just now, I felt that there was someone there, but....." Laharl muttered, cocking his head in confusion. "Am I tired? Yeah, that must be it. I definitely need to take a break."

Making this convenient interpretation, he opened the door without unnecessary conversation, and stepped out into the hallway.

He was about to go to the kitchen when a voice unexpectedly called out to him from behind.

"Laharl-san."

"Oh, Flonne. What are you doing?" Laharl asked once he turned around. He did not let her sense his earlier weakness at all.

"Thank goodness. You're all right now."

Flonne smiled in relief, and for some reason Laharl looked away.

"Y-yeah," he replied, seeming embarrassed.

"I'm looking for Kira-chan, have you happened to see him?"

"I've been working all this time," Laharl replied with a self-satisfied air.

"I did something sort of awful, and I have to apologize."

"Something awful?"

"Yes. And I must speak to his parents, too."

"Forget that. You can't carry on a straight conversation with those parents."

"If I don't try it, I'll never know."

"Listen, I was with those two for nearly 100 years. I know that much."

"Eh? When was that?"

At Flonne's question, Laharl withdrew completely. His expression said that he had spoken of something which was better left unsaid.

"I-it doesn't matter when! I've forgotten about back then!!" he said hurriedly, and turned his back as though to run away.

"Huh? Laharl-san, is there something on your back?"

His scarf fluttered, and she thought she saw something beneath it, so Flonne called out to Laharl to stop him.

"My back?"

"Yes, though it's beneath your scarf."

"Huh?"

Laharl tried to check his own back, but he could not see it. His scarf flew up on its own, and his back became completely visible to Flonne.

A black ball about the size of the tip of a thumb was stuck in the center of Laharl's back.

"T-that's—" Flonne gulped.

At that moment, the black ball on his back suddenly swelled up.

"Uoh!?"

"Laharl-san, it's a *shokuma*¹⁴ egg."

"What did you say!?"

The *shokuma* were nasty demons of low standing, but once they bit, whether pulled or roasted or struck by lightning, they would not let go, and they possessed the appetite to devour their victims.

The black mass swelled up larger than Laharl, opened its mouth wide, and snapped at Laharl head-first.

In one bite, he was swallowed to the waist.

Flonne covered her mouth with her hand and screamed, "Laharl-san!"

The *shokuma* swelled up even larger, and Laharl's whole body was reduced to a mass of flesh.

"Giga Ice!"

At Flonne's chanted spell, the mass of flesh was swallowed by a pillar of ice and

14 There's no real English translation for this, but the characters 食魔 read "eat" and "demon," and from the description that's just what they are: demons that eat.

froze. Immediately Flonne took hold of her staff and swung it with all her might.

A loud crack sounded, and the pillar of ice shattered, the fragments scattering. The fragments of the *shokuma* with them.

"Giga Fire!"

Meaning to burn them to nothing before they melted, Flonne loosed flames upon the shattered ice that had been the fleshy mass.

The hallway was enveloped in explosive flames. The smell of burning flesh hung close in the air.

Laharl crawled out from amidst the flames. His lower body was frozen and shedding white cold, and white smoke trailed from his torso.

"T-that was a close one..... I was preparing myself to be digested over 1,000 years. And I couldn't help thinking, on the way to eating dessert, I got eaten myself."

Covered in digestive juices, Laharl exhaled smoke and looked towards Flonne.

"Flonne, you saved me.¹⁵ That's twice now." Laharl grasped Flonne's hand and thanked her.

"Um, well, that is, thank goodness. Yes." Her cheeks suddenly turning red, Flonne quickly shook off Laharl's hand.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm sorry! It's nothing! Well then!!" Now beet red, Flonne vigorously walked away.

"What?"

Not having any idea what had happened, Laharl watched her go in astonishment.

"Was it because of this?" Laharl sniffed at the digestive juices stuck to his own body. "I'll shower before I eat."

He turned his legs from their path to the kitchen and headed towards his room.

Neither of the two could know that Etna, who had just happened to be passing by, had witnessed the scene. Moreover, on seeing Laharl take Flonne's hand, and Flonne turn completely red, Etna had immediately hidden herself, and she had not seen the parts before or after.

"What was that just now?" Etna muttered sullenly.

What the feeling was that had suddenly awoken inside of her, Etna did not know. She didn't know, but it had definitely become a very unpleasant feeling.

It has to be that fallen angel's fault, Etna thought, without making any logical connection.

In the corner of the empty hallway, a malicious giggle escaped her and then quieted.

Jane was with Jennifer and Gordon, inside the spaceship which had landed in the castle courtyard. Gordon was working and could not play with her, so she was in Jennifer's room.

And yet, Jennifer, too, was in the midst of research and not taking notice of anything else, so she couldn't play. Even so, Jane didn't want to be by herself.

Ever since returning from the House of Love, she had not left the room. She got

¹⁵ Laharl uses the phrase 助かった *tasukatta* here, which does literally mean "I was saved," but in Japanese this can be very casual. It's used for anything from escaping death to having someone loan you their cell phone.

the feeling that if she went outside something frightening would be there, and she could not move.

When she remembered Kira's eyes, she got scared and her legs froze.

She had never before seen such dreadful eyes. They had been so cold and devoid of emotion that she could not think he had the same face as Shas.

Jane suddenly strained her ears, and looked around her. She felt as though she had heard someone's voice calling.

"Shas-chan?"

She lifted her face and went to the door.

She had the same face, but Jane was not afraid of Shas. Even if she was Kira's double, Shas had done nothing. Jane was sure of it.

Jennifer did not notice that Jane was going out.

And without her notice, Jane went to the hatch.

She descended the ramp, and walked across the courtyard.

"Shas-chan?" she called out, and this time she heard the voice clearly.

"Over here." She heard the voice from the direction of the hallway.

With small steps, she crossed the courtyard and entered the hallway. But, Shas was not there.

"Where did she go?"

Walking around in search of Shas, Jane recognized someone standing in the hallway and ran up to her.

"Ah, Etna-san."

"Eh? Oh, Jane-chan." Turning around, Etna gave a sigh. Her expression was dispirited.

"What's wrong?"

"It's nothing," Etna replied in an uncharacteristically depressed voice.

"Are you hurt somewhere?"

"I said I'm fine!"

Her voice came out unintentionally forceful. When she realized that Jane was looking up at her with a stunned expression, Etna fell into self-loathing. *There's no use lashing out at a human child.*

Jane did not dispute Etna's reaction, and she hadn't forgotten that she had her own question.

"I'm looking for Shas-chan. Have you seen her, Etna-san?"

"Nope, I haven't," Etna replied, having pulled herself together.

"I heard her voice from over here."

"Maybe she's playing hide-and-seek again or something."

"But, the prinnies aren't here either," Jane said, looking around her curiously. And, she noticed the shadow of a person.

"Ah, it's Laharl-chan."

At Jane's voice, Etna felt her heart leap in her chest.

When she turned around, Laharl was headed in their direction. *I guess he separated from Flonne and came this way. He must be going to the kitchen or outside.*

"Etna? Is something wrong?" Laharl asked.

"Eh? No, nothing at all."

She tried to answer in the same manner as always, but Laharl hummed skeptically.

"Is that right? I get the feeling that something is really stressing you out."

Etna could not figure out how to answer. That was where Jane cut in. Whether she understood the situation or not, Jane tugged on Laharl's scarf and asked, "Laharl-chan, do you know where Shas-chan is?"

"Oi, you're calling both me and Shas 'chan'?"

"That's right," she replied as though she were entirely oblivious, and Laharl grimaced.

Without thinking, Etna laughed at the scene.

"This isn't something to laugh at," Laharl said. "It doesn't have the dignity of the Overlord or anything."

"It's your right as a demon, Prince."

"I don't need that option!"

"Although I don't think the previous Overlord Krichevskoy changed much on the point of dignity."

"Idiot. My old man was like that, so I'm going to be an Overlord with dignity."

"Well, keep at it!" Etna encouraged him, grinning as though she wasn't in earnest.

"Shas-chan isn't here, is she?" Tugging on Etna's leather skirt, Jane tried to get the conversation back on track.

"That's right," Etna said. "You want to come to my room?"

"But, I can't if I'm going to look for Shas-chan."

"Well then, I'll tell the prinnies that if they find Shas-chan to lead her to my room."

"Mm, okay."

Jane nodded, and Etna returned her attention to Laharl.

"And you, Prince?"

"I'm not going."

"You're going to the kitchen, aren't you," Etna asserted in a knowing tone.

"T-that's right."

"Later then, Laharl-chan."

Jane waved a hand to Laharl and walked off together with Etna.

"That brat, just once I'll have to make her understand my greatness."

Grumbling, Laharl walked off in the opposite direction.

After parting from Laharl, Flonne walked the inside of the castle in search of Kira. She had glanced around the places she thought he might go, and she was beginning to think he was no longer in the castle. Just as she was about to give up, she spotted him walking right before her eyes.

"Kira-chan!"

Kira turned around and asked Flonne in surprise, as though absolutely nothing had happened, "What is it?"

"You went flying out earlier and I was worried."

"I thought I said I was fine." A chuckle floating up from him, Kira beckoned her around a corner. "Never mind that, Flonne-san, come this way."

"What is it?"

"You'll be able to see something interesting." Kira's silver eye turned towards Flonne.

Although she thought to herself that an angel should not peek, somehow Flonne

found herself looking without protest to the other end of the hallway.

It was a sight not at all unusual.

"Etna-san?"

Etna was in front of Laharl. Jane was there, too, but to Flonne's eyes she might as well not have been there.

"It seems we have seen a bad spot." Kira smiled wryly.

Somehow Flonne could not move away. She could not take her eyes off of the two.

Etna was talking to Laharl, looking like she was enjoying herself. That was all, but the moment she heard Kira's words, something in her heart grew fretful.

No, I don't want to look anymore.

Pain ran through Flonne's chest.

It was a feeling more painful than any injury she had experienced in the past.

A pain like nausea welling up from deep inside her body.

"I'm sorry, Kira-chan. I'm not feeling well, so I'm going home."

No longer able to stand it, Flonne took her gaze away from the two.

"Are you all right?"

"I'll be fine once I rest a little," Flonne said, and she retraced the path from which she had come at a quick pace.

"Just as you'd expect from a former angel. She's too pure, she can't even stand the wicked thoughts in her own mind," Kira muttered, and then he raised his voice and laughed.

"This really is interesting. Flonne-san is the best, isn't she?" he murmured, and Kira stared at Laharl from the shadows.

Both of his differently-colored eyes were filled with hatred and an all-too-cold light.

4

"Ne, Etna-chan, do you like anyone?"

They were drinking tea and eating cake in Etna's room. Jane asked this inadvertently in conversation, and at her words, Etna looked like she was going to choke.

"Me, there's this boy in my class at school that I like. But, I haven't told Papa or Mama, so it's a secret, okay?" Jane held her index finger up to her lips. "What about you, Etna-chan?"

"I don't understand the word 'like' very well, I think."

"Why not?"

"Because until Flonne-chan came to the Netherworld, words like 'love' or 'like' were taboo. The Prince doesn't like them either."

"Eh!? Then how do you get married?" Jane asked curiously. "How do you decide who to be with? Papa and Mama got married because they loved each other, they said."

A lot happened with Gordon and Jennifer, huh, Etna remembered, and could not help grinning.

Jennifer's father General Carter had used mind control on Jennifer, and attacked Laharl and the others. Gordon had risked his life to protect her, and what had started as a

relationship between hero and assistant had apparently developed into love.

"In the Netherworld, what decides partners is sheer strength, or falling into a trap — We prioritize partners by their strength."

"Eh? It has nothing to do with their faces or the length of their legs or how nice they are?"

"It's better if they have a good face, but there's no such thing as 'nice.' If you're nice, then in the Netherworld you die pretty quickly."

"Really? The boy I like is cute and nice. But, he's good at soccer."

"Is that right?"

"So, what about you, Etna-chan?"

"I- I—"

Abruptly Laharl's face came to mind.

Hey, wait a minute. My impression of him has changed since the first time I saw him, and he's gotten stronger, but...

Flustered, she shook her head.

"What's wrong?"

"It's nothing." Putting on a false smile, Etna shook her head again.

There came knock, and they heard a voice from outside.

"Jane-chan, you there?"

"Ah, it's Shas-chan."

When Jane leapt up, the door opened and Shas was standing there.

"The prinnies told me you were here."

"Those guys are good for something every once in a while, huh," Etna said from her seat on the couch, as though she had no faith in her own subordinates.

"Shas-chan, over here."

As Jane started to lead her over to the sofa, she noticed that there was something strange about Shas's leg. From above her shoe up to about her knee, it had become completely red.

"What happened to your leg?"

As though Shas was realizing it for the first time at Jane's question, she looked at her own leg and made a curious face.

"Huh? I dunno."

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"It stings a little."

"Where did you hurt it?"

"Mm, well, before I realized it,¹⁶ it was like this."

"Show me." Etna came closer to Shas and peered at the injury.

"Maybe I fell down."

As she examined the wound, Etna's eyes narrowed grimly. "This isn't just a scrape. And it's not a burn....."

Staring intently, Etna's face grew even grimmer.

"This couldn't be— a holy water burn?"

There was only one place that would have a thing like holy water.

"That rotten angel..... What's she thinking getting this child hurt?" Etna muttered. Then she turned to face Jane. "Jane-chan, sorry, but go home for today."

"What is it?"

¹⁶ Interestingly, the verb being used here can also mean "to regain consciousness."

"A little something's come up."

Jane looked at Etna's expression, and she nodded obediently as though she had guessed at something. "Mm, okay. See you tomorrow then."

"Yeah, yeah."

Etna saw Jane and Shas out, and then with a grim face she rushed out in the direction of the town.

It was almost night, and having finished his work, Gordon had realized that he didn't see Jane anywhere and was searching the interior of the ship.

"Jane's not here, do you know where she went?" Gordon raised his voice, having rushed to Jennifer's research lab. He usually didn't do anything so thoughtless as raising his voice when Jennifer was in the midst of research, but circumstances were what they were.

"Hm? I thought she was just here a little while ago, but....." Jennifer looked up and replied distractedly, still unaware of anything outside her research.

"When is 'a while ago'?"

"Let's see, maybe it was about two hours earlier," Jennifer replied absent-mindedly.

"So she went outside. This is bad."

Jennifer hurriedly searched out the clock showing Netherworld time with her eyes. She had completely lost track of time. It often happened when she immersed herself in her research, but one could also say it was the problem with being a genius scientist.

"Jesus! It's evening already!!"

"Yes. For us humans, we're entering a dangerous period of time."

Vampires and other demons that preferred humans came out at night. Someone like Jane would wind up becoming the perfect prey.

"I'm sorry, dear. It's because I didn't warn her."

With a ghastly pale face, Jennifer took off her white coat and cast it aside. Beneath it was her revealing costume as Jennifer, the assistant to the Defender of Earth.

"We're going to save you now, Jane," Gordon said.

Just as Gordon and Jennifer rushed out of the room—

"I'm home!"

They heard Jane's tired voice call from the direction of the hatch.

"WHAT HAPPENED, YOU TWO?" Thursday, who had gone out to pick up Jane, asked in his beeping voice.

"Are you going out to play now?" Jane asked with a puzzled look.

"N-no," Gordon said, "that is, well—"

"It's nothing," said Jennifer.

For someone who in his position as Defender of Earth professed that he must conduct himself in a calm and collected way, this disgraceful behavior was difficult to explain.

"Now that's suspicious." Jane said dubiously, staring at her parents.

"W-well, are you going to eat dinner?" Gordon asked.

"I had cake with Etna-chan, so I don't need anything yet."

"O-oh, I see."

Jane was about to go to her own room when she suddenly turned around and

asked Gordon, "Ne, when are we going home?"

"That's right. Before much longer I'll have to return to work. Why don't we head back the day after tomorrow?"

"Okay. Well then, tomorrow I'll play all day. That's okay, right?"

"Yes, that's fine. In exchange—"

"Today I'll start my homework now," Jane answered immediately, and smiled at Gordon.

"I'm glad that's clear."

Watching their daughter run off to her room, the two exchanged glances and breathed a deep sigh of relief.

Flonne was before the statue of Lamington within the House of Love, offering up a prayer.

"Today, too, I was able to pass another day safely. Thank you."

Down on her knees with her head bowed, Flonne prayed with all her heart. There were no wicked thoughts in it. Although she was a fallen angel, it did not mean that she had fallen to violating precepts, and Flonne's heart was no different from when she had been an angel.

"But, I did something awful to Kira-chan. I may be careless, but hurting someone is out of the question. Is it a punishment, that my heart hurts for no reason? What should I do?"

As she prayed, she looked up at the statue of Lamington.

Of course, there was no way that a fallen angel would receive an answer from Celestia.

And, just then, suddenly the entrance was opened with a loud bang, and there came a shout full of anger.

"Flonne!"

The one who had stepped inside was Etna.

"Eh? What is it, Etna-san?"

Surprised, Flonne came out to meet her, and Etna showered her in abuse.

"Don't ask me what, you rotten angel!"

"R-rotten angel?" Flonne's eyes went wide.

"What the hell are you thinking, injuring a child!?"

Etna's words stole her breath away, and Flonne hung her head.

"And on top of that, to splash one with holy water!"

"I-it was an accident—"

"An accident? The bigger point is, it's completely senseless for you to keep something that dangerous here in the Netherworld!"

"It's not danger—"

"It is dangerous! It's a hazardous material! I can't understand why you'd hold that repulsive stuff so dearly!!"

"R-repulsive!?"

"That's right!"

"A-and as for you, Etna-san, what's wrong with you? You're horrible!!"

"*What's horrible!?*"

"W-well, to do those things!" Flonne shouted without knowing herself what she

was saying. The pain in her chest from midday seemed to have returned, and she felt awful.

"What the heck is that!? You're just turning it around and getting mad at me!"

"I thought we were finally able to understand each other, but you're terrible!"

"What are you saying? You, are your brains gone rotten!?"

The two glared at each other for a moment and stiffened.

In the next moment they had squared their shoulders, and their hands and mouths moved at the same time.

"You airheaded goody-two-shoes!"

"You savage woman!"

"You fallen angel!" Etna chanted a Fire spell and hurled a mass of flames.

"You demon!" Flonne chanted a Wind spell and struck at her with a gale.

"I'm through with you!" Etna shouted, thrusting a finger at Flonne.

"I was just about to say that myself!" Flonne retorted, glaring at Etna.

"Go back to Celestia already!"

Slamming the door with all her might, Etna left the House of Love.

"Repent your sins!" Flonne yelled back at the closed door. As one last shot, she flung a small flame at it, and with an expression of indignation that could not be calmed, she returned inside.

In the empty House of Love, silent laughter rang.

"The first match between fallen angel and demon. As a bonus, it's between women. Their friendship is a fragile thing, isn't it?"

Behind Etna's running back, the figure that revealed itself from lurking within the darkness was that of a single child.

"Now then, why don't we start wrapping things up," Kira murmured, and with his silver eye filling to the brim with a cold light, he gave a chuckle.



Next Time's Preview¹⁷



17 This particular preview is a parody of Heidi (possibly *Arupusu no Shoujo Haiji* in particular), with Etna being Heidi and Flonne being Clara.

5: An Excursion of Desperation

1

Laharl exited his office and called out to Etna, who was in the hallway, "Oi, I'm headed out."

In another two hours, it would already be time for lunch.

"Where are you going?" Etna asked.

"I can't unwind working all the time. On top of that, I can't take a nap in peace with someone after me."

"So, you're playing hooky?"

"That's right," Laharl answered, thrusting out his chest.

"In that case, please take Shas-chan with you. She was crying that she wanted to play."

"What?" Laharl asked Etna in reply, his expression serious. "Why should I have to do something like look after a child? Leave that kind of thing to the prinnies."

"You're free, aren't you? So I'm asking you."

Having said just what she wanted, Etna walked off.

"Oi, wait!"

But she was already gone.

"Grr, at a time like this."

When he tried to run off, something caught the edge of his scarf.

"Let's play, Laharl-chan!"

"She showed up, huh....." At his wits' end, Laharl looked down at Shas. "Listen, I'm busy. I don't have time to play with a kid."

"Laharl-chan, you seem free," Shas insisted.

"Now you just—"

"Shas-chan!" an energetic voice burst out from behind, interrupting his words.

Jane came running, the two embraced each other tightly, and, ignoring Laharl, they began talking. Gordon and Thursday could be seen as well.

"Ne, ne, where are you going, Shas-chan?"

"A picnic!"

"Who decided on that!?" Laharl said.

"I'm going, too!" Jane exclaimed, skipping.

Having descended from the spaceship, Jennifer came up to them and handed over a large basket to Laharl.

"Well then, I'm entrusting you with Jane, too, Laharl-chan."

"We haven't had any time together as a couple in a while," Gordon said.

Gordon and Jennifer pressed against each other.

"Oi, you lot!" Laharl barked. "All of you, what the hell do you think an Overlord is!?"

"A BABYSITTER."

"If it's babysitting, then you do it!"

"UNFORTUNATELY, I HAVE INSTRUCTIONS FROM JENNIFER TO HELP WITH HER RESEARCH."

"For a robot, you sure know how to make excuses."

"YES. IT IS BECAUSE I WAS WELL-CRAFTED."

"You want me to teach you the Three Laws of Robotics?"

"I KNOW THEM. BUT, LAHARL-SAN IS NOT HUMAN SO YOU ARE OUTSIDE THE APPLICATION OF THE LAWS."

"Tch, you always have a comeback."

Having been out-talked by a robot, Laharl glared at Thursday trying to figure out what to do. That was when Jennifer's voice broke in.

"That's the *bentō* you have, Laharl-chan."

"Yay, *bentō*!" Shas cried.

"Mama, thank you!" said Jane.

"Well then, Laharl-chan, I'm leaving it to you."

"Who said I was going!?" Laharl shouted.

Jennifer was smiling broadly.

Jane and Shas looked up at Laharl, their chests swelling in anticipation.

"We're going!" he said in a despairing voice, and taking Shas and Jane with him, and on top of that carrying the *bentō*, Laharl walked off.

Laharl went out, and, laying face-up on the sofa in her room, Etna picked up a magazine.

Naturally it was a fashion magazine. Even the accessories were loud. The latest trends of the human world could change on a whim, and because new things showed up, she never tired of it from day to day.

"The Prince is taken care of, and Shas-chan isn't here anymore, so it looks like I'll be able to take it easy until evening."

Once morning had come, Shas's wound had healed considerably. It had not even left a scar.

"All the same, that rotten angel is unforgivable."

Etna threw the magazine onto the table and glared at the ceiling.

When she remembered what had happened the night before, anger welled up inside her.

But, something was strange.

Why did I go storming off like that just from Shas getting hurt?

As she tried to think about it, Flonne's face floated up again in her mind, and again the anger came rising up in her.

Something's weird.

A strange power is at work here.

Seems like it'd be better to check it out.

Etna got up and put a hand on the door to her room.

Meanwhile, Flonne was at confession.

"Last night, I forgot myself, and gave myself over to anger. As long as I am someone who preaches love, committing that kind of act is disgraceful. Please forgive me."

Facing the statue of the Seraph, she prayed whole-heartedly.

Ahh, but, I wonder why I got so angry?

Flonne tilted her head.
Anyone would think that Kira-chan's injury was my fault. I shouldn't have tried to argue, but I wasn't able to stand there without saying anything back.

"Ahh, what was the matter with me?"
When Etna-san blamed me, I remembered how she looked talking happily with Laharl-san, and before I knew it, I was shouting.

"Huh?"
*Did I feel anger because I thought about Laharl-san?
I'm understanding this less and less.*
"I must talk to Etna-san again."
The moment she thought of it, just as before, that developing, nauseous anger filled her chest.
I wonder if I'm sick? she thought, but there were more important things than that.
Love thy enemies. That's it. If I can't even love Etna-san, then I can't do my work to spread love.

Determined, Flonne left the House of Love, and headed straight for the castle. With her mind set, she headed towards Etna's room.

"Etna-san!"
She thrust open the door.
At the same moment, she heard a loud thud together with a cry from Etna.
"Ow....."
Having been about to open it, Etna's face had been struck by the door.
"I- I'm sorry!" Apologizing reflexively, Flonne tried to help Etna back up. But, her hand was shoved away.

"It's because of that kind of slapstick stuff that Shas got hurt!"
"My personality is unrelated!" Flonne shouted, and then she became aware of something out of place. There was some sort of mistake. "Etna-san, what did you say just now?"

"That you hurt Shas! Did you forget already?"
"The right leg, wasn't it?"
"So you *do* remember."
"Um, but the one I injured was Kira-chan....."
"Eh?"
Etna stared at Flonne's face to determine whether or not she was lying. But, although she had fallen, Flonne was an angel. Etna didn't think that she would tell such an insignificant sort of lie.

"I was careless with the holy water and splashed it on him."
"And Shas was with you, right?" Etna asked in confirmation.
"No, it was only Kira-chan."
"What does that mean?"
The two of them looked at each other.
"Was it Kira-chan pretending to be Shas-chan?" Flonne wondered.
"That'd make for an impressive performance."

Flonne tilted her head.
They fell deep in thought. Searching her memory, Etna said, "Hey. There's never been a time when Shas and Kira were together, right?"
"That's right. Kira-chan said that he dislikes it."

The two of them looked at each other.
"It couldn't be—" Flonne began.
"It's possible." Etna continued with a grim expression, "Shas and Kira have some sort of secret."
"But, what for?"
"Maybe it's in order to kill the Prince."
Flonne gulped. "Then, the ones who have been setting traps recently are—"
"Probably. The recent super-Overlord is suspicious, too."
"I'm going to look into it," Flonne said. "We don't know why the seal which the previous Overlord-san put in place vanished either."
"Then I'm going to check up on Kira. He's royalty, so I think there should be records in the library."
"All right."
"Be careful, Flonne-chan."
"You, too, Etna-san."
As though the prior day's fight had never happened, the two nodded at each other and parted.

"Woow!"
Jane raised her voice in delight.
In front of her eyes, a verdant, grass-covered plain stretched into the distance. On the other side stood a range of mountains.
"So there are places like this in the Netherworld, too!"
"Of course," Laharl said. "Well, they're less famous than the scorching beaches or the plains of ice. It's probably because there's nothing interesting here."
Laharl flopped down atop the grass.
"Play whatever. I'm going to sleep."
"Eh!? Laharl-chan, you play, too!"
Shas tugged on Laharl's scarf in an attempt to make him stand up, but it seemed Laharl had no intention of moving.
"Have lunch or something." He pointed at the basket as though it were a pain.
"Yaay, *bentō*."
Jane came running, and jumped for the basket Laharl had left at his feet. There, she spread a sheet as she was used to doing, and, placing the containers with the *bentō* atop it, she began preparations.
"Laharl-chan, over here."
She tapped a place on the sheet, indicating that he should sit there. Laharl scowled, but without saying anything he got up and sat down on the sheet.
"Shas-chan, you're over here, okay?" In the same way, Jane indicated a seat to Shas.
But, without making any move to sit down, Shas stood where she was and looked intently at Laharl.
"But, is it all right for the Overlord to come to a place like this without bringing his retainers?" Shas asked.
"I'm not concerned. Who would rival me anyway?"
"That's right," said Jane. "Laharl-chan is strong, isn't he?"

"Yeah. I'm the most powerful of three worlds." In answer to Jane's words, Laharl showed them his muscles.

"I wonder how long you'll be able to say that," Shas said.

"Forever," Laharl said.

"That self-confidence is going to be fatal," Shas whispered in a cold voice, her silver eye shining.

2

"It's just as we thought....." Flonne murmured.

She was in the desert ruins where the self-proclaimed super-Overlord Baal had been sealed. It was about five minutes distant from the town. Five minutes flying, of course.

The seal at her feet clearly showed signs that someone had broken it.

"Someone released him."

Touching it with the palm of her hand and feeling the vestiges of magical power, Flonne faced the seal and cried out, "Hello, Super-Overlord-san?"

She waited a moment, and she heard a voice like the earth rumbling.

"What do you want?"

"Could you come out a moment and talk?"

"I'm going to sleep for another 8,000 years. As long as *he* is Overlord, there's no way that I'm coming out."

It must must have been quite a shock to have gotten such a thorough beating from Laharl. Flonne gave up on that, and decided to talk to him where he was.

"Well then, do you know who it was that released you from the seal?"

"I don't know."

"You don't remember anything?" Flonne persisted, and there came a sound like a moan.

"All that I remember is a vulgar pink color. Are you satisfied?"

With that, she no longer heard Baal's voice.

"Pink? I must let Etna know."

Just then, before Flonne's eyes there suddenly stood the shadow of a person. It was a stifling muscle man whose eye-popping, florescent pink cape fluttered in the desert wind.

"My, my, young lady. Where might you be going?" His voice was as thick as one would expect from his appearance, but he spoke with a woman's words.

"Who might you be?" Flonne asked without stammering.

"I've been slow to introduce myself. I am Kira's father, Vesuvio. Call me Vesvie. You're Flonne-chan, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am Flonne. I'm sorry. I'm in a hurry."

Flonne bowed politely and attempted to leave the ruins, but Vesuvio stepped in front of her to block her way.

"I can't allow that."

"Please don't obstruct me." Flonne smiled sweetly at Vesuvio, who held his arms thicker than her thighs out to either side, and slipped past him.

"W-wait a moment!" Vesuvio called hastily to stop her.

"I don't want to exercise violence on a cute girl, but if you don't stop then I have no choice. I'll have you black out for a bit."

Vesuvio struck an exaggerated pose, brandishing a fist, and punched at Flonne from behind.

"Shield!"

Flonne turned around, and at her voice, a transparent barrier spread before her. Vesuvio's fist was caught by the barrier and he could not move it.

"What?" In surprise, Vesuvio struggled to free his arm.

"You know, I'm getting mad," said Flonne.

"Huh?" Caught off-guard, Vesuvio stiffened. Even so, the pose he had taken was that of a bodybuilder.

"Because now, I understand. You released the seal here. Why did you do such a thing?"

"It's no big deal. We meant to test Laharl's strength."

"Test?"

"That's right. We thought it would be useful reference for our next steps. But, not at all. We thought it would be like that, but those of the opposing faction were a nuisance wanting to go ahead and try."

"By opposing faction, do you mean those who were against Laharl-san becoming Overlord? I didn't know there still were any."

"That's right. There are quite a lot of us."

"Why so many?"

"Isn't it obvious? It's because he has that filthy, inferior half-human blood coursing through him."

"What a thing to say!" Flonne cried out. "Certainly Laharl acts like a child, and he wakes up late, and he's lazy, and troublesome, and he never does any work, and he's short-tempered, and self-centered—"

"My, you have a lot to say yourself. I can relate to all that."

"But! Laharl-san knows love!!"

"Looove?" Vesuvio said in a strange voice that could have been a scream or a laugh, and Flonne's eyes flashed.

"You look down on love, too, don't you? That's fine. I'll instruct that body in love."¹⁸

"N-no, that's all right."

"Please don't hesitate." Flonne took out a white staff and indicated the ground with its tip. "Sit there."

"Nooo!"

In the desert ruins, Vesuvio's deep-voiced shrieks echoed eerily.

Around that time, Etna had shut herself up in the Netherworld library adjacent to the castle, and was covered in dust.

"The royal family tree and the like should be around here somewhere."

Etna looked up at the excess of documents, her face saying that she was at a loss.

A semicircular 10-shelf bookcase occupied one wall, and in the same area another

¹⁸ Flonne is imitating Laharl's line from Chapter 1. So yes, it sounds really wrong, but she doesn't realize it.

10 five-shelf bookcases stood in a row. Books and scrolls were crammed into them tightly. Their number was exceedingly large. At last she had found out that the books concerning the royal family were in the innermost of these bookcases.

"I guess I'll look at them in order."

Taking a bunch in her arms, she threw them down onto a bookrest. Dust billowed up, and for a moment everything went pure white.

"If it were a magic book, it'd answer me if I called its name..." Etna grumbled, and began looking at them in turn.

The mountain piled atop the bookrest shrank one by one. Once she finished looking through all of one row, she moved on to the second row without sparing the time to put the first away. Though she made mountain ranges of three bookrests, there were still more and more books.

Just as she was getting fed up with it, she at last came across the family tree she had been looking for.

"This is it!"

Her fingers turned the pages faster and faster. Before the blank pages at the end was the most recent part of the family tree.

"Vesuvio, Yasurl... Got it!"

The two names were lined up beside Krichevskoy's. From there the line continued

—
"This is—"

Stunned, Etna slammed the book shut and stood up. "I have to tell Flonne-chan and the Prince."

"I wonder what you mean to tell them?"

Abruptly she heard an icy voice from behind her. Not having felt the presence at all, Etna turned around in surprise.

"Yasurl.....-sama—"

The addition of 'sama' like an afterthought seemed to irritate her, and Yasurl's eyes narrowed. They were filled with a dangerous light.

"I wonder what that look is? For a lowly servant, you don't show enough respect towards the royal family."

"You're plotting to kill the Prince—no, the King, aren't you?"

"Even though you have no proof, you're going to treat me as a traitor?" Yasurl's stretched into a thin line. "You've got guts."

Yasurl placed her right hand atop her left palm, and slowly withdrew it. From the palm of her hand, she pulled out a rod-like thing. She then extended the thing as though it were a sword. Once it exceeded one meter, Yasurl swept her right hand out to the side.

The thing struck the floor with a sharp snap. It was a whip. A whip red like blood.

"Like I did with Laharl, I'll teach you manners."

"Don't you mean, like you broke¹⁹ him?"

"My, I don't do such rude things. For a relative, it was the expected upbringing. This is a convenient tool for instructing him without touching his filthy blood, don't you think? And if he misbehaves, I can inflict punishment, too," Yasurl declared, and controlling her whip, she drew it left and right. It cracked with a shrill sound.

"Now, let's have some fun!"

The raised whip swam through the air like a living thing, and then, came down

19 The word Etna uses here indicates training or breaking animals.

towards Etna.

Etna flew to the right to dodge, and with a shrill snap, the whip struck the bookrest. Immediately after was the sound of something collapsing with a crash. When she looked, the bookrest had fallen cut cleanly in two.

"You're nimble, aren't you. Don't run away," Yasurl growled in irritation and slid one hand from where she held the whip towards the end. Flames travelled along it.

"To children who don't do as they're told, I'll apply moxibustion²⁰."

Her brandished whip swept about the library. Etna dodged, leaping or crouching, and when she saw an opening she let loose a Mega Ice spell.

Yasurl destroyed the ice attack completely with her whip, and closed the distance between her and Etna.

Frustrated that her attacks had not hit, Yasurl increased the violence of her whip's movement. Here and there the library began to catch fire, and Etna could only defend her own body with magic.

While dodging an attack, she chanted a spell of protection.

And from that resulted one moment's opening.

"I've got you!" Yasurl cried, and the tail of her whip wrapped around Etna's legs. At the same time she pulled forcefully. At her wits' end, Etna was dragged before Yasurl.

"You've made yourself a nuisance. Prepare yourself!"

Yasurl's fiery whip howled as she lifted it.

Seeking to turn the tables, Etna was about to chant a spell, but however she thought about it there was no time. Gritting her teeth, she braced herself for the blow.

But, the whip did not come flying.

Having frozen with her whip held high, Yasurl's body pitched forward and fell.

"Are you all right, Etna-san?"

Behind the fallen Yasurl, having just lowered her staff, stood Flonne.

"Shas?"

Once he had said this aloud, Laharl shook his head.

"No, you aren't, are you."

Jane looked frightened and clung to Laharl. "That's not Shas-chan....."

"Kira, huh....." Laharl narrowed his eyes.

"A minute ago you were saying there was nothing exciting here, weren't you? Starting now, I shall provide you with plenty."

Kira made an exaggerated bow, and abruptly leapt into the air. He came to a stop at a height of about five meters, and looked down at Laharl and Jane.

"You've got guts, challenging me," Laharl said.

"Challenge? Your Majesty? By no means would I do something so reckless."

"What did you say?"

"I believe you'll destroy yourself for me."

"Destroy myself, you say? If I defeat you before that, it's all over."

Laharl began to bring flames to his clenched fist. In an instant his fist was red-hot, and it produced an immense power.

"My, my, do you intend to kill Shas?"

²⁰ Moxibustion is a form of traditional Asian medicine that involves applying burning herbs to the patient's skin, or using them in conjunction with acupuncture. Sounds painful.

"Shas is just your act."

"By no means. That isn't true. Shas is right here," Kira said as though Laharl's words were unthinkable. In that instant, he opened his eyes and his expression changed to one of fear.

"Laharl-chan, what's wrong? You look scary." The voice, too, had changed to Shas's high-pitched one, and it grew anxious. "Did Kira-chan do something?"

Kira abruptly stopped looking around and bowed in jest. "See?"

"See *what*? You're a bad actor."

At Laharl's words, Jane shook her head. "No, that was Shas-chan, just now."

"What the hell is this?"

"It seems that that girl can see my form, just a little." Kira continued his explanation to Jane. "Until now no one has seen my true form, but now there is someone who sees me. And yet, for that to be a frail human child, that's the most well-crafted joke."

"You want me to make it so no one will see you?" Laharl asked.

"Are you going to fight here? Can that child withstand your magic?"

At Kira's words, Laharl froze.

"Something like the life of a human child is trivial. You cannot fight while concerning yourself with such a thing. If you're a demon, too, then surely you agree?"

Jane clung to Laharl more tightly. Laharl gritted his teeth and glared at Kira.

"Now, let's fight." Kira spread both hands and chanted a spell.

In the next moment, a huge dome of flames enveloped Laharl and Jane.

"Kira is dead."

After Flonne had reported what she had learned from her investigation of the ruins, Etna said this.

"Ehh?"

Etna continued to the astonished Flonne, "The records say that he died immediately after being born. Probably, he's a ghost."

At that, Flonne clapped her hands together. "So that's it. So that's why....."

"Why what?"

"When I tried to heal his injured leg, he ran away."

Etna nodded in comprehension.

"So then, Shas-chan and Kira-chan are the same person?" Flonne asked.

"No, that's not it. Shas is alive. In other words, Kira is possessing Shas."

Etna picked up another book.



"That, and I found this out after reading this record, but it seems like when the the Prince was young, he was left in Yasurl's care for about 100 years. Right after his mother died."

"Um, you mean when Laharl-san became sick, and his mother saved him by sacrificing her life in exchange—"

"Yep. And it seems like Yasurl, who hated humans, tormented the Prince."

"Then, the reason Laharl-san's personality is so distorted—"

"That's got nothing to do with it—at least, I get that feeling. But, well, I can imagine the reason he hates buxom women."

"That's right. But, maybe that's all right," Flonne mumbled, looking down at her own chest, and then she stole a glance at Etna beside her. She, too, was looking down at her chest. Flonne met Etna's gaze, and for some reason or other they each let out an awkward breath and smiled faintly.

"By the way, what happened with Vesuvio, Flonne-chan?"

"It was kind of strange. When I hit him with my staff, he said things like 'Ahh, that's good~! My Queen~!!' It made me uncomfortable, so I let him go."

"Ah, that was the right thing to do." Vesuvio's image came to Etna's mind, and she smiled weakly.

"Never mind that, where is Laharl-san?"

"He should be playing with Jane-chan."

The two looked at each other.

Struck by an unpleasant premonition, they left the library, burst into the castle, and headed for Laharl's room. Along the way, they caught a passing prinny and asked it:

"Where's the Prince?"

"He went somewhere with Shas-chan, dood."

"Where!?"

"I- I don't know, dood."

Releasing the prinny which shook its head not knowing what was going on, Etna headed for Laharl's room. However, it was completely empty. The two went out into the courtyard and ran up the spaceship's ramp.

"Gordon! Have you seen the Prince!?"

Seated on the sofa in the living area, Gordon and Jennifer turned surprised faces on them. Whatever they had been doing, they hurriedly adjusted their clothes.

"If you're looking for Laharl-chan, he went for a picnic with Jane and Shas-chan."

"The three of them!?" Etna said.

"That's right."

"Damn it!"

"Has something bad happened?" Gordon asked.

"Kira is trying to kill the Prince."

"Unbelievable²¹!" Jennifer exclaimed. "Surely you're joking? But, Kira-chan isn't with them."

"Shas and Kira are the same," said Flonne.

"Well, that's not quite right, but," Etna said.

"What are you talking about?" Jennifer asked.

That was where Gordon broke in.

"Wait a minute! Jane will be caught up in it!!"

21 She says this in English.

"That's right." Etna nodded as if it were no big deal.

"We're going now, Jane!"

Having lost his head, Gordon flew out of the living area and ran onto the bridge. With the same momentum, he leapt over the pilot's seat and sat down. Immediately he activated the engine.

"Calm down, Gordon!"

Jennifer's cry did not reach his ears. Unreasonably, Gordon raised the output of the inadequately-warmed engine.

The bridge began to shake, so unstable that it became impossible to stand.

"YOU ARE RECKLESS, GORDON." Thursday shrieked as he rolled.

Without raising their altitude, Gordon jammed forward the throttle.

The rear engine roared, and with a jerk the ship accelerated.

With a thud came the impact of the lower part of the ship crashing into something. But, the spaceship rushed on just the same.

Left behind were the courtyard scorched by jet flames, and the castle tower which had been destroyed when the fuselage crashed into it.

3

"My, my."

The hemisphere of flames which had enveloped Laharl dissipated, and Laharl crouched wrapped in his outspread scarf. He had pushed Jane beneath his scarf and protected her from the flames.

"Is a human child really so valuable?" Hovering in the air, Kira gave a derisive laugh.

"I'll make you regret opposing me." Laharl threw up his scarf and stood, and pointing a finger at Kira, he chanted a spell.

Just then, Kira's expression abruptly changed.

"Laharl-chan!"

At the high-pitched cry, Laharl, about to let lose magic at any moment, froze instantly.

That was when Kira's loosed flames swiftly closed in.

With Laharl unable to dodge completely, the mass of flames struck his arm. No, it wasn't that he had not dodged, but in trying to protect Jane, he had raised his arm.

"Just as I thought."

Looking at Laharl's hideously burnt arm, Kira made a face of triumph.

"Your softness is fatal. It's a miracle that you've been able to go on unharmed until now. Now I understand that you cannot win against me."

"Is that so?" Although Laharl smiled fearlessly, in a low voice he cursed, "Will those guys get here already?"

"If you're seeking aid, no one is coming. Etna and Flonne have had a fight and it seems they've broken off their friendship." Kira was smiling in enjoyment.

"Broken it off, you say?"

"Yes. Once I introduced a little instability to their affection, they began fighting. It was a simple matter."

"You did what...?"

"The slight distrust, the jealousy arising from inside of them, like expanding a balloon, all I did was pump air into it. And in the blink of an eye it ruptured. For a demon and a fallen angel to live a demon's daily routine, it's too naive."

"Hm, you greatly underestimate those two."

"Is that so?"

"Flonne's Love Freak attitude isn't that shallow. She's a love *otaku* through and through. No matter what happens, she forgives the other person. Etna gets fired up about her rationality, too. If logic follows, then she'll overlook some things."

"You've really considered this. But, I wonder if they'll be able to live up to that."

"Of course," Laharl answered, full of confidence.

"Although, I think it'll be a problem for you to last until then."²² Kira smiled cheerfully and pulled a sword from thin air. "I'm going to kill you, and have fun with it."

Swinging the sword straight for him, Kira came closer.

"You're thinking to fight me with a sword?" Laharl reached a hand for the sword at his hip—the hilt of the Overlord's sword.

"I wonder if a human child can withstand it?"

At Kira's murmur, Laharl's hand stopped. Powerful magic had a strong impact on humans. And for a small child...

With great speed, Kira came closing in on the motionless Laharl. Accompanied by a shockwave, his sword sliced sideways and he attacked Laharl and Jane.

At once, Laharl spread his scarf so that the shockwave did not go past him. Jane was unharmed. However, the price was considerable. The scarf tore sideways, and Laharl was cut open from his chest to his arm.

Fresh blood fell.

"It's as I thought."²³

Without a moment's pause, Kira thrust out his sword, and as he attacked Laharl, he raised his voice, "When one prepares for battle, one naturally raises defense, and doesn't sustain injuries. But, there are also weak-hearted people who don't do that."

"I need neither a sword nor defense. I can beat someone like you with my bare hands."

"Is that so?"

Adjusting his sword stance, Kira prepared to attack.

Laharl clenched his fist and gathered his magic. That fist had demolished even the Earth army battleships. It was unthinkable that Kira could take a direct hit and be unharmed.

Laharl was about to thrust out his red-hot fist when—

"Laharl-chan!"

Kira's face had changed in an instant.

Laharl's fist froze.

That was when Kira's sword thrust forward.

Having stiffened, Laharl was not even able to dodge, and he took Kira's attack. The tip of the sword stuck out from the back of his left shoulder.

Immediately Laharl leapt back, and the sword pulled free. Threads of blood stretched from the base of his shoulder to the tip of the sword.

22 For some reason Kira drops his typical polite forms here and for the next few lines.

23 And Kira is back to speaking politely.

"Ugh....." Laharl groaned and grasped the wound. "You use dirty tricks....."
"It's because I told Sister that we were 'playing with Laharl-chan.' Consequently, when we change places for an instant, it's still in the middle of play," Kira replied in amusement as he swung his sword to shake off the blood. Then, he unleashed the final blow.

Laharl tried to fight back, but in an instant spears of ice brought forth from a quickly chanted Mega Ice struck at Laharl and Jane.

Laharl immediately pushed Jane to the ground to protect her. At the same time, he formed a shield. But, he was one moment too late. The sharp ice slipped through his shield and tore into Laharl's body.

"Laharl-chan!?"

Struggling out from beneath his body, Jane looked at the wound-riddled Laharl and let out a scream. Blood flowed from his whole body, turning it red, and his appearance was nothing short of miserable. However, Jane rushed out in front of the sword-brandishing Kira, and spread both arms to block his way.

"Stop!"

"Don't....." Staggering, Laharl got to his feet.

"What are you playing at?" His silver eye fixed to the brim with a cold light, Kira gave a twisted smile.

"Don't pick on Laharl-chan!"

"I'm not picking on him," Kira laughed. "I'm killing him."

"You can't!"

"Don't tell me that. Or will you die for me in his place?"

"Uhn....." Although she looked like she was about to cry, Jane bit her lip and stood her ground.

"But then, you won't really do for a substitute."

"Move aside!" Laharl pushed Jane aside and headed for Kira.

"Have you finally become serious?"

"Laharl-chan, that's a scary face," came Shas's voice.

"Shall I become serious, too?" Kira asked.

"Jane-chan, let's play."

In a whirl, Kira's expression and the sound of his voice changed. Even his appearance flickered as they switched places. The power of his ghost was that strong.

Trembling, Jane could only stand behind Laharl.

Meanwhile—

"Where are you, Jane!?"

Gordon was driving recklessly at full throttle.

Flying at low altitude at the speed of sound, the spaceship threw up sand with its shockwave, smashed trees, and rushed on.

"It's because you're dashing around without knowing where you're going," Etna said.

"He's really a doting parent, isn't he," said Flonne.

Patting Gordon's shoulder, Jennifer smiled to try to put him at ease. "Jane is all right, dear."

"There's no way she could be all right caught in a fight between two demons!"

"She's all right, because Laharl-chan is there."

But, Jennifer thought, her face becoming serious, I don't know if Laharl-chan will be all right or not. That boy, he isn't as ruthless as he thinks he is.

Just then, Gordon's shout struck Jennifer's ears.

"There they are!"

She looked at the main screen, and in the middle of a grassy plain was a circular area that showed traces of scorching. In the center of that were three figures.

"Jane! We've come to save you!!" Gordon let out a yell and forced the control stick down with all his might.

The spaceship took a nosedive and plunged for the plain.

"What are you thinking!?" Etna cried.

"This is crazy!" said Flonne.

"HE IS NOT THINKING."

"Be reasonable," Jennifer said. Thanks to her immediately pulling the control stick back, they avoided crashing. Even so, a shockwave rose up with a slam and assaulted the bridge, and everyone toppled over.

"Jane!"

Gordon was the first to spring up, and he dashed from the bridge. He pushed open the hatch, and the ground was right there. The ship had landed head-first and gouged up the earth. Gordon leapt down and went running.

"Jane!"

"Papa!" Jane shouted back from behind Laharl's back. But, because Kira was between them, she could not run.

"Now, you villain. Eat my powered up ray gun of justice!"

Gordon readied the ray gun at his waist. Then Laharl's sharp voice broke in.

"Stay out of it!"

"What did you say?"

"First, your weapon won't work. Second, I'm going to finish this guy off."

Flonne leapt out of the spaceship next, and seeing Laharl's figure she raised her voice. "What are you saying, in that condition!?"

"I'm fine so stay out of it. I have to teach this guy personally."

"Teach him what?" Flonne struck the palm of her hand. "Oh, I understand! Love!"

"No!" he denied, his whole body shaking. "My greatness!"

"Shall you be recorded as the shortest-lived Overlord in the history of the Netherworld?" Kira gave a sneer and looked in the direction of the spaceship.

"Nevertheless, it's surprising that they came."

"How dare you manipulate our hearts," said Flonne.

"They do say that there's no smoke without fire, don't they? I only fanned that fire, Flonne-san."

For some reason, Flonne turned red and fell silent.

Instead, Etna, the last to come down, thrust a finger at Kira. "We see your scheme."

"Even so, we did have a showy fight, didn't we?" Flonne said.

"That fight was an everyday thing," Etna said.

"We don't fight that much."

Etna and Flonne began arguing.

"Wow, they're fighting. They mustn't," Shas's delighted voice burst out. They

could see that Kira had become Shas again and was jumping up and down.

"You be quiet!" Etna said.

"Etna-san, it isn't Shas-chan's fault," said Flonne.

"Shas and Kira are equally guilty!" Etna glared at Flonne.

"What on Earth is going on?" With his ray gun held ready, Gordon looked at the three arguing in puzzlement.

"Kira-chan died when he was born, and he's possessing Shas-chan," Flonne explained.

"He died? You mean he's a ghost²⁴?" Gordon asked with a frightened face.

"Not quite, but something like that," said Etna.

"I hate ghosts. That's scary." Shivering from a cold feeling running up his spine, Gordon drew back.

In contrast, Jennifer's eyes brightened as though she had understood something. "Wow²⁵! Don't tell me, Jane is able to see Kira-chan possessing her?"

"Why do you say that?" Flonne asked curiously.

"The first time Jane met Shas-chan, I remember she said something strange. Now I understand it was because she realized Kira-chan was a ghost."

"For the daughter of the Defender of Earth and the genius scientist to see ghosts—you say some pretty unscientific things," Gordon said.

"Taking facts as facts is what they call scientific thinking, dear," Jennifer soothed the troubled Gordon.

"That's how it is." It was Kira's voice again, and Kira returned his gaze to Laharl. He assaulted Laharl, who had pulled out his sword and stood.

As he closed in, Kira feinted that he was going to strike, and with his empty hand he unleashed a Wind spell. The gust brought forth a vacuum around Laharl, and changed to a whirlwind of blades.²⁶

Laharl swung his sword, creating an eddy in the air to try to erase the whirlwind, and then froze.

In that moment, the blades formed a swarm and swooped down on Laharl.

In a flash, fresh blood went flying.

Laharl countered and chopped through all of the blades, and once again Kira came closing in on him.

In the interval between attacks, Kira feinted swings at Jane. Each time, Laharl's attention was drawn to Jane, and then, he suffered injuries. When he tried to shift to attacking—

"Laharl-chan, over here, over here!"

Shas abruptly raised her high-pitched voice. He stopped his attack, and Kira's swiftly unleashed blow pierced his body.

"What's wrong, Laharl-chan? Let's play more," Shas said impatiently to Laharl, who had fallen forward onto his knees.

"Laharl-san, please stop already!" Flonne cried, no longer able to watch.

24 The word Gordon uses for "ghost" is used when talking about haunted houses and ghost stories. What the others use is a little closer to "spirit."

25 Again, she says this in English.

26 The word *kamaitachi* is used here. Apparently one meaning of this is a trio of demonic weasels which appear in a whirlwind to scratch people. I'm assuming that its use here is more figurative and describes instead sickle-like blades made of air. But with Disgaea, you never know. They could be weasels.

"This isn't like you, Prince. Please just get to it and kill him," Etna shouted, getting irritated, too.

"You spectators sure are noisy....."

Laharl gave a shout and got to his feet. The instant his scarf fluttered, spatters of blood went flying. It was impossible to tell what color the scarf had been originally because of the blood.

"Laharl-chan, we have to stop your bleeding."

Knowing that the origin of half of those wounds lay with her, Jane unfastened her tie and wrapped it around Laharl's leg. But, it was not strong enough to bind the wound.

"If he can beat me at this level, then I can't prove myself the Overlord." Laharl forced his voice out through gritted teeth, and started to advance on Kira. He desperately held out against tripping over his own legs and falling.

"If this is how it is, then I—" Flonne began.

A hand intercepted her as she was about to butt in.

"Gordon-san?"

Flonne looked to the side, and Gordon stood at his full height watching Laharl.

"Let him do it," Gordon said. "He has his own way of doing things."

"What do you mean, his way? I can't see any such thing."

"Even so, you'll see it. If you have love." Gordon's eyes were blazing.

"Love....." Flonne's eyes, too, began to blaze. "I understand! Laharl-san is trying to teach Kira-chan about love, isn't he!!"

"I don't think that's it," Etna interjected quietly with an incredulous face, but Flonne did not hear her.

"Laharl-san, I will watch over you!" Clenching a fist, Flonne fixed Laharl with a fiery gaze.

"Right, I, too, will make certain with my own eyes!" Gordon shouted hotly, his arms folded.

"Can it!" Laharl shouted.

Driving the surrounding noise from his ears, Laharl concentrated on what was in front of his eyes.

With an expression of composure, Kira swung his sword around with complete mastery, as though it were a part of his body. His eyes darted around in amusement as he thought about how next to attack.

"Shas....." Laharl suppressed his body's shaking and raised his voice. "Do you mean to kill us?"

"Aren't we just playing?" came Shas's voice.

"Don't listen to him, Sister."

Laharl ignored Kira's voice and went on. "If Jane and I die, then we won't be able to play with you anymore."

"That's not true."

"It is. Do you understand what will happen when we die?"

"He's playing at riddles, Sister."

"Once I die, I'll become a prinny," Laharl said.

"See?" Kira laughed.

"Is Laharl-chan's prinny cute? I want to see!" Shas jumped up and down. "Will Jane-chan become a prinny, too?"

"Jane probably won't. Once I become a prinny, I'll work in the castle. So I won't

have the time to play. And then after a while I'll be cleansed and go to the red moon." Laharl pointed to the moon suspended in the daylight sky. It was not red now, but a normal moon. "Once that happens, we'll never meet again, and we won't be able to play. Is that really all right with you?"

"We can never play again?"

"That's right."

"Never ever?"

"Yeah."

"Don't lend him your ear, Sister. His Majesty is only playing."

"Kira and I aren't playing. That guy is trying to kill me."

"Is that true, Kira-chan?"

"It's a lie, Sister."

"It's true, Shas."

Having come out in front of Laharl, Jane clenched a fist and cried, "It's true, Shas-chan."

"It's a lie!" As he shouted, Kira tried to stab at Laharl. But, his body suddenly stopped its motion. As though pulled back by threads binding his arms and legs, he came to a sudden stop.

"It's true, isn't it, Kira-chan?"

"It's a lie!" Kira shouted again. But, his body did not move.

"Even though I wanted to play more with Laharl-chan and Jane-chan!" Shas cried as she clenched a fist and stooped. "Get out! I won't lend you my body anymore!!"

"Why, why won't you believe what I say, Sister?" Shas said angrily in Kira's voice.

"Because, now I understand what Kira-chan is thinking," Shas said, puffing out her cheeks.

"If this is what it's come to, then I'll steal your body, Sister! I'll make it my body!!"

Kira and Shas's shouting voices mingled, and something like a shimmer of heat rose up as if to envelop Kira.

"Stop, Kira!"

Laharl ran towards Kira. But, he could not get inside the heat haze. The power surrounding Kira's body became even stronger, and it seemed even Laharl was repelled.

"La-ha-rl.....-cha.....n—" Shas's pained voice squeezed out.

"Do you mean to kill Shas!?" As he shouted, Laharl gathered power into his fist and drove his arm into the midst of the burning air.

"I'll be damned if I let you do as you want to Shas!"

The heat haze emitted flames as it began to



tear to pieces. But, Laharl's arm, too, was torn to shreds by a power that could not be seen by the eye.

"Stay back!"

Together with Kira's shout, the power of the heat shimmer increased, and Laharl was forced back.

"I should have been born alive. Not my sister, but me!"

Kira and Laharl—they struggled against each other's power, and let out angry roars.

In the middle that straining tension—

"Hey, you, does that mean you're okay with a woman's body?" Etna's indifferent voice rang out.

In that moment, Kira's movements stopped as though he had frozen.

At the same time, Flonne went running out.

"Giga Heal!"

Kira tried to fly away, but he was one moment too late. A green light billowed up and surrounded Kira.

"Flonne-chan, nice one!"

Life energy poured into the entire surrounding area, and Laharl's wounds, too, healed. But, Kira— Possessing Shas's body, only Kira raised a cry of anguish as the life energy poured into him.

"I— I won't accept it. For you to be the Overlord—"

At the last glaring at Laharl, Kira dropped to his knees and then fell to the ground.

"Shas!"

Laharl ran up and lifted Shas into his arms. Flonne came up beside him and held the palm of her hand to Shas's forehead.

"She's all right. She was just forced to use too much power."

"Is that it. That's a relief....."

Flonne thought she saw something shine in Laharl's eyes, but without saying anything, she embraced Shas and Laharl.

Next Time's Preview

次回予告



Epilogue

"What the hell is this!?"

The instant Laharl took a seat in the chair in his office, he sprang back up in surprise. The chair had bitten him.

"Yay, you got caught."

"Shas, so it was you....." As he tore off the cushion which had bitten him in the rear, Laharl glared in the direction of the voice he heard from the recesses of the room.

"Was the pit your doing, too?"

"Yes, and?"

"Then what about the *shokuma*? And the poison arrows?"

"All me!"

"I won't forgive you!" Laharl snapped at Shas, who showed absolutely no sign of remorse.

"Yay, a game of tag²⁷!" Shas shouted and ran out.

As he was about to leave his room to run after Shas, Laharl gave up and his legs stopped.

"I don't know which one is more villainous."

You saved her, didn't you? Laharl thought, and slumped his shoulders dejectedly. He made an about-face to return to his office, and at the same moment, his foot slipped.

"Woah!"

His leading foot went sliding rapidly forward. Hurriedly he flew up into the air, and escaped the danger.

When he lowered to the floor and looked at his feet, he saw that a yellow peel had been placed there.

"And who put this here!?"

"You got caught!" Jane called out in a delighted voice from the other end of the hallway, and then she went running.

"Laharl-chan fell on the banana peel." She spread it about in a loud voice as she ran off.

"Seriously....." Laharl muttered as he returned to his office.

Two days after that incident, Vesuvio and Yasurl had left their parting threats and returned home to their own estate. Shas had said that she didn't want to go home, and remained behind. Flonne had said that she would take charge of her, so it turned out that she was living here for the time being.

Following a knock, there came Etna's voice.

"Prince, Gordon says he's leaving."

Gordon and the others were later than they had planned, but he had heard that they were going home now.

"I'm coming."

Laharl stood and left his office.

The spaceship in the courtyard was already finishing its warm-up. The burnt walls and destroyed towers were one way or another being repaired. Gordon's departure had naturally been delayed in order to fix them.

"You're going now?" Laharl asked.

²⁷ This time she actually does say tag.

"Yeah. Don't call me anymore," said Gordon.
"That's right. I probably won't call you while you're alive."
"That's what I'm asking you."
Gordon held out a hand, and after thinking for a moment, Laharl grinned.
"Well, at any rate, once you die, you'll come to the Netherworld as a prinny."
"Wait a second. Why must I, the Defender of Earth, fall to the Netherworld?"
"Because I'll call you."
"Even if you die, there's no escaping the 'Defender of the Netherworld.'"
At Etna's jeering, Gordon gave her a look that said 'give me a break,' and then all three of them burst into laughter at once.
A little distance from that circle stood Flonne.
Separating from Gordon, Laharl, and the others in the midst of their conversation, Jane jogged away.
"Ne, what's wrong, Flonne-chan?" Jane asked her as she noticed her and stepped up.
"Just something, a thought." Her gaze was on Laharl.
"Did Laharl-chan do something?"
"I don't know. When I look at Laharl-san, I have a feeling like a pain in my chest ___"
Jane nodded as though she understood. "Mm, well, you know, when there's someone you like, just thinking about that person makes your chest hurt."
"Is that so?"
"Yeah. It's like that with me, too."
"What!?! Jane, is there some man that you like?" Gordon had come to call her, and on hearing those words, the color of his face changed.
"Uh-oh, he found out." Jane pressed the palm of her hand to her mouth.
"Jane, tell me in detail. What sort of man is he?"
"Dear, let's go into the ship," Jennifer prompted.
"Wait! I won't forgive this! I won't allow Jane to associate with men!!"
"Dear!" Jennifer caught Gordon's arm and hauled him along, and looked at Jane over her shoulder. "Jane, it's time you said your goodbyes."
"Yeah....." Jane's face fell at that, and she turned to face Flonne. "Then, bye, Flonne-chan."
"We'll meet again someday."
"After I'm dead, right?"
"And yet, that isn't saying we can't see each other, right?"
"Yeah."
Flonne and Jane exchanged smiles and parted.
"That's it, isn't it?" Flonne nodded to herself. "That is to say, I like Laharl-san, don't I?"
As though she understood it now, Flonne murmured, "That's right. This is love, too. It's not at all different from everything up until now, is it?"
Reaching a hasty conclusion, Flonne walked off.
"Flonne-chan, Gordon says he's leaving already."
"I'm coming now," Flonne called, and joined the circle with Etna and the others. They saw Gordon's family off.
Raising a thunderous roar, the spaceship ascended.

Looking up at the scene from inside the castle was a group of demons.
"It seems this Oooverlord's reign will be looong, huhhh," said a zombie.
"I heard the boss of the opposing faction turned tail and ran," said a gargoyle.
"He has connections to both Celestia and the Human World. He has no enemies ready to face him," said a golem.
"Is that so?"
"What, do you have some complaint?"
The one who had asked the question was a single prinny. His cold, silver-colored eye was different from the other.
"No, I'm only concerned whether it's all right for one so soft to be Overlord."
"Hey you, the newbie over there! Go take the orientation like you're supposed to."
Etna had returned from the farewell, and her voice came flying.
"Yes, yes."
"It's not 'yes.' The way prinnies speak, it's 'yes, dood!' And when talking about her, call her 'Etna-san.'"
"I know," the prinny replied coldly to the gargoyle's warning, and departed with a clacking sound.
"What was with that guy just now?"
The demons looked at each other.
"By some chance, was that—" Etna watched the prinny go and made a grim face. But, in the next moment—
"Well, I guess it's fine."
She shrugged it off lightly, and Etna looked at Laharl, who was still together with Shas in the courtyard.
"Maybe I'll start his training over from square one," Etna murmured in amusement, and noticing her, Shas waved a hand to her.
Both of her eyes had changed to gold, and the evil gaze had vanished.

Next Time's Preview

次回予告



Afterward

From the very beginning, this story is the sequel to the novel *Makai Senki Disgaea: Enter the Maoh*. Because it is directly connected to a novel somewhat different from the game, I think even those who have beaten the game will understand it better if they read the previous volume.

And, well, that's all the advertisement I'm going to make.

Hello, this is Kamishiro.

The joke at the end of the previous volume predicted that there would be a second volume, but now it's really happened. It was meant entirely as a Disgaea-style joke, but there were so many readers who took it seriously and wrote me questions like "When is volume two?" and "It's coming out, right?" It was a little unexpected, but consequently it really came out. I'm grateful.

Well then, this time I took the liberty of daring to write a story not from the game.

Last time, I was rushing to fit so much of the game into one volume, and so I tried to write a little about the thoughts of the main characters and the state of the Netherworld which I hadn't much described.

A few new characters, Laharl's family, appear. Some of you may have noticed, but most of the characters' names are derived from volcanoes. So, the new characters similarly have the names of volcanoes. I thought it might be fun to broaden the world map, too.

Anyway, I've written the girls as cute, energetic, and villainous—I mean, innocent. Please enjoy it.

Oh, that's right. Supposedly they're coming out with figures. I didn't know when I was writing this volume, and when I heard afterwards, I laughed.

Finally, the editors who brought about my story, Chou Niku-san who drew not only the game characters but also my original characters, and, lastly, everyone at Nippon Ichi Software who gave the OK to this project, you have my thanks.

And, of course, my readers who hold this in your hands, you have my greatest thanks.

October 24, 2003

While listening to the *Secondhand Lions* OST...