

Chapter 156 - Invasion into Suzu's City Hall ⑬

"G-Grandfather...!?"

Rina is bewildered by Sayama Kotetsu who has readied his katana.

"Rina! Draw your sword!"

Kotetsu swings his katana down at Rina from overhead. Rina jumps backwards, dodging the blade by a hair's breadth and thus escaping a serious injury, but...she's still wearing an expression, betraying her confusion.

"Rina! If you say that the path you've walked is correct...show it to me with your sword!"

"G-Got it..."

Rina finally readies her sword in response to Kotetsu's spirited words.

"Head of the Sayama Style — Sayama Kotetsu, here I come!"

Kotetsu swiftly charges in front of Rina, and flashes his katana sideways.

"——gh!?"

Rina stops Kotetsu's slash with the blade of Dáinsleif, but she staggers with a pained look as she's been unable to completely kill its force.

"I see hesitation in your swordsmanship! So you have been brainwashed after all!?"

Kotetsu launches further attacks at Rina, who has lost her balance. Rina doesn't receive a fatal wound thanks to her superhuman sword handling, but she's been forced into a one-sided, defensive fight.

"Rina! Is this the extent of your resolve!? You've been prattling on about your own path...with a swordsmanship of such a level!?"

While donning an angry expression, Kotetsu swings his katana down, sweeps, and thrusts...continuing to shower with severe blows.

If you're only talking about the weapons they use, Rina's sword — Dáinsleif, is probably several leagues above Kotetsu's katana. It's the same when it comes to their armor. If they had fought under the same conditions, Rina might have died by now...

To give it an example, the difference in ability between both goes as far as the difference between a master and an amateur.

"Rina! What are you doing! Show him your real power!"

I unintentionally shout.

Master and amateur...? Don't kid around! Rina isn't an amateur! She's the strongest sword master

among my subordinates. Kotetsu is a sword master to the extent of being extolled as 『Sword King』, but I can't believe that the difference between them goes this far.

"Even this late in the game...you're holding back with me...Sayama Kotetsu as your opponent!?"

The one stirred by my yell isn't Rina but Kotetsu. Kotetsu swings his katana down from an overhead position with all his soul.

"——ng!?"

Rina blocks his swing with Dáinsleif, but falls backwards as she is unable to kill the force behind it.

"...Only this far, eh? As head of the Sayama Style...no, Rina, as your grandfather...it'll probably be my duty to perform the last rites at your funeral."

Kotetsu slowly raises his katana overhead in front of the fallen Rina.

Tsk!? This is bad! At this rate I'm going to lose a precious subordinate...Rina!

I amass mana in my right hand.

It might turn into a melee...it might become a war of attrition, but...I don't give a damn!

"I'll immediately follow after you as well... Wait for me on the other side with our family..."

No trace of his previous anger is to be found on Kotetsu's face. It's an expression full of love...and yet somewhat sad. He slowly swings down his katana.

Be in time! ——《Dark...

——!?"

At the moment I'm about to shoot a 《Dark Lance》 at Kotetsu——

A figure, who has suddenly appeared, is cut apart by Kotetsu's katana.

"...Eh? G-Guy..."

Rina, who had resolved herself for death, mutters the name of the one who has appeared in front of her.

"Hah...R-Rina...jou...sorry...for interrupting...your...family reunion..."

Guy smiles at Rina even while having suffered a lethal wound to his torso.

"Wh-...!? A-A monster...has voluntarily sacrificed itself...to protect Rina!?"

Kotetsu doesn't feel angry, but rather surprised by Guy who has gotten in-between their one-on-one, but...

"What nerve to interrupt a sacred duel!"

"In the end, they're just the likes of monsters!"

"Cowards!"

"Know some shame!"

The humans, who have watched the duel between Kotetsu and Rina, loudly protest. I guess, with this...a war will be unavoidable... Still, well done, Guy. Seeing that Guy has sacrificed himself, I grasp that the persuasion has failed.

——All hands, get ready for ba...

"Listen, imprudent humans! My name is Guy Shion! I pledge on my creator, Shion-sama, and my mother, the moon! My action just now was my very own!"

Guy yells very loudly when I'm about to give the order for a general offensive.

"The sin of having disgraces the sacred occasion of a duel...and above all, the sin of having stained Shion-sama's dignity...I shall take it all upon me, and make up for it with my own life! 『Sword King』! Behead...this foolish me!"

Guy spreads both arms, and offers himself to 『Sword King』 — Sayama Kotetsu.

"That fine?"

"Hah! Of course. Or do you wish for the killing between you humans and us to escalate?"

Kotetsu adjusts his katana, and looks into the eyes of Guy.

"G-Grandfather! Sto——"

"Sorry!"

Disregarding Rina's cry, Kotetsu swings his katana down at Guy.

"——gh!? O-Old man...Rina's...swordsmanship...isn't like that..."

The defenseless Guy is bisected by Kotetsu's katana.

"I shall admit. Even monsters have personalities."

Kotetsu clears away Guy's blood from his katana by swinging it.

"G-Guy...w-why...why...did you cover for someone like me...?"

Rina cries while embracing Guy's corpse.

"Shedding tears for the likes of a monster, huh...?"

"...Shut up."

"What was that?"

"Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! He's not the likes of a monster...he's Guy!"

"Hoo...even though it's cheeky, bloodthirst is dwelling in your eyes."

Kotetsu narrows his eyes at his granddaughter who's fuming with anger.

"Guy...I'm sorry. You died because of the weakness of my heart..."

"Indeed. Your weakness...killed his monster."

"...Shut up! Grandfather...no, 『Sword King』 — Sayama Kotetsu! Rina Shion will take you on as Demon King Shion's subordinate!"

Wiping away her tears, Rina readies her sword towards 『Sword King』 with eyes full of murder.

Chapter 157 - Invasion into Suzu's City Hall ⑭

"Hoh...finally your eyes look like those of a capable swordsman."

Sayama Kotetsu narrows his eyes in front of his granddaughter who has bloodlust oozing out of her body.

"Don't look down on me!"

Rina, who's eyed by her grandfather, shortens the combat distance with a sharp step-in, and unleashes a fierce slash — 《Slash》.

"It's a good slash...but, you're naive!"

Kotetsu matches his katana with Rina's slash heading down at him, and averts it to the side with a motion as if letting it flow away.

"Not yet!"

However, unleashes a chain of attacks at Kotetsu with a furious expression.

"You think a sword dominated by rage will be able to hit me!?"

"Shut up! Shut up! Shut uuuuupp!"

While parrying the violent, wide swings of Rina with skillful sword techniques, Kotetsu occasionally adds gash to Rina's body with a counter slash.

"Swinging your sword with strength, huh...? Having succumbed to the path of evil, you completely forgot even about swordsmanship, I guess."

As he turns a terribly sad look at Rina, Kotetsu stabs Rina's shoulder with a sharp thrust.

"——gh!?"

Even while holding her shoulder, Rina looks at Kotetsu with eyes full of loathe.

"Rina...I was happy to see that you were alive... But, now you've fallen to evil. In that case, I think it's my duty as your grandfather...to grant you a peaceful death."

Kotetsu slowly raises his sword overhead.
The difference in ability is plain, I suppose...
Once I try to intervene with their duel...

"Rina! Does your swordsmanship amount to only that much!? Guy has...what did he say about your swordsmanship!?"

Layla hurls words full of anger at Rina.

"My...swordsmanship?"

Rina dumbfoundedly gazes at her beloved sword — Dáinsleif.

"It's my final compassion for you...you shall pass on with one slash!"

Once Kotetsu swings his katana down in a flowing motion from its overhead position——
Rina received his katana by swinging her sword upwards out of a natural stance. Just like that, she nimbly jumps backwards, and unleashes a sword flash with a fluent motion.

"——《Moon Slash》!"

Rina's slash draws an arc, reaching Kotetsu for the first time.
That's the usual movement I've always watched through my smartphone, Rina's sword technique when she fought against Izayoi.
At long last, the Rina I know of has returned as the strongest sword master among my subordinates.



The battle between Rina, who has recovered her form, and Kotetsu lasts more than one hour afterwards.

Probably because they belong to the same sword style, both lack a conclusive finisher...and thus keep repeating an exchange of sophisticated sword techniques.

Kotetsu excels in technique, but likely because of her youth, Rina is superior in strength. Occasionally, Rina falls into a situation of being overwhelmed, but the quality of her equipment compensates for that difference.

"Kakaka! You've become strong...Rina!"

"Grandfather...you're way too energetic for your age!"

The grandfather who's called 『Sword King』, and his granddaughter who was known as 『Hero of the Black Sword』 trade sword slashes while smiling at each other.

"As long as you have that fighting spirit...you might even be able to become the number one in Japan."

"At this point I have no interest in being number one in Japan anymore!"

Their swords clash, making a metallic sound reverberate into their vicinity.

"Haaaaa!"

While Rina's sword and Kotetsu's katana are locked in a balance, Rina pushes Dáinsleif through by sheer strength alongside a spirited yell. Kotetsu, overmatched by her power, is knocked backwards, staggers, and falls on his backside.

Grandfather and granddaughter. In the end, the element dictating the winner of the two is — the difference in stamina.

"Grandfather...I've won. Please give up."

Rina thrusts the point of Dáinsleif at Kotetsu's throat, and gives him a final chance.

"...Kill me. You will exhibit your resolve by killing me."

Even after having been driven into a corner, Kotetsu glares at Rina with eyes full of unwavering will, and rejects her final offer.

"...Very well. Grandfather — resolve yourself!"

Even while showing an expression that has a tragic touch due to Kotetsu's reply, she stares at Kotetsu with eyes full of determination — killing intent, and tightly grasps Dáinsleif's hilt.

"——《Shining...》"

"Wait!"

Just when Rina is about to resolutely bring down Dáinsleif clad in its sacred light, I order Rina to cease.

Both Rina and Kotetsu turn their eyes in my eyes as the originator of the call to halt.

"Why did you stop her?"

"Let me ask in reverse, why are you hurrying to your death?"

I return his question with one of my own while approaching Kotetsu who asks me with an enraged look.

"It's because I lost."

"But, you're still alive, are you not?"

"This is not a training bout, but a duel to the death. Is it not?"

"It's not."

I deny Kotetsu who answers dispassionately.

"It's not, you say...?"

"This is a negotiation. Didn't I tell you so in the beginning?"

"What bullshit...!"

Kotetsu throws a fit at my reply.

"Sayama Kotetsu, let me ask you, why are you hurrying to your death?"

"It's because I lost."

"But, you're still alive, are you not?"

The dialogue between Kotetsu and me is looping.

This is the critical moment. If I succeed in persuading him...I'll gain a lot. I make my brain work at full throttle.

"Demon King! What is that you want to say!?"

"Won't you live, and walk through a second life together with your family — Rina?"

"Don't underestimate me! Are you telling me to betray the people I ought to protect...and change sides to you, a Demon King!?"

"If you get straight to the point, I suppose that's how it is. Your granddaughter has survived. In other words, I'm not your target of revenge. Why are you fighting despite that? And, why are you hurrying to your death?"

"You bastard are a Demon King, and I'm a human! I'm fighting for the sake of protecting the people! And, as head of the Sayama Style — something like betraying my people is impossible!"

He's quite the stubborn old man. However, Kotetsu has accepted a discussion with me, not through swords, but through words. In that case, the chance of me persuading him isn't nil.

"For the sake of protecting the people, huh...? Isn't that all the more a reason to negotiate with me then?"

"Don't screw with me!"

"I'm not. I'm serious with you. You want to protect the people, right? Don't you think that negotiating would be the best course of action towards that end? What will happen if we kill each other from now on? Both sides will spill a lot of blood. If you surrender...I will guarantee the safety of Suzu's citizens you've been protecting."

"What's the guarantee that you will keep your promise!?"

It's truly difficult to persuade humans... Even though an ordinary human would readily give up if they're cornered onto the verge of being killed...

"Guarantee, eh...? Rather than a guarantee, it's a proof, but one is Rina. It's hard to call it safe, but I think she leads a fulfilled life?"

"Grandfather! I have never regretted becoming Shion's subordinate!"

I get Rina to cover my words.

"The other proof is...the existence of civilians, humans who don't help with the fighting like Rina, I guess. I will show you the livelihood of the humans who're now leading a new life in my Domain. You won't call it a trap, will you? Keeping you alive in this situation and taking you into my Domain; there's no point in such an elaborate trap, is there? While at it, I will allow you to take up to eleven people with you, okay?"

I keep on talking, attempting to persuade Kotetsu. Killing him is easy. However, if we killed Kotetsu here, it'd definitely trigger a battle with the more than 30,000 remaining humans.

"What's your aim?"

Kotetsu asks me with a suspicious look.

"My aim is — a peaceful rule of Suzu City. And if I were to go even further, you —— 『Sword King』 Sayama Kotetsu."

"Me, you say...?"

"Indeed. You're strong. If possible, I'd like you to fight under me as my subordinate. While at it, I'm hoping that your pupils - I guess that's what they are - the group wearing battle surcoats would join as well."

I shift my eyes to the group in battle surcoats behind Kotetsu, and frankly tell him my true motives.

"Oh, let me tell you just in case, but I won't make all the humans, who become my subordinates, fight for me, okay? I will guarantee a safe life inside my Domain for those refusing to fight."

I suggest a special condition to Kotetsu.

"Who are the opponents we would fight? Wouldn't it be people who oppose your Demon King bastards all over the place like us!?"

"No...is what I'd like to say, but unfortunately humans, who take hostile actions against me, will also be included among the targets, I fear."

"Betraying humanity...you're telling us to submit to a Demon King?"

"Hmm...the nuance here is slightly different. Even the Demon Kings ruling Domains all around my Domain will be included among the targets — in short, they're all my enemies."

Everyone except for those under my rule are enemies to a Demon King like me. Even though humans can cooperate with each other, Demon Kings can't do the same. It's a truly, irrational world.

"All Demon Kings and humans are going to be the enemy, eh...?"

"That's how it will be. However, if you become my subordinate, your granddaughter will become your ally."

If the persuasion fails with this, what else could I field? I wrack my brain while estimating Kotetsu's thought process.

"Rina."

"Yes."

"Is this guy...Demon King Shion trustworthy?"

"Yes! You can trust Demon King Shion! You can trust him much more than the humans who are praised so exaggeratedly as 『Heroes』!"

Rina answers with a voice, overflowing with confidence. I've never talked with Rina about her time as 『Hero』, but the events back then appear to have become quite the trauma.

"Can you say those words are true...while swearing on the name of Sayama!?"

"Yes! I swear on the name of Sayama...on father, mother, and elder brother, they're the truth!"

"I see..."

Hearing Rina's powerful reply, Kotetsu closes his eyes, and after brooding for a short while — he informs us of his decision.