

## **Chapter 205 - Current State of the Ishikawa Prefecture**

"Damn it, who was the idiot who added booze to the ceremony...!?" I grumble all by myself in my room after slipping away from the party.

"Wasn't it Tamura-senseiii?"

——!

My body quivers as I suddenly hear Kanon's voice.

"Tamura...-sensei?"

"Yes. She's working as a teacher at the school, so everyone's calling her Tamura-sensei."

"If she's a teacher, she shouldn't allow alcohol on an occasion also joined by minors..."

"Fufufu...the alcohol has been a request by all of the leaders."

"Hooh, a request by the leaders, eh...? Who specifically?" I squint my eyes, piercing Kanon with my gaze.

"U-Umm...t-that's...I guess I should explain that I've only heard about it in rumors..."

——Answer my question precisely, without hiding anything! Also, roll up your skirt!

"Eh!? Wai-...!?! It's been Takaharu-san, Sarah-san, Hibiki-san, Yataro-san, Kotetsu-san, and Saburou! Why did you add the second ordeeeeeerrr!" Kanon names the ringleaders while rolling up her skirt.

"It's a punishment for trying to hide something from me. Rather, that's all the leaders except for the created bloodkin, no!?! Is that really true? Leaving aside Takaharu and the others, but even Kotetsu?"

"Y-Yes! According to him, alcohol is the best way to deepen friendships."

I'm greatly troubled after hearing Kanon's reply.

"So...why are you here...in my room, Kanon?"

"I've seen you slip out, so I tailed you! Ehehe."

For some reason Kanon proudly confesses that she stalked me.

"Haaah...well, whatever." After sighing deeply, I sit down on the chair in my room.

"So, what are you going to do after coming back here, Shion-san? Umm, as your strategist I believe it's an important duty for a Demon King to deepen his friendship with all the subordinates." Kanon

declares with a braggy look.

"I'll show my face once they've calmed down. Right now I want to think for a bit in a quiet place."

"Oh my...does that mean I'm in your way toooo?"

"No, it's a good opportunity...I'm just about to sort my thoughts anyway. Keep me company for a bit."

"Okaaay!" Kanon sits down on my shoulder while smiling happily. "So what have you been thinking about?"

"Our future strategy, I guess."

"In other words...the strategy against Kanezawa's humans?"

"Well, yeah. Currently Kanezawa's humans are ruling over the south of Kanezawa and Hakusan. They're in the middle of an ebbing and flowing exchange of battles with Kaoru who rules over the prefecture's south."

"Right. The humans hinder Kaoru from advancing north, and Kaoru prevents the humans from liberating domains... The last time Kanezawa's humans liberated a sector was one month ago, according to the net. On the other hand, Kaoru's last Reign was also a month ago."

Oddly, the battle between Kanezawa's humans and Kaoru is in an equilibrium. At the moment, both sides try to use any gap in the defense of the other to expand their territory, but...as result the war has lulled with just a few skirmishes here and there. If either side were to throw in all their forces, a liberation of sectors or a «Reign» by Kaoru should be possible, but...

"The reason why it's balanced is..."

"Considering the timing, it's got to be your —— Aster Empire's presence." Kanon finishes my words.

Them having limited their activities to skirmishes started one month ago. What happened one month ago? I unified the prefecture's north.

Now that I achieved a unification of the prefecture's north, my next target for invasion would be — Kanezawa's south. There's also the option of me doing something unexpected by invading Toyama's prefecture, but...there's no merit in pulling off such a move. Provoking the humans and Demon Kings of Toyama would be foolish.

On the other hand, I wouldn't produce any new enemies even if I were to use «Reign» in Kanezawa. Therefore, the humans of Kanezawa and Kaoru are cautious of what I'm going to do next.

In the eyes of the humans, throwing all their forces at Karou would lead to permitting my use of «Reign». From their standpoint, Kaoru and I are similar threats. Even if they were to liberate the Nomi District, it'd be pointless if I were to usurp Kanezawa's south in exchange.

Likewise, if Kaoru used all his forces to start 《Reigns》, the human's main force would shift to defense. Kaoru likely wouldn't be amused if I gained Kanezawa's south by using that opportunity.

And, if I launch 《Reigns》 in Kanezawa's south...the human's main force would shift to defense. Moreover, I wouldn't be amused if Kaoru gained Hakusan by using that opportunity either.

As a result of these three-sided, interwoven interests, the current situation has progressed into a lull.

"If Kanezawa's humans or Kaoru start a flashy battle...things would become much easier."

"I'm sure the other parties think the very same."

"Figures... Having said that, if the current situation continues...we'll fall behind the Demon Kings of other prefectures."

"Yeah, the Thirteen Evil Stars are steadily expanding their domains."

"For this reason, I'm going to devise a plan."

"Fufufu...it's time for your sinister schemes, isn't it Shion-san?" Kanon smiles evilly like a bad governor planning some conspiracy.

"So, self-alleged strategist, do you have a superb plan at hand for me?"

"Wh-!? Now all of a sudden you outsource it to me...!?"

"You're a strategist, aren't you?"

"Yes! You can entrust this important duty to your strategist Kanon!" Kanon is confused for a moment, but immediately recovers and hits her chest. "It isn't the first time for us to fall into a situation like this!"

"Hoo? Meaning?"

"The current situation...resembles the time when we faced off against Kanta and Alyssa!"

"Okay, and?"

"Back then the intentions of three sides were jumbled together as well...and there was the possibility of a stalemate. But! We magnificently got through that situation by coming up with a plan!"

"The one coming up with the plan was me, though."

Ignoring my retort, Kanon continues talking in an elated manner, "Kaoru's race is — devil! In other words, this time we'll have Yataro-san pretend to be Kaoru...and get him to attack the humans of Kanezawa! If we do that, the humans of Kanezawa should direct their desire for revenge at Kaoru, I'm sure! Fu fu fu...how about this!" Kanon looks at me with eyes full of anticipation and a bold smile.

"Yeaah!" I applaud Kanon's remark in an exaggerated manner.

"T-This response means..."

"Correct, that plan is a dud."

Kanon slumps her shoulders in response to my merciless rejection.

## **Chapter 206 - A Burning Lance at the Mastermind**

"And the reason is...?"

"There are several, but to put it simply—the situation was different last time." I explain to Kanon while using this as an opportunity to collect my thoughts.

"Situation? Not all three parties are Demon Kings...as humans are also in the mix this time. That's what you mean?" Kanon tilts her head in confusion.

"That's a part of it as well, but the biggest difference is the time, I'd say."

"Time...?"

"Yeah, when did we fight against Alyssa and Kanta"

"Hmm...I think it was May last year."

"And what was the situation back then...?"

"Huh? Alyssa, Kanta, and you were the last surviving Demon Kings in Kanezawa...and the humans weren't that much of a threat!"

Hmm...this time I can't really guide Kanon to where I want her to be.

"Last time, everyone was still fumbling in the dark about how to deal with this broken world. The groups of monsters leaving Domains were few, and neither the Demon Kings nor the humans really knew how this new world works."

"I see, I see."

"That's why such a simple plan succeeded back then. However, nowadays, things have become a bit clearer, and information about me is going around as well."

At that time, there was a preconceived notion to blame Alyssa as the perpetrator of the goblin attacks. But, how would it turn out today, now that a certain extent of information was available to mankind?

"Moreover, the geographical circumstances are quite bad as well. Even if I had Yataro attack the humans while leading a group of devil-type monsters...it'd be very obvious that it's my scheme if they come from the north. Even if they circle around to the south first, would it be possible for them to move stealthily without being found by the humans? Assuming they succeeded, what if Kaoru's subordinates attacked mine?"

"It'd immediately make it apparent that it's your handiwork, Shion-san."

Moving south without being spotted by the humans, and not suffering any attacks by Kaoru - the difficulty to succeed under these conditions is absurdly high. Moreover, if it fails, it'll immediately expose my movements.

"Therefore, rejected."

"Okay, I see...the path for the matchless strategist Kanon to be relied upon is still very long."

Kanon slumps her shoulders in disappointment. Matchless strategist? Rely on Kanon...? Who? Me? That future will never come to pass, I'm sure.

"So, what kind of plan did you come up with, Shion-san?" Kanon hurls at me as if to vent her anger after seeing me smiling wryly.

"Let's see...what's the current situation of the three parties — me, Kaoru and Kanezawa's humans?"

"A stalemate?"

"What's the reason for the stalemate?"

"Umm...all parties are waiting for someone to make the first move...?"

"Oh! ...Correct!"

"What's with the 『Oh!』!? You're so rude!"

The vision in my head continues to take clear shape as I'm talking with Kanon.

"In that case — we just need to move first."

"Eh? Isn't that just what our enemy wishes?"

"And who's that enemy?"

"This time it's Kaoru."

The current situation isn't a stalemate between three parties. Kaoru and I are in a stalemate due to another power, the humans, standing between us.

"Assuming I'd move first — how would Kaoru move if I launched a 《Reign》 against the humans?"

"That's...he'd start 《Reign》 in Hakusan as if his life depended on it."

"See. That's the end of the stalemate."

The stalemate will break apart if someone makes a move. However, no one moves, and that's a problem. Hence, I need to move myself.

"The stalemate will be undone, but...in that case, we'll face the human's main force, and using that opportunity, Kaoru will usurp Hakusan with a 《Reign》! Eh? Wait? You're not going for a brute force approach here, are you?" Kanon looks at me full of suspicion.

A brute force approach, eh...? Well, I wonder whether I'd be really able to defeat the humans and Kaoru with such a method. Going by my own assessment, it'd be possible. However...it'd cost me dearly.

Now that I've ranked Alchemy, the death of my leaders — carefully nurtured subordinates — would directly connect to a decline in combat power. This is something I must avoid at all costs. And assuming I were to avoid any deaths among leaders, losing a great number of subordinates in the battle against the humans would produce a possibility of me falling behind in the battle against Kaoru who would be waiting behind the humans.

Therefore, a brute force approach is no option.

"What do you think? How long will the humans need to move from Kanezawa's south to Hakusan's south?"

"In the case of humans, no one will block their path...so around one hour by car?"

"What's the time required to succeed in a 《Reign》?"

"Three hours... ——!? Oh, I got it! The matchless strategist Kanon has come up with a plan!"

Kanon whirls around in the air while pointing her finger at me with a broad grin.

"Stop pointing your finger at me. And while we're at it, come up with your plans a bit faster if you call yourself a strategist. ...So, let's hear that plan of yours, matchless strategist."

"Okay! First we'll launch a 《Reign》 against the humans!"

"...30 points."

"Wha-!? It's just the beginning and already a lost cause!?"

I tell Kanon, who tells me about her plan full of confidence, that it's basically no good.

"Launching a 《Reign》 is a stupid move."

"Eh? But..."

"How much time is needed to start the next 《Reign》 after the last?"

"Ten hours..."

"When will we know whether Kaoru's 《Reign》 has succeeded or failed?"

"After three hours..." Kanon's voice keeps getting weaker towards the end of her remark.

"What we are going to start —— isn't a 《Reign》, but a 『Declaration of War』."

It's no exaggeration to say that only a Demon King, who's just recently hit level 10, would start a 《Reign》 all of a sudden. If you comprehend the conditions of 《Reign》, you'd fully understand the importance of preparing things in advance. Therefore, it's very normal to make a 『Declaration of War』 before starting a 《Reign》.

"We will wait for Kaoru to start his 《Reign》 while running a diversion on the humans. Then, once Kaoru has started his 《Reign》, we'll launch a proper 《Reign》! This is the plan of the matchless strategist Kanon!"

Wow...such a triumphant look after completely ripping off my plan without the tiniest sliver of shame. Kanon's mental fortitude seems to have grown quite robust without me noticing.

"Kanon, can I ask you one thing?"

"Yes? What is it?"

"Did you drink wine...?"

"Just a tiny bit. A small lick of a taste test."

"How much is a tiny bit...?"

"How rude! I truly only tasted it! Afterwards I obediently drank a juice called Cassis Orange which Saburo provided in a rare moment of attentiveness."

I see...I should roast Saburo with some fire lances later.

Afterwards I forced Kanon to drink some water, and returned to the boisterous ceremony venue.