

## **Chapter 207 - Punishment**

I gathered my leaders after the ceremony came to an end.

"——And thus, as explained, the battle will start in a few days."

Moments ago I presented the strategy I drew up earlier.

"A few days...? When's dat?" Takaharu asks quietly.

Hmm? Usually Takaharu would go all meathead, clamoring about heading out as soon as possible...

"As fast as possible would be the best. Ideally in three days, I'd say."

"Three days, eh...?"

"Mmh? Anything wrong with that?"

"I think usin' these guys here 's goin' to be somewhat tough after three days..." Takaharu mutters after taking out his iron knuckles, the Growth Knuckles.

"Hrngh? Takaharu-dono, what are those?"

"Hah? These are Sacr——"

——Takaharu, shut up!

I wonder, does Takaharu have a birdbrain or something? I'm sure I've told him to keep the sacred treasures a secret from everyone other than Rina's team.

"Sacr...what?"

"It's...an item Takaharu's sacr...sacred life partner, Sarah, has given him as a present."

"Hah? Like no w——"

——Sarah, shut up!

Takaharu and Sarah have gone a bit too far with the cutting loose during the ceremony, so I think this should be the perfect punishment for those two.

"——Wh-!? D-D-Don't tell me...she gave him brass knuckles instead of a ring!? Romantic relationships are banned within the Aster Empire, aren't they!? No one has courted me...so it must be like that, right!?"

——《Fire Lance》!

"I'm happy about the special treatment, but...if possible, another form would be——"

"Saburou, shut it."

After silencing the culprit of the uproar, I return to the main topic.

"Currently my Alchemy A serves as a huge advantage against Demon King Kaoru. It's indispensable for us to move quickly so as to capitalize on that advantage. Any other questions?" I rattle down in one breath.

"Whoa, Shion-cci!?! I didn't understand a word you said!"

Ignoring Sarah's bullshit, I scan the faces of my leaders.

"Shion-sama, I'm not going to be able to participate in the battle, but...would it be fine for me to also ask a question?" Mrs. Tamura humbly raises a hand.

"What is it?"

"Your power has led to the foundation of a country — the Aster Empire. Is there no room to talk it out with the humans of Kanazawa?"

"Talk it out...? Mrs. Tamura, let me ask you in return: what are we going to talk about?"

"T-That's...a peaceful way to resolve this..."

"A peaceful way, huh...? How specifically? Are we going to suggest a non-aggression pact?"

"..." Mrs. Tamura falls silent with bitterness showing on her face.

"If you can pass it on to them so that there won't be any misunderstandings...it's not like I'd be against talking it over."

"——Eh?" Kanon yelps in surprise as someone who's associated with me for a long time now.

What a rude fairy... If I can get everyone to surrender through talk, I won't oppose doing so. Non-aggression treaties are...a no go since I don't see any merit in those.

Mrs. Tamura is essential personnel for the growth of the Aster Empire, but...she tends to be too moderate. It'd be a pain if she suggested the same thing over on various occasions from now on.

"In the first place, it's questionable whether the humans would respond to a call for a meeting from our side, right? We have named ourselves the Aster Empire. But, does mankind recognize the Aster Empire? Are they going to acknowledge its existence?"

"...I think it'll be difficult for them to do so under the current circumstances."

"You must offer something in exchange for obtaining something else. If you take that logic, we'd need to offer something to gain a place at the negotiation table — we'd need to concede, right? The Aster Empire is inferior to Kanazawa's humans...or, if we're equal, we should take all of this into

account. What's the current situation? Are we equal? Are we inferior?"

"Limiting it to just the military force, I think we're superior." Kotetsu answers in Mrs. Tamura's stead.

"Mrs. Tamura, let me ask you once more: what are we going to talk about?"

"I'm terribly sorry... Please forgive me for giving my opinion without having thought it through." Mrs. Tamura lowers her head deeply with a sad expression.

"It's not like I'm angry at you. Besides, we won't attack all of a sudden either. We'll first recommend surrender. That's the limit of what the current Aster Empire can do in regards to diplomacy. Can I have you understand as much?"

It'd be a foolish idea to have the residents think that I'm belittling Mrs. Tamura and then tell them to take part in the fight against mankind. Thus I've thrown her a lifeline to keep up appearances.

"Okay... Allow me to apologize once more for my impertinent statement. I shall put forth even more of an effort so that the Aster Empire gets recognized as a country." Mrs. Tamura bows deeply, showing me that she's understood what I've told her just now.

Pheew...it'd be wonderful if things became a bit easier with this, but...

"Taka-cchi?"

"Sup?"

"You see, is Shion-cchi possibly quite a playb——"

——Sarah, shut up!

"Saburou."

"Yes, Shion-sama!"

"Sorry for my magic going out of control earlier."

"O-Out of control...?"

"Yeah, out of control. Anyway, it's not intended to serve as an apology, but I give you permission to use 《Drain》 on Sarah."

"——! Y-You have my heartfelt gratitude!"

"Wai!? No wa——"

——Sarah, shut up!

"Put in all effort to master Sarah's magic for the battle in three days."

"As you command!" Saburou trembles, getting all emotional.

"Shion, are you going to take Saburou off defense duty for this time's operation?"

"No, I might borrow him depending on the situation, but his place basically remains with defense."

"In that case...even without him using 《Drain》 on Sarah-jou——"

"Yataro, I won't have any leeway to use 《Random Creation》. You'll need to hold back for around a year——"

"——it's necessary! Saburou absolutely needs Sarah-jou's special abilities!" Yataro amends his earlier words in panic.

"Everyone, sorry, we're going to take a short break, okay? Saburou, come."

"Yes!"

——Sarah, come!

"Noooooooo——"

——Sarah, shut up!

I take Saburou and Sarah with me, leaving the meeting room.

"Saburou, I'll allow you to use 《Drain》."

"Understood!"

"Sarah, you're forbidden to move until Saburou's 《Drain》 finishes!"

"No way! I'm sorry, okay!? I'll apologize as much as you want! I'll do anything to get you to forgiv——"

"I'll show you the least amount of mercy, and step outside as well..."

"Eh...!? Wai-...for real...!?"

I leave Saburou, who's trembling in joy, and Sarah, who's trembling in fear, behind, and head back to the meeting room.

"Nooooooooooooo!" Sarah's scream reverberates through the door separating us. After around three minutes, Saburou comes back to the meeting room with a glossy, sparkly face, followed by Sarah who drags her feet like a ghoul.

"Now then, does anyone else have any questions?" I survey the faces of my leaders with a smile, but it doesn't seem as though there are any questions left. "Okay, the plan will be carried out in three

days! All of you, strive to get ready in time!"

It was a bit chaotic at parts, but in the end the meeting finished without any problems.

## **Chapter 208 - Color, Honey, and Hohet**

Three people are lining up in front of me three days after the ceremony.

"Color, Honey, Hohet, the mission given to you guys is of utmost importance."

""""Yes, master! I understand!"""" The three dhampirs I've created for a diversionary maneuver reply respectfully.

The ones I've gotten ready for the diversion this time are the three bloodkin in front of me, who will bear the full brunt, and 200 bloodkin who I've sent out to deploy my subordinates - an army of more than 2,000 ghouls. I've ordered the bloodkin other than Color, Honey and Hohet to not fight at the frontline, no matter what happens.

Bloodkin are precious. Since this new world has the specification that only bloodkin and their subordinate can step outside a Domain, the number of bloodkin equals the military forces a Demon King can field against humans. For creating a single bloodkin, you need to save your CP to the cap, and spend all of it. Theoretically it's possible to create two bloodkin per day, but realistically, one per day is the limit.

Therefore it'd be like putting the cart before the horse if I were to lose my bloodkin during a diversionary maneuver carried out for the sake of lowering the losses. Having said that, it'd be next to impossible to launch a diversion without losing a single bloodkin. The noble sacrifices chosen for this task are Color, Honey, and Hohet.

I've ordered the leaders around Rina to standby at the First Domain — the frontline of the Aster Empire which faces the humans, together with 3,000 of my finest subordinates. I've also ordered Kaede to watch the situation over at Kaoru's frontline — the southern part of Hakusan City.

I carefully check the deployment of my subordinates and the plan I've drawn up while wondering whether I overlooked something or if something got leaked.

Currently it's 7 p.m. The humans are going to go to sleep soon. It's the perfect time for me to declare war as a vampire. The destination where I led my subordinates is around one kilometer away from Ishikawa University — the humans' front line base in their battle against the Aster Empire. It's located in a place close to three kilometers away from the First Domain.

—We're going to start the operation from now on!

I tell all my subordinates telepathically as I pick up my megaphone.

『Humans of Kanazawa City, I'm the Demon King of the 『Aster Empire』 who unified all of the prefecture's north — Shion. With this I announce the Aster Empire's invasion into Kanazawa! We

do not like senseless slaughter. We will grant those wishing to surrender safety, and those wishing to resist — death. Many humans already live peacefully in our Aster Empire. Those wishing to surrender are to disarm and come to my Domain! You have three hours. We will start our invasion after those three hours! I hope that many of you humans choose wisely♪

I recommend surrender in one go, without any pauses.

"Color, Honey, Hohet, you're up."

""""Yes, master!""""

I leave the front line to those three and withdraw.



"Welcome baaack." Kanon greets me after I return to the Domain.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes! It's all perfect except for Takaharu-san having tried to level as he got too bored."

I smile wryly after listening to Kanon's reply. The wait for my leaders will be long. Even if they've already prepared for battle, their turn will actually come after Kaoru starts his 《Reign》. Since I've given the humans three hours...they'll be forced to remain on standby for at least four hours, as long as the humans don't suddenly go nuts, attacking from their side.

Takaharu probably wants to cultivate his sacred treasure. I can fully understand that feeling. Ever since this world broke, weird concepts such as leveling have been introduced, but...what you can actually experience with your body comes from spending BP and ranking up on stats. In reality one might get stronger bit-by-bit, but you can only sense that at the beginning. In contrast to that, the sacred treasures are still at the beginning of their growth...you can feel how they get stronger every day, and the moment they change their appearance after a rank-up is also quite touching. If I could live by my instincts without needing to think about anything...I'd want to focus my attention on nurturing my sacred treasures.

Having said that, the world isn't nice enough to allow me to survive by merely following my own instincts and desires.

"Shion-san, this time you've invested three bloodkin and 2,000 ghouls, right?"

"Yes."

"Are those going to work as a diversion?"

"You think they lack numbers?"

"No, it's the other way around! In the eyes of the humans, that many monsters should look like a

fairly threatening force, don't you think?"

"Really?"

Kanon hasn't witnessed me struggling overly often. She also has a stance of regarding the humans, who invade my Domain, as experience points.

"I think it'll be hard for them to win, but...I feel like they'll put up quite a good fight. Isn't it even possible that the humans won't have the leeway to send their main force to Kaoru as they'll have their hands full with our forces...?"

"Assuming you're right....it'd just mean that Kanezawa's humans aren't worthy of any attention. I think I'd just give the leaders a go sign to charge and slaughter the humans in one swoop."

If it's as Kanon said, Kanezawa's humans would have a military strength equal to that of 2,000 ghouls. Could they really stand in Kaoru's way with such a lacking power? If they can, it'd actually show Kaoru's weakness. I'd be able to conquer the entire Ishikawa Prefecture in no time by stopping with the ingenious strategies and overrun both parties with a brute force approach.

"I'm worried about the opposite, wondering whether 2,000 ghouls will be enough to act as a diversion... It won't be much of a diversion if they quickly get slaughtered. I need them to at least hold out until Kaoru starts a 《Reign》 after judging this to be a good opportunity."

The ghouls' best trait is their durability. They only lose out to living mails when it comes to durability, but since living mails also require me to create equipment for them, their cost performance is bad. On the other hand, ghouls can't use any items. Seemingly not feeling any pain, they'll also continue attacking without a care about injuries, making them troublesome opponents to take on.

Just in case, I've parked another 3,000 ghouls as spare force in the First Domain. Depending on the circumstances, I plan to send those out to the front line as reinforcements.

How are things over there right now?

Using my smartphone, I confirm the state of the front through Color's eyes. All I can hear from the vicinity are the eerie groans of the ghouls. There seems to be absolutely no response from the humans.

Next I use my smartphone to call Tusk.

"What's the situation on your end?"

『Oh!? Thanks for your effort ~ssu! Since it'll be deleted if I use the name 『Aster Empire』, I've been spreading the information about the declaration of war in Kanezawa under the tag of the prefecture's northern member of the 『Thirteen Evil Stars』.』

"How are the reactions?"

『Some of the humans are making a racket out of it ~ssu. Right now it's pretty obvious that they're

moving about to check the credibility of the news ~ssu!』

"I see... Focus on scattering the information without any breaks."

『Aye ~ssu!』

The die is cast. All that's left now is to wait for the enemies to make their moves.