

Chapter 239 - Invasion of Nonoichi City ④

"Long time no see...Saori." Rina's monotonous voice fills the vicinity through the **【Megaphone】**.

"...Eh? ...N-No way?" Kayama Saori — 『Kanezawa's Saintess』 — clearly expresses her surprise after being addressed by Rina.

"W-Who is it...!? Kayama-san, is she an acquaintance of yours?"

On the other hand, Andou Hideya — 『Kanezawa's Sage』 — stares at Kayama Saori with confusion coloring his face, seemingly having forgotten Rina's voice.

"It's been a long time...Andou-senpai." Rina also calls out to Andou Hideya with a monotonous voice.

"——!? Wh-!? D-D-Don't tell me..."

"Have you already forgotten about me, Andou-senpai?" Rina answers in the same tone as before.

A voice lacking all emotions — a monotonous one — can induce fear.

"W-W-Wha-....i-impossible...it's an illusion! 'That' is Demon King Shion's to throw us in disarray! It's the same being as the bunny pervert over there — a phantom with the sole objective of causing chaos amongst us!"

"Oh my? You even treat me as an illusion?"

Hibiki — the bunny pervert who got dissed along the way — makes a pose while looking sulky.

"It's quite rude to call someone else 'that', you know...?" Rina takes off the Venetian Mask while smiling bitterly.

"——! Oh my god! ...Y-You were seriously Rina?"

"The real Sayama-san...?"

Seeing Rina's bare face, Kayama Saori and Andou Hideya become panicked, and the surrounding humans start to stir after seeing the two's reaction.

"It's regrettable, but Say——"

——Rina, don't talk any further!

I forbid Rina to speak any further after sensing that she's about to say something risky. Rina turns a confused look in my direction.

——Explaining that you're called Rina Shion right now will just complicate things. It's troublesome, but for now use Sayama Rina... 『Hero of the Black Sword』, or just Rina.

Rina clears her throat, and then starts over, "My name is Rina. In the past I've been called 『Hero of the Black Sword』 by you people!"

Unlike moments ago, Rina is now using a loud and powerful voice filled with intonations.

"...Eh?"

"Wait, the 『Hero of the Black Sword』 didn't die back then...?"

"She was supposedly killed by Demon King Shion..."

"Is she the real one...?"

"Going by how Sage-sama and Saintess-sama have reacted...I guess she's the real one?"

"...Maybe she's an illusion?"

After hearing Rina's words, the humans become quite agitated.

"I was called here as a witness by Shion...my master Shion! Therefore, I'll recount what happened on that day! No one but me is suited to directly tell you the truth I've experienced, here and now!"

"S-Shut up! Everyone, don't become misled! 'That' is an illusion! A phantom created by Demon King Shion!" Andou Hideya roars to interrupt Rina's powerful speech.

"On that day...I departed together with 11 other comrades, including Andou Hideya and Kayama Saori over there, to liberate the domain of Demon King Shion as certified heroes of Kanezawa. As a result, we lost many of our comrades on the third floor...my leg was shot from behind by an arrow of Emori Hajime who was supposed to be my comrade...causing me to fall down on the spot. And I begged my remaining comrades — Kayama Saori, Andou Hideya, and Makino Yuuya — to save me, but...all that I received in return were——"

""Shut up!!!""

Andou Hideya and Kayama Saori desperately interrupt Rina with hysterical voices.

"——all that I received in return were harsh rebukes and slowly fading footsteps of people running away."

However, Rina continued her recount with a calm voice as if she couldn't even see the hysteric duo.

"When I was surrounded by many monsters and a powerful enemy...after having been abandoned by my comrades...it was Demon King Shion who gave me a second chance at life. There was only one truth to be found in your words which were teeming with vainglory: On that day 『Sayama Rina』 certainly died! Being called 『Hero of the Black Sword』, 『Sayama Rina』 fought for the sake humanity and died! The one standing in front of you right now isn't 『Sayama Rina』! It's Rina Shion who serves Demon King Shion as a subject of the Aster Empire!" Rina's voice gradually gains in passion, ending with her screaming out her bare feelings at the end. "I don't regret the path

I chose, at all! I don't regret my current choice to fight for the Aster Empire, my friends, and my family! What sage...!? What saintess...!? Don't yap your mouth about me after you left me in the lurch!"

Rina lets the grudge and fury, which has been gnawing at her, freely explode. I instructed her to persuade the humans to surrender, but...I'd say she's gone berserk. Changing the current course...will be difficult with the current Rina.

I walk up next to Rina.

"Rina, give me the 【Megaphone】."

"——! Sorry, Shion."

Rina apologizes to me, hands the 【Megaphone】 over, and takes a step backwards.

"Now then, dear humans. This is the truth."

"No, those are lies! Everyone, don't get deceived!"

"All lies! Don't let them trick you!"

Kayama Saori and Andou Hideya loudly declare the truth as it was told by the person concerned to be a lie.

"Hey, hey, wait a sec. Did you forget the words of the 『Hero of the Black Sword』, your former friend? You people —— don't use Rina for your lies!" I raise my voice, and send a glare full of bloodlust at the two who still prattle some nonsense.

"It's a trick...! 'That' is no Sayama-san... 『Hero of the Black Sword』!"

As Andou Hideya continues to deny, I send in the second witness from our side.

"Hoh, so you're saying Rina...my granddaughter is an illusion? Am I an illusion as well then?"

"Who are you!?"

"My name is Kotetsu. I'm Rina's grandfather who has been inappropriately called 『Sword King』 by the people of Suzu City in the past."

Right after Rina, I have Kotetsu, who's quite popular, take the stage, further shaking the hearts and spirits of the humans.

"『Sword King』...?"

"N-No way...Sayama Kotetsu!?"

"The 『Sword King』 who spearheaded the fight against the Demon Kings and was even feared by those demons?!?"

"I heard that 『Sword King』 died as well, but..."

"No, there were also rumors about someone similar to 『Sword King』 being present on the previous battlefield."

"T-The real one...?"

A commotion spreads among the humans after Kotetsu's entry.

"According to the sage over there, I seem to be an illusion, but...I can assure you, I'm the real one. Just like Rina, I fought against Shion-sama, lost...and became one of those who were given a second chance at life by him. By the way, it's not just me who barely escaped death...no, was rescued. Shion-sama not only saved the more than 100,000 residents of Suzu, but also many of the people of the previous battle at Ishikawa University. Currently they're living a sound life in the Aster Empire...under Shion-sama's protection."

Probably because of his wisdom from his long life, Kotetsu has grasped my objective, unlike Rina.

"More than 100,000 are alive...?"

"What do you mean by sound life?"

"...I've heard rumors that people, who became the underlings of Demon Kings, get brainwashed."

"Did those two look to you as if they were brainwashed?"

"Not really."

"No, but didn't the 『Hero of the Black Sword』 address Demon King Shion...without any honorifics earlier?"

"So...she hasn't been brainwashed then?"

"Maybe their pecking order is lax?"

The humans' unrest intensifies as Kotetsu's words apparently were too shocking.

Hmm, was it a basic custom of negotiations to also mention the downsides?

I think back on the negotiation tactics I looked up online in advance, and decide to complement Kotetsu's words.

"As you've heard now, the ones next to me are 『Hero of the Black Sword』 and 『Sword King』. Just as Kotetsu — 『Sword King』 said, many humans are living in the Aster Empire. However...since I, unlike certain people, hate lies, I'll tell you the whole truth from the start. Not all humans, who confronted me, live in the Aster Empire. Or to be more precise, many humans, who faced me with hostility and bloodlust, have unfortunately died. As for the details, starting with 『Silver Hero』——"

Umm, what was his name again...? I doubt it was Yay lol, but what then...?

"...It's Miyamoto Masakado."

Rina is the first to notice my issue, and tells me the real name of Yay lol-kun.

"——Miyamoto Masakado, all heroes besides Rina and the two over there have been killed by me and my subordinates. Additionally, I don't mind you interpreting it as less than 10% of the humans who invade my Domain, coming out alive again. However, I won't ever raise my hand against those asking for my protection...and those who don't have any intent to fight. In reality, many of the people who surrendered in the past, are now living happily in the Aster Empire — my Domain."

Hearing the unblemished truth from me, the humans go through all kinds of emotions such as dejection, unrest, etc.

"After having told you all these truths, I'll further inform you as ruler of the Aster Empire: I'll show mercy and welcome all those, who wish to surrender, with open arms. As for those who resist, I'll reply with armed might to bring them death. Dear humans, whether it's going to be surrender or resistance, choose your own path by our own will!" I announce.

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"W-What should we do...?"

"You moron! The opponent is a Demon King! As if anyone would believe his bullshit!"

"B-But...the others have been living well after they surrendered, didn't you hear...?"

"In the first place, that woman...is she really 『Hero of the Black Sword』?"

"Must be a fake...I mean Sage and Saintess said so as well..."

"But, would they be this flustered over some fake?"

"I...have personally seen the real 『Hero of the Black Sword』...it's probably that girl over there."

"We can't exclude the possibility of her being manipulated, even if she's the real deal..."

Agitated discussions drift my way from the humans after I gave them my recommendation for surrender. People who seem willing to surrender, people who are against surrendering, people who believe in Rina being the real one, and people who regard Rina as a fake...all kinds of arguments are being exchanged, but all humans share one, certain feeling nonetheless.

Anxiety.

An emotion that's directly connected to a decline in their morale.

If I've managed to instigate anxiety among the humans, it means I've succeeded in my plans. Having said that, there's still many enemies left.

Let's try to stir up some more negative feelings among the humans.

"You have 24 hours to give me your reply! This isn't a reply I'm demanding from the 『Kanezawa Liberation Army』, but the humans belonging to the 『Kanezawa Liberation Army』. In other words, it's a reply I'm demanding from each of you as an individual. Decide your life by yourself! Those choosing the smart option — surrendering to me — are to come to my Domain unarmed! The Aster Empire's doors are always open for those asking for protection."

The main goal of the urging to surrender lies in chipping away the enemy's combat force. Human hearts are weak and easy to sway. The more humans surrender, the more the ones remaining behind will be mentally and spiritually cornered.

"Don't get cheated! You won't find any guarantee that the lives of the surrenderers will be spared!"

"He's right! Everyone, don't believe anything the enemy says! All of you should know how surrenderers have been treated by Demon Kings as shields...and as slaves!"

Andou Hideya and Kayama Saori reject my words with frantic verve. However, I continue as if those two didn't even exist to begin with.

"Well then, we'll take our leave here for the moment. Let me tell you once more, dear humans, you have 24 hours from now on. Those desiring protection are to disarm and come to my Domain! And, let me also give you a warning, humans. You won't be let off for launching attacks against us as we retreat. If you fire as much as a single arrow our way, I'll interpret it as you being willing to resist to the bitter end! The same applies for you attacking us within the 24 hours grace period."

Of course I had considered pulling back to allow my subordinates to recover and replace the subordinates we lost to begin with. Moreover, it's a gain for our side if a 24 hours grace period has been agreed upon.

And then, at the end, I pour even more oil into the fire to grandly shake the humans' spirits.

"Ah! I forgot to mention one more thing... 『Kanezawa's Sage』 Andou Hideya and 『Kanezawa's Saintess』 Kayama Saori, I won't approve your surrender. The reason is — I can't trust you. You escaped while deserting your comrade, and on top of that, you even hurled abuse at that very comrade...such trash has no credibility whatsoever, right? In short, dear humans, our Aster Empire looks forward to a smart choice by everyone except for 『Kanezawa's Sage』 and 『Kanezawa's Saintess』. That's all. Allow me to excuse myself then."

Going by the course of events so far, I doubt that Andou Hideya and Kayama Saori would consider a surrender anyway. At most, they're going to spread lies such as Rina being a fake or surrenderers being treated as slaves. In such a case, I'll just reject their surrender from the very start. In exchange, it also sows suspicion — another negative emotion — among the humans.

Many people who were offered protection, and two people who had protection denied. Are their

words really going to reach the hearts of the other humans from now on?

The suspicion planted by me will likely become a burden for the two who will try to persuade the other humans to not surrender after this.

"All hands, retreat!"

The final words are my order to withdraw, directed at my subordinates.

"Damn it! W-Wait! Everyone, attack! We have to attack! The enemy has turned their back on us! Now is the perfect opportunity!" Andou Hideya screams at our backs.

"B-But...if we attack..."

"For the time being...let's head back and discuss matters..."

"Y-Yep...we're tired as well. ...It's necessary to consider things carefully."

However, the humans, having been mentally and spiritually shaken, don't obey Andou Hideya's order, resulting in us successfully getting away without a scratch.



After returning to my Domain, I order the subordinates who participated in the battle to take a rest, and also handle the organization of the replacements.

"Kanon, we'll shelter any surrenderers in the 10th sector."

I set up a 【Transfer Array】 connecting to the 10th sector, the one closest to Nonoichi City. I don't have a clue how many people are going to surrender, but...it's necessary to prepare for them either way.

—Mrs. Tamura, can you hear me? Please get everything ready to receive surrenderers at the 10th sector.

As soon as I instruct Mrs. Tamura via telepathy, I get a call from her.

『Shion-sama, how many people are going to come?』

"No idea. How many people could you handle?"

『We can prepare food for 10,000 people at once. As for bedding: if we limit it to simple blankets, we will prepare any number you name』

"Please get everything ready for 10,000 for starters. I'll immediately tell you if more than that becomes necessary."

『I understand. We will also set up simple toilets and showers, but if possible, I'd like to request the creation of a 【River】 or 【Lake】 in the 10th sector』.

"Got it. I'll create a 【River】 in advance."

『Thank you very much for your consideration』

——Tusk, make it so that a video allowing others to grasp the lives of the residents can be watched in the 10th sector. No need to answer. Get to it right away.

Although they'll be surrenderers, they won't become residents until I finish a 《Reign》. I won't let them meet with the residents because it's possible that they'd cause a revolt. However, I think it'll be of advantage in the future if I show the surrenderers how beneficial and generous my rule is for the residents.

Having given Mrs. Tamura and Tusk their instructions, I open up 【Domain Creation】, and release the number restriction on the 10th sector while at the same time creating a 【River】.

This wraps up my preparations to welcome surrenderers. All that's left now is to wait for the humans' reply.

Six hours after my announcement of the grace period.

Far more than 10,000 surrenderers have appeared in front of my Domain. Because a number restriction is set for the sector at the front line, my subordinates guide the humans to the 【Transfer Array】 in groups of 12 after confirming that they're unarmed. Even while we're checking for weapons and moving the people, the number of surrenderers keeps gradually growing.

In the end, it took 16 hours after the announcement to guide all surrenderers to the 10th sector. With 72,000 people the number of surrenderers exceeded my expectations by leaps and bounds.