

## Is it Wrong for a Sword to Remain Sheathed Against Injustice?

### Story Starts

==&<o>&=-

### Chapter 5.3

### The Days Between

---

Booze and old parchment. Loki's office always smelled the same during these briefings, though it tends to lean towards the booze—the wine changed, the reports multiplied, but the essential character of the room never did. Maps and intelligence summaries lay scattered across her desk, their edges stained where the bottle had left rings on the paper. Loki lounged behind the mess with one leg drawn beneath her, vermillion eyes sharp despite the sprawl.

Finn, Riveria, and Gareth occupied the chairs arranged before her. The same chairs, the same arrangement, the same grim litany of threats and countermeasures they'd been cycling through for the better part of a year. Routine should have made it bearable. It hadn't.

"—maybe if you could raise it with the Guild staff," Gareth said, his voice a low rumble. He sat with his legs spread wide, one calloused hand resting on the head of his battle axe. "Get the Freya Familia tracing the supply chain—where those ignition pieces ended up after they were stolen. Find the stockpile, and we put a real dent in their capacity."

Loki's usual mischief had dimmed, replaced by something harder. She reached for her wine glass, swirled the contents without drinking.

"I've already had a meeting with Freya, Ganesha, and Astraëa. They managed to find a facility that had been raided—looked like it had been operating under Evilus without any of us knowing."

She set the glass down with a soft clink.

"According to Freya, her children found a broken wall of adamantite which leads to—"

She stopped. Her fingers stayed on the stem of the glass, and for a long moment the goddess who never let silence sit in a room simply let it sit.

Finn had his hands clasped before his mouth, elbows resting on the arms of his chair. His blue eyes hadn't moved from Loki's face.

"That there's someone at least Level 6 within Evilus," he finished.

Nobody spoke.

Gareth's hand, which had rested loosely on his axe, went still—then tightened until the leather of his glove creaked. Adamantite did not crack under spells or siege equipment. It did not yield to alchemical compounds or sustained bombardment. It cracked under force. Raw, concentrated physical force applied at a magnitude that rendered the material's legendary durability irrelevant. Gareth knew this because he was one of the few in Orario outside of Goibniu and Haephestus's smiths who could scratch or damage the material—despite him being Level 5.

To break through a wall of it required something else entirely.

Finn's thumb pressed against his interlaced fingers—a small, unconscious motion that his executives had long since learnt to read. Since the fall of the Zeus and Hera Familias, exactly one adventurer in Orario had reached Level 6. One. And he belonged to Freya. Every tactical calculation the Loki Familia had built during the Evilus conflict rested on the assumption that their own Level 5 executives represented the effective ceiling of combat power on both sides—Ottar notwithstanding—that whatever Evilus fielded, the three of them could answer.

This assumption was now dead.

Even Riveria, whose attention had drifted elsewhere for the better part of the briefing, raised her gaze from the far wall.

Loki didn't let the silence calcify. She picked up the wine glass, and this time she drank.

"The Ganesha Familia encountered another individual as well." Her voice had flattened, the theatrical edges filed away. "A woman. A mage who single-handedly massacred a group from Rudra Familia—they'd been caught with sacred tree branches. Shakti estimated the woman to be an elite Level 6."

A second shoe, dropping onto a floor that was already cracking.

Gareth's grip shifted on his axe. "So it's confirmed. Rudra Familia is with Evilus." His brow furrowed beneath his helm. "What about this mystery mage? A remnant from one of the banished Familias? Osiris, perhaps?" He stroked his beard. "Is she on our side?"

"We can't say that with certainty." Finn's voice cut cleanly through the speculation. "Not about Rudra, and not about the mage. Rudra Familia may be aligned with Evilus, or they may simply be operating in parallel—opportunists feeding off the same chaos. They should be investigated regardless. But if we extend that suspicion to Rudra, we must equally consider that this mage could be Evilus herself, and merely had a violent disagreement with those particular members."

"Aye," Gareth exhaled. "Internal conflicts amongst those of disrepute are hardly rare, especially when interests clash." He shifted his weight, the chair groaning beneath him. "We're already stretched thin as it is. Finn, how do your talks with the Dionysus Familia proceed?"

The prum shifted in his seat. "Willing enough to coordinate. They've offered to increase their presence on the upper floors, possibly join our patrol rotations above ground." He glanced toward Loki. "Can you speak with their god directly? Formalise the arrangement?"

Loki's expression transformed. The troubled strategist vanished, and what replaced it was something predatory. Her grin stretched wide, showing teeth.

"I'll be certain to visit Dionysus as soon as possible."

Gareth sighed—a deep groan from the dwarven executive of the Familia. "Loki. We need their cooperation. Please refrain from antagonising their god by drinking all his wine."

"This alliance is critical," Finn added, his tone diplomatic but firm. "We need Dionysus engaged, not you two nursing a hangover on our behalf."

Loki's lower lip jutted out in an exaggerated pout. Then, recovering with theatrical speed, she raised her right hand with her palm facing her children. Her index and middle fingers stood straight whilst the others curled against her thumb.

"Scout's honour."

Gareth and Finn exchanged a look. The dwarf's eyes narrowed. The prum merely raised one eyebrow.

Loki waved them off with an airy gesture. "Such little faith in your goddess. Honestly."

The conversation should have continued. There were supply routes to discuss, patrol schedules to coordinate, intelligence reports to cross-reference against the grim new arithmetic of enemy strength. But Loki's attention had drifted, her vermillion eyes tracking across the room to where Riveria sat in uncharacteristic silence.

The High Elf had contributed nothing to the discussion. Her posture remained perfect—spine straight, hands folded in her lap—but her gaze had fixed itself on a point across the office. Loki followed that line to the weapon mounted above the mantelpiece.

A bow. Elven craftsmanship, its limbs shaped from the sacred trees of the Alf's Royal Forest, its string long since removed. It had been Riveria's, once—back when their Familia was young, their numbers thin, and their goddess still learning to navigate mortal concerns. The kind of weapon a High Elf princess might carry before deity-blessed magic outgrew everything a bow could do.

It had hung there for years as a memento of younger, more innocent days. Riveria hadn't so much as glanced at it in recent memory.

Until today.

Loki's grin returned, though it carried a different quality now. She stood, her chair scraping against the stone floor, and began a leisurely circuit around her desk. She took the long way, skirting behind Finn and Gareth with exaggerated casualness. Both men tracked her movement. Both men shook their heads.

Loki's fingers began to writhe.

"Riveria-mama!" Her voice pitched up into a whine as she lunged, hands finding their targets with practised accuracy. She squeezed. "You've been distracted this whole—ow!"

Riveria's fist connected with the top of Loki's skull before the goddess could finish her sentence. The impact was precise, controlled, and entirely deserved.

---

-=&<0>&=-

Loki rubbed her head, though she recovered quickly enough—decades of teasing her Familia members had taught her exactly when to duck and when to accept the consequences. The goddess sprawled back against her chair, one eye cracked open to gauge whether a second strike was incoming.

"Loki is correct. You have been out of it since Rivira," Finn said, his calm voice cutting through the aftermath of divine punishment. The Pallum captain sat with his hands folded on the desk, watching Riveria with steady patience.

"Was there something of note that we missed?"

Riveria shook her head slowly, then reconsidered. The gesture shifted into something more ambivalent—not quite denial, not quite confirmation.

"There was a particular archer," she began.

The words came easier once she started. She told them about the battle for Rivira: how the coordinated monster assault had threatened to overwhelm even their combined forces, how Dionysus Familia had held their northern barricade whilst Astraea Familia carved through the centre. She explained how blade-arrows had begun striking monsters from two to four hundred metres away, each projectile finding magic stones with unerring accuracy.

"He prevented the Rivira incident from becoming far worse than it might have been," Riveria said. "His supporting fire allowed our forces to concentrate on the Evilus operatives rather than being overwhelmed by sheer numbers. I witnessed him eliminate at least thirty monsters myself, and the Astraea Familia reported similar assistance throughout the engagement."

Gareth leaned forward, his massive arms crossed over his chest.

"Blade-arrows, ye said. What manner of ammunition are we talking about?"

"Repurposed swords." Riveria reached into her pouch and withdrew the arrow she'd recovered during the battle. She set it on Loki's desk, where it caught the lamplight with a dull gleam. "Alicia pilfered one of his arrows as well, despite my having returned one that I recovered myself. Steel construction, exceptional craftsmanship."

The Dwarf picked up the blade-arrow and turned it over in his calloused hands. His fingers traced the edge, tested the balance, examined the way the blade had been shaped to serve as both projectile and cutting implement. He held it the way he held all weapons.

"Solid steel," Gareth muttered. "Ye don't see that often. Most adventurers give up on arrows in the Dungeon—too expensive to lose, too fragile to survive impact with anything past the upper floors." He turned the blade-arrow over once more, frowning. "Can't place the forging tradition, though. Not Goibniu's school. Not Hephaestus. Not anything I've seen from Rakia or the Far East, either."

"No," Riveria agreed. "I examined one more thoroughly after the battle. The steel carries residual mana, but no signature I could identify—no trace of any known school or method. When I asked, he claimed a Blacksmithing skill."

Gareth's frown deepened. A Blacksmithing skill could explain the quality, but not the absence of recognisable technique. Every smith learnt from someone, and every school left its fingerprints in the metal. A blade with no lineage was a blade with questions attached to it.

"Clever lad, solving the ammunition problem that way," Finn said. His thumb brushed against his lips in his characteristic thinking gesture. "And if they're retrievable, the cost issue disappears. It would scale well against tougher opponents, too. What else can you tell us about him?"

Riveria organised her thoughts before continuing. "According to the Astraea Familia, he normally operates a food cart in Orario. A noodle vendor, of all things. He also maintains an establishment in Rivira called Emiya-ya."

"A noodle vendor," Loki repeated flatly, her earlier theatrics forgotten.

"The Dionysus Familia's captain described him as a travelling noodle and potion merchant who traverses the upper floors through to the middle floors, going as far as Rivira." Riveria paused, letting the absurdity of that sentence speak for itself.

Three listeners processed this in their own ways. Gareth's eyebrows climbed. Finn's thumb stilled against his lips. Loki tilted her head, her expression flattening into something unreadable.

A noodle vendor who could shoot monsters at four hundred medr. A merchant who forged his own weapons in no tradition anyone could name. A man who solo-dived through floors that claimed experienced adventurers daily.

"His skill with the bow," Finn said carefully. "You mentioned precision at significant range. How significant?"

"Four hundred medr without apparent difficulty. Perhaps more—I only observed what I could verify." Riveria met her captain's gaze. "He maintained a sustained rate of fire throughout the engagement whilst hitting moving targets consistently. I've seen fewer than a dozen archers in my lifetime who could match that performance—most of them elves who'd been practising the bow for centuries. And even among those, few would match his accuracy at distance."

She gestured toward the bow displayed above Loki's mantelpiece—her own, from another life. Back when she'd fled her kingdom and its expectations. Back when a bow and a goddess's oath had been enough.

"That bow, given favourable wind, could reach a thousand medr. His looked as though it could match that range or exceed it, based on the draw weight and the material of the limbs alone."

Gareth set the blade-arrow back on the desk. "And ye think this lad's legitimate?" The question carried no accusation, merely professional curiosity.

Riveria considered her answer carefully.

"I don't believe he's hostile," she said finally. "Not in the way you're asking."

Finn's eyebrows rose fractionally. "Explain."

"During the battle, the Astraea Familia engaged a high-level Evilus member—a man named Vito. Level 4, based on his combat performance." Riveria recalled the report from the Astraea Familia captain. "One of their members stumbled during the fight. She was about to die. The archer's intervention saved her life."

She paused, letting the implication settle.

"If he were Evilus attempting to infiltrate through cultivated trust, he could have simply not acted. Let the Astraea member die. His position was distant enough that no one would have questioned a missed shot or a delayed

response." Riveria shook her head. "But he didn't hesitate. His arrow struck Vito's shoulder and disrupted the attack."

She did not mention what troubled her more than the shot itself—that the arrow had penetrated. Vito was Level 4. A Level 4's Falna-enhanced body could shrug off mundane steel the way stone shrugged off rain. She had seen the blade-arrow on Loki's desk. She had examined its twin. Exceptional craftsmanship, yes. But still steel. Still mundane.

And yet he had blades of significant quality that could punch through a Level 4's shoulder as though his Falna were tissue paper.

She could guess the materials used on that particular projectile.

Gareth stroked his beard. "Why not kill the bastard outright? If he's precise enough to hit a shoulder at that range during combat..."

"A captured Evilus operative is worth more than a dead one," Loki interjected, her voice losing its playful edge. "Information's harder to extract from corpses."

Finn nodded slowly. "A shoulder wound would disable without killing. If the intent was capture rather than elimination, it's tactically sound."

"Aye, but it failed," Gareth pointed out. "The target escaped."

"Pre-planted charges," Riveria said. "Explosions detonated throughout Rivira moments after the archer wounded Vito. The chaos provided cover for his escape. Even sound tactics can't account for countermeasures already in place."

The room went quiet. Riveria watched her companions absorb the full picture—the archer, the weapons, the impossible shot, the vendor's cart that explained nothing and raised everything.

"So we have two strong unknowns—potentially Level 6—one definitely hostile, one of uncertain allegiance," Finn said. His thumb resumed its motion against

his lips. "And now a skilled adventurer named Shirou. What do we know about his level?"

"According to the Astraea Familia, he's likely Level 2," Riveria said. "Recently arrived in Orario."

Gareth let out a low whistle. "Level 2? Doing all *that*?"

"The reasoning they provided was that Level 3 outside Orario is near-impossible. Foreign adventurers simply don't have access to the concentrated excelia the Dungeon provides. Even talented individuals plateau without consistent diving. And he has not been given a title by the deities here." Riveria kept her voice neutral, though she shared Gareth's scepticism. Near-impossible and impossible were not the same thing. She kept that thought to herself.

"But for the moment, let's assume their assessment is accurate," Finn said quietly. "A Level 2 who can solo-dive to Rivira. Weapons of exceptional quality in a forging tradition no one can identify. Archery skills that rival adventurers well above his station." He folded his hands. "He needs to be investigated."

The words came with quiet finality. Riveria felt her mouth open—

She stopped herself.

The objection died before it formed, smothered by a sharp awareness of her own irrationality. Finn had a point. They knew almost nothing about this man beyond combat performance and a profession that allowed unrestricted movement through the Dungeon. A noodle vendor who forged weapons with no lineage. A merchant with an archer's instincts and a veteran's composure.

Reasonable suspicion. Standard procedure. Nothing personal.

*'Then why do I want to argue?'*

Loki's vermillion eyes had narrowed, fixed on Riveria with an attention the goddess reserved for things that genuinely interested her. The playfulness

was gone. What remained was the sharp intelligence Loki usually took pains to bury.

"Riveria." The goddess's voice was soft. "What exactly is so special about this individual?"

"I don't—"

"Ye hesitated," Gareth said, not unkindly. "When Finn said he needed investigating. Ye were about to say something."

Three gazes settled on her. She could deflect—claim fatigue, dismiss the observation, steer the conversation to safer ground.

Instead, she found herself speaking honestly.

"He's a Level 2," she said slowly. "A Level 2 who can solo-dive to Rivira. A Level 2 who possessed a weapon capable of piercing a Level 4's body—and that alone should be impossible. A Level 2 whose skills make no sense for his apparent station, who splits his time between a merchant's cart and feats of archery that most experienced adventurers couldn't replicate."

Loki waited. Her patience was uncharacteristic and therefore unsettling.

"But that's not what caught my attention." Riveria closed her eyes. "It's the feeling I get when he's near."

"Feeling?" Finn prompted.

Riveria had lived for nearly a century. She'd travelled Orario's depths and heights, encountered countless adventurers and monsters and divine beings. She'd felt the weight of ancient magic, the resonance of sacred places, the pull of powers older than mortal memory.

None of it had prepared her for a human noodle vendor.

"He feels like the Alf's Royal Forest," she said quietly.

The office went still.

"He feels like a spirit. Or at least someone blessed by one." Riveria opened her eyes and met Loki's gaze directly. "When I'm near him, there's a sense of... apple trees. Silver blossoms. A resonance that shouldn't exist outside the forest—and certainly not in a human. But it's there. Every time. And it makes me feel as though I'm home."

Gareth stared. "Home," he repeated.

"I can't explain it better than that." Riveria heard the edge in her own voice and couldn't quite suppress it. "I've never encountered anything like it. He's human—clearly human—but something about his presence carries echoes of things I haven't felt since leaving the forest."

Loki's head tilted sharply, her eyes losing focus in that particular way gods displayed when reaching for memories too vast for mortal comprehension. For a long moment the trickster goddess seemed genuinely elsewhere, chasing some half-remembered thread through the deep places of divine experience.

Then she blinked, and the moment passed. Whatever she'd been searching for, she either hadn't found it or wasn't ready to share.

"Yes," Loki said, her voice carrying none of its usual levity. "We should certainly investigate this fellow. And if he's as skilled as you describe at Level 2, perhaps we could negotiate with his deity. Depending on who he belongs to—"

"Unknown," Riveria said. "I didn't pursue that line of questioning."

"Didn't ye ask?" Gareth raised an eyebrow.

"The situation didn't lend itself to casual conversation." Riveria's tone remained level, though she felt oddly defensive about the gap. "We were in the aftermath of a battle, surrounded by wounded adventurers and smouldering buildings. Interrogating someone who'd just helped save lives seemed inappropriate."

"Ye could've asked his Familia affiliation at least," the Dwarf pointed out.

"That's hardly secret information."

"He mentioned training 'elsewhere' when I asked about his archery background. When I pressed for specifics, he said it was 'nowhere I'd know.'" Riveria paused. "I chose not to push further."

Finn and Gareth exchanged a look that Riveria couldn't quite read.

"Riveria Ljos Alf, choosing not to push for information." Loki's grin returned, though it carried an edge that hadn't been there before. "Will wonders never cease."

"There was something about him," Riveria said. The admission cost her more than she'd expected. "The way he carried himself. The exhaustion in his eyes even whilst performing feats that should have been beyond him. He reminded me of..."

She trailed off, unwilling to finish the thought aloud.

"Of?" Finn prompted gently.

"Of adventurers who've seen too much. Done too much. Who keep moving because stopping would mean facing what they've lost." Riveria folded her hands in her lap, suddenly aware of how much she'd given away. "It seemed cruel to interrogate someone like that about his past."

The room fell quiet. Through the walls, the sounds of the Loki Familia compound continued uninterrupted—voices in the corridors, the distant ring of training weapons against training weapons, the ordinary rhythms of a Familia that had no idea its executives were discussing noodle vendors with impossible abilities.

"We'll need to approach this carefully," Finn said at last. "If he's genuinely what he appears to be—a skilled adventurer with unusual abilities and no hostile intent—alienating him through heavy-handed investigation would be counterproductive. Especially if his deity proves amenable to cooperation."

"Agreed," Gareth rumbled. "The lad helped our allies and asked nothing for it. That counts for something."

Loki drummed her fingers on the desk, her expression cycling through calculations Riveria could only guess at. Then the goddess's grin widened into something altogether too familiar.

"And it looks like our virgin hag finally has a crush on—"

The impact of Riveria's fist against Loki's skull echoed through the office.

"Ow!" The goddess clutched her head, sprawling across her desk. "What was that for?!"

"For being yourself," Riveria said coolly.

"Ye're such a violent woman! No wonder ye're still single after—"

Riveria raised her fist again.

"—after however many years it's been, which is *totally* a reasonable amount of time for an elf of your calibre to remain selective!" Loki finished in a rush, scooting her chair back.

Gareth chuckled, the sound rumbling up from somewhere deep in his chest.

"Walked right into that one, ye did."

"I was trying to lighten the mood!"

"Try harder," Finn suggested mildly.

Riveria lowered her hand, though she kept her expression stern. The familiar rhythm of it—Loki's provocations, Gareth's amusement, Finn's quiet diplomacy—settled something that had been restless in her since Rivira.

But even as she fell back into the comfortable patterns of her Familia, part of her remained elsewhere. On a rooftop. Watching a man draw a giant black bow, loosing arrows that seemed otherworldly in accuracy, and doing it all with the quiet exhaustion of someone who had been fighting for far, far too long.

'Who are you, Shirou Emiya?'

---

--&<o>&--

End

**Follow me on my other socials  
and stack additional voting  
points on the story of your  
choosing.**

[XTwitterX](#)

 [XTwitterX](#) 

 [Tumblr](#) 

 [Discord](#) 

 [BlueSky](#) 