

16



AUTHOR:  
DOUFU MAYOI

ILLUSTRATIONS BY:  
DaiXt  
KUROGIN (DIGS)

# BLACK SUMMONER

ADVENTURERS OF THE LABYRINTHINE COUNTRY



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SHIN

KELVIN

"KII-YAAAAHHH!  
THIS IS MY  
REVENGE FOR  
RIOOOLLLD!"

"WHAT?!"



SUZU'S AXE KICK, SEEMING FOR ALL THE WORLD LIKE A BOLT OF LIGHTNING DROPPING FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH, LANDED SQUARE ON ODDRADD'S HEAD. ATTACKS LIKE THIS USUALLY HAD A VERY LARGE WINDUP THAT ACTED AS A TELL, BUT HER ATTACKING SPEED HAD BEEN SEVERAL LEVELS FASTER THAN ODDRADD'S FLURRY.

**"LIGHT-  
NING."**

SUZU







# BLACK SUMMONER

## Characters

**Kelvin Celsius**

Summoner who gained powerful skills in exchange for memories of his past life while transmigrating from Japan. Constantly seeking battle with powerful foes.

Alias: Grim Reaper

## Kelvin's Companions



**Efil**

Kelvin's slave and a high elf girl.

A perfect maid, her love for her master included.



**Sera**

A beautiful demon in Kelvin's service.

Daughter of the previous Demon Lord. Ignorant and knowledgeable in equal measure.



**Rion Celsius**

A Hero summoned by Kelvin who became his half sister.

Has a rather skewed view of what it means to be a little sister.



**Clotho**

The first monster Kelvin ever took on as a Follower.

Its Storage and ability to create materials make it a key player!



**DarkMel**

The form DarkMel took when she made a contract with Kelvin while on the verge of death. She's cute, and that's pretty much it.



**Melfina**

Goddess of Reincarnation (currently on leave).

Refers to herself as Kelvin's wife. Eats a lot.





**Gerard**

The dark knight who serves Kelvin. Dotes on Ruka and Rion as if they were his own grandchildren.



**Shutola Trycen**

Trycen's princess. Currently freeloading at Kelvin's place. Every day is a blast!



**Ange**

Former Apostle. Now happily enslaved to Kelvin.



**Bell Baal**

A former Apostle. Made up with her older sister, Sera, after a fierce fight. Seems like a typical prodigy, but is actually pretty awkward on the inside.

## The Holy Empire of Deramis

A country that worships the Goddess of Reincarnation. Headed by the Pope. Connected to the Rizean Empire on the Western Continent through the Crux Bridge, but is at odds with them.



**Colette**

The Oracle of Deramis. Summoned the Heroes. Her fanaticism makes her a bit sick in the head.



**Kanzaki Touya**

A Hero summoned from Japan. Lucky pervert. Dual wields. Very oblivious to signs of affection.



**Shiga Setsuna**

A Hero summoned from Japan. Serious and diligent. Cleans up the problems that Touya causes.



**Mizuoka Nana**

A Hero summoned from Japan. Partnered with Mun-chan, a flame dragon. Has a comforting aura.



**Kuromiya Miyabi**

A Hero summoned from Japan. One-quarter Russian. Her thoughts are a complete mystery.



**Phillip**

The Pope of Deramis and Colette's father. Like Serge, he was a member of the party of Ancient Heroes.



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ILLUSTRATOR: DAIXT, KUROGIN (DIGS)



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# Chapter 1: Academic City

There had been a string of pleasant days dressed in a pleasant spring atmosphere. These days, Parth was the picture of peace. There were no sudden appearances of vicious monsters or a certain breed of angel-type threats falling from the sky.

*Man, those times with Demon Lords and black goddesses were terrific. My days had been so boring lately that this thought had seeped deep into my mind. I mean, wow, peace sure is great. Seriously, it's the best!*

"No, I can't do it. It's too peaceful..."

I was gazing out the window of my room while resting my chin in the palm of my hand. Those words had come out of my mouth naturally and completely unconsciously. A bird that had been resting on a nearby tree took off; it must have hated my unmotivated tone. Don't get me wrong, though; I didn't mean I wanted to disrupt the peace or anything, okay?

Just a month earlier, I had made my way around the entire continent, enjoying the Battle Rally. I hadn't had such a fun time since my fight with DarkMel, and even now, whenever I closed my eyes, I could see those fights vividly in my mind.

Unfortunately, that was a month ago. Since then, I'd had to go all over the place making the rounds in preparation for the wedding, stocking up on drinks for the reception, reserving a venue, and doing other acts relating to the new Goddess. With all that on my plate, I had been forced into a battleless life, and as things stood, no matter how much of a rational battle junkie I was, I would end up buckling under the stress. At the very least, I wanted to fit in some mock battles with my friends to fulfill my needs in between my many commitments.

"Ah, but that brawl with my father-in-law was good."

"What are you talking about, Master?" Efil asked in response to my muttering.



Scratching my cheek in embarrassment at being heard, I decided it would be fine to open up to her. “Oh, nothing much. I just haven’t been able to have a real match recently, or get some good exercise by beating monsters, or anything like that, right? So I’m feeling a little battle-starved, I guess I should say...”

“Well, everyone *has* been fully booked these days. They have no free time. If that’s how you feel, Master, would you like to head down to the underground training area right now? Though I may be unworthy, allow me, Efil, to be of service to you.” Efil put her hand to her chest, looking extremely motivated.

*I’m happy you feel that way. I really am, but...*

“You can’t just try to make me happy like that, Efil. Didn’t we decide a little while ago that fighting would absolutely not be allowed unless it’s for work? In fact, we really should be cutting down your maid duties as well.”

“No...you can’t...”

“Grk! Even if you cry, that won’t change anything!”

If I were the me from before, I would have happily taken Efil up on her offer. However, there was now a reason I couldn’t, a reason that it would never be allowed! I tearfully suppressed my desire to shout an invitation to fight, struggling to overcome my own urges.

“It’s coming up on one month since we found out you had a new life inside of you, Efil. You should understand how everyone, including me, feels.”

“I... I’m sorry. I know that in my head, but I just...”

Yes, in a joyous turn of events, Efil was pregnant with my child. After the Battle Rally, Efil, who was usually flawlessly self-controlled, had started to feel ill, got fevers, and was assaulted by urges to vomit. These symptoms had continued for a while, with me attempting to heal her with magic. However, her condition wouldn’t change, and Gerard and I finally started to worry. This worry spread to the great Dragon Kings whom she had been feeding, until finally it spread throughout the whole family, resulting in a huge uproar calling to take her to a doctor—or rather, Colette—immediately.

In the midst of all that, Ellie, the subhead maid, stopped us and said,



“Congratulations, Master, on your pregnancy.”

“Congrats!” Ruka followed up, but at that time, I wasn’t able to process what she’d said.

I’d exchanged looks with Gerard, who had just received unexpected news about a great-grandchild, and then looked back at Ellie for confirmation. She nodded encouragingly. Finally, I turned to Efil, whose face had gone red, and managed to squeeze out the words “Well done.”

Men are never reliable when it counts.

“I really thought I’d be the first, since I’m the legal wife...” Mel muttered, which was quickly followed by a flurry of voices.

“You’ve got DarkMel, so in a sense, you were the first. I don’t care about the order myself, though! Goldiana told me that it’s times like these when a woman should show how bighearted she can be!”

“I think you should have kept the second half of that to yourself, sister Sera.”

“Kh hh! Is it just the number of times?! It’s gotta be the number of times! It’s frustrating, but congratulations, Efil-chan!”

“Can I try touching your belly, Efil-nee? Huh? There won’t be any movement yet?”

“Wow, I’m already getting a little sister? Nice, papa!”

Of course, the excitement wasn’t just limited to Gerard and me. I don’t want to get into who said what, but the girls were really something. In the end, everyone seemed to agree that it made sense it was Efil.

Since then, there had been a disturbance in the family, in a lot of ways. After some discussion, it was unanimously decided that Efil should be banned from fighting. She would occasionally tempt me like she had just done, but I used my will of steel to caution her instead of falling for it.

However, Efil stubbornly refused to give up any of her maid work, so we reluctantly allowed her to continue her maid duties only during the initial stage of her pregnancy on condition that she wouldn’t push herself. Still, Ellie and the other maids were secretly putting in the extra effort to keep tabs on her and



lessen her work as much as possible from the shadows.

“You’re the one who understands me best, Efil. You don’t need to apologize. I know you offered because you were thinking of me. So, how do you feel? Has the taste of anything changed? You looked like you were struggling in the kitchen.”

“Ah, yes. I asked Ruka to be my taste tester, so I somehow managed proper adjustments to the flavor. As long as I get the process and quantities right, I can make things pretty much perfectly.”

“I see. Seriously, though, don’t push yourself. If you think you’re feeling anything other than perfect or you start getting a bulge, you need to go on absolute rest, okay?”

“Yes, I understand that perfectly well. But please allow me to be selfish while I still can.” Efil smiled.

*Oh, come on, I can’t say anything more once you make that expression. Fine, serve me as much as you like. I wonder how long my will of steel will hold out?*

“Hm?”

There was a good mood going between us, but then I heard the sound of panicked footsteps coming from outside the room. I listened carefully and realized the footsteps were coming towards us.

*What’s going on? I know everyone’s been trained not to run in the hallways unless there’s an emergency. It’s gotta be either Sera or Ruka...or maybe Dahak or Huba, though that’s a long shot. Jeez, I guess I should go give whoever it is a talking-to.*

*KerSLAM!* The door flew open.

*Hey now, doors aren’t meant to be treated like that. You’re being rude.*

I was about to put those opinions into words when I realized that, shockingly, it was Rion on the other side. Since this wasn’t something I expected of her, I found myself unable to form words. Meanwhile, she shoved a piece of paper in my face.

“Kel-niiiiiiii! I got an acceptance letter from Lumiest! Just

noooooowwwwww!”

“Seriouslyyyyyy?! Riiiioooooon, good joooooooooob!”

Instantly, I forgave her for everything. She jumped into my arms, so of course I caught her, and we spent the next while spinning around in celebration. There was a mountain of things I wanted to ask her and talk about, but for the moment I decided to prioritize our skinship.



The Academic City Lumiest, located on the Western Continent, was one of the few schools in this world. It was famous, and nobles and royals from all over gathered there to learn. It seemed the requirements for being admitted were very strict, and I had heard there were members of royal families who had been rejected for failing to meet them. If the prospective student didn’t have both standing and talent, or at least something that made up for a lack of those things, there would be no room for them at Lumiest. Once you got in, however, the instruction was absolutely first-class. It didn’t stop at just martial skills or magic either—many things were taught there in the best of environments.

That should do for an explanation of Lumiest. And as for why Rion was waving around a letter of admittance, allow me to tell that story. Going back to a few days after I finished the Battle Rally, just like my life these days, I was too busy preparing for the wedding, among other things, to enjoy any fights.

I returned home and took a small break. In order to soften my exhaustion from doing things I wasn’t used to as best I could, I sank limply into one of the deck chairs on the balcony. Even though no amount of fighting could make me this tired, having to prepare everything in a way that was even and fair for everyone was such a difficult task that I had no energy left. At any rate, it was safe to say that I was wholeheartedly done.

“Um...do you have a minute, Kel-nii?”

“Rion? It’s Rion!”

If you excluded battle, the number of things that could recover my mental and spiritual energy drastically dropped. However, one of those things, my little sister, happened to come over to resupply me with her essence with perfect



timing. Of course, I immediately jumped out of my chair—a completely natural response from any older brother.

“Aha ha, those are some amazing reflexes, Kel-nii. That was faster than during the Battle Rally, wasn’t it?”

“As your older brother, it’s a given that I pull out all the stops for you, right? Anyway, what’s up? If you just want a private chat between siblings, I’m all for it. I’ll recover at double the speed.”

“Of course I’d be okay with that too. But first, I want to show you something. It’s this...”

“Hmm?”

Rion handed me a pamphlet, and I took it without hesitation. I read the large header text to discover that it said “Lumi-est.” Apparently, my lovely, adorable little sister had come all this way with documents pertaining to the Academic City.

“This is the introductory pamphlet for the academy that Shutola and Colette told me they graduated from. What are you doing with it, Rion?”

“Uh, to tell you the truth...I want to try experiencing school life.”

I was utterly shocked, and wordlessly, the pamphlet fell from my hands. *Huh? What did she just say? School life? Rion...wants to go to Lumi-est...on the Western Continent? It wouldn’t be realistic to commute from home, so...she’d be living in a dorm? Away from me? It’s called the Academic City, so of course they’d have dorms. But still, are they really safe? Are they designed to withstand Rank S spells cast by unknown forces? Actually, I can’t allow Rion to live with random young people from who-knows-where; I don’t even know them! So, does this mean she’s seriously going to be living away from me?*

My Parallel Processing started running in loops, going from question to confirmation to answer over and over. Outwardly, it looked like I’d completely stopped functioning. However, Rion seemed to have expected that reaction, as she waited patiently for me to restart.

I gasped as I snapped back to reality. “Was I frozen just now?!”

“Yeah, totally. You didn’t even move a millimeter. Here, I picked up the pamphlet you dropped.”

“Oh, thanks. Sorry about that...”

“Also, I think you’ll get this as soon as you read it, but the dorms are separated by gender, so you don’t have to worry!”

“Uhh...did I say what I was thinking out loud or something?”

“Nope, I just figured it was the first thing you’d be concerned about, Kel-nii.”

“I... I see...”

While I was happy she understood her brother so well, I couldn’t approve of Rion attending Lumiest. After all, even if the dorms were separated, there would be guys at the school, right? And they’d be starving ones in the middle of puberty too, right?!

I wanted to argue that point passionately, but I couldn’t actually do so in the face of Rion’s absolutely angelic smile. Then, while I was hesitating, *he* suddenly appeared.

“I heard what’s going on! You can’t do that; you can’t, Rion! Even if the dorms are separated by gender, the school itself will be rampant with those ravenous beasts! Men are all wolves! I cannot allow my cute Rion to go to such a dangerous place!” Gerard must have climbed up from the floor below. He put his hand on the railing and stuck his head over it as he screamed from his soul.

It seemed he had been down below and overheard us talking. *What an incredible sense of hearing. Is he a bat?!* Still, I praised him in my mind for saying exactly what I wanted to, giving him a “good job” hand signal out of Rion’s line of sight.

“He’s right, I’m worried about that too. Plus, Lumiest isn’t an easy place to get into, you know? You need a letter of recommendation from a good source, and depending on the situation, you might need to donate a large amount of money. You’d also be surrounded by relatives of VIPs... We’re just worried about you, Rion, more than anything.” Having seen my chance, I voiced my own concerns. Rion was a kind girl, so I had no doubt she would reconsider after seeing her beloved older brother and grandpa so opposed.



“I... I see. Yeah, you’re right. It’s just that I was so sickly before reincarnating that I couldn’t really go to school...so I just wanted to experience that life, even if only a little. I figured I wouldn’t have the chance once I married you, Kel-nii, so... But that was selfish of me, wasn’t it? I’m sorry.”

I could practically hear the sound of both our hearts throbbing in sympathy for her. We were lost for words. Rion understood where we were coming from and had backed down. Yes, she’d backed down, but what was this pain in my chest? I was also feeling very guilty. Was this the outcome we actually wanted? Really?

“My... My liege, I can hear the sound of my conviction snapping clean in half...”

“What a coincidence—me too. But still! Even though we’ve broken, it’ll be too late if something happens to Rion! Far too late!” Somehow, I managed to endure the urge to give in.

“I see... I have now heard everything! Leave this to me!”

I gasped in shock as we heard another voice coming from beyond the balcony railing. Who was it? Well, being in love with the person in question, I didn’t even need to think. Sera, who seemed to have been listening in from below just like Gerard, made her appearance with an awfully confident expression.

*Hey, why is everyone suddenly popping up from there? Is it some kind of fad around the house or something?*

“Y-You too, Sera? I mean, I’m okay with it, but...what was your idea?”

“I have the perfect idea for you two worrywarts who are just piling anxiety upon anxiety!” Sera announced.

“A perfect idea?” Gerard and I parroted in unison.

“You’re worried because you’d be sending Rion off alone, which means you just have to include a reliable guard that’ll be admitted with her!”

“I...see?” *Damn you, Sera. Again with the outrageous ideas.*

“An escort, huh?” Gerard answered. “If there were one, both my liege and I would have peace of mind!”

“Right? Heh heh!”

“Wait, wait. Just...wait. Gerard, it’s too soon to say that. The conditions for acceptance are very strict. Who would we send as a guard who could even get in? We don’t have enough money to get someone in with donations since our funds are tied up in Mel’s food expenses and the wedding. And there’d be no point sending a guard if whoever it is can’t be with her in the dorms. A male guard would be out of the question, so this guard would have to be the same gender as Rion and have as much or more power than her for me to allow it.”

“Hrm, you’re right about that. My liege makes a good point.”

Planning to talk Sera down, I launched a spiel with all the logic I could muster. It had to be someone who could get into the academy on their own and match Rion in power. I was sure that no such person would be conveniently available. However, nothing I said caused Sera’s expression to falter.

“Then there’s no problem. My little sister, Bell, fits all your conditions! The next time I go home, I’ll ask her and father about it. I’m sure both of them will be totally on board!”

“Huh, Bell-chan?! I get to go to school with Bell-chan?!”

“Yep! You will! Bell’s a princess just like me, and now that Grelbareika is stable, the money won’t be an issue. In fact, if we need more, I can just go and earn some at the Beast King Festival! Heh heh, and the two little sisters would fit each other perfectly, wouldn’t they?”

“Whuh...whaaaaaaat...”

From there, the conversation proceeded well beyond what I could have imagined.



“I heard everything. Papa, I’m interested in the academy as well!”

This happened after I had reluctantly—so reluctantly that I was basically forced—agreed to Rion’s request. Specifically, when everyone had gathered in the dining hall for dinner, my beloved daughter DarkMel spoke up.

*Clatter...*



The sound of me dropping my spoon accented my second serious shock of the day. I thought that the sound was awfully loud, but then I noticed that Gerard had dropped his spoon too. It seemed DarkMel's interest had exceeded her great-grandfather's ability to process the words.

*Yeah, it's going to take me a little longer to work through as well, so just wait a while, please.*

"Uh...uhhhhh...erm...wh-what...do you mean by that?" I asked.

"My... My dear DarkMel, could you please say that again, slooowly, so that your grandfather can understand?"

Gerard and I finally managed to squeeze some words out. It was incredible how hard talking had suddenly become. I wasn't a fan of exposing this side of myself, but given how obviously shaken I was, I couldn't really make any excuses.

"I heard from Rion-san about the Academic City of Lumiest. Apparently, children of the appropriate age—meaning about my age at the earliest—go to school to study hard. I'm already eight years old, so I wanted to try leaving home and experiencing new things to grow!"

"Wh-What a wonderful attitude. But how should I put it... Your grandpa here is worried..."

It was clear what Gerard wanted to say, but with Rion's admission having set a precedent, he couldn't quite bring himself to openly oppose her. He was glancing at me repeatedly with a look that said, "You stop them, my liege."

*Come on, of course I'd love to just say no! But when it comes to this pair of sparkly, pure eyes... Gah!*

"I'm also worried about DarkMel, but let's put that aside for now. As a parent, I want to respect her strong desire to leave her comfort zone and grow."

"Papa!"

"That said, it would be impossible to send both Rion and DarkMel to Lumiest. Money is part of the reason, but we also need someone to recommend the applicant. I know we're a family of Rank S adventurers, but the Celsius house

isn't royalty, so getting two people admitted at once would be—”

“I see. I understand the situation,” someone else replied. “And we can do it—sending both Rion-san and DarkMel-san to Lumiest, that is.”

I made a strangled noise of surprise. While I had been making a do-or-die gambit to dissuade my daughter, a refined voice had cut through the dining hall. That voice was so beautiful, and the contents of the speech so merciless, that I reflexively stopped speaking.





“Sh-Shutola?”

The owner of that voice was Shutola. These days, she tended to hang around in her adult form, so that was the form she was currently in. Since she couldn't very well be in a dress every day in her own home, she was dressed in a rough manner that was unseemly for a princess. Still, her form was elegant as she held a cup filled with tea in one hand. She was directing a kind smile towards DarkMel as she implied that she had the perfect plan (and she probably did). Her kind expression looked incredibly scary to me, though.

“For the entrance exam, there's a practical skills test, then a written portion, and finally an interview. And for those who want to go the extra mile, there is also the option to get a recommendation from certain people, or you can make a special donation to the school. DarkMel is brilliant and skilled, and of course there's no doubt Rion is as well. I can personally vouch that they have been passionately studying every day and have even learned proper etiquette. So I don't believe there's any reason to worry about their test results. In fact, for the practical skills test, I would be more worried that they might go too far.”

“Mneheh heh!”

Both parties that had been praised so lavishly by Shutola smiled. Because Shutola had said this straight to their faces, Rion's cheeks turned red with embarrassment, while DarkMel seemed incredibly happy. As the big brother of one and father of the other, I couldn't help but feel proud.

At the same time, my anxiety was piling up.

“Officially, they take everything into consideration to determine who gets admitted, but Lumiest has a tendency to place importance on legacy or pedigree. This would be the only pitfall these two could fall into. Although we, the Celsius house, have risen to Rank S and been given a family name as proof of nobility, I cannot say how well received a new family that climbed the ranks through adventuring will be. There's basically no precedent for it, after all. The Rank S adventurer Leopardess, or Bakke-san, has twins who were admitted, but they're also princesses of Faanis. Frankly, in their case I cannot tell whether the exam proctor gave them high marks because he was awed by the power of a Rank S adventurer or because he wanted to protect tradition and prioritized

their noble lineage.”

“I see. On that front, Bell is perfect, then! She’s a princess too, after all!” Sera confirmed.

“In Bell’s case, I would be worried about her interview.”

“Agh!” Surprised, Sera made a face that screamed, “That’s right!”

*Though to be honest, if they’re going to emphasize Bell’s status as a princess that much, I don’t know if having her play chaperone would be a good thing after all.*

“So how do we remove that uncertainty? You sounded like you had some sort of secret plan, Shutola. This is important—it’ll affect my DarkMel’s future. We need to make sure she gets in!” Suddenly, Mel had glasses on and was acting like a tiger mom.

*Are those fake glasses from when Sera put on a white coat? Hey, did you seriously go out of your way to borrow those at a time like this?*

“There are two methods. As I mentioned earlier, we can get recommendations from certain people or make a special donation. The latter does not leave a good impression once they’re admitted, and it would put too much of a burden on our finances, so we will be going with the former. I’m sure you already know what I’m about to say. Both Colette and I are alumni and valedictorians of Lumiest, so we just have to recommend them!” Shutola declared with great force, as if to say that everything was solved. At the very end, she almost sounded like her child version. However, her words were a disaster...at least, to the big brother and the father.

“Will... Will things really be that simple? I know you two are alumni and graduated at the top of your respective classes, but I find it hard to believe that your recommendations will have that much of an effect.”

“I assure you, they will.”

I was flatly contradicted right to my face. *Oh no... I can’t do it. I don’t think I can win against Shutola in a battle of words.*

“Graduating as valedictorian earns the full trust of the entire Academic City of



Lumiést. In this case, valedictorians acknowledged by Lumiést would be marking prospective students as people they can expect a lot from. It will be much more effective than the word of some royal with nothing but their name going for them. We might even be able to set our sights on exemptions from tuition and other school fees.”

“Wha... Really?” Rion cried.

“Wow!” DarkMel exclaimed.

“Yes, it’s true. Colette loves the two of you...or rather...she worships you? *Ahem...* At any rate, there’s no doubt she thinks of you two fondly. I’ll contact Deramis myself, so don’t worry and do your best on your exams.”

“Yaaay!” My daughter and little sister both raised their hands and cheered.

Meanwhile, a certain father and grandfather were left with their shoulders drooping in silent despondence. The girls would procure recommendations, and it might not even cost any money to send them to school. Furthermore, they would be guarded by a former Apostle of the same gender who could live with them. There was no longer any room to argue. We were horrified, truly horrified.

::I know Rion-san and DarkMel-san will be leaving your side, Kelvin-san, but I don’t think it’s all bad.::

I suddenly got a telepathic message from Shutola. Wondering what she was on about, I turned to face her. At that precise moment, she had brought her teacup to her lips.

::Going to Lumiést will be a good experience for them and change them for the better. But more than that, this will be the perfect chance for you, Kelvin-san. As a father and an older brother, why not cheer DarkMel-san and Rion-san on?::

After that, I continued to listen to what Shutola had to say, and I completely switched sides to cheering them on. No, I wasn’t planning on following them to school or anything, but she was right that this would be good for me. It seemed that Shutola understood this rational battle junkie well.



Having been won over by my little sister, my beloved daughter, and Shutola, I traveled to Grelbarelka on the Northern Continent to ask Bell to be a guard, per Sera's suggestion. Accompanying me was Sera herself and the two who would be living with Bell: Rion and DarkMel.

We were led to a guest room that Sera would have described as having perfect aesthetics, whereas I would have said it was decorated in a very unique, demonic way. We waited several minutes before the poster boy of all doting parents, my father-in-law, Gustav, came to see us. His impressive red beard flowed with the wind of his actions as he opened the door with enough vigor to destroy it. His entrance was so explosive that I almost reacted like it was a battle; after all, he was clearly more powerful than the last time I'd seen him. Of course my battle-junkie brain would itch for it. Still, I endured.

*I'm so good.*

"Woow!" Rion and DarkMel reacted with honest joy and applause at my father-in-law's surprising entrance.

Meanwhile, Sera reacted with exasperation, but my father-in-law must not have noticed, because he seemed delighted.

"Welcome home, Sera! I'm glad to see DarkMel and Rion too. Feel free to treat this place as if it's your own home! I'll also welcome you while I'm at it, foolish son. Be grateful."

"Your treatment of me is horrible, as always..."

"Kheh heh heh, he's just hiding his embarrassment. Just let him have it." Victor appeared, placing down enough cups for everyone, along with a teapot and baked sweets that emitted a very appetizing smell, on the table in front of us. He gave off a different impression than usual, probably because he was wearing butler-like clothes. Still, his unique laugh was the same as ever.

"Whoa?! Dammit, Victor! Don't just spread whatever nonsense you like!"

"My, as expected, Victor! You understand my dad well! He really is like that, isn't he?"

"Y-You too, Sera?!"

*I see, but it's not good to lie. Still, this country's gotten a lot...brighter, hasn't it?* I got the impression that back when my father-in-law had been the Demon Lord, conversations like this would never have happened. *Given how things are going, maybe Bell really will agree to our plan?*

"Kheh heh heh heh heh, your praise delights me. Now, now, please, partake in the tea and snacks. This may be forward of me, but I made them personally."

"Urggkk, do *not* take this the wrong way, foolish son!"

"Ha ha ha ha..."

Leaving aside my father-in-law's obvious attempt to hide his embarrassment, the baked sweets were seriously good. Even DarkMel, who was normally a light eater, was totally entranced. If Mel had been there, the food would have disappeared instantly, but DarkMel was eating little by little, like a squirrel. The peace of mind she gave me as I watched her was incomparable to watching Mel eat, in a lot of ways.

"Sorry for keeping you waiting." Several minutes later, the star of our business that day finally showed up.

*Now then, let's get down to it...*

After we had explained, Bell's response was, "What? Why do I have to get involved?"

"Thought you'd say that..." I muttered.

Not everything in the world goes smoothly. After telling Bell our side of the story, I'd asked her to accompany Rion and DarkMel to Lumiest, but her answer was merciless. Not only that, but she seemed to truly despise the idea.

"Does Bell-chan...hate the idea of going with me?" Rion asked dejectedly.

"Wha— No! Err, that's not it! Don't tear up like that, Rion! That's not fair!"

"To tell you the truth, Bell, I was the one that suggested it," Sera jumped in. "You have the standing and the ability, but most of all, you're the one I trust the most with this. That's why I recommended you. It seems I failed to take into account how you'd feel, though. I'm a failure as a sister, aren't I?"

"It was your idea, sister Sera?! Uh...errr...it's not like I *hate* the idea. It's just



that this is all so sudden. I was just surprised...”

*Wow, her expression and attitude changed immediately. She’s way too soft on Rion and Sera. Well, let’s see, I should try confirming that.*

“Heh heh, seems like you’ve changed your mind. Will you be their guard?” I asked.

“What? No, wait a second. Why are you the one asking? Go die a million deaths.”

“You know, don’t you think the way you and your father treat me is just terrible? You could at least not be so blunt about it.”

“I’m being plenty roundabout as it is.”

“You...are?”

I knew that they were only harsh on the surface but didn’t actually feel that way deep down. Still, though, being talked to this way every time I interacted with them tended to bring even me down. Luckily, Sera and the others were sweet enough on me to make up for it.

“Now, now, please calm down, Bell-sama. Here, have this.” Victor stepped in to try and defuse the situation.

“Oh, is this a new one? The blood cake you made for me last time was good, so I expect a lot from this as well. Yeah, as I thought. It’s delicious,” she replied.

“Keh heh he, thank you very much.”

“In light of how good this is, I will deign to accept your request,” she informed us. “But don’t get me wrong, okay? It’s not like I actually *want* to be doing this.”

It seemed that Bell, who already cared about the people most involved in this idea, was also a fan of sweets. I never would have expected one of Victor’s treats to be the clincher in this equation.

“R-Really? Yaaay! Thank you, Bell-chan!” Rion squealed.

“Calm down. I’ll say this now: I’m not going to play buddy-buddy with you. I’m simply going as your bodyguard.”

“Still, I’m happy. Let’s work hard so all three of us can be valedictorians!”

“Mmgh... Yes, let’s!” DarkMel chimed in.

“DarkMel, you...eat really elegantly for being a part of that Goddess... Well, anyway, Rion, I think you’re being unfair to yourself. It may be one of the best academies in the world, but we’re talking about a place that’s just a gathering of normal people with maybe a little hair on them. Even if we put in no effort, it’d be weird if we didn’t graduate at the top. This’ll be easy.”

*Bell, girl, are you trying to set up the biggest flag in the world?*

“Oh, I know what this is! As Kelvin would say, this is a giant flag!” Sera exclaimed. “By setting this up, something huge will get in their way, making it hard for them to graduate easily!”

“Don’t believe everything he says, sister Sera. You’ll just go insane.”

“Wow, that was a really damaging stray bullet...”

She was right about that, but I made sure not to say it out loud because I knew how she would respond.

“Waitwaitwaitwaitwaaait!”

“What’s got you so excited, father? Did you get a stomachache or something?”

“Don’t just yell out of the blue like that, papa. It’s annoyingly loud, and you’ll just raise your blood pressure again.”

“Wooooaargh! My beloved daughters are worried about me! The power of their words is seeping into me! Wait, that’s not the point! Why does Bell have to go to some school?! From what my foolish son is saying, it will be filled with human boys—doesn’t that make it a den of young wolves?! No, it’s too dangerous! Your papa will not allow it!”

True to everyone’s expectations, my father-in-law vehemently raised his objections. He was working off the glow from the sisters’ words at the moment, so things were fine now, but if he was to work up the voltage, I could see him activating his Unique Skill, Wrath. Still...

“Unfortunately, this matter is already settled. Any objections you raise will be fruitless,” I cautioned him.

“Yooouuu?! Weren’t you on my side?! Agghh, you traitor! Are you really okay with what could happen to your daughter and little sister?!”

“Of course not! That is the only thing I will deny with all my might! But hear this: the Academic City of Lumiest...uses uniforms! And it’s the type that Bell would normally never wear—it has a cute skirt!”

“Wha— Whaaaaaaaat?!”

“Hey, don’t just casually use me like that!” Bell cried.

*Sorry, Bell, I know it’s wrong. But when it comes to convincing your father, no amount of logic or explanations of how we’ll ensure your safety will work. That’s why I need to make him cave by using the excuse of seeing you, who never wears anything but shorts, in a skirt. This is all for Rion and DarkMel! Forgive me!*

“And I have here...Bell’s personal uniform, faithfully recreated by Efil!” I announced. “You know how skilled Efil is; you’ve seen Sera’s clothes. If you agree, we can immediately make that image that you are surely picturing come true at once!”

“Whaaat?! Is this what they call a deal with the devil?!” wailed Gustav.

“You two, line up over there,” Bell instructed.

Suddenly, a kick that went straight for my heart came my way, sending both me and my father-in-law out of the castle. I was just reaping what I sowed, but the kick was much stronger than I’d expected, so I was a little happy.



Though I ended up being sent flying along with my father-in-law, I managed to get his permission for Bell to accompany the other two. It seemed he had been completely enthralled by the image of Bell in a school uniform, which was why he had reluctantly given his permission. He had stipulated that we must protect Bell from all the wolves that would be there, but...given how Bell was able to literally pierce through my heart, I was sure there was no need to worry.

*Oh, but Rion and DarkMel are different, okay? They’re still lacking in experience when it comes to society and are totally pure and innocent. Of course*



*it would be too soon for them to touch upon the darkness of the world... Yeah, it's too soon to let them go to school...hrrrrmmm, then maybe I really should just put the kibosh on this whole thing...*

"...nii? Kel-nii? Hey, are you listening?" Rion called.

"Huh? Ah, oh...what were you saying?"

*Crap, oh no. I already decided I wouldn't be an overbearing worrywart when I approved their applications for school. I was so immersed in thought that I ended up ignoring Rion, of all people! This is a grave failure as her older brother. I need to make it up to her!*

"I was just saying that I'm really looking forward to going to Lumiest. What were you thinking about?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just thinking about how confident I was that you and DarkMel will do great there. Bell's going as your bodyguard just in case, so there's absolutely nothing to worry about! Hah! Hah! Hah!"

*Everything I just said is a lie. I'm totally, terribly, inconsolably worried. Yeah, it's impossible. No matter how worried I get about my beloved daughter and little sister, it could never be too much. After all, worry is a form of love! And what's wrong with love? But if I were to let this actually affect my expression and let it out in words, I'd be the same as my father-in-law! I have to use my iron will to clamp down powerfully on this urge! Withstand it, me!*

"You're thinking about something stupid again, aren't you? It's showing on your face," said Bell.

"What? No way?! That's gotta be a lie!"

"You're right, I lied. But you really were thinking something stupid, then. Jeez, how is it you're both a doting parent *and* a sister lover?"

I could make no reply. Bell's verbal jab immediately exposed my iron will for everyone to see. I wanted to shout and retort that she was also an incorrigible sister lover, but I somehow managed to resist the urge again. *Iron will. You have an iron will.*

Several more days passed after I secured permission from my father-in-law,

and we were now on our way to Lumiest. Our group consisted of the three who were applying to the school, me, and my father-in-law. Our official reason for going was to take care of some parts of the application process, but truthfully, we could have done that without going all the way to Lumiest. Really, our goal was to take in the Academic City with our own eyes to determine whether it really was trustworthy...or something like that. We would also be around for Rion and the others to consult, and I had yet to visit the city myself, so taking a detour like this would surely be beneficial.

Through Colette and Shutola, we managed to gain permission to use the teleportation gate to go to the gate closest to the city, and from there, we would take a carriage to Lumiest itself. In fact, we were currently in the process of climbing into said carriage. We had readied two of them, with my unusually large father-in-law occupying the other.

*“Do I want to go with my papa? Never! It’s going to be extra cramped in there.”*

As expected, Gustav threw a tantrum about wanting to travel with Bell, but one word from her and he was sunk.

The two carriages formed a line as we moved, with my father-in-law in the rear. He was being scarily silent during our journey. Bell’s heartless words must have really hurt him.

*Rest in peace.*

“Still...wouldn’t it be faster to just run instead of going in these slow carriages?” Bell asked.

“Oh, don’t be like that. Don’t you think it’s nice and refined to enjoy a relaxed journey like this while watching the scenery?” I asked.

“Refined? It’s impressive how insincere you can be,” she retorted.

“Come on, don’t look at people with eyes full of pity like that. You’re seriously about to crush my iron will into dust, you know?”

“Again with the nonsense. Rion, DarkMel, if you keep living with this dumbass, you’ll catch his idiocy someday. Oh, actually, that means going to school would be an excellent countermeasure. I get it now.”

*She went really aggressive with that remark, but who's really the insincere one here? It's fine, though, since I know that even with all her thorns, Bell is a nice girl. She ended up accepting her role as bodyguard, after all. She's just the opposite of Sera in that she's really awkward.*

"Wh-What?! What's with those warm eyes you're pointing at me?" Bell shouted. "There's seriously something wrong with you, making those eyes after being slandered like that! Ah, wait...could it be...when I bored through your heart a while back, did it send some weird shock to your brain or something?"

*Yeah, it's amazing how she's managed to fuse kind words with blades. She's seriously worried about me, but at the same time, my heart is kind of hurt.*

"Of course not. Papa is very thoughtful and kind. I'm sure he's doing this out of concern for you, Bell-san," DarkMel chimed in.

"I'm with DarkMel," Rion agreed. "There's no need for you to be worried, Bell-chan."

"Oohh, I knew you'd understand, my beloved daughter and little sister! You two know me so well!"

"Ehe heh heh..." both of them chuckled bashfully.

As thanks for them being able to understand my thoughts, I gave them both a light hug. *Please let me hug you. Mmm...*

Bell sighed. "It's almost impressive how you can do that in front of other people..."

"Don't look at me like that; you're making me blush."

"I'm several times more embarrassed than you are. I'll say this again: don't do such things so lightly in Lumiest. I am coming as Grelbarelkan royalty, and those two are nobles risen from adventurers. We have appearances to maintain."

"Ha ha! I know—you don't need to remind me. I don't plan to do anything that would inconvenience you three."

"Really?"

"Really! That's also why I prepared these carriages!"



“I see... So, why *are* we using these carriages?”

“Allow me to explain,” I said. “The Grelbarelkan Empire is a huge nation that rules over the Northern Continent. However, the Northern Continent itself is not widely known. Though the four great countries of the Eastern Continent that participated in the battle at the central sea might be an exception, I’m sure most of the Western Continent hasn’t heard of you. Part of the reason you are being admitted into this school is to be something like an international bridge builder. The image you put out will directly influence people’s image of Grelbarelka itself, Bell.”

Bell paused to ponder that for a moment. “Well, you’re right about that. So?”

“Just try imagining the princess of a country from some land you don’t know crossing the entire continent at crazy speeds, especially during an impressionable time like this one. People will think that everyone in Grelbarelka is insane for sure.”

“That’s not—”

“On top of that, the plan is to have Rion and DarkMel accompany you, given your standing.”

“I see! I think that’s a great idea!” Rion exclaimed.

That being said, given Bell’s agility, no normal person would even be able to catch sight of her shadow if she was moving at speed. Still, such things couldn’t be relied on. If she were to be seen even for a moment, it would become a huge incident. That was why we were being careful.

“Essentially, I’m saying that me going around freely as a Rank S adventurer and Bell the Apostle doing the same is different. Everything within the bounds of common sense, get it? Oh, but totally feel free to go all out during tests. You should show them what you can do when you’re given the opportunity to do so!”

“Yeah!”

“Okaaay!”

That’d probably scare away any bad pests that might otherwise approach

them. Let their marks skyrocket, and let them possibly even skip ahead. Then they'll come back home even faster.

*Yeah, what an amazingly perfect plan, even for me.*

"With that reasoning, wouldn't it also be bad for royalty to be going around without much in the way of protection?" Bell pointed out. "Normally, even your common merchant will hire several adventurers. I think royalty going around with only a procession of two carriages is already plenty strange."

"Huh? But wouldn't hiring a bunch of escorts just to make up numbers get in the way in case of a fight?"

She paused for a moment. "Yeah, you're right about that. I see you're way more of a battle junkie than a crazy person."

*Wh-What? What's with that fed up look? Your dad agreed with me, you know?!*



The Academic City of Lumiest was located in the southwest region of the Western Continent, nestled between some mountains. Being in a valley might give people the impression of the deep countryside, but the roads leading to the city were properly paved and led to every neighboring country. The city itself was flourishing enough to rival a fairly large country's capital, and it seemed the people here were living well despite the locale. This place used to belong to a larger nation, but at some point, many people had come from other countries to study, and now the Academic City was completely independent, with the academy itself also running the city around it. The details of how this had come to be were rather complicated, and I had absolutely no clue about it given that the only studying I'd done was from the documents Rion gave me.

*Well, it seems like they're getting support from a bunch of different countries, so I guess it's kind of like Parth on the Eastern Continent? I'd tried asking Shutola about this the day before we left for Lumiest.*

*"From the intentions of various nations, the rights of the academy, the undercurrents of those who do business in the city, etc., etc... That part would be especially important to my explanation, so would you like me to set up a lecture,*

*dearest brother Kelvin?”*

*“Ah, no I’m fine. Thanks.”*

*“Awww...”*

Yeah, I shouldn’t have asked so lightly. I felt sorry for Shutola, who was clearly itching to give an entire lecture on the subject, but I wasn’t very interested, so I immediately got out of there. I was so fast, I actually surprised myself.

“Ah, I can see it! That’s Lumiest!” Rion, who was peering out of the carriage’s window, pointed as she shouted. Spurred by her words, I also looked out the window.

Since we were descending from the peak of a mountain, it was the perfect chance to take in the entire city. The marks of civilization towered over its surroundings, forming a clear border with the greenery of the mountains around it. It was a tall, gray wall, so tall it was almost hard to believe. Since I couldn’t see any seams in the wall, I didn’t think it was made of simple stone or brick. When I looked closer, I noticed magic power running along the surface.

*Is it made from magic like my Adamantite Rampart?*

There were gates built at each of the four cardinal directions, from which stretched paved roads. I could see people entering and exiting from each one. It seemed their security was top-notch, as expected from a school attended by the children of many powerful figures from all over.

“I’d like to rebuild Parth’s walls to be like that, if I could get the necessary permissions... No, actually, I want to make something even better.”

“What, you want to turn the entire town into a fortress?”

“Ha ha! I’m not going to do anything that insensitive. I’d just raise the defensive strength of the walls to a decent level while maintaining the feel of the town!”

“How is that any different...” Bell trailed off.

*It’s totally different. A fortress is specialized for defense, so function is valued higher than anything else, which results in an unrefined look. However, a place where people live needs a certain amount of charm. Making sure to keep that*

*perfect balance would be the most important issue! At least, that's what I vaguely remember Dahak saying. At any rate, I've previously contributed to the elven village, so when I have time I should propose this to Guildmaster Mist as well.*

"Wow, what a pretty place!" DarkMel exclaimed in wonder.

"Yeah! The school itself is also super impressive!" Rion agreed.

Past the walls was an orderly cityscape centered around a remarkably large school campus. If anyone looked closer, they'd be able to see people walking around and mingling, including students wearing Lumiest's uniform.

*I see, so they can go out on the town even in the middle of the day. Oh yeah, that reminds me, Lumiest uses a credits system that allows the student to pick the classes they want to take, doesn't it? So they can spend their time freely when they don't have classes...right.*

"From what I can tell, the uniforms and students themselves vary a lot. I suppose the school customs are pretty free in that regard?"

"Seems that way," Rion mused. "Apparently there are some who wear the uniforms as is, but also some who custom order their own unique versions or make extreme modifications. It seems it's all okay as long as you can understand what the uniform originally looked like."

"I heard that Shutola-san and Colette-san wore their uniforms as is," added DarkMel. "They said that everyone in the latter category were nobles that, erm...craved the...limelight? Or something."

"Yeah, I can see that. It— Oh, speak of the devil. Look, that dude's amazing! His entire uniform's shiny and gold!"

"What, lemme see! Wow, it really is!"

"Err...that...that might clash a little with my sense of taste...yeah..."

The kid was so shiny and gaudy that we could see him easily even from so far away. He sported long blond hair and a prominent nose. His extreme beauty made him the very image of a prince, but his clothing ruined all of that. Having to recognize it as a uniform actually hurt my head a little.



*If the three girls get in, he's going to be Rion's upperclassman, isn't he? Yeah, he is...*

"Hrmm...are you talking about that light?" Bell asked. "He's so far away; it's amazing you three can all see him."

"Hm? Oh, well, yeah. I'm borrowing Efil's Rank S Farsight skill. That kind of distance is as clear as a rock by the side of the road."

I waved my Skill Eater in front of Bell as I explained how it worked.

"Ah, so that's how... Then what about Rion and DarkMel?"

"Me?" Rion answered. "In my case, I'm seeing it through Clotho's clone, who's getting it because Kelvin is uploading recordings to the Network. Come on, come out..."

In response to Rion's words, a small clone of Clotho popped up from around her shoulder. It waved a bit of its body like it was saying hi.

By the way, these clones had a fair amount of combat strength and were able to act as reserve bodyguards for Rion and DarkMel. Specifically, it was strong enough to finish off a Rank S monster in one hit with ease. Of course, this would be effective on any harmful pests or vulgar upperclassmen.

"I also have a Clotho-san clone," DarkMel explained. "But since I'm contracted with papa, I can see it directly. It's super convenient since we can share these kinds of things with no lag!"

"I see. Huh, I heard about this from sister Sera. So, this is the slime. I see, huh..." Bell poked at the Clotho clone that was on Rion's shoulder. I didn't know why, but she didn't stop; her finger just kept poking it.

*Is she getting hooked on the way it feels? Or...*

"Oh, right. Here, I'll lend you a Clotho clone too, Bell. As Rion just said, with it around, you'll be able to access the Follower Network. I think it'll be useful while you're in school, even outside of any bodyguarding you have to do."

I didn't want to split Rion's or DarkMel's clones and lower their combat strength, so I had my own Clotho clone split in half and handed the new one over to Bell. I wasn't sure if it was unexpected or not, but Bell accepted without

a fuss, though she did turn away in a huff.

“Really? Well, if you’re going to go that far, then I suppose I can’t refuse. Fine, I’ll borrow it. Really, it’s just because I have no other choice; I have to consider your reputation sometimes too.”

“O-Oh, sure. Thanks?”

At first glance, Bell seemed like she had a cold attitude, but I noticed that she wouldn’t stop poking Clotho’s clone as it was in her hands.

*She’s just never honest, is she?*



“Hey boss, we’re almost at the gates. I’ll deal with things to start off, but y’all should get yer IDs ready.”

We had spent some time proceeding down these paved mountain roads when the carriage driver, Rudo, shouted to us from outside.

“Oh, so we’re finally there. Okay, got it. Make sure the carriage behind us gets that message too, Rudo-san. He’s got a sharp intuition so he probably already knows, but just in case.”

“Of course, boss.”

Rudo, who I’d hired to drive our carriage this time, was the same skilled driver who once drove us from Parth to Toraj. I suppose it would be easier to remember if I noted it was the time we were assaulted by the Black Wind bandits while on the road?

After that incident, Rudo had apparently gained enough fame to be noticed by Toraj’s Tsubaki. The number and quality of the carriages he owned had risen, he was able to train up younger people, and he even made great contributions to Toraj’s tourism industry, adding to Tsubaki’s coffers. The reason I ended up hiring him again was because while I was looking around for skilled carriage drivers, a certain bat-eared Tsubaki had heard about it and said this to me:

*“This is just between us, but Rudo is originally from the Western Continent. Apparently, he polished his skills by looking for safe routes during wartime way back when. Of course, the lay of the land right now is different from what it was*

*back then, but that's why he's a pro. As long as he gets some time to prepare, he'll probably do well, no matter where he goes. I'll even set up a special Toraj carriage for you. Don't worry; we're friends, aren't we, Kelvin? No need to hold back with me. I've already contacted Rudo and had him cancel all his other gigs so he can go with you at any time. Oh no, no need to thank me. I will always be on your side, Kelvin; of course I'd do at least this much. Oho ho ho ho!"*

And, well, that was how I ended up being treated so well by Rudo's company, all while experiencing mental pressure from Tsubaki. At first, I strongly suspected that she had some sort of ulterior motive, but I knew how seasoned and skilled Rudo was, so I figured I might as well go along with it. Arrangements proceeded smoothly, and I even managed to borrow some of Toraj's most cutting-edge and elegant carriages.

To be fair, though, it seemed that Rudo had been ordered to expand his business to Lumiest, which meant we were probably being used as guards for these fancy carriages, but that just meant this was a give-and-take situation. Since we were both benefiting, there was no problem at all.

"Just in case, I've gotten IDs issued personally by the rulers of each of the four great countries, since first impressions are important in times like these. Everyone, make sure you smile, and try not to act suspicious."

"I'll say this out of what little kindness I have in my heart, Kelvin: you should stop with that smile," warned Bell. "If that ends up turning into the face you make in battle, you won't just end up being suspicious, you'll instantly be carted off to prison."

"What do you think I am, Bell?"

"A battle junkie with a creepy smile."

*I mean, you're half right, but even I can make a smile to fit the occasion, okay?*

"Now, now. Let's just try to act natural," Rion said. "Unlike that time in Trycen when Kel-nii and I came in under false identities, today we're going through the front door as ourselves, so I'm sure there won't be any problems as long as we act as normal."

"Oh, you're talking about when we infiltrated Trycen? That's nostalgic... Yeah,

I *do* have a track record with this! See, Bell, I can make a regular smile if I want to! Look!” I smiled.

Bell paused for a moment as she looked at my expression. “I’m pretty sure that’s a con man’s grin.”

“Pft!”

*My precious daughter, please don’t laugh at that. Please. I know you’re not usually like her, but in this case you’re a lot like your mama and it’s going to make me cry.*

At any rate, after all that, we reached Lumiest’s walls. From up close, they felt even taller.

*I wonder how tall these walls actually are? Like, how many meters?*

“That’s a pretty long line,” DarkMel noted.

“Looks like they’re checking every group thoroughly,” Rion added.

Lumiest’s gate had a separate entrance and exit. Both sides required ID and luggage to be inspected. As Rion and DarkMel noted, they were clearly very cautious.

“As expected for an academy that caters to a lot of VIPs. It’s exactly why everyone gets checked equally. We’re going to be checked too, aren’t we?”

“I’m so glad I dressed up for this!” Rion exclaimed.

“Yeah!” DarkMel agreed.

Even though our only objective for the day was to take care of some administrative proceedings, I had suspected their security would be tight, so we had prepared. Rion and I had formal clothing from when we were promoted to Rank S, while DarkMel was wearing a refined black dress made by Efil. Her dress matched Rion’s, with both having a wing motif. Speaking conservatively, I could only describe the two of them as angels. Whether they were sporting black or white, both of them shone brightly.

Bell sighed. “I’m not a fan of this frilly clothing, though...”

“Aaww, but you’re so cute!” Rion countered.



“Yes, very cute!” DarkMel agreed. “I also think you look cool at the same time!”

Of course, we weren’t the only ones in formal dress. Bell and her father, who was riding in the other carriage, were dressed similarly, though their clothing tended towards a more military look. Bell was wearing a somewhat short military-style skirt, probably in a bid to get used to Lumiest’s uniform while she could. As a whole, she looked pretty cool, but I could also feel girlish cuteness from her clothing at the same time. I was pretty sure her father had chosen these clothes too. DarkMel and Rion had already said exactly what I was thinking.

*Yes, a very nice choice!*

By the way, my father-in-law’s clothes were, well, errr...about as imposing as you might imagine. He was totally ready to act as a pest repellent.

“Okay, I get it! Stop praising me so much! It’s a little embarrassing, even though I know it’s just flattery,” Bell quipped.

“It’s not, though. Sera-san was happy enough to nuzzle you with her cheek when we left, right? Not to mention, Uncle Gustav was crying an entire river. Basically, everyone thinks so! You think so too, right, papa? Riiiiight?”

“Yeah, I think you look amazing, Bell. Those clothes really suit you.”

“Sister Sera and papa are really soft when it comes to me. Come on, it’s almost our turn; we should be concentrating on that instead,” Bell answered.

“Okaaay...” both Rion and DarkMel said in unison.



*Huh? Bell? Did she just completely ignore what I said? Well...I mean, it's fine. After all, it's obvious she's just trying to cover up her embarrassment. Still, she was right that it was close to our turn. She seemed ready to kick me if I was to keep teasing her, so I decided to follow the group and behave.*

"I have just received confirmation. Sorry for causing you so much trouble, Eusterissa-sama. Allow me to welcome you to the Academic City of Lumiest. Please, enter."

"Good. Keep up the good work."

Having received permission from the guard, the carriage that was in front of us proceeded into the city. From his attitude, he seemed to be pretty high up on the social ladder.

"Okay then, will the next carriage please proceed to this line?" the guard called out. "Okay, good. Please stop there. Oh, these kinds of horses are rare around here. Excuse me, but may I have the name of the delegate inside?"

"Sure thing. This is the carriage of Kelvin Celsius, a Rank S adventurer. He is here today to continue procedures for admittance into the academy."

"What?! Rank... Rank S?!"

*I wasn't sure why, but a wave of shock ran through the guards. Are Rank S adventurers scary, even to people who are used to dealing with VIPs on a regular basis? When it comes to Rank S adventurers on the Western Continent, there's... Ah, I see. I get it. You don't need to be so scared, Mr. Guard. I don't have nearly the same impact as Prettia-chan.*



"I'm pooped..." DarkMel complained.

"Yeah...me too. Thanks for all the hard work, Kel-nii..." said Rion.

Our experience at the gate had been awful. There'd been no problem when they checked our IDs, those of us actually inside the carriage, our luggage, or the carriage itself (though they were still terrified to a strange degree the entire time), but when it came to my father-in-law in the other carriage, things fell apart.

“Why was papa so worked up?” Bell wondered. “Gah, he really should think of how old he is! It’s so embarrassing to be his daughter.”

“Well, being a father is pretty complicated. Still, I’d appreciate it if he took into account the time and place.”

After our carriage had cleared the checkpoint, it was my father-in-law’s turn. The moment I let my guard down, thinking there wouldn’t be any trouble, he suddenly slammed open the door of the carriage. Accompanied by an (imagined) banging noise, his huge form appeared from the door, throwing his intimidating sense of pressure all over the place and causing an uproar all around him. Rudo’s comrade had been dumbstruck, and my eyes had also widened in surprise. I had to wonder what was going on.

*“Gustav-sama?! What’s... What’s wrong?”*

*“I am checking the security. I will be leaving my most beloved daughter—the cutest girl in the world—Bell, in your care. If I don’t see how solid your defenses are against outside enemies, I’ll be so worried I won’t be able to sleep. That will affect my health and cause Bell to worry for her papa as well. That would make me so happy, I’d feel like I was burning up, further worsening my insomnia from sheer excitement. Hm? Actually, maybe that’d be okay? No, I can’t afford to cause Bell any undue stress. I will put my life on the line to burn this scene into my eyes!”*

With that, my father-in-law stood stoutly and imposingly on the spot. The family resemblance reared its head there, and the pose he took made him seem a lot like Sera. However, whenever Sera took that pose, she gave off a sense of grace and magnificence, while her father only succeeded in turning the scene into something reminiscent of a living hell. He had the scariest face among all the demons, and he was sending his glare all over the place. No one could bear to make eye contact with him because they were so scared. This included the guards of Lumiest, who needed to check him. They reflexively averted their gazes and getting close to him seemed out of the question.

“Thanks to Bell immediately reprimanding him with her barbed words, he quieted down and went back to his carriage, and it all turned out okay. But still, if things had taken a turn for the worse, it would have been pretty



troublesome.”

“It was surprising how one word from Bell-chan made him so easily go back...” Rion muttered.

“But he seemed pretty shocked. Is he okay? You know, physically too...” DarkMel wondered aloud.

“This always happens, so there’s no need to worry,” Bell reassured them. “We said we were here to take care of some administrative procedures, I think? Anyway, he’ll probably behave until that’s done, at least. I’m sure of it.”

Surprisingly, Bell was the one who had reacted with haste to put the stopper on her father’s rampage as he put a strangely large amount of effort into inspecting everything. Before I was able to recover from my shock, since my eyes had gotten so wide, she had jumped magnificently towards her father’s head before unleashing an axe kick with all her momentum behind it. The powerful force visited on his head forced him to kiss the ground, leaving the peanut gallery around us dumbstruck, with the rest of us left at the carriage. Next, Bell launched into a heart-gouging tirade against her father, rending his heart beyond recovery and causing him to collapse, unconscious.

“No father can win against his daughter. I suppose that holds true for any race...”

“Did you say something, papa?” DarkMel asked.

“Nothing much. Just noticing that you’re as cute as always, DarkMel.”

“Huh?! J-Jeez, papa! Come on!”

DarkMel looked so cute tilting her head like that, I ended up loosening my expression as I said exactly what was on my mind.

*I’ll refrain from saying anything about today’s incident, Gustav, for love!*

At any rate, setting aside Bell’s sharp gaze, which made it seem like she was looking at a pile of filth, the incident actually had caused some harm. Somehow, Rudo had used his excellent negotiating skills, along with the influence of the four great countries, to get us through Lumiest’s gates. But as expected, we had stood out a little too much. In between us taking care of business, we had time

to explore the city. We wanted to do some sightseeing, but thanks to the fuss at the gate, we couldn't. As I said before, avoiding a negative impression of the girls was an absolute priority. That was why I'd made sure to leave before we could be even more indelibly burned into people's minds, and now we had to hide ourselves in town as well. Currently, we were heading for the center of Lumiest—the academy—to take care of business, and I had asked Rudo to get us there as quietly as possible.

"It looks like we'll have to save the sightseeing for a little later."

"That might be a good idea. But first we have to go through the proper procedures! Let's work hard!" Rion exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Working hard is great, but the ones actually doing the paperwork will be our guardians, Kelvin and papa, right? There's nothing for you to do, Rion," interjected Bell.

"No, that was good. All that support becomes power for her guardian!"

*It helps me mentally too, and that can combine with DarkMel's power to make me the strongest physically! I don't care whether it's Serge or Prettia-chan—bring them all on! Wait, no...let's not, given how the guards reacted. Stop. Please stay away, at least for today.*

"Sorry to interrupt you, boss, but we're almost at the school building. We're using the entrance for guests rather than going through the front gate, but there's going to be another inspection, just like before. So, uhhh..."

"If you're worried about papa, then there's no need," Bell reassured him. "I told him if he were to make the same mistake a second time, I would cut all familial ties with him."

*She... She's a demon! Oh, wait, yeah, she is a demon.*

"Uhh, yeah, so that's how it is. I'll be on standby and will be able to react immediately, so please just focus on the inspection, Rudo-san."

"S-Sure. Got it."

I was about to sigh, since it seemed we'd be subjected to another inspection after already getting in, but then I realized that showed just how serious they

were about security. When I looked at the walls surrounding the school itself, I saw a barrier extending up into the sky, and it seemed pretty well-made. My father-in-law, who was worried about these things, was currently indisposed due to depression, so I decided to be kind and tell him about it later. I could only hope he would find some solace in that news.

In the end, nothing major happened at the next checkpoint, and we were let through to the school proper. I left the carriage to Rudo while we headed off to finish our business.

“Ah, uh, please wait just a little bit! The principal will be coming posthaste, so if...if you could wait over here for a while...” The guard at the gate stopped us, saying that the principal would be coming in person.

A short while later, I heard the pitter-patter of feet coming down the hall as a slightly older lady in a clerical uniform came to lead us to a classroom. The guard also seemed nervous, but this lady was on a whole different level, and it was enough to make me concerned about her.

“Oh, d-don’t worry! I’ll be leading you to a waiting room f-f-f-first! The principal will be meeting up with you th-there! You two must be K-K-Kelvin-sama and...Gustav-sama, yes?! P-P-P-Please, come this w-w-w-way!”

“Please go ahead; don’t mind me,” I answered.

*Don’t worry. We’re the safe sort of battle junkie and demon king; we’re perfect gentlemen.*

“Agh?!” cried the woman.

*Uh, did we come a little too early? We ended up eschewing the time we’d set aside to sightsee, so maybe they’re panicking as they try to change their plans?*

“Owie?!” she yelped again.

*I mean, I never heard anything about seeing the principal, but it’s not like we changed the time that much. You’ll be fine, lady. As I said before, this Demon Lord is the good kind. He’s also more of a former lord, so he’s really just a Rank S adventurer from the Northern Continent. He’s not scary, not at all!*

“Bwhegh!”

Of course, there was no way the words in my heart would reach her. I had to drag my father-in-law behind me all the way to the waiting room, since his consciousness had become hazy ever since that tongue-lashing. But on the way there, the lady tripped on what seemed like nothing and fell on her face a full three times.



“O— O-O-O... Okay then! P-P-Please wait in this roooooom!”

Though her scream made her sound like a cornered animal, the lady still closed the door quietly. It seemed like she couldn’t wait to run away from us, but at least she was able to keep up the bare minimum of decorum.

“What was up with her?”

“Err...the soldiers reacted strangely too, didn’t they?”

“The color of her face didn’t look healthy. I wonder if she’s okay?”

The lady’s manner was so strange that all three future students were pretty worried about her.

“Hrmm...well, setting aside how suspicious she was acting, I think she’s pretty skilled,” said my father-in-law.

“Whoa?! You were conscious enough to notice?”

My father-in-law, who I had spent a lot of effort to bring in with me, had suddenly started moving, sounding like nothing had happened at all. The shock of it surprised me quite a bit, as I was near him.

“Heh, who do you think I am, my foolish son? Even against a human, I am able to estimate their strength at a glance. That woman was pretty strong.”

“Oh, no, that’s not what I’m talking about.”

“What kind of nonsense *were* you talking about, then? The highest power in this academy is coming, no? He is coming to see us, the girls’ guardians. My foolish son, you do not have the leeway to show him a face like that.”

“You... You’re right about that...”

I’d been referring to how my father-in-law had finally woken up, but it

seemed like he wanted to pretend he had never been down for the count in the first place. What Bell said must have been super effective. He was basically refusing to face reality, but when I looked at him acting like a proper parent, I really felt like he was being much more careful now. It seemed like what Bell said was working perfectly.

As for what my father-in-law had just said about that office lady... He was right, the way she carried herself was strange, but I knew she was capable enough to block my Analyze Eye. I didn't know whose Concealment skill she was under, but that meant there was someone in the academy who could use a Rank S skill.

*Hmmm...maybe I should think about enrolling here too.*

*Knock, knock.*

As I sat there, imagining the girls' school life, someone knocked on the door. Before anyone answered, it was opened.

"Excuse me. I suppose I should also add 'sorry to keep you waiting'?"

It was a woman with pitch-black skin. Her ash-gray hair was bound at her nape, and she wore glasses that made her seem very intelligent. She gave off the impression of a very capable, refined woman. What I noticed immediately after that impression was her ears. They were long, like an elf's.

"Oh no, we haven't been here for long, so there's no need for that. Err..."

"Ah, my apologies once again. I seem to have forgotten to introduce myself. My name is Art Desire, and I am the principal of Lumiest."

*Huh? She's the principal? Wasn't Lumiest's principal supposed to be a nice old man with a beard? Uh...okay, let's recruit Rion's help here.*

I switched to the Network. *Rion, there's something I need to ask you. Did the position of principal change hands recently? Wasn't the principal supposed to be a wise old man instead of this cool beauty?*

::Ah, right, yeah. Apparently, the principal changed last year. The previous one retired and was succeeded by Principal Art. I believe Art was nominated for the position by the retired principal himself.::



*I see...* I replied through the Network.

::Also, Kel-nii, you referred to the principal as a woman, but Principal Art is male.::

*Uh...what?! I was so shocked that I let out a strange shout through telepathy. Thanks to my Nerves of Steel skill, which was very seasoned by now, I managed to stop it from showing in my voice and on my face, but that didn't mean my shock was anything but enormous. I doubted what I was seeing and hearing.*

::Are... Are you okay, Kel-nii? I know he's androgynous, so I understand why you would think that he's a woman.::

*Internally, no, I'm not doing great, I admitted. But wait...wait! She—no, I guess the principal's a he?! I... I know he has basically no chest, but I just thought she...he was that sort of woman! Not only that, but the clothes Principal Art is wearing... I know there's no skirt, but they're clearly meant for women! His entrance was so gallant! Why is he cross-dressing?!*

::Hmm...well, I can only assume that's his taste....::

*Taste?! I couldn't help but shout telepathically.*

*Privately, I thought, No, no, it's not like he's Prettia. In fact, given how good he looks, he's actually worse in a sense. I'm absolutely sure other guys have misunderstood as well. Ah...huh? Wait, does that mean that about half of all Rank S adventurers like to cross-dress? Let's...not think too deeply about this. Yeah, that's a good idea.*

::Also, I'm pretty sure you've already noticed the color of his skin and the length of his ears, but Principal Art is a dark elf. Just like elder Nellas of the elven village, he's a lot older than he looks.::

*I... I see, I answered telepathically. Ah, that reminds me, this is the first time we've ever seen a dark elf, isn't it?*

::I've read about them in books, but yeah, dark elves seem to be less numerous than elves, after all. Excluding any individuals that decide to come over, there shouldn't be any dark elf settlements on the Eastern Continent.::

*I see, that's good to know. Wait, Rion, why are you so knowledgeable about*

this?

::Shutola-chan taught me a lot!::

*Ahh, yeah, I thought to myself. She's been spending a lot of time reading with Shutola, so that's where she learned it all. DarkMel's started joining them recently too, so maybe they're actually better educated than me now... No, don't get me wrong, I know I lose to Shutola in every respect already, but...*

*That reminds me, I think I remember the name Art from somewhere...* I mused through the Network.

::I'd guess you just saw the name in the Adventurer's Directory. Principal Art is a Rank S adventurer, after all—::

::Gaaaahhh?!::

Once again, I nearly did a spit take. Still, at least on the surface, I endured the urge. *Sorry to stress you so much like this, Nerves of Steel!* But with that, I was able to confirm that he was a weirdo. The fact that he was a Rank S adventurer confirmed it!

Lumiest had one of the Western Continent's Rank S adventurers attached to it, and I'd met him thanks to Rion's desire to enroll. This was one of the benefits that Shutola was talking about. If things went well, I might be able to make up an excuse to have a battle with him. At least, I was thinking that could be an option for me, but...

*Hmm, that might be difficult, given that he's a principal. I need to come up with a way to smoothly bring this into a fight without endangering the girls' standings.*

::I bet you only looked at the name because you didn't want to learn about his fighting style beforehand::

*Heh! As expected of my beloved little sister, you really get me. But don't worry, it's not like I'm going to try to have a go at him right away.*

::Kel... Kel-nii...depending on the timing and situation when you say that, it could be a very dangerous statement. It's fine because you said it to me, but you should be careful so that Bell-chan doesn't hear you say stuff like that,

okay?::

*Huh? But isn't that a really reasonable statement as a battle junkie? I answered. Then, to myself, I thought, I mean, Rion's the one saying it, so I'll listen, but...still, is that really a man's face? Man, the world is unfair. I wonder how I should set the stage?*

"Is there something on my face?" the man in question asked.

*Whoops, gotta stop that. I've been preventing my feelings from showing on my face, but apparently I was subconsciously staring at him.*

"Sorry about that. It was rude, but this is my first time seeing a dark elf, so—"

"I see. Don't worry, you don't need to finish that. Being enraptured by this beauty is a common occurrence. There's no need to hold back; feel free to feast your eyes until you are satisfied. Come on!"

With that, the principal struck a pose like he was an art model.

*Ah, yeah. He's definitely a Rank S adventurer. I'm sure of it now.*



Apparently, Principal Art was the type of dark elf who had a very high opinion of himself. Even though we refused, saying that we'd had enough, he wouldn't stop posing. In the end, Rion had to draw an impromptu portrait in her sketchbook and give it to him before he was satisfied.

"Ah, very interesting. It seems you also have incredible talent in the arts, Rion-kun. I will gladly accept this beautiful portrait. Unfortunately, I cannot allow it to affect your entrance exam."

"Don't worry about that. I want to pass without resorting to bribery or anything like that, anyway!"



“Oho, that is interesting as well. Many companions of Rank S adventurers are eccentric or just plain strange, but you seem to have a very proper, pure sort of personality. It seems you have a wonderful little sister, Lord Celsius. Just like me.”

“Ha ha ha...” I couldn’t help but let out a strained laugh. *Look who’s talking. Who was the one posing up a storm just a few seconds ago?*

“Excuse the lack of a segue, but today—”

“Ah, no need to say it. I understand. Your purpose in visiting the academy today is to go through the procedures for the entrance exam and enrollment. You weren’t planning to meet me. You want to know why I invited you here, right?”

“Uh...yes. Exactly that, to be honest.”

*He really likes to interrupt people, doesn’t he?*

“Then allow me to be honest and to the point as well. It’s because I’m interested. First, in you, Lord Celsius, a Rank S adventurer like me. You have already met and exchanged blows with Peach Ogre, Violet Butterfly, and Leopardess from the Western Continent. The only Rank S adventurers on this continent that you have yet to face are me and the woman at the top of the Adventurer’s Guild headquarters. So I thought you might like to meet me, the one with the title ‘Rimless.’ After all, losing the chance to see me, the pinnacle of divine beauty, would make you nothing but unfortunate!”

“Yeah, maybe.” It took me a moment to force out a reply, and even then it sounded robotic. To my ears, at least.

*Wow, that is some narcissism. He said he was going to be honest and to the point, but he went on for quite a while. Not only that, but his first reason was just...wow. Is this the trope where he’ll just go on forever? The one where the dialogue never ends? I guess the heads of schools in every world tend to be long-winded as hell. And that name, Rimless...I’m pretty sure it just means “glasses with no frames.” Does he honestly not mind that as a title?*

::You look like you really want to quip about so much of what he says, Kel-nii. It hasn’t actually shown up on your face, but I’m sure in your heart....::

*I should have expected this, my beloved little sister. You can tell?* I replied through the Network.

::Yep, of course! I thought you would end up thinking that back when he mentioned his title. I'll tell you now, but Principal Art's title isn't about glasses, okay?::

*I kind of figured. So it really isn't, then? Hm, then that means it reflects Art's abilities or combat style somehow. Oh, you don't need to say anything about that!* I replied.

::Aha ha! I know already! The only thing I'll say is that his title seems to be a play on words somehow. It's supposed to be pretty humorous... It seems the folks from the Adventurer's Guild who named him put some thought into it::

*A play on words, huh? Rimless...but meant to be read as having no relation or no bond... If I take it to mean he doesn't maintain relationships with others and cannot be found unless he wants to be, he could be an assassin type, like Ange. I know this is just personal bias, but dark elves just have an assassiny vibe. Still, who even came up with that name? Joking around with wordplay when giving someone a title isn't a good thing to do. In that sense, my Grim Reaper title is a lot better.*

"Oho, are you interested in my glasses? As expected, Lord Celsius, you have good taste. Ever since I received my title, I have striven to polish my own taste in glasses. I searched the entire world for pairs that would suit me, thinking I might as well, since I would be a public figure and they would be a prominent feature of my face. In the end, though, I ended up designing a pair myself and custom ordering..."

Art showed no sign of stopping, even though I had never actually asked him a question. He just went on and on about glasses.

*Rion, are you sure that title has nothing to do with glasses?* I asked her privately.

::It shouldn't, but...::

*Could it be?* I thought. *He didn't find out he was given a straightforward name and charge into the guild to have it changed or anything...did he? Err, well...let's*



*just say there are titles of all kinds and leave it at that.*

“I understand full well how passionate you are about glasses, Principal Art, but we should move on...”

“Hm? Oh, my apologies once again. It seems I have fallen into my bad habit of self-indulgence. That goes for what I am wearing as well. Yes, I understand. Let’s get back to the topic at hand. The second reason I wanted to see you is, if I had to choose, the ‘real’ one. I wanted to give a little—actually, a *big* warning for when Bell-kun and DarkMel-kun enroll in Lumiest.”

“Me?” asked DarkMel, while Bell merely grunted in reply.

At the moment, there wasn’t even a shadow of the softness that Art displayed when he was talking about glasses. He had reverted to the competent air he’d exuded when we first saw him, which highlighted how important the matter was.

“As you know, Lumiest has a long history as one of the world’s best schools. We gained independence from our former country and have established relations with many different nations. However, or rather *because* of that, enrolling in Lumiest demands a massive tuition, which is generally paid by royalty or nobility. Also, our numbers are dominated by humans. Elves, dwarves, and beastfolk are all but nonexistent here unless they come from an especially powerful demihuman country.”

“So you’re saying there’s a lot of prejudice and racism?” DarkMel asked.

“Put simply, yes. It is impossible to enroll without not only standing and financial power, but also proven ability. However, those conditions are not absolute. There are those who make up for lacking in some areas by forcing their way through with money.”

“Should you really be saying that to us in public? It’s like telling us people cheat to get in, right?” Bell questioned incredulously.

“Don’t worry. The conditions for admittance are public knowledge. Depending on the country, using money to win the right to enroll would not be looked down on, and some nobles even take it as a sign of power. This might seem strange for someone from the Eastern Continent, which is composed of only

four large countries, but the Western Continent comprises many nations, so such behavior is commonplace. Essentially, the entire continent is filled with arrogant, prejudiced people.”

Art paused for a moment before continuing.

“This is just a hypothetical, but if a demon like Bell-kun or an angel like DarkMel-kun were to be thrown into the mix, I am sure they would experience unpleasant things that would be etched into their memories. Even more so because Bell-kun is a princess of a great empire on the Northern Continent, and DarkMel is the mysterious daughter of a Rank S adventurer. Whether or not you intend to, you will draw attention to yourselves. Everyone here wants to stand out, so they may not be all too amused with your fame. May I assume that both of you have yet to experience such attitudes?”

*Ooh, does he mean someone like Trycen’s Tabura? That reminds me, back when we visited Faanis, it was weird how the princesses tried to pick a fight with Shutola and the others for seemingly no reason. I knew it—the world of the upper crust is full of spite, malice, and trouble. Compared to the Northern Continent, where pretty much everything is settled with physical might, and the Eastern Continent, which is stable thanks to the balance of the four countries, the Western Continent is very...different.*

“Hmm, so this is basically a warning?” Bell confirmed. “You’re saying that if we come to this school, we’ll be met with harsh experiences, so we should just forget it?”

“No, not quite. In fact, I would welcome your enrollment at the academy. In my opinion, you three will easily pass the exam and be admitted to Lumiest. Having more demihumans like me here is something Lumiest surely needs for the sake of its future. That is the reason my predecessor appointed me, a dark elf, his successor.”

“Um, did you have a lot of trouble when you took over the position, Principal Art?” DarkMel asked.

“There are some instructors who are still trapped in the old ways and customs. To tell you the truth, I do face a lot of opposition. Of course, there are many who change their mind as soon as they lay eyes on this beauty of mine! I

knew it; I am the person most suited to become a principal for the new age!”

Art shot up from his seat and once again started posing. While he wasn’t a typical noble, he was still an attention-seeker in a different way. I got the feeling that he wasn’t an assassin type after all.

In the end, his point was that he was looking forward to seeing some internal changes after DarkMel and the others enrolled. However, I had to wonder if he was just brute-forcing an agreement because he was a Rank S adventurer... Anyone would elect to say yes if they were pressured by his aggressive posing. At any rate, given this complicated mess of circumstances, some brute force was probably necessary. The previous principal had probably placed his hopes not in Art’s beauty or strength, but in the fact that he was of a different race. If that wasn’t the case, I would be seriously disappointed in him.



“That being said, I don’t expect *too* much from you three. Just that you pass at the top of the exams, and that you enjoy your school lives without being unduly influenced by the other students. Also, you should become central figures and unite the students, fly through school by skipping grades, and graduate as valedictorians. Yes, that’s about all I’m hoping for. Of course, I will not favor you; you will be graded just as strictly as all the other students. That is the only thing that you cannot buy with money, after all. Everything will be dependent on your efforts.”

Art finished that spiel with a wink, sounding like he was asking for something simple. Given his incredible looks, the wink was a sight to see. However, the bottom line of that spiel was that he wanted the girls to obtain the highest grades in the entire school. He was asking for some pretty bold things with a wholly composed face, but it was all exactly what I wanted anyway. In that sense, I was aligned with the principal.

“That’s pretty much everything I wanted to tell you. Oh, that’s right... Once you finish with the administrative procedures, why not take a tour of the campus? It’s unfortunate that I can’t show you around myself, since I’m already here with you, so allow me to assign someone as your guide.”

“Someone? If whoever it is turns out to be like that lady from earlier, I don’t

think they'll be able to do much guiding."

"Lady? Ahh, you mean Katua-kun. Yes, it sounds like she was extremely shaken."

"You could say she was shaken. You could also say...err..." DarkMel hesitated to go further.

"Aha ha, it was so bad; I felt so sorry for her..." Rion chuckled. They looked at each other with somewhat strained smiles.

"I thought that might be the case. You see, it might not seem like it but Katua-kun is actually a former Rank A adventurer. She's a survival expert and is excellent at gathering information. However, because her detection abilities are so high, in certain situations, her mental fortitude is considerably unstable. It caused a lot of trouble for her when she was active."

"I can kind of see that happening, yeah..." I agreed.

No matter how excellent she was, it was no surprise she would experience hardship with such an imbalance.

"Heh heh! Well, thanks to that, she's now able to be here to accurately measure the students' strengths."

"Hm? Could it be you assigned her as our guide so that she could get the measure of us?"

"Of course. With your statuses hidden, Analyze Eye wouldn't do anything, would it? Oh, look at the time. Sorry about this since I'm the one who called you here, but I have work to do. I will be excusing myself now."

"No need for apologies; this was a fruitful conversation. I'm looking forward to seeing you again as a guardian when the girls make it in," I answered.

"Yes, I am too. Also, Bell-kun, DarkMel-kun, Rion-kun, I will sincerely pray for your good luck in passing the exams. I'll send the guide over, so please wait here a little longer. Now then, excuse me."

Art made a cool exit, his tied-back hair waving as he went. Even as he left, his narcissism was in full effect.

"You've been really quiet," I remarked to my father-in-law.

"I have decided to zip it for Bell's sake," he replied.

"I...see?"

"Good, good. You've learned, papa," said Bell.

Having been praised by his daughter, he silently raised his fist to the heavens. I heaved a sigh internally. *I'll pretend I didn't see that.*

A little while after we were left on our own, an older gentleman who seemed to be our guide arrived. The man gave off the air of a veteran, and while I was sure he was feeling at least some nervousness, he was able to guide us around the campus without a problem.

The campus was large, and it took some time to walk through it all. However, there were, of course, students hanging out or attending classes in different areas, so to avoid disturbing them—or rather, to avoid standing out—we decided to limit the places we visited.

"Um, I think I saw a golden light shine out from one of the rooms we passed earlier. I think it was a classroom. Are they having some sort of magic lesson?"

"The classroom we just passed? At this time, those students should be attending a lecture, not a practical lesson... Oh! The light you saw might have been from someone's uniform. Students who want to stand out a lot tend to do that."

"Their...uniforms, huh?"

I felt like he'd said something totally ridiculous, but the man seemed serious as he answered me. It was true that I'd seen someone with a golden uniform in town, but modifications like that were only rare, not unique?

*I know those who crave attention are allowed to do these things, but wouldn't taking it that far hinder lessons? What about the student who's wearing it? Are his eyes okay?* My questions were endless.

"Bell, can I ask you to caution the other two so that they won't ever get involved with anyone like that?"

"I mean, *I'd* never go near those people in the first place, so..."

"Yeah...you're right."

While I was feeling a touch of worry over the possibility of such rare students popping up, we reached what looked like an inner courtyard. There were students dotting the place, on benches or grassy areas that were set up for them. It made me wonder if they were here because they didn't have class this period. Even though they saw us, none of them paid us any mind, probably because prospective students touring the grounds was common at this time of year.

"Hm?"

The moment I felt some relief at the fact that all the students around us were wearing seemingly normal uniforms, a giant white monument suddenly caught my attention from the corner of my eye. It stretched up towards the sky like a tower and was the centerpiece of the courtyard. It was also familiar to me.

"Excuse me, is that some sort of commemorative monument?"

"Oh, that pillar? According to records, it was made to commemorate a miracle the Goddess bestowed upon us several hundred years ago. It's supposed to represent her sweeping away the evil that befell Lumiest and saving all of us or something like that. For the students...well, they say that any confessions of love done before this pillar are guaranteed to succeed."

"I see. Feels like spring, huh?"

"It certainly does. It is wonderfully heartwarming."

The conversation went back and forth between the older man and me as I internally pumped my fist. After all, I had just discovered one of the goals that Shutola told me about. I was in no way imitating Art, but I couldn't help striking a discreet pose.

::Kel-nii, could that be....::

::*Yeah. It's a divine pillar.*::



Someone was knocking on the door to the principal's office. Without taking his eyes away from the documents in his hands, Art bade whoever it was to enter.



“E-Excuse me. The guests have left, Principal Art. Yeah, they’re gone...”

At the door was Katua, the lady who had first led Kelvin’s party to the room. She had come to report that they had left, but she seemed exhausted for some reason.

“Well done. This may be too soon, but I would like to hear your thoughts, Katua-kun. Speak frankly: how were the girls?”

“It should be obvious to you just by looking at me...”

“I see. Just as I’d expect from my party member, the one who in her adventuring days was known as the Human Measurement Tool. You’re as reliable as ever. I will trust what your body felt!”

“P-Pay attention to your wording! Please! A-Also...that name was something *you* gave me, principal!” She paused for a moment to sulk. “By the way, that was just cruel. How could you make me stand right next to those monsters and measure them?”

“Yes, exactly. It is cruel how beautiful I am. This beauty of mine is so great it’s a sin. That’s what you mean, isn’t it, Katua-kun?!”

“Not at all! Urghh...even after so long, you’re still so selfish, principal. And way too narcissistic, to boot! You had me measure up those monster prospective students the other day too! Seriously, this is abuse...”

“Oh, are you talking about that child? That reminds me, you were just as haggard then as you are today. Hrm, it seems today’s crop is truly wonderful. He has long stopped being human, and she was never a human to begin with. My hopes will only continue to swell in scope at this rate. And the bigger they are, the more beautiful I become! Don’t you think so, Katua-kun?!”

Katua could only let out a deep, heavy sigh. It was the greatest she’d let out today.



Having met Principal Art and completed our original goal of finishing up enrollment procedures, we met up with Rudo and went to secretly enjoy sightseeing around Lumiest. After that, although I was made to sweat a little at

the gates thanks to my father-in-law's previous rampage, we made our return trip. The next time we would come to this city would be for the entrance exams. I personally wasn't worried, but Rion and DarkMel were putting in a lot of effort to study, possibly because of Principal Art's expectations. Bell, on the other hand, was spending her days as usual. She wasn't the type to allow her efforts to be seen, so I was sure she was studying like a whirlwind in secret.

*I heard she was taught by Sebasdel in the past, but I bet she'd hate the idea of that now. Actually, she probably did back then too.*

"Exam day is finally close. For the last few days, I'll have you solve all the questions on past tests. Treat this like the real thing," said Shutola.

"Yes!" DarkMel and Rion answered in unison.

"It seems you two are fully motivated. But keep in mind, this is when many people push themselves too far and end up destroying their health. Make sure you get sister Ef— *Ahem!* Make sure you eat your three meals a day from Efil-san, and don't forget to set aside time for sleep and rest breaks. Understand?"

"Yes!" they once again responded in unison.

The girls were in DarkMel's room, sitting at desks and studying under the reliable instruction of Shutola. They were more motivated than usual today, given the expectations placed upon them. I was at DarkMel's door, watching over them and cheering them on from the shadows. Honestly, I wanted to be like my father-in-law and cheer for them out loud while waving a flag, but unfortunately, I didn't have his lack of shame and common sense. I had manners and propriety.

"Hey, Kelvin, I'm also good with my studies, so I'd like to help teach them too. Don't worry. Shutola, Colette, and I are buddies who've shared meals together!"

For some time now, there had been one person beside me, shaking my shoulder. Sera must have been spurred on by Shutola being appointed their tutor, as she seemed incredibly jealous. Right now, Shutola was in her adult form, so she seemed even more like a proper teacher.

*But why is she wearing her glasses and white coat from when she was*

*heading that research team? Err, well...it fits her since she's in her adult form, so I guess it's fine...*

"Shared a meal? That has nothing to do with teaching people. At least say that you were smart enough to solve the riddle of the teleportation gate or something else that would actually be relevant."

"Ah, I see. You're smart, Kelvin!"

*I mean, I'm definitely dumber than you, Sera, but...*

"At any rate, you can't join in right now. It's an important time for them, and they need to put in a lot of effort. In fact, if you want to teach someone so badly, why not go tutor Bell? She'd happily learn from you, I'm sure."

"Bell? Hrrrrmmm...I wonder... Victor told me before that her grades aren't too different from mine, so I don't think she really needs me to teach her anything."

"Oh, now that you mention it, Bell got the same gifted education from one of the Four Demonic Generals, just like you... You handed one of the past tests from Shutola to Bell, right? How did she do?"

"She got full marks in nearly every subject. Bell said it was easy as she sipped some tea."

It took me a moment to process my surprise. "Seriously?"

"Seriously."

*So she wasn't the type to put in effort in the shadows, but a Sera-level genius?! Dammit, I didn't need to worry about her at all! Aghh, when I tried taking that test, my results were just embarrassing...*

"What's wrong, Kelvin?"

"O-Oh, nothing. I understand painfully well how good Bell is. That's all."

"Isn't she just the best? She's totally my little sister!"

I got the feeling that the conversation had somehow changed from her desire to teach to simply bragging about her little sister. *Still, though, studying, huh? I don't think I've done any real studying in this world at all. I guess that's why I got the score I did on that test... Yeah, it might be a good idea to try something*

*new now that everything's peaceful.*

"If you really want to teach someone, Sera, what about starting with me? I'm not going to be taking any exams, but leaving that score I got as is would just be uncool. As their guardian, I mean."

"Huh?! Can I really?!"

"Sure. If you're fine with it, I'd welcome that."

"Wow, are you really serious?! Like, for real?! Awright, Kelvin! You totally get it!" Sera exclaimed happily.

"Hey come on, no need to bounce around like that. Anyway, how do you plan on teaching me, Sera?"

"With a kind and careful lecture, of course. Take this question, for example. To solve it, you need to go like *fwip* and then turn it! Then you take this and that and *blam* it together, and solve it like a party! See, isn't it simple?"

I had no words. I'd forgotten that Sera was a genius that did things on intuition. She was absolutely not suited to teaching anyone. In fact, that little explanation was mostly made up of sound effects and descriptions of emotion. How did that even work? It wasn't like she was talking about fighting or anything.

"Actually, Sera-san, let's just forget we ever had this idea."

"Awww, why?! Actually, why did you just refer to me like a stranger?!"

*Sorry, Sera. Your lessons are a bit too high-level for me. I don't think I can keep up.*

"Kelvin-san? Sera-san?" a voice called out to us.

"Oh, Shutola...la?" Sera answered, startled.

At some point, Shutola had come to stand in front of us. Her expression was frightfully cold, and though her eyes behind her glasses were so beautiful, it was like I was looking at ice.

"Um...Shutola-san? Is it possible that you're...mad?"

"Of course I am. Please don't raise such a ruckus next to the classroom."

They're in the middle of a test right now!"

"S-Sorry..." both Sera and I answered together.

"If apologies could settle everything, this world wouldn't need laws. As punishment, you two will help me grade the tests!" she declared. After a moment, though, she seemed dissatisfied with something and continued. "Well? Where's your answer?!"

"Y-Yes!" both of us shouted at the same time.

And so, after apologizing to Shutola, Rion, and DarkMel, we put our efforts into grading tests. Temporary desks were prepared for us, and we devoted ourselves to the task. Devoted ourselves. Devoted ourselves...

"I... It's finally over! We're finally done!"

"Urgh...Shutola's stuffed doll was watching us from behind the entire time. I'm so tired..." Sera complained.

We finished grading all the tests and slumped down onto our desks. Even though the task had been a simple one where we'd just had to check answers, I didn't think I'd ever had to stare at text as much as I did that day. Sera was right; the monitoring was even stricter on us than on DarkMel and Rion during their test, and it shaved away at our mental state.



“Thanks for the hard work, papa,” DarkMel said to comfort me.

“Good work, Sera-nee! Want some sweets to refill on sugar?” Rion asked.

“I’ll take some!” Sera answered.

“Me too!”

Just in time, it seemed we were afforded a break, as Rion and DarkMel came in with cookies they had made. The treats gave off a mellow butter scent, and our brains were shouting at us to give them sugar. We couldn’t resist and scarfed the treats down.

*Damn you, Ruka; you’ve gotten better at baking, haven’t you?*

“With this, your atonement is complete. You two are free,” Shutola pronounced.

“Mmm, the fresh air of freedom.”

“It’s sweet and delicious!”

“It’s more the cookies than the air, though. Also, how were our results, Shutola-sensei? I’m pretty confident this time around!” Rion boasted.

“I-I think I did pretty well too!” DarkMel added.

“Let’s see...” Shutola flipped carefully through the tests Sera and I had struggled to grade.

“Both of you did excellently. Neither of you should have any problems during the exam. It seems your efforts have truly borne fruit.”

“Yaayyy!”

The girls cheered and high-fived as Shutola watched them, all smiles.



## Chapter 2: Entrance Exam

Rion and the rest had spent the night before the exam at a city inn, so that the day of, they would be able to head straight to the venue. Since it was the day of the exam, the road to the campus had clearly undergone maintenance recently and was being policed to allow the applicants priority access to the street. There were also many guides employed and placed around, so unless an applicant's sense of direction was extremely bad, there was no chance they would get lost.

"Wow, there are so many people here. Are they all our rivals?" Rion muttered in amazement.

"As... As I expected, almost everyone here is older than me. Urghhh...I'm getting nervous..." DarkMel seemed to wilt.

Bell countered flippantly, "Neither their number nor ages matters. Don't worry—ninety-nine point nine nine percent of them are so weak, you'd end up asking, 'Rival? What kind of joke is that?' with a straight face."

"B-Bell-chan, don't say such things in such a loud voice..." Rion murmured.

Many others were glaring at them. Though the number was limited to only the applicants in front of the venue having their documents checked or something similar, there were so many prospective students around, and since each of them was allowed to bring up to two servants, the group was surrounded by quite a lot of people. Bell meant what she'd said, but once her words reached other students' ears, they all looked their way with less-than-favorable expressions. Moreover, no one was accompanying the trio, as per Bell's decision.

"Aaghhh..." DarkMel seemed to wilt further under their gazes.

"Jeez, you're letting this shake you up way too much. Didn't the principal tell us there are a lot of idiots at the academy? You need to be able to let this sort of thing slide off your back or you won't last, you know? Then again, judging

from how much of a doting idiot Kelvin is, I get why you haven't had much opportunity to feel negative emotions."

"That doesn't mean you can just carelessly make more enemies for us, Bell-chan! And scaring DarkMel is not allowed either!"

"Personally, I think you were a lot scarier than me in that fight against other people, Rion."

"I... I was just trying my best to win!"

Seeing how scared DarkMel was and how flustered Rion was, Bell couldn't help but let out a wry chuckle. *There's no way anyone would guess one of them is the black goddess who threatened to destroy the world and the other a Hero who opposed her*, she thought.

"Okay, let's just leave it at that. More importantly, you two, have you properly memorized our schedule for today?"

"Of cou—"

"Waaaghhh..."

"Huh? DarkMel? Are you okay?"

"I-I-I-I'm fine, y-y-yes!"

"You definitely don't look fine. Jeez, you need to believe in yourself more." With that, Bell took DarkMel's hand in hers. Then, she activated her Unique Skill, Color Corrosion, temporarily diluting the color of fear in DarkMel's heart and adjusting her emotions to suppress how shaken she felt.

"Uh...huh? Why did I start feeling so much calmer when Bell-san took my hand?"

"You're feeling calmer? Good."

Having confirmed that DarkMel's emotions had stabilized, Bell quickly and coldly let go of her hand. DarkMel wasn't sure what had just happened.

"Wow, your hand is amazing, Bell-san! It's like magic! Just like papa and mama!"

"It's nothing like that. Also, don't put me in the same boat as that battle idiot

and food idiot. It hurts.”

Bell started walking without the slightest change to her expression, as if nothing had happened. However, Rion had been watching her closely the whole time.

::Hee hee! You’re so nice, Bell-chan.::

::What kind of nonsense are you spouting? I’m the one who surprised her; I just took responsibility.::

Rion secretly messaged Bell telepathically, pointing out that the girl’s cheeks were slightly red.

“Come on! We should be focusing on the exams! It’s going to be easy for me, but how about you two? Look, Rion, try reciting our schedule. You got interrupted earlier.”

“Yeah, okay. The exams take place over three days. Today is the first and is a written test. Tomorrow we have the practical skills test, and the day after is our interview. The scores we get on all three will be combined to make an aggregate score that will determine whether we pass or not.”

“All the studying we’ve done is for the written test. We’ve barely touched on the interview, and we basically haven’t practiced for the practical skills test at all. Are you sure we’ll be okay?” DarkMel asked nervously.

“We’ll be fine!” Rion was confident. “Let’s believe in Shutola-chan...err...our teacher, Shutola! Yeah!”

“Y-Yeaah!”

Rion and DarkMel raised their fists in a cheer. Bell, however, stayed silent. Noticing that, the two of them looked over at her, also silent.

“I’m not going to do that,” Bell warned them.

“Awww...” In sync, they both let out disappointed noises.

“I’m not doing it!”

In the end, Bell did it.

“Hmph. I don’t see why you needed to psych yourselves up. It would actually

be harder for us to fail,” Bell retorted.

“Mmgrr...you’re so full of confidence, aren’t you, Bell-chan?”

“Not confidence. Certainty. You said you were worried because you basically didn’t prepare for anything other than the written exam, DarkMel, but those worries are pointless. I mean, you’re the weakest among us and you’re still almost at the level of a Rank S adventurer. Do you really think you’re less capable than your run-of-the-mill noble who doesn’t have any real combat experience to speak of? If you do, I’ll have to tell you to get your head back to reality. Everything you’re thinking is nonsense. If *you* were to fail, Rion and I would be the only ones capable of passing.”

DarkMel gave that a moment’s thought. “Is that really true?”

“What? You can’t tell? Your strength is among the highest ranks in the entire world.”

“Hmm...maybe it’s because DarkMel’s standard is based on us?” Rion proposed.

“Huh? What does that mean?”

“Uhh...” Rion put her conjecture into words. Ever since becoming part of the family, DarkMel had spent pretty much all of her time around its members. Though she’d interacted with people outside the family, they were pretty much all either other Rank S adventurers, leaders of the four great countries, or the demons of Grelbareika. In other words, DarkMel was very used to the strength of the Celsius family and those involved with them. Because she based all her standards and comparisons of the world using people everyone else would consider monsters, Rion surmised that she wasn’t very confident in her own abilities. Furthermore, she might have actually been thinking that her strength was only average, since she was much weaker than everyone around her.

“I see. So that’s why she was so scared of the looks these small fry were giving us.”

“Erm, Bell-chan, I’m worried about those too, okay?”

“Well, if that’s the case, the only way to fix it is with actual experience. Make sure you take a good look at everyone else at tomorrow’s practical exam. You’ll

probably think they're all cutting corners or taking it easy. Still, that doesn't mean you're allowed to do the same, okay? Anyway, as long as you take things seriously, DarkMel, there's no way you'll score low on the practical exam."

"O... Okay. I'll give it my all!"

Bell patted the girl's shoulder, this time activating her Color Corrosion to give DarkMel courage. The effect took, and DarkMel began looking more confident by the minute.

"Okay! Then next, let's talk about the interview. You've developed a strategy for it already, haven't you? That's good enough. Totally good enough."

"Um...why?"

"Just think about it for a moment. We're surrounded by arrogant royals and nobles, and pretty much everyone who isn't is an heir to some wealthy merchant, right? Of course, I'm sure there are some exceptions, but everyone who fits those categories is, to be frank, disgusting. It doesn't matter what they say or how they try to dress themselves up; they're sure to mess up somewhere during the interview. Compared to them, you two are the nicest of the nice—truly good people. There's no way they'd have a bad impression of you."

"Are... Are you sure about that? It's a little embarrassing to hear you say that so confidently." Rion seemed bashful.

"Heh heh, good. It's payback for earlier."

"Oh, but I'm happier to know that Bell-chan thinks of us that way!" Rion exclaimed.

"I'm really happy too. It's great that we get along so well!" DarkMel agreed.

"Neither of you have a malicious bone in your body, do you?" Bell muttered.

The other two girls reacted with puzzlement. Their statements had actually caused Bell to feel embarrassed instead.

*I'm the one who'll be most in trouble when it comes to the interview...personalitywise, that is. Well, I'll just make up for it during the written and practical exams,* Bell thought.

At that point, the three of them reached the venue and their conversation

stopped. From here on out, not even servants were allowed, so only applicants could enter.

“Now then, it’s time to go inside. Don’t forget to write your names on the papers, you two,” Bell reminded them.

“Yeah, I know!”

“Understood!”



The trio received their exam admission tickets at the reception desk and passed their baggage checks without trouble. The first exam was being held in several rooms at once, but their luck must have been good, since they were all sorted into the same room.

“The multipurpose auditorium that’s supposed to be the second venue is... Oh, right here.”

The spacious room that would be their exam venue was filled with many desks and chairs lined up and evenly spaced. Already, more than half of the spots were filled with their rivals. Some seemed nonchalant and composed, some had their hands together in prayer, some were muttering things to themselves under their breath, and some were fearlessly laid out on their desks and sleeping without a care in the world. Because there was no real dress code for the exam, everyone was wearing clothes of all sorts and colors. Some people were wearing small crowns, likely to signify their peerage. There were even people wearing clothes so ridiculous, it made others want to ask if they were serious about their outfits. Of course, the trio had expected all that to some extent, so they didn’t react. Also, Rion and the others were wearing the same clothes they had worn on their last visit to Lumiest.

The only other things of note were four objects, one placed in each cardinal direction in the room. They seemed like magic items and looked like someone had taken staffs with jeweled tips and placed them in the middle of an apparatus to make them stand on their own. However, the girls paid no attention to these objects, assuming that their function would be explained by the academy later.

“Urghhh...there are so many people. But I’m sure I can do it!” DarkMel encouraged herself.

“That’s the spirit!” Rion cheered. Then, she continued to say, “Uhh...our seats are... They’ve already been assigned to us, right?”

“Yep,” answered Bell. “The number on your ticket is your seat number. There are signs on the walls to help you find them. Hmm...looks like I’m here, Rion is there, and DarkMel is over there.”

A map was on the wall near the entrance, and the desks also had their assigned numbers on them so that people could check. As expected, the three weren’t lucky enough to be placed together; their seats were scattered around the room.

“Wow, you found them so fast, Bell-san. Thanks!” DarkMel exclaimed.

“Your gratitude is nice, but you should make sure you do well on the test first,” Bell warned her.

“Yeah,” Rion agreed. “We’re separated from each other, and we’re forbidden to use the Network, but I believe we’ll all pass!”

“R-Rion-san!” DarkMel seemed moved.

“Yeah, sure. Enough with that now; hurry up and get to your seat.”

“Urgk, you’re so cold, Bell-chan...but I’m still praying for your good fortune!”

“Me too! Good luck!”

Both Rion and DarkMel gave Bell a thumbs-up as they headed to their own seats.

“Is luck the thing they should be praying for right now?” Bell sighed and shook her head, muttering to herself. Still, she was secretly relieved, thinking that they would be fine if this was how they were acting.

*If I remember right, this is what papa said I should do. Write the character for “person,” the character for “person”...*

*I’m so bored. I hope it starts soon...*

*Heh heh, I’m looking forward to it...*



After sitting down, each of the girls passed the time with something different. One wrote the character for “person” and swallowed it to calm herself down, one imagined how her academy life would be, and one simply sat and waited.

They didn’t need to wait long before a large man, who was probably the proctor, stepped up onto the auditorium’s stage.

“Quiet down, please. It is time for the exam to start, so from now on, I will ask you all to refrain from personal communication outside of break time. It seems one person has not made it in time and another is still sleeping at her desk, but...well, I suppose that was unavoidable. My name is Horace, and I will be the proctor and person in charge of the second exam venue. Hello to you all. Now then, first...”

After a light greeting, he proceeded to explain how the first exam would go. It would consist of five written tests, each on a different subject. Everyone would have one hour to finish each test, with a small break in between. The plan was to have two tests in the morning, break for lunch, and then finish off the remaining three tests in the afternoon. As a result, the first test would be the one that generally required the most time.

Horace then went on to give more details about the schedule, outlined things to watch out for, and more.

“As for the subjects of these tests, the academy has publicized them already. Also, I would like to warn all of you here about one thing. You may think what I am about to say is obvious and that I don’t need to say it, but all cheating is forbidden. We have checked your bags beforehand and prepared all the tools you will need in order to prevent this. Usage of unnecessary magic or other skills will be met with a warning, so be careful about that as well. By looking at the four corners of this room, all of you should be able to see the magic items shaped like staffs. I cannot tell you any details, but assume that they are made to guard against cheating and other illegal actions. Are there any questions? No, doesn’t seem like it. Well then, we will begin handing out the tests. Please wait in your seats.”

The rest of the staff started handing out tests face down. Bundles went to Rion’s desk, DarkMel’s desk, Bell’s desk, and even the desk of the fearless

applicant who was still in dreamland. Horace looked around the room, confirming that the tests had all been handed out. Then he checked the clock that had been set up for this purpose, pausing for a little bit.

“It’s time. Please start.”



Half a day had passed since the start of the first exam, and now the girls were in the midst of their fifth test, or in other words, the last one of the day.

*So bored...*

Around when half the allotted time had passed, Bell, who had long since finished, was feeling extremely bored. And it wasn’t just this test. She had ended with time to spare and felt bored for every test that day. She had finished so early, she resorted to checking her answers again just to kill time, and after she checked for any mistakes, answers written in the wrong place, and her name on the paper, she was set. She genuinely had nothing to do.

*These tests were so simple, I’m bored to death here, she thought. I guess it makes sense, though, since those princesses from Faanis who live entirely on instinct managed to graduate from here. Still, though, I’m bored. So bored I could die. Agh, there’s a limit to what I can do to kill time. Did they make a mistake in the amount of time they gave us? Wouldn’t half the time be more appropriate? Why can’t we just go home as soon as we finish? Oh, wait, I guess I can’t do that since I’m a bodyguard... I’ll give a bad impression if I take a nap on my desk, won’t I? I know there’s one idiot girl who’s been asleep this entire time, and a tardy one who arrived just in time for the second test, but it seems those people never intended to pass in the first place. Haaahhh...why do I have to care about what other people think...*

Although she was thinking all of that, Bell shot a look at Rion and DarkMel, who were sitting in front of her. Both of them still seemed to be grappling with their tests, as they were glaring at their answer sheets.

*Well, I guess there needs to be some leeway. Now then, I’m in the very back of the room, so I can look around, but I guess being too obvious about it would be suspicious. Let’s kill time thinking about the confectionery we’re going to stop by on the way back.*

It seemed that Bell hadn't had to use her brain too much during these tests, but she still wanted sugar. Even this demon, who couldn't see much benefit from school life, was secretly looking forward to the many sweets shops that dotted the city. She quite literally was *secretly* looking forward to it, as it was a secret from her sister, Sera.

*I've decided. Today will be cannolo!*

Thus ended the written exam.



Once the first day of exams were over, Rion and DarkMel went straight back to the inn to dive into their beds. Bell also returned to the room a little later.

"I'm so tiiirrreed! But I managed to finish the whole thing!" Rion exclaimed.

"I used up all my power..." DarkMel muttered.

Both of them stated their impressions of the first day while rolling around in bed. It didn't seem like they would get up again, probably because they had used their brains so fiercely.

"Mmgh... Sorry to interrupt you two while you're basking in your sense of accomplishment, but just to remind you, this is only the first day. Do you really think you can reach the top when you're in this kind of shape after just beginning?"

Bell's harsh words contrasted with the sweet smell that suddenly filled the room. That was to be expected, though, as she sat down in a chair and scarfed down cylindrical baked treats that had been stuffed with cream. She filled up her cheeks like a squirrel, chewed for a little, swallowed, and then proceeded to emanate a blissful aura. It was simply heartwarming to see.

"Ah, I think I'm feeling a little less tired," Rion remarked.

"Yeah, I'm feeling really refreshed. I wonder why!" DarkMel added.

It was so heartwarming that it blew away some of the exhaustion that had built up during the day.

"R-Really? You two change like the wind, as always. I'm glad you're feeling more energetic now, but I doubt your exhaustion is actually gone. Look, I

bought some for you too, so fill up quickly.”

Bell threw some of the extra food to Rion and DarkMel. The two of them caught their treats and turned to face her with smiles on their faces. Bell could only stand the looks they were giving her for so long.

“What?”

“Oh, noooooothing,” Rion said in a singsong lilt. “Anyway, thanks, Bell-chan.”

“Thank you. It looks very tasty!” DarkMel added.

“Hmph.” Though Bell turned away in a huff, the other two continued to smile.

“So, you took a detour on the way back, Bell-chan? You bought these in town?” Rion asked.

“I’ve never seen these before. Is this a cheese-based cream inside dough that’s been fried in oil? What’s this called, Bell-san?” DarkMel added.

“They’re called cannoli. A long time ago, Lumiest did some research into recreating some foods that could only be found in literature, so there are a lot of rare sweets that you can’t get anywhere else. I have the recipe written down here, so give it to Efil when you get a chance.”

Bell threw a piece of paper towards Rion. It flew straight—she had likely used wind magic to make it act that way.

“You want me to give this to Efil-nee?”

“Yep. I’d bet money she’ll improve the recipe and make it even more delicious. Then I can get her to teach it to Victor. It’s a quid pro quo; we both benefit, see?” Bell sounded as if she was stating the obvious as she scooped up some cream that had been left on the side of her mouth. She must have really liked the treat, since she was treating the outcome as if it was already set in stone. Though she liked to complain, it seemed Bell was enjoying Lumiest in her own way.

“R-Right...a give-and-take!” Rion exclaimed.

“I’m not sure what that means, but it sounds cool. Also, I’m sure Mdo-san will love it!” DarkMel also seemed happy with the suggestion.

The two of them brought the sweets to their mouths. With the first bite, they enjoyed the crispness of the fried dough. Then, the flavor of the sweet cream spread through their mouths, melting away their exhaustion with sugar. The pair were instantly convinced that they needed to have Efil improve the dish further.



It was the second day of the exam and time for the practical skills evaluation. The applicants would have their physical abilities, whatever martial discipline they favored, magic, and other skills tested this time. Essentially, every student would have their physical abilities assessed, and would also have to pick two other skills or abilities to be tested by a proctor. It was a somewhat strange format, as any skill or ability was fair game as long as the use of it didn't violate any laws. Since Lumiest accepted any and all talents, regardless of field or genre, this was the way the exam had to be carried out.

Leaving aside the abilities the trio had chosen to be tested in, the physical ability measurement that every applicant had to go through came first. The applicants were also split into groups for this stage, surrounded by peers who were different from the day before. They couldn't see the one who had been late to the test or the fearless one who had slept through the entire first exam. Rion was a little worried that those applicants would be late or still sleeping today.

As for the state of the three girls, DarkMel had been separated from the other two this time.

"I never expected to be together every day, but...for DarkMel to be the one who was moved to another group... I wonder if she's okay?" Rion mused.

"She's eaten enough, slept enough, and rested enough. I also readjusted her color in the morning, so she's perfect," Bell assured her. "But I have to say, this equipment...it's really easy to move around in."

Unlike the first day, when they'd been free to dress how they wished, today they were required to dress in something that was easy to exercise in. Though the clothes differed between people from different countries and cultures, almost all the applicants were lightly dressed. The trio's clothing for the day was

basically ultrahigh-quality gym clothes provided by Efil.

“They were handmade by Efil-nee, after all. Hee hee!” Rion giggled. “To tell you the truth, I thought up this design! I couldn’t take part in PE before, so I always wanted to try something like this on!”

“Is that so?” Bell replied noncommittally. “Well, I’m fine with whatever as long as I can move in it. Oh, looks like it’s about time.”

“Huh? Ah, rimless glasses...”

A woman wearing rimless glasses walked up in front of the applicants gathered on the exercise grounds. After her visit with Kelvin the other day and their encounter with the principal with a memorable title, Rion couldn’t help but think of Art when she saw those glasses. Since the woman was beautiful and gave off an intelligent vibe, she was reminded even more of him.

“Okay, it’s time. Is everyone here? If you don’t all gather round, you will be three steps closer to failing!” she shouted in warning. After a pause to allow everyone time to follow her instructions, she continued, “Good, looks like everyone is here! That means this assessment is complete.”

All the applicants were speechless. Though Rion couldn’t help but be reminded of Art, the figure in front of them was, in fact, a woman. She had white skin, and her hair was golden blonde as opposed to Art’s gray. Furthermore, the clothes she wore made her ample curves clear to see.

::Tch!::

::Bell-chan?::

::Nothing, don’t mind me. I’m—::

It was about Ms. Curvy. Even more so, it seemed the woman’s personality was at odds with her outwardly calm appearance; she seemed quite mischievous. By making that joking greeting, she had left most of the applicants speechless. However, a small number of the boys had their eyes glued on the new proctor for...*other* reasons.

*I guess I should remember their stupid faces, just in case,* Bell thought. She noticed the indecent looks and memorized the offending boys’ faces, marking

them down on her internal blacklist for when she was carrying out her role as bodyguard. Whether or not any of them passed or failed, she would have to do her best not to let those boys anywhere near Rion and DarkMel.

“Allow me to introduce myself before the exam starts! I am this practical test’s proctor and supervisor, Arche! I will mainly be taking charge of the physical ability portion, but I might also meet some of you later if you’re confident in moving your body! By the way, the academy also offers lectures on all forms of martial arts—”

“Proctor Arche, it’s nearly time for the exam to start. Please keep it simple.”

“Huh? O-Ohhh...yeah, you’re right. Sorry, I tend to get tunnel vision when I’m immersed in things! Ah, but I’m strong, I assure you!”

“Proctor Arche!”

Once again, the kids were speechless. Arche, warned by another proctor while under the gazes of all the applicants, laughed off her mistakes, not looking like she minded much.

*She seems like she’ll be a pretty refreshing teacher!* Rion thought excitedly.

*She’s definitely your typical meathead,* Bell immediately thought.

Arche was playful in the extreme, so much so that it was actually refreshing to see. “Well then, I’ll start by explaining how this assessment will go. Make sure you don’t miss a word, okay? Still, if you do, I’ll sneakily remind you, so don’t worry! I’ll make sure the others don’t notice!”

“Proctor Arche?!”

*What is this farce?* Bell thought, exasperated. As time went on, Bell grew more and more worried about Arche being the one in charge of the exam. And it seemed Bell wasn’t alone in this. In fact, the concern was so common that Bell started trying to read deeper into the situation, suspecting that there was a deeper meaning in the woman’s appointment as proctor. But there wasn’t.

“In this exam, you all will be engaging in various exercises such as sprinting and long jumping, and we will be accurately recording your data. We will also be measuring the amount of magic you have inside you. This is just to see how



much MP you have, so it doesn't matter if you don't know how to use magic! Warriors like me don't have to be worried. Uhh...I'll get into further detail when those points become relevant, so...are there any questions?"

"Here." One of the prospective students raised their hand. "If you just want to check our stats, wouldn't taking a look at them be faster? I find it hard to believe a school as renowned as Lumiest wouldn't have a magic item that can measure such things."

"There it is! And it's a good question, truly a good one!" It was...amazing how adamantly she engaged with the student.

"Uh, ahhh...th-thanks?"

"Allow me to answer immediately! Please think of the consideration the academy is showing by not looking at your stats. Did you know that different countries treat stats differently? While some strictly prohibit the revealing of one's stats, others are open enough to exchange that info as a sort of greeting. The difference is especially pronounced on the Western Continent with all of its small countries, and it is a very delicate thing; do you understand? So Lumiest has decided to treat stats in the way the Adventurer's Guild does, since their presence spans the world. We do not mind if you decide to reveal your stats on your own, but exposing the stats of others is strictly forbidden. Furthermore, there are a lot of things that you won't be able to understand through stats alone, such as how to move, which one of your muscles is most developed, or how to refine decision-making under different circumstances. I want to know your true strengths, not just what is written in your stats! And, well...that's it. Are you satisfied?"

With heavy breathing and a somewhat smug expression, Arche pressed towards the questioner as she answered. Pitifully, that person was completely swallowed up by her vigor.

"R-Right, yes. Thank you for the answer."

"Good! Now then, any other questions? No? Really? This is your last chance, okay?!"

No one spoke up.

“P-Proctor Arche, you’re creeping the kids out. I think we should move on and start the exam.”

“Really? Oh, fine; it’s work, after all! Well then, everyone, please follow me. Don’t lag behind; I walk fast!” Arche said before heading off. Her walking speed was actually quite normal.

The other proctors urged the children to keep up, and they all followed after her.

::Arche-sensei is an interesting person, isn’t she?:: Rion remarked.

::You think so? I think she’s just noisy. She does seem strong, though. Probably far more than any of the other proctors we’ve seen until now.::

::Oh, you thought so too, Bell-chan? I actually had an inkling that she was! Also, don’t you think she seems kind of similar to Principal Art somehow?::

::To Art? Ahh, you mean her glasses.::

::Y-You’re right that she also wears rimless glasses, but I wasn’t just talking about her appearance. There’s also, like, how much she loves to talk, or how much she thinks about her students, you know? Inside stuff!::

Bell paused to think. ::You mean...how she likes to interrupt people?::

::Exactly! Her energy, enthusiasm, and vigor are all just like him! And the way she gets into things too!::

::Yeah, you might be right about that. By the way, Rion, we’re not students yet, remember? It’s fine to be curious about the proctor, but you should worry about your test results first. I hate that it sounds like I care about that guy, but we want to make a splash to live up to his expectations.::

::You’re right. Kel-nii said not to hold back either. I learned during the Beast King Festival that against other people, the combatant who scares the other is the victor! Okay!::

::Against other people? Uh, never mind. If you’re okay with that, Rion, then I am too...I think?::

As the pair exchanged their last bits of conversation, Bell could only pray that Rion wasn’t psyching herself up for murder. Meanwhile, the applicants had

reached their destination. Several white lines had been drawn on the ground like a track for track-and-field events.

“Okay, everyone, stop! Stop! If you don’t, the consequences will be dire!”

No one said anything. They had all stopped when Arche had called for it the first time around.

“Oh, it seems this year’s applicants are all excellent specimens. Usually, this is around when one or two of you little rascals try to charge at me. Good, good!”

“Proctor Arche...”

“I know, I know! You don’t need to look so worried; I’m going to do this properly! Errrm...first, let’s see how fast all of you run. Really, I’m just going to have you sprint full speed down the track, so I don’t think it needs much explanatio— Oh, no, there totally is something. I remember now.”

Seeing the glares sent her way from the other proctors, Arche’s memory had been jogged. Her reaction was flustered.

“Just something to watch out for: this test is only to measure all of your basic physical abilities. I don’t mind if you use any skills based on that knowledge, but no using magic to buff your speed, okay? Before you all run...well, I can’t use magic, so this proctor here will make sure to dispel any buffs on you, and if you use magic on this track, an alarm will sound. So let’s all have a fair-and-square, no-magic fi— Run!”

*She had to correct herself!*

Everyone immediately noticed. She had probably been swept along with the flow of things and said it by accident. Either that, or Arche might actually get along well with Kelvin.

The kids were called in order for their sprint. There would be five of them racing at a time. It was at this point that Rion and Bell were separated; it had been decided they would run in different groups. Bell was part of the first group, so she had to go to the track immediately.

“Do your best, Bell-chan!”

“Yeah, yeah. Thanks.”

Bell waved haphazardly back at Rion as she entered her assigned lane. None of the other applicants who would be running with her stood out to Bell. She tapped the ground with the tips of her shoes as she decided she would easily beat them flat out. To her, leaving a good time record was less important than being careful to not hit the other kids with a shock wave from her running. If she was to go all out, she would likely gouge chunks out of the earth and send the people next to her flying. Actually, no—that was a *certainty*.



“Hey, girlie!”

Bell didn't reply immediately. But when she did, it was with a flat “What?”

She had been called out to in an unbelievably lighthearted manner, and the creeping suspicion that something annoying and incredibly unpleasant was about to happen bubbled up inside her. The feeling was so strong that she couldn't keep it out of her voice.

She looked at the person who had called out to her from the next lane. In other words, the male applicant who was her neighbor. The boy next to her had black hair and brown skin. He had a handsome face in an exotic way. But that was only from the perspective of someone the same age as him. To Bell, he merely looked like a cheeky little brat. Thanks to her demonic disposition, she had stopped growing, so she looked about the same age as Rion, but she was Sera's twin and was actually an adult on the inside.

*Ah, I see. He's an idiot.*

Also, he wasn't dressed well. Though they had all been instructed to dress in something that was easy to exercise in, the boy had a cloth wrapped around his head and was wearing thick clothes that covered his whole body. It was clear that the clothes weren't suited to today's exam. From Bell's perspective, it exasperated her and made her want to ask what he had come all this way for.

“Come on now, don't make such a scary face. You're ruining your cute face; it's so sad! Come on, smile! Smile, see?”

Bell stayed silent. Her irritation had spiked so much that she almost reflexively kicked the kid in the face, but since she was an adult, she restrained herself. Her displeasure was clearly showing on her face, but she made sure to keep all those feelings inside. She knew she could hold back.

Finally, she replied in a curt tone, “Could you not engage in useless chatter right before the exam?”

“Whoa there! Harsh! Also, it isn't useless, is it? After all, I'll be leaving you with precious lifelong memories of having talked directly with me!”

The irritation was reaching instinctual, primal levels now. Bell wanted to open

up a gaping hole in the boy's gut, but once again, she was an adult, so she stopped herself with an internal scolding right on the brink of losing it. It was really close, but she somehow managed to stop. She withstood the urge.

“My name is Charles Vaccania. As you no doubt know, I am the third prince of the Vaccania kingdom.”

The Kingdom of Vaccania was a country situated in the desert at the center of the Western Continent. For size, they were right smack-dab in the middle of all the countries on the Western Continent, and though the environment was harsh, their territory was abundant with valuable resources, so the country was relatively well-off. However, there was still an extra point that needed to be noted...

“Oh, right. If I remember correctly, that place is under the control of the Rizean Empire,” she mused.

Yes, Vaccania had been forced to sign an unequal treaty with Rizea in exchange for a promise of safety. Because they were rich in resources and maintained their subservient attitude to the empire, they were valued a lot more than the other conquered territories. As an aside, the royals of Vaccania loved being wrapped in long things and also tended to be womanizers and show-offs. It seemed that Charles had squarely inherited all those traits, as the impression he gave was of exactly that stereotype. Also, he had been quickly added to Bell's blacklist.

“Huh, you're pretty knowledgeable, aint'cha? But while the old Vaccania kingdom might have been that way, things are totally different these days. After all, Rizea went and imploded on its own. We, Vaccania, used that opportunity to free ourselves from their chains and take a step towards a new age. I am the vanguard of that, the breath of the new age!”

“If the first step of a new age results in you, then Vaccania's clearly made a mistake. What a pity. My condolences.”

“Heh heh, is that you being shy? You're cute even when you're being abusive. I bet you're just acting indifferent but are actually super interested in me, aren't y—”

“Just hurry up and state your business concisely, you third-rate prince. I'm not

nearly as full of free time as you are, and I don't want to ruin my pretest concentration on your stupidity."

While she wouldn't act physically because she was an adult, it was clear to Bell that he wouldn't understand just from her attitude and choice of insults, so she resorted to being direct and explicit. She also went further, adding a harsh glare, and Bell expected he wouldn't try to involve himself with her any further after that.

"No, no, that's not it. I'm the third prince, no rate involved. You're surprisingly scatterbrained, aren't you? To answer your question, though, I don't really have any business. I was just observing the people who could be my rivals during yesterday's exam and today's as well, and I thought you and that black-haired girl with you were much cuter than everyone else. Enough that I decided that I'd chat you up when given the chance, see? And here we are, right next to each other! I'm telling you, this is basically fate at this point! I couldn't be more grateful to the goddess! I'm quite religious, you see, enough that you could say I'm *too* familiar with my country's nuns. Is that surprising to you? I bet you didn't expect that. Given how spiritual I am, I bet you're feeling the sacred aura I'm giving off, aren't you?"

Bell didn't reply. Unfortunately for her, Charles's mental fortitude was far sturdier than expected. It seemed he didn't pay any heed to anything she did, and it made her suspect that he must have been a total, constant failure to build up such resistance. He was likely the type not to care that he was trying to hit on a demon, and the deity he would be praying to was one of muscled. While it didn't change the fact that he was the type she wanted nothing to do with, Bell actually started to loop around to being impressed, thinking that his mental fortitude was something she could learn from, at least.

"Whoa?! I-I suddenly felt a chill! This stimulation that goes directly to my brain... This is the first time I've ever felt something like this! It's gotta be because our meeting was fate. You think so too, right? Right?"

Even when Bell tried throwing some murderous intent Charles's way, he managed to interpret it in a strangely convenient way. At this point, she could only assume he was possessed of an invincible mentality. In a sense, he was a big shot. However, with how loud a voice he let out, of course a proctor would



hear him.

Instantly, Arche locked onto Charles. “Charles-kun, it’s fine for exam takers to bond with each other, but we’re in the middle of a test right now. Personally, I would like to praise your initiative and give you extra credit, but during an exam, that is worthy of docking points. It’s unfortunate, but it’s actually going to cost you a lot of points.”

“Well, if it isn’t Proctor Arche! It’s an honor for you to go out of your way and talk to me. The answer is no, the difference in our age and the large size of your chest don’t matter. As you can see, my strike zone is large!”

“Hmm, I see. But as I said before, that is another set of docked points! If this continues, you’ll fail before you even run, you know? Please only bother Bell-san in moderation. If this becomes an international problem, my excitement would never cea— *Ahem!* Anyway, Lumiest cannot allow actions like that.”

“I see! Your name is Bell? What an adorable name, like the tinkling of the item you’re named after! Given that she said this might become an international problem, I see your social status is quite high! Bell...Bell...Bell Vaccania... Yeah, sounds nice! What a miraculous match we are! It matches well with me!”

With how much of an idiot he was being, it was actually astounding how unusual he was. Bell’s anger blew past its limit and she felt an ice-cold sense of calm.

“There’s no need to worry. I won’t discount you just because you’re flat!” he announced.

“More docked points! You’re nearly at a red card, Charles-kun! I’m getting fired up!” Arche warned him.

*Okay. I’m gonna kill him,* Bell decided.

Charles’s statement, which he had clearly said because he thought it was okay, raised Bell’s icy calm to a coldheartedness with a temperature of absolute zero.

Given that he was brushing up against a red card, even Charles had to stop talking. Instead, he repeatedly shot Bell winks, but at this point, Bell looked straightforward and paid him no mind.

Finally, the first group took their places and waited for the signal to start.

“Okay, then! The Red Magic spell will be the signal to start. I’m beginning the countdown, all right? Reeaaaaddyyyyyyyyyy—”

*GWOOM!*

“Huh? Huewaagh?!”

One of the proctors cast a Red Magic spell, creating a small and harmless explosion sound. It was like a cannon firing a blank, but the sound of that blank was instantly overshadowed by a reverberating sonic boom.

Bell had skillfully created a shock wave that would only affect one unfortunate neighbor. It was like the air split, or there had been a fierce explosion. At any rate, it was a sound none of the proctors or applicants had ever heard in their lives. It only lasted a moment, but the impact was immeasurable.

“Wagh?! Wh-Wh-Wha... What was that sound?!”

“Huh? Uh, you’re done running already?”

“N-No way?! The race just started!”

As proof, everyone other than Rion and Arche had wide-eyed stares, their mouths agape in a foolish expression as if this had been a planned reaction, even though it wasn’t. The remaining applicants, who should have been running along with Bell, were so surprised that they hadn’t even managed to clear the starting line.

“My time?” Bell asked.

“Huh? Oh! Uhhh?!”

Since no one at the goal seemed to be moving, Bell reluctantly asked to confirm her time. The proctor finally regained the senses that had been shocked into inaction and hurriedly confirmed her time. A machine had automatically recorded that information when she’d passed the goal, so there was no chance of anyone forgetting to stop the timer.

“U-Uhhhhh?!”

However, Bell's recorded time was completely unrealistic. She was, after all, faster than anyone in Lumiest's entire history. In fact, no past record could even compare. The proctor, who had recovered from the first shock, once again ceased all brain activity the moment they tried to read the time, falling back into a dumbfounded stupor.

The first thing the proctor had to decide was whether to admit that this was reality or assume that they were currently in a dream.

"Wow, Charles-kun went flying. He went pretty far... I wonder if he's okay? I'm in charge here, so I'm totally worried!"

One of the proctors gasped. "Th-That's right, one of the applicants went flying! Hurry, we need to confirm his safety! Ready a stretcher!"

"R-Right!"

"Heh." Bell let out a refreshed chuckle.

Contrary to her words, Arche seemed to be having fun. Meanwhile, the other proctors were rushing to ready a stretcher.

Rion watched all their different reactions, impressed by how skillful Bell was. *Wow, Bell-chan! Not only did you control your power enough to get rid of the annoying one without knocking over anyone else, but you also measured how far he would fly so that he would land in water and not be hurt. Yeah, this is how combat against people should be: harsh but with the minimum amount of compassion still intact!*

Who knew how any of that related to interpersonal combat, but as Rion thought, Charles, who had been sent flying in a flashy manner, was okay. He had no outer wounds to speak of; at worst, he had been flung into some water and was drenched. However, he was sent to the infirmary just in case.

"We'll have him take the test later... Wow, though. Charles-kun sure is a strange kid, to jump in the opposite direction. I guess when show-offs go that far, you've got to give them some respect, huh? You think so too, right, Bell-san?"

"Hee hee, indeed." When Arche threw that question at her, a rare and delightful smile bloomed on Bell's face.

After that, the first group was determined to have had technical difficulties. The three applicants other than Bell and Charles, who had finished the race solo and been sent to the infirmary, respectively, were given their own smaller race. That one finished without a problem and in a peaceful, normal way. It was as if Bell's legendary record had never happened; the next races were all within the realm of normal. At best, they were good but within reason.

Finally, it was time for Rion's group.

"Reeeaaddddyyyyyy!"

After Arche gave her ready signal, the Red Magic spell was cast, as always. However...

"Hup! Awright, I'm first!"

"Huh?!"

In the exact opposite style of Bell, Rion took off while leaving behind no sound of footsteps or anything else that would betray her movement and slipped through the goal. The proctor in charge of the timer only noticed her presence when she let out a cheer, jumping with a momentary shiver of surprise. The proctor was even more surprised by this than Bell's results, enough that their heart felt like it would jump out of their mouth.

"What was my time?!" Rion asked.

"Whaaaaaahhh?!"

"U-Ummm?"

"T-Time, you say?! Oh yeah, the time! Yeah! Wait just a second; I need to take a deep breath! Give me a moment to find myself!" The proctor took a very deep breath. Though they had built up a little bit of a resistance to this sort of surprise after Bell's record, some bravery was still needed to look at the record Rion had left behind. After calming down and accepting that this was reality, they slowly looked over at the timer.

"Sorry, can you pinch my cheeks?"

"Why?!"

"I can't believe what I'm seeing..."

Rion's time was even faster than Bell's. Now the proctor could no longer tell if what they were seeing was real or a dream. They were so hounded by paranoia that they asked Rion for a nonsensical favor. Also, it should be noted that in this instance, everyone but Bell and Arche reacted with wide eyes, their pupils like pinpricks and mouths agape.

*I knew Rion could do it. It's only a small difference, and I couldn't use my Green Magic, but she still surpassed my speed. It makes me want to race her again, but no holds barred,* Bell thought, impressed. She was happy, as if something had just happened to refresh her mood.

"Hmmm, looks like this group needs a redo as well. Okaaaayyy, I know how you all feel, but try to come back to your senses!" Arche clapped her hands above her head to try and bring the other applicants and proctors back to reality. She must have had quite the bold personality, as she was the only one who seemed indifferent to these events.

"The exam's just started. If you're going to burn out, make sure you do it after everything is finished, okay? Ah, but there are still the interviews tomorrow. Sorry, ignore what I just said! Wait until the exams end tomorrow to burn to ash!"

Even to the other hopeful students who mostly came from highborn positions like royalty or nobility, and to the proctors who spent every year looking for as many outstanding students as they could, such an incredible showing was the rarest of the rare—the kind of thing that might be heard about in rumors but never actually seen. It was natural for them to be surprised.

Arche, however, was right: the second exam had just started. There were still the strength and magic tests to go before the elective ones, meaning there were many points of danger remaining for them to get through. Bell gave a small prayer in the hopes that, for the other applicants and the proctors, their hearts wouldn't break completely during these proceedings.

*Hmmhmmhmmhmmhmm!* Arche hummed internally. *This year's applicants are really excellent! Those two are pretty much on the level of Rank S adventurers! I don't think I can handle them, principal! Yaayy!*

During all this, Arche alone seemed excited for the next test. As many had

suspected, there seemed to be a screw loose in her head.

After the first round, Rion and Bell continued to go above and beyond Arche's expectations in every other event for the second exam. Once the day's tests were done, Arche was so excited that she might have even gotten a nosebleed.



All the tests in the second exam had finished, and it was now evening. There were still many students remaining in Lumiest's academy district, but the applicants had all returned to their lodgings before noon. Only the last day of interviews remained, so it was probably fair to say that both the applicants and exam proctors only needed to give one final push. That said, after the prospective students left, the job of grading everything still remained. Not only that, but even after the exams were graded, the day's work was not over.

"Now then, allow me to apologize for gathering you all here while you're still tired. How were the grades for yesterday's written exams and today's physical tests?"

In a school conference room, Principal Art's androgynous voice reverberated throughout. He was sitting at a round table along with several other teachers from Lumiest. It looked as if they were about to start a meeting.

It was customary, once the grading for the first and second exams was completed, for those in charge of each exam to gather in this conference room and share the applicants' current scores. This would inform the questions that would be asked in the next day's interviews and would allow information on any problems that occurred to be shared. In the event that any standout applicants had appeared, they would also be discussed in this meeting. If anything, Art was looking forward to the latter.

"Yes, it went without a hitch."

"Wow! Not surprising from you, Professor Horace! You don't look tired at all! And here I was, desperate to put together all the data just for this conference!"

"Heh! Makes sense, since despite your looks, you're not great with the detailed work, Instructor Arche. It's fine to hurry, but I can only hope that the data doesn't have any mistakes now. After all, the fates of those girls and boys

are riding on it!”

While Arche laughed cheerfully, a somewhat pudgy male teacher named Boyle verbally prodded her. Though he wasn’t wrong, the way he said it was very haughty.

“Please calm yourself, Instructor Boyle. Everything is checked multiple times, so there will be no mistakes in the grades. What you’re talking about won’t happen. You should know that, given how wise you are. If you didn’t, you’d have to be demoted from instructor to trash. I don’t believe you are trash, Instructor Boyle, but are you? Are you trash?”

The person who spoke up and stopped him was a young woman wearing a robe over her instructor’s uniform. This beautiful woman also seemed intellectual, though in a different way from Arche. Sometimes during her speech she smiled like a holy mother who could wrap everything in her embrace, and at other times she looked down sadly...but something didn’t click with what she’d said. Her words didn’t quite mesh, and it was hard to tell if she was trying to calm everyone down or start a new fight.

“Uh, hm? Of... Of course I know. I am *wise*, after all! That was just my way of showing concern... Yes, I was concerned about Instructor Arche!”

“My, how wonderful! Communication between teachers is important, after all. If it happened to just be a snide remark, then you really would have been a piece of shit, huh? I feel true relief, from the bottom of my heart.”

“You’re not talking like that on purpose...are you, Instructor Milky?”

“Hm? I have no idea what you could mean by that,” Milky replied in a gentle and warm tone, tilting her head cutely to accent her reply.

“Oh, uh, never mind. If you don’t understand the question, then it’s fine. Yes...I’m sure it was just my imagination.” Boyle couldn’t help but have his heart flutter when he saw the way she was acting, and he decided not to pry any further.

“Yeah, you should worry about yourself before other people! I know you can be as careless and forgetful as me, Professor Boyle, so be careful, okay? After all, the fates of those applicants are in the balance!” Arche chimed in.

“Now I *know* you’re making fun of me, Instructor Arche!”

“Oh no, I would never! I’m truly, purely worried about you! Your carelessness, that is!”

“That’s exactly what you’d call ‘making fun of me’!”

Of all the things that could happen, Arche refused to read the room and continuously stepped on that land mine. It was like she was dancing on top of the Bouncing Betty that was Boyle’s excessively high pride. Arche didn’t mind his anger; or rather, she was the type to not consider his feelings at all, so it seemed the exchange might go on forever.

However, a large teacher sitting next to Art chose to completely ignore what was going on in front of him, instead electing to report directly and frankly to the principal. “This is only limited to the first exam that I was in charge of, but there were no students who caused excessive trouble this year. At worst, there was one who slept through it and one who was late. Compared to last year, where some kids cheated or went on a rampage because they didn’t know the answers, this year’s crop is quite refined, I be—”

“I-Instructor Horace!” The matter-of-fact report shocked Boyle, who had been red in the face until just a moment before. “I don’t feel right pointing this out, but it’s amazing how you can pretend that nothing is happening right in front of you. Still, driving the meeting forward on your own is—”

“I wonder who is the one acting on their own? During this time, every minute—every second—is as precious as gold. From starting an argument to stepping in to stop it, don’t you think all that is just a waste of time? Forcing the meeting forward is the best course of action, don’t you agree?”

“Mm...mgrr...”

Though he spoke politely, Horace’s large build and scary face produced an intimidating pressure. Boyle, unable to stand it, got gummed up, unable to argue.

Instead, Art, who had been watching all this happen, raised his hand. “Instructor Horace is correct, but arguing with each other in the first place is not a good thing. It doesn’t set a good example for the students. I know full well



how different the four of you are, but please try not to make it so public, okay? I should be the only one to stand out this much!”

“Yes, I’ll make sure not to do that!”

“My...apologies.”

“Right, I understand.”

“Grk! Of course... I understand... Yes.”

The reactions were varied. One nodded obediently, while another did so reluctantly, and so on and so forth. However, all the teachers showed their willingness to comply in the end.

“Good. Then, since he’s already begun, let’s start with Instructor Horace.”

“Right. Allow me to continue. Looking at the grades, there is a huge gap this year. While some obtained full marks, others left their answer sheets entirely empty and received no marks at all. I’ve been proctoring this exam for many years, and this is the first time I’ve seen results split between such extremes.”

“True... The full marks are of course impressive, but in a way, having the boldness to turn in an empty answer sheet is impressive as well. Even I would attempt to barely avoid failing and put in some answers,” said Arche.

“Yes, well, you are of the more physical and...dumber...persuasion after all, Instructor Arche,” Milky replied. “It really is too bad, given how you look.”

“Ehe heh... Aww, don’t spell out the truth so plainly! It’s embarrassing!” Arch answered.

A moment of silence stretched as Boyle shot Arche and Milky a rather indescribable and awkward look. But their squabbles aside, this turn of events really was rare for Lumiest. It went without saying that full marks were uncommon, but the same went for scores of zero.

“Hee hee! So, who were the great ones who got full marks?”

“The only one who achieved full marks across all subjects was Bell Baal, a princess from Grelbarelka, a large country in the newly discovered Northern Continent. On the other hand, the one who dishonorably achieved a score of zero was a girl named Rami, who was recommended by the Beast Kingdom of

Gaun on the Eastern Continent. She seemed to have no intention of answering anything, as she spent the entire exam asleep.”



The rest of the group looked down at the documents that had been passed to all of them while they listened to Horace speak. Once the man finished his report, Boyle let out a loud sigh, purposefully trying to be heard.

“Hmph, the Northern Continent and Gaun? One is where demons live, and the other a country of beasts; I don’t think either is worthy of our confidence. Especially when it comes to the one who ignored our test and slept, I can’t believe that person intends to seriously apply to our school at all. In the end, she’s just a beastfolk, I suppose.”

“Just to note, applicant Rami is not a beastfolk. The Beast King Leonhart recommended her and has promised to pay a large sum for her tuition, but it seems she is not in any way related to Gaun’s royal family,” Horace noted.

“What?! Th-That would mean Leonhart went so far just to recommend a regular citizen of Gaun! What is he planning?!”

“I wouldn’t know. But, it’s true that this applicant comes with a guarantee that she is worth believing in. We can’t dismiss her out of hand, Instructor Boyle, don’t you agree?”

“Grr...grgrrk! I... I know!”

“Hee hee!” Milky spoke up. “We all know you like nobles, Instructor Boyle. But you’re a teacher; you can’t be biased against only a small portion of the students. Or, what, are you a bigot who will judge students as good or bad based on their race? Such a thing would be—”

“Of... Of course not! Race has nothing to do with it; I was just saying that I don’t like insincerity! That was uncalled for, Instructor Milky!”

Arche cornered him further. “Then why did you say that applicant Bell, who got full marks and looks to be an outstanding candidate, isn’t worthy of our confidence either? From what Professor Horace said, she took the exam seriously.”

“Well, that’s...”

Boyle wanted nothing more than to click his tongue. Although Arche was normally rather airheaded, at times like this, she always hit Boyle where he was weakest, and with no sign of any bad intentions, to boot. Furthermore, as long as he couldn’t argue his way out, she would verbally chase him down to the end. That was why Boyle disliked her so much.

“Rather than her specifically, I’m concerned about the Northern Continent as a whole. Saying that it’s a new land sounds nice, but it’s pretty much entirely populated by demons, right? In our world’s long history, no matter where you look, demons are treated as humanity’s enemies. They produce a lot of Demon Lords too. It seems that our principal is expecting her to act like a mediator, but surely considering the safety of the other students is only natural?”

“Ohh, it’s rare for you to make so much sense. You’re totally right!”

“Heh! Right? She’s supposed to have gotten everything right in the written exam, but what if she used some sort of unknown technique to cheat? It’s suspicious.” Boyle’s mood must have improved upon receiving Arche’s approval, as he did a one-eighty and got way more talkative.

“Isn’t that a rather extreme and irrational argument, Instructor Boyle?” Horace asked.

“Unfortunately, I can’t agree with that sort of thinking either.” Milky added.

“Ah, then I object too!” Arche instantly changed her mind.

“What? Why, Instructor Milky? Instructor Horace?”

“Ah, then I object too!” Arche repeated.

“Personally, I think what I said is totally reasonable—” Boyle started.

“Then, I also obje—”

“I know already, so shut up for a second!”

Boyle proceeded to ignore Arche, waiting for the other two to respond.

“In the mere few decades of your life, have you ever encountered a talking demon, or possibly a demon who doesn’t look much different from us humans?”

I haven't. Every sighting that's been reported has been a lesser demon that might be powerful but cannot be communicated with. But this time, she is clearly an archdemon, or rather, a princess, so there's no doubt she's much more evolved. Someone like her has decided not to use force, but instead side with common sense and go through the appropriate procedures to formally be admitted to Lumiest. Such an interesting event doesn't fall in our laps every day, you know? There are also humans who are evil or have bad habits. So I posit that we shouldn't treat her like the demons we've seen until now, but as a new type of demon. I would love to have her come to my lab, given her brilliant mind," Horace stated.

"That... That may certainly be true, but—"

"Allow me to give my opinion as well," Milky interjected. "You raised the suspicion that applicant Bell could have cheated, Instructor Boyle. May I take that to mean that you think she slipped past the anticheating device that I thought up—my watchful eyes? You think that such a thing occurred because I was negligent, don't you? Can you give a concrete example or idea of how she would have been able to cheat? Just for future reference, of course."

"Oh, uh...no, I would never say something like that. It was just a possibility..."

"I'd also like to see Bell-san do her best," Arche piped up. "She didn't just do well in the first exam; her results for the second exam were incredible as well. You might even say they made history. And it's not just pure physical ability either. She's easily more than a master in the field of martial arts, enough so that during the elective tests, her performance was apparently so good that the proctor almost passed away. I've gotta say, she's so talented that calling her a bundle of pure skill would actually be rude to her. I believe it would be a huge waste to let her go just because she's somewhat suspicious! As much of a waste as asking for seconds and not finishing the helping! Also, I think I would get along with her great!"

"Mghh...mgggrrrh!"

After being betrayed by Arche, the one person who had been on his side, Boyle was pushed farther and farther into a corner. He looked over at Art, pinning his last hopes on the dark elf, but Art's creed was to create a school that

did not discriminate, no matter the race. It would always be a mistake to expect support from him in matters such as this.

“This is the perfect chance to build a connection to the Northern Continent. I would question the wisdom of treating her only with suspicion and wasting such a chance. That, Instructor Boyle, might be what forces us into being enemies with demons, as you so fear. If that were to happen, our beloved academy would be in danger, you know?” Art said.

Boyle paused for a while, frustrated. “Yes...you’re exactly right. My apologies; allow me to retract my statement.”

“I’m glad you understand. But I can also understand what you’re trying to say, Instructor Boyle. I will give as much consideration as I can to ensure the students’ safety. Also, well...if you’re that worried, would you like to sit in on Bell’s interview tomorrow? If you talk to her directly, I’m sure you’ll be able to see what the demons of the Northern Continent are like.”

“M-Me?”

Boyle wasn’t the only one surprised by Art’s suggestion. The schedule had called for Boyle to be in charge of a different set of applicants, so he would normally not have had a chance to speak to Bell.

“If...you’re going to go that far to assure me, then...” Although suspicious of Art’s motives, Boyle hesitantly agreed to the suggestion.

Having heard his answer, Art smiled and stood up, spreading his arms wide. “Good, then that settles it. Let’s change the subject here, and the mood along with it! Tell me about the students who have caught your eye!”

“Me! Me!” Arche jumped at the chance. “For me, it’s Bell-san and Rion-san! Both of them are such nice girls and I know I’d get along well with them and they’re both super talented and really just amazing! Oh! Also, I wasn’t in charge of her, but I hear Rami-san was—”

“Of course Bell Baal, who got full marks, is one to watch out for. But personally, I am interested in an applicant named Graham Nakatomiuzi. Because he was late to the first exam, his total score did not stand out, but he got every question right in the exams he was around to take. If he had been

present from the beginning, he might have been able to stand at the top in the written test,” Horace noted.

Next was Milky’s turn. “Hmm, well...as everyone has said, I’m also interested in applicant Bell...but in addition to her, I’d have to point out applicant DarkMel, considering her potential down the line. She is of the youngest applicable age, but she still manages to pull perfectly good grades. Her score on the second exam was wonderful as well. I’m sure no one else has as much promise.”

“I... I recommend Edgar Lauzer!” Boyle exclaimed. “I’m sure no one has as much talent as he does!”

The instructors all spoke their opinions passionately. There was a reason they were this enthusiastic...but that would only become clear after the results of the exams were announced.



It was the fateful last day of the exam. All that was left was the interview, and then everything would be decided. The applicants all gathered in the interview hall with nervous expressions. They were divided into several waiting rooms, where they would wait for their turn for private interviews. This was now the annual custom for Lumiest: a long and arduous waiting time that got the prospective students to sweat. There were some strong-willed people who didn’t mind this because they always went their own way, but most of the applicants didn’t take all this waiting well.

The interview only lasted about ten minutes, but there were so many prospective students, each of whom needed to be interviewed, that in the end, the process took the entire day. That was why the Celsius trio had their own specified times when they needed to be at the venue for their interview, and they didn’t need to be around before then. This time, they were all separated.

Interview for Applicant DarkMel Celsius with Lead Proctor Milky Crespella:

Out of the three, the first one to be called was DarkMel. After entering the room, she faced the only proctor who was there and exchanged greetings.

“H-Hello, my name is DarkMel Celsius. Pweased to meet you!” She was so nervous that she bit her tongue.

“I am Milky, the proctor. You seem to be nervous, but I’d like to get to know you as you normally are, DarkMel-san, so please try to relax.”

“Y-Yesh! I’ll try my best!”

“Hee hee! Well, it’s nice to meet you too. Hmm...being serious all the time is no fun, so why don’t we start with a light chat? How were your written and practical exams? Do you think you did well?”

“I... I think I did as well as I could on both of them. Oh, but I caused the proctor some trouble during the practical exam, so, umm...sorry...”

“Oh no, no need for you to apologize, DarkMel-san. It was the proctor’s fault for being incompetent and picking an unsuitable measuring device because you were underestimated. Yes, he needs to repent.” Milky spat those poisonous words with a smile.

“Um...” DarkMel was taken aback and somewhat scared, despite the fact that she was in an exam.

“Oh my. Sorry. I shouldn’t talk about stuff that has nothing to do with the exam. I need to steer this back on track. So, about your grades, DarkMel-san...hee hee hee...they’re wonderful, for sure. For the written tests, you were twenty-eighth out of a total of one thousand twenty-seven children, and on the practical exams, you ranked fifth out of that same number. We allow a hundred children into the school every year, so you are well into passing territory. Well done! You’ve certainly worked hard, DarkMel-san. To tell you the truth, I can only say that producing those grades at your age is incredible. Enough that I’d love to make you my daughter.”

“O-Oh, thank you very much. But I already have a mama, so I can’t...”

“I know; it was just a joke!” Milky said in a singsong tone.

“What?!”

Though she was kind of being led around by the nose by Milky and her smile, DarkMel’s interview was amicable from beginning to end.

Interview for Applicant Rion Celsius with Lead Proctor Arche Desire:

After DarkMel came Rion. She gave an energetic greeting upon entering the room. This was her time to shine as someone who could get along with just about anybody.

“I’m Rion Celsius. Thanks for meeting with me today!”

But before Rion could show her stuff, her interviewer Arche spoke as if it had already been decided that she’d pass. “I’m your proctor, Arche, and the pleasure’s all mine! By the way, Rion-san, what would you say to enjoying your youth in Lumiest to the fullest and with burning intensity with me?! It’ll be fun!” Rather than questions, she was trying to recruit Rion.

“Wow, that does sound fun. Please allow me to join you!” Rion answered instantly, so in a sense she was calm and thinking clearly.

Arche, however, was clearly not the same. “Awright! It’s a promise, okay?!”

“Yes, a promise!” Rion paused for a moment as she realized something. “Um...what about the interview?”

“Oh, well...I mean, I pretty much already know what kind of person you are from yesterday’s exam, Rion-san, and even if you get nothing on this exam, you’re far past the acceptance line. From what I’ve got here, you were fifty-third on the written exam and third on the practical exam! Not even I would be able to get those grades if I were to take the exams!” Arche was a bit too frank.

*Am I really allowed to know that? Rion wondered. Err...hm? If I was third on the practical exam, that means there were two people above me, right? I’ll assume one of them was Bell-chan, but the other one... No way, DarkMel?! W-Wow!*

Rion secretly praised her niece (friend) in her heart. Setting aside whether or not her assumption was correct, it seemed that information only served to fire her up.

“Uh, but if I don’t conduct a proper interview, Professor Boyle will get mad at me, won’t he?” Arche mused. “Right, let’s take this seriously after all!”

“Okay! Once again, thank you for meeting with me!” Rion replied.

“And once again, the pleasure’s all mine. Well then, let’s start things off with



a solid foundation. Please tell me why you want to enroll in Lumiest.”

Surprisingly, Rion and Arche managed to have a proper interview after that, which was a total change from how things started off.

Interview for Applicant Bell Baal with Lead Proctor Boyle Potaufeu:

The last to have her interview was Bell. Out of the three, she was the least suited to this exam, and she herself knew it. Not only that, but her interviewer was Boyle, who was heavily prejudiced against demons. There was no way this pair would have a calm and peaceful meeting, but the question was, how would it turn out?

Several minutes had passed since Bell had entered the room. Both interviewer and interviewee had already sat down, but both sides seemed content to just stare at each other in silence. Each of them was observing the other. Actually, it was closer to two enemies locking eyes.

Finally, Boyle started with a click of his tongue. “Tch! Do you not even know how to greet people, Applicant Bell Baal? I have been waiting all this time, believing that you had basic manners, at least!”

“What? You’ve stolen my line word for word. I’ve been the one waiting for you to greet me. I am using up my precious time pinning any hopes on a pig like you, it seems. Why don’t you bow your head in apology? Come now, hurry.”

“Whaaaaaat?!”

Boyle had been the one to lose patience and speak first, but Bell’s answer overturned all of his expectations. Judging from Bell’s attitude, she was clearly insulting him. Boyle had believed that as long as their relationship was clearly defined as applicant and proctor, they would at the very least be able to converse on that level. But now that he had opened the lid of her personality, what came out wasn’t formal speech, but a commanding tone and a flood of insults. It was understandable that he would react by raising his voice.

“Y-You... You, what—”

“Oh, is something wrong? Your face looks pale. What a busy little pig you are, turning from blue to red like that. If you have something to say, say it clearly.

Do you seriously plan to stand above others acting like that? You should at the very least be able to answer yes or no. In fact, I don't want to listen to you any more than necessary, so keep all your answers to three words or less."

Boyle let out a strangled noise of shock. He had blown past rage, straight to being dumbstruck. He had broken new ground, and Bell smiled evilly, as if she knew she'd won.

*According to the research Ange forced onto me in preparation for the interviews, insults will work best on Boyle Potaufeu, but I have to wonder if it's really okay to do this?* Bell thought to herself. *No matter how you look at it, this is having the opposite effect. Well, I'll keep trusting in my friend and doing this, I guess. I'm used to it, since I just have to pretend he's Sebas.*

*Wh-Wh...Wh-Wh-Wha-What is wrong with this little girl?!* Boyle sputtered internally. *She's got a worse mouth than Milky, and her condescending attitude is just the worst! But... But...why is my heart racing?! What is this feeling?!*

No one would have been able to predict how this interview turned out.



After a few lonely days without Rion and DarkMel, I couldn't hide my joy at hearing that they'd returned. The instant I got the news from Ellie, I threw aside Dahak's hoe, which I'd been doing maintenance on, and ran up the stairs that connected the underground wing of the mansion to the aboveground part, sprinting straight for the front door. I was so excited that I managed to do all that in the blink of an eye.

"*We're baaack!*" the two of them shouted.

"*Welgooooomebaaaggkkk!*" I cried as I lifted them both up and twirled them around to celebrate our reunion.

I listened to them laugh and squeal happily as I filled up on my little-sister-and-daughter nutrients. Mdo happened to be beside us, and she fixed me with an incredibly disgusted look, but I didn't care.

A week had passed since our deeply moving reunion, and while I'd enjoyed that peaceful time to its fullest, DarkMel and Rion seemed restless to me

somehow. I understood why, since they were waiting on the results of the exams. Meanwhile, I couldn't help but feel the knowledge of the tragedy that was to come tearing me apart inside, and I knew Gerard felt the same. They would soon have to leave Parth again.

"You don't look too good, Master. Are you okay?"

"Huh? Oh, ahh, I'm fine. No need to worry."

It seemed the status of my heart had bubbled up to the surface, as Efil, who was in the same room as me (she was in the middle of handing over most of her duties and cutting down on work due to her pregnancy), showed concern. Given the situation, I had not been allowing her to do maid work or accompany me on adventures like exterminating monsters. In exchange, I was staying with her as much as I could while we were at the estate to give her peace of mind, but making her worry about me instead was having the opposite effect. I needed to do some serious reflecting on that.

"Hee hee! You were thinking about Rion-sama and DarkMel-sama, weren't you? Once they enroll at Lumiest, they'll go to live on the Western Continent and you won't be able to see them for a while. You've been convinced to let them go, but you still feel sad and lonely and don't want to. Is that about right?"

"Urgkk! S-So, you saw through everything, huh? I really can't hold a candle to you, Efil."

"I haven't spent every day thinking of you for nothing, Master. It's not just me either. Sera-san and Ange-san have also realized this. And it needn't be said that Shutola-sama has done the same. I'd wager that Mel-sama has too."

"S-Seriously? No, wait, I wonder about Mel... These days, all she's been doing is happily stuffing her face in front of me." On the way back from finishing today's request, Mel had had both her hands full with skewers. That memory was still fresh in my mind.

"Is that not Mel-sama's way of putting up a strong front? Though she is technically more of a clone, DarkMel-sama is basically Mel-sama's child. Just like you, Master, I'm sure Mel-sama is feeling uneasy and lost somewhere in her heart."

“I see. And she’s still trying to act herself more than usual so as not to worry me unnecessarily...”

*Dang that Mel, doing something she’s not used to. I’m gonna pat and stroke her to bits later and sentence her to the punishment of infinite helpings of food. No...let’s not. My detection skills just rang alarm bells when I thought of that.*

“Thanks for telling me all that, Efil. It seems I’m still rather thoughtless. You keep saving me.”

“Think nothing of it. What I’ve received from you is far more than that, after all.” Efil’s smile was like the sun.

*This nimbus of light... Is Efil an angel? No, she’d be an archangel—no, a goddess?! This is no time to be depressed, me!*

“I’ll do my best. Even though Rion and DarkMel are going off somewhere far away, I’ll get through this trial! For your sake too, Efil!”

“Uh, errm...I don’t think it’s good to push yourself too far. Your grieving face has its own charm, and being able to see it at your side is wonderful, but I don’t want to see you in pain either. Why don’t we move to the Western Continent temporarily while they’re in school? There are still countries and dungeons unknown to us there, so there might be new adventures and new excitement awaiting you, Master. If we set up a base near Lumiest, I’ll be able to accompany you, and you’ll be able to see Rion-sama and DarkMel-sama whenever you like as well.”

I had no words to reply with.

“Master?”

I had been determined and raring to take on this challenge, but Efil’s suggestion had effectively ambushed me and given me a shock. Her idea was so impactful that I was lost for words. I was almost sure I looked incredibly foolish.

“My apologies, I should have known that such a sudden suggestion would only cause you trouble, Master.”

“No, that’s not it, Efiuuuuuu! It’s the opposite! I’m super moved right now! The suggestion you gave was wonderful!”

“Uh? Huh?”

I was so overcome with emotion, I popped up out of my seat. *Yes, that's it! There's no need to politely stay in Parth or on the Eastern Continent while those two are in school. Even if we move to the Western Continent, as long as we have a base, we can even take Efil, who's pregnant, along. There's probably a mountain of unknown monsters and dungeons over there too. Efil's right, even if I can't see them every day, I would at least be able to regularly meet up with Rion and DarkMel... Yeah!*

“Why didn't such a simple answer even occur to me?! Well, I'm pretty sure that just shows how shaken I was. At any rate...Efil! We're going to the Western Continent!”

“P-Please calm down for the moment, Master. We haven't even talked this over with everyone else—”

*Kerchak!*

“I heard everything!”

“Yeah!”

“Me too!”

“Yep!”

*What perfect timing.*

The door to my room burst open and Gerard, Sera, Mel, and Ange pushed their way in. I was in a great mood, so I decided to ignore the fact that they had been eavesdropping.

“My liege, I am wholly on board with this idea!” Gerard declared. “Also, this is up for debate, but if we're going to be near Lumiest anyway, why not become security personnel for the academy for a while? I don't have any ulterior motives or anything. Just that I was thinking...there might be some bastards who would try to lead the children down a bad path, and it would benefit the academy for there to be a knight that can mercilessly cut down those sorts of people. Yeah, that's all.”

“Here, here! I'm on board too! I feel the exact same way as Gerard!” Sera

agreed before adding, “Also, if Gerard is going to work as security, I want to be an attractive female teacher! I mean, look at me: I’m way more fit to be a gorgeous teacher type than a student begging for an education, right? I’ve always wanted to try being in Victor’s position!”

“I’m glad you’re all on board with the idea, but stop it with that extra stuff.”

Even though I was flying high, there was no way I’d let their attempts to go too far pass. Even in my giddy mood, I understood manners, okay? What academy would want a security force that would create a pile of corpses for the sake of their grandchildren, or a teacher as woefully inept at teaching others as Sera? It was obvious to me that if I was to allow these things, it would cause the girls and the academy trouble. That wasn’t what I wanted.

“Leave the research to find a spot for our new base to me!” Mel offered. “I figured this might happen, so I’ve bought all available foodie tourist guides for the Western Continent! From popular places that are being talked about to hidden gems, I’ll provide you better information than even Shutola could! I promise you that!”

“I understand how considerate you’re being, Mel. But first, you should wipe off the drool that’s overflowing from your mouth.”

I took out a handkerchief and lovingly wiped the drool from her mouth. *I know you’re doing this for my sake, but it’s still too obvious for me to ignore, you know? I’m happy about it, but yeah... Hey, you’re still drooling? It’s...an act, right? Right?!*

“There’s a place your Ange-san wants to go while we’re at it, Kelvin-kun. Let’s go together; we can call it a date!”

“I will answer that immediately: yes.”

“Whaaat?! Why was Ange’s idea accepted, while mine was tossed aside! That’s not fair!” Sera complained.

And that was how it was decided that the Celsius clan would be going to the Western Continent.



While Kelvin and the others were getting excited on the second floor, Rion, DarkMel, and Shutola were sitting at the edge of a pond with a fountain in the front garden that was between the gates and the main building's front door. They were waiting for a certain something to be delivered, and although Shutola was as calm and composed as usual, the two prospective students were fidgeting restlessly.

"Wh-When is it going to come? Judging from previous years, it should be here any second now, I think, but..." DarkMel asked nervously.

"You need to be calm, DarkMel! We tried our hardest, so I'm sure we'll be fine!" Rion tried to sound confident.

Shutola tried to gently reason with them. "You need to calm down too, Rion. Do you hear yourself?"

As they conversed, Rion and DarkMel repeatedly glanced over at the gates, causing Shutola to sway back and forth like a pendulum as she laughed wryly. It's probably obvious what they were waiting for by now—the letters that would tell them whether they'd passed or not. The results of Lumiest's entrance exam were usually delivered to the applicants a week after the test. As DarkMel had said, if this year was to be the same as usual, it was about time for them to receive their letters.

"Okay, take a deep breath..." Shutola advised them.

Both of the girls breathed in deep, then let it out.

"Have you two calmed down now?"

Neither of the hopeful students answered, but their continued fidgeting made their feelings clear.

"It...seems you haven't. Come on, how many times have you two talked over your answers with each other to confirm you both did well? Didn't your interviewers tell you during the third exam that you both had amazing scores? It's going to be fine; you don't need to be so nervous! I can guarantee it!"

"Yeah..." Rion said slowly. "I know that in my head, but I just can't help feeling nervous."

“I was really nervous during the interview too,” DarkMel confessed. “I think, maybe, that could have affected things...”

“Is it just me or are you two more high-strung now than you are when fighting Rank S monsters?”

Taking an exam was a mysterious thing. Even Heroes who had been through countless battles, including at the Beast King Festival or against former black goddesses who nearly destroyed the world, couldn’t help but be affected by it. It wasn’t as if the fate of the world or any lives were on the line. Even so, it was plenty thrilling and gut-wrenching for Rion and DarkMel.

“Hey...they wouldn’t, like...not bother sending a letter if we failed, right?” Rion couldn’t help but ask.

“They wouldn’t, no,” Shutola answered bluntly. “It doesn’t matter if you pass or fail, everybody who takes the exam gets a notice of their results. Jeez, dearest brother Kelvin and DarkMel-chan are one thing, but I didn’t expect you to be so insecure too, Rion-chan. Bell-san hasn’t received her letter in Grelbareika either, right?”

“She hasn’t. We confirmed it when we visited yesterday. Also, she was really exasperated with us...” DarkMel admitted.

“We go to check every day, after all. Just like you, Shutola-chan, she told us flat out that we definitely passed so worrying about it is useless,” Rion added.

“Yeah, I think going every day is too much as well,” Shutola agreed.

As an aside, during this past week, Gustav had been in an extremely good mood, while Gerard seemed to be feeling something more mixed.

“Oh?” Shutola suddenly looked up, which caused Rion and DarkMel to tilt their heads, puzzled.

“What is it, Shutola-chan?” Rion asked.

“Yeah...looks like it is. Hey, you two, the notices you’ve been waiting for are here.”

“What?!” both girls exclaimed.

Shutola had fixed her eyes on a bird. There was a bag draped around its neck,



and it had a hat with Lumiest's crest emblazoned on it. The bird itself was quite large too. Actually, it was very large, as tall as a human. And that huge bird was currently circling the airspace above the estate.

"A bird courier? Wow, it's so big!" Rion exclaimed.

"It is. It's a monster that's being kept as a pet by Lumiest," Shutola clarified. "They're smart enough to understand maps and addresses, and I hear they've been combat-trained to be able to go all over the place. They looked so big and scary when I saw them before, but now they just seem charming!"

"Their eyes are black, like owls wearing glasses! And they seem so fluffy and soft!" DarkMel squealed. Because they looked like large owls with glasses, they were surprisingly popular with children.

"But why does it keep circling round and round like that?" Rion wondered.

"This estate is surrounded by a barrier, so it probably can't get in," Shutola suggested.

DarkMel panicked. "O-Oh no, that's terrible! We need to hurry and ask papa to undo the barrier!"

"Ah, wait a second. The owl touched down in front of the gates. It's talking to the golems!" Shutola noted.

"It looks like Two accepted the letters!" said DarkMel excitedly.

"Wow, so smart!" Rion exclaimed, impressed.

"Really smart!" DarkMel agreed.

After that, the giant spectacled owl once again took to the sky, heading for its next destination. DarkMel, unable to fulfill her urge to hug it, wilted a little.

As the trio stood and waved goodbye to the birdie, One, who had been guarding the gates, approached them.

"Letters from Lumiest arrived for you, Rion-sama, DarkMel-sama. Here, please take them," it said.

"Oh, right. Thank you." DarkMel accepted her letter.

"Thanks! F-Finally, we'll know the results. I'm getting nervous again!" Rion

took hers as well.

The two hesitantly opened their letters. Then, even more hesitantly, they checked the contents.

“Are you sure you don’t need to let dearest brother Kelvin know?” Shutola asked.

“I’m going!”

“Me too!”

With absolutely wonderful smiles blooming on their faces, Rion and DarkMel ran off into the main building. Shutola didn’t even need to ask them for the results to know what had happened. As she saw the girls off, she let out a small sigh of relief before the smile came back to her face.

“You seem happy, Shutola-sama,” said the golem.

“I am! My friends passed; of course I’m happy! Also, as their tutor, I’m proud. Yep!” Shutola paused for a moment before continuing. “But this is when problems start cropping up.”

“Oh? Problems?”

“It’s great that they passed, but what dorms they’re assigned to is entirely up to the academy. There are a total of four, so the chances of them all being in the same place are low, at least in my opinion. Those letters that Rion and DarkMel waited for should tell them which dorm they’re assigned to, but...this is the only part where all we can do is pray for a good result. Colette-chan and I were in different dorms, for example.”

“Is it a problem for them to be in different places?”

“Dearest brother Kelvin and grandpa Gerard would be driven to despair, for one.”

The golem paused for a moment. “That sounds awful.”

“It is awful. Rion asked to live with her pet, Alex, so we can assume she’s in one of the two dorms that allow pets. But for DarkMel-chan and Bell-san...hmmm...”

“Understood. This is why they say to rely on muscle in times of trouble, is it not?”

“Huh? Muscle? Errm...it should be ‘rely on the goddess of muscle.’ I think shortening it like that changes the meaning...”

Since long ago, Goldia had adopted a policy of never refusing any newcomers and never chasing anyone who left. Her Oracle had made a declaration to the same effect for their new religion, and Shutola, thinking that it might help, prayed in her heart to the new Goddess.



Rion and DarkMel charged into Kelvin’s room to share the news of their admittance to Lumiest. Both of them held out their letters with wide smiles, and the entire family, who had gathered together, celebrated right then and there.

“We did it, DarkMel!” Rion exclaimed.

“We did! I’m super happy!” DarkMel answered.

The two girls seemed in great spirits. Their smiles were in full bloom now, as if their worried faces from before had been a lie.

“Wooooaarghhh! Well done, you two! Truly, well done! My liege, we must have a banquet tonight!” Gerard shouted.

“Now, now, hold your horses, Gerard. We don’t know when there’ll next be a day as worthy of celebration as this. We should involve the whole town in a huge celebration for these two,” I stated.

“Understood! Okay, then, Ange-san, we’re going to need to use your connections to the fullest! Let’s start by going to the guild and negotiating with Guildmaster Mist to hold a festival!” said the knight.

“I’ll head back to Grelbarelka for a bit,” Sera told us. “Bell’s probably received her acceptance letter too. I want to go ask father if he’s interested in a joint celebration! I’m sure he’ll agree!”

“A joint celebration between Parth and Grelbarelka?!” Mel shrieked. “Oh no, you can’t do that. Not even I can conquer every food stall in two countries!”

After the third circuit, I'm going to run out of pocket money!"

The group, starting with the big brother and grandfather, were for some reason even more excited than the two young girls. They had already been rather excited before the pair had shown up with their report, and the news that their loved ones had been accepted spurred their family's joy on even further.

"U-Umm...there's still something I want to...erm...say..." DarkMel muttered timidly.

"Why don't we all take a second and calm down?" Efil suggested. "Let's take a deep breath... A deeeeeep breath."

Everyone did as she asked, breathing in deeply and then letting it all out. Efil was the last bastion of reason. It seemed that, as someone poised to become a mother, she was able to keep her distance from the excitement and make rational decisions.

After that deep breath, everyone regained their composure and the incident came to a close. Finally, the stars of the day were able to speak.

"Along with the news of our acceptance, we were also told what dorm we were assigned to. I'm in Selva," DarkMel announced.

"I'm in Volcann," Rion added. "The only dorms that would have let me come with Alex were that one and Selva, where DarkMel is. I guess for now, this is great news?"

"Uh...hmmm? Wait a second. How many dorms are there? Is it possible that all three of you might not be living in the same...one?" Kelvin asked.

"Huh?" Rion seemed surprised. "You didn't read the dorm descriptions, Kelvin? Lumiest has four."

Both Gerald and Kelvin let out strangled noises of surprise. Their expressions were comical, with Kelvin's jaw seeming like it would fall off and Gerard's helmet seeming like it would implode as Rion explained Lumiest's living system to the group.

"In... In other words, Lumiest is a boarding school, but it's not guaranteed

you'll be in the same dorm?!"

"Yeah. Well, it's more than not guaranteed; DarkMel and I have already been placed in different dorms." Rion then explained further, "Lumiest works on a credit system that allows the student to choose their curriculum, but apparently that alone won't foster a spirit of cooperation to prepare one for society, so they made this system to have students live communally with others during their stay. In a normal school, it would be like different classes, where we would compete against each other during festivals and the like. Each dorm would be its own team."

"A t-t-t-team?! With unknown men?! Around a campfire, holding hands?! Doing folk dances?!"

"A...um...camp? Err...I'm not exactly sure what you mean, papa...but don't worry," DarkMel tried to reassure him. "The teachers do their best to think about the placements so the students all have personalities that get along well and compliment each other. They won't place people who clearly won't get along together."

In her attempt to reassure him, DarkMel tried to explain Lumiest's dorm system in more detail. Dorm Volcann, which was where Rion would be placed, had a greater variety in race than the other dorms. It also seemed to be the dorm for the jockish types with good motor reflexes who liked to move their bodies rather than think. The dorm insignia used a fire motif, and the general vibe there was very bright. They tended to be by far the most cooperative of the dorms. Also, one of the dorm's distinctive traits was that it allowed the students to live with their pets. Thanks to the nature of this group, it was popular with demihumans and those who weren't as high up on the social ladder. On the other hand, the students tended to not be great at their studies, which might have been due to the influence of the dorm head: Arche Desire. In the past, this dorm had played host to the princesses from Faanis, Ren and Ran.

The opposite of Volcann was the dorm that used water in their insignia: Marle. The head of this dorm was Horace Ascade, and it was filled wall-to-wall with super serious, coolheaded intellectuals who prioritized rules over everything else. This trait was so pronounced that whenever it came to written tests, they would immediately spring to mind as the best. It was common for

those who belonged to Marle to have a monopoly on the upper ranks in tests, and it was said that its residents often ended up becoming academics or statesmen after graduation. Edward from Lifril Orphanage had lived there.

Next was Selva, which would house DarkMel. The insignia used a tree, and its students tended to be more balanced. Whether it was their studies, athletics, hobbies, the arts, or other special skills, its students tended to have interests in several areas and were immensely curious no matter the field, said to always be the first to try to confirm any new techniques or technologies. Selva tended to have many of these would-be researchers, as well as those who would make unheard-of decisions like throwing aside one's social status to become adventurers after graduation. After all, this dorm was led by Milky Crespella, so it made sense that it was the hardest to pin down. As an aside, it also allowed pets, and Colette from Deramis had been a resident.

Last was Cielo, headed by Boyle Potaufeu. Cielo's insignia used a great sky motif, and the students with the highest social statuses tended to gather there, which was why its members tended to possess excessive pride. Because the students all leaned towards being selfish, as long as there was no one with outstanding charisma living there, stormy relations were constant. Furthermore, the fact that they looked down on the other dorms created a powder keg situation. Someone had once ridiculed the group, saying it was like a microcosm of noble society. However, since pretty much all of the Cielo students had received a gifted education from a young age, their abilities were high across the board. Shutola of Trycen had been placed there.

"And that's the gist of it," DarkMel finished.

"I... I see... Thanks, I get it now."

"You do? I'm glad it got through to you, papa!"

"Yep, yep. I'm glad too. So, so glad..."

Kelvin patted DarkMel on the head, which she received with her eyes closed and an expression that said it felt really nice. However, that wasn't what Kelvin was worried about. The problem was that his cute little sister and daughter would be separated. This meant that one—or in the worst case, both—of them would be without their reliable bodyguard. Though it had been decided that the

family would temporarily move to a base on the Western Continent, it was possible that any necessary response on their part would come too late, since the girls would be surrounded by wolves. This was especially true for those in Cielo, which seemed to pose a particular danger for the girls since they had been assigned to dorms that those students looked down upon.

::*Actually, Gerard, maybe you really should become security personnel. Do you still want to try?*:: Kelvin asked discreetly.

::What a coincidence, my liege. I was just thinking that I wanted to cut some dangerous wolves to ribbons.::

Kelvin and Gerard were acting somewhat crazed, enough so that they began exchanging secret telepathic messages before long.



The next day, Gerard and I took a trip to the Fairy's Song, having been called there by a certain someone.

"Huh? You two are still going on about that? It's way past time for you to let go of your daughter, little sister, and grandchildren. If you take it too far, you'll end up like my papa, you realize that? Do you *want* to be given the cold shoulder by Rion and DarkMel? Did you two awaken to some sort of perverted tendency that I'm about to find out about?"

"Oh no, um...how should I put it... It's shameful, but..."

"We... We're just so, so worried. We didn't mean anything by it, honest..." Gerard backpedaled.

The person we were meeting, who was sitting right in front of us, was Bell. If not for Clare's special Mont Blanc that was placed in front of her on the table, she would probably have been in an even worse mood. *Scary...super scary...*

"I was surprised when sister Sera called me here. All due to how stupid you two are being."

"Grk..." Gerard and I simultaneously grunted in emotional pain.

At the moment, we were sitting across from each other at a table in the bar. While Bell was sitting normally, Gerard and I had been forced to sit in the seiza

pose on our chairs. Though this wasn't hard since these chairs didn't have backs to them, it was much more damaging to our psyches than being in the same pose on the floor. It was even harder for Gerard, physically, given his size. Also, we were approaching the one-hour mark since we had been forced into these poses. In short, what I want to say is that my legs were in danger. I couldn't feel them anymore. I wanted to apologize and get things over with already.

*I'm so sorry for making you do this as part of a punishment game, Touya...*

As for why we were being punished like this, it was because Gerard's plan to become the best security force had been exposed to Sera. Though I'd restricted our exchange of telepathic messages to the two of us, Sera was able to realize what was happening just by catching some of the brief eye contact that we'd made.

::You're planning on making Gerard—and only Gerard—a security guard, aren't you?!:: she had demanded. ::And then there was the thing with Ange too; it's not fair that all of you get all the fun! If you don't make me a teacher at Lumiest, I'm going to tell Bell!::

It was our mistake trying to keep a secret from Sera, who had amazing intuition and equally amazing luck. At any rate, after this and that, Bell was informed of our grand plan. Given that she had been called on by her beloved older sister, Bell had come over first thing in the morning, all the way from the Northern Continent. She'd woken up early to do so, even though she suffered from low blood pressure. As an aside, it seemed she had anticipated me revoking her permission to use the teleportation gate and gotten around that. I should have expected that sharpness of wit from a member of the Baal family.

And after arriving, she had dragged Gerard and me to the Fairy's Song, and as soon as we reached the bar, she forced us into our current seiza pose before ordering what she liked from the menu and showering us with violently abusive language.

*I mean, it's true that I was in the wrong, but...but...I would still appreciate it if she'd stop using DarkMel and Rion to attack us mentally. We were seriously repenting already, as we didn't want them to hate us. Seriously...*

"Jeez. Can I assume that after all this and me telling you about the dark future



that awaits, you two won't try anything stupid?" Bell asked sharply.

"We won't; we'll be careful. I'll use some self-restraint..." I vowed.

"I promise to do nothing but watch from afar, even after we go to the Western Continent. I'm telling the truth," Gerard pleaded.

"Wai— Gerard!"

"Huh? You're coming to the Western Continent?" Bell asked with doom in her voice.

"Wait, Bell-san! It's a misunderstanding! A total misunderstanding!" I cried.

Thus, our forced seiza pose and the mental attacks continued. It took another half hour for us to undo the misunderstanding.

"So you're saying the reason you're going to the Western Continent is for adventurer activities and not to start something in Lumiest, right?" Bell confirmed.

"We swear!" the two of us replied in unison.

Bell took a moment to scrutinize our faces. "Really?"

"It... It's true that part of the reason is so we can occasionally go see them, but we have no intention of doing anything to the academy or its students. We trusted you to be their bodyguard, Bell, so we believe in you wholeheartedly."

"I feel the same way as my liege..." Gerard trailed off, trying to emphasize his next words. "Just sometimes...truly, only every once in a while is fine...we just wanted to be able to visit..."

"Reeeaaally? Well, I guess that's fine as a compromise. Don't worry, now that I've accepted this mission, I don't plan on cutting any corners. I'm going to protect them perfectly, even against the Cielo dorm, which you two are so worried about," Bell said as she downed the last piece of Mont Blanc.

"Oh, what amazing confidence! That's a good sign!" Gerard exclaimed.

"Still, you're...suspiciously confident. Do you have some sort of plan?" I asked.

"Oh yeah, I haven't told you yet. I was assigned to Cielo."

"Huh?" Our reactions synced up once again, and both of us froze.

“I’ll take this plate.” Clare came in with perfect timing.

“Thanks. Also, I’d like some after-meal tea,” Bell answered as we remained rooted to the spot.

“Sure thing! It’ll be just a minute.”

*It’s a bit late for this observation, but man, Clare-san is strong. She’s not affected by this situation—this atmosphere—at all.*

“W-Well done getting into Cielo. It’s true that you’re of high enough birth, but...from what research we did on the dorms, including asking Shutola, Cielo is like the old Trycen, and they believe in human supremacy. The dorm head, Boyle, should be especially staunch in that opinion.”

“Ah, no need to worry about that. I did some training during the interview. Right now, he’s halfway to being like Sebas,” Bell replied.

“What did you do?! And during a test?!”

“An interview, of course. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Y-You’re so reliable, it’s actually scary!” Gerard remarked.

“Then rely on me more.” Bell elegantly started her teatime, unflinching even during that storm of quips and retorts. *Damn, she’s strong.* “Staying close to the two of them as a guard is certainly one way to go about things, but unfortunately, I much prefer attacking than defending. If there’s a nest of pests, why not rectify that problem at the source? That’s why I’m going to be taking Cielo down from the inside.”

“Taking them down? No, I just said we’d leave it up to you, Bell. I won’t question the method. You’re fine with that too, right, Gerard?”

“Oh, yes. We leave DarkMel and Rion in your care, Bell.”

“You’re our only hope. Please make sure they have a fun school life.”

“Heh, leave it to me. Compared to the missions I took on as an Apostle, this is child’s play.”

While still in seiza on our chairs, we bowed deeply to Bell. Even though we were familiar faces here, we still received a fair amount of attention given our

status as Rank S adventurers. There were also other adventurers we recognized here, but there was no way we could afford to care about how we looked. All our dignity had left us during our time spent in this pose anyway. What was required now was to show our sincerity in asking Bell to be our lifeline.

“Hey, Clare, what did Kelvin and Gerard-dono do, to be forced to lower their heads like that?” Uld asked his wife.

“Who knows? I certainly don’t. Just...they seemed to be pretty desperate,” Clare answered.

“Hmm? Well, I guess there’s no need for me to stick my nose into it. Hey, you guys should stay out of it t—”

“Hey, doesn’t that girl who’s sitting in front of them look a lot like Lady Sera? Is it her little sister? Does Lady Sera have a little sister?!”

“Gnrrrr! Damn you, Kelvin! Another cute girl?! Seriously?!”

“I... I want to get closer to her!”

“Seriously, guys? Again?” Uld reacted in exasperation. He and his macho-man party just happened to be in the bar as well, and he seemed curious about what was going on between the three of us.

*Yeah, I really want to tell him not to bother.*

“Our leader’s right, you idiots! Do you really want to get in the middle of that dummy-heavy mood?! Also, she’s someone Kelvin and Gerard-san have to lower their heads to. We could die. You guys aren’t worthy of her.”

“Urgh! Y-You’re right...”

“Buh... But...”

“And in the end, I was the one who saw her first! It doesn’t matter how heavy the mood is, initiative wins! You’ll never meet anyone if you don’t take action!”

“Ah?! Damn, you cheating bastard!” the other two shouted at once.

*Dooooong!*

“Grk...oooarghhh...”

I watched this all out of the corner of my eye, but from the nice sound that

rang out, I could tell the tray Clare had been holding had made a critical hit on someone's head. I couldn't turn to look, so I couldn't discern any details, but I would wager that whoever the victim was had fallen over, unconscious.

*Man, she's strong.*

"What do you think you're planning to do to one of my customers?! Prepare yourself, dear; you're getting what's coming to you later!"

"O-Okay..."

The next thing I heard was the sound of something being dragged away. *Ah, it's one of the macho men.*

"Hmm, this is a good place; the service is impeccable. The cake and tea are also to my liking. You have some pretty good taste, Kelvin; I'll give you that much, at least." Bell said.

"I... I see. I'm glad you liked it..."

## Chapter 3: Labyrinthine Country of Pub

Matriculation day at Lumiest drew steadily closer, and recently, the school life awaiting them was the big topic that Rion and DarkMel almost always wanted to talk about. They started to act restlessly again as well, as if every day were the day before a long-awaited picnic or something. However, today their restlessness was probably thanks to something different. After all, this was the day we moved to our secondary base on the Western Continent!

*“III WAAANNNT TO GOOO TOOOOOO!”*

*“Don’t mind Ruka. Have a pleasant trip!”*

*“Be sure to bring back souveniirs!”*

That was the goodbye we’d gotten from Ruka and Ellie after preparations were done and we were about to step through the teleportation gate under the estate. They were usually left behind when we went on trips since we couldn’t afford to leave the estate unmanned in our absence, and that went double this time while we would be staying on the Western Continent. As an aside, the souvenirs Ruka asked for were rare cooking tools that were unique to the countries we visited. She had totally gotten used to being left behind and was also growing more reliable as a chef.

This was a large-scale relocation of our base of operations, so pretty much everybody was taking part. Initially, Dahak had seemed like he wanted to stay and improve his plantation, but then he’d remembered that a certain holy ground existed on the Western Continent and immediately got on board, even going so far as to say that we should all go right away before taking the initiative to pack.

*Unfortunately for him, we don’t have any plans to go to Goldiana’s holy grounds. It’s totally unfortunate...super unfortunate...yeah.*

The teleportation gate was set to take us to the same gate we had used to go to Lumiest before. From there, we would once again use carriages to take us to

our destination. But this time, we were riding in carriages prepared by the Adventurer's Guild of the Western Continent instead of using Rudo's services. And with all that information, it should be easy to guess where our destination lay. Yes, we were making our base on the westernmost edge of the Western Continent, in the Labyrinthine Country of Pub, where the headquarters of the Adventurer's Guild were located.

"Hey, what kinda place *is* Pub?" Sera asked Ange, who was sitting next to her.

We had boarded the carriages marked with the guild headquarters' bear crest and were currently on our way to Pub's capital. Sera was sitting across from me, along with Ange.

"The Labyrinthine Country of Pub? Well, as its name implies, it's got a whole bunch of dungeons within its borders. Don't be surprised now, but only counting the confirmed ones, this country holds the world record at 247!"

"Two... Two hu—" Sera reacted with shock. "All in one country? Isn't that, like, way too many?"

"I know it sounds like a lie, but trust me—this info is coming to you from Ange-san, the most reliable source in the world! And I mean, that's the official number given by the guild. In terms of pure size, Pub is larger than most countries on the Western Continent, and even now, more dungeons are being discovered all the time. They were probably just born under a certain star or something that makes all this happen. Even at the lowest estimates, two or three new dungeons are discovered every year. On top of that, the dungeons in this country are harder than normal to conquer, so it's said that Pub is where all skilled adventurers end up."

"Huh, so things like that really do happen. Does that mean the adventurers in Pub are high-level?"

"It does. No matter how much a person delves into dungeons, new ones keep popping up. Furthermore, they apparently spawn more frequently around the guild headquarters, so the area is perfect for those who want great achievements. The headquarters are just crawling with ambitious future Rank S adventurers—well, that might be going too far. Still, there are quite a number of high-level adventurers who make Pub their base of operations. It's perfect

for Kelvin, who loves nothing more than to pick a fight when he's free."

"I see. Makes sense!"

"Oh no, don't be satisfied with that. It makes me sound violent!" Ange's description of Pub was on point, and it was a wonderful, fairy-tale country to me. But, I still wanted to object to what she said in the latter half of her explanation. On any occasion where I was not facing a villain, I rarely resorted to violence first. Even if I did, I always made sure to have a proper reason for it.

*Jeez, if someone who didn't know me were to hear that, they might come up with some crazy misconceptions.*

"There it is, from Kelvin-kun's standard repertoire!" Ange exclaimed excitedly.

Sera played along. "Yep. But it's starting to get old, so it'd be nice if he changed up his acting style."

"It's not an act! Uh, hey, come on...what's with those lukewarm stares?!"

"Oh noooooothing..." both of them replied in unison.

Despite my being perfectly serious, Sera and Ange refused to take it that way. *Grk! Why?!*

"Ah, ohhh...also, Pub is pretty close to Lumiest. They aren't bordering each other, but it's within range for people like us to easily make a trip."

"So it's like two birds with one stone, since Kelvin can be satisfied while also being close enough to Rion and DarkMel that he also doesn't have to be worried about them, right?" Sera confirmed.

"That's not all," replied Ange. "There's a date with Ange-san here waiting in Pub for Kelvin-kun too! It's three birds with one stone!"

"Uh, wait a second, Ange. What do you mean by that?!"

"Huh? Don't you remember? I asked you on a date before, and you agreed immediately, didn't you, Kelvin? I said that there was somewhere I wanted to visit while we were at it, right?" Ange asked with a wink and a singsong lilt.

"That place was Pub, Sera-kun!"

"Whaaat?!"

*Yeah, I remember her loudly declaring that. But the destination isn't really date-like... Well, maybe it's like a spy date? That sounds like it could be okay.*

“Kelvin! I wanna be next! I reserve my spot now!” Sera shouted. “There are a bunch of dungeons, right? Which means there’ve gotta be some cool statues in one of them! Let’s go find the best one together and take it back as a memento!”

“Oh...sure...”

*So that's what she went with. I totally expected fishing. Still, is bringing back decorations from a dungeon really acceptable? No one's gonna get in trouble because we decided to treat a statue matching Sera's devilish aesthetics like treasure and plunder it, right?*

While we talked, time flew. We didn't encounter any trouble as we had during our previous visit with my father-in-law, and we reached Pub before we knew it.

The four carriages in our caravan stopped in front of the entrance to the city.

“That was surprisingly uneventful. It makes me question why we had all that trouble before...”

“Huh? What’re you talking about?” Sera asked.

“Basically, my father-in-law.”

Sera tilted her head, still not getting it.

*I don't think you need to try so hard to understand, Sera. If you enter your rebellious phase too, I don't think he'll ever recover.*

When it came time for us to disembark, the coachman wearing the guild's formal uniform opened the door for us without a word. I totally felt like a celebrity, though in my heart, I was a common plebeian. In other words, I wasn't used to this treatment.

“Are you sure about this, Kelvin-sama?” he asked. “If you’d like, I would be happy to drive this carriage all the way to the guild headquarters...”

“Yeah, I’m sure. No need to worry about it. We’ve got time, so I want to walk there. There are places I’d like to stop by on the way too.”



“Is that so? I understand. Then I’ll excuse myself here.”

The carriage left by way of the city’s central street, wheels rattling as it went. DarkMel, Rion, and Shutola all continued waving goodbye to the carriage that had carried them until it left their sight. It was heartwarming to see.

“Man, though, this place looks pretty strange. Everywhere I look, there are stores an adventurer would frequent. Is there a flower shop anywhere?! Like, even one?! I wanna buy flower and vegetable seeds!” Dahak complained.

“Hm, a flower shop, huh? Well...I’m sure one exists if you look for it hard enough, but the adventurer population in Pub’s capital is especially large, so you’ll mostly find bars, smithies, or tool shops that specialize in adventuring gear.”

“N-No way, that’s just cruel!”

Dahak couldn’t hide his shock at the realization of just how specialized Pub’s facilities were. He was right, though. The look of the town was...different. Store variety aside, Pub’s cityscape was quite distinctive. They must have wanted to keep the dungeon feel going outside as well, as the roads and buildings were all made of matching stone with green vines growing along the walls. There were also statues that matched Sera’s taste dotting the place.

But the thing I was most interested in at the moment wasn’t Pub’s cityscape. This was the headquarters of adventurers everywhere, so of course I felt I should pay attention to the adventurers themselves. I mean, just look at all the skilled adventurers swaggering about town. There were so many of them, and their instincts proved their worth as well, since they quickly started paying attention to us, looking at us like they would a rival, with eyes that housed true ambition.

*Yeahhh...I just love this!*

“Oh man, I love how sharp all their gazes are. Their stares are totally stabbing into me. I wonder if any of them’ll pick a fight?”

“This is terrible, sister Efil. Master’s breathing is elevated. He is even speaking what’s on his mind, and it sounds kind of creepy. The symptoms are dire,” Mdofarak reported.

“It’s okay,” Efil told her. “He looks cool, so there’s no problem at all.”

That only served to confuse Mdofarak, and she made a noise to show it. “I...suppose that sort of remark has the opposite effect on you, sister Efil,” Mdo remarked.

“Yes. It’s the only flaw in the perfect superwoman that is sister Efil.” It sounded like Boga and Mdo were whispering about something.

*Heh heh, I wonder what it could be?*



“Okay, well, we can’t just stand around the town entrance forever. Let’s get moving,” I announced.

“The plan is to head to our home base first, right?” Mdo asked.

“Yeah, I want to let Efil get some rest, after all. That being said, we’ll be staying at an inn for a few days until we can find a good place.”

Given the city’s abundance of facilities geared towards adventurers, there would naturally be a plethora of inns as well. I had already researched the inns recommended by Shutola’s guidebook. I figured it would be fine to stay at one until we got used to life here before looking for a real base like in Parth.

“Sorry for causing so much trouble, Master,” Efil apologized.

“How many times have I told you not to care about that... Hm? Is it just me, or are your cheeks kinda red, Efil?”

“R-Really? Uh...um...I wouldn’t know why.”

“Hm...you might be tired from our trip here. Don’t push yourself, okay?”

I felt pressured as Mdo fixed me with a silent stare. She looked really disgusted.

*What? If you’ve got something to say, then say it. You can even do it through telepathy if you don’t want to talk out loud,* I thought.

“Ah, uhh...Efil and I will head to the inn first. What do the rest of you want to do?” I asked.

“In that case, I’ll look for nutritious food for Efil,” Melfina offered. “I might have a taste while I’m at it, but it’s basically like testing for poison. I’m doing this purely for Efil, yes.”

“Look at how many smithies there are! I think I’ll take some time to wander about,” stated Gerard.

“I’ll tag along with gramps!” Rion declared.

“Me too!” DarkMel jumped forward.

“Then I’ll join as well,” said Shutola.

“My liege, I’m so happy...I think I might die from it...” Gerard wailed.

“Flowers...” Dahak said mournfully.

“Wow, Dahak really seems like he’ll die,” Sera commented. “I know there are no flower shops here, but there’s gotta be at least one place that sells local specialties or something! I’ll go look for a souvenir pennant! Of course, I’ll buy one for Efil too!”

“Huh? Oh, okay. Thank you?” Efil seemed confused.

“I think I’ll go to the inn with Efil-chan and Kelvin. I’m kinda worried,” said Ange.

“I’m with sister Ange on this one. I’d be very worried about leaving Master alone too,” said Mdo.

“I... I’ll do the same,” said Boga. “We’re in a new city. I think...a guard will be necessary.”

“Grrr! (Walk!)” went Alex.

After Alex growled his intentions, Clotho, who was on Alex’s back, jiggled its moist body. It seemed it wanted to enjoy a walk with Alex.

“Will Alex and Clotho be okay walking around town alone? Alex is the size of a regular wolf, and Clotho is currently palm-sized, but won’t the adventurers here still mistake them for wild monsters?”

“I don’t think it should be a problem since Alex is wearing a collar with the Celsius house’s crest on it, but...”

“Even so, this isn’t Parth, where we’re well-known. I’ll go with Alex and Clotho-senpai on their walk...and look for a flower shop while I’m at it...” Dahak offered.

“Awoo! (Please and thanks!)” Alex howled.

“Okay, I’ll note the location of the inn on the Network, so once you’re all done, let’s meet up there. Good? Then it’s free time for everybody!”

“Yeah!” everyone else exclaimed in unison.

With that cheer, we scattered, rushing off into town. It was almost funny how

differently our group was acting compared to the sharp, knifelike auras the adventurers around us were putting out. That went doubly for Sera and Mel, who ran more childishly than DarkMel.

“Well then, let’s get to the inn. Let’s walk slowly, Efil-chan; you need to watch out for your belly,” Ange said.

“I’ll take the front, and Boga will take the rear. There’ll be nothing to worry about, sister Efil,” Mdo declared.

“Hee hee! I feel like you’re all making too big a deal out of this. But I guess I’ll allow myself to be pampered for today.” Efil giggled.

“Good. If you would just let yourself be pampered all the time, I’d—”

“You... Are you Kelvin Celsius, the Grim Reaper?”

“What do you want?” I had managed to say something really cool for once, but it was ruined by someone cutting me off with some *incredible* timing. I looked over at the person who’d spoken to see a group of men who seemed like adventurers blocking our path.

*Oho, so you’re not content with cutting off my speech, and you plan to cut off my way forward too? Ha ha! You guys’re pretty good! Crap...yeah, I’m glad I didn’t say that out loud. I’m absolutely sure Mdo’s stare would bore holes through me. Still... Oho ho...their equipment is pretty good from what I can see. Their weapons, armor, and robes are all made from good materials by good craftsmen.*

They were a party of seven, which was rather large, and in addition, their overall levels were high. They all seemed to be around Rank A and strong enough that a good chunk of them were in the upper echelons of that class too. I also thought highly of the look in their eyes—they were filled with ambition.

“Don’t get too big for your britches just because you got lucky a whole bunch and were promoted to Rank S faster than anyone else. Originally, this party, led by me, the great Paul Lauzer, should have gotten that spot!”

*Oho ho ho, yessssss! Can it be? Are they picking a fight with me? They’ve come all this way to pick a fight, right?! No way, I’d never have thought I’d have such a random encounter after only taking one step into Pub! I may actually be a*

*lucky person. But more importantly, I'm impressed by how astute this Paul Lauzer is!*

“Things won't go so easily for you here in Pub, where the strong gather. You'd do well not to forget this warning.”

“Heh! Seriously, though, you were a newbie until just a little while ago and you're already going around with two slave girls! Must feel nice, huh?! Those rumors about you being a lust demon were true!”

The man's friends were just as proficient with their taunts. But what they said raised a single question. I understood well that Paul Lauzer and his comrades were just my type of adventurers, but I still didn't have the most important piece of information about them. Well, at times like these, it was best to just ask the one whose job it was to know these things.

*Do you know this Paul guy, Ange?* I asked her through the Network. *I know I'll need to take care of this potential conflict regardless, but I don't know why they've got so much hostility towards me.*

::Yeah, I know him. Some years back he was the rising star of Western Continent adventurers, and for a while people were expecting him to become the next Rank S adventurer. But after he rose up to Rank A, his growth slowed. While he was taking his time, you appeared, Kelvin-kun, and rose up to Rank S in a flash. I...think that's how it went? Well, it's a common enough occurrence.::

*I see. So basically, they're just jealous,* I answered. *And unlike Cashel, who was newbie hunting in Parth, Rank S adventurers are a different prospect to take on. That means they've got guts, since they aren't budging an inch.*

::Oh man, Cashel? That's a nostalgic name. Yeah, you're right that Paul and Cashel seem different. I can't say he's got a good personality, since he's high-handed and quick to pick a fight, but at least they're proper adventurers who've put in the work.::

*Doesn't that just make him the very picture of an adventurer, then?* I mused to myself. *His rebellious spirit should also be rated highly, since it's so important in adventurers. Oh man, my favorability meter for Paul is maxing out just by him greeting us!*

That was when Mdo messaged me through the Network as well. ::We shouldn't stand here and talk too long, Master. It'll affect sister Efil's health. May I finish them off now?::

*Of course not!* I replied. *How is it your thoughts are way more dangerous than mine, Mdo?*

::That's surprising. I didn't know you realized your own thoughts were dangerous, Master.::

I had to refute that. *How could you say that to a rational battle junkie? Don't worry, I'm just gonna give them a little greeting. It'll be over right away.*

When it came to Efil, Mdo tended to be terribly short-tempered. Even I would have a tough time stopping her once she was set off. Not only that, but we were right at the town entrance, so I didn't want to cause a problem. I needed to finish this encounter before bullets started flying from Mdo's fingers. *As quick as possible... Right, let's go with that.*

"Okay, let's quit this small talk. If you've got a problem, then just come at me," I told them.



That day, a sound like wooden boxes or barrels being broken resounded over and over in rapid succession through Pub's capital. These satisfying sounds spread far, causing many curious people to gather. Unfortunately, no one would believe the scene left behind.

"Hey, did you hear? Apparently, there's a fight between adventurers going on at the entrance. Wanna go watch?" a bored male townie asked his similarly bored friend.

However, that friend didn't seem too keen on the suggestion. "Fights between adventurers happen every day here in Pub. Why would we go out of our way to watch something like that? Is there something special about this one? It'd be better to just go have a drink."

"Supposedly, there *is* something special! One side is the Rank A adventurer Paul and his friends, and they're fighting the Rank S adventurer Kelvin, who just arrived in Pub today. Even in Pub, no many would try fighting a Rank S adven—"



“Hey, what’re you just sitting there for?! We need to go or the fight’ll be over by the time we get there!”

The first man was right. Adventurers who based themselves in Pub were very ambitious, which caused daily fights between those of the same profession. So, fights weren’t that rare a sight. However, things were different with a Rank S adventurer in the mix.

“Are you seriously going to sprint off as soon as you change your mind?! H- Hey, wait!”

His friend’s feelings had done a one-eighty on the spot. Because it provided so many chances for advancement, Pub was home to many high-ranking adventurers. That meant there were many Rank A adventurers present who were candidates to become future Rank S adventurers. In terms of only Rank A adventurers, Pub probably had the highest concentration in the world. However, flipping that around, it also meant they didn’t have that many Rank S adventurers. In truth, the only Rank S adventurer publicly active in the Labyrinthine Country of Pub was the director of the guild headquarters. Possibly because of that, the townspeople were extremely interested in the fight that Kelvin, another Rank S adventurer, had allegedly picked.

“Oh, looks like that crowd is it! The noise must mean they’re still fighting!”

“You bastard, don’t just run off on your own and leave me behind!”

“Ha ha! Now, now, calm down. I know you’d have done the same. Our country has the headquarters of the entire Adventurer’s Guild in it, and yet we don’t see any people who stand at the top—Rank S adventurers—very often at all. And it’s even rarer to see one fight right in the middle of town like this! We basically only ever get to see a Rank S fight in mock battles at their promotion ceremony!”

“Yeah, I agree with you there. On top of that, promotion ceremonies for Rank S only happen once a year, at best, *and* they can be anywhere in the world!”

“Exactly! It’s an event that’s hard for normal citizens like us to attend. That’s why I’ve been hoping for the next hopeful to be from Pub! And yet...”

“The new Rank S, while from the Western Continent, neither comes from Pub

nor is based in Pub. The dude is all muscle and no hair, and it's already been decided that his ceremony will be held somewhere else, right? I mean, that's the entire reason I invited you to come and watch in the first place!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Yeah, yeah."

"Jeez, whatever, I guess. The fight's more important right now. The fight!"

A large number of people had gathered on one side of the main street, which was lined with diners, bars, and other venues. Almost all of them seemed to be rubbernecks like the two men who had just arrived, and the crowd was big enough that they were able to instantly understand that. The pair squeezed their way into the crowd of onlookers, hoping to somehow manage to get in front to try and grab a look at the rumored Rank S adventurer. Though another rubbernecker beside them clicked their tongue at the pair, their efforts bore fruit, and they succeeded in squeezing through.

Unfortunately, what everyone was looking at wasn't a fight between two adventurers.

"Huh? Barrels?"

"Yeah...barrels, it seems. There's a total of seven...all lined up."

The two men saw seven barrels standing in front of a store. They had drawn a crowd, so there was no way they were normal booze barrels. Each one had a body stuffed in it. Whoever was responsible must have stuffed the people in headfirst, as their upper halves were totally inside, leaving only their lower halves exposed in a foolish position. The fact that everyone was in the same pose made it even stranger and even more hilarious.

"Wait...isn't that Paul and his party? I believe there were seven of them..."

"Um...hmm, I wonder... But judging from the situation, that would be the only...ah, why not ask? Hey, you, do you know what happened here?" The man decided to try asking the old gentleman next to him.

"Hm? Ah, you boys must've just arrived. You came because you heard rumors of a Rank S adventurer, but by the time you arrived, it was already like this, so you're trying to puzzle it out. Is that about the order of things?"

“Sounds about right. Actually, seems like you know what’s going on. Do you?”

“Yeah, pretty much. After all, I’ve been here from the start. Not to brag, but I’ve already explained things many times. Heh heh!”

“Really now?”

The gentleman seemed proud for some reason. Then, he started cheerfully explaining what had happened. The old man had been coming to his usual shop for his morning coffee (it was noon now, though), when by coincidence, he’d heard Kelvin and Paul talking.

“And so, Kelvin whipped Paul and the rest into a fury with a single word. Though no one drew any weapons, all seven of them raised their fists to fight. Of course, an instant later, the fight had been decided.”

“So basically, the fight’s long over since Paul and his friends got wrecked instantly, resulting in this scene. Gotta say, that’s awfully pathetic of them, fighting seven-on-one and still ending up like this.”

“No, no, this is the natural outcome. To be honest, I used to be pretty famous as an adventurer a long time ago, and even then my eyes couldn’t keep up with Paul’s speed. They’re totally monsters. It’s just that Kelvin is in a dimension even beyond that. I mean, the sounds of the barrels breaking came *after* everything had ended! Of course they’d end up like that. Becoming a Rank S adventurer basically requires someone to stop being human, it seems.”

“I... I see...” the two men replied, their voices overlapping one another.

“Ah, and at the very end, he reimbursed the store for the broken barrels. He was very generous. *This* generous.” The old gentleman made a gesture to indicate how much money had changed hands.

“Whaaaaaat?!” Once again, both men reacted in unison. But having heard what the gentleman had to say, their faces looked like those of little boys.

“Oh, it’s about time I should excuse myself. I still have yet to have my morning coffee, after all. So with that, be well.”

“Sure! Thanks, man! Gaaahhh! Wow! A story that amazing just makes me want to have seen it even more! I wonder if Kelvin’ll start up another fight

somewhere else?”

“I doubt it. From the story we were told, it sounded like he just accepted the fight they picked. You know no Rank S adventurer would bother picking fights themselves. Well, actually, if the Adventurer’s Directory is right and he’s a huge battle junkie, Kelvin might— Hmmm?!” One of the men interrupted himself suddenly to let out a weird noise. He also turned to look off into the distance.

The other man made a noise, puzzled by his friend’s reaction. “What’s up?”

“Oh...don’t worry about it. There was just an incredible beauty on the roof across the street. I got the feeling she looked our way, but...she’s not there anymore. I think...I might have just seen wrong?”

“An incredible beauty? I see...that’s great news. I don’t care if it was just your imagination. Describe her to me.”

“Ah, sure. If I’m remembering right...she wore a skirt with a slit and strange clothes. Her hair was long and red, and...she had huge boobs.”

“I see, I see. Awesome! And?”

“She was holding some huge souvenir pennants. She had two, and they had a bear mark on them and were about as long as she was tall.”

“Yeah, she was totally a figment of your imagination. There’s no way a beauty like that exists, you idiot.”

“Yeah, thought so.”

“Tch! I guess we came all the way here for nothing, then. Aw, man...I wonder if the guild director would fight Kelvin?”

“Ha ha! Wouldn’t that destroy Pub? Though I get the feeling the town would celebrate like it was a festival anyway!”

“You’re not wrong! Gah ha ha ha!”

The two men laughed as they returned to their previous location. They left behind some ominous lines, not that the men themselves realized that.



The hubbub died down, the people growing bored of Paul and his party’s

disgraceful state, and the crowd started to disperse. Around that time, the old gentleman exited the store with a leisurely air, seeming to have finished his coffee time. He was wearing a crisply pressed white tie, a dapper silk hat, and had a cane in his hand. He seemed to want to show off his dapper sense of style, as he was also making gentlemanly poses as he moved.

“Whew, today’s morning was nice as well. I knew it, this morning routine is the best, especially right when I wake up. Truly, this is necessary to have in a gentleman’s repertoire. Also, hm...what perfect timing, it seems the crowd has dissipated. I’m lucky today, it seems. I dreaded the prospect of having to ford my way through the throngs of people to get home, after all.”

Clearly in a good mood, the old gentleman walked off, passing by the barrels that contained Paul and his party. As he did, he lightly rapped his cane against the bottoms of the barrels, eliciting a small sound each time.

“In contrast, none of you seem to have any luck today at all. What possessed you to taunt a Rank S until he put you in this state? Did Director Shin put you up to this?”

“Shut it, you. Don’t bad-mouth the director. I did this on my own,” Paul replied from inside the barrel.

Then, a sound could be heard from Paul’s barrel as, with a crack, he broke out from the side. At the same time, his party also started to move. One by one, they escaped from their barrels the same way.

“Agggghhh...all my blood rushed to my head...”

“If I think of that as training, it doesn’t sting nearly as much. Still...hm...I thought my face would catch fire, I was so embarrassed...”

“We were in there for exactly an hour; that sounds about right for reflecting on one’s actions. HEY! This isn’t a show! Get outta here! Scram!” Paul shouted threateningly at the few rubberneckers that remained.

“E-Eep!”

The remnants of the crowd, intimidated, ran off as fast as their legs would allow, leaving only Paul’s party and the old gentleman.

“Come now, it’s not good to threaten normal citizens like that. Weren’t you *just* admirably reflecting on your actions? What happened to that?”

“And I thought I told you to *shut it*! We only put on that show as punishment to ourselves. Once we were done, we stopped being something to gawk at! Actually, Walter, what was that lie you told about not being able to follow us?! You were a Rank A adventurer before you retired, weren’t you, you bastard! I *know* you saw the whole thing with those needlessly clear eyes of yours!”

“Oh my, did I touch a nerve? I thought I was doing you men a service, trying to lessen the blow to your reputations as much as possible.”

“Damn you, old man!” Paul ground his teeth, his rage meter rising.

On the other hand, the gentleman named Walter gracefully took a pocket watch and handkerchief from his pocket. Then, he used the kerchief to polish the watch.

“You should stop trying to argue with Walter, Paul. You’ll never win.”

“Tch! I know. Hey, old man, if you’re satisfied, go home already! Shoo! Shoo!”

“Oh come now, don’t say something so sad. As a retired elderly gentleman, I’m very free.”

“As if I care!” Paul slapped away Walter’s hand before turning to his comrades and holding out a clenched fist. “All right, you lot! That last fight taught us the strength of a Rank S! We’re going to use this experience to the fullest, got it?!”

“Heh heh, it was less of a fight and more of a massacre, though.”

“Shut it, you! That’s why I’m saying we should turn our frustration into strength, dammit!” Paul shouted in reply.

“Awriiight! I’m gonna get stronger, earn more cash, and use that to support a cute slave too!”

“Yeah, that’s the spirit!” Paul encouraged his friend.

“Hmm...what a shockingly ungentlemanly turn of phrase. And yet what was being said was very positive,” Walter commented.

“Shut *up*, old man! Seriously, you *cannot* be planning to sit in on this, you

poser!”

Walter had sidled up beside Paul’s party as if he belonged there. It seemed he was going to resolutely ignore everything Paul was yelling at him. Seeing that, the gigantic man who had been urging Paul to calm down earlier once again whispered into his ear.

“Paul, I know I’ve been saying this a lot, but—”

“I know!” Paul barked. “I’m just going to ignore this stupid old man! He doesn’t exist!”

“Hey, hey, is it just me, or is your Paul-kun super cold? Did something bad happen to him recently? Maybe got dumped by a girlfriend?” Walter asked one of the party members.

“Er...who knows? I wonder...”

“I told you to ignore hiiiiim!”

Though Paul had resolved to ignore him, Walter had already turned his attention to the rest of the group. The speed at which he changed and moved was just as fast as Paul and his friends, showing that while he had retired, his skills hadn’t rusted at all.

“Do your best to ignore him, Paul. As long as you do, that should keep the number of victims down. I’m pretty sure Walter-san is just playing with you.”

“Grrrrgggkhkh!” Paul clenched his teeth in frustration. “Ugh, we’re going to continue this conversation inside, you lot. Follow me. Also, though we’ve completed the punishment we set for ourselves, we still haven’t apologized to the store for bothering them. Each one of us needs to eat and drink at least enough to pay for the barrels we wrecked. Make sure you pick the good stuff!”

“Aye aye!” Paul’s party replied in perfect unison.

The party quickly filed into the store. Meanwhile, Walter—surprisingly—watched them go without trying to follow them.

“Hmm, that’s troubling. I just left that store; it would be a little embarrassing to go back in. As a gentleman, that cannot be allowed.”

Though whatever standards or rules he played by were inscrutable, it at least

seemed that from his perspective, following them back inside was a no-go. Returning to the store was apparently ungentlemanly.

“Still, they want to eat and drink more than enough to pay for what they broke, huh? My word, they’re just so awkward. They could have been smart about it and handed them money like Kelvin did. It seems their bad habit of not being able to just apologize honestly hasn’t been fixed. I can just imagine them eating and drinking more than they need so they end up not being able to move,” Walter muttered to himself with a faraway look in his eyes.

And lo and behold, loud voices immediately started coming from inside the store.

“Heyo, we’re gonna eat!”

“What?! P...uhh...Paul?! You’re finally awake! Oh, no, I mean...please, dear customer, you’re bothering the other customers, so please don’t shout—”

“Oh? Okay then, we’ll just rent out this entire place.”

“Oh no, no, no. No you don’t! I just told you that there are other customers!”

“Don’t worry, we’ll sit and have our meal and drinks quietly until the other customers leave. But in the meantime, we’ll be ordering a lot. Enough that you’re gonna start having to worry about your stock. Prepare yourselves!”

“Eeeeeeeep?!”

The voices drifted out onto the main street, loud enough to be heard even without having to actively listen.

“Wow, they’re way more awkward than I thought. I can’t hide my surprise; what a gentlemanly shock! It goes against my sense of aesthetics, but I should probably stop them. Hmmm...I know those kids are good deep down...it’s just...*really* deep down.”

Back when Walter was still an active adventurer, there had been several instances when he’d given Paul, who was still a newbie back then, some pointers. He still remembered clearly that he and his party were just a gathering of ruffians from who-knew-where who had been brought together by the director. Ever since he first met them, they had been awkward; he could tell



exactly why they were so peevish without them having to say it. But their talent and enthusiasm were the real thing. They were gifted people who thoroughly absorbed what Walter, who had been a Rank A adventurer at the time, had taught them.

“Well, I could only teach them up to a certain point. Not even I knew how to reach the highest class, Rank S. I couldn’t even imagine what kind of lives those of that rank, such as Grim Reaper Kelvin, have lived. I suppose he would have to have a screw loose to reach the same level as Director Shin at his age.”

The old gentleman walked forward, heading to the source of all the noise. His footsteps were quite light. The gentleman was fully intending to play around with Paul now that he had just cause. Who knew where all that previous talk of ungentlemanly behavior had gone...



There was no bigger waste than destroying someone with so much potential. Especially one in the same field who was aiming so high. However, if I hesitated, Mdo would have done worse out of concern for Efil. So it was much, *much* better for me to let them down easy with my own two hands. It was the more peaceful and beneficial solution; my personal feelings had nothing to do with it!

Though I felt some internal conflict, I still resolved the situation on my own and prevented Mdo from committing some unnecessary murder by cleaning up Paul and his party in a matter of a second. When I made them sleep, I made sure to stuff them in barrels to prevent them from hitting the ground too hard and reduce the risk of permanent damage. Against people so powerful, that amount of damage should have allowed them to wake up a little less than an hour later.

*Yeah, this isn’t something I should be saying about myself, but I had the perfectly soft touch there. I’m satisfied.*

“There should be a limit on how easy you can go on them, Master. People like that won’t learn unless you make them learn. I am quite unsatisfied.”

Unfortunately, it seemed that my actions hadn’t done anything to improve Mdo’s mood, and she’d been in a huff ever since. Quite literally, a huffy Light Dragon King.

Boga, a fellow Dragon King, tried his best to lift her spirits. “C-Calm down, Mdo...”

*He’s treating her like a horse or a cow... No, bad! Don’t sweat the small stuff! Right now, we’re on a grand mission to secure a place to stay!*

So we hurried towards an inn and finally reached our destination. The inn we’d decided on after considering Ange and Shutola’s info, Mel’s food reports, and several other factors, was the Golden Sparrow.

“What a large and elegant building. Also, it resembles the buildings you’d see in Toraj,” Efil noted.

“Oh, so you noticed, Efil. Actually, the proprietress is from Toraj, so it’s not just the outside; the inside and the food they serve resembles what you’d find in Toraj too.”

“From Ange’s research, this one came highly recommended!”

Ange’s report said that this inn set a very high standard in cleanliness, security, the taste of their food, completeness of their facilities, and training of their staff. It seemed it was the most popular inn that Pub had to offer. That also meant the rooms were expensive to match, but because the service was well worth it, it was used by many of Pub’s Rank A adventurers. For a privately owned inn, the scale of the operation was large, and the size of the building rivaled that of a small castle. The quality was so ridiculous that for a moment, Shutola had to wonder if Tsubaki had a finger in this pie.

However, that was only a small, meaningless worry to me. What I prized most was the ability to eat delicious rice, even in a foreign land! Not only that, but they even had an open-air hot spring. Having experienced the hidden springs of Toraj, that fact alone was worth a massive number of points. Also, another good point: the rooms were floored with tatami!

“I see,” Efil muttered. “If this is where we’re staying, they might actually have arranged Torajian dishes in Pub’s style. This would be a wonderful opportunity to improve my cooking. Of course, I have also put serious effort into learning real Torajian cooking, so...”

“Efil-chaaaan? You should already know you can’t push yourself. How many

times have we had to drill that into your head?” Ange teased.

“Oh...I...you’re right. But it’s possible to uncover recipes just by seeing and tasting the dishes! In fact, that would also serve to feed my imagination, and I might make something new!”

“You never stop, do you, Efil-chan?”

*Nope. She never does. And in Efil’s case, it really seems like she could master a dish just by seeing and tasting it once. Her talent is almost scary.*

“Torajian sweets! Torajian sweets!” Mdo chanted. The Light Dragon King next to Efil allowed her hopes to balloon in anticipation of new sweets.

*I should inform you, great Lady Light Dragon King-sama, your mouth looks like Colette’s when she has an episode.*

After Efil used a handkerchief to wipe Mdo’s mouth clean, we strode through the Toraj-style front yard that led to the door to the inn proper.

“Welcome. You are Kelvin-sama, yes? We have been waiting for you.” As we passed through the entrance to the Golden Sparrow, a beautiful, young, black-haired lady wearing a kimono welcomed us.

*If Gerard was here, he’d probably sigh in wonder, I thought appreciatively. The interior of the inn felt both elegant and calm. But...waiting for me? I don’t think I made any reservations... And how does she know my name?*

“We received a message from Tsubaki-sama a couple of days ago asking us to prepare rooms for you and your compatriots, Kelvin-sama. Ah, and there is no need to worry about payment. We will be sending the bill to Tsubaki-sama later.”

“Oh...well, thanks...”

*Are you just straight-up looking into the future, Tsubaki-sama? Not only that, but it seems like you used that to casually put me in your debt.*

::It’s fine to rely on Toraj’s ruler, Kelvin-kun, but I don’t think it’s good if you allow yourself to be spoiled too much by her. You’re gonna see some more persistent recruiting from her again, you know?: Ange warned me.

I replied to her telepathic message in kind. *Oh no, I didn’t tell Tsubaki*

*anything about going to Pub or where we would be staying.*

::So...she literally read our every move?::

*Maybe...* I answered.

I could only assume she had predicted everything I would do after taking my tastes and preferences into account, as well as my feelings about rice. *Scary... Truly terrifying...*

“Oh, excuse the late introduction. I am Ouka, the proprietress here at the Golden Sparrow. As you might have already figured out, I was born into a family of traditional Torajian inn owners and am using our good name to run this establishment. I have prepared some treats in the hopes that you will enjoy your stay. Now please, allow me to show you to your rooms posthaste.”

“Oh, thank you for being so polite...” I answered.

The proprietress flowed neatly into her introduction before taking us to our rooms. Her forcefulness reminded me somewhat of Tsubaki. At any rate, I didn’t have any reason to refuse, since I had always planned to stay at the Golden Sparrow, but something just didn’t sit right with me. This inn definitely had ties to Tsubaki! Thick-ass ties!

“This entire floor will be yours, Kelvin-sama.” Ouka had led us to the top floor of the building. With a spacious lounge at the center, there were many doors that led to what were undoubtedly bedrooms, a special bath, a place to enjoy the view, and several rooms decorated in Torajian sty—

*We’re getting the entire floor?!*

According to what Ouka said, we had this entire floor to ourselves. It seemed that Tsubaki hadn’t just rented us some rooms, she had gone as far as to get us the best rooms available... All of them, in fact.

*What is she going to extract from me in repayment once we get back?* I worried, my thoughts flowing through the Network.

::Get a hold of yourself, Kelvin-kun!:: Ange replied. ::Since we’ve come this far, we just have to conquer some undiscovered dungeon and bring back enough loot to pay for all this ourselves! If we force the payment onto the

proprietress when we leave, we shouldn't end up that deep in debt!::

*I can't see that working, I told Ange. Honestly, I get the same cunning feeling from this proprietress as Tsubaki-sama, so there's no way continuing to depend on her will end well for us.*

::Is it too late to go to our second choice, Master?:: asked Mdo. ::The prospect of sweets is enticing, but I can take non-Torajian sweets too. This is the Labyrinthine Country; there are lots of inns for adventurers here. And lots of variety in sweets too.::

*Mdo's right, I told everyone. But just think about it for a moment.*

::Hm?::

*It's true that there are other inns. High-class ones that serve wonderful food, even. But the only one with delicious rice and open-air baths is this place, the Golden Sparrow!*

::I... I see...::

As a former Japanese person, rice and hot springs were absolutely essential. I could not live without them. *Gah! Did Tsubaki-sama predict that about me as well?! What a cunning, ingenious trap! Her greed is bottomless!* I thought privately.

"It seems you approve of your lodgings," said Ouka. "Well then, please enjoy your stay."

I might have just been seeing things, but it looked to me like she flashed a sly, fox-like smirk as she spoke and then left.

*Is it possible that this inn isn't the Golden Sparrow, but the Golden Fox? Are we...being tricked?* I wondered.



I enjoyed a calm, relaxing time with the others while sipping some tea Boga had made. While I was normally all about battling, I didn't exactly hate spending time like this. In fact, I quite liked doing so if it was in a room as nice as the one I was in at the moment. *Mm, feels peaceful.*

*Om nom nom harmph mg crunch crunch crunch!*

While I was totally in relaxation mode, Mdo was beside me, scarfing down a truly prodigious amount of Torajian sweets.

*Yeah, depending on how you look at it, this could also be seen as adding to the elegant mood.*

“Mmgh...this is delicious.” Meanwhile, on the other side of the table, Boga was also eating heartily.

*You too, huh?*

Of course, the way Boga ate was completely different from Mdo; he cut a single serving’s worth of youkan into small pieces and was nibbling on them one at a time. Though he was even larger of body than Gerard, the way he ate was very dainty and slow. He was really well-behaved in human form.

“Aren’t you glad you picked this inn, Kelvin-kun?” Ange asked. “The way things are going, the food they put out will definitely satisfy Efil-chan, so we can relax and take it easy here.”

“You’re right about that. Well, in Efil’s case, there is the possibility of her getting weirdly competitive if the food is *too* good.”

“Urk, jeez! Can’t we move on already, Master? Ange-san? While my word may not be the most trustworthy, I, Efil, plan to rest with all my might!” Efil protested.

“Really?” both of us asked incredulously, but with a teasing lilt.

“Jeez!”

*Heh heh.* I chuckled internally. Without her subordinates Ellie and Ruka around, I could enjoy the sight of Efil acting her own age. *Nice. This is really nice. Keep it up. Oh...I guess that phrase is usually used for something else.*

*Also, hmm...once Rion and the others come back, that would complete this perfect soothing space, but there’s no way I’d be so conveniently luc—*

“Excuse me. Your friends have returned, Kelvin-sama.” The sliding door opened to reveal Ouka.

*Oh? Could it be?*

“We’re back, Kel-nii!” Rion greeted me.

“We visited so many stores!” Gerard seemed happy.

“But we didn’t go to any of the blacksmiths, grandpa Gerard. Are you really okay with that?” asked DarkMel.

“Yeah, don’t worry about me. I am very satisfied,” he replied.

The first group to return was the one consisting of a very happy Gerard, Rion, DarkMel, and Shutola. That was the moment the perfect storm of soothing was complete.

“Woowww!” the three girls all cried out together. That was their honest, surprised impression after seeing that we had rented out the entire top floor.

I wasn’t Gerard, but seeing such a positive reaction from them made me happy. Not that I was the one who made all this happen, though!

“Urgk, it’s too bright! This shine, it’s like the sun that sheds light upon all of creation!” Gerard cried. “Fwoaaarghhh! The light is seeping into my armor!”

*I knew his joy as the real deal would be amazing to see, though I think his happiness is reaching dangerous levels...*

“I mean, you bought out the entire floor?!” Rion exclaimed, amazed. “You really went all out, Kel-nii!”

“Yeah, I couldn’t win against Tsubaki-sama, or the allure of rice and open-air baths...”

“Huh?”

“Oh, nothing. Never mind. This is going to cost a lot of money, so I was just thinking we’d have to work to make up for it, that’s all.”

“Then I’ll do my best to help too, though it’ll only be until the day of the entrance ceremony.”

“I feel the same way, papa.” DarkMel jumped into the conversation. “I might not be of much help, but I’ll do my best!”

“I... I won’t lose to Rion-chan or DarkMel-chan either.” Shutola got competitive. “You can rely on me too, dearest brother Kelvin. That goes for the

big me as well; I'm sure she'll be happy to be relied on."

*Fwooooarrrrghhh! He was right, this is totally seeping right into meee! Their love is turning directly into energy! I get it now! I get it, Gerard!*

"Eurgh, why is my liege writhing around like that? It's scary," Gerard muttered. "Seeing that might be a bad influence on them, so would you mind doing it somewhere else?"

"Okay, Gerard, you want a fight? You got one. You got one right now!"

"Kelvin-kun and Gerard-san are at it again, huh?" Ange mused blithely.

"They are. What a peaceful day this is," Efil replied.

"More importantly, sisters, these treats are to die for. You need to try them," Mdo interjected.

"Wow, they *do* look great! I'm taking one!" Rion exclaimed cheerfully.

"Aaah," Efil muttered, impressed. "I can learn a lot from this flavor. Your tongue is very reliable, Mdo-chan."

Even an atmosphere like this, one that could go off with a single touch, seemed like nothing to my companions. Of course it did, because DarkMel had gotten in between Gerard and me, and the hostility had already drained from both of us.

"Jeez...bad! Both of you, bad! You'll trouble the other customers if you fight here. So stop it!" DarkMel cried.

"Okaaay," the two of us said together. More than hostility had been drained from us. We felt true joy.

"Excuse me for the repeated visits, Kelvin-sama," came Ouka's voice. "Once again, your companions have—"

"Whoa, what?! You rented out the *entire* floor, Kelvin?! Wow! I'm gonna claim a corner room with good sunlight!"

Just hearing that was enough for me to figure out who had returned. The pure and innocent way in which the owner of the voice expressed joy and the selfish way of claiming a room that brooked no argument made it obvious that



Sera had come back.

“Again with the arbitrary claiming of a room, Sera? Hey, what is that stupid huge piece of cloth you’ve got hanging over both your shoulders?” I asked.

“A souvenir pennant! I went around to a lot of stores over these past few hours, but this is the treasure that I fell in love with immediately. How about it? You’ve never seen anything like it, have you?”

“Yeah, you’re right that I’ve never seen one that big, but what are you planning to do with it? It looks about as tall as I am...”

“Oh, Kelvin, you can be so stupid sometimes. What do you think pennants are made for? Decoration, of course!”

*She’s...going to...hang it up? Where? On the ceiling? A pennant of a cutesy cartoon bear?*

“I’m as good as my word, so I bought one for Efil with my pocket money too. Here, Efil, you can give birth to a healthy baby while looking at this!”

“Uh...errr...that bear is...cute, isn’t it?” Efil seemed lost for a response. It was rare to see her so truly perplexed.

“I’ll refrain from being too harsh, Sera, so just go and return that immediately. You can buy one about a tenth of the size instead. That would make Efil happier.”

“Whaaat, why?! You can only get this pennant here, you know?! It’s not sold anywhere else!” Sera tried to defend her purchase.

*Yeah. And I’d like you to think about why that is.*

After that, in return for Sera being able to claim a corner room, I somehow managed to convince her to do what I asked. However, I didn’t feel great about returning a purchase for no reason, so I decided against getting rid of the original huge pennant in favor of using it for something else. *I...guess it’ll do fine as a souvenir for Tsubaki-sama.*

“By the way, Kelvin-kun...everyone’s back, so why don’t we go now?” Ange asked.

“Hm? Ah, yeah, you’re right. With so many of us here, I guess Efil will have

enough protection.”

“Oh? Are you going out?” Sera asked.

“Yep! Kelvin-kun is about to go on a date with me, Ange-san!” stated Ange.

“Wh-Whaaaaaat?!”

*You definitely only said that so you could have fun watching Sera’s reaction, didn’t you, Ange?* Still, it was somewhat impressive that Sera still reacted so strongly after we’d had this same exchange before.

“Well, I call it a date, but we’re really just going to say hello to people at the Adventurer’s Guild.”

“Oh, really? And...that’s a date?”

“As long as Kelvin-kun and I think of it as a date, then it’s a date no matter the time or place. Right, Kelvin?” Ange threw the conversation my way.

“Yeah, it’s all about your state of mind. We might also stop by some shops on the way there too.”

Sera hummed skeptically as she mulled it over. “Well, whatever, I guess. I am a woman of my word, after all. One day, my turn will come, so for today I’ll see you off happily! Have fun out there, and don’t bully the other adventurers, okay?”

*“Bully”? What could you mean by that?*



Having left Sera, a woman of her word, in charge of our home base, Ange and I left the Golden Sparrow and made for the Adventurer’s Guild headquarters. As she had said beforehand, this would also double as a date, so we were allowed to enjoy some sightseeing on the way. Still, it was unfortunate—or I guess I should actually say fortunate—that no other adventurers messed with us while we walked. Nor did any assassins from some mysterious organization appear. We simply walked with our hands intertwined like a normal couple enjoying a peaceful date.

“So we reached the guild headquarters without any trouble at all...”

“We did, didn’t we?” Ange agreed. “Don’t be sad, Kelvin-kun. I felt some weird looks come our way every once in a while. They were murderous stares in a different way than what you wanted, though.”

“Yeah. It’s all hostility...but they weren’t being directed at me because of who I was, but rather because you were next to me, Ange, so... Hey, what’re you making me say, Ange-san? I was purely enjoying our date.”

“I might have decided to believe that excuse if your tone hadn’t changed because you were so shaken...” she lamented in a singsong lilt. “Well, let’s just wrap this up by concluding that your older sister Ange here isn’t a bad catch.”

“Thank you, sister Ange. I am overjoyed at having been allowed to walk next to you.”

“Ah, were you trying to sound like Mdo-chan just now?”

“Correct!”

I tried keeping my face as impassive as possible, like Mdo did, and it seemed to do the trick. *Now then, we should stop joking around here; we’re about to enter guild headquarters. We’ve arrived, Adventurer’s Guild of the Labyrinthine Country of Pub. Your building is quite impressive. Allow us to have a look inside!*

“Is it just me, Kelvin-kun, or are you getting weirdly excited?”

“Oh, that may be because of this huge building. It’s so impressive, it almost felt like I was a newbie again. Sorry, I don’t really know what the feeling is myself.”

Given that these were the headquarters for the entire guild, the building was second only to Pub’s royal castle in size, it seemed. Once we entered, we found ourselves in a massive entry hall. This was true of the exterior as well, but it seemed the decorations had been chosen to match the general atmosphere of the city. Basically, everything was made of stone or otherwise manufactured to look like it belonged in a dungeon. On the other end was a long reception counter with several female receptionists seeing to the huge number of adventurers in line.

“Looks like the arrangement here is the same as in Parth or at the other guilds, though the scale is much bigger. But I guess there’s no attached bar?”

“No, there’s no attached bar. Since headquarters has to deal with the largest crowd of adventurers in the world, they’ve prioritized efficiently seeing to as many customers as possible. Don’t you get it? That’s why there are so many bars in town,” Ange explained.

“Ahh, I see. If there were a bar inside here, the adventurers would hang around inside the building forever. I get it.”

“Every guild location is busy basically all the time, but those can’t even be compared to how busy headquarters gets. Uh, imagine it being as busy as things were when we were holding your promotion ceremony, only every day. It’s like that. I’m so glad I wasn’t assigned here!”

*Doesn’t that just mean the working conditions here are super exploitative? I remember both you and Riold being really worn out back then.*

“Hey, that’s...”

“The Grim Reaper and Headhunting Cat...”

“The rumored Rank S’s...”

“He crushed Paul and his party just a little while ago...”

“I heard he cut them apart, grilled them, and ate them...”

As I was lamenting the headquarters’ working environment, the other adventurers’ gazes were slowly gathering on us as they noticed who we were. They were whispering quietly to their friends, but Ange and I had good hearing, so we could pick out what they were saying. It seemed that rumors traveled fast, as there were already people here who knew about the incident with Paul. However, as fast as rumors tended to travel, the credibility of the stories often faded to match. The information I heard coming from the adventurers’ mouths was wrong, and it made me even more interested.

*I’m not monstrous enough to cook and eat people, come on.*

“War Poet...”

“Philanderer...”

“Enemy of all men...”

*This can't stand. I know they're just rumors, but there's got to be a limit to how mistaken these rumors can be. Who was it?! Who spread these lies and falsehoods?!*

"Heh, so *that's* a Rank S? They just look like any other adventurer."

"There's not enough meat on his bones, I'd say! Rank S guys have got to be like Goldiana! Without at least that much muscle, there's just not enough impact!"

Among the adventurers in the crowd were those speaking loud enough that it was like they wanted us to hear. This fresh prey was so lively, I almost reflexively smiled, but since I had just kicked up a fuss with Paul, I decided to let it lie. It wasn't as if there was no hope for them to improve in the future, so I wanted my prey to age and become even tastier.

"Should we shut them up, Kelvin-kun? Drop a head or two as an opening act?" Ange asked.

"That wouldn't count as an opening act, Ange. It'd be way too serious; they'd just die."

"Ehe heh, oh yeah. You're right."

*You can't just laugh that off. I can say this as someone experienced with what you can do: I know you meant it as a joke, but it's scary that you seemed half serious.*

"So what do we do, given the situation this has become? Looks like the receptionists are pretty swamped. To be honest, I'm not a fan of waiting in line with all the attention we're getting. I don't know if I'll be able to control myself until it's our turn."

"So that's what you're worried about," Ange replied. "No need to worry, though; everything's fine! Your Ange-san here messaged ahead because she figured this would happen. Look, someone's coming up to us now."

"Oh, you're right."

I looked in the direction Ange was pointing, and there was in fact a woman who worked for the guild pitter-pattering towards us. She looked extremely

rushed and reminded me of Katua, who I'd met in Lumiest. Katua would also have tripped and fallen once for good measure, so I felt it would be great if this girl could try to learn from Katua's example and improve in that respect.

"E-Excuse me. Rank S adventurer Kelvin-sama and his companion Ange-sama, yes? The director is waiting for you above, so please allow me to lead you to her. This way."

"Well, how polite. Please and thank you."

She showed us past the reception desk and straight towards the director's room. This drew even more attention, but it was probably better than staying where we'd been.

"This building doesn't use stairs to travel between floors. Instead, we use these magic items."

As we followed the woman, we arrived at a bejeweled disk surrounded by glass walls. *So we go up with this instead of a set of stairs? That means...*

"Is that an elevator? Wow. This is the first time I've ever seen one."

"You're familiar with this magic item? I should have expected that of a Rank S adventurer like you, Kelvin-sama. Ange-sama doesn't seem too surprised either, though she's visited here before."

"Ha ha! Oh no, this is my first time seeing such a magic item. I just have theoretical knowledge of it."

It was a matter of course for me to know about elevators, while Ange had had to deal with Jildora during her time as an Apostle. He had made much crazier things in his lifetime, so it made sense that she wasn't surprised. Thinking about it logically, elevators could totally be considered over-technology.

"Are items like this common in Pub?"

"No, this was something the director brought in personally. I have no idea where it was discovered; it was just suddenly installed one day. I have no idea what kind of magic trick was used to do it so quickly. Oh, also, no accidents have happened with it so far, so there's no need to worry!"

"Ha ha ha! The director sure is *active*!"

Her words were all I needed to get an idea of how tough the lives of the people who worked here were. Surprise and anxiety were natural reactions to stairs being switched to an elevator in a single night.

I sent Ange a message through the Network. *Was this magic item made by Jildora?*

::Hmmm... It's possible, I think?::

*Okay, yeah. I'm worried, I thought.*



I was a little curious, so I asked a guild employee how people would move between floors if the elevator was ever out of order. Her answer was that no one incapable of escaping in such an emergency would be allowed onto the higher floors in the first place.

*Hrmm...should have expected that from the Adventurer's Guild headquarters. They're a meritocracy right down to the bone. Wait...doesn't that mean these girls are quite strong as well?*

*Booong!*

A soft, artificial sound resounded through the elevator.

"We have reached the highest floor. Please come this way."

It seemed the disk we were riding did not, in fact, malfunction, and brought us to the desired floor. With that, the possibility of needing to scale the building's walls disappeared.

As an aside, the building was made so that the higher floors were smaller, and it seemed the top floor contained only the director's room. After leaving the elevator and going down a short passageway, we had already reached the door.

"This may sound strange coming from someone like me who is merely part of the guild staff, Kelvin-sama, but allow me to give you a warning. The director is the hardest worker in the entire guild. At the same time, the way she acts is truly free and unrestricted, so I can't even begin to predict what she will do. I believe it would be best not to expect anything normal out of her..."

"Ah, no need to worry on that front. No Rank S adventurer could be described

as normal or typical, so I never expected anything like that in the first place.”

“Wow, that was your best smile today, Kelvin-kun!” Ange exclaimed happily.

*Right? I thought so too.*

“Is... Is that so? I suppose people of your rank really do somehow understand each other instinctively, then?”

*Hey there, staff girl. I know you muttered that so I couldn't hear, but given the distance, I totally could. And if you're going so far as to say that out loud, then the answer is a definite no. After all, every Rank S adventurer is weird in a different way. They've specialized all their weirdness stats in different categories, you could say. Oh, no, actually, I guess Prettia-chan and Grostina went in the exact same direction. My bad.*

“Well then, I will excuse myself now. Oh, just in case, I need to ask you—please only open this door after I've left the floor. For safety reasons.”

“Safety? Uh...what do you mean by that?”

“My safety, obviously! Didn't I just tell you that I have no idea what kind of greeting the director will give you?! Please, I'm begging you here!”

It took me a moment to agree because I was so shocked by her desperation. “Okay, I understand.”

*What's going to happen?* I shot Ange a look, but all she did was give me a strained smile. *Ah! That definitely means something weird's gonna happen! Even someone as oblivious as me can tell!*

“Okay then, excuse me! I really am going to leave now! Remember, don't open it until I'm gone, please!” The staff girl made sure to repeatedly drive that point home before she disappeared along with the elevator.

*What kind of trauma could she be holding on to?*

“Okay, it looks like she's gone. Let's go meet this famous Director-san.”

“Let's!” Ange chirped. “You do the honors, Kelvin-kun!”

“Um...is it just me or did you back up quite a bit just now?”

“Aha ha! It's just you! Gotta be!”



While I was standing directly in front of the door, Ange had backed up about ten steps. With her being so obvious about it, there was no way I wouldn't get an inkling of what was waiting for me.

"I mean, I'm fine with it, but..." I took a deep breath and called out, "Excuse me. It's Kelvin Celsius."

I was greeting the highest authority in the Adventurer's Guild. I couldn't afford to be rude first, so I knocked on the door and politely named myself.

"Oh, you're here! I've been waiting! Come in, come on! The door's open, so there's no need to wait."

The voice that came from within was a surprisingly casual female one. She did sound rather haughty at the end there, but rather than making a show of her authority, it sounded more like she was joking around. I found it strange, and Ange still refused to come forward, but I had no choice but to enter.

"Well then, all—"

I pressed my hand to the intricately decorated wooden door and pushed it inward. But when it was only halfway open, I detected an incredible explosion of hostility in front of me.

"Kii-YAAAHHH! THIS IS MY REVENGE FOR RIOOOLLLD!"

"What?!"

Something approached me from the front—or rather, was swung at me. Judging from the sound of it cutting through the air, it was something like a very large sword.

*I'll just block it using my Black Staff... No, that seems like a bad move!*

"Whoa! Well, isn't that just grand. You're exactly as the rumors describe you, Director-sama!"

It seemed like Ange was saying something while her Unique Skill was active, but I didn't have the leeway to focus on the contents of her speech. The attack had sliced through the half-open door and barreled into me, creating a huge noise that reverberated across the floor. The expensive-looking door was turned into expensive-looking sawdust, and while Ange was fine thanks to her

Unique Skill, the passageway behind me was in an awful state.

“Oh boy, as expected of our newest Rank S adventurer. You’re also someone who took down a goddess, Kelvin-kun. So not even my favorite weapon, nicked from Creator when I retired, can beat you. Too bad.”

“What the hell do you mean by ‘too bad!’ I almost died!”

I’d been blown all the way back into the wall on the other side of the hall, losing a third of my HP in the process. However, I immediately applied healing magic, so I was basically unharmed. Meanwhile, the director emerged from the cloud of dust and debris that had been kicked up by her attack.

“Well met, Grim Reaper Kelvin. I am the Adventurer’s Guild’s—uhhh, what number was it? Oh well, whatever! I am some generation’s guild director, ‘Freedom’ Shin Rainyheart. I am also Riold’s mentor, and you killed him, but oh well, what’s done is done! Nice to meet you!”

It took me a moment to find a response. “There’s a lot I want to say, but, well...okay...yeah, nice to meet you, I guess.”

“I might not have told you this yet, Kelvin-kun,” Ange decided to add, “but the director is the previous Fifth Seat, Seer. I actually only met her a little while ago...”

I had kind of figured that out already from what the woman had shouted when she ambushed me. She used Riold’s name and everything, after all.

*Also, I would like to note that Riold and I did not do battle.*

“Ah, I knew it. I hate being all stuffy and formal with my words. It ruins the feeling of being on the job...I think! Don’t you agree, Kelvin-kun? Ange-kun?”

“I’d prefer it if you didn’t look to me for agreement on that... More importantly, I have to say that the weird bullet you shot at me from your weapon is still letting out some unknown gas, Director. It’s purple and obviously bad. Are you honestly okay with that?”

Director Shin had given me a wonderful greeting upon our first encounter, and it seemed the tip of her greatsword(?) was fitted with some sort of projectile-launching mechanism. It was a wonderful weapon with a wonderful

trick to it that allowed it to slash and shoot at the same time. The projectile itself clearly had some poison mixed into it, so I put all my effort into avoiding it while only applying the minimum necessary defense to the slashing attack. I assumed the reason it somewhat resembled the gunsword Gerard had was because, as Director Shin had said, it was originally Jildora's creation.

"Ah, well, this greatsword's name *is* Hazard Cluster, after all. Apparently, that bullet-shaped dispersal unit spreads a powerful poison so wide it can even hit the weapon's user. So you could call it a failure, huh?! Keh heh heh!"

"Don't laugh about it! What the heck do you think you're doing, letting that go off right in the middle of the guild headquarters?!"

"Huh? I mean, you can use White Magic, can't you, Kelvin-kun? You're powerful enough to fix poison that's lethal enough to wipe out small villages easily, right? Come on, hurry up and get rid of it. I know you and I can withstand it for a while, and all Ange-kun has to do is use her Uncontainable skill, but it'll be a disaster if it reaches the lower floors. Hurry, hurry! The poison won't wait for you!"

I had no words in response.

"Let's leave the thinking for after this is fixed, Kelvin-kun," Ange suggested. "The director has always been like this and, erm...I heard that back when Analyzer was still an apprentice, he too faced a deadly amount of hardship."

*I see. If she's bad enough to cause Rio difficulty, it's no wonder a normal employee would be traumatized.*



I went around getting rid of the deadly poison that had been spread by the projectile, cleaning up the entire floor. I had to carefully and thoroughly disinfect everything, given this toxic environment where the owner was irresponsible enough to use such a thing without even knowing what kind of poison it was, and in the adventurer headquarters in the middle of town, no less.

"Okay, that should take care of all of it."

"Good work, as expected of the man I have such high hopes for. Okay then,

feel free to enter my room. It's a little messy, but...well, there should at least be room for one or two people to sit. Probably," Shin hedged.

Once again, I had no words.

"Kelvin-kun," Ange chimed in, "I know painfully well what emotions are causing you to make that face, but let's just go inside for now, okay? It'd just lead to a lot of unnecessary trouble if she were to use something weird again so shamelessly."

"Oh...yeah..."

Ange was weirdly okay with what Director Shin had done. *No, actually I think in this case she's just given up? That makes me wonder what kind of trouble she got involved in when she came before.*

Meanwhile, I was starting to suspect that the director would be the one I was least good at dealing with out of all the Rank S adventurers I'd met so far. Possibly even more so than Riold.

We entered the room to find that it was even messier than expected. It was filled with tools that I couldn't even imagine uses for, stone statues of a...*unique* aesthetic sense, the weapon she said she had nicked from Jildora, clothes strewn all over the place, and so on and so forth. This sounds rude, but to be honest, the room was one step removed from being a pigsty. It was twice as bad as Sera's room.

"This sofa's clear. Both of you should fit if you squeeze in a little," the director said.

"I guess we should sit."

"Yeah..." Ange replied.

The fit was really tight, but we did manage to sit on the unoccupied portion of the half-buried sofa she'd pointed out to us. Director Shin sat across from us on top of a half-buried desk.

Now was the first time I was able to get a good look at her, and I noticed she wore an eye patch over her right eye. *Does she have an eye skill?* I wondered. The other eye was purple, and her wavy hair was also purple. She'd Evolved, so

her looks didn't match her age, but she seemed to be in her early thirties.



“Oh man, sorry,” started Director Shin. “It’s a little dirty around here. I have a bit of a tendency to collect unusual and novel curiosities. Well, they’re all worth a lot, so I guess there’s nothing to be done about this mess. Yeah, nothing at all!”

“I’ll ignore how messy the room is. And...well, I get that you used to be an Apostle and Riold’s mentor. But there’s something I want to correct you on now: I didn’t kill Riold. It’s true that I wanted to fight him and claim victory if possible, but I was not part of the group who actually saw his end.”

“Yeah, I know. It was the former Apostles Bell Baal and Estoria Kranweltz, the Beast King Leonhart Gaun, and Ange-kun, who’s sitting right there, who finished him off, right? Ange told me about it when she dropped by before. So I totally know.”

Director Shin said that nonchalantly, and finally I was close to being at my wit’s end.

“So, you knew...then why did you attack me? It also seemed Ange knew you would...”

“Aha ha, so you noticed?” Ange chuckled.

“It was super obvious, which is rare for you, Ange. It was like you were telling me that something was going to happen.”

“I have no idea what you could be talking about? Your Ange here has no idea...” she said, averting her eyes while fidgeting with the ears on her hood.

*Yes, you do, you little cutie.*

“Hee hee! Don’t blame her,” said Director Shin. “I asked her to keep it a secret. I told her that this would be the most efficient way to get along with you, since you like fighting so much, so I needed her to keep quiet about the ambush. Doing things this way gave you a better sense of tension and got you to focus on me more, didn’t it, Kelvin-kun? Oh, the Riold thing was just an excuse, so there’s no need to mind what I said. Yelling that set the stage, and I figured it would instantly make you misunderstand what was going on. Riold went down his own path, and you’re going down yours. That’s all there is to it.”

“That hostility and desire to kill was a little too serious for what you claim to just be an excuse, though.”

“I mean, that’s what you like, right? We’re two people who fought each other. So we’re already friends, right? Best friends!” she exclaimed.

*Personally, I welcome, well...welcomes like that. But there’s something telling me I shouldn’t casually become friends with her this way. Is it just my imagination?*

“Don’t make that face. You were making such a nice one back when we were greeting each other...”

“What kind of expression was I making back then, Ange?”

“Your best smile of the day!” Ange exclaimed happily.

“Seriously?”

“Super seriously.”

*I mean...the method she used to welcome me aside, there was no way I wouldn’t take advantage of the chance I was given.*

“Other than that...I guess one of the reasons I did that was because I wanted to check your temperament in person,” Director Shin mused out loud.

“My temperament? How would that exchange tell you anything?”

“Quite a lot, actually. Also, I’m the one who wrote your entry in the directory, Kelvin-kun. I’m the one saying this, so there’s no doubt!”

I made a strangled noise of surprise. “Y-You?! *You’re* the one who wrote all those terrible trouble-causing things and gave me those awful titles?!”

“And guess what, I also drew up the illustration! It was cute, wasn’t it?”

“You’re right that the illustration was popular with the girls, but...the titles are more important! Way more important! Philanderer?! War Poet?! I can’t even tell you how much trouble I met because of those aw—”

“But they’re not lies, are they?”

“Wha— No, I...I mean...”



“You found out it was all true after taking into account your reputation before that and info from your friends, right?”

I couldn't respond.

“You're at a bit of a disadvantage, Kelvin-kun,” Ange noted. “You can feel free to cry in my arms later, so just let this go, okay?”

*Grrrkkkhhh! I wanna argue! But I can't! I'm totally gonna cry later!*

“Given what Ange-kun just said, I guess we should get back to the topic at hand. Er...I believe I was talking about Kelvin-kun's temperament?” Director Shin tried to think back.

“Yeah. What did you figure out from that ambush?”

“Okay, let me take some time to explain. Though you had some prior warning, you reacted calmly to my ambush. You have an unparalleled battle sense and an unparalleled love of fighting to go with it. I could see that clearly from your expression. Though you complain a lot, the fact that you responded to my unreasonable actions shows how understanding and generous you are. You did what you did out of concern for the normal citizens of Pub, didn't you? The fact that you prioritize common sense over your own pride is worth a lot of points as a Rank S adventurer!”

“It's rude to point at people... Anyway, I'm not as great a person as you make me out to be. Anyone would do what they could in that situation, right?”

“There are a lot of adventurers who can't, which is why I experience so much hardship as the one in charge of everything. That's especially true for the Rank A adventurers here in Pub. Seriously, they're all so pointlessly selfish and prideful! It causes the staff no end of trouble every day. Don't you think us pitiful, Kelvin-kun?”

“I can tell you that I *do* think you're the one causing the staff the most distress and hardship, Director Shin.”

“Oh, that's right. Sorry to change the subject so suddenly, but...”

I wasn't really in a position to point fingers, but the Director just changed the subject as soon as things weren't going her way! *Come on, at least try to think*

*of how your subordinates feel!*

“What do you think about trying your hand at raising a Rank A adventurer? I’ve always been looking for someone like you, who is strong, loves battle, is understanding, generous, and has a conscience!”

“What?”



*So, basically Director Shin wants me to teach promising future talent? But that came out of nowhere. There are loads of good adventurers around here; why does she specifically need me?*

“So? How about it?!” the person in question asked.

“Don’t get so close!”

In an attempt to get some distance after she put her face right up to mine, I put my hand on the director’s cheek and pushed her away. *Dammit, she’s pretty strong, huh?!*

“Before you get all up in my face, first tell me, what brought this on?! You’ve got some sort of hidden motive, don’t you? Just like your greeting earlier!”

“Aha ha, so you can tell?”

“You’re not allowed to imitate Ange either!”

“Baww, you’re so closed-minded. I may need to review your evaluation, Kelvin-kun...” The director sounded dissatisfied as she returned to her spot on her desk. Even if there was an actual need to do that review, the way she said it was somehow infuriating. “Oh well, I knew you’d react this way, so I guess I should get to the explanations. Didn’t someone pick a fight with you right when you arrived in Pub, Kelvin-kun?”

*A fight? If you’re just talking about stares and verbal jabs, then a certain someone in this very office did so, yes. But if she’s talking about an incident that actually came to blows, it would have to be that first one.*

“Yeah. Some Rank A adventurer named Paul. I bet you put him up to it, didn’t you? You’re being way too obvious about it.”

“Well guessed. I was indeed the mastermind. From the looks of it, you cleaned them up pretty easily, but I suppose I’ll ask you anyway: Paul and his crew are the most skilled Rank A adventurers in Pub by a wide margin. What did you think of their strength after fighting them?”

I considered my answer for a moment. “Paul’s got the leadership skills to head a pretty large party, and I like how they’re all powerful enough to be considered Rank A individually. They’ve got guts and have a nice sense of ambition, so I think they have a lot of room to grow. I think it’s not just Paul, but the entire party that can be expected to do a lot in the future.”

“Ooh, hearing that from a Rank S adventurer makes me feel proud! But I suppose you would give them somewhat middling marks? Do you think they’ll be able to become Rank S adventurers anytime soon?”

“Soon? Do you mean in a few days or months? Then no, that’d be impossible.”

It was true that I expected a lot from Paul. However, that expectation was for the future, not anything immediate. I could confidently say that I didn’t expect such things from any of the other Rank A adventurers either.

“Yes, that’s exactly right! With Paul-kun at the forefront, the average strength of Pub’s adventurers is high, but not a single one of them has reached Rank S! They certainly are excellent adventurers, but is that all they are? This is an awful problem! Furthermore, they’re all so *proud*!”

“Enough about the pride part already. Anyway, what’s the issue? People get promoted to Rank S only once a year, maybe, right? Grostina became one after me, so it’s actually been happening a lot. You’re a Rank S adventurer in Pub too, Director Shin, so it doesn’t sound like there’s a problem to me.”

She didn’t reply right away, but once she resolved herself, she muttered in such a way that only the tail end of her sentence was audible. “...a match...”

“What?”

“Every year, a match is held between the Academic City of Lumiest and the Adventurer’s Guild. Did you know that?”

*Nope. This is the first I’m hearing of it.* I shot Ange a look asking her if it was

true.

“I...think it was on the documents I got from Shutola-chan?” Ange replied.

“Was it? Hmm...I skimmed through those too, but...”

“Lumiest has a lot of yearly events, so it’s understandable that you’d miss some. I only knew about it because I used to be a guild employee, after all. Erm...in about half a year, the match is going to be held in Lumiest. Five representatives from the academy will face off against five adventurers from the guild in a total of five separate mock battles. The objective of these matches is to invite veteran adventurers from the outside and have them build friendships with the most excellent students through these mock battles. I...believe that’s the gist?” Ange explained.

“That is exactly right,” Director Shin confirmed. “But really, the goal is to crush the pride of all those sheltered little girls and boys. Our adventurers may be proud, but the students in that place are a cut above in that regard. Every year, we send in some random Rank A adventurers to teach the students how wide the world is over the course of those mock battles. That being said, sometimes there are royalty among them, so we limit candidates only to those with excellent manners.”

*Lumiest...excellent students...mock battles... Ah, I see where she’s going with this. I get the feeling I’m pretty involved already.*

“I see, that’s cool. So it’s like an event to help them learn about society, right? So?”

“Ha ha ha!” Director Shin laughed. “I know you already get where this is going, but it’s cute how you’re playing the fool. Is this your way of getting revenge for earlier? Well, it’s true that I was the one who said I’d explain things in order, so I guess I’ll just keep going. To be honest, Lumiest’s strength this year is unusual, so we can’t use our standard methods. In any normal year, a Rank A adventurer would have it extra easy, but now it’s looking like we won’t stand a chance. You know the cause of this, don’t you, Kelvin-kun?”

“Oh man, well...yeah. In regard to a particular subset of the students, we may or may not be involved...”

There was my little sister, Rion, who could rival a Rank S adventurer; Bell, who sported overwhelming combat strength and smarts; and my beloved daughter, DarkMel, who, while somewhat less excellent than the other two, could still sweep the floor with a Rank A adventurer. Regardless of who else ended up on the team, if the team was selected in terms of strength, there was no doubt Lumiest would score at least three victories. I could confidently say that the Rank A adventurers had no shot.

“The girls you’re thinking about are threats, but there are also several more dangerous new students besides them, including those who could be selected as Rank S adventurers themselves.”

I reacted with obvious surprise. “I... I see... Dangerous newbies, huh? Hmm...hrmmm...that sounds tough. Then why not just send in some adventurers who are strong enough for the job? Like a Rank S adventurer. If you want, I could participate—”

“There’s no need to make such half-hearted offers. It’s already established that you’re interested in this event, Kelvin-kun. I already set aside one of the slots for you.”

I paused for a moment, annoyed. “You’ve predicted that far?”

“I mean, yeah. But here is where the problem starts. Having you in the mix doesn’t fix things, Kelvin-kun, because we have no one to fill the other slots. Even if I, as the Director, participate personally, we’ll still have three slots empty.”

“What about other Rank S adventurers? Like Sylvia or Leonhart?”

“Unfortunately, no one else is interested. And even if Leonhart, to use your example, was interested, he couldn’t leave Gaun anyway. Meanwhile, Sylvia is a guest of Toraj. It wouldn’t be realistic to call her over to the Western Continent. It seems Goldiana is busy too. If I could call someone, it would have to be someone like Grostina, who’s new, or Bakke, the only adventurer who’s free all year. Of course, Art is out of the question, being affiliated with Lumiest. If we handle this badly, there is a chance he would have to act personally.”

*Hm? Does that mean that, depending on the opponent, there’s a chance I could fight Art?*

“Kelvin-kun! Drool! You’re drooling! Here, take this handkerchief.” Ange handed me one.

“Oh, thanks.”

“I should have known you’d get excited after hearing that, but in the end, I max out at four Rank S adventurers no matter how hard I try. That means one slot would be left empty. We have a reputation to uphold as the Adventurer’s Guild, so we can’t allow ourselves to lose against mere students. But that doesn’t mean we can bring just anyone in. We can’t borrow help from outsiders for this,” Director Shin explained.

“I see. So whoever we use has to be affiliated with the guild, plus a seasoned, skilled adventurer.”

Since that was the case, taking Ange would be tough, as she was a *former* guild employee. On the surface, this was supposed to be an event to build relationships with adventurers, so bringing along a former employee would seem weird.

“I considered Efil from your party, since she has adventurer qualifications, but she’s not in a state to participate, is she?”

“No, she isn’t. I will reject that idea with all my might. Ah...wait. Doesn’t that leave us back at square one? The one where you want me to raise a promising Rank A adventurer so that whoever it is can be strong enough for this?”

Director Shin gave an exaggerated nod with a full-faced smile.



Director Shin was steadily going through the steps to make this happen. She really was impatient—I hadn’t even agreed to it yet. She claimed to have been spending the past few days sorting through everyone to find only those with the potential to hold their own in the upcoming match. To be fair, I *was* interested in the top Rank A adventurers and wanted to try meeting them at least once. So, on condition that I could train them in any way I saw fit, I decided to agree to Director Shin’s proposal. She said that she would contact me once the list of candidates was complete, and we ended our meeting there.

Ange and I left headquarters unscathed, though we were once again bathed

in odd looks.

“...and that’s what happened. There’s a chance I might be fighting you, Rion. If that’s the case, let’s both fight our hardest.”

The next day, I found myself in a dungeon, one that had only recently been discovered to the west of Pub. In other words, it was unexplored. Several other adventurer parties had been dispatched before us, but apparently they’d all been beaten by some monster in the vicinity of the entrance. Thus, the Adventurer’s Guild had given it a provisional ranking of high A. I’d been sent in to investigate the details and hammer out that ranking.

*That reminds me, Director Shin told us as we left to rack up some moderate achievements here in Pub, didn’t she? She might have given us some extra opportunities to do that. Oh well, if she’s expecting a lot from us, I guess it’s only polite to produce some results.*

It would’ve been fine to bring all my friends along, but if there were too many of us, we could trigger the same extermination incident as back in the Sangria Forest. So I came with a small but elite force this time. I did this because the request from the guild was only for an investigation, not the elimination of the monsters. Also, if I felt like it was a good dungeon after checking it out, I could use it as a training ground to build up the chosen Rank A adventurers.

My present party consisted of Rion, who would be attending Lumiest, and Alex, who would go along with her as her pet. It seemed like we wouldn’t have much of a chance to explore a dungeon together during that time, so after discussing it with the others, I decided to give these two priority and take them with me. DarkMel wanted to come too, but she wasn’t strong enough, so I had to harden my heart and say no.

*Your papa won’t allow you to be so reckless, okay?*

“I’m on board with going all out but...Kel-nii, are you planning on using Experience Sharing? If you want to make them as strong as Rank S adventurers in a short time, you’ll have to do some absurd things otherwise.”

*“Woof! (You’d have to push them straight off a cliff!)”*

“Doing something like that *would* be fastest. But what Director Shin asked me to do is raise talents worthy of Rank S. They’ll need to go through their fair share of carnage and growth or they’ll end up all flash and no substance. Alex is right, I’ll have to train them like I’m throwing them off a cliff, and if there are any with strong enough wills to keep up even after that, I think that’s who I’ll choose. There’s no need to worry; we have a few months to do it. While you’re studying in Lumiest, Rion, I’ll be having my own fun.”

*You wanna become a Rank S adventurer? Okay, then you’ll have to go to even more extremes!*

“Jeez, Kel-nii... Keep it in moderation, ‘kay?” Whenever Rion spoke, her words were always filled with compassion.

*But, Rion, my little sister...raising a Rank A adventurer is a measure for the match against Lumiest, someone who might be fighting you. For their sake, with that possibility, I plan to train them with all my might. After all, you haven’t even got the slightest bit of mercy when it comes to fighting other people. I’d be the happiest person ever if I were to be the one to fight you, and I hope you don’t have to fight the person I train. In the worst case, I might be dealt a wound to the heart that will never heal. It would traumatize me.*

“Now then, we’re nearly there. That’s the entrance to the newly discovered dungeon.”

“Wow, it’s totally overgrown!”

*“Bow wow! (The vegetation on the way here was amazing too!)”*

We’d had to cross a hot jungle to get where we were. The entire place was thick with vegetation, so it was incredibly hard to walk. The place was crawling with huge carnivorous plants and small bug-type monsters with deadly venom, among other things. I figured it was a pretty dangerous journey for most, but at the moment, I would have to say the dungeon was more of a Rank B, and it seemed the same as Sangria Forest. If this was all it was, it should have been plenty easy enough for Pub’s Rank A adventurers to explore. To be honest, I was feeling quite dissatisfied.

*No, the real unexplored dungeon is yet to come. It’s too early to give up hope!*



At any rate, this dungeon that I had placed my hopes on had stone statues like those dotting Pub's townscape outside it, and the dungeon itself was made of stone as well. The general aesthetic was that of an ancient ruin. The stone statues were of living things, most often people's heads. Each one was overrun with vines and other plant life, giving the impression that the place had been here for many years.

"Has this dungeon been here a long time?" Rion asked.

"Probably, unless this is the work of some god's whim. It's not like anyone would go out of their way to come to the middle of a jungle like this—wait, this presence... Did someone get here before us?"

*"Growl. (It smells like human.)"*

"Yeah, I can feel it from inside the dungeon. Other adventurers? Or did someone wander in by mistake?" Rion wondered.

"It'd be impossible to get this far by mistake. Still, if it's an adventurer, that would be just as troubling..."

After the discovery of this unexplored dungeon and the further failure of several parties to get through it, the dungeon we were looking at had been designated a dangerous area by the guild, thus making it forbidden. This, of course, applied to Pub's many Rank A adventurers as well, so at the moment, we were the only ones with permission to go inside, as we'd been entrusted by Director Shin to investigate it.

If this trespasser happened to be a thief who was after the treasures that lay inside, it would be fine to simply catch them, but if it turned out to be an adventurer who had ignored a guild mandate, that would complicate things. When it came to skilled veterans who would be capable of getting this far, they would have to be fairly high-ranking in Pub. I was doubtful that they'd even listen to my warnings.

"Their pride is so uselessly high, and if yesterday was anything to go by, they don't really welcome me either. In the worst case, I might have to use force..."

"What's wrong, Kel-nii? You look really happy."

"Hm? Not troubled?"

*“Whiiine. (You’re grinning.)”*

*“Gnnnrrr...”*

*Hmm...my lips may be too loose these days. At the very least I need to keep it together in front of these other “guests”!*

“The location of the presence is... We’d have to go down one set of stairs. I see they’ve only just entered. Rion, Alex, we can put the investigation on the back burner. First, we need to find this trespasser. Just in case, you should prepare for a fight.”

“Roger!”

*“Woof! (Roger!)”*

“Okay. Let’s go!”

We applied speed-buffing magic on the spot. Once that was done, we kicked off the ground and rushed into the dungeon. At this point, we would ignore all monsters other than the ones directly in our way. We needed to reach the presence we were feeling as fast as possible, using the shortest route possible.

It took around three seconds. We reached a passageway with a branch, one side of which ended in a small room. In that room was, instead of a monster, a group of humans.

*One, two, three... Hm, three people, as expected. One man and two women.*

“Yo, playboy. What’re you doin’ here?” I asked.



My name is Sinjeel, a noble and beautiful Rank A adventurer who holds the title of one of Pub’s three greatest adventurers. Although I am male, my face is several levels more beautiful than the average woman, and I end up charming all sorts of living things. This face has caused a great number of misunderstandings, but I am not, in fact, a member of the nobility or royalty. In fact, I came from the poorest quarter of my hometown, a place that could be categorized as “the slums.” I was abandoned by my parents when I was young and have lived my life as a slave. My history is sad and full of misfortune for such a beautiful man.

Still, I was not the type of beauty to end things as a slave, to leave my story a tragedy. I understood my own worth, and I was a capable one who wouldn't let an opportunity escape me. So when I had the chance, I charmed the madam of my establishment and convinced her to loan me enough money to buy my freedom, releasing me from the life of a slave. I had to throw away my pride and do a lot of *mumble mumble*, but it was all necessary in order to repay my debts. I simply sealed those deeds away in order to keep my sense of self. Yes, the things a beautiful man has to do sometimes require that capable, beautiful man to erase some memories. All I did was stay true to my word.

Having repaid my debts, and refusing to look back upon my sad past, I threw away my home and struck out for new lands. So I see no reason to speak the name of my homeland. Don't raise up any unnecessary matters of debt and trauma—*ahem, ahem!* To not trouble the madam, I set off only with what was on my back. I did so in a great hurry too. The sight of my long hair waving in the wind was sinfully beautiful, of course.

Having come to a new country, with my whole future shining ahead of me, the first thing I did was spend a day at an inn. Wild but elegant; that was my style. However, my wild self had no end of worries, such as how to make a living. I pondered these things while looking up at a sky full of stars. In the end, I was overflowing with talent, *too* much talent. I was sure that I would succeed at anything I tried, and that meant there were a lot of paths I could go down.

One night passed after the other with me unable to sleep, until I finally arrived at the answer of becoming an adventurer. The freedom was a simple and obvious benefit. I came to the conclusion that living such a free and whimsical life, like the wind, was what suited me best. It certainly wasn't because I'd run out of money to maintain my lifestyle and needed more right away. I mean, look, given how wild I was, I was sure to be great at surviving in the wilderness!

Having started down the bright path of adventuring, my life changed month by month. I said my goodbyes to the newbie life of finding lost cats and picking wild herbs within three days, and reached Rank D after a week, finally becoming recognized as a full-fledged adventurer. With that, I no longer had to do anything like camping outside, as a room at a dirt cheap inn was waiting for me.

Do not underestimate dirt cheap, though. It had a roof, walls, and meals. That was enough to move me greatly. I suppose that's just proof of my sensitive heart. Heh, though it's a pretty plebeian lifestyle, living it taught me a lot. My talents allowed me to surpass such stages easily, though, and I quickly flew up to the next step.

Rising through the adventurer ranks draws attention, whether one likes it or not. This was especially true in my case, as my beauty placed a vice grip on all the female adventurers' hearts. What a sinful man I am... Still, I couldn't afford to lament the fact that I made one of them fall in love. I had a duty to take responsibility. So I extended an invitation to my party to go along with her confession.

"Thank you for joining my party, Sinjeel-san. My husband, who was until just recently in your place, hurt his hip, so I was looking for a partner. I didn't think it would be so easy to find someone willing to team up with such an old lady, so you're really helping me out. My husband wasn't a fan of the idea of me teaming up with a young person, but it seems like you totally get along with him."

"Heh! There is no one I can't come to an understanding with over drinks. That goes for men or women; it's all the same as long as you face the person with sincerity. Also, as the party leader, I have a duty to protect the ladies. That means putting your family at ease is also one of my jobs."

"Oh my! Treating me like a lady... You're such a charmer! Hee hee hee!"

My first party member was a lady by the name of Mrs. Respect, who had lots of experience adventuring. My word, I'm so sinful, stealing the heart of someone else's wife like that. Her husband, who had retired from adventuring, became my drinking buddy, and he did his best to prepare in case he had to back us up. However, being a capable beauty meant not allowing even the slightest mistake. With my relationship to this married couple as my bond, I needed to do my best not to put any others under my spell.

On a side note, the word "madam" is like poison to me, so as a sign of trust and for the sake of my own feelings, I called them "ladies" no matter their age.

I turned to look at the other lady next to me, who was staring silently. "Heh.

You're as shy as ever today, Lady Ice. Well, that's understandable. After all, I am standing in front of you as a member of the same party! I'm sure you are without words because you are in a constant cycle of joy and nervousness!"

"She's shaking her head side to side really hard," Lady Respect observed.

"She's so desperate to hide how embarrassed she is, but that's also adorable! Well, as the leader of this party, I see through it all, of course." I paused for a moment to look at our silent companion. "Wow, that's an impressive stare."

The woman of few words—or rather, of no words at all—was Lady Ice. I had accidentally passed by her when she was alone in a corner of the guild and ended up making her fall for me. Even though it had been some time since she joined the party, she still refused to speak in my presence. She was as cool as her name implied.

Still, showing attentiveness and picking up on what she was feeling was one of my duties as the party leader, and as the beautiful man who had made her fall for me, I had a lot of obligations and didn't intend to cut any corners. I always listened for the voice of her heart. That's just how I was.

And so, having completed my fated encounters with my friends, I spent the next few years steadily accumulating achievements until I rose up to Rank A here in Pub. I had yet to cross that dangerous bridge with Lady Respect, and had yet to hear Lady Ice's voice, but it wouldn't be going too far to say that I was blessed with everything, from talent to looks to even my fate.

Still, the road I had taken to get to this point was terribly dangerous, even for someone like me. Even now, a year after being promoted to Rank A, the path to Rank S had yet to show itself. In fact, I had been surpassed by some newbies named Sylvia and Kelvin, who had climbed the ranks with unbelievable speed. Then, there was Grostina Brujowana; he'd been promoted the other day, making it three people who had now passed me by.

I wasn't actually bothered by it. No, I wasn't feeling impatient at all. I just wanted to be Rank S with my party members. I refused to accept that this was our ceiling. This isn't something to say in the company of women, but Lady Respect was of a rather appreciable age. Normally, she would have retired already and enjoyed what was left of her life with her husband. My beauty had

caused her to stay and get reckless with her health, and that weighed heavy on my heart. I wanted to show her the vista from Rank S before she pushed herself too far.

I had just been pondering all that when, with perfect timing, I'd heard about a new dungeon that was discovered west of Pub. Not only that, but from the rumors, it was one difficult enough to be worthy of us Rank A adventurers. If I could make a good appeal to Director Shin using all of my beauty, actions, bonds, and whatever else, I might be able to rocket down the path to becoming a Rank S adventurer. That's right, I was not the type of beauty to let opportunities go to waste. If I spotted an angelic smile, I would of course approach the owner of it straightaway to catch her! That is who I am!

"Yo, playboy. What're you doin' here?"

With that mindset, we had started exploring the dungeon. But then, a man with a discerning eye appeared before us. Heh, stop it. You don't need to state the obvious like that. I am, after all, Sinjeel, the self-proclaimed most beautiful adventurer in the world.

So who was this man who had the excellent sense to call me a playboy with a single glance? We had just encountered a dead end in the dungeon, and by the time we turned around, they had appeared out of nowhere.

There was a young man in black robes, a cute lady, and a cute dog. Or...was that a wolf? At any rate, there they were. Still, it was strange... We should have been alone the whole time. As the thoughtful and considerate leader of this party, I was paying attention to not only my members but our surroundings as well. Like always, I was making magnificent turns to look every which way, then look lovingly at myself, look in admiration at my comrades, and, in general, look out for our well-being. Even so, I'd had no idea that these three were here until the black-robed one called out to me.

*Hmm...this is strange. I am one of Pub's three greatest adventurers, the most noble and beautiful of them. If he were fearsome enough to slip past my net of awareness, he would have to be overwhelmingly skilled. Just what is he?* I could see whooshing wind and crackling lightning under their feet, which was somewhat intimidating. Oh, that's right; first, I should get the ladies behind m—

“Oh? Isn’t that Kelvin the Grim Reaper? The one next to him must be his little sister, Rion-san the Black Comet. Which means that must be Alex-chan, the Heat Haze.”

“You know them, Lady Respect?”

“What do you mean? You were with us when we saw Kelvin-san yesterday at the guild, Sinjeel-san.”

“What?”

Lady Ice nodded.

“Even Lady Ice is nodding furiously?!” I exclaimed. “B-But, there’s no way I would forget meeting a young man with such excellent aesthetic sense!”

Once again, I turned to stare at the black-robed young man. Wait a second, I think I actually do remember seeing him at headquarters... Aaahhh!

“Wait...Kelvin Celsius, the Rank S adventurer?!”

“So you’ve remembered. You were pretty fast this time, for it being a man,” Lady Respect commented. Lady Ice nodded her agreement.

While I was confident that I could take the memory of any woman I met even once to my grave, it seemed I was shockingly forgetful about men. The fact that I’d quickly remembered this one could truly be called a miracle. But...but...what humiliation! How could I have ever thought the man I despised most in the world had good taste?!

“You know me? Good, that’ll speed things up. Wait, ah...I think I remember you too... You were the guy back at headquarters.”

“Yes, we do indeed know each other. If you remember me, you should also remember what I said to you back there. I do not recognize you as a Rank S adventurer. No matter what the rest of the world says, that is the one thing that will never happen.”

“Huh? Uh...where’s that coming from? I mean, I do remember you didn’t really like me for some reason, but...I don’t think you have any cause to go that far.”

“Even if you disagree, I do.”

“What, then? What did I do to you?”

It seemed Kelvin didn't realize how big a sin he'd committed. Heh, of course he didn't. Every one of his ilk I'd met so far were fools with no self-awareness. All right then, I'll teach you why I despise you. I'll teach you as I rain down a tirade of abuse as well!

“No matter how powerful you are, adventurers that own slaves are the lowest of the low. No...they're even lower! I will never trust anyone who would put a collar on someone else and force them into submission and slavery! It seems you didn't bring her with you this time, but I know I saw her at the guild! You were dragging around a girl who clearly didn't want to be there, as if you were showing her off to the other adventurers!”

I pointed my finger at Kelvin so hard, I could almost hear it cutting through the air. Having been a slave myself, I could understand that girl's feelings at least twice more keenly than others.

Kelvin was speechless, and he had a truly comedic and foolish look on his face. I'm sure he'd been cowed by my powerful style of accusation. I knew from research that out of all the Rank S adventurers, only he owned slaves. That went to show how wicked and licentious he was. It was clear as day! As a proud adventurer and future Rank S myself, I couldn't sit by and allow someone in my trade to continue such evil acts. *After all, I am a beautiful man who walks the right path!*

“Umm...he's talking about either Efil-nee or Ange-nee, right?” asked the girl.

“Oh, this is nostalgic. Reminds me of back when we first met Touya and the others. Seriously nostalgic,” Kelvin murmured.

“Jeez, Kel-nii. Now isn't the time for a trip down memory lane!”

“Grrroowwwlll...”

Hm? Hmmm? Something's...off. Even though I'd just slapped him with a declaration that was basically a challenge to a duel, for some reason, Kelvin and his lady friend still seemed happy and peaceful. Only their pet wolf was growling at me, but...what is this difference in attitudes?

“Ah, erm...Alex is saying that you shouldn't point your finger at people. It's



rude.”

“Woof!”

“Ah, excuse me for that. My apologies,” I replied. I see, so that’s why the wolf was mad. I still despised him, but I was in the wrong this time, so I quickly corrected myself. That’s just how I, Sinjeel—no wait! That’s not the point!

“Sinjeel-san!”

“Hm? What is it, Lady Respect? I am a little busy at the moment, but I always have time to listen to you.”

“It’s just...you’re mistaken. It’s true that Kelvin-san has slave girls with him, but he hasn’t forced them into anything. I mean, well, I’m sure part of it might have been forceful, but they all consented to it, I’m sure.”

Lady Ice blushed.

“Wha?!” I cried.

After that, Lady Respect taught me about the Celsius family, reading from a copy of the Adventurer’s Directory she kept around for some reason. According to her, Kelvin’s slaves had enslaved themselves to him of their own free will. In fact, Kelvin would have preferred them to be free. In other words, she was saying that since they were mutually in love so deeply that their relative social standings didn’t matter, I shouldn’t stick my nose into it. She also added, though, that the goodness of my heart was a great thing, and that I should continue to hold that passion within me for other wrongdoers. In essence, I had misconstrued things all on my own.

“Buh...but, Lady Respect...how do you know so much about it when it isn’t noted in the Adventurer’s Directory?”

“Hee hee! Of course, at my age, it’s only natural to be interested in the love lives of others! I suppose I should call it the Wellside Wives’ Network?”

“I...see?”

Throughout our exchange, this Kelvin—or rather, Kelvin-san—and his friends started to unpack their multitiered boxed lunch.

“Wow, this looks so good!” the girl cried.

“Oh, Efil... I keep telling her not to try so hard, but there she goes again...”  
Kelvin muttered.

A...boxed lunch?! Wait, that’s not it. Now’s not the time to be surprised. I need to apologize first!

“I must apologize, Kelvin-san! I, the proud adventuring beauty Sinjeel, have made an outrageous error! Please accept an apology from my sinful self—”

“Hey, you there, playboy and his friends. I don’t really care either way, but would you all like to join us? We can start over from there.”

For some reason, they were inviting us to a meal.



We put down some seats in this dead-end dungeon room to hold a picnic with a boxed lunch that was somewhat too fancy for a place like this. I poked at Efil’s specially made lunch with my chopsticks. *Yeah, super delicious, as always.* I was sure it was so delicious that no other boxed lunch in the world could match it.

“...m...gah?!”

“Oh my...oh my!”

*Om nom...*

Across from me, as I was feeling rather satisfied, were a group of older adventurers who had trespassed into this currently forbidden dungeon, completely absorbed in the meal as they scooped up food with borrowed forks in one hand. After every bite, the playboy changed his expression, while the somewhat older lady let out some variation of “My!” and the small girl, who looked like a mage and was wearing a pointy hat, shoveled food into her mouth silently. How should I put it... This meal scene was lively in a variety of ways.

The playboy gasped. “Wh-Why am I enjoying such hospitality?! No matter how good-looking I am, there are times when I must employ logic! I am not in a position to indulge in such a feast!”

Or rather than lively, I suppose it was more like *noisy*.

“Don’t worry about it. I was the one who invited you.”

“Buh... But...”

“More importantly, can we get to the introductions already? This is kind of rude, but I don’t really know you people.”

“Oh, my apologies. I am the Rank A adventurer Sinjeel. I am one of Pub’s three greatest adventurers, and if I were to claim the title of ‘too-beautiful adventurer,’ well, you understand, right?”

“Nope. Not at all.”

The playboy tilted his head, letting out a puzzled noise.

Then, the older lady spoke up. “I am Respect. I may not be able to hide my growing weakness due to old age, but I have been able to leverage my experience to stay in the field.”

*Om nom...*

The last girl did not deign to answer, so the older lady spoke up for her. “This child is Ice-chan. As you can see, she is a cute mage.”

“So, Respect-san and Ice-chan. Nice to meet you.”

The playboy made a strangled noise. “Wh-Why do you use such *respectful* language when talking to Lady Respect?!”

For some reason, Sinjeel was aghast. The expression he was making was incredibly...*loud*.

“I mean, isn’t using such language for someone above you normal? Respect-san is using it as well.”

“O-Oh, so that’s it. I see. That makes sense. By the way, I am currently twenty years old. How old are you, Kelvin-san?”

“Twenty-three.”

“Okay, then, that settles it! My divine self has recovered!”

*What is this sense of déjà vu I’m feeling? Oh, I get it. The narcissism and loudness all resemble someone I just met recently: Principal Art.*

Their races were different, but they were so similar that I almost wondered if they were related.

“Also, thank you for this heavenly, scrumptious meal! In our party, Lady Respect sometimes cooks meals for us, but the deliciousness of this is incomparable! To be blunt, it was amazing!”

“That’s good to hear.”

“Oh no,” Respect countered, “my skills are far too meager to even be spoken of in the same sentence. That’s how extraordinary this food was. I would love to learn from whoever cooked this meal.”

*Nom nom...* Ice continued eating without a word.

“I’ll introduce her to you next time, then. The food seems to suit Ice-chan’s tastes too, so she should come visit as well. For...*reasons*, Efil’s taking a break from adventuring for a while, so I’m sure she’d love the company.”

“Efil-san? My!” The older woman seemed surprised. “You mean *that* Efil-san?! You said ‘reasons.’ A break... My oh my!”

*There’s that déjà vu again. Ah, I get it. The way she loves rumors and will connect the dots on her own... She’s just like Guildmaster Mist. This is just a guess, but those two seem like they would get along like good neighbors.*

*Om nom...*

“Hey, do you like it?” Rion asked the silent girl. “I’d personally recommend this dessert. Want to try it?”

Ice nodded. It seemed Rion was already getting along famously with her. Put simply, she was very soothing.

*Whoops, this is no time to enjoy her healing power. I need to get to the point.*

“Now that we’ve shared a meal and deepened our friendship, Sinjeel, could you answer a few questions?”

“Sure, of course,” the man replied. “If it’s something I can say, then I’ll answer anything!”

“Okay, then. First off: this dungeon is currently off-limits. Why are you three here? From what I can see, you’re not in the habit of misbehaving, so do you have some special reason for trespassing? For the record, we’re here on a specially assigned quest from Director Shin, so you have no grounds to question

us.”

Sinjeel seemed confused. “This place is...off-limits? That’s news to me, erm...” He looked dazed and puzzled. It seemed he wasn’t lying; he really hadn’t known.

“We headed straight here yesterday after our encounter with you at headquarters, Kelvin-san. We might have just missed the announcement that it was off-limits,” Respect added.

*Yeah. I heard the announcement was pretty sudden, so that’s possible, I thought.*

“Hm, so that’s how it is...” The playboy seemed to connect the dots. “Sorry about this, Kelvin-san. Even though I didn’t know, the decisions of the guild are absolute for adventurers. This was completely my fault as party leader. To be honest, I don’t like the idea of letting go of such a promising unexplored dungeon, but you are the ones who have the right to such a place, given your assignment from Director Shin. We’ll pack up and return to Pub.”

“Wait a second, no need to be in such a rush. There are still some questions I want to ask.”

I had to stop Sinjeel and Respect, who had abruptly gotten up from their seats to leave. Ice was the only one who had remained sitting, as she was still absorbed in the food.

“Hm? I don’t mind, but what else is there to ask?” the man wondered aloud.

“Would you tell me about this country’s top active adventurers? I think you already know, but it’s only been a few days since we came to Pub. I have no info at all about others in my profession here.”

“Ah, I wanna know too!” Rion piped up. “What kind of people are Pub’s top adventurers?”

In the background, Ice whined, indicating how full she was.

Sinjeel seemed impressed. “Just as expected from a Rank S adventurer! What a good mindset! Though I may not be able to offer much, allow me to tell you everything I know! First, as you can see, I am Sinjeel, the adventurer whose

beauty thunders across the entire continent! What you should know..."

His eyes flashed as he once again straddled the seat. He must have been really excited to talk about himself, as he launched into his answer with absurd speed. His self-description was also absurdly long, so let's cut that short here. Basically, Sinjeel was an all-rounder who could use magic and a whip, Respect was a martial artist who could pick locks on treasure chests and detect traps, and Ice was an ice-wielding orthodox mage. According to him, they were all at the top of Rank A (self-proclaimed).

"As for the rest of Pub's three greatest adventurers, that would be Paul and Oddradd. You already know Paul, don't you, Kelvin-san? According to rumors, after he touched one of your women, you beat him up so badly, you can't tell what his original face looked like anymore."

"What? No, no, no, no way. He picked a fight with me, but he didn't do anything to anybody else, and I didn't beat him up that badly either. I just knocked him out and stuffed him in a barrel."

"Really? There were also rumors that you buried that barrel underground or threw it into the depths of the ocean..."

*Seriously, what kind of image do you people have of me? I mean, it's true that all Rank S adventurers are treated like live explosives, but...*

"W-Well, I get it. In the end, the fact that you were able to take on Paul's strong and sizable party by yourself easily shows how amazing you are, Kelvin-san. But of course, there's no doubt that the Rank A adventurer who stands out most right now is me!"

"So, there's Paul with the strong overall party, Sinjeel the overly confident adventurer, and...right. That just leaves Oddradd, doesn't it? What about him?"

"His is a totally power-focused party that doesn't use magic at all. I'm pretty sure they were next to us in line when you came to visit the guild. Do you remember them? They're always so uselessly loud and really stand out, and not in a good way."

*Ah, I remember. They were talking about Goldiana, weren't they? That's why they claimed that most of his party members were proud of their strength. But*

*Goldiana isn't just about power. That power needs a similar understanding of weapons, a tenacious mental outlook, overwhelming knowledge and experience, and a superhuman who can internalize all that information. If they're going to worship muscles as all that is right and just, they have a long way to go. Still...looking at it logically, these people were among those Director Shin selected. But that leaves the question of who I should be training, though.*



Hey everyone. Doing well, I trust? It's me, Sinjeel, the avatar of beauty and target of everyone's admiration. Huh? I sound really happy for some reason? Ha ha ha, so you can tell! To be honest, I have a special announcement for everyone today. What is it, you ask? Heh heh, no need to rush; it's not like I'm going anywhere. But it's not my style to slow roll people needlessly, so I think I'll just tell everyone the surprise straight-up. If you can believe it, the party that I, Sinjeel, lead is now accompanying the Rank S adventurer Kelvin Celsius's party!

*"I want to get a good grasp of your party's strength, Sinjeel. Want to attempt this dungeon investigation as a joint venture? If you're coming with us, you won't be in violation of any guild orders."*

Kelvin went out of his way to stop me as I was trying to make a dashing exit, all to try and chat me up with that invitation. The one! A Rank S adventurer who's the talk of the town! Kelvin himself! Oh man, it seemed my sinful self had finally charmed a member of the same sex. I had piled up so many sins that I felt it was about time to erect a Sinjeel tower, with the first three letters in bold.

Of course, I gladly agreed to the proposal. After all, there was no way I could tarnish Kelvin's reputation once he invited me! He was interested in my party's strength. So obviously, we would be the main stars while in battle. Perfect. Things were working out great for me. If we could show Kelvin a grand scene of combat, the guild would probably receive a great report of our strength from him.

In fact, there could even have been a quicker result in store. As I recalled, one of the conditions for becoming Rank S was overcoming a trial under the watch

of a Rank S adventurer. If this were to count, well...heh heh heh! I would only shine stronger, and I could give Lady Respect and Lady Ice even better lives! I'm sure Lady Respect's husband would also jump for joy! Either way, there's no way I'd ever let this chance go!

"I just made a rough sweep of the dungeon with a detection skill, and I know that there are a lot of hostile presences below. I'm pretty sure this dungeon is structured so that we'll have to descend underground. So there're probably some stairs leading downward somewhere, and we'll need to find those first. I know we just confirmed this, but are we sure we should leave combat entirely to Sinjeel's party?" the girl, Rion, asked.

"Yeah, of course. Believe in us; you two can just concentrate on exploration!" I announced.

"I...see..." Kelvin answered.

For some reason, it looked like his expression had clouded for a moment. *I see, though he said he would leave combat to us, he's still worried! Wow, what a kind soul! We've just met and are supposed to be rivals in the same occupation! What a broad-minded man he is! Incredibly broad-minded! I'll take this chance to learn what a Rank S adventurer's spirit should be like, Kelvin! Become fodder for Sinjeel's future as a kind, beautiful, and reliable man!*

"Well, I guess you made it into the dungeon. You must've taken down some monsters on the way here, right? That's comforting, at least," said Kelvin.

"Monsters? What do you mean by that? We haven't seen any monsters in this dungeon yet. I'm sure they were all so surprised by my beauty and energy that they were too embarrassed to show themselves. Hah! No way... It seems my beauty is so great, it works on monsters as well as men!"

Kelvin stayed silent. But after such a shocking revelation, I couldn't help but be surprised by my own sheer potential. It seemed not even Kelvin could stay completely unaffected by this truth, as his expression changed even more dramatically than mine had. *I see... Today is the day I've finally confirmed the divine is on my side! I'll keep up this striking growth and complete our exploration of this dungeon!*

"Now then, it's time to start our adventure! Watch your step and follow me!"



I said. We left the dead-end room, returning to the passageway with me in the lead.

“Sure... You should make sure to be more careful than the rest of us, okay?” Kelvin told me.

*You’re so kind, Kelvin!*



After finishing up our exploration, we went straight back to the Golden Sparrow, our current base. There, we found Melfina lazing around in one of the rooms with the piles of food she had bought. Her slovenliness was the very picture of a corrupt goddess. Still, I was extra concerned, wondering whether this was really the way a mother should behave just because DarkMel wasn’t around. I decided I should give her some direction before my beloved daughter came back.

“Oh, that’s how you ended up exploring a dungeon alongside this narcissistic adventurer Sinjeel and his party. So, what happened after? Mmgh...” Even when made to sit in seiza, Melfina didn’t stop eating. As if replacing her snacks, she badgered me to talk about our adventure in the dungeon.

“Not much; we turned back halfway through. Sinjeel was the one to call it when we reached the first underground floor.”

“Oh, around the first underground floor? That means you only explored the ground floor, then.” *Nom nom...*

“That would be the implication, yes. Dungeon monsters only come up to the entrance at worst, so it’s not really a pressing issue, but I think I can go back and explore at my leisure later. We prioritized Sinjeel and his party’s safety this time around.”

“We were told to prioritize the lives of other people in the area over our quest,” Rion clarified. “I think Kel-nii made the right decision. Also, we made some new friends for our troubles, so *I’m* totally satisfied!”

*“Woof woof! (We also got to take a nice walk, so I’m satisfied too!)”*

“Hee hee! That’s great to hear,” giggled Melfina. “Still, that must mean your

evaluation of Sinjeel isn't great..." *Crunch, munch.*

"Mel, please, at least stop stuffing your face while we're talking..."

I wiped the crumbs and other bits of food from the corners of her mouth.  
*Hmm...I know this is Mel's way of indulging me, but I'm having complicated feelings as a parent about doing this more for you than DarkMel. I mean, DarkMel eats elegantly like a lady, so I don't remember her ever needing me to do this. Mel, I love ya, but you're already losing to your own daughter.*

"My evaluation of Sinjeel, huh? Actually, I think he's a pretty good adventurer."

"I see. Why?"

"It's true he talks too big, but his party stood up well against the ground-floor monsters. They had a hard time on the first floor down, but that playboy had a good understanding of the strength of his party. Normally, adventurers like that would let their pride get in the way after talking such a big game and not allow themselves to turn back. Either that, or they'd make up a convenient excuse to abandon personal responsibility. But Sinjeel immediately took back his words and apologized, saying he didn't feel confident he could protect his comrades if we went any farther. He prioritized survival over petty pride, and he thinks of his party too, so even I wanted to cheer him on. Also, it might sound like the battles went terribly for him, but it felt like the monsters there were nearly Rank S in strength. So the fact that he got pretty far should actually be commended."



“They dealt with the dungeon’s traps pretty well too,” Rion added.

*“Bark! Growl! (They didn’t recklessly open any fake treasure chests either!)”*

“That was a better evaluation than I expected,” said Melfina. “In that case, I’d love to meet these people. Oh, that’s right. They’re going to come to learn cooking from Efil, aren’t they? I’ll join them. I’m aware that I cause an incredible disaster every time I try my hand at preparing food, so I’ll just be on the other side as a taste tester!”

*This girl... So that’s how she’s deciding to join in!*



Two days had passed since we’d encountered Sinjeel. During this time, we returned to the dungeon to sweep the lower floors, eliminating monsters to just short of absolute annihilation and disarming or destroying any seemingly dangerous traps. I had thought this back when we were exploring with Sinjeel and his party, but the monsters in this dungeon were pretty strong. As we got lower, stronger and stronger species started to spawn. Even on the floors we completed, we were seeing monsters on the level of Deramis’s Catacombs of Heroic Spirits. However, unlike in Deramis, the endpoint wasn’t in sight; we were simply going down endless floors, all while expecting even stronger monsters to appear. I was full of anticipation and joy, like I was having fun at an amusement park.

“...and that’s basically where we are at the moment.”

“I see. So, depending on how the investigation goes, the dungeon could shoot up to Rank S difficulty. Heh heh, I was right to entrust this to you, Kelvin-kun. No wonder none of the Rank A adventurers could get inside.”

I had gone to the director’s room at headquarters to deliver my report, accompanied by Rion, who had been there on my formal trip to the dungeon, and Alex, who was currently sleeping in her shadow.

“I’m also glad you seem to have enjoyed yourself, Kelvin-kun,” Shin added.

“Well, yeah. It’s rare to come across a dungeon this difficult. Honestly, I think you can just label it Rank S now. It’s already been established that Sinjeel’s Rank

A party raised the white flag after only one floor.”

“Hmm...that might be a good call. I’ll bring it up at the next board meeting. Hey, what should we name the dungeon? Got any good ideas?”

“Huh? Uh...come on, don’t ask a regular adventurer like me.”

“Come on, Kelvin-kun. I don’t come to you for boring answers like that. I want you to strut your naming sense as a Rank S adventurer.”

*Naming sense as a Rank S...*

“Here!” Rion raised her hand suddenly. “How do you normally decide names for a newly discovered dungeon?”

“Oohh, that’s a good question.” Shin seemed impressed. “What a wonderful point of view you have. Unlike Kelvin-kun, you’re so innocent and pure and bright and cute, Rion-chan!”

“I’d normally want to raise a complaint, but instead I’ll just graciously agree with you on that point!” I interjected.

“Ha ha ha! You love your sister as much as the rumors say. Your older sister here is a little creeped out!” Although Director Shin said that, she never stopped smiling.

*Come on, you knew that already, didn’t you?* I was confident that out of all the Rank S adventures, including Director Shin, I ranked fairly low—at least below average—on the weirdness meter. In fact, I should probably have been the one feeling creeped out.

“Allow me to explain,” Director Shin continued. “You see, for newly discovered dungeons, the naming convention depends on its difficulty. For dungeons of Rank C and under, the guildmaster of the local branch has the right to name it based on the location’s traits. For anything Rank B or above, all the information about it is transmitted here to headquarters, where the guild’s top brass will convene to decide on an official name. That’s the convention, anyway. This time, the dungeon falls squarely into the latter category, so I just want to hear some ideas while we’re here.”

“I see. So that means I can propose a name?” Rion asked.

“Sure you can! Depending on what it is, I might even preemptively adopt it!”

“Yay! Then I’ll think of one with Alex! Wake up, Alex!” Rion stuck her head into her shadow to call Alex from his sleep.

*Hm, my little sister is cute no matter what she does.*

“By the way, Kelvin-kun.” Director Shin turned to me. “Are you free after this?”

“Hm? Well, I don’t really have anything pressing to attend to. At best, I was thinking of going back to the dungeon if I could gather some people.”

“I see. That’s perfect, then. The candidates for our team in the match against Lumiest have been decided. I’ll need to go meet them after this; want to come with?”

“Could it be... Are you having them wait here at headquarters?”

Shin shot me a carefree smile. She really was such an *abrupt* person, given the ambush from before.

“Okay, okay, I get it. I’ll meet them too. You happy?”

“It’s great that you’re so understanding. Okay, then, I’ll call them over now. Just wait a moment.” With that, she exited the room.

*Odds are she’s just going to be calling the top three adventurers in Pub.*

“What about The Grim Reaper’s Dinner Table, Kel-nii?” Rion suggested from beside me. “Since you’re the one who did most of the exploring and this dungeon is just to your taste!”

“That’s a wonderful idea. Yes, truly wonderful. I have a full grasp of your naming sense now, Rion!”

“Really? Yaaay! That settles it! Now we just have to tell Director Shin!”

“Yes, please do. I’m sure she’ll be impressed with the name too.”

*“Whiiine? (Really?)”*

To be honest, putting my own title in there was pretty—no, really—embarrassing. But it was a great name that Rion had done her best to come up with, so I couldn’t afford *not* to praise her. Never.

*Kerchak!*

“Sorry to keep you waiting. Okay, everyone, no need to hold back. Come inside. It’s a bit messy, but don’t mind that. Also, it might smell like tobacco, but don’t mind that either!” As soon as she returned, Director Shin invited the candidates into her room.

*Oh, come on, already?*

We hurried to stand up from the sofa.

“Of course, you’ve met these people, haven’t you?” Director Shin asked rhetorically. “After all, they’re the ones who first picked a fight with you here; a brave group of adventurers. I’m the one who put them up to it, though!”

“Please, don’t talk about that, Director. Also, you should clean up your office at least a little. It’s crazy that this place is filthier than our room, and we’re guys.”

“Hee hee hee! Didn’t I just tell you not to mind it? Did you not hear me?” Shin countered.

“Uh...hey now, don’t come up to me while smiling like that. Seriously, it’s really intimidating...”

The first one to enter was Paul. He was a great prospect from my perspective. It was a matter of course that he’d be chosen. He had passion and a strong, rebellious spirit, so I got the feeling that if I just threw him into some appropriate sort of hell, he’d transform in a heartbeat.

*Heh heh, I’m looking forward to seeing him after that.*

“Jeez, I’d love it if you’d develop at least a little bit of respect for me. Okay, next candidate!” shouted Director Shin.

“Oh, my turn already? Personally, I think the best should be saved for last.”

“Whatever, just get in here. Or do you want to be strung up along with Paul-kun?” Shin said roughly.

“Ugh, okay, I get it. But lady, that isn’t how you should use a smile. Oh no, nothing. I, Sinjeel, have arrived.”

*Okay, so next is Sinjeel. I expected him too.* Leaving aside the fact that his narcissism was as strong as ever today, his ability was in line with Paul's. His consideration for others made him a level stronger than others, and he was someone I personally wanted to root for. But if he were to transform alongside Paul, he would probably turn into someone I wanted to root for even more. In other words, I wanted Sinjeel to grow.

*Heh heh heh, get ready for it.*

"Sure, sure. Let's keep this moving. Third one in!" Shin said brusquely.

"Oh, finally! I'm comin' in! M'name's Oddradd! The man aiming to be number one most muscular person in the world!"

"Ahh, hmm...could you lower your volume about three levels, Oddradd-kun? It really travels indoors," Shin asked.

"My bad! I'll be careful!"

"Okay, you're not getting it. Would dropping your consciousness be faster?"

As expected, the third choice was Oddradd, the last member of Pub's three greatest adventurers. I was withholding judgment, but he *did* seem like he'd be the strongest in melee. So I decided to train him seriously with that expectation in mind. And, as he so desired, I would help him to build his muscles. Of course, getting to the level of Goldiana or Grostina would be impossible, but I felt that I should be able to get him to a good point.

*Heh ha ha ha ha! My hopes and dreams will swell along with his muscles!*

"And the last one!" Shin said.

*Hm? Last? Oddradd wasn't it?*

"E-Excuse me! I have come as a candidate for this year's match! My name is Suzu! Pleased to meet you!"

The last one in was a very small and charming girl with twin buns. She introduced herself as Suzu, and had black hair and was wearing the same kind of qipao Sera liked to don. Her choice of clothing was just as rare as the color of her hair.

*Is she from Toraj?* I hadn't seen this sort of dress out in the wild, just the one



Efil had made; they were that unusual. So why did she have such an outfit? And I felt like the name “Suzu” was familiar somehow...

“Okay, so this is Suzu-chan, the last adventurer I chose as a candidate!” Director Shin said excitedly. “Just for today, she’s come all the way from the Eastern Continent and even took a break from work for this opportunity! We’ve gotta be thankful!”

“Oh nonononono!” Suzu sounded like a machine gun. “I was the one who asked the director for a favor, so there’s really no need to thank me! Also, I had someone to replace me on that job, so...”

It seemed Director Shin and Suzu were acquaintances. *She came from the Eastern Continent? If she’s such a skilled adventurer, I feel like I would know her, but...hmm...yeah, her name’s not ringing a bell. Still, I get the feeling I met her somewhere before, or at least heard her name. Erm...where could it have been?*

“Come on, Director Shin! Did you really pick this tiny stick of a girl as a candidate?! I’m already worried about her! Does she even eat?! You need to eat some more meat! Lots more meat!”

“Uhh...erm...” Suzu stammered.

“Oddradd-kun, try not to scare Suzu-chan so much.” Director Shin stepped in to help. “It’s true that she’s small and not very brave, so she might not seem too reliable, but she’s a super first-class adventurer even so! After all, she’s serving as the guildmaster for the Toraj branch at the moment.”

“What? Toraj’s guildmaster? By Toraj, you mean that huge country on the Eastern Continent? She’s that young and she’s the master of a branch in such a large country?”

“That’s right, the very Toraj you’re speaking of,” Director Shin confirmed. “Just like me, Suzu-chan is one of the few who are still active adventurers. Given her position, she’s a lot more restricted than normal adventurers, but she’s got the skills to make up for it. I can guarantee it.”

“Bah! I’m sure your guarantee would only distress a girl like her,” Paul interrupted.

“Hmmm? Did you say something, Paul-kuuuun?” Shin asked ominously.

“Come on, I already told you not to come up to me with a smile like that! Seriously, I’m gonna be traumatized!”

It seemed that Pub’s top three adventurers didn’t know about Suzu either. To be fair, I hadn’t heard of her, and I lived on the Eastern Continent, so it was understa—

*Wait, Toraj’s guildmaster?! That would mean she’s Guildmaster Mist’s successor!*

“Ah!”

*That’s right! I knew I’d heard her name somewhere! It was when Guildmaster Mist formally took up office in Parth! Right, I get it now. Okay, let’s say hello.*

“Nice to meet you, Guildmaster Suzu. I’ve heard about you from Guildmaster Mist. She told me how promising you are.”

“Oh no, no, no, not at all!” Suzu immediately protested. “I am nowhere near the likes of you, Kelvin-sama. In the end, I’m a mere insignificant Rank A adventurer! That formal speech and title are wasted on me, so please, just call me Suzu!”

“Oh, but—”

“Please!”

*“Uh, okay... Yeah, I get it, Suzu.” Uh, hmmm? Wha... What is that reaction? Isn’t that weird?*

“Oh, come on, can she really be left in charge of a large guild branch?! I mean, look at how terrible she is at dealing with Kelvin!”

“Hee hee!” Shin giggled. “Compared to that, you’ve never once used an honorific with her, huh, Oddradd-kun? That is understandable, though. Suzu’s a huge fan of Kelvin-kun.”

“A... A faaaaaaan?!” I ended up harmonizing with Paul and the rest of the candidates.

“Y... You’re a fan of Kelvin-san? Not me, but Kelvin-san?!” Next, it was Sinjeel’s turn to be shaken.

*Don't worry, I'm shocked too, so you're not alone.*

"U-Uh, yeah, it's the truth. Um...do you remember this signature?" Suzu showed me a signed square that she seemed to value a lot. It was my signature, and I clearly hadn't been used to signing things yet. At the bottom was a simple "To Suzu-chan," also written by me.

"Th-That's—" I started.

"Wow, that's shit. I *know* I'd be able to write a better one."

"No, I've got the best signature. I'd be willing to bet on it," Sinjeel asserted.

The peanut gallery was being incredibly noisy. Still, the thing was irrefutable proof that I'd signed something for Suzu and given it to her. Judging from how it looked like the first thing I'd ever signed, it had happened back at the very beginning. Which would mean...

"Wait, was this from when I was just promoted to Rank A?!"

"That's right! Exactly! I'm the Suzu from back then! So, you remembered!" she exclaimed.

"Uh, er...sorry. That's all I remember about this thing..."

If I remembered right, I'd been promoted to Rank A around the time I'd fought Victor and had just added Sera as a companion. When I realized that Rion hadn't been around yet back then, I felt really nostalgic.

"Back then, I'd just happened to travel to Parth as an adventurer from Toraj," Suzu started to clarify. "But, um...the moment I saw you, Kelvin-sama, I was so shocked! I was in the middle of a quest, so I had to go home to Toraj right after to confirm my quest was finished. But I just couldn't get you out of my mind, so I went straight back to Parth, only..."

"You returned to Parth? Uh...if I remember right, we went to Toraj after that."

"That's right. In a bout of terrible timing, we totally missed each other! I looked around Parth while making sure not to stand out, then bore the embarrassment of asking someone from the guild where you were, and that was the first time I learned you went to Toraj. So I went back, but..."

"Ah, yeah. I think I get it. We missed each other again, right?"

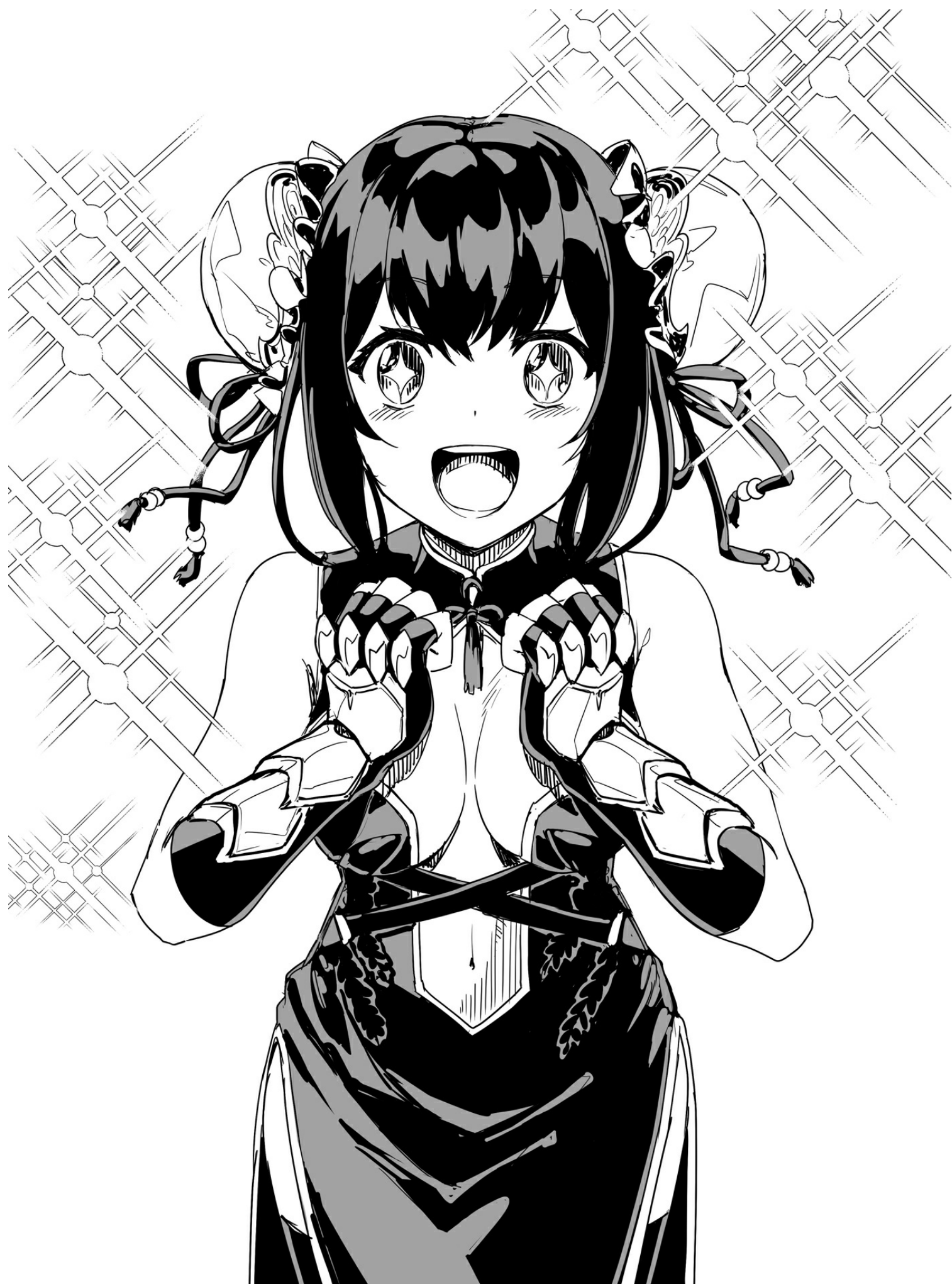
“Yes...” Suzu’s shoulders drooped in a clear show of disappointment.

*Yeah, I don’t remember ever meeting her after that, so...*

“I didn’t give up, though. I traveled all over, determined to meet you once again. But just chasing after you was kind of embarrassing, so I picked up quests as I went. I went to Gaun after I heard you were there, then Trycen, Deramis, and Parth again—I also went through all the dungeons in the countries you visited. But it seems I have terrible luck...”

“That bad, huh? Hm? No, wait a second. You went everywhere I did? So places like Parth’s Shrine of the Puppets, Toraj’s Dragon Sea Cave, and Deramis’s Catacombs of the Heroic Spirits too?”

“Huh? Oh, yes. I’ve explored all those places. It was really hard to get permission from Deramis, so I had to do it in my capacity as a guildmaster. After that, I also went to Gaun’s Cavern of the Divine Beasts. This was all after I became a guildmaster, by the way. But I already knew you wouldn’t be there, Kelvin-sama, so when I went, it was more like making a pilgrimage to a holy site; I used my vacation days for them. There were also places where it was said you grilled meat with your friends, and monsters you hunted and turned into food—I enjoyed it all!”



*H-Holy site?! Ermm...I guess they were all the country's best dungeons, but... She's been acting pretty wild, huh? What about her is supposed to be cowardly? She could be a hidden gem, despite her looks. Maybe? No, wait a second. There's still something I need to confirm.*

"I haven't heard a party name. Have you been going solo, Suzu?"

"O-Of course! There's no way I could form a party just to chase you; I'd be way too embarrassed!"

*Isn't this girl already Rank S in strength?*



Now that the introductions of the candidates were done, we took the elevator to reach the building's underground portion. According to Director Shin, they had mock battle arenas for high-ranking adventurers to use. It sounded like the one underneath my own estate. Since it was made based on Director Shin's strength, it seemed tough enough that we could go pretty hard and be fine. Also, just like with the elevator, Director Shin had apparently built these facilities in secret. It seemed she had been taking way too many liberties with the building.

"So, why did you bring us here?" Paul asked gruffly.

"That's a good question, Paul-kun. You really are one of my most promising students!" Director Shin exclaimed.

*"Paul-kun?!"*

Right now, this arena was playing host to me, Rion (with Alex in her shadow), the director, and the four candidates. Other than us, the large space was deserted, making it feel even bigger.

*Seriously, this place is huge. Way too big to have been built in secret.*

"I'll be training you guys to try and bring you up to a level where you can face off against Lumiest. You've heard about that, right?"

"In broad strokes, sure," Paul admitted. "I'm still not sure I believe what I heard, though. We do this match against Lumiest every year, don't we? Usually there's no need for people on our level to even go; they just send some polite

middle-ranker to do it, so why is it suddenly our turn? And we have to be trained to even get a chance to go?”

“Yeah, he’s right!” Oddradd chimed in. “We’re going to be fighting little brats who don’t know anything about the world and aren’t even adventurers, just like always, right?! So this group would be way too much! Paul, Sinjeel, and I would bring in three sure wins! And if Suzu over there is as strong as you say she is, that’s four!”

“Hah...she really did only give a broad explanation...” I shot a doubtful glance at Director Shin, who nodded back, full of confidence. *Wait, she wants me to give them the details now?!*

“I don’t really mind if I get to receive instruction from Kelvin-san,” Sinjeel noted. “Don’t you think this is our best chance to gain the strength to become Rank S?”

“Yeah, well...that’s true, but...” Paul stammered.

“I... If I can receive Kelvin-sama’s guidance and encouragement, then I’ll do anything! Anything at all!” Suzu shouted. “I want to get as close to his strength as possible!”

Even without any details, Sinjeel and Suzu were on board. Paul seemed a step away from being there, given what had happened before. So that left—

“Wait! Hold on a second! I’m not convinced yet!” Oddradd shouted. “They may be shitty nobles, but we’re fighting children here! Normal students! I’m not gonna help bully the weak! Not to mention, I don’t think Kelvin over here is really all that strong!”

Oddradd. His objection was well-founded. That was why it was important to teach him how strong Lumiest would be this year, as well as show my own strength. Specifically, I (as his instructor) and Rion (as a future student) would be showing him our skills. This would be a great chance to have a taste—I mean, properly educate him!

“Okay, I get that. But allow me to dispel both your doubts. Oddradd, Rion and I will—”

“W-Wait a second!” Suzu suddenly shouted, stopping me in my tracks as she

raised her hand straight up.

*What's this? You wanna battle too, Suzu? Oh, fine, you really are so greedy, heh heh heh.*

"What's wrong, Suzu?" I asked.

"Uh, erm...I think I also fit into this, as they don't know my strength either. Oddradd *did* say, 'If she's as strong as you say she is' earlier, so..."

"Hm, I said that?!" Oddradd seemed surprised. "Ah, right, I did, didn't I! So what?!"

"So why don't I try my hand against Oddradd?" Suzu suggested. "This place seems perfect, and it would be a chance for Kelvin-sama to see our strengths, since we're unknown to him." She turned to Oddradd. "Also, if I win, would you please accept that Kelvin-sama is strong? Someone like me wouldn't even be fit to touch his feet, after all."

"Huh?!" Her sudden suggestion stopped my Parallel Processing in its tracks.

"Oho, you sure can talk!" Oddradd shouted. "You've got guts for being so tiny! Fine, I like it! If you win, I'll accept the both of you as strong!"

"Th-Thank you very much. It's a promise, okay?"

"Of course! I swear on these muscles! Men do not go back on their word! But if I win, it's Kelvin's turn next! Get ready, y'hear?!"

"Oddradd-kun, that's not quite right..." Director Shin said.

"It's not?! Oh well!"

"As guild director, I'm fine with this. But Kelvin-kun is your teacher. He has the right to decide. What do you think, Kelvin-kun?"

"I'll fight my hardest, Kelvin-sama! Please! Pleeeaaasssee!" Suzu pleaded.

"I...guess it's fine? I was just about to suggest something similar, yeah..."

Suzu had completely taken over the plot with her innocent air, so it was far too late to say that I wanted to fight. I just couldn't do it!

"You can do it, Kel-nii!"



“Yeah, your older brother will work hard. Yeah, I will!” Thanks to Rion’s wholehearted cheering, I managed to recover. *Okay, as long as I grab the spotlight at the end, there’s no problem. I just have to wait... I just have to bide my time!*

I gave them a simple explanation of the mock battle’s rules and had Suzu and Oddradd go to their starting positions. Though I could heal things like missing limbs, having rules like the promotion ceremony, which was essentially a death match, could lead to disaster, so, I settled on rules similar to the ones we used at home: use nonlethal weapons, and the first person rendered unable to fight loses. Of course, Director Shin and I could also call the fight at any time should one of us judge that things were getting too dangerous.

“What do you two use for weapons?”

“I don’t use anything as unmanly as weapons!” Oddradd declared. “I fight like a man, with just my body!”

Suzu’s view was similar. “I’m also fine without weapons. I’m the most mobile that way.”

“I...I see...” I quietly returned the nonlethal weapons I’d taken from my Clotho clone to its Storage. “As I’ve already explained, Director Shin and I will be serving as the referees for this fight. Don’t worry about the aftereffects of your attacks; we’ll be able to dodge them.”

“I’ll go over there so I’m not in the way, Kel-nii,” Rion told me.

“The rest of you should follow her,” Director Shin added. “Okay, Paul-kun, Sinjeel-kun, hurry, hurry!”

“Agh?!” Paul yelped. “Don’t poke my back! I’ll run, okay?! I’m running!”

“I don’t mind being hurried along by a lady,” Sinjeel noted. “I’ll be obedient and run to my seat. Don’t push yourself too hard, Lady Suzu. As you can see, Oddradd isn’t all that deft.”

“Hah! You say some pretty good things for being *Sinjeel!*” Oddradd shouted. “I’m not good at holding back! If you think you can’t win, just give up instead of being stubborn! In exchange, I’ll do the same! If I don’t, it won’t be fair! That’s the spirit of compromise!”

“Thank you for your concern. I will do my best to avoid a disgraceful showing in front of Kelvin-sama,” said Suzu.

That concluded our preparations for the mock battle. It seemed like both sides were raring to go. Honestly, I was expecting Suzu to win, but maybe I could hope for a good match?

*Okay, if I’m going to focus on watching, I’ll burn your skills into my brain.*

“Match...begin!”



Both of them began moving at my word. Their starting positions placed them a little far apart from each other, so they needed to close the gap in order to enter melee combat. However, the fight was settled faster than I’d expected.

“The match is decided. I didn’t think the difference would be this clear.”

“Thank you,” Suzu said before letting out a huge sigh. “I... I won! I showed my good side in front of Kelvin-sama!”

“Seriously?” Paul looked stupefied.

“She... She took down Oddradd in one hit. It seems that one incredible lady has joined our ranks,” Sinjeel noted.

Suzu was the winner of the match, and it had only taken her a couple of seconds. Still, it wasn’t as if Oddradd hadn’t been able to lift a finger. This was how things had gone:

*“Hornet’s Needle!”*

As soon as the mock battle began, Oddradd thrust as hard as he could with his right index finger at Suzu. Given how far apart they’d started, there was no way he had the reach for that thrust, but Oddradd hadn’t been aiming for a direct attack. Unexpectedly, this was a ranged attack. Oddradd had used his absurdly high strength to manifest an invisible force of air that was launched at Suzu.

Although the man put such an emphasis on pure muscle, the first move he made was shockingly technical in nature. I was surprised, in a good way. However, I also recognized the move from somewhere.

While I pondered that, the bullet of air flew towards Suzu.

*“Willow.”*

Just before the attack hit, she seemed to blur for an instant. Oddradd’s air bullet passed straight through her, and she continued on as if nothing had happened.

*“What?!”*

If Oddradd had expected his attack to be defended against, he probably imagined it would either be dodged or turned aside. So, he was clearly surprised at seeing Suzu continue as if he’d done nothing at all. The air bullet hit the wall behind her, making a decent noise. It seemed to be fairly powerful.

At the same time, Suzu was advancing at a seriously fast clip. Oddradd only had time for his first failed move before the two were within arm’s reach of each other.

“Okay, try this on for size!” Oddradd yelled. “Furious Demon’s Destructive Fist!”

“Hey, that’s going too far, Oddradd!” Sinjeel shouted from his seat.

That told me this technique was Oddradd’s finisher. Oddradd didn’t stop, though. Once again, the name of the technique seemed somehow familiar to me as Oddradd threw out a rush of punches. Each blow, which would have been plenty powerful on its own, was thrown like a raging tide. After seeing his earlier attack slip right through Suzu, he must have decided that he didn’t need to hold back. His decision turned out to be correct.

*“Roundness.”*

In response to the fierce blows about to rain down upon her, Suzu swiftly moved her hands in a circular motion, swatting all the attacks aside. Seeing what was obviously a martial arts technique, Oddradd grimaced. Then, Suzu was right in front of him.

*“Lightning.”*

Suzu’s axe kick, seeming for all the world like a bolt of lightning dropping from heaven to earth, landed square on Oddradd’s head. Attacks like that usually had

a very large windup that worked as a tell, but her speed was several levels faster than Oddradd's flurry. By the time I announced that the fight was over, Oddradd's head had already been buried deep in the floor.

And that was how the match had gone. As expected, it had ended with Suzu's crushing victory. Still, the boon I'd gotten from this mock battle was huge. Given how badly he was beaten, Oddradd would likely not be able to complain anymore, and I had seen how he should shape his combat style. Even though he'd lost, he had shown promise.

As for Suzu, who had pulled off a magnificent win, she had totally become the dark horse. Her skills must have been hidden using Concealment, as my Analyze Eye couldn't tell me anything. At this point, I was actually getting a little excited, since even after opening the mystery box that was her fighting style, I wasn't disappointed. I could confidently say that she was currently at the top of the candidates with a bullet—actually, several bullets—in terms of skill. All the techniques she used had been very interesting as well.

"You okay, Oddradd?" I pulled his face out of the floor and healed him with magic. He seemed to be awake.

"I don't believe I lost in terms of pure physical strength. If that was all that was being measured, I'm probably way above her. But at the same time, I felt something that far surpassed my muscles. Heh... Heh heh! It felt like fighting against a Goldiana with no muscles. It was a crushing defeat!" Oddradd graciously admitted his loss. He still managed to fit in a line about muscles, but it seemed he was at least complimenting Suzu.

"You... You were also amazingly strong, Oddradd-san," Suzu stammered. "Um...is it possible that you learned the Goldia technique?"

"Yeah, I thought that too," Paul interjected. "All the moves you used resembled Goldiana's techniques, but you aren't a disciple of his, are you, Oddradd?"

*Hmm, the technique names were totally different, and I feel like I heard them from somewhere before Goldiana...*

"Heh! That would've been nice! By the time I knocked on Goldia's gates, they weren't accepting disciples anymore! There was nothing else for it, so I just

tried to imitate the style in my own way! Basically, it's a knockoff with superficial similarities! I mean, I've got no clue as to how to do that special Goldia aura, after all!" Oddradd exclaimed.

"A knockoff, huh? I think I know how to train you now, Oddradd."

"Wha?"

Who better to ask than a specialist? I decided to call a nearby one over. "Next is you, Suzu. You seem to use techniques I've never seen before. Are you self-taught? There was the one where you slipped through Oddradd's attack, then the one where you repelled all his attacks in an instant... Oh, right...and that last axe kick was incredibly fast."

"That's right! Every move you made was so fast, I could barely see it! What were those weird techniques you used?! Did you cast magic at the same time or something?!" Oddradd asked loudly.

"No, I didn't feel any magic flowing at all, so that's probably not it. It felt more like the speed of her movements were maxed out for an instant, kind of like she implemented the Wild Beast Style's iai techniques? I can't really express it properly, but that's what it felt like," I mused.

"Oh wooowww, I... I'm being analyzed by Kelvin-sama?!" Suzu gushed.

"Um...Suzu-san?"

Suzu had covered her mouth with both hands as her whole body seemed to vibrate. *Hey, is it just me or is she vibrating so fast that she's creating clones to her left and right?*

"S-Sorry, I was so overcome with emotion, I lost my composure. Erm, it's basically as you described, Kelvin-sama. I studied under my father to inherit the peculiar techniques of a shinobi and combined that with the foreign martial arts taught to me by my mother before improving the style in my own way. It's kind of a self-taught style, only it has an origin, so it's not, really..."

"Oho, that's interesting! This is the first I'm hearing of something like shinobi! And you mentioned a foreign martial art, so it's probably not from Toraj... Which country's martial art was it?!" Oddradd shouted.

“Oh, uh, I don’t know the country! According to my mother, it’s super-duper far away. Not on the Eastern or Western continents. It could have been an island country or something. Oh, and these clothes are traditional dress from my mother’s country, apparently. This is the only set that I got from my mother, so I just wear it on special days like this.”

“I see, how curious!” Impressed, Oddradd nodded vigorously.

Meanwhile, I stayed silent because I had my own thoughts on the matter. Thoughts pertaining to the possibility of Suzu’s parents having an incredible origin-gin-gin-gin-gin... I forced myself to snap out of it. *Crap I was so excited for a moment that my brain froze like a hard drive!*

“By the way, Suzu, what was your mom’s name?”

“My mom?”

“Yeah, I’ve been to a whole bunch of countries, so I might know where that name came from.”

“I see! Erm, her name was Lin-Lin. It’s a really unusual name; do you know anything about it?”

I didn’t answer for a while. “Sorry, I don’t think I’ve heard of anything like that in this world.”

“Oh no, it’s okay! It’s probably a really small isolated island that’s so far away, the Adventurer’s Guild doesn’t even know about it! So there’s really no need to be sorry.”

*Oh man, well...she’s right that it’s super far away, but it’s probably not an island...*



And so began the super fun candidate training time in preparation for the upcoming match.

“You want to acquire the essence of Goldia? Mmhmm. Oh, fine. I, as Goldiana’s best friend, will teach you myself!” Sera announced triumphantly, full of confidence.

I started with Oddradd, deciding that I would raise his basic abilities while also

bringing in Sera as a special instructor to teach him the Goldia basics, how to apply them practically, and even the style's secret techniques by the end. His goal would be skills the likes of Goldiana's and Grostina's, although I planned to be extremely careful that he didn't pick up their more *eccentric* traits as well. Not that I thought that there was any real need to worry about that.

*It'll be fine...right? He prides himself on being a manly man, so he won't...make a sudden change or anything, will he?*

"Awright, I'll be in your care!" Oddradd shouted, but he quickly turned around to add, "I know I just said that, but should you really be teaching me so lightheartedly?! I know you've mastered the art, but we're talking about the style's biggest secrets, right?! I know this is what I've always wanted, but that doesn't change the fact that I'm totally unrelated to the school, you know?!"

"I'm sure it's fine." Sera dismissed his concern. "There's no guarantee you'll learn it even if I taught you anyway, and I'm sure Goldiana would be happy if you did master it. I can guarantee you that, as her best friend!"

"I see! Then I'm relieved; let's get right to it!"

"It's good that you're so motivated. Let's start with the basic red aura. Gather power to your gut, like *gwoom*! But keep the rest of your body like *fwaaahhh*."

"Sorry, one more time, please!"

"Come on, I *told* you! *Gwoom*, then *fwaaahhh*!"

"Sorry, I don't get iiit!"

Whoa there, so the problems were starting already? Sera was the type of genius who did things by feel, so she was unbelievably bad at teaching others. Even I, who had spent a *long* time by her side, was only just starting to get what she was saying at times like this. Still, I had anticipated such a problem; I mean, it would have been weird if I hadn't. Of course I had taken countermeasures.

"I'll be translating sister Sera's explanations. Goldia requires you to circulate your ki throughout your body to raise your physical abilities. Sister Sera just told you to imagine it starting from your stomach and then going through the rest of your body. As for how to produce that all-important ki..."

I had Shutola join us as Sera's translator. She would be able to make the unintelligible and...*original* explanations easy to understand.

"Oh... Ohhh?! H-Hey, Kelvin?! What this girl is saying sounds correct, but is she actually right?!"

Unfortunately, it seemed that Oddradd only half believed in Shutola's ability to translate. I got it, though. Even if I had introduced her, it was tough to take the word of a girl he had just met.

"Don't worry. Shutola's a master at understanding people's intentions despite their words. To be honest, she'll be much more accurate than I would."

"Seriously?!"

"Seriously," Shutola answered for me. "So relax and follow my instructions, please. I'll guide you thoroughly."

"Hey, wait, I'm supposed to be the teacher here!" Sera complained.

It sounded like both Shutola and Sera were highly motivated, so I figured Oddradd was set.

*Okay, next.*

Sinjeel was currently in a mock battle with Rion. I had already told everyone that Rion was going to be a student at Lumiest, and that she would be one of their strongest participants. So in order for them to experience how high the bar would be, I planned to have everyone participate in a mock battle with her. But...the first one, Sinjeel, had stumbled already. He had started complaining that he couldn't attack women.

"I... I can't do anything so awful as attacking Lady Rion!"

"Hah!"

*"Hurk!"*

No matter what her opponent said, Rion was no longer the type to have mercy in battle against other people. She had just landed a knee to Sinjeel's gut, and now he was rolling around on the ground.

"What do you plan to do if your opponent is a female student, Sinjeel?" I



asked. “We already know that out of the five slots in the match, it’s highly likely at least three of them will be filled by girls, including Rion.”

“Buh... But!”

“Sin-chan,” Rion added, “your attitude is rude to your opponent. I know you think you’re being virtuous, Sin-chan, but what you’re doing is nothing but an insult to the person you’re facing. Do you think it’s fun hurting an opponent who doesn’t resist?”

“That’s not the problem!”

“Well, that’s the problem to me right now,” Rion answered. “If you keep on like that, you won’t be able to protect those close to you when it counts, you know?”

Sinjeel made a strangled, conflicted noise. And that showed how ruthless Rion could be. She had totally shaken his pride as a man and his sense of ethics, all while calling on his fighting spirit. Rion only had a little time left until school started, but it seemed like she’d be able to get Sinjeel over his weakness by then.

*Okay, next.*

“Nice to meet you. I’m DarkMel. Thank you for taking care of my papa.” DarkMel politely bowed and made her greeting. She was unbelievably cute.

On the other side, though, Paul seemed unhappy. “Hey, Kelvin, what kind of joke is this? My opponent’s even smaller than the kid with Oddradd or the one Sinjeel’s fighting. And she called you ‘papa.’”

“She’s my beloved daughter; of course she’s smaller than my little sister. Even so, she’s stronger than you. My plan was to have you fight against a bunch of different types of superior opponents. Through that experience, I wanted to figure out what kind of future you should aim for.”

“I get what you’re saying, but you’ve gotta be underestimating me, telling me to fight a tiny squirt like her. No matter how you look at it, she’s just a well-raised brat.”

“Right, I get your opinion. But that’s exactly my point.”

“Huh? Whaddaya mean?”

“You’re too wrapped up in common sense to face Rank S opponents, Paul. This fight will also serve to break you out of that. This will be the first of many, so I started you off with DarkMel, who’s not far off in ability from you. Even though she’s my daughter, I figured she’d be the perfect sparring partner for you. That said, I’m warning you, if you hurt her, I don’t know what I’ll do. I just know I’ll be seriously pissed, so keep that in mind.”

“Jeez, papa, you’re so overprotective!” DarkMel complained sweetly. “If you say that, Paul-san won’t be able to lift a finger!”

“Ha ha! Sorry. Your papa is just a worrywart! You know your papa would heal him if the worst were to happen!”

Paul didn’t say anything in response. As always, he seemed indecisive, but that changed the moment the mock battle actually started. It seemed he instantly realized how strong DarkMel was.

*That’s to be expected of a super first-class adventurer. But if you hurt her, I’m gonna punch you without holding back. Okay, time for the last one.*

“Uh...Kelvin-sama...it’s fine to talk with the others, but...uh...it would be nice if you’d concentrate more on your fight with me... I mean...look at me more!” Suzu shouted.

“If you want me to pay attention to you so badly, then you should motivate me more. Or what, is this your limit? If so, your depths were unexpectedly shallow. I’m a little disappointed.”

“I... I’m not done yet! I can do a lot more! Please, look!”

At the moment, I was working with Suzu, who was the number one candidate in terms of skill. First, there were the mysterious techniques she had learned. I had to understand all of them. She had taken the good parts of Chinese martial arts and ninjutsu and combined them, so the degree of perfection in her style was fearsomely high. Still, there were likely countless doors she could go through to progress.

*Now, show me more. Heh heh heh heh... I’m gonna train you right up! Turn a raw gem into a shining stone!*

“Kelvin’s expression looks kind of evil! How filthy!”

“Could you not spout lines that would make others misunderstand things, Sera?!”

“K-Kelvin-sama, please look at me with that evil expression!” Suzu shouted.  
“Oh, but...I’m still not emotionally ready!”

“You’re wroooooooooong!”

And that was how I got to work fixing everyone’s weak points and strengthening their good ones. Throwing Suzu and the others into that Rank S dungeon was a daily occurrence, and by the time I’d noticed, it was time for Rion and the others to go to Lumiast.



A few weeks had passed since I’d taken on the duty of training the candidates. They had begun to show promise, probably because of all the exciting days we’d spent together. The giver of this quest, Director Shin, was also over the moon at the growth of the promising young adventurers, and had ordered me to continue with a carefree and lighthearted turn of phrase. Continuing this venture benefited me anyway, so I was happy to do it.

At first, the relationship between the candidates had been somewhat strained, but now I thought they were getting along better. The adventurers of Pub were deepening their bonds, and all was right with the world.

“Master Kelvin! What should I do next?!”

However...the way Suzu addressed me continued to level up, and how far it had gone by now was basically my only sticking point with the whole affair. Recently, Oddradd and the others had begun to copy the way she referred to me as a joke, so I couldn’t allow it to go on. However, there were less funny things in the world. Yes, it was finally time for Rion and DarkMel to leave for the Academic City of Lumiast.

The rest of my friends and I were in front of the carriage we’d arranged for, saying goodbye to Rion and DarkMel, who were already wearing their uniforms. After the entrance ceremony, only students would be allowed into the academy, so regrettably, I couldn’t go with them. Rion and DarkMel had Alex as

an approved pet and a combat-specialized Clotho with them, but as an older brother and father, I was still super worried. I kept repeating my request over and over to the driver, Rudo, to bring them to Lumiest safely.

*Even so, I'm still worried. I really should go with them, just until they actually get into Lumiest...*

"It's about time for me to go, Kel-nii. Take care of Sin-chan while I'm gone!" Rion exclaimed.

"Leave Sinjeel to me. I'll train him even harder than you, Rion. More importantly, be careful over there, okay?"

"Aha ha, you're such a worrywart, Kel-nii! I get it already; all the male students are wolves, right?"

"Exactly! Act like you're about to fight every boy you meet inside the academy! Promise your big brother!"

"Yes, exactly! Your gramps thinks you should do that too!" Gerard agreed.

Rion was hesitant. "Umm...if I did that, I think I'd get expelled..."

"I'm so looking forward to my first day at the academy! Papa, mama, don't worry. I'm your daughter, after all!" DarkMel tried to assure us.

"DarkMeeelll!" I cried.

"Honey, I understand that you're happy, sad, and wanting to cry all at once, but there's got to be a limit," said Mel.

"Mama, is papa a crybaby?" DarkMel asked.

"He wasn't in the past. This is truly troubling...mmgh..." Melfina started snacking.

"I don't want to be told that by you, when you're eating at a time like thiiiiissssss!"

"If there's anything either of you don't understand, feel free to contact me at any time. I would be your senior at the academy if I were still there, so I'll teach you with all I have!" Shutola declared.

"Yeah! I'll be counting on you when the time comes, Shutola-chan!" Rion

answered.

“I’ll be counting on you too!” DarkMel agreed.

“Uh...um...we really should leave now...” came Rudo’s merciless warning. I cried uncontrollably as I reluctantly let the two of them go. “Okay, then, I’ll make sure they get to their destination safely!” he added.

“I have no idea what kind of traps or assassins from unknown countries are lying in wait for you, Ruoda-san. Please, exercise the utmost caution and make it to Lumiest safely!”

“Yes indeed! Their grandpa agrees with this sentiment!” Gerard added.

“Whaaat?!”

“There’s no need to make him unnecessarily anxious. Don’t mind what they said, Rudo-san,” Ange contradicted us. “They’re both a bit confused. In fact, whatever carriage they ride in is probably the safest in the world.”

“Uh...huh?”

Having been shut down by Ange, Gerard and I had no choice but to watch the carriage leave while bawling our eyes out. *Sniff, sniff... She’s leaving... Sniff, sniff.*

“Uh, okay, then. We’re leaving. Please get inside, you two.” Rudo seemed confused but moved on anyway.

“We’re off, everyone!” Rion exclaimed.

“Please look forward to the souvenirs we’re going to bring back! And I will make sure to grow before returning!” DarkMel declared.

Then, the carriage left Pub. The two girls leaned out the window and waved goodbye to us until they were out of sight. We did the same, staying and waving goodbye until we couldn’t see them anymore.

“I will not give them any specifics. After all, I don’t mind what souvenirs they bring back as long as it’s something delicious! Yes, something extra delicious!” Melfina shouted.

“They can’t hear you anymore, Mel. Still...they’re really gone... They’re going

to meet up with Bell at Lumiest, right?”

“Apparently. Given the state that Master and Gerard-san are in at the moment, I’m sure Gustav-sama was also crying his eyes out,” Efil guessed.

“Ah yeeeeaaahhh, my dad... Victor and the others are probably victims by now,” Sera muttered.

“Come on, Kelvin-kun, get a hold of yourself already. You need to go train the candidates after this, don’t you? Fathers shouldn’t cry forever. You’ve got another child with Efil-chan on the way in half a year too, remember?” Ange reminded me.



“Oh, yeah...you’re right about that. Speaking of half a year later, that’s about when the match with Lumiest will take place. I don’t have time to drag my feet; I need to prepare myself as a father.” I returned to my senses and stood up.

“Indeed, you are going to be very busy, Master. You need to grace the others with the same favor and happiness you have given me, after all,” Efil said.

“Wow, that’s so bold, Efil-chan!” Ange exclaimed.

Sera seemed wary. “E-Efil just made another incredible statement. I can’t let my guard down.”

“But I think sister Efil is right on the money,” Shutola said in a singsong voice. “There’s sister Sera, sister Ange, and sister Mel, and in a different sense, DarkMel-chan. After you marry my adult self, it’s Rion-chan’s turn once she grows up. You’ll have to put in effort like mad, dearest brother!”

“Y... Yeah...”

Being confronted with harsh reality made me want to lose my mind again.  
*Come on, body, please hold!*

“Oh? Have Lady Rion and Lady DarkMel already left?” Sinjeel asked.

“Ha ha! Dang, I wanted to see them off too!” Oddradd exclaimed.

“Ah, yes. While I couldn’t say goodbye, I will still think of them. I, Suzu, will work hard so I can face off against them when the match comes! Please, Rion-sama, stay well!” Suzu shouted.

“Tch! Why is someone like me stuck in a place like this...” Paul complained.

While I was being crushed by the reality of my situation, Sinjeel and the others approached me, having left the guild headquarters.

“Why’re you guys here?”

“Why, you ask? You didn’t show up on time, so we came to you,” Sinjeel answered.

“On the way here, we heard that Rion-sama and DarkMel-sama had already left for Lumiest, so we hurried over. But...” Suzu trailed off, unwilling to finish the sentence.



“As you can see, we didn’t make it in time! That’s too bad!” Oddradd shouted.

“I was forcefully dragged here,” Paul asserted. “Don’t get it twisted; I don’t care that I ended up with straight losses against your kid, and I definitely didn’t come here to see them off or anything!”

*I see. I understand everything. Everyone came to see Rion and DarkMel off, huh? Heh, adorable.*

“Thanks, guys. To show my appreciation, I’ll make up for Rion and DarkMel being gone by cornering you guys myself until you reach your limits. There’s half a year until the match, and by the time that comes, we’re all going to clear the Rank S dungeon: the Grim Reaper’s Dinner Table!”

“Hah, interesting! Let’s do it!” Oddradd shouted.

“I have gotten feedback on what I’ve gained from you, Kelvin-san, from Lady Respect and Lady Ice. My party will be the one that grows the most in the end,” Sinjeel declared.

“I, uhh...I, errr...I-I’ll try hard so I don’t lose!” Suzu stammered nervously.

“Hmph! You guys don’t stand a chance. That goes for the match against Lumiest too. Still, if the strongest among us is going, there’s no way I can refuse. Fine, I’ll elect myself!” Paul took a roundabout route to the same conclusion.

The candidates all responded to my encouragement and raised their fists.

*Hear this, little sister and beloved daughter: I won’t let you win easily!*

## Afterword

Thank you so much for buying *Black Summoner Volume 16: Adventurers of the Labyrinthine Country*. One-two, one-two! It's me, a fairly excited Doufu Mayoi. To all the readers who have come from the web novel to pick up this book, thank you, as always!

This time, I have to address the *Black Summoner* anime before anything else. I started posting the web novel in 2014 and managed something I'd never expected when it was turned into a novel in 2016. And now, an anime is being made. No...that's not a lie. I'm serious. Please look at the obi around your book. I swear I wouldn't go so far as to print fake information just to trick you. Do you believe me? Hey, do you believe me now?! By the way, I still only half believe this is happening.

Anyway, leaving that little bit aside... Oh man, when I started writing, I would never have expected an anime to be made of this. If the me from back then knew about this, I wonder how I would react? I think I would absolutely refuse to believe it. I'd say things like, "No, no, there's no way." Still, reality is sometimes strange. Kelvin, Clotho, Gerard, Efil, and the others will be moving on the other side of the screen, won't they? Man, seriously... (so moved).

Ah, and I have one more announcement. On the same day this book goes on sale, *Kurou Sister's Otherworld Campfire Cooking* will be published under the same label, Overlap-sama. It's an isekai novel set in a world just a little bit like *Black Summoner*, featuring cooking by a pair of sisters who are just as hungry as Melfina. Actually, there *are* battles, so you might not be able to call it a *cooking* novel, but...well, it's my kind of cooking novel! It has the golden ratio of seven parts cooking to three parts battles! Please, check out that series too! Seriously, please!

Lastly, in regard to the production of the *Black Summoner* series, I would like to thank my illustrators, Kurogin-sama and DaiXt-sama, everyone involved with making the anime, my proofreader, and I can't forget all my readers as well.

Okay, then, I will be praying we meet again in the next volume. Please continue to read *Black Summoner*.

—Doufu Mayoi

## ■ RION CELSIUS

■ 14 Y/O / FEMALE / HUMAN / SWORD SAINT

■ LEVEL: 216

■ TITLE: BLACK COMET

■ HP: 8652/8652 (+5768)

■ MP: 5423/5423

■ STRENGTH: 2899

■ ENDURANCE: 1370 (+640)

■ AGILITY: 5510 (+640)

■ MAGIC: 4119 (+640)

■ LUCK: 3030

### ■ EQUIPMENT

LUMIEST ACADEMY UNIFORM (RANK C)

GODDESS'S RING (RANK S)

LOAFERS (RANK D)

### ■ SKILLS

RESIDUAL SLICE  
(UNIQUE SKILL)

SWORD MASTERY (RANK S)

COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)

ACROBATICS (RANK S)

SKY WALK (RANK S)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK S)

PAINTING (RANK S)

EMPATHY (RANK S)

PRESENCE SENSING (RANK S)

VIGOR (RANK S)

ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)

DOUBLE GROWTH RATE

DOUBLE SKILL POINTS

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

DISGUISE (RANK S)

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

BLESSING OF THE LIGHTNING DRAGON KING

CONCEALMENT (RANK S) DISGUISE (RANK S)

ABSOLUTE PURIFICATION  
(UNIQUE SKILL)

DUAL WIELD (RANK S)

COVERT ACTION (RANK S)

RED MAGIC (RANK S)

MIND'S EYE (RANK S)

NERVES OF STEEL (RANK S)

COMPANIONSHIP (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

MAGIC ENHANCEMENT  
(RANK S)

STRATAGEM (RANK S)

FORTITUDE (RANK S)



## ■ DARKMEL CELSIUS

■ 8 Y/O / FEMALE / FALLEN ANGEL / CHILD OF THE DIVINE

■ LEVEL: 80

■ TITLE: GRIM REAPER'S BELOVED DAUGHTER

■ HP: 856/856 (+100)

■ MP: 1242/1242 (+100)

■ STRENGTH: 646 (+100)

■ ENDURANCE: 249 (+100)

■ AGILITY: 376 (+100)

■ MAGIC: 694 (+100)

■ LUCK: 455 (+100)

### ■ EQUIPMENT

LUMIEST ACADEMY UNIFORM (RANK C)

MINI SILVER HALO (RANK S)

ARCHANGEL'S RING (RANK S)

LOAFERS (RANK D)

### ■ SKILLS

MONSTER PARENT (UNIQUE SKILL)

COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)

BLUE MAGIC (RANK A)

BLACK MAGIC (RANK B)

FLIGHT (RANK B)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK S)

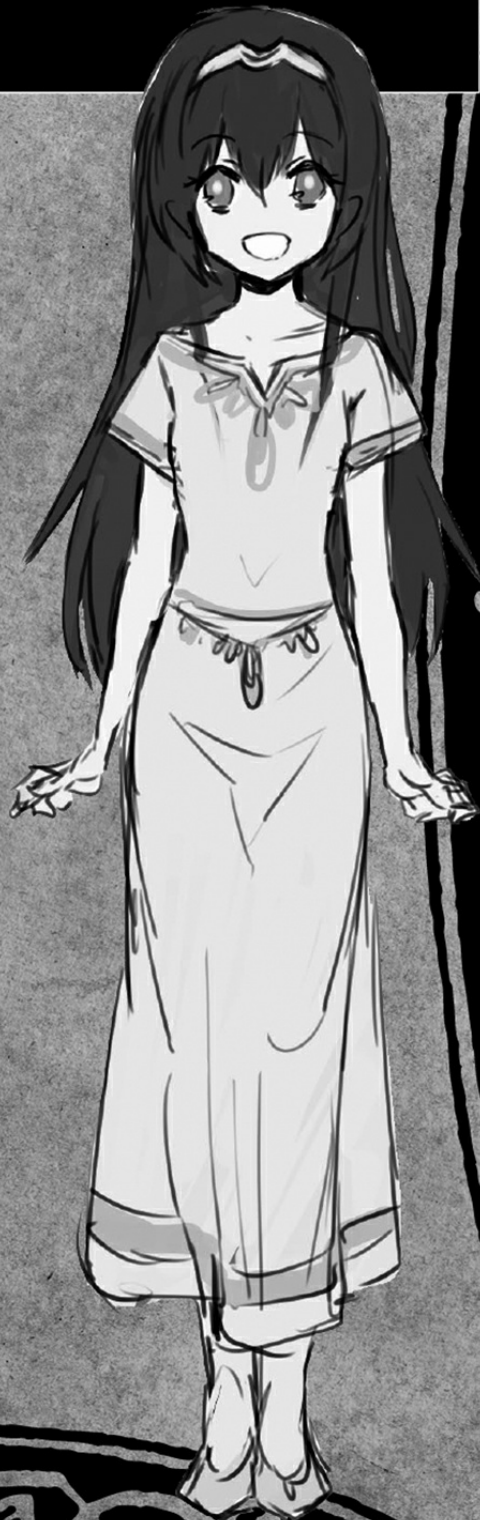
SINGING (RANK B)

COMPANIONSHIP (RANK A)

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

SUMMONING/MAGIC SUPPLY (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



## ■ BELL BAAL

■ 21 (+?) Y/O / FEMALE / DEMON STORM LORD / CALCITRIST

■ LEVEL: 187

■ TITLE: CONDEMNER

■ HP: 13536/13536 (+9024)

■ MP: 16857/16857 (+11238)

■ STRENGTH: 2855 (+640)

■ ENDURANCE: 2467 (+640)

■ AGILITY: 3414 (+640)

■ MAGIC: 4011 (+640)

■ LUCK: 3077 (+640)

### ■ EQUIPMENT

LUMIEST ACADEMY UNIFORM (RANK C)

CLIP OF CAMOUFLAGE (RANK A)

LOAFERS (RANK D)

### ■ SKILLS

COLOR CORROSION (UNIQUE SKILL)

COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)

GREEN MAGIC (RANK S)

HERCULEAN STRENGTH (RANK S)

PRESENCE SENSING (RANK S)

DANGER DETECTION (RANK S)

MAGIC DETECTION (RANK S)

CONCEALMENT DETECTION (RANK S)

TORTURING (RANK S)

MUSICAL PERFORMANCE (RANK S)

AUTO HEALING (RANK S)

GUSTATION (RANK B)

MAGIC ENHANCEMENT (RANK S)

SPIRIT (RANK S)

FLIGHT (RANK S)

FORTITUDE (RANK S)

IRON WALL (RANK S)

ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK S)

SUPER LUCK (RANK S)

DANCING (RANK S)

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

BLESSING OF THE DEMON LORD

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)

DISGUISE (RANK S)





## ■ SUZU

- 15 Y/O / FEMALE / TITAN / NINJA
- LEVEL: 101
- TITLE: GRIM REAPER'S FAVORITE DISCIPLE
- HP: 1966/1966
- MP: 89/89

- STRENGTH: 2041
- ENDURANCE: 575
- AGILITY: 2708 (+320)
- MAGIC: 160
- LUCK: 1310

### ■ EQUIPMENT

THUNDERSTORM STAFF (RANK S)  
KUNAI (RANK C) X2  
SHURIKEN (RANK S) (RANK C) X2  
HANDMADE CHIGNON CAP (RANK C)  
RAGING BERSERKER'S QIPAO (RANK S)  
KUNG FU SHOES (RANK C)

### ■ SKILLS

SHADOW CLONES (UNIQUE SKILL)  
SWORD MASTERY (RANK B)  
SPEAR MASTERY (RANK B)  
STAFF MASTERY (RANK S)  
COMBAT TECHNIQUE (RANK S)  
THROWING (RANK A)  
ACROBATICS (RANK S)  
DANGER DETECTION (RANK B),  
CONCEALMENT DETECTION (RANK B)  
COVERT ACTION (RANK B)  
SKY WALK (RANK B)  
ACUTE REFLEXES (RANK A)  
DOUBLE GROWTH RATE  
DOUBLE SKILL POINTS

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)



## ■ SHIN RAINYHEART

■ 34 (+?) Y/O / FEMALE / DAEMON / CALCITRIST

■ LEVEL: □□□

■ TITLE: FREEDOM

■ HP: STURDIER THAN ART!

■ MP: MORE BALANCED THAN ART!

■ STRENGTH: STRONGER THAN ART!

■ ENDURANCE: TOUGHER THAN ART!

■ AGILITY: OF COURSE, BETTER BALANCED THAN ART!

■ MAGIC: ABSOLUTELY BETTER BALANCED THAN ART!

■ LUCK: BOTH GOOD AND BAD LUCK IS STRONGER THAN ART'S! THAT MEANS IT'S SUPER STRONG!

### ■ EQUIPMENT

HAZARD CLUSTER (RANK S)

EYE PATCH (RANK E)

GUILD DIRECTOR'S CLOTHES (RANK S)

LEATHER BOOTS OF THE

GALE WIND BEAST (RANK S)

### ■ SKILLS

□□ (UNIQUE SKILL)

□□□ (UNIQUE SKILL)

—

### ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

CONCEALMENT (RANK S)





## ■ ART DESIRE

■ 28 (+?) Y/O / MALE / DARK HIGH ELF / MUSICIAN

■ LEVEL: ☐☐☐

■ TITLE: RIMLESS

■ HP: SHARPER THAN SHIN!

■ MP: MORE POPULAR AND BELOVED BY MAGIC THAN SHIN!

■ STRENGTH: MORE FEMININE THAN SHIN!

■ ENDURANCE: MORE LOVABLE THAN SHIN!

■ AGILITY: SPEEDIER THAN SHIN!

■ MAGIC: MORE BELOVED BY MAGIC AND POPULAR THAN SHIN.  
I'M BASICALLY AN IDOL!

■ LUCK: POSSIBLY A BIT LESS LUCKY THAN SHIN, BUT THAT ONLY  
MAKES ME MORE POPULAR!

## ■ EQUIPMENT

ADVANCED GLASSES (RANK S)

GLOBAL TAILORED JACKET (RANK A)

CLIP OF THE NEW MOON (RANK A)

GLOBAL STRAIGHT PANTS (RANK A)

GLOBAL DRESS SHOES (RANK A)

## ■ SKILLS

☐☐☐ (UNIQUE SKILL)

—

## ■ PASSIVE EFFECTS

NONE



# Bonus Short Stories

## Gerard's Aspiration

The day after Rion and DarkMel's admittance to Lumiest was set in stone, Gerard could be seen bowing over and over to Efil, his hands held together as if in prayer.

"I'm begging you, Efil! This is for the future!"

"Even if you're the one asking, Gerard-san, that won't make the impossible possible," Efil replied.

Gerard seemed to be asking for a favor from her. However, it also sounded like he had been refused several times and there was no sign of that changing. Even so, he continued to lower his head and repeatedly plead with Efil. That posed the question: what would his request be, to have a great knight begging like this? Judging from how terribly anxious he seemed to get it done, whatever the matter was, it was undoubtedly some sort of emergency.

"Please make a uniform I can wear too! I... I want to go to school with Rion and the others! I wanna go to Lumieessssst!"

In fact, it was the opposite. He simply didn't want to be separated from Rion and DarkMel, who he treated as his own grandchildren, and had come to make an incredibly selfish request.

"And I told you, no," Efil replied as she had done many times already. "If you do something excessive like that, you'll disturb their lives in school. Also, even if I were to make a uniform in your size, Gerard-san, the entrance exams are already over. If you were to try to enter the school without being admitted, that would make you a suspicious trespasser. There would be no doubt that you would cause trouble for Rion-sama and DarkMel-sama."

"Urk!" Gerard grunted in emotional pain. "You...really hit where it hurts!"

"She's right, you know? Older sister Ange here agrees that you should quietly

see them off!” Ange had dropped in from the roof right as Gerard was being beaten down by Efil’s logic. Her entrance was sudden, like that of a ninja’s.

“Uh, Ange?!” Gerard exclaimed, flustered. “Why were you up there?!”

“I’m guarding Efil-chan. She’s pregnant, you know?” Ange replied with a singsong lilt. “Well, I say ‘guarding,’ but I’ve mostly been spending my time talking! Anyway, I see you still haven’t given up, Gerard-san. You’ve gotta know that trying to get in as a student would be stretching it! Even with a lot of compromises, you’d barely fit as security—actually no, with black full-plate armor, I guess you wouldn’t. Nope, you’ve got no chance! Just give it up!”

Ange made her declaration with a full-faced smile. With someone like her, who specialized in disguise and infiltration, saying that, Gerard’s hopes were immediately dashed upon the rocks. Not that he had ever stood a chance in the first place.

Still, he refused to back down. “No! I won’t give up! I will live a wonderful school life with my grandchildren! One with many lovely flowers gathered together, where harmful pests will see the glint of my blade!” He fell to the floor on the spot and proceeded to throw a childish tantrum, flailing his limbs all over the place. It was awful to look at, just awful.

“Whoa...” Ange mumbled.

“That’s so pathetic, Gerard-san...” Efil muttered.

The expressions on their faces as they watched him act out were, obviously, ones of deep pity.

After that, Shutola was called in, and Gerard got a huge tongue-lashing.

## **The Former Goddess and Her Gourmet Tour in Lumiest**

### *Lumiest Gourmet Guide:*

Up until now, this magazine has focused on food from the Eastern Continent. Every single restaurant that has been introduced so far has been a wonderful place that the author can confidently recommend. However... However! I would like the reader to calm down for a moment and really *think*. The world of

gourmet food doesn't only exist on the Eastern Continent.

Did any of you know that the Western Continent, a place where a jumble of large and small countries are all mixed together, has its own gourmet food that will knock your socks off? This time, I would like to introduce you all to a place on the Western Continent that is worthy of my reputation as the King of Gourmet Food. And you guessed it—it exists in the Academic City of Lumiest, widely known as a place of the highest education.

The students who go to this school are the elite of elites from all over the world. It's because people like them call this place home while they learn that this city's food culture has developed so much. Enough that there are gourmet eateries capable of boasting that they can handle anyone, even royalty, regardless of how refined their palates are. In other words, Lumiest is a hotly contested battleground for restaurants, with venues catering to all ages and cultures. It wouldn't be too far to say that if a gourmand doesn't know about Lumiest, they aren't a gourmand at all...

The great former Goddess of Reincarnation, Melfina—otherwise known as Mel—had come to Lumiest in secret. She was breathing hard, likely because she was excited, and in her hands she held the guidebook she loved to read. She had come to have a preliminary inspection of the school that her beloved daughter, DarkMel, would be attending. It might not have seemed that way, but people shouldn't judge books by their covers. Surely the way she was acting was just part of a high-level disguise. She was merely posing as a tourist in search of good food, with her true purpose being to confirm how the school appeared in its unvarnished state. As one might expect of a former goddess, she was very well prepared.

"Those who don't know about Lumiest's food can't call themselves gourmands!" Mel suddenly shouted to herself in the middle of the main street.

All at once, the other pedestrians' gazes turned to her. Indeed...the disguise was advanced...very high-level! By purposefully standing out in a bad way, she was able to catch people off guard and seem like even more of a tourist. It was a bizarre but ingenious plan, one that even an infiltration specialist like Ange would have to doff her hat to. As one might expect of a former goddess.

“Now then, it’s about time I got started. Let’s begin with...*that* famous eatery!”

Mel’s excited expression changed into a resolute one as she started walking through the streets. Her first destination was apparently the school’s cafeteria. She knew without needing to be told that the foundation of all life was food. Her surprise inspection of the academy today would be especially strict!

Well, that was a lie. To be honest, she had just come to tour the food that the city had to offer. And today, she was hungry. Extra hungry. Megahungry, in fact. It was hard to believe, but she had actually gone without meals in order to prepare for this tour, and that was saying something. If Kelvin or Efil were around, they would likely have reacted with deep concern, suspecting illness. However, who could measure the depths of Mel’s stomach now that she’d fasted for a little while? The answer to that would soon come to light, but what would the answer be?



“Aaaghh... Principal Art! I...I...I feel an incredible pressure c-c-coming from town!” Katua suddenly stammered.

“Hm? Ah, you can just leave that alone,” Art replied. “She’s harmless. Well, not completely. But all she’ll do is clean out the food stores of several eateries.”

“Really?!” Katua asked skeptically. “That damage estimate is weirdly specific. But, erm, hmm... My intuition tells me that something worse will happen...maybe.”

“Heh! You’re as big a worrywart as ever, Katua-kun.”



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Black Summoner: Volume 16

by Doufu Mayoi

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