



HELL MODE

■ The Hardcore Gamer Dominates in
Another World with Garbage Balancing ■

STORY HAMUO

ART MO



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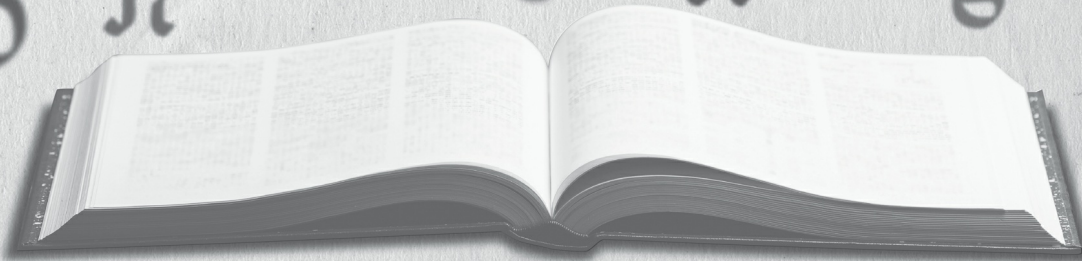
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Chapter 1: Distorted World

The renowned dwarven blacksmith Habarak glared at Allen with bloodshot eyes and roared, "It's all because you lot keep going on about Dygragni this, Dygragni that! Who even is he?! Lady Freyja is so furious, she's not letting me forge orichalcum anymore!"

He then shoved Allen away and crumpled to his knees, grinding his hands and head into the ground as his hunched back shook with sobs.

"Lady Freyja, I'm so sorry. Please don't be angry. I'm so sorry."

With the way he was bawling like a child, it was hard to believe that this dwarf was one of only three blacksmiths in the world capable of forging the rare metal orichalcum; he barely seemed like an adult. However, his reaction made crystal clear the sheer depth of his pain, leaving Allen and his friends temporarily stunned. Even the Hero Helmios, who had brought them here to introduce them to Habarak, was at a loss for words as he knelt down next to the master blacksmith and gently rubbed his back.

Several dwarven apprentices came out of the building that served both as their workshop and home, drawn out by their master's cries. Only upon their arrival did Habarak finally respond.

The young dwarf who had met them at the door earlier addressed the group. "I think that's enough for today. Would you please take your leave now?" He gave them little choice but to oblige.

"Let's visit again tomorrow. Who knows, perhaps he'll be in a better mood after having a night to think things over." With Helmios's suggestion in mind, the group returned to town to search for an inn.

The next morning, the party once again visited Habarak's workshop. Upon knocking on the door, they were met by the same young dwarf as before. This time, he let the group in without issue.

"Please follow me."

Once in the drawing room, Krena placed the chunk of orichalcum she had brought with her on a large table.

“I hope this was the right choice.”

Krena was referring to the discussion the party had held at the inn the previous evening regarding whether they should bring the orichalcum with them. They ultimately decided to, since leaving it at the inn was out of the question. While Krena had not expressed an opinion either way, judging by her remark, she still was not entirely convinced.

Habarak arrived a short time later. His gaze was immediately drawn to the chunk of shining golden ore atop the table.

“I take it that’s the orichalcum y’all found in Dygragni’s dungeon?” There was a tinge of sadness in his expression.

“That’s right,” Krena answered in an uncharacteristically reserved voice.

Habarak remained stock-still at the room’s entrance, a dejected look on his face. His words came out in a hoarse whisper. “That... Well, that certainly is orichalcum. But I can’t forge it anymore, sorry.”

A heavy silence fell upon the room. Krena, Allen, and the rest of the No-life Gamers were completely dumbfounded, unsure of what they could possibly say to the troubled blacksmith. Helmios, however, broke the silence in his usual chipper tone.

“You know, I’ve lost count of how many jams this sword you forged for me has gotten me out of.”

Right, his sword’s made from orichalcum. I’ve been on the wrong end of that blade myself.

Habarak finally spoke up. “I appreciate yer kind words.”

“Would you mind telling us why you’re no longer able to forge orichalcum?”

“My fire’s died down, y’see. It’s so bad, I can hardly even forge adamantite.” The pain was evident in his voice. “What’s worse, I can’t hear Lady Freyja’s voice anymore. I’d always been able to hear her when I was forgin’.”

So he could hear the Fire Goddess’s voice, huh? Sounds more like a priest than

a blacksmith.

“Yesterday you mentioned that this was all our fault for deifying Dygragni. Is that really the cause of your troubles?”

“Lady Freyja is the Goddess of Fire. If she ain’t lending me her power, then that must be the reason. Those fools in the Empire of Baukis are so intent on deifying that Dungeon Master or whatever you call him in the interest of lining their pockets.” The dwarven blacksmith’s tone was so harsh, he practically spat out those words.

This reminded Allen of what Uru had previously told him about how things were going in Baukis.

Uru mentioned that too. That was also the reason Admiral Garara held the Baukisian emperor in such low esteem.

Baukis filled its coffers thanks to Dygragni’s dungeons luring adventurers from around the world and the economic windfall they brought with them; consequently, the people there worshipped Dygragni like a god. Moreover, the war with the Demon Lord Army had increased foreign demand for magic tools, leading some to believe that the empire desired to prolong the war.

So that’s why they only provide the Central Continent with the absolute bare minimum of assistance.

The Empire of Baukis never dispatched golems to the Central Continent. In addition, despite possessing the military might capable of repeatedly driving off seaborne attacks from the Demon Lord Army, they never marched on the Forgotten Continent—the Demon Lord’s home base—north of the Central Continent.

I mean, sure, even I get that it’s no small feat to get the countries of the world to come together and put their personal interests aside, but we can’t let things go on like this.

Drawing upon his thirty-five years of experience from his previous life, Allen knew that no world would ever truly be ideal. However, he also felt that this world, in the midst of its life-or-death struggle against the Demon Lord Army, fell particularly short. The Empire of Giamut was a hegemony that used the

Alliance as a means of expanding its influence. The isolationist Rohzenheim despised foreign interference. Albahal, the Country of Beastkin, had suffered generations of persecution and could no longer envisage a unified world. Then there was the Kingdom of Ratash, currently consumed with infighting over succession to the throne and political factions. Baukis, with its profit-chasing and war-extending behavior, was far from alone in diminishing the Five Continent Alliance, once created to topple the Demon Lord Army, to little more than a fanciful name.

Maybe it's because the war's dragged on for several decades now. Or perhaps...

Perhaps this was all part of the Demon Lord Army's grand strategy.

"So Fire Goddess Freyja will no longer lend you her power because the people of Baukis are praying to Dygragni instead?"

"Even those who used to be part of the Kingdom of Melka no longer speak Lady Freyja's praises."

"Is that so?"

"Anyway, that's all I have to say. I'd appreciate it if ye'd get a move on."

The room fell silent once again. Even Allen was at a loss. There was no simple solution to Habarak's inability to forge orichalcum if it was caused by people losing faith in a deity.

It was then that the small creature sitting atop Sophie's shoulder addressed Habarak. "You are incorrect, and terribly so at that. Hmm...yes, I'm afraid I can no longer maintain my silence. Ha ha."

"Mind yer tongue!"

A look of anger exploded across Habarak's face as he jerked his head in Sophie's direction from where the voice that so completely shot him down originated. He swallowed his words the moment he caught sight of the creature on her shoulder, however. Allen figured he must have sensed the god's divine presence.

"The Freyja I know would never turn her back on the dwarves. She may be a

violent goddess, but she always had a soft spot for your people. More so than other races.”

“What?!”

“In that case, there must be some other reason Lady Freyja would stop lending her power to Habarak,” Allen mused.

“You are correct, Allen. There is another reason for her not lending her power. Or perhaps I should say that she is unable to lend it. Ha ha.”

“But you don’t know what that reason is, huh?” Regardless, they would not be able to forge the orichalcum.

“Ha ha. That’s why I’m going to the Heavenly Realm to ask her directly. Perhaps she’ll share it with me.”

With that, Rohzen tensed up and froze in place atop Sophie’s shoulder.

“Wh-Who was that...?”

Helmios explained everything about the Spirit God to the shaken blacksmith.

“I see. So you lot are accompanied by a god, then?” Habarak looked the group over once again, this time with a fresh perspective. “Never mind that. I’m sorry ’bout blaming you all. This is ultimately a problem for us dwarves.”

“No worries.” Allen figured the situation was more than sufficient to justify anyone falling into despair and losing their sense of perspective.

The young dwarf then entered the drawing room with tea, almost as if on cue now that the tension had eased. Habarak took a seat, his expression relaxed.

The group waited around two hours before Rohzen finally moved again. However, judging by the way his head slumped, he was not in good spirits.

Sophie looked worried. “What’s wrong, Lord Rohzen?”

“Hmph, well. Hmm.” He raised his head and looked toward Sophie. “Sophialohne...”

“Yes?”

“I want you to promise me one thing before I continue.”

Sophie returned his gaze. "Anything, Lord Rohzen."

"Everything I do as a spirit god is to aid the elves. When I entered the pact in response to the priestess's prayers, I swore to do my utmost for them. So, please don't worry."

"Huh? B-But why...?"

Allen quickly picked up on the reason Sophie was so astounded. That a god would say such things must have meant the matter he was about to discuss was quite serious. Everyone in the room watched on with bated breath.

"Things are far more dire than I anticipated. At this rate, the world will fall to ruin in a matter of years. Ha ha."

Rohzen's laugh rang dark and hollow in Allen's ears.

"Fall to ruin? What do you mean by that?"

"I will explain. But before that, I would like to discuss something that happened while you all were fighting to save Rohzenheim." The Spirit God intended to explain what was going on from the very beginning.

"Did something happen in the Heavenly Realm back then?"

"Indeed, something did. The battle you were fighting on this plane was merely a diversion. While you all were occupied, the Demon Lord Army's primary forces were invading the Heavenly Realm."

"Just as I thought. So that wasn't their main unit, then."

It seems like I'm always right whenever I predict the worst.

"Yes, it is exactly as you predicted."

Cecil was quick to demand an explanation. "Hold on. How did you figure out it was a diversion, Allen?"

"You remember how I mentioned it during the war, right? I was struck by how different the Demon Lord Army we'd learned about at the Academy was from the one we actually confronted. It felt like we were facing nothing more than a mob of monsters."

"Now that you mention it, I do recall you saying something to that effect,"

Volmaar said, nodding.

The Academy taught that the Demon Lord Army was cunning, striking at their enemies' weakest points—a trait which had led to the Five Continent Alliance losing battle after battle on the Central Continent. However, the Demon Lord Army that attacked Rohzenheim had practically nothing in terms of logistical support, consisting instead nearly entirely of assault troops. Said troops were constantly on the verge of starvation and had nothing in terms of leadership or discipline; they simply launched one reckless attack after another. Picking up on the discrepancy between what he had learned and what they encountered, Allen had often discussed this matter with his friends during their downtime.

Keel also reflected on Allen's conversations. "You mentioned that the forces were acting as if they were disposable. So you mean that really was the case?"

"It seems they were there solely to buy time. The Demon Lord Army's strategy was to draw the gods' attention to the events down in your world in order to make it easier for the main force to invade the Heavenly Realm."

"So they callously threw away ten million monsters just for that?"

Allen's question was met with a nod from Rohzen.

Prior to the Gamers' departure for Rohzenheim, the headmaster had told them that they would be facing an unprecedented number of monsters—a statement which turned out to be true once they finally reached the battlefield. Obviously it was far from smooth sailing for the party, given the sheer number of enemies they faced, but the fact that they were able to secure a victory at all struck Allen as peculiar. It all only made sense if the Demon Lord Army's true goal was simply to create a diversion.

So they... No. Could it be? Just how much had the Demon Lord Army prepared for this?

A single possibility made its way to the forefront of Allen's mind.

Rohzen spoke up once again. "Apparently the army that invaded the Heavenly Realm consisted of both savage and ancient dragons joined by Demonic Deities and archdemons."

Now that sounds like a force to be reckoned with. Ancient dragons are even

more powerful than Rank S monsters, way more powerful. In terms of strength, they're practically on par with demigods.

Every last member of the invading army was as strong as, if not stronger, than Demonic Deity Rehzal and the Rank S dungeon floor bosses.

"So what became of the Heavenly Realm?"

"It seems even the Demon Lord Army knew that they could not completely wipe out the Heavenly Realm with a single strike. Rather, their true focus was on attacking Freyja's temple."

Habarak's face drained of all color. His head jerked forward so quickly, he looked as if he would topple over at any second. "A-And Lady Freyja?"

"Not only is she one of the pillars of the Four Elemental Deities, but she's also known for her untempered power. She succeeded in driving off the Demon Lord Army with the help of her spiritual allies, but unfortunately, she didn't make it out entirely unscathed."

Habarak let out a sigh of relief. "Th-That's good to hear."

"However, something very important was stolen from her: the divine vessel, the symbol of Freyja's role as the Goddess of Fire."

Allen felt a wave of unease wash over him at Rohzen's mention of the divine vessel.

Rohzen hasn't been very forthcoming with information about the Heavenly Realm so far, so why is he so open about it now? Could the situation be that dire?

"Y-You mean that's why her flames've weakened?"

"Precisely. A god whose divine vessel has been stolen will lose their status as a deity."

The old dwarf's eyes went wide as tears threatened to escape at any moment. "I... That's..."

"And I suppose that will lead to humanity's downfall?" Allen asked.

"That is correct. If Freyja continues to use her Fire Goddess powers without

her divine vessel, I doubt she'll last three years before turning to stone."

She'll turn to stone, huh? That must be what death is like for the gods.

"When that happens, forging adamantite will be entirely out of the question. Even mithril will no longer be forgeable, which would leave the world no choice but to fight with rusted armor and scrap iron weapons."

"N-No way."

"W-Wait. Does that mean that the mithril mines in the White Dragon Mountains will become worthless as well?"

Both Cecil, a member of House Granvelle, and Keel, the head of House Carnel, were at a loss for words. Their respective families made their fortunes by mining and selling the mithril found within the White Dragon Mountains that bordered their territories.

There's no way we could farm enough equipment from dungeons to properly outfit our soldiers against the Demon Lord Army.

Even weapons and armor ultimately had a limited life span on the battlefield. If the forges' flames were to weaken, the Alliance would no longer be able to create new weapons...or even repair the old ones. They would be stuck using low-grade weapons and armor, which were all but useless against monsters Rank B and higher.

"Huh, so the class promotion rollout is an attempt to try to improve the situation."

Allen had been wondering why a class promotion system was being added so suddenly after the world had gone so long without. The reason was simple: the world would be destroyed if something was not done about it.

"Indeed. We intend to disseminate that information to the masses through the Church shortly, along with the fact that the Fire Goddess has lost her power."

Leading the bad news with good would at least keep people from losing all hope, even if they would ultimately still find the situation troubling. Were the gods to do nothing, humanity would surely become despondent. After all, the

Demon Lord Army was not fighting for control—they were using their legions of monsters to wipe the people off the face of the planet.

It's not like I can protect the whole world all on my own.

With only shoddy weapons and armor to work with, the forces of mankind would be doomed before they even had a chance to use any of the blessings the gods had graced them with, no matter how plentiful they might be. But now was not the time to think about all that. There were more pressing matters at hand.

“From what I’ve heard, Lady Freyja is quite the firebrand compared to all the other Four Elemental Deities. There must have been a reason the Demon Lord Army would specifically target her, right?”

Allen had learned about the relative rankings of the gods in his theology class at the Academy. Elmea, the God of Creation, was the most powerful and reigned supreme over all the other gods. However, there were other gods who also boasted tremendous power. The gods known as the Four Elemental Deities—Freyja of fire, Gaia of earth, Ninlil of wind, and Aqua of water—were all quite powerful in their own right.

While Gaia and Aqua were known for specializing in protection and healing, respectively, Freyja’s specialty was combat. She was infamous for being quite the temperamental goddess; once angered, she was capable of causing all the world’s mountains to erupt in unison, leaving behind nothing but scorched earth. The Demon Lord Army must have had a good reason for targeting a god like that, such as needing her divine vessel, or...

“Ye don’t think the dwarves deifyin’ Dygragni and no longer praying to Lady Freyja is related to all this, do ye?”

Habarak and Allen had reached the same conclusion.

“I suspect so. What do you think, Lord Rohzen?”

The Spirit God merely closed his eyes and refused to give a straight answer. “Ha ha. You’re certainly close to understanding the inner workings of the world, Allen. Alas, this is something I cannot answer.” Even with the world facing its possible demise, there were apparently still some things he was not free to

discuss.

“That’s fine; you don’t need to answer. Lady Freyja has clearly been weakening slowly over time, which must be why the Demon Lord Army targeted her.”

Apparently gods did lose their power as their followers lost faith in them.

“It... It can’t be! So we dwarves are responsible for Lady Freyja turning to stone?!” Learning that it was the dwarves’ act of stopping their prayers to Freyja that had caused the goddess to lose her power shook Habarak to his very core.

“How long did the Demon Lord Army wait for Lady Freyja to become weak enough?”

“Looks like you picked up on it too, Cecil. They must have put this plan into motion decades ago.”

The war with the Demon Lord Army had been going on for over sixty years. And it was starting to look as if the Five Continent Alliance, which was formed during that time, had already begun to break apart, with each of the respective parties pursuing its own aspirations. Even the Baukisian emperor’s lust for power—one of the leading factors behind the breakup—had been part of the Demon Lord Army’s grand scheme.

That must be why the Demon Lord Army didn’t wipe out humanity when they had the chance. They must have some sort of plan for the stolen divine vessel.

“The Demon Lord Army must be planning on ensuring the complete annihilation of the world, then. Ha ha.” Rohzen seemed to be speaking to himself more than anyone else.

Allen was thinking the same thing. This meant that the Demon Lord Army was not content to destroy only the Mortal Realm, but the Heavenly Realm as well. In order to avoid this rapidly oncoming fate, they needed to think of a way to save mankind.

* * *

The No-life Gamers, joined by Helmios and his party, were having dinner in

their usual pub. This pub served Meruru's alcoholic beverage of choice—an added bonus.

“They seem to be making good progress on making armor from monster carapaces.”

Sophie was relieved at the news. “That’s good to hear.”

Volmaar nodded firmly in agreement.

Several days had passed since Rohzen told the party about Freyja's divine vessel being stolen. Up until now, the world had relied on Freyja's power to forge weapons and armor. However, that power had been growing weaker and weaker over time. It prevented them from both creating new weapons and repairing old ones, thus leaving them unable to stave off the Demon Lord Army's advances.

Provided that the information did not spread wildly out of control, Rohzen left it to Allen's discretion as to whom he would share this information with—and how much. The peace and stability of the elves were of the utmost importance to the Spirit God, and to that end, he was receptive to disseminating some information to gain the necessary cooperation.

Allen spoke first with the queen of Rohzenheim about what Rohzen had told him. His idea was to make use of the materials acquired from the over one million monsters they had slain during the war in Rohzenheim to aid in the rapid production of equipment. Though their country had not yet completely recovered from the recent siege, she understood the importance of the situation and graciously agreed to prioritize these efforts. The carapaces of the bug monsters were lightweight and could make for strong armor, while the dragon bones and tendons were perfect for bows. Their teeth could be fashioned into arrowheads as well. Though the people of Rohzenheim viewed these materials as precious, the creation of weaponry took priority.

After Baron Granvelle also learned of the situation, he agreed to conduct a search of the armored ants' nests. The queen armored ant could give birth to a large number of armored ants within a very short period of time. Their carapaces could be used to make durable armor, meaning that capturing a queen would give them easy access to a steady supply of materials.

Upon Allen explaining the situation to Helmios, the hero made a request to the emperor of Giamut, located on the Central Continent, for assistance with the matter. If the entirety of its several hundred million citizens—the largest population in the world—were to mobilize, the effects would be tremendous.

With these plans underway, Allen hoped that they would be able to extend mankind's existence, even if for just a bit longer. However, he had no idea how long that would last.

This is all just life support. I'll need to think of an actual solution here too.

The only definitive answer that he could think of was to retrieve the divine vessel from the Demon Lord Army. Whenever he faced a problem, Allen thought back on solutions he had tried in his past life, particularly from his memories of the games he had played. This time, however, those seemed to be of little help.

He had learned from the situation surrounding the divine vessel that his opponent's scheme had been decades in the making. The Demon Lord Army's invasion, numbering over ten million monsters strong, had been merely one element of their grand plan. If he were to just ignore the Demon Lord and focus on leveling up and acquiring gear, Allen would probably be able to at least prepare himself. However, the Demon Lord Army would be constantly implementing one strategy after the next; if he did not have a plan of his own in place, he would always be caught on his back foot.

Keel cast a worried look in Allen's direction. "I just can't help but wonder if we shouldn't be doing something other than sitting here and taking a break like this."

Keel, you... No, actually, we all have families and things we hold dear. Even me. It's no wonder he's worried.

Keel was fretting over his family and had been glum ever since he heard about the Goddess of Fire's divine vessel being stolen and that the world might fall to ruin. He was probably thinking of his sister and servants back in Cernel.

"There's definitely a lot we need to do. But be that as it may, what good will it do us to work ourselves up over it all right now? We should rest while we have the chance. Now that I've said that, though, there are actually quite a few

things I'd like your help with. Are you game?"

"Y-You would? Of course!"

Merely asking his past acquaintances for assistance was not Allen's only plan. Even as the rest of his workload increased, his goal of clearing the Rank S dungeon had remained unchanged. Clearing it would give his friends a chance to promote their class and upgrade their equipment in turn, while also gaining plenty of loot in the process—all of which would help them break through the struggles of battling Demonic Deities.

"You really are something else, Allen." Helmios, who had been listening in on Allen and Keel's conversation, smirked.

"How so?"

"It's impressive you were able to put together a party like this at your age."

"Well, things just kind of happened to fall into place. Anyway, how did your negotiations with Dygragni about a reward for the first dungeon clear go?"

"Ah, that. Yeah, he said it's 'no problemo.'"

Great! The rumors about how laid-back he is were true!

"What kind of reward are you thinking of?"

"Something that'd help the world...I think."

"That sounds like the Allen I know."

"Besides, it's not like there's any guarantee that we're going to be the ones to receive it."

Dungeon Master Dygragni could be found in the temple located at the center of the Rank S dungeon's first floor, where he was waited upon by dwarven priests. It was not much unlike how the elves looked after Rohzen, actually. As with most other spiritual deities, mere adventurers were not allowed an audience with him. A person bearing the title of "Hero," however, was an entirely different story. Helmios was able to meet with Dygragni merely by submitting a formal request to the temple, which was why Allen had Helmios pass along his suggestion and ask a question on his behalf.

Allen's suggestion was that Dygragni create a special reward for the very first person to conquer his dungeon. He had heard from the beastkin Uru, among others, that the Rank S dungeon had yet to be cleared. Based on his past-life memories, Allen felt that it was only natural that someone would receive a reward for being the first to beat it.

He also had Helmios pass along his idea that the person to clear the dungeon should be allowed to choose their own reward. Allen figured it was a bit of a foolhardy suggestion, but he was both grateful and a bit surprised at how laid-back the dungeon master seemed.

"Oh, and about the divine vessel. You said that Dygragni has one too?"

"Right, that's what he said. He said he was over the moon when Lord Elmea granted it to him. He was just glad that all the time he'd spent diligently working as a dungeon master had paid off."

Allen noticed Rohzen furrow his brow at this.

"What do you plan to do with that information?" Cecil asked.

"Huh? Well, I figured we're going to have a pretty hard time finding the divine vessel if we don't even know what it is exactly. But...hmm... I think I get it."

Cecil was getting annoyed. "Okay, but / don't, so just spit it out already."

"Hmm, well... Do you think of Helmios as a god, Cecil? At the very least, he's certainly revered by multiple empires for his heroism."

"What? A god?" Cecil had no idea what Allen was going on about.

"What about you, Helmios? Assuming that you continue to be adored across the empires, do you feel like you could become a god if the people were to worship you as such?"

"Huh? No way. What are you going on about, Allen?"

"I was just thinking that maybe this divine vessel is a kind of container that accumulates all of the prayers made to you."

Allen had been pondering the connection between worship and gods ever since Sophie mentioned to him that "gods are created by worship" back at the Academy. And then there was what Habarak mentioned back at his workshop.

He had said that as Dygragni rose to prominence among the dwarves and they stopped praying to Freyja, her flame weakened. Now that she was without her divine vessel, she faced death as a god.

When Helmios mentioned that Elmea had granted Dygragni a divine vessel once the dwarves began to pray to him instead of Freyja, Allen came up with one possible explanation: gods in this world needed to be worshipped in order to live on, and the divine vessel existed as a manifestation of their godhood that accumulated all of those prayers.

Allen figured that God of Creation Elmea granted divine vessels to those he deemed worthy of being gods. As such, these possessors of divine vessels would then use various means to maintain the faith of their followers. Therefore, perhaps any able to maintain enough followers over a certain period of time would be upgraded from demigod to god. This would mean that Freyja and Rohzen had undergone this exact process to become revered figures. Meanwhile, Dygragni was still in the middle of that process. On the other hand, it also would mean that even if Helmios's acts of heroism earned him prayers and accolades equal to those of a god, he would not become one so long as he had not been granted a divine vessel by Elmea. Furthermore, after becoming a god, one would need to continually increase their believers' numbers and accumulate more prayers. If they did not, they risked losing their power and turning to stone—death, as far as gods were concerned. In other words, absent a divine vessel, not only did one lose the manifest proof that they were in fact a god, but they could no longer maintain their divinity.

"Hmm, I see." Helmios nodded in agreement with Allen's assessment and shot a sideward glance toward Rohzen.

Rohzen stood motionless, not even blinking, as if frozen in place. Judging by the rivulets of perspiration running down his body, Allen figured he had hit on something that the very mention of was taboo to the highest degree.

"In any case, I think it's safe to say that Dygragni has nothing to do with the Demon Lord Army, given he was granted a divine vessel from Lord Elmea," Helmios added.

"Honestly, I was a bit suspicious in the beginning."

One of the reasons the Fire Goddess Freyja had her divine vessel stolen was that she had been growing weaker. That, Allen assumed, was due to the dwarves praying to Dygragni instead of her.

For a brief moment, Allen had figured that Dygragni was one of the Demon Lord's minions and that this, too, was a part of the Demon Lord Army's plot. However, that made no sense. It was entirely possible that the Demon Lord Army merely took advantage of the fact that, as far as the gods were concerned, the Mortal Realm existed as a place to acquire believers from.

Looking at it from that perspective, the Demon Lord Army's objective all along was simply to steal a divine vessel. But if that were all they wanted, many other gods had one as well. If Dygragni had been actually working with the Demon Lord, then it would have been far simpler to obtain his rather than steal Freyja's.

Of course, it was also plausible that the Demon Lord Army specifically wanted to get their hands on one of the Four Elemental Deities' divine vessels to acquire their immense power for themselves. And who better to get it from than Freyja, the source of the world's fire?

"I get that," Cecil responded, "but what should we do about it?"

"Hmm, there is one option. And it should be here shortly."

Cecil was now well and truly lost. "Huh? What should?"

Allen's mind was firing on all cylinders as he made use of every bit of his past experience to try to find a resolution to this problem. It was hardly uncommon for Allen to get ahead of himself and offer up an explanation later, but today he was even worse than usual.

Uru's running late; he should've been here by now.

Allen looked up at the magical clock hanging from the bar's wall.

SLAM!

The door flew open with such incredible force, the sound reverberated throughout the bar.

You're gonna break the door, throwing it open like that.

Allen looked toward the doorway and caught sight of a fur-covered lionkin.

Huh, Beast Prince Zeu looks pissed. He seems to have a thing for letting his anger get the best of him and storming into shops.

Zeu looked around the bar before locking eyes with Allen and baring his fangs. He spoke in a low growl: "Charge."

"Hyaaaaaaaaah!"

At his command, a slew of armed beastkin came flooding into the bar.

Chapter 2: Pontiff of Daemonism

Allen had asked Uru to do some research for him. The result of those efforts had apparently led to the group of armed beastkin surrounding Allen's table, weapons drawn, as a thoroughly enraged Beast Prince Zeu slowly closed the distance between them. There was no way Allen could have anticipated that the beastkin prince would be *this* angry.

Did Uru screw it all up? C'mon, man, there must've been a better way for you to broach the subject. Is this whole thing really worth getting that worked up over, anyway?

Helmios remained completely unfazed and called out to the enraged lionkin in his usual chipper tone. "Greetings, Beast Prince. Care to join us?"

"Helmios. I take it your presence here indicates that this is one of Giamut's plots?"

Seemingly having picked up on what was happening, Helmios shot a look toward Allen.

"Hmm? And what do you mean, exactly?"

"Ah, actually, he's probably talking about me," Allen said, then glanced past Zeu toward Uru, who stood there with an apologetic look on his face.

Zeu seemed impressed by the way Allen had responded so casually before taking a sip of juice.

"So it was you, sticking your nose into the Country of Beastkin's business where it doesn't belong. You're pretty bold for a wee little field mouse."

"I'm truly sorry if I got involved in something I should have stayed out of. I was only trying to learn about the Union, a matter which I believe is connected to the Country of Beastkin as well."

Hmm, so it seems like they really are pretty involved.

The Union was a group of small-to medium-sized nations united both

politically and economically on the continent of Galiat, located to the south of Rohzenheim.

“I wanted to check something with Uru, but since you’re here, Your Highness, that’s even better. Please, take a seat.”

The look on Zeu’s face grew even fiercer. “What did you say to me?”

Keel, the worrywart of the group, was practically shaking in his seat, his face awash with anxiety. He seemed distressed that things were not quite as under control as Allen was pretending, but he dared not voice his concerns.

“Oh, is the great lion of the Country of Beastkin afraid of a mere mouse?”

This conversation’s not going anywhere. Just. Sit. Down. Already.

Helmios gave Allen a reproachful look, warning the younger boy that he had crossed the line.

“Hmph, you’re a peculiar one, kid. You intrigue me. Anyway, yes, I suppose my throat is a bit parched. I’d w-w-welcome a drink.” Though Zeu was too angry to speak properly, he managed to fake an awkward smile all the same in a bid to show that he was still in control of his emotions. He then settled down into an empty seat.

One of the accompanying beastkin made their way to the counter to place an order with the gawking bartender. A short time later, a stein of ale was set down in front of the Beast Prince. He emptied it in a single gulp.

“So tell me, why are you sticking your nose in my country’s business?”

“As I said before, I was looking into the Union.”

“I see. Yet you say that our country is somehow involved with it, and indeed, you have made attempts to question my citizens about circumstances within my kingdom. What is your reason for looking into the matter?”

Zeu seemed to have relaxed somewhat after drinking his ale, causing him to realize that he still had not properly thanked Allen for his past deeds. With that, he took on a slightly politer demeanor. However...

“Just to make sure I’m clear, I take it that we’re here to exchange information, yes?”

“Watch your mouth, you little upstart!”

Just as Zeu was about to offer Allen his gratitude for saving the beastkin, Allen’s remark once again sent him into a rage. Allen casually judged by the way his fur stood on end that all of his muscles must have tensed up.

“It’s only fair, right?” Allen pressed. “Both you and I want information, which means this is a transaction. Why would you think that only one side should be entitled to answers, especially with the future queen of Rohzenheim and the great Hero Helmios here with us?”

“Ngh, but... B-But I...”

Allen glanced toward Sophie and Helmios. Considering that the Beast Prince was not the crown prince, Sophie outranked him in terms of royal status. Helmios’s party members, meanwhile, were far stronger than Zeu’s men.

“Now, now, Allen. Let’s hold it right there.” Helmios then addressed Zeu in a calm, polite tone. “Sire, please. I don’t yet know what it is that Allen here wants to discuss, but I believe the information will be beneficial to all parties involved. All I humbly ask is that you would consider speaking with us.”

“Hmph, would it really be beneficial to me?”

“Of course,” Helmios continued. “If you would kindly agree to join us in conversation, we would be happy to discuss the matter. If Your Highness deems that the information is of no value to you, then you are welcome to end the conversation. How does that sound?”

“Hm, so I can call it off at any time? Fine, then. If the great Hero of the Central Continent says as much, I suppose it’s worth hearing you out. Men, go find a table and get yourselves something to drink.”

“Yes, sir!”

With that, Zeu dismissed his beastkin entourage.

“Well then, Allen, let’s hear it.”

“Of course, Helmios.”

Allen was impressed by the flawless way Helmios handled the situation.

So that's what it means to be a hero, huh. He got things under control better than I could've, all while allowing Zeu to save face.

Allen went on to explain the full story to Zeu, from when they discovered the orichalcum, to Freyja's divine vessel being stolen, to Allen's assumptions about what was coming next. He left nothing out. As he spoke, he glanced over at Rohzen from time to time, but the elven deity merely stood by and watched intently as the situation unfolded. The Spirit God made no attempt to either stop or add to Allen's story.

Zeu himself looked quite surprised at several points throughout the conversation. However, he patiently waited until the end before speaking.

"I see. You tell quite the incredible story, but I suppose it must be as you say. However, is it permissible for you to share all this with me?"

At present, the Country of Beastkin considered the Central Continent a potential enemy. While the Five Continent Alliance was intertwined militarily speaking, that only went as far as matters concerning the Demon Lord Army. Behind the scenes, the Country of Beastkin was waiting for just the right time to invade the Central Continent. And yet now he was hearing that the Empire of Giamut, which was in direct conflict with the Demon Lord Army, was facing a crushing defeat due to the loss of the divine vessel.

"Of course. A class promotion system is also about to be established, you see."

"'Class promotion'?"

Allen went on to explain the concept of class promotions. Though still a work in progress, the system was slated to release during the following year as part of the ongoing strategy to oppose the Demon Lord Army.

"That is quite valuable information, if true. But what does any of this have to do with the Country of Beastkin?" Zeu was at a loss as to how the stories about the divine vessel being stolen and the class promotion system had anything to do with his people.

"As I mentioned before, it's about the Union. Actually, this is related to the matter of removing the Pontiff of Daemonism from the Union, a matter which

the Country of Beastkin *is* involved in.”

“Hmm, I see. You have a point there. And is that why you were investigating Shia?”

Over the past few months, Allen had heard various stories about the Country of Beastkin from Uru, one of which involved information about succession to the throne in Albahal. Allen needed to know who was next in line to be king and whether it was possible to change the line of succession from Beast Crown Prince Beku to another.

In Albahal, tradition held that the first child would be the king’s successor. However, it was not uncommon for an even more talented child to be born after the first. In such cases, these other children would be put through a trial and, were they to overcome it, they would succeed the throne despite not being the firstborn. Zeu’s trial was to become the first to clear the Rank S dungeon.

It was not just Zeu who had a trial to overcome, though. His sister, Shia—the youngest of the litter and known as the War Princess due to her personality and prowess on the battlefield—had a trial of her own for becoming the next in line for succession. Hers was to take down the Pontiff of Daemonism.

Daemonism was a religion founded several decades prior in one of the Union’s member states. They proclaimed that worshipping the Demon Lord Army would keep them from invading. Coincidentally, the Demon Lord Army had never reached the Union’s shores.

Thanks to that fact, worshippers of Daemonism were steadily on the rise. The religion had begun to spread to neighboring countries as well, even crossing the seas several years prior to find a hold in Albahal. As the Country of Beastkin maintained commercial trade with the Union, apparently some Daemonism adherents had made it over along with the other shipments.

Upon hearing that the number of Daemonism believers was steadily growing within his own territory, the Beast King became incensed. Garm, the God of Beasts, was the only deity worshipped within Albahal. There was no way that the Beast King would allow a brand-new, completely unauthorized religion without a clear foundation behind it to spread within his country. This was how

his youngest child, the Beast Princess, came to be ordered to subdue the Pontiff of Daemonism. From what Allen heard, the Union was also supportive of this task.

“Right. I suspect that this Daemonism religion is somehow involved in the theft of the Fire Goddess’s divine vessel,” Allen said.

The Demon Lord Army was constantly plotting and playing the long game, which could only mean that they possessed a plan for how to use the divine vessel once they got their hands on it. With that in mind, Allen spent several days mulling over how the divine vessel could be used until he hit on it: that Daemonism religion Uru once spoke of.

According to his memories about a game from his past life, there was an enemy known as the Daemonists—whether they chose that name themselves or it was a name given to them by players, Allen could not recall—that needed stopping. Naturally, this memory prejudiced his outlook on the Pontiff of Daemonism here in this world as well. Given this, he decided that they, much like the Demon Lord himself, must be destroyed.

As he was thinking about where the divine vessel could have gone, he had stumbled across the possibility that the Pontiff of Daemonism whom Shia was going after could have gotten their hands on one and been growing their following. Whatever they were planning, it was bad.

“I see. But that can’t be right,” Zeu replied.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

How can you be so sure?

It was now Allen’s turn to be taken by surprise.

“Just the other day, I received a letter from Shia. She’s captured the Pontiff of Daemonism and handed them over to the Elmea Church. A religious trial should be held shortly.”

“Wha—? Really?”

Huh, so they’ve already been caught and are facing trial, then. Looks like the Elmea Church has a handle on things. But does that mean Beast Princess Shia is

the heir apparent?

The Holy Land of Elmahl, where the head offices of the Elmea Church were located, was one of the Union's member nations. Zeu explained to Allen that they were able to capture the Pontiff so quickly thanks to the full support of the Holy Land.

I guess that means I was completely off the mark, then. I was pretty sure these were the guys we were looking for when I heard about Daemonists, but maybe they weren't all that powerful if the Pontiff could be captured just like that. I guess they didn't have the stolen divine vessel, then.

It was also possible that the name itself, Daemonism, was simply due to a negative bias placed on them by other religions. All in all, Allen felt quite embarrassed at having dived in headfirst with his assertion.

"The trial will determine what actions the Daemonists actually undertook. If the rumors are true, it's likely that they will be found guilty and their followers put to death." Apparently Zeu had heard of a number of horrific acts carried out in the name of Daemonism.

With that out of the way, they then discussed several matters concerning the dungeon and plans going forward. The stolen divine vessel had to be out there in the world, waiting to be used in some manner or another. The two parties agreed to share and follow up on any information that even sounded like it was related to the divine vessel in order to prevent such a thing from happening. Eventually, their conversation was finished.

Outside the bar, Zeu turned to Allen before parting ways.

"Next time you look into Shia, talk to me about it first. Got it?"

"Absolutely. Will do."

Heh, sounds like a big brother looking out for his little sis.

From what Allen could tell, it was pretty apparent that Zeu worried deeply about his sister.

Chapter 3: A Coming-of-Age Ceremony at the Base

Massive, light-emitting magical devices stood on the roof of the immense temple located at the center of the Rank S dungeon's first floor. They were lit brilliantly during the daytime and dimmed at night. The lights on both the second and third floors of the dungeon also adjusted themselves to correspond with the time of day thanks to the magical devices under Dygragni's control.

Allen and his companions were gathered in the cafeteria just as the sun had begun to set.

The meals served in the dining room of the home base for both Allen's No-life Gamers and Helmios's Sacred—each high earners in their own right, though they were now working in tandem—were always feasts, but the cooks had really outdone themselves today. It looked like Helmios's servants had thrown themselves all in for this meal, since today marked Allen's birthday as well as the coming-of-age ceremony for the No-life Gamers.

October 10 marked not only Allen's birthday, but with the exception of Volmaar, it also meant that all of the No-life Gamers had finally reached adulthood this year. Humans and dwarves were considered adults at fifteen, elves at thirty, and high elves at fifty years old. Even serfs celebrated their coming-of-age in this world.

Nobility would often invite influential movers and shakers to huge celebrations at inns or restaurants, while royalty typically held balls. From what Allen heard, apparently there were even countries that would hold parades that filled the streets of the capital with knights and marching bands.

Allen realized right around when they had started preparing to clear the dungeon that he and the rest of the party would soon be fifteen. Upon asking the rest of the No-life Gamers if they would like to hold a coming-of-age ceremony, the majority expressed interest in doing so. However, it would be increasingly troublesome for them to hold individual ceremonies, so Allen suggested that they hold a group ceremony on one person's birthday instead.

Considering that Allen was the leader of the party, the group decided to hold it on his.

Huh, can't believe it's been fifteen whole years since I came to this world.

He was rather impressed that he had been here in the world long enough to reach adulthood. On the other hand, outside of the time he spent playing his beloved games, his memories of his past life had grown hazy.

Allen settled into a plump sofa and called out to Zeu.

“Are you really sure you want to join us, Your Highness? You’ll miss out on the Dungeon Festival today.”

The Beast Prince reclined into the sofa and responded casually, “Hm? It’s fine.”

Earlier that morning, one of Zeu’s beastkin servants had come to Allen to invite them to dinner. After explaining that they were unable to make it, Allen received no further response until, without warning, the Beast Prince himself showed up hefting a barrel of liquor, with Uru and Sara in tow.

I only decided to let them join us because I didn't have a good reason to send them on their way, but he's basically just chilling out here.

“What’s the problem, Allen? After all, it’d be a shame for you to turn away such a gracious act like royalty coming to celebrate your coming-of-age with you.”

“But the whole town’s been in such a festive mood since yesterday.”

“Hm? You have nothing to worry about. I’ve been drinking with my comrades all morning.”

Allen had a hunch that the Beast Prince was already pretty drunk by the time he showed up. This just confirmed it.

This Dungeon Festival seemed to be something of a special event where all the dungeon challengers prayed to Dygragni. They would thank him for allowing them to travel safely through the dungeon thus far and ask for continued safe passage.

The first of October was also the day of the Harvest Festival back in Allen’s

hometown. Apparently, similar festivals were held in other regions as well, although considering there were no fields here in the dungeon, they were slightly different kinds of festival. This year appeared to be particularly festive, with rows of stalls and merrymakers lining the main street all the way from the entrance to the temple.

Now that I think about it, I haven't actually gone to any festivals since coming to this world.

Back in Allen's past life, he never participated in any of the seasonal events held in-game. After all, it was not guaranteed that you would receive an item or experience just by joining in, and even if you did, it was usually just some item that changed your appearance. It made the whole thing rather unappealing to him.

Allen would often exclaim that he would rather his avatar go naked than bother with gear without any status effects. However, now that he was here with his friends and surrounded by well-wishers, he figured that maybe events like this were not so bad.

"Admiral Garara should be back any time now. Then again, he did say that he was going to slay the final floor boss."

To commemorate the Dungeon Festival, Admiral Garara, a hero among the dwarves, had left in the morning to enter the dungeon and challenge the final floor boss. A large group of dwarves was gathered in front of the temple awaiting his return.

The fact that the sun was about to set with still no word about his return suggested that taking the boss down was not going according to plan. While Allen and the No-life Gamers were spending their time collecting equipment and increasing their levels, and the Beast Prince's party was still struggling to get a proper group together, Garara had determined that his party had collected all the slates he needed. Figuring that they were already strong enough for the challenge, he decided to take on the final floor boss who supposedly lurked on Floor 5.

That's unfortunate. I was really hoping we'd get the reward for being the first to clear the dungeon. Oh well, I guess it's not too bad if this will help strengthen

the Five Continent Alliance. In any case, I want to find out what kind of boss they went up against.

He did not know if Garara and his party would actually be able to clear the dungeon, but Allen hoped for their safe return nonetheless.

“Hey, Allen. Looks like we’re finally getting close to finishing the dungeon, huh?” It was almost as if Dogora had read Allen’s mind. The longer they spent together, the more often things like this happened.

“Sounds like it. At this rate, we should be able to clear it faster than I’d thought.”

After Helmios and Zeu offered up brief celebratory speeches, the coming-of-age ceremony finally kicked off. To Allen, it felt little different than any other time he had enjoyed a meal with his close friends.

“C’mon Allen, lighten up a bit and have a drink. It’s our coming-of-age celebration, after all.”

A glassy-eyed, drunken Cecil held a wooden stein up toward Allen’s face. He could not think of any good reason to refuse, so Allen took the stein and brought it to his lips. It had been quite a while since he last drank...and it was frankly disgusting. Sure, this was the first time he had actually drunk alcohol in this world, but apparently little had changed from his previous, sober life. Allen could not help but snicker to himself.

While sipping at the beverage, Allen called out to Zeu. There was something he needed to ask.

“Your Highness, I was wondering...”

“Yes? What is it?”

“You mentioned that Shia succeeded in taking down the Pontiff of Daemonism. Considering that means her trial is over, doesn’t that mean that you should be heading back home?”

“No, I will not return until I have completed the trial His Majesty bestowed upon me of clearing the Rank S dungeon.”

Huh? But wasn’t his trial to be the first to clear the dungeon?

Admiral Garara was liable to show up at any moment as the first to have cleared it.

“Your kindness knows no bounds, milord.” Uru, who had overheard the exchange, looked over toward Zeu with tears in his eyes.

Suddenly, Allen understood what Zeu was truly intending to do. Up until now, Zeu had been unable to assemble a party with sufficient skills to clear the dungeon, stopping him from impeding his older brother’s succession to the throne. Sure, there were a lot of people with one-star classes who would be willing to join, but it was all but impossible for him to form a party consisting of three-stars and above. However, even in light of the troubles he faced, Zeu continued to stay here for the sake of the beastkin.

Allen had previously heard from Uru that not all beastkin who came from Albahal to challenge the incredibly dangerous Rank S dungeon—a task that came with a fifty-fifty chance of death—had come of their own free will. Apparently the crown prince, Beku, had ordered that all beastkin with a Talent must spend a year at the Rank S dungeon. Those who refused would be arrested on charges of treason, so there were quite a few who begrudgingly had come here. It seemed that Zeu was using his status as the Beast Prince to take command of all these beastkin in hopes of sending as many of them home as soon as possible.

Of course, Zeu himself would never admit as much. He quickly changed the subject in hopes of lightening the atmosphere after Uru’s tear-filled exclamation.

“You know, I figured you all to be pretty young, but I can’t believe that you’re just now reaching adulthood. So that means you were even younger when you performed all those heroic acts and saved Rohzenheim.”

A thoroughly drunk Cecil stood up, stein in hand, at Allen’s side.

“That’s right! We’ve always been awesome, I’ll have you know!”

“You don’t say?”

Picking up on the Beast Prince’s expression of interest, Cecil stumbled over on unsteady legs to regale him with stories of the events that unfolded when she

was ten years old.

“Here we go again,” Keel whispered under his breath. He had heard this story dozens of times back when they were together at the Academy. It was not that there was anything wrong with the story, per se, but he had grown quite tired of hearing the same thing over and over again.

“...and then, *WHAM*, he took down the murdergalsh with nothing but a short sword!”

Cecil did her best imitation of Allen shoving his short sword through the murdergalsh’s eyeball while the monster gnawed on him. Her actions were even more exaggerated than usual, probably due to the alcohol. It was hard to believe that she came from a noble family.

“We, too, have murdergalsh in our country, though I must admit that they’re quite a handful. I’m quite impressed to hear you took one down at the age of ten.”

“Yep! Pretty amazing, huh!”



Cecil narrowed her gaze at Allen, prompting him to be more forthcoming about his achievements. However, Allen was starting to get a bit drunk himself and failed to pick up on what Cecil was trying to say. He instead changed the topic to something he found more interesting.

“Nah, there are a lot of people way more impressive than me. Take Dverg here for example. He slew a red dragon when he was ten.”

The story of Dverg slaying a dragon was well-known throughout Ratash. In fact, there was a picture book titled *The Heroic Sword Lord Dverg*. The priest at Allen’s Appraisal Ceremony had even read it to them. However, Dverg merely continued to quietly sip at his drink, showing no interest in joining the conversation.

“I wanna hear about Dverg’s story too! Was the red dragon really tough?” Krena, even more interested in the topic of dragon slaying than Allen, pressed the topic.

Dverg let out a sigh of defeat so heavy it reminded Allen of a dragon’s breath. Finally, he started to speak.

“Well, yes, he was quite tough...”

A red dragon had lived near the village where Dverg was born. Once a year, it demanded that the villagers offer it a living sacrifice. Dverg first learned of this when one of his friends was chosen to be the sacrifice and taken to the dragon. He wanted to do something—anything—to put a stop to it, but no one would help him. The adults had accepted that this was simply how things were.

Dverg went to the village’s weapons shop and stole one of their best swords before heading off to save his friend. He somehow arrived right as his friend was about to be eaten and, after an arduous battle, miraculously managed to lop off the red dragon’s head. However, were he to have to pull off the same feat again, he doubted he would be able to.

With that, Dverg ended his story. Judging by the dispassionate way he told it, Allen figured he must be used to recounting that tale by now. Children in particular could probably hear it time and time again without getting sick of it. Most likely, the only reason he had agreed to tell it this time was that he

wanted to be nice and not ruin the celebratory atmosphere.

“Wow!”

All eyes were on Dverg, everyone beaming with admiration.

“Hmm.” However, Dverg apparently had nothing more to say on the subject and merely went back to drinking in silence.

Krena propped herself up, apparently wanting to hear more, when she noticed Uru suddenly jump to his feet. “Huh?! What’s going on?!”

Allen was quick to his feet as he, too, realized that the cheers of the festivalgoers outside had changed to shocked cries.

“Something’s happened! Let’s check it out!”

Everyone got up and made their way toward the door, rushing in the direction of the screams. As they ran, Allen Summoned a Grass C and used its Awakened Ability, Potherb, to sober everyone up. Upon reaching the temple, they had to push their way through the clamoring crowd to get any closer.

The area in front of the temple was a large, open square devoid of any shops or roads running through it. There, Allen found a crowd of dwarves huddled close together, at the center of which stood a familiar face—Admiral Garara.

“Pepeku is still in the dungeon! Bobogua too! Get yer hands off me!”

The admiral was screaming to be heard above the clamor of the crowd. He was missing an arm, and both of his legs were twisted in unnatural directions as if they had been crushed.

“They made a wall so we could escape! There’s nothing we can do for them now. Besides, we’re all out of healing herbs. We need to heal up your wounds quickly!” The two dwarves flanking the admiral supported his weight as they picked their way through the large crowd of onlookers, leaving a trail of blood in their wake.

Allen, who stood a whole head taller than the dwarves, easily assessed the situation. He took a Blessing of Heaven out of Storage and used it without even a moment’s hesitation. Admiral Garara’s missing arm and crushed legs returned to their normal state in an instant, and all of the other dwarves’ injuries, both

minor and severe, were also fully healed.

“Wh-What was that?!” Garara was taken completely by surprise. He looked around frantically after witnessing such an incredible act.

Allen spoke up. “I healed you with an elven elixir.”

“Ah... Allen.”

Apparently the admiral remembered his name, at least.

“Yes?”

Garara approached Allen on his now-healed legs.

“Do ye by chance have any more o’ those elixirs ye used just now?”

“Admiral?!”

Though the dwarves did not seem to understand what he was going on about, Allen instantly picked up on what the admiral intended to do.

I see. His men must be really important to him.

“I do, but what do you plan to use them for?”

“T’ save my friends, o’ course!”

Your friends, huh?

Allen had assumed that they had a sort of hierarchical relationship, but apparently Admiral Garara considered them not his subordinates, but his friends.

“But admiral, we’re all outta medals!” His dwarven companion grimaced.

Zeus, who stood even taller than Allen, called down to Garara.

“Perhaps it would be best to change locations and take a moment to collect yourself, Garara.”

“Hm? Prince Zeus?”

Having apparently calmed down a bit, Admiral Garara was finally taking in his surroundings. He and his party were drawing quite a bit of attention, standing right at the temple entrance to the dungeon—and in the middle of the Dungeon Festival at that. Given all this, Zeus invited them to Allen’s base.

“Of course, your party can come as well.”

“Well, this is certainly quite a feast,” the admiral commented upon stepping into the dining hall.

“Ah, yes, we were celebrating Allen and his friends’ coming-of-age, you see,” Helmios explained briefly.

“Huh? Now that ye mention it, ye joined the war before graduatin’, didn’t cha, Meruru?”

Meruru nodded sadly in light of the circumstances. “That’s right.”

“There’s a lot of food left. Would you like something to eat?”

“Ye don’t mind? We’ve been tryin’ ta get away since mornin’ and haven’t had a chance t’ eat. Yer a lifesaver.”

Trying to get away, huh?

The dwarves who had been gawking at the dining room since they arrived immediately started taking food. Seeing that, Allen did not mind in the least that Zeu invited the admiral and his party to their base without consulting him, nor the men eating up the feast meant to celebrate their coming-of-age. Allen wanted the exhausted dwarves to eat up and get some rest, of course, but there was also something in it for him and his friends.

Admiral Garara and his party of twenty were the first to take on the Rank S dungeon’s final floor boss and live to tell the tale. From what he gathered from them as they spoke between bites, only fourteen members had survived the incredibly difficult boss fight, the likes of which they had never seen before.

Naturally, Allen knew that there was no guarantee of landing on a winning strategy the very first time you faced a boss. You needed to use whatever information you could get to form a strategy, and at present, Admiral Garara and his party were the only people with such information. Allen did not plan on interrogating the exhausted admiral for information, but if he and his party were to take on the boss at some point, he would need to gather as much intelligence as he could if he wanted to avoid putting his friends in mortal danger.

Well, I seem to have figured a few things out, at least. First off, you can run away from the final floor boss even after you've entered combat. While it's not impossible to escape, it's apparently difficult, making it not much unlike a death stage, I guess?

Even the simple knowledge that they could run away from the battle was quite useful.

"I don't think we have nearly enough liquor for this many. Uru, go buy some more for us."

"As you command."

The large barrel Zeu had brought with him did not seem like it would stand a chance with the addition of Admiral Garara and the thirteen other dwarves.

As the dwarves continued to eat and drink their fill, Garara sat alone, gazing into the wooden stein in his hand, small ripples rolling across the surface of the liquor.

"Adults, eh? We'd been together just about since they reached adulthood, and now they just throw their lives away like that fer an old washout like me..."

Allen finally spoke to the admiral. "You'd been battling since the morning, huh?"

"Yer right about that. I wanted t' clear the dungeon in time fer the Dungeon Festival."

"But it's well into the evening now. Did you really spend over half a day fighting?"

"That we did. I already knew shortly after the battle began that we didn't stand a chance o' winning, but we just couldn't get away from the monster 'til a little while ago."

"You, the party who'd taken down BB and Crimson?"

Allen figured it must have been quite the impressive monster for Admiral Garara's party to figure they stood no chance against it, especially considering that they had taken down each of the Rank S monsters on Floors 2 through 4.

"Aye. You'd probably start thinkin' the same the moment ye laid eyes on it."

Upon hearing the admiral's words, some of the dwarves sitting next to them began to sob at the thought of their lost comrades. Garara then began to tell Allen about the final floor boss. As he spoke, the liquor began to take hold. The more inebriated he grew, the more the admiral took on a sullen tone as he started telling stories of some of his past exploits in whatever order they came to mind. Apparently he was once an adventurer. He had been bought by the previous emperor for his rare Talent and became an admiral of the Baukis military. The way he told it, the old emperor was much better than the current one.

The twenty members who challenged the final floor boss that day had come to join his party in a variety of different ways, such as from having known him since his adventuring days, to being his subordinates after he became an admiral, and more.

Before Allen realized it, it was already pitch-black outside. One of the dwarves made their way to the admiral.

"What's our next move, boss?"

"Hmm, good question." He gazed at the liquor remaining in his cup and sat there in silence. Allen and the others all awaited his decision. After gulping down the rest of the liquor, he finally spoke up. "I'm disbandin' the party."

"D-Disbanding?! But the emperor ordered us to clear the Rank S dungeon, didn't he?!"

"And? Obviously, we're gonna ignore that. Do ye really wanna fight that thing again?"

The dwarves all fell silent, swallowing hard. Twenty of them had faced the monster, and they had lost several comrades in the fight. They all knew that it would be an even greater challenge to take it down with fewer men. However, Admiral Garara was a military man. Orders from the emperor of Baukis were final.

"Don't ye worry. It was a decision I made all on my own, so it's got nothin' to do with ye. You can stay here, go back to yer hometowns, or do whatever else ye want."

Garara intended to take full responsibility.

“You aren’t going home, Admiral?”

“Heh, all I have left t’ return to is the same as what I had before: an idle, aimless life.”

He refilled his stein with more booze.

So he’s just gonna retire? Hm, then I guess Zeu needs to finally get around to getting himself a party together.

Allen realized that this ultimately left clearing the Rank S dungeon up to him and the No-life Gamers.

Chapter 4: Class Promotions and New Powers

After losing many of his comrades in the battle against the final floor boss and disbanding his party, Admiral Garara had begun coming to the No-life Gamers' base every day. While there, he would do nothing but drink. Today was no different: he could be found drinking straight from the cask on the dining room sofa.

Of course, Garara had a headquarters of his own. The building was far more impressive than the one the No-life Gamers inhabited, which was only fitting considering he was a hero of the Empire of Baukis and held the top rank in its military. However, now that he had disbanded his party, he no longer felt that he could face his men.

Even now, the men who once made up the members of his party were still maintaining the building. When Garara disbanded the group, he had told his party members and base staff that he would distribute all of the money they had earned over the past half year challenging the dungeon. The dwarves remained, however, awaiting the return of their admiral. From time to time, they would even stop by to check in on him, apparently going so far as to give money to Helmios's servants to pay for his food and drink.

Neither Allen, Helmios, nor their respective party members sent the drunken admiral on his way, choosing instead to sit by and patiently watch over him. As a military man, he must have witnessed the deaths of his comrades and subordinates on countless occasions, which suggested just how much the battle must have affected him for Garara to end up this way.

It was on that day that Spirit God Rohzen came to Allen, who was watching over Admiral Garara as the dwarf reclined deep into the sofa, drink in hand.

"Today is the day three of your members receive their class promotions."

"Understood. Please begin," Zeu responded.

What's Zeu doing here, anyway? Not like it's really an issue, I guess.

After exchanging information about Shia and Daemonism, Allen had told the beast prince about the class promotions. However, Dogora, Keel, and Volmaar were the ones who were planned to be promoted this time, so there was no real point in Zeu being here. Unless... Allen shot a glance in Helmios’s direction and was met with a smirk. So, apparently the Hero had invited the Beast Prince once again. As a duke in the Empire of Giamut, Helmios also had issues pertaining to social status to contend with.

The Spirit God began to swing his hips back and forth in a dance.

Keel had two class options available to promote to, one of which was the Paladin class, which would give him both offensive and healing capabilities. Dogora and Volmaar, however, only had one option each. Allen had already determined each of their class promotions for them.

Meanwhile, since Sophie was still in the midst of trying to bond with her fourth juvenile spirit, Rohzen decided to wait a month or so—that was, until she and the juvenile spirit had fully bonded—before promoting her.

“Their class promotions are now complete.”

“Thank you.”

After thanking the Spirit God, Allen quickly recorded the Statuses and class progressions of his three friends in his grimoire.

Name:	Dogora
Age:	15
Class:	Destroyer
Level:	1
HP:	1,729
MP:	857
Attack:	1,988
Endurance:	1,235
Agility:	1,138
Intelligence:	695
Luck:	953

Skills: Destroyer {1}, Full Might {1}, Axe Mastery {6},
Shield Mastery {3}
Extra Skill: Heart and Soul
XP: 0/10

Name: Keel von Carnel
Age: 15
Class: Saint King
Level: 1
HP: 970
MP: 1,740
Attack: 577
Endurance: 665
Agility: 1,182
Intelligence: 1,670
Luck: 1,274
Skills: Saint King {1}, Healing {1}, Sword Mastery {3}
Extra Skill: Drops of God
XP: 0/10

Name: Volmaar
Age: 68
Class: Bow King
Level: 1
HP: 1376
MP: 828
Attack: 1,605
Endurance: 1,294
Agility: 1,068
Intelligence: 622
Luck: 851
Skills: Bow King {1}, Keen Sight {1}, Bow Mastery {6}
Extra Skill: Arrow of Light
XP: 0/10

The No-life Gamers' Class Progression Trees

- Krena: Sword Lord ★★★ → Sword King ★★★★★ → Sword Emperor ★★★★★
- Cecil: Wizardess ★★ → Archwizardess ★★★ → Wizardess King ★★★★★
- Dogora: Axe User ★ → Berserker ★★ → Rampager ★★★ → Destroyer ★★★★★
- Keel: Cleric ★ → Saint ★★ → Greater Saint ★★★ → Saint King ★★★★★
- Sophie: Spirit Mage ★ → Spirit Wizard ★★ → Spirit User ★★★
- Volmaar: Archer ★ → Bow Master ★★ → Bow Lord ★★★ → Bow King ★★★★★

Wow, Dogora's HP and Attack stats continue to impress. If he just maxes out his level and skills, both of those stats should get just as high as Krena's. I think I'll leave Heart and Soul alone for now.

Dogora was over the moon about reaching four stars thanks to his class promotion. Allen could not help but feel a little annoyed about the fact that he had not used his Extra Skill, Heart and Soul, even once since his last class promotion half a year ago, though. He started to think that maybe something was preventing him from using it.

Volmaar's Attack stat is looking pretty good.

The fact that Volmaar's Attack stat had not increased at all in the past had always been a knock against him. But now, after three class promotions, he had grown strong enough that even his ranged attacks should be capable of taking out a Rank A monster.

Zeus nodded approvingly from where he stood by, taking in the whole scene.

"Huh, I see. So this is the class promotion system that will be starting up next year?"

"Sure looks that way," Helmios replied. "At this rate, I suspect they'll get

strong enough to take on the Demon Lord himself.”

The gods’ll be informing the masses about the class promotion system and the Goddess of Fire’s power weakening on the first of January via a divine message.

Rohzen had gone back to the Heavenly Realm recently and returned with additional information. He had learned that, while the gods would explain the class promotion system and the background behind it, they would continue to keep the facts that the divine vessel was stolen and the Demon Lord Army had attacked the Heavenly Realm under wraps. Their reasoning was that they wanted to avoid undue chaos in the mortal realm, but Allen wondered if that was really all there was to it.

“These parties boasting Sword Lords or even stronger-Talented members remind me of the Ten Heroic Beasts.” The Beast Prince, watching Allen’s party enviously from the sidelines, spoke with a tone of nostalgia, as if he were thinking of old friends.

“The Ten Heroic Beasts?”

Dogora quickly looked in Zeu’s direction, seemingly taken in by the interesting-sounding name.

“The Ten Heroic Beasts are the ten beastkin deemed great heroes in Albahal.”

Once a year, Albahal held a martial arts tournament. The fearless contestants were separated into ten categories, and the respective champions of each category were known as the Ten Heroic Beasts. Each of these fighters received a different weapon and served in both vanguard and rear-guard roles.

While listening to Zeu’s explanation, Allen recalled a story Uru had excitedly told him before. Participants in the martial arts tournament consisted of challengers ranging from adventurers to military personnel. The champion of each category would ultimately challenge the previous year’s champion—one of the Ten Heroic Beasts. In other words, those who became the Ten Heroic Beasts held on to their title provided that they did not lose to subsequent challengers.

Furthermore, once each year’s Ten Heroic Beasts were decided, a second, lottery-style tournament would be held, pitting the ten champions against one

another until one came out on top. This top champion would then fight against the one from the previous year, and the combatant to make it all the way through to the end would earn the title of Beast King. Allen found this slightly confusing since the ruler of the Country of Beastkin was also referred to as the Beast King, but apparently the beastkin did not take issue with it.

Essentially, it was an anything-goes-style tournament—rear guard or vanguard roles, weapon types, magic, and even skills were unrestricted—with rules covering only the very basics. Allen thought this rather fitting for the beastkin.

I bet Zeu wished he could call these Ten Heroic Beasts out to Baukis—or at least people on the same level as them.

Obviously, that would be to clear the dungeon, intentions Beast Crown Prince Beku had picked up on and furiously protested before prohibiting powerful warriors from going abroad.

“A hero, huh. D’ya think I could be a hero?” Dogora asked.

Hearing about the heroes of the Country of Beastkin brought a twinkle to the bumpkin-faced boy’s eyes. More than any of the other members of the No-life Gamers, Dogora longed to be a hero. Now, despite having grown more powerful than even a Sword Lord, that feeling remained unchanged.

“Heh, I don’t care if you’re a hero or not. Ye still ain’t good enough t’ beat the final floor boss!”

The drunken Admiral Garara practically spat out those words, throwing a wet blanket on Dogora’s excitement.

“Huh? Watch your mouth! There’s no way of knowing for sure if I don’t give it a shot!”

Feeling as if his dreams were being mocked, Dogora yelled back at the dwarf, his face burning red.



“Bein’ strong just fer the sake o’ it don’t mean nothin’; you’ll all meet the same fate. Ye could have twenty, even fifty copies o’ Helmios himself and ye still wouldn’t make yer way to the final floor boss.”

Dogora, his face now red as a tomato, raised his fist in response to the admiral’s reply. This finally prompted everyone else to get between the pair and calm them down.

Hmm. Wouldn’t even make it, huh?

Allen, however, was thinking of something else entirely.

Chapter 5: Pioneers and Those Challenging the Unknown

The morning after Dogora and the others received their class promotions, the No-life Gamers lined up outside the temple to once again enter the dungeon. The line was particularly long in the morning, and the party was left waiting for quite a while. Most of the members were growing bored. Sophie, however, was rather busy.

“You’re a good spirit, yes you are.”

“Froof froof.”

Sophie cuddled her juvenile earth spirit, Korpokkur, in her arms. He looked like a young boy of around three years old dressed in folk wear and with a large leaf on his back. He held tightly to Sophie with his tiny hands.

“He’s grown quite a bit,” Allen said.

“All thanks to Lord Rohzen.”

Allen looked up at the flying squirrel curled up silently atop Sophie’s head. Ever since learning that the world would fall to ruin within only a few years, Rohzen had done everything in his power to support Sophie. He fully intended to do whatever necessary to stop his beloved elves from disappearing from the mortal realm, with no regard to what others might think of him. However, Allen had his doubts about whether persuading the manifestation of this juvenile spirit to listen to Sophie was okay.

While not totally out of the realm of acceptability, he’s walking a fine line, giving advice like that. Then again, I’d say he’s giving way more than just advice at this point.

Due to the juvenile spirit’s low intelligence—or perhaps his uninhibited free spirit—Rohzen’s desperate attempts to convince the spirit to obey him often resulted in a mere shrug or a misunderstanding between the two. It gave Allen the impression that he was watching a comedy routine.

Dogora, on the other hand, was in a foul mood.

“Hey, Allen, I don’t know what’s going on with that admiral guy, but I think we should kick him out if he’s just gonna drink like that.”

He had managed to hold his tongue in front of Admiral Garara, but apparently he was at his limit.

“Are you still going on about that, Dogora?”

“I agree! He has no business talking like that!” Krena was also pretty upset at the way he had insulted Dogora and puffed out her cheeks.

“Hmm.”

Allen put his hands on either side of Krena’s face and squeezed.

“Heh?! Hnph!”

“Are you sorry yet?”

Seeing that Krena was not showing any sign of remorse, Allen doubled down on his punishment, alternating between tugging and squeezing Krena’s cheeks.

“H-Hey, should I get involved here?” The situation seemed to leave Keel at a loss for what to do.

Don’t ask me; just do it.

“Grow up a bit, will ya? The guards are gonna stop us again.”

Allen had been waiting for Cecil to butt in before finally releasing Krena.

“What was that for?” Krena had tears in her eyes and a look of confusion on her face. She did not know what was wrong with pointing out Garara’s bad behavior.

“That was because Admiral Garara’s a pioneer here. It’s not right to bad-mouth someone like that.”

“A pioneer?” Krena and Dogora asked in unison.

“This is coming from memories of my past life, but the world needs pioneers like him.”

As the party slowly advanced in the line, Allen discussed his past life. Of

course, he was only talking about the games he had played in his past life, but that was nothing new, so he left out that detail.

Even back then, there were all sorts of places such as dungeons and monster keeps where powerful enemies awaited. These incredibly powerful enemies known as “bosses” had not been there since the beginning of time, but rather suddenly appeared after game updates. Each new boss that was introduced would be completely unknown to everyone.

In the beginning, no one knew how to beat them. Therefore, there were those who took the initiative to challenge them and bring back any information they acquired, even if they were defeated in the process. This information about the new bosses, such as what kinds of attacks they used or their weaknesses, was then shared with others. Through trial and error, everyone aimed to find the optimal way to defeat the new boss, including the ideal party composition, necessary equipment, and so on. These people who immediately took on new bosses were known as pioneers.

Since they were taking on enemies with no strategy at all, these pioneers placed themselves in far greater danger than they otherwise would have against anything else. Yet they threw caution to the wind and carved out paths for those who came after them.

When Allen was still a student back in his past life and had ample free time, he used to take on the role of pioneer. Once he got a job and had far less free time, however, he joined the group of players who benefited from the information pioneers brought back.

In one of his old games, he had played a character called Kenpy. A new dungeon known as the Ice Palace had been released along with a new boss, the Ice Queen. This new boss was stupidly powerful and took out all the high-level veterans who tried to take her on. Since the developers had implemented this new boss without doing any of the proper play testing, they had made an enemy so powerful that she could not be beaten by ordinary means.

One pioneer had been playing the game even longer than Kenpy and would look out for him. Like the many pioneers before him, this senior player took on the Ice Queen as well, only to fall before her tremendous power.

That online game had a rule dictating that players would drop all their equipment upon defeat and that all dropped equipment would disappear. As a result of this rule, the senior player lost equipment they had all spent tens of thousands of hours enhancing. This senior player began to feel as if he had no choice but to quit the game, so Allen, wanting to help him out, worked together with other players to re-collect his equipment.

Memories such as these, of his life within those games, went beyond mere play to Allen. They were extremely hard to forget.

On the other hand, he was also aware that games were not reality. That was why, when he looked at Admiral Garara and his companions who had risked the one life they had in combat, Allen could not help but recall his experience as both a pioneer and a latecomer in his previous life. He also remembered the hardships pioneers experienced and his gratitude toward those who carried out the task.

“Admiral Garara has lost six of his comrades—men who had been with him since his days as an adventurer—partly because the greedy emperor gave him an impossible order, so maybe staying sober isn’t an option for him right now. Plus, the information he risked all their lives to bring back will surely prove vital in helping us defeat the final floor boss. If I’m right, that’s the message the admiral is trying to convey to us, so please hold off on criticizing him until we know his true intentions.”

“I guess I get it.”

“Got it.”

Dogora and Krena both nodded in acknowledgment. Judging by the looks on their faces, Allen figured they understood what he was saying.

After some time, the party arrived at Floor 4—a water world.

“The three of you who’ve changed classes are still at Lvl. 1, so Dogora, I’d like you to hang back while Meruru and Krena take point.”

Then again, this floor is full of nothing but Rank A monsters, so they should level up in no time flat.

Just before the Gamers moved out, the Bird E Summons Allen had left behind

to scout out the fourth floor shared with him their discovery of the hidden cube. Unlike the normal cubes which stayed in their designated locations on each floor and moved the party between floors, the hidden cubes teleported from location to location after a certain amount of time had elapsed, making them difficult to find. Once found, however, these cubes could exchange the medals gathered from defeating the various floor bosses for slates used to power up golems, as well as grant medals or slates, or even teleport people to unique locations such as bonus or death stages. There was a lot to gain from them, so Allen opted to head there first.

The party descended upon a single leaf floating in the middle of the ocean, which was where the hidden cube could be found.

“Hopefully we’ll get a Gigantify slate.”

“Yeah! And then my superpowered-up form will be complete!”

Meruru hugged the magic disc dangling from her neck tightly to her chest.

The superpowered form she spoke of was a hundred-meter-tall golem created by slotting both a Gigantify slate and a Supergigantify slate into her magic disc. Meruru already possessed Supergigantify, so all she needed was to get her hands on Gigantify. However...

“I wanna do it today!” Krena, who still looked dejected from Allen’s scolding, spoke up with her gaze still downcast.

“Okay, I guess...”

Cecil shot Allen an exasperated look in response to his reluctant answer.

“Come on, Allen, you’ve lost five times in a row already. Be mature about it and let her have a chance.”

“I *am* being mature about it; hence why I’m letting her do it.”

“I’d hardly call that ‘mature.’”

While the two of them were bickering, Krena approached the hidden cube and prepared to call out to it.

KTHUNK.

The party was teleported to an arid land dotted with reddish-brown rock pillars. What was more, a cyclops standing more than ten meters tall was right in front of them.

Wait, were we... We were sent to a death stage!

The giant took notice of the party and swung its club at them.

“Gwaaaaaargh!!!”

The monster let loose a mighty roar that shook the ground beneath their feet. Its roar was answered by additional roars from its sides as well as from behind the party as more cyclopes closed in.

“It’s a death stage! Everyone, onto the Griffs! Meruru, stall for time!”

“Roger! Tam-Tam, come forth!”

Meruru worked her magic disc and summoned a golem that shimmered with the brilliance of mithril in front of the group. It stood fifty meters tall, towering over the giant monsters. Upon sucking Meruru up into the crystal in its chest, the golem spun around and reached out with its long arms to hold back several of the incoming cyclopes at once. One by one, the golem kicked each of them high up into the sky.

“This never stops being amazing...”

Dogora watched on from his spot in the back of the formation, letting out a sigh of amazement at just how impressively powerful the mithril golem was.

That Supergigantify slate we got from that last hidden cube definitely was the right choice. Not even Rank A monsters stand a chance against it. Just what kind of person would put such an amazing slate up for sale, anyway? Ah well, I guess it doesn’t matter.

Allen was amazed at the power of the Supergigantify slate which, just prior to Allen’s five consecutive failures, Keel had received when he traded in their medals to the hidden cube.

Prior to Supergigantify, all of the mithril golem’s stats were at 3,000. However, by slotting in the Supergigantify slate, which took up three indentations in the magic disc, its stats were tripled to 9,000. Moreover, by

using another slate specializing in boosting Attack and Endurance, they were increased by an additional 3,000 each.

Name: Tam-Tam
Pilot: Meruru
Rank: Mithril
HP: 9,000 + 1,800
MP: 9,000 + 1,800
Attack: 9,000 + 4,800
Endurance: 9,000 + 4,800
Agility: 9,000
Intelligence: 9,000
Luck: 9,000

“You get ’em, Tam-Tam!”

After Tam-Tam, with Meruru at the helm, effortlessly mowed down the one-eyed giants, Krena and the others rushed to the toppled foes and began killing them one by one.

<You have defeated 1 cyclops. You have earned 720,000 XP.>

The experience gained from the fallen cyclops appeared in Allen’s grimoire.

“Oh yeah! Leveled up!”

Dogora shot up nearly 40 levels in one go, sending his stats flying. He hefted his now much lighter greataxe as he shouted out in excitement.

They took out the first wave of cyclopes within mere minutes of the battle starting. Newcomers quickly began to surround the party, though.

“Gwaaaaaargh!!!”

The cyclopes let out low, thunderous roars, but perhaps because they were wary of Tam-Tam and Krena, they did not go on the offensive. Regardless, their numbers continued to increase until there were over a hundred of them. Just as

the party was about to be completely surrounded by a wall of enemies, they deemed the timing right and rushed in all at once.

“Here comes the experience! It’s been a while since we’ve gotten a death stage, so let’s earn us some points!”

“I got this!” the now-leveled-up Dogora shouted back in response to Allen’s prompt, and the battle continued.

* * *

“Well, it’s almost evening. Best to pack it in.”

Allen glanced down at his magical watch. They had spent three days in the dungeon gaining experience. In the past, they would only stay in the dungeon for half a day at a time, but they had changed up their plans due to now needing to grind levels in light of the Demon Lord Army having stolen Freyja’s divine vessel.

Thanks to Krena getting them teleported to a death stage, they had pulled quite a few weapons and armor pieces from the treasure chests, as well as maxed out Dogora’s, Keel’s, and Volmaar’s levels at 60. This was their most impressive yield yet.

“Yeah, I’m getting pretty tired.” Dogora grinned as he rested the greataxe that had seemed so heavy when they first entered the dungeon easily on his shoulder.

Upon arriving back at their home base, the group joined Helmios and his party for dinner.

“We got a boatload of experience today.”

“That we did. We also got quite a few treasure chests, and thanks to Krena getting that death stage on her first try, we also got you three to max level.”

Krena beamed at the compliment.

“Hee hee, I did pretty good there.”

Heh, in normal mode you can max out your level with 250 million experience points. That’s pretty easy to do in a Rank S dungeon.

“Using a death stage to level up is pretty much unheard of outside of you guys,” the Phantom Thief, Rosetta, chimed in with an incredulous look on her face.

Large numbers of Rank A monsters appeared on Floor 4’s death stages. To make matters worse, because death stages existed on a plane outside of the floor, you were unable to escape until you found the cube-shaped object used for teleportation. This was hardly a safe proposition, even for a party of Helmios’s level.

“By the way, I’m going to need to use you as an excuse again tomorrow, Helmios.”

“Again? I mean, it’s fine, but don’t do anything too weird, all right?”

“You’ve got nothing to worry about.”

Allen smiled back at him, but Helmios could only let out a sigh, wondering what Allen meant by that.

* * *

Allen made his way to the Adventurer’s Guild early the next morning. Upon arriving at his usual counter, a staff member quickly took notice of him and made his way over.

“Well, if it isn’t Master Allen. It’s a pleasure to see you again.”

Considering that the sheer volume of loot Allen intended to trade in would not fit on the counter, the staff member led him and his party to a separate room. Once there, the first order of business was selling off the items they had acquired in the dungeon. Dogora and Krena unloaded the weapons and armor onto the table, then several other staff members joined them in the room.

“I’ll leave these with you. Please just do what you always do.”

“Certainly.”

The staff members would evaluate the items the Gamers dropped off to determine if they should be put up for auction. Allen left it up to the Guild to best maximize profits when selling the items.

“Sorry for making you lug all that stuff here, Dogora, Krena.”

“It’s no big deal. Are you sure you don’t need us to stick around?”

“You’re really okay with us heading off?”

“Yeah, this will probably take a while. I’ll meet you back at the base when I’m done.”

After the two left the room, Allen opened up his grimoire, set it on the floor, and addressed Cecil.

“Could you put all the magic stones into my grimoire?”

“Sure thing.”

Cecil grabbed one of the sacks in the corner of the room and poured its contents into the grimoire. The rest of the Gamers then followed suit, taking turns emptying the rest of the sacks.

These sacks of Rank C, D, and E magic stones cost two thousand gold apiece. Up until recently, Allen had paid one thousand gold per sack, but he doubled the price since he was in a hurry to raise his Summoning to Lvl. 8 now that he knew Freyja’s divine vessel had been stolen. Administrative fees had also tripled, given that there were not nearly enough magic stones to be had inside the city within the Rank S dungeon, which meant that stones needed to be transported by air from the capital of Baukis. Even so, Allen did not mind.

The room in the Rank S dungeon’s Adventurer’s Guild that Allen and his friends had been brought to was quite large, and the staff had even left tea, snacks, fruit, and more for them on the table—which Allen was quick to eat up. He figured the room was probably meant for entertaining nobles and that he had likely been taken here because he spent thousands upon thousands of gold here each month.

“We’ve finished with the magic stones,” Allen called out to the Guild staff member waiting beyond the door.

The staff member looked a bit taken aback to find the massive collection of magic stones now gone but did not say a word. Though incredibly expensive, magic bags similar to Allen’s Storage skill did exist in this world. Magic that could manipulate time and space also existed, so making all the stones disappear was not a completely unnatural phenomenon.

“Next up, Helmios has entrusted me with some more materials that I’d like to leave with you.”

The staff member looked stunned at this. “A-Are you sure? You’ve already given us so much.”

“Yes, I’m sure. This parchment here, if you’d—”

“Oh, uh, the guildmaster said that he would like to take the documents personally this time. Please wait here while I go summon him. I’ll be back shortly!”

With that, the man left the room without even waiting for Allen to respond.

After waiting a short while, a bearded, muscle-bound dwarf—the guildmaster—entered the room with the staff member from earlier.

“Mighty sorry ’bout that. Didja wait long?”

Though they had only had to wait for a few minutes, Allen was already fast asleep on the sofa. Cecil jammed her elbow into his side.

“Wake up, Allen. They’re here.”

“Mm? Oh, I’m truly sorry about falling asleep like that, especially considering that you’ve made time to meet with us.”

“Nah, it’s no big deal. Anyway, name’s Popokka. I’m the master of this here guild. So, what’d ya bring us today?”

His cutesy name definitely doesn’t match his physique.

Allen once again held out the parchment.

“First off, these are the updates to our information on the Rank S dungeon.”

Popokka unrolled the parchment and let out a gasp of surprise. “Wow, this is impressive.”

On the parchment was a map of each of the dungeon floors, with the locations of the hidden cubes and treasure boxes marked along with a list of what each contained. The list also contained information on the spawn rate for each type of hidden cube, the item drop rate for treasure chests, rates of monsters disguised as treasure chests, and more. Allen compiled this

information twice a month and provided it to the Adventurer's Guild free of charge.

"This one also includes an addendum based on our research concerning how many kaiser sea serpents Crimson will call at once. According to the report, it seems that the limit is a hundred."

"What?!"

Popokka practically tore the next piece of parchment from Allen's hand and pored over it. When he finally looked up, he stared at Allen with a look of disbelief on his face, his shoulders trembling.

"So what do you think?"

Crimson, the Floor 4 boss, was able to call forth a number of monsters known as kaiser sea serpents. Since no one had ever been able to actually count them before, it was assumed that Crimson could call forth an infinite number of them. According to the report Allen handed over, however, Crimson stopped summoning these monsters after a hundred were defeated.

More specifically, the report noted that they had conducted the experiment on five different days and even listed how long it took for the kaiser sea serpents to reappear. In other words, that meant that they had slain at least five hundred of them.

"Is all this true?"

"These are the results of Helmios's survey."

"Is the Hero really that strong?"

"As a matter of fact, he is. Though when you meet him, he looks just like an ordinary, albeit charming young man."

Allen simply went along with the flow of the conversation. In reality, it was he and the Gamers who had conducted the survey.

"Well I'll be. I was already blown away by the stuff you'd given us before, but this is something else entirely. I'll be sure to have the Guild relay this information to all the other adventurers."

Be sure to review and verify all the information.

The guildmaster handed the parchment over to the staff member.

“Finally, I have one more thing I’d like to report. It took a bit of time to put it all together, but...”

Allen handed over another roll of parchment with a map drawn on it.

“And what’s this? It’s pretty big, but doesn’t look like a floor map.”

Popokka, unsure of what the map was depicting, showed the parchment to the staff member sitting next to him. However, he had never seen it before either.

“This is a complete map of the death stages, including where you’ll be teleported to inside the death stage and where the operating system can be found.”

“Huh?”

The guildmaster did not quite seem to understand what Allen was talking about.

“Wh-What?! I... I can’t believe it! Sir, this is truly amazing!”

The staff member sitting next to the confused guildmaster jumped to his feet, his hands clasped together.

“I jus’ don’t believe it. Makin’ something like this shouldn’t be possible.”

Popokka looked at Allen with an expression of stunned disbelief.

“That’s not true. According to Helmios’s survey, it appears that each floor has its own unique death stage. The layout is the same for each, though; the only thing that differs is the monsters that appear. You’ll appear at one of the eight random locations marked on the map when you teleport in from a normal floor, and the operating system you’ll need to access in order to escape can be found...” Allen explained the contents to the men in a calm, almost nonchalant tone. Then, he handed over additional materials on the death stages that contained information such as the rank, strength, and other detailed information on the monsters that appeared.

“Hm, and what’s this 1,829 number mean?”

“That’s the number of monsters killed, though apparently even more can keep appearing. According to Helmios, monsters kept on appearing even after slaying over a thousand of them, so it seems like there may be no limit.”

Allen once again casually explained the number. He figured that the most important thing here was to explain that the information was coming from someone who was already trusted rather than to waste time trying to earn their trust in the first place.

There’s nothing better than name-dropping the Hero if you want people to believe you.

Something Helmios had that Allen did not was the trust of the people. After having spent so many years as the Hero, slaying enemies and saving countless people and countries, he was trusted more than even most royals in this world. Within the Empire of Giamut, there were some royal families who would lend their ear to Helmios while not even giving the emperor the time of day.

“This all’s referrin’ to Floor 4, right?”

“That’s correct. However, as you’ll see on the report, the same test was conducted on Floors 2 and 3 as well, and monsters there also continued to spawn even after a thousand were killed.”

Popokka thought back on his own experiences. Only Rank A monsters appeared on the Floor 4 death stage, which lined up with the information written in this report. Was Helmios really so powerful that he was able to verify all this? Popokka would need to confirm that for himself.

“Hey, didja bring that thing I asked for?”

“Y-Yes, sir. Here it is.”

The staff member handed a roll of parchment over to Popokka, who unrolled it on the table.

“Let’s see here... He worked as a servant to the Granvelle family. There’s a possibility that he killed a murdergalsh at the age of ten, though when the guildmaster attempted to verify it, he was turned away.” As the guildmaster read from the document, Allen was initially taken by surprise but decided to remain silent. “While a student at the Academy, he cleared five Rank A

dungeons. Now, this is the first time I've heard of such an impressive resume. Whaddya think?"

"Yes," the staff member responded, "this is the first time we've ever seen such a case since the Academy system was introduced. Going further back through history, he's maybe the third person to claim such achievements."

The guildmaster nodded in agreement and continued reading.

"Hm? It says here that you took part in a war recently, but not much else."

"My apologies, sir. I could not get any information from either Ratash or Rohzenheim with regard to that matter, so we don't know any of the details," the staff member explained.

"But still, you must've been quite busy. That much is certain. And you became a...grand strategist? A grand strategist for Rohzenheim? Jus' what kind of successes didja attain on the battlefield to be granted such a prestigious role from a major country in your very first war?"

Popokka stopped reading and looked up at Allen.

"What are you trying to say?"

"Jus' what's yer goal, kid?"

"Huh?"

"Why're you doing this? I'm sorry, but I'd like you to explain that to me. I get that this information is important, and I'm thankful for it, but this isn't somethin' any normal adventurer would do."

Under normal circumstances, adventurers did not publicize the information they discovered within a dungeon due to the fact that it was a source of income. Those who took on these dungeons were generally only thinking of their own profits. Anyone who managed to earn a fair amount and leave the dungeon with their life did not discuss how they managed to survive nor even what they saw inside. If they were to share knowledge of where one could camp to earn money before they had earned enough for themselves, their profits would decrease. Therefore, even if they were to share the information with others, it would only be with those whom they relied on to survive—their

fellow party members.

The same went for this Rank S dungeon, which claimed the lives of half who dared challenge it within any given year. In fact, it was especially true for this dungeon—adventurers could expect to earn thousands of gold pieces within a short period of time there, thus making the thought of sharing information outside the party inconceivable.

There were, of course, those who dreamed of clearing the dungeon, as well as those who were happy to share their knowledge with those outside their own party. Alas, the former were easily discouraged by the difficulty and typically ran away from threats, barely earning anything in the process, while the latter often died in the dungeon.

Which is exactly why I'm doing this.

The information Allen was providing in Helmios's name was so valuable, sharing it was downright bizarre.

The last time he dropped off information—where BB, Scarlet, and Crimson roamed along with other details such as teleportation points—it caused a major uproar within the Guild. While many had thought that there was some sort of regularity to both the Rank S floor bosses' pathing and the teleportation points' locations, properly studying that hypothesis necessitated risking life and limb, so no one had ever actually done it. There were few parties who managed to escape with such intel, and among those who did, they often decided that it was something they could utilize for their own benefit. Those who thought otherwise were gambling with their lives.

However, Allen had been providing all sorts of information to the Guild over the past two to three months. Furthermore, he could identify where a Rank S floor boss would be at any given time with eighty percent accuracy. Not only did this lead to a notable increase in the survival rate of adventurers entering the dungeon, but it was precisely the kind of information the Guild had been desperately searching for.

Though all of these reports were made in the Hero's name, in reality, they were all thanks to the black-haired young man sitting before them. There were even rumors circulating among the other adventurers about a boy fitting his

description who possessed the strange ability to summon monsters.

The guildmaster figured that there must be something behind this mysterious young man providing information about the Rank S dungeon—albeit claiming it came from Helmios—that the Guild had never been able to get despite making numerous attempts. As such, he decided to take whatever information he could get.

“The biggest reasons behind half of all adventurers dying in the Rank S dungeon are attributable to Rank S bosses and death stages.”

“Yer right about that.”

The Rank S bosses were unbelievably powerful and would kill you before you could get away, while the death stages spawned endless waves of enemies, killing off adventurers before they could escape. Since the deaths from the latter could not be accurately counted, the Adventurer’s Guild instated a rule that any adventurer who did not return from the dungeon within a given period of time was considered dead.

“Helmios said he wanted to do whatever he could to get the death rate under ten percent.”

“Under ten percent? But how?”

“That’s the point of providing this information.” Allen’s demeanor made it clear that he intended to give no further explanation, but the guildmaster stared silently at him, unwilling to let the matter drop. “He asks that you wait two more months.”

There will be a prophecy regarding class promotions at the beginning of the year. Hopefully you’ll put two and two together then.

After learning that the Demon Lord Army had stolen Fire Goddess Freyja’s divine vessel, Allen was in a hurry to acquire all the equipment he would need to outfit the soldiers of Ratash, Rohzenheim, and the other allied nations of the Five Continent Alliance. But even if he were to protect each of these countries from the Demon Lord Army, he still stood no chance of beating it. What he needed were not stronger soldiers, but stronger adventurers.

The system for class promotions would help those with Talents become even

more powerful. Those who could already take on the Rank S dungeon would gain even stronger Talents. As things stood, however, such capable warriors were being knocked off one after another, which prompted Allen to start providing this information in the hopes of improving the situation.

These adventurers would also need new best-in-class gear as they grew stronger. With the flames of the Fire Goddess weakened, they would no longer be able to forge weapons or armor, and both adventurers and soldiers alike would need to be outfitted primarily with loot found in dungeons. It was for this reason that he was telling everyone where the treasure chests could be found.

The reward for providing this information, in Allen's mind, was that the lives of adventurers would be spared. That was why he had stayed up all night to compile all the information on the death stages. Of course, his friends helped as much as they could, but it was much faster to work using his grimoire, leaving him to do the brunt of the work. It was why he had cut their time in the dungeon down from three and a half days to just three days as well.

Though he was still fairly exhausted, he felt that it was more than worth it if their efforts helped grow the number of adventurers who would be around at the beginning of the year for class promotions—and to face off against the Demon Lord Army. Allen provided this information to the Adventurer's Guild in the hope that it would spare their lives.

"So somethin's gonna happen in two months?"

Allen held Popokka's gaze in the hopes of convincing him without having to delve into further explanation.

"That's correct. Helmios said that everything would make sense in two months' time."

Obviously, there were risks involved with telling the Adventurer's Guild, an organization that existed around the globe, about the details that would come with the divine message. It could even impact their activities going forward.

"I understand. Thanks for the info."

The guildmaster smiled wryly and nodded. Though he may not have understood why, he figured that Allen and Helmios were living at the same base

and that Helmios must have at least agreed to lend his name to this project. The information itself was incredibly valuable, after all, and the guildmaster wished for nothing more than to decrease the death rate of adventurers who challenged the dungeon.

“Well then, I’ll bring along more information as it changes. Ah, one more thing. The information is only current as of today, but please note that the layout of the dungeon does change.”

Apparently Dygragni, the dungeon master, changed the layout of the dungeon whenever the mood struck him.

“Got it. I’ll make sure to put a warnin’ when I publish the information.”

Now that there was nothing left to discuss, Allen stood up.

“Thank you. I believe that’s all for today.”

Popokka looked down at the maps in front of him. On the map of the Floor 4 death stage, a route was marked which would allow one to escape to safety. It was easy to imagine just how many lives this single map could save.

“Who are you *really*, Allen?” he muttered to himself.

Sophie glanced over at Popokka and giggled as she followed Allen out of the room.

“Hmm? What is it?”

Sophie grinned. “Allen is a pioneer.”

The guildmaster nodded, seeming convinced.

“What is it? C’mon, Sophie and Volmaar. Krena and the others are waiting.”

“Certainly, Allen.”

Sophie then hurried after him.

Chapter 6: Slaying the Floor Bosses

Whenever possible, Allen and the No-life Gamers would join Helmios and Sacred for breakfast at their base. Today, however, Helmios was running late.

“Nnh, good morning.”

Helmios walked into the dining room on uneasy legs, rubbing his fist against his temple as if he had a headache.

I see someone slept in. Little hungover, pal?

“You’re running late. We’ve already started breakfast.”

“You’re not the empathetic sort, are you, Allen?”

Allen decided to use Grass C’s Awakened Ability, Potherb, on Helmios to help him recover. There was a reason, of course, why even the great Hero would suffer from a hangover.

Allen’s survey of the Rank S dungeon covered a wide range of topics, including how people could protect themselves from floor bosses and death stages, along with methods for earning money. In addition to the content and accuracy of his report, it was also important that the Guild trusted the source of the information. Naturally, the Adventurer’s Guild made mention of Helmios when revealing the information for exactly the same reason.

The beastkin and dwarves had been particularly pleased with these reports.

The beastkin, ordered by Crown Prince Beku to spend a year taking on the dungeon, generally spent their time on Floor 2 to try to earn money for their post-dungeon life as they toiled away. The biggest danger they faced was the Rank S floor boss, the Blood Blast Beetle—otherwise known as BB.

Information on where this fast, rhinoceros beetle-esque monster generally lurked and how close you could get to it before being spotted had doubtlessly saved countless lives. As a result, all of the beastkin who managed to live to the end of their term of service thanked Helmios every time they crossed paths. In

fact, there were apparently many in Zeu's party who expressed to him a desire to thank Helmios.

This was a bit odd when you considered the fact that Helmios was a noble belonging to Giamut, an empire that had persecuted the beastkin of Albahal one thousand years ago. However, it was also true that he had saved their lives and ensured they could see the end of their term of service, to say nothing of the fact that they were quite a ways away from their home country. The beastkin bore no ill will toward Helmios and, in fact, deeply respected him.

Of course, Zeu knew that it was actually Allen who had provided the information, though he also knew that Helmios had given his permission to make these reports in his name, so the beast prince shared the information with his beastkin under the same premise. None of this caused any problems for Helmios, anyway.

Everything was going well so far.

A tremendous shock ran through the dwarves when the full set of death stage maps, complete with escape routes, was announced the previous month. This was due to the fact that many of the dwarves used golems and sought out the hidden cubes in hopes of getting slates for the magic discs used to call them forth.

Hidden cubes tended to offer up golem slates either as a reward or for trade. The only place to sell off unneeded slates was the temple, which would buy them at bargain-basement prices, so it did not make any sense for parties without dwarves to take the risk of heading to the hidden cubes. Conversely, parties made up entirely, or even partially, of dwarves were forced to rely on hidden cubes to obtain slates, which often saw them heading into the death stage.

The dwarves were immensely thankful to learn that there was a near-surefire way to survive these hellish death stages. It was hardly uncommon to find them in tears in front of the Adventurer's Guild's bulletin board where this information was posted.

The dwarves would express their thanks by offering to buy a drink. Seeing as many dwarves had a penchant for alcohol, drinking was considered a

pleasurable activity for all involved.

Now, no matter where Helmios found himself within the Rank S dungeon town, someone would invariably call out to him—and not only at bars or restaurants either. Even when simply walking down the street, dwarves would stumble out of nearby bars, steins in hand, and offer him a drink. And while Helmios was not one to shy away from alcohol, he was hardly what one would consider a heavy drinker. Using his quick wit and keen senses, he had thus far been able to turn down all of their invitations. Never before had he been so grateful for his high stats.

Alas, he had let his guard down the previous night and found himself unable to escape the dwarves, who quickly dragged him off to a bar. He stayed up well into the night as the dwarves practically showered with liquor before they finally let him go. This morning was the result.

“Well, we’re off to go slay BB today.” Allen cast a sidelong glance at the bleary-eyed Helmios and announced his plans for the day.

His decision to finally take on BB, a monster they had not yet been able to defeat, was based on his desire to push his friends forward with their class promotions and to upgrade their skills. The members who had already undergone class promotions had skills around Lvl. 5, meaning that they still needed to be maxed out, while Sophie was still awaiting her final class promotion. This was why he had determined it had still been too dangerous until now and spent the last month focusing on boosting skill levels. However, considering that they still did not know what the divine vessel was going to be used for, he decided that it was counterproductive to ignore the floor boss. And in the event they were able to defeat it, they could analyze the monster’s unique characteristics to share with the Adventurer’s Guild and hopefully prevent even more deaths.

In one corner of the dining room sat Admiral Garara, sipping at his breakfast soup in silence. Over a month had passed since he disbanded his party and essentially moved into Allen’s base, though he no longer tried to stop nor even offer a word of encouragement to Allen and the party as he did in the beginning.

Once they were finished with breakfast, the Gamers made their way from the temple to Floor 2 and rode some Bird Bs to BB's location. Since they had around an eighty percent chance of knowing where it could be found at any given time, Allen Summoned a Bird E and sent it to scout ahead, where it quickly found its target.

The party held in place about one kilometer above BB, the red creature moving around beneath them.

"All right, Dr. Meruru, you're up."

"Leave it to me!" Playing off of Allen's joke, Meruru pretended to stroke at a nonexistent mustache before lifting up her magic disc and tumbling backward off her Bird B. "I'm off!"

Moments later, a fifty-meter-tall mithril golem appeared in midair—a tactic they had recently finished practicing.



By the time BB's multiple eyes caught sight of the giant approaching from above, Tam-Tam had fallen to where even BB, fast though it might be, could not avoid it.

A thunderous roar erupted a moment later as rocks and dust shot high into the air like a geyser. A huge crater formed amid the plume of rubble, and at its center, Tam-Tam could be seen standing atop BB.

"Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaar!"

Meruru let out a howl as Tam-Tam reached its hands underneath BB's body while keeping it pressed down.

"Kishaa! Kishaa!"

BB jerked its legs in a desperate attempt to escape Tam-Tam's crushing grip. However, as Allen and the others began their descent, it stopped moving sideways in a bid to escape and instead started pushing up against Tam-Tam.

With one leg holding BB down and the other on the ground, Tam-Tam started to find itself knocked off-balance.

Huh? I guess BB's Endurance is higher than Tam-Tam's Attack. BB's going to break free from Tam-Tam and get away at this rate.

Allen Summoned up multiple Bug Bs.

"Antsys, soften it up with Formic Acid!"

"Clack clack!"

The Bug Bs clung to Tam-Tam's arms and blasted BB with their Formic Acid attack. White wisps floated up from various parts of BB's body as its carapace began to dissolve, but as it did, Tam-Tam lost its grip on the monster and BB was able to slip out from under the golem.

Now free, BB scuttled across the ground and turned around to launch a counterattack against Tam-Tam. Before it had a chance, however, Krena and Dogora put themselves between it and its target, blocking the path.

BB froze for an instant, which was all the time Krena and Dogora needed to strike the monster head-on with their respective weapons. It opened up its

dissolved shell and, with a shudder of its wings, rose into the air to escape.

“Krena, Dogora, whatever you do, don’t let it grab you!”

“You got it!”

“Yeah! You’re going down today!”

BB was able to absorb HP from anyone it managed to get ahold of, and as such, ensuring that it was not able to do so was key to defeating the monster. That was why Allen had instructed Meruru to have Tam-Tam destroy BB’s wings, although apparently the carapace was far stronger than he expected and got in their way. Even the Formic Acid was not able to reach its wings.

Gah, its carapace is just way too strong. And it’s fast too.

While BB’s wings flitted about to keep it hovering in the air, Krena and Dogora used their weapons to exchange blows with the monster while also maintaining enough distance to both stay outside its attack range and keep it at bay.

Krena and Dogora were wearing two Agility-boosting rings each, giving them an additional 3,000 Agility points per ring. Having opened literally hundreds of treasure chests, the Gamers now held twenty stat-boosting items for every stat. From this collection, Allen had selected these particular 3,000-point-boosting rings for the pair because their role in this plan was to keep BB at bay and prevent it from attacking those in the rear. They could worry about attacking later.

As the two of them were drawing BB’s attention, Tam-Tam, a massive target in its own right, fell back to the rear of the group. Once BB took to the air to try and escape, Sophie and Volmaar used their bows to chip away at its health. Allen Summoned a Dragon B and used its Awakened Ability, Hellfire of Fury, to attack from a distance.

After about ten minutes of this, Allen issued his next order to Sophie.

“Looks like we’ve taken quite a bit of its HP. It’s about time now, don’t you think?”

“Agreed.” Sophie lowered her bow and nodded, her gaze distant.

Huh? What’s that about?

Though Allen's curiosity had been piqued, there was no way he ever would have guessed that Sophie wanted to be referred to by an honorary title—such as “doctor”—like he had done with Meruru earlier.

“Salamander, please lend me your aid.”

“Au au!”

Salamander, a juvenile fire spirit, leaped out of Sophie's arms. Using her MP, it transformed itself into a massive fireball.

Allen gave Krena and Dogora the sign to fall back and, within moments, the immense fireball slammed into BB, knocking it backward.

“Kishaa... Ki...”

BB dropped to the ground, engulfed in flames, and let out a faint cry as it slowly burned away. Allen made an observation from what he just witnessed.

Spirit magic is an entirely different beast than regular magic. Heck, it's not even comparable to normal skills.

<You have defeated 1 Blood Blast Beetle. You have earned 120,000,000 XP.>

Whoa, we got 120 million XP from that! When we defeated the Demonic Deities we just gained a level without receiving any XP at all, but I guess defeating monsters always gives you XP.

Upon digging around the spot where BB disappeared, Allen found a Rank S magic stone and a bronze medal emblazoned with a motif that looked like a cross between a rhinoceros and stag beetle.

“All right, my first Rank S magic stone. This thing is huge.”

At thirty centimeters across, the giant magic stone only barely fit into Storage.

“Good job, everyone. Though I didn't get to do anything this time around.” Cecil, who had to sit the battle out and watch on as her comrades fought, sounded both relieved and annoyed at the same time.

“Eh, not everyone will have a role in every battle.” Though BB was strong against magic attacks, spirit attacks worked just fine. Taking note of this fact,

Allen realized just how important it was to create a diverse party in order to take advantage of these weaknesses.

“Anyway, great job, Sophie. You really saved the day.”

“Yes, Dogora, it all went quite well.”

Dogora had once suffered a burn to his rear at Salamander’s hands, but that was not an issue anymore now that Sophie had gotten used to how to handle the juvenile spirit.

“So Scarlet’s next, then. I think we can take it out today!”

After taking down BB, the Gamers planned to battle the Rank S floor boss monster of Floor 3, Scarlet Sandworm—usually referred to as just “Scarlet.” This monster was not strong against any particular type of attack, but it was incredibly difficult to defeat no matter how hard you laid into it due to its ability to heal tremendous amounts of damage.

However, even after spending three whole hours trying to take Scarlet down, the party eventually had to give up for the day. After that, they focused on leveling up some more and finally got Allen’s Strengthening up to Lvl. 8. Even after that, however, they still were unable to defeat Scarlet.

As Allen had predicted, Strengthening Lvl. 8 boosted two stats by 2,000 points apiece for each Summon. Yet even with an additional 1,000 Attack points over what they had had at Strengthening Lvl. 7, his Summons were still unable to make a dent in Scarlet’s huge pool of HP. The Gamers spent another three hours locked in vicious combat with Scarlet, but had to give up once more to try another day.

* * *

November came to a close, and it was now December. During their time spent leveling up, Sophie underwent a class promotion and was now a Grand Spirit User. Other than Meruru and Sophie, the rest of the party members who had already undergone a class promotion had gotten their skill levels to 6 and further increased their stats. With all that done, Allen planned on taking a fourth shot at defeating Scarlet.

“We’re going to fight Scarlet today.”

“I’m always impressed each time you guys take it on.”

“Well, we’ll never be able to make it to Floor 5 if we don’t finish it off. By the way, how long do you plan on staying here at the Rank S dungeon, Helmios?”

“Hmm, the emperor still hasn’t summoned me back. I figure I’ll probably be here until I see you guys clear the dungeon.”

Whenever Allen was doing something out of the ordinary, he would swap notes with Helmios.

It did not seem like Helmios or his party had any plans of clearing the Rank S dungeon. On the other hand, they had already acquired quite a stockpile of both equipment and money, and yet here they remained despite the fact that they usually only spent around two to three months at the dungeon. Several months back, Helmios reported back to Giamut that Freyja’s divine vessel had been stolen, which Allen figured might be the reason behind why they continued to stay.

Cecil joined in the conversation. “So I guess you’re sticking around until Allen’s skill level increases, then.”

At this rate, Allen’s skill level would reach 8 next month, thanks largely to all the magic stones he bought from the capital of Baukis.

Rosetta spoke up next. “Hmm, I gotta admit, I’d be interested in seeing Allen’s new skill.”

All eyes fell on Allen. Apparently everyone was quite interested in what kinds of skills his unique Summoner class had.

“That’s true, I suppose. Anyway, if we can’t beat Scarlet today, then I’ll probably wait until I reach my next Summoning level before trying again.”

Meruru crossed her arms and chuckled as she made her prediction. “That’s not gonna happen. Me and my superpowered golem are gonna beat Scarlet to a pulp.”

Krena crossed her arms as well and belted out a triumphant laugh. Allen could hear Admiral Garara clicking his tongue as the party left to make their way to the temple.

The Gamers went straight to Floor 3—a desert—and headed to the location where a Bird E had spotted their target. Scarlet was a massive worm that crawled its way through the desert sands, making it all but impossible to spot with the naked eye. Bird E was able to find it using its Farsight Ability, however. As they arrived high up in the air above where Scarlet was located, Cecil called out to Allen from behind.

“I’m joining the fight today!”

Of course, that was no problem as far as Allen was concerned, but first he wanted to review the battle plan with everyone.

“Keel, I know I’ve mentioned this before, but you’re a bit slow on healing. Try to keep up on that.”

“Right, I understand.”

“I’m counting on you. If you don’t keep up, Krena and Dogora might not be able to hold the line. We’re really going to need to work together going forward as we take on these floor bosses.”

“Right.”

Keel seemed annoyed at being told the same thing over and over again, but Allen continued to press the point all the same.

“All right, Cecil, let’s go.”

Once the Gamers were ready, Allen sent a Fish B Summon, Archelon, to circle Scarlet’s head. Scarlet noticed the Fish B’s presence and, upon spotting its prey, began churning the nearby sand.

“All right, we’ve got it!”

Scarlet’s head breached the sand and shot several dozen meters up into the air. This was the moment Cecil had been waiting for.

“Petit Meteor!”

A large, flaming rock smashed straight into Scarlet’s upturned head as it rose high up into the air, perpendicular to the ground.

Cecil’s Extra Skill, Petit Meteor, was tremendously more powerful than it had

been back during the war in Rohzenheim. Now, she had Intelligence-and Magic-boosting rings that added 3,000 points each on top of having maxed out her stats after two class promotions. The attack obliterated the worm’s head and crushed its body.

The force of the Petit Meteor strike left a massive crater in the ground, at the center of which lay Scarlet’s toppled mass. Krena and Dogora rushed down the wall of the crater and immediately went about attacking Scarlet’s smashed head. After their multiple prior battles, they were well aware that it was far from dead.

Scarlet’s headless body rose up, its wounds already beginning to regenerate as the two pressed their attack on the monster’s body.

Since it doesn’t have any weak points of its own, it doesn’t really matter where we attack. In that case, we might as well make a weak point ourselves.

While Scarlet was not particularly strong against any particular type of attack, it also did not have any decisive weaknesses, leaving them little choice but to focus on attacking places they had already damaged. They were not able to damage it faster than it could recover, though. That was why they were going to try out a new strategy today.

Meruru summoned her mithril golem. “Tam-Tam, come forth!”

Name:	Tam-Tam
Pilot:	Meruru
Rank:	Mithril
HP:	15,000 + 1,800
MP:	15,000 + 1,800
Attack:	15,000 + 1,800
Endurance:	15,000 + 1,800
Agility:	15,000
Intelligence:	15,000
Luck:	15,000

Now that they had acquired a Gigantify slate and put it together with their Supergigantify slate, Tam-Tam had achieved its superpowered form. The golem that had once stood a mere ten meters tall now boasted a height of a hundred meters and had stats five times their original values. This made Tam-Tam the biggest and most powerful member of the party, even outclassing Allen's Summons.

Okay, that's pretty impressive. The only downside I can see is that neither Keel's nor my Summons' buffs work on it.

"Beam Sword!" Meruru shouted out the name Allen had given her special attack.

A beam of light shot out of Tam-Tam's wrist before forming up and solidifying in the shape of a sword. Then, Tam-Tam stomped into the crater, sinking down to its ankles in the sand before swinging its blade into Scarlet's side the moment it got close. Bodily fluids gushed out of the wound as Scarlet's body was cleaved in two.

"Whoa! One half is no longer moving!"

This is quite different from when we did it with only the Supergigantify slate. Did we stumble across a new strategy?

The tail end of Scarlet's body was no longer moving, so Tam-Tam thrust its blade into the still-writhing front end, once again chopping it in two. The worm continued to grow smaller and smaller, giving the party a chance to focus their attacks on just one small area.

Allen originally worried that, once severed into multiple parts, Scarlet's regenerative abilities would cause it to turn into two monsters, but that did not seem to be the case.

"Hey, it's trying to escape into the ground."

Meruru noticed that the wriggling part of its body was trying to crawl back into the sand. Allen also noticed this and issued a command.

"Sophie, call one of your grand spirits."

"Certainly! Grand spirit Gnome, please lend me your strength."

Upon using her Extra Skill, Grand Spirit Manifestation, Gnome appeared. Clinging to the desert sand, the spirit began to harden it into rock. With Scarlet incapable of escaping into the ground, Meruru once again used Tam-Tam's sword of light to chop it into pieces.

Once Scarlet was reduced to a sixteenth of its original size, Krena used her own Extra Skill to chop it down further. Allen then used Dragon B's Awakened Ability, Hellfire of Fury, to engulf it in flames. Scarlet, now unable to escape or even fight back, continued to endure the one-sided assault for another twenty minutes or so before a message appeared in Allen's grimoire.

<You have defeated 1 Scarlet Sandworm. You have earned 250,000,000 XP.>

Scarlet's body disappeared, leaving a Rank S magic stone and an iron coin with a worm embossed on it in its place.

Meruru let out a whoop of excitement. "Oh yeaah, we did it!"

After taking on the boss over and over again, they had finally won. The whole party was thrilled, and even the usually stoic Volmaar was smiling.

That's right, we did it!

Allen recalled his past life, thinking back on the joy of refining his strategy over and over until he found a way to take down a boss that could not be defeated with attacks alone. Those were some of the funnest times he had ever had.

"That leaves just Crimson."

"That's right."

Allen nodded in response to Dogora's comment, though he was already thinking about what they would be doing after beating Crimson.

Admiral Garara's party was made up of twenty members, all of whom could summon forth superpowered mithril golems, and yet they still could not beat the final floor boss. Allen figured that getting his skill levels to 8 might be the bare minimum to put together a winning strategy.

Chapter 7: Rank A Summons Unlocked

After beating Scarlet, the Gamers took on Crimson Kaiser Sea Serpent twice, only to meet with failure on both occasions. Crimson could Summon up to a hundred kaiser sea serpents, each of which was as strong as a white dragon. This made it impossible for the party to beat the boss while also abiding by their policy of preserving their Extra Skills. Though Allen felt that they could probably beat it if they were to push themselves just a little further beyond their limits, he decided it was best to hold off for now.

On the first of the year, members of the Elmea Church received a divine message. Just as the Spirit God had already revealed to Allen, this message conveyed to the people that the Fire Goddess's flame was weakening and that a class promotion system would be introduced in April. Upon hearing that the details of the class promotions would come in a later divine message, Allen could not help but wonder if this meant that the gods had yet to iron out the specifics.

The day after returning from a three-day stint in the dungeon, the Gamers had finished up their business at the Adventurer's Guild and were hurrying off to the temple. Under normal circumstances, the party would typically rest for two days after returning from the dungeon, but considering that his grimoire showed that his skill level had increased just the day before, Allen decided to change up his plans. When he shared this change with Cecil and the others, they had all agreed to go with him. So, they finished breakfast and then, instead of the usual two or three members, the whole party had followed Allen to the Adventurer's Guild.

* * *

"Looks like we're a little late."

Allen could barely conceal his excitement as he hurried to the temple.

It's been quite a while since I've been this hyped.

Near the temple's entrance, Allen and his friends met up with Helmios and his party, Sacred.

Helmios smiled softly. "We've been waiting for you. Mind if we tag along?"

After Allen had shared his plans before departing the base earlier that morning, Helmios asked if it would be okay for his party to join them, seemingly interested in what he and the Gamers had planned.

Wow, they're all here?

"Feel free, but you should be warned that it'll probably take some time for me to evaluate everything."

The No-life Gamers, now joined by Helmios and Sacred, waited in line for their turn to enter Floor 2 of the dungeon. During that time, Allen repeatedly checked the note he had copied over from the grimoire's log into the memo section. His heart fluttered just a little bit more each time he read the text.

<The Skill XP of Synthesis has reached 1,000,000,000/1,000,000,000. Synthesis has reached Lvl. 8. Summoning has reached Lvl. 8. Expansion has reached Lvl. 7. You have obtained Equivalency. You have obtained King Me [Locked].>

Allen had finally reached Summoning Lvl. 8 the night before.

Heh heh, now I can finally Summon Rank As. I can't believe I was able to reach this level at fifteen.

Up until this very day, Allen had focused solely on raising his skill level, and now all that effort had finally paid off, thus granting him the ability to Summon Rank A Summons. He was so happy, he was practically drooling with excitement.

Record of Level-Ups

- 1 year & 0 months old: Obtained grimoire, Summoning Lvl. 1, gained access to Rank H Summons
- 1 year & 10 months old: Summoning Lvl. 2, obtained

Synthesis

- 3 years & 0 months old: Gained access to Rank G Summons
- 5 years & 11 months old: Summoning Lvl. 3, obtained Strengthening, gained access to Rank F Summons
- 7 years & 9 months old: Summoning Lvl. 4, obtained Storage, gained access to Rank E Summons
- 9 years & 10 months old: Summoning Lvl. 5, obtained Sharing, gained access to Rank D Summons
- 12 years & 9 months old: Summoning Lvl. 6, obtained Awakening, gained access to Rank C Summons
- 13 years & 11 months old: Summoning Lvl. 7, obtained Quick Summoning, obtained Deputize, gained access to Rank B Summons
- 15 years & 3 months old: Summoning Lvl. 8, obtained Equivalency, obtained King Me, gained access to Rank A Summons

Watching the dopey grin spread across Allen's lips as he looked over the record in his grimoire, Cecil felt a mixture of exasperation and concern for her friend.

Fire Goddess Freyja's divine vessel had been stolen by the Demon Lord Army, and they still had no idea where it was or why it was even stolen in the first place. This was clearly a perilous situation, but Allen's skills leveling up granted them hope, if only a little. This would not be just a matter of satisfying mere curiosity; they needed to know exactly what this level up brought with it.

However, this was Cecil and the rest of the Gamers' first time joining Allen's testing his new skills. He planned to check out the Summons available to him, though he was worried that it could raise quite a fuss if he Summoned a huge beast in the front lawn of their base. To prevent that, he had told his friends that it would be best to do it in the dungeon.

Everyone knew that Allen tended to get stuck in his own head, blissfully unaware of the world around him whenever testing out any new skill—even

inside a dungeon filled with monsters, where danger lurked around every corner. When Cecil mentioned that to the others, Krena, Sophie, and even Dogora and Keel had agreed to come along.

After a short wait, the group finally entered the temple. From there, they teleported to Floor 2, mounted some Bird B Summons, and took off toward a place free of any other adventurers.

All right, I'll have to test these one by one as I try to sort this all out.

The night before, Allen had created cards of all of his Summons. He had more than enough Rank A magic stones for this, thanks to his time fighting back in Rohzenheim as well as his battles here in the Rank S dungeon.

Just as I'd predicted, my grimoire holder gained ten more slots, increasing my maximum number of held cards to eighty.

Each time his skill level went up, the maximum number of Summon cards he could carry went up by ten. The limit had increased this time too, meaning that he could receive stat buffs from ten more Summons.

I'll start with the new skills I obtained, Equivalency and King Me. First up, Equivalency.

Allen repeatedly called forth various Summons of differing ranks as he used Equivalency. As he used it, he noticed that the number of magic stones used also changed.

Up until now, whenever he Summoned anything, it would only use the same rank of magic stone as the Summon itself. For example, a Rank C Summon could only be called forth using Rank C magic stones. However, when using the Equivalency skill, he could use magic stones from a variety of ranks to call forth the Summon. Specifically, using one magic stone, he could call forth ten Summons from one rank below that of the magic stone. Furthermore, he could use ten magic stones to call forth a single Summon that was one rank higher.

There was another benefit to calling forth Summons of a lower rank using just one magic stone as well. If the number of Summoned creatures was lower than the total number the magic stone could Summon, the surplus power would be converted into magic stones and spawn along with the Summons.

Looks like Equivalency will be pretty useful. Now I don't need to worry about running out of any types of magic stones, and I'll also be able to use this to boost my Skill XP to boot.

The Equivalency skill seemed to convert magic stones into MP. This was the same calculation used for the number of magic stones required to utilize a magic tool. A magic tool operated by a single Rank D magic stone could also work with ten Rank E magic stones. Thus the sale price of magic stones was also determined in a similar manner. In other words, the price of one Rank D magic stone was ten times that of a Rank E magic stone.

Allen was in his own world, unaware of his colleagues around him, as he recorded his observations in his grimoire.

Equivalency Effects

- 1 Rank D magic stone can Summon 10 Bug E Summons
- 10 Rank D magic stones can Summon 1 Bug C Summon
- 1 Rank D magic stone can Summon 1 Bug E Summon and create 9 Rank E magic stones

My other skill, King Me, is still locked, it seems. Speaking of, I haven't leveled up at all since defeating Rehzal.

After the party defeated Rehzal in Rohzenheim, Allen reached Lvl. 76. However, that was the last time he had leveled up. In order to reach the next level, he needed 400 billion XP. Since he had been focusing on dungeon crawling to help power up his friends and gather gear, he had not had much of a chance to grind XP for himself.

The Rank S floor bosses certainly gave a lot of XP, but while not completely out of the question, they were pretty inconvenient to fight, since he did not have all his equipment and skills sorted. Furthermore, he had to traverse vast distances on each floor to fight these bosses.

“All right, time to call out my Summons. I'm curious what I got this time around.”

He already had a general impression of what his Summons would be from when he Created the cards, but it was hard to get a feel of their size until he actually Summoned them.

“I wonder what they’ll look like,” Cecil said from where she was standing by. The Gamers, along with Helmios and Sacred, were watching Allen warily.

Allen looked down at the card he had chosen. On it was depicted a beast he had only heard about in works of fantasy in his past life. It was something he had been longing to Summon ever since he first came to this world.

“I’ve been looking forward to this for a long time, so let’s start with something big. Come on out, Orochi!”

No sooner had Allen spoken the Dragon A’s name than a massive Summon the size of a mountain appeared.

“Gwaaaaaaaargh!!!”

“Gwaaaaaaaargh!!!”

“Gwaaaaaaaargh!!!”

Its cries were so loud and booming that Allen had to cover his ears. Any monster that could fly in the fields and forests in the immediate vicinity quickly took to the air.

Dogora looked up at the Dragon A in amazement. “Whoa! That’s awesome!” It was so big that he could not take it all in from where he stood on the ground.

Maybe I should use Hawkins to get a proper look.

Using a Bird E to inspect the creature from above, Allen noticed that the Summon was nearly a hundred meters long and had five heads. It looked like a cross between the Yamata no Orochi and the Lernaean Hydra.

Type: Dragon
Rank: A
Name: Orochi
HP: 10,000
MP: 7,700

Attack: 10,000

Endurance: 9,200

Agility: 10,000

Intelligence: 6,000

Luck: 8,000

Bufs: Attack 200, Agility 200, Immunity to Breath

Ability: Lethal Poison Fang, Super Regeneration

Awakened Ability: Hellfire of Sheol

“Wow, so its stats are at 10,000 without it even needing to be Strengthened. And it’s got two Abilities too.”

Allen looked down at the numbers in his grimoire and felt all the more impressed by the sheer immensity of the Dragon A. Between its size and its stats, it could probably hold its own against top-tier Rank A monsters. And with buffs from his other Summons as well as Keel’s support magic, Orochi could be a real game changer.

After that, Allen called forth the rest of his Summons one at a time to check them out. Depending on their Abilities and Awakened Abilities, each had its own pros and cons for any given situation. It was hard to get a feel for what kind of effects they would have in battle, but he decided to just get through them all now.

All right, that’s about it for the appetizers, so it’s time for the main course. Let’s see what new Summon type was added.

Krena was the first to notice the odd expression on Allen’s face. He looked nervous.

“What’s wrong?”

“Huh? Oh, it’s nothing. It’s just that I can tell this Summon is going to be different somehow. I guess the only way to know for sure is by Summoning it, though.”

He felt strange about this one, though he could not really put it into words. Maybe he was just too excited after finally getting a new Summon type after

more than a year.

Krena was also excited. “Well, I’m looking forward to seeing it too.”

All eyes fell on Allen as he pulled out the final Summon card from its holder.

“All right, you’re up.”

The card disappeared amidst bubbles of light as a young man in his late teens appeared before them. He was half clothed, had spiky hair topped by a halo of light, and sported a pair of wings on his back. This man floating just above the ground was about the same size as Allen.

Just like the card depicted, he looks exactly like an angel. Then again, the card did have “Angel A” written on it, so it makes sense.

The Angel A looked back at Allen, and the two silently inspected one another. After several moments of maintaining eye contact, the Angel A finally looked away to examine the rest of the party. It was almost as if it had no idea why it was there.

Upon looking over the group, the Summon looked down at its own hands and body and began to move its limbs around. It was as if it were checking itself for something that was—or perhaps was not—there. Once that was through, it looked back at Allen and the rest of the Gamers.

It seems confused. Is it okay?

The moment Allen took a step toward the Angel A, it suddenly let out a yell.

“That’s it! Lord Elmea granted my request! Hey, look at me, Kyubel! I’m gonna find you and kill you!”

Allen watched as the Angel A shouted in excitement.

Looks like I Summoned a rather...spirited angel. Maybe there’s some kind of new rule that comes with Rank A Summons?

Upon reaching Summoning Lvl. 8, Allen was able to Summon the new Angel type whose stats were through the roof. He looked down at his grimoire to check.

Type: Angel
Rank: A
Name: Merus
HP: 20,000
MP: 20,000
Attack: 20,000
Endurance: 20,000
Agility: 20,000
Intelligence: 20,000
Luck: 20,000
Buffs: 2,000 to all stats
Ability: Endow Element, Angel Halo
Awakened Ability: Judgment Lightning

Whoa, its stats are double the highest stats of the other Rank A Summons. This should solve the issue of me not being able to bring enough firepower to the table.

Up until now, a Summon's highest stat value was the same across all Summons within the same rank. This Angel A, however, had stats twice as high as any other Rank A's.

During their battle with Rehzal back in Rohzenheim, Allen's Summons were far weaker than Krena and the other members holding the vanguard of the formation, so he had had no choice but to use them to defend, to sacrifice as decoys, and to focus on healing. However, with this Angel A, he could join Krena right on the front line.

Its buffs are something else too. Every stat gets plus 2,000? Just imagine how much my stats would blow up if I had eighty of these Angel cards. Maybe I'll Create a few more. Hey, wait a sec. I can't? Maybe that's the same with all Rank As...but... No, I can make more of those.

Despite having a large stockpile of Rank A magic stones, he was not able to Create more than one Angel A. Apparently there was some kind of limit on how many he could Create.

While Allen was lost in his grimoire and recording his observations, Greta, a Saintess in Helmios's party, swallowed hard as her staff dropped from her trembling fingers.

"That's...!"

"What is it, Greta?"

"Helmios, I think this man is..."

At that moment, Rohzen hopped down from his perch atop Sophie's shoulder and knelt down low, bowing his head in the Angel A's direction.

"Sophialohne, please show some respect."

"C-Certainly." Sophie immediately took a knee and bowed her head as well.

"But...just what is Lord Elmea thinking? Ha ha." Rohzen's laugh rang hollow, devoid of his usual joy.

It was apparent to Allen and the others that if the Spirit God and the crown princess of Rohzenheim were bowing down in his presence, this was no ordinary Summon.

"I, um... Mr. Allen, I think this might be..."

Just as Greta was about to confirm her theory, Allen finally stopped glaring down at his grimoire and yelled as he finally figured out who this mysterious creature was.

"Aha! I got it! The name! He already had the name Merus!"

"So...it's true!"

A look of realization washed across Greta's face.

Allen had always assigned names himself whenever he Created a Summon card, but this Angel A already had a name assigned to it that Allen did not recognize.

Merus, huh? I feel like I've heard that name somewhere before. But who is he? What's it mean?

"Hm, but Merus sounds a bit too much like Meruru. Maybe I should rename him. Angel... Angey... Angelio, maybe?"

After thinking up several clever names, Allen finally decided to add one to his grimoire.

A-N-G-E-L-I-O... Wait, huh? I can't change his name. Looks like this Merus Summon is pretty stubborn.

Allen had changed the names of his Summons dozens of times before, but for some reason, he could not do it now.

Finally, Greta spoke up.

“Um, Allen... I believe that’s the First Angel, Merus.”

“First Angel?”

Huh? Now that she mentions it, that means that Merus and Elmea are... And hey, why’s Sophie bowing so low like that?

Allen finally took notice of Sophie and Rohzen.

“You are correct,” the Angel A replied to Greta.

Greta, Helmios, and all of the others quickly knelt in reverence. The only exception was Allen, who stood stock-still. His mind raced over the theology lessons he had taken back at the Academy.

Ah, now I remember. There was a guy named Merus who was a First Angel or something like that. But why is he a Summon, then?

Here in this world, there was a divine hierarchical order. At the top sat Elmea, the God of Creation, followed by the four greater gods known as the Four Elemental Deities as well as the gods of harvest, war, beasts, and more. Each of these gods had a large number of angels they could call upon to do their bidding out in the Mortal Realm.

Among those countless angels, the most famous was Merus. He was the chief angel to Elmea, the God of Creation, and his tasks included conveying Elmea’s will to the other gods, sending divine messages to the Church, and taking care of Elmea’s every need as his attendant. As such, Elmea’s worshippers also looked up to this so-called First Angel with respect and awe. In every cathedral across the lands, there was a painting depicting Elmea, and alongside him was always Merus. Among the priests, he was revered higher than even other

smaller, unnamed gods. He was a pretty major figure to be thought of so highly.

Wait, so a real angel changed classes to become a Summon? I'd really like to change his name, though.

Allen decided to just ask Merus straight out what he was thinking. "Huh? But why are you a Summon?"

"Hm, now where should I start?" Merus nodded slowly in response to Allen's question and inspected the group standing around him. Finally, his gaze settled on Spirit God Rohzen, who was kneeling just slightly behind Allen and at the front of the group. "Ah, Rohzen. It's been a while, hasn't it? I see you've become a spirit god?"

"Yes, I have. We haven't been in touch for quite some time."

"The fact that I hadn't noticed you despite being so close is truly shocking. I suppose this means that I am no longer a First Angel, then."

With that, Merus gestured for everyone to stand.

Rohzen grimaced as he spoke to Merus from his usual perch atop Sophie's shoulder. "So I take it that the story of your defeat during the battle to protect Fire Goddess Freyja is true."

"So you all know about the attack on Lady Freyja?"

"I heard about it from several gods and angels when I returned to the Heavenly Realm. After your death, I heard that Lapt took your place."

"I see. Lord Rohzen, would you please tell me what happened in the Heavenly Realm after my defeat?"

"Yes, of course."

In response to Merus's request, the Spirit God explained how Freyja's power had begun to weaken as a result of her divine vessel being stolen and that the Demon Lord Army's intentions with it were as of yet unknown. Rohzen then went on to explain how, in response to these dangers, the Heavenly Realm had decided to create a class promotion system and only recently shared this with the Mortal Realm by way of divine message.

"So that's what happened."

With that, Merus fell silent once again.

“If I may ask, why has a First Angel like yourself become one of Allen’s Summons?”

“Well, you see, I was the one who thought up the Summoner class systems in the first place.” Though he spoke casually, his words carried with them significant weight.

Wow, so he’s the developer then, huh? Guess that means he was also the one who came up with all my Summons, like that little apple with limbs? He’s got a pretty creative streak, then.

When he learned that Freyja, the Goddess of Fire, was under attack by the Demon Lord Army, Merus had left the God of Creation’s holy temple to rush to her aid. However, he was defeated at the hands of Greater Demonic Deity Kyubel, commander of the Demon Lord Army. Just before he died, Merus recalled that, when they had put the system together the previous March and April, he still had not finalized all of the Rank A Summons and had asked Elmea to include him after his death.

Wait, seriously? So they really were waiting until the very last minute to settle on my Summons. More importantly, does that mean that Kyubel had given it everything he had during our fight and can be beaten?

Allen and the party had met with Kyubel right as the war in Rohzenheim was just about wrapped up. He appeared during their battle with Rehzal, who was leading the assault on Rohzenheim, but that must have been after he had already defeated Merus in the Holy Realm. At the time, they only spoke briefly, which suggested that Kyubel might have been injured.

“That’s right! This is great! This means I’m finally out from under that annoying Elmea’s thumb! I’m free!”

Merus threw his hands into the air and shouted with excitement over his newfound freedom. Unfortunately, that last statement kind of ruined Allen’s impression of the great First Angel.

* * *

Floor 4 of the Rank S dungeon looked like a massive ocean, with water

sprawling out as far as the eye could see. Large, circular leaves floated on the water, providing a platform for adventurers to walk on. Allen was currently standing on one of these leaves and looking at his grimoire, reviewing the information he would be submitting to the Adventurer's Guild.

<You have defeated 1 Crimson Kaiser Sea Serpent. You have earned 340,000,000 XP.>

The ex-First Angel, now-Summon—Angel A—flew through the sky toward the party.

“That’s about it. Sorry for taking so long, Allen.”

“Not at all. You did great.”

Allen raised his head from his grimoire and looked around. The surface of the water was covered with the carnage of battle. All the leaves except for the one Allen and his party were standing on were burned to shreds, and the water was filled with the floating carcasses of kaiser sea serpents.

Merus had mentioned that he wanted to see what kind of power he could wield now that he was a Summon, so the party had brought him here to fight some monsters.

He easily took Crimson out on his own.

Judging by his stats, Allen figured he would have no problem taking on Rank A monsters or even the floor bosses, so they had started off with the Rank S Floor 2 boss. And though ultimately he proved unable to defeat Scarlet, the Floor 3 boss, Merus had no problem taking out BB and Crimson on his own.

“Looks like I can handle myself all right, that giant worm notwithstanding.”

“Well, with all its regenerative powers, that one’s kinda tough.”

Allen decided to treat Merus just like he would any other Summon. Merus had even stated that there was no need to use proper titles when speaking with him. Likewise, Allen told Merus to just call him and his friends by their first names.

This was not due to some kind of laudable reasoning on his part; rather that Merus hated all that stiff formality. Considering how he previously mentioned

being “under that annoying Elmea’s thumb,” Allen got the impression that he wanted to stretch his wings and live as a free angel. Though he was not sure how exactly Elmea had treated Merus, Allen figured being a First Angel still must have been hard work.

Merus frowned slightly. “I wonder if there are any other monsters out there that I *can’t* beat.”

“Were you more powerful before as an angel or now that you’re a Summon?”

“Hmm. I’d say I’m probably half as strong as I was before.”

“Well, in that case, that means Kyubel is at least twice as powerful as you are.”

“You’re right about that. I had an opportunity to watch you fight, Sir Allen. I have to say that if you were to take on Kyubel now, he would probably wipe out your entire party without even breaking a sweat.”

Merus referred to Allen as “sir.” He had referred to the pope simply by name earlier, so it seemed that this was his way of acknowledging his place as a Summon.

“I can’t believe it. You mean that even if we get several times more powerful, we still wouldn’t be able to beat him?” Keel rubbed his temples in frustration from merely imagining how powerful their enemy must be.

“Well, it’s almost nighttime. We’d best leave the dungeon.”

At Allen’s suggestion, the party headed back to their base. After dinner, he put all the information he had gathered about the dungeon down on parchment.

* * *

The next morning was the party’s day off, but Allen, Cecil, and Krena made their way to the Adventurer’s Guild with parchment in hand. This was the same process they had been following since the previous year.

As per usual, the Adventurer’s Guild staff led them into a spacious room and took possession of all of the items the party intended to trade in before Allen handed the death stage map over to Popokka. The layout had changed, so Allen

had drawn up another full map, including the escape routes.

“This is a map of the new Floor 4 death stage. The types of monsters that appear have also changed.”

“I see, thank you.”

“Please be aware that we haven’t checked the other floors yet. I don’t think the layouts have changed, but it’s likely that the monsters spawning there are different.”

Popokka looked over the parchment.

Well, I’ve already done my part. I think we can get going.

“Well, that’s all I have for you today.”

Just as Allen was about to stand and leave, Popokka spoke up.

“Just the other day, our branch received a divine message from the Elmea Church. The priest came to see me personally. Just as you said, things are lookin’ pretty bad.”

Allen would have preferred that they tell Helmios about this stuff once in a while, and said as much. “It was Helmios that provided the information and made these suggestions, you know. I’m merely serving as the middleman.”

“As for your suggestion, the head office of the Adventurer’s Guild provided their formal approval.”

“Oh? Well, congratulations.”

That’s great. It means there’s less work for me to do.

The previous month, Allen had recommended to Popokka, head of the local Adventurer’s Guild branch, that they create a department to collect information from adventurers, analyze it, then provide it back out to all adventurers. He had even created a full proposal outlining the structure of this new organization, the Dungeon Information Group, which he shared when making his recommendation.

The Adventurer’s Guild provided adventurers with a trading service dealing in magic stones, weapons, and armor. But information was far more valuable than

expensive equipment, especially in dangerous places like death stages. Good intel was far more likely to save an adventurer's life than any item. In fact, when the Adventurer's Guild began to share information about the Rank S dungeon, the death rate dropped ten percent that first month. Allen believed that this could reduce the current fifty percent death rate down to around twenty percent.

Since they still had no idea how the battle with the Demon Lord Army would develop in the future, they needed to nurture those with Talents born in the Mortal Realm—a mere ten percent—in order to build them into a valuable fighting force. It was Allen's hope that not only the Rank S dungeon, but all the world's dungeons would also become safe places for adventurers to level up.

However, Allen would be leaving the Rank S dungeon once he cleared it. He could not stick around and continue collecting and analyzing strategic information forever. In order for the Adventurer's Guild to continue to collect information even after he was gone, they would need to create an independent, permanent organization that would buy intel from adventurers, analyze and summarize it, and then provide it to those who needed it. Allen summarized the outline of the organization and ran some trial calculations in the proposal. He figured that all of this, along with the sense of foreboding from the earlier divine message as well as the results shown here at the Rank S dungeon, had helped lead the Guild Headquarters to approve the request.

"Now, about the point system."

Huh? He's still talking?

Allen wanted to hurry home, but since the question was about his own proposal, he had no choice but to answer. "What about it?"

"Um, how should I explain that people will be paid for information on death stages not in money but with points?"

"Hmm. Well, I guess money's fine too. You could just let the person providing the information choose. However..."

Allen had suggested creating a system wherein points would be given as payment to those who provided information. These points could be exchanged for letters of introduction to nobles, merchants, or other guilds, or even traded

in for items to show their status. He was thinking this would be aimed toward adventurers who had already accumulated their wealth in the Rank S dungeon.

Over half of the adventurers challenging the Rank S dungeon left after collecting over ten thousand gold coins. While not enough to live lavishly, with that much money on hand, they would still have a tidy enough nest egg to start on the next stage of their life. What these people who intended to start that next stage needed more than funds was some kind of title, or perhaps a letter of recommendation to start a business. In other words, without those, they would likely run out of money and would either return to adventuring, join a criminal organization, or become a fallen adventurer who created trouble for everyone else.

Allen thus thought up the idea of the global Adventurer's Guild as an organization that fully supported retiring adventurers who gave useful information that could help out others. If a record was kept of their contributions to the Adventurer's Guild, that could serve as a great resource to make it easier for nobles and merchants to hire ex-adventurers.

Besides, it was possible to earn money in the Rank S dungeon without selling information in the first place. The premise then was that the Adventurer's Guild providing personal references would be worth more than money to adventurers, and moreover, the Adventurer's Guild would not need to spend any money in order to do so. They could keep their outlays down to the cost of writing letters of recommendation, continuing their normal activities all the while.

In addition, the information they obtained could then be sold to adventurers who needed it, serving as a source of income for the guild. This could serve as the salaries for the information group as well as provide enough capital for them to focus on analyzing the information.

"That's true. I see what you mean."

Popokka nodded along as the staff member at his side frantically scribbled down Allen's explanation. On several occasions, the note-taker had to ask Allen to slow down so he could catch up. Apparently this staff member was going to be the head of the information group.

“There aren’t too many people out there who can become the head of an Adventurer’s Guild. In a sense, this can also be a way in which we can continue to support people after they quit being adventurers.”

“However, in that case, that means that you’re the very first person to provide us with information. What would you like as payment? As the branch chief of the one and only Rank S dungeon Guild, I’d like to do whatever I can to grant your request.”

From the look in his eyes, it was clear that Popokka was willing to do just about anything, even if it meant negotiating with the Adventurer’s Guild Headquarters.

“Huh? I’m pretty sure that I already stated that the information and proposal all came from Helmios. Please speak with him about that.”

Allen was only met with silence. It was clear that Popokka did not believe him, as he had already met with Helmios on numerous occasions in his capacity as guild chief. While Helmios was an incredibly strong, intelligent, and kind fellow more than worthy of being called Hero, he was not the type to think up something like this.

Since the guild chief was not saying anything, Allen slowly stood up from his chair and left the room.

“Hey, wait. Are you sure we can’t ask for anything?” Cecil looked disappointed.

“Hmm? Well, we earned ourselves a favor from a worldwide organization. If the time comes when we need it, we can call it in through Helmios later.” The smirk plastered across Allen’s face led Cecil to let out a sigh. “All right, we’ve got all the medals we need, and we’ve finished analyzing all the Rank A monsters. I think it’s about time we make our way to Floor 5.”

Krena clasped her hands together in front of her chest and cheered. “Yeah, it’s about time! Let’s gooo!”

They were finally about to take on the final floor boss lurking on Floor 5. It would be their first attempt since taking on the challenge of the Rank S dungeon back in April of the previous year.

Chapter 8: Challenging the Final Floor Boss

During breakfast back at their base, Allen and Helmios traded notes about what they planned to do with their respective parties.

“Today, we’re going to try to take on the final floor boss,” Allen said.

“It’s a little early, don’t you think?”

“I want to see what it’s like first. We still need to level up Sophie’s skills.”

Though they had spent around ten days trying out Allen’s Rank A Summons, the party still did not quite grasp how to perfectly utilize their skills. Additionally, Sophie’s skill level was still at 6, meaning that her relationships with her spirits were not as close as Allen would have liked.

Even so, not only had they collected all the medals they needed to enter Floor 5, but they also knew that escape was possible if things got too dangerous, as proven by Admiral Garara. Furthermore, if they did somehow manage to take out the final floor boss, they would receive a reward for being the first to complete the dungeon. They would receive a normal reward for defeating the boss as well, so there was merit in fighting it multiple times.

Admiral Garara lay atop the sofa where he was stationed, listening in on their conversation. After taking another swig of his liquor, he let out a loud snort.

“Harrumph.”

“Something on your mind, Admiral?”

“There’s no way the likes of ye would stand a chance against the final boss.”

Wow, those are some big words, coming from him.

“Wha—?! ‘The likes of you’?! Y-You pathetic old man!” Dogora’s face went beet red as he tried to get ahold of the admiral.

“Hey, calm down, Dogora.”

He gets worked up pretty easily. Can’t turn your back on a challenge, can you,

big guy?

After somehow managing to calm Dogora down, the party made their way out to the line winding from the temple.

“They must be pretty worried.”

As Allen thought back on it, Helmios had also been pretty worried about them when he first mentioned that they were going to take on the Rank S floor bosses. All of Sacred, too, had been rather caring and considerate toward Allen and the No-life Gamers. That was probably because not only had Admiral Garara failed to take out the final boss of the Rank S dungeon despite being accompanied by some of Baukis’s best, but the two parties had also spent the past few months living in close quarters.

“It’ll be fine. Besides, Allen’s gotten stronger now. Maybe even a little *too* strong.” Cecil cast a sidelong glare in Allen’s direction.

“Well, you know, I’m the only one who can’t change classes.”

Unlike his comrades, who were able to boost their base stats over and over again through class promotions, Allen could not transfer even half of his stats over to a new class. He could barely even level up.

“That doesn’t matter anymore, though,” Dogora responded. Everyone else nodded in agreement.

I mean, sure, I’ve grown powerful enough that changing classes no longer matters, but on the other hand, I’m not about to settle for this.

He was satisfied only for a brief instant before quickly realizing that this was just another step down a very long road.

Upon entering the dungeon, the Gamers used their medals to go straight to Floor 4. This was the first time they had even approached the cube to teleport them to the next one.

“Floor 5 it is. Please present five bronze medal variations, five iron medal variations, and five mithril medal variations.”

“Here you are.”

Allen retrieved the five medals of each type, including those obtained from beating the Rank S floor bosses, and held them out toward the cube. The medals disappeared, and the party was instantly teleported away.

Keel was the first to speak up. "Where are we?"

Allen looked around. They were in a dimly lit space of indeterminate size. Pipes ran across the floor and came together in a variety of parts, giving the impression that they were inside some kind of gigantic magic tool or surrounded by machinery. There was a cube directly in front of them, and lights shone off in the distance ahead of, behind, and to either side of them.

"It's quiet. Maybe there's no enemy here?"

Dogora readjusted his greataxe on his shoulder as Krena drew her blade and took position to protect the party members in the rear.

I mean, it's not like we were ever ambushed whenever we reached the final floor of Rank A dungeons either.

In dungeons of Ranks C through A, the boss would not attack until you drew close enough. However, considering that this was the final floor and that it was quite different from the ones that came before, it seemed wise to maintain a certain degree of caution despite the lack of monsters spawning. Allen could sense no presence other than their own.

"Seems like there aren't any monsters here, which means that this is just an open area until we close in on the boss," Cecil responded in kind to Allen's cautious assessment.

"You're right. I see several lights off in the distance. What should we do?"

First off, Allen decided to approach the cube in front of them.

"I am Special System S501. I can take you away from this floor. Do you wish to leave?"

"No, we would like to fight the final boss."

"Understood. In that case, make your way to the system up ahead."

"Okay." As directed, the party made their way toward the light up ahead.

As they walked, they spotted a waist-high platform with three indentations in it. The indentations were the exact same size as the medals they had collected previously. Before long, they reached a cube floating in the center of a square with lantern-like magic tools on each of its four corners.

“I am Final Floor Boss Transfer System S505, the transportation system to the final boss. I am unable to transport you to the final boss as you have not yet placed the necessary medals into the platform.”

“What? You mean we can’t go?”

“What does it mean about putting medals in the platform?”

“Please speak with each of the medal transfer systems for more information.”

“Hmm. Well, it seems like this cube here will send us to the final floor boss, but we need to put medals in the platform. I guess we need to speak with the other lights to find out more.”

The party returned to their starting position, then made their way to the light off to the right, where they reached another cube with lantern-like magic tools floating in front of it.

“So I guess we’re supposed to use this cube to take on each of the bosses and get their medals?”

“Looks like it, Cecil.”

Allen approached the cube.

“I am Bronze Transfer System S502. Do you wish to travel to the Bronze Zone?”

“No, I have a question. Are the medals we need to put in the platform the ones we can obtain in the Bronze Zone?”

“That is correct. You can obtain a medal by defeating the golem, protector of the bronze medal.”

The party made their way to the other lights to speak with each one. Allen wrote the information they gave down in his grimoire.

Locations and Names of Systems on Rank S Dungeon Final Floor

- System S501: located at the center of the final floor, meant for escaping
- System S502: located to the right, teleport to the Bronze Zone
- System S503: located to the rear, teleport to the Iron Zone
- System S504: located to the left, teleport to the Mithril Zone
- System S505: located up ahead, teleport to the final floor boss
- Platform for the medals: located in the central area

As expected, they would need to take down the golem protectors in each of the three medal zones, then put the medals they obtain from them into the platform in order to challenge the final boss.

“Which one should we try, Allen?”

Krena wanted to know which golem protector they would beat first. Not a single one of the Gamers considered going home an option.

“Well, why don’t we try the Bronze Zone, since that will probably be the weakest?”

The same logic had applied to the other floors as well, with bronze being the weakest of the medal-dropping enemies.

“I am Bronze Transfer System S502. Do you wish to travel to the Bronze Zone?”

“Yes.”

Bloop.

Upon Allen’s answer, the party was instantly teleported to a space with a

massive golem in it.

Allen spoke aloud as his mind raced to take in their surroundings. “This place is pretty big... And wow, that golem is huge!”

Standing nearly a hundred meters tall was a golem made of bronze. It looked as if it was waiting for them to approach.

“We need to beat that thing?”

“Looks like it. Anyway, looks like this is our first battle. Merus, you’re up.”

Allen Summoned Merus, who instantly swooped in toward the large golem.

Much like Allen’s other Summons, it appeared that when Merus was in the grimoire in card form, all of Allen’s experiences and thoughts were shared with him, allowing him to act as needed without awaiting commands.

Once Merus drew close, the golem began to move. Its arm spun like a drill as it swung at the Angel A Summon. Merus threw his arms up to block the attack, but he was quickly overpowered and sent flying back.

“Ngh!”

Whoa, looks like its Attack is pretty high.

After Strengthening, Merus’s Attack stat was 22,000. The bronze golem’s must have been even higher than that.

It was right then that Allen noticed something.

* * *

Merus’s halo began to glow as he spoke, his words coming so fast that they all blurred together.

“Angel Halo Ability activated. Operator permissions confirmed. Summoning Dragon A.”

Moments later, a Dragon A was Summoned behind Allen. It let out a mighty roar.

“Gwaaaaaaargh!!!”

“Listen up, Orochi! I want you to meet his attacks head-on and make an

opening for us!”

One of Orochi’s five heads responded to the command. “Yes, Master Merus!” With that, the dragon closed in on the monstrous bronze golem.

The attacking golem began to spin both of its arms, turning them into drills once again and striking at the Dragon A’s two outermost heads. Orochi attempted to dodge the strike, but only one head was able to narrowly escape; the other was ripped to shreds.

However, a loud squelching sound could be heard coming from the Dragon A’s neck as a new head began to sprout from the carnage. This was Orochi’s Ability, Super Regeneration.

This is definitely going to be useful. With five heads to work with, it can protect anyone that gets injured while still keeping up the offensive.

Up until recently, Allen had had little choice but to use his Summons as if they were disposable in the face of such powerful enemies, which in turn consumed a great number of magic stones. A Summon like Dragon A, which fought with extreme doggedness, would prove invaluable.

Just as he had hoped, Orochi continued to lay on the damage while healing all of his own wounds.

More to the point, though, this Angel Halo Ability is beyond awesome. Now to figure out just what these operator permissions can do.

Allen thought back on the Ability Merus had used earlier and, after opening his grimoire and turning to Merus’s page, found that there was yet another page dedicated to Angel Halo.

Angel Halo Permissions

Manage Angel Halo’s permissions:

- Summon: Unlimited
- Create: Locked
- Synthesis: Locked
- Strengthening: Unlocked

- Awakening: Unlocked
- Storage: Unlocked
- Sharing: Unlocked
- Quick Summoning: Unlocked
- Deputize: Unlocked
- Equivalency: Locked
- Daily Summon Limit: Locked
- Distance from Operator: Unlimited
- Chat Functionality: Unlimited

According to the grimoire, Allen could authorize Merus to use various Summoning skills. For example, he could choose which Rank H through A Summons Merus had access to. He could even give him unlimited access, which would allow the Angel A free rein to call forth any Summons Allen himself had access to.

He could also set a Daily Summon Limit to restrict the number of magic stones used in creating the Summons. These, too, could be set on a per-rank basis, such as setting a limit of one Rank E or ten Rank D magic stones.

“Distance from Operator” referred to the distance Merus could be from Allen and still be able to use Angel Halo. By setting this to one kilometer, for example, Merus would lose all of his Summoning skills once he was outside that radius.

It looks like this doesn't add to my Skill XP, though. But I guess that'd be hoping for a little too much.

Angel Halo used up Merus's own MP, meaning that Allen would not receive any XP for any Summons Merus Created.

For the time being, Allen decided to restrict the permissions to just what would be needed for fighting. Judging by their earlier exchange, other Summons like Orochi seemed to obey Merus's commands, possibly due to Merus holding a higher position than them. There was no mention of this in the list of permissions, however.

While Allen was busy mulling over these new observations, the Dragon A and bronze golem had reached a stalemate. The bronze golem could not overcome

Orochi's regenerative powers, but Orochi was not strong enough to win on its own. The rest of the party stood by as the battle unfolded before them, awaiting Allen's command.

Allen gave out orders based on what he had seen in the battle between the Dragon A and the golem. "Looks like this bronze golem's pretty tough! Watch out for its drill punch and give it all your best moves!"

"All right, we're up!"

"Let's go!"

Dogora and Krena stepped up from the rear of the group, hefted their weapons, then closed in on the bronze golem while Meruru called forth Tam-Tam. She moved carefully around Dogora and Krena so as to not squish her companions as she neared the golem.

The bronze golem turned its attention away from the Dragon A as it took notice of Tam-Tam. A moment later, Tam-Tam's arms shot out, taking a firm hold of its opponent's shoulders.

"Booyaaaah!"

Tam-Tam pressed its feet firmly into the ground in an attempt to lock the bronze golem in place, but the golem continued to press on, slowly pushing it back.

"Hnnngh!"

Its arms began spinning once again, and the bronze golem struck at Tam-Tam's lower back, slowly drilling its way through Tam-Tam's body as a loud screeching sound filled the air.

Meanwhile, Dogora and Krena had reached the bronze golem's feet and were letting loose with all they had, though all they could manage was to chop away at its body. They were doing little damage to the monster.

"This guy's made up of some really tough stuff!"

Despite possessing a jaw-dropping Attack stat thanks to having undergone three class promotions, Dogora was surprised at just how hard the bronze golem's exterior was. Apparently Krena was having the same issue as well.

These Rank S monsters on Floor 4 are completely different beasts from what we dealt with on Floor 2. This guy seems almost as strong as Rehzel.

Even Cecil's offensive magic and Sophie's spirit magic attacks had little effect on the bronze golem, suggesting that the monster had rather high resistance against both physical and magical attacks. They once again found themselves deadlocked.

"Allen, what do you think about Limit Break?!"

Seemingly frustrated, Krena asked Allen if she could use her Extra Skill, Limit Break, to boost her stats.

"No, not yet. Merus, are you ready?"

"Absolutely! Looks like it worked."

"Huh?"

Merus, who had been busy using one of his Abilities while avoiding the bronze golem's strikes, flew down to Krena's side and held his hand out toward her sword.

"This enemy is weak to lightning elemental attacks, so I'm going to change everyone's element to lightning." Purple bolts of electricity began to run up and down the length of Krena's blade. "Try attacking him now."

Following Merus's command, Krena slammed her lightning-empowered sword into the giant's ankle, causing the previously unfazed bronze golem to lose its balance. Its leg twisted inward before it stomped its other foot down again to right itself.

"Awesome, my attack worked!"

"H-Hey, do me too!" Dogora shouted.

Merus next moved around and used his Ability on Dogora's greataxe, followed by Volmaar's and Sophie's bows and arrows.

Merus's Ability, Endow Element, allowed him to change the element of friend and foe alike. For allies, it could grant a specific elemental affinity to any weapon, skill, or magic which did not already have one; for enemies, it could add an elemental weakness. Though there were some cases in which it did not

work all that well due to a monster's rank, skills, or its own defenses, this was how Merus had been able to defeat BB and Crimson on his own.

"This is great! My magic is finally getting through!" Cecil cheered excitedly. Ever since becoming a Wizardess King, she had had access to lightning elemental magic. And because Merus was unable to change the element of offensive magic that already had one, he instead changed the enemy's weakness to coincide with Cecil's capabilities. With two rings boosting her Intelligence—which was already impressive at over 10,000—by 3,000 points each, her lightning magic attacks were so strong that they slowly began to push the bronze golem back one step at a time.

Merus then pulled a Blessing of Heaven out of Storage and, upon replenishing all of his MP, closed in on the bronze golem. He concentrated all of his magical power into the palm of his hand before letting loose with his Awakened Ability.

"Begone, miscreant! Judgment Lightning!"

The ball of magical energy shot out from Merus's palm in elongated, purple bolts of lightning that struck the bronze golem straight in the chest.

The golem tumbled backward and slammed into the ground on its rear with a tremendous *thud* that reverberated throughout the entire zone. Despite its attempts to get up, its movements seemed slow and restrained. Judgment Lightning had the additional effect of temporarily paralyzing the enemy.

"Looks like he's slowed down quite a bit."

And yet he's still not down for the count.

"Time for the finishing blow!"

Krena activated her Extra Skill and ran up the bronze golem's leg. Cecil's lightning magic, Sophie's and Volmaar's lightning-imbued arrows, and Dogora's lightning-powered greataxe all hit at the same time as Krena dove up from the golem's knee and stabbed straight into its chest with her electric blade.

"Bwoooomf!"

The bronze golem let out one final roar before disappearing in a flash of light, leaving behind a single treasure chest. Text flashed onto the cover of the

grimoire.

<You have defeated 1 bronze golem. You have earned 860,000,000 XP.>

“We did it! Good job, team!”

While his friends were cheering at their victory over the powerful enemy, Keel noticed a floating cube toward the back of the room as well as another treasure chest in front of it.

“I guess there’s another one because of how difficult that monster was.”

Keel excitedly opened the treasure chests. Inside the bronze golem’s chest, he found a tablet for a mithril golem’s body. In the chest in front of the cube was a medal with a bronze golem embossed on it. He could not help but be disappointed at having pulled such low-value items.

“Hey, don’t be so quick to be disappointed, Keel. Look, this is our reward for beating one of the final floor bosses.”

The treasure chest the bronze golem had dropped had been made of wood, just like the ones they had run across countless times in previous dungeons. Allen figured that, just as they did in dungeons of Ranks C through A, silver and gold chests were also likely to appear here.

“Yeah, but it’s gonna be pretty rough having to fight such a powerful enemy over and over again just to get those silver and gold chests.”

Back when they were clearing dungeons at the Academy, silver chests appeared roughly once in every ten attempts, while gold ones spawned once in every hundred.

“Anyway, our goal this time around is to defeat the final floor boss.”

Though I guess this means that we also need to defeat two more golems just like this one.

Even though they had not fought the final floor boss yet, Allen had gotten a taste of just how powerful it would be. After defeating the bronze golem, Allen decided to put the iron golem on the back burner for a bit. The party spent the next two days exploring Floor 3 of the dungeon before returning to their base.

“Wow, so there are three *more* bosses on Floor 5 besides the floor boss?” Helmios asked.

“It seems that way, yes. We had quite a hard time against the bronze golem, which is likely the weakest of the bunch.”

“How bad was it?”

“Hmm, I’d say just a tad easier than our battle against Rehzal.”

Allen told Helmios about the onslaught of dual-fisted drill punches that could have taken out anyone in the party’s rear guard with a single blow. He also explained how, like Demonic Deity Rehzal, the bronze golem had high defense and was practically immune to both physical and magic attacks. They were only able to finally defeat it after repeatedly utilizing their more powerful magic and skills.

However, unlike Rehzal, the bronze golem did not have the ability to resurrect itself or use ranged attacks. That was what ultimately led Allen to rank it below Rehzal in terms of power, as they were still able to hack away at its HP from a distance.

“That’s pretty impressive, no?” Rosetta asked, her eyes wide with surprise. The rest of Helmios’s party also looked taken aback. Admiral Garara, however, who was sitting on the sofa in the corner of the dining room, was still in a dark mood.

“Tch, gettin’ yerselves all chuffed up over beatin’ a silly li’l bronze golem.”

Oh, he’s here?

“What’d you say?!”

And Dogora’s falling for it, just like usual.

Allen allowed himself a brief moment of celebration as he watched their usual screaming match begin to unfold.

“Hah? Ye don’t know nothin’. There’re *two* iron golems, I’ll have ye know. There’s no way ye little kiddies can defeat ’em if you’re so excited about beatin’ a single bronze golem. Ye buffoons make me laugh! Gah ha ha!”

Dogora stood up from his seat, fist clenched, as the admiral’s laughter filled

the room. It looked as if a fight were about to break out.

“Hey, Dogora...”

Allen, with the help of Keel and Volmaar, managed to push Dogora back into his seat.

Sounds like getting the next two medals will be no easy task.

Allen had figured that the iron golem would be stronger than the bronze golem, of course, but he never would have guessed that there would be more than one of them. Though it had not been given with the best of intentions, he was thankful for the admiral’s information.

When Allen and the others had first expressed their intention of going to Floor 5, Admiral Garara had commented that “Strength alone won’t get ye to the final floor boss.” While this had not exactly been offered up out of the kindness of his heart, Allen took it as advice on how they would be able to confront the final floor boss. He had expected that once they defeated the bronze golem and mentioned they were going to take on the iron golem, the admiral would provide yet more information. Rough around the edges though he may have been, Admiral Garara was not a bad person.

Suddenly, the grimoire appeared in front of Allen.

Huh?

Silver text appeared on its matte black cover.

<Summon me.>

There was only one person who could have done that.

Allen summoned Merus. His Ability, Angel Halo, gave him the power to write in the grimoire’s log—a power Allen had given him when assigning Merus Summoning permissions. However, Merus was unable to Summon himself.

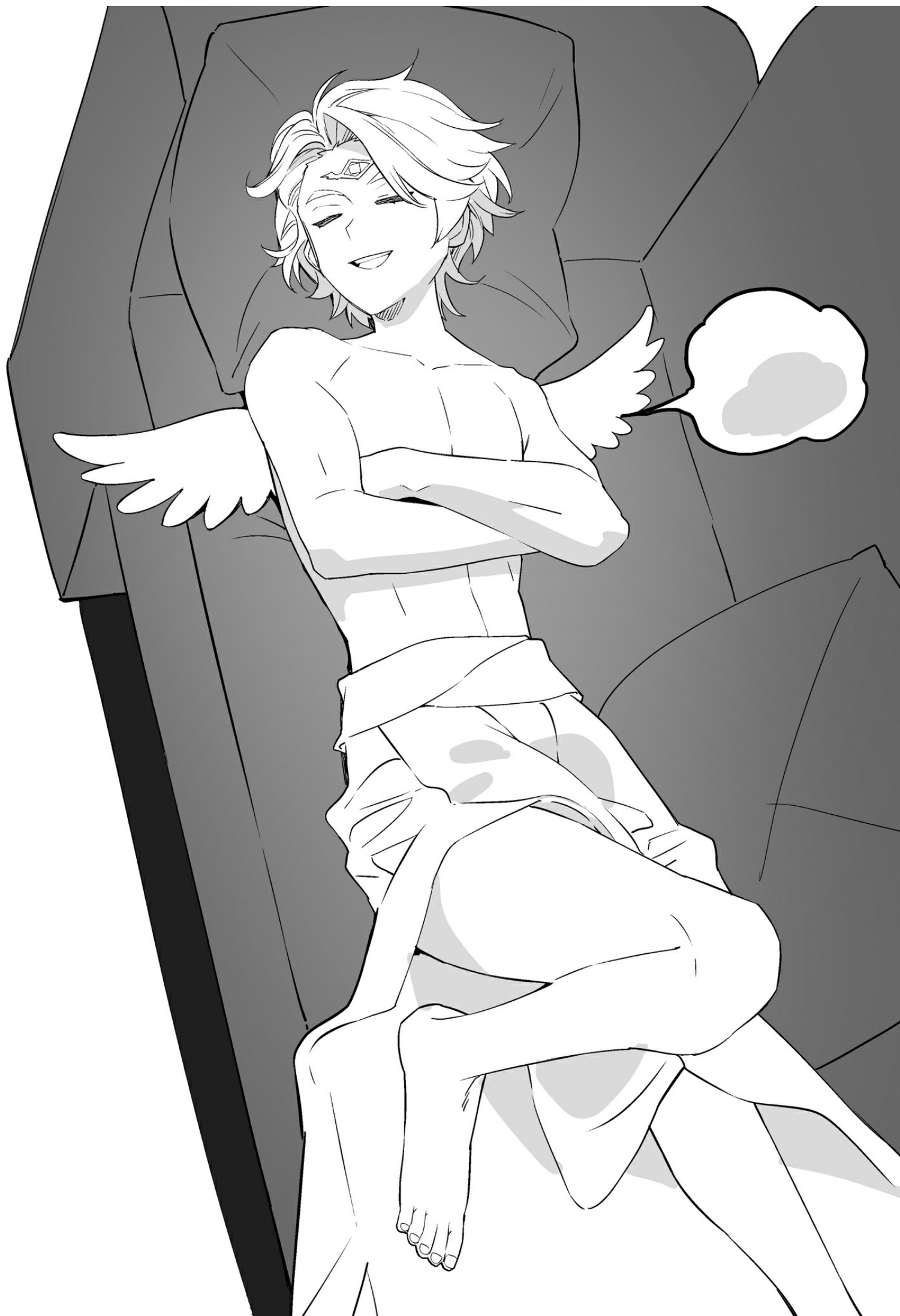
“This what you wanted?”

“Yep.”

Merus made his way to one of the sofas lining the wall of the dining room and plopped down as the whole room watched on in silence. Since they all regarded

Merus as the First Angel and right hand of Lord Elmea, his presence was still a bit much to take in no matter how many times they saw him.

On the other hand, Allen figured that Merus was taking this Summon thing as an opportunity to relax now that he was no longer the First Angel.



He's acting just like a guy who finally quit his slave-driving company to loaf around the house.

When he had previously summoned Merus to the base, Merus had told him all about the trouble he had gone through in creating Allen's Summons. It seemed that Elmea, the God of Creation, had quite a strong personality. He refused to compromise on anything, from balancing with other classes to the designs of the Summons. This meant that, for each rank, it had taken over a year to decide on the Summons' looks and Abilities.

Which is why nothing's been decided about the Rank S Summons.

Apparently Merus had not completely hashed out the Rank A Summons by the time Kyubel killed him. Allen could only hope that the next angel in charge was currently working on implementing the Rank S Summons for when Allen reached Summoning Lvl. 9.

"Are you sure it's okay for you to just lounge around like that, Mr. Angel, sir?" Having nowhere else to direct his anger, Dogora took his annoyance out on Merus.

From the way he was just chilling out on the sofa, Merus certainly did not appear even remotely alarmed by the fact that the Demon Lord Army had stolen the divine vessel and that everyone in the Mortal Realm was facing extinction. Keel and the rest of the party seemed to share Dogora's concern, appearing somewhat saddened and troubled by the situation.

Merus looked confused at this. "Hm? Well, the Goddess of Fire's divine vessel being stolen is definitely a big issue." However, he seemed wholly disinterested in the danger facing the planet.

"Are those in the Heavenly Realm not concerned about the Mortal Realm?"

Allen continued to press the point. If possible, he wanted to know to what extent the Heavenly Realm actually considered the Mortal Realm. Did they want them to prosper, or did they not care if all life perished? Would they be willing to throw in their lot with helping humanity destroy the Demon Lord Army, or did they have no intention of intervening?

"You guys seem to have a problem with my attitude." Merus sat up on the

sofa and reclined into its back. Everyone watched on in silence, waiting for the ex-angel to speak. “Well, I guess I can’t blame you. If you’re so concerned about it, I guess I’ll tell you. The gods, you see, believe in the importance of maintaining harmony.”

“Is that somehow different from saving humanity?”

“Yes and no. If the people are to be saved, that would only be when it is considered necessary for the gods to preserve this harmony. Essentially, people should prosper through their own power, and while the gods do provide teachings to the people, they believe that they should not interfere with how things play out.”

“But aren’t there gods, such as spirit and beast gods, who dedicate themselves to certain species?” For example, there was Rohzen, the Spirit God of Rohzenheim, as well as Garm, the Beast God of Albahal.

“That’s because these particular gods have decided to walk amongst these species.”

“So what you’re saying is that the gods don’t even care if the people die, as long as harmony is maintained, huh?!” Dogora shouted, clearly upset. He was not impressed by the way Merus was explaining the attitude of the gods.

“H-Hey, calm down, Dogora.”

Keel was taken aback by Dogora’s fearless determination. As far as he was concerned, Dogora was directly confronting an ex-First Angel. However, Merus merely continued to laze about on the sofa, a sardonic grin spreading to his lips.

“That’s right. After all, every living thing eventually dies. The same even goes for us angels.”

“B-But that...” Greta was at a loss for words at Merus’s unangelic demeanor.

“Do you have any idea how many species have been wiped out already? How many people are on the verge of dying at this very moment?”

“From the way you’re talking, it sounds like a pretty big number,” Allen responded.

“That’s right. Over the past few tens of thousands of years, it’s been quite a

significant number. If we were to talk about salvation, wouldn't it make the most sense to wipe out the human race for the sake of all the dwarves, elves, and beastkin driven out of the Central Continent? Do you know why the beastkin's names are only two syllables, Master Allen?"

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"Hmm, so there's a special meaning to the beastkin's names, then?"

Dogora did not seem to pick up on what Merus meant, but Allen had already noticed that there was something of a pattern; Uru, Sara, Zeu, Shia, Beku—all of the beastkin he had met over the past year had disyllabic names.

"Beastkin were once treated like livestock by the humans on the Central Continent, and no one gives long names to livestock. Some were only referred to by numbers. The beastkin still nurse their rage over their past treatment and thus have kept their names to only two syllables. Humans would likely do the same if they had endured similar treatment."

"What's your point?"

"Do you think humans are good? It's clear from the history of the human race that this is not the case. They don't care what happens to others, so long as they and their comrades survive. Or rather, they don't even realize that these other living creatures are just as desperate to survive as they are. Master Allen, have you ever considered that the monsters you've defeated thus far—the boars, the armored ants, the orcs—were all living their own lives?"

"As long as the problems are between the species, the gods won't get involved. I suppose that goes for monsters as well?"

"Correct. Monsters make up just one part of the world. That is the harmony of which the gods speak. Discord is just one part of harmony."

So that's why Demon Lord was also one of the class choices back then?

Allen finally understood why "Demon Lord" was one of the classes offered to him right before he first came into this world.

So harmony is more important than peace, which explains why the spirit gods were in such a panic.

Allen glanced over at Rohzen, who was sitting atop Sophie's shoulder. The Spirit God's pale face likely meant that he had already possessed a vague sense of how little the gods cared for the continued existence of the elves. In fact, millions of elves had been killed during the Demon Lord Army's invasion of Rohzenheim the previous year; Rohzen might very well have been trying to protect the elves without relying on the Heavenly Realm.

That may have even been the reason Rohzen tended to avoid giving straight answers whenever Allen asked about the ways of the world. Or perhaps he thought that understanding how the world worked would lead Allen to come up with ways to break the rules, and thus feared that he would be sanctioned once Allen did so.

"Hmm, so what you're saying is that the gods currently believe that the world is in harmony? Despite the fact that a divine vessel has been stolen, and that all living creatures except for monsters are facing extinction?"

"Not even close. The monsters have been marked for arbitration for quite some time due to how much they disrupt the harmony. In fact, an arbitration god was even dispatched for that very purpose, but they have yet to decide on a solution."

"An arbitration god?"

"It's exactly as it sounds: a divine arbiter who passes judgment on those who break the rules and disrupt the harmony. Lord Elmea has entrusted this god with the ability to pass judgment on anyone, god or otherwise. However, this all happened more than fifty years ago, and I'm sure you're already well aware of what's happened in the intervening years."

Merus shot Allen a knowing glance. Suddenly, a theory began to form in the young Summoner's head.

"No way... You don't mean...that it's *me*? No one's ever mentioned anything about that to me, though."

"The God of Creation chooses to not get overly involved, and the same goes for matters with respect to you. However, it is Lord Elmea's goal for harmony to be maintained."

Huh, and all I've been told by Elmea is to enjoy my time here. But...

Allen wanted to seek further clarification. "Chaos...is part and parcel of harmony, I take it?"

A sly grin spread to Merus's cheeks.

"Of course. A little bit of chaos is required in order to bring distorted harmony back into line."

Allen smirked at this. He finally felt as if he understood why he was brought to this world.

* * *

"I have to say, it's a huge hassle to have to get the Rank S medals together every time we head to Floor 5." Keel voiced his concerns as the team waited in line outside the temple, a location they often found themselves.

"You can say that again. At least beating the monsters has gotten easier, though."

Now that Allen was able to use Rank A Summons, they had managed to whittle down the time it took to beat the Rank S floor bosses by a fair degree. The other medals needed for traveling between floors were generally purchased with the party's shared pool of money.

As they collected equipment and slates, they would sell off all that they did not need, fetching anywhere up to tens of thousands of gold per item. In addition, 3,000-point stat-boosting rings they found could earn over thirty thousand gold through the guild auctions. Allen and his companions now had over five hundred thousand gold coins to their name.

Cecil had recommended that the party manage these funds and use them to pay for rent and food at the base, as well as the transaction fees for purchasing magic stones at the Adventurer's Guild every five days. The guild had now begun dealing in Rank B magic stones as well, resulting in a total outlay of fourteen thousand gold each trip, but they were able to make up for that by selling the items they picked up during their dungeon crawls.

Additionally, each party member received a hundred gold at the beginning of

every month for living expenses. Each person used the money in different ways. Krena and Dogora went out to various restaurants. Allen used his money on confections and fruit to satisfy his sweet tooth, and Meruru sent money back home to the seaside village where her family lived, near the Baukisian capital.

The Gamers finally arrived at the temple entrance, lost in conversation about how they all spent their money. Once they reached the dimly lit fifth floor, they made their way to the cube which would take them to today's objective: the iron golems lurking in the Iron Room.

"I am Iron Transfer System S503. Do you wish to travel to the Iron Zone?"

"Yes."

No sooner had Allen answered than the party found themselves teleported to another room. It looked similar to the room where they had fought the bronze golem, but here stood not one but two iron golems, each towering over a hundred meters tall. Allen noted to himself that Admiral Garara had been right.

The party was still a fair distance from their adversaries, so the iron golems remained unmoving. Allen ignored them and inspected the room. The ceiling was so dark that it was hard to see just how large the room truly was. Running along the walls were several entrances large enough for the iron golems to pass through, leading to long hallways on the other side.

Hmm, so it doesn't look like this is an isolated room.

Allen possessed a theory about these rooms that he had begun to form after puzzling over their fight in the Bronze Zone. Since that room had been so dimly lit and he had been too preoccupied to take a close look at the time, he had figured that it was segregated into its own zone and not connected to any other rooms. Admiral Garara's party had escaped from the battle with the final floor boss, however. And the cube that would teleport them away did not appear until after the golem was defeated. These two things suggested that there should be an escape cube separate from the teleportation cube, or possibly a passageway that would lead to said cube.

Perhaps I'd best look for an escape cube.

Allen already planned on having to fight the final floor boss multiple times before being able to beat it. In that case, it was his job as party leader to take all necessary steps to ensure that the Gamers could get to safety should they face any danger. As with the escape cubes located in the death stages, Allen theorized that there were also escape cubes in the Bronze, Iron, and Mithril Zones, as well as in the zone where the final floor boss lurked.

Allen Summoned several Bird Bs as he usually did. The party members at the rear of the formation could count on these Summons to move without instruction while they focused on attacking and healing.

After sending out several more Summons to look for the escape cube, Allen turned his attention back to the iron golems. This would be their first time taking on two Rank S enemies at a time, so Allen shouted out to pump the party up.

“Well, I think we’ve got all our ducks in a row. Let’s do this!”

Meruru called forth Tam-Tam, and the party formed up on her before slowly making their way toward the sleeping giants. Once they were around two hundred meters away, the twin golems began to move. One stepped forward, its arm glowing briefly before elongating and transforming into a shining spear. The other’s arms transformed into weapons made of light, its left becoming a sword and its right a shield.

So they can use the same types of skills as Meruru, just like the bronze golem could.

Dogora called out to Allen. “Looks like they’re both armed now. Which should we take out first?”

When he had first heard that there were two enemies, Allen figured that he would determine which one they would prioritize taking down only after seeing them for himself. That way, he would get the chance to analyze their skills, battle strategy, and weaknesses.

“We’ll start with the spear one. I think it’s gonna take a bit longer to take down the shield guy.”

Allen split the party into two groups. Dogora, Meruru, and a Dragon A would

hold the shield-bearing iron golem at bay, while Angel A and the rest of the party would concentrate on the spear-wielding one.

Dragon A closed in on the iron golem with the shield, which quickly stabbed at the Summon with its beam sword. Dragon A took the blow straight on and used its five heads to chomp at its enemy while holding it back.

I was worried that fighting two Rank S opponents at the same time would present a real challenge, but things are going all right. Maybe we can actually pull this off.

Meanwhile, the iron golem with the spear thrust out its beam lance toward its incredibly tiny opponents. It initially aimed for Krena, who was attacking its feet, but eventually gave up and began searching for a new target, likely because it could not land a blow on her. Unfortunately, due to its beam lance being nearly as long as the iron golem was tall, the iron golem was able to use its hundred-meter-long weapon to directly strike at the party's back line.

"Gyaaaah!"

The rearguard members hurriedly dashed out of the way, though Sophie's leg got tangled from atop her mount, sending her tumbling to the ground.

"Sophialohne!"

"Don't worry. I'm okay."

Wow, the spear's range is a lot farther than I figured.

"I'm sorry, team. Sophie, I'm going to try and lower his accuracy. Octo, you're up."

Allen Summoned a Fish A.

"You called, Master?"

A massive, ten-meter-tall creature that appeared to be a cross between an octopus and a kraken appeared in the middle of the hallway. It looked quite out of place sitting there on the stone floor.

Type: Fish

Rank: A
Name: Octo
HP: 9,000
MP: 10,000
Attack: 8,000
Endurance: 6,500
Agility: 8,000
Intelligence: 10,000
Luck: 7,000
Buffs: MP 200, Intelligence 200, Boost to Evasion
Ability: Smokescreen, Octopus Heart
Awakened Ability: Mimic

“Launch a Smokescreen around the enemies!”

“Your wish is my command.”

The Fish A shot a black, inky cloud out of its mouth, greatly restricting the iron giants’ views of the battlefield.

That should decrease their accuracy, at least.

Suddenly, Merus called out to Allen. “I used Endow Element on the one with the spear!”

“Great job. All right, everyone, focus on taking down the spear golem first!”

“Got it. Judgment Lightning!”

Merus used his Awakened Ability, Judgment Lightning. Once used, he would not be able to use it again for a full day, but Allen thought it important to cut down on the number of opponents they were fighting.

Cecil also switched to using lightning magic, and Krena landed blow after blow with her electricity-infused blade. After several minutes of this, the first iron golem fell.

<You have defeated 1 iron golem. You have earned 960,000,000 XP.>

Wow, so I'd earn 1.2 billion XP if I were to take one out on my own? More to the point, though, it wasn't as strong as I thought. Just one more to go.

However, as soon as they defeated the spear golem, the shield golem's eyes began to glow and it recited a chant.

"Repair Energy."

The spear golem slowly rose back up. Looking closer, Allen noticed that it did not have a single scratch on it. At its feet, Krena, who had been pumping her fist in the air in a victory pose, hurriedly stumbled back to get away.

"A-Allen, it's come back to life!" Cecil cried, the concern clear in her voice. The rest of the Gamers looked on in disbelief.

"This is the first time I've seen an enemy that can resurrect things."

Allen had fought monsters that could call allies into battle, but this was his first time seeing one that could use resurrection magic.

"You sure seem pretty calm about all this!"

Hey, stop punching my shoulder, will ya? I'm thinking here.

Allen's mind raced to think up a new plan while Cecil continued to hammer at his back from her seat behind him on the Bird B.

"All right, we'll take out the shield one this time! Dogora, Meruru, you keep the spear golem busy!"

"Gotcha!"

"Roger that!"

While Dogora and Meruru's Tam-Tam blocked the spear-wielding iron golem, the rest of the party focused their attacks on the shield golem. They did not have access to Merus's Awakened Ability this time around, but with element-imbued arrows from Sophie and Volmaar, they were able to defeat their opponent in a little over ten minutes.

<You have defeated 1 iron golem. You have earned 960,000,000 XP.>

However, moments after the text appeared in the grimoire's log, the spear

golem's eyes started to glow and it uttered a chant.

"Repair Energy."

This time, the shield golem was brought back to life.

"N-No way!"

"Hmph."

Allen began thinking up a plan while Cecil screamed in his ear. Krena and Dogora were in danger on the front line, to be sure, but there was also the very real danger of those in the rear sustaining life-threatening injuries from a single blow. Something needed to be done about that, and quickly.

So they can both raise their companions, then. Hmph, so how did Admiral Garara take them out?

They were being resurrected almost immediately, so that meant that even if both were taken out at nearly the same time, even the slightest delay would lead to the first to fall coming back to life.

Sure, Admiral Garara's party had twenty mithril golems at their disposal, but this doesn't seem like a challenge that can be overcome with strength alone. In that case, does it mean that they can only cast resurrection magic a certain number of times? Or perhaps...

Allen thought back to the beginning of the battle.

"C'mon, everyone, we're moving!"

Krena spun around and looked back. "Huh? We're running away?"

"That's right. We're heading toward the wall and going out into the hallway. Let's dash!"

"Whaddya mean, 'dash'?! " Even as the words were coming out of Cecil's mouth, Allen already had their Bird B moving. The Dragon A and Tam-Tam kept the iron golems at bay while the rest of the party followed Allen's orders and made their way toward the hallway entrance.

Once they made it through, they were quickly pursued by the shield golem, followed by its spear-wielding counterpart.

“Looks like the ceiling’s pretty high, so they have no problem coming after us!”

“That’s right. And now, they’re here!”

The iron golems’ stats were all quite high, making them incredibly fast. The shield golem immediately began attacking Dogora and Krena.

“Sophie, use Gnome to lock the furthest iron golem in place!”

“R-Right away!”

Upon using her Extra Skill, Grand Spirit Manifestation, the grand earth spirit Gnome appeared. Cracks formed underneath the spear golem’s feet, which were then pulled into the ground. Rock formed up and solidified around its legs before Tam-Tam closed in from behind and held tight to its arms, keeping them outstretched and locked in place.

“All right, now fall back just a bit more!”

After moving farther down the passage, only the shield golem was able to follow. Once Allen determined that there was enough separation between the two, he had the party use their element-imbued weapons to land a fatal combo on the shield golem.

<You have defeated 1 iron golem. You have earned 960,000,000 XP.>

This time, the iron golem faded away immediately after the text appeared in the log; its partner did not use a resurrection spell on it. Just as he had figured at the start of the battle, the iron golems were unaware of presences that were a certain distance away. This applied not only to their enemies, but to their allies as well.

“Hmm, it wasn’t resurrected this time.”

“Wow! How did you figure that out so quickly?”

“You’re awesome, Allen!”

The party was used to being surprised by Allen’s antics, but being able to come up with a strategy to defeat a boss the very first time they faced it was something else entirely.

“I guess I’m just used to it, though I must admit it’s been a while.”

Back in his past life, Allen had come across quite a few enemies in the games he played that could resurrect their allies. Common practice was to prevent them from using their resurrection magic or skills, but in this case, he was able to use the terrain to create some distance and prevent its use.

“Great! Just one more to go.”

For the time being, the group decided to ignore the treasure chest left where the iron golem once stood and head back to the hallway’s entrance. Tam-Tam was still standing there, restraining the iron golem’s arms.

“You guys sure took your time,” Meruru said.

It still can’t move, huh?

Between Gnome and Tam-Tam, the iron golem was firmly stuck in place. Allen watched on excitedly as the party laid into their motionless enemy.

<You have defeated 1 iron golem. You have earned 960,000,000 XP.>

The text Allen had been waiting some time to see finally appeared on his grimoire. As it did, the spear-wielding iron golem faded away, leaving a Rank S magic stone and a treasure chest in its place.

Allen made his way down the hall and checked on the iron golem they had slain earlier and spotted its Rank S magic stone and treasure chest. Both of the treasure chests were wood, earning the team a total of three mithril golem slates and one ring that boosted stats by 3,000 points. A cube and a treasure chest had also appeared in the room.

While the rest of the party celebrated their first-try victory, Allen was deep in thought.

“What’s wrong, Allen?” Dogora called out to his friend. “Aren’t you excited?”

“I was just thinking about all the XP we gained from that battle. Pretty sure we’ve hit pay dirt here!” Allen lifted his head and shouted, his voice reverberating around the Iron Zone.

The Gamers could tell that something new was about to begin.

Chapter 9: Homecoming and a Coming-of-Age Ceremony

“It’s great to finally be surrounded by some familiar sights. It’s not the most beautiful of places, but it still feels fresh and reinvigorating,” Cecil said from her seat on the back of a Bird B, casting her gaze across the rocky mountains below.

Allen was no fool. He realized that the words from the girl sitting behind him were slightly accusatory, but he chose to ignore that. There was, after all, a reason for it.

Ten days prior, Allen had discovered that killing the pair of golems inhabiting the Iron Zone was a great way of earning XP. If they only killed one of the two, they would earn nearly a billion XP and its companion would then quickly resurrect it. In essence, it was an infinite XP glitch.

Allen was so excited about this fact that he had set a goal for the Gamers to kill a hundred iron golems per day. The first time they attempted it, it had taken fifteen hours to defeat eighty-two iron golems—a feat which required some trial and error with their battle formations, target allocation, and attack methods. Then, using the cube that appeared after defeating both of the iron golems, the team returned to the Floor 5 hall for a break.

As far as Allen was concerned, this was a matter of course in pursuit of his ultimate objective, as it was the most efficient leveling strategy available. The other Gamers did not see it quite the same way, though. While they may have understood what Allen was intending to do, it had taken some time for them to truly appreciate how much Allen enjoyed this kind of robotic repetition. And even when they did come to understand his feelings, spending more than ten hours grinding with him still proved incredibly tedious.

Cecil was the first to give in to her anger and outright demand an answer from Allen. Though she was no stranger to spending a dozen or so hours dungeon crawling—after all, they had done so back in the Academy dungeons as well as in the Rank S dungeon—it verged on insanity for them to spend days on end

fighting the same enemy over and over. They had not even gotten to go anywhere else or do any exploring.

In response to Cecil’s outburst, Allen had started taking more breaks, brightened up the dimly lit Floor 5 hall with magic tools, and even built a bath there. Over time, however, more and more of the party members began to want to leave the dungeon and take a proper rest, and eventually, all of them except Allen had expressed a desire to withdraw.

Allen had considered coming to the dungeon alone, but he figured it would be best if his friends also came along for the XP farming. With that, he decided to give up on farming XP for the time being and go home for a break. After returning to their base and resting for the night, they headed out for their hometown in Granvelle, located in the Kingdom of Ratash, the next morning.

We were able to travel here in no time flat thanks to Swell.

A single Bird A sat atop Allen’s shoulder. It looked an awful lot like a swallow, so Allen had decided to name it Swell. Compared to his other Summons, it was quite small and unsuited to combat, but its Abilities held tremendous potential.

Type:	Bird
Rank:	A
Name:	Swell
HP:	200
MP:	8,000
Attack:	200
Endurance:	200
Agility:	10,000
Intelligence:	10,000
Luck:	9,000
Buffs:	Agility 200, Intelligence 200, Grants Flight
Ability:	Return to Nest, Build Nest
Awakened Ability:	Homing Instinct

All Rank A Summons had three buffs. Just like the lower-Ranked Summons, two were stat increases while the third could grant something like a resistance or a special skill. In Bird A's case, it bestowed Flight, which gave Allen the ability to fly around freely in much the same way as Helmios could. His movement speed was determined by his Agility stat.

The Return to Nest Ability allowed Allen to teleport to a location created using Build Nest. Allen named the teleportation points after the Ability, calling them "nests," and it seemed that only one nest could be created per Bird A card. In other words, if he were to get rid of a Bird A, he would need to Summon another one and use Build Nest once more in order to create a new nest.

Bird A's Awakened Ability, Homing Instinct, allowed Allen to teleport any or all of his friends within one kilometer of him to a Build Nest point he had previously set. He used Homing Instinct to teleport himself and the rest of his party to the nest he had created in Rodin Village in Granvelle, where his family lived.

Allen had used various means of travel since coming to this world, including magical airships which could take several days just to get to their destination. This new Ability that could instantly take him anywhere was a massive boon.

After graduating from the Academy and participating in the war in Rohzenheim, Allen had become acquainted with people from various countries, including none other than the Hero, Helmios. If he wanted to communicate with these people, it could take upward of half a month for a Dragon B or Spirit B to reach them, as his Summons had had no option but to fly from him to their destination. Furthermore, since Summons could only remain Summoned for a single month, he had needed to send multiple of them over the course of each month.

That was no longer the case thanks to Bird A. Now, Allen was able to teleport to any location where he had created a nest. Creating a new Bird A and its nest made getting around the need to replace his Summons once a month trivial.

According to Merus, who had created the Summons, he had prioritized implementing abilities he felt were otherwise lacking in the world, as well as

those he thought would simply be nice to have after having watched the way Allen used his Summons. Bird A gave the Flight skill because Allen had longed for it after his fight with Helmios and because of how long it had taken the party to travel during the war in Rohzenheim.

Additionally, Merus had decided to not implement the Analyze skill in Rank A Summons since he deemed it to be useless at Summoning Lvl. 8. Rank S monsters and Demonic Deities still needed to be Analyzed, but it was unlikely that a Rank S monster—and absolutely impossible for a Demonic Deity—could be Analyzed by a Rank A Summon.

In any case, it was all thanks to Bird A's Homing Instinct that the No-life Gamers were able to instantly travel to Granvelle. Cecil knew as much, yet she was rather annoyed about the whole XP-farming situation in the dungeon and continued to pepper Allen with complaints as they flew together on his Bird B. Allen was still listening to the onslaught of gripes as the group finally arrived at the White Dragon Mountains.

"Whoa, there it is!" Krena cried out from atop the Bird B flying ahead of Allen, excitedly pointing out landmarks. Hefted onto her back where her sword was usually found, Krena was carrying large hunks of meat on the bone, which made it look to Allen as if she was enjoying the break more than anyone else in the party.

"You're right. Let's head on down!"

The party made their way down to where the white dragon and the large Dragon B were waiting.

"You've grown quite a bit over this past year."

"You've definitely grown up a lot, Haku."

After dismounting their Bird Bs, the Gamers approached the white dragon. Though still a child, Haku dwarfed each and every one of them.

"Grrroowl!"

Haku bared its fangs and let out a thunderous roar as Allen and the team approached, probably out of fear of the unfamiliar creatures.

“Master Allen means you no harm!” the Dragon B sitting next to him scolded.

“Hyiiii.”

Aww, it sounds almost like a dog whimpering.

Cecil looked up at Haku with great interest. “Wow, it sure is huge. Are you sure it’s still a hatchling?”

“Whoa, it’s ginormous!”

Thanks to the Dragon B taking care of it, Haku had continued to grow at a fast pace and reached five meters in height in a single year alone. Its diet consisted of animals Dragon B caught for it. However, Allen felt that his Dragon A, with its five heads and higher stats, could provide even better care for the white dragon.

“Orochi, come on out!”

“Roaaagh!”

Haku quickly ducked behind the Dragon B when Orochi appeared.

Allen had come here with the intention of swapping out the Dragon B and having the Dragon A take care of Haku going forward. For the time being, however, he would have both dragons watch over Haku and slowly transition to the Dragon A.

Haku hung back, seemingly intimidated by Dragon A’s presence, as Krena slowly drew near.

“Hey, Haku. Look, I brought some meat. Have a bite.”

She held out the meat she had carried over from Rodin Village.

“Grrroowl.”

However, Haku seemed unsure of what to make of the dried hunks of meat, as it was used to eating animals freshly slain by the Dragon B. It ever so slowly chomped down on the meat and swallowed it whole, not even bothering to chew.

“You gotta eat up to grow big and strong,” Krena said, beaming as she looked up at Haku.

So this is what they call maternal instinct.

Allen recalled how Krena always got a wistful look in her eye whenever they discussed Haku's development.

As he continued to watch the interaction between Krena and Haku, Allen shot Merus a question. "Think we can domesticate Haku this way?"

"Hmm, I'm not so sure about that."

"But there used to be a lot of monsters with their own sense of self."

The Demon Lord was supposedly able to sway all monsters across the globe. However, it did not seem to Allen that the murdergalsh, a powerful monster that had proved more than formidable when Allen first faced off against it, had lost its sense of self, considering the way it liked to play with the humans it killed. The same went for the white dragon he had defeated a year ago. Had the white dragon also lost its sense of self and been driven mad by the Demon Lord's influence, Krena Village never would have existed in the first place.

"It'd be hard to tame precisely because it has its own sense of self. I suppose you probably could overrule that sense of self and control it if you had a subordination skill like the Demon Lord, though."

"I see..."

Krena, who had been listening to the exchange between Allen and Merus, looked back with a concerned expression on her face.

* * *

A short time later, Allen Summoned more Bird Bs and the party went on their way. Allen could use Flight now, but his MP would continuously drain as he flew, so he opted to ride a Bird B with Cecil instead.

"We're heading to the armored ants' nest next, right?"

"Right. I was thinking about doing an experiment at the armored ant farm."

At the foot of the mountain where Haku lived was a nest of armored ants, massive insects that dug labyrinthian tunnels beneath the mountain. Their exoskeletons, though inferior to mithril, were still harder and lighter than steel. In order to make use of their exoskeletons in weaponry, Allen first needed to

conduct some experiments on how to efficiently breed them.

The domain of Carnel, which Keel ruled over, had finally gotten its mithril mines operating again. But now that Freyja, the Goddess of Fire, had had her divine vessel stolen, they would need to find a substitute for mithril to outfit their troops—as long as the threat of the Demon Lord Army making a move at any time loomed over their heads.

After planting some Grass A Summons around the armored ant nest, the group got back onto their Bird Bs and made their way to their next location: Rodin Village, which would also serve as something of a break for them.

Since Bird A's Awakened Ability, Homing Instinct, could only be used once a day, they flew back at a leisurely pace. Upon getting closer to the village, they spied the villagers moving about busily down below. In particular, a large group of villagers had gathered around the home of Rodin, Allen's father and the village chief.

"The village certainly looks pretty impressive nowadays," Cecil remarked. She had seen Rodin Village prior to their departure for the Rank S dungeon, but she was surprised at how much it had developed.

"They've all come together to help it grow."

In addition to all the help from Allen's Summons, Rodin Village had accepted many settlers who helped build the village. It was now so heavily fortified that it could withstand attacks from monsters; Allen's plan was to keep bolstering it until it was as strong as Castle Lapolka in Rohzenheim.

Krena was also quite impressed at how far it had come. "Woow! That's one snazzy village!"

The party landed in the open field in front of the village chief's house and entered it, where they were immediately struck by a delicious scent wafting down the hall. Krena followed the scent and hurried her way through the building, the rest of the party in tow. In the kitchen, they found Allen's mother, Theresia, and some assistants bustling about as they cooked.

"Hello, mother."

"Oh, welcome back, Allen! We're almost done, so why don't you go wait in

the hall. All the other guests are already there waiting.”

A large group of people was in the reception hall, chatting among themselves. Myulla, Allen’s sister, came running over to the group.

“Hey, Pippi! You look different.” She seemed briefly taken aback by the fact that there was a Bird A on his shoulder rather than the Bird G—dubbed “Pippi” by his family—she was accustomed to. The Bird A took off from Allen’s shoulder and began flying lazy circles around Myulla, twittering the whole time. “Yay! Pippi!”

Myulla could hardly contain herself as the Bird A landed on her shoulder.

“Calm down, Myulla.” Mash, Allen’s younger brother, chided his exuberant little sister.

“Yeeesss, Maaash.”

Judging by the annoyed expression on her face and her tone of voice, it was clear that she did not feel like she was even remotely in the wrong.

To be fair, it was all kind of my fault anyway.

“Hi, Mash.”

“Welcome back, Allen.”

Allen could not help but be impressed at how much the boy before him, who answered in a smart, clipped tone, had grown. Mash was twelve years old now and had taken on the responsibility of caring for their sister.

Rodin, Allen’s father, made his way through the reception hall toward Allen, exchanging greetings as he went.

“Oh, you’re back?”

“Yes. Oh, mother said the food will be ready soon.”

Rodin’s face took on a look of chagrin. “I see. This was all pretty sudden, you know, so I’m afraid I haven’t been able to get all the preparations in order. Let me go get Viscount Granvelle.”

I’m counting on you as the village chief here, father. Everyone was intent on joining in, so we didn’t have a lot of options.

In addition to Krena's and Dogora's families, who already lived in Rodin Village, they were also joined by Keel's sister and servants, as well as Meruru's parents. Allen had been able to bring them here from Baukis using Bird A's Homing Instinct.

Meruru came from a commoner family, though her father was a junior officer in the military. And while she was not one to talk much about herself, growing up watching her father defend the nation was her inspiration to join the fight on the front lines in support of the people. She had shared this tidbit with the party when Allen bounced the idea of inviting their parents off everyone.

Allen looked around the room for Meruru and spotted her happily chatting away with her parents. Keel also seemed to be enjoying his time with his sister, whom he had not seen in some time. The two had missed the trip to the White Dragon Mountains in order to spend more time with their families.

Despite Dogora's parents being in the room, Allen noticed that Dogora was not sitting with them. He figured that Dogora was probably in that phase where there was nothing more embarrassing than being seen with your parents.

Now that I've got these teleportation skills, it could do the party some good to see their families more often.

While Allen was watching Dogora, an older man bearing a strong resemblance to Rodin approached.

"So, I guess you're Allen, then?"

"That's right, grandfather. Pleased to meet you. Have you adjusted to life in the village?"

Zohan was Allen's grandfather on his father's side. Shortly after Allen and his friends made their way to the Rank S dungeon, Zohan had moved to Rodin Village to live out his retirement. Allen had been so busy teleporting everyone around that he had not had a chance to properly introduce himself yet.

Allen's grandfather and the elderly woman next to him looked impressed at his response. Jenica, Allen's paternal grandmother, had tears in her eyes.

"You really are a smart one, just as they said. I can't believe that our son has such a magnificent child."

“I had a great upbringing, is all. Anyway, I understand that things are going to be a bit hectic tonight, but I hope you have a good time.”

As both Allen’s paternal and maternal grandparents had been moved to Rodin Village, he figured he should introduce himself to his grandparents on his mother’s side next.

Rodin showed up just as Allen’s grandparents were affectionately stroking his hair.

“This way, please,” he said to the man with him.

“Of course.”

Rodin escorted Viscount Granvelle and his wife, along with Cecil and her brother Thomas, into the room. They were also accompanied by their butler Sebas as well as both the captain and vice-captain of the guard. After seeing the viscount and his wife to their seats, Rodin once again left the room. Moments later, he returned with Grand Marshal Siguul, Field Marshal Lukdraal, Elder Filamehl, and several other elves.

Today was going to mark the coming-of-age ceremony for Allen and the rest of the No-life Gamers. They had already celebrated it back at the Rank S dungeon, but it would not hurt to celebrate again, this time with their families.

One of the reasons for all this was Allen’s desire to create a number of nests around the world in order to test the capabilities of his Bird A. Prior to his death as an angel and becoming a Summon, Merus had been in the midst of working out the Abilities and Awakened Abilities for the Rank A Summons. However, since he had been removed from the project prior to its completion, Merus did not know whether the Summons were implemented as he had originally planned, thus making it essential for Allen to test them out. Specifically, Allen wanted to know how much he could bring with him and how far he could teleport in one go.

Rodin Village was one of the locations he had teleported to when he started verifying the abilities of his Summons after reaching Summoning Lvl. 8. Allen’s parents were initially surprised to see Allen show up unannounced, but once he explained that he could teleport around now, they expressed a desire to hold a coming-of-age celebration. Figuring that his friends’ parents probably felt the

same way, he also reached out to Viscount Granvelle and the queen of Rohzenheim, who said that they wished to join the celebration. Celebrating a child's coming-of-age was particularly important for aristocrats and royalty.

Meruru's parents, whom Allen had not yet had a chance to meet, also wanted to attend. Keel's sister Nina and her servants expressed a desire to do the same. Ultimately, they decided that everyone would gather in Rodin Village for a grand celebration. Allen's plan had been to test out Bird A's Homing Instinct, and while this event had proved invaluable for that, the whole thing had grown much bigger than he had expected.

Grand Marshal Siguul joined on behalf of Rohzenheim, as the queen was unable to leave the country in light of her role as ruler. He sat down to the right of Viscount Granvelle. Considering that Rodin Village was part of the viscount's domain, all seating was centered around him. Technically speaking, however, there were no chairs in the room, but rather seating cushions.

"I apologize for the squalid conditions, Grand Marshal Siguul, but I am extremely honored that you would agree to stay with us."

Viscount Granvelle thanked Siguul on Rodin's behalf. It was clear that the viscount, a member of the lower-class nobility, was quite humbled by his presence. Siguul was an important leader in the elves' country, after all.

"I wouldn't have it any other way. We elves prefer being among nature. I've quite enjoyed my time in this village and its beautiful surroundings. Besides, I'd wanted to see where this heroic young lad had been born."

While the viscount and Siguul exchanged pleasantries, several more families from around the village entered the room. They were all families with children who were also celebrating their comings-of-age.

Allen's generation was born amid a baby boom in their frontier village, leading to quite a number of children besides Krena, Dogora, and Allen turning fifteen this year. They were also joined by the families who had come to help develop the village who had fifteen-year-old children of their own.

All of these families came together in the village chief's reception hall to participate in the coming-of-age celebration. Serf families were also in attendance, as Viscount Granvelle had left the decision about their participation

up to Allen. As a result, the room occasionally used as a social space for up to a hundred people was full to capacity. Allen caught fragments of conversations, from one person remarking on how well-behaved everyone was to another confirming their understanding about some topic or another.

Before long, the delicious scent of grilled meat wafted through the air as large platters with delicious-looking great boar meat were brought out. These were followed by salad, bread, meat and vegetable stew, and other celebratory dishes prepared in the kitchens of the village chief and his neighbors. With the arrival of the food, the tension the villagers had felt sitting among elves and nobility seemed to melt away.

“Whooooa!!!”

Great boar is definitely the meat of choice in these frontier villages.

Allen certainly could have used Bird A’s Abilities to buy higher-quality meats at either the capital of Ratash or back at the Rank S dungeon. Given that they were holding the celebration back at Rodin Village and that the kids all grew up loving great boar meat, however, he had decided to ask his mother to grill some up.

The alcohol, on the other hand, he had gone all out on and bought five large barrels of the finest fruit wine available at the Rank S dungeon. Also, because he knew that elves did not eat monster meat, he had made arrangements to gather large amounts of local fruit and fukaman, the acclaimed Baukisian food.

As the platters of food were passed out, Siguul thanked them for the additional consideration. Rohzen, meanwhile, was already cheerfully munching away at a fukaman from his perch on Myulla’s lap.

Once all the food was out, Theresia quickly changed her clothes and took her seat next to Rodin as the festivities began. The viscount, Siguul, and Rodin then gave speeches directed at the children who were now officially of age. Rodin, due to being either out of practice or simply uncomfortable speaking after the viscount and grand marshal, seemed to be all nerves and rambled on somewhat incoherently.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime event, so I would like to ask you to not hold back and eat your fill. However, as the village chief, it would help me out if you’d

hold back, just a bit. A-Anyway, please enjoy the festivities.”

The participants nearly drowned out Rodin as they let out a thunderous cheer and began excitedly shoving food into their mouths and washing it down with wine. He returned to his seat, where Theresia congratulated him on his speech, bringing a shy blush to his cheeks. Still, he looked happy.

It was not yet evening, but Allen and his friends were quite hungry after spending the day checking in on Haku, making preparations for the armored ant farm, and more, all with no breaks for meals in between.

Naturally, Krena’s stomach was as bottomless as ever; she was shoveling food into her mouth at a tremendous pace. From the other side of the room, her father, Gerda, glanced at her, perhaps hoping she would settle down at least a bit. Next to him, Krena’s grandparents beamed.

Mash had been begging Allen for stories about his dungeon-challenging experiences, so Allen told him about their exploits in the Rank S dungeon. Lily, Krena’s sister, listened in with excitement from her seat beside Mash.

When Allen appeared to be at a good stopping point, Viscount Granvelle called out to him.

“You know, Allen, I received a report the other day from the Adventurer’s Guild regarding the Dungeon Information Group. It seems like you’ve been keeping yourself busy in Baukis.”

Huh? They just went out and told everyone that I was the one who suggested creating the Dungeon Information Group? Popokka really just threw me under the bus here. Oh well, it’s no big deal.

“Oh, the news has already reached Ratash? My understanding was that the Dungeon Information Group was still in the trial stages.”

“Apparently that trial will be conducted using the dungeons located in Academy City, which is why they reached out to me.”

Oh, right, Viscount Granvelle is involved in the kingdom’s foreign affairs now.

With Ratash and Rohzenheim having officially established diplomatic relations, Viscount Granvelle was assigned to the kingdom’s diplomatic

department. This was apparently because Allen, who had once been one of the viscount’s servants, was actively involved in the war in Rohzenheim and had gained the elf queen’s trust. There were also rumors that the current king wanted to keep the viscount away from Count Hamilton’s military clique as well as from the Academy Faction.

Due to his work in the diplomatic department and the fact that he received various tasks from other nobles in the royal castle, the viscount now resided in the royal capital. As his son Thomas served in the royal castle as well, the viscountess, not wanting to be alone, had joined them in the capital, leaving their mansion in Granvelle in the hands of a magistrate. How Rickel—who, despite being something of a slacker, had kept an eye out for Allen when he had worked in the mansion—was holding up as head manservant under the magistrate’s iron grip was another story altogether.

After the viscount finished speaking, Siguul called out to Allen next.

“Ah, Allen, I’d like to thank you for your precious gift.”

“Oh, it was no trouble at all.”

Siguul was referring to the Silver and Gold Beans created by his Grass A Summon.

Type: Grass
Rank: A
Name: Beanie
HP: 100
MP: 10,000
Attack: 100
Endurance: 100
Agility: 100
Intelligence: 100
Luck: 10,000
Buffs: MP 200, Luck 200, Disperse Evil
Ability: Silver Bean, Bean Scattering
Awakened Ability: Gold Bean

The Grass A looked like a fava bean with limbs. Its buff, Disperse Evil, forced Rank C and lower monsters to keep their distance, while its Ability, Bean Scattering, sent Silver and Gold Beans flying at monsters. Both types of Beans would kill Rank B monsters upon impact and severely weaken Rank A monsters.

The Silver Bean Ability and Gold Bean Awakened Ability each created beans that, when planted, would grow into trees that created one-kilometer zones monsters would steer clear of. The difference between the silver and gold variants was in the strength of their effects and how long they would last—the silver variant worked against monsters Rank B and lower and lasted for ten years, while the gold variant worked against Rank A monsters but only lasted for one year. At least, those were the periods Merus had set up, so they might have changed at some point.

Both variants required five Rank A magic stones to create. Allen had ultimately created a hundred of each and gifted them to Rohzenheim, whose capital city and forts were still recovering after the Demon Lord Army's invasion.

Currently, the country was still dealing with Demon Lord Army stragglers who were lying in wait throughout their domain. While the monsters would occasionally come together as a group to strike, they generally wandered around on their own, making cleanup a task that would take months if not years.

The Silver Beans and Gold Beans would certainly help alleviate that problem by allowing them to safely rebuild while keeping the monsters away, thus sparing needless casualties. Allen figured this would save some tens of thousands of elven lives.

“Please pay close attention to how long they'll last.”

Allen was worried that the efficacy periods had been reduced from what Merus had decided upon when he was an angel.

“Thanks to you, we will be able to continue with our recovery efforts. The queen is truly pleased that you have come to our aid not once but twice now.

As am I, of course. Thank you, Allen, from the bottom of my heart.”

With that, Grand Marshal Siguul offered a deep bow, followed shortly after by Field Marshal Lukdraal, Elder Filamehl, and their respective servants. Their actions stunned all the other attendees speechless.

Silence spread like ripples in a pond, resonating outward from Allen and the Rohzenheim elves. One young serf who was also celebrating his coming-of-age dropped the boar meat he was eating, despite having been boisterously chatting mere moments before.

Serfs and commoners alike were at a total loss for just who Siguul was, even after listening to his earlier speech. However, what they did know was that he wore even more extravagant clothing than Viscount Granvelle—an important figure in his own right—did, and that he had long ears, so they assumed that he was nobility from a foreign nation. Seeing such figures bow so deeply that their heads nearly touched the floor, the partygoers turned their attention to whom they were thanking, only to find, much to their surprise, the village chief’s son on the receiving end.

Conversely, for those who knew who the grand marshal and Allen really were, it was quite a surprise to see the elven guests treat him with such profound respect. Viscount Granvelle, in particular, sat at Allen’s side with his mouth wordlessly opening and closing, looking as if his brain had gone on vacation. His gaze implored Allen for an explanation as to what the boy had gifted them, so Allen shot him a glance signifying that he would explain later.

“As I’ve mentioned previously, we elves of Rohzenheim will do anything within our power to grant whatever your heart desires. Should you ever encounter any trouble, please come straight to us.”

“Understood. I certainly will.”

Allen silently prayed that Siguul would refrain from bringing down the mood of the party any more than he already had.

As Rodin watched his son from behind, he could not help but feel a sense of melancholy. It seemed like just yesterday that he had told Allen that being one of House Granvelle’s manservants was only a stepping stone to further greatness. He had ended up being right, but it was hard for him to simply feel

happy for his son when Allen seemed to be moving further and further out of his reach.

“Oh, Rodin.”

The tone of Theresia’s voice expressed more than her words ever could. He could not spend the rest of the celebration looking like that.

“Ah, sorry, dear.”

Rodin squeezed his wife’s hand and put on a smile.

Meanwhile, Allen was now free from the Rohzenheim delegation. Seemingly not having noticed his father’s turmoil, he resumed his chat with Mash.

“Are you studying hard?”

“Yep.”

Mash, who planned to enter the Academy in April, had been diligently studying under the tutelage of teachers sent out to the village by Viscount Granvelle.

“In that case, let me give you these. You’re going to run into a lot of dangerous situations at the Academy.”

Allen handed Mash several rings he had pulled out of his grimoire. There were six in total, consisting of three pairs of rings that boosted HP, Attack, and Agility by 5,000 points each, respectively. These were rare drops he had obtained from silver chests on Floor 5.

His general plan for fostering level and skill growth in his younger siblings was to not help them level up, even if they had a Talent, until they had managed to stand out on their own. The risk of something going wrong if they leveled up dozens of times without doing any personal growth was simply too high. However, Mash was coming along much better than Allen had anticipated. While he had been pretty depressed when his older brother left for the Academy, he was now a capable young man who cared for his younger sister while also studying for the future.

Allen was taken aback when his brother merely stared at the rings in silence.

“What’s wrong?”

“Will I get stronger if I put these on?”

“Of course.”

“In that case, I don’t want them. I want to get stronger through my own efforts.”

Whoa! He actually turned me down!

“I see. But you do know that when you leave this village, you’re going to encounter monsters far stronger than the boars, right?”

It took all of Allen’s willpower to keep the smile off his face upon hearing his brother’s plans to improve on his own. All the same, he decided to try and convince him to take the rings.

“O-Of course I do. And I’ll take them down all on my own.”

“There are even monsters stronger than me, you know.”

“What? No way!”

“There are. Lots of them, in fact.”

Such as the Demonic Deities, for starters.

“No way...”

“And I heard that Lily’s going to the Academy next year. What’re you going to do if you run across a monster you can’t defeat when you’re with her? Monsters aren’t exactly known for their generosity. You might find yourself wishing you had these rings.”

“But I...”

Mash was unsure of how to respond, yet he still wanted to do everything himself.

“In that case, just put these rings in your pouch and keep them for when you’re in some serious trouble.”

“My pouch? What’s that?”

Allen pulled a pouch out of Storage and put the rings in it before handing it over to Mash.

“There’s nothing wrong with trying to solve problems using your own abilities first and then relying on others for help if that doesn’t work.”

Tears began to form in Mash’s eyes.

“Thanks, Allen.”

“Winning is more important than anything else. And that goes double for when you need to protect those important to you. At those times, you can’t afford to hesitate or be picky about how you want to pull that off.”

“You’re... You’re right. Thank you.”

After his brother finally accepted the gift, Allen reached out and ruffled his hair. Mash looked down at the ground, embarrassed that this display of affection was happening in front of everyone else.



Allen stood up and looked around the room. It looked like everyone was chatting with one another and enjoying their time together with their families.

This is what I'm fighting to protect.

Allen would do absolutely anything within his power to protect the scene playing out in front of him. He had no intention of telling Rodin and the rest here that the world as they knew it might come to an end in a few years' time or that the gods, with their emphasis on maintaining harmony, had no intention of aiding humanity. The No-life Gamers would use all the power available to them to stop the world from falling to ruin before they would ever have a chance to find out about it.

"I won't be picky about how I do it either."

Allen realized that the advice he had given his brother applied to himself just as well.

* * *

Allen and the Gamers returned to their base the day following their coming-of-age ceremony. Thanks to the opportunity to see their families again, the whole team seemed to be in high spirits once again.

Guessing that there must be considerable demand for them in Helmios's homeland of Giamut, Allen gave the Hero some Silver and Gold Beans. Giamut, like Rohzenheim, had been invaded by the Demon Lord Army, and the country's forces had managed to take back the territory that had been captured, only for it to be later seized by the Demon Lord Army once again. While the invasion was no longer ongoing, there was no telling when it would begin anew, which was the reason behind Allen providing them with the Beans.

A barrier to keep monsters away was not necessarily effective in a war against an opponent who could unleash those monsters on a whim, however. After all, even if the bases and forts they maintained could keep the monsters away, were Allen a commander of the Demon Lord Army, he would either attack them from a distance or ignore these locations entirely in his invasion. Alternatively, he could use something like a Rank S ancient dragon to destroy the monster-free zones.

Knowing all this, Allen told Helmios that the Gold and Silver Beans would be most effective to use when a base's defenses were about to fall, as they could be used to buy time for the soldiers to escape. Even if the Demon Lord Army took its time besieging a fortress, by using the Beans in such a way, the Giamutan forces would likely be able to regroup without suffering any serious loss in military strength. That would give them the opportunity to slowly chip away at the enemy's strength and bide their time.

"So it was *you* who kindly provided these to us, Allen."

Greta, a member of Helmios's party, beamed cheerfully as she spoke. Ever since she had learned that Allen was capable of Summoning the angel Merus, her attitude toward him had changed.

"Listen, Greta."

"Y-Yes?"

"These are from Rohzenheim."

"Huh? But..."

Helmios spoke up next.

"Let's just leave it at that, Greta."

Helmios had picked up on what Allen was doing on his days off, during which he spent most of his time cooped up in his room by himself. While it certainly seemed strange, Helmios was well aware of just how much Allen had done for the adventurers over the past year, so he decided to not pursue the matter.

"Well, I guess we're going to take on the mithril golem today."

With that, Allen made his way toward the dining room exit. Before he could leave, however, a familiar voice rose up. Admiral Garara, the drunken dwarf lying on the sofa, had some more complaints to make known.

"Ha! Ye can't even get close t' it 'cause of its long-range attacks. All ye're gonna achieve is adding more bodies t' the mountain of corpses, boy. Ye best just give up now!"

Huh, interesting. So the next golem specializes in long-range attacks.

Up on Floor 5 of the temple was a table with indentations in it, meant for the medals they needed to collect. The Gamers had filled two of those indentations with the iron and bronze medals they had already collected. Considering how unlikely it was that any other parties would be coming out this way, they had put the medals in their slots as soon as they got them. If they could beat the mithril golem and get its mithril medal today, they would finally be able to face the final floor boss.

Using the cube, they teleported to the Mithril Zone.

“Just as I expected, this place is nearly identical to the Bronze and Iron Zones.” In the middle of the large, open hall with vaulted ceilings stood a massive golem made of mithril. “Let’s go!”

Allen and the others mounted their Bird Bs while Meruru called forth Tam-Tam and suited up. Once they got close, the mithril golem began to move.

It did not appear to be attacking, however. Instead, the golem folded both of its legs and stored both of its arms inside its body as if to turn itself into a large box. What used to be its shoulders unfolded like fans to become wings, and its head separated from its body, taking off into the air as it transformed into a ring that spun at high speed. Then, the mithril figure began to float into the air.

“Huh? It’s flying?”

As the cylinder-shaped object flew toward the Gamers, two protrusions extended from it. Light flickered across the ends of the protrusions for a second, and a moment later, balls of light shot out of them.

“Watch out!”

Meruru sent Tam-Tam forward, using its body to protect her friends from the incoming shots.

“Hngh?! Augh!”

“Meruru!”

Tam-Tam stood with its arms crossed over its chest as the balls of light began to steadily chip away at its armor. The light also struck at its legs, tearing them out from under it and causing it to drop to its knees. From her crystal cockpit in

Tam-Tam's chest, Meruru prepared to swap out the spare arm slate in her magic disc.

"I'm up!"

Dogora hefted his massive shield and directed his Bird B to fly in between the floating mithril golem and Tam-Tam in an attempt to save his friend from the onslaught.

"Me too!"

Krena raised her weapon and launched toward the mithril golem, but unfortunately, the enemy fell back while still blasting away.

Even using Bird B's Awakened Ability, Jet, was not enough to help her close in. Though Dogora was managing to use his shield to protect Tam-Tam from the incoming shots, neither Krena nor Merus was able to get close to the enemy, resulting in a deadlock.

Whoa. Griff I could understand, but even Merus's stats aren't high enough to get close enough?

"Hngah?!"

Dogora continued to deftly wield his massive shield as he intercepted the blasts. Thanks to his class promotions and his now-high endurance stat, he was able to use the adamantite shield with ease. However, the Bird B he was riding on took a shot head-on and Keel was not able to heal it in time, causing it to fade away in bubbles of light.

"Allen, I need another Griff!" Dogora called out as he tumbled through the air, and Allen quickly Summoned up a new Bird B to catch his friend.

Keel cast some healing magic while Dogora tried to right himself to get back into the fight. Meanwhile, Sophie and Volmaar worked to keep the mithril golem at bay by launching a volley of arrows at it.

"I'm not gonna sit this one out!"

Cecil released a volley of offensive magic, though none of the attacks found their mark due to her opponent's tremendous speed. The mithril golem managed to maintain the perfect distance from the party as it ceaselessly

pressed its attack. Never before had the Gamers faced an enemy that would fall back whenever they tried to go on the offensive.

Hmm, this is the first time we've encountered an enemy like this. Not only does it attack from range, but it's fast, and it launches multiple attacks at once too. All right then, let's see how it likes this!

Allen Summoned a Stone A.

“Rockanel, you're up!”

Type: Stone
Rank: A
Name: Rockanel
HP: 10,000
MP: 8,000
Attack: 6,500
Endurance: 10,000
Agility: 7,000
Intelligence: 8,000
Luck: 9,800
Bufs: HP 200, Endurance 200, Damage Reduction
Ability: Absorb, Return from Death
Awakened Ability: Focused Bombardment

Stone A was made of hihirokane and stood around fifteen meters tall, though it was much slimmer than its fellow Stone-type Summons. Instead of large shields, it was equipped with a buckler on each arm.

“Use Absorb!”

Upon using its Absorb Ability, the Stone A shot a barrage of hihirokane spheres from its bucklers.

“Dogora, Krena, Merus, fall back!”

The two Gamers and the Summon retreated at Allen's command just as the

mithril golem began increasing the volume of its barrage. Dogora reflexively retook his defensive posture in front of Meruru, though the golem's light bullets were quickly absorbed by the metallic spheres sent out by the Stone A.

Upon absorbing the balls of light, the metallic spheres briefly let off a scarlet glow, growing whiter and whiter as they absorbed more light. As they did so, small cracks began to form in Stone A's body. Each individual crack was small, but they were rapidly increasing in number. Just when it looked like the Stone A was about to fall apart, all the cracks disappeared as if a clock had been reset.

Great, Return from Death worked!

Alas, the mithril golem's onslaught did not end. The metallic orbs once again absorbed the shots, and new cracks began to form in the Stone A.

"I guess it's about time, then."

Allen stretched both hands out in front of him. The Stone A followed suit, mimicking his pose, and all of the metallic orbs began to assemble right in front of it. The resulting mass looked like a miniature sun.

Looks like I finally get to say it, huh.

Allen felt a certain lightness in his chest as he finally had the chance to utter a phrase he had been wanting to say for so long. After taking a deep breath, he shouted out his command.

"Mow it down!"

The Stone A's eyes flashed and a beam of light shot from its outstretched hands toward the mithril golem. The afterimages were all that was left of the metallic orbs that hurtled through the air. They moved so quickly that the mithril golem did not have a chance to dodge the Stone A's Awakened Ability, Focused Bombardment, and it was ripped to shreds.

Text appeared on the cover of Allen's grimoire.

<You have defeated 1 mithril golem. You have earned 1,600,000,000 XP.>

"Awesome! You took it out with one hit!"

Allen took a minute to think back over how they had won the battle.

“Yeah, it looks like the mithril golem had high Agility and Attack stats, but low Endurance. Rockanel’s Return from Death was a huge help too.”

Stone A’s Ability, Absorb, allowed it to soak up damage from ranged attacks using magic spheres, then fire off those spheres once they had transformed the attacks into magical energy and stored it. Of course, there was a limit to how much damage it could absorb, and if it reached that limit, the Stone A would be destroyed. Furthermore, this damage could not be healed using recovery magic or items. It could only be healed using Stone A’s other Ability, Return from Death.

When Return from Death was used, which happened automatically and had a ten percent chance of success, the damage suffered by the Stone A due to Absorb was healed and the absorption limit was reset. The Summon would then also be able to take in and store twice as much damage as before.

Its Awakened Ability, Focused Bombardment, which Allen had used to defeat the mithril golem, launched all of the attack-absorbing hiiirokane orbs at the enemy. It was both a magical and physical attack, and if a large amount of damage had been absorbed with the help of Return from Death, it was unbelievably powerful.

I’m guessing the mithril golem was weak to physical attacks, judging by the way it was running away.

Were it strong against physical attacks, there would have been no reason for it to keep withdrawing like that. Allen figured that you could tell a lot about an enemy’s characteristics from its behavior.

Also, Absorb and Focused Bombardment fit my fighting style perfectly.

All of Allen’s Stone-type Summons had been impressive thus far, but the Abilities and Awakened Ability of this Rank A Stone Summon were exactly what Allen had been dreaming of. Absorb could protect allies from long-range attacks covering a wide area, while Focused Bombardment could strike a powerful blow to a single massive enemy. This made it possible for Allen, who was already able to fight against large numbers of enemies at once, to concentrate on one point with an impressive show of firepower, which had been his only weak point.

Looks like I’m already preparing for my battle against the Demon Lord.

If there was one drawback, it was that Absorb could not completely absorb attacks from Rank S or higher enemies; only about seventy percent of the mithril golem's long-range attacks had gotten absorbed. If it were not for Meruru's Tam-Tam and the spirits who answered Sophie's prayers, the remaining thirty percent would have reached the party.

"Whoa, hey! Looks like we got a silver chest!"

Keel burst out in excitement at the sight of the silver chest placed where the mithril golem had fallen moments before. When they opened it, they found a ring.

Huh, another ring?

Allen slipped it onto his finger to test it out and watched as his Attack stat rocketed up 5,000 points.

What the party had learned from their travels around Floor 5 was that apparently 3,000 was not the maximum for stat buffs provided by rings. Silver chests appeared at a rate of about one in ten, and when they did, they generally contained rings that boosted a stat by 5,000 points. Though he had acquired a full collection so far, he wanted enough rings to outfit each member of the party with at least twenty.

Farther off in the distance, another cube had appeared, this one with a wooden chest with the mithril medal inside.

"Looks like we finally got a full set," Cecil said.

"It sure does. I guess we should head out of this zone, then."

After speaking to the cube, the Gamers were teleported to the massive hall on Floor 5.

"So what're we gonna do?" Krena asked Allen. "Are you going to place the medal in?"

"Yeah, I think so. I want to see what happens."

Allen then pressed the mithril medal into the deep indentation in the table, just as he had done with the others. He could feel the medal being practically pulled away from his fingers as it entered the slot. A moment later, four torches

in the large hall all lit in unison.

“Whoa!”

Looks like we’ve got all the medals we need.

Allen and the party then made their way to the cube that would teleport them to the final floor boss.

“I don’t anticipate any problems, but you should still ready yourselves just in case.”

He had no intention of battling the final floor boss just yet, but he figured they could not be too careful. The potato-faced Dogora nodded and hefted his greataxe and shield.

Allen addressed the cube. “Excuse me.”

“I am Final Floor Boss Transfer System S505. The three requisite medals have been placed in the table. One party may face the final floor boss. Will you begin the challenge?”

Huh?

Cecil followed up with a question of her own.

“Wait, what do you mean by ‘one party’? How many parties can face the final floor boss at once?”

“Up to four parties, with a maximum of fifty total members.”

“If you have one of each type of medal, then only one party can join. So that means that if you had four of each medal type, four parties could join?”

“You are correct.”

That explains why the indentations were so deep.

Allen wanted to learn a little more about how this system worked.

“Is there any difference in how strong the final floor boss is if you fight it as one party or as four parties?”

“There is no difference.”

“Does the prize earned from defeating the final floor boss change depending on how many parties fight it?”

“There is no difference. Four prizes are granted for conquering the final floor boss regardless of how many parties fight. However, as the final floor boss has yet to be defeated, three standard prizes and one special prize will be granted upon its vanquishing. The details of this special prize are to be decided upon after negotiating with Dungeon Master Dygragni.”

In other words, there would be four prizes granted for defeating the final floor boss regardless of how many parties fought against it. That meant that if they fought it together with three other parties, the four total prizes, including the special prize for the first completion, would be split among the four parties. Or, if they did it on their own, then they could take home all the prizes.

“Are we allowed to decide which party gets the special prize?”

“We are not involved in how the prizes are divided. However, when teleporting to the zone where the final floor boss is located, you will first need to determine a leader for teleportation purposes.”

Sounds like they need a leader to be chosen in order to keep each of the individual parties from teleporting in and out whenever they please.

Allen looked back at the Gamers.

“Hey, guys, can you give me some time to think this over?”

“Of course,” Keel responded. “Do whatever you think is best.”

The rest of the party nodded in response as Allen turned back toward the cube, deep in thought. It seemed a bit odd to Keel that Allen, who usually always seemed to know what he wanted to do, would need to take some time to think things over.

After a few moments, Allen raised his head and looked back at the party.

“Sophie?”

“Yes?”

“There’s something I’d like to ask of you.”

“Consider it done,” Sophie responded without hesitation.

“But I haven’t even told you what it is yet.”

Sophie looked back at Allen, a strong look of determination in her eyes. “After all you did to save Rohzenheim, I’ll do everything in my power to grant any request from you, Allen.”

Chapter 10: Forming a Party to Take Down the Final Floor Boss

In the month since they had taken down the mithril golem, Allen and the No-life Gamers spent their time fighting nothing but iron golems. These enemies spawned in pairs, and if one of them was killed when its partner was nearby, the partner golem would instantly bring the fallen one back to life. The party had taken advantage of this ability to give themselves an endless supply of iron golems to fight throughout the time they were there, and thanks to that, Sophie had managed to max out her skill level despite being the last to have promoted her class.

Moreover, the team was able to get their hands on some valuable gear and items that they had not been able to pick up on Floor 4. Ninety percent of the chests dropped by the iron golems were wooden chests, ten percent were silver, and a mere one in one thousand were gold. The rarer a chest was, the more valuable its contents were, and in the past month, the team had managed to open three gold chests. One of them had even contained a chunk of orichalcum. This was all thanks to their unconventional method of fighting endless iron golems.

They had decided to leave the chunk of orichalcum ore with Habarak just like they had the last time. He promised to make them the best weapons and armor he could as soon as the Goddess of Fire's divine vessel was returned.

Allen also made sure to arrange for regular breaks during their iron golem runs. Today was their day off from dungeon raiding, and the party was out shopping. After he finished selling off his items at the Adventurer's Guild, Allen collected his magic stones.

You can never have too many of these.

Allen was currently at Summoning Lvl. 8, but it would take him forty billion magic stones in order to level up his skill again. He was hoping to pull this off by using his three million Rank B magic stones together with his Equivalency skill to

create Seeds of Magic. This, however, would take quite a bit of time if he was doing this while also farming for XP. Seeing as he did not know what the Demon Lord Army's next move would be, he was not sure he even had that much time.

His strategy for fending off the Demon Lord Army involved using a large number of magic stones to create Gold Beans using his Grass A. Each Gold Bean required five Rank A magic stones, but through the use of his Equivalency skill, he was able to use any skill regardless of what rank of magic stones it required. With its help, all he needed to do was acquire enough magic stones to correspond to five Rank A ones.

Obviously, he would still run into cases where he needed a large quantity of magic stones, and he could never have enough Blessings of Heaven or Seeds of Magic on hand. At some point, he would need to increase Summoning to Lvl. 10 or possibly even higher, so he figured it would not hurt to store as many magic stones as possible. And now that he had Equivalency, he no longer needed to worry about the types of magic stones.

More importantly, however, Allen had recently started feeling the pressure of needing to increase his level.

According to Merus, his Summoning level would not increase as long as he still had sealed skills such as King Me. When he thought about it, he remembered that magic-based classes also had limits on the magic they could learn that were dependent upon their level and unrelated to their Intelligence stat. Allen was surprised to hear that Summoners were similar in that respect and was all the more driven to gain experience.

Back when he was a serf, money had been the most important thing to him. But nowadays, at the age of fifteen, that had changed to magic stones—without them, he was nothing. Clearly, his needs changed as he grew older and his environment changed.

While he was able to farm a lot of experience from the iron golems, Allen still recalled how, during their battle in Rohzenheim, the Greater Demonic Deity Kyubel had mentioned something about the Demonic Deities coming out to play sometime. To a certain extent, he wanted to battle the Demonic Deities both to get a sense for how strong they had become and to help boost their

levels. Alas, no attack ever came.

There has to be a Demonic Deity out there somewhere, though, right? Maybe lurking as a tourist or something out in the world?

Cecil's voice brought Allen back to reality. "Hey, Allen, aren't we going shopping?"

"Oh, uh, right. We need to pick up some alcohol and meat. Let's get going."

At the butcher shop, they bought some large chunks of bone-in meat the likes of which Allen had only ever seen in his past life in manga. They also purchased three barrels of fine liquor from the liquor shop.

"Is three going to be enough?" Keel asked as Dogora, Krena, and Allen each carried a barrel.

"Hmm... It might be a little on the low side, but hey, if we run out, we can always go back out for more. The liquor shop is open late, anyway."

Back at their base, the party went about cleaning up the dining room. The hall itself was large enough to hold thirty people with room to spare, but they still needed to clear out some space for the night's event. To that end, they moved all the furniture they would not be using to relax into a corner and took some of the sofas out to the garden. Admiral Garara silently glared up at Allen, drink in hand, from one of the sofas left in the dining room.

Rosetta looked around the room in surprise. "Oh? What are you up to?"

Allen had not explained his plan for the evening to anyone outside of the Gamers yet. Looking up at the magic clock, he realized they had spent quite a bit of time simply cleaning up.

"Prince Zeu will be here shortly, so I'll explain then."

"I see. Well then, I'll be looking forward to it."

A short time later, Helmios arrived with his party, Sacred, and they all began helping out with the food and drink preparations. When they were nearly finished, one of Helmios's servants who helped oversee the base entered the room.

"Beast Prince Zeu has arrived."

After making his announcement, the servant left the room. He returned soon after with Uru and Sara in tow, followed a short time later by Zeu himself.

Zeu looked over the food lining the table. “My, it appears we’ve been greeted by yet another splendid feast.”

“Ah, welcome, Your Highness. You’re a bit early, it seems, but please sit down over there.”

Allen directed the prince to a sofa not occupied by Garara.

Go ahead and kick back for a bit.

Zeu leaned deep into the sofa. “And what, may I ask, is the reason for asking me here?”

Allen had not provided a specific reason with his invitation. Though it was practically unheard of to invite a head of state in such a manner, the fact that he came at all spoke to the prince’s strong sense of duty.

Once all the attendees were present, Allen made sure everyone had a drink in hand before beginning to speak.

“Today, we are gathered here to celebrate our decision to battle the final floor boss.”

“Ooh, so you’re going to fight it?!”

Zeu hopped up from the sofa in excitement. He had been keeping tabs on the progress of Allen’s attempt to clear the dungeon, both through the stories he had heard from Uru and by visiting the base on his own, though he had still been in the dark about when the Gamers planned on actually doing it.

Admiral Garara was still in his usual foul mood. “Hmph, so’s that what all this fuss’s about?”

Helmios took a swig from his wooden stein. “Best of luck to you. It’s gonna be a hard fight.”

“There’s something I’d like to ask of you, Helmios. I’d like Sacred to join us in the battle.”

“Huh? You want us to join your party?”

“Not quite. You see, up to four parties and a maximum of fifty people can battle the final floor boss.”

Allen went on to explain the information he had learned on Floor 5. All the while, Admiral Garara fixed him with a steely glare.

“Huh, is that so?” Helmios mumbled after listening to Allen’s story.

“Yep. You need to collect three types of medals in order to be teleported to the final floor boss, and one full set of three will allow one party to join the fight. We’ll take care of collecting as many as we need. Now, the first time the final floor boss is defeated, we’ll receive one special reward in addition to three regular ones. All I want is the special reward for being the first to defeat the boss, so you can split up the rest.”

“Do you have any idea how powerful the final floor boss is?” The usual cheerful expression was nowhere to be found on Helmios’s face.

You can definitely tell he’s the leader. This is the role he needs to play for his friends who rely on him.

“As best as I can guess, it’s probably several times as strong and difficult as each of the bronze, iron, and mithril golems.”

“What?!” Rosetta could barely contain her surprise. “And you want to take that thing on?!”

“That’s why I’m asking for your guys’ help.”

Helmios nodded.

“Even if we weren’t going to join, I imagine you’d take it on all on your own, huh, Allen?”

“I’m afraid I’m not following. Could you please explain what it is that you’re doing?” Zeu asked.

Since the members making up Zeu’s party changed each time they entered the dungeon, they usually traveled between Floors 2 and 4 depending on its composition. For that reason, they had no concept of how strong a Rank S monster was and had a hard time grasping the situation.

Allen went on to explain how the three golems on Floor 5 were more

powerful than the floor bosses located on Floors 2 through 4 and how he believed that the final floor boss would be several times stronger than the golems.

“Only one party can enter a death stage or any of the golem zones. However, in the case of the final floor boss’s zone, up to four parties can enter. I can’t speak too generally since there are some parties with up to twenty or thirty members each, but considering the number of parties allowed, I figure we’ll need about four times our fighting ability to battle it.”

“What kind of trials are you subjecting us to?” There was a mixture of sadness and anger in Zeu’s voice.

“Hmm, I think I’d like some more information. Assuming Sacred were to join you, what do you think our odds of success are?” Helmios asked.

“Well, if Sacred were to join us, I figure we have about a fifty-fifty chance.”

Everyone in the room—shy of Helmios and Garara—let out gasps of surprise at this. Apparently, even if Hero Helmios and his party joined Allen and his friends, who had made it all the way to the final floor boss, Allen still placed their odds of success at fifty percent.

“I see.”

“However, if things get too dangerous, we can escape and reevaluate if we want to try again.”

Fortunately, Allen was great at making an escape by using his Summons as decoys.

“Got it. In that case, I’d like to join you. What do you think, everyone?”

Helmios met the gaze of each member of his team in turn, confirming their desire. Each member nodded, with Rosetta giving him a wink.

“Of course I’ll go with you.”

“Why not?”

“Thank you.”

“Besides, the emperor told us to be nice to you guys.”

They're all being pretty casual about it. Then again, that's pretty much what I expected. Besides, they haven't been back to Giamut in a while.

Allen figured that, after passing along the Gold and Silver Beans, the team must have been told to try to get along with Allen and the Gamers. And just like that, Helmios's group would join Allen's party in taking on the final floor boss.

Now that it was decided that Sacred would also join the battle against the final floor boss, Zeu spoke up with renewed interest. "So you're going to assemble the might of the Central Continent to take on the enemy?"

"No, not quite. I also plan to have Admiral Garara's party, Stinger, join us."

Garara exploded at this. "What?! Just what're ye planning?!"

"Isn't that why you've spent the past three months here, Admiral?"

"No way!"

"Oh, really?" Allen continued in a casual tone. "Looks like my theory was pretty far off the mark, then."

"What're ye going on about?!"

"Well, I just figured that the reason you were angry was because you'd decided to take on the final floor boss with your party alone, resulting in the loss of some of your friends. Therefore, you've been coming here to our base waiting for an opportunity to take the boss on again."

Allen originally thought that the admiral had been coming here since October because he was upset at having lost his comrades due to the unreasonable task requested of him by the empire. However, upon collecting all the medals on Floor 5 and hearing the conditions for taking on the final floor boss, he realized that he had been mistaken. Admiral Garara must have also known that up to four parties and fifty members total could take on the final floor boss.

"Why ye little..." The admiral's words trailed off.

"Admiral, now's your chance to fight it again, together with Helmios and us."

However, the admiral objected once more, his tone of voice gruff.

"Hah?! Just what kinda casual invitation is this?! There's no way I can invite

my men back t' join me! D'you have any idea how many of 'em died?!"

"Is that so?"

"O' course it is! No doubt they all realize they lost their friends 'cause o' my poor decision-making!"

Half confessionally, half regretfully, the admiral practically spat out all the dark feelings that had taken hold of him. He had caused the death of his comrades as a result of his overconfidence and underestimation of their opponent's strength, and now he was beating himself up over it. Whenever he thought of his men, he was unable to cope with the burden on him due to his own actions. He found solace in the bottle, all the while harassing Allen and Dogora in an attempt to turn a blind eye to his own actions.

"Is that really the case, though?"

As soon as Allen finished speaking, Meruru left her place in the hallway to guide the guests from the second floor into the dining room.

"Admiral..."

It was the surviving thirteen members of Stinger, Admiral Garara's party.

"Wh-What're ye doing here?"

For the first time in forever, Admiral Garara dropped his ever-present stein of liquor from the shock of seeing his men. The beer spilled out, soaking Garara's shoes, but he did not seem to notice.

One of the dwarves spoke up, tears rolling down his cheeks as he choked back sobs. "Meruru and Allen invited us. Since Helmios and Sacred will be joining them, they invited us to take on the dungeon as well. We figured this is the only way we can move forward."

"Huh, so this was your plan, then."

Helmios offered up a wry smile. It put him in a bit of a rough spot since Allen had promised the members of Stinger that Sacred would be joining before even asking him, but the moment he found out that the dwarves were waiting upstairs, he had seen through Allen's plan.

"Only way forward, huh."

“That’s right. We can’t bear to see you like this, Admiral. We want to see your old self again, raring for a challenge to take down the dungeon. Please, sir!”

“Ye’re really puttin’ me in quite a spot here.”

Admiral Garara raised his head and looked between Allen and Helmios, and then their respective parties. He then cradled his head, opening and closing his mouth silently as he debated the idea of joining in the assault on the final floor boss.

All right, it looks like he’s back to thinking of himself as a leader.

Finally, Garara’s gaze settled on Allen.

“All right, Allen. I’ll join ye in the battle ’gainst the final floor boss. Or rather, please let us join ye.”

“Of course.”

“But first, I’d like ye t’ promise one thing, though it’s by no means a condition fer us joining.”

“Huh? Well, I won’t give up the reward for being the first to clear it.”

“No, it’s not that. Ye said that wi’ yer and Helmios’s parties, ye stand a fifty-fifty chance at victory. That means ye still can’t be sure of success even wi’ us joining, right?”

“That’s true.”

“If things go wrong. I want ye t’ ensure that everyone gets out safely. I’ll use my superpowered form t’ hold up the rear.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ll act as a decoy so ye can get all thirteen of my men outta there.”

“A-Admiral...”

“Shaddap, you!”

“I see. So that’s your responsibility as the party leader.”

“That’s right.”

“Hmm, I see. But you know, in that case, I’m the one who brought everyone

together to fight the final floor boss. In that sense, *I'm* the leader and thus responsible for staying behind to ensure that all parties escape."

Garara glared at Allen, but Allen did not back down. The two continued to stare at each other in silence as those in the room watched on. Finally, the admiral nodded his assent.

"Fine."

The dwarves of Stinger let out a celebratory cheer.

"All right! Now we can finally move on!"

"Time for drinks! C'mon, big bro!"

One of the dwarves had a twinkle in his eye as he handed Allen a wooden stein.

"Big bro"? Yeah, I'm not so sure about that. I'm pretty sure I'd remember taking on an honorary younger brother.

"Hmm, so now the strongest team in all of Baukis will be joining you as well. I guess that makes this a pre-celebration to your upcoming dungeon crawl. I, too, will toast to your good health."

Prince Zeu clapped his hands together. However, what Allen said next immediately put a stop to that.

"I've collected enough medals for you and your men too, Prince."

"What?"

"Well, that's fantastic news. With the Beast Prince joining us as well, our odds of taking down the final floor boss must be nearly assured. What's more, if we do succeed in the first clearing of the boss, that means His Highness will have fulfilled his promise to the Beast King."

Just as the words left Helmios's mouth, Zeu interrupted him with a shrill cry.

"What? No way! We can't be assisted by another country in matters pertaining to royal succession!"

Helmios was referring to the promise made between Prince Zeu and his father, the Beast King of Albahal, regarding who would be the next heir to the

throne. Prince Zeu, despite falling behind his older brother, Crown Prince Beku, in line to ascend the throne, would become the heir apparent should he be the first one to beat the yet-uncleared Rank S dungeon.

In Helmios's mind, it did not matter if other parties were involved so long as the condition of Prince Zeu and his party taking part in the first clear of the final floor boss was fulfilled. Zeu, however, was unwilling to accept this suggestion.

I expected a bit of a challenge, but after struggling to get Garara to join us, it's turning out to be just as difficult to convince Zeu. Then again, I guess I do remember times in my past life when it was a real pain to get a full alliance of members together for a raid.

Allen thought back on his past life as a gamer. Considering the rewards for success were great and that it would only get easier the more members you had in a multiparty raid, it was usually fairly easy to get a group together.

However, when it came to particularly powerful raid bosses or ones that had only recently been rolled out, there were more than a few players who felt that the risk was just too high and did not want to join. At times like that, you had to reach out to both parties who were in the same affiliation as your own as well as those in the opposite affiliation. He recalled getting into quite a number of arguments with a certain black knight, the leader of one of the joining parties, over which other parties to invite along.

Allen tried his best to win Zeu over.

"You're not receiving support from another nation; we're battling as a group that's expanded beyond national boundaries. Besides, we might not be able to beat this boss without your assistance."

"But Allen, you must know..."

The prince spoke as if all the strength had been drained from him.

Albahal had ordered all of its citizens with Talents to attempt to beat the Rank S dungeon, though most of these people had only one-or two-star classes. This was due to the fact that Beast Crown Prince Beku feared the risk of his brother stealing the throne from him.

"...Until my brother officially takes the throne, there's no way he'll send any

beastkin who actually has a chance at fighting the final floor boss, meaning that I would do nothing but hold you back even if I alone were to join you. Beyond that, I'm also responsible for protecting those who have been sent here from Albahal to perform their labor in the dungeon."

"Hmm, I understand. In that case, would your mind change if we were to bring in the strongest fighters from Albahal?"

With that, Allen looked over at the door to the dining room. Zeu and everyone else in the room followed his gaze as confusion set in.

Nothing happened. One minute passed, then two, and still no one entered the room. Zeu turned to Allen, a look of suspicion on his face.

"There's no one..."

Just as the words left Zeu's mouth, Helmios's servant appeared with a nervous expression on his face.

"Master Allen, we have guests for the Beast Prince."

"Send them in."

At those words, the servant hurriedly left the room.

A low din began to fill the dining room as the dwarves, the members of Sacred, and Allen and his friends chatted among themselves while stealing glances at the doors leading into the dining room. Only Allen and the Gamers remained cool and collected, as they already knew who was coming.

A short time later, the servant returned and opened the door to the dining room. A group of tall figures entered the room.

"Grand Marshal Siguul!" Zeu cried out in surprise.

Grand Marshal Siguul, the highest-ranking official in the Rohzenheim army, entered the room, accompanied by several members of his entourage. Zeu was familiar with him from the times he had attended meetings with the Five Continent Alliance.

Siguul addressed Allen. "I brought all the members you requested."

"Thank you for your assistance."

With that, Siguul gestured for those waiting in the hallway to enter the room.

A gasp escaped Zeu's lips as he watched on in surprise. The group entering the room was one that he had wished to bring together for quite some time but had given up on ever being able to.

"The Ten Heroic Beasts! All of you?!" The Beast Prince could hardly hide his astonishment, even as a part of him refused to believe that the Ten Heroic Beasts had come all this way. This was his first time seeing them in the two years since he had come to the Rank S dungeon.

"That's right, Your Highness," a bearkin dressed in exquisite armor responded. The ursine man stood over two meters tall and had a massive hammer strapped to his back. "We were granted the title of Ten Heroic Beasts at last year's Beast King Martial Arts Tournament."

The honorary title of Ten Heroic Beasts was granted to the winners of the ten divisions of the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament held in the Albahalan capital. Some members were unchanged from the previous year, having defended their titles, while others were newcomers who had bested the previous champions.

"General Hoba! It's been a while!" Zeu howled in excitement. Apparently he and the bearkin were already acquainted.

"Well, if it isn't the bumbling prince!"

A fox beastkin took a seat on the table as he insulted the prince before taking a wooden stein in both hands.

"Is that Lepe I hear?"

Lepe, the foxkin man, did not bother even looking in Zeu's direction before he took a drink and began voicing his woes.

"Y'know, things were goin' real nice with a lady friend of mine when that bastard Beku sent his guards to come get me. What a bunch of crap! Anyway, I heard we were summoned by the elves, but somethin' tells me this ain't Rohzenheim. Just what's goin' on here?"

"Not only are ya rude to His Highness, but now you're callin' the crown prince

by his first name too?!” Hoba roared, reaching for the hammer on his back. “Besides, ya look downright pathetic, sittin’ on the table like that!”

The floor shook with each of the armored beastkin’s thunderous steps, threatening to give way at any moment.

C’mon, guys, I don’t need you fighting here!

Lepe rolled his eyes and hopped off the table. “Gods, you’re annoying.” The accessories around his neck, biceps, wrists, waist, and ankles, which were made of pieces of metal and red, white, blue, yellow, and green beads, jangled as he moved.

Looks like someone’s the problem child of the group. Also, he doesn’t seem to have a weapon. Now that I think about it, though, I believe there was someone with the Beast Bard Talent in the group.

Uru had previously given Allen a brief overview of each of the Ten Heroic Beasts. As he was thinking back on that information, a squirrelkin just a hair taller than Meruru waddled up to the table.

Zeu’s eyes went wide in surprise. “I can’t believe it. The royal adviser, Temi, is here too?”

She may look like a preteen, but apparently she advises the king with her abilities in astrology.

Beast Astrologist was an incredibly rare Talent possessed by only a handful of people in Albahal. Because of her Talent, Temi was in a position to advise on national affairs as an aide to the Beast King, ranking her above even generals and ministers.

Considering that the Swordsman Talent became known as Beast Swordsman when possessed by a beastkin, Allen figured that they generally appended “Beast” to everything. In that case, humans likely had Bards and Astrologists too.

Just as he had done with the others, Lepe did not bother with formalities as he pulled out a chair and spoke to Temi. “Hey, Temi. Want a drink?”

The squirrelkin ignored him as she took her seat, instead calling out to

Helmios's servant.

"Juice, please."

"C-Certainly. I'll prepare it at once."

After receiving her juice, Temi picked up a fukaman from a plate and began nibbling at it.

"Wow, this is great!"

Zeu, still reeling from the shock of learning that the young yet politically influential Beast Astrologist was also one of the Ten Heroic Beasts, looked around the room before fixing his gaze on Siguul.

"Grand Marshal Siguul, just what is going on? Why did you bring the Ten Heroic Beasts here?"

"I'm afraid that's a bit difficult to explain," Siguul said with a frown, then shot a pleading glance toward Sophie. Picking up on this, Zeu turned to look at Sophie as well.

"Do you know anything about this, Miss Sophialohne?"

"Beast Prince Zeu, Rohzenheim wishes for our countries to coexist and prosper together. As such, I ask that you please not misunderstand our actions here today."

Sophie began to respond to Zeu's question in place of Siguul. However, she paused for a moment, choosing her words carefully. It was then that Allen decided it was time for him to speak up.

"Hmm, it looks like you two are having a hard time explaining, so why don't you let me take over."

"So this was all your scheme, huh?" Zeu asked, focusing his attention on Allen.

"Scheme" makes this sound like a bad thing. You don't need to be so rude, y'know.

"It's not a scheme, per se. You see, there are still remnants of the Demon Lord Army in Rohzenheim that are getting in the way of their reconstruction efforts.

All I did was request that the world-renowned Ten Heroic Beasts help clear out those remnants, and I asked them to come to Baukis while they were at it.”

Though it was true that there were monsters hindering the reconstruction efforts, he neglected to mention that a variety of countermeasures had already been taken, including putting up barriers.

Zeus nodded along with this. “Hmm, I see.”

Allen had, through Sophie, asked Siguul to go to Albahal and petition Beast King for his help by giving him the same story.

“As a sign of appreciation for granting us the assistance of the Ten Heroic Beasts, we have gifted three thousand elven elixirs to Albahal.”

With this last piece of the puzzle, it all made sense to Zeus.

The Beast King had likely remained unconvinced by Siguul’s entreaty alone. Presumably, however, Rohzenheim’s offer of three thousand of their valuable elven elixirs—a panacea that could even recover lost limbs—had convinced him that they were serious.

“But would they really send all of the Ten Heroic Beasts to another country simply to slay monsters?”

Five of the Ten Heroic Beasts should have been enough to provide aid to a foreign ally, but all ten seemed hard to believe.

The Ten Heroic Beasts were the ace up Albahal’s sleeve. While it may have seemed reasonable for Beku to have prevented them from being dispatched to aid Zeus or Shia and thus keep them from taking his place as next in line to the throne, it was also true that not all of the group’s members were present even at meetings of the Five Continent Alliance. And yet not only had they gone well out of their way to have soldiers round up Lepe—apparently a habitual offender for ignoring orders—but they had brought the king’s adviser, Temi, as well. Were something to happen to Albahal while they were absent, it could have dire consequences for the kingdom. The Beast King would have almost certainly objected to this, even in discussions about slaying monsters too powerful for the Rohzenheim forces.

“Don’t tell anyone else, but I made a secret promise to the Crown Prince.”

Zeu felt a pit form in his stomach at Allen's words. Sure, he had said to not tell anyone else, but there were nearly fifty people in the room.

"Just what did you do, exactly?"

"A promise, that's all. And by doing that, I was able to get the Crown Prince himself to convince the Beast King. His help was instrumental."

"Tell me what you promised my brother!"

"I promised that, were Albahal to attack the Central Continent, Rohzenheim would not act for one month."

Zeu's jaw nearly dropped to the floor. "What?!"

"Basically, if Albahal breaks the pact with the Five Continent Alliance and invades the Central Continent, Rohzenheim will not raise any objections and Giamut will not send reinforcements or war materials. I have to say, the fact that he agreed so quickly was immensely helpful, wasn't it, Siguul?"

Siguul remained silent, possibly figuring it improper to mention such top secret international political pacts in front of Giamut nobility. Or perhaps he just wanted to get out of this situation as soon as possible. Conversely, Crown Prince Beku had not hesitated to announce his intent to invade the Central Continent the moment he ascended the throne. It was not hard to imagine his impassioned pleas to the Beast King with his secret pact with Siguul in the back of his mind.

"H-How could..." The surprise on Zeu's face turned to fear and despair. His whole body shook as he dropped to his knees.

Hoba hurried to Zeu's side and threw an arm around him. "Your Highness!" Allen could not help but smirk at the sight of the two-meter-tall beastkin holding on to each other as Hoba tried desperately to help the prince to his feet. "It's unbecoming of royalty to kneel before others, Your Highness."

Hoba wrapped an arm around Zeu's shoulder and helped him to the sofa. Once there, Zeu slumped heavily into it and let out a sigh before finally looking up at Allen.

"And what do you plan on doing if this gets back to the king?"

“Huh? So what if it does? That’s no problem. Then you can play for the role of being the next king.”

Allen did not really care what happened, as it was the crown prince who would be losing out here.

“That decision is up to the king. However, we are also complicit in deceiving him in this matter and would no longer have the right to set foot in Albahal.”

The sense of despair Zeu felt was clear in how he held himself.

“Huh? Why’s that?”

Zeu looked off into the distance as he spoke. “You don’t know? The king will likely be enraged at this and send out a force to hunt me down no matter where I go.”

“I’m sorry, but I’m not sure I follow,” Allen responded casually. “Is the Beast King, the ruler of Albahal, really that petty?”

That question made Zeu’s fur stand on end. He launched his hulking form to his feet.

“I will not stand idly by and let you insult the king!”

“Calm down, please. Just let me explain,” Allen said, hoping to soothe the enraged Beast Prince.

Helmios, Admiral Garara, and General Hoba listened intently for what Allen was about to say, with the latter still keeping his hand on the hammer strapped to his back. There was a very real risk that what Allen said next could lead to the dissolution of the Five Continent Alliance and the opening of hostilities between Rohzenheim and Albahal.

“Fine, I’m listening.”

“All right, here’s what’s going on: Zeu, you’ve come here due to being granted a trial from the Beast King to clear the Rank S dungeon.”

Zeu fixed Allen with a steely glare and nodded silently.

“I had my friend, Sophie, get the ball rolling in Rohzenheim. After that, I used Crown Prince Beku to get the Ten Heroic Beasts to come clear the dungeon.

That's all."

"And what I want to know is why things ended up this way. This was all a part of your grand plan, then?"

While it may have seemed like Zeu was plotting against the Beast King, in reality, it was Allen and Rohzenheim who were working behind the scenes.

"The truth is irrelevant; what matters is what the Beast King thinks. Rohzenheim provided a vast supply of their invaluable herbs and, by way of deception, the Ten Heroic Beasts were summoned. The one who thought up this plan will be self-apparent. Do you think that someone would normally try to figure out who asked whom to put this plan in motion? Even if the Beast King doesn't inquire any further, there can be only one answer."

No one would suspect that Allen was behind this, nor would they think that Rohzenheim had simply decided to start working in the shadows. After all, Rohzenheim had given Albahal three thousand of their invaluable herbs and even sent Grand Marshal Siguul all that way to negotiate. Would the Beast King really believe they had done all that just to assemble the Ten Heroic Beasts?

No, it was more natural that the Beast King would think this was Zeu's plan, put into motion by going through the Rohzenheim royalty who just so happened to be at the Rank S dungeon with him. The future queen of Rohzenheim and the Beast Prince, who was still unable to complete the trial passed down to him from his father, were both here. It would be easy to assume that there had been negotiations with Rohzenheim wherein they could expect to receive some kind of favors once Zeu took the throne. Perhaps there was a secret pact of sorts concerning the relationship between the future queen and the Beast King.

"A king is someone who achieves their objectives regardless of means, right? I have a hard time thinking that even the Beast King doesn't believe that to be so. Rather, don't you think he would believe his son, who had put such a scheme in place in order to become the crown prince, truly had the makings of a king?"

"The makings of a king,' you say?"

"Correct. Let's say that you successfully clear the dungeon. Once that happens, you'll have achieved so much more than just becoming the Beast King

—more than three thousand elven elixirs’ worth. A close relationship with the great power that is Rohzenheim will certainly prove useful for the future of Albahal. This would all show that you truly have the makings of a king, given your efforts to become the next in line to the throne.”

Allen tried to explain to Zeu that the one who stopped at nothing to achieve their goals, even to the point of acting in greed to ensure the prosperity of their country, would be seen by the Beast King as having the qualities of a king.

“B-But...” Though his anger had since faded, Zeu still looked deeply suspicious. “You mentioned that I would be the next in line to become king, but I still need to contend with Shia. She completed her trial upon capturing the Pontiff of Daemonism.”

“But if she were to ascend the throne, shouldn’t there have been some kind of news by now?”

Several months had passed since they heard that Shia had captured the Pontiff, and yet the next Beast King was still undecided. That was why Zeu was still in Baukis.

“W-Well, I...”

“Perhaps the trials given to both you and the princess are the Beast King’s way of choosing his successor. What is a king, after all?”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand your question.”

“Sure, Shia was able to capture the Pontiff, but she had the help of the Elmea Church to do it.”

“That is true.”

“If you ask me, an achievement like that seems more in line with the makings of a general than the makings of a king.”

“What do you mean by ‘an achievement like that’?! Are you mocking Shia?!”

My, my. Someone really loves his little sister.

“Please just calm down and listen to me. Being able to mobilize the army and achieve her goal was quite an accomplishment for her. But assuming nothing changes, where do you see yourself in the near future?”

“Me?”

“You’ll be considered a master planner who did not limit yourself in how you completed your objective, even going so far as to deceive the crown prince. You’ll be thought of as a hero who brought together the powerful group led by Admiral Garara, the pride of Baukis, along with the Hero of the Central Continent’s party and even Rohzenheim royalty, all to clear the unbeaten Rank S dungeon. That’s how others will see you.”

A brief silence fell over the room before the bearkin, Hoba, finally spoke up.

“Splendid! A person who can lead the Five Continent Alliance is just what we need in a Beast King! I like it!”

Hoba approached the prince and knelt before him with tears in his eyes. No doubt he was imagining Zeu sitting on the throne as the Beast King.

“Wh-What are you doing?! Calm yourself, Hoba.” Zeu looked uncomfortable as he gazed down at Hoba, then quickly looked back over to Allen. “But this was all your doing.”

“Ah, I forgot to mention that. When transporting multiple parties to the final floor boss’s zone, you apparently need to choose someone as the leader of the whole group. I’d like to ask you to be that leader.”

Allen deeply bowed his head, and suddenly, the world went black for Zeu. He felt as if he was going to pass out.

“J-Just what are you hoping to achieve here?! Do you know what will happen if we lose?!”

The black-haired boy in front of him was offering to carry out a plan that would affect every corner of the world. Were they to fail, not becoming the Beast King would hardly be the worst of it. Albahal would unilaterally deem Rohzenheim its enemy and the Five Continental Alliance would dissolve. The forces standing against the Demon Lord Army would then immediately collapse, leading to the world’s destruction. Just what was Allen willing to risk so much for?

“With you and the Ten Heroic Beasts joining us, our victory is all but assured. Besides, I’ve mentioned time and again what I’m after.”

“Oh?”

Zeu thought back on what Allen had said but was drawing a blank.

“The reward for being the first to clear the dungeon,” Allen responded. While he was willing to give up the honor of leading the Rank S dungeon clear, he was unwilling to budge on this.

“That’s all you want? And you’ve got the whole world tied up in this just for that? You truly are crazy.” Zeu was so shocked that he did not know what else to say.

“So I take it you understand? Well then, Beast Prince Zeu, I would like to ask you to lead the Ten Heroic Beasts and join us in defeating the final floor boss of the Rank S dungeon.” Allen then turned to Zeu and bowed deeply.

Zeu seemed flustered at being put on the spot. “D-Do I need to decide right now?”

Seriously? You’re still not emotionally ready to deal with all this?

Allen continued to bow but lifted his head to look at the Beast Prince. “Yes, I’m afraid we don’t have much time.” Zeu turned his gaze toward the Ten Heroic Beasts.

“It’s time to make a decision, Your Highness! This is a perfect opportunity for us to show the world just how strong Albahal really is!” Hoba’s voice boomed, causing the glassware on the table to shake. Lepe put his fingers in his ears and slumped down into his seat.

“You don’t need to hold back just because of me, Zeu,” Temi, who was sitting next to Lepe, said. “I’m just a mere fortune teller, after all.”

“Temi...”

The squirrelkin paid no mind to what Zeu was about to say as she hopped off her chair and waddled over toward Allen.

“Allen, was it? How strange that you did not appear in any of my predictions. And yet I can tell that this has been decided by the stars, that it is our fate.” She reached up to the still-bowing Allen and pinched his cheeks.

“Huh? Do you mean to say that you’d already seen this through your fortune-

telling?”

“No, of course not. Had I known that something so unbelievably out of the norm was to happen, I certainly would have told Zeu about it. And yet... Yes. My divination was correct nonetheless.”

Temi went on to explain how the Beast King had once ordered Temi to tell him who would become the next in line to the throne, to which Temi had responded that it would be Zeu.

“So it *is* going to be me!”

“Zeu, please listen to what I’m about to say. It is incredibly important to the future of our kingdom.”

Zeu fell silent, allowing Temi to continue.

Upon learning the results of her fortune-telling, the Beast King had fretted that, if the kindhearted Zeu were to become the Beast King, Albahal would not be able to maintain an equal relationship with other countries in the future. He had ordered Temi to perform her fortune-telling again, but no matter how many times she tried, the answer was always the same. Fortune-telling, after all, only revealed the end result. How one got there remained a mystery.

Because Zeu was the second son of the Albahalan royal family, in accordance with the country’s tradition, he would need to pass a trial in order to assume the throne as predicted. Therefore, at Temi’s advice, the Beast King had given Zeu the trial of clearing the Rank S dungeon, a task which Crown Prince Beku would almost certainly interfere with. He then had Temi once again perform her fortune-telling to see who the next king would be. If the results were different, then their problem was solved.

However, the fortune remained the same. No matter how many times they tried during the months and years that followed, it did not change.

“I thought that I’d seen the downfall of Albahal.”

Concerned over having given the Beast King such a troubling fortune, Temi had even considered stepping down from her role as adviser and going into exile. Before that could happen, however, Rohzenheim’s grand marshal had arrived and made some kind of secret pact with Beku. Shortly thereafter, the

Beast King had decided to send the Ten Heroic Beasts to Rohzenheim.

“I-Is that really what happened?” Zeu’s voice wavered as the shock of what he was being told hit him.

So the Beast King himself is the one blocking Shia from ascending the throne.

“It is. I figured that this is your one chance to prove that you have the makings of a king and become worthy of carrying the burden of ensuring Albahal’s future.”

Crown Prince Beku had adopted a hardline policy with little regard for the loss of life of those with Talents, so long as it supported the prosperity of his nation. Meanwhile, Shia had chased the Pontiff of Daemonism to a foreign nation to capture him. Compared to his fierce older brother and proactive younger sister, the Beast King viewed Zeu as being far too kind and indecisive.

But that’s exactly what led to me becoming acquainted with Zeu.

If not for Zeu’s kindness and concern for Uru and Sara, he would not have met their savior, Allen, or been present in this room at this moment.

“Will you follow my orders, Temi?” Zeu still felt a bit hesitant about dealing with the Beast King’s adviser, but Temi merely snickered in reply.

“Zeu, this is no time for a Beast King to show restraint. Just look around you; the Ten Heroic Beasts are all here, waiting for you.”

Hearing that, Zeu looked around the room at the Ten Heroic Beasts. Every last one of them stared back at him in silence, awaiting his orders.

“Well then, I will ask that you all fight alongside me.” The members all bowed their heads down low in response.

“I guess I can take that as my answer, then,” Allen said.

Zeu, with a renewed glint in his eyes, nodded firmly.

“Yes, the Ten Heroic Beasts and I will lead our parties into battle against the final floor boss.”

“Great, I’m glad to hear it. With that settled, I bought a lot of alcohol, so let’s get this kickoff party started.”

With that, Allen, Helmios, Admiral Garara, and Beast Prince Zeu began discussing strategies for taking down the final floor boss.

* * *

For five days following the kickoff party to commemorate all four parties coming together to defeat the final floor boss, Allen and the other party leaders got down to business formulating a plan. They called together all of their respective party members and repeatedly used the Rank S bosses on each floor as practice for moving according to a unified strategy. In particular, the slow-moving Floor 3 boss, Scarlet, was the perfect opponent for their needs. Even though it recovered a lot of HP and was hard to beat, they could put their tactic to work against it again and again.

Finally, it was the eve of the battle against the final floor boss, and the group was throwing a party to commemorate the coming battle. Though they had only held the kickoff party a mere five days prior, Allen figured that it was worth holding another. But with the Ten Heroic Beasts now present as well, they could no longer fit all the attendees in the dining room and had instead moved the festivities to the garden. The dwarves jovially drank up, happy to see Admiral Garara in good spirits. They had come to Allen to tell him that though they did not know how the battle would turn out, they were thankful to him for getting the admiral back to his old self.

Allen grabbed some food and reached out for his drink, only to find it empty. "Could I get a juice refill?"

"Certainly." One of Helmios's servants holding a pitcher refilled Allen's glass. He was immensely grateful for how the servants so calmly and quietly worked the event.

And this will go on after we beat the final floor boss too.

Even after the final floor boss was defeated, Allen and the Gamers intended to continue slaying the iron golems. He wanted to keep at it until he was able to use his King Me skill.

While Allen was deep in thought about his future plans, Admiral Garara approached him.

“Any chance I c’n get mahself some juice too?”

“Certainly, sir.”

Allen was surprised to see the admiral take the stein of juice. “I got some excellent liquor, you know. You’re not drinking tonight?”

“Nay, I’ve drunk enough as it is. ’Sides, I want t’ wait till after tomorrow’s vict’ry.”

Allen looked at Garara and could not detect a trace of the man who, until just recently, had lay drunkenly on the dining room sofa and spat insults at them. Over the past five days, he had not consumed even a drop of alcohol. He gave off a reliable vibe to Allen now that he had calmed down once again.

“Looks like we’ll be holding a victory party tomorrow, then.”

“I s’pose so. Listen, Allen... I just want ye to know that whatever happens tomorrow, I really appreciate everything ye’ve done.”

Allen was quick to chastise the older man. “Cut it out with that depressing talk.”

“Yeah, yer right.” With that, Garara’s face brightened up and he made his way back to the dwarves’ drinking party.

Elsewhere, in the middle of the garden, Lepe was playing a large flute to keep the party atmosphere alive. Something caught his eye, however, and he put down his instrument, grabbed two cups of booze, and made his way to Cecil. “Hello there, you beautiful young lady. Mind joining me for a drink?”

“Oh? How thoughtful of you. Thank you.”

Cecil took the cup and then immediately began to walk away.

“Hey, wait, hold up!” Lepe called out. Cecil stopped and turned to face him.

“I’m only interested in strong gentlemen,” she said with a grin, then spun back and left.

Lepe cracked a smile as he watched Cecil walk away. There were a lot of strong female beastkin, and that was exactly the type of woman beastkin men liked. After downing the contents of his glass, the foxkin went back to playing

his flute.

Allen made his way over to Krena, who was furiously engaged in eating all the food laid out on the table. Zeu stood up from where he had been nursing a drink and approached Allen.

“What do you think? Do we meet your expectations?”

“Mostly. Honestly, each of the Ten Heroic Beasts is far too specialized for me to truly grasp their abilities in just five days, but I suppose understanding their specialties isn’t really necessary for us to help each other out.”

Every one of the Ten Heroic Beasts had a Talent that Allen had never heard of before, and he still did not completely understand their unique skills. He figured that if he were to try to fully understand the specifics of their personalities and skills, it would take at least a month of exchanging information and performing tests to do it properly. They had been able to grasp each other’s habits and ‘tells’ for when they were about to make a move, however—all of which was necessary when it came to fighting together. Besides, all four parties were veteran warriors with plenty of combat experience.

Once that had all been figured out, they decided to hold this party on the eve of the big day.

“Hmm, I see. Considering I had a chance to watch them all fight at the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament, I’ll take responsibility for giving them commands.”

The name of Zeu’s party was “Beast Prince Zeu and the Ten Heroic Beasts.” It sounded very joke-like, but naturally, they had not chosen it on a whim. The reasoning behind it was that leaving a record that Zeu and the Ten Heroic Beasts had defeated the final floor boss was more important than having a cool-sounding name.

“I’d like to watch the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament one of these days.”

“I think that’s a grand idea,” Zeu agreed and smiled back at Allen. “I’ll invite you next year.”

“There is one thing that worries me, though. Lepe seems to be quite the independent character.”

“I’ll make sure there aren’t any problems. Lepe is a powerful fighter who’s been a member of the Ten Heroic Beasts for three years running. He calms down quite a bit once he’s in battle.”

“That’ll be a great help.”

Zeus nodded at this. “You’re the one who’s been a great help to me, Master Allen. I owe a lot to you.”

“So, I’m ‘Master Allen’ now, huh?”

“Hmm, well, you’re not quite on the level of Grand Marshal Siguul, but please don’t be too hard on me.”

Ever since the kickoff party, Zeus had been referring to Allen as ‘Master Allen.’ Maybe it was a sign that his perception of Allen had greatly changed.

Speaking of the grand marshal, Siguul was still residing in the Rank S dungeon. It was his job to look after the welfare of the Ten Heroic Beasts who had been lent to them until they were returned to Albahal. He had also joined the evening’s party, where he could be found standing next to Volmaar and Sophie. Allen managed to catch his eye only for a brief moment before the elven man averted his gaze. He figured this whole ordeal must have been slightly traumatic for Siguul.

“Actually, I have one favor I’d like to ask of you, Zeus.”

“Oh, you’ve already decided what you want? Let’s hear it. What do you wish for?” Zeus was nervous, but not knowing what Allen wanted was even scarier to him, so he decided to ask.

“When you have a child who will inherit the throne from you, I want you to give them a trisyllabic name.”

Allen had heard that though Zeus was married, he did not yet have a child. Apparently, he occasionally received letters asking when he planned on coming back.

“Trisyllabic...”

“Yup. A name that will leave a lasting impression into the future.”

Nearly a thousand years had passed since Albahal broke away from Giamut’s

rule and established itself as an independent nation. In spite of that, however, they still bore hatred toward Giamut. They had continued the tradition of having disyllabic names as a continuing sign of their hatred, which was why Allen asked him to change that.

“What you’re saying is that it’s time to move on.”

“Indeed.”

Zeus fell silent, staring off into the distance as he seemed to steel himself for something important. As Allen looked up at the Beast Prince, he felt someone tap his leg. He turned his gaze downward to find the squirrelkin who had been following him around these past five days.

“Hello, Summoner of the Beginning. Have time for a chat?”

“Again?”

“Yes. After all, I might just have to leave for home tomorrow.”

Temi took Allen’s free hand and led him to an empty table and sat across from him. The Astrologist squirrelkin then pulled several objects out of her bag, dropping them on the table. They were various minerals and precious gems, and they glittered like stars in the sky.

“I just don’t get it. Or rather, it seems that the results of my fortune-telling are changing,” Temi murmured, looking down at the spread of stones. Apparently she was conducting a fortune-telling session.

I guess the number of stars she has in her Talent dictates how well she can tell the future.

Allen recalled how he was analyzed by Helmios back at the Academy. Merus had also mentioned that at Summoning Lvl. 8, he could not properly analyze Rank S monsters.

Allen watched the struggling Temi and wondered to himself whether it was a good thing or a bad thing that it was not possible for him to learn about his future even if he wanted to.

“By the way, there’s something I’m looking for. Do you think you could help me find it?”

“Hmm? And what is it that you seek?”

“I’m looking for a kind of vessel, though apparently it doesn’t have a defined shape.”

He decided to have Temi try looking for the stolen divine vessel. Their days of clearing dungeons were coming to an end, yet they still had not gotten their hands on any information pertaining to it.

“That sounds impossible to find.”

“That’s what I’m struggling with. But I really need to get my hands on it.”

Temi gazed at Allen’s face for a moment. “Hmm, I’ll see what I can do.” She picked the scattered minerals and precious gems up off the table, put them back into her bag, and dumped them out again. Then, she flipped the gems over with her fingers, slammed the minerals together, and poked at them over and over before picking some of them up and returning them to her bag. Finally, she nodded, a low rumble emanating from the back of her throat.

“Is this really okay? Hmm, you’re not going to find it. But wait, that’s the same thing. Why can’t I see the future?” She gazed at the placements of the minerals and gems on the table, nodding along all the while, then lifted her head to meet Allen’s gaze. “I’m sorry, I just don’t know.” Apparently, much like with his eight-star Talent, she was unable to find out any information about the divine vessel.

“That’s too bad. Oh, but can you do anything about what Dogora’s looking for?”

Seeing Dogora with a freshly emptied plate walk past, Allen decided to have Temi try her fortune-telling on something else.

“Huh? Me?”

“That’s right. Maybe we can have her tell us how to use Heart and Soul.”

“Tell me more about this,” Temi requested, and Dogora went on to explain that he could not properly use his Extra Skill.

Temi listened intently as she placed the items back into her bag and, right in the middle of their conversation, reached out to pinch his cheeks. With that done, she poured the bag’s contents out once more and started her reading.

“Yes... Yes, I see. Hmm, I’ve got it. So I guess I *haven’t* lost my powers, then. Hmm? But...” Temi’s face clouded over.

“D-Did you figure it out?” Dogora cut in excitedly.

“Yes, there is something to the southeast that is related to this matter.”

“Ratash is off in that direction. So there’s something waiting for him back in his home country?”

The Empire of Baukis was located next to the Central Continent. Crossing the ocean and traveling to the southeast would take them to the Kingdom of Ratash, located to the south of the Empire of Giamut.

Dogora let out a whoop. “Really?! Awesome!”

Wow, looks like I got even more than I bargained for by bringing the Ten Heroic Beasts out here.

“Wait!” A serious expression flashed across Temi’s face as she looked at Dogora.

“Yeah?”

“The closer you get to what you seek in the southeast, the more danger you will be in of losing your life.”

“Wh-What? You can’t be serious.”

“If you want to get stronger, you’d best prepare yourself. Understood?”

“I, uh... Right.”

It sounded like a tough trial awaited Dogora if he wanted to be able to freely use Heart and Soul.

Chapter 11: Battling the Final Floor Boss (Part 1)

A large crowd formed in the square in front of the first floor of the Rank S dungeon temple. All the people gathered there were talented adventurers who had earned the right to enter the dungeon. Adventurers generally started their days early, however, and as the sun was already high in the sky, this throng of more than ten thousand had gathered for a different reason. Their cries and shouts rose like a wave and spread out from the town toward the temple.

“There they are!”

“Really? So the rumor was true?”

“Whoa, awesome! Hey, who the hell pushed me?! Show yourself!”

The crowd parted to make way for the group of forty marching to the temple, swallowing hard at the sight.

“So the rumor *was* true, then. Admiral Garara really *has* teamed up with Helmios to defeat the final floor boss. I can’t believe it! This is huge news!”

A group of cheering dwarves who had come to see off Garara and his party, Stinger, was fighting back tears. Though not friends of the admiral, the rumor had reached their ears courtesy of a dwarf who had heard the story from a member of Stinger they had happened to sit next to at the bar.

Over the past few days, many adventurers had witnessed Admiral Garara and his men entering the dungeon alongside several other parties, which seemed to imply that they had joined forces in order to clear the Rank S dungeon. The groups had spent their time practicing together, and today was finally the day when all four parties would enter the dungeon to challenge the final floor boss.

The group of cheering dwarves had witnessed the tragedy that befell Stinger at the dungeon festival the previous year. The feeling of hopelessness was still strong in their minds as they were filled with a renewed sense of hope at the scene before them.

“What the hell’re you talkin’ about? Helmios was the one who got this

international group of parties together to take on the dungeon. That's our Hero right there. He's a real upstandin' guy, even goin' out of his way to provide information to us adventurers."

A human man standing next to the dwarves called out to them. Judging by how he spoke, it was clear that he was from Giamut.

It was well-known among the adventurers challenging the Rank S dungeon that Helmios had saved a great number of lives by providing valuable information through the Adventurer's Guild. Due to this, the man was absolutely confident that it was Helmios who had brought these parties together.

One of the dwarves was overcome with rage at this, but his anger quickly evaporated when he noticed the innocent smile on the young man's face. He then smiled as well and looked back at the group passing in front of them.

Someone standing behind the two laughed with a snort. The towering beastkin man pointed toward the procession, his arm easily going over their heads. "Heh, it's just like a human of the Central Continent to think that way. Take a look there, mah boy. That there's the Ten Heroic Beasts. You have no idea just how strong the beastkin really are."

"What'd you say?!"

"Can ya see the two standing at the center of the formation? The one covered in armor is General Hoba, a Heroic Beast said to be as strong as a thousand men. The man next to him is the future Beast King, Prince Zeu. I'm truly amazed that they managed to get 'em all together in order to lead the way to victory. Glory to Albahal! The whole world shall sing out praises!"

All of the beastkin at the Rank S dungeon had been sent by their country to spend one year taking it on. The scene before them gave them the sense that their work had paid off.

These men owed their survival to the fact that Prince Zeu had brought all of the beastkin together into one organization and looked after them. This led to the beastkin adventurers building a stronger connection to one another than any of the other races. Due to the close nature of their relationships, one of the men working closely with the prince had let slip what he was planning, leading

to the information spreading among them even faster than it had with the dwarves and humans.

It had been quite some time since these beastkin adventurers had stopped trying to clear the dungeon, though this fact was hardly unique to them. All adventurers who had faced the challenges and terror that awaited in the Rank S dungeon, be they human, dwarf, or beastkin, had given up on the idea. This was nothing more than a place to survive and earn money. By risking their lives, they stood to either earn money or die at the hands of monsters; thus those who had once dreamed of clearing the dungeon quickly concerned themselves only with collecting today's bounty and living to see tomorrow. However, rumors that this reality might change had caused somewhat of a revival in their lust for adventure, which was why they had all gathered to see these heroes off.

This was the day. Today, the Rank S dungeon would be defeated, and not by a party comprised of just one race, but by a party of *all* races—dwarves, humans, beastkin, and even elves. The races knew little about one another, regarding the others almost like inhabitants from another planet, but those watching this multiracial group come together to fight for a common cause could tell that something had changed, even if they could not quite put that feeling into words.

The dwarf, human, and beastkin adventurers exchanged glances and saw identical expressions on each of their faces. The three of them then turned their attention forward, a look of hope in their eyes as they watched the group heading toward the temple. None of them, however, seemed to pay the onlookers any mind.

"This was all Allen's doing, y'know," Dogora, at the back of the formation, muttered to himself in annoyance. He was the only member of the Gamers to object to Allen dropping Helmios's name when providing the Adventurer's Guild with the information they had learned from the dungeon. They had put their lives on the line to get that information, so he believed that it was only right that it be done in Allen's name.

Ultimately, Allen had managed to convince Dogora—albeit grudgingly—that this was the fastest way to get the information out there if they hoped to save any lives. He remained unconvinced over Allen's insistence that they refer to

Prince Zeu as the leader of this campaign to clear the final floor boss of the Rank S dungeon, however.

According to Allen, rather than clearing the dungeon, having Prince Zeu ascend the throne was his end goal. Crown Prince Beku, with his insistence on invading the Central Continent, could not be allowed to become the Beast King. Admiral Garara of Baukis; Helmios, the Hero who had fought the Demon Lord Army on the Central Continent; and even Rohzenheim, which had suffered greatly in the recent war, were all in agreement on this matter. The Five Continent Alliance simply could not be allowed to fall apart, and this campaign to beat the final floor boss and clear the Rank S dungeon was directly connected to that very fate.

While Allen's logic had won over the rest of the No-life Gamers, Dogora remained unconvinced. He did not much care for the fact that it seemed like he and his friends were being used by the queen of Rohzenheim instead of acting on behalf of their friend Sophie.

"Hey, Dogora."

Broken from his thoughts at the sound of his name, Dogora looked in the direction of the person calling out to him.

"Oh, uh, hey, Dverg."

Dverg was walking a few steps ahead of Dogora and still facing forward as he spoke. "Don't worry about it. Heroic acts can hardly be kept under wraps."

"R-Right."

"Those looking for a hero will eventually find what they seek."

"Is that so?" The young man with his signature potato-shaped head was taken aback by the words of the Sword Lord who had spent the past several decades on the battlefield.

"That goes for you too, Dogora."

"Y-You really mean that? I'm gonna be a hero too?" The anger that had been consuming Dogora was washed away by Dverg's compliment. Keel could not help but chuckle wryly under his breath at the sight.

The group eventually arrived at the temple and, thanks to the crowd making way for them, reached Floor 5 in no time flat. Helmios cast a cautious glance around at their surroundings.

“So this is Floor 5, is it?” he asked.

Zeu turned to Allen. “All we have to do is head forward like you said, right?” This was the first time Helmios’s and Zeu’s parties had been to Floor 5.

I guess we should have practiced this at least once. Actually, it’s probably better that we didn’t.

Allen doubted himself for a moment before quickly changing his mind. They would have needed to battle enough golems to get the requisite bronze, iron, and mithril medals for each of the participating parties. He had already collected one set prior to deciding to bring all of the parties together, but he would have had to collect all of those medals all over again if they were to use them just for a little bit of scouting and practice against the final floor boss.

Considering they still did not know where the Goddess of Fire’s divine vessel was or what the Demon Lord Army’s next step would be, however, all four party leaders agreed that they could not waste that time and decided against it. Even if they failed this time, they planned to try as many times as necessary.

The first time Allen broached the subject with Helmios, they had agreed to just give up if they failed on their first try. However, that changed after they heard about the final floor boss from Garara. As he learned more about the situation, Allen decided that his earlier promise with Helmios was null and void.

The group finally reached the floor cube.

“I am Final Floor Boss Transfer System S505. Four each of the three medals have been placed in the table. Four parties may face the final floor boss. Will you begin the challenge?”

“Yes.”

“Certainly. Please confirm that the head party leader is Zeu van Albahal of the Beast Prince Zeu and the Ten Heroic Beasts party.”

Zeu glanced back at Allen, who responded with a nod.

“That is correct.”

“Will you go to the final floor boss now?”

“Yes, please send us on our way.” The moment the words left Zeu’s mouth, the entire group was teleported to a large, open room. It was far larger than the zones in which the Gamers had fought the bronze, iron, and mithril golems, with its ceiling several hundred meters above them. Far off in the distance, they could hear the low rumbling sound of something moving.

The group spied five golems standing in a row over a hundred meters away from where they had teleported in.

Well, things are shaping up just like I’d heard.

The one-hundred-meter-tall hihirokane golem, which gleamed vermilion, was the final floor boss they were here for. Something about it stood out to Allen, though.

Now that I think about it, BB, Scarlet, and Crimson were all red too.

Allen could not help but wonder if there was a reason all of the Rank S floor bosses were a shade of red.

The golems remained stock-still as Allen and the gathered parties took stock of the area. Just like with the other Floor 5 golems, it seemed that the battle would not start until the group had come within a certain distance.

“Woow.”

Dogora could hardly contain his amazement. Meanwhile, Keel was clearly concerned.

“Do you think we can beat it?”

“Huh? We should be able to, as long as we stick to the plan. Right, Helmios?”

Helmios smiled wryly at Allen’s prompting. “Well, Dygragni *did* tell me to give it a shot if I thought I was good enough. To be honest, though, I’m not so sure.”

Why’s he gotta be so half-hearted about this? All we can do now is hope and pray that we’ve done enough to secure our victory.

The Rank S dungeon’s final floor boss had never been defeated.

Allen recalled in his past life that there were some games with bosses that simply could not be defeated. They were set up such that they either had absurdly high endurance and thus ignored players’ attacks or had infinite HP. Some boss battles even came to an end upon the boss taking a certain amount of damage, building excitement among the players over the prospect of being able to defeat it through skill adjustments or by equipping items added in a future game update.

However, considering that the creator of the final floor boss, Dygragni, had not stated that it was impossible to defeat, Allen went about structuring his parties and preparing his strategies under the assumption that it could be.

I guess things are going to play out just like Admiral Garara said. Allen once again closely inspected the golems as he thought about the upcoming fight. The hihiirokane golem was joined by two iron golems, one bronze golem, and one mithril golem. *At least now I know why he told me that we can’t just rush in.*

“Ain’t nothin’ ta fear here, men! This time ’round, victory will be ours!” Admiral Garara shouted out to his men to get them ready for battle.

“W-We’ll give it our all, Admiral!”

I figure the Gamers should be good to go. We’ve maxed out all our levels and have stat-boosting rings to boot.

Allen opened his grimoire to check his party’s stats.

Name: Krena
Age: 15
Class: Sword Emperor
Level: 60
HP: 4,150 + 3,000
MP: 1,832 + 3,000
Attack: 4,150 + 3,000
Endurance: 3,968 + 3,000
Agility: 3,510 + 3,000

Intelligence: 2,250
Luck: 2,688 + 3,000
Skills: Sword Emperor {6}, Slash {6}, Phoenix Smash {6},
Healing Blade {6}, Supreme Ruling Blade {6}, Valor {2},
Sword Mastery {6}
Extra Skill: Limit Break

Equipment

Ring 1: +5,000 Attack
Ring 2: +5,000 Attack
Adamantite Greatsword: +3,500 Attack
Adamantite Armor: +3,000 Endurance

Name: Cecil Granvelle
Age: 15
Class: Wizardess King
Level: 60
HP: 2,470 + 2,400
MP: 3,974 + 2,400
Attack: 1,640
Endurance: 1,686
Agility: 3,382 + 2,400
Intelligence: 4,138 + 2,400
Luck: 2,541 + 2,400
Skills: Wizardess King {6}, Fire {6}, Ice {6}, Thunder {6},
Light {6}, Abyss {2}, Sparring {4}
Extra Skill: Petit Meteor

Equipment

Ring 1: +5,000 Intelligence
Ring 2: +5,000 Endurance
Rod of the Wizardess King: +4,000 Intelligence, +20%
Magical Damage
Robe of the Wizardess King: +4,000 Endurance, Magical
Damage Resistance (High)

Name: Dogora
Age: 15
Class: Destroyer
Level: 60
HP: 4,089 + 2,400
MP: 1,919
Attack: 4,348 + 2,400
Endurance: 3,595 + 2,400
Agility: 2,849 + 2,400
Intelligence: 1,757
Luck: 2,664 + 2,400
Skills: Destroyer {6}, Full Might {6}, Explosion {6},
Peerless Slash {6}, Slaughter Strike {6}, Fighting Soul
{2}, Axe Mastery {6}, Shield Mastery {4}
Extra Skill: Heart and Soul

Equipment

Ring 1: +5,000 Attack
Ring 2: +5,000 Attack
Adamantite Greataxe: +4,000 Attack
Adamantite Large Shield: +3,000 Endurance
Adamantite Armor: +3,000 Endurance

Name: Keel von Carnel
Age: 15
Class: Saint King
Level: 60
HP: 2,740 + 2,400
MP: 4,100 + 2,400
Attack: 1,580
Endurance: 1,786
Agility: 2,893 + 2,400
Intelligence: 4,030 + 2,400
Luck: 3,634 + 2,400
Skills: Saint King {6}, Healing {6}, Exorcism {6}, Purify

{6}, Holy Wall {6}, Pray {2}, Sword Mastery {3}

Extra Skill: Drops of God

Equipment

Ring 1: +5,000 HP

Ring 2: +5,000 Endurance

Rod of the Saint King: +4,000 Intelligence, +3,000 HP, +20% Healing

Vestment of the Saint King: +4,000 Endurance, Magic Resistance (High), Curse Resistance (High)

Name: Sophialohne

Age: 50

Blessing: God of Spirits

Class: Grand Spirit User

Level: 60

HP: 2,834 + 2,400

MP: 4,156 + 2,400

Attack: 1,933

Endurance: 1,719

Agility: 3,011 + 2,400

Intelligence: 4,243 + 2,400

Luck: 3,453 + 2,400

Skills: Spirit Manifestation {6}, Water {6}, Wind {6}, Earth {6}, Wood {6}, Bow Mastery {3}

Extra Skill: Grand Spirit Manifestation

Equipment

Ring 1: +5,000 MP

Ring 2: +5,000 Endurance

Rod of the Grand Spirit User: +6,000 MP, -10% MP consumption

Raiment of Spirits: +2,000 MP, +3,000 Endurance, Breath Damage Resistance (Mid)

Name: Volmaar
Age: 69
Class: Bow King
Level: 60
HP: 3,436 + 2,400
MP: 1,949
Attack: 3,965 + 2,400
Endurance: 2,960 + 2,400
Agility: 3,428 + 2,400
Intelligence: 1,566
Luck: 1,972 + 2,400
Skills: Bow King {6}, Keen Sight {6}, Fire Dragon Shot {6}, Strongbow {6}, Power Shot {6}, Angled Shot {2} Bow Mastery {6}
Extra Skill: Arrow of Light

Equipment

Ring 1: +5,000 HP
Ring 2: +5,000 Attack
Adamantite Greatbow: +3,800 Attack
Garment of the Chief Protector: +4,000 Endurance, Breath Damage Resistance (Mid)

Name: Meruru
Age: 15
Class: Talos General
Level: 60
HP: 1,677 + 1,800
MP: 2,420 + 1,800
Attack: 782 + 1,800
Endurance: 1,318 + 1,800
Agility: 782
Intelligence: 2,420
Luck: 1,503
Skills: Talos General {6}, Flying Arm {6}, Drill Punch {6},

Laser Sword {6}, Repair {6}, Alloy {2}, Spear Mastery {3},
Shield Mastery {3}
Extra Skill: Union (Right Arm)

Equipment

Ring 1: +5,000 HP

Ring 2: +5,000 MP

Necklace: Magic Disc

Magitech Specialist Cloak: +3,000 Endurance, + 2,000 MP

After looking over all their stats, Allen closed his grimoire, convinced that his friends were ready for the battle ahead. All around him, the group armed themselves and got in formation, just as they had practiced.

“All right then, we’re gonna do this just like we practiced. We’ll cast the buffs once we get a bit closer.”

Zeus, Garara, and Helmios all nodded in response before giving orders to their respective parties.

I haven’t heard anything about there being any kind of time limit for beating the final floor boss, but I’d like to keep the battle to under an hour.

Allen was planning on the Abilities and Awakened Abilities of his Fish-type Summons to carry the day. Though normal Abilities lasted twenty-four hours, Awakened Abilities only lasted one. Assuming this battle would be even more difficult than when they had battled Rehzal, Allen had doubts about whether he would have time to recast buffs on the party.

While Allen was using the Abilities and Awakened Abilities of his Fish Summons on the four parties, Keel would also be casting his holy skills and Sophie would have her wood spirit manifest itself.

“Honorable wood spirit Dryad, please buff this party.”

“Okay, sure.”

Dryad, a spirit who took the form of a young girl with trees where her arms

and legs should have been, appeared in the air above the group and began to shake her branches. The whole group experienced a boost to their stats as the leaves rained down on them. This process was then followed by her manifesting her wind, earth, and water spirits.

Sophie's Spirit Magic

- Water spirit Nymph: +3,000 MP
- Wind spirit Gale: +3,000 Agility
- Earth spirit Pygmy: +3,000 Endurance
- Wood spirit Dryad: +3,000 HP

Sweet! Looks like Sophie's spirits have really powered up. That's gonna be a huge help. I gotta admit, I'm really impressed that each of the spirits is able to boost our stats by 3,000 points.

While Cecil's growth as a Wizardess King gave her the ability to cause more direct damage through her offensive magic, Sophie's new class of Grand Spirit User gave her a tremendous boost in her recovery and defensive skills. The most notable of these was her ability to manifest a wood spirit, which was proving to be a huge boon.

Once Sophie was finished, the Holy Knight in Helmios's party cast their buffs next. In this world, buffs from different skills could stack, meaning that the Holy Knight's buffs were added to those given by the spirit magic. However, as was the case with the Cleric class and its promoted class Saint, buffs coming from the same Talent line only allowed for the higher class's skill to take effect; the buff from the lower class would be lost. Helmios had two Saintesses in his party, but as they were of a lower class level than Keel's Saint King, their buffs would be overwritten by his.

In addition to that, the beastkin's Talents seemed to be on a completely different class line, possibly due in some part to the Beast God Garm, meaning that their skill and magic buffs also stacked.

The two Saintesses simply stood by, waiting along with the rest of Stinger and Meruru. The moment the dwarves called forth their golems could very well be

the moment the battle with the final floor boss started.

I'm glad I brought all these groups here with us. Each group has their own diverse abilities and skills, which I can only hope will prove useful in the upcoming battle.

Lepe, the Beast Bard, clapped his hands together and shouted toward their opponents. "Heh, interesting. So this is what kind of enemies lurk outside our borders. Battle Beat!"

Several long, tubular drums appeared and Lepe began to dance between them, slapping the top of the drums in a fast-paced rhythm. This was his skill known as Battle Beat, which boosted the Attack stat of all nearby party members by twenty-four percent. Once his performance was finished, the drums disappeared and he called forth a thin, round percussion instrument akin to a tambourine, which he hit with his free hand while he danced. This skill added a twenty-four percent buff to Agility.

Whoa, this guy's amazing!

There were not a lot of classes that had Attack-boosting skills. The most common buffs were to Endurance and were mostly given to others by healing classes such as Clerics.

While an impressed Allen was still checking out the effects of Lepe's skills, Temi took her turn in the spotlight.

"Celestial Protection!"

The squirrelkin reached into a bag in her cloak and threw its contents into the air. The crystals and gems twinkled as they floated around the parties, granting all members the status buff of auto-regenerating HP and MP.

Allen was really getting into it now.

Now this is what I'm talking about! I'm getting the same thrill I had whenever I did a raid!

Emphasis was usually placed on the arrangement of each individual member when working in a small party, but when you started working with thirty or even fifty people, party members were able to complement one another.

Additionally, having a team of this size allowed a person or two to have classes normally not found in their party, as this actually gave the whole group an even more stable footing—a style of play that Allen had learned during his previous life as a gamer. He was thrilled to finally have a chance to put this into practice for the first time since being reincarnated here.

After all the buffs had been cast, it was finally time for things to get underway. Allen took a deep breath to try and keep himself from getting too excited.

“All right then, let’s get going.” Zeu, Garara, and Helmios all nodded in agreement as their respective parties got into the agreed-upon formations and started to advance. Once they were fifty meters out, the hihirokane golem’s eyes lit up.

“I am Goldino, protector of the Tower of Tribulation,” its voice boomed, echoing throughout the room. “Have you measly runts come to challenge me?”

Huh, I never thought I’d see the day when someone would call me a measly runt. In fairness, Allen and his group must have looked minuscule to the massive golem. More importantly, though, I guess Goldino here has a sense of self. Seems like it’s no different than the final boss of the Rank A dungeon in that it doesn’t recall those who’ve fought it before.

Admiral Garara and his party tensed up for a moment at the sight of the hihirokane golem, but it did not appear that the monster was paying any special attention to them. As far as Allen could tell, it seemed as if it had no memory of its battle against Stinger and that its personality and memories were reset each time someone confronted it. In that case, it would not be adapting to their strategy each time they faced off against him.

“Show me what you’ve got, if you wish to defeat me.”

As soon as Goldino finished speaking, the other golems began to move. This was all in line with what Admiral Garara had told Allen. Now, all they had to do was stick to their strategy.

“Run toward the left hallway, now!” Allen quickly made eye contact with Zeu, Garara, and Helmios in turn before shouting out his command.

While Zeu was the overall leader of the parties, it was decided that Allen, who was accustomed to raids, would take command during the battle. Based on the flow of the battle, he would decide which enemy to attack, as well as when to defend, hang back, and retreat. Each of the party leaders would then issue more direct and specific orders to their respective parties.

Allen was in his element taking command of a raid.

“Yeaah!” the group shouted out in unison at Allen’s command. Thanks to their practice over the past five days, all of the members had grown to trust that he would properly analyze the situation and come up with the best strategy, and thus immediately took action.

Some party members rode on Bird Bs summoned by Allen, while others, such as Dverg, moved under their own power. Thanks to their small size compared to their enemy, the group members were able to fight on a three-dimensional plane by taking to the air.

“What’s this?! You’re running away?! C-Cowards!” Judging from Goldino’s sudden outburst, it seemed as if the inhuman golem also had a rather human side.

Though the golems were slow on their feet, they had a long stride thanks to their immense height and were able to cover tens of times as much ground as the group could. In just a few steps, the golems were on them. But this was all according to plan.

“All right, ye scurvy dogs! Let’s show ’em what we’re made of!” Admiral Garara shouted to Stinger, who served as the retreating parties’ rear guard.

“Raaah!”



The thirteen dwarves, accompanied by Meruru, roared in unison and grabbed their magic discs. The discs glowed as a massive wall made up of fifteen one-hundred-meter-tall golems appeared between Goldino and the rest of the retreating party.

Goldino looked over the golems and immediately took notice of the hihirokane golem standing among them. “Hm, I see one of you has a hihirokane golem.”

The vermilion golem standing at the center of the formation was Geraraba, Admiral Garara’s golem. The base stats of the golems called forth by the magic discs were largely determined by their rank: bronze was 1,000, iron was 1,500, mithril was 3,000, and hihirokane was an impressive 5,000.

The Gamers had acquired the magic disc that could call forth a hihirokane golem from a silver chest, which he then presented to Admiral Garara on the first day all four parties gathered for practice. By using this and turning Geraraba into a super hihirokane golem, all of its stats increased to 25,000 and the effects of the admiral’s Talos King skills were boosted.

After handing over the super hihirokane set, Allen had Admiral Garara show him his magic disc so he could make a note of Geraraba’s stats in his grimoire.

Name:	Geraraba
Pilot:	Garara
Rank:	Hihirokane
HP:	25,000 + 2,400
MP:	25,000 + 2,400
Attack:	25,000 + 2,400
Endurance:	25,000 + 2,400
Agility:	25,000
Intelligence:	25,000 + 2,400
Luck:	25,000

Goldino and its party of golems immediately attacked the dwarves’ golem

wall.

“Hrngh!”

A mithril golem had one of its arms destroyed by using it to block the incoming bronze golem’s drill punch.

“You okay, Beruruka?!”

“Aye, sir!”

Beruruka, the pilot located in the crystal cockpit of the mithril golem with the decimated arm, hurriedly swapped out the mithril slate. Instantly, the destroyed appendage was replaced with a fully intact one.

Allen had given a large number of slates to the dwarves. He and his party had pulled over a thousand of these “useless” drops from wooden chests over time. While Allen had planned to have the dwarves return the slates once the final floor boss was defeated, he had told them to use as many as they needed until then. Even if their golems’ bodies were destroyed and became unusable, they could use their Repair skills to once again use the slates, meaning that it did not really matter if they took some damage.

“Orochi, I want you to go in front of the admiral and support our retreat!”

“Ahhh!”

“Certainly, Master Allen! Leave it to me! Groooar!” The Dragon A Summon slipped through the wall and blocked the path of the oncoming enemy golems. While it was busy doing that, Geraraba stepped forward and took an attack from the bronze golem head-on. Though the hihirokane golem’s body was much stronger than Beruruka’s mithril golem, it still began to take damage under the onslaught.

Allen looked down at the battle unfolding below from his position atop a Bird B high in the sky. The golems were acting as a barrier while Allen’s Summons played a support role, allowing the party to escape. In a matter of moments, they would reach the entrance to the hallway located along the room’s outer wall. However, though the golems had been able to provide an impenetrable barrier against all of the floor bosses up through Floor 4, the five enemy golems were giving them trouble. Just like Beruruka had done before them, many of

the golems were swapping out damaged arms, heads, and legs for new ones in order to stay in the fight, but it looked as if they were about to be overrun by the powerful enemies.

Things aren't looking good. Guess I have no other choice.

Allen issued his next command, which was then repeated using Bird F's Transmission Ability. The Ability was usable within a three-kilometer radius, which allowed Allen to easily give orders to all parties even in this huge battle zone.

"All right, everyone, I want you to use your supercombined form!"

"Huh?! Are ye sure?? Don't ye think it's a li'l early?!" Admiral Garara's reply boomed from his golem's mouth. The original plan called for them to wait a little bit longer.

"Don't worry about that! This is only our first try! We've gotta fight back any way that seems like it'll work!"

Geraraba nodded in response. "All right, got it! Let's go, men! Time to combine!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" all thirteen golems responded in unison. They then, with the dwarves still in their crystal cockpits, began to give off a shimmering haze as their eyes lit up.

"C'mon over here, Meruru! You'll be the right arm!"

"Yes sir!" Tam-Tam shoved off from the mithril golem it was engaged with and approached Geraraba. All fourteen mithril golems surrounded the admiral's hihirokane golem, and an instant later, the room was filled with a blinding flash of light. When it died down, three immense golems were standing in their place. By using the Extra Skill Union, five super golems could come together to become one supercombined golem.

Whoa, now that's epic!

Allen looked excitedly over at the supercombined golems and could not help but think of the combiner robots he recalled from his past life.

Union allowed golems of the same size to join together into what was known

as a “supercombined” form. Of course, just like other Extra Skills, it could only be used for an hour and would need to cool down for a day before it could be used again. This was one of the reasons Allen hoped to keep the battle with the final floor boss to under an hour.

The pilots found themselves in a large crystal cockpit in the chest of their combined golem, with five dwarves per cockpit. Furthermore, each of the combined golems stood around 150 meters tall, not only making them one and a half times the size they were before combining, but also granting them a 1.5 multiplier on their stats, sending them up to the 10,000 level. The combined golem formed with the hihirokane golem received an even greater boost.

Admiral Garara let out a roar. “Yaaaaar! Ye fools don’t know what ye’ve got comin’!” The combined golem whose chest was made of hihirokane punched the nearby bronze golem, sending it stumbling backward, then wrapped its arms around its opponent’s waist, lifted it up, and hurled it toward one of the iron golems.

“You’re the one who doesn’t know what you’ve gotten into! Mithril golem, you’re up!”

At Goldino’s command, the mithril golem began to float into the air and transform into its flying mode. Just as Allen had previously experienced when fighting against it in the Mithril Zone, the golem began shooting balls of light from its twin cannons. He had anticipated this, however, and quickly Summoned multiple Stone As.

“You’re up, Rockanel! Don’t let any shots get through!”

As soon as the five Stone As were Summoned, they shot out gold orbs which absorbed nearly all of the mithril golem’s light bullets. In only a matter of moments, two of the Summons had already reached their absorption limit.

“That’s good enough! Time to mow ’em down!”

Allen had the ones that reached their limit use their Awakened Ability, Focused Bombardment. The shots went straight through the mithril golem, tearing it apart.

With the mithril golem defeated, a line of text appeared on Allen’s grimoire.

<You have defeated 1 mithril golem. You have earned 800,000,000 XP.>

“Heh, so you think that’s enough to win? Iron, use Repair Energy!”

He’s doing a great job at playing the role of a villain.

At Goldino’s command, one of the iron golems fully healed the mithril golem.

Having two members that can use revive abilities makes this way harder than it needs to be. It’s probably safe to assume they’d bring Goldino back too if we defeat it.

While Allen was thinking over the situation, one of the Bird Bs he had lent to the other party let him know that the group had made it to the hallway and were waiting there.

“All right, everyone! Let’s head for the hallway. Admiral, your combined golem will take the rear!”

The three supercombined golems made their way into the hallway one after another. Though the hallway was fairly wide, it was not wide enough for them to pass each other. Therefore, unless all three were defeated, there was no need to worry about any enemy golems slipping through the gaps or going around them. However, the ceiling was quite high, which would allow the mithril golem to use its ability to fly and shoot balls of light at them, necessitating that Allen use more Stone As to absorb any incoming attacks.

“Look at you, escaping like rats!” Goldino’s voice boomed from behind the bronze golem chasing after Admiral Garara, who stood at the back of the formation. “What, have you lost the will to fight? I’m really going to enjoy crushing you cowards!” Behind Goldino were the spear and shield iron golems, as well as the mithril golem floating in the air above them.

Allen looked down at the formation from his airborne perch atop the Bird B.

Hmm, so this is the formation they’ve decided to take. Personally, I really would have preferred it if he’d split up the iron golems. Oh well, we should still be able to pull it off.

Allen then issued a command to Merus, whom he had Summoned earlier.

“Merus, you’re up.”

“Got it.”

Merus flew over the top of Admiral Garara’s golem, which was currently taking a drill punch from the bronze golem, and headed straight toward Goldino.

Admiral Garara’s supercombined golem and the bronze golem fought on, gaining and losing ground in turn. With the five golems combined, they were finally able to hold their own, so it was now a matter of just how strong their opponent was. However, the party members with offensive magic and the ability to shoot arrows began to lay into the bronze golem from long range and slowly chip away at its HP.

Finally, Merus arrived at his target.

“Are we ready to go?”

“Yep, I assigned an element and created a nest.”

After hearing Merus’s reply, Allen turned back toward the group farther down the hallway.

“All right, time to strike! Helmios, you’re up! Homing Instinct!”

“Hmm?” By the time Goldino realized that something was up, it was too late. The iron golems at the back of the formation were already under attack.

“I’m taking the rear! Now to get down to business!”

“Looks like it’s my time to shine!”

At Helmios’s command, the whole party, led by Dverg, let out a roar of excitement.

Sacred and the supercombined golem were teleported to the entrance of the hallway and began attacking the shield-bearing iron golem at the back of the group in a pincer formation.

By using Bird A’s Awakened Ability, Homing Instinct, Allen could choose anyone within a kilometer of his current location and teleport them to a nest he had created. The Ability had several restrictions, such as whatever he was

teleporting needing to be completely within the teleportation range, which seemed to end at the ground—he was unable to teleport any trees with deeply buried roots, houses with deep-set foundations, or rocks buried firmly in the ground. However, as long as they were within range, he figured he should be able to teleport over a thousand soldiers along with their supplies. Obviously, then, a 150-meter-tall supercombined golem was no problem.

By using Homing Instinct, Allen was able to teleport one of the supercombined golems along with the entirety of Helmios's party, Sacred, behind the column of enemy golems who had followed them into the hallway. In order to create the all-important nest, Allen had sent Merus to the designated location and Summoned a Bird A there to create one. Merus's Ability, Angel Halo, allowed him to Summon in place of Allen, which effectively eliminated the limit on how far away Allen could call forth one of his Summons.

The key to Allen's strategy was taking advantage of the fact that Merus was able to move about on his own at high speed and freely create nests. He flew over yet another enemy golem's head, followed closely by Helmios and Sacred.

Allen continued issuing commands using this Bird F's Transmission Ability. "All right, the foundation's in place. Good luck, guys!" The moment Sacred began their assault, the other party members still in the hallway also began to attack.

"Yaaaah! Let's do this!"

"All right, they're finished!"

Dogora and Krena, tired of having spent this whole time waiting, swooped in toward the bronze golem atop their Bird Bs, followed closely by the Ten Heroic Beasts.

"Hey, I'm comin' too! I can't stand waiting any longer!" Razo, the spear specialist rhinokin, shouted out as he launched forward. He paid no mind to the bronze golem's drill punch flying right over his head and swung his halberd, striking his target in the side with a tremendous metallic clang. His attack had so much power behind it that the shock wave visibly reverberated across the walls as the bronze golem stumbled backward.

Razo, who was thrown backward by the sheer force, readjusted himself in midair before landing on the hallway floor, a look of surprise evident on his

face. He could hardly believe that he had just been thrown back several dozen meters and was in awe of just how powerful the stat-booting rings he had borrowed from Allen made him.

“Looks like that’s about par for the course for you, Razo.”

“Just what are these things? This is pretty impressive!”

The other Heroic Beasts continued to chat among themselves as they discovered the effects of the rings during their onslaught on the bronze golem.

“I feel so light, almost like I’ve grown wings!”

Senu, a leopardkin dual-sword specialist, used their twin adamantite swords to slash at the bronze golem’s ankles with lightning speed. They were moving so fast that their movements all blurred together.

Fantastic, it looks like the beastkin’s attacks are working. Here in this world, attacks can become practically meaningless if there’s too big a gap between an attacker’s Attack stat and their opponent’s Endurance, but it looks like that’s not a problem here.

The Ten Heroic Beasts were all beaming with excitement as they swung their weapons and laid into the massive enemy. Even Zeus seemed pleased at the sight from where he stood a short distance away.

“Good job, men.”

While they had each earned the title of being the strongest in their division through the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament, they hardly ever got a chance to make use of their abilities until the following year’s tournament since Crown Prince Beku prevented them from going to the Rank S dungeon in the Empire of Baukis. The act of Albahal acknowledging their strength was, in effect, a prison sentence for them.

They were now realizing how much more exhilarating it was to fight with all they had against an immense enemy rather than simply having the chance to show off their skills in their own home country once a year.

“Well, it’s better than living in fear.”

“You’re right. Oh, looks like I’m up.”

“Yes, sir. Be careful of the drill punch, Your Highness.”

“Of course. My wife is waiting for me back home, after all.”

Prince Zeu lightly punched his metal knuckles together before making his way toward the bronze golem.

Allen looked down once again at the scene unfolding below him from his Bird B perch.

Well, well. It looks like things are going just as we planned.

Their enemy was at least as strong as Rehzal, if not stronger. However, their stats were now increased to unbelievable levels thanks to their HP-and Endurance-boosting rings. Even those in the rear of the formation could survive a direct hit.

“Why you impudent little fools! I’m going to crush you like the bugs you are! Stomp them, Bronze!”

At Goldino’s order, the bronze golem raised its massive leg high into the air. However...

“You really think we’re gonna let you do that?!” The supercombined golem kicked the bronze golem’s raised leg, causing its attack to miss.

“Insolent bastards!”

Goldino thrust a beam lance it had created earlier past the off-balance bronze golem and landed a direct blow to the supercombined golem’s shoulder.

“Ngh!” The supercombined golem retreated upon taking the hit.

The enemy has a pretty much perfect arrangement of abilities, including close-, mid-, and long-range attacks. Goldino is clearly the strongest of the bunch, but it seems like its attacks aren’t actually that strong. Could that mean that it has some sort of other, hidden ability?

From the bronze golem at the front with its drill punch to Goldino behind it with its beam lance, followed up by the mithril golem’s long-range attack at the back of the formation, it seemed as if they had entered the hallway so as to take advantage of each of their respective weapons. Out of all of these enemies, however, Allen still did not know what kind of skills or special abilities

Goldino had, making it the only wild card of the bunch. Judging by the looks of the supercombined golem who had taken a direct blow from the beam lance, it did not seem like Goldino had a particularly impressive Attack stat.

After a few moments, General Hoba dove through the air and struck his massive hammer against the bronze golem's chest, killing it.

"Whoa, you guys did it?!"

A new line of text appeared on the cover of Allen's grimoire.

<You have defeated 1 bronze golem. You have earned 480,000,000 XP.>

However, one of the iron golems behind Goldino used Repair Energy, allowing the bronze golem to clamber back to its feet. The mithril golem had also fallen at the hands of a Stone A's Focused Bombardment attack, but it, too, was once again revived.

Zeu looked up to Allen for advice. "As soon as we take them down, they're brought right back."

"That's all according to plan. There are fewer attacks coming our way during the brief window before they're revived, so we just need to keep defeating them. Admiral Garara, go ahead and fall back slowly."

"Aye, just as we'd planned."

While it may have looked at first glance like nothing was changing, Allen's group was slowly retreating down the hallway. Unfortunately, this caused a problem among the group forming the rear guard.

"I can't keep up with the healing!"

"Everyone, stay close! Please, I'm begging you!"

The two beast healers cried out. They were at the center of the retreating group, taking care of allies wounded by the bronze golem's short-range attacks, Goldino's medium-range attacks, and the long-range attacks from the mithril golem that the Stone As were unable to block. They were healing nonstop and were not able to match the pace of the damage being dealt.

The Ten Heroic Beasts were a group specializing in war, sporting five

members at the vanguard, one offensive magic expert, and one shield bearer. Two-thirds of their group was specialized for offense, while the remaining members were made up of two buff givers and a single healer named Fui, a goatkin with the Greater Beast Saint Talent who used healing magic. Though not one of the Ten Heroic Beasts, they were also joined by Sara, a catkin with the Beast Cleric Talent. She could not provide anywhere near as much healing as Fui could, but Allen figured that she would be of assistance since numbers were the name of the game during raid battles.

Helmios and Sacred were behind the enemy formation and were running short on healers. Meanwhile, the rear guard was also coming under attack due to the sheer volume of attacks the enemy sent down the narrow hall. As a result, the situation was quickly overcoming Sara, who was at her healing limit, and Fui, who had little experience with large-scale combat.

Keel, a Saint King, called out to the other two.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got this. You just focus on healing the rear guard.”

He then began chanting his healing spells, anticipating how the rampaging beastkin and Bird B-riding Krena and Dogora would move, as well as the attacks they would be hit by a few seconds later. On top of that, he had to consider who would be in the healing area when he cast the spell, whether they often took attacks head-on, and what their Endurance stats were.

Keel and the other two were responsible for healing all those who remained in the hallway with Allen and the group, including Prince Zeu, the Ten Heroic Beasts, and the two remaining supercombined golems. About half of that group was Keel’s responsibility, though most of this was done by him anticipating what would happen next as he chanted recovery spell after recovery spell to keep up with the rapid movements of the beastkin on the front line.

Fui was impressed at Keel’s skill. “Y-You’re amazing! I’ve never seen someone cast their spells so fast. I can only hope I’ll get there someday.”

“Please, just let me concentrate on healing. My Intelligence stat is still too low, so I can’t spare any more than what I’m already doing. I can’t do anything for the rear guard.”

Upon hearing that they would be facing five enemies at once this time, Allen

figured that he and his companions would be attacked more frequently than ever before. In order to combat this, he decided to give rings that increased HP or Endurance to the group, emphasizing those in the rear guard. Now, thanks to the effects of both the rings and the stacked buffs, even the members of the rear guard could survive multiple blows. However, this also meant that Keel was not equipped with any rings to boost his Intelligence. This was currently hampering him, but even so, the way he was able to work his skills really impressed both Fui and Allen. Allen was doubly amazed, as he had never played the role of a healer in his past life.

Wow, Keel's really going all out.

Between class promotions, improved equipment, and even changing how they fought, the No-life Gamers had grown quite a bit during their preparations to clear the Rank S dungeon. Allen figured that Keel had undergone the most growth, however, given how he had finally grasped the extent of his power.

Making use of healing magic involved multiple stages: chanting, casting, and then, finally, the restoration of health. Each stage took a few seconds, but that shortened as one's Intelligence stat went up. In addition, by casting the healing magic several seconds prior to the target actually being hit with an attack and thus taking advantage of the lag between casting and healing, a sort of "reserve healing" state could be achieved. Doing so enabled the healer to greatly reduce the chance of the target sustaining any critical injuries by anticipating attacks and casting healing magic in advance, allowing the subject to take multiple blows at once. The person being healed would avoid losing the initiative or power behind their blows due to injury, and the healer could dynamically respond to the situation as long as they were able to predict what would happen next as they cast their healing spells.

Keel had expressed some annoyance when Allen first told him to work on this reserve healing process, as it was all easier said than done. However, after getting into the swing of predicting enemies' attacks, his allies' actions, and the timing of his healing spells, he was able to put it into practice. And though it had taken a lot of work to get used to using it on the friends he had been fighting alongside for so long, he was quickly able to put it into practice for the other parties as well despite having only five days to train.

Back in the games Allen had played in his past life, this would have been referred to as the player's skill. Allen could tell that Keel's skill had improved more than that of any of the other Gamers.

Oh well, this isn't exactly the time or place to dwell on these things. Besides, it looks like the battle is about to turn and it's almost my turn to enter the fray.

While Helmios kept the iron golems busy at the back of the pack, Admiral Garara's supercombined golem was slowly drawing Goldino and the bronze golem back, creating a space between them and the iron golems. Allen knew perfectly well what the range limit on their Repair Energy ability was—if things continued as they were, it was just a matter of time until they would lose their ability to revive their allies.

"We're almost there! They'll only have one ally who can bring them back soon!"

After sharing that information with the rest of the parties, Allen issued a command to Merus.

"Hngh!" Goldino grunted as it realized what Allen was doing. It stopped pressing the attack and called out to the other golems. "Gah, we have no choice but to fall back. To me!" Just before they stopped their forward advance, Merus arrived with a report and Allen used his Bird A's Awakened Ability.

"Heh, like I'm gonna let that happen!" In an instant, he teleported one of the supercombined golems into the gap between Goldino and the iron golems while pressing the assault on the iron golems from down the hallway behind them.

"What are you doing, you little runt?! Iron golems, on me!" Goldino's command, however, went unheeded. One of the iron golems farther down the hallway was being held back by the supercombined golem, and the other, near the entrance, had just been defeated by the party led by Helmios and Merus.

"Good job, team!" Helmios called out to his party. "That's one challenge down!"

"On to the next target!" Merus used the Bird A's Awakened Ability, Return to Nest, to teleport Helmios and his party to the other iron golem. Even while

under the heavy onslaught inflicted upon it by the supercombined golem, the iron golem was still hard at work bringing the bronze and mithril golems back when Helmios and his party arrived to join the fray. Several minutes later, the second golem was also defeated, and Helmios and Merus finally reached Goldino.

Meanwhile, the mithril golem was shot down at the hands of several Stone As' Focused Bombardment Abilities. Now that it was again safe to travel around by air, Allen hopped onto a Bird B and flew over to get a closer look at Goldino.

Hmm, just like I thought. Its Endurance stat is pretty impressive, though all of its stats are higher than those of the other golems. I doubt Merus or even Helmios's party can really do much damage to it.

It only made sense that the final floor boss would be pretty powerful. However, now that Goldino was busy fending off attacks from Merus and Helmios, it was no longer able to protect the bronze golem. Garara's supercombined golem, along with the Gamers and Prince Zeu's party, could now lay on the damage. Cecil and a Beast Archwizard mousekin named Rato focused their fire-based attacks on the bronze golem and managed to take it down in no time.

"All right, the bronze golem's down! That leaves just Goldino. Sweep in for a pincer strike!" At Allen's command, Garara's supercombined golem and the Ten Heroic Beasts moved into the space occupied by the bronze golem mere moments before, closing in on Goldino.

"Y-You mongrels! Now I'm going to show you what I'm really made of!"

"A-Allen, it looks like it's about to do something!" Cecil called out to Allen from behind, surprise clear in her voice.

Goldino let out a tremendous roar and its eyes flashed. "Components, come to me!"

Following its orders, the four golems began to float in the air.

Chapter 12: Battling the Final Floor Boss (Part 2)

Allen heard shouts of astonishment coming from Helmios and his party, Sacred, as the iron golem's body floated through the air toward them. It then, together with the other iron golem the group had defeated, transformed into two large legs. Goldino retracted its limbs into its body and landed atop the legs as the bronze golem connected to its right shoulder and the mithril golem to its left. The mithril golem further rearranged itself until it was bristling with gun barrels of various sizes. A long artillery battery formed atop either of its shoulders, each with multiple barrels aimed toward the ceiling, as Goldino completed its transformation into its supercombined form.

“Now I’m brimming with power! Behold my true form. Fear me, mortals, and quake in your boots as you meet your maker! Bwa ha ha!”

The very walls of the hallway shuddered as Goldino laughed, its supercombined form now filling the entire width of the passage. It sounded to Allen like a cheap cartoon villain.

Allen continued to circle around in the sky as he issued orders to the group. “Looks like Goldino also has a combined form! Golems, focus on protecting the rear guard and stop Goldino in its tracks!”

“Bwa ha! I don’t care how many of you weaklings there are; there’s no safety in numbers!”

Just as Goldino finished speaking, the two multibarrel batteries on its shoulders aimed behind it and started shooting toward the entrance of the hallway. The barrels rotated swiftly, sending countless balls of light the size of a person’s head flying down the hallway. They flew so fast that it looked like a solid beam of light. Merus quickly Summoned several Stone As above the shots and had them release their steel balls to try and use Absorb to block the attacks. Alas, there were too many shots, and cracks quickly began to form on their bodies as they reached their absorption limits.

Whoa, looks like Rockanel’s not going to be able to absorb it all.

“Merus, Summon more Rockanels! They can’t take it all!”

“Aaagh!” Meanwhile, Goldino raised its left arm toward Admiral Garara and the others closing in from farther down the hallway and began shooting balls of light out of the myriad guns covering its arm. Garara’s supercombined golem threw its arms up in front of its chest, forming them into a large X in order to take the shots head-on and protect the rest of the group standing behind him. A moment later, he was struck by a drill punch from Goldino’s right arm.

“Aughhh!”

Admiral Garara’s supercombined golem staggered backward as fragments of its destroyed arms rained to the ground. Meruru and the other dwarves hurriedly replaced the slates in their magic discs and slapped away the drill punch with its regenerated arms.

“Use Focused Bombardment on its shoulders!” Allen shouted to two Stone As. Blasts of silver light shot toward Goldino from behind and sliced cleanly through both shoulders, sending fragments of the artillery batteries to the floor. “Now’s our chance!”

“Yeah!”

Upon seeing this, the supercombined golem located behind Goldino closed in. However, before it was able to get within arm’s reach, a loud, metallic clanking sound erupted from Goldino’s shoulders as the batteries regenerated.

“Heh, is that all you’ve got? Not enough, kid. Not by a long shot!” Once Goldino was through mocking its attackers, it once again resumed its barrage of light orbs.

“Gyaugh!” The supercombined golem was unable to protect itself from the onslaught in time and took the attack head-on. While this was going on, Allen noticed that Goldino’s leg was glowing ever so slightly.

Hmm, so I guess it’s able to use the iron golems’ recovery abilities.

Based on his observations, he quickly issued orders to his comrades. “Aim for the legs! It’s going to keep regenerating any part we destroy until we take them out!”

Krena and Dogora launched forward on their respective Bird Bs in an attempt to draw the attention of Goldino's gun arm. All the while, Prince Zeu and his party launched an attack on its legs. Zeu repeatedly punched at them using his metal knuckles, slowly causing them to crack and deform. Though they were making progress, the iron golem legs were a lot harder than they had been prior to combining.

"Ngh! The metal's pretty hard!"

"Allow me, Prince!" General Hoba, the armored bearkin, yelled as he repeatedly slammed his massive hammer down on the enemy. However, every time he crushed a portion of the foot, it was soon restored, causing Hoba's hairy face to contort with rage.

Allen let out a groan as he recalled the stupidly powerful healing abilities of Scarlet, Floor 3's Rank S floor boss.

Gah, are we going to end up in a Scarlet situation again?

He was referring to the situation they had encountered with Scarlet, where the enemy was able to heal its HP faster than they were able to cause damage.

Making matters worse was just how powerful Goldino was. It could unleash long-range attacks with its mighty artillery batteries, as well as close-range attacks with its drill punch. Unlike Scarlet, they would not be able to defeat it by slowly draining his HP. In fact, this was quite the opposite situation—the longer the battle went on, the more dangerous it became.

"We're not gonna be able to beat it at this rate. Everyone in the vanguard, I want you to use your Extra Skills to attack its legs! We won't stand a chance at victory if we can't put a stop to its healing!"

"Got it!" Krena responded without a second thought and a haze began to emanate from her as she used her Extra Skill, Limit Break. One by one, the members of the Ten Heroic Beasts holding the front line used their Extra Skills as well.

Allen watched as his comrades moved swiftly between Goldino's legs. While this was going on, however, Goldino turned its shoulder batteries and gun arm forward and continued its assault on the supercombined golem before it. In

response, Allen continued to Summon and Strengthen Stone As, alternating his attacks between the shoulders and the legs.

Just like I thought. Some Extra Skills increase Attack, but the majority are a single, powerful strike. Personally, I'd prefer the stat-boosting ones right now.

Though single-hit-type Extra Skills dealt a tremendous amount of damage, if they did not kill, any damage they inflicted would quickly be undone by an opponent with high HP recovery.

Goldino swung its leg to the side and managed to strike Prince Zeu, who was unable to dodge in time, sending him flying into the wall.

“Nghyah!”

“Your Highness!”

Fui, the beastkin healer, hurried to the prince's side and healed him—and just in time, as the light had begun to fade from his eyes before the healing magic set in. Zeu slowly got to his feet, though it was clear from the way his tongue was hanging out of his mouth and how his shoulders heaved with every breath that he was exhausted.

It seems like we're just not able to do enough damage.

Allen feared that the effects of the stat-boosting Extra Skills would wear off before they were able to destroy the legs. Prior to the battle, he had distributed Blessings of Heaven to the support members and healers of the group in case someone took more damage than their healing magic could recover. Alas, even those had their limits.

After quickly checking on his friends' statuses, Allen closed his grimoire.

It's still a bit dangerous, but I guess it's time for me to enter the fray. If that doesn't work, we can always retreat.

In addition to adjusting the strategy and giving out orders as the situation demanded, Allen also had a role to play in his master plan. He did not intend to act unless it became necessary, but it was beginning to look like he would be needed.

“All right, it's time for me to join you all on the front lines. Sara, Goldino's

attacks are going to get even fiercer, so don't hesitate to use the elven elixirs if things get out of hand for your healing abilities."

After issuing his command, Allen turned to make his way to the front line. Before he could go, however, a hand wrapped around a metal knuckle grabbed his arm, stopping him in his tracks.

"It's fine, Allen," Prince Zeu said in a low, quiet tone. "This is my trial."

"But there's nothing to be gained by losing. Someone very important is awaiting your return in Albahal, you know."

Allen recalled hearing that Zeu's beloved wife was waiting for him back in Albahal. He could not help but wonder if there was something even more important to the prince that continued to drive him to maintain his fighting spirit.

Just then, Allen noticed a haze form around Zeu's body. Now that he thought about it, the prince had not used his Extra Skill yet.

"I, Zeu, descendant of the Albahalan royal beast family, call upon Beast God Garm to hear my wish. Please lend me your strength! Beast Mode! Graaawrrr!"

After a short prayer, Zeu threw his head back and let out a tremendous growl. His voice was nearly as loud as Goldino's, likewise making the walls of the hallway reverberate. His hair stood on end as his body began to grow before their very eyes. Already a massive two meters tall, he became even larger, causing the clasps on his armor to snap and sending his breastplate falling to the floor. A three-meter-tall beast stood where the prince had once been.

"Whoa!" Allen could hardly contain his surprise at the transformation.

"Heh, so this is his Beast Mode, huh? Looks like Garm went all out on this one." Even Merus was impressed, judging by his tone of voice.

What the heck is Beast Mode?

"What's happening? Do beastkin have some kind of special skill?" Allen quickly asked Merus, unsure of what was going on.

"This is also an Extra Skill."

"It is? So beastkin *do* have some kind of special skill?"

“Bingo. This is the power granted to them by Beast God Garm.”

Looking up at the massive, bipedal lion further impressed Allen. The figure, standing where Prince Zeu had just been, threw his muscle-bound arms into the air and shouted in a loud, booming voice. “Beastkin, follow my lead! Graaawrrr!” He then pounded his fists on the floor.



Allen felt himself briefly bouncing up and down on the floor moments before cracks radiated out from the points where Zeu's fists had hit the ground. Golden rays of light then spread throughout the cracks, crossing over one another to form a geometric pattern shaped like a magic circle.

"Ooh! The prince has gained the power of Beast God Garm, the likes of which has hardly ever been seen before! Grrrr!" Fui and General Hoba, who maintained his station at the prince's side, both shouted out in excitement. Once the ever-expanding magic circle reached Hoba's feet, his body, too, began to grow just like the Prince's had until he transformed into a massive, three-meter-tall bear. The large hammer he wielded in both hands now looked like a toy in his grip.

The transformation did not stop there either. The magic circle continued to spread until all of the Ten Heroic Beasts had transformed.

Dogora looked down from his Bird B, amazed at what he was witnessing. "What the heck *was* that?! I can't believe it!"

To Allen, this looked like the chance at victory he had been hoping for. "It should be fine, I think. Zeu has just used all of his power, is all. The real battle is about to start."

"Let's go! Everyone, follow me to victory! Grrrr!"

The transformed Ten Heroic Beasts let out a ferocious roar in response before moving together in unison to strike at Goldino.

"Raaawr!"

The Beast Prince leaned back momentarily before leaping up diagonally. He pierced Goldino's knee like a golden arrow of light, his knuckle-equipped fist embedding itself deep in the metal. It seemed that the beastkin also grew stronger as their bodies enlarged.

The Ten Heroic Beasts followed the prince's lead, wildly striking at Goldino and causing massive amounts of damage in a short period of time. While Goldino tried to avoid the attacks, it did little in the way of putting up a defense. Allen and Merus continued their conversation while doing all they could to support the beast party.

“That power was granted by Garm to the royal family so that the beastkin could gain their independence. It was a really big ordeal when Garm came to Elmea’s temple.”

Apparently a lot had happened in the background in order for the beastkin to gain their independence from the Empire of Giamut.

“‘Granted’? You mean it’s possible to gain Extra Skills you weren’t born with?”

Come to think of it, I remember reading that people can have up to three Extra Skills.

Allen had seen text in his past life mentioning that three Extra Skills were chosen at random for those playing on Easy Mode. He later confirmed this with Merus, who had stated that Extra Skills were granted to a given slot and people could have a maximum of three.

“That’s correct.”

Though still facing Merus, Allen averted his gaze to keep an eye on the battle. Using his immense Intelligence stat, he continued to watch the battle while Summoning to contribute to the fight.

So you’re granted one Extra Skill at birth and can have a maximum of three in total. Does that mean you need to appeal to the gods in order to get additional ones?

Allen tried to recall how he had acquired skills when playing games in his past life. In them, there were multiple ways through which you could gain a skill, such as by leveling up, beating a boss, or even opening a treasure chest. In this world, you grew through leveling up your class skills. As you leveled them up, you would improve your old skills and even gain new ones. This was the method he had used to gain skills over the past fifteen years here in this world, though apparently they could also be granted to you by gods.

Now it’s just a matter of what the best way to obtain our new skills is. Apparently the Beast God granted a special skill to the beastkin.

“So does this mean that the Beast King also has this Extra Skill?”

Merus nodded. “That’s correct. The current Beast King also has the same

Extra Skill.”

Hmm, so that’s how Helmios lost to the Beast King. He’d already given me a hint, but I failed to properly analyze what it really meant.

Helmios had previously battled—and lost against—the Beast King at a gathering of the respective leaders of the Five Continent Alliance. This probably meant not that the Beast King himself did not have skill useful in one-on-one combat, but rather that Helmios could not win in the face of an Extra Skill granted by the Beast God.

Long ago, Beast God Garm had directly negotiated with Elmea in order to save his suffering people. From that point forward, they had been granted a powerful buff to protect them. That would explain why the Beast King was so enraged at the teachings of Daemonism, which denied the very existence of Garm—a fact that the Beast King knew to be patently false.

“Grrrr!”

The Beast Prince and Ten Heroic Beasts surrounded Goldino’s legs and continued their assault, slowly destroying them.

It’s like they all jumped up a class and gained an extra star.

“Y-You fools!”

Goldino’s concern was evident in its voice. In addition to all the buffs they had received, the enlarged beastkin were able to cause more damage than Goldino’s recovery abilities could keep up with.

All right, this is great. One way or another, once its legs are destroyed and it can no longer heal, it’s finished.

Just as Allen felt assured of their victory, he felt as if the world shook around him. His whole body was then restrained, and he began moving quickly through the air.

“Huh?”

He was now face-to-face with Goldino, who had apparently grabbed Allen with his massive fist.

“A-Allen?!” Cecil hurriedly canceled the powerful magic attack she was going

to unleash on Goldino. Allen realized that he was in Goldino's right hand, which had transformed back from its drill form. He was the only one in the massive fist, as Merus had apparently used Return to Nest to escape. Since Allen had been using Bird A's buff, Flight, he and Cecil were not traveling together, meaning that she was, fortunately, unharmed.

Merus, you jerk. Why'd you run away like that? Actually, now that I think about it, Angel Halo doesn't let him teleport me around since it's outside his assigned permissions.

Merus's Ability, Angel Halo, allowed him to Summon just like Allen, though with several restrictions. Allen had removed some of these restrictions so that Merus could use the Summons without needing his permission, but he had not applied that to Bird A's Awakened Ability, Return to Nest, which would allow him to teleport groups.

"So you're the leader of the party, I see." Though the hiirokane face remained expressionless, Allen could hear the smirk in Goldino's voice.

Allen tried to brush him off. "Huh? Nope. The beast down there is. That lion-looking guy is the leader; I'm just playing a support role." Even as Zeu continued his assault on Goldino's legs, the massive golem kept its gaze fixed on Allen.

I wonder if it's just going to keep letting us drain its HP.

Allen turned around in the grip of the immense hand and used Bird F's Ability, Transmission, to assure Cecil, who was more than a hundred meters below, that things were fine. Bird F's Ability could communicate over vast distances without being overheard by the enemy.

Cecil thought back to when they were children. Just like then, Allen found himself in the grip of a large monster. However, this monster was several dozen times larger than the murdergalsh who had gotten ahold of him last time.

"You little wretch. You've really been a thorn in my side, sending these strange things out against me over and over again." It was becoming clear that Goldino had a pretty good idea of Allen's status within the party. "Now that I've got your attention, I should properly thank you!"

Goldino squeezed its fist tightly, causing Allen to disappear into the large fist

and out of sight of his friends.

“Oh no, Allen!” Sophie cried out, lowering her bow. “Keel, please, you have to heal him!”

Goldino bellowed out a loud, piercing laugh as it shook its tightly clenched fist. “Bwa ha ha! This is where it all ends! Your leader is dead!”

The group watched as Goldino hurled something down at the ground. The object hit the floor at tremendous speed, causing it to cave in and sending rocks flying. Goldino then lifted up its twenty-meter-tall leg and slammed it into the impact site again and again like a hammer slamming into a post. The crater grew ever larger as the sound of crushing rocks reverberated through the hallway.

Each of the four parties responded in their own way. Zeu and the Ten Heroic Beasts froze momentarily before quickly resuming their assault on Goldino’s pivot foot. Admiral Garara and the three golems under his command were being kept at a distance due to Goldino’s bombardment. Sacred awaited Helmios’s command, though he merely stood there with his arms crossed, waiting to see how things would unfold. And the No-life Gamers redoubled their attacks on Goldino, unsure of what else to do. Sophie and Volmaar loosed volleys of arrows while Krena and Dogora struck with their sword and axe, respectively. They continued to whale away at Goldino, making no effort to stop its stomping. However...

“Hm? What’s this?” Goldino stopped smashing its foot into the ground and a brief period of silence washed over the hall. In that silence, a voice could be heard calling out from the crater.

“Keep up the attack! Don’t let it heal all the damage you’ve inflicted!”

It was Allen’s voice.

“What the hell?! Die, damn you!” There was a tinge of fear in Goldino’s voice. It leaned its whole body forward, putting all its weight into bringing its foot down.

“Ngh!”

It stomped on something heavy, sending its foot bounding back up with a

loud, dull *thud*. Knocked off-balance, Goldino stumbled backward before stopping to look down at the crater.

There was Allen, shaking off the remnants of his armor as he slowly stepped out of the crater. In his hand, he held an adamantite sword.



Allen had slain many Rank A and higher monsters in the past year in his attempt to clear the Rank S dungeon, raising his level to 81. Though his King Me skill remained locked, his Summons' buffs had grown stronger upon reaching Summoning Lvl. 8. Furthermore, he had managed to reach Sword Mastery Lvl. 4 thanks to the party's endless hunting of iron golems in Floor 5's Iron Zone.

Name: Allen
Age: 15
Class: Summoner
Level: 81
HP: 2,615 + 2,400
MP: 4,140 + 2,200
Attack: 1,452 + 14,600
Endurance: 1,452 + 2,400
Agility: 2,703 + 16,200
Intelligence: 4,150 + 4,200
Luck: 2,703 + 2,000
Skills: Summoning {8}, Creation {8}, Synthesis {8},
Strengthening {8}, Awakening {8}, Expansion {7}, Storage,
Sharing, Quick Summoning, Equivalency, Deputize, King Me
{Locked}, Deletion, Sword Mastery {4}, Throwing {3}
XP: Approx. 700,000,000,000/900,000,000,000

Equipment

Ring 1: +5,000 Attack
Ring 2: +5,000 Attack
Adamantite Sword: +2,500 Attack
Magic Cape: +6,000 Endurance, +3,000 Attack

Holder

Insect:
Beast: A x 1
Bird: A x 5, B x 8, F x 1

Grass:
Stone: A x 1
Fish: A x 1
Spirit: A x 1
Dragon: A x 61
Angel: A x 1

In addition to the buffs Allen received from his Summons and the two rings increasing his Attack by 5,000 each, he had also received powerful buffs from the party members.

HP: 7,815
MP: 11,021
Attack: 31,808
Endurance: 11,557
Agility: 27,166
Intelligence: 8,355
Luck: 5,550

Stacked Buffs through Skills and Magic

- Sophie: multiple stat boosts from her spirits
- Keel: 24% boost to Endurance
- Fui: 18% boost to Endurance
- Holy Knight: 12% boost to Endurance
- Temi: 18% boost to MP, 18% boost to Luck
- Lepe: 24% boost to Attack, 24% boost to Agility

Thanks to all the stacked buffs, Allen was able to take Goldino's attacks head-on and, using his Sword Mastery and ring-boosted Attack stat, knock it off-balance.

“Waugh?! It’s a gh-ghost?!” Hoba cried out in surprise. Allen locked eyes with the general, who now stood with his hammer at the ready facing the young Summoner as his fear temporarily took hold.

“What are you doing?” Allen asked the frozen bearkin. “Keep pressing the assault; we’re almost there.” Hoba, having seemingly forgotten that he was in Beast Mode and drawn his weapon on the black-haired boy out of sheer terror, finally came to his senses and hurriedly turned his attention back to the enemy.

Allen quickly disappeared from the general’s view as he closed in on Goldino at tremendous speed and slammed his adamantite sword into the leg that had been stomping on him mere moments before. The sound of the impact echoed down the hallway as Goldino was knocked to the side.

“Hngh!”

Goldino managed to catch itself on the wall with one hand and push itself back to its feet, though the blow seemed to have dealt it a considerable amount of damage.

Looks like I was able to cause even more damage than my stats should have allowed. Thanks to everyone’s buffs, I’m practically landing critical hits now.

In addition to his Summons’ buffs, Abilities, and Awakened Abilities, Allen was also powered up thanks to his comrades’ buffs. Lepe and his Summons in particular had increased his chance of landing critical hits to nearly a hundred percent.

Allen continued to thrash away at Goldino’s leg.

“Whoa, looks like he’s back to it,” Keel whispered in amazement. This was a scene he had witnessed countless times when the Gamers spent a month hunting iron golems in the Iron Zone. Allen had been completely driven to increase his level and often attacked like this in his desire to defeat as many iron golems as he could.

“Y-You’d best learn your place, you little upstart!”

Goldino tried to attack Allen with a drill punch. Though there was a risk that it would hit its own leg, taking out Allen was a priority.

Allen raised his free hand and tried to catch the rapidly spinning drill. It tore through his hand in an instant, but right as it hit his wrist, it was unable to proceed any farther, almost as if it had hit a wall. This was thanks to Fish B's Ability, Turtle Shield, and Awakened Ability, Turtle Barrier, as well as the buff provided by Spirit A, Physical Damage Resistance (High).

Wow, okay, that drill punch really lays on the damage! C'mon, Physical Damage Resistance (High), you really need to step up your game! Then again, I guess it's not like I'm gonna die or anything, it just hurts like hell. You're not gonna walk away from this one, Goldino!

Allen's shredded hand began to regenerate bit by bit thanks to Keel's healing magic. Since becoming a Saint King, Keel could restore even lost limbs.

Once Allen's fingers were fully healed, he began to press the attack once again using the same strategy he had implemented back in the Iron Zone. Ever since his stats shot up after reaching Summoning Lvl. 8, he had started wielding a weapon and attacking as part of the vanguard, as he could now hold his own there.

Rather than concerning himself with if he could avoid attacks, Allen determined whether he would go on the offensive from the front line of battle based on if he could defeat the enemy before he was killed. It was Keel's role to support him with recovery magic, which obviously served as practice for Keel in anticipating the timing of an attack and chanting recovery magic in advance.

"Merus, get in here and fight."

And don't run away this time!

"All right. Sure thing, Master Allen."

Merus joined in attacking the same leg as Allen. He, too, enjoyed the benefits of the stacked buffs and boasted impressive stats. Allen figured he could probably even survive a drill punch.

Realizing that this was their chance since Goldino was fixated on Allen, Prince Zeu called out to his party. "All right, men, follow Allen's lead!" The group closed in on the remaining leg and attacked with such ferocity as to give Allen and Merus a run for their money. Meanwhile, Goldino continued to focus its

close-range attacks on Allen while its shoulder batteries and gun-covered left arm continued to focus on the supercombined golems in front of it, keeping them out of the battle. Now that Allen was directly involved in the fighting, he was no longer calling forth any Summons to absorb or protect the golems from the attacks, leaving them with little in the way of defense.

Allen could see what was going on through his shared vision with his Bird B and Bird A Summons, so he decided to speed up the assault as he deftly handled his one-handed sword.

I've...gotta...hurry.

Finally, Allen's blade managed to cleave halfway through Goldino's right leg, with the weight of its massive body crushing the remaining portion. At nearly the exact same time, Zeu managed to destroy the left leg.

Goldino's body slowly fell forward, and after a split second, a thunderous sound shook the hallway. The group was briefly lifted off the floor from the sheer force of the impact, and when they landed back on their feet, they found Goldino lying face down on the floor with its arms splayed out.

"Y-You imbeciles!"

Allen, Prince Zeu, and his party quickly rushed out from under Goldino.

"All right, Cecil, time to put the final nail in its coffin!"

Cecil nodded in response and prepared to use her Extra Skill, Petit Meteor.
"Here goes!"

However, just before she was able to let loose, a narrow cane appeared in front of her, hindering her movements. "Wait a moment."

"What do you think you're doing?!" Cecil looked over at the person who had stopped her and noticed a haze coming off the mousekin, Rato.

"Magic Spring, Full Burst!"

After activating their Extra Skill, a massive magic circle appeared on the ground.

"What's that?"

“This should be of some help. It doubles the power of your magic,” Rato answered with a grin. Apparently they were setting the stage for Cecil’s pièce de résistance.

“Wow, thanks for the help. All right then, let’s go! Petit Meteor!”

Contrary to her reserved response, Cecil wore a look of pure dedication as she poured all her MP into her Extra Skill. When she cast it, her expression tensed up due to the massive, fiery red meteor a hundred meters in diameter now racing down from the ceiling.

“What?! Whoa! Return to Nest!”

Seeing the meteor tearing its way through the walls on its way down, Allen hurriedly teleported his friends away. Looking back from the safe distance they had teleported to, he watched the meteor hit the now-kneeling Goldino head-on.

“Gyaaah! You mongrels! How dare you?!”

Goldino desperately tried to hold the meteor back, but the artillery batteries on both shoulders shattered and its hands were crushed before its entire body was buried in the floor.

“Did we win?” Cecil asked under her breath.

Allen looked at his grimoire. No text appeared on the cover. “No, not yet.” He then cautiously approached Goldino.

Due to its huge mass and high heat, the small meteorite had created a huge crater at its impact site. The closer they got, the higher the temperature rose, causing the party to sweat.

“H-Hey, there’s no way he could still be alive after being crushed by that massive rock, right?” Looking down at the large rock from his perch at the edge of the bowl-shaped cavern, Keel spoke his mind. Goldino’s massive body seemed to have melted due to the high heat and become one with the sloping wall of the crater.

“No, we need to put an end to this. Everyone, get into battle positions and—”

“Hyah!”

Just as the words left Allen's mouth, the meteor shattered and Goldino stood up.

This time, however, it was only a hundred meters tall, the same height it had been before combining. The other four golems had only barely retained their original forms and hung from it like scrap metal.

Goldino took a step forward to leave the crater, though the steeply sloped wall merely collapsed and sent it falling back down. It had cracks all over its body and looked as if it were about to collapse.

"You're still not dead?!" Zeu cried out in surprise.

I guess it needs to take a certain amount of damage in order to...

"I think this means that—"

However, before Allen could get the words out, Goldino interrupted him. "Looks like you just had to push me to start taking this seriously. You're gonna regret this, you know." Its voice oozed confidence.

An instant later, Goldino's body collapsed forward and an undamaged Goldino appeared from inside, only smaller. Parts of the collapsed body formed a spinning wheel on its back.

"Whoa, hey, something came out!" Keel shouted in surprise at this development. "Just what is that thing?!"

"Looks like it's gotten smaller. I figure this should be no problem for us, then." Dogora muttered his observations to no one in particular.

Compared to the first Goldino, this form was less than one-third the size. It had a slender body and a ring-shaped object floated above its head, not much unlike the mithril golem. Its face, however, remained unchanged as it fixed the group with a glare.

"This is my true form. Now it's time to meet your maker. Hyah!" A bright beam of light shot out from its eyes, surrounding the parties.

"What?!" It did not exactly hurt, but it still left them with a strange sensation, as if all their strength were leaving their bodies.

Oh no, is that what this is? This kind of annoying attack is a pretty standard

strat for bosses.

“What do you think? Now you have nothing left to protect you. Fear me, and learn the true meaning of despair!”

The ring above True Goldino’s head began to spin as its body floated up into the air.

Allen quickly whipped open his grimoire to check on his friends’ stats and was stunned at what he saw.

“All the buffs are gone! Recast all the support magic and skills on the double! Prioritize spells and skills that boost Endurance!” Allen shouted out commands to his teammates as he called forth his Fish Summons and began using their Abilities and Awakened Abilities.

“Bwa ha ha ha! You’re the first to ever lay eyes on this form. You should be proud of yourselves...in the moments before your deaths!” True Goldino let out a shrill laugh before a shield and sword of light appeared in its hands. It then swooped through the air directly toward Allen. The party was still in the midst of recasting their buffs, but it was clear that Goldino would arrive before they were through.

“Waugh!”

One of the supercombined golems stepped in the way, blocking True Goldino’s path. Alas...

“Heh, what an irritating little pest!” True Goldino swung its light sword and cleaved the supercombined golem’s arm clean off. It failed to even slow down in the slightest upon colliding with the supercombined golem, but rather sent the golem five times its size flying.

“Hngyah!” the dwarves inside all cried at the moment of impact.

True Goldino once again bathed the party in the light from its eye blast, robbing them of all their buffs. “You can do this as much as you’d like, but the result will always be the same!”

We’re in a pretty tight spot. It can wipe out our buffs in an instant, and cover a large area at that. There’s only one option available to us, then.

They could either continue the battle or retreat. Allen took no time in making his decision.

“Swell! You’re up!”

“Pii pii!”

Allen Summoned a large number of Bird As and sent them off to their target. Then, using Bird A’s buff, Fly, Allen himself took flight.

“All right, we’re going to split the group up into three parties, and each party will recast their buffs on their own members. Return to Nest!” Allen used Return to Nest three times in a row, splitting up the party into three groups that formed a large triangle. In a flash, Allen found himself in his new surroundings. The reason for teleporting three times was that this allowed him to break the groups up into three distinct parties that could form up under their own initiative as soon as they got their wits about them.

This method shuffled the parties and struck a balance between the vanguard, the rear guard, and those holding up the center of the formation. As for the healers in each party, considering there was only one Keel to go around, the other parties were paired with one of Sacred’s Saintesses and either Fui or Sara. Considering the healing role of the Saintesses and those of the beastkin were different, their effects could be stacked.

It appeared that True Goldino had temporarily lost track of Allen and the rest, giving them a brief window to prepare themselves. Allen called out to the group. “Now Goldino will need to split its attention in order to use its debuffing attack. I want you all to recast your buffs now!”

Everyone nodded in agreement and began recasting their buffs just as True Goldino caught sight of Allen.

“It can no longer heal itself, so all we have to do is bang away at its HP and we’re practically guaranteed victory!” Allen called out to the rest of the party using his Bird F as he flew through the air toward True Goldino.

“You can do whatever you please, but you’ll still lose!”

True Goldino swung its light sword as it and Allen crossed paths, the blade of light severing Allen’s left arm from his body.

“Gah!”

“Allen!” Helmios shouted, concerned.

“Don’t worry about me; just focus on casting your buffs!”

Allen used a Blessing of Heaven, causing his left arm to regenerate, and began to fly in a lazy circle around True Goldino, as if to draw his enemy out. Meanwhile, Merus was calling forth Fish Summons and using their Abilities and Awakened Abilities on their allies.

True Goldino, picking up on what Allen was trying to do, instead ignored Allen and began moving forward. However, Allen quickly gave chase, forcing his enemy into taking action. True Goldino struck back at Allen, only for the black-haired boy to once again escape. It struck again, this time lopping off Allen’s leg, but that, too, was quickly healed up.

Each blow takes away over half my HP, so I’m going to need to have Keel cast a buff on me once I get some breathing room here. I’ll die if this keeps up.

While Allen was busy using yet another Blessing of Heaven, True Goldino took the opportunity to lunge toward the nearest group, a party with Dogora in it.

“Get over here! Hyaaaah!” Dogora swooped down on his Bird B toward True Goldino, ready to strike.

“Heh, you little weakling!”

“Gyah!” Dogora’s greataxe was blocked by the light shield while his own shield was pushed back by True Goldino’s light sword. True Goldino pressed on after knocking Dogora out of the way and closed in on the party.

The vanguard counterattacked, but since they had prioritized defensive buffs, they lacked the offensive power needed to break the attack through the light shield. True Goldino moved easily through the air, reminiscent of the mithril golem, and easily evaded arrows and other long-distance attacks.

However, each party had in it one supercombined golem, which did not need any buffs or support magic. Their job was to protect the rear guard and prevent True Goldino from getting close enough to overrun them.

Allen managed to catch up to the enemy and strike at it in an attempt to draw

it away from the party, locking them in a stalemate. True Goldino would attack one party, Allen would close in to attack while they were under siege, and True Goldino would move on to another party. Around and around they went.

Each party tried every possible attack available to them, but they had hardly even made a dent in True Goldino's HP. Not even the gigantic Ten Heroic Beasts—nor any of the other party members, for that matter—could deal much damage due to their focus on short-range attacks. Long-range attacks like those from Stone B were simply dodged.

Finally, the supercombined golems, who had taken the brunt of True Goldino's attacks, had used up all of their spare slates. Moreover, the time limit on staying in their combined form was running out. With the golems no longer able to play the role of barrier, True Goldino would be able to directly attack the party members at the middle and rear of the formation.

Looks like we've got to make a choice now.

Allen had already placed a nest near the entrance of Floor 5 in case they needed to make an escape. In the worst-case scenario, he could always return and send his friends to safety.

Their supercombined form is gonna break up in just a few minutes. We still haven't used the Blessing of the Sovereign of Spirits, so maybe we should give that a shot? Then again, it's likely that some people will die before we can pull it off.

Blessing of the Sovereign of Spirits would grant all members a thirty percent boost to all stats and allow them to use their Extra Skills again. That was still an option available to them, but it would also make it harder for them to time their escape. Rather than letting anyone die, Allen figured it would be best to take some time and evaluate their shortcomings in the battle today and then try it again.

Just as Allen had made up his mind, however, he heard Rosetta's voice coming from the Bird B he had left with her party.

"All right, looks like it's my turn. I really didn't want to do this in front of you all, but it seems I don't have much choice considering how this battle's going. I'm going to use my Extra Skill now, so I want you all to make the most of it."

What's she talking about?

"Isn't your Extra Skill for stealing treasure?" Helmios had fought alongside Rosetta for some time and already knew about this. All the other members in the group turned their attention toward her as well, curious as to what she intended to do to True Goldino.

"Just you watch, Helmios. You guys are really gonna owe me for this one. Listen up, Allen, I'm going to steal a great deal of its power, so I want you to make the most of it!"

True Goldino swooped in as a fiery haze formed around Rosetta, who stood directly in its path.

"Gya ha ha! What do you think you're going to do, you wannabe pirate scum?! Not that it matters, because I'm going to wipe you all out anyway!"

"That's fine. In fact, I think I'd like that skill of yours for myself, if you wouldn't mind. Robber Hands!" Rosetta stretched her hands out toward the oncoming True Goldino and seemed to grasp something right out of the air. She then pulled her arms back, and something was shimmering in her hands.

"Hmm, what's this? Looks like I've got something pretty important to you, no? Seems your eyes won't be able to twinkle like they used to anymore. Tee hee."

"Huh?!"



Allen, Helmios, and even the rest of the party were in complete shock.

She stole its skill?! No way!

“You wench! How did you steal my skill?! You’re not going to get away with this!” True Goldino quickly realized just what Rosetta had managed to do with her Extra Skill. It picked up speed and launched itself like an arrow straight toward her.

This seemed to draw up a forgotten memory for Helmios. “So this was the future Elmea said awaited Rosetta...”

“H-Helmios, there’s no time for you to get lost in your own little world. Help me!” Rosetta shouted at Helmios in annoyance as she tried to dodge the incoming attack. Suddenly, someone leaped over her head and took True Goldino’s attack head-on.

“Guard Break!”

It was Dverg the Sword Lord, who had been with another party until moments prior. When Allen was not paying attention, he had made his way to Rosetta. Figuring that she would try using her Extra Skill on True Goldino, he had probably come to deal with the aftermath in the event that she failed.

True Goldino headed straight forward and found itself completely unable to take any evasive action. It quickly held up its light shield, but Dverg’s greatsword chopped off that entire arm.

“Gyagh!”

Having lost its balance, True Goldino crashed down to Rosetta’s left. It slid along the floor for several dozen meters, leaving a large, deep rut in its wake.

We’ve stolen its skill and knocked out its defense! Looks like things are going our way!

Allen quickly planned their next move.

“Return to Nest! Everyone, cast all your buffs! Sophie, use Blessing of the Sovereign of Spirits!”

He teleported all three parties back to one place so they could all assist one

another simultaneously. He then asked Sophie to put all her MP into her Extra Skill, Grand Spirit Manifestation.

“Certainly, Lord Allen! Spirit God Rohzen, please assist us.”

“Ha ha, I see the battle is about to come to an end.”

The Spirit God, who took the form of a flying squirrel, appeared atop Sophie’s shoulder and began to swing his hips. Moments later, shining raindrops began to fall from the sky over the gathered party members.

“You can all use your Extra Skills again! Hurry up with the buffs!”

Allen had already explained to the members of the group just what Blessing of the Sovereign of Spirits was capable of. When it was used, it granted them all the chance to use their Extra Skills once more.

“Like hell! Do you really think I’m going to sit by and let you make preparations?!” True Goldino rose up from the ground and rushed toward the party, ready to strike. However, two supercombined golems quickly stepped in to block it.

“We’ll buy you some time!”

The golems were in pretty bad shape, but they were not about to back down, so they pushed themselves back to their feet and made their way toward True Goldino.

“I’ll leave it to you guys, then! Hang in there, Meruru!”

“You got it!”

Admiral Garara’s supercombined golem soon followed after those of his comrades.

“Don’t overestimate yourselves!” True Goldino rushed straight toward the three supercombined golems. One of the golems, now without any arms, tried to ram itself straight into True Goldino’s torso, but it took the light sword straight to the stomach and immediately fell apart. The next one tried to fend off True Goldino with its only remaining arm, but the light blade cleaved through it from the fingers and all the way to the shoulder, sending the golem crumpling to the ground. The dwarves on board hurriedly escaped from the

crystals in the golems' chests.

Admiral Garara's golem stepped forward to protect them as True Goldino swung down with its light sword. This last supercombined golem was knocked back and had one arm destroyed. However, inside the crystal in its chest, Meruru manipulated the remaining right arm and tried to unleash a return blow.

"Megaton PUUUUUNCH!"

A huge fist slammed into True Goldino's light sword. Meruru was desperate to do anything she could to buy even an additional second for her friends to be able to cast as many buffs as they could.

For a moment, the powers of the two seemed to rival each other, but the light sword soon knocked the arm away and sent the supercombined golem tumbling backward, where it landed on its rear. Just then, they reached the time limit for their supercombined form. Admiral Garara, Meruru, and the other dwarves were sent flying out of the crystal cockpit located in the destroyed supercombined golem's chest.

"Hmph, and now it's time for you to die. Your battle ends here! Hey... What?"

Suddenly, the dwarves all disappeared from True Goldino's sight as Allen sent them back using Return to Nest.

"You've all done more than enough. Thanks, everyone." After thanking the group for their efforts, Allen readied his adamantite sword.

"He's right; there's nothing left for you to do. We'll take care of the rest." Helmios spoke in a relaxed tone as he also readied his beloved sword.

"All right, now I'm *really* pissed off! Grr!" The gigantic Zeu squeezed the metal knuckles in his hands so hard that he nearly crushed them. He then leaned forward and prepared to leap.

The three were surrounded by a dazzling light as all of their allies cast buffs on them.

"Sophie, I want you to stop him from moving."

Sophie deeply nodded in acknowledgment. "Certainly, Lord Allen. Wind Spirit

Gale, please lend me your strength.”

“Okay, mama.”

A wind spirit in the form of a young boy appeared before Sophie and took her hand. For some reason, the spirit always referred to her as “mama.” He absorbed all of Sophie’s MP, which had been boosted by the two rings that increased her MP by 5,000 each, the support from the Sovereign of Spirits, and the other stacked buffs.

The wind spirit turned around and let out a long breath toward True Goldino. The exhaled wind turned into a semitransparent white rope in midair and wrapped itself around True Goldino’s body.

“What the hell is this?!”

True Goldino tried to shake off the wind restraints. The moment its light sword made contact with them, they stretched out and looked as if they would break at any moment. Even using all of Sophie’s MP, they still could not hold it back for more than a few seconds.

But that was long enough. All the members of the vanguard attacked True Goldino as it stood frozen in place. Allen was the first to attack, flying in at high speed and slamming his adamantite sword into True Goldino’s face over and over again.

Thanks to the support of the Sovereign of Spirits, he managed to smash both of True Goldino’s eyes with a wet *thud*, all the while ignoring the hihiirokane golem’s impressive Attack stat.

“Gwaaargh!”

“Now you’re not gonna be able to use your eye beams anymore!”

Next up, the giant beastkin, Dverg, and Dogora attacked, hammering True Goldino’s body with various melee attacks.

“God Strike!”

“I’m up next. Supreme Ruling Blade!”

Helmios used his Extra Skill, followed by Krena using Limit Break. They both jumped high into the air and slammed their swords into True Goldino’s chest.

“Gyah! As if...I’m going to lose...to the likes of...” True Goldino sounded almost dumbfounded as the two swords were drawn from its chest. Then, it dropped to the floor like a rag doll, making a heavy *thud*.

A line appeared on the cover of Allen’s grimoire.

<You have defeated 1 Goldino. You have earned 4,000,000,000 XP.>

It played the role of a cartoon villain to the very end.

Allen looked up from his grimoire and toward the rest of the group.

“It looks like we beat it.”

The whole group let out a cheer.

“Yeah, we won!”

Allen and the assembled parties had finally defeated the final floor boss.

Chapter 13: The Reward for Slaying the Final Floor Boss

Allen moved toward Goldino's lifeless body and looked into its beat-up face. He had really done a number on it when he gave the golem a thorough thrashing with his adamantite sword.

I can't believe how strong it was; things got pretty dicey there for a moment. It's hard to imagine what they were thinking when they made such a crazy powerful boss. But I guess that doesn't matter anymore.

They had been a hair's breadth from failure before being saved by the beastkin's Beast Modes and Rosetta's special skill. There was something about beating his first raid in this world since being reborn here that really warmed Allen's heart.

A short distance away, Prince Zeu, now in his normal form, stood upright, his shoulders shaking slightly.

"Y-Your son pulled it off, father."

While he usually referred to himself in a royal manner and to his father as "the king," the words that came out of his mouth had a childlike tone to them. It seemed as if he were overcome with emotion due to having somehow managed to overcome the trial given to him that Temi had deemed insurmountable. The Ten Heroic Beasts, including a sobbing General Hoba, stood around their prince, congratulating him on his victory.

Meanwhile, Meruru and the other golem pilots gathered around Admiral Garara. "We pulled it off, men. Now it's time t' pour one out for those we've lost."

The dwarves all closed their eyes in response to Garara's words, recalling their deceased comrades. The thought of those who had given their lives so that the golem pilots could escape had been with them as they risked their own to do the same during this most recent battle. Had even one of the golem pilots not

been so selfless, the supercombined golems would not have been able to operate properly, and there would have surely been casualties.

Goldino's body finally faded away, leaving behind a Rank S magic stone. Then, Cecil approached Allen. "What's wrong, Cecil? You don't look very happy."

"I wasn't able to beat it," she replied.

"Well, everyone was too close together. You couldn't really use it to its full potential."

This had happened once before too. When Cecil's Intelligence stat shot up to outrageous levels thanks to Blessing of the Sovereign of Spirits, Allen was left stunned at the hundred-meter Petit Meteor she had created. Her Extra Skill was not exactly suited to large-scale battles.

"I guess you're right, but... Hey, look."

Over Allen's shoulder, Cecil spotted her potato-headed friend. He was just standing there, looking down at the ground with a dejected expression on his face.

Krena approached the two, a sad expression on her face. "Looks like something's bothering Dogora."

It seemed as if Dogora was once again upset with himself at how he had held up in battle.

"I guess we weren't able to make much use of you in the battle."

"Wh-What did you say?! Why you..."

"Don't worry about it," Allen continued. "Volmaar wasn't able to participate much either."

"Hey, now," Volmaar quipped back. "But I guess you're not wrong."

Volmaar, an archer, was not able to do much in battles against golems and the like because they were strong against piercing attacks. However, this meant little to him, as his primary concern was keeping Sophie safe.

That's just how things go, I suppose. Some classes are a better fit for certain situations than others. More to the point, it was hard for Dogora to help out in

the fight since he can't use his Extra Skill, but it's not like he was useless.

Dogora had undoubtedly been useful in the battle against Goldino. Between the three class promotions he had undergone and all the gear he had equipped, his Attack stat was on par with that of the Ten Heroic Beasts and even Helmios's party members. In addition, thanks to the fact that he had been fighting with the No-life Gamers since their time back at the Academy, he knew exactly when to press the attack and when to fall back. He and Krena, his partner in the party's vanguard position, acted in sync with one another, and he even had an uncanny knack for subconsciously picking up on the timing of Keel's healing spells. He was certainly a skilled member of the team.

Still, that's not enough to convince Dogora of his contribution.

Allen, looking over at his dejected friend, decided it was time to nip this one in the bud.

"What's the problem, Dogora? You didn't join the battle just so you could finally be a hero, did you?" He wanted to make sure that Dogora was not going to use this victory—as part of a large party he did not assemble and following a strategy he did not devise—to have people hail him as a hero. On top of that, he wanted to imply that Dogora was not ready to be one yet.

Dogora's eyes went wide at this. "Hell no!" He locked eyes with Allen and his gaze said it all: he wanted to overcome his inability to use his Extra Skill and become a hero with his own strength.

"Well, I think it's about time we head back. I want to claim my reward." Allen then turned away from Dogora and called out to the other parties so they could teleport out.

"Just you wait and see," Dogora whispered to himself while staring at Allen's back.

After picking up the Rank S magic stone in the hallway, Allen and the others all returned to the large, open area. The cube that would return them to Floor 5 was located farther down the hallway, and another cube had appeared in the room once the boss was defeated, which would teleport them directly to Floor 1 to claim their reward.

Using his Bird A, Allen teleported everyone to the room together so he could hurry to his prize. In the room, the party found not only the cube, but also a chest they had not seen before.

The cube addressed the group the moment they approached.

“Congratulations on your victory over the fin—”

“Whoa!” Keel interrupted the cube before it could finish what it was saying. “You guys seeing this?! Look how it sparkles! Oh yeah!”

“As always, he’s a real sucker for shiny things,” Cecil said, rolling her eyes.

Keel was not the only one impressed at the sight, however. Many of their other comrades were also unable to conceal their joy at finally setting their eyes on their reward—a physical sign of what they had accomplished by beating the final floor boss. There were three chests in total: a silver, a gold, and a glowing rainbow chest. Under normal circumstances, they should have received four chests, but one had been removed, as they would be receiving that prize directly from Dungeon Master Dygragni as a reward for being the first to defeat the final floor boss.

Well, well. Would you look at that. So the final floor boss only drops silver chests and better. I’m really curious about what kind of loot is gonna come out of that rainbow one.

Allen and the Gamers had defeated more iron golems than any of the others. In doing so, they had seen wooden, silver, and even gold chests, with silver chests appearing about ten percent of the time. The sheer fact that all three of the chests earned by defeating the final floor boss were silver or higher said something about what kind of special prizes awaited.

“These must be our rewards.” Prince Zeu looked intently at the three treasure chests.

“I figure that the silver, gold, and rainbow chests likely have increasingly more valuable rewards inside. Zeu, Garara, and Helmios, I’d appreciate it if you three would discuss among yourselves what you plan on doing.”

Zeu nodded at Allen’s explanation. “I see. That makes sense.”

“All right, why don’t we look and see what’s inside?” At Helmios’s prompting, the three men gathered together and opened the chests.

Contents

- Silver chest: item storage magic tool (large)
- Gold chest: adamantite body slate (leg)
- Rainbow chest: pendant (Attack + 3,000)

Rosetta glimpsed the spoils of war from over Helmios’s shoulder, her eyes sparkling. “Well I’ll be! Looks like they’re all winners!”

Wow! So if there’s a pendant that can boost your Attack stat, that must mean that you can boost your stats even higher by pairing them with rings. I’m going to need to collect some of those.

Unlike weapons and armor, accessories could affect skills and boost stats. If they could increase the number of accessories they could equip, that would let them boost their stats even further.

“Considering I’m the leader of all four parties, I think it’s only fair that I choose first. I want the rainbow chest.”

“What?!” Rosetta blurted in objection. She could not believe that Prince Zeu would say that. However, no one else seemed to object.

“I don’t see a problem wi’ that.” Admiral Garara was interested in the adamantite slate anyway. “I’ll take th’ gold chest.”

“F-Fine, then I guess we’ll make do with the grimoire.” Rosetta then took the storage magic tool (large) and held it close to her chest as if to prevent anyone from stealing it from her. They had no use for the golem slates, and even if they had ended up with it, they would hardly have gotten a reasonable price for it when selling it at the temple.

Helmios merely laughed ruefully. It was not until later that Allen learned that storage magic tools were incredibly valuable, costing as much to buy as it would to build a house in the most expensive part of the Giamutan capital. Furthermore, this one was spacious enough to store even large items. Were it

put up for sale, it would be worth even more than a mansion.

And here I figured they'd be fighting over the rewards. Looks like this world's more peaceful than I give it credit for.

Merely participating in a raid was not enough to ensure that every member would receive some kind of compensation. In his previous life, Allen had often participated in raids with fifty or so members only for the group to receive one or two prizes in return. It happened so often that it was not uncommon for the situation to devolve into a free-for-all.

While Allen was busy thinking back on his past life, Prince Zeu approached and held out his hand. "This is to thank you for saving Sara and the others," he said in a rather stiff manner. He was holding the pendant he had taken from the rainbow chest mere moments ago.

"Are you sure?"

"I've already achieved my goals. I have no need for this." It seemed that Zeu had intended to give the pendant to Allen the whole time, which was why he had said he wanted the rainbow chest. Allen looked past Zeu at the Ten Heroic Beasts and noticed that they were all nodding along.

"A single adamantite slate is o' no use t' me. Go 'head and give it t' Meruru," Garara said, offering up his slate to Allen as well.

"Whoa, you sure about that?"

"Ye helped us get revenge for our fallen friends," the admiral continued with a smirk. "Thanks t' ye, we can move on." Apparently he, too, had planned to give the item to Allen all along.

Rosetta tightened her grip around the storage magic tool and pulled it even closer to her chest. "Now just wait a moment! We're not giving this up!"

The Gamers had acquired a bunch of items through their time slaying nearly four thousand iron golems, including hiirokane slates, adamantite weapons and armor, and even a storage magic tool.

Though the one we got was only "big," not "large."

From the three gold chests they had opened, they had obtained one lump of

orichalcum and two adamantite slates. Fortunately for them, the slate they received from Garara was different from the other two they had.

This is great. Now we're one step closer to turning Meruru's Tam-Tam into an adamantite golem.

“Congratulations.”

With the matter of the rewards settled, the cube once again addressed the group.

“You are the first to clear the Tower of Tribulation Rank S dungeon. Please accept your certificate, which I will issue to you now.”

All-black cards the size of business cards appeared before Allen, Helmios, Garara, and Zeu. Written in gold lettering on the front of the card was the title “Completion Certificate for the Tower of Tribulation Rank S Dungeon,” while the names of all the participants were written on the back.

“This should be all the proof you need, Your Highness.”

Zeu turned his card over in his hand, inspecting both the front and back closely. “Yes, I suppose you're right.”

“Your reward for being the first to clear the dungeon will be given to you personally by Lord Dygragni.”

“Yes, that's perfect!” Allen cried out in excitement. No sooner had the words come out of his mouth than a large magic circle appeared behind the cube. With a hefty *thump*, a massive, glimmering, pitch-black object appeared in the center of the circle. Before them now stood a ten-meter-tall adamantite golem.

“What?!” Everyone present, with the exception of Allen, cried out in surprise.

Look who's here!

“Whoops! Sorry 'bout that, I didn't mean to surprise you. Name's Dygragni!” The Dungeon Master cheerfully introduced himself to the group.

“Greetings. My name is Allen. While Prince Zeu here is the overall leader of the parties, my party and I will be the ones to receive the reward for being the first to clear the dungeon. Now, since I'm the party leader of—”

“Good grief, kid, cut to the chase!” Dygragni quickly interrupted Allen.

“My apologies.”

“No, I’m sorry too. Things’re just a bit hectic right now, is all, what with Lord Elmea giving me all sorts of crazy orders like the creation of a whole new dungeon by next month.”

“Ah, the dungeon for class promotions. How’s that going?”

“It’ll definitely be worth looking forward to.” Dygragni, currently in the form of a golem, gestured to Allen and the group with his index fingers.

According to what Allen had heard from the spirit gods, one of the Rank A dungeons in Ratash’s Academy City would be renovated into an entirely new dungeon come April. Anyone who cleared the dungeon would receive a class promotion.

Huh, I wonder if that means he was in Academy City until just now. That’d mean he managed to teleport clear to another continent instantaneously.

Up until recently, Dygragni had been residing in the Rank S dungeon, and though Allen and the others had never personally seen him, apparently he would sometimes venture out into the town located on Floor 1. Recently, he had been out quite often to adjust the settings of and make revisions to the class promotion dungeon.

Rohzen finally spoke up as well. “You certainly never change, Dygragni.”

“Huh?! My, my, if it isn’t Rohzen! It’s been a while!”

“Watch your tone. Unlike you, I’ve actually become a god. Ha ha.” The sight of Rohzen standing there with his brow furrowed reminded Allen of the way he talked while munching on fukaman. Dygragni and Rohzen were both around five thousand years old and had received their divine vessels from Elmea at the exact same time.

Looks like they aren’t exactly the best of friends.

“C’mon, you. Don’t scowl at me like that.”

“Hmph. You know, Lord Elmea would be beside himself if he knew you were putting everyone’s wishes and prayers into this playground of yours.”

“What’s that? If Lord Elmea has no sense of beauty, then he’s still got a lot to learn!”

“Y-You scoundrel! Now you’re insulting not only me, but Lord Elmea as well?!”

Dygragni took one look at the flying squirrel shaking his tiny fist in rage and rolled his eyes.

Huh, so apparently he uses all the faith he collects in the divine vessel granted to him by Elmea to create his dungeons, treasures, and dungeon completion rewards.

Allen had previously heard from Rohzen that those who were granted a divine vessel used it to collect the prayers of the faithful, the power from which would then turn them into a demigod and, later, even a god. Dygragni used the power from the prayers he collected to create and build upon his pet project, the Rank S dungeon.

In short, that meant that not only were the tower leading up to the heavens and the Floor 1 town that continued to grow year after year created from the people’s prayers, but so were Goldino and the other incredibly powerful Rank S floor bosses.

Finally, Allen remembered the whole point behind why he was here.

“I was hoping to discuss my reward for being the first to complete the dungeon.”

Dygragni turned to face Allen and leaned in close. “Oh, right, that! What would you like?”

“I want you to transfer all my friends over to Hell Mode.”

“What?!” The Dungeon Master stared at Allen in disbelief and immediately blurted out a response. “That’s impossible! Do you even know what you’re asking?!”

“Is Extra Mode off the table too?”

“Of course it is!”

Even the spirit gods, who had gathered countless prayers from the elves, had

declared that transferring them to Extra Mode was simply not doable. As such, Allen had figured that it would be even less likely that Dygragni, who used all the prayers he accumulated to build up his dungeons, would be able to do it.

“All right, then how about granting us all a second Extra Skill?”

Thanks to Prince Zeu’s earlier performance, Merus had told Allen about the fact that people could have up to three Extra Skills. If he could not change the mode they were on, then he figured he might as well ask for additional skills.

“That’s not possible either. Everything you’ve asked of me is beyond my abilities. Besides, there’s a god right here, so why don’t you ask him?!”

“Hey!”

Allen took a moment to think things over. “Well, how about a class promotion?”

“Hmm? Now *that’s* something I can do, but only for those who haven’t already undergone a class promotion or those with a Talent without too many stars.”

Apparently there were some conditions.

“How many stars can you go up to, then?”

“Three.”

A three-star class promotion, huh? That’s not much. Then again, Rohzen was only able to upgrade Krena to five stars after becoming a spirit god. Anyway, it seems like Dygragni is being pretty open with me. I guess he doesn’t really care for all the limits Elmea has put on him.

These matters surrounding Hell Mode and star numbers were all well-known to Allen, but judging by the way Rohzen had acted when he brought the issue up before, he got the sense that these were things best not shared too freely. Perhaps Dygragni’s indiscriminate behavior was one of the reasons why he had been assigned to make the class promotion dungeon in the first place.

“The class promotion dungeon will open next month and allow only a single class promotion per person, up to a limit of four stars. That doesn’t really sound like too exciting of a reward,” Allen continued, though in the back of his mind,

he could only help but wonder if the stubborn Rohzen would have simply fled back to Rohzenheim if he were in Dygragni's shoes right now.

Dygragni offered up something he was much better at making. "This is true. Well then, how about some kind of magic tool? I can make one of those relatively easily."

In that case, I guess that leaves me with only one sensible option.

Allen had assumed from the start that mode changes and class promotions were out of the question. In place of either of those, he turned and called Meruru over from where she stood a ways off from the group.

"Hey Meruru, can I see your magic disc?"

"Sure thing." Meruru walked over to Allen, removed the magic disc hanging from her neck, and handed it over.

Allen closely inspected the object in his hands. Ten mithril slates were placed into slots located on the front, while the back was as smooth as glass and devoid of any indentations. He then made his next request to Dygragni.

"Can you make slots in the back of the magic disc so that it can accept slates? I'd like to be able to put ten slates in the back like I can in the front, making for a total of twenty slates."

While they were battling through the Rank S dungeon, one thing in particular had struck Allen as odd: there were a lot more magic tools available than there were in other dungeons. This suggested that Dygragni was quite skilled at making these magic tools, and thus, Allen figured that the best way to strengthen his party was to ask him to create or modify a magic tool as their reward for being the first to clear the dungeon. Of course, an orichalcum weapon or armor piece was tempting, but since they had already gotten their hands on some orichalcum ore, they could eventually just have Habarak make those items for them instead. They had also already obtained almost all of the magic tools that would prove useful in their future endeavors.

Thinking back on all the games he had thrown himself into in his past life, he finally came upon the magic disc. These magical items could fit up to ten slates. Put another way, they were limited to ten slates. The golem pilots operated

their golems under these limits, which were akin to the ones Allen and his friends had on their equipment—they could only equip a single stat-boosting ring to each hand, for example, with any subsequent ones having no effect. In other words, rings were limited to one per hand. In his previous life, he used to take on quests in order to increase limits like that.

In a sense, that makes this a quest to boost the number of magic disc slots.

Since he had ultimately managed to achieve his goal of getting class promotions for the rest of his party, Allen thought of the war in Rohzenheim as a class promotion quest. Considering that his group was improving with each event they faced, it was only fair for him to think of these events as opportunities for them to grow stronger. That left the question of what quest was represented by the Rank S dungeon clearing event.

“You want me to increase the number of slate slots in this magic disc?”

“Can you do it?”

Allen held the magic disc out toward Dygragni. An instant later, it disappeared from his hand, appearing in front of Dygragni’s face and beginning to spin around slowly. The Dungeon Master remained silent as he inspected the magic disc, so Allen decided to not interrupt his thoughts.

“Hmm, I think it should be doable. You sure are a peculiar one, kid!” The magic disc began to spin faster and faster in front of Dygragni, eventually going so fast that it blurred to look like a sphere. Shortly thereafter, it began to sparkle as well. “And here you go!”

The glowing “sphere” appeared in front of Allen before slowing down once again. When it finally came to a stop, Allen saw a thin disc with indentations on both sides. He took it into his hand and confirmed that there were indeed a total of twenty indentations, with ten each on the front and back. Tilting the disc back and forth, Tam-Tam’s stats were displayed on its surface like a hologram. Dygragni had really gone above and beyond on this.

“Are there any differences in what it can and can’t do now?”

“Hmm? Well, let’s see. You can still only use one Gigantify and one Supergigantify slate no matter how many you put in. As for everything else,

you'll just have to try it out for yourself."

"All right, got it." Allen thanked Dygragni for his help before turning back to Meruru and holding the magic disc out to her. "This is yours, of course. You were a huge help in the battle against Goldino."

Meruru's hands trembled and large tears threatened to pour down her cheeks as she accepted the magic disc. "Th-Thank you." She then began to curl in on herself and cry.

"Congrats, Meruru!" Krena wrapped her arms around her tiny friend from behind.

"All right, then!" Dygragni's voice echoed throughout the room. "Sounds like we're done here!"

"Um, not quite."

I'm not about to let you off the hook that easily.

"What is it?"

"When we cleared the Rank A dungeon, the operating system mentioned that after beating the final floor boss of the Rank S dungeon, we would have an opportunity to face off against you."

Dygragni briefly fell silent over this. "Ah, yes, that. I'd completely forgotten about it since no one has ever made it this far. Unfortunately, I'll have to ask that you take a rain check. Elmea would be pretty ticked off to see me playing around right now."

"I understand. We still aren't quite strong enough anyway, so perhaps we'll battle you another time." Allen had not planned on challenging him right then and there as Merus had already told him that they did not stand a chance of winning. Even with Helmios, Admiral Garara, Zeu, and their respective parties fully recovered and willing to join the fray, Merus estimated that they would still likely lose, and with a tremendous loss of life at that. When Allen asked him just how strong Dygragni was, Merus remarked that he was excellent in combat and, though still not quite a demigod, as strong as many of the Greater Demonic Deities. Even the final floor boss they had just defeated was not at that level.

Looks like we're going to need to get even stronger.

"I still have a few more questions. Is that okay?"

"Hurry it up!"

"If we beat you, will we be granted an even greater reward than the one we received now?" Allen's question left Garara and the other dwarves speechless. Allen was essentially demanding that Dygragni promise a reward for beating him in battle.

"Good question! You really are funny, kid. But sure, I'll grant any wish you have, assuming it's within my power. Of course, that only applies if you actually beat me!"

Allen bowed his head low, struggling valiantly to keep the smirk off his face all the while. "Thank you. We'll do our best."

If we win, I want Dygragni himself. Mwa ha ha.

From the moment he first laid eyes on Dygragni, Allen could not help but view him as a prize. Right in the middle of his adamantite golem's chest was a crystal cockpit.

Cecil sighed heavily, picking up on the fact that Allen was thinking up something devious.

"Come on by whenever you want. As long as you've got your certificate with you, the system can connect you to me anytime."

Allen bowed low once again. "That would be a great help. Thank you for everything."

"Y'know, since you've come all the way out here, I might as well send you on your way. See ya!"

"Huh?!" By the time Allen raised his head, he and the party had been teleported out to the large open square in front of the Floor 1 temple. They—as well as the adventurers amassed outside the temple—were left standing there with stunned looks on their faces.

"Hey everyone! My Rank S dungeon has finally been cleared!" Dygragni's voice boomed from above everyone's heads. Upon looking up, Allen found

Dygragni standing behind him in what he could only assume was meant to be some kind of superhero pose, the likes of which little kids would emulate after seeing them on TV back in his old life.

I guess this is Dygragni doing his best to strike a cool pose.

Allen recalled hearing once that Dygragni felt compelled to try to look cool in front of people. While the rest of the Gamers looked just as dumbfounded as Allen felt, Meruru also struck the same pose, followed in quick succession by her dwarf comrades and even some other adventurers waiting in the square. The sight seemed to warm Admiral Garara's heart and brought a smile to his face.

"Well then, I'll be waiting for your challenge!" With that, Dygragni was gone, probably off to work on the class promotion dungeon. The square was now filled with clapping adventurers, celebrating the group's victory over the Rank S dungeon after hearing the news from Dygragni himself.

Suddenly, a band of dwarves came out of the crowd and surrounded Garara. "Oy, whaddya think yer doin'?!" The teary-eyed group hefted him up and marched forward, holding him above their heads. Meruru could not help but laugh at the sight.

"Clear the way! This is Admiral Garara's road! We'll be drinking till sunrise, so anyone who's up for the challenge is more than welcome to join!" Apparently they were carrying the admiral like a mikoshi, those portable festival shrines, to a bar to celebrate. The sight reminded Allen of how the admiral looked when the two of them had first met.

Shortly thereafter, the entire city on Floor 1 of the Rank S dungeon turned into one big party in honor of the clearing of the dungeon.

Chapter 14: An Invitation from the Adventurer's Guild

Ten days had passed since the group conquered the Rank S dungeon. The Gamers were once again leaving for a two-day break from the dungeon after their most recent three-day foray into its depths. Clearing the dungeon had had no impact on their daily routine.

Cecil looked over at Allen, who seemed to have a skip in his step. "You certainly seem to be in good spirits."

"Hmm? Do I?" Allen let out a light chuckle.

"What's that chuckle about?" Though Allen's response had not really answered anything, this was hardly uncommon for him, and Cecil and the rest of the Gamers just let the topic slide. The group had spent the past three days farming iron golems on Floor 5, which finally brought Allen a long-overdue increase to his level. Whenever he leveled up, Allen was generally in a good mood for at least a week. This went double for when he raised his Summoning level, after which he would spend day in and day out smirking excitedly at the contents of his grimoire.

I gotta admit, I was really blown away by Meruru. Getting her those ten extra slots was definitely the right choice. That Attack-boosting necklace from Zeu also made quite a difference. Bwa ha ha!

After completely clearing the Rank S dungeon, the team was better than ever at farming iron golems thanks to Meruru's new-and-improved magic disc that allowed her to lock in twice as many slates. Using ten strengthening slates, her golem's stats were through the roof. The necklace he had given to Krena, which boosted her Attack stat by 3,000, really helped her make a dent in the iron golems' powerful armor. Allen could not thank Zeu enough for that one.

If the party continued to level up like this and could unlock Allen's King Me skill, he planned to try taking Goldino down several times as well.

As the party continued down the road, Allen mentioned to Sophie some information he had recently received. “Oh, by the way, the monster holdouts around Rohzenheim’s northernmost fort have nearly been hunted to extinction.”

“Oh my! That’s impressive!” Sophie could hardly contain her excitement at the good news coming from her home country.

Since reaching Summoning Lvl. 8 and becoming able to Summon forth Bird As, Allen had placed nests all around the continent and would occasionally travel between the locations. He had heard from the elven queen that the fort was being repaired and efforts were underway to rebuild the town so the elven refugees could return. Apparently it was a lot of work.

At the beginning of last year, Rohzenheim fell victim to a widespread assault by the Demon Lord Army, during which more than two-thirds of its territory was invaded and many cities and fortresses were destroyed. In the end, Allen and the Gamers had fought off the Demon Lord Army, and now, the cities and fortresses were being rebuilt. With the Demon Lord Army’s withdrawal, however, hundreds of monsters had scattered throughout the war zone and were still hiding. Hundreds if not thousands of these monsters could still be found throughout Rohzenheim, impeding restoration and reconstruction projects.

In hopes of turning the situation around, Allen had offered his assistance, Summoning sixty Dragon As and Insect As to seek out the remnants of the Demon Lord Army. His horde of Summons hunted day and night, terminating any monster they came across. Of course, he had needed to Delete the Insect As in order to make use of his buffs when facing off against the final floor boss, but as that was over and done with now, he had once again Summoned them and sent them to pursue the remnants of the Demon Lord Army. This was his way of helping with the rebuilding of the northernmost fort, which just recently the elven soldiers had been able to return to.

Allen explained all this to Sophie on their way back to their base, and when they arrived, Helmios’s servant informed him that he had a guest waiting for him—one of Baukis Emperor Pupun III’s servants.

“Oh? He’s already here?”

Several days prior, he had come to meet with Allen and Helmios bearing two letters embossed with the crest of the Baukisian imperial family, one for each of them. He told them that he would come to visit again in several days’ time and asked them to review the contents of the letters and make the necessary preparations to join him on a trip to the capital. Allen and Helmios then broke the seals on their respective letters and looked inside.

“The emperor will hold a ceremony to commemorate the four parties who have made history in clearing the Rank S dungeon.”

It was actually Pupun III who had initially ordered Admiral Garara to clear the Rank S dungeon. The news that this mission had been completed was broadcast across the entirety of Baukis thanks to the use of magic tools. Additionally, the reports also mentioned Helmios and Sacred, Prince Zeu and the Ten Heroic Beasts, and even Princess Sophie of Rohzenheim and her comrades as having fought alongside Garara. The reports sounded impressed that these four countries would all come together and achieve the difficult feat using their collective strength.

It was reported that Admiral Garara and the three other parties were invited to the ceremony at which the emperor would bestow his blessings on the people of both Baukis and each of the parties’ respective countries. There must have been some sort of political incentive behind him trying to impress Giamut, Albahal, and Rohzenheim now that their heroes had cleared the Rank S dungeon.

These were the circumstances under which they had initially received their letters. Obviously, with all that had gone into this, they were in no position to refuse. However, the leveling-obsessed Allen honestly was not excited to spend his time on such events.

Figuring that the time had finally come, Allen fought back the sense of annoyance that briefly came over him and forced a calm, reserved expression as he stepped into the dining room to face his guest.

“Wait, who are you?”

There was a single dwarf waiting in the room and no sign of the Baukisian

servant.

“You must be Allen. I’ve been waiting to see you.” The man was one of the workers at the Rank S dungeon’s Adventurer’s Guild.

“Huh? You have? You could have just left a message for me, you know.” Judging by the teacup and the state of the bowl of sweets set before him, it was pretty clear that the man had been waiting for quite some time.

The No-life Gamers maintained a schedule of three days in the dungeon, two days out. Today was their third day in the dungeon and the day on which they usually returned, but Allen had been fixated on farming the iron giants, which kept them out until nightfall.

Before Allen could ask how long the man had been waiting, Helmios called out to him. “Apparently it’s a pretty important matter.”

“Hmm, I see.”

Allen took a seat at the table the guild employee was sitting at. The sofa Garara had spent so much time on was empty for a change as he had returned to his own base, where he was apparently enjoying himself with his comrades.

The man waited for the other members to take their seats before finally beginning to speak.

“Guildmaster General Makkaron is heading here from the head office in Giamut, apparently in the hopes of meeting with you and your parties. Would you be able to stop by the guild tomorrow?”

“Hmm? What’s the occasion?” Allen shot a glance at Helmios. The older man only offered up a smile, apparently also having been summoned.

“I’m terribly sorry, but I’m afraid that’s all I’ve been told. If you need any more information, I can follow up for you.”

“No, that’s fine. Besides, we planned to go tomorrow anyway.” Allen had already planned to visit the Guild to sell off all the items they had farmed from the iron golems over the past three days. This was also a part of their repeating dungeon raiding schedule, which was something the man from the Adventurer’s Guild would surely have known. He had probably come all the way

out here just to avoid suddenly springing the issue on Allen and Helmios when they arrived tomorrow.

Allen did not have a reason to say no, and even if he did, the Adventurer's Guild had done a lot to assist them with clearing the Rank S dungeon. They had been helping him acquire magic stones since back in his Academy City days, and here in the Rank S dungeon, the local Guild had been upfront with him about their deadlines, making for a relatively easy life out here.

Just what could they possibly want to talk about, though? My only guess is that it has something to do with clearing the dungeon.

"We'll visit tomorrow, then."

"Thank you, sir." The guild employee smiled and began to stand up. Before he could, however, Helmios's servant arrived to inform them that dinner was ready.

Helmios's servants made sure to have dinner prepared for Allen and his friends every time they finished their third day in the dungeon. It had become something of a tradition for them to eat with Helmios and Sacred.

"Well, since you've come all the way here, why don't you join us for dinner?" The guild employee nodded at Helmios's invitation and returned to his seat.

* * *

The next day, Allen and the Gamers brought all of the items and equipment they had found during their three-day hunting expedition to the Adventurer's Guild. The room they were escorted to for the negotiations was even more exquisite than the one he was used to.

Since starting their iron golem farming, the party's war chest had continued to grow, and they now possessed over a million gold coins. Allen had even managed to buy up all the Rank A magic stones on the market thanks to the Gold Beans and their ability to ward off monsters, but their balance continuously increased even despite that.

Thinking back on it, when Viscount Granvelle was still a baron, the taxes he paid to the Kingdom of Ratash totaled around twenty or thirty thousand gold coins per year. Allen could currently afford to cover forty to fifty years' worth of

those tax payments in a single transaction.

Once the sale was finished, the group was brought to the local guildmaster general's office, located on the top floor of the building. This was the same room Allen always came to in order to share information on the Rank S dungeon with the local guildmaster general once their sales were complete. Upon the door opening, Helmios turned to look at them as they entered.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," Allen apologized. Just as he finished speaking, he noticed that Admiral Garara and Prince Zeu were also in the room. Even the golem pilots and the Ten Heroic Beasts were present, the latter of which had been allowed to stay in the dungeon thanks to the fact that their praises were still being sung in Albahal for having cleared the Rank S dungeon. Prince Zeu had also reported to the Beast King that the Ten Heroic Beasts had assisted him in the completion of his trial.

"Haven't seen ye in a while, Allen." Admiral Garara waved his hand, gesturing for Allen to come sit next to him. The rest of the dwarves hurriedly found their seats.

"You and Zeu were also invited, I see."

"I s'pose we're all here, then."

As soon as Garara finished speaking, all eyes shifted to the door in the back of the room. When it opened, an elderly gentleman—the guildmaster general—stepped through, fixing his sharp gaze on each of the assembled members in turn. Judging by the way he looked at everyone, it was clear that he was no ordinary man.

So this is the head of the Adventurer's Guild, huh? I wonder what brings him all the way out here from Giamut.

Just like religious sects and guilds that created magic tools, the Adventurer's Guild was one of many massive organizations that spread all across the globe. It was nearly on par with the Elmea Church in terms of global influence. The head office was located in the Empire of Giamut, but there were also major offices in national capitals, branch offices in large domains and cities, and satellite offices in certain villages. Additional locations had even been set up in generally insular countries such as Rohzenheim, where the Church still had not managed to make

inroads.

The main reason the Adventurer's Guild had come to be accepted throughout the world was thanks to the knowledge they had collected over the past thousand-plus years of slaying the monsters that ran rampant throughout the world. Stories told of countries that expelled the Guild falling to ruin at the hands of these monsters. In a sense, this meant that the various guildmaster generals throughout the ages held more power than some kings. Even the Giamutan emperor of a thousand years ago, known to all as the Dreadful Emperor, had been unable to hold the Guild back.

Giamut, which was in the process of trying to unify the entire Central Continent at that time, had attempted to make the Adventurer's Guild a part of the empire in a ploy to gain access to its wealth of information about slaying monsters. The Adventurer's Guild had not been keen on this idea, however, and moved its head office out of Giamut, an action which took several hundred years to reverse. After several breakups within Giamut itself and multiple incursions by the Demon Lord Army, the Adventurer's Guild and Giamut had finally reached the arrangement they were currently in.

Simultaneously with the Adventurer's Guild, the Elmea Church had also relocated its headquarters from Giamut. However, the Church never returned, instead choosing to found and reside in its own country on the Southeast Continent, the Holy Land of Elmahl. Only a branch of the Church now remained in Giamut.

"Oh, look. It's Carlova." Krena was the first to speak, and Allen followed her gaze to see what she was looking at. Behind the guildmaster general was Carlova, their teacher back at the Academy, standing in the doorway next to Popokka, the head of the local Adventurer's Guild.

"It looks like everyone's here now," the elderly man started. "I apologize for calling you all here on such short notice. My name is Makkaron and I am the guildmaster general of the Adventurer's Guild."

Allen watched the man closely as he inspected the faces of each of the members gathered in the room, bringing memories of his time at the Academy to his mind.

“Welcome, Makkaron. May I ask what brings you here today?” Helmios asked with a warm smile.

Leave it to the Hero to already be acquainted with such influential people.

Makkaron, however, did not return his smile, maintaining a cool, professional look on his face. “Ah, Helmios. It’s been quite some time since we last met, hasn’t it? I’ve heard that you successfully cleared the Rank S dungeon. Obviously, the Adventurer’s Guild must react to such news.”

How weird. News must travel pretty fast considering that it’s only been ten days since we did that. Maybe he already had plans to come here?

It took several days to get from Giamut to Baukis when traveling by a magic airship. Even if the news from the local Rank S dungeon branch had reached the head office by way of magic tools on the very same day that it happened, taking into account the time required to make preparations to travel abroad, he would have needed to make the decision to come within two, maybe three days at most.

“Now then, Beast Prince Zeu,” Makkaron said, turning his attention to the Beast Prince. “I’m told you were the leader of the group that cleared the Rank S dungeon. Is that correct?”

“I was the leader, yes. Is that important?”

“Hmm, I see. Then you will be certified as a Rank S adventurer.”

After being momentarily dumbstruck by this announcement, everyone in the room shouted in a mixture of excitement and surprise.

“Rank S?!”

Wow, didn’t they say that there are only a few Rank S adventurers out there? Even the Hero, Helmios, is only Rank A.

Adventurers registered with the Adventurer’s Guild were certified according to their skills and achievements. Rank A was generally the highest rank granted, but in cases so rare they were practically unheard-of, an adventurer would be certified as Rank S. Even the great Hero Helmios, who fought the Demon Lord Army head-on and gave hope to mankind, was Rank A.

“That’s correct. The Adventurer’s Guild has determined that anyone who can clear the Rank S dungeon deserves to be certified as a Rank S adventurer. I came all the way here as the guildmaster general is the only one who can give such a certification.”

Given how infrequently it happened, it made sense that the guildmaster general was the only person in the world who could bestow Rank S upon an adventurer. That certainly justified his traveling all the way here from Baukis.

“In that case, I should not be the one certified,” Zeu responded in a crisp, formal tone. “All I did was assume the role of leader over the four parties. Rank S should be bestowed upon the person who *actually* led the battle.”

“Oh? And who would that be?” Makkaron looked around the room.

“Master Allen.”

“Master Allen? The black-haired boy over there?” The guildmaster general, who had apparently already heard about him, fixed his gaze on Allen.

“He recently celebrated his coming-of-age ceremony.” The implication behind Prince Zeu’s words was that Allen should not be treated as a child.

“I see, I see. So the rest of you gathered here would say the same as well? Allen was the greatest contributor to your success in the Rank S dungeon?”

“That’s correct,” everyone in the room responded in unison.

Makkaron nodded and fixed his steely gaze on Allen. “I see. Popokka, is this the same person you told me about? The one who suggested the creation of a group for providing information to adventurers?”

“Yes,” Popokka replied in a much softer tone than he usually spoke with, likely because he was now addressing the guildmaster general. “And that’s not all. For the past half a year or so, Allen has been the focus of quite a number of occurrences here at the Rank S dungeon.”

Allen shook his head. “No, not at all. Helmios here was the one who provided the information. All I did was help.”

“Does he speak the truth, Helmios?”

“No, I just let him use my name,” Helmios answered with a smirk.

Hmph, so it seems like they're pretty intent on making me a Rank S adventurer. In fact, seeing as they even dragged Carlova along, it seems clear that they were focused on me from the start.

As Allen's head teacher from the Academy had been brought along, it was evident to him that Makkaron knew from the very beginning who they would certify as a Rank S adventurer.

"Well then, it seems like Allen here is the most suitable to be certified as Rank S. Any thoughts, Admiral Garara?"

"He saved all our butts." The admiral's response, which Dogora nodded along to, was short and to the point.

"I see."

Just ten days prior, when all the people had gathered to catch a glimpse of the four parties daring to challenge the final floor boss, all eyes were on Helmios, Garara, and Zeu. No one had paid Allen any mind. Though Dogora had been frustrated at the turn of events, Dverg had tried to reassure him, saying, "When people find themselves in need of a hero, they eventually tend to find one." This seemed to vindicate Dogora, as things had worked themselves out. Until Allen spoke up again, at least.

"Can an adventurer reject the certification?"

"What?!" everyone in the room cried out in surprise.

"You're saying that you don't want to be a Rank S adventurer? May I ask why?"

Being classified as a Rank S adventurer was practically on par with a once-in-a-lifetime miracle coming to pass, so obviously Makkaron was interested in hearing his explanation. However, his tone of voice betrayed that he was not particularly surprised.

"Frankly, I'm just not interested. I'd rather not gain unwanted attention due to such an unnecessary title."

Just how crazy has the world gotten that they're trying to make me a Rank S adventurer, a designation that even the great Hero Helmios hasn't been

granted, in the midst of a war for survival against the Demon Lord Army?

Frankly speaking, Allen saw no benefits to becoming a Rank S adventurer.

“Hm, you’re still quite young, Allen. While the title may carry with it some responsibilities, I’d hardly say that it’s useless.”

“What do you mean?”

“Twenty years ago, I was rejected out of disinterest when I tried to certify another as a Rank S adventurer. However, after giving me an opportunity to explain, they changed their mind.” It was pretty clear that Makkaron had already anticipated that Allen would turn him down.

“Is being known as a Rank S adventurer really that valuable?”

“It certainly is. Could I tell you a little bit about what Rank S adventurers are?” Makkaron didn’t wait for Allen’s response before continuing. “Generally speaking, Rank S is the rank granted to those whose skills and achievements are greater than a Rank A’s. This is why it’s so uncommon for someone to be certified as such. Believe it or not, only one person is certified as Rank S every few decades.”

I’m guessing my achievements are having cleared the Rank S dungeon and providing information to the Adventurer’s Guild. But how useful is the system if they’re only granting it to one person every couple decades?

“That’s not a whole lot of people, then. How many are there alive with the rank?”

“I believe there are two. Three, should you accept it.”

“You *believe*?”

“Rank S adventurers tend to be rather strong-willed and do as they please. I haven’t seen Bask, an adventurer I certified as Rank S twenty years ago, in at least a decade or so.”

The other Rank S adventurer had been certified multiple decades ago, so if they were even still alive was uncertain.

“Bask?”

It sounds like even the Adventurer's Guild doesn't know where he is. Or rather, they're comfortable letting him run around as he pleases. But still, it's odd that I've never heard about a Rank S adventurer considering the dire times we're in with the Demon Lord Army trying to destroy us all.

At present, the world was under continuous assault at the hands of the Demon Lord Army. If there was an adventurer out there with skills and achievements so great that they had been named a Rank S, now was certainly the time to make use of them and further their triumphs.

If this had all happened twenty years ago, that would mean it was before Helmios had even entered the picture. Allen and his friends had learned about him, as well as all the other heroes and generals who had fought against the Demon Lord Army, in their Demon Lord history class back at the Academy, but this was the first time he had ever heard of anyone named Bask.

"You know, Helmios has fought against the Demon Lord Army and saved humanity on countless occasions," Rosetta noted. "Why doesn't that count as an achievement worthy of being granted Rank S?"

Makkaron nodded in response. "What you say is certainly true."

"I guess it's for the better. If Helmios up and disappeared for a decade, the world would fall to ruin." Everyone got a good laugh at Rosetta's statement, which seemed to reduce the tension that had built up since Allen's announcement that he would not accept the certification.

"Shall I tell you about the rights granted to a Rank S adventurer, then?" Makkaron asked once the laughter had died down.

"Rights? You mean there are privileges granted to adventurers?"

Although adventurers had the backing of the Adventurer's Guild, they were basically freelancers who stayed out of politics and religion; the concept of there being rights and privileges associated with being one had never even occurred to Allen. The only real advantage that came with it was that countries—not including Rohzenheim and a few others—eased immigration procedures as it would be beneficial for them to have skilled adventurers working within their borders.

“Rank S adventurers, you see, are granted the same authority as a deputy guildmaster general.”

The room was filled with gasps of surprise. People exchanged glances and repeated his words in hushed tones to one another.

Being on par with a deputy guildmaster general would grant a status even higher than a managing guildmaster. That’s quite impressive indeed.

The Adventurer’s Guild was structured like a pyramid, with Makkaron sitting at the very top.

Adventurer’s Guild Structure

- Guildmaster General: The role filled by Makkaron.
- Deputy Guildmaster General: Assistant to the guildmaster general. Only a handful of people hold this title.
- Managing Guildmaster: The top member who oversees all of the Adventurer’s Guilds in a given country. Even large countries only have one. They are broken up into groups, each of which reports to a deputy guildmaster general.
- Deputy Managing Guildmaster: Assistants to the managing guildmaster. Each managing guildmaster has several that report to them.
- Guildmaster: The head of an Adventurer’s Guild founded in any given domain, large city, dungeon, etc. This is the role held by Popokka and Carlova.
- Chief: The head of an Adventurer’s Guild satellite office. Only one person is assigned to a village or other place which does not have a Guild.

In that respect, Carlova may seem like something of a meathead, but he’s actually got a pretty impressive resume.

Allen could not help but take a slight jab at his former teacher.

“If you become a Rank S adventurer, you will be granted the authority to provide guidance to each country’s managing guildmaster and other guildmasters as needed. This is just an off-the-cuff estimation and I can’t speak for all cases, but your influence in foreign countries should be greater than your current status as the grand strategist of Rohzenheim considering that they don’t have much in the way of diplomatic relations with other countries.”

Makkaron spoke about the title given to Allen by Rohzenheim as if it were obvious that he already knew about it.

Well, he’s got a point. I picked up on that too. My title in Rohzenheim only holds any meaning to countries that have diplomatic relations with Rohzenheim and larger nations that hold it in high esteem.

The only countries Rohzenheim maintained diplomatic relations with were Ratash and a few others. His title of grand strategist would only be met with confused stares from royalty belonging to countries that did not have any such relations.

The only reason I even asked the queen of Rohzenheim to grant me a court rank was to prevent Ratash from trying to place me in their court. I never actually intended to use it.

“In other words, you’re trying to tell me that it would be most advantageous for me to be a Rank S adventurer if I intended to travel around the world without being bothered?”

“That is correct. To a certain extent, a Rank S adventurer is the most unencumbered person in this world.” Makkaron fixed his gaze on Allen as he spoke.

Hmm. I gotta admit, that’s not too bad of a deal. To be honest, it sounds almost like a system created specifically for adventurers like me, though I guess it only makes sense that the Adventurer’s Guild of all places would do that.

Suddenly, Allen recalled that Makkaron had also mentioned that the title carried with it some responsibilities.

“Are there any kinds of hassles I’ll need to deal with if I become a Rank S adventurer? Like needing to attend monthly meetings or something?”

I'm way too busy with my iron golem farming to attend things like that if they exist.

However, Makkaron merely shook his head. "No, there's nothing predetermined like that. As I mentioned earlier, one person I certified over twenty years ago has been completely out of touch. I do wish that you would remain accessible, though."

"So what is that responsibility you were referring to?"

"Well, since you would have the same authority as a deputy guildmaster general, that also means that you would have the right to speak at gatherings of the Five Continent Alliance. It would be a good idea for you to simply bear that in mind. Also, in light of everything going on in the world, it's fairly likely that you'll run across people who have been hurt by monsters at some point in your travels. When that happens, I would appreciate it if you would help slay those monsters should anyone ask for your assistance. If you could just provide some instruction to the local Adventurer's Guild and perhaps work with them to think up some strategies, I'm sure they can do the rest on their own. I wouldn't think of asking you to stay there forever."

Allen finally felt as if he had a firm understanding of what a Rank S adventurer actually was.

Makes sense. So this is a kind of system to grant both powers and responsibilities to people who are a little bit out there, so to speak.

This seemed like a system created to force a little self-awareness onto people with incredible power who wanted to just live as they pleased, not giving a second thought to nobles or royal families.

Strength notwithstanding, it was difficult for free spirits like those to stand in the face of the tremendous collective might wielded by the rest of the world. Even if they were several or even several dozen times stronger than any normal human, they would still not be able to win against the world. On the contrary, the world would try to control their power. Then again, those without any desire to go against common sense and the rules of the land probably would not even consider leading a self-driven life in the first place. That was probably why people like Helmios and Garara, or even other nobles or military men,

would never be certified as Rank S adventurers no matter how powerful they were.

It was a completely different story if someone who possessed hundreds or even thousands of times the strength of a normal human, someone on equal footing with these other heroes, decided to rail against common sense and the rules of the land, however. They needed to keep such outrageous people at arm's length and interact with them as little as possible in order to avoid tragedy. Therefore, the meaning of the Rank S title was to grant them a certain degree of freedom while making them aware of the expectations of their power and to encourage them to be aware of their responsibilities. That also nicely summed up why Makkaron had hurried here after the Rank S dungeon was cleared.

Allen had been planning to meet with the emperor of Baukis. As had been the case in Ratash and Rohzenheim, there would likely be more opportunities to meet royalty and aristocrats in other countries in the future. Holding the title of Rank S adventurer could prove useful in stopping influential people from trying to restrict Allen's power while also preventing friction between them, as that could otherwise lead to conflict on a national scale.

With the privileges of a deputy guildmaster general, assuming that the other party knew what this meant, they would likely refrain from making unreasonable demands or otherwise acting rudely. Instead, they would choose silence so as to avoid the threat of Allen pulling the Adventurer's Guild from their nation. On the flip side, this also served to deter Allen from having the Adventurer's Guild leave a country.

I guess this is ultimately a lot better than being treated like just some member of the four parties that cleared the Rank S dungeon.

Allen was finally ready to start properly weighing the pros and cons of this offer when Cecil broke the silence, her harsh tone bringing him back to reality. "What's there to think about?!"

"Huh? What's gotten into you?"

"Listen, I want to be able to say that the leader of my party is a Rank S adventurer, all right? So hurry up and do it!"

As if issuing a command, she placed one hand on her hip and raised the other, extending her arm and pointing a finger at Allen.



“Sh-She’s right!”

“Definitely, just think about how cool it’d be to be a Rank S adventurer!”

Sophie and Krena quickly voiced their agreement with Cecil. Dogora, Keel, and Volmaar all nodded along as well.

“Hmm, I guess you’re right. If this is what my friends think, then it can’t be all that bad of an offer,” Allen said, finally deciding to agree to take up the role of a Rank S adventurer.

“All right then. Carlova, please get Allen’s ID card.”

Carlova hurried into the back room and returned with a metal chest. Inside was a glimmering gold adventurer’s ID card. They had apparently prepared a Rank S adventurer’s ID card in advance.

“I, Guildmaster General Makkaron of the Adventurer’s Guild, hereby certify you, Allen, as a Rank S adventurer. Please take your adventurer’s ID card.” Makkaron took the simple card with an S on the front and held it out toward Allen.

The whole room erupted in exuberant hollers and applause as Allen’s friends quickly surrounded him to get a look at his Rank S adventurer’s ID card.

“Well, looks like we better get t’ celebratin’!”

Admiral Garara quickly hopped down from his chair. Allen, however, knew that this could only mean a wild night of drinking.

“No, I think I’ll be all right.”

“Out o’ th’ question! I won’t hear another word! Gah ha ha!”

Garara belted out a laugh as he threw his arm around Allen’s shoulders as if to prevent him from escaping. Allen could not help but sigh inwardly at the thought that this was one of the few times where his status as a Rank S adventurer counted for very little.

Chapter 15: An Audience at the Baukisian Imperial Palace

After Makkaron bestowed upon Allen the status of Rank S adventurer, the Gamers returned to the base only to find a servant from the Empire of Baukis waiting for them. The servant confirmed the date on which Allen would have his audience with the emperor and informed them that they would have a few days of downtime after arriving in the capital. More than anything, Allen just wanted to hurry and unlock his King Me skill so that he could spend the time between their arrival and their audience with the emperor leveling up.

In order to get that done, Allen hatched a secret plan that he could carry out while on his way to the imperial palace. By using a Bird A's Abilities and Awakened Ability, the party would be able to go to and from the Rank S dungeon. Of course, he would spend his time following the servant around as they performed their mundane, time-consuming tasks such as riding the magic ship, landing in the imperial capital, and arriving at the room where he would be waiting until he was finally granted an audience. Meanwhile, however, whenever he was out of the servant's sight, he would return to the dungeon to farm iron golems and trade at the Adventurer's Guild. In this manner, he could still give Baukis the impression that he and his friends were observing all the proper formalities on their way to the capital. It went without saying that no one would know that he could travel across continents as he pleased merely by setting up teleportation points.

Considering that Helmios would also be traveling with them, Allen told him about the plan and asked him for his assistance. Helmios merely chuckled to himself and commented that this was a very Allen-like plan before agreeing to keep the servant busy during their travels.

* * *

Ten days after arriving in the capital, the party was finally granted an audience with Pupun III, the emperor of Baukis.

I know they said it would take a few days, but ten is just a tad excessive. I'm really glad I was able to travel back and forth.

Just as the Gamers finished selling the items they had garnered from their iron golem farming and buying their magic stones, Helmios called out to Allen via the Bird G he had left back in the capital. "It's about time. You'd better hurry on back."

"Ah, got it. I'll be right there," Allen responded through the Bird G. Then, using Bird A's Awakened Ability, Return to Nest, he teleported the whole party from the Adventurer's Guild in the Rank S dungeon to the room where Helmios was waiting in the Baukis imperial palace. The room was quite large and had around forty people inside. In addition to Helmios and his party, Sacred, Admiral Garara and his men, as well as Prince Zeu and the Ten Heroic Beasts, were also sitting at a long table that ran down the length of the room.

The managing guildmaster and deputy managing guildmasters overseeing the Adventurer's Guild in Baukis were present too, seated near the door. This was the first time that Allen, a newly minted Rank S adventurer, had been invited to an audience with a signatory of the Five Continent Alliance, so they had come along as representatives of the Adventurer's Guild.

"Oh, ye're here."

Admiral Garara was the first to take notice of Allen's presence. Much to Allen's surprise, he had done away with his usual tricorne hat and ruffian attire. Instead, he was dressed in an admiral's uniform, with countless medals and ribbons adorning his chest. Obviously, there was something of a dress code to be observed when meeting the emperor.

Garara was joined by the other dwarven golem pilots, similarly dressed in military garb. Seeing the group sitting in a tight formation around the admiral once again reminded Allen that Garara was indeed a military man.

"I gotta admit, you clean up well, Admiral. You look nothing like your usual slovenly self."

"Oh, shut yer trap," Garara replied playfully to Allen's teasing.

Allen then spoke to Zeu and his entourage. "Have you gotten a response from

the Beast King yet?”

Zeus also looked quite regal as he sat there with a relaxed expression. His mane shimmered like a proper beastkin, and he was clad in all white. Allen figured that this must have been how most of the Albahalan royal family dressed.

“I received a message just the other day telling me to return to Albahal. I can’t thank you enough, Allen.”

This was the first time Prince Zeus would be going home in many years. For as long as Allen had known him, Zeus nearly always kept a stern look on his face, but that had been almost completely replaced with a gentle grin now that he was to return home. He must have been quite pleased to finally reunite with his wife again.

“Hardly. We couldn’t have done it without your strength. And what of the Ten Heroic Beasts?”

Zeus chuckled. “Ah, yes. The king said he would like to speak about that as well. I can only hope he won’t get too physical over the matter.”

“Ouch. Good luck with that.” Though Allen assumed that Zeus was joking, the Beast King was known for having a short temper.

“Considering everything you’ve done for us, what do you think about coming to Albahal?”

“Really? Are you sure it’s okay?” Historically, there was a feud between beastkin and humans. Allen had heard that even the great Hero Helmios had found gaining entry to Albahal difficult.

“Absolutely. Of course, we should not force ourselves to forget what happened between our ancestors a thousand years ago, but just as we did in the Rank S dungeon, we should be able to work together as we aim for our shared goal. That is the era I hope to see going forward.”

It was certainly true that Zeus would have never been able to clear the Rank S dungeon were it not for Allen and Helmios’s assistance. According to the Beast Prince, their group clearing the dungeon had made him realize that there were goals that could not be reached if one held on to their hatred.

“I see. Well, perhaps we’ll come visit after Meruru gets her class promotion.”

“Understood. I’ll be eagerly awaiting your arrival, then.”

The class promotion dungeon was going to open up any day now, and Allen wanted to get Meruru’s class promotion so she could start piloting hiirokane golems.

Besides, I might be able to get my hands on some useful information for powering up. If I could just unravel the secret of the royal family’s Beast Mode, I’d be even closer to getting the Gamers into Extra Mode.

“Apologies for the wait. The emperor will now grant you an audience.”

Guided by a team of dwarves, everyone headed up one floor, where they were greeted by a long hallway. At its end was a set of massive golden doors decorated with red and blue gems, an elaborate design carved into the sides. One of the dwarves used a magic tool clipped to the wall to notify the emperor of the group’s arrival, then asked them all to wait patiently.

Allen stared at the door, lost in thought.

I wonder how many magic stones just one of those doors would be worth.

“Pupun III, the emperor of Baukis, will now see you!” the dwarf holding the magic tool suddenly declared. His voice echoed loudly throughout the large hall, making Allen briefly wonder if he risked going deaf.

With that, the golden doors opened and a blast of light filled the hallway. On the other side, Allen saw an audience chamber with a floor made entirely of gold. Dwarven nobles flanked the entrance, creating a path for Allen and the others. The line of aristocrats led to a throne of the same gold as the floor. On it sat a chubby man in his forties, looking at his visitors from afar with a curious look on his face.

“Beast Prince Zeu and the Ten Heroic Beasts of Albahal; Helmios and Sacred of Giamut; Princess Sophialohne, Grand Strategist Allen, and the No-life Gamers of Rohzenheim; and, of course, Admiral Garara and Stinger of the Baukis Navy. You are all hereby granted an audience with the emperor. You may proceed.” As soon as the dwarven guide concluded his remarks, Allen and the others passed through the golden doors that led to the audience room.

As they had been instructed in advance, the leaders of each of the parties walked in a row, leading the way. The golden floor reflected the light cast down by the illumination magic tools attached to the ceiling, making it look as if they were walking on the sun.

“It looks like this is what the emperor has spent all that money he earned through the blood, sweat, and tears of his subjects on,” Allen whispered over his shoulder to Keel, who was following closely behind.

“He can hear you, y’know.” Though Keel scolded Allen, he had been thinking exactly the same thing.

Allen had witnessed many dwarves trying to earn money in the Rank S dungeon. Those Baukisian citizens were taxed a portion of their dungeon earnings. In addition, Allen had heard that those who did business on Floor 1 of the Rank S dungeon were also obligated to pay taxes, citizens or not. He had no way of knowing what percentage of that tax money went into creating and maintaining this gilded room, but all the same, he could not believe it.

Before long, Allen stopped at a straight line made of jewels embedded in the floor, just as they had been instructed beforehand. He found it rather comforting to know exactly how far he was supposed to go. Garara, Helmios, Zeu, and Allen all then got down on one knee, followed shortly thereafter by their respective party members.

“The emperor would like to first speak to those heroes who cleared the Rank S dungeon!” exclaimed a dwarf—likely the prime minister or in some other such noble position, judging by his appearance—to Allen’s left, his voice booming throughout the room. Allen was impressed at how loud he was considering that he was not using a magic tool.

Everyone in attendance looked up at the seated emperor.

“Thank you all for coming. I am the emperor of Baukis, Pupun III.”

To Allen, who had seen many dwarves who were either in the military like Admiral Garara or working as adventurers, the emperor looked like an unremarkable, chubby old man.

So this is the emperor of Baukis, one of the founding members of the Five

Continent Alliance, huh? I'd heard that he was something of a petulant child, and I've gotta admit, he certainly looks that way.

The chubby old man let out a sigh before continuing to speak. "Admiral Garara, I would like to formally praise you for having completed your duty of clearing the Rank S dungeon in spite of the losses you suffered along the way."

"Thank ye, Yer Majesty."

Despite the kneeling dwarf's polite tone of voice, it was clear that he was fuming over the comrades he had lost being so casually disregarded. Allen heard the nobles standing in line breathe sighs of relief, perhaps due to the situation or perhaps because they knew that the admiral did not think highly of the emperor.

Seems a bit odd that they'd invite the admiral here despite knowing that he doesn't hold the emperor in high regard. I guess they just wanted to show and make the most of the fact that Baukis has a hero of their own.

"Please tell me everything you can about Dygragni's dungeon. What kinds of rooms did it have? What items did you obtain?"

The emperor began questioning Garara. All of his questions, however, were related to the sights and monetary values of items found within the dungeon. This led to the admiral getting even more stressed, and once the questions were finished, he answered the emperor in a frank, direct manner.

"Yer Majesty, I will give a full report at a later date. For now, I would appreciate it if ye would also thank those who joined me in clearin' the Rank S dungeon."

"Hmm? Ah, yes. That's right." The emperor nodded and turned his attention to Helmios. "Hero Helmios, I assume you are in good health?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"I would like to thank you for joining forces with Admiral Garara and clearing the Rank S dungeon."

"It is truly an honor to receive such a compliment from Your Majesty. Far more than I deserve," Helmios replied, holding his kneeling position and bowing

his head low.

The emperor nodded cheerfully at this and began asking Helmios various questions as well. Allen kept an ear open so he could listen to their discussion while he thought back on what he had been told about Emperor Pupun III.

The Empire of Baukis was founded by Pupun III's grandfather, who had planned to annex the other countries on the Baukisian continent. His father, who had inherited the plan, unified all of the countries into a single, giant empire. In other words, the current emperor of Baukis did not know the difficulties that came with uniting multiple countries. It seemed that he had grown up without much in the way of troubles and had no experience in dealing with such issues. In fact, the defensive naval force that would hold off the Demon Lord Army had been put in place shortly before he took the throne, so he had never personally experienced an invasion. All in all, he had had a rather pampered upbringing.

Even so, Allen bore no ill will toward him. Some rulers were cruel due to having been spoiled as children, while others were known to be wise despite having come from similar environments. However, no matter the case, it was an incredibly daunting task for a single person to wield the great power that came with leading a country.

Yeah, I'm definitely not suited to being a king or a member of the nobility. In that sense, I probably made the right choice by becoming a Rank S adventurer and further strengthening my relationship with the Adventurer's Guild.

Once he was finished speaking with Helmios, the emperor turned his attention to Zeu.

"Ah, yes, Beast Prince Zeu. Not only was I surprised to learn that you would lend us your aid in clearing the Rank S dungeon, but I was rendered speechless when I heard that the Ten Heroic Beasts, the cornerstones of Albahal's strength, would be joining you."

"Thank you, Your Imperial Majesty."

Though the emperor spoke to Zeu rather casually and Zeu replied politely in kind, there was a certain tension in the room due to the fact that Zeu had brought all of the Ten Heroic Beasts with him. As the emperor pointed out, the

Ten Heroic Beasts were the greatest warriors Albahal had to offer and rarely left the country. Even when they did, for reasons such as attending meetings of the Five Continent Alliance, the entire group had never come all together.

Moreover, beyond the borders of Albahal, beastkin were seen as a rough-and-tumble race, though no one would go so far as to call them lawless. Allen had heard from Uru, the wolfkin, that beastkin had a long history of persecution and tried to keep other races in check by spreading such an image.

And yet, the Beast Prince and his best warriors were now gathered within reach of the emperor. Allen figured that Baukis had almost certainly considered his safety and readied themselves for any eventuality when planning how the audience would go and where everyone would stand. Nothing could have prepared them for the beastkin's overwhelming presence, however.

In the case of Helmios and Sacred, they had already had countless audiences with the emperor and built up a trusting relationship, so no one gave being in the presence of Giamut's strongest warriors a second thought. And it seemed that Emperor Pupun III felt much the same way about Zeu's group rather than sharing the same concerns about them as the other nobles.

"What do you think? Would you mind staying here several more days as guests in my palace? I would love to hear more about Albahal and your amazing martial arts tournament." He looked at the Beast Prince with the glimmering eyes of an excited schoolboy.

"The king has already called for our return to the kingdom," Zeu responded firmly and to the point, "but if it is your wish, I would be more than happy to spend the time before our return here in the palace."

The emperor nodded enthusiastically before turning his attention to Allen.

"Last, but not least, Allen from Rohzenheim, was it? Please raise your head to face me."

"Certainly, Your Majesty."

No sooner had Allen raised his head than a completely different sense of tension ran through the nobles gathered in the room. Allen merely fixed the emperor with a strong, unwavering gaze, and several of the nobles and

ministers began mumbling among themselves at the sight.

“H-He’s still just a kid, no?”

“I’ve heard he’s already reached adulthood.”

“Is he really a Rank S adventurer?”

“That’s what the Adventurer’s Guild’s announcement said, at least.”

While those in attendance had been afraid of Prince Zeu and the Ten Heroic Beasts, a sense of shock and surprise rippled throughout the group upon seeing Allen. He had to fight back a sigh of annoyance as he deduced the reason behind all the eyes falling on him.

Makkaron really went too far, huh? I mean, was all this really necessary?

On the day Allen was certified as a Rank S adventurer, Makkaron had used a magic tool to disseminate information about him to all the Adventurer’s Guilds across the globe. This was to deal with the fact that the new Rank S adventurer—a position that granted him the same authority as a deputy guildmaster general, meaning he was able to give orders to all guildmasters and managing guildmasters—was a fifteen-year-old young man. He had shared this information in advance in order to prevent any unnecessary disputes among various countries’ branches since they had been operating at their own discretion up until now. Obviously, the guildmaster of each of the respective Adventurer’s Guilds shared these details with the countries in which they were located.

The fact that this was shared in a mass notification using magic tools shook each country. Nationwide announcements were not made except for matters of great importance, such as announcing the start of hostilities with the Demon Lord Army. The last time the Adventurer’s Guild had done this was when a Rank S monster appeared on the Central Continent.

The message stunned the ministers in each country. The opening text read, “We have certified Allen, a young man who has cleared the Rank S dungeon and greatly contributed to the Adventurer’s Guild, as a Rank S adventurer.”

It then went on to say, “He has been found to have made the contributions, and be skilled enough to make such contributions, of a Rank S adventurer. His

fighting ability is greater than the total fighting power of a medium-sized nation. The party members working under him are capable of going head-to-head with the entire army belonging to a major nation. The Adventurer's Guild will not interfere in any manner if you are to come into conflict with him or any other Rank S adventurer."

It essentially meant that the Adventurer's Guild would not get involved with either side in the event that a dispute arose with Allen. The scary thing about it was that Allen did not need their cooperation if such a thing happened.

That announcement is probably what delayed the audience by several days.

The day after the notification, Allen's home country, the Kingdom of Ratash, was flooded with inquiries. Various countries using magic tools and foreign affairs officers stationed in the royal capital alike all wanted to know who Allen was, why they had hidden such an influential person, how the kingdom planned to deal with Allen in the future, and so on.

In response, the king spoke to Viscount Granvelle and learned that Allen was the grand strategist of Rohzenheim and no longer belonged to Ratash. In truth, Allen himself was not a noble but an adventurer.

However, that answer seemed to have aroused strong suspicion from other countries. Members of the Five Continent Alliance in particular criticized the fact that it deviated from the Alliance's spirit of cooperating to fight the Demon Lord Army. They even went so far as to claim that the king had long been uncooperative with the Alliance. Rumors and harsh reactions flew in from all over the world, and the kingdom had spent the past few days canceling all of its events, seemingly busy dealing with the matter.

The Baukisian emperor was also panicked by this notice. While he had sent a personal letter to Allen to plan an audience, the only information he had had to go on was that Allen was "a person related to Rohzenheim." As soon as he learned of the relationship between Viscount Granvelle and Allen, he used all of his diplomatic privileges to bombard the viscount with questions at Ratash's royal castle. Concurrently, he made an inquiry to Rohzenheim, with whom he already maintained a diplomatic relationship, and received a stunning reply:

"Frankly speaking, we believe that it took longer than necessary for our grand

strategist, Allen, to be certified as a Rank S adventurer. Furthermore, we believe that the details in the notice underestimate Allen's abilities, so we are currently requesting the Adventurer's Guild to send a correction. Rohzenheim stands by Allen."

The nobles and ministers could barely hide their anxiety and skepticism at being in the same room as such a man. Unlike Helmios, who was known throughout the world for his gentle demeanor and battles against the Demon Lord Army, no one had so much as *heard* of Allen before now.

Allen could not tell if it was okay for him to speak or if he risked suddenly coming under attack.

I guess everyone's so freaked out since the last Rank S adventurer, Bask, was pretty rough around the edges. That so-called "King of Shura" really put me in a tough spot.

Twenty years prior, Bask, the King of Shura, had become a Rank S adventurer after saving a huge number of people from monsters. He greatly disliked serving under the Five Continent Alliance or armies led by nobles, however, and had disappeared. As a result of that experience, the various member nations of the Five Continent Alliance kept a wary eye on Rank S adventurers. That was why the Adventurer's Guild had sent the deputy managing guildmasters of Baukis to attend the audience as well.

The Empire of Baukis, where the Rank S dungeon was located, inevitably received a lot of income in the form of commission and tax payments from the Adventurer's Guild. On the other hand, the Guild could not simply overlook that much of their income from Baukis came directly from the Rank S dungeon. In that sense, they needed to keep a close watch on Allen so that he would not do anything crazy while also being prepared to react quickly in case there was an emergency. This, of course, was cause for concern for Baukis as well.

"Silence," the prime minister said in his loud, booming voice. "You are in the presence of His Majesty."

The murmuring immediately came to a stop. With the room quiet once again, the emperor continued speaking to Allen.

"Allen, you are the one known as the Summoner of the Beginning, correct?"

“Yes, I am.”

Allen had first used the title “Summoner of the Beginning” during his battle against Helmios at the Academy. According to Makkaron, it was common for Rank S adventurers to have two names, just like how Bask was known as the King of Shura.

“And you can put these Summons of yours to work? I wish to see this in action.”

“Certainly, Your Majesty.”

Allen nodded and, after thinking for a moment, Summoned a Bird F, which looked to all present like a pigeon. The Bird F left Allen’s hand and went high into the air, where it flew in lazy circles near the ceiling.

The ministers and nobles lining the room looked up, some with looks of surprise and others with barely contained worry as they wondered what Allen would do. Conversely, the emperor’s face flushed brightly with curiosity as he watched on.

“This is amazing! Bring it closer! Wow!”

Allen sent the Bird F to rest on the emperor’s shoulder. While the nobles and ministers gasped, ready to leap away at any moment, the chubby emperor thumped his legs against the throne in excitement.

“That bird is a symbol of peace in my homeland. I called it here out of a desire to build a peaceful relationship with Your Imperial Majesty as well as all the people of Baukis.”

Technically speaking, they were a sign of peace back in my past life.

“Ooh, I see!” Pupun III nodded enthusiastically at the Bird F perched on his shoulder.

“I appreciate you taking the time to grant me an audience. In fact, there is something that I would like to thank you personally for.”

The emperor cocked his head to the side. “Oh? Something you wish to thank me for? And what would that be?” The prime minister and other nobles gathered in the room all looked on with great curiosity.

“Meruru, a member of my party, is from Baukis. We first met her at the Academy in Ratash. She joined us in taking on the Rank S dungeon and is an important member of our team who I hope will continue to join us on our adventures. I would like to personally thank you for having granted her the opportunity to study at Ratash’s Academy.”

Baukis often sent talented people to study abroad. Part of it was to have them get an education in a foreign country, of course, but it served multiple purposes beyond that as well. Students could interact with up-and-comers from other countries and build relationships that would be beneficial for future diplomatic relations in the process. However, Allen believed that the emperor had chosen the small Kingdom of Ratash for Meruru as she would not have gotten a kind reception were she to study in Giamut. As the country had a hegemonic national policy, there seemed to be very few examples of talented people from other nations being sent to study there.

“Oh, is that so? I’m certainly pleased to hear it!” The overly excited emperor with the Bird F still perched on his shoulder nodded enthusiastically at the boy bowing before him.

“What?! No, I’m afraid that just can’t happen!” the prime minister chimed in shortly after the emperor. The look on his face made it clear that he knew they had been had. After all, Allen had mentioned that he hoped Meruru would “continue to join” them on their adventures, which essentially meant that he intended to bring her along with him.

Unseen by all, Allen had a devious smirk on his face. From behind him, Cecil let out a heavy sigh and muttered, “And so it begins...”

The prime minister panicked and glanced back at the emperor, who was looking at Allen with a smile on his face. Despite his joy, however, the next words to leave his mouth would significantly impact Allen’s ability to take Meruru with him on his travels across the globe.

“Well, I see you certainly are a Rank S adventurer. You definitely know whom you should show your appreciation to.”

“Of course. There is no one here that I am more appreciative of than you, Your Majesty.”

“Y-Your Majesty, please...” the prime minister said, trying his best to work his way into the conversation. Things could end poorly depending on how the situation surrounding Meruru played out, and he had no way of knowing what direction Allen would lead this conversation.

Hey, keep outta this!

Allen was just about to lay his cards on the table when they were rudely interrupted.

“Excuse me, Your Majesty!” A dwarf dressed as an officer rushed into the hall, drenched in sweat. He appeared to be the equivalent of a low-ranking knight in Ratash.

“Wh-What are you doing here?! Do you have any idea what’s going on right now?!”

While Allen was busy figuring out how to deal with the situation unfolding in front of him, his thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the prime minister, who was shaking with rage.

“M-My apologies, sir. It’s just that there’s an urgent matter and I—”

“Oh? And what might that be?” the emperor asked, directly addressing the officer.

“Y-Your Majesty. We’ve received a request for help from the Holy Land of Elmahl. It seems that the capital, Teomenia, is ablaze.”

The moment those words left the officer’s mouth, the whole room erupted in cries of shock. Apparently, a new battle was about to begin.

Side Story 1: Prince Zeu and His Bride

One day, several years prior to Allen's arrival at the Rank S dungeon, a group of beastkin outfitted in armor and carrying a palanquin approached the south gate of Albahal's capital. On any other day, this gate, which led directly to the city's business district, opened for business with the sunrise and would typically be bustling with merchants and travelers. On this day, however, it remained closed and silence blanketed the streets. It was clearly due to the arrival of the palanquin.

For the past three years, relations between the beast kingdoms of Albahal and Brysen had been worsening. Neither wished to go to war, however. Thus, in order to strengthen their ties, the two beast kingdoms had decided to bind their fates through marriage.

"We hereby announce the arrival of Princess Rena of Brysen! Open the gates!" the frontmost guard on the right side of the formation shouted once the palanquin reached the gates.

Silence again fell upon the scene before, moments later, the massive gate began to groan as it opened. Beyond it was a wide road that stretched all the way to the royal castle. This road, like the area surrounding the south gate, would be full of foot traffic on any other day, but none of its usual liveliness was to be seen. Rather, it was lined with large groups of onlookers gazing at the palanquin.

The guards, balancing the palanquin on their shoulders, marched slowly and silently through the gate, following the road toward the palace. Upon arriving at their destination, an Albahalan band, accompanied by a contingent of royal guards, began to play. Once the song was finished, the palanquin was lowered onto the castle's main yard and Princess Rena stepped out. Accompanied by several members of the Brysen royal guard, she was led by the Albahalan guards to the throne room on the second floor.

In the throne room, the group was met by Beast King Muza and the Beast

Queen, as well as Beast Princess Shia, Zeu, and several ministers and nobles. The gathered nobles immediately burst into applause as Rena entered, ending abruptly the moment she reached the throne. Muza, a lionkin, remained seated on his throne as he spread his arms in a welcoming gesture.

“I am Beast King Muza. I would like to express my appreciation to you for coming all the way here to meet with us, Princess Rena.”

In response, Lena pinched the edges of her exquisite gown and curtsied low to the ground. The wolfkin princess with gorgeous silver fur held that pose, her head angled toward Zeu, as she spoke with a smile. “I can’t possibly thank you enough for welcoming me here. For the sake of Albahal’s prosperity, I would like to join Prince Zeu on his life journey.”

“You are truly a rare treat—far too good for my son! Isn’t that right, Zeu?”

“O-Of course.”

“Come on, lad. Man up!”

Zeu seemed unfazed by his father’s reproaches. Meanwhile, Rena’s gaze danced across those assembled in front of her before finally fixing on Zeu.

“Is that...Prince Zeu?”

“That’s correct. You haven’t seen each other in a number of years, so it’s no surprise if you didn’t recognize him. However, yes, that is the man who will be your husband. He’s got a bit of a soft side to him, but I wish you the best.”

Rena nodded at the king’s words, then shifted her gaze over toward Shia before looking out at the rest of the nobles as if searching for someone.

“Beku isn’t here,” the king said, answering her unasked question.

Rena turned her gaze back toward Muza, the smile never leaving her lips. “I see.”

“I hoped to avoid dirtying that beautiful dress you’re wearing for our son today,” the king explained, smirking proudly. Rena’s smile gently faded in response.

“What are you saying, father?!” Zeu could not rip his gaze away from Rena even as he demanded clarification from his father, though the king merely

grinned back at him.

“I see that His Majesty understands how I feel.”

“I certainly do. So, what do you think, Princess Rena?”

Suddenly, Rena slumped her head.

“Wh-What’s wrong? Are you tired from your long journey?” Zeu, uncertain of what to do, took a step toward his bride-to-be.

“Muza, you bastard!” Rena’s head jerked up and, using her long, supple legs, she kicked off the floor, causing her dress to flutter. Baring her menacing fangs, she drew a dagger from its hiding spot at the small of her back as she rushed toward the throne.

“Huh? Rena?” Zeu took a step forward and then froze as Rena bounded forward and slammed into the king.

“Hmph.” The king leaned back into his throne and reached out his hand, grabbing tightly to Rena’s dagger-holding hand.

“What?!”

“Your father warned me that you were quite strong-willed and to be wary of you, but I must admit, I’m quite surprised. Is this all you’ve got?!”

With a swing of his arm, the king threw Rena back ten meters. Her body spun through the air before hitting and rolling across the floor, all while Zeu watched blankly. However, upon noticing that she was not attempting to get back to her feet, he immediately dashed over to his bride-to-be.

Finally, the nobles and ministers gathered in the room began to panic as they realized just what was happening. The Albahalan guards drew their weapons on the royal guards from Brysen, leaving them unable to draw their own.

“What do you think, Your Majesty?” the Albahalan prime minister called out to the king. “Judging by the princess’s actions, I believe we have no choice but to call off the wedding.”

“There is no denying the fact that Beku caused the death of Brysen’s king, even if it did occur during the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament. In that case, it’s only natural that his daughter would seek revenge. That is why I have

decided that she will marry Zeu in an attempt to stem any further animosity between our peoples—I don't wish for Beku to be unnecessarily killed."

In light of these circumstances, the king was willing to turn a blind eye to her actions in the hopes that she would now be satisfied.

The reason for the deteriorating relationship between Albahal and Brysen was that Beast Crown Prince Beku had killed Rena's older brother, the Beast King of Brysen, at the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament three years earlier. The two kingdoms had agreed that the situation was inevitable, but Rena and the citizens of Brysen remained unconvinced.

It appeared that Rena was unconscious, so Zeu wrapped his arms around her and hefted her up. The queen then turned toward the king, a look of alarm in her eyes.

"Are you sure about this? What if she attacks Zeu next?"

"What are you talking about? Have you forgotten how you attacked me on the night of our wedding?"

"I haven't, but you're different, Muza."

The queen was also an Albahalan by marriage. In the past, she was an assassin who had tried to slit Beast King Muza's throat as he slept. She had held a grudge against Albahal, the largest of the many beast kingdoms crowded together on the Garlesian continent.

Muza rubbed his throat, recalling the painful injury.

"Is that true, father?" Princess Shia, Zeu's younger sister, asked.

"Yes, it is. And if you find yourself married off to another country, then you must do the same."

"Of course, father!" Shia smiled cheerfully and made a stabbing gesture.

Seeing this, the King beamed. "You might not be able to kill them by slitting their throat, so you'd best aim for the heart."

"Just what do you think you're telling our daughter?!"

"What? I just— Gyaugh!"

The queen kicked Muza with such force that it sent him tumbling to the ground, a loud *thud* resounding throughout the throne room.

Several hours later, Rena awoke to find a concerned Zeu sitting next to the bed she had been placed in.

“Ah, I see you’ve finally awoken.” He sounded relieved.

“Zeu...” Rena let out a sigh and looked around the room. She took note of the fact that its windows were unprotected and that she was not restrained, indicating that she had not been taken prisoner.

“You have nothing to worry about. The king doesn’t intend to punish you for what you’ve done.”

Zeu held out her sheathed dagger.

“Hmph. I’m not interested in taking pity from my enemies.” She practically spat those words.

Three years prior, Rena’s older brother had fought against Beast Crown Prince Beku in the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament held in Albahal. Rena and her group were the only ones cheering on her brother; the rest of the stadium chanted Beku’s name. In spite of the one-sided support, Rena’s brother put his all into the battle until there was nothing left but his bloodied, discarded body. It was in that moment that Rena swore to herself that she would get revenge against the Albahalan royal family.

“Don’t say that, Rena.”

“What the hell do you know, born in this great kingdom and raised in a loving family?” She fixed Zeu with a steely glare as tears welled up in the corners of her eyes.

Rena had heard rumors that, compared to his older brother, Zeu was something of a weakling. This was unbelievable to her, who had grown up in the smaller and comparatively weaker and less influential beast kingdom of Brysen.

As descendants of the beastkin who were once oppressed by the humans of

Giamut, Zeu should have known that if he did not fight, he would, in turn, gain nothing. She could not help but wonder if he had been allowed to be so timid by hiding in the shadows of his father and brother. The mere thought of it enraged her. Zeu, however, merely sat there passively as she glared daggers at him, something which only fueled her rage even more.

“There’s nothing further to discuss. Give me back my dagger. It was left to me by my brother.”

Of course, Rena had no intention of returning alive. She was going to kill Beku—or King Muza in his place—even if it meant that she was stabbed to death in the process. And in the unlikely event that she achieved her goal unscathed, she did not have high hopes that she would escape the castle with her life. But that did not matter. If she could not avenge her brother’s death, her life had no meaning.

“I’m going to put an end to this.”

“But why? Who knows what good may come if only you continue to—”

“Why don’t you try saying that *after* you become king?!” Rena growled angrily, baring her fangs, before Zeu could finish his sentence.

“Well then, perhaps I’ll become king. Would that solve your problem?”

“A weakling like you?”

“Yes. If I become king, will that be reason enough for you to live?”

“How can you spout such stupidity? There’s no way you could become king. Not with your brother around.” Rena had done a significant amount of research into her enemy and knew just how strong Beku was. After all, he was well-known for his fighting prowess and loved by his people. He was even the youngest winner of the Beast King Martial Arts Tournament.

Zeu was another story entirely. Even being polite, he could at best be described as timid, and he had never won any of the tournaments. It seemed unlikely that there was anything this man could do to turn things around.

“I *will* become king. Just you watch,” he declared, holding Rena’s gaze. She could see a certain power in his eyes.

“You said that this dagger belonged to your brother, yes?” Zeu continued. “Then I shall swear upon its blade that I will become king. If the day comes where you believe I’ve broken my oath, then you can run me through with it.” He then handed the weapon back to Rena, who clenched her fingers around it.

“Wh-Why would you do this for me?” she asked, confused by the sudden development. She instinctively wrapped her fingers around his hand as she clasped her brother’s dagger.

Zeu continued to hold her gaze. “You’re too beautiful for me not to.”

“Huh?!” This left Rena at a loss for words, but she felt that she could see something familiar in his gaze. A moment later, she pulled the dagger—the physical manifestation of his oath—to her chest.

“When I become king, I want you to be by my side as my beautiful queen.” As Zeu said this, Rena was struck by just how serious he was. It all seemed a little ridiculous, in a sense.

“Ha ha, you’re an interesting one,” Rena said, chuckling from the bottom of her heart.

This was the first time in the past three years she had truly laughed. Considering how stupidly devoted the man before her was and that he had managed to elicit a mirthful laugh from her, she figured she might as well live a little while longer.

“So you’ll continue living for me?”

“Well, Prince Zeu, I trust that you’ll keep your oath.”

That is how Rena came to be Zeu’s wife.

* * *

Several years later, though without children of their own, the two lived happily together as husband and wife.

One day, while Zeu was meeting with several bureaucrats, a furious Rena came barging into the meeting room. “Dammit, Zeu, this isn’t what we discussed!” She kicked the door open with such strength that it splintered, then pulled Zeu to his feet and threw him to the ground.

“Huh? Wha— Gah!” Zeu was still trying to process what happened as Rena mounted his back and yanked both of his legs back, making him look like a reverse shrimp. “What are you talking about, Rena?! Can’t we at least talk about this?! I’m sure I can explain and— Rena!” Zeu struggled desperately to explain as his face was crushed against the floor and his spine was twisted backward.

“I-I believe we’ll be calling it a day, then.”

“Yes, please stop by again tomorrow.”

Ever since the two had gotten married, it was an open secret throughout the castle that Rena was the one in charge in their relationship. The bureaucrats hurried out so as to not get involved in the couple’s drama, leaving Zeu and Rena alone.

“What in the hell do you think you’re doing?! Have you forgotten your promise?!”

Zeu paused for a moment to think over his response. “Ah, yes, Shia. There’s really nothing I can do about that, as it’s up to the king.”

Muza had recently ordered Shia to subjugate the Pontiff of Daemonism. The problem was that it was not just a subjugation order but a trial that would make her the heir apparent upon its completion. It was obvious that Rena was furious to hear that the Beast King had given Shia a trial before he had Zeu. And though Zeu had done his best to keep the news from reaching her, she had apparently caught wind of it.

“What do you mean there’s nothing you can do about it?! Why the hell do you think you’ll have a chance at the throne if you’re just going to stand idly by and not receive a trial of your own?! The only way you’ll be able to become king is by overcoming your own trial!” Rena then pulled even harder on his legs.

“Ouch! That hurts! You’re really hurting me!”

“Get your ass down to see the king!”

Zeu swore he could hear his spine creaking in between her shouts.

“F-Fine, I’ll go to the king to receive a trial of my own!” As soon as he uttered

those words, Rena released her grip.

“All right, then get going!”

“Huh? Right, of course. I’ll head there right away!” Zeu had originally intended to put it off until the following day, but after seeing the way Rena was baring her fangs at him, he hurried out of the room and was on his way.

After nearly half a day, Zeu had still not returned. His place at the dining table sat empty, and eventually Rena went to bed alone. She had no idea how long she had been in bed when suddenly she sensed a figure in the darkness and was jolted awake. Her eyes immediately met Zeu’s.

“You’re late.”

Something about the situation seemed oddly familiar to Rena, like it had happened once before.

“I was granted a trial by the king,” Zeu whispered.

“R-Really? That’s great!” Rena sat up and reached out to pull Zeu into a hug. There was something strange about his behavior that she picked up on even in spite of the darkness, however, causing her to freeze before she could.

“I’ll have to leave you behind for a while.”

“Why are you talking to me like I’m a stranger all of a sudden? Just what kind of trial were you given? It’s not something like...like...” Rena could sense that the trial he had been given was no easy feat, but his next words were completely beyond her wildest assumptions.

“I’m to clear the Rank S dungeon.”

“What?! No way! The Rank S dungeon is unclearable!”

Rena was aware that the Rank S dungeon was an unexplored dungeon that had existed since thousands of years before the founding of Albahal. Many beastkin from across the Garlesian continent had headed there and never returned—the royal family being no exception. Many promising princes had made their way to the Rank S dungeon and lost their lives. No matter how heroic a beastkin was, assigning them the task of clearing it was even more terrifying than being given a death sentence.

“Alas, this is the trial I’ve been granted.”

Rena quickly sprung up from the bed. “That’s unbelievable! I’ll talk to the king myself!”

If Zeu were to die in pursuit of fulfilling his promise to her, that was ultimately no different from him not keeping it at all. She felt guilty that the pressure she had put on Zeu and his desire to be true to his word had led to this situation. However, before she was able to leave the room, Zeu stepped in front of the door to stop her.

“The king’s word is absolute. I must complete my trial.”

“But there’s no way you could ever do that!”

“Just who do you think I am?!” Zeu shouted, his voice echoing around the dark bedroom.

Rena’s legs gave out from under her as she stared blankly ahead. This was the first time Zeu had ever raised his voice at her.

“Zeu...?”

“I will become king, and you will be my beautiful queen. Did I not swear this to you?”

With that, Zeu left for the Rank S dungeon in order to make Rena his queen.

Side Story 2: The Story of Pelomas

This is the ending of the first chapter of Pelomas's story.

Around the time Allen and the others were preparing to challenge the final floor boss, Pelomas was getting ready to graduate from the commercial school he attended while also running the Pelomas Whaling Company. On this particular day, Pelomas was sitting in a room located within the Ratash palace and negotiating with a Giamutan diplomat. The diplomat had brought with him a man by the name of Maruman, one of the wealthiest merchants in the entire Empire of Giamut who was known by many as the "real estate king." Pelomas, on the other hand, was accompanied by the minister of commerce and Chester, a wealthy merchant who owned several luxury inns throughout the Kingdom of Ratash. Chester was also the father of Fiona, the woman Pelomas loved.

Officials passed two contracts between the groups facing one another across the large table. Once both parties had signed them, Maruman breathed a faint sigh of relief.

"I expected no less from the owner of Ratash's oft-praised Pelomas Whaling Company. You conduct yourself brilliantly. Were you a citizen of our country, it would probably only be a matter of time until the emperor sought an audience with you."

"I could hardly dream of the emperor granting an audience to a young person such as myself."

The agreements the two parties had made involved the opening of two Pelomas Whaling Company outfits in Giamut. The first would deal in weapons and armor. Right around the end of summer the year prior, Elder Filamehl of Rohzenheim had reached out to Pelomas to let him know that they had increased equipment production and were hoping to begin transacting sooner than originally planned.

This move was in preparation for another invasion of the Five Continents by the Demon Lord Army, which was expected to happen due to the Demon Lord

Army's theft of Freyja's divine vessel. The carapaces and fangs taken from the corpses of the dead insect-type monsters that had attacked with the Demon Lord Army were easier to utilize than mithril, which was currently difficult to mine and process. Granted, they were inferior, but nevertheless, they could still produce high-quality gear.

While it was great to see the increase in equipment production, there was little demand in Ratash at the moment. The country had already managed to secure mithril equipment and had previously received an abundance of weapons and armor from Rohzenheim. In light of that, the Pelomas Whaling Company would act as an intermediary to export the equipment to another party, the Empire of Giamut. If they were to suddenly flood the market with supplies, however, the counterparty would almost certainly demand a discount.

Just as they were pondering what to do, Pelomas happened to receive a call from a Giamutan diplomat asking for a large amount of equipment as soon as possible, and he had decided to make the most of this golden opportunity. He used his Extra Skill, *Libra*, which let him naturally intuit the current status of the fluctuating value of things along with his trading partner's degree of demand and budget.

He had negotiated with Rohzenheim to get a purchase price lower than what they had agreed upon the previous time since he would be taking on a larger amount of equipment than ever before. He then negotiated with Giamut to sell the equipment at a price higher than before and even included a rushed transaction fee. As a result, the Pelomas Whaling Company had made a significant profit. However, Pelomas approached the Empire of Giamut with yet another transaction.

"Chester, could you please look over the contract to ensure everything's in order?" Pelomas handed the second contract, unrelated to the purchase and sale of equipment, to Chester, who sat at his side.

"I, uh... Yes, certainly. Wait a minute...!" About halfway through the contract, Chester saw something that caused him to cry out in surprise and his eyes to well up with tears. This was all the proof Pelomas needed that the terms of the contract were exactly what he had hoped they would be.

“Thank you for agreeing to the terms we desired,” Pelomas said, bowing his head to Maruman.

Maruman beamed. “As you know, the imperial capital is scheduled for redevelopment. The plot you wanted was put up for sale at a price close to your request. Thanks to you, the redevelopment plan seems to be on schedule, and I even managed to earn myself a favor from the emperor.”

Pelomas had proposed to Giamut that, in exchange for eliminating the rush fee, they be allowed to open a branch of Chester’s inns in the imperial capital. He presented several candidate sites complete with business plans and prices—prices that he knew were fair thanks to his Extra Skill. The Empire reacted to this by incorporating Chester’s inn as part of the redevelopment plan, just as Pelomas intended, and left the purchase and sale of the land to Maruman, the real estate king.

With this done, Chester would finally be able to realize his longtime dream of running a top-class inn in a prime location within Giamut’s imperial capital. Meanwhile, Maruman’s role had been to bring about a compromise between the redevelopment plan and the business operator’s wishes. With all of the unused land now filled, the redevelopment plan could finally proceed in earnest.

“I’m sad to say that this is the end of our negotiations, but I truly appreciate you coming here to join me in this transaction, Pelomas.”

The diplomat and Maruman both stood up, followed shortly thereafter by Pelomas, Chester, and the minister of commerce, and the two parties bowed to one another. With that, the two Giamutan men left the room.

Once the pair was gone, Pelomas and Chester thanked the minister of commerce. Considering that he was involved in all aspects of trade between nations, they had asked him to attend the meeting for the sake of appearances.

Upon leaving the castle, they boarded a coach arranged for by Chester and made their way to one of his luxurious hotels. After getting in, Chester held the contract close to his chest, rubbing the pages gently against his cheek as he chuckled to himself. Meanwhile, Pelomas could feel his whole body trembling at the thought of the immensity of what he had just achieved. He tried to

reassure himself that he was merely trembling with excitement.

Pelomas finally worked up the courage to speak to Chester. “Is it safe to assume that this means I’ve met the terms of my promise?”

He was referring to the contract he had signed with Chester prior to entering the commercial school. The promise in question was meant to assure Chester of Pelomas’s future as a merchant, deem him to be a suitable match for his daughter, and allow him and Fiona to marry. Pelomas has grown the Pelomas Whaling Company while attending school in the hopes of meeting this requirement. Chester was briefly taken aback by Pelomas’s question, but he quickly turned to the younger boy and offered a broad smile.

“Of course! I knew you had potential, but I can’t believe how far you’ve come!”

Pelomas smiled at this. “It’s all thanks to your assistance, Chester.”

“What’re you saying? My trading business is now a subsidiary of your own, boy. No need to be so self-effacing.”

“Th-Thank you! I look forward to working with you in the future!”

Pelomas bowed his head several times in quick succession, to which Chester merely smirked.

“You know, Fiona’s here in the capital. I’d like to have you meet her.”

“R-Really?! Are you serious?!” The mere mention of Fiona was enough to make Pelomas’s face light up.

“Absolutely.”

The two finally arrived at Chester’s luxurious inn and headed for the manager’s private room on the top floor. While Chester called for Fiona, Pelomas sat patiently with a cup of tea filled by one of the servants sitting before him.

“When was the last time we met? I must’ve been about ten or so.” Pelomas sipped his tea as he thought back on his memories with Fiona.

The first time they had met was just after Pelomas turned ten. His father, the chief of Krena Village, had taken him to attend a New Year’s event at one of

Chester's high-class inns in the city of Granvelle. There, his father introduced him to Chester, which was also when he met Fiona. She was so cute that he had not even been able to say hello. It was love at first sight.

The next day, the day after that, and for the whole week that followed, Pelomas could not stop thinking about Fiona. Ultimately, a month later, he went to see Chester alone. He was happy that Chester had made time for him, the son of the chief of a small pioneer village, and was surprised that Chester neither laughed him out of the room nor flatly refused his request to court his daughter. Rather, Pelomas was pleasantly surprised when Chester told him that there would be terms and offered him a firm promise.

"I'll let you court Fiona if you become a fine businessman in your own right by the time you graduate from merchant school."

The fact that the person he was speaking to was Chester, one of the wealthiest merchants in the entire Kingdom of Ratash, made the situation all the more stressful. Not that it mattered—even if Pelomas had been talking to a boy his own age, he was not the kind of person who broke his promises. Though he was only a child, he already knew as much about himself.

So he worked hard, entered the commercial school, and founded the Pelomas Whaling Company while still a student. Whenever he hit a dead end, he changed his methods, came up with new ways of doing things, and gradually grew his business. And in the end, he asked Allen, with whom he had a relationship stretching back to their days in Krena Village, to aid him in opening up trade negotiations with Rohzenheim.

While Pelomas was reminiscing on all he had done to get to where he was, his thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door. He quickly composed himself and called out for the visitor to enter, his voice shrill with nerves.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Pelomas. I've brought Fiona with me."

Chester was accompanied by Fiona, the contract still firmly in his hand. Apparently he had gone straight to see her without stopping by his office. However, Pelomas was completely oblivious to Chester at that moment. His gaze was fixed on Fiona, the girl of his dreams.

"M-Miss Fiona." It took all of his courage just to gaze upon her beautiful face

and get those words out. It had been several years since he had seen her last, but she had only grown more beautiful in that time.

“Hm? What’s this about?” Fiona’s face, the one Pelomas had longed to see for so long, took on a confused expression as she looked up at her father.

“This is Pelomas, the boy I told you about. The one from the Pelomas Whaling Company.”

“Right, I understand that part. But why?”

“He had asked for my blessing to court you, and I’ve finally granted it.”

“What?!” Fiona shouted. “W-Wait a moment, father! What are you talking about?!”

Pelomas started to feel a peculiar feeling in the pit of his stomach. “Huh? Chester, sir, did you not tell her?” Judging by the way she was acting, it seemed that she had heard nothing about this.

“What are you saying, darling? I told you that I’d found you a great merchant, did I not?”

“Like I said, that much I’d heard about, but...” Fiona was still at a loss for words.

“Just look at this, Fiona. We’re opening up an inn in Giamut,” Chester went on, showing her the contract in his hand. “You know just how much I struggled to get that done. There’s nothing that Pelomas here can’t do.”

Chester tried to explain what had occurred earlier that day, but she still seemed perturbed. Or rather, it seemed like she was getting increasingly upset. Suddenly, everything became clear to Pelomas, so he decided it was time for him to try and mediate the situation.

“I, uh... Chester, sir. About our conversation concerning Fiona...”

“And, well, you know, it’s not only that, darling. You see, we also got permission from the minister of commerce to enter the palace whenever we please. That’s not all either.”

Chester continued to praise Pelomas’s business acumen in an attempt to show that there was even more to it, but he seemed to be losing his train of

thought. As a result, he failed to notice his young daughter staring silently at the ground, her shoulders trembling. Finally, she reached her breaking point.

“Father!” Chester and Pelomas both turned to look at the girl. “I’ve told you this time and time again! I want to be with someone who’s strong!” Her shout was still echoing off the walls as she turned on her heels and stormed out of the room.

“W-Wait a moment, Fiona! Do you realize what you’re doing?!” Chester clenched the contract he was holding and hurried after his daughter.

“Leave me alone, father!”

Pelomas could hear Fiona’s outbursts all the way down the hall as he felt all the strength leaving his body. He collapsed onto the rug, unsure of what to do next.

“It’s all over.” Putting his thoughts into words only made the reality of Fiona’s rejection all the more real.

Thus, the first chapter of Pelomas’s story came to an end. What the boy did not know, however, was that another chapter was about to begin.

Side Story 3: The Demon Lord Army Writhes

During the time Allen and the No-life Gamers were working their way through the Rank S dungeon, the Demon Lord Army continued moving behind the scenes.

The Demon Lord's castle, a vast complex made up of white marble floors and pearly white walls that acted as the headquarters for the Demon Lord Army, had thus far been spared any invasions by the Five Continent Alliance. At its center was a vast hall with a ceiling so high that it could easily give its visitors vertigo as they traced the solitary stairway extending to the top. The room was currently filled with monsters and demons of all shapes and sizes, ranging from several dozen meters tall to those only several times larger than a normal human. One thing was consistent among those in attendance, however: each and every one of them was far more intimidating than any of the monsters Allen had faced back in Rohzenheim.

This was only natural, of course. After all, the monsters gathered here were all Rank S and the demons held key positions within the Demon Lord Army. The monsters and demons mingled together, sharing information and laughing with one another before silence fell over the room as several demons descended the staircase. All eyes fell on the newcomers—the highest-ranking Greater Demonic Deities who controlled the Demon Lord Army. A burly Greater Demonic Deity stood at the front of the group, followed by the Demon Lord Army's Strategist, Kyubel, dressed as a clown. They had been upstairs discussing the results of their recent assault on the Heavenly Realm, including accolades and rewards that were to be given to those who had performed well.

The gathered monsters and demons stood stock-still in the large hall, eagerly awaiting the report.

"Silence!" the burly demon shouted from the center of the stairwell to those in the room. "It is I, Ardoe, Supreme Commander of the Demon Lord Army! I am here to announce the awards that will be granted to those who proved

themselves during our assault on the Heavenly Realm.”

The gathered group looked up adoringly at Ardoe at this announcement. Among the group was a set of twins identical in every aspect other than their genders.

“They must be talking about us, Ramon.”

“Agreed, Hamon. After all, we were the ones who stole Freyja’s divine vessel. The best reward will almost assuredly be granted to us.”

The rest of the gathered monsters and demons clamored among themselves, each positive in their own share of the rewards. The Demon Lord Army strictly evaluated each combatant based on their individual contributions on the field of battle before granting rewards.

“Silence!” Ardoe’s booming voice broke through the murmuring crowd. “Though we may have lost a great many warriors in our recent campaign, in light of the significant gains achieved, the Demon Lord has decided that he wishes to reward some of you. Sylva, step forward!”

A female demon with pitch-black wings growing out of her back moved to the front of the stairwell and got down on one knee, bowing her head down low. “Yes, sir.”

“Our assault on the Heavenly Realm was only able to succeed thanks to your efforts in deceiving the Goddess of Magic, Isis, and obtaining the Key to the Heavenly Realm. You did an excellent job securing the inroads for our invasion!”

“It was all thanks to Kyubel’s advice.”

“Yes, indeed,” Kyubel said, nodding in smug satisfaction at Sylva’s remark. “I’m glad you understand that, Sylva.”

Ardoe shot a glare at Kyubel for his comment, but the trickster only smirked in response. The supreme commander then turned his attention back to Sylva. “The Demon Lord is incredibly pleased with your efforts. Therefore, he has decided to grant you the status of Demon God as one of the Greater Demonic Deities.”

A roar of excitement erupted from the crowd. A Demon God was a member

of the elite guard assigned directly to the Demon Lord. Only those with sufficient skills and who had attained significant achievements were granted such a role.

Just like the armies of the humans, elves, dwarves, and beastkin, the Demon Lord Army was also broken up into different corps depending on their function.

Structure of the Demon Lord Army

- Heavenly Realm Invasion Army: comprised of the most elite of the Greater Demonic Deities for invading the Heavenly Realm
- Planetary Annihilation Army: a large group consisting of monsters under the control of Demonic Deities and Rank S monsters specializing in the annihilation of the Mortal Realm
- Dark Realm Research Group: a group of demonic researchers specializing in investigating the Dark Realm as well as strengthening and researching monsters, and responsible for gathering information on the various countries in the Mortal Realm and causing subterfuge from within

Much like how Ardoe served as the supreme commander of these corps and Kyubel as the strategist, Demon Gods also held a higher role, meaning that they would often be assigned as generals overseeing multiple corps.

“This makes you the sixth Demon God, Syla. As such, from today forward, the Demon Lord will refer to us as the Six Great Demon Gods. Now go to the Demon Lord to accept your reward!”

No sooner had Ardoe, the leader of the Six Great Demon Gods, spoken those words than Syla stood up. Amid the stares of the demons and monsters filling the room, she walked over to the staircase atop which the Demon Lord awaited her arrival. The Greater Demonic Deities standing in front of the stairway stepped aside to make room for her to pass, and halfway up, she stopped and

bowed deeply. Upon reaching Ardое, she bowed her head slightly before moving on.

Kyubel hopped up excitedly and held his hand out for a high five. “Good job, Sylа! How awesome!”

“Thank you, Kyubel.” Sylа offered a gentle smile and bowed her head in his direction before continuing up the stairs, leaving Kyubel’s hand hanging in midair.

“We’re not finished yet!” Ardое called out to the crowd once Sylа had disappeared from view. He then began calling out the names of those whom the Demon Lord had decided to reward as a result of their achievements.

Monsters who had courageously fought against the gods became demons, and demons who had managed to capture angels were granted those angels as their slaves. While all these rewards were being granted, there were those standing by in frustration over their names not being called.

“Ardое, why haven’t we been called?” Hamon’s voice echoed throughout the chamber. Ardое’s lips curled up momentarily in a smirk before being replaced by his usual calm expression.

“The Demon Lord has decided who is called and in what order. Are you implying that you object to this?” Ardое asked in a slow, chilling tone. Ramon and Hamon shuddered at his sudden change in demeanor.

“M-My deepest apologies,” Ramon said in an uneasy voice. “It’s just that we were the ones to steal Freyja’s divine vessel.”

Ardое remained silent for some time before finally speaking up.

“Hmm. Now that you mention it, the Demon Lord mentioned that the Research Group had succeeded in their research into the creation of Greater Demonic Deities. They’re apparently looking for two demons,” he said in a slow, casual tone, as if he had only just recalled this information.

“Wow! You mean that we could also become Greater Demonic Deities?!”

The monsters fielded by the army, numbering in the millions, were led by only a few dozen thousand demons. Greater Demonic Deities were an even rarer

breed in the entire Demon Lord Army. Hamon was thrilled that he and his sister would be able to become a Greater Demonic Deity just like Sylva had.

“All right, then I’ll speak with the Research Group. You can both head to the lab.”

“Thank you, sir,” Ramon answered, bowing her head down low. The siblings then let out a yip of excitement.

“Well then, that’s it for the rewards. Next up, we will be providing a report on the war’s progress in the Mortal Realm!”

Ardoe went on to report on the results of the invasions conducted across three continents that had taken place at the same time as the assault on the Heavenly Realm. Those in attendance were stunned to hear that, despite having sent a force numbering in the tens of millions, they were unable to make any progress.

“Y’know, I may have planned for Helmios, but my plan didn’t stand a chance when that Allen kid appeared.” Kyubel gestured exaggeratedly and spoke with a hint of annoyance.

“And yet it was you who had sent Rehzal to Rohzenheim, Kyubel. A land that the Demon Lord had hoped to see fall to ruin.”

Ardoe believed that the reason behind the failure to destroy Rohzenheim was that Kyubel had sent Rehzal, a dark elf who hated the elves for hunting his people to extinction, to lead the charge. However, Kyubel remained unfazed in spite of Ardoe’s criticism and the angry glares from the audience.

“And yet the Demon Lord was pleased as punch about getting his hands on the divine vessel!” he exclaimed, making theatrical movements.

“This is true. Obtaining the divine vessel was the ultimate goal.”

“Exactly. The research lab is still analyzing the divine vessel, but once they’ve finished, it should provide great benefits to us all. I’m sure my next strategy will be quite interesting indeed!”

At this, a celebratory roar erupted from the crowd. Those who had not participated in the previous plan or received a reward of their own cheered the

loudest. They all wanted to take part in the next battle.

“Hey, Kyubel!” A hulking figure adorned with golden ornaments, naked from the waist up and carrying two large swords on his back, called out to the strategist.

“Oh, Bask. You wanna join too?”

“Hell yes. You invited me here promising me an interesting fight, and yet you left me sitting in the rear echelon of the Planetary Annihilation Army. Were you lying when you told me I could raise as much hell as I want?”

Bask, who looked in all manners like a normal human, showed no fear in the face of Kyubel, one of the top-ranking demons, or any of the other countless fearsome monsters surrounding him.

“Well, yes, I suppose I was.”

Kyubel nodded, deep in thought, as the man started climbing the stairs toward them.

“It looks like he’s planning on taking action on his own here,” Ardoe said, glancing over at Kyubel.

“The Demon Lord was the one who assigned me the role of strategist of the Demon Lord Army, correct?” Kyubel, who had turned to look at Ardoe, asked after a short pause. Ardoe stared back into the dark eyes lurking behind his mask but remained silent. “In that case, I’ll create an interesting plan for Bask as well!”

“Gya ha ha! Well doesn’t that sound like fun! Hmm, but what do you mean by ‘as well’? Are other demons going to be joining me?”

“Well, you see, we can’t exactly afford to fail next time around, so I’ll need to send a powerful force along. Of course, you’re going to be directly involved, Bask.”

“Leave it to me to raise some hell. I just hope there are some strong people for me to face.”

With that, Bask—also known to the world as the King of Shura—grinned broadly.

Side Story 4: Meruru's Home

While Allen and the No-life Gamers were busy farming iron golems, they had received a summons to have an audience with the emperor of Baukis. On their way to the capital, supposedly traveling together on the same magical ship as Helmios, Allen used Bird A's Special Ability, Homing Instinct, to send them back to the Rank S dungeon. He continued doing so even after their arrival in the capital, with the party pretending to be in their room when they were actually in the dungeon right up until the day they were to meet with the emperor.

One day, Meruru's parents were invited to the palace. This news had first reached Meruru via Allen while they were in the Rank S dungeon, so she asked him to send her back to the palace as soon as he could. After all, she had not spent much time with her parents since leaving to become an exchange student at the Academy in Ratash, and she had some special news she wanted to share with them.

Allen agreed to her request and quickly teleported her back to their room in the Baukis palace.

"Thanks, Allen. I'll join up with you guys again after I'm done." Once her meeting with her parents was finished, she could communicate with Allen via the Spirit A he had left in the room.

"Don't worry about it. We can always meet up again tomorrow. Besides, it's not every day you get to see your parents, so you might as well take your time." With that, Allen teleported back to the dungeon.

Upon leaving their quarters, Meruru was called out to by an attendant standing by in the hallway.

"Are you off somewhere, Miss Meruru?"

"Yep. I heard that my parents have come to the palace, so I was heading to see them."

"Do you know where they are? The palace is quite large, so perhaps I can lead

you there.”

“Um, yeah, that’d be great.”

Judging by the way the attendant spoke and how she had been waiting in the hallway when Meruru arrived, the dwarf girl figured that she had been actually waiting for her the whole time. As such, it only made sense that she let the attendant take her to her parents.

The pair moved through the elegantly carpeted hallways, making their way to another floor full of guest rooms before the attendant led Meruru to a room where several more attendants were waiting. One of them opened the door for her as the attendant who had led Meruru here bowed down low.

“Please sit down and relax in here,” she said. “I’ll bring some tea and sweets shortly.”

“Thank you.”

Before those words had even left her mouth, Meruru noticed that the girl who had led her to the room exchanged a glance with the other attendants. Judging by the way the ones waiting by the door quietly left the hallway, she assumed this was her way of telling the others to go prepare the tea. Perhaps she would just have to get used to treatment like this now that she was one of the few to have cleared the Rank S dungeon.

As soon as Meruru entered the room, she noticed her mother, Kanana, trying on a dress in front of a full-length mirror. Nearby were a maid, a tailor, and a neatly dressed man who seemed to be a jeweler. Next to them was a cart with multiple dresses on hangers and a case filled with rings, necklaces, and earrings sitting on a table.

The tailor looked up at Kanana’s reflection as he adjusted the hem of the dress. “As one would expect of the mother of a hero, you truly look gorgeous no matter what you’re wearing.”

“Y-You think so? But I’m really not so sure about this. I don’t feel right borrowing such a beautiful dress.”

“Of course, madam. Nobles from all across the Empire of Baukis are eager to meet the parents of the great hero Meruru at tonight’s banquet.”

Apparently Meruru's parents had been summoned to the palace to attend a banquet, and the imperial officials had called in tailors and jewelers to ensure that her parents—mere commoners with little wealth to speak of—were dressed appropriately for it. Of course, Meruru knew nothing of these preparations, or even that she would be attending a banquet with her parents.

“Besides, madam, the empire is gifting this dress and jewelry to you.”

“What? That can't be. Why would you give this all...” Kanana was beside herself at the mere thought that she would receive such a glamorous dress and jewelry. They could work their whole lives and still never be able to afford such things.

“What are you saying, madam? You're the mother of a hero, and these clothes suit a person of such status.”

Meruru continued to watch the scene unfold before her, unsure of what to say.

“Oh, there you are, Meruru. So you're finally back?” It was Meruru's father, Neneku, who first took notice of her. He was sitting at a table, an unfolded piece of parchment in front of him, and seemed to be having a conversation with a dwarf who appeared to be a palace official.

“Okay.” Just after Meruru entered the room, the tailor working with her mother finished up his work. “I believe I'm about done here. Thank you for your time.” He, the maid, and the jeweler then left the room.

“Right, then. We'll continue this conversation at a later date.” The official speaking with Neneku stood up and left the room as well.

In their place came a maid holding a silver tray of tea and sweets. She quickly poured the tea into three cups, then silently left the room. Meruru, Neneku, and Kanana, now alone in the silent room, looked at each other, uncertain of what to do.

“I gotta admit, something real special's goin' on here. Meruru, Kanana, why don't you both come over here and sit down.”

At Neneku's prompting, Meruru and Kanana sat down at the table.

Meruru looked at her parents. “Has it been like this since you got here?”

“Yes, it’s been like this the whole time. Even the day we were brought here, they showed up at our house that morning with this amazing magical carriage.” Kanana gestured exaggeratedly as she explained the carriage that showed up at their house.

“It was pretty impressive back when you’d become an honorary baron, but this has gone far beyond even that. Is the Rank S dungeon really that impressive?”

Meruru’s parents had no Talents of their own and knew nothing about the situation surrounding the Rank S dungeon.

“I guess it kind of is. My friends and I worked really hard to clear it.”

Meruru looked down at the magic disc hanging from her neck. These items, used by Meruru and other golem users to call forth their golems, had indentations that slates necessary for summoning and strengthening their golems could be slotted into. Usually, the indentations were only on one side of the magic disc, but hers had indentations on both. Allen had requested this as his reward for being the first to clear the Rank S dungeon. It was not only indispensable to Meruru as a golem user, but also proof that she had cleared the Rank S dungeon with her companions—a memory near and dear to her heart.

“Hmm? What’s this?” Meruru looked down at the several sheets of parchment lying on the table. They were the documents Neneku and the official had been discussing earlier.

“Oh, right, those. The palace officials have agreed to rebuild our home. Well, rather than rebuild, it’s more like they’re pretty much building us a brand-new one.”

According to Neneku, the palace officials thought it inconceivable to let the hero’s parents live in a dilapidated house in a remote village. They claimed that doing nothing about the situation would affect the prestige of the empire, and were apparently the ones who had first proposed that her parents move to the capital.

“That’s amazing!” Meruru cried, deeply moved by her father’s story. This meant that she would not be the only one to benefit from the hard work she and her friends had put into clearing the Rank S dungeon. Seeing the wonderful and unexpected treatment her parents were receiving from the empire, she felt even better about all she had done to defeat the final floor boss.

What Neneku said next nearly made her bawl.

“Yeah, but y’know, I told them that we had no plans to leave our home. After all, if we left, you’d have no place to call home, Meruru.”

“Oh, father...” Tears formed in the corners of her eyes when her father mentioned a “place to call home.” She wanted nothing more than to go home with her parents right then and there.

“So they agreed to rebuild our home instead. There’s so much going on that I can hardly keep up, so I agreed to hear them out for now.”

Hearing from Neneku about how their new home was planned to be several times larger than their current one, Meruru remembered a conversation she had had with Pepeku.

Pepeku had been one of Admiral Garara’s golem pilots. Shortly after Meruru’s return from the Academy in Ratash, Admiral Garara had assigned Pepeku to teach her how to use a golem. In addition to the training, though, she had also asked Pepeku for advice about how she could convince her parents to let her make her own choices going forward.

“You know, even if you don’t clearly spell it out for them, your parents will still pick up on it,” Pepeku had told her. “What’s most important isn’t whether you tell them what you’re thinking or not, but rather that you stay true to yourself and do what you want.”

Later, Pepeku had taken on the Rank S dungeon with Admiral Garara and lost his life in the battle against the final floor boss. His words were just as valuable to her as the magic disc she now possessed.

“What’s wrong, Meruru?” Kanana called out to her daughter. Meruru turned back to gaze at her mother’s face. She knew then that everything Pepeku had told her was true. “Is there something you want to tell us?”

Meruru finally made her decision and nodded firmly. “Right now, I’m fighting with my friends against a bad guy who hopes to cause great harm to the world. That’s why we cleared the Rank S dungeon.”

“Meruru, what’re you talking about? You can’t be...”

“What’s she saying, dear?” Kanana turned to her husband, Neneku, who seemed to have already grasped what Meruru was talking about.

“I see. They mentioned somethin’ about that evil force back during my time with Admiral Garara at Base Lamchatka!”

Information surrounding the Demon Lord was not as closely guarded in Baukis as it was in Ratash. Furthermore, since Neneku was a soldier, he had heard that there was an evil enemy attacking from the Forgotten Continent who not only posed a threat to the Empire and planned to send the world to ruin, but also was the reason behind the formation of the Five Continent Alliance. And his daughter was going to fight against that enemy.

Neneku looked down at the parchment in front of him and thought things over for a moment. “Meruru, it looks like we let all this go to our heads. If it means you’ll be in danger, then I want none of it!” He held up the pieces of parchment, carefully laid them one atop another, and rolled them up.

Kanana nodded in agreement. “I can’t let you do that! If that’s how it is, I don’t want any of this either!” She took off the necklace filled with glimmering gems and placed it on the table.

Meruru was taken aback by her parents’ reactions. The looks in their eyes were clear: they would not stand by and watch in silence as their daughter faced such danger. But thanks to this, Meruru finally picked up on something. Her parents seemed to believe that the Empire was offering them a new house, beautiful clothes for a banquet, and more as a sort of payment for the danger their daughter would face.

“N-No, it’s not like that! Please, just listen to me! I’m the one who wants to go fight this evil force! Of my own free will!”

Meruru desperately tried to explain the situation to her parents in the hopes of winning them over.

The enemy was an army of mighty demons leading innumerable monsters with the goal of destroying the world—a manner of warfare unlike anything ever seen before. Some countries had actually been attacked by them, nearly to the point of extinction. The Five Continent Alliance was trying to protect the world from this army, but it alone could never hope to win. However, Meruru and her companions were merely fighting to defeat the evil force and stop the destruction of the world. It was the Empire that had taken it upon itself to do all these things for her family.

Though Neneku and Kanana knew that Meruru was trying to convince them, they were left at a loss for words. They swallowed hard at the realization that she was working for their survival too.

Neneku thought back on the coming-of-age ceremony held back in Rodin Village. “Back when we met you and that boy at your coming-of-age ceremony, I couldn’t help but notice just how big you’d gotten.”

“That’s right. You used to be so small, but you’ve grown up so much,” Kanana added, patting her daughter’s head.

“Hey! Stop treating me like a kid!” Meruru shouted, her cheeks puffed out.

“You’re right,” Neneku said with a chuckle. “You’re an adult now, and it’s time for us to let you spread your wings.”

“I agree, even if I don’t want to.” Despite her reservations, Kanana still looked pleased.

“Well, I guess I’ll choose our new house then. After all, this will be the home I’m going to return to. What do you think of this one? It’s nice.” Meruru took the rolled-up papers from Neneku and unrolled them, looking back at her parents’ faces.

“That was the one I was looking at too.”

“What are you talking about? The layout of this one will be much more convenient.”

Upon seeing her parents’ cheerful expressions, Meruru held her magic disc and swore that she would fight against the Demon Lord for the sake of them and her brothers.

Afterword

Thank you for reading all the way through the end of *Hell Mode: Volume 6*. We've finally completed the Rank S dungeon arc that carried over from volume 5. Being able to write about how the parties gathered for the raid to take down the final floor boss was quite a bit of fun.

Though not quite as many as volume 5, I was able to write four side stories this time. In one of them, I was able to write about the reason Zeu wanted to clear the dungeon, which I think captures some of his personality, don't you?

I also wrote about the Demon Lord's castle, the base of the Demon Lord Army, for the first time. I know I didn't write about the Demon Lord in volume 6, but what did you think of the buff supreme commander?

I even got to touch upon the story of Pelomas, who often appears in these side stories. He first appeared as the son of the village chief when he showed up at the Appraisal Ceremony in volume 1, so he's been with the series for quite some time. I know that Fiona really delivered a crushing blow in this story, but I hope you hang in there and look forward to his future achievements.

Back to the main story, the Rank S dungeon arc ended in a bit of an off-putting way, but I hope you'll continue to look forward to Allen and his friends' new adventures as they conquer unexplored dungeons.

Now, let's talk for a bit about my own personal memories. This book is releasing in September, which is still a very hot time of year, so be warned that it has a bit of a horror angle to it. You may not be able to go to the bathroom at night.

Last time, I think I talked about my family buying a house and me secretly keeping a hamster in it. I want to say I was in junior high school around that time. I don't have much to say about high school other than that I went to a high school in a city far away and don't really have any special memories of it, so I won't talk about that. What I *do* remember, though, is playing video games on my PlayStation.

In high school, I think my range of games expanded considerably to include various RPG-related games. I played all sorts of games well into university, and while I write about it like it's nothing, I was too busy playing to bother studying in high school. Because of that, I ended up having to take an extra year to study before getting admitted to a local university.

I began living alone while I was in university, which was also when I started playing these online games for the first time. This must've been around when I first connected to the internet. At that time, the standard for online games was that you were in vastly empty worlds where you had to replay the same things over and over just to get anywhere. Putting in hundreds of hours was a matter of course. I would listen to the game's tutorial, leave the city, defeat enemies, level up, and slowly equip new gear. I was thrilled when I could open a stall and sell some items in player-to-player transactions. I even spent two hours screaming in the open player square to try to get a healer to join my party.

Participating in raid boss parties was also difficult due to strict level and class restrictions. There were also player killers, whom I can finally look back on now and think of the experience fondly. At the time, though, I was so overcome with emotion that I can't possibly describe it here.

While I was focused so fixedly on getting better at the game, I noticed something: surprisingly, I wasn't keeping up with my university classes and had to drop out (sob). I learned that when you gain something, you also lose something else. Suddenly, I was off the normal track of going off to university, getting a job, and becoming a member of society.

What happened to my life after that? Well, it looks like I've reached my character count, so I'll have to continue the story in the next volume.

Lastly, as always, I ask that you please continue to support the manga version of *Hell Mode*. Tetta-sensei has done a wonderful job of depicting battles, character expressions, and other scenes that were lacking in the novel. Volume 4 will be released on August 10, 2022, so I hope you'll pick it up.

This work is still ongoing, but I hope that you will continue to read it. See you later!









Bonus Short Story

A New Manner of Drinking Party

Some time had passed since Allen and the No-life Gamers had cleared the Rank S dungeon. Even after having done so, however, they continued to farm iron golems. One day, the exhausted party found themselves back at their home base, which was in a rather festive mood.

“Come off it. I already told ye I’d give my report later, didn’t I?”

“And later is now! The magic ship is waiting; we need to get going!”

In front of the base, a high-ranking Baukisian official and Admiral Garara were in the midst of an argument.

“We can’t go today. We’re celebratin’ our victory.”

Though he did not say it exactly, Admiral Garara was essentially telling the official to give him more time.

“The emperor can hardly be expected to allow you to turn down his request for an audience!”

“Emperor this, emperor that. I’m tired o’ all this talk about th’ emperor!”

Allen could not help but wonder why they were doing this in front of someone else’s home base. All the same, he needed to head inside, so he made his way toward the door. As he did, he noticed that the members of Garara’s party were also present, leaning against the large number of liquor barrels that lined the road.

As far as Allen recalled, he had never had any intention of turning his base into a tavern.

“I have a bad feeling about this. Sophie, it looks like something big is about to go down; let’s get out of here.”

“Certainly, Lord Allen.”

Figuring that something was up, Allen turned to leave, deciding that it would be best to lay low in a place such as the Adventurer's Guild until things blew over.

Suddenly, Helmios stepped out of their base and spotted Allen. "It looks like things are getting pretty festive here. Oh, hey. Welcome back, Allen."

"Oh, Allen, you're back! We're gonna hold a party to celebrate our victory!"

"I'm quite all right, thanks."

Not wanting to sully his good memories of the party they had held immediately after clearing the Rank S dungeon, Allen chose to turn down Garara's offer.

"We should invite Prince Zeu too." Helmios ignored Allen's response and invited Admiral Garara inside.

An hour later, the dining room at the base had become the venue for the group's sixth victory celebration. On the past five occasions, Allen had tried various strategies to avoid being served alcohol. Basically, all he had to do was avoid getting caught by Admiral Garara and the dwarves, who were willing to do whatever it took to make him drink. In order to do that, however, he had to have someone with him at all times. Moreover, choosing who that would be was not a decision he could make lightly.

In terms of being a drinking partner, both Dogora and Krena would spend all their time eating and refuse to leave the dining room, which would ultimately lead to them getting invited to start drinking with Admiral Garara and the dwarves. Meruru, a dwarf herself, would not stop drinking even when she was drunk. Cecil, on the other hand, would yell at Allen if he did not drink, making her more annoying than the admiral in some ways.

As for Keel, he was not a big drinker in the first place and thus he got drunk very quickly. And Volmaar was simply hard to maintain a conversation with. Allen had tried using each of them as a drinking partner before, so this time, he decided that he would pretend to talk with Sophie.

"Hey, Sophie. I'd like to talk with you about the future of Rohzenheim. Would you mind having a drink with me a little ways away from the group?"

“Of course! I-I’d love to!” Sophie replied, her face flushed as she fought back tears of joy.

“It’s not *that* big a deal.”

With that, Allen led Sophie off to a corner of the garden.

“I’m leaving the last line of defense up to you,” Allen said.

“Oh?” Sophie did not quite understand what he was saying, but she trusted him fully and nodded in agreement. After bringing some food to their table in the corner and making a toast with their unglazed ceramic cups, the two had begun chatting.

“By the way, I recall hearing that the World Tree bears flowers and fruits.”

“Not every year, but its flowers are especially beautiful when it does.”

Allen figured that since Sophie was a member of the elven royal family, no one would intervene if he made it appear that the two of them were engaged in an important conversation. But wrong he was, as Prince Zeu interrupted anyway, liquor sloshing about in a large bottle he held in one of his hands.

“So, what are the great hero Allen and the princess of Rohzenheim doing all alone over here?” The Beast Prince then sat down on the bench next to Sophie without a care in the world.

“We’re having an important conversation about the future of Rohzenheim.”

Allen had figured that Sophie would be his impregnable shield. Alas, she, his last line of defense, was easily broken through, shaking him to the core. All the same, he easily lied his way through the situation while trying to maintain his composure.

“Ah, how embarrassing. You see, my men found some fine sake and I figured I’d offer you a sip, Allen. Would you like to try it?”

“Certainly.” Allen held out an empty mug that he had prepared in case his cover was blown, and Zeu gleefully poured the contents of the bottle into it. As Allen watched, his mug was filled to the brim with sake.

“My wife sent me a new portrait even though I told her I’ll be back shortly.”

“You must be looking forward to seeing her.”

“Of course I am! She’s my wife, after all.” It seemed that he wanted to tell Allen about the gift his wife had sent him and had no intention of leaving until they had discussed the topic in full.

“Come to think of it, Helmios said that he wanted to meet your wife at least once.”

“You don’t say!”

Clutching the bottle of fine liquor in one hand and a portrait of his wife in the other, Zeu snorted loudly and walked across the courtyard.

“Are you sure that’s okay?” Sophie asked.

“He’s a nice guy.” Helmios was a good person who could hardly turn down an opportunity to please others. As such, Allen figured that he would almost certainly be willing to share drinks with Prince Zeu while listening to him talk about his wife.

After letting out a sigh of relief, Allen noticed a concerned look on Sophie’s face.

“Ah, um... Lord Allen, it seems that the spirits would like to come out,” she said timidly. “Is it okay if I release them?”

“I don’t see why not. Let ’em on out.”

If there were spirits around, that would almost assuredly provide Allen with an even greater line of defense. Sophie nodded, and a girl appeared on the wooden table. She was wearing a coat with the hood pulled so far over her face that her eyes were hidden.

“This is delicious!”

The water spirit sat down next to the Spirit God, who was munching on fukaman, and started eating the food that had been brought to the table. While Allen was casually glancing over his surroundings, he could hear one of his Summons speaking to him.

“I’d just die to come on out too. I’m deathly excited to join parties!”

“Hmm? You want to come out too?”

He Summoned his Spirit C, Maria, and she also sat quietly at the wooden table. The water spirit was the first to speak to her. “Who are you?”

“I’m Allen’s Summon, Maria. I’ve been dying to meet you.”

“This is delicious. Try some.” The water spirit picked up a plate of nut salad and offered it to Maria, who fell silent for a moment and looked up at Allen. Summons did not need to eat, so it struck Allen as a bit odd that they were capable of doing so.

“You can eat it if you want.”

After Allen said that, Maria took the salad from the water spirit and began eating. She seemed happy, and Allen began to wonder if his Summon was also enjoying the party.

Since Sophie could only manifest one spirit at a time, she sent back the contented water spirit and immediately manifested a new one.

“This is amazing!” The wind spirit, Gale, who took on the appearance of a young boy, crawled around on top of the table, tasting everything he could get his hands on.

“Use your manners.”

“Okay, mama. But wow, this is good!”

Allen looked away from Gale, turning toward Sophie. “Tomorrow, let’s sell our equipment and go buy some magic stones.” He wanted to get back to discussing their plans for the following day, which they would have already gone over had the party not started.

“Certainly, Lord Allen.”

“Oh? What’s this?” Gale discovered the mug Zeu had filled with sake, which had been left untouched by Allen and Sophie. He brought it close to his face and sniffed.

“Heh, it’s good sake.”

“Is it to die for?” Maria noticed Gale’s response and approached.

“No, it’s delicious. Have a taste.” The salad she had received from the water spirit tasted great, so Maria was further inclined to try this new recommendation and picked up the mug.

“This is so good!” Maria floated above the table and wobbled around like a slowly spinning top. She looked drunk.

“Cut it out, Gale.”

“Okay...” Even as he replied, however, it did not appear that Gale felt he had done anything wrong.

“Hey, Maria, are you okay?”

“I’ll die if I take another sip!” Maria landed on the table with a *thud*, throwing her off-balance.

“Whoa, hey!” Allen hurried to try and support her, but she took three steps forward before spinning around to face him and tumbling forward. The mug she was holding slid out of her hands, spilling the booze inside and hitting Allen’s and Sophie’s cups. Those were then knocked onto their sides and over the edge of the table, each accompanied shortly thereafter by a loud *crash*.

Admiral Garara suddenly appeared next to the table. “Oh? What’s th’ matter?” Allen figured he was done for.

“It’s nothing. Actually, I’m drunk.” He pretended to be drunk so that he could escape, but his decision to sit at a table in the back of the room left him little choice but to cross the entire dining room in order to leave.

“Ye don’t say. Pretty unusual for ya to get drunk, ain’t it? Well, I guess we’ll jus’ have t’ drink together.”

Grinning, Admiral Garara squatted down and put his arm around Allen’s shoulders in a show of friendship. His dwarf companions brought barrels of liquor over the moment he did so. Allen’s plan had failed miserably, and as a result, he was forced to drink with the admiral.

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Hell Mode *The Hardcore Gamer Dominates in Another World with Garbage Balancing* Volume 6

by Hamuo

Translated by Jason Muell Edited by Adam Haffen

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