

Backstabbed in a **Backwater Dungeon**:

My Trusted **Companions** Tried to **Kill** Me, But Thanks to the **Gift** of an

UNLIMITED ∞ GACHA

LVL 9999

I Got

Friends and Am Out For **Revenge**

on My **Former** Party Members

and the **World**

VOL.

7

Story
Meikyou Shisui
Illustration
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Prologue

“I want to thank you again for allowing me to visit again under these circumstances, Lord Light,” Princess Lilith said.

“If I were you, I’d wonder what was going on too, so it’s fine,” I replied. “Also, if you don’t mind, I’d much prefer for you to refer to me as ‘Dark’ whenever I’m in this outfit. Since you’re in disguise too as an adventurer named Liliana, whom I recruited as a temporary member of my party, there’s no need to act so polite around me.”

“Understood, Lord—” Lilith paused and corrected herself. “Sure thing, Dark.”

Yes, my adventuring party, the Black Fools, had gained a new fake member named Liliana—aka Princess Lilith of the Human Kingdom—and at present, we were strolling through the settlement at the base of the Great Tower with some cargo in tow. Why were Nemumu, Gold, and I escorting Lilith incognito like this, you may ask? Well, it all went back to the war the Beastfolk Federation had decided to wage on the Wicked Witch of the Tower. The beastfolk had captured thousands of human hostages to be used in their war plans, and this had pissed me off enough to make me want to slaughter every single beastman soldier who set foot on the battlefield. Though as luck would have it, the two beastmen chieftains present had been wearing Twinblood Pendants, which when activated, suddenly turned them into monsters that ended up wiping out the entirety of the Beastfolk Federation’s army for us.

This episode came to be known throughout the rest of the world as the “Beastfolk Massacre,” and most of the humans we’d rescued from the beastmen had ended up staying at the settlement encircling the Great Tower. This greatly expanded the population of the community, and required another round of major development projects to be undertaken. The settlement now resembled one of those large castle towns, with the Great Tower at the edge of the clearing, overlooking the growing community. Thanks to the fairy maids and our dragons, the expansion of the town was proceeding at pace, and before we

knew it, everyone was calling the settlement “Tower City.”

As the princess of the Human Kingdom, Lilith wanted to see for herself just how much the settlement had changed since the last time she visited it, and to make sure that the residents’ quality of life hadn’t suffered from the sudden surge in population. When Lilith requested another tour, I had no reason to refuse her, but I didn’t really want to go through the rigmarole of formally arranging a visit through the Human Kingdom royals. So I’d suggested to Lilith that she should disguise herself as an adventurer for this trip to the settlement, which is why her wavy flaxen hair had been dyed a chestnut-brown color and tied up in a ponytail, and why our fairy maids had given Lilith a complete makeover, making sure to use a totally different set of cosmetics from what she usually wore. Unless it was someone who really knew her, nobody would have recognized her at first glance.

Using a gacha card to transform her would’ve been better, but it looks like she’s enjoying playing dress-up as an adventurer, I thought. *And I wouldn’t want to get in the way of her fun, now would I?* Even though the other races looked down on her kingdom, Lilith was still royalty, so she naturally didn’t get many opportunities to dye her hair, dress up like an adventurer, and sneak around a town. I decided I’d let her enjoy this novel experience to the fullest.

“Our first stop is a shop run by a couple of girls who are around your age,” I said. “I thought you’d appreciate starting off the tour by chatting to people you’d be most comfortable speaking with.”

“Thanks for looking out for me,” Lilith said. “And you’re right. I will be a lot more relaxed speaking with them first than with some gruff older man.”

I activated a Telepathy link so that I could communicate with Nemumu and Gold. *If you guys sense any danger, be sure to let me know. Not that I’m expecting any in this town.*

Understood, Lord Dark! Nemumu gleefully responded in my mind. *Leave everything to us!*

Keep calm and carry on, milord, for no harm shall befall you or Her Highness as long as the Auric Knight is around, what what? Gold replied, equally as enthusiastic.

Of course, it'd be one thing if we were hiking through parts unknown, but in truth, we had put up too many defenses both in and around the tower settlement for us to really have to worry about any bad guys attacking us. Still, I felt the need to warn my teammates all the same. There was no such thing as being too careful, after all. Before long, the shop in question came into view, as did the aforementioned pair of girls, who were outside the front of their store, sweeping up. The younger of the two, Silica, was the actual owner of the shop, and she had a pretty unique backstory. Silica had once been a slave forced by a party of elf adventurers to act as monster bait, but the Mohawks had ended up rescuing her from that situation and she eventually wound up here. Silica's parents had been traveling merchants by trade, and they had done a good job of teaching her how to read, write, and keep track of numbers. In fact, Silica was such a naturally talented youngster, she had been able to help the merchant who initially took her in with his business, and not long after, she had found herself running her own store in the tower settlement.

We couldn't find anyone else suitable to be shopkeepers, despite the huge number of people we have here, I thought. Most of Tower City's residents were either former slaves or former peasant farmers, and in any case, only very few humans on the whole entered the merchant business. On top of that, the store doubled as Silica's private home, and she didn't feel safe living and working with a man. In fact, she'd been running the shop as a one-person operation up until very recently, when she had decided to hire a teenage assistant who wasn't much older than her.

The teenager in question was a pretty blonde who tied her hair up at the back with a light-pink ribbon. She wore the same kind of simple dress that most of the other human girls tended to wear, and even though the outfit wasn't revealing in any way, you could still tell she was well-endowed and had a shapely figure. Another distinguishing feature about the girl was her nails, which were long, likely because she thought it looked chic. If I had to describe this older girl in a single word, I would say she was "bewitching," like a temptress.

I know I shouldn't go judging a book by its cover, I thought to myself. *But honestly, I don't like the vibes I get from her.* I was pretty sure a whole load of

guys would *insist* that her bewitching nature was one of the best things about the assistant shopgirl, but for some reason that I couldn't quite put my finger on, I couldn't shake my misgivings about her.

As these thoughts raced through my head, the two girls finished sweeping and went back inside the shop. I turned to Lilith and said to her, "The shop should be pretty empty at this hour, so this is a good opportunity to go say hello to them."

"Great. I can't wait to hear what they have to say about this city," Lilith said, quickening her pace in order to get to the store faster, with the rest of us following on behind.

Chapter 1: The Demonkin Nation Masters

A man with dreadlocks sighed loudly as he reclined on a sofa. “So I hear those Dragonute Empire Masters finally made their move on the Great Tower. It’s supposed to be this nation or village or whatever near the Elven Queendom. They thought C might be hidin’ in the tower.”

Goh was the leader of the group of Masters that had gathered in a building in the Demonkin Nation, the northernmost nation on the mainland. Goh’s arms were sprawled across the back of the sofa, while his legs were spread equally wide, his listless posture conveying his passive annoyance.

“Huh. Did they really?” a teenage girl sitting on a different sofa said with an air of indifference, her focus largely on her fingernails, which she was busy filing. “Those guys seriously get obsessed over the stupidest things. And they probably didn’t get anything out of it. The way they’re just totally cool with running around in circles all the time is *really* dumb in my book. They’re not gonna kill the almighty C, so they should quit wasting their time. They’d be *way* better off if they just followed the happy, carefree Miki lifestyle.”

The girl called Miki blew on her nails, studied them closely for flaws, then resumed filing. She had long blonde hair that was tied up at the back with a ribbon, and she was sitting with one leg crossed over her knee on a sofa without a backrest. She was wearing hot pants along with boots that went all the way up to above her knees, and the top she had on looked more like a brassiere, with one strap dangling loosely from her shoulder. The whole look was completed with a wide-sleeved jacket that hung off her shoulders.

Daigo, the third member of the group and the only one of the three who was standing, unsheathed the two swords he kept in a single scabbard that dangled from his hip, the chain connected to their hilts jingling with aggravation.

“Goh, if you’ve got nothing else to tell us, I’m going back to leveling,” Daigo said curtly. He was 170 centimeters tall, had his hair tied up, and his shirt lay open to reveal a set of bulging pectoral muscles. Etched across his face was an

X-shaped scar that had been carved into it by a sword, both lines stretching all the way from his forehead to the edges of his cheeks, and under it lay eyes with a gaze as piercing as his twin blades.

“No, I ain’t finished saying my piece, Daigo,” Goh retorted. “I was just gettin’ started, so settle back down and don’t interrupt me with those swords of yours again.”

Goh lifted his taut, muscular frame forward out of its slouch, and this time, there was a hint of excitement in his voice as he spoke. “So what those dumb Masters did was instigate the beastfolk into takin’ on the Great Tower. But guess what happened next? Their whole friggin’ army got annihilated in the battle.”

“Annihilated?” Daigo repeated. “You mean, at least a third of their troops were taken out of action? Never mind me, even this repulsive skank here could kill that many beastmen without breaking a sweat. That’s hardly worth talking about.”

“How can you call me a skank? You’re so mean!” Miki whined. “My only crime is that I *maybe* like cute girls and boys a little *too* much.”

Daigo’s face twisted in sheer disgust. “You go after any female who’s your type, and when it comes to the opposite sex, you’re only attracted to cute-looking boys. It wouldn’t be a problem if all you did was take ’em to bed, but that crazy kink of yours for snuffing out your lovers is a total deal-breaker. If that’s not the behavior of a repulsive skank, what is?”

“Huh? What’s *not* to get about my kink?” Miki said. “All those cute boys and girls look so *adorable* when they’re in pain, and they’re all miserable, and they’re so scared of me, they turn white as a sheet. You see, I start off by being all sweet on them so that they forget about everything that isn’t Miki, then I *totally* betray their trust just to see the look of horror on their faces. They’re just so totally *adorbs* and precious in those moments, I can’t stop the throbbing I get deep down inside!”

A completely enraptured Miki paused briefly as she realized she had forgotten to add something important. “Ah, but those aren’t the *only* times that they look so *unbearably* cute. I also like to bind their hands and feet, then slowly slice

open their bellies while they beg for their lives. The way they scream and plead for mercy *totally* melts my heart! But surprisingly, those human kids the demonkin give me don't die all that easily, so after I cut 'em open, I like to play with their innards while they howl and scream, their *cute* little faces twisting in pain—"

"Enough!" Daigo yelled, glaring down at Miki in undisguised disgust. "I didn't come here to listen to you go on about your stupid kink!"

"Oh, boo! You're always so mean to me, Daigo!" Miki pouted, puffing out one of her cheeks. "No girl will ever like you if you insult them like that. Besides, it's not as if you hesitate to kill women and children alike when you're doing your level grinding. And if you ask me, that leveling kink of yours is *also* stupid, especially since you keep killing cute kids I would've liked."

"They suffered a much better fate dying by my hand than having a sick, sadistic nutbag like you digging your claws into them!" Daigo shot back. "In any case, leveling is everything. It's the only thing that matters!"

"Would you two mind at all if I picked up from where I left off?" Goh interjected, tired of being ignored. "So anyway, when I said the beastfolk army was annihilated, I meant *completely* annihilated. There was nothin' halfway about it. Their entire army of two thousand was wiped out just like that, with no one left to tell the tale."

"All two thousand men?" Daigo pondered. "Sure, I *might* be able to do that, given enough time and the right setting for such a task, but even then, there's always a good chance I'd miss a few. But you're saying they killed *every* single soldier on the battlefield? Just who the hell were the beastfolk fighting?"

"We don't know that yet," Goh said. "It looks like the Great Tower used some kind of single-use, possibly phantasma-class magic item to trap in all the beastmen and massacre them all."

"Ugh, they sound *terrifying*!" Miki gasped with mock fear and even covered her face with her hands. Although it was just an act, most men who saw her would have instinctively felt an impulse to protect her, but Daigo simply clicked his tongue in contempt, while Goh continued talking without even addressing her histrionics.

“So it looks like those brainless tryhards who work for the dragonutes now believe C might be in that tower, or at least involved in some way,” Goh summed up. “And let’s face it, unless you’re C, it’s simply insane to activate a rare single-use, phantasma-class item just to massacre a bunch of beastfolk. Now I ain’t *totally* convinced C’s in that tower, but it wouldn’t hurt for us to check it out anyway. So do I got any volunteers?”

“What? Can’t you go yourself?” Daigo said.

“Yeah, hard pass on that,” Goh replied. “No reason for me to go dealin’ with stupid grunt work like that.”

“Well, the same goes for me too, then!” Daigo yelled back. “I’m way too busy with my leveling, at any rate. Besides, where’s Gira and Doc? Can’t we send one of them to do it?”

Goh sighed. “Ya really think Gira has the light touch needed for undercover work? That homicidal maniac will start chopping up everything in his path as soon as you set him loose. As for Doc, that gremlin would rather stay cooped up in his lab runnin’ experiments on humans than go off somewhere to gather intel. You know how he’s super focused on ‘the future of the human race’ and all that junk.”

Daigo could only choke down a grunt in response to this, because he knew Goh was right about Gira and Doc.

“You, on the other hand, are having a hard time findin’ monsters powerful enough for your level grinding, ain’t you?” Goh added. “I *know* ya got some free time, so you should use it to go look into this tower.”

“*Hell* no!” Daigo didn’t even hesitate to consider the suggestion before refusing, which caused Goh to click his tongue in irritation.

“Fine. You up for it, Miki?” Goh asked wearily.

“Well, I guess I *could* go, since I have the kind of abilities that’ll let me sneak around the tower unnoticed,” Miki said. “And if C *does* turn out to be there, I could pray for a perfect harem or my ideal life partner. But I don’t wanna waste my time on some wild-goose chase either.” Miki winced at the thought of going all that way for no reason, prompting Goh to add a sweetener to the deal.

“Well, this is just a rumor, so don’t quote me on it, but I hear the Wicked Witch of the Tower is a smokin’ hot babe,” Goh said. “Nobody’s seen her face, but they say you can tell how fine she is from the way she carries herself. Also, the tower’s got a bunch of maids workin’ there, who are apparently too gorgeous to be from this world.”

“All right, it’s settled! Miki will investigate the tower for the sake of her friends, her dreams, and the almighty C!” Miki roared with gusto. Her complete one-eighty was so predictable, Goh was unable to prevent a slight chuckle from passing his lips. He had, in fact, specifically wanted Miki to go check out the tower from the start, since out of all five of the Demonkin Nation Masters, her powers were the best suited for the task. After successfully convincing Miki to enthusiastically accept the assignment, Goh allowed himself a self-satisfied nod.

“Now hold on a minute!” cried out the fourth person in the room, a demon who had been loitering around in the background, listening to the conversation, before deciding this was the right time to interject. “Are you people *insane*?”

The demon had long horns protruding from his head, menacing fangs jutting out of the corners of his mouth, and he was at least several centimeters taller than Daigo. The finery he was wearing marked him as a member of the Demonkin Nation’s aristocracy, yet he was disciplined enough not to make his presence known in the usual ostentatious manner, preferring to simply watch proceedings from somewhere out of sight without moving a muscle until he felt the need to step in. In other words, it was obvious this demon had combat experience, but that fact mattered little to the Masters the demon had just obliquely insulted. After all, any one of these Masters had the power to lay waste to the Demonkin Nation if they really felt like it.

“The Wicked Witch of the Tower leads a band of psychotics who just killed every single beastman who dared to take up arms against them!” the demon exclaimed, clearly perturbed. “And *you* want to risk provoking them?”

“You wouldn’t be trying to stop us from doing what we wanna do, now would you?” Miki said languidly. “That goes against our contract, you know.”

“*You’re* the ones in breach of contract!” the demon retorted. “We signed an agreement pledging mutual cooperation, yet here you are, about to put our

nation in grave peril. I refuse to stand by and let that happen!”

The Demonkin Nation and the Masters had entered into a pact in which the nation agreed to provide aid, comfort, and other favors to the Masters, and in return, the Masters agreed to lend their powers to the demonkin whenever they were needed. Even though the demon knew the Masters could squish him like a bug, this was overshadowed by the much bigger risk of the Masters making an enemy out of the Wicked Witch and the Demonkin Nation getting caught in the middle. That prospect would inevitably open the doors to the wholesale slaughter of his people in the same manner as the beastfolk. However, the Masters weren’t ready to listen to reason.

“It’ll be chill, honest,” Miki assured the demon. “Nobody will know my true identity or that I’m working with the Demonkin Nation. There’s *nothing* to worry about.”

“I certainly have faith in your powers, but there’s no point in poking the hornet’s nest,” the demon said. “Miki, we’ll provide you with more human slaves that are to your liking, so is there any way you could forgo your plans to meddle with the Great Tower?”

“No way! Not a chance!” Miki pouted in a whiny voice. “*This* time, Miki’s gonna hook up with the Wicked Witch and her maids!”

Miki usually agreed to anything the demons asked of her, so long as they were willing to provide her with fresh humans to sate her wanton desires, but this time around, she was wholly convinced that the Wicked Witch was a woman of unparalleled beauty who controlled an army of maids that were just as pretty as herself. As such, there was absolutely no possibility of Miki passing up this chance to infiltrate the Great Tower, no matter what else was dangled in front of her.

“Besides, this is a *huge* opportunity for the demonkin too,” Miki argued. “C*might* be in that tower, and if he is, he’ll grant my prayers *and* yours too! You might finally get your wish of becoming a more powerful race than the dragonutes! That *definitely* makes checking out the tower worthwhile, no matter how ‘psychotic’ the people there are, *Your Highness.*”

The demon—who happened to be Voros, the crown prince of the Demonkin

Nation—gritted his teeth in vexation, but he couldn't deny Miki's point that the Great Tower might contain the answer to helping his people attain their long-held ambition of becoming the master race by surpassing the dragonutes. That goal had become the demonkin's whole reason for being, to the point where it could be called a collective obsession. As the crown prince, Voros was in no position to pass up this opportunity of a lifetime, even if it meant dealing with the bunch of murderous psychopaths residing in the Great Tower. After a moment's hesitation, Voros threw up his hands.

"Fine, do what you want!" he spat. "But you're sharing all the intel you get with us, you hear? And if your cover does get blown, you'd better do everything in your power to make sure none of the blowback reaches us. We'll do what we need to do to protect ourselves too. You got any problems with that?"

"Of course not! You can *always* trust Miki!" the female Master replied before aiming a cutesy wink at Voros, which unwittingly took his breath away. Miki was a sadistic killer who derived pleasure from torturing women and children both physically and mentally, but she was still so stunning to look at that she captivated most men, even the demon prince himself. Voros found himself forced to exit the room quickly before Miki completely captured his heart, and behind his retreating figure, Miki, Goh, and Daigo shared scornful smirks.



Voros rushed out of the Masters' suite and into the bitterly cold air of the hallway. He soon slowed his pace to a walk, but he still wanted to put as much distance as he could between him and the room he had just fled. *Who the hell did they think they were talking to?! Voros yelled in his mind. I'm the crown prince of the Demonkin Nation! Yet those inferior humans saw fit to insult me! If they weren't Masters, I would have had them flayed alive and tormented until they begged for death!*

But Voros knew full well that he was dealing with beings who had the power to destroy not just his own nation, but the nations of all the other races too. Well, except for the dragonutes. Despite looking human, the Masters were actually walking weapons of mass destruction, and although Voros had made a point of saying his piece in their suite, he couldn't afford to dig his heels in and potentially anger them. However, the crown prince took comfort in the fact

that the demons knew a secret that was being kept confidential from the Masters.

They can go ahead and spend all their time vainly searching through that tower or whatever other dungeons they want to look in for all I care. We already know they won't find C in those places, Voros thought, snorting in derision at Goh and his associates. *They have no clue that we already have C in our possession. They're like a bunch of ignorant dogs chasing their own tails.*

Having the Masters spy on the Great Tower ran counter to the interests of the Demonkin Nation, with Voros believing that the proper way to take action against a threat as dangerous as the Great Tower was to hold a vote at the next summit in order to form an international coalition that could share the risk. In truth, Voros couldn't understand why anyone would try to take on the tower alone, and what made the operation even more of a pointless endeavor was that the demons already knew where C resided. The demon prince had tried to do the Masters a favor by voicing his opposition to their impulsive mission, but in the end, he'd had little choice but to allow them to unknowingly head off on a fool's errand. Voros couldn't have told the Masters the *real* reason for his objection since that would lose his leverage over them, and digging his heels in risked inviting the wrath of the Masters. However, simply having C in their possession wasn't enough to grant the demonkin their long-held desire of becoming more powerful than the dragonutes.

There has to be a way to remove the seal and awaken C, Voros mused. *That way, we can finally be rid of these inferior reprobates and rise above the dragonutes.*

C was presently being held in a secret location, but a magical seal was keeping him asleep. The demons had no clue how to remove this seal, and it wasn't like they could just ask outsiders for help, so they continued to carry out research in secret, but so far, they'd had no luck with it. Voros quickened his pace, reminding himself what needed to be done. *As long as I still breathe, I need to awaken C so we can kill those Masters and become the most powerful race in the world,* thought Voros. *We are this close to achieving that goal within my lifetime, and that is the mission that has been granted to me as the next king of the demons!*

Voros's sense of purpose had been rekindled, sweeping through his soul like a wildfire, but little did he know at this time what his fiery ambition would end up bringing about.

Chapter 2: Flushing Out the Spies

Weeks before leaving to go on her undercover trip to the Great Tower settlement, Lilith was in her private bedroom in the Human Kingdom castle with two of her maids. In terms of scale, the royal residence resembled a large mansion more than it did a typical palace, but it was considered a castle all the same. At this particular moment, one of the maids in the bedroom was perched on the edge of Lilith's bed, looking dazed.

"So she's hypnotized, correct?" Lilith said.

"Yes, Your Highness," said the other maid, who looked no more than ten years old. "She's completely in a trance."

Lilith stared with fascination at the person they had hypnotized: her head maid, Nono. Normally, it would be a serious breach of etiquette for a maid to be sitting down while the princess stood, and it was practically unheard of for *any* servant to sit on Lilith's bed. Nono in particular was a real stickler for enforcing proper decorum at all times, so the idea that she was breaking two of her ironclad rules at present was nothing short of extraordinary.

After making sure Nono was indeed fully hypnotized, Lilith turned to the younger of the two maids. "Thank you for activating the SR Hypnosis card, Yume."

"You're welcome!" the maid replied with a sunny smile. "I'm always ready and willing to serve you, Your Highness!" While this maid looked like Light's little sister, Yume, she was actually a copy of her created by the UR Double Shadow card. The gacha card had the ability to replicate the original's physical appearance and mannerisms, right down to their habitual gestures. The likeness was so complete, in fact, not even a family member would be able to see through the copy. The card could even reproduce any Gifts possessed by the original, though their potency was somewhat diminished.

The SR Hypnosis card the doppelgänger had used on Nono allowed the user to either manipulate the subject or extract information from them, but it wasn't

foolproof. For one thing, the card wasn't so effective on high-level targets, and for another, even if the hypnosis did take, any third party would instantly realize that something was off due to the dazed look on the person's face. Yet there was a very good reason Lilith had decided to place her trusty head maid under hypnosis.

"I feel guilty about doing this to you, Nono," Lilith said. "But this is necessary for me to establish your innocence."

Lilith was planning to replace her father, the king, as the ruler of the Human Kingdom, and the takeover was all set to happen during the summit that was scheduled to be held at the Principality of the Nine in a few years. This plot wasn't born from any self-serving motive, though. While the Human Kingdom had the outward appearance of a fully sovereign nation at present, it was not allowed to levy tariffs on the eight other nations, and it was forced to sell its own people as slaves for cut-rate prices whenever the other races demanded it. The Human Kingdom was basically a servile province that didn't even have the right to choose its own monarch. The current king was dead set on maintaining the status quo, as was Lilith's brother, Crown Prince Clowe, but Lilith's revolutionary spirit meant she refused to accept the present state of affairs, leading her to seek Light's cooperation to make her the ruler of her nation, so that she might improve the lot of the human race.

However, claiming power wasn't as simple as using Light's army to strong-arm her way onto the throne, for the kingdom was awash with spies who were in the service of other races. If Lilith tried to take the crown by force and attempted to push her proposed reforms through that way, the royal vassals wouldn't accept her authority and nothing would get done. She would also find herself constantly watching her back for potential poisoners, assassins, and kidnappers. In other words, dealing with all of the toxic palace intrigue would leave Lilith no time to actually run her nation, so she had decided to try to identify all the spies using Light's cards in order to secretly eliminate them before her accession to the throne. And the first person to undergo this weeding-out process was Nono, the person Lilith trusted most.

"Yume, please wait outside the door and make sure no one else comes in," Lilith ordered. "If anyone tries to enter, give me a signal and stall them for a few

moments.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” the fake Yume replied before bowing and exiting the room.

I still can't believe how she can have the exact same appearance, speaking patterns, and mannerisms as the real Yume, thought Lilith. *I almost forgot she's a body double.* Although it pained her to think about it, the Double Shadow Yume was the only person in the entire castle that Lilith could truly trust. She collected her thoughts and turned to face Nono once more.

“You’ve looked after me ever since I was a kid, and I look up to you like an older sister,” Lilith said. “I can’t imagine you being a spy, but I have to do this, just to make sure.” She cleared her throat. “I will begin my interrogation now, Nono. Please answer my questions honestly.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” Nono said in a monotone voice.

“Nono, you aren’t a spy working for another nation, are you?” Lilith said with an air of confidence.

Nono was silent for a moment before answering, “Yes.”

“Well, of *course* you aren’t,” Lilith said. “We’ve been together since I was a little child. If you really were a spy, I would’ve noticed a long time— Wait, come again?”

Because Lilith was so sure that Nono was innocent, she’d initially failed to realize that her response of “yes” could have meant anything, grammatically speaking. Lilith fearfully asked the necessary follow-up question.

“A-Are you or are you not a spy working for another nation?” Lilith stammered.

“Yes, I am,” Nono said after another pause. “I am a spy and I serve the Demonkin Nation.”

This confession struck Lilith like a thunderbolt, and caused her to fall backward onto her posterior. Luckily, the only one who noticed the princess react in such an embarrassing manner was the fake Yume, who had heard the noise through the door and rushed into the room to calm Lilith down and help

her back up. After collecting herself again, Lilith continued to question Nono, but seated in a chair this time. The head maid spilled everything she had been hiding for all the years she had been alive.

She revealed that, for generations, her family had been under orders from the Demonkin Nation to operate in the Human Kingdom as spies, and that she had been personally instructed to assassinate the princess if her justice-related activism ever became a threat to the Demonkin Nation's interests. Nono added that because she had looked after the princess ever since she was little, her affection for her went beyond the usual master-servant relationship, but that affection would not win out against her familial duties and the mission she had been assigned, for if she were to go against orders and spare the princess's life, she and every single member of her family would be slaughtered. Nono went on to list some of the other spies who were working for the Demonkin Nation, which included maids, manservants, and some of the nobles who had been put in charge of running the kingdom, and she concluded the session by telling her questioner that she was also personally aware of other people who might be spies for the other seven races, but she hadn't bothered to confirm her suspicions, so they were only suppositions on her part.

Lilith clutched her head in distress. "I can't believe there are so many spies crawling around my kingdom! I was prepared for the worst, but this is just too much!"

For Lilith to become the next ruler of the Human Kingdom, there had been a very real prospect that she would need to execute a whole bunch of people if it came to it. But this new information meant Lilith was now faced with the worst-case scenario of not just having to execute Nono, but the rest of her family as well.

"How could you?" Lilith said accusingly, with hot, bitter tears streaming down her cheeks. "Why are you, of all people, a spy? Do you have no love for your nation?"

If Lilith had been any normal girl, she would have pretended not to hear what Nono had told her, given up on her plans to change the world, and attempted to live out the rest of her life as normally as she could. But Lilith couldn't simply abandon her objectives due to the weight of her responsibilities as the princess

of the Human Kingdom. After spending several minutes crying due to the pain of this betrayal, Lilith gritted her teeth and raised her head, her eyes filled with determination to lift her kingdom out of peonage and to save her people from being treated like cattle. She was hell-bent on achieving her goals, even if it meant excising the cancer that had spread throughout her kingdom.

“This pain and suffering will end with my generation,” Lilith declared. “And I will make that happen, even if I have to kill you myself, Nono.”



“I simply don’t have enough people!”

Sitting in a chair in her private suite, Lilith sighed deeply. The princess had secretly been running a probe to find out who was and wasn’t a spy inside the palace walls, but since the only person she could trust to help with the operation was the Double Shadow Yume, this fact-finding mission had been going at a snail’s pace. The one person Lilith thought she could trust, Nono, had turned out to be an undercover agent for the demonkin. After this shocking discovery was made, Lilith realized she could ill afford to rely on anyone else to be a confidential cohort. That said, two people were nowhere near enough to make meaningful progress on such an enormous task, and Lilith closed her eyes as she tried to come up with a solution, but all paths led to the same destination.

“I suppose I’m going to have to ask Lord Light for help,” Lilith muttered to herself. She retrieved the SR Telepathy card she kept in her desk drawer and awkwardly recited the activation spell.

“Um, let’s see...” Lilith said hesitantly. “SR Telepathy, release.” The card disintegrated and a mental link was established between Lilith and Light, who was all the way down in the Abyss.



Lilith used a Telepathy card to contact me because she wanted some advice, so we arranged to meet in person a few days later at her convenience. After replacing her at the Human Kingdom palace with a Double Shadow clone, Lilith showed up at my other office on the top floor of the Great Tower. We sat opposite each other on sofas and made small talk while sipping the tea that Mei

had brewed.

“I very much appreciate you taking the time to meet me today,” Lilith began.

“It’s the least I could do,” I replied. “I’m eternally indebted to you for saving my sister’s life, so I’m always available whenever you wish to meet.”

“I’m supremely glad to hear that,” Lilith said. “As for Yume, I hope she is doing well? I confess, I do not feel bereft of her company, since she—or rather, her body double—still waits on me every day. But I do find myself wondering how the *real* Yume is faring.”

“Thank you for caring so much about my sister,” I said. “Yume misses you a lot, so if you could make time in your undoubtedly busy schedule to go see her, it would make her day.”

“Yes, I would love to see Yume again,” Lilith replied. “We have so much to talk about since we’ve been apart for so long.”

The two of us continued to chat idly like we were old friends having brunch together. Once she was sure we were both in a good mood, Lilith finally broached the real subject of our discussion.

“To tell you the truth, I’ve run into a huge problem,” Lilith said, a grim look on her face. “There’s no one I can trust in my palace, other than the Yume clone you made with your card. I’m surrounded by spies, and it’s taking me and the fake Yume far too long to flush them all out. I need more manpower to get rid of these spies, so is there any way I could trouble you for more cards? I know I’m being a bit presumptuous, but this is all for the future of the human race.”

She really did make it sound like she had only come to me as a last resort. After listening to Lilith’s plea, my brow furrowed pensively.

“I see,” I said. “So you want more Double Shadow cards who you can trust to help you identify these spies?”

“That’s correct,” Lilith confirmed. “And yes, I know full well how immensely valuable those cards are.”

Lilith was being totally honest with me and there was no hint of her trying to wheedle me into giving her more gacha cards. I appreciated her candor, but in

this case, I couldn't squeeze blood from a stone.

"First, I want to thank you for coming to me with this," I said gently. "But honestly, I don't think I *can* give you any more Double Shadow cards. I know I owe you everything for saving my sister, but my Gift doesn't produce Double Shadow cards all that often, and right now, I'm not sure I have any of those cards in my possession to give you."

Lilith looked startled by this. "Is that so? And to think you already used a few of those precious cards for my sake. I should be the one thanking you."

Looking a little shaken, the princess bowed her head to me. In truth, I did have a few UR Double Shadow cards left, but since they were ultra-rare by definition, I couldn't afford to exhaust my very limited stock on creating a whole new team of investigators for Lilith. I know that I'd said I was indebted to her, but I wasn't just going to cut off an arm and a leg to repay that debt, especially when there were other, more reasonable options available.

"I'm sorry I can't share any more Double Shadow cards with you. But I *can* summon more people for you all the same," I said. "I have lots of cards that can manifest people, and I'm perfectly willing to give some to you so that you can use them to replace your servants gradually over time."

Because of the realities that were plaguing her kingdom, there was no way Lilith was going to become queen right away, and the next summit at the Duchy was still a few more years away. She could use that time to secretly put people she could trust into low-level attendant roles. Unlike the ultra-rare Double Shadow cards, the Unlimited Gacha had produced piles of regular, low-level humans like the Mohawks, and I didn't summon every human my Gift spat out because doing so wouldn't serve any practical purpose, and taking care of all of them would eat up too much time and resources. For these reasons, a lot of those Normal human cards had been taking up storage space, but now they would finally be able to serve a purpose by lending a hand to Lilith in her quest to flush out the spies in her kingdom.

Lilith took a few seconds to consider my suggestion. "Thank you, Lord Light. Like you say, I should take a more realistic approach and gradually switch out my retainers for people I can count on."

“I’m glad I was able to help,” I replied. Thankfully, Lilith had been accommodating enough to accept my first suggestion. The two of us spent the rest of our time mapping out the specifics of how she would go about switching out her servants with humans summoned from my cards. However, these plans were ultimately scrapped because the beastfolk declared war on us shortly after this meeting.

Chapter 3: Making Contact

Prince Clowe and Princess Lilith stood before their father, the king, after being summoned to his office in the royal palace.

“Two thousand beastmen soldiers have been slaughtered by the Wicked Witch of the Tower,” the king announced, his voice leaden.

His two children reacted with breathless shock at this news. Lilith, in particular, was completely taken aback, since neither the beastmen death toll nor the war versus the Beastfolk Federation had come up as a topic in her many recent conversations with Light.

“This massacre has led the Demonkin Nation to conclude that the Great Tower and the Wicked Witch are imminent threats,” the king continued. “The demons are pressing for an emergency summit to be held in the principality to discuss a collective response to the presence of the tower and the actions of its residents. We’re still finalizing the date for the summit, but I suggest that you two make sure you’re fully prepared to attend the summit at the drop of a hat.”

“Understood, father,” Clowe said, the unexpected briefing having turned him pale. But even though Lilith was just as shaken by the massacre of the beastmen, she saw this news as leverage to convince the king that she had been right all along.

“Dear father, if what you say is true, that means the Wicked Witch is as powerful as we all suspected!” Lilith exclaimed. “She has defeated the Elven Queendom and the Dark Elf Islands, and now she has also subjugated the beastfolk! We must seize this chance to ally with the witch and attain power for the Human Kingdom! This is a golden opportunity for us to escape from being a chattel nation beholden to others! We must grab this chance to elevate the status of humans with both hands!”

Both the king and Prince Clowe placed the palms of their hands on their foreheads as if nursing migraines. Knowing she was right on this, Lilith frowned at this unspoken yet belittling response.

“Lilith...” the king started, speaking as if admonishing a small child. “We are in no position to link hands with this Wicked Witch of the Tower. The risks are not worth the as-yet dubious rewards.”

“And what *precisely* would we be risking, dear father?” Lilith said, her tone strident. “The witch is the protector and ally of all humans. She believes in the absolute autonomy of our whole race, for heaven’s sake! When I went on my tour of the Great Tower, I observed for myself how she feeds, clothes, and shelters the humans in the settlement, and everyone there is thriving under the protection she guarantees! My dear brother was there with me, and he will back up what I’m saying! How can you still think that the witch presents a danger to our kingdom?”

The king sighed. “You really do not see the risks, do you, Lilith?”

“No, I absolutely do not,” she replied firmly. “In fact, I’m very curious to know what potential drawbacks you see.”

The king sighed deeply once more before launching into his rebuttal. “We are talking about a witch who has subjugated the elves, the dark elves, and now the beastfolk. From what I hear, the beastfolk incurred the wrath of the witch by illegally kidnapping humans and declaring war on the Great Tower. Abducting and imprisoning those humans without just cause was absolutely uncalled for, and as king of the humans, I strongly condemn their actions, but...” The king hesitated grimly. “But the witch has toppled three whole nations now, completely upending the international order. And I am told the witch slaughtered two thousand beastmen warriors, who went into battle armed with highly destructive weaponry. So you can imagine how shockingly disproportionate that level of butchery appears to me and the other world leaders, I hope?”

“Y-Yes, I find it extremely shocking as well...” Lilith stuttered. “But it was the *beastfolk* who declared war on the Wicked Witch, so the outcome was entirely justified. If anything, the beastfolk brought this disaster upon themselves by illegally abducting humans!”

“And I completely concur with your judgment on that, Lilith,” the king conceded. “But we also must not forget that the nations the witch has

conquered so far were weaker than the Dragonute Empire and the Demonkin Nation. We cannot say how those two superpowers will react if we ally with the witch, and she herself has yet to demonstrate that she can beat either of those races. And in all honesty, there is also no way for us to guarantee that the Wicked Witch will not turn against humans out of anger for whatever reason.”

Lilith paused, momentarily uncertain. “But the witch believes in the absolute autonomy of humans! She would never do something so unprincipled to our race!”

Of course, Lilith knew that the *real* power behind the Wicked Witch and the Great Tower was a boy named Light, and in every encounter she had had with him, he had always come across as an honest, approachable young gentleman. But at the same time, she had noted that Light exuded the overwhelming aura of a god or perhaps the dark lord himself. In any case, the “absolute autonomy” declaration wasn’t quite the same as giving humans a free pass to do whatever they wanted, and since it was really Light who had granted humans absolute autonomy, he was of course the person who set certain conditions on the pronouncement. Those who transgressed these rules would not be spared from the maximum punishment, even if the transgressor was Lilith, who had built up quite a close relationship with Light. Furthermore, any punishment could very well spill over and affect the entire Human Kingdom. It was all but certain that there were humans out there in the wild who were ambitious enough to want to plot against the Great Tower, and it was that very real possibility that stopped Lilith from making a full-throated defense of the Wicked Witch. Unfortunately, the king saw through Lilith’s equivocation.

“We are treated as less by the other eight races, and because of the power imbalance that exists, we have, by necessity, become experts on how to avoid drawing the displeasure of the other nations,” the king said. “However, we know next to nothing about this Wicked Witch. We could find ourselves doing everything in our power as a kingdom to appease the witch, and still incur her wrath due to some unintended misstep. In that event, we humans might end up ceasing to exist as a race, let alone as a ‘chattel nation,’ as you call it. It is my responsibility as monarch not to risk the safety of my people on that kind of reckless gamble.”

The king's words silenced Lilith completely. She knew in her bones that her father—a diehard advocate of the orthodox—could not be swayed in any way, no matter what other arguments she put forward. Not only had the king become inured with age to all sorts of outrages and atrocities that befell his people, he was convinced he would be secure in his lofty position so long as he didn't rock the boat.

The king likewise knew that his daughter was far from convinced by his justifications, even if she seemingly didn't have the energy to continue the war of words between them. With that in mind, he dismissed his two children, and Lilith exited the room first with Clowe following behind, the prince looking at his sister's back with a mixture of pity and disbelief. *Is she still too immature to know how these things work in the real world?* Clowe's eyes seemed to say. Sensing her brother's painfully patronizing gaze boring holes into her back, Lilith swallowed down her hurt pride and strode briskly to her private chambers, where on entering the lounge, the fake Yume dutifully pulled out a chair for the princess at the table. This young apprentice maid had recently been told that she was extremely adept at her job and well on her way to being promoted to a full maid. The other maid in the room, Nono, poured some tea into a cup and placed it in front of the princess.

Lilith briefly hesitated. "Thank you, Nono." Knowing that her head maid was a spy, the princess had wondered for a fraction of a second whether her tea might be laced with poison, but she had made sure that all of her extracurricular activities were done in secret, so there was no reason to believe her assassination would have been ordered. Nono noticed the pregnant pause, but decided to ignore it.

"It would appear His Majesty has related news to you that you have found quite troubling," Nono said.

"Yes, it was certainly a briefing I could have done without," Lilith grumbled. "In any case, I need to prepare to depart for a summit at the principality in the next few days. Or next few months, at the latest. I request that you have my luggage all packed and ready for then."

"They are holding a summit at the Principality of the Nine?" Nono queried. "I thought the next one wasn't due for a few years."

“Things have changed,” said Lilith. “Many things.”

For obvious reasons, she was going to keep the specific reasons for the summit being brought forward close to her chest, and since Nono was a consummate professional, the maid didn’t probe any deeper. Lilith calmly sipped the tea Nono had prepared, but her mind was buzzing. *Father won’t join hands with the Wicked Witch, no matter what I do*, she thought. *He’s just going to sit on his throne and rule over a lowly chattel nation whose citizens will continue to be exploited and killed with impunity.* Her brow furrowed further. *This isn’t over! I’ll admit that the Wicked Witch of the Tower—or rather, Lord Light—is powerful in ways that no ordinary person can comprehend, but his power is genuine and absolute! The only way we humans will ever be able to engage with the other races on equal terms is if we ally ourselves with Lord Light and his retainers!*

But she knew the king and Prince Clowe weren’t likely to have their minds changed, even if they met Light in person. *I will have to stand and fight alone if the human race is to have a future*, Lilith thought. *I haven’t finished flushing out the spies in the palace, but the summit being brought forward like this works in my favor. I must depose my father, become queen, and guarantee a brighter tomorrow for my people! And for that purpose, I must contact Lord Light at once and start laying the groundwork for our plans.*

Lilith’s passionate, if juvenile, revolutionary spirit was like fire in a furnace, engulfing her heart. Although Nono had known Lilith since she was a tot, the maid failed to notice her charge’s renewed sense of determination as she continued to wait upon her. After all, even Nono didn’t have the ability to read the princess’s mind.

Chapter 4: Favors

I was just wrapping up the postwar briefing with Mei, Ellie, and Aoyuki in my office in the Abyss, when out of the blue, I received another SR Telepathy call from Lilith, whereupon she relayed some news to me that really threw me for a loop.

“What? The Duchy is holding a summit really soon?” I said aloud. “But they aren’t supposed to be holding another one for years—wait, *what*? It’s because we toppled the Beastfolk Federation?”

Lilith told me that our shocking victory over the beastfolk had caused the Demonkin Nation to regard the Great Tower as a threat, and because of this, they had called for an emergency summit to be convened in the Duchy so that all the nations could come up with a unified response. Because of these developments, Lilith wanted to come and discuss what our next moves should be, and I readily agreed to meet her, since for one thing, there was no reason not to, and for another, because this whole debacle was the result of actions we ourselves had taken. We decided on a time to meet face-to-face, then ended the Telepathy call.



A few days later, I received Lilith again in my top-floor office inside the Great Tower. We greeted each other, then took seats on separate sofas, facing one another across a coffee table. Mei placed some freshly brewed tea in front of both of us before going over to the wall and standing with her back to it, allowing us to begin our conversation.

“I thank you once again for making time in your busy schedule to meet me at my request,” Lilith said.

“No, this meeting was necessary, since you need help with this problem,” I said. “I never would have guessed that our war with the beastfolk would trigger an emergency summit.”

“Yes, I was very surprised to hear about the Beastfolk Federation’s catastrophic defeat, let alone the summit being called off the back of it,” Lilith said. “Not only that, but the beastfolk seeing fit to abduct humans and force them to fight on the front lines of a war they started was absolutely monstrous, and I was completely shocked and appalled when I learned of it. In fact, I derived great satisfaction from knowing that you massacred all those beastfolk for their crimes against humanity.”

I nodded in agreement with that sentiment. We had informed Lilith before this meeting about the sequence of events that had led to the defeat of the Beastfolk Federation’s army, including their cruelty to the human hostages and the devastation that was wrought by the Twinblood vampire slimes. Like me, she probably thought the beastfolk had brought the massacre on themselves—quite literally. At the same time, Lilith may have been a little freaked out by the idea of launching major wars that lead to casualties and death on that scale, but if she truly wished to bring about reform for the human race, she needed to accept that some lives were going to be sacrificed to meet those ends. Taking over a nation and ensuring a better tomorrow for the human race was going to be a messy job, no matter how you went about it.

“I personally believe it’s by heavenly design that this summit is being held so soon after the beastfolk paid for the injustices they inflicted,” Lilith said. “Lord Light, I plan to depose my father at the summit and take his place on the throne as queen of the Human Kingdom. For that purpose, I require your help in getting the Elven Queendom, the Dark Elf Islands, the Dwarf Kingdom, and the Beastfolk Federation to support my ascension. Also, if you are able to guarantee the cooperation of one more nation, either through subjugation or by secret arrangement, then my coronation will be assured.”

I lapsed into silence as I pondered what Lilith was asking of me. I knew from what she had told me previously that the Human Kingdom didn’t retain the right to pick their own rulers, instead essentially falling to the eight nonhuman nations to decide by majority vote. It was meant to be a purely ceremonial process, but due to the huge power imbalance, the Human Kingdom didn’t dare crown a candidate that wouldn’t have the approval of the other nations.

But looking at the process another way, it meant we only needed to have five

of the nonhuman nations in our pocket to be able to crown Lilith as the new queen. *As of right now, we can easily get four nations to vote how we want, I thought. And given our capabilities, we should have no trouble either strong-arming or secretly befriending another nation, but...* Unfortunately, that wouldn't solve even half of the problems we had before us.

"We're very willing to help you if it means ending the suffering of humans," I said at last. "But you haven't finished clearing the spies out of your palace, have you? Don't you think it's a bit too early for you to seize the crown?"

"I have also been struggling with that dilemma, Lord Light," Lilith admitted. "But if I don't become the ruler now, it will be *years* before I get another opportunity, and in that time, our fellow humans will continue to suffer."

Lilith had placed her hands on her knees when she sat down, and at this point in the conversation, they balled up into fists. "I would much rather allow my father to remain the king so that he could lead the charge to reform the status quo, but I'm afraid he doesn't have the strength of will to even consider trying to change things for the better, and neither does my brother." Lilith bitterly recalled her recent conversation with the king in his office. "As such, the only one who can secure a brighter future for the human race is me," she declared. "I know this might be overstepping the bounds of our relationship, but I was hoping I might ask you for three more favors, Lord Light."

"Three favors?" I said. I could only guess at what they might be, but I wasn't prepared to flush out the spies in the Human Kingdom for her. That wasn't to say it couldn't be done if we had a free hand to move around out in the open, but it would be next to impossible to get rid of the spies without any of the other nations noticing. Surprisingly, however, Lilith's favors were of an entirely different variety.

"Yes, three," Lilith affirmed. "My first favor is to help me to boost my power level before the summit begins." In other words, Lilith wanted to reach a level where she would have some resistance to any potential assassination attempts. "I'm aware that getting rid of spies cannot be done overnight," she continued. "So the alternative is for me to level up so that I am not so easy to kill by normal means. That way, I can enact reforms and carry on flushing out spies without needing to worry about any deadly reprisals."

This was the sort of unconventional idea you wouldn't expect to hear from a member of a royal family, but as Lilith explained, this method would allow her to take the throne, bring the axe down on all the spies in her kingdom, and replace her retainers with a bunch of people summoned from my Normal cards. Sure, a political purge like that would cause a huge ruckus, but the attention would be entirely on Lilith, leaving my people free to assist in taking out the spies without being noticed.

"My next request is for you to lend me a few magic items that can ward off poison and similar methods of assassination," Lilith said. "Even if I do attain a higher level, it would be impossible to make myself immune to all potential attempts on my life through my new power level alone."

Needless to say, this also made sense. Besides, my N card summons would be completely vulnerable to deadly attacks too, so they would also need defensive items, healing potions, and other magical items to protect themselves. The N cards were my allies, after all, so I couldn't skimp on making sure they stayed safe.

However, I found Lilith's final request somewhat unusual. "Last of all, I would like you to accompany me to the summit at the Principality of the Nine as my protector."

"You want me to be your bodyguard?" I said.

"It would reassure me greatly knowing I have you by my side during the conference," Lilith explained. "The leaders of the Demonkin Nation and the Dragonute Empire will also be present at the summit. I may not be able to offer you much, but I *can* extend this invitation, which I believe will be to your benefit, for it will allow you to see these leaders and their inner circles in person."

Once again, Lilith was right. It would definitely be better for me to see the leaders of the two most powerful nations in the world in person, and going there as Lilith's bodyguard provided a good cover story.

"Any adventurer recruited to escort a member of Human Kingdom royalty anywhere must be A-rank," Lilith said, flashing me a smile. "But with your strengths, I'm sure you will manage to attain that classification before the

summit.”

Guilds categorized the many adventurers around the world using a six-rank system. A-rank was reserved for the top adventurers, and B-rank was the next tier down, for adventurers who were still high-level but not quite as stellar. C-rank was filled with proficient pros, while D-rank was for those who were considered full-fledged adventurers. If you had middling experience at questing, you were placed in E-rank, while F-rank was largely for adventurers who were just starting out. There was also a separate S-rank, which was reserved for the real cream of the crop, the likes of which were rarely seen.

I disguised myself as Dark when I helped rescue the human hostages from the beastfolk, I thought. With that on my record, and with the backing of the nations in our sphere of influence, maybe I'll be able to get to A-rank with little problem.

Lilith might have believed we were all-powerful, godlike figures, but we weren't capable of performing every miracle under the sun. It was just a happy coincidence that I'd already been operating undercover as the adventurer known as Dark for some time by this point, because otherwise, it would've been practically impossible to make A-rank in time for the summit if I'd needed to start afresh. But since it was entirely doable, given the circumstances, I readily agreed to her last request.

“Okay, I'll take you up on your invitation of bodyguard duty,” I said. “And I'll help you out with those other requests too.”

“Thank you so much, Lord Light!” Lilith said, almost squealing with delight.

“No, I should be the one thanking you for allowing me this valuable opportunity to attend the summit with you,” I replied. We both smiled at each other, and a warm, fuzzy feeling filled my office at the outcome of our meeting. Unfortunately, that warmth didn't extend to the reception some of my warriors gave to Lilith and the way she had dealt with me.



“Master,” Aoyuki started, the hem of her cat-eared hood hiding her eyes from view. “That woman, Lilith, disrespected you just then. I say she must pay for that effrontery with her life.”

After my meeting with Lilith, I returned to my office on the bottom tier of the Abyss, but the moment I sat down in my chair, Aoyuki and Ellie both appeared in front of my desk to lodge complaints.

“I happen to agree with Aoyuki, Blessed Lord Light,” Ellie said. “Yes, that woman did a good job saving and safeguarding your dear, dear sister, Miss Yume, but we have already fully rewarded her for her services. Yet here she is, treating you like a magic lamp! How *dare* she use you as her own personal handyman!”

Well, it looked like Lilith had indeed overstepped her bounds—at least in Aoyuki and Ellie’s eyes.

“You two need to get a hold of yourselves,” I said. “Yes, I know that Lilith has been asking me for a lot of favors lately, but it’s not like she’s been asking for the moon. Fulfilling all of her requests would be like a rounding error to us. Besides, she’s the only royal in the Human Kingdom who’s passionate about saving the human race, and you won’t be able to find anyone to replace her. She’s a valuable asset who’s willing to usurp her own father in order to realize her ideals. She’s ready to turn her back on her life as a sheltered princess, and I respect her for that.”

I paused for a moment before opening up about how I really felt. “What she did in saving Yume means the world to me. The whole world. You might think that we’ve already repaid her in full for that act of selflessness, but I don’t. I still have a long, *long* way to go until I even get close to repaying her for saving Yume’s life. Doing these favors for Lilith really is the least I can do for her.”

The fact that Lilith was a princess in prime position to become the next queen of the Human Kingdom made her an irreplaceable ally. And not only that, but Lilith had found Yume, used a healing potion on her to save her from her life-threatening injuries, and if that weren’t enough, gave my sister a job at the palace, so that she could lead a stable life. Aoyuki and Ellie may not have thought so, but I knew I was nowhere near paying off my sizable debt to Lilith.

“But I know that you two are only thinking about my own welfare and that of the Abyss,” I said, remembering to soften the conversation by throwing in some words of encouragement. “If Lilith does come forward with unreasonable

demands at any point, I'll be sure to put my foot down and refuse, regardless of what she did for Yume in the past. And if Lilith continues to pressure me after I've refused, then I will deal with her personally."

I made sure that my voice sounded cold and unfeeling when delivering that closing remark, and from the expressions on Aoyuki's and Ellie's faces, it seemed I had gotten it through to them that I hadn't gone soft and I still knew where to draw the line.



“I shall abide by your will, master,” Aoyuki said.

“Likewise. I will follow your decision to the letter, Your Blessedness,” Ellie said. “But if she *is* planning to cross a line that should not be crossed, I implore you to tell me first, and I will dispose of that woman in an instant!”

Judging from the vibes I was getting from them, Aoyuki and Ellie still saw Lilith as an enemy to a certain degree, but because my deputies were fiercely loyal to me, they would refrain from acting on this animosity. At least for the time being. I was glad they displayed such devotion to me, but at times, they could be a bit *too* extreme with it.

I guess I'll have to warn the others not to entertain the idea of assaulting or arguing with Lilith out of a sense of obligation to me, I thought. I didn't honestly believe Lilith would get into a nasty confrontation with one of my own, but I felt I couldn't be too careful about it, since we were talking about the person who'd saved Yume's life. Also, if Lilith were to perish due to neglect on my part, all the groundwork we had been preparing on the political front would end up going down the drain, and it was so important that it didn't, I even wrote down what I needed to do on a piece of paper to remind myself.



Immediately after walking out of Light's executive office, Aoyuki and Ellie entered a separate room. When the Abyss had undergone its redevelopment, a whole bunch of rooms were built that had remained empty ever since. If a room had a lock, it served as the perfect place to hold confidential discussions, especially if one of the conspiring participants also cast an anti-eavesdropping spell. On this occasion, two people that didn't usually get along very well had decided to have a private sit-down chat.

“Blessed Lord Light is truly a kind, gentle soul!” Ellie extolled grumpily. “So much so that he bestows so many more blessings on that woman than she deserves, even if you factor in that she saved Miss Yume's life. Blessed Lord Light's mercy soars higher than the air in the sky and its depth surpasses even the deepest ocean, but he's being far too generous, in my opinion!”

“Mrrow,” Aoyuki mewled in agreement.

“That Lilith woman is clearly taking advantage of His Blessedness’s kindness!” Ellie grumbled. “He says he will allow it, but she’s treating Blessed Lord Light like he’s her manservant! In any other circumstance, I wouldn’t tolerate it!”

“Yes, but master approves of it,” Aoyuki noted. “Therefore, we must tolerate her insolence *this* time. But the next time she deigns to exploit master for her benefit, I will end her existence.”

“So we must pardon her transgression. At least, for now,” Ellie said. “I’ll admit she’s willing to get her hands dirty for the sake of the human race, unlike the king or her brother, the prince. If we consider what we feel the future should look like, she fits into our plans very well.”

“She was able to come here because of a Double Shadow clone,” Aoyuki pointed out in an icy voice. “We could slay her and nobody would know.”

These weren’t idle words from Aoyuki; she would have ripped Lilith apart that very instant if Light had given Aoyuki his permission. Ellie nodded in agreement, then spoke in a tone that was dripping with the same murderous wrath as Aoyuki’s words had.

“We mustn’t touch her, though,” she muttered grimly. “Blessed Lord Light did not give us the go-ahead to do so.”

“Meeow,” mewled Aoyuki, twisting her head away testily as if to say she was better than that, which was met with an empathetic shrug of the shoulders by Ellie.

“Even if Blessed Lord Light grants us permission to execute that woman, that doesn’t give us free rein to make her suffer excruciating pain for trying to exploit His Blessedness,” Ellie pointed out. “We should take into account the fact that she saved Miss Yume and send that wretched woman on a painless final journey to paradise.”

“Mrrrow!” Aoyuki purred in agreement.

After that, Ellie and Aoyuki launched into a debate about how much of a romantic attachment they thought Lilith felt for Light. But these two weren’t the only ones in the Abyss who harbored a secret hatred for Lilith.

Chapter 5: Leveling Up with New Weapons

One of the things that Lilith had requested from me was to help her level grind. *Okay, but how am I supposed to do that?* I thought with my arms crossed.

When I was left for dead at the bottom of the Abyss, my Unlimited Gacha had miraculously summoned Mei, the Level 9999 Ever-Seeking Maid, who helped me to level up by gift wrapping a number of Snake Hellhounds so I could rack up experience points. I eventually reached a vastly higher power level, but hit a brick wall once I ran out of powerful monsters to kill. That all changed, however, when the Unlimited Gacha produced Ellie, the SUR Forbidden Witch. Ellie helped me to max out to Level 9999 by having me fight overpowered interdimensional monsters that had been brought into this world by her ultimate-class spell, the Koshmar Summon.

But I couldn't see Lilith following the same path that I'd taken to level up. For one thing, all the surviving Snake Hellhounds had been tamed and were now my allies, so I wasn't going to let Lilith kill them just to gain experience points. Also, she was only Level 7, which was much too low for her to face off against a supermonster spawned by the Koshmar Summon. Even if I and the other Level 9999s were there to provide backup, the murderous energy radiating from such a creature alone would be enough to kill Lilith by stopping her heart dead. When I started using those monsters to level up, my power level was already over the 4000 mark, but they could have in no way been called easy battles to win, even with Mei, Ellie, and Nazuna fighting alongside me. As a Level 7 fighter, she wouldn't just be the weak link on the battlefield, she would die on the spot the moment she glimpsed a Koshmar Summon monster. I couldn't put Lilith in that kind of danger.

"We just need to get her to a level where she has some resistance to assassination attempts," I reminded myself. "She doesn't have to level all the way up to 9999 like me."

In my view, a power level in the hundreds would be enough, and she could

attain that level safely by battling the monsters that were lurking in the woods around the Great Tower. Granted, this approach might take a little longer than the alternatives, but it was better than Lilith dying on my watch. I could also give her unused armaments and magic items produced by my Unlimited Gacha. In fact, I could put together a bunch of options that would suit her, design-wise, and she could pick whatever she liked best from that selection. With that settled, I proceeded to the next phase of Lilith's leveling-up plan.



On her first day of leveling, Lilith came to the large hall on the third floor of the Great Tower, where we had laid out a selection of weapons, armor, magic items, and other gear on a table for her to choose from.

"Um, Lord Light," Lilith said in a trembling voice. "A-Are you *really* going to let me borrow all of these armaments and items?"

"Oh, no, I'm not lending them to you. I'm *giving* them to you," I corrected her. "You're free to take what you like, and leave whatever you don't want."

Lilith was lost for words. *These weapons aren't all that powerful, so why's she acting so surprised?* I wondered, giving Lilith a curious look. *Did I say something funny?*

"B-B-But everything I see here is *preposterously* valuable!" Lilith protested. "I believe some of them must even be phantasma-class weapons, yes? These are the sorts of weapons that would normally be kept under lock and key as national relics, and I'm not even sure my kingdom has *any* armaments like these! Are you sure you're willing to just give these weapons away, Lord Light?"

Lilith's question made me realize that I was working from an entirely different frame of reference from hers. From my perspective, I was offering Lilith a bunch of unused weapons that held little value to me and my allies, and even though Lilith was completely correct that there were phantasma-class weapons on the table, the Unlimited Gacha had spit out a ton of them, and they were often too useless to withstand the overpowered mock battles my comrades regularly engaged in. To Lilith and everyone else on the surface world, however, any one of these weapons would be considered prized possessions on a national level, so it was no wonder that she would be shocked by the idea of me freely giving

her these things that were so rare in her domain. But the fact remained that my side didn't need these weapons, so I simply told her the truth.

"Of course I'm sure," I said. "These are all surplus to our needs, so by all means, you can have them. Plus, since you're going to be level grinding, I have to give you armaments that will protect you. And it makes sense that you should keep those armaments, because your safety is my top priority."

"Y-You care that much about my well-being?" Lilith said, her cheeks turning a shade of red for some reason. "Th-Thank you, Lord Light."

Lilith excitedly approached the table, while I looked on and wondered what had made her so giddy. I'd asked the fairy maids for advice on what armaments to offer Lilith, so it didn't take her too long to pick out gear she really liked. Next, I introduced her to the two other trainers who would be joining us to help her level grind.

"I'd like you to meet Orka and Khaos," I said. "I recently summoned them, and up on the surface, they serve as deputies to the Wicked Witch of the Tower, Ellie. I feel like you'll be seeing the witch a lot more in official settings, so I chose them to assist you in leveling up to give you a chance to get to know them better."

"It is my utmost pleasure to make your acquaintance, Your Royal Highness," Orka said with a debonair bow. "I'm known fully as the UR Level 8888, Pied Fiddler, Orka. I am both honored and humbled to be in your presence."

"I'm UR Level 8888, Menace of Mayhem, Khaos." As ever, Khaos was curt and borderline dismissive of our guest of honor, and poor Lilith was startled by this unnecessarily discourteous reception.

"Th-Thank you. I'm Princess Lilith of the Human Kingdom. I greatly appreciate your assistance in helping me to level up."

"The pleasure is all ours, for our lord and master ordered it," Orka replied with a warm smile. "We welcome this opportunity to aid you. And pay no mind to Khaos. He takes that attitude with basically everyone. He bears you no ill will."

Khaos remained silent so as to not contradict Orka's attempt at damage

control, which in any case, he secretly conceded was true. But Orka's follow-up statement had the effect of making the entire exchange even more awkward, and all Lilith could manage in response was a bewildered smile. I stepped in to steer the conversation in a different direction.

"Well, now that we're all done greeting each other, I think it's time to begin your level grinding in the nearby woods," I said. "Your task—with our help, of course—is to take on Level 300 monsters. Orka will lure the creatures out with his music, then Khaos will immobilize them so that you may attack them freely. You don't even have to start off by killing the monsters. All you need to do is make them take damage."

"What? I'll be fighting L-Level 300 monsters?" Lilith said nervously.

"Don't worry, we'll make sure you stay safe for the whole exercise," I said. "With us around, you'll walk away without a single scratch."

Despite my reassurances, Lilith still looked like a nervous wreck, but I decided it was better not to waste any more time and activated the SSR Teleportation card that would beam us into the wild forest.



"I shall now play my monster-luring tune, 'The Pied Piper's Pipe.'" Orka placed the bow on the strings of his fiddle, and as soon as he had played a few notes, a monster came thrashing toward us, snarling and roaring with both of its mouths open wide.



Lilith shrieked with fear at the frightening creature, which was five meters long, had horns sticking out of its forehead, and had scales all over its body. The strangest aspect of the monster was that, while it had a mouth in the usual place, it also had another teeth-filled maw where its belly should have been. I activated an SR Appraisal card, which told me the creature was a Level 300 Two-Jawed Lizard. The extra mouth on its abdomen was meant for chewing up prey while the monster lay on top of it, and its scales were as tough as armor in order to protect it. *But if it has mouths on its head and its stomach, how does it digest food?* I thought with a baffled look on my face.

“Chaos Scythe, cut down my enemy,” Khaos intoned, coolly reciting his battle cry before casually tossing his huge weapon at the lizard. The scythe sliced through all four of the Two-Jawed Lizard’s scaly legs like butter, causing the creature to screech in pain, which in turn made Khaos wince in annoyance.

“Shadow Dance,” Khaos growled. Dark, shadowy bands materialized out of thin air and wrapped themselves around the giant lizard in order to completely restrain it, even covering its mouths for good measure. The monster had now lost all of its limbs, couldn’t move a muscle, and couldn’t make a sound, yet Lilith still gawked at the scene with her magic rapier gripped tightly in both hands and all the color drained from her face.

“Princess Lilith,” I prompted in the gentlest voice I could muster. “Khaos has pinned down the monster for you, and that weapon you’re holding is capable of wind magic, so you don’t even have to walk up and stab the creature to attack it. All you need to do is think real hard, say the magic words, wave the sword at the lizard, and hit it with a wind blade. Even if you slip up, I’m here to help you, so just relax and give it a shot.”

“O-Okay, I’ll try,” stammered a still-nervous Lilith. “I-I have to do this, for the future of all humans.”

I was willing to bet that Lilith hadn’t so much as squished a bug her whole life, yet here she was, pushing herself to take the life of a dangerous five-meter-long monster in order to level herself up. Not only must that have been psychologically taxing for her anyway, but the pungent smell of monster blood also hung thick in the air, and I could tell just by looking at her that Lilith was

this close to doubling over and throwing up. But even so, she was still willing to get her hands dirty and take a life, which just went to show how devoted she was to her cause.

“R-Raging tempest, s-slice my foe!” Lilith yelled desperately. The phantasma-class rapier in her hands was known as the Storm Edge, and it was capable of harnessing the wind for both attacking and defending. With this weapon, she could use its long range to cut down enemies at a distance, and also shield herself with localized jet streams. And since it was a rapier, it was light and nimble enough for a girl like Lilith to wield.

On the other hand, the Storm Edge was only capable of wind-based attacks, which meant that for me or any other high-level warrior, it was pretty average as far as phantasma-class weapons went. But in this situation, the wind blades produced by Lilith’s Storm Edge successfully sliced the Two-Jawed Lizard right down the middle of its torso, spilling blood and guts everywhere. The creature gave one last muffled scream, then shuffled off the mortal coil. Lilith tried to shriek at the gory sight in front of her, but no sound escaped her mouth, and her face had gone completely ashen. Her legs eventually gave way and she would have fallen to the ground if I hadn’t quickly positioned myself to prop her up.

“Hey, are you all right, Princess Lilith?” I said, panicking. “You don’t look so good.” Not only had this been her first time killing another living being, but she’d also had to watch as a bunch of blood and guts spurted everywhere, and the shock of the experience had basically made her swoon.

“Th-Thanks for catching me, Lord Light,” Lilith said weakly, the rapier trembling in her quivering hands. “I’ll be fine. Let us continue.”

Instead of calling it quits, Lilith straightened herself up and regained her regal poise. This simple act of plucky determination caught Khaos’s attention.

“Why do you feel you have to try so hard?” Khaos asked.

“Lord Khaos?” she said.

“I hear you got a Double Shadow clone to take your place at the palace,” Khaos continued. “You could always let the clone train in your place while you take shelter in the white tower. That way, you wouldn’t have to go through all

this trouble.”

“Yes, it probably *would* make more sense to have my clone perform all the strenuous work of seizing the throne, with me simply taking her place after the coronation,” Lilith admitted. “But I can’t think of anyone who would follow someone who hasn’t shed blood, sweat, and tears in order to claim their place on the throne. And besides, this ordeal could never compare to the suffering that my people are constantly going through in their lives.”

She really is willing to do whatever it takes to bring about a brighter future for the human race, I mused. *And she’s the type who goes above and beyond what’s required of her, even if it’s hardly worth the effort. Any other girl would just sit back and enjoy the pampered life of a sheltered princess.* But instead of simply engaging in lip service, Lilith was perfectly willing to get her hands dirty by slaying monsters in order to build up her strength so that she could secure a better tomorrow for her kingdom. Even Khaos and Orka seemed impressed by her resolve.

“I had thought that all the people on the surface world were beyond redemption, but it appears that you are the rare exception to that rule,” Khaos said. The warrior mage always maintained that he abided by the laws of nature, where the strong rule the weak, but that was actually just a front for his true belief that the strong must *protect* the weak. It seemed that the war with the beastfolk had left such a bad taste in his mouth, he had started to feel that only the residents of the Abyss deserved his protection, but after seeing Lilith in action, he had started to warm to her.

“Um, you’re very kind?” Lilith said, obviously confused about how to take this compliment without knowing the full context. We cleared the dead Two-Jawed Lizard out of the way by placing its corpse in an Item Box, allowing Lilith the space she needed to continue her level grinding.

“Okay, let’s keep going,” I said. “But remember, we can take it slow and slay the monsters at your own pace. We have plenty of time, after all.”

“I’m most grateful to you for looking out for me, Lord Light,” Lilith said.

“Orka, go ahead and lure out the next monster,” I ordered.

“As you command, my lord and master,” Orka replied, before playing his

fiddle once more to draw the next creature out of the brush. Lilith had only just started to level up, so it was best to let her get a hang of the process first.



While Light and his team were busy helping Lilith level up, the Great Tower received a new batch of freed human slaves, and included among them was a teenage girl with strikingly beautiful features who spoke in a coquettish voice with vaguely devilish undertones.

“Thank you so much for rescuing me,” the girl said. “You have no idea how *glad* Miki is to *be* here!”

Chapter 6: Adventurer Rank Upgrade

On our first day helping Lilith to level grind, we managed to get the princess within touching distance of Level 100, but we decided we should stop there, since it seemed all the gory monster slayings were pushing Lilith perilously close to her breaking point. She wanted to pick it up again the next day and blast past Level 100, but I wasn't about to agree to that. For one thing, she needed a break to refresh and recharge, and for another, she was still a royal, and as such, had a busy schedule. Lilith had been able to spend the whole day leveling up because we'd replaced her at the palace with a Double Shadow clone, but she had no way of accessing the memories of what the doppelgänger got up to in her place, which meant if the real Lilith played hooky from her royal duties for too long, she would be behind the curve when she eventually returned. Due to this, Lilith and I agreed that she would only continue with her leveling when she was truly free to do so, as well as decided that it was best to leave her new armaments at the Great Tower for the time being.

Her free time wasn't the only factor to take into consideration. I had been tasked with becoming an A-ranked adventurer, so I wasn't free to help Lilith to level up all the time either, especially since she was the one who had given me the assignment. She needed me to get to this status so that I would meet the qualifications to act as her bodyguard at the summit in the Duchy. By this point, I'd already been active for quite a while as an adventurer named "Dark," which was the alter ego I'd created for myself for the times I wanted to go conduct intelligence-gathering operations on the surface. Since I already had a track record spanning several nations, I didn't envision it being too much of a problem to get my rank up. If I hadn't thought to recommence my questing career beforehand, however, things would certainly have been more complicated, to say the least.

The day after helping Lilith to level grind, Nemumu, Gold, and I took a trip up to the surface to kick-start the process of turning the Black Fools into an A-ranked party. We headed for the guild in the Dwarf Kingdom city bordering the

Elven Queendom that had the first dungeon we ever quested in, which was the same dungeon where we'd captured Kyto the serial killer.

"I see this city hasn't changed a bit," I remarked upon our arrival.

"I should bally well hope not, since it hasn't even been a year since we last traipsed through here," Gold said.

"Well, that means the guild should be exactly where we left it," Nemumu said.

Because this city was home to a huge dungeon that spawned lots of gems and other loot, the streets were buzzing with questers of all different races, just like before. There were naturally a whole bunch of dwarf adventurers among that number, but even though the dungeon was right next to the Elven Queendom, there weren't nearly as many elves, because the two nations had fought over the rights to the dungeon for generations. If there was one major change to the scenery that I could pick out, it was the relative lack of beastfolk in the throng of adventurers. Back when my party was regularly questing in the dungeon, you could see beastfolk practically everywhere in the city, but humans easily outnumbered them now.

So anyway, the reason we'd picked this guild out of all the options available was because it was a good bet that the guilds in the royal capitals of the Elven Queendom and the Dwarf Kingdom would have given us the third degree about our sudden request to move up ranks, while the guilds in the Beastfolk Federation would already have had their hands full dealing with the aftermath of the massive military loss the nation had just suffered, which meant the process of moving ranks would take more time there. On top of that, my party already had an established working relationship with this city's guild, and they had bailed us out in a timely manner in the past, so I knew the process of going up in rank would go smoothly here.

Some of the food stall owners and passing adventurers recognized us and greeted us as we made our way to the guild, and we waved back at them, and when we finally reached the guildhall, we found that not a single thing had changed about its interior. The quest board was in the same place as always, but since it was now past noon, there were almost no adventurers milling

around. Come evening, however, this place would be packed to the gills with adventurers returning from the dungeon to sell their loot. We had purposefully turned up at the guild at this time of day to avoid any long lines.

Opposite the quest board, the guild's receptionists were all lined up behind a counter, with each of their stations separated by wooden partitions. Since we were in the Dwarf Kingdom, it was perhaps unsurprising that nearly every receptionist was a dwarf woman, and one of these dwarf receptionists recognized us immediately, her eyes twinkling with excitement.

"Is that you, Mr. Dark?" the receptionist squealed. "Have you and your distinguished friends come to visit our fair city again?"

"Yes, it's been awhile," I conceded, approaching her station. "We just got into town today, in fact."

While this receptionist might have been treating us like VIPs this time around, when we'd first encountered her, she had dismissed me as a "know-it-all inferior." But when we started returning with ice gems from the fifth floor of the dungeon on a daily basis—a feat that was near-unreachable for other adventurers—she quickly changed her tune and began giving us the royal treatment every time we showed our faces at the guild.

"Have you fine folks come back to quest in our dungeon again, perhaps?" the receptionist ventured, her eyes all aglitter. "If so, you have the full backing of the guild in all your endeavors!"

I forced a laugh from under my SSR Fool's Mask. "Thanks a lot, but I've actually come here to apply to upgrade my party to A-rank."

The receptionist's shoulders drooped, unable to hide her disappointment. "Oh, I see. If you *had* come back to farm more ice gems, we would've been able to satisfy some of our many, many waiting clients..." The dwarf eyes suddenly widened. "Wait, did you just say you wanted to be upgraded to A-rank?"

"Yes, and I come with recommendations from these nations," I said, presenting her with the appropriate documents. At present, my party was C-rank, which would normally have taken three or four years to attain, but we had made it to that grade in less than a month after my party had put a stop to Kyto's killing spree in the nearby dungeon. Since then, several months had

passed without us moving up the ladder at all, and now here we were, asking to be numbered among the elites. I didn't blame the receptionist for having her socks knocked off by our request.

The receptionists scanned the documents I'd handed to her. "The Elven Queendom, the Dark Elf Islands, the Beastfolk Federation, and even our kingdom are all recommending you for A-rank? My goodness, are these all real? M-Mr. Dark, what have you done to receive these letters?"

"Well, technically, I'd be revealing highly confidential state secrets if I were to say," I replied. "But if you *really* wish to know, I'd be more than happy to—"

"Sorry, forget what I said," the receptionist said hurriedly. "You don't need to tell me anything at all. I'd much rather keep my head attached to my shoulders, thank you very much!"

For those wondering, the official reason behind my party receiving all of those recommendation letters was for the part we had played in freeing the human hostages from the beastfolk. Since the Beastfolk Federation had committed high crimes against humans, it was agreed that our party would basically abide by a gag order. Sure, the gag order could never have possibly applied to *all* the former hostages, but we didn't see any real reason to actively ruin the Beastfolk Federation's reputation any further than it already had been.

Thankfully, the receptionist got spooked when she found out that the reason we had received all of these recommendations was classified, which suggested there were possibly deadly consequences if these secrets were leaked. I didn't say another word on the matter, since we hadn't come here to ruffle feathers.

The receptionist slid down from her seat. "I shall inform the guildmaster, Mr. Dark. I'll be back in a jiffy." As promised, she was back a few minutes later to lead us to a back office.



"But *why*?" Nemumu screeched. "We gave them recommendations from *four* nations, yet they refuse to promote you to A-rank for 'the sake of appearances'?"

We were on the road back home after our meeting with the guildmaster, and

as you could probably guess, the session hadn't gone as well as we'd hoped.

"I think the chap made a rather compelling argument, what?" Gold said with a shrug. "No respectable guild goes along with whatever bally thing any nation tells them to, especially if that nation is ruled by a tyrant or a despot. Besides, he suggested a good middle ground by promising to fix us up with a proper quest in a few days that will heave us straight up to A-rank if we smash it. Frankly, we would be chucking mud in milord's face if we rejected the offer, m'girl."

Realizing she had been thoroughly out-argued by Gold, Nemumu growled under her breath.

"And I will not have you grumbling in such a manner, madam," Gold said sharply.

I chuckled awkwardly. "Thanks, Nemumu, for getting so angry on my behalf. But like Gold says, the guild has given us an out that works for everyone. Sure, a quest might take a bit longer, but I'll take it if it means I can reach A-rank in time for the summit. I don't think it's too bad a deal."



The guild chief had also assured us he wasn't about to foist some near-impossible quest on us, but that he planned to arrange a quest that was sufficiently high-status to make it easier to justify fast-tracking our promotion. Apparently, this quest could be as simple as escorting an upper-crust aristocrat in secret, or some other kind of "major quest" the guild would not be at liberty to elaborate on. We were told to come back at a later date, once whatever relatively minor quest he had in mind had been set up.

"Okay, well, if that's what you think, Lord Dark, then I'll—" Nemumu was just about to reluctantly accept my decision when we were suddenly interrupted by a familiar voice.

"Sir! Miss! And ya even brought the youngster with ya! How're y'all doin'!"

I turned around to find a group of five beastmen led by a tall bearman behind us. At one time, they'd been a gang of petty thugs, until Gold had successfully reformed them by giving them a few "hands-on" lessons centering around his brand of chivalry. The beastmen ran up to us, their eyes glinting with joy.

"If you guys were back in town, ya shoulda *told* us!" the bearman exclaimed.

"Well, if it isn't my old muckers!" Gold said. "Apologies, lads. I hope all is well on your end, what?"

"You bet your bottom britches it is, sir!" the bearman said enthusiastically. "We've been busy fillin' in for you by knockin' some sense into all the unchivalrous bums we got roamin' around town, an' believe you me, there were a *lot* of heads that needed bangin' together!"

"Well, blow me down with a feather! I'm truly heartened by your dedication!" Gold said. "I hope you lads will see your way to carrying on upholding the spirit of chivalry here, what what?"

"We appreciate your kind words, sir!" all five beastmen said in unison. Nemumu and I couldn't quite get our heads around what exactly these guys were so happy about, but Gold was taking it all in stride, arms crossed and nodding in approval. I had to admit, I always got a kick out of seeing the different sides of Gold and Nemumu whenever I came up to the surface with them.

“So are ya guys back to do some more dungeon questin’?” the bearman asked.

“Nope. We just dropped by for a tick to take care of some business,” Gold replied.

“Oh, yeah?” the bearman said. “But it’s a good thing we caught y’all in time. We hafta leave this city to go back to my homeland, so this hello’s really a goodbye.”

“You’re all going back to the Beastfolk Federation?” I piped up.

The bearman nodded. “My old man’s a big cheese back home, y’see. This stays between you an’ me, but the thing is, my nation got into a tussle with that tower witch and even kidnapped a buncha humans soldiers they could use as shields. ’Course, it didn’t work, since they’re sayin’ the witch wasted our entire army. Now they don’t gots enough folk to take care of things back home, so we gotta listen to my paw and head on back there.”

“Okay, now I get it,” I said. “And what *do* you guys think about that war?”

The bearman’s brow wrinkled in disgust. “Can’t say I like how my brethren got massacred, but the way I see it, my nation has to own that mess, whatever way you put it. I mean, they put together a dang army of slaves they bought and innocent people they nabbed illegally, just so they could be used as human shields. And if that wasn’t enough, they locked up a load of women and children as hostages. Now, what kinda chivalrous nation would do a rotten thing like that? The whole mess don’t make me proud to be a beastman.”

The other four beastmen voiced their agreement with this sentiment, which just went to show how much Gold’s lessons had straightened these guys out. I hoped the other beastfolk had also finally learned how insanely wrong it was to enslave people from another race for the purpose of getting them to fight.

The bearman turned to Gold. “We’d really like it if ya could come with us and teach the rest of my brethren about real chivalry, sir.”

“Gold!” Nemumu piped up excitedly. “You should take him up on their offer! Go with them! I can take care of Lord Ligh—uh, Lord Dark!”

I was fairly certain this was the first time I’d seen such a radiant smile break

out across Nemumu's face the entire time we'd been up on the surface. But even with his face hidden behind his full-face helmet, Gold still managed to show Nemumu how repulsed he was by this suggestion.

"You can't *possibly* expect me to abandon milord, whom I have sworn to protect, m'girl!" Gold said indignantly before turning to the beastmen. "Please accept my sincere apologies, laddies, but I'm afraid I have prior commitments."

"No problem, sir," the bearman said. "We were just kinda hopin' you'd join us, that's all. But really, we're the ones who should be sorry for tryin' to pull ya away from your duties."

The beastmen bowed their heads in apology, and after both parties had waved goodbye to one another, we went our separate ways. My party and I were soon outside the city limits, and once we'd found a secluded spot where nobody could see us, I activated an SSR Teleportation card to translocate us back to the Abyss.

Chapter 7: Silica and Her Shop

Once she had finished sweeping in front of her store, Silica let out a long breath. “Good. It looks much cleaner now,” she remarked.

She picked up the receptacle filled with her sweepings, took it to the back of the shop, then dumped the contents into a large bin marked for the garbage man. The city at the foot of the Great Tower had instituted a trash collection service that came by every other day to pick up any refuse.

Silica went back inside the store to tidy herself up. “My new helper’s supposed to be starting today, so I can’t look all dirty when she gets here.”

First, Silica washed her hands, then went to her bedroom to change out of her dirty clothes and put on some freshly laundered ones. Silica was the only daughter of traveling merchants who had once beaten a path all over the Human Kingdom. One day, a monster killed both her parents, and having been left to fend for herself as a helpless orphan, she was soon captured and sold into slavery. Silica eventually wound up being bought by a party of elves, who’d used her as a forward scout on a quest to perform recon on the Great Tower, which had mysteriously appeared out of nowhere in the wild forest near the Elven Queendom’s royal capital. The young girl’s “job” was to be the first one in the party to be attacked by a monster, buying time for the elves to either attack it all at once or flee the scene completely. But instead of this happening, a giant snake-tailed monster had sneaked up on the adventuring party from behind and devoured the elves. Silica had believed the monster would gobble her up next, but strangely, the creature ran off and left the girl all alone in the middle of that deadly forest.

The next thing she knew, a group of human men with weird-looking mohawks rescued Silica and handed her over to a human merchant. And she’d thought that was that, believing she would remain a slave under the merchant’s charge forever. And maybe she would have stayed with the merchant if a human woman calling herself the Wicked Witch of the Tower hadn’t brought the Elven

Queendom to its knees and outlawed human slavery across the realm. Finding herself suddenly emancipated, Silica was quickly transferred to a nascent settlement that was being constructed around the Great Tower.

At first, the tower and the settlement had occupied a clearing in the forest that only measured about a hundred meters across, but with the flood of liberated slaves and other humans streaming into the settlement, it widened and soon became a veritable city stretching for several kilometers. Housing, fields, wells, and stores were thrown up to keep pace with the rapid development, with a school that doubled up as an orphanage at the heart of the settlement. The tower witch had mandated schooling for all young children—with a few exceptions—which marked the start of a compulsory education system with subjects that encompassed reading, writing, arithmetic, physical education, and cultural refinement. The orphanage was being run by former female slaves, while fairy maids filled the teaching roles in the school. Silica herself was certainly still young enough to be attending that school, and this fact made her sigh with disappointment as she changed clothes.

“I still can’t believe they won’t let me go to school just because I already know my three Rs,” Silica grumbled. “And knowing proper manners was a point against me too.”

Since Silica’s parents had been merchants, they had tutored her in the educational basics that the orphanage school was designed to teach. The people in the Great Tower had seen no real need for Silica to attend the school, and in fact, even back then, they had already been thinking of assigning her another role: namely, running a store.

“Who ever would’ve guessed that I’d be living my parents’ dream of running a shop?” Silica sighed to herself. “You really never know what life is going to throw at you.”

The young girl finished tugging down her simple dress as she expressed this jaded sentiment more suited to coming out of the mouth of someone decades older. Owning a store was the quintessential dream of human merchants, because the job of being a traveling peddler usually entailed working out in the elements, which exposed them to an overwhelming amount of danger, so the prospect of settling down and leading a quiet life as the owner of a shop was

vastly favorable. However, owning a store required capital to buy a plot of land and construct a building, and that kind of money was usually beyond the reach of most humans. To raise the necessary funds, you would either need to save up money as a family over multiple generations, strike it rich as adventurers, or be one of the lucky few to gain the support of a powerful and wealthy patron. So how had Silica ended up landing the Great Tower as her backer? It all went back to the Beastfolk Massacre that had been perpetrated by the Wicked Witch.

As a result of this massacre—also known as the “Human Deliverance War” by the residents of Tower City—the population of the formerly tiny settlement ballooned to over ten thousand. With the help of dragons, the fairy maids were able to quickly expand the settlement to accommodate this flood of new arrivals, but even though basic infrastructure had been put in place, there weren’t enough humans among the populace who were qualified to run a store. This meant that despite her young age, Silica had more experience in the merchant game than the rest of the inhabitants, which is why she’d been selected to run this shop.

Running a store is too much work for one person, so I asked the fairy maids if I could have a few more pairs of hands. Or just an extra pair, at least, Silica thought. But only guys offered to help.

Silica reflexively shuddered at this memory. She didn’t necessarily harbor full-blown androphobia, but her experiences with men in her young life hadn’t been good ones. For starters, the male elf adventurers who had bought Silica as a slave had been horribly abusive to her, plus the Mohawks who had come to her rescue had initially frightened her. Of course, the Mohawks had turned out to be real gentlemen, as had the male merchant who subsequently took her in, but taking everything into account, Silica had decided she would much rather work with a woman than a man. For one thing, any employee Silica hired would likely reside on the second floor of the store with her, and Silica frankly didn’t have the stomach for sharing her living space with a man.

At the same time, running a store all by herself was physically taxing for a kid like Silica, so she asked the fairy maids to send her a girl who was close to her in age, or maybe even an older woman to help her out. Unfortunately, most of the

women in the city were either former slaves or peasants, meaning there were no candidates available who could read, write, do simple calculations, or even pull off the kind of business etiquette expected of a store clerk. All the other prospects who could do these things had already been sent off to other places that were more in need of their skills. As such, the acute labor shortage was starting to make Silica desperate. *Maybe I can find a girl who seems like she'll be a quick learner and train her up myself*, she had thought at one point. *I'd have more work to do in the beginning, but if she becomes better at the job, things will get easier for me.*

Fortunately for Silica, the heavens threw her a lifeline, and the fairy maids came to tell her that they had found a teenage girl who had the preferred qualifications. Like Silica, this girl was the daughter of traveling merchants who was orphaned when they were killed in a monster attack. The candidate was already well-educated, so there was no need for her to attend the city's school, and as luck would have it, this girl also said she wanted to work in commerce. It was as if someone were rescuing Silica from the dark forest all over again.

Silica had practically danced on the ceiling of her second-floor bedroom when she got the news. "Now I don't have to do literally everything by myself!" she squealed with glee at the time. "I'll finally have help hauling in the wares, stocking the shelves, cleaning the store, getting everything ready to open, dealing with customers, doing the bookkeeping, writing the reports, and drafting the orders for more inventory!"

On this particular day, Silica had a good reason to make sure that everything—including herself—was clean and presentable: she wanted to make a good first impression on the savior who would lessen her workload. Just as she finished changing, Silica heard a voice from downstairs.

"Excuse me?"

"She's here!" Silica hissed to herself in a half whisper. Before going to open the front door, she took a moment to fix her hair and double-check her clothes for wrinkles, before taking a couple of deep breaths to compose herself. Once she was totally sure that nothing was out of place, she opened the door and came face-to-face with a girl who was every bit as stunningly pretty as the fairy maids.

“How do you *do*?” the girl cooed, a cutesy smile splashed across her face. “I’m Miki, and I’ve come to work in *your* shop.”



“Thank you so much for coming, Miki,” Silica said. By this point, the two girls had moved to the living room on the second floor.

“Oh, no, I’m the one who’s so glad I get to work here,” Miki said. “I didn’t think I’d be *this* lucky, getting to live and work with such a *cute* girl like you. I was so worried about what my life would be like at the Great Tower, but now I feel like I can take *anything* on with you around, Silica!”

Miki’s blonde hair was all bunched up and tied at the back, and she was wearing a trim and tidy dress typical of a girl who came from a large town. She said she’d had no friends or relatives who could look after her following the death of her parents, who had been killed by a monster, so she’d ended up being sold into slavery. But some time later, Miki was found by someone from the Great Tower, who freed her in the name of the “Absolute Autonomy of Humans” decree.

Or that was Miki’s cover story, at least. After accepting the recon assignment from Goh, she and the other Masters had identified a group of slaves who were set to be freed by the Great Tower, and Miki had slipped in among them. Once she made it to the Great Tower, she passed the screening process performed on all newcomers by the administrators. Knowing that there was no way for a commoner like Silica to see through her guise, Miki sipped her tea and had an enjoyable chat with her new employer who was younger than her.

“Since you’ve only just arrived in this city, you must be tired,” Silica sympathized. “You should go ahead and rest till noon, since we’re closed for today anyway. I can take you on a tour of the city later.”

“Oh, *yay*!” Miki squealed. “I’ve never been to a city as crowded as this one, so I can’t *wait* to see what’s here!”

As Miki alluded to, Tower City had become a bustling municipality, and at present, it had the fastest-growing population on the whole mainland. The fairy maids and the dragons were just about able to clear enough new land and set up adequate infrastructure to serve the deluge of new arrivals, but there

weren't currently enough people to construct permanent homes, create new jobs, or work the farms that would grow the food to feed the growing population. Light's Unlimited Gacha was covertly producing enough resources to take care of all the residents, but the present arrangement wasn't one that would lead to self-sufficiency. To address this problem, people were actively being hired to build homes, tend to the farms, and produce the food needed. Former craftspeople had taken up their trades again and were selling their wares, and thanks to this, the city was the busiest it had ever been. But that didn't mean everything was rosy here.

"Don't worry. I'll show you everything," Silica said, smiling back at her new employee. "I know a bunch of fun places we can go to, plus restaurants that make the absolute best meals. But first..."

Silica sipped some of her tea, then let her face harden into a serious expression. "Before we go anywhere, I need to tell you a few things that you are absolutely *not* allowed to do when you walk out that door."

"Okay, Silica, you're *sort* of freaking me out now," Miki said.

Silica giggled. "Sorry if that sounded scary. But I promise I'm telling you all of it for your own good." She put her teacup down on the coffee table, softly cleared her throat, then started going over the rules. "I think it goes without saying that you're not allowed to commit any sort of crime in this city. But another thing you should never, *ever* do is make fun of the Great Witch of the Tower or the fairy maids."

"What happens if you *do* make fun of them?" Miki asked.

"People will glare at you, yell at you, and purposely ignore you. Some will even stop selling you their wares," Silica warned. "You'll be a total pariah, basically."

In other words, this city was like the kind of rural village that practiced extrajudicial social exclusion of people for committing transgressions, real or imagined. However, this treatment was a mere slap on the wrist compared to some of the other forms of punishment known to be meted out within the city limits.

"Also, I think you must've seen the fairy maids by now and noticed how

gorgeous they are, right?” Silica continued. “But nobody’s allowed to hit on them or touch them inappropriately. Also, it’s better not to even *think* about hurting or killing any of the fairy maids.”

“Oh? What would happen if you tried?” Miki asked innocently.

“Well, there was a former slave who tried it once,” Silica began. This particular man had been rescued by the Great Tower from an abusive elf slave master, and when the tower had put some of the humans to work on constructing buildings, this man had targeted the fairy maid who came to support the building projects. He waited until it was dark and there was no one else around, then attempted to assault the fairy maid.

“Ugh, what a dangerous creep,” Miki snarled. “So what happened to the fairy maid?”

“Nothing happened to her. She was too strong for him,” Silica said simply. “But do you know what they did to that man?” Her voice dropped to a hushed whisper. “They completely erased his existence.”

“They *erased* him?” Miki echoed, looking visibly confused at the notion.

“The fairy maids told us point-blank that they didn’t know of anyone who had attempted to assault them,” Silica explained.

To put it in another way, anyone who betrayed the kindness of the tower witch by trying to harm one of her fairy maids had no place anywhere near the Great Tower. Everyone in the settlement surrounding the Great Tower recognized the glory of the witch and her servants, and those like the assailant who failed to respect their greatness were banished and forced to return to the hellish world where they had once lived as slaves. Nobody in the city mentioned the man’s name ever again, not even the children. It was as if he had never existed.

“And before I forget, you shouldn’t say a word about that former slave while you’re out and about in the city,” Silica warned. “Always remember that there is nobody in this place who doesn’t glorify and honor the Great Witch of the Tower and the fairy maids.”

Looking somewhat shaken by Silica’s account, Miki simply nodded silently.

Knowing that she had gotten through to her, Silica smiled at Miki and took another sip of her tea.

“We’ll have an early lunch,” Silica decided. “After that, you can rest up for a bit before I take you on a tour of the city.”

“Um, sure,” Miki said, still on edge. “Thank you, Silica.”

A few hours later, the two girls were strolling leisurely through the streets of the newly built city.

“If you ever want to go out to eat, you should definitely come here,” Silica said, pointing to a diner. “That cafeteria we passed mostly fills up with guys who work outside all day, so they serve huge portions that are way too overseasoned for my tastes. I can only eat half of the food they give you before I start feeling stuffed. But here, the servings are just the right size, and they don’t overdo it with the seasonings.”

Although Silica was younger than Miki, she seemed more like an older head giving advice to someone who was her junior with the way she rattled off detailed descriptions of all of the stores, wells, marketplaces, and eateries, plus the clothing shops she liked. However, there were only a very small number of these kinds of businesses in the city relative to the size of the population due to the lack of capable managers available, so Silica was quickly running out of places to show her new assistant. The orphanage-slash-school had, in part, been built in hopes of training up a future generation of entrepreneurs who would eventually open more businesses, and there was also a secondary option of recruiting more merchants from elsewhere. Having fairy maids manage these establishments was a total nonstarter, since they were needed for the administrative duties, meaning they didn’t have time to run any of the stores as well. While some fairy maids did take on extra roles as teachers, the other lower-level occupations were designated as ones to be filled by humans themselves. There was also one other area of civic life that fairy maids chose not to interfere in.

Silica turned a corner. “Next, we have—ah!”

“What’s wrong, Silica?” Miki asked before noticing the spectacle in front of them. “What is *that*?”

A group of people led by a pretty girl with angular eyes and golden hair twisted into coils were making vocal appeals to passersby.

“Join our faith and exalt the glory of the Great Witch of the Tower!” the girl called out in a theatrical tone. “Give thanks to the eternally holy fairy maids and to the most holy Saint Miya! Join our family at the Church of Towerism!”

The girl was proselytizing with an electrifying sense of duty, to the point where she was even wearing an outfit that resembled that of a priestess. The adults within this group of disciples held up signs that conveyed the same message and added their voices to the girl’s exhortations.

“Silica, who even *are* they?” Miki asked. “I’ve never heard of ‘Towerism’ before.”

“Uh, yeah, about that...” Silica said slowly. “Let’s go somewhere else so I can fill you in.”

Silica took Miki by the hand and led her quickly past the Towerists. Even though a good number of passersby were making a point of ignoring the evangelists, their young leader, Quornae, never once let up in her calls for others to join her faith. Silica and Miki eventually made it out to the city limits, where they were free to converse frankly without needing to fear being overheard by other citizens. The younger girl quickly scanned her surroundings to make sure they were truly alone before launching into an explanation of what they’d just witnessed.

“Towerism is this brand-new religion that was made up just a little while ago,” Silica said. In Towerism, the tower witch served as the principal god, the fairy maids were her angels, and a girl by the name of Miya was a saint, according to Silica.

“I *sorta* get why the witch and the fairy maids would be holy, but *who’s* this Miya?” Miki said.

“She’s a mage that did a lot to help out the human hostages during the Deliverance War,” Silica replied. “She saved a bunch of lives during that war, just like the Great Witch and the fairy maids did, so people now worship her as Saint Miya.”

Silica sighed and shrugged. “A lot of the people who were saved by Saint Miya are now adherents to Towerism, but people like me who came to the tower before the war don’t believe in all that stuff. I get why people would want to worship the Great Witch and the fairy maids, but I think glorifying a simple mage alongside them is a step too far.”

For the sake of clarification, Saint Miya had been squarely placed at the bottom end of this theological hierarchy, yet people like Silica were still confused as to why Miya had been designated a saint at all. Some citizens had even approached the fairy maids to demand that they put a stop to this blasphemy. But the fairy maids had rebuffed these appeals, replying that they welcomed this new religion. Consequently, whenever the faithful engaged in distracting recruitment campaigns on street corners, the fairy maids didn’t interfere, though they did issue warnings if the proselytizing got to the level of becoming a true public nuisance.

“Does that mean the Great Witch *and* the fairy maids approve of Towerism?” Miki wondered.

“Nobody really knows,” Silica admitted. “They seem to tolerate the Towerists, but on the other hand, they don’t say anything to promote the religion. That’s why the rest of us aren’t really sure whether we should join or not.”

Light tacitly endorsed Towerism because he felt the new religion would contribute to public order and provide guiding principles that would help to resolve conflicts. And for what it was worth, Miya had performed small miracles in much the same way a saint would. And because Light had accepted Towerism, his loyal devotees, Ellie and the fairy maids, had followed suit and allowed the religion to be practiced, though they didn’t actively endorse Towerism either.

While the two were conversing, Miki noticed a load of activity that could only be witnessed from the city limits. “Wow, I *can’t* believe what I’m *seeing*.”

“It sure is something, isn’t it?” Silica agreed. “The first time I saw it, I was blown away too.”

A short distance from the girls, fairy maids were directing a bunch of dragons that were felling trees and pulling up stumps. Men under the direction of other

fairy maids were either filling in the holes where the tree roots used to be with dirt, or cutting up the uprooted stumps. Anyone could tell just by watching the operation that they were clearing yet more land to accommodate the expansion of the city. Even though its present size was large enough to house the population currently living in it, this work was necessary in case the city needed to take in more waves of newcomers in the near future. Silica bringing Miki out here had been no coincidence either.

“The dragons keep away any woodland monsters that might attack us, but you normally shouldn’t come here, just to be on the safe side,” Silica said. “If you do happen to get lost and wander all the way out to these border areas, you can just say something to one of the fairy maids or the dragons here, and they’ll find someone who can lead you back home. The dragons might look scary, but they’re actually gentle creatures that won’t attack you. They can also understand our language, so you’re always free to talk to them.”

“Uh, sure. I’ll do that, Silica,” Miki said, busily taking mental notes. *So the fairy maids are Level 500, and the dragons range from Level 500 to over 1000. If that level-grinding freak Daigo ever lays his eyes on this scene, he’ll definitely be drooling and unsheathing both of his swords. Speaking of drooling, those fairy maids are way, way cuter than I could ever have imagined! Ah, they’re absolute snacks made just for Miki! I just wanna stuff my fists into their tummies right now! I wonder what it sounds like when they squeal in pain? I’m getting moist just thinking about it.*

Every fairy maid and dragon in the immediate area felt the same chill shoot down their spine, and as one, they all swiveled their heads around to find out where the threat was coming from, but all they saw were two innocent-looking girls holding hands. Silica gazed back at their unexpected audience with a puzzled expression on her face, but she proceeded to cheerfully smile and bow at them all the same. Miki followed Silica’s lead, the smile on her face more angelic, as if to say “nothing to see here.”

The fairy maids and the dragons still wondered where this worrying premonition had come from, and they continued to scan their surroundings for threats, but after a while, they collectively reached the assumption that it had just been a false alarm and went back to work. Nobody suspected for even a

second that Miki had been the source of this awful foreboding.

With the tour of Tower City pretty much complete, Silica brought Miki back to the shop again, so that the two girls could start cooking dinner. Not everyone in the city had proper kitchens in which they could prepare meals, since many still lived in the temporary shelters that the N Prefab gacha cards materialized into existence. That said, for many of the residents, living in an N Prefab home was undoubtedly better than the lives they had left behind, and the food they received was freshly prepared by the Great Tower. The food distribution program prioritized residents living in shelters without kitchens, but the meals handed out had additional value, because 1) they were more delicious than what any ordinary human could cook, and 2) they were made by gorgeous fairy maids. The limited amount of leftovers from these meals had become a hot commodity among the residents, and some even fetched premium street prices.

Back in the shop, Silica and Miki chatted away while they ate the supper they cooked themselves, and when it grew dark, the two girls took baths and went to bed in separate rooms. Along with ordinary lamps, there were magic items that could brighten up rooms after sundown, but most people didn't bother wasting their money on those things.

A few hours into her sleep, an odor that resembled sickeningly sweet honey filled Silica's nostrils, and the smell was strong enough to induce a headache. Silica groaned softly, and her mind soon became so muddled, she wasn't sure if she was awake or still dreaming. Even after hearing a familiar voice through the proverbial fog, she found herself unable to think straight.

"Silica, it's *time* for you to get up and sit near me," Miki called.

"Okay..." Silica did as she was told and moved into a sitting position on the edge of her bed. Standing in front of her was Miki and a meter-long bee that was perched on the desk, staring back at her with dark, robotic eyes. Silica had every right to run off screaming at this point—especially since she had made sure to lock her bedroom door before going to sleep—but since Silica wasn't in command of her faculties at present, she remained firmly planted on her bed, silently awaiting Miki's next instruction.

The Queen Pheromone Bee under Miki's control was a higher-level version of the Pheromone Bee, a kind of monster known to lure its prey with pheromones before killing it. The Queen Pheromone Bee's scent went even further than that by allowing the creature to manipulate its target into doing its bidding, but the pheromones weren't supposed to be potent enough to work properly on humans. The exception here was that this was Miki's Queen Pheromone Bee.

"It looks like she's under your spell," Miki observed, and the Queen Pheromone Bee buzzed in response. Miki was a Level 6000 Beemancer, and due to her Beemancer Gift, she was able to summon all kinds of bees imbued with special abilities. This Queen Pheromone Bee Miki had summoned possessed stronger pheromones that could affect humans, and if those pheromones were released in a closed space, an unprotected low-level target would be unable to resist its effects. Although the pheromones weren't foolproof, when they did work, they could put a person into a trancelike state that was ideal for extracting information from them.

Miki smiled mischievously at her unsuspecting captive. "So anyway, *you're* going to answer a few *questions* for me. *No* keeping secrets from Miki now, you *hear?*"

"No, I won't keep secrets..." Silica said, her eyes completely glazed over.

"You weren't keeping any secrets from me when you took me on that tour of the city, were you?" Miki asked.

"No, I wasn't," Silica replied.

"Have you *ever* met the Wicked Witch of the Tower?" was Miki's next question. "Do you know *who* the witch really is?"

"I've never met the Great Witch in person..." Silica said woodenly. "But I've seen her touring the settlement with the prince and princess of the Human Kingdom once. The Great Witch looked like the Great Witch."

"Oh? I guess you *don't* know her *true* identity, then," Miki said, her tone suggesting this was something of an anticlimax. "Could you at *least* tell me if she's *hot?*"

"She is," Silica confirmed. "I didn't see her face because she wore a hood the

whole time, but I could tell from her voice, her figure, and the general air she had that the Great Witch is a very beautiful woman.”

Silica’s words triggered Miki’s animalistic lust, her wolflike grin widening like she’d just hit the jackpot. “And have *you* ever been *inside* the Great Tower? If you *have* gone inside, could you tell me where you went?”

“I’ve only been to the first floor,” Silica said. “Inside, it’s just as white as the outside, and there are lots of big pillars in there. And the ceiling was so high, I had to crane my neck to see it. I’ve never been to any of the other floors.”

“Do you *know* of anyone who *has* been to any of the *other* floors?” Miki cooed. “Do we *know* if the Wicked Witch even *lives* in the tower?”

“I heard the prince and princess stayed on the upper floors,” Silica said. “That means the Great Witch lives in the tower.”

“Is that right?” Miki mused. “In that case, my *next* question is...”

It took Miki more than an hour to finish up her interrogation, and although Silica was hypnotized, it was clear she was starting to get exhausted from all the talking. Miki would have to wrap up her questioning soon, or Silica might end up waking up the next morning suspiciously unrested.

“Okay, one last thing,” Miki said. “Do you *know* about the almighty C? Have you at least *heard* of him?”

“No, I don’t know anything about anyone called C,” Silica said simply.

“Huh.” Miki pondered on this. “If C *is* in the tower, he must be hiding himself *real* well. Either that, or C isn’t *even* in the tower to *begin* with. Seriously, it’s *way* too hard to tell.”

Miki instructed Silica to climb back under the covers, then put her to sleep again, but before leaving the room, Miki slipped into bed beside Silica to get a closer look at the younger girl’s slumbering face.

“You’re just *too* cute, Silica,” Miki purred. “I wanna slice open your belly and mush and gush your organs so I can hear how *precious* you sound when you cry out in pain.” Miki let out a long moan of ecstasy. “You *have* to be part of Miki’s collection right *now*! But then I’ll be ruining all the work I’ve done infiltrating

this city. Gawd, why *must* you be so *criminally* adorable?”

Miki’s red tongue extended out of her mouth like a serpent’s, and she proceeded to slowly lick the entire length of Silica’s cheek, savoring the taste of her eventual prey.

She giggled. “Once I’m all done checking out the tower, I’m gonna take *you* with me. Or maybe I should take one of those fairy maids instead. Ugh, it’s too hard to *decide*!”

Still agonizing over which captive would most satisfy her desires, Miki got up from Silica’s bed and folded her first investigative report into a tiny ball before summoning a Shadow Bee and tying the report to one of its legs. In its natural form, a Shadow Bee was a monster that was able to camouflage itself in a forest in order to attack any foes, but Miki’s version had upgraded stealth capabilities that basically allowed it to evade surveillance.

“The security surrounding this city is so tight, it’s next to *impossible* to get in,” Miki observed. “But it looks like they have next to no security on the inside. They must *really* think this city is completely free of threats, huh? Well, I *will* hand it to them that no normal Master *would* be able to battle their way into this city. But on the flip side, they’ve left a huge hole in their defenses that I’m *totally* free to exploit.”

Miki noiselessly opened the window in Silica’s room and released the Shadow Bee into the outside world. She spent about a minute watching the bee disappear into the night before shutting the window again. She took one last hungry look at Silica, then collected the Queen Pheromone Bee and went back to her own bedroom, making sure to leave no trace that she had ever been in Silica’s room in the first place.

Chapter 8: Questions

Silica awoke the next morning with a groan and an uncanny sensation that a savage, predatory animal had slobbered all over her cheek.

“Why does it feel like I had a horrible nightmare?” Silica mumbled to herself. “And why can’t I remember any of it?”

Still feeling groggy, Silica decided to head to the bathroom to splash some water on her face to fully wake herself up. As she walked down the hallway, she happened to run into Miki, who was already dressed and seemingly ready for the day.

“Oh, good morning, Silica!” Miki said, greeting her with a sunny smile that was so radiant, it could make even a woman fall in love with her.

Silica blushed in response. “Oh, uh, good morning, Miki. You’re up early,” she noted.

“It’s because I wanted to make you *breakfast* as thanks for taking little ol’ *me* on that tour yesterday,” Miki said.

“You mean it?” Silica said. “Well, since I’m now up too, let’s make breakfast together.”

“Of course! I’d be *glad* to,” Miki replied, acting like she hadn’t broken into Silica’s room the night before to hypnotize and interrogate her. Thanks to this short conversation with her pretty, bubbly coworker, Silica forgot all about how weird she had felt when she woke up. The two girls continued chatting about what they would make for their morning meal, though truth be told, they didn’t have all that much time to whip up an elaborate spread, since they needed to get the store ready to open for business. They settled on soup and salad for breakfast, along with some bread they had bought on their outing the day before. The two continued their enjoyable chat at the dining table—or at least, the conversation seemed enjoyable on the surface of it.

“We’ll do all the prep work together today, since it’s your first day,” Silica said

as they set about starting their workday. “Tomorrow, we’ll split up the tasks.”

“Sure. *Anything* for you,” Miki said in a slightly suggestive tone that made Silica’s heart skip a beat. She let it pass without comment, though, and went about showing Miki what to clean, where to place the store sign, where to go to dispose of the trash, where to put all the products on display, plus all the other tasks they had to get done before they could open. The two girls tidied up the front of the store, restocked the shelves, and returned any misplaced items they found to their proper places. While they were fixing up the shelves, a certain item on sale caught Miki’s interest.

“Silica, is this supposed to be soap?” she asked.

“Yeah, it’s one of our best sellers,” Silica replied.

“Soap sells for a *much* higher price where I’m from,” Miki stated. “Are you *sure* we’re supposed to sell it *this* cheap?”

Silica’s shop sold soap for half the average price that it would usually go for in the many nations around the world, while some places in the city even sold soap for as little as a third of the average. Since Miki claimed to be the daughter of traveling merchants, it was only natural that she was surprised by the low price.

“It’s fine. Trust me,” Silica said, smiling. “Unlike the soap you get in other towns, the fairy maids supply us with this soap at rock-bottom wholesale prices, so we’re able to make a neat little profit off it, even with the discount.”

“You get this soap from the fairy maids?” Miki queried.

“Yeah, and they say regularly washing hands with soap helps to prevent diseases,” Silica explained. “That’s why they wholesale the soap so cheaply.”

The soap in question was actually produced by the numerous N Soap cards that were spat out by the Unlimited Gacha in such large quantities every day, the people in the Abyss had no hope of using all of them. So instead of letting these surplus cards pile up and occupy space, it was decided that the soap would be put into circulation in Tower City as a way of maintaining high levels of hygiene among the residents. Light could have easily given the soap away for free, but that would open up the path to profiteering, so to minimize any

adverse effects from this initiative, he decided it was better to sell the soap at cut-rate prices instead.

“It’s a really popular item since it’s so cheap and it stops people from getting sick,” Silica said. “But there’s also another reason people buy a lot of soap.”

“What reason is that?” Miki asked.

“People associate the soap with the fairy maids,” Silica explained. “The fairy maids use soap a whole lot themselves, but it’s also the fairy maids who bring the soap to the stores.”

Due to the connection between soap and the fairy maids, even the men had picked up the habit of washing their hands with it. It was irrefutable that people were suffering fewer illnesses in Tower City than in the average human community, and while the better availability of nutritious food was partly to thank for that, it was also indisputable that the use of soap was contributing to the overall good health of the residents.

While Silica was busy giving Miki the lowdown on the soap, the door to the shop opened. Silica turned and smiled at the visitor. “We’re sorry, but the store isn’t open for business just yet, so if you wouldn’t mind, could you please wait outside for a few more moments until we’re ready to help you?”

“Oh, fear not, m’girl, we aren’t customers,” a familiar voice boomed. “We come bearing more goods for your shelves.”

“Is that you, Sir Gold?” Silica said. “Sorry, my mistake. I didn’t realize it was you and your party.”

With his knightly, golden armor gleaming in the morning sun, Gold walked into the shop carrying a heavy wooden box with ease, and he was followed inside by a stunningly beautiful woman who had amber-bronze skin and a scarf covering her mouth. Accompanying them was a dark-haired boy wearing a mask and a teenage girl Silica had never seen before. *Sir Gold always comes here with those two, but who’s this other person with him?* Silica wondered. *Is she a new member of their party? But if I didn’t know any better, I’d swear I’ve seen her somewhere before...*

Silica bowed to Gold. “Thank you for bringing all of these goods to my store.

They would have been much too heavy for me to carry all at once, and it would've taken way too long to ferry them here a little at a time."

"No need to thank me, love," Gold replied. "A chivalrous knight like myself is always on hand to help a young damsel in distress, what what?"

"Still, I can't thank you enough," Silica said. "And you too, Miss Nemumu and Mr. Dark. Thank you."

"Not to repeat what Gold just said, but it's all part of the job, so don't worry about it," Nemumu said.

"Yup, this is what we adventurers do, so it's no big deal, honest," Dark added.

Gold put the box down in the usual spot. After the Black Fools had helped the Wicked Witch to free the human hostages from the beastmen, the party had continued to show everyone how close they were to the witch by regularly performing courier duty that took them through the wild forest surrounding the Great Tower. Bringing goods to Silica's shop was part of their publicity campaign, and besides, Silica needed the help, because up until just recently, she had been running the shop all by herself.

"Might I have a moment with you two?" the Black Fools's new party member asked the girls.

Silica hesitated, a puzzled expression on her face. "Of course. What do you need?"

"My name's Liliana, and I'm just wondering if you could tell me a little about yourselves," the brunette girl said with a smile. Of course, this was actually Lilith in disguise, and the reason she was accompanying Light incognito at that moment was a whole other story in itself.



For Lilith's second level-grinding session, I'd picked Gold and Nemumu over Khaos and Orka to help me train her. This was because my party would be the one providing security for Lilith at the summit in the Duchy, so I figured it was better if she got to know them in advance. We had no trouble finding monsters for Lilith to kill, but we *were* having problems getting Lilith over the Level 100 cap that humans were generally assumed to have.

It took way more experience points than Mei was predicting for me to eventually clear Level 100, and I was slaying giant monsters in the Abyss, I recalled. Does that mean killing these monsters up here on the surface will take even more time? Killing Koshmar Summon monsters would be a much more efficient way of doing things, but if her power level isn't over 1000, her heart will stop dead just from looking at those creatures, so that's definitely out of the question.

No matter how long I mulled it over, I couldn't come up with a good solution to help her smash through that level cap, and we only had so much time left until Lilith's coronation. But while we were all wondering what to do about Lilith's snaillike leveling speed, she mentioned in passing that she would like to visit the Great Tower settlement again to see how much it had changed now that it was the size of a small city. Since I saw no reason to refuse her request, we arranged to take her on a tour of it a few days later.

The last time Lilith had come to the Great Tower, we'd had a Double Shadow clone take her place during the actual inspection tour of the settlement. Since it had been a much smaller settlement at the time, there wouldn't be a lot of people around who remembered what she looked like, but we decided Lilith should wear a disguise anyway, just to be on the safe side. We used magic to turn Lilith into a brunette, tied her hair up into a ponytail, and gave her a full makeover. Her new identity was Liliana, and she would be a temporary member of our adventuring party. Since it was run by two girls who were close in age to Lilith, we picked Silica's store as our first place to visit on the tour, and the princess was all smiles when she engaged the girls in conversation.

"So how are you enjoying life in this 'Tower City'?" Lilith asked. "It looks like this place has developed quite rapidly, so I'm curious if there's anything about all the changes that you find trying or unsatisfactory."

Before either of the girls could answer, Nemumu's brow wrinkled at this question and she silently stewed behind Lilith, her scarf quite clearly hiding a frown from view. I could tell that she wanted to yell at Lilith that there was absolutely *nothing* wrong with the way the most honorable Lord Light and Miss Ellie were ruling the city, and while I was flattered by the sentiment, Nemumu really needed to chill out, because she was in danger of unleashing the full

bloodlust of a Level 5000 warrior's aura, which would have harmed the three other girls present. I kept shooting meaningful looks at Nemumu, pleading with my eyes for her to calm down, and I guess that must have worked, since nobody noticed any dark energy.

"Well, uh, my parents always dreamed of owning their own store, before they were killed by a monster," said Silica, the owner of the store. "I was sold into slavery and almost died, but the Great Witch of the Tower and her fairy maids saved me, and thanks to them, I'm living my parents' dream. I'm in good health, and I really enjoy my job here. It might be a tough job, but it's worth it."

Silica told her story as earnestly as she could to someone she had only just met, and she sounded perfectly good-natured answering the questions, likely because she was an experienced salesperson. I'd known at the time that we couldn't leave all of the freed slaves to fend for themselves in the Elven Queendom, but after hearing Silica's story, I was very glad I'd been able to create a home for the former slaves.

"I was *also* enslaved after losing *my* parents in a monster attack," Silica's employee piped up. "But I just kept *telling* myself, 'Miki, don't lose hope!' and I was *super* glad when the Great Tower came to rescue me too."

So her name's Miki, huh? I thought. *She's so syrupy sweet, I feel like I could get a cavity just listening to her.* She struck me as the type of girl that a lot of guys would go for, but I wasn't one of them. Sure, she was pretty, but she wasn't the type of girl I'd ever see in the Abyss.

"I *only* got here yesterday, so I can't tell you how I feel about this city *quite* yet," Miki continued. "But I'm so grateful to the Great Witch *and* her fairy maids for taking me in. Daddy was a merchant, and he *always* used to stare into the distance with those squinting eyes of his and talk about how much he wanted his own store. And now here I am, running a store with Silica! As the daughter of a merchant, Miki is living her dream!"

After listening to Miki's story, my gaze narrowed, though thankfully my mask obscured my expression so she wasn't able to tell. Nearly all merchants dreamed of owning their own shop, and it wasn't really that much of a coincidence that both Silica's and Miki's parents were merchants. But there was

something fishy about her story, and I just couldn't shrug it off.

"It's nice to hear the Great Tower is treating you both well," Lilith said, not noticing my reaction. "I'd like to hear more of your thoughts on this city."

I let Lilith interview Silica and Miki for about ten minutes before I stepped in to wrap it up. The girls did still have a store to run, after all. As my party and I left the shop, I noticed Silica breathe a sigh of relief now that she was free to go back to work. But Miki kept her eyes fixed on us for some reason—especially on me, Nemumu, and Lilith. It was as if she was a little *too* interested in us. As far as I could tell from her stats, Miki was just a regular teenager, but the way she spoke and that backstory she had given us still struck me as odd.

Once we were all done showing Lilith around town, the princess departed for her palace while the rest of us headed back to the bottom level of the Abyss. As we walked down a hallway, Nemumu finally decided to air her grievances.

"I respect Princess Lilith for the hard work she does and the love she has for her fellow humans, but what gives her the right to go on a fault-finding mission in *your* city?" Nemumu griped. "Tower City is a heavenly paradise, thanks to your rule and Miss Ellie's management of it, so it's obvious that all the citizens are happy to be there! Granted, I'm not as enraged as Miss Ellie and Miss Aoyuki were about the whole thing, but don't you think we have a slight problem with Princess Lilith?"

By this point, it had already gotten around that Ellie and Aoyuki had drawn lines in the sand over Lilith, but I just shook my head at Nemumu's suggestion all the same.

"We can worry about what Lilith thinks about Tower City later," I said. "But thanks to her, I now want to look into something else."

"Look into what?" Nemumu asked.

"Oh, it's just a hunch," I said, remembering the chat at Silica's shop earlier. "I might be wrong, but even so..."

Chapter 9: The Shadow Bee

I can't believe three absolute cuties are here in this shop!

Miki—the Master who was affiliated with the Demonkin Nation—was almost delirious with delight when a group of adventurers walked in while she was helping Silica to get the shop ready for opening, though she was very careful not to let it show in her demeanor. The adventurers were completing a courier quest, and each one of these guests—except for one—excited Miki to no end. If they had all been typical adventurers—in other words, full-grown men of the burly, sweaty type—they wouldn't have drawn Miki's attention to anywhere near this extent.

That cheap, gold-plated rust bucket can take a hike, thought Miki. But the dark-haired boy, the tanned babe, and the rustic-looking honey—Miki approves!

It was at this point that Miki secretly activated her Appraisal skill. *They're all humans, but with higher power levels than I would have guessed. And the boy has burned his face? Ah, so that explains why he's wearing a mask.*

The SSR Fool's Mask that Light was wearing was capable of fooling any Appraisal scan into thinking his face was horribly disfigured by burn scars, as well as falsifying all of his other stats. It was entirely possible to uncover his real stats that were being concealed by the Fool's Mask through the use of a powerful magic item or skill, but these kinds of brute force tactics would naturally be noticed by Light. Furthermore, Miki had no inkling that a human adventurer might be equipped with such a powerful item, so she took the fake stats at face value.

Judging by his voice, this Dark kid would be a total cutie-pie if we managed to take care of his face, Miki thought. I don't think I'd be able to heal his scars myself, but Doc's a medical specialist, so it'd be super easy for him to patch this kid up! Then again, he'll ask me to return the favor by letting him poke and prod my body "for the sake of the human race" or whatever, and that's just gross!

Just because Miki and Doc were Masters in the same faction, that didn't

necessarily mean they trusted each other. The only thread that kept the Masters of the Demonkin Nation tied together was the fact that each of them wanted something from C. Miki had fallen in with this faction because she wanted C to either grant her a harem filled with gorgeous boys and girls who were exactly her type, or an ideal life partner. The Demonkin Nation Masters were at odds with the Dragonute Empire Masters because the latter viewed C as the enemy, but in truth, the Demonkin Nation faction was more of a casual assembly of acquaintances than a league of true allies, while the Dragonute Empire faction had formed out of necessity to deal with something they considered a threat.

But if we did heal the boy's face, he'd never stop weeping tears of joy and thanking Miki for making him look normal again, thought Miki. And just as he hits peak happiness, I'll grab him, burn his face again, and make him totally miserable. I can't wait to hear how adorbs he sounds when he's screaming in pain and anguish! Ah, just thinking about it has lit my fire and now I'm throbbing down there!

Miki really had started to feel flush from her highly active imagination, and that heat transferred upward into her unwavering gaze that was fixed on the boy adventurer named Dark. After her eyes had gotten their fill of Dark, Miki's lustful attention shifted to Nemumu and Liliana.

I can't get enough of Nemumu's tanned skin and platinum blonde hair! She's even cuter than the fairy maids! she thought. Liliana looks like she's fresh off the farm and knows practically nothing about the real world. Miki just loves thoroughly corrupting such innocent babes in the woods! It's like stomping around in a fresh layer of snow before anyone else has a chance to touch it!

Miki turned her gaze back to Nemumu again. *And she looks like a real tough cookie with a stuck-up attitude. I seriously wanna torture her till she submits! Then, afterward, I'll be sweet as honey with her until she's putty in my hands once more, and then when she completely trusts me, I'll stab her in the back! Literally!* Miki giggled inwardly. *I bet Nemumu will look absolutely precious when I do that! Ah, I so wanna summon my bees so I can paralyze and capture these three cuties plus Silica and take them home with me!*

By this point, Miki was in the middle of answering Liliana's questions with a

completely made-up backstory, though she was well-prepared enough to make the lies seem credible.

I'll base my merchant "daddy" on Hisomi, thought Miki. Having an image of someone you know in your head while making up a person makes the story a lot more believable than trying to invent someone out of whole cloth. I still think what those dragonute Masters believe is downright stupid, but thank god one of them is a merchant. As they say, you've always gotta add a sprinkle of truth to your lies. Miki once again took a moment to giggle inwardly. *My acting chops are off the charts. Someone should really hire Miki as an actress.*

In spite of the fact that a group of attractive people who were just her type were within arm's reach, Miki faithfully maintained her cover through the whole encounter. However, her dedication to her task would ultimately come back to haunt her, even though Miki didn't know this at the time. When Dark and his party left the shop, Miki watched them head off into the distance until she couldn't see them anymore, then went back to prepping the store under Silica's direction.



Because the Demonkin Nation was located in the northernmost part of the mainland, its cold climes didn't allow for the farming of wheat. The nation was able to grow hardier crops, though, and its fishing industry was large enough for it to be able to export seafood to other nations. However, the nearby waters contained sea monsters, and the fishermen constantly had to watch out for them. On this particular day, a human man was floating through the air slightly above the waves with a bunch of human slaves in tow.

"Please spare my son, I beg you!" one slave called out. "You can do whatever you want to me! Just let my boy go!"

"Dad!" the son cried. Both he and his father had been sold into slavery in the Demonkin Nation, and they now found themselves taken by force over coastal waters. Clutching his twin blades in his hands, Daigo turned to the pair of slaves behind him.

"Shut up, you stupid fish bait!" he spat. "The only reason you're here is to level me up!"

Daigo proceeded to chop up both the father and his son into small chunks of flesh that tumbled into the ocean below. The waves evenly spread out the finely diced bone and viscera over a wide area, and the water was stained with a light red tinge. The other slaves screeched in horror at the sight, making Daigo wince and place one of his sword-carrying hands over his ear. He turned to the surviving slaves and pointed the other sword at the group, and this simple action was enough to silence them, even though they were clearly still noiselessly screaming their lungs out. Daigo stuck a pinky in his ear and wiggled it to fix his hearing.

“Man, I almost forgot these numbnuts would make a racket like that after watching one of their own get chopped up,” Daigo sighed. “I’m only using these slaves ’cause they make better bait than cattle and monster meat, but I can definitely do without these people yelling and moaning every goddamn time. Well, anyway, hopefully this way, they’ll stay quiet till I’ve cut ’em all up.”

Daigo was using human slaves as bait to draw out powerful sea monsters that he could kill to level up, and as luck would have it, just as he finished his rant, the surface of the water became extremely active all of a sudden, with large creatures splashing around and eating the chum. These monsters turned out to be Level 300 Scorpion Sharks, a sea creature that had the body of a regular shark but a tail like a scorpion’s. A disappointed Daigo sighed again.

“Level 300 trash?” Daigo uttered. “Just my luck.” Daigo drifted down to them anyway and chopped up all the Scorpion Sharks, much like he had done with the father and son.

“Shit. I haven’t gotten any real *good* monsters for a while now!” Daigo muttered with a grim expression on his face as he carved up the sea creatures. “But I can’t go swimming into deeper waters to battle the higher-level sea monsters, ’cause I’d probably waste all my strength against ’em and I need at least some to swim back up.”

The general rule of thumb was that sea monsters had higher power levels than monsters that were found on land. While Daigo’s swords did actually have the power to keep him alive if he were to choose to swim to deeper depths to attack these monsters, such a feat would consume a huge amount of energy—so much so, in fact, it would even put a Master like Daigo at risk. True, he was

overly focused on leveling up, but not at the cost of his life.

Daigo clicked his tongue. “Screw this. Guess I’ll just have to find a better spot to bait sea creatures.” He flew his group of slaves to other sections of coastal waters, continuing to dice up human chum and monsters alike until he ran out of slaves to slaughter.

Daigo returned to his residence thoroughly disappointed with the piecemeal results of his leveling session, but his mood soon changed when he received the first bit of genuinely good news that he’d gotten in months. Daigo was relaxing on a sofa when Miki’s Shadow Bee showed up with her intelligence report. Miki had infused the Shadow Bee with extra stealth abilities, which had allowed it to slip out of the Great Tower settlement unnoticed. Daigo ripped the report off the Shadow Bee’s leg, read what was written in it, then roared with laughter at length.

“Who knew the Great Tower had Level 500 and 1000 monsters of all things?” Daigo guffawed. “That sadistic pervert really does prove her worth every once in a while!”

Daigo got up and went to his room to immediately start preparing for the journey to the Great Tower, where he would have his pick of powerful creatures to slay to help him level up. What Daigo had read was Miki’s initial intelligence report of her ongoing undercover work, and if it had been their leader, Goh, who read the dispatch first, he would have made sure that Daigo stood down in order to maintain their cover. But it had been Daigo who intercepted the report, and he wasn’t one for containing his impulses. Whether this would prove to be good or bad timing on Daigo’s part would no doubt be revealed in the not-so-distant future.

Chapter 10: Evacuation Drills

“We’re doing evacuation drills?”

Miki looked up from the bowl of stew she was eating for dinner after another long day running the store. Silica put the piece of paper down on the table for Miki to read too.

“Yeah. A fairy maid came and handed that to me while you were cooking lunch,” said Miki, who had just retrieved the note from the first floor. “I was going to show it to you right away, but then a customer came in and I completely forgot about it.”

The heading on the piece of paper jumped out at Miki. It read, “Commencing Evacuation Drills.”

“They say we need to practice taking shelter in case a monster from the forest attacks the city,” Silica explained. “There’s also a slight chance that a natural disaster might befall the city, so this training ensures that the evacuation effort goes smoothly.”

Silica ate another spoonful of her stew before continuing. “It says the drills won’t take place throughout the whole city all at once. Our neighborhood is holding the drills tomorrow, so we’ll have to close up shop.”

“Oh, really?” Miki queried.

“What’s strange about it is we’ve never done these types of drills before,” Silica mused. “I never even had an inkling that we *needed* to conduct any sort of drill either, so I wonder why we’re having to do this all of a sudden. Did something happen?”

After hearing Silica’s thoughts on the matter, Miki brooded in silence. *Wait, so they’ve never even thought about conducting evacuation drills before? Has my cover been blown and they’re pulling a trick to capture me? Nah, that can’t be it. I mean, why go through all this trouble when they could just walk up to the shop and arrest me? Besides, they don’t know Miki is a spy. I’ve barely even*

done any actual espionage work yet. I still have to get a hang of my new life, and as I've already sent off my initial report, I'm totally free to take it easy and lay low for a while.

The administrators of the Great Tower conducted thorough screenings of new arrivals, and Miki had needed to do everything in her power to pass the vetting process, but now that she was actually inside the city, she found the security here to be quite lax. After all, there was no sign that anyone was monitoring her. Of course, there was always the possibility that some other infiltrator had been discovered, which had prompted a higher level of caution, but it was more likely that the evacuation drill was indeed genuine and the timing of it was simply a coincidence. *This still feels kinda sketchy, though, Miki thought. I'm getting a bad feeling about all this, like there's some huge monster leering at me.*

By this time, Silica had already gone onto a different subject, but Miki was barely paying attention to her, and was only giving half replies in order to keep the conversation chugging along. *There's almost no way Miki's cover has been blown, thought Miki. But I should have a backup plan, just in case.*

The next morning, Silica and Miki's neighborhood conducted evacuation drills as scheduled, with fairy maids barking out instructions through magic items that were designed to amplify their voices.

"Earthquake! A major earthquake has hit the city!" the fairy maids called out. "Some homes have been destroyed, and others are in danger of collapse! All residents, please proceed to the first floor of the Great Tower immediately! I repeat..."

Naturally, the earthquake and the destruction of the houses were entirely fictitious, and the neighborhood was merely role-playing what would happen in the event of a disaster. Numbering under a thousand in total, the residents had already been given notice the day before of what was going to happen by the fairy maids, so everyone obediently followed their directions. As the crowd trudged toward the tower, another fairy maid gave some additional instructions through her magic loudspeaker.

"No pushing or running, please. Walk in orderly lines," the fairy maid said.

“The first floor of the tower has enough room to accommodate all of you, so please remain calm as you proceed to your destination.”

“If anyone isn’t feeling well, don’t be afraid to say something,” another fairy maid called out. “We fairy maids will help you right away.”

On hearing this last pronouncement, a number of the young men in the orderly lines started getting ideas, but a few well-placed glares from the women next to them quickly put an end to their mischief. The men fully understood that the city’s unwritten rules forbade any inappropriate acts with the fairy maids, so nobody went the extra step of actually feigning an illness. Since the residents had all been rescued by the Wicked Witch, they all made an effort in good faith to follow the fairy maids’ orders, and even though some grew exhausted on the march, everyone arrived at the Great Tower without any major problems. The fairy maids that were waiting at the tower for them checked their residency certificates before directing the arrivals to the dining space that had been prepared on the first floor.

“Thank you all for cooperating in this drill,” one of the fairy maids said. “As a token of the Great Witch’s gratitude, feel free to partake in the meal we have prepared for you.”

Cheering erupted from the crowd. The residents had found the evacuation drill to be a bit of a nuisance, even if they did feel an obligation to the tower witch, but a free meal was an entirely different matter. Almost everyone in this particular neighborhood had been taken off the food distribution program, but they still had fond memories of how delicious the food provided by the tower was. Not to mention, the food program also included sweets that were rarely available otherwise.

The prepared meals at the tower were also part of the evacuation drill, since evacuees would be in need of feeding if a real disaster struck. On the menu that day was salad, corn soup, fluffy bread, scrambled eggs, and a number of different types of fruit. The drink choices include water, tea, and several varieties of juice. Children lined up holding trays, and once they had received their food, they sat down at long cafeteria tables with their families. The participants in the drill were told they were free to go home once they had finished eating.

“I can’t wait to eat this food made by the fairy maids,” Silica said.

“Uh, right, me too,” Miki replied, a manufactured smile plastered across her face, while underneath, she was on high alert. However, the only people who were looking at Miki were a smattering of men in the room, and their attentions were focused almost entirely on her face, breasts, and buttocks, as well as some other body parts in that same libidinous vein. Since dirty men held no interest for Miki, the unwanted attention only served to annoy her, and if she had been in the Demonkin Nation at that moment in time, she would have summoned Killer Bees to dispatch every single one of these lechers.

While Miki was briefly distracted by this imagined scenario, the fairy maid who was serving her corn soup accidentally hit the edge of the cup with her ladle, tipping it over and spilling its contents all over Miki’s clothes.

“Ah! S-S-Sorry! I’m so sorry!” spluttered the fairy maid, who looked like a cute geek and had long, disheveled bangs partially covering her eyes.

“What’re you even doing?” said the fairy maid who was handing out bread next to the geeky maid. “Are you seriously, like, trying to give her third-degree burns?”

“I-I-I’m sorry!” the geeky maid stuttered.

“I’m the one you’re apologizing to?” said the other maid, who looked like a fashionable kogal who had dyed her hair light brown. She turned to Miki. “So anyways, we’re, like, sorry, yeah? If you’ll follow me, we can get you into a new change of clothes...?”

“Uh, no, I’m good,” Miki said. “I didn’t get burned at all, and you really don’t have to worry about these old clothes.”

“Yeah, but that’ll kinda make us, you know, look bad?” said the kogal fairy maid, who had a habit of phrasing everything like it was a question. “Besides, it’d definitely be better if you washed that dress right away, yeah? We’ll get you some new clothes too, and make a formal apology, if that’ll work for you?”

The kogal maid switched places with another fairy maid, while a third fairy maid took Miki’s tray from her hands so that she could go to another room to change.

“Don’t worry about your friend, yeah? We’re, like, just taking her to wash her clothes?” the kogal maid said to Silica. “So you can go ahead and eat without her, ’kay?”

Miki hesitated for a second, then decided it was probably in her best interest to do what the fairy maid said. If she persisted in refusing the offer, it would look like she was being discourteous to a fairy maid, which would break one of the city’s unspoken codes.

“Looks like you’ll have to eat without me, Silica,” Miki said. “I’ll catch up with you once I’m done changing out of these clothes.”

“Uh, sure,” Silica replied. “You got it.”

“Don’t worry, yeah? We do have a changing room here, if that’s what you’re wondering?” said the kogal maid leading the way. “We won’t, like, make you change where other people can see you, yeah?”

The fairy maid took Miki all the way across to the other end of the first floor, which was where the stairs were located. *Oh, so there was a door on the other side*, Miki thought, slightly surprised.

The doors were made of the same lily-white material as the walls, which made them practically invisible from a distance. The fairy maid opened the double doors to reveal a set of stairs, which were also made of the same material as the walls. As she ascended the stairs, Miki twisted her head this way and that to take in her surroundings. Since this was the kind of reaction one would expect from a teenage girl like Miki, the fairy maid didn’t try to stop her. The two reached a hallway, and when they rounded the corner at the end, the fairy maid stopped, prompting Miki to freeze as well. Standing before them was another maid whose beauty took Miki’s breath away.

With a height of 170 centimeters, this maid was quite tall for a woman, and not only that, but she was also busty with an hourglass figure. Her long legs exquisitely complemented her maid outfit, which had a billowing skirt that ended quite far above her knees. Her slender, elegant nose sat between a pair of large, slightly upturned eyes, which served to make her visage even more stunning than those of the fairy maids. If one wanted to accurately describe this maid’s looks overall, the word that would come to mind would be “dashing”

instead of “cute.” But what really set this woman apart from all the others was her hair, which was red on one side and blue on the other.

O-Omigod! Where have they been hiding this maid? thought Miki. *She’s way too hot! I can’t believe how hot she is!*

Although it was clear from her clothing that this woman was a maid, she didn’t have wings on her back like the fairy maid who had guided Miki up here. The fairy maid in question scrambled to greet the gorgeous woman.

“Good morning, Miss Iceheat?” the kogal fairy maid said. “I didn’t think I’d find you here?”

“I myself had some time on my hands, so I thought I’d spend it monitoring the situation downstairs,” The other maid—who was apparently called Iceheat—noticed Miki standing behind the fairy maid. “And might I inquire who our guest is?”

Miki treated the maid to a warm smile as she struggled to keep her inner dark urges in check. The fairy maid filled Iceheat in on what had happened down on the first floor.

“So we sort of messed up and spilled soup over her dress?” the fairy maid explained. “I brought her up here so we could, like, wash her dress and give her a change of clothes, you know?”

Iceheat gave the fairy maid a good dressing down. “How *could* you ladies allow this to happen? Is this any way to treat a valued resident who has just cooperated in our drill? Are you trying to besmirch the reputation of the Great Witch? Honestly!”

“W-We’re sorry, yeah?” the fairy maid said with a note of fear in her voice. Miki was unsure whether she should throw in a word of support for the poor maid, but Iceheat addressed Miki before she could.

“I can only apologize on behalf of our fairy maids,” Iceheat said, before turning to the kogal fairy maid again. “I myself will escort her to the changing room personally, and you will go find a change of clothes for our guest.”

“Thank you very much, ma’am,” the fairy maid said. “I’ll be right back with a new outfit, yeah?” And as soon as she had said this, the fairy maid bolted off

around the same corner she and Miki had come from. After watching the fairy maid go, Miki turned back to Iceheat, who beckoned the teenager to follow her.

“Come. Allow me to guide you to your room,” Iceheat said.

“Oh, uh, sure!” Miki replied. “Please do!” As the two of them walked down the hallway, Miki’s eyes were practically burning holes in the small of Iceheat’s back.

I can’t believe such a hottie is in this tower! thought Miki. I thought I’d just be checking out if C was hiding around here somewhere, but I’m literally surrounded by gorgeous chicks! Not to mention that cute boy too! I’m so glad I came here! Once we’re all done, I’m gonna take you home with me, Iceheat, and that’s a promise! You won’t be able to live without food, water, or Miki by the time I’m through with you!

While Miki was busy imagining all the ways she was going to violate Iceheat, the grappler maid suddenly halted in front of a door, signaling that they had reached their destination.

“Please forgive us,” Iceheat said. “It appears the only room available is this reception hall. You may wait here until that fairy maid returns with a change of clothes for you. We will also offer to help you to put on your new attire while we wash your soiled garments.”

“Oh, sure, don’t worry about me,” Miki replied. “You and the Great Witch have been *very* good to Miki, so I’ll take *any* room I can get.”

“Thank you, Miss Miki, for being so patient with us,” Iceheat said, and she bowed deeply before opening the door. “You may now enter.”

“Thanks a bunch!” Miki said, furtively stepping into the reception hall. The space was surprisingly dark considering it was still midmorning, but Miki was able to tell that the room was indeed large enough to host a dance.

“Oh, please forgive me,” Iceheat said when she saw Miki hesitate. “I’ll go put on the light.”

Iceheat shut the door and locked it before leaving Miki’s side to search for a light source to turn on. A few seconds later, what had once been an inky void of midnight black was transformed into a space as bright as an outdoor plaza at

high noon. The rapid transition from dark to light was too much for Miki, and she was forced to shield her eyes. As she slowly opened her eyelids again, she saw that there were three people standing in the middle of the reception hall. One of them—a boy in a black hooded cloak who was holding a staff—grinned at Miki with a distinct air of hostility.

“Nice to see you,” the boy said. “Or should I say ‘good morning’? It is still early in the day, after all. In any case, welcome to the Great Tower, Miki.”

On one side of the boy stood Nazuna, her arms crossed in front of her armored chest and her giant broadsword prominently affixed to her back, while on the other side stood Iceheat, though she was now wearing her battle gauntlets and exhibiting none of her previous friendly attitude.

It was then that Miki finally realized she had walked straight into a trap.

Miki had to work overtime to stop herself from looking extremely agitated by the developing situation. “Why, good *morning* to you too! So, um, Miss Iceheat, what’s going *on* here exactly? I thought I was meant to be changing in this room, so what’s this boy *doing* in here? Did you *call* him in here to help me change? While I appreciate the thought, I don’t think I *could* let a boy stay in here, even if he *is* a little kid, because it’d just be way too embarrassing for an innocent girl like me.”

“Yeah, I think you already know I’m not here to help you change your clothes, Miki,” Light said with a haughty grin. “I’m here to take you down.”

The friendly smile on Miki’s face didn’t falter. “Take me down? Sounds *awfully* scary. Let me guess: you’ve fallen for Miki and now you want to take her home with you the rough way? I’m flattered, kid, but you really have to learn to be a bit *nicer* to girls.”

“You lowlife!” Iceheat yelled at her.

“I don’t like this girl!” Nazuna seethed. Light’s two allies had reacted to the suggestion that their master had lured Miki to the tower because he had fallen in love with her.

Light held up a hand to calm both of them down, then explained the situation to Miki. “It’s no use trying to fool me. You clued me in back at the shop that you

weren't who you were claiming to be, so we did a more thorough background check on you and your supposed life as a slave. We also ran an Appraisal that revealed your true stats to us."

Miki looked on without saying a word, so Light continued. "I guess you wanted to make your backstory sound more convincing, but you probably shouldn't have suggested your merchant dad had 'squinting eyes,' because unfortunately for you, squinting merchants have caused me and my team a whole lot of trouble over the past few months. Though on the plus side, that tiny little detail blew your cover."

When Miki had spoken about her fictitious father's dream of owning a store he could call his own, she had imagined him looking like Hisomi, a Master and intelligence operative affiliated with the Dragonute Empire, who tended to work undercover as a merchant. Hisomi had used his Gift, the Kindred Maker, to make a copy of himself that went on to fight Light in the Dwarf Kingdom, while another of his clones was responsible for setting in motion the war the Beastfolk Federation waged on the tower witch. Because of that history, Miki describing a "squinting" merchant had raised a red flag in Light's mind.

"After visiting your shop, I got my people to retrace your steps before you came to the Great Tower," Light explained. "Admittedly, it took us quite a bit of time to find the evidence that proved your backstory was phony, and I'm actually kind of impressed how much effort you put into covering your tracks. But our Appraisal eventually removed all doubt that you were a fraud."

A regular Appraisal had been unable to see past Miki's falsified stats, but Light had Mei's super-enhanced Appraisal skill to call on, as well as a number of ability-boosting gacha cards. Mei had performed her upgraded Appraisal from a long enough distance away that Miki wouldn't notice she was being scanned, and also activated an SSR Conceal card as an extra safeguard. Mei had been able to identify Miki as a human female with a Gift known as "Beemancer," but due to the distance between the two, her Appraisal was unable to determine Miki's power level, so Light had brought his most powerful warrior Nazuna along to this confrontation as insurance. Light had instructed Iceheat to bring Miki up to the second-floor reception hall, which was a big enough room to do battle in.

Of course, none of this would've happened if Miki's attempt at subterfuge hadn't blown up in her face. Realizing she was truly cornered, Miki had started to back away toward the exit as beads of sweat formed at her temples. She wasn't quite ready to drop her innocent act, though.

"Wh-What do you *mean* you ran an Appraisal on me?" Miki gasped affectedly. "I'm *just* an orphan whose parents were killed by a monster."

"Guess you're not ready to fess up yet," Light sighed. "Okay, Iceheat, you're up."

"At once, Master Light!" Iceheat replied, excitedly infusing her left gauntlet with energy. "I myself will unmask you, Beemancer! Ice Bullets!"

Iceheat pointed the gauntlet at Miki as dozens of fist-sized globules of ice formed around it, then fired them at her. If Miki had been a normal human teenager, the Ice Bullets would have reduced her to a pile of mincemeat.

"Gawd, what's *wrong* with you?" Miki whined. "Why would you do that to a cute little *girl* like Miki?" This marked the official end of her performance as a helpless maiden, and she bolted away at superhuman speed, easily dodging the attack. She looked back at the spot where she had previously been standing with surprise. "Huh? Did you do *that*?"

The Ice Bullets had formed a sheet of ice that completely covered the door. Not only were the projectiles lethal in themselves, they were also able to freeze anything they touched. *Thank god I came with a backup plan*, thought Miki. *But I never imagined I'd need to use it this early! Seriously, this blows!* Miki was fuming that she wouldn't be able to take Silica or some of the fairy maids home with her, but at least she would escape with her freedom.

"Killer Bees, come to me! Stab these people to death!" Miki cried, and a magic summoning circle appeared beneath her that spat out a host of bees measuring thirty centimeters in length. But Miki knew these monsters wouldn't be enough to defeat Light and his crew. *I may be a powerful Beemancer, but I'm a lover, not a fighter! I'm usually the one providing cover instead of getting into actual hand-to-hand combat. These guys look way too overpowered for me to beat 'em all by myself!* In fact, Miki had merely summoned the Killer Bees to slow down her foes in order to give her enough time to whip out her insurance

policy.

She pulled out a card and held it aloft. “Magic Item: Skyrunner Wings!” she shouted. “Get Miki out of this stupid tower!”

The card went up in flames and a brilliant light enveloped Miki. But instead of translocating her far away from her present location as intended, the magical effect faded again without anything happening.

“Wh-What the hell?” Miki screeched. “Why aren’t my Skyrunner Wings *working*?!”

“I should hope they aren’t, because this tower was built to block teleportation magic,” Light said in a voice that was eerily calm for someone who was supposed to be in the middle of being attacked by Killer Bees. Miki recoiled in despair as Light’s two warriors quickly went to work on her minions.

“Prometheus! Bend my reality!” Nazuna cried as she swung her broadsword, and in so doing, multiple slicing arcs were manifested, cutting down Killer Bees left and right.

“Firestorm! Burn like blood!” Iceheat yelled before raising her right gauntlet and unleashing a crimson flame that cooked the remaining Killer Bees to ash. Light hadn’t needed to lift a finger to protect himself from the bees, and not even a speck of dust from them landed on his clothes.

Light advanced on Miki. “Once we have detained you, you will tell us why you came to the Great Tower, who you work for, and everything else we want to know.”

Miki briefly squealed as the dark energy emanating from Light washed over her, the Master sounding like a teenage girl who was genuinely scared for her life.

Chapter 11: The Existence of C

“Acid Bees! Armored Bees! Explosion Bees! Come to me!” Miki yelled.

After explaining to Miki that her cover had been blown, she tried to activate a teleportation item to get away, but the Great Tower’s jamming magic had thwarted that particular escape plan. It now seemed that Miki was going to try to fight us out of desperation.

Instead of using stingers like regular bees, the Acid Bees squirted a liquid that could melt physical objects, while the Armored Bees had metal plating that covered their whole bodies, giving them high protective stats, and jaws as sharp and pointed as spears. But the biggest headache of all turned out to be the Explosion Bees.

“Firestorm! Burn like blood!” Iceheat roared as she shot flames at the diving bee monsters. Her attack easily fried the Acid Bees and the Armored Bees, but when it came to the Explosion Bees, the flames ignited a few of them, causing several earsplitting explosions that were so huge, they sent Nazuna—who had leaped into the air to cut down the bees—tumbling backward across the floor.

Nazuna bounced back to her feet unscathed and yelled at Miki, “Darnit! Ya done it now, bee lady!”

“Ah! Please forgive me, Miss Nazuna!” Iceheat apologized to her partner.

Meanwhile, Miki was still looking around for a way out, though she made sure to keep one eye on us at all times. “Explosion Bees, bomb the wall!”

The remaining Explosion Bees formed one big buzzing clump and slammed into the wall of the tower, the collective blast creating a big enough hole to fit a fist through. This gave Miki a glimmer of hope.

“Sweet!” Miki exclaimed. “So if I keep hitting the wall with my Explosion Bees, I can make a hole big enough to slip out through, then I can activate another Skyrunner Wings card—huh?”

While Miki was outlining her next move, the tower wall promptly restored

itself, filling in the hole and causing the teenage girl to gawk at the pristine wall, her expression a mix of shock and anguish.

“*What?! How’d the wall fix itself?!* ” Miki shrieked. “Why won’t you let me outta here?”

The Great Tower had originally been built to lure the White Knights—the most powerful order of warriors in the Elven Queendom—into a trap they could never hope to escape from. Due to this, not only was the tower completely teleportation-proof but Ellie was also able to restore the walls if they ever got damaged. She’d just use the link she had set up to her own mana pool. The attack would need to be *really* catastrophic for anyone to blast a real hole through the walls.

But to safeguard against the one-in-a-million chance that Miki did actually manage to break through the wall, I’d stationed Mei and Orka outside the tower. If she did get out, Mei would cover the entire city with her Magistrings in order to protect citizens from Miki’s attacks while we attempted to capture her, while Orka’s job was to use music to calm down the residents until the emergency was over. Aoyuki was continuing her surveillance around the Great Tower, while Khaos and some of the other warriors were on standby in the Abyss, ready to respond if we needed them. Miki was going to have to be prepared for a tough fight if she wanted to get out of here.

“I suggest giving up now while you’re ahead,” I advised Miki. “If you do that, I might go easy on you. But my patience is starting to wear thin.”

“Good god,” Miki breathed. “What the *actual* hell? Who *are* you people, anyway? All I wanted to do was check out this tower since you caught the attention of the dragonute Masters, but this is *way* too insane! Did they secretly send us that info just so we’d fall into this trap?”

“What?” I said, somewhat startled. “Are you saying there are Masters working with the dragonutes?”

“Are you for real? How could you *not* know that?” Miki yelled. “That walking chandelier, Kaizer, couldn’t have come up with this trick, nor could that sus loner, Hei. I can safely rule out the serial bomber and the fish guy too, which means this trap *has* to have been the brainchild of either that male bimbo, Hiro,

or that squinting rat, Hisomi. Gawd, why'd I volunteer for this *disaster* of a mission?"

That was a whole lot of information coming out all at once. Needless to say, I had absolutely no idea who "Kaizer the walking chandelier" was, nor "Hiro the male bimbo," "Hei the sus (?) loner," the "serial bomber," or the "fish guy." But I definitely *was* aware of the final name on the list: Hisomi. That was the same name that had come to the surface when Ellie had performed her memory probe on Cavour, and it now turned out that not only was this Hisomi character supposedly a Master, he was also allied with the dragonutes.

My eyes narrowed. "I had a hunch that you were a Master, but that pretty much seals it. On top of that, you know far more than we could've imagined, which means we now *really* need to capture you and make you talk."

"Wait, seriously?" Miki said, puzzled. "You mean you guys *aren't* with the dragonute Masters? You're not like *working* for them or *partners* with them in some way?"

"Maybe we are, maybe we aren't," I said enigmatically. "It won't matter to you anyway, because we're taking you for questioning."

"So you guys really *aren't* with the dragonute Masters?" Miki said, grimacing with frustration. "Tell me you're kidding. You're not? Then, that means..."

Miki's dark expression brightened so fast that I was nearly bowled over. "That means you have nothing to do with them, but you're still unbelievably overpowered and you can build a tower with self-repairing walls that jam translocation magic! This can *only* mean that C is in this tower!"

"C?" I repeated.

"Yes, the almighty C!" Miki said. "C *must* be the reason you can do all of these impossible things! I know we got off on the wrong foot, but my side is actually allies of C. You should've told Miki sooner, silly! So where exactly *are* you keeping C in this tower?"

Hisomi had created a pseudo-Master called Cavour as a result of an experiment gone wrong, and this Cavour had mentioned C while battling me. Ellie's memory probe had subsequently told us that both Cavour and Hisomi

weren't fans of C, to say the least, but here was Miki referring to this mysterious entity as the "almighty C," which meant she was probably a servant or a worshipper of this being. Speaking of Miki, her ecstatic expression was slowly fading, probably because she was finally noticing that I had pretty much no clue what she was talking about.

"Wait, why aren't you saying anything?" she asked. "Are you telling me C *isn't* in this tower?"

"First of all, who is this 'C'?" I retorted.

"Please tell me you're joking," Miki said. "If C *isn't* here, then how in the world are you people so overpowered? This is crazy!" She was staring at us like my allies and myself had sprouted two more heads each. "Just who the hell *are* you guys?"

Before I could answer her question, we felt a reverberation from afar that even caused the interior of the Great Tower to shake.

Chapter 12: Daigo

“Who would’ve thought there’d be an entire *city* full of high-level targets that can feed me experience points,” Daigo said aloud on his way to the Great Tower. “I really must remember to thank that sadistic pervert later.” Daigo’s mind drifted back to the chance meeting long ago that had led to him becoming irrationally obsessed with leveling in the first place.

“Long time no see, Hei,” Daigo had called out to his fellow Master. “Never thought I’d see you here.”

Hei—a Master affiliated with the Dragonute Empire—didn’t even bother to reply to Daigo when the two men ran into each other deep in a dungeon. At the time, he was dressed head to toe in black, and had a dark bandanna tied over his eyes, with its long ends dangling down behind his head. Even though Hei should technically have been unable to see Daigo due to the blindfold, he turned to face his fellow Master directly, wielding a Japanese-style sword—which was also black—in his left hand.

“I recall that last time we met, we had a falling out and you fell in with the dragonutes, while I joined up with the demons,” Daigo joked with a shrug, still holding his own twin swords. “Anyway, I see you’re still as tight-lipped as ever. Can’t even say hello to an old bud.”

Hei maintained his silence, prompting Daigo to spit contemptuously at the ground and wave his swords in the other Master’s general direction, as if trying to shoo him.

“What you see here are *my* hunting grounds, and they’re mine *alone*,” Daigo said pointedly. “Now kindly remove your ass from this dungeon, ’cause you’re only making it harder for me to level up.”

Hei prefaced his response with another moment of silence. “I refuse.”

“You what?” Daigo said, glaring at Hei. “Now look here, you shady little shit stain. I’m being kind and letting you walk out of this dungeon without hurting

you, so I won't take any of your lip. Since we come from the same place, I'll give you one last chance. Get out of the dungeon and get out of my way."

Hei didn't say a word or move a muscle, but it was clear what he was thinking from his demeanor. *What if I don't leave? Are you going to make me?*

This response tipped Daigo over the edge. "Looks like we're gonna hafta do this the hard way, then, *ain't we?*" He rushed toward Hei, his twin blades swinging faster than any regular fighter could follow, but Hei was a fellow Master and he simply twisted his upper body to one side and evaded them.

Daigo clicked his tongue. "Damn you!" he yelled, swiveling and engaging Hei again as if he really intended to kill him. "Don't just duck and weave, asshole!" His twin swords whirled about in a flurry of deadly slices, but Hei dodged every single powerful swing by at least a hair's breadth, his blindfold not proving to be a handicap at all. Hei eventually grew bored of humoring Daigo, though, and raising his own sword, he executed two quick strokes of the blade.

A strangled sound escaped from Daigo's throat as he clapped a hand over his face, where Hei had carved two fresh wounds in the shape of an X—a mark that would serve as a humiliating branding that symbolized Daigo's subordinate status.

With his back still facing Daigo, Hei turned his head to address his beaten foe. "My level and skills exceed yours."

Daigo seethed, his teeth grinding audibly and his hand firmly clamped over his face, which was still burning from both the physical and emotional pain. *That giant piece of shit!* Daigo raged in his mind. *I'll kill this sonuvabitch with my Gift!* But despite the anger and humiliation he was feeling, Daigo managed to come to his senses, just barely. *No, there's no guarantee I can kill that rat bastard right now, and even if I could finish him off, I'd probably end up destroying my swords and this whole dungeon in the process. That'd be committing suicide, and it's just not worth it.*

This brief fight had proved to Daigo that Hei was the most powerful Master allied with the Dragonute Empire. His swordsmanship was so swift, Daigo hadn't even seen the slashes that had carved open his face, only realizing due to the burning pain and the dripping blood. It was a painful reminder for Daigo

that he was nowhere near Hei in terms of ability.

“Dammit!” Daigo yelled, angrily kicking a clump of dirt, then flashing Hei one last dirty look before heading for the dungeon’s exit. “This ain’t over, shithead!” he bellowed. “This pain and humiliation is only gonna motivate me to cap out my power level so that I can wield these swords at full strength. And when that day arrives, you won’t be able to stop me and my swords! I don’t care if we did come from the same place—you’re dead! Your ass is grass, you hear me?!”

Hei continued to regard Daigo without saying a word, though his silent rejoinder could easily be discerned: *You just try and take my head. If you’re good enough, that is.* Daigo ground his teeth again, but he chose to swallow his pride and leave the dungeon.

Daigo didn’t bother to heal his X-shaped wounds, instead allowing them to scar so that he would remember the indignity of that day every time he looked at his reflection. From that day onward, Daigo was almost pathologically obsessed with leveling.



Daigo roared with maniacal laughter. “There really *are* powerful monsters here! This is a level grinder’s paradise!”

Under his blood-soaked swords was the corpse of a Snake Hellhound he had just slain, its head separated from its body. The Snake Hellhound had noticed Daigo’s incursion into the wild forest that surrounded the Great Tower and promptly moved to engage the intruder, but the Level 1000 monster was no match for a Master.

Before Daigo could think about moving on to his next prey, he heard the deep, rumbling growl of a giant creature intermingled with the rustling of leaves, and the next thing he knew, a fifteen-meter-long canine with fur as white as the driven snow towered over him. The UR Level 9000, God Wolf Fenrir bared fangs as long as halberd heads at Daigo. Light had originally released Fenrir from its gacha card during his fight with the wolfman, Garou, but since then, Aoyuki had fully tamed Fenrir so that it could share its vision and other senses with her, and she was the one who had deployed the creature here to investigate an attack by an intruder. Now that Fenrir had found the

cause of the disruption, Aoyuki ordered it to engage the interloper. The giant wolf barked and waved its front paw in the air, unleashing a slashing attack and a freezing attack that barreled toward Daigo at the same time. The intent wasn't to kill the target, merely to neutralize and capture him, so that he could be picked up for questioning.

"Hey, mutt. Did you just try to do something to me?" Daigo growled, much to Fenrir's surprise. The two ranged attacks had somehow completely deflected away from Daigo, even though both the God Wolf and Aoyuki had intended for them to be direct hits. While Fenrir stood there confused, Daigo activated his Appraisal skill.

"Whoa, Level 9000?" Daigo blurted out. "Holy shit! This is *sweet*! I really need to put you down and raise my stats!"

Fenrir yelped loudly as a large gash suddenly appeared on its front paw, with blood spraying everywhere. The God Wolf hadn't sensed any signs of Daigo unleashing his own slashing attack, activating a spell, or even moving an inch from where he was standing. All Daigo had done was point one of his swords at Fenrir, and this seemed to have sliced its paw somehow. Fenrir quickly froze the wound to stem the bleeding and followed Aoyuki's orders to retreat from its present position in an attempt to lure Daigo as far away from the Great Tower as possible. Luckily, neither the injury to its paw nor the trees around it hindered the giant creature's progress.

"Hey, get back here!" Daigo yelled. "You're not getting away from me! Not until you've leveled me up!"

Daigo leaped off the ground and flew through the air in pursuit of Fenrir using what must have been some kind of magic, and even though the giant beast was as fast as anything on land, it was still unable to shake the airborne Master, who steadily closed in on the God Wolf. Knowing that Daigo would catch up to it eventually, since there were no obstacles in the sky to slow him down, Fenrir received permission from Aoyuki to halt in its tracks and unleash a concentrated blast of ice magic that should have been enough to kill Daigo on the spot. Fenrir focused the entirety of its powers into a large, snow-white ball of energy, then fired the shot at its deadly pursuer. Daigo was unable to dodge this attack and took the full force of it head-on. Even Light and his Level 9999

deputies would have been severely maimed by a direct hit like that if they had failed to get any defenses in time. But Daigo emerged completely unscathed.

“Too bad, fleabag,” Daigo said. “It just so happens that I’m an ace when it comes to blocking attacks with your properties!”

Daigo proceeded to slash Fenrir’s back just by waving a sword at it, making the God Wolf howl in pain again. “Your power level may be higher than mine, but thanks to my powers—or rather, these swords—your properties can’t touch me! But I have to keep on leveling up so that I can use my swords to their fullest potential. Now die, you dumb pup! Be fodder for my leveling!”

Fenrir tried to growl threateningly at its pursuer, but its voice lacked any intensity now that the God Wolf had no idea how to counter its opponent. Aoyuki knew that she and Fenrir were unable to battle this threat by themselves, so she called for backup. And naturally, the person receiving the call was Light.



So that was the source of the tremors I felt? I said through the Telepathy link.

That’s correct, Aoyuki answered back. Please accept my humblest apologies. Fenrir and I cannot overpower this enemy. It is to my shame that I must now recommend mobilizing Nazuna.

Aoyuki usually found Nazuna annoying due to the way she insisted on talking to the monster tamer unprompted, as well as how she would always offer to take care of her fellow lieutenant, since the vampire considered her colleague “weaker” than herself. For my part, I didn’t doubt for one moment that Nazuna wasn’t being sincere whenever she said these things and that she was in no way trying to insult Aoyuki, but these kinds of comments still managed to rub her fellow SUR warrior the wrong way. However, Aoyuki was willing to look past their somewhat checkered history and have me send Nazuna out to fight this mystery adversary in place of her own monsters, which just went to show how much the monster tamer prioritized me, the Abyss, and the Great Tower over her own pride. If she had been here right at that moment, I would have been rubbing her head and praising her for being so selfless. But as it was, I was inside the tower, and Miki chose that specific moment to say something I

couldn't overlook.

"The ground's shaking. Yippee! I'm saved!" Miki whooped. "That leveling freak must be here! Normally, I'd wanna *punch* him for raiding this place so soon after my first intel report, but I'll forgive him this time!"

An elated expression had replaced the look of desperation that had dogged Miki's face only moments ago. "That dude's too much of a scrub to be able to take you guys down by himself, but I know his twin swords will! He's armed with the most powerful mythical-class weapons in the world, in case you didn't know! Now it's only a matter of time before I blow this popsicle stand! Give it up for Miki, the luckiest girl ever!"

"The most powerful mythical-class weapons in the world?" I repeated.

"Whoops!" Miki squeaked, covering her mouth after realizing she had said too much, but figuring she had nothing to hide anymore, she soon giggled and struck a triumphant pose.

"That's right! That leveling junkie has *two* unbeatable mythical-class swords," Miki bragged. "You should surrender now while you still have a chance, and we might even, you know..." She paused. "Go easy on you, was it?"

Miki was deliberately throwing the exact words I'd said to her back in my face just to needle me, but at least that all but proved that she wasn't bluffing. *She must really believe this so-called "leveling junkie" is armed with the world's most powerful mythical-class weapons*, I mused. *What Nazuna can do with her Prometheus is so powerful, it's almost like cheating. Is there really a chance these other swords can go beyond what it can do?*

Nazuna's Prometheus sword was also a mythical-class weapon, capable of bending the rules of nature itself. The broadsword could make multiple copies of Nazuna, all retaining the exact same armaments and power level of the original. Yet however awesome that feat was, I wasn't sure I could say for definite that the Prometheus was the most powerful weapon in its class. And now here was Miki, claiming that the intruder who had just shown up near our tower had twin swords that might fit that description, and in all honesty, I couldn't even begin to imagine how powerful these swords would have to be for that to be true.

“When that guy goes on a rampage, he lays waste to *everything*, so it doesn’t matter how powerful you guys are,” Miki declared. “He might *even* massacre everyone in the city if you don’t watch out. But if you let me go, and allow me to take Silica and maybe two or three fairy maids with me, I’ll use my Miki charm to talk some sense into that dipstick. That way, we’ll both leave without doing any more damage to what you’ve built for yourself here.”

Miki beamed triumphantly after putting this offer on the table. And sure, I couldn’t deny that Miki would probably have been able to negotiate some kind of truce, but regardless, I pretended not to hear her offer and turned to Nazuna instead.

“You’re coming with me,” I said to her. “We’ve got a bad guy tearing up the place outside and we need to go capture him. We’ll let Iceheat’s team take care of her.”

“Ya got it, master!” Nazuna replied with her usual gusto.

“H-Hey! You don’t *get* to ignore me like that!” Miki huffed. “Was I asking a bit too much, maybe? Fine. Miki will just take Silica with her and we’ll call it even. Deal?”

“Ellie, I’m going outside to provide them with backup,” I announced through a Telepathy link I’d just set up. “Teleport Mera, Jack, and Suzu in here to help Iceheat deal with Miki.”

Ellie used her powers to create a door in the wall directly behind Nazuna and me, and I promptly opened it so we could head out into the hallway.

“Okay, *fine*!” Miki yelled. “I won’t take anyone! Just let Miki out of this tower —” I closed the door behind me before another word had the chance to drift over to me, and Ellie transformed the door back into wall again.

“Nazuna, we’re gonna take the nearest exit to the outside and provide backup for Fenrir, who’s battling the bad guy in the woods,” I said.

“Anythin’ ya say, master!” Nazuna replied. “But ya didn’t hafta come along too. I can beat this baddie all by myself! I’ll protect the city, our comrades, and you too, master!”

“Thanks, Nazuna,” I said. “But I really want to fight alongside you.” I gripped

my God Requiem Gungnir tighter. “You know how a Snake Hellhound almost killed me in the Abyss? Well, even now, I still stiffen up momentarily whenever one of those Hellhounds shows up without warning. But I’ve put the past behind me, and now the Snake Hellhounds are valued allies of mine, just like everyone else in the Abyss. And I’ve just been told that the intruder has killed one of my Snake Hellhounds.”

Nazuna was shocked, but I continued, barely noticing her reaction. “So I can’t just sit back and do nothing after one of my friends has been killed. Once we’ve captured this guy and extracted all the information we need from him, I’ll subject the bastard to never-ending torture in the deepest pits of the Abyss. He’ll suffer even more than Garou, Sasha, Sionne, and Naano! I’ll make this intruder feel deep, *deep* within his soul just how wrong he was to kill one of our own!”

“M-M-Master...” Nazuna stammered as fearful tears welled up in her eyes after listening to me rant. I guessed I had unwittingly radiated enough dark energy to even frighten the usually happy-go-lucky Nazuna.

I took some deep breaths to calm myself down. “Sorry, Nazuna. It’s okay. I’m not mad at you.”

“Master, ya really, really scared me there...” Nazuna quavered.

“I’m sorry, okay?” I treated her to the cheeriest smile I could muster and stroked her hair for good measure, which progressed to her rubbing her own head against my palm, just like a cat—or Aoyuki—would. Nazuna eventually noticed that she was acting like Aoyuki and smiled through her tears, before aiming a soft “mrrow” at me.

I found Nazuna’s antics so adorable that I couldn’t help smiling back at her a little more genuinely. I continued stroking her hair until I was sure she was feeling herself again, then I led her through a door that took us up onto the roof of the Great Tower. From there, we would head into the woods behind the tower.



“Okay, *fine*! I won’t take anyone! Just let Miki out of this tower—” Miki yelled, pleading for her release, but Light completely ignored her as he and his deputy,

Nazuna, exited the reception hall through a door that had appeared in the wall, then disappeared almost as quickly.

“Hey! Do you even *realize* what you’re getting yourself into?” Miki shouted at the wall. “Daigo’s *way* too unbeatable with those swords of his! If you wind up getting in way over your heads, don’t come crying to Miki!”

“Do not underestimate Master Light,” Iceheat warned. “There is no one in this world who can measure up to Master Light and Miss Nazuna, no matter how powerful they may claim to be. We still hold the overwhelming advantage, and I myself would suggest you would do well to worry more about yourself and your intruder friend.”

Miki slowly backed away from Iceheat until her back was touching the wall, the Beemancer truly spooked by her words. *If all of that’s true, we’re cooked! Miki thought. He can still hit ’em with that one attack, but that’s the absolute last card he has up his sleeve! He spent millions of hours leveling up just to get his powers to form a human shape! I don’t even wanna imagine all of that effort going down the drain!* As her train of thought concluded, Mera, Jack, and Suzu showed up in the reception hall.

Mera cackled long and hard. “Well, we’re here, just like master ordered. So this is the dumb blonde who decided she was gonna sneak around our tower, huh?”

“Whoa, Mera! That ain’t how we talk to someone we just met!” Jack said. “But from what I hear, this kid’s definitely the *opposite* of bro-worthy.”

“I don’t think calling an intruder ‘dumb’ is really the biggest issue here, Mr. Jack,” pointed out Suzu’s musket, Lock. Suzu herself nodded twice in agreement to this.

Faced with these three new powerful-looking foes, all color drained from Miki’s face. She activated her Appraisal skill to see if there was anything in their stats that she could use to her advantage, but unfortunately for her, all four of the Level 7777 warriors were able to conceal the majority of their stats from her detection abilities. One particular bit of undisguised info did lift Miki’s spirits, however. In fact, her face reddened like that of a maiden who had just fallen in love for the first time in her life, her desire-filled eyes latching onto a

certain girl (?). In fact, Miki was so completely consumed by her new love interest, as far as she was concerned, her world only contained the two of them.

“I thank the three of you for coming, but I myself will be enough to take care of her,” Iceheat said, not noticing Miki’s sudden infatuation.

Mera chuckled. “Are you really gonna hog the spotlight, hun?” Suzu nodded to show she shared Mera’s sentiments.

“If that is how you wish to view it, then yes,” Iceheat replied without a hint of shame. “Master Light ordered *me* to lure her into this room and ordered *me* to fight her. That is what happened, so I myself will finish the job.”

“Well, sure, ya got a point there,” Jack conceded. “But what kinda bro doesn’t wanna team up with all their other bros? ’Sides, ya gotta think there’ll be safety in numbers.”

“Mr. Jack’s right,” Lock agreed. “And just so you know, Lord Light also called *us* here to fight her. Would it be right to ignore a direct order from him?”

“That is not my intention, Lock,” Iceheat refuted. “But I...”

“But what?” Lock queried.

“I myself have had no opportunities to prove myself in battle since our mission in the Elven Queendom,” Iceheat continued. “The rest of you were all selected to accompany Master Light when he went off questing in the Dwarf Kingdom, and most of you also participated in the war with the beastfolk. I don’t see how allowing me to prove my loyalty to Master Light by capturing this suspect is too much to ask.”

“Oh.” Lock was caught totally off guard by this response, and Suzu felt equally awkward.

“Oh, yeah. Ya haven’t seen much action up on the surface, have ya?” Jack said, scratching his cheek, undecided on what to do. “Then again, I ain’t about to go disobeying orders. Know what I mean?”

“It would indeed be downright inexcusable to shirk your duties,” Iceheat agreed. “But what I myself am asking is for you to, ahem, ‘do a bro a solid’ as

you like to say. And if I find myself in trouble at all, I know I can count on you to back me up, bro.”

The second the word “bro” passed Iceheat’s lips, Jack did a complete one-eighty. “Oh, sure! Ain’t nothin’ wrong with doing a solid for one of my li’l bros! And rest easy, ’cause your wingman’s right here to bail you out if ya need it!”

Jack considered himself an older brother-type who watched out for all his “bros,” regardless of age or rank. He would constantly pester Iceheat to let him call her his “bro,” but she would usually have none of it, since the strict disciplinarian didn’t feel it was appropriate to place herself in such a subordinate position given that not only did the two of them share the same power level, but Iceheat had also been summoned before Jack. However, Iceheat was extremely eager to capture Miki on her own, to the point where she was willing to set aside her pride to make it happen.

This turn of events astonished Mera. *What’s this? Iceheat’s really going that far to make sure she has this battle all to herself? I didn’t realize she was quite that frustrated at being sidelined all the time.*

Iceheat turned to Suzu next. “You’ve been learning how to cook so that you may one day serve Master Light a meal, yes? Well, I myself will *personally* ask Master Light to set aside some time so that he can dine on food you have made. So please, allow me to have this one.”

Suzu nodded excitedly, which drew an exasperated response from Lock. “Really, partner? You’re not even gonna stop and think about it? But I guess there’s no real reason to object to it if you’re okay with it.” Lock then addressed Iceheat. “But we’ll step in if you look like you’re in danger at all, or if it seems like our target’s about to escape. Deal?”

“I would expect nothing less,” Iceheat said. “I thank you and Suzu for yielding. And Mera...” Iceheat’s eyes shifted to her friend, one of the very few people she had opened up to regarding how she really felt about getting passed over for missions up on the surface world.

Mera cackled good-heartedly at Iceheat. “Yes, yes, I know you’ve been bummed out that you never get a chance to show off how loyal you are to master,” she said. “But once we’re back in the Abyss, you owe me a cold one,

you hear?”

“Mera, I’ll treat you to barrel-loads of alcohol after this,” Iceheat promised.

Jack, Suzu, and Mera stepped back without another word and allowed Iceheat to engage Miki by herself. The grappler maid turned to face her opponent as a ring of fire formed around her right gauntlet, signaling her zeal, while a cloud of frozen mist formed around her left. When it came to manipulating fire and ice, even Ellie the Forbidden Witch wasn’t able to match Iceheat’s abilities. If she wanted to, Iceheat didn’t have to call out her attacks or even move to unleash her full power, so when she’d yelled out “Firestorm” while intercepting Miki’s bees earlier, it was only to let Light know what kind of attack she was using.

Iceheat bashed her gauntlets together and glared at Miki. “Know this: you are about to face the UR Level 7777, Frozen Firestorm Grappler, Iceheat!”

“Hoo boy,” Jack said, stroking his chin, impressed by Iceheat’s intensity. Suzu took a step back out of fear, while Mera chortled in her usual fashion. Iceheat’s desire to capture Miki was so all-encompassing that even a Level 9999 superwarrior would have thought twice before taking her on. But instead of being cowed by the overwhelming energy on display from Iceheat, Miki continued to ignore the maid and kept her focus on her sole point of interest: Suzu.

At last, Miki opened her mouth. “Babe, is your name *really* Suzu?”

The gunner’s response was wordless, motionless caution, but Miki didn’t really need Suzu to answer her question.

“Omigod, I’m so *completely* in love with you!” Miki gushed. “Can you please, *please* be my husband, wife, and mommy?”

Miki’s declaration seemed to cause time to stop. Everyone else in the room was completely taken aback, but Miki continued rhapsodizing regardless, her face crimson with desire and her eyes aflame with arousal.

“That mysteriously dark hair, those jewellike eyes... And despite having a baby face, you have a large bust hidden underneath that slim-fitting outfit of yours!” Miki raved. “The complete mismatch between your adorable purity and your wickedly sinful body is hotter than balls! Your gorgeous lips are pink like rose

petals, and even from over here, I can tell your skin's as smooth and milky as porcelain! And if that wasn't enough, you're also wearing a short skirt over black tights, which is another awesome contrast to the whole package. Speaking of *packages*, my Appraisal tells me you're a Double Gunner who's equipped with both male *and* female parts down there! Good god, you're *beyond* perfect! You're infinitely irresistible! We *have* to get married so that you can become Miki's husband, wife, and mommy all in one!"

The repeated marriage proposal at the end of a rabid, long-winded appeal made Suzu's skin crawl, because she quickly realized that Miki wasn't kidding. Her voice, attitude, and general demeanor all confirmed that she was completely serious about wanting Suzu's hand in marriage. With her soul on the verge of leaving her corporeal form entirely and her body trembling with total disgust, Suzu hid herself behind Mera, leaving Lock to respond on her behalf.

"Uh, well, as you can see, she clearly doesn't want to marry you, so I think you should give up on that idea," he said.

"Well, *you* should give up on asking Miki to give up," Miki fired back. "I've found my ideal life partner! There's no way I'm just gonna walk away!"

"Yes, you made your point. But you're our adversary and we're supposed to capture you," Lock retorted. "This isn't the time or place to be talking about marriage."

Still hidden behind Mera, Suzu nodded along with Lock's statement as rapidly as her Level 7777 powers would let her.

"So all I have to do is let you capture me and I can be with Suzu forever and ever?" Miki said.

"Bro, is she all there upstairs?" Jack asked, looking completely confused by the conversation.

Mera chuckled nervously. "Good lord. And I thought *I* was horror-inducing." The chimera was visibly sweating in the face of Miki's predatory aura, which was even more unsettling than all of the murderous and intimidating vibes Mera had encountered before.



Suzu was shivering like someone who had been stripped of their clothes and thrown out into a blizzard in the middle of winter. Miki paid no heed to the reactions of her would-be combatants, instead summoning her last bee.

“Oath Bee, come to me!” Miki chanted as she manifested an inky, slightly amorphous, regular-sized bee that looked much weaker than any of her previous summons. Surprisingly, the bee didn’t float toward the four warriors, but toward Miki’s face, where it pressed itself to her right cheek and phased into her skin.

“I, Miki, vow to defect to your side!” Miki announced. Her words caused a brief flash of light from her cheek, and when it subsided, a mark like a tattoo had been left behind.

Once this odd ritual was complete, Miki beamed at Suzu, her eyes treating her new love interest to a licentious gaze that was as sticky and gooey as honey.

“For *now*, let’s start off by being friends, my *sweet* Suzu,” Miki stated.

Jack stared at her dumbstruck, Mera giggled to hide her astonishment, and Suzu trembled as Miki relentlessly made bedroom eyes at her. As for Iceheat, despite all of the promises and concessions she had made to her three allies, she was once again left with no opportunity to unleash her pent-up yearning to engage in battle in the name of her master.

Chapter 13: Report

Nazuna and I made it up onto the roof of the Great Tower, and from our new elevated vantage point, we soon spotted an unknown man floating over the forest. I assumed that this was the other Master from the Demonkin Nation that Miki had mentioned, since he was hurling magical attacks down at the ground. At various intervals, I saw ice attacks shooting upward out of the canopy—which I could only assume were from Fenrir—though I noticed something was off about the attacks. *Why aren't any of Fenrir's shots hitting that guy?* I thought before watching them a bit closer. *Wait, are they all being deflected?*

The trajectories of the shots were so far off, it was as if Fenrir wasn't even trying to hit its target, but I knew the giant wolf would never go wasting shots like that. Plus, if Fenrir were missing shots on purpose, Aoyuki would have noticed and told me about it. So if we ruled out that as a possibility...

Then, it must be that guy's swords doing it. After all, Miki did say they were the most powerful mythical-class weapons in the world, I reasoned. I still wanna go over there right now and clobber that bastard for killing and wounding my comrades, but since I have practically no clue who I'm dealing with here, I should watch my step. First of all, I should instruct Mei to keep the Magistring dome in place over the city until we've taken care of this bad guy. Oh, and I should also tell Orka to play his fiddle to soothe the residents if it looks like pandemonium is about to break out—

"Hey, you X-faced dummy!" Nazuna yelled. "Ya won't get away with what ya did to our friends!"

I had just been about to activate my Telepathy card to deliver these orders to Mei and Orka when Nazuna impetuously bounded from the roof in the direction of our target.

"Nazuna!" I called out after her, but it was too late. Her leap was so powerful, it left cracks behind in the roof, and she flew as straight as an arrow toward our

adversary, though thankfully, it wasn't long before the cracks started repairing themselves rapidly. *That sudden bit of damage must've nearly knocked Ellie on her butt again*, I thought, slightly amused by the image in spite of myself.

Nazuna roared as she swung her Prometheus, causing the bad guy to spin around to confront her.

"Who the hell are *you*?!" our foe yelled back at her. It quickly became clear that Nazuna had wasted her chance at a surprise attack when the guy nimbly dodged the blow, but after swiveling her body in midair, she swung the Prometheus again one-handed, and this time, the blow connected. The intruder managed to block the strike by crossing his twin blades in front of himself, but since he was airborne and there was nothing to kill the momentum of the Prometheus, he was blasted backward and down to the ground.

"Huh? Was Nazuna's blow ever so slightly off the mark just then?" I said to myself. "But he wasn't able to completely deflect her sword like he was doing with Fenrir's attack magic..."

The God Wolf's ice attacks had missed the bad guy like it was on purpose, and while Nazuna had been able to get in a hit, it hadn't packed the full wallop I would have expected it to. This showed that our adversary was shielding himself using some kind of ability.

Do his swords nerf close-range melee attacks while completely shutting down ranged attacks? I wondered. Still, even if they could do that, was that really enough to call these swords the most powerful mythical-class weapons in the world? While all of these thoughts were churning around inside my head, the guy with the facial scars bounded back up from the ground and started trash-talking Nazuna.

"Are you freakin' *kidding* me?! A Level 9999 female brat? This is sweet! Hella sweet! These hunting grounds were practically *made* for me to level grind!"

The guy must have used an Appraisal to discover Nazuna's power level, but just like with Fenrir, he showed no sign of fear at being outleveled. A long way from the action, I activated an Appraisal card and saw that this guy was a Level 7000 human who went by the name of Daigo, but because he was concealing some of his stats, my Appraisal couldn't read the full name of his Gift. Level

7000 was the highest power level we had faced so far, but this Daigo character was taking on the Level 9999 Nazuna, so I couldn't understand why he was so confident that he would beat her.

Guess that's just how much he believes in the power of his mythical-class swords, I thought. I tried to run an Appraisal on the swords themselves, but their stats were concealed as well. I still found myself wondering why the name of his Gift would be scrambled the way it was. All I could read from the stats screen was that he was some sort of "swordsman."

Nazuna's battle cry dragged me up out of my thoughts. "Take this!" Nazuna yelled as she crossed swords with Daigo again, eventually spotting an opening that allowed her to force Daigo back and knock him off-balance. "Boy, it's really hard to hit ya with my sword!" she remarked. "Really, *really* hard!"

I quickly issued my orders to Mei and the others via Telepathy so that I could provide backup for Nazuna. "Detonation Inferno—release!"

I activated ten SSR Detonation Inferno cards, setting off a series of blasts that targeted Daigo. Detonation Inferno was a high-ranking tactical-class spell that unleashed a combination of flames and explosions strong enough to cause severe damage to any normal monster, and could at least wound a really powerful monster. But a sudden blast of wind blew away the flames and the smoke, revealing a completely unharmed Daigo in the middle of the whirlwind. I wasn't totally surprised by this outcome, but it was still weird how ten Detonation Inferno cards hadn't left so much as a single scratch on him.

"So I've got one female munchkin here who's Level 9999, and another stupid brat who's at the same level!" Daigo summarized. "This is fantastic! Lady Luck's finally on my side for once!"

Is this guy right in the head? I wondered to myself. Since I was active as an adventurer under the alias of Dark, I made sure that my stats were constantly falsified to maintain my cover, but in spite of this, Daigo had been able to figure out my real power level. I guessed it was probably because I'd unleashed ten tactical-class spells at once. Yet even though he was facing two Level 9999 opponents, he still saw us as sitting ducks that would help him to level up. If I were to believe what Miki had blurted out, then it must have been the swords

making him so cocky. *He still wants to fight us even knowing the odds are stacked against him*, I thought. *Just how powerful are those swords of his?*

“I might even reach Level 9999 myself once I’ve wasted you all!” Daigo bragged. “This is too sweet a chance to pass up!” He saw us as prey rather than overwhelming threats to his life. He must have seriously been a real leveling freak if he was *this* dedicated to his task.

Daigo ate up the ground as he sprinted toward where I was still standing watching the battle from the roof of the Great Tower.

“Master!” Nazuna yelled, running at breakneck speed to block Daigo’s path. He slashed Nazuna with his blades, leaving a nick in her armor.

“Prometheus! Heal my reality!” Nazuna chanted to fix the tiny crack in her armor. Or to be perfectly accurate about it, rather than repairing the armor, the sword rewrote reality to one where the armor was completely undamaged. Nevertheless, the fact remained that Daigo’s mythical-class swords were powerful enough to cause damage to Nazuna’s armaments.

Just as I was considering what my next move should be, I received a Telepathy call from Mera. “Master, can you spare a minute?”

I noticed she sounded pretty shaken up. “Yeah, what’s wrong? Has something happened?” I asked. While I was responding to the Telepathy message, I simultaneously fired off an SSR Solar Ray card to ward off Daigo, but exactly as I’d thought would happen, its trajectory curved upward from my intended target and off into the sky. Daigo started ascending at high speed toward my position on the tower roof as if he was running up some invisible staircase.

“Yer not hurtin’ master while I’m around!” Nazuna yelled, leaping into the air after Daigo. He turned to face Nazuna and unleashed a flurry of sword strikes that once again scratched up Nazuna’s armor.

“Prometheus! Heal my reality!” Nazuna shouted, and as her armor automatically repaired itself, she swung her sword heavily toward Daigo to bash him out of midair.

“Dammit!” Daigo yelled, crossing his swords to try to block Nazuna’s blow, but it wasn’t enough to stop him from getting slammed to the ground again.

Nazuna landed on the ground as well and dashed toward Daigo. “I’m gonna smash ya into outer space!”

Daigo clicked his tongue and chose to put a bit of distance between him and Nazuna, knowing that he was at a disadvantage at close quarters.

“Mera, I’m in the middle of a battle here, so could you make it quick?” I said through my Telepathy link.

“Certainly, master,” Mera replied with a chuckle. “So the thing is, Miki’s fallen in love with Suzu and defected over to our side.”

“Miki defected? That’s awesome!” I said. “Now we can— Wait, she fell in love with *who*?”

“With Suzu,” Mera repeated. “Miki is literally head over heels in love with her, and she’s defected to our side so she can be with Suzu as her life partner. We didn’t even have to fight her. Of course, Suzu’s having none of her advances, but Miki keeps on saying all this stuff about wanting to marry Suzu, and wanting to bear Suzu’s children, and wanting Suzu to bear *their* children...”

“Sorry, Mera,” I interrupted. “Can you back up a minute? You’re not making sense.”

Mera cackled wildly. “I can relate. It makes no sense to me either.” What Miki was doing must have been *really* bonkers if Mera was this baffled despite witnessing the whole scene.

“But putting aside all of her drivel, Miki did cough up some info on the intruder’s swords in exchange for letting her defect to our side,” Mera continued. “They’re mythical-class weapons known as the Elemental Blades, and they work by using elementals.”

“Elementals?” I said, and it was as if the scales had fallen from my eyes. “Of *course*! Elementals!”

Using fire and ice elementals would explain how Daigo was able to deflect ranged magical attacks, and those same elementals would also be able to partially absorb physical attacks. But even if Daigo’s swords *were* able to control elementals, that in itself wouldn’t necessarily make them the most powerful mythical-class weapons in the world.

Mera immediately cleared up that puzzle. “Miki said the swords don’t just control elementals, they create new ones. They sometimes even create elementals that aren’t supposed to exist in this world.”

“Elementals that aren’t supposed to exist?” I queried. “What do you mean by that?”

Mera chuckled grimly. “Miki said his swords can create elementals that can kill opponents on sight, ones that confer eternal youth, and even ones that give someone unbeatable luck. The swords can make elementals with any property the user can think of.”

“Whoa, yikes.” I whistled in awe. “Yup, I can see how that *would* make them the most powerful mythical-class weapons.”

“But here’s another thing,” Mera continued. “She says they’re the strongest weapons only because Daigo says they are.”

So he just thinks he has the strongest weapons, huh? I thought to myself. That meant both Miki and Daigo thought their team was virtually unbeatable because they had swords that could create and control any elementals they could think up. And if you were to take all of these claims at face value, they would be right.

“But hold on a minute,” I said. “If the Elemental Blades are that powerful, how come we’re still standing?” If the swords were as deadly as advertised, Daigo should have been able to kill Fenrir in an instant, but my God Wolf was still alive and kicking, albeit pretty banged up.

“The swords *themselves* are super powerful, it’s true, but apparently, it’s really tough to use them right, or so Miki says,” Mera relayed, laughing. “Daigo thinks he hasn’t been able to fully harness the powers of the Elemental Blades because his power level isn’t high enough yet.”

All the pieces were finally starting to fall into place. Now I truly understood why Daigo was a so-called “leveling freak,” and I also realized that I had to stop him here and now before he could level up further. Though now that I knew the secret behind his weapons, I figured it wouldn’t be too hard to see him off. I ended my Telepathy call with Mera, and from my UR Card Holder, I drew the one gacha card I should have used from the very start.

“SSSR Truth’s Eye—release!” I yelled, activating a triple super-rare gacha card that didn’t just work on me, but also on my allies.

“What’s that?” Nazuna asked. “There’s some kinda cloud thingy floatin’ around that guy!”

As she said, Daigo was surrounded by a semitransparent, humanoid-shaped mist, which must have been an elemental.

“Nazuna! His swords are able to create and control elementals!” I called out to her. “That’s why he’s been able to partially block all of your blows!”

“Hey! How’d ya know about my swo—” Daigo started before abruptly stopping midsentence when he realized the answer to his unfinished question. “That lousy skank! She *squealed* on me!”

“Nice goin’, master!” Nazuna called back. “Now I know how to beat ’im!” She rushed toward Daigo again with her Prometheus held aloft.

Daigo pointed his twin swords at Nazuna. “Wind Elemental, rip this half-pint to shreds!” The elemental lunged at Nazuna, but now that she could see it, the elemental was no match for the Vampire Knight and her Prometheus.

“We know how ya fight now, so that ain’t gonna work!” Nazuna said as she batted away pieces of the elemental. “That means you’re no match for my master, X-Face!”

The same wind elemental that had been able to tear chunks out of Fenrir was proving to be useless against Nazuna, and for the first time all battle, I could see in his eyes that Daigo feared for his safety.

“Chain Elemental! Shield Elemental! Charm Elemental! Protect me and stop this little brat!”

“You’ve got no chance, X-Face!” Nazuna yelled. “You’re too weak to stop me!” She hacked up all three of the elementals until there was nothing left of them before swinging her Prometheus down at Daigo faster than any ordinary eye could follow. A run-of-the-mill fighter wouldn’t have had any time to react, and only the top warriors in the Abyss would have even been able to sense the blow and shield themselves from it. But Daigo proved once more that he was a cut above the rest.

“Don’t screw with me, girly!” Miraculously, or by sheer grit alone, Daigo was able to block the Prometheus just in the nick of time by crossing his twin swords in front of him, and not only that, but he actually stepped forward into the swing to meet the Prometheus sooner, before it could reach its full momentum. Then, at the moment of contact, he just as quickly uncrossed his swords and repelled Nazuna’s sword. He grinned contemptuously, as if saying he didn’t need any elementals to beat back Nazuna’s sword swing.

Nazuna responded by sneering back at him. “Loser! I just tricked ya!” she boasted. She may have swung her sword at him faster than lightning, but that hadn’t even been the full extent of her might, and she had held back just enough for Daigo to be able to block her strike and repel the Prometheus. But with his arms now spread wide, he was exposed to Nazuna’s next strike. Daigo had focused so much on blocking the first attack, there was no way he would be able to completely dodge the next one, even if he managed to notice in time.

As soon as Daigo deflected her blade, Nazuna spun around, and using the added momentum, she unleashed her fully powered strike. “Prometheus! Bend reality and don’t kill!”

The speed of the sword swing went well beyond that of lightning, and the Prometheus seemed to disappear into thin air before reappearing buried deep into Daigo’s exposed torso. This blow would usually have been enough to slice Daigo clean in half, but thanks to Nazuna’s incantation, he was spared death, even if he was blasted backward, accompanied by a thunderous boom. He crashed through countless trees before finally ending up in his own little crater, the force making the ground shake. Once Daigo had come to a stop, Nazuna slung the Prometheus onto her shoulder so it was resting there, then scratched her nose with her free hand.

“Master said we should keep ya alive so we can ask ya questions. That’s why I didn’t kill ya,” Nazuna explained. “But I made ya think you’d won just ’cause ya blocked one of my sword swings. Y’see, now that I know where all yer power’s comin’ from, ya don’t stand a chance against me!”

While Nazuna basked in her victory, I chuckled to myself and jumped down from the roof of the Great Tower. Daigo had already dropped both of his twin swords in favor of rolling around on the ground clutching his belly due to the

excruciating pain from Nazuna's strike that had caused him to spew up bile, blood, saliva, and the contents of his stomach. Of course, this wasn't *nearly* enough payback for killing my Snake Hellhound, but I did feel a little better watching him suffer like this. Unfortunately, I didn't have all that much time to enjoy the spectacle, since we needed to capture Daigo and pump him for information. Since Miki had already defected to our side, I didn't really expect Daigo to add anything of value intelligence-wise, but on the positive side, at least he would be able to confirm anything Miki might tell us.

I instructed Nazuna to use the Prometheus to make a copy of herself, just in case Daigo decided he was going to pull a sneak attack on us while we tried to detain him. My thinking was that if he managed to seriously injure one of the Nazunas in the struggle, the other Nazuna could still heal her. But before we could even approach Daigo, he finally said something, his voice trembling with rage as if he was face-to-face with his sworn enemies.

"I'll kill you..." Daigo muttered before suddenly raising his voice. "I'll kill you! I swear I'll *obliterate* you!" Even though he was obviously still in pain, he picked up his Elemental Blades, and I could see that his eyes were ablaze with anger, resentment, pain, and humiliation, all swirling in a vortex.

"You're *dead*, you little piece of shit!" Daigo yelled at Nazuna. "You think you're better than me, short stuff? Well, you can go screw yourself and pound sand!"

Having recovered from his pain enough to move freely again, Daigo raised both of his Elemental Blades high into the air, then plunged them into his own body. At first, I was shocked, thinking he must have killed himself to prevent himself from being captured, but after a few seconds passed, he was still standing in the same spot and still very much breathing. The two swords melted into his body until they disappeared entirely, and tattoos appeared on his face where there hadn't been any a moment ago.

"Weapon Fusion!" Daigo yelled. "And Sole Supremacy!"

As soon as these words had passed his lips, my body grew leaden, and I noticed that I wasn't the only one who felt this way.

"I'm feelin' kinda weak," Nazuna grumbled. I activated an SR Appraisal card

on us to find out what was going on.

“All of our abilities are being drained?” I said incredulously. Even Nazuna had lost twenty percent of her usual skill level, so it was hardly any wonder that she was feeling weak. On the other hand, Daigo looked like he was growing stronger and stronger, as if he was absorbing all of our abilities.

Daigo sneered as he lapped up our shocked reactions. “Looks like you runts have finally figured it out. My Gift, Sole Supremacy, allows me to lower the stats of my enemies while raising the stats of me and my allies. And not only that—”

He spread his arms wide and seemed to summon a large, dark, humanoid elemental above his head. The mere sight of it alone sent chills down my spine.

“My other Gift, Weapon Fusion, allows me to become one with my Elemental Blades, which means I can now unleash the full power of the blades!”

“Wait a minute!” I yelled. “I thought humans could only have *one* Gift!” This simple fact was conventional wisdom pretty much everywhere, yet here was this Daigo character standing before me, claiming he had *two* powerful Gifts at his disposal.

Daigo laughed maniacally. “Feast your eyes on the world’s only Double Gifter, useless turds! You’re just trash bit players waiting to be slain by me! Now it’s time for you to die and feed me the points I need to level up!”

Daigo looked up at the creepy dark elemental above him, which must have been created using the twin blades he had absorbed, then issued an order to it.

“Death Elemental!” he yelled. “Kill these little pukes!”

The Death Elemental screeched soundlessly, and this one act killed every tree and blade of grass in a wide area, the soil turning dry and sandy. Death permeated the air, draining all color, sucking out all moisture, and even extinguishing all the light. Within the space of a moment, our surroundings were in total darkness. The Death Elemental had literally and figuratively killed *everything* within its vicinity. On seeing this barren world he had created, Daigo roared with maniacal laughter.

“You pip-squeaks are dead! You hear me? Dead!” Daigo yelled. “I’m completely unbeatable now! All you’re good for now is dying and feeding me

experience points! Mwa ha ha—*gah!*”

As it turned out, the darkness was only temporary, and the moment light broke through it again, I shut Daigo up with a single powerful punch that sent him rolling backward across the ground so fast, a cloud of dust was kicked up in his wake. It took him a good while to come to a rest, and the Death Elemental floated after Daigo as if it were worried about him. Splayed out on the ground, Daigo just about managed to raise his head, but he struggled to get his eyes to focus on me, since he was still groggy from my punch. In truth, I thought I’d hit him hard enough to knock him out cold, but it looked like I’d only done a bit of damage to his stats, nothing more.

“How the hell are you still alive?” Daigo blurted out in confusion. “If you get hit by the Death Elemental, you should be dead! Even if you’re resistant to instant death attacks, that shouldn’t matter. It was supposed to strike you dead on the spot!”

“Yeah, that thing did overwhelm my resistance stats,” I said. “And I’m sure I would’ve been killed if I hadn’t used an SSR Self-Sacrifice card. It’s a shame I had to burn one of them, though.”

The SSR Self-Sacrifice was a gacha card that basically died in my place if I ever found myself hit by an instant death attack. It was a single-use item that burned up and turned to ash on activation, but since it was only double-super rare, the Unlimited Gacha produced enough of them for me and my allies in the Abyss to each carry several on our persons at all times to protect ourselves. In other words, there was zero reason for Nazuna and me to be spooked by the Death Elemental.

“Anyway, how long are you gonna just lie around?” I sneered, looking down on Daigo with contempt. “Oh, and explain to me why you didn’t use your Weapon Fusion trick from the start. Are there limitations to your Gift? Is there a time limit? Or does it come with some kind of side effect?”

Daigo went pale, which told me I’d hit the nail on the head.

“Looks like I got it in one,” I said. “Now stop napping already and get up and fight me. Do you think I *care* if you’re a Double Gifter? That just makes you a weirder Gift wielder than most. Your Gifts may be double, but my Gift is

unlimited!”

“Y-You puny smartass!” Daigo yelled as he shot up to his feet, and even though he was still groggy, his eyes burned with hatred. “I can still make *other* elementals! Don’t forget that I’ve already debuffed you turds with my Sole Supremacy! Don’t go thinking you’ve won just because you can survive my death attack!”

“Do you really think that matters?” I said as I activated my UR Card Holder and released a whole bunch of stats-enhancing cards, which included the SSR Thought Accelerator, the SSR Sixth Sense Boost, the SSSR Accelerated Speed Boost, the SSSR Defense Build Enhancement, and the SSSR Ability Boost. I had one other trick up my sleeve too.

“Orka!” I yelled through my Telepathy link. “Back me up by playing some music!”

“Leave it to me, my most honorable lord and master,” Orka replied. “I call this piece ‘Lionheart.’” He had been put on standby to soothe the residents of Tower City with his music if necessary, but at this particular moment, I needed him to play his fiddle to buff my stats even further. Thanks to Orka’s playing, my stats rebounded to normal levels, then kept right on going.

Daigo activated his Appraisal and confirmed that my stats really were higher than before he’d used his Sole Supremacy on me. For the first time in this encounter, Daigo actually looked frightened, and I sneered at him as I stared him down.

“Told you my Gift was unlimited,” I bragged. “And thanks to my Gift, I can easily recover from some stupid debuff skill.”

Daigo was starting to get desperate. “S-Sword Elemental! Gravity Elemental! Darkness Elemental! Light Elemental! All elementals, kill those freaks!” he yelled.

The swarm of elementals Daigo had summoned rushed toward me and Nazuna, but I didn’t even bother to move from my spot.

“Prometheus! Bend my reality!” Nazuna yelled as she propelled herself forward from behind me. Her sword split the Vampire Knight into five identical

copies of herself, each one making quick work of the onrushing elementals.

“Ya ain’t layin’ a finger on master!” one Nazuna said.

“You’re *easy* to fight now that I can see ya!” said a second copy.

“Cause I’m awesome!” said a third.

“I bet master’s even *awesomer*!” another Nazuna added.

“Yeah, ’cause he’s super awesome!” agreed the last of the quintuplets.

“Nazuna!” I called out. “Take care of those elementals, will you?”

“Ya got it, master!” all five Nazunas replied in unison.

While they kept the elementals busy, I ate up the ground between me and Daigo. Thanks to Nazuna, the layer of protection the elementals had been providing Daigo had grown thin, allowing me to get within range to strike.

“S-Stay away from me—gah!” Daigo cried out as I buried my fist into his torso. But I didn’t stop there, since I had to pay him back for killing and maiming my allies. I punted Daigo straight up into the air, then took off after him and pummeled him as he soared higher and higher. Just as he was about to reach the apex of his arc, I did a vertical 360 spin in midair and landed an axe kick on him that blasted him straight back into the ground, the impact causing a small crater. But I still wasn’t finished with him.

“SSSR Plasma Sundown! SSSR Star Puncher! SSSR Bomber Lances—release!” I shouted, still in midair.

I limited myself to SSSR cards at most, because UR cards tended to be so powerful, I would risk doing damage to the city if I were to use them. Even so, these were the most potent SSSR cards in my arsenal, since I was facing a high-level opponent and I wanted to capture him alive, but I knew if I didn’t use potentially lethal force, there was a chance he might get away. Besides, if he did survive these attacks, we could always heal him later.

The Plasma Sundown formed a huge ball of superhot plasma resembling the sun that could be dropped on top of a foe, while the Star Puncher was an enhanced version of the SSR Solar Ray, meaning it fired a bigger laser beam. The Bomber Lances fired off multiple energy bolts intended to penetrate an

opponent, then explode them from inside. All three of these attacks rained down on Daigo, and even at his elevated power level, I imagined the impact would bring him to the brink of death. And sure enough, the strikes found their target and slammed into Daigo, but when the dust eventually settled, I noticed that my foe was surrounded by a red, circular force field, and it had just about managed to shield him from the worst of my multipronged offensive. I drifted back down to the ground with a wary eye still on Daigo, who was slowly getting to his feet in the middle of the small crater.

“I didn’t wanna do this,” Daigo muttered faintly. “I didn’t wanna go using my full powers, since that psycho skank and C might be in that tower. But now, I say screw it.”

The red force field suddenly started shining brighter, and Daigo’s pupils grew fully dilated with madness.



“I’m energizing the Elemental Blades inside me past their limits using my Weapon Fusion,” Daigo informed me. “I really didn’t want to do it, since it’ll destroy my swords forever, but this way, I’m *guaranteed* to kill you people and boost my power level. You, the witch, and that whole frickin’ tower are gonna be blasted to smithereens! Be sure to feed me a whole lotta experience points, you dumb prick!”

It sounded as though he believed the only way for him to win was by blowing himself up and taking everything else with him, but judging from what he’d just said, he would apparently remain unharmed in the explosion.

“We’re gonna cut ya down before ya get the chance to blast anything!” one of the Nazunas yelled, as all five copies charged at Daigo. In unison, the Nazunas swung their Prometheuses at Daigo, but he expanded his red force field bubble to block the blows. He roared with laughter at the Nazunas’ failed attempt to subdue him.

“You really think your attacks are still gonna work?” Daigo spat. “I’ve just sacrificed *two* mythical-class weapons in order to make powder out of you and your pals! You midgets ain’t stopping me! Not if those puny weapons are in the same class!”

“Darn it!” The Nazunas kept swinging their swords in vain at the red barrier, and all the while, the force field expanded and radiated yet more energy.

“This is what you get for royally pissing me off!” Daigo yelled. “You wiener kids shoulda let me kill you from the start, instead of trying to resist me! Now die like the trash you are! Die and max out my level!”

The capillaries in Daigo’s eyes were engorged with blood and pulsated grotesquely with every heartbeat. His newly created tattoos were also glowing in a weirdly rhythmic manner, indicating he was completely committed to blowing up the Elemental Blades. Underneath his ghoulish expression, Daigo looked very sure that he’d won the battle, but unfortunately for him, I still had one last card left to play.

“Nazuna! Move away from Daigo!” I ordered.

“Uh, ya got it!” the quintuplets obeyed.

“Commencing primary Soul Seal cancel code,” I chanted. “9999, four nines! God Requiem Gungnir!”

The EX God Requiem Gungnir was the only “extra rare” item my Unlimited Gacha had produced up to that point. Because the spear was way too powerful for me to handle in its regular form, Mei, Ellie, Aoyuki, and I had used our souls to nerf the weapon by sealing away its power, turning it into the boring-looking staff I usually carried around with me. Yet, I was able to unseal a quarter of the Gungnir’s power at my discretion, and doing this turned the staff into a spear with a dark blade at its tip.

The partially unsealed Gungnir emitted dark flames along its entire length that hovered around its shaft like smoke, and my hand audibly hissed like it was being seared by the spear’s energy. Just holding the weapon caused me to grunt in pain, but I should note that the Gungnir wasn’t *actually* burning my skin. It would be more accurate to say the Gungnir’s black magic was corrupting the flesh in my hand as well as my entire body, the weapon able to penetrate my Level 9999 resistance. But despite all of this, I knew instinctively that the Gungnir wouldn’t be able to break through Daigo’s elemental barrier. Not at quarter power, at least.

I need more power to break through his force field! I thought to myself before setting up a Telepathy connection to one of my lieutenants. “Ellie! Execute the Gungnir’s second cancel code!”

“B-Blessed Lord Light?” Ellie said uncertainly through the Telepathy link. “But if I do that, it’ll put your body in danger—”

“Ellie, there’s no time for arguments!” I interrupted, nearly screaming. “Do it now!”

The witch choked back her emotions. “A-As you wish, Blessed Lord.”

I could see mana churning around like boiling lava inside Daigo’s bubble, which told me it was only a matter of time before he unleashed an apocalyptic explosion. If I’d allowed Ellie to argue with my call, not only would she be reduced to ash, the Great Tower and the whole city at its base would be too. I couldn’t afford to stop and think about what might happen to me.

Steady and clear, Ellie’s voice resonated through the Telepathy link.

“Commencing secondary Soul Seal cancel code! Bacikal, iweleth, sheriruth, adyeshach, akzeriyyuth, kaitul, shakah, chemdah, aiyatsbus, qimranut. O Tree of Evil, contort thy vagaries and become thy iniquities! God Requiem Gungnir!”

The Gungnir transformed a second time, the tip splitting in half and becoming an L-shaped blade large enough to slice the heads off several people at once. Now that the weapon was half unsealed, the dark flames it emitted coiled themselves around my arm and shoulder, reaching up as far as my face and lapping against the right side of it. My right eye had started glowing bright red, and I felt like I had no control over that side of my body. I knew if I held on to the Gungnir for too long in its present state, I would lose my entire sense of self. I focused both my red eye and my normal eye on Daigo, and hurled the Gungnir toward him as if it were a harpoon.

“Neutralize that thing, God Requiem Gungnir!” I yelled.

“You runty piece of shit!” Daigo hissed back. “I’m blowing up the most *powerful* mythical-class weapon in the world! Do you really think that little *twig* is gonna stop me? I’ll just blast that weapon into atoms, then do the same to the rest of you road apples!”

Just as Daigo pushed his energy force field past critical mass, the Gungnir slammed into it head-on.

“I’ll be the mightiest!” Daigo declared. “I ain’t going nowhere till I’ve murdered that bastard Hei for giving me these scars on my face! I’ll destroy everything in this area, raise my power level, then take back what was taken from me!”

“You say those swords are the most powerful mythical-class weapons in the world?” I asked. “First of all, you can’t prove that. And even if you *are* right, they’re still just a pair of mythical-class swords.”

It was true that the Elemental Blades were packing enough energy to cause a devastating explosion that would turn everything over a fairly large area to soot, and Daigo was certainly powerful enough as a Master to trigger such a catastrophe as a last resort, but if I took him at his word, his twin swords were merely the most powerful *mythical-class* weapons, while I had in my hand a much more powerful *genesis-class* weapon that could beat his blades any day

of the week.

“Finish off him and his weapons, Gungnir!” I yelled. Even though Daigo’s crimson force field was glowing as brightly as the midday sun, the spear’s dark flames twisted around like a tornado and sucked up all the energy it was putting out. Then, with the force field dispersed, the Gungnir sped toward its intended target, Daigo.

“A-Are you shitting me?” Daigo wailed. “I even sacrificed my Elemental Blades! This can’t be happen—”

Before Daigo could finish his sentence, the Gungnir sucked him into its dark flames with the remnants of the popped energy bubble, completely erasing our adversary from existence. The Gungnir continued its flight into the forest, its dark flames sucking up trees and other objects in its path, but after it had traveled a certain distance, it stopped, arced back, and returned to me.

Our battle with Daigo had ended, and Nazuna and I stood in the middle of the barren wasteland in the middle of the forest that had been carved out by our fighting. The Great Tower and the city had escaped unscathed, but I hadn’t been so lucky, and half of my body had been corrupted by the half-unsealed Gungnir.

Chapter 14: Interrogation

“D-Do we really hafta do this?” Nazuna said tearfully.

“Well, we could subject Blessed Lord Light to a very lengthy purification treatment, but he wouldn’t be able to use his right arm at all during that time,” Ellie explained. “I personally believe the decision taken by His Blessedness is both logical and correct.”

Nazuna, Ellie, and I had returned to the bottom of the Abyss, and we were all gathered in a room in my underground citadel, with me lying on a bed. Even though Ellie made it sound like she had accepted what was about to happen next, she also looked like she was on the verge of passing out. But more of my pity was reserved for Nazuna, who I’d ordered to do something that was pretty much unthinkable.

“Look, I *am* sorry for putting you two through this,” I said. “But I simply don’t have time to get my arm purified. This is the fastest option available to us.”

Nazuna whined softly. “Oh, master...”

And why were my two lieutenants looking so unnerved, you might ask? Well, I had been forced to unseal half of the Gungnir’s power in my fight with Daigo, and the dark energy released by the weapon had corrupted my body. I had concentrated my resistance stats on my face and torso area, but this had necessitated leaving my right arm at the mercy of the Gungnir’s cursed powers and now the whole arm was corrupted, maybe even down to the bone. Not that it hurt at all; in fact, I couldn’t feel any sensation in my arm whatsoever. I couldn’t wiggle a finger or channel any mana into the limb.

Even if I used a whole bunch of SSSR High Exorcism cards, they wouldn’t be able to restore my arm right away. In truth, it would probably take years of constant treatment with High Exorcism cards before my arm was fully healed. But I was still in the middle of taking revenge on my sworn enemies and uncovering the truth about their betrayal, which meant I couldn’t afford to be out of action for that long.

For that reason, I'd asked Nazuna to use her Prometheus to amputate my arm, and I'd laid it on a chopping block, ready to be sliced off. Ellie would then use her ultimate-class healing spell to regrow my arm. Due to my elevated power level, it was next to impossible for a lesser blade to even scratch me, let alone cut off one of my limbs. The Prometheus, however, was a different matter. Problem was, Nazuna's loyalty to me meant she was understandably reluctant to hurt me in any way, and I could see that the prospect was equally horrifying for Ellie. But I really had to get this whole thing over and done with quickly because I needed to interrogate Miki, and I had a *lot* I wanted to ask her about.

"Ellie, Nazuna, I'm sorry for making this so hard for you two," I said. "But I need this to be done now so that I can use my arm again. And Nazuna, make sure you cut it off with one good swing. If you have to take more than one swing, it's gonna hurt. A *lot*."

Nazuna whimpered sadly as tears welled up in her eyes, but she responded with a small nod before taking a few deep breaths to steel herself for the unpleasant task ahead.

"O-Okay, Ellie," said Nazuna. "Here I go!"

"Ready when you are, Nazuna," Ellie replied.

Nazuna gulped down a couple more deep breaths, then raised her sword. "Prometheus! Sharpen my reality!" These words made Nazuna's blade sharper, if that was even possible. She aimed for my right shoulder and, with a smooth downward motion, cleanly chopped off my corrupted arm. The amputation was so neat, it was like I'd never had an arm there in the first place.

With her grimoire open in her hands, Ellie immediately recited the incantation for her ultimate-class spell. "Magic power, highly blessed! Save him from the brink of death! Though we take our lives in vain, spare his exit from this plane! Bestow on him the light of life, and delay his trip to Paradise—Ultimate Lief!"

I screamed as new bone, nerves, blood vessels, muscles, skin, and fat sprouted from the open wound in my shoulder to create a new arm. The experience was incredibly painful and altogether gross, but it was all over in a matter of seconds. Unlike my old corrupted arm, which had looked like it was

made out of ink, my new arm looked and felt healthy. I didn't like the way the process had left me drenched from head to toe in cold sweat, but my joy at finally being able to feel *something* from my right hand again trumped any feelings of disgust.

I sat up and swung my legs over the side of the bed as I gingerly tested the feeling in my new limb. "Thanks, you two. I got my arm back."

"Master, are ya still hurt anywhere?" Nazuna asked, still on the verge of tears.

"I'm fine, honestly," I replied. "But thanks for worrying about me, Nazuna." I tenderly touched her on the cheek to calm her down, and she grabbed my hand to stroke her cheek properly with it.

Ellie felt a mix of jealousy and relief as she watched on. "Blessed Lord Light, what should we do with your amputated arm? If I may have your permission, I'd like to keep it for research purposes."

"Do what you like with it," I said. "After all, there's a whole bunch of stuff we don't know about the Gungnir and its dark energy."

"And you say you're able to read more text when you do an Appraisal on the Gungnir now?" Ellie said.

"Yeah," I said. "I was surprised when I first checked it out."

For some reason or other, most of the Gungnir's stats were obscured, and an Appraisal had originally described the weapon as: "A spear____a____god." But after removing the second seal and beating Daigo with it, the main description for the weapon now read: "A spear__a burial__a god."

"I don't know whether it's because we removed the second seal, because we beat a Master with it, or because it swallowed up the Elemental Blades," I said. "All I can say for sure is the Gungnir is full of mysteries."

"That much is certain," Ellie agreed.

"So if you find anything out, let me know," I told Ellie.

"Understood, Your Blessedness," she replied with a bow. When she arose, I wordlessly beckoned her closer, and she obeyed, despite eyeing me curiously, trying to guess my intentions. When she was within reach, I used my free left

hand to stroke her cheek.

“Thank you, Ellie,” I said tenderly. “Because of you, I got my arm back.”

“B-Blessed Lord Light?” Ellie said, initially shocked by my actions. “I-I only did what you requested me to do! Then again, I could never say no to your divine touch.”

Ellie tried to maintain a degree of respectability in front of Nazuna, but she eventually gave in, and I stroked both of my lieutenants’ cheeks to their satisfaction. Afterward, I took a bath, put on a change of clothes, then went off to question Miki, both excited and somewhat nervous about the kind of mind-blowing secrets I would surely hear from her.



It didn’t take Ellie, Nazuna, and me long to reach the part of the training grounds where we were holding Miki, the Master we had caught spying in Tower City.

“Oh, you’re *finally* here!” Miki chirped. “I was *wondering* how long you were gonna keep Miki waiting.”

Miki had been tied to a chair and blindfolded, and she wasn’t wearing the respectable dress she’d had on when we fought her, but had changed into what I could only assume was her usual garb: hot pants, thigh-high boots, and a wide-sleeved jacket that she wore off-the-shoulder, exposing a tiny top that looked more like a bra. Her outfit showed a lot of skin, plus her belly button, and to complete the casual look, she’d let her hair down.

We had cuffed Miki’s hands and feet, and placed an SSSR Curse Collar around her neck. This gacha item had the ability to reduce the power level, mana, and physical skills of the wearer, as well as suppressing the powers of whatever Gift they wielded, and it couldn’t be removed without the help of someone else. But since Miki was a Master, even with a reduced power level, she still posed a threat, so we had decided to restrain her further by casting a strategic-class spell, the Dorn Fesseln.

Mei was already there, watching over Miki, as was Suzu, who was a *very* relevant party to the proceedings. In addition to these two, I had also brought

two more Level 9999 lieutenants with me, who would be able to keep Miki under control if she decided to resist. As for my fourth SUR warrior, Aoyuki, I'd assigned her to carry out surveillance around the Great Tower in case there were any other intruders. If I had to pass judgment on it, I would have said this setup to prevent Miki from escaping was foolproof, because not only were her powers debuffed, she also wasn't able to break free of the Dorn Fesseln, which was designed to hold max-level fighters, and even if she *did* manage to break free of its steely vines, she would find herself having to fight her way through four Level 9999 opponents, plus Suzu.

Mei and Suzu bowed the moment they saw me, then Mei proceeded to update me on the situation. "While you were away, Master Light, our subject showed no signs of doing anything suspicious. All she did was talk to us during your absence. However..."

"What is it, Mei?" I asked.

Mei took a moment to choose her words carefully before relating the issue to me. "Our subject appears to be completely infatuated with Suzu, and she has been repeatedly directing comments toward her, many of which were repuls—" Mei paused and corrected herself. "Many of which were *unsuitable* for a polite audience. As such, I would recommend that you rethink your participation in this interrogation, Master Light."

"It's okay, Mei," I assured her. "She has important information that I need to hear for myself, no matter how jarring her words may be. But thanks for looking out for me."

"No, I apologize for speaking out of turn," Mei replied, still looking concerned. Part of me wanted to ask her why she was so worried, but I was too focused on the prospect of questioning Miki to pursue the matter any further. I turned to look at our prisoner, who was bound but not gagged, which meant she would be able to speak to us normally.

"Ellie, is it true that you're not able to read her memory?" I asked.

"Yes, Blessed Lord," Ellie replied. "The Oath Bee she implanted into her right cheek seems to be preventing me from performing that particular spell. We don't know what kind of pledge she made to the bee, so I felt a mind probe was

too risky.”

While the Oath Bee looked like a weak summon, it was actually a bee that imparted a powerful geas, according to Ellie. Under normal circumstances, Miki would have used the Oath Bee to tag an adversary and force them to be bound to some kind of oath, such as one stopping them from killing people. Breaking the oath would lead to the person’s death, and Miki was able to give the Oath Bee whatever conditions she wished.

“So she might have made an oath to die if we try to extract any sort of information from her, even through means of torture?” I summarized.

“Indeed, Blessed Lord,” Ellie replied.

“And you’re not able to cancel the Oath Bee or find out what the vow was?” I pressed.

“Please forgive me, Your Blessedness,” Ellie apologized. “The Oath Bee uses a very peculiar spell that I’m not familiar with, and it seems that nobody is able to analyze an Oath Bee once it has entered a body.”

Even the SSSR High Exorcism cards were unable to cancel the effects of the Oath Bee, and we weren’t able to gouge out Miki’s cheek and make a new one using Ellie’s Ultimate Lief spell either. Because while the Oath Bee had left a bee-shaped tattoo on Miki’s cheek, the geas affected her whole soul. It seemed Miki had thought of everything when she marked herself with the Oath Bee.

“So we’re not able to torture her for information, read her mind, or use drugs of any kind to make her talk?” I summarized.

“Correctamundo!” Miki butted in. “I’ll only tell you *what* I want *when* I want!”

Miki laid out her terms for singing like a canary in a singsong voice. “If you want Miki to tell you what you wanna hear, you gotta make sure Miki’s safe and secure and gets full room and board. Oh, and you need to let Miki marry her sweet little love muffin, Suzu.”

We all stared at Miki in silence. I’d heard that Miki had defected to our side after falling in love with Suzu at first sight, though when they’d first told me that Miki was asking for Suzu’s hand in marriage, I honestly thought they were pulling a prank on me. But on hearing it straight from the horse’s mouth, my

head started to ache, and I had to rub my temple until the pain eased a little.

“We can guarantee you’ll be taken care of,” I said. “But we’re not letting you marry Suzu.”

“Aw, but *why* not?” Miki whined. “I’d tell you *everything* if you just let me marry that dreamboat! You’re the leader of these girls, aren’t you? So all you have to do is order her to do it and it’ll all be cool!”

I turned to look at Suzu, and saw that her legs were shaking violently like two leaves being whipped about by the wind, while her face had gone deathly pale from fright. It didn’t take a mind reader to know that Suzu wanted nothing to do with Miki.



But Miki was absolutely right in what she'd said too. If I commanded Suzu to marry Miki, she would submit to my order without resistance. But only if I wanted.

"No, it won't be cool," I said to Miki. "Yes, I'm pretty sure Suzu will marry you if I tell her to, but it's plain to see she doesn't want to. Suzu and everyone else here aren't my underlings or maids that I boss around however much I want. They're my family. My allies. I can't force a member of my family to do something she doesn't want to do, even if that means we're not able to get some critical intel we might have otherwise."

I used to think the Concord of the Tribes were my family too, until they betrayed my trust right here in the Abyss. I wasn't about to do the same thing to the new family my Unlimited Gacha had blessed me with. Suzu and everyone in the arena looked moved by this little speech from the heart, to the point where I was starting to feel a little bashful under their admiring gazes.

"Ellie," I said.

"Yes! What will it be, Blessed Lord?" she replied a little too enthusiastically. "Please know that I'm perfectly willing to carry out whatever you command me to do!"

I grinned wryly. "Then I empower you to attempt to extract information from her using any method of your choosing. If you kill her in the process, I won't hold it against you, or even care."

"As you wish, Your Blessedness," Ellie said sweetly. "I will try to salvage whatever intel is contained in her mind to the best of my abilities."

"Huh? Hey, wait a second! Don't do that!" Miki said, reacting frantically now that she knew she wasn't necessarily valuable enough as an asset to keep alive. "Okay, okay, I'll put my marriage to sweet Suzu on hold for now, so let's work *something* out!"

"You wish to negotiate?" I said.

"Yup!" she confirmed. "Miki will give you intel in return for favors. In other words, you scratch *my* back, and I'll scratch *yours*. Deal? I'd say it's a fair bargain."

I didn't answer her immediately. Sure, the deal *sounded* fair, but how good a bargain it was depended entirely on whether or not Miki would insist on another ridiculous demand I couldn't entertain. In truth, it was pretty suspect, but I was curious despite myself.

"Fine, I hear you," I said. "So what *do* you want?"

"Oh, that's easy!" Miki said, perking up. "I wanna **** Suzu raw, all gooshy and sloppy! I think that's good enough to get us started!"

I felt the mood in the arena turn frigid, and Suzu looked like she was about to faint in response to Miki's very graphic demand. *Maybe we should give up on extracting intel from her and just execute her*, I thought in all seriousness.

Mei shared my pained expression, while Ellie's face had gone beet red. Nazuna, on the other hand, looked at Miki in total befuddlement because she hadn't understood what Miki's foul language meant. Suzu was still white as a sheet, while Lock looked about ready to resolve this awkward ordeal by firing a bunch of bullets at Miki.

I better jump in and say something before Lock really does just straight-up murder her, I thought. I still wanted to get as much info as I could out of her, and for her part, she seemed willing to play ball. If she proved to be completely useless as a source of info, we always had the option of executing her later.

I held up my hand to signal to my allies to stand down. "That's not going to happen. I told you, I won't force Suzu to do something she very clearly doesn't want to do."

"Suzu doesn't even wanna hook up?" Miki giggled. "She may be playing hard to get now, but one of these days, I'm gonna make her putty in my hands, and her body and soul won't be able to *live* without Miki. Then we'll spend *all* day getting mushy, gooshy, and slippery wet like a couple of slugs in a rug."

The words coming out of Miki's mouth were honestly terrifying me, which wasn't helped by the fact that she was saying it all with such a gooey, lust-filled voice. Now I understood why Mei had tried to warn me not to interrogate her: she didn't want me hearing all of this sexually explicit stuff Miki was spewing. I appreciated Mei's concern, but I was mature enough to be able to put up with Miki's dirty remarks if it meant getting some useful intel out of it.

“Well, nobody’s getting ‘gooshy’ or ‘sloppy’ —ahem, I mean, all that stuff is off the table,” I said. “You need to come up with some actual, *realistic* requests, or we can’t help you.”

The moment the words “gooshy” and “sloppy” left my mouth, all of my allies blushed with anger and embarrassment at how Miki had influenced me, and they glared at our detainee with renewed fury. All, that is, except Nazuna, of course. But despite all of this rage that was directed at her, Miki responded without even a modicum of fear in her voice.

“Aw, come on. I was being *totally* realistic,” Miki grumbled. “So you want me to walk back my demands? Fine. If you don’t *want* me touching her, then you can just *give* me those dark tights she’s wearing.”

Is it wrong that I’m thinking this piece of insanity is actually preferable than everything else she’s pitched so far? I wondered. I glanced across at Suzu, and it looked like she was much more willing to consider this concession compared to the prospect of marrying Miki or sleeping with her. I directly consulted with Suzu about it, and she said she was prepared to give in to Miki’s request, though once we’d confirmed with Miki that we had a deal, she rattled off a bunch of conditions for the transaction.

“I wanna *see* sweet Suzu taking off her tights, so you’d *better* take off this blindfold,” Miki said. “And it *has* to be those exact tights she’s wearing, not some new pair of tights, nor someone else’s tights! Are we clear? Give me tights! Give me tights! Give me tights!”

Miki had started acting like a reveler in a tavern, egging on Suzu to immediately take her tights off in front of everybody, and she was shouting so enthusiastically and rhythmically, Nazuna was just about to join in when Ellie smacked her around the back of the head and whispered a short but stern lecture in her ear.

I pretended not to notice what Nazuna and Ellie were up to, and turned to face Miki. “Yeah, you’re not getting those tights right now. You’re still shackled, so you can’t hold them. Still, you have my word that you’ll get Suzu’s tights. Though first, you need to answer my questions.”

“Fine, you win,” Miki said, conceding defeat. “Then, I’ll keep *my* word and

answer your *question*. And you're only allowed *one* question, because that's the equivalent value of the tights. If you wanna ask me more questions, you gotta give me more."

I took a moment to mull this over. "All right. You got it. We'll limit it to one question." I decided to play along with her game, since Miki seemed to be acting in good faith, for whatever that was worth. Also, I didn't really want to drag out the haggling and end up putting Suzu on the spot again.

Okay, so what's my first question gonna be? I pondered. I had so many questions to choose from, so I had to frame my words in such a way that a whole bunch of info would be drawn out in one go. After taking a little while to think about it, I finally settled on my question.

"So there's you, Daigo, Hisomi..." I said. "Who exactly are you guys?"

"Whoa, that's gonna be a pain to answer," Miki replied. She still sounded eager to spill the beans, but I got the feeling she wasn't quite sure how to answer my question.

After several seconds of thinking time, Miki finally came out with a reply. "We're Masters, like the ones you keep talking about."

"That doesn't really answer the question," I said.

"Ugh, you're such a little pain in the butt!" Miki complained and pursed her lips. Since I'd picked such an open-ended question, it seemed Miki was forced to touch on a range of issues I'd been wondering about.

"Masters are basically souls the almighty C has brought to this world at the end of our past lives," Miki said. "Our souls retain all our memories from our previous lives."

"Wait, you're all souls that had previous lives?" I asked.

"Yup, we're people who used to live totally different lives in the past," Miki said. "All Masters remember their previous lives, and C was the one who brought all of our souls here."

Miki paused momentarily, then continued what was turning into a rather lengthy explanation. "Masters are divided into two factions: one worships C,

the other sees him as the enemy. Hisomi and the other Masters in the Dragonute Empire are hostile to C, while Miki's faction in the Demonkin Nation worships C. Both factions are always fighting because of our different views. Well, anyway, I came to investigate the Great Tower to see if the almighty C was here, and to find out if the dragonute Masters were planning something. And if those other Masters *had* been plotting something, I was meant to figure out how to stop them. Also, even though I say my faction worships C, it's not like we have a religion with a church or anything. The Masters in my faction follow C because we want him to grant whatever wishes we have."

She stopped to give me some time to process all of this new information. First of all, there were two factions of Masters that were opposed to each other, based on their stances alone.

While I was lost in thought, Miki snickered. "I wanted C to give me my ideal harem or life partner, but then I found my absolute *dream* girl Suzu right here," she said. "So now I don't care about C anymore, and that's why I defected."

Suzu held her breath, as if she were trying to keep herself from getting sick. She was so put off by the kind of stuff that was coming out of Miki's mouth, I could see the goose bumps on her skin.

"The dragonute Masters see C as the enemy, but they know they can't beat C, so they're working on an escape plan to get away from him," Miki explained. "I think the plan was called P.A. or something? The 'P' stands for 'Project,' but we're not entirely sure what the 'A' stands for, though we have debated it quite a bit."

Miki paused and took a moment to think. "Oh, yeah! So there are five Masters each on the dragonute and demonkin side, making ten in total. Or there *was* before you guys killed Daigo, so I guess that means there's only nine Masters that Miki knows about. That is, unless another one gets revived."

The purpose of interrogating Miki was to clear up some mysteries, but the flood of intel from her was only raising more questions about souls that had been brought to this world from another by C, the P.A. project, the Masters split between the dragonutes and the demonkin, what powers the other Masters had, and what Miki meant exactly by "revived." But before I could

jump in with any follow-up questions, Miki put her foot down.

“Now, if you wanna know more, you gotta do Miki more favors of equal value,” she stated.

I gazed at her without saying a word. She was once an adversary, but she *was* dealing with me earnestly (in her own way), so I felt I had no choice but to call it a day there. I didn’t want to end up cheating or manipulating someone who didn’t deserve it, just like the Concord of the Tribes did to me.

“So what kind of favors would make you say more about what you were just talking about?” I asked.

“Hm, let’s see...” Miki thought on this for a couple seconds. “Well, you said I can’t **** Suzu raw, but now I understand that ****ing anyone raw would be taking things way too fast. So how about me and Suzu get into some hot and heavy ****ing, yuri-style? Or maybe Miki can *** Suzu’s ***** and make her *** like a ***** in heat. I also wanna get a taste of Suzu’s ***** side, so we can do some *****feeding role-play. Or we can even get into some ***** kink in the bathroom. Suzu probably doesn’t know a whole lot about those things yet, but you can let Miki coach her on *everything*. Oh, yeah. I also wanna take her and—”

Ellie covered Nazuna’s ears as tightly as possible as soon as Miki started droning on about her illicit fantasies. Mei and I both raised a hand to our temples and nursed our respective headaches. Suzu, the subject of Miki’s spiel, couldn’t take the verbal harassment anymore, so she backed away to the far end of the training grounds and covered her ears as she fought back tears.

It was true that I wanted the intel Miki had to offer, but I once again seriously considered just putting her to death on the spot—and not just for Suzu’s well-being, but also because I felt having Miki around would be a bad influence on both Nazuna and Yume. But in the end, I decided I would honor our promise, and Suzu would give her worn tights to Miki. We did, however, keep Miki in a holding cell with the Curse Collar around her neck, and just to make doubly sure she wouldn’t be escaping anytime soon, her cell was placed under constant watch.

Chapter 15: Their Separate Ways

Reclining on the sofa, Goh groaned with a mix of apathy and annoyance. “Well, looks like we lost contact with both Miki *and* Daigo right after that level grinder sped off to raid the tower.”

“We lost *contact* with them?!” Doc screeched in anguish. “How could this have *happened*?!”

“Doc. You’re too loud. Shut up,” Gira said.

The three remaining demonkin Masters had gathered in a room in a residence in the Demonkin Nation. Doc—a spindly male measuring two meters in height—wore a mask over his face and a blood-splattered lab coat hung loosely over his tall, lanky frame. By contrast, Gira was only 150 centimeters tall, making him even shorter than Miki, and a scarf with skull imagery on it covering his mouth complemented his baggy attire. As for Gira’s gaze, it was so piercing, it could run a person through like a dagger.

Doc wasn’t about to let Gira’s emotionally detached comment stand. “Gira! We don’t know what’s happened to two of our *precious* allies! If we can’t mourn their loss now, when *can* we mourn them?!”

“Said shut up,” Gira repeated. “Or else, I’ll *make* you.”

One of Gira’s arms moved under his baggy clothes, and although Doc didn’t consider himself a fighter as such, the room would almost certainly be reduced to rubble if the two Masters started battling. It didn’t come to that, however, because Goh intervened by loudly stamping his feet on the floor to get the pair’s attention.

“Don’t get me wrong, I ain’t against you two gettin’ into a deathmatch, but I ain’t finished talkin’ yet,” Goh said. “Once I’m all done speakin’, you can have your little catfight. Anyway, if Daigo and Miki are both missin’, that means something’s definitely up with that Great Tower. Miki may not be a natural-born brawler, but Daigo? Sure, that guy’s a levelin’ freak ‘cause he ain’t A-list

yet, but he's got two Gifts and those Elemental Blades of his, and they shoulda done a whole lotta damage to anyone lookin' to take him out. Yet he's gone like a ghost."

"Must've been formidable, his opponent," Gira speculated in short, staccato phrases, as was his way. "Wicked Witch of the Tower? I'd like to slash her throat." He grinned under his scarf, like a serial killer out for blood.

"The witch might be hidin' other bruisers or wild cards up her sleeve for all we know," Goh said, setting aside Gira's comments. "But now it's come to this, we gotta move against the tower, 'cause this job's too big for those candy-ass demons. Get ready to put in the work once I give the word. And *now* I'm done talkin'."

"Are you implying we could move against the tower at *any* time?" Doc asked. "Don't you have a specific schedule in mind? I'm in the middle of conducting experiments that I can't afford to postpone."

"Relax. It ain't gonna be tomorrow or even the day after," Goh assured him.

Gira gave Goh an odd look. "Not moving right away? Act fast, might rescue Miki and Daigo."

"Oh! A splendid idea! We *must* go save our comrades!" Doc cried. "And if they're already dead, we should at least retrieve their remains! I could even use their bodies in my experiments! I'm sure that wherever they are, they would rejoice in the knowledge that we're putting their corpses to good use in our efforts to bring about a new future for the human race!"

Their brows wrinkled, Goh and Gira looked at each other as Doc went off on another one of his speeches. Although Doc liked to hide behind platitudes extolling his so-called "comrades," his motivations always circled back to creating superhumans through grisly human experimentation. It was no secret that Doc enjoyed butchering people and monsters alike "for the future of the human race," as he put it, but the hedonistic ghastliness of Doc's experiments made even Gira wince. Though in fairness, it was hard to judge exactly who was worse: Doc, who used humans as guinea pigs ostensibly out of a sense of altruism, or Gira, who murdered humans out of pure malice.

Goh sighed and answered Gira's previous question. "We got word about Miki

and Daigo disappearin' way too late after the fact, so there ain't no use racin' against the clock to get there. Besides, that summit in the Duchy is comin' up, and since it was the demons who called that summit, we can't go makin' our move till this whole thing's over. The least we can do for our host nation is *not* smear mud all over their faces. You get me?"

"Stupid reason to hold back," Gira opined.

"I beg to differ, Gira," Doc interjected. "It is, in fact, highly *critical* that we do not embarrass our hosts! Especially if said host is a major power like the Demonkin Nation. I believe Goh is correct in his decision, and I fully support it!"

Gira didn't feel much like pushing back against Goh's proposed timeline, so he simply gave a slight shrug and quietly went along with it.

"Okay, that's settled," Goh said. "We'll make our move against the tower once the summit's wrapped up. Doc, Gira, make sure you're free by then."

The two other Masters answered in the affirmative, effectively finalizing the plans for this cadre's eventual retaliation against the Great Tower.



"Miki..."

At roughly the same time that the Masters in the Demonkin Nation were having their fateful meeting, Silica was on the second floor of her shop and staring into Miki's former bedroom, which had been stripped completely bare.

The last time Silica had seen Miki was on the day her neighborhood conducted an emergency evacuation drill that saw all the participants relocating to the Great Tower. A fairy maid had accidentally spilled soup down Miki's dress, and another fairy maid had taken Miki up to the second floor to change into some clean clothes. A short time later, while Silica was finishing up her food, she had felt the ground shake, and the fairy maids had come out and informed everyone on the first floor that a high-level monster had appeared in the forest nearby. The drill turned into a real "shelter in place" situation, and the fairy maids kept the residents in the Great Tower for their own protection.

Once the crisis had been resolved, Silica and the rest of the residents were allowed to return home, but she decided to stick around and wait for Miki to

come down from upstairs. However, she never showed. Silica eventually asked a fairy maid where her friend was.

“Miki?” the fairy maid pondered. “I have no idea who that is.”

Silica felt a chill run down her spine on hearing these words, and she immediately ran home to her shop, rushed upstairs to Miki’s bedroom, flung open the door and found the room completely empty. None of Miki’s belongings were there, and the bed, chair, desk, and closet had all been removed too. It was like nobody had ever been in the bedroom in the first place. While Silica was over at the tower, the fairy maids had removed everything Miki had used from the shop, including the utensils.

They’ve completely erased her, Silica realized. Though she had no idea why the city had given Miki the same punishment as that one man who had attempted to sexually assault one of the fairy maids. *I mean, Miki’s a girl, and I did warn her in no uncertain terms not to even think about attacking the fairy maids, so I don’t think she would’ve done that*, Silica thought.

And if she could rule that out, it meant Miki had committed an offense just as grave as attempted assault, if not more so. Silica knew there were only a few crimes that fit that particular bill. *Was she a spy who came here to get dirt on the Great Witch and the tower?* Silica asked herself. *That would make some sense...*

The fact that the shop had been cleared of *everything* that Miki either owned or had used while here could have indicated that the fairy maids had gathered up everything that might serve as evidence of Miki’s presumed espionage. In light of this possibility, Silica decided not to dwell on Miki’s disappearance any longer and act like she’d never lived with her here in the shop.

But as she gazed into the empty bedroom in silence, Silica couldn’t help thinking about her former friend. After all, people simply weren’t capable of forgetting about someone just like that. After several more moments of scanning the bedroom, Silica went downstairs to get the store ready for opening alone. She had too much work to do and too little time to do it all to be standing around, wallowing in her own sentimentality.



I was sitting at my desk in my executive office in the Abyss with both Mei and Ellie in front of me. Mei was standing like usual, while Ellie was down on one knee with her head bowed in apology.

“Blessed Lord Light...” Ellie began. “I deeply, deeply regret allowing an adversary to contaminate our city. Please punish me for my unforgivable negligence.”

Ellie was clearly talking about Miki, the demonkin Master who managed to infiltrate Tower City and send back information to the other Masters in her faction, which led to one of them—Daigo—attacking the Great Tower. Miki told us it had been “crazy hard” to get into the city, but once she was inside, everything was “easy breezy.”

The truth was, we *did* have a highly rigorous screening process for anyone entering the city, in order to weed out any spies or other unwanted intruders. Everyone underwent an Appraisal scan and other background checks, but Miki had been able to slip through that particular layer of security and send intelligence back to Daigo. Because Ellie was the administrator of both the Great Tower and the city, she felt responsible for Miki’s infiltration.

I sighed and leaned back in my chair. “Ellie, your strong sense of accountability is undoubtedly one of your good points, but we can’t lay the blame for Miki infiltrating the city at anyone’s door. In fact, if someone should take the blame for being spied on, it should be me.”

Ellie reflexively lifted her head in shock. “Oh, no, Your Blessedness! You are *absolutely* not to blame.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence, Ellie,” I replied with a smile. “But I didn’t find anything wrong in how the screening process was being conducted, and I wasn’t keen on the idea of setting up a creepy surveillance state where the private lives of our residents would be constantly monitored.”

For starters, I didn’t know how we’d explain to people that we would be watching them while they ate, relieved themselves, changed clothes, or did what husbands and wives get up to in their bedrooms. Though I had since come to realize that these privacy concerns were overly simplistic and had opened the door to near disaster.

“So with that being the case, I’m not going to blame anyone for this incident,” I reiterated.

“Oh, but Blessed Lord Light, you *must* punish me!” Ellie pleaded. “Rewarding good work and punishing bad is essential for any organization!”

“Ellie...” I sighed.

It was at this point that Mei spoke up for the first time since entering my office. “Master Light, may I say something?” I nodded at her to proceed. “I thoroughly understand how much you love each and every one of us, Master Light, but I must agree with Ellie in her assessment that those who make avoidable mistakes must be disciplined for it. I implore you to accommodate her wishes, Master Light.”

I raised an eyebrow. “You too, Mei?”

I guess everybody needs a good talking to from time to time. But Ellie didn’t do anything wrong, I thought. But if they wanted to die on this hill, who was I to judge?

“Fine, Ellie. I’ll find some way to punish you later on,” I said. “Will that make you happy?”

“I thank you for acceding to my request, Blessed Lord Light,” Ellie said, bowing her head again.

“I also thank you, Master Light,” Mei said, bowing along with Ellie. And with that settled, we moved on to the next topic.

“So the lesson we’ve learned is that it’s not enough to just screen everyone who comes into the city,” I said. “We need to monitor the residents too. I know I said I didn’t want to go peering into people’s private lives, but that’s now outweighed by the need to prevent another Miki from infiltrating the city.”

“A wise decision, Master Light,” Mei said. Ellie nodded in agreement.

I pulled out a gacha card. “I didn’t know what to do with this SSSR Level 2864 Baby Fae before, but I think the time has come to release it.”

The card produced a small fairy measuring only ten centimeters in height that had no attacking capabilities, though what it *did* have was the ability to multiply

itself as many times as it liked. Even its seemingly random power level of 2864 was actually a pun in our written script as it could be read as “to multiply.” I had once considered using the Baby Fae for surveillance up on the surface world, but since it wasn’t able to disguise itself as an animal like many of our other spy familiars, I’d shelved the card until this moment.

“Ellie, take this card and use it to establish a web of surveillance in the Great Tower and the city,” I said.

“As you wish, Blessed Lord,” Ellie replied.

I placed the card on a tray that was held out toward me by the fairy maid who was serving as my office attendant, and she promptly carried it over to Ellie, who took the card from the tray. Then, with that matter settled, I moved on to the final topic of discussion.

“So it appears I owe Lilith yet another favor,” I mused.

Mei nodded politely in the affirmative, but Ellie could only grind her teeth in frustration. While I wouldn’t say that Ellie saw Lilith as her enemy exactly, she did think the princess was taking me for granted, so I was willing to bet that she wasn’t sure whether to be thankful or furious that Lilith had accidentally helped to root out Miki. After all, if it hadn’t been for Lilith asking to go on an incognito tour of Tower City, we wouldn’t have had the conversation with Miki where she slipped up and revealed more than she intended. And if we’d discovered Miki’s espionage much later down the line, we might have ended up facing a bigger crisis.

I pretended not to notice Ellie’s obvious irritation. “We’ll pay Lilith back when I do bodyguard duty for her at the summit. But before that, I will need to complete a quest to raise the rank of my party.”

I put on my most cheerful voice when talking about my upcoming quest in order to keep things upbeat, and thankfully, Mei and Ellie actively took part in the conversation, though I couldn’t help noticing that Ellie still seemed a little peeved right up until she left my office.



As she and Mei walked down the hallway following their meeting with Light,

Ellie voiced what was on her mind.

“Mei, thanks for your help in convincing Blessed Lord Light to discipline me,” she said.

“Oh, do not mention it. If it had been me in your position, I would have likewise begged Master Light to punish me, or else I would have never forgiven myself,” Mei replied.

She was neither kidding nor trying to be polite with this response. Light meant the world to her, so if she were ever to commit any kind of error, unforced or otherwise, she would beat herself up past the point of no return. As such, in order to prevent Ellie from inflicting that flavor of psychological self-harm on herself, Mei had petitioned Light to punish the witch in some way to provide her with an emotional outlet. Even though Mei was her rival, Ellie had been grateful for her helping hand in this matter and held no hint of resentment toward her over it, so she felt she had to thank the head maid in the hallway, away from prying eyes. However, this show of empathy by Mei didn’t supplant Ellie’s competitive spirit.

“Just so you know, I will most definitely repay the favor,” Ellie promised Mei. “Just you wait and see.”

“I was merely helping out a fellow comrade,” Mei stated. “I do not believe there is any need for you to feel indebted to me.”

“B-But that’s unacceptable to me!” Ellie blurted out. The witch didn’t want to admit that she *needed* to pay Mei back, because if she didn’t, she’d feel guilty every time she received Light’s affection, but Mei picked up on this subtext anyway and responded with a rarely seen mirthful smile. It was like she was an older sister graciously allowing her younger sibling to fume, and Ellie was fully aware of this treatment.

“I-I bid you good day!” Blushing with shame, Ellie turned a corner to get away from Mei, who watched her go without saying another word.

She acts as if she can see right through me! Ellie sulked. *I simply can’t stand her!* But because Mei had helped her out back in Light’s office, she was unable to utter anything mean to her. As a result, Ellie’s thoughts turned to her other adversary: Lilith. *I can’t believe we’ve ended up owing that woman,* she seethed

internally. *She uses the Blessed Lord like her own personal gofer! But thanks to her, we were able to catch that execrable degenerate before it was too late.*



From Ellie's perspective, Lilith was just a normal human with no extraordinary talents or abilities, and she could have easily dismissed Lilith's contribution to capturing Miki as plain old dumb luck. That is, if she didn't have such an overactive imagination.

Did she know that degenerate was a spy all along? Ellie wondered. Was that impromptu interview a ruse so that we'd notice as well?

Of course, there was no way Lilith could have had any inkling ahead of time that Miki was a spy and had simply been curious about the living conditions in the settlement-turned-city. But Ellie eschewed Occam's Razor in favor of overanalyzing Lilith's motives.

Was she just acting all mediocre just to fool us into lowering our guard? Ellie pondered. If so, what could her ultimate goal be? Does she genuinely wish to raise the status of humans? Or does she want us owing her so many favors that we end up becoming her pawns?

Ellie rejected this last one in her head, since everybody in the Abyss had sworn absolute allegiance to Light alone, which meant no one would be able to exercise control over one of Light's servants, no matter how indebted the servant was.

But even if we do take into account our loyalty to His Blessedness... Ellie's mind went into overdrive as she carried on down the hallway. By the time she reached the end of it, her disdain for Lilith had been completely replaced by a sense of precaution. It remained to be seen whether this change was one for the better or the worse for Light and his allies, or for Lilith and the world at large.

Extra Story 1: Heaven and Hell

Sometime before our fight with Miki, I called Iceheat into my office in the Abyss.

“You wish for me to participate in an operation?” Iceheat said.

I gave a nod. “We just happened upon a mole in our midst, and we plan to bait her into a trap. I want you to lead this mole into our trap.”

We had pretty much confirmed that Miki was a spy, so we had sent a notice out to her neighborhood that all the residents were expected to take part in an evacuation drill, with the Great Tower as the place of shelter. The idea was to trick Miki into coming inside the tower so that building’s counter-spells would nullify any teleportation magic or item she might think to use, aiding our capture of her. I’d decided to recruit Iceheat to help lure Miki to one of the large reception halls on the second floor, because there was a chance our little mole would get spooked midway and try to fight her way out. Since Miki appeared to have a high power level, I couldn’t get a fairy maid to escort her, since that would be putting that fairy maid at risk.

“This will be a dangerous job,” I said to Iceheat. “But I believe you are the best person for it, since you’re a hardworking maid who’s not only powerful but also highly competent in everything you do. You’ll be alone with our target while you’re luring her into our trap, but both Nazuna and I will be close by if you need us. So do you think you’ll be able to take on this assignment?”

“Of course, Master Light!” Iceheat exclaimed. “I myself will accept whatever command you give me. Let me worry about the risks! I vow to carry out your orders to the fullest!”

“Thanks, Iceheat,” I said. “Once we’ve drawn up a complete plan of action, I’ll call you and the rest in for a meeting so that we can talk it all through. Until then, wait for me to summon you.”

“Understood, Master Light!” Iceheat bowed enthusiastically, and I smiled

back approvingly.



After her meeting with Light, Iceheat finished her work in higher spirits than she would normally have let show. After work, Iceheat ran into her friend, Mera, and she invited the chimera to come and have dinner with her, so they went down to the cafeteria, and after taking a seat at one of the long tables, they chatted over their meal.

“I can’t remember the last time you took me on a dinner date,” Mera cackled. “So what’s got you in such a good mood?”

Iceheat giggled. “You can tell?”

Mera chortled in response. “You’re smiling from ear to ear. *Anyone* can tell.” Mera was always teasing Iceheat about how overly brusque she was and for her straitlaced attitude, but now the maid was grinning away without reservation as she munched away at her pasta and salad.

“Well, I myself can’t tell you *exactly* what has happened due to confidentiality reasons, but I *can* say that Master Light has personally recruited me for a secret mission.”

“Wow, master personally picked you for a special mission?” Mera chuckled. “That would make anyone’s day, hun.” For her meal, Mera had what would have been called a steak if it wasn’t basically just an oddly shaped slab of medium-rare meat. She tossed the hunk of meat under her skirt and ate it that way.

Mera’s response tickled Iceheat’s need for validation, which only broadened the grappler maid’s smile. “Since our battle with the White Knights, I’ve been passed over for the mission in the Dark Elf Islands’ dungeon, the exploration of the relics underneath the Dwarf Kingdom, the battles against Naano and Cavaur, and the war with the beastfolk. While everyone else has had their chance to shine, I myself have been unable to serve Master Light. But now I can finally prove my loyalty to him, and I’m very thrilled to do so!”

Mera laughed. “Slow down, babe. You don’t wanna get overexcited and mess up like last time. If you do, I’ll just point and laugh endlessly at you.”

“There’s no need to worry about that,” Iceheat said haughtily. “I won’t waste this precious opportunity by making an error.” As she spoke, Iceheat twirled pasta around her fork without a sound as etiquette demanded. Mera looked at her confident friend with more than a hint of envy.

“I’m not gonna pry into what your secret mission is, but I’m starting to get jealous here,” Mera admitted. “I wonder if master will call me up, just like he did you.” Much like Iceheat, Mera ached to prove her loyalty to Light. Even if he told her to kill herself, she would gladly do so without hesitation, though because Light treasured all of his allies, that kind of command was unthinkable. But it just went to show how absolute Mera’s loyalty was. It was only natural she would feel jealous that Iceheat had been picked for such an important mission.

Iceheat smiled as she basked in Mera’s jealous gaze. “Master Light hasn’t told me the details of the mission yet, but even if you do end up joining, I myself will do the most to serve Master Light.”

Mera roared with laughter. “Oh, is that a promise?”

“Of course!” Iceheat said. “Unlike you, I haven’t had many chances to fight for Master Light.”

“Okay, you got me there,” Mera chuckled, knowing that she had no argument against that. After all, not only had Mera been selected to join Light on his quest in the Dwarf Kingdom ruins, she had also played a key role in the war with the Beastfolk Federation. In short, Mera couldn’t be as hungry to please as Iceheat inevitably was.

Iceheat grinned at Mera’s reaction. “In any case, I myself will offer up all of my ability to ensure that this mission is a success!”

Mera knew Iceheat was dead serious when she said this, though at the time, she wasn’t sure if this level of dedication would prove helpful or harmful. But just by looking at how Iceheat’s face was positively glowing, Mera knew her friend was practically in heaven at that moment in time.



Iceheat slammed her glass whiskey tumbler down on the cafeteria table.

“How could this have *happened*?”

Mera had joined Iceheat on her drinking jag, and she emptied her own glass of alcohol before chuckling at her friend’s consternation.

“I get what you’re going through, hun, but you need to ease up on the booze,” Mera warned.

“What’s even the point anymore?” Iceheat whined. “I thought I’d finally get to show Master Light my worth in battle, but then, that *woman* chose not to fight! Instead, she started spewing that unhinged drivel and surrendered! Why didn’t she fight me to the end?”

Iceheat had successfully escorted Miki up to the second-floor reception hall in the Great Tower and trapped her inside what was basically a spacious battle arena. However, an unexpected attack by an interloper outside had led Light and Nazuna to exit the room to take care of this new foe. In their place, Mera, Jack, and Suzu had joined Iceheat in her mission to capture Miki. However, Miki had instantly fallen in love with Suzu and decided to switch sides. Before that, Iceheat had pleaded with her three Level 7777 colleagues to let her fight Miki one-on-one so that she could prove herself to Light, and had even gone as far as calling Jack her “bro,” humbling herself in a way she would have never even considered doing if she hadn’t been so desperate. But despite everything, Miki had brought a premature end to the fight after barely trading any blows with Iceheat. The outcome had left the grappler maid feeling dejected enough to want to drown her sorrows.

Mera didn’t have much of a say when it came to listening to Iceheat’s grievances, but while she outwardly consoled her friend, she could barely contain her amusement at this turn of events. *This is the first time I’ve ever seen Iceheat wasted before*, Mera thought. *And I gotta say, she’s one bad drunk.*

Iceheat was too inebriated to notice that Mera was silently mocking her, the maid slumped forward with her upper body resting on the table as she continued her griping. “This was supposed to be my chance to shine. Why did it have to end up this way? Am I just unlucky? Every single time, I either fail my mission or I don’t get picked in the first place...”

“Come on, buck up,” Mera said, cackling. “Sure, things didn’t work out the

way you wanted them to, but I'm sure you'll do fabulous work for master next time."

"Ugh, I don't wanna feel better," Iceheat grumbled. "I'm never gonna be useful to Master Light..."

It was a real struggle for Mera not to laugh out loud at this. *She actually just said "wanna" and "gonna"! I never thought I'd see the day that this complete tight-ass would do that!*

"Now, now, don't be like that, hun," was what Mera actually said, and she limited herself to a gentle chuckle. "You always take things way too seriously. Besides, that nympho was too much of an edge case anyway. We almost never come across those kinds of weirdos, so who could have prepared for that?"

Iceheat instantly sat up. "Yeah, you're right!" she agreed, yelling her lungs out. "This setback was all the fault of that stupid girl!"

Mera was dumbfounded yet again by Iceheat's yo-yoing emotions and couldn't utter a word, but in her drunken rage, the maid completely disregarded her friend's nonreaction anyway.

"Not only did that tramp refuse to fight me, she also said all those *disgusting* things to Suzu!" she roared. "How could she say all of that garbage without giving any regard to the time and place or who she was talking to? She's gonna set a bad example for Master Light and Lady Yume! Don't you think so?!"

Mera chuckled nervously. "Well, sure. I wouldn't want master or his dear sister to be influenced by that skeeze. In fact, I wouldn't want her anywhere near them, period."

"So you *do* get what I'm saying, Mera!" Iceheat said. "We must do away with that shameless strumpet sooner rather than later! I myself would hate to lose such a valuable source of information, of course, but there are still something like eight... Wait, uh, nine? There are nine Masters left we can capture! If we all work together, that task should be easy to accomplish!"

"Hold your horses, babe," Mera said. "I'm not saying I don't sympathize with you on that, but we can't go killing that hornbag just yet. We have to wait until master gives us the order first, and like you said, she has a bunch of intel that

could prove useful. Besides, I'm not even sure we'll be able to bag another Master. We might end up leaving a whole lot of damage in our wake if we try. Master probably considered all of these things when he decided to keep that sex pervert alive. So think of master. We'll get in trouble just for talking about killing her. Plus, I'd understand if Suzu wanted to kill her first."

"Fine. I'll just go yell at her instead!" Iceheat huffed.

Mera cackled despite herself. "Why's that your fallback plan?"

Iceheat shrugged off Mera's comment, stood up with a self-satisfied smile on her face, and marched toward the cafeteria exit, still tipsy from all the whiskey. Mera glided after her, still chortling.

"And where do you think *you're* going?" Mera said.

Iceheat grinned and gave a thumbs-up. "To give that stupid girl a piece of my mind!"

Now that she knew Iceheat was serious, the color drained from Mera's face. "Are you *actually* insane? Is it the booze that's making you do this?"

"I'm good, I'm good," Iceheat repeated. "I promise I'm sober. By the way, why have you split into three? She's just one girl. You didn't hafta go and make extra copies of yourself."

Iceheat laughed at her own joke, prompting Mera to admonish her. "Good lord! You're absolutely smashed!"

This only made Iceheat laugh even more, which was completely out of character for her and placed Mera in a bit of a dilemma. The chimera could perhaps attempt to restrain Iceheat by force, but the truth of the matter was that the Frozen Firestorm Grappler would win in a struggle that came down to brute strength. She could perhaps use her unique powers to give herself the edge, but because Iceheat was too drunk to know any better, Mera would end up having to engage in a very damaging battle in the cafeteria. If that were to happen, Light would be enraged at Mera and Iceheat equally, regardless of whatever love he had for his allies.

Since Iceheat could not be safely restrained using physical force, an unusually frantic Mera settled for a drawn-out attempt to talk Iceheat out of going

through with her drunken stunt. But Iceheat ignored all of her pleading and marched on down the hallways of the Abyss until the pair eventually arrived at Miki's jail cell, which was located in the deepest bowels of the dungeon. The pair encountered the Level 5000, UR Close Combat Magic Golem, Dark Knight, who served as the permanent sentry of the jail, along with the fairy maids who worked alongside it. Both the Dark Knight and the fairy maids tried to stop Iceheat, but none of them appeared to be strong enough to impede the progress of the Level 7777 grappler maid.

The door to Miki's cell was made of special-grade steel, and there were apertures at the top and bottom of the door. The upper opening was meant to be for peering into the cell, while the lower slot was for serving meals. Miki was inside the cell, still wearing the SSSR Curse Collar.

"Hey, you little sleazebag!" Iceheat bellowed, standing in front of the cell door. "Do you have any *idea* what you've done to me? It's *your* fault I feel so miserable! Do you even know how much grief you're putting Master Light and Suzu through?"

Despite Iceheat's rather loud screams, no answer was forthcoming from the other side of the door. Iceheat could sense that Miki was wide awake and rolling around in her bed, however, which meant Miki was deliberately ignoring Iceheat.

In addition to the alcohol, Iceheat's anger was quickly making her face go red, and she pressed her face up against the top opening and shouted again. "Don't pretend I'm not here, you wretched woman! In any case, you're being extremely rude to Master Light—"

Iceheat suddenly stopped midsentence. At first, Iceheat hadn't been able to make out what Miki was doing in her cell, since the interior was so dark, but as Iceheat's whiskey-soaked eyes adjusted to the bad lighting, she saw exactly what Miki was up to in her bed.

"Ah, Suzu! My sweet Suzu!" Miki cried, inhaling the scent from a certain piece of fabric that she had smooshed against her face. "I can't get enough of your *tights*, Suzu! Oh god, your scent! It's filling every inch of my head and making me secrete all kinds of brain narcotics! Suzu, you're violating me with your

smell! You're literally ****ing me right now! I'm all drugged up and you're ****ing my brains out! Mmmmmph! I can't stop throbbing down there! Good god, Suzu, you smell so—"

Before being locked up in her cell, Miki had received a pair of Suzu's used tights as her reward for supplying Light's team with the first batch of intel. Miki was so obsessed with the tights, she had absolutely no idea Iceheat was speaking to her, and since the Beemancer had covered her face with the tights, her voice had been too muffled for Iceheat to hear at first.

Now that Iceheat was getting a good look at her adversary, she felt herself instantly sober up and shake off her drunken stupor. Iceheat slowly backed away from the jail door like it was made of some kind of radioactive material, then turned to face the Dark Knight, the fairy maids, and the still-agitated Mera.

"I'm glad I didn't engage her one-on-one," Iceheat said, her eyes indicating that she had seen everything that was wrong with the world. "I count myself lucky that I myself didn't end up being the object of her affections. Suzu has my deepest sympathies."

Mera and the others nodded unanimously in response to Iceheat's heartfelt observation, before the grappler maid departed from the jailhouse as quietly as possible, so that Miki wouldn't notice her. Those working in the jails made sure the entrance was locked tight, the pity they felt for Suzu still fresh in their minds.



Extra Story 2: Ellie Learns Her Lesson

“That woman has put me in an unimaginable predicament,” Ellie grumbled. The Forbidden Witch was drafting a report that she would later submit to Light at her desk in her private quarters, surrounded by shelves filled with books of all kinds, from thick spell books with highly decorative spines to grimoires clutched by skeleton hands or enclosed with vines to serve as a warning not to open them.

There were also non-spell books with cuter spines on the shelves, their pages filled with poems, fairy tales, and whatnot, for Ellie was an avid reader who snapped up whatever books the Unlimited Gacha spat out. She often recommended books to Nazuna for her to read (as a way of broadening her knowledge), but the Vampire Knight just as quickly refused. On top of all the books, Ellie’s room was also cluttered with sorcery-related instruments, unfinished drawings of magic circles, and various potted plants she used for making elixirs. In short, her room was just what you’d expect the shadowy abode of a witch to look like.

Ellie continued sketching out the steps she would be taking in order to reform the screening and monitoring processes, as well as the overall security readiness of the city that was growing at the foot of the Great Tower. This was in response to the Master known as Miki infiltrating the city after passing inspection at the point of entry. Although the initial screening process was strict, there had basically been no scrutiny into her actions once she was within city limits, according to Miki. In fact, this gap in security was so wide, she had been able to send intel via a messenger bee back to her faction in the Demonkin Nation, and this had led to Daigo arriving to cause havoc near the Great Tower.

Ellie had offered to assume full responsibility for allowing this crisis to unfold, but Light had waved this away and refused to punish her at first. However, the thought of having caused harm to her beloved dungeon lord without some kind of penalty coming her way because of it was completely unacceptable to Ellie,

and Mei had intervened to convince Light to punish the superwitch at a later date, despite his misgivings. This meant that, although Ellie viewed Mei as her rival, she felt indebted to the Ever-Seeking Maid.

The pain Ellie felt at having allowed Light to be put in danger was still fresh and comparable to having her heart gouged out. Just remembering the episode made Ellie grind her teeth so hard, blood started appearing at the corner of her mouth, which she wiped away with a handkerchief before any of it could drip onto the report she was writing.

“It’s all that outrageously indecent floozy’s fault!” Ellie whined as she pocketed her handkerchief again, recalling Miki’s unprintable prattle in front of Light during their initial interrogation of the Beemancer.

Though on a more positive note, Light and his team had managed to capture Miki before she could cause extensive damage. Unfortunately, Ellie wasn’t the glass-half-full type. For one thing, Ellie felt it was her failure to enforce tighter security in and around the city that had led directly to Light needing to chop off his right arm and grow a new one, and she was unable to forgive herself for indirectly subjecting her beloved master to such an ordeal. If Light had given his permission, Ellie would have gladly fallen on her sword and ended her own life. But he would never have allowed that on his watch, and anyway, Ellie couldn’t just kill herself there and then because she was waiting for Light to discipline her.

Ellie breathed a heavy sigh. “I simply cannot endure the thought of my Blessed Lord Light getting hurt due to my misdeeds. Thankfully we were able to restore him, but even so, I wish there was a hole I could just crawl into and rot.”

But Ellie had no time to find a hole to crawl into, given her present need to improve the security around the Great Tower and thus redeem herself. And the key to achieving this goal lay in the numerous SSSR, Level 2864, Baby Fae.

“I fully understand how critical you all are for the task of reinforcing our security, but I didn’t anticipate you would be *this* peculiar,” Ellie noted. “In truth, I find each of you downright bizarre.”

Ellie had kept a few Baby Faes around to serve as samples to show Light, and they were holding up little placards on Ellie’s desk to make their points heard.

Fwattery won't get you anywhere, read the response of one Baby Fae.

If you weally wanna fwatter us, give us some shweets, the next placard read.

Forget shweets. Gimme booze! read the third placard in line.

Not only were they tiny creatures, their heads were the same size as their bodies, and they had the ability to multiply, to hide in nooks and crannies, and to contact each other through their own personal communication network. Due to these abilities, the fae were perfect for maintaining surveillance in Tower City and watching out for potential foes.

The fae were not without their flaws, however. For one, they were entirely incapable of fighting, even though their power levels were much higher than the average for surface-world folk. Their small size made them slow to move by any standard, and if that wasn't enough, the clones all differed in their personal tastes, with each and every one making demands based on their own preferences.

To be clear, the fae were perfectly willing to perform their duties without receiving any sort of compensation, but while they were like the other denizens of the Abyss in viewing Light as their unquestioned commander, that wasn't necessarily the case for anyone else, meaning if someone other than Light wanted to deploy the Baby Fae, they needed to know how to deal with them. The fae were the linchpins of Ellie's new security plans, but she wasn't about to indulge them by simply giving them what they asked for, and she lazily shooed away their pleas.

"I'm not giving you anything until you've done some work," Ellie said flatly. "You're free to drink water for all I care."

But that's not fwair! read one placard.

Shweets! Shweets! Shweets! read the next.

I wanna dwink booze! Booze! it said on the board held up by the third fae in line.

You fwiend! Dwevil! Ewwie! read the final placard.

"Oh? Would you care to write all of those complaints out *again*?" Ellie said

with a smirk as she unleashed a mana blast at the fae that made them scatter like mice in all different directions. Ellie treated the fae to one more incredulous look before returning to drafting her report for Light.



Once she was all done with her plan to upgrade security in and around the Great Tower, Ellie headed straight for Light's executive office. He was busy poring over some other documents, but since Ellie had made an appointment in advance, she was guaranteed an audience with the young dungeon lord. On arriving at his office, Ellie handed her master plan to the fairy maid whose turn it was on office duty, who then placed the document in front of Light. The wording was straightforward and easy to read, and the details of the steps Ellie would be taking in order to beef up security were immediately understandable without requiring an in-depth study of the text. Ellie was the smartest of all of Light's allies, so writing an easy-to-digest report on what was a complicated subject was a piece of cake.

Light nodded approvingly. "This all looks great, Ellie. I can't see anything wrong with this plan. I'm sure glad I got you to do this task."

"I thank you, Blessed Lord Light," Ellie replied. "Though I should give most of the credit to the Baby Fae. It would be simply impossible to form such a tight web of surveillance if I were to rely on just my own powers."

"Do you think so?" Light said. "I think if you wanted to, you're powerful enough to watch over the city."

"You truly, truly humble me with your words, Your Blessedness..." But even though Ellie's words expressed modesty, there was a distinctively downcast tone to her voice.

Light immediately understood that Ellie was still feeling responsible for Miki's infiltration, and after a pregnant pause, he issued an order to his fairy maid helper. "I need to speak to Ellie alone. Once you've shut the door behind you, tell the others who are guarding the entrance to move to someplace where they can't overhear us."

"But... B-But I don't think we should move the g-guards too..." the fairy maid stuttered.

“That is a direct order,” Light said firmly.

“F-F-Forgive me, Master Light!” the hapless maid squeaked as she beat a hasty retreat out of the room.

Oh, whoops. Did I sound a bit too harsh just then? Light wondered. *I’ll have to make it up to her later.*

Ellie watched on with a bewildered look on her face. Once Light couldn’t sense anyone on the other side of the door, he got up from his chair and walked over to Ellie.

“B-Blessed Lord?” she said nervously.

“Ellie...” Light took her hands in his and held them tightly, then addressed her like he would a sullen child. “Ellie, you don’t need to feel bad about what happened. Remember, it was partly my fault Miki was able to sneak in and send out intel.”

“I thank you for trying to comfort me, Blessed Lord Light,” Ellie said. “But in spite of your insistence to the contrary, I still feel I bear all of the blame for allowing this crisis to unfold.”

She believed she should have noticed and fixed the vulnerability in the Great Tower settlement’s security long before Miki’s arrival, but because she failed to recognize the issue in time, the damage Miki and Daigo had subsequently managed to inflict was entirely her fault.

Light smiled gently at her. “You always take everything so seriously. But that’s one thing I like about you.”

“B-Blessed Lord Light...” This compliment from Light lifted Ellie out of her funk, and her voice trembled with joy. This caused Light’s smile to grow even wider.

“But I will still take part of the blame for that mess,” Light insisted. “So there’s no need for you to feel entirely responsible for it. I know I’m asking a lot since you feel so duty bound to me, but I’d like to shoulder the blame with you.” Light looked up into her eyes. “Can I?”

Not only was her beloved lord holding her hands which was making her pulse

race, he was now looking up into her eyes like a cute, beseeching child. The puppy-dog treatment actually wasn't intentional on Light's part and was largely down to the height difference between them, but it was enough to make Ellie's heart nearly leap out of her chest. Above all else, the mere thought of Light showing her this much concern was giving Ellie such a thrill, she felt like her brain was about to melt.

I-if I was any less self-aware, I would be moaning and squealing my lungs out like that debauched girl at a moment like this! Ellie thought to herself. Of course, the Forbidden Witch had far too much pride to debase herself in such a manner in front of Light, though she could feel herself blushing to the tips of her tapered ears.

"I-I..." Ellie stuttered, her voice barely above a whisper. "I could work with that."

"Thanks, Ellie, for doing this for me," Light said.

"Y-Y-You're wel-hum." Ellie's emotions were so all over the place, she had even started uncharacteristically slurring her words.



Ellie left Light's executive office with a silly smile on her face that stretched from ear to ear. She practically skipped down the hallway, and along the way, she happened to pass Nazuna, who was licking away at a lollipop. Nazuna sauntered over to greet her friend, but paused when she saw the weird look on her face.

"Uh, Ellie?" Nazuna said uncertainly. "What's happened to ya? Yer face is looking all rubbery."

Ellie giggled and stretched her hands out toward Nazuna's face.

"Hey! Ow, ow, ow! Shtop pullin' muh cheeks!" Nazuna protested, but Ellie refused to stop punishing her for making such a flippant remark about her appearance. Ellie's face was still red from her heart-to-heart with Light, so she also felt an underlying need to distract Nazuna, meaning she wouldn't be breaking free from the witch's ecstatic grip for quite some time to come.

Extra Story 3: Yume Is Sick?

Yume pursed her lips and made a disgruntled noise as she lay in bed.

“No pouting now, Yume,” I said, sitting at her bedside. “You need to stay there and rest.”

“But I feel *fine*,” Yume whined. “Why do I have to lie in bed?”

“Because my diagnosis is that you have come down with the common cold, Miss Yume,” explained Ellie, who was also in Yume’s bedroom. “The fairy maids noticed you weren’t feeling well and informed me immediately. I believe all of the psychological exhaustion that you have been suppressing has finally come to the surface now that you have grown accustomed to your life down here in the Abyss. We managed to cure most of the symptoms of your cold with a potion, but we can’t magic away your fatigue. As such, you need at least one day’s bed rest so that you can fully recover your stamina, Miss Yume.”

In response, Yume made another disgruntled noise, but decided against arguing with Ellie. When the fairy maids serving Yume had gone to wake her that morning, they had noticed her face was flushed and that she seemed to be feeling awful in general, so they had immediately contacted me about my sister’s condition. I was really spooked when I first heard the news, but after Ellie had taken a look at Yume, we discerned that it was just a cold that could easily be taken care of using one of the potions my Unlimited Gacha had spit out. Thanks to the potion, Yume thought she was totally fine again, but the elixir was no replacement for bed rest, no matter how much she railed against it.

I breathed a sigh of relief and stroked Yume’s head. “I’ll make time in my schedule to come visit you as much as I can, but you need to stay in bed, you hear?”

“Boo,” Yume moaned. “Do you promise?”

“Sure thing. Cross my heart,” I said with a smile, which Yume returned. Then, I

turned to Ellie. “And thank you for curing her.”

“Oh, but I hardly did anything, Blessed Lord,” Ellie said, a bashful smile spreading across her face. “After all, the potion I used was from *your* divine Gift.” She then turned to address Yume. “I’m sure you’ll get bored lying in bed all day, so I’ll bring you some books to read.”

“You will?” Yume said, lighting up. “Ooh, I hope they’re good ones.”

“I hear you loud and clear, Miss Yume,” Ellie said. “I’ll pick out some of my favorites for you.”

“Do you really mean it?” Yume asked.

“Of course, Miss Yume,” Ellie replied.

I grinned as I watched the exchange, and once it was over, Ellie and I left my sister’s room.



I came back again at noon after finishing up reviewing some documents in my office, and when I got there, I found Yume eating lunch with Nazuna, a table having been pulled up beside my sister’s bed to allow her to do so. My sister had a cardigan on and a blanket covering her lap to keep her warm.

“Hi, brother!” Yume called out when she noticed me.

“Hey, master. Yer here to check up on little sis too?” Nazuna asked.

“Yup. Oh, and thanks for coming to see her, Nazuna,” I said.

Nazuna giggled, seemingly very pleased with herself. “Well, she’s *my* sister too, after all! And nobody wants to eat alone when they’re sick, so that’s why I came!”

“Thank you, Auntie Nazuna! This is why I love you!” Yume said, grabbing Nazuna’s hand.

“Love ya too, little sister!” Nazuna said, giving Yume’s hands a squeeze back.

Both Yume and Nazuna had stopped eating their soup and put their dirty spoons down on the table. Since this was considered very bad manners, the brow on the fairy maid who was attending to my sister noticeably wrinkled, and

she would have upbraided the pair of them if I hadn't raised my hand to stop her. Yume was enjoying herself in Nazuna's company and I didn't want the moment to be spoiled, especially considering my sister was sick.

"You should eat with us too, master!" Nazuna suggested.

"Thanks for the offer, but I've already eaten," I admitted. "But I will stay for some tea."

As soon as the words left my mouth, the fairy maid quietly started the brewing process, and despite her silence, I could tell that she was ecstatic to be making me tea. *They really do view serving me as the highest form of happiness*, I mused.

"So did you stay in bed all morning?" I asked Yume.

"I sure did," Yume said. "I kept my promise to you, and also read the books Mistress Ellie brought me."

"Ellie tried to get me to read one of her books again," Nazuna said despairingly. "I really wish she'd stop doin' that."

Ellie was always recommending books for Nazuna to read so that she could learn things, but since Nazuna was more into doing physical activity than sitting down reading, she always ran a mile whenever she saw Ellie with books in her hand. Admittedly, I *did* want Nazuna to read a little more, but on the other hand, I wouldn't have liked it if someone had tried to force me to do something I didn't like, so in the end, I just kept my mouth shut on the subject. On the plus side, though, it looked like Ellie had picked out exactly the right books for Yume.

"I liked the one about the tortoise and the hare, but I *really* liked the book on magic she gave to me," Yume told me.

"A book on magic?" I asked.

"Yeah," Yume said. "It was a book on illusion magic which I'm good at, and—"

Yume talked my ear off about this one particular book for quite some time. Nazuna looked like she had no idea what Yume was talking about, but she had enough sense to sit quietly and let my sister speak. And so, Yume and I discussed the illusion magic book until lunchtime was over.



The next time I came to check on Yume, it was past three in the afternoon. When I entered her bedroom, I found her asleep in bed with her arms wrapped around Aoyuki as if she were a body pillow.

“Myeeew...” Aoyuki whimpered meekly, and it sounded like a cry for help. If I were to hazard a guess at how this scene had come about, I would say that Aoyuki had come to check on Yume out of concern for her health, but had gotten too close to my sleeping sister and been grabbed, and now, my sister wouldn’t let her go.

I put my hands together, smiled sheepishly, and silently pleaded with her. *Please let her hold you like that until she wakes up or lets you go*, I signaled to her.

“Nyeeew,” Aoyuki whined, which was basically her way of saying, “I *knew* this would happen.” My lieutenant went limp and surrendered herself completely to Yume’s embrace. I honestly felt sorry for Aoyuki, but decided it was best to quietly leave the room, still grinning apologetically. *I shouldn’t let Yume sleep for too long, because otherwise, she won’t be able to sleep tonight*, I thought. *I’ll make sure I tell one of the fairy maids to wake her up when the time is right.*





It turned out Light had been overthinking how to handle Aoyuki's entrapment. Shortly after that, a fairy maid woke Yume up and finally set Aoyuki free. Yume stayed in bed wide awake for a time before falling into a deep sleep once evening rolled around. But late in the night, Yume started moaning in her sleep, before suddenly grabbing her head like she was in pain as sweat droplets formed on her forehead. But she soon drifted back into a peaceful repose again, the pain having seemingly subsided as quickly as it had arrived, and she slept all night long with a restful expression on her face that gave no hint that anything was wrong.

Extra Story 4: Naughty Girl Miki

“How in the world did my Iceheat become one of your ‘bros,’ Jackie-poo?” Annelia complained. “She *never* wants to be my kiddo!”

Annelia and her younger brother, Alth, had just happened to cross paths with Jack while strolling around the hallways of the Abyss, but instead of greeting him like a normal person would, Annelia immediately launched into protesting about what she felt was a slight against her. Behind Annelia, Alth bowed his head in apology for his sister’s deplorable attitude, but Jack held up a hand to stop him.

“It is what it is, Annelia,” Jack said. “Just shows I got more bro points than you, so you may as well start callin’ me your bro from now on too.”

“Th-That’s not fair!” whined a clearly devastated Annelia.

“Chill, I’m just playin’ wit’cha,” Jack said. “The thing is, stuff happened and she called me ‘bro’ for once.” He then went on to elaborate what “stuff” actually happened with Iceheat. “Y’all *must’ve* heard about that prisoner we’re holdin’, right? Well, the Lightmeister called all of us Level 7777s to the tower to capture that spy, but Iceheat was all, like, ‘I need to capture her myself, ‘cause I ain’t been on missions since *forever*.’ Now at first, I didn’t think that was muy bueno, but then she starts callin’ me her ‘bro,’ and I was like, ‘Okay, fine, you can have her,’ ‘cause ya know I can’t resist a favor from a newly minted bro, y’feel me?”

Jack’s lips then curved downward into a rarely seen frown. “But guess what happened next? The nutzoid Iceheat was supposed to lay the smackdown on decided to surrender before she did anythin’. So it meant Iceheat called me ‘bro’ with nothin’ to show for it. I’m not about forcin’ Iceheat to be my bro, and I’d rather my peeps called me their bro ‘cause they *wanna* do it.”

Jack glumly recalled the conversation he’d had with Iceheat immediately after their aborted battle with Miki. “I was mad stoked when Iceheat finally called me her bro, but in the end, I wasn’t able to give her what she wanted, so it didn’t count. I even told her she don’t hafta call me her bro no more, but she says that

once she's in on somethin', she won't back out, so I dunno what the score is on that."

"I can't believe something like that happened to her," Annelia said, tears beading in her eyes. "Iceheat, you poor thing..."

"Yeah, I feel the same way, Annelia," Jack agreed. "But just to warn you, Iceheat's been on edge with everythin' that's been goin' on, so you better lay off messin' with her, capeesh?"



After chatting to Jack, Annelia and Alth continued on their way to the Card Repository where they both worked. All the way there, Annelia ranted angrily about Miki for making Iceheat feel so miserable.

"That captive had no *right* to make my poor, sweet Icy so sad!" Annelia declared. "She needs to know how naughty doing that was!"

"Dear sister, I do not believe that saying anything to our detainee about it after the fact will change anything..." Alth said gently.

"I know it won't!" Annelia shouted. "But that awful person has hurt my poor, sweet kiddo, which means I need to go speak to her on Iceheat's behalf!"

But Miss Iceheat does not see herself as your "kiddo," Alth thought. *And you will not convince the captive that you are speaking for her either.* But knowing that voicing his true opinion would be a totally counterproductive argument, Alth did his best to bite his tongue. Before the two of them made it to the Card Repository, however, an unexpected visitor offered to lend Annelia a hand in her self-appointed task.

"You just said everything I needed to know," came a haughty yet even-keeled voice. "Allow me to join you in admonishing the captive."

"Mr. Khaos?" Alth guessed from the voice.

Khaos emerged from around the corner of the hallway, fully revealing his presence. It was clear that he had been listening in on the siblings' conversation.

"B-But *why*, Mr. Khaos?" asked a clearly perturbed Alth. "Do you also think

the captive needs to be punished for harming Miss Iceheat in this way?"

"No, I do not," Khaos said, almost dramatically. "I have no quarrel with our captive."



“During the most recent battle on the surface, I was on standby in the Abyss as insurance,” Khaos said, his eyes narrowing. “Since I ended up not being called into action, I remain unfamiliar with whom it was we were fighting in the Great Tower.”

From what Khaos had heard, Light’s team hadn’t been able to extract much information from Miki, aside from in the first interrogation session. Yet Light was keeping Miki well-fed and unharmed, albeit in a cell she couldn’t escape from. Miki had apparently been backed into a corner during the battle in the tower and had placed a geas upon herself to make sure that no one could do her harm. Putting all of these pieces together, Khaos had determined that Miki was an extremely crafty opponent, the likes of which he had never heard of before, and on top of that, he was told that simply speaking to Miki was “unsafe.” This naturally served to whet his curiosity about who this formidable Miki character was.

“It appears that while our captive cannot escape from her cell, she is not only as crazy as a fox, but also an extremely dangerous individual,” Khaos said. “Given this description of her, I wanted to see her in person. However, I’m not confident that I alone will get the necessary permission to visit the detainee, which means I’ll need you and Ann...” Khaos paused, then begrudgingly corrected himself. “...and *Ms.* Annelia to make petitions to see the captive at the same time that I make mine in order to raise the certainty that we will all get access to the prisoner.”

Annelia giggled. “Aw, are you worried about the mean old prisoner hurting me? Is that why you decided to tag along, honey? You’re so sweet to worry about me.”

Faced with Annelia’s radiant smile, Khaos simply averted his eyes huffily. He knew it was more trouble than it was worth to try to mount a rebuttal to this, and moreover, Annelia’s interpretation of the situation wasn’t entirely off the mark either, which left a bitter taste in his mouth.

“So it is safe to assume that you two will have no problem in making a petition along with mine?” Khaos asked, pointedly ignoring Annelia’s remark.

“Of course we can do that, kiddo!” Annelia said, a sunny smile on her face.

“It’s A-okay with me!”

“And I shall come along too, out of concern for my dear sister,” Alth stated, his own smile more out of knowing resignation. Since Annelia and Alth were in charge of one of the busiest sections of the Abyss, the pair and Khaos had to arrange a good time and date for them all to meet Miki. Once they had settled on an appropriate schedule, Khaos departed to write up the request, while Annelia and Alth went off to work in the Card Repository.



“You, Annelia, and Alth want to see Miki face-to-face?” Sitting in his office, Light looked up from the petition form he had received from Khaos with an expression on his face that was a mix of worry and utter disbelief. Light was about to talk Khaos out of the idea, when he suddenly began to have second thoughts. *Miki’s clearly not safe to be around, but that’s not because of her ability to fight or play mind games. It’s because she’s an unhinged sex maniac,* Light reasoned. *But I really don’t want to go into all the gory details of that. Heck, they probably wouldn’t even believe me if I tried to explain it, anyway.*

Light spent several seconds rubbing his forehead before signing the petition to approve it. He didn’t think the aphorism “seeing is believing” would justify the horrors the trio were surely about to witness, but he figured it’d be faster to show Miki’s depravity than to try to paint a picture with words.

After getting permission from Light, Khaos joined up with Alth and Annelia at the appointed time on the appointed day and made their way to the jailhouse that was located in the deepest depths of the Abyss. The three flashed the permission form to the Dark Knight golem that was standing sentry, as well as to the fairy maids who were on duty there. The Dark Knight let them pass without a second thought, but the fairy maids looked on aghast, wondering why anyone would actually go out of their way to meet a prisoner with Miki’s reputation. But Khaos really was excited to meet Miki, and the anticipation of getting to scold her had Annelia breathing heavily, so neither of the two noticed the funny looks the fairy maids were giving them. Alth did note the curious stares, however, but the reason for all the attention they were getting completely went over his head.

“This is the cell where we’re holding the Master in question,” a fairy maid said, leading the trio to the door. “You’re free to converse with the detainee all you like, but please refrain from delivering or receiving any kind of contraband. Please be aware that you will be punished severely if you break this rule.”

Once the fairy maid had briefed the visitors on all of the other directives as well, Khaos gave his consent. “Understood. I appreciate the warnings.”

“Don’t worry, kiddo,” Annelia said. “I’d never break a rule that my sweet little Light has made for us.”

The fairy maid bowed and left the three of them in front of the cell. Khaos and Annelia approached the steel door in front of them, and both had to stand on tiptoes to look through the upper aperture. Inside the cell, they saw a teenage girl with long blonde hair, who was kneeling at the edge of her bed with her hands folded in prayer.

Miki was clothed provocatively in hot pants and a bralette top with a jacket dangling off her shoulders, yet in spite of this, she had both knees firmly planted on the cold, stone floor of her cell and her hands clasped in front of her chest, her eyes closed in prayer, their long eyelashes resembling the delicate wings of a butterfly. If it hadn’t been for Miki’s skimpy attire together with the Curse Collar that was buckled around her dainty neck, she would have been the very picture of a saint fervently offering up a prayer to her god.

Miki broke the peaceful, mystical silence by reciting her spiritual devotion to Suzu’s tights that were spread out before her on the bed like some kind of holy relic. “O Suzu, you’re so cute. You’re so cute, I wanna lick you *all* over,” she said. “You hit me in the feels harder than I ever thought possible! I want you to plunge your Excalibur straight into my ***** so bad right now! Actually, I wanna be the one on top, ****ing you and screaming ‘Who’s your daddy *and* your mommy?’ Good god, you’re so moe! Good god, you’re so precious—”

Miki was “praying” at such a fever pitch that she didn’t notice she was being observed through the aperture, nor that her unholy canticles were making the onlookers’ skins crawl. In fact, Miki’s lack of awareness at being watched was so total, she proceeded to pick up Suzu’s tights and stuff them straight into her mouth.

“You taste *incredible*, Suzu!” Miki said in a muffled voice. “Nothing I’ve ever eaten in my *life* compares to this! You give me eternal life, sweet Suzuuu!” It was at this point that Miki’s eyes rolled back due to extreme arousal and she flopped sideways onto the floor before convulsing violently like a fish that had washed up onto a pier.

Despite initially entering the jailhouse in high spirits, Khaos and Annelia had gone green around the gills at what they had just witnessed and slowly backed away from the cell door. Thankfully for Alth, he hadn’t been subjected to the spectacle, so he wasn’t quite as traumatized, but since he had still heard every word that had passed Miki’s lips, he had gone pale imagining the abomination his sister and Khaos had seen inside the cell.

The three visitors made sure they didn’t make a sound as they slunk away from the jailhouse, for fear that the foul creature in the detention cell would notice that it had guests. Once they were well out of earshot, Khaos finally allowed the muscles in his face to twitch and shudder.

“What did I just witness?” Khaos asked himself.

“That girl must *never* be my kiddo...” stated a clearly shaken Annelia.

“I cannot imagine how Miss Suzu must be feeling, knowing that she has caught the eye of *that* depraved creature,” Alth said. From that short encounter alone, all three understood deep down to their very souls exactly why everyone considered Miki to be so “unsafe.” Still in a state of shock, Annelia, Alth, and Khaos retreated as far away from the jailhouse doors as they could.

A few days later, Khaos handed Light another document, though this one was a strongly worded statement calling for Miki’s immediate execution. It said that despite the Master potentially having extensive intelligence value, she was too much of a problematic and traumatizing risk to keep around. Khaos laid out in exhaustive detail all of the negative consequences Miki would wreak if kept alive, with each point anchored in his impeccably cold logic. In fact, he presented such an airtight, headache-inducing case against Miki that Light even considered putting her to death, if only momentarily.

Extra Story 5: What a Girl Needs

“You want to take a bath?” I echoed.

“Yup! You got it!” Miki said through her cell door. “Miki *really* needs to take a *real* bath!”

I’d gone to see Miki in her detention cell after a message was relayed via a fairy maid that she needed to tell me something that was, in her words, “a matter of life or death.” Naturally, I was taken aback by this, so I headed straight for her cell, only to find out that she just wanted to take a bath. It was such an infinitely dumb reason to urgently call for me, I had to repeat her request just to make sure I’d heard her correctly.

“So when you said you had something to tell me that was a ‘matter of life and death,’ this was it? A bath?” I sighed, my shoulders slumping after the misleading buildup.

“Gawd, why’re you like this?” Miki huffed. “Taking a nice bath *is* a matter of life and death for any girl!”

“Yeah, no,” I said. “Sure, I get that hygiene is very important, but I make sure you and your cell get a thorough cleaning with my Wash cards every day, so you don’t need to take baths.”

The R Wash was an Unlimited Gacha card that magically removed all grime and dirt from whatever the user released it upon, and the fairy maids used them on Miki and her cell once every day. It was entirely possible that Miki was living a much cleaner life in this cell than she had in her old life back on the surface world, so it made no sense to me why she’d feel the need to take a bath.

“That’s not enough at *all*!” Miki whined. “A bath isn’t just for washing your *body*! A girl needs to take baths to *unwind* and forget about all of her cares! A bath is like nutrients for a girl’s *soul*! It’s like breathing in lungfuls of fresh air!”

“Nutrients for the soul?” I glanced across at Mei, who I’d brought along as my

bodyguard just in case Miki decided to try something. Three years ago, when the Concord of the Tribes had first trapped me in the Abyss, I had taken a bath in a tub for the first time in my life with Mei. I had spent days grinding up to Level 1000 by throwing rocks at monsters she had captured, and to mark the occasion, she had used her Magistrings to fashion a bathtub for me. I remember feeling completely exhausted—both physically and mentally—from grinding and everything else that had happened to me, and of course, I hadn't washed in days. That bath I took with Mei was undoubtedly more soothing and relaxing than anything I had ever experienced in my young life up to that point, and it allowed me to unwind from all of my stress.

Now that I understood where Miki was coming from, I felt I had no right to refuse her request. "All right. I think we can compromise. However, my people will be watching you every step of the way. And I'd better get some good intel in return."

"Relax. You'll get what you want," Miki said. "It's a small price to pay for some much-needed bath time."

Later on, I presented Miki with the terms and conditions under which I would allow her to take baths, and she coughed up some info to meet her end of the bargain.



Miki readily agreed to the numerous rules that came with the privilege of using the women's baths in the Abyss. She was only allowed access to the bathing area once a week for one hour, and two women had to accompany her as her minders on each occasion. She wasn't allowed to bring anything to the baths besides a towel and a change of clothes, and she had to obey any and all orders from her attendants, or else find herself forcibly returned to her detention cell before the full hour was up. In the event of an emergency, she would need to end her bath prematurely and return to her cell. And so on and so forth. After reviewing the long list of conditions, Miki signed the contract and used her newfound privileges that very night.

"Wow, you guys have a *super* huge bath hall! Bigger than I'd *ever* imagine!" Miki cooed, standing in the entrance to the women's baths and peering around

the room with only a towel to preserve her modesty and the Curse Collar around her neck. There were all sorts of baths available, including milky baths, fruit baths, and baths with different varieties of flowers floating about in them, and the vast facility also had a sauna as well as a shower room. These baths were used by nearly every woman in the Abyss, but Miki was brought here late at night so that the space could easily be declared off-limits to everyone else. Of course, there was the option of taking her to one of the many private bathrooms in the Abyss, but those spaces were only designed to fit one person, meaning Miki's minders would have found themselves tightly crammed in.

Mera, one of Miki's handlers on this particular evening, cackled at the teenager's reaction. "We didn't come here to hear your thoughts about the place, cupcake, so just hurry up and wash."

The other minder, Iceheat, simply looked on in angry silence. Light had assigned the two Level 7777 warriors the job of keeping an eye on Miki because picking fairy maids to do it would have put them at risk of being taken hostage by Miki, Curse Collar or not. Incidentally, Light had personally made sure that Suzu was kept out of the rotation of bath minders, since Miki would surely sexually harass the musketeer, verbally or otherwise.

Miki turned to the two women with her. "I know you're here to *watch* Miki taking a bath, but wearing your *outside* clothes in here is bad manners, don't you think? And besides, I *really* wouldn't mind if a couple of hotties like yourself joined me in the tub."

Mera laughed contemptuously. "And why the hell should we take a bath with *you*, inmate? Also, just FYI: I don't even take baths. I always wash myself using cards, hun."

"I concur with Mera," Iceheat said finally. "I am under no obligation to ensure that a total degenerate like you has a pleasurable time in here. If I wish to take a bath, I myself will do so once you have finished."

Mera and Iceheat both shot Miki down, but Iceheat's response had been particularly venomous. When she defected to Light's side, Miki had robbed Iceheat of her opportunity to fight the female Master one-on-one, and prove her worth to Light. As a result, Iceheat now viewed Miki as something akin to a

mortal enemy, and these sentiments bled into her every word.

“Ugh, that *blows*,” Miki said impudently. “That means I won’t get to see you two naked. But whatevs. I’m *already* turned on just knowing there are two gorgeous chicks watching *me* bathe.”

“You always find some upside, don’t you?” Mera said, her customary giggle baffled and strained this time. Iceheat had no words, her expression contorting into one of unmitigated disgust. Miki ignored her two minders and flounced off to the washing area, officially beginning her bath time. All hour long, Miki never once let up on the chatter.

“Is this for *real*?!” Miki said when she first walked into the washing area. “You actually have body wash, shampoo, *and* conditioner here? You guys are *literal* gods!”

“Hey, are you guys gonna scrub my back?” Miki said as she scrubbed herself. “Or I guess you don’t run *that* type of bathhouse, do you?”

“I’ve never been in a rose bath before!” Miki said after stepping into the relevant tub. “I can’t believe how *good* it smells! I only wish my sweet Suzu was here, so Miki could die and go to heaven.”

“I still can’t believe there’s a *sauna* here!” Miki squealed with delight as she basked in the heat of the sauna room. “Your baths are just *too* amazing. I *seriously* need to find a way to get myself adopted here.”

Keeping her eyes firmly fixed on Miki, Mera let out a dry, gravelly laugh. “Okay, you’re enjoying this way too much now.”

“We are *never* going to adopt you!” Iceheat said adamantly. “You’re our prisoner, remember?”

Miki brushed off Mera’s and Iceheat’s cutting comments and continued to frolic in the bath hall until her full hour was up. Once time had run out, Iceheat and Mera wasted no time in shepherding Miki off to the changing room with her clothes in hand, before escorting her back to her cell, which she reentered in a buoyant mood.



A few days later, Light received another request from Miki, though this time it was written on paper.

Since little girls are made of sugar and spice and everything nice, Miki would like oodles of candies and treats with every meal, the note read. Be sure to load my trays up with lots of yummy goodies!

Since this request was clearly completely frivolous, Light considered it for the amount of time it took to raise one eyebrow before summarily rejecting it.

Extra Story 6: Suzu's Trauma and Joy

Suzu was sitting on her bed in her private chambers, shivering and trembling as she hugged a stuffed doll made in Light's likeness tightly to her chest. Suzu's talking musket and trusted sidekick, Lock, watched the pitiable scene from a nearby rifle stand.

"It's a real shame what you're going through, partner," Lock sympathized. "I'm glad I wasn't the one that sicko fell in love with."

The "sicko" in question was Miki, a Master affiliated with the Demonkin Nation. Light and his team had managed to trap Miki on the second floor of the Great Tower, but Daigo's unexpected raid on the area had required Light and Nazuna to exit the tower, and they were replaced in the room by Suzu, Mera, and Jack, who had been called there to provide backup for Iceheat.

Faced with these three new opponents, Miki ran her Appraisal ability on them to gauge their abilities, before her eyes happened to land on a single line in Suzu's stats that revealed she was intersex. This bit of info, along with Suzu's overall breathtaking appearance, checked all the right boxes for Miki when it came to what she was looking for in a partner, so she immediately defected to Light's side and started badgering the gunner to marry her using the most shockingly profane terms. With Miki's harassment still fresh in her mind, Suzu glared angrily at Lock for her weapon's failed attempt at trying to comfort her.

"What do you mean I'm supposed to show more empathy?" Lock said. "What happened with Miki doesn't affect me either way, so I couldn't even if I tried."

Suzu puffed out her cheeks as her anger grew, though this only made her look more adorable rather than threatening. But Lock still rowed back from his comment and tried to appease Suzu.

"Okay, okay. Sorry if I sounded insensitive just then," Lock said. "A crisis for you is a crisis for me too, since we're inseparable."

Suzu nodded in approval at Lock's charitable words, but the rifle wasn't

finished saying his piece. “And yes, I know you have gone through something very disturbing, but on the bright side, something good has come out of it.”

Suzu gave Lock a quizzical look, so the rifle explained. “Remember when we put that lunatic away in her cell? Lord Light came over and talked to you privately afterward.”

As soon as Lock jogged her memory, Suzu’s cheeks went bright red, and she buried her face into the Light doll, lay flat on her stomach, and kicked the bed repeatedly with her legs as if she were swimming. Lock watched this euphorically bashful reaction with as warm a gaze as an object without eyes could muster.

Right after Light’s team had finished conducting their initial interrogation of Miki, they had fulfilled their side of the bargain by handing Miki the pair of tights Suzu had been wearing. To fully demonstrate that it was all done in good faith, Suzu was compelled to swallow down her shame and drop her tights in front of Miki, who’d had her blindfold removed to witness the moment. Once they were off, Suzu had given her tights to a fairy maid, who had then handed them to Miki, the teen reacting by howling with elation.

“I finally have my baby Suzu’s black tights! Those sweet, *sweet* tights!” Miki had yelled ecstatically.

After subjecting herself to this indignity, Suzu had found herself fighting back tears, while even Light himself had been sorely offended by the display too. His team had quickly replaced Miki’s blindfold before escorting her to her holding cell. After assigning some fairy maids to watch over Miki, Light had dismissed the rest of his team, but kept Suzu behind so that he could talk to her.

“I’m really sorry for putting you through that,” Light had said.

Suzu had shaken her head briskly, which Lock had translated for the young dungeon lord: “It’s not your fault, Lord Light. She was put in that position by that crazy girl.”

Light had chuckled wryly at this. “Thanks, guys. But she was still super gross, and trampled all over your boundaries. I don’t care if I have to say it a thousand times, but you and my allies are way more precious to me than any intel I can get from anyone. I would never put you or anyone else in my new family in

danger just for my own benefit. I will always protect you, Suzu, along with everyone else. So please let me know if you ever feel like you can't deal with Miki anymore. Just say the word and I'll stop using her as a source of info."

Light had looked Suzu straight in the eye while delivering these heartfelt assurances which had caused Suzu's head to nearly boil. It was an unsurprising reaction, because to Suzu's ears, her romantic interest, Light, had just told her that she was more precious to him than Miki's high-value intelligence (though the same went for his other allies too). In that moment, Suzu had wanted to pat herself on the back for not slumping to the ground and rolling around in an emotional frenzy then and there.

Back in Suzu's bedroom, Lock decided to air his view on it. "Man, that one really hit home. In my eyes, Lord Light's always been a heroic leader, but in that moment, he really lived up to the part."

Recalling her master's words, Suzu murmured something unintelligible into the Light doll that was smooshed up against her face, her ears bright red as she slammed her fist down over and over again on the blanket. Suzu's crush had told her he would protect her, and she had felt like the luckiest girl in the world hearing that.

After a while, she lifted her head from the bed, her breath labored and her hair a tousled mop. While Suzu fixed her hair, Lock took the opportunity to add to his previous thoughts, now that his partner had regained her composure.

"So anyway, sure, it really stinks that you caught the eye of that freaky girl, but at least Lord Light's totally on your side," Lock said. "You might not like having to deal with Miki, but if I were in your shoes, I'd be doing everything I could to reciprocate Lord Light's devotion to you. In fact, I wouldn't give that stupid girl a second thought, now that I *know* Lord Light is my champion."

Suzu nodded gently as she once again remembered Light's promise to her. She was prepared to do anything for her leader and secret crush.

"But yeah..." Lock said. "That girl's not just disgusting, she scares the living daylights out of me. And I'm an intelligent weapon! How the heck did we end up with *that* character here, of all people?"

Suzu nodded her head vigorously to express her wholehearted agreement at

this sentiment, because however much she was willing to engage with Miki for Light's sake, the newly captured inmate still frightened her to the core.

Afterword

Hello, Meikyou Shisui here, and once again, I wish to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for reading and/or purchasing the seventh volume of *Backstabbed in a Backwater Dungeon: My Trusted Companions Tried to Kill Me, But Thanks to the Gift of an Unlimited Gacha I Got LVL 9999 Friends and Am Out For Revenge on My Former Party Members and the World!*

As in the previous volumes, this book contains a bunch of new scenes that aren't in the web novel version, as well as some additional extra stories. I should warn those of you who haven't read the book yet that there will probably be plenty of spoilers in this afterword, and one of them is that most of the extra stories revolve around Miki (*laughs*). I might have touched upon this in one of my activity updates on the *Shosetsuka ni Naro* website, but when I first wrote Miki's scenes for the *Unlimited Gacha* web novel, I initially considered letting Miki escape from the Great Tower, so she could pursue Suzu relentlessly from outside. But I ultimately chose to have her surrender to Light's side and become their captive, and from there, turn her into comic relief with her desperate appeals to Suzu. I suppose this is what they mean when they say there are scenes and characters that basically write themselves. Although I do have mixed feelings that it was Miki, of all people, who was the catalyst for such a valuable experience for me (*laughs*).

And with that, on to the acknowledgments!

First, I wish to thank tef for providing more wonderful illustrations and character designs. The designs of both Miki and Daigo were as brilliant as ever, and the illustration of Miki sniffing Suzu's tights was absolutely exquisite! All of the other dazzling and adorable illustrations you drew for this volume were just as impressive (a special mention for Light holding his half-unsealed Gungnir, as the color scheme and the designs for that one were off the scale). Thank you so much for contributing marvelous illustrations for each and every volume of this series.

Next to thank is my supervising editor, plus HJ Novels’s editorial team! I apologize for being an inconvenience this time around too. I intend to keep writing for you, and I look forward to our continued collaboration!

I also wish to thank Takafumi Oomae for his tireless work authoring such an enjoyable manga version of *Unlimited Gacha*, new chapters of which come out on the Magazine Pocket app every Tuesday! I can’t wait to see how you depict Miki and her crazy antics in your manga, as well as the rest of the stuff that goes on in the seventh volume of my novel!

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude for Magazine Pocket’s editorial team for their work in bringing such a wonderful manga to publication. I can assure you that this subscriber reads each new chapter every week!

And last but certainly not least, I would like to thank all of my readers for keeping up with the *Unlimited Gacha* novels to this very volume! It’s thanks to your dedication that this series is still going strong, and I really can’t thank you enough! The upcoming eighth volume will be like the third volume in that it will feature an entirely new story that isn’t found in the web novel. I wish to reward all of the loyal followers of this series by putting every effort into writing another book that I hope you will enjoy! And I’ll continue writing *Unlimited Gacha* to the best of my abilities, so I look forward to your support right through to the very end!

PS: Just like in the previous volumes, I have written a bonus story that is available to everyone who purchased this novel. To access the bonus story, go to my activity updates on the *Shosetsuka ni Naro* website, click on the entry that has a date of or around May 18 or 19, 2023, and you will be directed to my personal web page, where you will need to enter a password. (You can also do a web search for “明鏡シスイ 活動報告 (Meikyou Shisui Activity Update)” and that should take you straight to the right web page. Once there, search for the entry that corresponds to the dates above. Also, the password to my personal website changes with every volume of the novel that’s released, so please bear that in mind. When you have logged in, you should also be able to read all the past bonus stories.)

The password for this volume is: **miki**. [Please note: As of this English-language publication, this password has expired.]

“How can you call me a skank?
You’re so mean!”

✦ Miki ✦

A Master from the
Demonkin Nation.

“If you’ve got nothing else to tell us,
I’m going back to leveling.”

✦ Daigo ✦

Like Miki, a Master from the
Demonkin Nation.

Backstabbed in a **Backwater Dungeon**:

My Trusted **Companions** Tried to **Kill** Me, But Thanks to the **Gift** of an

UNLIMITED GACHA

I Got **LVL 9999**

Friends and Am Out For **Revenge**
on My **Former** Party Members

and the **World**


7
VOL.



**"Welcome to
the Great Tower,
Miki."**

Light grinned at
Miki with a distinct
air of hostility.

**"Miss Iceheat,
what's going on
here exactly?"**



I knew if I held on
to the Gungnir for too
long in its present state,
I would lose my entire
sense of self.

**“Neutralize that thing,
God Requiem Gungnir!”**

Bonus Short Story

The Lilith Problem

A group of four fairy maids were making their way to the Abyss's Card Repository to replenish supplies, the whole journey marked by complaints from the maid whose exaggerated cuteness overwhelmed whatever personality she had, as she grumbled away to her three colleagues.

"I don't *care* if she's the royal princess of the Human Kingdom, she has no right to push Master Light around like that," she moaned. "The nerve of that girl, thinking she can do whatever she wants, just because she rescued Miss Yume and gave her employment."

Light glinted off the glasses of the next fairy maid to speak, giving her elegantly bookish features an air of pretentiousness. "I heard what the princess asked of Master Light, but since our master sees no problem with her requests, it's not our place to find fault with her doing so."

The fairy maids were discussing how Princess Lilith had asked Light for multiple favors in preparation for the momentous summit that was to be held shortly at the Principality of the Nine. Aoyuki and Ellie felt Lilith was taking advantage of the fact that she had saved Light's sister, Yume, from certain death, and the two had aired their disapproval of the favors that had been requested to Light himself, but he had replied that helping Lilith would be no big deal, causing the pair to leave it there and bite their tongues. In front of Light, at least. Elsewhere, they continued to voice the issues they had with Lilith's "attitude," and their observations eventually reached the ears of the fairy maids. However, this particular quartet was sharply divided in how they viewed the situation.

"I think the princess is, like, being way out of pocket, if anything?" said the fairy maid who looked and acted like a Japanese kogal. "I mean, does she seriously need to take it *that* far just 'cause Master Light's so generous and

junk? If I were her, I'd count myself lucky that Miss Mei, Miss Aoyuki, and Miss Ellie didn't murder me on the spot, ya know?"

"Um, I-I hear what you're saying, b-b-but you need to dial it down a notch," interjected the fourth fairy maid who looked like a cute geek. "M-Master Light said he had no problem with Princess Lilith, s-so I'm going to agree with him."

And so, there was an even split of opinions on the matter—two for, two against—and this schism was creating tension between the fairy maids. And it wasn't just them; the lack of consensus over the so-called "Lilith Problem" was apparent among the rest of the fairy maids too.

The quartet finally arrived at the Card Repository, where they handed over their requisition forms and collected the gacha cards they needed. Since they had shown up at a very quiet time with no lines in sight, the fairy maids decided they would ask Annelia, the head administrator of the repository, for her thoughts on the Lilith issue.

"I'll support whatever my darling Light wants," she replied with a smile and no hint of displeasure at being asked the question. "In fact, it's my *duty* to make sure my sweet little angel feels validated! And if anything does ever go wrong, I'll be there to fix the boo-boo. After all, it's my job to look after all of my little kiddos."

Annelia had some sisterly love spare for the princess too. "Plus, from what I've heard, I don't think Lilith meant anything by asking those favors. She's just a hardworking sweetie pie who's a *teensy* bit clueless about what's going on. But she's still a kid who has some growing up to do, so it's not her fault."

Despite not being related, Annelia treated Light as if he were her kid brother, even though he was meant to be her superior. To date, nobody in the Abyss had even tried to correct this potentially disrespectful behavior, since Light had given his express permission for Annelia to treat him like a younger sibling, and because of this, the fairy maids decided to diplomatically let all the "kiddo" talk slide.

Alth, the other repository administrator and Annelia's younger brother by blood, wasn't as diplomatic as his sister, however. "I will grant that Princess Lilith is an ambitious young woman who is somewhat lacking in worldly

experience, but that is no excuse for her to act so rudely to our Creator,” he sniffed. “I would have preferred it if either Miss Mei, Miss Aoyuki, or Miss Ellie had issued the princess with a stern warning upon hearing her unreasonable requests. Do you not agree, my Mohawk friend?”

The Mohawk who was picking up gacha cards at Alth’s booth demurred gently. “I dunno, man. If Lord Light says he’s cool with the princess an’ all, I don’t see why we hafta go makin’ some huge thing ’bout it, ya dig?”

“B-But sir!” Alth exclaimed, utter disbelief writ large across his face. The shock of the Mohawk’s dissenting view had struck Alth with the same force as being betrayed by a best friend or cheated on by a long-term girlfriend. Alth launched into a rebuttal of the Mohawk’s statement, forgetting all about Annelia and the fairy maids beside him, and the four fairy maids decided it was probably best to leave the Card Repository promptly, before they could get drawn into the heated argument.

“Wow, who would’ve thought those two would be so divided on the issue?” Supercute remarked.

“Yes, they’re just as divided as us,” Glasses stated. “As is to be expected.”

“Hey, isn’t that M-Miss Iceheat down the hallway?” Geeky said, pointing at one of the figures in front of them. “A-And it seems like she’s arguing about Princess Lilith with the other higher-ups.”

Iceheat was indeed leading a discussion on the Lilith issue with the three other Level 7777 warriors, and the deputy head maid appeared to be firmly in the “against” camp.

“I’ll admit, I admire how hard she is striving to secure a better world for humans up on the surface, but I myself cannot look past how she never misses an opportunity to ask Master Light for a new favor,” Iceheat remarked, her brows fully furrowed. “Honestly, that kind of conduct goes beyond rank disrespect.”

Suzu nodded vigorously at this, and her talking musket, Lock, translated for her. “My partner says she agrees with you, Ms. Iceheat.”

Since Suzu was too shy to vocalize her thoughts, most of the time, she relied

on her intelligent weapon to do the speaking for her. The precious few times Suzu had actually spoken her own words out loud had been in situations involving her romantic interest, Light, so her antipathy for Lilith was colored by her own feelings for the young dungeon lord. On the flip side, Mera and Jack were standing up for Lilith.

Mera cackled in her customary way before adding her own point of view. “I don’t care what the princess does, just so long as Master’s fine with it. And if we’re being frank about it, I think the bigger problem here is the way you two are making her out to be some kind of villain behind Master’s back.”

“Spot on, my bro,” Jack said to Mera. “Ya gotta remember that Lilith went outta her way to save my little broski, Yume, and even took her on as a maid, of all things. She’s definitely earned herself a whole lotta bro points as far as I’m concerned, and all the favors she’s askin’ for don’t come close to settlin’ the score neither. ‘Sides, the Lightmeister’s all gravy with hookin’ her up. Or are you sayin’ Yume’s life ain’t worth the dues we owe Lilith?”

“Th-That is *not* what I’m saying, so don’t go twisting my words!” Iceheat sputtered. Suzu nodded four times to register her own protest at the implied accusation. Iceheat suddenly spun around and addressed the four fairy maids, whose presence she had sensed from the very beginning. “Tell us: what do you all think?”

“Ugh, she’s seriously putting us on the spot like this?” Kogal groaned.

Iceheat was in sudden need of some allies and she figured the fairy maids would back her up since she was their supervisor, but as was already established, the foursome were split on the subject. The fairy maids gave their honest opinions to the Level 7777s, and the debate ended in deadlock, with four siding with Lilith and four against. The role of tiebreaker naturally fell to Lock, who was clearly uncomfortable with being the center of attention.

“I hope you’re not asking *me* to declare a winner,” Lock protested. “You have to remember that no matter who wins this argument, it won’t change Lord Light’s mind about Princess Lilith.”

“Of course we’re aware of that. We simply want to know your *opinion* on it,” Iceheat pressed. “And since you *are* Suzu’s weapon, you must agree with her,

yes?”

Suzu nodded beseechingly at Lock, causing Mera to cackle at her two associates.

“Hey, Iceheat, don’t try to pressure Lock to take your side,” Mera objected. “That’s cheating, you know.”

“Chill, Lock. S’all good,” Jack said. “You may be a magic weapon, but you’ll always be my bro, so you just go ahead and say what ya want. If anyone decides they got a problem with what ya think, I’ll smack ’em back into line for ya.”

These assurances weren’t making Lock feel any better, especially as all eyes in the immediate vicinity were trained on the rifle. *I know I’m a magic weapon and don’t have one, but my stomach’s starting to hurt*, Lock thought under the intensity of the glares he was getting. *Someone please get me out of this jam!*

At that exact moment, a savior seemingly arrived to answer Lock’s prayers. “Might I ask what you are all doing here?”

It seemed as though Mei, the Level 9999 Ever-Seeking Maid, had heard every word of the discussion, and her sudden appearance drew everyone’s attention away from Lock, much to the musket’s relief.

“It appears your views regarding Princess Lilith are perfectly divided, though I will ask all of you to refrain from discussing the matter ever again,” Mei warned, her exasperation hardening her normally placid expression. “Since Master Light sees no issue with Princess Lilith’s requests, we are not entitled to opine on the matter, wherever we might stand on it.”

Mei paused. “There is also another reason why this subject is not open for discussion. I do not wish to deal with the serious repercussions that might arise if either Nazuna or Miss Yume were to hear about this supposed controversy.”

Everyone else in the hallway started imagining how the purehearted Nazuna would likely react to hearing that Lilith was taking advantage of Light.

“Wait, Lilith was a baddie all along?” Nazuna would no doubt say. “I thought she was good, since she saved li’l sis! But she ain’t gonna aggravate Master on my watch! I’ll clobber her all the way to the moon!” She would then immediately make a beeline for the Human Kingdom to make good on her

threat. Everyone else in the Abyss would do all they could to stop Nazuna, but if they failed, the Vampire Knight would wipe the kingdom off the map in the most literal sense.

Yume's reaction to hearing about the "Lilith Problem" would be no less devastating, even if it wouldn't be quite as *physically* destructive.

"Brother! Please don't be mad at the princess!" Yume would plead, tearfully bowing her head. "She was the one who saved my life! I owe her everything! I'll say sorry for her, so please don't be mad!"

Needless to say, Light would feel guilty and shaken for unintentionally making his beloved sister miserable. A wave of remorse washed over the eight people in the hallway as they thought about what would happen if Nazuna or Yume were to overhear what they were saying.

"So you must all watch what you say, particularly around those two," Mei said, continuing her admonishment of the group. "From this point forward, you are not to breathe a word on this matter. If you hear anyone else discussing it, I must likewise ask you to warn that person immediately."

"Uh, yes, understood, Miss Mei," Iceheat said hesitantly. "I will inform each and every fairy maid of this new directive."

"Please do that, Iceheat," Mei replied. "Now, if you will excuse me, I have work I must attend to."

Once Mei had departed, everyone else that had been blocking the hallway returned to their own tasks, acting as if they hadn't even mentioned Lilith in the first place. Meanwhile, Yume and Nazuna were having their own private chat about the princess as they sat eating tiramisu in Yume's private chambers.

"Mmm, this is really yummy, little sister!" Nazuna squealed. "I can't believe how tasty this is!"

"I love how it's just the right kind of bitter that grown-ups like," Yume agreed. "I think Princess Lilith would like this dessert too!"

"Princess Lilith?" Nazuna said. "You mean that girl who saved you? She must be nice!"

“Yup, she’s really sweet,” Yume said. “Whenever we had teatime in the castle, the princess would sneak me some cookies when the head maid wasn’t looking.”

“She did?” Nazuna said. “Well, now I like her even *more!*”

The two friends continued to chat away merrily while a group of fairy maids silently waited on them.



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Backstabbed in a Backwater Dungeon: My Trusted Companions Tried to Kill Me, But Thanks to the Gift of an Unlimited Gacha I Got LVL 9999 Friends and Am Out For Revenge on My Former Party Members and the World Volume 7

by Meikyou Shisui

Translated by Gad Onyeneho Edited by SMR

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