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I'm a
Noble^{on the} Brink of Ruin,
So I Might
as Well Try Mastering
MAGIC

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Character

Liam

Count Hamilton's fifth son who is actually a transmigrator from another world. He adores magic and spends all his time mastering it.



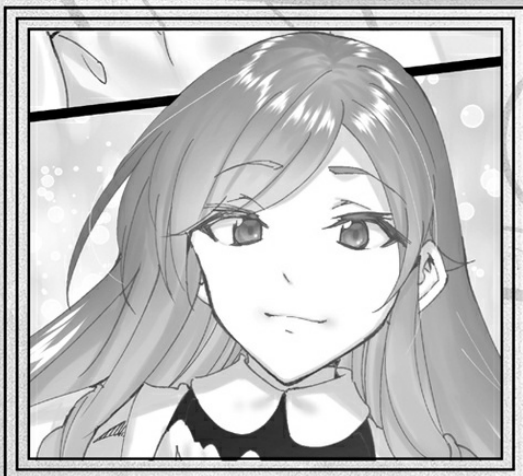
Asura

A bright and energetic hunter. She got prettier after becoming Liam's familiar.



Jodie

A motherly hunter who regained her youth after becoming Liam's familiar. She is now a member of his party.



Scarlet

The first princess of Jamille Kingdom. She saw promise in Liam, made him a baron, and made a certain request of him.

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“Magic Missile, seventeen rounds!”

From my extended fist, seventeen magic missiles shot out and drew arcs in the air as they flew toward the giant monster before me. With a crocodile’s head and a turtle’s body, the crocoturtle loomed over the plains on all four of its legs.

The magic missiles landed one after the other, but they were repelled by either the ridiculously sturdy shell on its back or the tough skin over its body. Thanks to the sheer number of missiles, however, the crocoturtle’s body was lifted off the ground, giving me just enough room to see its stomach past its front legs.

“Amelia Emilia Claudia... Pierce through, Holy Lance!”

I unleashed an aria-charged intermediate divine magic, manifesting a spear of light in my right hand. Seizing the opportunity, I threw it at the crocoturtle with all my might. It soared straight, pierced into its stomach, then exploded inside, scattering the giant crocodile-faced turtle into bits. Only its shell was left in the grisly aftermath.

“Phew...” I wiped the sweat off my brow with the back of my hand.

Glad that went well. I nonchalantly spun around, only to be met with Princess Scarlet’s beautiful face going slack and mouth falling agape in shock.

“Your Highness?”

She blinked for a moment before gasping. “P-Pardon me, Master. I was captivated at the sight of your extraordinary mana.”

“Were you now?” I was wondering what had her jaw dropping like that.

“If I am not mistaken, you seem to have gotten far stronger than before...”

“Well, I’ve started to grasp how to ‘use’ magic now.”

By that, I was talking about using it much more effectively and efficiently. Every time I learned new magic and practiced new spells, I also found more ways to combine them to produce different outcomes. I just found it all unbearably fun. It was so, so enjoyable to be able to find more ways to put magic to use.

“As expected of you, Master. At this rate, the cleanup of the promised land ought to end in no time at all.”

“You’re right, Your Highness. After that, you can—”

“Master.” Scarlet leveled a very sharp look at me.

I flinched. “Wh-What?”

“Please call me by my name. As one who serves you, I cannot bear to make you address me so respectfully.”

“O-Oh. I guess so.”

Still, I wasn’t so sure about that. Normally, a first princess like Scarlet would be as far above me as the clouds in the sky. Whether as the fifth son of a noble family or the commoner that I actually was on the inside, I couldn’t quite get used to treating her as a subordinate rather than a royal.

“M-More importantly...” I said, deciding to change the topic. “Are you sure you’re okay with this? You know, following me and building a country here and all that.”

“Of course,” she answered simply.

“But why? You’re already way up there as the first princess of an entire kingdom.”

“My maternal family is said to have inherited the blood of a dragon.”

“Really?!” I wasn’t expecting that.

“We are often referred to as dragonbloods. It is for this reason that we’ve always been valued as a precious lineage in the kingdom and have been wed to the king over the years.”

“Oh, wow. And that’s how you could keep being nobles?”

Scarlet quietly nodded.

That's what father was trying to do. So there was a proper precedent for it.

"As one who has inherited the blood of a dragon, I cannot possibly defy the... No." She closed her eyes and shook her head, as if purging a thought from her mind, then looked straight at me, or rather, at Lardon. "I myself wish to serve the divine dragon."

"I see... Lardon, was that story true?"

"It was but a passing whim of mine. As always, humans enjoy deifying the smallest matters."

When I passed that message on to Scarlet, her face instantly brightened like a vibrant flower in full bloom. That story served as a foundation her life was built on, so even this oblique affirmation seemed to have made her incredibly happy.

"Head one kilometer north."

"North? What for?"

"There lies something that should make that lass even happier."

I passed those words on to Scarlet as well. "What do you think?"

"Let us go!" she responded in a flash, looking terribly eager. "The divine dragon's will must be done."

I was also pretty curious about what could possibly make her even happier than she already was, so I took her along and trekked northward just as Lardon said.

"These stairs... They lead underground?"

"They appear to be ruins of some sort."

"Do we go in?"

"Of course." Yet again, Scarlet nodded without an ounce of hesitation.

Weathered and dotted with moss and signs of damage, the stone stairs told a tale of age. After we descended around three flights of steps, we arrived at a wide space brightly lit by a single glowing wall, unlike Another World, where the lighting had no determinable source.

In the very center of that space was a *dragon*.

“Is that...Lardon?”

“The divine dragon?” Scarlet blinked in shock, as she had never seen Lardon in person.

“No, it’s made of iron,” I observed. “Just what...”

“That is a guardian designed after me. Try defeating it first,” Lardon urged just as the iron dragon began to get up.

“How?”

“On its head is my name written in the ancient script. Erasing one character will change it into a word that means ‘submission.’”

“The third character!” Scarlet exclaimed right after I relayed those instructions to her. “Please erase the third character!”

Despite not saying anything else, I could sense that Lardon was satisfied by her response.

“The third one, huh? Got it.”

I took a step forward the same time the iron Guardian Lardon rose to its full height. It roared upward, sending tremors throughout this underground space, before lowering its eyes into a glare.

As I looked closely, there *were* characters carved onto its forehead—none of which I could read, of course, but I could at least tell the characters themselves apart.

It lunged at us with its jaws wide open, so I pulled Scarlet close and jumped to the side. Just as her surprised yelp reached my ears, I immediately set her down and teleported away, right on time for the iron dragon to snap its jaws over the spot we were just at. I quickly reappeared above it with Teleport again and firmly grabbed onto its head.

“Holy Lance!”

Forgoing the aria, I cast the spell with my hand directly atop the third character on its forehead, sending the spear of light soundlessly piercing

through.



The enraged Guardian Lardon came to a halt. Then, its body started to glow. I jumped down from its head and watched as it seemingly trembled in pain for a while, and eventually, it settled down. Its eyes roved around the area, until it caught sight of Scarlet.

The iron dragon shifted its position so that it was facing her—and it *kneled*.

“Wh-What?!”

“Oh, it must’ve submitted to the blood flowing within you,” I said. Scarlet blinked in confusion, so I clarified, “The dragon’s blood, I mean.”

After staring blankly for a moment longer, she gasped.

This guardian that took after Lardon’s appearance had submitted to her, in a way acknowledging the dragon’s blood she so treasured. That afternoon, yet another bright smile blossomed on her face.

“I’ll head back to the elves first, then.”

“Understood.” Scarlet stood next to Guardian Lardon with a somber look. “I shall follow immediately once the repairs are complete.”

“No rush. Your control over it won’t be fully established until the character self-repairs, after all.”

“Is that what the divine dragon said?”

I nodded. Guardian Lardon began listening to Scarlet’s orders after we partially erased the ancient script for “Lardon” on its forehead and changed it to “submission,” but it apparently wouldn’t stabilize until the character self-repaired and returned to “Lardon” once more. That should progress without a hitch as long as it stayed still, so it would be best for it to remain here in the meantime.

“There’s no need to force anything. Just be patient and wait by its side.”

“I understand. Thank you very much.”

“See ya.”

I parted ways with Scarlet, left the underground cave, and returned to the surface through the stairs. The sun was going to set soon, so I decided to end my “cleanup” here and teleported back to the elves.

The next moment, my eyes popped.

The village was under attack. The place I’d left earlier in the day looked very much like a proper village construction site with a general framework in place. Now, some of it was destroyed, with a few places even up in flames.

“AAAH!!!”

Before I could think any further, I made a mad dash toward the direction of the scream and found an elf being attacked by a monster, a bipedal wolf known

as a werewolf, that was holding the elf up by her petite arm.

“Let her go!” I bellowed, firing off a magic missile.

“Wha—” It landed a clean hit on the werewolf’s face just as he was turning around, knocking a grunt out of him and sending him flying.

The elf was thrown forward, but I caught her in my arms just before she hit the ground. “Are you okay?”

“Lord Liam!” She wrapped her arms around my neck.

The soft touch and pleasant scent made my heart skip a beat. “Wh-What’s going on here?”

“Oh, right! Those guys, the werewolves—they just suddenly attacked us.”

“Why?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know.”

I sighed. “Okay. I’ll save everyone. You hide in here,” I instructed, summoning Another World.

Having already entered it once before, the elf didn’t hesitate to step right in. Once I released the spell, her safety was essentially secured.

I continued running around the village-to-be, looking for the other elves like a restless gale in search of prey. I’d fire magic missiles at the defenseless werewolves before they noticed me and knock them unconscious before they could even retaliate. Then, I’d evacuate the elves into Another World. I managed to keep this up until I’d defeated around ten of the werewolves.

That streak was interrupted when a black shadow fell over my body.

“Ugh!”

I immediately crossed my arms in defense. A huge impact and a burning sensation assaulted my arms as my body was flung backward, but I managed to adjust my position in midair with a half flip and landed safely on the ground. Looking down, I could see blood gushing from some sharp clawlike wounds on my arms.

“Heal.” I cast beginner healing magic on myself before gazing at the one who

had attacked me. He was a werewolf just like the rest, yet the aura around him made him stand out very clearly. I didn't know if we could hold a conversation, but I gave it a try for now. "Are you the leader?"

"Filthy outlanders. Leave this holy land at once."

"Holy land?"

"If you refuse..."

With nothing but a whizzing sound as warning, the bare-bones house beside the werewolf got sliced up and collapsed into a pile of rubble. He held his claws out, brandishing the very cause of that destruction.

"...then I will tear you to shreds."

"Wait, just hear us out!"

That guy called this place the holy land. In other words, there was an exceedingly high chance that he was related to Lardon, or at least something along those lines. It meant that we could talk things out— "So you refuse! Then I will force you out!"

—until the werewolf kicked off the ground and came charging at me.

I fired seventeen magic missiles all at once, but the werewolf parried them all, causing loud explosions in the air. Then, with a spirited war cry, he leaped toward me with his claws outstretched—only to swipe at thin air.

He froze momentarily. "What?!"

To dodge, I teleported away to safety, leaving the werewolf stunned at my sudden disappearance. Using that opening, I teleported one more time and reappeared right behind him.

"Lightning!"

At close proximity, I cast a beginner electric magic spell and sent the current running through the werewolf's body. He stiffened up with a violent jolt before defenselessly collapsing onto his knees and convulsing over the ground.

"Ugh... I-I would never yield to you outlanders...over something like this...!"

"I'm telling you to listen... Fine, how about this?" I summoned a Lardon

Junior, a dog-sized dragon child that looked nearly identical to Lardon.

The werewolf opened his eyes wide in shock. “Th-That’s...”

“So you really *are* related to Lardon.”

I gathered everyone to the center of the village, the elves led by Reina on one side and several dozen werewolf invaders on the other. They were quite the big pack. I cast healing magic on all the wounded—yes, including the werewolves—and made sure everyone was fit as a fiddle.

As I’d suspected, the werewolf I defeated last seemed to be their leader. He stepped forward as their representative and asked, “Is the divine dragon really inside you?”

“You need more proof? Just let me know. I can ask Lardon for something.”

He trailed his thoughtful gaze over the Lardon Junior I’d summoned and shook his head. “No, this is enough.”

“All right. So, your race follows Lardon, you’ve always been living here, and you drive out any invaders from outside. Did I get everything right?”

“You did.”

“So you’re just like these girls. They’re under Lardon’s protection too.”

“Were they now...” The werewolf faced the elves and lowered his head. “It seems we’ve committed some horrible acts in our ignorance.”

“Not at all. I understand where you were coming from,” Reina said. Perhaps finding some sort of kinship as fellow races related to Lardon, she and the other elves didn’t seem to mind at all. “More importantly, how would you all like to form contracts with Lord Liam as well?”

“Contracts?”

“We’ve formed contracts and sworn our allegiance to Lord Liam and Lord Lardon. Would it not be fine if you all did the same?”

“I see.” The werewolf nodded, and this time, they all faced me. “Could we ask this of you?”

“Sure.”

I had no reason to refuse, especially if these fellows had sworn loyalty to Lardon. I cast Familia on all the werewolves one by one, forming contracts with each individual. Just as the elves did, the werewolves, too, evolved. From bipedal wolves, they turned into wolfmen that had a more humanlike appearance.

One, however, stood out.

“Then you’ll be...Chris.”

I named the werewolf while casting Familia as I did any other. Chris’s appearance began to change before my eyes into one so closely human, even among the other wolfmen, save for the wolf ears and tail. There was also a more glaring issue.

“Huh? You were a girl?”

“Yeah?”

The beautiful wolf-eared girl gave me a weird look, as if I was supposed to have known that all along.



With the addition of Chris and the other evolved wolfmen, the village construction quickly sped up. Dexterous as they were, the elves were still a weak race by nature; even with the help of Gorak's clone I'd called through contract summoning, efficiency inevitably dropped whenever some brawn was needed in the equation. On the other hand, the wolfmen were truly strong *and* far more nimble than the elves. They easily filled in the gaps the elves had left in this project, leading to some very smooth progress.

With no real need to help, I wandered the village, supervising only in name, when I ran into Chris.

"Oh, Master!"

Even among the wolfmen, she had evolved into an especially humanlike form. The beautiful wolf-eared girl tossed her work aside, dashed over, and quite literally *pounced* on me.

"Masteeer," she crooned, hugging me tightly and nuzzling her cheek against mine. Far from coming off as obscene, it just seemed to me as if her animalistic instincts took over when expressing affection. It felt like being pounced on by a large yet playful dog, actually.

"Were you working properly?"

"Yep! I was fixing that."

"That? Oh, the house you broke."

Chris was pointing at the foundation of one of the houses that they had broken in their attack. The building's wooden frame was irreparably snapped apart, and some parts were charred completely black. Buildings like this needed to be demolished entirely first before any rebuilding could be done.

As I nodded, Chris pulled away from me and visibly wilted. Both her wolf ears and her tail glumly drooped down. "I'm sorry... I'll do my best to fix it, so please

forgive me.”

“It’s fine. No use crying over spilled milk. It’s all good as long as you give your all to help fix the place up and build some new houses.”

“Yeah! I’ll give it my very best!” Chris crowed, immediately cheering up.

She was honestly reflecting on her mistakes and never lost her spirit. *She really is a good and sincere girl*, I thought as my eyes shifted toward the pile of rubble.

“What is it, Master?”

“Hm? Oh, well... I was just thinking that it’d be nice if I could repair that with magic too.”

“Repair it?”

“Like healing magic.”

Honestly, it all felt like such a waste. What they were demolishing right now were the houses that the weak elves had worked so hard to build. It gave these awkward structures some intangible, unplaceable value that I felt reluctant to just disregard.

Well, I haven’t learned any magic of the sort. Not much I can do about that.

“Then you simply have to make it.”

My eyebrows shot up. “Make it? What do you mean, Lardon?”

Chris’s eyes sparkled and her tail stood ramrod straight when she realized that I was speaking with the dragon housed inside my body.

“Precisely that. If you haven’t learned any such magic, then you simply have to make it.”

“Magic can be created?”

“How do you suppose the existing magic came to be?” Lardon shot back, the slightest bit of exasperation leaking through.

I hummed in understanding. The magic we knew of today had to have been created by someone too. But even if that were the case... “Can I make magic?”

"I do not seek weapons from a barbershop."

That was a terribly roundabout way to put it, but basically, that was a yes.
"What should I do?"

"Imagine," Lardon answered simply. *"Imagine far more strongly than when you cast magic. What do you want to do? How do you wish to do it? From the process to the end result, imagine it all strongly, fiercely, vividly, in your mind."*

Lardon was being uncharacteristically elaborate with the explanation, which prompted me to take it to heart. So I did. I chewed on it, turned the words over and over in my mind, working toward a deeper understanding.

Imagine it.

What do I want to do? How do I want to do it?

From the process to the end result, imagine it all vividly in my mind.

I mustered my mana. Following the blueprint I'd conjured up, I molded it into my desired shape as if it were clay.

Then, all of a sudden, things just seemed to fall into place.

I immediately put my newfound understanding to the test, seventeenfold. I even unsummoned Gorak's clone in order to pour all my mana and concentration into testing this original spell of mine.

I was met with failure after failure. I couldn't quite do it the way I'd imagined, and time passed with only my mana whittling away. Despite it all, I persevered. I tried seventeen times and failed seventeen times. After making minute adjustments on my mental image and the shape and flow of my mana, I tried again for seventeen more.

I ceaselessly repeated my efforts in a cycle of consuming mana and recovering using lekukro crystals, until finally, my persistence bore fruit. Some words appeared in my head.

"Shape Memory."

I was certain that this was it. The magic activated, its light enveloping the rubble, then seeping right into it.

“Master? Were you able to create magic?” Chris asked, her excitement palpable.

I nodded. “Yeah. Try snapping one of those pillars.”

“Okay!” With a small huff, Chris trotted over to the rubble and easily snapped a thick pillar in two. But then, the broken pillar began to glow and before our eyes reverted back into its original shape. “Wh-What is this?!”

“Shape Memory,” I answered. “It’s a spell that can record the shape of a nonliving thing at the time it was cast. If it ever changes shape, this spell will revert it back to its original recorded form.”

Chris breathed out in awe. “You made it just now, Master?”

“Right.”

“You’re amazing! My master’s the best!” Chris, glowing with excitement, clung to me once again and even began licking my face.

Meanwhile, I could hear Lardon chuckling in amusement. *“I didn’t quite expect you to craft it within a day. An interesting human as ever.”*

The space surrounding my house in Another World had expanded quite a bit since the time I first had the house constructed. Now, I stood within that space while looking at the salt water I'd taken out of my item box.

Having formulated a new spell called Shape Memory, I immediately came up with a new goal related to a certain obstacle I'd encountered right after I began learning and applying magic: extracting fresh water from salt water. Back then, I'd originally planned to have an Undine split them, but the low-rank spirit was incapable of it since both were identified as products of nature.

In the end, I'd succeeded in extracting the fresh water in a more roundabout way using Gnomes and a few other things, but thinking back on it now, that process was way too complex for my liking. I wanted a much simpler method, something closer to the one-step process I'd been expecting from the Undine in the beginning—which brought me to the idea of making yet another original spell just like Shape Memory.

I faced the salt water and imagined it splitting into its components as I gathered my mana and crafted the spell. However, my face twisted into a scowl as I heard the airy sound of something dissipating with a *puff*.

I failed. In fact, I felt like I was nowhere near succeeding. Reading the flow of mana, I could tell that the salt water I'd poured into a bucket from my item box remained completely unchanged. Back when I made Shape Memory, I could clearly envision it succeeding and even allocated seventeen of my nineteen spell slots for it. But now, I could see no such vision.

“What could be the problem...? Is it just impossible? No, that can't be it,” I wondered aloud.

This, too, was something I knew from my experience with Shape Memory: the possibilities were endless with magic. Of course, calling it “endless” was certainly a bit of a stretch, but magic should at least be capable of splitting salt

water into fresh water and salt. Thus, the problem here must lie in my method alone.

Attempting to figure out just what about my method was wrong, I let my thoughts wander back to my experience with Shape Memory. What I saw, what I did, and what I imagined as I made it—I recalled it all in minute detail.

“That is not enough,” Lardon said out of nowhere.

“Huh? What’s not enough?”

“Everything follows the law of causality.”

“Causality...” My voice trailed off as I waited for the rest, but Lardon refrained from offering more, leaving me hanging and blinking like an idiot. “Huh? Is that all?”

Even to this, the dragon refused to respond, showing absolutely zero intention of speaking any further. *Okay, so that was all.* Lardon would never speak nonsense, especially not in this situation. Of course, not saying enough or speaking in a roundabout manner was just par for the course, so I needed to decipher that earlier statement myself.

Everything follows the law of causality, I recited in my mind. *The law of causality... Cause and effect... The broken house and the newly built one...*

That instant, I felt like a bolt of lightning struck me from the heavens. An idea flashed through my mind.

“Celsius!”

As I kept practicing with multicasting as I always did, I had eventually mastered the summoning spell for Celsius, a mid-rank spirit.

“You called, Master?”

“Can you split the salt water in that bucket into fresh water and salt?”

“Of course.” The Celsius swiftly nodded and raised her hand toward the bucket. In no time at all, fresh water began rising from within.

If I were to think in terms of causality, the cause would be the materials, and the effect would be the finished product. I watched the process of salt water

splitting into fresh water with my own eyes. With this, I now had my very own mental image, just as I did back when I'd created Shape Memory with the broken and fixed houses both in my sight.

The Celsius watched with a curious gaze as I poured out more salt water from my item box, but the explanation could wait for later. I went on to imagine the salt water splitting into fresh water and salt. This time, I could envision it succeeding, so I used all my remaining spell slots on crafting the spell and poured a huge amount of mana into the process, until finally...

“Distillery!”

Grayish salt emerged from this new batch of salt water. I scooped up some of the remaining water and gave it a lick—it was completely flavorless. *It's fresh water!*

“Master... Could it be? Have you done the same as I?”

“Yeah. Thanks to you, I was able to form an image and craft the spell.”

“You even made it yourself?! A-Amazing...”

The Celsius was utterly stunned, while Lardon was chuckling in what seemed to be a mix of approval and amusement. *“You learn quick. Truly an interesting human.”*

Whether it was learning magic or inventing a spell, being able to *recreate* it was important. Now that I'd crafted a spell a second time, I had a clearer image I could use for future reference.

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“Power Missile!”

Seventeen bullets of pure mana shot out from my right fist, quickly spreading out before homing in on the pure white wall. Another World wasn't shaken, but it was easy to see how strong the impact was.

“It's about twice as strong as Magic Missile. Good.” I nodded in satisfaction as I observed my third original spell.

Following the law of causality once more, I had summoned an Undine and a Celsius at the same time and placed the two spirits of different ranks beside one another for comparison. With that reference, I made a new-and-improved version of a spell I'd been using quite a lot recently, Magic Missile. This new version was practically the same as its predecessor save for its improved firepower, which was how I was able to invent it so smoothly with a low and mid-rank spirit serving as models. Moving forward, I'd probably start using this instead of Magic Missile.

An amused chuckle echoed in my mind. *“That adaptability of yours is always fun to watch.”*

“Sounds like someone's having fun.”

“You would do well to keep those efforts up.”

“That's the plan.”

“If so, you must learn more about the world. Start with establishing this country. Whether you want to or not, you will undoubtedly learn more in the process.”

As Lardon advised, that was likely the best way to accumulate experience. I had no doubt about that. However, I had something else on my mind as well. “That's nice and all, but there's another thing.”

“Is there now?”

I nodded with certainty. In the process of crafting magic, I had honed my imagination and racked my brain quite a bit. By the end of it all, my mind had landed on a certain conclusion. It was a coincidental breakthrough of sorts, but from the moment my thoughts fell into place, I only grew more and more certain that I was right.

“To start with, what in the world did the first inventor of magic do?” I heard Lardon draw in a sharp breath, but I pushed on. “If they essentially created something out of nothing, then it should theoretically be possible to create magic from nothing.”

Putting it into words only solidified my conviction even further. I shouldn’t be mistaken. Even without a precedent or a causal relationship to serve as reference, it should be possible to make magic from scratch.

“Ha...ha ha...ha ha ha!” All of a sudden, Lardon’s laughter began ringing in my mind.

“Wh-What? What is it?”

“Ah, how fun. As I thought, you truly are fascinating to watch.”

The pleasant laughter finally tapered off after a while, but even so, this was the loudest Lardon had ever laughed since we met.

Having finished my magic crafting workshop, I stepped out of Another World and back to the center of the village that the elves and wolfmen were building at breakneck speed. Reina seemed to be waiting for me, as she immediately rushed to my side as I stepped out.

“Lord Liam!”

“What’s up? Something happen?”

“Yes. The pixies of this land have come seeking protection.”

“Pixies? Here?” I questioned. Reina turned around, and I followed her gaze to find a hundred or so little fairies floating in the air. They looked just like how Reina and the others did a while back. “Oh, I see. But why?”

“They say humans attacked them.”

“Really?”

“The pixies suspect they were soldiers of some country, but they don’t know much else. They just fled here after their settlement was attacked.” Reina frowned. “What do we do?”

I mulled it over for a moment. “This can’t be a trap, can it?”

“We—I mean, *pixies* cannot lie.”

“Oh?” She said “*cannot*” rather than “*do not*.” It must be a pixie thing. “All right, then. Let’s welcome them aboard. Ah, and I may as well name and form a contract with anyone interested while I’m at it. Could you go check on that with them too?”

“I have already done so. They’ve all accepted.”

“All of them?”

“Yes. The pixies saw us and decided they could trust you.”

“Just like that? Seriously?”

“We, too, cannot lie. They accepted once we shared our experiences with them.”

“Hmmm.” The current and former pixies must have some sort of tacit understanding.

I gave out names and contracts to the roughly one hundred pixies seeking protection, helping them all evolve into elves, and thus suddenly boosting our village population up by a hundred.

After gathering some information from the newly evolved elves, I made my way toward the settlement they’d escaped from in search of their assailants. It was in the open field that I’d passed through while searching for Guardian Lardon that I ran into a group of roughly a hundred armed men on horses. Their weapons were all uniform in design, and it was clear at a glance that they were no bandits. They seemed more likely to be some country’s cavalrymen.

The man in the lead caught sight of me and raised his hand, making the troops following behind him all pull on their reins and smoothly bring their horses to a halt.

They’re pretty well-trained. Definitely some country’s soldiers.

“You there, child,” the man, likely their captain, called. “Are you a resident of this place?”

“Yeah. This is my...country.” For a moment, I wasn’t really sure what to answer, but I remembered what Scarlet told me and settled with this.

“Your country?” He raised a brow. “And what is this country’s name?”

“It’s...” It wasn’t even named yet, so I had no way of answering.

Seeing me falter, the grim-faced captain snorted. “Is this a prank?”

I frowned, indignant. “Anyway, this is my land. I have no idea who you guys are, but I’m gonna have to ask you to leave.”

However, his subordinates began speaking up behind him.

“Captain, we should go.”

“I agree. We came here to scout out this land that suddenly appeared.”

“We wouldn’t want to fall behind Jamille or Quistador because of a kid like this.”

The captain nodded at them as he grabbed his reins and urged his horse forward. In response to that, I raised my hand up in the air.

“Power Missile, seventeen rounds!”

Seventeen was the maximum number of spells I could cast without an aria. The captain managed to dodge one by making his horse stoop low, but the other sixteen cavalymen up front weren’t as fortunate. They were all flung back, their armor crumbling apart and their bodies rolling in the dirt before they passed out.

“Y-You—!”

“This is a warning.” I raised my fist even higher. “This is my country, my land. If you insist on trespassing, then I’ll have to remove you by force.”

“Urgh...” The captain clearly faltered—a sentiment his subordinates did not seem to share.

“RAAAH!” They bellowed out, some in fear and some in rage, as they came charging straight toward me on their horses.

“You guys just don’t get it...”

Crafting all those spells recently had helped my imagination grow more vivid than ever. With this newfound skill, I formed a mental image of myself overwhelming them, reaping their morale—a picture I painted into reality.

I teleported and reappeared behind one of the cavalrymen. Perched atop his horse, I fired a power missile right at his defenseless back.

“Argh!”

After sending that one flying, I teleported to the next cavalryman and fired off another missile. Another teleport, another power missile, over and over. The fourteen men that had come charging at me were all wiped out in no time. Since I’d come this far, I figured I might as well mow down the rest too.

At some point, the cavalrymen began to pivot completely the moment they saw me disappear in an attempt to counterattack, but that was well within my expectations—the *image* I’d drawn up in my mind. I began mixing in some feints, teleporting in front of them, above them, all around. Come the end, even the captain tumbled over the ground with a grunt.

I looked down at him and warned, “Don’t show your faces around here again. Understood?”

Thus I annihilated a hundred-strong cavalry unit in the blink of an eye.

With the cavalrymen fended off, I returned to the village to find most of the elves and wolfmen all flocking around *something*, and although it was several hundred meters away, I easily spotted what it was: Guardian Lardon, the iron dragon. Upon closer inspection, I found Scarlet in the middle of all that too.

“Oh, hey. You’re back.”

“Yes, Master! The character’s restoration has been completed.”

“Yeah? That’s great.” I walked over and looked up at the guardian. From its glossy finish to the listless pose it struck on the ground, it really looked like a bronze statue. “Scarlet, I have something to discuss with you. Follow me.”

“Understood.”

“Reina...” I trailed my gaze over the crowd that had gathered around the iron dragon. “And Chris. You two as well.”

Taking along the leaders of the elves and wolfmen respectively, I stepped into Another World, invited them into the living room, and urged them to take their seats.

“Take a look at this.”

With the four of us surrounding the table, I took a piece of broken armor from my item box, one among the many lying around on the ground after I sent all those cavalrymen flying. This one in particular bore a crest, so I swiped it after our little scuffle and brought it back.

I set the piece down on the table and asked Scarlet, “This ring any bells?”

She pursed her lips for a moment. “That is the Duchy of Parta’s crest.”

“The Duchy of Parta?”

“It is a nation neighboring this promised land, just like our Jamille Kingdom and the Quistador Kingdom.”

“Oh...”

“Have they already sent scouts for reconnaissance?”

“Scouts...” I nodded in affirmation. “I guess that’s what they were.”

After recounting to Scarlet how I came across and drove off a hundred cavalymen, Reina piped in, “So they were the ones who attacked the pixies?”

I nodded again. “Right. If they were sent for reconnaissance, then they probably just happened upon them and decided to attack then and there.”

“I concur. We will likely see troops from Jamille and Quistador soon as well,” Scarlet added. “Gallar Valley used to separate these three nations as a natural barrier, but the promised land’s reemergence has bridged these nations’ borders together.”

“Guess they all want dibs on this place, then...” I groused.

“Indeed.”

The situation was clear as day: since the neighboring valley suddenly turned into a flatland, they all wanted to survey this place and seize it by force if they could.

“What should we do?”

“I implore you to build a country here, Master.”

I nodded mutely. The elves, the wolfmen, and now this new batch of elves... Our group just kept growing in numbers. They were all my familiars, so I couldn’t possibly kick them to the curb. It had become even more imperative for me to establish a country here compared to the first time Scarlet asked me to.

“There are three necessary elements to a state: territory, population, and power. Among those, our territory is quite clear-cut. Our population, too, is meager at the moment, but it should increase soon once rumors of you spread far and wide, Master.”

“So it’s down to power, huh?”

“In that sense, I believe it was good that you repelled the scouts on your own.

Moreover, we now have Guardian Lardon with us.”

“But that’s not enough. We’ll need soldiers too, maybe something like a defense squad.”

“Leave that to me!” Chris proudly stood up and thumped her chest. “I just need to kill all of your enemies, right, Master? Then we’ve got it in the bag!”

For a cute wolf-eared girl, she was saying some rather vicious things. I nodded anyway. “Right... Okay. It’s all yours.”

Although they all evolved with the same spell, the wolfmen were far more suited for battle than the elves. They were, after all, wolves—a species that specialized in hunting and combat. I suppose I could leave the “power” bit to them for now.

“Once they realize that we have power,” Scarlet continued, “they will not approach us carelessly. Furthermore, depending on how they perceive the extent of our power, they may even come bearing talks of peace and alliance.”

“So we just need to make them think that they’re better off befriending rather than antagonizing us?”

“Precisely.”

“Got it. So for now, we’ll just keep fending off any scouts,” I concluded. “*They’re* the ones trespassing on *us*. It should be no problem for us to knock them back, right?”

“It is as you say, Master. The most favorable scenario would be for them to approach us with gifts on hand and talks of an alliance on the table. The grandeur of the gift shall serve as a good measure of how seriously they view you.”

I nodded. Thanks to Scarlet’s detailed advice, I could see what we had to do for the foreseeable future: make a village, fend off enemies, and flaunt our power as much as we could.

It was simple as pie...or so I thought. The next day, matters escalated far beyond our expectations.

In the center of the village, I stood facing a man who seemed to be in his late

thirties. Dressed as a noble, he wore a monocle and had a well-groomed mustache to boot. Behind him were several dozen guards, none of whom were showing any hostility whatsoever.

The man politely bowed as a start. "My name is Leonardo Berkley."

The wolfmen and elves began murmuring behind me. Not like there was much else for them to do, though, as his actions were as harmless as they could get.

"Marquis Berkley..." Scarlet murmured from where she stood diagonally behind me.

I turned my head to her. "You know him?"

"He is a nobleman from Jamille."

Humming, I shifted my gaze back to the marquis. His lips curled up into a smile, and his eyes were focused only on me. "I'm Liam," I said, finally returning the greeting. "What business do you have here, Marquis Berkley?"

"My lord, His Majesty Lorenzo II, has ordered me to come meet you."

"His Majesty the King?"

"Indeed." Leonardo smiled pleasantly. "Our Jamille Kingdom has no intention of fighting you. On the contrary, we wish to form an alliance."

"Huh?" *All of a sudden?* I blinked in shock—and he wasn't even finished yet.

"Should you accept..."

I held my breath.

"...we shall make preparations to offer our kingdom's first princess, Her Highness Princess Scarlet, as your bride."

Scarlet and I both flinched. The first princess was certainly a grander "gift" than I could've ever expected. *Is that how seriously Jamille is taking me? I mean, that's nice of them, but why? They haven't even sent their own scouts yet, nor have we displayed our power to them...*

"Ah..."

The answer suddenly occurred to me. My gaze flicked over my shoulder to

Scarlet. *She was being too obvious.* Just like that time she gave me some hush money, she made it clear as day that she was investigating the divine dragon.

Almost as if he could tell what conclusion I'd come to, Leonardo looked me in the eye and declared, "Jamille has no intention of opposing such esteemed and illustrious individuals."

The implication was clear: in their eyes, I was of utmost importance.

This guy... He said “individuals,” plural. He must’ve been talking about not only me but also Lardon, whom they likely noticed because of Scarlet’s overt movements.

As I was about to give the deal some thought, I realized that there was something else I needed to check with him first. “Marquis Berkley...”

“Please, call me Leonardo.”

I hesitated for a moment, but gave in. “Mr. Leonardo, then. Have you ever met Ms. Scarlet?”

“Oh?”

“Hm...”

Lardon and Leonardo hummed at the same time. They both sounded fairly impressed, although the former also seemed amused as usual, while the latter looked as if he’d been seen right through.

After a pause, Leonardo cleared his throat and schooled his expression. “Pardon me. I hadn’t expected you to be endowed with such political wit. Ordinarily, those that are not the eldest, much less the fifth son, would never have to hone such a skill.”

True... Any normal fifth son wouldn’t have the opportunity to display it at all.

As he spoke, Leonardo discreetly and ever so slightly averted his gaze from Scarlet. “You asked about Her Highness the Princess, yes? I have seen her quite a few times. The other day, I had the honor of dancing with her at a ball.”

In other words, he was very familiar with her—with *Scarlet*, who happened to be standing right behind me now—and yet insisted on keeping up this farce of ignoring her presence and offering her to me.

This was all pretty clear so far, and I’d gathered everything I could from this

discussion. Despite that, I couldn't quite come to a decision as to whether I should accept this offer. It was a really good deal, sure, but that just made me all the more reluctant to jump on it right away.

I want to discuss things first... Hey, Lardon.

"What is it?"

The moment I heard that voice in my head, I had an epiphany. The cause, as well as the effect that I sought, and all the extraordinary experiences I'd gone through until now—all of it helped form a clear image in my mind. Multicasting to my maximum capacity, I crafted a new spell on the spot: Telepathy.

"Don't react to this, Scarlet. Just listen."

"Master?" The response came after a pause, but I sensed no movement behind me. She showed no visible reaction, as I'd instructed.

"Oh?" Meanwhile, Lardon seemed entirely pleased by the fact that I made a new spell in an instant, but that didn't matter right now.

I responded to Scarlet through the spell. *"Yes, it's me. I'm talking directly to your mind with a new spell I just made."*

"You just made a...? Truly impressive, Master."

"Do you think I should accept this?"

"I do," she answered instantly, not a shred of doubt in her tone. If anything, she sounded like she genuinely found it to be a good idea.

"Because...?" I urged.

"Whatever their goal may be, the mere fact that they offered the first princess as a bride should buy us, at the very least, half a year's worth of time. That is how long it would take Quistador and Parta to confirm the motives behind Jamille's actions."

"Is that for certain?"

"Absolutely. International relations can easily devolve into war at the slightest mistake, even one as slight as misspeaking during a diplomatic exchange. In that regard, they will surely tread carefully at all times."

“And treading carefully will take up their time, huh?”

“Indeed. Come what may, it will surely take half a year.”

Half a year... If it meant we could earn at least that much time, then it was definitely better to accept. With that decided, I finally responded to Leonardo.
“All right.”

“Ooh! Do you mean...”

“Yes. I gladly accept Her Highness—”

Right at this moment, I had yet another epiphany. I promptly altered my choice of words as they were about to leave my mouth.

“—as a *prospective* bride.” I took a moment to organize the new thoughts in my mind. “I would love to welcome her right away, but as you can see, we will need some time to prepare.”

“Prepare?”

“I don’t wish to shame her with such lacking hospitality. Please give us a year.”

Leonardo fell silent, his gaze boring into my face.

So, what’ll it be...?

“You never cease to amaze me, Master,” Scarlet chimed in telepathically, expressing her approval of my impromptu scheme.

A beat later, Leonardo finally responded. “I understand. I shall convey your decision to His Majesty. If it will be delayed by one year, then the engagement will likely proceed separately and ahead of time...” He trailed off, waiting for my acknowledgment.

“That should be fine,” Scarlet assessed, *“as long as there is still one year before the actual ceremony. And if I stay in the capital too, then perhaps...”*

“That’s fine,” I parroted to Leonardo.

“Understood. I shall include that in my report.”

And with that, everything was settled. While mentally breathing a sigh of relief now that we’d *hopefully* secured ourselves some breathing room, I heard

a familiar chuckle cut into my thoughts. *“What’s up?”* I asked.

“You’ve bought some time, I see. As did they.” Sensing my confusion, Lardon elaborated, *“They underestimated you, so they, too, need time to reassess their evaluation of you.”*

Really...? Now that I thought about it, although his face was hard to read, Leonardo was still silently observing me.

“His wariness toward you is clear as day,” Lardon mused, sounding as pleased as always.

My gaze drifted over the sight of the village being constructed at a commendable pace. Thanks to the knowledge and skill of Gorak's clone, the exceptional physical capabilities of the wolfmen, and the surprising dexterity of the elves, the whole process was proceeding without a hitch. At this rate, they should be done with everything right around tomorrow.

As for what to do after that...

Suddenly, my clone teleported right in front of me. "Sorry for the wait."

"You got there?"

"Yeah. Let's go."

It still feels a bit weird talking to my own clone, I mused while nodding.

He teleported once more, this time taking me with him into a room inside an exquisite mansion. From the furnishings to the carpet and even the architecture itself, it was clearly and undeniably far more extravagant than the Hamilton manor could ever hope to be.

"Well, that's it for me."

"Yep." I tipped my head at my clone and dispelled him.

"Master..."

I turned around and found Scarlet in the room too. "So, this is your mansion in the capital? Were you waiting for me here?"

Scarlet bobbed her head, looking somewhat perplexed at what she'd just seen. "You are...the real one, yes?" she asked dubiously.

"I am."

"And, um, what you did just now..."

"It'll be faster if I show you."

I teleported Scarlet back with me to the village in the promised land. As she let out a gasp, I brought us right back to the mansion.

“Wow...”

“I had you bring my clone here, then my clone in turn brought *me* here. That’s all.” Basically, I marked this location to teleport to using my clone. He did all the traveling in my stead, so it was much easier on my end.

“Such a method would never have occurred to me,” Scarlet marveled.

“More importantly, is it fine for you to just be here?”

“Yes. Excluding urgent military matters, His Majesty only accepts audiences in the morning.”

“That’s the rule?” *What an odd policy.*

“Indeed. Thus, I cannot greet him today.”

I hummed as I mulled over what to do. I could stay within Scarlet’s manor since this was her domain, but it wouldn’t be very wise for me to so boldly show my face in the capital. It wouldn’t matter much as the Hamilton family’s fifth son or even as the newly appointed knight or baron, but I *was* currently trying to build a new country in the promised land. As the monarch of a foreign nation, I obviously couldn’t just go prancing around the capital willy-nilly now.

Guess I should head back for now. I’ll just come and scope things out when I need to— I froze. “Huh?”

“What’s the matter?”

“This presence... Lardon?”

“Hm? The divine dragon?”

“This is your presence, isn’t it?” I asked the dragon inside me.

“Indeed. It is weak but undoubtedly remnants of my power.”

“Remnants, huh...” I turned to Scarlet. “Is there anything here that might’ve been from Lardon?”

“Oh, yes. Right this way.”

Scarlet stepped out of the room, and I followed behind her. Along the way, we ran into some of her maids, all of whom seemed baffled at the sight of the princess escorting a guest herself. Scarlet paid those stunned, wide-eyed stares no mind as she led me down the halls.

Before long, we found ourselves in front of a room even grander than the last. Scarlet urged me inside, and as soon as I stepped in, I spotted a dragon statue. My brows shot up at the sight.

“This is a statue of the divine dragon,” Scarlet claimed. I was sad to say that it bore no actual resemblance to the one I was familiar with. “It has been passed down through my mother’s—through the queen’s family for generations.”

“Oh, right. You said you inherited a dragon’s blood.”

“Yes.”

I pondered over that while observing the statue. Although I couldn’t say the same for its appearance, the power in it was undoubtedly Lardon’s.

“Hm...”

“What is it? Ring any bells?”

“To think that this survived that chaotic wartime. I had assumed all of them were lost by now.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Try using magic. Hm... I suppose Cure-All will do.”

“On this statue?”

“Yes.”

I turned to Scarlet and said, “Lardon told me to use magic on this. Can I?”

“But of course!” She nodded ecstatically. “The divine dragon’s oracle must be heeded. Please go right ahead, Master.”

Er, oracle? Well, as long as she’s okay with it. I approached the statue and cast Cure-All on it. This divine magic spell used Lardon’s power to heal any and all status abnormalities—or so it should have. Now, it simply encased the statue in light before triggering a sudden change: it broke into several pieces, all of

which homed in on Scarlet.

“Eek!”

She shrieked in surprise, but it did nothing to stop the light. In a mere three seconds, she was clad in a suit of armor that still retained the statue’s original shape in a few spots.

“This is...” Scarlet drew a sharp breath. Slowly, she lifted her hand and chanted, “Holy Lance,” which launched a spear of light piercing right through the wall.

“I did—ah.”

Before she even realized it, Scarlet collapsed on the spot. The suit of armor peeled itself off her and returned to its original form as a dragon statue, leaving the princess panting in exhaustion on the floor as if she’d just run a marathon across the entire kingdom.

Scarlet managed to compose herself after five minutes of rest, though she remained seated on the floor and looked far too exhausted to stand up anytime soon.

“My apologies, Master... You truly are amazing.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Using that one spell alone left me feeling as if all the energy had been sapped from my body.”

“It did? Lardon, what’s going on?”

“This was what humans call enchanted armor. It was made with my power,” the dragon explained. *“Do you think human mana is sufficient to wield my power?”*

“Ah... So *that’s* why you mentioned wartime earlier,” I recalled. Enchanted armor was a suit of armor but also a weapon, and this one had been passed down from so long ago. I snapped out of my thoughts when I noticed that Scarlet was staring at me with a rather passionate look in her eyes. “Hm? What’s up?”

“That spell I just used... Master, you have used it as well, no...?”

“A couple times, yeah.”

“Just once left me this exhausted, and yet you could use it so casually...
Astounding...”

Experiencing Lardon’s power for herself seemed to have made Scarlet feel even deeper admiration for me.

I observed the golden statue which, possibly due to its power having been unleashed, was now shining brighter than before.

“Still...”

“What is it, Master?”

“This...enchanted armor, was it? I know it’s impressive, but it’s barely usable as it is now. Just look at how you ended up after just one use.” One cast of Holy Lance, and Scarlet was done.

She visibly drooped. “I have no words...”

“That is because this is the highest grade,” Lardon explained. *“There were three types of enchanted armor, and their appearances differed based on their offensive capabilities. That golden armor was the highest grade available.”*

“Would she be able to use a lower-grade one?” I asked, ignoring Scarlet’s owlish blinking in favor of waiting for the answer.

“Correct. However, such an article no longer exists.”

“Ah. Chaotic wartime. Right.” I nodded and mulled it over. “How do you make one?”

The golden dragon in front of us was an heirloom of Scarlet’s family, a relic of the distant past. It went without saying that the blueprint for it must already be lost to time. Luckily, inside me now was the one being in this world who probably knew more about it than anybody else. Of course I’d ask.

“You will need some high mithril silver.”

“Scarlet, can you get us some high mithril silver?”

“O-Of course!” Scarlet snapped to attention, though she staggered for a moment as she had yet to fully recover. Still, she gritted her teeth and planted her feet on the ground before raising her voice and calling for a servant.

Soon, a maid opened the door and entered. “You called, Princess?”

“Contact the merchants of the capital. Tell them to bring me as much high mithril silver as they can.”

“R-Right away?”

“Yes.”

Scarlet’s decisiveness left no room for argument, her voice as dignified as one would expect from a royal. It was a far cry from how she usually acted around me. *Oh, yeah. This was how she was when we first met.* It wasn’t that long ago, but I felt like I could already reminisce about it.

After watching the maid excuse herself in a hurry, Scarlet turned back to me. “Do you need anything else, Master?” she asked, already back to how she always was.

“Well, Lardon?”

“The rest will depend on your mana.”

“It’s all up to my mana now, apparently,” I relayed.

“Then it may as well be a success already!”

I smiled wryly. “I guess?”

Seems like I have some really high expectations to live up to.

Once when I was in my family’s manor, my father ordered our merchants to prepare some goods in a way similar to what Scarlet just did. Succumbing to the authority of the Hamiltons, the merchants immediately brought him the goods he needed in the amount he needed.

And he was just a count, so how much better service would a princess receive?

However, when the high mithril silver we had gathered at Lardon’s behest was first melted into liquid form—courtesy of the Salamander and Gnome I summoned—it ultimately amounted to just enough to fill a single salad bowl. *This was the result of the first princess of the kingdom ordering all the capital’s merchants to bring her as much high mithril silver as they could.*

“How much would this sell for?”

“Hm...” Scarlet looked perplexed as to why I was asking but answered anyway. “For high mithril silver, this amount should be worth around five hundred gold coins.”

I could only wince and groan in response. It was more expensive than I thought. It seemed this really was quite the valuable resource, so failure was *not* an option.

“What do I do?” I asked Lardon.

“You once made an iron rose, did you not?”

“You know about that?”

“Make a statue of me using my mana.”

“That’s all?”

“The more detailed it is, the stronger it will be.”

More detailed, huh? I nodded, recalling the iron rose I made in the past. *So I have to make it just like that, and as detailed as I can manage. All right. Easy.*

Summoning a Lardon Junior and a Gnome, I ordered the former to stand as a model and the latter to craft a mold as I gave it more minute instructions along the way. Here, too, the law of causality proved its effectiveness; since I wanted a more detailed depiction of Lardon, having a Lardon Junior as a visible model was the best choice.

“Make sure to mix in an equal amount of mana.”

“Got it.”

Following Lardon’s instructions, I carefully poured the high mithril silver into the mold while threading my own mana along with it. Once the mold was filled, I waited for it to cool before peeling it right off.

“Goodness... It’s the divine dragon...” Scarlet gasped in wonder, staring at the high mithril silver statue that was practically identical to the Lardon Junior.

“What now?”

“Have the lass form a contract with it. It needs some blood.”

I passed the message on to Scarlet, who readily nodded. She cut her own finger and let a single drop land on the statue. That moment, the Lardon Junior statue began to change just as the golden statue had earlier. It broke into pieces and formed into a draconic suit of armor over Scarlet's body.

"Oh..." She breathed out in awe. "P-Power... So much power!"

"Really?"

"H-Holy Arrow!" Scarlet cast a beginner divine magic spell, sending an arrow of light piercing through the wall and reducing it to rubble. And then...nothing happened. The suit of armor was still on her, and she hadn't collapsed either. She was perfectly fine.

"Oh, wow..."

Thus, I had succeeded in making enchanted armor that, unlike the golden version, could realistically be used in actual battle.

When Scarlet undid the high mithril silver armor, it peeled itself off her figure and gradually turned back into a Lardon Junior statue. I quietly watched that play out with a pensive look on my face.

“Is something the matter?” she asked.

“Oh...” I blinked sheepishly. “Well, it’s just, I made this spell called Shape Memory, but now that I think about it, something similar was probably invented already in the past. I mean, just look.”

Scarlet directed her perplexed gaze to the enchanted armor. “Oh...”

“You see? This works the same way as Shape Memory. Actually, it’s more complex. It records two ‘shapes,’ after all.”

“Which indicates there must be a more advanced version of this magic,” Scarlet concluded.

“Exactly. I’ll have to find it someday.”

“This is such a profound artifact. It would not surprise me if there were many spells at work here,” she observed, nodding solemnly. “It almost felt akin to a living being. Could that also have been some form of magic?”

“Huh?” I stared at her in shock.

“Wh-What is it, Master?”

“You said it felt like it was alive?”

“What? Oh, yes. Just vaguely.”

“Alive, hm...”

“It certainly is very nearly a living being itself,” Lardon piped in. “Most high-grade magic items are made that way for better functionality. Such is also the case for what humans oftentimes refer to as magic swords or cursed swords.”

Inspiration struck. I held my hand up toward the newly made enchanted armor and cast a spell on it: “Familia.”

“Familia?” Scarlet echoed incredulously. “Master, what are you...?”

I decided the explanation could wait for later. “Your name will be Ares,” I declared, “meaning ‘ruler of war.’”

The magic’s light enveloped the enchanted armor before being absorbed into it. Nothing about its appearance changed, but I could hear Lardon mumbling in wonder. *“Goodness... What a novel idea.”*

From that reaction alone, I was certain I’d succeeded. “Scarlet, try it on again.”

“Huh? Oh, of course!” She still looked a bit lost but did as I said. The Lardon Junior statue broke apart and reassembled itself as armor over her figure. “Th- This is...”

“How is it?”

“It feels much lighter than earlier—and much more powerful too!”

“How powerful?”

“I-I may be able to cast Holy Lance now.”

When she gave it a go, she indeed managed to cast the intermediate divine magic spell. It had completely sapped her of her strength when she tried it with the golden armor, but that no longer happened this time.

An amused chuckle echoed in my mind. *“You’ve shown me something fascinating today. Accompanying you truly was the right decision.”*

“Is this fascinating to you?”

“Of course. Even when enchanted armor was more commonplace, no human ever thought to do as you did.” It really must be that intriguing, seeing as Lardon wasn’t holding back on the praises today. *“As an exception, I once named a suit for the humans to have a way of differentiating it from others, but it never came to me to turn it into a familiar.”*

“Are you... You’re talking about Guardian Lardon?”

“Ah, you noticed. That is correct.”

“That was enchanted armor?”

“It was my personal suit.”

“Hmm... The one you used in the Tri-Draconic War?”

Scarlet, who could only hear my half of the conversation, drew in a sharp breath.

The Tri-Draconic War was a catastrophic conflict fought by three dragons, the victor of which went on to coexist with humans and founded a country with them. This legend was very important to Scarlet, so much so that she abandoned her position as the first princess and urged me, who now housed Lardon in my body, to establish my own country. Nobody could fault her for her reaction.

“Would I be able to use it?”

Lardon just chuckled in amusement and said, *“You may try,”* which led me to believe that it was surely worth a go.

“Scarlet, come.”

“Y-Yes!”

With an armored Scarlet in tow, I teleported back to the village and found Guardian Lardon lazing around right on its outskirts. Now that I thought about it, it really was pretty impressive. This thing was essentially a huge statue that held its own free will. That alone served as a testament to how incomparable it was to the enchanted armor used by humans.

Standing beside that marvelous artifact, I cut the flesh of my finger and let the blood drop onto Guardian Lardon. With the contract formed, the iron dragon began to glow and shrink at the same time, and soon, its looming figure scattered into pieces and reassembled itself into a suit of armor perfectly fitting over my twelve-year-old body.

“Power Missile...thirty-seven rounds?!”

I shot mana bullets off to the sky, stunned at the sheer power flowing within me. I’d essentially skipped five steps up the prime number stairs with one

generous leap. Just looking at the numbers alone, it was more than double my previous capacity.



Scarlet was rendered speechless, staring at me with saucers for eyes. All she could let slip in the end was an awed sigh.

Suddenly, my legs buckled beneath me. “Ngh!”

“Master?!”

“I’m fine...” As I lay there on my knees, the armor peeled itself off my body and reverted back into Guardian Lardon. “That drained me of all my mana just now.”

“All of it?!” Scarlet flinched, likely recalling her own experience. “O-Oh... I suppose that makes sense.”

All the while, Lardon was laughing pleasantly. *“Interesting. You fared better than I expected. This makes you the third to survive equipping this and the first to manage casting a spell with it.”*

“What a dangerous piece of armor...”

Of course, that only made this dragon inside me laugh even louder, fascination and admiration ringing clearly in my ears. *“Go on, try and make it yours. You will find the very world itself within your grasp.”*

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Having lost too much mana, I used some lekukro crystals to recover, and only after regaining my bearings did I resume my discussion with Scarlet.

“Sorry, but could I borrow Guardian Lardon for a bit?”

“Of course! In fact, Master, you should keep it,” she insisted.

“All right.” I nodded and took my item box out. This couldn’t store living beings, but it seemed Guardian Lardon didn’t meet that criteria. “It’s just ‘very nearly’ a living being, huh?”

“Indeed,” Lardon affirmed. “*Very nearly, but not quite.*”

“Right.”

Be it this Guardian Lardon or just enchanted armor in general, I wanted to be able to get what I could out of it. *Guess I’ll be needing more mana.*

The reason Scarlet had returned to the capital was to do some political investigation regarding that offer that Leonardo brought up, so I made sure to teleport her back there before returning to the village myself. The moment I was back, Reina walked up to me.

“Lord Liam.”

“What’s up, Reina?”

“I heard this from Chris, but I believe it should be reported to you as well.” When I urged her on, she continued. “There seems to be a troll settlement nearby.”

“Trolls... They’re big fellas, right?”

“Yes. They are a large-bodied race.”

I knew about them because they were a pretty well-known race. They generally had large builds, stood between two to three meters tall, and were endowed with the toughest of muscles. Their temperament stood out quite a

bit too; they either stayed true to their outward appearance or completely and utterly betrayed it. That is to say, any troll you met could either be a violent ruffian or a saintly soul, and never in between.

“Um, and those trolls are...?”

“The violent type, apparently,” she answered grimly. “Also, Chris doesn’t seem to understand this, but we need to avoid fighting with the humans for now, right?”

“Right.”

“But they’ll probably keep coming.”

I clamped my mouth shut, realizing what she was getting at. “That’s true. We can’t leave those trolls be. They might just go ahead and pick the fight for us.”

Reina nodded. “I think it’s for the best if we bring them over to our side and make sure they listen to you, Lord Liam.”

“Agreed. Thanks for letting me know. Where are they?”

I got the location of the troll settlement from Reina and headed right over.

With the information Reina passed on to me from Chris, I headed eastward until the scenery shifted from abundant grassland into rugged wasteland.

No, wait. I bent down, picked up a rock by my foot, and carefully cracked it in half. What I’d noticed from its surface became even clearer underneath—these were iron-rich ores. I could spot many more scattered all around. This area might be lacking in greenery, but it was a resource-abundant land all the same.

I took another step forward but came to an abrupt stop. My gaze swept over the area.

“They’re here...” I mumbled.

Before I knew it, I was surrounded by a band of huge trolls from a few dozen meters away. They looked exactly as I’d heard: huge and muscular, reaching two to three meters in height—there was no mistaking them, really. There were around thirty of them, all slowly approaching me.

“You,” one troll grunted once they were within earshot. “Who?”

This one seemed a bit different from the others, and not because of his size. Clothed with just a single loincloth, he had some orelike stubs growing from his bare upper body. Honestly, it made him look stronger and—dare I say—cooler, even. Moreover, judging from the way he spoke up first, he must be their boss. Even the club he was carrying stood out, looking thicker and sturdier than the rest.

“My name’s Liam. I’ll be making a country here, so I’ve come to take you all in.”

“Humans are liars,” the troll boss said, his voice gruff and pronunciation stiff. “Cannot trust.”

“Please, trust me. We won’t treat you badly. Even the elves—” I cut myself off, reconsidering. It might be better to refer to them as their former race here. “I mean, even the pixies and werewolves joined us.”

“Leave. Or I kill you.”

I hung my head in dismay. “Hearing that only makes me want to take you in even more...” At this rate, I could already imagine all the problems that’d crop up once the scouts from the three human kingdoms start pouring in.

“Okay,” the troll boss huffed out. “Then die.”

Without warning, the troll boss came charging at me with his club.

I immediately leaped back to avoid the club closing in on me from above. It crashed into the ground instead, leaving a huge crater in its wake. That did nothing to deter the troll boss, however—he continued to swing his club over and over, barraging me with blows that took my all to dodge. Instead of me, they struck the earth and formed crater after crater, sending rocks and broken bits of the ground flying all over the place. One particularly powerful blow left a gaping fissure big enough that it could swallow me right up.

This guy was as strong as he looked. I couldn’t afford to take even a single hit.

I kept my feet moving as I racked my brain for a way to counterattack without injuring him too badly—that is, until my foot got caught in a fissure.

The troll boss’s lips twisted into a sinister grin—it didn’t escape his notice. He

brought his club down toward me at full strength, its sheer force seemingly bending even the air itself. None of his attacks until now could compare to this one. I could tell, with only a glance, that it was an order of magnitude stronger than the rest.

I was *baited*. I let my guard down, thinking he was just some musclehead because of how he looked, but he'd cleverly lured me in with this one sure-kill blow lying in wait. My eyes darted around the area, and in the end...

I took the hit with a grunt. The club slammed down, driving me deep into the ground. I felt myself stop only once I was ten meters deep.

"Whew..."

When the dust cleared, I sighed in relief. My last-second countermeasure had worked. Realizing that, I kicked my feet against the bottom of the pit I'd been buried in and landed on the surface once more.

The troll boss was agape. "Not hurt... But how?!"

"I managed something just in the nick of time," I told him. "Release."

The armor I had equipped a second before the blow landed reverted into Guardian Lardon and returned into my item box. This enchanted armor was worn by the very dragon that served as its namesake, so while it did sting a little, I was able to take the hit unscathed.

I glanced to the side. *Looks like they're all fine too.*

"Grrr... You—"

"Boss..."

The troll boss seemed on the verge of pouncing again, until he was suddenly called by another troll. He turned his head. "What—"

However, he suddenly froze, and with each second his eyes only grew wider and wider. He was finally taking in the sight around him.

Surrounding the thirty-or-so members of his band were several stones and boulders, some of which were even larger than the trolls themselves. These were the stones and debris that the troll boss had sent flying all over the place whenever his attacks hit the ground. Not a single one of them had landed on his

brethren.

“How...”

“You let the blood rush to your head and nearly hurt your friends.”

“You do this...?”

I nodded in acknowledgment. I didn't dodge his attack and instead equipped the enchanted armor in order to protect the trolls. With nearly thirty of them to cover for, my standard number of spells wouldn't have been enough, but equipping the armor had given me a boost, and with it I managed to protect them all.

The boss was at a loss for words until one of the trolls hesitantly called out to him again. That was when he finally opened his mouth. “Okay. I listen now. You are strong...and good human.”

At last, he was ready to talk instead of brawl. And from what he said just now, I got the feeling that these guys had always been the kindhearted type of trolls from the start.

“What you want?”

The trolls, who were no longer hostile, all sat cross-legged in front of me. They were nearly two meters tall even when seated, so naturally, my neck suffered the consequences as I looked up at them and explained.

“We’re making a new village here in this land. As of now, we have mostly elves and wolfmen, and if you include me, we also have two—well, *four* humans, I guess. I want you to come join us.”

“Why?”

“For various reasons.” I mulled it over for a moment before giving him the most harmless one. “A lot of humans will be coming to this land from now on. Worst-case scenario, you guys may get subjugated if we leave you be, and I don’t wanna see that happening.”

The troll boss didn’t respond, instead narrowing his eyes at me as if trying to see through my true intentions. His band around him all gulped, nervously waiting.

“First...”

“Yeah?”

“First, we look at village.”

“Okay. Sure.”

I brought the trolls to the village. Not by foot, of course, but by teleportation.

“Wh-What?!”

“It’s an advanced divine magic spell called Teleport,” I explained. “It can bring me to any place I’ve been to before.”

Stunned at their sudden change of scenery, the trolls all murmured among themselves, but that hushed air was soon cut through by a girl’s scream. When I

whipped my head around, I saw Chris glaring at me—or rather, at the troll boss.

“Who that woman?” he asked.

“What’s that meathead doing here?!” Chris demanded at nearly the same time.

“‘Meathead...’ Only boar woman call me that.”

“I told you I’m a wolf, not a boar!”

Quite literally flying into a rage, Chris kicked off the ground, leaped into the air, and whipped a clean flying kick right across the troll boss’s chin. He tried to block the blow but wasn’t quite fast enough, leaving him staggering on his feet and ultimately tumbling backward. As his fellow trolls all crowded around him, Chris placed a hand on her hip and let out a very smug little huff.

“Chris,” I called.

“Hm? What?”

“What’s your relationship with him?”

This all started with what she shared with Reina, after all. That little, uh, *interaction* just now made it quite clear that they went beyond simple acquaintances.

“Ummm... An annoying idiot?”

“No, that’s not a *relationship*...”

“I dunno. He’s annoying, so we just start throwing hands whenever we see each other.”

“So you’re frenemies? But if you start fighting every time you meet, then how many times does this make?”

“I guess I’m at 306 wins and 378 losses now.”

“You meet way too much! Are you two fated to be together or something?!” I barely held myself back from yelling, “*Just get married already!*”

“Anyway, why’re you so weak now, meathead? What’s with the one-hit KO?”

“He didn’t get weaker. You just got stronger, Chris.” When all she gave me

was a vacant stare, I had to tell her, “You evolved into a wolfman thanks to Familia, remember?”

“Oh yeah!” She looked like she’d genuinely forgotten that happened.

Meanwhile, the troll boss finally sat back up with the help of his fellow trolls. “You stronger now.”

“Of course I am. Becoming Master’s familiar made me stronger. I can’t possibly lose to a meathead like you.”

Didn’t you literally forget about that until just a second ago? And now you’re bragging all about it? Knowing Chris’s personality, though, I just shrugged it off with a chuckle.

As the troll boss digested that information, she told him, “You know what? You should become his familiar too.”

“Me?”

“Yep. You good with that, Master?”

“Yeah, well, that was always my plan, but it depends on them.”

“No problem there, then. Hey, meathead! You just lost, so as always, you gotta listen to one order from me, yeah?”

The troll boss grumbled. “Okay. I listen.”

“Great! He’s all yours, Master.”

They really do get along well, don’t they? Well, whatever.

“I’ll form the contract, then.” After the troll boss grunted in acknowledgment, I cast Familia and gave him a name that I thought would suit him well. “You’ll be Gai.”

Suddenly encased in light, Gai’s body grew visibly smaller with each passing moment. By the time it dissipated, the three-meter-tall troll had shrunk down to just about a meter and eighty centimeters. He was still incredibly burly regardless; it seemed as if he’d equipped a suit of armor made purely of muscle and no fat. Although his body itself had gotten smaller, the power he housed within had undoubtedly gone up, I’d wager by around three times as much.

“I have attained new heights...” he marveled, his tongue no longer moving stiffly around his words. His speech now sounded closer to that of humans, although I did have to wonder about him sounding a bit *too* eloquent now.

“All right! Time for round two!” Chris instantly pounced on him.

The troll who had been knocked down by her flying kick just moments ago was nowhere to be seen. Now, Gai was reacting to her swift movements with his own smooth defense, even countering with a backhand fist. The wolf girl also nimbly dodged that blow, however, and the exchange just kept going.

Now that I knew the nature of their relationship, they looked like a cat and dog messing around. Of course, no cat or dog could ever fight a battle so intense. Each and every one of Gai’s punches could instantly kill, and they were far stronger than the blow that buried me in the ground earlier. On the other hand, Chris’s movements were swift and precise, so much so that it seemed her attacks were aimed to cause major internal damage.

The trolls were all slack-jawed as they watched that battle unfold.

“Boss...strong.”

“A lot stronger.”

“Is he...legendary giant?”

Based on what I was hearing and what had happened with the elves and wolfmen so far, I surmised that trolls who received a name and contract from me likewise evolved into a race known as giants. My deductions were confirmed when I went ahead and helped the rest of them evolve too.

Thus, the kindhearted giants joined our ranks, giving us brighter prospects for the defense and power we’d be needing in the future.

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With Gai in the lead, approximately thirty evolved giants carried huge baskets filled with mountainous piles of ores on their backs. Each of them had a load that was at least three, possibly even *five* times bigger than their own body, painting a true picture of undaunting strength.

“Hrgh... Hnggg...!”

Meanwhile, Chris was stubbornly competing with them, carrying a load that was only nearly as big as her own body. She looked like a frail wolf-eared girl on the outside, so it was already plenty impressive that she could even lift that much at all.

“You need not force yourself,” Gai chastised.

“Like hell...I am...!”

“It would be wise of you to leave the manual labor to us and—careful!” Chris, for all her efforts, suddenly got squashed beneath her own load. Gai looked down at her with a frown. “I see my concern was not unfounded.”

Tears began to well up in Chris’s eyes. “D-Don’t...”

“Don’t...?”

“Don’t think you’ve won with this!” The wolf girl sprang up with a sudden burst of vigor and tearfully ran away.

This whole scene seemed to be par for the course around here, as the rest of the giants watched the duo with warm smiles on their faces.

The giants brought the ores all the way from the wasteland back to the village, where I then got the help of some Gnomes and Salamanders to process them and extract all the metals. After adjusting the temperature and restructuring the interior of the makeshift furnace here and there, I found myself with an entire harvest of iron, copper, gold, and silver.

Unfortunately, I barely managed to get any high mithril silver. An entire day of effort netted me only five puny beads—far from how much I needed to forge enchanted armor. In stark contrast, iron took up the biggest portion of this haul. The one kilo of gold was quite impressive too, but the iron totaled to an entire *ton*. It was quite the fruitful endeavor.

Still, I stared down at the miserable amount of high mithril silver in my hands and mumbled, “I didn’t think it’d be this hard to find some.”

“It is a rare metal for humans. You would be hard-pressed to find it in large quantities so easily.”

“Yeah, fair. Even the first princess’s order only got us so much last time.”

When I realized that the wasteland back where I met the former trolls was filled with ores, I’d thought I could score myself some high mithril silver and mass-produce enchanted armor, which was why I had the giants carry all these ores back. But suddenly, this whole venture didn’t seem very realistic to me anymore.

“Considering what lies in store for us, I really do want more enchanted armor, though.”

“Would it not be a safer bet to mass-produce a different product and obtain what you need through trade?”

“Maybe...” I mumbled noncommittally. “Can’t it be any other metal?”

“High mithril silver is the bare minimum,” Lardon answered, blunt and merciless. *“Any other metal would not be strong enough.”*

Problem is, that bare minimum is already so hard to find as it is... “Huh? Wait, did you say it’s not strong enough?”

“Indeed. What of it?”

Ignoring the dubious lilt in Lardon’s tone, I lapsed into silent thought. “All right,” I decided with a nod. “I’ll give it a shot.”

“What are you trying to do? I will warn you now that the necessity of high mithril silver has already been established. You would only be diving headlong into certain failure.”

“That’s fine.”

“What?”

“Failure just means I didn’t succeed. It’s not a big deal.”

The voice in my head fell silent, then burst into a fit of laughter. *“Hah...! Ha ha ha ha ha!”*

“Wh-What’s gotten into you?”

“Ha ha... I see now. Failure is not failure, but rather, a lack of success, hm?”

“Isn’t it?” Magic was the prime example of that. Any efforts you made until you could master or even just cast the spell for the first time weren’t failures—they just weren’t successes yet. All you had to do was keep at it until they were.

“That way of thinking... How fascinating. I am liking you more and more.”

“Sure...” *What’s even there to like about this...? Well, whatever. Time to get started.*

Lardon no longer discouraged me and instead seemed rather excited to see what I had in store, so I went ahead and melted a large amount of iron with a Salamander, poured it into a mold I made with a Gnome, and infused my mana into it. These were all the same steps I followed when making enchanted armor with high mithril silver. The deviation came with the next spell I chanted.

“Familia!”

Casting this spell on the enchanted armor I had made for Scarlet increased its capabilities. In simple terms, it was like boosting a one into a two. Following that logic, if enchanted armor made with iron wasn’t entirely zero, then naming it with Familia could bump it up to a one—in other words, into ordinary enchanted armor. That was my rationale behind this experiment.

“You’ll be...Apollo, which means ‘the sun’!” Once I named it, my mana got sucked into the mold, revealing what had formed within.

“The sun?”

“Yeah. I thought making its appearance match its name would make it stronger.”

This was something I had realized while naming Gai and the other trolls. Even the first name that I would come up with off the top of my head seemed to suit them well, and they would evolve accordingly too. I just thought that the same might be true for the enchanted armor.

“Interesting.”

“Huh?”

“You succeeded in making enchanted armor with iron.”

“Really?” I trailed my eyes over the sun-shaped item in front of me.

“A most fascinating idea.” Lardon chuckled, sounding greatly pleased. *“Truly, I can never keep my eyes off you.”*

Now that I knew I could make enchanted armor with ordinary iron as long as I paired it with Familia and a name, I proceeded to make as many as I could. In the process, I'd confirmed one other thing: for some unknown reason, I couldn't give the same name twice.

"A name is a spell of origin that any human can cast," I recalled Lardon saying once. For a spell to house power, I couldn't cut any corners—that must be why trying to cheat the system by using the same name rendered it useless.

I had a mountain of iron, all ready to be processed at a moment's notice. I also had enough mana, which I could freely replenish using lekukro crystals. Names were the only ingredients in the recipe that I didn't have an ample supply of.

The iron wouldn't form into enchanted armor if I didn't come up with a proper name, so I had to rack my brain to produce just fifteen suits first, five for each of the three races I now had under my wing.

After the enchanted armor was distributed to the combatants of each race, they split into pairs and began conducting some mock battles while the rest of the residents served as their audience.

Among them, however, was a certain pair whose intense exchange of blows could barely be called a mock battle: Gai the giant and Chris the wolfman. These two longtime rivals had evolved thanks to their contracts and names, and now enchanted armor was added into the mix. Even the other participants had stopped in their tracks and were captivated by the hair-raising battle unfolding before them.

"Way too slow, meathead! You'll never catch me like that!"

"I daresay your flimsy little punches will never so much as graze me."

"Why, you!"

“Hmph!”

It also seemed their verbal exchange was just as cutthroat as their physical one.

“Those two really do get along quite well,” Reina mumbled beside me.

“That’s for sure. I’m thinking of pairing them up, actually. They’ll be pretty good for cases where we need to fight with a limited number of people.”

“I can already hear them arguing.” Reina cleared her throat. *“Don’t you dare lose to anyone besides me!”* she huffed. *“You may hide behind me as much as you like, boar woman.”*

I chuckled. “I can totally see it happening.”

As we watched the two of them spar, a peaceful air settled over us.

That air was soon disturbed by the sound of horse hooves clapping over the ground. As the galloping grew louder, it became clearer that at least ten horses were approaching us. Gai and Chris stopped fighting, and everyone present turned their attention toward the source of the sound. Eventually, around twenty men pulled the reins on their horses and stopped right before us.

“Hey, look. Elves!”

“And so many of ’em too! I was wondering what kinda creepy place just showed up outta nowhere. Turns out it was a hidden treasure trove!”

“We’ll be playin’ around for the rest of our lives if we sell ’em all!”

They all began laying their greed bare. With their crude outfits and crass speech, it was plain that they were bandits or something of the sort.

“Listen up!” One of them looked down at us from atop his horse and arrogantly declared, “Be good, and we won’t treat you badly.”

Oh boy. Here we go a—

“Mina.”

As I was getting ready to fend them off, I heard Reina whisper something to a petite elven girl beside her. As one of the selected combatants, Mina had enchanted armor on, and hers in particular looked like light armor—so light that

the lower half was practically a miniskirt. She looked cuter than she did strong.



“Understood,” Mina responded with a nod. She started walking over to the bandits.

“Oh? I like your attitude.”

“Well, it ain’t enough.”

“We’ll be taking all of you, so get ready, yeah?”

The men laughed vulgarly, assuming that Reina had offered Mina up to them—until that “offering” bolted forward and landed a straight right that sent the man at the very front flying back together with his horse.

“What?!”

“Why, you!”

That one blow served as their wake-up call. They all drew their weapons out at once, but it was too late. Mina charged at them head-on and beat them down one after the other. Not even three minutes later, she’d flattened each and every one of the men to the ground.

“Wonderful moves,” Gai praised.

“We don’t need to trouble Master with these kinds of small fry!” Chris huffed.

They, along with all the other combatants in enchanted armor, had stood by silently without lending a hand, certain of Mina’s victory. Meanwhile, I watched them all with satisfaction and pride swelling in my chest. I had been concerned over the defenses of our country-to-be, so it was a huge relief to see proof of our enchanted armor’s effectiveness in battle before my eyes. Because of what I was seeing, I decided I could rush to produce maybe ten to twenty more suits, which should be just about enough to sustain our self-defense. Although coming up with more names might be a bit of an— “D-Don’t move! Or this brat gets it!”

I was snapped out of my reverie when a pair of arms suddenly grappled me from behind. I felt a cold blade press against the back of my neck. It seemed like one of the bandits decided to take me, a kid, as hostage.

“Oh,” uttered Reina, Chris, and Gai in succession.

“Ohhh...” Everyone else sighed.

The man didn't seem to have gotten the reaction he was hoping for. “Wh-What the hell?! You think I can't do it?! I'll stab him real—argh!”

While he was ranting, I pointed my fist behind me and fired a single power missile. It smashed the sword into bits and sent the man himself flying too. He drew a clean arc in the air before crashing into the ground, eyes rolled back and body convulsing.

“Yep. That's Lord Liam for you.” Reina grinned.

Gai nodded to himself. “I must say, that was the most powerful blow we have witnessed thus far.”

“Wow, his jaw's done for! One-hit KO, woot!” Chris cheered.

As the trio leisurely weighed in, the bandits who hadn't yet lost consciousness looked between me and the man I knocked out in one hit. They all began trembling, and some even fainted on the spot.

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That night, I went back into Another World and set up a chair in the yard in front of my house. I had to wonder if I could even call this a yard, considering it was just the space that expanded around the house, but I digress. I plopped right down, took my item box out, and summoned a whole crowd of mid-rank water spirits.

Our village's population had grown quite a bit, with the largest percentage being made up of elves, followed by wolfmen, and then giants. Humans took up the smallest slice of the pie since there was just one so far: me. Nobody else was human, but that didn't change the fact that they all needed water and salt to live.

In line with all that, the spirits' task today was to split all the salt water I had in my item box into fresh water and salt for everyone's use. I could just use Distillery myself, but it would certainly be far more efficient to have all these spirits do it for me instead.

"I want you all to split the salt water coming out of this item box into fresh water and salt. Make sure to put it all back inside once you're done."

All eighteen spirits nodded at my explanation. They flocked toward the salt water and got right to work—save for one that only kept staring at me.

"What's wrong? Something you didn't understand?"

"No, not at all. Do you perhaps remember me?" When I cocked my head in confusion, she continued. "I am the one you helped evolve before."

"Oh..." I nodded. There were many spirits in existence, and spirit summoning called forth one of them at random. "So, I've summoned you before. How've you been?"

"My world has expanded greatly since then. I can truly never thank you enough."

“You’re very welcome.”

“Although I’m not yet skilled enough, as a mid-rank spirit, I can now possess things and interact with the human realm even without a summoning. Of course, the Spirit King will reprimand me if I go overboard.”

“I didn’t know spirits had a king...” I mumbled, then froze. “Hang on. What did you just say?”

“Um... The Spirit King will reprimand me if I—”

“No, before that. You have a lot to learn, but...?”

“But I can now possess things?”

“Can you really?”

“Yes. Mid-rank spirits and above can do so, as long as they are strong enough. That is also why there are many items in the world that have the power of a spirit housed within.”

“I see...” I hummed in thought. “You just need to be strong enough?”

“Huh? Oh, yes.”

I nodded. “I’ll make you stronger, so could you cooperate with me for a bit?”

“Yes, of course! Please allow me to repay my debt!” the spirit crowed, eagerly accepting.

“*Amelia Emilia Claudia*,” I chanted, using up more mana in exchange for increasing the number of spells I could cast at once. Naturally, I also gave her a name. “Your name will be Zero. Celsius Zero.”

Zero was enveloped in the magic’s light, a sigh of wonder spilling from her lips. She stared down at her own hands. “Thank you so very much!”

“You got stronger?”

“Yes.”

“Can you possess things?”

“I should be able to now!”

“Good.” I summoned a Gnome and a Salamander to melt some of the iron I’d

stockpiled in my item box and molded it in Zero's likeness. Of course, I didn't forget to pour in Lardon's mana at the same time.

"Zero, possess this."

"Understood!"

Without hesitation, Zero leaped toward the incomplete enchanted armor. Right before she made contact with it, she dissipated into many particles of light that were absorbed into the suit.

This was a revision of my usual process: instead of naming the iron statue itself, I had a named spirit possess it.

"Waterfall!"

At Reina's call, a massive downpour of water rained down from the clear and sunny skies. The mighty flood crashed down to the ground and carved out a humongous crater beneath it. Reina looked like a water spirit herself because of the Celsius-enchanted armor she was wearing, and even she was left speechless by the utterly destructive sight.

"EXPLOOOSION!!!"

A little farther away, Chris's passionate yell tore through the air. Clad in flaming red armor, the wolf girl had become destruction incarnate as she called forth a tremendous explosion. A ten-meter-wide sphere of fire swirled into an angry crimson vortex before blowing up.

"Gaia Crusher!"

Last but not the least was Gai, whose muscles bulged beneath his rugged armor. With all his might, he smashed his fist right into the ground—and split it apart!

I'd handed the leaders of each race prototypes of the spirit-enchanted armor. The results were *astounding*, to say the least.

"This is amazing, Lord Liam," Reina marveled. "It's far stronger than yesterday's armor!"

Chris agreed. "She's right! I got super strong with yesterday's already, but I feel like I'm ten times stronger with this one!"

“With this power, I can surely protect everyone. I am eternally grateful to you, milord,” Gai said with a bow.

Spirit-enchanted armor produced greater power than enchanted armor made with high mithril silver, *and* it could be easily and steadily produced. Of course, with my mana, I could only make two or three in a day, but that was of little issue. Mana recovered naturally anyway, and I could even gather some lekukro crystals if I wanted.

“Oh... But this takes quite a lot of energy...”

“Yeah. I’m way more pooped than yesterday.”

“But of course; it grants us so much power. We must exert our greatest efforts in order to be worthy of these wondrous artifacts.”

Chris huffed indignantly. “Look at this meathead, yapping away like he’s all that.”

“Then you may simply remain as the mindless boar that you are. I, on the other hand, shall work toward repaying my debt to milord.”

“I’ll work hard too,” Reina chimed in.

“I-I’m not saying I won’t! I also wanna get stronger for Master!”

The three of them seemed to be getting along quite well.

In any case, we now had plenty of power. Once I’d produced plenty of “neo-enchanted armor,” or so I’d like to call it, I’d have essentially attained a means of protecting our land.

Liam’s outlook, unbeknownst to him, was far too naive.

His idea of granting a name to iron was already shocking, but even more so was his epiphany of having a named spirit possess it. He was severely underestimating the power this method could bring about. If he distributed his neo-enchanted armor to the combatants of the three evolved races under his wing, then he would be plenty capable of warring with other nations.

This boy did not seem to understand that just yet—and that only made it more amusing.

Because he did not comprehend the magnitude of his power, he would continue searching for potential improvements when given the chance. He was a human who was never satisfied with the status quo, who never once stopped in his pursuit of magic. Would he eventually notice that I, too, could be used on enchanted armor?

Yes, indeed... Truly a most fascinating human.

“Liam!”

After I teleported back to town and went to the hunter guild, my two party members, Asuna and Jodie, came rushing over while calling out to me.

“Where have you been? You didn’t even leave a message. We’ve been looking for you,” Asuna grumbled, sulking like a child.

Jodie beside her looked worried. “Were you involved in some kind of incident?”

“Sorry about that. I had a lot going on—”

“Well, whatever. You can tell us later. More importantly...” Jodie cut me off and suddenly held her hand out toward me, her palm facing up. “Money, please.”

I blinked. “What?”

“We asked you to keep ours before.”

“Oh.”

Quite a while ago, Scarlet gave me three thousand Jamille golds as hush money, which I split three ways and gave them a thousand each. However, they had no place to stash so many coins away, so they asked me to hold on to it for them.

“We need a thousand. Oh, I mean five hundred from each of us.”

“Asuna, wouldn’t it be better if we went to the shop first before taking the money out?”

“Ah, right. Could you come with us, Liam?”

They were both staring at me expectantly. I didn’t really know where all this was going, but they looked as serious as could be, so I nodded. “All right. Where to?”

“This way!” Asuna dashed off, Jodie and I trailing behind her.

I found myself captivated at the sight of her running through the streets, as free as the wind brushing against her face and whizzing by her ponytail. It was so stunning, so full of vigor, and just so *her*. Meanwhile, Jodie moved with swift elegance. Although she was easily keeping up with Asuna, her upper body barely swayed as her feet carried her gracefully with each step. They had both seen vast improvements in their physical capabilities after becoming my familiars.

Not long after, Asuna stepped in front of a certain shop and barged right in, her peppy voice carrying all the way back outside. “Mister! You still have it reserved for us, don’t you?!”

I watched on with a wry smile until Jodie urged me inside with a glance. Together, we stepped into what seemed to be a shop that handled all sorts of curios and antiques. Having breezed right past all the shelves lined with various goods, Asuna leaned over the counter on the farthest end of the establishment. The target of her intense stare was the glaringly bald and bespectacled man in his fifties seated right behind that counter.

He glanced at me before responding to Asuna. “Your money?”

“Liam!”

“Ah, sure.” I figured they were going to buy something here. I approached the counter, took a thousand Jamille golds from my item box, and stacked them on top of it.

The shopkeeper quietly stared down at it for a short while before mumbling, “So, it was for you.” I tilted my head, confused, but the man just said, “Wait here,” and went to the back of the shop. He returned a minute later and handed over a book.

“Thanks,” Asuna crowed, then turned toward me. “Here you go, Liam.”

“Huh?”

“This is the one and only ownerless grimoire here in town. Aren’t you collecting these?”

“So you bought this...for me?”

“I don’t think you have this one yet, and it *should* be authentic...” Asuna trailed off, waiting for my confirmation.

“Let me see...” I opened the grimoire up and briefly skimmed through the contents: the name of the spell, how it was used, and what it did. “Yeah, I haven’t learned this one yet.”

Grimoire in hand, I began practicing the spell. The flow of mana told me that this was an authentic grimoire.

“Wow... Thanks a bunch, you two.”

Inside a tavern that was open during the day, I brought the two girls up to speed on recent events: taking Scarlet with me to the so-called promised land, making a new village and country there, and everything else.

“Basically, that’s why I’ve been MIA for a while. My bad.”

“Wow... Making a country, huh?”

“That would certainly keep you too busy to stay in contact.”

“So, what’ll you two do? Come with me? Or will you stay in this town as hunters?”

“What are you on about?” Asuna rolled her eyes.

Yeah, it definitely isn’t so easy to abandon the life they’ve lived here for so—
“Of course we’re coming with.”

“Huh?”

“We’re your familiars,” Jodie piped up in agreement. “We’ll follow you to the ends of the earth.”

“Jodie...” Neither of them hesitated the slightest bit. I reached out and shook both their hands. “Okay. Thank you. Let’s go later.”

“Why later?” Asuna asked, quite understandably.

“Oh, I’m practicing the new spell right now—at max capacity. I’ll master it soon enough, so you’ll have to hang on for a bit before I can teleport us.”

“Huh?!”

“So soon?”

Seeing them both so shocked, I realized they didn’t know about this just yet. “A spell gets closer to mastery the more times you cast it. So when I practice magic, I run multiple spells at once—”

“Since it’s more efficient that way,” Jodie finished.

“Exactly.” I nodded.

When I finally felt that I was close to activating the new spell, I chanted, “Dust Box.” Atop the table between us, boxes began to appear and disappear in succession. This happened a total of nineteen times, the maximum I could cast at once.

“That makes nineteen,” I told them. “With that, the time it takes for me to cast this spell now shortened from a bit under an hour to just three minutes.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Just watch.”

I chanted yet again, preparing to cast the second batch of spells with the help of the grimoire for the next three minutes. It was almost as if I were waiting for instant noodles, actually. By the end of it, another nineteen boxes came and went just like before.

“And with that, I’ve mastered the spell.” To finish it off, I let go of the grimoire and cast the spell one last time.

“W-Wow. That took no time at all.”

“So you can master a spell this quickly...”

The two girls marveled at my demonstration.



“Hey, what kind of spell is it?” Asuna asked.

“It’s like Item Box. It can fit as much as the caster’s mana allows.”

“What’s the difference?”

“Its contents will rot,” I answered. “Anything placed in an item box will never go bad, but anything placed in this one will immediately start to spoil. Or decay, rust, corrode—whatever applies, really. And depending on the caster’s mana, the process can speed up too.”

I placed the fish I ordered into the dust box, and after one minute...

“Ugh, that stinks!” Asuna pinched her nose.

“Whoops. Sorry.” I tossed it back inside. “Anyway, as you just saw, it’s basically a box that makes things spoil faster.”

“So it’s like a trash can.”

“Essentially, yeah.”

“Is it something you can use?” Asuna asked, eyes sparkling expectantly. She was like a little puppy begging for praise and head pats.

This spell’s uses weren’t obvious, but it did have some. With that in mind, I opened my mouth to thank her for her gift when the sound of something crashing snatched my attention. The customer seated on the table next to ours seemed to have dropped something on the floor. When I looked down, I caught sight of broken glass and spilled wine.

“Oh. Oh!”

Suddenly, I jumped to my feet and dashed out of the establishment, even as Asuna and Jodie called out to me from behind. I ran around town until I found a fruit store and bought as many grapes as I could. My hunt didn’t end there, and as I continued moving on my feet, I also summoned a Gnome to prepare an earthen bowl for me. Then, once I’d purchased a bottle from another store, I squeezed the grapes into the earthen bowl before pouring the juice into the bottle.

It was at this point that the two finally caught up to me. “Jeez. What’s gotten

into you, Liam?”

“I made this grape juice just now.”

“Huh? Oh, cool.” Asuna nodded blankly, while Jodie cocked her head curiously.

I sealed the bottle of grape juice and tossed it into the dust box. Five minutes later, I took it back out and opened the lid.

“Ohhh...”

“It smells like wine.”

I used the dust box to ferment juice into wine in an instant. The two girls were stunned.

“Wow! You made wine in the blink of an eye!”

“That’s certainly one way to use it... Did you just think of that?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re amazing!” Asuna cheered.

I didn’t have very high hopes for it at first, but this certainly changed things up. From popular condiments like soy sauce, to pickled vegetables, to even that delicacy from the east called “miso,” not to mention all the different varieties of wine under the sun! Anything that needed to be fermented could be mass-produced in a short period of time with this dust box.

It turned out to be quite the useful spell after all.

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I was conducting an experiment using Dust Box in Another World.

From the box, I took out one sealed bottle after the next until I had a total of ten lined up in front of me, each one labeled with a number from 1 to 10. They all, of course, contained wine that had been grape juice when I first put them in.

Bottle no. 10 was the first one I stored away ten hours ago, while bottle no. 9 was the bottle I placed in an hour after that—in other words, nine hours ago. The rest of the bottles were also labeled accordingly, all the way down to bottle no. 1 that was placed inside the dust box just one hour ago.

Anything placed into the dust box would rapidly spoil or ferment. I once heard that spoilage and fermentation both followed the same principle, the point of contrast being that fermentation happened when the process was controlled to produce the desired outcome, while not doing so resulted in spoilage.

What I was doing now was a test to see just how fast that spoilage and fermentation could progress in the dust box. For starters, I poured some wine from bottle no. 1 into a glass I'd prepared beforehand and took a sip, humming as I savored the taste before moving on and doing the same for bottle no. 2.

"I get it now."

Just to be sure, I drank from bottle no. 3 as well, then jumped to bottles no. 5 and 10. Before becoming Liam, the fifth son of a noble family, I was just an ordinary guy who liked to enjoy a nice drink or two at night, so I knew my way around alcohol. A generous sip was all I needed to tell how long the drink was aged for, else I'd find myself being scammed into buying cheap or even fake wine.

"Some helpful experience from my 'past life,' I suppose," I mused to myself, a wry smile forming on my lips before I continued taste-testing all the wine.

It was easy to tell, really: bottle no. 1, which was placed inside the box an hour ago, tasted like a drink that was aged for one year, while bottle no. 10

from ten hours ago had the flavor of wine that was aged for ten years. The other numbered bottles followed the same principle.

Simply put, one hour inside the dust box equated to approximately one year.

I stared silently in thought before mumbling, “I’ve never tasted fifty-year-old wine myself...” Maybe I could make some and have James try it for me.

Several kilometers west of the village was a small yet plentiful forest, and currently scattered around it were all my villagers, now numbering to nearly a hundred, who were busy plucking and harvesting all sorts of fruits that I needed to make a wide variety of wines.

I’d learned about this place from Gai and Chris, who were natives to the promised land. With even Asuna and Jodie here to help, this tranquil little harvesting session of ours proceeded rather smoothly. Everyone’s diligence was dazzling under the warm sunlight pouring down between the tree leaves.

So far so good. At this rate, we’ll even have some fruits to spare for everyone to snack on and—

“AAARGH!”

A scream tore through the peaceful forest air. It sounded like it had come from a giant. As everyone descended into confusion, I immediately kicked off the ground and headed for the direction of that voice.

Near the forest entrance where we’d left a whole pile of baskets for our harvest was a giant under attack. The muscular two-meter-tall monster was being grappled by a man far smaller than him—and whose teeth seemed to be sunk deep in the giant’s neck.

“Stop!” I yelled, but of course, the man didn’t listen.

The giant tried to shake him off but to no avail. The man’s fangs remained firmly clamped onto the giant’s neck. Charging in, I fired off seventeen power missiles that all landed perfectly on the man, knocking him off the giant and sending him tumbling over the ground. He soon clambered onto his feet and sent just one glance our way before making a run for it.

“Wait! Where do you think you’re—”

“Gon! Stay with me!”

I tried to chase after him but froze when I heard Gai cry out desperately behind me. When I spun around, the bitten giant, Gon, was lying limp on the ground. Gai was shaking him by the shoulders, when all of a sudden, Gon roared out and began thrashing around like a wild beast.

“Ugh! What’s the matter, Gon?! ’Tis I, Gai!”

As Gai held the rampaging giant under his hold, everyone else came rushing over after hearing the commotion. As I approached the two giants, I realized that Gon had a crazed look in his eyes. His face was pale as a sheet, and his eyes were dull yet bloodshot. Not to mention the two bleeding holes punctured at the base of his neck.

“What in the world is this?”

“I haven’t the faintest clue, milord.”

“Is that...a status abnormality?” I mumbled to myself and made a swift decision to cast Cure-All on him. This beginner divine magic spell of Lardon’s could cure any and all types of status abnormalities.

After the divine light enveloped his body, the thrashing giant began to settle down. His roars slowly quieted into groans, and before long, his eyes fluttered closed and his breathing settled into a calm, peaceful rhythm.

“I am eternally grateful!” Gai exclaimed, setting Gon down and prostrating himself before me. However, there were matters more pressing than his gratitude at the moment.

“What the heck was that?” I asked.

Jodie was the one who spoke up from amid the gathering crowd. “Could he have been a vampire?”

However, Gai instantly shot her down. “That cannot be.”

“Yeah, no way,” Chris agreed. “A vampire can’t move about in the day. They turn into ash the moment they make contact with sunlight.”

“But what if there was a dracula involved?” Jodie proposed.

“Ah...” Gai and Chris both lost their words.

I looked between them all and asked, “Um, what exactly are those?”

“Vampires are a type of monster. As she said earlier, they hate the sun and can’t act during the day,” Jodie explained. I hummed, urging her to continue. “They possess all sorts of abilities, the most troublesome of which is their ability to turn anyone they bite into fellow vampires. It’s called infection.”

“Well, that sounds bad.”

“It is indeed. Typically, there’s no saving someone once they’re infected...” She knelt beside Gon and gently took his pulse before looking back up at me. “But you just went and cured him, Liam. That’s amazing.”

It really must be quite the feat if Jodie said so. I found myself trusting this Cure-All spell even more.

“And,” she continued, “a dracula is a vampire mutant that’s born just once every few centuries. They’re able to command vampires and—worse yet—completely nullify their weakness to sunlight.”

“Oh, that sounds *really* bad.”

“Yes. It seems we’ve got ourselves a rather tricky opponent this time around.”

Vampires and a dracula... Looks like I’m gonna need more info.

In the open space at the center of the village, I was convening with the three leaders and my two party members when a wolfman I recalled naming Leon approached us. He was light on his feet and swift as the wind, reminding me that while their race could also hold their ground in battle, their strong suit lay not in their power as the giants' did but in their speed instead.

"I-I found them... It doesn't look good."

"How so?" asked Chris.

"The vampires were gathering ten kilometers north. They're at least ten thousand strong."

Our small meeting circle broke out into gasps and murmurs.

"Ten thousand..."

"That's a hundred times more than our population."

"Hang on. Could it be..."

"Correct. The vampires have likely subordinated others by feasting upon their blood." Gai nodded firmly as he laid the situation out for us, his somber tone and grim expression speaking volumes as to just how bad this might get.

"Moreover, even if someone were on the verge of death, the subordination would still succeed as long as blood is drawn while they are alive."

"So the more they fight, the more their opponent's numbers get transposed to their side." I turned to look at Leon, our wolfman scout. "Then those ten thousand vampires..."

He nodded grimly. "They were composed of many different races. All of them had become vampires. I saw they had fangs similar to ours."

A strangled groan escaped my throat. Beside me, Asuna blanched. "They're like locusts," she grumbled in disgust.

“And they’re all...” I trailed off as I lifted my gaze. Spanning out above us were a vast blue sky, soft white clouds, and a single mercilessly blinding sun. “They’re all out and about under this afternoon sun, which means that dracula guy is out there with them too.”

“It is as you say,” Gai affirmed.

“Well, that explains it,” Chris said. “Vampires have always lived in this land too. While they weren’t exactly the friendliest neighbors, they never really caused trouble.”

“Is that true, Chris?” I asked.

“Yep. They must be going wild now ‘cause they’re under the dracula.”

Jodie sighed. “If we don’t stop them now, their numbers will only continue to grow beyond our control.”

“But if we just charge right in, we’re all gonna end up becoming vampires,” Asuna pointed out.

“Indeed. We must go with an elite few.”

As Asuna and Jodie came to an agreement, they cast their meaningful gazes over the rest of us. Reina, Chris, and Gai, the three leaders of each of their race; my two human familiars, Asuna and Jodie; and lastly, of course, me. The “elite few” they were talking about was to be all six of us present here now.

“In which case,” Reina continued, “we should avoid engaging with the small fry and aim to defeat the dracula. If we do...” She turned to Gai for confirmation.

“At minimum, the vampires would become incapable of moving during the day,” he finished for her. “I daresay they would likely stop antagonizing us as well.”

Jodie nodded. “Then it’s settled.”

“Before that,” I jumped in, recalling something that must be done first. “Gai, are there still others living in this promised land?”

“There are indeed, milord.”

“Chris. The wolfmen are faster on their feet. Send them out and tell the other residents to evacuate.”

“Got it!” Chris called out to Leon and passed the order down the chain of command. He hurried over to the area where the wolfmen built their houses, and soon, they were all rushing out of the village, swift as the wind.

Meanwhile, Asuna huffed. “Guess we gotta let loose, huh?”

“Don’t go and get yourself bitten, meathead.”

“I would say the same to you, boar woman. I will show no mercy should you become a foe.”

Jodie looked at me and asked, “What are you doing, Liam?”

“Oh... Just a little something. I don’t know if it’ll work, but it’s worth a shot.”

“What is it?”

“Just watch.”

The moment they heard I had something in mind, the others all hushed up and focused their attention on me. It was under their watchful gazes that I took some high mithril silver from my item box—ten very precious pea-sized beads from the ores that the giants had collected—and melted some with a Salamander. I formed an image in my mind of what I wanted to create, making good use of the abilities I honed while making enchanted armor.

“Oh...” I uttered.

“What’s wrong?”

“I failed... Well, whatever. It’ll come in handy someday.” Although I called it a failure, it was still usable in its own way, so I tossed it back into my item box for future use.

I looked back at the remaining high mithril silver—it really didn’t amount to much, so failure was no longer an option. I carefully imagined what I wanted and used my magic; if my earlier quasi-failure were likened to a path, then I was now taking the other branching road.

“Did that do it?” I wondered aloud.

“Do what?”

“Take a look.”

I held the small pill-like item I made between my index finger and thumb—then *crushed* it. It unleashed a divine light, after which the high mithril silver itself disappeared without a trace.

“It’s gone...”

“Wh-What was that, milord?”

“Cure-All,” I answered.

Asuna blinked. “That magic you used to stop Gon from turning?”

I nodded before making more pills out of the remaining high mithril silver. I had just enough to make five more. “You see, there’s this thing called Ancient Memoria. It’s kinda like this ring of mine.” I showed the magicpedia on my finger to them.

“That’s like a grimoire, isn’t it?”

I nodded at Asuna. “Exactly. Turns out it’s actually called Ancient Memoria. Basically, it makes it so that you can use magic even without having mastered it yet. Of course, you’d still need the mana and aptitude for it.”

Jodie hummed. Her wealth of experience seemed to have led her right to the answer. “You made it so that anyone can use that spell, but only once.”

“That I did.”

“Wow, really?!”

“Truly astounding, milord.”

“Wait, so is this for...”

I nodded and handed the Cure-All pills to them. “I could only make five. I’m glad it’s enough for all of you. God forbid, if you ever get bitten, then don’t hesitate to use it.”

Asuna looked like her chest was swelling with emotion. “Oh, thank you, Liam!” she exclaimed, everyone else behind her looking no less touched than she was.

“A dracula has appeared among the vampires’ ranks. Avoid engaging and evacuate immediately.”

That was the gist of the warning I had the wolfmen disseminate to all the different races living within this promised land. However, one of those messengers, a wolfman named Jake, was now kneeling before me at the center of the village. He had gone to warn the orcs but returned with a crestfallen expression.

Under some distant gazes, I asked him, “No luck?”

He grimly shook his head. “They refused to listen to me, claiming they couldn’t possibly lose to, and I quote, *‘a bunch of beansprouts who can’t even walk under the sun.’*”

I scrunched my nose up in distaste. “That confidence of theirs doesn’t bode well.”

Jake affirmed my suspicions with his own bitter scowl. “As I was attempting to convince them, a group of vampires came to attack. The orcs fought back, but they were outnumbered and all turned into vampires as well.”

“Oh boy,” I grumbled, shaking my head.

“During the battle,” Jake continued, “a certain vampire appeared. He was clearly different from the rest.”

“What?” At the end of the day, this was all done and over with, but I found myself tensing up regardless.

“I was already watching from afar by the time the orcs engaged in battle, so I saw how all the vampires knelt before that one individual. He used something that looked like magic on the fallen vampires, and they all revived.”

“So, that guy was the dracula?”

“I would assume so. He had the ability to revive his subordinates, and also...” He trailed off, but I quietly urged him on. “The moment he appeared, the vampires around him all grew stronger.” Jake then fell silent, looking terribly despondent. “It seemed risky to stay any longer, so I fled... My sincerest apologies.”

“No, that was a good call. We wouldn’t want you turning into a vampire too,” I said to reassure him. He didn’t look any less repentant, however, so I added, “Besides, you fetched us some good info.”

As Jake blinked in confusion, Chris walked over and chimed in, “I agree! Now we know that he can revive his subordinates and that we need to take him down first.”

“That’s not all,” I interjected.

This time, both Jake and Chris looked lost. In any case, thanks to this info Jake got for us, I was starting to see how we could fight against these vampires.

With the other races refusing to heed our warnings, we were left with no choice but to quickly go on the offensive. The more we dallied, the more the vampires would grow in numbers and strength. As it stood, they were already a ten-thousand-strong army that could revive any lost forces. Gai and the others were certain that no race living in this promised land had the power to hold their own against such foes.

It was now or never.

Following the advice of our wolfman scout, I directed the three leaders and my two party members to lie in wait along the path that the vampire army would be marching through, while I fell back a distance to observe them. This battlefield-to-be was an area within this bountiful promised land that looked like a barren wasteland at first glance but actually contained countless precious ores. Unlike the other regions, it was open and free of obstacles, making it very easy to fight on.

Soon, the army of bloodsuckers came marching in. They easily exceeded ten thousand in number and were clearly composed of many different races, from the pig-headed orcs whom Jake failed to convince to green-skinned goblins who were around half a human’s size. Although they were diverse, they all shared

one characteristic: the sharp fangs protruding from their mouths.

As soon as they were close enough, my team engaged them in battle.

Blessed by the mid-rank spirits possessing their neo-enchanted armor, all five of my allies ran absolutely wild. Gai unleashed his Gaia Crusher by smashing his fist on the ground, forming a gaping crevice in the earth that swallowed a hundred vampires in one go. Chris and Asuna made use of their speed and agility to dominate the jagged terrain, while Reina mowed down hordes of vampires with her large-scale water and fire magic. Any dregs that escaped their onslaught were reaped by Jodie and her slender rapier as she danced elegantly across the battlefield.

This small-scale battle began with five overpowering ten thousand. However, I could tell from afar that each swing of their fists and weapons, each spell unleashed, took its toll on the five of them. Gradually, their movements dulled and their stamina depleted. They were, after all, still living beings.

“Urgh... This is as far as we go. Retreat!”

Heeding Gai’s command, they all began pulling back with some strength still in store. Thanks to that, they were able to fend off any pursuing vampires as they scrambled to withdraw. Despite leaving in their wake nearly a thousand corpses, over ten thousand vampires that could very much still be called an army yet remained.

It was then a handsome middle-aged man, his grace and elegance clear to see even from afar, emerged from within their ranks. The moment he stepped out, all the vampires got on their knees and brimmed with power. It was just as Jake had reported; that power-up was clearly his influence.

He knelt down by a corpse and did *something*. Just a moment later, the corpse sluggishly got up.

It revived, I observed, eyes narrowed. *So that guy’s the boss of the vampires—the dracula.*

With that confirmed, I finally made my move.

The dracula was currently standing where my five allies had been waiting earlier—the very spot I also momentarily stood on myself before moving away.

As such, I was able to use the advanced divine magic spell Teleport, appear right in front of him, and take him away with me to somewhere far away—all the way to the forest where Lardon had been sealed.

“This is...” the dracula murmured, glaring at the area before turning it to me. “My followers are gone. What is the meaning of this?”

“I took you away from them. We’re at least a hundred kilometers apart now.” If the vampires could grow stronger and revive near the dracula, then we just had to keep him away from them.

“You dare use such petty tricks on me...”

Quiet wrath and chilling bloodlust simmered behind his gaze, but it only made me even more certain that this was the right move. Inside, I was already celebrating.

“Now I just need to take you down, and it’ll all be over.”

The dracula scoffed at my declaration. “And you think you can?”

“It’s worth a try. Just to be sure,” I asked, “you have no intention of coexisting with us, do you?”

“Of course not. I shall not stop until I devour all you lesser beings.”

“Oh yeah?” I took a deep breath.

Then, I chanted an aria and fired off nineteen power missiles.

The dracula parried them all and looked no less dignified for it. All the mana bullets dispersed in midair, bursting apart as if they’d collided with something. I couldn’t even see what he’d done—and he didn’t give me any room to breathe. The bloodlust he unleashed the very next moment was so chilling, it sent shivers down my spine.

I gasped and, acting on instinct, teleported twenty meters away. When I looked back, the dracula was where I’d stood earlier, his sharp nails thrust forward. Had I not dodged in that instant, they would have undoubtedly stabbed straight through my back and out my stomach.

“What a pesky little trick.”

I ignored his snide remark and chanted an aria again, this time to cast two different spells at once: Teleport and Holy Lance. I teleported to nine different spots and loosed glowing spears at each one, subjecting the dracula to a rain of light from every direction. He was able to block two, but the remaining seven pierced right through his body. One even managed to lop his right arm off from the elbow down.

“Yes!”

Seeing the damage, I clenched my fists in triumph—but the next second, I

nearly doubted my eyes. The dracula faded into a shroud of mist, then reconstituted with all his injuries gone. Even his arm, both the dismembered part and the part still attached to his body, turned into mist before coalescing back together. *He just regenerated!* As if to spite me even further, even his fancy noblelike clothes were mended, like the assault never tore them apart.

“Now it’s my turn.”

The dracula dissipated into a mist once more, and I could do little but groan in frustration. The entire shroud came closing in on me, so I teleported away. However, he seemed to have predicted my movements as he reappeared behind me, grabbed my shoulders, and moved to bite my neck.

“Clone!” In a flash, my summoned clone seeped out from my back like a blotch of ink and took the bite in my stead, giving me enough time to shake the dracula’s hands off and gain some distance.

“AAAH!” I heard my clone yell in anguish. The healthy flush on his skin faded into a pallid complexion. His eyes turned dull, and fangs grew from within his mouth. *He’s being turned into a vampire!*

“Release!” I chanted, sending him away with a soft gust of wind.

The dracula let out an impressed hum. “That’s quite the repertoire of spells you have, young man.”

I still had an ace up my sleeve. Guardian Lardon’s enchanted armor mode could grant me three times as much firepower for a moment. However, I needed to find a surefire way to deal some effective damage first, since using it would suck me dry much sooner than this dracula would. I couldn’t afford to use my last trick before finding something that worked.

Figuring my usual brute force method wouldn’t work, I was pushed to constantly use seventeen spells at once, the most I had at my disposal without an aria, to test the effectiveness of all sorts of magic. From Fireball to Ice Needle, I kept hurtling any and all offensive spells I had from my hundred-strong repertoire. Some of them did work—my flames scorched his skin, and a stone spear had even left a bone peeking past his flesh—but all that damage was nullified whenever he regenerated using that mist transformation of his.

“It’s pointless. I am undying,” the dracula taunted. “I am unbound by the ways of this world. I am lifeless; thus, I am deathless.”

“You’re lifeless...?”

“Precisely.” He nonchalantly cut his own arm off. The inside of the wound looked no different from what I’d expect from a human, but it wasn’t bleeding at all. “This body is but a vessel I use to move around, made by absorbing the ‘life’ floating in the air. I myself, however, am not alive. At the same time, as long as there is life in this world, I will never die. That is why all your attacks are meaningless.”

“So you’re...not alive,” I echoed, turning those words over in my head.

“Fear not. Once you become my follower, that despair, too, shall fade into nothingness.”

The dracula swayed, and his figure disappeared in a flash, too fast to see yet again. The next moment, he reappeared right in front of me and grabbed my head. His open mouth and sharp fangs drew closer to my flesh—

“Dust Box!”

Responding to my chant, a box manifested in the air—and sucked the dracula right in! The passage of time aside, this box was entirely similar to Item Box in the sense that it could take in anything but living beings. In other words, it couldn’t contain “life” inside it. The caster was also the only one who could take things in and out and was provided with a list of its contents.

Speaking of, I checked my list and saw it now had “one dracula” on it. Since one hour in real time equated to one year inside, I waited without dispelling the box all the way until ten hours—that is, *ten years* inside—had passed by. By then, my itemized list showed “one dracula (asphyxiated),” giving me certainty over my imminent victory.

Sure enough, five days and just past the hundred-hour mark later, my list was wiped clean and my dust box became empty. Without any life to absorb, the dracula eventually faded into nothingness.

I plopped down on the ground with a sigh of relief. I was just waiting the whole time, but I was on high alert for the entire ten hours out of fear that the dracula might somehow break out of the dust box. I could finally loosen up my shoulders now that I was certain he was gone.

“Clean work with just one spell, hm?”

“That’s just how it is sometimes. There’s nothing better than fixing everything with one solution, really. Sometimes, using large-scale spells like Eruption and Hellfire beats casting Fireball a hundred times.”

Hearing a chuckle in my mind, I raised an eyebrow questioningly.

“You have talent in multicasting but do not thoughtlessly rely on it every step of the way. You truly are different,” Lardon said, sounding rather impressed.

The small talk helped unravel the tension that had wound up in me these past few hours, and I finally noticed that it was pitch dark here inside the forest. I could see the moon peeking out from above the trees—understandably so, as I’d waited an entire ten hours.

“It’s already night...” I sighed, figuring it was time to go back.

I got on my feet and dusted some dirt off my pants. *Everything’s all wrapped up here. I wonder how they’re doing on the other side,* I pondered as I teleported to the village center first.

“Oh! You’ve returned!” Jake called as he rushed over to my side.

“Hey,” I greeted. “Where are the five of them?”

“They have yet to return.”

“Okay. Good.” I nodded in relief.

I hadn’t told the other five about my plan to isolate the dracula, but I’d given them instructions to return to the village or have everyone evacuate should

something go awry. I especially emphasized that at least one of them needed to make it back to the village. Based on what I'd seen of the vampires, as long as the dracula was taken out of the picture, it should be unlikely for all five of them to be annihilated without being able to fulfill those orders.

With all that in mind, I once again teleported to the wastelands and found Asuna and Jodie sitting by a few campfires. They ran over to me the moment I arrived.

"Liam!" Asuna called. "Are you okay?"

"So, you defeated the dracula?" Jodie asked, though her tone seemed to imply that she was practically certain of my victory.

"Yeah... How's it going here?"

"Look there." She pointed behind me. "They've been like this for a while now."

My gaze followed her finger and found the other three covered in some wounds and cuts, none of which were too deep but nevertheless spoke of the fierce battles they'd faced. Farther behind them were vampires galore—some standing, some sitting, and some just collapsed on the ground. Their appearances were diverse, but they all had the same dazed looks on their faces.

"They just suddenly stopped moving," Jodie explained.

"Take a look at this, Liam," Asuna urged as she tugged an orc-turned-vampire over. She opened up his mouth and gently poked his fang. It just popped right out. "I barely touch it, and this happens."

"Some came out on their own too," Jodie added, "so we figured you probably defeated their leader."

I nodded. "Does this mean they're no longer under control?"

"I think so. It's hard to tell in the dark, but they don't look as pale anymore either."

"That's good."

Ten thousand residents of this promised land had been taken under the dracula's control. Figuring out how to turn them back to normal would be on

our agenda from now on. Of course, it'd be great if it turned out that getting rid of the dracula solved everything.

"We still have some loose ends to tie up, but it looks like it's case closed—"

"Ugh..."

"Uaaargh..."

"Aaaaah...!"

Aaand I spoke too soon. Countless groans filled the air, coming not from me or my familiars but from the vampires. Their moans sounded like creepy, otherworldly cries that sent shivers running down my spine.

Asuna looked around in bewilderment. "Wh-What? What is this?"

"Liam!" Jodie called out to me, sounding unusually agitated.

When I turned toward her, I saw a goblin clawing at his own face...and disappearing! Starting from the top of his head, he was fading away into a glowing mist and floating up into the sky.

"What's going on?"

"The dracula's mana."

"You know about this, Lardon?!"

"His mana had taken over their bodies, and now, the source of that mana is gone."

"You mean they're all just belatedly disappearing like him?" I asked in horror. Lardon didn't give me a straight answer, but I could pick up on the tacit affirmation. "Damn it. Can't we do anything about this?!"

I racked my brain for a solution. With a gasp, I soon hit upon one.

I hurriedly cast Cure-All on the goblin closest to me. This spell could heal any and all status abnormalities, just as it did for the giant that had been bitten before. It worked again this time around. The fading body whose lifeforce was dissipating into a glowing mist began expelling pitch-black mana instead.

This'll work!

I chanted an aria and began dashing all around, casting Cure-All as much as I could. However, I clicked my tongue when I realized that this was far from enough, so I tried something else. Taking Guardian Lardon from my item box and wearing it as enchanted armor instantly doubled the number of spells I could cast at once.

And now Cure-All again—

“Ugh!”

It still wasn’t enough. I saved one vampire after the other, but they were fading away at an even faster rate than I could hope to catch up to.

“Aaargh!”

“Calm down.”

“There’s no way I can—”

“Do you remember what you said earlier?”

“Huh?” I blinked, thinking back. “Oh!”

Realizing what Lardon meant, I took a deep breath and trailed my gaze over the crowd of fading bodies that should, at the very least, still amount to nine thousand. I formed an image in my mind, amplified my mana with my enchanted armor, and began molding it at once into a wide-range version of Cure-All.

The next moment, I heard the crisp sound of something bursting apart in my mind as a divine light radiated from my body like the sun. All the vampires embraced by that light began drawing their glowing lifeforce back in and pushing the black mana out instead.

“I...did it...”

I could barely remain on my feet after using up all of my mana, but I was sure that I’d succeeded in saving them all.

I jolted awake and sat upright in a flash, sweeping my gaze over my surroundings before lifting it up toward the sky.

“Thank goodness...” It was still night.

“What’s got you so relieved?” I heard a voice behind me and found Asuna and Jodie both looking at me with a mix of concern and relief.

“You two...”

“Are you okay now, Liam?” Jodie asked.

“Yeah. More importantly, how long have I been out?” I couldn’t yet strike out the possibility that I’d blacked out for an entire day, so I had to confirm.

“An hour!” Asuna groaned. “Do you have any idea how worried we were?”

Just an hour. That’s good. I should still make it in time, I thought as I looked around. “How is everyone? Is the dracula’s mana gone?”

“It’s all good,” she answered.

“Yes. Everyone’s calmed down as well. Look over there.” Jodie raised her hand and pointed into the darkness that was dotted by campfires. As I trailed my gaze along that direction, I found many monsters illuminated by those lights, mostly slumped over the ground in exhaustion.

“Looks like they’re all alive.”

“Yeah!” Asuna crowed. “Liam, what the heck did you do? It looked awesome.”

“A sudden flood of light, and everyone was saved. Even those who’d half faded away were brought back.”

“That does sound like quite the sight,” I mused. I’d only witnessed the monsters whose heads had faded away at most, but I guess it was a closer call than I thought. Now I felt even more glad that I’d made it in time.

“Master!” Chris rushed over and pounced on me, practically tackling me and pinning me to the ground. “Master, are you okay?! Are you okay, Master?!”

“Calm down. I’m fine. I just passed out because I used up all my mana at once. I’ve rested up already, so I’m all good.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really. More importantly, where are the vampires? I mean those that were vampires from the start.”

“Huh? Ummm...” Chris got off me and began looking around.

Just then, Reina sauntered over. “Lord Liam, shall I gather the vampires?”

“Could you?”

“We have them under watch. After you collapsed, we called for some help from the village to monitor them.”

I took in the scene around me with narrowed eyes. Now that she mentioned it, there were a bunch of elves, wolfmen, and giants scattered all around the seated monsters. Nodding, I answered Reina, “Then call them over now.”

“Understood.”

As Reina walked off, I stood up and looked over myself. I had collapsed from using up all my mana at once, but fortunately, there didn’t seem to be any other negative side effects.

Suddenly, I heard Lardon chuckle.

“What is it?” I asked.

“There certainly are no negative side effects.”

I tilted my head in confusion, wondering what this dragon was on about this time. Still, I already knew that Lardon enjoyed speaking in a roundabout way. *If there are no negative effects...then what about a positive one? What could be a positive side effect?*

“Oh.” I stretched my fist up and, skipping the aria, fired off some power missiles toward the sky. “I’ve reached the next level...”

“Huh?” Asuna whipped her head around. “Oh, right! Now it’s nineteen

without an aria.”

“That’s amazing, Liam,” Jodie said, smiling. “You got stronger again.”

“Is it because I wrung myself dry earlier...?” I tried again, this time with an aria, and was able to simultaneously cast twenty-three. My mana got bumped up by one level. This gave me a lot more wiggle room to try things out.

As I finished checking myself over, Reina and a few elves came back with around a hundred vampires in tow. Just like the elves, these purebloods looked practically human, save for their pale skin that stood out even in the night and the sharp fangs peeking out of their lips.

“Is this all of them?”

Reina nodded. “These were their original numbers.”

“So they snowballed into ten thousand from this much...” I mumbled, a bit impressed despite it all.

All of a sudden, the vampire in front prostrated himself before me. “Please let the rest of them go! I beg you!” I blinked down at him in confusion, but the man continued pleading. “I’ll take responsibility for everything! Please take my head and let everyone else go!”

The other vampires clamored behind him as I slowly responded, “Hang on. I’m not trying to pin the blame on anyone here.”

“What?” He raised his head and looked up at me owlishly.

“From what I could tell, you guys were being manipulated by that dracula, right?”

“W-Well... Yes, but...”

“Then there’s no point in discussing all that. More importantly...”

“Y-Yes...?” The man gulped nervously, the vampires behind him looking just as tense.

“With the dracula gone, you can’t walk around during the day anymore, can you?”

“Ah... No, we can’t.”

“I’ll help you with that if you join us.”

This was why I had made sure that a day had yet to pass when I woke up. If the sun had come up, these dracula-less vampires would’ve been baked into ash pie. I was planning on doing something about that—a plan that I went ahead and shared with the man.

“Huh?” From his expression down to his body, the man very obviously froze, almost as if he had been petrified.

“Oh, don’t misunderstand. I’m not trying to follow in the dracula’s footsteps or anything. As long as you don’t defy me or cause trouble, you’re free to do as you please.”

“Just like us,” Reina piped in.

“More friends!” Chris cheered.

The man’s metaphorical petrification came undone. “Can we really...?”

“Yeah.”

Still kneeling on the ground, he silently turned around and swept his gaze over the other vampires. They briefly conversed with their eyes before bowing their heads in unison.

“Thank you!!!” they all exclaimed.

“Sure thing.” I nodded as I held my hand up toward the man, who was very likely their leader.

Jodie saw that and muttered, “Familia?”

“Not quite.”

“Huh? What do you mean?” Asuna asked.

“Just watch.”

This would be the culmination of everything I’d experienced until now: learning and crafting magic, discovering and forging enchanted armor, and spinning my own twists into the things I make. Now, I was going to do exactly that with Familia. Whenever I used this spell, the contracted individual would evolve. This time around, I would *guide* that evolution.

“High Familia.” I cast my newly crafted spell on the vampire, willing the evolution into one that would permit them contact with sunlight. “From this day forth, you are Alucard.”

With that new name, the man, Alucard, evolved into a noble vampire.

Somewhere on the continent, two men sat in a lavishly furnished room with a low table between them. One had slicked back silver-gray hair and a tranquil gaze framed by deep wrinkles. Although he was well on his way into his later years, there was still much depth behind his eyes. The other was young, brimming with energy and spirit.

On the table was a small puppet that had been snapped into two.

“My apologies. I never expected the dracula to be defeated by a single human...” The younger man shrunk into himself as he begged for forgiveness.

“Worry not,” said the other man.

“But Lord Dalton, your plan was to use the dracula to make the monsters run amok, to use as a justification for us to send our forces...”

“Enough. Our problem at hand is the one who defeated it.”

“Liam Hamilton...”

“We don’t know how he did it?”

“No... I haven’t the faintest clue,” the young man admitted glumly. “You’ve seen part of their battle for yourself, but aside from that...”

Both their gazes fell to the other thing atop the low table—a crystal ball on a stand. Playing on its glossy surface was the battle between Liam and the dracula.

“This is not good.”

“Huh?”

“Simultaneously casting seventeen spells, manipulating a dragon’s power, and even that armor that can be automatically equipped...” Dalton furrowed his brows as he watched the footage their scout had sent back. “That is but a calamity dressed in human skin. He may very well be the strongest being on this

continent.”

“Th-That cannot be...!” The young man was pale and aghast.

“The situation has changed. We need more information. Continue monitoring him,” Dalton ordered darkly. “Seizing that land can wait.”

“U-Understood!”

The young man rushed out of the room, leaving Dalton by himself. His eyes, however, stayed locked on the crystal ball.

“The turning point of an era is always marked by calamity,” he mumbled under his breath, lost in thought. “But will the storm this one brings be a boon or a bane?”

Dalton, so fixated on Liam’s figure, failed to take in the fear and anguish in his own reflection against the glass.

“Phew... What a workout.”

I was lazing about in the middle of this still expanding village-turned-town, with my hands propping me up from behind and legs stretched out over the ground. I had just finished naming all our new residents. None of the others needed a specific evolution like the vampires did, so I only had to cast the ordinary version of Familia on them.

Oh, but did I mention there were *ten thousand* of them?

At first, it was just business as usual. The names for each race’s leaders even came to me the moment I saw them. But the more names I crossed off the list, the more difficult it was to give new ones. At some point, I could’ve sworn I heard the devil whisper by my shoulder, “*Just name them Slime 1 and Slime 2, why don’t you?*”

Of course, I didn’t have it in me to do that to them, so by the latter half of this whole naming fiasco, I’d submitted myself to milking each name as much as I could. Say, for example, Bob into Bobby, Bobert, Bobamin, Bobrew, and what have you.

An entire day of that was what had left me lying on the ground here, thoroughly and utterly drained.

“Lord Liam, Lord Liam!”

“Look, look!”

I turned my head when I heard a pair of soft voices calling out to me with clumsy, childlike pronunciation. Jiggling beside me on the ground were two slimes, or more precisely, two neo-slimes that had evolved with Familia. Whereas slimes were just gelatinous creatures, neo-slimes developed eyes and a mouth and were partially capable of speech.

“What’s up, Sli and Lime?”

“For you!”

“From us!”

The two slimes literally spat something out of their bodies, which I caught with a bit of confusion. It was a wood carving of me, except it didn’t have any of the rough and splintery edges that were characteristic of wood carvings. Instead, it was smooth to the touch. After a beat, I realized that they must have made this by melting it in their bodies.

Wow... This really looks like me. It’s good enough to sell as our local specialty.
I smiled down at them. “Thanks, you two.”

“We love you!”

“Love you lots!”

Sli and Lime both clung on to me like a couple of puppies, and all my exhaustion just whittled away just from looking at how cute they were. As I enjoyed this slime therapy session, I took a gander around at all the people who were up working on their feet, unlike me.



Our population got a sudden boost with all my new familiars, so they were busy making houses for themselves. The dexterous elves were the most numerous, so I left all construction-related matters to their leader Reina. Gai led the giants in patrolling this promised land, while Chris took the wolfmen to hunt for everyone's food. I allocated them all tasks well-suited to their strengths, and it seemed to be bearing good results. More and more house frames were being set up around the area. The town was well on its way into expansion.

"Milord."

"Hm? What is it, Gai?" I looked up at the giant, the slimes still frolicking on my lap.

"Some humans have come to meet you. How shall I proceed?"

"Humans?"

Gai nodded. "I encountered them along my patrol route. They claim to be merchants from Quistador and wish to speak with this country's king," he explained. "Will you be meeting them?"

"Merchants, huh? Guess I should." I stood up, then froze. "Wait."

"Is something the matter?" Gai asked, tilting his head.

"They wanted to meet this country's king?"

"Indeed. Such was their request."

"No, I mean—you delivered that message to *me*?"

"I certainly did."

"But I'm not a king."

"Surely, you jest. You are our lord, our liege, and our king."

"Since when, exactly...?" *I could've sworn I put this whole king business on hold before...*

"I ask you all!" Gai suddenly bellowed. Our bustling surroundings instantly settled down, and everyone's eyes fell on us. "I believe Lord Liam is our king. Have you any objections to this sentiment?"

“None!”

“Of course he is!”

“Why are you asking that?”

Cheery voices began yelling back in response, and they were all of the same opinion. Even Sli and Lime joined in while bouncing happily by my feet, cheering “King Liam!” and “So strong! So cool!” in tandem, as they always did.

In my mind, I heard a chuckle. *“Very well.”*

“Uh? Very well *what?*”

Before I even finished speaking, Lardon came out of my body for the first time. The humongous dragon that appeared before me was mostly see-through but still had physical substance. The town was ruled by silence in the face of this profound presence.

“I, Lardon the Golden Dragon, hereby proclaim Liam Hamilton as the king of this land.”

It was a silence instantly shattered by loud and celebratory cheers.

Scarlet had decided to stay in the capital for a few days in order to get a grasp of Jamille's internal affairs. I came back to her mansion now that those specified few days had passed, only to find her wistfully gazing out the window. With such a terribly morose expression on her face, it was clear that her mind was preoccupied with more than just the scenery outside.

"What's wrong? Did something happen?"

Scarlet gasped and shot up from her chair. "Master, I have been waiting for you."

As I got close enough to look up at her, the tenseness in her expression only became more evident. "Did something happen?" I asked again.

"Yes... I have been probing into matters these past few days," she prefaced. When I urged her with a nod, she continued. "I did not find anything. However..."

"However...?"

"From His Majesty down to his ministers—everyone seems to be hiding something. It certainly does not look as if they plan on giving up on that land. Alas, the reason behind that sentiment is beyond my comprehension."

"Hm... So they're keeping some sort of secret about it?"

"Most likely." Scarlet nodded.

"Any idea, Lardon?" I asked the dragon inside me but got no response. When Scarlet looked at me expectantly, I slowly shook my head. "It's a no."

"I see..."

"It's probably something that concerns just the human side of things."

"Indeed. It must be a matter so mundane the divine dragon need not even pay it any heed."

“Well, anyway,” I said, brushing that aside for now. “At least we know for sure that they don’t plan on withdrawing.”

“I concur.”

“And you? Are you staying here or coming with?”

“I shall remain here a while longer.”

“All right. I’ll come check up on you again next time.”

I parted with Scarlet and teleported back to town. Even from afar, the bustling sounds of construction and productivity were carried to me by the wind. I absently gazed at that distant sight and slowly parted my lips.

“You have an idea, don’t you?”

“Why do you assume so?”

“You’ve never lied to me, and people who don’t lie tend to stay quiet when they need to. Like what you did earlier.”

“And why do you ask me now?”

“I mean, you would’ve answered if it was something I could tell Scarlet, and you’d be holding your silence now if it was something I didn’t need to know either.”

“That acumen of yours... How intriguing. I would not have taken you for a twelve-year-old child.”

This time, it was my turn to keep mum.

“Oh? No answer?” Lardon chuckled, sounding faintly amused.

How could I answer? I myself didn’t know what to say. One night, for god-knows-what reason, I’d gone from some ordinary guy enjoying his evening drink to the fifth son of a noble house. I didn’t even know if I could tell anyone else about this. Silence was my only option.

“Liam, do you know what the word ‘guardian’ implies?”

“Hm? As in the ‘guardian’ part of Guardian Lardon’s name?”

“Indeed.”

“Well... That it’s meant to guard something?”

Lardon didn’t deign to give me either affirmation or rejection. *“And what would that be?”*

“I mean, it was *your* enchanted armor, so... Huh?” I cut myself short. Something felt off. “You...don’t need to be protected. It was your weapon.”

Lardon no longer spoke, but my mind was racing as I continued mumbling to myself. “As enchanted armor, Guardian Lardon was more of a weapon, not a guardian. Then why is it called...? Oh!”

I cut myself off yet again and teleported to the underground space where we first found the iron dragon. “What was it protecting here?”

Instead of answering, Lardon told me, *“Fill this space with mana.”*

“What?”

“Your mana pool recently grew. You should have enough now.”

I didn’t really get why, but I listened for now and unleashed as much mana as I could. Without a specific spell to be poured into, my mana gradually filled the air of this underground space. Just as some exhaustion was starting to hit me, my surroundings trembled. The ground split apart, revealing another set of stairs that led farther down.

Without a moment’s hesitation, I descended the steps. I trusted Lardon’s guidance; if filling the space with mana opened up these stairs, then I was probably meant to see what was at the very bottom too.

Welcoming me was an area several times wider than the upper level I had come from. However, something else stood out even more than this vast chamber.

“Is this...Ancient Memoria?”

“You did well in noticing that. You are correct,” Lardon affirmed. *“This space itself is indeed Ancient Memoria.”*

“Does that mean there’s some sort of magic here?”

“Do you know about crows?”

“Huh? Of course.” I wondered where the conversation was headed this time.

“Those birds like to gather shiny objects. Dragons are the same.”

“So...?”

“This is a dragon’s nest, a space where ancient magic and secret spells have been gathered.”

“Ancient magic and secret spells? Really?!” I trembled in excitement. This place seemed to have many treasures in store for someone like me who loved everything magic.

“The seal gradually comes undone the more mana is used on it. As for this one, you are the first human to undo it in these past few centuries.”

“This one...” I mumbled, feeling giddier than ever. That wording indicated that there were many more places like this out there.

Lardon chuckled. *“Is that what caught your attention?”*

“What else is there?”

“Ha ha... Now, go on. The Ancient Memoria is waiting for you.”

“Yeah!”

Thus began my efforts at analyzing the ancient magic from this space.

“I get it now.”

This entire chamber was no different from your average grimoire, so even without a book to peruse, I was able to understand what kind of magic it contained and how to use it in a flash.

“Oh? Then give it a try.”

With a nod, I began casting the spell on maximum capacity, hoping to master it as soon as I could. The next moment, however, several bubbles appeared in midair. The fist-sized blue bubbles floated around the space, slowly making their way toward me.

“What are these?”

Lardon didn’t answer, which made me even warier. I cautiously poked one of the bubbles with the tip of my finger, and as one would expect of a bubble, it dispersed with an innocent little *pop*. It didn’t hurt me or anything.

But, right after I made contact with the bubble, the nineteen spells I’d been casting all dissipated alongside it.

“It...nullifies magic?”

“Precisely.”

Pursing my lips, I decided that I needed more information and began casting just one instance of the new spell again. The bubbles manifested once more, floating innocently in the air. This time, I gave them a rather generous swat, the same kind I would give a persistent fly. The results were the same: the bubble popped, taking my magic along with it. Next, I tried casting Cure-All, Fireball, and all sorts of other spells, but these didn’t trigger the bubbles.

“So these bubbles only get in the way of practicing the magic lodged in this space.”

“Correct.”

I hummed. With a few more ideas in mind, I gave it another go. The moment the pesky little bubbles showed up, I teleported away to the surface. However, the spell-in-progress was canceled right as I left. Teleporting back, I tried fleeing to Another World instead, but that was also a bust.

“That space itself is Ancient Memoria.”

“It’s just like a grimoire,” I grouched. “I can’t use an unmastered spell if I ‘let go’ of it...” Troublesome as it was, I could also see the logic behind it.

As I stepped out of Another World and back into the underground space, I racked my brain over how to deal with those bubbles. I quickly fetched a stone from the surface using Teleport and tried popping the bubbles with it. They were floating leisurely in the air, looking as if the slightest breeze could blow them away, yet the grape-sized stone didn’t leave so much as a dent. The bubble just got knocked back before it resumed floating my way.

“Magic Missile.”

I tried hitting it with magic this time, and the bubble did pop—but two more appeared in its place.

“So physical attacks are nullified, while magic is absorbed and triggers replication.”

“Correct. The point of this trial is to master the spell while maneuvering past that obstacle. Additionally, they increase in number as time passes.”

I sighed. “Can’t say I like it, but I guess that makes sense.”

Apparently, this was some sort of trial, which explained all these obstacles. I needed time to master this spell, but this army of bubbles would only grow in number as time went on and hinder my progress.

“The rationale behind it is that no matter how much mana you have, you cannot become overly dependent on it. You must also train your body.”

“Hmmm.”

Lardon chuckled. *“It should prove to be of little issue to you. You can use multiple spells at once, so allocating one to practicing the spell and the*

remaining to deflecting the obstacles should see you to mastery in due time."

However, I didn't jump on the solution that was laid out for me. "There's a better way," I decided after a short pause.

"Oh?"

As that intrigued hum resounded in my mind, I chanted, "Contract Summoning: Liam," and brought forth my own clone. "I'll leave it to you."

"Sure thing," my clone said, nodding back.

With one spell now in use, I began casting eighteen of the new spell while my clone used nineteen power missiles to shoot the bubbles away. They duplicated but were also pushed back, giving us both more space to work with, and from there, it was a cycle of knocking the bubbles back and watching them multiply. I decided I could trust my clone with it and moved all my focus on to this new spell.

An hour passed before I managed to successfully cast it, courtesy of my clone's efforts, of course. When I chanted, "Absolute Force Shield," eighteen transparent shields manifested before my eyes.

"Well?" my clone asked.

"I think it'll only take me five minutes this time."

"Five minutes? Easy."

"Thanks."

I started with the next batch of eighteen spells. Five minutes later, I activated them all at once and finally mastered it. This spell held the same qualities as the bubbles that had gotten in my way—it provided one instance of absolute defense against any and all kinds of physical attacks.

I decided to run a little experiment with my clone. All these pesky little bubbles were getting in the way underground though, so I returned aboveground first and summoned a clone again before starting.

“Let’s start.”

“Right.”

We both nodded. The connection between me and my clone went beyond tacit understanding. He inherited all my memories up until the moment I summoned him, so he obviously knew what it was I wanted to test too.

My clone stood about five meters away from me. “Here I go.”

“Ready when you are,” I said as I put up an absolute force shield, which manifested as a faint blue barrier in front of me.

My clone made sure my barrier was set up before he picked a stone from the ground and threw it at me. His strength wasn’t nearly as impressive as his mana; the projectile drew a leisurely arc in the air before making contact with the blue surface. Instantly, the barrier shattered like glass, while the stone was knocked backward.

“Next,” my clone announced, and I nodded in acknowledgment.

He took a huge boulder around the size of a person into our item box, which he then resummoned above me. As it came plunging down, I set up the absolute force shield once more. It clashed with the barrier boasting absolute defense and, much like the pebble, was repelled. The barrier shattered and faded away.

“Next,” my clone said again.

I put the barrier up for a third time as my clone picked up two stones and threw them both at the same time. My barrier knocked one of the stones back as it disappeared, but the second went right through and landed smoothly in

my hands.

“Seems about right,” he concluded.

I nodded. “Yep.”

Absolute Force Shield was a spell that provided *one instance* of absolute defense against physical attacks. This little series of tests confirmed that the strength and force behind that attack were irrelevant, and the “one instance” portion held true and firm. After all, it could defend against a huge boulder but failed to block one of two little pebbles.

“Next up,” my clone continued. “Magic Missile.”

I put the barrier up as my clone cast the simple beginner spell, but the measly mana bullet phased through.

“So it’s completely ineffective against magic.”

“Even this weak spell got through. Pretty clear-cut.”

It was, for all intents and purposes, a spell that only worked on physical attacks. In exchange for the “one instance” rule, however, it worked no matter how strong the attack.

“All right. I’m going all in now.”

“Ready.”

My clone gathered all the stones around him and kept chucking them my way. I, in turn, made full use of my capability to cast nineteen simultaneous spells and layered one barrier after the other. One stone shattered one barrier, and I’d put up new ones with each barrier breached.

If one barrier could only sustain one impact, then I just needed to put them up as fast as, if not faster than, my opponent dished out their attacks. This was how I could put this spell to practical use and bring it closer to a true absolute defense.

“But on a battlefield, they could rain down dozens to even a hundred arrows all at once.”

“This doesn’t seem very viable against someone like Asuna either. She dishes

out attacks way faster than we could ever put these barriers up.”

“So those two issues are on the agenda, huh?”

“Both seem solvable with more mana, though.”

My clone and I nodded in sync. Thanks to two heads—quite literally, in my case—being better than one, my inspection of Absolute Force Shield went without a hitch, and I was able to take note of any future points of improvement. With all that out of the way, I released my clone and breathed out a sigh of relief.

“Wonderful. In but an instant, you’ve nearly turned the spell into your own.”

“It’s a nice and clear-cut spell. Very easy to use.”

“Absolute Magic Shield is sealed in the next stage. The name is self-explanatory. You may undo the seal once your mana increases once more.”

“Will do.” I nodded and spun on my heels, ready to return to the town, but stopped. “No, wait.”

“What is it?”

I clamped my mouth shut as I organized my thoughts. “You said Absolute Magic Shield’s name is self-explanatory?”

“Indeed. It is a barrier that can provide one instance of absolute defense against any magical attack.”

It really was self-explanatory—it was just the magical counterpart of Absolute Force Shield.

“Then this is doable.”

“What is?”

I narrowed my eyes in thought. “Ah, I see. Are you the one who set up that whole system underground?”

“Yes... *What of it?*” Lardon didn’t seem to have noticed just yet. Well, you could hardly blame someone for tunnel-visioning on a system they set up themselves.

I had already mastered Absolute Force Shield and knew that Absolute Magic

Shield was its counterpart for magical attacks. The foundation was right there, and the contrast was perfect for forming a mental image.

This is doable, I decided with absolute certainty.

Thus, I began crafting a spell with multicasting on maximum capacity while applying minute adjustments along the way—one of which was, of course, steering the mana toward defending against magic instead of physical attacks. No more than ten failures later, the spell was crafted.

“Absolute Magic Shield,” I chanted, summoning a faint red barrier before my eyes. “Did I get it right?”

The sagely voice in my head was silent and only responded when I called out once more. *“I am genuinely impressed,”* Lardon admitted, sounding half stunned and half awed. *“To think you would acquire ancient magic in such a way.”*

With this, I was certain that I’d successfully recreated Absolute Magic Shield.

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I silently sat in place while expelling mana from my body, the same way I did when I unsealed that underground space, letting it aimlessly spill forth without directing it toward a spell.

“What are you doing?”

“Training... Well, no. I guess ‘breathing exercises’ is a better way to put it?”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m honing my sensitivity to mana.”

Lardon hummed. *“Is this so you can instantaneously decide between the two types of barriers?”*

Quick on the uptake, as usual, I mused. Absolute Force Shield defended against physical attacks, while Absolute Magic Shield defended against magical attacks. Match them up the wrong way, though, and the attack would completely phase through. In order to make the most of these barriers, I needed to be able to make that split-second decision on the nature of my opponent’s attack. Thus, I was training myself by releasing and sensing mana on my own.

“Could you not simply put both up at all times?”

“I could, but you see, there’s this thing I learned called the multiplication table.”

“Hm?” Lardon sounded perplexed by my statement that seemed to have come out of nowhere but patiently listened on.

“I’ve heard that the children of merchants could even memorize the table up to ninety-nine times ninety-nine. Honestly, I can’t even imagine how big the table would have to be for that, but it’s apparently pretty useful for accounting.”

“Your point is?”

“If you don’t know your multiplication table, then to you, ten would be two plus two plus two plus two plus two rather than just two times five. And you said earlier than I should just keep both up at all times? This is just like that: possible, sure, but also too much unneeded effort.”

“A fair point. It would be much more efficient if you could discern an attack’s nature at a glance.”

Magic was my passion, so I didn’t want to make too many compromises on it. Thus, I spent some more time training until I became capable of determining whether moving objects contained mana.

Once I teleported back to the town that was well on its way to completion, Asuna dashed over to me. “Liam!”

“What’s wrong? You look pretty frazzled.”

“Gai’s looking for you—wants you to head over as soon as possible.”

“He did? Got it.” I nodded. “Where to?”

“Point 17.”

“All right.”

With more and more monsters getting added into our ranks, the town was growing to be fairly large. This promised land was also just a really vast territory in general, so I’d prepared several “points” in case I ever needed to head anywhere for anything. These locations were all places I had been to and could thus teleport to directly.

After recalling Point 17’s exact location, I teleported right over to the vast plains where we’d been planning to pave a road leading toward the Duchy of Parta. There, I found Gai with some other giants, as well as a huge procession with an opulent carriage right in the middle. It was secured by several armed men who were glaring rather fiercely at the giants.

When I called out to Gai, he whipped his head around and hurried over. “Milord! You have finally arrived, I see!” At the same time, the other party buzzed when they heard how he had addressed me.

“What is all this?” I asked.

“They claim to be envoys from the Duchy of Parta.” As I blinked in confusion, Gai continued. “They seek an audience with you, milord.”

“An audience...?” It took me nearly ten seconds to process the word I wasn’t very used to hearing. “Oh... Um, right.” I supposed they meant that they wanted to meet with the king of this place, which was, well, *me*. “Okay. And who’s in charge over there?”

“That man standing by the carriage,” Gai answered.

I turned toward the carriage and locked eyes with said man. He made his way here and bowed deeply before me. “It is my greatest pleasure to make your acquaintance. My name is Eks Blast.”

“Um, I’m Liam.” I figured it wouldn’t be a smart move for me to bring up my last name here. “Mr. Eks, do you have any business with me?”

“I come on the orders of my lord, His Royal Highness the Grand Duke, who bears but one proposal: your marriage with Princess Flora.”

I blinked. “Marriage?”

“Indeed. By the by, Your Majesty, may I be so bold as to ask if you have already wed Princess Scarlet of Jamille?”

“Huh? Oh, no...” Still a little baffled, I reluctantly answered, “This and that happened, so it’s been delayed.”

“Is that so? Well, our proud duchy and the esteemed grand duke are no misers who defer our dues.”

As I blinked in confusion, Eks gracefully raised his hand. One of the soldiers approached the carriage and whispered something to it. The next moment, the curtains parted, and out came a young lady whose exquisite dress made it quite clear that she was a princess.

“If you so wish, we could very well offer Princess Flora to you, here and now.”

“You mean you’ll just hand her over?”

Eks nodded with great confidence.

Can they just...do that? I mean, can all this marriage shebang even be discussed in terms of “paying dues” or whatever he called it? I really can’t understand these nobles.

“For now, um...” I decided to put it off for a bit. “Please follow us to town. We can’t really talk properly here.”

“Ohhh! So you accept?”

“No, uh...”

“Thank you very much. His Royal Highness will surely be delighted.”

“Um...” Everything was just going so fast. I was too befuddled by this all to keep up. “A-Anyway, let’s just—”

That instant, I felt a horrible shiver run up my spine.

“Absolute Magic Shield!”

The moment I sensed mana, my body moved faster than my mind. I put a magic barrier up facing the direction I sensed magic from. What I saw in that instant was a single monster resembling a fireball appearing by Princess Flora’s side. It floated harmlessly in the air, up until I felt its mana suddenly shoot through the roof—and then *explode*.

The mana-infused explosion left a gigantic crater in its wake. In its center were Princess Flora, who had sunk to the ground with a dazed expression on her face, and several soldiers who had passed out after being knocked back.

“What the heck was that?”

“A suicide elemental.”

“A what?”

“It is a man-made monster that detonates through a spell. Had you reacted a second later, that lass would be mincemeat by now.” Lardon sounded a little proud, but this wasn’t the time for that.

“Who’d do such a thing?!”

“Hmph... Who indeed? It could very well be someone not present here.”

Lardon was speaking as obliquely as always, but I noticed something just then

—amid Princess Flora and the soldiers who were all too stunned to speak, Eks was nowhere to be found.

“Was it Eks?”

“It is more likely that he has someone above him.”

“Wh-What do you mean?”

“Who knows? Speculate as I may, human matters have always been beyond me. Those known as nobles, especially, are troublesome to no end.”

“Nobles, huh...” If Lardon didn’t know, then I just had to ask someone who did. “Gai.”

Gai came over from where he was standing by. “You called, milord?”

“I’m stepping out for a bit. Guard the area and protect Flora. The soldiers too, if you can.”

“Understood.” Gai lowered his head and gave out orders to the other giants, who all swiftly moved to fulfill them. They managed to prepare a defensive formation in no time at all.

After watching over them for a bit, I teleported to the usual room in Scarlet’s manor, where I ran into a maid I’d seen before.

“Oh!” She gasped, immediately recognizing me as well.

“Is Scarlet in?”

“Th-The princess is currently bathing.”

“Okay. Could you tell her to come over once she’s done? I need to talk to her.”

“Of course!”

The maid, who seemed to be in the middle of cleaning, set her broom aside and rushed out of the room. A few minutes later, I heard some footsteps that sounded even more rushed than the maid’s had been. Scarlet burst into the

room, fresh from the bath.

“I apologize for making you wait, Master.”

“I’m the one who came out of the blue, so no worries. More importantly, I need to ask you something.”

“What could it be?”

“It’ll probably be faster to show you. Come with me.”

“Understood.”

I teleported with Scarlet back to the scene of the crime, Point 17. In the short time I’d been gone, the giants had gathered the unconscious soldiers together and were monitoring and guarding them separately from Flora.

“Goodness...” Scarlet’s expression stiffened as she took in the aftermath of the explosion, from the crater to the unconscious men.

“Apparently, that girl over there is Princess Flora from the Duchy of Parta.”

“Flora? I’m afraid I’ve never heard of a princess with that name.”

“What...?” Judging from her grave expression, I highly doubted she was lying.

“May I know what happened?” Scarlet asked.

“Oh... Well, a man calling himself Eks Blast came here and started prattling on about making Princess Flora my wife or whatever... Sounded like he was trying to one-up Jamille.”

“Eks Blast... I’ve heard of that name,” Scarlet recalled. “Known as the grand duke’s dagger, he takes on jobs that need to be done in the shadows.”

“Hmm. Anyway, I was just going to let them in for now when a...suicide elemental, was it? That monster appeared beside her and *boom*—here we are.”

Scarlet narrowed her eyes. “So, this is what they are resorting to now.” Seeing the confusion on my face, she elaborated, “They are fabricating a justification.”

“What?”

“Ostensibly, they graciously offered their own princess up to this country of monsters, yet all they got in return was her brutal murder.”

I grimly pursed my lips. "So they're cooking up a reason to attack us."

"Precisely."

"Ah, humans. Such creative creatures," Lardon mused, voice laced in irritation.

Scarlet looked equally enraged as she approached Flora, who'd passed out earlier, and peered at the girl's face. "Oh...?"

"What is it?" I asked.

"I know this girl."

"You do?"

"Indeed. She should be the grand duke's illegitimate child, albeit one who is not officially acknowledged."

"You're sure?"

"Yes... Allow me to confirm." Scarlet bent down and tugged on the collar of Flora's dress.

I whipped my face away. "Wh-What are you doing?!"

"She has a mole on the side of her breast. This should be her."

"Why do you even know to check for that?"

"It is because she is an unofficial illegitimate child. In such cases, certain physical characteristics are announced in case they are ever needed."

"R-Really?"

I heard cloth rustling and took a peek, making sure that Scarlet had put Flora's dress back in order. When I was certain the princess was decent, I turned my face back with a sigh of relief.

Meanwhile, the slight movement seemed to have stirred Flora awake. With a groan, she slowly returned to her senses and looked around with hazy eyes, trying to get a grasp of her surroundings.

"Where...?"

"You good?" I asked.

“Yes... Am I...in heaven?”

“Hey, don’t go dying on me now. Not after I even protected you and all.”

“Protected me...?”

“You don’t remember? Or maybe they didn’t let you in on the whole exploding monster plan?”

Just then, Flora gasped. All the haziness snapped out of her eyes in an instant as she clambered onto her feet and jumped away from me. “S-Stay back!”

“What’s wrong?”

“Please stay away from me! It’s dangerous!”

“What, is there another explosion in store? Don’t worry. Magic explosions are no biggie for me. I can protect us.”

“That’s not it!” She pulled her sleeve up, showing the inner side of her wrist. Her veins looked as if they had jet black ink coursing through them instead of blood. “I-I am afflicted with a curse. Even if I survived the blast, I will still succumb to this!”

Scarlet’s face scrunched up in distaste. “They even set up a contingency plan... How atrocious.”

“Thank you very much for saving me! I don’t want to drag my saviors into this. Please stay back!” Flora begged, but when she saw that I hadn’t budged, she grew even more desperate. “Wh-What are you doing? Hurry!”

“You said it’s a curse?”

“Yes, a curse!”

I reached my hand out and chanted, “Cure-All,” casting the divine magic spell on her. Light engulfed her body, just until the black veins on her wrist were purified.



Flora blinked. "Huh?"

"That should do it. Anything else?"

"Wh-What...? Did you undo the curse?"

"Sure did."

"No way... They said it couldn't be undone..."

While Flora's jaw dropped in astonishment, Scarlet's lips curled up into a smug smile. Although her brows were still furrowed in displeasure at Parta's antics, she looked proud as could be.

"Master can use divine magic," she preened. "A curse is but child's play to him."

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Flora stared at her own hands, still in clear disbelief. “My curse... It’s really gone...?”

“It should be. Don’t worry. By the way, what kind of curse was it?”

“Um... They showed me. I saw someone with the curse take the form of a nearby monster.”

“They turned into a monster?”

“Yes. After that, the original monsters began following the orders of that human-turned-monster.”

“Ghoul liquid. They’ve laid their hands on it, I see.”

“You know about this, Lardon?”

From the corner of my eye, I saw Flora flinch when I suddenly spoke to Lardon. Scarlet took it upon herself to explain the dragon’s existence to her. My attention, meanwhile, was directed inward.

“It is a cursed item. Its effects are exactly as that lass explained.”

“Hmmm...”

“Does it not remind you of something?”

“Something, as in...?”

Once again, Lardon clammed up, meaning the answer must already be within my reach. I fished out the keywords from Flora’s explanation and pondered on it. *Turning into a nearby monster, and the original monsters following their orders...*

I gasped. “The dracula...?”

Lardon chuckled. That must be the correct answer, then.

“So the Duchy of Parta was involved in that dracula incident too?”

“There is no concrete proof. Jamille or Quistador could have used it too.”

I sighed and smiled wryly. “Everyone’s just head over heels for this land, huh?”

“U-Um...” I turned and saw Flora looking at me anxiously. “What should I...?”

I thought about it for a moment. “Did the duchy take anyone hostage from you?”

“What? Hostage?”

“Yeah. That seems right up their alley.”

“Oh, no. They haven’t...”

“Really now? Then just stay here. I’ll protect you and make sure the Duchy of Parta never lays a hand on you again.”

“Huh...” Flora blinked owlishly, her face gradually flushing red. In the end, she could only give me a small and meek nod. “O-Okay...”

We welcomed her to our country then and there.

Inside Another World, which had expanded yet again, Scarlet and I sat facing one another in the living room of my house.

“As rude as this may sound,” she suddenly began, “I believe you are being belittled, Master.”

“By Parta, you mean?”

“By all three neighboring nations.”

“Ah. Guess I am,” I agreed with an empty chuckle. As sad as it sounded, recent events did only point to that one fact.

“I believe you must vaunt your strength.”

“Vaunt...?”

“It means to show off,” Lardon provided kindly.

“You mean I should show off my strength to them?”

Scarlet nodded. “Preferably along with the strength of this country as a whole,” she added.

“Fair point. So, what do I do? Go pick a fight with them?”

“I believe issuing currency should be our first order of business.”

“Currency? As in, making our own money?”

“Yes,” Scarlet answered. “Perhaps... Would you happen to have that iron rose you showed me before?”

“I don’t, but... Give me a sec.”

Simultaneously using multiple spells, I set about creating an iron rose on the spot. I pulled an iron bar out of the stockpile I had in my item box, then had a Salamander melt it into a mold made by a Gnome. All of it was completed in the blink of an eye.

“Here you are.”

“Impressive as ever, Master. Only you would be able to produce such an intricate work of art so quickly,” Scarlet marveled. “I am only left more certain than ever that we must issue our own currency.”

“What do you mean by that? Explain it to me in simple terms.”

With a nod, Scarlet dropped several coins on the tabletop. Familiar coins, at that—they were Jamille silvers. I urged her on with an arched brow.

“There are three types of coins on the table now,” Scarlet explained.

“Hm...?” I dropped my gaze back on the coins with renewed curiosity. “Oh, I see. The clarity of their designs are different.”

“An astute observation.” Scarlet took the coin with the most striking design. “This is the original Jamille silver that I borrowed from the palace.”

“Original?”

“It is used to produce models in large quantities—” she raised the second coin “—which are then distributed to our kingdom’s mines. Those in turn are used as bases to remint and mass-produce the coins in common circulation,” she finished with the last coin in hand.

I observed the silver coins closely. “I see. They’re each less sharp than the last.”

“Each reproduction diminishes the pattern’s clarity, just as how each usage wears away at a stamp’s design. This, along with the silver content of the coin, serve as indicators of a nation’s skill and power.”

“I get it now.” I finally understood. No wonder she asked about the iron rose earlier. “Basically, I just need to make sure that even the coins in public circulation will be as detailed as the original.”

“I could not have summarized it better myself, Master,” Scarlet applauded. “*This* is the ‘fight’ you must pick. It is far more impactful, and certainly more justifiable, than war could ever be.”

“All right. Let’s do it.”

I had absolutely no reason to refuse.

A few days later, Asuna and Jodie visited Mistol, a town within Jamille Kingdom. Their destination was the currency exchange guild, a guild that primarily catered to merchants and businesses rather than ordinary townsfolk. Thus, more often than not, it tended to boast the most extravagant building in town.

It was into such a building that Asuna and Jodie pushed a cart loaded with boxes of silver coins, prompting the elderly guild master to welcome them himself, albeit with a frown.

“May I ask what currency these coins are?”

Liam’s side profile was etched into the silver surface. The guild master could only cock his head at the unfamiliar design.

“Have you heard of Liam Kingdom?” Asuna asked.

“It’s a new country in the promised land,” Jodie added.

The look on the guild master’s face changed in an instant, and their surroundings began clamoring as well. The emergence of a nation of monsters within the promised land was something that every merchant already knew of, given how vital information was in their trade.

“Is this the real thing?” he asked.

“It should start circulating soon enough,” Asuna answered. “We just wanted

to check what exchange rate this could go for first.”

The guild master observed the silver coins with narrowed eyes, taking piece after piece into his hands. “Goodness,” he mumbled as he continued comparing the coins across all the boxes. “Are these...for circulation...?”

“They’re all of this quality,” Jodie confirmed as Asuna casually nodded.

“Unbelievable... The silver content and the design’s clarity are a cut above that of Jamille silvers...”

“I know, right? Isn’t Liam amazing?” Asuna preened, smug like a child and proud as if it were her own achievement.

“Well?” Jodie urged the guild master for his assessment—the very purpose of their visit.

Deep in thought, the elderly man remained silent for a while longer before he finally came to a decision. “One is to three,” he declared. “If this quality can be guaranteed, then these coins will have thrice the value of Jamille silvers.”

A wave of awed gasps washed over the guild. All the merchants present were left slack-jawed at the incredible value and technical finesse boasted by this new currency.

“Could you take a look at our copper coins too?”

Jodie momentarily stepped out of the guild and brought back a few more boxes they had stowed in a carriage. After the whole spectacle caused by the Liam silvers, everyone present waited with bated breaths for what they could possibly have in store for the copper coins.

Jodie lowered the box before the guild master and opened it up for him, revealing a sea of copper coins. He took one, weighed it in his hand, and brought it up to his nose for a whiff. Rapping a knuckle against it produced a nice and clear sound by his ear. After some more careful inspection, his face was yet again painted in disbelief.

“Th-This coloration... What is its copper content?”

In a similar fashion as the last time, Asuna smugly declared, “Fifty percent. The rest is stuff like tin or lead.”

“F-Fifty, you say? With this clarity?!”

From the guild master to all the merchants present, everyone erupted into an even greater commotion. To make sense of this, however, we would have to go back a bit in time.

Scarlet had the iron rose in one hand and the silver coin I just made as a test in the other. She carefully examined the side profile of my face engraved on the surface.

“Splendid work, Master. I have no complaints regarding the design or the silver content. This should be plenty to flaunt your skill.” She returned the coin to me. “Next are the copper coins. Unlike silver coins do with silver, these do not make use of pure copper. Most, in fact, are made of an alloy—*bronze*.”

“Hm? But why?”

“Bronze is an alloy composed of copper and tin. The less tin there is, the more

malleable the metal is for minting. Inversely, more tin means less malleable metal, which is less favorable for minting.”

“Then why not put as little tin as possible? Actually, why even include it at all?”

“Since ancient times, the production of copper coins has presented a certain conundrum. That is, melting the copper coin typically produces an amount of copper that is worth more than the coin’s assigned value. Thus, low-value tin is added into the mix.”

“Ah. So that it won’t be worth melting anymore,” I surmised, humming when Scarlet nodded. “I see. Once, I saw this guy get caught and lose his head for messing with some copper coins. Guess I know why now.”

“Indeed. Copper coins are made and issued with the state’s resources. It is unacceptable for someone to not only melt them but even profit off of doing so. As it places the prestige of the nation at risk, the act of destroying or melting currency is punishable by death in most countries.”

“Hmmm. Then why not just mix in a whole lot of tin...or even some other cheap metals like lead?” That was the first example that came to mind when I tried to think of cheap metals.

“That is a very valid suggestion, Master, but therein lies yet another issue.”

“Which is...?”

“The more tin is mixed into the solution, the less malleable it becomes, and the more difficult it will be for minting. In particular, producing a clear design will prove to be quite the challenge.”

“Ah...” So it was the same as silver coins.

“A mere one or two coins should be of little issue as long as they are minted with great care. However, for issuing currency...”

“You’ll need to make a lot.”

“Precisely. Adding more tin can lower the coin’s value as a metal, but it will also drag down its quality, and consequently, the trustworthiness of the issuing state. On the other hand, lessening the tin and increasing the proportion of

copper—”

“Will instead increase its value and run the risk of it being misused for profit,” I finished for her.

“Indeed. As such, Jamille maintains sixty-five percent copper content for its coins. This percentage provides the most optimal balance between the coin’s quality and value,” she concluded. “I believe that achieving the same should be but child’s play to you, Master, seeing as how you’ve already combined not only metals but even spirits and mana into enchanted armor.”

“Right.”

“You should be capable of producing a much higher quality copper coin with the same ratio. With that feat under your belt, you would be able to further flaunt your strength.”

“Okay.” I nodded.

The exact percentage of copper in Jamille coppers should be a state secret. At most, experts in the field, such as those who work in currency exchange, could probably take their own approximate guesses, but that was it. The fact that Scarlet shared this with me, as well as that passionate look in her eyes, told me that she was eager to see me show them who’s boss.

“I have prepared a Jamille copper for you. Please feel free to compare and—”

“Oh, no need.”

“Huh?” Scarlet blinked and looked at me in confusion.

“I won’t make it sixty-five percent.”

“Wh-Why is that?”

My lips stretched into a grin. “Cause I have a better method.” In the same way I did with the silver coin, I summoned my item box, a Gnome, and a Salamander in that particular order to make a copper coin with magic. The result of using the same steps but different metals was a coin with a pale silver luster.

Scarlet’s eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. “What?!”

“What’s wrong?”

“This color...” She gulped. “H-How much tin did you use, Master?”

“Oh, does the color change based on the percentage?”

“Yes. Jamille coppers have a strong red tint. For it to be such a pale silver color... C-Could you have made it fifty percent tin?”

“You got it,” I affirmed with a chuckle. She hit the bull’s-eye even before I explained it myself. While I marveled at her wit, however, Scarlet had all her attention on the coin.

“Fifty percent tin, with *this* quality... And it can be mass-produced as-is...?”

“Sure can.” I nodded without an ounce of hesitation.

Scarlet looked me in the eye, her gaze overcome with awe. “Simply astounding, Master. You are likely the one and only person in the world who can mass-produce copper coins of this quality and percentage.”

With this, my copper coins were given Scarlet’s stamp of approval and were now ready to be flaunted to the world.

“What are you reading, Master?”

I was in the outskirts of town, minting some copper coins using six simultaneous spells, when Scarlet curiously approached me.

“It’s a letter,” I told her. “A hunter was commissioned to deliver it to me.”

“A hunter?”

“Yep. This *is* a town of monsters, right? Guess they deemed it dangerous enough a place to need an A-ranker for the delivery.”

“I see... What does it say? You look terribly perplexed...”

I patted my own face with a wry chuckle. “Was it that obvious?” It must’ve been, for Scarlet to feel the need to point it out at all. I’d just finished reading through it myself, so I handed the letter over to her.

She briefly scanned it over. “Albrevit... This man is your older brother, no?”

“Yep.” I nodded.

Silence settled between us as Scarlet’s eyes ran over the rest of the letter—that is, until a scoff cut through the air. Her expression changed drastically; the corners of her lips curled up into a smile so chillingly sharp, anyone who’d catch sight of it would likely feel shivers up their spine.

“What a funny man,” was all she said.

Ah, she’s snapped, I realized. Not that I could fault her for it. The contents of Albrevit’s letter were plain and simple, and could be easily summarized into just one line: *“I heard you made a town. I have a deal for you, so get over here.”*

“Lord Liam, may I—eek!”

Reina couldn’t have come at a worse time. Scarlet turned her way, and frankly speaking, the look in her eyes right now was plain *terrifying*.

“I-I’m sorry! I will come back later!” The poor elf fled in fear before she even finished speaking.

Scarlet, on the other hand, realized that she’d scared off an innocent person and calmed herself with a deep breath. “My apologies,” she said, her expression now schooled into something of the calmer variety.

“Nah, it’s fine. Thanks for getting mad on my behalf.”

“What will you do, Master?”

“What are *your* thoughts on this, Scarlet? Objectively, I mean.”

She lapsed into silence. I could sense her inner struggle; clearly, she was still trying to rein in her anger. A minute later, she finally answered, “I believe you need not deign him with a response.”

“Why not?”

“Albrevit is the eldest but not the family head,” she explained. “Moreover, he just recently committed a terrible mistake. This must be his attempt at recovering his losses—of his own initiative, of course. An offer from the head of House Hamilton would be worth further discussion, but there is no reason whatsoever to entertain the arbitrary actions of this man.”

I nodded in agreement. “All right. Thanks for the advice, Scarlet.”

Her eyes lit up under my praise and gratitude. She immediately got on one knee and bowed her head. “I-I am not worthy of such kind words!” she exclaimed, sounding like she was nearly moved to tears.

The next day, I received a sudden guest: my older and fourth brother, Bruno. I waited for him at the town entrance, where Gai and a few other giants escorted him and several servants to me.

“Bruno? What brings you here?”

“Well, you know.” He shrugged sheepishly. “Before that, though, this place sure is something. I heard it was a town of monsters, but it definitely lives up to the ‘town’ a bit more than I thought it would.”

“Huh? Oh, thanks.” This was the first time an outsider complimented this place, which made me pretty happy. “But, um...”

“Ah, right. I’ve got something to discuss with you. Any place around here we can talk in private?”

As I hummed, thinking of a good place for a private discussion, Scarlet approached me. “Please feel free to make use of my residence, Master.”

“Can we?”

“But of course. I fear your house may not be the most suitable location.”

She was referring to my house in Another World, and she wasn’t entirely wrong. I wanted to avoid letting any outsiders in there, and besides, it was still that shabby little bungalow I’d commissioned a while back. In stark contrast, the residence that was built for Scarlet was, for all intents and purposes, a *mansion*.

“All right. We’ll borrow a room, then. This way, Bruno.”

“S-Sure.” My brother followed after me, looking slightly baffled.

“What’s wrong?”

“Wasn’t that Princess Scarlet just now?”

“Uh, yeah?”

He looked a bit lost for words for a moment. “And that princess is, well, being your subordinate and all?”

“Oh... Well, it’s a long story.”

“Uh-huh...” A faint wry smile tugged on his lips, but he didn’t ask any more questions after that. All he murmured was, “You’re amazing,” as we both made our way down the street to Scarlet’s manor.

“Lord Liam, I just baked some cake! Wanna try some?”

“Master, could we trouble you to attend the opening ceremony of this establishment?”

“Lord Liam, Lord Liam! Uhhh... Love you lots!”

Many monsters called out to me along the way. All of them flocking around me and tugging me here and there slowed our progress, but I trudged onward, leaving promises to return later at every point.

Bruno, who weaved through that crowd with me, said once more, “You really are amazing.”

“Hm?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

I cocked my head in confusion but shrugged it off. Soon, we made it to Scarlet’s mansion. Although we called it as such, there were no servants or staff around. Scarlet personally escorted us to a parlor room and even served us some tea, rendering Bruno speechless yet again.

I sat facing my brother and began our discussion. “So, what brings you here?”

“Oh... Right.” Bruno took a deep breath and schooled his expression. “I bear a humble request for King Liam.”

“Uh?”

Before I could even register my own confusion, however, Bruno continued. “Would you grant my house the privilege of conducting business in this town?”

“You want to...do business here?”

“We will obey your laws and pay any necessary taxes, so please!” he begged, getting on his feet and lowering his head.

“H-Hang on, Bruno. This is all too sudden for me to understand. Calm down and explain to me from the start.”

“Of course... My deepest apologies, Your Majesty.” Although he agreed to explain, it didn’t look like he was going to drop his polite speech at all. “This land is surrounded by the three nations of Jamille, Quistador, and Parta. It is ruled not by the monsters and is instead suspected to prosper under your reign.”

“R-Really?”

“In which case,” he continued, “there is a great chance that this town will become an economic hub in the future. My aforementioned request stems from this reason.”

“Oh... Right. You’re the head of your family now.”

“Indeed.”

My gaze wandered off to the corner of the room where Scarlet was standing by. On her face was a look of approval toward Bruno, and for a moment, I had to wonder why. However, the pieces to that puzzle came together quickly.

Albrevit had tried to summon me from atop his high horse despite not even being the family head. In contrast, Bruno, the head of a destitute noble house, came all this way to lower his head to his little brother. It was only natural that Scarlet approved.



“All right. I understand, Bruno.”

“Thank you very much!” Bruno got down on one knee and deeply lowered his head once more.

“Raise your head and take a seat, Bruno. Let’s discuss things a bit more.”

“Thank you very much, Your Majesty.” Bruno lifted his head and sat back down on his seat.

He was the first person I got along with since I ended up in Liam’s body. At the time, he was a cynical little kid, but he always looked out for me. It wouldn’t be a stretch to say he was my one and only ally in that manor. As my own way of saying thanks, I did want to accept his proposal, but as for the finer details...
Hm, what should I do?

All the monsters here were contracted to and looked up to me as their king. This meant my decisions would affect all their futures. Even if I wanted to say yes, it felt like a bad move to just carelessly accept without knowing the specifics of this deal. I was the king of this place; I had to be conscious of my decisions.

Just then, I met Scarlet’s gaze. *Right. I have her.*

Forget kingdom—even being a *noble* was new to me. On the inside, I was just a commoner who liked drinking at night. Unlike me, Scarlet was born a royal, so I decided to ask for her thoughts.

“*Can you hear me, Scarlet?*” I asked via Telepathy, a spell I’d crafted just recently, in order to speak to her in private.

“*Yes, Master,*” she responded, her expression giving nothing away as always.

“*I want to accept Bruno’s proposal, but I don’t know how all this works, really. Got any advice for me?*”

There was a brief pause. “*Very well. You have but two things to do, Master.*”

“*And those are...?*”

“*First, you must treat him favorably. Be it the taxes or the plot of land you will*

give him in this country, bequeath him favorable treatment in all aspects. And second,” she continued, “you must also treat Albrevit, as well as the Hamilton house in general, unfavorably.”

“Huh?” I had to stop myself from frowning. “What do you mean?”

“Simple,” she stated. *“Reward the friendly and submissive, and dismiss the arrogant like Albrevit. If need be, suppress them by force. That is what it means to be king.”*

That made sense. I accepted Scarlet’s advice and continued discussing the details with Bruno.

“Thank you very much for giving me your precious time today.”

“It’s no big deal. Our representatives can discuss things a bit more next time.”

“Thank you. Well then, please excuse me.” Bruno bowed one last time before leaving the room.

As I let out a sigh, Scarlet spoke up. “That was your brother, yes?” She was staring at the door that Bruno had just left through.

“Hm? Oh, yeah. What about it?” I asked, tilting my head.

“He is young, but he has a very good head on his shoulders.”

“Does he now?”

“Indeed. There must be many reasons,” she slowly began, “but the biggest would be the impeccable balance he maintained between his position as your brother and his humble attitude.”

“Oh, now that I think about it...” He only started acting humbly when we started our discussion, but until then, he’d just been the same old Bruno as before.

“Excessive humility is actually improper.”

“Oh, really...” I could see what she was getting at—it was like demanding pity with a facade of humility. *How eye-opening.*

“Why, I would even call it shameful.”

“That bad?!”

“Yes,” Scarlet said with a firm nod. “He neither lowered himself too far nor tried to appeal to you as your older brother, maintaining the perfect position all throughout. He is quite the exceptional young man.”

“Bruno was just some sarcastic kid a while back...” I recalled the first time we attended private school together. As an adult on the inside, I saw Bruno as an adolescent kid going through an edgy phase of sorts. Seeing the way he was now came as a bit of a shock.

“People are shaped by their environment.”

“Lardon?” I blinked at the sudden interjection.

“Did the divine dragon say something?” Scarlet asked. After I repeated the message for her, she nodded. “I see. That is indeed the case.”

“That lad went from being the fourth son to the head of his family,” Lardon continued. “Poor as they may be, the sense of responsibility and status have changed the way he carries himself. Any who inherit a position would look toward successful precedents as their model.”

“Right. I guess the same goes for an heir who grew up watching a family head who only inherited the position.” My thoughts wandered to Albrevit. I smiled wryly at how differently he and Bruno had acted this time around.

“Correct. That is why I proposed the system of confiscating noble ranks after three generations to the first king of Jamille.”

“Huh?! That was *your* idea?”

When I passed the message on to Scarlet once more, she was stunned. “The divine dragon is truly ingenious. While there were some who’d cheated that system, the vast majority felt a sense of danger and strove to contribute to the nation. Thus, our kingdom has far fewer parasites among the nobility compared to other countries.”

So, it seemed to be working as Lardon had intended.

“You are also rather interesting. You sought advice from the lass before going into the finer details, did you not?”

“What about it?”

“Your status as a king urged you to do so.”

“I mean, I didn’t know what to do. It would’ve been another story if it was about magic, of course.”

“As far as I am aware,” Lardon proudly declared, *“seeking the counsel of your retainers is the makings of a wise king.”*

Thanks to my recent breakthrough, Another World expanded yet again. Now, the area easily measured more than five hundred square meters, wide enough to make the house I bought look like a measly cabin.

Incessantly ringing inside that vast space were sharp, snappy explosions—I was firing one power missile after the other at the pure white wall.

“What in the world are you up to?” Lardon asked, perplexed by my odd actions.

“I’ll probably have to fight a lot more from now on.”

“Indeed. Knowing how humans are, I highly doubt they would leave such a monster-infested country be.”

“You think so too, huh?”

“That Scarlet lass is rather clever. Her counsel is sound,” Lardon praised her, referring to her advice to flaunt our nation using currency. *“However, that plan will only work against similarly clever humans.”*

“Really?”

I heard a chuckle in my mind. *“Imagine what would happen if the monarch were someone like your eldest brother.”*

“Oh...” The outcome was very easy to imagine. Lardon was right—if someone like Albrevit were up top, then Scarlet’s roundabout way of flaunting our power wouldn’t get through at all. I could totally see him continuing to pester us without picking up on the implicit message.

“Foolish humans will always need to learn the hard way,” the dragon stated with great confidence. *“That will likely entail several more skirmishes, at the very least.”*

Those were exactly my thoughts, and Lardon only made me more certain that

I needed a countermeasure.

“In that case, I *will* need to fight—but my current style isn’t enough,” I admitted bitterly. “My ability to use all sorts of magic will become more widely known from now on. If it were me, I’d definitely think of a way to deal with the enemy’s leader first.”

I heard an impressed hum in my head, but I didn’t stop to ponder the thoughts hidden behind it.

“I read all sorts of books while I was in the manor,” I continued, “and I realized—mages have one weakness: they’re defenseless when casting a spell.”

“Can you not multicast?”

“But in exchange, I run out of mana faster. I *could* stock up on lekukro crystals, but that doesn’t address the fundamental issue.”

Lardon chuckled. *“I must praise you for your awareness. You must be thinking about magic day and night.”*

“Well...” I did love magic a lot, so of course I’d give it lots of thought.

“You have two possible solutions,” the dragon continued. *“One would be to secure your perimeter with your familiars. They will protect you while you cast your magic.”*

“But that also doesn’t address the real issue.”

“Then the other: strengthen your body with mana.”

“Like with Shell?”

“No. The closest example among everything you have seen would be, I believe, the dracula empowering the vampires. However, you would be strengthening yourself with your own mana.”

“You’re saying I should make that kind of spell?”

Lardon didn’t give me a straight answer. *“Magic has yet another weakness: it can be sealed. There are spaces and barriers that can prevent the activation of magic, rendering you unable to release any of the mana in your body.”*

“So, I’ll have to use magic within my body?”

"It would not take the form of magic. Simply turn your mana into power."

"Hm..." I folded my arms and tilted my head left and right. I couldn't quite understand.

"Can you read the mana flow of other people?"

"Hm? Well, a bit."

"Good."

The next moment, my body began to glow. I had to shield my eyes until the bright flash settled down.

When it did, I slowly lowered my hands. "Huh?"

Standing before me was an unfamiliar little girl who looked to be more or less ten years old.

"Wh-Who are you?"

"It's me."

"Lardon?!"

"Indeed."

"You were a girl?!"

As my jaw dropped in shock, Lardon shot me a look of exasperation. "You ask that now, after you've put my *offspring* to work so often?"

"Oh..." Right. The Lardon Juniors. Now that I think about it...

"Now, that matters not," Lardon dismissed. "I shall demonstrate for you. Watch closely."

"Uh... O-Okay." I didn't really get where this was going, but I decided to pay close attention anyway.

In just a second, the surface of Lardon's body began to release a faint glow of mana. The light twisted around her body like a river, mostly condensing over her legs. Lardon, in the form of this little girl, was pouring her mana not into a spell but into her legs instead.

Then, she started jumping all around Another World like a rubber ball,

zooming left, right, up, down, and all over this relatively narrow space by kicking against its walls.

“Ohhh, I get it! Like this?”

I copied her and gathered mana around my legs. It didn’t go very well at first, so I tried supplementing it with a mental image as I always did, minus the usual final “activation” step. This way, I could strengthen my body—specifically, my legs—without actually casting magic.

“I did it!”

With a strong image and condensed mana, I pounced around the area in a way I normally would never be capable of. However, I didn’t quite have the hang of it just yet. While Lardon was able to freely jump all around, I only managed two leaps before my mana began diffusing like a deflated balloon, leaving me crashing into the ground.

“Owww... Welp, that didn’t work. Hey, Lardon. Got any advice for me?”

When I turned, Lardon was giving me a blank stare.

“Hello? Did I do something wrong? Your eyes look like they might pop out any second now.”

“I am baffled,” Lardon declared.

“So I *did* do something wrong...”

“No.”

“Huh?”

“I am baffled that you were able to do it in that instant. Your ability to absorb new concepts is simply astounding.”

“Um...” So, she was *praising* me?

“Never mind,” Lardon said with a pleasant smile. “This simply means there is much worth in teaching you.”

“My mana just kind of dispersed on my third jump. How can I maintain it?”

Lardon hummed and nodded once. “So long as you can pace your mana well, it should come naturally to you.” When she saw me frown in confusion, she continued, “As you are now... Yes, I would say you are like a child who instantly falls asleep after playing around too excitedly.”

“Oh... A pretty simple analogy.” That explanation made sense to me. I’d succeeded with a burst of mana, but that wasn’t sustainable. “Basically, I have to pace myself for an entire race rather than a single long jump?”

“More precisely put, you must learn to be capable of both.”

“I get it. Can’t call it usable if I can’t even jump with it.”

Lardon nodded, then held her hand up toward me. Suddenly, blue bubbles appeared over both of my hands and feet, plus one on my forehead. They stuck to me like glue but were neither heavy nor restrictive; at most, it was a bit bothersome to see them stuck all over me.

“Are these the same ones from that underground space?”

“Indeed,” Lardon said. “I invented these myself. Did I not mention that?”

“Oh, right. You did.” She said as much back when I was trying to learn Absolute Force Shield and Absolute Magic Shield. “So? What now?”

“First, you must try gathering mana in those five spots. Any amount will do.”

I gave it a try. “Like this?”

“Now remember that amount. We will designate that as the total,” Lardon instructed. “Hm... You seem to be right-handed. You poured slightly more into your right hand and foot.”

“Huh. You’re right.”

“First, try adjusting all spots to twenty percent in, hm... Yes, ten seconds will

do.”

“Ten seconds? What’ll happen if—”

“Ten, nine, eight, seven...” Lardon ignored my question and began counting down.

Flustered, I tried adjusting my mana, but all five bubbles popped at once. “Wh-What happened?”

“You tried to add more mana into your left hand and foot but subconsciously directed some into your right side as well. As a result, you totaled to 110 rather than 100.”

“O-Oh...”

“Add more to your left and deduct from your right. Maintain the total.” Lardon held her hand up and manifested the bubbles, then counted down again.

This time, I made sure to be careful. *Less on the right and more on the left. Make sure the total doesn’t—* Pop!

Okay, never mind. “What happened this time?”

“You ran out of time.”

“Oh...”

“Ten seconds is already plenty,” Lardon told me. “Surely you agree?”

“Yeah!” I nodded vigorously. Having mastered all sorts of magic, I knew very well how long that was in practice.

“Again,” Lardon said.

“Okay!”

Another five bubbles. I proceeded carefully but with haste, making sure both sides were even— Pop!

“The mana in your head dispersed. Pay attention to that as well.”

“Got it.”

“Again.”

I started over and over, failing and trying again, and eventually...

“All right!”

Lardon hummed. “So, you managed it within ten seconds. Now try twenty-five percent on your left hand, twenty-five percent on your right foot, and fifteen percent each on your right hand and left foot.”

“Hm, I see.”

It was now shuffled between my dominant and nondominant sides. This seemed a little difficult, but I understood what she was getting at here. It was definitely worth the effort, so I kept going, trying to attain the percentage distributions that Lardon dictated within the time limit. Most ended in failure, but of course, that didn’t stop me.

“Next, please.”

“How surprising.”

“Hm?”

“I thought you would lose interest since this is about mana and not magic.”

“But if I can do this...” I shot out two consecutive power missiles toward the wall—one weak and one strong—before facing Lardon again. “If I can learn to control my mana more precisely, then whether I’m shooting out nineteen or twenty-three or even a hundred and one power missiles, each and every single one’s power level will be free for me to adjust as I please, right? Besides, I might face someone who can use something like Absolute Magic Shield at some point. Actually, if I can *nullify* magic, then someone out there might be able to *reflect* it. If I ever run into that kind of foe, I’ll need to be able to mix feints into my barrages.”

Lardon’s face kind of stiffened partway through.

I cocked my head. “What? Did I have the wrong idea?”

“The idea is...certainly not wrong.”

“Well, that’s an interesting way to put it,” I mused. “Then what *is* wrong?”

“That was supposed to come two stages later.”

“Huh?”

“I planned on training you in this, plus two more obstacles, before bringing that topic up,” Lardon explained. “I am simply stunned that you came to that idea yourself.”

“Oh, okay.” Well, that explained it. It was like teaching a kid addition and watching them figure out on their own that adding the same numbers over and over was essentially multiplication.

Lardon’s eyes sparkled in praise. “You may very well be a genius when it comes to magic.”

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“Sixty on your right, ten on everything else.”

“Got it.”

“Next, zero on your head. Clockwise from your right hand: ten, twenty, thirty, and forty.”

“Okay!”

I continued my mana allocation practice with Lardon in Another World. Instructions that started slow and simple gradually got faster and more complex, but I took it all on regardless. No matter how complicated it got, what I had to do didn't change: keep practicing and keep going. I made a few mistakes, but that was a given. I didn't let it get me down and disrupt my efforts.

“Next, juggle the following. Right hand, eighty. Left foot, eighty. Head, eighty. Right hand, eighty. Now, neutral.”

Following Lardon's instructions, I returned all five spots back to twenty, and finally, she called for a halt. I let out a breath of relief—without losing focus, of course. I still maintained twenty percent on all five spots, as instructed.

“Hm. You can now mostly move your mana at will.”

“Is this enough?”

“Indeed. Now, we can proceed.”

“Proceed...” I echoed blankly. My mana control nearly stuttered for a moment, so I hurriedly snapped back to attention.

“Wait for a while.” Lardon returned inside me for a bit and popped right back out. “There.”

“What did you do?”

“You will know once you clear this next task.”

“Okay.” If Lardon said so, then there was no need for me to ask any further. “So, what’s next?”

“Take this.” Lardon flicked her hand up, and a single glowing stream of rope came stretching out. I caught it with my right hand. “From now, we will have a tug-of-war. Right hand, zero. Try pulling.”

So I did, but... “Huh? It won’t budge.” The rope, which was about as thick as a pinky finger, was connected to Lardon, but she was just standing leisurely in front of me. It looked easy enough to pull yet barely even quivered.

“This is a tug-of-war with mana, not physical strength.”

“Oh, I see. So it won’t budge ’cause I’m at zero.”

“Try ten.”

“Okay.” I allocated ten percent into my right hand, gave it a tug, and managed to yank Lardon a bit. However, that only lasted for a second. The rope quickly reverted to being taut.

“I poured some mana in as well,” Lardon explained. “I will slowly adjust my mana. You must make sure to maintain the equilibrium.”

I hummed for a moment and nodded. “I get it. After controlling my own mana comes sensing my opponent’s.”

Lardon just chuckled in response.

“Hey!” Suddenly, I lurched forward with a gasp, so I hurriedly added more of my mana and held my ground.

At first, I tried adjusting my mana based on what I felt from the tugging rope, but that didn’t go too well. I just ended up lurching forward a few times and tumbling backward some others. I figured I wouldn’t be getting anywhere at this rate and focused as hard as I could—and then, I *noticed*.

From the rope of light connected to Lardon, I could sense how strong her mana was. Using that as reference, I started to adjust my own mana as well. Thanks to my accumulated failures, I was now developing a better grasp of this sensation.

Ten, twenty, thirty, ten—and now ninety-nine. Lardon mixed in a few feints

and sudden changes, but I adapted to them all. On the outside, we were both completely still. I was adjusting my mana nonstop to keep this tug-of-war in a stalemate, but on the surface, we were simply holding a rope together.

“Hm?”

Just then, something changed. I’d been sensing Lardon’s mana via the rope, but all of a sudden, I couldn’t read it anymore. I thought I’d lost focus and tried sensing it again, but I only managed to get a very faint grasp of it.

“This...isn’t from the rope?”

As always, Lardon smiled without answering.

I couldn’t sense anything from the rope. Instead, I was sensing Lardon’s mana from—was it the air, maybe? That might also be why it felt so faint, as if it would disappear the moment I lost the slightest bit of focus.

I poured in as much concentration as I could muster, working hard to sense Lardon’s mana while maintaining my tug-of-war. Eventually, I got used to it and was able to pick up on it much more clearly than earlier.

“That was faster than I was expecting.”

“Huh?”

“If you’ve made it this far, then you should notice it soon.”

“Notice what?” I didn’t know what she was talking about, but if Lardon was saying so, then there must be something I needed to pick up on—something related to this mana practice. I focused my attention back on the sensation.

“Your mana, it’s...the same as my mana?”

“Correct.” Lardon grinned. “I returned to your body earlier, did I not? I left behind some excess power then. Right now, my body only has the same amount of mana as yours.”

“Oh, that’s why you said I’d know once I clear the task...”

Lardon chuckled. “I was of the mind that you would take a tad longer, but you exceeded my expectations with ease.”

The rope of light slowly dissipated.

“Are we done?”

“Yes. To end, try multicasting to your maximum capacity.”

“Huh? Oh... Okay.” I nodded and cast Power Missile into the air. Without an aria, I should be seeing nineteen—but there were more than even I was expecting to see myself. “What?! That’s twenty-seven, twenty-eight... Twenty-nine?!”

I turned to Lardon in shock, but all she gave me was an amused chuckle.

“B-But why? My mana capacity...hasn’t increased.” Thanks to her training, I could clearly read my own mana capacity. Even Lardon’s current mana, which should’ve amounted to just as much as mine after she came back out of my body, was the same as my usual. Despite that, my multicasting had jumped up from nineteen to twenty-nine in one go.

“Your senses have expanded, and that has made you capable of handling mana more efficiently,” Lardon explained. “That is why your multicasting capacity, too, has increased by two levels.”

Lardon grinned yet again. It seemed to be her way of congratulating me for my efforts.

I was still in disbelief at how huge this power-up was. “B-But it doesn’t feel like my mana increased. The efficiency makes this much of a difference?”

“You can tell, yes?” Lardon chuckled. “With this training, your ability to sense and detect mana has improved. You can clearly read that your own mana has not increased.”

“Y-Yeah.”

“You are correct in that. The problem lies in what you have been doing until now.”

“Huh?”

“You have been studying magic on your own until now. That is, you are self-taught,” Lardon said, as if she’d been watching my progress right from the start. “We had yet to meet then, but I can tell—you simply leaned upon your own efforts and hard work, no?”

“Isn’t that how it is with magic?”

“With magic, yes.”

“So...?” I cocked my head in confusion. Lardon was being vague again, so I gave it a bit of thought. If magic was a yes... “Then what about mana?”

Lardon chuckled, satisfied. “Do you know the eastern philosophical concept of ‘the soft overcoming the hard’?”

“Huh? Why...” I trailed off, wondering where this was coming from all of a sudden. “I guess I might’ve heard of it...? Something about technique over power, was it?”

“Correct. But were you aware that it is merely part of a larger concept?”

“Really?”

“The original teaching preaches that the hard can similarly suppress the soft.”

“Huh... I didn’t know that.”

“Even now, humans favor the first one, do they not?”

“Really...?” I wasn’t very sure, but I guess I did hear people talking about working smarter, not harder. The other way around, though, didn’t really ring any bells.

“Humans are the weakest beings on this land. That insecurity leads them to subconsciously seek out ways to overcome the hard with the soft—to overcome power with skill.”

I hummed. “Are you trying to say that the other way around is actually superior?”

“Until now, you have flaunted your *power*—and to that, I added *efficiency*.”

“Huh? Um, yeah.” She just jumped topics again—or I guess she just went back to our first one.

“They go hand in hand,” Lardon finished.

“Hm...” I mulled it over. “So, neither power nor technique is better than the other. They’re both equally important, right?”

Lardon chuckled, seemingly satisfied with my answer. Then, without saying anything else, she faded away and returned to my body.

That must’ve been the right answer. Power and technique. Hard and soft. I’ll need to keep this in mind from now on.

Another World was always a bright space with neither day nor night, but the sun was already high up in the sky in the outside world, so much so that my eyes stung a bit the moment I stepped out. I thought that Another World was pretty well-lit, but it really wasn’t much when compared to the sun itself.

I shielded my eyes. When my vision finally adjusted, I caught sight of a certain princess.

“Huh? Scarlet?”

Amid the ongoing construction, she was standing by the town’s entrance and appeared to be sending someone off. After that person got on a horse and left, I

called out to her again as I approached her.

“Master...”

“Who was that?” However, I changed the question when she turned around—she wasn’t looking too good. “Did something happen?”

Her face twisted bitterly. “That was my subordinate. I have just received some rather unfavorable news.”

“What is it?”

“The Izie region in Jamille has not seen a single instance of rain this year. The place seems to be suffering a terrible drought.”

“Izie is...”

“The territory of my maternal family,” she answered.

“Oh...”

Scarlet’s maternal family had produced queens for generations. That Izie region must be the territory they ruled over.

“My sincerest apologies, Master. As your vassal, I mustn’t bring my personal matters to you. I shall ensure my subordinate never makes such a mistake again.”

“No, that’s fine. More importantly...” I held my chin. “A drought, huh? Do they just need some water?”

“Huh? Ah, well... That would certainly help, but...” Scarlet furrowed her brows in confusion.

“Then I’ll provide water for you.”

“What?”

“Normally, it’d be pretty hard to transport water, but it’ll be a cinch for me with Item Box and Teleport. With some salt water and Celsiuses, we’ve got an unlimited supply.”

“Wh-Why...” Scarlet seemed perplexed, and I could understand why. Although it was essentially her hometown, this was still Jamille’s problem in the end.

“Shouldn’t we get along well with our neighbors?”

“I...suppose so...”

“Is there a problem?”

“Um... I shall speak with His Majesty.”

“Then you can be the messenger for this issue. Tell them I can provide as much water as needed, and I won’t be asking for compensation either, since it’s a natural disaster.”

“U-Understood.” Scarlet ran off in a flurry.

As I gazed at her back, I heard Lardon say, *“Rather generous of you, no?”*

“You taught me.”

“Me?” she asked, incredulous.

“You said they go hand in hand,” I reminded. “At Scarlet’s advice, I made our currency and flaunted our national *power*. You could even say we intimidated them.”

“Hm...”

“So instead of just intimidating them, we should show that we can also use our power to help them.”

“You applied your new learnings here,” Lardon remarked.

“That I did.”

I heard a pleasant chuckle resound in my mind. *“You truly do have the makings of a wise king,”* she said, giving me her stamp of approval for this decision.

I teleported by the sea and began producing fresh water. Now that my multicasting capacity had been bumped up to twenty-nine, I could put one item box and twenty-eight mid-rank water spirits to work. At our current pace, I was storing fresh water at a rate of around six hundred liters per minute.

As I was working, I suddenly sensed Lardon wanting to say something. “What is it?”

“Hm?”

“Feels like you have something to say.”

“Oh? How so?”

“Well...” I cocked my head, trying to put my finger on the odd sensation. “I felt the fluctuation of your emotions...or something like that?” I’d been able to pick up on this vague feeling ever since Lardon revealed herself to me in the form of a young girl.

She hummed, and again, I sensed that I wasn’t wrong. *“I was simply thinking that your efforts may be for naught,”* she explained. *“What you are doing is not wrong. To lend aid in times of disaster is a clever course of action for friendly—No, even between enemy nations, I would say.”*

“How so?”

“Because natural disasters care not for human borders.”

“Oh...” She was right. Typhoons, earthquakes, droughts—such disasters could very easily cross between countries.

“Hence why I say you made a wise and clever decision. However, not many can do the same. Their pride would get in their way.”

“Really?”

“Albrevit,” she said simply.

“Hm...” Point taken. The eldest son of the Hamilton house was certainly a prime example of someone whose pride led him down one skewed path after another. “So, you’re saying that the king of Jamille might be the same?”

“It might also be his ministers,” Lardon said. *“They could claim that accumulating too large a debt would cause problems down the road. That would be the most generic and foolish excuse I have heard from humans thus far.”*

“Right...” That was definitely well within the realm of possibility. I myself had seen similar cases. Sometimes, people would assume they were helped out of pity and return the goodwill with hostility.

“I will pray that is not the case this time,” Lardon said in consolation as I continued my fresh water production.

Unfortunately, her intuition was right on the mark.

On the agreed upon day, I teleported Scarlet back to this town of monsters and sat down with her inside her mansion. After hearing her report, I could only let out a sigh in response.

“My apologies, Master,” Scarlet said, visibly wilting. “You were even generous enough to offer your aid...”

“It’s fine. I was expecting this. By the way, what reason did they give?”

“They claim that they can easily handle a disaster of this scale.”

“How?”

“They did not say. However, following precedents, the affected citizens would take refuge in the surrounding regions, where food supplies would be sent. Water...would be rather difficult to transport.”

“At the very least, whatever they do won’t be as effective as Teleport and Item Box...”

“It is as you say,” Scarlet glumly agreed.

As we lapsed into silence, Lardon suddenly suggested, *“How about you make it rain?”*

“Rain?” I echoed. “That’s possible, Lardon?”

“That which you humans call divine magic includes a supreme spell that can control the weather.”

“Wow... But no, let’s not use that this time. Oh, but I still want you to teach me that later.” Magic was magic. I wanted to learn whatever I could.

“Why not?”

“You talked about soft and hard going hand in hand, right? Forcing rain on them would just end up falling on the ‘hard’ side.”

Lardon chuckled. *“Indeed.”* Somehow, I got the feeling that I was being tested and managed to pass.

“It’s time for a soft approach,” I declared, and began racking my brain for ideas.

“Y-Your Majesty?!”

After leaving Scarlet’s mansion, I headed for the lodging that Bruno had been staying at all this while. The moment he saw I had come to visit, he hurriedly stood up and offered me his seat.

“Please, have a seat.”

“Thanks. I have something to talk about, so you should sit too.”

Bruno thanked me with a short bow. Once settled, he asked, “What would you like to talk about?”

“You’re a Jamille noble, right?”

“Yes.”

“Do nobles provide disaster relief?”

“We do,” he answered immediately. “Depending on the extent, it may even be acknowledged as an achievement that can extend one’s succession rights.”

I hummed. That made things easier. “Do you know about the drought in Izie?”

“I am aware.”

“I want to supply them water, but Jamille has rejected my offer.”

Bruno pursed his lips and nodded gravely. He probably figured out why.

“So, Bruno,” I continued, “I want to sell the water to you. To be precise, I’ll teleport to where I need to go and bring the water out with my item box, like this.” To demonstrate, I took out a barrel of water I’d prepared beforehand. “Then, I want you to take these and distribute them.”

Bruno nodded in understanding.

“I want it to look like it was your work, so I’ll sell it to you.”

“Understood. Please leave it to me, Your Majesty. However, I will need a large sum of money to provide enough water for the entire territory, so I would like to ask for some time.”

“No, just ten Jamille silvers will do.”

Bruno blinked. “Huh?”

“Isn’t that the average daily wage? I can prepare the water you’ll need in three days, so that’ll be enough.”

“B-But...”

“Goods are typically cheaper when purchased where they were produced. Am I wrong?”

“Oh...”

“Besides, considering this is for disaster relief, I’ve decided to charge only for the labor costs out of goodwill.”

Bruno picked up on what I was getting at and immediately shot to his feet. “Truly astounding, Your Majesty,” he said with a deep bow of his head, his voice tinged with gratitude and wonder.

With this, I could use Bruno as a middleman to deliver several millions of liters of fresh water to the drought-stricken Izie Region.

“Disaster relief of unprecedented scale,” Lardon mused, sounding most impressed.

As the king of this nation-to-be, I needed a specialized building for welcoming and entertaining state guests and foreign dignitaries—or so Scarlet had advised me. Since I wasn't planning on using Another World for this purpose, we went ahead and had a reception hall constructed.

Inside this new building, I watched Jamille's envoy exit the spacious parlor, leaving me to take my seat and tilt my head left and right in thought.

"They've attached a bell to you," Lardon mused.

"You think so too?"

"Indeed. They claim it's to discuss the marriage with the princess, but they are actually looking out for whether you stick your nose into Izie."

"They'd go that far, huh?"

"Humans are prideful beings. It must be difficult for them to back down on something they have already once declared." Lardon sounded rather exasperated. She must have seen many such humans time and again.

"That leaves me in a bit of a pickle. If only they had come a bit later..." I sighed.

As Lardon said, Jamille had attached a bell to me. To be precise, the envoy would be on the lookout for whether I left town. With Teleport at my disposal, I could definitely manage so long as they weren't watching twenty-four seven. However, I could only teleport to places I'd been to before, and neither Izie itself nor its surrounding regions fit that criteria. I couldn't even take my time traveling, not with a pair of eyes on my back.

"I'll have to use my clone and—"

"Pardon me," Gai said as he entered the room. "A report, milord. The emissary's adjutants have scattered around the area."

“Adjutants... You mean his subordinates?”

Gai nodded. “They claim to be confirming the route that will be utilized for the princess’s bridal procession. What shall I do?”

I sighed. “Fine. Just keep the bare minimum surveillance on them and make sure they don’t plant anything weird. Otherwise, let them do as they please.”

“Understood.” Gai bowed and excused himself.

“They’re being pretty blatant about it,” I remarked wryly.

“They certainly are.”

“In which case, I can’t even use my clone.” I was thinking of staying here and letting my clone go out, but it’d cause problems if he was spotted.

I mulled it over a bit more. There were two things I wanted to achieve—or, rather, just one thing that had its own condition attached: me staying here while my clone headed for Izie without being spotted. That was all.

In other words, my clone just had to not look like me. There might be one way to achieve that, but first, I needed to reconfirm the functionality of the spell.

I held my hand up and chanted, “Contract Summoning: Liam.”

My clone appeared in front of me. He met my gaze, and we both nodded.

“Here I go.”

“Okay.”

My clone cast Wind Shot, a beginner magic spell, to cut his own hair. The silky locks of a well-pampered noble son fluttered to the ground. The result looked pretty off, given he’d just thoughtlessly lopped a chunk off with magic.

After we nodded at one another, I released and resummoned him. His hair was back to normal.

I released him again, and this time, I cut just a tiny, inconspicuous bit of my own hair. When I recast the spell, he had the same postsnip hairstyle as mine.

“As we thought, the clone’s appearance is based on the original’s at the moment of the spell’s casting.”

“Yep. Also, everything that happened to the clone—memories included—gets erased the moment the spell is released.”

“We wouldn’t have to use such a roundabout method like leaving a letter in the item box if it weren’t for that. Just resummoning the clone would be faster.”

“True that.”

My clone and I chuckled wryly together. I’d had a vague idea of how this spell worked for a while now, and this quick test just confirmed it. It was normally quite the inconvenient little quirk, but this time, I’d be using it to my advantage.

I held my hand up toward my clone.

“We’re equal in power, so you should probably chant an aria,” he advised.

“Yep. *Amelia Emilia Claudia*... High Familia: Amelia!”

The next moment, my clone’s figure was enveloped in light. This original spell of mine was a notch higher than the usual familiar contract spell, which allowed me to guide the evolution of my familiar. With a vivid image in mind, I cast the spell on my clone and made him evolve into the appearance of one of my favorite songstresses, Amelia.

“How is it?”

“Perfect,” I told him. “Even your voices are the same.”

“Is it?” My clone, in the form of Amelia, looked at his own hand.

“And your magic?”

He chanted Item Box, and it popped right up. “Works,” he said. “This is pretty awesome.”

“Final check.” I released and resummoned him for the last time. When I saw that my clone was back to looking like me, I knew this was going to work.

With that, I cast High Familia on him and made him look like Amelia again. “It’s all up to you.”

He cleared his throat and said, “Of course,” in a soft and feminine tone. My clone had completely turned into a woman.

Now, I could stay here while my clone, in Amelia’s appearance, secretly went

out to transport water to Izie.

I secretly sent my clone-turned-Amelia on his way. He teleported from within Another World to a different place, from which he would then head to Izie on foot.

Meanwhile, in order to make an alibi, I stepped out of Another World and went into town. Until the water reached Bruno's hands, I would have to make it pretty obvious that I was still here.

As I strolled around, thinking of what I could do, two cute little slimes came bouncing over by my feet like a pair of puppies.

"Lord Liam, Lord Liam!"

"You bored? Wanna play?"

Sli and Lime were speaking with their childlike lisps as always, but something with them caught my eye. "Wow... You guys sure are dirty."

"Dirty?"

"Really?"

They stopped bouncing and looked at one another, only then realizing that their gelatinous bodies were both covered in mud.

"Really dirty!"

"Make it clean!"

The next moment, Sli and Lime literally flipped themselves inside out. Like clay, their insides reached outward and swallowed up their muddy surface. All the dirt melted within their bodies, leaving a pair of pristine little blobs.

"Lord Liam, Lord Liam!"

"Are we clean?"

"Yeah. You're the cleanest slimes around," I said while petting them.

The faces they gained after I cast Familia on them formed blissful smiles as their bodies practically jiggled in excitement.

In the meantime, I took a gander around. The streets were littered with muddy puddles, meaning it probably rained just recently. Of course these two would end up this dirty if they were bouncing all over the place.

“Lord Liam, Lord Liam!”

“You thinking lots?”

“Hm? Yeah... I just thought we shouldn’t leave the streets all muddy like this.” I could easily imagine an accident happening if, say, the wheels of a carriage were to get stuck in all that mud.

“Why not pave the road?” Lardon suggested.

“How?”

“The simplest way would be to use stone,” she answered. *“Roughly speaking, you dig up the path, fill it with crushed stones, and smooth it out.”*

“Oh...”

“On that note, the thicker the pavement, the better.”

“What else is there?”

“Hm... Bricks, perhaps.”

“Bricks... Okay.”

“You can also heat up and melt a special material before pouring it in and letting it set.”

“A special material?” I asked.

“I recall humans called it asphaltum.”

“Hmmm...”

As I listened to Lardon’s explanation, I began to collate all the information on how to pave roads in my head.

At my orders, the giants carried huge stones on their shoulders. They all stood at about two meters tall, yet the stones they carried were about a head bigger

than each of them. I *could* bring them over easy-peasy, but I couldn't exactly teleport out of town right now, so I had them procure the stones in my stead.

"Will this suffice, milord?" Gai asked.

"Yeah, it's perfect. Get everyone to crush these all into gravel and pile them up in one spot."

"Understood. Get to work, everyone!" At Gai's orders, the giants all began crushing the stones.

Meanwhile, I stood before the road that I had barricaded beforehand and summoned several Gnomes. I ordered them to dig out the ground evenly—child's play for several earth spirits. It didn't take long for the entire length of the path to be dug out a meter deep.

As I was nodding in satisfaction, I heard Lardon chuckle. "Hm? What is it?"

"I take it you mean to lay a one-meter-thick pavement, correct?"

"Yeah? What about it?"

"That is about as thick as the Road of Triumphant Return in Jamille."

"The road of what?"

"As the name implies, it is the road that the nation's army parades through toward the palace after returning home victorious from war."

"Ohhh, that..." I didn't know that street specifically, but I did know another street that served that exact purpose. *I guess those are pretty sturdy.*

"That you are planning to make one so casually is truly amusing. Do you see the look on that official's face?"

I turned to where Lardon was pointing at, which I was able to pick up on thanks to our mental connection. The official from Jamille who'd come to watch me was agape in disbelief.

"Milord, will this do?" Gai asked.

I looked at the mountain of gravel that the giants had prepared. "Looks good. Now pile it into this ditch and make sure it's packed."

"Understood."

The giants followed my orders and crammed the ditch with as much gravel as possible, a task finished in no time thanks to their incredible strength.

For the finishing touch, I summoned a Salamander and had it melt the gravel the giants had laid out. The gravel melted into lava, filling up the gaps and flattening out. It gradually cooled off, leaving us with a nice stone road.

“OOOH!” The giants let out a cheer.

“I see what you’ve done,” Lardon mused, voice tinged with praise.

Among the methods she told me about were laying out stone and heating up asphalt. I just fused the two together into my own original style of pavement, which was showing promise so far. When I turned around, I found that the official’s jaw had nearly dropped to the ground in shock.

After finishing paving the streets inside the town, we went on to extend them outward too. I found this part more important, in fact.

"You seem oddly serious about this," Lardon noted, sounding a little curious. *"Even more so than with the roads you paved inside the town."*

She'd begun talking to me more often whenever nobody was around. I feel like it might have started ever since she appeared before me as a little girl.

"It's because these main roads are very important."

"Oh?" Lardon sounded a little impressed. *"To think that a fifth son would have done that much studying."*

"There was this village I...visited before," I began, pausing awkwardly as I nearly said "lived in" instead. "It has a peddler who regularly drops in. But, one day, he didn't come by as usual."

"Was he swallowed up by a wolf that could speak human language?"

"It's nothing so dramatic. Turns out, around half a day away from the village, the peddler's cart got stuck in a hole in the path."

"Hmph." For some reason, Lardon seemed displeased by the mundanity of the story.

*"The villagers all helped the peddler heave his cart out of the hole. Apparently, he was *this* close to losing not only his goods but even his entire cart."*

"Humans live such inconvenient lives."

"That's why I think the streets in town are important, but even more so are the main roads leading to other nations—is what I believe."

"Indeed. That is correct," Lardon praised.

With all that said, I returned to work. The earth spirits dug the ditch out, while

the giants, noble vampires, and the other residents we called over all worked together to crush the stones, carry them over, and fill the path up. Once all that was done, the Salamanders would melt and flatten it, and the road would be complete once it had cooled off. Then, we'd go to another section, and rinse and repeat.

As a test, I stomped hard on each newly paved road. *This shouldn't get damaged*, I determined. As long as it wasn't intentionally destroyed, it shouldn't end up with any big holes that could get anyone stuck. Having confirmed that, I continued on with our road work. At some point, I'd even forgotten that this was all to give myself an alibi for the official from Jamille.

We started early in the morning, and by the time noon rolled around, two slimes came bouncing toward me.

"Lord Liam, Lord Liam!"

"Break time, break time!"

Two jiggly little blobs were nimbly balancing a basket and a canteen on each of their heads. It was a pretty funny sight. "What are those?"

"Jodie made it!"

"Lunch for you!"

"Ohhh." Lunch made by Jodie—just hearing that was enough to stir my appetite. Since they insisted so kindly, I decided to take a break and reached out for the food. However, my hand immediately froze in the air as my gaze landed on Sli and Lime.

"Lord Liam?"

"Not hungry?"

Their tiny mouths slipped into frowns; they'd be cocking their heads if they actually could. Still staring at the two, I realized, "I need to change it."

"Hm? What do you mean?" Lardon asked.

"Sli and Lime, I'll eat that later. Just wait here, okay?"

"Okaaaay!"

“We wait here!”

I left the two slimes and doubled back to the paved road, stomping my foot over as I observed it closely.

“I knew it... Right. Of course.”

“What are you doing?”

“I realized that I shouldn’t leave this as it is. All thanks to Sli and Lime, of course,” I explained. “Here, I’ll show you.”

Lardon hummed and watched quietly as I summoned a Salamander and a Gnome. First, I had the former melt ten centimeters off one side of the freshly paved road, then I had the latter bend its shape. The other side of the road, I left untouched.

“Good,” I murmured. “Next is Item Box.”

I summoned my item box and poured some water over the road—both the untouched part and the part I had just fixed.

“Oh? The drainage, hm?”

“Right. The reason I started paving the roads is because Sli and Lime got all dirty, right? Because there were muddy puddles all over.”

“Indeed.”

“I remembered when I saw them again,” I continued. “We made the roads flat, but that’s not good for the drainage. Roads should gradually tilt downward starting from the center where the traffic goes through. That shouldn’t change even with a road made of stone. If we leave it flat, water will gradually accumulate.”

“I see. That’s why...” Lardon trailed off as she assessed the part of the pavement that I fixed. There, the water had drained off to the sides, while the untouched part had some puddles here and there. *“A wonderful idea,”* she praised.

Having received Lardon’s approval, I redid the pavement to make way for better drainage.

Come nightfall, when it grew too dark to see our surroundings, I sent everyone who helped out with the road pavement back to town.

“Well then, please excuse us, milord,” Gai said.

“Sure. I’m gonna stay here, but I’ll call on you if I need anything.”

“Understood.”

I watched as the monsters all packed up and left in droves before taking a look around. Spotting a few trees nearby, I decided to spend the night there.

“Crafting an alibi is quite the hard work,” Lardon teased.

“There’s no way around it. I have to hold on till this whole thing is over.”

“Hm. But should you be speaking with me now? What if somebody hears?”

“It’s fine... Probably. I don’t sense any mana within earshot.”

“Oh? So, you can tell?”

“Just a bit.”

“What if someone who cannot use magic is lurking?”

“I can also sense what the mana pattern of humans who can’t use magic is like. It’s sort of like a tangled ball of yarn.”

“Hmmm.”

In the span of our conversation, I arrived at the trees I planned to camp by. I used some kindling from my item box to start a fire. Then, I took a single strand of rope that I prepared beforehand and tied it between two trees at about the height of my waist.

“What is that?”

“A bed.”

“What nonsense are you spouting this time?” Lardon sighed, unamused.

“Ouch. You make me sound like I’ve lost my mind.”

“But of course. You are saying something so ridiculous.”

“It’s not that outlandish. Take a look.” I got on the rope, sitting on it first before lying down, then nimbly set both my feet down on the rope. With this, I was completely lying down on a one-rope hammock. “Urgh... Hm. This is harder than I thought it’d be.”

“Oho...” Meanwhile, all of Lardon’s exasperation was replaced by admiration. She seemed even more pleased than that time she taught me how to sense mana. *“You are applying my teachings,”* she observed.

“Exactly.” I nodded firmly while swaying atop the rope.

Back in Another World, Lardon had taught me how to control and maintain the allocation of my mana across my body. There was one thing I learned from that experience: endowing your mana directly onto your body could convert it into physical strength, or in other words, weight—which brought me to this unusual sleeping-on-a-tightrope idea. To keep myself from falling, I’d be forced to maintain my balance at all times by distributing my mana around my body.

“That training of yours—I figured it’d be much better if I kept it up.”

“Indeed. The more you hone your foundation, the better you will become at using mana.”

“Whew.” To be honest, I only had a feeling that was the case, so it was a relief to hear Lardon’s validation. “I gave some thought as to how I could practice regularly, and this is what I came up with. If I can get used to this, then I’ll be able to hone my mana even in my sleep.”

“Yet another novel idea,” Lardon praised with a tone tinged half with praise and half with exasperation.

“I do love magic, after all. I don’t know what kinds I’ll be learning in the future, but it’s not a bad move to solidify my foundations.”

Lardon chuckled. Although she didn’t explicitly respond, I felt as if she approved of my viewpoint.

I swayed atop the rope, nearly falling off each time a breeze blew by. I did actually fall off a few times, and each time, I had to get back up onto the rope and adjust my position and mana allocation. This was much harder than Lardon's training. Not only did it require more precise adjustments, I was even at the mercy of the unpredictable whims of nature.

Though complex, Lardon's instructions still stemmed from her will. The wind, on the other hand, was completely unreadable; it left me reacting and adjusting at a moment's notice. However, by dealing with it all, I could feel myself getting better at manipulating my mana and drawing closer to another breakthrough in my growth.

"You seem to be getting the hang of it," Lardon observed right on cue, being completely privy to my inner thoughts.

"Yeah, kind of."

"So your mastery of mana has improved yet again."

"I'm kinda shocked that you're complimenting me so straightforwardly."

Lardon chuckled. *"Can you sense it now?"*

"Sense what?"

Just the fact that Lardon brought it up meant it wasn't nonsense. I thought back to the things she's mentioned, retracing the steps of our entire conversation. One thing came to mind—something that Lardon didn't clearly give an answer to.

She never agreed with what I said back when I talked about sensing any mana near us. I tried expanding my consciousness and sensing the mana around me again.

"What...?"

"So you noticed."

"Two reactions," I said. "I never picked up on these until now... What are they?"

"You can sense them now that you have improved," she told me. *"One is deliberately suppressed, while the other is naturally blending in with nature."*

They should not pose much danger, so I would say to leave them be."

"O-Oh..."

Lardon chuckled. *"You were able to sense them in such a short time. Not bad,"* she said, sounding the most pleased she had all day.

Our road construction continued the day after under the watchful eyes of my lurking observers. I made sure to keep track of their locations, but it was proving more difficult than last night since a lot of giants and other residents had come over to help. Sensing mana was like picking up voices—it was harder to tell them apart the more presences there were around me.

I kept at it anyway. It felt more fun than difficult, even with the road work taking my attention, since I knew all this was going into my magic proficiency. As I tried to fish out the presences I was looking for, I noticed something.

“They’re subtly different from one another... Why?”

“So you noticed.”

“Yeah. I can tell now that everyone’s here.”

“It is the difference caused by where they live,” Lardon explained. *“Mana is the power that flows from within a person’s body. Naturally, the land a person was born and raised in, and even the food and water one regularly consumes, causes differences in wavelengths.”*

“Huh. I didn’t know that.” But now that I did, I gave it another go. “Have all three surrounding nations sent people in?”

“Correct. Well deduced,” Lardon praised, affirming my suspicions.

Bull’s-eye. I was sensing three distinct types of presences, so I figured that might be the case. In other words, not only Jamille but even Parta and Quistador had come to observe me now.

“Pretty bold of them.”

“They do not know that you can sense them. Power is a deterrent, but such is not the case for unseen power.”

“Power is a deterrent...” I mumbled thoughtfully.

“Take armies, for example—the numbers that comprise them, to be precise. Would you think to invade a country with a hundred million troops?”

“Absolutely not,” I answered with a wry chuckle.

Although it was a pretty extreme example, I understood what Lardon was getting at. After some thought, I asked a nearby wolfman to call Scarlet over to me.

“You called, Master?” she said once she arrived.

“Yeah. I just wanted to ask you something. Do you know how strong Jamille, Parta, and Quistador are? In terms of their numbers, I mean.”

“I know Jamille’s very well,” she answered. “As for Parta and Quistador, I can only offer you an overview.”

“That’ll do. If they were to invade us, how many men do you think they’d send?”

The people monitoring me were still around, which meant that they probably felt more hostile toward me than not. I ought to keep in mind just how strong our potential enemies could be.

“The three nations are constantly keeping one another in check, so I believe Jamille and Parta would send twenty thousand each, while Quistador would send approximately fifty thousand.”

“And if they don’t bother keeping each other in check?”

“Should they all come rushing in hoping to take everything for themselves, then Jamille and Parta would double their forces. Knowing Quistador, I believe fifty thousand would have already been their full force, so I do not see it increasing by much.”

“So I’ll need to fight around a hundred thousand troops just to defend our land...” I groaned, baffled at the unexpected numbers.

“I believe you are strong enough, Master,” said Scarlet.

“We’re talking about a hundred thousand here,” I replied with a wry smile. “A bit too much for one person, I’d say. Besides, we only have around ten thousand on our side, and that’s already including the noncombatants. Even if

we add some more enchanted armor into the equation...”

“If only you could supply your combatants with the original version,” Lardon noted. *“That would be plenty.”*

I chuckled bitterly. It was *because* I couldn’t do that in the first place that I made new kinds of enchanted armor. Yet, easier as they were to make, nothing could beat the original in terms of firepower. That was just how superior a metal high mithril silver was.

“Guess we’ll have to settle with doing things as we have, making silver coins and providing aid and all that.”

“You may leave all the diplomatic and political matters to me,” Scarlet said with a resolute gaze. “It would be my honor to be of use to you, Master.”

“Sure. I’m counting on you.”

“Yes!” She nodded cheerfully.

We ended our discussion there. I returned to paving while keeping up my mana detection around me. I was especially gung ho about it, so I was soon able to clearly differentiate the three kinds of mana wavelengths I was feeling. These could correspond to the three nations, but that didn’t necessarily have to be the case. While only Jamille, Parta, and Quistador bordered this promised land, many other countries on this continent could also send their people here.

Lardon chuckled. *“Very wise.”*

I poured even more focus into my mana detection in order to scout out that possibility—then froze. “Hm? This mana...”

“What is it, Master?”

“Did you sense something?”

“Scarlet,” I called. “And the rest of you too. Step back.”

She looked utterly confused at the sudden order but obeyed anyway, as did the monsters around us. I summoned ten Gnomes and instructed them to dig—not a shallow ditch, as we’d been doing for the pavement, but much farther down. The earth spirits showed no struggle whatsoever as they smoothly dug their way deeper and deeper, until the pit was deep enough for a well.

“I knew it...” As the layers of soil obstructing my senses were peeled away, I recognized it more clearly now.

“This is...high mithril silver?!” Lardon exclaimed in shock.

I jumped down into the hole dozens of meters deep and halted my momentum with magic. Once I safely landed, I picked up a stone from inside the pit and observed it closely. “I knew I sensed high mithril silver mana,” I muttered.

“You recall what it was like?”

“Sure do. Also...” I looked around and saw a vein deposit containing tons of high mithril silver ore—a whole lot more than what the giants were able to gather near their former settlement last time. “If we have this much...”

“Indeed. You would be able to make enough enchanted armor for everyone.”

“And if I have spirits possess them...?”

“Ah. Correct. It would be even stronger,” Lardon affirmed, sounding pleased. *“With it, you will be able to fill the gap in your numbers.”*

“And that’s not all.” I teleported back to the surface. As Scarlet rushed toward me, I turned to her and instructed, “Scarlet, spread this around: our country has found a large deposit of high mithril silver ore—and it’s more than enough to equip our forces and then some.”

She gasped. “Yes, Master!”

At Scarlet’s advice, we had flaunted our power using silver coins. Then, we had supplemented that with a “soft” approach by providing aid for a drought. All this high mithril silver would serve as the cherry on top to wrap it all up. Although we could now boost the strength of our lacking numbers, not many were aware of how powerful enchanted armor was. In that case, this strategic resource that anyone familiar with magic would know of could serve as our deterrent instead.

Announcing that a large ore vein appeared in our country was as foreboding a deterrent as a hundred million men.

I had some workers continue to lay gravel over the road and called more from town to start mining the newly discovered ore deposit. Considering its size, I had Reina come over to assist me.

She just finished assessing our work status and was currently giving me her report. “This should be enough for a few hundred—no, a few *thousand* suits of enchanted armor.”

“I was just exaggerating back there, but it looks like we’ll actually have enough for everyone.”

“I believe it is partly because of your skill in refining,” Reina said as she glanced to the side where I had piled up high mithril silver ingots. I made those as a test from the ore we’d mined out so far. It was a huge upgrade from when I only had little beads of it at my disposal.

“The only problem is that it takes so much time,” I noted.

“Even for you, Lord Liam?”

“There’s only one of me, after all. The road pavement is even on hold because I’m over here now.”

“Oh...” The clever elven leader hung her head. “My apologies. We are simply too powerless. If only we could be of more help to you...”

“Aren’t there a few who have aptitude for magic?”

“There certainly are, especially so after they formed a contract with you. Not only among the elves, but across all the races too.” Reina hung her head.

“However, as for grimoires...”

“Yeah, I thought so.”

There wasn’t much we could do about that. You needed to hold a grimoire for a long time in order to learn magic. Normally, it would take anywhere between

a few days to a few months just to learn a single spell, throughout which you had to be constantly holding the grimoire. The magicpedia I got from my teacher had hundreds of spells in it, but lending it out was essentially letting one person monopolize it all. Not very efficient, if you asked me. Wasteful, even.

“Lord Liam,” Reina suddenly called. “Can you not make grimoires with all this high mithril silver?”

“Oh. You’re talking about Ancient Memoria?”

Reina nodded.

“Well, it’s not like I can’t... No, hang on. I *can*.” I nodded firmly. My experience told me that turning any magic I knew into a grimoire would be much easier than making my own spell.

“Then perhaps you can...?”

“I see. I never thought about it until now because I didn’t have any high mithril silver... Wait.” I suddenly had a brilliant idea. “Instead of something for individual use, I should just make it like that underground altar.”

“Altar...?”

I told her about Lardon’s underground altar—how that whole space was essentially one big Ancient Memoria.

“I see! Then you could make a building just like that, where we can go to practice.”

I paused for a moment. “No, not that,” I mumbled.

“Huh? What is it?”

“Reina, do you have aptitude for any magic?”

“I do. The result of the test indicated I had some for frost magic.”

“Good.”

I took some newly refined high mithril silver ingots and teleported to town with Reina. Sli and Lime just so happened to be playing by the street and came bouncing around to me.

“Lord Liam!”

“Wanna play?”

I gave them a few pats before turning back to Reina. “Wait here,” I told her.

Although she cocked her head in confusion, Reina still nodded and waited in place.

I held my hands up, summoned two Salamanders, and ordered them to melt the paved road. There, I poured in some high mithril silver—also melted by the Salamanders—and let it spread into a layer about as thin as gold leaf underneath the pavement. Lastly, I cast magic on the metal.

Grimoires, my magicpedia, the underground altar—all these different forms of grimoires, ranging from tangible items to space itself, had given me an even deeper understanding of Ancient Memoria. With that knowledge, I transformed the high mithril silver into Ancient Memoria.

Finally, I reverted the exposed pavement back to normal. It looked like an ordinary road again. “All right. Reina, stand there.”

“U-Understood.” Although she still looked confused, she followed my instructions and stood atop the repaved road.

“You feel anything?”

“Yes!” she exclaimed after a pause. “This is Ice Needle, isn’t it?”

I nodded. Since Reina had the aptitude for it, I infused a frost magic spell into the Ancient Memoria under the road. It was now covered by the pavement, but Reina was still able to enjoy the same effects as if she were using a grimoire, possibly because she and the Ancient Memoria were still making contact via the road between them.

“Looks like a success.”

“May I ask why you did it this way?”

“Rather than making a building, spreading it out across town via the roads will make it easier for everyone to learn it, right?”

“Ah, I see now,” Reina said with sparkling eyes. “You’re amazing, Lord Liam!”

Looks like I'll need to redo the pavement all around town to add this in.

“We’re ready!”

“All right. Go ahead!”

At my signal, ten elves nodded all at once. They were standing within the town’s border while I faced them from outside, several dozen meters away. Raising their hands, they chanted, “Fireball!” in unison and shot out a ball of fire each.

With an impressed hum, I put up eleven absolute magic shields to block them all.

“We’re also ready!” said a wolfman. Their side had fewer than ten people, with one noble vampire among them. When I gave them a nod, they all chanted, “Ice Needle!” and unleashed spears of ice toward me from inside the town, the same way they would to repel any attackers trying to get inside.

I also blocked their attacks with another eleven barriers. There were always bound to be extra shields given the prime number rule.

“Lord Liam, Lord Liam!”

“Go ahead, Sli!”

“Cyclone!” The slime cast an intermediate magic spell, instantly forming tornadoes around me, and again, I defended myself with a magic barrier.

“W-Wow...” Reina gasped in awe behind me. “Everyone’s casting all those spells...”

“I’ve laid out high mithril silver beneath all the roads. Now, as long as you’re in town, it’ll be as if you’re holding a grimoire.”

“That’s amazing, Lord Liam! With this, even those who don’t have the willpower to learn can bolster our forces should the need arise.”

“Exactly.” With the huge stock of high mithril silver we’d procured, I had

successfully turned this entire town into a huge grimoire. “That’s not all, though.”

“What else is there?” Reina asked, tilting her head in confusion.

“Now should be a good time. Follow me.”

“Okay.”

I took the elf back into town, where we were assailed by the cheers of all the monsters who were thrilled that they could use lots of magic now. I came to a halt right in the middle of the street and told Reina, “Try using a spell called Telephone.”

“Telephone...? Oh!” The spell’s name naturally came to whoever held the grimoire, as would its effects if the holder also happened to have the aptitude for it. “Is this similar to your Telepathy, Lord Liam?”

“Yep. If I recall correctly, in ancient tongue, *tele* means far, *phone* means sound, and *pathy* means... Was it emotions? That’s why Telepathy can convey your inner voice across a distance, while Telephone will convey your normal voice instead.”

Reina hummed. “It seems I have the aptitude for it as well... Huh? But how did you know?”

Simply holding a grimoire didn’t mean you’d be able to cast the spell; you needed the aptitude for it too. Reina realized that, despite not testing her for it, I’d brought her here with absolute certainty of her compatibility.

“Because I made it so you’d have the aptitude for it.” Picking up on the confusion all over her face, I elaborated, “I made it so that the aptitude needed to use Telephone is ‘being my familiar.’”

Reina gasped. “So everyone here can also...?”

“Exactly.” As she surmised, I made this spell in such a way that my familiars—in other words, everyone in this town—would be able to use it. “Now try it.”

“Okay...” Reina closed her eyes and focused.

I knew better than anyone how long it could take to cast a spell for the first time, so I waited patiently. “Being my familiar” was practically the one and only

condition attached, so all she needed was ten minutes.

“Um... Hello? Natasha?”

“Huh? Reina? Where are you?” Another elf’s voice resounded in the air.

“Oh! She really can hear me.”

Reina spoke with Natasha a bit more and found out that she was on the opposite end of town. She explained to the stunned elf that it was a spell I created, sounding as smug as if it were her own achievement. Then, she dispelled the magic after a short while and turned back to face me.

“This is amazing, Lord Liam! This will make it so much easier to communicate with everyone! And there’s even more...” Her gaze fell to the ground she was standing on, this road paved with Ancient Memoria. “You truly are astounding to have made this place into such an amazing town. We could very well call it a magic city!”

“A magic city... I like the sound of that.”

The “magic” in that name left me beside myself with excitement at what the future had in store for this land.

The Young Head and His Old Butler

In the office of a noble's mansion, Bruno held a quill pen in one hand and his head in the other as he struggled to compose a letter, one of such importance that it could greatly sway the future of this household.

His words needed to give the recipient a pleasant impression while also outlining the benefits of this cooperative venture. At the same time, he had to dance around the main point in case this letter fell into a third party's hands, so that it couldn't serve as any form of evidence against him. As the cherry on top, he needed to compose it all in typical noble fashion, with flamboyant words and lengthy expressions. The letter had to be so intricate, it would put even the most ornate works of art to shame.

It was after half a day of racking his brain that the letter finally neared completion—and he was interrupted by a knock on the door.

He responded without lifting his head, after which an elderly gentleman came in. This man had served as this family's butler for three generations, all the way from his apprenticeship to the present, and thus held great status in the house. Perhaps as an inevitable consequence, he was rather disapproving of the young man who had married into the house—a sentiment that Bruno himself was well aware of.

"Hudler," Bruno greeted him, showing not the slightest bit of disconcertion. "What is it?"

"I would like to implore you, milord," the butler began. "Please refrain from interacting with that suspicious nation of monsters any further."

"You mean King Liam's?" Even when speaking with the butler of his house, Bruno made sure to refer to Liam with due respect, careful not to leave any seeds of conflict in his speech.

On the other hand, the butler was making his disdain quite clear. "Indeed," he said. "Our house has a long and proud history. Playing along with the monsters'

folly will stain our honor.”

“Honor, hm? I get that.”

“Then—”

“But I refuse.”

The butler narrowed his eyes. “Are you sane, milord?”

“About as sane as I can be,” Bruno replied while holding back a sigh. He set his pen down and looked the butler in the eye. “King Liam’s nation is going to keep developing from here on out. I’d say it might even become a hegemon. I can’t afford to let go of my connection to him.”

“A hegemon?” The butler blatantly scoffed. “A mere horde of wild monsters—led by a child, no less. You claim such a nation can attain hegemony?”

“Yeah.” Bruno firmly nodded.

The butler shook his head in dismay, even letting out a sigh. “How absurd. I understand you favor him because he is your brother, but this is simply far too absurd.”

Bruno didn’t deign to respond. Frankly, he felt like he didn’t have the time to be squabbling about this. Liam’s country was only going to get bigger moving forward, perhaps even big enough to swallow up the surrounding three nations and claim hegemony. He could say that for certain because he’d visited and seen the place himself several times.

Just like this butler, there were many who failed to recognize that—which, to Bruno, was a huge chance. It was like throwing all his cash into what only he knew was a winning bet. That was just how powerful Liam was, and how extraordinary his feats were. If Bruno wanted to reap as many benefits as he could before everyone else, then he couldn’t waste his time debating with a single butler.

“If you refuse to listen,” Hudler said, “then I’m afraid I must take my own measures.”

However, this elderly man was still someone who had served this house for three generations—an *insider*, if you will—unlike Bruno, who was an outsider

despite his status as the head now. Whatever this butler could manage if Bruno let him do as he pleased would be no laughing matter.

He mulled it over for a moment before proposing, “You should come with me the next time I visit King Liam.”

“What do you mean?”

“Try seeing it for yourself. You’ve never been there, have you?”

“I do not need to see how a horde of monsters live to know—”

“Just come. Or can you not even listen to such a simple order?” Bruno pressed, using an iron fist to settle the butler down.

At the end of the day, Bruno was still the head, and Hudler, his butler. Whatever power play lay beneath the surface, the subordinate couldn’t possibly refuse an order as simple as “accompany me as I work.”

The butler groaned but ultimately had to obey. “Understood. It’s not as if seeing it will change anything.”

“Fine by me. Anything else?”

“No, milord.” He bowed once and left the room.

Bruno gazed at the closed door and sighed. “Jeez. Now’s not even the time for that,” he grumbled as he lifted his quill pen once more and resumed his work.

“Th-This is...”

Hudler, who had accompanied Bruno to the town’s entrance, was dumbfounded at what greeted him. His eyes were like saucers, his mouth agape.

“S-So many buildings... Was this not a country of monsters?”

“What, were you imagining a bunch of trees and caves?”

The butler’s silence was answer enough.

“As you can see,” Bruno continued, “the townscape here certainly isn’t losing to the capital. Also...”

“Also...?” The butler gulped.

“You there. Excuse me,” Bruno called out to a passing giant.

The burly monster faced him. “Oh... You’re Lord Liam’s brother, right?”

“Yeah. I have a favor to ask of you. Could you show me some magic you use for your day-to-day life?”

“Hm? Sure, I guess.” Knowing that Bruno was Liam’s older brother, the giant amicably accepted his request. He held his hand out and, after a few grunts, managed to cast a spell.

“Th-That is...”

“Light,” answered Bruno. “A spell with zero offensive ability. Its only purpose is to illuminate the surroundings.”

“I-It’s magic?”

“Monsters aren’t the only residents here, you know? There are humans too, though they use magic all the same. That’s why it’s bright here even at night. It’s a nightless city.”

“A-A nightless city...”

“And that’s not all,” he continued. “They use all sorts of magic on a daily basis. Right?”

The giant nodded. “How about... Should I contact Lord Liam for you?”

“I’d appreciate it.”

The giant cast another spell. “Lord Liam, is now a good time?”

“Ryu? What is it?”

“Your older brother is here. What should I do?”

“Oh, Bruno? You can bring him right over.”

The butler remained speechless as he heard the voice resound from thin air, and his jaw only dropped impossibly lower as Bruno went on.

“That’s also magic,” Bruno told him. “Everyone here can use it. It lets them speak with others even when they’re far away. The monsters of this town—no, King Liam and his subjects have lots more magic at their disposal, so long as

they remain here and under their king's domain."

"I-Is that...t-true?" Too stunned for conversation, the butler lost his usual eloquence.

"Isn't it obvious enough? You're not gonna last long in this magic city if this was enough to shock you so badly."

"Magic...city."

Bruno nodded in satisfaction as he watched the butler lose his words. With this, he should no longer claim that being involved with Liam was meaningless. This magic city was simply so astounding that even the old butler was knocked off his socks and out of his hard-headed views—and the one who made such a place was none other than Liam.

"He really is amazing," Bruno thought to himself, deeply impressed.

Afterword

Light novels are written by humans to depict human lives.

Hello, everyone! It's nice to meet you, or maybe it's "long time no see" for some? I'm Nazuna Miki, a Taiwanese light novel author. I sincerely thank you for picking up a copy of *I'm a Noble on the Brink of Ruin, So I Might as Well Try Mastering Magic* volume 2.

We were able to publish this second volume thanks to all your support. The publication of light novel sequels depends heavily on previous sales, so the fact that this volume exists is no doubt thanks to all you readers out there. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

With all this support I have received, I most certainly have to give back. I am of the belief that light novels must be written not to flaunt one's own writing but to respond to the readers' support, and that is why I brought this story to you with the very same concept as the first volume's: a man who reincarnated into the fifth son of a noble family learns all sorts of magic spells with his newfound talent. It's an endless waltz of learning, casting, and succeeding in magic.

I promise you I will never stray from this concept, so those who enjoyed the first volume can rest assured and pick up this second book as well. If you happened to pick this volume up first and it caught your interest, then I do hope you would give the first book a try too.

Now, some words of thanks:

To Kabotya, the illustrator, thank you once again for all the great illustrations!

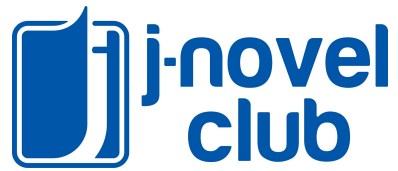
To Takakura and TO Books, who gave me the wonderful opportunity to publish volume 2, I truly cannot thank you enough.

And to the readers who picked up a copy, thank you all from the very bottom of my heart.

I now set my pen down while praying that this volume will sell well so I can bring you the next one too.

Sincerely,

Nazuna, April 2020



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I'm a Noble on the Brink of Ruin, So I Might as Well Try Mastering Magic:
Volume 2

by Nazuna Miki

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Original Japanese edition published in 2020 by TO Books, Inc., Tokyo.

This English edition is published by arrangement with TO Books, Inc., Tokyo
English translation © 2024 J-Novel Club LLC

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Ebook edition 1.0: July 2024

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