

8

# The **FRUIT** of EVOLUTION

Before I knew it,  
my life had it made!





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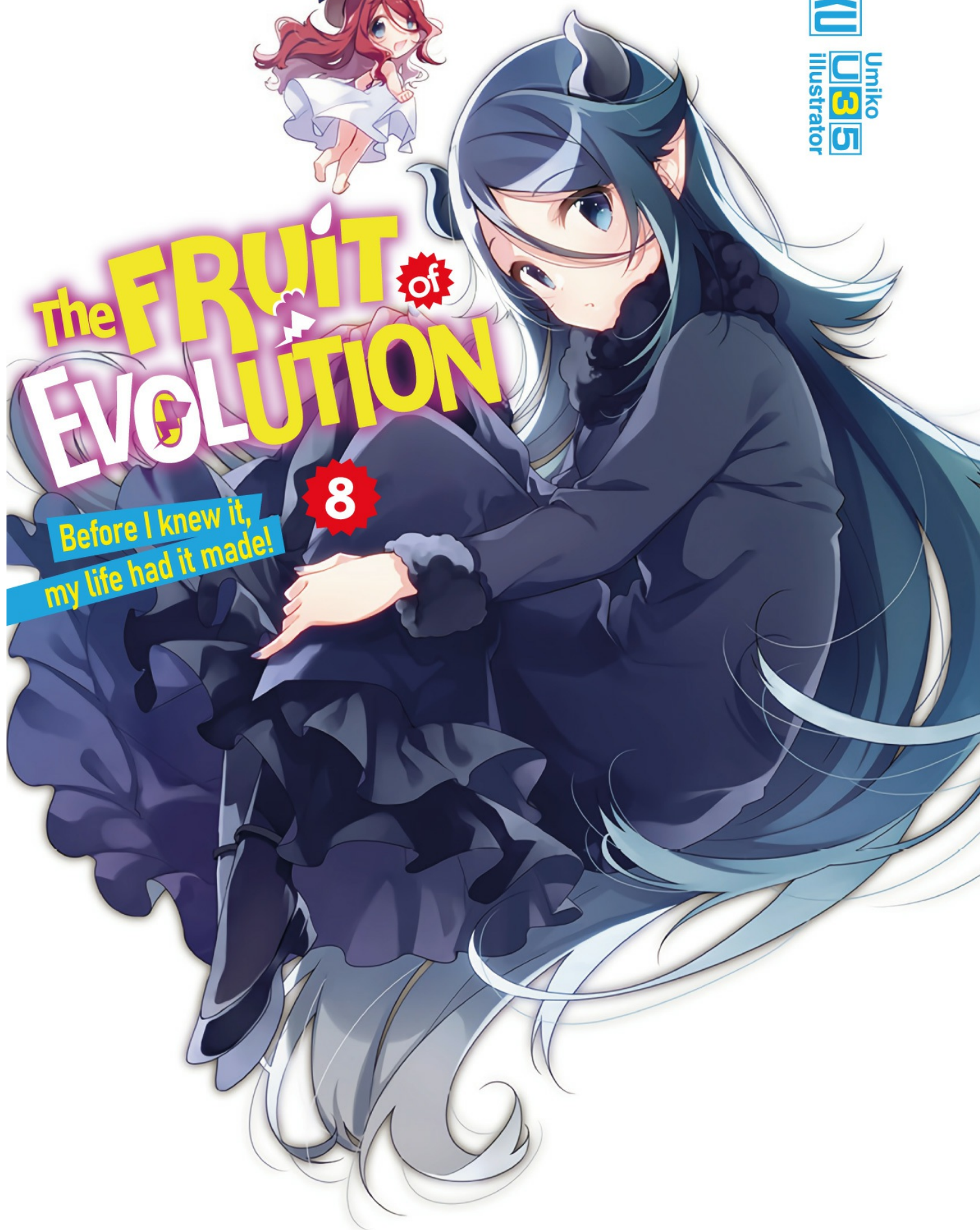
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"Huh?  
That's, uh..."

♂  
**Seichi**  
Human

"I want  
one, too!"

♂  
**Routier**  
Demon's King  
Daughter







"Please,  
leave me  
alone."

"We can't just  
leave you here.  
It must be so lonely  
in a place like this!"

Zora  
Mergon  
.....  
Serpentkin

Saria  
.....  
Kaiser Kong



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# THE FRUIT OF EVOLUTION 8

Before I knew it, my  
life had it made!

Miku 美紅



## Chapter 1: An Unexpected Encounter

**“W**hat an unexpected surprise—and what an unusual thing to say. The Heroes’ mentor? The first Demon King? Hah—keep your filthy lies to the believable ones.”

Lordias, Servant of the Cult of the Wicked One, quickly regained his composure to snort at the newcomers. He clearly didn’t believe Zeanos and Lucius were who they claimed to be.

Around him, the battered Demon Generals gawked at the dark-clad newcomers.

“Th-The first Demon King...?” Rialetta muttered in disbelief.

“They can’t be serious,” Urs grunted through his pain.

“But those horns... he’s a demonkin, no doubt,” Reiya mused. “Still, that’s just not possible.”

Lucius smirked. “Guess I can’t be surprised. It’d be weirder if you took my word for it,ahaha!”

Lordias’s glowering look intensified. “You don’t seem to understand your situation. No matter who you claim to be, standing before me is tantamount to suicide.”

The intensity of the Servant’s threat made even Zolua and Zeros shudder from where they stood keeping the monster horde at bay.

Zeanos gave his companion a sidelong look. “Allow me to handle him, Lucius-dono. You may tend to the monsters in the meantime.”

“Hm? You sure you can take him alone?”

“Of course.”

Lordias’s brow twitched in irritation. “Vanity befitting fools, indeed. But no matter—you claim you can defeat me, but you’ll be torn asunder by the



monsters before you can even try!”

“GREAAAAAGH!!”

“KEEEEEEEEEEE!!”

A roiling wave of monsters rose, about to crash down on the pair. Lucius spun about, shooting the horde a dark look.

“Quiet.”

With that word alone, the mass fell silent—no, they stopped moving altogether, as if petrified. Despite their blood-frenzy, their few remaining instincts were enough to snap them back to their senses and obey.

Lucius smirked and nodded approvingly. “That’s the spirit. I knew you were cool.”

Everyone—from the soldiers of the Demon Army to the Swordsaint Valkyries to Lordias himself—stared at the mob in shock.

“Impossible,” Lordias said in a strained voice. “What did you do?!”

“Rather bold of you to ignore me now.”

While the Servant’s attention was locked on Lucius, Zeanos closed the gap between them in a heartbeat and thrust his pitch-black saber into his side.

“Gah?! Wh-What...?!”

Lordias stumbled away, trying to regain his composure, but Zeanos was no fool.

“You’ve lost your only chance to attack.”

Zeanos’s onslaught continued. Lordias struggled to block his blows, but the Dark Nobleman’s blade snaked and whipped about as if alive, slipping through his defenses with startling ease.

“I-Impossible... This can’t be!” Lordias gritted his teeth through his pain. “The Wicked One has blessed me with impenetrable defenses... His power is absolute!”

“Wicked One?” Zeanos scoffed. “How pathetic. We have a man—no, a *human*—on our side who bent the very Underworld to his will!”

“Whaaat?!”

“There!”

Zeanos’s sharp eyes didn’t miss the gap Lordias’s shock left in his defenses, and he deftly drove his sword deep into the Servant’s leg.

“Gah?!” Lordias collapsed, grasping his leg and panicking.

Zeanos coolly wiped the blood from his sword. “Still determined to resist, cretin?”

Lordias knew that composure. It was the confidence of a man with absolute control, a position the Servant himself had been in for so long. Now he was the victim.

“This can’t be... Impossible! We are the Wicked One’s Chosen! We cannot know defeat!”

The weakened Servant willed himself to his feet, and with a caress of mana, he manifested dozens of daggers in the air around him. Each one of them was laced with its own cocktail of elemental magic and status effects.

Lordias flung his arm forward in a command to attack. “Die!!”

The storm of knives darted toward Zeanos. He calmly assessed their motions before leaping out of their path, but no sooner than he moved, the blades altered their course in the air to follow him.

“My knives will follow you to the grave!” Loriad hissed.

“Hmm.” Zeanos nodded once to himself, then calmly extended his hand. “Dark Hole!”

The air between Zeanos and the weapons suddenly blackened, like a hole in space, and the daggers were sucked inside.

“What?!”

Lordias barely had the time to be surprised, however, as Zeanos turned to him next.

“Dark Chain.”

“?! ”



A pitch-black chain whipped out of Zeanos's hand, rapidly coiling around the Servant and rendering him immobile.

"My apologies," Zeanos said with a short, condescending bow. "In death, they called me the Dark Nobleman, and Dark Magic is something of a specialty of mine."

"Gh!" Lordias struggled and strained to break free, but the chains didn't give an inch. He could only struggle and flail powerlessly.

Zeanos stuck his blade just under the man's chin, point leveled against his neck. "How unfortunate. It seems playtime is over already."

"Kh... Damn you!"

With that, Lordias was safely taken into custody.

※ ※ ※

"Gh, what infernal numbers... When will this hell end?!"

The Black Paladin cursed under their breath as a fresh gout of Blackflame Magic roasted the nearest group of monsters. It was their unique element, a variant of Fire Magic that offered great defensive and support abilities. While there were far more offensively powerful variants of Fire Magic, they specialized in utilizing their more defensive and supporting capabilities.

"Hm, Eremina-sama?! Blackflame Bulwark!"

Upon catching sight of their queen, they cast a protective spell on her. Her body became wreathed in flames.

Eremina brightened at the sight of them. "Oh, the Black Paladin! Thank you!"

"My actions warrant no gratitude."

"Honestly, though, just how many monsters are there?" she remarked, flame and lightning-bathed blade tearing a draconic monster in half. "At this rate, we'll run out of mana and stamina before we can get through them all."

The other S Rank adventurers were beginning to sweat as well, strain and exhaustion slowly mounting on their faces. Despite their numbers, their

opponents were S Rank monsters, and despite the speed and ferocity of the adventurers' attacks, they needed to exercise more caution than any passerby could know. Even taking one of the fiends' attacks could render them unable to fight. Florio and his squad of royal mages were making a noble effort to provide supporting fire, but they couldn't have much mana left.

The end would soon be upon them—though none of them could suspect how, much less their unexpected backup.

The former Heroes, Abel's party, had arrived.

"Gars, help shore up the defenses over there! Anna, keep the monsters split up and distracted! Liliana, kill as many of the physically resistant ones as you can from here!"

"Got it, boss!"

"Let's go!"

"Of course! Flame Line!"

Eremina gawked at them in surprise. "What...?"

The defenders all paused to watch the incoming heroes for a moment. Abel and his allies barely glanced at them before cutting into the monstrous horde.

A single mighty slash from Abel dropped several monsters, and he didn't so much as blink before carving through his next opponents. Gars the Warrior's mighty shield effortlessly staved off a blow aimed at an injured soldier before crushing the attacker's skull with a mighty bash. Anna the Hunter scattered a flurry of arrows and throwing knives into the crowd, whipping the monsters into a confused frenzy and foiling their assault. Meanwhile, the sage Liliana fired blast after blast of magic into the throng, vaporizing anything with especially troublesome defenses. They carved through the creatures with supernatural speed and ease as they went.

"We've already died once, so no need to hold back!" Abel shouted as he charged ahead. "After all we went through with Seiichi, this is nothing!"

"Need my help?" the Treasure Chest rumbled, arms and legs flailing in eager anticipation.

“Hm? No, we’ve got this. Watch Seiichi’s parents and the others!”

“Okay...” It bobbed its lid obediently before scuttling back to Seiichi’s parents, Marie, and Naturliana.

Seiichi’s father, Makoto, shook his head in disbelief at the sight of the horde. “I know we’ve seen plenty of things here that they don’t have back on Earth, but who’d have thought they have real dragons here?”

His wife, Kazumi, nodded readily. “Can you imagine what would happen if this happened back home?”

“Yeah... These monsters, or whatever they are, seemed pretty hellbent on attacking people. Come to think of it, do you think that meat Zeanos-san brought back to camp a few days ago was from a monster?”

“Probably. I didn’t think much of it at the time, but monster meat is quite tasty, isn’t it?”

“Yeah... Sounds pretty gross, but I guess that’s how they do things here.”

“I wonder what dragon meat tastes like?”

“Great question! We’ll have to ask Abel-kun for some later.”

Most people would faint at the sight of so many monsters, let alone being so close to them.

*Who... who are they?* the Treasure Chest wondered to itself with a small shudder.

Even Zeanos’s maid lover, Marie, and the florist Naturliana were terrified at the apocalyptic scene.

As Abel squared off against one particular monster, however, the Hiiragis looked at each other.

“Hey...”

“It sure looks like one, doesn’t it?”

“Is... something wrong?” the Treasure Chest asked.

Makoto turned to the chest. “Hey, is there any way you can take us up to where Abel-kun is?”



“What? I can... but it’s dangerous...”

“We know.”

“Why do you want to go...?”

“C’mon, it’s important. Please?”

“Okay...”

Upon seeing the Treasure Chest nod, Marie and Naturliana started in surprise.

“Y-You mustn’t go!” Marie protested. “Why would you want to do such a thing?!”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Kazumi assured her. “Treasure Chest-san will be there to protect us.”

“But you can’t guarantee you’ll be okay!” Naturliana pleaded.

Kazumi nodded firmly. “I know. Still, we need to go.”

After finally placating the pair, Seiichi’s parents followed the Treasure Chest’s lead to the front lines.

Abel, meanwhile, was facing off against a particularly competent pair of monsters. They were moving in unison, aiming to flank him, and he was carefully eyeing the pair for some opening.

“Dammit... How do I break through these two?” he cursed under his breath.

“Abel-kun!”

At the sound of Makoto’s voice, he glanced back in shock, straining to watch both his opponents as he did so. “What? Makoto-san?! You too, Kazumi-san, what are you doing here?! It’s dangerous! Get out of here, now!”

“We know,” Makoto replied. “Just let us do what we came for.”

“What?”

Kazumi slipped past him and looked up at the giant monsters. “Excuse me! You’re Saria-san’s parents, aren’t you?”

“Huh?! ”

“What...?”

Both Abel and the Treasure Chest recoiled in shock.

“But Saria-san was that girl with Seiichi, wasn’t she? There’s no way that’s—”

“You, know daughter?”

“Seriously?!” Abel’s eyes nearly popped out of his head. “And wait, the monsters can talk?!”

One of the monsters—a Kaiser Kong—peered down at Kazumi curiously.

“I know her!” Kazumi promised. “She’s with my son right now!”

The gorilla monster sniffed dubiously. “You... not lying?”

“Oh? You can tell if we’re telling the truth? My, what a useful skill!”

It was hardly the time to be surprised at parlor tricks, but she seemed genuinely impressed.

“Wait, hold up!” Abel protested. “How are you all being so natural about this?! And are you trying to tell me Saria-san is a monster?!”

Kazumi pouted her lips. “Of course! Just look at her eyes—she looks just like Saria-san!”

“Her eyes? And wait, the gorilla’s a girl?!”

The Kaiser Kong raised herself up incredulously. “Me, woman. And?”

The other beast nodded. “Nngh. Me, man.”

“I know that,” Kazumi assured him. “You must be Saria-san’s father.”

“I can’t even tell!” Abel shouted in exasperation. “How are you doing that?!”

“Hmm... my intuition, I suppose?”

“Is Seiichi’s whole family crazy?!”

“Anyhow,” Makoto told him in a level voice, “we noticed that you were fighting Saria-san’s parents, so we had to come stop you.”

“Again, how? I didn’t think you could tell the monsters apart if you tried... but fine, let’s table that. What happens now? Do we just keep fighting?”

The Kaiser Kong father shook his head. “No. No more. We, no hurt friends of Saria. Well, all brainwashed. Saria, name woke us up.”

“Brainwashed?” Abel’s brow furrowed. “How? Who—”

“GWEAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!!”

Before he could finish, a fresh wave of slaving monsters was upon him.

“Dammit... We can’t talk here! If you’re done, Makoto-san, get back to Marie and Naturliana now! I promise I won’t hurt these things—er, people? Whatever, I won’t hurt them! Just go!”

“Yeah, we’d better go,” Makoto agreed. “We don’t want to get in your way any more than we already have.”

“I suppose...” Kazumi’s face suddenly brightened. “Oh, and Abel-san? Can you please get some dragon meat for us? We’d love to try some!”

“We’re in the middle of a battle! Gah, fine, I’ll figure it out!”

“Thank you! Come on, dear, let’s go.”

“Good luck.” The Treasure Chest solemnly rattled its lid.

With that, the trio returned to safety, away from the front lines.

After making sure they were clear, Abel refocused his attention on the invading monsters. He glanced back at the Kaiser Kong pair as he fought.

“You said you were brainwashed before, right? Does that mean you’ll help us.”

The female nodded. “Me, help. Also, me called Sunny.”

“Me, Adramelc. You, call me that.”

“Wait, why is your name so cool?!”

“Hm? Monsters, have this kind of name? Normal.”

“Wow, I was *not* ready to hear that!”

As they talked, Saria’s parents started laying into the surrounding horde.

In the end, the contributions of Abel’s party and the Kaiser Kongs proved to be the deciding factor in the battle, and the invading horde was safely



vanquished.

## Chapter 2: Treasure Chest, Our Savior

**W**ith the monsters safely dispatched, the royal mage Florio approached Abel.

“I must thank you for lending your aid. However, I must confess, I don’t know who you are. Are you adventurers? And those monsters with you...”

Abel smiled thinly. “We’re not adventurers, but honestly, it’d be really hard to explain at this point. Uh...”

Not only were they former Heroes, he had to somehow explain that they’d been dead for centuries. That wouldn’t be an easy thing to explain.

Fortunately, he was spared by the arrival of Gars and the Treasure Chest’s charges.

“Is something wrong?” Kazumi asked, noticing his discomfort.

“Uh... I’m just trying to explain who we are and what we’re doing here.”

“Hmm... They look like the soldiers of this country.” Makoto looked Florio and his accompanying mages over. “Sorry for the intrusion. My name’s Makoto Hiiragi. This is a little sudden, but do you know Seiichi?”

“Seiichi-kun?” Florio’s eyes widened.

Makoto nodded. “We’re friends of his... actually, Kazumi and I are his parents. These two individuals here are Saria’s parents.”

“S-Seiichi-kun’s parents?!” Florio twitched with surprise. “Saria-san’s parents, too?! No, that can’t be... Aren’t they monsters?”

Kazumi cocked her head to the side. “Hm? Didn’t you know? Saria-san is a monster, just like these two.”

Sunny nodded and smiled tuskily. “Ungh. Saria, monster. Kaiser Kong.”

“What in the world...?! You can talk?!”

Abel let out a sigh of relief. Apparently, he wasn't the only one surprised.

"We've only just met Saria-san's parents ourselves, but the rest of us have been traveling together for a while," Makoto explained. "We ran into Seiichi a while ago, and since we were looking for a place to live, it was recommended that we come here. Abel-kun and the others have been protecting us on our journey. When we got here, however, we found the city under attack, so Abel-kun and his companions thought they could lend you a hand."

Abel nodded. "Precisely. We also thought that once we arrived here, my friends and I would join your local adventurer's guild. None of us expected there to be so many monsters, let alone Saria's parents."

Florio shook his head in disbelief. "Honestly, I should've expected as much the second you mentioned Seiichi-kun... Regardless, we owe you a great deal. Thank you once again for your aid."

"We're just glad we arrived in time to help."

Florio bowed deeply to them, but his expression was still rife with anxiety. "I'm afraid this isn't the end. There's another horde of monsters assaulting the city from the opposite side."

"Oh, that? I wouldn't worry if I were you."

He started a little at Abel's interjection. "Huh?"

"Some of Seiichi's other friends are already there," Makoto explained.

Abel nodded. "Honestly, it was probably a little overkill to send them both."

"I honestly can't imagine anything stopping them," Kazumi wondered aloud. "Except our Seiichi, of course."

"Yeah," the hero agreed. "Especially against both of them at once, only Seiichi-kun would stand a chance."

Florio looked at them uncertainly. "Um... Who exactly—?"

"Florio-sama!" A voice cut the mage off, and a messenger hurried toward them. "I bring news! A pair of warriors arrived at the city's far side not long ago, and the battle there has already been won!"



“What?!”

Abel smiled thinly. “Thought so.”

The messenger continued his report. “Our scouts have confirmed all monsters in the area have been successfully subjugated. As such, you and the S Rank adventurers’ presence is requested at His Majesty’s side immediately.”

Florio nodded. “Okay. Please pass that on to the others. When you’ve finished, you can join the other soldiers in retrieving the fallen monster drops. I’ll leave some of my mages with you in case there’s unexpected trouble.”

“Sir!”

With that, he ran off to continue his report.

After watching him depart, Florio turned to Abel and his party apologetically. “I hate to ask, but could you please accompany us? You may come as well,” he continued, nodding at Saria’s parents.

Abel blinked. “Of course, if you think we can help... but are you sure?”

“Yeah. We, monsters.”

“It’ll be fine,” Florio assured them. “Not only did Saria-san’s parents prove instrumental in staving off the invaders, but I feel it would be best if you explained your situation to His Majesty directly. Besides, as friends and allies of Seichi-kun, we can’t possibly turn any of you away.”

Abel and his companions agreed, and the motley group returned inside the city walls to make for the palace.

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“Hm? You’ve arrived.”

“Hey, over here!”

Upon arriving at the parlor they’d left Landze in, they found Zeanos and Lucius were already waiting for them. Their casual greetings were a far cry from the horrible state of the chamber.

“Gh... uggghhhh...”

“Ahh...”

“Hahh... hahh...”

Lucius had pinned three people to the chamber walls with spears of darkness, his smile perfectly cheerful and natural. The trio were clearly Servants, but despite their immense powers, the Demon King had incapacitated them with joyous ease. Florio, the S Rank adventurers, and the others could only look at the bloody figures with shock.

Abel cleared his throat uneasily. “Uh... What’re you guys doing?”

“Hm?” Lucius cast the Servants an offhanded glance. “Oh, they rubbed me the wrong way, that’s all. I thought I’d just give them a little slap on the wrist.”

“Hahaha... Is that so?”

*This isn’t funny*, Abel thought to himself. He looked around the room for something—anything else to talk about—but the faces of everyone assembled were grim.

Florio, noticing the gloom, kneeled before his lord, Landze.

“We have returned, Your Majesty.”

“Hm? Oh, Florio. Good work out there.”

“The pleasure was mine. Might I ask, however, who those individuals are?” He glanced uneasily at Zeanos and Lucius.

Landze shrugged and sighed heavily. “Damned if I know. They say they’re friends of Seiichi’s, and they saved Louise’s life, so we can probably trust them. Speaking of, who’s that with you there? I, uh, noticed some of them aren’t human?”

“They’re friends of Seiichi’s as well. This couple is Seiichi’s parents, and those monsters happen to be Saria’s parents.”

His eyes widened. “No shit?! That’s a hell of a twist! I think there’ll be a lot of explaining to do once things have calmed down a little, but for now, it’s enough to know they’re friends of Seiichi’s. Never thought even his friends would be so crazy, though...”

Florio finally decided to address the elephant in the room. “Pardon my forwardness, Your Majesty, but might I ask the reason for the dour mood? Come to think of it, I don’t see any of the demonkin delegation...”

“They... got the Demon King’s daughter, Routier.”

“What?!” Florio was struck speechless for a moment, but hurriedly pressed for details. “What of the Demon Generals, then?”

“They’re with her in the other room.”

“Have you tried healing her?”

“Sure, we hit her with every recovery spell in the book. But the thing that asshole used...” He gestured at a grubby man pinned to the wall. “There’s no healing that.”

“What do you mean?”

“It was an Anathema.”

Suddenly, everything clicked for Florio. “Oh.”

Landze nodded grimly. “The Anathema’s curse was just like the one I got hit with. Nothing’ll work on it—worse, if we don’t find some way to get rid of the curse, she’ll die in three days.”

“No...!”

“The Demon Generals wanted to kill the assassin on the spot, but I persuaded them not to. He’s the only clue we have to a cure, and if we kill him, the princess dies with him. We’ll need every last bit of information we can get.”

“I... I suppose so.” Florio didn’t know what else to say.

The assassin, Edmund, chuckled hoarsely from where he was pinned to the wall.

“Hehe... hehehe... Fuck you all. The girl’s... dead!”

Lucius’ brow twitched. “Someone seems full of energy. Maybe I should just finish you off?”

“Enough, Lucius-dono,” Zeanos warned him coldly. “Don’t play into his hands.”



Finally, Florio remembered something critical. “Right, let’s call Seiichi-kun back! I’m sure he’ll be able to cure her, just as he did you!”

Landze shook his head. “Impossible. It’ll take a full week to get to Barbodel. We have a few mages who can teleport, sure, but none of them have ever been to the Academy. Nothing doing.”

“But there must be some way!”

As if on cue, a sing-song voice rang out.

“Can I please say something?”

Landze looked in surprise at Kazumi. “Hm? What is it?”

She approached him uneasily. “I’m so sorry I overheard, but you need Seiichi? Is that all?”

“Yeah, that’s it.”

“Well, I won’t pretend to know any details, but I think Treasure Chest-san can make that happen.”

“It what?”

Everyone in the room froze, and there was a long moment of silence.

“Treasure what?” Landze finally said.

“Me...” the Treasure Chest rumbled.

“Shit, a talking treasure chest?! Why’ve you got so many arms and legs?!”

“Doesn’t matter... Don’t worry...”

“I swear, doesn’t Seiichi have any friends who are fucking normal?!” He let out a heavy sigh, trying hard to recompose himself. “Look, the lady says you can bring Seiichi here. Can you?”

“I can... I’ve been there... I can teleport.”

“Damn. Is there anything you can’t do?!”

The Treasure Chest gave him a half-dozen thumbs-up. “Leave the rest to me...”

The sight was more reassuring than anyone could've expected from a former piece of furniture.

## Chapter 3: Half-Dragged Back to Terbelle

**“W**ait, a dungeon formed?”

“There is indeed.”

I, Seiichi Hiiragi, had been called to the headmaster Barney-san’s office, where I heard the last thing I’d been expecting.

*I’ve only ever heard of two dungeons before, the Forest of Endless Heartbreak and that labyrinth place I fought the Black Dragon God in...*

“Is it normal for dungeons to just show up like that?” I asked.

“It should be a rare occurrence indeed. With the odd powers that Servant fellow was using, however, there’s been an unusual shift in the nearby forest.”

*Right... Al mentioned going to check that place out a little while ago. I guess that’s where that Servant guy had been hiding.*

“So, it’s a brand-new dungeon then?”

“Well, we can hardly say for certain.”

“You can’t?”

I cocked my head to the side in confusion. From what he just said, it certainly sounded new.

Fortunately, he noticed my confusion. “I suppose you don’t know, then. Sometimes, all that forms is a new entrance to an existing dungeon. Totally new dungeons are far easier to deal with—you simply need to clear them once. For the older breed, however, you may have entrances in different countries, creating new borders over unforeseen distances. They’ve been used as an avenue for invasion in the past, even. Because of that, it’s important to properly identify and codify new entrances as quickly as possible.”

“Okay... I think I get it.”



*I never thought that could be possible, honestly.*

“As such,” Barney-san continued grimly, “we must investigate the dungeon as soon as possible.”

“So then you called me here because—”

“I would have you explore this dungeon.”

“But why me?” I protested. “I know I’m an adventurer, but I barely have any experience with dungeons at all.”

“I know just how powerful you are. I’ll confess, I don’t know why you try so hard to hide it, but I witnessed your prowess firsthand when you eviscerated the monsters assaulting Terbelle. My suspicions were proved once again with your defeat of that Servant fellow at the Clash of Classes. If you hadn’t been there... why, I shudder to think of what might’ve happened!”

*Right... I guess I kinda forgot about hiding my strength. Or maybe I didn’t want to be so secret in the first place? I either wasn’t trying at all, or I’m really that stupid. Either way, no need to worry about it now.*

“It’s my trust in your strength that led me to this decision,” the headmaster continued sagely. “With any luck, you’ll be able to glean what information we need before anything goes amiss. I’d go myself, naturally, but with the state of the Academy these days...”

I nodded understandingly. “I think I get it. If you’re sure you want me to do it, I can go check it out, no problem.”

“Oh, wonderful! I was hoping you’d say that. Ah, and if you’re at all worried about your lack of experience, you’re more than welcome to take Altria-kun with you. The rest of your party, of course, I’ll leave to your discretion.”

“Got it. I’ll head out as soon as I’m ready.”

“Thank you. Take care, now.”

*It’s been forever since I’ve been in a dungeon... Though I guess the Underworld might count?*

Either way, it was my first time doing real adventurer work in a long time, and I had to be on the ball. I didn’t want to make any stupid mistakes, like when Al

got separated from Saria and I in the Black Dragon God's place. As for who I'd been taking, well, the answer felt obvious. Al would be coming, of course, as well as Saria and Lulune, and we could take Origa-chan with us for good measure. Agnos and the other students would be fine with Beatrice-san for the time being.

As I headed down the corridor, however, I was blinded by a flash of light.

"Huh?"

I stared blankly into the illumination, and as I watched, the light died to reveal the Treasure Chest.

"Wait, huh? What're you doing here?"

"Found you... Come... Come with me."

"Excuse me?"

It ignored me, however, and grabbed me tightly by the arm.

"We're going... now."

"What? Going where?!"

"Get in."

"Whoa, wait, whaaaaaaat?!"

Before I could protest, however, it's lid flipped up and I was sucked inside, still none the wiser as to what the hell was going on.

※ ※ ※

"I brought him..."

"Seriously, what's going on here?! Can SOMEBODY please explain?!"

After what felt like ages inside the darkness, a beam of light shone down on me from above. One of the Treasure Chest's arms lashed down and grabbed me a moment later, and I was dragged out into open air.

*Who knew its insides were like that?*

“Looks like you’re doing well,” said a familiar voice. I looked up to see the King of Windberg.

“What? Landze-san?! So that means this is...”

“Yep. You’re in my palace, here in Terbelle.”

*At least I know where I am now.*

Looking around, I found a slew of familiar faces. There were Zeanos, Lucius-san, and the others, plus palace mainstays like Louise and Florio to boot.

*Wait, those gorillas in the back there look familiar... I must be imagining things.*

“Um... What’s going on?” I asked nervously. “I still have no idea what I’m doing here.”

*I didn’t do anything bad, did I?*

From the gloom in the air, it couldn’t be anything good.

Landze-san frowned. “I’m afraid I’ve got a favor to ask.”

“Of me?”

“Yeah.”

*Why does everyone want me to do things for them today?*

I owed Barney-san and Landze-san a lot, of course, so I was happy to do whatever I could for them. I wasn’t expecting his next words, however.

“The Demon King’s daughter got hit by an Anathema. I want you to remove her curse.”

“Whoa, whose daughter?! A curse...?”

Lucius-san smiled cheerily at me, but I got the impression he was ready to kill at the drop of a hat. “See those pieces of shit by the wall? They hurt our friends. It was their idea to use a goddamned Anathema in the first place.”

“Shit?”

I followed his gaze, and sure enough there were three men there, bloodied and crumpled on the floor. It looked like a scene from a slasher movie.

*Th-They're still alive, right?*

"They're Servants of the Cult of the Wicked One," Landze-san explained dryly.

"Huh?!"

That name was unfortunately still fresh in my memory.

"They hit the Demon King's daughter with a curse, and worse, it's the same kind as the one I got hit with before. There's not a person alive who can cure her now—except you, of course. Hopefully, you'll be able to work the same magic on her that you did on me."

I was still struggling to follow. I couldn't wrap my head around the demonkin princess being there, let alone how the Cult of the Wicked One was involved. That could wait, though, until after she was better.

I nodded shakily. "I'll see what I can do, I guess. I can't make any promises, but I'll give it my best shot."

*I never thought I'd be casting Get Better again... Wait, I don't need to say its name this time! Yeah!*

Everyone seemed to relax a little at my response, and I was ushered into a new room.

"She's sleeping inside," Landze-san explained. "Everyone else in there's one of the Demon Army's commanders, so no need to get nervous."

"Okay."

Stepping inside, I found a bunch of demonkin with worried looks on their faces, each of them just as upset as Lucius-san was. It was almost hard to breathe in there.

Landze-san didn't so much as blink. "Hey, pardon us. I brought someone who can break the curse."

"?!" Everyone in the room turned to size me up at once.

"Whuh?!"

*J-Jeez, I'm starting to feel really self-conscious now...*

Finally, one of them—a beautiful lady in a startlingly revealing dress—huffily turned to Landze-san.

“You mean that little man? You’re joking.”

“Believe it or not, I’m dead serious.”

She pursed her lips. “Even I hate to admit it, but this is a curse. I’ve never heard of anyone removing one before.”

Following suit, a super-handsome guy with stark white hair glared at us, his lips parting in a sneer. “You think you’re funny for pokin’ fun at us now? Damn, you got one helluva death wish.”

The situation reminded me a lot of when Landze-san fell sick in the same way. People seemed to think of curses as malignant forces of nature instead of just nasty magic effects.

*But that aside...*

“I’m a friend of Landze-san’s,” I explained. “I’m not going to ask you to trust me blindly, but I’ll need a little leeway if I’m going to cure your ruler there.”

The pretty-boy snorted. “Trust you? Yeah, right! You’re just some freak in a weird robe!”

*The worst thing is that he’s right!*

At that reminder, though, I pulled down my hood. All the demonkin started a little in surprise.

“Is this better?” I asked.

“Huh? Uh... Y-Yeah, I guess... I did kinda ask you to, but...”

*What’s with that reaction? Seriously?!*

I could understand their suspicion, of course, but at this point I was tempted to ignore them altogether and just get casting on their leader. Before I could do anything, though, Lucius-san stepped inside after us.

“Don’t worry about him,” he assured the demonkin commanders. “I can vouch for him.”

*Right! He’s the first Demon King, so of course they’ll listen to him!*



The pretty demonkin lady gave him an odd look. “Huh?! Well, um... I’ve been meaning to ask, but who exactly are you?”

“Right, right... I forgot I hadn’t introduced myself properly.”

“Dammit, what the hell?!”

*He’s just as much of a stranger to them as I am, then!*

Lucius-san chuckled. “Sorry, sorry. The name’s Lucius Alsare. I’m the founder of your little country... the First Demon King.”

“WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAT?!”

Everyone gawked in surprise, much as I had when I first met him.

“Guess I didn’t mishear him earlier,” a buff guy with big horns muttered.

“But the First Demon King?” another demonkin lady wondered aloud. “That’s a tad far-fetched...”

Of course they’d struggle to believe him. Looking around, they seemed more confused than before.

Lucius-san stroked his chin. “Hmm... We can’t afford to waste too much time on this... Oh, I know! You’d all have been pretty screwed if I didn’t show up when I did, right? That means you owe me your lives, so you can trust me.” His gaze hardened a little, his voice dropping. “You’ll trust me, won’t you?”

*Damn, Lucius-san, that’s just kinda mean!*

It seemed to work, though, as the demonkin commanders were forced to begrudgingly nod and parted to let us pass. It was a perfectly Demon King—or honestly, just a demon—thing to do, but his smile as he looked at me was perfectly innocent.

“Go on, then! Do your thing!”

“O-Okay.”

In the end, I bent and agreed just as readily.

## Chapter 4: A Mysterious Intruder

**N**ow that I was finally able to approach the Demon King's daughter with Lucius-san's aid, I extended my hand over her and cast my Reversal Magic, Get Better. As soon as I did so, streaming motes of light flooded from my hand into her body.

"What?!"

The Demon Generals all started in surprise, and the white-haired handsome guy grabbed me roughly by the front of my robes.

"The fuck are you doing?! What kinda magic was that?!"

"Huh? D-Do I have to say the name...?"

"Course you do! Sure, voiceless incantations are cool and all, but how the hell are we supposed to know what you cast on our Routier-sama?! Spill it, now!!"

I could feel a similar malice from all the other commanders around us.

*Aww... D-Do I really have to say it? They'll kill me if I don't, but I'm pretty sure they'll kill me even harder if I do!*

The pressure was far too heavy for me to think clearly, let alone come up with a decent plan, and I found myself answering him.

"It was, um..."

"What was that, prick?! I didn't hear you!"

"It was Get Better..."

"Huh? What'd you just say?"

*Fine, dammit! I'll say it!*

"I-It's Reversal Magic! I call it Get Better!"

He stared at me blankly for a moment before his face twisted in rage. "Stop fucking around!!"

*I knew it! I shouldn't have said anything! I knew this was a bad idea!! Who named this spell anyway?! Right, it was me... Why the hell am I so stupid?!*

“You think this is some kinda sick joke?” he hissed. “You think you’re some shitty brat, fucking around on the playground?! How dare you—”

“Ngh... hmm...?” The prone demonkin girl’s eyes fluttered open. “Where am I...?”

“She’s awake?!”

As soon as her eyes opened, the white-haired guy shoved me roughly away and rushed to her side. The rest of the Demon Generals followed closely behind.

“Routier-sama! Are you all right?! How do you feel?!”

“I’m fine,” the girl muttered, dizzily looking around. “But what happened...?”

A demonkin with an odd sense of composed majesty readily bowed. “It would seem, Routier-sama, that you were victim to an underhanded villain’s Anathema and were cursed to sleep until death.”

Her eyes widened in horror. “A curse?!”

“Exactly. Fortunately, this man here has removed your ailment. I have confirmed your health with a skill, but...”

“But what?”

Her inquisitive gaze encouraged him to speak.

As soon as he said that, the other demonkin commanders whipped about to face me, ready to kill me again at the drop of a hat.

*Oh, give me a break!*

“I am unsure how to phrase this,” the solemn demonkin said, “but your curse has been replaced by Unending Health—a so-called Enchantment. I’ve never seen the like.”

“Huh?” The other generals looked to him in confusion.

*I thought that might happen... Landze-san got the exact same thing when I cured him. I still don't know the exact curse she got hit with, but all's well that*

*ends well, I guess.*

If I remembered correctly, it'd make her life ten years longer, and she'd be extra-resistant to injury and illness to boot.

The other generals checked her Status one by one, and they each started in surprise.

"Wh-What in the world?" the hot lady demonkin general muttered. "What a ridiculous effect..."

Lucius-san clapped me hard on the shoulder, grinning. "Just what I'd expect from you! Everyone knows curses can't be removed, and nobody could've guessed you'd turn that effect right on its head!"

The Demon King's daughter looked at Lucius-san in confusion. "Um... Who are you?"

"Me? Lucius Alsare. I was the First Demon King—though I can guarantee we're not related."

"Huh?!" Her eyes flew open. "I recognize that name, but you can't actually be the founder of my country... can you?"

"Course I am! I'm not surprised you don't believe me, but Seiichi-kun here brought me back from the Underworld—that was before he removed your curse, of course."

"From the Underworld?!"

Everyone started in shock again, unsurprisingly. I know I'd be shouting right along with them if I hadn't done it myself.

*What even am I at this point...?*

For the first time, the Demon King's daughter looked at me.

"So you saved my life?" she asked innocently.

"Uh, yeah, um... I guess that's what I did...?"

She hopped off her bed to approach me.

"Um..."

“ ... ”

She looked up at me with big, wet eyes.

*What is this? Is this how the kids are bullying people these days? This is too awkward for words!*





After a long and painfully awkward pause, she took a step back.

“I could feel an immense power from you... Are you really human?”

“I’m human,” I instantly replied.

*Not that I’m confident about that at all at this point.*

“Thank you for saving me nonetheless,” she said. “If what everyone else said is true, I was beyond saving. I need to thank you for your aid. Is there anything you want? Anything at all?”

I got a flash of PTSD from when I saved Landze-san. Apparently, I couldn’t even save the ruler of a country without getting an excessive thank-you. I didn’t want anything, and I didn’t save her for a reward. I couldn’t even think of anything I wanted.

“Um... You don’t need to thank me...” I started to protest.

The handsome white-haired guy glared at me, gaze sharpening into daggers. “You ain’t about to turn down Routier-sama’s kindness, are you?”

*God, he’s terrifying!*

“Sorry,” I apologized, deciding to come clean. “I can’t think of anything I want, so can you wait a little until I have a better idea?”

She seemed a little disappointed but nodded. “I suppose...”

I had to think about it either way, though, so I tried not to feel too guilty about it.

Nonetheless, I’d successfully saved her just as Landze-san had asked and decided to report back to him.

“Really?!” His face lit up. “Great! You’re a real piece of work, but I appreciate it.”

“Is that how you normally thank people who help you?!”

I let out a small sigh of irritation and turned to the trio of beaten Servants, which were still by the wall.

“So, uh... What’ll we do with them?”

“Oh, right.” Landze-san nodded in their general direction. “We’ll get them properly tied up and pass them on to Rona for questioning.”

*Right... Louise’s subordinate Rona-san’s really good at interrogations.*

“I’m afraid I can’t let you do that.”

Everyone turned in shock to look at the speaker. A sick-looking man with a thin, crooked smile was now standing between us and the Servants. All the assorted adventurers and Demon Generals drew their weapons.

“Who are you?!” barked the solemn demonkin, but the intruder ignored him.

“I can’t let you take these men into custody, you see... These pawns are a tad too valuable to sacrifice so early into the game.”

“Answer the damn question!” the white-haired guy hissed, flinging a spear of manifested darkness at the mystery man.

The intruder simply snapped his fingers, however, and the spear disappeared.

“What...?!”

“Rest assured,” the intruder continued, “we shall meet again. But this is the end of today’s encounter.”

With that, he snapped his fingers again, and in the blink of an eye, he and the three Servants behind him were gone.

*Who was that guy? I mean, he’s got to be an ally of the Servants at the very least...*

Even more disturbing, however, was that my body didn’t so much as try to react. I was sure his disappearing ability had to be a skill or magic or something, but if my Evolution Skill didn’t do anything, it couldn’t be either. It had to be some other kind of power.

While I was thinking, however, Landze-san was already barking commands at his men.

“Search the palace top to bottom! Find him and put the guards at the gates on high alert!”

“Sir!”

The panic continued for several hours, but in the end, no trace of the invader or the Servants was found.

## Chapter 5: Saria's Parents

**D**espite the intruder and the Servants' departure, Landze-san and his men had their hands full cleaning up after their attack, so I headed off to where Mom, Dad, and my other friends were hiding out. I was technically clear to return to the Academy, but with everything still so uncertain, I decided to touch base with them while I had the chance.

That was the plan, at least.

I glanced back at our uninvited tagalongs. "So, uh, how long are you gonna follow us?"

"I can't come?" the Demon King's daughter asked curiously.

"No, I didn't say that..."

"Then I'm coming."

"Look, I'm only trying to ask why!"

For some reason, she was intent on sticking with me.

I sighed. "Shouldn't you be with your aides or something instead of wandering off with me? I mean, you almost died, and you should really have a few more guards at least..."

She shook her head. "I'm safest with you. You're the strongest person here."

I couldn't argue with that.

*Why, though?! We've got all the strongest people in at least two countries right here, so how am I the strongest?!*

She didn't seem to notice my growing headache, however, as she continued in a murmur.

"Um... And you can call me Routier."

"Oh, uh... Okay, Routier-san."



“Just Routier.”

“Nonono, you’re a princess or something, right? I can’t.”

“Routier.”

“Uh...”

“Routier.”

“Okay, fine! I’ll call you Routier.”

“Good... good.” She nodded in satisfaction as I finally caved to her will.

“What’s your name?”

“Me? I’m Seiichi.”

“Seiichi... okay. And no being formal with me... I won’t let you even try, period.”

“Is it just me, or are you getting more and more assertive?!”

*Not that I really cared either way.*

I tried not to think about her intent too much as I entered the room where my parents and friends were waiting. When I opened the door, however, I saw that same eerily familiar pair of gorillas.

Dad noticed me and beamed. “Seiichi! How’ve you been?”

I shrugged. “Same as always, I guess.”

“Great! Saria-san and the others are doing well?”

“Yeah... So about those gorillas with you there...”

I knew that there had to be some story behind them, and fortunately, one of the gorillas was quick to reply.

“Seiichi? You, know daughter? Saria’s mate?”

“Huh? Daughter?!”

That was the last thing I’d been expecting.

“Me, Saria’s mom. Sunny.”

“Me father. Adramelc.”

“Whoa whoa whoa... Just slow down a little there!”

“Talking monsters? How rare,” Routier remarked.

*They're seriously Saria's parents?! I mean, obviously her parents are gorillas, but still!*

I thought of Saria as human most of the time, honestly, so the Kaizer Kongs' declaration completely blindsided me. Even Routier seemed surprised.

“Did you realize?” Mom asked me confusedly. “Look, Sunny-san's eyes are just like Saria-san's.”

“You can tell?! I sure can't!”

*I always knew Mom was a little weird, but this is really taking it to the next level!*

Sunny-san studied me closely. “Hmm. Looking again... You, not bad. Didn't expect so strong.”

Adramelc-san nodded. “Saria, find good male. Good stock for species.”

*I guess I should properly introduce myself, huh... I'd be rude not to.*

I turned to the pair. “Sorry for not introducing myself sooner. My name is Seiichi Hiiragi, and I've been going out with your daughter.”

“Ohh... Polite. So? Kids when?”

“Faster, better. Life, unpredictable.”

“Huwuh?!”

*Yeah, they're Saria's parents, all right! They think just the same!*

Sunny's brow furrowed in confusion. “But daughter, gorilla. You, human. That okay? No problem?”

“Oh, right. She's living life looking like a normal human right now, so no problems there. Besides, I'd love her even if she was just a pure gorilla.”

“Me, see... Mm? Daugher, normal human? How?”

*So they don't know about the Fruit of Evolution, then? I thought they'd always been growing in the Forest of Endless Heartbreak...*

I explained to them about the Fruit, and how with their power, Saria was able to “evolve” so that she looked human.

“Fruit of Evolution?” Adramelc grunted. “Me, remember weird fruit...”

“But Fruit, secret. Not for humans. We, want try, but...”

“Really? I have some if you’re curious. Wanna try?”

I pulled out the magic app I used to grow the Fruit. The virtual trees were now full of fruit, and I had plenty to spare now. I had no use for them myself. They were strong, of course, so I couldn’t give away the Fruit lightly, but I trusted Saria’s parents enough to hand them over without issue.

The pair took the Fruit and began examining them from all angles.

“Hrm... This, Fruit of Evolution?”

“No strong smell...”

Observing the pair, Routier tugged on my sleeve. “I want one, too.”

“Huh?” I averted my gaze. “That’s, uh...”

Fortunately, I didn’t have to come up with an excuse. Both Saria’s parents took bites out of their Fruit at the same time, sending them both reeling.

“Ugh... Taste baaaaaaaaaad!!”

*Yeah, big same there.*

It tasted awful, making it the one real drawback to the Fruit’s amazing effects. Routier’s jaw dropped as she watched the pair of monsters retch.

“Nevermind,” she muttered.

*Great, that’s one less thing to worry about. Thanks again, Fruit! I owe you one!*

I wiped my brow in relief.

“That, awful,” Sunny-san muttered uneasily. “Fruit, really make you human?”

“Well, about that...”

The key to activating the effect was defeating a monster higher than the consumer, and it didn’t do anything without that key. I hesitated to break the

bad news to them, but just then, that mechanical voice echoed through my head again.

**>Skill: Tuning has been activated. Now tuning your environs.**

“Whuh?!”

That wasn’t what I was expecting.

*Why is it activating now?! What’s going on?!*

Sunny-san and Adramelc-san began to glow.

“What?!”

“Why, glowing?!”

**>Tuning complete. Changelog: Seichi-sama’s ‘Evolved’ effects have been applied to both nearby individuals who have consumed Fruit of Evolution. Both individuals have gained the ‘Evolved’ effect.**

“You’re kidding!”

*This makes no sense! How can I just spread my Evolution to other people like that?! Is my body really just “everything goes”?! And why am I still surprised now, after all this nonsense?!*

The glow surrounding the pair began to grow into a brilliant aurora, and everyone had to shield their eyes. Once it had finally dissipated, I opened my eyes to find two humans standing there.

“Is this a human body?” Sunny-san muttered.

“What a strange feeling,” Adramelc-san agreed.

One was a pretty older woman with long, messy crimson hair, and beside her, there was an older man with matching red hair mussed up in a cowlick. Both of them were completely and utterly naked.

“PUT SOME CLOTHES ON!!” I yelled at the pair.

*Right... Whenever a monster becomes human, they’re naked. How could I forget that?!*

Despite my wailing, Sunny-san put her hand on her hip and puffed out her chest with pride.

“Why? Is there anything wrong with how we look?”

“It’s perfectly normal for a monster, sure,” I reassured her. “But you guys are human now!”

Adramelc-san hopped in place, swinging his arms. “Oh... the air feels so refreshing without fur!”

“Adramelc-san, stop! D-Don’t do that!”

He only laughed and ignored me.

*Don’t they have any shame? No, wait, Saria was bashful in her gorilla form... Gah, I give up!*

No matter how hard I tried, neither of them seemed at all interested in putting some clothes on, and they kept running around and avoiding me.

“Please, get ahold of yourselves! Please!!”

In the end, I had to forget about their relationship with Saria altogether, stopping and clothing the pair of them by force.



## Chapter 6: The Truth about the Cult of the Wicked One

**A**fter I had finally gotten Saria's giggling parents to wear some clothes, but before I could fully catch my breath, a woman I didn't recognize approached me.

"Are you Seiichi-san?" she asked.

"Uh... Yeah, that's me."

She had silky golden hair that reached her waist, and she was clad in an armored dress. Something about her seemed familiar, but she chuckled and continued before I could ask.

"Ah, where are my manners? I am Eremina Kisa Windberg, also known as the S Rank Adventurer the Thunder Emperess. I also happen to be Landze's wife."

"You're his what?!"

Thinking back, when Roberto from Class S was introduced during the Clash of Classes, the announcer mentioned that his mother was an S Rank adventurer.

*But what does she want with a guy like me?*

"Is everything okay?" I asked her nervously.

"I've heard a lot about you from my husband," she explained. "When he was last in trouble, I wasn't even in the country. Instead, I heard you saved his life, and I've been meaning to thank you myself ever since." She bowed deeply. "Thank you so much for saving Landze."

"Y-You don't need to bow like that! He's helped me a ton, too, and I really like this country... um..."

She smiled at me warmly. "I'm glad to hear you say that."

A question I'd been sitting on for a while popped into my head. "Mind if I ask you something?"

“Oh? What is it?”

“Can I ask why you’re an adventurer? I-I don’t mean anything bad by that, I’m just a little curious is all...”

It sounded ruder than I thought it’d be, but I couldn’t take my words back now.

Fortunately, she didn’t seem angry at all and explained readily. “I suppose it’s a strange hobby for a queen, isn’t it? I’ve always loved adventuring, though, and my sweet Landze insisted I continue with it, even after we were married. As such, I’m able to gather information on our neighbors as well as any particularly interesting techniques I happen to come across. There was also the diplomatic side of it, of course—but lately, I’ve been focusing my efforts on one particular problem.”

I gave her a curious look. “Problem?”

“Yes—the Cult of the Wicked One.”

“?! ”

*Those are the guys that attacked Barbodel the other day, not to mention all the trouble they just caused here in Terbelle...*

I’d heard the name, but I didn’t know anything about them specifically. The lab-coat creep who attacked the Academy in particular had some weird and unsettling powers.

As I frowned over it, Eremina-san readily shared what she knew.

“Since you’ve saved Landze’s life, and because we could use your power to combat them, it’s only right that I tell you everything I know about them.”

“Oh, uh, thanks. I’ve fought one of those guys before, actually, but I didn’t really get what was going on back then...”

She nodded. “All right, then. First, I must mention that, as they sound, they worship a god. Do you know what god that is?”

*God? So, like the Black Dragon God I fought way back when?*

“It doesn’t look like you know,” she continued, noticing my confusion. “Let’s see how much you do know, then. You’re aware this world has been abandoned by the gods, correct?”

“Oh, yeah, I heard that. One of the gods started a war against all the others, right? When that one lost, it got sealed away.”

That was what Beatrice-san told me, at least. The Fruit of Evolution was born from the chaos of that battle, even.

“Exactly,” she confirmed. “And the god that the Cult of the Wicked One worships is none other than that beaten, sealed deity.”

“What?!”

*So, it’s not a folk “god” like the Black Dragon, it’s a real God like the one that sent me here?! I’m not sure I’m ready for this...*

“B-But it’s locked up, right?” I stammered. “How are they even supposed to worship it?”

“Their aim is to break that seal and bring that God back into the world.”

“Wait, revive a *God*?! How can they even do that?!”

*I mean, how are humans supposed to revive a literal God?!*

Eremina nodded gravely. “That’s the problem—how they plan to achieve their goal.”

“But how?”

“You see, if they spread enough negative emotions—sorrow, rage, despair—that energy can be used to revive their God. Our attackers were Servants, individuals who have received divine power to see their deity reborn. That’s their goal, and why they’re so intent on causing harm the world over.”

“Negative emotions, huh...”

*Well, that obviously makes the sealed God evil. And wait, weren’t the Gods supposed to love people way back then? Why does it need negative emotions in particular? What, is it a sadist? Is it so lonely that it’ll take any attention it can get?*

“I think I get what the cult’s after now,” I told her. “But why doesn’t everyone just agree to hunt them down and stop them? They’re international, right?”

“If only it were so easy,” she sighed. “Besides, the cult has only shown itself to the world recently, and it was nothing more than a rumor for ages before that. You must also remember how powerful the Servants are... They have plenty of players like that grinning creep who let his allies escape, so we can’t act against them lightly.”

“Oh... Yeah, that makes sense.”

*Sounds like they’re a serious problem, then. Why are those Servant guys working with an evil cult like that anyway?*

Their God didn’t seem to care whose emotions it fed on, after all, so I couldn’t imagine anyone serving it willingly.

“What if they revive their god?” I asked.

Eremina-san shrugged. “I can’t say. Given that all the other Gods have long left us, however, I can’t imagine it would be anything pleasant.”

In the end, it felt like I was left with more questions than answers. I still just wanted to live a happy, peaceful life with Saria and the others, but I doubted trouble could stay away from me long enough for that. The one thing I knew for certain was that even if the so-called Wicked One used to love people in ancient times, it was our enemy now, and I’d do anything to make sure Saria and the others stayed safe.

As we finished talking, Landze-san and the others returned from their search for the creepy-smile Servant.

“Dammit,” the king swore. “There’s no sign of them.”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself,” Eremina soothed him. “There’s a lot we still don’t know about the Servants’ powers.”

“I just wish he hadn’t run off with our hostages... We *needed* the information those three had.” Landze sighed, then turned to me. “Thanks again for saving us, Seiichi. The Demon King’s daughter wouldn’t have made it without you, and your friends were key to staving off the monsters. I owe you one.”

“N-No, I’m just happy to help! But I should really get back to the Academy now... I don’t want to make anyone worry about me, and Barney-san has an important job I really should get started on.”

“That so? Hope that job of yours goes smoothly—and if you need any help, well, you know where to find me.”

“I’ll be fine,” I assured him. “But I’ll make sure to reach out if I’m in trouble.”

With that, I said my goodbyes to my parents, Saria’s parents, and everyone else who’d helped with this mess. Before I could leave, however, I felt a tug on my sleeve.

“Seiichi? Please take me with you.”

“Wait, *what?*”

That was the last thing I had expected Routier to say.

## Chapter 7: The Demon Generals Versus Seiichi

I stared blankly at Routier for a long moment.

“By ‘take you with me,’ you mean...?”

“I want to go to the Academy with you.”

“Routier-sama?!” The super-pretty demonkin lady’s eyes widened in horror. “You can’t! You only barely survived an attempt on your life, and now you want to willingly leave your protectors’ sides?!”

“Yeah!” the pretty white-haired guy sneered. “Sure, he saved you, but that’s no excuse!”

I could totally understand their protests. I was the one she’d asked, and I was still struggling to grasp the situation. To the generals, I was a total stranger who was literally threatening to whisk away their beloved leader.

Routier shook her head at them. “Reiya, Zolua, I’ll be fine. Seiichi’s strong.”

The white-haired guy scoffed. “Strong? Yeah, right! Sure, breaking your curse was pretty hot stuff, but how’re we supposed to know he can protect you in a fight?!”

The refined-looking demonkin nodded solemnly. “Routier-sama, I must agree with Zolua for once. That mere human appears far from strong.”

“You too, Zeros...?”

*Hopefully, she’ll reconsider now.*

Looking around, the other demonkin were just as upset by the idea, even though they remained silent.

*Wait, Lucius-san?! Stop smirking at me like that! This isn’t funny! Whatever you’re thinking, I promise it’ll be a bad—* “I know.” Routier looked up at her aides. “Why don’t you all fight Seiichi there, then? If he beats you, you can’t complain.”

“Oh dear,” I muttered.

*I knew this was a bad idea! I saw that flag coming! And “Oh dear”?! What am I even saying?! God, I wish I could just run away... All I want is to live in peace!*

The noble-looking demonkin frowned. “Are you certain, Routier-sama? You want *all* of us to attack this mere human?”

She nodded. “I’m sure. He’s strong enough.”

*Uh... Routier-san? You can have lower expectations of me! It won’t hurt you, I promise!*

The white-haired guy snorted. “Enough jokes, Routier-sama. Zeros or I could take him on in a heartbeat, and you want *all* of us? That’s just overkill.”

“I’m serious. Even if you all attack him together, Seiichi won’t lose.”

The white-haired guy glared at me. “Think you’re hot stuff, do you, human?!”

“Th-This isn’t fair!”

*Why’s he getting angry at me, anyway? I didn’t even say anything! Can he not yell at her because she’s important or something?! Man, this sucks!*

“What’s this?” Landze grinned at us in amusement. “Sounds like fun. You folks can use the training grounds if you like.”

“Gee, thanks, you shouldn’t have!”

*You know what? Fine! That’s the only way I’ll get anywhere at this rate!*

With that, I found myself following the others out onto the training ground. I was surprised to see Mom, Dad, my other friends, and even a bunch of castle guards followed us out onto the field. Suddenly, I was surrounded by people eager to see us fight.

*How did THIS happen?*

I sighed and slumped my shoulders as the Demon Generals opposite me glared, ready to fight—or kill me, judging from the murderous looks in their eyes.

*This is like a sparring match still, right? I’m not actually in mortal peril, right?*



The white-haired guy cracked his neck. "Right. Let's get cracking."

"I hope you don't mean that literally!"

*Dammit, they really want me dead!*

The demonkin ignored me, though, and Landze stepped between us.

"Right, so let's get this match out of the way. Anything and everything's game as long as you don't kill anyone."

"Shit," the white-haired guy cursed under his breath.

"L-Landze-san! Did you hear him? He wants me dead!"

My violent opponent sneered at me. "You're hearing things."

"You're kidding!"

The ultra-pretty demonkin lady raised her hand. "One question before we begin."

Landze raised an eyebrow at her. "Go on."

"You said we can't *kill* him, but can we hurt him so badly he'll *wish* he was dead?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Whose side are you on?!" I shouted.

*Those are some messed-up rules! I just know she's going to do everything she can to hurt me now!*

Landze chuckled at me. "Relax. You'll be fine, promise."

"Who or what, exactly, do you think I am?"

He smoothly averted his gaze. "Let's get started, then."

"At least answer me!"

My words fell on deaf ears, however, as Landze took his distance from the combatants.

"All right, the Demon Generals versus Seiichi... BEGIN!"

"Consume!"

At the exact instant Landze gave the signal, the white-haired guy coated his body in some kind of dark energy, and countless black tentacles whipped out toward me. For a moment, I thought it was some kind of spell—but since my body didn't react, it apparently wasn't either magic or a skill.

*First that creepy smiling Servant, now this guy... It looks like there's some other kind of power at play here that I don't know about.*

As I watched the tendrils snake through the air toward me, however, a buff demonkin with oni-like horns rushed at me from the side.

"I'll beat you down before Zolua's Darkness gets the chance!"

*He looks pretty strong,* I thought idly before catching his fist in the palm of my hand.

"Huh?!"

The oni guy looked at me in shock.

*Wow, he's really just leaving himself open.*

"Urs, get out of there!" the pretty demonkin shouted.

He paled. "W-Wait, Reiya! I'm still—"

"Phoenix-Flame Rondo!"

"Nooooooooooooo!"

The pretty lady fired off a flurry of spiraling wheels of golden flames. Again, my body didn't react, so this was probably another one of those non-magic non-skills. It looked like the macho guy was in the line of fire—in fact, he took every single one of the attacks for me. I let go of his fist in surprise, and he slumped away, a singed mess.

"How dare you!" the pretty lady screamed at him. "You made all my attacks miss!"

"I'm the victim here!" he moaned weakly.

*I feel sorry for you and all, guy, but I'm literally getting ganged up on here. If anyone, I'm the victim.*

It was at that point that the tentacles finally reached me. They weren't slow, but so much had happened in the last second or so that I'd nearly forgotten about them. That told me just how strong the Generals were, if nothing else.

I considered dodging them, but a sexy-dressed demonkin woman took a few steps closer and met my eyes.

"Stop where you are! Charming Gaze!"

"Huh?"

A strange feeling came over me, one that I hadn't felt since I had eaten that Erotic Mushroom back in the Forest of Endless Heartbreak. That probably meant that the demoness was trying to hit me with Charm, but since that mushroom back in the Forest gave me Charm Immunity, it didn't work on me.

Her eyes widened in shock as she realized I was unaffected. "I never thought I'd meet someone I couldn't Charm... I'm about to lose all faith in my abilities as Succubus Queen altogether."

I smiled sheepishly at her. "Uh... sorry?"

While I was apologizing, though, I'd lost my best shot at escaping from the tentacles. I could probably still avoid them if I needed to, of course—but I didn't even have time to consider it as tentacles lashed out at me from above.

"What'd happen if I just punched them?" I wondered aloud. I gave them a light jab just out of curiosity. "Hup!"

The force of my blow instantly evaporated the shadowy graspers.

"Wh-Whaaat?!" The white-haired guy's jaw dropped. "M-My Darkness!"

I checked my knuckles. "Huh... I didn't think I could blow them away that easily..."

I didn't even feel the impact—the force of my fist moving through the air must've obliterated them before I got the chance.

*Jeez... That's just nuts.*

As I grimaced at my own power, Lucius-san guffawed and began to applaud me. "Ahahahaha! That's Seiichi-kun all right! His Darkness is special stuff, but

you just blew it all away!”

*Wait, it is? Dammit! I hate that I’m so busted!*

“Enough, Zolua.” The oddly majestic demonkin brushed his companion aside and extended his hand toward me. “Annihilation Sphere.”

He shot a translucent orb of some kind at me.

*I wonder if I can punch that, too?*

“Hup!”

Sure enough, I got it in one.

“What...?!”

The white-haired guy swore. “How the fuck did he beat the gecko’s Annihilation Sphere?! What the hell is this guy?!”

“Don’t give in so easily, Zolua-chan!” a large, effeminate demonkin chided. “He’s bound to have a weakness somewhere!”

“Huh?”

I blinked. The air around me suddenly felt different, somehow, in a way that I couldn’t quite put my finger on.

*What now?*

“Oh? You picked up on my mana? Well, now, I’m beginning to doubt you’re even human!”

“How rude!” I snapped. “Of course I’m human... probably!”

“My, how unconvincing.” He chuckled at me, but his expression turned grave in a heartbeat. “Playtime is over, sweetie. Now it’s your turn to disappear!”

“Huh?! ”

I reflexively drew my twin rapiers, Black and White, and slashed at the air where the weird feeling was strongest. It didn’t look like there was anything there, but I could feel my swords hit something.

The effeminate demonkin’s eyes flew open. “Oh, my! You shouldn’t have been able to see that!”

Apparently, that was his gimmick—invisible attacks out of nowhere. I kept on slashing, cutting through unseen threat after threat.

While I was occupied, the Generals regrouped, with even the pretty demonkin and the macho guy rejoining the main group, and they began a new, concerted attack together. They all moved in near-perfect unison, displaying a truly professional level of power and skill. Given just how unusual it was for me to go up against a group like them, and figuring that I may as well gain something from our fight, I decided to approach it as I would a proper sparring match.

*Jeez, fighting's so much harder when you try to rely on technique, not brute force...*

I got as much value as I could out of them before, one by one, they began to run out of steam, each collapsing into a panting heap.

“Th-The hell is up with this guy...?” the white-haired youth gasped.

The oni was wheezing so hard, he couldn't even reply at first. “Hahh... I-I can't... move...”

“It's hard to believe... someone like him... is even of our world.” The pretty lady panted.

*That's rude! I'm not an alien or anything... but I guess I'm not technically from their world, am I? Does that mean I am an alien? But more importantly...*

“So, uh, about our fight...”

“It's over!” the Generals all shouted at me in exasperation.

“Oh. Okay.”

And with that, I was declared the winner.

## Chapter 8: Louise's Resolve

**“W**e’re so sorry!” the Generals apologized.

After the match—or rather, my training—ended, the demonkin all bowed their heads to me. Routier was smirking at me for some reason, but I honestly couldn’t puzzle out why.

“Y-You don’t need to do that!” I hurriedly motioned for them to stand up straight. “I wasn’t offended or anything!”

The white-haired guy scoffed, his brow furrowing regretfully. “Damn, I’m an idiot... Why’d I get so angry at you, anyway? You saved Routier-sama’s life.”

The pretty lady nodded in sorry agreement. “I think her poor health must have shaken us more than we knew...”

I could understand where they were coming from, but I didn’t really mind. I would’ve been content to just save her life and be on my way, but nothing was ever that simple these days.

The white-haired guy’s expression turned deadly serious. “You can watch Routier-sama, then... Honestly, she’ll be safer in your hands than ours, much as I hate to say it. You’d better take good care of her, okay?”

“Wait, so do I have to take her with me now?!”

“Of course,” Routier replied.

“Don’t I get a say in this?!”

“Take good care of her!” The Demon Generals bowed again in unison.

“Why does nobody listen to me?!”

*I can’t turn them down if they’re all bowing like that... Oh, if only Japanese people could say no!*

Realistically, though, they were right that she'd be safest with me, especially since there was a fair chance she'd be targeted again in the future. I knew better than anyone how brokenly strong I was, but I had no idea how widespread my strength was yet.

"If you're all asking like that, I guess I'll just have to keep her safe," I replied with a sigh.

Routier smiled smugly at me. "I'm counting on you."

*All right... Now I can finally go back.*

I didn't want Saria or the others to worry, and the sooner I got to Barney-san's request, the better. I glanced around for Landze-san or my parents so I could tell them I was leaving, but they must've headed back inside the palace already. Before I could go inside after them, however, Lousse approached me.

"Teacher?"

"Hm? Oh, Lousse! I know it's been a while, but I should really be getting back to the Academy. Could you show me where Landze-san is?"

"Of course. I'll be going back with you after all."

"Thank—wait, what?" I replayed her words in my head. "Wh-What did you just say?"

"I said I'd be returning to Barbodel Magic Academy with you."

"I heard that! What I wanna know is why?!"

At my exasperation, however, her expression only darkened.

"There was nothing I could do in that battle."

I blinked in surprise. "Huh?"

"There was none who could match my strength save for the Black Paladin, and that was before I even became a Transcendent. That's why I respected you... I'd never met anyone so decisively more powerful than me before."

I remembered hearing as much from her subordinate, Claudia-san. She was so strong, she was all alone. She seemed relieved—happy, even—when I beat her.



“But when those horrifyingly powerful men attacked, when I was beaten so easily, I... I felt desperate. I was arrogant and foolish. If not for your friends’ aid, I would’ve failed to protect anything.”

“ ... ”

She looked me square in the eye. “I want to become stronger, Teacher. Strong enough to never lose to anyone... Strong enough to protect everything I hold dear.”



Her words hit a soft spot in my heart. Sure, I was strong—stronger than I could even comprehend. But that didn't mean that I was the most powerful thing out there. There could easily be something more powerful out there, and if that thing decided to hurt Saria or anyone else I cared about, I'd probably be unable to protect them. Case in point, I still had no idea what the Servants' powers were, much less the Demon Generals' abilities. I could beat them out with sheer force for now, but I felt I had to take a page out of Lousse's book and become stronger still.

*Strong enough to protect Saria and the others, no matter what.*

"Okay." I finally nodded to the knight. "If Routier's coming with me, you may as well tag along, too. And Lousse?"

"Yes?"

"Let's become stronger together."

Her eyes flew open in shock, but she composed herself a moment later and nodded, a faint blush on her cheeks. "Of course."

Of course, I was hoping to slowly build up my powers little by little. I had no idea just how crazy my body would get, and I would only be blissfully naïve for a short while longer.

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*Okay, so I have two whole new companions now... How am I supposed to explain this to the others? I bet Helen's going to be shocked.*

There wasn't any point complaining about it now, though. The more pressing issue was that I'd left the Academy with zero notice and had been gone for quite some time. I didn't waste any time in following Lousse to Landze-san.

I stepped into the room to find the king talking to my parents.

Landze-san shook his head with a smile. "Seiichi-kun sure saved our asses. I guess I've got you two to thank, in a way."

“We should be thanking you!” Dad insisted. “I’m just glad our boy is being useful.”

“He’s gotten so big, hasn’t he?” Mom gushed. “First Saria-san, now this... I wish he’d tell us when the wedding is.”

*Uh. How am I supposed to join a conversation like this?*

Fortunately, I wasn’t left standing awkwardly at the sidelines for long. Zeanos spotted me and approached.

“If it isn’t Seiichi-dono! What brings you here?”

Mom whipped her head about to look at me. “Oh, Seiichi! Come in, why don’t you?”

I chuckled awkwardly. “I-I had no idea you guys were so close with Landze-san...”

Dad broke out in a grin. “Of course! This’s the first king your old man’s properly met, but that’s more than enough to brag to the neighborhood about.”

Mom nodded cheerily. “I’ve never been inside a real palace, either. It’s so fancy! And all these maids... How much do you think they make?”

Dad shrugged. “No clue. Hey, do you think these maids sing and dance and write messages on your food for you? Y’know, like at those cafes back home?”

“Honestly, Makoto-san! I’m sure that’s only in Japan. These are real, bona-fide, professional maids. We’ll need to get a few pictures with them before we leave, though!”

“Ohh, yeah!”

Landze-san gave them a slightly disturbed look. “They, uh... They sure act like your parents.”

“What do you mean by that?!” I snapped back at him.

*They’re the only weird ones! Probably! I hope?*

I let out a heavy sigh. “Anyway... Sorry to say it, but I’ve really got to head back now. The others are probably worried, and I’ve got an urgent errand from the headmaster I’ve got to see to.”

Landze-san nodded understandingly. “No worries. I’ll make sure your parents are well cared-for, and Zeanos-dono already explained your friends’ circumstances. They said they want to immigrate, and I’m more than happy to accept them as our newest citizens. I’d count myself lucky to have such powerful individuals at hand, and I’ll naturally extend the same offer to Abel and his companions.”

“Really?! Thank you!”

Looking around, Abel’s party was nowhere to be seen, not to mention Gustle and the adventurers. They’d probably gone back to the Guild already.

*I’m glad he’s already decided to take everyone in... that’s one less thing to worry about.*

At that point, Routier stepped forward to address him. “I’ll be going with Seiichi, King Landzelf.”

“Huh?” He started in surprise but nodded. “Right, I forgot that that’s what you all were trying to hash out. If your ministers are fine with it, it’s not my place to tell you no. Besides, I can’t think of a safer place on the planet than with him.”

She nodded before continuing hesitantly. “Our meeting was derailed by the Cult of the Wicked One this time, but there’s no telling when someone will take issue with our alliance and target us again. Are you sure this is what you want?”

There was a serious look in her eyes, and Landze-san stopped to levelly meet her gaze.

“Of course. I’m not going to chicken out over something like this.”

Routier’s face split into a small smile, and she released the breath she’d been holding. “Thank you.”

With that, Landze-san turned back to me. “Later, Seiichi. See you around! Hopefully we can relax a little the next time you visit.”

“Of course. Thank you for everything.”

Routier turned to her Generals as I said my goodbyes to my parents. “Farewell. Zeros, Zolua, Reiya, Rialetta, Urs, Jade... the rest is in your hands.”

They bowed in practiced unison. “Take care, Routier-sama!”

Just before we left, Lucius-san approached Routier.

She looked up at him in confusion. “Who are you, again?”

“I’m glad to finally meet you... Too bad we don’t have the time to chat. Now that I’m alive again, though, we can talk whenever it’s convenient. Hopefully we can shoot the breeze then.”

“Okay...”

*Right... As the First Demon King, I bet he’s curious about what’s become of his country and his people. He’s right, though—they’ll have tons of chances to catch up later.*

Before we left, Louise said her farewells to Landze-san.

“Your Majesty. I’ll be taking some time off to train, starting now.”

“Sure... Wait, what did you say?!”

“I shall return anon.”

“Waitwaitwait! What, you’re going, too?! Nobody told me that!”

“I just did.”

“I keep telling you, you need to communicate shit like this to me *before* it happens! I’m your king! Your boss! Got it?!”

*So she never told him? Man, am I feeling sorry for the poor guy...*

In the end, Louise—and I, by extension—had to suffer through a thorough scolding before we were finally allowed to be on our way.

## Chapter 9: Into the Dungeon

Once Landze-san finally granted Louisse permission to accompany me, I opted to use my teleportation magic to take us back to the Academy instead of having the Treasure Chest ferry us. I took us to the middle of the training grounds, and just as I was hoping, there wasn't a soul in sight.

Louisse and Routier looked around us in awe.

"Amazing," Louisse breathed. "It takes a significant amount of mana to teleport one person such great distances, let alone three at once. It must be extremely difficult to be so accurate at this range..."

Routier nodded in agreement. "It's not impossible, but it'd take tons of mana. I'm impressed you still seem to have so much mana left in you."

I noticed they were both staring at me now.

*Jeez, this is awkward.*

"Uh... So, Routier, what made you think I was so strong in the first place? You thought I was strong without even seeing me fight, right?"

I broke her curse, sure, but that didn't necessarily translate to combat ability, just like that white-haired general said. Louisse's awe made sense since she knew I was strong from our earlier sparring, but Routier's confidence in my talents seemed to come totally out of the blue.

She looked up at me in confusion. "Was I wrong? I felt you were amazing, plain and simple. There wasn't any reason for it."

I sighed. "Another mystery, huh."

*What's "amazing" supposed to feel like, anyway? Does everyone feel that way about me? First time I've heard of any of this.*

"Well, whatever." I shrugged and turned to leave. "I bet everyone's gathered in my class already, so we'd better not leave them waiting."



With that, I lead my two new companions toward the classroom.

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“—and that’s about it. This is the Knight of Sword from the Kingdom of Windberg, Louise, and beside her there is the Demon King’s daughter, Routier.”

“So, *what’s* this?! I can’t believe you’ve brought even more unusual people with you!”

I briefly explained the situation and introduced Louise and Routier once we returned to Class F, and Helen was just as shocked as I’d expected. Saria, Al, Lulune, and Origa-chan were obviously all shocked as well.

Saria gawked. “Huh? Louise-chan?! What are you doing here?!”

“Louise-san at least makes sense.” Al shook her head in disbelief. “Who’s that other chick? She can’t really be the demonkin princess or whatever, right?”

I smiled awkwardly. “It’s a long story, honestly.”

Since nothing made sense as it was, though, I told everyone what I’d been up to, from being abducted by the Treasure Chest to my clash with the Cult of the Wicked One. By the time I finished, Helen had her head in her hands. She looked ready to explode.

“H-How does this keep happening to you...? You’re insane.”

“It’s not on purpose, promise,” I told her.

“Um, Seiichi-sensei?” Beatrice-sensei asked me worriedly. “Am I correct in assuming these two will be staying here?”

I nodded. “Yeah. I saved Routier’s life, sure, but she’s still being targeted by those Servant guys. Even her generals thought she’d be safer with me.”

Rachel raised her hand. “By ‘generals’, do you mean the leaders of the Demon Army~? They sound pretty powerful, so why do they think she’s safer with you than with them~?”

Helen rolled her eyes. “Save your breath. That Louise lady’s one of the strongest knights in Windberg, and she just said she’s Seiichi-sensei’s *apprentice* in all things. Don’t try to apply any kind of logic to anything he says or does.”

“You’re right, but you could put it more nicely!”

*Why does it sound even worse when she spells it out so logically?!*

Agnos grinned at me. “Sweet, Aniki! Looks like you snagged two more girls!”

Flora was absolutely giddy with excitement. “Seiichi-sensei! Can you pleeeeeeease teach me how to pick up girls now?!”

“You’re both so sincere, it hurts.” I grimaced at them before clearing my throat and continuing. “Anyway, Routier will be here under my protection for a while, and Routier’s here to learn some more under me. Also, I don’t want to be too abrupt, but I won’t be around in class for a while.”

Agnos’s jaw dropped. “Huh?!”

Beatrice-san just nodded understandingly. “Oh, of course. I remember now.”

*Sounds like someone must’ve told her about my dungeon expedition already.*

“I have a special task from Barnabus-san himself,” I explained to everyone. “A dungeon’s formed in the nearby forest where the Servant that attacked the Academy was hiding out. I’ll be exploring it along with Louise, Routier, Saria, Al, Lulune, and Origa-chan. Most of them were adventuring with me, after all. The rest of you will stay here and keep studying. It’s too dangerous to take you along.”

The color rapidly drained from Agnos’s face. “S-So Beatrice-neesan’s gonna be teaching us while you’re gone?”

I nodded. “That’s right.”

“Also note that I can’t conduct combat classes like he can,” Beatrice-san added. “As such, we’ll be working purely on theory until his return.”

He collapsed to his knees, despair filling his eyes. “Noooooooooooooooooooo!”

*Poor guy.*

I smiled at them a little. "There's not much else I can say right now... Good luck and happy studying, I guess?"

"Okay," echoed the class, sounding surprisingly fine with this turn of events.

"Kill me now!" Agnos cried.

Agnos's cry of horror alone echoed throughout the halls.

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As everyone got ready for their respective studies or adventures, I took Saria aside.

"Saria? A moment?"

"Hm? What's up, Seiichi?"

"I just saw your parents."

Her eyes flew wide with shock. "Huh?! M-Mom and Dad? Where were they?"

"Remember I told you the Cult of the Wicked One used a horde of mind-controlled monsters to attack Terbelle? Well, your parents were apparently in that group."

She cocked her head to the side in confusion. "Really? But I thought my parents were taken away to fight in the Demon Army?"

*Come to think of it, I remember her mentioning that a while back... No, she said that every monster stronger than her had been taken. I guess her parents must've left then.*

"Do you remember when that was?" I asked.

"Hmm... It was a long time ago, but I dunno when exactly." She gave me a sad look. "Sorry."

"Nonono, don't worry about it! I was curious, that's all! No big deal!"

"Okay." Saria nodded a little hesitantly. "But even though I don't remember when it was or what the person who took them away looked like, I'm positive they were conscripted into the Demon Army, not the Cult of the Wicked One."

“All right... Thanks for telling me.”

“Of course! Oh, were Mom and Dad doing okay?”

I grimaced. “They were full of life, trust me. Plus, they’ll be living with my parents now, from what I heard, so you can go see them whenever you like.”

I’d happened to overhear as much while Landze-san was scolding Louisse and me. They mentioned they’d become adventurers like Zeanos and the others, so they could be able to support themselves financially and help keep Windberg safe to boot. Not only that, they really hit it off with my parents, so there was nothing to worry about on that front, either.

Saria’s eyes lit up. “Really? We’ve gotta go say hi together sometime! I really wanna see your parents again, too!”

“R-Right... We can see my parents, too.”

I was pretty sure that by ‘saying hi,’ she meant properly introducing ourselves as boyfriend and girlfriend. Just thinking about it gave me goosebumps.

*I know we’ve already met each other’s parents and everything, but this feels so different... I guess I’d better track down Al’s parents and properly introduce myself to them, too. I’ll ask her about that later.*

With that, I resumed my preparations to delve into the dungeon’s depths.

※ ※ ※

“So this is the dungeon...”

“Wow, the entrance really looks the part!”

When we arrived at the dungeon’s entrance, I realized for the first time that I hadn’t actually asked any of the others if they even wanted to go in with me, but nobody thought twice about accompanying me.

The entrance was a cave that did, in fact, look just like I’d expect any dungeon’s entrance to look. It was almost identical to the cave we found in the Forest of Endless Heartbreak, the one that Zeanos had been lurking in when we first met.

*Who'd have guessed there was a cave in the middle of this forest, though?*

When they'd interrogated the Servant who attacked Barbodel, he told them about this place, and the scouts had found piles and piles of shredded monster corpses. The bodies were long gone by now, but the havoc he'd wrought on the ecosystem had invited a bunch of powerful new monsters in and gave birth to this dungeon.

Even though this would be my third time in a dungeon, it was only my second time going in the entrance proper, and I was so anxious I was afraid the monsters could hear my heart pounding from out here.

Saria flashed our newest companions a carefree smile. "It's nice we get to do this with you, Louisse-san, Routier-san!"

Louisse nodded. "Likewise. I'm looking forward to it."

"Yes. Very nice." Routier stopped and squinted at her. "You feel off somehow... In the same way Seiichi feels odd, in fact."

"Really? Hehe, as long as I'm the same as him!"

Louisse spotted Origa-chan and gave her a curt nod. "Origa. Long time no see."

"Mm. It's been a while, Louisse-oneechan."

"How have you been?"

"Awesome sauce." She gave the knight a thumbs-up.

*Where did she even hear that...?*

Routier followed Louisse's gaze, her eyes widening at what she saw. "A black cat beastkin? How unusual."

"Is it really that weird?" I asked.

The princess nodded warily. "In a sense... Or rather, it's unusual to see her so happy and healthy."

"Oh."

*Right, Origa-chan was orphaned because of her black fur and was forced to be an assassin... Why the hell does it have to be like that?*

Routier's gaze passed on to Lulune and Al. "You, with the brown hair... You also have the same aura as him. The other of you feels different, but you've clearly been blessed."

Lulune blushed. "M-Me? The same as Master...?"

"Blessed?" Al wrinkled her nose. "Sorry, can't say that rings a bell."

*If I remember correctly, the ring we got from the Treasure Chest turns her bad-luck curse into a blessing. That must explain it.*

I didn't know how, but Routier seemed to have a sixth sense for qualities and traits most people were blind to. She'd sniffed out Saria and Lulune as both having eaten Fruit of Evolution like me, after all.

Once she'd finished observing my companions, the demonkin princess cast her gaze into the maw of the cavern before us.

"This dungeon... Somehow, it feels so sad."

"Sad?" I echoed dumbly.

"Yes, but I'm afraid I can't tell why."

*Huh. It looks like an ordinary cave to me.*

"Well, we're not going to figure it out here," I announced. "Let's head inside."

My companions nodded, and with that, we took our first steps into the dungeon's dark depths.

## Chapter 10: Dungeon Traps

The inside of the dungeon was strangely bright.

I looked at the walls in confusion. “Huh... I don’t see any torches or anything. Where’s this light coming from?”

“Very astute observation, Teacher,” Louisse replied. “While some dungeons do indeed possess torches and the like as light sources, most have this same unnatural brightness. I’m afraid I’ve never put any thought into why, however.”

*Come to think of it, the Black Dragon God’s place was the same way... not that I had it together enough to take in the sights back then. There were monsters to worry about, plus we had to watch out for traps like the one that separated us from Al.*

We’d ended up just plowing through all the walls, so we probably didn’t have to worry about traps at all, but it never hurt to be careful. It wasn’t a strategy we could rely on, either, since we couldn’t risk a cave-in.

“Keeping an eye out for monsters is great, but watch out for traps, too,” I warned the others. “If you see anything weird on the floor or walls, let everyone else know right away.”

“Oh, Master!” Lulune pointed eagerly. “That wall’s a different color than the others!”

“Huh?” I peered at it more closely. “Yeah, you’re right.”

“May I push on it?!”

“Why?”

*I just told her to look out for traps, too.*

Origachan looked up at Lulune curiously. “Are you stupid, Hungry?”

Our resident donkey recoiled in horror. “Wh-What?! Are you saying you *don’t* want to push any strangely colored walls you find?! It might, er... What if it



makes steaks fall from the ceiling? What then?!”

“Sounds pretty gross,” I grimaced.

If enough steaks dropped with enough force, it could kill us, or at least make us greasy and uncomfortable.

“Seiichi.”

“Hm? What’s up, Routier?”

I turned around to find her looking intently at the ground in front of her.

“The floor here has an odd color... Hah!”

“Okay... Wait, did you just step on it?!”

She did it so naturally that it took a moment to process the motion.

“What the hell are you doing?!” I shouted. “What happened to looking out for traps?! Why would you trigger it on purpose?!”

She looked up at me in confusion. “I’ve never been in a dungeon before... Do different colors always mean traps?”

“Great. So we’re starting from literal square one, huh?”

I didn’t know if I was right for sure, but I thought it was common sense that things like that were telltale signs of hidden mechanisms. By that logic, purposefully stepping on one was stupid, bordering on suicidal.

“Okay, no need to panic... W-We just need to look out for any traps acti— WHOA!”

I was cut off as spears suddenly erupted from the walls on either side of me. I bent out of their path at the last moment, but it was close enough that I could practically smell the sticky-purple fluids on their tips. A drop of the stuff fell off, hitting the stone floor with an unsettling sizzle.

“Ohh!” My companions ooh’d and aww’d as they applauded my acrobatics.

“Stop clapping and help me, maybe?!”

With a little help, I managed to unthread myself from the mass of spears.

Louisse nodded sagely as I finally stepped free. “Ah, I see... By purposefully triggering traps, you can train your reactions.”

“Wait, what?”

“Without further ado, then...” She readily stepped forward onto a different spot of mismatched floor.

“WHAT?!”

“I’ll break through whatever trap is thrown at me!” the knight announced. “Now, come at me!”

“What happened to avoiding obvious danger?!” I shouted in exasperation. “Are you crazy?!”

She shook her head firmly. “I understand now, Teacher! Only by treading the path of a reckless fool can one achieve true strength!”

“You’re reading *way* too deep into this!!”

She braced herself for the trap’s activation, and then—

“Whuh?!”

I had to bend over into a reverse bridge to avoid a sweeping laser that came slicing toward my neck. The beam instantly vaporized the few strands of hair that were a tad too slow to avoid the trap.

“Ohh!” Again, applause from my companions.

“Seriously, why don’t you guys help me?!”

“What about the wall?” Routier wondered aloud, pressing hard on the suspicious spot Lulune had found.

“Stop tha—WHOOPS!”

A pit suddenly opened beneath me, and I was only able to avoid falling in by twisting my prone body awkwardly out of the way.

Al whistled in admiration. “Not bad, Seiichi.”

“You’re so cool!” Saria enthused.

“Enough with the traps already!” I pleaded.

*You could at least try to be worried for me instead of just enjoying the show!*

I pulled myself back to my feet, casting an uneasy look around. “By the way, Al, you think you’d struggle with this dungeon’s monsters? Judging from the power of those traps, I mean.”

She pursed her lips in thought. “Hmm... I’ve gotten a heck of a lot stronger than last time, and I’ve got no idea how to tell how strong I am with you showin’ off, but I doubt I could get through this place alone. Louisse-san could probably pull it off, though... I’ve never even tried to take on a dungeon alone before, and I barely know the first thing about traps.”

I nodded. “Okay... What about you, Saria? Are your animal instincts pointing out any dangerous monsters in the area?”

“Same as Al said!” Saria replied instantly. “I can probably take on anything here one-on-one, but I dunno if I can clear out the whole cave that way.”

“Right... I keep forgetting that you’re a monster. I still don’t know what exactly your ‘animal instincts’ do, but you’re a good girl. You don’t carry a weapon around, let alone fight monsters that often.”

She blinked at me in surprise. “Really? I need to turn back into my monster form to fight, sure, but I can use my full power if I just turn my head back.”

Al grimaced. “Don’t. I’m with Seiichi on this one—that’d be weird.”

“Aww...”

I didn’t want to imagine her gorilla head on her human body, but I didn’t want to tell her no outright. It was still a means of accessing her full power, after all, and there was no telling when she might need it.



Fortunately, Louisse got the message, and neither she nor Routier triggered any more traps on purpose.

*Why is that even a problem, though? Hasn't Louisse been in a million more dungeons than me?*

We walked for a while longer before Origa-chan's ears twitched. "Mmm? Seiichi-oniichan, something's coming."

"What? Oh, you're right."

I noticed its presence right after she mentioned it. My Clairvoyance skill not only kept an enemy radar up at all times, but I could use my Life Energy proficiency to scan for any and all living things.

"Please leave this to me, Teacher."

Louisse stepped forward. If she wanted to be stronger, this was exactly how she could do it.

Finally, our opponent appeared before us. It was a bear-like creature that was nearly ten feet tall on its haunches. Its eyes were oddly round and shiny, much like the old bear mask Berard used to wear, but any cuteness that might've earned it was lost on its trunk-like, viciously clawed arms. It even had some sort of jar on its head as a makeshift helmet.

As soon as it spotted us, its eyes took on a fresh gleam.

*"Ah! Humans!"*

"Huh?"

That was the last response I was expecting. It felt more like a friendly, fairytale, Goldilocks-type bear, not a bloodthirsty killer. I used Greater Analysis on it just in case.

**<DUNGEON BEAR> Level: 488**

*No shit! That's a really high level for a random bear!*

Its name aside, the level put this dungeon as more-or-less equal to the Forest of Endless Heartbreak or the Black Dragon God's place. I had no idea why I had such consistent luck, but I couldn't really complain. I had no idea what Al's level

was, but it probably wasn't too far from Saria's... then again, I hadn't checked her level in ages, so she'd probably gotten stronger since.

Now that I thought about it, I could probably only understand it thanks to Universal Language Comprehension. Saria could also figure out what it was saying, maybe Lulune too. Routier might be able to understand the gist of what he was saying, but I'd be surprised if she understood everything.

The bear eagerly started sprinting toward us, its foreclaws extended.

*"Humaaaaaans! Play with me!"*

*How sweet! How innocent! Is it even a monster? I guess if it tries to play with us like it would another bear, that'd be pretty lethal...*

While I mulled over this new dilemma, Lousse had already sprung into action.

"Hahh!"

"L-Lousse, wait! Stop!!"

*"Gaaaaaaaaaah?!"*

"No! Bear-saaaaaaaaan!!"

*I was too late!*

Lousse closed the distance between her and our new "friend" in the blink of an eye, cleanly severing its head from its shoulders. As its head thudded to the floor, she turned to look at me in eager anticipation.

"Well, Teacher? How did I do? Am I getting stronger?"

*"Wh-Whyyyyyy! I just wanted to play with you...!"*

I could only stare at the dismembered beast in horror.

*I'm so sorry! I swear I tried to stop her!*

It cried tears of fresh blood as it faded into motes and vanished forever.

*Dammit, I never thought being able to hear monsters could suck so much!*

"Um... Teacher? Is something wrong?"

I finally realized that I hadn't even looked at her, let alone given her a proper answer. The anxiety in her eyes was steadily growing.

“Wha? S-Sorry, I, uh... Nice job? Yeah, let’s go with that.”

“Really?” She let out a sigh of relief. “In that case, go on.”

She stuck her head out toward me.

“Go... what?”

“Hm? Do you not pat good girls on the head?”

“Where the hell is *that* coming from?!”

*What is she, six years old?! I only do stuff like that for Origa-chan!*

“Is that a no?”

“Uh...”

Her expression barely changed, but she still seemed to droop with sadness. In the end, I had to give in.

“Fine... You did good.” I patted her on the head.

“Thank you.”

For some reason, there was genuine joy in her eyes.

## Chapter 11: The Pentalisk

**A**fter rewarding(?) Louisse with head pats, Saria and the others seemed reinvigorated, and I could barely lay eyes on the next monsters we came across before somebody slaughtered them. Luckily, there were no more disturbingly friendly monsters like that first bear.

*Honestly, I'm still so guilty about this I could die... I've gotta prevent shit like that from happening again, no matter what.*

"Seiichi!" Saria beamed at me. "See, I killed it! Now you have to pat my head!"

"Hey, Seiichi!" Al was glaring, but her cheeks flushed bright red. "It's dead! You, uh... You better pat my head now!"

"Do you see how fast I slew that one, Teacher?" Louisse tilted her head toward me, her cheeks slightly pink. "If you please."

*So, uh. What the hell is going on here? This is a dungeon, right? Why is nobody the slightest bit worried?*

As I tried to figure out what was going on, Origa-chan looked up at Lulune.

"You're not joining them, Hungry?"

"Hm?" The donkey started. "No, I couldn't possibly interrupt Saria-sama and the others' efforts..."

Origa-chan nodded. "My turn, then."

"Wh-What?!"

I frowned at the sight.

*Great. That's someone else who'll need head pats.*

Routier peered up at me. "Is this normal for dungeon-delving?"

"No! Not at all!"



*Absolutely not! Probably... I hope not? I don't even know!*

As it turned out, the first Dungeon Bear's level was about average, and the dungeon seemed like it was difficult. Even now, Louisse was slashing at a new monster.

"Hahh!"

*"Grrrrrgh... Woarrrrrrrgh!!"*

This time, our opponent was Blood Hound, a Level 621 monster with deep crimson fur that was nearly seven feet long. Its eyes were unusually large and bloodshot. Luckily, though, there were no moral dilemmas with this one. I shivered a little at its words.

*"HYAHAAAAAAAAAA!! Meat, fresh meat! I'm gonna rip you all apart and gobble you down!"*

Most of them were like that. Even the Dungeon Bears we ran into after the first one were homicidal, too, which was a relief.

The Blood Hound was nimble and dexterous, and it could make great use of the limited space of the dungeon to leap off walls and attack from all manner of angles. Louisse managed to block its latest slash with the flat of her slender blade.

"Kh!"

"Over here, mutt!" Al roared.

She swung her massive axe at the wolf, but it smoothly dashed away—right into the arms of Saria in her gorilla form.

"Saria, smash!"

*"Warf?!"*

She landed a heavy punch on the monster's flank, sending it reeling. Louisse rushed in for a follow-up before it could recover, plunging her blade deep into its flank. The blow proved fatal, and it rapidly faded into motes of light.

Since I didn't slay it, there weren't any drop items. If I had, I probably would've evolved a few more times already.

Louisse let out a sigh of relief. “The enemies have been getting rather strong... I may not have been victorious alone. Saria-san, Altria-san, thank you for your assistance.” She bowed politely to them.

*Wow, she’s so nice. I’m sure she wouldn’t have killed that first bear if she could hear it...*

With that, she continued to carve through the monsters, steadily honing her skills with each kill. Even against stronger opponents, she was able to take them out with Al and Saria’s aid. They weren’t always lucky to run into monsters one by one, but even against small mobs of monsters, Lulune and Origa-chan pitched in, and they were able to fight through without any significant injuries.

Routier nodded understandingly at the sight. “I knew you were abnormally strong, but even your companions are unusually powerful... Is that thanks to you, perhaps?”

“Wh-Who knows?”

I didn’t know how to reply to her. I didn’t think I had anything to do with their strength, specifically, but I couldn’t be sure.

We continued through the winding tunnels at a leisurely pace before coming into an unusually spacious chamber.

“Where are we now?” Routier wondered aloud, scanning the room. “I suppose dungeons are more than endless, maze-like tunnels...”

“Yeah,” Al confirmed, tightening her grip on her weapon. “Cept in wide-open spaces like this, you typically get either a nasty trap or a boss.”

Louisse nodded. “Rooms like this are far from unusual. If you’re lucky, you may find a treasure chest.”

“A chest with food?!” Lulune slobbered.

The knight gave her an apologetic look. “Likely not. Besides, there seems to be no treasure here.”

Origa-chan looked up at Lulune worriedly. “You would eat food you found in an abandoned box, Hungry?”

“Naturally! What a foolish question!”

She scrunched up her face in disgust, putting a hand on her stomach. “Mm... You’ll get a tummyache.”

“This isn’t the first time Lulune’s been a glutton,” I added. “More importantly, if there’s no treasure here, then this room’s gotta have either a trap or a boss.”

*“Precisely, intruder.”*

“Huh?!”

The strange, deep voice seemed to come from nowhere and everywhere all at once. A thick set of doors emerged from the doorway behind us, slamming shut.

I cursed. “Both a boss *and* a trap?!”

Saria pointed toward the far end of the room. “Seiichi, look!”

I followed her direction to find another thick pair of doors there, identical to the ones that were behind us. The only difference was the pair of unnaturally large human eyes that slit open on either side.

*“You have done well to come so far, intruders. I am the dungeon, and I welcome you miserable wretches into my midst.”*

There didn’t seem to be any source of the sound; it was just all around us.

“You... welcome us?” I caution.

*“Verily... Now, accept my gift to you.”*

Its pupils suddenly dilated, and countless monsters appeared in the room before us. There were dragons, wolves, zombie, all manner of mismatched creatures swarming us and attacking in unison.

“Shit!” Al cursed. “A Monster House!”

“Monster what?” I echoed confusedly.

“A type of trap that summons swarms of monsters,” Louise explained. “Normally, however, there is no need for eyes or any manner of voice to activate. We would ordinarily be allowed to proceed after slaying a certain number of opponents, but under such circumstances, we cannot make such an assumption.”

*Oh, so the walls don’t normally grow eyes?*

Either way, we'd have to fight our way to safety before anything else.

"I will consider this an extension of my training." The knight drew her blade. "Water Laser!"

Instead of firing a high-power jet of water, however, the spell wrapped itself around her weapon, fortifying and lengthening it into a heavy broadsword.

"Hahh!" With a single heavy strike, she cleaved through the first rank of attacking enemies. She cast a look back at me. "Please, allow me."

"Uh, sure. Go ahead."

She threw herself into the horde with startling speed.

*Yeah, I can't imagine her being weak by any measure... Those Servant guys just have the edge because of their weird powers. That's more than enough reason to get stronger, though.*

My other partners sprang into action, following Lousse into the fray.

"Al!" Saria grunted. "We, fight!"

"Y-Yeah... Dammit, I'm still not used to a gorilla head on your body!"

"Flash Arm!"

"Already?!"

Saria's Flash Arm Skill sent her rocketing at the nearest hound, driving her tiny human fist into his flank. The sheer force of her blow ripped clean through it and even blasted chunks out of the monsters behind it.

*It's been a while since I've seen her Flash Arm, but I don't remember it hitting that hard... I mean, she blew how many people apart with that? If she hit me with an attack like that before I evolved, I'd be very dead.*

Al only gawked at Saria's strike for a moment before lashing out at the nearest monsters with her colossal two-handed axe.

"I ain't weak, either!"

She drove her axe into a boar-like monster's flank, but as it made contact—

"Get wrecked! Ice Shock!"

A burst of frigid air exploded from her weapon's blade, flash-freezing the boar from the inside. The wreathing frost rapidly snaked out across the floor, rooting countless more in place.

"Excellent strike, Al-san."

Louisse didn't waste the opening, methodically cutting down the immobilized enemies one by one.

Together, the trio's efforts were thinning the horde before our eyes, leaving the rest of us to stand and watch from the doors.

*Why am I even here?*

Routier tugged at my sleeve, and I turned to look down at her.

"Hm? What's up?"

"I considered myself safe when I decided to accompany you. Seeing your companions, however, I feel even more reassured."

"Really? Great."

She was an incredibly important person to demonkin everywhere, and I was glad she felt safe.

The giant eyes began to quiver and dart about uncertainly as they witnessed the carnage.

*"Wh-What?! Who are you people?! This is abnormal... Impossible!"*

*Abnormal?! How rude! I guess it's right, though.*

*"L-Let's see you slay this!"*

The heavy door between the eyes swung open, and out slithered a colossal serpent with five large heads. It felt like it was in an entirely different league from the lowly mobs we'd found until now. I wasted no time using Greater Analysis on it.

**<PENTALISK> Level: 893**

*Wow, that's strong... Like twice the level of everything else in this place. Is this the boss?*

Louisse lunged at the serpent, having finished cleaning up the weaker monsters. She removed one of its heads with a single slash.

“Huh?! Wait, did you just kill it already?!”

I couldn't hold back my surprise.

*“Fuhahahahaha!!”* the eyes cackled. *“You fool! It's unkillable unless you slay all five heads at once! As if you wretches could must such coordination!”*

Sure enough, the removed head fizzled away into nothingness, and a new head sprouted from the unoccupied neck-stump.

*This could be rough...*

Lulune and Origa-chan exchanged looks.

“Ready, Hungry?”

“If its head regrows, does that mean I could keep eating it forever?!”

“You're ready.”

With that, there were five of them—Louisse, Saria, Al, Lulune, and Origa-chan, all ready to fight. If their timing was good enough, they could each take out one head and slay the serpent. Timing their attacks so precisely, however, was far easier said than done.

Routier shot me a worried look. “Are you sure they'll be all right? Perhaps you should help them?”

For some reason, though, I was convinced they could do it. Obviously, I was worried they might get hurt, but my faith in them easily won out over the anxiety. This would be the best for Louisse, besides... she was here to get stronger, and I was ready to lend a hand if she needed help.

The Pentalisk, however, was far from an easy foe. As the five fighters tried to close in on it, its five mouths spewed sickly purple venom at them. The venom even melted through the stone floor with an unsettling, sloshing sizzle, meaning that even an indirect hit would be incredibly painful. Its worst attack, however, came when its eyes began to shine. My friends were dodging it effectively, but anywhere the light hit would begin to petrify. Getting hit would slow them

down significantly, and any hit on their vitals would be lethal. I was the only one with immunity to all status conditions, so they had to be incredibly cautious.

They exchanged blow after blow, but neither party was able to make any progress on the other. Then, all at once, my party realized something.

“Ohhh!”

“Huh?”

I had no idea what their idea was as they all took their distance. The Pentalisk regarded them warily, one head fixed squarely on each. Then—

“Flash Arm: Spread!”

“Sundering Wave!”

“Fall Disaster!”

“Ego Art: Kill!”

“FOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOD!!”

With only one of them uttering a strange war-cry, they all unleashed their biggest area-of-effect attacks. Saria used Flash Arm with both her arms, creating a blast wave of immense size. Al brought her axe down on the ground in a massive slashing blow, shattering the earth and sending a massive blade of energy forward. Louisse used the same Fall Disaster spell I was unfortunately very familiar with, imbuing it in her sword to release a massive blade of water. Origa-chan split herself into five identical clones, with each one stabbing a kunai into one of the serpent’s heads. Lulune... let out a large kick? I wasn’t sure what she did exactly, but it looked impressive. To make a long story short—

“Each of us just has to attack every head at once!” they all shouted, perfectly in sync with each other.

The Pentalisk took all five attacks at the exact same time. It widened its ten eyes in shock, but was vaporized before it could move a muscle.

*“Impossible!”* the wall eyes shouted. *“This can’t—gyaaaaagh?!”*

The attacks pierced through the serpent, colliding with the far wall. Dust exploded into the air, and by the time I could see again, the path ahead was

wide open.

“Seiichi.” Routier looked up at me. “Your companions are rather ridiculous, too.”

“Uh... Yeah.”

I could do nothing but nod in agreement.



## Chapter 12: The Snake Goddess

**B**eyond the shattered door was a staircase that snaked down into the ground.

“A staircase?” I muttered. “I guess some dungeons have more than one floor, huh?”

All the dungeons I’d been in since coming to this world were only a single floor, so I’d assumed every dungeon was like that.

“Some do,” Louisse explained. “Most dungeons in flatlands are a single floor, but they tend to fold in on themselves like a maze. The dungeons that go deeper tend to have a more straightforward layout, but each level has progressively stronger monsters.”

“Okay... That makes sense.”

With that, I decided to lead the way down the stairs. I was far from prepared for what I saw, however.

“Huh?!”

There was open sky there, oddly enough, complete with a sun. A wide-open grassy plain extended around us, with the occasional tree dotted here or there. I couldn’t believe that we were underground.

“Wow!” Saria breathed. “It’s like we’re outside!”

Origa-chan squinted up at the sky. “Mm... good picnicking weather.”

“Who has the sandwiches?!” Lulune looked around excitedly.

Nobody else seemed as shocked as me, oddly enough.

*Wait, am I the weird one here?*

Routier seemed confused, at least. “Is this normal for a dungeon? I can’t tell.”

“Not as far as I know. Does any of this make sense to you, Louisse-san?”

She thought for a moment. “Some dungeons will have more natural cave formations or underground lakes. I’ve never experienced a dungeon with a room like this.”

*So it’s not normal, after all. First Routier said this place felt sad, then the wall eyes, now this... What’s up with this place?*

We began to walk across the grasslands, but it wasn’t long before we stumbled across our first monster of the floor.

*“Groooooaaannn...”*

“What’s that?”

It was a colossal, cow-like monster with dull black hide and massive pointed horns, more like a raging bull than a dairy cow. As soon as it spotted us, it began pawing at the earth warily with a massive cloven hoof.

I analyzed it. “Let’s see... It’s an Impact Bull, Level 630. Not as tough as the Pentalisk, but tough enough.”

My Universal Language Comprehension kicked in, just like it did with the bear.

*“I am the wind... Yes, I am black lightning! I’ll run down all you foolish weeds!”*

*Wait, are you the wind, or are you lightning? Make up your mind! And why are all the monsters here so weird?! Is it a special problem with this dungeon, or are all monsters like this?*

Lulune stepped forward, putting herself squarely in the bull’s path. “Master, allow me to slay this beast. I am your knight and your humble slave. I must serve you to the absolute best of my ability!”

“Does the cow look that tasty to you?” Origa-chan asked, unamused.

“Of course it does... Wh-What are you making me say?!”

I sighed. “Not even gonna deny it, huh?”

I thought she’d genuinely gotten tired of watching, but clearly not.

The bull glared at Lulune, pegging her as its first target.

*“Hmph! What nerve, standing up to me! I’ll charge you so fast, you’ll never know what—”*

“Hup!!”

*“Waaaaaaaargh?!”*

It was over in the blink of an eye. Lulune rushed at the bovine behemoth and hit it with a heavy roundhouse kick. It went flying, bouncing unceremoniously along the ground a few times before collapsing.

*"I... I was never supposed to be light..."*

With that, it faded into motes of illumination.

*Okay, but light is the one thing it did become. No consistency at all.*

All that remained were a few leaf-wrapped packages of meat.

Lulune snorted with a triumphant grin. “Stupid cow. Did you really think you could... MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAT!!”

**"If you're gonna get a one-liner off, at least finish it!"**

*And should a donkey be talking trash about a cow anyway?*

“Those are the first drops of the dungeon, right?” I asked. “Are drops supposed to be this scarce?”

My skill, Perfect Loot, made it so that I always got all of a monster's drops, so I had no idea what normal drop rates were supposed to be like.

“I believe so,” Lousse said. “It differs by person, of course, but excepting the Monster House kills, this is normal.”

“Huh? So Monster Houses are different?” I asked.

“They are. Monster Houses grant only experience. It’s impossible to retrieve anything else from such a trap.”

Al nodded. "I heard Luck plays a big part, too—like, one of our Stats."

*Makes sense... though I probably would've gotten drops from the Monster House anyway.*

While we chatted, Lulune picked up the meat, slobbering over it eagerly.

“Mmm... Hahh... Good... Meat good... Grill it, dunk it in sauce, gobble it down on nice, hot rice... I can taste it now...!”



*Cut that out! You're going to make me hungry now.*

I couldn't think for long, though, as my Clairvoyance skill suddenly activated. There was an enemy somewhere close to Lulune, but there was no sign of it. As I tried to puzzle out what that could mean, Origa-chan's eyes flew open.

"Hungry! Look out!"

"Hm?"

A serpent suddenly burst out of the ground. It was shaped a lot like a cobra but large enough to swallow any one of us whole. I was still flustered and confused until the moment I used Analysis and everything made sense.

### **<UNDEAD HIDING SNAKE> Level: 622**

Undead. In other words, it was dead. That was why my Life Energy—detecting abilities couldn't pick up on it, and if it was so stealthy as to literally have "hiding" in its name, then it made sense that Clairvoyance would be slow to pick up on it.

The cobra loomed over Lulune, jaws unhinging to swallow her whole.

"What?!" She gawked. "I love eating, but I draw the line at getting eaten!"

"How about you stop talking and run?!" I shouted.

I moved to intercept—but Routier, of all people, summoned a mass of black flames in her palm and launched it at the monster.

"Routier?" I gasped.

"I've had my fill of watching for now," she explained. "Besides, if I can grow stronger, then I won't have to be protected all the time. Then we can all rest easy."

"I guess that makes sense..."

She made a good point. I was protecting her for now, but there was no guarantee I could always cover her perfectly. The stronger she became, the safer she'd be.

The Snake changed its target to Routier in an instant, but before it could reach her, she'd already cast a new spell.

“Demon King’s Grasp.”

A massive hand made from ebony flames burst out of her back, swinging a heavy blow down at the serpent. One square hit was all it took to reduce the undead to ash.

She nodded in satisfaction. “I haven’t fought in ages, but I haven’t lost my touch.”

“Wow, that was so cool!” Saria’s eyes were filled with wonder. “Was that a spell?!”

“It was a special type of magic passed down from one Demon King to the next.”

“Uh-oh.”

*I’m getting a bad feeling about this...*

**>You have acquired Demon King Magic.**

*Dammit! I hate being right! I’m not even a demonkin, though, let alone a Demon King! Why can’t my dumb body understand that?! It’s weird enough that I have the Heroes’ Divine Magic, but now I have Demon King Magic too? What the hell does that make me now?!*

I tried to repress the coming migraine, and unfortunately Routier noticed my pain.

“Seiichi? Are you all right?”

“Uh... I don’t know how to say this, but... I can use that Demon King Magic stuff now, too?”

“Huh?” Everyone gasped at once.

Routier gave me a serious look. “Are you a demonkin?”

“I’m human, honest! I’m human from the top of my head to the tips of my fucking toes!!”

*I’m less sure of that every day, but that’s what I want to believe!*

Al gave me a concerned look. “Look, this is probably a no, but... You came here from another world, but you ain’t a Hero, right? You ain’t gonna tell us you

can use Divine Magic too, right?”

“Uh... I can?”

“What the hell?! You’re sure you’re human?!”

“Stop asking me that!!”

*I ask myself that every day now, dammit! Like, does everyone know that the description for Human literally says you can become anything from a God to a Demon King?! That’s just OP! Dammit, humans!*

Lulune and Louise, however, seemed strangely excited by the news.

“How amazing, Master! You’re clearly fit to obliterate the world!”

“Wait, obliterate what?! No! Why the hell would I do that?!”

“I consider myself truly blessed to be under your tutelage, Teacher. I would be glad to offer you my humanity.”

“Shit, that’s heavy! And haven’t you already sworn your life to the Kingdom of Windberg or something?!”

I had people I had to protect, but I didn’t need anywhere near enough power to destroy the world, let alone actually do it. I couldn’t protect people *and* end all life at the same time.

Saria smiled softly at me. “I think you’re amazing. Right, Origa-chan?”

“Mm.” She looked up at Saria. “I always knew Seiichi-oniichan was amazing, but you’re amazing, too, for staying so normal with him.”

“Really? Hehe, thanks!”

“You might be *more* amazing than him,” she continued in a murmur.

It took a little while to recover mentally from that beating, but before long, we got back to exploring. We encountered another Undead Hiding Snake on the way, though Lulune wasn’t caught off-guard again and quickly kicked it to death. We also ran into more Impact Bulls, some Night Snakes, and even a couple General Snakes that were clad from head to tip in thick plate mail.

“Is it just me, or are there a lot of snakes in this dungeon?” I wondered aloud.

Louisse nodded. “Yes... Perhaps that is the natural state of this floor, but judging from the presence of the Impact Bulls, I somehow doubt that. Something seems amiss.”

It seemed like there was something snake-y going on with this place, but I doubted we’d figure out what before hitting the bottom floor.

We pressed on for a while, eventually coming across a gigantic lake.

“Whoa... That’s a lot of water.”

Al looked around uncomfortably. “If this place was more like a cave, this kind of thing might be normal... Everyone’s heard about underground lakes.”

She had a good point. With all the reeds and grasses, it would’ve fit right in beside a village or on a quaint roadside.

Saria took a few cautious steps forward to peer at the bottom. “Oh, Seiichi! Look at this!”

“Hm? What’s up?”

“Doesn’t that look like the doorway down?”

The lake’s water was clear enough that we had no difficulty seeing all the way to the bottom. Sure enough, I saw a door there that looked just like the door in front of the last staircase. It seemed fused into the ground, though, and it looked like it wouldn’t open easily.

“You’re right... But how’re we supposed to get through a door at the bottom of the water? We’ll need to open it to get to the next floor, but we can’t just swim all the way down there and pop it open...”

Al nudged my elbow. “Hey. Look at that.”

“Huh?”

I looked in the direction she’d pointed to find a white snake with a strangely wise aura around it. It was staring at us.

My jaw dropped. “Wh-What?”

“Dunno. It ain’t hostile, at least not now, but I bet it’s the boss of this floor.”



She was right—its sapphire eyes seemed placid, and it didn't attempt to uncoil its silver-scaled body. Despite its massive size, not to mention how close we were to it, my Clairvoyance Skill didn't trigger. While I was trying to puzzle out the door, the snake, and any connection the two might have, it spoke.

*"Art thou capable of saving the poor girl that lieth before thee?"*

"Huh?"

Apparently, everyone could hear its voice, as everyone else started in surprise as well. I was even more confused by its words, however.

"Poor girl? What do you mean?"

*"Precisely as it soundeth. The girl hath been sealed in this accursed land for more than a millennium. Hast thou the resolve to free her?"*

"A millennia?!"

I was still shaky on the details, but apparently the snake had been locked in the dungeon for over a thousand years, and the voice wanted to know if I could save her.

*Jeez. Here I am, trying to scout out this place, and I wind up in this madhouse with all this extra drama...*

Still, it was worth visiting to assess any potential risk to Academy students. Barney-san and Louisse-san were unusual in that they'd actually surpassed the Human level cap of 500, and since many of the monsters here were stronger, it was a smart move to check it out. If there was some other, greater meaning to this place, then that only meant I had to explore it further.

*I really don't know if I can save the snake, though, or what that'd even mean.*

"I don't know if I can save her or how," I said. "I don't know enough to say for sure either way. We need to press on, though, no matter what."

The snake chuckled softly. *"Hmm... If thou hast claimed to be able to save her while knowing close to nothing, I wouldst have erased you where you stand. I admirest thine honesty."*

*Erased us?! Shit, that's terrifying!*

I found myself using Greater Analysis on it.

**<SNAKE GODDESS> Level: 5,500**

*What's with that level?! And she's a god?!*

Even the Black Dragon God was only Level 5,000, and this snake easily eclipsed it. At that level, she had to have known that I had just checked her Status, but she didn't say anything.

*"Shouldt thou prove unable to save her, I shalt allow thee thine lives. But I warneth thee—advance further and thou shalt encounter monsters of yet greater power. Willt thou proceed?"*

I grimaced a little. "We don't really have a choice."

The Goddess's serpentine grin widened. *"Excellent. There remainst but one condition for opening yonder door."*

"Condition?"

*"Thou must remove all the water."*

"Wait, all of it?!"

That was the last thing I was expecting.

*"Yes. All of it. Thou mayt use whatever means thou deemt fit. Well? How shalt thou proceed?"*

I didn't know how to answer that and exchanged confused glances with my companions.

Magic was the obvious answer, but I didn't know any spells that could get rid of so much water so easily.

*There's the Dark spell Magic Hole that can absorb and destroy any spell, so maybe I can make a similar version for water?*

Lulune slowly raised her hand. "Master?"

"Hm? What's up?"

"You need to be rid of all that water, correct?"

"That's right."

“May I do the honors?”

“Huh?!”

I wasn't the only one taken aback by her offer—the others seemed just as shocked.

“You can cast magic?” I asked her in disbelief.

“No, not in the slightest.”

“How would you do it, then?”

“I'll drink it all.”

“Drink it?!” My eyes flew open in shock.

Origachan shook her head. “You're too stupid sometimes, Hungry.”

“I'm *what?*!”

I nodded. “Absolutely.”

“Et tu, Master?!”

I didn't know what else to tell her, though. Only a real monster could drink that much water—not even I could do that.

Lulune frowned at me, pouting. “How callous, Master! I was simply thinking that all this walking and fighting was making me rather thirsty.”

“There's thirsty, and then there's wanting to literally drink a lake!”

*She's even more of a monster than me!*

“I-I can do it!” she insisted. “Just watch, Master!”

“What? Hey! You can't be serious!”

Before I could stop her, she ran right up to the lake.

“*Hm?*” The snake flicked its tongue amusedly. “*Thou wouldst remove the water?*”

“Exactly! 'Tis my duty as Master's sworn knight!”

*“What confidence... How wilt thou do so?”*

“I'll drink it.”

*“What?”*

*“I’ll drink it all!”*

The snake just stared at her confusedly.

*No wonder!*

A moment later, it began to cackle a high-pitched, hissing laugh. *“Hahahahahaha! Of all impossible things... What a fool! Thou couldt not possibly—”*

*“Done.”*

*“What?”*

*“HUH?!”*

I couldn’t believe my eyes. All the water that had just been there was gone. The only indication where the water had gone was Lulune, who was wiping the last of it from her lips.

“An ordinary taste, truth be told. If you live in this lake, you could at least improve the flavor a little.” With that, she turned on her heel and returned to my side. “Mission accomplished, Master.”

“Uh... That’s... I’m really sorry for doubting you.”

For some reason, her cheeks flushed a little, and she blinked through her thick lashes at me. “Th-Then... well... could we eat street food again sometime, maybe?”

*“What?”*

“O-Only if you want to! You don’t have to...” She began to droop sadly.

“W-We can go!” I hurriedly assured her. “We’ll go sometime, promise! Okay?”

“Yes... Yes, let’s!” Her face lit up in a cheerful grin.

Origa-chan watched our exchange, her ears drooping a little. “Hungry... I’m sorry.”

“Hm? I don’t mind! Not as long as you finally understand my majesty!”

“I didn’t think you were this hungry...”

“What kind of apology is that?!”

The Snake Goddess raised herself up a little, indignant. *“No! What nonsense is this? Who is that girl?! Art thou truly human?!”*

“Nope!” Lulune raised her head with pride. “I’m a donkey!”

*“That maketh even less sense!”* She began thrashing about unhappily. *“What utter nonsense! It would maketh more sense if she could casteth Demon King Magic and Divine Magic at once! How utterly inconceiv—”*

“I can use both?” I offered.

*“Who, then, are youuuuuuu?!”* the serpent screeched. After flailing its fill, it looked at us reproachfully as it caught its breath. *“Hahh... hahh... Many moons have passed since I hath achieved divinity, but never hath I been so flustered...”*

“Life’s weird like that?” I suggested.

*“This is all thine fault!”*

*Why’s she angry at me? I don’t get it.*

*“Hahh... Fine. Regardless of thine means, thou hast removed the water as I hath requested. I shall openeth the door for thee.”*

Her blue eyes flashed, and the door that had been on the bottom of the lake moments before loudly creaked open.

*“Go, now. Thou shalt encounter stronger monsters than ever before... though I feeleth my worry may be misplaced.”*

“Haha, yeah...”

She shook her scaly head. *“I shall counteth thine preposterous power as a blessing. My expectations for her liberation hath yet increased.”*

“So, uh... Can you tell us who this girl is? And what’s up with this whole dungeon while you’re at it?”

*“I am naught but a monster, bound to this land. I hath no power to share such secrets. Forgiveth me.”*

“Oh... Okay.”

*Man, being a god must suck. The Black Dragon God was bound by some kind of contract, too... But capital 'G' Gods like the one that sent me to this world probably don't have to worry about that.*

Regardless, with our business on that floor complete, we headed down into the lakebed. Just before we passed out of earshot, however, the Snake Goddess called after us.

*"Be careful now. The true threat hath yet to perish."*

"Huh? What's that supposed to—"

Before I could finish asking, she faded into mist.

Saria gave me a curious look. "Are you okay, Seiichi?"

"Yeah... It's probably nothing."

With that, we resumed our trek deeper into the dungeon's depths.

## Chapter 13: Ordinary, Peaceful Class Time

**W**hile Seiichi and his companions were delving the dungeon's depths, Beatrice continued to teach Class F.

“So that’s why Abyss Mushrooms and Heven Mushrooms are both forbidden for alchemical use. There are plenty of other reagents that are taboo, but those two are by far the most infamous.”

Beatrice jotted down a simple explanation on the blackboard, and her students readily copied everything down into their books. Only Agnos sat and watched, steam slowly billowing out from the top of his head. He hadn’t so much as moved a muscle all class.





“Shit,” he groaned. “They all just look like mushrooms... You can still eat ‘em all, right?! They all come out the other end the same!”

Blud sighed in exasperation. “Why are you talking like Lulune, of all people? Did you listen to a single word she said?”

“Yeah, I listened! That’s why I’m sayin’ it!”

“That’s even worse.”

Unlike Agnos, Blud had been keeping very tidy notes and had all the most important information neatly jotted down.

Unable to handle any more insults, Agnos suddenly stood up. “GAH! My head’s gonna explode! G-Get back here, Aniki... Save me...!”

Blud rolled his eyes. “Idiot. He only just left. He couldn’t possibly return so—”

“He’s Seiichi-sensei,” Berard reminded him softly. “Remember?”

“He *probably* won’t return so soon.”

“See?!” Agnos puffed out his chest with pride. “He’ll be back in a flash!”

“You still have to take classes until he’s back,” Blud reminded him.

“You’re right, dammit!”

Realizing he had no way to escape, he clutched his head in his hands and groaned.

“Ahahaha!” Flora pointed at him and cackled. “Who’d have thought we’d wind up like this?!”

Agnos shot a look back at her. “Like what?”

“Like, we could never use magic before, right? Magic lessons were kind of a waste of time... Honestly, it felt like a cruel reminder, y’know?”

“Well, sure, that sucked...”

“That’s why it’s so funny you actually *want* magic lessons now. I’m actually kinda liking school now! We’ve got Seiichi-sensei to thank for that... He’s really amazing!”

Blud nodded thoughtfully. “I suppose you’re right. We’ve always been treated like trash, and it’s all thanks to him that we can cast as effectively... No, even better than the other classes.”

“I-I’m really grateful, too!” Leon chimed in. “He didn’t care that I’m gloomy, useless, boring, and a pain to be around... He’s been nice. O-Oh no, I cut in, didn’t I?! I’m so sorry!”

Agnos sighed. “Just when I thought you’d grown a pair... You’re still just as cowardly as ever.”

“I don’t know about that... Wait, I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to talk back!”

“See?! Not one damn bit!”

Even with the power of the Greater Spirits on his side, he was the same nervous little boy as always, though he was somewhat more optimistic... Not that most people could see the change at all.

“Oh, stop fighting!” Flora chided them. “I’m trying to say that I’m having fun!”

Her pleasant smile was suddenly cut off by a thick piece of chalk embedding itself in her desk. Everyone looked up to find their teacher glaring at them.

“Are you done?” she asked coolly.

“S-Sorry!” echoed everyone.

As the students clambered back into their seats, Beatrice let out a lonely sigh.

“I must admit, I’m glad everyone seems to be enjoying themselves. I certainly can’t have managed such a feat alone...”

“Not true!” Agnos shouted. “Without you, we would’ve dropped out forever ago!”

Blud readily agreed. “We couldn’t even use magic before, a damning condition for students of a magic school. You’re the only one who took the time to look after us, and I cannot thank you enough for that.”

Beatrice’s eyes swam. “N-No, I don’t deserve your thanks! I was hardly able to help you at all!”

“Preposterous. You stood up for a group of weirdos like us. You looked after us, and we cannot thank you enough for that.”

“Yeah!” Flora echoed. “All the other teachers hated our guts, but you actually tried!”

“I-I’m grateful, too!” Leon echoed.

Helen rolled her eyes in irritation. “See? We owe you a lot. You gave us something better than magic. What? Have you decided to stop trusting your students?”

“Of course not!” Beatrice insisted. “I only...”

“Enough, Beatrice-sensei,” Irene huffed. “Only you and Seiichi-sensei possess the right to instruct a picture of perfection such as myself. Your lessons are streamlined and gorgeous, nothing like the crude machinations of lesser instructors.”

“I dunno most of what Irene’s talking about,” Rachel confessed, “but I really like you~! Everything’s gotten kinda weird since Seiichi-sensei got here, and without you, we never could’ve kept up~!”

In the face of all her students’ honest gratitude, tears began to well in Beatrice’s eyes.

“I... I suppose I wasn’t misguided, then.”

“That’s right!” Agnos crowed. “You mean the world to us, seriously!”

“Thank you all... Truly.” She smiled a little, wiping her eyes. After a moment, she was back to her usual, level, self. “In that case, I’d better teach you all even more thoroughly. Back to class, now.”

“Eh?” Dread began to creep over the class.

“I can’t help you all on the practical side of things,” she continued, “but I have every intention of pushing you to perfection on the theoretical side. Rest assured, you’ll be brimming with knowledge by the time Seiichi-sensei returns!”

“Uh, B-Beatrice-neesan?” Agnos’s voice quivered. “You don’t gotta be *that* serious about it...”

Her smile only widened. “Let’s broaden the scope of our class a little, shall we? And go into a tad more detail while we’re at it.”

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!”

Agnos’s cry of horror echoed through the academy’s halls, but fell only on deaf ears.

## Chapter 14: Super-Strengthening and A Woman's Battle

Just as the Snake Goddess said, the next floor's monsters were even stronger than the last bunch. Everything was over Level 700. While I offered to help, Louise outright refused to accept my aid, and everyone else worked together to beat up the monsters instead—including Routier.

"What am I even doing here?" I muttered to myself.

Honestly, I hadn't done a single thing yet in this dungeon, and I was starting to get a little despondent.

Luckily, this next floor was composed of narrow, winding stone corridors, so we didn't have to worry about being swarmed or overrun.

"Saria!" Al yelled. "Comin' at ya!"

"Yeah. Me, kill!"

After Al darted around the Level 711 Mad Mantis, she left it wide open for an unexpected blow from Saria.

"Hahh!" Lulune rushed blindly at her and Origa-chan's opponent, a Level 802 Tyrant Stallion. It was a large, black horse with unsettling, throbbing veins all over its face.

"Hungry." Origa-chan shook her head. "Try to work with me, maybe?"

"But can we eat this thing?!"

"Forget it."

It was a battle of donkey versus horse in the truest sense, but its massive equine frame only made itself a bigger target. Origa-chan, having totally given up on proactively working with her companion, focused instead on swift, precise follow-up strikes.

“Routier-san.” Before their opponent, Louise cast a glance at her demonkin princess companion.

She nodded. “On it... Demon King’s Grasp.”

“Water Laser!”

They cut into the Wicked Serpent in front of them with fantastic ease, despite the reptile being a whopping Level 900. It wasn’t a fair fight by any measure—despite a difference of nearly 400 levels, Routier’s magic kept the snake pinned down with her blasting flames while Louise went in for the kill.

...

“I’m totally useless, aren’t I?”

*I’m the only one who hasn’t fought once yet, and this whole expedition’s supposed to be my job!*

I let out a heavy sigh as Louise approached me, having slain her quarry.

“Not at all, Teacher. We would not be able to fight so unreservedly, if not for your support.”

“Really? I mean, I still think I should fight at least a little...”

Since that would defeat the purpose of their training and they were still doing well given the circumstances, I decided not to bring it up again. I did sigh a little, though.

“Oh, and Teacher?” Louise continued. “I should mention I’ve reached Level 730.”

“You *what?!?*”

“I’m Level 900 now!” Saria chimed.

“You’re kidding!”

I’d thought she was still in the ballpark of Level 500, but evidently she’d been gaining more experience than I thought—not to mention Saria’s ludicrous level.

“Saria’s a monster, so I get that, but what’s going on with you?!” I asked Louise frantically. “I thought nobody went over Level 500! Even one more level’s supposed to be a big deal, right?!”

“Yes, but now I’m Level 730.”

“That’s not an answer!”

*I get that she’s a Transcendent or whatever, but isn’t she transcending a little too hard too fast?! The hell’s going on here?!*

Al pursed her lips. “Uh... I guess I should mention, Seiichi...”

“Yeah?”

“I’m, uh... I just hit Level 687.”

“No shit?”

“No shit.”

*So Al’s a Transcendent now, too? This is just ridiculous.*

I whipped around to Lulune and Origa-chan. “What about you two?!”

“Um, Seiichi-oniichan...? I’m Level 710 now...”

Lulune grinned proudly. “I have no idea!”

“How are you still the most confusing one here?!” I shouted in exasperation.

I honestly wasn’t surprised Origa-chan was a Transcendent at this point, but Lulune was special as always.

*What kind of donkey can drink a whole lake that quick anyway?! She wasn’t even full after that! That’s just insane!*

Routier fidgeted a little, her enthusiasm apparent on her face. “Seiichi? I’m Level 651 now. Looks like I’m a Transcendent, too.”

“Well... That’s good, honestly. Now you should be safer if you get attacked again.”

She nodded. “I won’t have to rely on my generals as much now... Hopefully, Father will be proud of me when he returns.”

“Yeah...”

I hadn’t really thought of it before, but she was still just the Demon King’s daughter, which meant that her dad had to be alive somewhere. I had no idea

where he was or what he was doing, though, and I'd hardly heard about her family situation at all.

*I guess it couldn't hurt to ask when we're out of here.*

With that, I was officially the only member of our party to not be a Transcendent. I couldn't prove if Lulune was, technically, but there was no doubt in my mind, not with the kind of power she was throwing around.

*Right, my robe makes it so I level up more slowly... I guess I could take it off if I want to get stronger, but I don't want to become too inhuman or anything.*

I decided to take our newfound heights of strength as a good thing, and we continued our trek down the corridor. Before long, however, Origa-chan suddenly stopped.

"Seiichi-oniichan."

"Hm? What's up?"

"I think we could break this wall."

"Huh?"

The wall she was pointing at looked the same as any other... or rather, if my time in the Black Dragon God's labyrinth was anything to go off of, all walls were breakable, but I didn't want to think about that too hard.

*Yeah, I'd be better off forgetting about it.*

Origa-chan stabbed her kunai into the wall, and sure enough, it readily crumbled away.

"Ohh!"

Beyond the wall was a small room, at the center of which was a highly ornamental treasure chest.

*This chest had better not be another monster...*

While I was thinking of my first encounter with the Treasure Chest, Origa-chan crept into the room.

"Mm... No traps in the room or on the chest..."



“What? You got a trap-finding skill or somethin’?” Al asked.

“Yeah... They made me learn it during my assassin training in the Kaizell Empire.”

“Oh. Sorry I asked. Still, that’s damn useful for dungeon-crawling. Tons of adventurers’d be desperate for somethin’ like that.”

She nodded. “I know, Altria-oneechan... I don’t mind now. I’m just glad I can help Seiichi-oniichan.”

She puffed out her chest with pride, and I couldn’t help but give her a good-job head pat before stepping inside the hidden room.

“If the chest’s harmless, we may as well crack it open.”

Inside, we found a kunai that was shaped somewhat differently from the one Origa-chan was already using.

“A kunai...?” Origa-chan muttered confusedly.

“Looks like. Let’s see what it does.”

**>SNAKE-CURSED KUNAI: A knife that houses a great serpent’s curse. Legendary equipment. By channeling mana into the blade, the user can imbue it with poison, paralysis, and petrification. The weapon can be duplicated at will, and when thrown, the user can make duplicates disappear at will.**

“Damn, that’s kind of twisted.” Al shuddered.

Louisse nodded. “A fitting enchantment for a Legendary weapon. Finding a weapon of such high rarity speaks to the difficulty of this dungeon...”

It looked plenty strong to my eyes, too. Inflicting three ailments at once was nice, but being able to replicate it, potentially infinitely, was crazy. It was also nice that the last effect prevented you from having to pick up all the kunai after the fight.

I noticed that Origa-chan was staring at the blade in awe, so I held it out to her.

“Here you go.”

“Hm...? Why are you letting me hold it?”

“C’mon, you found it. It’s only right that you get to keep it.”

“But...”

“You always use kunai anyway!” Saria chimed. “It’s only right that you take it!”

She hesitated for a long time, unsure of how to react. She looked around at everyone else and received nothing but encouraging smiles and nods.

“Are you sure?”

“I mean, you *did* do all the work,” I told her. “Not to mention, you’re probably the only one of us who’s ever used a kunai. It only makes sense that you keep it.”

“Okay... thank you.”

She beamed happily at us all.

Routier gave her a slightly jealous look. “How lucky... I only use magic, so I couldn’t make use of a weapon like that if I found one.”

“Really?” Louisse frowned slightly. “My brother is a mage, and he often makes use of staves or magic armor to increase his power or control. I cannot guarantee we’ll find such a thing here, but there are plenty of options to suit your skillset.”

“Are there really? Maybe I should watch for chests, then...”

From the look in her eyes, she’d found a goal for herself. Leveling up was great, but it couldn’t hurt to have a few good pieces of equipment.

“Maybe I should look, too!” Saria grinned. “I hope we can find something I can wear over my fists...”

Lulune kicked idly at the ground. “I could use boots or something of that nature.”

I was glad that they were motivated as well, and some magic brass knuckles or something could give Saria a nice power boost—though I was admittedly a little scared about what heights Lulune might reach if she got a power boost.

*What would she do with all that strength, anyway? I just got her to ride around...*

I could probably find decent weapons for the three of them if I fought. It seemed only fair that they got some new equipment as well.

*Come to think of it, Origa-chan's new weapon has a lot to do with snakes, too. There's gotta be something snake-y about this place, but we're no closer to figuring out what.*

With our business in the secret room at an end, we headed back into the corridor we came from and deeper into the dungeon. We ran into a few more monsters as we went, but with her new weapon, Origa-chan was making short work of everything.

"Secret Technique: Hell's Agony."

She created a countless cloud of kunai, then sent them all flying at the attacking Level 855 Sage Serpent, a massive snake with ash-gray scales and burning red eyes. It blocked the first wave of blades by spewing streams of water, fire, and even lightning from its maw, but it was unable to stave off the infinitely replicating cloud, and finally was skewered from head to tail.

*"Hshaaaaaaah... ahhhh..."*

It let out a hissing howl as sickly purple bubbles dribbled out of its mouth while it steadily turned to stone from the opposite end. In mere seconds, it was completely petrified. Despite being dead, it still hadn't faded into light, so Al gave it a good smack with her axe.

"And there!"

The statue instantly shattered, and the scattered stone chunks rapidly faded and disappeared. In its place were a handful of scales and a small chest.

"Item drops," Origa-chan gasped quietly.

"Yeah, and not just materials." Al nodded as she picked up the loot. "We're on a real good-luck streak!"

The scales were analyzed thus:

**>SAGE SERPENT SCALES: Scales from the hide of a Sage Serpent. They possess fantastic magical resistance and physical durability alike, making them ideal for armor-crafting.**

I barely thought about armor at all since I had no excuse to take off my robe, but it seemed like a useful material. I was a lot more curious about the chest's contents.

"A necklace, huh?"

It was a classy chain that held a shiny little red gem, and I wasted no time using Analysis on it.

**>SAGE SERPENT'S PENDANT: Legendary equipment. Greatly increases the wearer's magical resistance and magical power. Spells become significantly easier to control, and mana consumption is decreased.**

*That's oddly perfect... Just the kind of thing Routier was looking for.*

Everyone else was just as surprised.

"This ain't just a lucky streak," Al muttered. "The hell do we find just what we want, just when we want it?"

"We're just super lucky?" Origa-chan wondered aloud, his head tilting to the side curiously.

Al looked over at Routier. "Uh, Routier-san? We found something you'd like."

Her eyes widened. "Are you sure? You two slew the monster, though."

Al shrugged. "I ain't much of a caster, honestly."

Origa-chan nodded. "I... already got something."

"Well... if you insist..."

With that, it readily wound up in Routier's hands without any struggle. It looked pretty good on her, honestly, and contrasted nicely with her black dress.

After that, Routier was a lot more aggressive in combat. Now when she used her Demon King's Grasp spell, the power was easily several times greater, and everyone—including Routier herself—was shocked.

*Good equipment really makes a difference, huh.*

We obviously weren't lucky enough to get more good drops, though, and we didn't find anything else before coming across a cavernous chamber.

"This place sure is big..." I muttered.

"There's another big door over there!" Saria announced, pointing at the far side of the room. "You think there's a boss in here?"

"A boss, huh... I bet it's another snake."

*"Excellent guess."*

"Huh?!" I started in surprise at the strange voice.

Before our eyes, a spiral of darkness appeared in the center of the room, and from within, a monster emerged. Its lower half was long and serpentine, covered in metallic blue-and-black scales in a scattered pattern. The top half, however...

*"As you feared, I am indeed a snake monster!"*

Its—or from the sound of its voice, her—top half was that of a muscular gorilla.

"No way you're a snake! You're a gorilla!" I found myself shouting.

*Sure, its bottom half is a snake, but I can't get over that buff, hairy top half!*

Unlike a Kaiser Kong, though, its gorilla-fur was a deep shade of blue. Its muscles were just as bulging as gorilla-form Saria's, and it had metal gauntlets on both forearms to boot.

It snapped its metal-clad fingers, and black spirals of energy formed in the air around us, from which countless snake monsters poured out—and, unsurprisingly, thick doors appeared in the doorway behind us to lock us in.

*"There's nowhere for you to run now. I am this chamber's boss, and I'd sooner die than let you pass. Go now, my underlings! Slay them all!"*

*"You got it, Neesan!"* the snakes hissed.

My companions were already poised to intercept, determined to keep them at a distance. Origa-chan and Routier, in particular, were adept at keeping the snakes at bay with their powerful ranged abilities.

I was taken off-guard by the boss's unusual appearance, but I readily used Greater Analysis on her to size up the threat she posed.

**<GIANT ANAKONGDA> Level: 1,800**

*Shit, that's strong! Are all gorillas in this world OP? I mean, it's got twice Saria's level! And that name... not even the name can decide if it's a gorilla or a snake!*

Before I could recover from my shock, the Anakongda noticed me, her eyes widening.

*"Hm?! You..."*

"Huh? Me?" I blinked at her in surprise.

Her cheeks flushed red. *"You're not a bad male... I like you! You're going to be my husband!"*

"I... huh?"

"Back off, you dumb gorilla!!"

Al and Lulune leapt at her at once, both frothing at the mouth. The Anakongda effortlessly blocked their attacks with her gauntlet, bouncing them off harmlessly.

"Huh?!"

"M-My kick didn't work!"

*"Don't you dare get in my way!"*

With one two-handed strike, they were both sent flying, but they were able to recover in midair and managed to land without taking too much damage. Despite the chaos unfolding around me, I was still unable to move.

*Why does every gorilla I see want to mate with me...?*

*"I'll kill your worthless friends, and then we'll be wed!"* she hissed.

"S-Stooooooooop!!" I finally managed to shout. "Why do you, my *enemy*, another goddamn gorilla, want to marry me?!"

*"What a strange thing to ask. Doesn't every girl want a strong mate?"*

“Again with this natural-selection survival-of-the-fittest shit! What? Am I really that hot to you somehow?! What, do I have pheromones that attract gorillas or something?!”

*“Yes, actually, you do.”*

“Goddammit, you’ve gotta be kidding me!”

*What kind of niche-ass pheromones are those?! Who wants that?! Can’t I swap them out for something, anything else?!*

As I moaned under the mental weight of this new revelation, the Anakongda slithered closer.

*Why can’t it just be Saria?! This is just weird! What the hell’s up with my body?!*

Louisse and the others tried to intercept the monkey-reptile hybrid, but the swarms of other snakes cut them off and kept them occupied.

*I can finally fight now, right?! She’s aiming right for me! Like, jeez, Saria’s the only gorilla wife I need! Gorilla or no, I want Saria! I’m not expecting any other gorilla wives!*

This was no time to hold back for the others’ training. Before I could enter the fray myself, though, I heard a voice from beside me.

“Me, no give up Seiichi!”

*“Gh?!”*

Saria closed in on the Anakongda with blazing speed, throwing a heavy punch. The Anakongda caught her blow with a gauntleted hand, then tried to slug her back with the other—but Saria caught her punch in return. They were left gripping each other’s fists and squaring off, eye to eye.

“Hngh!”

*“Gah, who do you think you are?!”*

Despite the difference in their levels, Saria was matching the Anakongda’s strength—rather, she was slowly overpowering the boss, pushing her back.

“Me... Seiichi’s, wife...!”

*"His wife?!"* Her blue-furred face twisted with rage. *"Fine... I'll take him over your dead body!"*

"Horgh?!"

She pushed back, using a fresh burst of strength and her level advantage to put them on equal footing once more. Determined not to lose, Saria slammed her skull forward in a rough headbutt.

"He, mine!"

*"Gah?!"*

The Anakongda released Saria from the force of the unexpected blow, slipping awkwardly a few yards back before lunging forward with a hefty strike to Saria's face.

*"Don't get cocky!"*

"Guh!"

"Saria!"

I moved to help her, but she held out a thick arm to stop me.

"Stay back! This fight... Woman to woman!"

"Huh?!"

"Me... Need to fight alone... Win!!"

Saria slugged the Anakongda back, landing a square blow on her jaw.

*"Gah!"*

From there, the fight was truly brutal. Neither backed down, no matter how many vicious blows the other landed.

"Why, want Seiichi?! Find other mate!"

*"Like you could understand, outsider! Do you know how hard it is to meet guys this deep in the dungeon?! Do you know how it feels to be in your thirties and still single?!"*

*Not sure I needed to know that about this dungeon... and wait, she's in her thirties?*



"Me, not know... Your feelings, not mine. But me, never let Seiichi go!"

*"You little bitch... He's mine! Give up already!"*

I was progressively getting increasingly lost in their conversation, and all I could do was watch their slugfest. At some point, Al and the others had stopped fighting with the snake horde and stopped to watch with me.

"Don't let her get you!" Al shouted. "Show 'er who's boss!"

"There's your opening. Strike!" Lousse encouraged her.

"Saria-oneechan, good luck."

"What power..." Routier took a deep breath. "So this is a true monster-on-monster fight..."

*"Don't lose to that hussy, Neesan!"* a snake shouted.

*"Damn, the gorilla girlie's strong!"*

*"Hey, why're you complimenting the enemy?! Sure, she's strong, but Neesan's desperate enough to win! Poor thing's never had a man, not once..."*

*"Yeah, she ain't exactly marrying age... Don't lose, Neesan! You can bag that male no problem!"*

The Anakongda glared at her snake underlings. *"I'll make you worthless gossips pay!"*

*"W-We're sorryyyyyy!!!"* the chatty snakes wailed.

*Is this some kind of comedy routine? Or what, am I weird for not understanding what the hell's going on here? Man, I feel outta place.*

I tried to focus on the fight and blot out the cheers of the monsters.

"Haaaaaaaaaah!!!"

*"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahh!"*

Saria and the Anakongda were still exchanging wicked blows, the sheer force of which caused the walls to crack and the floor to shatter beneath them, but any damage the room took was regenerated almost immediately. I was still

watching the room repair itself when a snake slithered up to me and draped his tail over my shoulder.

*“Man, are you popular... with gorillas.”*

*“Not what I wanna hear!”*

*That’s just weird, no matter how I think about it! Heck, even without thinking about it, that’s strange! And you, snakes—aren’t you our enemies, too?! Why’re you so friendly all of a sudden?!*

He let out a hissing laugh. *“Nah, I mean that in a good way. Neesan’s a good girl... and a good gorilla, too.”*

Other snakes started chiming in around me.

*“She’s the generous type, too! Even though she’s a gorilla!”*

*“A great boss, too. She’s got a real mind for management, gorilla or no!”*

*“She’s good at cooking, too, and damn has she got nimble fingers—”*

*“But she’s still a gorilla, right?!”* I shouted back at them.

*They just won’t stop bringing that up, will they?! There’s nothing wrong with gorillas, but that’s not the point!*

*“Give him to meeeeeeee!!”*

*“Neverrrrrrrrr!”*

Some people might be happy to have two girls fighting over them, since it proved they were desirable.

*But why am I only desirable to gorillas?! Can’t I have human women fight over me, please?! This goes beyond interspecies love... and I’m already with Saria!*

By the time I’d composed myself enough to pay attention again, both combatants were bloody and battered.

*“Hahh... hahh...”*

*“Hss... hss...”*

They glared at each other, the tension thick in the air. It was clear that the next blow would end it, and each only had enough strength left for one more

good hit.

At that moment, though, the Anakongda started to laugh.

*“Hehehe... Hahahahahaha!”*

“Hm? What, funny?”

*“Hehe, sorry... I wasn’t expecting to get such a kick out of this fight, that’s all. Sorry for mocking you. You put everything you got into our fight, and you really stepped up to match me. I can admire that. But see...”*

“?!”

*“I’m still gonna win!”*

The Anakongda slithered forward faster than she’d moved all fight, landing a heavy blow square in Saria’s gut.

“Gwugh?!”

“Saria!”

I shouted out for her as the Anakongda reveled in her certain victory... but Saria wasn’t done.

“Got, you,” she grunted, grinning at her opponent from close, easy punching range.

*“What?! Crap—”*

*“Seiichi... MIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIINE!”*

She delivered a brutal uppercut to the Anakongda’s jaw.

*“Gaaaaaahh!!”*

*“Neesan!”* her snake posse cried.

Saria froze, fist raised to the ceiling, and the Anakongda slumped weakly to the ground.

## Chapter 15: The Poor Snake-Girl

**A**s soon as the Anakongda was on the ground, I rushed to Saria's side and used healing magic on her.

"Saria! Are you okay?!"

"Seiichi... Me, won... Seiichi, my mate..."

"Saria..."

*"You're really something, aren't you, girl?"*

"?!"

The Anakongda was back upright again and slithered over to us despite her injuries. I automatically moved to shield Saria with my body, but the boss only chuckled.

*"You think I'll try to finish her off? That's cold. I've already lost in the fairest fight I could ask for."*

"Oh... R-Right. Sorry."

*"I don't mind. The girl matters that much to you, does she?"*

"W-Well... yeah, she does."

It was still embarrassing to admit, but telling the truth was the least I could do. The Anakongda just nodded understandingly and turned to Saria.

*"What's your name, girl?"*

"Saria."

*"Not a bad name. I've got a gift for you, Saria."*

She slipped her gauntlets off, holding them out to the Kaiser Kong.

"What?"

*"My weapons. You beat me, and you'll get to leave the dungeon when this is all over. You deserve them. Go on, take them."*

*"Okay."*

Saria readily slipped the gauntlets on.

**>PURE MAIDEN'S GAUNTLETS: Elegant weaponry for an elegant lady. Phantasm equipment. The wearer becomes immune to all status conditions. The wearer's Attack and Defense steadily increase as long as she remains proud and true.**

They were impressive by any measure. Status condition immunity was always nice to have, and the permanent, passive Stat increases were bound to come in handy.

*What the hell does it mean by "proud and true," though? Can't it be a little more specific?!*

The Anakongda smiled as Saria put them on. *"See? I knew they'd suit you."*

Saria frowned. "You, okay?"

*"What do you mean?"*

"You, want mate. You, gave up?"

*"To think you, of all people, would ask that." She snorted and shook her head, but replied readily. "We were born and raised in this dungeon. We never had any parents, so we've always dreamed of having a real family... of having kids. I don't know the first thing about starting a family, though, let alone any males I could mate with if I wanted to. When I saw you, though..." She glanced at me, forcing a smile. "I thought I finally had a chance, but I was wrong. You already had a mate, a better female than I could ever be. There was never any room for me."*

"What, you do now?" Saria asked, a little sadly.

The boss smiled warmly. *"You've gotta get through here, right? There's rules for opening the door, though, and the only way the door'll open is if the master gets wiped out. Basically, I gotta disappear if you wanna go ahead."*

*"?!"*

Her subordinate snakes were uncomfortably silent.

She laughed. *“What’re you moping about? We’re enemies, always were. What’re you getting so sappy about now?”*

Saria tried to protest. “But...!”

*“Dead or alive, it doesn’t matter. We’re dungeon monsters, sad little creatures that can never leave this claustrophobic little world.”* Her face contorted in discomfort for a moment, but she quickly returned to a smile. *“Forget about me, now! Hurry up and—”*

*“You worthless wretch!”* boomed a familiar voice.

“Huh?”

*“What? Gah?!”* The Anakongda suddenly clutched at her chest, face contorting in pain.

*“Neesan!”* the snakes cried out.

Saria and I tried to help her, but she stuck out her hand to stop us.

*“Get back! Don’t come any closer!”*

“But we can’t just leave you!” I protested.

*“So my time’s come, eh?”*

*“Of course,”* the mystery voice drawled. *“Useless as you are, you may at least prove useful in taking those wretched intruders with you.”*

A familiar pair of massive eyes appeared on either side of the doors on the far wall.

“You again?!” Al cussed. “I thought we killed you!”

*“Fools! As if such a miserable attack could harm me! I am the dungeon itself. You have no means of victory!”* The massive pupils shifted to fixate on the Anakongda. *“To think I bothered leveling you for so long, only for you to perish so easily to inferior foes... How pitiful. You’ve no use if you cannot slay the intruders. Now die.”*

The Anakongda’s face contorted in pain. *“Gaaaaaaaaaah!!”*

“What, you do her?!” Saria shouted angrily.

*“Not much—I simply turned her worthless body into a bomb. I created that miserable gorilla, and as such, I may use or modify her as I will.”*

“That, awful... Stop!”

“You rotten little punk!” Al swore, gritting her teeth.

“I’ll kill you,” Origa-chan vowed.

My companions tried to attack the eyes, but they faded from the wall and disappeared before they could get a hit.

*“Mwahahahaha!”* the now-disembodied voice cackled. *“Too slow! You’ll perish alongside my worthless creation! Should you survive, I shall deal with you myself... though such a feat is utterly impossible! Bwahahahahaaa!”*

The voice seemed to get further and further away.

“Get back here, dammit!”

Al and the others attacked the walls nonetheless, but nothing they did seemed to affect the voice, and soon it was gone altogether.

The Anakongda grimaced at them. *“D-Don’t worry about me... You’ve gotta get outta here! Go!”*

“We, no do that!” Saria protested.

*“Stop being such a brat! Didn’t I tell you? The dungeon decides if I live or die—I’m stuck here. No matter what you do, you can’t change that.”*

“Why... Why?!” Saria shouted in frustration.

*“Don’t make that face, now.”* She glanced at me, trying hard to force a smile through the sweat flooding her brow. *“You better stop her before she does something we’ll all regret.”*

With that, I knew what I had to do.

“Seiichi... You, help her!”

“Okay.”

With that, I cast my anti-magic spell, Abraham Lincoln, on the Anakongda. She was enveloped in a warm glow, and as the light faded, her pain eased. She stared at me in shock.

*“What did you do?!”*

“I freed you from this dungeon,” I explained.

*“You... What? How?!”*

I cast healing magic on her instead of replying, watching as her injuries faded.

*“Huh...?”*

“No matter what you say, I can’t be with you,” I told her. “Heck, I couldn’t if I wanted to.”

I had my hands full with just Saria and Al, and with Kannazuki-senpai and Airin to worry about on top of that, there was no way I could take on another partner.

“But I don’t care if you’re a gorilla or whatever,” I continued. “I’m glad you like me, and you seem really nice. That’s why you should get out of this dungeon and find an even better guy. That’s why I freed you. Makes sense?”

*“I... I can’t believe I’m free, but I can feel it’s true. How’s a monster like me supposed to find a mate, though? There’s only so much I can do.”*

I pulled out the cure to her misery—a Fruit of Evolution.

“Here, eat this.”

*“What?”*

“If you eat this and level up, you might just become more human, like Saria.” I hesitated, trying to choose my words carefully. “You’re a good woman. If you can pass as more human, you’re bound to find plenty of guys interested in you.”

*“Wh-What’re you saying? That’s ridiculous...”*

Despite her words, she readily accepted the Fruit and ate it. She froze up as soon as it was in her mouth.

“So? Feel any different?” I prompted her.



*"I... I've never tasted anything so awful in my life."*

*"Hahahaha! It's pretty horrible, isn't it? I promise it'll work, though."*

Her eyes flashed open in surprise, then she quickly averted her gaze. *"Jeez... And here I thought I could just give up..."*

*"What was that?"*

*"N-Nothing!"*

*"Uh... Okay?"*

If she said so, though, I had no reason to doubt her. The important thing was that I'd done all I could. All that was left was to confront those creepy wall eyes.

*"We'd better get going,"* I told her. *"It looks like when I freed you from the dungeon, the room decided the room's master was gone."*

The hefty doors leading to the stairs down were now open.

*"Th-Then I'd better... ugh..."*

*"Hey, take it easy!"*

*"But..."*

Even though her wounds were healed, she didn't have the stamina to do much.

*"Leave the rest to us. All you have to do is get out of this place and find the guy of your dreams."*

*"It, okay,"* Saria assured her. *"Seiichi, strong."*

The Anakongda pursed her lips in thought, then sighed. *"Fine. The rest is up to you. But listen up, I'm not ungrateful! I'll remember this, and I swear I'll repay you one day."*

*"It's not that big a deal, really."*

*"I'll go see you myself if I have to!"* she insisted, blushing again just a little. *"The next time we meet, I'll be so hot you'll have to pick your jaw up off the floor!"*

The snakes bubbled with excitement.

*“Neesan’s sure fired up.”*

*“We’re coming with you!”*

*“Wait... We’re still bound to the dungeon, aren’t we?”*

*“Nooooooooo!”* they all cried.

I rolled my eyes at their little comedy skit, then cast Abraham Lincoln on them without a second thought.

*“Y-You freed us? It’s that easy? P-Please let us call you Aniki!”*

*“Aniki! Aniki!”*

*“God, I have my hands full with an apprentice already!”*

*I don’t need anyone else calling me that... Agnos alone is more than enough!*

With everyone freed, though, we were finally ready to move on to the next floor.

“Eh, I guess it’ll be fine... See you again sometime, hopefully!” I waved goodbye to them.

“Bye!” Saria echoed, now back in her human form.

*“Later!”* the Anakongda waved back before heading out through the doors leading toward the exit.

After promising to meet again sometime, we headed down the stairs to where the eyes no doubt waited.

Al shot me a sidelong look. “So, uh, Seiichi? You some kinda gorillakiller or something?”

“Gorillakiller? What?”

She shook her head and sighed. “Nah, forget about it. She grew on me, too, and Saria seems pretty okay with her now.”

“Huh?”

Looking around, Louisse and Routier seemed a little disturbed and confused; Origachan was the same as always; and Lulune looked oddly proud. I was the

only one who didn't get what she meant by that—even Origa-chan seemed to understand on some level.

*There's no time for that, though. Those eyes are still alive out there.*

That was probably the “threat” that the Snake Goddess was referring to, since we were all convinced the eyes died at the time. There was still the “poor girl” part of her warning that stuck with me, though, and we hadn't encountered anything like that yet. Whoever she was, she was sealed somewhere in this dungeon—unlike the Anakongda, who was created here.

Weird omens aside, though, I was in a foul mood. Selfish as it was, I hated the way those eyes worked, and I was determined to end them one way or another.

“Let's see... I wonder if it'll finally face us head-on?”

Those were the first words out of my mouth as soon as we came across the door—a massive piece of stonework that seemed to herald the end of the dungeon.

※ ※ ※

“What is this place?”

Beyond the massive, snake-motif door was a gloomy chamber. It was too dark to see anything, except for a humanoid form strung up by chains in a cross pattern. Something about the sight made us hesitate in the doorway. When we finally took our first cautious steps into the chamber, the door closed behind us.

We approached the figure and finally were able to see it through the gloom—but this time we stopped for a different reason.

“Please don't come any closer.”

“Huh?”

The woman bound there had hair made of writhing green serpents, her eyes downcast. She was pretty hot, too—her clothes were battered and torn, but she had no visible injuries. She had a pretty curvy body despite being roughly the same age as me, and the way the chains bit into her chest in particular was oddly arousing. Regardless, I was nothing but shocked at the sight of her.

“A medusa...?” I muttered.

She looked like she could’ve come straight out of Greek mythology. I couldn’t say for sure, of course, since I didn’t have any real-life experience with the creatures, but she definitely had snakes for hair, and I couldn’t think of any other explanation for that.

Al shot me a confused look. “What’s a medusa?”

“Uh... It’s a made-up monster from my world.”

Apparently, they didn’t have monsters like that here—but that wasn’t important now. We had to help her somehow.

“Excuse me?” I called out to her. “About those chains—”

“Please stay away from me.”

Despite our hopes to help her, she refused our help again.

“But why?” Saria pressed.

“I don’t know what you people are doing here, but please leave now. I don’t want to hurt anyone else.”

I took a few slow steps closer. “I don’t know what’s wrong, but we can’t just leave you here. Can you—”

“Gah?!” She suddenly cried out, straining painfully against her chains. “N-No... Please run...!”

“Huh?!”

“Gh... No... Nooooooooooooo!!”

Her eyes suddenly flashed open, violet light bursting out of them right at me like a pair of lasers. Sensing danger, I ducked out of the way of the light, and it hit the door behind me instead.

“What...?”

“Th-The door...”

I wasn’t too surprised, but everyone else who saw the effects of the light started in shock. After all, the door had been turned into cold, rigid stone. The

metal was pretty cold and rigid from the beginning, but the double doors were now a single slab of unified rock.

The girl hurriedly dropped her head again, struggling desperately against some unknown force.

“I can’t... hold it back... Please, leave while you still can...!”

“Uh... We can’t really do that.”

We couldn’t abandon her when she was suffering like that, after all, and we still had unfinished business with the dungeon. While I puzzled how to respond to her, our mark’s voice boomed out.

*“What, you wretches survived? How depressingly dull.”*

“You bastard...!” I gritted my teeth.

*“No matter. You’ll die here all the same... Now go, my cursed pet! Slay those miserable intruders!”*

“Gh... uh... Gaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!”

She screamed, unable to withstand it any longer. The chains and cross she was bound to snapped off and away from her.

*“Mwahahahaha! Go, smite them with your unholy powers! Kill them! Kill them and elevate my strength to yet-greater heights!”*

“Ugh... ahh...”

*“Stop dawdling! Kill them all! The outside world abandoned you, and I finally offer you purpose! Release your darkness, now!”*

“N-No... I won’t...” She pressed her hands hard over her eyes.

“I’m sick of your stupid games!” Al shouted at the voice. “Stop hidin’ and get your crummy ass out here!”

Lulune nodded gravely. “How dare you cower and flee from Master? What callous impudence! Do you want to be wiped off the face of the world?”

The pair looked about the room in irritation, trying to find the source of the voice.

*“Fools!” the dungeon scoffed. “Why should I sully my hands? Your fate is death shall, and no amount of flailing or childish posing may change that.”*

Louisse drew her sword. “If you won’t come out on your own, I shall attack until I hit.”

She began firing off indiscriminate energy slashes into the walls and ceiling, but despite the damage she was dealing, it regenerated almost immediately.

*“Bwahahaha! Resistance is futile! You cannot leave this room... no, leave my body ever again! You shall fall to the girl’s curse in due time.”*

“I-I don’t... want... to hurt them!” she protested through desperately gritted teeth.

*“Hmph. You would resist? Against inhabitants of the very world that ruined and abandoned you? Give in!”*

“Gah... A-Aaaaaaaaaaaaaagh!!”

Black smoke crept out of the floor, enveloping the medusa-girl’s body. She fought desperately to resist it, but her strength gave out all too quickly, and her eyes flashed completely open, brimming with malice. She swept her gaze over us.

“I hate you... I hate you I hate you I hate you I hate you!!”

“Whoa!!”

“Shit!”

“Uh-oh.”

We all desperately leapt to avoid the petrifying light.

*Wait, I’m immune to petrification, and Saria has those new gauntlets from the Anakongda. I guess this is more like a mental health thing? I dunno, it’d feel wrong to not dodge.*

As my companions dodged, they continued to indiscriminately tear chunks of the room’s walls, desperate to land a blow on the dungeon.

“Why?!” the girl screamed as I dodged. “Why did you abandon me? What did I do to deserve this?! I never wanted a body like this... I didn’t want any of this!”

*“Humans are such filthy, selfish creatures!” the dungeon agreed vehemently. “They birthed you, but sealed you in these depths as soon as they grew sick of you! The ability to petrify anything you lay eyes on is a great power indeed, a curse by no measure, but they hated you all the same! What a poor girl, indeed!”*

I couldn't see its face, but I could just imagine it singing sadistically.

*“When they sealed you in this place, I gained full access to your glorious strength and furthered my own power to untold heights. You're useful trash to me, if nothing else!”*

*“Gh... gaaaaaah!!”*

*This stupid dungeon really loves rubbing people the wrong way, huh?!*

The girl didn't know how to refute the booming voice, and desperate tears of blood began to streak down her face.

*“Mwahahahahahaha! The humans gave me an amusing tool, indeed! I must thank them for that, at least—I'll swallow humans and their miserable, twisted strength, and soon this whole rotten world will be mine!”* It let out a delusional, cackling laugh. *“Well, girl? What are you waiting for?! Slay—”*

*“Jeez, can you shut up already?”* I muttered.

I cast Abraham Lincoln on the girl, making him MVP for the second time today. The dark smoke wreathed around her body burst away from her, and she collapsed to the ground like a puppet freed from its strings.

*“Agh...”*

*“What?!”*

Girl and dungeon alike gasped in shock.

*I know she's just sealed here, but I guess she was bound here just like the Anakongda.*

I cast an irritated look around the room. *“Jeez, you keep going on and on about your plans and shit... Honestly? Don't know, don't care.”*

*“Y-You what?!”*

*How could I understand? Like I can just relate to someone's half-assed backstory.*

Saria and the others stopped their attacks, returning to my side.

*"Gh... I've no idea how you managed to pry her from my grasp, but you'll never escape this place! You cannot leave as long as I live! But fine... I shall discard the chamber you stand within and that worthless piece of trash with it! Bwahahaha, MWAHAHAHA!"*

Again, the dungeon's voice began to grow distant.

"Dammit, it's getting away!" Al swore. "You're just gonna let it run?!"

"Yeah."

I didn't mind too much. It couldn't escape from me.

Routier frowned. "Are all dungeons this ill-mannered?"

Louisse shook her head with a sigh. "To be frank, I have never heard of a sentient dungeon before, let alone been inside one."

*Yeah... this whole situation is just plain weird. We've got more important stuff to deal with now, though.*

"You okay?" I called out to the girl.

"I... um... er... I-I'm fine."

She was quivering in terror, her eyes desperately clamped shut. I smiled painedly at the sight.

"You don't have to be that scared."

"Of course I'm scared. The light may be gone now, but I can't control it. You don't want to be turned to stone, do you?"

Her head drooped, but Saria crouched down to address her a little more softly.

"My name's Saria. What's yours?"

"Zora Mergon."

"Okay, Zora-san, what brings you here?"



She shifted uncomfortably. “Can I please not answer that? Please leave me alone.”

“We can’t just leave you here. It must be so lonely in a place like this!”

“Besides, we promised,” I added. “The Snake Goddess was pretty insistent.”

She suddenly looked up, eyes still clamped shut. “The goddess?!”

“That’s right. She was determined that we save the poor girl trapped here.”

“Oh... I see...” Zora hesitated for a long moment before finally beginning her tale. “I’m a serpentkin, and I was born in a small village in the depths of a forest. As soon as I was born, though, I turned the first person I saw—my own mother—to solid stone.”

“ ... ”

*So she’s always had that power, huh.*

“Mom was treated almost immediately, so she lived, but everyone... My own parents even called me a monster, a curse on the village. The Snake Goddess-sama told me everything.”

“The Snake Goddess did?”

“Yes... The other serpentkin feared me and decided to kill me, but the Snake Goddess-sama, in all her benevolence, grew angry with them. She prevented me from being killed, but enough people were upset by their guardian deity that they sealed the both of us away in this miserable dungeon. It was just a small cave at first, and the Snake Goddess-sama and I lived here together. The more power the dungeon accumulated, however, the larger it became, and eventually it awakened. It built floor after floor and separated me from the Snake Goddess-sama. As soon as it learned of my power, it locked me in this chamber and used me to fuel its power.”

I didn’t know what to say. She was orphaned, nearly killed by her friends and family, and got locked in a cave with the one person who stood up for her. If she had such a miserable life, then it wasn’t surprising Routier felt the dungeon was so sad.

*I know I thought this with the Black Dragon God, too, but people can be so ungrateful... It's not my place to say, but that's no way to treat someone who's protected you and sheltered you for so long.*

“That’s why I’m here,” Zora concluded. “From the very moment I was born until now, my life has been nothing but misfortune.”

She smiled sadly and was caught utterly off-guard when Origa-chan ran up and wrapped her little arms around her.



“Huh...?”

“Don’t say that.”

“What do you know? How could you possibly know how I—”

Origachan shook her head. “I know. My parents abandoned me because I’m a black cat.”

Zora twitched in surprise. “What?”

“They said I never should’ve been born. My parents sold me, and I was bought and forced to be an assassin.”

“...”

“But I’m happy now. I don’t care about the rest of the world. Everyone has the right to be happy.”

“Of course I want to be happy!” Zora protested. “I want to get out of here and see daylight again! I want fresh air, and I want to see places all over the world! But I...”

She broke down, sobbing.

Al shot me a sidelong glance. “Hey, I know this ain’t something I should be askin’ you, but can’t you help her? I know how shit being cursed can be.”

“I’m glad you feel comfortable relying on me, but...”

I wanted to help her, but there was one critical issue. No matter how many times I checked her Status with Greater Analysis or Clairvoyance, there was no indication of her being cursed. That meant— “She was just naturally born like that,” I muttered.

I could remove a curse, but this was different. I couldn’t even imagine a spell that could physically change her to such an extent. Worse, her petrifying gaze wasn’t a skill either, so I couldn’t think of a single thing I could do for her.

“Even if this is just her natural state, I don’t even know *how* that light’s coming out of her eyes,” I lamented.

“I think she has too much mana leaking from her eyes,” Routier suddenly said.

“Huh?”

The Demon King’s daughter was carefully studying Zora’s face.

“I have the ability to ‘see’ magic—it’s like seeing an extra color,” she explained. “She must have a similar talent, but I’ve been trying to figure out why her eyes have so much extra mana. Honestly, she’s blinding to look at. When she’s unable to restrain that mana, it emerges as a petrifying light.”

“Okay...” I nodded, only a little confused now. “But what can we do about it? Do we just need to siphon off the extra stuff?”

That sounded possible, but unfortunately, Routier shook her head.

“Mana naturally circulates throughout the body. If you try to drain it away without using it, there’s no telling what might happen to her... She could die.”

“So we can’t do anything at all.”

“Well... Perhaps if there was a way to absorb the mana as it escaped her eyes...”

*Like putting a net or lid over her eyes?*

“How hard would that be?” I asked.

Routier frowned. “Under normal circumstances, impossible. You can’t prevent it from coming out, and generally speaking, there’s no means of blocking mana once it’s left the body.”

“Oh...”

In other words, we needed something that could totally block the flow of mana, but it wasn’t even as simple as that. She wanted to see the outside world, and it only felt right to grant her that wish, too.

*I may be totally off-base here, but that probably means she needs anti-magic goggles or glasses or something.*

I sighed in frustration. “Something that shuts out mana but doesn’t shut out sight...”

*No way something like that actually exists! And even if it did, there’s no way I* — “Wait,” I cut myself off as I remembered.

*Right... It does exist! It exists, and I know how to get it!*

I raised my voice to address the whole room. "Hey, everyone!"

"Hmm?"

"I know how to fix Zora's problem."

"WHAT?!" Everyone gasped.

Routier shot me a disbelieving look. "Seiichi... Nothing can shut out mana the way we need it to, especially if it needs to be see-through as well."

I'd almost agreed with her, but there was one thing she was overlooking.

"Just trust me! But in order to get it, I'll have to leave the dungeon first."

Al furrowed her brow. "Leave? You know we're stuck in here, right?"

I'd honestly forgotten about that, but it didn't matter.

"I've got teleportation magic, so I'll be fine."

Al nodded understandingly. "Right... I remember that now."

I could feel that the spell would work even in this room, so we could leave without any trouble.

"But once we've finished our business outside, I've got to come back here."

"Huh? Why?"

I gave Al the best, brightest smile I could.

"Isn't it obvious? I need to make this asshole dungeon pay."

## Chapter 16: Clear Skies

**“B**eatrice-san!”

“What? Seiichi-san?! What are you doing here? I thought you were in the dungeon still.”

I returned ahead of the others, making a beeline for Beatrice-san to figure out how to make the tool we needed. She was shocked to see us appear so suddenly, but I’d expected as much.

“Sorry, but this is urgent.”

“Urgent? What’s the matter?”

“Well... Where did you get your glasses made?”

“What?” She blinked at me confusedly, trying to process what I just said. “My glasses?”

“Yeah. It doesn’t have to be glasses, though—goggles would work, too. I know you know I’m from another world, and glasses are pretty common back there, but I have no idea where to find them here.”

“I’m afraid I still don’t understand, but you can buy them in the academy town. There’s a general store that sells them.”

“Okay... Do you think they could make glasses out of materials I give them?”

“Your own materials?” She was no less confused than before, but she considered it seriously, at least. “You’d likely be better off taking your business to a blacksmith. There’s one in town as well, so it wouldn’t take you long to get there. Here, let me draw you a map.”

“Thank you so much!”

After accepting the makeshift map from her, I headed right into town. Her map was very detailed and precise, and I had no difficulty finding the blacksmith in question.

“Hello? Is anyone here?” I called as I stepped inside.

“Welcome!”

A buff man with a shaggy, graying beard emerged from the back to greet me. Looking around the store, they sold a wide array of both weapons and armor. I would’ve loved to examine his wares in more detail, but I had more important things to do.

“Can you make glasses, or maybe goggles, out of this?”

I handed him the key to this whole puzzle—a hefty bag of Antimagic Sand. It was a drop from a Sandman I had fought way back in the Black Dragon God’s dungeon, and I’d held onto it ever since. The description explicitly said it shuts out magic and mana but provides no magic defense. I was half-convinced it was useless when I found it, and I was glad to be proved wrong.

The blacksmith accepted the bag from me and examined it carefully. “Hmm... Can’t say I’ve ever seen sand like this, but Analysis tells me I can turn this into glass. Why make it into glasses, though?”

“It’s really important,” I insisted. “Can you do it?”

“Sure. I could even make one pair of glasses and goggles each, if that strikes your fancy. What’ll it be?”

“Can you make both, then?”

“Leave it to me! You can hold on out here—I’ll be back in a jiffy.”

With that, he took the sand into the back of the store. I didn’t have anything to do while I waited, though, so I ended up idly browsing his wares anyway. It wasn’t long before he came back out.

“All done.”

“Wow, that was fast!”

“The glass was pretty easy to make,” he told me. “Here you go. For the glasses, I used a bit of variametal, though of course I mixed in a bit of other metal. Seemed only fitting to match your Antimagic Sand. I dunno who’s planning on using it, but the frames’ll change size and shape to fit whoever puts them on.”



He handed me a pair of glasses with slender silver frames.

“Here’s your goggles,” he continued. “Gotta admit, nothing special or fancy here. I used rubber, I guess, if you think that’s fancy.”

The goggles were the kind a pilot might wear. The band was made out of black rubber, just like he said, so it looked like it could fit Zora fine.

Content with the results, I thanked him and paid the price he named. It was unexpectedly cheap, between how pleased he was to work with such an unusual material and the fact that he could use leftover scraps of variametal. I wasn’t short on money by any stretch, but it was nice to get it for cheap.

With everything ready, I teleported back to the dungeon’s deepest room, where Zora and the others were waiting.

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“I’m back!”

“Oh, Seiichi!”

“Damn, that was fast. Done already?”

Saria and Al were the first to greet me, followed closely by everyone else.

“Yep, all done,” I told them. “It was pretty easy. All she has to do now is put these on.”

I held out the glasses so the others could see them.

“What’s this?” Saria wondered.

Louisse inspected them carefully. “As you claimed, Teacher, I imagine she could see through these without difficulty.”

“Are you sure it can cut off the flow of mana?” Routier asked me dubiously.

“We’ll have to try it to find out.” With that, I approached Zora, who was still huddled on the ground. “Here. Why don’t you try these on?”

“B-But—”

“I know you’re scared,” I told her as calmly as I could. “But if you don’t try, you’ll never move forward. You don’t have to look at anyone—you can just face an empty wall, and we’ll be able to tell if the glasses work from that. Okay?”

“O-Okay...”

She slipped the glasses on, then slowly opened her eyes. As soon as she did...

“Ah... Whaaaa?!”

The light was completely shut off by the glasses. I was a little worried that the light would slip out the sides or something, so I had the goggles at the ready, but for some reason I didn’t see any light coming from her eyes at all.

It took me a moment, but I finally realized an addition to the glasses I hadn’t noticed before. There was Antimagic Sand integrated in small volumes in the frame, notably on the bridge and by her temples, which totally shut off all the leaking mana. Zora frantically felt at her face, then turned to face me.

“I-I can see!”

“Yeah.” I sighed with relief. “That worked out fine.”

“I-I... Waaaaaaaahh!!”

She broke out in tears, and Saria reassuringly stroked her hair.

“Isn’t that nice, Zora-san?” Saria cooed.

“Y-Yeah... Yeah!”

“Don’t get too surprised yet.” I smiled.

Zora looked back up at me in confusion. “Huh?”

“I’ve still got something great to show you. C’mon.”

“Huh? What?”

Al looked at me in confusion. “Seiichi? What’s goin’ on?”

“Just trust me... Oh, and try to stay as close to me as possible, okay?”

“R-Right...”

Everyone obediently did as I asked, even through their confusion.

“All right, then!”

I drew my swords, Black and White, and stepped forward with all my might. The ground all around us shattered and burst, and my companions started in shock.

“Here we go!”

Foot still firmly planted in front of me, I imbued my two swords with a certain spell and slashed at the ceiling, mustering just enough force to make the world itself shriek with discomfort. As soon as I did so, everything began to shake.

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As Seiichi was handing the glasses to Zora, the dungeon snickered to itself, content with its certain victory.

*“Hehehe, those foolish humans! As if mere mortals could ever stand against the reality-warping power of a dungeon! When they finally crumble and fall in that chamber, their deaths will be a meal for my strength!”*

Its invisible grin spread.

*“Other dungeons have fallen to their machinations before they could gain consciousness, but not I! With them joining the rest of the foolish would-be explorers of my depths, plus that girl’s glorious curse, the world shall be mine! Who is fit to rule this world? Not the humans—ME! I will hold infinite power and rule all of existence as I please! Mwahahahahahaha!”*

At that moment, however, it felt something shudder and shift.

*“Wh-What... What’s happening?!”*

Each floor was like an internal organ or digestive tract of the dungeon. Given its supernatural, reality-warping qualities, no amount of conventional damage could cause lasting damage. Rather, any humans inside would have their stamina slowly drained as they were “digested” and eventually incorporated into the dungeon itself. That worked two ways, however—Seiichi’s heavy stomp in the dungeon’s lowest room hit like a stabbing pain to its gut, and it let out a wail of pain.

*“Gaaaaah?! Owowow... Wh-What is this?! Where is this pain coming—gwagh?!”*

The pain suddenly exploded in intensity.

*“Gh... guh... Wh-What’s happening to me...?!”*

It frantically felt through its rooms for the source of the pain, but its attempt was short and miserable.

*“Geh?!”*

With that, the dungeon ceased to exist, not allowed any means of resistance or even the time to process its death. Its human-filled “stomach” burst, tearing up through its stony “throat” and obliterating its “brain.” It never could have expected such a counterattack. Not a soul was present to witness its fate, as it simply ceased to be.

One single, mighty blow from Seiichi had destroyed it utterly from the inside-out. Every wall, ceiling, and monster was wiped off the face of the world, miraculously sparing only the Snake Goddess, the Anakongda, and her snake underlings. They were simply enveloped in a protective veil and lifted delicately out of the wreckage.

*“Well, now...”*

The Snake Goddess opened her eyes in shock as the dungeon she’d been trapped in fell apart around her.

Elsewhere, the Anakongda was desperately trying to make sense of the collapsing tunnels around her.

*“You okay?!”* she called out to the other snakes, who were fortunately quick to reply.

*“R-Right as rain, Neesan!”*

*“What’s going on here?! This is crazy!”*

*“You think I know?!”* she snapped. *“We seem safe in this light for now, at least, but stay on your guards!”*

*“Yeah! We don’t wanna die here!”*

*“That’s right! We’ve gotta watch you become smoking hot! Man, I can’t wait until you see Aniki again!”*

*“Damn!”* a few others whistled at the thought.

The Anakongda’s eyes narrowed. *“I wonder if I can kick you guys outta this veil?”*

*“Sorryyyyyyy!!”* they wailed.

It was as if the world itself bent to Seiichi’s will—to be frank, that was exactly what had happened, though none of them knew that was the reason they were saved.

Even after blasting through the dungeon, however, the attack continued at full strength, as though the floors above were naught but a minor obstacle on the path to its true destination.

The trees of the forest the dungeon lay beneath were vaporized, along with the monsters that lived there. No damage was done to the Barbodel Magic Academy nearby, another artifact of the world’s bending about Seiichi’s will. It was unable to block or deflect his blow directly, but it managed to reduce the sheer scale of the destruction somewhat. The entire forest that the Servant Demioros had lurked in was destroyed as a result, but still, the attack continued.

One of the world’s core motivations for such efforts was to reduce the stress Seiichi incurred, fervently hoping that he would not be tempted enough to attempt another apocalyptic strike in the near future. It hoped this blow alone would be cathartic enough to stay his hand—though, of course, not even Seiichi himself was aware of the lengths to which reality bent to his whims.

Through this, a threat of existential proportions—the Dragon God-Emperor—happened to be flying overhead, on its way to wipe a country or two off the map to quell its boredom. If not for the Wicked One and his dark machinations, the Dragon God-Emperor would have been the greatest threat the world had ever known. Despite that, it had made the mistake of cutting across the sky over the dungeon Seiichi had destroyed and was obliterated before it even knew what hit it.

Still, Seiichi's mighty slash continued, blasting through the atmosphere and into open space, plowing through several lifeless worlds and stars before encountering a starship in its path. Said vessel was sharper and sleeker than any vessel of Earthly make, a vehicle beyond human conception.

Aboard the craft, a pair of silver-skinned life forms with orbular black eyes were talking.

"Captain. It seems there's a planet with intelligent life near our present location."

He pulled up a hologram of said world on the central display apparatus in the middle of the bridge. It was none other than the world Seiichi and his companions presently lived on.

The captain grinned. "Oh? To think there's intelligent life in this miserable corner of the galaxy... No doubt those primitives have no way of detecting our craft. Very well, we shall colonize this planet as a plantation world, and—"

The captain never finished their sentence. The ship was hit by Seiichi's slash, and was destroyed with greater ease than any plasma cannon. The aliens aboard were slain in a heartbeat, and in doing so, he inadvertently saved his world from interstellar conquerors. Still, his attack did not slow or wane, growing even greater in power as it absorbed the crafts' inexplicable power.

The attack continued past an empty, dead husk of a star, bathing it in immense energy. Its dead core was rejuvenated by its passing, flaring back to life so as to bathe its orbiting planets in warmth. The civilizations of those worlds, having been haunted by the cold darkness of space for far too long, cried great tears of joy as life returned to their cold, lonely worlds.

Seiichi's attack continued blasting through the cosmos until it reached an incomprehensible corner of the universe. A great creature dwelled there, many hundreds—no, thousands of times larger than Earth's sun—and a fleet of innumerable spacecraft were confronting the horror.

"Give up, Space Overlord! The universe will never be yours!"

*"Mwahahaha! Resist all you can, Space Hero, but what can you do to resist Us and Our inevitable conquest?"*

“I’m not alone—I’m surrounded by all the friends and allies I’ve found during my journey and the survivors from all the countless worlds you’ve devoured! We won’t let you wreak such havoc across the universe again. We, the Great Federation of Planets, will strike you down here and now!”

The Space Overlord sighed with languid disinterest. *“You are powerless, mere playthings before Our nigh-infinite strength. Your weakness is a sin punishable by death. We destroyed your planets? Of course We did—it was Our right to do so. You possess no means of resisting.”*

“You space-bastard!”

*“Now fall, weaklings! We shall enjoy crushing you into—”*

Seiichi’s attack connected with the Space Overlord. His attack was only the radius of the sun at that point—the equivalent size of a flea to a human—but it still possessed the sheer destructive power to wipe the Space Overlord off the face of the universe.

“What?!”

The Space Hero and his assembled Great Federation couldn’t believe their eyes, and the Space Overlord surely could never have imagined such a death, much less while extolling the weakness of lesser life forms. It could have never predicted that there was life in the universe so incomprehensibly strong that such semantics meant nothing.

Even through their confusion, however, the Space Hero and his companions knew one thing—the omnipotent, immortal being that had asserted absolute control over the entire known universe was dead. They broke out in cheers and cries of jubilation.

“Yeaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!”

“We did it... We really did it!”

“Nobody ever has to be afraid of the Space Overlord again!”

“I have no idea what happened, even now, but one thing is clear... we have finally gotten vengeance for the destruction of our lives and slain our oppressor. We no doubt knew that deep down, this was a fight we could not win and that

we would likely all lose our lives trying. I just... I can't believe we did it! I'm so happy that we didn't have to lose anyone else; I don't know what to say...!"

The brave space-warriors embraced each other as they celebrated, crying untold tears of joy. They still had no idea who to thank or why—all that mattered was that the Space Overlord was dead.

—And with that, Seiichi inadvertently saved not only entire worlds, but the universe itself.

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I blew away the ceiling and every floor above that straight up to the surface. The Snake Goddess and the Anakongda were probably on those floors, so I imbued my swords with my enemy-slaying-ally-saving spell Judgment. I really hoped that meant they'd all be okay, at least. It occurred to me that I could've just cast Judgment itself and removed any margin for error, but it felt like a muscles-over-magic kind of day.

*Wait, those aren't a thing, are they?*

After witnessing my attack not only blast all the way up to the surface but even through the clouds above, my companions stared up at the gaping chasm in horror.

"Sweet, the sky!" I remarked, looking up at my handiwork.

"The fuck are you so calm about?!" Al yelled at me. "Seriously, how?! Did you just blow away the whole goddamn forest?! Just frying the dungeon itself is batshit enough!"

I could understand what she was feeling. Honestly, I wasn't expecting to do so much with one attack either.

*That went super smoothly... Maybe the dungeon's ceilings had mold or something?*

Still shielding my eyes from the sun, I turned to smile at Zora.

"See? There's the sky."



“Oh...”

She stared up at the heavens in awe. Then, slowly and silently, tears began to streak down her face.



“So that’s it... The sky...”

“Yep. Pretty, isn’t it?”

“Yes... very,” she whispered dreamily. “I might’ve seen it once, when I was only a little girl, but it was never so vibrant before. I’ve never seen anything this beautiful...”

She looked down for just a moment to wipe her eyes, then looked up once again.

“I never knew the world was so vast...”

I smiled. “Sure is. Heck, the world out of this hole’s so big and bright, I don’t know if I’ll ever see it all, but it’ll always be there if we want it. The world belongs to nobody.”

“Yes...” She nodded.

“Wanna come with us?”

“What?”

“I don’t want to force you or anything, but I think it’d be fun to travel that big, mysterious world together with you.”

“Travel the world... together...”

Saria hugged her tightly from behind. “Let’s go! Traveling around alone is fun and all, but the more friends you have, the more you can share your happiness! It’s the best thing ever!”

“Yeah,” Al agreed. “I’ve been an adventurer for ages, but my... condition meant I could never go too far. Now, though, Seiichi made it so I can go wherever the hell I like. I stick with him ‘cause it’s a lot more fun with him... I’m pretty damn happy, honestly.”

Louisse smiled faintly at her. “You should take this opportunity to enjoy all the world has to offer, Zora-san. I am sure you could manage that by Teacher’s side.”

“Nobody wants you to be miserable,” Routier told her. “The world is here for you as much as it is for anyone else. It doesn’t want you to suffer. Life is kinder

and more beautiful than you can imagine.”

“Precisely, little snakeling!” Lulune huffed. “The world is full to the brim with delicious things to eat, and to live in ignorance of such bliss is unthinkable!”

I chuckled a little. “That was surprisingly a little kind for you, Lulune.”

“M-Master?!” she gasped.

I wouldn’t call it unthinkable or anything, but she was right in that food was a great way of sampling what the world had to offer.

Origa-chan looked up at Zora and extended her little arm.

“Want to come with us?”

Zora hesitated for only a moment, then clenched the smaller girl’s hand tightly. “Y-Yes!”

It was the perfect way to cap off all the dungeon’s chaos—or at least, it would’ve been if not for a fortunately very familiar voice in my head.

**>You have leveled up.**

*I... what?*

## Chapter 17: Return of the Sheep

**A** level-up?

All the peace and contentment I'd been feeling was gone in an instant.

*Okay, deep breaths... Maybe nothing crazy's going to happen to me? All my level-ups until now have been pretty insane, but maybe this time is finally different!*

Al seemed to notice the despair on my face. "Hm? You okay there, Seiichi?"

"I... I just leveled up..."

"Damn, you're getting stronger *again*?!"

*That's what I wanna know! C'mon, body, what the hell do you want from me?!*

Instead of moping about it forever, I swallowed hard and opened up my Status for the first time in ages.

*I wonder what's going on in there?*

*Dear Seiichi-sama,*

*My sincerest congratulations on your latest level-up. I am filled with warmth and joy at your burgeoning strength. However, I regret to inform you that I am presently unable to display your Status for you, and for this, I must sincerely apologize. I beg your forgiveness for such a display of ineptitude.*

*I shall not give in so easily, however. I have left on a journey to train, with the hopes that one day I will be capable of displaying your Status in all its glory. Until then, please do not look for me. I pray that you will be content while waiting for my return.*

*I pray with every fiber of my being that your exploits shall grow yet greater. Until we meet again.*

It seemed my Status was out to lunch.

“WHYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY?!”

*Status, come back!! How can my Status abandon my Status? I thought it was bad before, dammit!! I thought last time was bad enough... And wait, where'd it even go? When's it coming back?! This is just fucking weird, no matter how I try to reason it! I can't believe I went into this knowing it'd be really bad, and somehow it was a million times worse!*

Saria and the others jumped in surprise at my sudden screaming.

“Seiichi? What's wrong?” Saria asked me worriedly.

“M-My Status just ran away from home...”

“Huh?”

Everyone gasped in confusion.

*I wish I could at least be surprised, like it was someone else's problem... Dammit, I wanna cry again.*

Saria was the first to recover, nodding in understanding. “Okay... You're you, I guess!”

Al scrunched up her face a little. “Guess it's a pretty big ask, bein' your Status. It's probably been under a lot of pressure for a while now... Wait, Status is sentient?!”

Lulune nodded proudly. “Finally, even your Status acknowledges your glory! A fitting accomplishment for my Master!”

“Seiichi-oniichan?” Origa-chan looked up at me with a worried smile. “That's not normal... but it's very you.”

Louisse shook her head in despair. “How could I possibly be your equal now, Teacher? I've lost all confidence in my ability to someday match your prowess.”

Routier breathed a sigh of relief. “I see it now. I was convinced that the Cult of the Wicked One was a threat of unrivaled proportions, but I've begun to pity the Wicked One himself.”

“H-Huh?” Zora looked around in confusion. “I'm afraid I'm still a little lost, but... Good for you?”

“Stop it! Stop treating me so normally!!”

*Especially you, Saria! “You’re you” doesn’t mean a thing!*

I felt pretty mentally beaten by that point already, but it was then that I finally remembered I hadn’t properly introduced myself to Zora.

*God, I don’t want to deal with any of this!*

I cleared my throat embarrassedly. “So, uh... I don’t think I told you my name.”

“Oh, yes, you haven’t! I was introduced to all your lovely companions while you were having the glasses crafted.”

“Right... Lemme start from the top, then. I’m Seiichi Hiiragi, but you can just call me Seiichi.”

“Seiichi-san? Understood!”

She seemed full of life now, which was like a breath of rejuvenating fresh air on my poor, strained heart.

“—But that’s not all! No, the rejuvenation has only just begun!”

“?!”

The mysterious voice seemed to come out of nowhere. Al and the others prepared their weapons, ready to attack the mysterious intruder—but Saria and I recognized it.

“Huh... Is that...?”

“Oh, god, not him!”

Much to my distress, he—that stupid Sheep—appeared.

“It’s been a while, friends! It’s me, your friendly neighborhood Sheep-san! Go on, now, drink in my fluffiness and relax!”

“You’re so annoying already!” I screamed at him. He was clad in his usual top hat and tuxedo, but his smirk was somehow a hundred times worse than I remembered.





*Just when I finally had the chance to relax, too! I'm sick of this already!*

"Wait, you two know this thing?" Al asked Saria and me.

"Yep!" Saria beamed at her. "His name's Sheep-san!"

The little freak nodded smugly. "Astutely put as always, Saria-ojousama! In comparison, Seiichi-sama, I'm not surprised your Status finally decided to fly the coop. Inhuman as always, eh?"

"Jeez, rub more salt in my wounds, why don't you!" I shouted at him. "How do you know about my Status, anyway?!"

"I've been watching you for some time now. Why, I laughed so hard I couldn't breathe."

"That's just cruel!"

*Dammit, he hasn't changed a bit... Why is that so relieving?!*

Al's brow furrowed in confusion at our exchange. "He's, uh... He's got a personality on him."

He chuckled. "Why, how kind of you to notice."

"She wasn't complimenting you!" I snapped.

*Seriously, how the hell does his brain work?*

"Now, if you'll permit me to *actually* say my piece"—he shot me an accusatory look—"I'd like to address why I'm here today."

"How is this my fault?!"

He waved me off. "Enough distractions, I said."

*I swear I'm gonna drop-kick this little jackass!*

Sheep-san cleared his throat. "Now, I'm assuming you know why I've appeared already—at least you should be aware, Seiichi-sama and Saria-ojousama."

"Huh?" I paused to think. "Right... You show up whenever someone 'truly' clears a dungeon, right?"

“Precisely. Under most circumstances, only dungeons ripe with lingering regrets can be truly cleared, meaning that I should not be here by rights.”

“Wait, really?”

*I think he mentioned something about that before, actually...*

Sheep-san turned to Zora. “This dungeon was originally formed through natural mana. However, once Zora-sama and the Snake Goddess-sama were sealed in, the dungeon itself grew sentient.”

“But wait,” I interrupted. “They’re both alive, so how can they have ‘lingering regrets’?”

He wagged his finger at me admonishingly. “Oh, how naïve!”

“Huh?”

“While granted, most such dungeons feature the possessor of said regrets as the boss, that’s not to say that *only* the boss can possess dungeon-shaping regret. In this case, upon the sealing of the Snake Goddess-sama and Zora-sama, the emotions of the serpentkin who sealed them away were trapped within these halls. The possessing emotion was therefore not as much regret as it was *malice*, hatred strong enough to curse its miserable inhabitants. Therefore, it became possible to truly clear this dungeon.”

“Okay... I think I get it...” My face drooped a little with sadness.

Zora was their regret, then—a violent, loathing regret. I didn’t know anything about the serpentkin or what exactly they were feeling, but that much was at least clear.

Sheep-san sighed. “But I must admit, Seiichi-sama, you seem to rather enjoy doing the impossible.”

“Wh-What are you talking about?”

Not that I had no idea—rather, there were so many things I couldn’t imagine which one he was referring to.

“Listen well—it should have been completely and utterly impossible to truly clear this dungeon.”

“Huh?”

*Impossible? But I did it somehow, right?*

“True-clearing a dungeon can only be achieved by allaying the lingering regrets,” he explained. “But the regrets in question here are, as I mentioned, those of the girl’s former serpentkin villagers. You would assume combating such a thing would be impossible, correct?”

“Well... I guess, yeah.”

“What you did, however, was deceptively simply. You *destroyed the dungeon itself*, making the presence or absence of said regrets a moot point.”

I awkwardly averted my eyes, trying not to look guilty. “Y-You can’t be serious!”

“Honestly, what a preposterous feat of strength,” the sheep continued. “Dungeons are indestructible by nature, but you wiped it quite thoroughly out of existence. You even liberated a few permanent fixtures, including Zora-san there, which is every bit as unimaginable. You’re not human by any stretch of the imagination, my friend.”

“Stop saying that!” I cried.

*Why’s he using my emotions like a punching bag?! I don’t think I’m human either, granted, but at least my Status says... wait, my Status ran away from home, dammit!*

“But enough of that for now,” he continued, ignoring my pain. “We still have to commemorate your true-clearing this place.”

“Why’d you bother insulting me at all, then?!”

“You noticed, then? How unexpectedly clever of you.”

“You better clench your woolly little jaw!” I swore, cracking my knuckles.

Sheep-san squealed, overacting his terror. “Oh, heavens, no! Anything but violence! Anything, good sir!”

*He’s making fun of me, isn’t he?*

As if to prove that, he quickly composed himself. “There’s no need to be so rash.” He turned to face Routier. “Now, Routier-sama...”

Her brow furrowed in confusion. “Me?”

“Yes, you, my fair lady. In addition to this somewhat unusual case, I must inform you that a dungeon rather close to your own heart—the one in which the Black Dragon God-sama resided—is also close to being truly cleared, following the visits of both Seiichi-sama and your father. As such, both your father and the Black Dragon God-sama have been freed from their respective servitudes.”

Routier’s eyes went wide, and she took an eager step closer. “Really? Are you sure?!”

“Of course! I’m a gentleman, and I would never dream of lying. As such, there is some crucial information that I wish for you to have.”

“Information?”

“Indeed.” He smiled cheerily at me before continuing. “In the near future, I imagine that not one but *two* dungeons shall be truly cleared.”

“Two?” I muttered confusedly.

“The first is the Black Dragon God-sama’s dungeon, as I mentioned.”

“The Black Dragon God?!” I gasped.

*Huh, so his dungeon’s almost done, too... Wait, he’s alive?! Nobody told me that! And to think I almost glossed over that bit!*

“What’ll happen if that place gets truly cleared?” I asked nervously.

“Let’s see... The main effect is that the Black Dragon God would be free to leave at his leisure and that Routier-sama will no doubt meet him outside the confines of his labyrinth in time.”

Routier nodded understandingly. “Might I ask who may be clearing it?”

Sheep-san made a show of hesitating. “Ordinarily, it would be strictly against the rules to share any names, but I shall consider this part of your reward this time.”

*Right, we get special loot for true-clearing a dungeon... How could I forget that stupid motorcycle helmet I got saddled with?!*

He shot me an uneasy glance. "I'm beginning to feel a lot of hostility, so I shall tell you right away. The adventurers in question are Zeanos-sama and Lucius-sama."

I smiled at their names. "Oh, those two!"

Al nodded, only a little confused. "Those're both guys Seiichi brought back from the Underworld, right? Damn, sayin' it out loud makes it sound so nuts..."

"I believe they were among the individuals that accompanied Teacher," Lousse mused. "The former Heroes' mentor and the first Demon King, if I recall."

"Precisely," Sheep-san confirmed. "The sole condition for clearing that dungeon is to have Lucius-sama present. Ordinarily, that is again an impossible feat given that he was dead. Honestly, it takes a special kind of insanity to bring people back from the dead."

"That I know." It was hard not to admit it, honestly.

"Good." Satisfied with my reply, he continued. "At any rate, I imagine those two shall have the Black Dragon God's Labyrinth cleared in short order."

"That makes sense. What's the other one?"

He still hadn't mentioned the second dungeon yet. Admittedly, every dungeon I knew was either truly cleared or would be soon, so hearing the name wouldn't mean anything to me, but I was still curious.

Sheep-san's expression turned grave. "Regrettably, that would be the Wicked One's dungeon."

"What?!"

Everyone was struck speechless.

"Th-The Wicked One's dungeon? Like, the sealed evil God's?"

"The very same. That means that his revival is drawing near."

“Well, shit,” Al swore angrily. “Hey, Sheep-san, or whatever the hell your name is! The hell aren’t you tryin’ to stop that?!”

He shook his head. “I’m afraid that’s impossible. My duty is to observe and regulate dungeons, and I’m incapable of directly interfering with adventurers.”

“C-Can’t you at least tell us where it is?!” I begged.

If we only knew where the dungeon was, there was a chance we could make it in time to stop them—but again, he shook his head no.

“I’m unable to do even that.”

“Why?!”

“That’s yet another rule... and besides, the Wicked One’s dungeon is not presently in this world.”

“Huh?”

He wasn’t making any sense.

“It was here, once,” he explained. “The so-called Cult of the Wicked One sliced the dungeon off from the world, however, placing it within an alternate dimension. As I am only able to monitor the dungeons of this world, I don’t know where it is now—and even if I did, I would be unable to tell you.”

“...”

Nobody said anything for a long time.

Finally, Sheep-san broke the silence with attempted cheerfulness. “Still, that’s far further in the future than with the Black Dragon God-sama’s dungeon—I meant soon in the relative sense. Making haste couldn’t hurt, but I wouldn’t call it a particularly time-sensitive situation.”

“Right... And we’ll have to find the Wicked One’s dungeon before we can do anything anyway.”

*Man, this could be trouble... and, of course, we have those cultist freaks to thank. Those weird powers, all their sadistic little games—I’m sick of them already!*

“At any rate,” Sheep-san concluded, “those are the only dungeons likely to be truly cleared in the near future.”

“Sheep-san?” Routier asked as soon as he finished. “Er... May I call you that?”

“Of course! Please do.”

“Thank you. Father is still sealed in a dungeon somewhere, and from the way you spoke, I gathered that true-clearing his dungeon would be enough to free him. What are the conditions to achieve that?”

“Oh, I see... I see how it is! You wish to ask how to free him!”

Her brow creased with worry. “Am I not allowed to?”

Sheep-san shot me a knowing look. “Well... I’ve already shared information on other dungeons as your reward, so I’m afraid I can’t tell you what you wish to know for free. However, if you’re willing to forego your reward from the dungeon in question, I’d be willing to share what I know. What will it be?”

*Jeez, that’s a shitty thing to ask... though I guess I’m not interested in any true-clearing rewards anyway. Not unless it’s something too good to pass up, like the Fruit of Evolution I got from the Forest of Endless Heartbreak.*

“I don’t really mind,” I told Routier. “The information’s more valuable to you.”

“Sounds good to me!” Saria added.

“I’m just followin’ Seiichi around,” Al said with a shrug. “I’m good with whatever he wants.”

Louisse nodded. “I shall likewise abide by your decision.”

Lulune and Origa-chan didn’t seem interested in joining the conversation—Origa-chan was yawning with boredom, even—and from the confusion on Zora’s face, she wasn’t following our conversation at all.

“Are you sure?” Routier asked nervously.

“Of course. Go on ahead.”

With that, she turned back to Sheep-san. “Thank you for your generosity. I’ll gladly take you up on your offer.”

“Excellent! The deal is struck, then!” He bowed deeply, and when he looked up again, he had a shit-eating grin on his face. “It’s simple—if you bring Seiichi-sama there, everything will work out as you hope.”

“What kind of information is that?!” I shouted.

*That’s not even a proper hint!*

“I’m perfectly serious,” he continued unaffectedly. “If you can break people from a dungeon’s bonds at will, let alone being able to annihilate the dungeon itself, I imagine you could do away with most places.”

“Well, yeah, but that’s not what I’m referring to! You know it’s not!”

“I’m afraid I don’t.”

“Dammit... Damn you!”

*We gave up the true-clearing loot for this?! That’s just stupid!*

The worst part, though, was that I got the feeling he was exactly right.

Routier looked up at me uneasily. “Seiichi?”

“Oh... Right. We can free your dad if I just go to his dungeon, right? I don’t really know what I’m supposed to do there, though.”

“No... I suppose not...”

“Eh, we’ll figure it out when we get there.”

Her eyes widened in shock. “You’ll come with me? R-Really?”

“Sure. I can’t promise it’ll be right away, but I promise I’ll go there and free your dad. Okay?”

“Okay... thank you.”

“No need to thank me. He’s still not free yet, y’know.”

“What in the world are you saying?” Sheep-san cut in with a smug little grin. “I’m sure you’ll use that immense, gorilla-like strength to force your way through any obstacle—and you won’t monkey around. I’d expect no less from the man with a gorilla wife.”

“Never open your annoying little mouth again!”



*Jeez, just when I was trying to help Routier relax... He's such a little prick, and I hate that he's actually not bad at jokes.*

He burst out laughing. “Hahahaha! I’m glad to see you haven’t changed, Seiichi-sama.”

“Oh, yeah? You’re just as annoying as ever, as much as I hate to say it!”

“What a pity you can’t appreciate my brilliance.” From the look on his face, he wasn’t too broken up about it. “With that, however, I really must be going.”

He lifted his top hat to us and clacked his little can on the stone floor twice.

“This place is nothing now, much less a proper dungeon, so I’m afraid that I cannot transport you to the entrance—though I imagine you can handle that yourself.”

I shrugged. “More or less, yeah.”

“Excellent. In that case, I’ll be taking my leave.” As the circle of teleportation magic at his feet began to light up, however, he recalled something. “Oh, and one last thing—your Status may have left you, but you’ll be able to see your titles without difficulty. I recommend you examine that, as well as the contents of your Item Box.”

“Huh? My titles I get, but why my Item Box?”

He only grinned at me. “That’s for me to know and you to find out.”

“Huh?”

“Without further ado, then—good day!”

With that, he disappeared in a small flash of light.

“What a weirdo,” Al grumbled.

I laughed weakly. “I’m so, so tired.”

“Uh... Don’t sweat it, I guess?”

She hesitantly patted me on the head to reassure me. It felt weird and more than a little embarrassing, but it was just as reassuring.

I let out a relieved sigh. “It’s about time we get home, but do you guys mind if I check my titles and stuff first?”

“Okay!” Saria readily agreed.

“We’ve but to return to the Academy now,” Lousse agreed. “We shall talk with Zora-san in the meantime.”

With that, they started chatting with our resident serpentkin.

*I dunno about Lousse, but I bet Saria knows this won’t be easy for me... I’m glad she’s being so considerate.*

With that, I opened what remained of my Status, and sure enough, the “Titles” section was still there.

*That’s weird... Obviously my level and Attack and stuff aren’t here, but aren’t my titles part of my Status too? Why are they still here?*

I didn’t think about it too deeply, though, and focused on scanning the section for any new titles. Sure enough, there were five new ones.

TITLE DETAILS
<b>DUNGEON DELETER:</b> A special title for those who obliterate dungeons instead of clearing them. Dungeons are normally impossible to damage, let alone destroy... how nonsensical.
<b>BOSS SMITER:</b> A title for those uniquely suited for slaying the strongest of the strong. Before you, even the strongest of bosses are powerless. When battling a boss-type enemy, your Stats greatly increase.
<b>PLANETARY SAVIOR:</b> A title given to those who slaughter conquerors from outer space, saving the planet.
<b>LIBERATOR OF THE UNIVERSE:</b> A title given to those who save the entire universe from certain doom.

**ACCIDENTAL MESSIAH:**

A title for those who accidentally save countless lives.  
Whenever you make mistakes, the best possible  
results are guaranteed.

**WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS?!**

*First off, what the hell's up with Dungeon Deleter?! "Impossible," my ass! I did it just fine! Boss Smiter feels a little too dumb! Aren't bosses supposed to be hard? This defeats the whole point! And that weird Planetary Savior one—since when did I save the world, let alone from goddamn aliens?! I don't know how to deal with that one, let alone this Liberator of the Universe shit! Since when was I even in a position to do that—I didn't even know the universe was in danger! None of this makes sense! But this last one, Accidental Messiah—that would imply I accidentally saved the entire universe. Was this super-threat really so fragile I could wipe it out without even know about it?! Somebody explain this, dammit!*

No matter how hard I whined or tried to deny it, though, nobody could tell me the answers, and that just drove me nuts.

That was overwhelming enough, but then I remembered that the Sheep had told me to check my Item Box, too. I was getting a bad feeling about it, but there was no point sitting around—I opened it up and took a look.

"..."

I quickly closed it again.

*What the hell? Hahaha... I didn't see anything in there! No Ultima-Spec Spacecrafts, no Space Overlord's Hearts or Dragon God-Emperor's Heads... Nope, nothing at all! I saw nothing! End of story, period!*

Smiling as mindlessly as I could, I headed over to regroup with the others.

Saria brightened up at the sight of me. "Seiichi! Are you done?"

"Yep! All done being human, dammit!"

Al shot me a worried look. "You sure don't sound okay..."

*It's no big deal. Not like even my Status abandoned me... Can we just go home now? I have a lot of crying to do alone in my room.*

In the end, listening to that sheep's words brought me nothing but pain, and I found myself wishing that I'd never looked at my titles or my Item Box in the first place.

## Chapter 18: Returning Home and Reporting In

**“S**o to make a long story short, I wiped the dungeon out of existence.”

“Th-That’s too short! What happened?!”

As soon as I was back at the Academy, I reported all that had happened to Barney-san. Saria and the others had already gone back to the dorms to rest, but since I needed to explain Zora’s situation, she was still with me.

“It just... happened?” I shrugged. “It seemed like a good idea, so I just did it.

“I’ve never heard of anyone destroying a dungeon at all, let alone so frivolously!”

“Haha... Life can be weird, y’know?”

“Can’t you think of a better excuse than that?!”

*You don’t know the half of it, Barney-san. I don’t even want to get into the aliens or the universe-level threats right now.*

He let out a heavy sigh and shifted his gaze to Zora. “So, you’re the girl who was sealed in that dungeon. Am I correct?”

“Y-Yes. My name is Zora.”

“Hmm... Those aren’t ordinary glasses, are they? You said you could turn people to stone by looking at them?”

She nodded uncomfortably. “I can’t control it at all, though.”

“Hmm... I see...” Barney-san folded his arms in thought before turning to me. “What do you intend to do with her?”

“Well, I *did* save her life. If she wants, I’d like to let her stay here and help me out if I need it.”

He nodded, his gaze shifting to Zora. “You heard him. What would you like, Zora-kun?”

I'd told him she'd agreed to come with my friends and me, but it felt only fair to check again. She looked right at the headmaster.

"I would like to accompany him, if you don't mind. He saved my life, and even in the fleeting time we've spent together, I've found that I enjoy his company."

Barney-san nodded sagely. "Hmm... Very well, then. I have no objections. You're free to join us as a teaching assistant or as a student; the choice is yours. Do whatever you please."

"I will! Thank you very much!"

She nodded, a grin spreading across her face. Even the snakes that made up her hair seemed to be enjoying themselves.

With that, the headmaster turned back to me. "Preposterous complications aside, you did what I asked and neutralized any threat the dungeon posed to boot."

Right after we left the dungeon, I took a moment to regrow as much of the forest as I could with magic. There weren't any monsters at the moment, sure, but the ecosystem would set itself straight soon enough.

"Now then, Seiichi-kun, Zora-kun, you may spend the rest of the day however you please."

"Thank you very much!"

"Thanks."

After saying our final goodbyes, the two of us left the headmaster's office.

※ ※ ※

As soon as Seiichi and Zora had left his study, Barnabus let out a heavy sigh.

"To think I'd still be getting so surprised at my age..."

He found himself smiling a little as he grumbled.

"Still, to think the Wicked One is so close to revival—and the means to stop it is no longer in this world, no less. I was hoping to be more proactive, but it seems we'll be playing catch-up for a while yet."

As soon as he heard that the Wicked One was sealed in a dungeon, he resolved to wipe out the entire cult of his before they could do anything. Regrettably, the only Servant they managed to capture, Demioros, was too mentally shattered to give them any useful information. His accomplice, Angreia, was able and even willing to talk, but as she wasn't even a Servant, she knew nothing of value.

Even if they located the main stronghold of the Cult of the Wicked One, however, wiping them out was far easier said than done. Demioros was frighteningly strong, and they still knew nothing about the strange powers he and the other Servants wielded. If it came to a fight, they had to expect casualties, and that would only foster more negative emotions for the Wicked One to feed on.

“Hahh... What a troubling problem.”

There was nothing he could do about the cult now, that much was clear. Instead, he had another task that needed tending to.

“I wish I could brighten up the Academy somehow...”

He glanced down at the paper in his hands. Given the absolute disaster Demioros's attack entailed, he'd been going from country to country and apologizing to the parents of all the children who were affected by the ordeal. Many guardians had come to distrust the Academy as a result, and most of the children had been called back home. The few children left at the Academy were there as a result of the headmaster's pleading, and relations were still strained.

Barbodel Magic Academy was the only independent school in the world, however, and Barnabus knew just how important it was. No matter how difficult it was to maintain neutrality when they relied on donations from all over to fund their school, it was the one place the children could be free of the outer world's wars and politicking. It proved there was genuine hope for peace, and that was why he had to keep the Academy open, no matter what.

“For good or for ill, I suppose it will at least entertain the students...”

His eyes ran over the words at the top of the page for what felt like the hundredth time. It read, *Notice on the Start of the School Festival*.

## Side Story: The Former Heroes Help Rebuild

**“H**ey, somebody come carry this for me!”

“I need a couple magic-users over here!”

“Break it, break it all! Hahahaaaa!”

“Hold up! Who called this guy here? No, stop that! We’ve gotta repair this stuff, not break it more!”

In the wake of the Cult of the Wicked One’s attack on the Royal Capital of Terbelle, there was extensive damage to the outer walls, and many were injured. They were lucky to avoid any deaths, but only through sheer luck. While Seiichi delved into the dungeon’s depths, many adventurers and soldiers alike were striving to put the city back together. Among them were the former Hero, Abel, and his companions.

“Here we... go!” Abel sighed with exhaustion. “Hahh... This is so much more exhausting than adventuring...”

Anna nodded. “Yeah... We’re a lot better at killing monsters than this stuff.”

“They’ll need all the help they can get,” Gars reminded them, gesturing loosely at the surrounding destruction. “Sides, this is pretty fun.”

“You were always good at manual labor,” Liliana complained, trying to stretch. “I’m thoroughly helpless... All I can do is try to tend to the wounded.”

The four of them finished disposing of a pile of rubble and sat down to enjoy a short break.

“Remember, though—if we do well here, they’ll raise our adventuring ranks,” Abel reminded them.

Despite all their earlier heroing, they were soundly in the adventuring business now, and that meant they had to start from the very bottom of the system. At the lowest rank, they didn’t have access to even half-decent



subjugation requests and were often forced to run errands in town. All of them were desperate to go on proper quests.

“What wrong, humans? No, carry more?”

“Come, come! You, have two arms. Carry two at once!”

Saria’s parents, Sunny and Adramelc, tried to encourage them as they easily hauled large pallets of wood and mountains of bricks. There was a lot of uncertainty at first that a pair of monsters would be unable to acclimate to city life, but the pair were as bright and cheerful as Seiichi’s parents were generous and tolerant, and the pair of Kaiser Kongs were readily accepted as residents of Terbelle. Just like Abel and his companions, they were slated to become proper adventurers.

Sunny squinted at them as they rested. “Hm? Heroes? You, stop resting, start helping.”

Abel shrugged sheepishly. “Easy for you to say! We humans need our rest from time to time.”

“Hmph. Human, weak, not useful... No. Seiichi, different.”

“Don’t think he’s normal,” Abel told Adramelc seriously, a pleading look in his eyes. “Not for a second.”

As they chatted, Zeanos and Lucius arrived on the scene. Both were dressed in light, mobile work clothes.

“Oh? If it isn’t Sunny-san and Adramelc-san.”

“Haha, I never used to do this back when I was the Demon King! This is pretty fun!”

“Are you on break, too?” Abel asked the pair.

The nobleman nodded. “Something to that effect.”

“Using your muscles can be surprisingly tiring,” Lucius added as he sat down.

The Hero’s party shared the water they’d been provisioned as they began to chat.

“They’ll let us go up a rank when we’re done here, right?” Abel asked them.

“So it seems,” Zeanos replied. “With luck, that will lead us to more fruitful work.”

“We did herb-gathering and the like forever ago,” Liliana complained, “but I’d rather go monster-hunting in a dungeon any day.”

Gars grinned his agreement. “Much as I love working out, nothing quite hits the spot like monster hunting!”

“I don’t think we’ll ever be in trouble financially,” Abel added, “but adventuring’s a pretty unstable career. I think I’d almost prefer a proper job to this.”

Zeanos nodded thoughtfully. “I imagine that out of all of you, Liliana would have the easiest time finding more mundane work.”

The priestess blinked in surprise. “Y-You really think so?”

“C’mon, there’s no way any of us can have a normal job now,” Lucius reasoned. “I was the Demon King! Back in my day, I never had to do a lick of paperwork—I had servants for that nonsense.”

Anna frowned a little. “And here I thought a Demon King would be more responsible.”

As they continued to chat, the conversation gradually shifted to Seiichi’s parents and Naturliana.

“Do you think Makoto-san and his wife are doing okay?” Abel wondered aloud.

Zeanos frowned. “I’m afraid I haven’t heard much.”

“Makoto-san found the house we’re living in now, didn’t he?” Liliana asked. “Who do you think he is? And where did he get that massive bag of gold?”

Abel smirked a little. “I mean, they *are* Seiichi’s parents.”

“Oh...”

Seiichi’s name was the only explanation any of them needed.

“Th-They probably found jobs and just haven’t told us yet,” Abel reasoned.

Anna nodded vehemently. “Yeah... Naturliana-san found a flower shop to work at already, so I’m sure they could find something.”

“Better work when you can,” Gars agreed. “Never know when you’ll need the extra silvers.”

Just as they were wrapping up their break, however, they heard a new set of voices from close by.

“Ohh...!”

“Hm?”

There were all manner of soldiers and volunteers alike, all gathered around and gasping at something. Abel turned to investigate.

“Man, that’s crazy!”

“All that rubble, gone in the blink of an eye!”

“You can use teleportation magic too, right? That’s crazy!”

“I’m... useful?” came a familiar low, moaning voice.

“Better believe it! Thanks again, friend!”

Abel and his companions found themselves frozen and staring at the unlikely pair of the Treasure Chest and Claude.

“You’re another friend of Seiichi’s, right?” Claude asked.

“Yes...”

“Wanna work for us, then? We could really use an Item Box like you, and we’re always enlisting folks with teleportation magic. With skills like yours, you’ll make a bundle. So, what’ll it be? I can even introduce you to His Highness if you like.”

“Sounds good... I want a proper job...”

“Great! You can just wait around here, then—I’ve gotta go let the palace know.”

With that, the guard left for the palace.

Abel and the others could only stare in shock, and finally the Treasure Chest noticed.

“I’m... a public servant now...”

“You whaaaaaaaaaaaat?!”

Rumor has it that the Heroes’ cry spread throughout the entire kingdom.

## Back Matter

**Author: Miku** I'm a university student, and I love karaoke and reading. Flawed as it may be, I sincerely hope you enjoy my work. (December 2018)

**Illustrator: Umiko/U35**

I was born on November 17 in Shimane Prefecture. My favorite things are cooked potatoes and summer skies. (December 2018)



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